

Executive summary

Permanent migration to EU and OECD countries has reached record highs in recent years, but this should not overshadow the longstanding presence of settled migrants, their children and their native-born descendants. Today, the OECD and the European Union are home to around 128 and 58 million immigrants, respectively, accounting for over 10% of their population. In the European Union, around two-thirds of immigrants are from non-EU countries. Over the last decade, the immigrant population has increased by 23% in the OECD and by 28% in the EU.

This publication documents the integration outcomes of immigrants and their children in all EU and OECD countries, as well as in selected non-OECD G20 countries. It focuses, in particular, on skills and labour market outcomes, living conditions and integration in the host society; it also provides comprehensive background information on immigrants and their lives.

In most domains, immigrants tend to have worse economic and social outcomes than the native-born, although these gaps tend to reduce the longer they stay and become more familiar with their host country. Education helps migrants to successfully integrate, but having a higher education does not necessarily provide them with the same returns that it does for the native-born. Immigrants in European countries tend to have lower outcomes than those in other OECD countries, particularly immigrants from outside the EU, partly driven by their lower education on average. Over the last ten years, labour market integration of immigrants has slightly improved in most OECD and EU countries, as have their qualification levels. Immigrants have generally not, however, caught up with the outcomes of the native-born. There is also still some way to go for full social integration.

Key findings

Labour market outcomes

- In all OECD and EU countries, immigrants have higher unemployment rates than the native-born. The differences are particularly marked for non-EU migrants in the EU.
- Over the last decade, differences in unemployment rates of immigrants and native-born have widened in OECD and EU countries, most notably in Southern Europe, due to the difficult economic situation.
- When unemployed, immigrants are generally less likely to receive unemployment benefits than the native-born in the EU.
- Across the EU, almost one in four economically inactive immigrants wish to work, compared to one in six among the native-born.

- On average in the EU and OECD, over one in four low-skilled jobs is held by an immigrant. This figure rises to over 40% in Austria, Germany, Sweden and Norway, and over 60% in Switzerland and Luxembourg.
- Among the 33.2 million immigrants in the OECD and 11 million in the EU who are considered highly educated, around 8.1 million and 2.9, respectively have jobs for which they are overqualified. About another 7 million and 2.4 million, respectively, are unemployed. Taken together in both areas, this is almost 45% of the highly educated immigrant population whose formal qualifications are not – or not fully – used, compared with 40% of the highly educated native-born OECD wide and 30% in the EU.
- Almost every labour market in the OECD and the EU does not value foreign degrees as highly as native ones. In the EU, the employment rate of non-EU migrants with foreign credentials is 14 percentage points lower than that of their peers with host-country qualifications. Furthermore, those who do have a job are more likely to be overqualified.

Education and skills

- In the OECD, 37% of immigrants are highly educated, 5 percentage points more than among the native-born.
- In the EU, around 15% of non EU-born aged 15 to 64 went no further than primary school education. While that share has slightly declined over the last decade, it remains three times as high as among the native-born.
- The highly educated proportion of immigrants has grown in virtually all OECD and EU countries, rising by 7 percentage points over the past decade in both areas.

Living conditions

- Immigrants are over-represented in the lowest income decile in virtually all OECD and EU countries – 14% and 18% of immigrants, respectively. At the same time, income inequality among the foreign-born tends to be wider than among native-born.
- Relative poverty is today more widespread among the foreign-born than a decade ago. The OECD- and EU-wide poverty rates among immigrants increased by 1 and 5 percentage points, respectively, over the last decade, while remaining stable among natives.
- Having a job provides protection against poverty, although less so for immigrants than natives, in all countries. Over 53% of the foreign-born in the United States, Switzerland and Iceland who are poor are also working.
- In a number of countries, spatial concentration is very pronounced. In the EU, 30% of non-EU migrants from the largest immigrant groups in their respective country, state that most inhabitants of their neighbourhoods share their ethnic background. This is most pronounced in Belgium and the Netherlands (where more than 50% report living in such a neighbourhood), followed by France and Portugal.

