

The size and composition of international migration flows are at the forefront of policy debates in OECD countries. In Europe, EU enlargements and the economic crisis make these issues a hot topic. Yet, misconceptions are numerous. Hard evidence is needed to ensure an informed, constructive and balanced public debate.

*This edition of **Migration Policy Debates** looks at the magnitude and characteristics of the migration movements to Europe and the OECD and at how have they evolved over time.*

Is migration really increasing?

Immigration to OECD countries has been rising since the 1960s, albeit with numerous ups and downs. This trend continued into the first decade of the new century, which saw the number of immigrants living in OECD countries rise from around 75 million at the start of the decade to more than 100 million at its close. Mexico, China, the United Kingdom and India are the biggest countries of origin.

Behind this long-term trend lies considerable diversity, both in flows to individual countries and between different immigration categories, such as labour migration, family migration and humanitarian migration.

Permanent migration flows to OECD countries

- Overall permanent migration flows to OECD countries are stable in 2012 compared to 2011 at approximately 4 million, but a third higher than in 2000 and 14% lower than in 2007.
- Migration flows to **Germany** rose by over a third in 2012 over 2011, driven largely by inflows from central and Eastern Europe and, to some extent, southern Europe. After the United States, Germany is now the OECD's second-largest country of immigration, up from eighth place in 2009.
- Other European countries also saw increasing flows in 2012, with inflows to **Sweden, France and Finland** reaching historical highs although the numbers involved remain relatively low as a percentage of the population in the latter two countries.
- Inflows declined in a number of southern European countries, amid continuing economic uncertainty. In 2012, inflows to **Spain** fell by 22% and to **Italy** by 19%. In these two countries, levels were more than twice higher in 2007. Meanwhile, the **United Kingdom** saw inflows fall by 11% to under 300 000 persons, the lowest level recorded since 2003.
- In a continuing trend since 2008, inflows into the **European Union** from non-EU countries fell by 12%.
- Inflows to countries with high levels of managed migration were mostly up. Permanent migration flows rose by 12% in **Australia** and by 7% in **Canada**.
- Migration flows into the **United States**, the OECD's largest receiving country, fell by 3% but remain over a million persons.

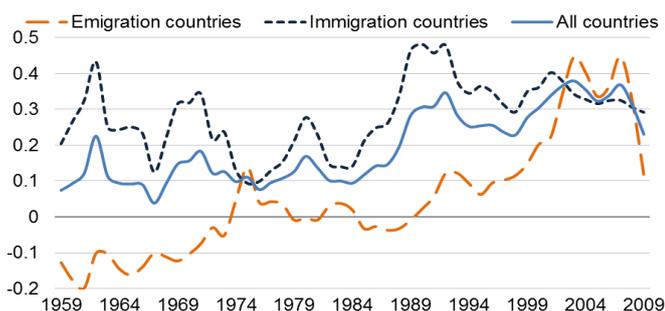
Flows by migration category

- The composition of migration flows also varied sharply, with **family migration** almost unchanged over 2011, **labour migration** down 10% but **intra-EU migration** up 12%.
- **Family migration** was essentially unchanged in the United States, which receives around half of family-reunion flows in the OECD.
- The drop in **labour migration** of 10% is striking. However, it mainly reflects falls in just two countries: Italy and Spain. Labour migration was otherwise mainly stable.
- **Intra-EU migration** saw its second year of double-digit increases but this jump largely reflected increases in just a few destination countries, most notably Germany.

Migration flows and immigrant populations have been increasing for decades

Since the 1960s, net migration to OECD countries has increased, although this long-term trend is characterised by some sharp fluctuations, often in response to the business cycle or geopolitical events. Over that same period, many OECD countries have shifted from being countries of emigration to countries of immigration.

Net migration to OECD countries as a percentage of the total resident population, 1959-2009



Source: OECD Population and Vital Statistics database.

According to most recent population censuses, between 2000/01 and 2010/11, the number of immigrants in the OECD increased by around 35%. In 2010/11 there were more than 100 million foreign-born in the OECD compared to just over 75 million a decade earlier (OECD-UNDESA, 2013).

A little more than half of the foreign-born, or 52%, were women and 75% were aged between 25 and 64. Mexico is the main country of origin with 11 million emigrants, followed by China (3.8 million), the United Kingdom (3.5 million) and India (3.4 million). The number of immigrants in OECD countries who were born in China, India and Romania has increased by more than 1.5 million in ten years.

