

Frequently Requested Statistics on Immigrants and Immigration in the United States

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New U.S. citizens attend a naturalization ceremony in Washington, DC. (Photo: Kelsey Bell/National Archives)

The year 2020 was a momentous one for U.S. immigration, marking the last year of an administration that had a nearly unprecedented focus on reducing immigration, as well as the COVID-19 pandemic, which drastically chilled travel and migration to the United States and around the world.

Even prior to 2020, the immigrant population in the United States already had been growing at much slower rates than a decade ago. And origins for recent arrivals were shifting, with more new immigrants coming from Asia than other regions. The year had other notable developments: The most recent estimates revealed illegal immigration was on the decline, the United States resettled the smallest number of refugees in the history of the refugee resettlement program, and nearly half of recently arrived immigrants had a bachelor’s degree or more.

To offer more context on the immigrants often at the center of political discussions, who numbered 44.9 million in 2019, this Spotlight offers information about some of the most frequently requested immigration-related issues by compiling the most authoritative and current data available. It answers questions such as: What are the historic immigration trends in the United States? Who is immigrating, and through which channels? In what occupations do immigrants work? How many immigrants become naturalized citizens? What immigration enforcement actions were taken during the year? What are income and poverty metrics, as well as health insurance coverage, for immigrants and the U.S. born alike?

This article draws on the most recent resources and data from the Migration Policy Institute (MPI); the U.S. Census Bureau (using its 2019 American Community Survey [ACS], 2020 Current Population Survey [CPS], and 2000 decennial census); and the U.S. Departments of Homeland Security (DHS) and State. (Note: DHS and State Department data refer to fiscal years that begin on October 1 and end on September 30; ACS and CPS data refer to calendar years). For more detailed information on U.S. and global immigration data sources and one-click access to these datasets, see the MPI report *Immigration Data Matters*. And all of the data tools and maps linked to in this article also can be accessed through MPI’s [Migration Data Hub](#).

Click on the bullet points for more information on each topic:

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Immigrants Now and Historically

Definitions

"Foreign born" and "immigrant" are used interchangeably and refer to persons with no U.S. citizenship at birth. This population includes naturalized citizens, lawful permanent residents, refugees and asylees, persons on certain temporary visas, and unauthorized immigrants.

Geographical regions: MPI follows the definition of Latin America as put forth by the United Nations and the U.S. Census Bureau, which spans Central America (including Mexico), the Caribbean, and South America. For more information about geographical regions, see the [U.S. Census Bureau](#) and [United Nations Statistics Division](#).

How many immigrants reside in the United States?

More than 44.9 million immigrants lived in the United States in 2019, the historical numeric high since census records have been kept. Immigrants' share of the overall U.S. population has increased significantly from the record low of 4.7 percent in 1970. In 2019, immigrants comprised 13.7 percent of the total U.S. population, a figure that remains short of the record high of 14.8 percent in 1890.

The foreign-born population remained largely flat between 2018 and 2019, with an increase of 204,000 people, or growth of less than 0.5 percent. This is consistent with the 203,000 increase from 2017 to 2018 and much lower than the approximately 787,000 increase—or 2 percent growth—seen between 2016 and 2017. The slowing growth of the immigrant population over the past few years is mirrored by the slowing growth of the total U.S. population since 2015.

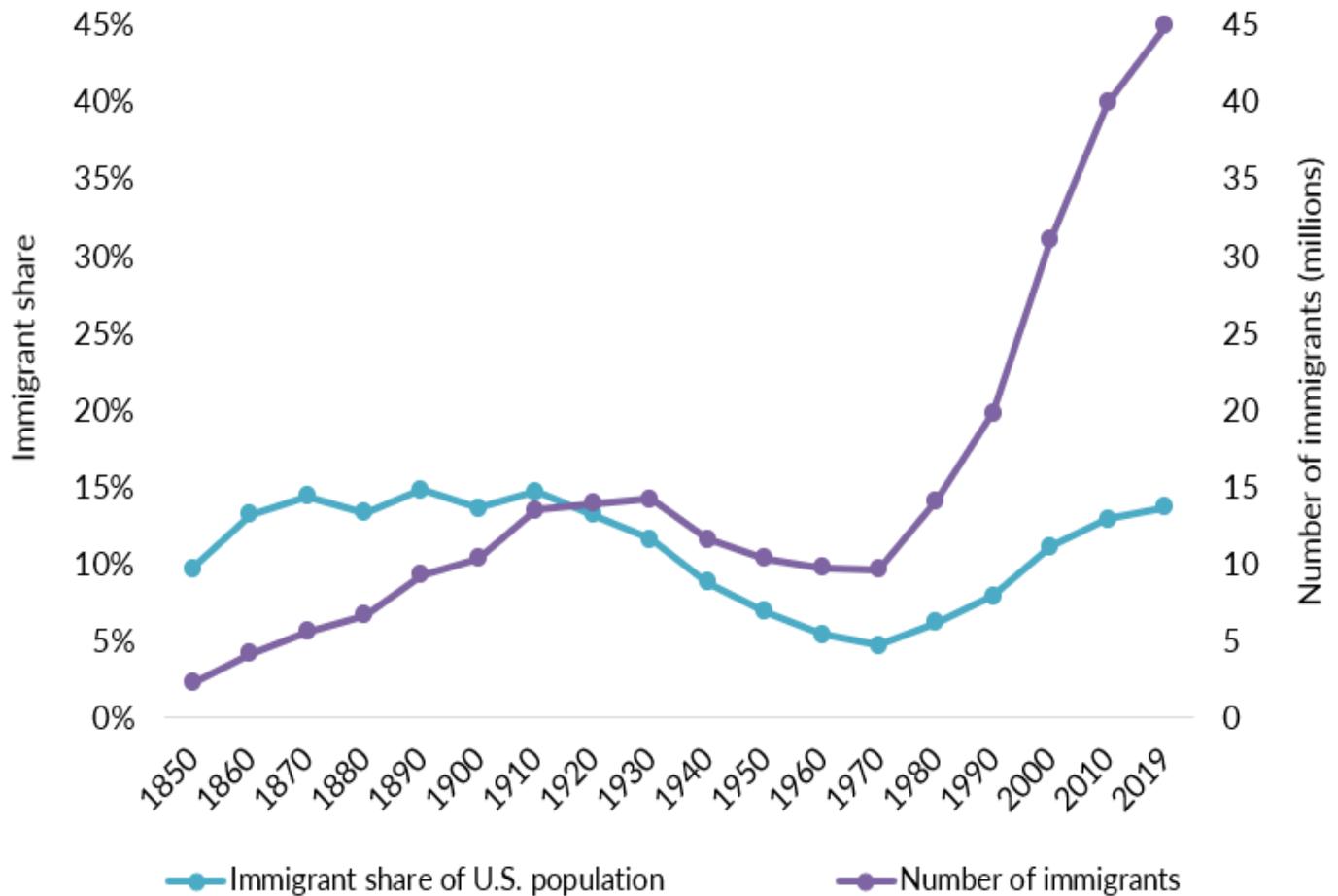
How have the number and share of immigrants changed over time?

In 1850, the first year the United States began collecting nativity data through the census, the country had 2.2 million immigrants, representing nearly 10 percent of the total population.

Between 1860 and 1920, the immigrant share of the population fluctuated between 13 percent and almost 15 percent, peaking at 14.8 percent in 1890, largely due to high levels of immigration from Europe. Restrictive immigration laws in 1921 and 1924 kept permanent immigration open almost exclusively to northern and western Europeans. Combined with the Great Depression and World War II, this led to a sharp drop in new arrivals from the Eastern Hemisphere. The foreign-born share steadily declined, hitting a record low of 4.7 percent (or 9.6 million immigrants) in 1970 (see Figure 1).

- Want to know how immigration to the United States has fluctuated over time? Check out the **U.S. Immigrant Population and Share over Time, 1850-Present data tool**.

Figure 1. Size and Share of the Foreign-Born Population in the United States, 1850-2019



Source: Migration Policy Institute (MPI) tabulation of data from U.S. Census Bureau, 2010-19 American Community Surveys (ACS), and 1970, 1990, and 2000 decennial census. All other data are from Campbell J. Gibson and Emily Lennon, "Historical Census Statistics on the Foreign-Born Population of the United States: 1850 to 1990" (Working Paper no. 29, U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, DC, 1999).

