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Eidgenössisches Departement des Innern EDI
Bundesamt für Statistik BFS

Factsheet – survey / statistics

Statistics on the Foreign Resident Population (PETRA), 1991–2009

Description

Statistics on the size and structure of the foreign resident population on 31 December in a given year as well as population change in foreign resident population registered during a calendar year. In 2010, PETRA was integrated into the Population and Household Statistics (STATPOP).

Available since:
1991

Features registered:
people in the foreign resident population living in Switzerland

Population size and population change (births, deaths, immigration, emigration, and acquisition of Swiss citizenship) by:

- commune of residence
- sex
- age
- marital status
- citizenship
- residence permit
- length of residence

Methodology

PETRA is a composite statistic in which
information from various administrative registers and exhaustive surveys is collated and tested for plausibility. Data are then aligned and an overview compiled. It is based on the following official register and administrative data:

- Central Aliens Register of the State Secretariat for Migration (SEM)
- Register of diplomats and international civil servants (Ordipro) of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA)
- Asylum register (AUPER) of the State Secretariat for Migration (SEM)
- Vital Statistics (BEVNAT). Information in the BEVNAT factsheet.

To calculate the permanent foreign resident population, data on population size and change are balanced using the following approach: Based on both data on population size (population size on 1 January and 31 December) and data on population change throughout the year, additional population changes are generated to arrive at a mathematically coherent and correct population projection.
A population projection is also made for asylum seekers in the non-permanent resident population.

Degree of regionalisation:
communes

Periodicity:
annually, for the last time in 2009

Reference period:
calendar year or end of year

Quality of statistical information:
The residence and settlement of foreign nationals in Switzerland is governed by several federal offices across various federal departments.
The principle use of the registers concerned is for administrative purposes and their use for statistical purposes is therefore fairly restricted.
The data structure is adapted to the specific purpose of each register, which makes it extremely difficult to merge data from different registers.
Processing administrative data for statistical purposes always involves numerous tasks of a conceptual and methodological nature. The main reason for this is that even in long-standing registers, a lot of data has been entered incorrectly. Many of the errors occur because mutations are not reported in time, if at all, meaning that individual variables ‚cannot be updated properly. Data is often recorded decentrally (i.e. by cantonal and communal authorities), leading to differences in the quality of data and the way in which it is recorded. The manual entry of data into a register is always subject to errors, which despite automatised plausibility checks, are not always detected and corrected.
Lastly, it should be mentioned that variables that are important to population statistics (e.g. civil status, age, gender) are not necessarily important for administrative tasks, for which the registers are chiefly intended. For this reason they are not systematically checked when entering data.

Policy on revisions

From 2010, PETRA was replaced by the Population and Household Statistics (STATPOP), which are part of the statistics in the new census system. These statistics now include (Art. 3 of the Ordinance on the Federal Population Census of 19 December 2008, RS 431.112.1):

a. core statistics (e.g. STATPOP)
b. structural statistics
c. statistics on specific topics
d. statistics on current issues (omnibus survey)

For more information, please see the STATPOP factsheet

Legal bases

Ordinance on the Conduct of Statistical Surveys by the Confederation of 30 June 1993 (RS 431.012.1)

Organisation

Federal Statistical Office (FSO)

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