

IIE Center for Academic Mobility  
Research and Impact



# A World on the Move

Trends in Global Student Mobility

ISSUE 2

March 2018

As an independent, 501(c)(3) not-for-profit founded in 1919, IIE's mission is to help people and organizations leverage the power of international education to thrive in today's interconnected world. IIE's work focuses on advancing scholarship, building economies, and promoting access to opportunity.

Project Atlas® is a global research initiative that disseminates comparable student mobility data, conducts studies on academic migration and the internationalization of higher education, and provides customized workshops and research to strengthen data collection systems around the world. Project Atlas® is supported by the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) of the U.S. Department of State, IIE, and country partners.

Institute of International Education (IIE)  
809 United Nations Plaza  
New York, NY 10017  
[www.iie.org](http://www.iie.org)

Portions of the report have been excerpted from the Open Doors 2017 Report on International Educational Exchange, which was funded by a grant from the U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. The opinions, findings, and conclusions stated herein are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the U.S. Department of State.

All data or statement of facts contained in this report belong to the reporting organization providing such data or statement, and the Institute of International Education (IIE) does not make any representations or warranties pertaining to the accuracy or completeness of any such data or statement of its adequacy for any purpose. The opinions, advice, or conclusions of the authors expressed herein do not necessarily state or reflect the official positions of IIE, the report's funder, or the organizations and agencies reporting data.

# Global Mobility Snapshot

This report provides an overview of recent developments in the field of international higher education and student mobility. Incorporating data and information contained in the *Open Doors* report, Project Atlas, and other key sources of global education statistics, the findings discussed in this report indicate that while the demand for an international education has risen to an all-time high, the factors that drive student flows continue to shift.

Valuing the global perspectives and talents brought by international cohorts, higher education stakeholders around the world are devising new incentives to draw students to their shores. This report examines some of the key policy innovations that aim to attract international students not only to study but also to gain valuable career building opportunities through internships and employment pathways. Long-standing exchange programs, such as Erasmus in Europe, have also recognized the growing demand for employability skills, with internships and apprenticeships comprising recent offerings. Extensive research, highlighted in this report, attests to the benefits of an international education to one's career progression over the long term. What we are also seeing is that countries are not only turning to historically large sending countries to increase their international student cohorts and talent pools; they are also sustaining and growing regional student flows.

In recent years, some countries have become more inward facing, resulting in a growing concern about how such developments will affect students' decisions about where to pursue international educational experiences. However, the impacts on international student mobility have yet to be fully gauged and drawing precise conclusions will require time and additional evidence before we can see with clarity just how student flows are responding to unprecedented changes around the world.

Global attention continues to be paid to the many ways in which international students can be welcomed into university life on campuses around the world. Initiatives range from promoting awareness of cross-cultural sensitivity among campus communities to support services offered through international student offices. The #youarewelcomehere campaign in the United States and recent calls in the UK to send more open and welcoming messaging to students from abroad demonstrate a clear trend to bolster support for international students.

This report shows too that despite social, economic and political flux and change, there is continuity amidst uncertainty. The demand for an international education is only expected to increase and the value of the skills, competencies, and global outlook gained abroad continue to gain currency.

Rajika Bhandari, Ph.D.  
Head of Research, Policy & Practice, IIE

## Global Student Mobility

### Many countries turn to international education in the competition for global talent.

Internationally mobile students from all over the world are choosing to study abroad in larger numbers and in different countries. Overall, the volume of student mobility is at an all-time high. The OECD estimates that 4.6 million students crossed a border to pursue an international education experience in 2015, demonstrating a massive increase from the 2.1 million students who went abroad in 2001 (Fig. 14) (OECD, 2017; Project Atlas, 2017). While the desire to pursue an education abroad is only expected to grow in the coming years, what has given new shape to student flows are the many initiatives competing to attract global talent. In this section we will examine the expanding range of favorable policies and programs in some of the countries aiming to edge past competitors.

#### EDGING PAST THE COMPETITION: ESTABLISHED AND EMERGING PLAYERS

English-speaking countries are among the largest hosts of international students, with the United States enrolling about one-quarter of all the world's globally mobile students, more than double the number of international students enrolled in the UK, the next largest host (Project Atlas, 2017). Taken together, 50 percent of the

world's international students enroll in five English-speaking countries (United States, UK, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand) (Project Atlas, 2017).

In recent years, with the expanding scale of knowledge-based and innovation-driven economies worldwide, some countries are turning to international higher education to provide a pool from which to recruit highly skilled job applicants. Canada, Germany, Japan, and China are among the many countries that have initiated policies to not only bolster the enrollment of international students, but also to retain them in their labor markets (CBIE, 2016; Hemmadi, 2016; ICEF, 2017a; Liu-Farrar, 2009; Nafie, 2017).

In the case of **Canada**, where the goal is to attract 450,000 international students by 2022 (Fig. 15), the number of international students choosing to study there has sharply increased. In 2016, Canada hosted more than 312,100 international students (Project Atlas, 2017). In November 2016, Canada adjusted its immigration process to better retain international students in the workforce, by giving additional points to applicants for residency who hold job offers and whose degrees were obtained in the country (Hemmadi, 2016). An initiative was also launched to attract foreign researchers

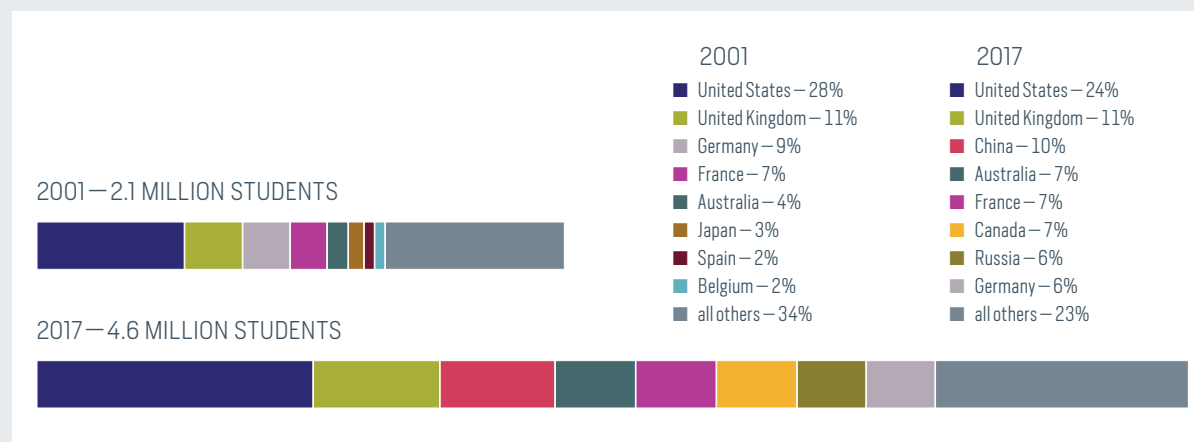


FIGURE 14 Host destinations of globally mobile students, 2001 & 2017 SOURCE: PROJECT ATLAS, 2017; UNESCO, 2017



