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ABSTRACT

This paper presents an analysis of the number of university students attending institutions outside of their country of origin, focusing on the changes in such attendance between 1980 and 1990. Five tables present information on: (1) foreign students by region of origin; (2) percentage distribution of foreign students by region of origin; (3) major host countries of foreign students; (4) foreign students in major host countries and percentage distribution by region of origin; and (5) foreign students by major countries of origin. The global number of foreign students rose from 915,859 in 1980 to 1,177,583 in 1990, an increase of 29 percent. Approximately 60 percent of these students were from developing countries. Nearly 90 percent of all foreign students are enrolled in developed countries. In 1980 the largest number of foreign students originated from Europe and the Soviet Union, while in 1990 the majority came from Eastern Asia and Oceania. An appended table provides data on major host countries of foreign students for the years 1980 and 1985 through 1990. (MDM)

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# statistical issues

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## FOREIGN STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

### COMPARATIVE STATISTICAL DATA FOR 1980 AND 1990

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#### ABSTRACT

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*The present Statistical Issue presents an analysis of the number of students in the world pursuing their studies at the third level of education (higher education) outside their countries of origin.*

*The global number of the foreign students rose from 916 thousand in 1980/81 to 1178 thousand in 1990/91, representing an increase of 29 per cent; about 6 out of 10 of these students were from developing countries. The data further show that 90 per cent of all students are enrolled in developed countries and the remaining 10 per cent are in developing countries.*

*It can also be seen that whereas in 1980 the highest number of foreign students originated from Europe and the former U.S.S.R., in 1990 the majority of them are from Eastern Asia and Oceania.*

*An early version of this paper was presented at the International Congress on Recognition of Studies and Academic Mobility, held at UNESCO House, Paris, 2-5 November 1992. Since then, limited revisions have been made to the data.*

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Prepared by Eliam Nguni, Section of Statistics on Education, Division of Statistics

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## Introduction

International student exchange plays an ever increasing role in higher education. Study opportunities offered to students away from their countries of origin may help especially developing countries with limited resources, to train much-needed high level manpower. On the other hand, developed countries tend to increase their mutual exchange of students; many of these countries have already implemented special student exchange programmes, one example of these being the ERASMUS programme of the European Communities.

UNESCO in keeping with its constitution has constantly regarded as one of its main functions *"to maintain, increase and diffuse knowledge"* by encouraging *"the international exchange of persons active in the fields of education, science and culture"*. In order to keep track of development in this field, the UNESCO Division of Statistics has been for many years collecting on a regular and annual basis data on foreign students enrolled in higher education institutions. The data refer mainly to foreign students by sex and by country or region of origin.

For the purposes of this document, data on foreign students are presented for a certain number of regions or special groupings of countries within two major categories, i.e. developed and developing countries. Mention should be made of the fact that some countries are included under both "Sub-Saharan Africa" and "Arab States", because they belong to these two groups.

