



**SOME  
STATISTICS  
ON MIGRATION  
IN THE WORLD**



**AS OF  
MID-2019**

THE LATEST YEAR  
AVAILABLE,  
THERE ARE 271.6 MILLION  
MIGRANTS IN THE WORLD



*©Some statistics on migration in the world*

**Al cuidado**

Argos. Observatorio Internacional  
de Migración y Derechos Humanos

**Diseño de portada y diagramación**

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Our views seek to investigate the social, economic, political and cultural phenomena surrounding human migration in different areas of the world, with the aim of defending the universality of human rights.

We observe the migratory processes by looking at their structural causes, the vulnerable populations, the various actors involved and the possible strategies of alarm, denunciation, follow-up and resolution of cases.

We focus on the specialized production of reports, maps and pedagogical contents, which serve as tools for research and action, and which can be useful to social, academic, civil and multilateral organizations.

The evocation of the ARGOS myth -the one with multiple eyes- inspires us to observe, with a plurality of perspectives, the migratory phenomena and the possible recommendations that guarantee free human mobility in conditions of equality and non-discrimination.

Before addressing the subject of migration statistics in the world, we must make reference to the numerous limitations that we can find for their elaboration, given the complexity of the phenomenon, since this population is permanently subjected to three factors that mark its dynamics: birth rate, mortality and the same mobility in which this group finds itself. These circumstances mean that the numbers we are talking about move every day, as births and deaths occur, as well as entries and exits from the national borders of all countries, regardless of their particular contexts.

States also face difficulties in detecting migrant flows, either because they lack the necessary capacity or because migrants themselves seek to evade controls when there is a risk of being detained or returned to their countries of origin.

Another limitation of the data is the legal differences within each country with respect to the definition of migrant. In some countries, it is sufficient for a person to be born within their territory to be considered a citizen. In other countries, nationality is only transmitted by the parents, so that people born within the borders of a country are considered foreigners. This means that certain ethnic groups may be stateless and therefore inadequately quantified as immigrants.

The Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) of the United Nations (UN) has been publishing every two years information related to cumulative migration in all countries of the world, using the most reliable sources available<sup>1</sup>.

Thus, as of mid-2019, the latest year available, there are 271.6 million migrants in the world, distributed as follows according to the income level of the countries of migratory destination.

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<sup>1</sup> Available at: <https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/data-landing-page>

COUNTRIES BY INCOME	MIGRANTS	RATE
High-income countries	175.811.829	49,75%
Middle-income countries	82.237.681	23,27%
Upper middle-income countries	54.279.436	15,36%
Lower middle-income countries	27.958.245	7,91%
Low-income countries	13.072.099	3,70%
Countries with no income information	520.496	0,15%
Total	353.359.290	100%

**Table N° 1:** Number of migrants by income level of destination country (2019).  
**Source:** DESA, UN, 2020.

As can be seen in the table above, higher income countries account for almost half of the migrants registered worldwide, while middle, upper middle, upper middle, lower middle and lower middle income countries account for 50.25%. It is possible that an improvement in data quality would only increase this difference somewhat in favor of middle- and low-income countries, which may have migrant records with lower coverage.

On the other hand, in the following table we have the information on the destination of migrations according to continents. Thus, we have that:

CONTINENT	MIGRANTS	RATE
Africa	26.529.334	9,77
Asia	83.559.197	30,76
Europe	82.304.539	30,30
Latin America and The Caribbean	11.673.288	4,30
North America	58.647.822	21,59
Oceania	8.927.925	3,29
Total	271.642.105	100

**Table N° 2:** Migrants by destination continent (2019).  
**Source:** DESA, UN, 2020.

As we can see, Asia, Europe and North America are the three main migratory destinations if taken as continents. The case of Asia, which is the continent with the most migrants, reaching 30.76%, explains to a large extent how up to half of the migrants are in middle- or low-income countries, as we saw in the previous table. We also see that Europe is the Western region where most migrants reside, 30.30%, while North America follows with 21.59%.

However, it is worth noting the growth in the stock of migrants over the last three decades. Thus, we have that Europe went from 49,608,231 migrants in 1990, to 82,304,539 migrants in 2019, which represents an increase of 60.27%.

With regard to Europe, some clarifications are necessary. First, Europe includes all the countries of this continent, both those that belong to the European Union (EU) and those that do not, such as Russia, Ukraine, among others. On the other hand, these migrants include those who migrate from one European country to another, so that they also include, for example, German migrants to England, Dutch migrants to France or Russian migrants to Spain.

Now, taking only EU countries, and only migrants from non-EU countries, the total number of migrants accumulated until January 1, 2019 reaches 20.9 million people from outside the EU, as well as 30.2 million people born outside the EU, although in the latter case those who do have a nationality of one of the member countries are added, according to data provided by the European Commission<sup>2</sup>.

