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**EMBARGOED TO 1AM CET, 15 OCTOBER**

## **International students contribute \$1.7 trillion to their host economies through their careers**

*New research that tracks half a million international graduates shows how they contribute to economies, and societies, and help plug critical skills gaps.*

Cambridge, United Kingdom — International students worldwide who graduated in 2024 are set to generate a staggering \$1.7 trillion to host economies over their working lives, according to a major global study. 60% of this value goes to the Big Four study destinations: The US, UK, Canada and Australia.

Until now, most research in this area has measured the value of international students through the money they generate during their studies. The new report, *Talent Beyond Borders*, developed by Studyportals and Cambridge IELTS, is the first to examine what happens to international students after they leave university and where they go on to build their careers.

International students' economic contribution has traditionally been assessed primarily through tuition fees and local spending during their studies. A global estimate published in 2019 put the economic impact of internationally mobile students during their studies, at around USD 300 billion, based on 2016 data.

The new analysis broadens this perspective by considering the economic contribution of international graduates over their working lives. The 2024 graduating cohort alone is estimated to contribute USD 1.7 trillion through their careers in the country of study.

Taken alongside previous estimates of the economic impact generated during students' studies, this points to a total economic contribution associated with international students and graduates of around USD 2 trillion, illustrating the much

greater economic value of international education when its longer-term effects are considered.

But experts behind the report say the economic value is only part of their contribution to society. The report also shows that the impact of international graduates goes well beyond economic output. These graduates help drive innovation, entrepreneurship, international networks, soft power, intercultural understanding and long-term competitiveness; they are founders, leaders, mentors, investors and connectors between countries and cultures.

**Edwin van Rest, CEO and co-founder of Studyportals says:**

"Many of the world's most successful companies, universities, research labs and governments are led by former international students. This is the first time their labour contribution is quantified. International students are worth so much more as a talent source than they are in tuition fees and local spend. Furthermore, there's a lot more they bring in social impact and soft power that no spreadsheet can capture. We hope this supports policy makers and the world to not only think about international education as an export, but to more comprehensively consider their contributions. And as global demographics shift, that talent impact is only going to become more critical."

**Francesca Woodward, Global Managing Director, English at Cambridge University Press & Assessment says:**

"International students bring significant value to countries all over the world. *Talent Beyond Borders* puts this firmly in the spotlight. Our new report places the economic contribution international students make to host economies at \$1.7 trillion over a lifetime, which is a remarkable figure. But the financial impact is only part of the story when you consider the social and cultural impact students have on the countries where they study, work and live.

"International students enrich communities, plug vital skills gaps, boost diversity and help build stronger connections between people and countries. The report also paints a fascinating picture of the pathways students take after graduation and highlights the positive impact they continue to have on communities around the world".

**Where international graduates go after university**

The report classifies international graduate pathways into three groups:

- 'Stayers' (41% of graduates globally) remain in the country where they studied and join the local workforce, helping fill skills gaps and strengthen the economy.

- 'Homecomers' (35% of graduates) return to their home country, bringing back the skills, networks and perspectives they gained abroad.
- 'Nomads' (24% of graduates) move on to a third country, using their international education as a springboard into regional or global job markets.

Each pathway creates value differently: some fill skills shortages where they studied; others bring skills and international networks home, while others connect countries through careers that span borders.

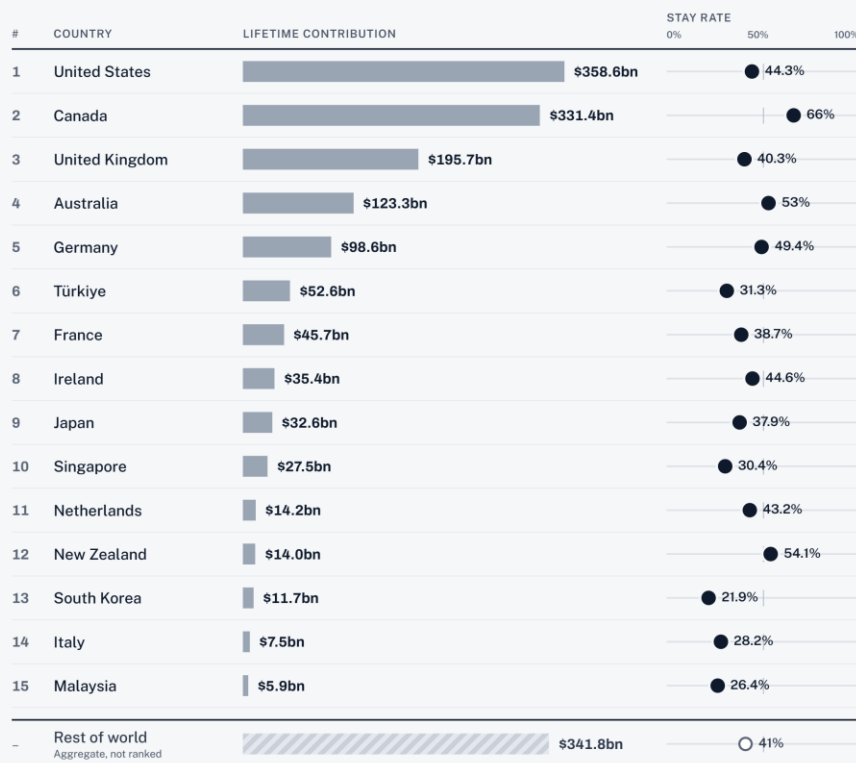
### **The report estimates a \$1.7 trillion economic contribution**

