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Abstract

This chapter discusses the statistics on the Chinese population in Europe and explains the difficulties inherent in answering the question: How many Chinese are residing in Europe? The research literature on the Chinese population in the world, and especially in Europe, is reviewed through various official data sources. These include the United Nations Division of Population (UNDESA), the European Union's EUROSTAT, and OECD's international migration statistics, as well as the statistics on the Chinese diaspora produced by the People's Republic of China (PRC) and Taiwan (officially, the Republic of China, Roc). Each of these official sources of demographic data defines Europe and the Chinese diaspora in different ways. In addition, each country employs its own methods for compiling statistics on migrants, other visa holders, and ethnic groups. Based on these conflicting sources, this chapter summarizes the diverse official estimates of the Chinese population in the world and in different European countries. It then offers alternative sources of data that hold promise for future studies of Europe's Chinese diaspora, particularly EUROSTAT statistics on valid residence permits. The chapter concludes by suggesting demographic analysis shift focus from determining precise migrant totals to identifying trends that can help scholars and policymakers understand the complexities of Chinese migration in Europe.

Introduction

Anyone who posits the existence of a homogeneous Chinese diaspora is immediately faced with the problem of how to count, even how to define, "Chinese." (Miles 2020, 255)

Demography is devoted to analysing population numbers and their characteristics over time through variables such as sex, age, death, birth, and marriage. Demography has always been closely linked to the development of the state, as counting the population has important economic, political, and social implications. It is necessary to know how many people live in one place to manage society, so the population census is a very valuable tool of statecraft

(Anderson 1991; Scott 1998). Nevertheless, it is almost impossible to produce exact population data; we can only make estimations and approximations, which still serve as useful indicators with multiple possible applications.

Populations not only reproduce, grow, and/or decrease but also move, meaning that the groups of people located in one geographic space can change over time. Natural disasters, famines, wars, colonization, economic recessions, and educational resources are just some of the factors that explain population movements. The concept of international migration was developed to count and register the movement of people from one state to another, while internal migration accounts for the movements of people within the borders of a single state.

This chapter aims to answer a demographic question: What is the total population of so-called Chinese migrants in Europe? However, it cannot claim to offer a definitive answer. This is because answering this question raises significant conceptual and empirical issues. Nonetheless, this chapter will review the available data and attempt to provide reasonable estimates of the Chinese population in Europe. This chapter first discusses the concepts of diaspora and international migration. These concepts form the basis of the different statistical sources on the Chinese in the world and in Europe. This discussion is followed by a brief literature review on the statistical approach to Chinese international migration and the Chinese diaspora, especially focusing on studies of the European case. The next sections analyse the statistics on the world-wide Chinese diaspora by continents since 2000, followed by international migration and citizenship statistics compiled by European countries that are published in various sources. Finally, the chapter focuses on statistical data related to residence permits for Chinese citizens in European countries during the period 2015–2021.

Who Is Who? Concepts and Categories Applied in Counting Chinese Migrants

When exploring how many Chinese migrants live in Europe, one is invariably faced with the question of defining who is a Chinese migrant and which countries constitute Europe. The criteria used depend on who oversees counting the population. Defining the official categories for population counts—such as citizenship and ethnicity—can easily become contentious. Should people from Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan be registered as Chinese? Should ethnic Chinese with Indonesian, Vietnamese, or Surinamese citizenships be counted as Chinese migrants based on ethnicity?

There is no universal definition of an “international migrant.” The United Nations defines an international migrant as “any person who changes his or her country of usual residence.” This definition includes some categories—such as

students—but excludes others—such as tourists (UNDESA: Population Division 1998, para. 32, 9). Other statistical sources, such as EUROSTAT, include under the category “migration” subcategories such as “citizenship,” “country of birth,” and “acquisition of nationality” that further complicate the definition of migrants. Whatever the definition, nationality is usually a key statistical criterion: an international migrant has the nationality of an origin country that is different from the current place of residence.

However, the use of nationality also presents difficulties because when an international migrant becomes naturalized in any destination country, this person will no longer be included in national migration statistics as an “international migrant.” On the other hand, persons born in the country where their parents moved as international migrants are in some cases also considered as migrants if their citizenship follows the foreign nationality status of their parents. In other cases, the category of “international migrant” may also encompass naturalized migrants, based on assumed ethnic identity (Fenton 2010). Some destination countries included in diaspora statistics typically categorize people based on both national and cultural origin regardless of citizenship status and time of migration.

In addition, there are migrants who are not registered in any census because they are undocumented or “irregular.” It is in the interests of both the sending and receiving states to identify these migrants to better manage and control human mobility of both regular and irregular migrants. Undocumented migrants are also an important issue for scholars who seek to understand the reality of Chinese mobility. However, estimations of undocumented migrants are often highly speculative; thus, I will not address this issue in this chapter.

Finally, the definition of the continent of Europe is itself a contentious issue. A major reason is that not all countries generally included in the geographic definition of Europe are part of the same political groupings, such as the European Union (EU). Indeed, the main statistical sources differ in their definition of which countries constitute Europe. Sometimes European states are limited to EU member states and the other countries belonging to the European Economic Area (Iceland, Liechtenstein, and Norway). For the purposes of this chapter, Europe is considered to include all these countries as well as non-EU countries conventionally understood as European, stretching from Iceland in the west to the Ural Mountains in the Russian Federation in the east. However, official data on Chinese populations living in all these countries are not always available.

Demographic Statistics

The main official statistical sources that may be used to identify the Chinese

migrant stocks—i.e., the total number of Chinese migrants living in a specific place at a specific time—around the world, including European countries, are:

1. The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), also used by the International Organization for Migration (IOM). They measure the international migrant stock at mid-year. UNDESA distinguishes between the People's Republic of China (PRC), Hong Kong SAR, and Macao SAR, but not Taiwan. UNDESA manages the United Nations Global Migration Database from various statistical sources (<https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/global-migration-database>) (McAuliffe and Triandafyllidou 2022). The Institute for Statistics (UIS) of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is in charge of the database Global Flow of Tertiary-Level Students (<https://uis.unesco.org/en/UIS-student-flow>) (UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) 2014).
2. EUROSTAT is the statistical office of the European Commission of the EU. Data come from national statistical institutes (NSIS) of the EU member states and from almost all non-EU member states in Europe, including EFTA countries, candidate countries, and potential candidate countries. EUROSTAT data distinguish between the PRC, Hong Kong SAR, Macao SAR, and Taiwan. EUROSTAT also compiles databases on international migration, citizenship, asylum, international students, and managed migration (<https://ec.europa.eu/EUROSTAT/web/main/data/database>).
3. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) organizes the International Migration Database (<https://data-explorer.oecd.org>). Data are drawn from several different sources and includes inflows and outflows of foreign population by nationality, stock of foreign-born population by country of birth and by nationality, acquisition of nationality by country of former nationality, and international students (OECD 2022, 226). The PRC, Hong Kong, Macao, and Chinese Taipei (Taiwan) are distinguished.
4. The Overseas Chinese Affairs Office (OCAO) of the PRC State Council (*Guowuyuan qiaowu bangongshi*) does not officially publish detailed emigration or return migration data by country, but does offer global figures (see e.g., Guowuyuan qiaoban 2020). Diaspora data are released according to the official definitions of “overseas Chinese” (*huaqiao*) excluding Chinese international students and those “working abroad on official business (including expatriate labourers).” However, data is seldomly disaggregated by category of Chinese nationals, Chinese having renounced their PRC nationality, and Chinese descendants (*houyi* and *huayi*) (Guowuyuan qiaoban 2012).
5. The Overseas Community Affairs Council (OCAC) (*Qiaowu weiyuanhui*) of the Republic of China (ROC), Taiwan, offers diaspora statistics including

first-generation Chinese emigrants and their descendants born in host countries. The Taiwanese diaspora, as a separate category, is sometimes distinguished, but the OCAC usually gives a global figure of all Chinese migrants—from the PRC and the ROC (Taiwan)—and their descendants without distinction. Recent publications note only global migration data (Qiaowu weiyuanhi 2022). Updated migration data is made available on the OCAC’s website (<https://www.OCAC.gov.tw/OCAC/Pages/VDetail.aspx?nodeid=58andpid=492837>)

- 6. Each European country has its own NSI offering data without any standard European definition for registering international migrants or inter- national students living in these countries.