On the other hand, the migrant population in North America increased from 27,610,408 migrants in 1990 to 58,647,822 migrants in 2019, which represents an increase equivalent to 47.08%. In this case, the bulk of migrants are concentrated primarily in the United States of America, a total of 50,661,149 migrants, followed by Canada, with 7,960,657 migrants, both for 2019.

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2 Available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/promoting-our-european-way-life/statistics-migration-europe\\_es](https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/promoting-our-european-way-life/statistics-migration-europe_es)

Much more modest is the increase experienced in Latin America and the Caribbean, which went from 7,161,371 migrants in 1990, to 11,673,288 in 2019, representing an increase of 61.35%, and including, as is logical, migrations between these same countries.

If we follow up on the countries where the most migrants reside in 2019, we have the following relationship:

COUNTRY	MIGRANTS
United States of America	50.661.149
Germany	13.132.146
Saudi Arabia	13.122.338
Russia	11.640.559
United Kingdom	9.552.110
United Arab Emirates	8.587.256
France	8.334.875
Canada	7.960.657
Australia	7.549.270
Spain	6.280.065
Italy	6.273.722
Turkey	5.876.829
Ukraine	4.964.293
China	4.372.697
Suráfrica	4.224.256
India	3.967.470
Kazakhstan	3.705.556
Thailand	3.635.085
Malaysia	3.430.380
Jordania	3.346.703

**Table Nº 3:** Countries with the highest number of migrants received (2019).  
**Source:** DAES, UN, 2020.

Beyond the fact that the United States of America is the country where most migrants reside, it is striking that there are only two American and six European countries in the list of the top 20 countries with the most migrants. Although it is not the region with the most migrants in the world, it should be noted that there are five countries from the Middle East on the list, as well as another five from the rest of the Asian continent. Only one African country, South Africa, and one oceanic country, Australia, appear on the list.

On the other hand, it is noteworthy that while some countries have seen their migrant population increase over the last three decades, there are other countries where the migrant population has remained stable over the same period, which may be due to different forms of measurement, or to other social phenomena. If we take the same twenty countries in the table above, and order them by the percentage increase in their migrant population between 1990 and 2019, we have the following:

COUNTRY	2019	1990	PERCENTAGE INCREASE
Spain	6.280.065	821.605	664,37
Thailand	3.635.085	528.693	587,56
United Arab Emirates	8.587.256	1.306.574	557,23
Turkey	5.876.829	1.163.686	405,02
Malaysia	3.430.380	695.920	392,93
Italy	6.273.722	1.428.219	339,27
South Africa	4.224.256	1.163.883	262,95
Saudi Arabia	13.122.338	4.998.445	162,53
Jordan	3.346.703	1.146.349	191,94
United Kingdom	9.552.110	3.650.286	161,68

Germany	13.132.146	5.936.181	121,22
United States of America	50.661.149	23.251.026	117,89
Australia	7.549.270	3.955.213	90,87
Canada	7.960.657	4.333.318	83,71
France	8.334.875	5.897.267	41,33
China	3.391.219	2.457.623	37,99
Kazakhstan	3.705.556	3.619.200	2,39
Russia	11.640.559	11.524.948	1,00
Ukraine	4.964.293	6.892.920	-27,98
India	3.967.470	7.594.801	-47,76

**Table N° 4** Countries with more migrants according to percentage increase of their migrant population (1990 -2019).

**Source:** DAES, UN, 2020. Own calculations.

As we can see, the positions of the countries with the largest number of immigrants change significantly when we analyze the percentage increase in their migrant population, with respect to the context they had in 1990. While countries such as Spain, Thailand, United Arab Emirates, Malaysia and Italy have seen their migrant populations increase by at least 300%, countries in Eastern Europe and Central Asia have experienced a stagnation in terms of their migrant population, as is the case of Kazakhstan or Russia; while other countries have experienced a process of reduction in their migrant population, such as Ukraine and India.

The highly industrialized Western countries of Europe, North America and Oceania have also registered large increases in their migrant population, thus occupying the middle positions in the table. In this case, the United Kingdom has increased its migrant population by 161.68%, while Germany recorded an increase of 121.22%.

The country with the largest migrant population, the United States of America, has also seen its migrant population double in the period considered, reaching an increase of 117.89%.

Finally, it is necessary to consider the differences between what each country considers migrant according to its legislation. This aspect undoubtedly constitutes a source of heterogeneity in the data, which are often presented as if they were comparable. On the other hand, the quality and coverage of administrative records is fundamental for obtaining the data presented, so that phenomena such as illegal immigration or weaknesses in the territorial coverage of the states introduce further distortions to the information.

## REFERENCES

United Nations. Population Division (2021). Available at: <https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/data-landing-page>

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