



Immigration Task Force

ISSUE BRIEF:

U.S. Immigration Priorities in a Global Context

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As a share of total immigrants in 2011, the United States led a 24-nation sample in family-based immigration but ranked 19th in employment-based immigration.

In June 2013, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) released the [*International Migration Outlook 2013*](#), which contains standardized statistics on permanent legal immigrants for 23 OECD countries and the Russian Federation. These statistics enable comparisons of how different countries prioritized different immigration categories in 2011. Among the 24 nations, the United States ranked first in total permanent immigration, but ranked 19th in permanent immigration as a share of its total population (0.34 percent).

In 2011, the United States was a world leader in immigration for family and humanitarian reasons, but fell near the bottom in employment-based categories. As a percentage of total immigrants, the United States was first among the 24 nations in the world in family-based immigration (64.8 percent), second in humanitarian immigrants (15.9 percent), and 19th in employment-based immigration (6.1 percent).ⁱ Relative to its total population, the United States was eighth in family immigration (0.22 percent), ninth in humanitarian immigration (0.05 percent), and 20th in employment-based immigration (0.02 percent).



Table 1. U.S. immigration categories and ranks among 23 OECD countries plus Russia, 2011

Category	SHARE OF TOTAL POPULATION		SHARE OF PERMANENT IMMIGRANTS	
	Percent	Rank	Percent	Rank
Employment	0.02	20	6.1	19
Family	0.22	8	64.8	1
Accompanying workers	0.02	7	7.0	5
Family (including those accompanying workers)	0.24	7	71.8	1
Humanitarian	0.05	9	15.9	2
Other	0.02	8	6.2	9
Free movements	0.00 (NA)	T-19 (NA)	0.0 (NA)	T-19 (NA)
All permanent immigrants	SHARE OF TOTAL POPULATION		NUMBER OF PERMANENT IMMIGRANTS	
	0.34	19	1,061,400	1

Note: internationally standardized statistics may not exactly match national accounts. Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

America's low ranks in employment-based immigration came despite the fact that the United States does not have free-movement migration. Many countries, especially European Union (E.U.) members, have free-movement agreements that eliminate numerical caps and most other restrictions on migration between them. On average, 42.2 percent of 2011 permanent immigration to the 23 OECD countries was from free movements. [According to OECD](#), free-movement migration typically occurs for employment reasons, suggesting that the United States trails even farther behind in employment-based immigration. However, because free movements also occur for other reasons, it would be inappropriate to combine these categories for comparative purposes.

Among the 24 nations, Spain was first in employment-based immigration as a share of its total population (0.29 percent), while the Russian Federation led that category when calculated as a percentage of total immigrants (66.2 percent). New Zealand was first in family-based immigration relative to its population (0.37 percent), and Korea came in second behind the United States as a share of immigrants (52.4 percent). New Zealand and the United States maintained their top spots in family-based immigration when people accompanying employment-based immigrants were included.² Sweden led the world in both categories of humanitarian immigration (0.13 percent and 17.6 percent). Across the 24 countries, China, Bhutan, and Myanmar were the main countries of origin for humanitarian immigrants.

