

Executive summary

Main trends

Permanent migration flows in the OECD area have increased for the third year in a row, according to preliminary 2016 data. Around 5 million people migrated permanently to OECD countries in 2016, well above the previous peak level, observed in 2007 before the economic crisis.

Humanitarian migration was the main driver behind this rise in 2015/16, accounting for 1.5 million people between January 2015 and December 2016. In 2015, family migration and free movement within the European Union each accounted for about one-third of all permanent migration to OECD countries. The five main countries of origin in 2015 were China, Syria, Romania, Poland and India. Among new migrants to OECD countries, 29% came from another OECD country.

Temporary migration has also increased in the OECD. In 2015, international intra-firm mobility increased by more than 10% and the secondment of workers within the European Union rose by 3%. International recruitment of seasonal workers increased in many countries, particularly sharply in Poland.

In 2016, as in 2015, OECD countries registered more than 1.6 million new asylum requests. Of these, almost three-quarters were registered in European OECD countries. Syrians made more than 20% of applications in the OECD area, while Afghans made 13%. Germany registered 720 000 formal asylum applications in 2016 and, of all OECD countries, received the most applications in proportion to its population (0.9%).

In response to the growing demand for international protection, many OECD countries have increased their resettlement programmes. The conditions offered to those with protection status outside the 1951 UNHCR convention, however, have become less favourable in several countries. Many countries are also implementing stricter border controls and stricter verification of entries and stays. At the same time, OECD countries are continuing to review and improve their policies for attracting high-skilled foreign workers, entrepreneurs and investors, offering them more channels for entry and better conditions for residence.

In 2016, the employment rate of the OECD's migrant population remained relatively stable at 67.4% – a 1 percentage point increase compared to the previous year. The unemployment rate of the foreign-born, however, remain higher than those of their native-born peers, notably in Europe.

- Against the backdrop of the refugee crisis, much effort has gone into designing appropriate policy responses to facilitate the integration of recently arrived refugees and asylum seekers into the labour market. Many OECD countries have diversified their integration offers to provide tailor-made measures and to align them with labour market needs. At the same time, there has been an emphasis on early interventions, such as upfront skills

assessments, and on speeding up the integration process, including by curtailing the duration of programmes. Several countries have made participation in integration programmes compulsory.

Family migration

- Family migration, which encompasses four main subcategories (family formation, accompanying family, family reunification and international adoption), has been the main channel of permanent migration to the OECD area in recent years. Compared to other groups of migrants, adult family migrants integrate slowly in the labour market of their host country.
- Family migration includes a large variety of migrants from new-borns to the very aged, persons of every skill level and from all countries of origin. This diversity distinguishes family migration from other migration channels. It is a complex phenomenon addressed by a range of different family migration rules and provisions in OECD countries.
- An expansion of rights over past decades has been accompanied by increasing conditions on eligibility and on the residence permits granted to family migrants. The management of family migration is becoming more complex as it struggles to reconcile separate priorities and competing policy objectives. While family migration should be managed, a number of constraints limit the scope for such management. There are four key challenges for current family migration policies: how to better anticipate the levels of family migration flows; how to balance rules for family migration against the need for countries to remain attractive to targeted labour migrants; how to use conditions for family migrants to accelerate their integration; and how to deal with family reunification rights for unaccompanied minors.

Main findings

Migration is at its highest since 2007

- Permanent migration flows to OECD countries reached 4.7 million entries in 2015 (+7% compared with 2014), and should total around 5 million entries in 2016, according to preliminary data.
- In 2016, OECD countries registered over 1.6 million asylum applications, as in 2015. Around 1.5 million people were granted international protection during these two years.
- In 2015, over 1.5 million study permits were delivered to tertiary students in the OECD area.
- The foreign-born population in OECD countries stood at 124 million people in 2015.

The labour market integration of immigrants is slowly recovering

- More than two in three immigrants in the OECD are employed. On average, the unemployment rate of foreign-born workers reached 8.3% in 2016 and 12.4% in European OECD countries; this is 1.8 and 4.3 percentage points higher, respectively, than the rate of native-born workers.
- Migrants are overly represented in jobs involving routine tasks, rendering them more at risk for job loss as automation progresses. In European OECD countries, 47% of foreign-born workers are working in occupations that primarily involve routine tasks.

Family migration

- More than 1.6 million family migrants received a residence permit in the OECD area in 2015, representing almost 40% of the total permanent migration inflow.
- Family reunification comes with a delay compared to economic migration categories, but also responds to policy changes regarding conditions, processing times, and rules for other migration channels.
- Family formation is an important and increasing driver of family migration. In many OECD countries, more than 10% of marriages occur between a citizen and a foreigner.
- Compared to other groups of migrants, adult family migrants seem to integrate more slowly in the labour market of the host country. In Europe, they achieve employment levels similar on average to those of other migration categories and natives only after 20 years of stay.
- Family migration of the spouses and children of foreigners is subject to income or housing requirements in most OECD countries. Such restrictions are less common for citizens' foreign spouses and children. Language and integration requirements have also been added by a number of OECD countries in the past decade, with little evidence of an effect on employment outcomes.



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