

More Indians seeking citizenship in Norway, Sweden and Belgium

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BENGALURU: Will more Indians wanting to become citizens of other countries look to find happiness and not just chase their dreams in the years to come? Will countries like the US, UK, Australia and Canada become less attractive?

In the past four years, a total of 4.52 lakh Indians have become citizens of 84 countries. In 2017, more than 92,000 Indians became citizens of other countries, compared to 1.15 lakh the previous year, and the dip in number is largely seen in countries that traditionally attracted Indians.

Although the absolute numbers are not comparable, the number of Indians seeking citizenship of Sweden, Norway and even Belgium

increased, while the number of those wanting to permanently settle down in the US, UK, Canada and Australia — countries that have for long attracted Indians — dipped compared to 2016.

DIASPORA SPREAD

Source: Ministry of External Affairs

Country	No. of Indians who got citizenship in 2016	Indians who got citizenship in 2017	No. Of PIOs AND NRIs (Dec 2017)
US	22,999	20,327	44.6 lakh
UK	28,720	19,882	18.2 lakh
Canada	16,615	7,487	10.16 lakh
Australia	23,073	20,948	4.9 lakh
Norway	244	775	20,018
Sweden	253	660	25,719
Belgium	471	571	18,404
77 Other Countries	26,441	45,219	Not Applicable

The number of Indians who became citizens of the US dipped 12% in 2017 compared to 2016, while the drop was 30% in the UK, 9% in Australia and 55% in Canada. In comparison, the numbers for Sweden and Norway saw a 160% and 218% jump traditionally. The high percentage for Sweden and Norway are because the numbers are in three digits, compared to five-digit numbers in the other countries.

Pointing to the changing political climate and increased pressure from native citizens in countries that were first choice for Indians, experts say the trend of more Indians wanting to settle down in smaller but developed countries will continue for a few more years to come.

"It won't be that people going to the US or UK will reduce. Job opportunities there are still very lucrative and lots of Indians, especially the young, will continue to go there in search of opportunities. That said, the number of people wanting to go to countries like Sweden and Norway, among others, will also increase and that trend is here to stay," Saju James, partner and managing director at immigration services firm Fragomen India, says.

By the end of 2017, Sweden had a total of 25,719 Indians — 10,370 Persons of Indian Origin (PIOs) and 15,349 Non-Resident Indians, while Norway had 20,018 Indians (12,300 PIOs and 7,718 NRIs).

The number for UK, US, Canada and Australia are in hundreds of thousands, with the four countries housing 78 lakh Indians cumulatively.

Vikram Shroff, leader, HR law practice, at law firm Nishith Desai Associates, says: "People are looking for more than just job opportunities. From standard of living to social security and happiness index, there are a variety of factors that prompt people to choose and relocate to another country. Countries that encouraged migrants (including Indians) are now pushing for stricter immigration regime. Countries with relatively lesser population are sensing this opportunity and welcoming talented migrants. Norway, Sweden and Malta are some examples."

Shroff also felt that this trend is here to persist, while K Muralidhara, member-secretary of NRI Forum-Karnataka, argues that there is a certain stagnation in the US, UK and Canada.