

Changing Origins, Rising Numbers

Unauthorized Immigrants in the United States

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BY JULIA GELATT, ARIEL G. RUIZ SOTO, AND JAMES D. BACHMEIER

Executive Summary

The unauthorized immigrant population in the United States has grown sharply in recent years, with the Migration Policy Institute (MPI) estimating it reached 13.7 million as of mid-2023, following more than a decade of stagnation. Still, nearly half of this population—45 percent—had lived in the country for 20 years or more, with 80 percent having at least five years of residence.

Amid this growth in the unauthorized immigrant population, which is up 3 million since 2019, has come diversification, with rising numbers from South America and the Caribbean in particular.

The unauthorized immigrant population is varied in its socioeconomic and labor market characteristics, family composition, and places of settlement. It also is increasingly diverse in status, with a growing share having some form of liminal (or “twilight”) status conferring protection from deportation and work authorization. Earlier this year, MPI estimated that as of mid-2023, as many as 4 million people—29 percent of the unauthorized population—were holders of Temporary Protected Status (TPS) or Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), had a pending asylum application, or had an active grant of humanitarian parole.

BOX 1

Explore U.S., State, and County Data

For detailed sociodemographic profiles of unauthorized immigrants in the United States, 43 states and the District of Columbia, and the 135 counties with the largest unauthorized populations, explore bit.ly/unauthdata.

This fact sheet offers a profile of the unauthorized immigrant population, using a unique methodology developed by MPI researchers in partnership with demographers at The Pennsylvania State University and Temple University to assign legal status in U.S. Census Bureau data. It is accompanied by detailed MPI sociodemographic profiles of the unauthorized population nationally and for 43 states, the District of Columbia, and 135 counties, which derive from MPI’s analysis of American Community Survey (ACS) data.

Among the key findings, in mid-2023:

- ▶ Nearly 4.2 million unauthorized immigrants were married to a U.S. citizen or lawful permanent resident (LPR, also known as a green-card holder). While marriage typically conveys the right to apply for legal permanent residence, most spouses who are unauthorized immigrants are unable to apply due to a 1996 immigration law.

- ▶ 6.3 million children under age 18, all but 1 million of them U.S. citizens, lived with at least one unauthorized immigrant parent. Such children are often strongly affected by their parents' limited employment opportunities and restrictions on eligibility for public assistance, as well as the threat of separation due to immigration enforcement.
- ▶ 14.0 million U.S. citizens, green card holders, and temporary visa holders lived in a household with at least one unauthorized immigrant.
- ▶ Unauthorized immigrants represented 26 percent of the total U.S. foreign-born population.
- ▶ More than one-fifth of all unauthorized immigrants lived in California; collectively, half lived in California, Texas, Florida, or New York. At the local level, the largest concentrations were in Los Angeles, California; Houston, Texas (Harris County), the five counties making up New York City; and Chicago, Illinois (Cook County).
- ▶ Mexicans accounted for 40 percent of all unauthorized immigrants—down significantly from their 62 percent share in 2010.

1 Introduction

The recent growth in the unauthorized population can be attributed to several factors. U.S. job opportunities expanded rapidly as the U.S. economy recovered more quickly and fully from the COVID-19 pandemic-induced downturn than those of many countries in the Western Hemisphere. New waves of displacement were fueled by economic and political instability in Central America and South America; eruptions of gang violence in Haiti, Ecuador, and parts of Mexico; and continued political repression

in Cuba, Nicaragua, and Venezuela. And early Biden administration border and humanitarian parole policies, combined with false promises from smugglers, enticed some to venture a trip across the Western Hemisphere to seek opportunity in the United States.

This fact sheet and accompanying data profiles at U.S., state, and top county levels sketch a portrait of the 13.7 million unauthorized immigrants that the Migration Policy Institute (MPI) estimates were living in the United States as of mid-2023. Included are top countries and regions of origin and places of settlement, how unauthorized immigrants fit within the broader U.S. foreign-born population, how many are part of mixed-status families, and key socioeconomic characteristics such as education, English proficiency, family income levels, and homeownership.

These indicators are designed to address policy questions such as:

- ▶ How many unauthorized immigrants are well educated and how many are proficient in English?
- ▶ How many are in the workforce, and what are their top industries of employment?
- ▶ How many are recent arrivals, and how many have deep roots in the country?
- ▶ How many live in mixed-status households, and what is the composition of those households?

