

Trajectories of Indian Diaspora in Portugal: A Transnational Perspective

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Abstract

Transnational history is an interdisciplinary perspective which examines historical phenomena, processes, and relations that transcend national borders by focusing on the movements of people, ideas, goods, and capital, including the entanglements between different nations, cultures, and societies. This approach challenges the traditional nation-state boundaries in historical writing, emphasizing global connections and the fluidity of historical processes across borders. From the colonial era through to the present, Indian migration to Portugal has been influenced by several factors, including the lingering legacy of Portuguese colonialism, evolving migration policies and the shifting economic landscape. The present work is an attempt to understand the migration patterns and the trajectories of the Indian diaspora in Portugal, considering the historical as well as the contemporary trends. It also intends to estimate the impact of the Indian community, in shaping the broader socio-cultural and economic ties between India and Portugal.

Keywords: Transnational Histories, Diaspora, Indo-Portuguese History, Migration, Trajectories, Immigration, Diplomatic ties, Colonial Legacy

Introduction

The term 'transnational' highlights the movement and interaction across multiple national and geographical boundaries. Therefore, transnational history seeks to move beyond the limits of national histories by focusing on phenomena that cross borders, blur boundaries, and are not contained within the traditional nation-state framework. This includes migration, cultural exchange, trade networks, and colonial interactions by highlighting the stories of migrants who move across multiple borders and have their lives influenced by global economic, political, and social forces. Transnational histories of empires such as the British, French, and Portuguese colonial projects examine how empires and their colonies were interconnected and how colonial rule shaped the global flows of people, ideas, and goods. Movements like socialism, feminism, and human rights have often spread across national boundaries, influencing social and political structures globally. Histories of these movements

are often studied through the lens of transnational networks. The study of trade routes, financial flows, and economic globalization often requires a transnational perspective. The study of the global impact of the Silk Road or the Atlantic slave trade, for instance, is crucial for understanding interconnected historical processes.

As Benedict Anderson argues, 'In our globalized world, history is no longer the exclusive domain of nations. Transnational history reveals how global networks and exchanges have shaped the development of empires, nation-states, and individuals alike.' According to Saskia Sassen, 'Migration is the very lifeblood of transnational history. Understanding the flow of people and ideas across borders allows us to understand the forces that shaped the modern world.' Thomas Bender one of the foundational scholars of transnational history, Bender's work challenges the nation-state-centred approach to history. His influential essay 'Rethinking American History in a Global Age' (2002) advocates for the inclusion of global networks and processes in the study of American history.

Akira Iriye, leading historian in the field of transnational history, focuses on how international and global relations shape national histories. His key works include *Global and Transnational History: The Past, Present, and Future* (2013), where he discusses how historical phenomena transcend national borders and influence global events. Catherine Hall has written extensively on British imperialism and the legacies of colonialism in shaping transnational histories. Her work brings attention to the intersections of race, gender, and empire, and how these intersections travel across borders.

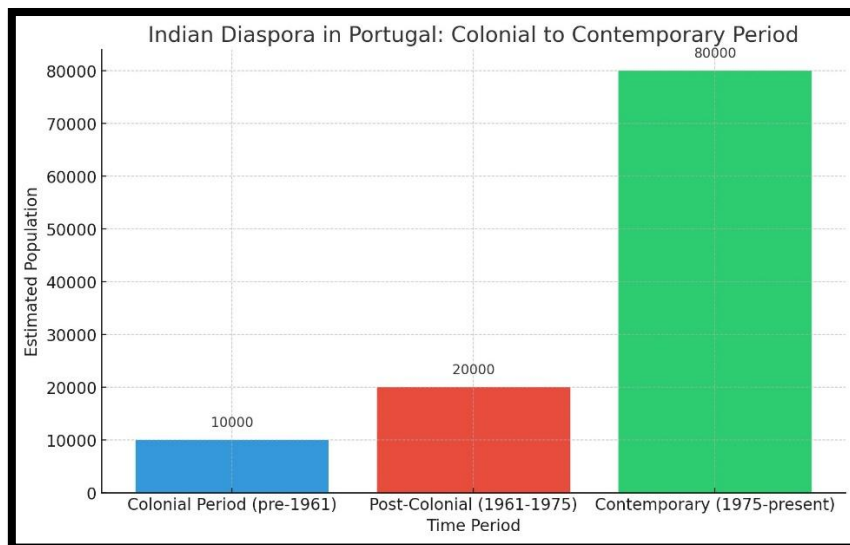
Nina Glick Schiller's work on migration and transnationalism, particularly her theory of 'transnational social fields,' has been instrumental in defining how migration, diaspora, and cross-border networks shape global history. Her article *Transnationalism: A New Analytic Framework for Understanding Migration* (1999) remains a key text. Andreas Wimmer is known for his work on the transnational dimension of migration and how these movements challenge national borders. He has written extensively on the intersection of transnationalism and global history.

