

"IN GERMANY'S INTEREST": STATE RESPONSES TO TRANSNATIONAL NURSE RECRUITMENT

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Abstract

West Germany experienced a considerable shortage of nursing staff in the 1960s. One way of countering this was to recruit nurses from abroad, mainly from South Korea, the Philippines and Kerala in Southern India. Recruitment from India was organised primarily by individual clergy, hospital directors and former migrants. Based on archival research, this article reconstructs how the West German state authorities responded to this transnational recruitment. In particular, it analyses the arguments used by the state authorities to justify why they had to respond in a particular way. It shows how they referred – either explicitly or implicitly – to the interests of West Germany, and how the definition of West Germany's interests differed between the various authorities. It illustrates how development aid entered as an argument, and the impact of the sociopolitical context.

Keywords: Nurses, Transnational Migration, India, West Germany, State, Development Aid

1 "IT WOULD BE INHUMANE"

After the German authorities have tolerated the stay of these Indian nurses and nursing students for years, it would be inhumane to expel them from Germany at short notice, when they have a genuine contractual relationship with their hospital operator and many Indian women are also in the middle of their nursing training.¹

In 1977, the German Caritas Association of the Archdiocese of Freiburg appealed to the Minister for Labour of the southern German state of Baden-Württemberg not to act inhumanely in the context of nurses working in West Germany who had been recruited from the southern Indian state of Kerala. Attached to the letter was a memorandum from the nurses pleading against forced termination of their residence in West Germany.

In this article I reconstruct the state actions in West Germany that led to this ethical appeal by a religious institution. Although nurse recruitment had been predominately organised by non-state actors since the early 1960s, West German state authorities were involved in various ways. Consequently, German state archives contain much correspondence between state authorities, and between state and non-state actors, concerning the recruitment of Indian nurses. In this article I am interested in reconstructing how the West German state authorities responded to this transnational recruitment,

¹ Caritasverband für die Erzdiözese Freiburg e.V. to Frau Minister Annemarie Griesinger, Ministerium für Arbeit, Gesundheit und Sozialordnung Baden-Württemberg, 04.02.1977, PA AA B85-REF 513/1262. Translated with the help of deepl.com.

the arguments they used to justify why they had to respond in this way, how they referred explicitly or implicitly to the interests of West Germany, how the definition of West Germany's interests differed between the various authorities, how development aid entered this as an argument and the impact of the sociopolitical context.

In order to better understand the framework in which the state authorities needed to respond, the article starts with a brief overview of the recruitment processes. Following this, I provide a short description of the archival sources used and my methodological approach as a cultural anthropologist. On this basis, I commence the analysis by describing how staff shortages were the major concern in the beginning, and how claims of development aid entered later. Subsequently, the article looks at attempts to restrict recruitment, and how these gained traction when West German unemployment levels rose in the early 1970s. Finally, the article turns to the attempt to terminate the right of residence of the migrated nurses in 1976/77, which prompted the Caritas Association to write to the Minister of Labour. I show how, at this stage, the West German interest was defined in very different ways, ranging from privileging non-migrant unemployed nurses to showing gratitude towards the migrants. The article ends with a brief look at how recruitment of nurses from abroad was – and continues to be – resumed whenever staff shortages reappear.

2 AN OVERVIEW OF NURSE RECRUITMENT

In the 1960s there was a massive shortage of nursing staff in West Germany.² A number of different measures were taken to counter this. Firstly, efforts were made to professionalise the nursing profession in order to provide better working conditions and thus attract more women into this field of work.³ Secondly, an (unsuccessful) attempt was made to attract men to nursing.⁴ Thirdly, since these measures were not sufficient to end the shortage, recruiters turned their attention to nurses from abroad. This endeavour, however, ran counter to the repressive immigration policies of West Germany at the time. Since there was a ban on non-European immigration,⁵ initial attempts focused on recruiting nurses from European countries. But as the status of nurses in those countries was higher than in West Germany, this strategy was not successful.⁶ Consequently, the recruiters shifted their focus to South Korea⁷, the Philippines⁸ and Kerala in southern India⁹.

Kerala was a particularly attractive place for recruiting nurses since it was home to a large Christian community, in which many women were already working as nurses (both in secular contexts and as part of religious orders) and were already migrating, both within India and internationally.¹⁰ The West German recruiters were able to build on this background.

One protagonist in the recruitment process, who is frequently referred to in the state archives, was a Catholic priest, Hubert Debatin. Tobias Großmann has reconstructed in detail how Debatin started recruiting sisters for a convent in southern Germany in the late 1950s, then proceeded to recruit secular nurses as well, and left West Germany to do missionary work in Southern Africa in 1971.¹¹ In

² Kreutzer 2005.

³ Kreutzer 2005.

⁴ Schwamm 2021.

⁵ Schönwälder 2001, pp. 257–277.

⁶ Schuhladen-Krämer 2007, p. 301.

⁷ Chang Gusko/Han/Kolb 2014.

⁸ Mosuela 2020.

⁹ Goel 2023; Großmann 2024.

¹⁰ Kurien 2002; George 2005; Nair 2012.

¹¹ Großmann 2024, pp. 101–279.

Großmann's reconstruction, it seems that Debatin acted outside of the German church framework, but in cooperation on the one hand with clergy in Kerala and on the other hand with West German state authorities, religious orders and hospitals.

However, Debatin was not the only recruiter. Other clergy, hospital staff and private individuals were involved. One was Pater Werner Chakkalakal from Kerala, who first became aware of the needs of religious orders when he was studying in Bonn in 1958.¹² Subsequently, he became involved in the recruitment of women from Kerala to work in West Germany.¹³ A few years later, the Second Vatican Council (1962 to 1966) brought clergy from Kerala to Rome, who travelled through West Germany, staying at Catholic institutions. Consequently – like Chakkalakal – they learned of the shortage of nursing staff and subsequently became involved in transnational recruitment.¹⁴

Regardless of how recruitment was organised in individual cases, state authorities had to be involved in order for the (trainee) nurses to come to West Germany. The local state authorities in India had to issue a passport, the German consulate in Madras had to grant a visa, the local labour agency in West Germany had to provide a work permit, the state nursing training schools had to open their doors to the recruited trainee nurses, the state hospitals had to issue contracts to the recruited (trainee) nurses, etc. In other words, many different state authorities at municipal, state and national level, both in India and West Germany, had to respond to recruitment endeavours. Each pursued specific responsibilities, had particular competences and worked under differing political majorities.¹⁵ In West Germany it was the task of the interdepartmental working group on the employment of foreign workers, which came under the Federal Ministry of Labour, to coordinate the responses of the state authorities.

Whereas the 1960s were a time of economic boom and full employment, in the early 1970s the economy stagnated and unemployment rose. The government responded by terminating the recruitment of foreign workers in 1973.¹⁶ While this did not immediately impact nurse recruitment, it changed the general atmosphere in which recruitment took place and in which the recruited nurses worked. During the time of nursing staff shortages, the restrictive immigration policies that were in place were not strictly implemented. In the stagnating economy they were implemented more rigorously, in particular by local immigration authorities.

At the end of 1976, the first recruited nurses were informed that their residence permits would only be extended for a few more months and that they should prepare to return to India.¹⁷ This caused much anxiety among the nurses from Kerala and for the hospitals that employed them. The Caritas Association, which had been taking care of the nurses from Kerala,¹⁸ supported the nurses against these measures. It was in this context that the Caritas Association of the Archdiocese of Freiburg appealed to the Labour Minister of Baden-Württemberg.

