

Spotlight On Temporary Admissions Of Nonimmigrants To The United States

by Jeanne Batalova for the Migration Information Source

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This updated Spotlight takes a detailed look at the statistics on admissions of foreign nationals who come to the United States on a temporary (i.e., nonimmigrant) visa. The data are from the Department of Homeland Security's Office of Immigration Statistics (OIS), specifically the *Annual Flow Report - Temporary Admissions of Nonimmigrants to the United States: 2006*, as well as tables published on the OIS website.

Note: all yearly data is for the government's fiscal year (October 1 through September 30).

Special Note: Temporary visa data gathered by DHS counts admissions, not individuals. In some cases, temporary visa holders may enter the country more than once in any given year.

Click on the bullet points below for more information:

- [Nonimmigrants are foreign nationals seeking to enter the United States temporarily for a specific purpose.](#)
- [Nonimmigrants may only engage in activities permitted under the visa issued to them.](#)
- [A nonimmigrant visa does not necessarily lead to lawful permanent residence.](#)
- [There is no limit on the total number of nonimmigrants admitted each year.](#)
- [Nonimmigrant admissions represent the number of arrivals, not the number of individuals, admitted to the United States.](#)
- [The number of nonimmigrant admissions does not equal the number of nonimmigrant visas issued by overseas consulates.](#)
- [Two important groups, exempt from completing arrival/departure forms, accounted for more than 141 million temporary admissions in 2006.](#)
- [The total number of nonimmigrant admissions to the United States has almost doubled from 17.6 million in 1990 to 33.7 million in 2006.](#)
- [In 2006, almost nine out of 10 temporary admissions were temporary visitors \(tourists and business travelers\).](#)
- [Citizens from three countries — Mexico, the UK, and Japan — accounted for nearly half of all nonimmigrant admissions in 2006.](#)
- [Nationals of South Korea, Japan, India, China, Taiwan, and Mexico accounted for half of all foreign academic student admissions in 2006.](#)
- [Nonimmigrants from India and the United Kingdom made up more than one-third of all H-1B "specialty occupation" worker admissions in 2006.](#)

- Nonimmigrants from Mexico and Jamaica accounted for three quarters of all H-2B seasonal nonagricultural worker admissions in 2006.
- Four states — California, Florida, New York, and Texas — were the intended destination for half of all nonimmigrant admissions in 2006.

Nonimmigrants are foreign nationals seeking to enter the United States temporarily for a specific purpose.

According to US immigration law, nonimmigrants are citizens of other countries who have received a particular type of visa and enter the United States temporarily for a specific purpose. Nonimmigrants are also referred to as temporary admissions. There are more than 70 classes of nonimmigrant admissions, including tourists, business visitors, students, H-1B workers, religious workers, intracompany transferees, diplomats, representatives of international organizations, etc.

Nonimmigrants may only engage in activities permitted under the visa issued to them.

Upon admission, nonimmigrants are restricted to the activity or reason for which their visa was issued. For example, a person admitted as a tourist (i.e., a temporary visitor for pleasure) is not allowed to work or study unless he leaves the United States and enters on a work or student visa.

A nonimmigrant visa does not necessarily lead to lawful permanent residence.

By law, nonimmigrants are admitted temporarily for a specific purpose. However, if they meet certain eligibility requirements, they may apply to adjust their status to lawful permanent residence.

For example, a woman comes to the United States as a student. While on a student visa, she marries a US citizen. Her spouse can petition DHS on her behalf to adjust her status from a student to that of a lawful permanent resident. Family reunification would be the basis for her adjustment (see **Spotlight on Legal Immigration to the United States**). If the couple meets all required criteria, she will receive a green card stating she is lawfully admitted for permanent residence.

(Note: this example is a very simplified case provided mainly to illustrate the point.)

There is no limit on the total number of nonimmigrants admitted each year.

Although there is no overall cap on how many nonimmigrants can be admitted to the United States per year, Congress sets a numerical limit for some categories of nonimmigrants. These categories currently include temporary skilled workers (65,000 H-1B skilled occupation visas for first-time applicants plus 20,000 visas for foreign graduates of US advanced degree programs), seasonal nonagricultural workers (66,000 H-2B visas), treaty aliens in specialty occupations (10,500 E-3 visas), victims of trafficking (5,000 T-1 visas), and victims of criminal activity (10,000 U-1 visas).

