14 EDUCATION INDICATORS IN FOCUS

education **data** education **evidence** education **policy** education **analysis** education **statistics**

2013/05 (July)

How is international student mobility shaping up?

- **Between 2000 and 2011, the number of international students has more than doubled. Today, almost 4.5 million tertiary students are enrolled outside their country of citizenship.**
- **The largest numbers of international students are from China, India and Korea. Asian students account for 53% of all students studying abroad worldwide.**
- **New players have emerged on the international education market in the past decades, such as Australia, New Zealand, Spain, the Russian Federation and, more recently, Korea. By contrast, the share of international students in some of the most attractive countries – Germany and the United States, for instance – has declined.**
- **As countries increasingly benefit from student mobility, the competition to attract and retain students has diversified the map of destinations over the past decade.**

The internationalisation of tertiary education has gone hand in hand with its expansion.

The number of students enrolled in tertiary education outside their country of citizenship has sharply increased over the last decades, reflecting the expansion of tertiary education systems worldwide and the globalisation of economies and societies. As most students who study abroad choose to do so in OECD countries, the expansion of tertiary education outside the OECD area has fuelled its intake of foreign students.

The number of students enrolled in tertiary education outside their country of citizenship increased more than threefold, from 1.3 million in 1990 to nearly 4.3 million in 2011, representing an average annual growth rate of almost 6%. This is a greater increase than the overall rise in tertiary enrolments globally. Contrary to what some observers expected, there has been no decline in the growth rate of international students during the global economic crisis (see chart on page 2).

Among the benefits of studying abroad perceived by an increasing number of students are the cultural enrichment and improved language skills, high-status qualifications, and a competitive edge to access better jobs. Studying abroad helps students to expand their knowledge of other societies, languages, cultures and business methods, and to leverage their labour market prospects (OECD, 2004). Moreover, declines in the costs of international travel and communications also make it easier for students to study abroad.

Mapping the international student intake.

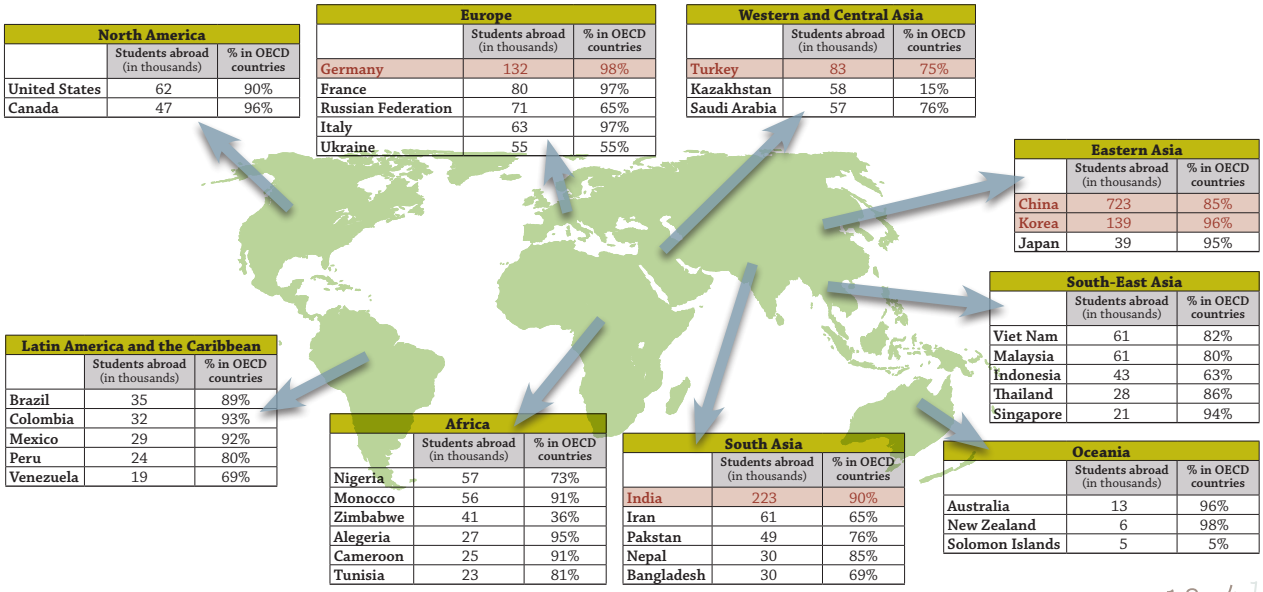
In 2011, the largest numbers of foreign students came from China, India and Korea. Asian students represented 53% of foreign students enrolled in tertiary education worldwide, with 3 out of 4 of them enrolled in an OECD country (see map). In some countries, such as China, students are encouraged to study abroad as part of a capacity building strategy (OECD/World Bank, 2007).

