

New Americans in Iowa



Iowa has a small but vital community of immigrants, half of whom are naturalized citizens. About 5.3 percent of the state's residents are foreign-born, and 3.0 percent of its U.S.-born residents live with at least one immigrant parent. While relatively few in number, immigrants help support Iowa's economy in many ways. They account for 4.6 percent of entrepreneurs, 17.8 percent of construction laborers, and 15.4 percent of postsecondary teachers in the state. As neighbors, business owners, taxpayers, and workers, immigrants are an integral part of Iowa's diverse and thriving communities and make extensive contributions that benefit all.

OVERVIEW¹

Immigrant residents ²	170,118
Immigrant share of population	5.30%
Immigrant taxes paid	\$1.7B
Immigrant spending power	\$4.8B

DEMOGRAPHICS

In the United States, immigrants are more likely to be working-age than their U.S.-born counterparts. This means they are more likely to be active in the labor force, allowing them to contribute to the economy not only as consumers but also as taxpayers, helping fund social services and programs like Medicare and Social Security.

Share of immigrant women	50.70%
Share of immigrant men	49.30%
Number of immigrant children	15,086
Share of total population who are U.S.-born residents living with at least one immigrant parent	3.00%
Number of U.S.-born residents living with at least one immigrant parent	90,641
Share of Foreign-Born that are proficient in English	77.30%

Age Group	Foreign-Born Population	U.S.-Born Population
0-15	7.10%	21.00%
16-64	83.70%	60.70%
65+	9.20%	18.30%

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Top Countries of Origin for Immigrants

Mexico	23.80%
India	5.80%
-	-
-	-
-	-

ENTREPRENEURSHIP

It is hard to overstate the importance of entrepreneurship since new businesses are the main driver of job growth in the United States. Immigrants play a particularly important role in this—founding businesses at far higher rates than the U.S. population overall. Today, millions of American workers are employed at immigrant-founded and immigrant-owned companies.

Immigrant entrepreneurs	7,719
Share of entrepreneurs who are immigrants	4.60%
Total business income of immigrant entrepreneurs	\$157.6M

TAXES & SPENDING POWER

Immigrant households contribute hundreds of billions of dollars in federal, state, and local taxes and hold a tremendous amount of spending power. This gives them significant economic clout, helping support local communities as consumers and taxpayers. Like all residents of the United States, regardless of where they were born, immigrants make use of public services like education, healthcare, and public safety. Even with these costs, however, immigrants' economic contributions far outweigh the cost of additional public services they incur.

Immigrant household income	\$6.5B
Total taxes paid	\$1.7B
Federal taxes paid ³	\$1.1B
State & local taxes paid ⁴	\$630.6M
Total spending power	\$4.8B

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WORKFORCE

The growth in the immigrant population has helped to strengthen America's labor force. As baby boomers retire, younger immigrants are filling crucial gaps in the labor market. Nationally, immigrants are more likely to hold an advanced degree than the U.S.-born. They are also more likely to have less than a high school education. As such, they are able to fill critical shortages at both ends of the skill spectrum, from high-tech positions to agriculture, hospitality, and service jobs.

Number of immigrant workers in the labor force	113,301
Share of workers in the labor force who are immigrants	6.70%

Education Level	Foreign-Born Population	U.S.-Born Population
Less than high school	27.80%	5.00%
High school & some college	44.80%	64.60%
Bachelor's degree	15.80%	20.90%
Graduate degree	11.50%	9.40%

Top Industries with Highest Share of Immigrant Workers

Animal slaughtering and processing	45.20%
Services to buildings and dwellings (except cleaning during construction and immediately after construction)	19.60%
Animal production and aquaculture	16.20%
Nursing care facilities (skilled nursing facilities)	11.90%
Supermarkets and other grocery (except convenience) stores	9.20%

Top Occupations with Highest Share of Immigrant Workers

Packaging and filling machine operators and tenders	53.90%
Maids and housekeeping cleaners	26.20%
Construction laborers	17.80%
Postsecondary teachers	15.40%
Janitors and building cleaners	15.20%

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HOUSING

Immigrant families have long played an important role in helping to build housing wealth in the United States. In recent decades, the more than 40 million immigrants in the U.S. collectively increased U.S. housing wealth by trillions of dollars. Much of this was possible because immigrants moved into neighborhoods once in decline, thus helping to revitalize communities and make neighborhoods more attractive to U.S.-born residents.

Immigrant homeowners	38,787
Share of recent homebuyers who were foreign-born	5.30%
Housing wealth held by immigrant households	\$7.8B
Amount paid by immigrant-led households in rent	\$311.7M

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS⁵

International students in the United States contribute tens of billions of dollars to the U.S. economy every year and support a significant number of U.S. jobs through their tuition payments and day-to-day spending. Research has also found that increases in the number of international students at American universities boost innovation and patent creation.

Students at U.S. colleges and universities who are international students	8,246
Economic contribution of international students	\$240.6M
Jobs supported by international students	1,827

NATURALIZATION & VOTING POWER

As more immigrants naturalize and become eligible to vote, they continue to gain political power. The number of immigrant voters is only projected to rise in the next decade, and in some states foreign-born voters are already capable of deciding elections.

