

Characteristics of the European Born in the United States

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This spotlight examines the foreign born from Europe. It is the first in a series on the size and characteristics of the foreign-born population in the United States.

As a group, the European born are more likely to be proficient in English, work in higher-level occupations, and have higher earnings than the overall foreign-born population. Also, they are less likely to live in poverty and to be unemployed. Unlike other foreign-born groups, the European born groups generally have had more time to adjust to living in the United States.

For this reason, the European born can be easily overlooked by researchers and policymakers interested in immigrant populations in the U.S.. However, there are many differences among European-born groups from specific countries, which reflect the European-born population's diversity and show that some groups may warrant further attention.

The series draws primarily from Census 2000 data, including social, economic, and housing profiles of the foreign born developed by the **U.S. Census Bureau**.

Click on the bullet points below for more information:

- In 2000, there were 4.9 million European born in the United States, an increase of 13 percent since 1990.
- The European born accounted for 15.8 percent of the total foreign-born population.
- Historically, Europeans have accounted for the largest portion of the foreign-born population in the U.S., but changes in U.S. immigration policy have led to dramatic shifts in the size and composition of the European foreign born.
- Those born in Eastern European countries accounted for most of the increase in the numbers of the European born between 1990 and 2000.
- Eastern Europeans made up the largest proportion of the European born, followed by Western, Northern, and Southern Europe.

- Of the total European born currently living in the United States, 53.2 percent arrived before 1980.
- While Russia, Ukraine, and the United Kingdom accounted for the largest number of arrivals between 1990 and 2000, the European-born groups with the largest percentage of recent migrants were from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Moldova, and Albania.
- The European born were more likely to be citizens than the foreign-born population in general.
- The European born were older than the overall foreign-born population.
- Women make up a larger proportion of the European born than do women in the native or the total foreign-born population.
- Two of every three European born spoke a language other than English.
- The majority of the European born who spoke a language other than English at home spoke English "very well."
- Roughly three in every four of the European born had a high school or higher degree.
- Nearly three in every 10 of the European born had a bachelor's or higher degree.
- The European born had a lower labor force participation rate than the total foreign-born population.
- The unemployment rates for all European-born groups were lower than the rates for the total foreign-born population.
- The European born were concentrated in management or professional and sales or office-related occupations.
- European-born men and women had higher median earnings than all foreign-born men and women in the U.S..
- European-born individuals were less likely to be in poverty than the total foreign-born population.
- The European born were more likely to own their homes than the total foreign-born population.

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In 2000, of the 31.1 million foreign born in the United States, 4.9 million were born in European countries. The number of European born increased 13 percent (565,154) between 1990 and 2000.

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The European born accounted for 15.8 percent of the total foreign-born population.

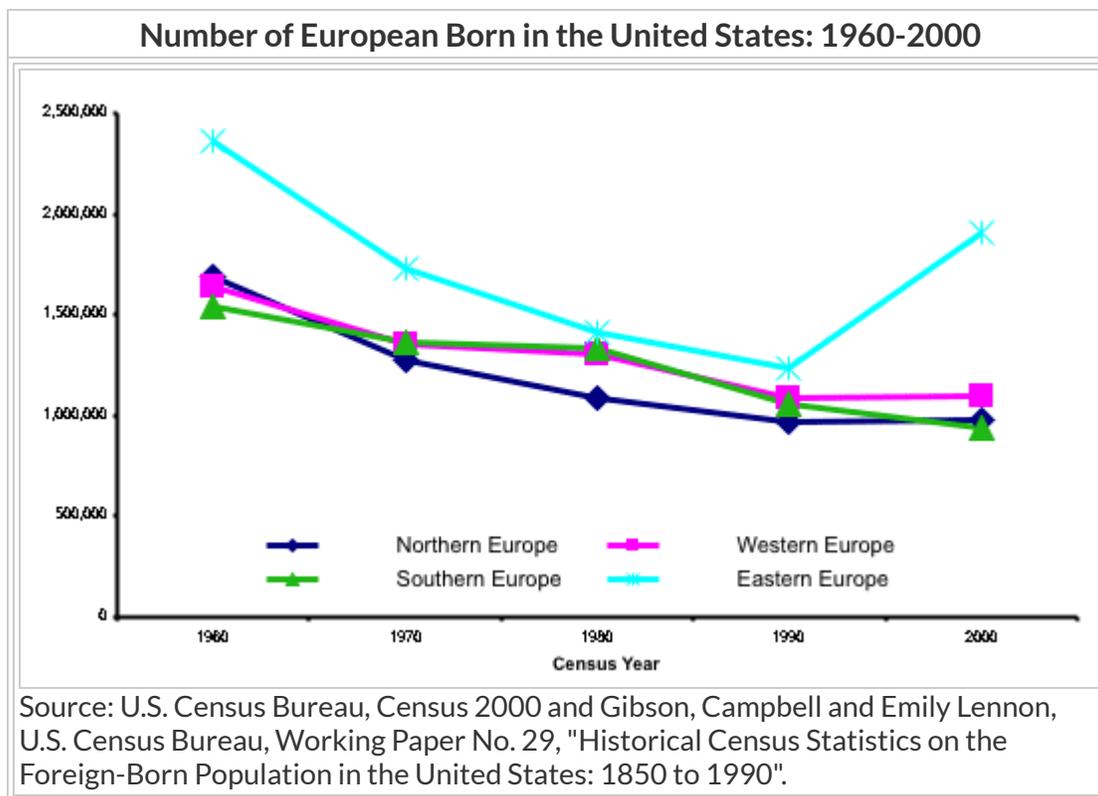
The share of the foreign born from European countries decreased from 75 percent in 1960 to 61.7 percent in 1970, 39 percent in 1980, 22.9 percent in 1990, and 15.8 percent in 2000. Although the total number of the foreign born from Europe increased between 1990 and 2000, the numeric increase was relatively small compared with the increase in the number of foreign born from Asia and Latin America.

