



FAIR MIGRATION

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Fair Migration Within the EU/German-Indian Corridor: Is it truly Fair?

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Further Engagement: Readers interested in discussing the policy recommendations presented in this brief, or in sharing insights on how migration systems function in their respective countries, particularly with regard to successful initiatives or best practices, are warmly encouraged to reach out to the authors. The contact details for both authors can be found on the second-to-last page of this document.

Disclaimer: This policy brief is based on the authors' cumulative professional experience gained over several years of close engagement with stakeholders across the German-Indian migration corridor. Both authors have worked extensively with individuals navigating these pathways, as well as with institutions involved in recruitment, integration, and policy implementation. The analysis and recommendations presented in this paper are therefore informed by these practical insights and on-the-ground observations.

The views expressed herein are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the positions, policies, or opinions of any organisations, institutions, or entities with which the authors are or have been affiliated.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

An Indian optician who wishes to work in Germany is advised to take up a traineeship as a nurse, only to realise after arrival that more suitable pathways exist. An advertisement to attract prospective migrants uses the term “food processing”, while in reality, the recruitment is for butcher roles. Some more ads promise salaries in the “lakhs” (thousands of euros) without requiring German language skills or even proving English language proficiency, and some even market the Opportunity Card/*Chancenkarte* as a very quick pathway to permanent residency in Germany. Are these advertisements false? Not necessarily. In many cases, they are technically correct. They simply do not provide the full picture. But then the more important questions arise: are these ads ethical? And most importantly, are they fair towards the potential migrant who may take them at face value?

As the European Union enters a period of demographic decline and growing labour shortages, skilled migration is no longer optional but a structural necessity, and within this context, India has emerged as a key partner for many EU Member States, including Germany. To facilitate, encourage, but also to regulate this migration corridor, the concept of “Fair Migration” has gained increasing prominence. However, while countries like Germany formally commit to this principle, this policy brief argues that its current implementation within the EU/German–Indian corridor falls short in practice.

Today, this corridor is characterised by fragmented information systems, inconsistent procedures, limited cross-border oversight, and a growing reliance of migrants on recruitment intermediaries. Migrants face misinformation, financial risks, and integration challenges, while employers, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), encounter high levels of uncertainty and limited predictability. At the same time, rapid policy expansion and shifting labour market dynamics have created a mismatch between expectations and on-the-ground realities, further straining existing systems. These structural imbalances not only undermine the principles of fair migration but also reinforce dependencies and inefficiencies across the entire migration process.

This brief demonstrates that the core issue is not a lack of policy activity, but a lack of coordination across systems and actors. To address this, it argues that Fair Migration must be redefined in practical terms. Fairness should not imply the absence of costs or risks, but rather that these are distributed in a transparent, proportionate, and predictable manner across all stakeholders. Building on this understanding, the brief presents concrete policy recommendations aimed at realigning the system and strengthening the functioning of the EU/German–Indian migration corridor in practice.

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1. INTRODUCTION: WHY FAIR MIGRATION MATTERS NOW

From 2026 onwards, the European Union (EU) is projected to enter a phase of sustained population decline, [with forecasts indicating that by 2050, 22 out of the 27 EU Member States \(MS\) will face a shrinking working-age population](#). This demographic shift represents one of the most significant structural challenges for European economies in the upcoming decades. Within this context, Germany stands out as one of the EU countries most affected by skilled labour shortages. Although Germany [remains the leading destination for inward migration within the EU in absolute terms](#) and has seen an [increase of approximately 77% in skilled worker immigration between 2021 and 2025](#), it continues to face large shortages in various key sectors. This shortage is driven by Germany's age structure, which is undergoing a fundamental transformation from the traditional population pyramid to a ["bulb"](#) shape, driven by the impending retirement of the "baby boomer" generation. This demographic wave is placing growing pressure on policymakers, both in Germany and within the EU, to ensure that the labour market remains functional and that economic productivity can be sustained.

In response, Germany and the EU have intensified efforts to attract skilled labour from abroad, and among the countries identified as key partners, India occupies a central and crucial role. With a median age of just [28.1 years as of 2023](#) and an estimated [five million graduates entering the labour market each year](#), India represents a significant pool of potential talent. As not all of this workforce can be absorbed domestically, international mobility is an important avenue for Indian employment. Recognising this, the German Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs explicitly identified India as a "focus country" in its 2024 [Skilled Labour Strategy India](#), underlining the strategic importance of this bilateral migration corridor.

At the same time, the document emphasised that labour migration within this corridor should not only seek to be effective, but also fair. The concept of Fair Migration has therefore become a central pillar in official discourse around skilled migration. According to the German Federal Employment Agency, [Fair Migration entails equal access to the labour market regardless of origin, gender, or religion, supported by transparent procedures and impartial, free advice](#).

In the area of recruitment within skilled migration, Germany aligns itself with non-binding international guidelines such as the [IRIS Standard](#), which seeks to define ethical recruitment practices by promoting transparency, accountability, respect for migrant workers' rights, and principles such as the "Employer Pays Principle." These frameworks have helped shape the German regulatory approach to recruitment agencies, including certain legal provisions, [such as mandatory written placement contracts and a cap on placement service fees of up to 2000 euros \(excluding additional service costs\)](#). These regulations aim to regulate and ensure that migration benefits all actors involved: the migrants, employers, recruiters, and both countries of origin and destination of interest.

However, while these principles are normatively compelling, the reality of migration within the EU/German–Indian corridor is considerably more complex. In practice, numerous challenges persist that call into question the extent to which the current form of skilled migration can actually be described as "fair." Cases of inaccurate or misleading information, unrealistic expectation setting, high financial burdens, lack of judicial reach, and long, uncertain administrative processes are frequently reported. In some instances, the migration pathways are marketed as quick and straightforward solutions, despite involving lengthy procedures and uncertain outcomes. Financial risks borne by migrants, including loans taken to finance migration-related expenses, as well as losses of investment incurred by German programmes or employers investing in candidates during the preparation phase in India, further complicate the picture.

While recent public discussions have increasingly focused on problematic aspects of education migration from India to Europe, the question of fairness within employment migration pathways has received comparatively less attention. Yet it is precisely within these pathways, which are most often being presented as the more structured, regulated, and mutually beneficial, that significant gaps between policy and practice can currently be observed. These dynamics have already contributed to a growing perception among stakeholders that the current system does not consistently live up to the standards it sets for itself, thereby undermining employers' trust in the pathway.

In order to address these gaps within the pathway, both for ethical reasons and for the long-term sustainability of the migration corridor itself, it is essential that this subject is further examined. Therefore, this policy brief will examine *how Fair Migration currently functions within the EU/German–Indian corridor and what would be required to make it work more effectively in practice.*

To do so, this policy brief will first clarify what Fair Migration within this corridor actually entails in practice. This will be followed by an analysis of the migration corridor, identifying the central weaknesses that hinder the full implementation of Fair Migration principles and demonstrating why the current understanding of Fair Migration must be adapted to the operational realities of cross-border German-Indian labour mobility. Building on this, this brief will explain why Fair Migration cannot be achieved through national policy alone, but instead requires a coordinated governance approach across European, national, regional, and private-sector actors. And finally, it will present concrete policy recommendations that aim to translate this revised understanding of Fair Migration into a system that functions more effectively in practice.

