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FAQS ON IMMIGRATION

(Thanks to SJRAISE members Jim Mendez and Amy Larsen for their work putting this fact sheet together)

Here are some facts regarding immigration that may help in your understanding of the immigration issue in America.

DEFINITIONS

1. **WHO IS AN IMMIGRANT?** "Foreign born " and "immigrant " are used interchangeably and refer to persons who are not US citizens at birth. This population includes naturalized citizens, lawful permanent residents (green card), refugees and asylees, persons on temporary visas, and unauthorized immigrants.

2. **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 for protection or asylum.

Refugees are nearly always outside of the United States when they are considered for resettlement, whereas

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 United States Customs and Immigration Service (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 (deportation) proceedings who appear before EOIR and people who apply for asylum at US borders and points of entry.

1. **NATURALIZED CITIZENS** are foreign-born individuals who have met all the requirements of becoming a citizen as established by the Immigration and Naturalization Act (INA) passed by the U.S. Congress



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2. **LEGAL PERMANENT RESIDENTS (LPR).** LPR's are also known as "green card" holders . They are non-citizen immigrants who have been granted lawful permanent residence in the United States, but who have not yet become US citizens.
3. **TEMPORARY RESIDENTS** are foreign nationals/non-citizens with a visa that grants them the right to stay in the US for a certain length of time. They may be in the US for tourism, for work, for education, for business, or for other reasons.

SOME NUMBERS ON IMMIGRATION.

Remember when reading numbers to always check when the numbers were obtained. Were the numbers from 2012? 2015? 2018? As of May, 2021, many of the most recent numbers on immigration come from Fiscal Year (FY) 2019. The numbers from FY 2020 are not yet available. The following numbers come from a February 11, 2021, report from Migration Policy Institute (MPI)

<https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/frequently-requested-statistics-immigrants-and-immigration-united-states-2020>.

1. **TOTAL NUMBER OF IMMIGRANTS** in US was estimated to be **44.9 million** in 2019. Of that number it's estimated that 10 -12 millions are unauthorized immigrants.
2. **NATURALIZED CITIZENS** — In FY 2019, **23.2 million immigrants were naturalized US citizens** , accounting for approximately 52 percent of the total estimated 44.9 million foreign -born persons living in the US.
3. **LEGAL PERMANENT RESIDENTS (LPR)** — The total Lawful Permanent Residents (LPR) population grew from 13.0 million in



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2015 to **13.6 million in 2019** . Among LPR's, about 9.2 million were eligible to naturalize in 2019.

4. **TEMPORARY RESIDENTS**— In fiscal year (FY) 2018, the US State Department issued 9 million temporary visas to nonimmigrants, a 7 percent decrease from a year earlier. **Nonimmigrant visas** are issued to foreign nationals seeking to enter the United States on a temporary basis for tourism, business, medical treatment and certain types of temporary work. The highest number of temporary nonimmigrant visas issued since FY 2000 was 11 million in FY 2015. **About 1 -2 million lawful temporary residents are in the US at any one time** depending on the year, the time of year and administration policy. Different types of temporary visas allow different lengths of time. The following is a list of some of the more common types of visas and the allowed length of stay:

- A. Business (B-1) for 3 months,
- B. Tourism (B-2) for 180 days Per Entry,
- C. Academic Student (F-1) can stay for 60 days after completion of the educational program,
- D. Skilled worker (H-1B for 3-6 years, H-2B for 1 year)
- E. Temporary agricultural worker (H-2A) can stay for maximum period of 3 years, then must leave for 3 months before returning.
- F. O-1 non-immigrant visa is for the individual who possesses extraordinary ability in the sciences, arts, education, business, or athletics, or who has a demonstrated record of extraordinary achievement in the motion picture or television industry and has been recognized nationally or internationally for those achievements.

[https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/immigration_migration -](https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/immigration_migration_-_statistics/yearbook/2019/naturalizations_2019.pdf)

[statistics/yearbook/2019/naturalizations_2019.pdf](https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/immigration_migration_-_statistics/yearbook/2019/naturalizations_2019.pdf)

Link to Department of Homeland Security on data regarding naturalizations in 2019.



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<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/visa-information-resources/all-visa-categories.html>

Link to the US State Department site on types of visas — temporary non-immigrant vs immigrant.

