

PRESS KIT

How can we measure migration in Europe?

Purpose of THESIM

The European Union faces an urgent need for better statistics on migration and asylum in order to support the development of a common EU migration policy. A forthcoming EU regulation on international migration and asylum statistics aims to improve the situation of statistical data collection in term of availability, reliability and comparability. Within the EU 6th Framework Programme for Research, the THESIM project was selected in order to support the implementation of this regulation and more precisely to help countries fulfil their tasks in relation to the regulation. THESIM is an acronym for ***Towards Harmonised European Statistics on International Migration***. The project started in April 2004 and ended in October 2005. It involved 7 different scientific teams originating from 7 different EU countries under the co-ordination of Michel POULAIN (GéDAP - Belgium). A book presenting all results of the THESIM project has recently been published with Michel POULAIN, Nicolas PERRIN and Ann SINGLETON as editors (Presses Universitaires de Louvain, 744 pages, ISBN: 2-930344-95-4).

The THESIM research project

Since the Tampere Council meeting in 1999, the need for better statistics to support the development of European policy on migration and international protection has been clearly emphasised in official EU documents. During the intervening period, DG Justice, Freedom and Security and Eurostat have led the Commission's work on developing a proposal for an EU Regulation on data collection in the field of migration and international protection. The proposal for a regulation was adopted in September 2005 by the European Commission and is now under discussion in the Council of the European Union and the European Parliament. Once agreed, under the co-decision procedure, the EU Regulation will require all EU Member States to produce annually, in some cases monthly, a full set of statistics on international migration and international protection. It will explicitly request reliable figures and metadata which explain the level of data comparability at EU level.

For the purposes of the Regulation it is important to have a clear idea of the situation with regard to migration statistics in each Member State. Accordingly the main objective of the THESIM project, as a policy-support research project, was to prepare the implementation of this proposal from a scientific viewpoint. THESIM organised 25 national meetings and through these meetings 25 country reports on the national situation relating to the collection of data on international migration, asylum, residence permits, citizenship and the implementation of enforcement measures against illegal immigration (CIREFI data). These meetings were organised with help of all statistical offices and the National Contact Points (NCPs) of the European Migration Network (EMN). All ministries and administrations involved in the field took part: those involved in legislation, in practical procedures and in data collection.

The THESIM project looked at the availability, accuracy and comparability of data on migration across Europe. It found that data currently available in the field of international migration and asylum are still too unreliable enough for policy-making. However, THESIM suggests that solutions can be found for each member state to improve the quality and accuracy of the data collected in view of the forthcoming Regulation.



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The THESIM project represents a step forward in practice from the dismal and dispiriting task of documenting the problems. It is an example of how the academic community, national officials and EU policy makers can develop strong collaborative working links and take action to improve the current situation. The final report of the project submitted to the European Commission in October 2005 and the THESIM book published in February 2006 represent real progress, not least because in addition to bringing together data suppliers and users at the national and EU level, it has also involved the creation of a strong international network of key academic experts on migration statistics in the EU.

The THESIM book

The THESIM book includes 25 country reports, in addition to a comprehensive set of overview reports on various topics, including the history of international attempts to improve migration statistics, 25 country reports. Each of these documents in detail the sources of international migration data, related administrative procedures and registration systems and the national systems for producing statistical data on migration in each of the Member States of the European Union. The information covers all identifiable aspects of the system in each country and assesses the capacity of the national system to produce statistics which will meet the requirements of the forthcoming EU Regulation on migration statistics. Most importantly, it identifies for each country, for all data types covered by the Regulation, the data sources which can meet the legislation's requirements and those which have the potential to do so. The project team carried out an impressive task in little over a year, completing a substantial amount of intensive work in all countries. The book (and the THESIM report) will be an invaluable tool to help national officials and the European Commission to implement the Regulation and any subsequent implementing measures. It will provide up-to-date information for national and EU officials in Eurostat and in the DG Freedom, Security and Justice and for the European Migration Network.

Many problems will remain for some time to come. Certain statistical data on international migration and asylum are unavailable in all EU MS. Available data are often unreliable, mainly due to under-coverage. Data that may be considered reliable are not necessarily comparable at EU level, because of the variety of data sources, definitions and concepts used. Despite these problems, a key conclusion of all the discussions during national meetings and of all investigations undertaken in the THESIM project appears to be that the implementation of the EU Regulation is feasible.

This book identifies obstacles to the implementation of the EU Regulation and provides some insights to help countries meet the requirements of providing reliable and comparable data to Eurostat.

