

Rethinking Migration Distribution in the EU: Shall we start with the facts?

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No. 23 / 22 January 2016

There is much anxiety about the distribution of third-country nationals in the EU – starting with the refugees who have been arriving for the last three years from the regional war in Syria and Iraq, the civil war in Afghanistan and the dictatorship in Eritrea – to name only a few root causes. The question of migrants has also come in for intensive discussion in EU circles, with much overlap with the issue of refugee protection; indeed sometimes it is difficult to understand what category is under discussion. Yet, the distinction is important as the Common European Asylum System (CEAS), as part of the international framework of refugee protection, prohibits sending back to persecution or torture (including random violence of civil war) anyone who seeks international protection in the EU. Migrants, on the other hand, do not enjoy an internationally recognised right to remain on the territory of a state, if it conflicts with the assessment of that state’s authorities of the desirability of their presence. There are other human rights considerations, of course, but the two groups are quite different as regards the right to remain on the territory.

Making policy about either of these two groups – the current debate in EU circles about how to distribute responsibility for asylum seekers, how to deal with the issue of secondary movement (when asylum-seekers move from one state to another within the EU) and whether migrants are welcome or not – needs to be based on evidence. EUROSTAT issued statistics on 16 November 2015, on the issue of first-residence permits by member states. These statistics merit consideration before any new policy initiatives are proposed, as the picture is quite different from the one that the European media have promoted.

EUROSTAT’s statistics cover only the issue of first-residence permits to third country nationals. But the data are separated into four categories: first residence permits issued for the purpose of 1) family reunification, 2) education, 3) employment and 4) ‘other’, which includes refugees and beneficiaries of international protection. The majority of the data is for the year 2014, but the statistics commence with an overview of the issue of first-residence permits each year from 2008 through 2014. What is perhaps astonishing in light of the current debate about the number of refugees is that the number of first-residence permits issued each year in the

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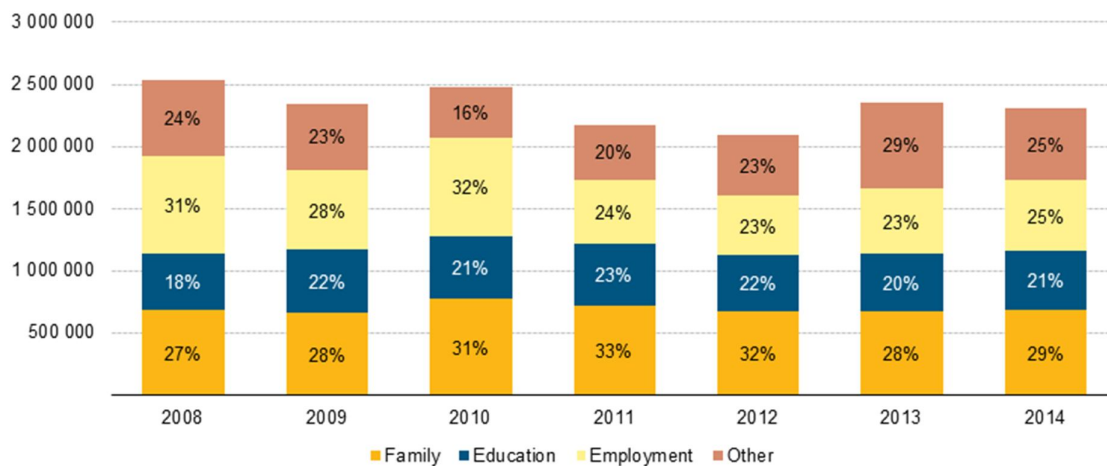
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EU from 2008 to 2014 has remained very stable, at just under 2.5 million per year. In fact, 2014 was a year in which fewer first-residence permits were issued than 2013 – and these statistics include refugees and beneficiaries of international protection. Secondly, the distribution of first-residence permits among the four categories is surprisingly equal – other (including refugees) accounted for 29% in 2014, education 21%, family and employment each accounting for 25%. It may be that when the 2015 data has come in and has been analysed that there will be a bulge in the figures for ‘other’ including refugees, but this is not certain. The 2008-14 statistics include the period of the Arab Spring in 2011, yet the influx of refugees and migrants from the North African region did not seem to result in a substantial increase in the number of first-residence permits issued. This is interesting not least as the spat over the Franco-Italian border of that year when the French President re-introduced border controls with Italy (temporarily) was based on the fact that the Italian authorities had been issuing short-stay first-residence permits to Tunisians, which enabled them to move within the Schengen area to France (or elsewhere, but the French President was only worried about France). In fact, according to these EUROSTAT figures, the number of first-residence permits issued for employment in 2011 (24% of the total) was substantially below the number issued in 2010 (32% of the total) when no one imagined that the Arab Spring was about to arrive.