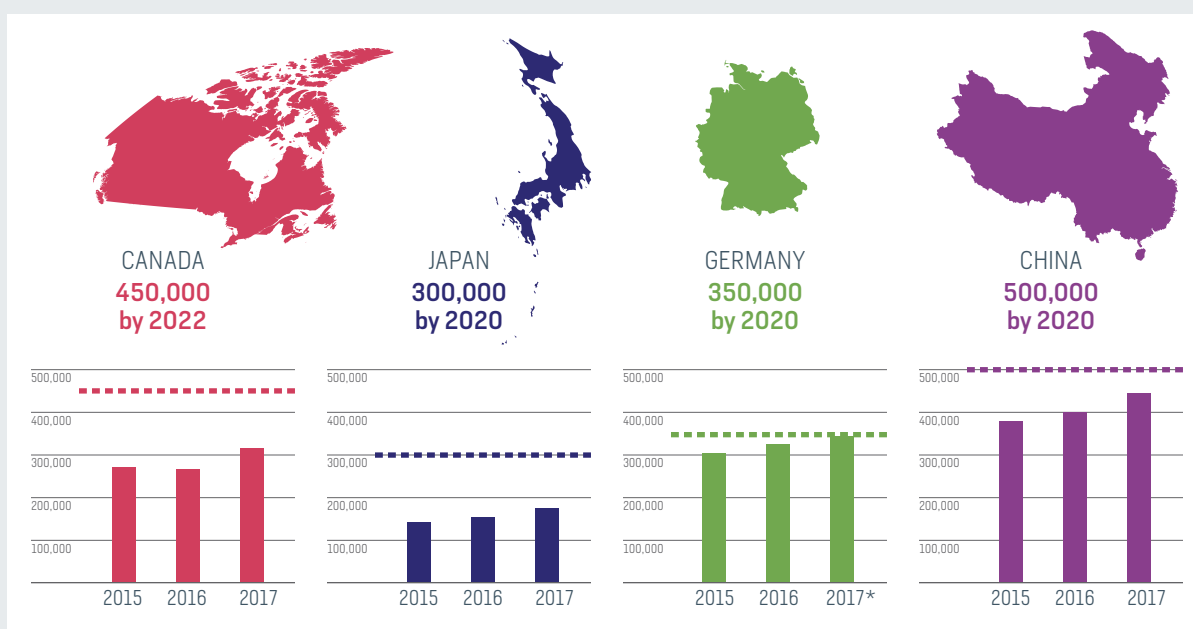


FIGURE 15 International student enrollment targets SOURCE: PROJECT ATLAS, 2017

coming to work on short-term contracts at public universities, by removing the requirement for a work-permit (PIE Review, 2017). Reflecting positive overall views of the country's higher education initiatives, a study by the Canadian Bureau for International Education (CBIE) found that 51 percent of international students plan to apply for permanent residence after graduation (CBIE, 2016).

Offering degree programs with minimal fees, career incentives, and more English-taught graduate programs, **Germany's** higher education sector is becoming increasingly attractive. These concerted efforts have drawn more international students to Germany's institutions. In the 2017 reporting year, reflecting 2016 enrollment, 251,542 international students were enrolled in German institutions, representing a 7 percent increase since 2016 (Project Atlas, 2017). The country's target to increase international student enrollment to 350,000 by 2020 was surpassed in late 2017, three years before the target date (Fig. 15) (Kennedy, 2017; Nafie, 2017). International graduates from non-EU countries have 18 months to find employment in Germany and a large number take advantage of this policy. According to the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), half of the foreign students who earn a degree in Germany choose to stay, and an estimated 40 percent plan to remain for at least 10 years (Nafie, 2017).

Looking to the East, emerging destinations like

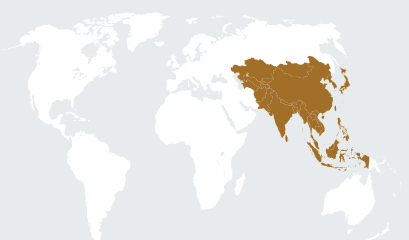
China and Japan have recently stepped up initiatives to attract global talent. In **China**, the cohort of 442,773 internationally mobile students hosted in 2015/16 are benefiting from new opportunities to undertake internships, smoother pathways to residency permits, and a variety of programs which enable graduates to stay in-country to work. The aspiration is to host 500,000 international students by 2020 (Fig. 15). Several cities—including Beijing, Shanghai, and Shenzhen—have put policies into place to address local skills gaps and create opportunities for international students in high-technology and e-commerce programs to transition easily into the workforce (Sharma, 2017).

In **Japan**, the goal of international higher education initiatives is to boost student enrollment to 300,000 by 2020 (Fig. 15). To support this target, a large recruitment effort by the Japanese government and institutions in targeted regions offers both educational and employment opportunities to prospective students. Subsidized company internships, job search assistance, additional Japanese language courses, and a more streamlined process for work visas are among the incentives for both graduates and employers (ICEF, 2017a). These types of offerings provide the opportunity to develop international work skills that can be attractive assets in the Japanese job market down the line.

\* Date refers to the 2017 *Project Atlas* reporting year, reflecting 2016 enrollment. Germany has since surpassed its target (Kennedy, 2017).

## WORLD REGION TRENDS

### Asia



In 2016/17, tertiary-level students from across Asia totaled 734,309, accounting for 68 percent of all international students in the United States. Students from China and India account for half of all international students. In 2016/17, China was the leading place of origin of international students for the eighth consecutive year, reaching a high of 350,755 students. The number of Indian students in the United States continued to grow, increasing by 12 percent in 2016/17. While the growth of both Chinese and Indian students remains high, both countries grew at lower rates than the very high growth rates of over 20 percent in the recent past.

Students from South Asian countries including Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka increased in 2016/17. Although with smaller absolute numbers than their neighbor, India, students from these four countries increased 14 percent. Notably, students from Nepal grew 20 percent in 2016/17, marking a second year of high growth, and for the first time Bangladesh moved into the top 25 places of origin.

Overall, students from Asia pursue undergraduate and graduate degrees in fairly even proportions, with 36 percent enrolled at the undergraduate level and 39 percent enrolled in graduate programs (Table 1.15). An additional 5 percent enroll in non-degree programs, such as intensive English study or certificate programs, and 19 percent pursue Optional Practical Training following the receipt of their degree. Students from some places in Asia enroll primarily in undergraduate programs, including Hong Kong (66 percent undergraduate), Indonesia (62 percent), Japan (48 percent), Malaysia (68 percent), Nepal (54 percent), South Korea (51 percent), and Vietnam (68 percent). Students from countries such as Bangladesh and India enroll in graduate programs at high rates (61 percent and 56 percent, respectively). Among the leading Asian places of origin, students from Japan enroll in non-degree programs at the highest rate, accounting for 28 percent of

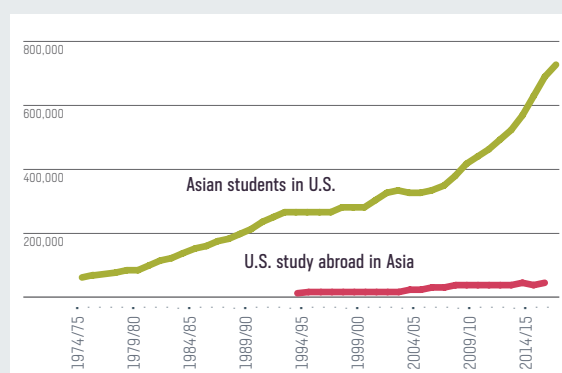


FIGURE 16 Student mobility between the United States and Asia 1974/75–2016/17

all Japanese students in the United States in 2016/17. Indian students pursue OPT at the highest rate, making up 30 percent of Indian students in the United States.

The proportion of U.S. study abroad to Asia has plateaued over the last decade, with 11 percent of U.S. study abroad taking place in Asia in 2015/16. For the fourth year in a row, U.S. students in China declined, falling 9 percent to 11,688 students, causing China to descend from the fifth to the sixth leading destination of U.S. students. While the number of students traveling to China has declined, American students in other Asian destinations continue to increase. In 2015/16, Cambodia, Japan, Hong Kong, South Korea, and Vietnam all hosted growing numbers of U.S. students (Table 2.7).

#### **SPOTLIGHT:** **EAST ASIA'S ADVANCES IN ACADEMIC MOBILITY**

Increasing economic prosperity and higher education competitiveness in East Asia have created a more level playing field in student mobility. The rapid pace of institutional linkages and support for mobility in all directions offers new momentum to East Asia's enhanced position in the global higher education landscape. In addition to fostering mobility into and out of the region, governments and institutions are also turning their

focus to the circulation of intellectual capital within the region (Batalova, Shymonyak, & Sugiyarto, 2017; ICEF, 2017d). As a result, in recent years, intraregional academic exchange and collaboration has strengthened substantially.

