

After massive dip in 2020, foreign students arrivals up 14% in 2021

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BENGALURU: After a massive dip of 72% in 2020 — a year that saw extraordinary measures to curb the spread of Covid-19 — the number of foreign students arriving in India has seen a 14% increase in 2021, mostly from the immediate neighbourhood.

As per the latest data from the ministry of external affairs (MEA), 23,439 foreigners have arrived in India on student visas between January and December 2021, compared to 20,561 in 2020. The number was 74,689 in 2019.

Data for years between 2016 and 2021 shows that more than 3.3 lakh foreigners came to India on student visas from more than 160 countries. The highest number of such visas were issued in 2019, followed by 2018 (72,268). The two other years also saw more than 70,000 people obtain

such visas.

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Countries That Sent Most Students To India In 2021

Bangladesh & Afghanistan Have Sent The Most During 2016-2021 Period Too

Bangladesh Afghanistan Sri Lanka Tanzania Sudan

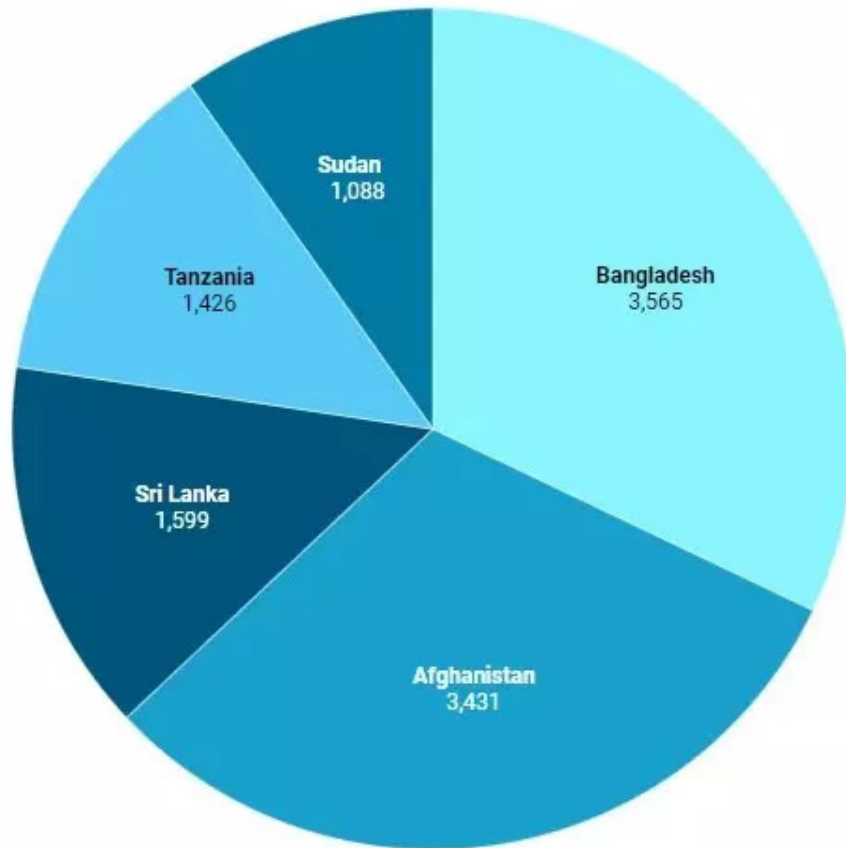


Chart: Chethan Kumar • Source: MEA • Created with Datawrapper

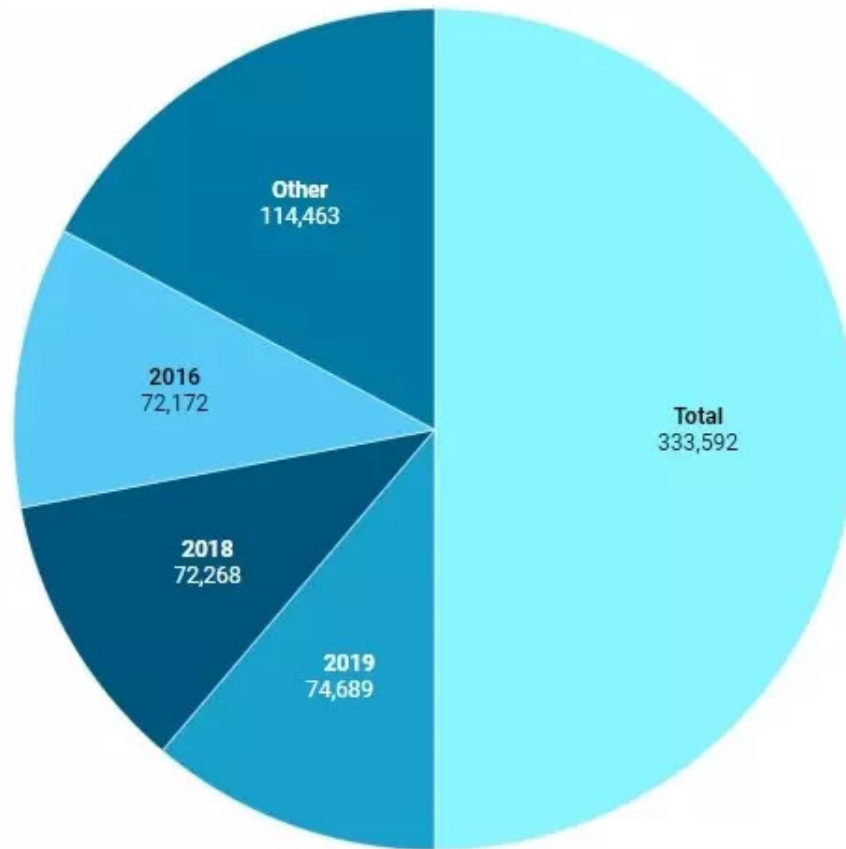
Immigration law expert Vikram Shroff of Nishith Desai Associates, said: "...I expect our government to further ease Covid-19 travel restrictions in a phased manner. Given the importance of education, getting students back to Indian universities should become a priority. While online education has played a crucial role, research and networking opportunities are indispensable

for higher education. India's focus should be to attract foreign students by promoting Indian universities and to exceed the 2018 & 2019 intake levels by next year."

