

INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION OUTLOOK—SOPEMI 2008

Immigrants and the labour market

Highlights

Contexts: For a range of reasons, employers in OECD countries sometimes struggle to find staff at both ends of the skills spectrum—highly skilled professionals as well as workers willing to do “3D jobs” (dirty, dangerous and dull). Increasingly, they are turning to immigrants to fill these gaps—think of the number of immigrants working as doctors in hospitals and as chambermaids in hotels. Although migration can only be a partial solution to such shortages, it seems likely that the role of immigrants in the workforce will continue to expand.

A sizeable slice of the workforce: Overall, the proportion of the population in OECD countries that is in employment has been rising in recent years, and this is true, too, for the immigrant population. In many countries, immigrants now account for a sizeable slice of the workforce, ranging from just 3pc in Finland to 44pc in Luxembourg, and growth in their share of employment has often outpaced that of locals: In the United States, just over 15 million jobs were added in the 10 years to 2006, and about half of these went to immigrants; in the United Kingdom, 1.8 million jobs were added, of which two-thirds went to immigrants.

What sort of work do immigrants do? Immigrants work right across many sectors, but there are a few areas where they are more likely to be found, notably in construction, hotel and restaurant work, and in healthcare and social services.

Rising employment rates: Immigrants appear to be finding it easier to get work in OECD countries. In the non-European OECD countries, their employment rates tend to match those of natives, but even in Europe their situation is generally improving with just a few exceptions—in France, immigrants’ employment rates fell by 1.4 percentage points in the five years to 2006 and in the Netherlands by 3.4 points.

... But wages still lag: International comparisons on wages are hard to come by, but in general immigrants tend to earn less than locals, even when account is taken of their lower education levels. The gap is particularly large for immigrants from non-OECD countries.

Find out more ...

To find out more about immigrants and the labour market, see Part I, Section B of the International Migration Outlook—SOPEMI 2008, from the OECD.