Share of immigrants who are naturalized U.S. citizens	49.40%
Number of immigrants who are naturalized U.S. citizens	84,016
Number of immigrants who are eligible for naturalization	31,803
Number of immigrants eligible to vote	77,706

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UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANTS

The presence of a significant number of undocumented immigrants in the United States, most of whom have lived in the country for more than five years, poses many legal and political challenges. But while politicians continue to debate what to do about illegal immigration, millions of undocumented immigrants are working across the country, contributing billions of dollars to the U.S. economy.

Number of undocumented immigrants ⁶	35,544
Share of undocumented immigrants who are working age	89.30%
Undocumented entrepreneurs	-
Undocumented household income	\$989.4M
Total taxes paid ⁷	\$113.3M
Federal taxes paid	\$62.8M
State & local taxes paid	\$50.5M
Total spending power	\$876.2M
Share of immigrant population who are undocumented immigrants	20.90%
Share of workforce that is undocumented	1.40%
Share of population that is undocumented	1.10%
Number of U.S. citizens living with at least one undocumented family member	23,478
Share of U.S. citizens living with at least one undocumented family member	0.80%
Number of U.S. citizen children living with at least one undocumented family member	18,513
Share of U.S. citizen children living with at least one undocumented family member	2.60%
Number of U.S. citizen children living with at least one undocumented parent	16,260
Share of U.S. citizen children living with at least one undocumented parent	2.20%

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REFUGEES⁸

Refugees living in the United States make tremendous contributions to our economy as earners, taxpayers, and consumers. Rather than a drain on communities, refugees, with their high employment rate and entrepreneurial spirit, actually sustain and strengthen their new hometowns.

Number of likely refugees	36,514
Employment rate of likely refugees	91.30%
Refugee household income	\$1.3B
Total taxes paid	\$326.0M
Federal taxes paid	\$195.9M
State & local taxes paid	\$130.2M
Total spending power	\$968.0M
Number of refugee entrepreneurs	-
Total business income of refugee entrepreneurs	-

THE DACA-ELIGIBLE POPULATION

DACA-eligible people contribute billions of dollars to the U.S. economy. Removing the protections afforded to DACA recipients would likely upset local economies, communities, and schools, hurting employers and businesses that depend on these young immigrants as workers and customers.

Number of active DACA recipients ⁹	2,170
Number of people with DACA granted ¹⁰	2,962

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To learn more about Map the Impact, visit maptheimpact.org.

The American Immigration Council works to empower immigrants from arrival to belonging. To learn more about the Council's work, visit americanimmigrationcouncil.org.

ENDNOTES

1. Unless otherwise specified, data comes from the American Immigration Council analysis of microdata from the 1-year sample of the 2021 American Community Survey (ACS), downloaded from the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS), <https://www.ipums.org/>.
2. Except where otherwise noted, an immigrant refers to anyone born outside the country to non-U.S. citizen parents who is resident in the United States. This includes naturalized citizens, green card holders, individuals holding temporary (nonimmigrant) status, refugees, asylees, and undocumented immigrants, among others.
3. Congressional Budget Office. 2022. "The Distribution of Household Income and Federal Taxes, 2019." <https://www.cbo.gov/publication/58353>.
4. Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy (ITEP). 2018. "Who Pays? A Distributional Analysis of the Tax Systems in All 50 States (6th edition)." <https://itep.org/whopays/>.
5. We use the state-level data of international students in the 2021-22 academic year from the "International Student Economic Value Tool", developed by NAFSA, <https://www.nafsa.org/policy-and-advocacy/policy-resources/nafsa-international-student-economic-value-tool-v2>.
6. We use data from the ACS to arrive at an estimate of the undocumented immigrant population by applying the methodological approach outlined by Harvard University economist George Borjas in his 2016 NBER working paper, "The Labor Supply of Undocumented Immigrants", <https://ideas.repec.org/p/nbr/nberwo/22102.html>.
7. When estimating the tax contributions of undocumented immigrants, we take into consideration the fact that about 50 percent of undocumented immigrants pay taxes using false Social Security or Individual Tax Identification numbers and follow the methodology detailed by ITEP in "Undocumented Immigrants' State & Local Tax Contributions" to discount the total amount by half, <https://itep.org/undocumented-immigrants-state-local-tax-contributions-2017/>.
8. To identify cases in microdata from the 2021 ACS that are likely to be refugees, we use an imputation method based on each foreign-born respondent's country of birth and their year of arrival, similar to the work of Kallick and Mathema in "Refugee Integration in the United States," <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/refugee-integration-in-the-united-states/>, and Capps et al in "The Integration Outcomes of U.S. Refugees: Successes and Challenges", <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/integration-outcomes-us-refugees-successes-and-challenges>.
9. U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). "Count of Active DACA Recipients by Month of Current DACA Expiration as of March 31, 2023." https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/document/data/Active_DACA_Recipients_March_FY23_qtr2.pdf.
10. USCIS. "Number of Form I-821D, Consideration of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals – Requests by Intake and Case Status, by Fiscal Year, Aug. 15, 2012 – March 31, 2023." https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/document/data/DACA_performancedata_fy2023_qtr2.pdf.