Education can help young migrants integrate into society, learn the local language and develop the skills they will need for the adult world. Unfortunately, their track record in schooling is mixed – some do exceptionally well, but others encounter problems that can hold them back throughout life.
By way of introduction...

One word will long be associated with the Bracken Educate Together school in Ireland – “emergency”. In a country, where preparations for new schools usually begin at least 12 months – and often many years – in advance, this school was conceived, staffed and opened over just a few weeks in September 2007.

The school, housed to begin with in a summer holiday centre, is different in other ways, too. The pupils are almost all the children of migrants. They speak Pashto, Czech, Yoruba, Arabic, and many other languages. And, in a country where the bulk of the population is at least nominally Roman Catholic, the children mark the feasts of the world’s major religions – Diwali, Ramadan and, of course, Christmas.

The Bracken school is a monument to many things. At one level, it represents the difficulty of finding places for non-Catholic students in a primary school system still dominated by the Catholic Church. But perhaps more significantly, the Bracken school reflects a sea change that has swept over Irish society. Over a very short period this country of emigrants has become one of immigrants: in the mid-1990s, people born overseas represented less than 3% of Ireland’s population; today the figure is closer to 14%.

As the Bracken experience shows, planning for such change is difficult, and nowhere more so than in education. In some ways the questions are basic – how does a society with rapidly changing demographics find enough classrooms and teachers who can work in a multicultural environment? More profoundly, how does it ensure that schools really give migrant children the education they need to realise their full potential. Speaking to a reporter, the school’s administrator, Gerry McKevitt, put the challenges facing his school this way: “This is the front line in all this. This is where the problems are emerging. This is where integration is going to happen or not.”

This chapter looks at the intersection of education and migration. It examines how well immigrants do in education, drawing in part on data from the OECD’s PISA testing of 15-year-old students around the world. It then looks at ways in which immigrants can be helped to make up educational shortfalls. Finally, it examines the growing importance of the international student – an example of migration for education – and why universities and governments might like to see even more of them.
How well do migrants do in education?

Gerry McKevitt has a good point when he says that school is “where integration is going to happen or not”. His school is not alone. Many OECD countries now have sizeable numbers of students from immigrant backgrounds. In Germany, France and Sweden, for example, at least one in ten 15-year-old students is a first or second-generation immigrant. In the United States it’s one in six, while in Australia, New Zealand and Canada it’s more than one in five.

These raw numbers conceal as much as they reveal. Just like native populations, migrants are a diverse lot, and the families of immigrant children vary greatly in terms of income, education levels, attitudes towards schooling, language abilities and much more. Still, in at least three significant ways, school can play a role in supporting migrant children:

Firstly, education helps to mould the next generation, whether native-born or migrant. Around the world and throughout history, this process is seen as key to building long-term social stability – developing shared senses of identity and communicating core values and traditions to children. This is a complex task, and even in societies that are relatively homogenous there is often fierce debate over the sort of values schools should help to transmit. In multicultural societies, this task is even more fraught, and it can raise questions over societies’ core values and the extent to which immigrants should be expected to adopt them. Are they derived from religious or secular values? Do they stress the need for people to work together or to make their own way in the world? Do they seek to pass on tradition or urge an embrace of modernity?

“As socialising agents, schools help transmit the norms and values that provide a basis for social cohesion. In diverse, multi-ethnic societies, this task is not only important, but also complex.”

Where Immigrant Students Succeed

These questions may sound abstract, but how they are asked and how they are answered can have implications in the real world. For example, two very different OECD countries, France and Turkey, have both struggled with debates over whether
Islamic girls and women should be allowed to wear headscarves in educational institutions. Opponents say the wearing of headscarves in state-run schools and colleges flies in the face of official secularist values. Proponents argue that not allowing girls and young women to wear headscarves leads religious families to keep them at home, thus depriving them of a full education.

Secondly, education plays a key role in the lives of migrant children when it comes to language learning, a process that can also help to form useful social bridges. And, finally, just as with native-born children, education helps immigrant children to develop the skills and competencies they will need to find jobs later on in life and to navigate their way through the adult world.

How well do schools do in educating immigrant children? Do immigrants do better – or worse – than native-born children? Over the past few years, the OECD’s PISA programme for testing students around the world has been helping to answer these questions.