- 5. UNAUTHORIZED IMMIGRANTS ARE RESIDENTS WHO EITHER OVERSTAYED THEIR VISAS (62% in 2016) OR CROSSED THE BORDER WITHOUT AUTHORIZATION (38% in 2016)** According to the Center for Migration Studies, since 2010, the number of residents who overstayed their visa has been greater than the number of unauthorized immigrants crossing the border. It has been estimated that there were ~10-12 million unauthorized residents in the US in 2019. “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.” 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.
- 6. REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS.** The Trump administration resettled only **11,814 people in FY 2020**. All refugees are **required** to apply for a green card to become a permanent resident after one year in the United States. After five years of residency, they become eligible to apply for US citizenship. US immigration law allows **asylees** to apply for lawful permanent resident (LPR) status after they have been physically present in the



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US for at least one year since being granted asylum. The United States anticipates receiving more than 300,000 new asylum claimants and refugees in Fiscal Year (FY)2021. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic there is a **backlog of over 1.1 million asylum seekers** who are awaiting adjudication of their claims inside the United States. Asylum *applicants* are not eligible for the Reception & Placement assistance offered to refugees.

1. <https://www.state.gov/reports/report-to-congress-on-proposed-refugee-admissions-for-fy-2021/>
2. <https://immigrationforum.org/article/fact-sheet-u-s-refugee-resettlement/>

ARE IMMIGRANT WORKERS TAKING JOBS FROM CITIZENS?

The answer is “NO.” Neither authorized immigrants nor unauthorized immigrants are taking jobs from citizens. The fact is that both authorized immigrants, and unauthorized immigrants, are working in occupations that need more workers. That includes both highly skilled and lower-skill occupations.

The share of immigrants in the US labor force has increased significantly, from 10% in 1995 to 17% in 2018. The number of US-born workers is not increasing fast enough to support a growing economy. Current workers pay the taxes that support the Social Security and Medicare trust funds. With an increasing number of retiring baby boomers, there will not be enough US-born workers to cover the costs of the boomers. Without



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decreases in Social Security benefits, increases in taxes, eliminating the Social Security tax cap or an influx of immigrant workers, the retiring baby boomers will bankrupt the Social Security trust fund. According to a March 8, 2017, article from Pew Research, “Immigrants will play the primary role in the future growth of the working-age population (though they will remain a minority of it).” Without an increasing number of immigrants, the number of working age adults (25-64) in the US would decline by 17.6 million by 2035.

<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/03/08/immigration-projected-to-drive-growth-in-u-s-working-age-population-through-at-least-2035/>.

<https://www.cbpp.org/research/poverty-and-inequality/immigrants-contribute-greatly-to-us-economy-despite-administrations>

August 15, 2019 article from the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP) that discusses the contribution of immigrants to the economy.

WHAT JOBS DO IMMIGRANTS PERFORM?

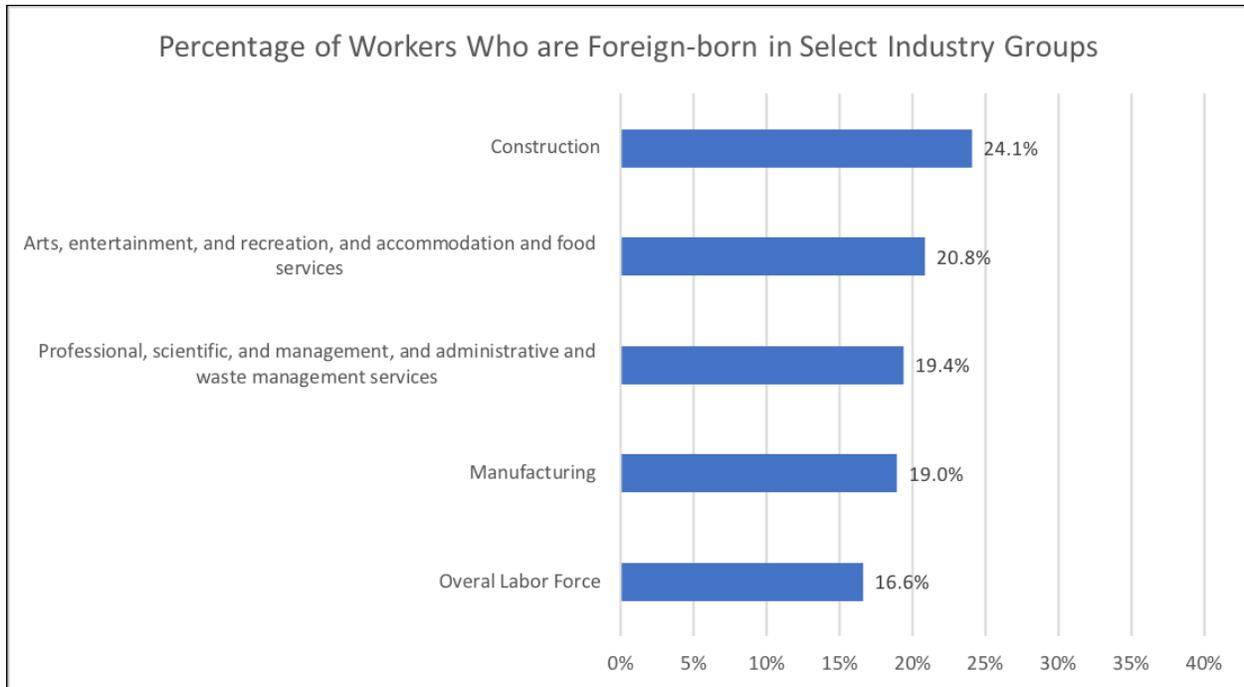
On June 5, 2018, the National Immigration Forum published an article on occupations immigrants work in, percentage of immigrants in different occupations, and occupations where undocumented immigrants make up large percentage of workers. Overall, about one-third of all immigrant workers do not have lawful authorization to work in the US. That percentage is higher in some occupations than in others. The article states, “2014 census data shows that undocumented immigrants make up 12.7 percent of the construction workforce, 8.7 percent of the leisure and hospitality workforce, and 6.2 percent of all business service workers.”



