

Migration Skill Corridor Brief

India - Canada

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Examining the India-Canada migration skill corridor, this brief analyses its skills, mobility and governance dynamics. Drawing on stakeholder interviews, desk research and project data, it characterises the corridor as established, highly skilled and largely private-sector-led. International education is the principal entry route, with STEM, IT and healthcare driving skilled mobility. Despite strong post-study work and permanent residence pathways, high migrant costs, fragmented credential recognition, provincial licensing differences and recent policy uncertainty continue to constrain the corridor.

This Migration Skill Corridor Brief is part of a Link4Skills compact publication series examining labour mobility and skills mobility pathways between select countries across Europe, Africa, Asia, and North Ame. Based on the project's more extensive Migration Skill Corridor reports, the briefs provide concise analyses of migration dynamics, policy frameworks, good practices, and challenges shaping skills mobility, with the aim of supporting fair, sustainable, and mutually beneficial migration pathways.

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1. Executive summary

The India-Canada migration skill corridor is an established, high-skilled and increasingly settlement-oriented corridor shaped by education-led mobility, professional migration and sector-specific recruitment. Unlike corridors governed by comprehensive bilateral mobility agreements, the India-Canada corridor is largely mediated through Canada's general immigration system, provincial regulation, post-secondary educational institutions, employers and private intermediaries. Indian mobility to Canada has been driven most strongly by international education, the Post-Graduation Work Permit route, skilled worker programmes and permanent residence pathways, with STEM, IT and healthcare forming the most visible skill sectors.

India is one of Canada's most important source countries for students, skilled migrants and permanent residents. The Indian-origin population in Canada reached approximately 1.35 million in the 2021 Census. 392,810 valid study-permit holders were Indian nationals as of December 2024, which is 39.4% of all study permits in Canada. Indian nationals accounted for 98,830 permanent resident admissions in 2025, close to four times the next largest source country¹. The corridor is therefore not only a labour mobility channel but also a major settlement corridor, supported by diaspora networks, higher-education linkages and employer demand. However, recent policy tightening, especially around international student numbers and post-study transitions, has introduced uncertainty for Indian students and workers already inside the pipeline. In 2025, 93,840 new study permits were issued to Indian nationals, down 66 per cent from the 2023 peak².

The corridor's main strength lies in its multiple pathways: international study leading to work and permanent residence, direct skilled migration, provincial nominee routes, and limited government-to-government recruitment initiatives such as the Kerala and Newfoundland and Labrador healthcare partnership. At the same time, the corridor is marked by uneven regulation, high migrant-borne costs, fragmented recognition systems and provincial variation in licensing. Healthcare professionals, especially nurses and physicians, face lengthy recognition and registration processes, while students and graduates often experience financial vulnerability, survival work and labour market mismatch. The corridor therefore combines strong demand for Indian talent with complex institutional barriers that require better coordination, clearer information and stronger safeguards.

2. Migration dynamics

Indian migration to Canada has grown steadily over the last two decades, supported by Canada's points-based immigration system, international education strategy, labour market demand and long-standing diaspora ties. The corridor was initially shaped by education-led mobility and family settlement, but has diversified into skilled professional migration in healthcare, STEM, IT, business analytics and selected technical sectors. Earlier migration flows were strongly associated with Punjab and Gujarat, while recent flows increasingly include migrants from Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Telangana and Andhra Pradesh.

¹ Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. (2026c). Canada – Study permit holders by country of citizenship and year in which permit(s) became effective [EN_ODP-TR-Study-IS_CITZ_sign_date.xlsx]; and Canada – Study permit holders with a valid permit on December 31st by country of citizenship [EN_ODP_annual-TR-Study-IS_CITZ_year_end.xlsx].

² Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. (2026c). *Temporary Residents: Study Permit Holders* – Monthly IRCC Updates. Open Government Portal.

The Indian diaspora is now one of the largest and most visible communities in Canada. Indian-born permanent resident admissions between 2015 and 2025 totalled 941,280, an average of about 86,000 a year, and India has been the largest source country for permanent residents throughout the period³. Indian government estimates place the number of Indian citizens resident in Canada at approximately 1.39 million as of January 2026 (MEA, 2026), a figure that reflects the accumulation of permanent residents yet to naturalise alongside the large temporary-resident population.

Although International student mobility is the dominant route along the corridor, the recent restrictions imposed by Canada reflects in the numbers as well. India held 392,810 valid study permits on December 2024, down from a peak of 426,195 a year earlier, and accounted for 24.6 per cent of all new study permits issued in 2025, down from 40.8 per cent in 2023. Many Indian students use Canadian education as a bridge to employment through the Post-Graduation Work Permit route and later transition to permanent residence through the Canadian Experience Class or Provincial Nominee Programs (Castaneda et al, 2024). Permanent admissions are also more diverse than skills-only context. In 2025, family sponsorship accounted for 29,165 Indian admissions and provincial nomination for 32,785 together almost two-thirds of the 98,830 Indians admitted that year, against 1,630 through the federal skilled worker route⁴.

