



Immigrants in California

California has long been home to the largest number of immigrants in the United States, having accepted early settlers along their seaports as far back as the 17th century. Immigrants now account for over one quarter of the state's population and comprise nearly 34 percent of the entire labor force. As workers, business owners, taxpayers, and neighbors, immigrants are an integral part of California's diverse and thriving communities and make extensive contributions that benefit all.

More than a quarter of California residents are immigrants, while nearly one in four residents is a native-born U.S. citizen with at least one immigrant parent.

- In 2015, 10.7 million immigrants (foreign-born individuals) comprised 27.3 percent of the population.¹
- California was home to 5.3 million women, 4.9 million men, and 449,878 children who were immigrants.²
- The top countries of origin for immigrants were Mexico (40 percent of immigrants), the Philippines (8 percent), China (5.9 percent), Vietnam (4.8 percent), and India (4.5 percent).³
- In 2016, 9.3 million people in California (23.8 percent of the state's population) were native-born Americans who had at least [one immigrant parent](#).⁴

Nearly half of all immigrants in California are naturalized U.S. citizens.

- 5.3 million immigrants (49.7 percent) had naturalized as of 2015,⁵ and 2.2 million immigrants were eligible to become [naturalized U.S. citizens](#) in 2015.⁶
- Two-thirds (66.7 percent) of immigrants reported speaking English "well" or "very well."⁷

Immigrants in California are distributed across the educational spectrum.

- More than a quarter of adult immigrants had a college degree or more education in 2015, while over a third had less than a high school diploma.⁸

Education Level	Share (%) of All Immigrants	Share (%) of All Natives
College degree or more	27.4	35.1
Some college	18.6	35.3
High school diploma only	19.6	21.5
Less than a high-school diploma	34.4	8.0

Two million U.S. citizens in California live with at least one family member who is undocumented.

- 2.4 million [undocumented immigrants](#) comprised 22 percent of the immigrant population and 6 percent of the total state population in 2014.⁹
- 4.7 million people in California, including 2 million born in the United States, lived with at least one [undocumented family member](#) between 2010 and 2014.¹⁰
- During the same period, nearly one in five children in the state was a U.S.-citizen living with at least one undocumented family member (2.4 million children in total).¹¹

Nearly 200,000 Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipients live in California.

- As of 2016, 64 percent of [DACA-eligible immigrants](#) in California, or 242,339 people, had applied for DACA.¹²
- An additional 120,000 residents of the state satisfied all but the educational requirements for DACA, and another 62,000 would be eligible as they grew older.¹³

Immigrants make up more than a third of the labor force in California and are integral to a range of industries.

- 6.6 million immigrant workers comprised 33.9 percent of the labor force in 2015.¹⁴

- Immigrant workers were most numerous in the following industries:

Industry	Number of Immigrant Workers
Manufacturing	930,261
Health Care and Social Assistance	874,169
Accommodation and Food Services	691,552
Retail Trade	663,977
Construction	524,665

Analysis of the U.S. Census Bureau's 2015 American Community Survey 1-year PUMS data by the American Immigration Council.

- The largest shares of immigrant workers were in the following industries:¹⁵

Industry	Immigrant Share (%) (of all industry workers)
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing & Hunting	66.9
Manufacturing	45.6
Administrative & Support; Waste Management; and Remediation Services	43.2
Other Services (except Public Administration)	39.7
Accommodation and Food Services	39.2

Analysis of the U.S. Census Bureau's 2015 American Community Survey 1-year PUMS data by the American Immigration Council.

Immigrants are an integral part of the California workforce in a range of occupations.

- In 2015, immigrant workers were most numerous in the following occupation groups:¹⁶

Occupation Category	Number of Immigrant Workers
Office and Administrative Support	675,184
Sales and Related	641,880
Production	596,157
Management	587,525
Building and Grounds Cleaning & Maintenance	580,164

Analysis of the U.S. Census Bureau's 2015 American Community Survey 1-year PUMS data by the American Immigration Council.

- The largest shares of immigrant workers were in the following occupation groups:¹⁷

Occupation Category	Immigrant Share (%) (of all workers in occupation)
Farming, Fishing, and Forestry	77.1
Building and Grounds Cleaning & Maintenance	61.7
Production	53.3
Construction and Extraction	43.0
Computer and Mathematical Sciences	41.3

Analysis of the U.S. Census Bureau's 2015 American Community Survey 1-year PUMS data by the American Immigration Council.

- Undocumented immigrants comprised 9 percent of the state's workforce in 2014.¹⁸

Immigrants in California have contributed tens of billions of dollars in taxes.

- [Immigrant-led households in the state paid](#) \$56.5 billion in federal taxes and \$26.4 billion in state and local taxes in 2014.¹⁹
- Undocumented immigrants in California paid an estimated \$3.2 billion in [state and local taxes](#) in 2014. Their contribution would rise to \$3.7 billion if they could receive legal status.²⁰
- [DACA recipients](#) in California paid an estimated \$534.1 million in state and local taxes in 2016.²¹

As consumers, immigrants add hundreds of billions of dollars to California's economy.