The report estimates that of the 7.3 million international students worldwide in 2023, around 2.67m graduated in 2024. The research finds that 41% remain in their study destination after graduation, meaning around 1.1 million international graduates join host-country labour markets annually. A single annual cohort of these graduate Stayers generates approximately USD 110 billion in economic output in their first year of work and USD 1.7 trillion over their working lifetime, given their retention patterns.

The report finds that this value is concentrated in The United States, United Kingdom, Australia and Canada. While the 'Big Four', host just 35% of the world's international students, they account for almost 60% of total first-year economic output. Together, these four destinations generate an estimated USD 1 trillion in lifetime value from the international students that graduated in 2024. For reference, that's equal to the 2025 GDP of Switzerland.

To provide a representative global estimate, the analysis focuses on fifteen major international study destinations, where the best data is available and which collectively host approximately 60% of the world's internationally mobile students.

The report also compares the lifetime economic contribution of those graduating in 2024 and entering the workforce in 2025 for these countries. It also shows the percentage of international graduates who stay to work in their host country. The stay rate is based on Studyportals' global dataset containing over half a million international graduates.



INTERNATIONAL GRADUATE MOBILITY · 2024 COHORT

## One graduating class. \$1.7 trillion.

The lifetime economic contribution of 2024's international graduates to the countries they study in, and the share of graduates each country keeps.

■ Lifetime contribution, US\$ bn ● Graduate stay rate

### International graduates help fill critical skills gaps

Talent Beyond Borders also looks at how international graduate Stayers fill an important role in shortage-affected sectors, in particular including Medicine and Health, Engineering and Technology and Computer Science and IT. Across these shortage-relevant fields, Stayers are the largest persona, accounting for 48% of Medicine and Health graduates, 59% of Engineering and Technology and 56% of Computer Science & IT.

— ENDS —

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## Notes to Editors

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|----------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|
| <a href="#"><u>Embargoed Report access for journalists</u></a> | <a href="#"><u>Link to share with readers</u></a> |
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### Additional information below

- International graduates profiled in the report
  - Key data summary
  - Country-by-country comparisons: at a glance
  - Explanation of methodology
  - About Talent Beyond Borders
  - About Studyportals
  - About Cambridge IELTS
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## International graduates profiled in the report

(Click to read their stories)



GRADUATE VOICE

### Ousman Camara

🌐 THE GAMBIA → QATAR → GERMANY

One Scholarship Created Opportunities for Thousands of Students: Ousman's Story

*"My experience in Germany, the Middle East, and from Africa is helping people all over the world."*

— OUSMAN CAMARA



GRADUATE VOICE

### Lívia Ribeiro de Souza

🌐 BRAZIL → GERMANY AND UK → UNITED KINGDOM

From International Student to Entrepreneur: How Lívia Ribeiro de Souza Built a Sustainable Technology Company

*"It's not just the economic impact, but also the cultural exchanges graduates bring that enrich a country."*

— LÍVIA RIBEIRO DE SOUZA



GRADUATE VOICE

### Naomi Thompson

🌐 SOUTH AFRICA → UNITED STATES → SOUTH AFRICA

Building Bridges Through Legal Innovation: How international education shaped Naomi Thompson's path

*"What I've always wanted to do and what I'm busy building is that bridge between what happens internationally and in South Africa."*