In 2015/16, over 1 million students from East Asia comprised approximately 23 percent of worldwide student mobility, with an estimated 36 percent of these students choosing to study within the region. China is the number one destination for students from five of the seven countries in East Asia. Anglo-phone countries—including the United States, Australia, and the UK—remain among the top five destinations for East Asian students seeking an international higher education outside of the region (Project Atlas, 2017; UNESCO, 2017c).

Taking a closer look at East Asia, the top three host and sending countries in the region—China, Japan, and South Korea (Fig. 17)—have solidified mutual exchange agreements and joint education programs through a collaborative initiative, known as the Collective Action for the Mobility Program of University Students (CAMPUS Asia). Initiated in 2011, CAMPUS Asia launched its second pilot round in 2016, facilitating undergraduate and graduate regional mobility through academic credit transfer agreements, dual degree and joint degree offerings. This program is expected to yield many important benefits, including strengthening

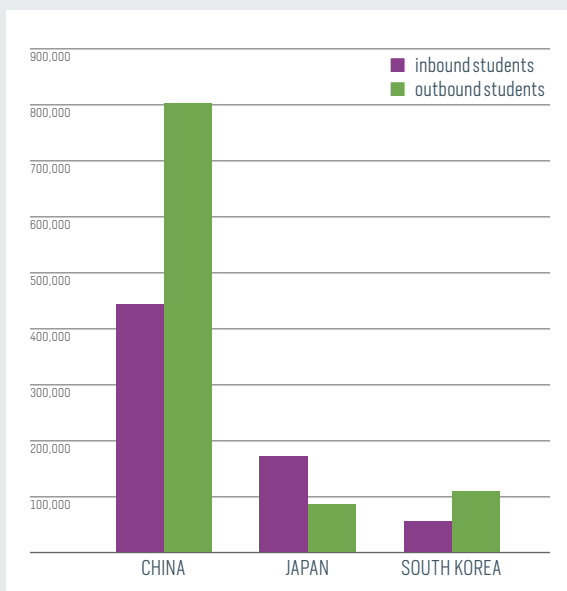


FIGURE 17 Inbound and outbound student flows in select East Asian countries, 2015/16 SOURCE: JASSO, 2017; MINISTRY OF EDUCATION (CHINA), 2017; UNESCO, 2017

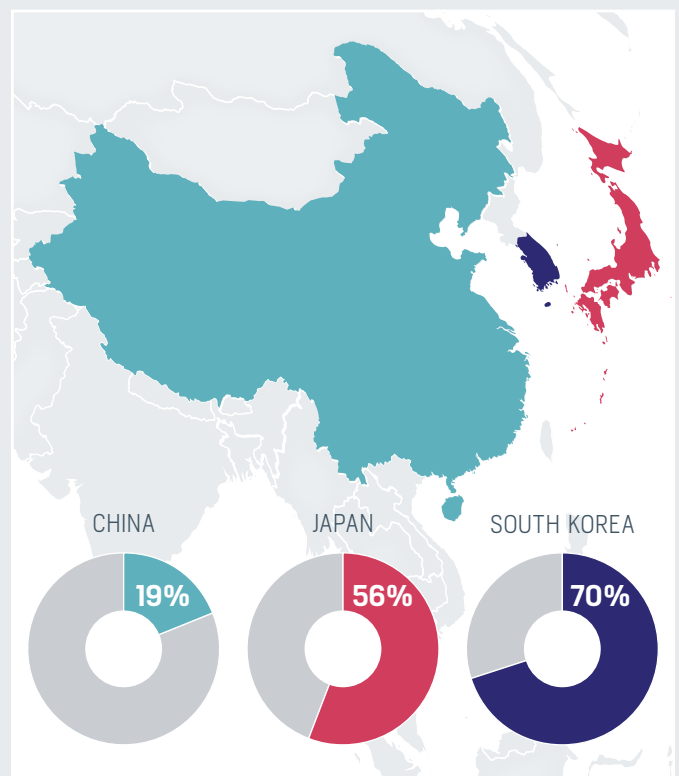


FIGURE 18 Intraregional inbound students as a percentage of all inbound students in select East Asian countries, 2015/16 SOURCE: PROJECT ATLAS, 2017; UNESCO, 2017

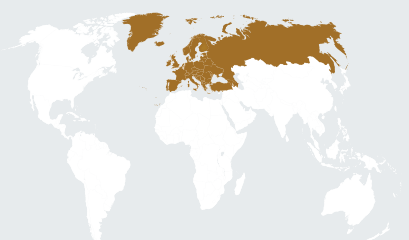
circulation of intellectual capital, increasing cross-cultural understanding, supporting knowledge sharing, and deepening regional stability (Choi, 2017; Yonezawa, Hoshino & Shinmauchi, 2017).

While China, Japan, and South Korea remain top host countries in the region, the rise in the number of world-class universities and competitive programs are giving new shape to students' decisions about where to study within the region (Fig. 18). Increasing regional and multilateral exchange agreements and academic networks and collaborations that are mutual in nature define the relationships among East Asian universities (Yonezawa, Hoshino & Shinmauchi, 2017). Attracting students from around the world to institutions in East Asia is the growing use of English as a common academic language.

East Asian countries hosted an estimated 715,000 students from around the world in 2015/16, accounting for 16 percent of the more than 4.6 million students who pursued an education abroad. Together, the top three destinations—China (62 percent), Japan (24 percent), and South Korea (8 percent)—hosted approximately 92 percent of all inbound students in the region (Project Atlas, 2017; UNESCO, 2017c).

## WORLD REGION TRENDS

### Europe



European students comprised 9 percent of international students in the United States in 2016/17, reaching almost 92,000 students. Five countries — France, Germany, Spain, Turkey, and the UK — remain among the top 25 places of origin for international students, well behind the top senders in Asia. Growth from the overall region was flat while student numbers from a few countries rose. Students from Italy and Spain increased at the highest rates, 9 and 8 percent respectively.

Europe continues to attract the majority of U.S. students who study abroad. In 2015/16, 176,890 U.S. students studied in Europe for credit back at their home campuses, accounting for 54 percent of all U.S. study abroad and reflecting a 4 percent increase from the prior year. The United Kingdom, Italy, Spain, France, and Germany were the leading five destinations of U.S. students worldwide in 2015/16, with Ireland, Denmark, Greece, Czech Republic, Netherlands, and Austria also among the top 25 hosts of U.S. students. Among these top destinations in Europe, the strongest growth in U.S. students was among those studying in Denmark (+15 percent), Czech Republic (+13 percent), and the Netherlands (+17 percent).

#### SPOTLIGHT: 30 YEARS OF ERASMUS SUPPORT FOR ACADEMIC MOBILITY

Considered Europe's flagship program to support learning mobility across the region, Erasmus celebrated its 30-year anniversary in 2017. Erasmus has long attracted students who have a desire for international experience as well as an interest in improving their career prospects. The program was first established by the European Commission in 1987 with the goal of promoting student and cultural exchange between European countries. At that time, relatively few tertiary-level students pursued an education

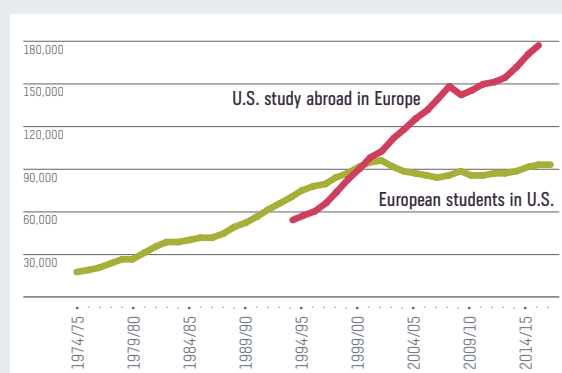


FIGURE 19 Student mobility between the United States and Europe 1974/75–2016/17

abroad. Enabling higher education students from European Union (EU) countries to undertake a short period of learning abroad, Erasmus programs are generally completed during one academic semester. Since the program's inception 30 years ago, an estimated 9 million Europeans have studied, trained or volunteered abroad through Erasmus (European Commission, 2017b) (Fig. 20).