## Foreign Students in Higher Education

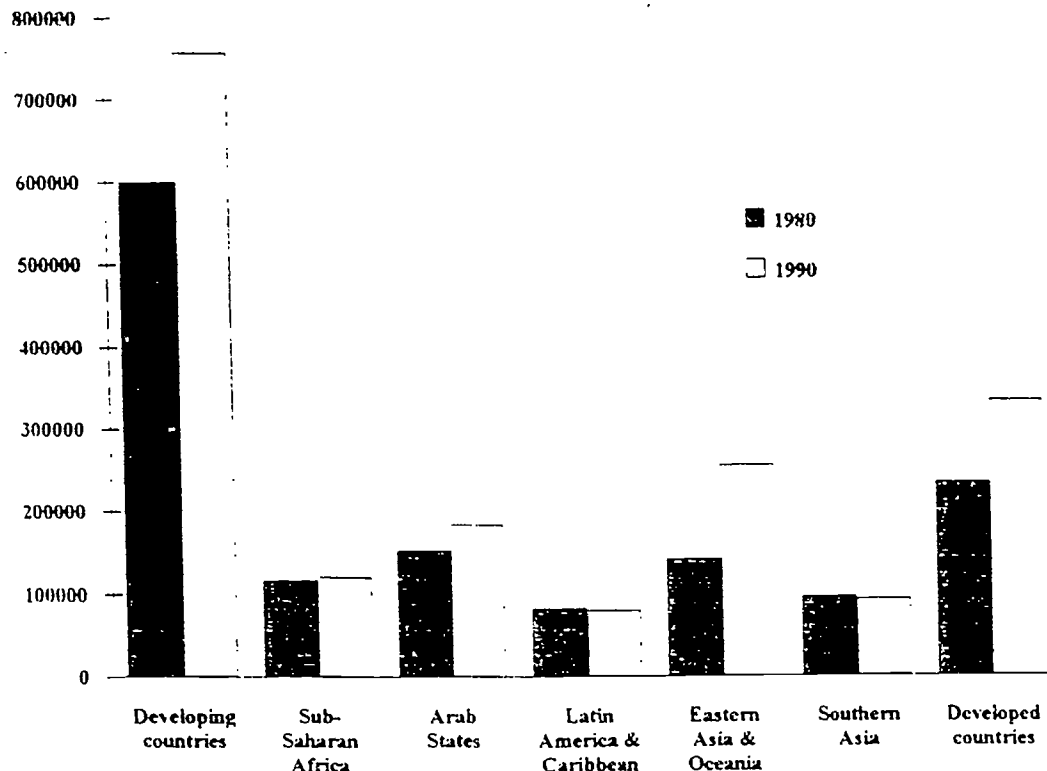
Table 1 shows data on 62 countries for which information on foreign students by country of origin was available for 1980 and 1990. These countries were host to more than 95 per cent of the estimated total foreign students population in 1990.

It can be seen from the table that the number of students pursuing higher education outside their countries of origin increased by 29 per cent from 916 thousand in 1980 to 1178 thousand in 1990. In both periods, these students constituted about 2 per cent of the estimated total enrolment in higher education. The largest number of foreign students came from developing countries (757 thousand in 1990), an increase of 26 per cent over 1980. Although students from developed countries were only 334 thousand in 1990, this was an increase of 42 per cent over 1980. Concerning the individual regions, the greatest increase was in Eastern Asia and Oceania which almost doubled the number of their nationals studying abroad during the periods under study. For Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean and Southern Asia, there was little difference during this period (see Figure 1).

Table 1 : Foreign students by region of origin, 1980 and 1990. ( 62 host countries)

Host regions	Regions of origin											Unspecified
	World	Developing countries	Sub-Saharan Africa	Arab States	Latin America & Caribbean	Eastern Asia and Oceania	Southern Asia	Developed countries ex- U.S.S.R.	Northern America	Asia and Oceania		
World	1980 915859	598005	116713	152424	81681	141812	95964	234589	169541	37575	27473	81465
	1990 1177583	757040	120477	183927	79434	255943	93052	334036	237748	44328	51960	86507
Developing countries	1980 99837	81403	21941	45272	1920	7465	13398	5961	3537	1584	840	12473
	1990 174854	90595	27038	53966	2974	6542	8703	10647	6921	1622	2104	3612
of which												
Sub-Saharan Africa	1980 5375	4326	3871	667	22	13	25	382	366	14	2	667
	1990 4682	4558	4053	737	5	59	43	103	84	19		21
Arab States	1980 52158	42761	11306	37048	10	1848	1536	403	321	77	5	8994
	1990 53374	50127	12181	43095	73	1471	1313	293	225	61	7	2954
Latin America and Caribbean	1980 3919	3166	929	261	1784	153	25	315	190	112	13	438
	1990 6335	5718	2750	180	2619	93	73	502	358	132	12	115
Eastern Asia and Oceania	1980 10547	7210	624	205	48	2409	3962	2985	1110	1158	717	352
	1990 13017	8822	1468	1887	220	3521	1876	4173	1134	1170	1869	22
Southern Asia	1980 17179	14999	4257	2756	3	3015	500	500	291	157	52	1680
	1990 13108	12447	5820	4668	36	1357	413	413	212	159	42	248
Developed countries	1980 815793	518195	94565	107152	79761	134347	82566	228606	165982	35991	26633	68992
	1990 1072729	666445	93439	129961	76460	249401	84349	323389	230827	42706	49856	82895
of which												
Europe and ex- U.S.S.R.	1980 439378	231040	58110	62789	31185	37098	26275	152657	129201	16599	6857	56281
	1990 573609	330705	71106	106099	31207	56432	37038	213585	181670	21643	10272	29319
Northern America	1980 357931	271933	35843	40541	48300	87133	55627	73979	36262	18461	19256	12019
	1990 442716	290310	19664	23647	44608	150169	45960	106136	48035	19397	38704	46270
Asia and Oceania	1980 17084	15222	112	3822	276	10116	664	1970	519	931	520	692
	1990 56404	45430	369	215	645	42800	1351	3668	1122	1666	880	7306

