



Immigrants in the United States

The United States was built, in part, by immigrants—and the nation has long been the beneficiary of the new energy and ingenuity that immigrants bring. Today, over 13 percent of the nation’s residents are foreign-born, almost half of whom are naturalized citizens. Nearly 72 percent of all immigrants, who come from diverse backgrounds across the globe, report speaking English well or very well.

Immigrants make up significant shares of the U.S. workforce in a range of industries, accounting for over 41 percent of all farming, fishing, and forestry workers—as well as nearly 25 percent of those working in computer and math sciences. As workers, business owners, taxpayers, and neighbors, immigrants are an integral part of the country’s diverse and thriving communities and make extensive contributions that benefit all.

One in eight U.S. residents is an immigrant, while one in nine residents is a native-born U.S. citizen with at least one immigrant parent.

- In 2015, 43.3 million immigrants (foreign-born individuals) comprised 13.5 percent of the national population.¹
- The United States was home to 21 million women, 19.8 million men, and 2.5 million children who were immigrants.²
- The top countries of origin for immigrants were Mexico (27.8 percent of immigrants), India (5.5 percent), China (4.8 percent), the Philippines (4.6 percent), and El Salvador (3.2 percent).³
- In 2016, 37.2 million people in the United States (11.7 percent of the country’s population) were native-born Americans who had at least [one immigrant parent](#).⁴

Nearly half of all immigrants in the United States are naturalized citizens.

- 20.7 million immigrants (47.8 percent) had naturalized as of 2015,⁵ and 8.4 million immigrants were eligible to become [naturalized U.S. citizens](#) in 2015.⁶
- The majority of immigrants (71.8 percent) reported speaking English “well” or “very well.”⁷

Immigrants in the United States are concentrated at both ends of the educational spectrum.

- More than one in four adult immigrants had a college degree or more education in 2015, while almost the same share had less than a high school diploma.⁸

Education Level	Share (%) of All Immigrants	Share (%) of All Natives
College degree or more	29.4	30.9
Some college	18.7	31.1
High school diploma only	22.5	28.6
Less than a high-school diploma	29.3	9.4

Millions of U.S. citizens live with at least one family member who is undocumented.

- 11.1 million [undocumented immigrants](#) comprised 26 percent of the immigrant population and 3.5 percent of the total U.S. population in 2014.⁹
- 16.7 million people, including 7 million born in the United States, lived in the country with at least one [undocumented family member](#) between 2010 and 2014.¹⁰
- During the same period, 1 in 12 children in the country was a U.S. citizen living with at least one undocumented family member (5.9 million children in total).¹¹

The United States is home to nearly 690,000 active Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipients.¹²

- Approximately 689,800 active [DACA recipients live in the United States](#), while DACA has been granted to about 800,000 people in total since 2012.¹³
- As of 2016, 68 percent of [DACA-eligible immigrants](#) in the United States, or 886,814 people, had applied for DACA.¹⁴
- An additional 398,000 people in the United States satisfied all but the educational requirements for DACA, and another 228,000 would be eligible as they grew older.¹⁵

Nearly one in six U.S. workers is an immigrant, together making up a vital part of the country’s labor force in a range of industries.

- 27.2 million immigrant workers comprised 16.9 percent of the U.S. labor force in 2015.¹⁶

- Immigrant workers were most numerous in the following U.S. industries:

Industry	Number of Immigrant Workers
Health Care and Social Assistance	3,854,400
Manufacturing	3,359,742
Accommodation and Food Services	3,171,569
Retail Trade	2,905,527
Construction	2,656,500

Analysis of the U.S. Census Bureau's 2015 American Community Survey 1-year PUMS data by the American Immigration Council.

- The largest shares of immigrant workers were in the following U.S. industries:¹⁷

Industry	Immigrant Share (%) (of all industry workers)
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing & Hunting	27.4
Construction	22.2
Administrative & Support; Waste Management; and Remediation Services	22.0
Accommodation and Food Services	20.9
Other Services (except Public Administration)	20.6

Analysis of the U.S. Census Bureau's 2015 American Community Survey 1-year PUMS data by the American Immigration Council.

Immigrants are an integral part of the U.S. workforce in a range of occupations.

- In 2015, immigrant workers were most numerous in the following occupation groups:¹⁸

Occupation Category	Number of Immigrant Workers
Office and Administrative Support	2,692,238
Sales and Related	2,616,933
Building and Grounds Cleaning & Maintenance	2,432,692
Construction and Extraction	2,394,349
Management	2,364,294

Analysis of the U.S. Census Bureau's 2015 American Community Survey 1-year PUMS data by the American Immigration Council.

- The largest shares of immigrant workers were in the following occupation groups:¹⁹

Occupation Category	Immigrant Share (%) (of all workers in occupation)
Farming, Fishing, and Forestry	41.3
Building and Grounds Cleaning & Maintenance	31.2
Construction and Extraction	24.6
Computer and Mathematical Sciences	24.4
Life, Physical, and Social Sciences	21.6

Analysis of the U.S. Census Bureau's 2015 American Community Survey 1-year PUMS data by the American Immigration Council.

- Undocumented immigrants comprised 5 percent of the workforce in 2014.²⁰

Immigrants in the United States contribute billions of dollars in taxes.

- [Immigrant-led households](#) across the United States contributed a total of \$223.6 billion in federal taxes and \$104.6 billion in combined state and local taxes in 2014.²¹
- Undocumented immigrants in the United States paid an estimated \$11.7 billion in combined [state and local taxes](#) in 2014. Their estimated contribution would rise to \$13.9 billion if they could receive legal status.²²
- [DACA recipients](#) paid an estimated \$2 billion in combined state and local taxes in 2016.²³

As consumers, immigrants add hundreds of billions of dollars to the U.S. economy.

