Introduction: International migration represents a global phenomenon. The variety of countries of origin and ethnic backgrounds of international migrants coming to Chile has grown over time, but no study has explored its characteristics yet. The purpose of this study was to analyse the ethnic characteristics of immigrants and Chileans in the past years and how they have evolved over time.

Methods: Exploratory secondary analysis of nationally representative, anonymous Chilean survey CASEN 2009, 2011, 2013 and 2015 (participants belonging to about 70 000 households each time). We divided the sample into self-reported immigrants (about 3500) and Chilean-born (about 210 000). We did not include in the analysis those who preferred not to report their migration status (missing values about 2000 each time). We estimated self-reported ethnic belonging among immigrants and Chileans separately, as considered by the Chilean government (9 ethnic minority groups legally recognised in the country).
Results: In comparison with those born in Chile, immigrants reported a lower proportion of ethnic indigenous population (immigrants 6.8% 2009; 6% 2011; 5.4% 2013; 5.1% 2015). In 2015 for example, 9.2% of those born in Chile declared to belong to one of the 9 native peoples recognized by law in the country, while that in immigrants this percentage corresponded to 5.1%. Because CASEN survey collects data on these 9 ethnic groups only, we could not explore the raising of other ethnic grupos relevant to the region like Afro American descendents. However, migrants from Haiti (0.2% 2011 versus 3.4% 2015) and Colombia (8.1% 2011 versus 13.6% 2015) have significantly increased their numbers in past 5 years, which might represent an unestimated growing number of inhabitants with other ethnicities.

Conclusion: Based on a repeated population survey analysis, international migrants do not report higher proportions of ethnic minority background than Chileans. However, the growing number of immigrants form Central American countries might mean an undetected increase in African American descendants that are not being adequately estimated through national surveys. Further studies are required to explore this hypothesis.