¹² Fr. Werner Chakkalakal to the journal *Priester und Mission*, Keralesische Mädchen in Deutschen Klöstern, ADCV 380.40 (540) Fasz. 01. My notes from the archive are unclear at this point. It is unclear, whether Chakkalakal's text was published in *Priester und Mission* or whether it was just a letter to the editors. My notes are also undated, but from the context it is likely that this text is from 1965.

¹³ Fr. Werner Chakkalakal to the journal *Priester und Mission*, Keralesische Mädchen in Deutschen Klöstern, ADCV 380.40 (540) Fasz. 01. Cf. Documentary Film: *Translated Lives*, Shiny Jacob Benjamin, India/Germany, 2013.

¹⁴ Goel 2025.

¹⁵ A detailed analysis of these different responsibilities, competences and political frameworks goes beyond the possibilities of this article.

¹⁶ Berlinghoff 2013.

¹⁷ Goel 2019.

¹⁸ Goel 2025.

3 THE SOURCES

As the focus of this article is on how the state authorities responded to transnational nurse recruitment, it is based primarily on sources from state archives. Firstly, I used sources from the Political Archive of the Federal Foreign Office. These give insights in particular into the transnational aspects of the recruitment process, including not only the question of issuing visas, but also the contact with Indian institutions. Furthermore, these archival sources document the negotiations with other state authorities and non-state actors. I did not carry out the research in this archive myself, but rather was given access to the documents by Susanne Kreutzer (with the consent of the archive).¹⁹ As a result, in this case I lack the archival experience, did not decide myself which documents to copy and which not, and lack knowledge about the context from which the documents were taken.²⁰

Secondly, I used sources from the state archive of North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW) and, in particular, documents produced by the Ministry of the Interior of this federal state. These give insights into the handling of transnational nurse recruitment within West Germany. The state ministry acted, amongst other things, as an intermediary between the local authorities and the federal state. Furthermore, this archive – like the Federal Foreign Office archive – includes documents about the negotiations between state authorities and between state and non-state actors. It was a former student, Daniel Schumacher, who first identified the archive as relevant for my research and visited it to carry out some initial research. He provided me with his notes and a list of relevant files,²¹ which I then examined myself in the archive.

Since both archives include correspondence with and documents from other state authorities involved in handling the recruitment, I am able to assess their reactions to a certain degree. My insights are, however, restricted to their correspondence with the Federal Foreign Office and with the Ministry of the Interior of North Rhine-Westphalia, and constrained by the archival practices of these two organisations. Tobias Großmann's analysis²² allows me to gain access beyond this, but it is restricted by his decisions in the archives and in writing.

Thirdly, my analysis is also informed by my archival research in the archives of the Archdiocese of Cologne (including the archive of the German Bishops' Conference), the Diocese of Rottenburg and the German Caritas Association in Freiburg, as well as in the archives of the municipal hospital in Karlsruhe²³ and the university hospital in Tübingen²⁴. The material from these various archives provides a broader framework for understanding and interpreting both transnational nurse recruitment in general and individual documents. The materials from the different archives also speak to each other, thereby creating meaning. In this article I occasionally refer to these other sources.

Fourthly, my attempts to identify relevant archives in India have been less successful. I was only able to find some parliamentary debates on the recruitment of nurses in the online archive of the Indian Parliament. Accordingly, references in this article to Indian state responses are based primarily on the German archives.

¹⁹ I want to thank Susanne Kreutzer for this generous sharing of material, which started my own archival research.

²⁰ Cf. Imeri and Schneider 2013 for the importance of reflecting on the archive and the research within it.

²¹ I want to thank Daniel Schumacher for his research and for providing me with his list of sources and his notes.

²² Großmann 2024.

²³ Archived in the municipal archive of Karlsruhe.

²⁴ Archived in the university archive in Tübingen.

Finally, as a cultural anthropologist, my starting point for the research was not archival research, but rather fieldwork in the nurses' communities in West Germany.²⁵ This has informed my archival research, the reading and contextualisation of the documents as well as the manner in which I pursue my research.

4 SHORTAGE OF NURSES AND DEVELOPMENT AID

In November 1964, the Ministry of Education of Baden-Württemberg wrote to the university hospitals in the state:

The Ministry of Education has learned that Father Debatin has for years been actively counteracting the shortage of staff in German hospitals by recruiting Indian girls suitable for the hospitals of Catholic religious orders based in South Baden. In view of the severe shortage of staff at university hospitals and the difficulties in recruiting staff for university hospitals in Germany and Europe, the Ministry of Education has approached Father Debatin with a request to become active in this regard for university hospitals as well. The Ministry of the Interior has also sought to recruit such staff for the state psychiatric hospitals. According to the surveys carried out, the university hospitals are primarily in need of housemaids and kitchen maids.²⁶

The Ministry of Education and the Ministry of the Interior of Baden-Württemberg were responsible for the state's university hospitals and psychiatric hospitals respectively. Like the other hospitals in West Germany, these were facing a shortage of staff, which could not be met from within West Germany and Europe. As a result, when they became aware that Debatin was recruiting nurses for religious orders,²⁷ they contacted him. Through him they hoped to recruit 90 housemaids and kitchen maids as well as ten trainee nurses.

In this eight-page letter to the administrative departments of the university hospitals, the Ministry of Education gave detailed information about how the recruitment was to be organised, what the hospitals were to expect and how they should look after the young women. Training for the migrants from India was mentioned only in passing. It was not specified who should receive what form of training (other than language courses). Judging from the archival sources of the university hospital in Tübingen, the housemaids and kitchen maids were not supposed to receive any training.²⁸ A former German teacher in Tübingen later claimed that a conflict arose because the Indian women demanded training, which had been promised to them in India.²⁹

What this document reveals is that, early in the 1960s, two ministries in Baden-Württemberg were actively involved in recruiting women from India. Their interest lay in countering the staff shortages in their hospitals. No mention was made of any intentions with respect to India, such as development aid.

The document also claimed that the granting of work and residence permits was already organised.³⁰ Residence permits were issued by the immigration authorities, which came under the Ministry of the Interior. Work permits, however, were the responsibility of the Federal Agency for Employment Services

²⁵ I have done participant observation, conducted interviews and collected material from private and community archives on many occasions since 1997. Due to the focus on state actors in this article, however, I hardly refer to this directly in the following.

²⁶ Kultusministerium Baden-Württemberg to Akademische Rektorate – Verwaltungen der Kliniken der Universitäten Freiburg, Heidelberg und Tübingen, H 0503/24, 15.11.1964, Beschäftigung von indischen Mädchen bei den Universitätskliniken, SAK, Abt. 1/Klinikum, Nr. 217. Translated with the help of deepl.com.

²⁷ Großmann 2024, pp. 107-115.

²⁸ UAT 389/16.

²⁹ Former German teacher to Landrat, Schwäbisch Gmünd, 10.04.1967, AEK, DBK Sekr. 203/543. – For an analysis of the conflict cf. Goel 2024.