International students are those who have crossed borders for the purpose of study. The UNESCO Institute for Statistics, the OECD and EUROSTAT define international students as those who are not residents of their country of study or those who received their prior education in another country. When data on international students are not available, data on foreign students are used.

Foreign students are defined according to their citizenship. International students are thus a subset of foreign students.

The Asian group is followed by Europeans (23%), particularly citizens from European Union (EU) countries that are also members of the OECD (EU21) (14%). Students from Africa account for 12% of all international students, while those from the rest of the world account for only 12%.

Top countries of origin of foreign students, by regions of the world, in 2011



North America	Students abroad (in thousands)	% in OECD countries
United States	62	90%
Canada	47	96%

Europe	Students abroad (in thousands)	% in OECD countries
Germany	132	98%
France	80	97%
Russian Federation	71	65%
Italy	63	97%
Ukraine	55	55%

Western and Central Asia	Students abroad (in thousands)	% in OECD countries
Turkey	83	75%
Kazakhstan	58	15%
Saudi Arabia	57	76%

Eastern Asia	Students abroad (in thousands)	% in OECD countries
China	723	85%
Korea	139	96%
Japan	39	95%

South-East Asia	Students abroad (in thousands)	% in OECD countries
Viet Nam	61	82%
Malaysia	61	80%
Indonesia	43	63%
Thailand	28	86%
Singapore	21	94%

Latin America and the Caribbean	Students abroad (in thousands)	% in OECD countries
Brazil	35	89%
Colombia	32	93%
Mexico	29	92%
Peru	24	80%
Venezuela	19	69%

Africa	Students abroad (in thousands)	% in OECD countries
Nigeria	57	73%
Monocco	56	91%
Zimbabwe	41	36%
Alegeria	27	95%
Cameroon	25	91%
Tunisia	23	81%

South Asia	Students abroad (in thousands)	% in OECD countries
India	223	90%
Iran	61	65%
Pakstan	49	76%
Nepal	30	85%
Bangladesh	30	69%

Oceania	Students abroad (in thousands)	% in OECD countries
Australia	13	96%
New Zealand	6	98%
Solomon Islands	5	5%

Note: Countries in red are the overall top countries of origin.
Source: OECD and UNESCO Institute for Statistics.

Global student mobility mirrors inter- and intra-regional migration patterns to a great extent. Furthermore, student flows in European countries and in Eastern Asia and Oceania tend to reflect the evolution of geopolitical areas, such as closer ties between Asia-Pacific countries and further co-operation between European countries beyond the European Union (UNESCO, 2009).

Globalisation: increasing choice and competition for international students.

In 2011, OECD countries were hosting some 77% of all students enrolled outside their country of citizenship. Within the OECD, almost half of all foreign students were enrolled in one of the top five destinations for tertiary studies abroad: the United States, with 17% of all foreign students worldwide followed by the United Kingdom (13%), Australia (6%), Germany (6%) and France (6%).

