

International students

Patterns and trends in OECD countries and beyond

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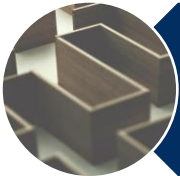
International students: some points for our discussions today



Patterns and trends in international student mobility



Patterns and trends in public policy around mobility



Challenges for students and public policy



What is international student mobility?

International degree mobility

- Students who enrol in higher education in another country to **obtain a full qualification** (credential) in that other country
- Data on enrolment reported by institutions in **destination country**

≠ International credit mobility

- Students who enrol in higher education in another country for a short period (often >15 ECTS and >3 months) to **gain credits** recognised in their “**home**” institution
- Data on enrolment reported by **home institutions**



Who are (counted as) internationally mobile students?

Not all countries report “international” students

International degree mobility

- Students who enrol in higher education in another country to **obtain a full qualification** (credential) in that other country
- Data on enrolment reported by institutions in **destination country**

“International” students

- moved from their country of origin (prior education, prior residence)

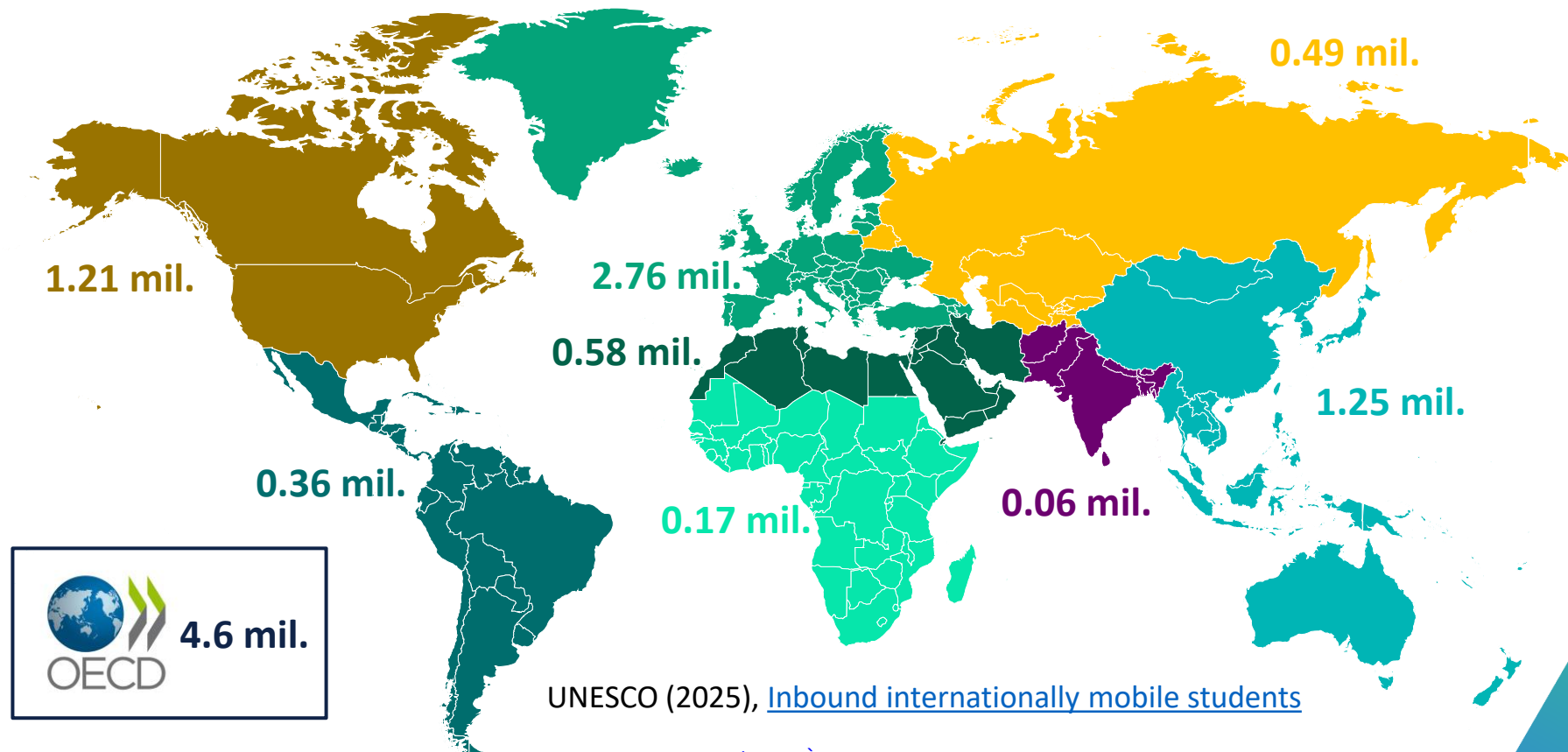
“Foreign” students

- not a citizen of host country but could be a long-term resident



6.9 million internationally mobile students in 2022

40% in Europe, 20% in North America, 20% in East Asia and Pacific



OECD

4.6 mil.

UNESCO (2025), [Inbound internationally mobile students](#)

