National Foundation for American Policy

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New DHS Data Show Legal Immigration Declined More Than 7% Between 2016 and 2018

Administration Policies Have Contributed to the Decrease; Court Rulings Could Lead to Larger Immigration Reductions

Arlington, Va. – Legal immigration to the United States declined by 86,894, or 7.3%, between FY 2016 and FY 2018, according to a new analysis released by the National Foundation for American Policy (NFAP), an Arlington, Va.-based policy research group, that examined recently released Department of Homeland Security (DHS) data. The DHS data show a larger decline in legal immigration in FY 2018 if refugees who physically arrived in the United States more than a year earlier are excluded from comparisons between FY 2016 and FY 2018. Excluding refugees means 122,412 fewer legal immigrants became lawful permanent residents in FY 2018 than in FY 2016, a decline of 11.5%, based on a National Foundation for American Policy analysis.

Most of the decline can be traced to lower admissions in the Immediate Relatives of U.S. Citizens category, which includes the spouses, children and parents of Americans, the analysis concludes. Contributing to the lower numbers are processing delays and policy changes that could prevent an individual from obtaining permanent residence, such as a March 6, 2017, presidential directive on "heightened screening and vetting." If allowed by the courts, administration policies requiring immigrants to possess health insurance and a "public charge" rule could significantly reduce future levels of legal immigration. The data analyzed in the report are contained in the *2018 Yearbook of Immigration Statistics,* which DHS recently made available on its website.

The report, "Analysis of FY 2018 Legal Immigration Statistics," can be found at https://nfap.com/.

"The latest statistics show efforts by administration officials to reduce legal immigration have, from their perspective, been successful," said NFAP Executive Director Stuart Anderson, who served as head of policy and counselor to the Commissioner of the INS in the George W. Bush administration. "Favorable court rulings and another four years in power would almost certainly mean even lower levels of legal immigration to the United States and fewer U.S. citizens allowed to have their spouses, parents and children come live with them in America."

The number of people who received lawful permanent resident status (green cards) declined from 1,183,505 in FY 2016 to 1,096,611 in FY 2018, a drop of 86,894 or 7.3%. The number of Immediate Relatives of U.S. Citizens declined from 566,706 in FY 2016 to 478,961 in FY 2018, a drop of 87,745, or 15.5%. Comparing FY 2016 and FY 2018, the U.S. in FY 2018 admitted 36,209 fewer spouses of U.S. citizens (a decline of 11.9%), 21,700 fewer children of U.S. citizens (a 24.5% fall) and 29,836 fewer parents (a drop of 17.2%). Immediate Relatives may enter without numerical limitation. Denials or long delays in the category can reduce annual immigration levels.

Table 1
Legal Immigration: FY 2016 to FY 2018

	FY 2016	FY 2018	Decline FY 2016 to FY 2018
Persons Obtaining Lawful Permanent Resident Status	1,183,505	1,096,611	-86,894 (-7.3%)

Source: Department of Homeland Security, National Foundation for American Policy.

Table 2
Non-Refugee Legal Immigration: FY 2016 to FY 2018
(Excluding Refugees Obtaining Lawful Permanent Resident Status)

	FY 2016	FY 2018	Decline FY 2016 to FY 2018
Persons Obtaining Lawful Permanent Resident Status	1,063,289	940,877	-122,412 (-11.5%)

Source: Department of Homeland Security, National Foundation for American Policy.

Among the findings in the analysis:

- Excluding refugees and asylees who entered the U.S. in earlier years, legal immigration from the five majority-Muslim countries (Iran, Libya, Somalia, Syria and Yemen) designated by the administration's travel ban declined 18,595 (or 64.7%) between FY 2016 and FY 2018. The number of legal immigrants (excluding refugees or asylees) admitted from Yemen declined by 87.1%, from 12,906 in FY 2016 to 1,661 in FY 2018. In FY 2016, 8,407 Immediate Relatives of U.S. Citizens from Yemen obtained permanent residence, compared to only 1,271 in FY 2018.