Figure 1. First-residence permits issued in the EU-28, by reasons 2008-14



Source: Eurostat.

Perhaps the most surprising aspect of these statistics is simply the stability of the numbers. Notwithstanding the discourse of exceptional numbers of arrivals, overwhelmed state authorities, etc., when it comes to issuing first-residence permits, refugees are not a group in which there has been a huge increase. In fact fewer first-residence permits were issued to them as a group in 2014 than in 2011. Now there may be many reasons for this, not least the overwhelmed state authorities who may not be getting to the issue of permits with the same alacrity that characterised their activities in 2011. But in the country where the greatest attention has been focused on the matter – Germany – many centres such as in Berlin and elsewhere are proud of their record in issuing first-residence permits to Syrian refugees within a week or less of application. Some other countries are much slower, but then their numbers are lower as well so less significant for our purposes. It may be that the 2015 figures will show a substantial increase, although this is not clear. One will have to wait until the next EUROSTAT report is published in order to obtain statistics that are collected and analysed in a consistent manner permitting valid comparisons across the member states.

The next piece of evidence about the practices of member states in the issue of first-residence permits, which is critical to all policy discussions on the subject, is the nationalities of the persons to whom these permits have been issued. It is worth noting that Poland issued more first-residence permits to one single nationality group (Ukrainians). EUROSTAT shows us that the first nationality in terms of numbers of first-residence permits issued by all member states is Ukrainian. In second place comes the US, China third (including Hong Kong) and then India, Morocco and Syria in that order. Syrians arrive at sixth place after Moroccans and before Belarusians.

