

# **FAMILY IMMIGRATION POLICY AND TRENDS: HOW THE U.S. COMPARES TO OTHER COUNTRIES**



April 10, 2018

# Presenters



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# Today's Report and Data Tool



Issue Brief

## It's Relative: A Crosscountry Comparison of Family-Migration Policies and Flows

By Kate Hooper and Brian Salant

April 2018

### Executive Summary

While family migration is a central part of immigration systems worldwide, the policies that govern the number and types of family members eligible and the conditions attached to their admission differ considerably. In a number of countries, policymakers are revisiting issues related to family migration. Debates about which family members should be eligible to join their relatives in the United States have attracted widespread attention since President Trump's administration began questioning the value of family-sponsored immigration. Meanwhile, at the height of the 2015–16 European migration crisis, policymakers in Germany and Sweden put in place restrictions on the family-reunification rights of some recently arrived asylum seekers, and concerns that generous unification rules may be serving as a "pull factor" for prospective refugees and migrants.

Against this backdrop, this issue brief explores family-migration trends and policies in nine Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries that receive large numbers of family migrants: Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and the United States. It draws on data from national migration and statistics agencies for the years 2011 to 2016. Because countries use different methods for categorizing and recording admissions, direct comparisons across all nine countries are not always possible. For Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States, the brief examines data on permanent-residence grants (i.e., family members sponsored by citizens and permanent residents). The data available for the European countries (excluding the United Kingdom), on the other hand, measures the total number of first residence permits issued, whether temporary or permanent; they include both immigrants sponsored to join family members already living in Europe and relatives who accompany a migrant admitted through other categories (e.g., a spouse accompanying a temporary worker). Nonetheless, this analysis sheds light on a number of commonalities—and some key differences—in family migration to these countries.

Among the top findings:

- Across countries, family-based migration accounts for an important part of immigration flows—especially when family members who arrive through both family and other admissions streams are considered. In France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, and Sweden, the largest share of first residence permits were issued for "family reasons" (ranging between one-third and nearly half of all admissions) between 2012 and 2016. In Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom, family migrants accounted for between 27 percent and 29 percent of all permanent-resident visas granted during the same period; the share was about two-thirds in

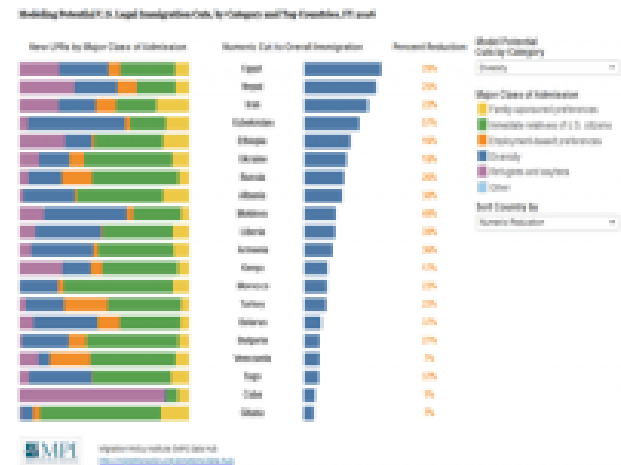
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<http://bit.ly/familyimm>

## Data Tool: Modeling Potential U.S. Legal Immigration Cuts, by Category and Top Countries

<http://bit.ly/model4usimm>



# Julia Gelatt



**Julia Gelatt** is a Senior Policy Analyst at the Migration Policy Institute, working with the U.S. Immigration Policy Program. Her work focuses on the legal immigration system, demographic trends, and the implications of local, state, and federal U.S. immigration policy.

Dr. Gelatt previously worked as a Research Associate at the Urban Institute, where her mixed-methods research focused on state policies toward immigrants; barriers to and facilitators of immigrant families' access to public benefits and public prekindergarten programs; and identifying youth victims of human trafficking. She was a Research Assistant at MPI before graduate school.

Dr. Gelatt earned her PhD in sociology, with a specialization in demography, from Princeton University, where her work focused on the relationship between immigration status and children's health and well-being. She earned a bachelor of the arts in sociology/anthropology from Carleton College.



