



BRIEFING

International Migration: The UK Compared with other OECD Countries

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This briefing uses data from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) to compare international migration to and from the UK with migration to other OECD countries.

Key Points

The OECD's "permanent-type legal migration" includes migrants with settlement rights and migrants with temporary but renewable residence permits that can lead to settlement.

The UK had 321,200 permanent-type incoming migrants in 2011, the third highest level among OECD countries with comparable data.

The UK was above the OECD average in the share of inflows in the work category in 2011, but below the OECD average in the share of inflows in the free movement category.

The UK occupied the 7th position among OECD countries in requests for asylum in 2011.

The UK held the second position in the OECD (just behind the USA) in number of international tertiary-level students in 2011.

The UK is a top-ten source country of migrants to OECD countries (107,000 migrants in 2011).

Understanding the evidence

The OECD is an international economic organisation of 34 countries, most of which are developed countries.

The data in this report are from the OECD 2013 International Migration Outlook. Most of the data are from the individual contributions of national correspondents appointed by the OECD Secretariat. In order to provide a comparison of migration inflows in different countries it is necessary to standardise the country-specific estimates.

The OECD's "permanent-type legal migration" includes migrants with settlement rights (i.e. permission to stay permanently), as well as migrants on temporary but renewable residence permits that can lead to settlement (such as those individuals in the Tier 1 and Tier 2 migration categories in the UK). Therefore, the term "permanent" does not indicate that the migrants enter the country with the right of permanent residence. The OECD definition excludes temporary migrants whose temporary residence permits cannot be renewed or only renewed under limited circumstances. The OECD's definition of a permanent migrant also excludes international students, even if they stay for more than a year in the host country.

The OECD also provides a measure of the inflow of temporary workers to OECD countries.

The UK had 321,200 permanent-type incoming migrants in 2011, the third highest level among OECD countries with comparable data

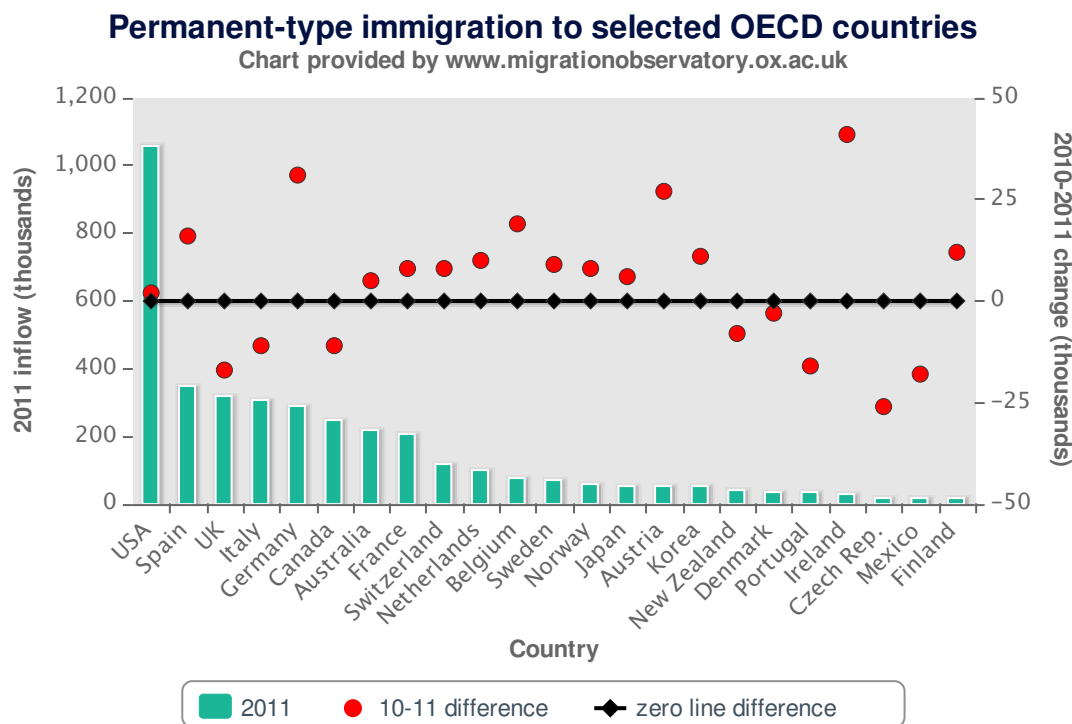
Permanent-type international migration movements to OECD countries with comparable data (i.e. those with standardised statistics) were close to 3.9 million migrants in 2011, up from 3.8 million in 2010. The increase was close to 2%, equivalent to 77,900 migrants. This increase contrasts with the consecutive annual declines in permanent-type migration inflows to OECD countries during the 2008-2010 period.