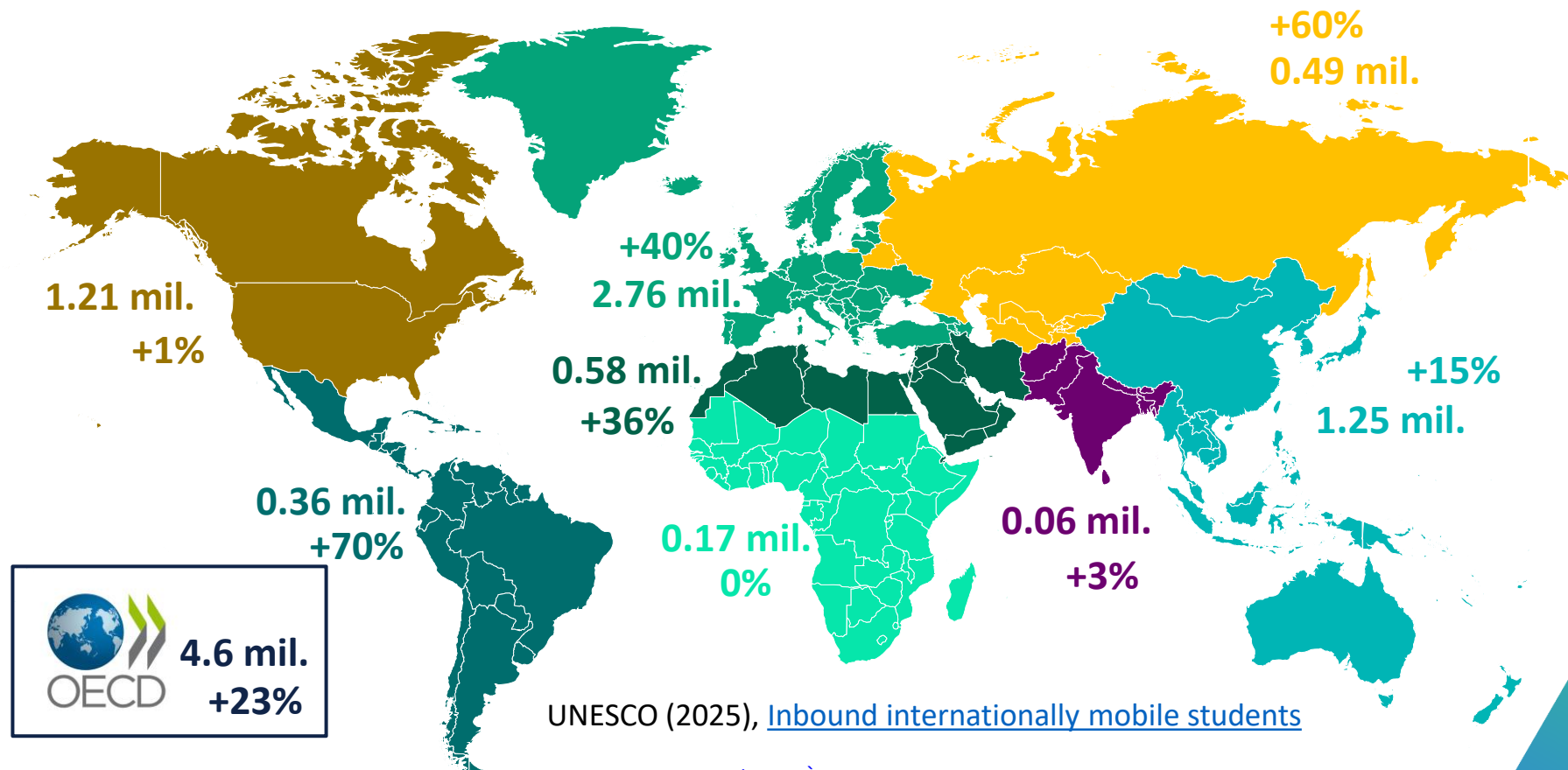
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Trends in international student numbers over the last five years

Strong growth in Europe, Central Asia (although data questions) and Latin America (from a low base)



UNESCO (2025), [Inbound internationally mobile students](#)

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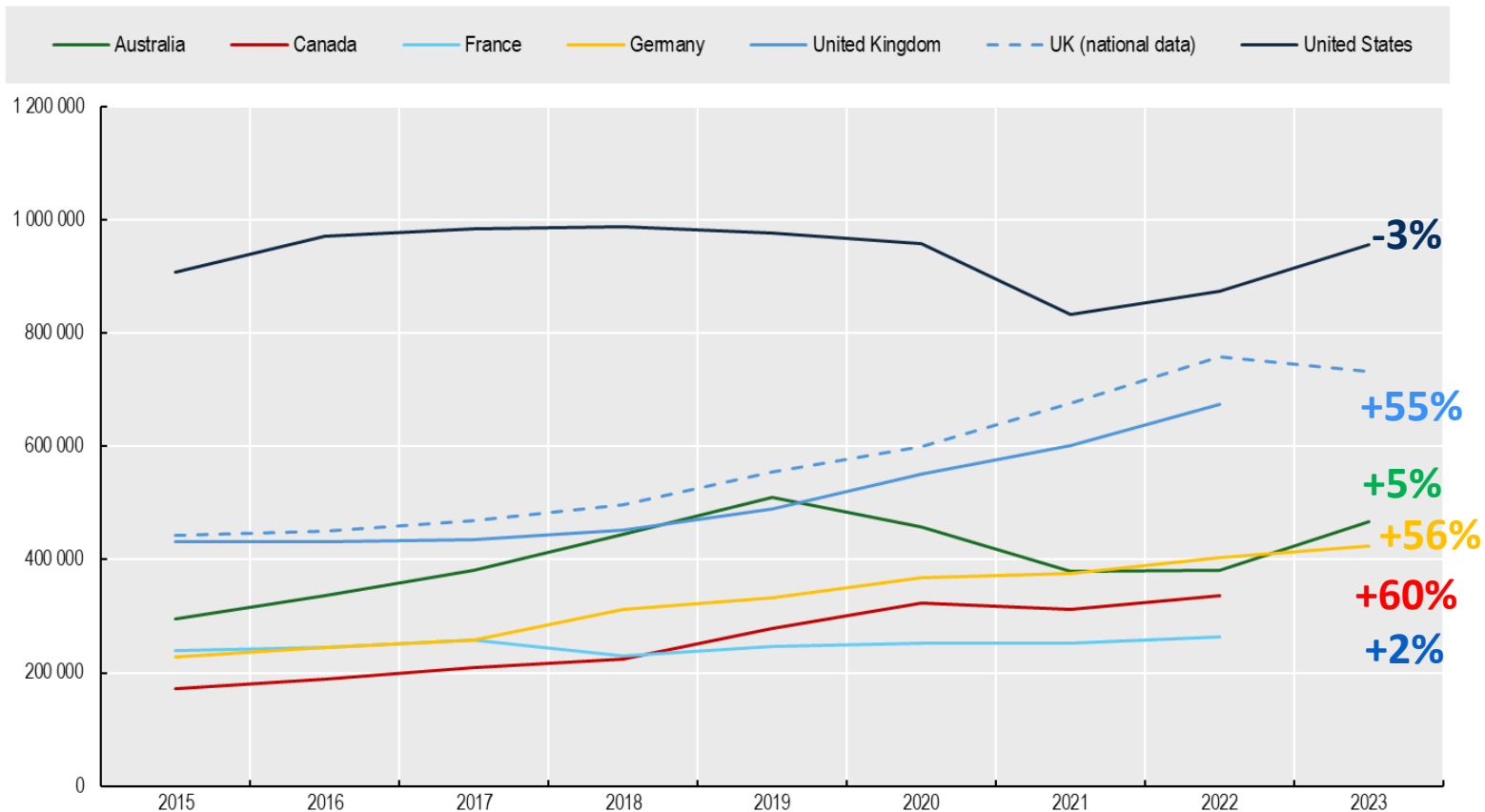
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43% of international students are in the “big six”