As the accompanying sociodemographic profiles show, the characteristics and experiences of unauthorized immigrants vary across U.S. states and localities.¹ Understanding their workforce, economic, and sociodemographic characteristics is important for policymakers, service providers, and the public in an era of rapidly changing policy.

2 Recent Growth of the Unauthorized Population

MPI estimates that between 2019 and 2023, the unauthorized population grew by 3 million (see Figure 1). The United States has not experienced a pace of change this rapid in the size of the unauthorized population since the early 2000s. This increase represents a sharp departure from the stagnation observed in the size of the population over the prior decade, during which the numbers had remained fairly steady at around 11 million.

A combination of irregular arrivals at the U.S.-Mexico border and migrants entering lawfully through temporary parole programs² (many now rescinded by the Trump admin-

BOX 2 Developing Estimates of the Unauthorized Immigrant Population

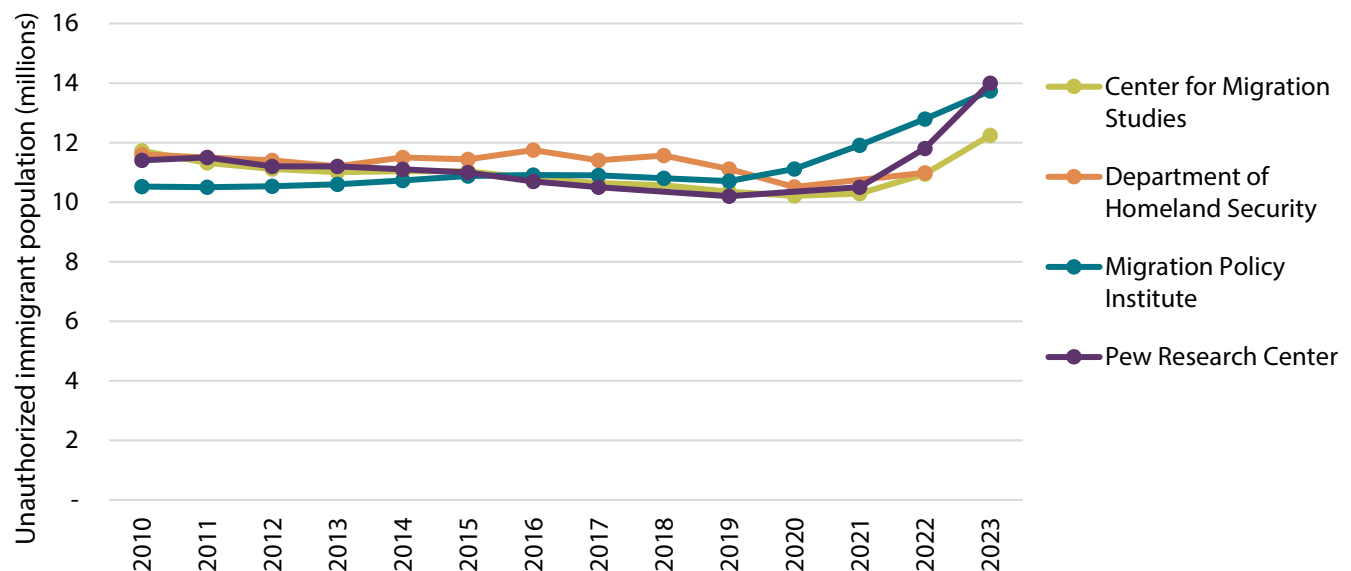
Given the fact U.S. census surveys do not ask respondents if they are in the country without authorization, the Migration Policy Institute (MPI) developed a unique methodology, working in partnership with demographers at The Pennsylvania State University and Temple University, to generate the most accurate estimates possible of the unauthorized immigrant population at national, state, and local levels.

This methodology, which assigns legal status to noncitizens in the U.S. Census Bureau's annual American Community Survey (ACS) using data from the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) permits estimating the number of unauthorized immigrants and ascertaining their characteristics.

MPI's method, which combines detailed data from several authoritative data sources, including the Census Bureau and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS), is described in more detail in MPI, "[MPI Methodology for Assigning Legal Status to Noncitizen Respondents in U.S. Census Bureau Survey Data](#)."