Figure 1: Foreign students by region of origin, 1980 and 1990 (62 host countries)



### Host Regions

The distribution of foreign students by host regions is also presented in Table 1. Developed countries received approximately 91 per cent of the total number of foreign students in 1990, a slight increase over 1980. During this period, the developed countries of Europe and the former U.S.S.R. hosted about 48 per cent of the foreign students; Northern America received about 38 per cent of these students during the same period. As for the developed countries of Asia and Oceania, the number of foreign students in these countries more than tripled from 18 thousand in 1980 to 56 thousand in 1990. As it concerns the developing countries, the Arab States hosted the largest number of foreign students (more than 50 per cent of all foreign students in developing countries during 1980 and 1990).

### Inter-regional Mobility

These data can also be analysed by inter-regional mobility (Table 2). More than 60 per cent of the foreign students in developed countries were from developing countries in both 1980 and 1990. Students from East Asia and Oceania had the largest proportion, i.e. about 17 and 23 per cent in 1980 and 1990 respectively, followed by those from Arab States (12 per cent in 1990). For the remaining developing countries, the percentage distribution were: Sub-Saharan Africa (8.7 per cent), Southern Asia (7.0 per cent) and Latin America and the Caribbean (7.1 per cent).

Table 2 : Percentage distribution of foreign students by region of origin, 1980 and 1990. ( 62 host countries)