While this policy brief focuses on the German–Indian migration corridor, its relevance extends far beyond a purely bilateral perspective. For this reason, the term “EU/German–Indian corridor” is used throughout this paper, where appropriate, to reflect the broader context in which these migration dynamics occur. As is known, migration corridors are inherently interconnected systems, shaped by overlapping policy frameworks and mobility patterns across multiple countries. Accordingly, migration between India and Germany does not occur in isolation, but is embedded within a wider European landscape that influences both opportunities and outcomes, and addressing any larger structural challenges within this corridor requires coordinated efforts across governance levels.

Consequently, many of the challenges identified in this analysis are not unique to Germany, but are likely to be encountered, or are already emerging, in other EU Member States engaging with India as a partner country. In this context, the insights and recommendations presented in this brief are intended not only to contribute to and inform the German policy debate around this, but also to contribute and support broader European initiatives, such as the EU Legal Gateway Office pilot, and the development of a more coherent and effective EU–India migration framework.

2. WHAT IS FAIR MIGRATION

Building on the need identified in the previous section to reassess how Fair Migration is functioning within the EU/German–Indian skilled migration corridor, it is imperative to first clarify what Fair Migration actually means and entails in practice.

In the context of labour migration, Fair Migration is generally understood as a system in which access to employment across borders is regulated, transparent, and non-discriminatory, while safeguarding migrant workers' rights throughout the recruitment process. This understanding is reflected in the approach of institutions such as the German Federal Employment Agency, [which emphasises equal access to labour markets through clear procedures, impartial guidance, and structured recognition systems.](#)

Within the Indo-German corridor, unlike in some other government-to-government agreements, migration pathways are formally designed to be directly accessible to individuals, allowing them, in principle, to independently apply for jobs and visas, navigate the legal procedures, and secure employment. In practice, however, the process is often complex, fragmented, and difficult to navigate across jurisdictions. As a result, many skilled workers rely on third-party intermediaries, such as recruitment agencies, to bridge information gaps and manage administrative hurdles.

Given the large number of recruitment actors operating across international borders, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), together with multiple other global stakeholders, developed the [International Recruitment Integrity System \(IRIS\)](#), a set of concrete standards and guidelines for ethical recruitment, serving as a reference point for private recruitment agencies, employers, and state actors alike. Although this IRIS Standard is non-binding in Germany, it has influenced regulatory provisions within the German Social Code (SGB III), which regulate key aspects of recruitment agencies, including [placement contracts and fee structures.](#)

As, however, this policy brief is not intended as a legal analysis but rather as a reality check of on-the-ground practices, its focus will remain on how these standards, which contribute to the definition of Fair Migration above, are applied, or not applied, within the EU/German–Indian corridor.

For this purpose, some key elements of the IRIS Standard will serve as the practical benchmark for assessing Fair Migration, which include:

- The prohibition of recruitment fees charged to workers (the Employer Pays Principle), which seeks to eliminate debt-driven migration where workers incur significant financial burdens before their employment even begins;
- The respect of transparency of terms and conditions of employment, meaning that migrant workers receive contracts in a language they understand, with full information on the job, clearly defined wages, and working hours prior to departure;
- the due diligence and accountability of recruitment agencies, where agencies are expected to verify whether employers comply with labour and human rights standards and ensure that job offers are genuine; and finally
- The protection of fundamental rights during recruitment, which includes prohibitions on coercion, document retention, and forced labour, as well as guarantees of non-discrimination and freedom of movement.

Taken together, these elements define Fair Migration as a shared-responsibility framework involving countries of origin and destination, skilled workers, employers, and, crucially, recruitment agencies. Where these individual responsibilities are not upheld collectively, the system becomes imbalanced, and the risks and burden shift disproportionately onto those least equipped to manage them. It is precisely this imbalance and gap between principle and practice that the following section will examine in greater detail.

3. THE CURRENT EUROPEAN / GERMAN-INDIAN MIGRATION CORRIDOR: WHERE FAIR MIGRATION FALLS SHORT

Informed by the definition of Fair Migration outlined above, it is clear that Fair Migration is inherently a shared-responsibility framework that requires coordinated action by all stakeholders. For it to function in practice, these actors must operate within a functioning system that regulates, transparently and non-discriminatorily, access to employment, while safeguarding the rights of migrant workers throughout the recruitment process. The following subsections will show how the current EU/German-Indian migration corridor deviates from these principles and where the gap between normative frameworks and operational reality becomes most visible.

3.1 Policies and Destination Countries Failing Fair Migration

On the side of destination countries, particularly Germany and the EU, recent years have seen a significant intensification of efforts to attract skilled labour, including from India. At the EU level, the revised EU Blue Card Directive (2021), among others, lowered salary thresholds, shortened contract requirements necessary for the Blue Card application, and expanded eligibility by recognising professional experience alongside formal qualifications. At the bilateral level, Germany and India [signed a Migration and Mobility Partnership Agreement \(MMPA\)](#) in 2022, the first comprehensive migration agreement of its kind for Germany, supporting legal migration pathways in both directions. This MMPA was followed by Germany's update to its [Skilled Immigration Act](#) in 2023, which incorporated and implemented the updated Blue Card provisions, introduced new recognition and employment pathways, and created additional legal entry routes such as the Opportunity Card/*Chancenkarte*. In the same year, the [European Commission proposed the EU Talent Pool](#) as a platform to streamline international recruitment across Member States, further demonstrating a strong political commitment to facilitating international recruitment.

Alongside these legislative developments, a range of operational programmes, pilot projects and initiatives targeting, among others, also Indian talent, were launched. These included programmes such as [Hand in Hand for International Talents](#) funded by the German Federal Ministry for Economics and Energy, and programmes like [Triple Win](#) by the *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit* (GIZ) in cooperation with the German Federal Employment Agency. These efforts were further complemented by increased outreach activities, including information campaigns, events, and high-level political visits. Together, these developments and efforts demonstrate that both Germany and the EU actively sought to create the structural conditions under which Fair Migration should have been possible.

However, the speed and scale of these developments have introduced new challenges. Migration flows from India to Germany have increased rapidly, with the number of Indian nationals rising from approximately [48,000 to 151,000 between 2010 and 2020, to around 277,000 by April 2025](#). While this growth reflects Germany's increasing attractiveness as a destination, it also highlights how quickly the corridor has expanded, often faster than the institutions, labour markets, and integration systems have been able to adapt.

Effective policymaking in this field requires long-term planning, continuous adjustment, and alignment with rapidly evolving labour market realities. For many years, however, migration policy targeting India focused primarily on highly skilled professionals, particularly from the IT sector, who entered through instruments such as the EU Blue Card. These migration pathways were designed with relatively specific requirements, including limited or even non-existent expectations regarding German language proficiency for both migrants and, in most cases, their families. More recent instruments, such as the Opportunity Card, were developed based on labour market projections formulated during periods of acute labour shortage, when estimates at one point suggested that Germany would require up to [400,000 skilled migrants annually](#). At that time, the central policy objective was to enable rapid labour-market entry by facilitating direct contact between migrants and employers in Germany.

However, the economic and geopolitical context has evolved considerably since then. A combination of global crises, [economic slowdown](#), and technological innovation, the [rapid development of AI](#), has altered labour market dynamics in Germany.

