India to GCC Manpower Statistics 2026, Migration, Trades & Salary Trends

Comprehensive 12-year statistical breakdown of Indian workforce emigration to the six GCC states (Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar, Oman, Kuwait, Bahrain). Covers emigration clearance volumes 2014-2026, the post-COVID rebound, the structural shift toward skilled trades, top fifteen occupations by deployment volume, source state concentration, salary corridors by trade, and a 2030 forecast. Built from MEA emigration clearances, eMigrate portal data, World Bank KNOMAD remittance flows, and Mahad Manpower's anonymised placement audit covering 4,200+ deployments across all six destination countries.

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1.84M
Indian workers deployed to the six GCC states between 2022 and 2025, the steepest three-year recovery in the corridor's recorded history.

Key Statistics

7.6M Indians currently working across the six GCC states (stock estimate)
Source: MEA Annual Report 2025

643K Emigration clearances issued in 2025, highest single-year volume since 2015
Source: eMigrate / Protector General of Emigrants

$56.2B Annual remittance inflow from GCC to India (FY 2024-25)
Source: World Bank KNOMAD

38% Share of total Indian outbound emigration absorbed by Saudi Arabia alone in 2025
Source: MEA emigration clearance data

57% Share of all GCC-bound emigration originating from just three states: UP, Bihar, West Bengal
Source: eMigrate state-wise breakdown 2024

24% Year-on-year growth in skilled-trade emigration clearances (2024 vs 2025)
Source: eMigrate occupation tags

32 Average age of an Indian worker emigrating to the GCC in 2025 (down from 35 in 2018)
Source: eMigrate demographic data

4.7x Multiple of source-country wage that average GCC blue-collar pay represents
Source: World Bank wage corridor analysis

A 12-Year Arc: Boom, Bust, and the Steepest Recovery on Record

Between 2014 and 2025, the India-GCC labour corridor moved through three distinct phases. The boom phase (2014-2015) saw annual emigration clearances exceed 745,000 as Saudi Arabia's pre-Vision-2030 expansion and UAE's Expo 2020 build-out absorbed Indian labour at near-record rates. The structural decline phase (2016-2019) cut volumes by more than half, driven by Saudization (Nitaqat) tightening, the 2014-2016 oil price collapse, and Kuwait's mass cleanup of irregular workers. By 2018, annual clearances had fallen to 343,000, the lowest in over a decade. The pandemic shock

(2020-2021) compressed the corridor further still, with 2020 clearances at just 94,000, an 87% drop from peak. What followed is the most striking statistic in the entire dataset: in just four years (2022-2025), the corridor recovered to 643,000 annual clearances, a 6.8x expansion off the pandemic floor. This recovery has not been a return to the 2014-2015 model. The composition has shifted: median age has dropped from 35 to 32, the share of skilled trades (electrician, AC technician, fabricator) has risen from 28% to 41%, and Saudi Arabia's mega-project pipeline has displaced UAE construction as the single largest driver.

Country-by-Country: Where Indian Workers Are Going in 2025

Saudi Arabia absorbed 38% of all Indian GCC-bound emigration in 2025 (244,340 clearances), reclaiming its position as the corridor's anchor destination after a brief UAE-led interlude in 2022. The Kingdom's mega-projects, NEOM ($500B), Qiddiya, Diriyah Gate, the Red Sea Project, and the 2034 World Cup stadium pipeline, have created sustained demand for civil and MEP trades that no other GCC state can match in scale. The UAE held second place at 27% (173,610 clearances), with demand concentrated in Dubai's post-Expo property cycle and Abu Dhabi's industrial corridor. Qatar at 11% has rebounded sharply post-2022 World Cup, with 14% YoY growth in 2025 driven by Lusail-area mixed-use development and the National Vision 2030 social infrastructure programme. Oman (10%), Kuwait (9%), and Bahrain (5%) round out the bottom tier, each with distinct demand profiles. Oman's Duqm SEZ has become a quiet but consistent absorber of fabrication and welding talent. Kuwait remains the slowest-growing destination, hampered by visa quotas and political pushback against expatriate labour. Bahrain, while smallest in absolute terms, has the highest growth rate per dollar of GDP, reflecting its emerging status as a fintech and logistics hub.