Figure 1. Immigration categories as a share of total population, 2011

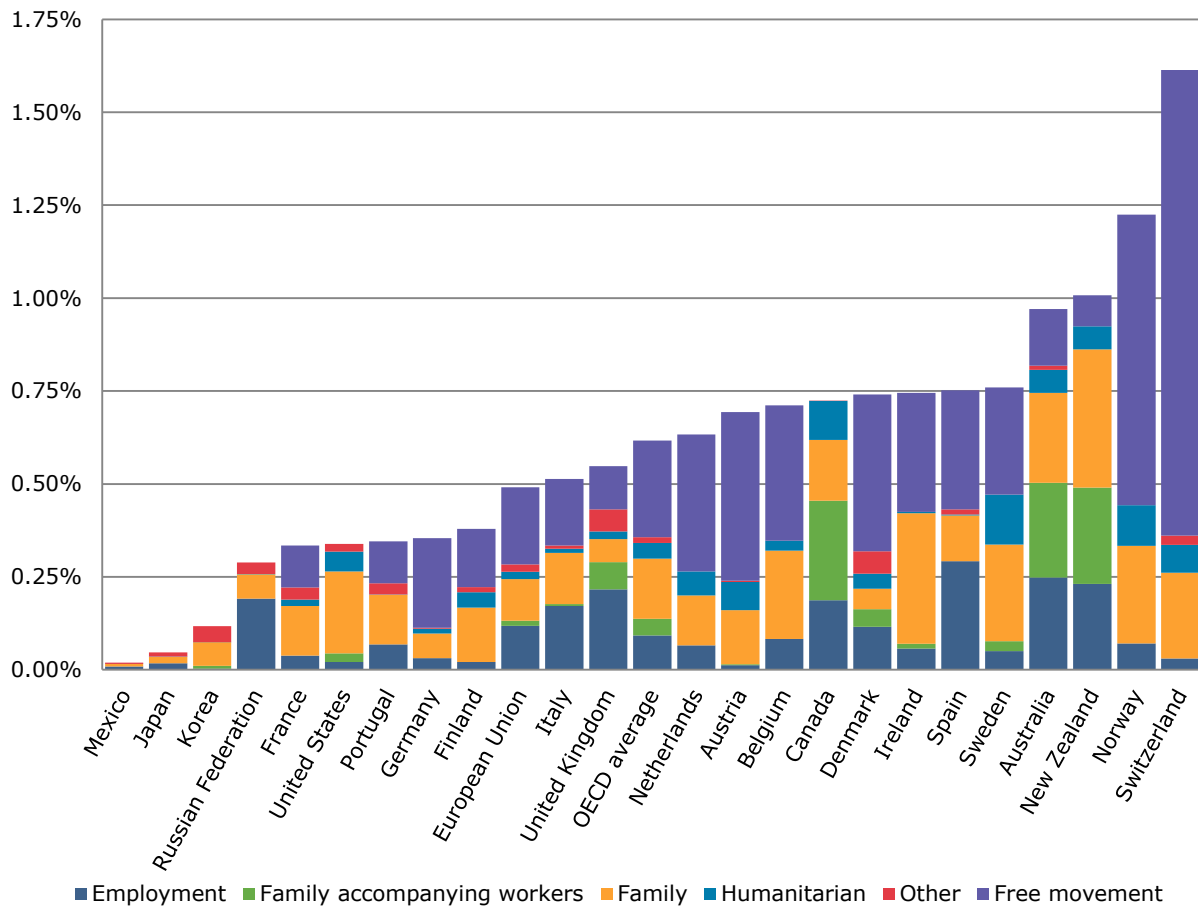
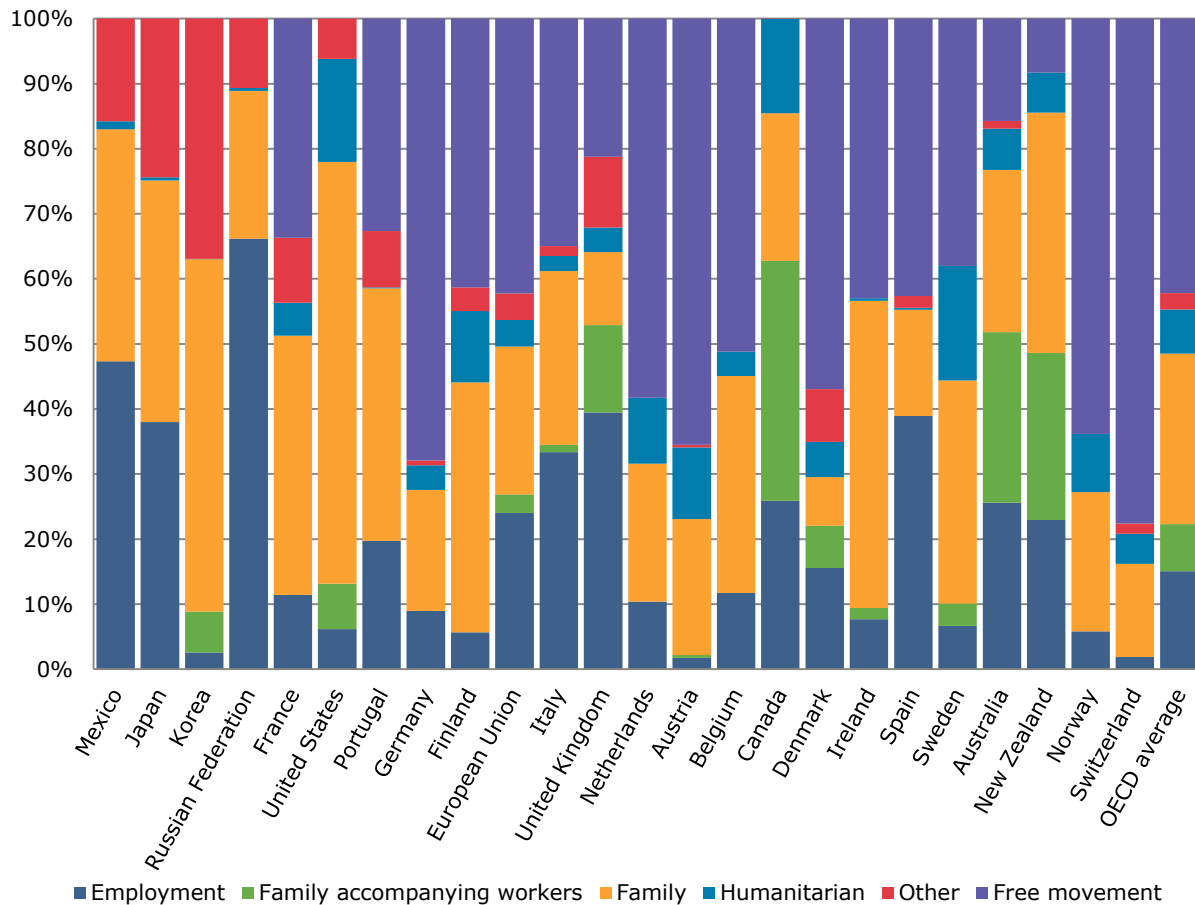