In some sectors, such as the automotive sector, unemployment has increased, while demand for international labour has shifted sectors rather than uniformly expanded. At the same time, global migration dynamics, particularly for Indians considering moving abroad, have also changed. Developments in traditional destination countries for Indian migrants, such as the [US under President Trump](#), or tighter immigration policies in [Canada, the UK, and Australia](#), have redirected attention towards Germany and the EU.

These coinciding developments occurred relatively quickly and may not have been fully anticipated by policymakers or institutions responsible for labour market integration in Germany. One of the [best examples to illustrate this is the Opportunity Card](#), whereby many Indians, often insufficiently informed and taking on significant financial risks, arrived in Germany with limited German language skills, but expectations of broad employment opportunities as had been marketed to them, only to encounter a more constrained and competitive labour market. As a result, large parts of this Indo-German migration system continue to operate on earlier assumptions of widespread labour shortages, even as conditions on the ground have become more differentiated. The consequence has been continued upward scaling of migration flows without a corresponding adjustment in labour-market absorption capacity or integration infrastructure.

As migration numbers increase, the risks associated with this imbalance are becoming more visible. Migrants from India are increasingly encountering challenges such as limited job availability, particularly in positions where English alone previously sufficed, housing shortages, and difficulties in understanding their rights and administrative obligations. Many struggle to navigate the complex bureaucratic systems, access legal remedies, build professional networks, and just integrate socially, for that matter. These challenges are compounded by structural issues such as slow administrative processes and insufficient enforcement against exploitative practices, leading many to question their long-term prospects in Germany.

At present, the migration pathways into Germany are expanding faster than the systems designed to support them. This mismatch is not only creating significant challenges for migrants, who often arrive with expectations that differ sharply from reality, but it is also causing broader ripple effects for employers and shaping public perception of migration as negative within Germany.

3.2 Limits of Fair Migration: Employers and Recruitment Agencies

The perspectives of employers and recruitment agencies illustrate particularly clearly where the current migration corridor begins to diverge from the principles of Fair Migration. The EU and German Employers, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), are among the most affected stakeholders of skilled labour shortages. Demographic change impacts them directly and disproportionately, as a large share of their workforce belongs to the “baby boomer” generation approaching retirement, while domestic talent remains insufficient to replace outgoing staff. As a result, SMEs are among those most urgently dependent on skilled migration to sustain operations; however, at the same time, they are also among the least equipped to manage the complexity of international recruitment. Unlike large corporations with dedicated HR departments and in-house expertise, SMEs depend heavily on public infrastructure for information on how international recruitment functions, for guidance through administrative and legal processes of hiring international workers, and for support with the societal integration of those workers once they arrive.

For most SMEs in Germany, recruiting skilled migrants internationally is not part of their traditional scope or hiring strategy, and as such, when the need arises, their first points of contact are usually local chambers of commerce, local employment agencies, or external recruitment agencies approaching them with ready-made proposals. While official government-funded programmes often present structured timelines for identifying, training, and preparing candidates in India, recruitment agencies frequently promise significantly faster timelines and results. These shorter timelines can make agency-based recruitment appear more attractive, particularly for employers under immediate pressure to fill vacancies.

However, both pathways share a fundamental characteristic, and that is that they involve considerable investment from the employer. German employers and training providers may spend the equivalent of two to three months of a candidate’s gross salary on identification, preparation, and onboarding processes before the individual even arrives in Germany. Under current interpretations of Fair Migration, there are very limited enforceable guarantees that a candidate who has been invested in will remain, even for a minimum period, with the recruiting employer or within a specific programme, either through the preparation phase in India or after arrival in Germany.

Fundamental rights such as freedom of movement rightly limit how far retention can be enforced. Yet in practice, this creates a structural imbalance in which employers are bearing significant upfront costs, while carrying substantial uncertainty regarding retention. In response, in the quest to have their investment guaranteed, many employers increasingly turn to recruitment agencies, particularly foreign agents, that promise greater predictability and retention, often at the expense of transparency, and in some cases, through questionable means that may restrict the migrants' freedom of movement. Within this environment, German recruitment agencies operating under German law are structurally disadvantaged compared with their counterparts in third countries that can offer such “retention guarantees”. It is therefore not surprising that we see an increasing number of German agencies working or partnering with second- or third companies operating outside German/European jurisdiction.

This trend exposes a deeper regulatory gap. While Germany, guided by its own legal framework and standards such as the IRIS Standard, can ensure and protect the freedom of movement and fair labour conditions within its jurisdiction, its regulatory reach does not extend to recruitment practices in third countries such as India. Accordingly, in practice, this has led to cases in which migrants sign multiple contracts, one with a recruitment agency in India and another with an employer, or even multiple employers, in Germany. With the international recruiter often embedded locally in the regions where candidates are sourced, many mechanisms to secure the retention of the skilled migrants may be applied, which are informal or opaque, including restrictions or dependencies that are not always visible to the German employer. As reliance on such third parties grows, the presence of “guarantees” should be treated less as reassurance but more as a warning signal.

At the same time, broader economic developments such as the economic slowdown resulting from geopolitical challenges, combined with technological shifts such as the increasing role of automation and AI, have made many employers more cautious in their hiring strategies. Even before these developments, many SMEs were hesitant to recruit internationally because of the complexity and uncertainty involved. These conditions have strengthened the preference for candidates who are already physically present in Germany, such as international students or individuals holding job-seeker or Opportunity Card visas.

While this is in line with the original intention of the policy maker when creating such instruments, such that once a candidate is already in the country, some administrative hurdles are partly resolved, and that initial assessments, such as language ability and cultural fit, can be conducted more easily, one crucial structural contradiction was forgotten.

As migration numbers increase, so do expectations regarding quality and long-term workplace and social integration. Within migration corridors, a small number of negative recruitment experiences can quickly shape broader employer perceptions of migrants from a particular country. This is particularly evident in sectors such as healthcare, where employers have encountered cases in which migrants arrived with language certificates indicating advanced proficiency but then demonstrated significantly lower practical communication skills in the workplace. In such cases, employers may attribute the problem to Indian candidates as a group rather than recognising that the underlying issue may lie in unreliable recruitment intermediaries or inadequate preparation. As a result, recruitment failures involving a limited number of individuals have not only been discouraging SMEs from taking risks, but have also been contributing to significant reputational risks for India as a country of origin.

For this reason, many SMEs, particularly those that are often located outside major metropolitan areas, place strong emphasis on language proficiency and social integration. Employees are not only expected to perform professionally, but also to become part of the local company culture and, often, the local community. This creates a growing divergence between what is often communicated to migrants abroad, where predominantly the widespread labour shortage is emphasised, and what employers actually require and want in practice. The result has been a growing mismatch between employer and migrant expectations and preparation.

Taken together, these dynamics highlight a central tension within the current corridor. German employers are expected to engage in international recruitment, often for the first time, while operating within a system that offers limited predictability, fragmented support, and often incomplete cross-border accountability. Without addressing this imbalance, achieving Fair Migration will remain difficult from the employer's perspective.

3.3 The Power Imbalance Between Migrants and Recruitment Agencies

Building on the challenges identified from the perspective of employers, a complementary imbalance must also be acknowledged on the side of migrants. Within the German–Indian migration corridor, third-party intermediaries play an increasingly central role, particularly for first-time migrants navigating complex cross-border systems. This reflects a broader structural context in India, where [long working hours](#) have contributed to the emergence of a wide range of service providers that simplify everyday tasks, from delivery services to administrative assistance. Within this environment, the outsourcing of complex processes, including information collection, is both common and widely accepted.

