NAVIGATING THE PANDEMIC

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' RELOCATION TO AND LIFE IN GERMANY

2021

In partnership with DEGIS
Foreword

Being a leading innovative player in the international education sector in Germany gives us the opportunity to amplify international students' voices. Thanks to our large customer base, we are able to provide new insights on the experiences international students underwent throughout their relocation to Germany. The 2020 survey report was a result of over 1,200 respondents from across the globe with insights covering seven key topics. In the subsequent survey (2021), there was a 31% increase in the number of respondents, representing over 90 nationalities.

In 2021, COVID-19-related disruptions on student migration, skilled immigration, and education systems persisted. International students and expatriates wanting to relocate to Germany were faced with unforeseen, temporarily halted visa processes and travel restrictions. Consequently, complexity in decision-making for learning institutions and employers was heightened. This became a driver to explore how internationals' relocation was affected.

As a means to make relocation as effortless as possible, the survey was conducted by Expatrio, a solution supporting international students and expats wanting to live in Germany, in partnership with DEGIS (Deutsche Gesellschaft internationaler Studierender gGmbH), a non-profit organization building the largest community for internationals in Germany.

The insights on this report could contribute to keeping Germany as an attractive destination for international students and highly skilled workers. Looking back to the previous survey results, the top challenges faced prevail. Some have worsened, while others improved. These include; visa processing periods, language barriers, and a lack of digitalization. Prioritizing these could help retain international students as skilled workers after graduation.

However, despite the issues faced, there is a noticeable increase in the number of those intending to stay in Germany longer. Expatrio and DEGIS agree that this can be positive for society.
INTRODUCTION

Expatrio in partnership with Deutsche Gesellschaft Internationaler Studierender (DEGIS) conducted a survey at the end of August to October 2021.

There were 1,862 survey respondents who were primarily international students representing 93 nationalities. The respondents have gone through the relocation process during the COVID-19 pandemic. The results reveal some insights on the relocation to and life in Germany amidst the pandemic.

Nearly 2000 people were surveyed, mostly international students of 93 nationalities.
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### Relocation Preparation

**Study Destination**

45% of the respondents did not consider any other study destination besides Germany. The top two alternative destinations initially considered were the USA (17%) and Canada (16%).

All nationalities mainly chose Germany because of no tuition fees. The exceptions were Mexicans and Brazilians, who were drawn primarily to employment opportunities in Germany.

More than half (55%) of the respondents’ main source of funds was from family. The funds mostly covered accommodation in Germany and full tuition costs.

**Visa Process**

The biggest challenge during the visa process was getting a visa appointment. Compared to 2020, waiting periods have become longer, with 11% more respondents waiting for more than two months.

In 2021, respondents waited longer for their visa appointment and collection. 5% more respondents waited for more than two months compared to the 2020 survey result.

No other nationality had respondents who waited for over six months except for South Korean, Taiwanese, Chinese, Turkish, Indian and Mexican respondents.

### Life in Germany & Outlook

**Challenges, Finances, Outlook**

The language barrier and finding accommodation remain the top two challenges respondents face after arriving in Germany. In 2021, finding new friends amid the pandemic became one of the top challenges.

2% fewer respondents in 2021 felt that the amount set by the government is enough to cover monthly living expenses. Most of those living in Kaiserslautern (100%), Ingolstadt(97%), and Dresden(97%) felt that it is sufficient.

57% of the respondents plan to stay in Germany after completing their current activity. The nationality with the biggest share of respondents who have felt like going back to their home country was the Chinese (70%).

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*Source: expatrio.degis // 2021*
RESPONDENT PROFILE

Top Nationalities

- Indian 10%
- Mexican 10%
- Taiwanese 9%

Several sections of this report have been broken down by nationality. Only the top represented nationalities (73%) from the list of survey respondents have been included in the breakdown while the rest (27%) of the nationalities with a lower number of respondents have been included in holistic data.

Top Professions

- Masters Degree 67%
- Bachelor’s Degree 9%
- Exchange Students 9%

Gender

- 63% Male
- Female (35.6%)
- Prefer not to say (0.9%)
- Non-binary (0.4%)

Age

- 45% Aged between 23 and 25
  Median: 24 years | Age Range: 18 - 50
Which country did you have on your list before finally choosing Germany?

In comparison to the 2020 survey, 14% fewer respondents had no other country in mind except Germany. Results further show a growing interest in the following study destinations; the Netherlands, France, and Spain.

Which most important factor finally convinced you to come to Germany amidst the pandemic?

