



Immigrants in District of Columbia

The District of Columbia (D.C.) has a sizable community of immigrants, many of whom emigrated from El Salvador. Roughly 14 percent of D.C.'s population was born in another country and foreign-born residents make up a vital, educated share of the District's labor force. Nearly three-fifths of immigrants in D.C. possess a college or higher degree, while more than four-fifths report speaking English well.

Immigrants support the D.C. economy in various ways—from starting new businesses in the region to making up more than a quarter of all Washingtonians working in the life, physical, and social sciences. As neighbors, business owners, taxpayers, and workers, immigrants are an integral part of D.C.'s diverse and thriving communities and make extensive contributions that benefit all.

One in seven D.C. residents is an immigrant, while about one in nine residents is a native-born U.S. citizen with at least one immigrant parent.

- In 2018, 97,846 immigrants (foreign-born individuals) comprised 14 percent of the population.¹
- D.C. was home to 50,612 women, 40,673 men, and 6,561 children who were immigrants.²
- The top countries of origin for immigrants were El Salvador (11 percent of immigrants), Ethiopia (7 percent), Mexico (3 percent), Trinidad & Tobago (3 percent), and China (3 percent).³
- In 2018, 75,363 people in D.C. (11 percent of the population) were native-born Americans who had at least one immigrant parent.⁴

More than two-fifths of all immigrants in D.C. are naturalized U.S. citizens.

- 44,289 immigrants (45 percent) had naturalized as of 2018,⁵ and 21,952 immigrants were eligible to become [naturalized U.S. citizens](#) in 2017.⁶
- More than four in five (86 percent) of immigrants reported speaking English “well” or “very well.”⁷

Immigrants in D.C. tend to be college educated.

- Nearly three-fifths (58 percent) of adult immigrants had a college degree or more education in 2018, while fewer than one-fifth (18 percent) had less than a high school diploma.⁸

Education Level	Share (%) of All Immigrants	Share (%) of All Natives
College degree or more	58	61
Some college	12	16
High school diploma only	12	17
Less than a high school diploma	18	6

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

More than 10,000 U.S. citizens in D.C. live with at least one family member who is undocumented.

- 25,000 [undocumented immigrants](#) comprised 28 percent of the immigrant population and 4 percent of the total state population in 2016.⁹
- 23,979 people in D.C., including 10,482 U.S. citizens, lived with at least one [undocumented family member](#) between 2010 and 2014.¹⁰
- During the same period, about 7 percent of children in D.C. were U.S. citizens living with at least one undocumented family member (7,572 children in total).¹¹

D.C. is home to hundreds of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipients.

- 600 [active DACA recipients](#) lived in D.C. as of March 2020, while DACA has been granted to 738 people in total since 2012.¹²
- As of 2019, 29 percent of [DACA-eligible immigrants](#) in D.C. had applied for DACA.¹³
- Fewer than 1,000 residents of D.C. would satisfy all but the educational requirements for DACA, and fewer than 1,000 would become eligible as they grew older.¹⁴

One in six D.C. workers is an immigrant, making up a vital part of the labor force.

- 68,114 immigrant workers comprised 17 percent of the labor force in 2018.¹⁵

- Immigrant workers were most numerous in the following industries:

Industry	Number of Immigrant Workers
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	13,114
Public Administration	9,811
Accommodation and Food Services	9,156
Health Care and Social Assistance	8,493
Other Services (except Public Administration)	7,585

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:¹⁶

Industry	Immigrant Share (%) (of all industry workers)
Mining, Quarrying, and Oil & Gas Extraction	100
Accommodation and Food Services	25
Administrative & Support; Waste Management; and Remediation Services	23
Construction	23
Finance and Insurance	20

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 D.C. workforce in a range of occupations.

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

Occupation Category	Number of Immigrant Workers
Management	9,395
Business and Financial Operations	7,492
Building and Grounds Cleaning & Maintenance	5,723
Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports, and Media	5,206
Life, Physical, and Social Science	4,758

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:¹⁸

Occupation Category	Immigrant Share (%) (of all workers in occupation)
Building and Grounds Cleaning & Maintenance	42
Healthcare Support	40
Life, Physical, and Social Science	29
Construction and Extraction	22
Installation, Maintenance, and Repair	22

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 5 percent of the District of Columbia's workforce in 2016.¹⁹

Immigrants in D.C. have contributed over a billion dollars in taxes.

- [Immigrant-led households in D.C.](#) paid \$931.8 million in federal taxes and \$416.9 million in state and local taxes in 2018.²⁰
- Undocumented immigrants in D.C. paid an estimated \$48.7 million in federal taxes and \$23.1 million in [state and local taxes](#) in 2018.²¹
- D.C. [DACA recipients](#) and DACA-eligible individuals paid an estimated \$3.1 million in state and local taxes in 2018.²²

As consumers, immigrants add billions of dollars to the D.C. economy.

- D.C. residents in immigrant-led households had \$3 billion in [spending power](#) (after-tax income) in 2018.²³

Immigrant entrepreneurs in D.C. generate tens of millions of dollars in business revenue.

- 5,452 immigrant business owners accounted for 16 percent of all self-employed D.C. residents in 2018 and generated \$145 million in business income.²⁴
- In 2018, immigrants accounted for 31 percent of business owners in the greater Washington metropolitan area (which spans D.C., Maryland, and Virginia).²⁵

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.
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/.
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. 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%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.
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.
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.
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.
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.
25. American Immigration Council analysis of 2018 CPS data. Flood, King, Rodgers, Ruggles, and Warren, *IPUMS CPS* dataset.