

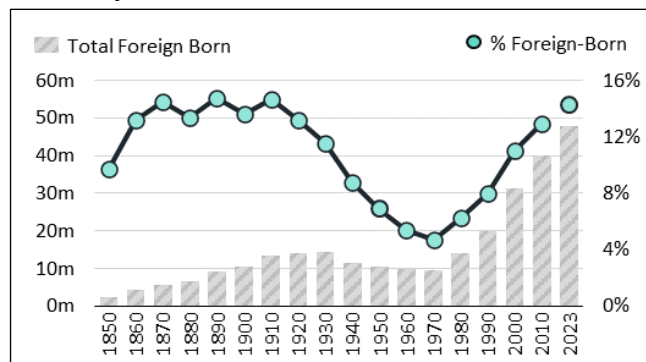
Updated September 17, 2024

# Citizenship and Immigration Statuses of the U.S. Foreign-Born Population

The U.S. foreign-born population consists of individuals living in the United States who were not U.S. citizens at birth. In 2023, according to the American Community Survey (ACS), an estimated 47.8 million foreign-born people resided in the United States, representing 14.3% of the total U.S. population. The ACS is a U.S. Census Bureau survey conducted each month with a sample of households in 50 U.S. states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico.

The proportion of foreign-born individuals among the total U.S. population has changed over time. Since 1850 (the first decennial census to collect data on nativity), the foreign-born proportion of the total U.S. population has ranged from a high of 14.8% (1890) to a low of 4.7% (1970). During the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the foreign-born proportion remained relatively consistent, averaging around 14%, through 1920 (**Figure 1**). From 1910 to 1970, the foreign-born proportion declined each decade; since 1970, it has steadily increased.

**Figure 1. U.S. Foreign-Born: Total and Percentage of Total Population, 1850-2023**



**Source:** 1850-2000: Campbell Gibson and Kay Jung, "Historical Census Statistics on the Foreign-Born Population of the United States: 1850 to 2000," U.S. Census Bureau Population Division, 2006. 2010 and 2023: ACS, Table B05001.

The foreign-born are heterogeneous with regard to citizenship and immigration status. They include the following:

- **resident nonimmigrants**, who are a subset of nonimmigrant (temporary) visa holders admitted for a limited period of time and specified purpose whose classes of admission are associated with U.S. residency, including temporary workers, students, exchange visitors, and diplomats;
- **lawful permanent residents** (LPRs, or *green card* holders), who can reside and work lawfully and permanently in the United States;

- **naturalized U.S. citizens**, who acquired U.S. citizenship generally after fulfilling residency and other requirements; and
- **unauthorized immigrants** who have entered the United States without inspection or have overstayed their period of lawful admission, including those who hold a temporary, discretionary status such as Temporary Protected Status (TPS) or Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA).

Researchers find that government surveys tend to undercount the foreign-born population, particularly the unauthorized, compared with the native-born population. Because of these undercounts, and different survey and administrative data sources used, the sum of the subgroups enumerated in each section of this In Focus exceeds the total foreign-born population as measured by the ACS.

## Resident Nonimmigrants

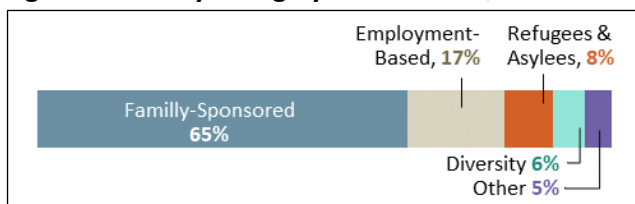
Nonimmigrant visas are issued to foreign nationals for specific purposes and on temporary bases. Typically, the Department of State (DOS) has issued 9 million to 10 million nonimmigrant visas annually. In FY2023, DOS issued 10.4 million nonimmigrant visas.

The majority of nonimmigrant visas are issued in categories related to nonresidential purposes (e.g., tourists). However, some nonimmigrants are admitted for purposes associated with U.S. residence. Approximately 3.2 million nonimmigrant workers, students, exchange visitors, diplomats, and their relatives were residing in the United States in 2019, according to the most recent Department of Homeland Security (DHS) estimate. Nonimmigrant workers represented the largest category (1.4 million).

## Lawful Permanent Residents

DHS's Office of Homeland Security Statistics (OHSS) estimates that 12.7 million LPRs lived in the United States in January 2023. Typically, approximately 1 million people become LPRs each fiscal year. In FY2023, 1.2 million persons obtained LPR status; 48% were new arrivals to the United States and 52% adjusted to LPR status from a nonimmigrant status within the United States.

The largest number of LPRs are admitted through family-sponsored categories, followed by employment-based categories, grants of refugee status and asylum, and the diversity visa (DV) program (**Figure 2**).