— NAOMI THOMPSON

### Key data summary:

| Economic contribution                                                                                                                          |                                                     |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|
| What international students who graduated in 2024 and stay to work in their host countries are expected to contribute throughout their careers | <b>USD 1.7 trillion</b>                             |
| What international students who graduated in 2024 and stayed to work in their host countries contributed in 2025                               | <b>USD 110 billion</b>                              |
| International graduates tracked in the study                                                                                                   | <b>500,000+ worldwide</b>                           |
| Graduate mobility outcomes                                                                                                                     |                                                     |
| Stay                                                                                                                                           | <b>41%</b>                                          |
| Return home                                                                                                                                    | <b>35%</b>                                          |
| Move to a third country                                                                                                                        | <b>24%</b>                                          |
| Nationality trends                                                                                                                             |                                                     |
| Most likely to stay in their study destination                                                                                                 | <b>India, Iran, Nepal</b>                           |
| Most likely to return home                                                                                                                     | <b>Kenya, South Africa, Sri Lanka</b>               |
| Most likely to study in one country, build a career in another                                                                                 | <b>France, Italy, Spain</b>                         |
| Study destination outcomes                                                                                                                     |                                                     |
| Destinations where the highest proportion of graduates stay to work after studying                                                             | <b>Canada (66%), Australia (53%), Germany (49%)</b> |
| Destinations with the biggest lifetime economic contribution of Stayer graduates                                                               | <b>US, Canada, UK, Australia</b>                    |
| Destinations with the biggest lifetime economic contribution of Stayer graduates (outside the 'Big Four')                                      | <b>Germany, Türkiye, France, Ireland</b>            |

## Country-by-country comparisons: at a glance

1. **United States:** The 2024 cohort of international graduates in the United States represents a lifetime economic contribution of **\$358.6 billion** to the country, with **44%** of graduates staying after their studies.
2. **Canada:** The 2024 cohort of international graduates in Canada represents a lifetime economic contribution of **\$331.4 billion (Approximately C\$460bn)** to the country, with **66%** of graduates staying after their studies.
3. **United Kingdom:** The 2024 cohort of international graduates in the United Kingdom represents a lifetime economic contribution of **\$195.7 billion (approximately GBP 148 billion)** to the country, with **40%** of graduates staying after their studies
4. **Australia:** The 2024 cohort of international graduates in Australia represents a lifetime economic contribution of **\$123.3 billion (approximately AUD 190 billion)** to the country, with **53%** of graduates staying after their studies.
5. **Germany:** The 2024 cohort of international graduates in Germany represents a lifetime economic contribution of **\$98.6 billion** to the country, with **49%** of graduates staying after their studies. This is the highest stay rate among the European destinations included in the analysis.
6. **Türkiye:** The 2024 cohort of international graduates in Türkiye represents a lifetime economic contribution of **\$52.6 billion** to the country, with **31%** of graduates staying after their studies.
7. **France:** The 2024 cohort of international graduates in France represents a lifetime economic contribution of **\$45.7 billion** to the country, with **39%** of graduates staying after their studies.
8. **Ireland:** The 2024 cohort of international graduates in Ireland represents a lifetime economic contribution of **\$35.4 billion** to the country, with **45%** of graduates staying after their studies.
9. **Japan:** The 2024 cohort of international graduates in Japan represents a lifetime economic contribution of **\$32.6 billion** to the country, with **38%** of graduates staying after their studies.
10. **Singapore:** The 2024 cohort of international graduates in Singapore represents a lifetime economic contribution of **\$27.5 billion** to the country, with **30%** of graduates staying after their studies.
11. **Netherlands:** The 2024 cohort of international graduates in the Netherlands represents a lifetime economic contribution of **\$14.2 billion** to the country, with **43%** of graduates staying after their studies.
12. **New Zealand:** The 2024 cohort of international graduates in New Zealand represents a lifetime economic contribution of **\$14.0 billion** to the country, with **54%** of graduates staying after their studies.

13. **South Korea:** The 2024 cohort of international graduates in South Korea represents a lifetime economic contribution of **\$11.7 billion** to the country, with **22%** of graduates staying after their studies.
14. **Italy:** The 2024 cohort of international graduates in Italy represents a lifetime economic contribution of **\$7.5 billion** to the country, with **28%** of graduates staying after their studies.
15. **Malaysia:** The 2024 cohort of international graduates in Malaysia represents a lifetime economic contribution of **\$5.9 billion** to the country, with **26%** of graduates staying after their studies.

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## Supporting quotes

**Dr Leyla Karatay, Senior Research Manager at Cambridge University Press & Assessment, and co-author of the report said:**

“Talent Beyond Borders will help international graduates feel seen and valued. This report recognizes many ways they contribute to economies, workplaces and communities”.