Table 1. Main groups of citizenship granted first-residence permits, 2014

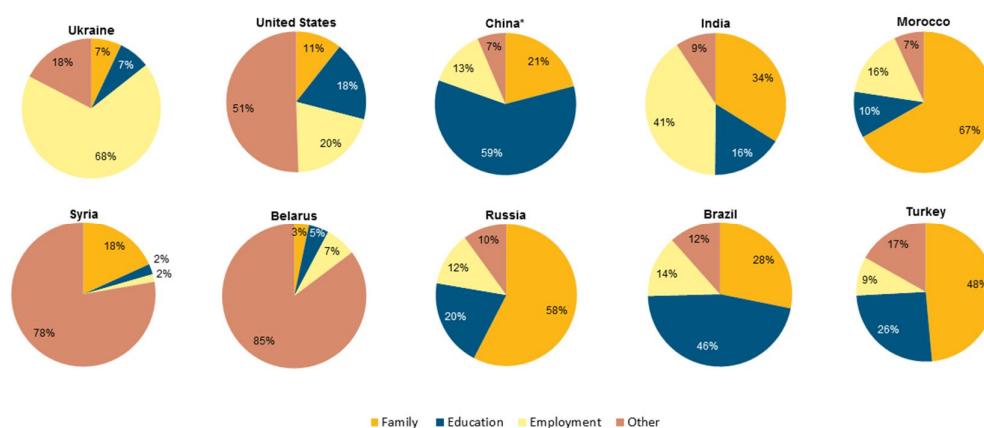
| Country of citizenship | Permits | Main EU-28 Member states issuing permits | | | | | | | | Other EU-28 | | | | | |
|------------------------|---------|--|---------|------|--------|--------|------|--------|--------|-------------|--------|--------|------|--------|------|
| | | Rank 1 | # | (%) | Rank 2 | # | (%) | Rank 3 | # | (%) | Rank 4 | # | (%) | | |
| Ukraine | 302 772 | PL | 247 397 | 81.7 | CZ | 12 867 | 4.2 | IT | 8 761 | 2.9 | DE | 6 163 | 2.0 | 27 584 | 9.1 |
| United States | 199 244 | UK | 136 202 | 68.4 | DE | 11 722 | 5.9 | IT | 9 049 | 4.5 | FR | 7 107 | 3.6 | 35 164 | 17.6 |
| China* | 169 657 | UK | 73 878 | 43.5 | IT | 16 971 | 10.0 | FR | 15 436 | 9.1 | DE | 14 603 | 8.6 | 48 769 | 28.7 |
| India | 134 881 | UK | 72 691 | 53.9 | IT | 13 004 | 9.6 | DE | 11 863 | 8.8 | SE | 6 589 | 4.9 | 30 734 | 22.8 |
| Morocco | 96 273 | ES | 36 362 | 37.8 | FR | 25 727 | 26.7 | IT | 19 759 | 20.5 | BE | 5 565 | 5.8 | 8 860 | 9.2 |
| Syria | 81 899 | DE | 29 757 | 36.3 | SE | 26 428 | 32.3 | NL | 8 474 | 10.3 | DK | 5 654 | 6.9 | 11 586 | 14.1 |
| Belarus | 80 442 | PL | 74 062 | 92.1 | LT | 1 043 | 1.3 | DE | 948 | 1.2 | IT | 638 | 0.8 | 3 751 | 4.7 |
| Russia | 73 821 | DE | 10 198 | 13.8 | UK | 9 676 | 13.1 | CZ | 6 040 | 8.2 | ES | 5 691 | 7.7 | 42 216 | 57.2 |
| Brazil | 57 099 | UK | 10 472 | 18.3 | IE | 8 883 | 15.6 | PT | 8 334 | 14.6 | ES | 6 631 | 11.6 | 22 779 | 39.9 |
| Turkey | 56 323 | DE | 18 934 | 33.6 | FR | 6 214 | 11.0 | UK | 5 544 | 9.8 | PL | 4 496 | 8.0 | 21 135 | 37.5 |

*China, including Hong Kong

Source: Eurostat.

It is worth noting that Poland issued more first-residence permits to third-country nationals (mainly Ukrainians) in 2014, resulting in that country topping the list. While Germany issued quite a lot of first-residence permits to Syrians, these were dwarfed by the Ukrainian and US figures. Also surprising in light of the rhetoric in the UK is the fact that that country is the top first-residence permit issuer for US nationals, Chinese and Indians. It also tops the list of Brazilians beating Portugal to the post by over 2,000 first-residence permits issued. The media in the UK are very active, reflecting the intention of the government to clamp down on immigrants. It might be an idea to stop issuing first-residence permits in such large numbers. However, there may be quiet voices in the UK who counsel against refusing first-residence permits to Americans and Chinese as a potential inhibiting factor towards inward investment from those two countries.

Figure 2. Main groups of citizenship granted first residence permits in the EU-28, 2014



* China, including Hong Kong

Source: Eurostat.

Overall these figures beg the question: which member states are issuing first-residence permits to which nationals and for what purposes. Fortunately, EUROSTAT is able to provide us with more fine detail on this matter. The detail is almost overwhelming, as often happens with EUROSTAT statistics. There are some particular important highlights bear reflection before proceeding to adopt new measures in the area of distribution of refugees and migrants across the EU. First, the largest-single reason for issuing first-residence permits in Germany is family reunification. Notwithstanding much discussion about the need of German industry for workers, the issue of first-residence permits in that country for employment was substantially lower than in Spain or Italy - countries still recovering from the recession. However, the biggest issuer of first-residence permits for employment was Poland, which issued double the number issued by its next contender - the UK - and almost seven times more than Germany. There is an important discussion to be had about the issue of first-residence permits by Poland to Ukrainian nationals as a way of gently dealing with the crisis in Ukraine. But that does not change the figures.

