

ATTRACTING AND RETAINING INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN THE EU

EMN INFORM

2019

The importance of attracting international students is well-recognised by the EU and promoting their mobility has been part of the EU's policy as early as 1994. Since then, the need for intensified efforts to provide opportunities for students has been reiterated by the European Commission regularly, both as an alternative to irregular

migration and as a contribution to a more competitive EU economy.

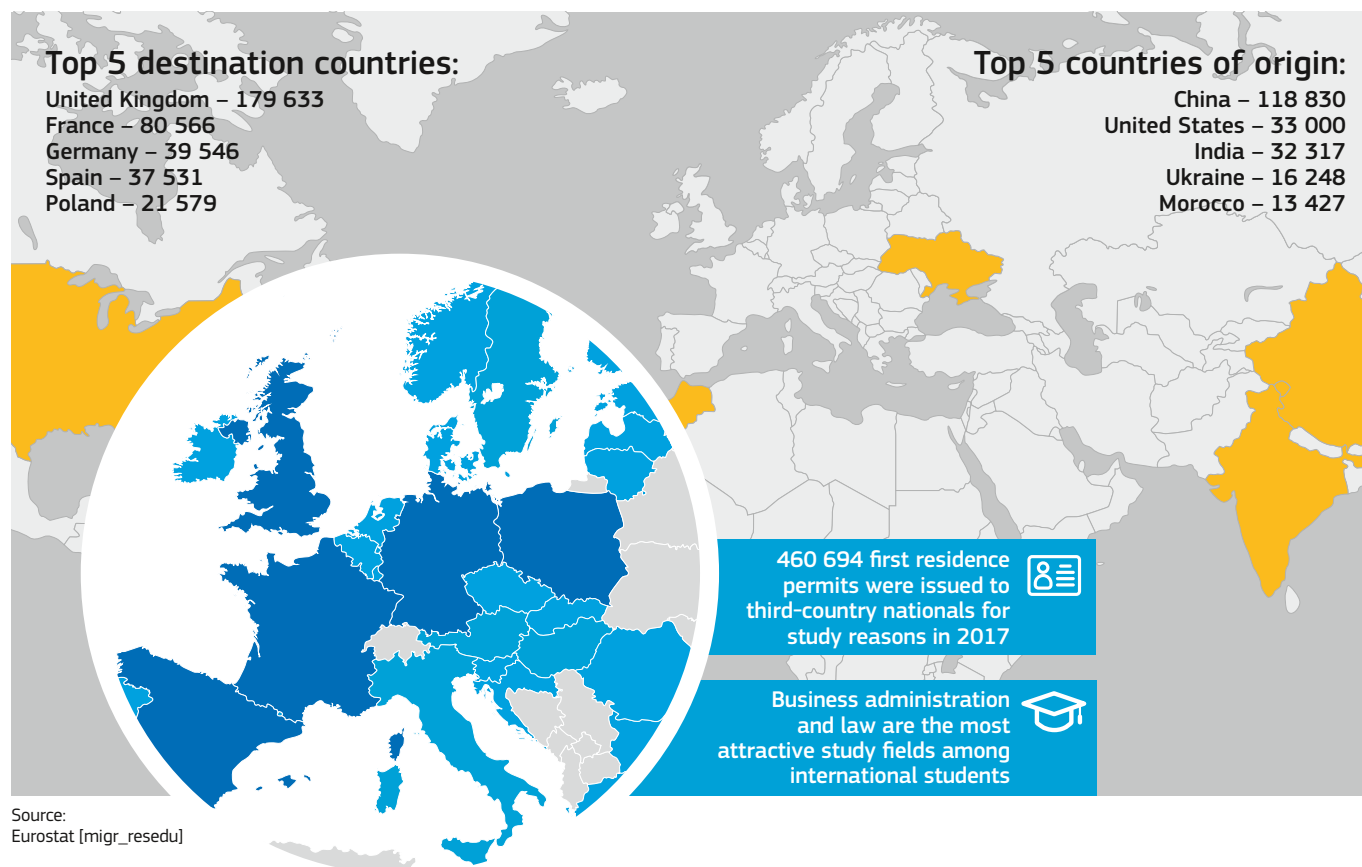
This Inform summarises the results of the EMN study of the same title which explores the national policies and practices in Member States to attract and retain international students.