In brief, determining the size of the Chinese population living in Europe requires overcoming several challenges presented by the diversity of statistical sources (Brown 2013; Knerr 2015). There are three types of statistics: diaspora statistics, international migrant statistics, and nationality statistics (Table 1.1).

TABLE 1.1 Demographic categories by each source of data on Chinese migrants: diaspora, international migrants, and citizenship

	Diaspora OCAC and OCAO	International migrants UNDESA	Citizenship EUROSTAT
International students	No	Yes	Yes
International adoptees	Yes	Yes	No
Foreign born	Yes	Yes	Yes
Local born	Yes	No	Yes

SOURCE: AUTHOR BASED ON EUROSTAT 2022A, OCAC, OCAO, AND UNDESA.

Each type defines the category “Chinese” differently. Diaspora statistics from the PRC and Taiwan define Chinese ethnicity in a broad sense, regardless of nationality. Statistics on international migrants are based on people who move from one country to another and retain their original nationality. Citizenship data are based on nationality but take different approaches to two groups: 1) migrants who previously held Chinese citizenship but have become naturalized and 2) the children of Chinese migrants born in the destination country and holding Chinese citizenship.

Moreover, these various sources of statistical data do not always agree on which countries are included under the category of Europe. They also define China in different ways: some sources differentiate the PRC, Hong Kong SAR, Macao SAR, and Taiwan, while others combine some or all places into a single category.

Trying to Determine the Number of Chinese Migrants in the World

The demographic data on Chinese migrants in the academic literature have often been vague and incomplete. As Li and Li (2013, 25) state, “Despite substantial research on Chinese overseas, there have been few attempts to analyse the Chinese overseas population.” Many studies on Chinese migration do not include statistics, while others include only partial references to population numbers without discussing the source of the data in detail. Some exceptions include authors who have analysed and given data on the population of the Chinese diaspora from a longer historical perspective, such as a brief overview by Zhou and Benton (2017). Poston and Yu (1990), Poston, Mao, and Yu (1994), and Poston and Wong (2016) give a general overview of Chinese diaspora statistics for 1990, 2001, and 2011 by continent and country. Despite the general paucity of sources, I will provide a brief update on the more recent literature on the issue.

Goodkind (2019) analyses the differences between “three key data sources” related to the Chinese diaspora.

All in all then, the major sources of international data on the Chinese diaspora—the UN, the Overseas Community Affairs Council, and the OECD—each provide different estimates (and underlying definitions) of that population, the relative value of which will vary depending on the specific interests and questions asked by the observer. (Goodkind 2019, 6)

Diaspora statistics are often inflated for political and historical reasons, among others. For the Chinese state, the overseas Chinese population has been a critical political issue at several historical moments since the foundation of the Republic of China (1912) and before. At present, both Taiwan and the PRC are making renewed efforts to promote the overseas population for political and economic reasons (Han 2019; Schäfer 2022; Tan 2022; Thunø 2018, 2022). The figure of 60 million often mentioned by PRC authorities (Zhang 2021; Zhuang 2020) is a vague and undetermined estimation, but this figure is often cited in the PRC to indicate that the Chinese diaspora is a sizeable population with potentially powerful political implications.

At present, there is no comprehensive analysis of the demographic data on Chinese migrants that includes all the countries of Europe. Some edited books and special issues of journals on Chinese international migration or the Chinese diaspora in Europe include some references to population data, and some of the country chapters reference national data (see e.g., Baldassar et al. 2017; Benton and Pieke 1998; Chang and Rucker-Chang 2012; Knerr and Fan 2015; Li and Li 2011; Liu and Wang 2020; Siu and Tölölyan 2020; Tan 2013; Thunø and Li 2020; Zhou 2017).

Studies with significant discussions of statistics on Chinese in Europe include Latham and Wu (2013), Wu and Latham (2014), Knerr (2015), Plewa and Stermšek (2017), Sluka, Korobkov, and Ivanov (2018), Li Minghuan (2019), and Plewa (2020). There are also works on Chinese in specific countries that offer a detailed demographic statistical analysis, for example: Horálek, Cheng, and Hu (2017) on the Czech Republic, Li Minghuan (2017) on Spain, and Dei Ottati and Cologna (2015) on Italy. Some authors compare multiple countries, such as Liu (2020) who compares the Chinese populations in Portugal and Hungary. Despite the limited and inconsistent sources of demographic data, several researchers have used the existing data to identify recent trends in the Chinese population in the world and in Europe. For example, Goodkind (2019) briefly analysed the changing social characteristics of the Chinese diaspora — including sex ratio, age structure, employment, financial status, student migration status, and family composition. Plewa (2020) studied Chinese labour migration to six European countries—France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, and the United Kingdom (UK)—based on statistics provided by the OECD and EUROSTAT databases. These databases offer data on inflows and outflows of Chinese migrants, the number of work and student visas issued, and related issues. As Shibao Guo (2022, 854) argues, it may be more useful to use the incomplete demographic data to study trends rather than trying to determine a specific total number of migrants.

Statistical Data on the Global Chinese Diaspora

The OCAO of the PRC often gives the official figure of 60 million Chinese living in the world outside China (see e.g., Zhongguo qiaowang 2018). Zhang (2021, 2) quoted a Xinhua article published in 2014 under the title “There are more than 60 million overseas Chinese, spread over 198 countries and regions in the world.” Zhuang (2020) estimated a slightly lower figure—58 million—for 2016, which included 3 million in Europe. But neither of them explains the sources of the statistical data.

Taiwan’s OCAC identified 2.4 million Chinese in Europe in 2021 out of a total of 49.3 million in the world, but its latest publication only breaks down the figures for the three largest European countries with large Chinese populations: France (750,000), the UK (477,000), and Italy (330,000) (Qiaowu weiyuanhui 2022a, 10).

Comparing the statistics published by Taiwan authorities to those produced by the PRC authorities, OCAC-Taiwan reported that the global Chinese diaspora was 13.4 million smaller than the total reported by OCAO-PRC for the year 2016 (Table 1.2). The largest discrepancy is in the numbers for the Chinese diaspora in Asia: the OCAO-PRC total is 12 million larger than the total provided by OCAC-Taiwan. For Europe and Africa, the difference is close to 1 million for each. The PRC authorities may consider it important to report a large diaspora, leading them to choose criteria that result in a higher estimate. Based only on the data from OCAC-Taiwan in table 1.2, during the first two decades of the 21st century (2001–2021) the continent with the largest diaspora increase has been

TABLE 1.2 Chinese in the world and by continents: OCAC, 2001–2021 and OCAO, 2016

	2001a	2011a	2016	2021	% Increase 2001–21	2016× OCAO
Total	35,800,000	40,307,000	44,623,000	49,290,000	38	58,000,000
Asia	27,821,000	30,041,000	32,028,000	34,300,000	23	44,000,000
Americas	6,124,000	7,498,000	8,669,000	9,610,000	57	8,350,000
Europe	973,000	1,565,000	2,153,000	2,450,000	152	3,000,000
Oceania	745,000	955,000	1,206,000	1,740,000	134	1,150,000
Africa	137,000	249,000	566,000	1,180,000	761	1,500,000

SOURCE: AUTHOR BASED ON ^aPoston 2016, 365; ^bQIAOWU WEIYUANHUI (OCAC) 2022, 10; ^cOVERSEAS CHINESE AFFAIRS OFFICE QUOTED IN ZHUANG 2020.

