Higher Education

International Students in Higher Education

A comparative analysis of trends, challenges and policy responses in Australia, Canada, France, Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom

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A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF TRENDS, CHALLENGES AND POLICY RESPONSES IN AUSTRALIA, CANADA, FRANCE, GERMANY, THE NETHERLANDS AND THE UNITED KINGDOM

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Foreword

More people than ever before are choosing to move from their home country to pursue education abroad. This report provides a comparative analysis of trends, challenges and policy responses related to international students in six leading study destinations: Australia, Canada, France, Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. These six countries were selected among OECD member countries because they have all seen strong growth in international enrolment over the last decade, have a high share of international students in overall enrolment and have several shared policy challenges and comparable policy responses.

International students are a symbol, and an important part, of vibrant, innovative and globally connected higher education systems. Across Australia, Canada, France, Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, international enrolments expanded substantially over the last decade (2013–2023). While the COVID-19 pandemic temporarily slowed arrivals, countries recovered and even exceeded pre-pandemic enrolment levels by 2023. In the years since (2023-2025), Australia, Canada, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom have recalibrated their policies in relation to international students, while France and Germany maintained policies to attract and retain more international students. This report captures emerging evidence of slowing international enrolments and of reduced issuance of study visas/permits in these countries. It analyses how these countries worked to attract increasing numbers of international students and how some are now reconsidering earlier policies, as well as the challenges international students face and how different stakeholders are responding.

This publication was prepared by the Higher Education Policy team within the Directorate for Education and Skills as part of the programme of work of the OECD's Education Policy Committee (EDPC). The report draws on harmonised international data collected by the OECD – in particular indicators collected for Education at Glance – information from a policy survey carried out by the International Migration Division in the OECD's Directorate for Employment, Labour and Social Affairs and desk research analysing national data, survey reports and relevant academic literature. This evidence helped to situate headline trends within a wider policy context spanning the fields of higher education, migration, foreign affairs and employment. The project was carried out by the OECD Secretariat in co-operation with the Learning Branch of Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC), and with the input from key stakeholders in the six comparator countries.

Chapter 1 provides an overview of trends in international-student enrolment and key policy responses. The report then follows the journey of international students from choice of programme to post-graduation. Chapter 2 examines how students choose programmes and destinations, how admissions and study visa/permit processes operate, the main patterns of international enrolment and how costs and funding shape access. Chapter 3 looks at study adaptation, progression and completion, highlighting what institutions do to support preparedness and where gaps persist. Chapter 4 considers how international students navigate life in a new country. It covers issues like housing, accessing services, working during studies, integration in local communities, discrimination and safety, and study visa/permit conditions. Chapter 5 analyses what happens after graduation, who stays, the conditions attached to post-graduation visas/permits, labour-market outcomes and the challenges international graduates face in finding employment and staying longer term. Chapter 6 sets out four policy considerations for policymakers and stakeholders.

The OECD hopes that the analysis presented here will support policymakers, institutions, communities and other relevant stakeholders in developing predictable and evidence-based policies around international students.

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Abbreviations and acronyms

Countries

AUS	Australia
CAN	Canada
DEU	Germany
FRA	France
GBR / UK	Great Britain / United Kingdom
NLD / NL	Netherlands

Currencies

AUD	Australian dollar
CAD	Canadian dollar
EUR	Euro (DEU, FRA, NLD)
GBP	Pound sterling (GBR)
USD	United States dollar

Organisations and institutions

BMFTF	Federal Ministry of Research, Technology and Space (Germany, current ministry)
BMBF	Federal Ministry of Education and Research (Germany, former ministry)
CBIE	Canadian Bureau for International Education
CMEC	Council of Ministers of Education, Canada
CROUS	*Centres régionaux des œuvres universitaires et scolaires* (Regional centre for university and school services, France)
DAAD	German Academic Exchange Service
DEPP	*Direction de l'évaluation, de la prospective et de la performance* (Directorate for evaluation, forecasting and performance, Ministry of National Education, France)
DSED	*Département des statistiques, des études et de la documentation* (Department of statistics, studies and documentation, Ministry of Interior, France)
EEA	European Economic Area
ENIC-NARIC	European Network of Information Centres / National Academic Recognition Information Centres

ESDC	Employment and Social Development Canada
EU	European Union
HESA	Higher Education Statistics Agency (United Kingdom)
KMK	Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs (Germany)
QILT	Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching (Australia)
UCAS	Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (United Kingdom)
UKCISA	UK Council for International Student Affairs (United Kingdom)
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

Concepts

ICT	Information and Communication Technologies
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics

Executive summary

International students are an integral part of dynamic, high-quality higher education systems. Across Australia, Canada, France, Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, their numbers grew strongly through the 2010s. While temporarily affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, all six countries saw the number of international students recover to pre-pandemic levels by 2023. Political and social pressures, including concerns about recruitment integrity, low stay rates, reliance on international tuition fees, housing pressures and capacity constraints have led to a tightening of international student policy in Australia, Canada, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. Emerging evidence for 2024 and 2025 suggests that growth in international enrolments in these countries has slowed and, in some cases, the number of international students has even fallen. In parallel to these developments, France and Germany have continued to implement policies to attract and retain more international students.

Prior to the pandemic, policies related to international students across all six comparator countries focused on attractiveness and recruitment. The recent policy changes in some countries have shifted the emphasis to sustainability and balance. This creates space to rethink approaches to international student policy, consider whether countries and institutions have sufficient capacity to support international students, and address the challenges that students face throughout their journey. The evidence in this report highlights challenges linked to:

A. Choosing studies, admission and arrival processes: International students need reliable information about study options and life in the country and should be able to choose programmes that match their abilities and aspirations while responding to host-country needs. International students tend to be enrolled in higher shares in master's and doctoral programmes and in STEM and business, administration and law. International students are mostly enrolled in university-type institutions. Studying abroad has become more expensive, with countries providing fewer and more targeted scholarships. Some international students also struggle to navigate admission processes and to meet all the requirements for a study visa/permit.

B. Study adaptation and success: Students from different countries and backgrounds vary in their preparedness and must navigate a new learning environment with approaches, expectations and norms that may differ to those in their home country. While many international students often feel a sense of belonging in their host countries, some struggle to connect with domestic students and to integrate into the wider academic community. International students tend to be aware of support services but often rely on informal support from peers and family. Compared with domestic students, international students seem to have lower initial progression and higher dropout rates, though they are more likely to complete their studies within the theoretical duration. Among the main reasons for dropout are financial pressure, stress and wellbeing, unmet expectations, language proficiency and study visa/permit requirements.

C. Life in a new country: Many international students face difficulties in securing suitable housing, encounter scams and, in some countries, pay more for housing than domestic students. Various local activities exist to help international students on arrival. Some students face financial stress and have problems covering study and living expenses. Most international students work, in part because they rely on earnings to meet costs. Nearly all feel safe within their institution, but some do not feel safe or welcome in their community. Many struggle to integrate into local communities, especially where language barriers persist.

D. Post-graduation opportunities and possibilities: Most international students intend to stay in the host country, but only a minority remain long-term. With the introduction or expansion of post-graduation visas/permits, more graduates stay initially, but many are unable to secure longer-term status. International graduates often struggle at first to find employment and have weaker early labour-market outcomes, although the gap with domestic graduates tends to shrink over time.

Addressing these challenges is often beyond the scope of a single actor and requires co-ordination across policy areas (e.g. higher education, migration, employment, foreign affairs) and levels (e.g. national/federal, provincial/territorial/state, regional, local, institutional). Stakeholders need to work closely together to develop and implement effective policies to support international students. Based on the evidence analysed and international examples identified, the report proposes four policy considerations:

1. **Steering enrolment by creating a predictable environment for students and institutions**. Prospective international students benefit from promotion and recruitment messages that reflect realistic possibilities and opportunities. National information platforms can play an important role in providing accurate, realistic and comprehensive information, including on costs, limits and challenges. Recruitment integrity and quality pre-arrival support can be ensured by appropriate compliance regulation and guidance. A more balanced distribution between regions, sectors and study fields could be encouraged through targeted initiatives, prioritisation and capping of study places where appropriate. A more predictable policy environment for institutions and policymakers can be supported by ongoing dialogue with and consultations across relevant stakeholders.
2. **Reducing dropout by strengthening academic adaptation, integration and wellbeing support**. Academic adaptation can be facilitated by expanded pre-arrival and on-arrival support, addressing gaps in preparedness. Integration can be encouraged by promoting interactions between international students, domestic peers and local communities. Various stakeholders can also support international students by assisting them in facing non-academic challenges, such as housing, financial difficulties, finding employment. Promoting greater awareness and uptake of support services can also help international students.
3. **Supporting post-graduation transitions to the labour market and providing clear information on possibilities for longer-term stays**. Higher education institutions can support international students by helping them to develop relevant professional networks, by facilitating work experience and by providing career guidance. Relevant stakeholders can facilitate local integration through language learning, cultural orientation and opportunities to interact with the local community. Employers could be encouraged to hire more international graduates through provision of clearer information about hiring of foreign nationals. A more welcoming culture across society could be promoted by highlighting international students' contributions to local economies and communities.
4. **Strengthening evidence gathering and monitoring**. Policymaking would benefit from more comprehensive and detailed data on international students, including post-graduation journeys. More timely data, better connected and more harmonised data, nationally and internationally, could help to make monitoring more transparent and support policymaking.

1 Overview

This overview maps recent trends in international student mobility across Australia, Canada, France, Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, and situates these trends within the evolving policy contexts in these countries. It documents a decade of strong growth in enrolments, increasing concentration by countries of origin, and the central role of international students in overall tertiary education growth and institutional finances. It also notes a trend to tightening of policies since 2024 in Australia, Canada, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, with emerging effects visible in study visa/permit and enrolment data. The chapter establishes a framework for analysing the international student journey, highlighting challenges international students face, starting with the search for information about study options, through to arrival and integration, and, ultimately, post-graduation trajectories. The chapter also highlights the interplay of policy areas and levels involved in international-student policy.

Key findings

- International student numbers increased rapidly across the six countries in the 2010s, declined during the COVID-19 pandemic and recovered in most cases by 2023. Since 2024, Australia, Canada, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom have moved to stabilise the numbers of international students enrolling in their countries. Early data show the effects of policy changes on the number of study visas/permits issued, the number of new international entrants and overall international enrolments. In contrast, France and Germany have continued to pursue their established policies aimed at attracting more international students.
- International students' origins are increasingly concentrated. Students from Asia make up a larger share of international students in 2023 than in 2013 in Australia, Canada, Germany and the United Kingdom. Students from Africa have an ever-larger presence in France, while the Netherlands primarily attracts international students from other European countries. Indian enrolments increased across countries, while the share of Chinese students fell in most countries.
- International students are an important driver of growth in the tertiary education systems in all six countries. However, reliance on their tuition fees has created financial vulnerabilities and governance concerns in several systems, particularly Australia, Canada and the United Kingdom.
- International-student policy sits at the intersection of higher education, migration and foreign policy, with implications also for research, employment, housing, health, social, fiscal, security, international development, trade and industry policies. Effective international-student policy requires co-ordination across policy domains and levels of government.

This report has been developed as a contribution to future reflection on policies influencing international students in OECD countries. The report compares trends, policy responses and practices in six major host countries for international students – Australia, Canada, France, Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. These countries were selected based on the size of their international student population, a shared pattern of rapid growth in the number of international students in recent decades, similarities in the contemporary policy debate and a common search for appropriate responses. The report starts with an overview of recent trends and developments in international student mobility in the selected countries, followed by four substantive chapters structured around four groups of challenges faced by international students as they progress through their study journey. The report concludes with emerging policy considerations for policymakers and stakeholders.

The report refers to international students, a group that may refer to mobile students (i.e. students whose prior education was pursued in another country) or foreign students (i.e. whose citizenship is different from the country they are studying in currently). The analysis will distinguish between these two groups, where relevant and possible. In contrast, the term "domestic students" is used to refer to students who pursue studies in the country of their citizenship and/or where they have also pursued prior education. Various data sources used in this report use different definitions, which are explained where relevant. The report considers students at all levels of tertiary education, from short-cycle degrees (ISCED level 5) up to doctoral education (ISCED level 8), unless specified otherwise. The primary focus of the report is on degree mobility, where students move abroad to obtain a full qualification, rather than credit mobility, where students spend only part of their studies abroad. Throughout the report, the term "study visa/permit" refers to an authorisation that allows a foreign national to enter and reside in a country for the purpose of study. The comparator countries use different terms and processes for this authorisation, which are described in detail in Chapter 2 Choosing what to study, admission and arrival processes.

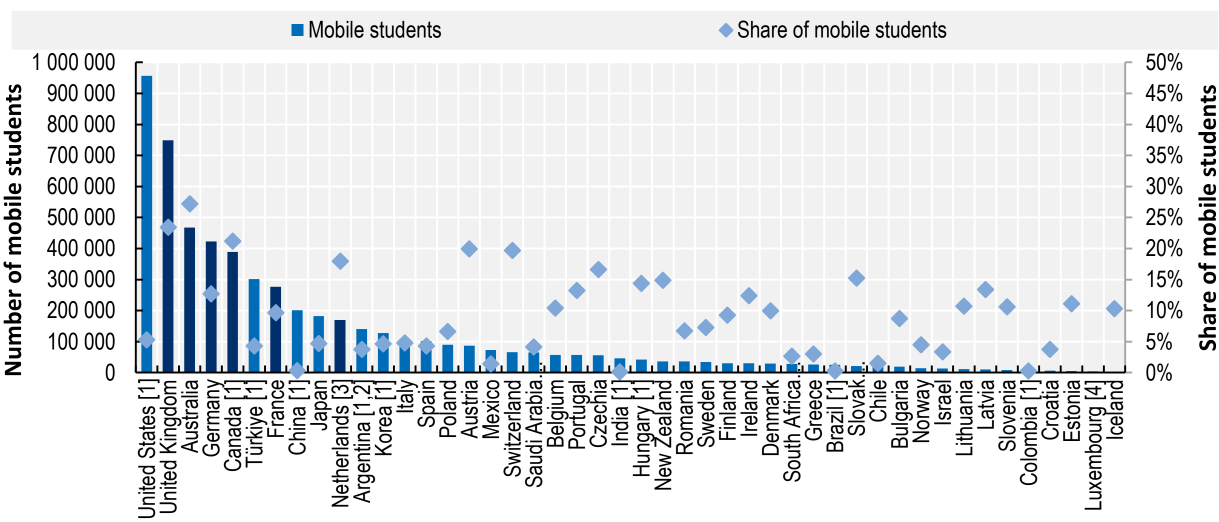
Most OECD data used in this report were, at the time of writing, only available up to 2024. Several countries examined have introduced new measures relating to international students very recently, but the available data do not yet show the effects of these reforms. Where possible, the report also draws on other international and national data sources to capture emerging trends.

Trends and developments in international student mobility

International student enrolment is peaking in leading host destinations

The six comparator countries covered in this report are all major destinations for international students and, in all six systems, international students make up a significant share of overall enrolment in tertiary education (Figure 1.1).

Figure 1.1. Total number and share of international students in tertiary education, 2023



Note: Figure only includes OECD Members, Key Partners and accession candidate countries. The six comparator countries analysed in this report are highlighted in dark blue. Countries are ranked by the total number of mobile students in tertiary education.

[1] Data refers to foreign students.

[2] Year of reference is 2022 for Argentina, Saudi Arabia and South Africa.

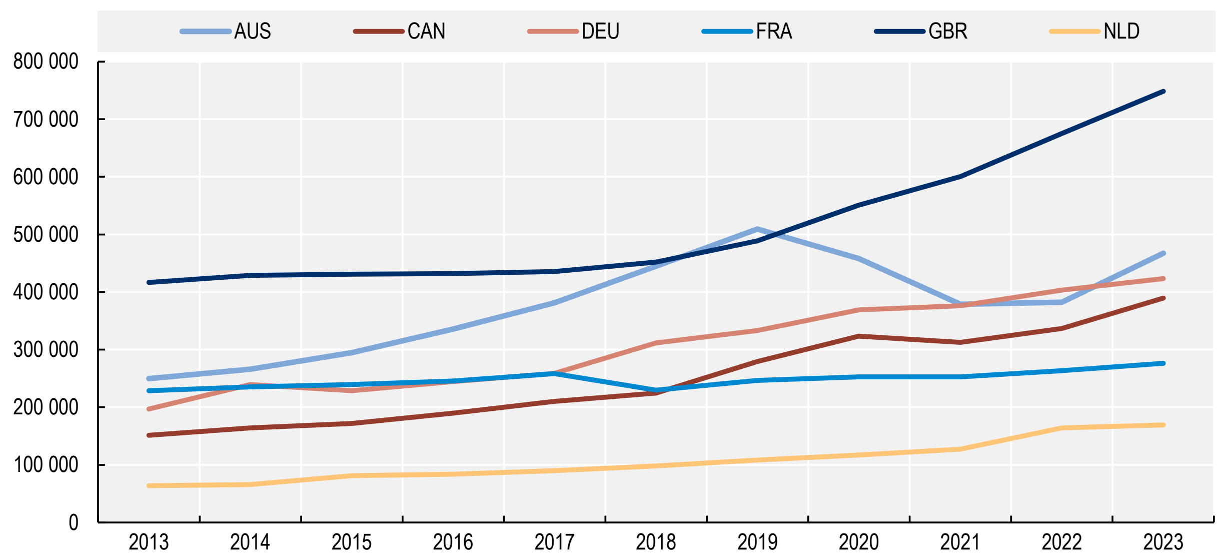
[3] Data does not include doctoral students.

[4] Share of international students in Luxembourg is 52.3%.

Source: Based on Table B4.3. in OECD (2025[1]), Education at a Glance 2025: OECD Indicators, https://doi.org/10.1787/1c0d9c79-en.

Furthermore, all six comparator countries have experienced rapid growth in the number of international students over the last decade (Figure 1.2). The United Kingdom is the second largest destination globally, after the United States, in terms of international student enrolment (748 461 international students in 2023). The number of international students in the United Kingdom has increased by 80% since 2013 and, in 2023, international students accounted for 23% of tertiary enrolment. Australia was in third place globally with 467 074 international students in 2023, their enrolment having increased by 87% since 2013. While the country experienced a significant fall in international-student enrolment in 2020 and 2021, the number of international students is increasing again and, in 2023, they made up 27% of tertiary enrolment. Fourth globally, Germany (423 197 students) saw growth of 115% over the decade to 2023 and the share of international students in the overall student population reached 13% in 2023, up from 5% in 2013. Canada was the fifth destination globally, with 389 181 international students, accounting for 21% of the tertiary enrolment in 2023. Canada saw one of the most rapid rates of growth in international student numbers between 2013 and 2023, with international enrolment growing by 157%. France hosts the eight largest population of international students globally (276 217 in 2023), an increase of 21% since 2013. International students in France made up about 10% of the student population in 2023, about the same share as a decade earlier. Lastly, the Netherlands was the twelfth destination globally (169 459 in 2023), but has been one of the fastest-growing countries in terms of international-student enrolment, with a 166% increase between 2013 and 2023 and international students accounting for 17% of its total tertiary education enrolment in 2023 (OECD, 2025[1]; UNESCO, 2025[2]).

Figure 1.2. The number of international students enrolled, 2013-2023



Note: NLD without doctoral students (ISCED 8). From 2018, FRA reported mobile rather than foreign students.
Source: OECD (2025[3]) Number of mobile students enrolled and graduated by country of origin, https://data-explorer.oecd.org/s/3ju.

While, at the time of writing, internationally reported and standardised data were only available up to 2023, national statistics provide more recent information on trends in international student mobility (Table 1.1). Australia has the most up-to-date statistics, as it reports monthly statistics, and, at the time of writing, the latest refer to October 2025. The comparison of the year ending in October shows an 10% increase in international-student enrolment in Australia between 2024 and 2025 (Department of Education, 2025[4]). The second highest growth was in Germany, which saw a 6% increase of foreign students enrolled in the winter semester 2024/25 compared to year earlier (Destatis, 2026[5]). In France, a similar comparison showed a 3% growth in international enrolment between 2023/24 and 2024/25 (DEPP, 2025[6]). In the Netherlands, growth in the numbers of international students seems to have slowed down, with an increase of around 3% between 2023/24 and 2024/25 (Nuffic, 2025[7]). The latest data from the United Kingdom show a 6% decrease in the number of students with a non-UK permanent address between the academic years 2023/24 and 2024/25 (HESA, 2026[8]). National data from Canada are published only up to the academic year 2023/24, when there was a rapid (23%) increase in international enrolment compared to one year earlier. However, international enrolment rapidly decreased in years after due to federal policy changes that limited study permits for international students. Institutional surveys, carried out by Studyportals, NAFSA and Oxford Test of English, found that, in autumn 2024, about 90% of Canadian institutions had lower international enrolment than the year before (Studyportals, 2024[9]). In autumn 2025, 82% of responding Canadian institutions reported lower undergraduate international enrolments and 71% lower postgraduate international enrolments compared to a year earlier. At both levels of study, only 6% and, respectively, 7% of institutions experienced an increase in international enrolments in 2025.

Table 1.1. International enrolments and new entrants in national sources

	Year	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025 [1]
AUS	Total enrolment	440 866	418 365	365 644	359 927	434 664	497 236	537 657
	Yearly change		*-5.1%*	*-12.6%*	*-1.6%*	*+20.8%*	*+14.4%*	*+10.0%*
	New enrolments	177 202	136 069	107 494	146 893	207 182	212 688	206 554
	Yearly change		*-23.2%*	*-21.0%*	*+36.7%*	*+41.0%*	*+2.7%*	*+1.1%*
	Academic year	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	
CAN	Total enrolment	337 824	336 828	360 069	415 938	510 714		
	Yearly change		-0.3%	+6.9%	+15.5%	+22.8%		
	New enrolments	99 078	75 417	106 536	114 267	148 023		
	Yearly change		-23.9%	+41.3%	+7.3%	+29.5%		
DEU	Total enrolment	411 601	416 437	440 564	458 210	469 485	492 087	
	Yearly change		*+1.2%*	*+5.8%*	*+4.0%*	*+2.5%*	*+4.8%*	
	New enrolments	91 168	75 817	86 146	92 952	95 919	104 961	
	Yearly change		*-16.8%*	*+13.6%*	*+7.9%*	*+3.2%*	*+9.4%*	
FRA	Total enrolment	290 470	278 278	302 863	310 759	319 873	329 146	
	Yearly change		-4.2%	+8.8%	+2.6%	+2.9%	+2.9%	
GBR	Total enrolment	554 375	600 180	675 200	758 865	729 850	685 565	
	Yearly change		+8.3%	+12.5%	+12.4%	-3.8%	-6.1%	
	New enrolments	317 130	326 545	376 910	459 175	427 580	404 555	
	Yearly change		+3.0%	+15.4%	+21.8%	-6.9%	-5.4%	
NLD	Total enrolment	91 434	100 722	112 791	120 619	127 169	131 004	
	Yearly change		*+10.2%*	*+12.0%*	*+6.9%*	*+5.4%*	*+3.0%*	
	New enrolments	40 845	43 162	50 089	50 355	51 594	51 796	
	Yearly change		+5.7%	+16.0%	+0.5%	+2.5%	+0.4%	

Note: There are notable differences between data presented in this table, based on national sources, and data presented in other figures, which use internationally harmonised data, as reported by individual countries. The differences in the number of international students are in part due to time lag, particular definitions of international students and what levels of education are considered.

AUS: International enrolments and commencements by the sector – Higher Education

CAN: Total enrolments based on international students enrolled in ISCED 5-8 programmes. New enrolments considers post-secondary students who enrolled in programmes leading to career, technical or professional training diploma, undergraduate, master's or doctoral degree.

DEU: Table refers to foreign students and new enrolments of foreign nationals rather than international students.

NLD: Only includes international bachelor and master students.

[1] Preliminary data for year ending in October 2025. Yearly change compared to the same period last year.

Source: Compiled and calculated based on:

Department of Education (2025[4]), International student monthly summary, https://www.education.gov.au/international-education-data-and-research/international-student-monthly-summary-and-data-tables (accessed on 17 February 2026).

Statistics Canada (2026[10]), Table 37-10-0018-01: Postsecondary enrolments, by registration status, institution type, status of student in Canada and gender, https://doi.org/10.25318/3710001801-eng

Statistics Canada (2025[11]), Elementary to Postsecondary Student Education Dashboard: Enrolments, Graduations and Tuition Fees, https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/71-607-x/71-607-x2022019-eng.htm (accessed on 17 February 2026).

Destatis (2026[5]), Statistik der Studierenden Wintersemester 2024/2025 (Statistical report - Student statistics - Winter semester 2024/2025), https://www.destatis.de/DE/Themen/Gesellschaft-Umwelt/Bildung-Forschung-Kultur/Hochschulen/Publikationen/_publikationen-innen-hochschulen-studierende-endg.html (accessed on 19 February 2026).

DEPP (2025[6]), Repères et références statistiques - 2025 (Statistical Benchmarks and References - 2025), https://rers.depp.education.fr/ (accessed on 19 February 2026)

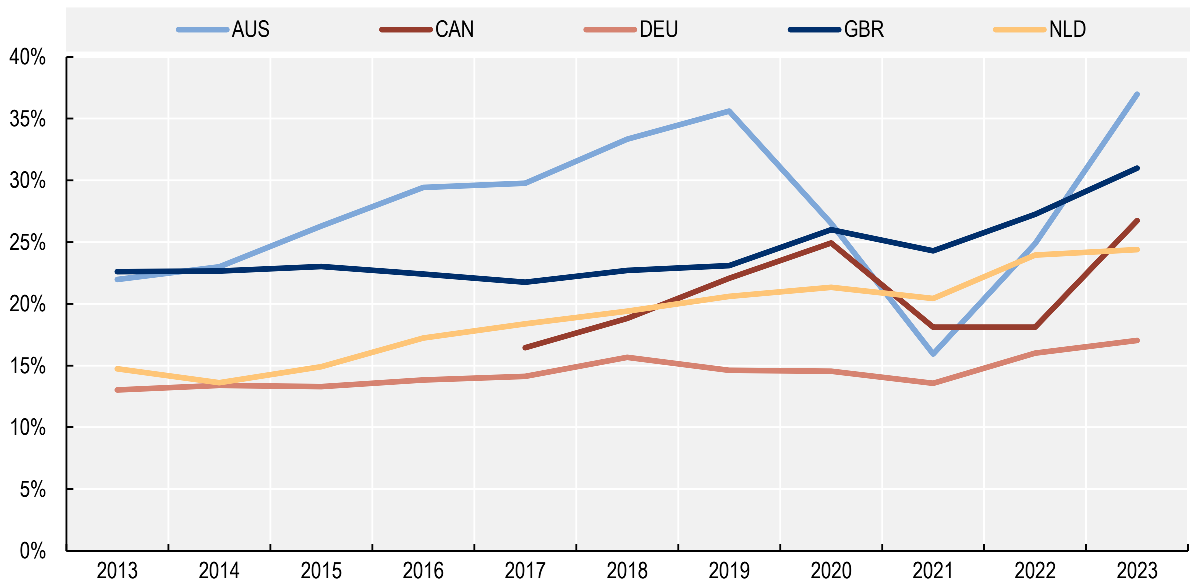
HESA (2026[8]), Figure 3 - HE student enrolments by level of study 2020/21 to 2024/25, https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/sb273/figure-3 (accessed on 17 February 2026).

Nuffic (2025[7]), Countries of origin, https://www.nuffic.nl/en/countries-of-origin (accessed on 17 February 2026).

Nuffic (2025[12]), New enrolments, https://www.nuffic.nl/en/new-enrolments (accessed on 2 December 2025).

Compared to data on total enrolments, developments in the number of new students, first-time entrants, can provide greater insight into current trends. The number of international first-time entrants (i.e. new international students) increased in all five countries with internationally reported data between 2013 and 2023. As seen in Figure 1.3, in 2023, international students accounted for 17% of all new entrants in Germany compared to 37% in Australia (no data for France). All five countries shown in the figure, experienced a fall in international-student enrolment during the COVID-19 pandemic, but subsequently saw international enrolment recover.

Figure 1.3. Share of mobile new entrants, 2013-2023



Note: AUS: Data only considers bachelor, master and doctoral-level students, as there are no data on short-cycle programmes reported until 2019. FRA: No internationally comparable data available.
Calculated based on OECD (2025[13]), Total number of enrolled students, new entrants and graduates, https://data-explorer.oecd.org/s/40i.

