

How many students study abroad and where do they go?

- More than 4.5 million students are enrolled in university-level education outside their home country. Australia, Austria, Luxembourg, New Zealand, Switzerland and the United Kingdom have the highest proportion of international students as a percentage of their total tertiary enrolments.
- Students from Asia represent 53% of foreign students enrolled worldwide. The largest numbers of foreign students are from China, India and Korea.
- OECD countries receive more international students than they send abroad for tertiary education. About three times as many foreign students are enrolled in tertiary education in OECD countries as there are OECD citizens studying abroad.
- Some 82% of all foreign students are enrolled in G20 countries, while 75% are enrolled in OECD countries. These proportions have remained stable during the past decade.

Significance

This section looks at the extent to which students are studying abroad and their preferred destinations. Pursuing higher-level education in a foreign country allows students to expand their knowledge of other societies and languages, and thus improve their prospects in globalised sectors of the labour market. Beyond its social and educational effects, studying abroad has a considerable economic impact. For host countries, enrolling international students can not only help raise revenues from higher education, but also can be part of a broader strategy to recruit highly skilled immigrants.

Findings

OECD countries attract three out of four students studying abroad, with Australia, Canada, France, Germany, the United Kingdom and the United States together receiving more than 50% of all foreign students worldwide.

In terms of geographical area, Europe is the top destination for tertiary level students enrolled outside their country of origin, hosting 48% of these students, followed by North America, which hosts 21% of all international students and Asia with 18%. The number of international students in Oceania has tripled since 2000, although this region hosts less than 10% of all foreign students. Other regions, such as Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, are also seeing growing numbers of international students, reflecting the internationalisation of universities in an increasing number of countries.

International students from OECD countries mainly come from Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Korea and the United States. In the 21 European countries that are members of the OECD, there were, on average, three foreign students per European citizen enrolled abroad.

International students represent 10% or more of the enrolments in tertiary education in Australia, Austria, Luxembourg, New Zealand, Switzerland and the United Kingdom. They also account for more than 30% of enrolments in advanced research programmes in Australia, Belgium, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom.

Trends

Over the past three decades, the number of students enrolled outside their country of citizenship has risen dramatically, from 0.8 million worldwide in 1975 to 4.5 million in 2012, a more than fivefold increase. During 2000-2012, the number of foreign tertiary students enrolled worldwide more than doubled, with an average annual growth rate of almost 7%. In OECD countries, the number of foreign students enrolled at the tertiary level mirrored the global trend.

Definitions

Students are classified as “international” if they left their country of origin and moved to another country to study. Students are classified as “foreign” if they are not citizens of the country in which they are studying. Data on international and foreign students refer to the academic year 2011-12 unless otherwise indicated and are based on the UOE data collection on education statistics administered by the OECD in 2012. Additional data from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics are also included.

Information on data for Israel:
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932315602>.

Going further

For additional material, notes and a full explanation of sourcing and methodologies, see *Education at a Glance 2014* (Indicator C4).

Areas covered include:

- Distribution of students by country of origin and destination.
- Trends in the numbers of students studying abroad.

