RELOCATING TO AND LIVING IN GERMANY

INSIGHTS

www.expatrio.com
www.degis.info
Expatrio in partnership with Deutsche Gesellschaft internationaler Studierender (DeGiS) and with academic support from the Institute for Global Entrepreneurship and Innovation (IGEI) conducted a survey in July 2020. There were over 1,200 survey respondents, who are international students from across the globe living in Germany. The participants are Expatrio customers and DeGiS members. Most have gone through the relocation process before the CoVID-19 pandemic hit. The results reveal some insights on the relocation to and life in Germany.
CONTENTS

Key Findings 4

Preparation

Study Destination 5
Visa 6

Life in Germany

Cost of Living 8
Challenges 12
Cities 16
Accommodation 18
Outlook 18
What Can Germany Improve? 19

Summary 20
Suggestions 21
**KEY FINDINGS**

**STUDY DESTINATION**
59% of respondents decided on Germany without considering any other study destinations first. The top deciding factors were tuition-free German universities and their reputation. 13% considered the USA before selecting Germany and 11%, Canada.

**COST OF LIVING**
The average monthly expenses for those living in Munich, Berlin and Cologne are the highest, ranging from €770 to €874. Dresden has the lowest average monthly expense of €627 among the representative cities of this survey.

**CHALLENGES**
36% of respondents considered language barrier in Germany as a major challenge. Finding accommodation and dealing with German bureaucracy are also top challenges.

**CITIES**
75% of respondents gave a satisfaction rating of between 8 and 10 for their city of residence in Germany. The majority of those who gave the highest ratings reside in Hamburg and Dresden.

**OUTLOOK**
Overall, over 60% of the respondents are planning to remain in Germany after graduation.

**VISA**
The survey results show that the biggest challenge during the visa process is the long waiting period for visa appointments and processing times. Almost half of the respondents had to wait between one and nine months to get an appointment.
PREPARATION
Study Destination

This section covers experiences during the preparation phase for relocating to Germany.

Although respondents have considered other countries as study destinations before reaching a final decision, 59% did not have any other country in mind except Germany. 13% considered the USA and 11%, Canada.

Results further show the motivations for selecting Germany. The factor that convinced the respondents the most is the opportunity to study at tuition-free Universities. The other factor that is almost equally as important is the reputation of German universities.

Figure 1
Which factor finally convinced you to go to Germany??

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No tuition fee</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>German university reputation</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment opportunities</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living expenses</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family / friends in Germany</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>German economy</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigration regulation</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2

The top study destinations according to respondents are Germany (59%), USA (13%), and Canada (11%).
89% of respondents applied for the first visa in their home country while the rest had the option of starting the process in Germany. Majority of those who applied for a visa in Germany were from Japan and USA. For those who applied for a visa in their home country, different challenges were experienced.

The biggest challenges during the visa process for the respondents was getting a visa appointment and long waiting times to collect them.

During the visa process, what was the biggest challenge you had to deal with? (Choose as many as you like)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenge</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Getting a visa appointment</td>
<td>38.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long visa processing times</td>
<td>38.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncertain waiting duration</td>
<td>35.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparing required documents</td>
<td>19.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expensive visa fee</td>
<td>9.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analogue processes</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Results show that the duration of the entire visa process varies from country to country, and even in embassies and/or consular offices within the same country. The top five countries within the group with the longest waiting periods are; Malaysia, Egypt, Mexico, India, and Taiwan. This may not be a perfect representation as there is no sufficient respondent numbers for all countries.
How long did you have to wait until your visa appointment?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 - 7 Days</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 - 2 Weeks</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 - 4 Weeks</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 - 2 Months</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 - 3 Months</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Months +</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

_Figure 4_

For the respondents who applied in their home country, 58% of them had to wait for up to one month for a visa appointment after making a booking. 42% had to wait between one and nine months for the appointment.

It also appears that the waiting period after the visa appointment delays the process even further. While only 13% of the respondents had to wait for up to two weeks to collect their visa, more than two-thirds had to wait between one and eight months.

How long did it take between your visa appointment and collecting your visa?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 - 7 Days</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 - 2 Weeks</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 - 4 Weeks</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 - 2 Months</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 - 3 months</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 months +</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 months +</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

_Figure 5_
LIFE IN GERMANY
Cost of Living

The consensus is that the monthly amount of €853 is enough to cover living expenses. Munich has the highest average of monthly living expenses at €874 and Dresden has the lowest at €627.