But five-year trends vary substantially

Enrolled students



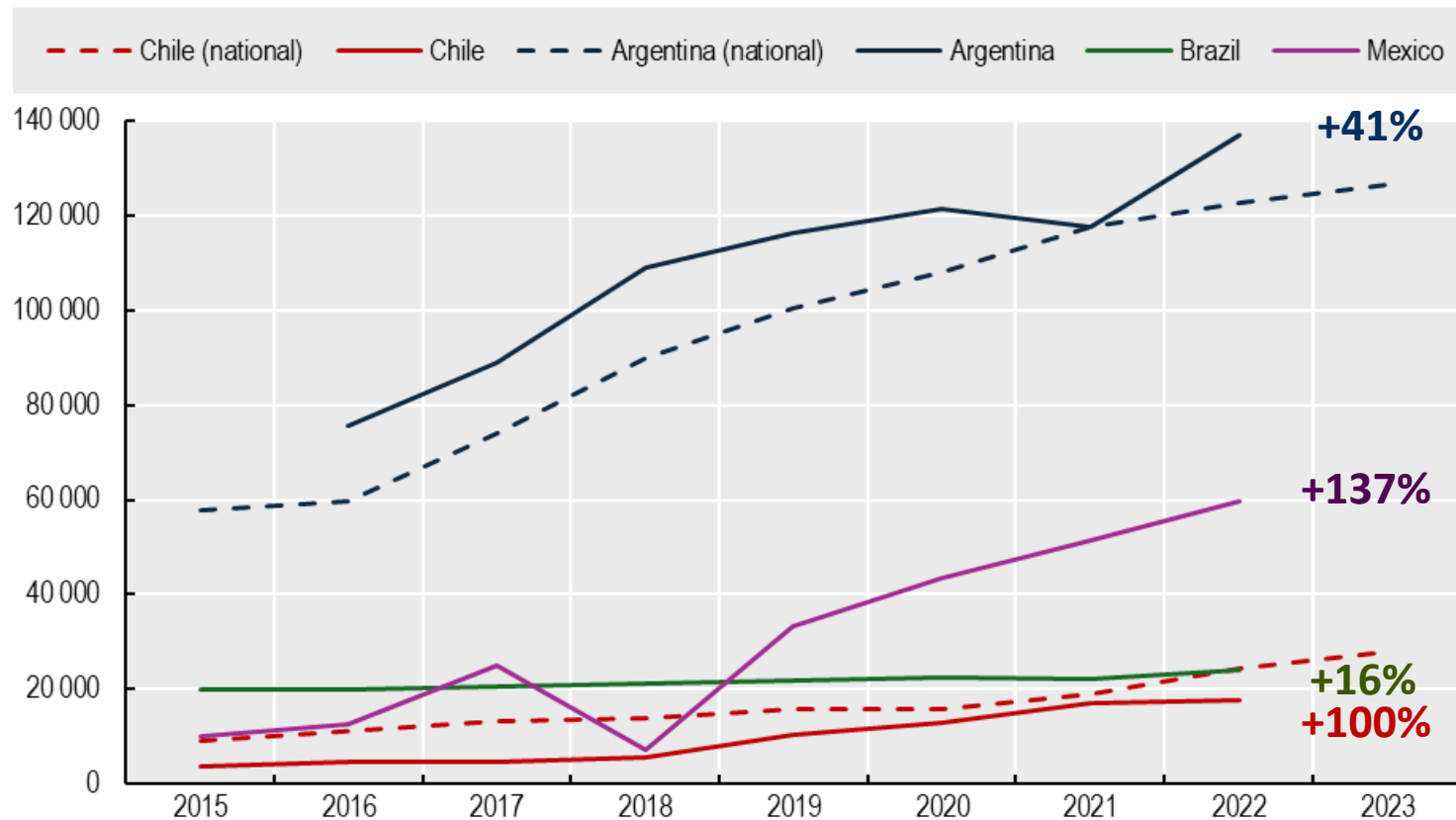
Sources: [OECD](#)/ [UNESCO](#), UK nat.: [HESA](#)

