
Orchestrating Mobility - How Immigration Agencies, Universities, and Platform Companies Construct the Migration and Labor Pathways of Indian Food Delivery Workers in Berlin

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Abstract

In the German economy, with the pandemic there was a sharp rise in platform companies which ensured that services like food, consumables, grocery, clothes, etc reached the doorstep. The demand for the workforce for these companies therefore started going up exponentially. Almost at the same point of time we see a sharp increase in the migration from India to Germany. At the end of 2023 there are 241,000 Indian immigrants in Germany (Wolf, 2023) as compared to about 50,000 in 2010. Amongst which, 49,008 are students enrolled in the 2023-24 winter semester (Universities, 2025), ranking as number 1 in terms of net student population in Germany.

This massive uptick of immigration therefore compels us to ask, what explains the sudden increase in immigration from India to Germany and where are they currently being employed? This study attempts to answer these questions and understand the structural aspects of labour market segmentation, migration infrastructures and social and cultural capital (or lack of it) of Indian immigrants.

This ethnographic study is conducted with Indian student migrants in Germany working as food and grocery delivery workers. The study finds that a nexus of immigration agencies in India and private universities in Germany, use the relatively relaxed regulation of student visas to mediate the migration. However, this alone would not have been sufficient if not backed by the promise of easy-to-find jobs in the platform companies after immigration. These findings strengthen the argument of how platform capitalism uses migration vulnerabilities to create a secondary labour segment and flouts social protection norms.

The study also immerses itself in the social and cultural life of migrants to understand post immigration conditions. The recurring image of Indians as delivery workers seems to have created a cultural stereotype. The experiences of delivery workers point to a prevalent feeling of being ignored in the German public life. This is further accentuated by physical ghettoisation in the outskirts of the city, away from the centre of public life. The study uses these findings to argue about the role of cultural representation and ghettoisation impacting prospects of labour migrants.

The research concludes by stressing the interconnectedness of the divergent spheres of migration studies, platform economy and cultural theory to be able to make meaning of the recent trends and trajectories of labour migration.

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