



Reliable & Objective Statistics to Inform Our Immigration Discussions

Discussion of hot topics can quickly become controversial, but a reliable, objective starting point can be found in the resources of government statistics. Government data sources can be invaluable for journalists, policymakers, educators, students, and any citizen seeking to be well-informed. The information that follows was drawn from the website of the Department of Homeland Security [Office of Immigration Statistics \(OIS\)](#).

There are four main immigration categories tracked by OIS. The full definitions are hyperlinked in the following but, briefly, [lawful permanent residents](#) (LPRs) are immigrants who have been granted lawful permanent U.S. residence and generally are eligible to apply for U.S. citizenship after a period of time; [non-immigrants](#) are foreign nationals granted temporary admission into the U.S.; a [refugee](#) is a person who is unable or unwilling to return to his or her country of nationality; and [unauthorized immigrants](#) are non-citizens who are not lawfully present.

Lawful Permanent Residents

- An estimated [13.6 million LPRs](#) lived in the U.S. in January 2019, including 9.2 million (68%) who were eligible to naturalize. An additional 17.4 million immigrants were naturalized or derived citizenship between 1980 and 2014. Mexico is the [largest country of origin](#) for both LPRs.
- About [1.1 million people](#) obtained LPR status in 2018. Just over half were already living in the U.S. when they adjusted to LPR status, and just under half were newly arriving immigrants. Of new LPRs, 63% were family sponsored immigrants (immediate relatives of U.S. citizens or family-sponsored preference immigrants); 13% were employment-based immigrants; and 14% were refugees.
- About [810,000 LPRs applied to become U.S. citizens](#) in 2018, and about 760,000 LPRs naturalized. These numbers are similar to those observed each year since 2010.
- The top countries of origin for new U.S. citizens were Mexico (17%), India (6.9%), China (5.2%), the Philippines (5.1%), and Cuba (4.2%).

Nonimmigrants

- Approximately [2.3 million nonimmigrant](#) workers, students, exchange visitors, and diplomats resided in the U.S. in 2016, the majority of which were workers (50%) or students (40%). In 2018, the U.S. permitted [186 million nonimmigrant admissions](#), including 179 million admissions of visitors for business and pleasure.

Refugees

- The [U.S. admitted 22,000 refugees](#) in 2018. The refugee number was down 58% from the previous year and was the lowest number of admissions since the passage of the Refugee Act of 1980.

Unauthorized Immigrants in U.S.

- An estimated [12.0 million unauthorized immigrants](#) were living in the U.S. on Jan. 1, 2015; the number is almost unchanged for the last decade.

Unauthorized Migration & Immigration Enforcement

- DHS estimates that [65-75% of aliens](#) – any [person not a citizen or national of the United States](#) – attempting to cross the border between ports of entry are apprehended in recent years. For the southwest border in 2017, this amounted to approximately [160,000 aliens who successfully crossed](#) without being apprehended, a 92% decrease from 2000.
- DHS estimates that [89% of attempted illegal border crossers](#) were detected by U.S. Customs and Border Protection in 2017. (Not all detections lead to apprehensions.)
- [Enforcement actions increased](#) in 2018 compared to 2017. For example, apprehensions were up 24%; inadmissibility determinations, 30%; notices to appear (i.e., documents to initiate removal proceedings) were up 37%; intakes to ICE detention facilities were up 23%; and repatriations, 14%. The increase in repatriations was the first since 2004.
- Aliens fare differently in the U.S. immigration enforcement system depending on their backgrounds. [Of aliens encountered during the 2014 surge](#) of southwest border arrivals, 92 percent of single Mexican adults and 97 percent of criminal aliens had been repatriated as of the end of FY 2017, versus three percent of non-Mexican unaccompanied children, 10 percent of family unit aliens (i.e., parents and children arriving together), and 33 percent of asylum-seekers.

Learn more with these OIS Resources

- [Estimates of the Unauthorized Immigrant Population Residing in the U.S.](#)
- [Estimates of the Lawful Permanent Resident Population in the U.S.](#)
- [U.S. Naturalizations: 2018](#)
- [U.S. Nonimmigrant Admissions: 2018](#)
- [Nonimmigrants Residing in the U.S.](#)
- [Refugees and Asylees: 2018](#)
- [FY2018 Border Security Metrics Report](#)
- [2014 Southwest Border Encounters: Three-Year Cohort Outcomes Analysis](#)

Objective government statistics are important elements of constructive dialogue and evidence-based policymaking. They provide a reliable and free snapshot of important aspects of our society—on topics ranging from health and safety, to the economy, to education. Its resources provide key information for geographical regions ranging from national to neighborhoods, and for time periods ranging from monthly to multi-year periods.

Government statistics are the gold standard of data because of the scientific rigor with which the data are collected, analyzed and shared. Help [Count on Stats](#) ensure public trust in government statistics is robust, and that the agencies have the resources they need to do their job effectively and efficiently.

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