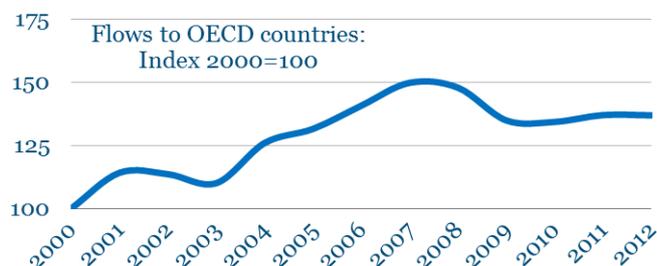
Overall, international migration flows to OECD countries are a third higher in 2010 than they were in 2000. At first glance these facts may support the idea of a constant, if not accelerating, increase in migration.

However, the situation is actually more nuanced as global migration flows to OECD have not followed a steady trend. After a strong increase at the turn of the century and a peak in 2007, they fell sharply in 2008 and 2009, in response to the global financial

crisis, and then remained relatively stable until 2012.

In 2012, total permanent migration flows to the OECD reached 4 million, half of which is for European OECD countries.

Migration flows to the OECD area, 2000-2012



Source: OECD International Migration database.

Looking at the evolution by country of destination gives an even more complex picture. Apart from Japan and Korea, where immigration remains at relatively low and stable levels, flows to other countries showed large variations over the first decade of the millennium. Spain displayed the widest variations, with inflows tripling between 2000 and 2007 before subsequently decreasing to a third of the 2007 peak. Trends observed in 2012 clearly illustrate this responsiveness to economic conditions.

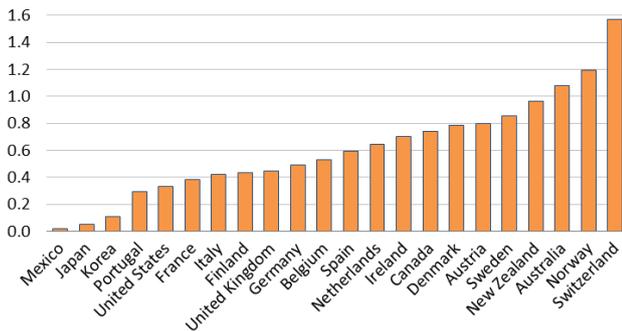
The overall level of permanent international migration to OECD countries remained fairly stable in 2012 relative to 2011, dropping by only 0.4% (15 000 persons). Yet, this overall stability hides highly diverging patterns across countries of destination and by type of migration. In fact, the heterogeneity in migration trends has never been as marked as today.

Migration trends are diverging widely across countries

Germany stands out among the countries where immigration increased in 2012. Flows increased by over a third compared with 2011, reaching 400 000 persons. Germany became the second-largest immigration country, after the United States, in the OECD in 2012, receiving more than 10% of all permanent immigration to the OECD area. In 2009, it was only the eighth largest. This spectacular increase has been fuelled mainly by inflows from central and eastern European countries and, to a lesser degree, southern Europe.

Several other European countries also experienced significantly higher migration flows in 2012 compared with 2011, with some, such as France, Sweden and Finland, even reaching historical highs. However, by international standards, inflows into France and Finland still represented only a small share of these countries' populations – only around 0.4% of the population. Overall, this ratio varies considerably between countries, ranging from over 1.5% of the population in Switzerland to less than 0.1% in Mexico and the Asian OECD countries.

Permanent migration flows as a percentage of the population, 2012



Source: OECD International Migration database.

On the other hand, three of the main European destination countries witnessed a large scale reduction of their permanent inflows. After a rebound in 2011, flows to Spain resumed their post-crisis downhill trend, falling 22% in 2012. However, that still represented just under 300 000 people, or 0.6% of the population. The second-largest decrease was in Italy, where permanent inflows fell 19% in 2012, to less than half what they were in 2007. In the United Kingdom, flows fell 11% in 2012 to under 300 000 persons.

Between 2007 and 2011, the European Union as a whole saw a decline of inflows from outside the Union of around 4% per year. In 2012, these flows dropped by 12%.

In the OECD countries that have been settled by migration and where labour migration represents a high share of the flows – i.e. Australia, Canada and New Zealand – changes from 2011 to 2012 were more limited. Permanent migration flows to Australia increased by 12% in 2012, slightly exceeding 250 000 persons. Flows to Canada also amounted to 250 000 persons, up 7% on 2011.

The United States remains, by far, the largest receiving country in the OECD in absolute terms, accounting for more than a quarter of total permanent flows to the OECD area. However, the

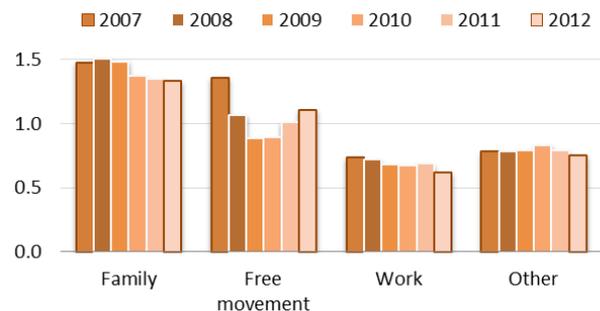
migration to population ratio is low, only around 0.3% of the population. In 2012, migration flows declined slightly, by 3% (or 30 000 persons).