FIGURE 1

Estimates of the Size of the U.S. Unauthorized Immigrant Population by Leading Institutions, 2010–23



Sources: Analysis of U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) administrative records and data from the U.S. Census Bureau (the 2000 decennial census and the American Community Survey [ACS] for various years) by Migration Policy Institute (MPI) researchers and Jennifer Van Hook at The Pennsylvania State University, Population Research Center. Estimates from other organizations are from Bryan Baker and Robert Warren, "Estimates of the Unauthorized Immigrant Population Residing in the United States: January 2018–January 2022," (Washington, DC: DHS Office of Homeland Security Statistics, 2024); Jeffrey S. Passel and Jens Manuel Krogstad, U.S. Unauthorized Immigrant Population Reached a Record 14 Million in 2023, Pew Research Center, August 21, 2025; Robert Warren, The Undocumented Population in the United States Increased to 12.2 Million in 2023, Center for Migration Studies, May 7, 2025; and Robert Warren, "In 2019, the US Undocumented Population Continued a Decade-Long Decline and the Foreign-Born Population Neared Zero Growth," *Journal on Migration and Human Security* 9, no. 1 (2021): 31–43.

istration) were the primary factors leading to the recent growth in the unauthorized immigrant population. These include migrants coming from Colombia, Cuba, Ecuador, Venezuela, and other origins beyond the traditional sending countries of Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. However, the recent growth also stems from a sizeable number of immigrants, primarily from Europe, who overstayed their temporary visas.

As shown in Figure 1, MPI's estimates are roughly in line with estimates produced by other organizations using their own methodologies, though these estimates diverge in the exact timing and size of the recent increase.

3 Time in the United States

Still, despite the increase in recent arrivals, the vast majority of unauthorized immigrants have significant years of residence in the United States. Fully four-fifths of the unauthorized population had more than five years of U.S. residence as of mid-2023.

The largest share—45 percent—had lived in the United States for 20 years or more, with another 14 percent having 15 to 19 years of residence, and 21 percent at least five years of residence. Just 20 percent had lived in the country for less than five years.

4 Family Composition

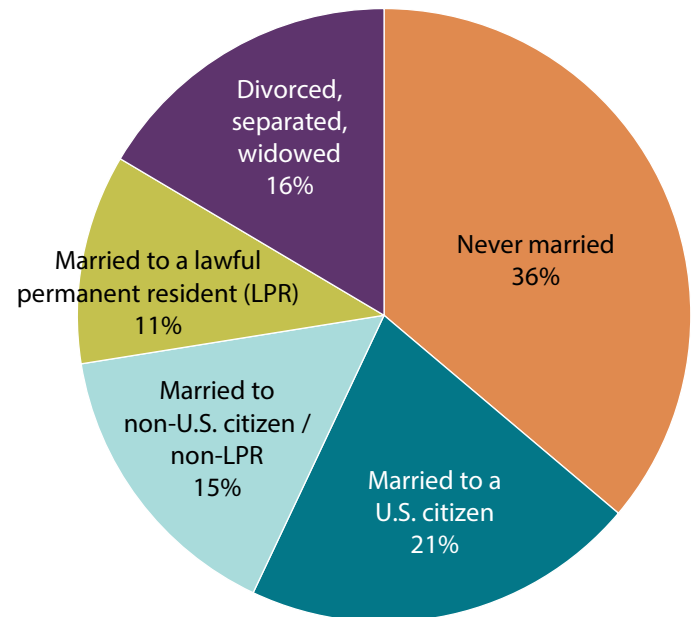
Millions of unauthorized immigrants lived in households with spouses and children who had U.S. citizenship or legal permanent residence.

As of mid-2023, just under half (6.2 million) of all unauthorized immigrants ages 15 and older were married. About one-third (4.2 million) were married to a U.S. citizen or LPR, and 15 percent (2.0 million)

were married to another unauthorized immigrant or to a temporary visa holder (see Figure 2).