The factor that convinced the respondents the most remains the opportunity to study at tuition-free universities. For different nationalities, the weight of importance to the listed factors varies. This is depicted on the next page.

Some respondents mentioned other motivation factors such as; their partner being German or in Germany, the opportunity to learn the language, being awarded scholarships, and three-year study programs.
### All top respondent nationalities had the biggest share of those who were convinced by the no tuition fees in Germany except for Mexicans and Brazilians. They were mostly drawn by the employment opportunities available in Germany.

On the other hand, Nigerians and Americans had a bigger share of those were convinced by family and/or friends.
What was your main source of information while preparing your relocation to Germany?

Embassy / Foreigners Offices: 30%
Friends / Family: 19%
German University: 16%
Online Communities i.e. QQ, Facebook: 15%
Search Engines i.e. Google, Baidu: 9%
Information Websites i.e. DAAD: 5%
University Student Associations: 2%
Expatrio’s Partners i.e. Uni Agents: 2%
Other: 1%
Expatrio Website: 1%

Besides the fact that embassies and consulates were the top sources for the respondents, friends and family and German Universities were also deemed as main information sources.

30% of the respondents appear to seek reliable information sources about their relocation to Germany from mostly embassies and consulates.

From where did you get assistance with finding the right course and university in Germany? (Multiple option question)

The majority of international students found the right course and/or their place of study with the help of free course finder websites. Paid agents and consultants at universities also contributed to their decision making for their study program and university choice.
The respondents were asked about their main source of funds for their relocation and life in Germany.

**What has been your main source of funds for your relocation and life in Germany?**

- From family: 55%
- My own savings: 21%
- Student loan: 12%
- Part-time job: 6%
- Scholarship in Germany: 3%
- Scholarship from home country: 2%
- Other: 1%

The above figure shows that family was the primary source of funds. A lower share (5%) of respondents had scholarships as their main source of funds. Scholarship holders use blocked account services less as they often do not need a blocked account as their financial proof.

The respondents’ main source of funds varies across different nationalities and ages.

**If you got financial aid, what costs does it cover? (Multi-select question)**

The most common purpose of the financial aid received went to accommodation, full tuition costs (for those who paid for tuition), and other expenses such as transportation costs in Germany.

55% of the respondents’ main source of funds were from family. The funds mostly covered accommodation in Germany and full tuition costs.

Financial sources by age (Top 3)

- From family - Ages 19 (93%), 18 (87%), 20 (80%)
- My own savings - Ages 35 (76%), 34 (65%), 31 (64%)
- Student loans - Ages 26 (22%), 24 (16%), 25 (16%)
All top respondent nationalities had the biggest share of those who received their main source of funds from family, except for Americans, Brazilians and Hong Kongers respondents. Their main source was mostly their own savings [American (71%), Brazilian (58%), and Hong Konger (53%)].

The nationalities with the most significant share of those who got their main funds from family are Indonesian (84%), Chinese (79%), Peruvian & Nepalese (69%). Indians (21%), Taiwanese (9%), Nepalese (6%) have most respondents who mainly got funds from student loans.

Another relevant factor is that the top two nationalities with the biggest share of those who got a scholarship from German institutions: Nigerian (19%), Mexican (13%), Peruvian (6%). Turkish (15%) and Ghanaians (6%) had the most significant share of those who attained scholarships from their home country. However, it should be noted that the percentage of scholarship holders in the results may be lower because they are less reliant on Expatrio’s services, such as the blocked account.

19% of the Nigerian respondents got scholarships from German institutions such as DAAD, their universities, or others. No other nationality had this rate of respondents who were awarded scholarships.
As the German visa is the main determinant for relocation, the respondents were asked about their experience with the visa process. Yet again, their biggest challenge was getting a visa appointment.

**During the visa process, what were the biggest challenges you had to deal with during the pandemic? (Multi-select question)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenge</th>
<th>2020</th>
<th>2021</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Getting a visa appointment</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncertain waiting duration</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long processing time</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparing required documents</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expensive visa fee</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analogue processes</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As opposed to the survey conducted in 2020, uncertain waiting durations became the second most popular challenge regarding the visa process in 2021.

Other reasons mentioned:
- "Flights being cancelled and having to apply twice for the visa." - Turkish
- "Having to wait a year to be able to finally come to Germany." - Turkish
- "The Embassy is not in the country I live in, so during Covid-19 lockdowns, it was difficult for me to even get approval to fly." - Malaysian
- "Visa cost increase." - Salvadorean

The biggest challenge during the visa process was getting a visa appointment (36% selections). In comparison to 2020, waiting periods have become longer, with 11% more respondents waiting for more than two months. As opposed to the survey conducted in 2020, uncertain waiting durations became the second most popular challenge in 2021.

