



Once Again: Prospects for a U.S. Legalization Program & the Unauthorized Immigrant Groups that Could Factor in the Debate

February 4, 2021

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Back on the Table: U.S. Legalization and the Unauthorized Immigrant Groups that Could Factor in the Debate

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Jessica Bolter
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Speakers



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Jessica Bolter, Associate Policy Analyst, U.S. Immigration Policy Program, MPI



Kerri Talbot, former Chief Counsel for U.S. Senator Robert Menendez (D-NJ); Deputy Director, Immigration Hub



C. Stewart Verdery, Jr., former General Counsel to Assistant Senate Majority Leader Don Nickles (R-OK); former Assistant Secretary for Policy and Planning, Border and Transportation Security Directorate, Department of Homeland Security; Founder and CEO, Monument Advocacy



Characteristics of the Unauthorized Immigrant Population

- 60% have lived in the U.S. for 10+ years
- 57% of those who are at least 5 years old speak only English, or speak it well or very well
- 66% of those age 16 or older are employed (5% are unemployed and 30 percent are not in the labor force)
- 29% are homeowners
- 35% of those who are at least 15 years old live with at least one minor U.S.-citizen child
- 22% of those age 15 or older are married to a U.S. citizen or lawful permanent resident (LPR)

Source: MPI Data Hub, "Profile of the Unauthorized Population: United States,"
<https://www.migrationpolicy.org/data/unauthorized-immigrant-population/state/US>

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Subgroups of the Unauthorized Immigrant Population

Unauthorized Population Subgroup	Estimated Size (year of estimate)
DACA-eligible and DREAMers (those who arrived as minors)	1.7 million to 2.9 million (2021) (the range depends on definitions of years of U.S. residence, age at entry, and maximum age)
Temporary Protected Status (TPS) holders	320,000 (2020)
Essential workers	1.1 million to 5.6 million (2018) (the range depends on the definition of occupations considered essential)
Essential workers with DACA	72,000 to 361,000 (2020)
Farmworkers	1.2 million (2016)
Spouses of U.S. citizens and permanent residents	1.4 million (2018)
Parents living with U.S.-citizen and permanent resident children	3.4 million (2021)
Recipients of repeated discretionary relief	69,000 to 109,000 (2020) (the range depends on how many people have received discretionary status grants for multiple years)
Unauthorized immigrants with possible employer sponsors	At least 1.7 million (2018)



Unauthorized Immigrant Essential Workers, 2018

	Definition 1: Food Industries, Health Care, Deliveries, Scientific Research, and First Responders	Definition 2: Frontline Workers	Definition 3: CISA-Defined Essential Workers
Accommodation and food services	N/A	974,000	1,057,000
Agriculture, forestry, fishing, and hunting	255,000	269,000	283,000
Construction	N/A	1,295,000	1,352,000
Educational services	N/A	44,000	222,000
Finance and insurance, and real estate and rental and leasing	N/A	68,000	185,000
Health care	302,000	263,000	327,000
Information	N/A	17,000	57,000
Manufacturing	172,000	383,000	497,000
Mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction	N/A	17,000	23,000
Other services	N/A	104,000	110,000
Professional, scientific, and management, and administrative, and waste management services	20,000	605,000	686,000
Public administration	12,000	19,000	46,000
Retail trade	173,000	255,000	319,000
Social assistance	40,000	76,000	104,000
Transportation and warehousing	23,000	167,000	215,000
Utilities	N/A	9,000	15,000
Wholesale trade	65,000	88,000	117,000
Total	1,063,000	4,654,000	5,615,000

Source: MPI analysis of U.S. Census Bureau data from the pooled 2014–18 ACS and the 2008 SIPP, weighted to 2018 unauthorized immigrant population estimates provided by Jennifer Van Hook of The Pennsylvania State University, Population Research Institute. The definitions of essential and frontline workers employ the coding used in Francine D. Blau, Josefina Koebe, and Pamela A. Meyerhofer, "Who Are the Essential and Frontline Workers?," NBER Working Paper 27791, National Bureau of Economic Research, Cambridge, MA, September 2020. MPI added educational workers in the definition of essential workers.



Unauthorized Immigrants Potentially Eligible to Adjust Status under Updated Registry Dates of January 1, 2000-2010, as of 2018

Registry Date	Eligible Population	Share of Unauthorized Population
2000	2,811,000	26%
2001	3,641,000	33%
2002	4,213,000	38%
2003	4,691,000	43%
2004	5,148,000	47%
2005	5,650,000	51%
2006	6,233,000	57%
2007	6,735,000	61%
2008	7,195,000	66%
2009	7,613,000	69%
2010	7,957,000	72%

Source: MPI analysis of U.S. Census Bureau data from the 2014-18 American Community Survey (ACS) pooled and the 2008 Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), drawing on a methodology developed in consultation with James Bachmeier of Temple University and Jennifer Van Hook of The Pennsylvania State University, Population Research Institute.



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