Table 2. Total number of first residence permits issued, by reason, 2014

| | Total | Family | | Education | | Employment | | Other | |
|--------------------------|------------------|----------------|-------------|----------------|-------------|----------------|-------------|----------------|-------------|
| | # | # | (%) | # | (%) | # | (%) | # | (%) |
| EU-28⁵ | 2 305 758 | 680 025 | 29.5 | 476 817 | 20.7 | 572 414 | 24.8 | 576 502 | 25.0 |
| Belgium | 43 823 | 23 114 | 52.7 | 6 286 | 14.3 | 4 768 | 10.9 | 9 655 | 22.0 |
| Bulgaria | 8 795 | 2 591 | 29.5 | 911 | 10.4 | 304 | 3.5 | 4 989 | 56.7 |
| Czech Republic | 35 458 | 10 687 | 30.1 | 6 030 | 17.0 | 11 083 | 31.3 | 7 658 | 21.6 |
| Denmark | 35 886 | 10 339 | 28.8 | 8 101 | 22.6 | 10 954 | 30.5 | 6 492 | 18.1 |
| Germany | 237 627 | 91 661 | 38.6 | 49 406 | 20.8 | 29 275 | 12.3 | 67 285 | 28.3 |
| Estonia | 3 222 | 1 263 | 39.2 | 777 | 24.1 | 882 | 27.4 | 300 | 9.3 |
| Ireland | 36 728 | 2 526 | 6.9 | 23 730 | 64.6 | 5 139 | 14.0 | 5 333 | 14.5 |
| Greece | 22 451 | 12 647 | 56.3 | 835 | 3.7 | 2 190 | 9.8 | 6 779 | 30.2 |
| Spain | 188 573 | 100 841 | 53.5 | 29 438 | 15.6 | 42 379 | 22.5 | 15 915 | 8.4 |
| France | 218 267 | 92 093 | 42.2 | 65 403 | 30.0 | 19 118 | 8.8 | 41 653 | 19.1 |
| Croatia | 3 334 | 1 928 | 57.8 | 418 | 12.5 | 609 | 18.3 | 379 | 11.4 |
| Italy | 204 335 | 99 051 | 48.5 | 24 373 | 11.9 | 53 327 | 26.1 | 27 584 | 13.5 |
| Cyprus | 13 841 | 2 111 | 15.3 | 1 444 | 10.4 | 7 989 | 57.7 | 2 297 | 16.6 |
| Latvia | 9 857 | 4 903 | 49.7 | 1 050 | 10.7 | 971 | 9.9 | 2 933 | 29.8 |
| Lithuania | 7 252 | 1 473 | 20.3 | 666 | 9.2 | 4 800 | 66.2 | 313 | 4.3 |
| Luxembourg | 4 289 | 2 470 | 57.6 | 456 | 10.6 | 965 | 22.5 | 398 | 9.3 |
| Hungary | 21 188 | 6 736 | 31.8 | 5 168 | 24.4 | 3 733 | 17.6 | 5 551 | 26.2 |
| Malta | 9 895 | 2 077 | 21.0 | 2 924 | 29.6 | 2 044 | 20.7 | 2 850 | 28.8 |
| Netherlands | 69 569 | 22 115 | 31.8 | 12 746 | 18.3 | 11 780 | 16.9 | 22 928 | 33.0 |
| Austria | 23 186 | 13 394 | 57.8 | 6 350 | 27.4 | 3 442 | 14.8 | : | : |
| Poland | 355 418 | 1 188 | 0.3 | 29 825 | 8.4 | 206 176 | 58.0 | 118 229 | 33.3 |
| Portugal | 29 764 | 13 846 | 46.5 | 3 407 | 11.4 | 6 409 | 21.5 | 6 102 | 20.5 |
| Romania | 10 294 | 3 331 | 32.4 | 3 535 | 34.3 | 1 803 | 17.5 | 1 625 | 15.8 |
| Slovenia | 9 891 | 5 099 | 51.6 | 500 | 5.1 | 4 183 | 42.3 | 109 | 1.1 |
| Slovakia | 5 510 | 1 735 | 31.5 | 1 082 | 19.6 | 1 741 | 31.6 | 952 | 17.3 |
| Finland | 21 552 | 8 043 | 37.3 | 5 528 | 25.6 | 4 786 | 22.2 | 3 195 | 14.8 |
| Sweden | 107 947 | 46 262 | 42.9 | 9 194 | 8.5 | 14 857 | 13.8 | 37 634 | 34.9 |
| United Kingdom | 567 806 | 96 501 | 17.0 | 177 234 | 31.2 | 116 707 | 20.6 | 177 364 | 31.2 |
| Iceland | : | : | : | : | : | : | : | : | : |
| Liechtenstein | 709 | 488 | 68.8 | 35 | 4.9 | 101 | 14.2 | 85 | 12.0 |
| Norway | 25 902 | 9 093 | 35.1 | 4 192 | 16.2 | 7 830 | 30.2 | 4 787 | 18.5 |
| Switzerland | 43 252 | 18 526 | 42.8 | 8 767 | 20.3 | 12 776 | 29.5 | 3 183 | 7.4 |