³⁰ My copy of the page about the work permit and residence permit is barely readable beyond the headings.

and Unemployment Insurance, which also held the sole right to recruit workers from abroad.³¹ In other words, the two ministries had to involve this federal agency in their endeavours, and the agency had to justify why the recruitment was legitimate. It argued that the recruited Indian workers were not genuine employees, which meant their recruitment did not violate the rules concerning recruiting labour from abroad.³² It based this interpretation on the way Debatin organised the recruitment process:

Together with Indian clergy he had founded a religious community called 'The Nirmala Seva Dalam'.³³ Rather than employing the migrants directly in the hospitals, the ministries signed a kind of secondment contract (Gestellungsvertrag) with Debatin, who acted as the representative of this community. A Gestellungsvertrag used to be the usual way of employing, or rather not formally employing, nurses in Germany.³⁴ The hospitals would sign a contract with a sisterhood of nurses. The sisterhood provided the nurses, received the financial compensation and distributed part of it to the nurses. The nurses themselves were members of the sisterhood and not employees of the hospitals. The ministries and Debatin used this construct for their own endeavours. It gave Debatin total control over the income of the nurses, who were known as Nirmala Sisters. He gave the young woman their pocket money, decided what was sent to their parents, how much and how this was saved for their return, and did not give any account of what he was doing to anybody.³⁵ It also made him the sole negotiation partner of the ministries. Großmann shows that there was no sound legal basis for this construct, but the ministries did not seem to mind.³⁶ Indeed, it helped them and the federal agency to justify the recruitment. The agency argued that because the aims of the community were purely religious and charitable, the recruited women were not to be considered as employees.³⁷ Furthermore, in 1970, when the newly founded Nirmala Association, which had been set up by the Catholic Church in order to end the extra-legal activities of Debatin,³⁸ wanted to terminate the contracts of the Indian nurses with the psychiatric hospital in Emmendingen, the ministry refused to recognise the Nirmala Association as a contract partner and referred to Debatin as the legal representative of the migrants.³⁹ It was thus able to prevent the premature departure of the nurses from the hospital. In doing so, it also prevented them from taking up internships in general hospitals, which the Nirmala Association had planned in order for the psychiatric nurses to gain a qualification, which would be recognised in India.⁴⁰

The contracts had been signed for six years. From the beginning, it was clear that the Indian women would return after this time. In November 1967, Debatin wrote to West Germany's Federal Minister of Labour claiming to have recruited almost 800 young Indians for nursing training (and not as employees), who were to serve their home country once they returned.⁴¹ Consequently, he asked the minister to help with the recognition of the German qualification.

The interdepartmental working group on the employment of foreign workers had decided that recruitment should be authorised only if there was an irrefutable need on the West German labour market, or

³¹ Bundesanstalt für Arbeitsvermittlung und Arbeitslosenversicherung to Deutsche Lufthansa, Calcutta, Vermittlung von indischen Krankenschwestern in die Bundesrepublik Deutschland, 04.09.1968, PA AA B85 REF 505/V6/699.

³² Der Bundesminister für Arbeit und Sozialordnung to Bundesminister des Inneren und Bundesminister für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit, Zulassung von ausländischem Krankenpflegepersonal zur Arbeitsaufnahme, 14.04.1965, PA AA B85 REF 505/V6/699.

³³ Großmann 2024, pp. 128–139.

³⁴ Kreutzer 2005, pp. 110–114.

³⁵ Großmann 2024, pp. 235–237.

³⁶ Großmann 2024, pp. 57–163.

³⁷ Der Bundesminister für Arbeit und Sozialordnung to Bundesminister des Inneren und Bundesminister für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit, Zulassung von ausländischem Krankenpflegepersonal zur Arbeitsaufnahme, 14.04.1965, PA AA B85 REF 505/V6/699.

³⁸ Großmann 2024, pp. 201–205.

³⁹ Großmann 2024, pp. 245–247.

⁴⁰ Stadtpfarrer Maier to Psychiatrisches Landeskrankenhaus Emmendingen, 31.12.1969, quoted in: Großmann 2024, p. 245.

⁴¹ Pfarrer Hubert Debatin to Arbeitsminister Katzer, 03.11.1967, PA AA B85 REF 505/V6/699.

if the training was beneficial from the perspective of development aid,⁴² i.e. if the recruitment met either West German or Indian interests. This prompted a range of responses from the various state authorities. The Federal Ministry of Labour had nothing against the immigration of Indians who wanted to work in the field of nursing.⁴³ The Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation, on the other hand, referred to this matter and concluded that, from the perspective of development aid, the recruitment of significant numbers of trained nurses was not in the interests of India.⁴⁴ The federal agency for recruitment acknowledged that, because of the shortage of nursing staff, recruitment from Asia was acceptable, even though this was associated with problems and could harm the interests of the sending countries.⁴⁵ It concluded, like the Federal Ministry of Labour, and in contradiction with the position of the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation, that qualified nurses could apply for a position in West Germany.

Shortly afterwards, the working group discussed whether the residence and work permits of the non-European nurses could be extended beyond five years, although this would give them access to a more secure status and would make it impossible to return their contributions to the pension insurance schemes.⁴⁶ It agreed that, given the shortage of trained nurses, the permits should be extended. Nevertheless, the Ministry of the Interior of North Rhine-Westphalia informed its authorities that, as a rule, they should not extend the permits beyond five years.⁴⁷

A year earlier, the ministry had already argued that providing training for foreign nurses was reasonable only within the context of development aid.⁴⁸ For this to apply, however, the West German qualifications needed to be recognised in the countries of origin. Accordingly, no residence permit should be issued if this was not the case. An exception could be made in individual cases if the returnees could use the acquired skills, for example in the context of a religious order.

In this way, development aid was used increasingly to legitimise a more restrictive response to the recruitment of non-European nurses.⁴⁹ However, this response did not go unchallenged. A retired government official turned to the Minister of the Interior of North Rhine-Westphalia to complain about the non-extension of the residence permits beyond five years:

The [Chief District Director, UG] obviously completely fails to realise that we do not bring in nursing students from Asian countries in order to patronisingly conduct 'personal development aid', for which these 'underdeveloped' countries should possibly even be grateful to us, but because we constantly need thousands of foreign nurses for our hospitals and nursing homes.⁵⁰

He argued that, since the West German examination was not recognised in India, the nurses would not be able to work there after their return, so it would be irresponsible to send them back. He attached an

⁴² As summarised in: Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit to Bundesminister für Wirtschaft, Bundesminister für Arbeit und Sozialordnung, Bundesminister des Innern, Beschäftigung indischer Krankenschwestern in Deutschland, 05.10.1965, PA AA B85 REF 505/V6/699.

⁴³ Der Bundesminister für Arbeit und Sozialordnung to Bundesminister des Innern, Bundesminister für Gesundheitswesen, Bundesminister für Wirtschaft, Bundesminister für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit, Beschäftigung indischer Krankenschwestern in Deutschland, 05.04.1966, PA AA B85 REF 505/V6/699.

⁴⁴ Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit to Bundesminister für Wirtschaft, Bundesminister für Arbeit und Sozialordnung, Bundesminister des Innern, Beschäftigung indischer Krankenschwestern in Deutschland, 05.10.1965, PA AA B85 REF 505/V6/699.

⁴⁵ Bundesanstalt für Arbeitsvermittlung und Arbeitslosenversicherung to Deutsche Lufthansa, Calcutta, Vermittlung von indischen Krankenschwestern in die Bundesrepublik Deutschland, 04.09.1968, PA AA B85 REF 505/V6/699.

⁴⁶ Arbeitskreis für ausländische Beschäftigte, 29.01.1969 (handwritten), LAV NRW NW 760 Nr. 180 (according to notes made by Daniel Schumacher).

