MIGRATION AND TERTIARY EDUCATION*

Chapter 11

Rapid technological advances are changing modern economies, which now depend heavily on the production of ideas rather than tangible goods. Maintaining a highly skilled workforce has become increasingly important for industries seeking to develop or maintain a competitive edge. Rising demand for skilled workers has led to larger numbers of students seeking to obtain tertiary education, many of whom choose to pursue their studies outside their country of origin.

As a result, cross-border education is now included in the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) as a tradable commodity. Of the four types of mobility addressed by GATS, this paper focuses on the mobility of students, in the context of youth migration. UNESCO defines 'mobile students' as those who cross a border to seek education, and works with global, regional and national authorities to ensure that students receive a quality education that will benefit all concerned: the student and both origin and destination countries. Implementing a standard for cross-border education contributes to economic development through human capital formation and the creation of an efficient higher education market. Moreover, students have a right to education, and discussions about cross-border education should place priority on supporting students and giving them the opportunities they need to achieve better livelihoods.

TRENDS IN CROSS-BORDER EDUCATION

In 2004 the International Labor Organization (ILO) estimated that nearly 70 per cent of all new jobs require post-secondary education.[1] The number of students enrolled in tertiary education is increasing in all parts of the world. According to UNESCO's Global Education Digests (GEDs) the number of students enrolled in tertiary education institutions worldwide nearly doubled between 1991 and 2004-- from 68 million students to 132 million. By 2009, even during the financial crisis, enrollment rates continued to rise, reaching 164.5 million.[2] That same year over 3.3 million students were pursuing a degree outside their country of permanent residence or prior education, representing 2 per cent of all students enrolled in tertiary education institutions (GED 2011). With the emergence of middle classes in countries such as China and India, demand for cross-border higher education is likely to continue rising.

Students look to cross-border education, first and foremost, as a means to secure better career opportunities. Degrees received in major host countries are perceived as academically superior to those in their home countries, and the cultural experience and acquisition of a foreign language serve to enhance students' skills and competitiveness. Students may also choose to study in a country where income levels are higher than those of their home country in hopes of remaining, and gaining an advantage for employment from having studied in that country.[3]

Box 11.1. Tertiary education expanding in the Arab World

Most of the nearly 167,000 internationally mobile young people studying at the tertiary level in Western Asia in 2009 came from within the region. In some countries – such as Lebanon, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) – internationally mobile female students outnumber their male counterparts (representing 54, 56 and 52 per cent, respectively, of the total number of students from abroad). The number of young people migrating to study in the region is liable to grow. Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE are expanding their tertiary education facilities, by founding or expanding home-grown universities and/or collaboration with universities abroad.

Student migration is important in the "global search for talent", especially since many students stay in their countries of study to take up job opportunities.[4] Thus these new university hubs are likely to have a major impact on intra-Arab student mobility flows. They open new opportunities for students from the region to study at prestigious tertiary educational institutions without having to travel outside the region. For countries of destination such as Qatar, seeking to upgrade the skills of their migrant workforce,[5] such inflows of students can help to ensure that potential future migrants have relevant skills and knowledge of the country.[6]

However, in the absence of appropriate regional cooperation, this new trend may also exacerbate concerns about 'brain drain' of students and staff from poorer countries of the region.[7] The dearth of research and understanding on the effects of student mobility in general,[8] and student mobility within the Arab region in particular, makes it difficult to draw conclusions on this form of mobility and its effects. However, as expansion continues, there is an urgent need to consider the impacts of this trend from a regional perspective to ensure that the benefits are shared.

Source: Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, submission to Thematic Report.

While North America and Western Europe have long been the preferred destinations for international students (58.6 per cent), a significant number decide to study in a neighbouring region. In this case, the choice of destination country largely depends on geographic proximity and the cultural and historical affiliation between the countries of origin and destination, as well as cost and the availability of scholarships.[9] Table 11.1 shows destination preferences according to mobile students' country of origin.

Different patterns of student mobility by region call for region-sensitive policy frameworks when developing guidelines to support and encourage international cooperation in the provision of cross-border higher education.