Figure 2. Immigration categories as a share of total immigrants, 2011



The following tables present percentages and rankings for each category included in the *International Migration Outlook 2013*. Figures on immigrant categories as a percentage of the total population comes directly from the *Outlook*, and percentages relative to total immigration were calculated.³ The rankings are not part of the *Outlook*. Note that percentages are rounded and that OECD's standardized statistics may not exactly match national accounts. The Russian Federation is excluded from OECD averages.

Table 2. All permanent immigrants, 2011

SHARE OF TOTAL POPULATION			TOTAL NUMBER OF IMMIGRANTS		
Rank	Country	Percent	Rank	Country	Number
1	Switzerland	1.61	1	United States	1,061,400
2	Norway	1.22	2	Russian Federation	412,600
3	New Zealand	1.01	3	Spain	349,300
4	Australia	0.97	4	United Kingdom	321,200
5	Sweden	0.76	5	Italy	312,200
6	Spain	0.75	6	Germany	290,800
7	Ireland	0.74	7	Canada	248,700
8	Denmark	0.74	8	Australia	219,500
9	Canada	0.72	9	France	211,300
10	Belgium	0.71	10	Switzerland	124,300
11	Austria	0.69	11	Netherlands	105,600
12	Netherlands	0.63	12	Belgium	76,500
	OECD average	0.62	13	Sweden	71,700
13	United Kingdom	0.55	14	Norway	60,300
14	Italy	0.51	15	Japan	59,100
15	European Union	0.49	16	Austria	58,400
16	Finland	0.38	17	Korea	56,900
17	Germany	0.35	18	New Zealand	44,500
18	Portugal	0.35	19	Denmark	41,300
19	United States	0.34	20	Portugal	36,900
20	France	0.33	21	Ireland	33,700
21	Russian Federation	0.29	22	Czech Republic	22,600
22	Korea	0.12	23	Mexico	21,700
23	Japan	0.05	24	Finland	20,400
24	Mexico	0.02			