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<th>What is a first-generation migrant?</th>
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<td>Immigrants who were born in another country are called first-generation immigrants. Those whose parents were born in another country, but who themselves were born in the country where their parents have settled, are known as second-generation immigrants. These distinctions are important when it comes to looking at how immigrant children are doing in education. For instance, second-generation students often speak the local language better than first-generation immigrants, and their test scores tend to be stronger, although not always markedly so. Nevertheless, PISA also shows that both first and second generation issues face many similar challenges in education.</td>
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What does PISA tell us?

PISA – the Programme for International Student Assessment – is an OECD project that tests the abilities of a sample of 15-year-old students around the world every three years. Unlike regular school exams, which usually test students to see how much of the curriculum they’ve absorbed, PISA is more broad ranging. It seeks to determine how well young people at the age of 15 – a point that in a number of countries marks the end of compulsory schooling – can apply their skills in reading, mathematics and science to solving real-world problems.
As well as the tests themselves, PISA also collects a very wide range of data on students’ personal and family background, as well as on their motivation to learn and attitudes to school. OECD has analysed the results to see how well immigrant students are performing, and has produced a huge amount of data and information.

Here are some of the findings:

**Some migrant students do well, some don’t:** A self-evident point, but one that bears repeating. In parts of the world, racism and xenophobic attitudes are a constant – albeit at times inaudible – backbeat in the migration debate, and they can obscure the reality that migrant students, like any other student, are individuals. Just as in the wider population, family and social background can go a long way to determining how well an individual migrant student does in school, but they’re not the only factors. The student’s own attitudes and personality matter a lot, and this is true of migrants just as much as native students. That said, looking at average performance in the PISA results shows that children from immigrant backgrounds do better in some countries than in others. Understanding why is important, as it can offer clues to how education systems can better support migrant students. But it’s also important to bear in mind that because of varying country admission policies, schools in one country may not be dealing with the same sort of immigrants as those in another country: In some countries migrant families may typically be wealthier, better educated or more fluent in the local language than in others.

**Migrant students want to learn:** Amid the great diversity of findings from PISA, one result shows up with what OECD researchers call “striking” consistency – migrant students are at least as keen to learn, if not more so, than native-born students. There has been a lot of speculation over why this should be so. In part, it may be because people who migrate are more motivated to succeed and optimistic about the future. Whatever the reasons, the finding is important because it shows that schools have much to build on in terms of students’ positive attitudes.

“Previous research suggests that immigrants tend to be optimistic and may therefore possess more positive learning characteristics.”

**Where Immigrant Students Succeed**

**Migrant students’ performance varies between countries:** In three of the traditional settlement countries – Australia, Canada
and New Zealand – immigrant students did every bit as well as native students in the PISA 2006 tests. For example, in those countries about 18% of second-generation immigrants reached the highest levels (Levels 5 and 6), which was about the same as native students. But in a number of other countries, most notably Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden, they did noticeably less well. In Denmark, only about 1% of second-generation immigrants were top performers, against 7% for natives.

It’s tempting to imagine that these differences might be mainly due to the likelihood that migrant students’ parents in Australia are wealthier and better educated than those in Denmark. But this isn’t the full answer. PISA shows striking variations in the performance of immigrant children with very similar backgrounds in different countries. For instance, in PISA 2003, immigrant students from Turkey living in Switzerland scored 31 points higher in maths than those living in Germany. This effectively means the children in Switzerland were not too far off from being a full year ahead of those in Germany, even though they were still behind native students (38 points on PISA’s 600-point scale is roughly equivalent to a school year’s difference). This finding is important, because it shows that schools in some countries are doing a better job of educating migrant students.

Many migrant students are struggling in school: PISA grades students in each subject area on a scale from 1 to 6, where Level 1 equals the weakest performance and Level 6 the strongest. These levels reflect more than just how well students are doing in school – they’re designed to give a sense of whether students have sufficient skills to be able to make real use of them in later life. For example, can they do the sort of maths needed to work out price differences in the supermarket or to figure out interest rates on a loan? In the 2003 tests on maths skills, it was reckoned that students falling below Level 2 risked facing lifelong problems in this sort of area.

“... the long-term social and financial costs of educational inequalities can be high, as those without the competencies to participate socially and economically may not realise their potential and are likely to generate higher costs for health, income support, child welfare and security.”

