



**FRIEDRICH NAUMANN  
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# **MIGRATION IN FOCUS: NAVIGATING SKILLED AND HUMANITARIAN MIGRATION FLOWS FROM SOUTH ASIA TO GERMANY**

**Prof. S. Irudaya Rajan**

**Varsha Joshi**

**ANALYSIS**

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## **Authors**

Prof. S. Irudaya Rajan  
Varsha Joshi

## **Editor**

### **Dr. Bipin Ghimire**

Regional Political Analyst  
Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom, South Asia

## **Concept Development**

### **Dr. Carsten Klein**

Head, Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom,  
Regional Office South Asia

## **Contact**

Phone +91 11 41688149, 41688150

Email southasia@freiheit.org

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## Executive Summary

Germany's migration policies present a duality: on one hand, the country actively seeks skilled migrants to address labor shortages caused by an aging population, while, on the other, it struggles with the political and social challenges of humanitarian migration. As one of the world's leading economies, Germany has actively sought skilled migrants to address labor shortages caused by an aging population and declining birth rates. This demand has led to policies such as the EU Blue Card, which facilitates the entry of highly skilled professionals, and mobility agreements with key labor-exporting nations. India has become one of Germany's primary partners in skilled migration, particularly in fields such as IT, healthcare and engineering. Indian professionals hold over a quarter of all Blue Cards issued in Germany, and Indian students form the largest group of international students in the country, benefiting from Germany's world-class education system and affordable tuition.

At the same time, Germany has struggled with the complexities of humanitarian migration, particularly in response to global conflicts. The 2015 decision to welcome over a million refugees, primarily from Syria, was a landmark moment that defined Germany's approach to migration. However, the subsequent political and social challenges including strained public resources, integration difficulties and rising anti-immigrant sentiment have led to a tightening of asylum policies. This document explores Germany's migration landscape with a particular focus on South Asian migration trends, primarily with respect to India, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh. Migration from South Asia has been met with increasing restrictions, including deportation agreements and voluntary return programs. Many Pakistani and Afghan asylum-seekers lack higher education and German language proficiency, which further complicates their integration into German

society. As a result, return and reintegration programs often supported by the EU have been implemented to manage irregular migration from these countries.

Germany's migration landscape has also been shaped by geopolitical crises, particularly the Russian invasion of Ukraine. However, the large influx of refugees has also placed a significant strain on Germany's resources, further fueling debates about migration policies. The rise of far-right political movements has intensified anti-immigration rhetoric, leading to calls for stricter border controls and asylum regulations. This shift in public discourse has created a paradox: while Germany remains dependent on migration for economic sustainability, growing political opposition threatens to undermine its ability to attract and retain skilled workers.

Despite these challenges, Germany continues to position itself as a global leader in migration governance. Initiatives such as the "Make in Germany" campaign and the revised Skilled Immigration Act of 2023 aim to streamline migration pathways for foreign workers. However, the management of economic migration in tandem with humanitarian migration remains a contentious issue. Moving forward, Germany will need to balance its economic imperatives with social and political realities, ensuring that migration policies remain both effective and sustainable. Strengthened international cooperation, particularly with South Asian countries, will be essential in addressing labor shortages while maintaining ethical and legal migration practices.

# 1

## Introduction

Migration has been a transformative force, shaping Germany's historical and contemporary landscape. In recent decades, Germany has openly acknowledged its dependence on skilled international workers to sustain economic growth despite its aging population. The country requires approximately 288,000 immigrants annually to address these challenges. With initiatives to attract talent worldwide, Germany has positioned itself as a hub for migrants seeking economic opportunities; the nation has also become a destination for refugees and asylum seekers fleeing conflict and instability. The landmark decision (made a decade ago) to welcome large numbers of refugees put Germany in a unique position with respect to its commitment to humanitarian values and workforce-centric migration.

Germany today, however, grapples with the complexities of cross-border movement, seeking to address its needs for skilled labor whilst supporting vulnerable populations. Migration continues to spark debates across Germany and Europe, fueled by broader geopolitical shifts like Brexit and the rise of far-right political parties. These movements have intensified discussions on the cultural, economic and social implications of migration. According to the 2022 census, Germany is home to 15.6 million immigrants as of 2022, representing nearly 19% of its population, exemplifying these tensions and opportunities.

