Almost half of all Member States consider attracting and retaining international students a policy priority, although the degree of priority significantly differ across Member States.

The main policy drivers for attracting and retaining international students include the internationalisation of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and increasing financial revenue for the higher education sector, increasing the national pool of qualified labour as well as addressing specific (skilled) labour shortages plus tackling demographic change.

Retention measures for international graduates were found to be in place in the majority of Member States, seeking to facilitate access to the labour market by eliminating certain restrictions.

Some factors which significantly contribute to student attraction do not necessarily benefit student retention. Programmes taught in English have had positive impacts on attracting international students, but can hamper their long-term integration into the labour market, unless language learning and other integration measures are started during the period of study.

Bilateral and multilateral agreements with third countries have created important frameworks for cooperation, including in relation to student mobility. Most of them aim at exchanging experiences and practices, teachers, students and researchers, as well as the establishment of fellowships.

The common challenges identified in attracting international students:
- Limited availability of courses taught in foreign languages
- Lengthy processing times of applications for visas and residence permits
- Insufficient promotional activities and scholarships opportunities
- Shortages in (affordable) housing.

Top 5 countries of origin:
- China – 118,830
- United States – 33,000
- India – 32,317
- Ukraine – 16,248
- Morocco – 13,427

Top 5 destination countries:
- United Kingdom – 179,633
- France – 80,566
- Germany – 39,546
- Spain – 37,531
- Poland – 21,579

460,694 first residence permits were issued to third-country nationals for study reasons in 2017

Business administration and law are the most attractive study fields among international students.

Source: Eurostat [migr_resedu]