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Statements and Recommendations

Working Group Five: The Dynamics of International Student Circulation in a Global Context: A Comparative Analysis of Egypt, India, Indonesia, South Africa and the United States

Key issues and global challenges

Students going abroad are the most visible form of international higher education. Whereas enrolment in higher education increased 40% between 1999 and 2004, student mobility increased by 41% from 1.75 million to 2.5 million. A forecast predicts that by 2010 the global demand for international student places will increase to 3.3 million and in 2020 to approximately 8 million. The purpose of this study is to develop a better understanding of the dynamics of international student circulation in the process of internationalization of higher education in a global context, to assess its implication on higher education in different nations and regions, and to provide recommendations for action and study. The focus of the study is on degree seeking international students in four countries in the South (Egypt, India, Indonesia and South Africa) perceived to be primarily on the sending side of student mobility, and two regions in the North (Europe and the USA) perceived to be primarily but not exclusively on the receiving side. Given the fact that student flows are looked into both inward and outward, the term international student circulation is introduced. Existing assumptions regarding patterns of international student circulation (that it is primarily South-North and North-North, and that South-South flows are rather marginal; that student mobility is dominated by economic rationales; that the growing presence of national and international providers of higher education, as well as opportunities for distance education, will reduce the need for international student mobility) are questioned and discussed.

New perspectives

The study provides important data and analyses of the specific role of international student circulation in Southern countries, what makes the study already in itself unique and provides new perspectives on this theme. Regarding existing assumptions, although the economic rationale stays dominant, for instance the religious factor appears to be relevant for changing patterns in student flows in the case of students from Islamic countries. The emergence of cross-border delivery of programs and institutions – based on the data available- appears to have still a rather marginal impact on student flows. And although South-North and North-North student flows are still dominant, one can observe an increase in South-South student mobility: the emergence of regional hubs, also by countries that remain themselves senders of students to the North. Different push and pull factors are looked into for each of the case studies. Inbound and outbound flows are related to rationales and to main approaches to internationalization: mutual understanding; skill migration, revenue generation and capacity building.

Recommendations

- Definitions and data should become more compatible. UNESCO's work on statistics should be supported by common definitions and criteria and more up to date input by the different countries.
- It is also recommended that the example of Australia to include specific data on international student flows in cross-border activities will become generalised and incorporated in the data by UNESCO and OECD.

- Adoption by nations and institutions of higher education of the guidelines for cross-border education as developed by UNESCO and OECD should be stimulated.
- To enhance international student circulation, governments should apply conducive conditions to attract students including investment in the quality aspects of higher education, reasonable visa and study permit conditions, and strategic partnerships at the national and institutional levels
- The emergence and role of regional hubs in student circulation in the South, the role of regional protocols and agreements, and possible impacts and future trends of these practices are to be given more attention and should be further analyzed.
- The role and impact of religion and other cultural/social rationales on international student circulation require more attention.
- The risks and opportunities of revenue generation in international student circulation for individuals, institutions and nations requires attention by policy makers at the (inter)national level.
- The debate on skill migration and brain circulation related to student mobility remains relevant for further action and study, and should include the design of instruments for mutual benefits and opportunities for the North and the South.
- Where emphasis is still on South-North and North-North mobility and the underlying study is addressing South-South mobility, North-South mobility should be given more priority: identification of what are current push and pull factors for such mobility, what are the main challenges restraining such mobility, and what are potentials for its increase.