The most recent data on first-time entrants, based on national sources (in Table 1.1), suggests a slowdown in recruitment of new international students in most of the six comparator countries. In Australia, the number of new commencements by overseas students in higher education increased rapidly after the COVID-19 pandemic, in 2022 and 2023. However, since then, growth in commencements by international students has slowed down, with only a 3% increase between 2023 and 2024. Data for the year ending in October 2025 show only a slight increase of 1% from the same period in 2024 (Department of Education, 2025[4]). In the Netherlands, the number of new international enrolments stayed nearly the same between 2021 and 2024 (Nuffic, 2025[12]). In the United Kingdom, the number of entrants with non-UK permanent address decreased in two consecutive years, by 7% between 2022/23 and 2023/24, and by a further 5% by 2024/25 (HESA, 2026[8]). While data for Canada in Table 1.1 show a 30% yearly increase in new international enrolments between the academic years 2022/23 and 2023/24, recent policy changes appear to have reversed this trend. In the Global Enrolment Benchmark Survey, Canadian higher education institutions reported a decline in new international enrolments by over one-third for both undergraduate (-36%) and postgraduate (-35%) programmes (Studyportals, 2025[14]). The only country with continuing growth of international new entrants is Germany, with a 9% increase of newly enrolled foreign students in the winter semester 2024/25 compared to year before (Destatis, 2026[5]). No data are available on newly enrolled international students in France, although the data presented below on the number of new temporary student residence permits show little change between 2023 and 2024 (see Figure 1.6.). These findings from national and international statistics, and institutional surveys on first-time entrants highlight that international enrolments have peaked in some countries. This aligns with recent developments in Australia, Canada, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, which have seen the introduction of more restrictive policies, explored in section Developing policy for international students.

International students originate primarily from Asia, Africa and Latin America

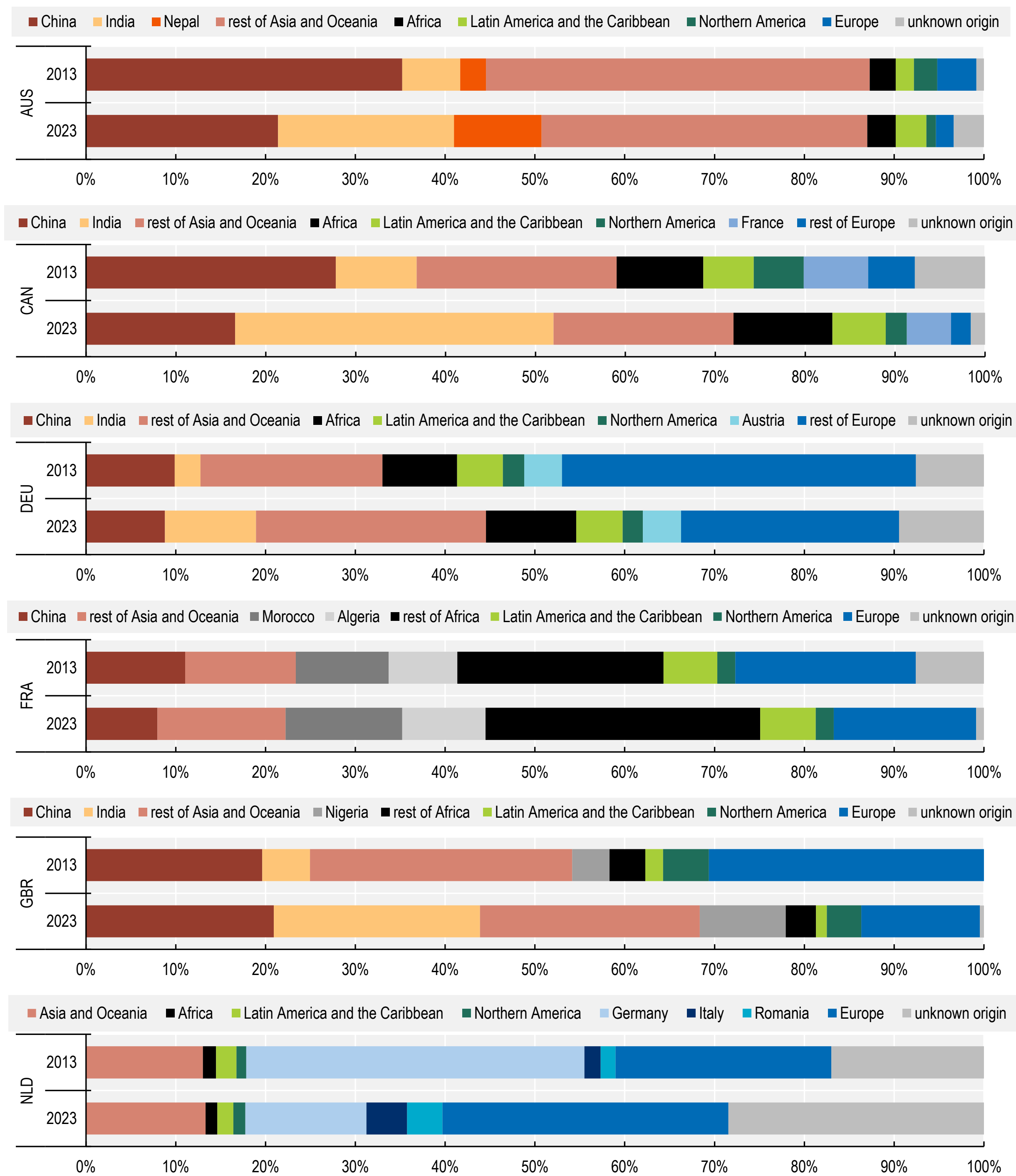
International students worldwide originate primarily from Asia, with China and India as the leading countries of origin. Across the six comparator countries, the composition of international student populations varies considerably (Figure 1.4). In 2023, students from Asian countries made up the largest share of international students in Australia (89% of those with known country of origin), Canada (73%) and the United Kingdom (68%). Students from Asian countries were also the largest group in Germany (49%), followed by students from other European countries (31%). In France, the largest numbers of international students came from African countries (53%), with Asian (22%) and other European (16%) countries following. By contrast, the Netherlands primarily attracted students from other European countries (74%).

Between 2013 and 2023, the number of international students from Asian countries at least doubled in Canada (316% increase), Germany (291%), the Netherlands (270%) and the United Kingdom (228%). Much of this growth came from India, while the share of Chinese students declined in all countries except the United Kingdom, where it remained stable.

Although the numbers of international students from African countries were relatively low in 2013, they grew significantly across all six countries by 2023, more than doubling in all countries except France, which nevertheless continued to receive the largest student inflow from Africa. Mobility from European countries to Australia, France and the United Kingdom decreased, but increased in the Netherlands, Canada and Germany. The numbers of international students from countries in Latin America and the Caribbean remain smaller overall but grew substantially in all six comparator countries, while the largest increases of international students from North America occurred in Germany and the Netherlands.

Reliance on a single country or region increases the risk for higher education systems and institutions, as sudden declines in enrolments can be caused by geopolitical tensions, pandemics, or shifts in immigration policy.

Figure 1.4. Share of mobile students enrolled by country and continent of origin



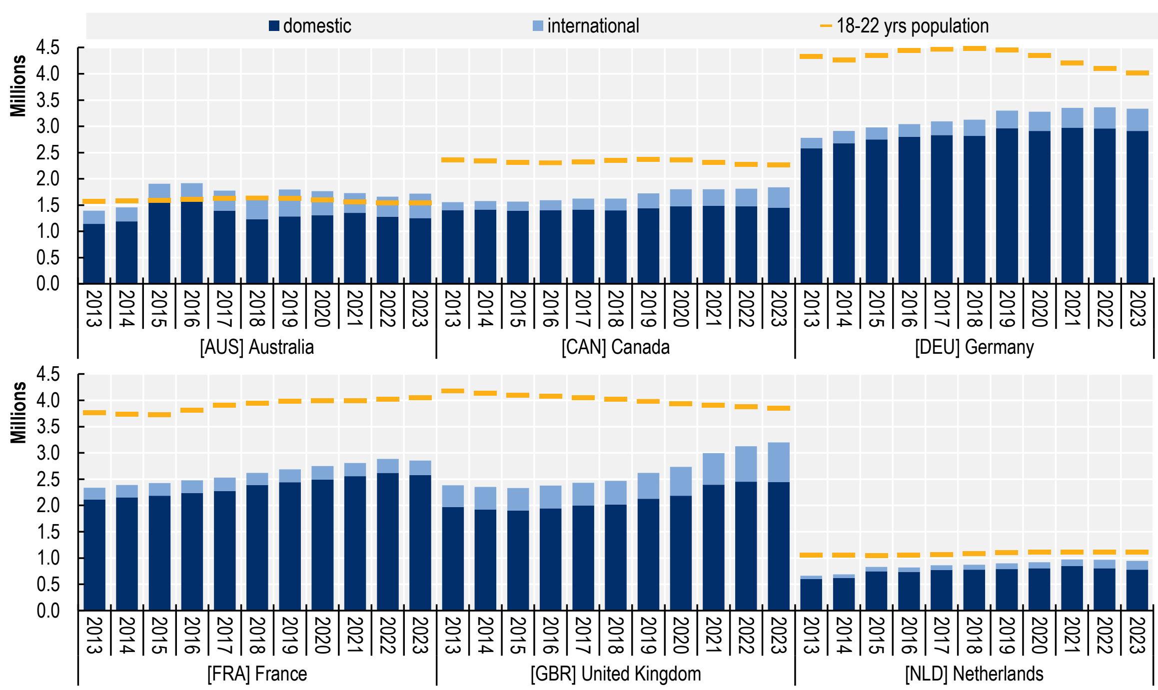
Note: Calculated based on OECD (2025[3]) Number of mobile students enrolled and graduated by country of origin, https://data-explorer.oecd.org/s/3ju.

International students have been a major contributor to overall enrolment growth

In all six comparator countries, the number of international students increased between 2013 and 2023. In all except France, growth in the international-student population outpaced domestic enrolment growth (Figure 1.5). As such, enrolment of international students has been a major contributor to overall growth in tertiary education enrolment. The most significant difference was seen in Canada, where domestic enrolment grew by only 3% in the decade to 2023, while international enrolment grew by 157%. In Australia, domestic enrolment increased by 10% and international by 87%, while Germany saw an increase of 13% in domestic enrolment and of 115% in international students. The United Kingdom and the Netherlands experienced significant growth in domestic (GBR 24% and NLD 30%) and even more rapid growth in international enrolment (GBR 80% and NLD 166%). In France, the rate of change in enrolment in domestic and international students was nearly identical (22% for domestic and 21% for international). Domestic enrolment trends were likely influenced by a shrinking population aged 18–22 in some countries, including the United Kingdom, where this group declined by 8% between 2013 and 2023, Germany (-7%), Canada (-4%) and Australia (-2%). In contrast, the Netherlands and France saw an increase in the population of young people in typical higher education age in the same period (5% in NLD, 8% in FRA) (UN, 2024[15]).

Figure 1.5. The number of domestic and international students 2013-2023

Shown in relation to the population of typical age of higher education students (18-22 years old)



Note: Data for NLD excludes doctoral students (ISCED 8).
Source: OECD (2025[16]) Number of enrolled students, new entrants and graduates by age, https://data-explorer.oecd.org/s/3eq.
United Nations (2024[15]), World Population Prospects: The 2024 Revision, https://population.un.org/wpp/ (accessed on 21 March 2025).

International students boosted institutional revenue

In many countries, international students have become an important source of revenue for higher education institutions (OECD, 2025[17]). In countries with tuition fees for international students (AUS, CAN, FRA, GBR, NLD and in three German states), tuition fees are a direct form of additional revenue. In Germany, all students, international and domestic, pay a relatively small administrative fee. Tuition fees are charged only by private institutions and to international students from outside the European Economic Area (EEA) in some public institutions in three German states (Baden-Württemberg, Bavaria and Saxony). In France, fees for both domestic and international students from other EEA countries are set at a low level and are moderate in the Netherlands for domestic and EEA students. However, tuition fees for international students coming from non-EEA countries are, on average, much higher in these two countries, although these higher tuition fees are not always applied in France (Cour des comptes, 2025[18]). In Australia, Canada and the United Kingdom, the revenue from international student fees has become a particularly significant source of funding for many higher education institutions. Reports from governments and stakeholder organisations have raised concerns about over-reliance on revenue from international-student fees and noted the ethical and policy challenges related to cross-subsidisation of research or even teaching costs for domestic students with income from international student fees (Popovic et al., 2025[19]; PwC, 2024[20]; Australian Universities Accord Panel, 2024[21]).

Revenue from international students has helped to supplement sometimes insufficient public funding and low revenue from other sources. However, increased reliance on international students has also exposed institutions to significant risks for their finances in cases where international enrolment stagnates or starts declining. Signs of this vulnerability were brought into focus during the COVID-19 pandemic and have become even more apparent in light of more recent geopolitical developments and political pressures to lower incoming international migration in some countries. In Australia, Canada and the United Kingdom, the rapid growth in enrolments and reliance on income from international students has contributed to calls for more “managed” or “sustainable” patterns of international student recruitment and enrolment. Particularly in Australia and the United Kingdom, higher education institutions have also worked to expand their offer of transnational education abroad, which allows them to host (more) students outside the country (PwC, 2024[20]; Universities Australia, 2024[22]).

To varying extents, possible revenue from international students has also led institutions in several countries to expand their offer of programmes particularly targeted at international students. The pathways to temporary stay after graduation and possible permanent residency, introduced by governments in some form in all six countries, also play an important role in recruitment efforts. In some select cases, however, they may also have been used as a questionable marketing tool by agents or institutions, who expanded their offerings focused primarily on short programmes with less stringent academic and compliance requirements, but which would still facilitate immigration. While nearly all international students are enrolled by legitimate providers operating within appropriate quality assurance frameworks, some providers have exploited regulatory gaps, which permitted the mass recruitment of international students and the charging of high fees for low-quality education.

A recent report in France has raised concerns about the emergence of private, unregulated or little-regulated providers recruiting international students to non-degree programmes and training courses with misleading information about the recognition and value of the qualifications provided (Cour des comptes, 2025[18]). This has been a longstanding issue, and countries have taken steps to regulate the sector more effectively. The United Kingdom already introduced tighter compliance regulations in the 2010s and plans to further regulate student visa sponsors. Australia and Canada have more recently been working on measures to tackle fraudulent providers. In Canada, this has focused on improved verification of acceptance letters by the migration authorities in order to detect fraudulent letters issued without the knowledge of the education institution by agents (Collett, 2025[23]).

Particularly in France, Germany and the Netherlands, study costs for international students are subsidised from public budgets and only some pay full tuition fees (more details on what fees students pay in each country are provided in Chapter 2). With demographic decline and declining interest in some institutions, international students allow institutions to maintain or even increase their enrolment, which is tied with the level of public subsidy. In the academic year 2023/24, Germany experienced declines in domestic first-time entrants, which have been largely offset by increased international enrolment (Stacey, 2024[24]).

The financial impact of international student enrolment is felt not only by higher education institutions, but also by businesses in the localities where institutions are located. International students drive up the demand for, and spending on, housing, travel, food and other items. Furthermore, they provide additional labour, during and after their studies, especially for service industries of all skills level, and can thus potentially address local labour shortages.

Policies are increasingly being amended to regulate numbers of international students

Attitudes towards international immigration have been shifting in some countries in recent years, which has also affected the perception of international students. The significant growth in international student flows, occurring against the backdrop of increasing economic and societal pressures, has negatively affected the longstanding welcome with which they had previously been received. In many national contexts, international students are concentrated in larger urban areas, where they are sometimes perceived to place further strain on already limited housing supply. As discussed above, these issues have combined with concerns about the integrity of certain education agents, providers and programmes catering to international students, and the possible misuse of entry to the country for the purpose of study. At the same time, particularly in France, Germany and the Netherlands, where study costs of international students are partially or fully covered by the state, the concern is the economic contribution of international students during their studies and especially after the graduation. In the context of overall increases in rates of inward international migration, promoted to address dire demographic prognostics and propel economic growth, current public perception towards migrants, including international students, seems to have shifted. Several countries have thus taken steps to curb migration, which have also resulted in changes to the issuance of study visas/permits and related regulation in several leading host countries for international students (Collett, 2025[23]). Consequently, Australia, Canada and the United Kingdom are becoming more selective in their efforts to recruit international students.

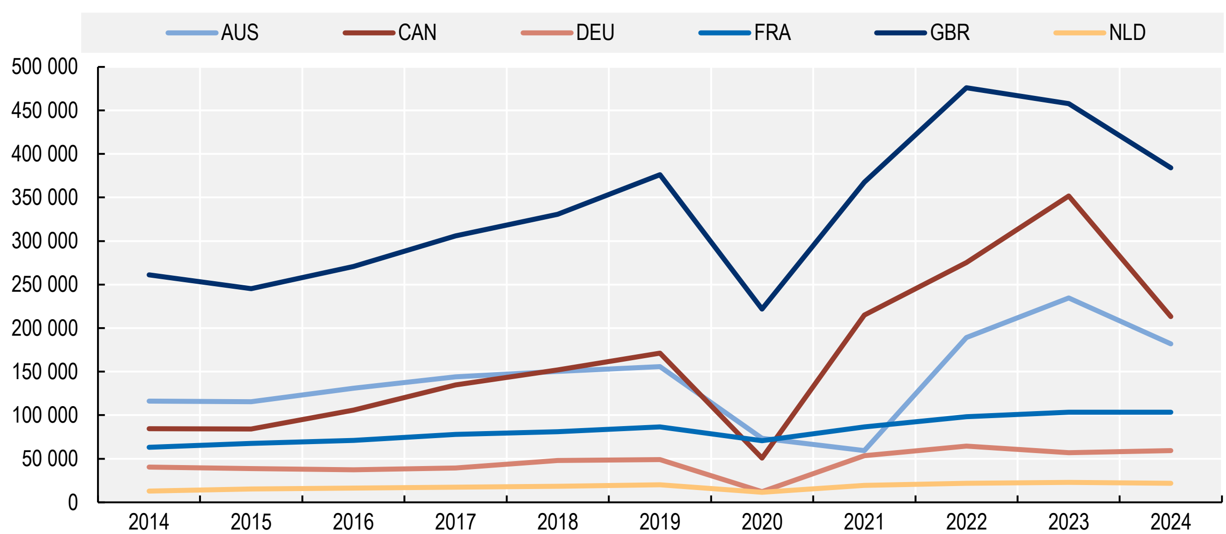
In the United Kingdom, the government restricted the right to bring dependants for individuals holding a student visa in 2024 and, in 2025, announced further changes to shorten the duration of the post-graduation visa and increased the level of financial resources that students must demonstrate (OECD, 2025[25]). Further changes were introduced in the 2026 United Kingdom's International Education Strategy, which outlines a tightening in the regulation of study visa sponsors (i.e. higher education institutions) and the introduction of a levy on international student fees paid to English higher education providers starting in academic year 2028/29. The strategy also places emphasis on sustainable recruitment of international students and improving their student experiences (UK Government, 2026[26]).

In Australia, in recent years, the government has increased language requirements for international students, restricted visa hopping (i.e. switching between temporary visas), changed conditions for financial capacity and raised visa application charges (OECD, 2025[25]). In 2024, the country also introduced a prioritisation system for student visa processing, which allocates a number of visas to each sponsor institution that will be prioritised in processing. Once an institution hits 80% of their indicative allocation, subsequent applications will be treated as a standard priority (Department of Home Affairs, 2025[27]).

In Canada, where higher education falls under the jurisdiction of provinces and territories and where admission to Canada for study falls under the purview of the federal government, inter-governmental dynamics have added complexity to these measures. The federal government introduced caps on issuance of new and extensions of existing study permits from 2024, as well as a series of additional changes throughout 2024 and 2025, including increasing the threshold of financial resources needed to obtain study visa and eligibility for the post-graduation work permit. These have resulted in a significant decrease of both applications and approvals for study permits. Furthermore, federal, provincial and territorial governments have taken steps to strengthen the integrity of the International Students Program through more robust verification process of letters of acceptance, legislative, regulatory, and policy amendments to oversight and compliance mechanisms, and closer monitoring of trends and institutional data. Provinces and territories have strengthened their policies for designating learning institutions. These institutions are now required to verify all letters of acceptance.

All six comparator countries covered in this report experienced an increase in the number of newly granted study visas/permits between 2014 and 2019 (Figure 1.6), with numbers subsequently falling significantly during the COVID-19 pandemic (2020-2021). All countries then experienced a recovery in the number of international students admitted each year, with a surge in the number of international students in Australia, Canada and the United Kingdom being one of the main drivers for changes to immigration policy. The increase in the United Kingdom could also be partially attributed to EEA students needing a visa to study in the United Kingdom from 2021 onwards, following the end of the Brexit transition period. Nevertheless, the recent policy changes in Australia, Canada and the United Kingdom are already reflected in the decline of newly granted study visas/permits between 2023 and 2024. France, Germany and the Netherlands saw more modest growth in the number of newly granted study visas/permits in the period following the pandemic. In their cases, however, data only captures non-EEA international students who require study visas/permits. Recent growth in the numbers of these students can be also attributed to the post COVID-19 pandemic recovery.

Figure 1.6. Standardised inflows of temporary migrants: International students, 2014-2024



Note: These are estimates of annual temporary migration flows to selected countries based on the number of newly granted visas/permits issued to foreign citizens (international students newly registered in a tertiary education programme), provided to the OECD by relevant statistical services.
Source: OECD (2025[28]), Standardised inflows of temporary migrants, https://data-explorer.oecd.org/s/3jv.

Preliminary national data for 2025 suggest further declines in the number of newly issued study visas/permits in Australia, Canada and the Netherlands, and a slight increase in France and the United Kingdom (Table 1.2). The largest decrease is seen in Canada, where the number of new temporary residents with study permits fell by 61% between 2024 and 2025 (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2026[29]). The Netherlands and Australia have seen a rather modest decreases of 4% and 2% respectively, in the number of study visas/permits granted in 2025 compared to 2024, but for both this is the second year-to-year decline (Department of Home Affairs, 2026[30]; Immigration and Naturalisation Service, 2026[31]). In the United Kingdom, the data for 2025 show a slight increase of 4% in the number of study visas issued compared to 2024, but that the number of new visas issued is still well below the number granted in the peak years of 2022 and 2023 (Home Office, 2026[32]). The largest, but still modest, growth was seen in France with about 6% increase of residence permits issued to students in 2025 compared to 2024 (DSED, 2026[33]).

Table 1.2. Preliminary number of newly granted study visas/permits, 2022-2025

	2022	2023	2024	2025	Change 2022-2023	Change 2023-2024	Change 2024-2025
AUS	204 481	241 544	209 058	204 701	+18.1%	-13.4%	-2.1%
CAN	395 937	496 918	293 060	115 470	+35.5%	-41.0%	-60.6%
FRA	103 917	110 688	110 914	117 970	+6.5%	+0.2%	+6.4%
GBR	484 140	456 748	392 832	406 824	-5.7%	-14.0%	+3.6%
NLD	22 300	23 110	22 240	21 430	+3.6%	-3.8%	-3.6%

Note: No data available for 2025 for DEU, data from previous years are already in figure
AUS: Visa granted to primary applicant within higher education sector. CAN: New study permit holder arrivals to Canada, which includes also students pursuing other than tertiary education. For 2022 and 2023, number of issued and confirmed study permits excluding extensions. FRA: Initial residence permits issued for students, data for all level of education. Data for 2025 are estimates. GBR: Sponsored study entry clearance visa issued to main applicants, which includes students pursuing other than tertiary education. NLD: Number of decisions on residence permits for study per year, data include students in any level of education. Positive decisions in 99% of cases.
Source: Compiled and calculated based on:

Department of Home Affairs (2026[30]), BP0015 Student visas granted at 2025-12-31, https://data.gov.au/data/dataset/student-visas/resource/338d7226-ea79-4dda-a8c7-8615a8a09e0f (accessed on 17 February 2026)

Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (2026[29]), Understanding student and temporary worker numbers in Canada, https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/corporate/reports-statistics/statistics-open-data/immigration-stats/students-workers.html (accessed on 18 February 2026)

Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (2024[34]), CIMM – International Students Data Dashboard: Intake, Output & Issued, https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/corporate/transparency/committees/cimm-feb-28-2024/intake-output-issued.html (accessed on 18 February 2026)

DSED (2026[33]), Les titres de séjour en 2025 : Les protections subsidiaires ont plus que doublé [Residence permits in 2025: Subsidiary protections have more than doubled], https://www.immigration.interieur.gouv.fr/Info-ressources/Etudes-et-statistiques/Les-chiffres-de-l-immigration-en-France/Sejour (accessed on 18 February 2026)

Home Office (2026[32]), Entry clearance visa applications and outcomes detailed datasets, year ending December 2025, https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/immigration-system-statistics-data-tables#entry-clearance-visas-granted-outside-the-uk (accessed on 27 February 2026)

Immigration and Naturalisation Service (2026[31]), Yearly figures – 2025, https://ind.nl/en/about-us/statistics-and-publications/annual-reports (accessed on 18 February 2026).

Policy changes to international-student policy were also partially introduced in the Netherlands. Between 2021 and 2023, international student numbers rose sharply, creating political concern about pressures on the housing market, English replacing Dutch as the main language of instruction, and fears that internationalisation was growing “out of balance”. Already at the end of 2022, the education minister called on higher education institutions to halt recruitment of international students and suggested that the government will consider a range of measures. In 2024, the “Balanced Internationalisation bill” (*Wet internationalisering in balans*, WIB) was introduced in parliament. The proposed law would regulate the offer of programmes with foreign-language instruction (Government of the Netherlands, 2024[35]). At the time of writing, the bill is still not adopted. In the Dutch system the general rule is that if a student qualifies for a study programme they must be admitted to that programme. There are a few exceptions, where selection is applied to the study programme.

In 2024, as part of budget discussion, the law on higher education was amended so that higher education institutions can also put a maximum number of students or apply selection criteria on study programmes offered in English or other foreign language. In response to the call by the minister and proposed law, higher education institutions in the Netherlands, as represented by the Universities of the Netherlands (UNL) and the Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences (*Vereniging Hogescholen*), have proposed their own set of self-imposed measures to limit the intake of international students and to avert regulatory action from the government. These self-imposed measures included limits on students in selected large study programmes, while keeping bilingual and foreign-language courses in study fields and regions with specific labour shortages. Higher education institutions have also halted active recruitment in international fairs, reduced the offer of preparatory years, and committed to support international staff and students to learn Dutch, better inform international students about housing shortages and to work to raise the stay rates of international students after graduation (UNL, 2025[36]; Vereniging Hogescholen, 2024[37]). A coalition agreement of the new Dutch government, announced in January 2026, suggests that the new government will not to go ahead with restrictions on study programmes taught in other languages than Dutch (NL Times, 2026[38]).

At the time of writing, France and Germany have remained on a path of promoting a greater intake of international students. France is continuing with its national target to have half a million international students enrolled by 2027, in part to strengthen its global influence. As part of its strategy, France is taking steps to simplify arrival to the country. While in 2024, France has made changes to its immigration policy, most measures that would impact international students were deemed unconstitutional by the Constitutional Council (Campus France, 2024[39]). Remaining measures concerning international students only require greater transparency, more data collection and better protection for them. In Germany, international students are seen as a large opportunity to address labour shortages. The German international strategy 2024-2034 commits to further increasing the attractiveness of the country for international students, reducing obstacles to their recruitment, integration and retention (BMBF and KMK, 2024[40]).

One further approach to reduce the number of international students is by developing capacity to deliver education programmes in another country, through transnational education. Particularly, Australian and British higher education institutions have opened international branch campuses and expanded the offer of study programmes through various franchise or collaborative arrangements. The 2026 UK's International Education Strategy places more emphasis on expanding the offer of transnational education as a way to increase the number of international students pursuing qualifications awarded by institutions in the United Kingdom, bringing additional income to institutions without students spending extended periods in the country (UK Government, 2026[26]). Transnational education is also present in French and German context, but there it is also oriented towards international development, promoting educational and cultural exchanges. Most notably, German higher education institutions are supporting various German binational universities operating in number of countries around the world. While France also has a few French institutions operating abroad. However, these German and French institutions are relatively limited in scale. Canadian and Dutch institutions are only involved in a few transnational education arrangements.

What challenges do international students face?

International students face a range of challenges throughout their journey as students (Figure 1.7.). The challenges faced by prospective international students may discourage many from even attempting to study abroad. Moreover, challenges remain after graduation. Different international students will face different challenges throughout their study journey, shaped notably by the cultural, linguistic and education-system "proximity" between the host country and the student's country of origin. Similar challenges are, to various extents, also experienced by domestic students, although domestic students are often better placed to address the challenges in question, particularly because they have better knowledge of relevant systems and norms and pre-existing supportive social networks.

Figure 1.7. Life cycle of international students and related challenges

Applicant → **Admitted** → **Student** → **Graduate**

Choosing studies, admission and arrival processes
- Identifying reliable information about study and life
- Matching abilities and aspirations with study offer and country needs
- Funding studies
- Meeting admission requirements
- Obtaining visa and permit

Study adaptation and success
- Academic preparedness and adaptation
- Integration into academic community
- Access to institutional support services
- Study progression and completion

Life in a new country
- Securing suitable housing
- Familiarising with the surroundings and accessing services
- Local and community integration (including language)
- Covering study and living costs
- Working during studies
- Maintaining legal status
- Discrimination and safety
- Accompanying family members: partners and dependents

Post-graduation
- Staying in the country
- Recognition of education in another country
- Obtaining post-graduation visa/permit
- Securing employment
- Participating in alumni networks

Note: Developed by the OECD Secretariat.