PISA 2006: Science Competencies for Tomorrow’s World
Only very small percentages of native students failed to reach Level 2, but that wasn’t true for immigrant students. In most of the countries with large immigrant populations that took part in the 2003 PISA round, around a quarter of first generation immigrant students failed to reach Level 2. In some countries, the proportion was even higher – around two out of five in Belgium, France, Norway and Sweden. These are worrying findings, as they indicate that many migrant students will face serious problems later on, including poor job prospects, low earnings and difficulties playing a full part in society.

**What explains migrants’ PISA performance?**

What causes these variations? Why do the children of some migrants do better than others? The range of factors is wide, and they aren’t always easy to disentangle from each other, but here are some of the more significant.


[StatLink](http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/141848881750)
Country admission policies: The sort of immigrants that settle in a country makes a difference to how well migrant students do in school. For instance, some traditional permanent settlement countries like Australia use selection systems to decide who should be allowed to immigrate, grading would-be citizens for things like professional skills, language abilities and – crucially – educational qualifications. So, migrants to Australia tend to be better educated and to have higher incomes than those who go to, say, Germany. In turn, their children tend to do better in PISA testing.

Socio-economic background is important: In many ways, a student from an immigrant family is no different than one from any other family. Just as with his or her local counterparts, success in school is linked to a considerable extent to the family’s social and economic status – its income levels, whether it’s blue-collar or white collar, and so on. Research from PISA and around the world has consistently shown that – on average – middle-class children do better in school than children from poorer families, and this is true too of migrant children. (It must be stressed again that all this refers to averages; there are children from poorer families who excel in school and children from middle-class families who don’t.)

Other factors are tied in with socio-economic status, especially parents’ level of education. For example, people who come from better-off backgrounds are more likely to attend university. This matters for how well their children do in school because, in general, the children of more highly educated people are themselves more likely to stay on in education. Also, it’s probable that the more highly educated place a higher value on education, and may be better able to help and encourage their children in their learning.

So, where immigrant students face problems in education, how much of it can be attributed to their families’ socio-economic background? Across the OECD area, migrant students are an average of 54 points behind native students on PISA’s 600-point scale. However, when account is taken of the reality that, in many OECD countries, migrant families have lower incomes than natives, that gap falls to 34 points. That’s a considerable reduction, but it still means that socio-economic factors alone aren’t enough to explain the performance of migrant students.
Language: Mastering the language of instruction plays an important role in how well students do, especially those who were born in another country (first-generation immigrants). Generally, students who speak a foreign language at home do less well in PISA tests. In a number of European countries, such as Germany, Switzerland and the Netherlands, such students performed between 82 and 102 points lower in science in the PISA 2006 round. However in some of the permanent settlement countries, Australia and Canada, the gap is smaller – only around 19 to 23 points. Once again, this probably reflects that fact that immigrant families in these countries are usually wealthier and better educated than migrants in Europe. In addition, it may show that – in some cases at least – these countries are doing a better job at helping immigrant students make up language shortfalls.

Speaking a different language at home can be a benefit – there is evidence to show that early bilingualism improves people’s overall language-learning abilities. But it can also hold back students. Firstly, where immigrant students are not as fluent in the local language as native students, they can find it hard to follow lessons in class and complete assignments, and they may struggle to settle into the school community. Secondly, families may not be able to help their children with their lessons. In the United States, for instance, researchers came across the case of a boy from a Mexican immigrant family who convinced his father that the failing grade “F” on his report card actually stood for “fabulous”.

Education systems: The conditions in schools can affect student performance. So, do migrant students go to the same sorts of schools as natives? In terms of resources – school labs, computers, teacher numbers and so on – the differences don’t tend to be all that great. In a few countries, such as Greece and
Denmark, school principals in schools with high numbers of migrant students say resources can be a problem; in others, such as Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom, there may actually be more resources in such schools.

“Students from many minority groups are more likely to end up in low status tracks and streams, be more at risk of dropout, and be underrepresented among students in tertiary education. Often social background explains much of this.”

No More Failures: Ten Steps to Equity in Education

However, there is one important characteristic worth noting: Immigrants are more likely to go to schools with large numbers of students from poorer families. This links back to immigrant families’ socio-economic status. In most OECD countries, migrants tend to be poorer than the general population; equally, in most OECD countries, social status tends to be a factor in determining what sort of school students go to – most countries have schools that are effectively blue collar or white collar. And, in general, students in schools with lots of better-off students tend to do better. Children from poorer families are also more likely to be “streamed” into non-academic courses than those from wealthier families, regardless of their aptitude. This streaming – both social and academic – can be very hard for students to escape from.

