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A migration miracle? Indian migration to Germany: Opportunities and challenges

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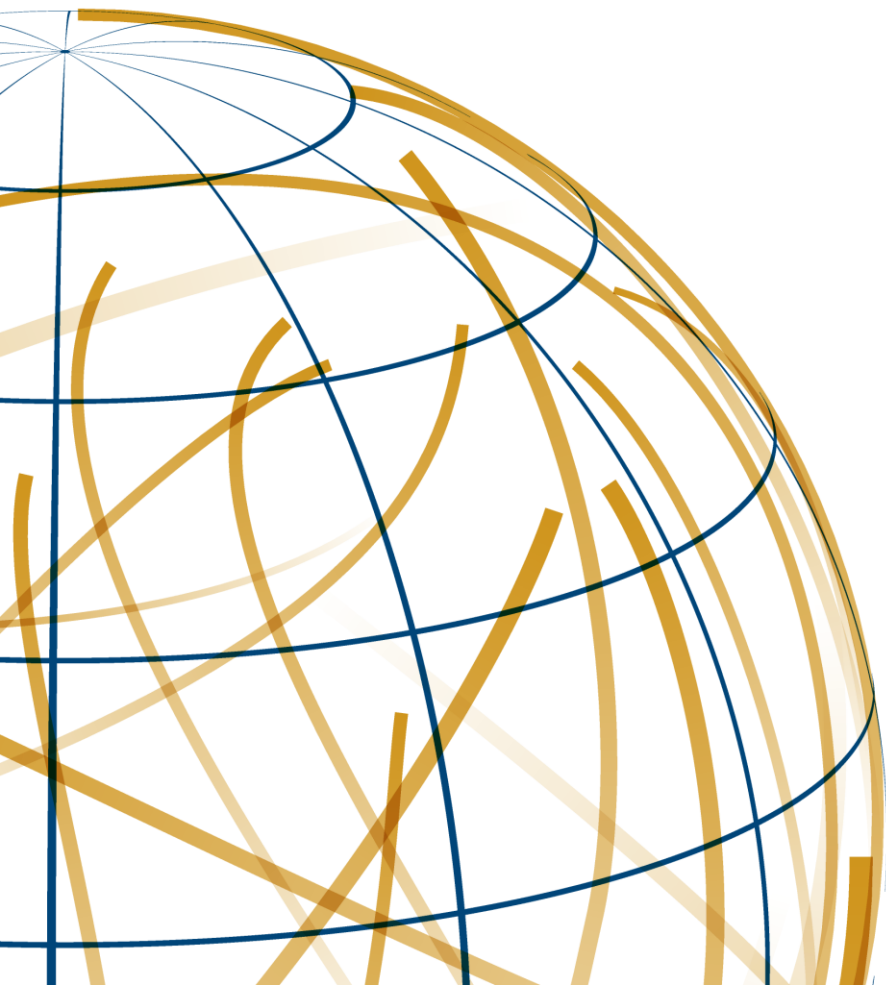
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SWP Research Paper

David Kipp

A Migration Miracle? Indian Migration to Germany

Opportunities and Challenges



Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik
German Institute for
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- The number of Indian migrants in Germany has risen sharply in recent years. In particular, they are helping alleviate the shortage of skilled workers in STEM professions.
- For Germany, India is the most important country of origin for labour and education migration. Currently, the profile of migration to Germany is changing: fewer experts are entering on the EU Blue Card (which, until recently, was the most important residence permit for skilled workers), while more students, trainees and professionally qualified people are coming to look for jobs or have their qualifications recognised by the German authorities.
- The Migration and Mobility Partnership Agreement (MMPA) concluded by Berlin and New Delhi in 2022 does not expand the German legal framework for recruiting skilled workers through the provision of new access routes. However, it does improve the practical implementation of self-organised migration from India — for example, by speeding up visa procedures.
- The MMPA Joint Working Group offers the opportunity not only to engage in a dialogue with the Indian government aimed at harnessing the full potential of increasing migration but also to address the challenges that have arisen from that trend, including the inadequate regulation of private recruitment agencies.
- The example of India shows that Germany's external infrastructure and migration-related development cooperation must be used much more effectively in countries of origin in order to develop new approaches to the fair and successful recruitment of skilled workers for the German labour market.
- Migration cooperation is a bridge builder in German-Indian relations, which are becoming increasingly important. Key areas of bilateral collaboration — such as digitisation, artificial intelligence and climate protection — should be systematically linked to knowledge exchange and the mobility of skilled professionals in these sectors.

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A Migration Miracle? Indian Migration to Germany: Opportunities and Challenges

The new German government emphasises that its migration policy aims to limit irregular arrivals and strengthen state control over migration processes. It is paying less attention, however, to the challenge of further developing skilled migration from third countries so that the demographic decline in the working-age population of Germany can be addressed. While the German government intends to establish a digital central agency (the so-called Work and Stay Agency) in order to boost the effectiveness of the procedures required for the migration process and the recognition of qualifications of applicants, such measures alone will not suffice to achieve the desired number of skilled workers recruited from abroad. Even an up-to-date legal framework and digital procedures will have the hoped-for impact only if a sustained effort is made to cooperate on migration policy with countries of origin. This is clearly evident in the case of India, the country that has become the largest source of labour and education migration to Germany.

The number of Indian nationals in Germany has more than tripled over the past decade – from 86,000 in 2015 to 280,000 in 2025 – while the already low number of asylum applications from India has continued to fall. The majority of Indians employed in Germany are highly skilled workers in natural sciences, (information) technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) and there are now more than 50,000 Indians currently studying at German universities. As a result, Indian migration to Germany is considered a success story. Some observers even speak of a “migration miracle”.

In 2022, Germany signed a Migration and Mobility Partnership Agreement (MMPA) with India. The aim of that agreement is to further improve the conditions for “safe, orderly and regular migration” from India to Germany. This research paper examines the learning processes that can be observed in German migration policy amid deeper migration cooperation with India and considers the opportunities and challenges arising from Indian migration to Germany.

India has a large number of institutions, programmes and bilateral agreements devoted to migra-

tion cooperation. On the one hand, the Indian government is interested in alleviating pressure on the domestic labour market, where 7–9 million new jobs need to be created each year for the growing working-age population. On the other hand, it is seeking to harness migration as a tool to deepen foreign relations, enhance the strategic role of the diaspora and ensure the steady inflow of remittances. Measured in terms of these ambitions, migration governance is weak in India, partly because the long-overdue reform of its migration law has been repeatedly postponed. At the level of central government, there is a lack of trustworthy partner institutions for the overseas recruitment of skilled workers. So far, German recruitment efforts have focused on the subnational level, that is, the Indian states, some of which have structures that inspire more trust than those of the central government.

But when Indians want to go abroad to work, study or undergo training, most of them turn to private recruitment agencies rather than state institutions. Together, these agencies form a migration infrastructure that has grown over the decades and enables migrants to identify the fastest and easiest migration routes to different destination countries. However, fraudulent business practices are frequently reported owing to the lack of transparency, quality standards and government regulation.

Recently, many private recruitment agencies have been stepping up their activities in Germany. One reason for this is that since the reform of its Skilled Labour Immigration Act, Germany has become more open for skilled workers and students. By contrast, traditional destinations for Indian migration — such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada and Australia — have become more restrictive. Elsewhere, the Gulf states still attract mainly low-skilled Indian migrants, who continue to live and work largely in poor conditions in those countries. Although private recruitment agencies are extremely important for the migration of Indians, they are not mentioned in the MMPA — an omission that the German government corrected in its “Skilled Labour Strategy for India”, adopted in October 2024. This is a good starting point for engaging with the Indian government in the MMPA Joint Working Group with a view to developing new instruments that take into account the important role private agencies play in the recruitment of skilled workers and at the same time ensure they are better regulated.

The number of Indian students at German universities is steadily increasing. Despite its internationalisation since the mid-2000s, the German higher education system is not yet sufficiently equipped to deal with the large number of students from India. For example, there are no reliable selection methods for the numerous applications from India, which makes quality control difficult. And despite the great labour market potential of Indian students, instruments for integrating them into the German economy are not yet sufficiently developed. In addition, under the business model developed by some private recruitments agencies in India working with various private universities in Germany, young Indians pay high fees for a place at university only to find out that in some cases, the study conditions are poor and their degree is of limited value. Because of the large debts they have incurred, many Indian students depend on short-term ways of earning money in the gig economy. This means working in services such as food delivery, which, arranged via platforms, do not offer a permanent employment relationship.

Despite the challenges, Indian migration provides many opportunities. Germany’s intensified cooperation with India in this policy area should be seen in the context of the latter’s growing international importance. Moreover, migration plays a crucial role as bridge builder for the strengthening of bilateral relations. This is a process that necessitates the creation of synergies with other areas of cooperation. In the case of Germany, the extensive bilateral development cooperation with India should be further opened up to migration-related cooperation. The aim should be to work with Indian partners to establish the structural conditions that make migration from India to Germany (and other destination countries) as fair as possible. Finally, at the EU level, it should be ensured that the cooperation efforts of the individual member states do not work against one another and the EU’s instruments for cooperation in migration policy are brought up to date.

Trends in Indian Migration

With a population of 1.46 billion, India is the most populous country in the world. Owing to its sheer size alone, it plays a particularly important role in international migration flows. While the migration of Indians to the Gulf states and traditional migration countries such as the US has grown over time, it is only in the past decade that migration via newer routes to Germany and other EU countries has gained significantly in momentum.

Historical and social factors

Contemporary migration from India cannot be understood outside the historical context. In the 19th century, British colonial rule established a system of temporary (forced) labour migration under which several million Indians were shipped to other British colonies around the world and exploited there.¹ The British withdrawal from India in 1947 and the associated partition of British India into India and Pakistan were unique events both in terms of the scale and speed of the (forced) migratory movements. Four years after the partition, a total of 14.5 million people living in the region had been forced to flee.² For a long time, this event continued to be reflected in the migration statistics of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), which until the mid-2000s listed Pakistan as the most important destination country for Indian-born migrants. How-

ever, this figure has fallen from 2.8 million in 1990 to 1.6 million in 2024.³

In the 1990s, migration from India to Western countries, primarily the United States, began to increase.⁴ In the West, Indian migrants have generally achieved an above-average socioeconomic status compared with the overall population. But the situation of Indian migrants who moved to the Gulf states from the 1970s onwards is very different. Those countries have attracted mainly low-skilled workers, who for decades have faced exploitation, poor working conditions and human rights violations.⁵ Even today, most Indian migrants there are employed in the low-wage sector of the labour market – on construction sites, in the hospitality industry or in transport and logistics – and often on a temporary basis only. In addition, Indian migrant workers' wages have stagnated, while the cost of living in the Gulf states has soared in recent years.⁶ But none of this has deterred migration to the Gulf states. And for many Indian migrants, social expectations are another decisive factor: in states with a long tradition of migration, such as Kerala, individuals are often expected to pursue employment opportunities in the Gulf countries not least because of the prospect of comparatively high-earning opportunities owing to income disparities. In the Gulf states as a whole, incomes are on

1 Verena Schulze Palstring, *Das Potenzial der Migration aus Indien. Entwicklungen im Herkunftsland, internationale Migrationsbewegungen und Migration nach Deutschland*, Forschungsbericht 26 (Nuremberg: Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge [BAMF], 2015), 80, https://www.bamf.de/SharedDocs/Anlagen/DE/Forschung/Forschungsberichte/fb26-potenziale-migration-indien.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=14 (accessed 20 March 2025).

2 Ibid., 81.

3 Nileena Suresh, "International Migration from India", *Data for India*, 7 February 2025, <https://www.dataforindia.com/international-migration/> (accessed 2 May 2025).

4 Schulze Palstring, *Das Potential der Migration aus Indien* (see note 1), 81.

5 "Away from Home: On the Plight of the Indian Worker", *The Hindu* (online), 23 December 2024, <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/%E2%80%8Baway-from-home/article69015954.ece> (accessed 21 January 2025).

6 *Global Mobility of Indian Workforce. A Comprehensive Report on Trends and Status in European Union, Australia, the UK and the GCC*, ed. KPMG and Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) (New Delhi, November 2024), 33.

average about 120 per cent higher than in India; and in the UAE, they are up to 300 per cent higher.⁷

At the same time, Indian migration to the Gulf states is not limited to low-skilled workers; well-educated Indians have established themselves there, too.⁸ The latter often pursue highly skilled jobs in sectors such as healthcare, technology and finance but can also be found in management positions in large companies. The considerable influence of Indian nationals is also evident from their large-scale investments in the Gulf states. Particularly striking are the investments in real estate projects and the economy in Emirati metropolises such as Abu Dhabi and Dubai, where Indian nationals account for 30 per cent of all start-ups.⁹

The motives for leaving India are manifold. Among other things, migration decisions are influenced by the increasing autocratisation in the country and ongoing discrimination.¹⁰ An important factor in this context is religious and caste affiliation. For example, around 80 per cent of the Indian population are adherents of Hinduism, from which the caste system derives; and it is this system that shapes living conditions in rural areas. The migration of Hindus to countries such as Germany often means leaving behind the caste system, which can be perceived either as a deprivation or as liberation.¹¹

In traditional migration countries such as the United States, many Indian migrants are from socially privileged classes.¹² Religious minorities such as Chris-

tians and Sikhs are overrepresented in the US, too: in 2012, Christians accounted for 18 per cent of the total number of Indian migrants there (compared with 2.3 per cent in India) and Sikhs for 5 per cent (1.7 per cent). Hindus and Muslims, on the other hand, were underrepresented.¹³ Muslim Indians and lower castes have a relatively strong presence in the Gulf states. At the same time, caste discrimination persists in important destination countries such as the United Kingdom and the United States.¹⁴ California was the first US state to include this discriminatory practice in its anti-discrimination laws. The law defines “caste” as a system of social hierarchy that is often determined by birth and either confers social privileges or causes disadvantages.¹⁵

Recent trends in international migration

Figures for international migration from India differ significantly. While according to UN DESA there were around 18.5 million Indian migrants worldwide in mid-2024,¹⁶ the Indian Ministry of External Affairs puts the number at around 35.4 million.¹⁷ The difference arises because UN DESA counts only Indians born abroad while the Indian Ministry of External Affairs includes not only the 15.9 million so-called non-resident Indians (NRIs) but also the 19.6 million Indian nationals and descendants of Indian origin living abroad as persons of Indian origin (PIOs).

According to the UN DESA figures, the most important destination region for Indian migrants is the Gulf states, led by the United Arab Emirates (UAE) with 3.2 million Indian migrants, Saudi Arabia with 2 million and Kuwait with 1.2 million. The Western industrialised countries are the second most-impor-

⁷ World Development Report 2023. *Migrants, Refugees, and Societies* (Washington D.C.: World Bank, 2023), 97, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/wdr2023> (accessed 7 January 2025).

⁸ Ibid., 8.

⁹ Stefan Lukas and Leo Wigger, *Indien als aufstrebender Akteur im Nahen Osten: Entwicklungslinien, Herausforderungen und Handlungsmöglichkeiten*, Arbeitspapier 1/2024 (Berlin: Bundesakademie für Sicherheitspolitik, 2024), <https://www.baks.bund.de/de/arbeitspapiere/2024/indien-als-aufstrebender-akteur-im-nahen-osten-entwicklungslinien> (accessed 16 January 2025).