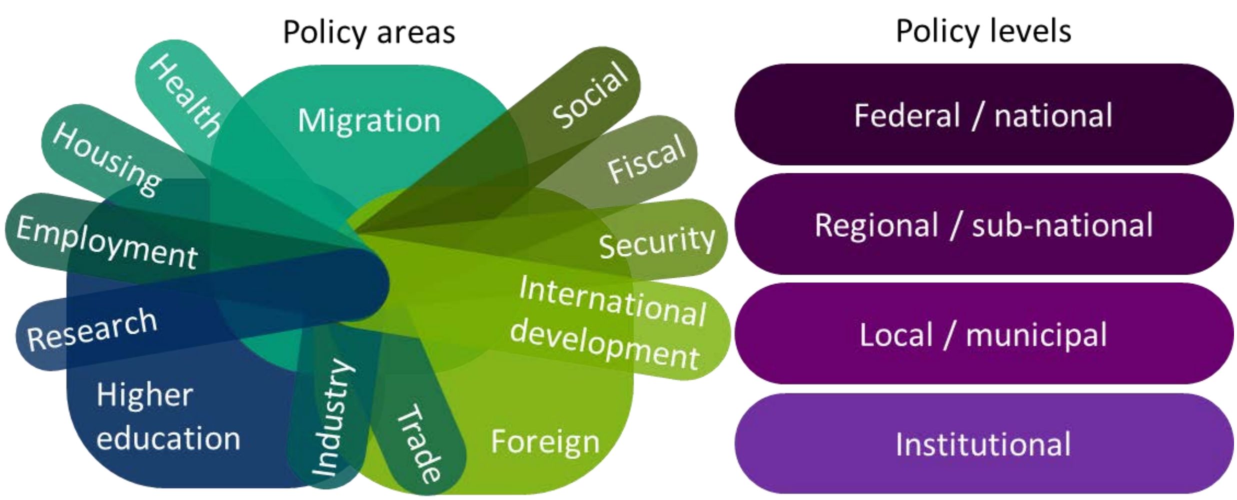
In terms of study adaptation and success, domestic students may face similar challenges to international students, particularly if they do come from less advantaged social backgrounds where the codes and expectations of academic life are less well known and understood. Domestic students, particularly from minority or disadvantaged groups, also tend to face challenges with identifying reliable information and social integration. One challenge unique to international students is study and post-graduation visas/permits and related conditions, which determine when they can move to the country, ability to stay, the ability of family members to move with the student, the ability of students to work while studying and their ability to stay on in their country of study after graduation. A second challenge that can also be felt to a greater extent by international students than domestic students is access to financial support, notably as international students pay higher tuition fees in six countries analysed except in most higher education institutions in Germany.

International students not only face challenges in the country they arrive in, but often they move there because of challenges they faced in their previous country of residence or their country of origin. This report does not cover them, but they are an important part of understanding why people leave to study abroad.

Developing policy for international students

Multiple policy areas and levels of policymaking are involved in shaping policies for international students (Figure 1.8). At the core are three policy areas. First, *higher education policy* shapes admission processes, public funding and tuition fees, regulates accredited or recognised education providers, supports collection of statistics, and provides information to prospective and current students. Often, it also shapes recruitment practices, language of instruction and what institutional support services are offered to students. A second area is international *migration policy*, which specifically regulates study visas/permits for primary applicants as well as anyone accompanying (e.g. partner, dependants), as well as subsequent opportunities to remain in the host country after graduation. Migration authorities are responsible for reviewing applications for study visas/permits and often establish criteria regarding the organisations that are eligible to sponsor study visas/permits and host international students. A third major area is *foreign policy* and diplomacy, which often plays an active role in recruitment of international students and country awareness campaigns, participates in migration processes through embassies, and in some cases also maintains contact with graduates, for example by supporting alumni networks. Foreign affairs may also seek to promote specific bilateral and multilateral relationships, offering special scholarship schemes and other offers to facilitate access to higher education. An important consideration for both migration policy and foreign affairs is how to balance concerns about brain drain from other countries, while attracting international talent to contribute to the development of the country of study, during their studies and especially after.

Figure 1.8. Policy areas and levels involved in shaping policies for international students



Note: Developed by the OECD Secretariat.

International students are also influenced by a range of other policies including *research policy* (e.g. research study programmes, eligibility for funding); *employment policy* or labour market policy (e.g. labour protections, access to work during studies and for anyone accompanying student, post-graduation pathways, addressing labour shortages, attracting highly-skilled labour); *housing policy* (e.g. student housing, housing assistance, tenant protection); *health policy* (e.g. access to health care, medical practice, professional recognition); *social policy* (e.g. social benefits/aid, welfare, social protection); *fiscal policy* (e.g. tax status, international transfers); *security policy* (e.g. access to sensitive research, espionage); *international development policy* (e.g. education, scholarships and research to support development of another country); *trade policy* (e.g. promoting country, international education as export); and *industrial policy* (e.g. research and labour talent, priority industries).

Policy making and implementation are not only shared across multiple policy areas but also exercised by policy and decision makers at various levels of governance (Figure 1.8). The national (or federal) level tends to have responsibility over migration and foreign affairs, as well as much of finance, security, international development and trade policy. However, responsibility for other policy areas may lie fully or partially with subnational and regional governments or even local and municipal governments. In all six countries covered in this report, higher education institutions also have a broad autonomy, so many decisions about the organisation of studies and research and, where relevant, student housing are taken by institutions.

International student mobility is not only the result of policies in host countries, but also, at least in part, an outcome of policies in countries of origin or prior residence. It is important to consider the various “push” factors – political, economic, social and environmental – that contribute to people moving elsewhere to study. Global student mobility tends to flow from less-developed countries towards more developed countries. In some cases the outward student mobility is also encouraged, whether as part of bilateral exchange, with the aim of strengthening ties between countries, or also as a means to develop skills of individuals who may later return and contribute to the development.

This division of responsibility for policymaking and implementation across policy areas and levels highlights the relevance of inter-governmental collaboration to effectively support international students. For example, promotional campaigns and recruitment need to be matched by capacity in the migration system to handle peak application periods and in the higher education system to support international students. Similarly, regional priorities in ensuring a demographically healthy, educated and economically prosperous society should inform migration policies and system capacity. All six countries have developed some degree of cross-governmental collaboration on policy for international students.

In 2000, Australia adopted the Education Services for Overseas Students Act, which provides a legal framework to govern the delivery of education to international students and outlines the split of responsibilities between public bodies (Department of Education, 2024[41]). In May 2025, Australia established a new role of Assistant Minister for International Education, which is a shared portfolio between the Department of Education and the Department of Home Affairs (Martin, 2025[42]). Additionally, collaboration takes place in relation to the Study in Australia portal. The portal is managed by the Australian Trade and Investment Commission (Austrade) in collaboration with all state and territory study destination agencies and with input from a number of governmental and public bodies (Austrade, 2025[43])

In Canada, where responsibilities for higher education fall under the jurisdiction of provinces and territories, standards and policies for international education delivery are overseen by the respective ministries responsible for post-secondary education. Those ministries, for example, designate educational institutions that can enrol international students, oversee quality assurance and set policies to strengthen student protection for international education. In addition, provinces and territories, through the Council of Ministers of Education (CMEC), have collaborated with Global Affairs Canada to develop the EduCanada brand and platform. The former serves as a seal of quality for authorised institutions, while the latter provides reliable information to international students regarding the Canadian education system and program offerings (EduCanada, 2025[44]).

In France, an interministerial approach was established as part of the 2018 *Bienvenue en France* (Welcome to France) strategy. The collaboration primarily focused on facilitating applications and admissions and the visa and residence permit process, by connecting higher education institutions, embassies and migration authorities through the *Études en France* (Studying in France) platform (Cour des comptes, 2025[18]). Campus France, a public body jointly created by the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Higher Education and Research, has a major role in implementing the policy and co-ordinating across different stakeholders.

In Germany, in 2024, the federal and state (*Länder*) ministers of science and culture have adopted a joint internationalisation strategy for 2024-2034 (BMBF and KMK, 2024[40]). Based on this strategy, a working group comprising representatives of the federal and state governments meets regularly to discuss various aspects of internationalisation, including conditions for international students. Much of the implementation and funding of internationalisation policies in Germany is done through the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), an association of higher education institutions and student bodies. To fulfil this role, the DAAD receives significant funding from the federal government for, for example, the Study in Germany portal and campaign. The DAAD also advises policymakers on issues related to internationalisation and includes representatives of key federal and state bodies in its governance (DAAD, 2025[45]). Additionally, higher education institutions in Germany have formed the GATE-Germany consortium, which offers services and expertise to support international marketing, such as participation in university fairs, presentation of study programmes online and development of marketing materials and strategies. The administrative office of the GATE-Germany consortium is located at the DAAD. GATE-Germany is funded by the Federal Ministry of Research, Technology and Space (BMFTR), but still governed by the member universities (GATE-Germany, 2024[46]).

In the Netherlands, in a similar way to Germany and France, much of the policy implementation is conducted through Nuffic[1], an organisation tasked to provide information and generate knowledge about internationalisation of education. Furthermore, it also acts as the national agency for Erasmus+ and the Dutch ENIC-NARIC with duties in regard to qualification recognition. The work of Nuffic is supported by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the European Commission (in case of EU funded programmes) (Nuffic, 2025[47]). The overall internationalisation strategy and policy is developed, as well as co-ordinated by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, with Nuffic playing an advisory role.

In the United Kingdom, the 2019 International Education Strategy established the role of Government International Education Champion and created the Education Sector Advisory Group (Department for International Trade and Department for Education, 2019[48]). The Group was co-chaired by two ministers from the Department for Business and Trade, and the Department for Education, with participation of various stakeholders, representatives of devolved administrations, the British Council, the Home Office and the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office. The United Kingdom's new International Education Strategy, published in January 2026, suggests creation of ministerially chaired Education Sector Action Group, with representatives from the Government, higher education sector and industry. The 2026 strategy maintains the role of International Education Champion (UK Government, 2026[26]). The British Council has a major role in promotion of the British higher education abroad, producing reports and shaping policy. Scotland has its own International Education Strategy (Scottish Government, 2024[49]), whose implementation is overseen by the International Education Strategy Governance Group, comprised of government and sector representatives.

In some of the comparison countries (DEU, FRA, GBR, NLD), public internationalisation bodies (i.e. DAAD, Campus France, British Council, Nuffic) have a significant role in facilitating co-ordination on international-student policy and implementation, and in providing direct support to international students.

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2 Choosing what to study, admission and arrival processes

This chapter examines the beginning of the international student journey. First, it examines how prospective international students find reliable information about study options and life in another country. The chapter compares national information platforms, policies and initiatives to support prospective students in their study choice. Second, it considers how well study choices match applicant aspirations and abilities, while also considering a country's needs. This section also delves into enrolment patterns and key characteristics of international students. Third, the chapter focuses on finances, tuition fees, financial means requirements and scholarships. The fourth section compares different admission approaches. The fifth section describes processes and conditions related to acquiring of study visas/permits, noting recent policy changes.

Key findings

- International students rely most on institutional websites and rankings for information, yet all six countries support comprehensive national information portals complemented by many provincial, state-level, regional and even municipal portals with information for international students. The use of education agents is increasingly being regulated, particularly in Australia, Canada and the United Kingdom.
- International students are over-represented in postgraduate education. A higher share of international students, compared with domestic students, is enrolled in STEM and business, administration and law, while a smaller share is in health and education. International students are primarily enrolled in university-type institution rather than other types of higher education institutions (e.g. universities of applied sciences, academies, engineering schools). Across all six countries, international students are enrolled in institutions based in the major metropolitan areas in even larger shares than domestic students.
- International tuition fees are generally highest in Australia, Canada and the United Kingdom, while nearly German public institutions charge only a small administrative fee to all students, domestic and international. Financial means requirements for study visas/permits have risen across most countries, except in France. General scholarship schemes are shifting to more targeted schemes by level, field or region of origin.
- Admissions processes range from more centralised platforms (Studielink in the Netherlands, UCAS in the United Kingdom, Études en France in France) to more decentralised organisation, where each institution organises its process. All countries are parties to the Lisbon Recognition Convention and have national information centres and processes for recognising foreign qualifications.
- Study visas/permits processing times, fees and sponsor obligations vary between countries. Australia, Canada and the United Kingdom have recently taken steps to tighten the processes, introducing further obligations and restrictions for international students and higher education institutions that host them.

For international students, country of origin and previous educational qualifications play a major role in shaping their study choice, whether they meet eligibility criteria for admission, and how difficult it will be for them to obtain a study visa/permit. This section focuses on the specific challenges prospective and admitted international students face before arrival to study in their chosen host country.

Identifying reliable information about study and life in foreign countries

Prospective students make study decisions based on available information about possible study programmes, institutions and places to study, as well as information about study and post-graduation visa/permit. Compared to domestic students, international students are less likely to have pre-existing knowledge, guidance or support in prior education and from their social network. As such, they face greater challenges in obtaining information about study and life in potential destination countries.

In response to this challenge, OECD governments, including the six comparison countries, have developed or supported the development of dedicated online portals for international students (Table 2.1).

Table 2.1. National outreach and information portals for international students

Portal	Responsible organisation	Main menu	Social media	Languages	Sub-national portals
Study Australia	Australian Trade and Investment Commission	Why Australia Plan your studies Life in Australia Plan your move Work in Australia Tools and resources	Facebook Instagram YouTube X	English, Chinese, Arabic, Spanish, Indonesian, Japanese, Korean, Portuguese, Thai, Vietnamese	Study NSW Study Queensland Study Adelaide South Australia Study Tasmania Study Victoria Study Perth Western Australia Study in Canberra Study NT (Northern Territory)
EduCanada	Global Affairs Canada and CMEC	Why Canada Find programs and costs Scholarships Plan your studies Live and work in Canada Start your journey	Facebook Instagram YouTube LinkedIn	English, French	Study in Alberta Study in British Columbia Study in Manitoba Study NB (New Brunswick) Study in Newfoundland and Labrador Study in Nova Scotia Study in Ontario Study on PEI (Prince Edward Island) Studying in Québec Study in Saskatchewan
Study in Germany	DAAD and BMFTR	Why Germany Plan your Studies Living in Germany Meet the Community Get in Touch	Facebook Instagram YouTube TikTok	English, German	Baden-Württemberg: The place to study! Study in Bavaria Studying: Universities of Brandenburg Studying in Bremen Study in Hamburg Study in Hesse Study in Lower Saxony Studies in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern Make it in Rhineland-Palatinate: Study Study in Saarland All about studying (Saxony) Studying in Saxony-Anhalt Study in Thuringia
Campus France: study in France	Campus France	Choose France Studying in France Getting organised Living in France And after?	Facebook Instagram LinkedIn Bluesky YouTube	French, English, Spanish	
Study in NL	Nuffic	Dutch education Finances Plan your stay Life in NL After your studies Student stories Newsletter	Facebook Instagram YouTube	English	Study in the Amsterdam Area Studying in Delft Studying in Eindhoven Studying in Groningen Study in The Hague Leiden International Centre Study in Nijmegen Utrecht International Centre
Study UK	British Council	Why study in the UK? Plan your studies Scholarships and funding Moving to the UK After your studies Blog (+ More)	Instagram, Facebook, X, LinkedIn, YouTube, Spotify, TikTok, Weibo	English, Chinese, Thai, Indonesian, French	Study in Scotland Study in Wales

Note: Compiled by the OECD Secretariat

All six portals have a similar structure, providing information on why students should study in the country, about the educational system, on the study offer and on living in the country. Portals, to varying extents, also cover topics of study costs and overview of available scholarships. All national portals also either directly mention or provide reference to sites with information about study visas/permits and associated conditions. While all six countries have among the most comprehensive information sources, compared to portals in other OECD countries, the depth of information shared varies greatly between portals. These portals not only provide information but are often part of larger campaigns to promote country and its higher education sector and to assist higher education institutions with recruitment.

Study NL, the Dutch promotion portal and campaign, has recently changed its focus, effectively halting active recruitment and presence in recruitment events, as a result of policy changes aimed at curbing the number of international students. Nuffic closed some of its offices abroad and embassies are no longer engaging in recruitment. The focus shifted from prospective students to those who have already applied, providing more information to support their arrival and integration.

In addition to national outreach and information portals most Australian states and territories, Canadian provinces and territories, German states and individual countries of the United Kingdom also have their respective portals targeted at international students (Table 2.1). In the Netherlands, the sub-national portals are available for specific regions or even cities, supported by respective regional and local governments. Some sub-national portals are also directly supported by individual higher education institutions. There is a greater variety in the scope of information offered by these portals, but they are also an important resource for prospective and current international students, especially on guiding them regarding living, working and studying in a particular state, province, country, territory, region or city.

Survey evidence from some of the comparison countries suggests that international students tend to rely on information from institutional websites and global university ranking portals, while government-supported portals are perceived as less important. In Canada, 95% of international students found institutional websites to be the most useful resource for information and 87% referred to rankings, while only 67% found EduCanada a useful resource and 78% rated the website of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada positively (CBIE, 2024[1]). In Australia, only 35% of international students said they used the Study Australia website, but 84% of those who did use it found the information to be helpful (Study Australia, 2025[2]). In Germany, international students most frequently report using university website (68% of respondents), followed by ranking portals (36%) and only then the information services provided by DAAD (35%). However, DAAD information services were found to be more relevant than ranking portals (considered relevant by 23% of respondents compared to 16% respectively) but still less than university websites – rated positively by 45% of respondents (DAAD, 2025[3]). Besides institutional websites, ranking and national portals, international students most often rely on information from other people, current students they know or their family and friends, and some prospective students also found information on social media. Despite a relatively information-rich environment for prospective international students, a survey in Canada found that about 25% still faced challenges in obtaining sufficient information about higher education providers (CBIE, 2024[1]).

Information on study programmes and support for international students

All national outreach and information portals for international students allow prospective students to search through an available study offer. The depth of information however differs between countries.

Study Australia has a Course Search tool (2026[4]), which references all programmes listed in the Commonwealth Register of Institutions and Courses for Overseas Students (CRICOS). The prospective students can easily verify that the programme is eligible to sponsor study visas. The portal provides some information about each study programme, including a short course description, qualification classification, address and registration of the provider, attendance options, tuition costs, possible related careers and a reference to more detailed information provided on the institutional websites. While the website is offered in multiple languages, information on study programmes is only in English.

The EduCanada search tool draws from the Canadian Post-Secondary Institution Collection (CPIC) database from Employment and Social Development Canada (EduCanada, 2025[5]). The information provided on the website is relatively brief, allowing users to filter study offer by language, education level and location. The programme description shows only the programme name and the name and location of the provider, with a hyperlink to institutional websites that provide more detailed information about the study content. The content is offered in both English and French.

DAAD has a database with international programmes (2025[6]) that includes a subset of all offered study programmes in Germany that are more geared towards international students, mainly because they are taught in English. Besides degree programmes, the database also includes short programmes and language courses. The search has multiple filters. The database has very detailed information on individual study programmes, programme descriptions, costs and funding, requirements and application process, services offered by the institution, details about the university and relevant contact information. This submission of the programme into the database is voluntary by institutions and is permitted if the programme meets certain criteria. Institutions pay for every programme that is published in the database. Additionally, DAAD also provides the My GUIDE platform (2025[7]), which includes all study programmes offered in Germany, drawing on the Higher Education Compass, an information portal provided by the German Rectors' Conference. All information is provided by the institutions, basic set of information is available for all study programmes, while detailed information is available for programmes listed in the database with international programmes. DAAD has combined this information with their database on admission requirements and scholarships. Prospective international students can use My GUIDE to conduct a preliminary check on whether they meet admission requirements based on their prior education, and they can also find information about relevant scholarship opportunities. The portal also facilitates communication with the institution, allowing institutions to set up automated replies to general inquiries in both German and English, aided by artificial intelligence (DAAD, 2025[7]).

Campus France directs prospective students to multiple programme search tools (Campus France, 2026[8]), with a diverse level of detail. It has developed its own Taught in English database, which has relatively basic filters (i.e. study level, field, language, type of degree and a marker for institutions with *Bienvenue en France* label[2]) and simple information on each study programme, such as a programme description, admission prerequisites, programme objectives, tuition fees and institutional profile. Campus France also has separate catalogues with bachelor's and master's level programmes. Both however, offer a relatively limited set of information on individual study programmes. While both catalogues are in English, most content is only in French. The most detailed information is within the CampusArt catalogue, which only covers programmes in arts and detailed information is also only provided in French.

The Study in NL platform, an initiative from Nuffic, provides Studyfinder that includes all English-taught programmes in the Netherlands (2026[9]). The information is simple but comprehensive, covering a programme description, admission criteria, information on tuition fees, available scholarships and a prominent link to the programme at the institutional website. Additionally, the portal recommends Studiekeuze123 as a tool to search for all study programmes offered in the Netherlands, but which is only available in Dutch. This Studiekeuze123 portal provides very detailed information for prospective students, incorporating statistics on enrolment, completion, student satisfaction and labour market outcomes (e.g. profession, job search, salary, match, satisfaction) for each study programme.

As part of the "Study UK" platform, the British Council provides a search tool for programmes and scholarships – Plan your studies (Study UK, 2026[10]). The portal includes key information on tuition, study

[2] Label awarded based on assessment on how well a higher education institution can support international students, explained in detail in section Requirements and guidance for institutions hosting international students

mode, duration, location of the provider, course details and entry criteria. Additionally, Study UK recommends prospective students to also search for undergraduate programme information on the website of the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) and on Discover Uni platform. UCAS provides detailed programme-level information, focusing on admission, application deadlines and process, entry requirements, historical entry grades, data on student outcomes from the Office for Students and information on fees and funding. Discover Uni incorporates programme-level data from the national student survey, prior education, student progression and completion, accreditation, labour market outcomes and graduate perceptions of the programme.

Agents and third parties

Some international students are aided and guided in their study choice by agents and third parties that provide information and guidance on study options and assist with admission and study visa/permit processes. However, the scale of their use differs and seems to be especially prevalent in Australia, where around 88% of international students used an agent for visa application or enrolment, according to the 2024 Student Experience Survey (QILT, 2025[11]). The use of agents is also quite common in Canada and the United Kingdom, where most institutions work with agents to aid their recruitment and around half of international students are estimated to be referred by agents (ICEF, 2021[12]). Although not all agents are affiliated with the institutions for which they recruit. The use of agents in the Netherlands, Germany and France seems to be more restrained. Rather than relying on agents, Campus France has an extensive network of 257 offices and branches in 134 countries around the world that often provide local advice and guidance (Campus France, n.d.[13]).

All three countries with a widespread use of agents (AUS, CAN, GBR) have regulated the activities of agents through placing requirements on higher education institutions in relation to education agents acting on their behalf. In Australia, for example, as part of the Education Services for Overseas Students Framework, the National Code of Practice for Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students 2018 directly sets out requirements for providers working with education agents in Standard 4. Higher education institutions need to ensure that their agents act in the best interest of the student. Institutions need to have a written agreement with the education agents and maintain their list in a register, ensure that agents have appropriate knowledge and must take immediate corrective actions if an agent has not complied with the responsibilities (Department of Education, 2023[14]). Observing an increase in risks to compliance, the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) conducted an assessment in 2023 to observe how providers in Australia are meeting their obligation regarding monitoring of education agents. They found some gaps in internal processes and responsiveness to problems, while some providers were able to address the concerns, in some cases regulatory intervention was required (TEQSA, 2024[15]).

The British Council, the Universities United Kingdom (UUK), the UK Council for International Student Affairs (UKCISA) and the British Universities' International Liaison Association (BUILA) have jointly developed the UK Agent Quality Framework, which includes a guide for students and parents on choosing education agents, a national code of ethical practice for agents and a good practice guide for providers that use education agents. The British Council has furthermore developed training for agents and counsellors, maintains an engagement hub and a database of certified counsellors (British Council, 2025[16]). The UK Government has agreed that signing up to the Agent Quality Framework will be added to the student sponsorship guidance as a sponsorship duty for any sponsors who use agents when recruiting international students.

In Canada, the federal government does not regulate education agents, although some provinces and territories have implemented guidance or regulation on the use of agents as part of their process of accrediting designated learning institutions that are eligible to host international students. For example, amongst a broader suite of measures strengthening support for international students, British Columbia has adopted the International Education Code of Practice as part of its Education Quality Assurance designation, which sets consistent standards for institutions interacting or engaging with an education agent by requiring institutions to have practices for effectively managing and monitoring the performance and conduct of education agents (Ministry of Post-Secondary Education and Future Skills, 2025[17]). On the federal level, the College of Immigration and Citizenship Consultants licenses and regulates International Student Immigration Advisors, that assist international students with immigration matters (College of Immigration and Citizenship Consultants, 2026[18]).

Pre-departure services and guidance

All comparator countries, through the portals mentioned in Table 2.1. , offer relatively comprehensive information concerning the practical aspects of life in the host country. However, some initiatives have also developed activities and tools to support international students prior to their arrival and facilitate their academic and social adjustment to a new environment. The British Council, for example, organises pre-departure briefings for admitted international students and region-specific events to offer guidance and information on travel, visa, finances, accommodation, expectations and life as a student in the country. The British Council has also developed online courses for international students, relevant before arrival or even during studies, to prepare them to study and live in the country, to manage their wellbeing and prepare them for work (British Council, 2026[19]). “Study in NL” organises regular online question and answer sessions on different topics. These sessions include both relevant experts and current students acting as student ambassadors, to share their experience. The “Study Australia” portal offers international students a detailed Cost of Living Calculator (2026[20]) that allows them to project their expected living expenses based on multiple factors and preferences. The portal also developed a Career Matcher tool (Study Australia, 2026[21]), a short quiz that gives personalised advice on careers that might fit students’ personality and skills. Another tool is the Speaking English Practice Test that identifies areas to improve spoken English (Study Australia, 2023[22]). The “Study in Germany” portal includes, alongside information on study options, a detailed overview of all cities that host a higher education institution, providing practical information about the place and a tool to help find student accommodation (Study in Germany, 2026[23]).

Matching applicant aspirations and abilities with study offer and country needs

The enrolment patterns of international students tend to differ from those of domestic students. This reflects the different prerequisites, aspirations and specific constraints they face. The challenge for prospective international students is to identify a study programme that suits their aspirations and abilities, within their constraints. As explored above, international students do not always have access to the same set of information and guidance as domestic students, which might lead to sub-optimal decisions and unmet expectations. In parallel, the challenge for institutions and host countries is to shape available study offers to make them attractive to international students, while also considering available capacity and domestic labour market needs.

Enrolment patterns

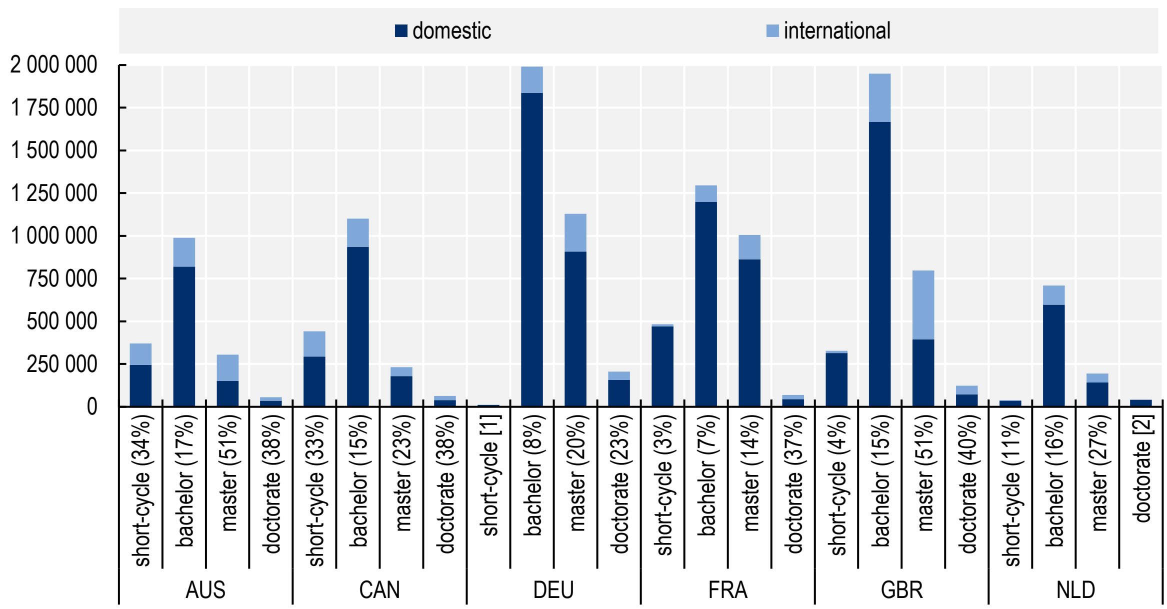
More international students are enrolled in master’s than in bachelor’s-level programmes

Across OECD countries, international students are enrolled in higher shares in master’s and doctoral programmes (ISCED 7-8) compared to bachelor’s-level programmes (ISCED 6). The share of enrolment in short-cycle tertiary education (ISCED 5) differs between countries (OECD, 2025[24]). Across the six comparator countries (Figure 2.1), this pattern holds, with Australia and Canada having a substantial number of international students enrolled in short-cycle programmes, with about one-third of students in these programmes being international in 2023. The share of international enrolment in bachelor’s-level studies is relatively low in France (7%) and Germany (8%), while the other four countries have between

15% and 17% international-student enrolment rates at bachelor's level. Combined, across the six countries, about 0.98 million international students were enrolled in bachelor's-level programmes in 2023, while about 1.03 million were enrolled in master's-level programmes. International students account for about half (51%) of all students in master's-level programmes in both Australia and the United Kingdom, and about one-quarter to one-fifth of all students in Germany (20%), Canada (23%) and the Netherlands (27%). The headcount of students in doctoral programmes is relatively low overall, but the share of international students tends to be high across the six countries.