## 2

## Indians in Germany

Indians have a long-standing history of migration to European countries.. While its volume and patterns have evolved over time due to socio-economic and political factors in India and European nations, migration continues to be a key aspect of India's international presence. Historically, the UK was the primary destination for Indian migrants. However, the appeal of the UK has declined in recent years due to Brexit and the country's economic challenges (Plewa 2021). In contrast, Germany has emerged to become a promising alternative. Despite the language barrier, Germany's migrant-friendly policies, mobility agreements offering long-term prospects and relatively affordable university tuition have made it an increasingly attractive destination for Indian migrants.

The growth of Indian associations in Germany gained momentum after World War II, reflecting the increasing diversity of Indian migrants. As migration from India expanded, region-specific associations emerged, such as the Malayali Association for the Welfare of the Indian Malayali Community, formed by nurses from Kerala. In the 1960s and 1970s, Germany faced a shortage of nurses, prompting Catholic Church-run hospitals to recruit Christian women from Kerala. Approximately 6,000 nurses from Kerala were recruited during this period, leading to subsequent family migration (Knerr, 2009). Many nurses married Indian men from similar socio-economic backgrounds residing in India, while others married Germans, contributing to the growth of the Indo-German population. Migration from India slowed significantly following the 1973 oil crisis and the resulting economic downturn. It was in this period that opportunities in the GCC countries attracted a large number of Indian workers.

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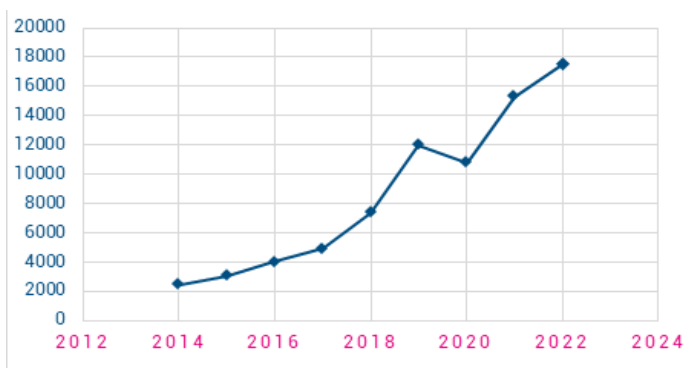
<sup>1</sup> <https://schengen.news/germany-urgently-needs-288000-skilled-foreign-workers-annually-to-maintain-its-economy/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://publications.iom.int/books/world-migration-report-2018>

However, migration to Germany revived between 1981 and 2000, with an annual average of 10,620 Indians moving to Germany (Knerr, 2009). However, unlike the earlier demographics, these Indians were mostly Sikh migrants fleeing the aftermath of the Punjab conflict. The population of Indian migrants in Germany more than doubled between 1990 and 2017, increasing from approximately 32,000 to 68,500. The German Immigration Act of 2005 introduced policies that were more liberal, yet selective, for highly skilled migrants. Between 2000 and 2005, Indians constituted the largest group of IT professionals receiving work permits. The 2012 implementation of the EU Blue Card Directive further liberalized migration policies, offering long-term residence permits for highly skilled workers in fields experiencing shortages, such as engineering and IT. These reforms made Germany's admission system for highly skilled workers one of the least restrictive globally. As of 2022, Indians have received close to 21,228 EU permits; Germany and Poland are two of the top three countries issuing these EU permits to Indians. Almost 28% of all first-time Blue Card visas in Germany were granted to Indians. In 2022, Indian professionals comprised over 1/4th of all Blue Card holders, and Indian students represented the largest cohort of international students in Germany. Indians in Germany enjoyed 19.2% of the 67,965 first-time issuances of a residence permit in the context of educational migration in 2023. Remittance flows from the EU to India grew at a rate of 3.51% annually between 2010 and 2018, with an increase from \$1.69 billion (€ 1.49 billion) in 2010 to \$2.32 billion (€ 2.05 billion) in 2018 (World Bank, 2019).<sup>3</sup>



