

## EDUCATION ATTAINMENT OF IMMIGRANTS

The educational attainment of immigrants tends to vary considerably across countries. In some countries, low-educated persons are more prevalent among the foreign-born than the native-born; in other countries, it is the reverse. This reflects historical migration patterns as well as the effect of migration policies that favour, whether deliberately or by default, one kind of migration relative to another.

### Definition

Immigrants are defined here as the foreign-born population, that is, persons who have actually changed countries since birth. Education levels are given by the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED), which classifies attainment levels on the basis of completed educational programmes of a certain length and orientation.

### Comparability

The foreign-born population consists of the usual residents of a country who were born in another country, irrespective of what their nationality at birth was. What constitutes a “usual resident” tends to differ from country to country, but the differences bear on a small proportion

of the immigrant stock and so can generally be ignored without risk of distorting the general picture. The lower age limit used in the table is not ideal, because it tends to include many young persons who have not yet completed their education.

Countries that are long-standing immigration countries tend to have immigrant population with an age structure similar to that of the native-born populations, or perhaps even skewed toward older ages, especially if immigration levels have declined in recent decades. In more recent immigration countries, the immigrant population tends to be younger and to show higher attainment levels, simply because educational levels have been increasing in all countries over time.

The education of immigrants has in most if perhaps not all cases been obtained in the country of origin. The education level is generally reported by the immigrant and the coding of the qualification according to national categories may sometimes be approximate. It is clear from looking at the chart, for example, that the proportion of immigrants with high education levels in many countries tends to be similar to that of the native-born, with some notable outliers (Ireland, Mexico, Portugal, Turkey and the United Kingdom). Some of this may be due to the fact that entry policies (at least for labour migrants) tend to reflect employer skill requirements, which in turn are mirrored by the educational attainment of native-born workers. However, it may also be the case that the structure of the national education system and the distribution of national attainment levels tend to influence how foreign qualifications are classified.

The data shown here come from a special Census data collection described in the section dealing with the foreign-born population by region and sex.

### Long-term trends

The educational distribution of the foreign population in OECD describes the result of some forty plus years of international immigration. As such it reflects labour needs in OECD countries, both in the past and more recently, as well as the evolution of attainment levels in the principal origin countries over the past decades. Because international migration is strongly affected by networks, the educational attainment of past migrants tends to influence that of current and even future migrants, because spouses tend to have similar educational levels and because networks tend to operate within socio-economic groups. However, in all countries, attainment levels are increasing, as generally are the formal educational qualifications for many jobs.

One can thus expect that the educational attainment of immigrants will continue to increase, the more so as destination countries implement policies to favour more highly educated immigrants. However, many labour needs are beginning to appear in less qualified occupations such those in construction, hotels and restaurants, cleaning services and care for children and the elderly. If these needs are filled by immigration, the educational credentials of new immigrants may not always keep pace with the average qualifications of new entrants to the labour force.

### Source

- *International Migration Statistics*.

### Further information

#### Analytical publications

- OECD (2002), *International Mobility of the Highly Skilled*, OECD, Paris.
- OECD (2006), *Education at a Glance: OECD Indicators – 2006 Edition*, OECD, Paris.


#### Methodological publications

- OECD (1999), *Classifying Educational Programmes: Manual for ISCED-97 Implementation in OECD Countries – 1999 Edition*, OECD, Paris.
- OECD (2005), “Counting immigrants and expatriates in OECD countries – a new perspective”, *Trends in International Migration: SOPEMI – 2004 Edition*, OECD, Paris.

