2018 Migration Report: Key Results
2018 Migration Report: The most important trends in immigration to and emigration from Germany

**Net migration decreases**

After immigration had reached its highest level in 2015 with 2.1 million persons and a net immigration of 1.1 million persons, net immigration to Germany declined in the three subsequent years. In 2018, some 1.6 million immigrants and 1.2 million emigrants were recorded. Immigration to Germany rose 2.2% from the 2017 figure, but emigration increased as well, by 4.5%. The result was a net immigration of +399,680 persons, a figure somewhat lower than in 2017 (+416,080 persons).

One thing is clear: migration to Germany is changing. Immigration on humanitarian grounds has receded in the past three years, but more people are coming to Germany to study and work. The Federal Republic remains a consistently attractive destination for EU citizens entitled to freedom of movement.

As it had been in the previous year, Romania was the principal country of origin for immigrants in 2018 (15.1% of all immigrants), followed by Poland (9.2%) and Bulgaria (5.2%). The other quantitatively significant countries of origin in 2018 were Italy, Croatia, Turkey, Hungary and the United States.

There were substantial declines in immigration figures from the primary countries of origin for refugees. While Syria still placed sixth among countries of origin with the heaviest immigration in 2017, in 2018 it was no longer among the top ten countries of origin for migration overall in terms of quantity. In 2018, arrivals from Syria accounted for 1.9% of total immigration, while the 2017 figure had been 3.3%. Fewer people also came to Germany from Iraq and Afghanistan than the year before.

For emigrants, Romania, Poland and Bulgaria were the most important destinations in 2018. Thus these countries evidence a large volume of migration in both

<table>
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<th>Total migration in 2017 und 2018</th>
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<tr>
<td>Immigrants</td>
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<td>2017: 1,550,721</td>
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<td>2018: 1,585,112</td>
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<td>Emmigrants</td>
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<tr>
<td>2017: 1,134,641</td>
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<tr>
<td>2018: 1,185,432</td>
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<tr>
<td>Net immigration</td>
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<tr>
<td>2017: +416,080</td>
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<td>2018: +399,680</td>
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Source: Federal Statistical Office, Migration Statistics
directions; i.e., many people immigrate from there to Germany, and many others emigrate there again.

The largest net volume of immigration in 2018 was from Romania (+62,373). Syria came next with a considerably lower figure, +28,814. Net immigration from Syria has declined steadily over the past few years (2017: +49,123, 2016: +153,239).

Two-thirds of all immigrants come from European countries

Migration movements in Germany have been dominated for years primarily by immigration from and emigration to other European states. In 2018, for example, 66.9% of all immigrants came from another European country¹, out of this total, 53.0% pertained to EU states and 13.9% to the other European states. 13.8% of immigrants came from an Asian country. Only 4.2% of immigrants came from African countries to Germany, and 5.3% came from the Americas, Australia and Oceania.²

The significance of internal European migration is also evident in the emigration figures. As with immigration, Europe was also the primary destination region. About two-thirds of emigrants in 2018 relocated from Germany to another European country (66.1%); 54.3% migrated to other EU Member States. Emigration to Asia accounted for 8.4%, and emigration to the Americas, Australia and Oceania came to 5.3%. Only 3.2% of the registered emigrants moved to Africa.

¹ European Union and third countries in Europe, including Turkey and the Russian Federation (the official statistics count both as Europe).
² This section focuses on the migrants’ countries of origin or destination, not on their nationality. As a result, for example, immigration from EU countries may also include third-country nationals who moved from the EU countries to Germany. See the section on “Internal EU migration” for migration of EU nationals.
Against this background, the largest net immigration in 2018 came from EU states, at +195,366; the figure for the previous year was somewhat higher, at +239,790. The principal contributors to the net immigration figure were Romania (+62,373), Croatia (+25,126), Bulgaria (+25,090) and Italy (+23,534). Thus, net immigration involving European Union states was once again below the 2015 level (+332,511). The net figure was also down for Asian countries of origin, at +118,686 (2017: +142,790). Net immigration remained almost constant from the previous year for African countries of origin (2018: +28,767, 2017: +28,310) and for the Americas, Australia and Oceania (2018: +21,606, 2017: +21,214).

