

HOW MANY STUDENTS STUDY ABROAD?

As national economies become more interconnected, governments and individuals are looking to higher education to broaden students' horizons. It is through the pursuit of high level studies in countries other than their own that students may 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 established policies and schemes that promote such mobility to foster intercultural contacts and help build social networks.

Overview

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 4.3 million in 2011, more than a fivefold increase. Growth in the internationalisation of tertiary education has accelerated during the past several decades, reflecting the globalisation of economies and societies, and also the expansion of tertiary systems and institutions throughout the world. The destinations of international students highlight the attractiveness of specific education systems, whether because of their academic reputation or because of subsequent immigration opportunities. Foreign students enrolled in G20 countries account for 83% of total foreign students, and students in the OECD area represent 77% of the total foreign students enrolled worldwide. European countries in the OECD were the destination for 41% of foreign students in 2011 followed by North American countries (23%).

Compared to 2000, the share of international students who chose the United States as their country of destination for tertiary education dropped from 23% to 17% in 2011, and the share of international students who chose Germany fell by almost three percentage points. In contrast, the shares of international students who chose Australia, Korea, New Zealand or Spain as their country of destination grew by at least one percentage point, while the share of students who chose the United Kingdom or the Russian Federation grew by around two percentage points. Some of these changes reflect differences in countries' approaches to internationalisation, ranging from marketing campaigns in the Asia-Pacific region to a more local and university-driven approach in the United States. Language as well as cultural considerations, quality of programmes, geographic proximity and similarity of education systems are determining factors driving student mobility.

Despite the strong increase in absolute numbers, these proportions have remained stable during the last decade. In the OECD area, the number of foreign students in tertiary education is nearly three times as high as the number of national citizens enrolled abroad. In the 21 European countries who are OECD Members there is a ratio of 2.7 foreign students per each citizen from an European country studying abroad.

Definition

Students are classified as "international" if they left their country of origin only for the purpose of study. Students are classified as "foreign" when they are not citizens of the country where they are enrolled. This includes some students who are permanent residents, albeit not citizens, of the countries in which they are studying such as young people from immigrant families. Consequently, foreign graduation rates are not comparable with data on international graduation rates and are therefore presented separately.

Comparability

Data on international and foreign students refer to the academic year 2010/2011, based on data collected on education statistics, annually by the OECD. Additional data from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics are also included. Data on the impact of international students on tertiary graduation rates are based on a special survey conducted by the OECD in December 2011.

Sources

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Further information

Analytical publications

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Online databases

- OECD Education Statistics.

Websites

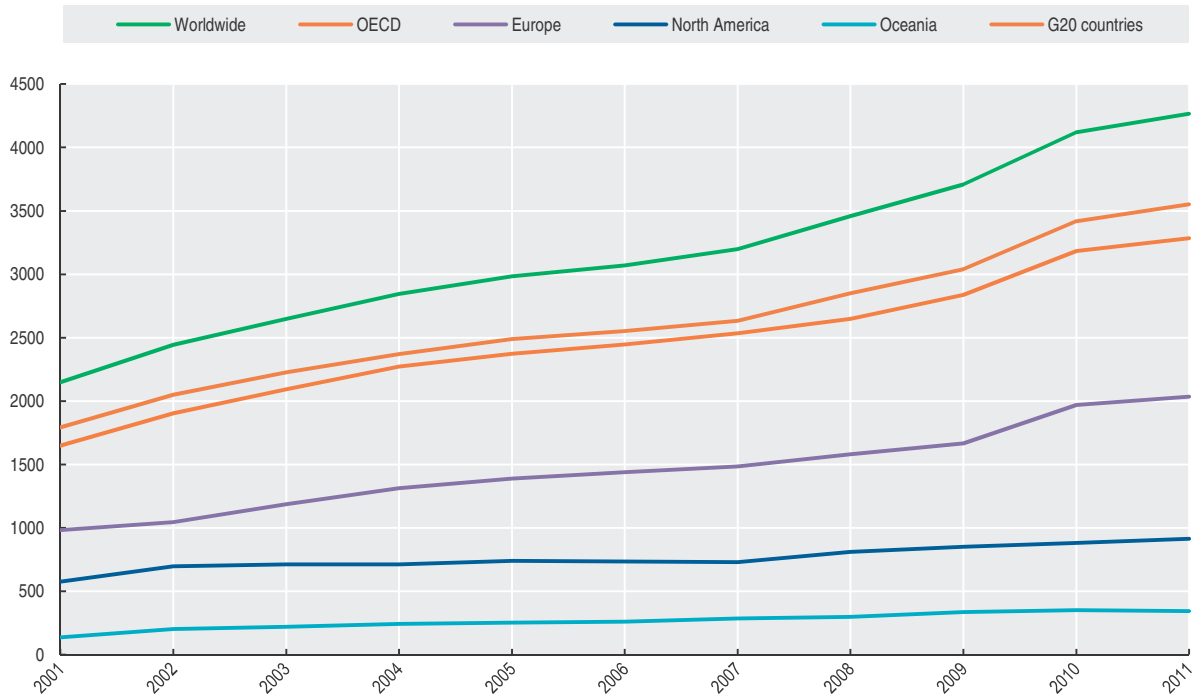
- OECD Education at a Glance (supplementary material), www.oecd.org/edu/eag.htm.