Since 1970, the share and number of immigrants have increased rapidly, mainly because of large-scale immigration from Latin America and Asia. The vast diversification of immigration flows was ushered in by important shifts in U.S. immigration law (including the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 which abolished national-origin admission quotas; the creation of a formal refugee resettlement program with the Refugee Act of 1980; and the Cold War-era grant of preferential treatment to Cuban immigrants); the United States' growing economic and military presence in Asia and Latin America; economic ties, social linkages, and deep migration history between the United States and its southern neighbors; and major economic transformations and political instability in countries around the world.

- To see the changing regional makeup of immigration to the United States, use the **Regions of Birth for Immigrants in the United States, 1960-Present data tool**.
- Read about historical U.S. immigration trends and policies in *Immigration in the United States: New Economic, Social, Political Landscapes with Legislative Reform on the Horizon*.
- Learn about the impact of the 1965 law in *Fifty Years On, the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act Continues to Reshape the United States*.
- Read more about the end of national-origin quotas in *The Geopolitical Origins of the U.S. Immigration Act of 1965*.

How do today's top countries of origin compare to those 50 years ago?

In 2019, Mexicans comprised 24 percent of all immigrants in the United States a decline from 30 percent in 2000. Immigrants from India and China (including those born in Hong Kong and Macao but not Taiwan) were the next two largest immigrant groups, each making up about 6 percent of the foreign-born population. Other top countries of origin include the Philippines (5 percent); El Salvador, Vietnam, Cuba, and the Dominican Republic (each accounting for 3 percent); and Guatemala and Korea (each 2 percent). Together, these ten countries accounted for 57 percent of all immigrants in the United States in 2019.

The predominance of immigration from Latin America and Asia in the late 20th and early 21st centuries starkly contrasts with the trend in the mid-1900s, when immigrants were largely European. In the 1960s no single country accounted for more than 15 percent of the U.S. immigrant population. Italians were the top origin group, making up 13 percent of the foreign born in 1960, followed by Germans and Canadians (about 10 percent each).

- To see immigration trends from individual countries over time, use the **Countries of Birth for U.S. Immigrants, 1960-Present** data tool.

How long have immigrants lived in the United States, and what are the leading sending countries?

Fifty percent of all immigrants in the United States in 2019 had entered the country prior to 2000 (29 percent entered before 1990 and 21 percent between 1990 and 1999), while 25 percent entered between 2000 and 2009 and the remaining 25 percent in 2010 or later.

While immigrants from Mexico have dominated the flows post-1970, the composition of new arrivals has changed since 2010. Recently arrived immigrants are more likely to come from Asia, with India and China leading the way. In fact, in 2013, India and China overtook Mexico as the top origin countries for new arrivals, displacing its longstanding position.

The number of immigrants from the Dominican Republic, the Philippines, Cuba, Venezuela, Guatemala, and El Salvador also increased between 2010 and 2019. By contrast, the number of Mexican immigrants in the United States declined by more than 779,000 during the same period, representing the biggest absolute decline of all immigrant groups.

Among the origin countries with at least 100,000 immigrants in the United States in 2019, the top five that experienced the fastest growth between 2010 and 2019 were Venezuela (an increase of 153 percent), Afghanistan (143 percent), Nepal (140 percent), Myanmar (also known as Burma; 84 percent), and Nigeria (79 percent).

- Read more about ***Immigrants from New Origin Countries in the United States***.
- Check out **Largest U.S. Immigrant Groups over Time, 1960-Present**, an interactive tool showing the top ten source countries by decade.
- To learn more about key immigrant populations, check out the *Migration Information Source's* **Spotlights archive**, which includes data profiles of individual immigrant groups in the United States, including Mexicans, Indians, Chinese, Vietnamese, Koreans, South and Central Americans, Europeans, sub-Saharan Africans, and those from the Middle East-North Africa region.

How many U.S. residents are of immigrant origin?

Immigrants and their U.S.-born children number approximately 85.7 million people, or 26 percent of the U.S. population, according to the 2020 Current Population Survey (CPS), a slight decline from 2019. The Pew Research Center has projected that the immigrant-origin share of the population will rise to about 36 percent by 2065.

Demographic, Educational, and Linguistic Characteristics

Definitions

College-educated persons are defined as adults 25 years and older with a bachelor's degree or higher.

Race as used by the Census Bureau reflects the race or races with which individuals most closely self-identify. Race categories include both racial and national-origin groups.

Hispanic and Latino are ethnic, not racial, categories. They include individuals who classified themselves in one of the specific Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino categories listed on the decennial census and American Community Survey questionnaire—"Mexican, Mexican Am., Chicano," "Puerto Rican," or "Cuban"—as well as those who indicate that they are "other Spanish/Hispanic/Latino origin." Persons who indicated that they are "other Spanish/Hispanic/Latino" include those whose origins are from Spain, the Spanish-speaking countries of Central or South America, the Dominican Republic, or people who self-identify more generally as Spanish, Spanish-American, Hispanic, Hispano, Latino, and so on.

Read more about Census Bureau's definitions on [its website](#).

What is the median age for immigrants?

The immigrant population's median age in 2019 was 45.7 years, making it older than the U.S.-born population, which had a median age of 36.5 years. Children of immigrants who are born in the United States contribute to the younger median age of the U.S.-born population compared to the immigrant population, which is comprised of people who immigrate largely as adults.

Fewer than 1 percent of immigrants were under age 5 in 2019, compared to 7 percent of the U.S.-born population in this age group. Children and youth ages 5 to 17 years accounted for 5 percent of immigrants and 18 percent of the U.S.-born population. People of working age (18 to 64 years) comprised 78 percent of the immigrant population, a much higher figure than the 59 percent of U.S. born in this category. Approximately 17 percent of immigrants were 65 years and older, similar to the 16 percent of the U.S. born in this age group.

What is the female share of the immigrant population?

In 2019, about 52 percent of all U.S. immigrants were female. The share has fluctuated slightly over the past four decades: 53 percent in 1980, 51 percent in 1990, 50 percent in 2000, and 51 percent in 2010.

What is the racial makeup of immigrants?

In 2019, 45 percent of immigrants reported their race as single-race White, 27 percent as Asian, 10 percent as Black, and 15 percent as some other race. About 2 percent reported having two or more races.

How many immigrants are Hispanic or Latino?

In 2019, 44 percent of U.S. immigrants (19.8 million people) reported having Hispanic or Latino origins.

Note: The Census Bureau classifies Hispanic and Latino as ethnic categories, separate from the racial categories listed above (see Definitions box for more information).

How many Hispanics in the United States are immigrants?

The majority of U.S. Hispanics are U.S.-born. Of the 60.5 million people in 2019 who self-identified as Hispanic or Latino, 33 percent (19.8 million) were immigrants and 67 percent (40.6 million) were U.S.-born.

Use the MPI Data Hub's [State Immigration Data Profiles](#) to learn more about the demographic characteristics of immigrants and the U.S. born (including race and ethnicity) in each of the 50 states, the District of Columbia, and the United States.

Which languages are most frequently spoken at home?

In 2019, approximately 78 percent (241 million) of all 308.8 million people ages 5 and older regardless of nativity reported speaking only English at home. The remaining 22 percent (67.8 million) reported speaking a language other than English at home.

Among those who reported speaking a language other than English at home, 62 percent were Spanish speakers. Other top languages were Chinese (5 percent, including Mandarin and Cantonese); Tagalog (almost 3 percent); and Vietnamese, Arabic, French (including Cajun), and Korean (about 2 percent each) (see Table 1).