## The educational attainment of the native- and foreign-born populations

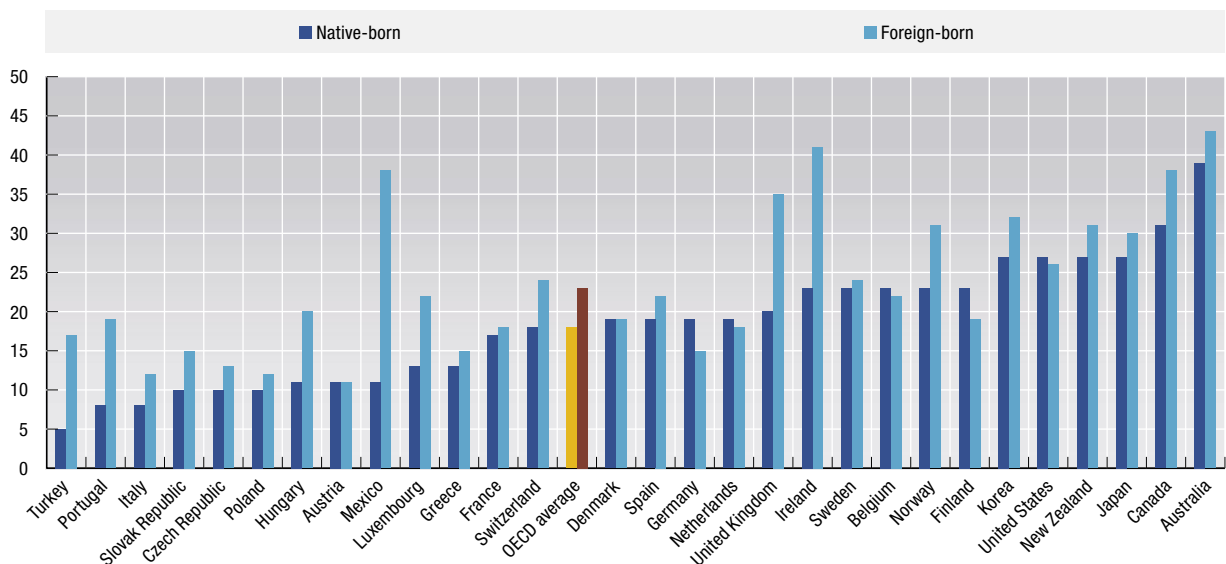
As a percentage of the population aged 15 and above within each group, circa 2000


	Native-born				Foreign-born			
	Less than upper secondary	Upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary	Tertiary	All persons	Less than upper secondary	Upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary	Tertiary	All persons
Australia	46	16	39	100	38	19	43	100
Austria	33	56	11	100	49	39	11	100
Belgium	47	30	23	100	54	24	22	100
Canada	32	37	31	100	30	32	38	100
Czech Republic	23	67	10	100	38	49	13	100
Denmark	41	40	19	100	49	32	19	100
Finland	40	36	23	100	53	28	19	100
France	46	37	17	100	55	27	18	100
Germany	24	57	19	100	44	41	15	100
Greece	54	32	13	100	45	40	15	100
Hungary	45	44	11	100	41	39	20	100
Ireland	48	29	23	100	30	29	41	100
Italy	64	28	8	100	54	33	12	100
Japan	25	47	27	100	26	44	30	100
Korea	36	37	27	100	24	44	32	100
Luxembourg	29	59	13	100	37	42	22	100
Mexico	72	17	11	100	37	26	38	100
Netherlands	41	40	19	100	53	29	18	100
New Zealand	30	43	27	100	19	50	31	100
Norway	21	56	23	100	18	51	31	100
Poland	31	58	10	100	48	40	12	100
Portugal	80	12	8	100	55	26	19	100
Slovak Republic	28	62	10	100	29	56	15	100
Spain	64	17	19	100	55	23	22	100
Sweden	25	52	23	100	30	46	24	100
Switzerland	26	56	18	100	42	35	24	100
Turkey	79	15	5	100	49	34	17	100
United Kingdom	51	29	20	100	41	25	35	100
United States	22	51	27	100	40	34	26	100
OECD average	41	40	18	100	41	36	23	100

StatLink  <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/767175437254>

## Tertiary attainment of the native- and foreign-born populations

As a percentage of the population aged 15 and above within each group, circa 2000



StatLink  <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/347100210316>