Top 15 Trades by Deployment Volume

The 2025 emigration clearance data, cross-referenced against Mahad Manpower's 4,200-record placement audit, identifies the fifteen occupations that absorbed 78% of total India-to-GCC blue-collar deployment. In rank order: (1) Mason, 14.2% of total volume, anchored by Saudi mega-project demand. (2) Steel-fixer, 9.8%, the trade with the steepest 2024-2025 growth at +31% YoY. (3) Electrician, 8.6%. (4) Carpenter / shuttering carpenter, 7.9%. (5) Plumber, 6.4%. (6) AC technician (HVAC), 5.9%, with the highest wage premium of any blue-collar trade. (7) Welder (6G certified), 5.5%. (8) Driver (heavy and light), 5.1%. (9) Painter, 4.7%. (10) Scaffolder, 4.0%. (11) Helper / unskilled labour, 3.6%. (12) Tile fixer, 3.2%. (13) Cleaner / housekeeper, 3.0%. (14) Cook / commi chef, 2.8%. (15) Mechanic (auto / heavy equipment), 2.6%. The headline pattern: skilled trades now constitute over 60% of deployment volume, up from 38% in 2018. Helper and unskilled categories have shrunk in absolute and percentage terms, partly due to GCC employer preferences, partly due to MEA's minimum-wage policies for emigration clearance.

Source State Analysis: The UP-Bihar Concentration

Three states accounted for 57% of all GCC-bound emigration clearances in 2025: Uttar Pradesh (28%), Bihar (18%), and West Bengal (11%). This concentration has tightened over the past decade, in 2014, the same three states represented just 41%. The shift reflects two underlying dynamics. First, Kerala's historic dominance has eroded. Once the single largest source state with over 25% share in the 1990s, Kerala now contributes just 7%. Higher domestic wages, an aging worker population, and rising graduate emigration to Western markets have all pulled Keralite labour out of the GCC blue-collar segment. Second, Eastern UP and North-Central Bihar have become structural sources. Districts like

Gorakhpur, Azamgarh, Basti, and Siwan now operate as deeply institutionalised migration corridors with intergenerational chains, district-level recruiters, and dense skill-training ecosystems oriented toward Gulf demand. The next tier, Tamil Nadu (8%), Kerala (7%), Rajasthan (6%), represents specialty corridors. Tamil Nadu skews toward construction and manufacturing in UAE and Qatar; Kerala's remaining flow is concentrated in nursing and hospitality; Rajasthan dominates the marble, stone-cutting, and carpenter trades into Saudi Arabia.

Salary Corridors: What Indian Workers Actually Earn

The basic-pay headlines understate total compensation. A mason earning a USD 540 basic salary in Saudi Arabia receives, on average, a fully-loaded package of USD 760-820 once overtime, food allowance, accommodation provision, transport, and end-of-service gratuity are valued. Across our 4,200-record audit, the median total compensation for a skilled trade in 2025 was USD 715/month, against a basic-pay median of USD 540. The dispersion is wide: a 6G-certified welder in Qatar can clear USD 1,400 fully-loaded, while an unskilled helper in Kuwait may net USD 380 after deductions. The wage corridor remains powerful: against an Indian rural-construction wage of roughly USD 130-160/month, a basic GCC blue-collar package represents a 4x to 6x multiple. After remittance home and personal expenses, a typical Indian worker remits USD 380-520/month, totalling USD 4,500-6,200 annually back to source households. This corridor underwrites the bulk of the USD 56.2B annual GCC-to-India remittance flow recorded by World Bank KNOMAD in FY 2024-25.

The Skilled-Unskilled Mix Shift

Perhaps the most consequential structural change in this corridor is the rebalancing toward skilled trades. In 2014, MEA emigration clearance occupation tags showed roughly 38% of clearances going to skilled occupations (categorised under MEA's skilled trade bands), 24% semi-skilled, and 38% unskilled / helper. By 2025, the same breakdown stands at 61% skilled, 26% semi-skilled, 13% unskilled. Three forces are driving this. First, GCC employer preference: post-2017 visa cost increases (Saudi Arabia's Expat Levy in particular) made low-productivity unskilled labour expensive to host, pushing employers toward higher-output skilled hires. Second, GCC labour ministries have raised minimum-wage and skill-certification thresholds, Saudi Arabia's Wage Protection System and the Musaned platform now effectively gatekeep low-skill inflows. Third, Indian skill-training infrastructure has expanded. NSDC's sector skill councils (CIDC, ASCI) and private players have certified over 300,000 GCC-bound trade workers since 2019, materially raising the supply-side skill profile.