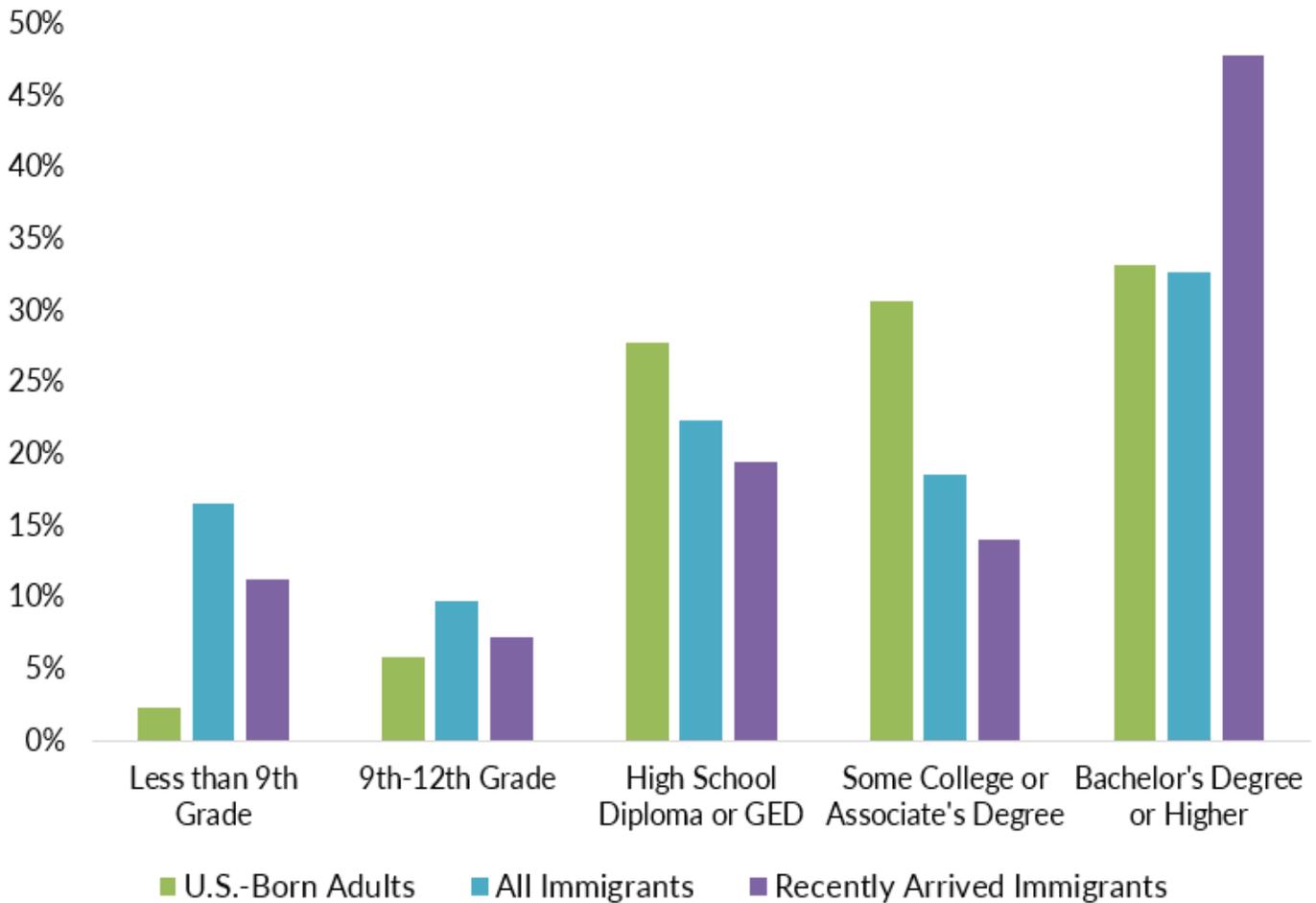
Table 1. Languages Spoken at Home Other than English (ages 5 and older), 2019

	Estimate	Share of All Speakers of Foreign Languages
Speak Language Other than English	67,802,000	100%
Spanish	41,757,000	61.6%
Chinese (including Mandarin, Cantonese)	3,495,000	5.2%
Tagalog (including Filipino)	1,764,000	2.6%
Vietnamese	1,571,000	2.3%
Arabic	1,260,000	1.9%
French (including Cajun)	1,172,000	1.7%
Korean	1,075,000	1.6%
Russian	941,000	1.4%
Haitian	925,000	1.4%
German	895,000	1.3%
Hindi	893,000	1.3%
Portuguese	846,000	1.2%
Amharic, Somali, or other Afro-Asiatic languages	590,000	0.9%
Yoruba, Twi, Igbo, other languages of Western Africa	589,000	0.9%
Other Indo-European languages	576,000	0.8%
Yiddish, Pennsylvania Dutch, other West Germanic languages	560,000	0.8%
Italian	540,000	0.8%

Source: MPI tabulation of data from the U.S. Census Bureau 2019 ACS.

Spanish was the most common language after English in all but four states: Alaska (where the Eskimo-Aleut languages dominated), Hawaii (Ilocano, Samoan, Hawaiian, Marshallese, or other Austronesian languages), and Maine and Vermont (French) (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Map of Most Commonly Spoken Languages other than English and Spanish, by State, 2019



Note: Recently arrived immigrants are those who entered the United States between 2014 and 2019.

Source: MPI tabulation of data from the U.S. Census Bureau 2019 ACS.

Educational attainment varies by country of origin. In 2019, almost 80 percent of Indian immigrant adults in the United States had a bachelor’s degree or more. Other top countries were Zimbabwe (74 percent), Taiwan (73 percent), United Arab Emirates and Belarus (70 percent each), and Singapore (69 percent).

- **Educational Attainment Among U.S.-Born Adults and All Immigrant Adults by Country of Birth in 2019**
- Read more about the socioeconomic characteristics of highly skilled immigrants in *College-Educated Immigrants in the United States*.

Immigrant Destinations

Which states have the largest number of immigrants and which ones have experienced the fastest growth of their immigrant populations?

In 2019, the top five U.S. states by number of immigrants were California (10.6 million), Texas (5 million), Florida (4.5 million), New York (4.4 million), and New Jersey (2.1 million).

When classified by immigrants' share of total population, the top five states in 2019 were California (27 percent), New Jersey (23 percent), New York (22 percent), Florida (21 percent), and Nevada (20 percent).

- Interested in the top U.S. destinations for immigrants by country or region of origin? Use our interactive maps to see top immigrant concentrations at **state and county** or **metropolitan-area** levels.

While traditional immigrant destinations have the largest absolute number of new immigrants, other states have seen much larger relative growth in their immigrant populations. In some cases this is because the states' initial foreign-born populations were quite small, so a relatively small absolute increase has translated into high-percent growth (see Table 2).

Table 2. Top Five States by Absolute and Percent Growth in Immigrant Population, 2000-10 and 2010-19

Absolute Growth

Rank	2000-2010		2010-2019	
1	California	1,286,000	Florida	868,000
2	Texas	1,242,000	Texas	809,000
3	Florida	987,000	California	414,000
4	New York	429,000	Washington	247,000
5	Illinois	368,000	New Jersey	230,000

Percent Change

Rank	2000-2010		2010-2019	
1	Alabama	92%	South Dakota	68%
2	South Carolina	88%	North Dakota	67%
3	Tennessee	82%	Kentucky	40%
4	Arkansas	79%	Delaware	35%
5	Kentucky	75%	South Carolina	32%

Source: MPI tabulation of data from the U.S. Census Bureau 2010 and 2019 ACS and 2000 decennial census.

- For more information on the top states of residence for the foreign born, see the interactive tool **Immigrant Population by State, 1990-Present**.

Immigrants in the Labor Force

Definitions

The civilian labor force is comprised of civilians ages 16 and older who were either employed or unemployed but looking for work in the week prior to participation in the American Community Survey or decennial census.

How many immigrants are in the U.S. civilian labor force?

