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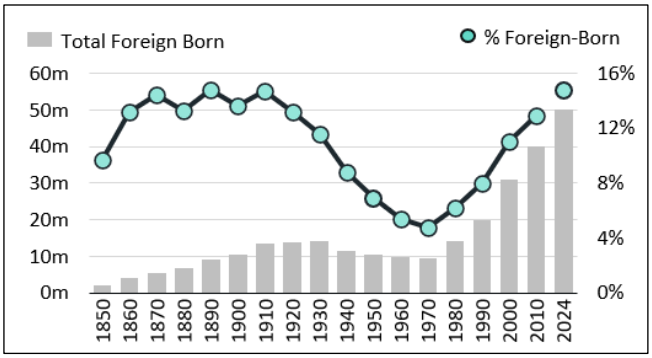
Updated September 22, 2026

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 2024, according to the American Community Survey (ACS), an estimated 50.2 million foreign-born people resided in the United States, representing approximately 14.8% of the total U.S. population, equaling the highest proportion ever recorded since 1890. 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 year the decennial census collected data on nativity), the foreign-born proportion of the total U.S. population has ranged from to a high of 14.8% (1890 and 2024) to a low of 4.7% (1970). During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the foreign-born proportion remained relatively consistent, averaging around 14% from 1860 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, 1850-2024



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 2024: ACS, Table B05001.

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

- **resident nonimmigrants**, a subset of nonimmigrant (temporary) visa holders admitted for a limited time and specified purpose whose classes of admission are associated with U.S. residency, including temporary workers, students, and diplomats;
- **refugees and asylees** who are unable or unwilling to return to their countries because of persecution and who may become LPRs after one year;
- **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;
- **unauthorized immigrants** who have entered the United States without inspection or have overstayed their periods of lawful admission; and
- **persons with temporary, discretionary permissions to enter or remain in the country**, such as Temporary Protected Status (TPS), Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), and immigration parole.

Resident Nonimmigrants

Nonimmigrant visas are issued to foreign nationals for specific purposes and on temporary bases. Typically, the Department of State has issued 9 million to 10 million nonimmigrant visas annually. In FY2024, it issued nearly 11 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 3.6 million nonimmigrant workers, students, exchange visitors, diplomats, and their relatives were residing in the United States in FY2024, according to the Department of Homeland Security's Office of Homeland Security Statistics (OHSS). Temporary workers represented the largest category (1.7 million) of resident nonimmigrants, followed by students (1.2 million).

Refugees and Asylees

Refugees are persons outside their countries who are unable or unwilling to return because they have experienced persecution or have a well-founded fear of persecution based on race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group. Refugees are processed and admitted to the United States from abroad through the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP). Refugees may apply to adjust to LPR status after one year in refugee status. USRAP has been suspended since January 2025 with some exceptions. In the first nine months of FY2026, there were 7,730 refugee admissions.

Persons who meet the definition of *refugee* but are already present in the United States may apply for and be granted asylum, either by DHS's U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (*affirmative asylum*) or, for those in removal proceedings, by immigration courts in the Department of

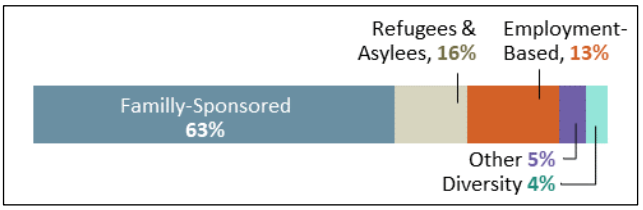
Justice's Executive Office for Immigration Review (*defensive asylum*). Asylees are eligible to apply to adjust to LPR status after one year. In FY2024, 68,000 principal applicants were granted asylum.

Lawful Permanent Residents

OHSS estimated that 12.8 million LPRs lived in the United States in January 2024. Typically, approximately 1 million people become LPRs each fiscal year. In FY2024, 1,364,090 persons obtained LPR status; 43% were new arrivals to the United States, and 57% adjusted to LPR status from within the United States.

The largest number of individuals who obtained LPR status in 2024 were admitted through family-sponsored categories, followed by adjustments of status of refugees and asylees, employment-based categories, and the diversity visa program (**Figure 2**).

Figure 2. LPRs by Category of Admission, FY2024



Source: OHSS, *Legal Immigration and Adjustment of Status Report Fiscal Year 2024*.

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 diversity visa 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.

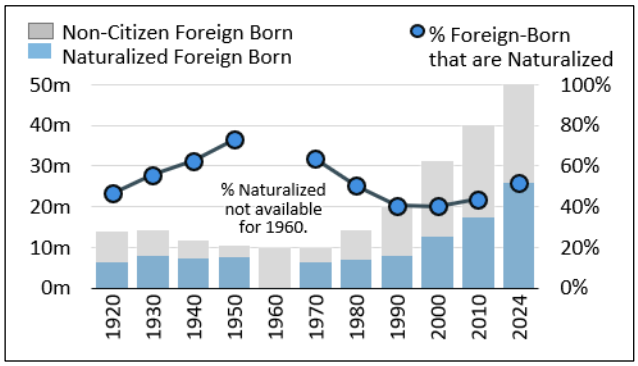
OHSS estimated that 8.5 million LPRs were potentially eligible to *naturalize*, or become U.S. citizens, as of January 2025 based on meeting U.S. residence and other requirements. Typically, only a relatively small subset of this number apply to naturalize.

Naturalized Citizens

Approximately 25.8 million foreign-born individuals in the United States are naturalized U.S. citizens, representing about half (51%) of the foreign-born population in 2024. In FY2024, 818,570 individuals naturalized.

During the past 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, 1920-2024



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 2024: 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 such as the ACS measure whether individuals are foreign-born and whether they are U.S. citizens, 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.

In 2024, the unauthorized population was estimated to range between 14.6 million to 15.8 million individuals living in the United States. Based on these estimates, the unauthorized population represents around 30% of foreign-born individuals living in the United States.

Persons with Discretionary Permissions

Some policies allow certain foreign nationals to enter or remain in the United States temporarily, regardless of whether they have lawful immigration statuses, 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, DACA, and immigration parole.

In March 2025, 1.3 million individuals were covered by TPS, which provides protection from removal for certain aliens from countries designated by the DHS Secretary as unsafe for their return. Since that time, the Trump Administration has terminated 13 of 17 TPS country designations. As of June 30, 2026, 436,350 individuals were covered by DACA, which is granted to certain persons brought to the United States as children. Immigration parole is granted on a case-by-case basis for urgent humanitarian reasons or significant public benefit. There is no publicly available government source of the total number of individuals residing in the United States with parole grants.

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IF11806

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