Africa (762% increase), followed by Europe (152%). Based on these statistics, Europe has become one of the preferred continents for Chinese migrants in the 21st century.

To understand the Chinese diaspora figures in relation to Europe, it is necessary to consider that several European countries—such as the UK, the Netherlands, and France—experienced the arrival of ethnic Chinese from their former colonies, including Hong Kong, Indonesia, Surinam, Vietnam, etc. These arrivals from former colonies are also included in the Chinese diaspora statistics produced in both the PRC and Taiwan. The complexity of this issue is often mentioned, and many researchers resort to personal estimations. For example, Ma Mung makes this estimate of the ethnic Chinese population in France:

It is difficult to estimate the population of ethnic Chinese in France. ... The main reason is that the French census does not count population on an ethnic basis. However, we can approach the number of ethnic Chinese by adding the “immigrants” as defined by the French National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies (INSEE) of the PRC and those of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. However, the figure is higher than the number of ethnic Chinese because part of the population coming from the three countries is not of Chinese descent ... in 2008 there were 239,840 immigrants from the countries mentioned. Immigrants of the PRC represent 32.7% of the total and those of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia 67.3%. ... For all these reasons, one can only make very rough estimates. For my part, I estimate the population of ethnic Chinese between 300,000 and 500,000. (Ma Mung 2015, 54)

Other kinds of diaspora statistics come from the PRC’s local administrative levels. It is important to also consider this data to get a picture of the specific origins of Chinese international migrants and their distribution around the world; however, they are usually vague estimates rather than detailed statistics. For example, Li Minghuan (2017, 295) includes a chapter on Chinese in Spain based on the results of a survey conducted by the Asociación de Chinos en España (*Xibanya huaqiao huaren xiehui* Association of Chinese in Spain). However, ethnic associations are not all-encompassing and rely on unclear criteria for their estimates.

Studies have also been conducted on the estimated populations of Wenzhounese, Fujianese, and Chinese from other provinces in the PRC, but they do not offer data about the distribution of their population in the different European countries. They also often lack statistical analysis. For example, Li Zhipeng describes the difficulty in counting the Wenzhounese diaspora in Europe in this way:

The Chinese diaspora from Wenzhou is estimated to be between 150,000 and 200,000 individuals in France. However, this estimate does not take into account the mobility of people in the Schengen area, since based on observation, there is often a movement of people between France, Italy, Spain and other countries in the Schengen region. (Li Zhipeng 2020, 134)

International Migration Versus Diaspora Statistics on Total Chinese Population in Europe

The most comprehensive and reliable sources for international migration statistics are UNDESA and EUROSTAT. Both international organizations retrieve original data from NSIS, but their data still do not necessarily match. This may reflect discrepancies in how countries collect data, as well as discrepancies within the internal data collected by some countries.

According to UNDESA data, the total world population of international migrants grew by 1.62 times between 2000 and 2020 to 280 million migrants (Table 1.3). A similar rate of increase is also reflected in the UNDESA data on the total number of Chinese migrants—including the mainland PRC, Hong Kong, and Macao, but not Taiwan. Specifically, the number of Chinese international migrants rose to more than 11 million people in 2020. However, in Europe the number of Chinese migrants more than doubled from around 600,000 in 2000 to 1.4 million people in 2020 (Table 1.4). That means that, during the 21st century, Europe has become an increasingly attractive destination for Chinese migration relative to other continents, as the diaspora statistics (Table 1.2) also indicate.

TABLE 1.3 Chinese international migrants in the world, 2000, 2010, and 2020

	2000	2010	2020
World total international migrants	173,230,585	220,983,187	280,598,105
China	5,884,919	8,714,648	10,461,170
China, Hong Kong SAR	685,913	862,070	1,007,788
China, Macao SAR	94,517	123,599	145,192
Taiwan	—	—	—
Total	6,665,349	9,700,317	11,614,150

SOURCE: AUTHOR BASED ON UNITED NATIONS, DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS (POPULATION DIVISION-UNDESA 2019, 2020).

TABLE 1.4 Chinese international migrants in Europe, 2000, 2010, and 2020

	2000	2010	2020
China	488,547	950,635	1,239,701
China, Hong Kong SAR	80,515	94,620	127,078
China, Macao SAR	3,022	1,789	2,301
Taiwan	—	—	—
Total	572,084	1,047,044	1,369,080

SOURCE: AUTHOR BASED ON UNITED NATIONS, DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS (POPULATION DIVISION-UNDESA 2019, 2020).

TABLE 1.5 Comparison of Chinese in the world and in Europe by OCAC-Taiwan and UNDESA, 2020

	OCAC	UNDESA
Chinese in the world	49,330,000	11,614,150
Chinese in Europe	2,410,000	1,369,080

SOURCE: AUTHOR BASED ON UNITED NATIONS, Department of Economic and social Affairs (Population Division-UNDESA 2020A; QIAOWU WEIYUANHUI (OCAC) 2022A).

Comparing diaspora statistics provided by the OCAC-Taiwan and international migration statistics provided by UNDESA for the year 2020 (Table 1.5) shows a great difference in the total world population of the Chinese diaspora, with OCAC-Taiwan reporting 49,330,000 and UNDESA reporting just 11,614,150. This discrepancy of over 37 million is explained in part by different numbers of ethnic Chinese who no longer hold Chinese citizenship around the world. There is a significant but less pronounced difference in terms of data for Chinese migrants living in Europe, with OCAC-Taiwan reporting 2,410,000 and UNDESA reporting 1,369,080. While this still represents a discrepancy of about 1 million, the data is relatively more consistent because large-scale migration to Europe only began in the later 20th century. Thus, more of the diaspora is captured by citizenship data rather than the more contested ethnic definitions used for long-standing ethnic Chinese communities in other regions of the world.

In brief, the total number of Chinese migrants in the world and in Europe is reported differently depending on the type of statistics employed. Different sources agree, however, that in recent times Europe is becoming a more popular destination, with a higher rate of recent growth compared to the traditional destinations of Asia and the Americas.

Statistical Data on the Stock of Valid Permits for Chinese Nationals in Europe by Country

The two main statistical sources on the distribution of Chinese in Europe with valid residence permits are produced by UNDESA and EUROSTAT. Table 1.6 shows data retrieved from UNDESA in 2000, 2010, and 2020 and from EUROSTAT

TABLE 1.6 Chinese international migrants in Europe, 2010, and 2020 (35 states), and Chinese citizens with valid permits in 2020

	2000 UNDESA	2010 UNDESA	2020 UNDESA	Increase 2000–2020 (%) UNDESA	2020 valid permits China, HK, Taiwan EUROSTAT	2020 valid permits Taiwan EUROSTAT
World Total	5,884,919	8,714,648	11,614,150	97.35		
Europe Total	488,547	950,635	1,369,080	180	1,242,243	32,297
UK	144,073	155,196	332,351	131	253,693 (2018)	13,714 (2018)
Italy	74,865	194,677	233,338	211	279,726	696
Spain	21,380	154,918	179,104	738	231,855	981
Germany	49,190	82,444	142,891	190	86,756	2,991
France	44,375	103,338	126,496	185	116,740	5,468
the Netherlands	32,395	52,617	72,803	125	43,766	2,587
Russian Federation	60,177	55,119	56,138	–7	–	–
Sweden	8,150	21,706	34,767	327	19,868	607
Switzerland	11,538	15,226	25,088	117	17,699	1,095
Belgium	6,757	15,591	21,418	217	11,727	506
Austria	12,165	15,095	17,776	5	10,761	988
Hungary	7,543	11,058	17,648	134	44,624	393
Ireland	7,229	12,416	16,704	131	11,769	415
Denmark	3,580	10,328	14,576	307	–	–

TABLE 1.6 Chinese international migrants in Europe, 2000, 2010, 2020 (35 states) (cont.)