It can be argued here that, transnational history is an approach that transcends the confines of national history, focusing instead on the global networks and processes that shape the past. By considering movements of people, ideas, goods, and capital across borders, transnational history offers a richer, more complex understanding of historical developments.

India and Portugal, two countries with a rich shared history, continue to deepen their bilateral relations in contemporary times. While their historical ties trace back to the colonial

era, today their relationship is defined by cooperation in multiple areas, such as trade, security, sustainable development, and cultural exchange. A critical element of this relationship is the significant Indian diaspora in Portugal, particularly the Goan community, which has shaped both the social fabric of Portuguese society and its diplomatic ties with India. This paper explores the evolving India-Portugal relationship, with a particular focus on the contributions of the Indian diaspora in Portugal to the country's economy, culture, and diplomacy. The Indian diaspora in Portugal represents an intriguing intersection of colonial history, migration, and transnationalism. The history of Indian migration to Portugal can be traced back to the colonial period, but contemporary migration patterns have been shaped by a complex web of political, economic, and social factors. The present study is an attempt to explore the migration patterns of the Indian diaspora in Portugal, considering both historical and contemporary trends and also to examine the impact of the community on the broader socio-cultural and economic ties between India and Portugal, while assessing the opportunities and challenges of the increasing bilateral connections in the future ahead.

The Indian Diaspora in Portugal



Graph 1: Timeline of Indian Diaspora population in Portugal

Source: SEF Immigration and Borders Report 2023

Here is a demographic graph of the estimated Indian diaspora population in Portugal from the colonial period to the contemporary period. The estimated populations for each period illustrate growth patterns influenced by historical events like colonization, decolonization, and

contemporary migration trends. The Indian connection to Portugal dates back to the 15th century when Portuguese explorers and traders arrived on the west coast of India, beginning with Vasco da Gama's famous voyage to Calicut in 1498. This event marked the start of Portuguese colonial presence in India, which lasted for more than four centuries. The Portuguese established settlements in Goa, Daman, Diu, and other parts of the Indian subcontinent. The historical relationships between Portugal and India were therefore deeply shaped by Portuguese imperialism, trade, and religious missionary activity. During the colonial era, many Indians moved to Portugal in various capacities, such as traders, servants, soldiers, and missionaries.

However, the large-scale migration of Indians to Portugal occurred much later, particularly after India gained independence in 1947 and after the Carnation Revolution of 1974, which led to the decolonization of Portuguese overseas territories. The significant waves of Indian migration to Portugal began in the late 20th century, especially after the political changes in Portugal, including its withdrawal from former colonies in Africa and the 1974 Carnation Revolution. Following the revolution, Portugal experienced a major economic and political shift that encouraged emigration from former colonies and a significant influx of migrants from Goa, Mozambique, and Angola, many of whom were of Indian descent.

A distinctive feature of the Indian diaspora in Portugal is the way in which migration and transnationalism shape the identities, practices, and experiences of its members. Many Indian families maintain close ties to their home regions, whether through remittances, frequent visits, or communication with relatives back in India, Mozambique, or Angola. These ties are crucial in maintaining a sense of belonging to both the Indian and Portuguese worlds. Transnational identities in the Indian diaspora often involve a complex negotiation between maintaining one's Indian heritage and adapting to Portuguese society. This is reflected in cultural practices such as food, religion, festivals, and language.