In recent years, Erasmus has expanded the range of learners served. The Erasmus Mundus program provides opportunities to earn joint degrees between institutions within and outside the EU and the Erasmus+ program expands study, training, and volunteer opportunities to young people, students, adults, teachers, trainers, volunteers, and youth workers (European Commission, 2017a; 2017b). Special focus has been given to social inclusion and one in three Erasmus+ youth participants are from disadvantaged backgrounds.

The top destinations for the 291,383 Erasmus+ students in 2014/15 were Spain (14 percent), Germany (11 percent), the United Kingdom (10 percent), France (10 percent), and Italy (7 percent). In 2014/15, the countries of origin of the most mobile students were France (14 percent), Germany (14 percent), Spain (13 percent), Italy (11 percent), and Poland (6 percent) (European Commission, 2017b) (Fig. 21).

Strategic partnerships across Europe offer new opportunities for staff and professionals in the European Union to train or exchange experience, learning from their host-country peers (European Commission, 2017c). Facilitating employability skills and career development is another key focus of the Erasmus+ program, with new offerings for young people to gain work experience through traineeships, apprenticeships, youth exchanges, and European Voluntary Service opportunities (European Commission, 2017b). In 2015, 678,000 people, including students and others, participated in Erasmus+ expanded programs (European Commission, 2017d).

While the inability to speak a foreign language held some prospective Erasmus students back from participation in previous years (Souto-Otero, Huisman, Beerkens, De Wit & Vujić, 2013), language learning opportunities are now provided to all Erasmus+ enrollees (European Commission, 2017c). Work responsibilities in one's home country and perceptions about low levels of available funding are two other common barriers (Souto-Otero, et al, 2013), which may be countered by international work experience opportunities and an increase in overall funding for the program.

To support its extended range of programs, Erasmus+ received approximately 16.6 billion USD of support from the EU. Erasmus+ is benefiting from an increase of 40 percent more funding than its predecessor initiative, the Lifelong Learning Programme (2007-13). Two-thirds of the Erasmus+ budget is allocated to support learning opportunities abroad and one-third provides funding for institutional partnerships and reforms of the education and youth sectors (European Commission, 2017c).

Erasmus has been found to yield a number of important benefits for the students who study abroad through its many programs. A recent report, *The Erasmus Impact Study*, revealed that the program positively impacts employment outcomes. The risk of long-term unemployment is significantly reduced, the likeliness of working in an international environment significantly increases, and alumni are measurably more mobile across Europe even after completion of tertiary studies (European Commission, 2016). Eastern European students benefit particularly from Erasmus+, with their long-term unemployment being reduced by 83 percent when compared with their non-mobile peers (ICEF, 2016). It is also notable that of all Erasmus alumni, more hold management positions 5 to 10 years after graduation than do their non-mobile peers (ICEF,

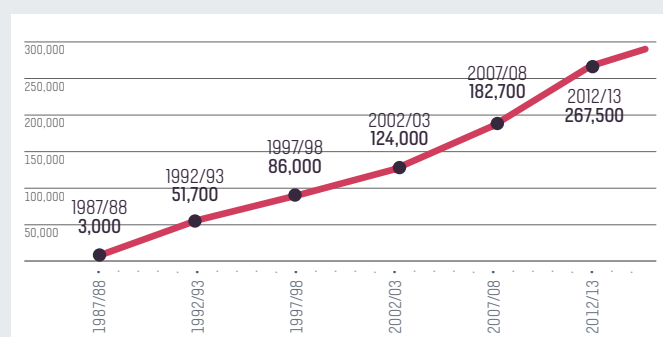


FIGURE 20 Erasmus to Erasmus+: 30 years of mobility, 1987–2015

SOURCE: EUROPEAN COMMISSION, 2017B

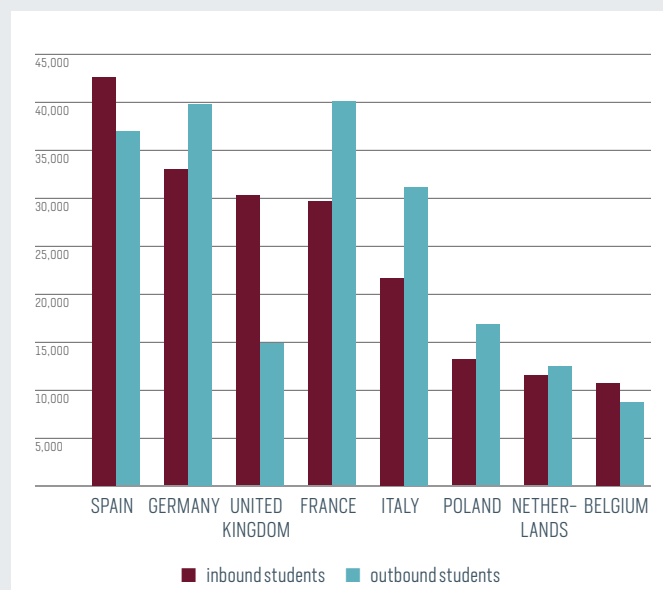


FIGURE 21 Erasmus+ inbound and outbound mobility in select countries, 2014/15

SOURCE: EUROPEAN COMMISSION, 2017B

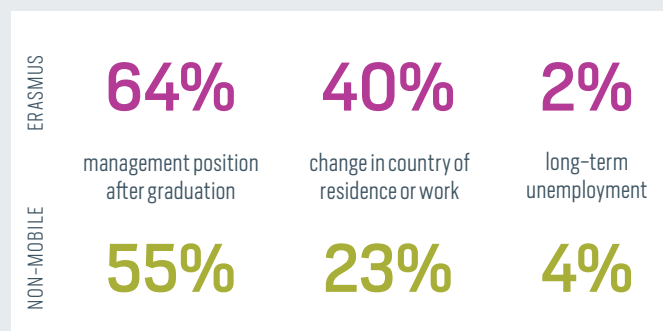


FIGURE 22 Selected career outcomes of Erasmus alumni and non-mobile students SOURCE: EUROPEAN COMMISSION, 2016

2016) (Fig. 22). Fostering not only a sense of shared European identity and citizenship, Erasmus also promotes an international outlook. More than 90 percent of Erasmus students from all regions report that they can “easily imagine living abroad at some point in the future” (European Commission, 2016).

## Latin America & the Caribbean



Student mobility from Latin America and the Caribbean to the United States declined by 6 percent to 79,655 students in 2016/17. This sizable decline was primarily due to a 32 percent decrease in Brazilian students following the end of Brazil's Scientific Mobility Program. Students from both Venezuela and Colombia increased slightly (3 percent and 2 percent, respectively) while the number of students from Mexico remained flat.

U.S. students in Latin America and the Caribbean grew 6 percent in 2015/16, with 53,105 American students receiving academic credit for study in the region, second only to Europe. Costa Rica and Mexico continue to be top destinations, with Mexico seeing a 10 percent increase, while Costa Rica remained flat. Cuba had a 59 percent increase in U.S. students in 2015/16, marking the fifth consecutive year of double-digit growth and moving the country for the first time into the top twenty destinations of U.S. students. The region leads as a destination for U.S. students seeking a non-credit work, internship, or volunteer experience, with 38 percent of these students pursuing non-credit education in the region, most notably in Nicaragua, Mexico, and the Dominican Republic (Table 2.14).

