

From Clearance to Competitiveness: Rebuilding India's Global Workforce Strategy

India's overseas employment ecosystem stands at a decisive moment. With a large, skilled workforce and growing global demand across sectors, the country is well-positioned to become a leading supplier of human capital. Yet, despite these advantages, India's approach remains constrained by a structural limitation—it continues to treat overseas employment primarily as a regulatory function, rather than a strategic export sector.

This distinction is not academic. It defines outcomes.

The First Uncomfortable Truth

India does not need to wait for a perfect new law to start behaving differently. India already has a base layer to build on.

Existing frameworks, bilateral agreements, and institutional mechanisms provide a foundation. The limitation lies not in policy absence, but in execution, institutional ownership, and strategic intent.

Structural Limitation of the Current Framework

India's overseas employment architecture remains anchored in a system focused on emigration clearance, licensing, and compliance. While this has served an important protective function, it does not actively support:

- Creation of new labour markets
- Structured employer engagement
- Scalable deployment pipelines
- Long-term global positioning

The result is a system that is administratively sound but strategically under-leveraged.

The Need to Shift from Regulation to Promotion

India must transition toward a promotion-led model, where overseas employment is treated as a strategic export sector.

This requires:

- Proactive global promotion of Indian manpower
- Government-led market development initiatives
- Continuous engagement and negotiation with destination countries
- Integration of labour mobility into trade and bilateral frameworks

Global experience demonstrates that labour mobility markets are not passive—they must be actively built and sustained.

The Limits of the ECR/ECNR Framework

India's reliance on ECR and ECNR passport classifications as the primary filter for risk is increasingly outdated.

Risk today is not determined by passport category, but by:

- Employer practices
- Contract enforcement
- Working and living conditions

A modern system must shift from worker-side categorization to employer-side accountability.

The Missing Piece: Employer-Side Accountability

India's system remains overly recruiter-centric.

To scale safely, it must strengthen foreign employer accreditation, including:

- Verification of employers and project owners
- Validation of wage structures and payment systems

- Assessment of accommodation and workplace conditions
- Defined grievance and escalation mechanisms

This is especially critical in emerging geographies(CIS,Balkans,) where regulatory protections may be uneven.

From Agreements to Execution: Mobility Corridors

India has signed multiple labour mobility agreements. However, many remain underutilized.

The next phase must focus on corridor-specific mobility compacts—sector-driven, employer-linked, and operational.

Each corridor should include:

- Pre-approved employer pipelines
- Standardized contracts and wage benchmarks
- Skill and language requirements
- Insurance and welfare provisions
- On-arrival support and monitoring

Without this, agreements remain intent rather than execution.

Recognition & Incentivisation of Proven Recruiters

India's licensed recruitment industry represents a proven execution backbone, built over decades across diverse global markets.

Policy must:

- Identify and empanel high-performing, compliant agencies
- Prioritise them in government delegations and bilateral initiatives
- Provide predictable and expedited processes under systems such as eMigrate
- Engage them as implementation partners in mobility corridors

Scaling existing capability is more efficient than attempting to recreate it.

Creation of an Overseas Labour Market Development Cell

A key structural gap is the absence of a dedicated mechanism for market development.

India should establish an Overseas Labour Market Development Cell tasked with:

- Mapping global labour demand
- Building verified employer databases
- Conducting international outreach and roadshows
- Converting diplomatic relationships into employment pipelines

Without such a mechanism, India will remain reactive in a competitive global market.

Recalibrating the Skill Ecosystem

The role of the National Skill Development Corporation must be aligned to overseas employment outcomes.

This requires:

- Demand-driven training linked to specific international roles
- Standardised and independently verifiable assessments
- Certification based on competency, not completion

Inconsistent training quality directly impacts global credibility.

The Role of States: Enable, Don't Duplicate

State governments are critical stakeholders but must act as enablers rather than parallel recruiters.

Their focus should be on:

- Training and testing infrastructure
- Candidate mobilisation
- Collaboration with licensed recruitment agencies

Clear role definition will prevent duplication and improve efficiency.

On-Ground Worker Support: The Real Gap

India's biggest weakness lies in post-deployment execution.

While labour welfare agreements exist, operational capacity is limited.

India should establish Overseas Worker Support Desks in priority missions, with defined benchmarks:

- Grievance response timelines
- Wage dispute resolution
- Emergency support systems
- Repatriation protocols
- Employer escalation mechanisms

Worker protection is both a moral responsibility and a strategic differentiator.

Data-Driven Governance: A Full Labour Mobility Intelligence System

India cannot scale without data.

The eMigrate platform must evolve into a full labour mobility intelligence system & support, data tracking collection, safe and legal passage on employment visas and work permit.

Without data, policy remains fragmented and reactive.

The Way Forward: A Strategic Reset

India's overseas employment ecosystem requires a fundamental shift:

- From regulation to promotion
- From worker-side control to employer-side accountability
- From fragmented systems to coordinated strategy
- From agreements to execution-driven mobility corridors

India does not lack talent. It does not lack demand. It does not lack industry capability.

What it lacks is a system that integrates these elements into a coherent, outcome-driven framework.

Conclusion

Overseas employment must be repositioned as a core pillar of India's services exports strategy.

The opportunity is significant. The foundation already exists.

The question is no longer whether India can lead in global manpower mobility—it is whether it is prepared to act with the urgency and clarity required.

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