

International mobility of doctoral students is an indicator of the internationalisation of both the higher education sector and the research system. It also highlights the attractiveness of advanced research programmes and in some cases the existence of career opportunities for junior researchers in the host country. During their studies and afterwards, doctoral students contribute to the advancement of research in the host country. When returning home, they bring back new competences and connections with international research networks.

The share of foreign doctoral students in total enrolment differs widely across countries. Non-citizens represent more than 40% of the doctoral population in Switzerland, New Zealand and the United Kingdom, but less than 5% in Italy and Korea. Shares of foreign and international doctoral students are between 25% and 40% in Canada, France, Belgium, Australia and the United States.

In absolute numbers, the United States hosted the largest foreign doctoral population, with more than 92 000 students in 2006 from abroad, followed by the United Kingdom (38 000) and France (28 000).

Language plays a role in the choice of destination, notably for English-speaking countries or for Spain (students from Central and South America). However, other factors also matter: geographical proximity, cultural and historical links, the existence of exchange programmes (e.g. Erasmus) or scholarships, as well as immigration policies. Asian students (particularly from China, India, Korea and Chinese Taipei) represent the bulk of foreign doctoral students in the United States, whereas European universities enrol large shares of doctoral students from other European countries.

International mobility of doctoral students has increased over the past seven or eight years, most notably in Canada and New Zealand, as well as in Norway and in Spain. The share of foreign students enrolled in advanced research programmes rose in most countries between 1998 and 2006. Belgium, one of the main European host countries, is an exception.

Men still account for the majority of foreign doctoral students, but women are catching up, representing at least 45% of international students in half of the countries for which data are available.

#### Foreign and international doctoral students

The data are from the Indicators for Education Systems (INES) project conducted jointly by the OECD, the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) and Eurostat. Doctoral students are defined according to the International Classification of Education developed by UNESCO (ISCED 1997). ISCED level 6 corresponds to programmes that lead to an advanced research qualification, equivalent to a doctorate.

The term “international student” refers to students who have crossed borders expressly with the intention to study. The UNESCO Institute for Statistics, OECD and Eurostat define as international students those who are not residents of their country of study or those who received their prior education in another country. Overall, the country of prior education is considered a better criterion for EU countries in order to take account of intra-EU student mobility. The residence criterion is usually a good proxy in countries that require a student visa to enter the country. Since not all countries are yet able to report data on international students, data for “foreign students” are also presented here. However, it should be borne in mind that not all “foreign students” have come to the country with the intention to study.

#### Source

OECD, Education Database, 2009.

#### Going further

OECD (2004), *Internationalisation and Trade in Higher Education: Challenges and Opportunities*, OECD, Paris.

OECD (2008), *Education at a Glance 2008: OECD Indicators*, OECD, Paris, [www.oecd.org/edu/eag2008](http://www.oecd.org/edu/eag2008).