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Historically, Europeans have accounted for the largest portion of the foreign-born population in the U.S., but changes in U.S. immigration policy have led to dramatic shifts in the size and composition of the European foreign born.

Up until the 1970s, in both absolute and relative terms, the European born have composed most of the foreign-born population since official record keeping began in 1820. The downward trend of European immigration that began in the 1930s was accentuated by changes in U.S. immigration policy brought about by the 1965

Immigration Act (see the **U.S. profile**). Today, Latin America and Asia now account for the most significant immigrant populations in terms of numbers and share of the total foreign-born population.



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Those born in Eastern European countries accounted for most of the increase in the numbers of the European born between 1990 and 2000.

Figure 1 (above) indicates that the bulk of the increase after 1990 is a result of growing numbers from Eastern European countries (see sidebar for definitions), which experienced profound changes following the Cold War. The stock of Western and Northern Europeans also increased slightly during the past decade, while the number of Southern Europeans continued to decline.

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Eastern Europeans made up the largest proportion of the European born, followed by Western, Northern, and Southern Europe.

Eastern Europeans (1,906,157) composed 38.8 percent of the overall European-born population in 2000. The main sending countries from this region were Poland (466,742), Russia (340,177), and Ukraine (275,153). Western Europeans (1,095,847) made up 22.3 percent of the European-born population. Most Western Europeans in the U.S. were born in Germany (706,704), with the next-largest group born in France (151,154). Northern European countries (974,619)

Regions of Europe

Eastern Europe includes Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Belarus, Russia, Ukraine, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Yugoslavia, Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Macedonia, Slovenia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, and the USSR.

Northern Europe includes the United Kingdom, Ireland, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, and Norway.

Southern Europe includes Greece, Italy, Portugal, Spain, and Malta.

Western Europe includes Austria, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, and Switzerland.

Note: Regions are as defined by the United States Census Bureau. Czechoslovakia includes both the

accounted for 19.8 percent of the European-born population. The United Kingdom (677,751) contributed by far the largest group from this region, followed by Ireland (156,474).

Czech Republic and Slovakia. The specific country for those who reported USSR could not be determined. Yugoslavia includes Serbia and Kosovo.

Southern Europeans (934,665) made up about 19.0 percent of the European foreign born, with Italy (473,338), Portugal (203,119), and Greece (165,750) making up the three largest sending countries.

- For information on where specific groups are living in the U.S., see **State Immigration Data Profiles**.

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Of the total European born currently living in the United States, 53.2 percent arrived before 1980.

Of the total European born in the United States, 32.9 percent arrived between 1990 and 2000, 13.9 percent arrived between 1980 and 1989, and 53.2 percent arrived before 1980.

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While Russia, Ukraine, and the United Kingdom accounted for the largest number of arrivals between 1990 and 2000, the European-born groups with the largest percentage of recent migrants were from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Moldova, and Albania.

