

Legal Immigration to United States Up from Last Year

New data released by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) show that in Fiscal Year (FY) 2004:

- Legal immigration grew by 34 percent since FY 2003.
- The number of people who adjusted their status to legal permanent residence increased 68 percent, explaining much of the overall growth.
- The level of newly arriving legal permanent residents remained relatively steady.
- Refugee admissions recovered significantly, but remained below pre-9/11 levels.
- The level of temporary visitors rebounded to near pre-9/11 levels.
- Naturalizations increased by 16 percent.

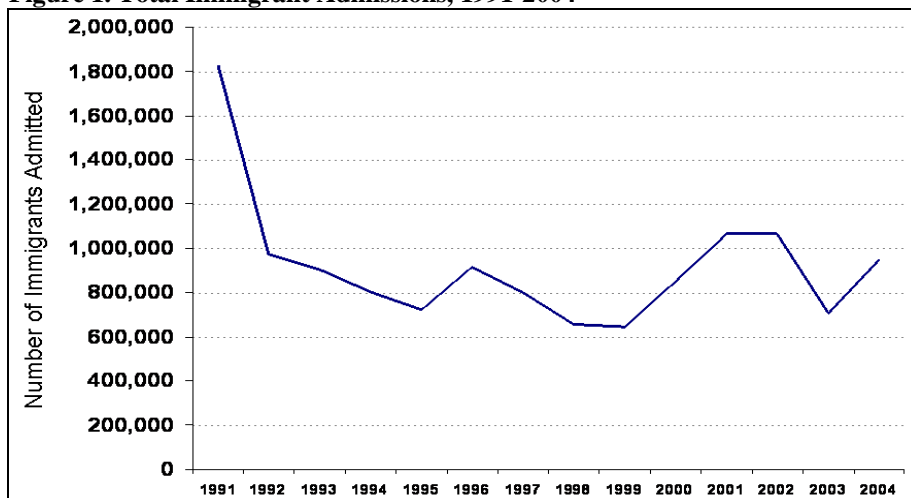
Below is an overview of US immigration based on FY 2004 data released by the Department of Homeland Security's Office of Immigration Statistics in 2005.

Permanent Immigration

The number of people granted legal permanent residence in the United States in FY 2004 climbed 34 percent from FY 2003 levels to 946,142. This included 362,221 new arrivals and 583,921 adjustments of status.

These figures remain lower than the 1.06 million who became new legal permanent residents in FY 2002 but are up from FY 2003 levels. The number of new arrivals in FY 2004 was very similar to the 358,411 new arrivals in FY 2003. Status adjustments grew by a notable 68 percent but remained short of the FY 2002 level. DHS officials attributed the processing slowdown after 2001 to new requirements for additional background checks on applicants, as well as the shifting of adjudications staff to the Special Registration program leaving fewer officials available to process green cards.

Figure 1. Total Immigrant Admissions, 1991-2004



Source: 2004 Yearbook of Immigration Statistics, Office of Immigration Statistics, DHS

The largest numerical increases in immigrants came from Mexico, India, the Philippines, Cuba, and China.

In FY 2004, 175,364 Mexicans became legal permanent residents, compared to 115,864 in FY 2003, an increase of 51 percent (59,500). The number of immigrants from India increased by 39 percent (19,744) between FY 2003 and 2004, and the number of Cuban immigrants increased by 120 percent (11,184).

Over half of all new legal immigrants arrived from just ten countries.

The top countries of origin for immigrants in FY 2004 were Mexico (175,364), India (70,116), the Philippines (57,827), China (51,156), Vietnam (31,514), the Dominican Republic (30,492), El Salvador (29,795), Cuba (20,488), Korea (19,766), and Colombia (18,678). Cuba rejoined the top ten after falling off the list in 2003, and Korea is also new to the list in FY 2004. Russia and Guatemala fell out of the top ten.

Six states remain key destinations for many new legal immigrants.

