

# 1. EDUCATION LEVELS AND STUDENT NUMBERS

## Where do students go to study abroad?

- Six countries – Australia, Canada, France, Germany, the United Kingdom and the United States – hosted more than half of the world's students who studied abroad in 2009.
- The United States saw a significant drop as a preferred destination of foreign students between 2000 and 2009, falling from about 23% of the global market share to 18%.
- The shares of foreign students who chose Australia and New Zealand as their destination grew by almost 2%, as did that in the Russian Federation, which has become an important new player on the international education market.

### Significance

This indicator describes students' preferred destinations and subjects they study. Beyond its social and educational effects, the phenomenon of studying abroad has a considerable economic impact. Some OECD countries already show signs of specialisation in the sort of education programmes they offer, and the internationalisation of education is likely to have a growing impact on some countries' balance of payments of services as a result of revenue from tuition fees and domestic consumption by international students.

### Findings

Even if their share of foreign students has slightly decreased by 2% in the past five years, European countries still lead the preferences in absolute numbers, with a share of 38%, followed by North America (23%). Nevertheless, the fastest growing regions of destination are Asia, Oceania, Latin America and the Caribbean, mirroring the internationalisation of universities in an increasing set of countries.

The five most popular destination countries in 2009 were: the United States, which took in 18% of all foreign students; the United Kingdom, 10%; and Australia, France and Germany, which each took in 7%. Other major destinations include Canada, 5%; Japan and the Russian Federation, 4%; and Spain, 2%. (Figures for Australia, the United Kingdom and United States refer to international students; see Definitions on page 30.)

Language is an essential factor in students' choice of destination country. Countries whose language of instruction is widely spoken and read (e.g. English, French, German, Russian and Spanish) are therefore leading destinations, although Japan is a notable exception. The dominance of English-speaking destinations, such as Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States, reflects the progressive adoption of English as a global language. An increasing number of institutions in non-English-speaking countries now offer courses in English as a way of attracting more foreign students.

International students are less represented in the humanities and were strongly represented in social sciences, business and law. Business programmes attract the largest numbers of international students. This is true in 14 of 22 countries reporting international students and in 2 of 6 countries reporting foreign students. Around half of all international students are enrolled in social sciences, business or law in Australia, Estonia, the Netherlands and Portugal. France has the largest proportion of foreign stu-

dents enrolled in these subjects (40%). Sciences attract at least 15% of international students in Germany, Iceland, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland and the United States, and a similar proportion of foreign students in France, but only 1.5% in Japan. The large proportion of foreign students in scientific disciplines in Germany may reflect the country's strong tradition in these fields. Non-English-speaking countries tend to enrol a higher proportion of international students in education, humanities and arts; these areas of study are preferred by 45% of international students in Iceland and by over 20% in Austria, Germany, Japan, Norway and Switzerland, as well as by foreign students in the Slovak Republic and Turkey.

### Trends

A number of countries saw a fall in their market shares in the first half of this decade. The most notable decline was in the United States, which was the destination for almost one in four international students in 2000, but fewer than one in five in 2009. Germany's market share fell by about two percentage points, the United Kingdom's by one percentage point, and Belgium's by about one percentage point. By contrast, the impressive growth in the Russian Federation's share by almost two percentage points makes it an important new player in the international education market. The shares of Australia and New Zealand also increased by about two percentage points each, and in Korea and Spain shares grew by more than one percentage point. The slump in the United States' share may be due in part to the increasing diversification of destinations, especially among fast-growing economies, as well as to competition from universities in the Asia-Pacific region, which are becoming increasingly active in their marketing efforts.

### Definitions

See previous spread.

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 and A4).

Areas covered include:

- Trends in international education market shares.