## Figure no 1: Number of EU Blue cards in Germany



Source: Federal Statistical Office, Germany

India and Germany have strengthened their bilateral cooperation on skilled migration through the Comprehensive Migration and Mobility Partnership Agreement, signed in 2019, focusing on fair and legal migration practices, worker rights' protection and compliance with international labor standards. Both countries are committed to ensuring the mobility of skilled workers, minimizing exploitation and facilitating transparent recruitment and visa processes. The partnership has led to initiatives such as a Joint Declaration of Intent (JDI) in the field of employment and labor (Plewa 2021). Additionally, educational migration to Germany has been growing, given the country houses world-class universities with low tuition fees, attracting many Indian students pursuing higher education (Schmidt, 2018). As of 2022, Germany has issued 12,313 EU permits to India for educational purposes out of a total of 36,165. Germany is one of the most preferred EU countries for Indian students as well as health professionals such as nurses.

<sup>3</sup>World Bank (2019). Migration and Remittances – Recent Developments and Outlook: Migration and Development Brief 31, April 2019.

Table 1. Stock of overseas Indians in 2022

Country	Non-Resident Indians (NRIs)	Persons of Indian Origin (PIOs)	Overseas Indians
Germany	142585	42500	185085

Source: Ministry of External Affairs 2023 report

The German census in 2022 revealed that migration from Asia, particularly India, saw significant growth; Asians accounted for 12.4% of all immigrants, with those of Asian descent representing 24% of the German population with a migration history. Notably, the number of Indian nationals increased by 47.5%, totaling 8,900 individuals, making them the third-largest immigrant group in Germany after a previous count of 6,035 applicants. This trend reflects Germany's ongoing efforts to attract skilled labor amidst demographic challenges and labor shortages.

## 3

## Humanitarian migration and ‘voluntary’ return

Germany has long been a focal point for humanitarian migration due to its robust economy, strong social welfare systems and liberal asylum policies (Hess & Green, 2016). South Asian countries such as Afghanistan, Pakistan and Bangladesh have contributed to the influx of migrants seeking better lives in Europe. South Asia’s geopolitical and socio-economic challenges drive many to seek refuge in Germany. Afghanistan, in particular, has seen a sharp increase in asylum applications. Similarly, migration from Pakistan has been consistent over the years. Since 2010, Pakistan has ranked among the top ten countries of origin for asylum seekers in Germany (Mazhar, 2018). However, data indicates that many Pakistani asylum seekers lack higher education and language skills, which hampers their integration into German society. For instance, in 2015, only 8.2% of Pakistani asylum applicants had higher education and a mere 0.1% possessed German language skills (IOM, 2019). These figures highlight the challenges faced by Pakistani migrants in navigating Germany’s labor market and social systems. However, with stricter rules in place, these numbers have seen a sharp decline. As for the number of Bangladeshi asylum seekers in Germany, the census shows a decline from 571 in 2017 to just 125 in 2022. The lower acceptance rate of those who seek refuge is also complemented by an increasing number of deportations and voluntary returns.

The EU’s database shows that between 2013 and 2022, about 171,665 Pakistanis were ordered to leave the EU territory, this occurrence peaking in 2022 (25,445). Between 2016 and 2019, a total of 32,080 first-instance Pakistani applicants were refused asylum in Germany. In a study, out of the 117 German returnees surveyed, better salaries were cited as an important reason to migrate to Germany (28%) together with job availability (17%); 16 % of respondents indicated that they chose to migrate to Germany because of the possibility of becoming a national (IOM, 2021). Many of these respondents (42 %) were forced to opt for voluntary return due to issues with visas and documents.

In 2018, the Overseas Pakistanis Foundation (OPF) and GIZ launched the pilot project 'Facilitation and Reintegration Centers for Pakistani Migrant Workers' (FRCs). Currently operating in Lahore and Islamabad, FRCs serve as one-stop shops to support returnees' economic and social reintegration. They support migrant skilling and returnee integration through Pakistan's Kamyab Jawaan Programme, offering seed loans for small businesses. They also collect data on return migrants, analyze market trends, disseminate information and guide returnees toward employment opportunities (domestic and international) and entrepreneurship. Similarly, the EU–Pakistan Re-admission Agreement (EURA), effective since 2010, governs returns from the EU to Pakistan. Since 2016, the EU and member states have supported Pakistan in implementing a digital Re-admission Case Management System within the country to facilitate the flow of information required to manage returnees. Although various European countries, including Germany, have collaborated with the Pakistani government to aid in the reintegration of returnees, studies show that these returnees mostly choose to remigrate, as conditions in their homeland are not optimal.