This section covers the experiences of the respondents after their arrival in Germany. These include living costs and challenges faced while settling and living in Germany. The results are also presented in the context of the cities and type of accommodation that respondents stay in. Given the challenges, the report further states the students' plans after they complete their studies in Germany as well as their improvement suggestions.

One of the visa requirements for international students coming to Germany is a blocked account. This account has to be opened while the applicant is still in their home country. It has restricted access until the owner arrives in Germany. The money in the account can, to a certain extent, cover living expenses for up to one year and is usually released monthly to the owner's current bank account.

Although the consensus is that the monthly amount of €853 is enough to cover living expenses, a significant ratio of respondents who reside in Munich think otherwise.

The monthly living expense is set to €853 by the German government. According to your life in Germany, do you think €853 per month is enough to finance your living expenses in Germany? (Excluding travelling costs)

![Figure 6](image)

Despite the consensus that €853 is sufficient, a significant percentage of respondents residing in Munich think otherwise. The monthly living expense is set to €853 by the German government. According to your life in Germany, do you think €853 per month is enough to finance your living expenses in Germany? (Excluding travelling costs)

For the rest of the respondents who mentioned that the amount is not enough, a further comparison has been made between their city of residence and their accommodation type (figure 7).

This comparison has only been made for cities with a significant number of respondents and those who indicated that the amount is insufficient. The cities that have been compared are; Berlin, Cologne, Frankfurt, Hamburg, and Munich.

Learn more about the blocked account on www.expatrio.com
Life in Germany - Cost of Living

Given the minimum monthly amount needed to cover living expenses set by the German government, a comparison of the actual monthly spend was made.

How much is your monthly living expense in Germany, approximately? (in EUR)

A further comparison has been made based on the respondents' city of residence (figure 9). This applies for the top five cities with the most respondents; Aachen, Berlin, Cologne, Dresden, and Munich.

Average monthly expenses per city.

The respondents were asked about the financial sources during their stay in Germany and the majority had more than one source. Figure 10 shows the response ratio of the financial sources ranked by the frequency of selection.
Life in Germany - Cost of Living

From where do your get financial support during your stay in Germany? (please select all that apply)

- Parents: 49%
- Own Savings: 28%
- Part time job: 24%
- Student Loan: 8%
- German Institute scholarship: 4%
- Home country scholarship: 4%

**Figure 10**

A large portion of the monthly living expenses is allocated to groceries and rental costs for most respondents.

Further comparisons were made based on the respondents' cities of residence; Aachen, Berlin, Cologne, Dresden, and Munich (figure 12 and figure 14).

How much do you spend on groceries every month, approximately? (in EUR)

- €150 - €300: 44%
- €300 - €600: 14%
- €600+: 1%

**Figure 11**

City comparison of average grocery expenses per month.

**Figure 12**

Only the cities with the highest number of respondents have been compared.
For monthly rental costs, most respondents spend between €300 and €500, while the ones living in Munich spend more than €700.

How much do you spend on rent every month, approximately? (in EUR)

**Figure 13**

City comparison of average rent expenses per month.

**Figure 14**

Only the cities with the highest number of respondents have been compared.
The common thread of the challenges encountered once the respondents arrived in Germany was the language barrier as it applies to all the other challenges faced. In addition, this worsens the bureaucracy experienced by international students and expats in Germany due to misunderstanding requirements and instructions.

What was the biggest challenge after arriving in Germany?

- Language barrier: 36%
- Finding accommodation: 26%
- German bureaucracy: 16%
- Finding new friends: 9%
- Opening a current account: 7%
- Cultural differences: 6%

For those who encountered bureaucracy issues, the top three unpleasant experiences faced are similar in most cities. This is in regards to long waiting times for services and not understanding German-speaking service providers (figure 16).

The respondents were of the view that the use of email for communication and to send important documents could be increased as well as the use of other digital platforms.

The appointment systems mentioned are for services such as getting residence permits, visa extensions and registering an address. One would only find an appointment slot for a much later date which could be several weeks or months later.

