

How many students study abroad?

- In 2008, over 3.3 million tertiary students were enrolled outside their country of citizenship, representing an increase of nearly 11% on the previous year.
- Just over 79% of students worldwide who study abroad do so in OECD countries.
- Asians account for almost 49% of all students studying abroad in the OECD area.

Significance

This spread looks at the extent to which students are studying abroad. One way for students to expand their knowledge of other cultures and languages, and to better equip themselves in an increasingly globalized labour market, is to pursue their higher-level education in countries other than their own. 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 (31%) are themselves from other OECD countries: Of the total number of students studying abroad in the OECD area, 2.4% come from France 3.4% from Germany 2.1% from Japan, 4.6% from Korea and 1.8% each from Canada and the United States. But the biggest single source country is China, which accounts for 17.1% of all students studying abroad in the OECD area (or 18.5% if Hong Kong, China is included). Indeed, Asia generally is the biggest source area for such students, accounting for just under 49% 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, the Asian group is followed by the Europeans, accounting for 24.5% of international and foreign students, followed by Africa with 10.1%, South America with 5.3% and North America with 3.7% (see Table C2.2 in *Education at a Glance 2010*).

There are big variations between countries in the percentage of international students enrolled in their tertiary student body. In Australia, international students represent 20.6% of tertiary students; 15.5% in Austria; 12.9% in New Zealand; 14.1% in Switzerland; and 14.7% in the United Kingdom. By contrast, the

proportion in Chile and in Estonia and Slovenia is less than 2%.

As noted on page 16, the large presence of international students has a significant impact on tertiary entry rates in a number of countries, in especially Australia and New Zealand (see Chart A2.5 in *Education at a Glance 2010*). Equally, as the second chart on the opposite page shows, international and foreign students can have a big impact on tertiary graduation rates. If data from international students were excluded, graduation rates from university-level education in Australia and New Zealand would drop by 15 and 8 percentage points respectively.

Trends

Over the past three decades, the number of international students has grown substantially, from 0.8 million worldwide in 1975 to 3.3 million in 2008, a more than four-fold increase. This growth has accelerated since the late 1990s, mirroring the globalization of economies and societies.

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).

Going further

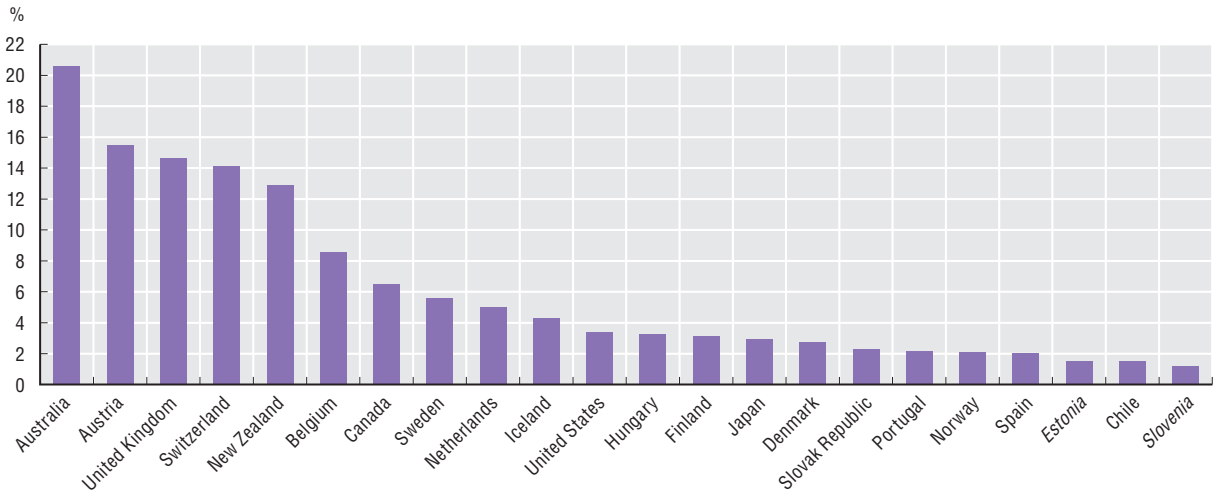
For additional material, notes and a full explanation of sourcing and methodologies, see *Education at a Glance 2010* (Indicators C2 and A3).

Areas covered include:

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

Figure 1.20. **Percentage of international students enrolled in tertiary enrolments, 2008**

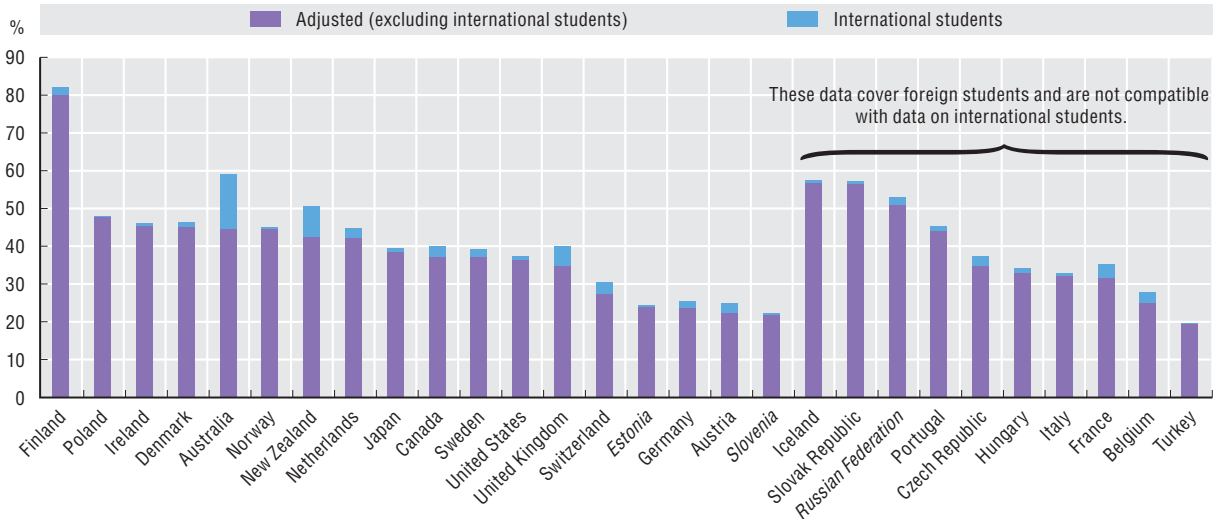
This figure shows the share of international students in each country's student body at tertiary level.



Source: OECD (2010), *Education at a Glance 2010*, Table C2.1, available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932310434>.

Figure 1.21. **Impact of international/foreign students on graduation rates in university-level education, 2008**

This figure shows the percentage of international and foreign students compared with domestic students among graduates taking a first degree.



Source: OECD (2010), *Education at a Glance 2010*, Table A3.3, available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932310130>.



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