# U.S. Family Trends and Policies

Immigrants come to the United States in various ways:

- Green cards for lawful permanent residence (LPR status)
- Foreign students
- Temporary workers
- Without authorization -- illegal entry or overstay visa



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# U.S. Family Trends and Policies

## Current permanent immigration system

### Family-based

#### **U.S. citizens may sponsor**

Parents

Spouses

Minor, unmarried children

Adult children (capped)

Siblings (capped)

#### **LPRs may sponsor**

Spouses (capped)

Minor, unmarried children (capped)

Adult, unmarried children (capped)

### Other categories

**Employment-based**

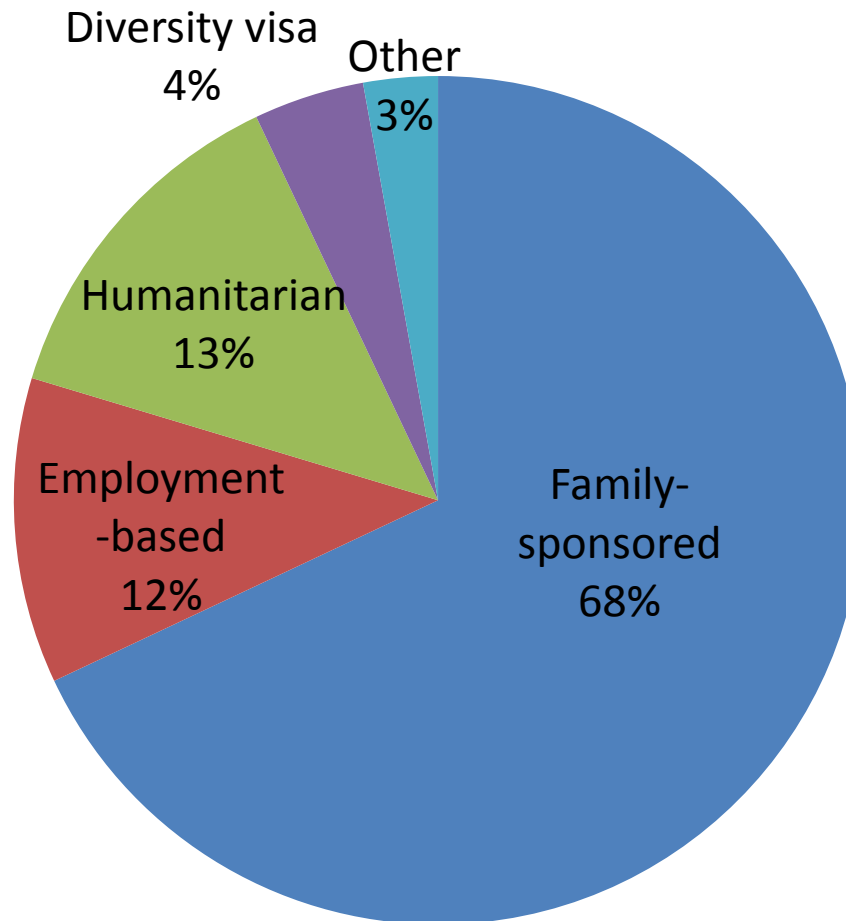
**Diversity visa**

**Humanitarian**



# U.S. Family Trends and Policies

## Share of immigrants by category, FY 2016



1,183,505 people gained lawful permanent resident (LPR) status in 2016

Source: DHS Office of Immigration Statistics, *2011-2016 Yearbook of Immigration Statistics*.  
Washington, DC: Department of Homeland Security.