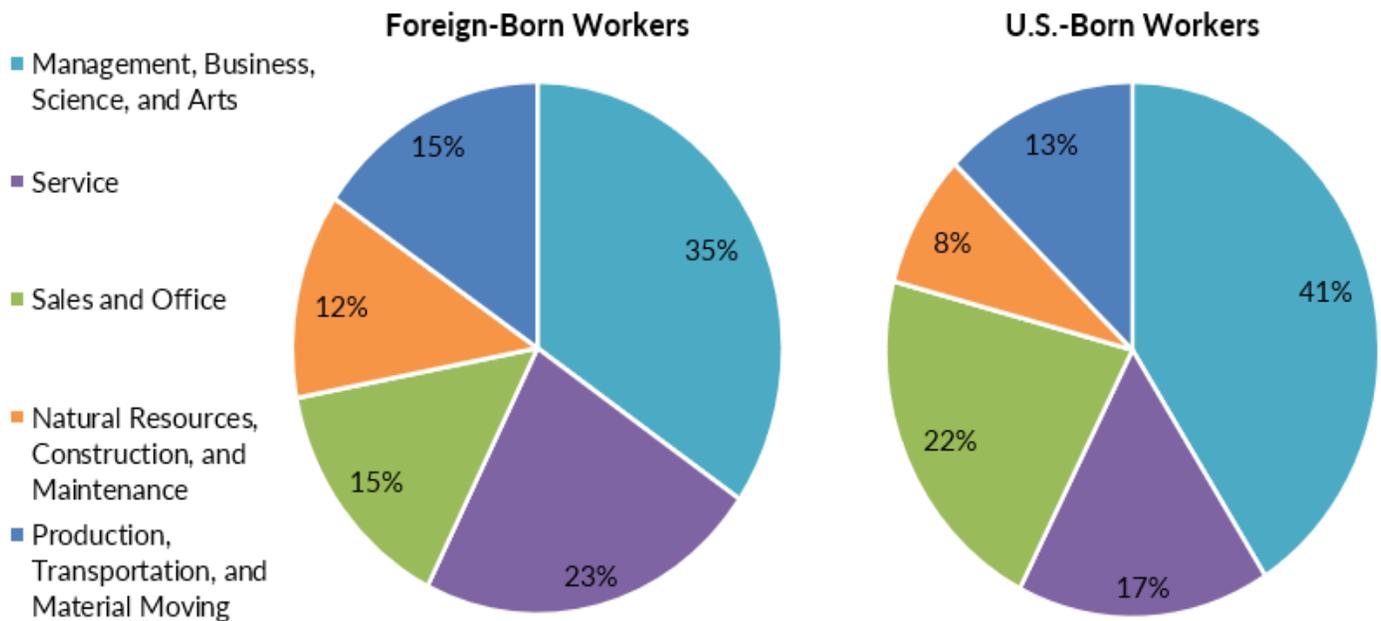
Immigrants constituted 17 percent (28.6 million) of the civilian labor force (166.3 million) in 2019. Immigrant participation in the labor force has more than tripled since 1970, when immigrants accounted for approximately 5 percent of the civilian labor force.

- For more on the evolving share of immigrants in the labor force nationwide and by state, see **Immigrant Share of the U.S. Population and Civilian Labor Force, 1980-Present**.

What types of jobs do immigrants perform?

Of the 27.6 million employed foreign-born workers ages 16 and older in 2019, the largest share (35 percent) worked in management, professional, and related occupations (see Figure 4).

Figure 4. Employed Workers in the U.S. Civilian Labor Force (ages 16 and older), by Nativity and Occupation, 2019



Note: Numbers may not add up to 100 as they are rounded to the nearest whole number.

Source: MPI tabulation of data from the U.S. Census Bureau 2019 ACS.

- Check out the Data Hub’s **State Immigration Data Profiles** for more information on the labor force participation of immigrants and the U.S. born in the United States, each of the 50 states, and the District of Columbia.

Income and Poverty

In 2019, immigrant households had a median income of \$63,550, compared to \$66,040 for native-born households.

Fourteen percent of immigrants were poor (that is, with family incomes below the official poverty threshold), compared to 12 percent of the U.S. born.

Health Insurance Coverage

What share of immigrants have health insurance?

In 2019, approximately 58 percent of U.S. immigrants had private health insurance (compared to 69 percent of the U.S. born), and 30 percent had public health insurance coverage (compared to 36 percent of the U.S. born).

Since implementation of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) in 2014, health insurance coverage rates improved for both the U.S. born and immigrants. From 2013 to 2017, the rate of uninsured immigrants fell from 32 percent to 20 percent, and the rate for the native born fell from 12 percent to 7 percent. In 2017, the Trump administration made a number of changes to policies initiated by the ACA, including removing the

individual coverage mandate, ending cost-sharing subsidies to insurers, and cutting funding for navigator programs. In 2019, the share of uninsured among the immigrant population remained at about 20 percent.

Note: Health insurance coverage is calculated only for the civilian, noninstitutionalized population. Since some people may simultaneously hold both private and public health insurance coverage, estimates of those with public health insurance and those with public coverage may overlap. Their sum therefore may be greater than the total number of people with health insurance.

Children of Immigrants

Definitions

Second-generation immigrant children are any U.S.-born children with at least one foreign-born parent.

First-generation immigrant children are any foreign-born children with at least one foreign-born parent.

Children with immigrant parents are both first- and second-generation immigrant children.

Note: The estimates in this section include only children under age 18 who reside with at least one parent.

How many U.S. children live with immigrant parents?

In 2019, approximately 17.8 million U.S. children under age 18 lived with at least one immigrant parent. They accounted for 26 percent of the 68.9 million children under age 18 in the United States, up from 19 percent in 2000 and 13 percent in 1990.

Second-generation children, who were born in the United States to at least one foreign-born parent, accounted for 88 percent (15.6 million) of all children under age 18 with immigrant parents. The remaining 12 percent (2.2 million) were born outside the United States.

- For state-by-state and age information on children living with immigrant parents, see the **Children in U.S. Immigrant Families** data tool.

How has the number of children in immigrant families changed over time?

Between 2000 and 2010, the number of children ages 17 and under with immigrant parents grew 30 percent, from 13.1 million to 17 million. Between 2010 and 2019, the number grew by another 5 percent, reaching 17.8 million.

The population of first-generation children, who were born outside the United States, declined by 12 percent between 2000 and 2010, from 2.7 million to 2.4 million. It then declined further by another 9 percent between 2010 and 2019, to 2.2 million.

In contrast, the number of second-generation children has grown steadily since 2000. Between 2000 and 2010, the number increased by 40 percent, from 10.4 million to 14.6 million, followed by a 7 percent increase between 2010 and 2019, reaching 15.6 million.

How many children living with immigrant parents are in low-income families?

In 2019, there were 25.6 million children under age 18 living in families with incomes below 200 percent of the federal poverty threshold. Of them, nearly 8 million (or 31 percent) were children of immigrants.

Children of immigrants were more likely to be in low-income families (45 percent of the 17.8 million) compared to children of U.S.-born parents (35 percent of the 51.1 million).

- For state-level estimates of children of immigrants and share in low-income families, see the Demographic and Social Profiles in the **State Immigration Data Profiles**.

Which states have the largest number of children in immigrant families and which ones have experienced the fastest growth of this population?

In 2019, the top five states by the total number of children under age 18 living with immigrant parents were California (4 million), Texas (2.4 million), New York (1.4 million), Florida (1.4 million), and New Jersey (769,000). These states accounted for 56 percent of the 17.8 million U.S. children with immigrant parents.

The five states with the largest share of children with immigrant parents in 2019 were California (47 percent of all children in the state), New Jersey (41 percent), Nevada (38 percent), New York (36 percent), and Texas (35 percent).

While traditional immigrant destinations experienced the largest absolute growth in children with immigrant parents over time, other states have seen much larger relative growth (see Table 3). In some states, this is because the initial number of children with immigrant parents was quite small. Thus, relatively small absolute increases in the immigrant population in these states have translated into high percent growth.

Table 3. Top Five States by Absolute and Percent Growth in Children with Immigrant Parents, 2000-10 and 2010-19

Absolute Growth

Rank	2000-2010		2010-2019	
1	Texas	667,000	Texas	211,000
2	California	326,000	Florida	168,000
3	Florida	263,000	New Jersey	90,000
4	Georgia	231,000	North Carolina	82,000
5	North Carolina	197,000	Maryland	70,000

Percent Growth

Rank	2000-2010		2010-2019	
1	Tennessee	122%	North Dakota	57%
2	North Carolina	118%	Delaware	53%
3	Alabama	111%	Kentucky	49%
4	Arkansas	108%	South Dakota	44%
5	South Carolina	108%	Wyoming	43%

Source: MPI tabulation of data from the U.S. Census Bureau 2010 and 2019 ACS and 2000 decennial census.

Permanent Immigration

How many immigrants obtain lawful permanent residence (also known as getting a green card)?