Nonimmigrant admissions represent the number of arrivals, not the number of individuals, admitted to the United States.

Nonimmigrant admissions are recorded for each arrival. A nonimmigrant may travel on the same (or different) visa back and forth between the United States and another country within the same year. Every time this person enters the United States, the entry is recorded and added to the total number of admissions for that fiscal year. Therefore, the count of admissions exceeds the number of individuals arriving.

The number of nonimmigrant admissions does not equal the number of nonimmigrant visas issued by overseas consulates.

The number of nonimmigrants arriving in the United States does not match the number of nonimmigrant visas issued by overseas consulates in the same fiscal year.

There are a number of reasons for this difference. First, not all foreign nationals need a visa to enter the country. Nationals of 27 countries that are part of the Visa Waiver Program (eg, the United Kingdom, Belgium, Finland, Australia, Canada, Japan, etc.) can travel to the United States without a visa if they come for a period of less than 90 days as tourists or business travelers.

Second, most nonimmigrant visas are valid for several years. And third, some people may choose not to travel to the United States even if they obtain a visa, or they may choose to travel in the next (fiscal) year.

Two important groups, exempt from completing arrival/departure forms, accounted for more than 141 million temporary admissions in 2006.

In 2006, there were about 175.1 million nonimmigrant admissions to the United States, of which 141.4 million (80.1 percent) were exempt from completing the I-94 arrival/departure form at the port of entry. These nonimmigrant admissions are from two groups: Canadians who travel to the United States for business or pleasure, and Mexicans who possess a nonresident alien Border Crossing Card (i.e., laser visa). DHS only reports characteristics of I-94 nonimmigrant admissions.

The total number of nonimmigrant admissions to the United States has almost doubled from 17.6 million in 1990 to 33.7 million in 2006.

Temporary admissions of nonimmigrants to the United States has increased 1.9 times from 17.6 million in 1990 to 33.7 million (not including the admission of certain Mexicans and Canadians) in 2006 (see Figure 1).

The number of foreign nationals who entered the United States just one time in 2006 totaled 21.4 million, and an additional 4.4 million individuals entered the country more than once.

A number of factors caused the 15.1 percent drop in nonimmigrant admissions between 2001 (32.8 million) and 2003 (27.8 million), one of which was increased scrutiny of visa applicants following the September 11 terrorist attacks. However, the upward trend resumed after 2003.

Figure 1. Total Nonimmigrant

Admissions, 1990 to 2006

Source: Data from 1997 to 2006 are from the DHS *Yearbook of Immigration Statistics, 2006: Data on Temporary Admissions (Nonimmigrants)*, Table 25; data from 1990 to 1996 are from the *Yearbook of Immigration Statistics, 2003: Data on Temporary Admissions (Nonimmigrants)*, Table 22.

In 2006, almost nine out of 10 temporary admissions were temporary visitors (tourists and business travelers).

Similar to the past, temporary visitors accounted for an overwhelming majority of all arrivals. In 2006, they represented 88.9 percent (29.9 million) of all admissions to the United States (see Figure 2). Of those, 24.9 million were tourist admissions and 5.0 million were business-traveler admissions.

Temporary workers and trainees, including H-1B "specialty occupation" workers, registered nurses, temporary agricultural workers, North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) professional workers, treaty traders, and intracompany transferees, among others, accounted for 1,709,953 arrivals (5.1 percent of total admissions); this figure includes spouses and children of all temporary workers and trainees.

Students who came to the United States to study at academic or vocational institutes together with their family members made up 3.5 percent (1,168,020) of total arrivals.

Figure 2. Nonimmigrant Arrivals by Class of Admission, 2006

Source: DHS's *Yearbook of Immigration Statistics, 2006: Nonimmigrant Admissions (I-94 Only) by Class of Admission: Fiscal Years 1998 to 2006*, Table 26.

Notes: *Temporary workers, trainees, treaty traders, intracompany transferees, and their families, plus representatives of foreign media; **US citizens' fiance(e)s and their families, and certain immediate

family members of legal permanent residents; ***Foreign government officials and representatives to international organizations and their families;
****Foreign students and exchange visitors and their families.

Citizens from three countries — Mexico, the UK, and Japan — accounted for nearly half of all nonimmigrant admissions in 2006.