As growing numbers of Indians consider migration to Germany, many without prior international experience, the demand for intermediaries who can provide structured information, guidance, and end-to-end “pathway services” has increased significantly. In a context where official information is often perceived as fragmented or difficult to navigate from abroad (more on this in the sub-section 3.4), such services are not only attractive but frequently preferred. However, it is precisely at this intersection that many of the practical challenges associated with Fair Migration emerge.

While reliance on intermediaries for information and administrative support is, in itself, not problematic, it can create, particularly among first-time migrants unfamiliar with their rights, a structural dependency that exposes them to significant risks. Without prior knowledge of migration systems or their rights in the destination country, individuals often place considerable trust in agents who claim to manage the entire process. While in some cases this trust is justified and honourably handled, in many others, this imbalance of information has resulted in situations in which migrants are highly vulnerable to misinformation and exploitation.

Numerous migrant testimonies indicate that some intermediaries charge substantial fees for services such as placement, interview preparation, documentation support, language training, or general migration assistance, which in many cases are financed through loans taken out before departure.

Particularly problematic here are situations in which large fees are charged for information or services that are, in fact, freely available through official German government platforms. Evidence from studies such as the IOM-PRAYAS report from Feb 2026 suggests that these financial burdens can be considerable, leaving migrants vulnerable from the outset. In practice, this contributes to situations resembling debt dependency, where migrants feel compelled to accept unfavourable working or living conditions in order to repay financial obligations incurred in their country of origin, which very much goes against the idea of Fair Migration that Germany stands by.

While the German legal and policy frameworks emphasise the prevention of exploitative recruitment and explicitly reject debt-based coercion, their enforcement remains confined to Germany's jurisdiction, and recruitment practices in countries of origin, such as India, fall outside this regulatory scope. At the same time, the persistence of such practices indicates that oversight mechanisms on the side of the country of origin are also insufficient¹. The result is a regulatory gap in which exploitative practices are continuing with limited accountability.

Beyond financial aspects, recruitment intermediaries are also shaping migration pathways in ways that are not always aligned with EU/German labour market realities. A recurring issue is the steering of qualified, skilled migrants toward educational pathways that are marketed as indirect routes into employment. Prospective qualified migrants are, for example, encouraged to enrol in academic programmes, such as English language Master's degrees, that do not necessarily provide clear or realistic prospects for the German labour market. Migrants in these situations often find themselves navigating costly and time-consuming alternatives, attempting to balance employment, study obligations, and financial repayments, sometimes without completing their qualifications. This traps migrants in ways which are also not sufficiently addressed.

Similarly, newer migration instruments, such as the Opportunity Card, are often presented as straightforward solutions for accessing employment in Germany, while in practice, entering the labour market without a prior employment contract or without sufficient German-language proficiency involves significant financial risk and intense competition.

¹ Companies registered as so-called "Recruiting Agents" with the MEA are legally allowed to charge up to INR 30,000 as a service charge for placement, but often charge additional sums labelled differently, for example, overcharging for mandatory German classes.

When these realities are not clearly or even adequately communicated, migrants may arrive with [expectations that are difficult to fulfil, contributing to outcomes that resemble what can only be described as a “migration trap”](#).

If this situation wasn't sufficient, the challenges associated with recruitment intermediaries do not end upon arrival in Germany. Many migrants continue to face significant barriers in the early stages of settlement, also in relation to housing and access to reliable information. The issue of Housing, in particular, is a critical bottleneck, as many employment opportunities, especially in sectors experiencing labour shortages, are often located outside major urban centres, where navigating and securing accommodation is already quite challenging. For international migrants, this situation is considerably more difficult due to structural constraints such as the lack of a SCHUFA credit record. When this is combined with language barriers and unfamiliarity with local housing markets, it creates a situation in which migrants struggle to access formal rental channels. As a result, many migrants become dependent on their (recruitment) agents for housing assistance, further reinforcing existing dependencies, while others depend on informal networks and word-of-mouth contacts from previously arrived migrants. In some cases, this leads to overcrowded living arrangements² or (non-transparent) rental agreements at prices significantly above market rates.

All together, these dynamics showcase the dual role recruitment intermediaries within the German–Indian migration corridor fulfil. On the one hand, they fulfil a practical function by bridging informational and administrative gaps where both the country of origin and the destination country of interest are falling short. On the other hand, the current consistent lack of cross-border oversight, transparency, and accountability allows practices to emerge that consistently undermine the principles of Fair Migration.

² Sharing a room is, by Indian standards, very common, and in Germany, nearly unheard of since overcoming the Post-WWII Housing Crisis.

3.4 Fragmented Information Ecosystem and the Rise of Misinformation

From the challenges identified in the previous sections, it becomes increasingly evident that a significant share of the shortcomings within the German–Indian migration corridor can be traced back to regulatory gaps. While the development and alignment of regulatory frameworks across borders, to fill these gaps, is inherently time-consuming, there is one immediate and powerful tool available to both the EU and Germany to stabilise the dramatic situation at hand: namely, the provision of clear, concise, coordinated, and trustworthy information. Unfortunately, despite considerable efforts by Germany in this area, this crucial point of intervention has not yet been functioning as intended.

Over recent years, acknowledging both the importance of information provision and the time required for policy development, numerous well-intentioned government actors have sought to address existing information gaps by creating a wide range of platforms, including apps, digital platforms, organising awareness campaigns, high - and mid-level events, leading political delegation visits, and starting government funded aid projects, pilot programmes, advisory initiatives etc. These efforts, often publicly funded and politically supported, were designed to improve transparency and accessibility. However, today, the German migration ecosystem consists of a broad array of government actors, including multiple federal ministries, regional governments, development agencies, chambers of commerce, international organisations, and many others, all contributing to the dissemination of information. Although many of these initiatives were designed to pursue similar objectives, they have rarely functioned as part of a unified strategy. Instead, they have created a patchwork that often overlaps or operates independently of one another, resulting in a fragmented and uncoordinated information landscape.

For prospective migrants, particularly those navigating the system from abroad for the first time, this oversupply of information snippets has not translated into clarity, but instead has been creating uncertainty and confusion. Multiple platforms provide guidance on the same migration pathways, often with different wording, emphasis, or levels of detail (see the EU Blue Card), leading to an abundance of often fragmented information making it increasingly difficult for migrants to identify which source is reliable and authoritative.

This confusion is further intensified by the rapid expansion and presence of private-sector actors entering the migration space. Currently, numerous online platforms provide migration-related information, often using visual designs and communication styles similar to official channels such as [Make-it-in-Germany](#). While this official platform provides comprehensive and accurate information, it is not always clearly distinguishable as the authoritative government source, particularly for migrants unfamiliar with German institutional branding. The mere presence of a government logo, without clear communication that the website is the official information channel of the German Government, is often insufficient, especially when private platforms, with similar logos “inspired” by the Make-it-in-Germany brand, appear more prominently in (sponsored) search results or present themselves in ways that suggest credibility. As a result, migrants struggle to differentiate between official guidance and commercially motivated content. This lack of clarity often leads migrants to rely on consultants or recruitment agents to interpret information, thereby reinforcing their dependency on intermediaries, something that runs counter to the principles of Fair Migration, which requires public authorities to provide direct, transparent, and accessible information.