The conditions of returnees vary significantly with changes in their origin countries. Germany's Migration Report 2022 reveals that Germany recorded 36,358 first-time asylum applications from Afghanistan, marking a 56.2% increase from the previous year. Political instability, violence and economic hardships following the Taliban's return to power have amplified this migration trend. The increasing rejection of Afghan migrants eventually led to Germany and Afghanistan signing a "Joint Declaration of Intent on Cooperation in the Field of Migration," focusing on the re-admission of rejected asylum-seekers in 2016. However, Afghanistan remains highly unsafe, described by WHO as "one of the most dangerous and crisis-ridden countries in the world" (2017), ranked 162 out of 163 on the 2018 Global Peace Index. Despite this evidence, the German government insists that parts of Afghanistan are safe enough for deportees despite the bombing of the German embassy in Kabul; Germany still lacks a fully operational diplomatic representation in the country. Studies on Afghan returnees from Norway and the UK reveal that many live in constant fear, avoiding public spaces even without direct

threats; under such conditions, returnees often feel compelled to leave Afghanistan again, highlighting the persistent dangers and instability that undermine their prospects for reintegration and safety (Schuster & Majidi, 2013; Sökefeld, 2019).

Germany's cooperation with South Asian countries plays a crucial role in facilitating deportations and voluntary returns. Bangladesh, for instance, signed Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) with the EU in 2017 to streamline the repatriation of irregular migrants. These SOPs have enabled financial and logistical support for returning migrants, such as economic reintegration plans funded by the EU. Organizations like BRAC have also contributed to making returnees financially independent through tailored programs (OECD, 2024). Similarly, India's 2022 mobility pact with Germany represents a significant step towards regulating migration and addressing irregularities. The agreement emphasizes facilitating legal migration while enhancing cooperation on the return of undocumented migrants. It also encourages skilled migration, aligning with Germany's focus on attracting talent to fill labor shortages.

Barring those from Afghanistan, Germany has a very small number of humanitarian migrants from South Asia. The current debates and political challenges faced by Germany in terms of migration have more to do with the recent invasion and wars. For Germany, nations like Poland, Turkey and Russia are predominant migrant origin points. The conflicts in Syria and Ukraine have significantly bolstered refugee populations, with the arrival of 757,000 and 763,000 people, respectively, in 2022 (Hoffmann & Vries, 2024). These dynamics reflect not just numbers but the lived realities of individuals and families seeking stability and opportunity in Germany. Following the Russian invasion, Ukrainian migration to Germany in 2022 was largely female, with Ukrainians accounting for 41.2% of total immigration, primarily consisting of women accompanied by children (Brücker et al, 2023). In contrast, migration from South Asia tends to be male-dominated, reflecting conventional migration trends where men, as primary earners, seek employment opportunities abroad. Clearly, Germany's humanitarian migration challenges related to South Asia are marginal when compared to Syria and Ukraine.

## 4

## Migration: a manifesto tool

Germany's Revised Skilled Immigration Act, implemented in 2023, lowers barriers for skilled workers from non-EU countries. It removes the requirement for a labor market test, allowing employers to hire foreign workers without first checking for local candidates. In its efforts to address its labor needs, Germany has focused on Vocational Education and Training (VET) Initiatives and has strengthened pathways for vocational learners, allowing part-time employment during training and providing support for those with refugee backgrounds seeking vocational qualifications. The German government is actively promoting job opportunities in Germany through targeted advertising campaigns in collaboration with the private sector, aiming to attract skilled workers from abroad. The Triple Win Program, launched in collaboration with the International Organization for Migration (IOM), is another popular initiative designed to address labor shortages. This program facilitates the recruitment of skilled professionals, particularly from countries like the Philippines and India, to fill gaps in Germany's healthcare sector. It ensures that the migration process is beneficial for all parties involved. Additionally, the 'Make it in Germany' campaign promotes Germany as an attractive destination for skilled migrants, providing resources and information on job opportunities, visa processes and living conditions. Germany has also established agreements with various countries to facilitate the exchange of skilled labor, ensuring that both sides benefit from the migration process. These initiatives have helped Germany successfully recruit thousands of individuals in various sectors over the years. However, the volume of irregular and humanitarian migration to Germany has grown in tandem (Vollmer, 2018).