Overview of immigrant groups

As was already evident from the consideration of countries of origin and destination, migration to Germany is largely European in origin. In 2018, 792,796 EU nationals immigrated to Germany. Migration for humanitarian reasons decreased significantly from 2017 to 2018. While 198,317 applications for asylum were received in 2017, the figure decreased to 161,931 in 2018 (-18.3%). Moreover, 97,129 residence permits for family reasons were granted in 2018 (-15.4%). 109,995 international students\(^3\) came to Germany to study. 60,857 persons who immigrated in 2018 obtained a residence permit for employment purposes. Thus, employment migration was at roughly the same level as in the year before.

\(^3\) This figure refers to international students who obtained their qualification for higher education in another country.
Internal EU migration: Immigration and emigration both up slightly

A more detailed look at immigration and emigration by EU nationals (excluding Germans) in 2018 shows that the number of immigrants remained almost the same from a year earlier, at 792,796 (2017: 777,750 immigrants). An increase in immigrants in 2018 was particularly evident among Lithuanian (+17.6%) and Romanian nationals (+9.3%); internal immigration within the EU as a percentage of total immigration to Germany came to 50.0%.

The total number of EU citizens who emigrated from Germany in 2018 came to 590,443 (+9.6%). Thus internal migration within the EU as a percentage of total emigration from Germany rose from 47.5% in 2017 to 49.8% in 2018.

Germany is an attractive destination for international students

Germany is increasingly attractive to international students. The number of international students initially schooled outside Germany who began a university-level course of studies in Germany rose once again in 2018 (summer semester 2018 and winter semester 2018/2019). All in all, 109,995 international students who qualified for higher education elsewhere began studies at a university-level German institution, 4.8% more than in 2017 (104,940). Thus 2018 saw the largest number of such students to date matriculating for their first semester here.

As has been the case since as far back as 2006, the largest group that began their studies at a German university was Chinese nationals. Syria has been another important country of origin since 2017; in 2018, the 5,783 students from Syria represented the third-largest group of international students beginning their first semester at a German university, at 5.3% India was the second most important country of origin for international students.
Applicants for asylum decrease

Numbers of applicants for asylum have been shrinking since 2016. They had decreased from 722,370 to 198,317 between 2016 and 2017 (-72.5%), and in 2018 the number of first-time applicants for asylum decreased again by 18.3% (161,931 first-time applications). Of these applications, 32,303 (19.9%) were for children less than one year of age born in Germany. Thus, after nine years of increases, the number of first-time applicants fell back below the 2014 level (173,072 first-time applications).

Asylum applicants by the ten most common nationalities in 2018

The evolution of refugee migration to Germany has always reflected worldwide crises and conflicts across the years. Since 2014, Syria has been in first place among the nationalities with the largest incoming numbers. In 2018, 44,167 asylum applications were filed by Syrian nationals, equivalent to 27.3% of all asylum applications lodged in 2018. This figure represented a 9.8% decrease from the prior year in first-time applications by Syrian nationals (2017: 48,974 first-time applications). Iraq, with 16,333 first-time asylum applications, was the country of origin with the second largest volume in 2018. This was equivalent to 10.1% of all first-time applications, and represented a 25.5% decrease from the year before (2017: 21,930 first-time applications). The country of origin with the third-largest volume was Iran, with 10,857 first-time applications and a 26.1% increase from the year before (2017: 8,608 first-time applications). Two European countries, Turkey and the Russian Federation, are also included in the list of the ten countries of origin with the largest number of applications.

The list of these ten countries in 2018 did not change from 2017; only the relative position of the various countries did. Nigeria saw the largest increase from the year before (+30.2%); Eritrea had the greatest decrease, -45.5%.

Family reunification of third-country nationals decreases

Family reunification has decreased. In 2018 a total of 97,129 third-country nationals were granted residence permits in Germany on family grounds. The number of these permits was down 15.4% from the prior year (2017: 114,861).

Ever since 2015, Syrian nationals have been the largest group for family reunification – a development associated with the rising numbers of individuals immigrating from that country to join family members granted humanitarian protection. However, in 2018, there was a distinct decrease in immigrating Syrian family members from the year before, to 14,350 (2017: 33,389 arriving family members, -57.0%). Thus, following the 2017 percentage of 29.1%, the proportion of Syrian nationals among total incoming family members in 2018 decreased to 14.8%. Other important countries of origin for family reunification were Turkey, Kosovo and India. Somewhat more than half of the granted residence permits (54.9%) were for the reunification of spouses; more than one-third (36.8%) were for minor children.
More skilled workers immigrating from non-EU countries

Looking at migration by third-country nationals for employment purposes overall, one finds an almost continuous increase in immigration for employment. In 2018 a total of 60,857 third-country nationals came to Germany and obtained a residence permit for employment purposes under Secs. 18 through 21 of the Residence Act. Of these, 38,682 (63.6%) immigrated to pursue a qualified or highly qualified profession, including – among others – holders of an EU Blue Card, as well as intra-company transfers (ICTs), researchers and self-employed individuals.