Social integration

- Views of immigration have remained broadly stable in EU host countries since 2006, although in a majority of countries more people now take slightly more positive stances. In a large majority of countries, the more the native-born actually interact with the foreign-born, the more likely they are to consider immigration as an opportunity for their country rather than a problem.
- In all EU and OECD countries, more than 80% of immigrants report feeling close or very close to their host country.
- Around 14% of all foreign-born people in the EU report belonging to a group they think is subject to discrimination on the grounds of ethnicity, nationality or race.
- An average of 74% of immigrants with host-country nationality in the OECD and the EU report that they participated in the most recent national elections – less than the native-born average, 80%.

Gender differences

- In the OECD and EU, women account for 51% of both immigrants and native-born populations. This share has increased slightly during the last decade.
- OECD-wide, immigrant men, 77% of whom have jobs, are slightly more likely to be employed than their native peers (74%); in the EU, the likelihood is similar. The reverse is true among women, with 59% of the foreign-born and 60% of the native-born being in work in the OECD. Rates EU-wide are 57% and 63%, respectively.
- In Korea, Slovenia and Southern Europe (with the exception of Portugal), over 30% of immigrant women work in low-skilled jobs compared with less than 15% of their native peers. In the EU, immigrant women are ten times more likely to work in household services than their native peers and their proportion in these jobs exceeds 20% among the immigrant female employment in Southern European countries.
- EU-wide, immigrants are more likely than natives to agree with the statement that “when jobs are scarce, men should have more right to a job than women”, although the difference is not large: 22% vs. 16%.

Youth with a migrant background

- The outcomes of young people with a migrant background are often seen as the benchmark for the success or failure of integration. OECD-wide, those who immigrated as children or were born in the host country of at least one foreign-born parent account for nearly one in five 15 to 34-year-olds, or 38.7 million people (13% of the EU 15-34 population or 15.4 million). A further 9% arrived in the host country as adults (8% EU-wide).
- For youth with a migrant background, on many indicators there is a disparity between European countries on the one hand and the non-European OECD countries on the other. In general, outcomes for young people with a migrant background compared with young people with native-born parents tend to be unfavourable in Europe, while the opposite is the case elsewhere. This is largely driven by differences in the socio-economic characteristics of immigrant parents.

- Nevertheless, in the EU, the educational attainment levels and outcomes of youth with immigrant parents have improved over the past decade – both in absolute terms and relative to their peers with native-born parents. This is not only evident in better educational outcomes and higher resilience at age 15, but also in lower levels of school drop-out and higher educational attainment.
- In spite of the progress achieved, in Europe, youth with a migrant background still lag behind their peers with no migrant background (e.g. by over half a school year for the reading score when aged 15). In non-European OECD countries in contrast, native-born with foreign-born parents perform better at school than their peers with native-born parents, except in the United States.
- While there has been progress in educational outcomes, this is less evident with respect to employment. In all EU countries, except Portugal and Lithuania, young immigrants and the native-born offspring of immigrants are less likely to be in work than their peers with native-born parents. The overall employment gap between the native-born of native- vs foreign-born parentage is 6 percentage points. As for child-arrival immigrants, they are 8 points less likely to have jobs.
- The relative child poverty rate in immigrant households is twice as high as in native-born households, both in the OECD and the EU, and indeed in the latter, discrepancies have grown further over the past decade. The divergent trend was most pronounced in Spain and in a number of other EU countries, such as Austria, France and the Netherlands.
- In many European countries, native-born children of immigrants report higher levels of perceived discrimination than young immigrants. This is not the case in non-European OECD countries, however.
- OECD- and EU-wide, close to 58% of native-born youth with immigrant parents report that they voted in the most recent national elections, 10 percentage points lower than their peers with native-born parents.