Data on emerging global shortages of highly educated and skilled personnel indicates that the trend of cross border education and training will increase considerably in coming years. A recent study by the McKinsey Global Institute (MGI)[10] forecast that by 2020 the global economy could face 38 million to 40 million fewer workers with tertiary education than employers worldwide will need --13 percent of demand for such workers, along with 45 million too few workers with secondary education --15 percent of total demand. Addressing these imbalances will require concerted, global efforts to raise educational attainment and provide job-specific training. The report projects that advanced economies will need to double the pace of increase in young people earning college degrees and find ways to graduate more students in high demand fields of science, engineering, and other technical fields. Cross border movement of students to educational centres and employment opportunities for these skills is already rising, propelled by market demand and imperatives to raise productivity, and will continue to increase. The MGI forecast also shows that secondary and vocational training must be expanded to provide needed job skills for the many youth who cannot pursue university studies.

Table 11.1. Destination for outbound students by region

Destination / Origin	Arab states	Central and Eastern Europe	Central Asia	East Asia and the Pacific	Latin America and the Caribbean	North America and Western Europe	South and West Asia	Sub-Saharan Africa	Total
Arab states	19.5	6.7	0.5	7.2	0.2	64.5	1.8	0.1	100.5
Central and Eastern Europe	0.2	34.7	3.0	1.2	0.1	60.9	0.02	0.01	100.1
Central Asia	0.4	59.1	21.4	3.7	0.03	15.3	0.2	-	100.1
East Asia and the Pacific	0.2	3.0	0.4	42.5	0.4	53.3	0.2	0.01	100.01
Latin America and Caribbean	0.3	1.0	0.002	2.8	22.8	73.3	0.02	0.001	100.2
North America and Western Europe	1.0	4.4	0.03	6.1	1.6	86.9	0.2	0.01	100.2
South and West Asia	1.2	4.6	1.3	20.6	0.4	70.3	1.5	0.01	99.9
Sub-Saharan Africa	2.9	3.1	0.01	6.0	2.8	61.5	0.8	22.5	99.6

Source: UNESCO, Global Education Digest 2011.

REGULATORY FRAMEWORKS

The increasing number of cross-border students has put the recognition of academic and professional qualifications high on the international cooperation agenda. Cooperation across borders is a preliminary step for mutual recognition and quality management in cross-border education. Recognition of qualifications and existence of quality controls is vital to ensuring that students receive the education they seek. In

this regard, UNESCO has promoted regulatory frameworks, codes of conduct and quality guidelines in recent years.

Credential recognition: The UNESCO Regional Conventions on Qualifications Recognition are legal agreements aimed at promoting the recognition of academic qualifications for academic purposes. They include six regional conventions and one inter-regional convention (including East, West and Southern Africa, Arab States, Asia and Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean, and two European conventions, as well as the inter-regional Mediterranean Convention). In total, 134 states have ratified the convention of their region. Recognition allows states to take part in enhancing the mobility of people and the exchange of ideas, knowledge and scientific and technological experience.

Quality control: To control the quality of regional regulations, the "Code of Good Practices in the Provision of Transnational Education" was established by the Council of Europe, in cooperation with UNESCO, and adopted at the 2001 Lisbon Convention. The code is designed to protect students from fraudulent degrees or certificates, and to prevent national authorities from devising excessively strict regulations for transnational education.

Guidelines: The UNESCO Secretariat and the OECD have worked closely together to develop guidelines for quality provision of cross-border higher education, particularly in light of a rapidly expanding sector in which new forms of education (campuses abroad, electronic delivery of higher education and for-profit providers) are proliferating.[11] The guidelines address six stakeholders in higher education: governments, education institutions, student bodies, quality assurance and accreditation bodies, academic recognition bodies, and professional bodies. While not legally binding, the guidelines provide member countries with ideas for regulating quality assurance and accreditation systems in accordance with their national context, and thus assist in policy formulation in member countries.

In addition to the UNESCO Regional Conventions, regional regulatory frameworks for recognition of foreign qualifications granting access to education and employment have been worked out in several regions (Table 11.2).

Similar to GATS, some regional arrangements are implemented in the context of trade agreements that allow a country to recognise certifications of one member state, without necessarily granting the same right to all member countries. NAFTA, the MERCOSUR "Protocol on Trade in Services"[12] , and the ASEAN framework are included in this type of agreement; thus countries party to these agreements could sign several Mutual Recognition Agreements.