New Zealand is the only settlement country where permanent flows have steadily decreased since 2005. However, at 42 000 in 2012, they still represented almost ten immigrants per thousand population.

Big variations in trends across different migration categories

Family migration continues to be the main component of international migration flows. Migration flows for family reasons were fairly stable in 2012, slipping just 1%. By contrast, migration within free-movement zones went up 10%, while managed labour migration decreased by 10%. Never before have these three major migration channels displayed such different trends.

Permanent immigration in OECD countries by category, 2007-2012



Source: OECD International Migration database.

In recent years, the United States has received more than half of the permanent family migration flows to the OECD. In 2012, 680 000 family members of US citizens or permanent residents obtained legal permanent resident status in the United States, unchanged from 2011 and 2010.

Many other OECD countries have witnessed strong variations in family migration. Flows in this category rose sharply in Sweden, up 26%; Switzerland, up 16%; and Canada, up 15%. They also rose, although less sharply, in Australia and in France, which each saw increases of 7%. On the other hand, family migration dropped sharply in Spain, probably in response to the economic situation. Family migration also decreased in some other European countries, for example Belgium and Portugal.

Permanent labour migration is decreasing

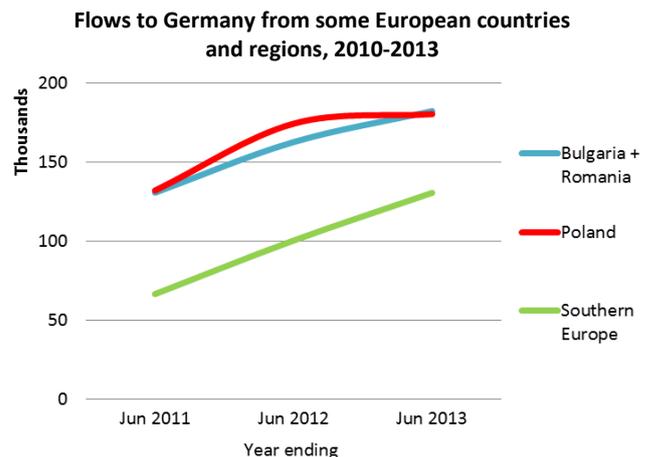
International migration to OECD countries in 2012 was marked by a notable fall in permanent labour migration. OECD countries received 10% fewer permanent workers in 2012 than in 2011. But this should not be seen as a sign of a general trend, as the decline was driven mostly by just two countries, Italy and Spain. Labour migration to Italy returned to its pre-2007 level, just below 60 000, with a drop of over 40% compared with 2011. However, labour migration still accounted for 37% of non-free movement migration to Italy, just above the figure for the European Economic Area as a whole of 36%. In Spain, labour migration fell by 17% but remained at a relatively high level of 112 000.

Otherwise, labour migration remained fairly stable in many OECD countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Belgium and Ireland. Among the large immigration countries, Australia and Canada saw labour migration rise by 6%. Austria and Japan saw large increases, about 20%, but from very low levels.

Free-movement migration is increasing again

While it remains far from its pre-crisis level, free-movement migration, in particular within the European Union, has soared again in 2012. A total of 925 000 EU citizens emigrated to another EU country in 2012, up 12% over the previous year. This was the second consecutive year of double-digit increases.

This increase is, however, concentrated in few European destination countries. In absolute terms, the overall increase of EU free-movement stands just below 100 000, which correspond more or less to the increase recorded in Germany alone. More than 300 000 EU citizens emigrated to Germany in 2012, making it the second consecutive year with an increase of around 50%. Partial figures for migration to Germany in 2013, published by the German Statistical Office, suggest the upward trend continues, although perhaps not at the same magnitude. Indeed, whereas flows from Poland seem to have stabilised, flows from other major sending European countries may have continued to rise.



In absolute terms, variations in other countries have not been particularly significant, except in Spain, where 116 000 EU citizens settled in 2012, still a high level, but down 22% on 2011. Flows of EU nationals to Italy went down 9%, while those to France went up by 11%, equivalent to just below 100 000 people in both countries. Permanent migration to the United Kingdom from other European countries has remained stable since 2009, at around 75 000.

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Useful links

www.oecd.org/migration

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