How can education help migrants?

Because students’ success at school is so intricately tied up with their families’ socio-economic background, it can be hard to come up with recommendations for changes in education that specifically target migrant needs. In most OECD countries, especially in Europe, any policies that succeed in making family background less of a factor in education are likely also to benefit migrant students.

Indeed, there may be sound political reasons for thinking about the education problems of migrant students primarily in terms of their socio-economic background. In much of the world, there’s considerable public opposition to giving special treatment to immigrant families, who may be accused of “scrounging off the system”. However, by not acting to help migrant students with
With migrant populations growing in many developed countries, OECD is placing a new emphasis on research into migration and education, especially in trying to develop a deeper understanding of the policies that work in the education of young migrants. Already, the PISA programme is providing unique insights into how well 15-year-olds from all sorts of backgrounds – not just immigrants – are doing in education. More than 60 countries are taking part in the most recent round of PISA, in 2009, providing a wealth of data on the performance of students in education systems around the world.

Now OECD is working to build on that research by examining real-world policies and practices in a number of member countries on migrant education. The Thematic Review on Migrant Education, which got under way in 2008-09, will examine the situation in five to six member countries, reviewing existing education policies to develop an understanding of what works – and what doesn’t – at the national, local and school levels. Through interviews with teachers, students, parents and other key actors in education, the review aims to explore questions raised by PISA, and investigate issues outside the scope of PISA.

Why should countries be concerned about how well migrant students are doing? Aart de Geus, an OECD Deputy Secretary-General sought to answer that question in a speech at the launch of the review: “If we don’t help immigrant children to succeed in school, then we impose on them a penalty that will stay with them for the rest of their lives,” he said. “They will find it harder to participate in the economy, face a higher exposure to unemployment, earn less over their working lives and have lower pensions.” But, he pointed out, it’s sometimes difficult for governments to figure out the most appropriate policies. “The education of migrants is challenging and complex, not least because each migrant group has its own distinctive history. And so does each country…” he said. “Perhaps all this diversity explains why policy makers in many countries are grappling with the challenges and finding it difficult to figure out what can, and should, be done.”

To find out more about the Thematic Review on Migrant Education, visit www.oecd.org/edu/migration.

To find out more about PISA, visit www.pisa.oecd.org.

difficulties – whether through targeted policies or a broader socio-economic approach – societies risk depriving them of the skills and education they will need to make their own way in the world and to make a full contribution in the societies they have come to call home. Ultimately, societies that fail to help migrant children to fulfil their potential through education will pay a social cost as well as a real financial price through things like higher rates of unemployment.

What can societies do to help migrant students who face problems in education? Before trying to answer that question, it
needs to be stated that an education system always exists within a broader context – in any country, a school system both shapes and is shaped by deep-seated cultural and social values, history and the mix of rich and poor in society. Approaches to education in one country may not be acceptable in another. Nevertheless, looking at and comparing how countries run their education systems can be useful and eye-opening. In particular, the experiences of countries in three areas are worth briefly highlighting:

**Pre-school care and education:** Providing high-quality pre-school care and education can bring benefits to children no matter what their background. But it may have a special role to play for immigrant children and their families – for example, getting families involved in their children’s pre-school care and education can help break down social barriers and help integrate them into the community.

“... family involvement should also be encouraged and valued, especially the involvement of low-income and immigrant parents, who face the added challenge of segregation and exclusion.”

*Starting Strong II: Early Childhood Education and Care*

So, what can pre-school do for immigrant kids? Firstly, in educational terms, very young children have a powerful ability to learn languages, and not just the one spoken at home. Pre-school can help children make use of this ability, and provide a means for them to gain a firm foothold in the language of their adopted country. The early education and learning benefits go beyond just language learning: Research from the United Kingdom showed most children classified as “at risk” in terms of their social and intellectual development (which included a disproportionate number of migrant children), moved out of that category after just a year in a good nursery school.