Figure 2.1. Students by level of education, 2023

Proportion of mobile students by level of education (in brackets)



Note: Short-cycle – ISCED 5, bachelor – ISCED 6, master – ISCED 7, doctorate – ISCED 8

[1] DEU: no international students enrolled in programmes reported as short-cycle tertiary education

[2] NLD: total doctoral students (ISCED 8), available data does not provide split for international students.

Source: OECD (2025[25]) Number of enrolled students, new entrants and graduates by age, https://data-explorer.oecd.org/s/3eq.

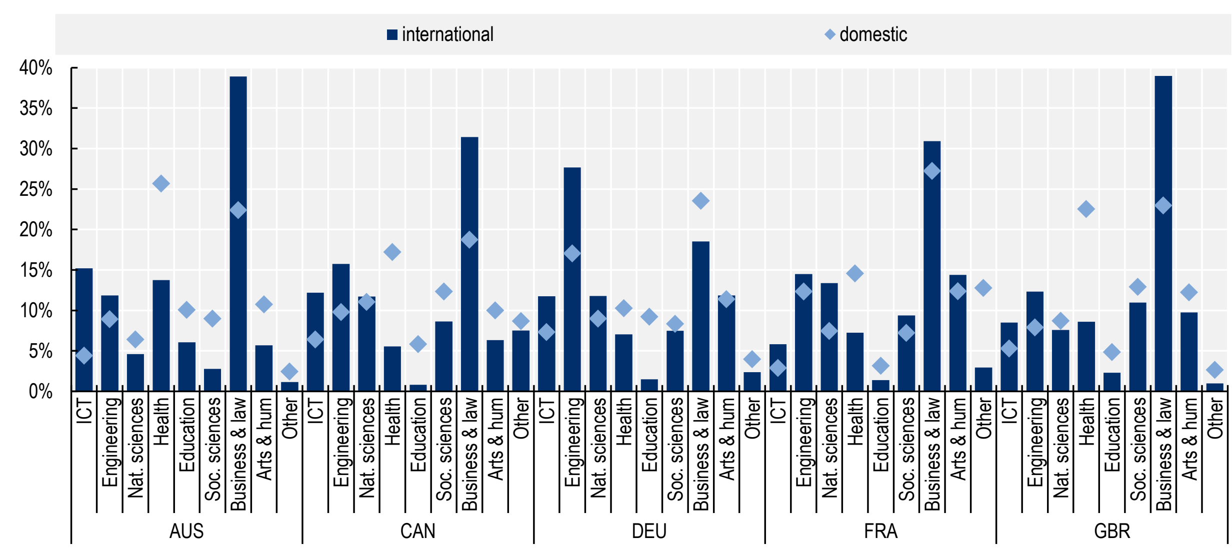
Compared to five years earlier in 2018, the largest shifts in enrolment patterns were observed in Canada, with the rise of international enrolment in short-cycle tertiary programmes. The number of international students in these programmes more than tripled (a 211% increase). Enrolment in ISCED 5 programmes also increased rapidly in the Netherlands, but such programmes are still a relatively small part of the sector in the Netherlands. The number of international students more than doubled in master's-level programmes in the United Kingdom (159% increase) and in doctoral programmes in Germany (101%) (OECD, 2025[25]).

The different levels and types of programmes are oriented towards different groups of international students and respond to their diverse motivations. A growing number of shorter study programmes, pre-bachelor's or master's level programmes, is a response by higher education institutions to offer more affordable study opportunities. Some international students pursue shorter and specialised programmes, as means for their professional advancement. However, there is also a concern that some international students pursue short programmes in order to access post-graduation visa/permits and migrate permanently to the host country.

International students are more frequently enrolled in STEM and business programmes

Across five countries (data not available for the Netherlands), there seem to be consistent differences in the distribution of domestic and international students across study fields (Figure 2.2). International students tend to be enrolled in STEM study fields more frequently than domestic students, especially in study programmes focusing on ICT (on average 5% of domestic students but 11% of international students) and engineering, manufacturing and construction (11% domestic, 16% international). Shares of international students in natural sciences, mathematics and statistics are similar to those of domestic students, except for France, where international students are over-represented (7% of domestic compared to 13% of international students). The highest share of international students is enrolled in business, administration and law to an even greater extent than domestic students in all countries except Germany. In Australia, Canada and the United Kingdom, the share of international students in business, administration and law is about 70% higher than the share of domestic students. Two fields where international students are clearly under-represented are health and welfare (18% domestic, 8% international) and education (7% domestic, 2% international). The shares of enrolment in social sciences, humanities and arts seem to be more varied across countries, but there tends to be a lower share of international students enrolled in these programmes compared to domestic students, except in France.

Figure 2.2. Share of enrolled students by field of study, 2023



Note: No internationally comparable data available for NLD. ICT stands for Information and Communication Technologies.
Source: OECD (2025[26]), Distribution of enrolled students, new entrants and graduates by field of education, https://data-explorer.oecd.org/s/3es

Many stakeholders consulted in preparation of this report expressed their concern that international students tend to choose study fields that do not have the best labour market outcomes and are not related to labour markets sectors that are facing labour shortages.

International students are mostly enrolled in university-type institutions

International students in the three European countries (DEU, FRA, NLD) tend to be enrolled in higher levels in university-type institutions rather than in other types of higher education institutions. Table 2.2 compiles available national data for five comparator countries, showing distribution of domestic and international student population across different types of institutions. The United Kingdom is omitted in the table, as nearly all students are enrolled in universities, so sectoral comparison is not relevant.

Table 2.2. Distribution of students across types of higher education institutions

	Type of higher education institution	Domestic students	Share of domestic students	Total international students	Share of international students
AUS	Universities (Table A & B)	989 829	93.5%	485 511	83.8%
	Other HEIs	68 329	6.5%	93 547	16.2%
CAN	University	1 104 135	77.0%	268 572	52.6%
	College	330 525	23.0%	242 142	47.4%
DEU	Universities	1 347 233	56.8%	303 101	61.6%
	Universities of applied sciences	974 190	41.1%	174 707	35.5%
	Academies and universities of arts	24 491	1.0%	12 778	2.6%
	Other HEIs	26 121	1.1%	1 501	0.3%
FRA [1]	Universities	1 631 500	54.2%	210 701	64.0%
	Business schools	284 900	9.5%	52 709	16.0%
	Engineering schools	194 300	6.4%	16 744	5.1%
	Other HEIs	902 200	29.9%	48 993	14.9%
NLD	Universities	249 150	37.7%	92 610	70.6%
	Universities of applied sciences	411 390	62.3%	38 560	29.4%

Note: AUS: Data for 2024, overseas students. Table A includes public universities, Table B approved private universities. Other providers include overseas universities and institutions (Table C) and non-university higher education providers. Categorisation made based on eligibility for public funding and loan scheme. Count only considered students in undergraduate and postgraduate courses.
CAN: Data for 2023/24. International students enrolled in post-secondary ISCED 5-8 programmes.
DEU: Data for 2024/25. Table refers to foreign students rather than international students. Universities of applied sciences also include federal and state universities of applied sciences for public administration.
FRA: Data for 2024/25.
NLD: Data for 2024/25.
GBR: No data reported, as there is only a small number of total students enrolled in tertiary education courses outside universities.
[1] Total students, rather than domestic students. Total students rounded to the closest hundred.

Table compiled and calculated based on:
Department of Education (2025[27]), Selected Higher Education Statistics – 2024 Student data, https://www.education.gov.au/higher-education-statistics/student-data/selected-higher-education-statistics-2024-student-data (accessed on 2 December 2025).
Statistics Canada (2026[28]), Table 37-10-0018-01: Post-secondary enrolments, by registration status, institution type, status of student in Canada and gender, https://doi.org/10.25318/3710001801-eng
Destatis (2026[29]), Statistik der Studierenden Wintersemester 2024/2025 (Statistical report - Student statistics - Winter semester 2024/2025), https://www.destatis.de/DE/Themen/Gesellschaft-Umwelt/Bildung-Forschung-Kultur/Hochschulen/Publikationen/_publikationen-innen-hochschulen-studierende-endg.html (accessed on 19 February 2026).
DEPP (2025[30]), Repères et références statistiques - 2025 (Statistical Benchmarks and References - 2025), https://rers.depp.education.fr/ (accessed on 19 February 2026)
CBS (2025[31]), Hoger onderwijs; internationale studenten, onderwijskenmerken (Higher education; international students, educational characteristics), https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/cijfers/detail/85125NED (accessed on 19 February 2026)

The widest gap is in the Netherlands, where about 71% of international students were enrolled in universities, compared to only 38% of the domestic students. In the universities of applied sciences, the trend is reverse, with 62% of the domestic enrolment while only 29% of the international student population (CBS, 2025[31]). In France, 64% of international students on degree mobility were enrolled in universities, compared to 54% of the total enrolment. However, in recent years, the share of international students in France has been rapidly rising in business schools. The most recent data, from 2024/25, show that 16% of international students, while only 10% of the total enrolment was in business schools (DEPP, 2025[30]). In Germany, about 62% of foreign students were enrolled in universities, slightly higher than 57% of domestic students. A smaller share of foreign students was enrolled in the universities of applied sciences, 36% of foreign and 41% of domestic students, but foreign students seem to be more represented in academies and universities of arts (Destatis, 2026[29]).

Outside Europe, as seen in Table 2.2, the distribution is different. In Australia, international students are slightly over-represented in the non-university sector. In 2024, 84% of overseas students were enrolled in Australian universities, while this was the case for 94% of all domestic students (Department of Education, 2025[27]). In Canada in 2023/24, international students in ISCED 5-8 programmes (i.e. tertiary education) are almost evenly split between universities (53%) and colleges (47%). However, about 77% of domestic students are enrolled in universities, compared to only about 23% in colleges. It is important to note that about 0.39 million students are enrolled in other study programmes offered by Canadian post-secondary institutions, primarily colleges (Statistics Canada, 2026[28]).

International students tend to be concentrated in a few major metropolitan areas

Tertiary enrolment tends to be skewed towards urban areas, as higher education institutions are primarily located in these areas and may also be better known. In comparison to domestic enrolment, international students are even more heavily concentrated in major metropolitan areas. This is visible across all six countries to some extent, as seen in Table 2.3.

Table 2.3. Regional concentration of international and domestic students, 2022

Five small regions in each country with the highest enrolment in tertiary education

	Small regions (TL3 code)	Domestic students	Share of domestic students	Total international students	Share of international students
AUS	Melbourne [AU2GM]	203 135	20.1%	141 425	31.1%
	Sydney [AU1GS]	199 767	19.8%	110 099	24.2%
	Perth [AU5GP]	90 357	8.9%	42 684	9.4%
	Brisbane [AU3GB]	76 260	7.5%	31 279	6.9%
	Adelaide [AU4GA]	68 800	6.8%	22 416	4.9%
CAN	Toronto, ON [CA3520]	167 115	14.7%	45 524	17.6%
	Montreal, QC [CA2466]	147 441	13.0%	37 038	14.3%
	Vancouver, BC [CA5915]	91 482	8.0%	33 996	13.2%
	Ottawa, ON [CA3506]	63 294	5.6%	14 894	5.8%
	Waterloo-Kitchener, ON [CA3530]	55 890	4.9%	10 046	3.9%
DEU	Berlin [DE300]	148 120	6.1%	38 482	10.5%
	München, Kreisfreie Stadt [DE212]	95 431	3.9%	29 683	8.1%
	Rhein-Sieg-Kreis [DEA2C]	104 028	4.3%	12 751	3.5%
	Hamburg [DE600]	89 550	3.7%	12 326	3.4%
	Essen, Kreisfreie Stadt [DEA13]	83 646	3.4%	7 546	2.1%
FRA	Paris [FR101]	380 654	15.4%	31 052	18.5%
	Rhône [FRK26] (Lyon)	185 777	7.5%	7 257	4.3%
	Nord [FRE11] (Lille)	165 484	6.7%	10 226	6.1%
	Gironde [FRI12] (Bordeaux)	103 580	4.2%	6 596	3.9%
	Haute-Garonne [FRJ23] (Toulouse)	104 276	4.2%	2 670	1.6%
GBR	Inner London [UKI33 - UKI45]	204 975	10.3%	163 685	22.2%
	Outer London [UKI51 – UKI75]	78 290	3.9%	36 540	5.0%
	Milton Keynes [UKJ12]	139 340	7.0%	255	0.0%
	Birmingham [UKG31]	71 410	3.6%	23 290	3.2%
	Glasgow [UKM32]	57 110	2.9%	27 965	3.8%
NLD	Groot-Amsterdam [NL32B]	102 465	14.5%	23 383	20.4%
	Utrecht [NL350]	73 422	10.4%	7 216	6.3%
	Groot-Rijnmond [NL366] (Rotterdam)	61 502	8.7%	10 756	9.4%
	Arnhem–Nijmegen [NL226]	63 348	9.0%	5 116	4.5%
	Overig Groningen [NL115]	52 000	7.4%	12 475	10.9%

Note: Calculated based on the OECD Analytical Database of Higher Education Providers, which has institutional level data based on national databases for AUS and CAN, and the European Tertiary Education Register for DEU, FRA, GBR and NLD. The database is incomplete but captures a significant part of the enrolment. The shares are calculated out of the enrolment captured in the database. Domestic students calculated based on difference between total enrolment and number of enrolled international students. The small regions based on the OECD Territorial grids TL2024 classification.

AUS and CAN: Each higher education institution was manually associated with the small region (TL3) based on their main location. For other countries (DEU, FRA, GBR, NLD), institutions were already linked with specific small region (TL3).

GBR: Small regions within London combined for comparison purposes.

In Australia, about 40% of domestic students were enrolled in institutions located in Melbourne or Sydney, while about 55% of international students were in the same institutions. In Canada, institutions located in Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver account for 36% of domestic enrolment, but about 45% of international enrolment. In the United Kingdom, Greater London hosts about 14% of domestic enrolment and 27% of all international students. Milton Keynes, which hosts the Open University, has enormous enrolment, but most of these students are distance learners and they reported only a small number of international students. Both major Scottish regions, around Glasgow and Edinburgh both have higher share of international enrolment than domestic enrolment.

In France, the concentration is primarily in Paris, which accounts for about 15% of domestic students and 19% of international students. While other French regions in Table 2.3 have higher share of domestic students, international students are more concentrated in regions around Montpellier, Strasbourg and Marseille, so primarily on the coast or in border regions. In the Netherlands, Amsterdam is a major hub for both domestic and international students, accounting for 15% of all domestic enrolments and 20% of international enrolments. Groningen and Maastricht, and their respective small regions have combined 10% of domestic enrolment, while they host about 22% of all international students in the country. What these regions share is proximity to the border.

In Germany, the enrolment is more evenly spread out, but still with concentration of international students. Higher education institutions in Berlin, with the largest share of the total enrolment in the country, host only about 6% of domestic students, but about 11% of international students. Second, Munich, which has 4% of domestic enrolment and 8% of international enrolment. Other regions are not as internationally oriented, except Aachen, a border region, with 2% of domestic enrolment and 4% of international students.

The regional pattern of international enrolment across all six countries seems to gravitate towards the capital city and the major metropolitan areas, as well as to border regions in Europe.

Countries have been implementing policies to promote greater regional distribution of international students. The Australian Government's Migration Strategy introduced a system of visa processing prioritisation, that encourages students to take up study programmes linked to sectors with labour shortages and programmes offered in regional locations (Department of Home Affairs, 2023[32]). In the Netherlands, similarly, the border regions and programmes linked to sectors with labour shortages are expected to be exempted from planned regulation of the number of international students allowed to enrol per programme and of whether particular programmes can be delivered in English (Government of the Netherlands, 2024[33]).

In Canada, the federal government has started distributing its Provincial Attestation Letter allocation to provincial governments on a per-capita basis, which will impact the geographic distribution of international students in coming years. It is up to the discretion of provincial and territory governments to allocate the letters to institutions, however they have yet not used this to push international students to apply to a greater diversity of institutions and locations. International students tend to continue to study primarily in major metropolitan areas. Under the former International Education Strategy in Canada, there was a targeted digital marketing strategy to attract students to a greater diversity of educational institutions and study programmes.

In France and Germany, efforts to better distribute international students across the country are mainly pursued through support to institutions to better market themselves and build up support services for international students.

International students tend to be more mature and to have parents with higher education

International students across European countries included in this study tend to be older than their domestic peers at the start of their education (AdvanceHE & HEPI et al., 2025[34]; Eurostudent, 2025[35]). A key factor is that international students are more likely to be enrolled in postgraduate programmes, in which students tend to be older.

From countries with available data, it seems that international students are likely to have at least one parent with higher education more often than domestic students. In the United Kingdom, for example, only about 16% of international students are the first generation to enter higher education, compared to 31% of domestic students (AdvanceHE & HEPI et al., 2025[34]). In Germany, nearly 70% of international students have at least one parent with a higher education qualification, while this is the case for only 57% of German students (Kroher et al., 2023[36]). A similar trend is also observed in the Netherlands, but differences are smaller in the case of France (Eurostudent, 2025[35]). In Canada, in a student survey conducted in 2023, about 34% of international student respondents reported being first generation (i.e. first person in the immediate family to attend a post-secondary institution) (CBIE, 2024[1]). This presents a relatively complex picture. There are some international students who come from a relatively affluent background. At the same time, there are many who, individually and their families, choose to make significant financial commitments to support their study abroad.

Aspirations and motivations

Understanding the aspirations and motivations of international students in relation to their study choice is important to identify which policy levers might be used to steer the choices. Across the selected countries, surveys of prospective and existing international students have found a large value being placed on the safety and security of the host country, the perceived quality of the education system, affordability of studies and living costs, ability to work during studies and possibilities for stay and work after graduation. The choice of institution and programme is shaped by the perceived quality of education and the reputation of the provider – often understood through university rankings – as well as the offer of specific programmes, location, tuition and scholarships, and language of instruction (CBIE, 2024[1]; DAAD, 2025[3]; QILT, 2025[11]). Conditions like social networks, accessibility by transport as well as legal requirements can also shape where and whether prospective students pursue education abroad (Shkoler and Rabenu, 2022[37]).

Countries have introduced and expanded post-graduation visas/permits and also some countries, particularly Australia, Canada and the United Kingdom, and to lesser extent also Germany and the Netherlands, shifted the messaging towards prospective students from primarily emphasising cultural exchange and quality of education, to focus on work opportunities and employment outcomes (Collett, 2025[38]). For example, in the United Kingdom, this shift was part of the 2019 International Education Strategy, which aimed to diversify from where international students are arriving and widen recruitment to the growing middle class, rather than wealthy elite, enabling students to work after study to pay off loans and creating a clear return on the investment (Department for International Trade and Department for Education, 2019[39]). In turn, more international students now cite career and employment outcomes, as well as opportunities to obtain post-graduation visa/permit and permanent residence as key motivators for study choice. Recent research in Australia highlighted how central permanent residency became to many choices international students made, including enrolling in programmes that they have no particular interest in and might not want to work in long-term, but ones that offer the highest chances of obtaining permanent residence (Jobs and Skills Australia, 2025[40]). Findings from surveys in Germany suggest that international students consider expected post-graduation income, career opportunities and specific career goals, as well as the reputation, ranking and international orientation of the institution in their study choice, more than domestic students (Kroher et al., 2023[36]). Another survey among international students in Germany also confirms that they are mostly considering where they can study with their financial means, possibilities to work in the country after studies and what is the offer of study programmes, especially taught in English (DAAD, 2025[3]).

These various motivations and aspirations intersect and apply to various subgroups of international students. A study by DAAD providing an in-depth survey of analysis of choice motivations has proposed five profiles of international students and their key characteristics (Pineda et al., 2022[41]):

a) Cultural explorers have desire to try life abroad. They are curious about other cultures and want to develop themselves, but do not always have clear academic or career goals.
b) Cosmopolitans are people already exposed to a multi-cultural environment; they might have been mobile before and often speak multiple languages.
c) Career-oriented pragmatists are focused on improving their career prospects and focus on labour market relevance of their studies. They are flexible in study choice, based on costs and relevance.
d) Career-oriented idealists often have a strong interest in a specific discipline and possible career afterwards. They tend to be very targeted in where they apply and have high expectations.
e) Immigrants came to the country for non-academic reasons but decide to pursue studies. This category can also include displaced populations.

Abilities and capacities

As for domestic students, the choice of study programme is guided by prospective students' existing general or subject-specific knowledge and abilities. Different education systems have different focuses and, as a consequence, international students might have more advanced knowledge and skills in some domains compared to domestic students, but also greater weaknesses in other areas. Study choice for international students is thus also shaped by their prior education, the topics it focuses on and the type of qualification they already hold. Because of prior education and future plans, some international students are also more inclined to study programmes with a more international focus (e.g. international law, international business, international relations) or area studies.

A major ability that shapes study choice is language, which influences choice of the country and language of instruction. International students with higher German proficiency more frequently pick Germany as their first-choice destination for studies (DAAD, 2025[42]), while mobility to France is predominantly Francophone (Cour des comptes, 2025[43]). One reason the Netherlands has become such a popular student destination, has been the widespread use of English in instruction and the ability to use English in daily life. In Germany, France and the Netherlands, English-taught programmes have much higher shares of international students than those taught in the national language. Language proficiency can also shape choice of a study programme. Irrespective of where they are taught, some study fields, like ICT and business, have more study content and learning materials in a widely spoken international language (primarily English) and some fields, like mathematics or physics, can rely more on abstraction. While students in study fields, like journalism, law or literature, require very high levels of proficiency in the language of instruction.

Constraints to enrolment

Citizenship shapes the particular conditions associated with entry to another country. While students from EEA countries can freely move around most of Europe, non-EEA students often face complicated and lengthy processes to obtain a study visa/permit. A correlated factor to country of origin is language proficiency, with prospective students from Francophone countries often having already studied in French and having more options to study in France or in Canada. A third factor is prior education, which also differs between countries and even within countries, with impacts on admission requirements and the existing knowledge students possess in specific subjects. A fourth factor is bilateral and multilateral agreements on recognition of secondary and higher education qualifications between countries, which can facilitate the access of some international students and hinder others. All six countries reviewed here are part signatories to the Lisbon Recognition Convention, Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region. They all have a national information centre and established processes for the recognition of higher education qualifications. This topic is covered in more detail in section Recognition and equivalence of foreign qualifications and in Chapter 5.

Funding studies

As noted, a key factor in the decisions of international students is affordability, including tuition fees, expected living costs and the availability of scholarships and other financial assistance. The costs of living and studies, linked with a lack of affordable housing, are becoming a major obstacle to international mobility in all six countries covered by this study (Studyportals, 2025[44]). The challenge lies not only in the total expense the studies entail, but also in a lack of clarity about the level of resources needed and a risk of actual costs being higher than anticipated and the opportunities available to access part-time work during studies being more challenging than expected (Oduwaye, Kiraz and Sorakin, 2023[45]).

The annual average or most common tuition fees for international students and the financial means required by visa/permit regulations in the six countries covered by this study are shown in Table 2.4. Data presented here, collected for the OECD Education at Glance 2025, are averages for master's or equivalent programmes, which does not reflect the level of tuition across various tertiary education programmes, but they are the best available and most comparable data on this issue.

Australia, Canada and the United Kingdom all charge relatively high fees to both domestic and international students, but international students on average pay at least double the rate of domestic students. One exception are Scottish domiciled students studying in Scottish universities, whose tuition fees are waived.

The Netherlands has relatively low tuition fees for domestic students and student from other EEA countries, but substantially higher tuition fees for non-EEA international students (about 28% of international students). France has even lower annual average tuition fees for domestic students and students from EEA countries than the Netherlands. In 2019, France has introduced differentiated tuition fees for international students coming from non-EEA countries, although these are not yet broadly applied (Cour des comptes, 2025[43]) and annual average is therefore still relatively low. In Germany, rather than tuition fees, all students, regardless of their origin, have to pay a relatively small administrative fee. This fee is a mandatory flat charge which typically covers university administrative costs, contributions to the student services organisation, the student union and often the semester ticket for public transportation. Only a few students also pay tuition fees, this includes students in private higher education institutions and non-EEA international students pay tuition fees in three German states, Baden-Württemberg (in all public institutions), Bavaria and Saxony (institutions can choose).

Table 2.4. Tuition fees and required annual financial means for international students

	Annual average (or most common) tuition fees charged for master's or equivalent programmes in public institutions, 2022/23		Required annual financial means for study visa/permit [1]		Different financial means
	domestic	international			
AUS	USD 9 496	USD 20 880	AUD 29 710	USD 21 124	
CAN	USD 9 564	USD 20 876	CAD 22 895	USD 16 771	Quebec CAD 24 617 | USD 18 032
DEU [2]	USD 157	same fees as domestic [2]	EUR 11 904	USD 14 067	
FRA	USD 360	USD 5 592	EUR 7 380	USD 8 721	

GBR [3]	capped at USD 12 855 [4]	estimated USD 12 134 - 40 446	GBP 10 530	USD 14 209	London GBP 13 761 | USD 18 553
NLD	USD 3 041	USD 20 328	EUR 13 569	USD 16 035	

Note: In DEU, FRA and NLD students from other EEA countries are treated as domestic students.

[1] Rounded, converted to USD as of 27 February 2026. Monthly amounts for FRA and NLD calculated for annual amount based on 12 months, while for GBR based on nine months as international students in the United Kingdom need to provide proof of financial resources only up to nine months.

[2] Students in Germany pay administrative fee rather than tuition fees. Public institutions in three states, all in Baden-Württemberg and some institution in Bavaria and Saxony charge fees to non-EEA international students.

[3] No data reported by the United Kingdom for the OECD collection. The amount is range based on information provided by the British Council on their website, rather than an annual average. Currency converted to USD as of 27 February 2026.

[4] Tuition fees waived for Scottish domiciled students enrolled in Scottish universities. Domestic tuition fees also capped in the Northern Ireland for domiciled students at about half of the national cap.

Source: Annual tuition fees: OECD (2025[46]), Education at a Glance 2025: OECD Indicators, https://doi.org/10.1787/1c0d9c79-en.

Tuition fees for GBR based on Study UK (2026[47]), Cost of studying in the UK, https://study-uk.britishcouncil.org/moving-uk/cost-studying (accessed on 26 February 2026).

Required financial means for study visa/permit based on information provided by countries and from OECD (forthcoming[48]), Services and Costs in International Study.

The study visa/permit system in all six countries places a requirement on students to demonstrate sufficient annual financial means (Table 2.4). Immigration authorities require that for the first study visa/permit application, prospective students show proof of resources for the first year of studies. In Australia and the United Kingdom, international students on programmes longer than one year do not have to again prove resources. In Canada, as part of the initial application, international students are also required to have some evidence on how they plan to fund the further years of their studies. In France and Germany, regardless of the length of study, international are given time-limited residence permit, one or two years, and they need to prove that they meet annual financial requirements every time they renew their residence permit. In the Netherlands, higher education institutions, as sponsors of study visa, are required to check annually whether international students have sufficient resources to support themselves.

The lowest amount is in France, where the requirement has not been updated for several years, and has been found to be well below the real costs of living, especially in Paris (Cour des comptes, 2025[43]). All other countries have been updating these figures in recent years to better reflect living situation. For example, in Canada, prior to December 2023, international students were required to document annual financial means of CAD 10 000 (USD 7 325), amount that was not adjusted for many years prior. The current requirement, as of November 2025, is more than double the amount. Other countries more directly link the amounts required to expected living expenses, with the United Kingdom also making a distinction between students coming to London, where the costs of living, especially rent, is higher than elsewhere in the country. Proving sufficient financial means is reported as an increasing challenge for international students. In Canadian survey, carried out prior to the recent increases in required financial means, 35% of international students reported having issues with demonstrating sufficient funds (CBIE, 2024[1]) and in Germany 39% of international students found proof of financial means to be one of the most difficult aspects before arrival (Pineda et al., 2022[41]).

The relatively high price tag of international mobility is one of the reasons why international students tend to come from more affluent backgrounds, are dependent on scholarships or fund their studies from their savings and working on the side. To address affordability issues and steer study choice, some governments provide scholarships, loans, grants or tuition fee exemptions, in a targeted or generalised fashion. However, in recent policy shifts, the reviewed countries have been moving away from general financial aid towards more targeted funding, focusing on regions, postgraduate programmes, specific study fields and mobility from a few selected partner countries.

