



## Immigrants in Tennessee

Tennessee has a small but growing immigrant community, with many hailing from Mexico. While 1 in 20 Tennesseans was born in another country, immigrants are a vital share of the labor force. Roughly 17 percent of all Tennessee residents working in construction and extraction are immigrants, as well as 15 percent of life, physical, and social sciences employees. The majority of immigrants speak English well and are naturalized citizens or eligible for naturalization. As neighbors, business owners, taxpayers, and workers, immigrants are an integral part of Tennessee's diverse and thriving communities and make extensive contributions that benefit all.

### **Five percent of Tennessee residents are immigrants, while about 4 percent of residents are native-born U.S. citizens with at least one immigrant parent.**

- In 2018, 348,562 immigrants (foreign-born individuals) comprised 5 percent of the population.<sup>1</sup>
- Tennessee was home to 158,500 women, 157,509 men, and 32,553 children who were immigrants.<sup>2</sup>
- The top countries of origin for immigrants were Mexico (24 percent of immigrants), India (5 percent), Honduras (4 percent), China (4 percent), and Egypt (4 percent).<sup>3</sup>
- In 2018, 269,996 people in Tennessee (4 percent of the state's population) were native-born Americans who had at least one immigrant parent.<sup>4</sup>

### **Two out of five immigrants in Tennessee are naturalized U.S. citizens.**

- 140,557 immigrants (40 percent) had naturalized as of 2018,<sup>5</sup> and 60,484 immigrants were eligible to become [naturalized U.S. citizens](#) in 2017.<sup>6</sup>
- More than three in four (77 percent) immigrants reported speaking English "well" or "very well."<sup>7</sup>

### **Immigrants in Tennessee are distributed across the educational spectrum.**

- One-third (34 percent) of adult immigrants had a college degree or more education in 2018, while more than one-fourth (27 percent) had less than a high school diploma.<sup>8</sup>

Education Level	Share (%) of All Immigrants	Share (%) of All Natives
College degree or more	34	27
Some college	15	29
High school diploma only	23	32
Less than a high school diploma	27	11

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2018 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates.

**Tens of thousands of U.S. citizens in Tennessee live with at least one family member who is undocumented.**

- 130,000 [undocumented immigrants](#) comprised 38 percent of the immigrant population and 2 percent of the total state population in 2016.<sup>9</sup>
- 151,743 people in Tennessee, including 70,982 U.S. citizens, lived with at least one [undocumented family member](#) between 2010 and 2014.<sup>10</sup>
- During the same period, about 4 percent of children in the state were U.S. citizens living with at least one undocumented family member (56,518 children in total).<sup>11</sup>

**Tennessee is home to thousands of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipients.**

- 7,650 [active DACA recipients](#) lived in Tennessee as of March 2020, while DACA has been granted to 9,123 people in total since 2012.<sup>12</sup>
- As of 2019, 59 percent of [DACA-eligible immigrants](#) in Tennessee had applied for DACA.<sup>13</sup>
- An additional 5,000 residents of the state would satisfy all but the educational requirements for DACA, and fewer than 1,000 would become eligible as they grew older.<sup>14</sup>

**Immigrants are an important part of the Tennessee workforce across industries.**

- 228,857 immigrant workers comprised 7 percent of the labor force in 2018.<sup>15</sup>

- Immigrant workers were most numerous in the following industries:

Industry	Number of Immigrant Workers
Manufacturing	43,997
Construction	34,203
Accommodation and Food Services	32,902
Health Care and Social Assistance	24,372
Retail Trade	20,447

Source: Analysis of the U.S. Census Bureau's 2018 American Community Survey 1-year PUMS data by the American Immigration Council.

- The largest shares of immigrant workers were in the following industries:<sup>16</sup>

Industry	Immigrant Share (%) (of all industry workers)
Construction	14
Accommodation and Food Services	10
Administrative Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services	10
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing, and Hunting	9
Manufacturing	9

Source: Analysis of the U.S. Census Bureau's 2018 American Community Survey 1-year PUMS data by the American Immigration Council.

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

- In 2018, immigrant workers were most numerous in the following occupation groups:<sup>17</sup>

Occupation Category	Number of Immigrant Workers
Construction and Extraction Occupations	33,479
Transportation and Material Moving Occupations	27,329
Food Preparation and Serving Related	25,769
Production Occupations	23,637
Building and Grounds Cleaning and Maintenance	21,075

Source: Analysis of the U.S. Census Bureau's 2018 American Community Survey 1-year PUMS data by the American Immigration Council.

- The largest shares of immigrant workers were in the following occupation groups:<sup>18</sup>

Occupation Category	Immigrant Share (%) (of all workers in occupation)
Construction and Extraction	17
Life, Physical, and Social Science	15
Building and Grounds Cleaning & Maintenance	13
Architecture and Engineering	11
Food Preparation and Serving Related	10

Source: Analysis of the U.S. Census Bureau's 2018 American Community Survey 1-year PUMS data by the American Immigration Council.