¹⁰ Amrita Datta, *Stories of the Indian Immigrant Communities in Germany. Why Move?* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2023), 81, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swp-berlin/detail.action?docID=30881079>.

¹¹ Wido Geis-Thöne, *Zuwanderung aus Indien: Ein großer Erfolg für Deutschland*, IW-Report Nr. 1 (Cologne: Institut der deutschen Wirtschaft [IW]), 4 January 2022, 9, <https://www.iwkoeln.de/studien/wido-geis-thoene-ein-grosser-erfolg-fuer-deutschland.html>.

¹² Kalyani Vartak and Chinmay Tumble, “Migration and Caste”, in *Handbook of Internal Migration in India*, ed. Sebastian

Irudaya Rajan and M. Sumeetha (Los Angeles: Sage, 2020), 252–67 (259), doi: 10.4135/9789353287788.n18.

¹³ Geis-Thöne, *Zuwanderung aus Indien* (see note 11), 9.

¹⁴ Swati Singh Parmar, “The Internationalisation of Caste”, *Völkerrechtsblog* (online), 15 June 2023, doi: 10.17176/20230615-110944-0.

¹⁵ Chloe Kim, “California Is First US State to Pass Ban on Caste Discrimination”, *BBC News* (online), 7 September 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-66736708> (accessed 3 June 2025).

¹⁶ Suresh, “International Migration from India” (see note 3).

¹⁷ Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, “Population of Overseas Indians” (New Delhi, 21 January 2025), <https://www.mea.gov.in/population-of-overseas-indians.htm> (accessed 21 January 2025).

tant group of destination countries. The United States has 3.2 million Indian migrants, almost half of whom have US citizenship;¹⁸ and the United Kingdom has some 1 million, although according to the 2021 British census, a similar number of British citizens are of Indian origin.¹⁹ It is unclear whether the UN DESA figures reflect the latest migration trends, as half a million Indians migrated to the UK in 2023–24 alone.²⁰ Approximately 1 million Indian migrants live in Canada and, according to the 2021 census in that country, a similar number of Canadian citizens are of Indian origin.²¹

Education is an important driver of Indian migration; however, many Western destination countries want to limit the number of Indian students.

In Australia, the number of Indian migrants has doubled to 900,000 over the past decade. Student migration has played a significant role in that increase. Between July 2022 and June 2023, more than 100,000 student visas were issued. But at the request of the Australian government, this number was lowered to 50,000 for the period from July 2023 to

June 2024.²² Similarly, both the Canadian²³ and the British government²⁴ have taken measures to reduce the number of migrants, which will make further migration from India more difficult.

Since President Trump took office for a second time, the United States has introduced various restrictions on Indian migrants and stepped up the deportation of those without valid residence status. In early 2025, the Indian government agreed to take back around 18,000 nationals who were living in the US illegally, hoping to thereby improve relations with Washington and secure legal visa programmes.²⁵ However, the total number of Indian migrants without valid residence status in the US is significantly higher: in 2022, it was estimated at 375,000.²⁶ In 2023–24 alone, almost 190,000 people arrived irregularly, mainly via the so-called donkey flight route, which is used by smugglers moving migrants from various Central American countries to the Mexican-US border.²⁷ Alongside the US, Canada is increasingly becoming a destination country for Indian migrants; but at the same time it serves as a transit country for onward travel to the United States.

18 Jeanne Batalova and Madeleine Greene, “Indian Immigrants in the United States” (Washington, D.C.: Migration Policy Institute, 8 November 2024), <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/indian-immigrants-united-states> (accessed 15 November 2024).

19 Office for National Statistics, *Ethnic Group, England and Wales: Census 2021* (Newport and elsewhere, 29 November 2022), <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/ethnicity/bulletins/ethnicgroupenglandandwales/census2021> (accessed 29 April 2025).

20 Id., *Long-term International Migration, Provisional: Year Ending June 2023* (Newport and elsewhere, 23 November 2023), <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/internationalmigration/bulletins/longterminternationalmigrationprovisional/yearendingjune2023> (accessed 29 April 2025); and id., *Long-term International Migration, Provisional: Year Ending June 2024* (Newport and elsewhere, 28 November 2024), <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/internationalmigration/bulletins/longterminternationalmigrationprovisional/yearendingdecember2024> (accessed 29 April 2025).

21 Statistics Canada, “2021 Census of Population” (Ottawa, 16 December 2022), <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/as-sa/fogs-spg/page.cfm?topic=9&lang=E&guid=2021A000011124> (accessed 29 April 2025).

22 Australian Government, Department of Home Affairs, *Australia's Migration Trends, 2023–24* (Belconnen, 2024), 21, <https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/research-and-stats/files/migration-trends-2023-24.pdf> (accessed 29 April 2025).

23 Sahil Sinha, “Justin Trudeau Announces ‘Temporary’ Cut in Intake of Immigrants to Canada”, *India Today* (online), 24 October 2024, <https://www.indiatoday.in/world/story/justin-trudeau-canada-immigration-cut-temporary-housing-prices-economy-2622815-2024-10-24> (accessed 29 April 2025).

24 UK Home Office, *Immigration White Paper to Reduce Migration and Strengthen Borders* (London, 12 May 2025), <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/immigration-white-paper-to-reduce-migration-and-strengthen-border> (accessed 16 May 2025).

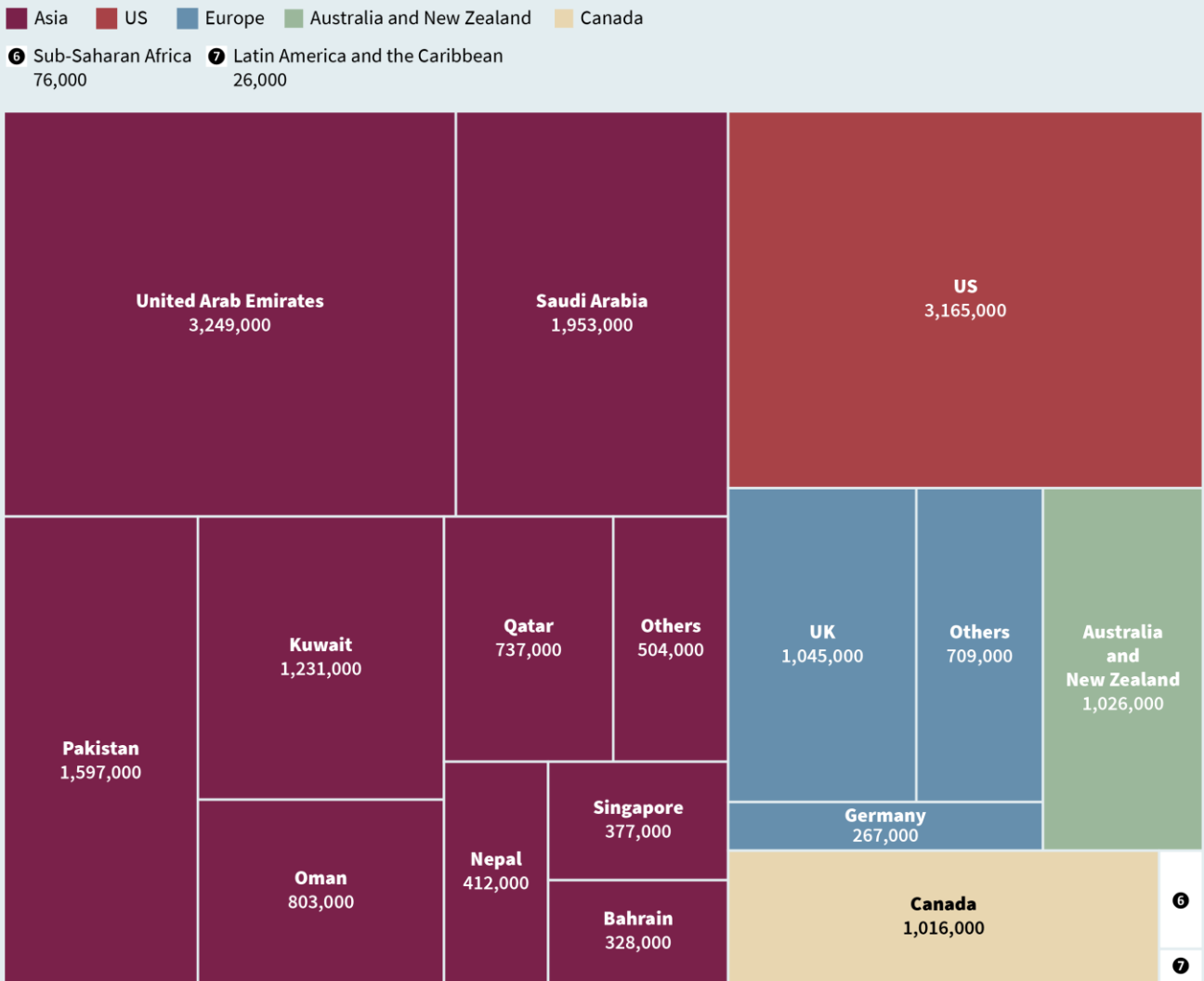
25 Hannah Ellis-Petersen, “Modi’s Government Planning to Repatriate 18,000 Indians Living in US Illegally”, *The Guardian* (online), 21 January 2025, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/jan/21/modi-government-planning-to-repatriate-18000-indians-living-in-us-illegally> (accessed 29 April 2025).

26 Batalova and Greene, “Indian Immigrants in the United States” (see note 18).

27 Sambavi Parthasarathy, “Most Deportees from the U.S. Are from Punjab, Haryana and Gujarat”, *The Hindu* (online), 19 February 2025, <https://www.thehindu.com/data/most-deportees-from-the-us-are-from-punjab-haryana-and-gujarat/article69233846.ece> (accessed 4 June 2025).

Figure 1

International migrant stock of Indian origin by destination country (2024)
Estimation, rounded to '000



Source: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, "International Migrant Stock 2024". CC BY 4.0

In the EU and the Schengen area, there are significantly fewer irregular arrivals from India. The majority enter via regular channels. According to the EU statistics authority (Eurostat), 842,000 Indian nationals were living in the EU on valid residence permits at the end of 2023²⁸; of these, 208,000 had newly issued

permits.²⁹ In the same year, there were 967,000 Indian applications for short-term visas for the Schengen area, of which just under 85 per cent were granted.³⁰ Meanwhile, the number of asylum appli-

28 Eurostat, "All Valid Permits by Reason, Length of Validity and Citizenship on 31 December of Each Year" (Luxembourg City, 2025), doi: 10.2908/MIGR_RESVALID.

29 Id., "More Than 3.7 Million First Residence Permits in 2023" (Luxembourg City, 12 September 2024), <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/-/ddn-20240912-1> (accessed 2 May 2025).
30 Id., "Residence Permits — Statistics on Stock of Permits at the End of the Year 2023" (Luxembourg City, 14 November 2024), <https://tinyurl.com/54u8bty8> (accessed 2 May 2025).

cations from Indian nationals across the EU totalled just 8,400 in 2023 and nudged down to 8,120 the following year.³¹ A short-lived spike in asylum applications from Indian nationals in 2022 – to more than 25,000, of which almost 20,000 were filed in Austria – was due to an irregular migration route via Serbia, which allowed Indian nationals to enter the Balkan country without a visa. However, following changes to Serbian visa practices and the Austrian-Indian migration and mobility agreement, this route has lost its significance.³²

In addition, there have been isolated cases of Indian nationals attempting to enter the EU and Germany via Russia and Belarus.³³ The prospects for Indian nationals seeking asylum in the EU are poor, even though the proportion of positive first-instance decisions on asylum applications across the EU rose from 1.8 per cent in 2022 to 2.3 per cent in 2023 and 4 per cent in 2024.³⁴

The development of Indian migration to Germany

Migration from India to Germany – which was modest until the early 2010s – can be divided into four historical phases.³⁵ In the 1950s, Indian engineering and medical students became the first to enter the Federal Republic in significant numbers. They were followed from the late 1960s onwards by 6,000 nurses from the state of Kerala, whose recruit-

ment was organised by the Catholic Church.³⁶ In 1970, there were around 8,000 Indian nationals living in Germany.³⁷ The third phase was marked by the forced migration of Punjabis and Sikhs following the unrest in the Indian state of Punjab in the early 1980s. The number of Indian nationals in Germany subsequently rose to more than 28,000 but then declined somewhat until German reunification.³⁸ In the German Democratic Republic, on the other hand, there was no systematic recruitment of Indian workers, although an unknown number of Indians studied there.³⁹

The fourth phase of immigration began in reunified Germany between 2000 and 2004 with the introduction of the German Green Card.⁴⁰ However, the initiative was of limited success, as fewer than 15,000 IT specialists were recruited, instead of the targeted 20,000.⁴¹ Of these new IT recruits, just under 4,000 came from India.

It was not until the introduction of the EU Blue Card, which was implemented in German law in 2012 that there was a quantum leap in the number of migrants from India. This new residence permit made it easier for third-country nationals to enter the EU for work purposes. From 2005 to 2015, the number of Indian nationals residing in Germany more than doubled – from 40,000 to 86,000. At the beginning of 2025, there were around 280,000 Indian nationals living in Germany as permanent residents,⁴² more than 152,000 of whom were in employment subject

31 Id., “Asylum Applicants by Type, Citizenship, Age and Sex – Annual Aggregated Data” (Luxembourg City, 2024), https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/migr_asyappctza/default/table.

32 Bundesministerium Inneres Österreich, “Illegale Migration aus Indien: Konsequente Rückführungen” (Vienna, 12 June 2023), <https://www.bmi.gv.at/news.aspx?id=63745A4D735247554B6B413D> (accessed 29 April 2025).

33 “Illegale Einreisen: Polizei stoppt Inder mit Fahrrad auf A11”, NDR (online), 4 June 2024, <https://www.ndr.de/nachrichten/mecklenburg-vorpommern/Illegale-Einreisen-Polizei-stoppt-Inder-mit-Fahrrad-auf-A11%2Cinder118.html> (accessed 30 April 2025).

34 Eurostat, “First Instance Decisions on Applications by Type of Decision, Citizenship, Age and Sex – Annual Aggregated Data” (Luxembourg City, 2025), https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/product/page/MIGR_ASYDCFSTA (accessed 29 July 2025).

35 Datta, *Stories of the Indian Immigrant Communities in Germany* (see note 10), viii.

36 Schulze Palstring, *Das Potential der Migration aus Indien* (see note 1), 125.

37 Wido Geis-Thöne, *(Hoch-)Qualifizierte Inderinnen und Inder in Deutschland* (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 11 May 2022), <https://www.bpb.de/themen/migration-integration/regionalprofile/deutschland/508205/hoch-qualifizierte-inderinnen-und-inder-in-deutschland/> (accessed 20 March 2025).

38 Ibid.

39 Deutsches Historisches Museum Berlin, “Ausländische Studenten in der DDR”, <https://www.dhm.de/archiv/ausstellungen/zuwanderungsland-deutschland/migrationen/rooms/0603.htm#:~:text=Im%20Studienjahr%201970/71%20waren,Entsendeland%20und%20der%20DDR%20festgelegt> (accessed 1 July 2025).

