

Unauthorized Immigration to the United States

The size of the undocumented immigrant population in the United States is probably about 9 million people.

A report released by the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service in January 2003 estimated the size of the undocumented immigrant population at 7.0 million in 2000. A separate analysis by Jeff Passel of the Urban Institute estimated there were 8.5 million undocumented immigrants in 2000. Passel and others believe that net illegal immigration from Mexico alone has been growing at a rate of 500,000 people annually, which places current estimates at a minimum of 9.0 million unauthorized immigrants.

In the 1990s, the undocumented immigrant population grew by 350,000 per year.

According to the INS, from 1990 to 1999, the size of the undocumented immigrant population grew by about 350,000 people per year on average, and by as much as 500,000 people per year in the latter third of the decade.

The states with the largest unauthorized populations are California and Texas.

INS estimates show the states that had the largest unauthorized immigrant populations in 2000 were California (2.2 million) and Texas (1.0 million), followed by New York (0.5 million), Illinois (0.4 million), and Florida (0.3 million). Texas became the second state after California to have over one million unauthorized residents.

Almost one-third of all undocumented immigrants live in California.

According to the INS, of all undocumented immigrants in the United States in 2000, 32 percent lived in California, followed by Texas (15 percent), New York (7 percent), Illinois (6 percent), and Florida (5 percent). Combined, these five states accounted for 64 percent of all undocumented migrants.

The states with the largest numerical increases in their unauthorized populations in the 1990s were California, Texas, and Illinois, in that order.

INS data show that the states with the largest numerical increases in their unauthorized populations between 1990 and 2000 were California, Texas, Illinois, Arizona, Georgia, North Carolina, and New York, in that order. Each of these states had increases of more than 100,000 in the number of unauthorized residents between 1990 and 2000.

Georgia, North Carolina, and Colorado experienced rapid growth in their unauthorized immigrant populations between 1990 and 2000.

Between 1990 and 2000, the unauthorized immigrant populations of several states grew rapidly, according to the US Immigration and Naturalization Service, including:

- Georgia 571 percent (from 34,000 to 228,000)

- North Carolina: 692 percent (from 26,000 to 206,000)
- Colorado 365 percent (from 31,000 to 144,000)

Seven states that had 10,000 or fewer unauthorized immigrants in 1990 also experienced rapid growth through the decade:

- Arkansas 440 percent (from 5,000 to 27,000)
- South Carolina 414 percent (from 7,000 to 36,000)
- Tennessee 411 percent (from 9,000 to 46,000)
- Alabama 380 percent (from 5,000 to 24,000)
- Iowa 380 percent (from 5,000 to 24,000)
- Wisconsin 310 percent (from 10,000 to 41,000)
- Nebraska 300 percent (from 6,000 to 24,000)

There is no evidence to suggest that this pattern has changed since 2000.

The five countries of origin with the largest unauthorized immigrant populations are Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala, Colombia, and Honduras.

In 2000, the largest source country for unauthorized immigrants was Mexico (4.8 million), according to the INS. The unauthorized resident population from Mexico increased by 140 percent, from about 2.0 million in 1990 to 4.8 million in 2000, according to the INS.

Unauthorized immigrants from Mexico represented 69 percent of the total unauthorized resident population in 2000. In 1990, unauthorized immigrants from Mexico represented 58 percent of the total.

Six other source countries were estimated to have over 100,000 unauthorized immigrants resident in the United States, including El Salvador (189,000), Guatemala (144,000), Colombia (141,000), Honduras (138,000), China (115,000), and Ecuador (108,000). There is no evidence to suggest that this pattern has changed since 2000.

This information was compiled by Elizabeth Grieco, MPI's Data Manager, in October 2003. For questions or to arrange an interview with a data expert or policy analyst, please contact Colleen Coffey at 202-266-1910 or ccoffey@migrationpolicy.org. Please visit us at www.migrationpolicy.org.

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