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Trends in Latin America

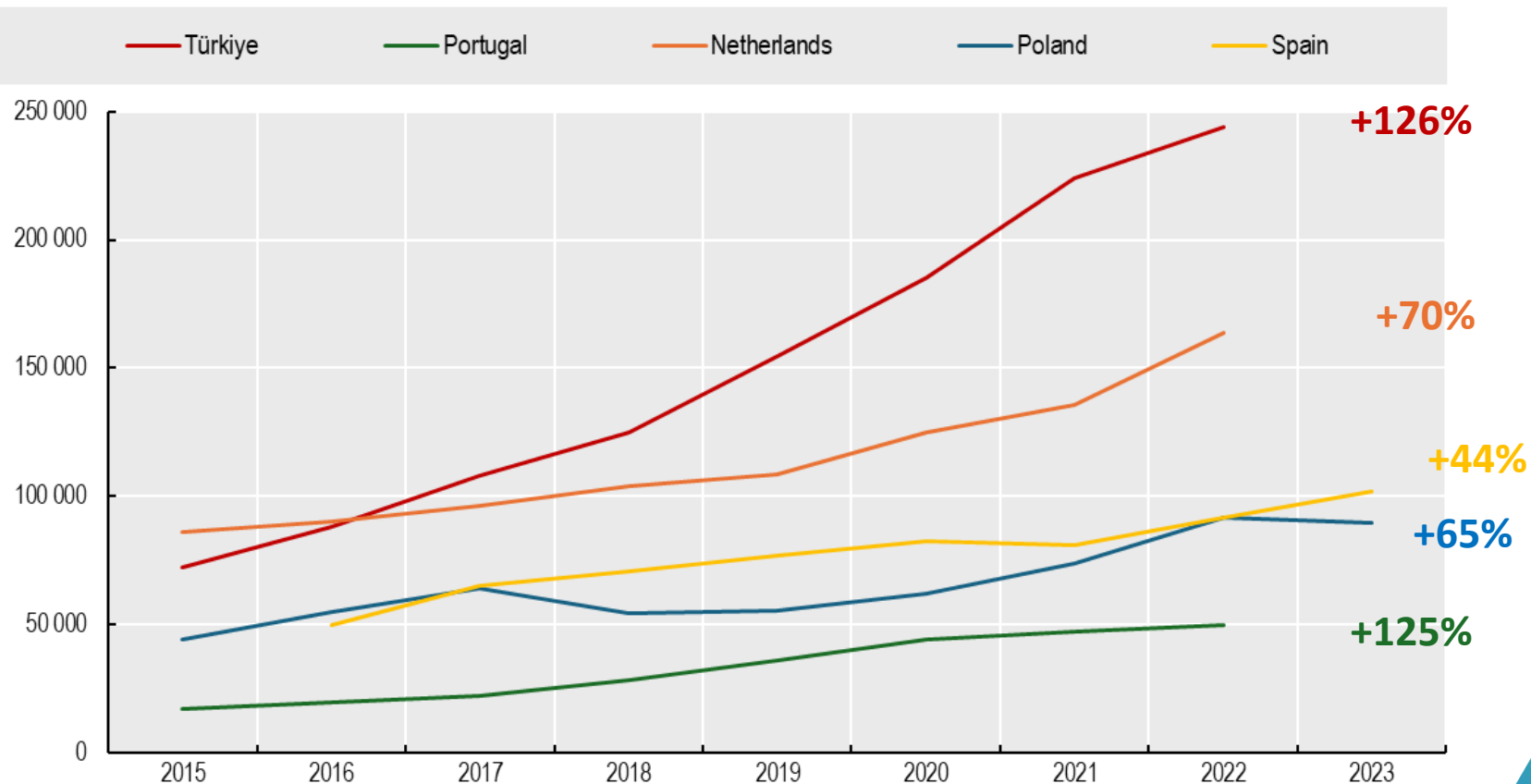
Substantial growth in Mexico, Chile and Argentina





Rising stars in Europe?

Medium to large systems with above-average growth in international students



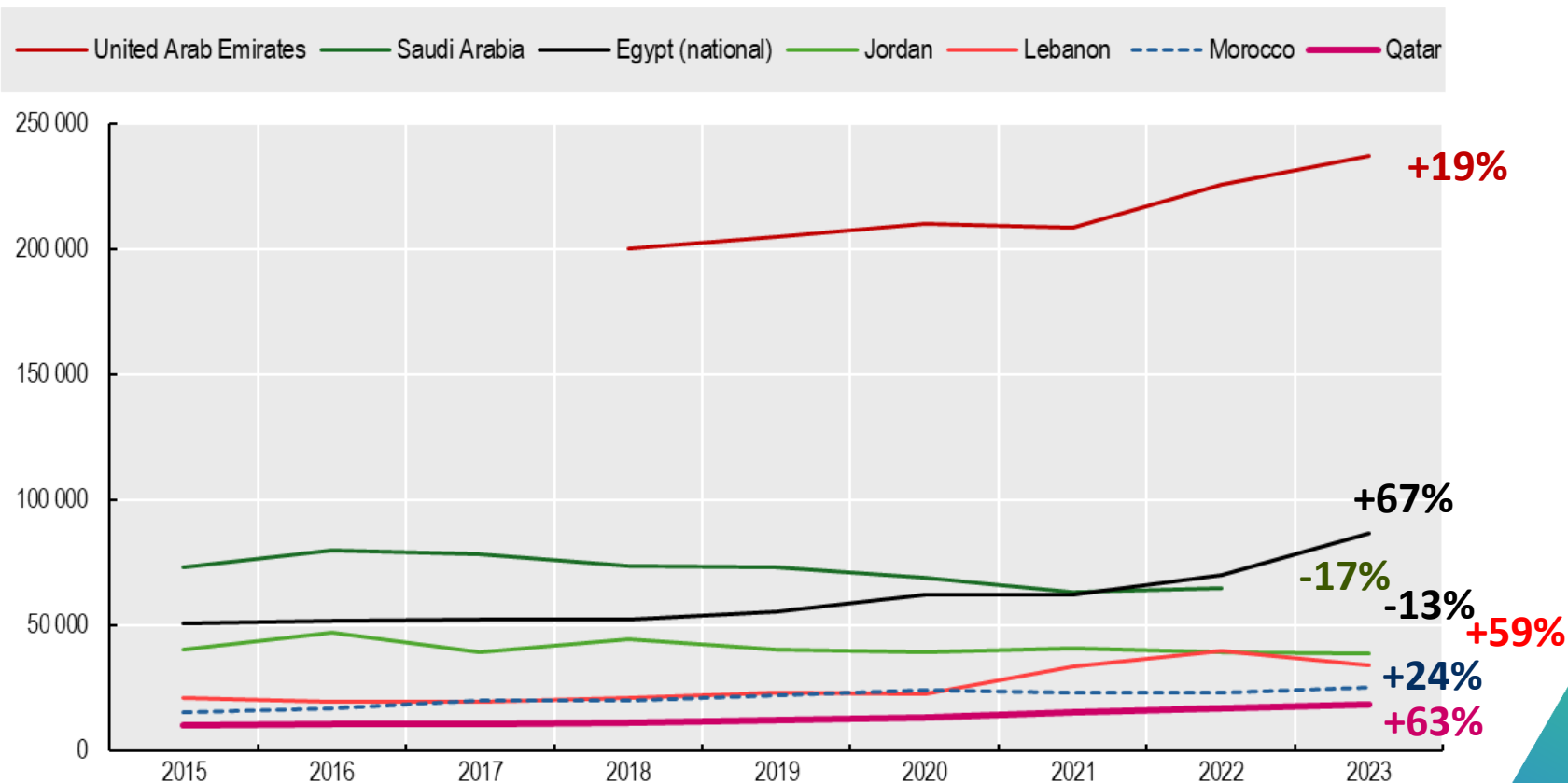
Sources: [OECD](#) / [UNESCO](#)

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Middle East and North Africa (MENA)

The international student population is increasing outside of the Gulf (e.g. Egypt)