#### Figure notes

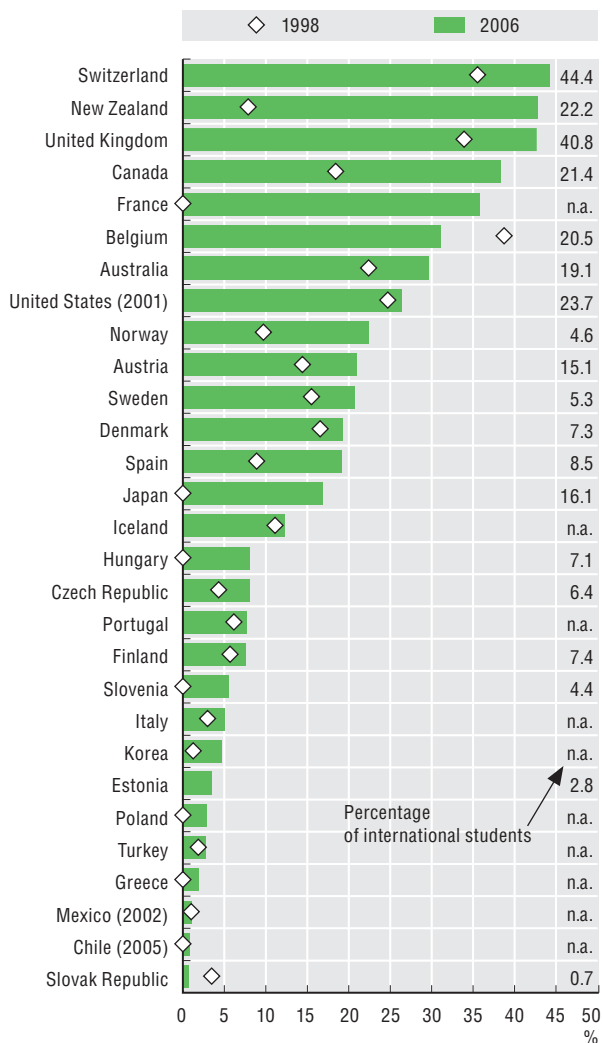
Share of foreign doctoral students: Data refer to 1999 instead of 1998 for Belgium, Mexico, the Slovak Republic and Turkey; 2000 for Iceland and Portugal.

In the United States, data refer to 2001 in the case of foreign students and to 2006 in the case of international students.

Number of international doctoral students: International students are defined as non-resident students of reporting countries for all countries except Finland and Switzerland which define them as students with prior education outside the reporting country.

### Share of foreign doctoral students, 2006

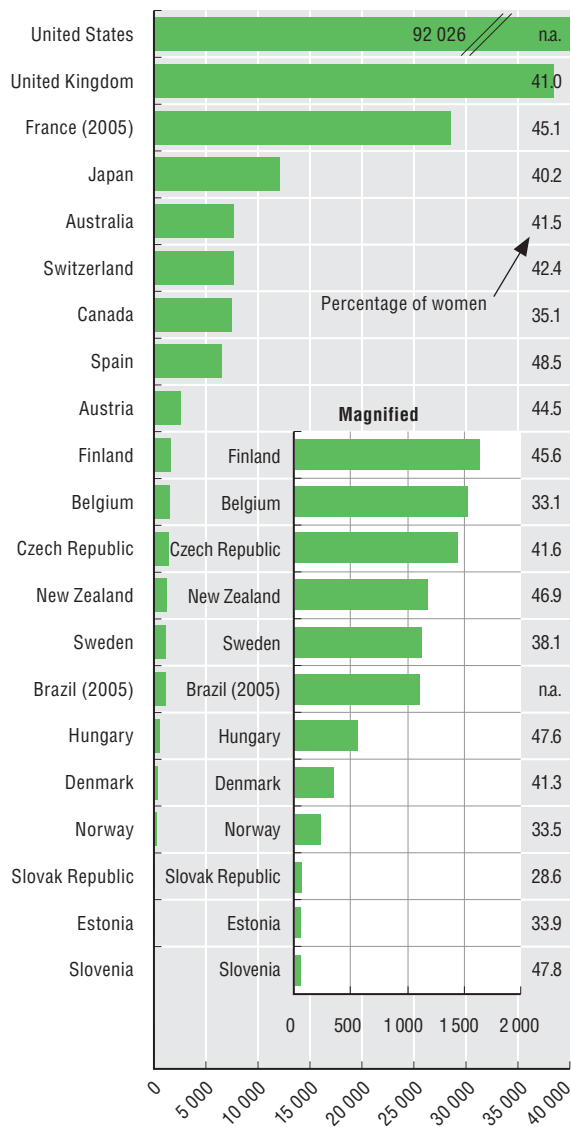
As a percentage of total doctoral enrolment in host country



StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/746305288783>

### Number of international doctoral students, 2006

By host country



StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/746324062876>



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