While marriage to a U.S. citizen or LPR can typically open a pathway to applying for a green card, many unauthorized immigrants are blocked from this path because they must leave the United States to apply and, under terms of a 1996 law, would face a ten-year bar on re-entry if they had spent at least a year in the country without legal status.³

FIGURE 2
Marital Status of Unauthorized Immigrant Adults (ages 15 and older) and Spousal Immigration Status, 2023



Note: Numbers do not add to 100 percent due to rounding.
Source: These 2023 data result from MPI analysis of data from the 2019–23 ACS, pooled, and the 2008, 2022, and 2023 Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), weighted to 2023 unauthorized immigrant population estimates provided by Van Hook.

About one-third (32 percent) of unauthorized immigrants had one or more U.S.-citizen children under age 18 living with them, while 10 percent lived with noncitizen children, and 58 percent did not live with any minor children of their own.

Because unauthorized immigrants may have more than one child, the number of children with an

unauthorized immigrant parent was higher. At the national level, 6.3 million children under age 18 lived with at least one unauthorized immigrant parent. Of these children, the great majority—5.3 million—were U.S. citizens. Fully one-fifth of all children with an unauthorized immigrant parent lived in California (see Table 1), while 16 percent resided in Texas and 6 percent in Florida.

TABLE 1
Top Ten States of Residence of Children with At Least One Unauthorized Immigrant Parent, 2023

State	Estimate	Share of Total
Total	6,303,000	100%
California	1,286,000	20%
Texas	997,000	16%
Florida	391,000	6%
New York	370,000	6%
Illinois	269,000	4%
North Carolina	247,000	4%
Georgia	240,000	4%
New Jersey	199,000	3%
Washington	192,000	3%
Arizona	158,000	3%
All Other States	1,954,000	31%

Source: These 2023 data result from MPI analysis of data from the 2019–23 ACS, pooled, and the 2008, 2022, and 2023 SIPP, weighted to 2023 unauthorized immigrant population estimates provided by Van Hook.

Overall, MPI estimates that 14.0 million U.S. citizens, green card holders, and temporary visa holders lived in a household with at least one unauthorized immigrant in 2023.

5 Educational Attainment and Socioeconomic Status

Of the 11.4 million unauthorized immigrants who were ages 25 and older in mid-2023, 1.7 million had completed some college or received an associate’s

degree but lacked a four-year degree; another 1.8 million had a bachelor’s degree or higher. The remaining 8.0 million (about 70 percent) had obtained a high school diploma equivalent or less.

Unauthorized immigrants in Michigan were more likely to have some college education or a higher education degree (41 percent) compared to the national average (30 percent). Similarly, more than 37 percent of unauthorized immigrants living in counties that make up California’s Silicon Valley (Santa Clara and San Mateo) had some college education or a higher education degree.

Two-thirds of unauthorized immigrants ages 5 or older were limited English proficient (LEP), meaning they reported speaking English less than “very well.” In Texas, the share that reported speaking English less than very well was 71 percent, which was the highest among Southwestern states. Even within Texas, however, English proficiency varied: About 66 percent of unauthorized immigrants in Tarrant County (Fort Worth) reported being LEP, compared to 75 percent of their peers in neighboring Dallas County (Dallas).

Forty-seven percent of the unauthorized population nationwide, approximately 6.5 million people, reported family income of less than 200 percent of the federal poverty level, a common definition of “low income.” About 2.7 million of the low income reported income below 100 percent of the poverty level. Still, more than half of the total unauthorized immigrant population reported income at or above 200 percent of the poverty level.

Unauthorized immigrants’ poverty rates varied by state. For example, poverty rates were lower in Washington State (15 percent) but higher in South Carolina (24 percent). And in some small counties such as Providence County, Rhode Island, the poverty rate (15 percent) was lower than the national average for unauthorized immigrants: 19 percent.

Approximately 4.3 million unauthorized immigrants (31 percent) reported owning a home. Their home ownership rate was higher in Oklahoma (46 percent) but lower in New York (20 percent) as in other states with high housing costs. Immigrants' homeownership rate was closer to the national average in suburban counties such as Fairfax, Virginia (27 percent).

6 Employment and Industries

Of the 13 million unauthorized immigrants who were ages 16 and older in 2023, about 9.6 million were in the labor force, meaning they were employed or seeking employment. Ninety-four percent were employed.

