

Definition and measurement

Place of birth and nationality are the two criteria commonly used by OECD countries to define their immigrant population. According to the first criterion, migrants are persons residing in a country but born in another. According to the second criterion, migrants are residents who have a foreign nationality and may include persons born in the host country. Cross-country differences between the size of the foreign-born population and that of the foreign population depend on the rules governing the acquisition of citizenship in each country. In general, the foreign-born population is substantially larger than the foreign population. More information on the origin and characteristics (age, gender, educational level, duration of stay and labour market outcomes) of the immigrant population in OECD countries can be found in the publication *A Profile of Immigrant Populations in the 21st Century*.

Net migration is the number of arrivals of foreigners and of nationals returning from abroad in a given year net of departures of foreigners and nationals in the same year. Although the inflow and outflow data are generally not comparable, the net migration statistics, which are calculated as the difference between inflows and outflows, tend to “net out” the main source of non-comparability in the flow data, namely short-term movements. The OECD annual report *International Migration Outlook* provides a consolidated analysis of recent trends and migration policies in OECD countries.

On average about 12% of the OECD population was foreign-born in 2006. OECD countries differ sharply in the size of their migrant populations. More than half of OECD countries had immigrant populations exceeding 10% of their total population (GE3.1). France (8%) and the United Kingdom (10%) have modest immigrant populations compared to their immediate neighbours Ireland and Spain. The share of the foreign-born was highest in Australia, Canada,

Luxembourg, New Zealand and Switzerland, where it was 20% or more. Mexico and Turkey, countries of high emigration, have negligible foreign-born populations.

OECD foreign-born population shares are growing rapidly. The foreign-born share in the OECD has grown by 2 percentage points since 2000. Some countries, in particular Spain (7%), Ireland (6%) and New Zealand and Austria (both 4%), have registered very high changes in the immigrant share of the population.

On average, net migration contributed up to half of population growth in OECD countries over the last decade. For some countries, net migration accounted for most (e.g. Spain) or all (e.g. Italy) of the increase in the population over the last ten years (GE3.2). Highest net migration was recorded in Ireland, Luxembourg and Spain.

Gross immigration into the OECD area has increased over the past fifteen years (GE3.3). Net migration flows disguise much larger long term gross flows, both in and out of countries. Many OECD countries are faced with the challenges of economic and social integration of immigrants and their children. At the same time, for some of the non-European OECD countries, emigration of the young, skilled and healthy – the “brain-drain” phenomenon – also constitutes a policy concern.

Further reading

OECD (2007), *Jobs for Immigrants (Vol. 1): Labour Market Integration in Australia, Denmark, Germany and Sweden*, OECD, Paris.

OECD (2008a), *International Migration Outlook*, OECD, Paris.

OECD (2008b), *A Profile of Immigrant Populations in the 21st Century: Data from OECD Countries*, OECD, Paris.

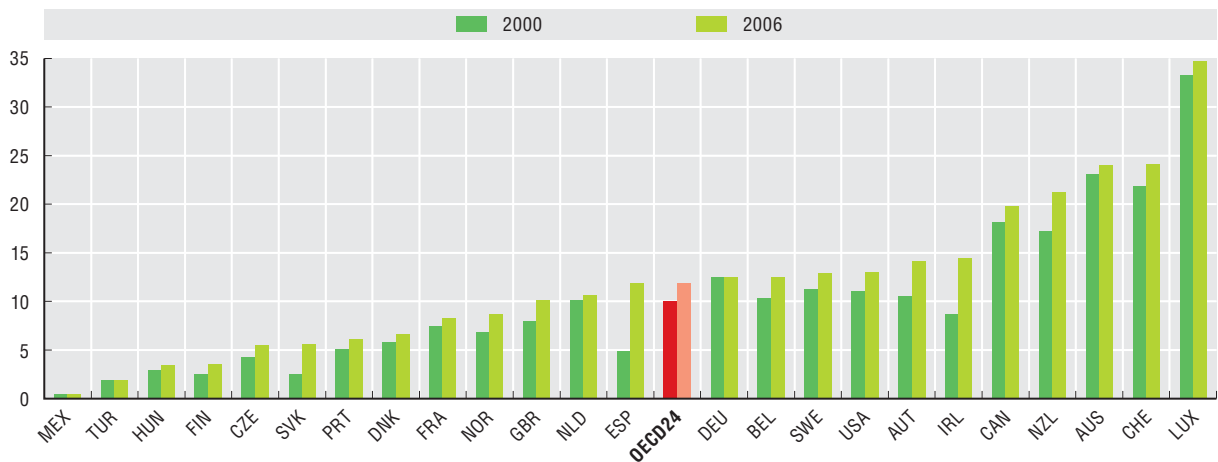
OECD (2008c), *Jobs for Immigrants (Vol. 2): Labour Market Integration in Belgium, France, Netherlands and Portugal*, OECD, Paris.

