Who are today’s U.S. immigrants?

The United States has more immigrants than any other nation in the world. In 2017, there were 44.4 million immigrants in the country, meaning almost one in every seven people living in the U.S. was born in another country and was not a U.S. citizen at birth. These immigrants include both residents with legal status and those in the country illegally.
Mexicans are the largest group, but not among new immigrants.

The U.S. foreign-born population is diverse, representing the majority of the world’s countries. But one country – Mexico – stands out. More than 11 million U.S. immigrants were born in Mexico, putting it at the top of birth countries. There are nearly as many immigrants from Mexico as from all of South and East Asia.

The next most popular birth nation is China (2.9 million), followed by India (2.6 million). All of the top 10 birth countries are either in Latin America or Asia.

Mexicans had been the largest group among new arrivals to the U.S. over the past three decades, but in recent years that has changed as immigration from Mexico has slowed. Today, India and China send as many immigrants to the U.S. each year as Mexico, reflecting a broader shift away from Latin America and toward Asia among new immigrant arrivals.
Most live in Western and Southern states.

Immigrants tend to be concentrated in certain states and regions. That’s partly because immigrants often move near family members or other people from their home countries. Or, they come for employment that is concentrated in certain areas – agriculture or technology jobs, for example. More than six-in-ten immigrants live in only 20 U.S. metropolitan areas, even as those areas are home to just 37% of the total U.S. population.

California, Texas and New York have the nation’s largest immigrant populations, together accounting for nearly half (45%) of the country’s foreign-born residents in 2017. The regions with the most immigrants are the West and South.

Demographically, they differ from those born in the U.S.

Compared with people born in the U.S., immigrants as a whole are more likely to be married, to have lower overall education levels and to be poor. However, there often are wide differences among immigrants by country of origin, as well as among those born in the same country. For example, immigrants from Mexico and Central America are less likely to have graduated from high school than those born in the U.S. But immigrants from South and East Asia, Europe, Canada, the Middle East and sub-Saharan Africa were more likely than U.S.-born residents to have a bachelor’s or advanced degree.
A growing majority of immigrants have lived in the U.S. at least 15 years. About half of immigrants ages 5 and older are proficient English speakers. That includes 16% who only speak English at home and 36% who speak another language at home but speak English very well.

**More than 28 million are working in the U.S.**

Immigrants are more likely to be of working age (18 to 64) than people born in the U.S. In fact, they make up 17% of U.S. workers, higher than their share of the total population (14%). Immigrants are concentrated in some types of jobs – for example, agriculture, construction and service – but are not a majority in any industry.

**Most have lawful status, but about a quarter do not.**

The nation’s 35.2 million lawful immigrants include naturalized citizens, permanent residents (that is, immigrants with green cards) and immigrants who have temporary visas for work, school or other reasons. The nation’s 10.5 million unauthorized immigrants mainly arrived illegally or stayed after their temporary visas expired.

Today’s lawful and unauthorized immigrants often live in the same communities (and sometimes in the same homes), but there are important differences between them. We’ll explore those next.

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