



The COVID-19 Pandemic and its impact on international student migration

Measures taken in non-EU OECD countries

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Jonathan Chaloff and Thomas Liebig

International Migration Division

Directorate for Employment, Labour and Social Affairs



Introduction

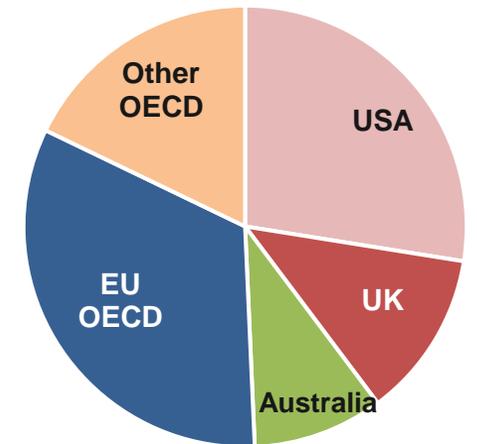
The role of international students in non-EU OECD countries differs to some extent from that in EU countries:

- The largest numbers and shares are in non-EU countries
- They are an important source of funding for the tertiary education system in major non-EU OECD destinations
- International students are more explicitly targeted in labour migration policy in many non-EU OECD destinations

International students are considered an “essential” migrant group virtually everywhere and the industry is influential in policy settings in many non-EU OECD countries.

- The European Council recommendation on the temporary restriction on non-essential travel grants an exception for international students

International students enrolled in OECD countries, 2016





Specific policies for the admission of international students

- Granting more flexibility for certain requirements
 - Extended deadlines for admission or submission of documents (e.g. language tests in Australia)
 - Exemptions from biometric testing requirements (e.g. Canada)
 - Alternatives to meet requirements for language tests (e.g., university can certify in Switzerland) or standardised exams (exemption from SAT or ACT for some universities).
 - Granting leaves of absence and deferrals which would normally not be allowed (Korea allows them for first-year students).
- Encouraging applicants to apply for visas so that they can enter when restrictions are lifted (e.g. Australia which is current not admitting international students, but processing applications).



New measures to support international students in case of hardships

- Government support
 - General assistance programmes targeted at all students or all residents (e.g., in Japan)
 - Specific assistance programmes targeting international students or extensions in coverage of general assistance programmes to cover international students
 - General programmes for foreign nationals experiencing temporary hardship due to COVID-19 also open to international students. (E.g. in New Zealand)
- In addition, many HEIs also provide direct support
 - In the US, 57% of HEIs allowed international students to stay in student housing over the summer, and 42% offered funding to international students (Open Doors Survey)
 - Government grants to HEIs to provide support to students, or specifically to international students (including regional governments in e.g. Australia). Also in Japan, a number of HEI provide specific hardship support for international students.



More flexibility in terms of access to employment

- A significant share of international students work to fund their studies. Most countries limit employment for international students, in terms of hours (usually 20-28 hours/week; full time during holidays)
- Easing of restrictions in non-EU OECD countries was **sector-targeted**:
 - In Australia, full-time work in **supermarkets** (until 1 May), **aged care**, and **nursing**.
 - In Canada, full-time work for international students already in the country in “essential services” (**health care**, **critical infrastructure**, or the supply of **food** or other critical goods) until 31 August.
 - In New Zealand, restrictions relaxed exclusively to work at a **supermarket** when a region is in COVID-19 Alert Level 3/4 (only if student was already employed by a supermarket).



Addressing the impact of absence on longer-term outcomes

- Some countries count student years towards post-graduation residence rights and programmes. This is a major incentive for students to come to these countries.
- Countries made efforts to **diminish negative long-term effects for** students forced to remain abroad due to COVID-19:
 - In Canada, international students can begin their classes outside Canada without affecting eligibility for the Post-Graduation Work Permit Programme.
 - In Australia, existing and new student visa holders who undertake online study outside Australia because of COVID-19 can count this towards the Australian Study Requirement for later applications.



Exceptions on physical presence: The specific case of online courses

With the pandemic, on-line studies have extended, **though online-only studies are still rare** – most HEI have opted for the hybrid model

Fully on-line instruction is normally not grounds for issuance of visas.

- Most countries **allow currently present students to stay**

However, since many universities have gone on-line, **can students still enter?**

- Most countries restrict new admissions for students whose courses are fully online. The US does not issue visas and does not admit visa holders unless their courses meet minimum in-person requirements
- Israel admits students regardless of whether they are studying on-line or not
- In Canada, on-line students with visas issued prior to the pandemic can enter, but only if they convince a border officer that they cannot study abroad



Conclusion: impact on the future of international study

- The pandemic has reduced student migration for the current academic year - but will it reshape the scope and direction of international student migration in the longer term?
- International students are an important feeder for labour migration, so lower enrolment will affect labour migration flows when labour markets will be recovering from the negative impact of the pandemic
- The importance of international education has limited restrictive measures and increased support to international students. It has also seen governments grant more flexibility to HEIs while enhancing supervision
- Support (hardship grants; work opportunities; visa flexibility) will not only prevent countries from losing current international students but also send signals to prospective students and helps countries to re-position them on the global market
- The recourse to online courses has implications for the future:
 - ❖ *Are online courses accessible and of comparable quality to the courses they replace?*
 - ❖ *Can HEIs maintain the same fees when instruction is online?*
 - ❖ *When education is separated from migration, will students still come?*



For more information on the OECD's work on international student migration:

Jonathan.Chaloff@oecd.org
Thomas.Liebig@oecd.org