The THESIM team

Coordination

- GéDAP (Groupe d'étude de Démographie Appliquée), Belgium, Louvain-la-Neuve, Michel Poulain, Nicolas Perrin and Laetitia Simar, responsible for Belgium, Luxembourg, United-Kingdom and Ireland

Partners

- CEFMR (Central European Forum for Migration Research), Poland, Warsaw, Marek Kupiszewski, Dorota Kupiszewska, Beata Nowok, responsible for Poland, Czech Republic, Slovak Republic, Hungary and Slovenia
- ICMPD (International Centre for Migration Policy Development), Austria, Vienna, Veronika Bilger, Michael Jandl, Albert Kraler, responsible for Austria and Germany
- ICstat (International Cooperation Center for statistics "Luigi Bodio"), Roma, Italy, Giambattista Cantisani and Valeria Greco, responsible for Italy, Greece, Malta and Cyprus



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- INED (Institut National d'Etudes Démographiques), France, Paris, Xavier Thierry and Yves Breem, responsible for France, Spain and Portugal
- NIDI (Netherlands Interdisciplinary Demographic Institute), The Hague, Netherlands, Rob van der Erf and Liesbeth Heering, responsible for The Netherlands
- Anne Herm, Statistical Office, Tallinn, Estonia, responsible for Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Finland, Sweden and Denmark

External Expert

- Ann Singleton, Senior Research Fellow at the School for Policy Studies, University of Bristol, joined the THESIM project as external expert and contributed as editor of the THESIM book, published in February 2006.

Collecting data on international migration: the THESIM experience

The first problem is the absence of data. As scientists, our main recommendation is to use all potential sources and databases related to the given topics but that care should be taken in checking the consistency of different data sources. For example, the number of foreigners entering the country for immigration may be captured through the usual population registration system but also by using the residence permit database for non-EU citizens.

When a given figure is available, it has no meaning by itself. Firstly it should be checked in terms of reliability and thereafter be harmonised in comparison with similar data at EU level. Only after completing these checks, may the figure be interpreted and become useful for analysis and for policy-support. Scientists are cooperating with all National Statistical Institutes and with EUROSTAT to improve the reliability and comparability of the data.

Some global figures and associated problems

The most basic figure, the total number of usual residents in each EU Member States, provides problems in terms of reliability and comparability because of both under-counting and double-counting. Figures on nationals who have left the country on a temporary basis or on foreigners living in the country for a variety of reasons (including seeking asylum), may or may not be included in the stock of usual residents for a given country. Every non-recording of a person leaving or entering the country may involve problems of under-registration and more specifically, within the EU territory, problems of double-counting.

Who is a non-national in a given EU country?

A non-national is someone who does not hold the citizenship of this country. However some 'intermediate categories' exist, such as the non-citizens of Latvia. In each EU Member State there are non-nationals who are EU-citizens and those who are non EU-citizens. In terms of data collection, the administrative source for identifying and characterising the non-national population is often different to that used for the total population. In several countries discrepancies appear and are not easy to solve. In addition, some countries only provide detailed data on the non-national population at the time of the census, providing only estimated figures in the intercensal period.

The following figures are provided based on EUROSTAT figures, some additional information has been collected from the different websites of the National Statistical Institutes, while missing data have been estimated by the authors based on previous figures.