⁴⁷ Innenministerium NRW to Regierungspräsidenten, Ausländerbehörden, Oberverwaltungsgericht und die Verwaltungsgerichte, 07.05.1969, LAV NRW NW 760 Nr. 180 (according to notes made by Daniel Schumacher).

⁴⁸ Innenministerium NRW, Ausbildung von Schülerinnen für Krankenpflegeberufe aus außereuropäischen Staaten, 20.06.1968, LAV NRW NW 760 Nr. 180 (according to notes made by Daniel Schumacher).

⁴⁹ Similar processes of using development aid as a justification can be seen also with respect to other non-European migrants. Cf. Goel 2006, pp. 130–132.

⁵⁰ Ltd. Ministerialrat a.D. to Innenminister des Landes NW, Ausländerrechtliche Behandlung indischer Krankenschwestern und -schülerinnen, 21.09.1974, LAV NRW NW 760 Nr. 180. Translated with the help of deepl.com.

overview of the residence permits that had been denied an extension, or granted only very short-term extensions, in North Rhine-Westphalia. In his letter he also pointed out that, rather than returning to India, the nurses concerned would migrate further, for example to Switzerland. In this way he argued that terminating the nurses' residence in West Germany did not support development aid. A few months later, the representative of the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation argued in the working group that, from a development aid perspective, there was no need to train Indian nurses in West Germany.⁵¹

The argument that the recruitment of Indian nurses was a development aid matter was, therefore, on shaky ground. The non-recognition of the West German nursing examination made this quite obvious. This was an issue pursued in particular by the director of Caritas Cologne, Josef Koenen. From 1969, if not earlier, he took many initiatives to obtain universal recognition by the Indian Nursing Council.⁵² In 1970, the Indian Nursing Council asked the German Embassy to provide English translations of the relevant legal regulations in order to assess the examinations for potential recognition.⁵³ The Federal Foreign Office approached the Ministry for Economic Cooperation, i.e. the ministry responsible for development aid, but it declined to finance the translation, since the recruitment was not part of its responsibility.⁵⁴ Since the Federal Foreign Office did not want to provide the necessary funds either,⁵⁵ the translations were eventually provided by the Federal Ministry of Health.⁵⁶ The ministry was, however, surprised that the qualification had not yet been recognised, since that was a prerequisite for recruiting the trainee nurses. However, the translations did not settle the issue. The Indian Nursing Council suggested that their General Secretary should visit West Germany to find a solution.⁵⁷ The Ministry of Health organised the trip, but it proved impossible to convince the General Secretary of the value of universal recognition of the qualification.⁵⁸ She argued that India was not interested in nurses trained in West Germany.⁵⁹

In view of this, the argument that the Indian nurses were recruited as a matter of development aid does not appear to be very convincing, even though the argument appears repeatedly in the archives. Instead, the main driver of the nurses' recruitment seems to have been the shortage of nurses in West Germany. Because of this, exceptions to the restrictive immigration rules were made. As long as there was a need for the nurses, recruiters like Debatin could go ahead with their endeavours and could be quite certain that this would be legitimised by the relevant state authorities. However, it also becomes quite clear from the archives that the West German state did not follow a coherent policy with respect to the recruitment of nurses from non-European countries. Rather, the different state actors involved pursued their respective interests and interpreted the rules and regulations accordingly. Because of the need for nurses, those who interpreted the rules liberally, were able to implement this. But there had always also been counter-voices.

⁵¹ Ergebnisprotokoll über die Sitzung des Arbeitskreises für Fragen der Beschäftigung ausländischer Arbeitnehmer im Bundesministerium für Arbeit und Sozialordnung am 5. Dezember 1974 (Protokoll vom 30.12.1974), LAV NRW NW 760 Nr. 105 (according to notes made by Daniel Schumacher).

⁵² Josef Koenen to Ambassador of India to the Federal Republic of Germany, Recognition of the German Nursing Diploma by the Indian Nursing Council, 02.06.1976, PA AA B85 REF 513/1262.

⁵³ Deutsche Botschaft to Auswärtiges Amt, Anerkennung des deutschen Krankenpflegediploms in Indien, 08.07.1970, PA B85 REF 513/1262.

⁵⁴ Der Bundesminister für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit to Auswärtiges Amt, Anerkennung deutscher Krankenpflegediplome in Indien, 11.08.1970, PA AA B85 REF 513/1262.

⁵⁵ III B2 to Referat V6, Anerkennung deutscher Krankenpflegediplome in Indien, 25.08.1970, PA AA B85 REF 513/1262.

⁵⁶ Der Bundesminister für Jugend, Familie und Gesundheit to Auswärtiges Amt, Anerkennung des Deutschen Krankenpflegediploms in Indien, 22.12.1970, PA AA B85 REF 513/1262.

⁵⁷ Fernschreiben Deutsche Botschaft to Auswärtiges Amt, Anerkennung des deutschen Krankenpflegediploms, 04.08.1971, PA AA B85 REF 513/1262.

⁵⁸ Der Bundesminister für Jugend, Familie und Gesundheit to Auswärtiges Amt, Anerkennung des deutschen Krankenpflegeexamens, 23.08.1971, PA AA B85 REF 513/1262.

⁵⁹ Botschaft der Bundesrepublik Deutschland to Auswärtiges Amt, Anerkennung des deutschen Krankenpflegediploms, 16.09.1971, PA AA B85 REF 513/1262.

5 RESTRICTING RECRUITMENT

Right from the beginning, there was criticism of the recruitment of nurses from India. A number of different archives hold a copy of, or a reference to, a confidential report by a German priest about his conversation with a regional passport officer in Madras, in which the Indian official expressed concern about the high number of young women going to West Germany.⁶⁰ The Consulate General of West Germany in Madras investigated this report and came to the conclusion that it seemed implausible and exaggerated and, since nothing illegal was happening, the consulate did not need to interfere.⁶¹ In its investigation, the consulate also spoke to Chakkalakal:

Father Chakkalakal reckons that only 10 to a maximum of 25% of the girls will decide to stay in Germany after completing their education. It is doubtful whether the purpose of recruitment will be achieved under these conditions. It should also be borne in mind that some of the Catholic hospitals in Kerala are themselves suffering from a shortage of junior nursing staff.⁶²

At this stage then, the Consulate General in Madras was worried not only that the recruitment would harm the interests of Kerala, but that it was not in the interests of West Germany either, because the recruited nurses would not stay there.

Furthermore, the archives also contain many references to, and copies of, an article by Harry Haas and Albert Otto in the journal "Priester und Mission" that is highly critical of the recruitment from India.⁶³ In particular, the authors criticise the fact that the recruitment did not promote a religious mission, but was rather driven by the lack of sisters in the religious orders. Haas, who worked for the Catholic Academic Foreigners Service (KAAD), also replied at length to a request for a statement by the Federal Foreign Office.⁶⁴ He criticised the non-recognition of the German examinations, argued that the recruitment was happening because of staff shortages and not as an instrument of development aid, and, in particular, criticised the fact that at the hospital in Tübingen, there were no plans to train the recruited women.