**Dr Carla Pastorino, Principal Research Manager for IELTS and co-author of the report said:**

“The Talent Beyond Borders report highlights that international graduate mobility is a complex and individualised journey. Through this journey, students have an impact on the communities where they study, live and work many times over, not only through their economic contributions but crucially through the cultural and social exchanges they foster”.

**Arunima Dey, Research Analyst at Studyporals, and co-author of the report said:**

“What makes this dataset particularly valuable is not just its scale, but its comparability. International graduate outcomes are often measured differently across countries, making meaningful comparisons difficult. This dataset applies a consistent framework across key markets, allowing us to identify global patterns that would be difficult to observe through national statistics alone.”

**Tayyeb Shah, President, European Association for International Education (EAIE) said:**

“With internationalisation under pressure in many countries around the world, and narratives circulating that suggest hosting international students brings more burdens than benefits, the findings from the 2026 Talent Beyond Borders report offer a crucially important, data-supported indication that this perspective could not be further from the truth. Societies in many different parts of the world are experiencing tangible gains from international student enrolments, the retention of graduates, and the wider circulation

of this mobile talent. International student mobility is a public good that deserves ongoing support from the key stakeholders benefitting from these dynamics.”

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## Explanation of Methodology:

### What is the \$1.7 trillion measuring?

- It estimates what international graduates **contribute after graduation**, rather than the tuition fees and living costs they generate while studying.
- **The economic model focuses on graduates who stay** and work in the country where they studied. This does not mean Stayers are more valuable than Homecomers or Nomads. Stayers are the group whose contribution can be modelled most consistently using available data.
- The number of **international students is based on 2023** data, reflecting the latest year for which comparable global coverage was available through UNESCO at the time of analysis. It estimates that a certain **percentage of students graduate in 2024**. 2025 is taken as the first full year of employment for 2024 Stayers. This model therefore takes into account that degrees vary in length and does not assume every 2024 graduate first enrolled in 2023.

### What is the Studyportals Graduate Outcomes Dataset?

It is a global dataset containing over half a million international graduates. It combines Studyportals user data with publicly available professional and education information to examine where graduates work after study, which sectors they enter, and whether they stay, return home or move to another country. For this report, the analysis uses the first identified job after graduation.

### How is the \$1.7 trillion figure calculated?

To provide a representative global estimate, the analysis focuses on fifteen major international study destinations, which collectively host approximately 60% of the world's internationally mobile students. Estimates for the Rest of the World are also calculated.

## The methodology in 6 steps

### Step 1 Count international students

We used UNESCO's 2023 data to estimate the number of international students worldwide

### Step 2: Calculate annual graduates

We used graduation figures and historical graduation ratios to estimate how many international students completed a degree in 2024.

### Step 3: Estimate who stays

We used Studyportals' Graduate Outcomes data, covering more than half a million students, to estimate how many international graduates stayed in the country where they studied.

#### **Step 4: Measure their economic contribution in the first year**

We used World Bank data to estimate how much the 2024 graduates who stayed, contributed to the economy in their first year of work (2025).

#### **Step 5: Model long-term retention**

We used the [OECD's International Migration Outlook 2022](#) data to estimate how many graduates stay over which timeframes.

#### **Step 6: Project lifetime contribution**

GDP per worker was projected forward annually based on a long-term productivity growth trends.

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### **About Talent Beyond Borders**

International students are too often reduced to a source of tuition income. This initiative by Studyportals and Cambridge IELTS uses large-scale data and econometric analysis paired with real stories to show where they go, what they work on, and the many ways they contribute to our societies after graduation. The initiative is supported by EAIE (The European Association of International Education).

### **About Studyportals**

Studyportals began as a group of international student associations coming together to solve a student problem. Today it is the global platform making education choice transparent, empowering students worldwide to choose the education that fits their needs best — and helping universities connect with the right students.

### **About Cambridge University Press & Assessment**

Cambridge University Press & Assessment, is a department of the University of Cambridge. Our English team produces the world's leading range of learning resources and assessments for learners and teachers of English. Everything we do is based on research and we are dedicated to helping people learn English and prove their skills to the world. Cambridge is where your world grows.

The Cambridge English exams, which are designed for all levels of English language ability, include [IELTS](#), the world's most trusted English language test. IELTS is jointly owned by the British Council; IDP IELTS; and Cambridge University Press & Assessment.

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