Remittances: The $56 Billion Backbone

India's GCC-sourced remittances reached USD 56.2 billion in FY 2024-25, accounting for 49% of the country's total inward remittance receipts and roughly 1.7% of GDP. Within the GCC bucket, UAE leads at USD 19.4B, Saudi Arabia at USD 16.1B, Kuwait at USD 6.2B, Qatar at USD 5.8B, Oman at USD 4.6B, and Bahrain at USD 4.1B. Per-worker remittance averages have risen materially, a 2018 average of USD 2,900/year per migrant has climbed to USD 4,400/year in 2024-25, reflecting both wage gains and the skill-mix shift. State-level disaggregation shows a striking concentration: Kerala (USD 12.3B), Tamil Nadu (USD 7.8B), Andhra Pradesh / Telangana combined (USD 6.4B), Uttar Pradesh (USD 6.2B), and Bihar (USD 4.1B) capture 65% of total GCC remittance inflow. Kerala's outsized remittance share against its declining migrant flow reflects accumulated stock, a legacy migrant population still actively remitting. UP and Bihar's share is rising rapidly and will likely overtake Kerala by 2028 if current trends hold.

What This Means for Employers

For GCC employers planning 2026-2027 manpower budgets, the data argues for three strategic moves. First, lock in skilled-trade pricing now. The 24% YoY growth in skilled emigration is being met by structural demand, not surplus supply, wage inflation across mason, steel-fixer, and AC technician categories has been running at 7-11% annually since 2022 and shows no sign of cooling. Second, diversify source-state intake. Over-reliance on UP/Bihar exposes employers to monsoon-cycle volatility, harvest-season departures, and election-period dispatch slowdowns. A 60/30/10 split (UP-Bihar / TN-Kerala-Rajasthan / Other) materially reduces dispatch-cycle risk. Third, prioritise NSDC-certified candidates. The wage premium for certified workers is now smaller than the productivity differential, making certified intake economically rational at scale. Across our 4,200-record audit, certified workers showed 16% higher employer retention rates at the 18-month mark and 23% lower workplace incident rates than uncertified peers.

Forecast 2027-2030

Three forecast scenarios for India-GCC manpower flow over 2027-2030. Base case (60% probability): annual clearances stabilise in the 650K-720K range, with Saudi Arabia's share rising to 42% as 2034 World Cup construction peaks in 2028-2029. Total cumulative inflow 2026-2030: 3.4 million workers. Bull case (25% probability): a successful NEOM Phase-1 handover combined with UAE's 2027-2028 Operation 300bn industrial expansion pushes annual clearances to 800K+ by 2028. Cumulative: 3.9 million. Bear case (15% probability): a sustained oil-price decline below USD 60/barrel triggers GCC fiscal tightening, pushing annual flows back to the 480K-540K band. Cumulative: 2.6 million. The medium-term composition forecast is clearer than the volume forecast: skilled trades will exceed 70% of total deployment by 2028, helper-grade flows will fall to under 8%, and the source-state Herfindahl index will tighten further as UP/Bihar/WB combined share crosses 60%. India's remittance receipts from GCC are projected to cross USD 70B by FY 2028-29 in the base case.

Limitations and Data Caveats

Three caveats matter for interpreting this dataset. First, MEA emigration clearances cover only the ECR (Emigration Check Required) passport category, Indian citizens with non-ECR passports (graduates, professionals) deploy without clearance and are not captured here. Estimates suggest non-ECR GCC inflow runs at an additional 180K-240K annually, concentrated in IT, healthcare, and finance. Second, eMigrate data captures only formal employer-sponsored migration. Visit-visa-converted employment, family sponsorship transfers, and irregular flows are excluded; combined estimates suggest these add 8-12% to formal numbers. Third, the Mahad Manpower placement audit (n=4,200) is one operator's view, not a market-wide sample. We have triangulated where possible against published MEA aggregate data, GASTAT and UAE FCSA labour force surveys, and World Bank KNOMAD remittance reconciliation, but trade-mix and salary granularity should be read as directionally accurate, not statistically representative of the entire corridor.

"The story most people miss is that this is no longer a labour-export corridor, it has become a skill-export corridor. The worker we put on a flight to Riyadh in 2025 is on average three years younger, fifteen percent more likely to be NSDC-certified, and earning a wage that is structurally higher than what the same role paid in 2019. The buyer side has changed too: GCC employers are no longer asking for headcount, they are asking for certified, productive trade specialists. Our

retention numbers prove this, placements with certifications stay 16 percent longer."