Host regions	Regions of origin											Unspecified
	World	Developing countries	Sub-Saharan Africa	Arab States	Latin America & Caribbean	Eastern Asia and Oceania	Southern Asia	Developed countries ex- U.S.S.R.	Northern America	Asia and Oceania	Unspecified	
World	1980 915859	65.5	12.7	16.6	8.9	15.5	10.5	18.5	4.1	3.0	8.9	
	1990 1177583	64.3	10.2	15.6	6.7	21.7	7.9	20.2	3.8	4.4	7.3	
Developing countries	1980 99837	81.5	22.0	45.3	1.9	7.5	13.4	3.5	1.6	0.8	12.5	
	1990 104854	86.4	25.8	51.5	2.8	6.2	8.3	6.6	1.5	2.0	3.4	
of which Sub-Saharan Africa	1980 5375	80.5	72.0	12.4	0.4	0.2	0.5	7.1	0.3	0.0	12.4	
	1990 4682	97.4	86.6	15.7	0.1	1.3	0.9	2.2	0.4	0.0	0.4	
Arab States	1980 52158	82.0	21.8	71.0	0.0	3.5	2.9	0.8	0.1	0.0	17.2	
	1990 53374	93.9	23.8	80.7	0.1	2.8	2.5	0.5	0.1	0.0	5.5	
Latin America and Caribbean	1980 3919	80.8	23.7	6.7	45.5	3.9	0.6	8.0	2.9	0.3	11.2	
	1990 6335	90.3	43.4	2.8	41.3	1.5	1.2	7.9	2.1	0.2	1.8	
Eastern Asia and Oceania	1980 10547	68.4	5.9	1.9	0.5	2.8	37.6	28.3	11.0	6.8	3.3	
	1990 13017	67.8	11.3	14.5	1.7	27.0	14.4	32.1	9.0	14.4	0.2	
Southern Asia	1980 17179	87.3	24.8	16.0	0.0	17.6	30.2	2.9	0.9	0.3	9.8	
	1990 13108	95.0	44.4	35.6	0.3	10.4	21.0	3.2	1.2	0.3	1.9	
Developed countries	1980 815793	63.5	11.6	13.1	9.0	16.5	10.1	28.0	4.4	3.3	8.5	
	1990 1072729	62.1	8.7	12.1	7.1	23.2	7.9	30.1	4.0	4.6	7.7	
of which Europe and ex- U.S.S.R.	1980 439978	52.5	13.3	14.3	7.1	8.4	6.0	34.7	3.8	1.6	12.8	
	1990 573609	57.7	12.8	18.5	5.4	9.8	6.5	37.2	3.8	1.8	5.1	
Northern America	1980 357931	76.0	10.0	11.3	13.5	24.3	15.5	20.7	5.2	5.4	3.4	
	1990 442716	65.6	4.4	5.3	10.1	33.9	10.4	24.0	4.4	8.7	10.5	
Asia and Oceania	1980 17884	85.1	1.7	21.4	1.5	56.6	3.7	11.0	2.9	2.9	3.9	
	1990 56404	80.5	0.7	0.4	1.1	75.9	2.4	6.5	3.0	1.6	13.0	

The number of foreign students in developing countries increased by about 5 percentage points from nearly 100 thousand in 1980 to 105 thousand in 1990. It should be noted, however, that only 10 per cent of these students were from developed countries in 1990 which was in itself a slight increase over 1980.

### Intra-regional Mobility

The movement of students between countries of the same region has an important role especially in developed countries where certain projects have been agreed on the exchange of students between these countries. It can be seen in Table 1 that of the 334 thousand foreign students from developed countries, 323 thousand or 97 per cent went to other developed countries. The majority of these students were from Europe and the former U.S.S.R. who went to other countries within this region; within the European Communities, Greek students who went to study in Italy and the former Federal Republic of Germany as well as the Spanish and Portuguese students who went to France and the former Federal Republic of Germany. In the East bloc countries, most of their students abroad went to the former U.S.S.R.. Northern America received a third of total foreign students from developed countries, the majority of whom came from Europe and the former U.S.S.R.. Students from Northern America tended to go to the United Kingdom, the former Federal Republic of Germany and France. Within the Northern America group, more Canadian students went to the United States.

**Table 3: Major host countries of foreign students**

(20 countries)

Host Countries	Number of foreign students			Foreign students as % of total enrolment, 1990
	1980	1990	% Change 1990	
United States	311882	407529	30.7	2.9
France	110763	136015	22.8	8.0
Germany:				
Former German Dem. Rep.	7106	13343	87.8	3.0
Former Germany, Fed. Rep.	61841	107005	73.0	5.9
United Kingdom	56003	70717	26.3	6.0
Former U.S.S.R.	62942	66806	6.1	1.2
Canada	32303	35187	8.9	2.6
Belgium	12875	33335	158.9	12.3
Australia	8877	28993	226.6	6.0
Japan	6543	23816	264.0	0.9
Switzerland	15515	22621	45.8	16.4
Italy	27784	21416	-22.9	1.5
Austria	12885	18434	43.1	9.0
Syrian Arab Republic	6276	13879	121.1	7.9
Saudi Arabia	14298	12408	-13.2	8.1
India	14710	11759	-20.1	0.2
Spain	10997	11051	0.5	0.9
Holy See	9104	10938	20.1	-
Sweden	10401	10650	2.4	6.1
Egypt	21751	10176	-53.2	1.3

## Major Host Countries, 1980 and 1990

Table 3 presents data on countries which received more than 10 thousand foreign students in 1990.