Closely linked to this fragmented information landscape is the issue of misinformation and misaligned expectations. As we have seen, migrants are often required to make complex and high-stakes financial and life decisions based on fragmented or inconsistent information, which can lead to incorrect assumptions and unrealistic expectations. Over the years, we have been seeing cases where healthcare professionals, such as nurses, pursue academic study programmes in Germany as they have been advised to do so, without being aware that direct pathways for professional recognition and employment migration already exist. In other cases, prospective migrants, often guided by educational consultants, assume that any form of study in Germany, including English-language degrees without German language requirements, will automatically lead to long-term employment opportunities. These assumptions overlook key realities, including labour market conditions, visa constraints, and the central importance of language proficiency.

At the same time, misconceptions are not limited to migrants. Within Germany itself, it is often assumed that Indian international students or skilled professionals who leave the country after completing their studies or shortly after arrival do so voluntarily. What is less frequently acknowledged, however, is that most Indians do not come to Germany without seriously considering long-term settlement; on the contrary, many intend and wish to stay.

Their decisions to return are therefore often shaped not by preference, but by structural constraints. In practice, many migrants face difficulties securing employment within limited timeframes, struggle with housing shortages, lack sufficient German language proficiency, often due to prior misinformation about English-only opportunities, or encounter administrative challenges related to residence permits. Misinformation further reinforces these dynamics. For example, many migrants who apply for an Opportunity card in India arrive in Germany with the naive misconception that they are “needed” in the German labour market, regardless of whether their profile falls into one of the shortage professions or whether they possess the required German language skills. In addition, many underestimate the cost of living in Germany relative to their home country. As a result, many departures are not a matter of choice but the consequence of unmet expectations and systemic constraints within the system.

Taken together, the fragmented information environment, the spread of misinformation, and the resulting misaligned expectations significantly undermine the functioning of Fair Migration within the EU/German–Indian corridor. These dynamics not only create adverse outcomes for migrants and employers alike, but also risk distorting the evidence base on which policies are designed, thereby reinforcing the very challenges they seek to address.

4. WHY FAIR MIGRATION CANNOT WORK THROUGH NATIONAL POLICIES ALONE

The challenges identified across the previous sections, ranging from employer uncertainty and recruitment practices to information gaps and migrant vulnerabilities, point to a broader structural reality: Fair Migration cannot be achieved through national policy measures alone. While destination countries such as Germany can design visa frameworks, labour market regulations, and integration policies within their own jurisdictions, the dynamics that shape migration decisions extend far beyond national borders. Skilled migration is not a domestic process, but the outcome of interconnected systems involving labour markets, education and training structures, recruitment networks, diaspora communities, and global economic developments. Policies that focus primarily on what happens after migrants arrive fail to address the much larger ecosystem that determines whether migration works effectively in practice.

A key reason for this lies in the nature of skilled and highly skilled labour migration itself. Professionals entering sectors such as healthcare, engineering, or technology require significant onboarding, training, and integration within the companies that employ them. Unlike short-term or low-skilled migration models, these processes involve language acquisition, professional recognition, adaptation to workplace cultures, and the development of company-specific skills. Unlike short-term or low-skilled migration models, where turnover may be manageable, these investments are substantial. In this context, migration models based on temporary labour rotation, such as those commonly associated with Gulf states like Dubai, are not viable for Europe. The investment required from employers and the system as a whole does not “break even” if workers remain only for short periods before returning. European economies, facing long-term demographic decline, require sustainable migration models that support long-term integration rather than short-term circulation. Achieving such sustainability, however, depends on coordination across borders, since key elements of preparation, selection, and expectation-setting occur outside the destination country.

Within Europe itself, fragmentation between EU-level and national-level policies further complicates the picture. Migration frameworks often exist in parallel rather than in alignment, creating confusion and inefficiency for both migrants and employers. The EU Blue Card, for example, is frequently misunderstood as being equivalent to the U.S. Green Card - suggesting a single, uniform status across the EU.

In practice, however, its implementation varies across Member States. Even within Germany, the existence of different Blue Card categories with varying thresholds creates confusion. Such complexity reinforces reliance on external intermediaries simply to navigate basic regulatory questions, thereby reproducing some of the very challenges identified earlier.

A similar pattern can be observed in information provision, where national and regional platforms operate alongside EU-level initiatives without sufficient coordination. As highlighted in the previous section, this results in fragmented communication structures that are misaligned with the way migrants actually access and interpret information. In essence, migration governance is currently organised in layered and partially disconnected systems, while migration itself operates as an interconnected, cross-border process.

For these reasons, national policies alone are insufficient to ensure that Fair Migration functions in practice. What is required is coordinated action across multiple levels - local, regional, national, European, and international. This does not imply a loss of national sovereignty, but rather a recognition that effective governance of skilled migration corridors depends on structured cooperation between all actors involved. Skilled migration corridors must be treated as shared policy spaces, where responsibilities are aligned, and actions are coordinated across borders. Only through such multi-level cooperation can Fair Migration move from a set of principles to a system that functions reliably in practice. As such, if Fair Migration is to function as intended, it must be redefined in a way that reflects these operational realities and should be translated into a framework of shared responsibilities and coordinated implementation.

5. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS: REDEFINING “FAIR MIGRATION” WITHIN THE EU/GERMAN- INDIAN CORRIDOR

The preceding analysis has demonstrated that the concept of Fair Migration, as it is currently articulated within the Indo-German corridor, does not fully reflect the current realities on the ground and must therefore be adapted in a way that aligns with the operational realities. The goal must therefore not be to eliminate all costs, risks, or responsibilities within the migration process, an approach which we see in practice is neither realistic nor sustainable, but rather to ensure that these costs and responsibilities are distributed in a transparent, proportionate, and predictable manner across all actors involved. For this, we must first acknowledge that fairness in migration is not entirely cost-free or risk-free for any stakeholder, and while acknowledging that, we must build a system which very clearly operates under clearly defined expectations and accountability structures, where all stakeholders, regardless of the location where they are based, are held to consistent and enforceable standards. A fair system is therefore not one that removes all burdens, but one that ensures that no single actor disproportionately carries them, and that all participants operate within a framework of transparency and responsibility.

To achieve this, different actors must take on clearly defined responsibilities and implement targeted changes within their respective areas of influence. The following policy recommendations are therefore not isolated interventions, but rather components of a broader effort to realign the migration corridor with the principles of Fair Migration in practice. While not exhaustive, these recommendations reflect practical insights from within the corridor and aim to provide a structured orientation for policymakers and stakeholders.

To support implementation, the recommendations are presented along a spectrum of feasibility, beginning with measures that can be implemented relatively quickly within existing frameworks, and progressing toward more complex structural adjustments that require deeper coordination across actors and governance levels. This sequencing is intended to facilitate gradual but coherent system improvement. Taken together, the following measures are designed to guide stakeholders across all levels, European, national, regional, and private, in identifying their respective roles and responsibilities in strengthening the functioning of the migration corridor. Only through such coordinated contributions can the principles of Fair Migration be translated into a system that operates sustainably in practice.