40 Schulze Palstring, *Das Potential der Migration aus Indien* (see note 1), 125.

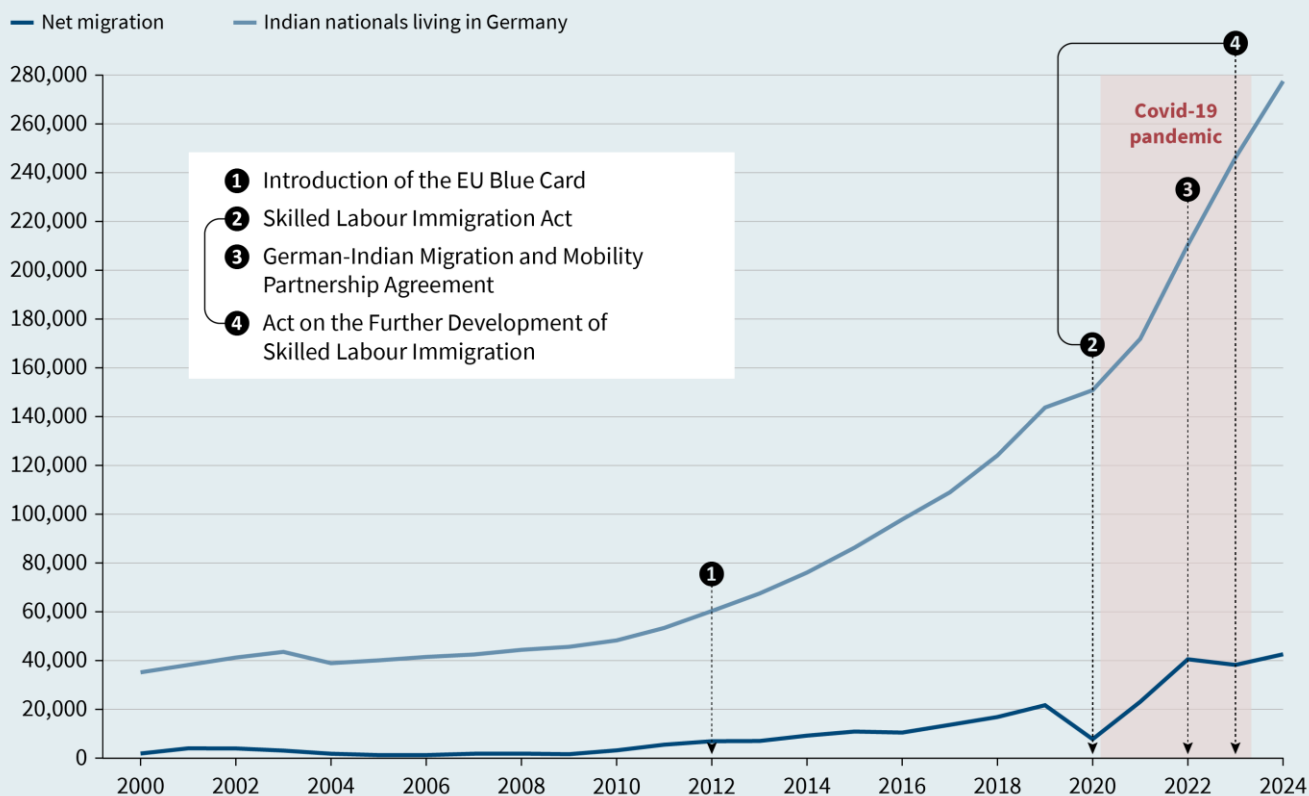
41 Geis-Thöne, *Zuwanderung aus Indien* (see note 11), 25.

42 Information obtained by the author from the Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge (BAMF), Indian nationals in Germany (as of 31 January 2025).

Figure 2

Development of Indian migration to Germany

Net migration and number of Indian nationals living in Germany (2000–24)



Sources: German Statistical Office (2025). Data codes: 12521-0002, 12711-0007
Mediendienst Integration (2024).

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to social insurance contributions.⁴³ With the exception of the coronavirus year 2020, net migration has grown steadily⁴⁴; however, at the same time, the number of Indian nationals leaving Germany has risen somewhat in recent years.⁴⁵

⁴³ Information from the Bundesagentur für Arbeit (BA), Sozialversicherungspflichtig Beschäftigte aus Drittstaaten nach Aufenthaltsstatus und Geschlecht (as of 30 September 2024).

⁴⁴ Fabio Ghelli and Miriam Sachs, "Migration – Nicht nur IT-Fachkräfte aus Indien", *Mediendienst Integration*, 13 December 2024, <https://mediendienst-integration.de/artikel/nicht-nur-it-fachkraefte-aus-indien.html> (accessed 20 March 2025).

⁴⁵ Statistisches Bundesamt, "Wanderungen über die Grenzen Deutschlands nach ausgewählten Herkunfts- und Ziel-ländern 2020 bis 2024" (Wiesbaden, 24 June 2025), <https://www.destatis.de/DE/Themen/Gesellschaft-Umwelt/Bevoelkerung/Wanderungen/Tabellen/wanderungen-nach-herkunfts-ziel-gebieten-jahr-04.html> (accessed 15 July 2025).

Migration movements from India to Germany are becoming more diversified.

From the data on visas issued to Indian nationals, it is evident that most migration to Germany is for work, education or family reasons. Since 2023, there have been signs of a change in labour migration: the number of EU Blue Cards issued to Indian nationals has been declining – from 8,405 in 2022 to 5,151 in 2023 and 3,276 in 2024 – as have the number of visas issued for intra-company transfers.⁴⁶ In other areas of employment, however, such as nursing, the

⁴⁶ German Bundestag, *Antwort der Bundesregierung auf die Kleine Anfrage der Fraktion der CDU/CSU. Fragen zur Qualität, Zielgenauigkeit und Nachhaltigkeit der Bildungs- und Erwerbsmigration*, Bundestags-Drucksache 20/14956 (Berlin, 12 February 2025), 14f, <https://dserver.bundestag.de/btd/20/149/2014956.pdf> (accessed 20 March 2025).

numbers have been increasing, albeit from a low base. The Opportunity Card, which was introduced in Germany in June 2024 with the Act on the Further Development of Skilled Labour Immigration, is in particularly high demand. This points-based instrument enables qualified skilled workers — even those without an employment contract — to obtain a residence permit (initially limited to one year) for the purpose of seeking employment or having their qualifications recognised in Germany; it also allows them to switch later to a permanent residence permit. Of the 12,000 or so applications for this residence permit processed in the 11 months from June 2024, more than 4,000 — or one third — were from Indian nationals.⁴⁷ By contrast, the number of asylum applications filed by Indian nationals in Germany has continued to fall from what was an already low level (to 1,543 in 2024⁴⁸ from 2,485 in 2023⁴⁹). At the beginning of 2024, however, there were 4,037 Indians living in Germany who were required to leave the country; of these, 3,353 were in possession of a *Duldung*, which means they are permitted to remain temporarily but do not have regular residence status.⁵⁰

Since the beginning of the 2010s, the gender distribution of migrants from India has changed, too: the ratio between male and female migrants, which was 70:30 in 2012,⁵¹ has narrowed to 60:40 in 2023.⁵²

According to a survey conducted by the German Employment Agency's research institute (IAB) in 2021, the majority of migrants from India want to stay permanently in Germany, while 37 per cent have already obtained German citizenship.⁵³

In 2024, the number of visas issued for study purposes exceeded 25,000 and thereby surpassed those issued for labour migration.⁵⁴ More than 50,000 Indian students were enrolled at German universities, making them the largest group of international students in the country (between the 2018–19 winter semester and the 2023–24 winter semester, their number increased by 138 per cent⁵⁵). Not least because of its numerous universities, Berlin is the main destination for migration from India to Germany — more than 40,000 Indian migrants now live in the German capital (in 2014, there were just 3,500⁵⁶) — followed by Munich and Frankfurt am Main. The growing number of Indian migrants is also reflected in the increasing flow of remittances from Germany to India, which, according to estimates by the Bundesbank, rose from €131 million in 2022 to €164 million in 2024 — an increase of around 25 per cent.⁵⁷

47 Marcus Engler and Pau Palop-Garcia, *Ein Jahr Chancenkarte. Erste Bilanz des deutschen Punktesystems für Fachkräfte-einwanderung*, DeZIM Briefing Notes (Berlin: Deutsches Zentrum für Integrations- und Migrationsforschung [DeZIM], 28 May 2025), <https://www.dezim-institut.de/publikationen/publikation-detail/ein-jahr-chancenkarte/> (accessed 4 June 2025).

48 Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge (BAMF), *Antrags-, Entscheidungs- und Bestandsstatistik 2024* (Nuremberg, 2024), https://www.bamf.de/SharedDocs/Anlagen/DE/Statistik/Asylgeschaefsstatistik/hkl-antrags-entscheidungs-bestandsstatistik-kumuliert-2024.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=21.

49 *Migrationsbericht der Bundesregierung 2023*, ed. Bundesministerium des Innern und für Heimat (BMI) and Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge (BAMF) (Berlin and Nuremberg, January 2025), 259, <https://www.bamf.de/SharedDocs/Anlagen/DE/Forschung/Migrationsberichte/migrationsbericht-2023.html>.

50 German Bundestag, *Antwort der Bundesregierung auf die Kleine Anfrage der Fraktion der CDU/CSU* (see note 46), 10.

51 Schulze Palstring, *Das Potential der Migration aus Indien* (see note 1), 126.

52 BMI and BAMF, ed., *Migrationsbericht der Bundesregierung 2023* (see note 49), 225.

53 Davit Adunts et al., *Indische Arbeitskräfte in Deutschland* (Nuremberg: Institute for Employment Research [IAB], 21 February 2024), 10, <https://iab.de/daten/indische-arbeitskraefte-in-deutschland/> (accessed 10 April 2025).

54 German Bundestag, *Antwort der Bundesregierung auf die Kleine Anfrage der Fraktion der CDU/CSU* (see note 46), 14.

55 Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst e.V. (DAAD), *Wissenschaft weltoffen 2024. Daten und Fakten zur Internationalität von Studium und Forschung in Deutschland und weltweit* (Bielefeld: wbv Media, 2024), 36, https://www.wissenschaft-weltoffen.de/content/uploads/2024/11/WWO_2024_DT_aktualisiert_BF.pdf (accessed 15 July 2025).

56 Sebastian Schöbel, “Warum der Boom der indischen Community in Berlin kein Zufall ist”, *RBB*, 22 March 2025, <https://www.rbb24.de/panorama/beitrag/2025/03/berlin-migration-fachkraefte-indien-migrationsabkommen-.html> (accessed 24 March 2025).

57 Carsten Wolf and Fabio Ghelli, “Neue Bundesbank-Zahlen — Mehr Rücküberweisungen ins Ausland”, *Medien-dienst Integration*, 3 April 2025, <https://mediendienst-integration.de/artikel/mehr-rueckueberweisungen-ins-ausland.html> (accessed 3 June 2025).

Foundations, legal framework and actors in German-Indian migration cooperation

Having slowly gained relevance over the previous two decades, migration was finally identified as a new area of cooperation with the signing of the Migration and Mobility Partnership Agreement (MMPA) at the German-Indian government consultations in Berlin in May 2022. The MMPA has strengthened cooperation efforts on both sides.⁵⁸ And in the case of Germany, it was accompanied by the further liberalisation of the Skilled Labour Immigration Act and the introduction of the “Skilled Labour Strategy for India”.

The foundations of bilateral migration cooperation

The Migration and Mobility Partnership Agreement

In the early 2000s, Germany paved the way for large-scale skilled labour migration from India through its programme aimed at meeting IT skills shortages (the Green Card) and, in the 2010s, through the EU Blue Card. At the same time (2011), Germany and India concluded a bilateral social security agreement on pension insurance. This agreement stipulates that social security contributions paid in one of the two countries are to be taken into account in the other country in order to safeguard pension entitlements.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ “Agreement between the Federal Republic of Germany and the Government of the Republic of India on a Comprehensive Migration and Mobility Partnership”, *BGBL*. 2023 II/128, 5 May 2023, 2 – 20, https://www.recht.bund.de/bgbII/2/2023/128/regelungstext.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=2 (accessed 10 October 2024).

⁵⁹ “Agreement between the Federal Republic of Germany and the Republic of India on Social Security”, *BGBL*. 2012 II/19, 588 – 600, <https://www.dvka.de/media/dokumente/>

It took several years of negotiations for the MMPA to be signed. Initially, in 2019, the responsible German ministry – the Ministry of the Interior (BMI) – wanted to negotiate only a bilateral agreement on the readmission of Indian nationals.⁶⁰ Inspired by the MMPA between France and India (signed in March 2018),⁶¹ the initiative for a broader agreement developed during the bilateral dialogue. In the end, the Indian-German MMPA was negotiated not by what at the time was the Grand Coalition but by its successor, the Scholz government, and agreement was reached during the German-Indian consultations in Berlin in May 2022. This was the first comprehensive bilateral migration agreement under the then new German government and was to be followed by others.⁶² The signing took into account India’s growing importance for Germany’s foreign policy, which had already been acknowledged in the government’s Indo-Pacific Guidelines of 2020⁶³ and was reconfirmed more

rechtsquellen/svabkommen/indien_sva.pdf (accessed 23 March 2025).

⁶⁰ Background discussion between the author and a representative of the Federal Ministry of the Interior in Berlin in March 2025.

⁶¹ Government of India, *Migration and Mobility Agreement between The Government of the Republic of India and The Government of the French Republic* (New Delhi, 10 March 2018), <https://www.mea.gov.in/Portal/LegalTreatiesDoc/FR18B3321.pdf> (accessed 1 April 2025).

⁶² Nadine Biehler, David Kipp and Anne Koch, *The Potential of Bilateral Migration Agreements*, SWP Comment 47/2024 (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, September 2024), doi: 10.18449/2024C47.

⁶³ Auswärtiges Amt (AA), “German Government Adopts Guidelines for the Indo-Pacific region”, press release (Berlin, 1 September 2020), <https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg->

recently (in October 2024) in a strategy paper titled “Focus on India”.⁶⁴

Following the logic of the agreement between France and India, the MMPA aims to comprehensively regulate migration: it seeks, on the one hand, to promote the mobility of Indian students, trainees and skilled workers and, on the other hand, to strengthen readmission cooperation. While the German government has emphasised improved readmission cooperation,⁶⁵ the Indian government has stressed the need for accelerated visa procedures.⁶⁶ The former prefers the concept of “mobility” to that of “migration”, which it regards as having negative connotations. Because the MMPA is an agreement about both migration and mobility, a bridge that spans the two concepts is thus being built between the parties.

The agreement comprises a series of non-binding declarations of intent, which do not, however, go beyond the existing legal framework. The most concrete objective, which is set out in Article 6, aims to send at least 3,000 young professionals from India to Germany each year.⁶⁷ In addition, detailed rules are laid down on the return of Indian nationals required to leave Germany, on voluntary return and reintegration, and on combating irregular migration and human trafficking (Articles 12 – 14). In accordance with Article 16, a Joint Working Group on Migration and Return Issues has been established. This group is to oversee the monitoring of the implementation of the agreement and will meet regularly (at least once a year). The BMI is the responsible ministry and the establishment of a separate sub-working group is planned to deal with issues related to the return of nationals required to leave. In April 2025, a sub-work-

ing group on labour migration was set up; the German Foreign Office (AA), the German Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (BMAS) and their Indian counterparts are in charge of this new group.