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<https://immigrationforum.org/article/immigrants-as-economic-contributors-they-are-the-new-american-workforce/>

Here is a chart of some of occupations more commonly held by immigrants.



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This chart does not include agriculture workers. Due to the COVID-19 epidemic we learned last year about “essential workers.” The report concluded that, “A remarkable **70 percent of the undocumented labor force consists of essential workers** (emphasis supplied).” During the COVID pandemic, agricultural workers were deemed essential workers. According to an April 2, 2020, New York Times article, “About half of all crop hands in the United States, more than one million, are undocumented immigrants, according to the Agriculture Department. Growers and labor contractors estimate that the share is closer to 75 percent.”

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/02/us/coronavirus-undocumented-immigrant-farmworkers-agriculture.html>



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Nearly one quarter of workers in the construction industry are immigrants. Immigrants, especially Latino immigrants, are more likely than U.S.-born workers to work in lower-skill occupations. Even so, over the recent decades more immigrants are being employed in high-skill, non-mechanical jobs according to a Pew Research Center analysis of federal government data. The largest group of recent arrivals are Asian immigrants and they tend to be employed in higher-skill occupations.

<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/02/24/the-share-of-immigrant-workers-in-high-skill-jobs-is-rising-in-the-u-s/>

DO IMMIGRANTS PAY TAXES?

YES. “Immigrants, including those without documentation, pay billions of dollars in taxes to federal, state and local governments every year.

Immigrants paid **\$405.4 billion in taxes in 2017**, including an estimated \$27.2 billion in taxes paid by undocumented immigrants.” Total includes federal, state, and local taxes. In particular, undocumented immigrants contribute more in tax revenue than they collect. There is some research by economists that suggest the legalization of undocumented immigrants would increase the immigrants' earnings and consumption considerably, and thus increase US gross domestic product. These studies indicate that comprehensive immigration reform (aware of the unlikelyhood of such), would also boost immigrants' effective tax rate from 8 to 8.6 percent.

<https://americasvoice.org/blog/immigration-101-immigrant-taxes/>

<https://www.newamericaneconomy.org/locations/national/>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Economic_impact_of_illegal_immigrants_in_the_United_States

<https://itep.org/immigration/>



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<https://itep.org/undocumented-immigrants-state-local-tax-contributions-2017/>

A 2017 Study done by the Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy (ITEP) showed that, “like all others living and working in the United States, undocumented immigrants are taxpayers too and collectively contribute an estimated \$11.74 billion to state and local coffers each year via a combination of sales and excise, personal income, and property taxes.

On average, the nation’s estimated 11 million undocumented immigrants pay 8 percent of their incomes in state and local taxes every year. While it is unlikely to happen in the current political environment, undocumented immigrants’ state and local tax contributions could increase by up to \$2.1 billion under comprehensive immigration reform, boosting their effective tax rate to 8.6 percent.”

Granting Legal Status to All Undocumented Immigrants Would Boost Their State and Local Tax Contributions

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 30,000 ceiling for FY 2019, 18,000 in FY 2020, and 15,000 in FY 2021. **In FY 2020, no more than 11,800 refugees were actually resettled in the United States**, amounting to only 66 percent of the admission ceiling (18,000) allocated for the year. These numbers are the lowest since the resettlement program was formally created in 1980. The Biden administration pledged to reverse the cuts,



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including by raising the FY 2022 ceiling to 125,000 refugees, but as of April, 2021 has not done so.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Myanmar (formerly 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.