

INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION OUTLOOK—SOPEMI 2008

Recent trends in international migration

Highlights

Contexts: Immigrants are diverse—some are seeking to settle permanently, others only for short periods. Their reasons for travelling also vary greatly— few are fleeing political or religious persecution, many move for family reasons, and some to work, in everything from high-skilled professions like medicine, to low-skilled work in hotels and restaurants. In addition to the description of these “flows” the report includes data on the total size of the immigrant population in OECD countries.

Permanent immigration: About 4 million permanent entered the OECD area in 2006. This represented a rise of about 5% on the previous year, but a slowing of growth compared with recent years. The largest proportional increases were in Portugal, Sweden, Ireland and Denmark, which all saw migrant inflows rise by more than 20%; growth was also strong in the United States, Korea and Spain.

Reasons for migrating: Family reasons—such as when people are travelling to reunite with families or to get married—account for 44% of permanent type migration in OECD countries (for which data is available). Labour migration accounts for about 14% and humanitarian for about 12%. Free movement accounts for most of the rest.

Source countries: Just 20 countries accounted for 60% of migrant arrivals in the OECD area in 2006. The top five were:

- China 10.7 %
- Poland 5.3 %
- Romania 4.6 %
- Mexico 4.2 %
- Philippines 3.6 %

Temporary migration: Around 2.5 million temporary labour migrants entered the OECD area in 2006, which is around three times the number of permanent labour migrants. However, overall, temporary migration is tending to grow more slowly than its permanent equivalent.

Size of immigrant populations: Immigrants (or, more accurately, foreign-born persons) accounted for just under 12% of the total population in OECD countries in 2006. In more than half of all OECD countries, immigrants account for at least a tenth of the population. Since 2000, a few countries have seen very big increases in the size of their immigrant population, although sometimes from relatively low bases: In Ireland, the increase was 66%, in Finland 40% and in Austria 34%.

Education levels of immigrants: On average about a quarter of immigrants have tertiary qualifications, but this proportion varies from as low as about 11% in Austria to almost 38% in Canada. Countries that use selection processes for immigrants, such as Canada, tend to attract more highly educated immigrants.

Find out more ...

To find out more about recent trends in international migration, see Part I, Section A of the International Migration Outlook—SOPEMI 2008, from the OECD.