



Immigrants in Wisconsin

Wisconsin has a small but growing immigrant community, much of which emigrated from Mexico. While 5 percent of Wisconsin's population was born in another country, over 7 percent of residents are native-born Americans with at least one immigrant parent. Across sectors, foreign-born residents support the state's economy and are vital to the state's labor force. For example, over 22 percent of all Wisconsin farmers, fishers, and foresters are immigrants, as are 12 percent of residents working in the computer and math sciences. As workers, business owners, taxpayers, and neighbors, immigrants are an integral part of Wisconsin's diverse and thriving communities and make extensive contributions that benefit all.

Nearly 5 percent of Wisconsin residents are immigrants, while over 6 percent of residents are native-born U.S. citizens with at least one immigrant parent.

- In 2015, 278,981 immigrants (foreign-born individuals) comprised 4.8 percent of the state's population.¹
- Wisconsin was home to 127,339 women, 127,799 men, and 23,843 children who were immigrants.²
- The top countries of origin for immigrants were Mexico (31.6 percent of immigrants), India (8.1 percent), Laos (6.6 percent), Thailand (3.7 percent), and China (3.5 percent).³
- In 2016, 379,613 people in Wisconsin (6.6 percent of the state's population) were native-born Americans who had at least [one immigrant parent](#).⁴

More than two in five immigrants in Wisconsin are naturalized U.S. citizens.

- 126,745 immigrants (45.4 percent) had naturalized as of 2015,⁵ and 50,860 immigrants were eligible to become [naturalized U.S. citizens](#) in 2015.⁶
- Almost four in five immigrants (79.4 percent) reported speaking English "well" or "very well."⁷

Immigrants in Wisconsin are concentrated at both ends of the educational spectrum.

- Nearly 3 in 10 adult immigrants had a college degree or more education in 2015, while a slightly smaller share had less than a high school diploma.⁸

Education Level	Share (%) of All Immigrants	Share (%) of All Natives
College degree or more	29.3	28.3
Some college	19.0	32.6
High school diploma only	22.9	31.7
Less than a high-school diploma	28.7	7.3

Over 55,000 U.S. citizens in Wisconsin live with at least one family member who is undocumented.

- 80,000 [undocumented immigrants](#) comprised 27 percent of the immigrant population and 1.3 percent of the total state population in 2014.⁹
- 115,747 people in Wisconsin, including 49,928 born in the United States, lived with at least one [undocumented family member](#) between 2010 and 2014.¹⁰
- During the same period, 3 percent of children in the state were U.S. citizens living with at least one undocumented family member (43,101 children in total).¹¹

Nearly 7,000 Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipients live in Wisconsin.¹²

- As of 2016, 81 percent of [DACA-eligible immigrants](#) in Wisconsin, or 8,144 people, had applied for DACA.¹³
- An additional 2,000 residents of the state satisfied all but the educational requirements for DACA, and another 2,000 would be additionally eligible as they grew older.¹⁴

Immigrants are vital members of Wisconsin’s labor force in a range of industries.

- 183,626 immigrant workers comprised 5.9 percent of the labor force in 2015.¹⁵
- Immigrant workers were most numerous in the following industries:

Industry	Number of Immigrant Workers
Manufacturing	45,653
Health Care and Social Assistance	23,383
Accommodation and Food Services	19,185
Educational Services	18,319
Retail Trade	14,928

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:¹⁶

Industry	Immigrant Share (%) (of all industry workers)
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing & Hunting	11.2
Administrative & Support; Waste Management; and Remediation Services	10.2
Other Services (except Public Administration)	7.9
Manufacturing	7.2
Accommodation and Food Services	7.1

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 Wisconsin workforce across occupations.

- In 2015, immigrant workers were most numerous in the following occupation groups:¹⁷

Occupation Category	Number of Immigrant Workers
Production	34,182
Office and Administrative Support	15,950
Transportation and Material Moving	15,178
Food Preparation and Serving Related	14,771
Management	14,667

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:¹⁸

Occupation Category	Immigrant Share (%) (of all workers in occupation)
Farming, Fishing, and Forestry	22.3
Life, Physical, and Social Sciences	15.4
Computer and Mathematical Sciences	12.3
Building and Grounds Cleaning & Maintenance	9.7
Production	9.3

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

- Undocumented immigrants comprised 1.9 percent of the state's workforce in 2014.¹⁹

Immigrants in Wisconsin contribute billions of dollars in taxes every year.

- [Immigrant-led households in the state paid](#) \$1.4 billion in federal taxes and \$675.4 million in state and local taxes in 2014.²⁰
- Undocumented immigrants in Wisconsin paid an estimated \$71.8 million in [state and local taxes](#) in 2014. Their contribution would rise to \$91.7 million if they could receive legal status.²¹
- [DACA recipients](#) in Wisconsin paid an estimated \$17.8 million in state and local taxes in 2016.²²

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

- Wisconsinites in immigrant-led households had \$5.5 billion in [spending power](#) (after-tax income) in 2014.²³

Immigrant entrepreneurs in Wisconsin generate nearly a quarter-billion dollars in annual business revenue.

- 14,866 immigrant business owners accounted for 5.4 percent of all self-employed Wisconsin residents in 2015 and generated \$249.5 million in business income.²⁴
- In 2015, immigrants accounted for 30 percent of business owners in the Milwaukee/Waukesha/West Allis metropolitan area, 20.3 percent in the Chicago/Naperville/Joliet metro area (which extends from Illinois to Wisconsin and into Indiana), and 6 percent in the Minneapolis/St. Paul/Bloomington metro area (which spans Minnesota and Wisconsin).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, 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. 2015 ACS 1-Year Estimates.

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, <https://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 “Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals” (DACA) initiative began in 2012 and provides certain immigrants (those who were brought to the United States as children and meet specific requirements) with temporary relief from deportation, or deferred action. American Immigration Council, “Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals: A Q&A Guide,” August 17, 2012, www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/deferred-action-childhood-arrivals-qa-guide. The number of DACA recipients reflects USCIS’ estimate of those with active DACA grants as of September 4, 2017. U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services CLAIMS3 and ELIS Systems, *Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals: Population Data* (Washington, DC: Dept. of Homeland Security, September 20, 2017), Approximate Active DACA Recipients: State of Residence as of September 4, 2017 [dataset], <https://www.uscis.gov/daca2017>.

¹³ “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.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ 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.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ 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.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Pew Research Center, “U.S. unauthorized immigration population estimates,” 2016.

²⁰ New American Economy, *The Contributions of New Americans in Wisconsin* (New York, NY: August 2016), 5, <http://www.newamericaneconomy.org/research/the-contributions-of-new-americans-in-wisconsin/>.

²¹ Institute on Taxation & Economic Policy (ITEP), *Undocumented Immigrants’ State & Local Tax Contributions* (Washington, DC: March 2017), 3, <https://itep.org/undocumented-immigrants-state-local-tax-contributions-2/>.

²² 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/>.

²³ New American Economy, *The Contributions of New Americans in Wisconsin*, 5.

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 2015 ACS 1-year PUMS data by the American Immigration Council.

²⁵ American Immigration Council analysis of 2016 CPS data. Flood, King, Ruggles, and Warren, *IPUMS CPS* dataset.