



Student visa holders in and outside Australia in 2020

As a result of the coronavirus outbreak a number of travel restrictions were progressively introduced in early 2020, starting with cessation of direct travel from China from 1 February 2020, followed by further staged restrictions until all foreign entry was ceased on 20 March 2020. The Department of Home Affairs has kindly provided data that quantifies the number of current student visa holders on a particular day, including information on whether each visa holder was in or outside Australia on that day. This provides some insight on the impact of travel restrictions on the number of international students in Australia in 2020.

Table 1: Student visa holders on 29 March 2020, by visa subclass

Visa subclass	In Australia	Outside Australia	Grand Total	% Outside
Higher Education	330,535	82,918	413,453	20%
Independent ELICOS	23,171	7,690	30,861	25%
Non-Award	5,121	7,396	12,517	59%
Postgraduate Research	27,124	6,311	33,435	19%
Schools Sector	18,029	4,379	22,408	20%
VET	160,214	15,713	175,927	9%
Other	4,411	1,026	5,437	19%
Total	568,605	125,433	694,038	18%

Table 1 shows the location of visa holders across the different visa subclasses. The largest volume of student visa holders outside Australia are in the higher education subclass, while the largest proportion outside are in the non-award subclass. The top country for non-award subclass visa holders is the USA, from where many students traditionally travel to Australia on student exchange and study abroad programs. Many of these students were recalled home due to the coronavirus outbreak.

Table 2: Country of citizenship of student visa holders on 29 March 2020

Top 10 countries	In Australia	Outside Australia	Grand Total	% Outside
China	109,523	67,919	177,442	38%
India	105,514	6,974	112,488	6%
Nepal	56,186	1,761	57,947	3%
Vietnam	21,221	3,213	24,434	13%
Brazil	20,161	2,959	23,120	13%
Malaysia	18,658	1,843	20,501	9%
Colombia	18,281	2,136	20,417	10%
Indonesia	16,900	1,820	18,720	10%
Korea, South	16,557	1,937	18,494	10%
Philippines	17,345	1,131	18,476	6%
Others	168,259	33,740	201,999	17%
Total	568,605	125,433	694,038	18%
<i>Total excluding China</i>	<i>459,082</i>	<i>57,514</i>	<i>516,596</i>	<i>11%</i>

Table 2 shows the location of visa holders by country. It is clear that China had the largest proportion of student visa holders outside Australia, consistent with it first being the subject of travel restrictions to Australia. When first measured in early February the proportion of Chinese visa holders outside Australia exceeded 50%. Since then Australian Border Force has reported that over 47,000 Chinese citizens arrived from third countries up until Australia closed its borders on 20 March 2020. Excluding China, the large majority (89%) of other student visa holders were in Australia on 29 March 2020.

A complete dataset is available in pivot table format (see [here](#)) to enable further analysis.

Some important considerations for interpreting this data

- Student visa subclasses do not comprehensively align with the similarly-named education sectors. For example, a higher education visa holder may study an ELICOS or non-award course before commencing their higher education course.
- The data above are both primary (student) and secondary (dependent) visa holders combined. Secondary visa holders were 11% of the total on 29 March 2020.
- The data do not represent all overseas students, some of whom may be travelling on other types of visas that permit study. In particular, many ELICOS students might not hold student visas.
- The data does not contain information on scheduled commencement dates for students, so not all students shown as *Outside Australia* have necessarily been delayed by prevalent travel restrictions.
- Over time new visas are granted and existing visas expire both in and outside Australia and some current student visa holders in Australia may have departed Australia or changed visas.

For more information, visit <https://internationaleducation.gov.au/research/international-student-data/pages/default.aspx> or contact IEResearch@dese.gov.au.