If the services are required urgently, the alternative for waiting for an appointment would be to go to the relevant offices early morning to wait in a queue and hope to be assisted. This urgency is usually caused by the illogical processes that respondents also mentioned as a challenge.
If you had unpleasant experiences with German bureaucracy, please describe them below. (Open question)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Analogue processes (inefficient, slow)</td>
<td>19.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language barrier (service providers)</td>
<td>14.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appointent system (waiting long for services)</td>
<td>12.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unfriendly service providers</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unclear and inconsistent information / requirements</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General bureaucracy</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigration office process (Auslanderbehörde)</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discrimination by service providers</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illogical processes</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language barrier (documents in German)</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unnecessary charges - broadcasting tax</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citizens' registration process (Bürgeramt)</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding accommodation</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opening a European account</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not enough service hours</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>8.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 16**

A typical case of an illogical process would be someone living at a temporary address, and therefore, not being able to get a proof of address yet. Without the address proof, a residence permit cannot be attained and that is a prerequisite for opening a bank account. Moreover, without a bank account, one cannot access the blocked account money. The appointment delays cause a domino effect with other services and processes.
Life in Germany - Challenges

Although there are numerous challenges that respondents faced, there were positive responses about integrating into the German society. The majority have stated that personal effort is paramount to becoming a part of the society.

Based on your experience, how inclusive is the German society towards international students/expats? (1 - not inclusive, 10 - extremely inclusive)

![Figure 17](image)

The cities with the most respondents for this survey - Aachen, Berlin, Cologne, Dresden, and Munich - have most ratings between 8 and 10.

Several respondents mentioned that for them to feel more included by the German society, they should speak better German, join social groups, and for the society to be more open and friendlier.

Several also mentioned the need for exchange with others in order to have a sense of community, be it through sports, Facebook groups or networks such as InterNations and DeGiS.

![Figure 18](image)

How important it is for you to be a part of an international community in Germany? (student association, DeGiS, InterNations, etc.) (1 - not important, 10 - extremely important)
While 54% of the respondents are experiencing a positive integration into the German society, a similar percentage have had the thought of going back to their home country. Reasons for this consideration are diverse.

Have you ever felt like you want to go back to your home country?

![Pie chart showing 56% Yes and 44% Not really.]

Among the reasons provided, homesickness and language barrier are the most common factors.

What made you feel like you want to go back to your home country? (Select as many as you like)

![Bar chart showing reasons: Homesick 56%, Language barrier 36%, Cultural difference 28%, Racism 19%, Climate 14%, High Living expenses 13%, Other 13%.]

Among other reasons not included in the choice list that respondents gave were missing food from home, loneliness, and the Covid-19 pandemic.
Cities in Germany are considered to have different personalities, and in Berlin alone, different neighborhoods have unique flairs. The cities with the highest number of respondents are Aachen, Berlin, Cologne, Dresden and Munich.

75% of respondents gave a satisfaction rating of between 8 and 10 for their city of residence in Germany. The majority of those who gave the highest ratings reside in Hamburg and Dresden. Approximately 25% of respondents have moved from their initial city of residence in Germany. Munich has the highest rate of respondents moving to and from there.

The respondents were not asked for the rationale behind the city of choice; however, it appears that most are satisfied with their city of residence. Three quarters gave a rating of between 8 and 10, while only 2% gave a rating below 5.

In the top five cities with the highest rate of respondents who gave a score of between 8 and 10, Hamburg and Dresden came out on top.

City ranking based on high satisfaction scores (out of 10).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hamburg</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dresden</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Munich</td>
<td>9.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berlin</td>
<td>9.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stuttgart</td>
<td>9.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How satisfied are you with the city you are living in now in general? (1 - not satisfied, 10 - extremely satisfied)

Figure 22
The average rating of respondents who gave a score of between 8 and 10 per city is shown.
Munich has the highest rate of respondents moving to and from there. For those who moved from Munich, several of them relocated to Deggendorf. Deggendorf is situated in the greater Munich area. This move could be explained by the high rental costs in the central part of Munich and because Deggendorf has one of the most international universities in Bavaria.

*Figure 23* depicts the rate of respondents' move to and from the top five cities with the most respondents; Aachen, Berlin, Cologne, Dresden, and Munich.

Moving rate per city.
Life in Germany - Accommodation & Outlook

Accommodation

The most common accommodation types are flat shares (WG), student dormitories and studio apartments. With Dresden being the city with the lowest monthly expenses according to the results, 63% of respondents living there stay in student dormitories. With regards to the respondents plans after their studies, over 60% are planning to remain in Germany after graduation.

There are multiple accommodation types to choose from in Germany. These range from flat shares referred to as "Wohngemeinschaft" (WG), dormitories, and studios. Other options include, and are not limited to home stays with German families and living with friends or family. Flat shares (WG) are the accommodation type of choice among international students.