- California residents in immigrant-led households had \$238.7 billion in [spending power](#) (after-tax income) in 2014.²²

Immigrant entrepreneurs in California generate billions of dollars in business revenue.

- Nearly 880,000 immigrant business owners accounted for 38.2 percent of all self-employed California residents in 2015 and generated \$21.8 billion in business income.²³
- In the following California metropolitan areas in 2015, at least one in six business owners was an immigrant. Immigrants accounted for:
 - 40.2 percent of business owners in the Los Angeles/Long Beach/Anaheim metro area,
 - 24.1 percent in Riverside/San Bernardino,
 - 17.4 percent in Sacramento/Arden/Arcade/Roseville,
 - 34.3 percent in San Diego/Carlsbad/San Marcos,
 - 31.2 percent in San Francisco/Oakland/Fremont, and
 - 42.4 percent in San Jose/Sunnyvale/Santa Clara.²⁴

Endnotes

1. “Foreign born” does not include people born in Puerto Rico or U.S. island areas or U.S. citizens born abroad of American parent(s). U.S. Census Bureau, 2015 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates. The American Immigration Council elected to use data from the 2015 ACS 1-Year estimates wherever possible to provide the most current information available. Since these estimates are based on a smaller sample size than the ACS 5-year, however, they are more sensitive to fluctuations and may result in greater margins of error (compared to 5-year estimates).
2. Children are defined as people age 17 or younger. Men and women do not include children. Ibid.
3. Analysis of the U.S. Census Bureau’s 2015 American Community Survey 1-year PUMS data by the American Immigration Council.
4. Analysis of data from the 2016 Current Population Survey by the American Immigration Council, using IPUMS-CPS. Sarah Flood, Miriam King, Steven Ruggles, and J. Robert Warren, *Integrated Public Use Microdata Series, Current Population Survey: Version 5.0* [dataset] (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, 2017).
5. 2015 ACS 1-Year Estimates.
6. Augmented IPUMS-ACS data, as published in “State-Level Unauthorized Population and Eligible-to-Naturalize Estimates,” Center for Migration Studies data tool, accessed August 2017, data.cmsny.org/state.html.
7. Figure includes immigrants who speak only English. Data based on survey respondents age 5 and over. Analysis of 2015 ACS 1-Year Estimates by the American Immigration Council.
8. Data based on survey respondents age 25 and older. Ibid.
9. Pew Research Center, “U.S. unauthorized immigration population estimates,” November 3, 2016, www.pewhispanic.org/interactives/unauthorized-immigrants/.
10. Silva Mathema, “State-by-State Estimates of the Family Members of Unauthorized Immigrants,” University of Southern California’s Center for the Study of Immigrant Integration and the Center for American Progress, March 2017, www.americanprogress.org/issues/immigration/news/2017/03/16/427868/state-state-estimates-family-members-unauthorized-immigrants/.
11. American Immigration Council analysis of data from the 2010-2014 ACS 5-Year, using Silva Mathema’s “State-by-State Estimates of the Family Members of Unauthorized Immigrants” and IPUMS-USA. Steven Ruggles, Katie Genadek, Ronald Goeken, Josiah Grover, and Matthew Sobek, *Integrated Public Use Microdata Series: Version 7.0* [dataset] (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, 2017).
12. “DACA-eligible” refers to immigrants who were immediately eligible to apply for DACA as of 2016. Migration Policy Institute analysis of U.S. Census Bureau data from the 2014 American Community Survey (ACS), 2010-14 ACS pooled, and the 2008 Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), as cited in “Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) Data Tools,” accessed June 2017, www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/data-hub/deferred-action-childhood-arrivals-daca-profiles.
13. Ibid.
14. Analysis of 2015 ACS 1-year PUMS data by the American Immigration Council. Categories are based on the 2012 North American Industry Classification System (NAICS), www.census.gov/eos/www/naics/index.html.
15. Ibid.
16. Analysis of 2015 ACS 1-year PUMS data by the American Immigration Council. Categories are based on the 2010 Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) system, www.bls.gov/soc/major_groups.htm.
17. Ibid.
18. Pew Research Center, “U.S. unauthorized immigration population estimates,” 2016.
19. New American Economy, *The Contributions of New Americans in California* (New York, NY: August 2016), 5, <http://www.newamericaneconomy.org/research/the-contributions-of-new-americans-in-california>.
20. Institute on Taxation & Economic Policy (ITEP), *Undocumented Immigrants’ State & Local Tax Contributions* (Washington, DC: March 2017), 3, www.itep.org/undocumented-immigrants-state-local-tax-contributions-2/.
21. ITEP, *State & Local Tax Contributions of Young Undocumented Immigrants* (Washington, DC: April 2017), Appendix 1, <https://itep.org/state-local-tax-contributions-of-young-undocumented-immigrants/>.
22. New American Economy, *The Contributions of New Americans in California*, 4.
23. “Business owners” include people who are self-employed, at least 18 years old, and work at least 15 hours per week at their businesses. Analysis of 2015 ACS 1-year PUMS data by the American Immigration Council.
24. American Immigration Council analysis of 2016 CPS data. Flood, King, Ruggles, and Warren, *IPUMS CPS* dataset.