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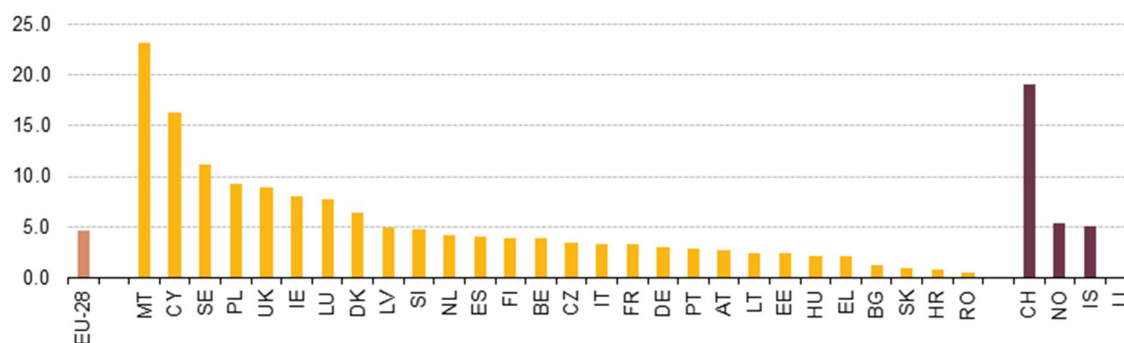
Source: Eurostat.

Also worth noting is the issue of family-reunification first-residence permits in Spain. This number tops 100,000 in 2014, outclassing Italy (99,051), the UK (96,501), France (92,093) and Germany (91,661). There is no obvious order to this ranking. Undoubtedly the arrival of migrant workers in Spain in the 1990s and 2000s who have remained, notwithstanding the

economic recession, may explain the family reunification figures. It is very common for countries to experience a surge in family reunification applications some years after the arrival of migrant workers. As those workers become established in the host state and are able to secure housing and support for their family members, they frequently seek first-residence permits for those family members. EUROSTAT provides more specific information on nationalities of third-country nationals issued residence permits by member state. Syrians appear as the top nationality seeking permits for Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden. Ukrainians on the other hand come in top in many fewer member states: only Czech Republic, Poland and Slovakia. This movement seems to be highly contained in the neighbouring countries. Russia, however, is the top country of origin for first-resident permit holders in as many member states as is Syria (although these are smaller member states): Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Finland. Among the more unexpected results are the top nationality in Ireland, which is Brazilian, and among the most expected results are Albanians in Greece and Libyans in Malta.

Another interesting statistic provided by the data relates to the number of residence permits issued per 1,000 inhabitants. Of course, the very small member states come first on the list (Malta and Cyprus), the effect of the impact of even a few first-residence permits being evident on small populations. But among the larger member states, the distribution is not so self-evident.