### INTRAREGIONAL MOBILITY IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN\*

Of the 96,000 international students who studied in Latin America and the Caribbean in 2014, more than 55,000 students (57 percent) came from another country in the region (UNESCO, 2017e), with the largest numbers of intraregional students hailing from Haiti, Bolivia, Peru, Colombia, and Venezuela

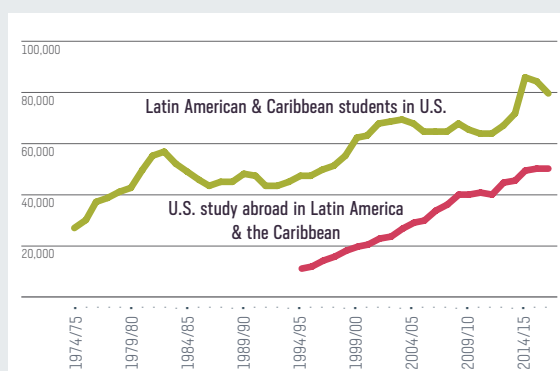


FIGURE 23 Student mobility between Latin America & Caribbean and the United States, 1974/75–2016/17

(UNESCO, 2017e). Many of these sending countries have limited higher education capacity at home, pushing students towards study in another country, while personal financial constraints cause students to seek study options in nearby countries. In some cases, proximity plays a role in intraregional mobility patterns, as in the case of Haitian students who study in large numbers in the Dominican Republic; Bolivian students who study in Brazil and Chile; and Venezuelan students in Colombia (UNESCO, 2017c).

Cuba, Brazil, Dominican Republic, Colombia, Chile, and Ecuador host the largest numbers of students from within the region (UNESCO, 2017d) (Fig. 24). For some host countries, the size of their higher education systems and strength of their internationalization efforts helps attract students broadly from the region. Growing interregional cooperation among national and regional higher education associations accounts for some of the growth in intraregional mobility, as well as intraregional efforts towards broader regional integration, such as those occurring as part of the Mercado Común del Sur (MECOSUR) alliance and the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) (CARICOM, 2017; Jaramillo & de Wit, 2011; Martínez Larrechea & Chiancone Castro, 2009).

\* These sections are excerpted from C. Farrugia (2018), Academic Mobility in the Americas: Patterns and Prospects. *Revista Educación Superior y Sociedad*. UNESCO-IESALC, Vol. temático Núm. 21. Tema: Internacionalización de la Educación Superior, 93–118 (see <http://ess.iesalc.unesco.org.ve/ess3>), and C. Robles (2018), *Expanding Vistas: International Academic Mobility in Brazil*. New York: Institute of International Education (see [www.iie.org](http://www.iie.org)).



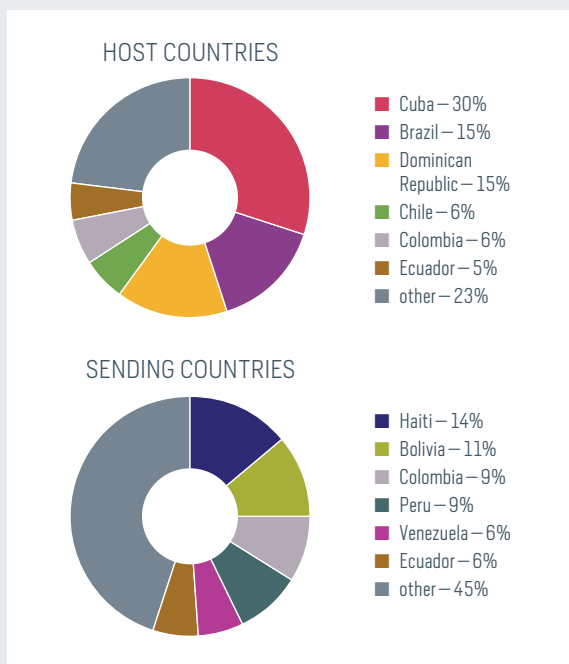


FIGURE 24 Largest hosts and senders of intraregionally mobile students in Latin America and the Caribbean, 2014 SOURCE: UNESCO, 2017

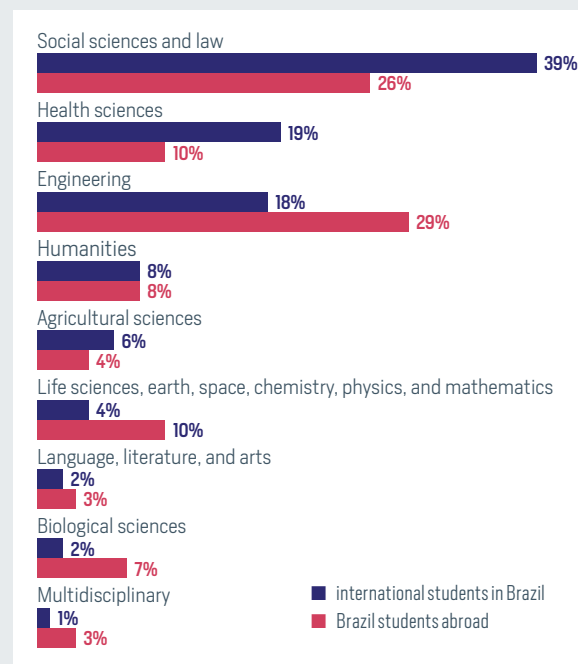


FIGURE 25 Fields of study of international students in Brazil and Brazil students abroad, 2016 SOURCE: ROBLES, 2018

### SPOTLIGHT: BRAZIL\*

In recent years, Brazil has had a rising role in the field of international education. Despite significant political and economic shifts over the past two years, Brazil has continued to make strides toward internationalizing its higher education sector. Across the country's universities, internationalization is visible in the provision of programs and courses taught in English, virtual learning, and initiatives to support inbound and outbound student flows. However, while global engagement is increasing in many directions, little is known about the trends, challenges, and opportunities for internationalization that define Brazil's higher education sector. It is within this context that, in 2017, IIE conducted a pilot study of higher education institutions in Brazil to glean insight into global mobility in the country's tertiary education sector. The study was conducted in partnership with the Brazilian Federal Agency for Support and Evaluation of Graduate Education (CAPES) and the Brazilian Association for International Education (FAUBAI), with support from the Australian Government Department of Education and Training. This section presents selected findings from the study based on survey responses from 158 institutions.

In the 2016 academic year, Brazil hosted 20,523 international students in degree and non-degree programs, most of whom studied in metropolitan areas in the

Southeastern region, which is the country's economic and industrial hub containing many highly ranked universities (Bothwell, 2017). The prestige of the universities in this region may be among the factors that draw international students to the Southeast. The majority of international students study at the undergraduate level (83 percent) and most are classified as full-degree students (74 percent).

The country has relatively low outbound mobility, with just 0.6 percent of Brazilian students studying abroad in 2016. Language poses a barrier for Brazilian students who would prefer to study in the United States or Europe but have not met English language requirements. Brazilian undergraduates may be less likely to study abroad due to the good quality of higher education available at home as well as "generally strong cultural ties to their local setting" (European Commission, 2012).

Outbound student flows are largely at the undergraduate level (77 percent). Outbound mobility is concentrated in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM), including engineering (29 percent); life sciences, earth, space, chemistry, physics, and mathematics (10 percent); and biological sciences (7 percent) (Fig. 25). These patterns are largely due to the Brazil Scientific Mobility program (2011–2016), which provided scholarships for study abroad in STEM fields.



## Middle East & North Africa



The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) is the second largest sending region of international students to the United States after Asia, accounting for 9 percent of international students. Students from MENA decreased 8 percent in 2016/17 to 100,014. Most students from the region hail from Saudi Arabia, Iran, or Kuwait.