In 2015 and 2016, Germany welcomed approximately 1.5 million refugees and migrants, primarily from the Middle East. The term “Willkommenskultur,” meaning “welcome culture,” was coined, reflecting the willingness of Germany to accept and provide refuge to those in need (Varma and Roehse, 2024). The inflow of individuals seeking humanitarian aid has been overwhelming for Germany in recent years. The 2022 census data reveals that Ukrainian refugees constituted 41.2% of total immigration, significantly overshadowing labor migration, which accounted for just 3.8% of residence permits, a decline from 7.7% in 2021. The net migration figure for 2022 was more than four times that of previous years, indicating the highest increase in the rate of migration since the keeping of migration records began in 1950. A total of 73,065 individuals received residence titles for labor migration in 2022, reflecting a 77.8% increase from the previous year as per the recent census. Analysis of the labor migration structure reveals that the majority of employees from other countries are skilled professionals with recognized qualifications, totaling 38,820 people or 53.1% of labor migrants. Furthermore, 61.0%, or 44,595, of immigrants held qualified occupations, while 39.0% were in roles without clearly definable qualification levels according to the data reported by the 2022 census. This shift underscores the impact of humanitarian crises on Germany's immigration landscape, where the urgent need to accommodate refugees has diverted attention and resources from labor migration initiatives, despite the ongoing demand for skilled workers in various sectors (Drewski and Gerhards 2024).

The strife resulting from Germany seeking to strike a balance between its economic needs and humanitarian support has been exacerbated over the years. Germany has intensified its efforts to address irregular migration. In 2022, the country carried out 12,945 removals, an 8% increase from the previous year. Among these, 32.1% were transfers under the Dublin procedure, which mandates that asylum seekers be returned to the first EU country they entered. Afghans comprised the nationality with the highest deportation numbers (732), highlighting the challenges of managing asylum applications while maintaining legal migration pathways (World Bank 2023).

The rise of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AFD) party has also added to the momentum of anti-migration sentiment in Germany, fueled by challenges related to an influx of refugees (Marsh, 2023). Following the 2015 refugee crisis, which saw over a million asylum seekers enter Germany, public perception shifted as many citizens expressed concerns about integration and resource allocation. Far-right parties in Europe, including those in Germany, have centered most of their election campaigns around increasing hostility towards refugees and how the current pattern of migration has created hurdles for skilled migrants from other countries. While Germany has historically relied on skilled migration to address labor shortages, the growing anti-immigrant discourse has led to stricter immigration policies and a heightened scrutiny of newcomers. This paradox undermines Germany's ability to attract the talent it needs for its economy, as potential skilled migrants may be deterred by the negative climate surrounding migration. The paradox is that the government is desperate to attract workers to Germany. But the increasingly hostile rhetoric over migration may not only put people off emigrating but also push away those go-getting New Germans who are already leading successful lives in the country.



## 5

## Emigration in India

Unlike Germany and other EU countries, where international migration (especially) involving refugees and asylum seekers has become a highly politicized issue due to the rise of far-right parties, India does not treat emigration as a prominent topic in its political discourse. Instead, internal migration often dominates political debates. This distinction is reflected in India's structural policies concerning emigration. The Emigration Act of 1983, which replaced the colonial-era Immigration Act of 1922, remains the primary legal framework governing emigration and the welfare of migrants. Primarily focused on temporary and contractual migration, particularly of low-skilled workers, the Act enforces recruitment agency registration and provides grievance redressal mechanisms. Additionally, regional disparities in development and demographic factors have resulted in varied migration patterns across different states.

