

India-first careers gain ground amid visa delays and global volatility

STRUCTURAL SHIFT. Domestic opportunities signal a broader rebalancing of outward migration

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A sharp drop in Indian students going abroad, coupled with rising visa uncertainty, is triggering a structural shift in talent mobility, with more early- and mid-career professionals opting for India-first careers as domestic opportunities expand, signalling a broader rebalancing of outward migration.

According to Indeed's Global Career Work & Mobility Report 2026, which surveyed 552 employers and 1,019 employees, around 61 per cent of Indian professionals now prefer global remote roles over physically relocating overseas.

Alongside, the Government of India's Bureau of Immigration data shared in Parliament show that Indians travelling abroad for education fell to 6.26 lakh in 2025, from 7.7 lakh in 2024 and 9.08 lakh in 2023.

"Friction in key destination markets is no longer just 'temporary paperwork'; candidates now treat it as a structural risk — higher rejection probability, longer processing, tighter scrutiny, and narrower post-study work outcomes. From our advisory conversations, more candidates are taking the India role first and keeping overseas as an option, rather than planning life around a single visa-dependent move," Varun Singh, MD, XIPHIAS Immigration, observed.

DIGITAL ROLES

The shift is not uniform across industries, with technology and digital roles being the most visibly affected since these sectors are highly compatible with remote work.

On the other hand, finance and consulting show a partial impact. While many global functions can operate from India, certain leadership and



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front office roles still benefit from relocation.

Healthcare, academia and regulated professions remain less affected by the remote alternative since they require physical presence, licensing, or on-ground clinical and research engagement.

"The pivot toward domestic or remote global roles is strongest in digitally transferable industries, while physically dependent professions continue to rely on in-

ternational mobility," Ankit Mehra, Founder and CEO of GyanDhan, explained.

DOMESTIC HUBS

Many MNCs are embedding global teams in India, enabling professionals to manage international portfolios and lead cross-border projects from domestic hubs, with remote global roles further expanding access to international exposure without relocation.

While US and European

salaries remain higher in absolute terms, remote roles allow Indian professionals to tap global pay scales while benefiting from India's lower cost of living, narrowing the economic incentive to move abroad.

However, this temporary correction may be a structural rebalancing rather than a permanent reversal.

RISK TOLERANCE

"The desire to go abroad has not disappeared. What has changed is the risk tolerance. Candidates now treat immigration outcomes as probabilistic. When that mindset changes, behaviour changes in durable ways: more Plan B thinking, more India-first moves, and more emphasis on roles that are resilient to policy swings. If immigration policies ease in major markets, there will likely be some rebound, but it will be selective, not a full return to the old pattern," Singh shared.