



Studying Abroad as a Person Living With HIV

As for me, I'm still searching for a country where I can live, study, access healthcare, find housing, and build something stable.

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I've always dreamed of studying abroad. My dream countries were France, Canada, and the United States. In 2015, when I was in 8th grade, my sister who lives in the United States had planned, along with her friend living in Germany, to bring me to Europe so I could live with that friend. We started the process: national ID, passport... But the project was never completed.

After I graduated high school in 2019, I resumed my search for universities abroad. I had found two institutions in Canada: Laval University and the University of Montreal. I had already started filling out the application forms, and my sister was ready to cover the costs. But as I dug deeper, I discovered that Canada imposes restrictions on people living with HIV, especially for long-term stays. This information deeply disappointed me. I felt excluded from a dream I held dear and gave up.

Unfortunately, many countries still maintain entry restrictions for people living with HIV, whether for studies or work. So eventually, I gave it all up.

For a long time, Canada was a highly sought-after destination for young Cameroonians. It still is today. Many of my friends now live there. When I see their photos, I feel a silent pain. I had that dream too. But because of an illness I didn't choose, that dream was never fulfilled.

My sister wanted to bring me to the United States, but the process turned out to be very complicated. The U.S. family reunification program gives priority to parents, spouses, and children under 21. Siblings are not considered a priority, which makes the process very long and difficult. Given this challenge, she suggested I apply for the U.S. DV Lottery. I hesitated, unsure whether the U.S. would accept someone living with HIV. But she showed me a screenshot proving that it was no longer a disqualifying factor. Still, once doubt settled in my mind, I gave up again.

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In 2024, she sent me a post listing countries that Cameroonians can enter without a visa, including Singapore. She said, "If you spoke English well, I would have told you to go there right away." Curious, I did some research. I discovered a modern, safe, and technologically advanced country. I started imagining myself there, as a photographer capturing the landscapes, filming life, discovering the local culture. But when I checked the hivtravel.org site (now positivedestinations.info), my hopes were quickly dashed. Singapore prohibits stays longer than 90 days for people living with HIV. I wrote to an organization (Afa Singapore) to ask if this restriction was still in place. They confirmed that nothing had changed. I simply thought, "That's life."

But among all these closed doors, there is hope. Countries like Greece, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Denmark, Portugal, and Spain no longer have restrictions for people living with HIV. These countries show openness and humanity. I hope others will follow their example.

As for me, I'm still searching for a country where I can live, study, access healthcare, find housing, and build something stable. I have several destinations in mind, but what holds me back today are financial means. My sister is willing to support me in my efforts, and I know how lucky I am. But the requirements are sometimes very demanding.

Right now, I'm keeping the dream alive. I want to leave. I want to see something new, give myself a chance elsewhere. What I want is a new chapter in my life, a fresh start. I hope this will finally be the moment when my life takes a positive turn where I can be useful, fulfilled, and fully myself.

The Well Project is a non-profit organization whose mission is to change the course of the HIV/AIDS pandemic through a unique and comprehensive focus on women and girls across the gender spectrum. Visit their website, www.thewellproject.org, to access fact sheets (English and Spanish), blogs, and advocacy tools, and to join a global community of women living with HIV.

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