	2000 UNDESA	2010 UNDESA	2020 UNDESA	Increase 2000–2020 (%) UNDESA	2020 valid permits China, HK, Taiwan EUROSTAT	2020 valid permits Taiwan EUROSTAT
Portugal	2,291	9,227	14,434	530	26,138	42
Norway	3,617	9,823	13,579	275	5,414	–
Finland	1,783	6,591	11,614	551	6,689	197
Ukraine	7,502	6,539	6,668	–11	–	–
Czechia	605	4,558	6,629	996	8,013	619
Romania	2,100	2,695	6,554	112	7,626	18
Luxembourg	927	691	4,295	363	3,749	57
Greece	560	3,596	3,462	518	25,680	77
Serbia	1,870	1,804	1,796	–4	–	–
Bulgaria	524	780	1,550	196	1,521	14
Poland	674	1,221	1,550	130	6,648	635
Slovakia	681	856	1,256	84	2,662	59
Slovenia	201	732	1,113	454	1,499	24
Malta	220	292	1,076	389	2,819	13
Iceland	177	483	747	322	–	–
Estonia	124	201	495	299	391	17
Croatia		433	417		1,942	12
Latvia	326	230	369	13	599	18
Lithuania	137	60	191	39	560	7
Liechtenstein	52	66	113	117	109	4
Faroe Islands	1	18	35	3	–	–
Cyprus	–	–	–		11,421	43

SOURCE: AUTHOR BASED ON UNITED NATIONS, DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS (UNDESA POPULATION DIVISION 2019, 2020A; EUROSTAT 2022A).

in 2020. UNDESA reports 1.4 million Chinese residents in Europe in 2020, while EUROSTAT reports only 1.273 million, or 127,000 less Chinese in Europe in the same year. This discrepancy is largely due to different countries being included as part of Europe. UNDESA accounts for Chinese migrants with permits in 35 European countries while EUROSTAT includes this data from only 28 countries. The countries not included by EUROSTAT include Denmark because of incompatible data collection methods as well as the Russian Federation, Ukraine, Serbia, Greenland, Iceland, and the

Faroe Islands. For unknown reasons, neither source includes data for Belarus, Moldova, Albania, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Northern Macedonia, Andorra, San Marino, and Monaco.

EUROSTAT statistics encompass migrants with valid permits who hold passports issued by authorities in the PRC, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. Table 1.6 includes a column accounting for Taiwanese nationals holding residence permits in 2020, making up a total of 32,297 persons. In 2018, nearly half of them dwelled in the UK (specifically 13,714 or 43% of the total population of Taiwanese in Europe).

According to the UNDESA data in table 1.6, 11.6 million nationals from the PRC, Hong Kong SAR, and Macao SAR (excluding Taiwan) held residence permits as migrants in another country in 2020. However, this figure does not include children of Chinese migrants who were born outside China but hold Chinese citizenship. UNDESA states (2020, 4) that “In estimating the international migrant stock, international migrants have been equated with the foreign-born population whenever this information is available, which is the case in most countries or areas.” Hence, migration data remains in both cases incomplete and should only be considered as indicators of trends and developments.

To get a more complete picture, we should consider other factors. For example, from 2002 to 2020 a total of 200,000 persons holding passports from the PRC, Hong Kong, and Taiwan acquired the nationality of one European country according to OECD and EUROSTAT statistics (EUROSTAT 2022d; OECD 2023). The data on naturalizations give trends on the settlement and distribution of the Chinese in Europe, as well as signalling that in some countries it is easier or more desirable for Chinese migrants to apply for citizenship.

Nevertheless, the data from UNDESA and EUROSTAT are broadly comparable when considering the distribution of Chinese migrants holding valid permits in European countries. In 2000, there were five European countries with more than 100 thousand Chinese migrants: the UK, Italy, Spain, Germany, and France. Incongruencies in the two data sources still emerge when it comes to, e.g., the number of Chinese migrants in Spain, Hungary, and Portugal in 2020 (Table 1.6). The reason is that UNDESA only categorizes Chinese nationals born in China as international migrants, while EUROSTAT includes Chinese citizens regardless of birthplace. Discrepancies could also be explained by the residency-by-investment programmes—the so-called “Golden Visa Programmes”—which do not require recipients to live in Europe to receive a residence permit. Such programmes have existed in Cyprus, Greece, Ireland, Portugal, Malta, and Spain, among others (European Commission 2019).

In short, the differences in the UNDESA and EUROSTAT statistics for the year 2020 could be related the following factors:

- Each European state has its own naturalization laws, and these laws vary in how quickly they facilitate naturalization.
- The proportion of Chinese migrants holding residence permits to those who have been naturalized varies based on whether Chinese migration to the country is more recent or more longstanding. France, Germany, the Netherlands, and Belgium have more Chinese migrants who have become citizens rather than holding residence permits. By contrast Italy, Spain, Portugal, and Hungary have a higher proportion of Chinese migrants who hold residence permits.
- The preference to naturalize in some countries rather than others. German or French citizenship may generally be more attractive than Italian or Spanish citizenship, for example.

Table 1.7 presents the distribution of Chinese international migrants in European countries based on UNDESA statistics. It is organized by size of population

TABLE 1.7 European states grouped by size, 2020 and increase of Chinese international migrants, 2000–2020

Size of Chinese migrant population (in thousands)	Increase of Chinese migrant population 2000–2020			
	100% or less	100%–200%	201%–300%	301% or more
Above 101		UK, France, Germany, the Netherlands	Italy	Spain
51–100	Russian Federation			
21–50		Switzerland	Belgium	Sweden
11–20	Austria	Hungary, Ireland	Norway	Denmark, Portugal, Finland
3.1–10	Ukraine	Romania		Czechia, Greece, Luxembourg
1–3	Serbia, Slovakia	Bulgaria, Poland		Slovenia, Malta
Less 1	Latvia, Lithuania	Liechtenstein	Estonia	Iceland, Faroe Islands, Cyprus

SOURCE: AUTHOR BASED ON UNITED NATIONS, DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS (UNDESA POPULATION DIVISION 2019, 2020A).

and percentage of increase from 2000 to 2020. Significant increases in Chinese migration during this period were observed in two regions: Southern Europe (Spain, Portugal, Greece, Malta, Cyprus, and Slovenia) and Nordic countries (Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, and the Faroe Islands), as well as the Czech Republic in Central Europe. By contrast, three countries saw a decrease in the number of Chinese international migrants: the Russian Federation, Ukraine, and Serbia, while Central-Eastern Europe and the Baltics—including Austria, Slovakia, Latvia, and Lithuania—experienced a minor increase.

These are the characteristics of the distribution and evolution of the settlement of Chinese international migrants in European countries at the beginning of the 21st century according to the data published by UNDESA. They show several facts and trends but are incomplete estimates that require further analysis.