Saudi students in the United States have increased substantially over the past ten years. In 2006/07, fewer than 8,000 studied in the United States, rising to a peak of 61,287 in 2015/16 as large numbers received scholarships from the Saudi government to sponsor their U.S. studies. In 2016/17, Saudi students declined 14 percent to 52,611 students due to a narrowing of scholarship eligibility requirements. As the leading source of students from the region, the drop in Saudi students has led to an overall decline in enrollment from the region. Many U.S. higher education institutions (76 percent) also report concern about future enrollment from MENA as tightened visa vetting for individuals from the region may impact students' willingness or ability to study in the United States (Baer, 2017).

U.S. study abroad to MENA has been low historically, accounting for only 2 percent of all study abroad in 2015/16. Israel remains the region's top destination for U.S. students, hosting over 2,000 students. Jordan, the United Arab Emirates, and Morocco each hosted between 700 and 1,400 students in 2015/16 (Table 2.7).

### SPOTLIGHT: KUWAITI STUDENTS AROUND THE WORLD

Kuwait is emerging as one of the MENA region's top senders of students overseas, with 21,930 of the country's students abroad in the 2016 reporting year (UNESCO, 2017c). The top destination is the United States, hosting 9,825 Kuwaiti students in 2016/17 (Fig. 2). Other top destinations for students from Kuwait include Jordan, Egypt, the United Kingdom, United Arab Emirates, and Australia (UNESCO, 2017c) (Fig. 27).

Bolstered by the expansion of generous government scholarships supporting overseas study, Kuwaiti

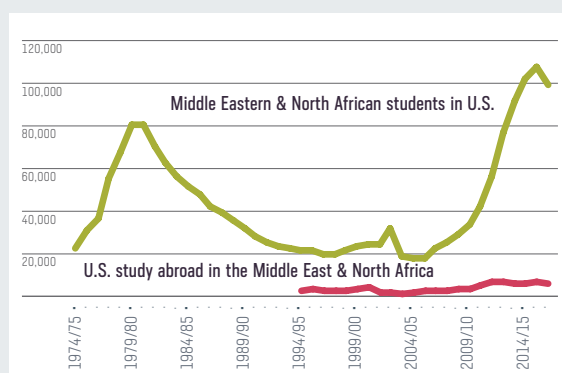


FIGURE 26 Student mobility between the United States and the Middle East & North Africa, 1974/75–2016/17

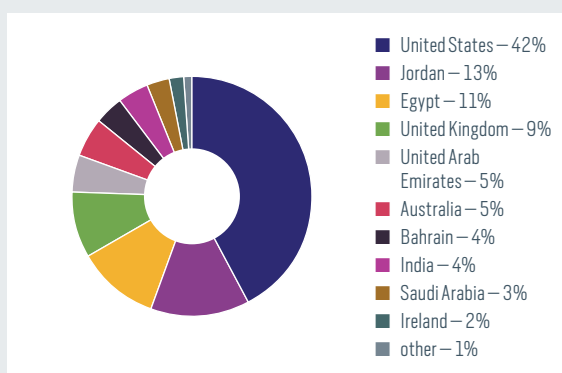


FIGURE 27 Proportion of mobile Kuwaiti students by study destinations, 2016/17 SOURCE: OPEN DOORS, 2017; UNESCO, 2017

students are taking advantage of opportunities to undertake an education abroad. While domestic higher education is provided free of cost to Kuwaiti citizens, individual family wealth also enables many students to self-fund their studies abroad (ICEF, 2015).

A small higher education sector also accounts for some of Kuwait's outbound mobility. Kuwait's higher education sector is comprised of one public and three private universities. Students who wish to enroll in higher education courses not offered in the country, such as social sciences and humanities fields, often pursue an international education (Chronicle of Higher Education, 2017).

## WORLD REGION TRENDS

### Sub-Saharan Africa



Almost 38,000 students from Sub-Saharan Africa studied in the United States in 2016/17, up 7 percent from the prior year (Fig. 28). Students from Nigeria — the leading place of origin from the region — increased for the fifth year in a row, growing by 10 percent in 2016/17 to reach 11,710 students. Ghana and Kenya are also large senders, each with more than 3,000 students enrolled in U.S. higher education.

U.S. students in Sub-Saharan Africa increased sharply by 20 percent to 12,738 in 2015/16, almost fully rebounding from an equally steep decline in 2014/15 tied to the Ebola outbreak in several West African countries. While study abroad to Ebola-affected countries has been low historically, Ghana — a country that experienced declines because of its proximity to affected areas (Ortega, 2014) — hosts the majority of the region's U.S. students and drove the region's growth in 2015/16. The number of U.S. students in Ghana more than doubled in 2015/16 to over 1,500 students. Also contributing to the rise in U.S. students in Sub-Saharan Africa was a 10 percent increase to South Africa — the leading host in the region — reaching 5,782 students in 2015/16.

#### SPOTLIGHT: EAST AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION AREA

Students from East Africa are increasingly mobile, with an estimated 53,391 pursuing a higher education outside of their home countries in 2016, more than double the number in 2001 (UNESCO, 2017b). Top senders include Kenya, Sudan, Ethiopia, Rwanda, and Uganda (Fig. 29).

While East Africa is comprised of a diverse set of countries, common issues hinder academic mobility into and out of the region. Significant and persistent challenges for students who wish to study abroad include: overall limited access to higher education; lack of funding; university management issues; questions about the quality of education; the transferability of credits; and difficulty retaining intellectual capital at the faculty level (Teferra & Altbach, 2004; Waruru, 2017b).

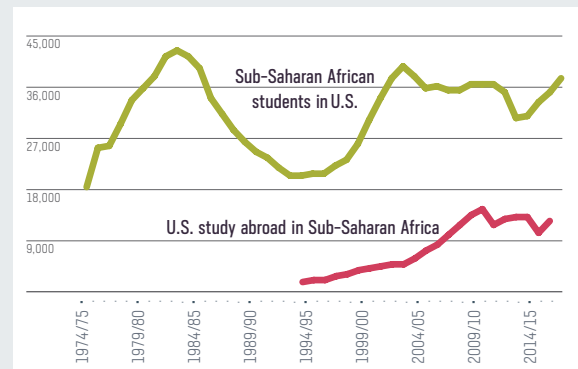


FIGURE 28 Student mobility between the United States and Sub-Saharan Africa, 1974/75–2016/17

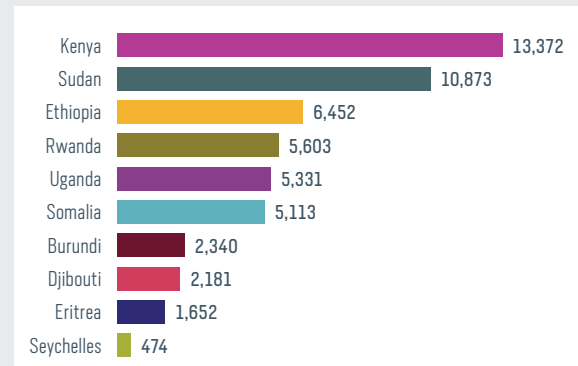
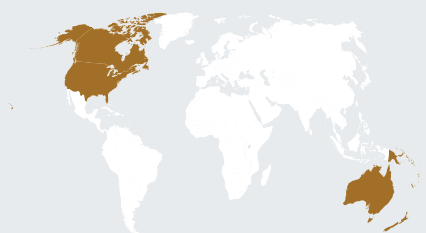


FIGURE 29 Outbound East African students from select countries, 2016 SOURCE: UNESCO, 2017

In order to promote mobility within the region, efforts to address such challenges have been announced as a priority of the East Africa Higher Education Area, which was formalized by the East African Community (EAC) in May 2017. Five countries head the initiative — Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda, and Burundi. The agenda includes the development of regional standards, guidelines, and national commissions and councils for higher education. To facilitate student flows, EAC students will be able to enroll in any of the 100 universities in the region without taking a special exam, and credits will be transferable across institutions (Waruru, 2017a).

## North America and Oceania



Anglophone countries in North America\* and Oceania are among the top hosts of international students worldwide. Expansive program options, state of the art education facilities, and practical training are some reasons why—together—the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand host approximately 40 percent of all globally mobile students (Project Atlas, 2017).