The corridor is sectorally concentrated but not uniform. STEM and IT remain the core high-skilled sectors, with Indian migrants heavily represented in professional, scientific and technical services. Healthcare is an increasingly strategic sector, especially nursing, where Indian training pipelines and Canadian shortages intersect. Construction and technical trades are relevant to Canada's labour market demand, but structured pathways connecting Indian-trained trades workers to Canadian employment remain limited. Overall, the corridor is mature and dynamic, but recent policy shifts have created instability in student and post-study pathways.

Table 1. Key indicators of Indian migration and student mobility to Canada

Indicator	Data / Year
Population of Indian origin in Canada	1.35 million, 3.7 percent of total population, 2021 Census
Indian-born permanent residents admitted	941,280 cumulative, 2015–2025 (98,830 in 2025)
Active study-permit holders from India	392,810 as of 2024 (39.4% of all study permits)
Share of India in total new study permits	24.6% in 2025 (93,840 permits), down from 40.8% in 2023
Main provinces of residence	Ontario, British Columbia, Alberta, Manitoba; Atlantic Canada emerging
Composition of Indian PR admissions, 2025	Economic 68,085 (68.9%); of which PNP 32,785, Canadian Experience Class 27,355, Federal Skilled Worker 1,630. Family 29,165 (29.5%)

³ Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. (2026a). Canada – *Admissions of permanent residents by country of citizenship* [EN_ODP-PR-Citz.xlsx]. Permanent Residents – Monthly IRCC Updates. Open Government Portal.

⁴ Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. (2026). Canada – *Admissions of permanent residents by country of citizenship and immigration category* [EN_ODP-PR-CitzImmCat.xlsx]. Permanent Residents – Monthly IRCC Updates. Open Government Portal.

Note: Statistics Canada. (2022). Census Profile, 2021 Census. Statistics Canada. Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada,– Admissions of Permanent Residents by Country of Citizenship (EN_ODP-PR-Citz.xlsx); Admissions of Permanent Residents by Country of Citizenship and Immigration Category (EN_ODP-PR-CitzImmCat.xlsx), Permanent Residents – Monthly IRCC Updates, data to May 2026; Study permit holders with a valid permit on December 31st by country of citizenship (EN_ODP_annual-TR-Study-IS_CITZ_year_end.xlsx); Study permit holders by country of citizenship and year in which permit(s) became effective (EN_ODP-TR-Study-IS_CITZ_sign_date.xlsx), data to May 2026.

3. Policies and agreements

The India-Canada corridor does not currently operate through a comprehensive bilateral migration and mobility partnership agreement. Instead, mobility is governed by Canada's federal immigration framework, provincial recruitment of skilled workers, education-sector recruitment, employer sponsorship and selected sub-national initiatives. On the Indian side, the federal Ministries of External Affairs, of Skill Development, state migration agencies and professional councils collectively shape recruitment, skilling and migration support. Canada's immigration framework is central to the corridor. The Canadian Experience Class, Provincial Nominee Programs, study permits and Post-Graduation Work Permits create the main routes through which Indian students and professionals enter, work and settle. However, recent caps and reductions in study permits and permanent resident targets have created uncertainty for students, graduates and their families already navigating the study-to-work pipeline. The Family Open Work Permits (OWPs), starting in 2025 were restricted to spouses of international students enrolled in master's programs of at least 16 months, doctoral programs, or selected professional programs. Spouses of college and undergraduate students, who make up a large share of Indian enrolment, are no longer eligible, and dependent children lost eligibility entirely. The effect is already visible: work permits issued to spouses of students fell from 69,763 in 2023 to 17,521 in 2025.

Bilateral cooperation exists, but it is fragmented across education, skills and provincial initiatives. The Canada-India Joint Statement of October 2025 signalled renewed diplomatic engagement and reaffirmed cooperation in higher education, research collaboration and people-to-people ties. Earlier higher-education MoUs between India and Canada supported academic exchange, joint research and student mobility. Certain institutions, like Mitacs, a nonprofit national research organization, present opportunities for promising Indian students to pursue their studies and work in Canada with government co-funded scholarships. Skills-related cooperation also includes engagement between National Skill Development Corporation International, a public-private partnership under the Ministry of Skills in India and Colleges and Institutes Canada, focused on vocational curricula, instructor training and mobility possibilities. A notable sub-national initiative is the partnership between NORKA-Roots and the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador for the recruitment of nurses and allied health professionals from Kerala. This arrangement is important because it uses a government-to-government model, regulated procedures and transparent recruitment practices.

Recognition and licensing remain the major institutional bottlenecks, and the barrier differs sharply by sector. Because education and labour fall under provincial jurisdiction, requirements, timelines and costs vary across provinces. Internationally educated nurses must complete a credential assessment, bridging coursework where gaps are identified, and the NCLEX-RN licensing examination used across Canada outside Quebec. Physicians face even more difficult barriers- postgraduate training obtained abroad is often not recognised, and few routes exist to maintain clinical recency while pursuing licensure. In non-regulated occupations, including most STEM and IT roles, no formal recognition process applies at all: assessment rests with employers,

and the resulting demand for “Canadian experience” pushes many qualified Indian migrants into skills-occupation mismatch.