# U.S. Family Trends and Policies

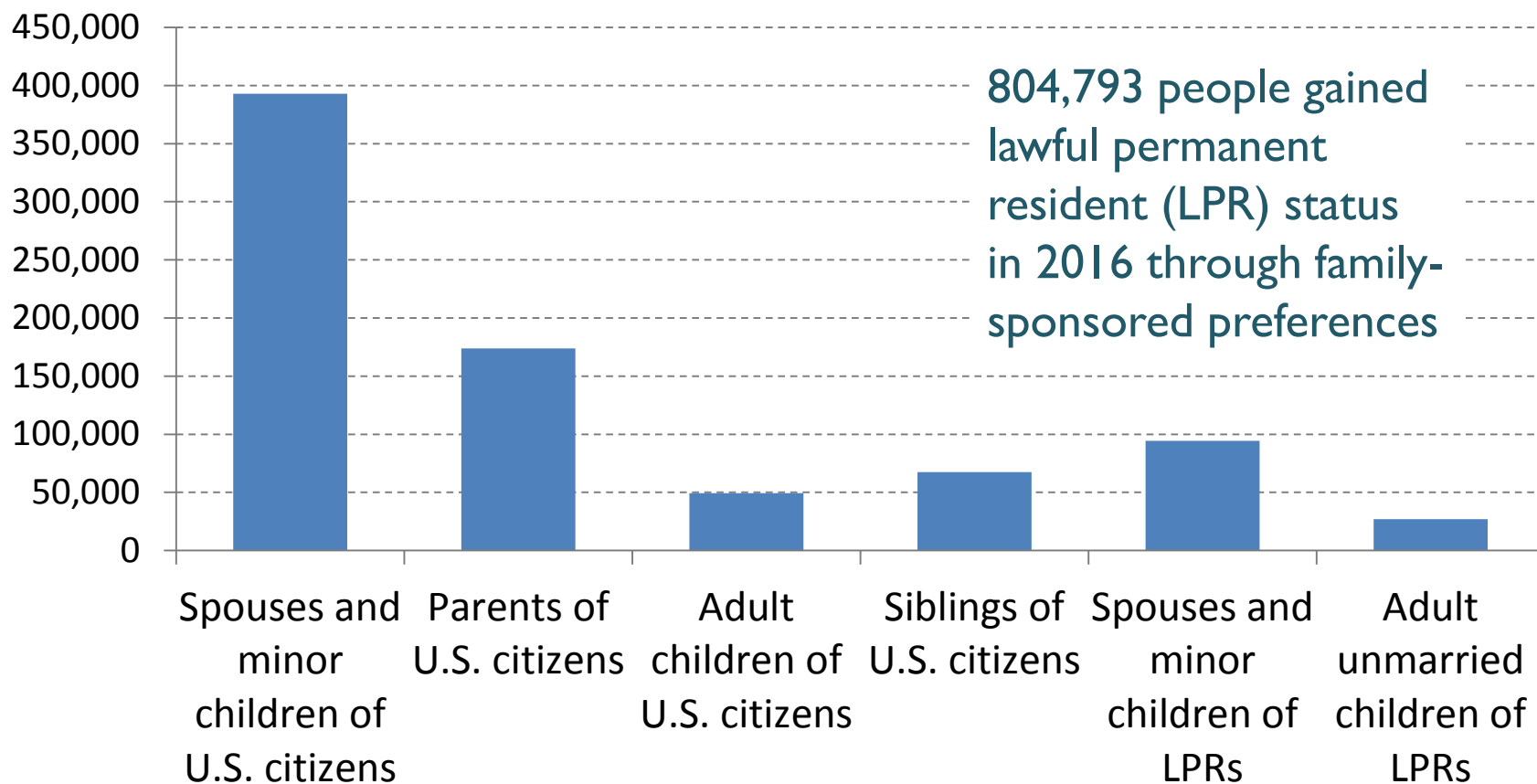
## Numerical caps on family-sponsored visas

Category Name	Composition	Annual Cap
<b>FAMILY CHANNEL</b>		
Immediate Relatives of US Citizens	Spouses and minor children (under 21) of US citizens, and parents of US citizens who are 21 or older	No numerical limit
1 <sup>st</sup> Preference	Unmarried adult sons and daughters (21 and over) of US citizens	23,400
2A Preference	Spouses and minor children of lawful permanent residents	114,200* shared between the 2A and 2B categories
2B Preference	Unmarried adult sons and daughters of lawful permanent residents	
3 <sup>rd</sup> Preference	Married adult sons and daughters of US citizens	23,400
4 <sup>th</sup> Preference	Siblings of US citizens who are 21 and older	65,000

Source: Bergeron, Claire, "Going to the Back of the Line: A Primer on Lines, Visa Categories, and Wait Times," Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/going-back-line-primer-lines-visa-categories-and-wait-times>

# U.S. Family Trends and Policies

## Immigration in FY 2016 by detailed family-sponsorship category



Source: DHS Office of Immigration Statistics, 2016, *2016 Yearbook of Immigration Statistics*.  
Washington, DC: Department of Homeland Security.