Other sub-regional agreements include the SADC "Protocol on Education and Training", the SAARC "Technical Committee on Human Resources Development", and the ECOWAS "General Convention on the Recognition and Equivalence of degrees, diplomas, certificates and other qualifications in Member states". Some areas have not yet developed a regional accreditation body, as is the case for CARICOM. The European Union has been proactive in building a system for recognition of qualifications, adopting a "European Qualification Framework" and establishing the European Network of Quality Assurance in 2000 to develop common European standards.

Table 11.2. Regional regulatory arrangements

	Regional Recognition Agreements
Africa	East African Community (EAC) Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) Southern African Development Community (SADC) Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)
Arab	Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)
Asia and the Pacific	Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)
Europe	European Union (EU) European Free Trade Association (EFTA) BENELUX Council of Europe (COE) NORDIC Community of Independent States (CIS) Eurasian Economic Community (EURASEC)
America and Caribbean	Central American Common Market (CACM) Andean Community (CAN) Caribbean Community (CARICOM) East African Community (EAC) Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR) North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA)

OPPORTUNITIES AND GOOD PRACTICES

Existing governmental bodies should be encouraged to develop bilateral or multilateral agreements to facilitate recognition of each country's qualifications, based on the mutual agreements. It is important to realise that quality assurance and accreditation of cross-border higher education provision involves both sending and receiving countries. There is a need to sustain and strengthen existing regional and international networks and establish networks in regions that do not yet have one. Challenges can be overcome through better coordination among bodies in sending and receiving countries at the regional and global levels. Coordination can be achieved by using platforms to exchange information and good practice, disseminate knowledge, increase understanding of international developments and improve the professional expertise of their staff and quality assessors.

However, national frameworks in many countries still fail to address the challenges of cross-border provision of higher education.[13] Different criteria and terminologies are used, but there are no set standards for effective quality analysis. The diversity and unevenness of national-level quality assurance and accreditation systems creates gaps in the quality assurance of cross-border higher education, leaving some providers outside any framework.

Box 11.2. Malaysia seeks to reverse brain drain

TalentCorp Malaysia and Educity are among several innovative efforts introduced to generate a sustainable source of talent for the country and advance its 2011-2015 national development plan and reverse the brain drain/brain gain situation challenging the country. TalentCorp Malaysia's 'Returning to Malaysia' programme attracts, facilitates and retains aspiring Malaysian returnees, through a package of incentives to encourage talented Malaysians who have been working and living abroad to return home. Considering that there are over 300,000 university-educated Malaysians working abroad, as part of Educity the Government has invested in buildings and infrastructure and partnered with world-class educational institutions, to set up schools and universities so that the same degrees and qualifications as abroad can be attained in Malaysia, thus increasing the chance of graduates staying in the country.

Source: L.L. Lim (2011)[14]

A good example of regional efforts to reorganise national systems in line with global initiatives is the Bologna Process, which began in 1999 with the Bologna declaration,

and led to the creation of the 'European Higher Education Area' – a series of agreements reinforcing comparability and quality of higher education. The overall aim is to coordinate national education policies, in order to produce comparable degrees and establish quality assurance mechanisms as well as a credit system for student assessment.[15] Most of the 46 countries of the European region have adopted new higher education legislation and a credit system (European Credit Point Transfer System).[16] Governments in Africa, Asia and Latin America have acknowledged the effectiveness of the Bologna process, and plan to form their own regional networks for higher education.[17]

ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

Both states that send and receive mobile students can benefit from cross-border education: sending countries by gaining knowledge that can be utilised to promote economic development, and receiving countries by acquiring a productive population possessing a new set of skills. The challenge faced by quality assurance and accreditation systems is to maximize the benefits and limit potential drawbacks of the internationalisation of higher education.

However, in some case national bodies charged with addressing cross-border recognition of higher education qualifications possess only limited knowledge and experience on the issue. The challenge becomes more complicated when cross-border higher education providers deliver qualifications that do not match the criteria offered in their home country. Countries investing in the higher education sector should put in place regulatory frameworks or arrangements with universally accepted criteria, to cover different forms of cross-border higher education in a comprehensive manner.