Sixty-five percent of new immigrants planned to live in six states – California, New York, Texas, Florida, New Jersey, and Illinois. All of these states saw an increase in new legal permanent residents since FY 2003. However, the states experiencing the fastest growth in immigrant population between FY 2003 and FY 2004 included some not traditionally considered top immigrant destinations. North Dakota, Mississippi, Tennessee, Georgia, South Dakota, Rhode Island, and Oklahoma were all among the ten states with the highest percent growth in immigrant population. Other areas with top growth were Arizona, Texas, and Puerto Rico.

Family reunification based immigration continued to comprise a large proportion of legal immigration, and absolute numbers increased by 26 percent.

Approximately 66 percent of the 946,142 immigrants who obtained legal permanent residence in FY 2004 were relatives of US citizens or permanent residents. This percentage is similar to previous years. The total number of relatives of permanent residents or US citizens who obtained legal permanent residence increased 26 percent, from 491,551 in 2003 to 620,429 in 2004.

Employment-based immigration increased as a percentage of overall legal immigration, while the absolute numbers increased by 89 percent.

Employment-based immigration accounted for 16 percent of new immigrants in FY 2004, returning to FY 2002 percentages after a dip to 12 percent in FY 2003. The 155,330 employment-based immigrants represented an 89 percent increase from the 82,137 immigrants in FY 2003 but did not quite reach the FY 2002 levels of 174,968.

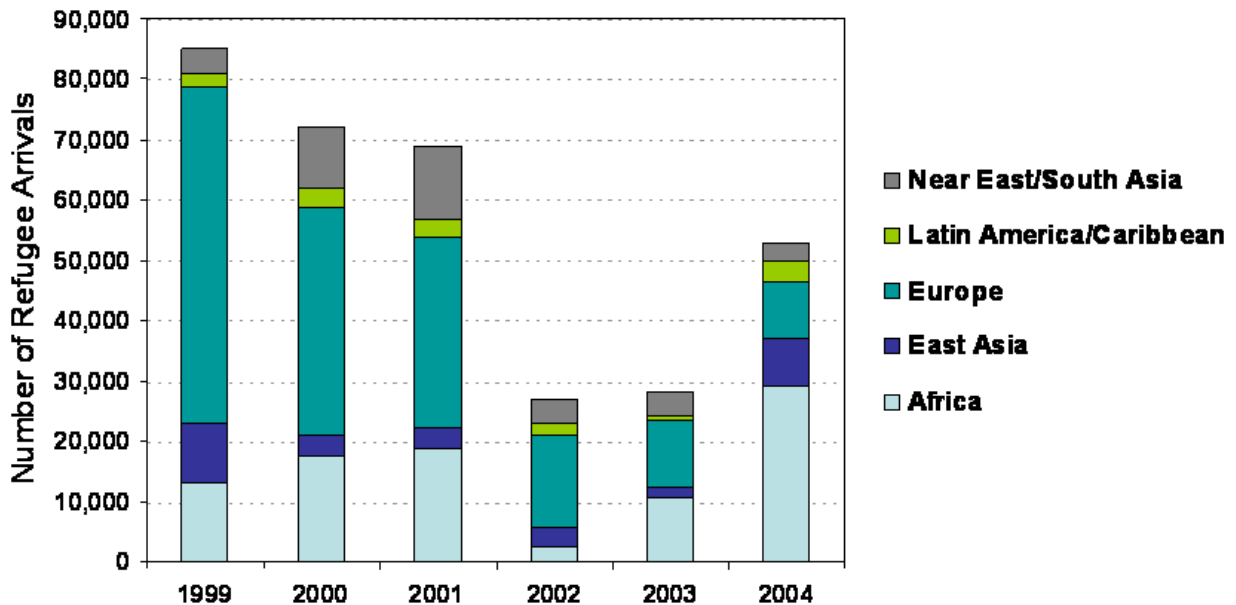
The number of immigrants admitted under the Diversity Program increased slightly from FY 2003 levels.