# U.S. Family Trends and Policies

## Backlogs, in years, for capped family-sponsored visas

	China	India	Mexico	Philippines	All Other
Unmarried adult children of U.S. citizens	7	7	22	12	7
Spouses and minor children of LPRs	2	2	2	2	2
Unmarried adult children of LPRs	7	7	22	12	7
Adult married children of U.S. citizens	12	12	23	23	12
Siblings of U.S. citizens	14	14	20	23	14

Source: U.S. Department of State, *Visa Bulletin For April 2018*,  
<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/legal/visa-law0/visa-bulletin/2018/visa-bulletin-for-april-2018.html>



# U.S. Family Trends and Policies

## Proposed cuts to U.S. permanent immigration system

### Family-based

**U.S. citizens may sponsor**

~~Parents~~

Spouses

Minor, unmarried children

~~Adult children (capped)~~

~~Siblings (capped)~~

**LPRs may sponsor**

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Minor, unmarried children

~~Adult, unmarried children (capped)~~

### Other categories

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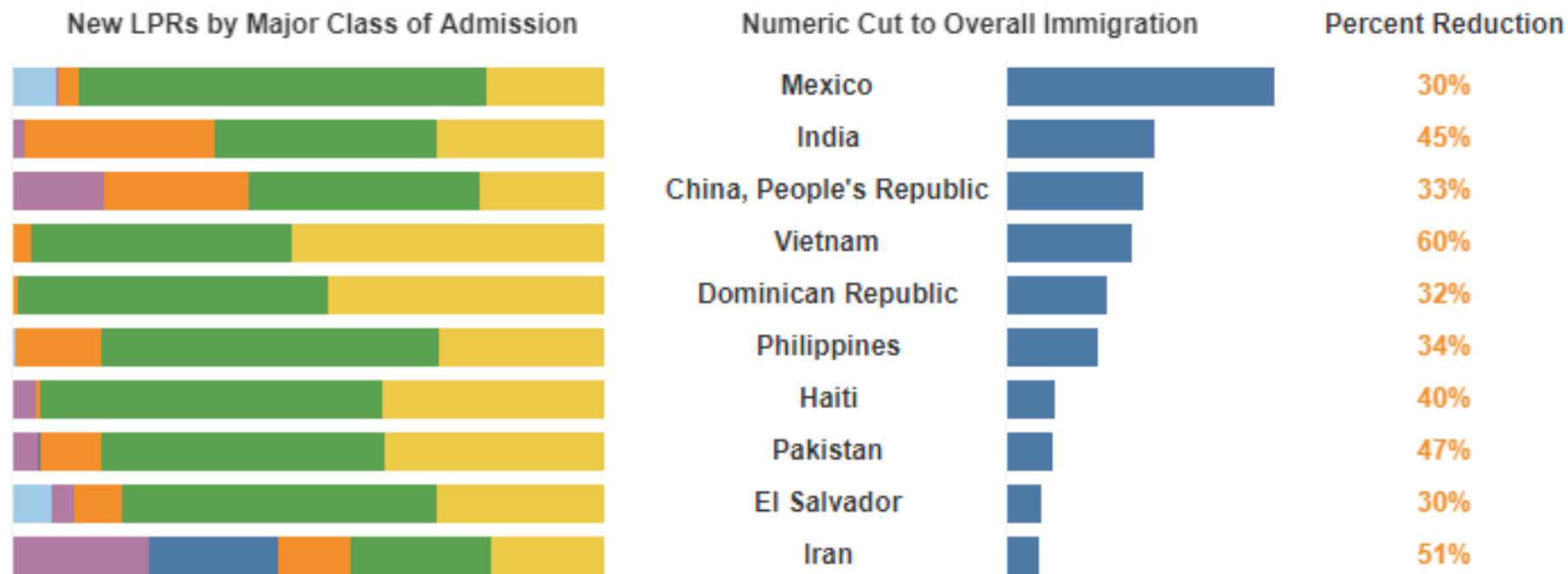
~~Diversity visa~~

**Humanitarian**

# U.S. Family Trends and Policies

## MPI data tool showing the potential impact of proposed cuts

**Modeling Potential U.S. Legal Immigration Cuts, by Category and Top Countries, FY 2016**



<https://www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/data-hub/charts/modeling-potential-us-legal-immigration-cuts>

# Kate Hooper



**Kate Hooper** is an Associate Policy Analyst with the Migration Policy Institute's International Program, where her research areas include forced migration, refugee and immigrant integration policies, and economic migration.

Previously, Ms. Hooper interned with the Centre for Social Justice, where she provided research support on UK social policy and deprivation issues, and a political communications firm in Westminster, United Kingdom.

