

Key facts about U.S. immigration policies and proposed changes

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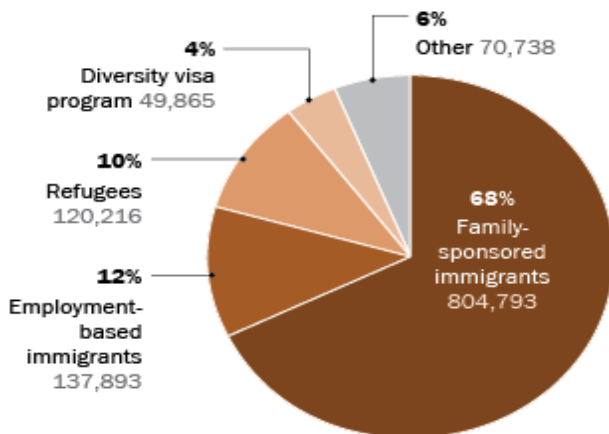
Nearly 34 million lawful immigrants live in the United States. Many live and work in the country after receiving lawful permanent residence (also known as a green card), while others receive temporary visas available to students and workers. In addition, roughly 1 million unauthorized immigrants have temporary permission to live and work in the U.S. through the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals and Temporary Protected Status programs.

For years, proposals have sought to shift the nation's immigration system away from its current emphasis on family reunification and employment-based migration, and toward a points-based system that prioritizes the admission of immigrants with certain education and employment qualifications. These proposals have received renewed attention under the Trump administration. Here are key details about existing U.S. immigration programs:

Family-based immigration

Green card categories that have faced or may face reductions

Admission categories for fiscal 2016 lawful permanent residents



Note: "Other" includes parolees and asylees.

Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

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In fiscal 2016, 804,793 people received family-based U.S. lawful permanent residence. This program allows someone to receive a green card if they already have a spouse, child, sibling or parent living in the country with U.S. citizenship or, in some cases, a green card. Immigrants from countries with large numbers of applicants often wait for years to receive a green card because a single country can account for no more than 7% of all green cards issued annually. President Donald Trump has proposed restricting family-based green cards to only spouses and minor children. For other family members, a Senate bill would make a limited number of green cards available under a skills-based point system. Today, family-based immigration – referred to by some as “chain migration” – is the most common way people gain green cards, in recent years accounting for about 70% of the more than 1 million people who receive them annually.

Refugee admissions

The U.S. admitted 84,995 refugees in fiscal 2016, a total that declined to 53,716 in fiscal 2017 – the fewest admissions since 2007. This decline reflects a lower admissions cap. For fiscal 2018, refugee admissions have been capped at 45,000, the lowest since Congress created the modern refugee program in 1980 for those fleeing persecution in their home countries. One of Trump’s first acts as president in 2017 was to freeze refugee admissions, citing security concerns. Admissions from most countries eventually restarted, though applicants from 11 nations deemed “high risk” by the administration were admitted on a case-by-case basis. In January 2018, refugee admissions resumed for all countries.

Employment-based green cards

In fiscal 2016, 137,893 employment-based green cards were awarded to foreign workers and their families. A Senate bill would replace the existing eligibility criteria with a point system similar to that proposed for family-based green cards. The new system would eliminate a green card for immigrant investors who put money into commercial U.S. enterprises that are intended to create jobs or benefit the economy. This path to a green card, the EB-5 program, has drawn criticism from some lawmakers.

