Françoise De Bel-Air: The Global Competition for Talents. Comparative Overview of Highly Skilled Emigration Trends to Canada, France, Germany, the UK and the US

The Global Competition for Talents

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Françoise De Bel-Air

Executive Summary

This report provides a comparative analysis of highly skilled migration to five major OECD destination countries—Canada, France, Germany, the United Kingdom (UK), and the United States (US)—with the objective of assessing both their attractiveness to highly skilled migrants and their capacity for long-term retention and settlement. In an increasingly competitive global context involving the Gulf states, the report examines not only where highly skilled migrants go, but how destination-country institutions structure entry, temporariness, and access to permanence.

The analysis combines OECD stock data on foreign-born, tertiary-educated migrants with national administrative flow data on visas, permits, renewals, and permanent residence. To ensure conceptual clarity, the report adopts a four-stage analytical framework distinguishing between entry authorisation, first-time access to skilled employment, continuation through renewals, and long-term stabilisation. These stages are analysed as distinct administrative processes rather than as individual trajectories.

Stock data show that Canada, the US, and the UK host the largest stocks of highly skilled migrants, reflecting long-standing selection mechanisms favouring education and professional experience. Germany and France host smaller relative stocks, though Germany has experienced notable recent growth. Across all five countries, highly skilled migrants display strong labour market attachment but also persistent risks of skills mismatch and overqualification. Nationality-specific stock patterns reveal the cumulative imprint of past migration regimes, with Indian and Filipino nationals dominating highly skilled stocks in North America and the UK, while Tunisian, Egyptian, and Pakistani nationals show more destination-specific profiles.

Flow data organised across the four stages highlight structurally distinct national models. Canada stands out as a settlement-oriented and explicitly sequenced system, where high inflows and renewals are