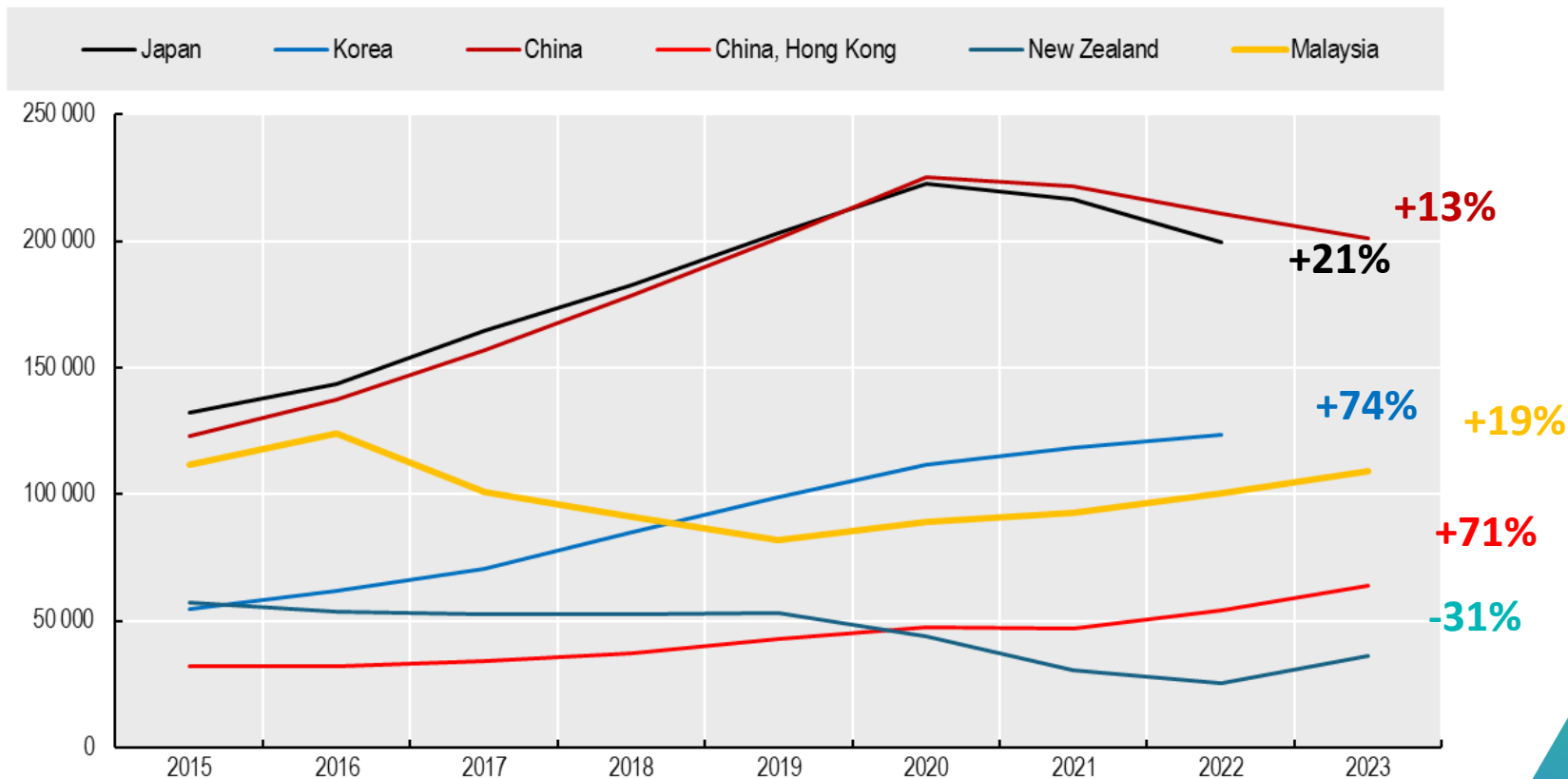


Sources: [UNESCO](https://unesco.org/), OECD Review of Higher Education in Egypt (forthcoming)



Asia and Pacific recovering after the pandemic?

China and Japan recovering, Hong Kong and Korea increasing





International students account for a varying proportion of enrolment

Australia stands out in its reliance on international students

Share of internationally mobile students in total enrolment in 109 countries with available data from 2021-2023 ([UNESCO](#))

25% + = 13 countries

- San Marino (100%)
- Liechtenstein (86%)
- Monaco (85%)
- United Arab Emirates (70%)
- Macao (China) (69%)
- Luxembourg (50%)
- Qatar (41%)
- Bhutan (34%)
- Singapore (33%)
- Malta (30%)
- Turks and Caicos Islands (28%)
- **Australia (27%)**
- Kyrgyzstan (26%)

15 – 25% = 11 countries

- Hong Kong (China) (22%)
- **United Kingdom (22%)**
- Cyprus (20%)
- Austria (20%)
- Switzerland (20%)
- Saint Lucia (19%)
- **Canada (19%)**
- Netherlands (17%)
- Czechia (16%)
- Georgia (15%)
- Slovak Republic (15%)

In 2022, 2.7% of the world's tertiary education students were internationally mobile

5 – 15% = 36 countries

New Zealand (14.9%), Hungary (14.4%), Latvia (13.4%), Lebanon (12.9%), **Germany (12.7%)**, **Portugal (12%)**, Andorra (11.2%), Estonia (11.1%), Ireland (11%), Dominican Republic (10.7%), Slovenia (10.6%), Jordan (10.3%), Belgium (10.1%), Bahrain (10.1%), Denmark (9.9%), Iceland (9.6%), Malaysia (9.6%), Finland (9.3%), **France (9.1%)**, Senegal (9%), Lithuania (8.8%), Bulgaria (8.7%), North Macedonia (8.4%), Bosnia and Herzegovina (7.9%), Bermuda (7.4%), Sweden (7.3%), Mauritius (7.1%), Armenia (7%), Belarus (7%), Moldova (7%), Romania (6.7%), Rwanda (6.6%), Poland (6.6%), **United States (5.3%)**, Samoa (5.2%), Japan (5.1%)