Germany’s MMPA with India — like the migration agreements that it has since concluded with Georgia and Kenya — is an international treaty. At the same time, the German government has reached informal agreements with Morocco and Colombia that allow for greater flexibility and for domestic sensitivities in the partner country to be taken into account.⁶⁸ The advantage of an international treaty over an informal agreement is that migration cooperation is not as dependent on fluctuating priorities and changing governments. This is evident in the context of Indian migration cooperation with the Gulf states: India has had better experience under its international migration agreement with Saudi Arabia than under the non-binding memorandums of understanding with other Gulf states such as Oman and Bahrain.⁶⁹

Skilled Labour Strategy for India

Once the BMI and the AA had secured agreement on the MMPA, the entire German government was called upon to implement it. During the previous legislative period, the BMAS developed the political will to shape the cooperation on skilled labour recruitment from India; and in autumn 2024, it published, together with the AA, a corresponding strategy.⁷⁰

The “Skilled Labour Strategy for India” focuses on the improved matching of Indian skilled workers with companies in Germany and on increased efforts to teach the German language in India, including through more online language courses. Economic and academic cooperation is to be expanded and partnerships with Indian institutions in the field of higher education and vocational training intensified. In addition, a series of measures are planned to promote targeted outreach and provide information on regular migration channels to Germany. They include further

en/service/archive/indo-pacific-1781916 (accessed 21 August 2025).

64 Id., ed., *Focus on India* (Berlin, October 2024), <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/resource/blob/2680288/8909ac2c501ab85d55defff7d1b8b75d/241016-fokus-indien-data.pdf> (accessed 21 August 2025).

65 BMI, “Deutsch-indisches Migrationsabkommen unterzeichnet”, press release (Berlin, 5 December 2022), <https://www.bmi.bund.de/SharedDocs/pressemitteilungen/DE/2022/12/abkommen-indien.html> (accessed 16 September 2024).

66 Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, *District and State Wise List of Active Recruiting Agents* (New Delhi, 4 January 2024), <https://www.mea.gov.in/Images/attach/03-List-4-2024.pdf> (accessed 17 September 2024).

67 “Agreement between the Federal Republic of Germany and the Government of the Republic of India on a Comprehensive Migration and Mobility Partnership” (see note 58), 8f.

68 Biehler, Kipp and Koch, *The Potential of Bilateral Migration Agreements* (see note 62).

69 Sameena Hameed, “India’s Labour Agreements with the Gulf Cooperation Council Countries: An Assessment”, *International Studies* 58, no. 4 (2021), 442 – 65 (458).

70 *Skilled Labour Strategy: India*, ed. Bundesministerium für Arbeit und Soziales (BMAS) and Auswärtiges Amt (AA) (Berlin, October 2024), https://www.bmas.de/SharedDocs/Downloads/EN/a798e-skilled-labour-strategy-india.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=1 (accessed 18 August 2025).

developing the “Make it in Germany” information portal so that it is more country-specific as well as working with Indian influencers on social media and making use of trade fairs in India.

The strategy also includes measures to improve the recognition of Indian professional qualifications (which was included in the MMPA) and streamline the administrative processes in Germany and abroad necessary for the migration of skilled workers. A new sub-working group has been set up to deal with labour migration issues separately from return policy. Although the strategy may be of shorter-term nature compared with the MMPA, it has effectively highlighted the potential of migration cooperation for both parties. Moreover, in this document, the enormous importance of private recruitment agencies is recognised for the first time and their regulation has been made an area of future cooperation.⁷¹

Legal framework and state actors

Following a reform in 2020, the Skilled Labour Immigration Act was amended in 2023, further opening up the already liberal legal framework for labour migration to Germany from third countries. As early as 2013, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) had stated that Germany had the most liberal immigration regulations for skilled workers and highly qualified people of all OECD member states.⁷² However, unlike in countries such as Italy and Spain, Germany’s migration law is not geared towards accepting large contingents of workers from abroad.⁷³ For this reason, the MMPA does not set binding targets for labour migration or rules that favour Indian migrants. Rather, the agreement aims merely at interpreting the rules in the spirit of goodwill and strengthening and improving the conditions for cooperation between state actors from the two countries. For Germany, this means the continued presence of Goethe institutes and centres

in India, while those facilities have recently been closed in other countries.⁷⁴

Various ministries from each of the two countries have agreed to cooperate with one another. In Germany, the AA and the BMAS are playing a key role. The AA is responsible for coordinating specific measures in India through its country desk and missions abroad; and the BMAS is responsible for coordinating the measures in Germany outlined in the Skilled Labour Strategy for India and for dealing with specific issues related to labour migration. Other German ministries that have dealings with India are involved, too, through a new, interministerial country concept for the recruitment of skilled labour from India. They include the Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy (BMWE), the Ministry of Research, Technology and Space (BMFTR), the Ministry for Education, Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMBFSFJ), the Ministry of Health (BMG) and the Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). Finally, the AA and BMAS are responsible for implementing the country concept, which, the first of its kind, is intended to ensure that the activities of the individual departments are coordinated on the ground.

In India, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), the Ministry of Labour and Employment (MOLE) and the Ministry for Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE) are responsible for migration cooperation with Germany. From 2004 to 2016, there was a separate Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs (MOIA), which was responsible for promoting labour migration and the Indian diaspora; for reasons of efficiency, it was later integrated into the Ministry of External Affairs.⁷⁵ Responsibility for issues related to the return of nationals lies with the Ministry of Internal Affairs, as in the case of Germany.

The respective embassies and implementing organisations of the two countries play a key role in migration cooperation, too. On the German side, they include the German Employment Agency (BA), the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ), the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), the Goethe institutes and centres, and the Indo-German

71 Ibid., 18.

72 Steffen Angenendt, Nadine Knapp and David Kipp, *Germany Is Looking for Foreign Labour*, SWP-Research Paper 3/2023 (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, January 2023), doi: 10.18449/2023RP03.

73 Biehler, Kipp and Koch, *The Potential of Bilateral Migration Agreements* (see note 62).

74 Background discussion between the author and ministry representatives in Berlin in February 2024.

75 “Government to Merge Overseas Indian Affairs Ministry with MEA”, *Times of India* (online), 8 January 2016, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/government-to-merge-overseas-indian-affairs-ministry-with-mea/articleshow/50491031.cms> (accessed 3 April 2025).

Chamber of Commerce (AHK). On the Indian side, the semi-state National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) has a special role to play. A public-private partnership (PPP) that is 51 per cent privately funded, the NSDC was established by the MSDE in 2008. Besides performing its main task of vocational training, the NSDC is also active in the training and recruitment of Indian migrant workers through its subsidiary NSDC International (NSDCI). But because the NSDCI does not have a licence as a recruitment agency, it has to depend on cooperation with licensed agencies.

In India, migration is only loosely regulated; attempts to reform migration legislation have failed.

In India, the regulation of migration is less developed than in Germany or even other leading countries of origin for migrant workers. Furthermore, the protection of Indian workers from exploitation and abuse has long been neglected. The employment of Indian nationals abroad is regulated by the Emigration Act of 1983.⁷⁶ The Protector General of Emigrants (PGE) under the Ministry of External Affairs is responsible for implementing Indian migration legislation. Its most important task is to protect Indian migrant workers from exploitative or fraudulent recruitment practices. The PGE is supported by 14 regional sub-units, known as Protectors of Emigrants (PoEs), which act as licensing and supervisory bodies at the operational level. In early 2025, it was announced that the number of PoEs is to be increased to ensure better territorial coverage.⁷⁷

One of the PGE's main powers is to grant licences to recruitment agencies. At the same time, it has an oversight role and is responsible for ensuring that employment relationships are based on fair recruitment practices and binding contracts. (To this end, the eMigrate system was introduced in 2014. This is a digital platform that connects all relevant government agencies with potential employers, workers and insurance companies. It also enables affected migrants

or third parties to report unregistered or fraudulent recruitment agencies.⁷⁸) The PGE's supervisory powers are limited by executive order to 18 target countries in Asia and the Gulf states — both regions where working conditions can be particularly precarious. Furthermore, checks are carried out only on employment contracts for low-skilled and selected medium-skilled jobs. Highly skilled workers and students, along with migrants to Western countries such as Germany, are exempt from state control and approval procedures.

In 2021, an attempt to reform India's outdated migration legislation proved unsuccessful.⁷⁹ However, the growing number of abusive recruitment practices — including those that may have been deployed in the case of the Indian migrants who claim to have been unwittingly recruited as mercenaries for the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine — has triggered new dynamics.⁸⁰ The Indian government is reportedly planning to introduce a new bill to the parliament in 2025 — an Overseas Mobility Facilitation and Welfare Bill.⁸¹ Meanwhile, the Immigration and Foreigners Bill⁸² was passed in spring 2025 as a replacement for the outdated law on the entry, stay and departure of foreigners in India. Under the new law, a modern, digitally supported system is to be introduced — one that includes a visa and registration requirement and the establishment of an immigration authority.

⁷⁸ Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, "eMigrate — List of Unregistered Agencies against which Grievances Received" (New Delhi), <https://www.emigrate.gov.in/#/emigrate/recruiting-agent/list-of-unregistered-ra-agencies-or-agents> (accessed 21 May 2025).

⁷⁹ PRS Legislative Research, *Welfare of Indian Diaspora and Status of Emigration Bill*, Standing Committee Report Summary (New Delhi, 9 April 2025), <https://prsindia.org/policy/report-summaries/welfare-of-indian-diaspora-and-status-of-emigration-bill> (accessed 3 May 2025).

⁸⁰ Shibimol KG, "Emotional Video from Kerala Man Forced to Fight in Russia-Ukraine Conflict Surfaces", *India Today*, 15 January 2025, <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/kerala/story/kerala-man-injured-in-russia-ukraine-conflict-says-contract-canceled-forced-to-fight-2665185-2025-01-15> (accessed 10 June 2025).

⁸¹ "A New Law in the Works for Safe, Orderly Migration" (see note 77).

⁸² Lok Sabha (the lower house of the Indian parliament), *The Immigration and Foreigners Bill, 2025*, 27 March 2025, https://prsindia.org/files/bills_acts/bills_parliament/2025/Immigration_and_Foreigners_Bill_2025.pdf (accessed 16 June 2025).

⁷⁶ Meera Sethi and Debolina Kundu, "Migration Policy: Where Do We Stand?" in *Handbook of Internal Migration in India* (see note 12), 684–702 (692), doi: 10.4135/9789353287788.n50.

⁷⁷ "A New Law in the Works for Safe, Orderly Migration", *Economic Times* (online), 6 February 2025, <https://economic-times.indiatimes.com/nri/migrate/a-new-law-in-the-works-for-safe-orderly-migration/articleshow/117978626.cms?from=mdr> (accessed 10 June 2025).

The Indian states attach great importance to migration cooperation, although there is no mention in the MMPA of such cooperation at the state level.⁸³ They pursue their migration policy interests more or less independently of the Indian central government, and almost half of them have their own semi-state recruitment agencies. At the same time, there have been new regulatory attempts at the level of the states to prevent abusive recruitment practices. In the southern state of Kerala, for example, a task force headed by the local PoE has been formed,⁸⁴ which, among other things, launched investigations against numerous fraudulent recruitment agencies in March 2025.⁸⁵

Non-state recruitment actors

Non-state actors play a crucial role in self-organised migration from India to Germany. They include the Indian migrant workers themselves, who often use their networks and knowledge of the local language and conditions to inform and support people in India who are interested in migrating. The importance of these diaspora actors is recognised in the MMPA (Article 11) and promoted within the framework of the GIZ programme “Migration & Diaspora”.⁸⁶ Otherwise, there is no mention in the MMPA of non-state actors.

The Indian staffing and recruitment market is lucrative: it was estimated to be worth US\$18 billion in 2022 and projected to reach around US\$48.5 billion by 2030.⁸⁷ Private recruitment agencies operate

in complex networks involving employers, private universities and other agencies both within India and elsewhere.

Many private recruitment agencies are not registered, making it even more difficult to regulate them.

Just under 2,000 recruitment agencies are registered with the Indian Ministry of External Affairs. All are required to provide a bank guarantee: agencies that place fewer than 100 workers a year have to deposit the equivalent of around €8,000, while the others have to deposit the equivalent of some €50,000.⁸⁸ Because even the lower amount can be too high a hurdle for smaller recruitment agencies, it is not surprising that there is a large number of unregistered providers — more than 3,000 according to a 2024 parliamentary report — whose activities are rarely prosecuted.⁸⁹ It is often private recruitment agencies working in the field of education migration⁹⁰ and travel agencies that operate outside the existing regulatory framework, as they are not required to register with the Indian Ministry of External Affairs and thus their activities are not monitored.⁹¹

Excessive recruitment fees for prospective migrants is a common problem.⁹² Although there is an upper limit of 30,000 Indian rupees (around €300) plus 18 per cent VAT,⁹³ many migrants have to pay up to

⁸³ Geis-Thöne, *Zuwanderung aus Indien* (see note 11).

⁸⁴ “Kerala Government Forms Task Force to Combat Illegal Recruitment and Visa Fraud”, *Deccan Herald* (online), 18 October 2024, <https://www.deccanherald.com/india/kerala/kerala-government-forms-task-force-to-combat-illegal-recruitment-and-visa-fraud-3238440> (accessed 10 June 2025).

⁸⁵ “Crackdown on Illegal Recruitment Agencies Uncovers Widespread Fraud”, *Times of India* (online), 21 March 2025, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/thiruvananthapuram/crackdown-on-illegal-recruitment-agencies-uncovers-widespread-fraud/articleshow/119270217.cms> (accessed 10 June 2025).

⁸⁶ Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), “Fachkräftefonds Migration & Diaspora” (Bonn and Eschborn, 2025), <https://www.giz.de/de/weltweit/80044.html> (accessed 19 May 2025).

⁸⁷ The Insight Partners, “India Staffing and Recruitment Market to Reach US\$48,530.94 Million by 2030”, press release (5 October 2023), <https://www.theinsightpartners.com/pr/india-staffing-and-recruitment-market> (accessed 3 May 2025).

⁸⁸ Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, “Recruiting Agents (RAs): Guidelines for Registration as RAs” (New Delhi, 10 February 2023), <https://www.mea.gov.in/ras.htm> (accessed 1 July 2025).

⁸⁹ PRS Legislative Research, *Welfare of Indian Diaspora and Status of Emigration Bill* (see note 79).

⁹⁰ DAAD, *India as a Strategic Partner. DAAD Recommendations to German Higher Education Institutions*, DAAD Perspectives (Bonn, March 2025), 13, https://static.daad.de/media/daad_de/pdfs_nicht_barrierefrei/infos-services-fuer-hochschulen/kompetenzzentrum/dokumente/daad_perspectives_india_engl_barrierefrei.pdf (accessed 21 March 2025).

⁹¹ Background discussions between the author and international experts on India in June 2025 (digital).