KEY POINTS TO NOTE

1. **Almost half of all Member States consider attracting and retaining international students a policy priority**, although the degree to which this is a priority significantly differed across Member States. Other policy priorities such as preventing misuse of this legal migration channel for third-country nationals were also identified.
2. **The number of international students coming to the EU to undertake their studies has increased steadily over the recent years. In 2017, over 460 000 first residence permits were issued for study reasons in the EU.** The most popular destinations for international students coming to the EU in 2017 were the United Kingdom, France and Germany which issued around half of all first residence permits for study reasons in the EU. In terms of the share of third-country nationals of all students, data for 2017 for 14 Member States showed that the highest share of international students from all students was in Cyprus (18 %), Germany (10 %), Hungary (9 %), Ireland (8 %) and Latvia (8 %).
3. The highest number of international students came to the EU from **China**, the **United States** and **India**.
4. The **main policy drivers** for attracting and retaining international students included the internationalisation of HEIs and increasing financial revenue for the higher education sector, contributing to economic growth by increasing the national pool of qualified labour and addressing specific (skilled) labour shortages plus tackling demographic change.
5. **Both national governments and HEIs alike were found to implement comprehensive promotional activities and campaigns in many Member States to attract international students, often combining their efforts.** The most common approaches in place to attract international students were promotional activities and dissemination of information targeted at prospective international students, in some cases, taking place directly in selected countries of origin.
6. **Member States identified a number of common challenges in attracting international students.** These included: limited availability of courses taught in foreign languages, especially in English; lengthy processing times of applications for visas and residence permits, especially for Member States with insufficient representation in third countries; insufficient promotional activities and scholarship opportunities; as well as (affordable) housing shortages.
7. **Retention measures for international graduates** were found to be in place in the majority of Member States, seeking to facilitate access to the labour market by eliminating certain restrictions.

Third-country nationals arriving in the EU to study (2017)



8. **Some factors which significantly contributed to student attraction did not necessarily benefit student retention.** Programmes taught in English have had positive impacts on attracting international students to Member States but can hamper the long-term integration of international students into the labour market, unless language learning and other integration measures take place during the period of study.
9. **Member States aim to balance policies to attract and retain international students with measures to prevent abuse of the student route for other**

migration purposes by ensuring opportunities to study and work are made available only to those with a genuine intention to pursue higher education in the EU.

10. **Bilateral and multilateral agreements with third countries have created important frameworks for cooperation, including in relation to student mobility.** The majority of these agreements were aimed at exchanging experiences and practices, teachers, students and researchers, as well as the establishment of fellowships.

1. SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The subject of this Study is attracting and retaining third-country nationals who are granted residence permits or long-stay visas for the purpose of studies, and/or are undertaking a higher education degree (Bachelor, Master or PhD level). In this sense, the term 'international student' used throughout the Study refers to students from non-EU/EEA countries - i.e. third-country national students. The following categories are excluded from the scope of this Study: researchers, part-time students, third-country national family members of EU citizens, vocational

post-secondary education students, trainees and apprentices, au pairs and beneficiaries of international protection. For the purpose of this Study, higher education comprises tertiary education programmes at levels 5 (Short-cycle tertiary education), 6 (Bachelor's or equivalent), 7 (Master's or equivalent), and 8 (Doctoral or equivalent) of the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED). The Study only focuses on full-time students, covering the period 2013-2017 for statistics and 2012-2018 for policy developments.