India's 28 states exhibit diverse internal and international migration dynamics, prompting state-level policymaking for non-resident nationals. Kerala leads with its Non-Resident Keralites' Affairs (NORKA) Department, while Telangana is establishing a Centre for Non-Resident Telanganites' Affairs to address similar issues. Despite these efforts, India lacks a robust national or state-level emigrant database, hindering evidence-based policymaking and migration governance across all stages—departure, destination and return. The strengthening of migration governance requires updated legal frameworks and comprehensive data systems to address evolving migration trends and ensure better protection for Indian emigrants.

Although migration is a central theme in India, recent political manifestos have primarily focused on internal migrants, largely neglecting the issues faced by emigrants, international migrants and the diaspora. While political parties, especially those on a national level, occasionally mention international migration, it is rarely a focal point on their platforms. However, in states like Kerala and Punjab, where migration significantly impacts local economies, there is a greater emphasis on protecting the rights

of migrant workers and improving facilitation for those seeking opportunities abroad. The limited attention given by the central government to issues concerning migrants became evident when the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs (MOIA), established in 2004, was merged with the Ministry of External Affairs in 2016. This decision was justified by the government's stated aim of "minimizing government and maximizing governance."

The lack of attention to these matters in political discourse reflects a disconnect between domestic migration policies and the realities faced by Indians abroad, indicating a need for more comprehensive engagement with the diaspora in future electoral agendas. Given that India is home to the largest migrant community in the world, there is immense unexplored potential in harnessing the power of almost 22 million Indians across the world.

In 2024, remittances to India were projected to grow by 3.7%, reaching \$124 billion, according to the Economic Survey of India. This marks a continuation of India's status as the world's leading remittance recipient, following a record \$120 billion in 2023. The growth in remittances is primarily attributed to strong labor markets in the United States and Europe, which are significant destinations for Indian skilled migrants, as well as positive demand for both skilled and less-skilled workers in Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. India's diverse migrant pool, comprising highly skilled professionals in high-income OECD markets and less-skilled workers in GCC nations, contributes to the stability of remittance inflows, even amidst external economic shocks. Additionally, efforts to link India's Unified Payments Interface (UPI) with source countries like the UAE and Singapore aim to reduce transaction costs and expedite remittance transfers. Stronger diaspora networks foster trade, investment and entrepreneurship between host and home countries. For example, Indian business communities in the U.S. and the U.A.E. have facilitated bilateral trade and created job opportunities for migrants. The presence of a strong diaspora community also often lowers entry barriers for new migrants by providing job leads, housing and cultural reorientation. This is especially visible in Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, where established Indian communities help sustain migration chains.

# 6

## Education: the new pathway for migration

Germany’s aging workforce and skilled labor shortages make it an attractive destination for South Asian professionals, who often lack sufficient employment avenues in their home country. This is also true in India’s case, where a demographic dividend is evident with a large working-age population. As India experiences a steady outflow of young individuals seeking better economic opportunities abroad, Germany emerges as a prime destination due to its robust economy and demand for skilled labor.

When looking at the migration pattern from India, although there is no recent official data available, estimates and observations of the types of migration have revealed a trend of increasing student migration from India over the last decade. The Kerala Migration Survey in 2023 reveals that student emigration from Kerala doubled to 250,000 from that in 2018, offsetting the anticipated decline in overall emigration. Though their state is an increasingly aging one compared to the rest of India, Kerala’s younger emigrants, including those as young as 17, form 11.3% of its total emigrants.

**Table 2. Students Migration from India to Popular Destination Countries**

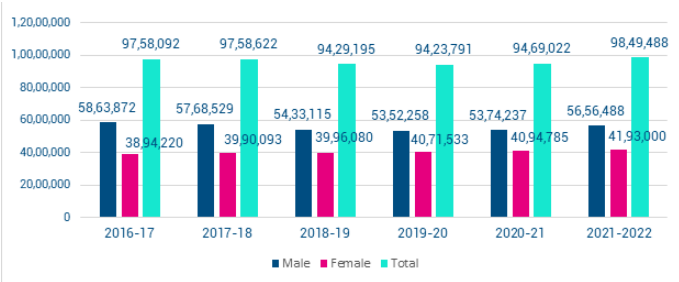
Year	USA	Canada	UK	Australia	Germany
2007	94,563	7304	25905	27,078	3431
2012	96,754	28,929	N/A	12,629	5745
2017	206,708	100,000	14,830	63,283	13,740
2023	234, 473	233,532	136,921	122,391	42,997

Sources: IIE Open Doors, UK Higher Education Statistics Agency, Australia Education International, Citizenship and Immigration Canada, New Zealand Ministry of Education, DAAD/HIS (Germany).