⁹² *Global Mobility of Indian Workforce*, ed. KPMG and FICCI (see note 6), 11.

⁹³ Neelanjit Das, “Overseas Job Recruitment Agents Cannot Charge More than Rs 30,000: Govt”, *Economic Times* (online), 23 December 2023, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/wealth/save/overseas-job-recruitment-agents-cant-charge->

US\$1,500 for a job in the Gulf states.⁹⁴ Higher four-digit euro amounts are demanded for migration to Europe, with placements in East European countries such as Romania or Hungary tending to be cheaper than in those in Germany.⁹⁵

Though not explicitly stated in law, registration is, in effect, limited to Indian nationals or Indian-registered legal entities. This is the reason why the AHK-India was denied a recruitment licence, for which it had applied as part of the BMWF-funded pilot project “Hand in Hand for International Talents”: the implementation of the project, aimed at the recruitment of skilled workers in the catering industry,⁹⁶ required partnering with a registered Indian recruitment agency. For international recruitment agencies, another option would be to establish an Indian subsidiary run by a local manager.

Alongside the traditional German recruitment agencies, new actors are to be found along the German-Indian migration corridor. They include IndiaWorks⁹⁷ in Freiburg, which is jointly operated by a former employee of the local chamber of crafts and a representative of the Indian recruitment agency Magic Billion. IndiaWorks recruits workers for the hospitality, skilled trades and healthcare sectors. While skilled workers are placed free of charge (according to the “employer pays principle”⁹⁸), trainee apprentices have to pay fees totalling several thousand euros for their preparation, language training and placement, in part as employers are unwilling to contribute to those costs because they will have to provide expensive training once the trainees are in Germany.⁹⁹ From an Indian perspective, the earning potential in apprenticeship professions in Germany seems to be attractive enough that even people with

an Indian bachelor’s degree are being recruited for training positions.¹⁰⁰ When approaching employers, it is advantageous to have legal representation and local contacts in Germany — something that Indian recruitment agencies have recognised, too. This explains why Indian companies are taking over German nursing recruitment agencies. For example, Border Plus has acquired the Onea Care recruitment agency¹⁰¹ and TERN the Rekrut company.¹⁰² Both German-based companies are certified with the quality seal “Fair Recruitment Healthcare Germany”, which, introduced by the BMG, is intended to guarantee, among other things, the “employer pays principle” and comprehensive integration support.¹⁰³

Despite the growing number of private recruitment agencies active along the Indo-German migration corridor, there is still no systematic oversight and control over their practices. To ensure fair migration, bilateral migration cooperation should be aimed at strengthening the transparency and regulation of private recruitment agencies.

more-than-this-limit-govt/articleshow/106213364.cms?utm_source=chatgpt.com (accessed 18 July 2025).

⁹⁴ Hameed, “India’s Labour Agreements with the Gulf Cooperation Council Countries” (see note 69), 445.

⁹⁵ Background discussion between the author and a private recruitment agency in New Delhi in July 2024.

⁹⁶ Background discussion between the author and a representative of Indo-German Chamber of Commerce in June 2025 (digital).

⁹⁷ IndiaWorks website: <https://india-works.de/> (accessed 18 May 2025).

⁹⁸ Institute for Human Rights and Business (IHRB), “The Employer Pays Principle”, <https://www.ihrb.org/projects/employer-pays-principle> (accessed 2 July 2025).

⁹⁹ Background discussion between the author and the managing director of IndiaWorks in July 2025 (digital).

¹⁰⁰ Till Fähnders and Tim Niendorf, “Die Inder sind mein Kapital”, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (online), 14 February 2024, <https://www.djp.de/images/preistraeger-2024/die-inder-sind-mein-kapital.pdf> (accessed 5 June 2025).

¹⁰¹ Brinda Sarkar, “BorderPlus Acquires Onea Care, Paving the Way for Indian Nurses in Germany”, *Economic Times* (online), 1 April 2025, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/nri/work/borderplus-acquires-onea-care-paving-the-way-for-indian-nurses-in-germany/articleshow/119848160.cms?from=mdr> (accessed 18 May 2025).

¹⁰² Express Healthcare, “TERN Group and NSDC (I) to Help 7,000+ Nurses with Global Jobs in 2025” (24 December 2024), <https://www.expresshealthcare.in/news/tern-group-and-nsdc-i-to-help-7000-nurses-with-global-jobs-in-2025/447419/> (accessed 21 May 2025).

¹⁰³ RAL quality seal “Fair Recruitment Healthcare Germany” (website), <https://fair-recruitment-nurse.com> (accessed 21 August 2025).

Migration Cooperation: Opportunities and Challenges

In general, increasing migration from India is viewed positively in Germany, as it helps alleviate the shortage of skilled workers and because there are only a small number of Indian nationals residing irregularly in Germany, even though the overall number of Indian migrants is rising. At the same time, interest in Germany as a migration destination continues to grow in India.¹⁰⁴ However, while many opportunities exist for expanding labour and education migration from India to Germany, there are also challenges. These include the different approaches to migration cooperation, skills matching in the area of labour migration and quality control in the selection of Indian students. Furthermore, India's cooperation over the return of citizens required to leave Germany will remain a thorny issue, even though the numbers of such individuals are relatively low.

Different approaches to migration cooperation

India has extensive experience in migration cooperation with a large number of destination countries. It has concluded legally binding and non-binding agreements with seven European countries (including Germany, France and the United Kingdom) and other destination countries such as Australia, Jordan, Israel, Japan, Taiwan and the Gulf states.¹⁰⁵ Migration cooperation clearly contributes to the diversification of India's foreign policy relations, as it can serve as unifying element that strengthens cooperation in other areas. The Indian government sees at least some parts

of the diaspora as representatives of its interests abroad.¹⁰⁶

Another important incentive for the Indian government is remittances, which have more than doubled since 2010 and were estimated to reach around US\$129 billion, approximately 3.4 per cent of gross domestic product, in 2024.¹⁰⁷ Some regions of India depend heavily on remittances, which are crucial for their economic development. In recent years, the share of remittances from industrialised countries has risen significantly, overtaking those from the Gulf states.¹⁰⁸ In addition to the tangible financial gains, India is counting on the intangible benefits: namely, that at least some students and workers from abroad will return to India with language skills, professional knowledge and entrepreneurial skills that can contribute to the country's economic development.

Yet another incentive is linked to the immense challenges facing India's labour market and education system. Around 90 per cent of the workforce is employed in the informal sector, and many people remain dependent on very low-paid casual work.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁴ Sanjay Kumar, *Indian Perceptions of Europe and Germany. A Report* (New Delhi, 2025), 62.

¹⁰⁵ Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, "List of MoUs/Agreements Signed with Other Countries" (New Delhi, 2024), <https://www.mea.gov.in/Images/CPV/RSe-1999-1-12-12-2024.pdf> (accessed 3 May 2025).

¹⁰⁶ "Narendra Modi's Secret Weapon: India's Diaspora", *The Economist* (online), 27 March 2024, <https://www.economist.com/international/2024/03/27/narendra-modis-secret-weapon-indias-diaspora> (accessed 16 September 2024).

¹⁰⁷ Gayatri Nayak, "India Receives over \$100 Billion Remittances for Three Consecutive Years", *Economic Times* (online), 31 March 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/msve75cc> (accessed 5 June 2025).

¹⁰⁸ Dharendra Gajbhiye et al., *Changing Dynamics of India's Remittances. Insights from the Sixth Round of India's Remittances Survey*, RBI Bulletin (Mumbai: Reserve Bank of India, March 2025), https://rbi.org.in/Scripts/BS_ViewBulletin.aspx?Id=23260.

¹⁰⁹ International Labour Organization, *India Employment Report 2024. Youth Employment, Education and Skills* (Geneva, 29 March 2024), 20, <https://www.ilo.org/publications/india-employment-report-2024-youth-employment-education-and-skills> (accessed 17 September 2024).

In order to offer the growing working-age population the prospect of employment, between 60 million and 150 million new jobs will have to be created by 2030.¹¹⁰ But for decades, the Indian education system has favoured an elite higher education system over a high-quality broad-based one, which has had negative consequences for social justice and the long-term development of the Indian economy.¹¹¹ Even if these structural deficits were to be tackled immediately, the tangible benefits could be expected only in the medium term. In the meantime, migration is helping alleviate at least some of the pressure on the job market.

For the Indian government, migration agreements provide an opportunity to reform vocational training. As a reference model, it cites the Technical Intern Training Programme (TITP) – an exchange programme with Japan that was launched by the MSDE in 2017 and is being implemented by the NSDC. The aim of the programme is to allow young Indians to acquire vocational qualifications through practical training at Japanese companies. However, the impact has been limited so far: by March 2024, the number of participants had only slightly exceeded 1,000.¹¹² While India's interest in practical training and knowledge transfer is understandable, such programmes could not easily be transferred to Germany because they would be at odds with German immigration law. Moreover, they run counter to the interests of German employers, who are keen to retain skilled workers once they have invested in their training.

The different approaches to migration cooperation are also evident in debate about the number of Indian migrants making their way to Germany. In 2024, the Indian government criticised the German implementation of the MMPA as too hesitant, noting that the MMPA target of recruiting 3,000 young workers a year (Article 6) had not been met through state-supported

recruitment programmes. In response, Germany pointed out that significantly more than 3,000 had been recruited thanks to self-organised migration and that this figure was in any case not intended to be achieved exclusively through state-supported recruitment programmes.¹¹³

Although this dispute has now been resolved, it highlights the fundamental differences in approaches towards migration cooperation. While the Indian government is pushing for a rapid scaling up of labour migration through state recruitment programmes, there remains uncertainty in Germany as to which Indian state actor can be considered a trustworthy cooperation partner. The NSDC recently came under heavy criticism over a recruitment agreement concluded with Israel in November 2023 following the sudden shortfall of Palestinian workers in the wake of the Hamas attack. The Indian workers sent to Israel did not receive sufficient information or protection, nor were they sufficiently qualified in the eyes of their Israeli employers.¹¹⁴ Even better-prepared, privately recruited Indians suffered as a result of the poor reputation of Indian workers that the NSDC initiative generated.¹¹⁵ In addition to this problematic track record, there were also allegations of corruption made against the NSDC in spring 2025. They led to the dismissal of the chief executive officer, who simultaneously served as managing director of the NSDCI (the subsidiary created for recruitment).¹¹⁶

Against this backdrop, it is to Germany's advantage that it is already cooperating with individual Indian states to recruit skilled workers. For example, under the "Triple Win" programme implemented by the BA and GIZ to attract nursing staff, recruitment agreements were concluded with the semi-state recruitment agencies Norka Roots in Kerala (end of 2021)

110 "India Needs to Create 148 mn Additional Jobs by 2030 Given Population Growth: Gita Gopinath", *Economic Times* (online), 17 August 2024, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/india/india-needs-to-create-148-mn-additional-jobs-by-2030-given-population-growth-imf-dmd-gopinath/articleshow/112591177.cms?from=mdr> (accessed 19 July 2025).

111 Ashoka Mody, *India Is Broken. A People Betrayed, Independence to Today* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2023), 11ff.

112 National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC), "Technical Intern Training Program (TITP)", <https://nsdcindia.org/home-titp> (accessed 19 May 2025).

113 Background discussions with representatives of the ministries involved in July 2024 in New Delhi and in May 2025 in Berlin.

114 "The Many Flaws in the Israeli Job Scheme for Indians", *Deccan Herald* (online), 10 September 2024, <https://www.deccanherald.com/india/the-many-flaws-in-the-israeli-job-scheme-for-indians-3184472> (accessed 19 May 2025).

115 Background discussions with private recruitment agencies in New Delhi in July 2024.

116 Ritu Sarin, "After Pile of Complaints, National Skill Corporation CEO Removed", *Indian Express* (online), 28 May 2025, <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/after-pile-of-complaints-national-skill-corporation-ceo-removed-10032908/> (accessed 5 June 2025).

and TOMCOM in Telangana (end of 2023).¹¹⁷ For their part, the German states have launched their own recruitment measures together with various Indian states; some of which are linked to existing university partnerships or India-based liaison offices for economic cooperation.

The conditions for cooperation vary considerably from Indian state to state, above all owing to the diverse migration traditions.¹¹⁸ In terms of the volume of international remittances, Maharashtra, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh are the most important home states of Indian migrants.¹¹⁹ However, there are significant differences in conditions even within each of these states — for example, between urban and rural areas. Good educational standards and a reliable migration infrastructure are important factors for cooperation. The economy and social fabric of Kerala, for example, has been shaped by migration since the 1970s. It has two well-functioning semi-state recruitment agencies: Norka Roots, which offers comprehensive support and reintegration services for migrants from Kerala, and ODEPC Kerala, whose sole focus is recruitment.

Many other states do not have such high-quality recruitment structures. They include Maharashtra, notwithstanding the large volume of remittances that it receives. In early 2024, Baden-Württemberg signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the state on the recruitment of a sizeable number of migrant workers.¹²⁰ For its part, Maharashtra — during the run-up to the State Assembly election — took steps to rapidly set up a new state recruitment agency and other support structures, including language training in cooperation with the Goethe Institute. But then it rushed ahead with the selection of several thousand candidates, despite not yet having agreed on the selection criteria with the German state of Baden-Württemberg, which was not responsive to

attempts to forge ahead with the project.¹²¹ Both sides seemed to have lacked the experience and state structures to implement the MoU, which might have been signed primarily for political purposes. As a result, the project is currently on hold, causing enormous disappointment among the candidates selected in India.¹²² This whole episode underscores the need for robust implementation structures as well as for expertise on both sides in launching such projects.

In any case, private recruitment agencies are often able to support migration ambitions more effectively and flexibly as many have a long track record in the selection of good prospective migrant workers and the necessary job-specific preparation. However, the quality of services offered varies enormously: while some established recruitment agencies have been operating reputable businesses for many years, others lure potential clients with unrealistic promises or even fraudulent claims. Moreover, the vast majority of the agencies charge their clients fees, thereby violating the “employer pays principle”. Improved regulation of private recruitment agencies is essential for the sustainable expansion of labour migration from India. Because Germany cannot directly regulate India-based agencies, it is required under the framework of the MMPA to engage in closer bilateral coordination with the Indian government and the individual states from which the majority of labour migrants to Germany are recruited.

Skills matching for labour migration

Since the early 2010s, migration from India to Germany has increased significantly, mainly owing to highly skilled workers gaining access to the German labour market via the EU Blue Card. These skilled workers make an important contribution to alleviating skilled-labour shortages, particularly in key sectors such as IT. Overall, their integration into the German labour market has been very successful: in February 2024, the unemployment rate among Indian nationals was just 3.7 per cent, roughly half the German average. In addition, Indian workers tend to be

117 GIZ, “Sustainable Recruitment of Nurses (Triple Win)”, 2024, <https://www.giz.de/de/weltweit/41533.html> (accessed 17 September 2024).