These figures are at roughly the same level as for 2017 (60,882 total, 38,082 skilled and highly qualified workers).

Where immigration of skilled workers is concerned, the EU Blue Card has made particularly strong gains in significance as residence permit for highly qualified individuals. Since 2015, there has also been a substantial increase in the immigration of third-country nationals who have taken up an occupation that does not require vocational training. The western Balkan states have played a particularly important role in this regard.

Migration for family reasons (residence permits granted), ten most frequent nationalities in 2018

Source: Central Register of Foreign Nationals
Resettlement of ethnic Germans to Germany remains at low level

Following a steady decrease from 2001 (98,500 persons) to 2012 (1,800 persons), subsequent years saw a slight increase in the immigration of resettled ethnic Germans and their family members – a consequence of changes in the law. In 2018, 7,126 persons were registered as resettled ethnic Germans, including their family members. This represents a slight increase of about 1.0% from the year before (2017: 7,059 persons).

Emigration from Germany

While immigration increased, more people also have been leaving Germany, as is shown by developments since 2010. From 2000 to 2018, 20.2 million people moved to Germany from other countries; over the same period, however, 15.1 million people left the country, 12.0 million of whom were foreign nationals.

Source: Central Register of Foreign Nationals
In 2018 a total of 1,185,432 moves away from Germany were recorded, including 923,581 by persons of foreign nationality. At the same time, 1,585,112 moves to Germany were recorded, including 1,383,581 by persons of foreign nationality. This yielded a total net immigration of +399,680 persons (2017: +416,080): a clear decrease from the net figure of +1,139,402 from 2015, which was heavily influenced by the extensive immigration of persons seeking humanitarian protection.

Germany ranks first among European countries as a destination

Compared to the rest of Europe, it is evident that Germany remains a primary destination for migration, and its appeal in comparison to the other European countries has grown significantly in recent years. Other countries with large immigration figures were the United Kingdom, Spain and France.4

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4 Migration figures for the EU only become available after a delay of about two years, so that here only the figures for 2017 can be considered.
One out of every four persons in households in Germany has a migration background

According to the microcensus data, in 2018 some 20.8 million people had a migration background, equivalent to 25.5% of the total population living in households. The Federal Statistical Office defines a person as having a migration background “if the person himself or herself, or at least one parent, did not acquire the German citizenship by birth”. Thus this definition includes not just foreign nationals, but also naturalised immigrants, resettled ethnic Germans, persons who obtained German nationality through adoption by German parents, and the children of these four groups.

Immigration and emigration (as defined by the UN*) in 2017 for most frequent countries of origin and destination in the EU

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* The UN’s definition differs from the definition in the German official migration statistics by requiring an intended duration of at least one year for the immigrants’ stay, while the German statistics do not include this factor. This means that the UN’s definition does not generally include temporary forms of migration, so that the German figures for both immigration and emigration are lower than was previously indicated in this document.

Source: Eurostat (migr_imm1ctz/migr_emi1ctz, consulted: 19 August 2019)
Among those with a migration background, about 10.9 million are German nationals (52.4%) and about 9.9 million are foreign nationals (47.6%). Thus the German nationals who have a migration background represent about 13.3% of the overall population in households, and the foreign contingent represents 12.1%. All in all, over one-third of persons with a migration background came from other EU countries, and nearly another third came from another European country. The remaining third is composed of persons from various countries outside Europe. In terms of the most important “countries of birth”, persons with a Turkish migration background, at roughly 2.8 million individuals, constituted the largest group.

A total of nearly two-thirds (64.7%) of the persons with a migration background had immigrated themselves (first generation), while more than one-third (35.3%) were born in Germany (second or later generation). The Federal Statistical Office makes no further distinctions among generations.

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6 For persons born in Germany, the categorisation is based on the parents’ country of birth.