Types of Residence Permits Held by Chinese Nationals in Europe, 2015–2021

This section provides an analysis of changes in total numbers of different types of valid residence permits held by Chinese nationals from the PRC, Hong Kong, and Taiwan living in Europe based on EUROSTAT data. Residence permits are issued for different reasons, including the major categories of family reunification, employment, education, and “other.” There are more variables in the statistics, but in line with my focus on broad trends, I consider only the total number of valid permits accumulated each year (annual stock) and the number of first permits issued (annual flow). These totals are categorized according to type of permit and divided by the sex of the migrants to illustrate the development and trends of the data.

The data show an increase of the annual stock of valid permits held by Chinese nationals (PRC, Hong Kong, and Taiwan) in European countries (excluding the UK), from around 900,000 in 2015 to 1 million in 2021 (Table 1.8). However, some countries saw the stock of overall permits decrease, such as Italy with 44,000 fewer permits in 2021 compared to 2015. European countries (as defined by EUROSTAT) had a stock of 33,000 fewer residence permits held by Chinese nationals in 2021 compared to 2019—the COVID-19 pandemic period. In many European countries, the stock of valid residence permits dropped at the end of 2020 compared to 2019, but some had already recovered by 2021 (Sweden, Cyprus, Luxembourg, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Liechtenstein). Countries that saw a continuous increase in the annual stock of valid permits for Chinese citizens during the period 2019–2021 included

TABLE 1.8 All valid permits for people with Chinese citizenship, including Hong Kong and Taiwan, 2015–2021 (31 December of each year)

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Italy	336,057	320,092	310,042	318,806	301,954	280,442	291,951
UK	215,160	226,531	247,110	267,407	–	–	–
Spain	203,999	212,543	221,120	228,027	234,422	232,836	237,459
France	99,024	99,905	106,961	112,458	118,952	119,549	118,067
Germany	94,349	98,961	109,156	116,385	120,195	92,224	103,977
Hungary	14,268	15,434	37,969	35,158	42,985	45,017	47,594
the Netherlands	33,578	35,877	39,340	42,303	45,601	46,353	49,667
Greece	4,675	5,791	7,373	11,708	22,805	25,757	27,468
Portugal	21,375	22,553	23,242	25,398	27,904	26,180	23,022
Sweden	16,683	16,806	18,362	20,079	21,243	20,475	21,097
Switzerland	15,352	16,245	16,868	17,641	18,717	18,764	19,903
Belgium	10,927	11,706	11,636	12,035	12,701	12,233	13,274
Ireland	10,532	10,931	12,400	13,424	14,921	12,184	12,637
Cyprus	547	502	471	9,496	11,213	11,464	11,395
Austria	9,996	10,712	10,910	11,310	12,274	11,749	11,666
Czechia	6,372	495	7,398	8,199	8,191	8,632	8,400
Finland	6,744	7,029	7,602	8,001	11,059	6,886	–
Poland	7,423	9,567	11,396	11,809	10,041	7,283	7,531
Romania	7,562	7,721	6,673	6,852	8,177	7,644	6,741
Norway	3,149	3,029	2,848	5,516	5,753	5,414	5,035
Luxembourg	2,762	3,057	3,303	3,591	3,824	3,806	3,827
Malta	1,077	1,107	1,284	1,595	2,524	2,832	3,327
Slovakia	2,092	2,308	2,425	2,533	2,700	2,721	2,716
Bulgaria	1,100	852	1,307	1,345	1,498	1,534	1,591
Slovenia	1,176	1,205	1,277	1,380	1,564	1,523	1,516
Croatia	942	920	870	1,025	2,095	1,954	1,094
Latvia	1,190	1,146	1,079	965	906	617	617
Lithuania	377	430	457	483	515	567	453
Estonia	279	308	329	357	378	408	435
Iceland	215	205	240	268	285	–	–
Liechtenstein	82	90	90	97	116	109	115
Denmark	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Total without UK	913,904	917,527	962,028	1,026,864	1,065,513	1,007,157	1,032,575

SOURCE: AUTHOR BASED ON EUROSTAT 2022A.

Greece, Hungary, the Netherlands, Spain, and Switzerland, among others. Other countries experienced large decreases during the same period, including Germany, Italy, Portugal, Poland, Ireland, Romania, and Croatia.

These recent trends show some divergence in the popularity of European destination countries, as some experienced a rise in the number of Chinese residence permit holders while others experienced a significant decline. It is useful to consider why this divergence occurred. Did the countries with falling annual stocks of residence permits become less attractive to Chinese migrants or did those countries’ visa policies make it more difficult for them to enter? It is also important to consider the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. There were significant pandemic border restrictions both in the potential destination countries in Europe and in the origin jurisdictions of migrants. It is also important to consider the influence of the PRC government-backed narrative that many regions outside of mainland China were dangerous due to poor pandemic responses. On the other hand, rising racism and xenophobia against Chinese in Europe during the pandemic could have also had some impact in specific countries. Rising tensions between China and Taiwan during this period may have also been a factor, especially in countries such as Lithuania, which faced significant Chinese backlash over its deepening ties with Taiwan starting in 2020 (Haas 2023).

In 2021, the most prevalent type of valid residence permit in Europe for Chinese migrants was related to “family reasons” (35% of the total in 2021), but some countries had more permits in the ill-defined category “other” (Table 1.9). In Spain, this category accounted for more than half of the total number of permits held by Chinese nationals in 2021. This category

TABLE 1.9 All valid permits by reason in European countries from China, including Hong Kong, 2021

	Total	Family	Educational	Employment	Others	Change 2019–21
Italy	291,178	124,584	8,462	156,771	954	−9,877
Spain	236,355	84,224	5,310	6,485	140,293	3,232
France	114,965	39,664	18,856	13,308	34,272	−933
Germany	97,920	34,724	25,412	21,229	14,878	−15,749
Hungary	47,207	2,551	2,259	3,810	38,587	4,617
the Netherlands	46,803	10,751	5,775	13,908	15,641	3,904
Greece	27,373	16,374	52	1,607	9,340	4,634
Portugal	22,976	3,462	454	3,510	15,541	−4,982

TABLE 1.9 All valid permits by reason in European countries (*cont.*)

	Total	Family	Educational	Employment	Others	Change 2019–21
Sweden	20,439	10,377	4,189	5,057	654	–59
Switzerland	18,808	3,484	5,506	1,446	5,740	1,262
Belgium	12,686	6,329	2,166	1,852	1,198	492
Ireland	12,244	1,195	4,065	3,044	3,915	–1,805
Cyprus	11,375	227	36	137	10,975	182
Austria	10,736	1,977	814	484	7,461	–495
Czechia	7,822	2,774	713	1,522	2,748	92
Poland	7,162	1,303	1,122	2,812	1,897	–1,990
Romania	6,726	1,869	60	1,451	3,343	–1,430
Finland (2020)	6,689	2,128	677	2,169	1,705	–
Norway	5,035	980	420	737	2,821	–690
Luxembourg	3,759	1,622	86	1,018	1,026	–17
Malta	3,191	240	89	378	2,484	693
Slovakia	2,655	1,194	41	1,255	161	12
Bulgaria	1,573	966	189	228	190	80
Slovenia	1,489	59	14	324	1,092	–48
Croatia	1,087	123	13	449	502	–1,005
Latvia	592	236	45	72	234	–297
Lithuania	444	74	73	154	142	–63
Estonia	410	79	80	71	180	41
Iceland (2019)	284	83	34	81	85	–
Liechtenstein	112	30	5	11	50	–1
Denmark	–	–	–	–	–	–
Total (2021)	1,020,094	353,733	87,017	244,380	318,109	
UK (2018)	253,693	24,765	207,377	19,953	1,512	

Note: The total of 2021 includes the data from Finland in 2020 and Iceland in 2019.

