

Legal Immigration to United States Increased Substantially in FY 2005

New data released by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) show that in Fiscal Year (FY) 2005:

- Lawful permanent immigration grew by 17 percent from FY 2004.
- The number of people who adjusted their status to lawful permanent residence increased 26 percent, explaining much of the overall growth.
- The level of newly arriving lawful permanent residents remained relatively steady.
- Refugee admissions rose slightly from FY 2004, but remained below pre-9/11 levels.
- The level of temporary visitors rebounded to near pre-9/11 levels.
- Naturalizations increased by almost 13 percent from FY 2004.

Below is an overview of US immigration based on FY 2005 data released by the Department of Homeland Security's Office of Immigration Statistics in 2006.

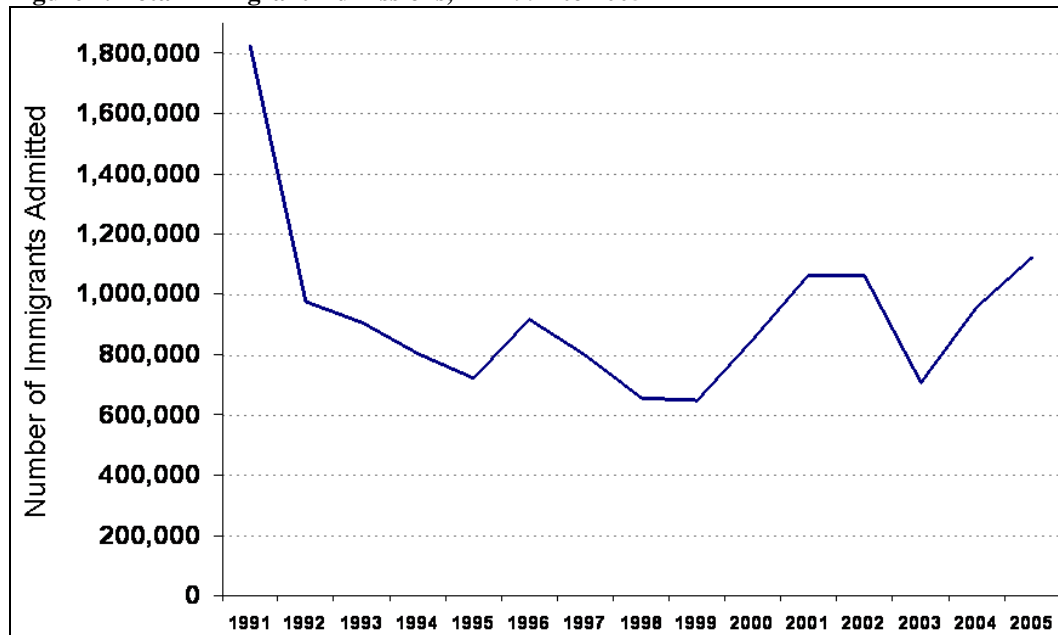
Permanent Immigration

The number of people granted lawful permanent residence in the United States in FY 2005 climbed 17.2 percent from FY 2004 levels to 1,122,373. This included 384,071 people newly arriving to the United States, and 738,302 adjusting from another type of immigration status.

This is the highest number of new lawful permanent residents (LPRs) in a single year since FY 1991 when 1.8 million people gained LPR status. The number of LPRs newly arriving to the United States increased just 3 percent over the 373,962 new arrivals in FY 2004, while the number of persons adjusting from another immigration status to permanent status increased 26 percent over the 583,921 status adjusters in FY 2004.

The large increase in persons adjusting to LPR status is likely a result of efforts by USCIS to speed the processing of immigration applications in order to eliminate its backlog of applications that have been pending for more than six months.

Figure 1. Total Immigrant Admissions, FY 1991 to 2005



Source: DHS, Office of Immigration Statistics, *2005 Yearbook of Immigration Statistics* (Washington, DC: Office of Immigration Statistics, 2006).

Nearly half of all new legal immigrants came from just ten countries.