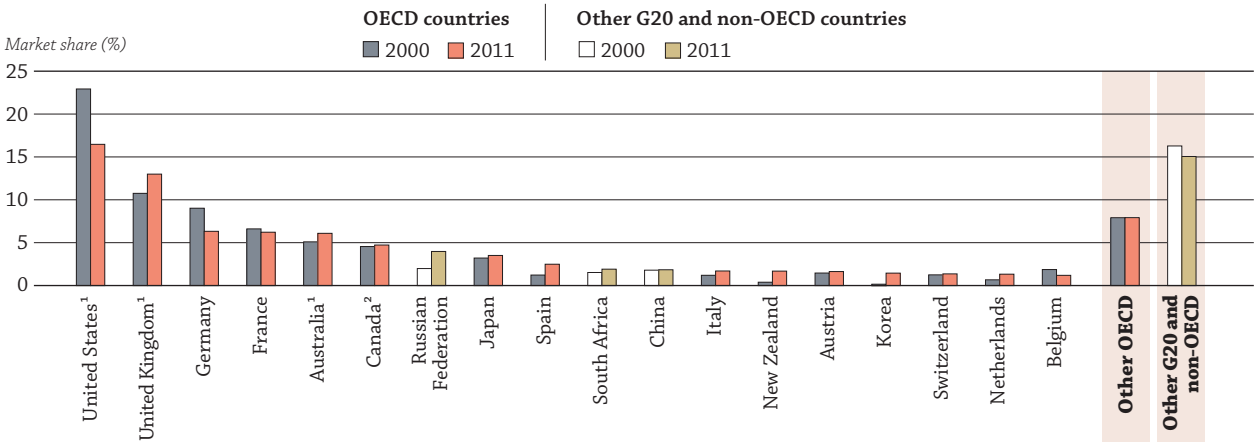
International students primarily go to English-speaking countries to study, often in the fields of social sciences, business and law (more than 30% of the total in these fields). Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States together host 36% of all foreign tertiary students enrolled worldwide. This proportion has remained fairly stable since 2000, when it stood at 39%.

International students are now more likely to be enrolled in the highest levels of education than in the past, reflecting an increasing internationalisation of academic research and science (OECD, 2009). In OECD countries, an average of one in five tertiary students enrolled in advanced research programmes in 2011 is international. This proportion exceeds 30% in Australia, France, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Switzerland and the United Kingdom.

New players have emerged on the international education market in the past few years. For instance, in 2011 significant numbers of foreign students were enrolled in Canada (5%), Japan (4%), the Russian Federation (4%) and Spain (2%). Conversely, the market share of some of the most popular countries has decreased: the share of international students in the United States dropped from 23% to 17% between 2000 and 2011, while the share of international students in Germany fell by three percentage points over the same period (see chart above). While it still has only a small share of the international education market, the number of foreign students in Korea has increased over 17-fold during this period.

Trends in international education market shares (2000, 2011)

Percentage of all foreign tertiary students enrolled, by destination



Note: Year of reference of data for countries other than OECD and G20 is 2010.
1. Data relate to international students defined on the basis of their country of residence. For the United Kingdom, data for 2011 is based on citizenship.
2. Year of reference 2010 instead of 2011.
Countries are ranked in descending order of 2011 market shares.
Source: OECD and UNESCO Institute for Statistics for most data on non-OECD countries. Table C4.7, available on line. See Annex 3 for notes (*www.oecd.org/edu/eag.htm*).

Fees, language and immigration policies can attract students – or put them off…

The reputation of a country's higher education and of its programmes may have an impact on the decision of where to study. However, immigration policy and language can also turn out to be a bridge or a barrier for international students. As English-speaking destinations are the most attractive in absolute numbers, an increasing number of non-English-speaking countries have started to offer courses in English in order to overcome their linguistic disadvantage. Immigration policies have also been recently modified in some OECD countries: Finland and Norway have amended their naturalisation laws to take into account the years of residence as a student when assessing eligibility for citizenship, while Canada facilitates permanent residence for international graduates (OECD, 2012). In contrast, countries like the United States and more recently the United Kingdom have made it more difficult for international students to enter.

The amount of tuition fees charged for international students can also have an impact on the attractiveness of a destination. Increasingly, public and private suppliers of education see international students as a source of additional revenue and have tended to raise the fees for international students. In the majority of OECD countries where data are available, the tuition fees charged by public educational institutions are higher for international students enrolled in the same programme than for domestic students (see table below).

