



The global context of tertiary student mobility

The OECD's *Education at a Glance 2020* provides a picture of where international students around the world choose to study. The OECD report only counts tertiary students, including those from undergraduate and postgraduate higher education programs and vocational diploma programs that are of at least two years duration. The OECD data counts students studying towards **full qualifications** in other countries and excludes students who may be studying for **course credit** through study abroad and student exchange programs.

Major destination countries

There were 5.6 million international students studying outside their home country in 2018 with an average annual growth rate of 4 per cent in OECD countries and 6 per cent among non-OECD countries since 1998. There were 3.9 million international or foreign students studying in OECD countries in 2018 with 6 per cent growth over 2017. The United States hosted 987,314 international tertiary students in 2018, (18% of the global total), followed by the United Kingdom with 452,079 (8%) and then Australia with 444,514 (8%). The top five destination countries, including Germany (6%) and France (4%), hosted 43 per cent of all international tertiary students (Figure 1). Canada was the sixth most popular study destination in 2018.

The USA's share of international tertiary students in 2018 had declined since 2000 as had that of the United Kingdom and France since 2010 due to the growing prominence of other study destinations (Figure 2). From 2017 to 2018, Australia's share increased by one percent.

The OECD reported Australia as having the second highest proportion (27%) of international students in its total student population in 2018, behind Luxembourg (48%) and ahead of New Zealand (20%), the United Kingdom and Switzerland (both 18%) (Figure 3). The same figure for the United States was 5 per cent. International students in OECD countries accounted for 6 per cent of all students in OECD countries.

Major source regions and countries

Asia (57%) was the largest regional source of international tertiary students for OECD countries, followed by Europe (23%), the Americas (9%) and Africa (8%). Twenty three per cent of the students came from China and eight per cent from India.

Broad fields of education

Education at a Glance 2020 reports that 25 per cent of international tertiary students in OECD countries were studying engineering, followed by manufacturing and construction (17%) and natural sciences and mathematics and statistics (8%).

The report 'Education at a Glance 2020' is available at [OECD](https://www.oecd.org/education/) website.

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 more information, visit the [International Education](https://www.international-education.gov.au/) website of the [Department of Education, Skills and Employment](https://www.education.gov.au/) or contact IEResearch@dese.gov.au.

Figure 1: Distribution of international students in tertiary education by country of destination, 2018

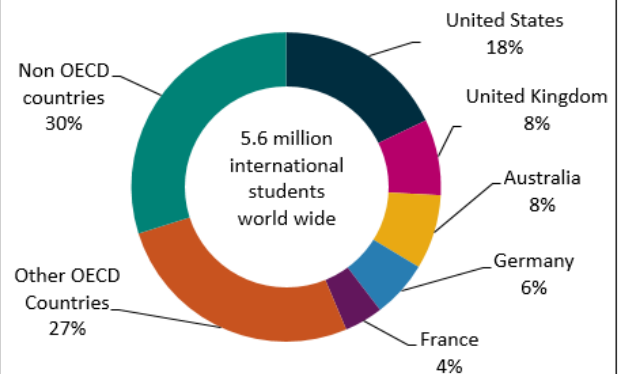


Figure 2: International education market shares, between 2000 and 2018

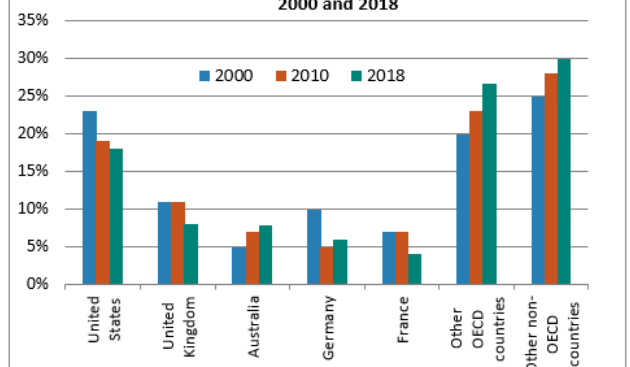


Figure 3: International students as a percentage of total tertiary students (top 15 OECD countries), 2018

