

These COVID-19 Analytical Snapshots are designed to capture the latest information and analysis in a fast-moving environment. Topics will be repeated from time to time as analysis develops. If you have an item to include, please email us at research@iom.int.



New research & analysis on international students & COVID

[Drop in international students would imperil university finances](#) by Jack Britton, Elaine Drayton and Laura van der Erve

[How COVID-19 is impacting prospective international students at different study levels](#) by Quacquarelli Symonds

[Student Exchanges in Times of Crisis](#) by Wim Gabriels and Rasmus Benke-Åberg



The COVID-19 pandemic has upended the lives of many international students, caught in a crisis they could not have predicted or prepared for. Recent estimates put the number of international students in tertiary education globally at [5.3 million in 2017](#). China, India and Germany were the top 3 countries of origin of international students while the largest destination countries included the United States, Australia and the United Kingdom.

Stranded

Travel and movement restrictions, imposed by nearly every country in the world, have left many international students stranded. Those who were unable to return home before the restrictions came into force and were not repatriated by their countries of origin have found themselves stuck, some on [deserted university campuses](#). A [survey](#) on the impact of COVID-19 on exchange student mobility in Europe by the Erasmus Student Network, for example, shows that the inability to return home was among the students' major concerns. Many students in other countries outside Europe, such as [Australia](#), [Senegal](#), [China](#) and others were also left stranded.



Did you know?

International students are significant contributors to several countries' economies. In 2018-19, for example, international students contributed almost USD [41 billion](#) to the economy of the United States while in Australia, their contributions in fees, taxes and spending amounted to more than [38 billion](#) last financial year (up 15% on the previous year).

QS Survey of prospective international students

An [ongoing QS survey](#) of prospective international students showed that by mid-April, more than 50 per cent of those who responded stated that COVID-19 had affected their plans to study abroad, with 46 per cent saying they plan to defer or delay their entry until the following year.



Lacking access to basic needs

International students have not been spared by lockdowns, curfews and business closures. Many have lost jobs and left in [precarious circumstances](#), without income to fulfil basic needs such as housing and food. In Senegal, university closures, coupled with the suspension of flights, left some international students [homeless](#). In countries such as the United States, while some local students have benefited from [federal government stimulus](#) to colleges in response to COVID-19, international students are not included in such aid. While in Australia, COVID-19 is expected to take a toll on international students' ability [to pay rent](#). And [with little to no government help](#), some international students also face the prospect of not completing their studies.

Racism and xenophobia

Some international students have been subjected to and have had to endure incidents of racism and xenophobia, with some people associating them with the spread of COVID-19. In the United Kingdom, Chinese international students have reported [increased racism and discrimination](#). Incidents of racism, including [racist attacks](#) on [Asian students](#), have also been reported in Australia. Meanwhile, racism linked to COVID-19 against students from African countries in China led to some students being [hounded out of their accommodation](#). IOM and other UN agencies have come out in recent weeks to condemn all incidents of racism. Read more about combating xenophobia and racism in [Analytical Snapshot #33](#).



Supporting international students

Several countries – through their federal or state authorities – have stepped up efforts to support international students who are stranded and without work. In Canada, for example, the government has implemented [several measures](#) to help international students, such as [temporarily allowing](#) them to work more than the 20 hours they are permitted to work while classes are in session, as long as they are working in sectors deemed essential. This not only ensures that there are enough workers in essential sectors but also allows international students to sustain themselves financially. In Australia, several state governments, in the wake of COVID-19, have [put in place support packages](#) for international students struggling during the pandemic.



The significant contributions of international students

International students not only play key roles in [knowledge production and circulation](#) in destination countries, but also make significant economic contributions to both the institutions they attend and the [local economies](#) where they live. The COVID-19 pandemic, which has restricted student mobility and closed universities threatens to roll back these contributions, at least in the short-term. A recent [study](#) in the United Kingdom, for example, shows that should there not be enrollments of new international students in the next academic year, the higher education sector would lose about 10 per cent of income.

This COVID-19 Analytical Snapshot has been produced by [IOM Research](#) (research@iom.int).

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