Secondly, in development terms, pre-school can help ease the impact of family poverty. Kindergartens that combine education with care – monitoring children’s health and development, ensuring they get exercise and providing sound nutrition, for instance – can bring major benefits to very young children at a crucial stage of their development. Also, providing day-care facilities can make it easier for parents to go out to work, especially mothers, which can increase family incomes and further reduce the impact of poverty.

Hard data is difficult to come by, but in many countries migrant children appear less likely to attend pre-school than
their native counterparts. In some cases, that’s because pre-school provision is inadequate for the entire population, not just immigrants. Alternatively, when pre-school is largely state-funded – either through grants to the kindergarten or support for parents – migrant families in some countries may have to wait some time before qualifying for such support. Also, families of irregular migrants may be unwilling to bring attention to themselves by enrolling children in pre-school. And there may be cultural objections to children attending pre-school – among some communities, it’s felt that the young should be raised at home by their mothers, and not by strangers. 

**School support:** Many countries offer special preparatory classes to young migrants, which aim to get them up to speed in their language abilities and, where necessary, in other subjects. But students’ experiences in these classes differ greatly. In Spain, for instance, most students spend only a few months in such “welcome classes” before entering mainstream schooling. In others, such as Switzerland, students may spend as long as two years in special classes and still not be deemed ready to join regular schooling.

There may well be a law of diminishing returns to placing migrants in preparatory classes. Many educationalists believe it’s better to keep as many students as possible in mainstream classrooms, and then target assistance to those who need it. This may help to speed up migrant students’ social integration and avoid the creation of “ghettos” in education.

“*Immigrant children with weak achievement sometimes learn faster in normal classes than in special education.*”

*No More Failures: Ten Steps to Equity in Education*

Segregation of migrant students can also show up in other areas of education. In a number of countries, migrant and minority children are more likely to be schooled in special-needs institutions: In the United States, African-American children – most of whom are *not* immigrants – are 2.5 times more likely to be diagnosed as mentally retarded than whites; in some areas of Switzerland, Hispanic children are overrepresented in special education; and in Hungary, about 40% of Roma – or Gypsy – children are classified as “mildly mentally retarded”, compared with 9% of Hungarian children.

Of course, just as in the general population, some migrant and minority children do indeed suffer from real learning disabilities. However, for a number of reasons, these problems
may be over-diagnosed among migrants and minorities: They may have spent less time in school than their native peers; they may have “learned” rules of behaviour from their families or native communities – boisterousness or passivity, for example – that are misinterpreted by mainstream society; or they may be victims of ethnic stereotyping. School bullying may also be an issue, which can lead to higher drop-out rates among immigrant children.

Cultural differences can be a barrier in education. But they can also be a bridge. In Sweden, one local school has sought to improve teaching for Roma children through hiring Roma teachers and staff, and by integrating elements of Roma culture into mainstream subjects. In teaching maths, examples drawn from horse-raising are widely used. Girls, meanwhile, can also learn traditional embroidery skills. Through their work with parents, Roma teachers in this Nytorpsskolan programme have managed to sharply reduce dropout rates.

Indeed, regardless of immigrant and minority students’ background, the quality of teaching is a prime factor in their education. In some European countries that have seen sudden influxes of immigrants in recent years, such as Spain and Ireland, teachers have sometimes struggled to cope with the challenge of teaching increasing numbers of children from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds. With international migration likely to grow in the years to come, these are issues that more and more teachers are likely to face. Increasingly, this will need to be reflected in their training, both at the initial stages and throughout their careers.

There may also be a need to look at how schools can support immigrant families in playing a bigger role in their children’s education. As we’ve seen, levels of parental education are a big influence on how well students do in school, but among some immigrant communities parents may have very low levels of education, especially if they come from cultures that place little emphasis on schooling for women. Schools may be able to work with such families to provide guidance on how students can be helped with homework and given space and time for study, for example. More broadly, where state resources for immigrant education are limited, schools may be able to work more closely with immigrant communities and private groups that support immigrant education to explore creative ways to support student’s learning.

**Language:** There are a wide variety of potential approaches for schools aiming to get young immigrants up to speed in the
Migrants and Education

language of their adopted countries. At the most basic level, migrant children may simply attend school like any other student and receive no special language instruction. The idea is that they will pick up the language simply through being immersed in it. These days, however, this sort of approach is rather rare.