118 Geis-Thöne, *Zuwanderung aus Indien* (see note 11), 28.

119 Gajbhiye et al., *Changing Dynamics of India's Remittances* (see note 108), 92.

120 Astrid Scheppelmann, “Fachkräfte. THE LÄND und der Partnerbundesstaat Maharashtra unterzeichnen Absichtserklärung zur Zusammenarbeit bei der Fachkräftemigration” (Stuttgart: Baden-Württemberg, 20 March 2024), <https://www.bw-i.de/newsroom/news/nachricht/fachkraefte-service-desk-kooperationsbuero-indien> (accessed 3 May 2025).

121 Government of Maharashtra, “Employment Opportunity in Germany. Pathdarshi Project”, *Indian Express*, 24 August 2024.

122 Niraj Pandit, “Govt Inaction Stalls Germany Job Hopes of 7,500 Youngsters”, *Hindustan Times* (online), 1 July 2025, 4, <https://www.pressreader.com/similar/281672555938251>.

younger and better educated than the average member of the working population in Germany and are more likely to be employed in highly skilled professions, especially the STEM ones. A similar trend is evident in income levels: at the end of 2023, the average gross wage of Indian nationals was €5,359, well above the German median of €3,945.¹²³

At the same time, there are signs that the proportion of IT experts among migrants to Germany is declining, although it is not entirely clear why. One reason could be Germany's weak economic growth in recent years and the corresponding fall in demand for workers in the local IT sector. Another could be the declining attractiveness for IT specialists from India, because they are also in demand in their home country and earning opportunities have improved. What is certain, however, is that demand for Indian experts in the field of artificial intelligence (AI) is growing.¹²⁴

Unclear is which fields of activity beyond the STEM professions lend themselves to recruitment from India.

It remains to be seen whether Indian specialists beyond the STEM and AI professions can be successfully recruited for those industries where the shortage of skilled workers is greatest. Small and medium-sized enterprises, in particular, remain reluctant to recruit workers from third countries such as India. According to a survey conducted on behalf of the Bertelsmann Foundation in 2024, only 18 per cent of German firms were actively seeking workers abroad, even though a full 70 per cent of the companies surveyed complained about staff shortages, especially among those with vocational training.¹²⁵ The high

administrative hurdles, including the lengthy recognition of professional qualifications, are often cited as the reason for their reluctance. However, another factor is scepticism about the integration and performance capabilities of third-country nationals. For their part, Indians interested in migration are often very concerned about discrimination and racism in Germany. According to an OECD survey of skilled workers of various nationalities who have migrated to Germany, this has proved to be a much bigger problem than anticipated by those workers.¹²⁶

Besides the social challenges, successful labour migration requires an effective matching process to ensure that Indian qualifications are transferable. The fact that practical training accounts for only a small proportion of the Indian curriculum is considered a weakness compared with the German dual system of vocational schools and training on the job. Nevertheless, there appears to be a good match in the health-care professions, particularly in the case of urgently needed nursing staff. Their training is regulated at the federal level by the Indian Nursing Council and in many respects meets the requirements for nursing professionals in Germany¹²⁷ – a strength that the GIZ project “Global Skills Partnerships”, funded by the BMG, wants to further enhance. As part of this project, German and Indian education institutions are developing joint nursing curricula. The aim is to ensure that the corresponding qualifications can be immediately recognised in either country.¹²⁸

Discussions are also under way on the targeted recruitment of workers in other sectors, including for so-called green jobs (for example, technicians and engineers for renewable energies). In addition, Deutsche Bahn (DB) plans to recruit Indian train drivers and, in the long term, train skilled workers in India for other

123 Axel Plünnecke, *Qualifizierte Zuwanderung: Indische Beschäftigte verdienen am meisten*, IW-Kurzbericht 98/2024 (Cologne: Institut der Deutschen Wirtschaft [IW], 28 December 2024), https://www.iwkoeln.de/fileadmin/user_upload/Studien/Kurzberichte/PDF/2024/IW-Kurzbericht_2024-Lohnvorsprung-Indier.pdf (accessed 24 March 2025).

124 Laurenz Hemmen and Siddhi Pal, *Where Is Europe's AI Workforce Coming From? Immigration, Emigration & Transborder Movement of AI Talent*, Data Brief (Berlin: Interface, 31 July 2024), <https://www.interface-eu.org/publications/where-is-europes-ai-workforce-coming-from> (accessed 9 April 2025).

125 Susanne U. Schultz, *Fachkräftengpässe und Zuwanderung aus Unternehmenssicht in Deutschland 2024: Die Bedarfe bleiben hoch*, Policy Brief (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Stiftung, October 2024), <https://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/en/publications/>

[publication/did/fachkraefteengpaesse-und-zuwanderung-aus-unternehmenssicht-in-deutschland-2024-die-bedarfe-bleiben-hoch](https://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/en/publications/publication/did/fachkraefteengpaesse-und-zuwanderung-aus-unternehmenssicht-in-deutschland-2024-die-bedarfe-bleiben-hoch) (accessed 4 May 2025).

126 Thomas Liebig and Maria Huerta del Carmen, *Der Weg nach Deutschland. Ergebnisse der Schlussbefragung einer Längsschnittstudie von an Deutschland interessierten Fachkräften aus dem Ausland* (Paris and Berlin, 31 January 2024), 16f., <https://blog.oecd-berlin.de/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/OECD-Fachkraefte-migrationsbefragung-Jahresergebnisse-FINAL.pdf> (accessed 2 July 2025).

127 GIZ, “Sustainable Recruitment of nurses (Triple Win)” (see note 117).

128 Global Skills Partnerships website: <https://global-skills-partnerships.de/> (accessed 6 June 2025).

occupations within the company.¹²⁹ As regards other occupational fields, pioneering work will be necessary in both Germany and India, involving cooperation between government actors, companies and private recruitment agencies.

Besides government pilot projects aimed at attracting skilled workers for specific industries, the effects of the newly established legal avenues for self-organised labour migration to Germany should be closely monitored. The Opportunity Card introduced in Germany in summer 2024 is intended to enable qualified individuals to find a job in Germany and gain a foothold in the labour market. Those who already have a residence permit for employment or training can apply for the card, too. During the job search, part-time work (up to 20 hours a week) is permitted. Although it is still too early to draw any meaningful conclusions, it seems that private recruitment agencies regard the Opportunity Card as a relatively simple migration route from India.¹³⁰ It remains unclear how many Indian migrant workers have, in fact, entered the country in possession of this new residence permit and whether they are sufficiently informed about its initial temporary nature.

Education migration – High level of interest demands improved selection procedures

An important driver of Indian migration is the desire to study abroad. In 2024, there were 1.33 million Indian students enrolled in other countries,¹³¹ most of whom came from the states of Maharashtra, Telangana and Punjab.¹³² Germany ranks fifth among the most popular destination countries and is the leading non-English-speaking country for study, accounting for around 6 per cent of all Indian students enrolled overseas.¹³³ The fact that there are no or only low tuition

fees at Germany's institutes of higher education¹³⁴ makes the country attractive to students from India's middle class who want to avoid the high fees charged by traditional destination countries.¹³⁵

Germany has less experience dealing with international students than traditional immigration countries such as Canada and Australia.¹³⁶ Standardised selection procedures abroad have barely been established, not least because German universities are less market-oriented and therefore less active in seeking to recruit students from abroad.

The majority of Indian students in Germany have already obtained a bachelor's degree in India and are now pursuing a master's degree in Germany (mainly through courses offered in the English language). Only 10 per cent come to Germany to study for a bachelor's degree.¹³⁷ This is due in part to the fact that there is only a limited number of good study programmes beyond the bachelor's level in India. Seventy-three per cent of Indian students in Germany choose a STEM subject, which corresponds to the prevailing educational preferences in India.¹³⁸ According to the OECD, the proportion of Indian students who remain in Germany after the completion of their studies is higher than that among students of other nationalities. In 2020, 76 per cent of students who had gone to Germany from India five years earlier were still in the country after graduation, compared with an average of 63 per cent of all international students.¹³⁹ A DAAD

¹²⁹ *Skilled Labour Strategy: India*, ed. BMAS and AA (see note 70), 35.

¹³⁰ Engler and Palop-García, *Ein Jahr Chancenkarte* (see note 47), 4.

¹³¹ "13,35,878 Indian Students Studying Abroad, Canada Tops the List", *The New Indian Express* (online), 1 August 2024, <https://www.newindianexpress.com/nation/2024/Aug/01/1335878-indian-students-studying-abroad-canada-tops-the-list> (accessed 6 June 2025).

¹³² Gajbhiye et al., *Changing Dynamics of India's Remittances* (see note 108), 93.

¹³³ DAAD, *India as a Strategic Partner* (see note 90), 12.

¹³⁴ Lisa Ruth Brunner et al., "Magnets, Gatekeepers, Surveillants, and Refiners: The Emergence of Higher Education Institutions as Migration Governance Actors in Australia, Canada, and Germany, 1990 to 2019", *International Journal of Educational Research* 129, no. 102490 (2025), doi: 10.1016/j.ijer.2024.102490.

¹³⁵ Thomas Faist et al., "Migration von indischen Hochqualifizierten und Studierenden nach Deutschland. Auswahlkriterien, Bleibeintentionen und Entwicklungseffekte", in *Faire Fachkräftezuwanderung nach Deutschland. Grundlagen und Handlungsbedarf im Kontext eines Einwanderungsgesetzes*, ed. Bertelsmann Stiftung (Gütersloh: Verlag Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2017), 143–60 (149).

¹³⁶ Brunner et al., "Magnets, Gatekeepers, Surveillants, and Refiners" (see note 134), 7f.

¹³⁷ DAAD, *India as a Strategic Partner* (see note 90), 18.

¹³⁸ Akila Kannadasan, "On Our Love for Engineering", *The Hindu*, 16 September 2016, <https://www.thehindu.com/features/metropolis/society/On-our-love-for-engineering/article14404932.ece> (accessed 6 June 2025).

¹³⁹ *International Migration Outlook 2022*, International Migration Outlook Series (Paris: Organisation for Economic Co-

survey conducted in 2024 confirms the higher number of students intending to stay: around 40 per cent of Indian students said they were “definitely” planning to remain in Germany, while another 26 per cent said “probably yes”.¹⁴⁰

Amid the growing number of Indian students wanting to study in Germany, the country’s higher education system is faced with the challenge of selecting the right candidates from among the numerous applications. Under the German-Indian MMPA, an Academic Evaluation Centre (APS) was established at the German Embassy in New Delhi (as had been done previously at the German embassies in China and Vietnam) “to improve the quality of applications of qualified Indian students as well as the application process experience for the applicants”.¹⁴¹ However, the APS in India has so far limited itself mainly to supporting visa procedures and checking the admission requirements of Indian students. It is clear that the role the APS could play goes beyond this. An internal evaluation of APS data shows that it is not always the best-performing students from India who apply to study in Germany. Moreover, there are hardly any students from India’s leading universities among the applicants.¹⁴²

Owing to the admission freeze for international students in the United States and the more difficult visa and admission requirements in traditional destination countries such as the United Kingdom and Canada, interest in studying in Germany will only continue to grow.¹⁴³ As in the case of labour migration, private agencies play a key role here. They provide support with the choice of university as well as with the application and visa process; and they also offer their services to foreign universities.¹⁴⁴ However, they are not regulated by the responsible authorities (PoEs), which makes it difficult for the Indian state to clamp down on fraudulent activities.

Finally, professional education consultancies face the challenge of “study-abroad influencers”, who share their experiences in Germany over social media and YouTube.¹⁴⁵

Indian students in Germany suffer under the questionable practices of some recruitment agencies.

The growing number of Indian students is having a direct impact on the German labour market, as many have part-time jobs in the gig economy and logistics.¹⁴⁶ Many Indian students have to generate an income while studying — mainly through temporary jobs in services such as food delivery — in order to pay off the debts they incurred when migrating to Germany.¹⁴⁷ At the same time, they face high rents and precarious living conditions and have to do everything in their power to protect their residence status.

Together with some private universities, private recruitment agencies have developed a business model in which they secure places at university for young Indians and then charge them a high four-digit sum in euros annually. These private universities offer a quality of education that is not always the highest and award degrees that are often not recognised by the German authorities, leaving graduates with poor prospects of finding employment in Germany.¹⁴⁸ Such abusive practices among international educational institutions, which are still only a limited phenomenon at present, should be curbed by the responsible bodies in Germany. If they are not, the credibility of the entire migration corridor is at risk, as demonstrated by the example of Canada, where

operation and Development [OECD], 2022), 188, doi: 10.1787/30fe16d2-en.

140 Plünnecke, *Qualifizierte Zuwanderung* (see note 123), 1.

141 “Agreement between the Federal Republic of Germany and the Government of the Republic of India on a Comprehensive Migration and Mobility Partnership” (see note 58), 4.

142 DAAD, *India as a Strategic Partner* (see note 90), 13.

143 Hannah Ellis-Petersen and Aakash Hassan, “‘They Are in Shock’: Indian Students Fear Trump Has Ended Their American Dream”, *The Guardian* (online), 4 June 2025, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/jun/04/indian-students-shock-trump-international-study-visa> (accessed 6 June 2025).

144 DAAD, *India as a Strategic Partner* (see note 90), 12f.

145 Sazana Jayadeva, “‘Study-Abroad Influencers’ and Insider Knowledge: How New Forms of Study-Abroad Expertise on Social Media Mediate Student Mobility from India to Germany”, *Mobilities* (online), 11 June 2023, doi: 10.1080/17450101.2023.2220944.

146 “Lieferando, Wolt, Uber Eats & Co. Wie Lieferdienste in Berlin Tausende Migrant*innen aus Südasien ausbeuten”, interview by Nadja Dorschner with Aju Ghevarghese John (Berlin: Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, 16 September 2024), <https://tinyurl.com/365s3ks6> (accessed 22 November 2024).

147 Aakriti Dhawan, “Revealing the Struggles of South Asian Students in Germany. Dheeraj Tyagi & Aju John”, *YouTube*, 25 July 2025, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kB9uTvwGCuE> (accessed 28 July 2025).

148 Nina Scholz, “Junge Inder in Deutschland: Das Geschäft mit den Studis”, *taz* (online), 1 July 2025, <https://taz.de/Junge-Inder-in-Deutschland/!6094350/> (accessed 1 July 2025).

similar cases of fraud led to a tightening of migration policy.

Fortunately, most Indian students in Germany attend regular universities. Despite all the challenges, there is enormous potential for their helping alleviate pressure on the local labour market. This potential could be tapped into more effectively if local networks of universities, civil society and employers were involved in language support and integration measures from the outset. For its part, the German Employment Agency is seeking to lead the way with a pilot project to support Indian students in selected locations as they transition to the labour market.¹⁴⁹

Return policy – (not) a major problem

Compared with the total number of Indian nationals residing in Germany, the number of those required to leave the country is very low. Nevertheless, improved readmission cooperation was the guiding principle for the German government and the BMI (the responsible ministry for this issue) during the bilateral negotiations in 2018. But it should be noted that the relatively high number of asylum applications at the time (2016) – some 3,500 – may have been a factor.

