

Box I.3. More women in all forms of migration

Statistics on international migration by gender that make it possible to identify the characteristics of migrants are scarce and hard to obtain. However, they can be evaluated with varying degrees of accuracy and consistency using census data and employment statistics. For example, on the basis of various censuses conducted in 1990, the United Nations Population Division estimated the total number of women living outside their country of birth at 57 million, or 48% of all migrants.

It appears that recently there has been a trend towards the feminisation of migration. This is particularly obvious from changes in the proportion of women in total immigration flows between 1990 and 1999 (see Table I.3). The trend is particularly marked in Portugal and, to a lesser degree, in the Netherlands, Finland and Switzerland, where the proportion of women in inflows has risen by over 1% a year since 1990. In 1999 the share of women in the overall immigration flow (nationals and foreigners) ranged between 41.3% for Germany and 56.8% for Greece. For most of the countries studied, however, the percentage was close to 50%. It was slightly higher than that for the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, the Nordic countries and Belgium, and somewhat lower for Austria, the Netherlands, Denmark and Switzerland.

The trend towards feminisation in fact affects all components of migration flows. In recent years women have formed an increasing proportion of employment-related migration and refugee flows, whereas earlier female migration to OECD countries was largely via family reunion. But reunion still remains the chief vector of female immigration in most of the OECD countries (between 50 and 80% of the total for this category of flow).

Japan and Korea show the most significant volume of female migration related to employment. In some non-Asian OECD countries, foreign women are employed in increasing numbers, especially in the health sector and household services. These women are largely from the Philippines, Indonesia, Peru, some countries in Central and Eastern Europe, and to a lesser degree from Sri Lanka and Thailand. They are as yet only a small component in flows from countries in the Middle East and North Africa.

Refugee flows, on average, consist largely of equal numbers of men and women. But in countries which, like the United States, Canada and Australia, have adjusted their legislation to take account of persecution specifically directed at women, the proportion of women in refugee and asylum seeker flows may be more significant.

A trend of concern to OECD countries is the trafficking in women from developing and transition countries. Organised prostitution networks and illicit immigration rackets are at the root of a modern form of slavery, affecting women in particular. International measures of co-operation need to be stepped up to counter and prevent such exploitation.

Table I.3. Proportion of women in immigration flows in selected OECD countries, 1999
(unless otherwise indicated)

	Proportion of women in immigration flows, % of total	Average annual growth since 1990 ¹
Australia (1999-2000) ²	48.2	-0.4
Austria (1998)	46.5	..
Belgium	50.7	0.9
Canada	51.0	-0.5
Denmark (1998)	49.7	0.4
Finland	50.3	1.4
France ³	52.8	0.4
Germany	41.3	-0.1
Greece (1998) ⁴	56.8	0.3
Luxembourg	46.4	-1.1
Netherlands	49.1	1.7
Norway (1998)	50.1	0.1
Portugal ⁴	48.6	4.3
Spain (1998)	50.1	0.4
Sweden	51.6	0.9
Switzerland	49.8	1.2
United Kingdom	50.6	0.2
United States (1997-98) ⁵	53.5	0.4

Note: For Canada and the United States, data refer to the number of permanent resident permits delivered to immigrants; for Australia, to effective entries of permanent and long-term residents. For the European countries, data refer to people (excluding nationals for France, Greece and Portugal) who wish to settle permanently in the country.

1. 1992 for Portugal; 1993-94 for Australia; 1994 for Luxembourg; 1995 for Canada.

2. Data refer to fiscal year (July 1999 to June 2000).

3. Data relate only to entries of foreigners (excluding refugees and people who benefitted from the regularisation programme).

4. Data relate only to entries of foreigners (excluding returns of nationals).

5. Data refer to fiscal year (October 1997 to September 1998). Annual average growth is calculated without taking into account people who benefitted from the IRCA regularisation procedure.

Sources: Eurostat (New Cronos database); Australian Bureau of Statistics; Citizenship and Immigration Canada; Office des migrations internationales (France) and US Department of Justice.