- Undocumented immigrants comprised 3 percent of Tennessee's workforce in 2016.<sup>19</sup>

**Immigrants in Tennessee have contributed billions of dollars in taxes.**

- [Immigrant-led households in the state paid](#) \$2 billion in federal taxes and \$676 million in state and local taxes in 2018.<sup>20</sup>
- Undocumented immigrants in Tennessee paid an estimated \$143.4 million in federal taxes and \$85.9 million in [state and local taxes](#) in 2018.<sup>21</sup>
- Tennessee [DACA recipients](#) and DACA-eligible individuals paid an estimated \$17.2 million in state and local taxes in 2018.<sup>22</sup>

**As consumers, immigrants add billions of dollars to Tennessee's economy.**

- Tennessee residents in immigrant-led households had \$8.2 billion in [spending power](#) (after-tax income) in 2018.<sup>23</sup>

**Immigrant entrepreneurs in Tennessee generate hundreds of millions of dollars in business revenue.**

- 26,240 immigrant business owners accounted for 8 percent of all self-employed Tennessee residents in 2018 and generated \$731.7 million in business income.<sup>24</sup>

## 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, 2018 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates. The American Immigration Council elected to use data from the 2018 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 2018 American Community Survey 1-year PUMS data by the American Immigration Council.
4. Analysis of data from the 2018 Current Population Survey by the American Immigration Council, using IPUMS CPS. Sarah Flood, Miriam King, Renae Rodgers, Steven Ruggles and J. Robert Warren, *Integrated Public Use Microdata Series, Current Population Survey: Version 7.0* [dataset] (Minneapolis, MN: IPUMS, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.18128/D030.V7.0>.
5. 2018 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 April 2020, [data.cmsny.org/state.html](http://data.cmsny.org/state.html).
7. Figure includes immigrants who speak only English. Data based on survey respondents age 5 and over. Analysis of 2018 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, 2016,” February 5, 2019, [www.pewhispanic.org/interactives/unauthorized-immigrants/](http://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/](http://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. The number of DACA recipients reflects USCIS’ estimate of those with active DACA grants as of March 31, 2020. U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), “Approximate Active DACA Recipients: As of March 31, 2020” [dataset], July 22, 2020, <https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/document/data/Approximate%20Active%20DACA%20Receipts%20-%20March%2031%2C%202020.pdf>. DACA grants reflect USCIS Form I-821D initial requests approved from Aug. 15, 2012-Mar. 31, 2020, as of April 2020. USCIS, “Number of Form I-821D, Consideration of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, Status, by Fiscal Year, Quarter, and Case Status: Aug. 15, 2012-Mar. 31, 2020,” July 22, 2020, [https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/document/data/DACA\\_performance\\_data\\_fy2020\\_qtr2.pdf](https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/document/data/DACA_performance_data_fy2020_qtr2.pdf).
13. Estimates of the DACA-eligible population as of 2019 include unauthorized immigrant youth who had been in the United States since 2007, were under the age of 16 at the time of arrival, were under the age of 31 as of 2012, and who met DACA eligibility requirements as of 2016. Migration Policy Institute (MPI) analysis of U.S. Census Bureau data from the 2012-16 American Community Survey (ACS) pooled, and the 2008 Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), with legal status assignments by James Bachmeier and Colin Hammar of Temple University and Jennifer Van Hook of The Pennsylvania State University, Population Research Institute, as cited in “Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) Data Tools,” accessed April 2020, [www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/data-hub/deferred-action-childhood-arrivals-daca-profiles](http://www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/data-hub/deferred-action-childhood-arrivals-daca-profiles).
14. Ibid.
15. Analysis of 2018 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](http://www.census.gov/eos/www/naics/index.html).
16. Ibid.
17. Analysis of 2018 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](http://www.bls.gov/soc/major_groups.htm).
18. Ibid.
19. Pew Research Center, “U.S. unauthorized immigration population estimates, 2016,” 2019.
20. New American Economy analysis of 2018 ACS microdata using IPUMS. New American Economy, “Map the Impact,” section Taxes and Spending Power, January 31, 2020, <https://www.newamericaneconomy.org/locations/>.
21. Ibid. at sec. Undocumented Immigrants.
22. Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy, *State & Local Tax Contributions of Young Undocumented Immigrants* (Washington, DC: April 2018), Appendix 1, <https://itep.org/state-local-tax-contributions-of-young-undocumented-immigrants>.
23. New American Economy, “Map the Impact,” section Taxes and Spending Power.
24. “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 2018 ACS 1-year PUMS data by the American Immigration Council.