
The Triennial Comprehensive Report on Immigration

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Executive Summary

Background

In 1986, the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) was signed into law. It represented a new approach on the part of the United States to control immigration, especially illegal immigration. While IRCA is best known for its amnesty and employer sanctions provisions, it also contains a number of other provisions, including major reporting requirements on the implementation and impact of the new law. The most comprehensive of these is a triennial report on immigration, mandated in Section 401. Each report is to address the following subjects for the preceding 3-year period and project it for the succeeding 5-year period:

- The number and classification of aliens admitted (whether as immediate relatives, special immigrants, refugees, or under the preferences classifications, or as nonimmigrants), paroled, or granted asylum, during the relevant period.
- A reasonable estimate of the number of aliens who entered the United States during the period without visas or who became deportable during the period under Section 241 of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA).
- A description of the effect of admissions and other entries of immigrants, refugees, asylees, and parolees into the United States during the reporting period on the economy, labor, and housing markets; the education system; social services; foreign policy; environmental quality and resources; the rate, size, and distribution of population growth in the United States; and the effect on specific States and local units of Government with high rates of immigration resettlement.

The report may also include recommendations on changes in numerical limitations or other policies under Title II of the INA bearing on the admission and entry of aliens to the United States.

Responsibility for the Triennial Report

The lead responsibility for the development and production of the report was given to the Attorney General in coordination with the Secretary of Labor by Executive Order on February 10, 1992. On behalf of the Attorney General, the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) contacted 10 other Federal agencies whose responsibilities fall in the areas to be addressed in the report. The agencies were asked to report on the fiscal year (FY) 1995-1997 period and to project, if possible, for the FY 1998-2002 period. Most of the agencies were able to submit relevant material, although their focus on immigration and their ability to provide information regarding the effect of immigration on their program areas varies widely. The INS prepared a section on the number, categories, and location of aliens in the United States. The INS also compiled the sections contributed by the other agencies and prepared introductions to selected sections.

The report includes six chapters in three parts.

Part I, *Population Impacts*. This section addresses the level of immigration and its effect on the population of the United States and individual States. Chapter 1, *International Migration to the United States*, which was prepared by the INS, summarizes information on the flow of migrants to the country. The primary focus is on lawful permanent migration, but material is also presented on temporary migration and on other categories. Estimates of the population residing illegally in the United States and of emigration are included.

Legal immigration (the admission of foreign-born persons for lawful permanent residence) during the FY 1995-1997 period covered by this report totaled 2.43 million or an average of 800,000 per year. This was 9 percent less than the 2.68 million admitted during the FY 1992-1994 period. There was no evidence of a decline in the demand to immigrate during FYs 1995-1997. Instead, a temporary provision in immigration law caused applications for adjustment of status to nearly double, creating a backlog, while an increase in applications to naturalize created another large workload that may have diverted some resources from processing immigrant applications. As the backlogged applications are completed, immigration is expected to resume an upward trend. Growth in immigrant numbers will come from two sources: 1) recent legislation under which persons from selected Central American and Caribbean nations may apply to become lawful permanent residents, and 2) family-sponsored immigration as permanent residents naturalize and become eligible to sponsor their immediate relatives for lawful permanent residence.

In other categories, the number of temporary visitors (nonimmigrants) to the United States grew from 17.6 million in FY 1990 to 24.8 million in FY 1996, a 41 percent increase. The typical visitor is a tourist, but millions of others arrive as visitors on business, as students or exchange visitors, and in many other categories. Nonimmigrant admissions are expected to continue to increase at a rate governed by economic, social, and political factors. As of October 1996, the INS estimated the number of aliens who had taken up residence illegally in the United States at 5 million, with a net annual inflow of 275,000 during the 1992-1996 period. Emigration of foreign-born residents from the United States is estimated to have been 1.6 million during the 1980's. The limited data available indicate that current levels of emigration of foreign-born residents could be more than 250,000 annually, increasing as immigration increases.

