ANALYSIS OF LEGAL IMMIGRATION REDUCTIONS

The Trump administration's policies will reduce legal immigration to the United States by an estimated 33% to 50%, or by 1.5 million to 2.4 million legal immigrants, by the end of Donald Trump's four-year term, according to a National Foundation for American Policy analysis. The FY 2023 level of legal immigration was 1,172,910, or 4,691,640 over 4 years.[1] NFAP estimates 1,546,710 to 2,369,998, or 33% to 50%, fewer legal immigrants will gain green cards during Donald Trump's administration due to policies that include significantly lower admission levels for refugees, restrictions on the Immediate Relatives of U.S. Citizens due to "public charge" policies and a 39-country immigration ban, actions taken against Diversity Visa recipients and other policies. The range is due to uncertainty on how restrictively the administration will enact or maintain policies.

Table 1
Legal Immigration Reductions During The Trump Administration

Category	Legal Immigration Reduction Over 4 Years
Immediate Relatives of U.S. Citizens	941,625 to 1,654,770
Refugees	470,000
Diversity Visas	55,076 to 165,228
Other Categories	80,000
TOTAL LEGAL IMMIGRATION REDUCTION	1,546,701 to 2,369,998 (33% to 50% reduction from FY 2023 Legal Immigration Level)

Source: National Foundation for American Policy, DHS. Numbers based on FY 2023 admissions.

Immediate Relatives of U.S. Citizens: NFAP estimates that 941,625 to 1,654,770 fewer Immediate Relatives of U.S. Citizens will gain green cards during the Trump administration due to restrictive policies. NFAP estimates the December16 proclamation on 39 countries, which prohibits the entry of the Immediate Relatives of U.S. Citizens and others, will reduce immigration by up to 76,000 a year, depending on whether processing is permitted for adjustment of status inside the United States. USCIS has said it will hold pending applications and "re-review" cases approved since January 20, 2021, for individuals from the 39 countries.

The Immediate Relatives of U.S. Citizens category (the spouses, children under 21 and parents of U.S. citizens) is not subject to a numerical limit and, as a result, does not have backlogs. The category represents approximately 48% of the green cards awarded in FY 2023 (551,590 of 1,172,910). Since there are no backlogs, new restrictions on admissions in this category are a crucial way for immigration opponents to achieve significant reductions in legal immigration. The administration is imposing the restrictions on U.S. citizens who wish to sponsor for immigration close family members, including a spouse or child.

The administration is likely to deny immigrant visas for a high percentage of the Immediate Relatives of U.S. Citizens after the State Department and the Department of Homeland Security employ a new subjective standard on "public

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[1] https://ohss.dhs.gov/topics/immigration/yearbook/2023.

charge." Between 50% and 100% of the Immediate Relatives of U.S. Citizens could be denied visas, depending on how strictly and subjectively the new standard is employed. The State Department announced the "freeze" on 75 countries on January 14, 2026, to prepare for denying applicants for immigrant visas using new public charge criteria.

Public Charge Criteria Is a Pretext: The Trump administration will use new public charge criteria to deny green cards for family immigrants. In its proposed rule to eliminate the Biden administration's public charge rule and replace it with vague, restrictive criteria, DHS does not acknowledge research showing the positive fiscal impact of admitting immigrants. George Mason University economics professor Michael Clemens found that an average recent immigrant without a high school degree has a *lifetime positive net fiscal balance of $128,000*. "Including the expected children and grandchildren of the average immigrant without a high school degree, the lifetime positive net fiscal effect is $326,000."[2] An immigrant with more education has a more positive lifetime net fiscal balance.

DHS concedes in its Federal Register notice on the proposed rule that new immigrants are not eligible for federal means-tested public benefits for at least five years after entering the United States. (The rules differ for refugees and asylees.) The DHS proposed rule ignores empirical evidence by assuming that family immigrants are static individuals who do not improve over time in the United States. "Real earnings increased by 76% over 12 years for immigrants from countries where family sponsorship is the primary method of immigrating to the United States," according to a National Foundation for American Policy analysis by economist Mark Regets, an NFAP senior fellow.[3]

"The research also finds that family immigrants have lower rates of incarceration and use of public assistance income than U.S.-born individuals of the same age, and that they increase their educational attainment and English proficiency over time in America."[4]

"Even if someone starts out at a low income, a rapid increase in earnings makes it very likely they will be a net asset to the U.S. economy," according to Regets.[5]

Family immigrants have higher labor force participation rates than comparable U.S.-born individuals and, on average, only 1.6% received public assistance income in 2021-2023.