< 5% = 54 countries

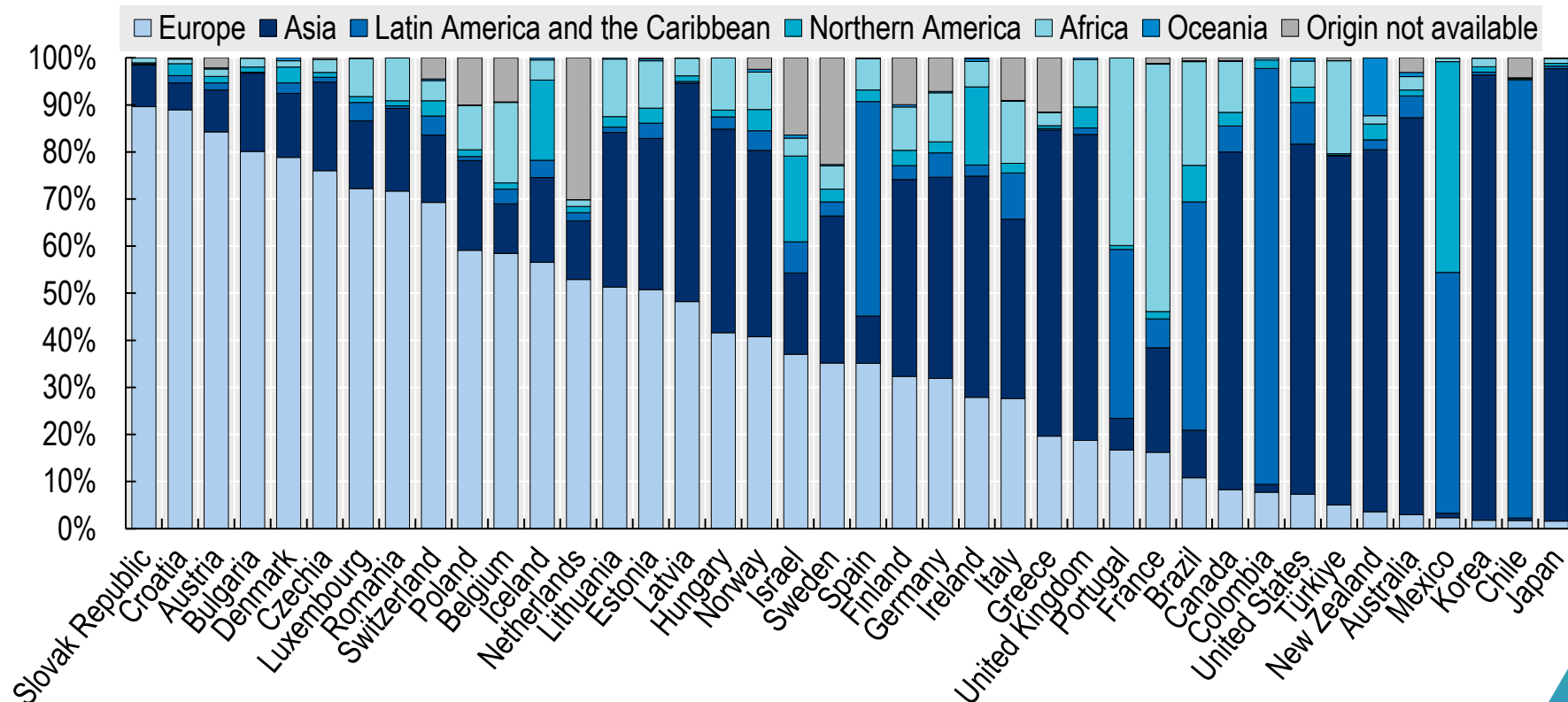
Italy (4.8%), Russian Federation (4.8%), Serbia (4.6%), Norway (4.5%), Brunei (4.4%), Republic of Korea (4.4%), Spain (4.3%), Botswana (4.2%), Saudi Arabia (4.1%), Argentina (3.7%), Croatia (3.6%), Ukraine (3.5%), Israel (3.2%), Namibia (3.1%), Tunisia (3.1%), Benin (3.1%), Greece (3.1%), Panama (3%), Marshall Islands (3%), Türkiye (2.9%), Oman (2.7%), Azerbaijan (2.5%), South Africa (2.5%), Mongolia (2.5%), Egypt (2.3%), Uruguay (2.3%), Cuba (2%), Burkina Faso (1.9%), Morocco (1.8%), Cameroon (1.8%), Nicaragua (1.7%), Albania (1.7%), Chile (1.5%), Thailand (1.4%), Côte d'Ivoire (1.4%), Mexico (1.2%), Ecuador (0.7%), Ghana (0.7%), El Salvador (0.5%), Guatemala (0.4%), Uzbekistan (0.4%), Belize (0.4%), Sri Lanka (0.4%), Tanzania (0.4%), Madagascar (0.3%), China (0.3%), Viet Nam (0.3%), Brazil (0.2%), Colombia (0.2%), Algeria (0.2%), Cambodia (0.2%), India (0.1%), Bangladesh (0.1%), Turkmenistan (0.1%)



The origin of incoming degree-mobile students also varies...

Many European systems attract primarily European students

Distribution of international tertiary students studying in selected OECD countries, by region of origin (2022)





Drivers of international student mobility and related policy

Why students decide to cross borders and governments seek to attract them

Frequent motivations for mobile students	Frequent motivations for policy makers
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Accessing specialised or higher-quality higher education to support future career and earning prospects & post-graduation pathways2. Accessing more prestigious higher education (see above)3. Obtaining a place in higher education when this is highly competitive/impossible in their home country4. Economic migration – moving to a country with better employment opportunities including working during studies5. A preference for something different: a change of country and change of education system6. Safety of the country, country reputation, welcoming culture, ease of access to country7. Costs and scholarships	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Attracting talent to meet labour demand2. Bringing additional revenue into higher education systems3. Bringing additional students into systems to use capacity4. Promoting values (cultural exchange, language learning, intercultural understanding, tolerance) and “soft power” (person-to-person diplomacy, national branding, global development)5. Economic diplomacy and trade connections6. Diversification of student body, internationalisation at home7. Research capacity (international postgraduate students)8. Institutional prestige - international students are prominent in rankings



Policy and international student mobility

1. An interplay of foreign, international development, science, workforce and higher education policy



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40TH ANNIVERSARY

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文部科学省

MEXT|Scholarships



**FRANCE
EXCELLENCE
EIFFEL**




Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst
German Academic Exchange Service