- In the United States, residents of immigrant-led households had \$926.9 billion in collective [spending power](#) (after-tax income) in 2014.²⁴

Immigrant entrepreneurs in the United States generate tens of billions of dollars in business revenue.

- 3.3 million immigrant business owners accounted for 20.3 percent of all self-employed U.S. residents in 2015 and generated \$72.3 billion in business income.²⁵
- In 2015, immigrants accounted for 21.9 percent of all business owners in 50 of the largest U.S. metropolitan areas.²⁶

Endnotes

1. “Foreign born” does not include people born in Puerto Rico or U.S. island areas or U.S. citizens born abroad of American parent(s). U.S. Census Bureau, 2015 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates. The American Immigration Council elected to use data from the 2015 ACS 1-Year estimates wherever possible to provide the most current information available. Since these estimates are based on a smaller sample size than the ACS 5-year, however, they are more sensitive to fluctuations and may result in greater margins of error (compared to 5-year estimates).
2. Children are defined as people age 17 or younger. Men and women do not include children. Ibid.
3. Analysis of the U.S. Census Bureau’s 2015 American Community Survey 1-year PUMS data by the American Immigration Council.
4. Analysis of data from the 2016 Current Population Survey by the American Immigration Council, using IPUMS-CPS. Sarah Flood, Miriam King, Steven Ruggles, and J. Robert Warren, *Integrated Public Use Microdata Series, Current Population Survey: Version 5.0* [dataset] (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, 2017).
5. 2015 ACS 1-Year Estimates.
6. Augmented IPUMS-ACS data, as published in “State-Level Unauthorized Population and Eligible-to-Naturalize Estimates,” Center for Migration Studies data tool, accessed August 2017, <http://data.cmsny.org/state.html>.
7. Figure includes immigrants who speak only English. Data based on survey respondents age 5 and over. Analysis of 2015 ACS 1-Year Estimates by the American Immigration Council.
8. Data based on survey respondents age 25 and older. 2015 ACS 1-Year Estimates.
9. Pew Research Center, “U.S. unauthorized immigration population estimates,” November 3, 2016, <http://www.pewhispanic.org/interactives/unauthorized-immigrants/>.
10. Silva Mathema, “State-by-State Estimates of the Family Members of Unauthorized Immigrants,” University of Southern California’s Center for the Study of Immigrant Integration and the Center for American Progress, March 2017, <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/immigration/news/2017/03/16/427868/state-state-estimates-family-members-unauthorized-immigrants/>.
11. American Immigration Council analysis of data from the 2010-2014 ACS 5-Year, using Silva Mathema’s “State-by-State Estimates of the Family Members of Unauthorized Immigrants” and IPUMS-USA. Steven Ruggles, Katie Genadek, Ronald Goeken, Josiah Grover, and Matthew Sobek, *Integrated Public Use Microdata Series: Version 7.0* [dataset] (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, 2017).
12. The “Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals” (DACA) initiative began in 2012 and provides certain immigrants (those who were brought to the United States as children and meet specific requirements) with temporary relief from deportation, or deferred action. American Immigration Council, “Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals: A Q&A Guide,” August 17, 2012, www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/deferred-action-childhood-arrivals-qa-guide. The number of DACA recipients reflects USCIS’ estimate of those with active DACA grants as of September 4, 2017. U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services CLAIMS3 and ELIS Systems, *Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals: Population Data* (Washington, DC: Dept. of Homeland Security, September 20, 2017), Approximate Active DACA Recipients: State of Residence as of September 4, 2017 [dataset], <https://www.uscis.gov/daca2017>.
13. Ibid.
14. “DACA-eligible” refers to immigrants who were immediately eligible to apply for DACA as of 2016. Migration Policy Institute analysis of U.S. Census Bureau data from the 2014 American Community Survey (ACS), 2010-14 ACS pooled, and the 2008 Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), as cited in “Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) Data Tools,” U.S. Total, accessed June 2017, www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/data-hub/deferred-action-childhood-arrivals-daca-profiles.
15. Ibid.
16. Analysis of 2015 ACS 1-year PUMS data by the American Immigration Council. Categories are based on the 2012 North American Industry Classification System (NAICS), www.census.gov/eos/www/naics/index.html.
17. Ibid.
18. Analysis of 2015 ACS 1-year PUMS data by the American Immigration Council. Categories are based on the 2010 Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) system, www.bls.gov/soc/major_groups.htm.
19. Ibid.
20. Pew Research Center, “U.S. unauthorized immigration population estimates,” 2016.
21. New American Economy, “Taxes and Spending Power,” accessed August 2017, <http://www.newamericaneconomy.org/issues/taxes-&-spending-power/>.
22. Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy (ITEP), *Undocumented Immigrants’ State & Local Tax Contributions* (Washington, DC: March 2017), 3, <https://itep.org/undocumented-immigrants-state-local-tax-contributions-2/>.
23. ITEP, *State & Local Tax Contributions of Young Undocumented Immigrants* (Washington, DC: April 2017), Appendix 1, <https://itep.org/state-local-tax-contributions-of-young-undocumented-immigrants/>.
24. New American Economy, “Taxes and Spending Power.”
25. “Business owners” include people who are self-employed, at least 18 years old, and work at least 15 hours per week at their businesses. Analysis of 2015 ACS 1-year PUMS data by the American Immigration Council.
26. American Immigration Council analysis of 2016 CPS data. Flood, King, Ruggles, and Warren, *IPUMS CPS* dataset.