Several years later, in 1973, the Consulate General in Madras wrote to the Federal Foreign Office with concerns about the recruitment.⁶⁵ It complained, in contrast to its concerns in 1965, that the doors to West Germany were wide open since, due to the shortage of nurses, all applications were accepted. It argued that the claim of serving development aid was false, in particular since the examinations were not recognised. And it demanded a bilateral agreement between India and West Germany to restrict this form of immigration. Two years later, in 1975, the Consulate General again voiced similar concerns in a similarly derogatory way, but with a different signature.⁶⁶

⁶⁰ Abschrift, vertraulich, 65 (handwritten), AEK Gen. III 20.38, Ordner 54 aus Zug. 554. Cf. Großmann 2024, 3.3.6.

⁶¹ Generalkonsulat Bundesrepublik Deutschland Madras to Auswärtiges Amt, Einreise von jungen Inderinnen aus Kerala in die Bundesrepublik Deutschland, 16.03.1965, PA AA B85 REF 505/V6/699.

⁶² Generalkonsulat Bundesrepublik Deutschland Madras to Auswärtiges Amt, Einreise von jungen Inderinnen aus Kerala in die Bundesrepublik Deutschland, 16.03.1965, PA AA B85 REF 505/V6/699. Translated with the help of deepl.com.

⁶³ Jos. Alb. Otto/Harry Haas, Indische Mädchen in deutschen Ordensgenossenschaften, Sonderdruck: Priester und Mission 1 (1965), ADCV 380.40 (540) Fasz. 01. Pater Chakkalakal (Footnote 13), for example reacts to the article. See also Großmann 2024, p. 113.

⁶⁴ Katholischer Akademischer Ausländer-Dienst to Auswärtiges Amt, 29.07.1965, PA AA B85 REF 505/V6/699.

⁶⁵ Generalkonsulat der Bundesrepublik Deutschland Madras to Auswärtiges Amt, Familiennachzug außereuropäischen weiblichen Krankenpflegepersonals, 13.06.1973, PA AA B85 REF 513/1262.

⁶⁶ Deutsches Generalkonsulat Madras to Auswärtiges Amt, Aufenthaltserlaubnis in Form von Sichtvermerken an indische Krankenschwestern und Angehörige, 25.03.1975, PA AA B85 REF 513/1262.

Following the letter of 1973, the Federal Foreign Office pursued the request for a bilateral agreement.⁶⁷ From the manner of the correspondence between the ministries, one can see that the sociopolitical atmosphere had changed and the critical voices were gaining in importance. The Federal Ministry of the Interior argued that the training capacities in West Germany were restricted and that there was a need to examine whether the recruitment of trainee nurses from India should be stopped.⁶⁸ In the working group discussion, the representative of the Ministry of the Interior objected to such a bilateral agreement, since Indians would not have much inclination to return to India.⁶⁹ The working group then decided that, since the numbers of Indian applicants were small, no bilateral agreement would be sought.

The absence of a bilateral agreement became relevant later.⁷⁰ In 1975, the working group discussed more restrictive policies for the recruitment of non-European nurses.⁷¹ Although the Ministry of Health still identified a considerable shortage of nurses, all the representatives agreed that recruitment should be restricted. It was argued that exceptions should only be made for the countries with which bilateral agreements had been signed (South Korea and the Philippines). The Ministry of Labour wanted to restrict the recruitment to specific fields of nursing (e.g. psychiatric nursing). The Ministry for Economic Affairs argued that recruitment should be restricted because of rising unemployment. The decisions of the working group were later communicated to the relevant state authorities in order to inform their decisions.⁷²

The arguments in favour of more restrictive policies were not coherent. While the Consulate General and the Ministry of the Interior had feared attracting too many Indian migrants in 1973, the working group had abstained from a bilateral agreement because the numbers were small. Rising unemployment rates in West Germany were used as an argument even though there was still a shortage of nursing staff, and exceptions were made in order to counter this. Therefore, there does not seem to have been an economic or demographic necessity to become more restrictive. There is also no reference to development aid to legitimise this change of policy. It seems rather that the general sociopolitical atmosphere had changed so much that a restrictive policy became the legitimate response and these counter-voices were listened to.

6 TERMINATING RESIDENCE PERMITS

The retired government official quoted above criticised the immigration authorities for giving the nurses the feeling that they were facing bureaucratic arbitrariness without recourse to justice and were being humiliated in the process.⁷³ Caritas officials complained about this repeatedly in letters – and also in interviews with me.

⁶⁷ Auswärtiges Amt to Bundesministerium des Innern, Bundesministerium für Arbeit und Sozialordnung, Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit, Bundesministerium für Jugend, Familie und Gesundheit, Familienzug von außereuropäischen weiblichen Krankenpflegepersonal, 22.06.1973, PA AA B85 REF 513/1262.

⁶⁸ Der Bundesminister des Innern to Bundesminister für Arbeit und Sozialordnung, Einreise von außereuropäischen weiblichen Krankenpflegepersonal, 11.07.1973, PA AA B85 REF 513/1262.

⁶⁹ Arbeitskreis ausländische Arbeitnehmer (BMA), 06.09.1973, PA AA B85 REF 513/1262.

⁷⁰ Der Bundesminister für Arbeit und Sozialordnung to Deutsche Krankenhausgesellschaft, Beschäftigung außereuropäischen Krankenpflegepersonals, 14.08.1975, PA AA B85 REF 513/1262.

⁷¹ Der Bundesminister für Arbeit und Sozialordnung, Ergebnisprotokoll über die Sitzung des Arbeitskreises für Fragen der Beschäftigung ausländischer Arbeitnehmer im Bundesministerium für Arbeit und Sozialordnung am 9. Juli 1975, 30.07.1975, LAV NRW NW 760 Nr. 105.

⁷² Der Innenminister des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen to Regierungspräsidenten Arnsberg, Detmold, Düsseldorf, Köln, Münster and Ausländerbehörden, Ausländerrecht, 13.10.1975, LAV NRW NW 760 Nr. 180.

⁷³ Ltd. Ministerialrat a.D. to Innenminister des Landes NW, Ausländerrechtliche Behandlung indischer Krankenschwestern und -schülerinnen, 21.09.1974, LAV NRW NW 760 Nr. 180.

In December 1976, this threat became existential in Karlsruhe. The immigration authority informed a nurse that his residence permit was being extended for the last time and that he should prepare to leave the country.⁷⁴ The nurse had been employed by the hospital since November 1973 and had been on a permanent work contract since April 1975. While the immigration authority argued that unemployed Germans were available, his boss stated that it would not be possible to replace him with a similarly qualified nurse and that the functioning of the department would be hampered if he left.⁷⁵

This nurse was not the only one who was faced with the threat of deportation. It seems that in Baden-Württemberg and Bavaria many more received such notices. This led to a whole range of reactions. The appeal by the German Caritas Association of the Archdiocese of Freiburg quoted at the beginning of this article and the accompanying memorandum by nurses was one.⁷⁶ Other nurses made similar complaints with the help of their local Caritas Associations.⁷⁷ In Karlsruhe, the German wife of a North Indian migrant started a petition and sent this to the German Caritas Association⁷⁸ and many state authorities and politicians⁷⁹. In her letter to Caritas she compared the threat to terminate residence with the colonial practices of exploiting labour. Meanwhile, the director of Caritas Cologne travelled to India and informed the Indian Ministry of Health of the developments.⁸⁰ As a consequence, the Indian Ministry of External Affairs expressed its concern to the German Embassy.⁸¹ All this caused much media coverage.⁸²

The issue of recognition of the German examination became urgent. The Mayor of Karlsruhe requested that the local employment agency strive to obtain this recognition, since this was a matter of care and fairness towards the women.⁸³ The Caritas director, Koenen, was also still pursuing it, but to no avail. The Indian Embassy informed him:

The Indian Nursing Council Act does not provide for universal recognition of foreign qualifications by the Indian Nursing Council. Till a provision of that type is made, we will have to continue the present arrangement of recognising the qualifications of individual institutions.⁸⁴

This letter later found its way into the archive of the German Federal Foreign Office, but I cannot find a further reference to this legal argument. Rather, there are traces of parallel activities happening. Already at the beginning of the year, the German Embassy had suggested taking up negotiations with the relevant government authorities in India.⁸⁵ The head of the Western Europe department of India's Ministry of Foreign Affairs had said he would instruct the Indian Embassy accordingly.⁸⁶ Two months

⁷⁴ Stadt Karlsruhe, Polizeibehörde, Ausländerabteilung to Nurse, Aufenthaltserlaubnis für die Bundesrepublik Deutschland, 13.12.1976, PA AA B85 REF 513/1262.