SOURCE: AUTHOR BASED ON EUROSTAT 2022A.

includes those with long duration permits (more than five years), independent of the reason. In fact, many of these “others” are workers. At the end of 2021, there were 107,143 Chinese registered in the Social Security system in Spain, which means that they were contracted or self-employed workers (Secretaría de Estado de la Seguridad Social y Pensiones 2022). Other countries with

relatively high numbers of permits in the category of “other” in 2021 included Hungary, Portugal, Cyprus, Switzerland, Ireland, Austria, Romania, Poland, Norway, Malta, Slovenia, Croatia, Lithuania, and Estonia. In some countries the category “other” included permits related to the “Golden Visa Programmes” (Portugal, Cyprus, Malta, and Spain). Ireland stands out as an academic destination judging from the stock of permits granted to Chinese for education— like the UK which is also a major destination for Chinese students (Table 1.9). In 2021, the stock of employment-based residence permits in Italy for Chinese migrants reached 156,771, which was higher than the number of permits held for family reasons (124,584). Employment was also the top type of permit held by Chinese migrants in 2021 in Poland, Slovakia, and Lithuania, as well as in Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden, Ireland, and Finland. Nevertheless, these figures do not describe the whole situation because the category “other” in some countries—like Spain—also includes workers (Table 1.9).

In 2021, there were around 30,000 fewer valid residence permits for international Chinese students in European states than in 2019, with 115,000 permits (excluding the UK) (Table 1.10). In brief, the COVID-19 pandemic especially affected the number of international students arriving in Europe. The UK has consistently had the largest population of Chinese international

TABLE 1.10 All valid permits by educational reason in European countries for Chinese, including Hong Kong, 2015–2021

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
UK	163,944	170,384	186,639	207,377	—	—	—
Germany	33,389	33,450	36,310	38,690	38,528	15,771	25,412
France	27,263	24,858	24,943	24,858	25,521	20,565	18,856
Italy	13,789	12,774	10,432	10,306	11,169	6,493	8,462
the Netherlands	5,361	5,371	5,395	5,563	5,545	4,722	5,775
Switzerland	4,851	5,043	5,033	4,895	5,137	4,941	5,506
Spain	6,409	8,117	8,560	8,390	8,020	4,420	5,310
Sweden	3,600	3,712	4,023	4,105	4,350	3,942	4,189
Ireland	5,450	5,305	5,325	5,579	5,900	3,989	4,065
Hungary	1,193	1,730	2,039	2,061	2,904	2,456	2,259
Belgium	1,302	1,433	1,324	1,419	1,792	1,471	2,166
Poland	1,036	1,078	1,174	1,328	642	268	1,122
Austria	1,153	1,208	1,171	1,126	1,300	912	814
Czechia	259	491	645	785	604	719	713

TABLE 1.10 All valid permits by educational reason in European countries (cont.)

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Finland	1,320	1,281	1,156	1,023	1,150	677	–
Portugal	284	325	405	558	660	564	454
Norway	757	685	654	658	715	370	420
Bulgaria	46	8	98	111	101	120	189
Malta	114	70	88	105	247	130	89
Luxembourg	52	59	72	80	81	75	86
Estonia	119	122	99	91	86	83	80
Lithuania	23	50	73	94	119	145	73
Romania	104	104	86	88	94	53	60
Greece	21	46	61	30	30	42	52
Latvia	12	20	26	38	55	60	45
Slovakia	48	57	56	53	56	50	41
Cyprus	76	52	80	73	61	23	36
Slovenia	14	11	16	15	28	17	14
Croatia	10	29	31	55	37	13	13
Iceland	36	33	39	36	34	–	–
Liechtenstein	2	4	3	4	3	2	5
Denmark	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Total	272,037	277,910	296,056	319,594			
Total without UK	108,093	107,526	109,417	112,217	114,969	73,093	86,306

SOURCE: AUTHOR BASED ON EUROSTAT 2022A.

students in Europe. The 2018 EUROSTAT data showed there were 207,377 Chinese students with educational permits in the UK. This number greatly exceeded the total number of education permits issued to Chinese students in the entire rest of Europe that year—112,217. Many of these permits were concentrated in Germany and France. Although COVID-19 caused a drop in permits for international Chinese students in Europe, the numbers quickly rebounded in several countries after they eased pandemic restrictions in 2021. These countries included Belgium, the Netherlands, Poland, Switzerland, Bulgaria, Czechia, Greece, and Luxembourg (Table 1.10).

In 2021, the total number of valid residence permits held by ROC (Taiwan) nationals in Europe was 19,453 (Table 1.11). This figure did not include

TABLE 1.11 All valid permits by reason in European countries for Taiwanese, 2021

	Total	Family	Education	Employment	Other
Germany	6,057	2,593	1,345	1,392	722
France	3,102	1,209	1,029	572	290
the Netherlands	2,864	786	609	1,052	413
Spain	1,104	334	453	47	270
Switzerland	1,095	344	407	120	221
Austria	930	172	138	42	578
Italy	773	375	130	229	39
Sweden	658	287	227	136	8
Belgium	588	273	160	138	17
Czechia	578	186	247	91	54
Ireland	393	115	89	93	96
Hungary	387	49	171	68	99
Poland	369	38	210	67	54
Malta	136	6	0	124	6
Greece	95	42	3	21	29
Luxembourg	68	31	0	31	6
Slovakia	61	25	2	33	1
Portugal	46	22	3	12	6
Slovenia	27	6	0	3	18
Estonia	25	7	7	5	6
Latvia	25	6	13	6	0
Cyprus	20	1	0	0	19
Bulgaria	18	6	1	11	0
Romania	15	5	8	2	0
Lithuania	9	3	3	1	2
Croatia	7	3	1	2	1
Liechtenstein	3	1	0	0	2
Norway	0	0	0	0	0
Denmark	—	—	—	—	—
Finland	—	—	—	—	—
Iceland	—	—	—	—	—
UK					
Total	19,453	6,925	5,256	4,298	2,957

SOURCE: AUTHOR BASED ON EUROSTAT 2022A.

the UK, which was not included in the data after it withdrew from the EU in 2020. In 2018, however, the UK had accounted for 40% of all valid residence permits of Taiwan nationals in Europe, with a total of 13,714 (Table 1.6). As in the case of PRC and Hong Kong migrants, most valid residence permits for Taiwanese in 2021 were for family reunification (36% of the total), followed by education (27%) and employment (22%) (Table 1.11). The top five countries (excluding the UK) in 2021 for permits for family reasons included Germany, France, the Netherlands, Spain, and Switzerland. In Germany, the Netherlands, and Italy, Taiwanese held more permits for employment in 2021 compared to permits for studying, while in the rest of the European countries the situation was the opposite.

Valid Permits for Educational Reasons

The figures for educational permits for Chinese migrants in all European countries (excluding the UK) for 2020 and 2021 reflect the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, as the number of permits dropped from 115,000 in 2019 to 73,000 in 2020 (Table 1.10). The following year, the stock of permits for education slightly increased to 86,000 (Table 1.10). While all European countries saw a decrease in these permits during the pandemic, some countries still maintained an overall growth trend in the number of Chinese international students. For example, thirteen small and medium sized countries—including the Netherlands, Sweden, and Czechia—actually had more permits in 2021 compared to their total a few years before the pandemic in 2015 (Table 1.10).

UNESCO and OECD statistics on international students in Europe (Table 1.12) do not directly match the statistics on valid permits for educational reasons compiled by EUROSTAT (Table 1.10). The national sources of data and defining criteria applied by UNESCO are different from those employed by EUROSTAT, which is reflected in the different total of international students from China, Hong Kong, and Macao registered as residing in Europe. Consequently, the latest UNESCO figures (Table 1.12) were higher than those from EUROSTAT (Table 1.10). The UNESCO data also show a small increase of PRC students residing in European countries in 2020 with a total of 270,000 persons (of which 145,000 were registered in the UK), up from 218,000 in 2018 (Table 1.12).