Rethinking Fair Migration in Practice

Fairness for Migrants	Fairness for Employers	Destination Countries	Countries of Origin	Recruitment Intermediaries
<p>Bearing only limited, transparent, and proportionate costs, with no exposure to exploitative fees or debt-driven migration models</p>	<p>Operating within a system that provides predictability, transparency, and reduced administrative uncertainty</p>	<p>Maintaining functioning, well-resourced administrative systems, avoiding bureaucratic fragmentation and delays</p>	<p>Acting as active partners in regulating recruitment practices, preventing exploitation before departure</p>	<p>Operating within clear, enforceable standards of transparency, accountability, and ethical conduct</p>
<p>Access to clear, reliable, and official information - “One-stop-shop”, without reliance on intermediaries to navigate basic migration pathways</p>	<p>Protection from unregulated recruitment practices and unreliable intermediaries</p>	<p>Setting realistic expectations regarding labour market access, integration requirements, and language needs</p>	<p>Strengthening transparent, accountable, and publicly supervised recruitment channels</p>	<p>Prohibition of misleading information and false promises</p>
<p>Receiving contracts in a language they fully understand, with full clarity on wages, roles, and conditions</p>	<p>Access to efficient, standardised, and timely procedures (e.g. recognition, visas, fast-track systems)</p>	<p>Providing structured integration support, including early-stage orientation and anti-discrimination frameworks</p>	<p>Supporting migrants with accurate pre-migration information</p>	<p>No involvement in debt-driven recruitment, hidden fees, or coercive practices</p>
<p>Protection from coercion, binding contracts, and dependency structures, ensuring full freedom of movement and choice</p>	<p>A balanced system in which employers are not exposed to disproportionate upfront risks without safeguards</p>	<p>Addressing structural bottlenecks, particularly housing, as part of migration policy</p>	<p>Enabling recognition of qualifications upon return</p>	<p>Full transparency in contracts, services, and cost structures</p>
<p>Being adequately prepared for migration, including basic language skills and understanding of administrative and labour market realities</p>	<p>Clarity on realistic candidate preparedness, particularly regarding language and integration capacity</p>	<p>Ensuring migration systems remain orderly, enforceable, and publicly legitimate</p>	<p>Contributing to data collection to better align migration with labour market realities</p>	<p>Functioning as regulated facilitators of migration, not as actors exploiting information asymmetries</p>
<p>Access to fair working conditions, equal wages, and employment aligned with qualifications and experience</p>		<p>Collecting data to better align migration with labour migration realities</p>		
<p>Support in overcoming initial barriers, particularly housing and early-stage integration challenges</p>				

5.1 Introduce a Regulated, Refundable Migrant Commitment Deposit

One of the recurring challenges within the current migration corridor lies in the absence of structured and transparent mechanisms to ensure commitment and predictability during the recruitment and preparation phases. As was mentioned in sub-section 3.2, informal financial arrangements already exist, oftentimes unregulated and, in some cases, undermining the principles of Fair Migration.

Against this background, and given the persistence of such practices, it is necessary to acknowledge that Fairness in migration constitutes, to a certain extent, an individual investment by the migrant for themselves. This means that, within clearly defined limits, certain reasonable and proportionate financial contributions may be acceptable if they contribute to improving the reliability and predictability of the recruitment process. Formalising such contributions through a regulated framework would allow policymakers, particularly in Germany, to bring existing informal practices into a transparent system, while at the same time creating a more level playing field between recruitment actors operating within and outside European jurisdiction.

Our recommendation is the introduction of a regulated, limited, and fully refundable interest-free commitment deposit, for example, of up to approximately INR 20,000 (around 200 euros), to be fully reimbursed upon the commencement of employment. Such a deposit could serve as a mechanism to increase commitment on the part of the applicant and reduce late-stage withdrawals or switching between recruitment channels after preparation processes have already begun. While the sum is relatively modest in the European context, it is an amount in India that is sufficient to discourage repeated or non-serious participation in recruitment processes.

The implementation of such an instrument would require a simple and transparent mechanism, supported by careful institutional design. However, the underlying principle remains that modest, regulated financial commitments can contribute to greater process stability without imposing disproportionate financial burdens on the migrant. At the same time, and most importantly, such regulations would introduce the much-needed oversight into a space that is currently shaped by informal practices.

5.2 Strengthen Transparency and Combat Misinformation in EU-India Migration Recruitment

Another persistent challenge within the current migration corridor lies in the fragmentation of information and the continued prevalence of misleading recruitment practices. Despite extensive efforts by German public authorities (see more in sub-section 3.4), the existing information landscape remains dispersed across multiple actors, while insufficient oversight is allowing inaccurate or manipulative representations of migration pathways to persist. The EU and Germany should therefore prioritise strengthening a coordinated transparency and anti-misinformation framework in close cooperation with Indian authorities.

Such a framework should contribute to the reduction of information fragmentation through clear structures outlining responsibilities and should be coordinated across all stakeholders, including ministries, federal states, government agencies, and affiliated institutions. Within this framework, through systemic monitoring, more attention should be given, on all sides, to identifying, flagging, and penalising misleading recruitment practices, such as incorrect advertisements - including false or exaggerated claims regarding timelines, job guarantees or job profiles. Furthermore, bundled “Visa service packages”, particularly in cases where services such as applications for the Opportunity Card are marketed with misleading assurances of immediate employment, should be outright prohibited. And likewise, coercive contractual arrangements, including binding agreements that restrict job mobility and undermine the principle of voluntary employment, should be clearly banned as part of a consistent regulatory approach.

Given the cross-border nature of these challenges, primary enforcement will need to be strengthened on the Indian side, supported by structured information exchange with European counterparts. In this regard, the development of the [EU Legal Gateway Office](#) provides an opportunity to establish a more coordinated approach, also regarding awareness-raising on misleading practices. In the medium term, such a platform could contribute to the development of formalised monitoring or blacklisting mechanisms for recruitment agencies, building on already existing informal practices, as this challenge affects most EU Member States.

In parallel, operational adjustments could also be considered at key points of migrant interaction, for example, at service providers such as VFS Global. Through formal arrangements that exist between governments and VFS, the service provider could be mandated to provide the migrants with direct access (e.g. through QR codes) to official government information portals of all relevant Member States, and require applicants to formally acknowledge that they have consulted these official channels about their rights and are applying without coercion. While such measures introduce an additional procedural step, they serve an important function in raising awareness and strengthening informed decision-making in a process with significant long-term implications.

5.3 Expansion of Government-Supervised Recruitment Agencies in India

To improve standards within the recruitment ecosystem, the expansion of authorised and government-supervised recruitment agencies in India should be considered. Existing models, such as Norka Roots or Tomcom, which are publicly affiliated recruitment platforms operating under state governance, demonstrate that it is possible to combine commercial efficiency with public accountability in the recruitment process.

Positive experience with such entities already showcases how they serve as benchmark actors within the market. By adhering to clearly defined standards on transparency, cost structures and ethical recruitment practices, we already see them contributing to raising the overall quality standards within the recruitment space. At the same time, they also help to build trust among both migrants and employers by offering more predictable and regulated pathways.

As migration flows between India and international destinations, including Germany and the EU, are expected to continue increasing, strengthening the presence and capacity of publicly supervised recruitment channels would not only provide credible alternatives for prospective migrants but it would also exert indirect regulatory pressure on private recruitment agents by setting clearer market standards. In this way, the systematic expansion of government-supervised recruitment agencies can serve as a structural instrument to contribute to the development of a more accountable and balanced migration system.