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Evolution by destination in the number of students enrolled outside their country of citizenship

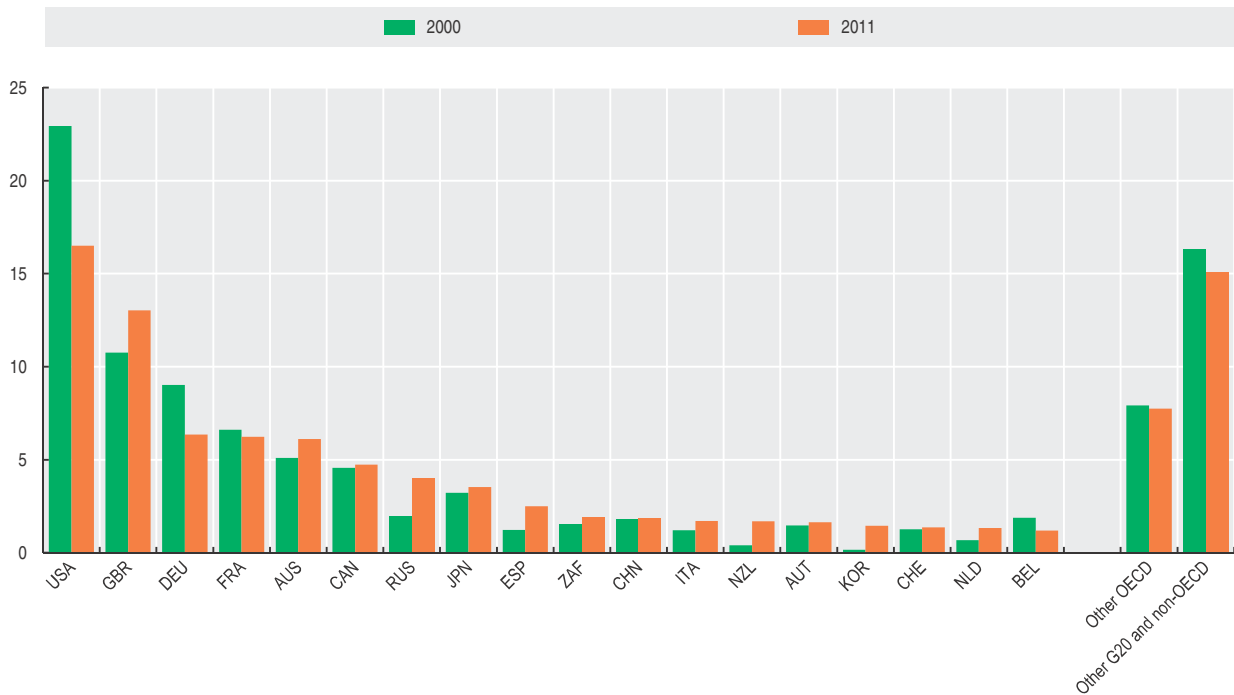
Thousand of persons



StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933026297>

Trends in international education market shares

Percentage



StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933026316>



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