⁷⁵ Oberarzt der Klinik für HNO-Krankheiten und plastische Gesichtschirurgie, Bescheinigung, 18.01.1977, PA AA B85 REF 513/1262.

⁷⁶ Caritasverband für die Erzdiözese Freiburg e.V. to Frau Minister Annemarie Griesinger, Ministerium für Arbeit, Gesundheit und Sozialordnung Baden-Württemberg, 04.02.1977, PA AA B85-REF 513/1262.

⁷⁷ Goel 2019, 2025.

⁷⁸ Desai to Deutscher Caritasverband e.V., Nichtverlängerung der Arbeits- und Aufenthaltsgenehmigungen für indisches Pflegepersonal, 10.02.1977, PA AA B85 REF 513/1262.

⁷⁹ For example: Rita Desai to Bundesaußenminister, Bitschrift, 17.02.1977, PA AA B85 REF 513/1262.

⁸⁰ Botschaft der Bundesrepublik Deutschland New Delhi to Auswärtiges Amt, Indische Krankenschwestern in der Bundesrepublik, 08.02.1977, PA AA B85 REF 513/1262.

⁸¹ Botschaft der Bundesrepublik Deutschland New Delhi to Auswärtiges Amt, Indische Krankenschwestern in der Bundesrepublik, 08.02.1977, PA AA B85 REF 513/1262.

⁸² For example: Meine Welt (1977).

⁸³ Stadt Karlsruhe to Oberverwaltungsdirektor Städt. Krankenanstalten, Beschäftigung von indischen Krankenschwestern bei den städtischen Krankenanstalten, 14.03.1977, SAK, Abt. 1/Klinikum, Nr. 217.

⁸⁴ Embassy of India Bonn to Koenen, 03.03.1977, PA AA B85 REF 513/1262.

⁸⁵ Botschaft der Bundesrepublik Deutschland to Auswärtiges Amt, Indische Krankenschwestern in der Bundesrepublik, 19.01.1977, PA AA B85 REF 513/1262.

⁸⁶ Botschaft der Bundesrepublik Deutschland New Delhi to Auswärtiges Amt, Indische Krankenschwestern in der Bundesrepublik, 08.02.1977, PA AA B85 REF 513/1262.

later, however, the embassy had still not received an instruction, but had scheduled a meeting with the nurses.⁸⁷ A month later, the German Embassy spoke again with the Indian Nursing Council, but still did not achieve universal recognition.⁸⁸ Another month later, the Federal Foreign Office informed the Federal Ministry for Labour that the Indian Embassy had not been instructed, for understandable reasons, and that this would not happen in future.⁸⁹ However, it remains unclear what these reasons were. Was it the state of emergency in India,⁹⁰ which had just ended after two years? Was it a lack of interest on the part of the Indian government in the nurses' recruitment? If the latter, was that understandable? In any case, the non-recognition of the German examinations had been known about since recruitment started. The German state authorities had proceeded with it regardless, as the nursing staff was needed. The German Caritas Association of the Archdiocese of Freiburg stressed this fact in its appeal for a humane treatment of the nurses.⁹¹

Meanwhile, Indian nurses seem to have left West Germany in large numbers. The German Caritas Association estimated that between 1976 and 1978, 1,500 of 4,000 Indian nurses had left, most of them from Bavaria and Baden-Württemberg (about 1,000).⁹² Because of negative press coverage in Kerala,⁹³ the Federal Foreign Office also made investigations:

It is true that there have been cases in both Bavaria and Baden-Württemberg in which a work permit could not be issued, despite more than 5 years of uninterrupted lawful work residence in the Federal Republic, because the legal residence requirements for the issue of the work permit were not met due to non-renewal of the residence permit.

In Baden-Württemberg, non-European nurses [...] who entered the country between 1967 and 1971 were informed by the responsible immigration authorities that they could not expect their residence permits to be extended again after the expiry of the last residence permits issued in that year.⁹⁴

§ 19 of the Employment Promotion Act (Arbeitsförderungsgesetz) was the basis on which the extensions of the residence and work permits were refused in 1976/77. It stipulated that if there were German workers who could take the positions, the foreign workers could not have their permits extended. The Federal Minister of Labour, however, argued that this would not apply if the foreign worker had worked five years without a break in West Germany.⁹⁵ It was for this reason that the working group had been hesitant in 1969 to extend the stay of the non-European nurses beyond this time limit.⁹⁶ In 1977, however, the immigration authorities in Baden-Württemberg and Bavaria violated this right by not issuing residence permits. This made it impossible for the employment agencies to issue work permits,

⁸⁷ Auswärtiges Amt to Botschaft Neu-Delhi, Indische Krankenschwestern im Bundesgebiet, 06.04.1977, PA AA B85 REF 513/1262.

⁸⁸ Botschaft der Bundesrepublik Deutschland to Auswärtiges Amt, Indische Krankenschwestern in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, 25.05.1977, PA AA B85 REF 513/1262.

⁸⁹ Auswärtiges Amt to Bundesministerium für Arbeit und Sozialordnung, Beschäftigung indischen Krankenpflegepersonals in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, 14.06.1977, PA AA B85 REF 513/1262.

⁹⁰ Jaffrelot/Anil 2021.

⁹¹ Caritasverband für die Erzdiözese Freiburg e.V. to Frau Minister Annemarie Griesinger, Ministerium für Arbeit, Gesundheit und Sozialordnung Baden-Württemberg, 04.02.1977, PA AA B85-REF 513/1262.

⁹² Mitbürgerinnen auf Abruf. Die Situation der asiatischen Krankenschwestern. In: Informationen des Deutschen Caritasverbandes 3 (1978), 19, p. 2, PA AA REF 513/1464.

⁹³ Generalkonsulat der Bundesrepublik Deutschland Madras to Auswärtiges Amt, Indische Krankenschwester in der BRD, 14.10.1977, PA AA B85 REF 513/1262.

⁹⁴ Auswärtiges Amt to Generalkonsulat Madras, Indische Krankenschwestern in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, 08.11.1977, PA AA B85 REF 513/1262. Translated with the help of deepl.com.

⁹⁵ Der Bundesminister für Arbeit und Sozialordnung to Vizepräsidenten des Deutschen Bundestages, Beschäftigung koreanischen Krankenpflegepersonals in deutschen Krankenhäusern, 27.05.1977, PA AA B37-ZA/107632.