Under the Diversity Program, nationals of underrepresented countries can apply to join the Diversity Visa lottery. The annual cap on Diversity Visas is 50,000, though slightly more or fewer immigrants may be admitted in any given year. There were 50,084 Diversity immigrants in FY 2004, up from 46,347 in FY 2003. The five top sending countries under the Diversity Program were Ethiopia (4,517), Ukraine (2,975), Nigeria (2,959), Poland (2,850), Kenya (2,730), and Bulgaria (2,342).

Refugee admissions rose by 87 percent in FY 2004 but remained significantly below the 70,000 admissions ceiling authorized by the President in consultation with Congress.

Refugees are individuals unable or unwilling to return to their country of nationality because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution. Refugees are interviewed and approved for admission while abroad, and then move to the United States. The number of refugee arrivals totaled 52,835 in FY 2004, up from 28,306 in FY 2003 and 26,839 in FY 2002. This number remains below pre-9/11 levels – 68,925 in FY 2001 and 72,143 in FY 2000. Refugee admissions increased dramatically over the past year from Africa (almost tripling, from 10,717 to 29,125), East Asia (from 1,608 to 8,046), and Latin America (from 452 to 3,556). Meanwhile, numbers declined from the Near East/South Asia and Europe. Sixty-three percent of refugees admitted in FY 2004 came from five countries: Somalia (13,331), Liberia (7,140), Laos (6,005), Sudan (3,500), and Ukraine (3,482). The overall increase in admissions is a product of eliminating bottlenecks that resulted from the implementation of additional security checks post-9/11.

Figure 2. Refugee Arrivals by Country of Origin, 1999-2004



Source: 2004 Yearbook of Immigration Statistics, Office of Immigration Statistics, DHS

The number of individuals granted asylum decreased 6 percent from FY 2003 to 14,359 in FY 2004. Like refugees, asylees are persons unable or unwilling to return to their country of nationality because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution. However, in contrast to refugees, asylees apply for such status upon arrival in the United States. The 14,359 asylees admitted in FY 2004 represent half the number of people granted asylum in FY 2001 (28,677). Fifty-three percent of those granted asylum in FY 2004 came from five countries: Colombia (2,930), Haiti (1,794), Venezuela (1,204), China (919), and Ethiopia (769). Sixty-three percent resided in three states: Florida (3,292), California (2,025), and Maryland (1,079).

Refugee adjustments increased by 77 percent from FY 2003 levels to 61,013 while asylee adjustments slightly decreased (2 percent) to 10,217. Both remain below FY 2001 numbers.

Both refugees and asylees are eligible to apply for legal permanent resident status after one year in the United States. Refugee adjustments ranged from 97,305 pre-9/11 to 115,832 in FY 2002 to a 15-year low of 34,496 in FY 2003. This decline in adjustments likely resulted from decreased refugee admissions in FY 2002, due to tightened restrictions post-9/11. Asylee adjustments to permanent status had been limited by law to 10,000 per year, but this cap was recently eliminated as part of the REAL ID Act, included in the Emergency Supplemental Appropriations Act of January 2005.

Temporary Admissions

Temporary non-immigrant admissions totaled 30.8 million in FY 2004, nearly reaching pre-9/11 levels.

During the 1990s, non-immigrant admissions had ranged from 20.9 million to 33.7 million, following the ups and downs of the economy. Between FY 2001 and 2003, the number of admissions had fallen 15 percent from 32.8 million to 27.8 million. By FY 2004, admissions rebounded to 30.8 million, only 6 percent below FY 2001 levels. The vast majority of non-immigrant visitors were tourists and business travelers (89 percent combined in 2004). The leading destinations for non-immigrants were Florida, California, New York, Texas, and Hawaii.

Temporary admissions from certain regions declined, while other regions picked up from FY 2003 levels.

Between FY 2003 and 2004, admissions dropped from several Central and Eastern European countries, including Serbia and Montenegro, Belarus, the Czech Republic, Uzbekistan, and Hungary, and from several South American countries. Temporary admissions from Saudi Arabia also decreased by 1,019 (4.4 percent) on top of a previous decline of 76 percent between FY 2001 and 2003. However, some other Islamic countries, such as Jordan and Malaysia, saw temporary admissions increase by 9.5 and 33.2 percent respectively between FY 2003 and 2004 after experiencing sharp declines following FY 2001.