Table 3. Employment-based permanent immigrants, 2011

SHARE OF TOTAL POPULATION			SHARE OF PERMANENT IMMIGRANTS		
Rank	Country	Percent	Rank	Country	Percent
1	Spain	0.29	1	Russian Federation	66.2
2	Australia	0.25	2	Mexico	47.3
3	New Zealand	0.23	3	United Kingdom	39.5
4	United Kingdom	0.22	4	Spain	38.9
5	Russian Federation	0.19	5	Japan	38.0
6	Canada	0.19	6	Italy	33.4
7	Italy	0.17	7	Canada	25.9
8	European Union	0.12	8	Australia	25.6
9	Denmark	0.12	9	European Union	24.0
	OECD average	0.09	10	New Zealand	22.9
10	Belgium	0.08	11	Portugal	19.7
11	Norway	0.07	12	Denmark	15.6
12	Portugal	0.07		OECD average	15.0
13	Netherlands	0.07	13	Belgium	11.7
14	Ireland	0.06	14	France	11.4
15	Sweden	0.05	15	Netherlands	10.4
16	France	0.04	16	Germany	9.0
17	Germany	0.03	17	Ireland	7.7
18	Switzerland	0.03	18	Sweden	6.6
19	Finland	0.02	19	United States	6.1
20	United States	0.02	20	Norway	5.8
21	Japan	0.02	21	Finland	5.6
22	Austria	0.01	22	Korea	2.5
23	Mexico	0.01	23	Switzerland	1.9
24	Korea	0.00	24	Austria	1.7

Table 4. Permanent family immigrants, 2011

SHARE OF TOTAL POPULATION			SHARE OF PERMANENT IMMIGRANTS		
Rank	Country	Percent	Rank	Country	Percent
1	New Zealand	0.37	1	United States	64.8
2	Ireland	0.35	2	Korea	54.2
3	Norway	0.26	3	Ireland	47.2
4	Sweden	0.26	4	France	39.9
5	Australia	0.24	5	Portugal	38.8
6	Belgium	0.24	6	Finland	38.4
7	Switzerland	0.23	7	Japan	37.2
8	United States	0.22	8	New Zealand	36.9
9	Canada	0.16	9	Mexico	35.7
	OECD average	0.16	10	Sweden	34.3
10	Finland	0.15	11	Belgium	33.4
11	Austria	0.15	12	Italy	26.7
12	Italy	0.14		OECD average	26.3
13	Netherlands	0.13	13	Australia	24.9
14	Portugal	0.13	14	Russian Federation	22.7
15	France	0.13	15	European Union	22.7
16	Spain	0.12	16	Canada	22.7
17	European Union	0.11	17	Norway	21.4
18	Germany	0.07	18	Netherlands	21.2
19	Russian Federation	0.07	19	Austria	20.9
20	Korea	0.06	20	Germany	18.6
21	United Kingdom	0.06	21	Spain	16.4
22	Denmark	0.06	22	Switzerland	14.3
23	Japan	0.02	23	United Kingdom	11.2
24	Mexico	0.01	24	Denmark	7.4