More common is to combine immersion with special language support: Students attend regular classes as well as additional language classes. Although approaches can vary between different regions within countries and even between schools, this sort of teaching is widespread across the OECD area.

Other approaches exist, too. Students may go through a relatively short and separate intensive programme of language learning before transferring to mainstream education. In some countries, this transitional phase is broadened out to cover a wider range of academic subjects, so that students are taught bilingually for a time, and only gradually make the transition to learning full-time in their adopted language. Finally, in a very few countries, students may be helped to go on learning in both languages, with the aim of helping them to become fully bilingual. In Sweden, for instance, municipalities are legally required to provide such teaching if there are five or more children in the area with the same native language.

Language – how it’s taught and whether children are encouraged to hold on to their native tongue or to adopt a new one – is a sensitive issue. It goes to the heart of identity and to the debate over how immigrants should “integrate” into their adopted country – should they be encouraged to retain their own culture or should they try to blend in to their adopted countries. Nevertheless, even if bilingualism is officially encouraged, there’s widespread consensus in OECD countries on the benefits for immigrants – and especially children – in also learning the local language.

While research is still limited on what works best in helping young immigrants to do that, one thing seems clear: Countries that approach the challenge systematically – setting down clear goals and standards for language learning by young immigrants – seem to do a better job.

Migration for education

In recent years, a growing number of young people have been migrating – temporarily at least – to advance their education. These
international students are not always considered migrants in a formal sense, but they are still having a significant economic and social impact, both on the countries they leave behind and on those in which they study. In many cases, this migration for education is also a prelude to longer stays overseas and even permanent emigration.

In 1975, it’s estimated that there were around 610 000 students enrolled outside their home country. By 2005 – 30 years later – that had more than quadrupled to just over 2.7 million students. That growth is still going strong: In the early years of this decade, it’s estimated that the number of international students worldwide was rising at more than 8% a year.

Where do these students come from? In the OECD area, around one in two – 47.4% – come from Asia. Within Asia, China (including Hong Kong, China) is the biggest source, accounting for around 18% of students. The next biggest source region is Europe, which accounts for about one in four international students in the OECD area, followed by Africa, about one in 10, and then South America, about one in 20. North Americans account for fewer than one in 25.

As for where they go to study, around 85% of the world’s international students come to the OECD area. Within this zone, just four countries – the United States, United Kingdom, Germany and France – absorb more than half of the incoming students. Of these, the United States is by far the largest destination country – taking in more than one in five in 2005.

More and more young people are enrolling in courses overseas, a trend that is creating increasing competition for students.


**Education goes global**

The increase in international students mirrors, of course, the broader phenomenon of globalisation in recent decades – a process marked by increasing flows of people, goods, services and information around the globe. Like so much else, education has become caught up in this. Not only are more young people travelling to study, but colleges and universities are also actively reaching out to new “markets” overseas.

Talking about “markets” in education may seem crass. After all, education continues to be regarded in most of the world as a social necessity that is funded – at least in part – from the public purse and which brings benefits that cannot be measured simply in economic terms. And yet, there’s little doubt that economics is an increasingly important driver in the internationalisation of education.

Back in the 1970s, overseas study was mainly seen as a way to foster social, cultural and academic links between countries and individuals, especially in the states that would go on to form the European Union and within the two major political groupings of the time, the US-led West and its allies and the Soviet-led Eastern bloc. Even today, more than 100,000 students in Europe take part every year in the Erasmus exchange programme (although these exchanges usually run for no longer than an academic term).

However, since the end of the Cold War, and on the back of the broader trend towards globalisation, colleges and universities have become increasingly keen to move out into other countries – spurred in part by commercial factors. Institutions in many developed countries now offer “remote education” courses to students who choose to study in their home countries, and are even setting up campuses overseas. Monash University, Australia’s biggest, has campuses in both South Africa and Malaysia, where students can complete degrees without ever stepping foot in Australia.

Governments, too, are paying increasing attention to international education, for various reasons. Firstly, offering places to foreign students can help foster international mutual understanding, both between countries and within today’s increasingly multicultural societies. The presence of international students on campus can widen both their own horizons and those of local students, and provide fresh perspectives and impetus for research. It can also help to establish personal links between young people who may one day go on to form part of their own countries’ political and economic elites.
“Governments ... are more actively promoting the international mobility of students and teachers for a mix of cultural, political, labour market and trade reasons.”