Figure 3a. Total Temporary Admissions 1998-2004

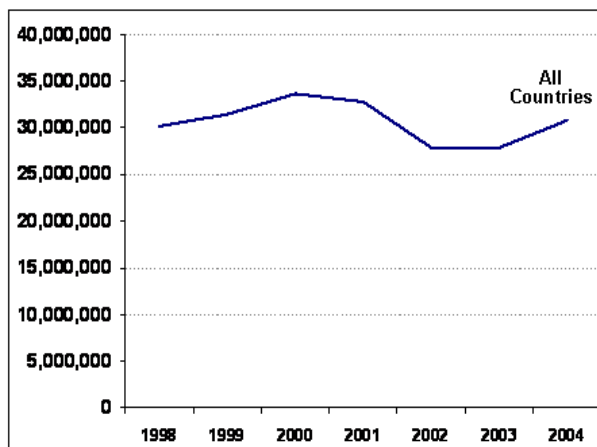
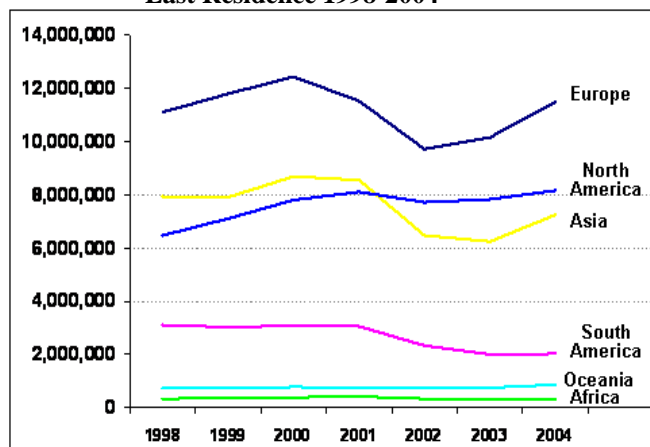


Figure 3b. Temporary Admissions by Region of Last Residence 1998-2004



Source: 2004 Yearbook of Immigration Statistics, Office of Immigration Statistics, DHS

Almost half of all non-immigrant visitors were nationals of the United Kingdom, Mexico, Japan, and Germany.

Admissions increased between FY 2003 and 2004 for nearly all top sending countries. The only exception was Korea, which sent 15,317 fewer non-immigrant visitors in FY 2004. Sixty-two percent of all non-immigrants cited one of ten countries as their last residence: the UK (5.0 million), Mexico (4.5 million), Japan (4.3 million), Germany (1.6 million), France (1.2 million), Korea (829,031), Italy (759,895), China (687,148), Australia (645,234), and India (611,327).

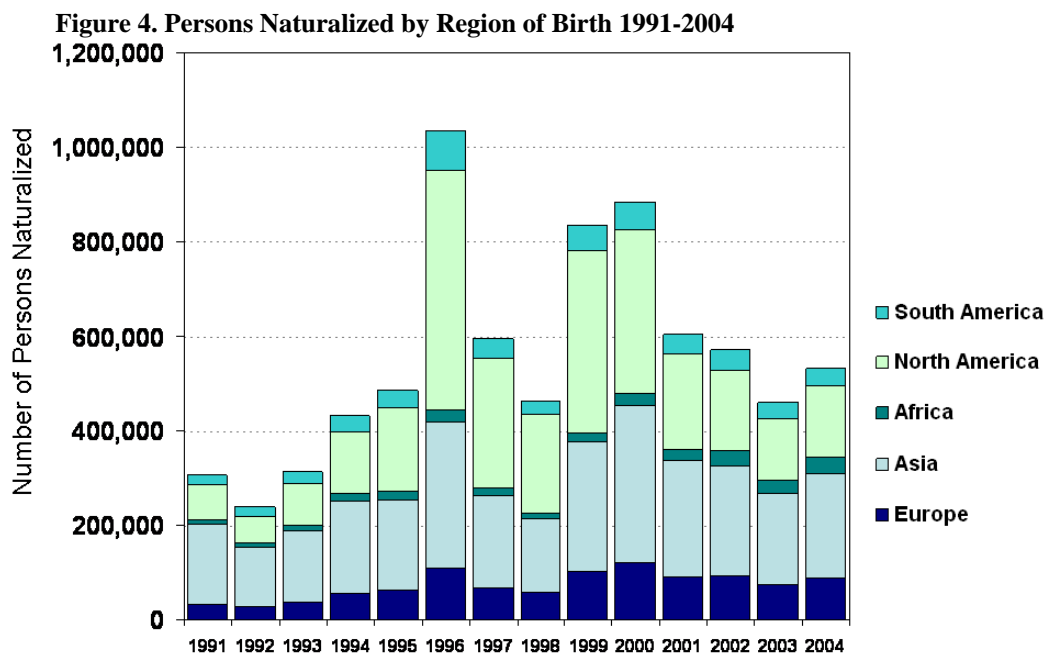
More visitors were admitted in FY 2004 for some temporary categories, such as foreign government officials, visitors for business and pleasure, and temporary workers, while visitors for other categories such as students decreased from FY 2003 levels.