2. AIMS OF THE STUDY

The Study aimed to explore the national policies and practices in Member States to attract and retain third-country national students. The Study examined the incentives in place at national level to encourage international students to study in EU Member States and, in some

cases, to stay on following graduation to seek employment or to enter the labour market. It further explored the admission conditions in place in the Member States and the extent to which those conditions facilitated the process of attracting and retaining international students.

In light of the recent transposition of the Students and Researchers Directive, the Study also aimed to capture the way in which Member States transposed the relevant provisions of this Directive (with regard to international students only), for example the right to remain in the Member State for a specific period of time following graduation.

Furthermore, the Study provides a brief overview of the bilateral and multilateral cooperation agreements with third countries covering international students. Finally, it aimed to illustrate common challenges and good practices developed by Member States with regard to the attraction and retention of international students.

3. METHOD AND ANALYSIS

The information used by this Study was based primarily on secondary sources as provided by 25 EU Member States in their national contributions for this study. National contributions were largely based on desk analysis of existing legislation and policy documents, reports, academic

literature, internet resources and reports and information from national authorities. Statistics were sourced from Eurostat and also provided by national authorities. The full overview of the collected statistics is provided in the Statistical Annex to this Study.

4. NATIONAL LEGAL AND POLICY FRAMEWORKS FOR ATTRACTION AND RETENTION OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

The Students and Researchers Directive ((EU) 2016/801), whilst not limited to students, is the legislative instrument at EU level setting out the conditions of entry and residence of third-country nationals for the purpose of studies. The Directive aims to make the EU a more attractive destination for international students by harmonising admission conditions. At the time of writing this report, the majority of Member States had already completed the transposition of the Directive, or aimed to complete it by early 2019. Denmark, Ireland and the United Kingdom do not take part in the Directive.

In 2017, over 460 000 first residence permits were issued for study reasons in the EU, an upwards trend for the years 2013 to 2017. The most popular destinations for international students in the EU were the United Kingdom (almost 180 000 new permits issued in 2017), followed by France (just above 80 000 first permits issued in 2017) and Germany with just about 40 000 first permits. In terms of the share of third-country nationals of all students, data for 2017 for 14 Member States showed that the highest share of international students from all students was in Cyprus (18 %), Germany (10 %), Hungary (9 %), Ireland (8 %) and Latvia (8 %).

In 2017, the highest number of international students coming to the EU was from China – accounting for almost

a quarter of all first study permits (118 830 permits) – followed by the United States (33 000 permits) and India (32 317 permits). Ukraine (16 248 permits), Morocco (13 472 permits), South Korea (11 358 permits), Brazil (10 414 permits) and Turkey (9 941 permits) were also amongst the top countries of origin for international students in the EU.

The main recent policy changes introduced by Member States included measures to, on the one hand, facilitate the administrative process of immigration as well as to ease access to labour market for international graduates. A few Member States, notably Estonia and Spain, liberalised their family reunification rules with regard to international students. In some Member States, special integration programmes have also been established. For example, Estonia introduced a “Welcoming Programme”, which aimed to ease the adaptation of foreign students (and others) to local life and launched a free migration advice service, provided by the Migration and Border Guard. On the other hand, in other Member States, legal and policy developments did not indicate a clear shift towards liberalisation. In some cases, policies became in certain ways more restrictive, including in Belgium and the United Kingdom, where student immigration rules have mainly focussed on preventing abuse of this legal migration channel.