Over time, this community diversified into entrepreneurship, especially in the hospitality and retail sectors. Indian-run restaurants, particularly those serving Goan and South Indian cuisine, have become integral to the Portuguese culinary scene, especially in cities like Lisbon and Porto (Dias, 2019). Culturally, Indian immigrants have made significant contributions to the Portuguese social fabric. Goan religious festivals such as the Feast of St. Francis Xavier and Carnival, as well as Hindu festivals like Diwali and Navratri, have been integrated into Portugal's multicultural identity (Dias, 2019). These cultural exchanges have

fostered mutual understanding and tolerance between Indian and Portuguese communities. The influence of Indian culture is also evident in the growing popularity of yoga, Bollywood, and Indian art forms within Portuguese society (Gomes, 2018). The Indian diaspora in Portugal also plays an active role in charity work, focusing on education, health, and community welfare. Through community organizations, Indian immigrants support social causes such as food distribution, healthcare, and education for underprivileged communities. These charitable activities have helped integrate the Indian community into the broader Portuguese society, fostering social cohesion and solidarity (Nair, 2020).

When comparing the Indian diaspora in Portugal to other European countries, Portugal's Indian population remains smaller, though it is unique in its historical and cultural ties to Goa. The Indian diaspora in the United Kingdom is significantly larger and has seen extensive integration into various sectors, including healthcare, education, and IT (Singh, 2020). In contrast, the Indian communities in Germany, France, and Italy have made notable contributions to fields like engineering and healthcare, although their integration is still evolving. In Portugal, the Goan community is particularly influential in sectors such as hospitality, small businesses, and community development. However, despite these contributions, challenges remain, especially with regard to integration. Language barriers and socio-economic disparities still hinder full social inclusion, though efforts to address these challenges have gained momentum in recent years (Patel, 2022).

One of the most notable groups of Indian migrants to Portugal are Goans, a group with deep historical and cultural ties to the country due to centuries of Portuguese colonial rule in Goa. The Goans have maintained their Portuguese citizenship, which allowed them easier migration pathways to Portugal. Starting from the mid-20th century, particularly after Goa's liberation from Portuguese colonial rule in 1961, Goans migrated in large numbers to Portugal in search of better economic opportunities, especially as the economy in Goa and other parts of India was struggling. Another significant group of Indian migrants to Portugal comes from the former Portuguese colonies of Mozambique and Angola, particularly after those countries gained independence in the 1970s. Many people of Indian descent who had been living in these African colonies for generations faced uncertain futures after the end of Portuguese colonial rule. Political instability, economic hardship, and civil conflict in both Mozambique and Angola drove many to migrate to Portugal.

In more recent decades, the Indian diaspora in Portugal has become more diverse, with individuals coming not only from Goa and Africa but also from other parts of India, including the states of Gujarat, Maharashtra, and Kerala. Migration today is often driven by economic opportunities, education, and family reunification. In addition to the established Goan community, Indian professionals, students, and entrepreneurs have become increasingly visible in Portugal's cities, especially in Lisbon and Porto.

Understanding the Trajectories and Perspectives

The demographics of the Indian community in Portugal are diverse and evolving. As of 2023, the Indian community in Portugal is estimated to be around 34,000, making it the fourth-largest immigrant group in the country. The Indian immigrant population tends to be young and working-age, with many individuals migrating for employment opportunities in sectors like construction, IT, healthcare, and hospitality. Youth and Working-age population (ages 18-45) constitutes a significant portion of the community, which is reflected in the economic activity in sectors such as retail and service industries. The elderly population remains relatively smaller, though there is a growing trend of family reunification, leading to an increase in the elderly and children. There is a higher male-to-female ratio among the Indian population, which is typical of labour migration patterns. Men often migrate first for work, and families are often reunited later. However, the gender gap has been narrowing as family reunification increases, especially in cities like Lisbon.