The European-born groups with the largest numbers who entered between 1990 and 2000 were from Russia (237,975), Ukraine (191,230), and the United Kingdom (177,900). The European-born groups with the largest percentage of their own populations arriving between 1990 and 2000 were from Bosnia and Herzegovina (95.0 percent), Moldova (85.6 percent), and Albania (83.0 percent), which together accounted for 142,630 new arrivals.

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The European born were more likely to be citizens than the foreign-born population in general.

More than half (2.7 million) or 56 percent of the European born are naturalized U.S. citizens, compared with about 40 percent (12.5 million) of the total foreign-born population. The European-born populations with the highest naturalization rates – from Greece (76.7 percent), Hungary (76.4 percent), and Italy (74.8 percent) – were also among those reporting the largest proportions entering before 1980. Conversely, the sending countries with the lowest naturalization rates—Bosnia and Herzegovina (10.8 percent), Albania (22.1 percent), and Bulgaria (27.6 percent) – were also among those with the highest proportions entering between 1990 and 2000.

- See the Spotlight on **Naturalization in the United States**

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The European born were older than the overall foreign-born population.

The median age of the total European born (50 years old) reflects a much older population than the overall foreign born in general (37). The oldest European-born groups were from Austria (63 years old), Estonia (62

years old), and Latvia (62 years old). The youngest European-born groups were from Bosnia and Herzegovina (30 years old), Albania (33 years old), and Bulgaria (34 years old).

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Women make up a larger proportion of the European born than do women in the native or the total foreign-born population.

The overall sex ratio for the European-born population was 83, indicating 83 men to every 100 women. This represents a greater proportion of women to men than the overall foreign-born population (99), which may reflect the long history of European immigration. Generally, foreign-born groups that are older in age and have spent more time in the U.S. tend to have more female-dominated sex ratios. This may be especially true for the European born in the context of decreasing migration from traditional sending countries.

How Sex Ratios Are Calculated

One method demographers use to measure the relative number of males and females in a population is the sex ratio. The male-to-female sex ratio is calculated by dividing the number of males (of all ages) by the number of females (of all ages) and multiplying by 100.

A value above 100 means there are more males than females in the population. For example, a sex ratio of 115 means there are 115 males to every 100 females.

A value below 100 indicates more females than males. A sex ratio of 90 means there are 90 males to every 100 females. A sex ratio of 100 means there are an equal number of males and females (i.e., 100 males to 100 females).

The groups with the highest female sex ratios were Germany (57), Finland (61), and Luxemburg (63). The European born from Greece (116) had the highest male sex ratio, followed by Albania (112), Bulgaria (107), and Macedonia (107).

- See the Spotlight on **Sex Ratios of the Foreign Born in the United States**

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Two of every three European born spoke a language other than English.

Two out of every three (67.6 percent) of the European born 5 years of age and older speak a language other than English at home. This rate is much lower than that for the total foreign-born population (83 percent). The groups with the highest percent of those speaking a language other than English at home – from Bosnia and Herzegovina (97.1 percent), Moldova (96.5 percent), and Belarus (96.5 percent) – were also among the most recent groups to enter the U.S..

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The majority of the European born who spoke a language other than English at home spoke English "very well."

Of the European born 5 years of age and older who speak a language other than English at home, 53.4 percent reported speaking English "very well." Denmark (88.0 percent) had the highest percentage of those with a high degree of English proficiency, followed by Iceland (86.5 percent), and Sweden (85.7 percent). Conversely, the European-born groups with the highest percentage of limited English proficiency – or those who reported speaking English less than "very well" – were from the Ukraine (69.0 percent), Belarus (68.5 percent), and Moldova (66.2 percent).

- See the Spotlight on **English Abilities of the U.S. Foreign-Born Population**

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Roughly three in every four of the European born had a high school or higher degree.

Of the European-born population 25 years of age and older, 76.5 percent reported having a high school or higher degree compared to 61.8 percent of the total foreign-born population. Those born in Bulgaria (92.6 percent), Switzerland (90.5 percent), and Ireland (90.4 percent) were the most likely to report having a high school degree or higher. Those born in Portugal (42.9 percent), Italy (53.7 percent), and Greece (59.9 percent) were the least likely to report having completed a high school education.

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Nearly three in every 10 of the European born had a bachelor's or higher degree.

Of the European-born population 25 years of age and older, 29.2 percent had a bachelor's degree or higher education, compared to 24 percent of the overall foreign-born population. Those born in Bulgaria (53.8 percent), Russia (51.7 percent), and Switzerland (46.7 percent) were most likely to report having a bachelor's or higher degree. Those born in Portugal (7.3 percent) were least likely to report having a bachelor's or higher degree, followed by those born in Malta (12.5 percent), Macedonia (13.7 percent), and Bosnia and Herzegovina (13.7 percent).