Canada remains the fifth leading sender of international students to the United States, with 27,065 students in 2016/17 (Fig. 30). The number of U.S. students in Canada grew in 2015/16, with 1,716 students receiving academic credit from their U.S. institution for study abroad in Canada. Most U.S. students in Canada enroll in full-degree programs, numbering at over 8,000 U.S. students (Project Atlas, 2016).

Both Australia and New Zealand continue to see growth in U.S. students. In 2015/16, the combined number hosted by these two countries was 13,342, a 10 percent increase from the prior year (Fig. 31). Additionally, 4,800 American students pursued a full degree in Australia or New Zealand (Project Atlas, 2017). The scale of mobility in the reverse direction is much smaller, with the United States hosting 7,222 students from Oceania in 2016/17, 92 percent of whom were from Australia and New Zealand.

### CANADA'S GROWING INBOUND STUDENT FLOWS

Attracted by the quality of Canada's education system, its reputation as a safe country, the diversity of its population, and its skilled immigration policies, 312,100 international students studied in Canada in 2016, an increase of 18 percent from the prior year (CBIE, 2016; Project Atlas, 2017). The country's recent growth as a host of international students is tied to its national and provincial initiatives to internationalize its higher education system as well as shifting international student demand in other leading Anglophone host countries.

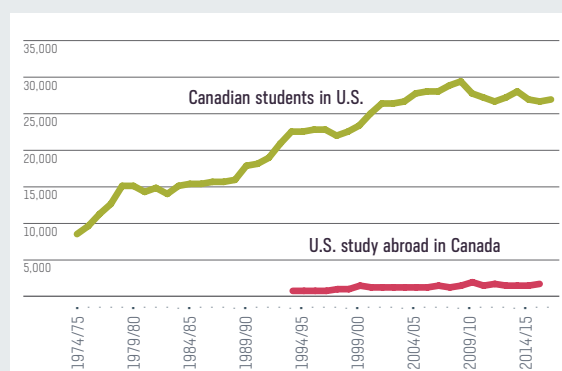


FIGURE 30 Student mobility between the United States and Canada, 1974/75–2016/17

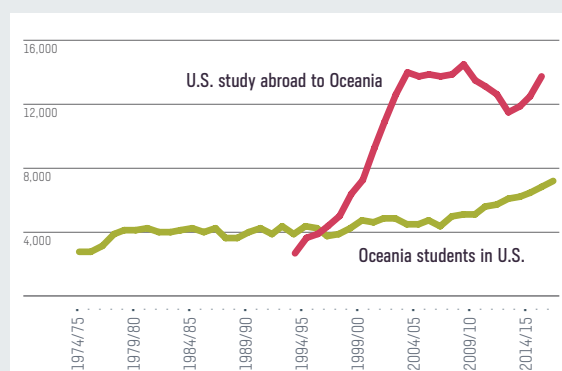


FIGURE 31 Student mobility between the United States and Oceania, 1974/75–2016/17

China, India, and South Korea are the leading places of origin in Canada, with students from these countries comprising 74 percent of international enrollments (Project Atlas, 2017) (Fig. 32). Canada is also increasingly popular among Vietnamese students. Owing to Vietnam's rising middle class, as well as the recently-launched Canada Express Study Program, and Canada's post-graduation employment and immigration opportunities, enrollments of Vietnamese students have grown more than five-fold since 2013 (EducationUSA, 2017; UNESCO, 2017c).

\* For the purposes of *Open Doors* analysis, Mexico is grouped in Latin America and the Caribbean.

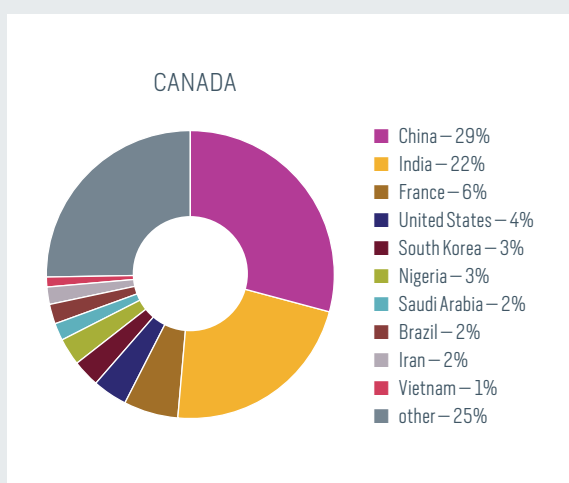


FIGURE 32 Places of origin of international students in Canada, 2015/16 SOURCE: PROJECT ATLAS, 2017; CANADIAN BUREAU FOR INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION, 2017

While Canada is a popular destination for inbound international students, the number of Canadians pursuing full-degrees abroad totaled 49,771 in 2016 (UNESCO, 2017c), and just 11 percent of Canadian undergraduates completing degrees in Canada participate in a short-term exchange (Crace, 2017). Renewing attention to the value of international education for Canadian students, the Report of the Study Group on Global Education was released in November 2017. Proposed is a 10-year national strategy to support more Canadians gaining international competencies and connections, particularly in emerging destinations and with special initiatives to support students from the least-advantaged backgrounds (University of Toronto & University of Ottawa, 2017).

#### AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND: A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

In 2015/16, international student enrollments in Australia (327,606) and New Zealand (62,570) increased by 12 percent and 2 percent, respectively, with most international students coming from the Asia-Pacific Region (Fig. 33).

China and India remain the two leading places of origin in both Australia and New Zealand, with Chinese students comprising more than a third of all international enrollments in Australia (Fig. 33). Mirroring trends in the United States, Indian and Nepali students had the steepest growth in Australia, rising 26 percent and 24 percent, respectively, from the previous year. In New Zealand, the number of students from the Philippines and Malaysia surged upward by 18 percent

