

Executive summary

Migration flows are at a record high

Migration to OECD countries is at unprecedented levels. With more than 6 million new permanent immigrants (not including Ukrainian refugees), permanent-type migration to OECD countries reached a record level in 2022. This was driven by increases in humanitarian and managed labour migration, along with accompanying family members. More than one in three OECD countries registered their highest levels in at least 15 years, with several countries, such as Canada and the United Kingdom, reporting the highest figures on record. Temporary labour migration, especially of the seasonal kind, also registered a strong increase. The number of admissions of international students neared 2 million for the first time.

On top of these figures come the inflows of refugees from Ukraine. As of June 2023, there were around 4.7 million displaced Ukrainians in OECD countries. Germany, Poland and the United States host the highest number of refugees from Ukraine in absolute terms, while Estonia, the Czech Republic and Lithuania have received the highest number as a share of the population.

Asylum applications in the OECD were also at a record high in 2022. Over 2 million new applications were lodged in OECD countries in 2022, the highest number recorded so far, well above the 2015/16 previous record of 1.7 million and twice the 2021 level. The increase was largely driven by soaring applications in the United States, at 730 000 compared with less than 190 000 in 2021.

In the meantime, acquisitions of citizenship in OECD countries also reached a new high in 2022, at 2.8 million, according to preliminary data.

Labour market outcomes of immigrants are at the highest levels since the beginning of the millennium

Between 2021 and 2022, the employment rate of migrants improved in all OECD countries except Poland – which had high inflows of refugees from Ukraine – and reached the highest level on record, OECD-wide. There was a particularly strong improvement in the labour market outcomes of migrant women, diminishing the gender gap in several countries.

In light of growing labour needs, labour migration is high on the policy agenda, while trends in integration were marked by the specific needs of refugees from Ukraine

The recorded increases in both new labour migration and the employment rate of resident migrants are linked to the fact that many countries in the OECD are experiencing labour shortages. This has pushed labour migration high on the policy agenda. Several countries, including Australia and Germany, are planning significant changes in their labour migration frameworks, while others have increased their targets for labour migration.

In reaction to record numbers of asylum seekers, increasing exits from origin countries and movements through transit countries, several OECD countries have introduced stricter asylum and border policies and reduced quotas for resettlement. Temporary approaches to protection – without a direct pathway for permanent or long-term residency – are increasingly being applied to address protection needs. At the same time, there is also a trend towards more diversification in the international protection and humanitarian admission responses, including through new complementary pathways such as private sponsorship programmes, and labour and education pathways for refugees.

Developments in integration policies have been marked by the challenges arising from the massive inflow of refugees from Ukraine, with a disproportionate share of highly educated women with small children. This exacerbated some prior trends, notably broader consideration of the specific needs of women and mothers in integration policy, as well as improvements in the procedures for the recognition of foreign qualifications.

Immigrant mothers face specific challenges

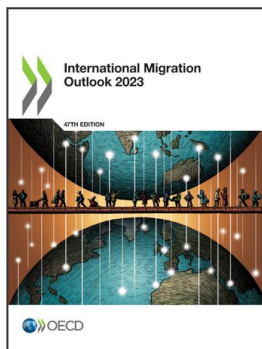
The childbearing behaviour of migrants plays a rather limited role in population dynamics. While migrant women tend to have more children than their native-born peers, their total fertility rate is still below the replacement rate (2.1 children per woman) in most OECD countries. Since female migration is often associated with family formation or reunification, the likelihood of childbearing is frequently elevated immediately after arrival. As the total fertility rate typically measures what happens at a destination and in a given year, it tends to overestimate fertility differentials between native- and foreign-born women, as the latter often go through a phase of low fertility and high fertility before and after migration, respectively. Migrant women also tend to have children at earlier ages, with potential negative consequences for their labour market insertion in their host countries.

On average, differences in the employment rates among women between mothers and non-mothers are twice as high for migrants as for the native-born. Individual and cultural preferences are often cited as main obstacles to their labour market integration, but the evidence suggests that migrant women do not choose inactivity voluntarily. Migrant mothers also report higher levels of underemployment and involuntary part-time employment.

Migrant women who emigrate for family reasons often do not benefit from structured integration programmes, such as those available for humanitarian migrants, nor from a job offer as do labour migrants. Integration measures which focus on new arrivals may also be ill-timed for this group. Against this backdrop, a growing number of OECD countries now allow for parental leave schemes in integration programmes, have extended the time limit for eligibility or have invested in programmes targeting those who have remained inactive for a prolonged period after arrival.

Key findings

- Permanent-type migration to OECD countries increased by 26% in 2022 compared with 2021. Preliminary figures for 2023 suggest a further increase.
- Family migration remained the primary category of entry for new permanent-type migrants, representing 40% of all permanent-type migration, while managed labour migration and free mobility both accounted for 21% each.
- The top origin countries for asylum applicants within the OECD in 2022 were Venezuela (221 000), Cuba (180 000), Afghanistan (170 000) and Nicaragua (165 000).
- In more than half of OECD countries, the employment rate of migrants is at the highest in more than two decades.
- Immigrant mothers face a disproportionate disadvantage, both compared with immigrant women without children and vis-à-vis their native-born peers. On average across the OECD, the gap in employment rates between immigrant and native-born mothers is 20 percentage points.



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