The top countries of birth for immigrants in FY 2005 were Mexico (161,445), India (84,681), China (69,967), the Philippines (60,748), Cuba (36,261), Vietnam (32,784), the Dominican Republic (27,504), Korea (26,562), Colombia (25,571), and Ukraine (22,761). Ukraine was a new addition to the list of top ten sending countries of new LPRs, while El Salvador fell out of the top ten. The number of legal immigrants from Mexico declined 8.0 percent (13,966) from the number in FY 2004 and the number from the Dominican Republic declined 9.8 percent (3,002). The other eight countries experienced growth over their FY 2004 levels. Despite the decline in legal immigration from Mexico, the number of new LPRs from Mexico was still about twice that from India, the next largest LPR-sending country.

The countries with largest numerical increases in immigrants to the United States were Cuba, India, China, Ukraine, and Korea.

In FY 2005, 36,261 Cubans became lawful permanent residents, compared to 20,488 in FY 2004, an increase of 77.0 percent (15,773). The number of immigrants from India increased by 20.7 percent (14,530) between FY 2004 and 2005, and the number of immigrants from China increased by 26.1 percent (14,473). The large increase in new Cuban LPRs resulted from a near doubling of the number of refugees and asylees adjusting to LPR status, from 16,678 in FY 2004 to 32,555 in FY 2005.

Six states remain key destinations for many new legal immigrants.

Sixty-two percent of new immigrants lived in six states — California, New York, Florida, Texas, New Jersey, and Illinois. All but California saw an increase in new lawful permanent residents since FY 2004. However, the states experiencing the highest percent change in the number of new immigrants between FY 2004 and FY 2005 included some not traditionally considered top immigrant destinations. Georgia, South Carolina, Alabama, Delaware, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, North Carolina, and North Dakota were all among the ten states with the highest percent change in flows of new permanent immigrants. Florida also experienced high growth.

Family reunification-based immigration continued to comprise a large proportion of legal immigration, though its share was slightly smaller than in recent years.

Approximately 58 percent of the 1.1 million immigrants who obtained lawful permanent residence in FY 2005 were relatives of US citizens or permanent residents. This percentage is slightly lower than the share in FY 2004 (66.0 percent). The total number of relatives of permanent residents or US citizens who obtained LPR status increased 2.7 percent, from 632,170 in FY 2004 to 649,201 in FY 2005.

Employment-based immigration increased as a percentage of overall legal immigration, while numbers of employment-sponsored immigrants increased by 58.9 percent.

Employment-based immigration accounted for 22.0 percent of new immigrants in FY 2005, rising from only 16.2 percent in FY 2004. The 246,878 employment-based immigrants represented a 58.9 percent increase from the 155,330 immigrants in FY 2004. The number of employment-sponsored LPRs in FY 2005 exceeded the 140,000 annual cap on employment-based immigration because of a provision allowing the recapture of unused visa numbers from FY 1999 and 2000, under the American Competitiveness in the 21st Century Act of 2000.

The number of immigrants admitted under the Diversity Program declined slightly from FY 2004 levels.