- Immigration from Mexico dropped from 174,534 in FY 2016 to 161,858, a fall of 7.3%. Immigrants from China declined from 81,772 in FY 2016 to 65,214 in FY 2018, a drop of more than 20%. Immigration from South Korea declined by 18.9% between FY 2016 and FY 2018. Immigration was lower in FY 2018 compared to FY 2016 from India (down 7.5%), the Dominican Republic (down 6.1%) and the Philippines (a fall of 11.3%). Yemen had the largest percentage decline (87.1%) in legal immigration due to the travel ban.

- Much of the decline for specific countries occurred because the United States admitted fewer people in the Immediate Relatives of U.S. Citizens category (spouses, children under 21 years old and parents). Between FY 2016 and FY 2018, the number of Immediate Relatives of U.S. Citizens admitted from Mexico fell by 14,002 (11.7%), the Immediate Relatives of U.S. Citizens from China dropped by 7,636, or 24.1%, while family members in that category declined by 17% from the Dominican Republic, 24.1% from the Philippines, 14.8% from India, 17.3% from South Korea, and 85.5% from Yemen.

- The number of immigrants admitted in the family-sponsored preference categories fell by 21,524 (or 9%) between FY 2016 and FY 2018. These include the married and unmarried sons and daughters (21 or older) of U.S. citizens, the siblings of U.S. citizens, and the spouses, minor children and adult unmarried children of lawful permanent residents. Given

the limited number of cases that can be processed in a month, when a case is denied or delayed significantly there may not be sufficient government resources to process and approve other cases. That can result in immigration categories with backlogs not having all the numbers utilized.

- The number of employment-based immigrants was 137,171 in FY 2018 and 137,893 in FY 2016. The category has a large backlog.

- Both processing delays and policy changes that could prevent an individual from obtaining permanent residence contributed to lower numbers. "Heightened screening and vetting" has made it more difficult for cases to be approved. In FY 2018, there was a significant increase in visa refusals at consulates for immigrants on the grounds of 221(g) "Application does not comply with provisions of the INA [Immigration and Nationality Act] or regulations issued pursuant thereto," increasing from 254,478 in FY 2017 to 341,128 in FY 2018, a rise of 34%. "Administrative processing" at U.S. consulates can include a variety of situations, including security clearances, and many cases won't be cleared or approved in the same fiscal year, or may never be approved.

Administration policies could significantly reduce legal immigration levels in the future. Courts have at least temporarily blocked a presidential proclamation requiring immigrants to possess health insurance and a public charge rule limiting potential immigrants who consular officers or adjudicators predict may use certain public benefits within a 12-month period in the future. Either measure could potentially reduce legal immigration by hundreds of thousands of people per year. The Trump administration also may expand the number of countries subject to the travel ban.

Lower levels of legal immigration have both personal and broader economic impacts. On a personal level, policies that prevent American citizens from sponsoring close family members, including spouses, children, parents or siblings, exert a significant negative impact on those Americans and their families.

Economic growth, which improves standards of living, primarily comes from increasing the growth in labor and productivity, and economists have found immigrants contribute significantly to both labor force growth and productivity. America is also facing significant demographic challenges with an aging workforce and lower fertility, and immigration is a major way to address those challenges.

The administration's primary efforts to reduce legal immigration have been through executive authority, administrative restrictions and regulatory action. The latest data show officials who joined the Trump administration hoping to reduce the number of Americans allowed to have spouses, parents and children come live with them in America, along with an overall reduction in legal immigration, are seeing success. An additional four years in power and favorable court rulings would reduce the number of legal immigrants admitted to America by far greater numbers, changing many lives and the country.

About the National Foundation for American Policy

Established in 2003, the National Foundation for American Policy (NFAP) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit, non-partisan public policy research organization based in Arlington, Virginia focusing on trade, immigration and related issues. The Advisory Board members include Columbia University economist Jagdish Bhagwati, Ohio University economist Richard Vedder, Cornell Law School professor Stephen W. Yale-Loehr and former INS Commissioner James W. Ziglar. Over the past 24 months, NFAP's research has been written about in the *Wall Street Journal*, the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and other major media outlets. The organization's reports can be found at www.nfap.com. Twitter: **@NFAPResearch**

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