*Internationalisation and Trade in Higher Education*

Secondly, international students are big business. In the United States alone, one independent institute estimated that foreign students made a net contribution to the US economy in the 2006/07 academic year of $14.5 billion. As seen earlier, the United States is the biggest destination for students travelling overseas, but its share of the market is falling. Looking at enrolments of international students worldwide (and not just in the OECD area), in 2000 the United States took in around 26%; five years later, that had slipped to around 22%. In part, this fall reflects tightened rules for entry following the September 11 attacks in 2001. But it also reflects increasing competition from other English-speaking countries, most notably New Zealand, which saw its share of the international market rise six-fold to 3% over the same period.

New Zealand, as well as neighbouring Australia, are attracting more international students in part because they boast two of the major factors that influence where students choose to study: They speak English and – in relative terms, at least – they’re near to where the bulk of students come from, Asia. Worldwide, students mainly go to countries where they will be taught in a language that’s widely spoken. And although there are exceptions, such as the huge numbers of Chinese who go to study in North America, students generally don’t like to stray too far from home. In Europe, most prefer not to leave the continent – in large part, perhaps, because EU rules mean their fees are lower there.

There’s a third reason why countries are increasingly seeking to lure international students – skilled migration. For many young people, studying overseas is just the first step to a longer sojourn in another country, and some governments actively encourage them to stay: Every year, the United States sets aside 20,000 H-1Bs – a type of visa for highly skilled migrants – for foreign graduates of United States colleges.

However, in both the United States and Canada it’s academic institutions – not governments – that play the biggest role in attracting overseas students. In Europe, by contrast, governments are often more directly involved in higher education, and they also often play a big part in trying to lure foreign talent.
4. Migrants and Education

Germany and France are just two of a number of European countries that have set up special programmes to strengthen the international appeal of their higher education and research systems, particularly in science and technology. Approaches can include offering direct support to would-be students, including scholarships, and running educational consulting services.

PERSONAL VIEW | Jeevan

Born in Nepal, Jeevan has studied law in both India and United States, and now lives and works in New York. (He has asked not to be identified by his full name.)

About a decade after graduation, only 10 or so of Jeevan’s 80 classmates from his elite Kathmandu boarding school are still in Nepal. Ten have gone to India, another 10 to Europe and Australia – and about 30 have, like Jeevan himself, left for the United States.

Jeevan first left Nepal at age 17 to continue his education in India, at a school chosen by his father, a prominent lawyer. All five astrologers in his home town had predicted that once he turned 18, Jeevan would become driven to succeed, and they were right. But after five years of law school in Bangalore and two years at a firm in New Delhi, “I was getting really bored without challenges,” Jeevan recalls.

So he applied and was accepted to a one-year post-graduate programme in the United States.

The cultural contrast was much sharper this time. Some customs – like having women greet him with a kiss on the cheek – felt awkward at first. Comparing the cost of a meal with one back home was “a financial shock”. The students seemed to separate into certain groups – North Americans with Britons, and Europeans with South Americans and Australians. Culinary motives brought the Asian students together.

Jeevan spent a while observing the people around him – how they talked, how they dressed, what and how they ate and drank – trying to participate, to blend in. Jeevan now works at a law firm in New York. He enjoys the challenges of his job, the variety of his new lifestyle, the efficiency and professionalism that he sees as central to the American system. But while he finds much to admire in American society, it can also be cold and impersonal – it is hard to make friends, particularly with white Americans. Unlike in Nepal or India, where doing things to help out friends and acquaintances is the norm, here “I find myself thinking very hard before asking a favour,” Jeevan explains.

And personal schedules are more rigid – you can’t just call up a colleague to go for dinner in an hour, it needs to be planned days in advance. When it comes to friendship, “it’s easier to deal with other immigrants”.

Will he go home to Nepal? Years of political crisis there have fuelled the mass emigration that Jeevan is a part of. But it’s also a reason for him to go back and turn things around. The same astrologer who predicted Jeevan’s successful academic turn and the year in which he would move to the United States also forecasted that he would “move continents” again, so perhaps a change is at hand.
“Cross-border education is used in a strategic way in order to attract skilled students that may become skilled immigrants...”