Employment Permits

The growth of valid employment permits in all European countries (except for the UK) during the period from 2015 to 2021 was generally quite steady with a total annual stock of 240,000 permits (Table 1.13). While most countries saw increases in the number of these permits from 2015 to 2021, a few

TABLE 1.12 China, Hong Kong, and Macao international students in Europe, 2020

	China 2018	China 2020	Hong Kong 2020	Macao 2020	Total 2020
Europe total	218,496	270,494	17,011	1,052	288,557
United Kingdom	–	143,867	16,332	765	160,964
Germany	30,023	39,281	329	11	39,621
France	23,494	24,780	–	–	24,780
Russian Federation	14,971	18,531	–	–	18,531
Italy	15,167	12,413	34	17	12,464
the Netherlands	5,089	–	–	–	–
Belarus	1,564	3,998	–	–	3,998
Ukraine	1,539	3,598	–	–	3,598
Ireland	2,489	3,362	92	–	3,454
Spain	2,436	3,289	–	–	3,289
Hungary	2,075	2,776	8	–	2,784
Sweden	2,597	2,670	6	–	2,676
Switzerland	1,902	2,401	91	–	2,492
Finland	1,556	1,717	–	–	1,717
Denmark	1,182	1,381	–	–	1,381
Poland	983	1,292	11	–	1,303
Belgium	340	914	29	–	943
Norway	771	881	32	–	913
Czechia	414	801	12	–	813
Portugal	599	777	8	259	1,044
Austria	651	630	–	–	630
Lithuania	70	177	5	–	182
Bulgaria	79	159	–	–	159
Estonia	113	116	11	–	127
Cyprus	105	101	–	–	101
Luxembourg	89	88	–	–	88
Romania	75	85	11	–	96
Latvia	66	85	–	–	85
Greece	61	68	–	–	68
Malta	31	65	–	–	65
Slovakia	32	47	–	–	47
Slovenia	25	35	–	–	35
Iceland	32	34	–	–	34
Serbia	21	23	–	–	23
Republic of Moldova	15	22	–	–	22

TABLE 1.12 China, Hong Kong, and Macao international students in Europe, 2020 (cont.)

	China 2018	China 2020	Hong Kong 2020	Macao 2020	Total 2020
Croatia	20	20	—	—	20
Liechtenstein	4	6	—	—	6
Monaco	—	2	—	—	2
North Macedonia	2	1	—	—	1
Bosnia & Herzegovina	1	1	1	—	1

SOURCE: AUTHOR BASED ON UNESCO INSTITUTE FOR STATISTICS (UIS) 2023.

TABLE 1.13 All valid permits for employment reasons in European countries for Chinese, including Hong Kong, 2015–2021

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Italy	177,660	169,307	163,332	169,824	156,417	145,615	156,771
Germany	14,880	16,751	19,677	21,584	23,292	17,952	21,229
UK	18,547	18,553	18,864	19,953	—	—	—
the Netherlands	8,629	9,325	10,666	12,385	13,614	13,881	13,908
France	7,802	7,949	9,342	11,062	13,536	14,830	13,308
Spain	10,144	8,822	7,998	7,468	7,396	6,771	6,485
Sweden	3,781	3,667	4,109	4,825	5,202	4,980	5,057
Hungary	5	8	15	2,710	3,891	3,851	3,810
Portugal	3,182	3,453	3,517	4,132	5,055	4,625	3,510
Ireland	1,236	1,434	1,858	2,162	2,841	2,848	3,044
Finland	1,513	1,580	1,703	1,851	2,214	2,169	—
Poland	3,547	4,917	6,265	5,793	4,832	3,018	2,812
Belgium	1,453	1,558	1,509	1,571	1,681	1,726	1,852
Greece	798	690	679	733	1,016	1,325	1,607
Czechia	811	917	982	1,298	1,623	1,763	1,522
Romania	1,239	1,297	761	946	1,924	1,769	1,451
Switzerland	1,300	1,369	1,494	1,764	1,874	1,489	1,446
Slovakia	943	1,051	1,075	1,147	1,235	1,254	1,255
Luxembourg	752	839	943	1,000	1,087	1,029	1,018
Norway	954	945	843	718	752	743	737
Austria	371	388	375	514	655	487	484
Croatia	166	168	154	263	895	812	449

TABLE 1.13 All valid permits for employment reasons in European countries (*cont.*)

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Malta	394	362	301	339	414	360	378
Slovenia	206	205	208	276	403	361	324
Bulgaria	211	113	273	297	302	248	228
Lithuania	181	188	186	179	164	189	154
Cyprus	139	125	117	170	205	162	137
Estonia	67	57	72	74	65	72	71
Latvia	59	66	80	105	83	47	72
Iceland	27	41	56	73	81	—	—
Liechtenstein	3	2	2	4	9	10	11
Denmark	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Total	261,000	256,147	257,456	275,220			
Total without UK	242,453	237,594	238,592	255,267	252,758	234,386	243,130

SOURCE: AUTHOR BASED ON EUROSTAT 2022A.

countries showed a decrease in the number of employment permits, including Italy, Spain, Poland, Norway, Malta, and Lithuania. Hungary and Croatia had especially noteworthy increases, but there were also significant increases in Germany, the Netherlands, France, Sweden, Ireland, Greece, Czechia, and Slovakia (Table 1.13). The variation in employment permit trends across European countries, with some experiencing increases and others decreases, appears to reflect a redistribution of PRC and Hong Kong migrants residing in Europe for employment reasons. This may be related to factors including national regulations and changes in employment opportunities in different countries, but more research is needed to determine the exact causes.

Annual Flows of First Permits

The annual flow of Chinese migrants from the PRC, Hong Kong, and Taiwan can be measured by the number of “first permits” (residence permits issued to a person for the first time) for the period of 2018 to 2021 (Table 1.14). The flow of “first permits” dropped from 115,000 in 2018 to 75,000 in 2021. In 2018, the top countries (excluding the UK) issuing “first permits” included Germany, France, Spain, Italy, and the Netherlands. This changed in 2021 with Germany falling to the fifth position and Italy occupying the third. Significant drops in

TABLE 1.14 Total first permits for Chinese, including Hong Kong and Taiwan, 2018–2021

	China, including Hong Kong				Taiwan	
	2018	2019	2020	2021	2018	2021
UK	100,545	–	–	–	–	–
Germany	19,444	15,876	6,274	5,842	1,052	412
France	14,313	15,498	8,577	9,709	1,070	762
Spain	13,675	13,509	9,551	10,964	482	374
Italy	11,208	8,813	4,718	8,751	225	87
the Netherlands	7,467	8,682	5,148	6,637	1,018	801
Sweden	5,377	5,051	3,442	3,460	346	226
Greece	4,506	10,958	2,497	847	27	15
Hungary	4,161	5,473	5,998	2,067	155	93
Poland	4,063	3,388	1,761	2,330	497	228
Switzerland	3,456	2,794	–	3,700	352	268
Ireland	3,334	3,658	1,731	2,409	614	81
Denmark	2,939	3,053	2,084	1,963	115	152
Portugal	2,335	2,175	1,414	1,478	11	10
Finland	1,774	2,193	1,204	3,068	159	116
Belgium	1,715	2,100	1,203	1,589	261	136
Czechia	1,696	2,586	626	753	353	106
Norway	1,215	1,261	742	786	0	0
Austria	1,091	1,200	632	903	97	98
Romania	1,008	1,572	431	549	14	5
Luxembourg	638	583	309	374	12	19
Malta	621	1,218	861	649	27	128
Croatia	350	903	430	524	1	4
Bulgaria	278	299	173	110	2	4
Cyprus	248	237	128	154	2	0
Slovenia	242	410	176	116	8	3
Slovakia	225	275	140	129	20	7
Latvia	134	126	54	63	5	8
Lithuania	113	136	153	28	5	3
Iceland	90	75	–	–	0	–
Estonia	73	68	51	67	6	10
Liechtenstein	18	26	–	17	1	0
Total	208,352	–	–	–	–	–
Total without UK	107,807	114,196	60,508	70,036	6,936	4,156

SOURCE: AUTHOR BASED ON EUROSTAT 2022b.