In fiscal year (FY) 2019, 1 million immigrants became lawful permanent residents (LPRs, also known as green-card holders). The number of new LPRs in FY 2019 decreased by 64,800 from the prior year (a 6 percent drop). In the past decade, the annual number of new green-card recipients has ranged from 991,000 (FY 2013) to 1.2 million (FY 2016).

In recent years, immigrants obtaining LPR status have been, on average, about evenly divided between those already living in the United States who are adjusting their status and those applying from outside the country. More than 55 percent (or 573,000) of the 1 million new LPRs in FY

2019 received green cards from within the United States. Many of these new permanent residents are spouses, minor children, and parents of U.S. citizens, or persons who arrived as refugees or as temporary workers.

About 459,000 of the new LPRs (nearly 45 percent) were granted this status from abroad in FY 2019, a slight dip from previous years when the share of new arrivals was higher (48 percent in FY 2018 and 51 percent the prior year). Most new arrivals are immediate family members of U.S. citizens and LPRs.

- Trace changing immigration trends over time with the **Legal Immigration to the United States, 1820-Present** data tool.

Under which categories are permanent immigrants admitted?

There are four main pathways to obtain a green card: through a family relationship, employment sponsorship, humanitarian protection (for refugees and asylees), and the Diversity Visa (DV) lottery (also known as the green-card lottery).

Overall, of the 1 million immigrants who received green cards in FY 2019, 49 percent were immediate relatives of U.S. citizens (an uncapped visa category), followed by another 20 percent of family-related immigrants (whose admission is limited by visa and country caps).

Ten percent of new green-card holders adjusted from refugee or asylee status. About 14 percent of new LPRs were either sponsored by their employers or self-petitioned, including investors who create jobs. Approximately 4 percent were diversity lottery winners.

What are the top five countries of birth for new permanent immigrants?

The top five countries of birth in FY 2019 were Mexico (15 percent), mainland China (6 percent), India (5 percent), the Dominican Republic (5 percent), and the Philippines (4 percent). These countries represented about 36 percent of everyone who received a green card in FY 2019.

How many people are selected in the Diversity Visa lottery and where do they come from?

In FY 2019, 43,000 people from countries with low rates of immigration to the United States received a green card as diversity immigrants, representing approximately 4 percent of the 1 million new LPRs.

The leading countries of birth of DV immigrants were Egypt and Nepal, together accounting for about 14 percent of DV entrants adjusting to LPR status. Other top countries of origin were the Democratic Republic of the Congo (6 percent), Russia (5 percent), Albania (5 percent), Ukraine (4 percent), and Ethiopia, Cameroon, Turkey, and Algeria (3 percent each).

For some countries, the Diversity Visa lottery represents a major share of all new LPRs. For example, out of all nationals of Tajikistan adjusting to LPR status in FY 2019, 72 percent were DV immigrants. Shares were also high for nationals of Algeria (58 percent) and Azerbaijan (55 percent). DV lottery winners represented between 40 percent and 50 percent of new LPRs originally from Turkmenistan, Sudan, Benin, and Albania.

Created in 1990, the lottery sets aside 55,000 green cards annually, of which 5,000 must be used for applicants under the Nicaraguan and Central America Relief Act of 1997. Interest in the lottery is significantly higher than the amount of available visas; about 6.7 million qualified applications were **registered for the DV-2021**, covering 11.8 million applicants and their spouses and minor children. This number was down from 14.7 million in DV-2020 and 14.4 million in DV-2019. (The application number varies each year in part because of which countries are eligible.) Before receiving permission to immigrate, lottery winners must provide proof of a high school education or its equivalent or show two years of work experience within the past five years in an occupation that requires at least two years of training or experience. They also must pass a medical exam and a background check.

- Read the most recent State Department **Visa Bulletin** for more on the DV lottery.

- For more information on the Diversity Visa program, read *The Diversity Visa Program Holds Lessons for Future Legal Immigration Reform*.

Temporary Visas

How many people have temporary visas?

According to the most recent Department of Homeland Security (DHS) estimates available at this writing, 2.3 million foreign nationals on various temporary visas resided in the United States during FY 2016, up from about 2 million in FY 2015. Almost half (1.1 million) were temporary workers and their families, followed by 40 percent who were foreign students and their families (870,000).

Sixty-one percent were from Asia. Nationals of countries in Europe and North America accounted for 15 percent each. The top five countries of origin—India, China, Mexico, Canada, and South Korea—accounted for 57 percent of all residents on temporary visas.

Note: This estimate of temporary visa holders includes temporary workers, international students, exchange visitors, diplomats, and representatives of foreign governments and international organizations. It excludes tourists and other short-term visitors. North America includes Canada, Bermuda, Central America, and the Caribbean.

- Read about temporary nonimmigrant population trends in *Temporary Visa Holders in the United States*.

How many people entered the United States on nonimmigrant visas?

According to the most recently available data from DHS, 42.7 million individuals entered in FY 2016 as I-94 nonimmigrants on various temporary visas. On average, each I-94 nonimmigrant was admitted 1.8 times. This is the first time, and to date the only time, the DHS Office of Immigration Statistics (OIS) has estimated the number of unique individuals who came temporarily, as opposed to the number of nonimmigrant admissions or entries.

Most of these nonimmigrants—34.2 million—entered as tourists, followed by 3.7 million as business visitors. Of these, 15 million tourists and 1.7 million business travelers were from Visa Waiver Program countries, meaning they did not need a visa to enter the United States. Further, approximately 1 million international students entered on F-1 visas. OIS additionally estimated that about 290,300 individuals were admitted on high-skilled worker H-1B visas (mostly from India, China, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Mexico) and 81,600 on nonagricultural temporary or seasonal worker H-2B visas (mostly from Mexico, Jamaica, Guatemala, South Africa, and Canada).

- Read more on *Nonimmigrant Admissions and Estimated Nonimmigrant Individuals*.

How many nonimmigrant visas does the State Department issue?

In FY 2020, the annual number of nonimmigrant visas issued by the State Department decreased for the fourth time since 2015, to 4 million—a 54 percent decline from the 8.7 million issued in FY 2019.

Seventy-one percent of the 4 million nonimmigrant visas issued in FY 2020 were temporary business and tourist visas (B and BCC visas). The next largest visa class was for temporary workers and trainees and their family members (H visa categories), who comprised 12 percent of nonimmigrant visas issued in FY 2020. The third largest group was for academic students and exchange visitors and their family members (F and J visa categories), who comprised 6 percent of nonimmigrant visas.

In addition to the Trump administration's travel ban, which was extended to six other countries in early 2020, the sharp decline in nonimmigrant visa issuances in FY 2020 can be attributed to the worldwide slowdown in mobility amid the COVID-19 pandemic and the administration's accompanying immigration restrictions. On June 22, 2020, President Donald Trump issued a proclamation suspending the issuance of certain nonimmigrant visas. This proclamation applied to H-1B visas (for temporary workers in specialty occupations), H-2B visas

(for nonagricultural workers), certain J visas (for exchange visitors), and L visas (for intracompany transferees), as well as visas issued to the dependents of these nonimmigrants.

Note: The number of visas issued does not necessarily match the number of foreign nationals who entered the United States in the same year because some nonimmigrant visas may not be used.

- Read the State Department’s **Annual Reports of the Visa Office**.
- Read the State Department’s **fact sheet on Visa Refusals**.

How many nonimmigrant admissions does DHS grant in a year?

DHS granted 186 million nonimmigrant admissions in FY 2019, of which 105 million were admissions of Canadians and Mexicans traveling for business or pleasure. These travelers are exempt from completing the I-94 arrival/departure form at the port of entry, thus DHS does not provide characteristics for this group.

In FY 2019, there were 81.6 million total temporary admissions of I-94 nonimmigrants, similar to the 81.3 million a year earlier (see Table 4).

Table 4. Nonimmigrant Admissions by Category, FY 2019 (I-94 only)

Category of Temporary Admission	Number of Admissions	Share of Total
Total	81,563,000	100.0%
Tourists	64,865,000	79.5%
Temporary visitors for business	9,060,000	11.1%
Temporary workers and families	4,106,000	5.0%
Students and families	1,907,000	2.3%
Exchange visitors	620,000	0.8%
Transit admissions	463,000	0.6%
Diplomats and other representatives	454,000	0.6%
Fiancé(e) and child admissions	40,000	0.0%
Other	48,000	0.1%

Note: Nonimmigrant admissions represent the number of entries. Individuals may have multiple entries within the year. The DHS Office of Immigration Statistics (OIS) reports characteristics of nonimmigrants who must complete an I-94 arrival/departure form at entry.