OECD countries experienced different levels of change in permanent-type immigration from 2010 to 2011. As shown in Figure 1, eight countries experienced falling inflows in 2011. From those eight countries, six experienced declines in immigration of over 10%. The declines were greatest in the Czech Republic and Mexico (26% and 18% decline, respectively). However, these two countries have a relative small flow of permanent-type immigration (about 22,000 each in 2011). From the countries with significant permanent-type immigration flows (i.e. over 300,000), the UK and Italy experienced the biggest decreases in immigration (18% and 11%, respectively).

Some OECD countries experienced increases in permanent-type immigration in 2011. The largest percentage increases were that of Ireland and Austria (41% and 27%, respectively). However, Ireland receives a relatively small number of permanent-type migrants (33,700 in 2011).

The USA was the leader among OECD countries in terms of absolute inflows of permanent-type migrants in 2011, being the only country with an inflow of over 1 million migrants. The USA has had the highest permanent-type migration inflows since the OECD started reporting these statistics in 2003. The UK had an inflow of 321,200 permanent-type incoming migrants, the third highest level among OECD countries with comparable data.

Figure 1



Source : OECD 2013 International Migration Outlook

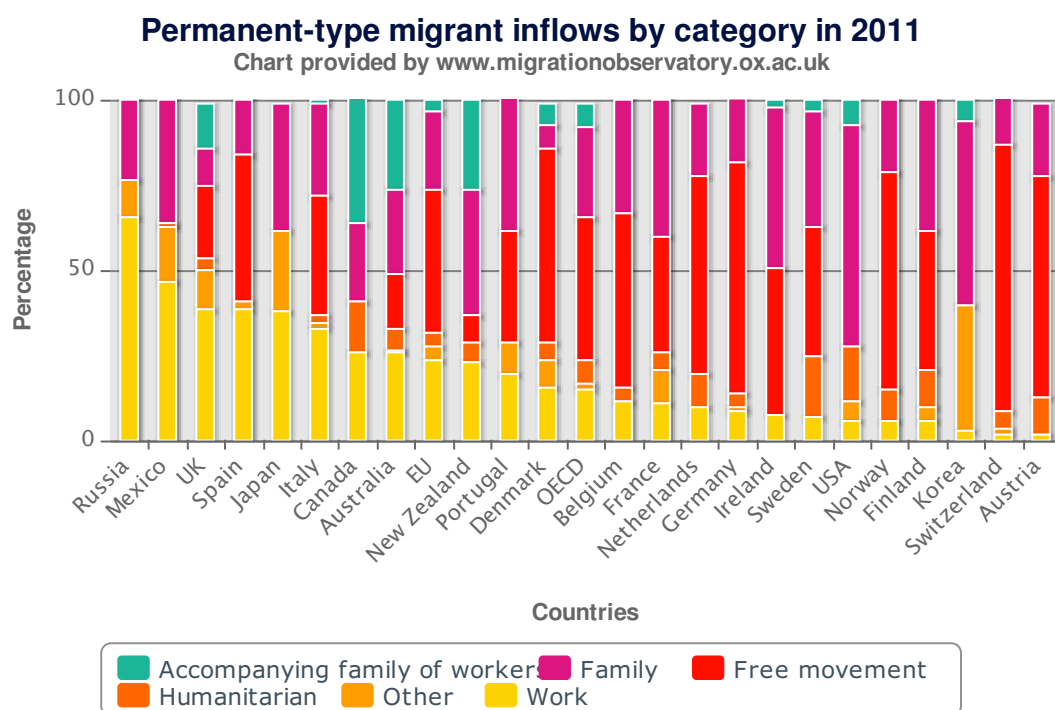
The UK was above OECD average in the share of inflows in the work category in 2011, but below OECD average in the share of inflows in the free movement category