During the past decade, five countries: the United States, France, the former Federal Republic of Germany, United Kingdom and the former U.S.S.R. together received about 788 thousand foreign students in 1990, representing 67 per cent of the total foreign students in that year (see Table 1). The rest of the countries shown in Table 3 received between 10 and 35 thousand foreign students during 1990.

Table 3 further shows the percentage change of foreign student intake between 1980 and 1990. These changes can be summarized as follows:

- Australia and Japan received three times more foreign students in their countries.
- These students more than doubled in Belgium and the Syrian Arab Republic.
- In the 5 largest host countries, foreign students increased by between 23 per cent (in France) to 73 per cent (in the former Federal Republic of Germany).
- The most significant decreases during the two periods were in Egypt (53 per cent), Italy (22 per cent), India (20 per cent) and Saudi Arabia (13 per cent).

Data on Table 3 are further analysed in terms of foreign students expressed as a proportion of total enrolment in higher education for the corresponding countries of study, in 1990.

This information shows that:

- More than one in ten of the students enrolled in higher education in Belgium and Switzerland was a foreigner. Several other countries also had a significant proportion of foreign students in their institutions of higher learning; these countries included: Austria (9 per cent), France and Saudi Arabia (8 per cent), Syrian Arab Republic (about 8 per cent), Sweden, Australia and the United Kingdom (6 per cent).
- Although the United States received the highest number of foreign students (407529), these students represented only about 3 per cent of total enrolment in this country. Other host countries with a low proportion of foreign students are: the former U.S.S.R. (1.2 per cent), Japan and Spain (0.9 per cent), Italy (1.5 per cent) and India (0.2 per cent).



Table 4: Foreign students in major host countries and percentage distribution by region of origin, 1990

Major Host Countries	Total foreign students	(19 countries)										Not Specified
		Developed countries	Developing countries which	Sub-Saharan Africa	Arab States	Latin America & Caribbean	East Asia & Oceania	Southern Asia				
U.S.A.	407 529	24.0	64.9	3.9	5.1	10.3	33.4	10.7	11.2			
France	136 015	24.1	75.6	20.3	43.3	4.1	4.9	2.5	0.3			
Former Germany, F.R.	107 005	43.1	53.6	3.2	5.1	3.6	12.3	11.4	3.3			
United Kingdom	70 717	41.1	56.9	10.9	6.7	3.2	27.4	5.7	2.1			
Former U.S.S.R.	66 806	13.3	86.6	20.1	23.6	12.3	15.0	11.0	0.0			
Canada	35 188	24.2	73.4	11.0	7.6	7.4	39.6	6.8	2.3			
Belgium	33 335	48.4	48.3	18.7	19.6	2.9	2.8	1.1	3.3			
Australia	28 993	6.1	70.0	0.7	0.2	0.2	66.3	2.5	23.9			
Japan	23 816	7.6	92.4	0.6	0.7	2.5	86.3	2.1	0.1			
Switzerland	22 621	73.5	18.2	2.9	4.0	4.0	2.9	1.8	8.3			
Italy	21 416	61.5	31.3	4.0	11.3	3.3	0.4	8.8	7.3			
Austria	18 434	66.2	31.8	2.1	3.9	1.9	5.2	8.6	2.1			
Saudi Arabia	12 408	0.5	91.9	12.4	70.3	0.0	5.1	7.4	7.5			
Syrian Arab Rep.	13 879	0.3	99.0	8.6	95.9	0.3	0.2	1.0	0.7			
India	11 759	3.4	94.5	46.6	32.9	0.3	10.7	20.5	2.1			
Spain	11 054	45.2	49.0	5.0	12.0	29.3	1.3	1.4	5.8			
Holy See	10 938	53.0	36.3	8.6	1.8	14.5	4.2	5.5	10.7			
Sweden	10 650	64.1	31.3	2.8	2.1	4.8	3.1	15.1	4.6			
Egypt	10 176	0.3	99.1	50.8	93.9	0.0	3.8	0.4	0.6			

