

Where do students go to study?

- Five countries – Australia, France, Germany, the United Kingdom and the United States – hosted almost half of the world's students who studied abroad in 2008.
- The United States saw a significant drop as a preferred destination of foreign students between 2000 and 2008, falling from about 26% of the global market share to less than 19%.
- Thirty per cent or more of international students are enrolled in sciences, agriculture or engineering in Canada, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Sweden, Switzerland and the United States and Slovenia.

Significance

This indicator describes students' preferred destinations and subjects they study. As well as its social and educational effects, international study has a substantial 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 countries' balance of payments as a result of revenue from tuition fees and domestic consumption by international students. There are financial benefits, too, for educational institutions; international students can also help them to reach the critical mass needed to diversify the range of their educational programmes.

Findings

The five most popular destination countries in 2008 were as follows: The United States, which took in 19% of all foreign students; the United Kingdom, 10%; and Australia, France and Germany, which each took in 7%. Other major destinations include Canada, 6%; Japan and the Russian Federation, 4%; and Italy, 2%. (Figures for Australia, the United Kingdom and United States refer to international students; see Definitions on previous page.)

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 and Russian) 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, may be explained by the fact that students intending to study abroad are most likely to have learned English in their home country or wish to improve their English language skills through immersion and study abroad. An increasing number of institutions in non-English-speaking countries now offer courses in English as a way of attracting more foreign students.

Sciences attract at least one in six international students in Germany (16.9%), just over 17% in Iceland, just over

20% in New Zealand, and just under 20% in the United States; in Japan, however, the figure is fewer than one in fifty (1.3%). Non-Anglophone countries tend to enrol high proportions of such students in the humanities and the arts, ranging from over 20% in Germany to almost 42% in Iceland. Social sciences, business and law programmes also attract students in large numbers. In Australia, the Netherlands and Estonia, these fields enrol around half of all international students. In EU countries, health and welfare programmes attract large proportions of international students, most notably in Belgium, accounting for almost 34% of international students, Hungary with almost 36% and Spain more than 33%.

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 more than one in four international students in 2000, but less than one in five in 2008. Germany's market share fell by about 3 percentage points, the United Kingdom's by 2 percentage points, and Belgium's by about a percentage point. By contrast, the impressive growth in the Russian Federation's share by 2 percentage points makes it an important new player on the international education market. There were increases also in the shares of Australia, Korea, and New Zealand, which grew by about a percentage point each. The slump in the United States' share may be due in part to the tightening of conditions of entry for foreign students following the September 2001 attacks, and to competition from universities in the Asia-Pacific, which are becoming increasingly active in their marketing efforts.

Definitions

See previous spread.

Going further

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

Areas covered include:

- Trends in international education market shares.

Further reading from OECD

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

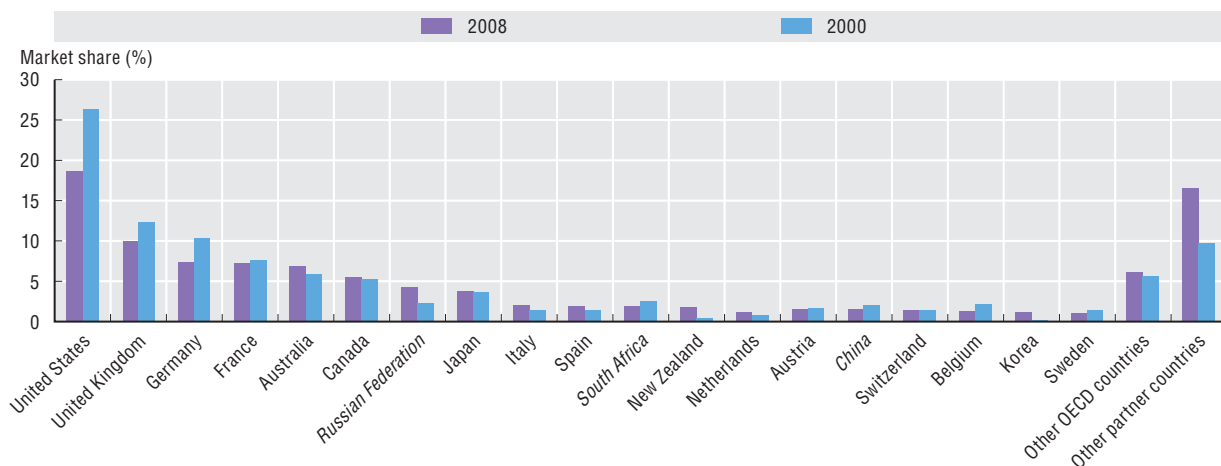
Internationalisation and Trade in Higher Education: Opportunities and Challenges (2004).