Unauthorized immigrant workers were employed across a diverse set of industries, ranging from construction to automotive repair and maintenance (see Table 2). Nationally, nearly 2 million unauthorized immigrants worked in construction, for example,

and another 955,000 worked in food services and 213,000 in crop production.

7 Legal Composition of the Overall Immigrant Population

Of all foreign-born individuals in the United States as of mid-2023, MPI estimates that 26 percent were present in the country without authorization, the result of either having entered the country without permission, overstayed a visa, or entered on temporary humanitarian parole. Of these, MPI estimates that perhaps as many as 4 million people—29 percent of the unauthorized population—held a liminal status, such as Temporary Protected Status (TPS), a pending asylum application, or humanitarian parole.⁴ Many of those who had some form of temporary protection in 2023 no longer do, given Trump administration actions to terminate TPS programs, rescind parole status, and deny asylum applications.

TABLE 2

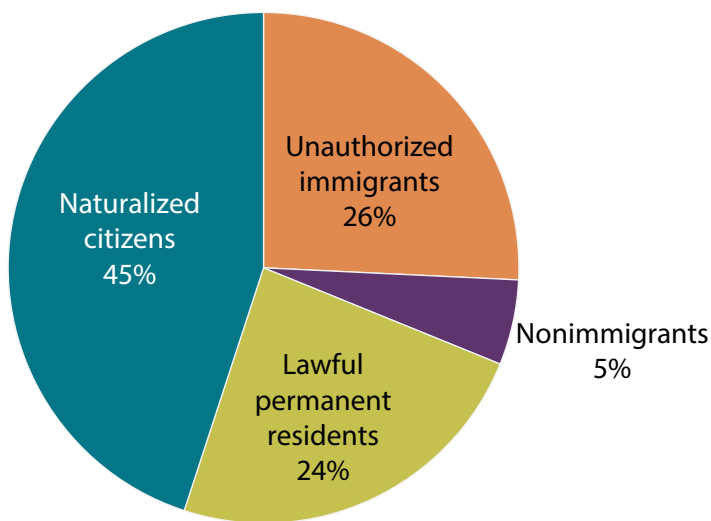
Top Ten Industries of Employment for Unauthorized Immigrant Workers, 2023

Industry	Estimated Number of Unauthorized Immigrants in Civilian Workforce	Share of All Unauthorized Immigrant Workers (%)
Civilian employed population ages 16 and older	9,107,000	100%
Construction	1,990,000	22%
Food Services	955,000	10%
Services to Buildings (cleaning, landscaping, maintenance)	411,000	5%
Landscaping Services	378,000	4%
Crop Production	213,000	2%
Elementary and Secondary Schools	204,000	2%
Private Households	170,000	2%
Supermarkets and Other Grocery	147,000	2%
Traveler Accommodation (hotels, motels, etc.)	138,000	2%
Automotive Repair and Maintenance	137,000	2%
All Other Industries	4,362,000	48%

Source: These 2023 data result from MPI analysis of data from the 2019–23 ACS, pooled, and the 2008, 2022, and 2023 SIPP, weighted to 2023 unauthorized immigrant population estimates provided by Van Hook.

The largest share of the overall immigrant population—45 percent—was comprised of naturalized U.S. citizens, while 24 percent were green-card holders, and 5 percent either had a temporary visa for study, work, or other temporary stay, or were refugees or asylees who had not yet obtained LPR status (see Figure 3).

FIGURE 3
Legal Status of the Overall U.S. Foreign-Born Population, 2023



Note: The “nonimmigrant” category includes refugees and asylees who had not yet obtained lawful permanent residence (LPR status, also known as getting a green card).

Source: These 2023 data result from MPI analysis of data from the 2019–23 ACS, pooled, and the 2008, 2022, and 2023 SIPP, weighted to 2023 unauthorized immigrant population estimates provided by Van Hook.

8 Traditional Destinations Despite Growing Dispersal

As in prior years, the unauthorized immigrant population remained concentrated in a handful of states that have been traditional migration gateways to the United States. Of the 13.7 million immigrants living

in the United States as of mid-2023, half lived in California, Texas, Florida, or New York (see Table 3). Sizeable populations also lived in relatively newer destination states such as Georgia and North Carolina.