5.4 Expansion and Standardisation of the Fast-Track Procedure (Beschleunigtes Fachkräfteverfahren)

Another time-consuming and unnecessarily complicated limitation of the current German-Indian migration corridor lies in the inconsistent application and effectiveness of the German fast-track procedures across regions. While the *Beschleunigtes Fachkräfteverfahren* was introduced to accelerate administrative processes, its implementation remains uneven, with varying timelines and interpretations at the German regional level. This can, in particular, be observed through how the starting point of the processing period is not uniformly defined, with some regions considering the day of submission as the starting date, while others use the day of formal acceptance by the responsible immigration authority/*Ausländerbehörde*. This lack of standardisation creates confusion, delays, and reduced predictability for both employers and migrants.

To address this, Germany should prioritise both the expansion and the standardisation of the fast-track procedure across all regions. The existing target processing time of three months should be made binding and enforceable nationwide, ensuring consistent application across jurisdictions. At the same time, the start of the processing period should be clearly defined as the date of complete application submission, rather than the date of acceptance by the responsible immigration authority. These measures would reduce administrative uncertainty and significantly enhance the predictability of skilled migration processes for both employers and migrants, thereby strengthening the overall effectiveness of the migration system.

5.5 Establish a Verify Once System for Qualifications and Documents

Another structural inefficiency lies in the duplication of processes and the repeated verification of documents across different stages of the migration procedure. Employment migration between Germany and India often functions like a handcrafted clockwork: each component is handled individually, multiple authorities repeat similar checks, recognition is conducted on a case-by-case basis, and documents are re-verified at several points. While this may function at low volumes, it becomes increasingly inefficient and difficult to sustain as demand rises.

The objective should therefore not be to lower standards, but to transition towards a system that remains controlled and accurate, while functioning more predictably under increased pressure. This requires the establishment of processes in which document authenticity is verified once and is subsequently available across all relevant stages of the migration process. In practical terms, this would involve linking the new digital migration platform with recognition procedures, visa processes, and labour market access, as well as developing accelerated recognition pathways for applicants from educational institutions whose qualifications have already repeatedly been assessed positively in previous cases.

Initial steps in this direction can already be observed through initiatives at the EU and Member State levels, such as online portals like the [EU Talentpool](#). However, these initiatives require further development and integration into a more coherent system. The use of digital tools and AI-supported process management should also be explored, particularly for document triage, standardised plausibility checks, and case allocation, while keeping the final legal and recognition decisions strictly under human authority. The guiding principle of control should remain firmly in place; however, reducing unnecessary procedural duplication would significantly improve efficiency for both migrants and employers.

5.6 Re-introduce a Mandatory Basic Language Threshold

As outlined in previous sections in detail, several German migration pathways currently allow entry without any prior knowledge of the German language. While this approach addressed labour shortages in the past, it has increasingly led to situations where migrants arrive insufficiently informed and underprepared for the realities of living and working in Germany. Many lack a basic understanding of administrative processes, labour rights, and everyday systems, and, particularly in a tightening labour market, face difficulties in securing appropriate employment. This, in turn, increases their vulnerability to misinformation and exploitative practices.

To address these challenges, Germany should reintroduce a mandatory basic German language requirement (minimum A2 level) as part of its Fair Migration framework. Even at a basic level, language competence can serve as an important filter against uninformed migration, encourage greater self-preparation and long-term commitment, and strengthen migrants' ability to navigate the labour market and assert their rights.

It would also prompt employers to more realistically assess whether a candidate is likely to integrate and function effectively in the German context.

A practical and balanced approach would be to require A2-level German either prior to migration or, where justified, within the first six months after arrival. While A2 does not enable full professional communication, it provides a necessary foundational step toward integration and participation. Such a model would reinforce the principle that basic linguistic integration is not optional, but a core condition for sustainable migration outcomes. In practice, most employers with long-term intentions would, anyway, require a higher German level for employing migrants, but the false belief that living and working in Germany is possible without any German skills would be confronted.

Allowing fulfilment after arrival in defined cases also reflects operational realities: it would help reduce pressure on limited examination capacities abroad (e.g. Goethe and telc centres), while leveraging the broader availability of training and testing infrastructure within Germany.

5.7 Establish Mandatory Integration Orientation Programmes Post-Arrival

Beyond language acquisition, one of the most significant challenges for newly arrived migrants lies in understanding how everyday life and administrative systems in Germany function. While larger companies often have internal structures to assist employees in navigating these processes, the current labour shortages in Germany are disproportionately affecting SMEs, which typically lack the capacity to provide such onboarding themselves. In the absence of structured support, many migrants lose valuable time, become dependent on informal networks, or make avoidable administrative mistakes. A basic, publicly provided onboarding framework should therefore be understood not as an optional support measure, but as a core element of fair and effective migration policy.

To address this, Germany should introduce mandatory, state-supported integration orientation programmes for all adults within the first three months after arrival, organised at the regional level, for example, through existing welcome centres. These programmes should be free of charge and primarily delivered in German, with multilingual support where necessary to ensure accessibility.

The content should be practical and be immediately applicable knowledge, including: an overview of relevant public authorities in Germany and how to interact with them, how registration and documentation work, how to open a bank account, the structure of health insurance and social systems, labour rights and protections, tax obligations, and key aspects and expectations that shape everyday life.

Such programmes would accelerate early-stage integration, reduce administrative burdens and costs across public authorities by preventing recurring issues and information gaps, reduce dependency on informal networks, and prevent the emergence of isolated social environments, while ensuring that both skilled migrants and their families are equally supported in building independent and informed participation in society. Importantly, it would also relieve employers, especially SMEs, of responsibilities they are not equipped to fulfil, thereby improving overall system efficiency.

The expertise required to deliver such programmes already exists within Germany, and should therefore just be adapted and systematically extended to all newly arriving migrants as a mandatory component of the integration process.

5.8 Strengthen Migration Data Collection and Strategic Use

A further constraint in the effective management of the EU/German-Indian migration corridor lies in the limited availability and strategic use of detailed data. As a country comparable in size and diversity to the EU, India cannot be judged and approached through a single, uniform lens or strategy. Regional differences in education systems, labour market conditions, administrative cultures, and social norms are substantial and shape how migrants prepare for, experience, and respond to migration processes.

To address this, Germany should strengthen both the collection and the strategic use of migration-related data within this corridor. This includes systematically capturing and analysing information on migrants' region or state of origin, professions and qualification levels, approval and rejection rates across migration pathways, timelines and outcomes of recognition procedures, and the timeline for status changes after arrival (e.g. transitions between permits).

Furthermore, educational patterns (e.g. frequently recognised universities or training institutions) and outcomes across different migration channels are also part of the crucial information needed for adapting policies more intelligently and for supporting earlier identification of systemic bottlenecks.

At present, many actors operate with incomplete or outdated understandings of where migrants are coming from, how they enter the system, and what outcomes they experience after arrival. Strengthening the data foundation is therefore key to more effective and responsive migration governance. Understanding these regional variations is not only relevant for public authorities, though, but also for academic institutions and research organisations that contribute to evidence-based policymaking. A stronger data foundation would, therefore, enable more targeted pre-migration preparation, improve alignment between labour market demand and incoming qualifications, and support a more demand-driven and outcome-oriented approach to migration planning.