Figure 3. First residence permits issued per 1,000 inhabitants, 2014

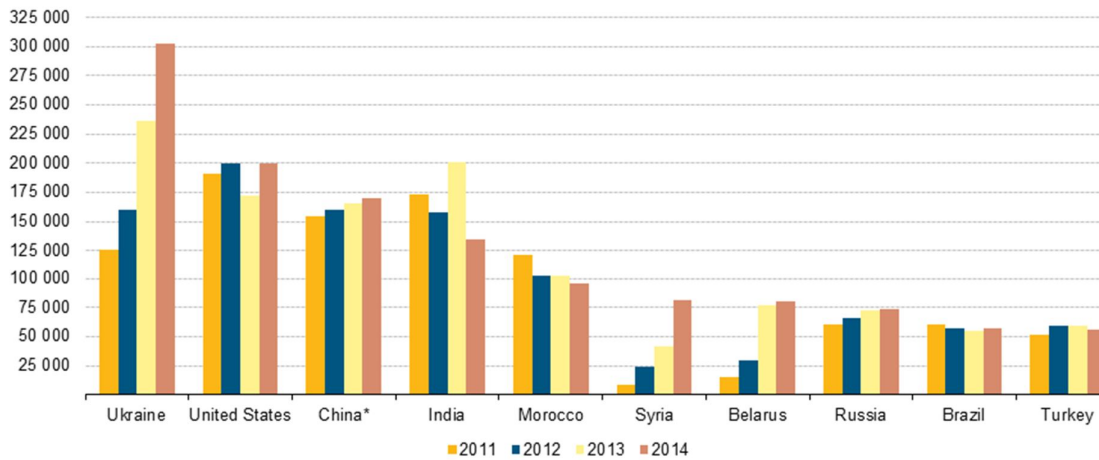


Source: Eurostat.

The question always arises whether the statistics are stable or suffer from high fluctuation. EUROSTAT has provided a table of first-residence permits issued across the EU by country of origin.

Clearly there has been a very substantial spike with respect to Ukraine, which accounts for a very substantial number of the issued permits particularly in comparison with Syria. There has also been a substantial increase in the numbers of permits issued to Syrians, but overall they are a much smaller category. For other nationalities the issue of first-residence permits appears to have remained fairly stable over the past two years although Belarus had a jump in 2013 which was retained in 2014. India has some variation greater than its neighbour China, but the variation is downwards as well as upwards.

Figure 4. Evolution of main groups of citizenship granted first-residence permits, 2001-14



China, including Hong Kong

Source: Eurostat.

Finally, in light of the current debate on refugees and migrants, it is important to also look to the figures on family reunification. Already a number of member states are expressing concern that the arrival of the Syrians will be accompanied by applications for family reunification, which is already happening. From the perspective of a refugee, it is understandable that it may be intolerable to watch one's nearest and dearest relatives who have been left behind suffer from bomb attacks and other atrocities. Family reunification in the safe country where the refugee has arrived may well seem like the best solution. For the host member state, however, the arrival of substantially more people through family reunification may seem a daunting prospect. Yet, already in 2014, the single largest category of first-residence permits was in this area of family reunification where over 680,000 such permits were issued. Family reunification was the main reason for issuing residence permits in more than half the member states, according to EUROSTAT. EU law has already set a minimum threshold for family reunification of third-country nationals (including refugees) in Directive 2003/86, so the rules should not vary among the member states (except for the opt-out states – Denmark, Ireland and the UK).

Conclusions

What does this data tell us? The first and most important thing that is revealed is the stability of the issuing of first-residence permits to third-country nationals in the EU. The 2015 data may show a slightly different story, but we need to wait those figures before jumping to conclusions. Secondly, these data tell us that there is no obvious preponderance of nationalities among those who obtain first-residence permits and that the reasons for the issuing of those permits remain fairly stable across the four main categories – family, work, studies and international protection. Although international protection and refugees attract the lion's share of media attention, in fact they represent only a quarter of first-residence permits issued in the EU. Finally, the member state that presents itself as the most migrant-unfriendly, the UK, is actually the one that issues the largest number of first-residence permits to third-country nationals – a whopping 567,806 in 2014 compared to 355,418 in Poland, the next most-liberal issuer of first residence permits.