*Internationalisation and Trade in Higher Education: Opportunities and Challenges*

A “brain drain”?  
There is, of course, a potential downside to international education. Countries that send students abroad can find themselves at risk of a longer term “brain drain” of academic talent, depriving them of researchers and – ultimately – workers in key sectors of their economy, such as information technology and medicine. Although this is sometimes portrayed as an issue mainly for developing countries, it’s one that is causing concern in developed countries, especially in Europe. A study by the European Commission in 2003 showed three-quarters of European postgraduates studying in the United States wanted to stay on there after completing their doctorates, in large part because they felt the United States offered better career and employment opportunities.  

Developing countries face similar concerns about a brain drain of talent (see Chapter 6), but there can be benefits, too, from sending students overseas. Students from smaller countries – at every level of development – can gain access to courses and research facilities that are unavailable at home. Indeed, such approaches to “capacity building” – in this context, the idea of helping developing countries to build a reservoir of well-trained workers in areas like technology, engineering and medicine – can form part of international development aid. But developing countries are also taking the initiative. Malaysia has an extensive programme of scholarships to train teachers, academics and public servants overseas, mainly in the United Kingdom and Australia, and it even has offices in some countries to help its citizens studying abroad.  

Ready for life  
This chapter has looked at the role of education in the lives of young immigrants. Crucially, as well as giving them the knowledge and skills they will need to build their lives in a new country, education also lays the groundwork for migrants’ job prospects. The next chapter will look at immigrants and work – how well they do in finding jobs, the role of work in helping immigrants to integrate, and controversies over the impact of immigration on native workers.
### Find Out More

**FROM OECD...**

**On the Internet**
For an introduction to PISA, visit [www.oecd.org/PISA](http://www.oecd.org/PISA).

To find out more about OECD’s review of migrant education, go to [www.oecd.org/edu/migration](http://www.oecd.org/edu/migration).

**Publications**

**PISA 2006: Science Competencies for Tomorrow’s World (2008):** Presents the results from the most recent PISA survey, which focused on science and also assessed mathematics and reading. It is divided into two volumes: the first offers an analysis of the results, the second contains the underlying data.

**Where Immigrant Students Succeed: A Comparative Review of Performance and Engagement in PISA 2003 (2006):** Based on results from the 2003 PISA round, this report examines the performance of students from immigrant backgrounds. It looks at countries’ approaches to the integration of immigrants, and at other factors that can influence how immigrant students do in school, such as their motivation and learning strategies, social background and the language spoken at home.

**No More Failures: Ten Steps to Equity in Education (2007):** This report challenges the assumption that there will always be young people who can’t or won’t make it in school. It looks at how different countries have handled equity in education, including responding to the special needs of migrants and minorities.

**Starting Strong II: Early Childhood Education and Care (2006):** This report reviews early childhood education and care in 20 OECD countries, and describes the social, economic, conceptual and research factors that influence early childhood policy. It includes discussions of the potential for preschool care in helping immigrant children overcome difficulties in their later education.

**Internationalisation and Trade in Higher Education: Challenges and Opportunities (2004):** This report brings together statistics, case studies and policy reports on the major trends and developments in cross-border post-secondary education in North America, Europe, and the Asia Pacific region.

For an introduction to OECD work on managing migration flows, go to [www.oecd.org/migration](http://www.oecd.org/migration), and follow the link to “international migration policies”.

... **AND OTHER SOURCES**

A number of academic centres and think tanks work on migration-related issues. They include the following:

- **Institute for the Study of International Migration**, at Georgetown University, Washington DC ([www12.georgetown.edu/sfs/isim](http://www12.georgetown.edu/sfs/isim)).
- **Centre on Migration Policy and Society**, at the University of Oxford, UK ([www.compas.ox.ac.uk](http://www.compas.ox.ac.uk)).
- **Migration Policy Institute**, in Washington DC ([www.migrationpolicy.org](http://www.migrationpolicy.org)).
- **Migration Policy Institute**, in Washington DC ([www.migrationpolicy.org](http://www.migrationpolicy.org)).
- **Migrinter**, at the University of Poitiers, France ([www.mshs.univ-poitiers.fr/migrinter](http://www.mshs.univ-poitiers.fr/migrinter)).
- **Quebec Metropolis Centre – Immigration and Metropolis** ([www.im.metropolis.net](http://www.im.metropolis.net)), in Quebec, Canada; research consortium of six Quebec universities.