## Foreign Students in Major Host Countries by Region of Origin, 1990

Table 4 presents data on 19 major host countries which received more than 10 thousand foreign students in 1990 distributed in percentage by region of origin.

These data can be analysed as follows:

- In 12 host countries, the majority of the foreign students were from developing countries. More than 90 per cent of these students in Egypt, Syrian Arab Republic, India and Saudi Arabia were from developing countries. In the remaining 8 countries, students from developing countries were between 54 per cent in the former Federal Republic of Germany and 87 per cent in the former U.S.S.R..
- In 5 of the 19 countries, the majority of the students were from developed countries, ranging from 53 per cent in the Holy See to 74 per cent in Switzerland. It should be noted that in Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Syrian Arab Republic students from developed countries were less than one per cent of total foreign students enrolled in these countries.
- In Belgium and Spain, students from developing countries represented the same percentage as students from developed countries (between 45 and 50%).

The distribution by region of origin shows that:

- The largest proportion of foreign students in the former U.S.S.R. and India were from Sub-Saharan Africa. However, in actual numbers, France received the highest number of African students in 1990 (29 thousand) as against 17 thousand for the former U.S.S.R. and India and Egypt each had more than 5000.
- The highest percentage of foreign students in Syrian Arab Republic, Egypt and Saudi Arabia were from the Arab States, but the largest number of Arab students were in: France (59 thousand), United States (21 thousand) and the former U.S.S.R. (16 thousand).
- The largest proportion of foreign students in Spain was from Latin America and the Caribbean. However, in absolute figures the United States hosted 42 thousand of the students from this region as against 3000 in Spain.
- Japan and Australia followed by the United States and Canada enrolled the largest proportion of the students from East Asia and Oceania; in absolute figures, the United States had the highest number of students from this region (136 thousand) in 1990.
- 20 per cent of the foreign students in India, 2000 in absolute figures, came from Southern Asia; the largest number of students from this region, 44 thousand, was enrolled in the United States.

Table 5 presents data on countries (including Palestine), which had each more than 10 thousand of nationals studying abroad in 1990.

**Table 5. Foreign students by major countries of origin, 1980 and 1990** (25 countries)

Country of origin	Number of nationals studying abroad		% increase
	1980	1990	
China	30127	93347	209.8
Japan	18066	39258	117.3
Morocco	20876	36595	75.3
Germany	22477	34850	55.0
Republic of Korea	9675	32986	240.9
India	15238	32972	116.4
Greece	31509	32184	2.1
Malaysia	35693	31497	-11.8
Iran Islamic Republic	65521	30555	-53.4
Hong Kong	20625	28954	40.4
Italy	13848	25647	85.2
United States	19843	24174	21.8
Turkey	14606	21460	46.9
Jordan	17030	20767	21.9
France	11159	20017	79.4
Algeria	12661	18891	49.2
United Kingdom	15776	17240	9.3
Indonesia	10957	16835	53.6
Lebanon	15117	16531	9.4
Spain	7035	15149	115.3
Syrian Arab Republic	13701	13944	1.8
Sudan	11008	12252	11.3
Tunisia	9817	11297	15.1
Pakistan	5547	10801	94.7
Singapore	5366	10720	99.8
Palestinians	15414	12597	-18.3

This information can be summarised as follows:

The largest increases (more than 200 per cent) between 1980 and 1990 were for the Republic of Korea and China, followed by Japan, India and Spain which had increases of 115 per cent and above. Increases were also important in Singapore, Pakistan and Italy: from 85 to 99.8%.