Citizens from Mexico (6.1 million), the United Kingdom (4.9 million), and Japan (4.3 million) accounted for 45.7 percent (15.4 million) of all temporary admissions in 2006. Citizens from Germany and France accounted for another 2.9 million admissions or 8.6 percent. South Koreans made up 2.8 percent (942,341), and Indians represented 2.3 percent (761,223) of all nonimmigrant admissions. The overwhelming majority of admissions were tourist admissions.

Nationals of South Korea, Japan, India, China, Taiwan, and Mexico accounted for half of all foreign academic student admissions in 2006.

Citizens of South Korea (101,705), Japan (69,652), and India (59,878) made up 33.3 percent of all 694,030 foreign academic student admissions in 2006 (vocational students or students' family members are not included in these figures). Nationals of China (49,095), Taiwan (41,080), and Mexico (33,651) accounted for another 17.8 percent.

Asian countries accounted for 59.6 percent of all foreign academic student admissions. The remaining students were from the Americas (20.0 percent), Europe (16.0 percent), Africa (2.9 percent), and Oceania (0.8 percent).

Nonimmigrants from India and the United Kingdom made up more than one-third of all H-1B "specialty occupation" worker admissions in 2006.

Of all 431,853 temporary worker admissions under the H-1B "specialty occupation" visa in 2006, 29.1 percent (125,717) were from India and 6.5 percent (28,002) were from the United Kingdom (family members are not included in these figures). Together with Canada (5.8 percent or 24,912), Mexico (4.1 percent or 17,654), Japan (3.4 percent or 14,863), France (3.4 percent or 14,723), and China (3.4 percent or 14,548), these seven countries accounted for 55.7 percent (240,419) of all H-1B admissions.

Altogether, Asian countries made up 48.0 percent of all H-1B admissions, followed by the Americas (24.1 percent), Europe (24.0 percent), Africa (1.9 percent), and Oceania (1.8 percent).

Nonimmigrants from Mexico and Jamaica accounted for three-quarters of all H-2B seasonal nonagricultural worker admissions in 2006.

In 2006, Mexico (89,483) and Jamaica (11,488) accounted for 75.3 percent of 134,071 H-2B seasonal nonagricultural (new and returning) worker admissions. Guatemala (4,485), Romania (2,868) Canada (2,689), South Africa (2,051), the United Kingdom (1,682),

Brazil (1,591), Dominican Republic (1,462), and the Philippines (1,447) accounted for another 13.6 percent.

Four states — California, Florida, New York, and Texas — were the intended destination for half of all nonimmigrant admissions in 2006.

In 2006, the most popular destinations for the 33.7 million nonimmigrant admissions (mostly tourists and business visitors) were the states of California (16.6 percent), Florida (14.7 percent), New York (12.6 percent), and Texas (7.3 percent).

Of all 694,030 foreign academic student admissions in 2006 (family members are not included in this figure), nearly half intended to study in five states: California (17.0 percent or 117,974), New York (12.7 percent or 88,201), Massachusetts (6.8 percent or 47,339), Texas (6.5 percent or 44,915), and Florida (5.9 percent or 40,647).

Of all 431,853 H-1B temporary worker admissions (family members are not included in this figure) in 2006, 16.6 percent (71,672) intended to go to California, 16.1 percent (69,660) to New York, 9.7 percent (41,803) to Florida, and 7.7 percent (33,402) to Texas.

Of all 134,071 H-2B seasonal nonagricultural worker admissions (including the returning H-2Bs) in 2006, 16.4 percent (22,046) intended to go to Texas, 7.8 percent (10,401) to Florida, 6.4 percent (8,631) to Colorado, and 5.6 percent (7,557) to Louisiana.

Additional Resources

Information on nonimmigrants:

- Data on nonimmigrant admissions from the DHS **Office of Immigration Statistics**
- Definitions of terms from the DHS **Office of Immigration Statistics**
- Information about types of temporary visitors in the United States from the **US Department of State**
- Batalova, Jeanne. 2006. **The Growing Connection Between Temporary and Permanent Immigration Systems**. Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute.

Visa Waiver Program:

- **US Department of State Visa Waiver Program**
- **Weaknesses in the Visa Waiver Program**

Testimony of Susan Ginsburg, Director of MPI's Mobility and Security Program, before the Senate Judiciary Committee Subcommittee on Terrorism, Technology and Homeland Security.

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