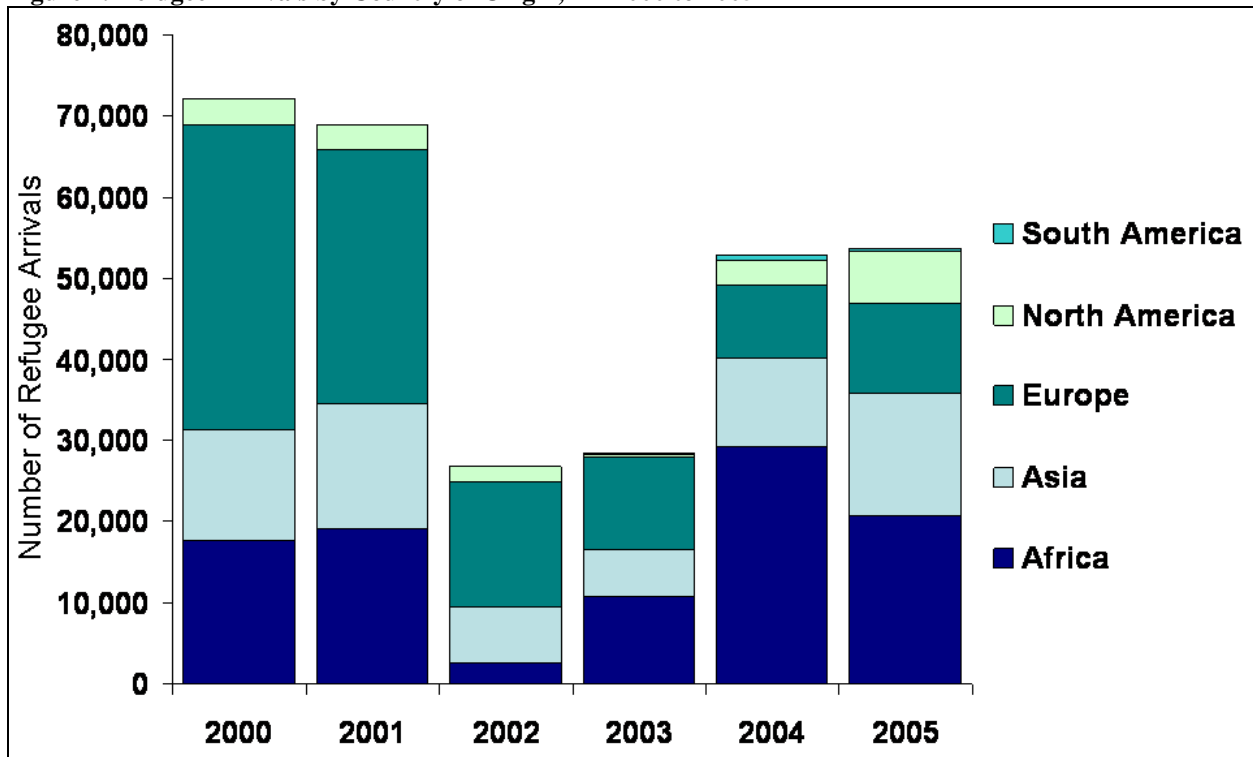
Under the Diversity Program, nationals of underrepresented countries can apply to join the Diversity Visa lottery. The annual cap on Diversity Visas is 55,000; however, this number has been temporarily reduced to 50,000 under the Nicaraguan and Central American Relief Act of 1997. Slightly more or less than 50,000 immigrants may be admitted in any given year. There were 46,234 Diversity immigrants in FY 2005, down from 50,084 in FY 2004. The five top sending countries under the Diversity Program were Ethiopia (3,427), Poland (3,259), Bulgaria (2,854), Ukraine (2,745), and Egypt (2,478).

Refugee admissions rose by a slight 1.7 percent between FY 2004 and FY 2005, remaining significantly below the 70,000 admissions ceiling authorized by the president in consultation with Congress.

Refugees are individuals unable or unwilling to return to their country of nationality because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution. Refugees are interviewed and approved for admission while abroad, and then move to the United States. The number of refugee arrivals totaled 53,738 in FY 2005, up from 52,835 in FY 2004 and 28,304 in FY 2003. This number remains below pre-9/11 levels — 72,143 in FY 2000 and 68,925 in FY 2001. Refugee admissions more than doubled over the past year from North America (from 2,976 to 6,371), and also increased from Asia (from 10,897 to 14,970) and Europe (from 9,254 to 11,316).

Meanwhile, numbers declined from Africa and South America. Two-thirds of refugees admitted in FY 2005 came from five countries: Somalia (10,405), Laos (8,517), Cuba (6,356), Russia (5,982), and Liberia (4,289).

Figure 2. Refugee Arrivals by Country of Origin, FY 2000 to 2005



Source: DHS, Office of Immigration Statistics, *2005 Yearbook of Immigration Statistics* (Washington, DC: Office of Immigration Statistics, 2006).

The number of individuals granted asylum decreased 7.2 percent from FY 2004 to 25,257 in FY 2005.

