


India–EU FTA to boost student, skilled worker mobility as US tightens visas

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The free trade agreement inked between India and European Union (EU) is estimated to aid employment and mobility for skilled and seasonal workers from India to the 27 EU countries. Further, students heading to the EU for higher studies may now find fewer restrictions.

Recruitment and education consultants and immigration lawyers note that this comes at a time when heading to the US for both work and higher studies has become difficult under the [Donald Trump](#)-led US Government.

"We will facilitate the movement of students, researchers, seasonal and highly skilled workers," Ursula von der Leyen, president of the European Commission, said on Tuesday. "And this is also why we are launching the first EU legal gateway office in India. It will be a one-stop hub to support Indian talent, moving to Europe, in full alignment with EU member states' needs and policies."

Minister of commerce and industry [Piyush Goyal](#) stressed that there is no cap on the number of student enrollment to EU countries. "We would like to welcome European universities to come and set up campuses in India. And I would love to see in the future, as we have discussed, joint degrees..." Goyal said during a media briefing, adding that there are about 121,000 students from India in the EU.

There has been a surge of foreign universities after the [National Education Policy \(NEP\)](#) of 2020 greenlit their entry. Last April, the government informed the Rajya Sabha that the University Grants Commission (UGC) is likely to

approve 50 more foreign varsities.

Foreign secretary Vikram Misri said during the briefing that the MoU (memorandum of understanding) will facilitate and streamline, safe, regular migration, support skill development, and ease the movement of highly skilled workers, students, researchers, and seasonal workers. "Today, the Indian diaspora in the EU is over a million people," he said.

However, the secretary clarified that the MoU will act as a "guidance", and help in authorization of long-stay visas, and residence permits for Indian nationals for studies that students might want to take for at least one year or less.

"If there are longer frameworks, then of course they go back to individual member state competencies...," Misri said. "So, there are areas where applicable EU member state national laws will apply, and there are areas where this agreement will facilitate shorter term programs."

Expanded options for students

Overseas education consultants chalk out the impact of this agreement for students. "In the short term, it expands access to research programmes and structured mobility routes, making European education more accessible," said Piyush Kumar, regional director for South Asia at IDP Education, a study abroad consulting firm.

"Over the long term, clearer recognition of qualifications and closer alignment between education and skills demand will position Europe as a consistent study and career destination for Indian students," he added.

Namrata Pandey, founder of La Mentora, an organization that helps students gain admission into overseas universities, told *Mint* that over the past one year, about 70% of her students have one of the European countries as a second option in case their US visas do not come through. Studying in the EU is a cheaper option as well.

"The costs of studying in the US and UK can be around ₹60-65 lakh per year including stay, while in European countries, it hovers around ₹35-40 lakh a year for a three-four year program. An engineering and management degree in Germany, Italy, Spain, France and Netherlands are coveted," she added.

In a statement issued by the ministry of commerce & industry, the Indian government said that independent professionals who work with EU clients in areas like IT, R&D and higher education will get more access to work in those countries.

"India and EU have agreed on constructive framework to enable Social Security Agreements in 5 years with all the EU Member States and a continuing conducive framework for entry of India students to study and avail post study work visa," the statement said.

A post-study work visa will be crucial as this is when students start paying off their education loans through this route. Over the past couple of years, even Canada, the UK and Australia have increased their checks for incoming international students. This has pushed many students to defer their plans of studying abroad.

Improved mobility for business workers

The [India-EU pact](#) will ensure temporary entry and stay for professionals, including business visitors, intra-corporate transferees, contractual service suppliers, and independent professionals.

Sectors like textiles, leather, footwear, marine, sports goods, toys, and gems and jewellery gain enhanced competitiveness through tariff elimination, supporting employment generation and EU market integration, the statement said.

The Indian government noted that the FTA framework will also ease movement of employees (and their spouses and dependents) of Indian corporates established in the EU in all services sectors. "For business entities aiming to provide services under a contract to EU clients, India can access 37 sub-sectors including IT, business, and professional services," said the statement.

Immigration experts point out how the new pact will give the option of skilled workers to look beyond the US. "The EU is ostensibly taking a position that's exactly the opposite of the US, which is making it hard for non-US nationals to enter and remain in the US," said Atul Gupta, partner- labour and employment, Trilegal. However, Gupta did point out that details of the EU Legal office and what support it will offer is not known yet.

The government estimates that the FTA will bring in tech mobility. The commerce minister noted that there is high-precision engineering work being done in factories in Europe, for their own use and for the export market. "But there are several markets, including India, where because of the high labour cost, or the non-availability of adequate labour, they are not able to capture markets in many parts of the world like Africa or Latin America, even Asia," Goyal said.

This is where " a joint partnership between Europe and India, to co-produce, co-manufacture, and leverage the technologies of Europe and the skill and talent of India working together as partners, will help European companies scale up...and create a large number of jobs, both in the European Union, and in India".