Obaidur Rahman, Mahad Manpower

GCC Country Comparison, 2025 Indian Worker Inflow at a Glance

Country	Clearances 20...	YoY Delta	Avg Monthly W...	Most Common T...	Avg Visa Time
Saudi Arabia	244,340	+11%	$540	Mason, steel-...	38 days
UAE	173,610	+8%	$680	Carpenter, AC...	21 days
Qatar	70,730	+14%	$620	Plumber, scaf...	34 days
Oman	64,300	+6%	$510	Mason, painte...	28 days
Kuwait	57,870	+4%	$595	Driver, clean...	42 days
Bahrain	32,150	+9%	$575	Steel-fixer, ...	24 days

Wages reflect basic pay only; total package including OT, food and accommodation runs 35-55% higher.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q. How many Indian workers are currently employed in the GCC?
A. The Ministry of External Affairs estimates roughly 7.6 million Indian nationals are currently working across the six GCC states as of end-2025. The single largest concentration is in the UAE (~3.5M), followed by Saudi Arabia (~2.4M), Kuwait (~870K), Oman (~570K), Qatar (~700K), and Bahrain (~310K).

Q. Which Indian state sends the most workers to the GCC?
A. Uttar Pradesh is the single largest source state, accounting for 28% of all Indian emigration clearances to GCC destinations in 2025, followed by Bihar (18%) and West Bengal (11%). Together these three states represent 57% of all GCC-bound emigration.

Q. What is the average salary for an Indian worker in the GCC?
A. Across our 4,200-record placement audit, the 2025 median basic salary for a skilled trade was USD 540/month, with a fully-loaded package (including overtime, food allowance, accommodation, and end-of-service gratuity) of approximately USD 715/month. Unskilled helpers earn USD 380-450 fully-loaded; specialist trades like 6G welders or HVAC technicians can clear USD 1,200-1,400.

Q. How much do Indian workers in the GCC remit home each year?
A. World Bank KNOMAD reports USD 56.2 billion in remittances flowed from GCC to India in FY 2024-25, representing 49% of India's total inward remittance receipts. Per-worker average is approximately USD 4,400 per year, up from USD 2,900 in 2018.

Q. Which trades are most in demand for GCC recruitment in 2026?
A. The fifteen highest-volume trades in 2025 were mason, steel-fixer, electrician, carpenter, plumber, AC technician, welder, driver, painter, scaffolder, helper, tile-fixer, cleaner, cook, and mechanic. Steel-fixer and AC technician categories saw the steepest YoY growth at 31% and 24% respectively.

Q. How long does it take to deploy an Indian worker to the GCC?
A. Average end-to-end deployment time (from candidate selection to flight) ranges from 21 days for UAE to 42 days for Kuwait. Saudi Arabia averages 38 days, Qatar 34 days, Oman 28 days, and Bahrain 24 days. The bottleneck is typically GAMCA medical clearance and embassy visa stamping, not flight or paperwork.

Q. Is GCC manpower demand expected to grow or shrink through 2030?
A. In our base-case forecast (60% probability), annual Indian emigration clearances to GCC will stabilise in the 650K-720K range through 2030, with Saudi Arabia's share rising to 42% as 2034 World Cup construction peaks in 2028-2029. Cumulative deployment 2026-2030 is forecast at 3.4 million workers.

Q. Can these statistics be cited in articles or research?
A. Yes. This research is published under the Creative Commons CC-BY 4.0 license. You may freely cite, quote, and embed the data in articles, blog posts, academic papers, and corporate research provided you link back to the original report at mahadmanpowers.co.in/research/.

Methodology

This report combines three datasets. (1) MEA Annual Reports and eMigrate portal exports for 2014-2025 emigration clearance volumes, country-of-destination breakdowns, source-state distributions, and occupation tags. (2) World Bank KNOMAD bilateral remittance matrices for FY 2014-15 through FY 2024-25 reconciled against RBI's remittance receipt data. (3) Mahad Manpower's anonymised internal placement audit (n=4,242 records, deployments 2022-2025) for trade mix, fully-loaded compensation breakdowns, deployment cycle times, and 18-month retention metrics. Forecasts are scenario-based rather than point estimates, with explicit probability weightings against three demand environments. Where MEA and eMigrate aggregates diverge (typically by 2-4% annually due to reporting lag), we use eMigrate as the authoritative source for occupation and state breakdowns and MEA for country-of-destination volumes. All USD conversions use the FY-average RBI reference rate. Data cut-off: 28 April 2026.

Sources

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