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The European born had a lower labor force participation rate than the total foreign-born population.

Among the population 16 years of age and older, 54.1 percent (2.5 million) of the European born, compared to 60.5 percent (17.2 million) of the total foreign participated in the civilian labor force. The European born's lower labor force participation rate may again reflect the higher median age of the group and the number of European born who are retired. The European-born groups with the highest labor force participation rates were from Bosnia and Herzegovina (71.8 percent), Bulgaria (68.6 percent), and Portugal (61.7 percent). The European born with the lowest rates were from Estonia (39.2 percent), Lithuania (41.1 percent), and Norway (42.8 percent).

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The unemployment rates for all European-born groups were lower than the rates for the total foreign-born population.

Of the population 16 years of age and older in the civilian labor force in 2000, 2.3 percent of the European born reported to be unemployed, compared to a rate of 6.8 percent reported for the overall foreign-born population. The European groups with the highest unemployment rates, from Albania (4.6 percent), Bosnia and Herzegovina (4.4 percent), Moldova (4.3 percent), also had lower unemployment rates than those found for the foreign-born population in general. The European-born groups with the lowest unemployment rates were from Norway (1.1 percent), Austria (1.0 percent), and Luxembourg (1.2 percent).

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The European born were concentrated in management or professional and sales or office-related occupations. Of the employed population 16 years of age and older in the civilian labor force, the European born were much more likely to work in management and professional occupations than the overall foreign-born population. Additionally, the European born were less likely to work in service, production, transportation, material moving, construction, and maintenance occupations than the foreign born in general (see table below for detailed tabulations).

Occupational Comparison of the European-born and Foreign-born Populations in the U.S.

Occupation	Foreign born		European born	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Employed civilian population 16 years and older	16,073,543	100.0	2,389,140	100.0
Management, professional, and related occupations	4,584,924	28.5	961,540	40.2
Service occupations	3,212,333	20.0	358,460	15.0
Sales and office occupations	3,201,333	19.9	522,505	21.9
Farming, fishing, and forestry occupations	330,173	2.1	6,160	0.3
Construction, extraction, and maintenance occupations	1,678,361	10.4	214,800	9.0
Production, transportation, and material moving occupations	3,066,419	19.1	325,670	13.6

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000. Foreign born figures are from 5 percent PUMS, and figures for European born are from Foreign-Born Profiles, STP-159

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European-born men and women had higher median earnings than all foreign-born men and women in the U.S.

Among those full-time, year-round workers in 1999, the median earnings of European-born males (\$44,763) were 33 percent higher than the median reported for all foreign-born males (\$30,000). The European-born groups with the highest male median earnings were from Norway (\$64,792), Denmark (\$60,983), and Switzerland (\$60,826). Those with the lowest male median earnings were from Bosnia and Herzegovina (\$24,904), Albania (\$28,528), and Portugal (\$36,744).

The median earnings of European-born women (\$29,930) were 16.5 percent higher than those for all foreign-born women (\$25,000). The European-born groups with the highest female median earnings were from Luxembourg (\$38,854), Switzerland (\$36,200), and Norway (\$35,657). Those with the lowest female median earnings were from Bosnia and Herzegovina (\$18,729), Albania (\$20,490), and Macedonia (\$24,389).

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European-born individuals were less likely to be in poverty than the total foreign-born population.

Of the people for whom poverty status was determined in 1999, European-born individuals (10.6 percent) were less likely to be in poverty than the total foreign-born (17.9 percent). The European-born groups with the lowest poverty rates were from Malta (6.0 percent), the United Kingdom (6.3 percent), and Ireland (6.8 percent). The European-born groups with the highest poverty rates were from Moldova (34.2 percent), Albania (22.7 percent), and Bosnia and Herzegovina (21.8 percent).

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The European born were more likely to own their homes than the total foreign-born population.

In 2000, 63.7 percent of European-born householders owned their homes, compared to 49.9 percent of all foreign-born householders. The European-born householders most likely to own their homes were from Italy (79 percent), Malta (76.2 percent), and Slovenia (74.6 percent). The European-born householders least likely to own their homes were from Bosnia and Herzegovina (26.9 percent), Albania (27.7 percent), and Belarus (30.7 percent).

Notes: For information on sampling error, nonsampling error, and definitions (labor force, occupations, and poverty), **[click here](#)**.

Sources

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