Australia has implemented the “Australia Awards” scheme, which offers scholarships every year to students coming from developing countries, covering their tuition, travel and living expenses (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2026[49]). In Canada, most of the financial aid to international students comes from institutions or private sources. Provincial, territorial and federal government schemes are oriented towards shorter education or training mobilities, for example, the Emerging Leaders in the Americas Program and Study in Canada Scholarships. Funding is provided for short-term study or research exchanges rather than for degree mobility. There are some notable exceptions, through participation in the Commonwealth and Francophonie scholarship schemes. Some measures and incentives also exist on the provincial and territorial level. For example, the Government of Quebec provides exemptions from differential tuition fees for some international students coming from countries with which it had signed an international agreement. In September 2023, it also introduced a distinct scheme of exemptions for students who go into selected study fields, studying in French and in institutions outside Greater Montreal (Gouvernement du Québec, 2024[50]).

In France, the Eiffel Scholarship offers a monthly stipend primarily to international students in master's and doctoral-level programmes, often connected with fee waivers offered by the institution. Additionally, some French embassies offer specific scholarships for students coming from the countries where they are located (Campus France, 2025[51]). In 2019, when France introduced higher tuition fees for non-EEA international students, it allowed institutions to exempt up to 10% of international students from higher fees. However, most higher education institutions decided to provide exemptions to a higher share of international students. It is estimated that only 10% of non-EEA international students pay differentiated tuition fee (Cour des comptes, 2025[43]).

Most higher education institutions in Germany continue to support international students by not charging tuition fees, instead only charging a small administrative fee each semester. Additionally, DAAD has multiple scholarship schemes that go towards covering living expenses, some of which focus on specific fields or partner countries. In the Netherlands, the NL Scholarship offers a modest one-time grant of EUR 5 000 (USD 5 909) to first-year international students coming from outside the EU (Study in NL, 2026[52]). There are multiple scholarship schemes in the United Kingdom (Study UK, 2026[53]). The British Government, through the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office supports the Chevening and Commonwealth scholarship schemes, both covering tuition, living expenses, travel and visa for postgraduate studies. The British Council, in partnership with universities, has also introduced the GREAT Scholarships, a one-time GBP 10 000 (USD 13 420) award towards postgraduate study, focused on selected countries.

Admission procedures

In the area of higher education admissions, the countries analysed in this report differ in two primary respects: the level of centralisation in the application process and the timetable for applications. Australia and Canada have more diverse application pathways, with some centralised portals in some provinces, states or territories, but a majority of international students apply directly to the institutions. In Germany, many institutions are part of the uni-assist platform, which can perform an initial or full evaluation of international students' application, especially of their prior education (uni-assist, 2026[54]). The most recent data suggest that most international students (42%) still apply directly to their institutions of choice and another 15% after initial evaluation via uni-assist. However, about 26% of international students in Germany apply directly through the uni-assist portal and about 9% went through Hochschulstart portal, used for application to admission-restricted programmes (DAAD, 2025[3]).

France is also in a transitionary period, with the development of the *Études en France* (Study in France) platform, which facilitates both admission and study visa/permit applications, now covering applications from 73 countries. Campus France local offices interview candidates and provide them guidance, while admission decisions are made by individual institutions. Students from other countries apply through the same portal as domestic students: Parcoursup (Campus France, 2025[55]). The Netherlands has a centralised portal for both domestic and international students, Studielink (2026[56]), although some institutions process international applicants directly. In the United Kingdom, most applications for undergraduate degrees go through UCAS, about 90% of international undergraduate entrants from the EU and about 60% of the non-EU international entrants in 2023 (Bolton, 2026[57]). For postgraduate programmes, which enrol more international students, students apply directly to institutions. Countries with more centralised applications tend to have more standardised processes, systems to pre-screen applications and collect information. However, in all countries, admission decisions are still made by individual institutions. A centralised or co-ordinated approach to applications allows setting system-wide limits on number of applications by one person and to manage offers based on priority set by the applicant. This can reduce number of offers received by one applicant and facilitate enrolment confirmation. Prospective students can be also encouraged to apply to less known institutions, promoting greater regional and institutional distribution of international students.

The primary intake in most countries is in September or October of the year, while in Australia the academic year starts in February. However, countries differ by application windows and deadlines. The gap between application and enrolment is relatively long in Canada and the United Kingdom. In Canada, the exact application window and deadline vary by institution and programme, although most applications for the fall intake open in October of the previous year, with admission deadlines usually from January to March of the entry year, some institutions extending it further into the year. In the United Kingdom, the application deadlines are more centrally fixed in UCAS, with an early deadline for some institutions and study fields already in October of a year before intake, while most undergraduate courses have a deadline in January. However, applications can still be made until end of June (UCAS, 2026[58]). Deadlines for postgraduate study programmes are more varied. As part of introducing its new application platform for international students, France has recently tried to move the application period ahead of the summer to give incoming students more time to apply for study visa/permit and ensure that students can arrive to France in time. Late admissions have been attributed to a relatively low confirmation of studies, as only about 53% of students offered a study place actually enrol (Cour des comptes, 2025[43]). Currently, in France, international students should mark their choices in the platform by the beginning of April, and the admission decisions are made by July (Campus France, 2025[59]). The Netherlands has a January deadline for programmes with a fixed number of study places, while other applications must be made by early May (Study in NL, n.d.[60]). Germany has a comparatively late deadline for fall intake in mid-July (DAAD, n.d.[61]). In Australia, the deadline would usually fall in October to December, for the February intake, although the exact deadline depends on the institution and programme. It is important to ensure that prospective students have easy access to information about application deadlines. Furthermore, there needs to be sufficient time after the admission decision is communicated, for students to obtain their study visa/permit and to arrange their move.

Recognition and equivalence of foreign qualifications

One of the primary challenges in assessing the application of international students is to get their foreign qualification recognised and compared against domestic qualifications and to understand whether they meet admission criteria. In all comparator countries, the decision on recognition and equivalence is made by the institutions accepting the students, but in some cases, some institutions outsource part of the assessment process, and countries also approach differently whether they support gathering of information on foreign qualifications. In line with their international, legal commitments, under Lisbon Recognition Convention that governs recognition of higher education qualifications (Council of Europe, 1997[62]), all countries included in this report have established processes of recognition of higher education qualifications (OECD, 2026[63]), which facilitates access especially to postgraduate degrees.

Furthermore, under the Lisbon Recognition Convention, all six countries have established national information centres and co-operation mechanisms that collect and share information about the higher education system (part of the ENIC-NARIC Networks). The Australian Department of Education (ENIC

Australia) developed Country Education Profiles, an online qualifications recognition tool, which institutions can access for a fee, to facilitate the recognition and equivalence of foreign qualifications (Department of Education, n.d.[64]). In Canada, the Canadian Information Centre for International Credentials (CICIC or Canadian ENIC) is mandated under UNESCO conventions to provide information and referral services to individuals and organisations on the recognition of academic and occupational credentials for working and studying in Canada and abroad, as well as descriptions of the 13 provincial and territorial education systems (CICIC, 2025[65]). In complementarity, six members of the Alliance of Credential Evaluation Services of Canada (ACESC) have been mandated to issue assessment reports for general purposes to outline expert, non-binding opinions on the assessment of academic credentials issued outside Canada (ACESC, 2025[66]). These reports are widely used by competent recognition authorities in Canada, such as some post-secondary educational institutions that may rely on these third-party services in their admission decisions. In Germany, the Central Office for Foreign Education (ZAB or German ENIC-NARIC) manages the “anabin” database, which lists many foreign qualifications and their German equivalent (ZAB, 2026[67]). Many institutions are part of the uni-assist platform and use it to evaluate the applications against the anabin database. The “My GUIDE” platform provided by DAAD is the only one that allows international students to conduct a pre-check on whether their qualifications meet the admission requirements for specific programmes. France Education international (ENIC-NARIC France) also gathers information on foreign credentials and recognition and equivalence procedures are built into both admission portals (France Éducation international, 2026[68]). In the Netherlands, Nuffic (Dutch ENIC-NARIC) has a statutory task to advise the public and government about comparability of foreign qualification to the Dutch system. Nuffic therefore developed a public overview of foreign education systems comparing them with the Dutch education system (Nuffic, n.d.[69]). Lastly, in the United Kingdom, information on foreign qualification is also collected centrally by the UK ENIC and admission offices have subscriptions to this database (UK ENIC, 2026[70]).

Obtaining a study visa/permit

International students not only need to be admitted to the institution but many also need to obtain permission to enter and reside in their chosen host country through a study visa/permit if they do not have the citizenship or another authorisation to be in the country. The terms used and processes to obtain the authorisation differ between countries and are explained in detail in Annex 2.A. Exception to this occur in the case of Germany, France and the Netherlands, for international students who are nationals of another country within the EEA, and more specific exemptions exist based on bilateral agreements between countries. As already mentioned, changes in study visa/permit access have been the primary policy tool used by some countries to regulate the number of international students in the country. Institutions around the world report that restrictive government policies are a significant obstacle to international enrolments, with this factor mentioned by 86% of surveyed institutions in Australia (Studyportals, 2025[71]), 90% of responding providers in Canada, 51% in the United Kingdom and around 59% in other European countries combined (Studyportals, 2025[44]). Countries are not only using migration policy to reduce or stabilise the number of international students but also taking steps to make the study visa/permit application processes more seamless and efficient and facilitating access to the country for admitted international students. France and Germany have made this a priority in their internationalisation strategies. Australia has been working to implement a system where some study visa applications are prioritised, and Canada has recently introduced expedited visa processing for international PhD students.

Data from a policy survey for the forthcoming OECD publication show differences in processes for study visa/permits (OECD, forthcoming[48]). First, in terms of processing times, ranging from on average less than two weeks in the Netherlands, three weeks in the United Kingdom and up to 60 days in Canada (and up to 120 days for study permit extension). However, processing times also depend on demand and the country where the application is filed. While Dutch immigration authorities have up to three months to decide, visas are often processed quicker. In part, because higher education institutions, as recognised sponsors, do their due diligence and they carry the legal responsibility for the risks involving the migration.

Australia has recently increased the student visa application fee to AUD 2 000 (USD 1 422 converted as of 27 February 2026). The United Kingdom also has a high fee of GBP 524 (USD 706) in addition to a mandatory immigration health surcharge of GBP 776 (USD 1 046). The UK Government has also recently announced an intention to introduce an international student levy, which will require higher education institutions in England to pay a flat fee of GBP 925 (USD 1 247) per international student per year, starting from academic year 2028/29 (UK Government, 2026[72]). This may be passed to international students in the form of higher tuition fees. France has the lowest fees (USD 59 or USD 117 based on country), followed by Germany (USD 89), Canada (USD 110) and the Netherlands (USD 287).

All six countries require study visa/permit applications to include proof of acceptance or sponsorship from the institution, as well as to provide evidence of financial means and of prior education. In most countries (except a few Canadian provinces/territories), international students also need to secure health insurance. Australia, Canada and the United Kingdom require a health certificate or check before travel. Only Australia requires to present a criminal record check and proof of accommodation, in case they are still minors upon arrival.

Requirements and guidance for institutions hosting international students

A shared prerequisite for study visas/permits is proof of acceptance from a recognised (higher) education institution. Some of the countries analysed impose specific conditions and requirements on institutions and programmes related to issuing study visas/permits.

Australia has the Education Services for Overseas Students framework, which consists of dedicated legislation from 2000, a national code of practice from 2018 and a register of institutions and programmes that can enrol students on student visas. The framework regulates the work of the Tuition Protection Service and outlines the registration process and obligations for registered providers. The national code of practice provides standards for registration and conduct of these providers, covering a wide range of topics, including marketing and recruitment practices, agreements with students, use of educational agents, support services for international students, student transfers, deferrals, suspensions and cancellations of enrolment, and visa requirements (Department of Education, 2023[14]).

In the United Kingdom, all institutions that want to enrol international students on a study visa, need to obtain a student sponsor licence from UK Visas and Immigration. They need to meet certain basic criteria and annually pass the Basic Compliance Assessment. As part of Immigration White Paper published in May 2025, the UK Government has announced that it will tighten the requirements. The assessment will require student sponsors to have a visa refusal rate of less than 5% of admitted students (down from 10% already required), an enrolment rate of at least 95% of accepted students (up from 90%) and a course completion rate of at least 90% of enrolled students (up from 85%) (UK Government, 2026[72]). Besides that, the regulation gives institutions instructions on how to register students, what work during studies is allowed, requirements to report any changes to student status and institutions need to remain under the oversight of one of the quality assurance bodies (UK Visas and Immigration, 2025[73]). The UK Government also considers that institutions have obligations under consumer protection law, which apply to students in general, especially in relation to information provision to prospective and current students, clear and fair terms and conditions, and complaint handling processes (Competition and Markets Authority, 2023[74]). This is accompanied by guidance from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA), *Supporting and Enhancing the Experience of International Students in the UK*, focused on information provision pre-arrival and on arrival, induction and integration, provider requirements and external compliance, academic support, professional services and non-academic support, inclusivity and employability (QAA, 2023[75]).

In Canada, federal government and provinces/territories have introduced a more robust system of requirements on institutions hosting international students. Within provincial/territorial responsibility for licensing, accreditation and approval of institutions and programmes, provinces and territories are responsible also for the designation of learning institutions for the purposes of hosting international students. Through federal-provincial/territorial collaboration, a single Designated Learning Institutions list is compiled and hosted by the Government of Canada. The list serves as the reference for the granting of study permits, conditional on the acceptance of the individual into their study programme. Provincial and territorial requirements vary, supplementing general criteria and conditions applicable to all student intake and awarding of qualifications with specific assurances pertaining to international students, such as recruitment practices, information provision and support services. Additionally, a system of provincial attestation letters was introduced in 2024. These letters are a mandatory document issued through a province/territory to confirm that an international student has been allocated a space within the national cap on study permits.

In Germany, there are no elaborate specific conditions on which institutions can host international students, the only condition is that they are a recognised educational institution. While there are no legal criteria, the German Rectors' Conference has adopted a National Code of Conduct for German Universities Regarding International Students (2009[76]) that provides guidance to institutions. The national code covers topics like information and marketing, admission and placement, academic, language and social support and counselling, services related to completing studies and handling complaints.

The Netherlands works with a system of recognised sponsors. In the case of study visas/permits, higher education institutions carry a considerable responsibility. They check the entry conditions of the student and will apply on behalf of the international student for residence permit. Institutions that are recognised sponsors bear legal risk and obligations for the international students they sponsor. Additionally, a national commission with the representatives of the government and higher education institutions has developed the Code of Conduct for International Students in Higher Education (2024[77]), which guides institutions in relation to information provision, use of agents and private providers, admission and registration, and offers and assistance to international students. The commission has also further elaborated specific guidance on language tests.

France is a special case. Regulation states that study visa/permit can only be granted to students admitted to a recognised provider. However, no definitive list of all providers and programmes exists, which has led to some confusion regarding which programmes and providers are state recognised (Cour des comptes, 2025[43]). Campus France, as part of the 2018 internationalisation strategy, developed an institutional label *Bienvenue en France* (Welcome to France), which assesses the quality of services for international students in higher education institutions. The criteria consider the quality and accessibility of information, orientation services and activities, teaching support, housing and life on campus, post-graduation support and commitment to sustainability and social responsibility (Campus France, 2024[78]).

Annex 2.A. National processes for study visa/permit

Australia – Student Visa (Subclass 500)

International students need to apply for the student visa (subclass 500) that acts both as authorisation to enter and reside in the country for the duration of studies and usually a few additional months after the end, depending on the length of the study. Students arriving from outside Australia need to inform their education provider of their address within seven days of their arrival and report any changes in residential address. More information: https://immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/visas/getting-a-visa/visa-listing/student-500.

Canada – Study permit

International students need to apply for a study permit that authorises them to stay in the country for the duration of their study with some additional time. Once the study permit is issued, the applicant will also receive either a temporary visa or a travel authorisation, allowing entry to the country. More information: https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/study-canada/study-permit.html.

France – Long-stay student visa equivalent to a residence permit (VLS-TS)

International students need to apply for *visa de long séjour valant titre de séjour* (long-stay visa equivalent to a residence permit) for the purpose of study. The visa is valid up to one year. Within three months of entry, students need to validate it online. At least two months before the visa expires, students need to apply for a temporary residence permit, which can last one year or be multi-annual (up to four years) and is renewable. More information: https://www.service-public.gouv.fr/particuliers/vosdroits/F2231.

Germany – Student visa and residence permit

International students need to apply for either *Visum zu Studienzwecken* (Student visa) or, if they have not been yet admitted, *Visum zur Studienbewerbung* (Prospective student visa). The student visa is valid for up to one year, while the prospective student visa is only valid for up to three months, but can be extended up to six months. Within three months of entry to Germany, international students need to apply for a residence permit, issued for up to two years and can be extended. More information: https://www.study-in-germany.com/en/plan-your-studies/requirements/visa/.

Netherlands – Student residence permit for university or higher professional education

In the Netherlands, higher education institutions, as visa sponsors, are responsible for checking whether the international students meet the entry conditions. Institutions bear the legal responsibility for everyone they sponsor. Higher education institutions apply for the student residence permit for university or higher professional education on behalf of international students. If needed (i.e. if they do not have a current permit to reside in the Schengen zone), international students are given an entry visa. Upon arrival in the

Netherlands, a residence permit card is issued for the duration of studies, up to five years. More information: https://ind.nl/en/residence-permits/study.

United Kingdom – Student visa

International students need to apply for the Student visa when their higher education institution issues the Confirmation of Acceptance for Studies (CAS). The student visa is valid for the duration of the studies with some additional time, depending on programme length. The visa is both an authorisation to enter the country and to reside in it. More information: https://www.gov.uk/study-uk-student-visa.

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3 Study adaptation, progression and success

This chapter looks at how international students adapt, progress and complete their studies in another country. First, the chapter examines how institutions respond to differences in preparedness and how international students adapt to a new learning environment, different study expectations, teaching and assessment approaches, and academic norms. Second, the chapter looks at the evidence on sense of belonging and isolation of international students. Third, it focuses on what institutional services are usually available to international students and whether they use them. The fourth section examines data on study progression and completion for international students.

Key findings

- Language proficiency and familiarity with teaching and assessment approaches are important for academic adaptation. Targeted induction, language support and early feedback can bridge gaps in academic preparedness.
- Based on available evidence, sense of belonging for international students is frequently equal to or higher than that of domestic students. However, a sense of isolation and lack of connection with domestic students remains an issue, as does a weaker sense of welcome beyond the academic community.
- Awareness of institutional support services is higher than uptake. Many international and domestic students rely on help from peers or family rather than institutional services. In some countries, in addition to institutional support, regional and local hubs and centres offer activities and support to international students.
- International students often have higher completion rates than domestic students, although their first-year progression tends to be lower and their initial dropout rate higher than for domestic students. Key drivers of dropout include financial pressure, stress and wellbeing, unmet expectations, language and study visa/permit.

Academic preparedness and adaptation

The transition from secondary to higher education or progressing to a higher level within higher education is associated with the need to master more advanced knowledge and skills. All students, domestic and international, need to cope with navigating a wide range of literature, actively participating, completing assignments and sitting exams. This is combined with a range of non-academic aspects, such as housing, finances, wellbeing and social life, which also contribute to student performance. International students, to varying extents and usually more than domestic students, also need to:

1. <u>Understand the education system, organisation of studies and academic norms</u>. Understanding these elements is an important factor for successful adaptation and progression in studies. National information portals provide system-level information on the organisation and key features of the educational system, such as types of institutions and qualifications, the credit system and quality assurance. However, the organisation of studies (e.g. calendar, programme structure, grading) and academic norms (e.g. communication with academic staff and fellow students, referencing, academic integrity) can be very different between and even within institutions, and quality of information provision differs between institutions.
2. <u>Adapt to different teaching and assessment approaches.</u> In Canada, half of international students (50%) reported difficulties with adjusting to the learning environment and completing written assignments, with this being particularly common among first and second-year students (CBIE, 2024[1]). In the United Kingdom, international students highlighted the challenges of adapting to new educational expectations and they were slightly more likely than domestic students to ask for an extension on assignments (AdvanceHE & HEPI et al., 2025[2]). Furthermore, some international students in the United Kingdom mentioned experiencing digital shock, experiencing greater reliance on digital learning than expected, and navigating unfamiliar tools they had little or no prior experience with (Newman, Gulliver and Newall, 2023[3]). In Germany, 23% of international students were not satisfied with transition to German teaching (DAAD, 2025[4]). In the Netherlands, active participation in class and engagement with the teaching staff is often required, with points awarded for active participation, which often proves difficult for international students. The teaching and

assessment approaches can, to various extents, differ from students' previous educational experiences. The key elements to understand about teaching are in the balance of contact hours and independent study, the balance of lectures and seminars, practical and theoretical focus, and how technology is being used. In terms of assessment, countries and study programmes differ by types of assignments used, whether the assessment is continuous or more concentrated, what grading criteria are used and how feedback is provided. Understanding these elements helps students to better meet expectations, allocate their time and effort to activities that matter and enhance their learning. Many study programmes hold orientation sessions and introduction courses helping students to understand these elements, as well as providing information in their institutional information systems and offer study-related counselling.

3. Identify gaps in preparedness and fill them. Students coming from diverse backgrounds, with different educational and professional experiences, will have gaps in their subject knowledge, their abilities and skills to participate in education and meet requirements. Most institutions already make initial assessments of the potential gaps during admission, sometimes requiring or suggesting admitted students to complete specific preparatory courses before starting the study programme. In Germany, around 34% of international bachelor's and 20% of master's-level international students attended some form of preparatory course (Pineda et al., 2022[5]). Additionally, some programmes will make initial assessments of skills and knowledge, to provide students with additional courses, workshops or to seek support from available services. During the term, most students also receive some feedback to direct their individual efforts.

Across all these factors, many international students need to cope with finding information and studying in a language that is different to their native language. A survey among international students in Germany found that international students studying in English have a higher self-assessment of their language skills being sufficient for their studies than those studying in German. International students in English-language programmes were more active, asking more questions and joining discussions, than international students in German-language programmes. Furthermore, 24% of international students in German programmes had language problems when writing their final thesis, compared to 18% of respondents on English-taught programmes (Pineda et al., 2022[5]). This corresponds with a common finding across the literature that many international students, primarily non-native speakers, struggle with language and avoid speaking in classes (Oduwaye, Kiraz and Sorakin, 2023[6]).

Integration into the academic community

International students feel that they belong, often even more than domestic students

Most international students feel that they belong. In Germany and the Netherlands, slightly fewer international students disagree with the statement that "they do not belong in higher education" compared to domestic students (DEU 74% domestic compared to 66% international, in NLD 70% compared to 68% international) (Eurostudent, 2025[7]). Interestingly, in the United Kingdom and Australia, international students had a higher sense of belonging to their institution than domestic students. About 67% of international students rather agreed that they belonged at their institution, compared to 61% of domestic students (AdvanceHE & HEPI et al., 2025[2]). And in Australia, the equivalent proportions were 57% of international undergraduates and only 44% of domestic students. The gap widens further among postgraduate coursework students. In 2024, 62% of international postgraduates felt a sense of belonging in their institution, while this is the case for only about 38% of domestic students (QILT, 2025[8]). In Canada, about 73% of international students felt a sense of belonging and even more (85%) feel treated with respect (CBIE, 2024[1]). While about 75% of international students felt welcome at their university in Germany, only 50% felt that outside the institutions (DAAD, 2025[4]), a point further explored below in Chapter 4, section Local and community integration.

International students feel isolated and disconnected from their peers

While international students feel belonging overall, some feel isolated and disconnected from their peers. In Germany and the Netherlands, international students were slightly less likely to know many fellow students with whom to discuss subject-related questions. In the same survey, answers from France and the Netherlands show that international students are more likely to feel isolated from fellow students, with this being the case for 14% of international students compared to 8% of domestic students in France and 15% of internationals in the Netherlands, compared to 5% of domestic students (Eurostudent, 2025[7]). In Canada, 19% of responding international students considered leaving because they felt isolated or unwelcome (CBIE, 2024[1]). Interestingly, peer engagement was much more positively rated by international students in Australia, where, among undergraduates there was 15 percentage point gap (72% international and 57% domestic students) and 37 percentage points difference among postgraduates coursework students (78% vs 41%) (QILT, 2025[8]).

What was commonly observed is the separation of international students from their domestic peers and a lack of contact and connection between the groups. In Germany, half of international students (50%) were dissatisfied with the contact with domestic students in the beginning of their studies. The contact was somewhat easier for international students coming from EU countries, in part because some speak German and there is greater cultural closeness. After orientation activities, only 21% of domestic students were in regular contact with international students (DAAD, 2025[4]). International students in Germany, during their first semester, when facing problems in studies most often turn for help to students from their country (42%) or other international students (37%), rather than domestic students (27%). By the fourth semester, most asked for help from other international students (35%), followed by students from their country (33%) and only then German students (25%), a share that declined even further (Pineda et al., 2022[5]).

Institutions have been promoting greater connection between international and domestic students by organising events and creating buddy schemes that pair domestic and international students to support orientation and integration. These activities are more complicated in the case of language differences (more pronounced in non-English speaking countries), which naturally create separation between English activities and classes, primarily attended by international students, and local language activities, primarily attended by domestic students. In many instances, international students tend to be concentrated in some study programmes, shaped by language of instruction, study field or particular focus, which means that there are not always natural opportunities for interaction.

One of the key activities to promote connections is through extracurricular activities. In Germany, for example, more frequent participation has been found to contribute to a sense of belonging (Thies and Falk, 2023[9]). Data on participation in student clubs and activities is limited, with the only source identified in the Netherlands, where about 22% of international students were members of Dutch study or student associations, while about 37% were members in international study or student associations (Nuffic, 2022[10]). Most institutions encourage international students to join student clubs, associations and other extracurricular activities. But even here, there tends to be segregation, as international students are more likely to join cultural and religious clubs, international students’ associations and sports common in their home country. In Germany, there is a large national German Association for International Students (DEGIS) with local branches in most cities that organise events, meet-ups, cultural celebrations and city exploration, as well as running a buddy programme to facilitate connections between, mostly international, students (DEGIS, 2025[11]). In many places, local branches work with relevant higher education institutions and authorities to provide activities. However, DEGIS is an independent organisation, not connected with higher education institution, student bodies, any government or any public bodies. Student unions, especially at the local level, particularly in Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, have a significant role in organising events and activities to integrate international students.

Access to institutional support services and activities

While many international students are aware of available services and support structures, they do not always use them. This is also a pattern noticed among domestic students, but international students often have access to additional services primarily intended for international students, such as support with study visa/permit and arrival or language support. In the Netherlands, international students tend to have a similar level of awareness of available support services as domestic students, but only a small proportion of students have actually used them (Eurostudent, 2025[7]). In Canada, while most international students are aware of available services, in many cases they have not used them even if they reported need (CBIE, 2024[1]). In Germany, international students were familiar with individual support services offered by their institution, but these were used by only some (DAAD, 2025[4]). As a consequence, a relatively large supply of support services serves a relatively small number of international students, as they tend to turn to their fellow students or academic staff for help (Pineda et al., 2022[5]). In the Netherlands, international students were also found to seek help from their family, partner, friends inside the country and outside, from student associations and from academic staff, before turning to their institutions (Nuffic, 2022[10]). The internationalisation strategy in France has supported welcome desks for international students, but a recent report found that many have been underutilised (Cour des comptes, 2025[12]).

The relatively small usage of some support services is puzzling, considering the self-reported needs of international students, who would like help in many areas of their life. In the United Kingdom, international students have expressed a need for more support to be provided beyond academic matters (AdvanceHE & HEPI et al., 2025[2]). This is also seen in the responses from Germany, where international students, even more than domestic students, highlighted the need to receive support regarding finances, housing, health insurance, childcare, study interruptions and problems with study progress and completion (Kroher et al., 2023[13]).

Support services are primarily provided by individual higher education institutions, but there are several ways in which national stakeholders and policymakers work to promote them. In Germany, for example, the database of international programmes (DAAD, 2025[14]) includes information on what support services and activities are offered by the provider, thus already informing prospective students of what they can expect and have access to. In France, as part of the internationalisation strategy, the government has funded welcome desks for international students. Furthermore, starting in 2019, Campus France has started to certify institutions based on quality of their welcome and support services for international students, giving them "*Bienvenue en France*" (Welcome to France) label. The evaluation looks at a) quality and accessibility of information, b) quality and accessibility of welcome facilities, c) programme accessibility and assistance, d) housing and quality of campus life, e) quality of follow-up after graduation (Campus France, 2024[15]). By December 2025, 180 higher education institutions were certified and promoted online as recommended institutions for international students.