⁹⁶ Arbeitskreis für ausländische Beschäftigte, 29.01.1969 (handwritten), LAV NRW NW 760 Nr. 180 (according to notes made by Daniel Schumacher).

since these required residence permits. The Federal Foreign Office justified this breach of the law by arguing that the nurses had known that they would only stay in West Germany for a limited time.⁹⁷

In the archive of the Federal Foreign Office there is a document with no author or addressee that contains a recommendation about how to talk about what was happening in 1977:⁹⁸

The Indian nursing staff [...], who came to Germany mainly in the years 1964–1970 for the purpose of training and development aid, are very popular with patients and German colleagues. For this reason, the measures envisaged in some cases due to the labour market situation and the legal provisions on the regulation of the labour market, such as the non-renewal of work permits and residence permits, have met with a strong response from the German public. We are particularly grateful for the remarkable contributions that Indians have made to the development and expansion of the German health and hospital system in difficult times. We believe that they can also use the knowledge they have acquired in Germany for the benefit of their own country.⁹⁹

This recommendation clearly aims to pacify negative reactions to the forced return of the nurses by speaking warmly of them. However, it contains several misrepresentations in claiming that the return was a legal necessity, that the nurses had been recruited in the context of development aid and that the returnees would be able to use their acquired skills in India. The immigration authorities' breach of the law was thus not only legitimised, but also disguised, by a verbal (but not material) recognition of what the nurses had contributed to Germany's health sector, and the pretence that they would also contribute to India's.

7 "IN THE GERMAN INTEREST"

Behind these attempts at legitimising what was happening, the state authorities were anything but united in how they assessed the forced return of foreign nurses. Early in 1977, the German Embassy was already asking questions:

At the same time, the embassy is raising concerns as to whether it is really in Germany's interest to send back the Indian nurses, who have performed a difficult task with recognised commitment and success over the past few years.¹⁰⁰

The Ministry of Labour shared the concern of the German Embassy about the immediate return, and suggested that alternative employment should be found for the nurses in West Germany.¹⁰¹ The Federal Foreign Office shared this concern for political reasons.¹⁰² It and the embassy had to deal with the negative image of West Germany that had developed in India as a result of the forced returns. As a consequence of this, the Federal Foreign Office pursued recognition of the examinations and tried to

⁹⁷ Auswärtiges Amt to Generalkonsulat Madras, Indische Krankenschwestern in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, 08.11.1977, PA AA B85 REF 513/1262.

⁹⁸ Betr.: Arbeitserlaubnisse für indische Krankenschwestern. Gesprächsführungs vorschlag, 31.8. (handwritten), PA AA B85 REF 513/1262.

⁹⁹ Betr.: Arbeitserlaubnisse für indische Krankenschwestern. Gesprächsführungs vorschlag, 31.8. (handwritten), PA AA B85 REF 513/1262. Translated with the help of deepl.com.

¹⁰⁰ Botschaft der Bundesrepublik Deutschland to Auswärtiges Amt, Indische Krankenschwestern in der Bundesrepublik, 19.01.1977, PA AA B85 REF 513/1262. Translated with the help of deepl.com.

¹⁰¹ Der Bundesminister für Arbeit und Sozialordnung to Auswärtiges Amt, Beschäftigung indischen Krankenpflegepersonals in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, 04.02.1977, PA AA B85 REF 513/1262.

¹⁰² Auswärtiges Amt 302.516-INI to Referat 513, Indische Krankenschwestern in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, 17.02.1977, PA AA B85 REF 513/1262.

assess the extent to which Indian nurses were finding employment in other regions.¹⁰³ The Ministry of Labour claimed that by July 1977 there had been no termination of work permits.¹⁰⁴

Although it was the immigration authorities that were mainly responsible for the threat of return, the Ministry of the Interior also became critical of what had happened:¹⁰⁵

However, I do not consider such a regulation [the non-extension of the work and residence permits, UG] to be justifiable, for the following reasons:

Due to the shortage of nursing staff that prevailed here until some time ago, which could not be remedied even by recruiting in European countries, the Federal Republic of Germany was dependent on turning to non-European countries, in particular India, South Korea and the Philippines, to meet its labour needs in this area. [...]

[...] We are particularly indebted to this group of people, whom we brought in to care for our sick in an emergency situation. [...] I believe, however, that the state's duty of care towards foreign workers, which is particularly pronounced in the case of these nurses, does not allow these people to be sent home now. In my opinion, therefore, non-European nurses should be granted a residence permit beyond the period mentioned above.¹⁰⁶

The Ministry of the Interior seems to have responded to the ethical appeal made earlier in the year by the Caritas Association. Rather than arguing in the interest of West Germany, it stressed the state's responsibility to care for the nurses. It recognised the essential work they had done, admitted that they were recruited because of a shortage of staff and argued that the residence permits should be extended. The Ministry of Labour supported this, since it was the non-extension by the immigration authorities in particular which had prevented an extension of the work permits.¹⁰⁷ In North Rhine-Westphalia an official of the state's ministry of the interior captured this moral obligation in its instructions: "Apparently, this is intended to honour the work done by non-European nurses in times of a shortage of German staff."¹⁰⁸

However, not all state interior ministries were willing to follow this line. Berlin's Senator for the Interior did not consider it justifiable to privilege non-European nursing staff over other foreign employees.¹⁰⁹ The Ministry of the Interior of Schleswig-Holstein agreed with this view.¹¹⁰ Consequently, the Ministry of the Interior of Baden-Württemberg, which had initiated a survey on the question among the state interior ministries, requested that the Federal Ministry of the Interior put the topic on the agenda.¹¹¹ There was obviously a political struggle about whose interests should be looked after.¹¹²

¹⁰³ Auswärtiges Amt to Bundesministerium für Arbeit und Sozialordnung, Beschäftigung indischen Krankenpflegepersonals in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, 14.06.1977, PA AA B85 REF 513/1262.

¹⁰⁴ Der Bundesminister für Arbeit und Sozialordnung to Auswärtiges Amt, Beschäftigung indischen Krankenpflegepersonals in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, 04.07.1977, PA AA B85 REF 513/1262.

¹⁰⁵ It would be interesting to do more research into how this difference between the Federal Ministry of the Interior and its (through the intermediary state ministries of the interior) subordinated immigration authorities. It is likely that differing political majorities played an important role in it. However, organisational differences in the state authorities and differences in the way topics such as the recruitment of nurses manifested themselves at municipal, state and national level, should also be taken into account.

¹⁰⁶ Der Bundesminister des Innern to Innenminister (Senatoren für Inneres) der Länder, Ausländerrecht: Beschäftigung von Krankenpflegepersonal aus außereuropäischen Staaten in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, 15.11.1977, PA AA B37-ZA/107632. Translated with the help of deepl.com.

¹⁰⁷ Bundesministerium für Arbeit und Sozialordnung to Staatssekretär im Bundesministerium des Innern, Beschäftigung außereuropäischen Krankenpflegepersonals in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, 06.12.1977, PA AA B85 REF 513/1286.

¹⁰⁸ Handwritten note attached to: Der Bundesminister des Innern to Innenminister (Senatoren für Inneres) der Länder, Ausländerrecht, 07.02.1978, LAV NRW NW 760 Nr. 180. Translated with the help of deepl.com.

¹⁰⁹ Der Senator für Inneres Berlin to Innenministerium des Landes Baden-Württemberg, Ausländerrecht, 14.03.1978, LAV NRW NW 760 Nr. 180.

¹¹⁰ im kiel to alle im, Ausländerrecht, 07.04., LAV NRW NW 760 Nr. 180.