Bangladesh (45,250) and Afghanistan (39,111) students — together accounting for a quarter of such arrivals in the last six years — outnumber others by a huge margin. Among the top countries that exported students to India in the said period are also Malaysia (20,758), Sudan (15,126), Sri Lanka (14,635), Thailand (13,423), Yemen (11,437), Republic of Korea (10,135), Iran (9,960) and Iraq (7,113). These ten countries account for more than 45% of the overall arrivals.

After Massive Dip In 2020, Foreign Students' Number Up

■ Total ■ 2019 ■ 2018 ■ 2016 ■ Other



Numbers Still Not Comparable With Pre-Pandemic Levels

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In 2021, the highest number of students came from Bangladesh (3,565), Afghanistan (3,431), Sri Lanka (1,599), Tanzania (1,426) and Sudan (1,088). While these five countries together account for more than 47% of such arrivals, the remaining 12,330 students came from all the other countries.

TV Mohandas Pai, chairman, Aarin Capital Funds, says: “While the increase seen this year is welcome. There’s a lot to do: India has 7.5 lakh students studying outside of India but have only a small number of students coming here from abroad, mostly from our neighbouring countries. India should identify the top 100 institutions and enable them to market Indian education so we can get around 1 lakh or 1.5 lakh students coming here.”

Another expert said that while the number is further expected to pick up in the coming year, it may take at least two years to reach the 2019 levels.

“...There is a need for globalisation of Indian education. We need to implement the new education policy and greater freedom for our top institutions to get global students. There are about 3-4 million students studying globally and a lot of them are Indians, whose parents spend about \$20 billion each year to educate their children outside. This is more than the overall budget of the union government for higher education. We cannot have global institutions without global students. Bad policy has depleted our resources, diminished our names and hurt us very badly,” Pai added.