



The **Migration Policy Institute** is an independent, nonpartisan, and nonprofit think tank dedicated to the study of the movement of people worldwide. The institute provides analysis, development, and evaluation of migration and refugee policies at the local, national, and international levels.

Annual Immigration to the United States: The Real Numbers

The official data on immigration levels seem quite clear. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) reports that there were 1.1 million "immigrants," (otherwise known as lawful permanent residents or those with "green cards") in fiscal year (FY) 2005 and 1.3 million in FY 2006. However, this number does not accurately reflect actual levels of immigration to the United States. As Congress debates comprehensive changes to the US immigration system, it is important to have a clear understanding of the permanent levels of immigration that the United States is currently absorbing.

In reality, the actual annual level of immigration averaged about 1.8 million between fiscal year (FY) 2002 and 2006. The difference between the official figures and this more complete number is due to the nature of certain forms of temporary immigration and unauthorized immigration.

The table below approximates the true numbers of people who enter the United States each year who are likely to stay indefinitely. This five-year average of 1.8 million exceeds the average official number of yearly "immigrants" (1.0 million) by over 800,000.

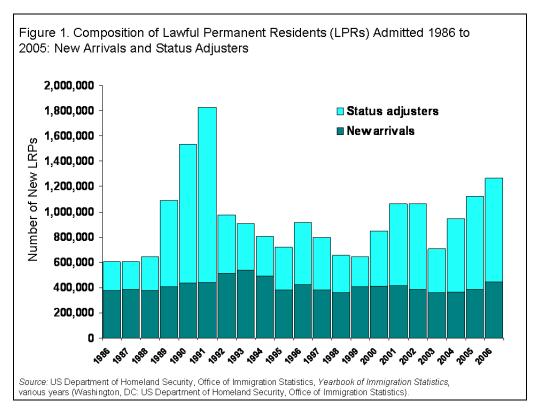
Approximation of Actual Annual Immigration

	Average Number, FY 2002 to 2006
All New Lawful Permanent Residents	1,021,884
Employer Sponsored	163,366
Family Sponsored	648,944
Other	209,573
Temporary Workers and Dependents*	320,686
H-1B	74,884
H-2B	45,227
O-1	3,871
Dependents of H-1B, H-2B, O	123,983
K, S, T, U	47,745
V	24,976
The Unauthorized (Pew Hispanic Center estimate)	500,000
TOTAL	1,842,570

^{*} This is an estimate of the number of workers who entered each year on temporary visas who are likely to stay permanently. The number is based on experience and assumes that 60 percent of H-1B, H-2B, and O-1 visa holders will ultimately remain in the country permanently, as will all K, S, T, U, and V visa holders. The number also assumes that H-1B, H-2B, and O visa holders will bring an average of one dependent per principal.

Source: Doris Meissner, Deborah W. Meyers, Demetrios G. Papademetriou, and Michael Fix, *Immigration and America's Future: A New Chapter* (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, September 2006).

DHS statistics count "**immigrants**" as those who obtain lawful permanent resident (LPR) status in the country in any particular year. Of those obtaining LPR status in recent years, about 60 percent have not, in fact, been new entrants to the United States, but instead were adjusting from some temporary status to permanent status. These status adjusters include people who entered as temporary workers, as students, as refugees or asylum seekers, or on one of myriad types of "nonimmigrant" visas. This 60 percent comes to an average of about 632,000 status adjusters each year.



This means that there are hundreds of thousands of people who enter the United States each year in some type of legal temporary status, who ultimately remain in the country indefinitely. Some past studies have found that about 60 percent of persons on H-1B visas adjust to permanent status. Given that an annual average of roughly 124,000 H-1B visas have been issued over the past five years, about 74,000 future **intending permanent immigrants** are likely to have entered through this visa category alone.

Not only do official measures of the annual number of new immigrants leave out intending permanent immigrants or temporary immigrants who end up staying, they also leave out the hundreds of thousands of **unauthorized immigrants** who enter the country each year or who overstay legal permitted periods of entry and lose their legal status. The best available estimates place the growth in the size of the unauthorized immigrant population at about 500,000 each year.

Actual permanent immigration takes place through several modes, all of which need to be measured to provide a true picture of today's immigration to the United States.

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DATA SOURCE

The data are from the 2005 and 2006 *Yearbook of Immigration Statistics* published by the Office of Immigration Statistics in the Department of Homeland Security, and the Report of the Visa Office of the Department of State. Fiscal Year (FY) 2005 began October 1, 2004, and ended September 30, 2005.

This information was compiled by MPI Research Assistant Julia Gelatt in May 2007, based on research undertaken for the Independent Task Force on Immigration and America's Future. For questions or to arrange an interview with an MPI expert on immigration, please contact Colleen Coffey, Director of Communications, 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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