Chapter 2, *International Migration and Population Change in the United States*, was prepared by the U.S. Census Bureau. It presents data on the total U.S. population and its foreign-born component based on the decennial census and the Current Population Survey. The 1990 census showed 19.8 million foreign-born persons, or 7.9 percent of the resident population. (Because the Census Bureau attempts to count everyone living in the United States, these figures include long-term nonimmigrants and persons without lawful status as well as legal immigrants.) Net migration from abroad (immigration less emigration) was estimated to have added 5.5 million persons to the population between April 1, 1990 and July 1, 1997 and is projected to add another 4.1 million between July 1, 1998, and July 1, 2002. Census data demonstrate the uneven impact of immigration; about three-fourths of the foreign-born population have settled in just six States.

Part II, *Education and Social Services Impacts*. This section contains material from four Federal agencies that are responsible for education and social services programs. Particular attention is paid to programs that are targeted at defined immigrant populations or that, by their nature, are likely to serve these populations. Where available, data are presented on the extent to which the foreign-born population used mainstream programs.

The U.S. Department of Education (DOEd) contributed Chapter 3, *Impact of Immigrant Students on the U.S. Educational System*. It describes and summarizes programs that may serve recent immigrants. Most are based on the students' education or financial need. Only the Immigrant Education program provides assistance on the basis of immigration status. In 1998, roughly \$2 billion in DOEd funding supported services that benefited several million students with limited English proficiency.

Chapter 4, *Immigration and Social Services*, incorporates material from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), the Social Security Administration (SSA), and the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) program. All three agencies administer programs designed to provide income support for needy persons or to alleviate the effects of poverty in other ways. Many of these programs compile data on the immigration status or country of birth of their service populations, making it possible to estimate the extent to which foreign-born persons are served. Other programs have provided a more general range of services and, during the reporting period, did not maintain records on immigration status. This chapter highlights changes in the access of noncitizens to many of these programs under the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 ("welfare reform"), which took effect during the period covered by this report. The chapter also describes research projects recently

undertaken to study the adjustment and well-being of immigrant families, sponsored jointly by HHS, FNS, INS, and other Federal agencies.

HHS reports that from 1995 to 1997, the percentage of legal immigrants in the caseload of the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program fell from 6.0 percent to 5.3 percent. This decline mirrored the overall decline in the total AFDC (now Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, TANF) caseload and is attributed primarily to welfare reform. HHS, through its Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR), also administers a program of services designed to help recently arrived refugees become resettled and find jobs. From 1995 to 1997, 306,500 refugees¹ arrived, a drop of 22 percent compared with the 1992-1994 period. The SSA reports a drop in the number of aliens receiving benefits under its Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program, from 785,410 in December 1995 to 669,630 in December 1998, at which time aliens made up 10 percent of the SSI caseload. The USDA reports that the number of foreign-born persons receiving food stamps fell from 2.1 million in FY 1995 to 1 million in FY 1998, of which 40 percent were naturalized citizens. In 1998, 5.1 percent of the food stamp caseload was foreign-born persons.

Part III. International Impacts. The chapters in this section place migration to the United States in an international context. Chapter 5. Selected Economic Impacts of International Migration, was contributed by the Bureau of Economic Analysis of the U.S. Department of Commerce. This chapter presents estimates of five categories of international transactions related to nonimmigrant and immigrant flows: travel expenditures in the United States by foreign visitors, their related passenger fares paid to U.S. carriers, education services to foreign students, personal remittances by foreign-born residents in the United States to persons abroad, and the amount of wealth that immigrants bring with them when they enter the United States. The first three are major components of rapidly expanding exports of U.S. services, while the fourth is a major component of private unilateral transfers, and immigrant wealth is a component of the capital account. The dollar volume in each of these categories increased from 1995 to 1998.

Chapter 6. The Foreign Policy Impact of Immigration, was authored by the U.S. Department of State. Immigration issues continue to play an important role in the foreign relations of the United States. U.S. immigration laws have traditionally been generous, and the United States has long been the favored destination of large numbers of immigrants. Their participation in the fabric of American life has strengthened the relationships between their native countries and the United States. Many foreign governments pay close attention to U.S. immigration law and policy.

Recommendations

This report does not make recommendations on changes in numerical limitations or other policies under Title II of the INA bearing on the admission and entry of aliens to the United States.

¹ Also statutorily eligible for ORR services are Cuban-Haitian entrants and Amerasian immigrants from Vietnam.

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