

Global Boom in Private Enrollments

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One in three students globally is enrolled in private higher education institutions, according to research that reveals the huge growth and wide reach of private providers.

The analysis, the first study based on comprehensive data on the size and shape of private higher education internationally, finds that private institutions have 56.7 million students on their books, or 32.9 percent of the world's enrollment.

While the U.S. has historically towered over the rest of the world in terms of the size of its private sector, the proportion of students in the country in private higher education stands at 27.5 percent, lower than the global average, and it now accounts for only a tenth of global private enrollment.

Private universities' share of enrollment is highest in Latin America (48.8 percent) and Asia (42.1 percent), but the sector is far from limited to a small number of countries: 97.6 percent of the world's total tertiary enrollment is in higher education systems with "dual-sector provision," and in all regions at least 10 percent of students are in the private sector, according to the research.



The research draws on a data set developed by the Program for Research on Private Higher Education, a global scholarly network founded by Daniel Levy, distinguished professor in the School of Education at the State University of New York at Albany. The data cover 192 countries and were sourced primarily from the Institute of Statistics at the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, as well as other cross-border agencies and national organizations.

A paper describing the data set, newly published in the journal *Higher Education*, says that while higher education has "long and overwhelmingly [been] seen beyond the U.S. as an essentially public sector function with no or only marginal private presence," it has become "very much a dual-sector phenomenon globally." This has occurred despite unprecedented growth in public enrollment and indicates how governments have been unable to meet soaring demand for higher education via the creation of public university systems.

Private Enrollments in Selected Countries

Country	Percentage of Enrollment in Private Higher Education
India	58.3%
U.S.	27.5%

Brazil	72.7%
China	19.6%
Japan	78.6%
Indonesia	58.2%
South Korea	80.7%
Iran	44.9%
Philippines	60.8%
Russian Federation	14.7%

Source: Program for Research on Private Higher Education. Countries listed in order of total number of students in private higher education.

Of the 179 countries showing enrollment by sector, only 10 nations appear to have no private higher education, according to the analysis.

Despite the wide dispersion of private higher education, enrollment in the sector concentrates mostly in developing regions. Compared with the higher figures for Latin America and Asia, private providers account for less than a sixth of total higher education enrollment in Canada, Australia and New Zealand (10.1 percent) and Europe (14.9 percent).

Levy's analysis indicates that the developing world holds 69.8 percent of the world's private higher education, versus 30.2 percent in the developed world. Put another way, in the developed world, 25.2 percent of enrollments are in private higher education, compared with 37.8 percent of the developing world's enrollment.

The country with the largest private sector is India, which is home to 21.9 percent of global private enrollment, with more than 12 million students -- more than twice the size of the sector in the U.S.

Countries with very high shares of private enrollment tend to have small higher education systems.

Levy told *Times Higher Education* that his expectation is that while private higher education enrollment will continue to increase in absolute terms, the sector's share of enrollment will "level off."

He said that this is partly because as the sector gets larger, the "challenge of increasing share becomes more difficult."

Liz Reisberg, an independent higher education consultant and research fellow at Boston College's Center for International Higher Education (and a blogger for *Inside Higher Ed*), said that private higher education is "both inevitable and necessary" as the "public sector will never

have the resources to meet either the scale of demand or its diversity.”

However, she said, the quality of the private sector “remains an urgent concern.” In Latin America, for example, “while nearly every nation in the region now has an accreditation agency, none have adequate capacity to address poor quality in either the private or public sector.”