



CONCEPT NOTE

SECTORAL SESSION ON CONNECTIVITY & PEOPLE

1. Background & Context

India and New Zealand share a longstanding relationship rooted in shared democratic values, strong people-to-people ties, and growing economic engagement. As both countries advance discussions on a comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (FTA), there is increasing recognition that **connectivity and human linkages** will play a pivotal role in unlocking the full potential of the partnership.

The conclusion of the India–New Zealand Free Trade Agreement on 22 December 2025 represents one of India's fastest-concluded FTAs — negotiated in just nine months across five formal rounds. The formal signing, set for 27 April 2026 at Bharat Mandapam in New Delhi, is a defining milestone in bilateral relations and in India's broader strategy of integrating with the Indo-Pacific and Oceanian economic order.

India–New Zealand bilateral trade stood at approximately USD 1.3 billion in goods in 2024–25 — a 49% increase from the previous year. Services trade adds a further USD 634 million (India's services exports to New Zealand grew 13% in 2024). The two governments have committed to doubling total bilateral trade to USD 5 billion within five years. New Zealand has also committed to facilitating USD 20 billion in private-sector investment into India over 15 years, backed by a dedicated New Zealand Investment Desk in India.

A critical driver of this ambition lies in the people-to-people and connectivity dimensions of the FTA — direct flights, mobility pathways, educational linkages, digital connectivity, and diaspora networks — which form the focus of this roundtable session.

The 300,000-Strong Living Bridge

Approximately 300,000 persons of Indian origin and NRIs reside in New Zealand, constituting nearly 5% of its total population. This diaspora is the most powerful pre-existing connector between the two economies. The FTA formally builds on this foundation, embedding it into a structured framework of student mobility, skilled worker pathways, cultural recognition, and investment facilitation.

2. Objective of the Session

- To explore opportunities for enhancing **connectivity across transport, digital, and logistics domains**
- To facilitate **greater mobility of students, professionals, and skilled workforce**
- To identify key **policy enablers and institutional frameworks** under the FTA
- To recommend **collaborative initiatives** that strengthen long-term bilateral engagement

3. Key Discussion Areas

A. Physical Connectivity

- Enhancing **air connectivity** (direct routes, cargo connectivity)
- Improving **logistics and supply chain linkages** for efficient trade flows
- Port connectivity and multimodal transport solutions

B. Digital Connectivity

- Cross-border digital trade frameworks
- Collaboration in **fintech, startups, and emerging technologies**
- Data flows, cybersecurity, and digital standards alignment

C. Education & Skill Mobility

- Facilitating **student mobility and academic partnerships**
- Mutual recognition of qualifications and skill certifications
- Joint research, innovation, and vocational training programs

D. Migration & Professional Mobility

- Streamlining visa processes for **skilled professionals and business travelers**
- Frameworks for temporary movement of natural persons under FTA
- Mobility partnerships in priority sectors

E. Tourism & Cultural Linkages

- Promoting two-way tourism flows
- Collaboration in **film, media, and creative industries**
- Strengthening diaspora engagement and cultural exchanges

4. Key Initiatives for Consideration

- Structured framework for movement of students, professionals, and skilled workers
- Exploring viability of **direct passenger and cargo routes**
- Strengthening cold chain and agri-logistics
- Fast-tracking recognition of **educational qualifications and professional certifications**
- Establishing a bilateral platform for **startups, fintech collaboration, and digital trade facilitation**
- Sector-specific skill partnerships (agriculture, healthcare, IT, education)
- Joint campaigns, film co-production agreements, and cultural festivals

5. Expected Outcomes

- Identification of **priority areas for inclusion under the FTA framework** on connectivity and mobility
- Recommendations for **policy reforms and institutional mechanisms** to ease movement of people and services
- Roadmap for **enhancing direct connectivity and reducing logistical barriers**
- Strengthened collaboration in **education, skills, and innovation ecosystems**
- Enhanced industry participation through **structured engagement platforms**

6. Way Forward

- Facilitate **regular stakeholder consultations** with industry and academia
- Pilot **early harvest initiatives** (e.g., student mobility, digital trade cooperation)
- Strengthening connectivity and people-to-people linkages will be central to building a **future-ready, resilient, and inclusive India–New Zealand partnership**.
- As both countries navigate evolving global trade dynamics, this sectoral session will provide a critical platform to translate intent into action, ensuring that the FTA delivers tangible and sustainable outcomes for businesses and citizens alike.

6. Way Forward

- ASSOCHAM and INZBC to develop a **time-bound action plan** for implementation of agreed initiatives.
- **Launch pilot initiatives** in key areas such as:
 - **student and faculty exchange programmes** between leading institutions and India and New Zealand.
 - **Webinars on B2B digital collaboration platforms** engaging the startups and SMEs of both the countries
 - **Identify Joint skill development programmes** in sectors such as agriculture, food processing, and manufacturing technology, amongst others.
- **Constitute a working group to facilitate direct engagement between logistics, aviation, and trade facilitation stakeholders from India and New Zealand** to identify practical solutions for improving cargo movement and reducing transaction costs both the sides.
- **Prepare a joint industry recommendation paper** from the session outcomes for submission to the respective trade negotiators, ensuring that industry priorities on connectivity and mobility are reflected in the India–New Zealand FTA negotiations.