Table 2. Relevant cooperation frameworks between India and Canada

Framework	Period	Actors	Focus
Canada-India Joint Statement	2025	Government of India; Government of Canada	Renewed cooperation in education, research, people-to-people ties and broader partnership
Higher Education Cooperation MoU	2010, renewed 2015	Indian and Canadian education authorities	Academic exchange, joint research, curriculum alignment and student mobility
Skills and vocational collaboration	2021 onward	NSDC International; Colleges and Institutes Canada	Vocational curricula, instructor training and skilled mobility cooperation
Kerala-Newfoundland and Labrador healthcare initiative	2023 onward	NORKA-Roots; Government of Newfoundland and Labrador	Government-to-government recruitment of nurses and allied health professionals

4. Good practices

Multiple mobility pathways: The corridor offers several routes for Indian migrants, including study permits, Post-Graduate Work Permits, skilled worker programmes, Provincial Nominee Programs and sector-specific recruitment. This diversity allows different profiles of students and professionals to enter Canada and, in many cases, transition to longer-term settlement.

Education-to-work transition: Canadian education, followed by post-study work, has created a relatively clear pathway for some Indian students to gain Canadian credentials, work experience and eligibility for permanent residence. For successful graduates, this can reduce barriers related to foreign credential recognition and lack of Canadian experience.

State-led ethical recruitment in healthcare: The Kerala and Newfoundland and Labrador partnership shows the potential of public-sector facilitation in reducing recruitment costs, improving verification and aligning candidates with provincial demand. NORKA’s regulated fee structure and official procedures provide a useful model for ethical recruitment.

Diaspora and peer networks: Long-standing Indian communities in Canada provide information, contacts, housing support, job leads and informal guidance. These networks complement formal institutions and help new migrants navigate settlement and labour market entry.

5. Areas for improvement/ Policy recommendations

Bilateral cooperation: Bilateral cooperation efforts should focus on regulation and monitoring of international skilled worker recruitment. It should incorporate structured mechanisms to engage diaspora communities in Canada which have been pivotal networks for information and policy. It should include sector-specific safeguards and supports: strengthened bilateral oversight of international recruitment practices, cost-sharing arrangements for pre-departure skilling and

post-arrival reskilling, expedited credential recognition pathways, and labour market integration to reduce skills-occupation mismatch upon arrival.

International student support: Educational institutions should develop a bilateral scholarship and tuition cost-sharing scheme to reduce the financial barriers associated with study-to-work pathways. Drawing on existing bilateral scholarship models, the federal government should work with provincial governments and post-secondary institutions to systematize arrangements that offset international tuition costs for Indian students in designated programs aligned with Canadian labour market needs.

Health credentials recognition: Building on the success of the Kerala-Newfoundland and Labrador partnership for the recruitment of nurses, a replicable bilateral health worker recruitment framework could be developed, adaptable across provinces and healthcare credential categories, including physicians. This could include standardized protocols for recruitment, competency assessment, bridging supports, and regulatory engagement.

6. Key takeaways

- The India-Canada corridor is established and high-skilled, and its route to permanent residence runs overwhelmingly through prior temporary status in Canada rather than direct selection from abroad. In 2025, federal skilled worker admissions from India fell to 1,630, only 2.4 per cent of Indian economic admissions, while the Canadian Experience Class, which requires Canadian work experience, accounted for 40 per cent, and provincial nomination for a further 48 per cent. Changes to the study and post-study pipeline therefore transmit almost directly into permanent admissions. Family sponsorship is also an important major channel along this corridor.
- The corridor is largely private-sector-led and intermediary-driven, especially in student recruitment and education consultancy, while public actors are more visible in selected healthcare initiatives.
- Credential recognition is the central bottleneck, particularly for healthcare professionals and regulated trades. Provincial fragmentation makes timelines, costs and requirements difficult to predict.
- The financial burden is heavily borne by migrants and their families through tuition fees, language tests, credential assessments, bridging programmes and living costs. This increases vulnerability and can push students and newcomers into survival work.
- Recent Canadian policy tightening has created uncertainty in the study-to-work pipeline. This may redirect Indian students and professionals toward other destinations such as the UK, Australia or Europe.
- The Kerala and Newfoundland and Labrador healthcare initiative provides a promising but limited example of how state and provincial actors can build more transparent, ethical and sector-specific pathways. Future cooperation should build on it, focusing on reliable information, cost-sharing, ethical recruitment, credential transparency and closer coordination between Indian institutions and Canadian provinces.

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About the Link4Skills project

Link4Skills is an EU-funded research and project addressing the global challenge of skill shortages and mismatches through innovative, sustainable solutions that foster fair skill utilization and exchange across continents.

Focusing on Europe, Africa, Asia, and America, the project seeks to bridge the gap between skill supply and demand by facilitating re/up-skilling, promoting automation, and encouraging migration as policy options.

Link4Skills is creating an inclusive, participatory policy decision-making environment by integrating a diverse range of stakeholders, including EU decision-makers, inter-governmental institutions, national and subnational decision-makers, employers organizations, employees organizations, and civic society co-development institutions.

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