Table 5. Permanent immigrants accompanying employment-based immigrants, 2011

SHARE OF TOTAL POPULATION			SHARE OF PERMANENT IMMIGRANTS		
Rank	Country	Percent	Rank	Country	Percent
1	Canada	0.27	1	Canada	36.9
2	New Zealand	0.26	2	Australia	26.2
3	Australia	0.25	3	New Zealand	25.7
4	United Kingdom	0.07	4	United Kingdom	13.4
5	Denmark	0.05		OECD average	7.2
	OECD average	0.04	5	United States	7.0
6	Sweden	0.03	6	Denmark	6.5
7	United States	0.02	7	Korea	6.3
8	European Union	0.01	8	Sweden	3.5
9	Ireland	0.01	9	European Union	2.8
10	Korea	0.01	10	Ireland	1.7
11	Italy	0.01	11	Italy	1.1
12	Austria	0.00	12	Austria	0.4
13	Mexico	0.00	13	Mexico	0.0
13	Japan	0.00	13	Japan	0.0
13	Russian Federation	0.00	13	Russian Federation	0.0
13	France	0.00	13	France	0.0
13	Portugal	0.00	13	Portugal	0.0
13	Germany	0.00	13	Germany	0.0
13	Finland	0.00	13	Finland	0.0
13	Netherlands	0.00	13	Netherlands	0.0
13	Belgium	0.00	13	Belgium	0.0
13	Spain	0.00	13	Spain	0.0
13	Norway	0.00	13	Norway	0.0
13	Switzerland	0.00	13	Switzerland	0.0

Table 6. Permanent family immigrants plus those accompanying employment-based immigrants, 2011

SHARE OF TOTAL POPULATION			SHARE OF PERMANENT IMMIGRANTS		
Rank	Country	Percent	Rank	Country	Percent
1	New Zealand	0.63	1	United States	71.8
2	Australia	0.50	2	New Zealand	62.6
3	Canada	0.43	3	Korea	60.5
4	Ireland	0.36	4	Canada	59.6
5	Sweden	0.29	5	Australia	51.1
6	Norway	0.26	6	Ireland	48.9
7	United States	0.24	7	France	39.9
8	Belgium	0.24	8	Portugal	38.8
9	Switzerland	0.23	9	Finland	38.4
	OECD average	0.21	10	Sweden	37.7
10	Austria	0.15	11	Japan	37.2
11	Finland	0.15	12	Mexico	35.7
12	Italy	0.14		OECD average	33.5
13	United Kingdom	0.13	13	Belgium	33.4
14	Netherlands	0.13	14	Italy	27.9
15	Portugal	0.13	15	European Union	25.6
16	France	0.13	16	United Kingdom	24.6
17	European Union	0.13	17	Russian Federation	22.7
18	Spain	0.12	18	Norway	21.4
19	Denmark	0.10	19	Austria	21.3
20	Korea	0.07	20	Netherlands	21.2
21	Germany	0.07	21	Germany	18.6
22	Russian Federation	0.07	22	Spain	16.4
23	Japan	0.02	23	Switzerland	14.3
24	Mexico	0.01	24	Denmark	13.9

Table 7. Permanent humanitarian immigrants, 2011

SHARE OF TOTAL POPULATION			SHARE OF PERMANENT IMMIGRANTS		
Rank	Country	Percent	Rank	Country	Percent
1	Sweden	0.13	1	Sweden	17.6
2	Norway	0.11	2	United States	15.9
3	Canada	0.11	3	Canada	14.5
4	Austria	0.08	4	Austria	11.0
5	Switzerland	0.07	5	Finland	11.0
6	Netherlands	0.06	6	Netherlands	10.1
7	New Zealand	0.06	7	Norway	8.9
8	Australia	0.06		OECD average	6.8
9	United States	0.05	8	Australia	6.4
	OECD average	0.04	9	New Zealand	6.2
10	Finland	0.04	10	Denmark	5.4
11	Denmark	0.04	11	France	5.1
12	Belgium	0.03	12	Switzerland	4.6
13	United Kingdom	0.02	13	European Union	4.1
14	European Union	0.02	14	United Kingdom	3.8
15	France	0.02	15	Germany	3.8
16	Germany	0.01	16	Belgium	3.7
17	Italy	0.01	17	Italy	2.3
18	Ireland	0.00	18	Mexico	1.2
19	Spain	0.00	19	Japan	0.5
20	Russian Federation	0.00	20	Russian Federation	0.4
21	Portugal	0.00	21	Ireland	0.4
22	Mexico	0.00	22	Spain	0.3
23	Japan	0.00	23	Portugal	0.2
24	Korea	0.00	24	Korea	0.1