“first permits” also occurred in Greece and Lithuania between 2018 and 2021, while they increased in Finland and Switzerland (Table 1.14).

All Types of Valid Permits by Sex Ratio

According to EUROSTAT statistics, the sex ratio for all the valid permits in Europe for Chinese (from the PRC and Hong Kong) in 2021 was almost equally divided, with 52% for women and 48% for men (Table 1.15). In certain countries, Chinese women with valid permits dominated such as in France (59%), Germany (60%), Norway (59%), Switzerland (56%), Austria (56%), Sweden (56%),

TABLE 1.15 All valid permits by sex in European countries for Chinese, including Hong Kong, 2021

	Total	Males	Females	Females%
Italy	291,178	145,397	145,781	50
Spain	236,355	120,054	116,301	49
France	114,965	47,078	67,887	59
Germany	77,721	31,264	46,416	60
Hungary	47,207	24,736	22,471	48
the Netherlands	46,803	22,064	24,735	53
Greece	27,373	13,354	14,019	51
Portugal	22,976	11,585	11,391	50
Sweden	20,439	9,015	11,424	56
Switzerland	18,808	8,254	10,554	56
Belgium	12,686	5,610	7,076	56
Ireland	12,244	5,571	6,673	55
Cyprus	11,376	5,493	5,883	52
Austria	10,736	4,698	6,037	56
Czechia	7,822	4,094	3,728	48
Poland	7,162	3,744	3,418	48
Romania	6,726	3,848	2,878	43
Norway	5,042	2,025	3,017	59
Luxembourg	3,759	1,676	2,083	55
Bulgaria	1,573	765	808	51
Slovenia	1,489	825	664	45
Croatia	1,087	684	403	37
Latvia	592	303	289	49

TABLE 1.15 All valid permits by sex in European countries (cont.)

	Total	Males	Females	Females%
Lithuania	444	269	175	39
Estonia	410	211	199	49
Liechtenstein	112	52	60	54
Denmark	--	--	--	--
Malta	--	--	--	--
Slovakia	--	--	--	--
Finland	--	--	--	--
Iceland	--	--	--	--
UK	--	--	--	--
Total	987,085	472,669	514,370	52

SOURCE: AUTHOR BASED ON EUROSTAT, 2022c.

Belgium (56%), Luxembourg (55%), and Liechtenstein (54%). Valid permits for Chinese men dominated in Lithuania (61%), Croatia (62%), and Romania (57%).

In brief, while Chinese migration to Europe has generally been increasing, the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic meant that the number of valid permits for Chinese nationals in European countries only increased slightly from 2015 to 2021, when the total stock reached 1 million. Since 2015, the main type of valid permits for Chinese migrants in Europe has been permits for “family formation and reunification.” However, the share of permits for family reasons was not significantly higher than those for employment and educational reasons. As the category of permits with reasons such as “other” also included work-related reasons in some countries, it is difficult to ascertain what these different types of permits may reflect in terms of Chinese migration to Europe. Despite these ambiguities, the stock of annual permits for education in Europe indicates two trends: a persistent increase in the number of Chinese students in Europe and a significantly uneven distribution of these students across different European countries. All in all, the changes in the annual stock of permits over time seems to be a good indicator for the changes and dynamics of Chinese migration in Europe.

Conclusion

This chapter has documented the wide range of numbers for the Chinese population in Europe provided by official sources. In 2021, the Taiwanese government reported 2.4 million and the PRC government 3 million (2016), while UNDESA reported 1.4 million and EUROSTAT reported 1.24 million. The major discrepancies in the totals reflect the difficulty of arriving at an accurate and widely agreed-upon number. This underlines the importance of considering data criteria, data sources, and data objectives when attempting to determine the number of Chinese living in Europe (and beyond).

Given the challenges in determining precise population numbers, I have established in this chapter the benefits of focusing on data that can indicate broad trends in Chinese mobility to Europe. As discussed, one way to do this is by looking at the annual stock of valid permits for Chinese nationals (including people from Hong Kong and Taiwan) compiled by EUROSTAT. EUROSTAT— together with UNDESA and OECD—provide data on almost all European countries (excluding the Russian Federation, Ukraine, and Belarus) in Europe and are not limited to the current 27 EU member states. Although there are some discrepancies between the valid permit data from institution to institution, the larger trends are consistent.

It is impossible to get exact numbers, but at least we have indicators of major population trends when it comes to Chinese migration to Europe. These data consistently show modest rises in the numbers of Chinese migrants to Europe. This contrasts starkly with the hyperbolic rhetoric promoted by racist anti-migration movements in many European countries (Angeli 2018; Dennison and Geddes 2018). The far-right political parties representing these movements—such as the Lega in Italy, National Rally in France, Alternative for Germany, Freedom Party in Austria, Vox in Spain, the United Kingdom Independence Party, the Swedish Democrats, and the Finns Party—seek to inflame xenophobia by exaggerating the number of migrants of various origins, including Chinese migrants. Migration statistics thus have an impact on political imaginaries and could be dangerous when they are misrepresented to promote biased political attacks on specific populations.

More accurately counting Chinese migration to Europe would require in-depth analysis of how migration is accounted for by national statistical institutions in each country—as well as devising methods to count those left out of the official statistics. However, the larger demographic trends in Chinese migration to Europe are apparent in the data provided by EUROSTAT. For example, Italy seems to be losing its former attraction as a migration destination following the pandemic. France has also seen a similar, though less pronounced,

decline in popularity. New preferred destinations seem to be emerging, including Hungary, Greece, Cyprus, Malta, and Switzerland. The Netherlands, however, continues to retain its popularity.

Still, there are many more statistical variables that need to be considered to gain a clearer picture of the mobility patterns of Chinese populations in Europe. One important matter is the composition of nationals by place of birth. Many Chinese nationals were born in Europe as children of Chinese migrants, but they are not included in the overall population data from sources like EUROSTAT. Another important issue is how to count the children of a parent with Chinese nationality and a parent with non-Chinese nationality. The age structure of the Chinese populations in Europe is also an important issue that few scholars have attempted to analyse. A particularly complex issue is Chinese migration related to the “Golden Visa Programmes,” in which some countries issue residence permits to migrants without requiring them to first take up residence in the destination country.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on global migration and mobility, with Chinese migration to and in Europe being no exception. Wars and associated economic crises can also significantly affect migration— as seen with the huge flows of refugees from Syria and Ukraine. It is thus necessary to continue and deepen this type of statistical analysis to produce more accurate estimations of population mobility, while at the same time remaining conscious of the limitations of statistical approaches. One of the characteristics of Chinese international migration and diaspora is hypermobility (Guo 2022), which is also reflected in frequent residential changes within countries (Zhou and Beltrán Antolín 2020). More research is sorely needed to better understand the Chinese populations in Europe and each European country— despite the difficulties presented by the varying national criteria for compiling statistics based on conflicting definitions of citizenship and identity.

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