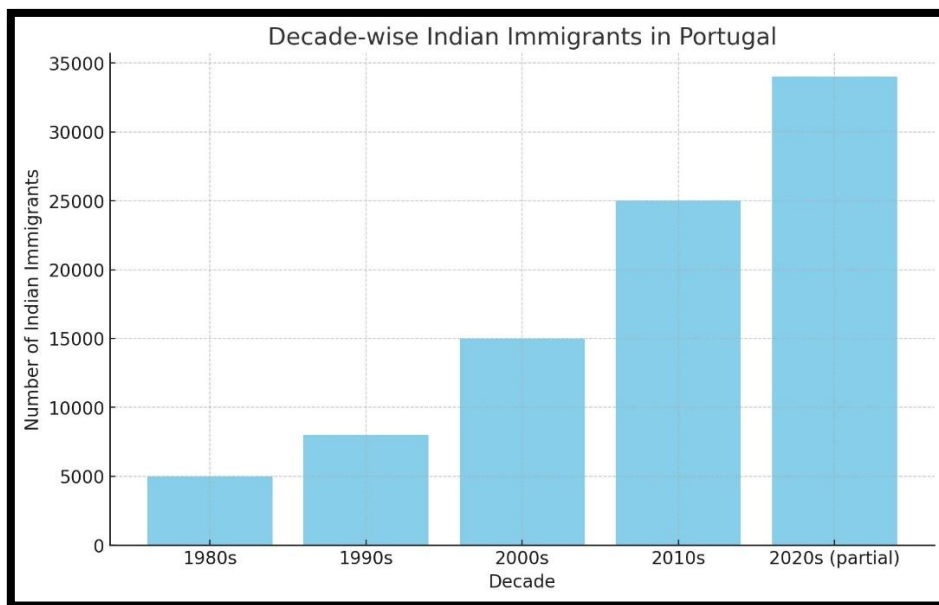
Scholarly perspectives on Indian migration to Portugal provide a nuanced understanding of the forces shaping the diaspora. The history of migration, particularly from Goa, Daman, and Diu, has been shaped by colonial legacies. Historian José Ramos Torgal argues that migration from India to Portugal was not solely driven by economic opportunity but was deeply influenced by the historical, cultural, and social ties forged during the colonial period (Torgal 112). This continued cultural affinity facilitated migration, particularly among the Goans, after Portugal's annexation of Goa in 1961.

Anthropologists like Carla Martins suggest that Indian migration from Goa to Portugal must be understood in terms of 'diasporic continuity,' where Goan migrants maintained strong transnational ties to their homeland, including language (Konkani) and religious practices (Martins 58). These elements of cultural identity have played a crucial role in shaping the integration of the Goan community into Portuguese society, while preserving their distinct cultural practices in the diaspora.

Scholars such as Olga da Silva have also noted the pivotal role of labour migration in the post-colonial era, as Goan workers filled labour shortages in sectors such as construction, agriculture, and services (da Silva 104). This labour migration was vital during Portugal's economic expansion in the 1960s and 1970s, and the Goans' shared colonial heritage made their integration into Portuguese society relatively smooth compared to migrants from other parts of India.

However, the more recent wave of migration, particularly under Portugal's Golden Visa program, represents a distinct shift toward investment-driven migration. Migration researcher Siddharth K. Suri argues that this program has attracted economically affluent individuals, reshaping the diaspora by introducing a new class of upper-middle-class and wealthy Indian migrants who seek not only residency but also opportunities for business expansion within the EU (Suri 34).

Factors for Migration and Immigration Trends



Graph 2: Decade-wise immigration of Indians to Portugal

Source: SEF Immigration and Borders Report 2023

Here's a bar chart illustrating the estimated decade-wise immigration of Indians to Portugal. The data shows a gradual increase, with significant growth in the 2010s and even more in the 2020s, indicating a rising trend in Indian migration to Portugal.

The annexation of Goa in 1961 continues to shape the public discourse around Indo-Portuguese relations. Despite Portugal's formal recognition of the annexation, the historical memory of colonial loss remains an influential factor in shaping contemporary attitudes, particularly among the older generations (Borges 45). This historical backdrop complicates the

modern relationship, as debates about colonial exploitation and historical grievances continue to surface in intellectual circles and public discussions, occasionally hindering people-to-people ties (Borges 67).