Table 8. Other permanent immigrants, 2011

SHARE OF TOTAL POPULATION			SHARE OF PERMANENT IMMIGRANTS		
Rank	Country	Percent	Rank	Country	Percent
1	Denmark	0.06	1	Korea	36.9
2	United Kingdom	0.06	2	Japan	24.4
3	Korea	0.04	3	Mexico	15.8
4	France	0.03	4	United Kingdom	10.9
5	Russian Federation	0.03	5	Russian Federation	10.7
6	Portugal	0.03	6	France	10.0
7	Switzerland	0.02	7	Portugal	8.6
8	United States	0.02	8	Denmark	8.1
9	European Union	0.02	9	United States	6.2
	OECD average	0.02	10	European Union	4.1
10	Finland	0.01	11	Finland	3.7
11	Spain	0.01		OECD average	2.5
12	Japan	0.01	12	Spain	1.9
13	Australia	0.01	13	Italy	1.6
14	Italy	0.01	14	Switzerland	1.5
15	Mexico	0.00	15	Australia	1.1
16	Austria	0.00	16	Germany	0.7
17	Germany	0.00	17	Austria	0.4
18	Canada	0.00	18	Canada	0.0
19	Netherlands	0.00	19	Netherlands	0.0
19	Belgium	0.00	19	Belgium	0.0
19	Ireland	0.00	19	Ireland	0.0
19	Sweden	0.00	19	Sweden	0.0
19	New Zealand	0.00	19	New Zealand	0.0
19	Norway	0.00	19	Norway	0.0

Table 9. Permanent free-movement immigrants, 2011

SHARE OF TOTAL POPULATION			SHARE OF PERMANENT IMMIGRANTS		
Rank	Country	Percent	Rank	Country	Percent
1	Switzerland	1.25	1	Switzerland	77.6
2	Norway	0.78	2	Germany	67.9
3	Austria	0.45	3	Austria	65.5
4	Denmark	0.42	4	Norway	63.8
5	Netherlands	0.37	5	Netherlands	58.3
6	Belgium	0.36	6	Denmark	56.9
7	Spain	0.32	7	Belgium	51.2
8	Ireland	0.32	8	Ireland	43.0
9	Sweden	0.29	9	Spain	42.6
	OECD average	0.26	10	European Union	42.2
10	Germany	0.24		OECD average	42.2
11	European Union	0.21	11	Finland	41.3
12	Italy	0.18	12	Sweden	38.0
13	Finland	0.16	13	Italy	34.9
14	Australia	0.15	14	France	33.7
15	United Kingdom	0.12	15	Portugal	32.7
16	Portugal	0.11	16	United Kingdom	21.2
17	France	0.11	17	Australia	15.7
18	New Zealand	0.08	18	New Zealand	8.3
19	Mexico	0.00	19	Mexico	0.0
19	Japan	0.00	19	Japan	0.0
19	Korea	0.00	19	Korea	0.0
19	Russian Federation	0.00	19	Russian Federation	0.0
19	United States	0.00	19	United States	0.0
19	Canada	0.00	19	Canada	0.0

Endnotes

¹ Percentages of total permanent immigration were calculated from underlying data.

² Some countries include family derivatives of employment-based immigrants in the family categories, but no country included family derivatives in the employment category. The *Outlook* notes on page 24, “Other countries either have few entries in [the family derivatives] category or classify accompanying family members with other family migrants.”

³ OECD’s underlying data tables provide percentages of the total population to 16 decimal places, allowing percentages of total immigration to be calculated without significant rounding error.