TABLE 3
Top Ten States of Residence of the Unauthorized Immigrant Population, 2023

State	Estimated Number of Unauthorized Immigrants	Share of Total Unauthorized Immigrant Population (%)
Total	13,738,000	100%
California	2,910,000	21%
Texas	1,966,000	14%
Florida	1,223,000	9%
New York	836,000	6%
Illinois	588,000	4%
Georgia	479,000	3%
New Jersey	476,000	3%
North Carolina	450,000	3%
Massachusetts	388,000	3%
Maryland	373,000	3%
All Other States	4,050,000	29%

Source: These 2023 data result from MPI analysis of data from the 2019–23 ACS, pooled, and the 2008, 2022, and 2023 SIPP, weighted to 2023 unauthorized immigrant population estimates provided by Van Hook.

At the local level, the largest population concentrations for unauthorized immigrants were in four of the largest U.S. metro areas: Los Angeles (Los Angeles County), Houston (Harris County), New York City (five counties making up the city: Bronx, Kings, New York, Queens, and Richmond), and Chicago (Cook County).

But other localities with sizeable unauthorized populations could be found beyond the traditional immigrant-destination areas, including the Boston-Cambridge-Newton area, as well as Phoenix (Maricopa County).

TABLE 4

Top Ten Counties of Residence of the Unauthorized Immigrant Population, 2023

County	Estimated Number of Unauthorized Immigrants	Share of Total Unauthorized Immigrant Population (%)
Total	13,738,000	100%
Los Angeles County, California	1,101,000	8%
Harris County, Texas	610,000	4%
Cook County, Illinois	369,000	3%
Miami-Dade County, Florida*	356,000	3%
Dallas County, Texas	319,000	2%
Boston-Cambridge-Newton, MA**	301,000	2%
Orange County, California	229,000	2%
Maricopa County, Arizona	227,000	2%
Queens County, New York	222,000	2%
Broward County, Florida	180,000	1%
All Other Counties	9,824,000	72%

* Miami-Dade County data also include unauthorized immigrants in Monroe County, Florida, due to the process MPI used to construct county-level data out of the public use microdata area identifiers available in the ACS individual-level data.

**Refers to the Boston-Cambridge-Newton Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) in Massachusetts based on the 2013 definitions from the U.S. Office of Management and Budget. While this MSA generally crosses into New Hampshire, this analysis includes only the portion of the MSA in Massachusetts.

Source: These 2023 data result from MPI analysis of data from the 2019–23 ACS, pooled, and the 2008, 2022, and 2023 SIPP, weighted to 2023 unauthorized immigrant population estimates provided by Van Hook.

9 Regions and Countries of Origin of Unauthorized Immigrant Population

Mexicans have long formed the largest group of unauthorized immigrants in the United States, accounting for 40 percent of the overall unauthorized immigrant population—down significantly from their 62 percent share in 2010.⁵

The Mexican unauthorized immigrant population had been falling ever since the onset of the Great Recession of 2008–09, hitting a low of 5.3 million in 2021. Yet, the number of unauthorized Mexican immigrants increased in both 2022 and 2023, reversing

the earlier period of decline, and stood at 5.5 million as of mid-2023 (see Table 5). This increase seems to have been driven by a combination of local concentrations of violence and economic instability in Mexico combined with strong U.S. job growth after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Most of the recent growth in the overall unauthorized immigrant population came from countries beyond Mexico, however. Between 2019 and 2023, the unauthorized immigrant population from Central America increased by 1.7 million, driven primarily by migrants from Honduras and Guatemala. And the South American unauthorized immigrant population increased by 729,000, primarily due to large-scale migration from Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, and Brazil.

By region, immigrants from Mexico and Central America accounted for more than two thirds of the total unauthorized immigrant population (see Figure 4). South America was the second largest region of origin, representing 12 percent, and Venezuela and Colombia were the top origin countries within that region.

The rest of the world accounted for a combined 20 percent of the total unauthorized population. Notably, the Dominican Republic, Canada, the Philippines, and Nigeria were immigrants' top countries of birth for countries from regions beyond Mexico/Central America and South America.