Structure of tuition fees in OECD countries

Tuition fee structure	OECD countries
Higher tuition fees for international students than for domestic students	Australia, Austria,[1] Belgium,[1] Canada, the Czech Republic,[1] Denmark,[1] Estonia,[1] Iceland,[1] Ireland, the Netherlands,[1] New Zealand, Poland,[1] the Russian Federation, Sweden,[1] Turkey, the United Kingdom[1] and the United States
Same tuition fees for international and domestic students	France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Korea, Mexico, Spain, Switzerland
No tuition fees for either international or domestic students	Finland, Norway

1. For non-European Union or non-European Economic Area students.



… however, a high level of tuition fees does not necessary prevent a country from being attractive.

In some countries such as Australia, the United Kingdom or the United States, high levels of tuition fees are not necessarily a hindrance for international students. In some cases, international students can benefit from loans or scholarships to pursue their studies in these countries, in other cases programmes remain attractive thanks to the labour market opportunities they offer within the country of destination (as in Australia and New Zealand). However, the deterioration of the United States' market share may be attributed in part to the comparatively high tuition fees charged to international students, especially in a context of fierce competition from other, primarily English-speaking, destinations offering similar educational opportunities at a lower cost.

On the other hand, Nordic countries show a lower proportion of foreign students compared to all other countries, although they offer some programmes in English and charge low or no fees for national and foreign students. Moreover, in Sweden, the number of international students from countries outside the EEA and Switzerland declined by almost 60%, from 10 234 in the fourth quarter of 2010 to 4 269 in the fourth quarter of 2011 after the introduction of tuition fees for foreign students.

Host countries benefit from foreign students in both the short and long term.

Public and private suppliers of education also increasingly see international students as a source of additional revenues from exports of higher education services and tend to rise the fees for international students. As well as the fees charged by both public and private educational institutions, the revenues generated by international students during their period of study can be substantial especially in terms of living expenses (European Commission, 2013). In Canada, international student expenditure on tuition, accommodation and living expenses contributed more than CAD 8 billion to the economy in 2010. This amount is "greater than total Canadian exports of unwrought aluminium (CAD 6 billion) or Helicopters, Airplanes and Spacecraft (CAD 6.9 billion)" (Canada, 2012).

When foreign students stay on after graduation, they have a long-term influence on the economy. Overall, among the OECD countries with available data in 2008 and 2009, the stay rate is up to 25% and the large majority of them see over 20% of students stay on. In Australia, Canada, the Czech Republic and France, the rate is more than 30%, thereby affecting the labour market.

References

Canada (2012), *International Education: a Key Driver of Canada's Future Prosperity,* Advisory Panel on Canada's International Education Strategy Final Report, Canada.

European Commission (2013), *Immigration of International Students to the EU,* European Migration Network Study 2012, European Commission.

OECD (2004), *Internationalisation and Trade in Higher Education: Opportunities and Challenges,* OECD Publishing.

OECD (2009), *Higher Education to 2030, Volume 2: Globalisation,* OECD Publishing.

OECD (2012), *International Migration Outlook 2012,* OECD Publishing.

OECD/World Bank (2007), *Cross-Border Tertiary Education: A Way Towards Capacity Development,* OECD Publishing.

UNESCO (2009), *Global Education Digest 2009,* UNESCO Institute for Statistics, Montreal.

The bottom line **The number of students enrolled outside their country of citizenship has risen dramatically over the past decades, with Asian students making up 53% of the total in 2011. New players are entering the education market as a result of broader policies to attract and retain highly skilled migrants, a source of short- and long-term revenues for countries.**

Visit:
www.oecd.org/edu/eag.htm

See:
OECD (2013), *Education at a Glance 2013: OECD Indicators*, OECD Publishing.

For more information, contact:
Cuauhtemoc Rebolledo-Gómez (*Cuauhtemoc.Rebolledo-Gomez@oecd.org*)
Joris Ranchin (*Joris.Ranchin@oecd.org*)

Coming next month:
How many students will enter the university? And how many will get a degree?

Photo credit: © Ghislain & Marie David de Lossy/Cultura/Getty Images