**How long did you have to wait until your visa appointment?**

The most common waiting time for the respondents was between two to four weeks in 2020, whereas in 2021, four to eight weeks was the most common.
How long did you have to wait until your visa appointment?

While all nationalities had the biggest share of those who had to wait for two to four weeks, Ghanaians had the majority (25%) waiting only one to two weeks. The majority of Nigerians (19%) waited for one week or less, and most Brazilians (31%) had to wait for four to six weeks.

Another commonality was that all top respondent nationalities had the smallest to no share of those who had to wait for their visa appointment for over a year, except for Pakistanis (33%) and Nigerians (13%). Alternatively, there were countries with the most significant share of those who only had to wait for one week or less; Americans (29%), Nigerians (19%) and Vietnamese (16%).
How long did you have to wait between your visa appointment and visa collection?

It also seems that the waiting period after the visa appointment delays the process even further, with the majority (85%) having to wait for up to two months.

In 2021, respondents waited for longer periods between their visa appointment and collection. 5% more respondents waited for more than two months as compared to the 2020 survey results.

The most common waiting time for the respondents shifted from two to four weeks in 2020, to four to eight weeks in 2021.
### SECTION 1: RELOCATION PREPARATION

**How long did you have to wait between your visa appointment and visa collection?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>1 Week or Less</th>
<th>1 - 2 Weeks</th>
<th>2 - 4 Weeks</th>
<th>4 - 6 Weeks</th>
<th>6 - 8 Weeks</th>
<th>8 - 10 Weeks</th>
<th>10 - 12 Weeks</th>
<th>3 - 6 Months</th>
<th>Over 6 Months</th>
<th>Over 1 Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Indian</td>
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<td>Mexican</td>
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<td>Taiwanese</td>
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<td>Turkish</td>
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<tr>
<td>South Korean</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vietnamese</td>
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<tr>
<td>Colombian</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brazilian</td>
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<tr>
<td>Indonesian</td>
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<td>Pakistani</td>
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<tr>
<td>American</td>
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<tr>
<td>Peruvian</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ghanaian</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Nigerian</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Nepalese</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Hong Konger</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

No other top respondent nationalities had respondents who waited for over six months between their visa appointment and collection except for South Koreans, Taiwanese, Chinese, Turkish, Indians and Mexicans.

While all nationalities had the biggest share of those who had to wait for two to four weeks, the majority of Hong Kongers (47%), Colombians (19%) and Peruvians (25%) waited for four to six weeks.

Another commonality was that all top respondent nationalities had the smallest to no share of those who had to wait for their visa collection for over a year, except for Americans (6%) and Nigerians (6%).

Alternatively, there were countries with the most significant share of those who only had to wait for one week or less; Americans (29%), Brazilians (23%), and Hong Kongers (20%).
### CHALLENGES AND FINANCES

This section covers the respondents’ experiences after they arrive in Germany. These include living costs and challenges faced while settling and living in the country. The results are also presented regarding the cities the respondents live.

**What was the biggest challenge you experienced after arriving in Germany?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenge</th>
<th>2020</th>
<th>2021</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Language barrier</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding new friends (amid the pandemic)</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding accommodation</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>German bureaucracy</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opening a European current account</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural difference</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As opposed to the survey conducted in 2020, the challenge that ranked higher than the German bureaucracy in 2021 was finding or making new friends amid the pandemic.

Other reasons were mentioned, such as; weather conditions, online lectures, anxiety and depression, and not having internet access on the first day in the country.

The language barrier and finding accommodation remain the top two challenges faced after arriving in Germany. In 2021, finding new friends amid the pandemic became one of the top challenges. Regarding living expenses, there has been a 2% decrease in the number of those who felt that €861 is enough to cover monthly living expenses.

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

The monthly living expense is set to €861 by the German government.

**According to your life in Germany, do you think €861 per month is enough to finance your living expenses in Germany?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2020</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2021</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From 2020, there has been a 2% decrease in the number of international students who think that the monthly fee set by the German government is enough to finance their living expenses.
Do you think €861 per month is enough to finance your living expenses in Germany?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Yes (%)</th>
<th>No (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kaiserslautern</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ingolstadt</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dresden</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dortmund</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aachen</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bremen</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stuttgart</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heidelberg</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berlin</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frankfurt</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hamburg</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Munich</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Kaiserslautern (100%), Ingolstadt (97%), and Dresden (97%) had the most share of respondents who mentioned that the set monthly amount by the German government is enough to sustain them.