In Australia, Canada and the United Kingdom, the offer of support services is outlined in regulations related to providers eligible to sponsor study visa and host international students. For example, in Australian, this topic is covered in the National Code of Practice for Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students 2018 (Department of Education, 2023[16]), while in Ontario Canada, provincial government has regulated the offer of support services within the framework for designating learning institutions, in the Requirements for Designated Institutions under the International Student Program (Ministry of Colleges and Universities, 2024[17]). In Canada, every province or territory sets conditions, including on student services, to be met before a post-secondary institution can be designated as eligible to host international students (i.e. designated learning institution). Guidance on offer of support services to international students is also provided by other stakeholders, such as the UK Council for International Student Affairs (UKCISA). UKCISA is a membership organisation of higher education institutions, student unions and other organisations working with international students (2026[18]). UKCISA provides information to international students, supports institutions that work with international students through advice, training and events, and it also monitors policy, collects data and advocates for policy change. UKCISA issued the #WeAreInternational Student Charter, which provides guidance to institutions on supporting international students from pre-arrival to post-graduation. Furthermore, it has run a grants scheme to support piloting of new projects and sharing of good practice that support international students.

The German state of Baden-Württemberg is one of the three German states that has introduced modest tuition fees for international (non-EEA) students, but it has intended to use a portion of this revenue to improve support services for international students (Baden-Württemberg International, n.d.[19]). A similar idea was present in France with the introduction of differentiated tuition fees for non-EEA international students. Revenue from these fees would provide continuous funding for welcome desks, other support services for international students and a scholarship fund. However, as the differentiated fees have not been fully implemented with most international students being granted exemptions and less than 10% of eligible students paying the differentiated fees, there is a substantial shortfall in resources (Cour des comptes, 2025[12]; OID, 2025[20]).

In Australia, some of the support services are also offered by state study hubs, supported by state and local governments. Study Melbourne that covers the state of Victoria has established the Study Melbourne Hub that offers counselling and guidance services (e.g. mental health, legal advice) to international students, hosts events and training for international students, and provides a space for students to meet and hang out (Study Melbourne, 2026[21]). The hub provides complementary and independent support for international students in the major universities in the state, which already have comprehensive support infrastructure. However, many international students are also in smaller institutions, with less internal capacity and hub has an important support function for these students. Study Melbourne initiative not only focuses on international students but also engages with local community and organisations to facilitate their integration, working with employers to facilitate employment of international graduates, including by organising an international student career fair. As part of Study in Melbourne inclusion programme, the initiative has own grants scheme which provides seed funding for various initiatives and activities that promote integration of international students into the local community. Similarly, the StudyPerth International Student Hub, offers space and a range of wellbeing, legal and career support (StudyPerth, 2026[22]). The StudyPerth campaign and hub is financed in part through membership of the universities and other higher education institutions.

Local support centres are also operated by the *Centres régionaux des œuvres universitaires et scolaires* (CROUS, Regional Centre for University and School Services) in France and *Studierendenwerk* in Germany. Local branches of CROUS and Studierendenwerk cover one or more higher education institutions, offering various services to all students, domestic and international. They often run dormitories, host canteens, many also provide counselling, advice in applying for various benefits and organise social and cultural activities (CROUS, 2026[23]; Deutsches Studierendenwerk, 2023[24]). These organisations have been created to serve all students but are having increasingly larger role in supporting international students, while not all are equipped to handle it. National association of studierendenwerk has created a Intercultural Competence Service Centre, supported by the funding from the federal government, to support local branches and advocate better support for international students. The centre has been organising language and intercultural trainings, forums and conferences for exchange and publishing materials for staff in local branches to more effectively support international students (Deutsches Studierendenwerk, 2025[25]).

Study progression and completion

International students have higher completion rates than domestic students

Across five comparator countries (no data for Germany), international students tend to have better completion rates (i.e. share of students who complete their study programmes within a set period) than domestic students. Although in most countries (CAN, DEU, England (GBR) and NLD), international students have lower initial progression rates (i.e. share of students who advance to the next year of their studies) or higher dropout rates (i.e. share of students who leave their higher education programmes before completing).

In Australia, the retention rate (i.e. progression rate, share of students who continue in their studies after their first year) within a provider, seems to be about the same for both international and domestic students, at about 82% for students who started in 2023. Although the retention rate was higher for international students in previous years, with a ten-year average of 89% for international students, compared to 82% for domestic students (Department of Education, 2025[26]). In terms of completion, both four and six-year completion rates of bachelor's students are consistently higher among international students than among domestic students. For students who started in 2021, 42% of domestic students completed their studies by 2024, compared to 71% of international students. For the class commencing in 2019, six years after, in 2024, 63% of domestic students had completed studies compared to 77% of international students (Department of Education, 2025[26]).

In England (United Kingdom), continuation rates (i.e. progression rates, the number of first-time entrants that continue in their studies after their first year) for undergraduate full-time students who started between 2019/20 and 2022/23 were slightly higher for domestic students (89%) than for international students (87%). However, among full-time undergraduate student cohorts starting between 2016/17 and 2019/20, international students have slightly higher completion rates (90%) compared to domestic students (88%) (OfS, 2025[27]).

Similar pattern is seen in Canada, where initial persistence of undergraduate degree students after one year (i.e. progression rate) is slightly higher for domestic students (87% for 2021/22 cohort) compared to international students (84%). The four-year completion rate, for the cohort starting in 2018, was slightly better among international students (48%) than for domestic students (44%). The six-year completion rate, for the cohort starting in 2016, was about the same, with 74% of domestic students completing their studies compared to 73% of international students (Statistics Canada, 2024[28]).

In France, in the cohort starting in 2018/19, 46% of domestic students progressed into the second year of their bachelor's programme (i.e. progression rate), while 50% of international students did so. For the same cohort, four years later, 45% of domestic students had completed their bachelor-level programme, compared to about 48% of international students (MESR/SIES, 2025[29]).

In the Netherlands, the available data considers dropout rates rather than progression rates. Initial dropout rates, within the first year of study, were significantly larger for international students, with a dropout rate of 17% within the first year, compared to only about 6% of domestic students. Among master's students, the difference was smaller but still with higher dropout rate among international students, 9% of international and 6% of domestic master's students. In terms of completion, 60% of domestic university bachelor's students, cohorts that started between 2011 and 2017, finished their programme within four years, while 65% of international students from EEA countries and 61% of non-EEA international students did so (Inspectorate of Education, 2022[30]).

In Germany, similarly to the Netherlands, data captures dropout rates rather than progression rates. Within their first year of study, 16% of international bachelor's students who started in 2020 dropped out, while about 13% of domestic students did the same (Netz et al., 2025[31]). Robust data on completion rates are not available for Germany. Where available, retention and completion rates of postgraduate students are generally higher than for undergraduates.

Many students also consider whether to drop out during their studies. In the United Kingdom, about 29% of both international students and domestic students considered withdrawing from their studies at some point (AdvanceHE & HEPI et al., 2025[2]). In Australia about 13% of international students considered early departure from their institution, although about 20% of domestic students did the same (QILT, 2025[32]). In Germany, domestic students are also more likely to consider dropping out of their studies than international students (Kroher et al., 2023[13]).

Dropout factors for international students

Across surveys from Australia, Germany and the United Kingdom, certain cross-cutting factors influencing propensity to dropout emerge (Kroher et al., 2023[13]; AdvanceHE & HEPI et al., 2025[2]; QILT, 2025[32]), all of which are also relevant for many groups of domestic students. The first concern, shared among all students, is financial difficulties. At least in Australia and the United Kingdom, finances appear to be less of a concern for international students than for domestic students. An important consideration is also the level of financial investment and overall commitment made for their studies. For example, the costs of dropping out for international student from EEA country studying in another EEA country tend to be lower than for non-EEA students, because they are paying domestic tuition fees, if any. Furthermore, EEA international students have not gone through a complicated process of obtaining a study visa/permit and they can stay in the country, even if they stop studying. A second common issue is stress and wellbeing, which is also not unique to international students. A third factor, lack of motivation, is especially highlighted in Germany (Pineda et al., 2022[5]), with some concerns in Australia and the United Kingdom that courses were not meeting expectations. Compared to domestic students, international students tend to be more cautious about changing programme or institution, in part because it might impact their study visa/permit (Kroher et al., 2023[13]). A fourth factor is working and caring responsibilities. As explored in Chapter 4, section Working during studies, many international students work to fund their studies, which at times might come into conflict with their study obligations. Furthermore, as international students tend to be more mature, some also have caring responsibilities, which might distract from, or lead to interruptions in, studies. Lastly, other specific challenges felt more acutely by international students in Australia were concerns about career prospects and language skills, the latter one being a relatively minor problem affecting only 6% of international students (QILT, 2025[32]).

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4 Life in a new country and integration

This chapter examines the lives of international students outside their academic pursuits. First, it outlines challenges they face in securing housing. Second, chapter examines how international students are familiarising themselves with new surroundings and accessing local services, including health insurance. Third, it explored challenges they face with integrating into local communities. Fourth, it covers their study and living expenses. Fifth, the chapter looks at how many international students work during their studies and the conditions for employment during studies. Sixth, it outlines the obligations that international students and their institutions need to meet for students to maintain their study visas/permits. Seventh, it summarises experiences of discrimination and sense of safety. Eight, chapter reviews policies on accompanying family members.

Key findings

- Difficulties with housing for students are widespread across countries. International students often require ready-to-live-in accommodation, face higher risks of scams and, in some countries, pay more than domestic students. International students primarily live in private rentals and student accommodation. The supply of available housing units is constrained, but across the examined countries, plans and funding have been put forward to incentivise the building and upgrading of affordable housing, including for students.
- Orientation, local welcome desks and national portals help with navigating registration, banking, insurance and transport, among others, yet information gaps persist for some groups. However, international students often feel disconnected from their local communities.
- Some international students across countries report financial stress and difficulty covering their study and living costs. Most international students work, and many rely on these earnings. Study visas/permits impose limits on allowed work time that range from 16 to 24 hours per week. The search for part-time jobs is not always easy, especially if international students do not speak the local language and have limited local networks.
- International students must keep progressing in their studies while also meeting other obligations to maintain a study visa/permit. In Australia, Canada, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, international students are usually granted study visa/permit for the whole duration of their studies, while in France and Germany, they typically need to renew them.
- Reports of discrimination are higher for internationals than for domestic students, although nearly all international students feel safe on campus, less so in the broader community.
- Policies on dependants and partners have tightened in several examined countries.

Specific academic challenges faced by international students are exacerbated by diverse obstacles they face in their life, outside of their education. Some of these challenges are shared with domestic students who move within their own countries. Students in these situations struggle to navigate the housing market and secure suitable housing. They need time to settle down, understand their surroundings and access different services. International students are also, to varying extents, integrating into their local communities. Covering study and living costs remains a major challenge for some international students, which for many means a need to work while studying. International students often have specific restrictions, related to their study visa/permit, on how much they can work and other conditions to maintain their legal status, as well as to bring family and dependants with them during their studies.

Securing suitable housing

Housing costs relative to income are high in all six countries covered by this study compared to other OECD countries (OECD, 2025[1]). This is combined with limited availability of housing, especially affordable housing, in the major metropolitan areas or even specific neighbourhoods, where most international students reside. Securing suitable and affordable housing is one of the challenges most frequently highlighted by international students and in related studies.

In Canada, the most cited challenge during the arrival phase for international students is securing accommodation, reported by around 60% of international students in a recent survey (CBIE, 2024[2]). In Australia, about half of international students responding to a survey (51%) found it hard to find suitable housing (Study Australia, 2025[3]). Australian stakeholders highlighted that the proportion of available resources that goes towards housing has increased significantly. In Germany, apartment search was also the element with which international students were most dissatisfied, with 59% of survey respondents citing this as problematic (DAAD, 2025[4]). One of the issues highlighted in Germany, by stakeholders consulted, was stagnation in student housing, while the overall enrolment, domestic and international, has gone up, the number of student housing units did not grow. While about 26% of all students in Germany faced some challenges in finding accommodation, this was much more common among international students, with 39% of them reporting frequently applying for accommodation unsuccessfully (Kroher et al., 2023[5]).

In the Netherlands, about 72% of international students surveyed mentioned having issues with housing. The difficulty with housing also influences considerations about staying or leaving the country after graduation, about 37% of those that left indicating that not being able to find suitable housing was an important factor. For those staying, about 60% identified difficulties with finding housing as one of the top challenges with life in the Netherlands (Nuffic, 2023[6]). While domestic students also face many challenges with securing accommodation, the situation of international students seems to be more precarious, as they do not necessarily have as vast of a network of social contacts in the country, they have more limited understanding of the rental market and tenant rights, more frequently face discrimination and, in some countries, also face language barriers. For example, in France most renters need a guarantor for private independent accommodation. Only 8% of domestic students had difficulty with finding a guarantor in France, but about 36% of international students were in the same situation (Feres et al., 2023[7]). Due to these challenges, international students (33%) were more likely than domestic students (14%) to mention they have a significant need for advice on housing in Germany (Kroher et al., 2023[5]).

Unlike domestic students, most international students cannot stay with their family or parents. As such, they are dependent on housing associated with their institution or on private landlords. Furthermore, they also need a place ready to live in from the first day and fully furnished accommodation, especially when arriving in the country for the first time. A survey in the Netherlands has shown that 72% of international students want to live in furnished accommodation, while for 72% of domestic students accommodation with only basic fixtures is sufficient (ABF Research, 2025[8]). As such, some international students coming to the Netherlands only find a temporary place before they arrive, but then they struggle to find more permanent places to live.

A majority of domestic and international students live in accommodation rented on the private market, while some domestic students live with their parents. A significant proportion of students also live in student residences; however, international students tend to live in student housing in higher proportion compared to domestic students. Especially in the first year, living in a student residence gives international students ready-to-live-in accommodation and can facilitate opportunities for socialisation.

In Australia, a majority of undergraduate international students live in a private rented house, flat or room (54%) or are staying with friends or family in their accommodation (20%). A share of international students living in student housing is lower, with about 7% of international students in institutional (university) halls of residence, 5% in private student halls or hostels and another 5% in student house or flat controlled by university. Among international postgraduate coursework students, an even larger share lives in a private rented house, flat or room (66%) (QILT, 2025[9]).

In Canada, on-campus residences are only used by 14% of international students (CBIE, 2024[2]). However, another Canada-wide survey found that the total student population living in student residences, whether it is operated by the institutions (4%) or by private owners, is even lower (2%) (UTILE, 2022[10]). Across Europe, more domestic and international students live in student residencies. Based on the Eurostudent survey and excluding students living with their parents, about 40% of international students in Germany live in a student residence, compared to about 13% of domestic students, followed by 38% in the Netherlands, where 56% of domestic students not living at home are in student residences, and lastly in France, where 30% of international and 18% of domestic students live in student residences (Eurostudent, 2025[11]). In the United Kingdom, among those living away from home, 46% of domestic students are in student accommodation, compared to only 33% of international students, but international students are more likely to live in non-university halls (16% compared to 10% of domestic students) (AdvanceHE & HEPI et al., 2025[12]).

International students tend to spend more on accommodation than domestic students. This is very visible in the Netherlands, where across different types of accommodation, international students pay consistently more than domestic students (ABF Research, 2025[8]). In Canada, based on survey of students across the country, international students also pay higher median and average rent than most domestic students. But interestingly, they pay slightly less than domestic students studying out of the province (UTILE, 2022[10]). This underlines the importance of social networks in the place where a student studies. Other available data from Germany and France does not suggest great differences in mean costs for accommodation. In Germany international and domestic students spend about the same amount, while in France international students spend slightly less than domestic students (Eurostudent, 2025[11]). Based on this overview of various surveys, international students in the Netherlands and Canada tend to have higher housing expenses than domestic students. While international students seem to more frequently live in student residences, still most international students rely on private rentals, which impacts the housing costs. Furthermore, a contributing factor, for some international students, is greater uncertainty around their enrolment, which means that they start their accommodation search and secure accommodation later than domestic students, which means they have more limited choice and thus end up paying more or accepting less suitable housing arrangement.

The providers of student residences differ between countries and as does the scale of the student residence offering. To some extent, all countries have private purpose-build student accommodation, operated by private companies. In Australia, Canada and the United Kingdom, this is complemented by some institution-managed housing. In Canada, based on country-wide survey, about 4% of students who rent are in a residence operated by their institutions, while only 2% are in student residences operated by private companies (UTILE, 2022[10]). In Australia only 3% of the total student population is in on-campus housing, while 6% live in other student accommodation (amber, 2024[13]). Higher education institutions in the United Kingdom host more students in their residences (about 27% of all students) than other private residences (7%) (AdvanceHE & HEPI et al., 2025[12]). In the other three countries, most student housing is operated by regional organisations. In the Netherlands, rather than institution-owned residences, about 33% of students living away from home live in student housing provided by non-profit social housing organisations (ABF Research, 2025[8]). In Germany and France, dedicated student housing is provided by public organisations, which have a regional presence. The French network of *Centres régionaux des œuvres universitaires et scolaires* (CROUS) hosts about 7% of all students in France and other university residencies about 4% (Feres et al., 2023[7]). In Germany, most student housing is offered by local Studierendenwerke branches that host about 10% of all students, while about 18% of students overall live in some form of student residence (Kroher et al., 2023[5]).

Factors like remote searching for housing and reliance on online ads, language barrier, shortage of suitable and affordable housing and lack of knowledge about local rental market, make international students particularly vulnerable to fraud and scams. Due to unfamiliarity with tenant rights and high competition in major student cities, international students face higher risks of scams, illegal payments, exploitation, discrimination and ending up in unsuitable or overcrowded housing. Survey of students with study abroad experience in Europe, found that up to a quarter of them (25%) have experienced scams (ESU and ESN, 2023[14]). A study based on the Canadian 2021 Census of Population, found that international students have consistently higher rates of living in unsuitable housing, particularly effecting students from India (Stick, Hou and Zhang, 2024[15]). These experiences affect their study experience, housing insecurity increases financial stress, and can disrupt academic focus, harm mental health and slow down social integration, undermining both their wellbeing and academic success (Fang and van Liempt, 2020[16]; Hastings et al., 2023[17]; Mu and Soong, 2025[18]).

Policymakers have taken multiple strategies to promote better access to suitable student housing. In Germany, public authorities directly supported the building of new and renovation of existing student residences as part of the *Junges Wohnen* (Young Living) programme, allocating EUR 500 million annually since 2023 (USD 591 million as of 27 February 2026), as part of a larger effort for the construction of social housing (BMWSB, 2025[19]).

Similarly, in France, the CROUS has been expanding the number of available places, but the growth has not matched rising student demand (Cour des comptes, 2025[20]). In January 2025, student housing was declared a priority policy for the French Government, followed by a letter from the Prime Minister in August 2025, to regional governments and higher education institutions to develop regional plans and targets. At the same time, the Banque des Territoires launched the AGiLE programme, with EUR 5 billion (USD 5.9 billion) dedicated to support the construction, conversion and major renovation of student housing units by 2030 (Banque des Territoires, 2025[21]). One reason for slow growth in France is restrictions placed on public higher education institutions in France to directly invest in student housing.

The Dutch government together with the representatives of municipalities, higher education institutions, students, housing associations and other stakeholders with the *Landelijk Platform Studentenhuisvesting* (National Student Housing Platform) agreed on the National Action Plan for Student Housing 2022-2030, aiming to provide an extra 60 000 student housing units (Landelijk Platform Studentenhuisvesting, 2022[22]). The plan involves co-ordination with local governments, housing associations and other stakeholders. While there are some government funding incentives, the construction is expected to be primarily carried out through private projects. The plan seeks to increase housing through both new constructions, incentivised by government funding but primarily privately supported, and identifying opportunities to better use the existing housing stock.

In Canada and the United Kingdom, as part of government support for housing, a combination of subsidies and loans has been directed to also support the development of student accommodation, by higher education institutions or private companies (i.e. Social and Affordable Homes Programme in the United Kingdom or the Affordable Housing Fund in Canada). Federal, provincial, territorial and local governments in Canada are also addressing regulatory barriers to speed up construction.

Across institutions, it became common to prioritise first-year students in allocating student accommodation. National information portals now have specific sections on housing and provide advice on how to search for accommodation and tenants' rights. Institutions are also working locally with associations and student organisations to inform students about available housing in the community and supporting them to find accommodation off campus.

Familiarising with the surroundings and accessing services

The first weeks and months after arrival present many challenges for international students, a period during which they need to quickly become familiar with a foreign place. First, students need to navigate their new surroundings, finding where various amenities (e.g. groceries, pharmacy) are located and figuring out the local transport system. A second group of challenges is more related to accessing services, including registration with local government and applying for residence permits, financial integration by opening a bank account and starting to file taxes, when relevant, getting a phone plan, and access to health care and identifying appropriate doctors and hospitals to use. These challenges can be especially difficult if an international student does not speak the local language or there are larger cultural barriers.

Many higher education institutions try to assist students who might face these challenges either by information provision, various orientation activities and, in some cases, individual guidance. Some also collaborate with local governments, organisations and companies to facilitate students' access to various services. National information portals for international students to various extents also offer information on these topics. There are a few specific examples of more systematic policies. In the city of Paris, CROUS Paris and other partners operate together the Welcome desk Paris (CIUP, 2025[23]), a one-stop-shop which is helping international students online and through individual appointments before and during their arrival with various administrative procedures, finding housing and getting housing benefits, getting health insurance, providing language courses and practical information about banking, transport and working, and also helping international students to discover the city, culture and various activities going on. IN Amsterdam is a joint initiative of the cities of Amsterdam and neighbouring towns, along with the Dutch Immigration and Naturalisation Service and the Dutch Tax Office. There is an office in Amsterdam and an online portal that provides advice to international students moving to the Amsterdam metropolitan area. The portal gives advice on finding student housing, official procedures, healthcare and insurance, tax, information for families on education and various benefits, how to learn Dutch and advice for students on how to find internships (IN Amsterdam, 2025[24]). Similar initiatives are also present in other Dutch cities, such as the Utrecht International Centre, the Hague International Centre, Leiden International Centre and International Welcome Center North (Groningen). Germany also has a network of welcome and advisory centres that support foreign nationals arriving in the country and some of these centres have dedicated services and information for international students (Make it in Germany, 2026[25]). Furthermore, as part of the “Internationalization of Higher Education Institutions in Germany” strategy, Germany aims to encourage the professional development of employees (e.g. foreign language and intercultural skills training) working in relevant public and local authorities that interact with higher education institutions and international students to enable them to better support this international audience (BMBF and KMK, 2024[26]).

Health insurance

Health insurance is organised differently in the countries covered by this study. In Australia, international students have a specific plan, the Overseas Student Health Cover, that they need to have for the duration of their studies (Study Australia, n.d.[27]). In the United Kingdom, international students pay an immigration health surcharge during their visa application, which gives them access to healthcare in the National Health Service (UK Government, n.d.[28]). In Canada, the health insurance rules vary by province and territory, with some allowing international students access to their public health insurance and others requiring them to take out private insurance (EduCanada, 2024[29]).

In Germany, international students need to provide proof of health insurance when applying for their visa and then also, after arrival and when applying for a residence permit. They can either have insurance from another country that covers them in Germany, or they need to sign up for the German public health insurance. Non-EEA international students over the age of 30 at the beginning of their studies generally are unable to register for German public health insurance (Study in Germany, n.d.[30]). In the Netherlands, health insurance is mandatory, but only international students who work can take out Dutch public health insurance, otherwise they need other, private, insurance to cover them (Study in NL, 2025[31]). France is the only country that provides universally free access to basic health insurance, although taking out a private complementary insurance is recommended (Campus France, n.d.[32]). While free, a survey also found that not all students in France have health insurance, about 4% of domestic students and 21% of international students are not covered. As a consequence, the same survey found that international students were less likely to visit a doctor and even forego treatment for financial reasons (Feres et al., 2024[33]). In Germany, France and the Netherlands, international students who are nationals of other EEA countries can use health insurance of their home country and use the European Health Insurance Card.

Local and community integration

The findings on local and community integration are mixed. On one side, international students seem to be content with their lives, although at least some of them seem to struggle more than domestic students with loneliness and a sense of isolation (Eurostudent, 2025[11]; AdvanceHE & HEPI et al., 2025[12]) and missing their friends and family back home (Nuffic, 2022[34]). Many report generally good social lives, such as 65% of international students in Canada that said they found a community (CBIE, 2024[2]). In Australia, 85-87% of international students gave a positive rating on making friends (QILT, 2025[9]). And in the Netherlands 48% of international students are satisfied with their social life (Nuffic, 2022[34]). Results of this survey by Nuffic, however, could also be affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Evidence from Germany and the Netherlands suggest that international students have different experiences within the academic community, where they tend to feel comfortable and welcome, while in greater proportions, struggling with life in their local communities. In the Netherlands, around 40% of international students said they mainly interact with other international people and 67% said they would like more contact with Dutch people (Nuffic, 2022[34]). A survey in Germany found that 75% of international students felt welcome at their institution but only 50% felt welcome outside the university (DAAD, 2025[4]). The evidence from Germany suggests that this is connected with the ability to use German in everyday life and local integration is easier for international students coming from countries with a smaller cultural distance (i.e. other European countries) (Pineda et al., 2022[35]).

Across surveys and literature, proficiency of language used in host country shows up as an important factor in integration. International students who feel proficient are more comfortable to interact with locals and engage in community life (Wilczewski and Alon, 2022[36]). Meanwhile, students with low language proficiency feel more comfortable to interact with international peers, living and socialising inside, primarily English-speaking bubbles. Higher education institutions, as they host international students and staff, are often one of these bubbles. In turn, however, many international students have less opportunities to practice host language and improve their proficiency.

Many higher education institutions in co-operation with local governments and organisations are trying to facilitate connections between students and the local community, providing language courses and trying to involve international students in various local activities, such as volunteering or sports. Findings from a study on supporting the integration of international students in England found that continuous shared spaces are more conducive to making friends than one-off socialisation events (Pagliarello et al., 2023[37]). In this area, there seem to be some institutional examples of initiatives primarily on the local level. For example, My Local Friend in Groningen (NLD), sponsored by the Groningen Alliance, which connects the municipality and local higher education institutions. As part of the initiative, international students are linked with locals for various activities, with the purpose to build links and practice Dutch (IWCN, 2025[38]). In Germany, local Studierendenwerk branches offer various activities for both domestic and international students, excursions and trips, get together events and activities for students living in the residences. In Australia, the City of Sydney has created the International Student Leadership and Ambassador Program, which provides volunteering opportunities as well as training and integrated learning, bringing students to city events and activities. Participating students are supported to implement various projects for other international students in the city (City of Sydney, 2026[39]). The city also organises an annual mayor's welcome for international students to show appreciation and encourage them to actively participate in the community. Study Melbourne (AUS), initiative of the state of Victoria, has an annual funding call for activities in the state that support the wellbeing of international students and enhance their experience, by, among other things, promoting a strong sense of belonging and connectedness with the local community (Study Melbourne, 2026[40]).

Covering study and living costs

As already mentioned above, studying abroad tends to come with a relatively high price tag, which causes significant worries to students and their relatives that support them. For more details, see Chapter 2, section Funding studies, which provides a comparison of study costs. Furthermore, international students in the six comparator countries tend to be concentrated in metropolitan areas (see Chapter 2, section International students tend to be concentrated in a few major metropolitan areas), in cities that have globally relatively high costs of living.

While international students tend to need more resources for tuition fees, their expenditure on other items broadly corresponds to that of domestic students. In Australia, excluding tuition fees, international students spend similar amounts and the patterns are broadly similar, although international students seem to spend slightly more on accommodation, food and travel (McCowage, Stinson and Fink, 2025[41]). According to Eurostudent, in Germany, living costs are about the same for international and domestic students, in France international students spend slightly less, while in the Netherlands they spend a little more. International students spend more on accommodation in the Netherlands than domestic students, while less in France (Eurostudent, 2025[11]). In France, there is an issue with the financial resource requirements needed to secure a study visa/permit being only EUR 615 per month (USD 727 as of 27 February 2026), which is below the poverty line and below real living expenses in France, especially in Paris. Furthermore, for proof of resources, it is sufficient to submit sworn statements and public authorities are unable to systematically verify these (Cour des comptes, 2025[20]).

International students rely primarily on funding from their relatives and on self-earned income, either from savings or part-time jobs. To a lesser extent, they also receive some resources from scholarships and student support schemes, but these appear to be decreasing in importance (CBIE, 2024[2]; AdvanceHE & HEPI et al., 2025[12]; Eurostudent, 2025[11]; DAAD, 2025[4]; Campus France, 2022[42]). Analysis from Germany also shows changing patterns over the course of students' study time, with students later in their studies relying more on self-earned income and facing decreased contributions from parents and depleted personal savings (Pineda et al., 2022[35]).

Across all six countries, news reports exist on the precarious financial situation of some international students. Despite high financial resource requirements in many countries, the costs of living and tuition, and insufficient earnings from part-time jobs exceed expectations of international students. In the United Kingdom, impacts of the cost of living were felt by a majority of both international (77%) and domestic (78%) students. Despite satisfying visa requirements, some international students have insufficient funds to sustain themselves (AdvanceHE & HEPI et al., 2025[12]). This is in part, because financial requirements for study visa/permit are only checked at the time of application or permit renewal, except for the Netherlands, where international students are checked every year whether they still meet financial requirements. In France and Germany, where most international students need to renew their residence permit, their financial situation is also checked. Financial requirements are not placed on international students who do not require visa, for example nationals of other EEA countries, if they study in another EEA country.

