



The global context of tertiary student mobility

The OECD's *Education at a Glance 2019* provides a picture of where international students around the world choose to study. The OECD report only counts tertiary students, including undergraduate and postgraduate higher education programs and vocational diploma programs of at least two years duration. The OECD data is largely reflective of students studying towards **full qualifications** in other countries and excludes the substantial number of internationally-mobile students who may be studying for **course credit** in other countries through study abroad and student exchange programs.

Major destination countries

There were 5.3 million international students studying outside their home country in 2017 with an average annual growth rate of 5 per cent in OECD countries and 6 per cent among non-OECD countries since 1998. There were 3.7 million international or foreign students studying in OECD countries in 2017 with 6 per cent growth over 2016. The United States hosted the largest number of international tertiary students around 984,897 (18% of the global total), followed by the United Kingdom with 435,734 (8%) and Australia with 381,202 (7%). The top five destination countries, including Germany (5%) and France (5%), hosted 43 per cent of all international tertiary students in 2017 as shown in (Figure 1).

The USA's share of international tertiary students has declined since 2000 and that of the United Kingdom and France since 2010 due to the growing prominence of other study destinations (Figure 2). Nonetheless, from 2016 to 2017 the global shares of the USA and the UK declined by one percentage point, while Australia maintained its share of the global market (7%).

The OECD reported Australia as having the second highest proportion (21%) of international students in its total student population in 2017, behind Luxembourg (47%) and ahead of New Zealand (20%), United Kingdom (18%) and Switzerland (18%) (Figure 3). The same figure for the United States was just 5 per cent in 2017. International students in OECD countries accounted for 6 per cent of all students in OECD countries but 22% of all enrolments at doctoral level.

Major source regions/countries

Asia (56%) was largest regional source of international tertiary students for OECD countries, followed by Europe (24%), the Americas (9%) and Africa (8%). The top source countries were China (17%) and India (6%).

Broad fields of Education

Education at a Glance 2019 reports that about one third of internationally mobile students were studying in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) fields. This can be further broken down into engineering, manufacturing and construction (18%); natural sciences, mathematics and statistics (8%); and information and communication technologies (7%) in OECD countries.

The OECD report 'Education at a Glance 2019' is available at: https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/education-at-a-glance-2019_f8d7880d-en#page1.

The OECD term 'international student' refers to those students who have left their country of origin and moved to another country for the purpose of study and 'foreign student' refers to students who are not citizens of the countries in which they are enrolled, but may be long-term residents or were born in the "host" country. The 'international students' in this research snapshot also include 'foreign students'. The data do not include students enrolled in countries that did not report international or foreign students to the OECD or to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics.

For further information about this Research Snapshot Series contact the International Research and Analysis Unit by email: IEResearch@education.gov.au.

The Research Snapshot series can be accessed from <https://internationaleducation.gov.au/research/research-snapshots/pages/default.aspx>.

Figure 1: Distribution of international students in tertiary education by country of destination, 2017

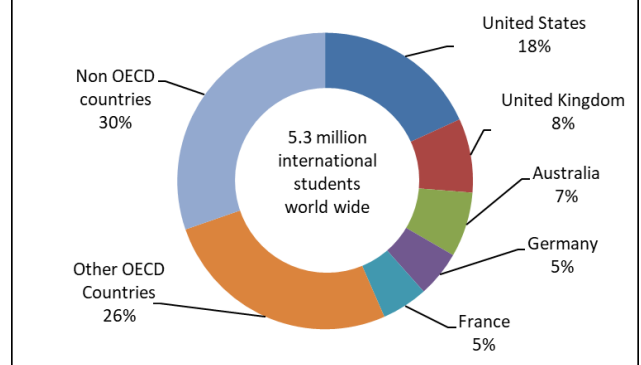


Figure 2: International education market shares, between 2000 and 2017

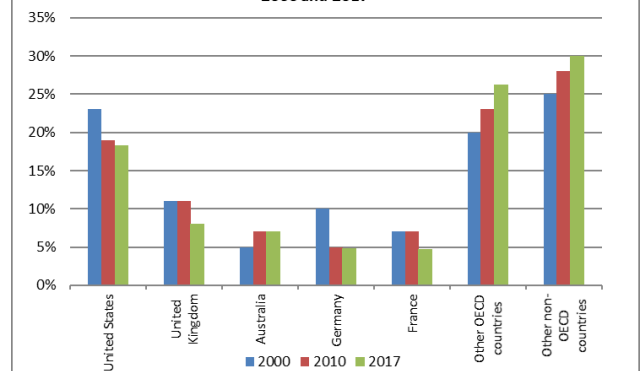


Figure 3: International students as a percentage of total tertiary students (top 15 OECD countries), 2017