Figure 1. Non-National population among the 25 EU Member States in 2005

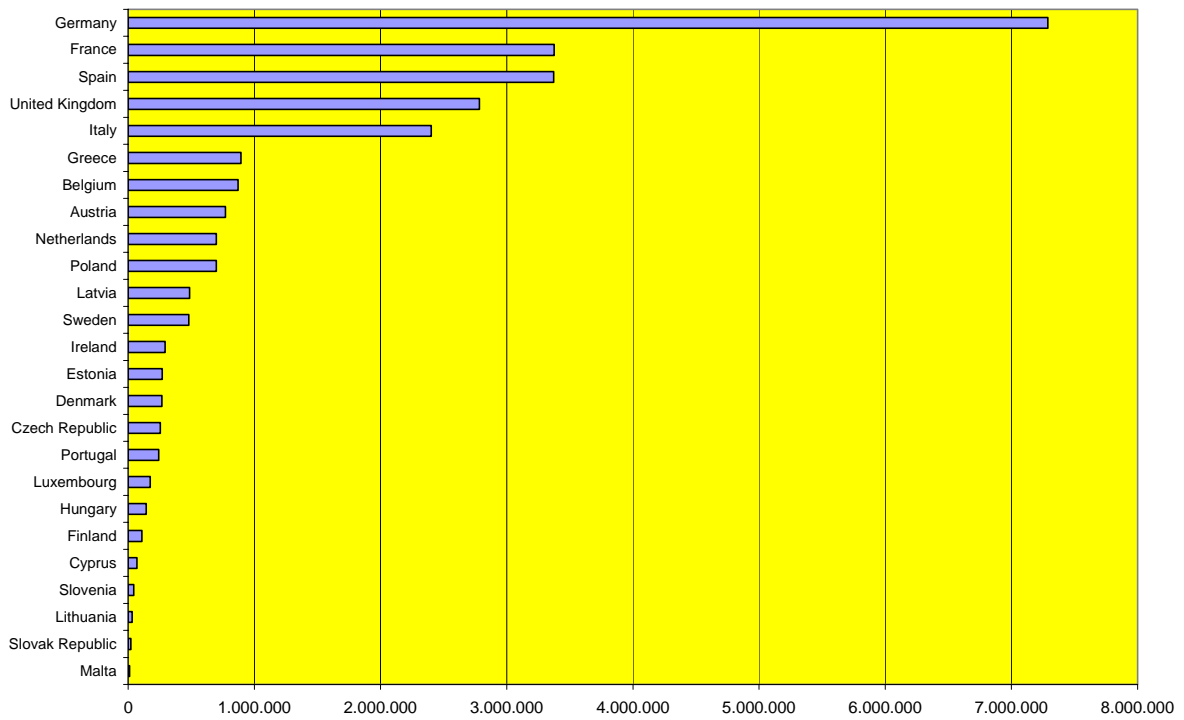


Figure 2. Relative distribution of the non-national population in the 25 EU Member States in 2005