Currently, Indians form one of the largest student communities in the US, the UK, Canada and Germany. The tuition-free higher education system and Germany's reputation for academic excellence have particularly boosted the number of South Asian students choosing the country. As of 2024, over 1.3 million Indian students are studying abroad, with a notable increase in those opting for European destinations. Specifically, Germany has emerged as a preferred choice, hosting around 43,000 Indian students, making India the largest origin country for international students in Germany. Furthermore, improved post-study work opportunities, allowing graduates to stay and work in Germany for up to 18 months, have significantly contributed to its appeal among Indian students seeking career prospects in Europe (Faist et al, 2017).

This overwhelming outflow of student migrants can be traced to India's socio-economic limitations, especially for youth seeking better living standards. In engineering and technology, the unemployment rate rose from 0.36 million in 2017 to 0.58 million in 2019, before slightly declining to 0.57 million in 2020 and then increasing again to 0.68 million in 2022. However, in terms of enrollment, STEM, including the Science (including Mathematics) and Engineering and Technology streams, has a total enrollment of 9.85 million students across UG, PG, M.Phil. and Ph.D. levels, according to the All India Survey on Higher Education for the academic session (AISHE) 2021-22.<sup>5</sup>

Figure no 2: STEM enrollment from 2016 to 2022



Source: All India Survey on Higher Education for the academic session (AISHE) 2021-22

Although enrollment in STEM and medical programs has increased over the years, employment opportunities within India remain limited due to various socio-economic challenges, including a pronounced rural–urban divide. Many graduates face a skill–job mismatch, prompting them to seek better opportunities abroad. Even those who secure employment often encounter low wages and minimal career progression, comprising offerings that fail to compete with benefits offered by developed nations, particularly in Europe. This challenging scenario has made the prospect of international education more attractive, with many associating it with better career success and higher social mobility.

India has initiated several programs to tackle the challenges of unemployment and underemployment among its youth. One of the most significant initiatives is the Skill India Mission, launched in 2015, which aims to enhance the skill sets of over 400 million individuals by 2023. This comprehensive initiative focuses on providing market-relevant skills, thereby increasing employability and productivity across various sectors. The government has consistently endeavored to position India as a global skill capital, recognizing the potential of its young workforce.

Despite signing a few mobility pacts with countries like Germany, there remains untapped potential in leveraging the strengths of India's existing diaspora. Promoting migration as a mutually beneficial program for both sending and receiving countries can enhance economic opportunities for Indian professionals abroad while addressing labor shortages in host nations.

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<sup>4</sup>India Employment Report 2024, 2024. International Labour Organization.

<sup>5</sup>All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) reports. (2019-2021). Ministry of Education. Government of India. Retrieved from <https://aishe.gov.in>

## 7

## Way forward

South Asian migration to Germany has emerged as a pivotal phenomenon in recent years, characterized by the dual streams of highly skilled labor and humanitarian, including irregular, migration. Germany's robust economy and labor shortages have positioned it as a key destination for migrants globally. South Asia, particularly India, has become a prominent source of skilled labor for Germany's critical industries, such as IT, healthcare and engineering. Over 70 professions, including nursing, software development and construction, are expected to experience significant workforce deficits in the coming years in Germany. This shortage is driven by an aging population, a low fertility rate (1.54 as of 2019) and regional disparities, particularly between East and West Germany. Germany has signed several bilateral mobility agreements with South Asian countries, focusing on addressing its labor shortages in specific sectors such as healthcare.