1. EDUCATION LEVELS AND STUDENT NUMBERS

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Figure 1.22. **Trends in market share for international education (2000, 2008)**

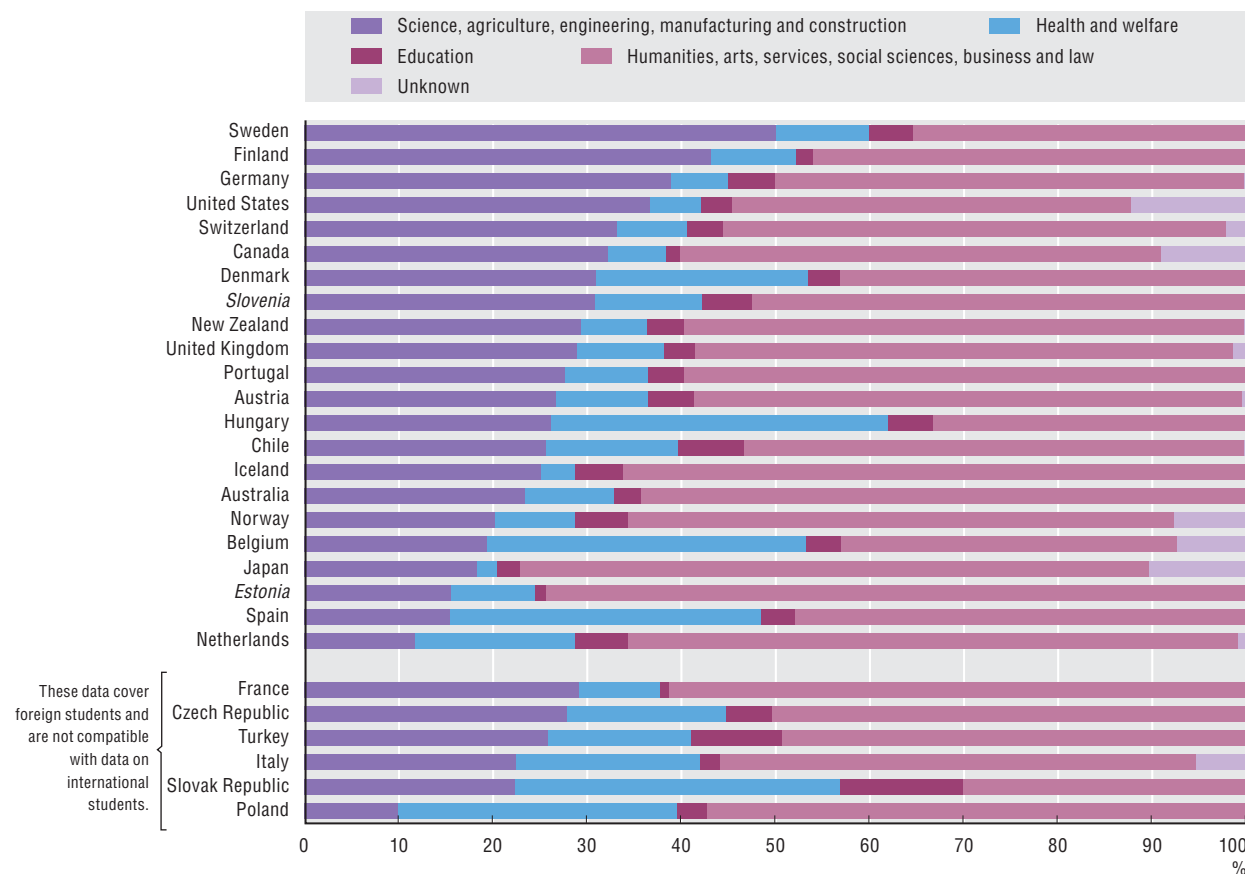
This figure shows the share of all foreign tertiary students taken by each of the major study destinations, and how that share has changed. Most notably, more than a quarter of all foreign students went to the United States in 2000, but this has since fallen to less than a fifth.



Source: OECD (2010), *Education at a Glance 2010*, Table C2.7, available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932310434>.

Figure 1.23. **Subjects studied by international students, 2008**

This figure shows the fields of study pursued by international students.



Source: OECD (2010), *Education at a Glance 2010*, Table C2.5, available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932310434>.



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