5.9 Integrate Housing Support into Labour Migration Policy

Access to housing remains one of the most critical challenges for newly arriving migrants in Germany. Individuals arriving from abroad, particularly from countries such as India, typically lack a German credit history (SCHUFA), local guarantors, and familiarity with German rental procedures, leading to securing accommodation becoming a decisive bottleneck. In the absence of these prerequisites, many migrants either struggle to access housing altogether or are compelled to accept accommodation that circumvents standard requirements, often at disproportionately high costs. Others rely on informal networks or recruitment intermediaries to secure housing, frequently incurring additional financial burdens. This combination of structural barriers and dependency creates a situation in which access to adequate and affordable housing becomes not only a practical challenge but also a source of vulnerability for newly arrived migrants.

For this reason, housing should be treated as an integral component of labour migration policy, instead of being a separate or downstream issue. In the short term, employers, in particular, should be expected to play a more active role in supporting newly arriving workers, whether through assistance in navigating the housing market, support mechanisms such as rent deposit guarantees, or by providing temporary accommodation during the initial months after arrival.

Such support can significantly reduce early-stage uncertainty and enable migrants to stabilise their situation more quickly. At the same time, Germany should take steps to address the structural constraints in housing supply. One avenue would be to introduce targeted tax incentives to expand employee housing/*Firmenwohnungen*. Companies that invest in building or acquiring housing specifically for their workforce, while offering it at fair, local market conditions, should benefit from tax deductions or credits. While larger firms may have the capacity to develop dedicated housing projects, smaller companies could be supported through targeted incentives that enable them to secure accommodation for their employees.

If designed and implemented effectively, the integration of housing support into labour migration policy could evolve into a strategic labour market instrument, improving recruitment outcomes, reducing dependency on informal structures, and strengthening long-term integration prospects for migrants.

5.10 Strengthen Recognition of Foreign-Acquired Qualifications in Countries of Origin

Migration policy within this corridor should not focus solely on entry and integration, but also account for return mobility and long-term reintegration in countries of origin. A number of Indian migrants choose to return to India after gaining international work experience, whether due to family considerations, life-cycle decisions, or professional opportunities, yet the qualifications they acquire in Germany are not always recognised upon return. For example, many vocational qualifications obtained through Germany's dual training system are not consistently recognised within domestic frameworks in India. This represents a missed opportunity, limiting the ability of returning migrants to fully utilise their skills and experience in the local labour market.

To address this, Germany and partner countries such as India should work toward mutual or aligned recognition mechanisms for qualifications acquired abroad, particularly in vocational education and training. Strengthening recognition upon return would reinforce the Win-Win nature of migration, ensuring that skills and experience gained abroad are effectively reintegrated into domestic economies. In doing so, migration would not just be a labour market tool for destination countries, but could also serve as a long-term development instrument for countries of origin.

5.11 Establish Regulated and Accessible Financing Pathways for Migration Preparation

A further and final recommendation concerns the financing structure of migration preparation. As indicated above, Fair Migration should not imply the complete absence of costs for migrants; rather, it should require that costs are transparent, proportionate, and free from exploitation.

Within this framework, it is reasonable for migrants to contribute to certain limited preparatory investments, such as appropriately priced language training and possibly a modest and regulated commitment deposit in the case of recruitment consultant usage. Taking part in appropriately priced language training should be understood as a long-term investment in the migrant's professional integration and career prospects. However, to ensure equitable access to this form of training, such investments must be supported by accessible and regulated financing mechanisms, particularly for individuals without sufficient disposable financial resources.

In the Indian context, the cost of a single level of certified language training can amount to approximately one month's salary for a vocationally skilled professional, representing a significant upfront financial barrier. To address this, formal financing pathways should be expanded and systematically linked to migration preparation. Existing instruments, such as education loans provided by credible public financial institutions or government-backed schemes at the Indian state level, should be made more widely accessible to prospective migrants and explicitly extended to cover language acquisition costs. Crucially, access to such financing must be embedded within a framework of independent, verified information and decision-making, ensuring that migrants retain full agency over their choices.

Strengthening formal financing options would reduce reliance on informal or agent-mediated lending arrangements, where high-cost loans are often tied to recruitment services and offered without sufficient transparency. By decoupling financing from recruitment intermediaries, the risk of debt dependency and exploitative financial practices can be significantly reduced.

At the same time, as already mentioned, any recruitment-related costs going beyond preparatory investments, such as bundled migration service packages or debt-driven placement systems, must be curtailed. Contracts must always be available in languages the candidates understand, and coercive or binding arrangements that effectively restrict mobility or trap migrants with one employer or intermediary should be prohibited. Finally, Migrants must receive the same wages and working conditions as local employees, and recognition procedures should lead, as far as possible, to employment that corresponds to qualification level and prior professional experience.

CONCLUSION

The starting point of this policy brief was the growing political and policy emphasis on Fair Migration within the EU/German–Indian corridor. In official discourse, Fair Migration is presented as a system built on transparency, equal access, ethical recruitment, and mutually beneficial outcomes for migrants, employers, and both countries of origin and destination. In principle, this is the right ambition. Yet, as this paper has shown, the current operation of the corridor still falls significantly short of that standard.

What emerges from the analysis is not the absence of effort, but the absence of sufficient alignment. Germany, the EU, India, employers, and recruitment intermediaries are all already active within this space. New visa pathways have been introduced, recruitment initiatives launched, and information platforms expanded. However, these measures have often developed faster than the surrounding systems of support, coordination, and accountability. The result is a corridor in which migration has grown in scale, but not yet sufficiently in coherence. Migrants continue to face misinformation, financial vulnerability, fragmented procedures, and unrealistic expectations. Employers, particularly SMEs, continue to carry disproportionate uncertainty and risk. Public authorities, meanwhile, continue to work within fragmented structures that are not yet fully adapted to the realities of a rapidly expanding skilled migration corridor.

This policy brief has therefore argued that Fair Migration, as currently articulated, is not yet fair enough in practice. If the corridor is to remain sustainable, trusted, and politically viable, the concept itself must be operationalised more honestly. Fair migration cannot mean the absence of all risks or costs. Rather, it must mean that these risks, costs, and responsibilities are distributed transparently, proportionately, and predictably across all actors involved. It must also mean that all relevant actors are held to clear and enforceable standards, regardless of whether they are located in Germany, elsewhere in Europe, or in India.

For precisely this reason, Fair Migration cannot be implemented by a single actor. It requires destination countries to align their migration policies with labour-market realities and their integration capacity. It requires countries of origin to strengthen oversight, information provision, and accountability within recruitment systems. It requires employers to engage responsibly in recruitment and integration. It requires recruitment intermediaries to operate transparently and within clearly enforced boundaries. And it also requires European, national, regional, and local institutions to work together far more closely than they do at present.

Ultimately, Fair Migration is not a slogan to be declared, but a governance model to be built. If all actors involved recognise that they are part of a shared-responsibility framework, the EU/German–Indian corridor can move closer to becoming what it currently claims to be: not only effective, but genuinely fair.

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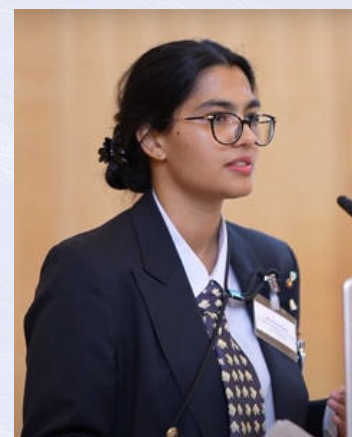


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