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France, a Country of Immigration and... Emigration


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The positive net migration of immigrants counterbalances... There are six types of migratory flows, involving three distinct categories of people. The first category concerns people who migrate for residential reasons but who were born in a foreign country and had foreign nationality at birth, according to the French definition of the term immigrant1. During the 2006-2013 period, such immigrants represented more than two thirds of all inflows into France, 67.4% precisely, but only a minority of the outflows (25.1%). The in-out balance of immigrants directly contributed to an increase of the population in France—the inflows—and those who decided to leave France to go and live in another country—the outflows.

The numbers behind this net result reveal a significant mobility2. Indeed, 2,475,000 people came to live in France whereas 2,070,000 went to live abroad.

More inflows than outflows
For this purpose, we will examine the inter-censal period 2006-2013, actually covering census surveys that took place from 2004 to 20153. Over a 7-year period the net migration in France excluding Mayotte, in other words mainland France plus the four overseas departments (Guyane, Guadeloupe, Martinique and the Reunion Island, as well as the French overseas collectivities), is estimated at 405,000 people. This is a net result, the difference between those who came to live in France—the inflows—and those who decided to leave France to go and live in another country—the outflows.

The positive net migration of immigrants counterbalances... The migration issue in France is very much in the news, but the figures quoted are often unreliable, one way or another. We will try to clarify the components of French migrations.

…the negative migratory flows of people born in France
The migration of people born in France (mostly of French nationality) is the complete opposite of that of immigrants. Indeed, their in-out balance is a negative 845,000 persons. This negative amount shows the low attractiveness of France during the period under review, as it involves many French people who believe that they have a better chance of professional success abroad, and therefore leave the country, as witnessed for example by the presence of several hundred thousand French people in United Kingdom.

The third category of migratory flows is that including people migrating back to their home country after a professional period abroad, or because it is in France that they find opportunities for graduate studies, after having attended, for instance, a French “lycée” abroad. Overall, the picture of French migrations is highly contrasted, as the country attracts foreigners but repels people born in France.

3. Insee Analyses, n° 22, October 2015.
4. According to the department for statistics, studies and documentation (DGES), of the French public service in charge of foreigners present in France (Direction générale des étrangers en France).