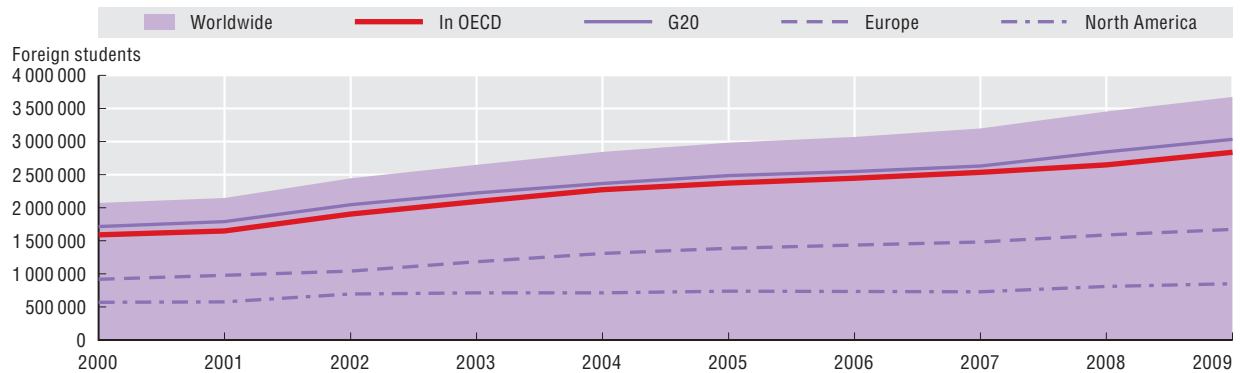
### Further reading from the OECD

*Cross-border Tertiary Education: A Way towards Capacity Development* (2007).

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

Figure 1.20. **Evolution in the number of students enrolled outside their country of citizenship (2000, 2009)**

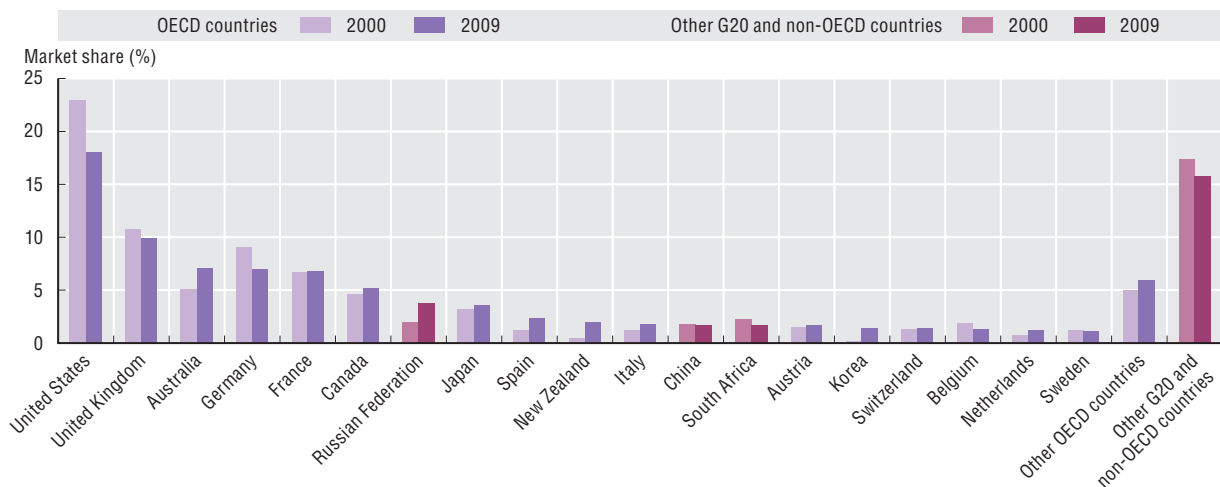
This figure shows the growth of foreign tertiary student enrolment, by regional grouping, over the past nine years.



Source: OECD (2011), *Education at a Glance 2011*, Table C3.5, available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932464543>.

Figure 1.21. **Trends in market share for international education (2000, 2009)**

This figure shows the share of all foreign tertiary students taken by each of the major study destinations, and how that share has changed. Most notably, almost a quarter of all foreign students went to the United States in 2000, but this has since fallen to less than a fifth.



Source: OECD (2011), *Education at a Glance 2011*, Table C3.6, available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932464562>.



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