In the realm of trade, despite growing bilateral exchanges, the economic relationship between India and Portugal remains imbalanced. India exports significantly more to Portugal than it imports, with Portuguese exports concentrated in machinery, chemicals, and agricultural products, while Indian exports include textiles, pharmaceuticals, and engineering goods (Singh and Pereira 112). The challenge of diversifying trade and achieving a more balanced exchange is a focal point for both countries, particularly in sectors like technology and renewable energy (Bastos 110).

Moreover, the Golden Visa program, which has drawn Indian investors, has not yet resulted in substantial direct investment flows between the two countries. While the program has bolstered real estate and business ventures, Indian companies are more likely to invest in other EU countries with larger markets and established business ecosystems (Alves 88). Similarly, Portuguese firms have shown limited interest in investing in India, despite the potential for growth in sectors such as renewable energy and infrastructure (Reddy 64).

Portugal, as a member of the European Union, has long supported closer EU-India relations, championing India's interests within the Union. As both nations advocate for stronger economic and trade ties between India and the EU, Portugal has positioned itself as an ally in enhancing India's global presence, particularly in areas like technological development and global governance (Almeida 122). Yet, India's relationship with the EU is complex, marked by the varying national priorities of member states. While Portugal has actively supported India's stance on issues such as United Nations Security Council (UNSC) reform, India's frustrations often stem from the EU's cautious approach to trade and defence cooperation (Bastos 30).

The Indo-Portuguese relationship is also impacted by the dynamics of maritime security, especially in the Indian Ocean region, where both countries share common interests (Fernandes 78). However, defence cooperation remains limited, as Portugal's defence capabilities do not match those of larger EU powers, and India's focus on regional security often leads it to prioritize other strategic partners, such as the United States and Japan (Reddy 50). Despite this, the two nations have fostered cooperation in areas such as counter-terrorism, peacekeeping, and defence technology, although maritime cooperation remains peripheral to India's broader naval strategy (Almeida 65).

Migration, Integration, and the Role of the Diaspora

India and Portugal share strong diplomatic relations, rooted in both historical ties and contemporary global challenges. These two nations have collaborated on several global security issues, including maritime security and counter-piracy operations. Portugal, situated on the western edge of Europe, plays a strategic role in maritime security, which aligns with India's interests in securing international sea routes, particularly in the Indian Ocean region (Vijayan, 2020). Additionally, both nations have cooperated in peacekeeping missions and the fight against terrorism, recognizing the importance of a united approach to global security. Both countries have also supported each other's positions in multilateral organizations, notably the United Nations. Portugal has supported India's bid for a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), while India has backed Portugal's involvement in various UN peacekeeping and development initiatives (Gomes, 2018). This alignment reflects both countries' shared commitment to multilateralism and a more inclusive global governance structure.

The socio-cultural integration of Indian migrants, particularly from Goa, has been an area of significant scholarly interest. Sociologist Joaquim Carvalho examines the process of cultural hybridity, noting that the Goan community in Portugal has developed a unique Indo-Portuguese identity, blending Indian traditions like Konkani language and Catholicism with Portuguese cultural practices (Carvalho 78). This hybridity is most evident in the cultural, social, and religious practices of the Goan diaspora, which continue to shape their collective identity in Portugal.

However, newer Indian migrants face challenges in cultural integration. Miriam Cooke points out that these migrants, particularly those from South India or those who have recently arrived, often encounter racial discrimination based on their ethnicity, skin color, or socioeconomic status. Such experiences can inhibit their social mobility and complicate their integration into Portuguese society (Cooke 56).

The Golden Visa program, while attracting wealthier migrants, has created a class of Indian elites who maintain transnational ties through investments, social media, and business ventures. These newer migrants are less likely to face the same integration challenges as earlier labour migrants from Goa, who were able to rely on established social networks within the Goan community (Suri 58). However, despite the positive economic contributions of these migrants, some face challenges in securing formal recognition of their educational qualifications or navigating bureaucratic hurdles in securing work permits (Alves and Carvalho 45).