After the conclusion of the MMPA, there was criticism from within the German government about readmission cooperation having, in fact, declined rather than improved. In 2023, 51 Indian nationals were returned,¹⁵⁰ compared with 176 in the pre-coronavirus year of 2019.¹⁵¹ The reasons for this are not clear. The lower number of repatriations could be interpreted as a tactical move by an Indian government that wants to see immediate tangible progress in the expansion of labour migration to Germany. However, it seems more plausible that time was needed for adjustments to be made on both sides following the replacement of the previous voluntary

repatriation practice by a formal agreement. Indeed, repatriation processes depend to a large extent on trust being built between the administrations and individual actors involved and the resulting willingness to cooperate.¹⁵²

The return of persons required to leave the country is regulated by Article 12 of the German-Indian MMPA.¹⁵³ Accordingly, India is obliged to respond to a readmission request within 30 calendar days if the identity of the person to be returned has been clearly established. If this is not the case, the deadline does not apply and India has the option to confirm the Indian nationality of the individual concerned “within a reasonable period”. That process requires lengthy checks because the Indian side often insists on the nationality being confirmed by the police of the responsible state.¹⁵⁴ Once people have been returned or return voluntarily, they find themselves with almost no support from the Indian state: there are no reintegration measures in place apart from those supported by Germany for voluntary returns (such as the REAG/GARP programme¹⁵⁵), as a report to the Indian parliament pointed out.¹⁵⁶

Recently, the number of returns of Indian nationals required to leave Germany has risen again: in 2024, they more than tripled compared with the previous year. A total of 167 Indian nationals required to leave were deported,¹⁵⁷ while 656 returned voluntarily.¹⁵⁸

Cooperation on readmission can be expected to continue to improve. At the same time, the new Ger-

¹⁴⁹ *Skilled Labour Strategy: India*, ed. BMAS and AA (see note 70), 29.

¹⁵⁰ German Bundestag, *Wirkung des deutsch-indischen Migrationsabkommens. Antwort der Bundesregierung auf die Kleine Anfrage der Fraktion der CDU/CSU*, Bundestags-Drucksache 20/10499 (Berlin, 27 February 2024), 4, <https://tinyurl.com/bdzy8n65> (accessed 19 September 2024).

¹⁵¹ “Abschiebungen: Noch kein Effekt des Migrationsabkommens mit Indien” (dpa), *Die Zeit* (online), 29 April 2023, <https://www.zeit.de/news/2023-04/29/noch-kein-effekt-des-migrationsabkommens-mit-indien> (accessed 19 September 2024).

¹⁵² Background discussions with ministry representatives in Berlin in February 2024 and March 2025.

¹⁵³ “Agreement between the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany and the Government of the Republic of India on a Comprehensive Migration and Mobility Partnership” (see note 58), 11 – 13.

¹⁵⁴ Background discussions with Indian ministry representatives in New Delhi in July 2024.

¹⁵⁵ BAMF, “REAG/GARP” (Nuremberg, 16 January 2025), <https://www.bamf.de/EN/Themen/Rueckkehr/Foerderung/mREAGGARP/reaggarp-node.html> (accessed 6 September 2025).

¹⁵⁶ PRS Legislative Research, *Welfare of Indian Diaspora and Status of Emigration Bill* (see note 79).

¹⁵⁷ German Bundestag, *Antwort der Bundesregierung auf die Kleine Anfrage Abgeordneten Clara Büniger, Dr. André Hahn, Gökay Akbulut, weiterer Abgeordneter und der Gruppe Die Linke, Abschiebungen und Ausreisen im Jahr 2024*, Bundestags-Drucksache 20/14946 (Berlin, 11 February 2025), 2, <https://dserver.bundestag.de/btd/20/149/2014946.pdf> (accessed 19 April 2025).

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 25.

man government wants to declare India a safe country of origin in order to speed up decisions on asylum applications received from that country. Belgium, Cyprus, Ireland, France and Switzerland have all classified India as a safe country of origin.¹⁵⁹ At the end of 2024, the Netherlands however had to remove India from its list of safe countries of origin in accordance with a ruling by the European Court of Justice (ECJ) that countries cannot be classified as safe when certain regions are excluded.¹⁶⁰ In April 2025, the EU Commission proposed a uniform application of the concept of “safe country of origin” in the form of a new, joint EU list and named India as one of the countries that might be included on that list.¹⁶¹ Even if asylum applications and the return of Indian nationals required to leave the country remain issues for bilateral migration cooperation, other challenges appear more urgent.

159 European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE), “Asylum Information Database”, <https://asylumineurope.org/reports/> (accessed 16 June 2025).

160 Asylum Information Database, “Safe Country of Origin. Netherlands”, <https://asylumineurope.org/reports/country/netherlands/asylum-procedure/the-safe-country-concepts/safe-country-origin/> (accessed 20 May 2025).

161 European Commission, “Commission Proposes to Frontload Elements of the Pact on Migration and Asylum as well as a First EU List of Safe Countries of Origin”, press release (Brussels, 16 April 2025), https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_25_1070.

Enhancing Germany's External Infrastructure in India

Improvement of Germany's external infrastructure

In order to attract suitable workers from India, Germany must further develop its external infrastructure. The German Foreign Office has acknowledged this in recent years by expanding the relevant personnel capacities of embassies and consulates and maintaining the presence of the Goethe Institute.¹⁶² There have also been major improvements in visa procedures. The diplomatic missions in India are playing a pioneering role here. With the support of external service providers and the German Office for Foreign Affairs (BfAA), the time needed for the acceptance and processing of applications has been significantly reduced. Since 2022, the German Consulate General in Kolkata has been running a pilot project to test the digitisation of visa procedures, which should become standard practice at all missions abroad. The goal is for applicants to appear in person only for identity checks and biometric data collection, with everything else — at least in the case of India — being done electronically in advance with the help of external service providers. Even if there are concerns among domestic policymakers that such services are very vulnerable to fraud, the increasing number of visa applications in India would virtually be impossible to handle without VFS Global.

The so-called Work and Stay Agency for the recruitment of skilled workers, which is envisaged in the German coalition agreement of April 2025, will probably build on the experience gained from digitisation and centralisation. At the same time, the new German government will be able to assess the impact of the latest amendments to the Skilled Labour Immigration Act with the benefit of hindsight.

¹⁶² *Skilled Labour Strategy: India*, ed. BMAS and AA (see note 70), 27.

Furthermore, it is important that Germany's external infrastructure in India is kept up to date in order to reach and inform Indians interested in migration. To this end, the central online portal "Make it in Germany" should be further developed and supplemented with a country-specific section.¹⁶³ Any revisions of the platform should consider further simplifying the language, as the English used may be too complicated for non-native speakers, and translating the information provided into the most relevant other languages of India. Indian influencers in Germany, such as Foreign Ki Duniya,¹⁶⁴ play an important role in providing information, too. However, a critical assessment is needed here as there are numerous reports of influencers painting an unrealistic picture or pursuing fraudulent business models.

The provision of a sufficient number of high-standard German-language courses is a major challenge for German institutions abroad.

Ensuring adequate capacity for the teaching of the German language is a considerable challenge for German institutions in India. In what is a rapidly growing market, the quality standards of the numerous private-language schools vary significantly. This is evident from the significantly lower pass rates in Goethe Institute language exams among those who have attended courses at alternative (mostly cheaper) providers, which often fail to ensure the same level of language proficiency.¹⁶⁵ It is in this environment that the Goethe institutes and centres have to compete.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 20.

¹⁶⁴ "Foreign Ki Duniya", *YouTube*, 18 May 2025, <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC9PO7QJa9N74nQwgF7t3juw> (accessed 18 May 2025).

¹⁶⁵ Background discussions with various interviewees in Hyderabad, Mumbai, Pune and New Delhi in July 2024.

Other institutions that certify the level of German-language skills include telc, a subsidiary of the German Adult Education Association,¹⁶⁶ and the Austrian German-Language Diploma (ÖSD).¹⁶⁷ At the same time, there are enormous differences in the approaches to language teaching. Some private agencies offer fast-track courses in which Indians interested in migration are prepared for the B1 level examination in two to three months of full-time study at boarding school-like structures.¹⁶⁸ Given the increasing number of certification bodies and the growing range of courses on offer, it is essential to define quality standards and systematically monitor compliance with them.¹⁶⁹

The growing interest in learning the German language is also evident from the number of students learning the language within the Indian education system. In 2024, there were 18,144 students studying German at 48 PASCH schools,¹⁷⁰ 25,704 at 126 schools participating in the *Deutsch an 1000 Schulen* project and 81,605 students at 413 other secondary schools.¹⁷¹ Between 2011 and 2014, a more systematic approach had been pursued by the Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan (KVS) — a central government organisation that runs more than 1,200 schools throughout the country and, above all, provides educational continuity through a uniform curriculum for the children of civil servants — which integrated German-language instruction into its syllabus. However, after just three years, German was struck from the curriculum as a result of the nationalist language policy pursued by the Indian government.¹⁷²

Under the National Education Policy, which was reformed in 2020, students are required to learn three languages, one of which may be a non-Indian one;

this means that German can be offered as a third language only if a state decides accordingly. For its part, the German Foreign Office has said there is reason for “cautious optimism” over the impact of this policy.¹⁷³ For example, from the 2026–27 school year, the state of Maharashtra plans to introduce 12 non-Indian foreign languages — including German — for Grades 8 to 10 and possibly Grade 11 to 12. In order to further strengthen the status of German as a foreign language within the Indian education system, including at universities, new measures should be promoted within the framework of migration cooperation.

In order to improve the management of student migration from India, the APS should be granted increased responsibilities so that, among other things, a more competitive selection of study applications could be established in cooperation with the DAAD and German universities. To this end, the German government should seek a dialogue with the German states and universities aimed at reforming the admission procedures for international students. Measures should also be taken to increase the proportion of Indians studying for a bachelor’s degree in Germany, as receiving a full higher education increases the likelihood of language acquisition and retention.

Redefining migration-related development cooperation with India

Although the BMZ has focused on migration-related development cooperation for several years now, the topic has barely been addressed in Germany’s development cooperation with India. For example, Germany does not have a Centre for Migration and Development in India, even though the establishment of such centres has been a flagship initiative in recent years.¹⁷⁴ The only related undertaking that the BMZ has supported is the much smaller “Shaping Development-oriented Migration” (MEG) project. Launched by

166 “telc wächst in Indien”, *telc*, 16 December 2024, <https://tinyurl.com/k3hedydj> (accessed 20 May 2025).

167 ÖSD website: <https://www.osd.at/> (accessed 1 July 2025).

168 Background discussion between the author and a private recruitment agency in New Delhi in July 2024.

169 Background discussion with the author and an Indian migration expert in June 2025 (digital).

170 “PASCH-Schulen in Indien”, *Goethe-Institut*, <https://www.goethe.de/ins/in/de/spr/eng/pasch/psn.html> (accessed 6 June 2025).

171 Information (as of September 2025) obtained by the author from Goethe Institute India.

172 Christine Möllhoff, “Neu-Delhi: Indiens Regierung bremst Deutsch-Unterricht”, *Rheinische Post* (online), 4 November 2014, https://rp-online.de/politik/indiens-regierung-bremst-deutsch-unterricht_aid-20167319 (accessed 20 May 2025).

173 Auswärtiges Amt, “Deutsch als Fremdsprache weltweit 2025. Perspektiven, Herausforderungen, Strategien”, Berlin, 2025, <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/de/newsroom/deutsch-als-fremdsprache-2728478> (accessed 6 September 2025).

174 Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung (BMZ), ed., *Centres for Migration and Development*, BMZ Factsheet (Berlin, November 2023), <https://www.bmz.de/resource/blob/187792/bmz-factsheet-zentren-fuer-migration-und-entwicklung-en.pdf> (accessed 21 August 2025).

GIZ, MEG involves 15 partner countries in all, one of which is India.¹⁷⁵

For a long time, there were no links within the BMZ's bilateral portfolio to other development cooperation priorities with India. It was only at the request of the Indian government that a migration component was added to an already planned GIZ project to improve vocational training in green professions, especially for women.¹⁷⁶ Under this project, curricula are to be designed in such a way that trainees also qualify for employment in Germany or other destination countries. However, this should be seen only as a start. Together with the BMBFSEJ, the BMZ is working with India's MSDE to make the Indian vocational training system more practice-oriented.¹⁷⁷ And in spring 2025, the Indian government signalled in the JWG sub-working group on labour migration that it wants the state vocational training centres to be more geared towards practical preparation for working in Germany and to offer language courses.¹⁷⁸

The BMZ's hesitance can be attributed, among other things, to the strict limits on the use of development funds set by the OECD Official Development Assistance (ODA) criteria.¹⁷⁹ According to these criteria, no activities may be supported if German employers are likely to benefit more than the country of origin — in this case, India. In addition, there may be concerns that the recruitment of skilled workers by German companies could lead to a brain drain of highly qualified workers in India. Indeed, there are

labour shortages in those sectors in India — such as IT, renewable energies, electromobility, healthcare and manufacturing — in which modern technologies require rapid skills adjustments. And workers who have undergone practical training are in short supply, too, particularly in the technical professions and those requiring digital skills.¹⁸⁰ As for shortages in the health and care sectors, these are evident mainly in the poorer, rural states.¹⁸¹ However, the main reason for this is not migration but inequalities within the country and the fundamental inability to exploit the country's demographic potential and ensure that the several million workers who join the workforce each year have sufficient employment prospects.

Moreover, recent migration research highlights the many benefits of migration for the development of countries of origin. Besides the positive impact of remittances, they include strengthening educational incentives in the country of origin. Furthermore, some migrants do return to or invest in their home country — a phenomenon known as “brain circulation”. In India, this effect was particularly evident in the rise of the IT sector: influenced by their experiences in Silicon Valley, members of the Indian diaspora in the US brought technical know-how, market knowledge and international business practices back to India, thereby making a significant contribution to the global competitiveness of the Indian tech industry.¹⁸²

So far, “Triple Win” has been the only recruitment project launched by a development cooperation actor. It is funded not by the BMZ but by German employers and is being implemented by GIZ International Services, a subsidiary that is allowed to generate revenue, which it reinvests into its development projects.¹⁸³ GIZ International Services is supporting the recruit-

175 GIZ, *Shaping Development Oriented Migration* (Eschborn, September 2024), <https://www.giz.de/en/downloads/giz2023-en-Shaping-Development-Oriented-Migration.pdf> (accessed 22 April 2025).

176 GIZ, *Bridging the Gender Gap in Green Skills. Indo-German Green Skills Programme (IGGSP)* (Bonn and Eschborn, August 2024), <https://www.giz.de/de/downloads/giz2024-en-bridging-the-gender-gap-in%20green-skills.pdf> (accessed 20 March 2025).

177 *Skilled Labour Strategy: India*, ed. BMAS and AA (see note 70), 18.

178 Background discussion with representatives of the ministry involved in May 2025 in Berlin.

179 Public funds are eligible as ODA if they are provided by public authorities to developing countries or their nationals or to international organisations with the aim of promoting their economic and social development. BMZ, “Leitfaden ‘Was ist Official Development Assistance (ODA)?’” (Berlin, 22 July 2025), <https://www.bmz.de/de/ministerium/zahlen-fakten/oda-zahlen/hintergrund/leitfaden-oda-19206> (accessed 22 July 2025).

180 Alp Consulting, “Bridging the Gap: How is India Addressing Skills Shortages?”, <https://alp.consulting/how-india-addressing-skills-shortages/> (accessed 8 June 2025).