The number of foreign students dropped further from pre-9/11 levels of nearly 688,970, falling to 620,210 in FY 2004. Some temporary worker categories that had fallen after 9/11, including H-2A temporary agricultural workers and TN workers (holders of NAFTA visas for professionals), rebounded slightly. Numbers of aliens in transit fell following the August 2003 suspension of the Transit Without Visa (TWOV) and International-to-International (ITI) transit programs, two of several types of transit admissions.

Naturalizations

In FY 2004, 537,151 people gained US citizenship, yet a processing backlog of 653,190 naturalization applications remains.

The number of naturalizations was a 16 percent increase from the 463,204 naturalized in FY 2003. The higher naturalization numbers were consistent with the higher number of applications received during FY 2004. The processing backlog grew 4 percent (25,920) between FY 2003 and FY 2004.



Source: 2004 Yearbook of Immigration Statistics, Office of Immigration Statistics, DHS

Forty-one percent of the 537,151 people who naturalized in FY 2004 were born in Asia, while 28 percent were born in North America.

The single largest country of origin for newly naturalized US citizens in FY 2004 was Mexico, with 63,840. Other key countries of origin this past year were India (37,975), the Philippines (31,448), Vietnam (27,480), China (27,309), South Korea (17,184), the Dominican Republic (15,464), Jamaica (12,271), Iran (11,781), and Cuba (11,236). Almost half of all naturalizations in 2004 involved nationals from these ten countries.

The majority (65 percent) of those who naturalized in FY 2004 were married.

Fifty-four percent of those who naturalized in FY 2004 were female, and two-thirds were married. Over 40 percent were ages 30-44. Their stated occupations included professional and technical workers; operators, fabricators, and laborers; service; executive and managerial; sales; unemployed; students; homemakers; and the military.

DATA SOURCE

The data are from the *2004 Yearbook of Immigration Statistics* published by the Office of Immigration Statistics in the Department of Homeland Security. Fiscal Year (FY) 2004 began October 1, 2003 and ended September 30, 2004. Backlog data was taken from MPI Fact Sheet #10, *Backlogs in Immigration Processing Persist*.

This information was compiled by MPI Research Assistant Julia Gelatt and Senior Policy Analyst Deborah Meyers in October 2005. They appreciate the assistance of Megan Davy. It updates data from Fact Sheet #9, *Legal Immigration to US Still Declining*. For questions or to arrange an interview with an MPI expert on immigration, please contact Colleen Coffey, Communications Coordinator, at (202) 266-1910 or ccoffey@migrationpolicy.org. Please visit us at www.migrationpolicy.org.

For more information on immigration to the United States and worldwide, visit the Migration Information Source, MPI's online publication, at www.migrationinformation.org. The Source provides fresh thought, authoritative data from numerous global organizations and governments, and analysis of international migration trends.

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