She holds a master's degree with honors from the University of Chicago's Committee on International Relations, and a bachelor of the arts degree in history from the University of Oxford. She also holds a certificate in international political economy from the London School of Economics.

# What do we mean by family migration?

Family migration policies vary by country along three dimensions:

## I. Who can sponsor a family migrant

- U.S., Canada, Australia, UK apply one set of rules for citizens and permanent residents, and another for temporary migrants
- Most EU Member States don't make this distinction

## II. Which family members are eligible

- All countries allow sponsoring of spouses/partners and children
- Opportunities to sponsor other relatives vary by country

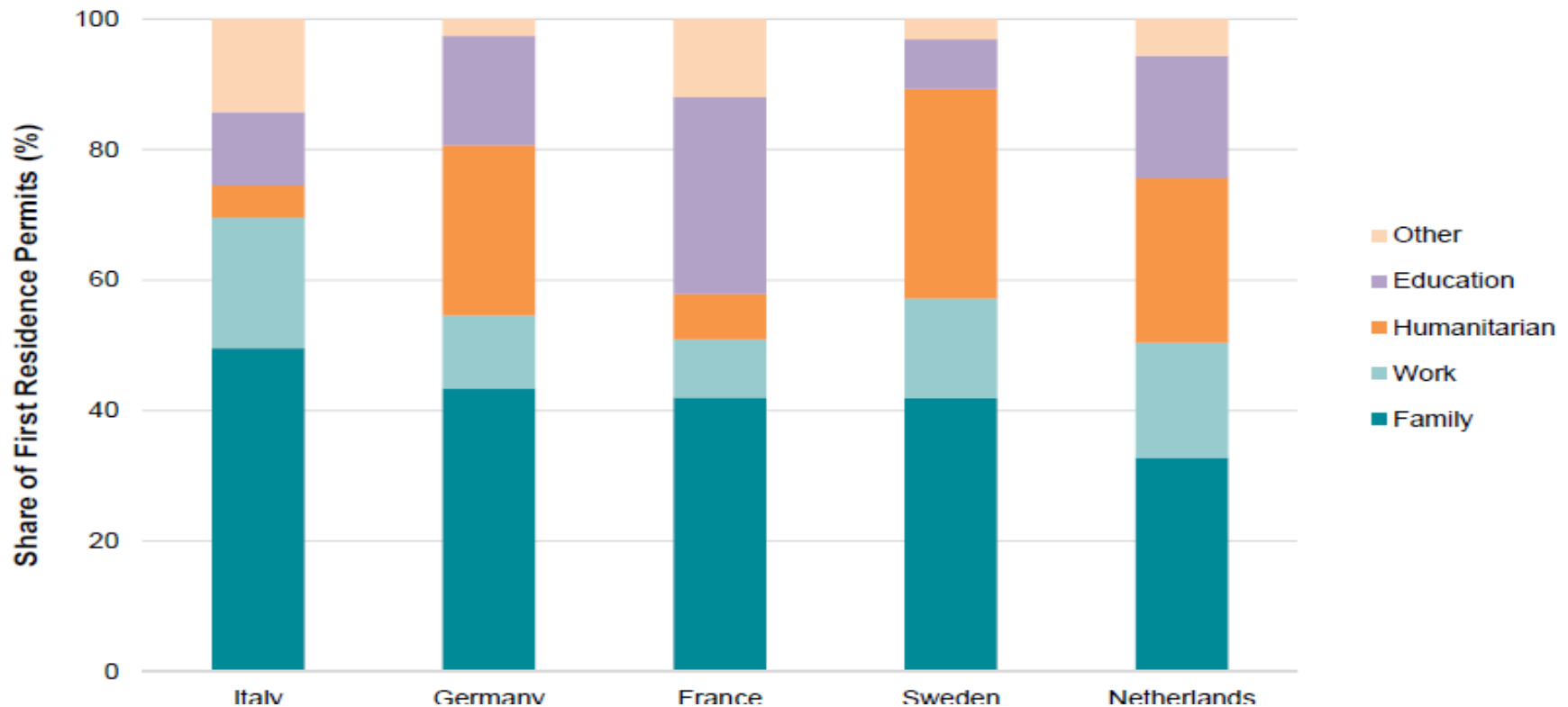
## III. What status the relative receives