Figure 2 reports the share of permanent-type migration entries by category for 2011. The OECD reports estimates of six entry categories: work, family, free movement, humanitarian, accompanying family of workers and other. Those migrants who are in one category (e.g. free movement) are not included in other categories (i.e. work). These categories represent the routes for entering the country, not the reasons for immigration.

During 2011, on average 42% of migration to OECD countries was accounted for by the free movement category. This was mainly due to migration to EU countries. Other important migration categories for OECD countries during 2011 were family (26% in average) and work (15% in average). It is important to highlight that much of the migration for work and family reunion purposes to OECD countries is counted under the free movement category.

For the UK the most common category of permanent-type immigration was work (39%) followed by free movement (21%), accompanying family workers (13%) and family (11%). This means that the UK was above the OECD average in the importance of the work category to its overall permanent-type migrant inflows, but under the OECD average concerning the free movement and family categories.

Figure 2



Source: OECD 2013 International Migration Outlook

The UK occupied the 7th position among OECD countries in requests for asylum in 2011

OECD countries received 425,530 requests for asylum during 2011. The main countries of origin of asylum seekers in the OECD were Afghanistan, China and Iraq. The OECD leader in asylum claims during 2011 was the USA (60,590) followed by France (52,150) and Germany (45,740). The number of asylum seeker requests in 2011 was 25,460. The UK occupied the 7th position in this regard among OECD countries. The main countries of origin of asylum seekers in the UK during 2011 were Pakistan, Iran and Sri Lanka.

Luxembourg and Sweden dominate in asylum requests per capita at 4,024 and 3,140 requests per million population. The UK received 408 asylum requests per million population in 2011, occupying the eighteenth place among the OECD countries with comparable statistics.

The UK held the second position in the OECD in number of international tertiary-level students in 2011

Comparing the number of international students across countries is challenging because some countries collect data on foreign students (students that do not hold the citizenship of the country in which they are studying), others collect data on students who completed their prior education in a different country and others on non-resident students (those who have migrated for the purpose of taking up studies). The data for the UK refers to non-resident students, but this is compared with countries which use different definitions.