In continental Europe (FRA, DEU and NLD), in countries where most international students pay low or no tuition fees, more international students still report more serious financial difficulties than domestic students (Eurostudent, 2025[11]). A French survey found that about 40% of international students are unable to cover their basic needs, compared to 16% of domestic students. About 26% of international students at least sometimes had to rely on food assistance, compared to only 6% of domestic students (Feres et al., 2023[7]).

While many international students face financial difficulties, they are often not eligible for public support schemes or due to lower language proficiency and less information, might not be aware of available support instruments. In Europe, across Germany, France and the Netherlands, fewer international students than domestic students received national public support (Eurostudent, 2025[11]). Nearly 47% of international students expressed a need for financial advice, a much higher proportion than among domestic students (Kroher et al., 2023[5]). In France, nearly half (48%) of emergency social assistance paid out by CROUS between academic years 2018/19 and 2022/23 went to international students (Cour des comptes, 2025[20]). In the United Kingdom, most internationals are not eligible for maintenance loans, the primary funding for living costs for most domestic students (AdvanceHE & HEPI et al., 2025[12]).

Some countries (CAN, FRA, GER, GBR) have introduced hardship funds that also cover international students, disbursed either during the COVID-19 pandemic or, more generally, in response to rising living costs for students. Many institutions in all six countries have their own hardship funds, but these are primarily targeted to students in the most extreme financial need, rather than providing general assistance for the many domestic and international students who struggle financially. The Studierendenwerk in Germany offers hardship loans to students. Various charities and student associations help students in greatest need. CROUS and Studierendenwerke have canteens with subsidised food (available to all students) and offer other assistance (CROUS, 2026[43]; Deutsches Studierendenwerk, 2023[44]). All countries, except France, have also addressed this issue by adjusting the financial requirements for study visas/permits and better verifying these requirements. In the United Kingdom, for example, differentiated requirements exist for students coming to London, where the expenses tend to be higher. Living-cost calculators (AUS) and detailed information on expected living costs (DEU, FRA, NLD) provided by the national informational portals can give prospective and current international students a more realistic overview of the costs associated with studying and living in their intended destination country. Access to affordable subsidised or rent-regulated housing certainly has the most significant impact on the financial stability of international students and provides them with the peace of mind needed to focus on their studies.

Working during studies

Most international students work during their studies. In European countries (DEU, FRA, NLD), it seems that international students tend to work slightly less than domestic students (Eurostudent, 2025[11]). In the United Kingdom, more international students than domestic students have paid employment during term time, but they work fewer hours: around 50% of working international students work 10 or more hours per week, compared to 64% of domestic students (AdvanceHE & HEPI et al., 2025[12]). In Germany, 51% of international and 65% of domestic students were employed, with domestic students working 17.4 hours per week on average, while international students only work an average of 14.9 hours per week (Kroher et al., 2023[5]). In Canada, around 57% of international students reported working at the time of the last major survey in 2023: an increase of nine percentage points compared to 2021 (CBIE, 2024[2]). In Australia, it is estimated that about 61% of international students have participated in the labour market in 2024, up from 44% labour market participation rate before the pandemic (2015-2019) (McCowage, Stinson and Fink, 2025[41]).

Across countries, a majority of international students rely on income earned during their studies to cover their study and living costs. In Canada, 70% of international students reported that income from work during their studies was an absolute necessity (CBIE, 2024[2]). In Germany, 88% of international students report that they rely on income from work to cover their study and living costs (DAAD, 2025[45]). In France, among those working, 54% of international students report that the wage is essential to cover basic expenses (Campus France, 2022[42]). In the United Kingdom, both domestic and international students work, although domestic students (66%) are more likely to work to cover their living costs than international students (49%). However, 31% of international students in the United Kingdom report that they also work to financially support their family, either family members that are accompanying them or in the form of remittances (AdvanceHE & HEPI et al., 2025[12]). At least in Germany, the reliance on income from work increases over time, which sometimes leads to delays in academic progress (Pineda et al., 2022[35]). Other reasons cited for seeking employment in available surveys include a desire to acquire professional experience and to explore possible career paths (AdvanceHE & HEPI et al., 2025[12]; Campus France, 2022[42]).

Access to jobs does not guarantee financial stability (Wilson et al., 2022[46]), as many international students struggle to find jobs during their studies and the jobs they do find are frequently not sufficiently well paid to cover the students' financial needs (Oduwaye, Kiraz and Sorakin, 2023[47]). For example, in the United

Kingdom, about half of non-working international students report that they need additional income, but cannot find a job (49%), compared to 35% of non-working domestic students (AdvanceHE & HEPI et al., 2025[12]). While settling in the country, 42% of international students in Germany were dissatisfied with the experience of looking for a part-time job (DAAD, 2025[4]). In Australia, international students rated “employment while studying” and “work experience” as the two lowest rated factors in the domain of living experience, although a majority of international students still rated these aspects positively (QILT, 2025[9]).

Study visas/permits in the six countries restrict how many hours and which jobs international students can do while studying. None of the six countries analysed allow full-time employment during term time. However, the Dutch study residence permit allows international students to work as entrepreneurs without restrictions. The exception is international students from EEA countries in France, Germany and the Netherlands, who are allowed to work full time on the same conditions as domestic students. Although full-time employment comes with implications for their social insurance contributions and possibly their formal status for tax, residency and social security purposes. For example, in France, any student who works more than 60% of maximum annual working hours is generally considered to be an employee rather than a student by the French administration.

An OECD policy survey carried out in early 2025 (OECD, forthcoming[48]) found that most international students are allowed to work during term time on average up to 16 hours a week in the Netherlands, 18.5 hours in France, 20 hours in Germany and the United Kingdom, and up to 24 hours in Australia and Canada. However, countries differ in terms of the period over which maximum employment hours are calculated. In France and Germany, maximum employment hours are calculated over a full year, while in Australia it is per fortnight, while in the other countries the maximum is set per week. In Canada, a distinction is made between on and off campus work, with the weekly work time limit only applying to off-campus work. In Australia, Canada, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, international students can work full-time outside the study terms. In some countries (DEU, FRA and GBR), the right to work does not extend to self-employment or business activity. Another special situation is internships and work-based learning activities connected to studies, which are usually exempted from standard work restrictions or regulated separately, allowing international students to participate in such activities.

The difficult financial situation of some international students, restrictions regarding their employment and sometimes-insufficient language proficiency makes them more vulnerable to different forms of precarious working conditions, informality and even exploitation. Survey evidence shows that international students particularly appreciate efforts that connect them with available employment opportunities on and off campus. For example, some local Studierendenwerk branches in Germany collect job opportunities for current students. They also offer social counselling, share information about worker’s rights and regulations, and sometimes even assist students in problematic employment situations.

Another promising approach involves integrating work experience as part of the study programme (e.g. internships, work-based learning), with the connections to employers facilitated by the institution. Supporting international students to find part-time jobs in the short-term can help with their financial situation and, in the long term, help them with their transition to the labour market.

It is however not only that international students depend on work to finance their studies, but also certain businesses, especially in hospitality, depend on part-time work by students, including international ones. This became obvious, for example, in Australia during the COVID-19 pandemic, where the government even temporarily lifted limits on work hours, due to their crucial role in the labour market (Packer, 2023[49]).

Maintaining study visas/permits

Among other concerns, international students also need to continue meeting requirements under their study visa/permit. In all countries, students need to progress with their studies, comply with limits on employment, report changes in address or enrolment, and maintain health insurance, where relevant. In

Australia and the United Kingdom there is a single visa that serves both as authorisation for entry and to reside in the country for the purpose of study. In France, Germany and the Netherlands, international student, if needed, is first given an entry visa and they receive a residence permit once they are in the country. In Canada, arriving students need a travel authorisation to enter the country as well as a letter of introduction, which confirms that the person was approved for a study permit (and, in Quebec, a CAQ, Québec Acceptance Certificate). The study permit will be issued at the port of entry or sent to an address if the person already resides in Canada.

In Australia, Canada, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, a study visa/permit is issued for the duration of the studies and with some additional time after graduation. Pursuing further studies requires students to apply for a new visa/permit or to renew their visa/permit. Germany relies on a shorter residence permits, usually lasting only one to two years and need to be renewed. In France, non-EEA international students in France are eligible for a multi-annual residence permit on renewal (up to 3 years), however, most students have a shorter residence permits that need to be renewed annually. This is in part because processing officers do not always have sufficient information on the length of study programmes and they have adopted a cautious approach to issuing renewals for longer period. A high proportion of students (60%) also submit the application for an extension to their residence permit later than the deadline of two months before the permit expires (Cour des comptes, 2025[20]). More details about national processes for study visa/permit are in Chapter 2, Annex 2.A.

All comparator countries also have some policies that monitor academic progress of international students. In the case of France and Germany, study progress is examined as part of residence permit renewal. Dutch institutions, as sponsors of the study visas/permits, need to report students who do not obtain at least 50% of the credits assigned for the year and provide justification as to whether they are making sufficient progress in their studies. Australian education providers are also required to “report students who: a) do not achieve satisfactory attendance, b) withdraw from a course, or c) do not maintain satisfactory course progress” (Department of Home Affairs, 2024[50]). In the United Kingdom, study sponsors are required to report if international student stops being “academically engaging,” with defined conditions international students need to meet and institutions must have in place academic engagement policy (UK Visas and Immigration, 2025[51]). In Canada, designated learning institutions must regularly respond to compliance reporting and confirm that international students are still actively pursuing their study programme.

A qualitative study, which interviewed international students in Australia, Canada and the United States observed how study visa/permit policies had a pervasive influence on students’ everyday life (Crumley-Effinger, 2023[52]). This shaped their study choice, created pressure on them to finish on time, limited options to take a break, limited access to work, and created uncertainty about processes for visa/permit extensions. Visa/permit policies were even reported to affect whether students invest in relations with other students and the local community, given the significant long-term uncertainty regarding their chances to stay in the country.

Discrimination and safety

In addition to many other challenges, some international students face discrimination. Available data from the Eurostudent survey, covering France and the Netherlands showed that nearly twice as many international students experienced discrimination in some form compared to domestic students. In the case of France, 14% of domestic and 31% of international students reported discrimination, while in the Netherlands, the equivalent figures were 21% of domestic students and 41% of international students. Nearly a quarter of international students in the Netherlands (23%) and France (24%) reported in the survey experience with discrimination based on their nationality or ancestry (Eurostudent, 2025[11]).

In Germany, a national student survey focused on discrimination faced by those perceived as foreigners and as people of colour. Many international students from other European countries were found to be less often perceived as foreigners than domestic students with a migration background. Among those that felt perceived as foreigners, 80% never experienced discrimination at university. However, international students from Sub-Saharan Africa (29%) and the Middle East and North Africa (26%) were over-represented among those that report having experienced discrimination. Discrimination was more frequently experienced outside university, where 68% of foreign-perceived students experienced discrimination, 13% "often" and 55% "sometimes". This was especially the case for students from Sub-Saharan Africa (88% combined), Asia Pacific (78%) and Middle East and North Africa (74%) (DAAD, 2025[4]).

Similar dynamics have been also reported in Canada, where international students report discrimination and harassment more often off campus, in the community or online. Experiences with harassment or discrimination also differed by country of origin, with discrimination less frequently experienced by French students but more often experienced by those coming from Asia or Africa (CBIE, 2024[2]). A survey carried out across Russell Group universities in the United Kingdom, universities that enrol about 40% of international students, found that about one-third of international students reported having experience with racism (32%) and xenophobia (30%) (Russell Group Students' Unions, 2025[53]). A report from Australia further underlines this issue by highlighting discrimination, harassment and experiences of staff and students with racism in higher, with a particular focus on the incidence of antisemitism, Islamophobia and the experience of First Nations peoples' (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2024[54]).

While many international students experience discrimination and harassment, only some know about the process for reporting such incidents. In Canada, only 50% of international students knew who to contact and the process for reporting discriminatory incidents (CBIE, 2024[2]). In Germany, only about 34% of those who experienced discrimination knew about anti-discrimination offices at their institution. About 19% went to the office, while 15% chose not to use it despite being aware of its existence (DAAD, 2025[4]). A report from Australia also highlights that many international students are afraid of reporting incidents of discrimination, as they fear it might compromise their visas (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2024[54]).

Despite the evidence of discrimination, most international students tend to feel safe in their host countries, especially in their institution. In the Netherlands, perceived safety is even higher for international students than for domestic students (Eurostudent, 2025[11]). Safety was one of the most positively rated factors of the living experiences of international students in Australia, but the positive rating was higher for on campus (98%) than off campus (88%). Transport was positively rated only by 77% of international students (QILT, 2025[9]). Similarly in Canada, international students generally report a high degree of perceived safety, but felt most unsafe in public transport (21%), public places (19%) and online (9%) – compared to only 2% feeling unsafe on campus (CBIE, 2024[2]). Across Russell Group universities in the United Kingdom, only 6% of international students felt unwelcome and unsafe in their university, while about 27% felt unwelcome and unsafe in the country more generally (Russell Group Students' Unions, 2025[53]).

Accompanying family members: partners and dependants

International students tend to be older than domestic students, and, as such, they are more likely than domestic students to live with partners and have children (AdvanceHE & HEPI et al., 2025[12]; Eurostudent, 2025[11]). This creates another challenge for international students, as their mobility not only impacts them but also their partners and dependants. The available data for four of the countries analysed in this report show a substantial number of additional visas/permits being issued for family members accompanying international students. The ratio of visas/permits for family members per study visas/permits issued to students in 2024 was 16% in Canada, 10% in Australia and 6% in the United Kingdom. In France, there were only a few individual cases of such visas/permits, as international students are not allowed to come with dependents in France (OECD, 2025[55]). The number of issued visas for dependants of students in the United Kingdom has declined rapidly, from a ratio of 32% in 2023 (OECD, 2024[56]) to 6% in 2024, as the government introduced restrictions on the ability of postgraduate students to bring dependants and family members. As of January 2025, Canada has also introduced stricter rules, limiting open work permit eligibility for spouses to master's and doctoral international students, and students enrolled in select professional and eligible programmes (IRCC, 2026[57]).

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5 Post-graduation opportunities and possibilities

This chapter looks at what happens to international students after graduation. First, the chapter looks at intentions to stay and evidence on how many international students remain in the country post-graduation. Second, it outlines the processes for recognition of the acquired qualifications in other countries. The third section examines the different arrangements for post-graduation visas/permits and the possibilities for longer or permanent stay in the country. Fourth, the chapter analyses available evidence on the labour market outcomes of international students and challenges they face in accessing the job market. Fifth, it highlights existing international alumni networks.

Key findings

- While most international students intend to stay in the country, at least for some time, only some remain long-term. Five years after being granted a study visa/permit, many international students are no longer in the country on a valid visa/permit. This ranges from about half in Canada and Germany, about one-third in Australia and France, one-fifth in the Netherlands and below one-tenth in the United Kingdom. With the expansion of post-graduation visas/permits, a higher share of international students appears to stay short-term in some countries.
- All examined countries have adopted the Lisbon Recognition Convention, facilitating recognition of their higher education qualifications abroad.
- Post-graduation visa/permit schemes differ between countries. They typically last from one to three years, depending on country and level of study. Recent or announced changes announced amend conditions and eligibility, as well as the duration of the visa/permit. While temporary stay in the country after graduation is common, transitions to permanent residence or citizenship often take many years, and many international graduates leave before securing it.
- International graduates often start with lower employment rates or salaries than domestic peers, but gaps typically shrink with time in the labour market. Proficiency in the local language, relevant work experience, internships and access to employer networks ease the transition.
- There appear to be tensions between recruitment messaging, which suggests future employment and possible residence, and the realities of post-graduation opportunities.

Staying in the country

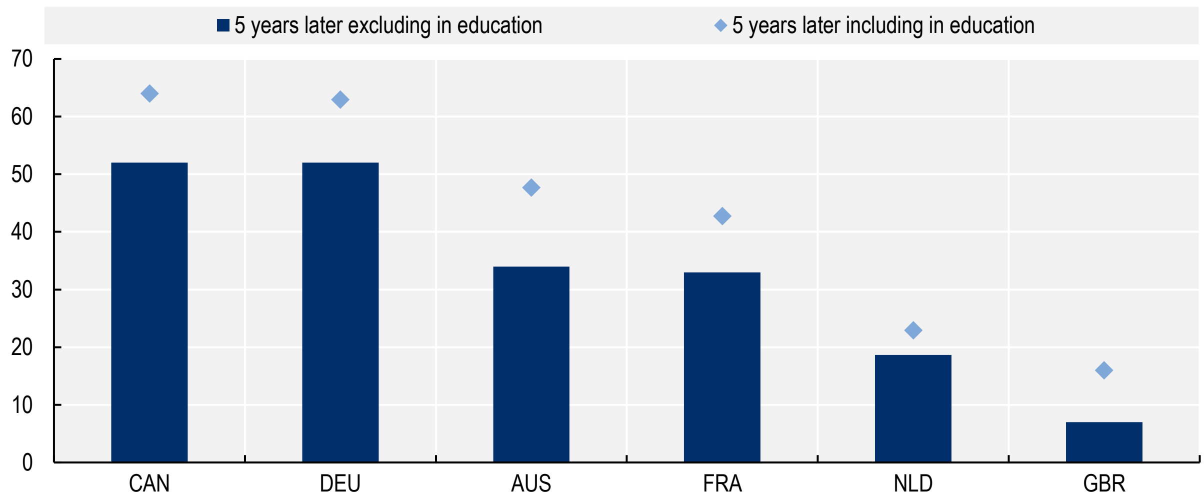
Most international students intend to stay on, but only some remain long-term

Survey evidence suggests that most international students contemplate staying in their host country after graduation. In Canada, about 70% of international students intended to apply for a post-graduation work permit (CBIE, 2024[1]). In the Netherlands, 73% of international students report wanting to remain in the country for a year or more after graduating (Nuffic, 2023[2]). In Germany, 64% of international students are inclined to stay in the country, 28% undecided and only 8% are inclined not to stay. The proportion of students inclined to stay increases to almost 70% towards end of their studies (DAAD, 2025[3]). An earlier survey from France, shows that in 2017, about 83% of responding international students expressed that they wish to extend their stay in France with a first professional experience (Campus France, 2017[4]).

While a majority of students intend to stay for some time in the country where they studied, actual retention rate in the country (i.e. share of students who remain in the country after their graduation) tends be lower. Earlier OECD analysis calculated the share of students who were given first study visa/permit in 2015 and how many were recorded with a valid visa/permit five years later in 2020. When excluding those that were still on study visa/permit, about half of students remained in Canada and Germany (both 52%) five years after receiving their first study visa/permit (Figure 5.1). Australia and France saw about one-third of the first-time receivers of a study visa/permit still in the country after five years (34% and 33%). The equivalent figure for the Netherlands was 19% and only 7% in the United Kingdom.

Figure 5.1. Five-year in-country retention rates for receivers of study visa/permit

Share of first study visa/permit receivers in 2015, recorded with valid visa/permit in 2020



Note: Data include individuals on a valid visa/permit. Data for DEU includes persons already resident who obtained a first-time education visa/permit. Data do not include citizens in FRA and the NLD. Data for GBR refer to out-of-country visa grants with no valid leave in the prior 12 months, are based on nationality and include a small number of minors arriving for secondary education. This graph refers to visa/permit statistics and does not include individuals benefiting from free mobility.
Source: OECD (2022[5]), International Migration Outlook 2022, https://doi.org/10.1787/30fe16d2-en.

Using the same methodology, for the cohort entering the country in 2010, ten-year retention rate seems to remain high, 45% in Germany and 44% in Canada, around 29% in Australia. Rates are lower in France (19%), 16% in the United Kingdom and 12% in the Netherlands. What is consistent in the pattern of ten-year retention is the initial rapid drop in the number of individuals staying, as many international students leave the country when they leave education and even more so among international students on short-term programmes. Throughout the ten years, the number of individuals remaining decreases, with only a sub-section of former international students changing their status to work or family-related visas/permits, or obtaining long-term stay visas/permits or even citizenship (OECD, 2022[5]).

More recent national data suggest that the number of international students staying in the country is increasing. In Australia, about 53% of international graduates were granted another visa in 2022/23 after their student visa, 15% of these were for further studies. Still, this is up from 40% in 2017/18 (Jobs and Skills Australia, 2025[6]). In Canada, out of the cohort whose study permit expired in 2017, 43% were on post-graduation work permit, up from 33% of students whose study permit expired in 2012 (Crossman, Lu and Hou, 2022[7]). In the United Kingdom, following the introduction of the Graduate route in 2021, the three-year retention increased from below 40% for students starting throughout 2010s, to about 60% students starting in 2020 and 2021 (Home Office, 2025[8]). In France, five years after being granted the first study visa in 2019, about 27% of students were still in the country with a work-related visa/permit. This is up from 23% in the 2015 cohort (Cour des comptes, 2025[9]). In the Netherlands, the one-year stay-on rate after graduation has kept increasing: for the cohort graduating in 2022, about 57% were still in the country a year later. This is up from 48.5% in 2018. For each graduating cohort, the share of staying gradually declines with each year. The 2018 cohort had about 30% of graduates remaining in the country, five years after graduation (Nuffic, 2025[10]). Consistently across these studies, it is clear that, at least initially, most students try to stay in the country, but over time more of them leave. This matches findings in the survey cited above, which suggest that while most students want to stay in the country, many only intend to stay in the medium-term, either for further studies or to work for a limited period. Data presented in this paragraph suggest that the share of international students staying at least short-term in the country after graduation seems to have been increasing in Australia, Canada France, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom in recent years.

International graduates are more likely to continue in further studies

In Australia and the United Kingdom, international graduates are nearly twice as likely to continue to further studies after graduation than their domestic counterparts. In Australia, only about 18% of domestic undergraduate graduates are in further studies one year after graduation, compared to about one-third (33%) of international graduates (QILT, 2025[11]). In the United Kingdom, about 17% of international graduates continued in full-time further studies, compared to only 6% of graduates with a domestic permanent address (HESA, 2025[12]). In the Netherlands, one year after graduation, about 30% of international students are in further studies (Nuffic, 2025[10]), while the share is estimated to be much lower for domestic students at about 11% (Bowley et al., 2019[13]). In Germany, about one-third of international students (32%) from those that intend to stay in the country after graduation plan to continue studies (DAAD, 2025[3]). While more international graduates seem to continue immediately to further studies, domestic students have more options to take a break and return to studies after a gap, as they do not need to maintain a specific legal status. More domestic graduates seem to return to education later in their career.

Who stays, perspectives from Europe

The most comprehensive mapping of post-graduation pathways identified by this study comes from the Netherlands, which uses administrative data to monitor the movement of people in the country and their labour market status (Nuffic, 2025[10]). As in the case of intentions to stay on among international students in Germany, non-EEA students have higher stay rates in the Netherlands, and among EEA graduates, graduates from Southern and Eastern Europe show higher stay rates than those from neighbouring countries. One year after graduation, the stay rates are higher for university graduates (44%) in contrast to graduates of universities of applied sciences (37%), but the difference becomes smaller five years after graduation. One reason is that university graduates are more likely to pursue further studies. Graduates from master's-level programmes have slightly better five-year stay rates (26%) than those only with bachelor's-level degree (24%). The stay rate for graduates who completed both bachelor's and master's-level studies in the Netherlands is slightly higher (30%, and 37% for the cohort graduating in 2018). Education and engineering graduates have the highest stay rates, even though education programmes have low rates of international enrolment.

A survey in the Netherlands among international students (Nuffic, 2023[2]) found that most want to stay in the country due to the quality of life (87%), career opportunities (83%), safety (78%) and work-life balance (76%). Across people who left the country and stayed in the country, but faced challenges, a similar set of factors was mentioned, including difficulty in finding a suitable job and housing, language barriers in work and outside of the workplace, financial difficulties, a lack of social and professional networks, and challenges with visa and residence permits. About 62% from non-EEA graduates who left the country indicated that issues with residence permits and legal status were an important factor. At the same time, a strong motivator for some students is a partner or a relationship in the country, with 50% of students mentioning a partner or relationship as one of the reasons to stay and 55% of those that did stay indicating that having a partner in the country was an important reason to stay. Some of these findings also correspond to a survey in Germany, where students who had a partner in Germany or had better language skills, were more likely to consider staying in the country after graduation (Pineda et al., 2022[14]). Language and the relative wealth of the country of origin seem to play a significant role in whether international students stay in France after graduation (Zhu, 2025[15]).

Studies into the motivations for international students to stay on in their host country mostly come from Europe. This in part reflects the fact that government-subsidised higher education for international students creates greater pressure to justify whether the students and graduates contribute sufficiently to host countries' economic development. A study from Germany, modelled various scenarios of in-country retention rates after graduation and their impact on the financial return of public investment in international students. With high retention rates (50% still in the country five years after obtaining their first visa/permit), the net balance turns positive about two to three years after graduation, if students finish on time. In a more conservative model, with lower retention rates of about 30%, the net balance is reached after three to five years (Geis-Thöne and Plünnecke, 2025[16]).

Where do international students go after graduation?

International students who stay in the country after graduation, also tend to stay in the place they studied, although a substantial proportion of them also move to another major urban centre (Tang et al., 2016[17]; Nuffic, 2025[10]; González-Leonardo et al., 2022[18]; DAAD, 2025[19]). This even further concentrates international talent in the cities and limits the potential of international graduates to fill labour shortages in less-populated regions. Domestic graduates also tend to stay in the location or to move a more urban location, but a study from Europe suggests that foreign-born populations with tertiary education are twice as likely to migrate internally, compared to native-born populations with the same level of education (González-Leonardo et al., 2022[18]). Such mobility is determined both by economic factors, such as access to job opportunities, and more personal factors, such as relationships and family ties.

Most international graduates who plan to leave their host country intend to move to their country of origin (DAAD, 2025[3]) and over time a majority return, as in the case of France (Campus France, 2024[20]). However, at least some international students, as individuals that already have experience of migrating, are inclined to continue moving between countries, either to access further studies in another country or to find a job. In the EU, most international students, especially those from the EEA, find it easier to be mobile across national borders and to search for jobs in multiple countries.

Recognition of qualifications in another country

Recognition of qualifications and participation in recognition conventions are crucial for countries hosting international students because they ensure the portability and credibility of national qualifications around the globe. All six countries are part of the Lisbon Recognition Convention, the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region, which facilitates recognition of degrees and study abroad period between the state parties (Council of Europe, 1997[21]). Furthermore, Australia, France and the United Kingdom have already ratified the Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education (UNESCO, 2019[22]). All comparator countries are also part of bilateral and multilateral mutual recognition agreements that facilitate recognition. A 2026 report on the implementation of the OECD Recommendation concerning Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-Border Higher Education also found that extensive efforts have been undertaken to facilitate academic recognition of qualifications, but more policy work is needed to streamline professional recognition, especially in regulated professions, which requires participation of various public and professional bodies across countries (OECD, 2026[23]). An example is the agreement between Canada and the EU on the professional recognition of architects (European Commission, 2022[24]).

Obtaining post-graduation visa/permit

All comparator countries have a dedicated post-graduation visa/permit scheme for international graduates. However, the schemes differ, as displayed in Table 5.1. Post-graduation visa/permit allows international students to take time to search for a job and seek initial employment under relatively favourable conditions.

Table 5.1. Post-graduation visa/permit for seeking employment/self-employment

	Name of scheme	Max. length (months)	Restriction on employment	Favourable conditions for change of status to employment visa/permit
AUS	*Temporary Graduate visa*	24-70	No	Yes
CAN	*Post-graduation work permit*	36	No	Yes
DEU	*Residence permit (job-seeking)*	18	No	Yes
FRA	*Job seeker/ new business creator residence permit*	12	Yes [1]	Yes
GBR	*Graduate Route visa*	24-36 [2]	Yes [3]	Yes
NLD	*Residence permit for orientation year*	12	No	Yes

Note: Compiled by the OECD Secretariat based on policy survey (April-May 2025), based on OECD (forthcoming[25]), Services and Costs in International Study.

[1] In France, a person on Job seeker/ new business creator residence permit can work only in jobs related to their field of study and their gross monthly salary needs to be at least EUR 2 734.55 (USD 3 231.42 as of 27 February 2026)

[2] The UK Government announced changes from 2027 to the length of Graduate Route visa, shortening it to 18 months for undergraduate and master's graduates, while keeping 36 months for graduates who obtained a PhD or other doctoral qualification.

[3] In the United Kingdom, a person on the Graduate Route visa cannot work as a professional sportsperson.

Post-graduation work permits have become an important part of the attractiveness of some of these countries, offering prospective students not only high-quality education but also time-bound rights to work and clearer pathways into longer-term employment visas/permits, in some cases even to permanent residence. Governments treat these post-study visas/permits as an important tool of talent policy (Campus France, 2025[26]); data presented in section above show growing take-up, particularly in Australia, Canada and the United Kingdom. At the same time, all three countries have also recently made or announced changes to the permit with the aim to limit the scope. In Australia, recent changes reduced the length of the permit and lowered age limit to 35 years in most circumstances. The UK Government announced changes starting in 2027, which will reduce the length of the Graduate Route visa to 18 months for bachelor's and master's graduates. Lastly, in 2024, federal government in Canada changed eligibility criteria for post-graduation work permit for graduates from colleges graduating from specific study fields.