- Temporary vs. Permanent residence
- Some countries place restrictions on their ability to work



# Family migration trends in Europe

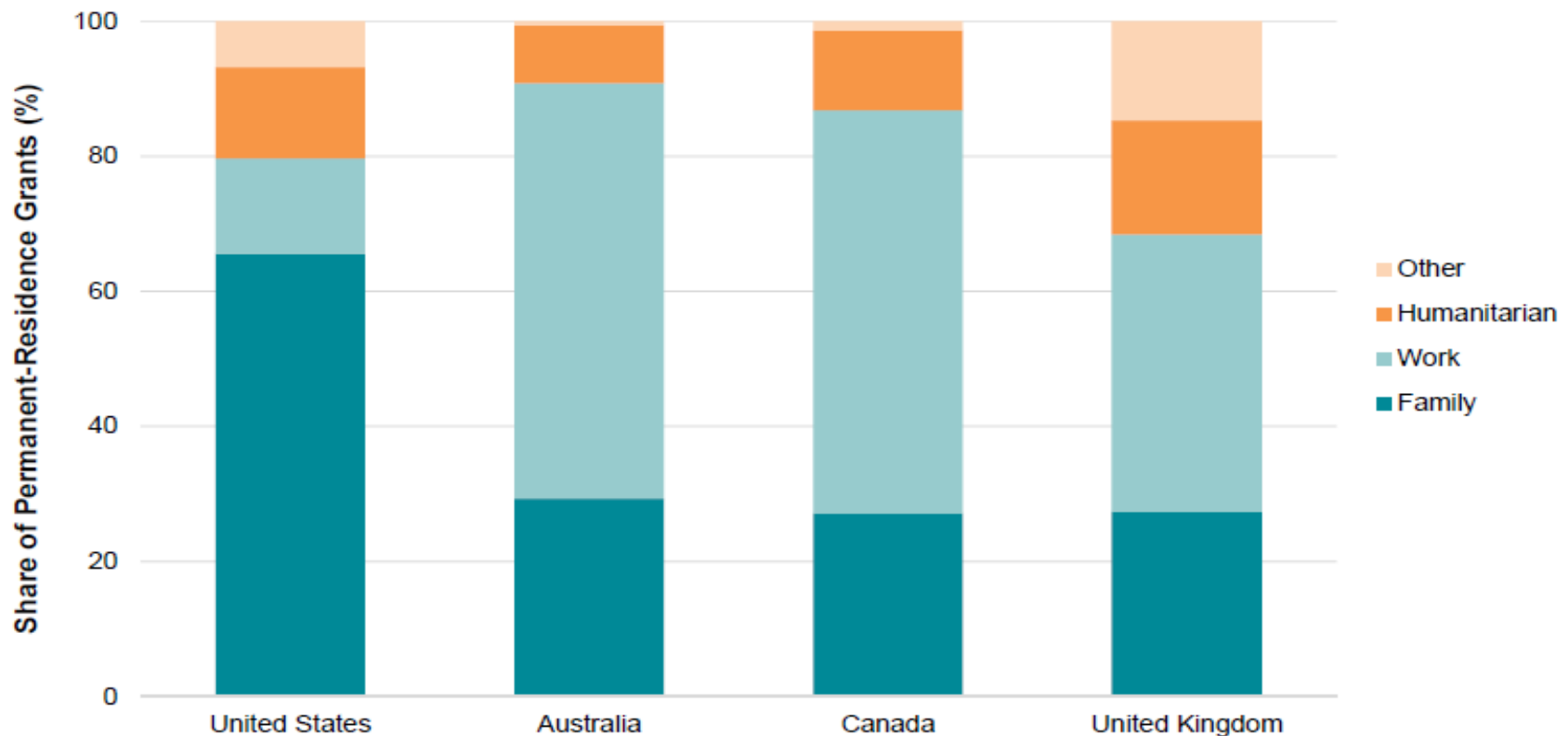
In France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, and Sweden, between a third and half of all first residence permits were issued for "family reasons" between 2012 and 2016



Sources: Eurostat, "First Permits by Reason, Length of Validity, and Citizenship [migr\_resfirst]," updated February 16, 2018; and Eurostat, "First Permits Issued for Other Reasons by Reason, Length of Validity, and Citizenship [migr\_resoth]," updated February 16, 2018.