Source: DHS Office of Immigration Statistics, *Yearbook of Immigration Statistics 2019*.

- Read more in the *Nonimmigrant Admissions to the U.S. fact sheet*.

Refugees and Asylum Seekers

Notes on Refugees and Asylees

What is the difference between a refugee and an asylee? In the United States, the main difference is the person's location at the time of application.

Refugees are nearly always outside of the United States when they are considered for resettlement, whereas asylum seekers submit their applications while physically present in or at a port of entry to the United States.

Asylum seekers can submit an asylum request either affirmatively or defensively. The affirmative asylum process applies to persons who initially file an asylum application with USCIS as well as applicants who subsequently have their application referred by USCIS to the Executive Office for Immigration Review (EOIR). The defensive asylum process applies to persons in removal proceedings who appear before EOIR and people who apply for asylum at U.S. borders and points of entry.

How many refugees entered the United States, and where were they from?

Every year, the president in consultation with Congress sets the annual refugee admissions ceiling and allocations by region of origin. The Trump administration set the annual ceiling at 18,000 in FY 2020 and 15,000 in FY 2021, down from the 30,000 ceiling of FY 2019 and the lowest since the resettlement program was formally created in 1980. The Biden administration has pledged to reverse the cuts, including by raising the FY 2022 ceiling to 125,000 refugees.

In FY 2020, more than 11,800 refugees were resettled in the United States, amounting to 66 percent of the admission ceiling allocated for the year. This represents a 61 decrease from the 30,000 admissions in FY 2019.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Myanmar (also known as Burma), Ukraine, Afghanistan, and Iraq were the primary countries of nationality, accounting for 68 percent (8,100) of all refugees resettled in FY 2020. Rounding out the top ten were Syria, Eritrea, El Salvador, Moldova, and Sudan. Together, nationals of the top ten countries comprised 85 percent (10,000) of all refugee arrivals in FY 2020 (see Table 5).

Table 5. Top Ten Countries of Refugee Admissions by Nationality, FY 2020

Country	Refugee Admissions	Share of Total Admissions
Total	11,814	100.0%
Democratic Republic of Congo	2,868	24.3%
Myanmar (Burma)	2,115	17.9%
Ukraine	1,927	16.3%
Afghanistan	604	5.1%
Iraq	537	4.5%
Syria	481	4.1%
Eritrea	475	4.0%
El Salvador	365	3.1%
Moldova	364	3.1%
Sudan	254	2.1%

Source: MPI tabulation of Worldwide Refugee Admissions Processing System (WRAPS) data from the State Department's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration.

- For more data on refugees, including top resettlement states, read *Refugees and Asylees in the United States*.
- Learn more on refugee admissions by year, national origin, and destination with **State Department WRAPS** data.

What is the female share of the resettled refugee population?

In FY 2020, about 48 percent of all resettled refugees in the United States were female.

What are the most common religions of refugees?

Refugees who identified as Christian (including Pentecostals, Catholics, and Baptists) made up 74 percent of all admitted refugees in FY 2020. Muslim refugees (including Sunni and Shiite) comprised 22 percent of resettled refugees. The remainder included Buddhists (1 percent) and Hindu (under 1 percent). About 1 percent of refugees reported not being affiliated with any religion or being atheists.

Overall, the United States admitted more Christian refugees in the past decade than Muslim ones. Between FY 2010 and FY 2020, Christians represented 48 percent (286,100) of the 601,000 refugees with known religion data. In comparison, 33 percent (201,000) of refugees admitted during the same period were Muslim.

FY 2016 marked the only time since 2010 when the United States resettled more Muslim refugees (38,900 individuals, or 46 percent of the total 85,000 refugees in FY 2016) than Christians (44 percent, 37,500 individuals). Since the Trump administration implemented restrictions on admissions of nationals of particular countries, additional vetting procedures, and historically low admissions ceilings, the proportion of resettled Muslim and Christian refugees has changed substantially in the last five years.

Note: Refugee demographic data is based on self-identification, so religious breakdowns include major religions as well as denominations.

What are the most common languages spoken among refugees?

In FY 2020, the top languages spoken by resettled refugees were Ukrainian, Russian, Arabic, and Kiswahili. Rounding the top ten were Spanish, Kinyarwanda, Sgaw Karen, Kibembe, Tigrinya, and Dari. Speakers of the top ten languages made up 71 percent of all refugees resettled that year.

How many asylum applications were filed and where are asylum seekers from?

Approximately 92,800 affirmative asylum applications were received by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) in FY 2020, the lowest number in five years. This marked the third year of declining applications after eight years of growth, and is at least partly due to the pandemic-related closure of USCIS offices for nearly three months. Applicants for affirmative asylum must be present in the United States, and do not include those seeking asylum through the defensive asylum process while in removal proceedings.

Meanwhile, 151,800 defensive asylum applications were filed with the Department of Justice's immigration court system, known as the Executive Office for Immigration Review (EOIR), in FY 2020—a similar number as FY 2019 and a 31 percent increase from the 116,000 applications filed in FY 2018.

What is the asylum approval rate?

According to USCIS data, 31 percent of affirmative asylum petitions adjudicated in FY 2019 were approved, a slight increase from the 30 percent in FY 2018 but a decline from the 37 percent in FY 2017 and 43 percent in FY 2016. (USCIS data for FY 2020 were not available at the time of writing.)

Asylum petitions handled by immigration courts have undergone a steadier downward trend. In FY 2020, 26 percent of such petitions were approved, versus 29 percent in FY 2019, 33 percent in FY 2018, 37 percent in FY 2017, and 43 percent in FY 2016.

How many people receive asylum status?

In FY 2019, 46,500 individuals, including principal applicants and their spouses and/or unmarried children under age 21, were granted asylum after seeking protection upon or after arrival in the United States—a 24 percent increase from 37,600 in FY 2018. An additional 3,300

individuals received derivative asylum status in the United States as immediate family members of principal applicants and 6,300 were approved for derivative status outside the United States. (Note that this number reflects travel documents issued to these family members, not their arrival in the United States.)

Nearly 60 percent of asylum grants came through USCIS (rather than in the immigration courts), of which there were 27,600 in FY 2019, up 13 percent from 24,400 in FY 2018 and up 77 percent from 15,600 in FY 2017. This increase is partly a result of a January 2018 policy change by USCIS to begin adjudicating asylum applications on a last-in, first-out basis, which the agency has said discourages non-meritorious cases.

China was the top country of origin for those receiving asylum in FY 2019, with 7,500 people (or 16 percent of total asylum grants), followed closely by Venezuela, with 6,800 individuals (accounting for 15 percent). Other top countries of origin were El Salvador (with 3,200), Guatemala (2,600), and India (2,300). Together, nationals of these five countries made up 48 percent of those receiving asylum in FY 2019.

What is the current asylum application backlog?

Due to the large application volume and limited resources, both the affirmative and defensive asylum systems have extensive backlogs. As of December 2020, according to USCIS, there were 350,000 affirmative cases pending; EOIR reported over 570,000 pending asylum cases.

- For more information, see the **USCIS affirmative asylum quarterly reports**, the **workload and adjudication statistics data** on asylum cases from EOIR, and the ***Refugees and Asylees Annual Flow Report*** from DHS's Office of Immigration Statistics.
- For more on the immigration court backlog and asylum share, see the MPI report ***The U.S. Asylum System in Crisis: Charting a Way Forward***.

Unauthorized Immigrants

How many unauthorized immigrants are in the United States?

The Migration Policy Institute (MPI) has estimated there were about 11 million unauthorized immigrants in the United States in 2018. Almost half resided in three states: California (24 percent), Texas (16 percent), and New York (8 percent). The vast majority (81 percent) lived in 178 counties with 10,000 or more unauthorized immigrants each, of which the top five—Los Angeles County, CA; Harris County, TX; Dallas County, TX; Cook County, IL; and Orange County, CA—accounted for 19 percent of all unauthorized immigrants.

