


Education abroad: Portugal, a gateway to Europe for international students

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Gen Z, the cohort born in the 1990s, has been found to be more concerned with academic performances and employment prospects as compared to previous generations. Not only have Gross Enrollment Ratios (GERs) improved across the world, the student community is increasingly pursuing higher education outside of their home country. The number of internationally mobile students has more than tripled in the 21st century, with more than 6 million such students across the world (as per 2019 figures). In reply to an unstarred question in the Rajya Sabha, Shri V. Muraleedharan (MoS, Ministry of External Affairs) stated that in the first quarter of 2022 itself, more than 0.133 million students had left from India for educational purposes. With the impact of COVID-19 starting to recede, the previous year had in fact witnessed a mammoth 41% increase in the number of Indian students moving abroad for higher education.

India continues to be one of the top countries in terms of students abroad, second only to China. An interesting aspect of this global migration, however, is that more than half of these students opt for higher education in countries situated in the North American and West European regions. Surprisingly, according to a white paper by Western Union titled, "Education Overseas, an Evolving Journey", even and above materialistic goals, Gen-Z students prefer to make their higher education choices based on opportunities for self-dependency and personal development, as well as for travel and cultural exploration.

It is then no surprise that Indian students are increasingly flocking to countries like Portugal in Western Europe. Known for its perfect climate, beautiful beaches, rich history and culture (not to mention the Primeira Liga), and high quality of student life (the country was ranked 2nd in Latin Europe according to the 2021 Global Student Satisfaction Awards); Portugal offers thousands of courses through its 50 universities and 84 polytechnics, both public and private. These include some of the best ones in Europe such as the University of Porto, University of Lisbon, and the University of Coimbra, the oldest in the country. Portugal also has international partnership agreements in education, especially with universities in the USA, such as the Programa MIT-Portugal, The Lisbon MBA, and Harvard Medical School-Portugal.

Voted the 4th best place for expats in 2022 by InterNations, Portugal is known as much for its warm and friendly populace as it is for its welcoming weather. In terms of safety and security as well, it has one of the lowest crime rates and was voted the 6th most peaceful country in the world, according to IEP's 2022 Global Peace Index.

A report by RedSeer stated that about a third of student expenditure abroad comes from visa, insurance, food and housing expenses, making these important considerations for the international student community, especially those looking for a secure future and returns on their investment. In order to enjoy the experience better and increase opportunities in the new country, many international students have been considering pursuing a permanent residence program, instead of having just a student visa. Such residency and citizenship schemes of permanent residency through investment – in case of Portugal, the Golden Visa, provide an array of benefits (freedom to work and travel across the EU) as well as an opportunity for citizenship (the quickest in Europe), not only for the investor but for their spouse and dependents as well. Those who acquire citizenship may access the special university admission regimen, avail lower tuition rates, and even free tuition in some of the public universities in Portugal.

As international students explore newer avenues and destinations for higher education and employment, these programs are turning into an increasingly attractive option.

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