# Family migration trends in the U.S., Canada, Australia, and the UK

Family-based migration is a much larger share of permanent migration in the United States, than Australia, Canada, or the UK



Sources: UK Home Office, "Immigration Statistics, October to December 2017"; Government of Canada, "Facts & Figures 2015: Immigration Overview"; Australian Government, Department of Immigration and Citizenship, "Migration Programme Statistics—Migration Programme Reports, Years 2012–13 through 2016–17"; DHS, "Yearbook of Immigration Statistics—Table 7," Years 2012 to 2015.

# Including accompanying family

These data exclude family members arriving through other admissions streams (e.g. the spouse of an economic migrant)

- When they are reclassified as family migrants, family admissions becomes the biggest immigration stream in Canada and the UK

Admissions Stream	Canada		United Kingdom		United States*	
	Original	Adjusted	Original	Adjusted	Original	Adjusted
Family	27%	66%	32%	57%	65%	81%
Economic	62%	28%	42%	22%	14%	7%
Humanitarian	10%	5%	14%	7%	14%	8%
Other	1%	1%	13%	13%	7%	4%

Sources: UK Home Office, "Immigration Statistics, October to December 2017<sub>1</sub>"; Government of Canada, "Facts & Figures 2015: Immigration Overview<sub>2</sub>"; DHS, "Yearbook of Immigration Statistics—Table 7," Years 2011 to 2015, [www.dhs.gov/immigration-statistics/yearbook](http://www.dhs.gov/immigration-statistics/yearbook).

# Adjusting for population size

When adjusted for population size, Australia, Canada, and the United States admit family migrants at similar rates

- 2.6, 2.0, and 2.1 admissions per 1,000 people, respectively

But the United States admits far fewer economic migrants:

- The United States admits 0.5 economic migrants per 1,000 people, compared to Australia (5.5 admissions) and Canada (4.5 admissions)

When this includes dependent family members in other admissions categories, Canada admits family migrants at a higher rate than the US:

- 4.8 vs. 2.6 admissions per 1,000 people, respectively

# Demetrios G. Papademetriou



**Demetrios G. Papademetriou** is a Distinguished Transatlantic Fellow at MPI, which he co-founded and led as its President for the first 13 years and where he remains President Emeritus and on the Board of Trustees. He served until 2018 as the founding President of MPI Europe, a nonprofit, independent research institute in Brussels that aims to promote a better understanding of migration trends and effects within Europe.

He is the convener of the Transatlantic Council on Migration, which is composed of senior public figures, business leaders, and public intellectuals from Europe, the United States, and Canada. He convened the Regional Migration Study Group, that has proposed multi-stakeholder support for new regional and collaborative approaches to migration, competitiveness, and human-capital development for the United States, Canada, Mexico, and Central America. He co-founded Metropolis: An International Forum for Research and Policy on Migration and Cities (which he led as International Chair for the initiative's first five years and is now International Chair Emeritus); and has served as Chair of the World Economic Forum's Global Agenda Council on Migration (2009-11); Chair of the Advisory Board of the Open Society Foundations' International Migration Initiative (2010-15); Chair of the Migration Committee of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development; Director for Immigration Policy and Research at the U.S. Department of Labor and Chair of the Secretary of Labor's Immigration Policy Task Force; and Executive Editor of the *International Migration Review*.

Dr. Papademetriou holds a PhD in comparative public policy and international relations (1976) from the University of Maryland and has taught at the universities of Maryland, Duke, American, and New School for Social Research.



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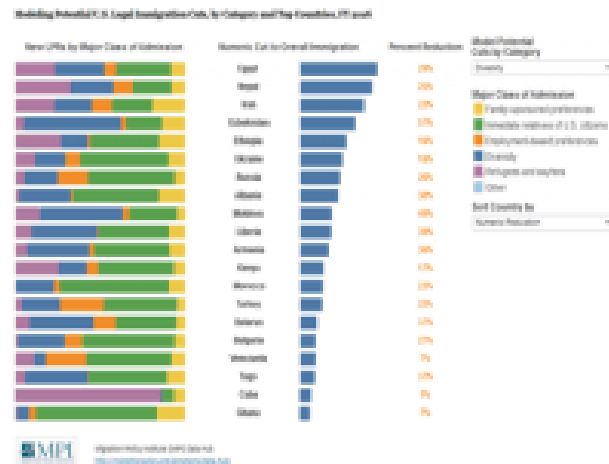
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