From the cities top respondents live in, Munich has the highest share (37%) of those who believe the set monthly amount is insufficient. This finding is correlated with the 2020 survey, as Munich residents had the highest average living expenses. Contrastingly, Kaiserslautern, Ingolstadt, and Dresden residents felt that it is sufficient.

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

Cities with expenses of over €1000 were Munich (28%), Berlin (25%), and Frankfurt (5%). Those with costs below €700 were Berlin (8%), Aachen (7%), and Munich (5%).
SECTION 3: OUTLOOK

FUTURE PLANS

This section covers the respondents’ plans after they complete their current profession in Germany. In 2021, the respondents were presented with a wider list of pursuits stemming from survey 2020. These include; pursuing further education in other countries, starting a business and traveling.

What do you plan to do after finishing your current activity?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Plan</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Look for job opportunities in Germany</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pursue further education in Germany</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Look for job opportunities in other countries</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Return to my home country</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do not know yet</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travelling around the world</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pursue further education in other countries</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Starting my own business in Germany</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Starting my own business in other countries</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The majority of respondents will be looking for job opportunities in Germany once they have completed their current profession. However, in comparison to the survey conducted in 2020, there has been a 10% decrease in this number.

Furthermore, there was a 3% increase in the number of those who would like to pursue further education in Germany. In 2021, 50% more respondents mentioned that they would look for job opportunities in other countries.

How long are you planning on staying in Germany?

- **Up to 1 more year**: 18%
- **1 - 2 years**: 29%
- **2 - 4 years**: 19%
- **4 - 6 years**: 18%
- **More than 6 years**: 27%
- **Undecided**: 5%

57% of the respondents are planning to stay in Germany after completing their current activity, with 27% thinking of staying beyond six years. Reasons for staying include; looking for jobs, pursuing further education, and starting businesses.
What obstacles do you foresee with staying in Germany?

- Language barrier: 47%
- High living expenses: 13%
- Homesick: 11%
- Cultural differences: 9%
- Climate: 8%
- Little to no career opportunities: 6%
- Racism: 5%
- Other: 1%

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

- 2020: 56%
- 2021: 46%

Compared to the survey conducted in 2020, there has been a 10% decrease in the number of students who have felt like they wanted to return home.

10% more respondents mentioned that they have not felt like returning home country compared to 2020. Nonetheless, the top obstacles foreseen with staying in Germany by the respondents is the language barrier (47%) and high living expenses (13%).
**SECTION 3: OUTLOOK**

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Yes (%)</th>
<th>No (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistani</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taiwanese</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Korean</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesian</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnamese</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nigerian</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peruvian</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexican</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colombian</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hong Konger</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghanian</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nepalese</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkish</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

70% of Chinese respondents said they wanted to go back to their home country.

From the top represented nationalities, the Chinese have the biggest share (70%) of respondents who felt like they wanted to go back to their home country. Contrastingly, the Turkish, Nepalese and Ghanaian had the least share of those who mentioned felt like returning home.

**What made you feel like you want to go back to your home country?**

Other factors mentioned were: loneliness, missing food from home country, family being at risk during the pandemic.
SECTION 4: WHAT CAN GERMANY IMPROVE?

SUGGESTED IMPROVEMENTS

How do you think Germany can improve especially during the pandemic?

"Mitigate language barriers for important notices."

"My tuition fees could be reduced because classes are online."

"Keep COVID rapid-tests free please."

"Germany can reduce the rent and waive off the ARD Radio fees, especially for students."

"Provide more part-time jobs in small cities like Hof."

"I hope to have more German language courses for free."

"More incentives for vaccination."

"Less bureaucracy and easier online appointment processes for people coming in."

"Make more services available online. City hall registration should be available online."

"Fast track the visa extension process."

"I think they have done pretty well in managing the pandemic."

"Have better internet packages for sim."

"Disinfections could be placed in public transport. People should wear masks properly."

"As an Asian international student, I worry that hate crime has worsened. This should be solved."

"More work from home job opportunities would be helpful."
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 AND 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.

MISSION

DEGIS connects internationals across the country and offers a space for professional and personal growth through:

- Volunteering opportunities & practical learning in more than 50 City Chapters all around Germany
- Offering scholarship opportunities
- Online webinars on a range of relevant topics
- Online and offline support through the DEGIS Buddy Program
- Supporting international offices of universities with incoming internationals
- Connecting students with potential employers

Our vision is to support every international student in Germany with achieving their dreams and goals.
DEGIS aims to think out of the box by addressing its core values: diversity, entrepreneurship, globalization, internationality, and sustainability.