Like refugees, asylees are persons unable or unwilling to return to their country of nationality because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution. However, in contrast to refugees, asylees apply for such status upon arrival in the United States. The 25,257 persons granted asylum in FY 2005 represent a slight decrease from the 27,222 persons granted asylum in FY 2004. Over half of those granted asylum in FY 2005 came from five countries: China (5,225), Colombia (3,375), Haiti (2,962), Venezuela (1,114), and Ethiopia (728).

Refugee adjustments increased by 84.7 percent from FY 2004 levels to 112,676, while asylee adjustments nearly tripled to 30,286.

Persons granted either refugee or asylee status are eligible to apply for lawful permanent resident status after one year in the United States. Refugee adjustments have ranged widely in recent years from 115,601 in FY 2002 to a 15-year low of 34,362 in FY 2003. As with overall adjustments to LPR status, the high number of adjustments in FY 2005 likely resulted from efforts by USCIS to reduce its backlog. Asylee adjustments increased 196 percent from FY 2004 as the result of a change in legislation: The REAL ID Act, included in the Emergency Supplemental Appropriations Act of January 2005, removed the 10,000 annual cap on asylee

adjustments. Therefore, some asylees who had not been able to adjust under the cap in past years were able to do so in FY 2005.

Temporary Admissions

Temporary nonimmigrant admissions totaled 32.0 million in FY 2005, a 4.0 percent increase from FY 2004.

During the 1990s, nonimmigrant admissions had ranged from roughly 20 to 30 million, following the ups and downs of the economy. Between FY 2001 and 2003, the number of admissions fell 15.2 percent from 32.8 million to 27.8 million. Since then, nonimmigrant admissions have been rebounding, and the FY 2005 level is only 2.5 percent below the FY 2001 level. Admissions numbers count entries into the country, but may count individuals multiple times if they enter more than once in a given year. The DHS Office of Immigration Statistics estimates that the 32.0 million admissions in FY 2005 represented about 26.9 million people. Of these individuals, an estimated 23.5 million entered the country one time during the year, while 3.3 million entered at least twice.

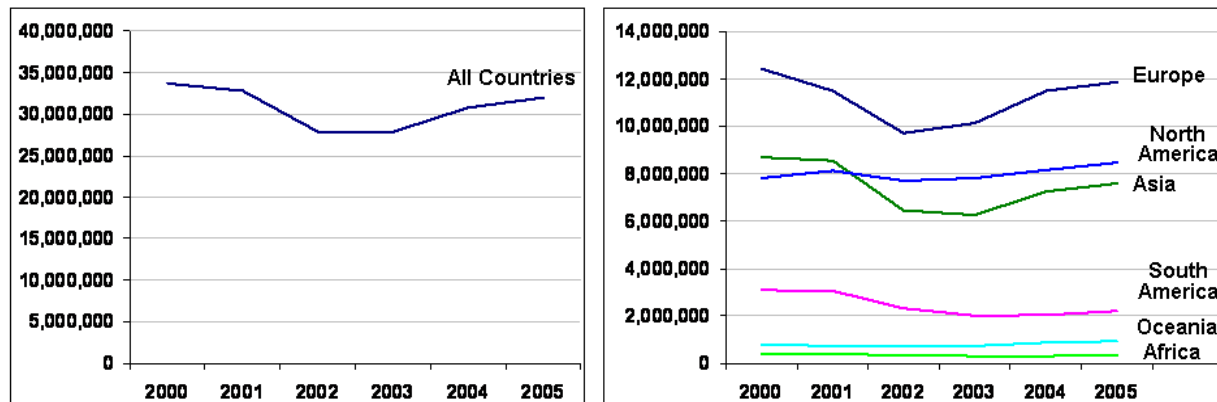
Most nonimmigrant visitor admissions were from tourists and business travelers, while less than 5 percent were from temporary workers.

The vast majority of nonimmigrant visitors in FY 2005 were tourists and business travelers (89.1 percent combined), while 3.3 percent of nonimmigrant admissions were students or exchange visitors and their families, and 4.8 percent were temporary workers and their families. The leading destinations for nonimmigrants were Florida, California, New York, Texas, and Hawaii.