In any of the countries, international students on study visa/permit are not guaranteed that they will be able to obtain the post-graduation visa/permit. Recent policy changes have highlighted that the conditions can evolve, and eligibility or length of post-graduation visa/permit will be different. Furthermore, in some cases, international students have been presented with unrealistic information about possibilities to stay in the country after graduation. However, also some international students, not always having all relevant information, have, at times, unrealistic expectation of the ease with which they could find a job, secure visa/permit and obtain permanent residency or even citizenship.

Possibilities for a longer or permanent stay in the host country

As discussed, a sizeable proportion of international students intend to stay long-term in the country of their studies. While there are post-graduation schemes that allow graduates to seek employment, these are all temporary arrangements. As such, international graduates need to find and maintain employment that will make them eligible and support them in an application for another visa/permit. This puts some international graduates in a precarious situation, where they accept jobs for which they are overqualified, with lower earnings and worse working conditions, in return for the possibility to remain in the country. The graduate outcome survey in Australia found that about one-fifth of international graduates (18% of undergraduate, 20% of postgraduategraduate coursework international graduates) reported the main reason for working in jobs that do not fully utilise their skills or education was they do not have permanent residency (QILT, 2025[11]). Some graduates also extend their stay by pursuing further studies and some also stay thanks to family-related visa/permits. The situation of moving between temporary visas/permits in Australia has been characterised as "visa limbo", with the country seeing an increasing number of "permanently temporary" international graduates (Coates, Wiltshire and Reysenbach, 2023[27]).

Report from Australia found that many international students try to also stay on various temporary permits with the aim to obtain permanent residency. However, in part due to rapid growth in the recent years, the number of available permanent residencies is far lower than number of graduates. In report, the authors estimate based on various sources that about 35-40% of international students who started in early 2010s achieved permanent residency within ten years, but they estimate this share to decline to about 25-30% for international students entering Australia in late 2010s (Jobs and Skills Australia, 2025[6]). In Canada, the share of post-graduate work permit (PGWP) holders that transition to permanent residency seems to be growing. Among graduates first issued PGWP from 2006 to 2010, about 74% of them achieved permanent residency within ten years. For graduates with PGWP issued from 2011 to 2015, 73% of them were already permanent residents within five years. For the latest cohort, that was granted PGWP from 2016 to 2020, about 40% of them achieved permanent residency within two years, higher shares than previous cohorts (Lu and Hou, 2024[28]). In the United Kingdom, while the share of international students who stay short-term increased, in part to new Graduate Route visa, the share of international graduates who obtain indefinite leave to remain (i.e. settlement) is very low. Calculations based on data, published in the Migrant journey: 2024 report, suggest that only about 4% of people who arrived in 2015 on study visa achieved settlement within nine to ten years. For people who arrived in 2010 that was 6% and for those arriving in 2005 it reached 10% (Home Office, 2025[8]).

Recruitment messaging by some higher education institutions, agents and national promotion campaigns emphasises post-graduation opportunities in terms of employment and possibilities to stay in the country. While these messages raise attractiveness, they also raise students' expectations regarding possibilities for longer and more permanent stays. However, this messaging, at times, does not adequately reflect the complexities, such as various eligibility criteria that need to be met to receive post-graduation visa/permit and permanent residency. A more realistic approach clearly communicates that the available opportunities, jobs and permanent residency permits, might be scarce. That stay after graduation is not guaranteed and there is a significant uncertainty, whether a particular international student will be able to settle in the country long term.

Securing employment

International students have better employment outcomes than foreign-born groups but worse than the domestic populations

Compared to other migrant groups, international graduates can be considered as a "pre-integrated group" in society, having often initial contact with the labour market during their studies, either through part-time jobs or internships. They also have domestic qualifications, which are easier to understand for domestic employers than credentials held by other highly educated migrants (OECD, 2022[5]). A working paper analysing the 2021 and 2023 Eurostat Labour Force Survey found that international graduates in the OECD-EU countries tend to have better labour-market outcomes than other foreign-born individuals with higher education. However they are still both disadvantaged compared to the native-born population, they often struggle to find suitable employment and some feel discriminated against in the labour market (Andersson and Dumont, forthcoming[29]).

International graduates are initially worse off compared to domestic graduates

Australia and the Netherlands have the most comprehensive data on the labour outcomes of international graduates. The Graduate Outcome Survey in Australia initially monitors the labour market outcomes of students after four to six months after graduation and undertakes a follow-up survey three years after graduation. In the Netherlands, analysis relies on administrative data, which tracks information on international graduates five years after graduation, offering a perspective on change over time.

Initially, in both countries, the labour force participation of international graduates is lower than for domestic graduates, in part because more of international graduates continue in further studies. In Australia, the survey report suggests that domestic students entering postgraduate education are typically older and possess professional experience. This results in a wider gap at the postgraduate level in labour market outcomes after graduation. International graduates are typically younger and are much more likely to go straight into postgraduate studies following completion of their undergraduate qualification (QILT, 2025[11]). Initial employment outcomes show wide gaps between domestic and international graduates who stayed. Among undergraduate graduates in Australia, the full-time employment rate a few months after graduation is 74% for domestic graduates but only 52% for international graduates. The smallest difference in the employment rates is observed among those that finished postgraduate research programmes (83% for domestic graduates and 78% international graduates). In the Netherlands, one year after graduation, about 42% of international graduates who stayed have a paid job, compared to 65% of Dutch graduates (Nuffic, 2025[10]).

In both countries, the gap between international and domestic graduates becomes smaller over time. In Australia, for the cohort first approached in 2021 for the short-term outcomes survey and then followed up in 2024, the gap of 25 percentage points in full-time employment between domestic and international undergraduate graduates shortly after graduation has reduced to 8 percentage points three years after graduation. Similar patterns are observed among postgraduate coursework graduates, where the gap has reduced from 38 percentage points to 6 and postgraduate research programmes graduates, where the gap falls from 10 to 2 percentage points (QILT, 2025[30]). In the Netherlands, five years after graduation, 80% of international graduates who stayed in the country have paid employment compared to 90% of domestic graduates, a gap of 10 percentage points, compared to a 23 percentage-point gap one year after graduation (Nuffic, 2025[10]). The initial gap can be attributed to the initial challenges faced by international graduates in accessing the labour market and higher participation in further studies. The improved outcomes reflect that more graduates are in the labour force, but also that many have left the country.

While employment rates among international graduates improve over time, a salary gap persists for most international graduates. International students who stay on after graduation in both Australia and the Netherlands across all levels and types of education start with lower earnings than their domestic counterparts. In the medium term, the salaries increase for both, but the earnings gap persists. The only exceptions are international graduates from universities in the Netherlands, who appear to be more represented among high earners five years later than their domestic peers: 48% of international graduates earn more than EUR 55 000 annually (USD 64 994 as of 27 February 2026), compared to 44% of domestic graduates (Nuffic, 2025[10]).

In Australia, the pay differential does not diminish substantially over the three-year period covered by the study (QILT, 2025[30]). The differences in salaries can also be attributed to the different sectors in which international and domestic graduates work, and what opportunities international graduates have for career progression. Data from Australia suggest that graduates report differences in occupation, with fewer international undergraduates and postgraduate coursework graduates working in managerial or professional occupations that require higher levels of skills. Furthermore, international postgraduate coursework graduates more often report feeling that their education and skills are underutilised. This reflects their younger age profile and higher rates of continuous further full-time study after completing an undergraduate degree, both resulting in less experience in the workforce than domestic graduates (QILT, 2025[11]). The Dutch data also highlight an uneven distribution of international graduates across sectors compared to their domestic peers. About 39% of domestic graduates work in the Government, Education and Healthcare sector, compared to only 18% of international graduates five years after graduation (Nuffic, 2025[10]). These sectors are a primary destination for higher education graduates, but because profession-specific regulations, requirements for advanced language skills and even restrictions based on citizenship, they can be difficult to enter for international graduates.

In Canada and the United Kingdom, data on the labour market outcomes of international graduates are based on a one-off graduate survey. In the case of Canada, this takes place three years after graduation and in the case of the United Kingdom, 15 months after graduation. Both surveys confirm that international graduates who stayed in the country have slightly worse employment rates than domestic graduates. In Canada, the difference is minimal: 89% of international graduates compared to 91% of domestic graduates. However, the gaps are relatively large among those who finished bachelor's-level programmes, with an employment rate of 85% for international graduates and 92% for domestic graduates (Etmanski, 2025[31]).

Excluding those continuing in full-time studies, 86% of domestic graduates and 80% of international graduates are found to be in some form of employment 15 months after graduation in the United Kingdom. Students from EU countries have levels of employment similar to domestic graduates (HESA, 2025[12]). International graduates in Canada report more frequently working in jobs unrelated to their field of study: 54% of international graduates, while 41% of domestic ones. More international graduates also feel overqualified (29% of international graduates and 21% of domestic graduates) (Etmanski, 2025[31]). In the United Kingdom, 32% of international graduates earn below GBP 27 000 (USD 36 401 as of 27 February 2026) compared to 27% of domestic graduates (HESA, 2025[12]). In Canada, international graduates who stayed in the country with bachelor's-level qualifications having a median salary 20% lower than domestic graduates. Also, international graduates working in Canada have 17% lower earnings in the case of master's-level graduates. While the differences can, in part, be explained by different patterns of employment by sector and occupation, these factors do not explain the whole difference (Etmanski, 2025[31]).

France and Germany do not have comprehensive graduate surveys that report data separately for domestic and international graduates. According to estimates based on the EU Labour Force Survey, calculated for an OECD report, former international students in Germany and France have higher employment rates than the overall foreign- and native-born populations, but slightly below those who arrived as labour migrants. Moreover, the incidence of overqualification is much lower for this group than for native-born population, labour migrants or for migrants overall (OECD, 2022[5]). Furthermore, an alumni survey by Campus France suggests that about 87% of international graduates have found job within a year of completing their studies, but that this share has been falling for more recent cohorts. Among the degree programme international graduates, 56% of them found their first job in France, the rest primarily secured a job in their country of origin. Interestingly, the survey results also show that about 36% of international graduates work in public bodies, but twice as many do so in their country of origin rather than in France (Campus France, 2024[20]). This confirms the earlier finding from the Netherlands that it is harder for international graduates to access public-sector and civil-service jobs.

Supporting transition to the labour market

International graduates in Germany mention during interviews that finding a job is more difficult than they expected (Pineda et al., 2022[14]). In the Netherlands, about 59% of international graduates who remained in the country reported facing difficulty in finding a job after graduation (Nuffic, 2023[2]). The Eurostudent survey in France, Germany and the Netherlands found that most international students feel less prepared for the national labour market than their domestic peers, but that they were more ready for the international labour market (Eurostudent, 2025[32]).

Interestingly, in Australia, international graduates reported that their education prepared them well for their job more often than their domestic counterparts across all study levels (QILT, 2025[11]). Surveys in Germany and the United Kingdom have highlighted that many international students are relatively dissatisfied with the preparation for labour market they receive from their institution. In Germany, preparation for the labour market was the aspect of studies emerging with the worst satisfaction score. Only 35% of international graduates felt “rather” or “well” supported by their institution in planning their career. The support was more felt in universities of applied sciences (42%) than in universities (31%) (DAAD, 2025[3]). In the United Kingdom, career support and placements were seen by 53% of international graduates as areas for improvement at their institution, with the second highest rated area being internships and experiential learning. Only 21% of international graduates from the United Kingdom report that they used the career support service at their institution to help them find a job after graduation and only 3% of those working found a job through career support services (UUKi and QS, 2024[33]). There seems to be a shared nervousness about the transition to employment among both international and domestic students. However, in the case of international graduates, the transition to employment is also tied with the possibility to remain in the country.

An uncertainty regarding international graduates is also felt by the employers, especially in smaller organisations and business. Employers are not always aware of specific conditions and obligations they need to meet to hire someone on temporary visa/permit. At the same time, employers might be more interested in hiring someone permanently, but, at least initially, most international graduates are on temporary visas/permits. A survey among Dutch businesses found many employers reporting that they had problems in understanding the exact implications of hiring international graduates, their obligations and costs regarding visa and permits, so they often opted to look for someone else (Nuffic, 2025[34]). Further experience from the Netherlands, shared by stakeholders, highlights that some employers were not willing to invest time to become visa sponsor, there were also challenges in hiring process, language proficiency and active steps to integrate them. In the United Kingdom, research on the implementation of the Graduate visa found that some students had to explain their visa status to their perspective employers, with some even refusing to accept it as a valid visa/permit to work (AGCAS, 2023[35]). In Australia, some employers are also hesitant to hire temporary visa holders, many of whom are international graduates. In part because not all, especially smaller businesses, understand the visa system and have resources to meet all obligations and they are also sometimes looking to hire some for longer periods or permanently (Jobs and Skills Australia, 2025[6]).

Policymakers and higher education institutions can play multiple roles in supporting students in transition to labour market. First, they can help international or domestic students to understand the labour market, before and during their studies, to guide them in what topics to focus on and on choices regarding their education. Some of the relevant information is already available on existing national outreach and information portals (explored in Chapter 2, section Identifying reliable information about study and life in foreign countries). At the institution level, labour-market literacy can be well integrated into programmes and supported by career centres. Second, there is a need for more personalised guidance and advice, which can direct individual students to explore possible careers and even apply for jobs and prepare for the recruitment process. Australia has developed a relatively basic virtual career matching tool for international students to explore possible careers. Much of this guidance can be also provided by the institutions and their career centres. Third, students can engage with employers and work experience already during their studies. This can help students to build professional networks and gain experience, facilitating their search for employment. Both professional networks and relevant work experience have been identified as among the most highly rated factors in finding employment by international graduates in the Netherlands (Nuffic, 2023[2]). All these require for higher education institutions to establish and maintain strong relations with relevant employers. Consultations with stakeholders for this report highlight that it is important to inform international students to start looking for possible employment early, to better inform them about various employment opportunities, as international students tend to be aware of the big and well-known companies, but not always are aware of small- and medium-sized businesses and other employers.

In 2024, the federal government in Germany, through DAAD, started a large-scale initiative to support the labour market transition of international students (Box 1). The actions focus on better language preparation, academic support to complete studies, strengthening institutional career services and promoting closer co-operation with regional employers to facilitate networking and work experiences for international students. While many areas of the initiative are already improving the labour market transitions, stakeholders reported difficulties in meaningfully engaging with employers, in part due to the uncertain economic situation.

Box 1. DAAD Campus Initiative for International Skilled Workers

To address growing shortage of skilled labour in Germany, DAAD launched the Campus Initiative for International Talents in 2024. Backed by EUR 120 million (USD 142 million as of 27 February 2026) in federal funding until 2028, the initiative supports 114 projects at 104 universities to strengthen the transition of international students and graduates into the German labour market. The initiative consists of two main actions.

FIT – Promotion of international talents for integration into studies and the labour market

The FIT action focuses on supporting international students throughout their journey, from preparation to study through their study progression all the way to their graduation and employment. In the preparatory phase, it focuses on bridging and language courses, as well as providing information and advice to international students. Further, it focuses on study success, supporting additional courses (e.g. language, academic writing, methodology), tutorials, integration services and activities, information and support for international students. The action aims to promote employability through job-related language training and career services assisting with job search and application, and by encouraging more networking and co-operation between higher education institutions and employers, to facilitate internships and work experiences, organise networking events (e.g. career fairs), and buddy schemes with international alumni.

Pro plus – Academic Training for the German Labour Market

Targets international graduates with foreign degrees, offering additional professional training, language and social skills development, and practical experience through partnerships with German companies to facilitate their access to labour market.

Source: DAAD (2025), Campus Initiative for International Talents, https://www.daad.de/en/information-services-for-higher-education-institutions/expertise-on-subjects-countries-regions/campus-initiative-international-academic-experts/ (accessed on 17 September 2025).

In Nova Scotia (CAN), EduNova, a provincial co-operative association of education providers, has developed Study and Stay programme targeted on international students, providing them with events, resources, employment opportunities, tools and support to help them launch a career in the province (EduNova, 2025[36]). In Australia, the engagement with employers is promoted through the Study Australia Industry Experience Program (2026[37]), a free two-week virtual programme for students to work jointly with other international and domestic students on a project as defined by one of the industry partners. Study NSW, in promoting study opportunities in New South Wales (AUS), has additionally developed a longer, in-person industry experience programme and has also partnered with a major job advertisement platform to filter jobs in the region that are relevant for the international students (Study NSW, 2025[38]). Study in NL has a career ambassador programme with events for current international students and recent graduates to interact with international alumni based in the Netherlands (Study in NL, 2025[39]).

Language barriers in access to labour market

Particularly in Europe, a frequently reported issue for international graduates has been language barriers encountered in accessing the labour market. In the Netherlands, speaking Dutch is seen as one of the most important factors in finding suitable employment (Nuffic, 2023[2]). In Germany, international students from English-language programmes expressed frustration with their job search, mainly because of their limited German-language skills (Pineda et al., 2022[14]). A higher level of French proficiency is also correlated with better employment outcomes in France (Cour des comptes, 2025[9]). This issue has been also highlighted in consultations for this report with stakeholders in Canada, especially in French-speaking areas.

International students, particularly those studying in English or other language that is not the language of the host country, might have slightly skewed understanding of the labour market. During their studies, they are surrounded by English, in their institution and they tend to socialise with other internationals. However, job opportunities for English speakers, in non-English speaking countries, tend to be very limited and concentrated in a few specific industries. Most companies in France, Germany or the Netherlands will still expect at least working-level proficiency of the local language. In Germany particularly, governments and institutions have been making efforts to promote language learning during studies but facing obstacles with finding space in the curricula for the classes and hiring quality staff to teach German.

Participating in alumni networks

Staying in touch with alumni can be valuable for countries hosting international students because it creates a long-term link between graduates and their host country. Alumni networks also have value for graduates, as they can turn to them for career support and mentorship. The DAAD alumni network consists of more than 140 alumni associations worldwide, which has been supported for many years (DAAD, 2026[40]). France Alumni was established and is supported by Campus France, comprises alumni groups in at least 130 countries around the world (Campus France, 2025[41]). The British Council launched the Alumni UK in 2022, as a platform to connect alumni, organise networking events, share job opportunities and even provide resources for career (e.g. research insights, online courses) (British Council, 2026[42]). EduCanada lists on its website 20 alumni groups around the world, part of the Canada's Alumni Network (EduCanada, 2026[43]). At the same time, it is important to recognise that many higher education institutions have their own, well-developed, alumni networks that engage both domestic and international graduates. Institutions tend to have much closer connections to their graduates and these networks might be much more effective than country-level networks. However, national networks play an important role in strengthening relationships between countries. Both national and institutional alumni networks might serve their respective purposes.

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6 Emerging policy considerations

This concluding chapter summarises the key trends and policy developments in relation to international students. Based on the evidence examined, it suggests four policy considerations for policymakers and relevant stakeholders.

Policy considerations

Based on the evidence analysed and the international policy examples and practices identified in this report, policymakers and stakeholders may wish to consider:

1. Steering enrolment by creating a predictable environment for students and institutions
2. Reducing dropout by strengthening academic adaptation, integration and wellbeing support
3. Supporting post-graduation transitions to the labour market and providing clear information on possibilities for longer-term stay
4. Strengthening evidence gathering and monitoring

Across the six comparator countries – Australia, Canada, France, Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom – international student enrolment generally increased rapidly throughout the 2010s. After the sudden decline during the COVID-19 pandemic, countries initially recovered and returned to a growth path. International students account for a significant share of tertiary education enrolment and, in countries with high tuition fees (AUS, CAN, GBR), are an important source of funding for higher education institutions. This situation has made systems with high international enrolment vulnerable to geopolitical changes that affect student flows, while the rapid growth of recent years has created tensions in the political sphere, in intergovernmental dynamics and between policy areas, as efforts to curb the number of international students have increased. Australia, Canada and the United Kingdom have all introduced migration-related policy changes and all saw a decline in the number of study visas/permits issued to international students in 2024, with issuance of new study visas/permits staying low in 2025 according to national data. As a result of self-regulation and policy changes in English-taught programmes, the number of international students has also stagnated in the Netherlands. The recalibration of policies and approaches towards international students is an opportune moment to also consider the experiences of international students and to better address the challenges they face.

This report has reviewed available literature to examine the experiences of international students through their study journey, from initial search for available study options all the way to post-graduation outcomes. The report focused on four groups of challenges faced by international students:

1. Choosing what to study, admission and arrival processes,
2. Study adaptation, progression and success,
3. Life in a new country and integration,
4. Post-graduation opportunities and possibilities.

Policy considerations for improving the experience of international students

The interconnectedness of policy in the field means that policymakers and stakeholders across policy areas (e.g. higher education, migration, labour, foreign affairs) and levels (e.g. national/federal, provincial/territorial/state, regional, local, institutional) often need to work closely together to effectively develop and implement policies to support international students. Based on the evidence analysed and the international policy examples and practices identified, it is possible to outline four main policy considerations of wider relevance to policymakers and stakeholders across countries hosting large numbers of international students.

Consideration 1. Steering enrolment by creating a predictable environment for students and institutions

Rapid growth in the intake of international students created a somewhat unpredictable environment for governments, which has, in turn, led to sudden and wide-ranging policy changes affecting the whole higher education sector in several of the reviewed countries. Policymakers should now ideally focus on stabilising the situation and creating a more predictable policy environment for both international students and the institutions that host them. This can be promoted through:

- Aligning promotion and recruitment messaging with realistic possibilities and opportunities for study, work and stay after graduation. This could be supported by widening the collection and publication of data on study visa/permit processing, study success, work while studying and stay-on rates.
- Consolidating and improving national information platforms. These platforms have an important role in providing accurate, comprehensive and multilingual information on study opportunities and life in the countries. Prospective international students would benefit from realistic information on study and living costs, clear information on the limits of available financial support, housing, study visa/permit processes and a realistic assessment of opportunities to stay on in the country after graduation.
- Ensuring recruitment integrity and quality pre-arrival support. Many countries already have compliance regulations and guidance for all institutions hosting international students, including guiding their use of education agents, their marketing practices, and what pre-arrival information and support they provide to students. Stakeholders might consider how best to further develop and enforce these regulations and guidance.
- Working to achieve a more balanced distribution of enrolment across programmes, institutions and regions by encouraging and steering international students to enrol in institutions and programmes based on transparent criteria. These criteria can consider available capacity, quality of education and available support services for international students, as well as regional development and labour-market needs. Policymakers and institutions can consider steering enrolment through a) promoting less-known study programmes, higher education institutions, cities and regions, b) providing field or region-specific scholarships and fee exemptions, c) prioritising study visa/permit processing for specific study fields, qualifications and regions, d) expanding post-graduation work rights for specific fields or regions, e) setting maximum allocations of study visas/permits or number of study places in a specific programme based on available capacity.
- Strengthening platforms for ongoing dialogue and consultations across policy areas and levels of governance, including various stakeholders. A wider consultation of proposed policy changes and assessment of policy implications could help with policy implementation. For this purpose, policymakers can consider to further strengthen existing platforms for cross-governmental collaboration on policy for international students and appropriately include sectoral stakeholders. This can include supporting initiatives to develop also representation of international students in policy making and implementation.

Consideration 2. Reducing dropout by strengthening academic adaptation, integration and wellbeing support

Many international students struggle during the arrival period and in their initial months in the host country to navigate the new environment and different approaches to education and its organisation, which leads them to fall behind and, in some cases, even to drop out. Governments, higher education institutions and other stakeholders might assist international students by:

- Addressing gaps in preparedness early by expanding pre-arrival and on-arrival support and information. Academic adaptation can be facilitated by providing international entrants with information about the educational system, the organisation of studies, academic norms, and teaching and assessment approaches. To minimise gaps in preparedness, higher education institution could systematically assess existing knowledge and abilities of international students and provide feedback. Identified gaps can be bridged by preparatory and add-on courses, and academic and language support.
- Promoting closer contact and integration of international students in their academic and local community. Where possible, higher education institution could integrate programmes or their parts to jointly educate domestic and international students. Institutions can also encourage participation of international students in extracurricular activities and student associations. Together with local stakeholders, higher education institution can co-develop initiatives to connect international students with the local population through volunteering, community outreach and events.
- Assisting international students with non-academic challenges, through information, advice and counselling, that can be offered by the institutions or through local partnerships. When possible, assist international students in finding initial housing, within own accommodation or in collaboration with local actors, and in accessing basic services (e.g. insurance, registration, bank account, phone plan). Policymakers, institutions and other stakeholders may want to consider developing and expanding targeted financial aid systems, with scholarships, loans, grants and hardship funds, to provide financial security to vulnerable students. This could be potentially financed by revenue from tuition paid by international students. Where possible and when relevant, try to facilitate information on relevant part-time jobs. Higher education institutions and local stakeholders could consider how to best raise awareness about available support and how to encourage international students to use these, including mental health and wellbeing counselling.

Consideration 3. Supporting post-graduation transitions to the labour market and providing clear information on possibilities for longer-term stay

There is a gap between the number of international students who intend to stay and the number of graduates who remain in the country in the medium and long term, due to various challenges they encountered. The labour-market outcomes of international students are below those of domestic students, but the gap seems to narrow over time. The introduction of temporary post-graduation visas/permits provides an initial step to remain in the country but a transition to permanent residency is unlikely for most international students. As such, given the potential benefits of retaining domestically trained international talent, governments and other partners could work on improving post-graduation opportunities and possibilities by:

- Developing relevant professional networks and experiences, and career guidance for international students. Higher education institutions could consider how to best provide international students with relevant career counselling and how to facilitate networking. International students could be supported by information about the local, national and international labour market, available opportunities and employment and business regulations. Where possible and when relevant, higher education institutions could consider how to best facilitate engagement of international students with relevant labour-market actors. This can be done through embedded work experience (e.g. internships, work-based learning) as part of study programme that is organised by the institutions, through lectures and mentoring from external professionals, and through assignments developed and implemented with external partners. Stronger professional networks can be also supported by developing and strengthening alumni networks.
- Integrating international students into society. Relevant local stakeholders can encourage integration by providing language learning, cultural orientation, opportunities to contribute to local

community and supporting integration activities, such as buddy or mentorship programmes pairing international students with locals. International students and graduates could better plan their lives if they receive clear information about realistic possibilities, pathways and integration criteria to stay in the host country long term after graduation.

- Informing employers and society**.** Clearer information for employers on hiring foreign nationals could help reduce uncertainty and improve access to jobs for international graduates. Policymakers may want to assess what formal or informal barriers there might be to employ foreign nationals in specific industries and sectors, for example within public sector. A more welcoming culture towards international students across society could be promoted by emphasising their contribution to the local economy and community.

Consideration 4. Strengthening evidence gathering and monitoring

There are significant gaps in available evidence on international students and challenges they face. Better evidence collection would allow for more precise monitoring of the compliance of institutions hosting international students and provide information to prospective international students to inform their study choice, as well as a better evidence base for future policymaking. Policymakers may want to consider:

- Collecting more detailed evidence, including data on the enrolment patterns of international students, progression and completion rates, and their post-graduation labour-market outcomes and stay rates, as well as information on available student housing, wellbeing and financial situation of students. The evidence could be based on both administrative data and, when relevant, regular and ad hoc surveys and studies to monitor the experiences of international students. For example, France, as part of the 2024 immigration law created new requirements for reporting and publishing annual reports on international students.
- Providing more timely data on international students as much of the available data comes with significant time lags, many internationally comparable data is reported only two or three years later. Australia already provides monthly statistics on international student enrolment, while some other countries (AUS, CAN, GBR) provide monthly statistics on the number of issued study visas/permits, with much shorter reporting period.
- Connecting and harmonising data on international students. Relevant stakeholder could consider how best to link existing collected data in various domains, particularly education, immigration and labour-market statistics. Data collections and resulting statistics, where possible, could be internationally harmonised to allow comparison.

Higher Education

International Students in Higher Education

A comparative analysis of trends, challenges and policy responses in Australia, Canada, France, Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom

Australia, Canada, France, Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom have been among the OECD countries with the strongest growth in international student enrolment over the last decade. International students have significantly contributed to enrolment growth, shaped campus life and, in some countries, institutional finances. This report examines the journey and challenges of international students, from choosing where and what to study and obtaining a study visa/permit, to adapting academically, finding housing, integrating into local communities, progressing in their studies and navigating post-graduation pathways. After strong growth through the 2010s and a rebound after the COVID-19 pandemic, international student mobility is entering a more uncertain phase, with some countries tightening policies while others continue to expand international enrolment. By comparing six major OECD study destinations, the report highlights both shared challenges and emerging policy responses. It provides timely evidence on trends, challenges and policy responses related to international student enrolment at a time of growing public and policy attention. It is relevant for policymakers, higher education institutions and other stakeholders.

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