Policy and international student mobility

2. Broad-based approaches to attract international students: generally led by education sector



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HOME

UNIVERSITIES

ADMISSIONS

SCHOLARSHIPS

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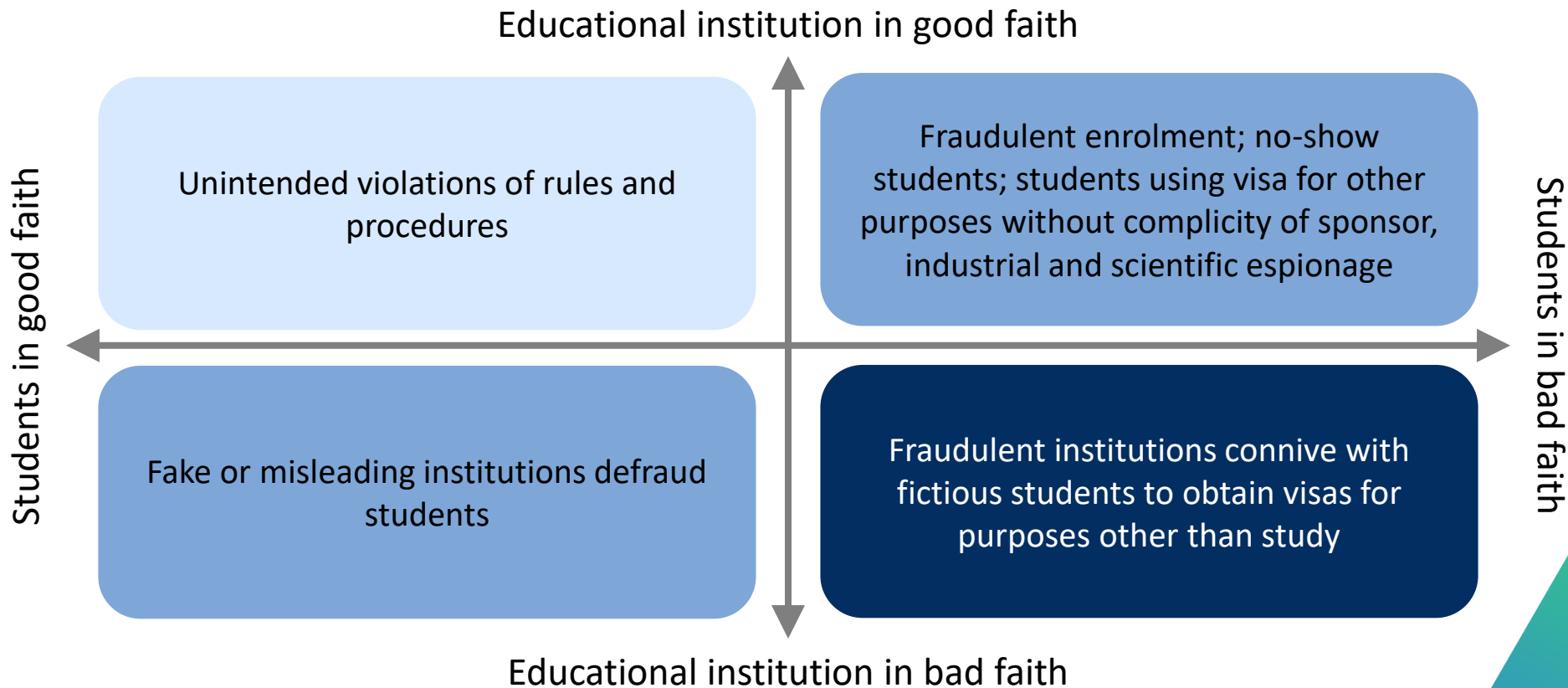
A world of possibilities
Un monde de possibilités





Policy and international student mobility

3. Immigration policy: concerns about misuse of the system





Policy and international student mobility

4. Governments permit institutions to raise money from international and out-of-state students

Annual tuition fees for full-time bachelor's programmes in public or government-dependent institutions in 2023/24 (EUR)

	Domestic / in-state students	International / out-of-state students
California (UC system)	13 180 ⁽²⁾	44 420 ⁽²⁾
England (UCL)	10 650 ⁽²⁾	30 000 – 40 000 ⁽²⁾
Australia (Uni Sydney)	2 480 – 9 100 ⁽¹⁾	27 000 - 35 000 ⁽²⁾
Netherlands (UvA)	2 530	9 570 – 24 640
Belgium (KULeuven)	1 092.10 ⁽³⁾	1 344 – 7 099
Belgium (UCL)	835	2 505
Portugal (Uni Coimbra)	697	7 000
France (Universities)	170	2 770
Finland (Uni Helsinki)	0	13 000 + ⁽⁴⁾

(1) Commonwealth supported places

(2) Tuition only (sticker price)

(3) Full rate for those not receiving student grants

(4) Only for programmes in languages other than Finnish or Swedish

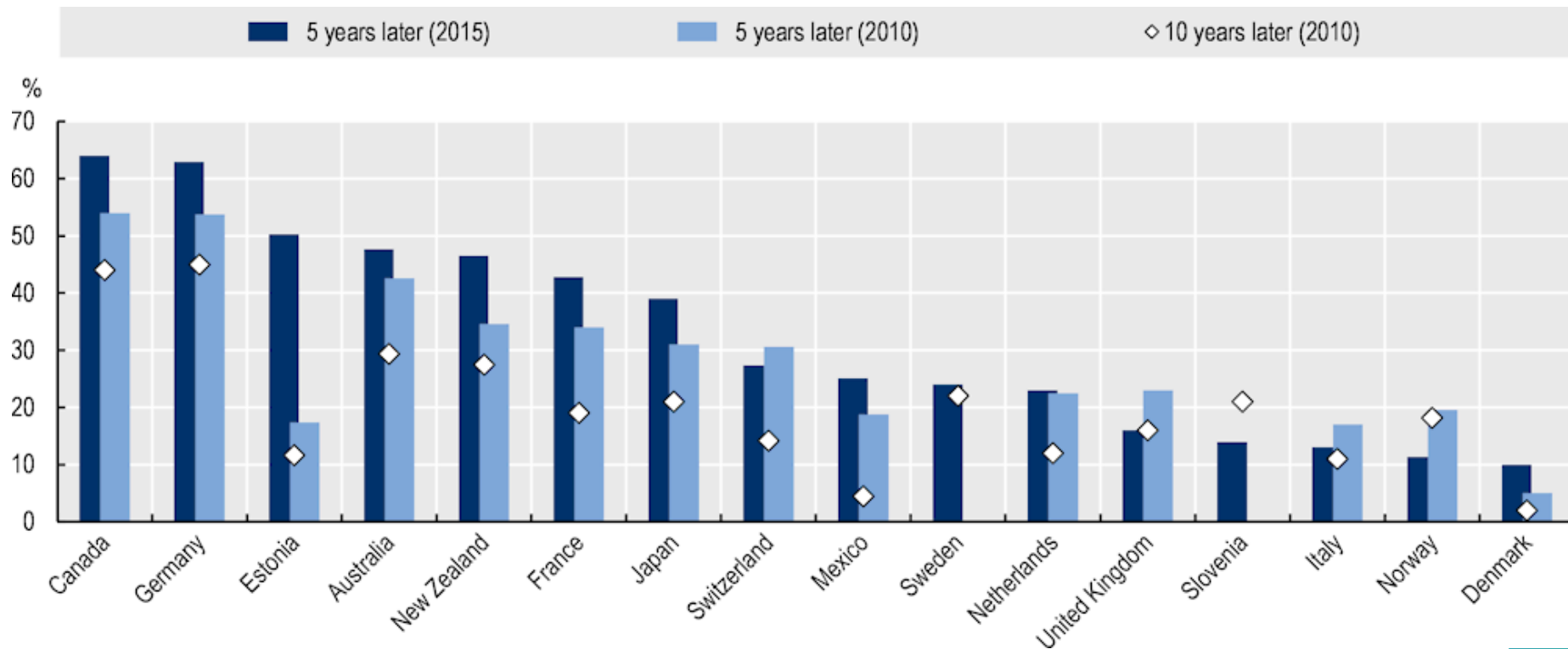
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Policy and international student mobility