- Read ***Unauthorized Immigrants in the United States: Stable Numbers, Changing Origins*** for an overview of the characteristics of this population.
- Visit the Data Hub's **Unauthorized Immigrant Population Profiles** for detailed sociodemographic information for the United States, 41 states and the District of Columbia, and 127 counties.
- MPI estimates of the number of unauthorized individuals who could receive legal status under various policy scenarios, including DREAMers, essential workers, and farmworkers, in ***Back on the Table: U.S. Legalization and the Unauthorized Immigrant Groups that Could Factor in the Debate***. See also ***MPI Estimates of Potential Beneficiaries under the DREAM Act of 2021***.

Where are unauthorized immigrants from?

Mexicans and Central Americans accounted for roughly two-thirds (68 percent, or 7.4 million) of U.S. unauthorized immigrants as of 2014-18, MPI estimates. About 1.5 million (14 percent) were from Asia; 783,000 (7 percent) from South America; 648,000 (6 percent) from Europe, Canada, or Oceania; 406,000 (4 percent) from the Caribbean; and 230,000 (2 percent) from Africa.

The top five countries of birth for unauthorized immigrants were Mexico (51 percent), El Salvador (7 percent), Guatemala (5 percent), and India and Honduras (4 percent each).

- This interactive map, **Unauthorized Immigrant Populations by Country and Region, Top States and Counties of Residence, 2018**, displays top U.S. concentrations by country or region of origin.

How many unauthorized immigrants live with children under age 18?

About 4.4 million unauthorized immigrants (42 percent of all unauthorized immigrants ages 15 and older) lived with one or more children under age 18 as of 2014-18, MPI estimates. Of this group, about 84 percent (3.7 million) resided with at least one U.S.-citizen child under age 18 and 16 percent (704,000) lived with only non-U.S.-citizen children.

How many children under age 18 live with at least one unauthorized immigrant parent?

Approximately 5.2 million children under age 18 lived with an unauthorized immigrant parent during the 2014-18 period, representing 7 percent of the U.S. child population. About 85 percent (4.4 million) of these children were U.S. citizens, another 14 percent (728,000) were themselves unauthorized, and 1 percent (63,000) were legally present, including LPRs and those with temporary visas.

How many people are eligible for the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program under original rules and how many applications have been received since its launch in 2012?

The DACA program, announced on June 15, 2012, offers a two-year grant of deportation relief and work authorization to eligible young unauthorized immigrants. Requirements for eligibility include:

- being at least 15 years old;
- having entered the United States before the age of 16;
- having continuously resided in the United States since June 15, 2007;
- being enrolled in school, having earned a high school diploma or its equivalent, or being an honorably discharged veteran; and
- having not been convicted of a felony, a significant misdemeanor, or three or more misdemeanors; or otherwise posing a threat to public safety or national security.

On September 5, 2017, the Trump administration announced the termination of DACA, with a six-month wind-down. Multiple court challenges over the decision led to preliminary injunctions that allowed DACA recipients to renew their protections starting January 2018, but only for current holders or those who held DACA in the past. The U.S. Supreme Court ruled in June 2020 that the DACA rescission violated federal law.

After additional federal district court rulings, including one in November 2020 invalidating a DHS policy memo seeking to bar new DACA applicants and shorten work authorization periods, USCIS has been accepting new DACA applications. On his first day in office, President Joe Biden announced his intent to preserve the DACA program.

MPI estimates that 1.7 million individuals were DACA-eligible as of December 2020, 1.3 million of whom were immediately eligible under the program's age and educational requirements.

Between August 15, 2012 (when the government began accepting applications) and September 30, 2020, a total of 827,100 applicants were approved, suggesting this is the maximum number of people who have ever held DACA status at one point or another during the life of the program. The agency granted 90 percent of the 914,600 initial applications; 9 percent (82,400) were denied, and 4,000 remained pending.

The top five states of residence for accepted initial applications since the program's inception are California (28 percent), Texas (16 percent), Illinois and New York (5 percent each), and Florida (4 percent). The top five countries of origin of accepted applicants are Mexico (78 percent), El Salvador (4 percent), Guatemala (3 percent), Honduras (2 percent), and South Korea (1 percent).

How many people still have DACA status?

USCIS reports as of September 30, 2020, 640,700 individuals had active DACA status.

The top states of residence for DACA active participants were California (29 percent), Texas (16 percent), and Illinois (5 percent), followed by New York, Florida, North Carolina, and Arizona (about 4 percent each).

The top countries of origin of active DACA program participants were Mexico (81 percent), El Salvador (4 percent), Guatemala (3 percent), Honduras (2 percent), and Peru, South Korea, Brazil, and Ecuador (about 1 percent each).

- Find USCIS data on **DACA applications and approvals**.
- View **MPI estimates of DACA program participation numbers and the immediately eligible** at national and state levels, as well as for top countries of origin.

How many people are covered by Temporary Protected Status?

Since the Immigration Act of 1990, the United States has occasionally granted a form of humanitarian relief called Temporary Protected Status (TPS) when the origin countries of foreign nationals in the United States experience natural disasters, armed conflicts, or other circumstances making return unsafe. TPS offers work authorization and protection from deportation for six- to 18-month periods. El Salvador was the first country to be designated for TPS, in 1990, to protect Salvadorans who had fled its civil war.

Since 1990, 22 countries have been designated for TPS. Ten countries currently are designated: El Salvador, Haiti, Honduras, Nepal, Nicaragua, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen. In 2020, an estimated 319,000 people from these ten countries had maintained active status under TPS, with the largest groups being Salvadorans (195,000), Hondurans (57,000), and Haitians (46,000).

The Trump administration attempted to halt extension of TPS for immigrants from El Salvador, Haiti, Honduras, Nepal, Nicaragua, and Sudan; court cases challenged the effort and TPS protections have been extended for those countries through October 4, 2021.

- Read more about the TPS program in this *Migration Information Source* **article**.
- View **an overview of the TPS program**.

How many unaccompanied children and families have been apprehended at the U.S.-Mexico border?

Enforcement encounters at the Southwest border decreased significantly in FY 2020, dropping sharply during the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic and increasing slightly in the last couple months of the fiscal year. (The term "enforcement encounters," used by DHS, covers both apprehensions and the expulsions of most Southwest border arrivals since a pandemic-related public-health order took effect in March 2020.) The U.S. Border Patrol made 52,200 encounters of children and adults travelling as families (known as "family units") and about 30,600 unaccompanied children along the Southwest border in FY 2020. This represents an 85 percent decrease from the 474,000 family units and 76,000 unaccompanied minors apprehended in FY 2019.

The apprehensions in FY 2019 were the highest recorded since recordkeeping began in FY 2008 for unaccompanied children and in FY 2012 for family units. But the FY 2020 encounters were also much lower than the 107,200 family units and 50,000 unaccompanied children apprehended in FY 2018, pointing to the impact of COVID-19 on activity at the border. In April, shortly after adopting new restrictions in response to the pandemic, only slightly more than 700 family units were intercepted at the Southwest border, a 79 percent decrease from the previous month. These children and families were primarily from Mexico, with smaller numbers from Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala

Note: The term "family unit" refers to individuals—either a child under 18 years old, parent, or legal guardian—apprehended with a family member by the U.S. Border Patrol.

- View the **most up-to-date DHS data** on apprehensions of unaccompanied children and family units.
- View **more DHS data on FY 2020 apprehensions**.

Immigration Enforcement

Note: The government fiscal year runs from October 1 to September 30. All figures for immigration control and enforcement given here are for the fiscal year. The data presented here are the most recent offered by U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

How many apprehensions of unauthorized immigrants occur at the border annually?

CBP reported 405,000 enforcement encounters at both the southern and northern borders in FY 2020, a significant decrease from 859,500 a year earlier.

Note: Apprehensions and expulsions are events, not individuals. In other words, the same individual can be apprehended more than once, with each apprehension counted separately. The recidivism rate has increased sharply since the expulsions policy began, given intercepted migrants are not being put into formal removal proceedings that could trigger criminal sanctions upon a future re-entry.

How many people are arrested by ICE within the United States yearly?

ICE made 103,600 administrative arrests in FY 2020, down 28 percent from a year earlier. ICE has attributed the drop to a change in focus during COVID-19. An administrative arrest is the arrest of an individual for a civil violation of U.S. immigration law, which is subsequently adjudicated by an immigration judge or through other administrative processes.