5. ATTRACTING INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

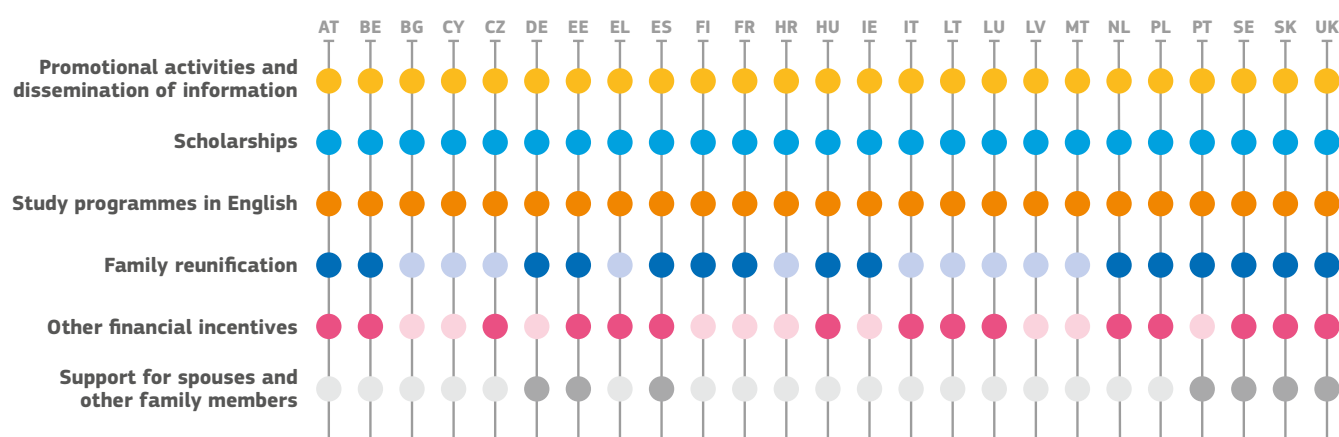
Both national governments and HEIs alike were found to implement comprehensive promotional activities and campaigns in many Member States, often combining their efforts. The most common policies in place to attract international students included promotional activities and dissemination of information targeted at prospective international students, for example through online portals or education fairs organised in third countries. Scholarships provided both by the state and HEIs, as well as availability of English-language programmes, constituted two additional important attraction factors.

The admission conditions for international students are determined by Articles 7 and 11 of the Students and

Researchers Directive. As per the provisions of the Directive, all Member States require students to provide proof of acceptance by a HEI, proof of sufficient resources to cover subsistence costs and study costs and health insurance (except Belgium).

As regards tuition fees, public HEIs in general charged higher tuition fees for international students than for domestic or EU students. Exceptions here were the Czech Republic, Italy, Luxembourg and the Slovak Republic, where tuition fees were the same for all students. In ten Member States, tuition fees were capped, meaning that there was a state-imposed upper limit on the fees public HEIs were able to charge international students.

Incentives for attraction



Source: EMN NCP reports

Common challenges encountered by Member States in attracting international students included: limited availability of courses taught in foreign languages, especially in English; lengthy processing times of applications for

visas and residence permits, especially for Member States with insufficient representation in third countries; and insufficient promotional activities and scholarship possibilities.



6. RETAINING INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

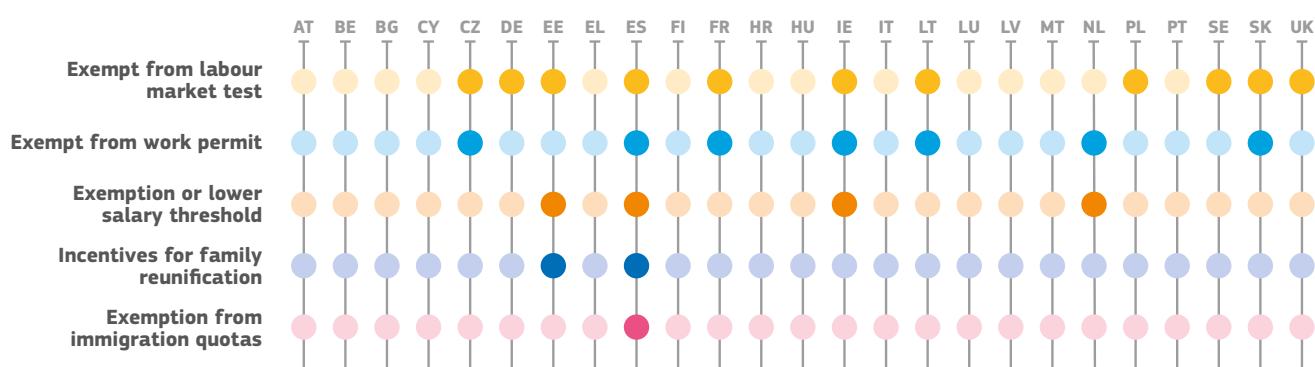
An important vehicle for retaining international students was found to be by providing them with an opportunity to stay in the Member State and seek work after graduation. Pursuant to Article 25(1) of the Students and Researchers Directive, the vast majority of Member States provided for a residence permit for the purpose of seeking employment or self-employment/starting up a business after completion of studies. Article 25 of the Directive stipulates that Member States shall provide for such a permit with a minimum duration of 9 months. The period of such permits ranged from nine months to 24 months in Member States.