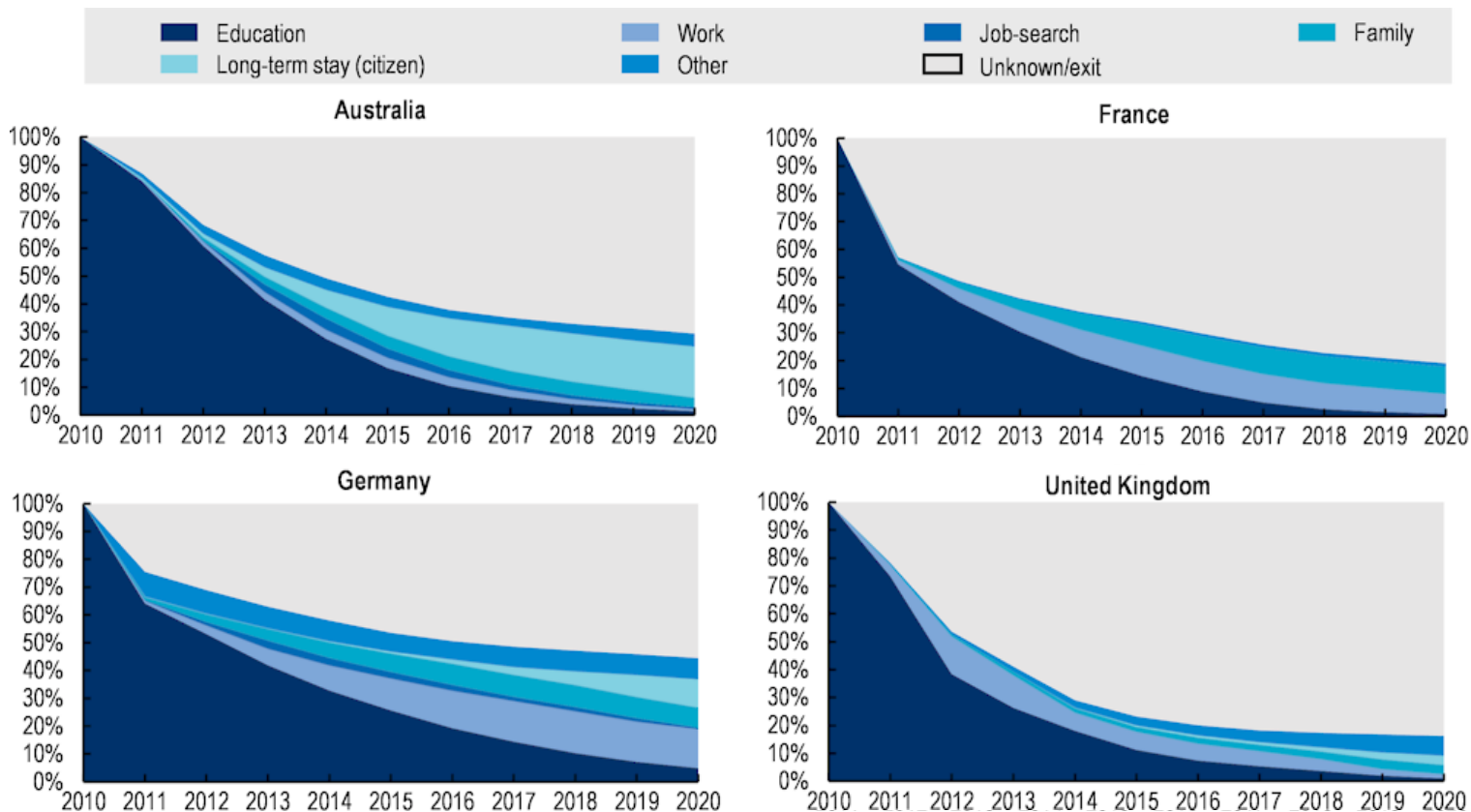
5. Workforce / immigration policy: Five-year retention rates for the cohort of 2015 and 2010





Policy and international student mobility

5. Workforce / immigration policy: retention rates over 10 years vary substantially





Challenges for students and public policy

An increasing tension between higher education and migration policy?

Arrival

- Recruitment, information, guidance
- Admission requirements
- Matching talent / needs with study paths
- Visa and permits
- Affordability
- Securing suitable housing

Study completion

- Academic adaptation
- Integrating with school and local community
- Access to health and support services
- Working while studying

Post-graduation

- Adequate career guidance
- Lack of job experience
- **Hiring practices and policies towards foreigners**
- **Residence and employment permits**

For more information:



OECD > About > Higher Education Policy

Higher Education Policy

The Higher Education Policy Programme carries out analysis on a wide range of higher education systems and policies

Directorate for Education and Skills

<https://www.oecd.org/en/about/programmes/higher-education-policy.html>