The Context of Indo-Portuguese Diplomatic Ties

In recent decades, diplomatic relations between India and Portugal have strengthened, with both countries working to overcome the legacy of colonialism and build a partnership based on mutual benefit (Costa 98). The bilateral relationship has expanded beyond trade and economic engagement to encompass cultural, educational, and technological cooperation. High-level diplomatic visits, such as those by Portuguese Prime Minister António Costa, have been crucial in fostering goodwill, particularly given his Goan heritage (Bastos 102).

Joint statements issued by both nations emphasize their shared commitment to democracy, human rights, and multilateralism, and underscore the growing cooperation in areas such as climate change, defence, and technology (Reddy 45). Trade between the two countries has steadily increased, with bilateral trade reaching €1.6 billion in 2022. Both countries are keen to expand this trade, particularly in sectors like renewable energy and technology, where there is significant potential for collaboration (Singh and Pereira 120).

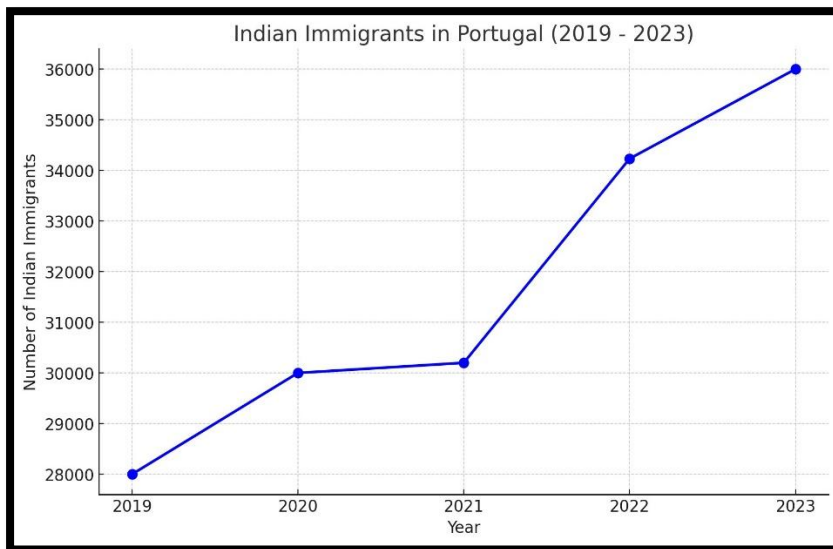
Cultural exchanges remain a cornerstone of the Indo-Portuguese relationship. Portugal's vibrant Indian diaspora, especially from Goa, plays a critical role in maintaining cultural ties between the two nations. Events such as the 'Year of India in Portugal' and reciprocal cultural festivals have contributed to greater mutual understanding (Martins 72). Additionally, academic and research partnerships have flourished, with increasing student exchanges and collaborative research projects in areas like innovation and sustainable development (Carvalho 90).

The Indian diaspora in Portugal, particularly the Goan community, continues to serve as a bridge between the two nations, strengthening cultural, social, and economic ties. While challenges related to migration policies, economic integration, and the historical legacy of colonialism persist, the growing cooperation in sectors like renewable energy, technology, and maritime security offers promising opportunities for deeper bilateral engagement. The evolving Indo-Portuguese relationship highlights the significance of historical ties in shaping contemporary migration patterns, while also illustrating the ways in which both nations can work together to address shared challenges in an increasingly interconnected world.