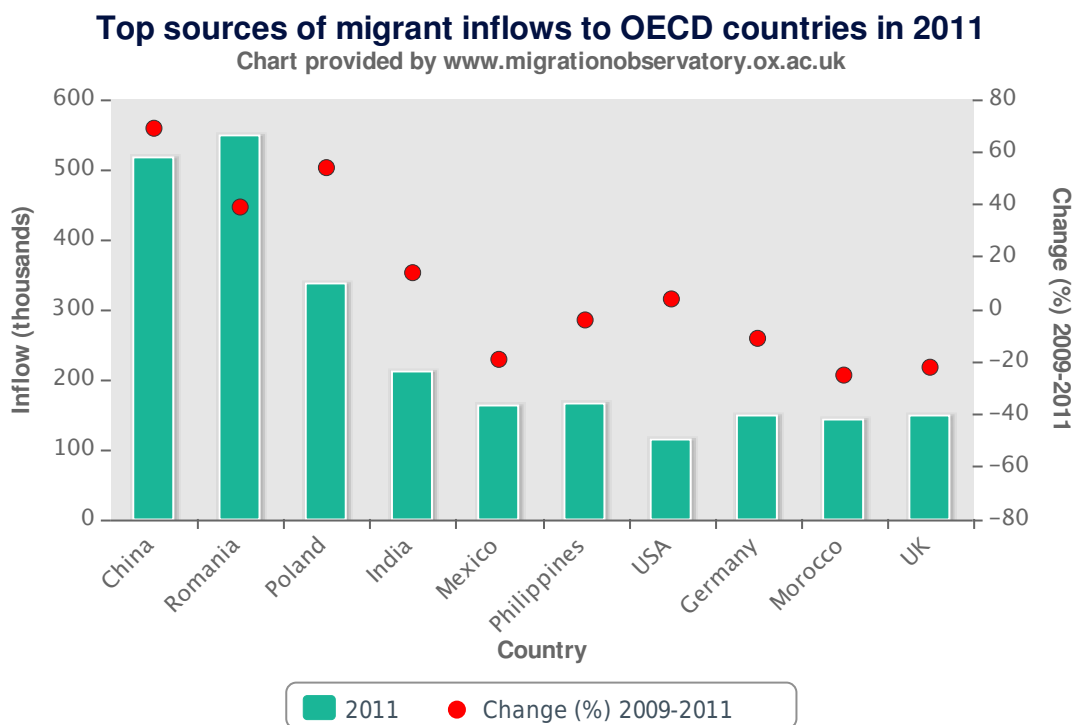
The number of tertiary-level international students in OECD countries reached 2,629,400 in 2010. The USA was the leader in international students in tertiary education with 684,800 students. The UK occupied the second place in the number of international students in tertiary education in 2011 with 397,700 international students. International students accounted for 16% of the whole tertiary level enrolment in the UK during 2010, a value which is higher than the OECD average (7.2%). Close to 35% of the international students in the UK are from other OECD countries, a value which is slightly lower than the OECD average (39%).

The UK is a top-ten source country of migrants to OECD countries (107,000 in 2011)

As reported in Figure 3, the top countries of origin in terms of inflows to OECD countries in 2011 were China, Romania, Poland and India. These four countries accounted for over 20 percent of immigration to OECD countries. Several developed country members of the OECD, such as Germany, the UK and the USA are also among the top-ten sources of migrants to other OECD countries.

The UK occupied the 10th place as a source country and it accounted for close to 2.1% of total migrant inflows to OECD countries in 2011. The UK was the country of origin for close to 107,000 migrants to other OECD countries in 2011.

Figure 3



Source : OECD 2013 International Migration Outlook

Evidence gaps and limitations

The OECD permanent-type migration data do not correspond precisely to actual movement across borders, since they include individuals already in the country who have changed status (e.g. from student to permanent resident). Moreover, the year of reference for immigration tends to be the year of approval of the residence permit application, not the year of entry into the country.

Also, for several countries, the OECD categorizes migrants in some categories (e.g. intra-company transfers) as permanent migrants because they have settlement rights or renewable residence permits. Therefore, the same migration movements may be classified as temporary or permanent depending on the country.

Further Readings

- OECD. International Migration Outlook. Paris: OECD, 2013.
- Salt, J. "International Migration and the United Kingdom, 2012." Report of the United Kingdom SOPEMI correspondent to the OECD, Migration Research Unit, University College London, 2012.

Related material

- Migration Observatory briefing – Immigration by Category: Workers, Students, Family Members, Asylum Applicants www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/briefings/immigration-category-workers-students-family-members-asylum-applicants

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The Migration Observatory

Based at the Centre on Migration, Policy and Society (COMPAS) at the University of Oxford, the Migration Observatory provides independent, authoritative, evidence-based analysis of data on migration and migrants in the UK, to inform media, public and policy debates, and to generate high quality research on international migration and public policy issues. The Observatory's analysis involves experts from a wide range of disciplines and departments at the University of Oxford.



COMPAS

The Migration Observatory is based at the ESRC Centre on Migration, Policy and Society (COMPAS) at the University of Oxford. The mission of COMPAS is to conduct high quality research in order to develop theory and knowledge, inform policy-making and public debate, and engage users of research within the field of migration.

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