

# 1. EDUCATION LEVELS AND STUDENT NUMBERS

## How many students study abroad?

- In 2009, almost 3.7 million tertiary students were enrolled outside their country of citizenship, representing an increase of more than 6% on the previous year.
- Just over 77% of students worldwide who study abroad do so in OECD countries.
- In absolute terms, the largest numbers of international students are from China, India and Korea. Asians account for 52% of all students studying abroad worldwide.

### Significance

This spread looks at the extent to which students are studying abroad. Pursuing higher-level education in a foreign country allows students to expand their knowledge of other cultures and languages, and to better equip themselves in an increasingly globalised labour market. Some countries, particularly in the European Union, have even established policies and schemes that promote such mobility to foster intercultural contacts and help build social networks.

### Findings

OECD countries attract the bulk of students who study abroad worldwide – just slightly under four out of five. A number of those students (32%) are themselves from other OECD countries. Students from Korea (4.8%), Germany (3.6%) and France (2.1%) represent the largest groups of foreign OECD students enrolled in other OECD countries, followed by students from Canada (1.8%), Japan (1.8%) and the United States (1.8%). But China is the biggest single source country, accounting for 18.2% of all students studying abroad in the OECD area (or 19.5% if Hong Kong-China is included). Indeed, Asia is generally the biggest source area of foreign students, making up 51% of the total in OECD countries. Their presence is particularly strong in Australia, Japan and Korea, where they account for more than 75% of international and foreign students. In the OECD area, Europeans form the second largest group, constituting 24.4% of international and foreign students, followed by Africa with 10%, Latin America and the Caribbean with 6% and North America with 3.7% (see Table C3.2 in *Education at a Glance 2011*).

There are big variations between countries in the percentage of international students enrolled in their tertiary student body, as the second chart on the opposite page shows. In Australia, international students represent 21.6% of tertiary students; 15.3% in the United Kingdom; 15.1% in Austria; 14.9% in Switzerland; and 14.6% in New Zealand. By contrast, the proportion in Chile, Estonia, Poland and Slovenia is less than 2%.

In a number of countries, especially in Australia and New Zealand, this large presence of international students has a significant impact on tertiary graduation rates (see Chart A3.4 in *Education at a Glance 2011*). If data for international students is excluded, Australia's graduation rate from university-level first degree programmes drops by 15 percentage points and New Zealand's by 9 percentage points.

### Trends

Over the past three decades, the number of international students has grown substantially, from 0.8 million worldwide in 1975 to almost 3.7 million in 2009, a more than four-fold increase. This growth has accelerated since the late 1990s, mirroring the processes of economic and social globalisation. The global increase in the number of international students also reflects the overall increase in tertiary enrolment.

### Definitions

Data on international and foreign students are based on the UOE data collection on education statistics, administered annually by the OECD. Data from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics are also included. 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. This latter category includes some students who are permanent residents, albeit not citizens, of the countries in which they are studying (for example, young people from immigrant families).

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 2011* (Indicators C3, A3 and C2).

Areas covered include:

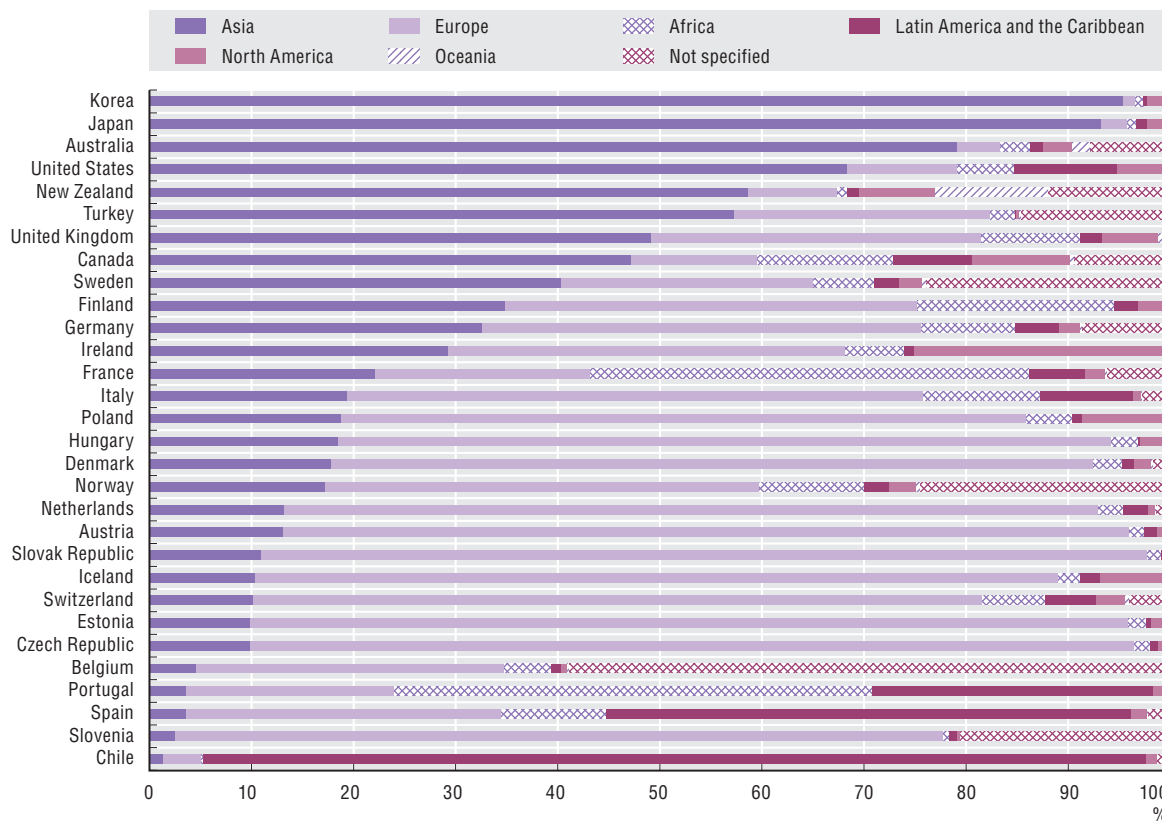
- Distribution of students by country of origin and destination.
- Trends in the numbers of students studying abroad.

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## How many students study abroad?

Figure 1.18. **Distribution of foreign and international students in tertiary education, by region of origin, 2009**

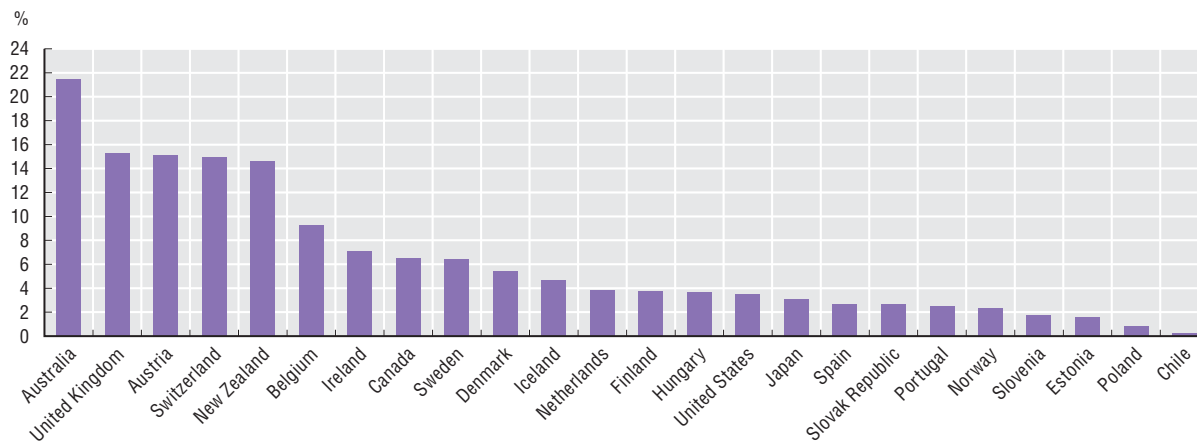
This figure shows the regional origins of international and foreign students studying in OECD countries. The majority of students studying abroad come from Asia (52%), followed by Europe (23%) and Africa (11.5%).



Source: OECD (2011), Education at a Glance 2011, Table C3.2, available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932464486>.

Figure 1.19. **Percentage of international students enrolled in tertiary education, 2009**

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



Source: OECD (2011), Education at a Glance 2011, Table C3.1, available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932464467>.



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