Figure note

Figure GE3.3: EEA: European Economic Area is the European Union (EU15 for these data) plus Iceland and Norway.

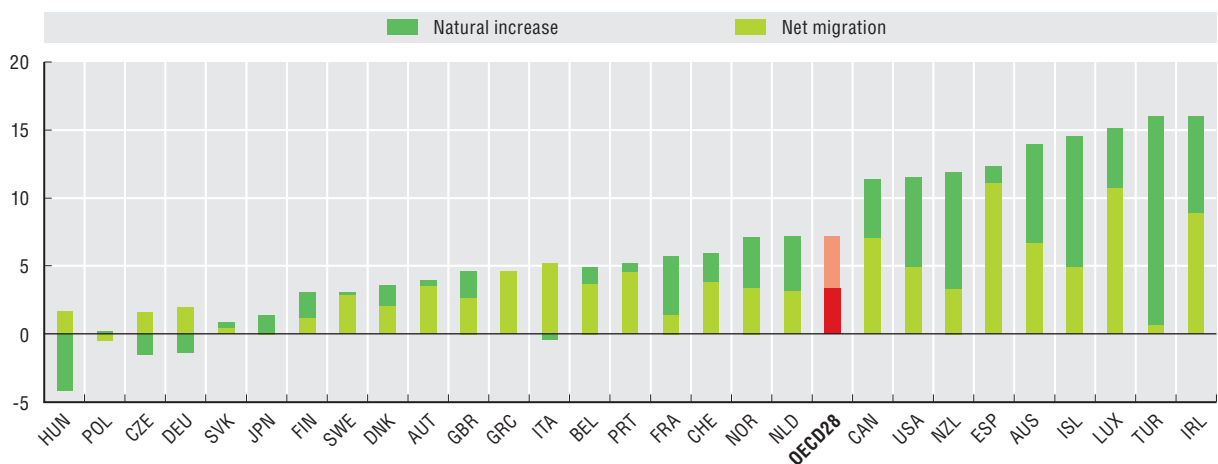
GE3.1. OECD foreign-born populations are growing rapidly

Foreign-born population as a percentage of the total population in 2000 and 2006



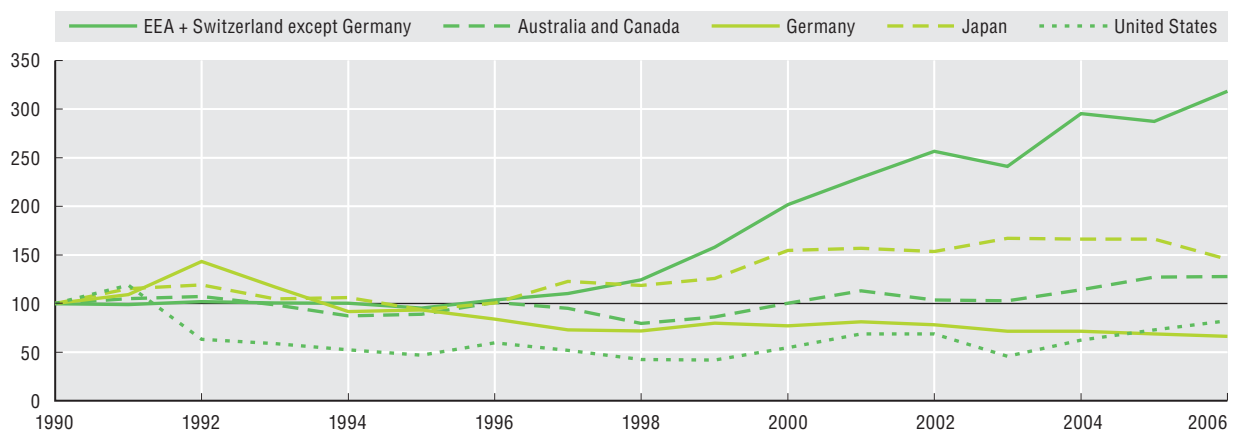
GE3.2. Net migration contributed up to half of population growth in OECD countries over the last decade

Percentage change in population 1996 to 2006 and the contribution of net migration



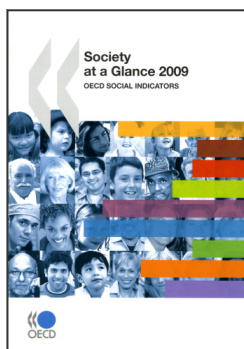
GE3.3. Gross immigration into the OECD area has increased over the last decade

Inflows of foreigners in selected OECD countries, 1990-2006, 1990=100



Source: OECD (2008), International Migration Outlook, OECD, Paris.

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