Other challenges yet to be dealt with are related to transparency in quality control procedures and compliance with the need for easy access to information and customer protection.

The rapid expansion of cross-border higher education has left gaps in quality provision frameworks, and the trend toward commercialisation of the sector has brought on some undesirable and even fraudulent practices, such as degree mills and accreditation mills. Accreditation mills are accrediting agencies that are not recognised by the national education system. At degree mills, providers lack legal

authority to operate. In addition, concerns have been raised about such institutions serving as visa mills, opening the possibility of international student admission as a potential route for irregular migration.[18] International frameworks still lack mechanisms to fully control these fraudulent practices.

Without proper implementation of relevant frameworks, the risk of students falling victim to misleading guidance and disreputable providers will increase, and low-quality accreditation bodies will lead to qualifications of limited validity.

Dubious quality provision in cross-border education is also a disadvantage for nations receiving mobile students, since these young people represent a potential human capital asset, given their age, skills and eagerness to join the labour force. For example, 90 per cent of Chinese and Indian doctoral students in the U.S. remained there after their studies.[19] Students who choose to remain in the destination country not only serve as a labour resource, but also contribute to sustaining the population size of the developed economies.

Finally, to ensure a win-win situation, it is crucial to understand the burden faced by young people crossing borders for academic purpose, and take their human rights into consideration.

Mobile students are at risk of rejection in receiving countries.[20] One of the many factors that contribute to unemployment among these young migrants is the lack of unified definitions for the recognition of tertiary education. Sustainable implementation of credential controls and recognition will help employment of mobile students, but nations should take effective steps to provide more job opportunities to those who finish their studies, and eliminate any discrimination they may encounter in the process.

Although there is a tendency to view international study as an option open to qualified students from all countries, in reality most international students come from relatively few countries and are recruited from among the affluent elite who can afford high tuition costs.[21] Without better regulation of tertiary education institutions, there is a risk of enhancing the social stratification of students based on their fee-paying capacity. Proper implementation of foreign credential recognition should ease the increasing inequalities among students, as well as regional imbalances. To provide

equal opportunities, all students, including mobile students, must be granted access to social protection and minimum living conditions, through programmes such as student loans, housing services and health insurance. Both sending and receiving countries bear responsibility for respecting, protecting and fulfilling the human rights of mobile students.

KEY MESSAGES

- The number of students migrating abroad is growing rapidly, a trend likely to continue.

- Enhancing quality and harmonising standards of cross-border tertiary and vocational education leads to 'win-win' situations for students and employers in origin and destination countries.

- International collaboration is needed for cross-border higher education and technical training, including defining terminologies and unifying criteria for regulatory frameworks, particularly to ensure that qualifications obtained abroad are recognised at home and vice versa.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Establish or strengthen regional policy frameworks for quality governance of higher education and accreditation of educational and training institutions.

- Adopt comprehensive regulations and standards to manage quality and credentials of different forms of tertiary education, and systematically monitor implementation of credential accreditation and quality assurance in cross-border education policies.

- Establish or strengthen transferability and recognition mechanisms for educational credits and for professional, technical and vocational qualifications.

- Incorporate student bodies as partners in ensuring equal rights and opportunities for mobile students.

- Improve conditions for mobile students through student loans, housing services, health insurance and related programmes.

NOTES

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[12] Includes: 'Education Integration Protocol on the Recognition of Certificates, Degrees and Primary- and non-Technical Secondary Level Studies', 'The Educational Integration Protocol on the Revalidation of Diplomas, Certificates and Degrees and the Recognition of Secondary-Level Technical Studies', 'Educational Integration Protocol on the Recognition of University Degrees for the Pursuit of Postgraduate Studies at the Universities of MERCOSUR Countries'.

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[17] Varghese, *Ibid.*, p. 53.

[18] R. Middlehurst and J. Fielden (2011), "Private providers in UK higher education: Some policy options", Oxford: Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI).

[19] Varghese (2011), *op. cit.* p.10.

[20] Hawthorne (2008) op. cit. p.6.

[21] Kritz (2011) op. cit. p.20.