181 Sakthivel Selvaraj et al., *India. Health System Review* (New Delhi: World Health Organisation, 2022), <https://iris.who.int/bitstream/handle/10665/352685/9789290229049-eng.pdf?sequence=1> (accessed 20 May 2025).

182 Frederic Docquier and Hillel Rapoport, *Globalisation, Brain Drain and Development*, CID Working Paper no. 219 (Cambridge, MA: Center for International Development at Harvard University [CID], March 2011), 41ff, <https://www.hks.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/centers/cid/files/publications/faculty-working-papers/219.pdf> (accessed 16 January 2025).

183 GIZ, “Sustainable Recruitment of Nurses (Triple Win)” (see note 117).

ment agreement between the German Employment Agency and the semi-state recruitment agencies of the states of Kerala (since 2022) and Telangana (since 2024). The advantage of these programmes is that they are based on international standards for fair recruitment, including the “employer pays principle”. However, only 670 nursing staff have been recruited in three years; all of them were from Kerala.¹⁸⁴ More recently, the Confederation of German Employers’ Associations (BDA) called for the “Triple Win” programme to be phased out, arguing that it was not attracting enough skilled workers and that private agencies had long since become more important.¹⁸⁵ It is difficult to make an empirical assessment of the claim by the BA (which is also involved in “Triple Win”) that the programme is a trailblazer for other recruitment agencies and that, in the best case scenario, the latter would be guided by the same principles of fair and orderly labour migration going forward.¹⁸⁶

Given India’s strategic importance both as a partner country for development cooperation and as an important country of origin for labour and education migration, the BMZ should seek to develop new measures and, together with the BMAS, step up the promotion of the framework conditions for fair migration to Germany. An important step in this direction is the decision to put private recruitment agencies to the agenda of the MMPA Joint Working Group (the sub-working group on labour migration), which is in line with the Skilled Labour Strategy for India. In addition, the German government should encourage the Indian government to improve the regulation of private agencies recruiting workers for Europe — for example, through the Protector General of Emigrants and the eMigrate platform — as a part of a possible reform of Indian migration law. Alternatively, a list of trustworthy recruitment agencies could be drawn up with the Indian government or dialogue sought with the various associations of private recruitment agencies with a view to establishing voluntary commitments along the German-Indian migration corridor.

¹⁸⁴ Information provided by the Bundesagentur für Arbeit (as of April 2025).

¹⁸⁵ BDA, *Wege öffnen: Eine moderne Strategie für Erwerbsmigration. Kernforderungen für mehr Zuwanderung in Beschäftigung und Ausbildung* (Berlin, 11 March 2025), 4, <https://tinyurl.com/2eb4fp6d> (accessed 22 April 2025).

¹⁸⁶ Background discussion between the author and representatives of the BA in Berlin in February 2025.

It is unclear whether the German concept of fair migration is compatible with the reality of the Indian migration landscape.

However, it must also be stated that there are clear limits to migration-related development cooperation. It is unclear, for example, whether the German concept of fair migration is compatible with the reality of the Indian migration landscape or whether the “employer pays principle” can be fully implemented (regardless of pathway and skill level). Moreover, the Indian government has so far been reluctant to tighten the regulation of private recruitment agencies and it remains to be seen whether that will change. For this reason, cooperation should be expanded with trustworthy semi-state recruitment agencies of individual Indian states — such as Norka Roots in Kerala — that abide by the “employer pays principle” and thereby contribute, at least at the regional level, to raising awareness of fair recruitment principles among Indians interested in migration.¹⁸⁷ In addition, these semi-state recruitment agencies should be helped to strengthen their capacities for direct placement in Germany, that is, without detours via German implementation organisations. And pilot projects for developing fair credit and repayment models could be designed together with German employers in order to support those migrants who use the services of selected trustworthy private agencies.

Approaches to EU cooperation with India

India has concluded migration agreements with six EU member states. A knock-on effect is evident here: Germany’s MMPA is based largely on the French agreement, while Austria’s is based on the German agreement. At the same time, the EU has established a framework for dialogue on migration, mobility and readmission with India in the form of the 2016 Common Agenda on Migration and Mobility (CAMP). This legally non-binding instrument has also been agreed with Nigeria, Ethiopia, Jordan and Morocco. In the

¹⁸⁷ Mahima Jain, “How Not To Be Deported: India’s Nurses Seeking Work Abroad Learn How To Migrate Safely”, *The Guardian* (online), 12 March 2025, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2025/mar/12/how-not-to-be-deported-indias-nurses-seeking-work-abroad-learn-how-to-migrate-safely> (accessed 20 May 2025).

case of India, it is being implemented by the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) in cooperation with the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA).¹⁸⁸ However, India would like to see an overhaul of the dialogue format, not least because it feels there is too strong a focus on return policy.¹⁸⁹

Even before the CAMM entered into force, the Indian side had been considering the possibility of a comprehensive migration agreement with the EU as a whole. Around 2010, the then independent Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs (MOIA) was determined to negotiate such an agreement with the EU but failed to do so owing to the EU Commission's lack of legal competence for migration policy, which is the responsibility of the member states. And while the EU Commission's plan to conclude a free trade agreement with India¹⁹⁰ would, in theory, provide a robust framework for strengthening cooperation on migration policy,¹⁹¹ the domestic political sensitivity of the issue in many member states explains why no such references have been included into the trade negotiations.

At the very least, however, it should be ensured that member states exchange information related to their migration cooperation agreements with India so that they can learn from one another's experiences. The conditions for Indian migration vary significantly from one member state to the other; but it is possible that methods used elsewhere in the EU to regulate private recruitment from India could inspire new regulatory approaches in Germany. In addition, there should be a better understanding of the migration corridor from India to the EU. This requires improved

data on the migration of Indian nationals not only from India to the individual member states but also within the EU. Furthermore, discussions should be held with India on the appropriate measures to combat irregular migration and human trafficking.¹⁹²

Finally, as part of its external migration agenda, the EU Commission is considering testing a new instrument – the so-called Legal Gateway Office – as a pilot project in India.¹⁹³ Going forward, steps should be taken to ensure that this instrument does not overlap with the approaches of the individual member states and that structures are not duplicated. Real value added could be achieved by tasking the Legal Gateway Office with the quality control of private recruitment agencies along the European-Indian migration corridor.

188 ICMPD, "India-EU Cooperation and Dialogue on Migration and Mobility Phase II", <https://www.icmpd.org/our-work/projects/india-eu-cooperation-and-dialogue-on-migration-and-mobility-phase-ii-india-eu-cdmm-phase-ii> (accessed 2 November 2023).

189 Background discussions with various interlocutors in Brussels in December 2024.

190 European Commission Representation in Austria, "EU und Indien streben Einigung auf Freihandelsabkommen in diesem Jahr an", 28 February 2025, https://austria.representation.ec.europa.eu/news/eu-und-indien-streben-einigung-auf-freihandelsabkommen-diesem-jahr-2025-02-28_de (accessed 4 May 2025).

191 Simon Stocker and Marion Panizzon, "Die Schweiz geht mit Indien eine Wette ein", *Avenir Suisse* (blog), 6 September 2024, <https://www.avenir-suisse.ch/die-schweiz-geht-mit-indien-eine-wette-ein-teil-1/> (accessed 15 June 2025).

192 Sahajveer Baweja and Vansh Bhatnagar, "Addressing the Void: The Call for a Human Smuggling Law in India", *Law School Policy Review*, 5 March 2024, <https://lawschoolpolicyreview.com/2024/03/05/addressing-the-void-the-call-for-a-human-smuggling-law-in-india/> (accessed 17 May 2025).

193 Ursula von der Leyen, *Letter from President on Migration* (Brussels, 16 December 2024), 4, https://www.eunews.it/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Letter-from-President-UvdL-on-Migration_EUCO-December-2024.pdf (accessed 4 May 2025).

Conclusion and Recommendations

Germany's migration cooperation with India has intensified noticeably in recent years. The MMPA and the Skilled Labour Strategy for India have created the conditions for further advancing this development, and the fact that a separate sub-working group now deals with issues of labour migration is advantageous. However, there are still blind spots in Germany's approach to migration from India – for example, with regard to the challenges arising from the growing number of Indians who want to study in Germany. In addition, German activities in India should be better coordinated; this applies especially to the numerous parallel skilled labour initiatives of the federal states.

Migration flows from India to Germany are becoming more diversified: while the number of highly skilled individuals entering the country on the EU Blue Card is declining, more and more Indians are arriving as students, trainees and skilled workers (particularly in the care sector) or as job seekers on the Opportunity Card. As today's migration from India is largely self-organised, government measures should be more focused on improving the framework conditions for fair migration and avoiding undesirable outcomes. An important lesson learned is the enormous relevance of private recruitment agencies involved in the migration flows from India. Effective regulation of the activities of these agencies should be a top priority of the Joint MMPA Working Group. Although the quality seal "Fair Recruitment Healthcare Germany" has set standards, it cannot be transferred to Indian recruitment agencies, nor can it be applied in all sectors. Thus, new methods should be tested to raise awareness among prospective Indian migrants about the importance of fair and transparent recruitment practices when choosing a private recruitment agency.

Although readmission cooperation is an integral part of overall migration cooperation, it should be considered separately from labour migration issues. If India were to be classified as a safe country of origin

by the new German government or included on a new joint EU list of such countries, this would be consistent with the very low asylum recognition rate. In any case, asylum applications and deportations should not be the focus of bilateral migration cooperation. After all, the number of asylum applications continues to fall, while the number of Indian nationals in Germany is growing rapidly. Thus, it is all the more important to respond to problematic trends beyond the asylum statistics and to seek to nip them in the bud. This applies, for example, to Indian students having to pay large sums of money to recruitment agencies and private universities, only to find out that degrees obtained from the latter are often of dubious quality and, in some cases, not recognised by the German authorities and employers.

Migration cooperation with India must not be viewed in isolation from the country's growing international importance and economic strength. India is expected to overtake Germany as the world's third-largest economy in the coming years. Therefore, it seems advisable to link bilateral cooperation issues – such as digitisation, AI and climate protection – to knowledge exchange and mobility components. The EU Commission has announced negotiations on a free trade agreement between the EU and India, which has generated high expectations. The resulting momentum should be used to better coordinate migration policy with India within the EU and to develop a new framework for cooperation. And the Legal Gateway Office that the EU Commission proposes to establish in India should be designed in such a way as to avoid duplicate structures among member states and promote real value added.

As far as migration diplomacy is concerned, Germany's migration partnership with India has shown that areas of responsibility within the government need to be redesignated. Even though the BMI has led the negotiations on agreements with India, it can do little to deliver on the promises made in the area of

labour migration. Both the BMAS and the Foreign Office have distinguished themselves in this regard by initiating a cross-ministerial, country-specific approach to the recruitment of skilled workers. Regardless of the benefits that the planned Work and Stay Agency will bring, it must be clarified which ministry is to be responsible for migration cooperation with third countries going forward. Given the important groundwork that it has already laid, the Foreign Office would be the most obvious choice. But at the same time, the importance of migration-related cooperation must be even more firmly anchored in the self-image of German diplomacy. And, furthermore, the future role of the BA and implementing organisations such as the GIZ must be more precisely defined.

Migration-related development cooperation with India should be significantly expanded so that the increasing migration flows from India can be dealt with as fairly and cooperatively as possible. To this end, the BMZ must revise its bilateral portfolio and make use of synergies with existing projects – for example, in the area of vocational training. In addition, bilateral cooperation should directly strengthen those partners in India that are contributing to fair recruitment practices, such as Norka Roots in Kerala.

Last but not least, the issue of ensuring a welcoming culture in Germany is crucial for the continued successful management of migration from India. If attitudes towards migration continue to harden, despite all the advantages it can bring, Germany will suffer damage both as a society and as a business location. Like others with a migration background, Indians experience discrimination and racism in Germany on a daily basis. Countering this reality is a task not only for politicians but for society as a whole. Trade unions and employers, many of whom are reluctant to hire workers from abroad, can play an important role here. Ultimately, all efforts must be aimed at increasing the opportunities for Indian migrants to participate in German society and at seeking dialogue with the emerging diaspora networks in Germany, which will continue to grow both in size and in importance in the coming years.

Abbreviations

AA	Federal Foreign Office (Auswärtiges Amt)
AHK	German Chambers of Commerce Abroad (in this context Indo-German Chamber of Commerce) (Außenhandelskammer)
AI	Artificial intelligence
APS	Academic Evaluation Centre (Akademische Prüfstelle)
BA	Federal Employment Agency (Bundesagentur für Arbeit)
BAMF	Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge)
BDA	Confederation of German Employers' Associations (Bundesvereinigung der Deutschen Arbeitgeberverbände e.V.)
BfAA	Federal Agency for Foreign Affairs (Bundesamt für Auswärtige Angelegenheiten)
BGBI	Federal Law Gazette (Bundesgesetzblatt)
BMAS	Federal Ministry for Labour and Social Affairs (Bundesministerium für Arbeit und Soziales)
BMBFSFJ	Federal Ministry for Education, Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (Bundesministerium für Bildung, Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend)
BMFTR	Federal Ministry for Research, Technology and Space (Bundesministerium für Forschung, Technik und Raumfahrt)
BMG	Federal Ministry for Health (Bundesministerium für Gesundheit)
BMI	Federal Ministry for the Interior (Bundesministerium des Innern)
BMWE	Federal Ministry for Economy and Energy (Bundesministerium für Wirtschaft und Energie)
BMZ	Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung)
CAMM	Common Agenda on Migration and Mobility
DAAD	German Academic Exchange Service (Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst)
DB	German Railways (Deutsche Bahn)
ECJ	European Court of Justice
EU	European Union
GIZ	German Agency für International Cooperation (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit)
IAB	Institute for Employment Research (Institut für Arbeitsmarkt- und Berufsforschung)
ICMPD	International Centre for Migration Policy Development
ICWA	Indian Council of World Affairs
ILO	International Labour Organization
IT	Information technology
IW	German Economic Institute Cologne (Institut der deutschen Wirtschaft)
JWG	Joint Working Group (of the MMPA)
KVK	Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan
MEA	Ministry of External Affairs (India)
MEG	Shaping Development-oriented Migration (Migration entwicklungspolitisch gestalten) (GIZ)

MMPA	Migration and Mobility Partnership Agreement
MOIA	Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs (India)
MOLE	Ministry of Labour and Employment (India)
MSDE	Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (India)
NRI	Non-resident Indian
NSDC	National Skill Development Corporation
NSDCI	National Skill Development Corporation International
ODA	Official Development Assistance
ODEPC	Overseas Development and Employment Promotion Consultants Ltd.
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
ÖSD	Austrian German-Language Diploma (Österreichisches Sprachdiplom Deutsch)
PGE	Protector General of Emigrants (India)
PIO	Person of Indian origin
PoE	Protector of Emigrants (regional office in India)
PPP	Public-private partnership
REAG/GARP	Reintegration and Emigration Programme for Asylum-Seekers in Germany/Government Assisted Repatriation Programme
STEM	Science, technology, engineering, mathematics
TTTP	Technical Intern Training Programme (India-Japan)
UN DESA	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
UAE	United Arab Emirates

Further Reading

Christian Wagner (ed.)

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