TABLE 5

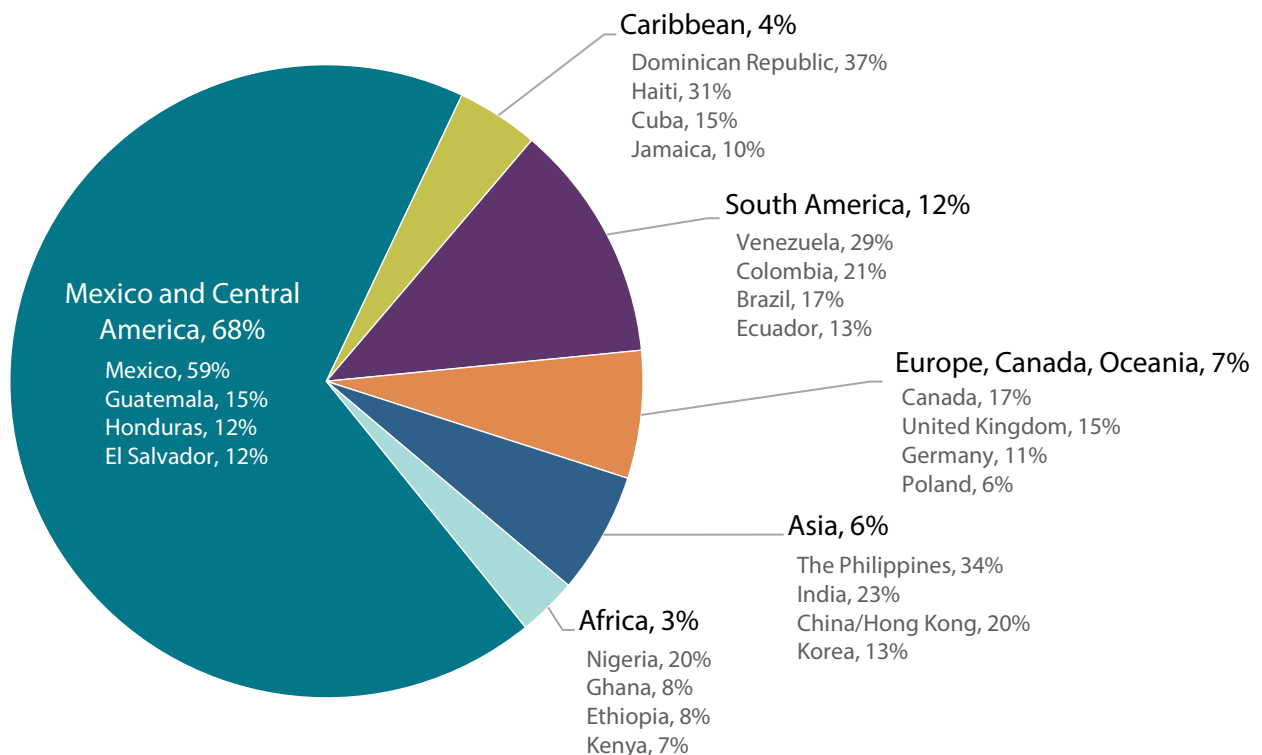
Top Ten Countries of Origin of the Unauthorized Immigrant Population, 2023

Country of Birth	Estimated Number of Unauthorized Immigrants	Share of Total Unauthorized Immigrant Population (%)
Total	13,738,000	100%
Mexico	5,530,000	40%
Guatemala	1,402,000	10%
Honduras	1,098,000	8%
El Salvador	1,078,000	8%
Venezuela	486,000	4%
Colombia	351,000	3%
Philippines	294,000	2%
Brazil	286,000	2%
Ecuador	225,000	2%
Dominican Republic	212,000	2%
All Other Countries	2,777,000	20%

Source: These 2023 data result from MPI analysis of data from the 2019–23 ACS, pooled, and the 2008, 2022, and 2023 SIPP, weighted to 2023 unauthorized immigrant population estimates provided by Van Hook.

FIGURE 4

Regions of Origin and Top Countries for Unauthorized Immigrants in the United States, 2023



Source: These 2023 data result from MPI analysis of data from the 2019–23 ACS, pooled, and the 2008, 2022, and 2023 SIPP, weighted to 2023 unauthorized immigrant population estimates provided by Van Hook.