Temporary admissions increased in FY 2005 from all world regions.

Between FY 2004 and 2005, admissions increased 8.3 percent from South America, 7.1 percent from Oceania, 4.5 percent from Asia, 3.6 percent from North America, and 3.3 percent from Europe. Countries with the largest increases in nonimmigrant admissions were Mexico, Brazil, Japan, Germany, and China, while Canada, the Bahamas, Spain, El Salvador, and Switzerland saw the largest declines in admissions. Temporary admissions increased from FY 2004 levels for some countries that had experienced large post-9/11 declines in admissions. Admissions increased 17.9 percent for Saudi Arabia, 12.5 percent for Jordan, and 7.8 percent for Malaysia. However, despite these increases, admissions remained 22.7 percent and 28.0 percent below their FY 2001 levels for Jordan and Malaysia respectively, and 68.7 percent below their FY 2001 levels for Saudi Arabia.

Figure 3a. Temporary Admissions FY 2000 to 2005 Figure 3b. Temporary Admissions by Region of Residence FY 2000 to 2005



Source: DHS, Office of Immigration Statistics, 2005 Yearbook of Immigration Statistics (Washington, DC: Office of Immigration Statistics, 2006).

Over half of all nonimmigrant visitors were nationals of the United Kingdom, Mexico, Japan, Germany, and France.

Admissions increased between FY 2004 and 2005 for all of the top ten sending countries but Canada. Sixty-two percent of all nonimmigrants cited one of ten countries as their place of residence: The United Kingdom (4.8 million), Mexico (4.8 million), Japan (4.3 million), Germany (1.6 million), France (1.1 million), South Korea (767,671), Italy (659,849), Australia (653,076), Brazil (602,819), and Canada (527,264).

Nonimmigrant admissions increased from FY 2004 levels for nearly all visa categories, including visitors for business and pleasure, students, temporary workers, treaty traders and investors, and representatives of foreign governments.

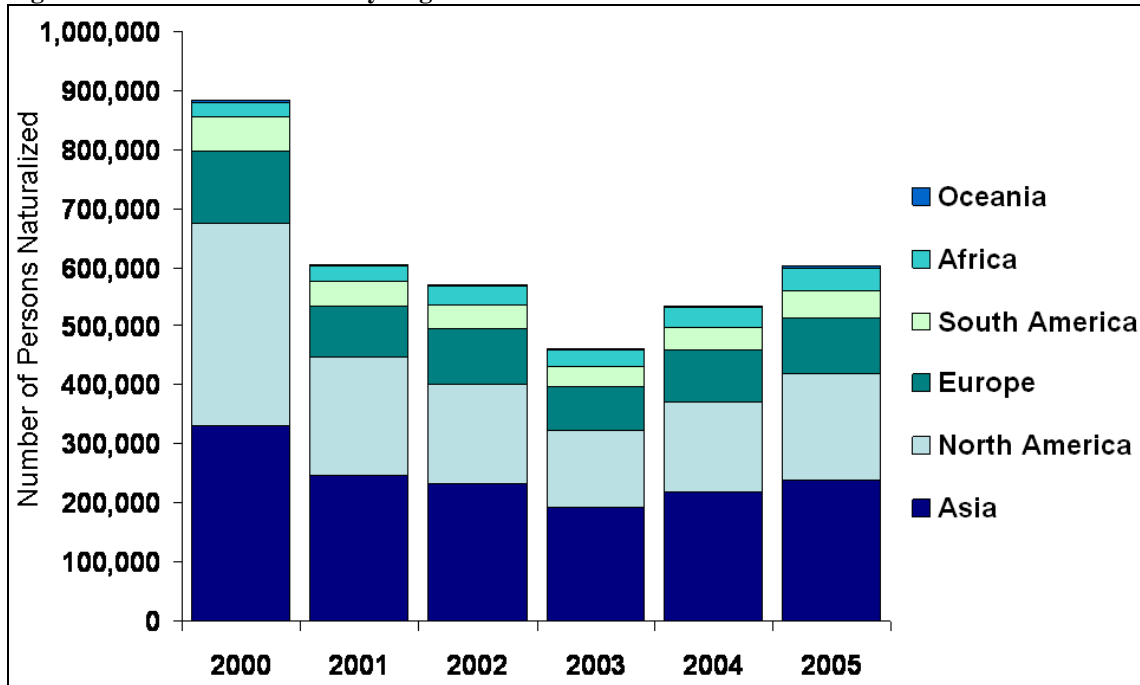
The number of admissions of visitors for business and pleasure increased 4.1 percent from FY 2004, foreign students and their families increased 2.9 percent, temporary workers rose 6.3 percent, treaty traders and their families increased 5.4 percent, and foreign government officials and their families increased 5.3 percent. Nearly all nonimmigrant visa categories saw their admissions rise from FY 2004 levels. Two notable exceptions were intracompany transferees and their families and Legal Immigration Family Equity (LIFE) Act entrants. LIFE Act entrants include fiancées of US citizens and spouses or children of US citizens or LPRs who are waiting for a permanent visa. Admissions of H-1B high-skill workers increased by 20,597 (5.3 percent) between FY 2004 and 2005, due to a change in legislation that made 20,000 additional H-1B visas available for foreign workers who completed a graduate program in US universities, under the H-1B Visa Reform Act of 2004.

