

# Study: International student enrolment in postsecondary education programs prior to COVID-19

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Canadian universities and colleges have become increasingly cosmopolitan over the past decade. International students accounted for 14.7% of total university enrolment in 2017/2018, up from 8.2% in 2008/2009. At the college level, international student enrolment rose from 5.2% to 13.2% over the same period.

A new study provides a snapshot of where these international students came from and what they were studying prior to the onset of the pandemic.

In the wake of COVID-19, prospective international students may be more likely to stay home as they have yet to invest in a Canadian postsecondary education. The data suggest that international enrolments comprise an even larger share of new enrolments than total enrolments. Almost one-quarter (23.8%) of new university enrolments and 16.3% of new college enrolments were international students in 2017/2018.

China was the main source country of international students for 11 of the 12 broad university program areas in 2017/2018, often by a wide margin. At the college level, India was the primary source in 9 of the 12 areas, with China often a close second.

Certain academic programs also rely heavily on international student enrolment. For example, almost one-third of enrolments in "Mathematics, Computer and Information Sciences" were international at both the university (31.6%) and college (30.8%) level in 2017/2018.

International students pay substantially higher tuition fees than their Canadian-born counterparts, and these fees have helped reduce some of the gap between rising operating expenses and stagnant provincial grants over the past decade.

The research article "[International Student Enrolment in Postsecondary Education Programs Prior to COVID-19](#)," published as part of the series *Economic Insights* (**11-626-X**), is now available.

The short summary article "[Which postsecondary programs had high levels of international student enrolment prior to COVID-19?](#)," published as part of the series *StatCan COVID-19: Data to Insights for a Better Canada* (**45280001**), is also now available.

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