10 Conclusion

Strong growth in the unauthorized immigrant population in 2022 and 2023, amid record levels of encounters at the U.S.-Mexico border, ended a decade-long period of stasis. Against this backdrop, the unauthorized immigrant population at the mid-2023 mark was more diverse than ever before. More unauthorized immigrants held some form of temporary protection such as TPS, humanitarian parole, or a pending asylum application than in prior periods. The national origins of the population continued to diversify. And while many unauthorized immigrants were recent entrants, far more were long-term residents with deep roots in the country.

The unauthorized immigrant population likely continued to grow strongly through mid-2024, based on high border encounters and continued inflows of migrants permitted entry pending a future U.S. immigration court date or granted humanitarian parole. Beyond mid-2024, that growth likely stalled, and in 2025, may have even reversed based on the very low numbers of U.S.-Mexico border encounters, heavy immigration enforcement inside the country, and an overall atmosphere intended to convince would-be migrants not to come and current unauthorized immigrants to leave.

Future data will show how these new dynamics, alongside a sea change in migration policies across the Western Hemisphere, may be affecting the characteristics of unauthorized immigrants and their distribution across the United States.

Strong growth in the unauthorized immigrant population in 2022 and 2023, amid record levels of encounters at the U.S.-Mexico border, ended a decade-long period of stasis.

Endnotes

- 1 Migration Policy Institute (MPI) Migration Data Hub, [Unauthorized Immigrant Population Profiles](#), accessed October 5, 2025.
- 2 Muzaffar Chishti, Kathleen Bush-Joseph, Colleen Putzel-Kavanaugh, and Madeleine Greene, [Biden's Mixed Immigration Legacy: Border Challenges Overshadowed Modernization Advances](#), *Migration Information Source*, December 10, 2024.
- 3 For more on ten-year bars, and other bars to marriage-based green cards, see FWD.us, "Three- and Ten-Year Bars: Policy Brief," March 20, 2025.
- 4 Jennifer Van Hook, Ariel G. Ruiz Soto, and Julia Gelatt, [The Unauthorized Immigrant Population Expands amid Record U.S.-Mexico Border Arrivals](#), Migration Policy Institute, February 2025.
- 5 Van Hook, Ruiz Soto, and Gelatt, [The Unauthorized Immigrant Population Expands amid Record U.S.-Mexico Border Arrivals](#).

About the Authors



JULIA GELATT

Julia Gelatt is Associate Director of the U.S. Immigration Policy Program at the Migration Policy Institute (MPI). Her work focuses on the legal immigration system, demographic trends, and the implications of local, state, and federal U.S. immigration policy.

Dr. Gelatt previously worked as a Research Associate at the Urban Institute, where her mixed-methods research focused on state policies toward immigrants; barriers to and facilitators of immigrant families' access to public benefits and public prekindergarten programs; and identifying youth victims of human trafficking. She was a Research Assistant at MPI before graduate school.

Dr. Gelatt earned her PhD in sociology, with a specialization in demography, from Princeton University. She earned a bachelor of the arts in sociology/anthropology from Carleton College.



ARIEL G. RUIZ SOTO

Ariel G. Ruiz Soto is a Senior Policy Analyst at MPI, where he works with the U.S. Immigration Policy Program and the Latin America and Caribbean Initiative.

His research examines the interaction of migration policies in the region that stretches from Panama to Canada, as well as their intended and unintended consequences for foreign- and native-born populations. He also analyzes demographic trends across the region and methodological approaches to estimate the unauthorized immigrant population in the United States.

Mr. Ruiz Soto holds a master's degree from the University of Chicago's School of Social Service Administration with an emphasis on immigration policy and service provision, and a bachelor's degree in sociology from Whitman College.



JAMES D. BACHMEIER

James D. Bachmeier is an Associate Professor in the Department of Sociology at Temple University. His research is focused on patterns of immigrant incorporation in the United States, illegal migration, and the measurement of immigrant legal status. He is an MPI Nonresident Fellow.

Dr. Bachmeier's research has been published in leading social science journals, including *Social Forces*, *Demography*, *International Migration Review*, and *Social Science Re-*

search. He is a member of the American Sociological Association and the Population Association of America.

Prior to joining Temple in 2013, Dr. Bachmeier was a postdoctoral researcher in the Population Research Institute at The Pennsylvania State University. He received his Ph.D. in sociology in 2010 from the University of California, Irvine.

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