Naturalizations

In FY 2005, 604,280 people gained US citizenship, yet a processing backlog of 552,940 naturalization applications remains.

The number of naturalizations was a 12.5 percent increase from the 537,151 naturalized in FY 2004. Meanwhile, the backlog of naturalization applications to be processed decreased 15.3 percent (100,188) between FY 2004 and FY 2005, due to the higher number of applications processed by USCIS in FY 2005.

Figure 4. Persons Naturalized by Region of Birth FY 2000 to 2005



Source: DHS, Office of Immigration Statistics, *2005 Yearbook of Immigration Statistics* (Washington, DC: Office of Immigration Statistics, 2006).

Just under 40 percent of the 604,280 people who naturalized in FY 2005 were born in Asia, while about 30 percent were born in North America.

The single largest country of origin for newly naturalized US citizens in FY 2005 was Mexico, with 77,089. Other key countries of origin were the Philippines (36,673), India (35,962), Vietnam (32,926), China (31,708), the Dominican Republic (20,831), Korea (19,223), Jamaica (13,674), El Salvador (12,174), Colombia (11,396) and Cuba (11,227). Almost half (48.2 percent) of all naturalizations in FY 2005 involved nationals from these ten countries.

Two-thirds of those who naturalized in FY 2005 were married.

Of those who naturalized in FY 2004, 55.5 percent were female, and 65.8 percent were married. About 71 percent were between the ages of 25 and 54. The states of residence of the largest numbers of newly naturalized persons were the six traditional immigrant states: California (170,489), New York (84,624), Florida (42,999), Texas (38,553), New Jersey (33,160), and Illinois (27,739).

DATA SOURCE

The data are from the *2005 Yearbook of Immigration Statistics* published by the Office of Immigration Statistics in the Department of Homeland Security. Fiscal Year (FY) 2005 began October 1, 2004, and ended September 30, 2005. Backlog data was taken from the “Monthly Immigration Statistical Report, September 2005 Year End Report,” released in August 2006, by the Office of Immigration Statistics in the Department of Homeland Security.

This information was compiled by MPI Research Assistant Julia Gelatt and Senior Policy Analyst Deborah Meyers. It updates data from Fact Sheet #12, *Legal Immigration to US Up from Last Year*. For questions or to arrange an interview with an MPI expert on immigration, please contact Colleen Coffey, Deputy Director of Communications, at (202) 266-1910 or ccoffey@migrationpolicy.org. Please visit us at www.migrationpolicy.org.

For more information on immigration to the United States and worldwide, visit the Migration Information Source, MPI’s online publication, at www.migrationinformation.org. The Source provides fresh thought, authoritative data from numerous global organizations and governments, and analysis of international migration trends.

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