**Figure 2. LPRs by Category of Admission, FY2023**

**Source:** DHS, OHSS, *Legal Immigration and Adjustment of Status Report Fiscal Year 2023*.

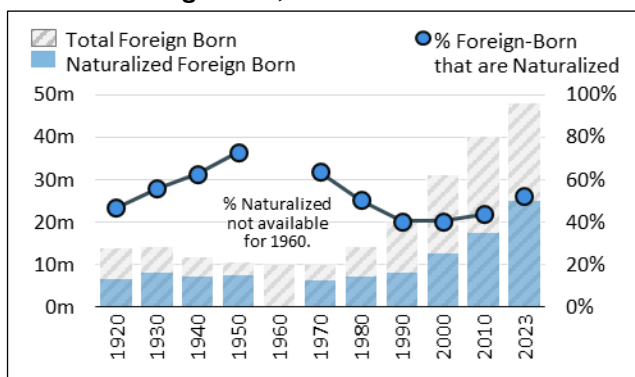
Statutory caps limit the annual number of individuals who can be granted LPR status through the family-sponsored system (480,000), employment-based system (140,000), and DV program (55,000). Family-sponsored categories include numerically limited (226,000) preference immigrants and numerically unlimited *immediate relatives* of U.S. citizens. Therefore, the number of persons who acquire LPR status through the family-sponsored system may, and regularly does, exceed its annual permeable limit. LPRs from any single country cannot exceed 7% of the total annual limit of numerically limited family-sponsored and employment-based preference immigrants.

OHSS estimated that 9 million LPRs were eligible to *naturalize*, or become U.S. citizens, in 2023, based on meeting U.S. residence and other requirements.

## Naturalized Citizens

Approximately 25 million foreign-born individuals in the United States are naturalized U.S. citizens, representing about half (52%) of the foreign-born population in 2023. In FY2023, 877,770 individuals naturalized.

During the last century, the proportion of naturalized citizens relative to the total foreign-born population peaked in 1950 (74.5%) and then declined, reaching its lowest point (40.3%) in 2000, before increasing to its current level (Figure 3).

**Figure 3. Naturalized Foreign-Born as a Proportion of the Total Foreign-Born, 1920-2023**

**Source:** 1900-2000: Campbell Gibson and Kay Jung, "Historical Census Statistics on the Foreign-Born Population of the United States: 1850 to 2000," U.S. Census Bureau Population Division, February 2006. 2010 and 2023: ACS data, Table B05001.

**Note:** The 1960 Decennial Census did not ask respondents about their citizenship status.

## Unauthorized Population

The unauthorized population is challenging to measure. There are no official counts of unauthorized immigrants living in the United States. Census Bureau surveys like the ACS measure whether an individual is foreign-born and whether they are a U.S. citizen but most do not collect information on immigration status. However, federal agencies and nongovernmental researchers have long produced estimates of the unauthorized population, drawing on survey data and various methodologies.

Recent estimates of the number of unauthorized individuals living in the United States range from 11.0 million to 11.7 million. Based on these estimates, the unauthorized population represents about one-quarter of all foreign-born individuals living in the United States.

Some policies allow certain foreign nationals to remain in the United States regardless of whether they have a lawful immigration status, but they do not provide pathways to LPR status. Individuals covered by these programs are generally included in unauthorized population estimates. They include individuals granted TPS (863,880 as of March 2024), which is a blanket form of humanitarian relief; and DACA (535,030 as of June 2024), which is granted to certain eligible persons brought to the United States as children.

Other individuals may be allowed to remain in the United States temporarily with immigration *parole*, which is granted on a case-by-case basis, for urgent humanitarian reasons or significant public benefit. In recent years, the Biden Administration has extended special parole processes for particular populations who meet specific criteria. There is no publicly available government source of the total number of individuals residing in the United States with parole grants.

## Recent Migrant Arrivals

In recent years, the United States has experienced an unprecedented level of migrants arriving at the U.S.-Mexico border who, in many cases, are seeking asylum and do not otherwise have permission to enter the country. Individuals who are charged with an immigration violation by DHS may pursue their asylum claims in the removal (deportation) process and, if they are not subject to mandatory detention, may be released to reside temporarily in the United States while they await their removal proceedings in immigration court. Some of these individuals are covered by certain legal protections such as humanitarian parole or TPS; others may be released with no other status or protection.

Through May of FY2024, according to OHSS, DHS's U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) released or paroled approximately 1.3 million migrants to await their removal proceedings. Since June 2024, the Biden Administration has implemented new limitations on asylum eligibility that appear to have reduced the number of individuals who are being released into the United States.

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