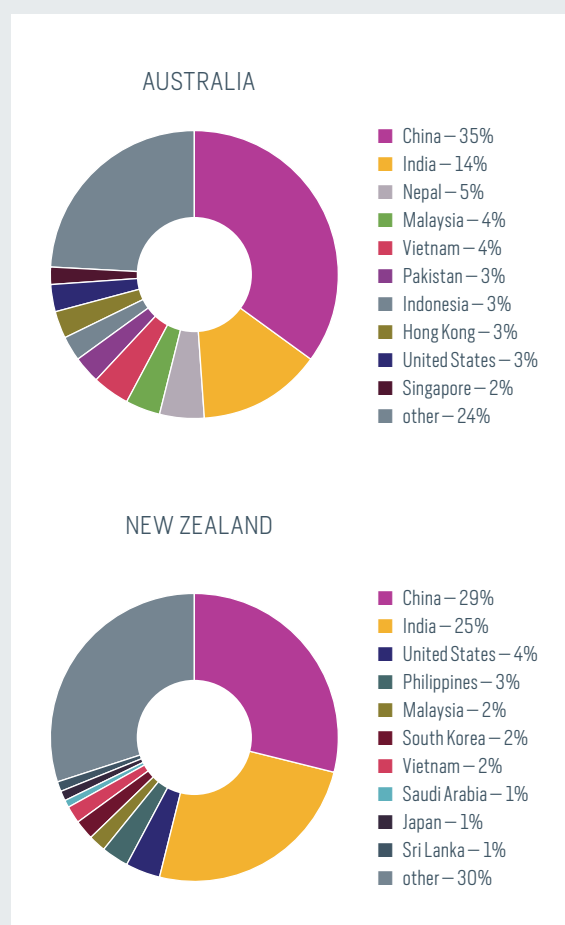
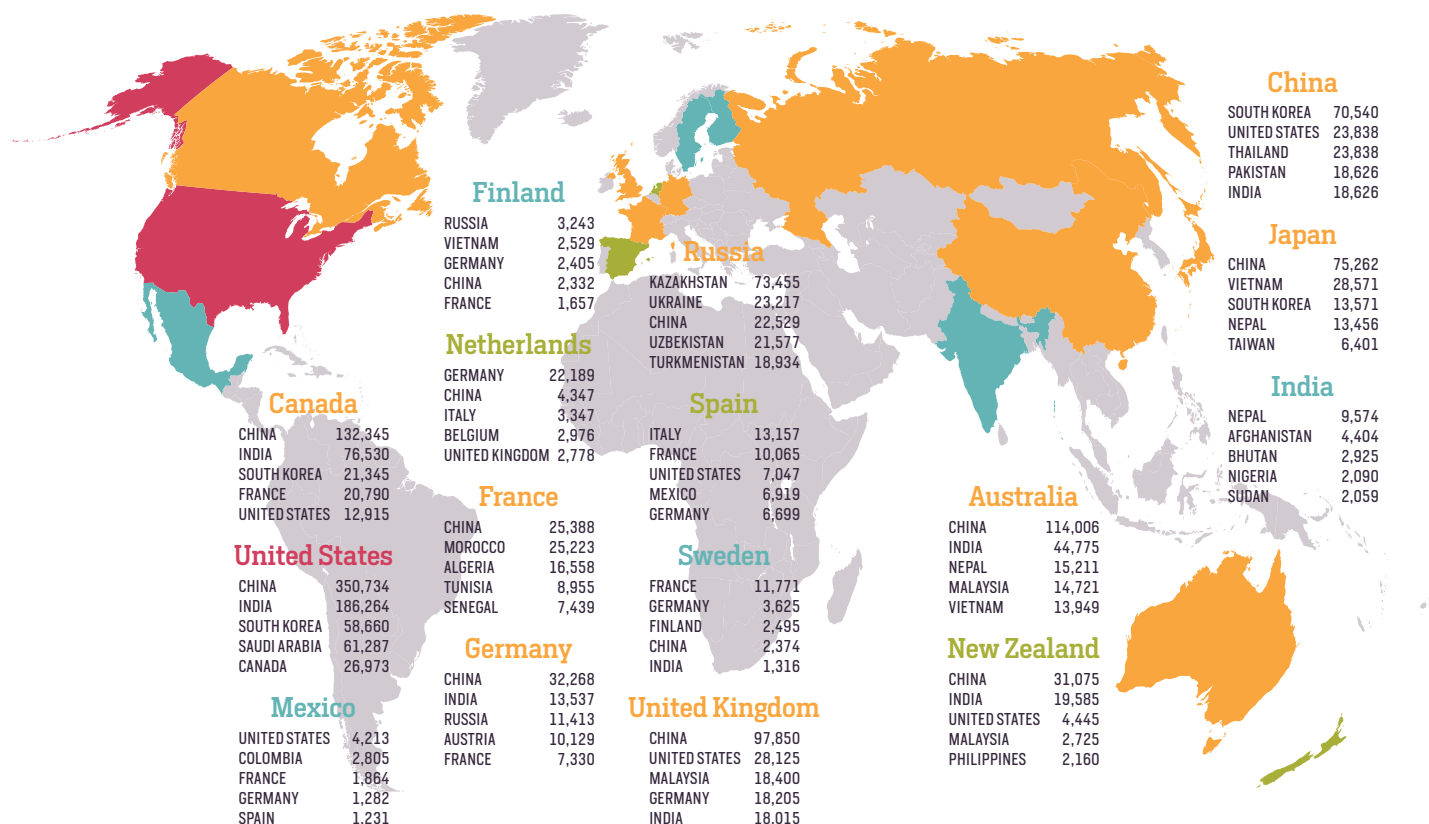


FIGURE 33 Places of origin of international students in Australia and New Zealand, 2015/16 SOURCE: PROJECT ATLAS, 2017; AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING, 2017; NEW ZEALAND MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, 2017

and 15 percent, respectively, from the previous year. Undergraduates pursuing full degrees comprise the majority of enrollments in New Zealand (65 percent) and Australia (50 percent) (Project Atlas, 2017).

Comprehensive national strategies recently released by both countries' governments guide the expansion of international higher education in Australia and New Zealand. Australia's National Strategy for International Education 2025 emphasizes stronger student support services, increased quality assurance mechanisms, and expanded opportunities to integrate work and learning opportunities for foreign students (ICEF, 2017b). In 2017, the government of New Zealand released a draft international education strategy that encourages high quality and sustainable growth among higher education institutes. Among the priorities is the diversification of sending countries by encouraging greater linkages with emerging economies (ICEF, 2017c).

# LEADING PLACES OF ORIGIN OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS BY HOST COUNTRY



Total number of international students in host country:

■ > 1,000,000 ■ 100,001-500,000 ■ 50,001-100,000 ■ 20,001-50,000 ■ ≤ 20,000

Source: Project Atlas, 2017

## PROJECT ATLAS DATA PARTNERS

**Australia** Australian Government Department of Education and Training  
**Brazil** Brazilian Federal Agency for Support and Evaluation of Graduate Education (CAPES), and the Brazilian Association for International Education (FAUBAI)  
**Canada** Canadian Bureau for International Education (CBIE)  
**Chile** Ministry of Education, Higher Education Division  
**China** China Scholarship Council  
**Denmark** Danish Agency for Universities and Internationalisation  
**Dominican Republic** ConnectDR  
**Finland** Centre for International Mobility (CIMO)  
**France** CampusFrance  
**Germany** The German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD)  
**India** Association of Indian Universities (AIU)

**Ireland** Education in Ireland  
**Japan** Japan Student Services Organization (JASSO)  
**Malaysia** Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia  
**Mexico** National Association of Universities and Higher Education Institutions (ANUIES)  
**Netherlands** Netherlands Organization for International Cooperation in Higher Education (NUFFIC)  
**Norway** Norwegian Centre for International Cooperation in Education (SIU)  
**New Zealand** New Zealand Ministry of Education  
**Republic of the Philippines** Commission on Higher Education (CHED)  
**Russian Federation** Center for Sociological Research, Ministry of Education and Science  
**South Africa** International Education Association of South Africa (IEASA)  
**Spain** Spanish Service for the Internationalization of Education (SEPIE)

**Sweden** Swedish Institute  
**United Arab Emirates** Center for Higher Education Data and Statistics, Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (MOHESR)  
**United Kingdom** British Council  
**United States** Institute of International Education (IIE)

## PROJECT ATLAS RESEARCH AFFILIATES

**ANIE** African Network for Internationalization of Education  
**CIHE** Center for International Higher Education, Boston College  
**IAU** International Association of Universities  
**OECD** Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development  
**TECO-NY** Taipei Economic and Cultural Office in New York  
**UIS** UNESCO Institute for Statistics

PROJECT ATLAS® was launched in 2001 by the INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION with support from the Ford Foundation and is now supported by the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) of the U.S. Department of State and the participating organizations in each country. The goal of this collaborative global project is to share accurate and timely data on student mobility at the higher education level, addressing the need for improved research comparability of academic mobility data. Project Atlas also helps strengthen data collection capacities worldwide through customized workshops and academic mobility assessment projects. For more on global student mobility data and associated research, please visit the Project Atlas website at [www.iie.org/atlas](http://www.iie.org/atlas).

**iie Project Atlas®**

2017 release

Figures in this report reflect the most recent data available by Project Atlas country and data partners at the time of publication. Visit website for details.

[WWW.IIE.ORG/ProjectAtlas](http://WWW.IIE.ORG/ProjectAtlas)





**Institute of International Education • [iie.org](http://iie.org)**

Addis Ababa • Bangkok • Beijing • Budapest • Cairo • Chicago  
Denver • Hanoi • Hong Kong • Houston • Jakarta • Kyiv • Mexico City  
Moscow • New Delhi • New York • San Francisco • Washington, D.C.