Despite its efforts to attract a workforce, Germany's migration-related challenges persist, particularly in managing humanitarian and irregular migration. Parties like Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) have gained considerable electoral ground by opposing the Christian Democratic Union (CDU)'s 'open door policy'. AfD has been vocal that that hospitality towards the alien 'other' is alienating people at home. Germany has found the solution in strict differentiation between the economic migrant and the refugee based on ideas of deservingness and humanitarianism. Germany, has over the years, worked on deportation measures to ensure further economic resources are not depleted in this regard. Governments use deportations and "voluntary" return programs to expel displaced populations or irregular migrants to "safe countries." In Germany, deportations have proven costly, with single cases reaching tens of thousands of euros. "Voluntary" return programs, considered more ethical and less politically divisive, are also economically motivated (Sökefeld, 2019). These measures aim to manage "irregular" migrants while deterring future economic migrants. This framework

prioritizes entry to those deemed deserving over those escaping economic hardship, where again defining 'deservingness' lies in the hands of the German government. In case studies carried out by Mahar (2020), where 'voluntary' return is discovered to be a mode of migration management, it is apparent that those who opted for 'voluntary return' from Germany to Pakistan had mixed experiences. While some of them were thankful for the German hospitality and the financial aid offered by the German government, many of them complained of safety issues they experienced once they were back in their home country. These findings contradict the idea of a safe return.

Apart from the voluntary return program, Germany has also actively worked on several treaties and agreements to address such individuals' migration challenges. Many countries in Asia, including India, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh, and some outside it, like Germany, are part of the Budapest Process, an interregional dialogue on migration governance involving European countries. It focuses on dignified return and sustainable reintegration, guided by a roadmap emphasizing effective return management, post-arrival assistance, referral mechanisms and long-term reintegration measures to ensure inclusive and rights-based migration practices. There have been efforts from the origin country to find spaces for the returnees. One of the most effective roles returnees play in Pakistan is that of a source of information. While diaspora members can be effective sources of information for campaigns, a survey conducted under PARIM-I showed that (among potential migrants in Pakistan) reliance on returnees was much higher than on diaspora members for migration-related information.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup><https://www.icmpd.org/our-work/projects/awareness-raising-and-information-campaigns-on-the-risks-of-irregular-migration-in-pakistan-parim-ii>

When it comes to Germany's dual-migration challenge, determining who is allowed to enter the country and who isn't is a complex question. Efforts to resolve this conundrum are made at different stages, often involving direct engagement with migrants' countries of origin and through various international agreements. The approach to these challenges also varies significantly depending on the specific origin country involved. Unlike other South Asian countries such as Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan, which contribute to humanitarian migration, India predominates in skilled labor migration. The number of refugees from India remains negligible, as most Indian migrants seek education or employment opportunities rather than asylum. To address its growing labor needs while mitigating irregular migration, Germany must focus on enhancing the skills of its existing workforce to counter arguments of 'depleting resources for refugees,' which currently dominate the migration discourse in the country. This, along with strengthened international collaboration, will ensure that Germany remains an attractive destination for high-skilled migration. The continued cooperation between Germany and India, particularly in education, labor mobility and skill development, can serve as a model for sustainable migration policies that benefit originating and recipient countries.



## 8

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# About the Authors

Prof. S. Irudaya Rajan



S. Irudaya Rajan is Chair of the International Institute of Migration and Development, Kerala, India. Rajan is India coordinator of the Link4Skills project funded by the European Commission. Prof. Rajan is the Founder Editor in Chief of Migration and Development (Sage) and the editor of two Routledge series - India Migration Report and South Asia Migration Report. He has coordinated nine large-scale migration surveys in Kerala since 1998 (with K.C. Zachariah) and replicated in Goa (2008), Punjab (2009), Tamil Nadu (2015), and Odisha (2023), Gujarat (2011) and Jharkhand (2023).

Varsha Joshi



Varsha Joshi is a Research Fellow at the International Institute of Migration and Development (IIMAD), where she contributes to the ongoing DemiKnow (SSHRC, Canada) and Link4Skills (European Commission) research projects on international migration. In addition, she is an editorial staff of Migration and Development Journal of the IIMAD (Sage). She holds a Master's degree in Development Studies from Azim Premji University,

Bangalore, and a Bachelor's degree in Economics from Madras Christian College, Chennai. Her research interests include international student mobility, the role of recruitment agencies, gendered dimensions of migration, and high-skilled migration from India.

