

# FTA puts spotlight on student and worker mobility from India to EU

**MAJOR HINDRANCE.** The key constraint today is the lack of clarity around visa pathways, say experts

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People movement has emerged as a key pillar in the India-EU FTA, with education consultants, immigration firms and staffing companies expecting a structural shift in student flows and skilled workforce mobility if the deal delivers on the recognition of qualifications and visa clarity.

At present, Europe accounts for a relatively modest share of India's outbound student market. Around 100,000 Indian students head to EU countries every year, making up 10-12 per cent of the total outbound volumes, according to Aman Singh, Co-founder of GradRight. This comes at a time when the overall overseas education market has slowed amid macroeconomic uncertainty and geopolitical tensions.

"Germany alone attracts nearly 50,000 Indian students, while France and Ireland host about 10,000 each, followed by Italy, Spain and other EU countries," said Singh.

He added that the flow is heavily skewed towards postgraduate education, with 80 per cent of the students enrolling in Master's programmes, 15 per cent in under-graduate courses and the remaining 5 per cent opting for short-term upskilling.

Singh said this composition could change meaningfully if the India-EU FTA improves mobility outcomes.

"The agreement has the potential to alter the current dynamics if it leads to mutual recognition of qualifications



**DEAL IS SEALED.** Prime Minister Narendra Modi with European Council President Antonio Costa (left) and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen during their meeting at the Hyderabad House in New Delhi on Tuesday PTI

and smoother professional access, making Europe a more predictable destination," he said.

#### VISA CLARITY KEY

Beyond education, Germany has also emerged as the leading EU destination for Indian researchers and skilled professionals, particularly across engineering, manufacturing, IT and applied sciences, said Varun Singh, MD at XIPHIAS Immigration.

Other countries seeing rising interest include France, Spain, Italy, Poland and the Netherlands.

According to Varun Singh, a key constraint today is the lack of clarity around visa pathways.

"If the FTA improves transparency on visa categories and processing timelines, it could significantly reduce friction for both Indian professionals and European employers," he said.

Europe's push to ease mobility is being driven by deeper structural challenges. The region is facing acute skill shortages and demographic pressures, which are forcing governments and employers to look outward for talent.

"If mobility norms are relaxed, we expect the earliest demand to come from digital and IT services, core engineering roles, healthcare and life sciences and green and

sustainability-linked jobs, where shortages are already pronounced," said Yeshab Giri, Chief Commercial Officer, operational talent solutions at Randstad India.

Over time, the opportunity could expand beyond white collar roles, Giri added.

#### WORKFORCE PIPELINE

European employers are also likely to rethink how they engage with Indian students studying locally.

According to Giri, companies may increasingly view Indian students as a ready, locally trained talent pool, leading to more structured campus hiring, internships-to-employment pro-

grammes and early-career recruitment strategies anchored within the EU.

The FTA is also expected to accelerate the expansion of GCCs of EU-headquartered companies in India. Mohammed Faraz Khan, Partner at Zinnov, said an India strategy anchored by a strong FTA would mean reduced risk when moving engineering, R&D, AI and other core operations to India, given the talent shortage back home.

"EU-headquartered companies account for over 15 per cent of India's GCC landscape, including majors such as SAP, Siemens, Bosch and Ericsson that are already running India centres with own core operations. With the FTA, more EU firms are expected to expand into this ecosystem and move higher-end work to India, leading to a win-win situation," he said.

On the investment front, Prem Barthesarathy, Founder and Managing Partner of Pontaq, believes the FTA will lower the perceived risk of investing in India, unlocking previously sparse EU capital into Indian start-ups.

Conversely, it will also reduce barriers for Indian start-ups entering the EU market, though they'll need to adapt to Europe's stricter compliance standards, a challenge that could ultimately improve product quality and market credibility.

However, industry executives caution against expecting immediate results. Even if the agreement is signed, tangible movement on the ground is likely to take 12 to 18 months, as policy changes are notified and implemented across member states.