The other most common retention measures included facilitation of labour market access, including exemption from labour market tests, exemption from salary thresholds where such conditions were in place and exemption from having to obtain a work permit. In the majority of Member States, there were no restrictions regarding the job field in which the international student was able to seek

employment or to set up a business. A few Member States, notably Estonia, have provided additional facilitation measures, such as provision of career counselling services and facilitation for family reunification. In contrast, retention policies implemented by HEIs generally aimed at bridging the gap between graduation and finding employment, by providing career counselling and assisting with finding internships and employment.

HEIs often collaborated with companies to facilitate job-seeking for international students. For example, in Sweden, HEIs had alumni programmes including mentorship programmes, which could help students to establish networks and contacts to employers. In Estonia, the Estonian Employers' Confederation organised days when foreign students studying in Estonian HEIs were able to shadow employees from a variety of companies and recognised companies operating in Estonia that had provided significant support for the work practice of foreign students.

Incentives for retention



Source: EMN NCP reports

Common challenges encountered by Member States in retaining international students included lack of competitiveness of the conditions offered on the labour market and the living standards in some Member States; a high national unemployment rate and unfavourable economic situation as well as challenges around extensions of

permits, including long processing times. At an individual level, the lack of the necessary national language level to enter the labour market and the lack of professional and support networks were also found to hinder successful labour market integration.



7. BILATERAL AND MULTILATERAL AGREEMENTS

Member States have concluded various bilateral and multilateral agreements with third countries. The majority of these agreements aimed at exchanging experiences and practices, teachers, students and researchers, as well as the establishment of fellowships. Cooperation

amongst HEIs in Member States and those in third countries was an important factor in mobility of students, teachers, researchers and/or academic personnel. Exchange programmes were found to be an important vehicle for fostering international student exchange and mobility.



FULL STUDY PUBLICATION

European Migration Network (2019). Attracting and Retaining International Students in the EU. Brussels: European Migration Network.

https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/european_migration_network/reports/studies_en



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Bulgaria www.emn-bg.com

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Cyprus www.moi.gov.cy

Czech Republic www.emncz.eu

Denmark https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/european_migration_network/authorities/denmark_en

Estonia www.emn.ee

Finland www.emn.fi

France <https://www.immigration.interieur.gouv.fr/Europe-et-International/Le-reseau-europeen-des-migrations-REM3/Le-reseau-europeen-des-migrations-REM>

Germany www.emn-germany.de

Greece <http://emn.immigration.gov.gr>

Hungary www.emnhungary.hu

Ireland www.emn.ie

Italy www.emnitalyncp.it

Latvia www.emn.lv

Lithuania www.emn.lt

Luxembourg www.emnluxembourg.lu

Malta <https://homeaffairs.gov.mt/en/mhas-information/emn/pages/european-migration-network.aspx>

Netherlands www.emnnetherlands.nl

Poland www.emn.gov.pl

Portugal <http://rem.sef.pt>

Romania www.mai.gov.ro

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Spain <http://extranjeros.empleo.gob.es/en/redeuropeamigracion>

Sweden www.emnsweden.se

United Kingdom https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/european_migration_network/authorities/united-kingdom_en

Norway www.emnnorway.no