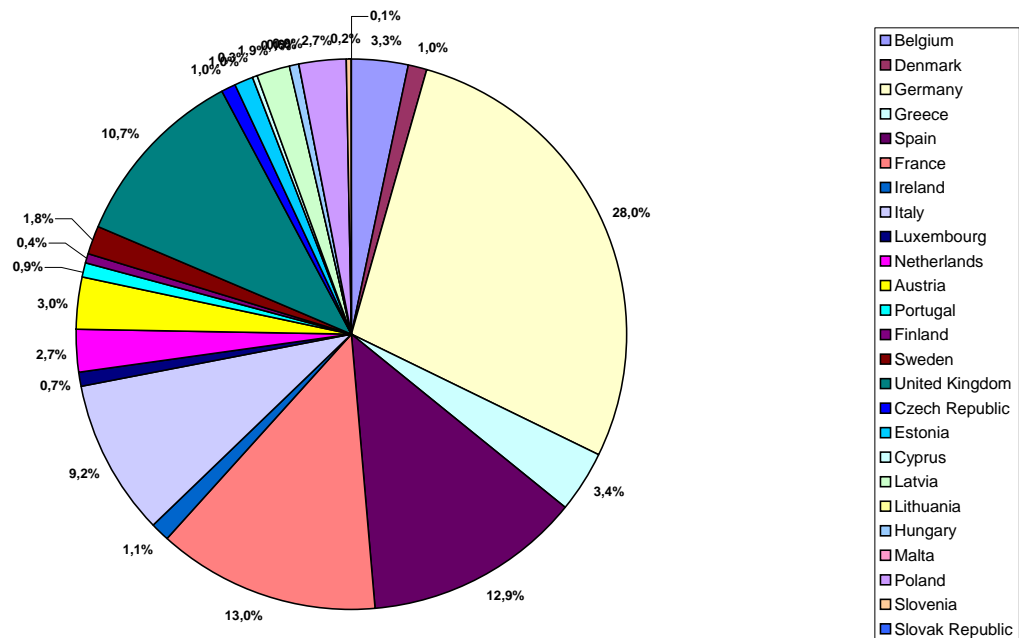


Figure 3. Proportion of non-nationals in the 25 EU Member States in 2005

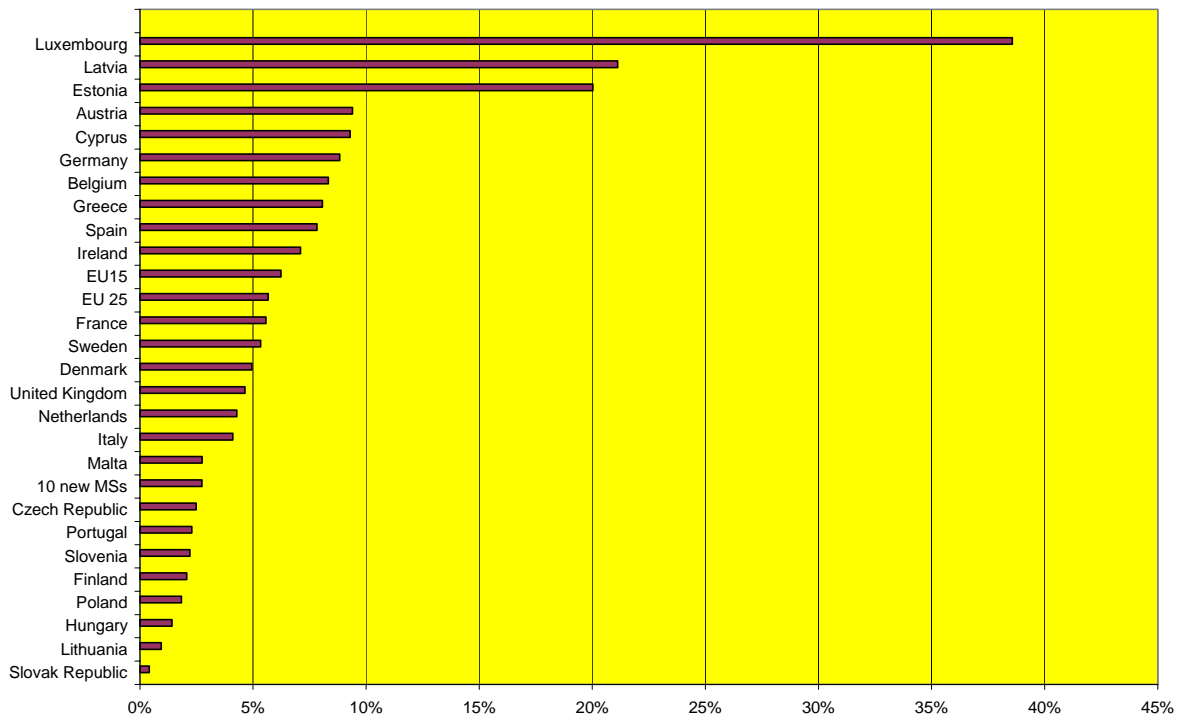
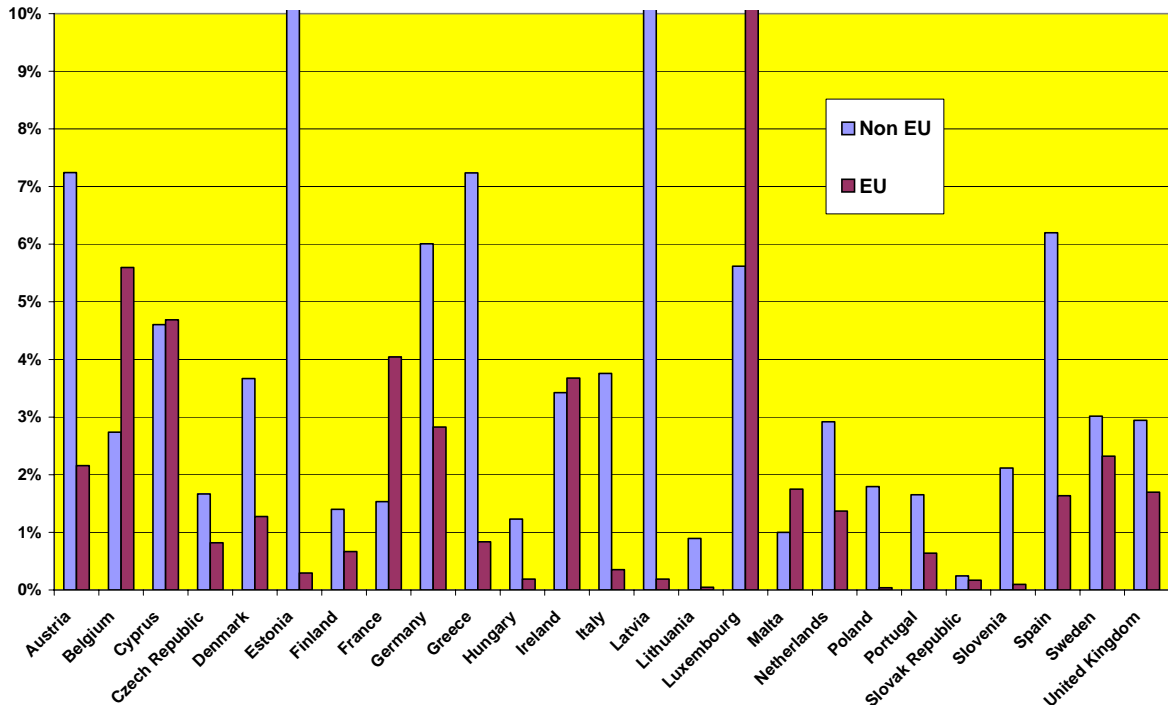


Figure 4. Proportion of EU and non-EU citizens of the foreign population in all 25 EU Member States in 2005 (Nationals of the given country are excluded)



Note: the figure for EU citizens in Luxembourg (33%), non-EU citizens in Estonia (20%) and non-EU citizens in Latvia (21%) are not shown.