The economic relationship between India and Portugal has seen steady growth over the years, albeit with a noticeable trade imbalance. India exports significantly more to Portugal than it imports, which has led to discussions around diversifying trade relations in high-value sectors. According to the World Bank, India's exports to Portugal primarily consist of machinery, chemicals, and textiles, while Portugal exports mostly wines, cork products, and

olive oil to India (World Bank, 2023). There is, however, potential to enhance cooperation in emerging sectors such as renewable energy, green technologies, and fintech. Portugal's progressive work in solar and wind energy aligns with India's ambitious renewable energy goals, creating a natural avenue for collaboration (Patel, 2022). The introduction of Portugal's Golden Visa program, which offers residency to non-EU nationals making significant investments, has attracted Indian investors, particularly in the real estate sector (Rodrigues, 2021). This program provides opportunities for Indian entrepreneurs and businesses to expand their presence in Portugal, thus enhancing economic integration. Moreover, the growing number of Indian investors in Portugal is also a sign of the growing economic importance of the bilateral relationship.

Future Prospects



Graph 3: Indian Immigrants in Portugal (2019-2023)

Source: SEF Immigration and Borders Report 2023

Here's a graph showing the increase in the number of Indian immigrants in Portugal from 2019 to the estimated count in 2023. The upward trend reflects a steady growth, especially notable between 2021 and 2022, where there was a significant increase. The future prospects for Indian immigrants in Portugal are bright, particularly in sectors such as technology, healthcare, and green energy. Portugal's growing reputation as a hub for tech start-ups, especially in Lisbon and Porto, presents opportunities for skilled Indian professionals in fields like artificial intelligence (AI), data science, and renewable energy (Rodrigues, 2021).

Additionally, Portugal's aging population creates a rising demand for healthcare professionals, a sector where Indian-trained doctors and nurses can contribute significantly.

Portugal's favourable immigration policies, including the Golden Visa program and the Tech Visa for skilled professionals, continue to attract Indian investors and workers (World Bank, 2023). These policies, combined with the country's increasing focus on sustainability and innovation, create an environment conducive to professional growth and integration for Indian immigrants. Furthermore, the children of Indian immigrants, particularly the second-generation Goans, are expected to play a critical role in bridging cultural gaps and enhancing community integration. As these young professionals enter Portugal's educational and professional sectors, their contributions will further solidify the Indian community's position in Portuguese society (Singh, 2020).

Conclusion

The Indian diaspora in Portugal represents an intriguing intersection of colonial history, migration, and transnationalism. The history of Indian migration to Portugal can be traced back to the colonial period, but contemporary migration patterns have been shaped by a complex web of political, economic, and social factors.

The India-Portugal bilateral relationship has evolved from a colonial history to a multifaceted partnership in the 21st century. Both nations have fostered strong diplomatic, economic, and cultural ties, with the Indian diaspora in Portugal acting as a key bridge between the two. The contributions of the Indian community, particularly the Goan diaspora, have enriched Portugal's cultural diversity, economic development, and diplomatic relations. However, challenges in terms of full social integration remain, particularly with regard to language barriers and socio-economic inequalities. Moving forward, both India and Portugal stand to benefit from continued cooperation in emerging sectors like technology, renewable energy, and tourism. The Indian community in Portugal will remain a vital force in strengthening the bilateral relationship, fostering both cultural exchange and economic growth. As Portugal continues to embrace its multicultural identity, the Indian diaspora will play a central role in shaping the country's future.

Despite the contributions and integration of the Indian diaspora in Portugal, members of the community face challenges in areas like employment, education, and social integration.

Discrimination, language barriers, and limited recognition of foreign qualifications are common obstacles for newer migrants. However, as the diaspora grows and becomes more established, there are increasing opportunities for greater social mobility and political influence. Moreover, the Indian community in Portugal has also begun to assert its presence in the political and cultural landscape. The formation of associations and cultural organizations dedicated to the interests of the diaspora has helped raise awareness about the contributions of the Indian community to Portuguese society.

The trajectories of the Indian diaspora in Portugal are shaped by a combination of historical, political, and economic factors that reflect broader global patterns of migration, imperialism, and transnationalism. The Indian diaspora in Portugal is not a monolithic group, but rather a diverse community with deep roots in both Indian and Portuguese histories. Over time, this community has contributed significantly to the social, cultural, and economic life of Portugal, while also maintaining strong transnational ties to India and other parts of the world. Understanding these trajectories involves appreciating the complexity of identity formation, migration, and the ongoing negotiation between local and global forces.

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