How many people are deported per year?

Removals and returns, which are carried out both by ICE and CBP, result in the confirmed movement of inadmissible or deportable aliens out of the United States. DHS reported a total of 531,300 removals and returns during FY 2019. CBP carried out 264,100 removals and returns in FY 2019, up 39 percent from 190,300 a year earlier. ICE carried out 267,300 removals and returns in FY 2019, a 4 percent increase from the prior year.

CBP data on FY 2020 returns and removals were not available at the time of writing, but ICE effectuated 185,900 removals and returns, a 30 percent decrease from FY 2019.

- For more information, see *FY 2020 ICE Enforcement and Removal Operations Report*.

Naturalization Trends

How many immigrants are naturalized citizens?

In FY 2019, 23.2 million immigrants were naturalized U.S. citizens, accounting for approximately 52 percent of the total foreign-born population (44.9 million) and 7 percent of the U.S. population (328.2 million), according to ACS estimates.

Of the 23.2 million naturalized citizens, 32 percent were naturalized between FY 2010 and 2019, 28 percent between FY 2000 and 2009, and 39 percent prior to FY 2000.

- Use this [Naturalization in the United States, 1910-Present](#) tool to learn more about naturalization population over time.

How many immigrants become U.S. citizens annually?

USCIS naturalized about 844,000 green-card holders in FY 2019, an 11 percent increase from the 762,000 in FY 2018. The number of petitions for naturalization filed in FY 2019 (831,000) fell by 1 percent from a year earlier (837,000). At the same time, the number of denied petitions

increased by 6 percent, from 93,000 in FY 2018 to 98,000 the following year. USCIS is taking longer to process naturalization applications, with average processing time increasing from 5.6 months in FY 2016 to 9.9 months in FY 2019.

From a historical perspective, naturalizations have increased dramatically in recent decades. On average, fewer than 120,000 LPRs became citizens each year between 1950 and 1969, 210,000 in the 1980s, 500,000 in the 1990s, and 680,000 during the 2000s. Naturalizations reached an all-time high in FY 2008, increasing 59 percent from 660,000 the prior year to 1,047,000. This came as a result of impending application fee increases and the promotion of U.S. citizenship in advance of the 2008 presidential election. Between 2010 and 2019, an average 730,000 immigrants received U.S. citizenship annually.

- For more historical data on naturalization, see **Naturalization in the United States, 1910-Present**.
- For more information, see ***Naturalization Trends in the United States***.
- For more information on USCIS processing times, see **Historical National Average Processing Time for All USCIS Offices**.

How many foreign nationals become U.S. citizens through military naturalization?

In FY 2019, 3,800 foreign-born military personnel became U.S. citizens, a 16 percent drop from the prior year (4,500) and the lowest number since FY 2002.

- For more information on the foreign born in the U.S. military, see ***Noncitizens in the U.S. Military: Navigating National Security Concerns and Recruitment Needs***.

Where are newly naturalized citizens from?

Of the new U.S. citizens in FY 2019, 14 percent were born in Mexico, 8 percent in India, and 5 percent each in the Philippines and China (see Table 6). Immigrants from these four countries, together with those from Cuba, Vietnam, the Dominican Republic, Iraq, El Salvador, and Jamaica comprised the top ten countries of birth for newly naturalized citizens in FY 2019. These countries accounted for 48 percent of the 844,000 new U.S. citizens that fiscal year.

Table 6. Top Ten Countries of Origin of Newly Naturalized Citizens, FY 2019

Country	Naturalized Persons	Share of Total
Total	844,000	100.0%
Mexico	122,000	14.5%
India	64,000	7.6%
Philippines	43,000	5.1%
China (mainland)	40,000	4.7%
Cuba	36,000	4.3%
Vietnam	25,000	3.0%
Dominican Republic	23,000	2.7%
Iraq	18,000	2.1%
El Salvador	18,000	2.1%
Jamaica	18,000	2.1%

Source: DHS Office of Immigration Statistics, *Yearbook of Immigration Statistics 2019*.

Where do newly naturalized citizens live?

In FY 2019, 55 percent of the newly naturalized lived in one of five states: California, with 18 percent (148,800); followed by 12 percent in Texas (97,700); 11 percent in Florida (96,100); 10 percent in New York (85,400); and 4 percent in New Jersey (36,700).

The top five metropolitan areas with the largest number of naturalizations were New York-Newark-Jersey City (108,000), Miami-Ft Lauderdale-Pompano Beach (60,600), Los Angeles-Long Beach-Anaheim (56,900), Houston-The Woodlands-Sugar Land (33,800), and Washington-Arlington-Alexandria (30,800). These five metro areas accounted for 34 percent of all naturalizations in FY 2019.

How many green-card holders are eligible to naturalize?

According to the latest available DHS estimates, about 9.1 million of the 13.6 million green-card holders residing in the United States on January 1, 2019 were eligible to naturalize.

- For more information, see *Estimates of the Lawful Permanent Resident Population*.

How long does it take on average for green-card holders to naturalize?

On average, immigrants held green cards for eight years before becoming U.S. citizens in 2019, unchanged from the year before. The time varied by country of origin: African-born immigrants spent an average six years in LPR status before naturalization, followed by those born in Asia (seven years), South America (eight years), Europe (nine years), and Oceania and North America (including Central America, ten years each).

In general, naturalization requires being at least 18 years of age, passing English and civic exams, and for most, residing in the United States with LPR status continuously for at least five years (three years for those married to a U.S. citizen).

- For more information, see **DHS Annual Flow Reports**.
- Read the **USCIS Naturalization Eligibility Requirements**.

Visa Backlogs

Notes on Visa Backlogs

Two types of backlogs impact the issuance of green cards.

The first is due to visa availability (with caps established in 1990):

- Family-sponsored preferences are limited to 226,000 visas per year.
- Employment-based permanent visas for foreign workers and their families are capped at 140,000 per year worldwide.
- Also, no country can receive more than 7 percent of the total annual number of family-sponsored and employment-based visas (approximately 25,600 visas).

The second type of backlog is due to processing delays of applicants' documents, which is related to government processing capacity as well as increased background and criminal checks.

How many visa applications for permanent immigration (green cards) are backlogged?

Because of limits on certain visa categories and per-country caps, the U.S. government in some cases is still processing applications that are more than two decades old. In February 2021, the State Department was processing some family-sponsored visa applications dating to September 1996, and employment-related visa applications from April 2009.

According to data on petitions submitted to the State Department, there were almost 4 million applicants (including spouses and minor children) who were on the waiting list as of November 1, 2020, a 10 percent increase from the same point in 2019 (when there were 3.6 million applicants).

The overwhelming majority of backlogs were family-sponsored applicants (3.8 million, which includes the principal applicant and his or her immediate family members). About 216,000 were employment-sponsored applicants and their families.

Of the overall 4 million applicants, 1.2 million were citizens of Mexico, followed by those from the Philippines (318,000), India (310,000), mainland China (247,000), and Vietnam (218,000). Family- and employment-based prospective immigrants who are waiting to adjust their status to lawful permanent residence from within the United States are not included in the State Department estimates.

USCIS also publishes backlog statistics, but only for petitions approved in one of the five employment-based categories. As of November 2020, slightly more than 500,000 approved employment-based immigrant petitions were awaiting a priority date. The figure corresponds to the number of primary applicants covered by these petitions but excludes their dependents. To MPI's knowledge, USCIS has not published backlog statistics on other types of green-card applications the agency adjudicates.

In other words, the overall number of people waiting for a green card—within and outside of the United States—is likely to be larger than the 4 million reported by the State Department and 500,000 reported by USCIS (as of November 2020).

- For more details about wait times by immigration category and country of origin, see the State Department [Visa Bulletin](#).
- For more on capped employment- and family-based preference categories, see [Explainer: How the U.S. Legal Immigration System Works](#).
- Read [Going to the Back of the Line: A Primer on Lines, Visa Categories, and Wait Times](#) for more on the green-card backlog.
- Read the [National Visa Center annual report](#) on immigrant visa waiting list and view [USCIS employment-based immigrant petition backlog data](#).

IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS OR COMMENTS ABOUT THIS ARTICLE, CONTACT US AT Source@MigrationPolicy.org

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