Students from the Islamic Republic of Iran more than halved from 65521 in 1980 to 30555 in 1990. Palestinians and Malaysians also declined by respectively 18.3% and 11.8%.

In 1990 and in actual numbers, China has become the leading country of origin. Chinese nationals studying abroad accounted for 8% of total foreign students population in 1990 (see Table 1). The majority of the countries or origin of foreign students are from Asia.

Ten of these countries are also major host countries (see Table 3). In 1990, there were more Japanese students abroad (39258) than foreign students in Japan (23816). Germany, which is the third major host country, is also the fourth major country of origin. As for the largest host country, the United States, its nationals studying abroad represent about 5 per cent of the foreign students population in this country.

ANNEX TABLE: MAJOR HOST COUNTRIES OF FOREIGN STUDENTS, 1980 TO 1990

( 45 countries )

HOST COUNTRY	1980	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990
Algeria	1810	2479	...	...	2648	...	...
Australia	8777	16075	...	...	18207	25447	28993
Austria	12885	15388	15740	16174	16580	17306	18434
Belgium	12875	24761	20095	22555	23966	33335	...
Bulgaria	3988	7254	7860	7364	7121	7233	8768
Canada	28443	29496	27210	27119	28622	32144	35187
China	1381	3250	4343	4408	6400	4993	8495
Cuba	2026	3161	4075	4143	4660	4057	5654
Cyprus	331	544	598	759	859	760	1184
Former Czechoslovakia	3642	4175	4534	4803	5056	5107	4803
Denmark	3035	3167	3400	4534	6609	6864	...
Egypt	21751	12235	11025	10729	11151	10716	...
Finland	610	979	1024	1168	1230	1356	1617
France	110763	131979	126762	123978	125574	143640	136015
Former German Dem. Rep.	7106	9231	9613	10351	13343	...	...
Former Germany Fed Rep	61841	79354	81724	85749	91926	97985	107005
Holy See	9104	9775	10440	9882	10567	11000	10938
Hungary	2742	2485	2479	2573	2569	2538	3310
India	...	...	11759	...	...	...	...
Ireland	2845	2606	2554	2537	2889	3094	3282
Italy	29447	26268	23259	28815	21411	20199	21788
Japan	6543	12442	14960	17641	20373	23816	...
Ireland	722	2231	...	...	2467	1586	2498
Rep. of Korea	1015	978	900	1327	1598	2057	2237
Kuwait	2892	5985	4983	5152	5253	...	2592
Morocco	1641	2064	...	3621	...	...	4318
Netherlands	4128	5705	7873	8351	9224	8876	...
New Zealand	2464	2618	2959	3014	3678	3595	3229
Norway	...	...	...	...	...	...	6907
Philippines	7901	...	...	...	5306	...	...
Poland	2912	2986	3113	3447	3619	4118	4259
Portugal	1318	2047	3396	...	...	3608	3773
Qatar	1099	1320	1309	1540	1452	1417	...
Romania	15888	10774	...	7062	6503	...	...
Saudi Arabia	14298	17607	17971	...	...	14012	12408
Senegal	3065	2378	...	...	1952	1903	...
Spain	10997	...	...	...	13839	11051	...
Sweden	...	10401	...	...	10650	...	...
Switzerland	14716	17396	13576	13925	14462	20914	22621
Syrian Arab Rep.	6267	12909	7886	...	...	...	13879
Tunisia	781	1349	1375	1514	1602	2220	2434
Turkey	6378	7021	6923	8233	7502	7904	7661
Former U.S.S.R	...	...	...	...	...	74737	66806
United Kingdom	56003	53694	56726	59220	63223	70717	...
United States	311882	343780	349610	356167	366354	386745	407529
Yugoslavia(1)	4426	7384	7426	6787	6233	5883	5967

Note: (1) All data refer to the Former Socialist Federal Republic Of Yugoslavia

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