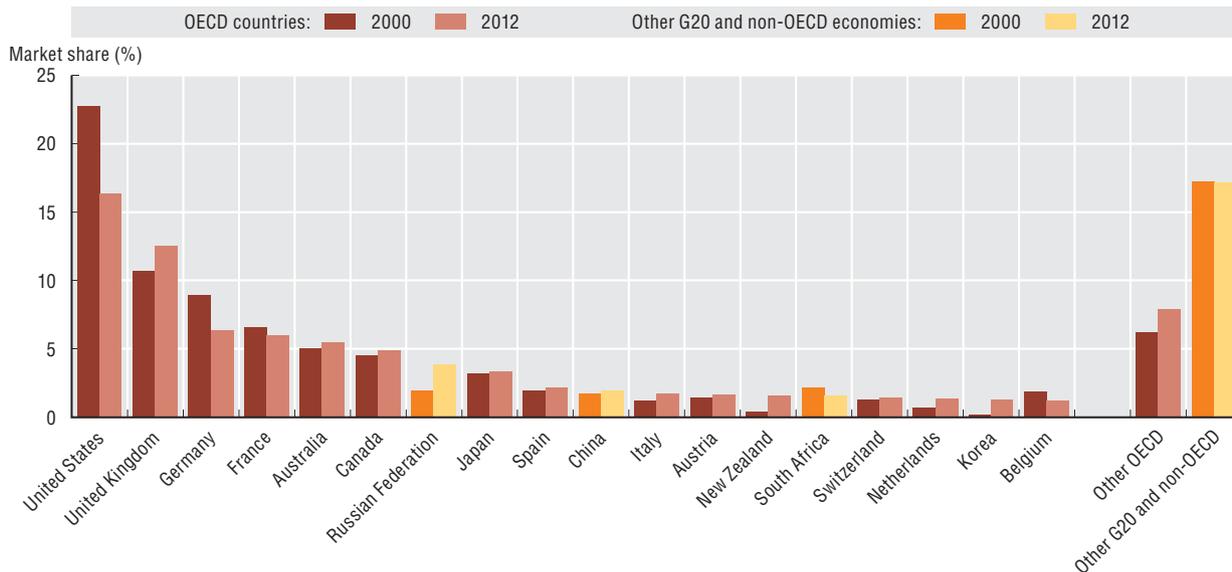
Further reading from OECD

OECD (2013), *International Migration Outlook 2013*, OECD Publishing, Paris, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/migr_outlook-2013-en.

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Figure 2.5. Trends in international education market shares (2000, 2012)

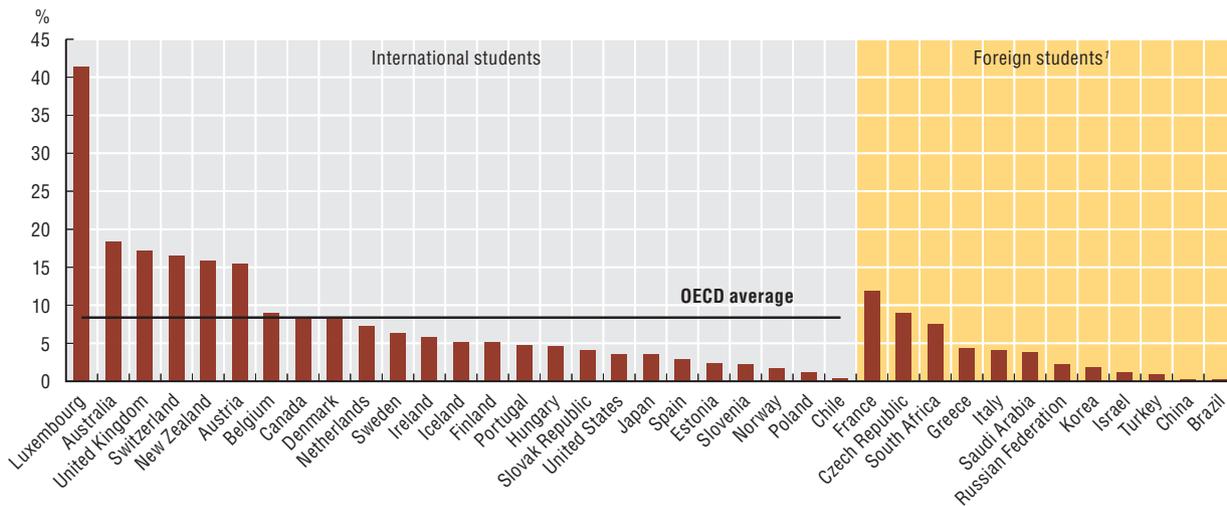
This figure shows the distribution of foreign and international students in tertiary education, by destination.



Source: OECD (2014), *Education at a Glance 2014*, Chart C4.3, available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933118827>.

Figure 2.6. Student mobility in tertiary education, 2012

This figure shows the percentage of international students at the tertiary level in each country.



1. Foreign students are defined on the basis of their country of citizenship, these data are not comparable with data on the international students and are therefore presented separately in the chart.

Source: OECD (2014), *Education at a Glance 2014*, Chart C4.4 available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933118846>.



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