

Executive summary

Main trends

Permanent migration flows increased sharply in the OECD area for the second year in a row, preliminary 2015 data suggests. Around 4.8 million people migrated permanently to OECD countries in 2015, slightly above the 2007 peak level and 10% more than in 2014.

Family reunification migration and free movement within the European Union each accounted for about 30% of all permanent migration to the OECD. Migration from Romania, Bulgaria, Italy and France increased sharply in 2014. One in three new migrants to OECD countries comes from another OECD country. About 1 in 10 migrants to the OECD is Chinese and 1 in 20 is Indian.

Temporary migration has also increased. In 2014, intra-firm mobility and secondment of workers within the European Union and the European Free Trade Area rose by 17% and 38%. International recruitment of seasonal workers increased in several countries.

In 2015, there were 1.65 million new registered asylum seekers in the OECD, a record high. Almost 1.3 million of them came to European OECD countries. Syrians made about 25% of applications, Afghans made 16%. Germany registered 440 000 formal asylum applications in 2015 and more than one million pre-registrations. Sweden received the most applications in proportion to its population (1.6%).

There were no major changes in OECD migration policies in 2015-16. In Canada, however, a new application management system for economic immigrants entered into force in 2015. In Europe, the “European Agenda for Migration” was adopted and implemented in 2015, as well as other measures aiming at addressing the root causes and aftermath of the recent migration flows surge and at reforming the common European asylum system. In 2016, the European Commission proposed amendments to the blue card directive for highly skilled workers and the conditions for the posting of workers within the EU.

In 2011-15, migrants’ employment rates stayed level or slightly decreased in most OECD countries, but migrant unemployment remained high in many. On average, about 60% of the immigrants in the OECD are employed (64.9% for the native-born) and their unemployment rate reaches 9.3% (7.3% for the native-born).

In countries most affected by the refugee crisis, integration measures for asylum seekers and refugees were stepped up. Expenditure on education and language courses increased in Austria, Finland, Germany, Norway and Sweden. Several countries reduced waiting times to enter the labour market or facilitated early access to language courses and skills assessment.

The local impact of migration

Much of the empirical evidence on the impact of migration in host countries focuses on the national level, although the impact is most felt locally. It is difficult to generalise across domains (labour market, education, health, housing, etc.); the local impact of migration usually depends on the specific socio-economic characteristics of migrants. For example, available evidence suggests that immigrants tend to consume less health services than the native-born, but use public transportation more often. In school, children of immigrants, especially recent arrivals, often require more support and are thus more costly per capita, notably because of language training.

Large sudden inflows may exacerbate longstanding structural problems in local infrastructure and adapting to higher demand can take time. Acknowledging that migration is not the primary cause of such challenges is an important first step in reconciling often negative public opinion with the facts of the situation.

Migration associated with environmental and geopolitical shocks

Environmental and geopolitical shocks are often associated with large-scale migration flows, which can put legal migration and protection systems under strain.

Past experiences show that OECD countries make use of temporary relief measures for people from countries in conflict or facing natural disasters. Some OECD countries operate sizeable resettlement programmes in the context of geopolitical shocks, but temporary and subsidiary protection remains, the most common response to upsurges in asylum seekers, including the current crisis. Alternative pathways, such as labour, international study and family channels, or humanitarian visas and private sponsorship programmes, are not part of the usual response to increased flows, including in the context of the current refugee crisis.

This year's *Outlook* emphasizes that: effective international co-operation cannot be taken for granted; protracted crises generate growing tensions between the need for durable solutions and the general preference for short-term protection measures; and selection, a common feature of most migration systems, needs to be rethought in the context of an international protection framework.

Main findings

Migration is rising and has returned to its pre-crisis level

- Permanent migration flows to OECD countries amounted to 4.3 million entries in 2014 (+4% compared with 2013). According to preliminary data, this increased by around 10% in 2015.
- The foreign-born population in OECD countries was 120 million people in 2014.
- In 2015, OECD countries registered 1.65 million asylum applications, double 2014 and 1992 levels.
- In 2013, there were almost 3 million international students enrolled in OECD countries, 23% from China.

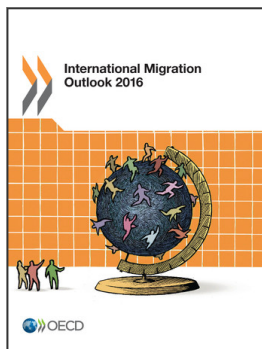
The impact of migration at the local level should not be underestimated

- In all OECD countries, immigrants are overrepresented in urban areas.

- The impact on public infrastructure and services depends on the relative characteristics of immigrants compared to the native born and on the public services and infrastructure considered. High inflows can put pressure on local infrastructure. However, while immigration can exacerbate structural problems, notably in housing and education, it is generally not the main source of these challenges.

Migration policies could better respond to geopolitical and environmental shocks

- There is a limited range of international instruments for dealing with shock-related migration.
- Despite the practical challenges of implementing alternative pathways for refugees, the potential in terms of number of beneficiaries may be important, shown by the Syrian crisis.
- In the OECD area, 18 200 work permits were granted to Syrians (nearly 2 million Syrian 18-to-59-year-olds were displaced to neighbouring countries) during the past five years, while about 15 300 young Syrians received student visas to OECD countries (less than 10% of displaced Syrian university students) and more than 72 000 Syrians were reunited with family members.



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