Outlook

Besides being asked about their accommodation type, international students were asked about their plans after their current activities (usually Bachelor or Masters courses). The majority plan to stay in Germany and look for job opportunities.

What do you plan to do after finishing your current activity (university studies, language course, etc.)?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Plan</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Look for job opportunities in Germany</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do not know yet</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pursue further education in Germany</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Return to home country</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pursue job opportunities in other countries</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The “Other” category constitutes pursuing further education in other countries, starting a business in Germany, starting a business in other countries, and travelling around the world.
WHAT CAN GERMANY IMPROVE?

“Be more cashless”

“More guidance for people who do not speak German”

“Better technology and less paper documents”

“At least supermarkets should run on Sunday”

“Little less Bureaucracy ;)”

“Put some more English guidance signals in public areas”

“Have affordable mobile data plans”

“How medical institutions function is really strange for newcomers. Better explanation of it would be good.”

“Increase English speaking jobs. There are so many talents and experts out there who are really good at their skills but don’t get opportunities because most companies still want German speakers. So the company might end up with inferior talent German speaking employee Vs more talented no-German speaking employee”
Even though challenges were highlighted throughout this insights report, there was a significant number of respondents who attested to the fact that Germany is a great place to be. The pain points do not wipe out that factor. The rate of those who mentioned that no other consideration was made in terms of country choice apart from Germany is a pure indicator that the intention to relocate and be integrated into the German society was there.

In summary, it appears that bureaucracy and outdated processes that lack digitization are the major challenges faced. The language barrier is also a hindrance to progress for most international students and expats living in Germany. Many would prefer officials of essential services to speak English, to make the arrival and settling stage smoother. Conversely, it can be argued that anyone relocating to Germany should make efforts to learn the language in order to take integration to the next level. Communities such as DeGiS, could foster social connections with others in the same boat.
SUGGESTIONS

Given the survey results that highlight the pain points for international students in Germany, some suggestions for improvement have been made;

Public-private partnerships

There could be public-private partnerships between the government and digital solution providers like Expatrio through system integration to optimize processes for visa handling, blocked account verification, city registration and other relevant services.

Digitization

There needs to be a fundamental shift from postal mail to secure, encrypted digital communication amongst governmental institutions, essential service providers and to the public (including international students and expatriates). Innovative solutions such as a decentralized Blockchain and Smart contracts should be applied.

Language

English documents and guidelines should be made available for services required by international students and expatriates.

Country-wide communities

A lot of international students could benefit from country-wide international communities such as DeGiS, instead of ones that are just based on cities, universities, study majors, and nationalities.

Skilled Labor Act

It is imperative that international students remain in Germany after graduation. Therefore specific programs have to be launched to further qualify for the German labor market and the integration into the society.

By and large, there are a lot of opportunities to make Germany more attractive for young international talent in the face of a demographic shift and a shortage of skilled labor.
ABOUT EXPATRIO

Expatrio is a relocation platform supporting international students and expats wanting to live in Germany. An all-inclusive service is offered to minimize the bureaucracy that is faced when moving to Germany.

By applying experience and expertise, Expatrio enables customers to open a state-recognized German blocked account and receive health insurance for the German visa application. Once in the country, internationals can benefit from additional services like finding accommodation or a tailored job opportunity.

MISSION & VISION

Our mission is to help international students, workers and expatriates to relocate to Germany. We provide a fully digital, trustworthy, easy to use service to ensure that relocation to Germany is seamless.

Our vision is to be the digital relocation partner enabling people from all around the world to relocate to Germany effortlessly. Expatrio is an innovative company providing digital and integrated services with state-of-the-art technology for students and workers.
ABOUT DEGIS

Deutsche Gesellschaft internationaler Studierender (Eng.: German Association for international students) is a non-profit organisation (NPO) shaping the community for international students and anyone coming to Germany to pursue an academic career and/or employment.

WHAT THEY DO

DeGiS connects internationals across the country and offers a space for exchange by organizing exceptional events. These range from;

- Seminars and receptions with experts from the society, politics and business.
- Connecting a unique network of like-minded people
- Offering scholarship opportunities
- Opening doors to the German job market and much more.
- Performing research on international students to foster deeper understanding.

DeGiS aims to think out of the box by addressing their core values; diversity, endurance, globalization, internationality and sustainability.
CONTACT US

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