Diversity visas

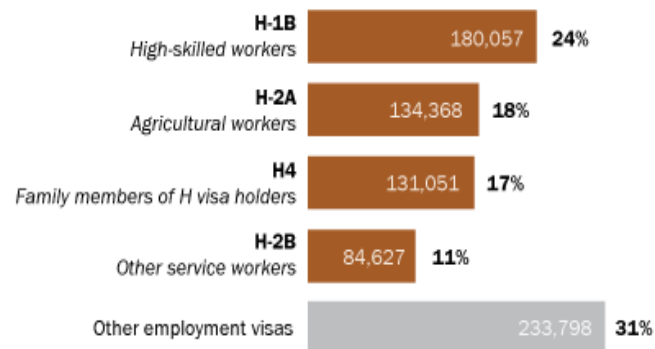
Each year, about 50,000 people receive green cards through the U.S. diversity visa program, also known as the visa lottery. Since the program began in 1995, more than 1 million immigrants have received green cards through the lottery. Trump has said he wants to eliminate the program, which seeks to diversify the U.S. immigrant population by granting visas to underrepresented nations. Citizens of countries with the most legal immigrant arrivals in recent years – such as Mexico, Canada, China and India – are not eligible to apply.

H-1B visas

In fiscal 2016, 180,057 high-skilled foreign workers received H-1B visas. As the nation’s biggest temporary employment visa program, H-1B visas accounted for about a quarter (24%) of all temporary visas for employment issued in 2016. In all, more than 1.4 million H-1B visas have been issued from fiscal years 2007 to 2016. Under the Trump administration, the number of H-1B applications challenged by the federal government has increased. In addition, the administration has considered restricting the number of years foreign workers can hold H-1B visas. In Congress, long-standing efforts to expand the H-1B visa program continue.

H-1B visas account for a quarter of temporary employment visas issued in 2016

Temporary employment visas issued, fiscal year 2016



Note: "Other employment visas" includes H1B1, H3, L, O, P and Q visas.
Source: U.S. Department of State.

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Temporary permissions

A relatively small number of unauthorized immigrants who came to the U.S. under unusual circumstances have received temporary legal permission to stay in the country. One key distinction for this group of immigrants is that, despite having received permission to live in the U.S., most don't have a path to gain lawful permanent residence. The following two programs are examples of this:

DACA

About 700,000 unauthorized immigrants had temporary work permits and protection from deportation through Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals as of Sept. 5, 2017. The program has been central to negotiations as Congress debates changes to U.S. immigration law. Trump ended the program in September 2017. As a result, DACA enrollees whose benefits expire March 5 would be the first to be dropped from the program. However, two federal court cases may temporarily keep DACA in place after March 5.

Temporary Protected Status

More than 320,000 immigrants from 10 nations have permission to live and work in the U.S. under Temporary Protected Status (TPS), because war, hurricanes or other disasters in their home countries could make it dangerous for them to return. Many are expected to lose their benefits in 2018 and 2019. The Trump administration has said it will not renew the program for people from El Salvador, Haiti, Nicaragua and Sudan, who together account for about 76% of enrolled immigrants. The first group expected to lose their benefits will be roughly 1,000 Sudanese whose benefits expire Nov. 2. Benefits for the largest group, about 195,000 people from El Salvador, are scheduled to expire on Sept. 9, 2019. About 7,000 Syrians with TPS recently had their benefits renewed. Under the Trump administration, only those from Syria and South Sudan have received TPS extensions with the possibility of future renewals.

Immigrants from 10 nations have Temporary Protected Status

■ Trump administration says it will not renew*

NATION	ESTIMATE	EXPIRES
Nepal	8,950	June 24, 2018
Honduras	57,000	July 5, 2018
Yemen	1,000	Sept. 3, 2018
Somalia	250	Sept. 17, 2018
Sudan	1,040	Nov. 2, 2018
Nicaragua	2,550	Jan. 5, 2019
South Sudan	70	May 2, 2019
Haiti	46,000	July 22, 2019
El Salvador	195,000	Sept. 9, 2019
Syria	7,000	Sept. 30, 2019

*Administration positions as of Feb. 22, 2018.

Note: For Syrians, TPS only available for those who have been in the U.S. since Aug. 1, 2016.

Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security estimates included in Federal Register notices, 2016-2018.

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Correction: A previous version of the chart "H-1B visas account for a quarter of temporary employment visas issued in 2016" misstated the source of the data. It was updated on March 19, 2018, to credit the U.S. Department of State.