¹¹¹ Innenministerium Baden-Württemberg to Bundesminister des Innern, Ausländerrecht, 25.04.1978, LAV NRW NW 760 Nr. 180.

¹¹² Baden-Württemberg, for example, was ruled by a very conservative government, which may account for its restrictive policies. Reference to the ruling political parties alone, however, does not explain the difference in the way the states reacted. Further research is needed to analyse this.

The archival sources suggest that the debate about the Indian nurses almost ceased after this. Baden-Württemberg and Bavaria had reduced their numbers drastically. North Rhine-Westphalia, which was the other state with a sizeable number of Indian nurses, had refrained from doing this. The German Hospital Federation established that there was still a shortage of nursing staff in some places.¹¹³ Because this was the case in North Rhine-Westphalia too, the immigration authorities were instructed to extend the residence permits.¹¹⁴ The instructions ended with praise of the achievements of the non-European nurses and a claim that the state government's policies concerning the employment of foreigners reflected this.¹¹⁵ Caritas Cologne, however, complained that it was still difficult to obtain extensions to permits of residence and that some immigration authorities in particular pressured the nurses to sign a statement accepting a termination in a year's time.¹¹⁶ This statement included the following:

My training took place within the framework of development aid, and I am aware that I normally have to leave the Federal Republic after my training. [...] I was told today that I must return to my home country at the expiration of this year, on 23 April 1979.¹¹⁷

It can be seen then that even though several ministries at federal and state level expressed their gratitude and obligation to the nurses from India, immigration authorities continued to threaten them and also continued to make the false claim concerning development aid. The practice of forcing migrants to sign statements like this one when they applied for an extension of their residence permit had been in existence for some time.¹¹⁸ The immigration authorities seem to have considered the departure of migrants to be in the interest of West Germany.¹¹⁹

8 ON REPEAT

Despite these developments, many Indian nurses stayed in West Germany, in particular in North Rhine-Westphalia. They were also joined by new nurses from India, even though it was not easy to organise the necessary documents, at least as long as the staff shortages in the hospitals were not significant. Once the shortages increased again, the voices demanding transnational nurse recruitment became louder.¹²⁰ In 1989, the Ministry of Education of North Rhine-Westphalia joined these voices, because the nursing school of the university hospital in Bonn was no longer receiving enough applications.¹²¹ In my field research I discovered that in the early 1990s some of the nurses who had been forcibly returned in the 1970s were re-recruited.¹²²

¹¹³ To Präsidenten des Landtags Nordrhein-Westfalen, Verlängerung der Arbeitsverträge von koreanischen Krankenpflegekräften, Juni 1978, LAV NRW NW 760 Nr. 180.

¹¹⁴ To Präsidenten des Landtags Nordrhein-Westfalen, Verlängerung der Arbeitsverträge von koreanischen Krankenpflegekräften, Juni 1978, LAV NRW NW 760 Nr. 180.

¹¹⁵ To Präsidenten des Landtags Nordrhein-Westfalen, Verlängerung der Arbeitsverträge von koreanischen Krankenpflegekräften, Juni 1978, LAV NRW NW 760 Nr. 180.

¹¹⁶ Caritasverband für die Stadt Köln e.V. to Innenminister des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen, Erteilung der Aufenthaltserlaubnis für indische Pflegekräfte, 27.09.1978, LAV NRW NW 760 Nr. 180.

¹¹⁷ Verhandlungsniederschrift, 06.02.1978, LAV NRW NW 760 Nr. 180. Translated with the help of deepl.com.

¹¹⁸ Goel 2006, p. 129.

¹¹⁹ Further research into the functioning of the immigration authorities could make their actions more understandable.

¹²⁰ For example: Heinz Schemken, MdB to Innenminister des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen, Runderlaß des Innenministers vom 16.04.1984, 16.08.1988, LAV NRW NW 760 Nr. 180.

¹²¹ Der Minister für Wissenschaft und Forschung des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen to Innenminister des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen, Ausbildungsplätze in der Kranken- und Altenpflege, 19.10.1989, LAV NRW NW 760 Nr. 180.

¹²² Goel 2023, p. 261.

Ever since the 1960s, Indians have been coming to Germany to work as nurses.¹²³ The recruiters were primarily former migrants from Kerala. For some time, official recruitment was prohibited by the rules of the World Health Organisation (WHO) in an attempt to prevent brain drain. At some point, however, India was taken off the WHO list. Faced with a new care crisis,¹²⁴ Germany signed an agreement with the federal state of Kerala to recruit nurses in 2021. Nurses are recruited through its Triple Win programme,¹²⁵ which promises benefits for the German employers, the nurses and the countries of origin. Interestingly, Germany itself is not mentioned as a beneficiary. It seems to be acting altruistically. Following this, a large number of recruitment agencies have been established. Most have little knowledge of the former recruitment processes, but former migrant nurses or their children are involved in some of the agencies.¹²⁶

This recruitment programme is likely to continue in the future. The recruitment of skilled labour is a much-debated topic at the moment and one in which many actors have an economic interest, so the German Embassy will be occupied with organising it over the coming years.¹²⁷ Fair recruitment is in demand. Certification processes that are intended to guarantee ethical procedures are being implemented. Given the huge shortage of nursing staff, however, recruitment is not restricted to certified agencies. Moreover, my explorative field research about the current recruitment processes raises doubts about the extent to which certification can guarantee a recruitment process that caters to the interests of the recruited nurses.¹²⁸ Furthermore, in view of the earlier recruitment situation in the 1960s, the question arises as to what will happen once the labour market situation deteriorates or the general political atmosphere in Germany becomes much more restrictive again. Will the current recruitment drive once again be followed by a termination of residence permits on false claims? How sure can the recruited nurses be that they will be treated fairly in the future?

While many state authorities, politicians and representatives from the economy currently consider the recruitment of skilled workers, including nurses, to be in the interests of Germany, other political actors claim that Germany's interest lies in the remigration of all those who cannot claim German heritage. In this way, we are once again experiencing a struggle about what is in the interests of Germany, and this is, among other aspects, an ethical question. The historical perspective raises doubts about whether in this struggle the interests of the recruited nurses – or those of the hospitals – will be the decisive factor.

¹²³ Goel 2023, pp. 261–263.

¹²⁴ Dowling 2021.

¹²⁵ <https://www.arbeitsagentur.de/vor-ort/zav/projects-programs/health-and-care/triple-win/india> (13.01.2025)

¹²⁶ I have recently started a research project on current recruitment of skilled labour from India and am conducting field research, in which I have interviewed agencies.

¹²⁷ Personal communication from the Ambassador in March 2023.

¹²⁸ In 2024 I started researching current recruitment of butcher apprentices from India to work in Germany. In the margins of this research I am also in contact with agencies recruiting nurses, have done field research in preparatory German classes in India and have talked to various German state authorities involved in the recruitment processes.

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ADCV	Archiv des Deutschen Caritasverbandes (Archive of the German Caritas Association)
AEK	Archiv des Erzbistums Köln (Archive of the Archdiocese of Cologne)
LAV NRW	Landesarchiv Nordrhein-Westfalen (State Archive of North Rhine-Westphalia)
PA AA	Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes (Political Archive of the Federal Foreign Office)
SAK	Stadtarchiv Karlsruhe (City Archive of Karlsruhe)
UAT	Universitätsarchiv Tübingen (Tübingen University Archive)

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