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[2] https://www.cream-migration.org/publ_uploads/CDP_34_21.pdf.
[3] Mark Regets, *The Economic Advancement, Adaptation and Integration of Family Immigrants in America*, NFAP Policy Brief, National Foundation for American Policy, November 2025.
[4] Ibid.
[5] Stuart Anderson, "New Immigration Policy Likely To Block Many Family Immigrants," *Forbes*, November 25, 2025.

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Refugees: By freezing and then reducing annual refugee admission levels to 7,500, well below the 125,000 ceiling established in the last year of the Biden administration, Trump officials significantly reduced projected legal immigration by about 470,000 over four years. The administration has also tried to claw back previously granted refugee status and prevent the awarding (or, potentially, the continuation) of permanent residence for individuals.

Diversity Visas: After the shooting at Brown University, the State Department announced a freeze on the Diversity Visa category.[6] It is unclear when or if the freeze will be lifted. NFAP estimates a range of one to three years of Diversity Visas being banned.[7]

Other Categories: The administration has slowed or halted processing for many countries, and it is uncertain how many people will obtain adjustment of status in several categories, including asylees, victims of crime, Iraqi and Afghans employed by the U.S. government (and their spouses and children) and others.

Table 2
Annual Legal Immigration Totals for Countries Subject to Dec. 16 Proclamation and Jan. 14 Freeze

Category (Based on FY 2023 Immigrant Visa Numbers)	Individuals Banned from 39 Countries in Dec. 16 Proclamation	Individuals from 75 Countries Subject to Visa Freeze Announced Jan. 14 (Some of the 75 countries also included in Dec. 16 proclamation)	Combined Total for 93 Countries Subject to Dec. 16 Proclamation or Jan. 14 Freeze
All Immigrant Visas	212,740	371,030	481,460
Immediate Relatives of U.S. Citizens	76,160	171,210	206,550

Source: National Foundation for American Policy, DHS. Numbers based on FY 2023 admissions.

The freeze on processing and a December 16 proclamation will also affect family and employment-based immigrants. However, those categories have substantial backlogs, which means, at least in the short term, if the lack of processing or public charge rule prevents some individuals from obtaining permanent residence in a family or employment-based preference category, another person in the backlog could take their place, thereby not reducing the overall level of legal immigration. If the family preference categories fall below their annual minimum level, the difference would be added to the following fiscal year's total for employment-based immigration. That happened during the Covid-19 pandemic.

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[6] See https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/News/visas-news/diversity-visa-issuance-updated-guidance.html.
[7] The State Department lists 55,076 Diversity Visas issued in FY 2023. https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2025/08/05/2025-14784/visas-enhancing-vetting-and-combatting-fraud-in-the-diversity-immigrant-visa-program.

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Freeze On Immigrant Visas: On January 14, 2026, the State Department announced, "The State Department will pause immigrant visa processing from 75 countries whose migrants take welfare from the American people at unacceptable rates. The freeze will remain active until the U.S. can ensure that new immigrants will not extract wealth from the American people."[8]

There is overlap between the 75 countries on the "freeze" list and the 39 countries in the Dec. 16 proclamation, totaling 93 countries across the two lists.

The NFAP analysis shows that in FY 2023, nearly 213,000 individuals from the 39 countries banned under the Dec. 16 proclamation received permanent residence, 76,160 in the Immediate Relatives of U.S. Citizens category. Approximately 371,030 individuals from the 75 countries subject to the Jan. 14 freeze received permanent residence in FY 2023, 171,210 in the Immediate Relatives of U.S. Citizens category. Combining the two lists shows that 481,460 individuals from the 93 countries received permanent residence in FY 2023, 206,550 in the Immediate Relatives of U.S. Citizens category. Immigrant visas denied in the Immediate Relatives category will reduce the number of new green card holders, but unused family or employment visas are reallocated to the other category in the next fiscal year.

The NFAP analysis assumes that individuals from the 75 countries on the Jan. 14 "freeze" list—except for those banned from the 39 countries under the Dec. 16 proclamation—will eventually be allowed to apply for immigrant visas and adjustment of status. However, between 50% to 100% of them will be denied immigrant visas, depending on how strictly DHS and the State Department enforce their new "public charge" criteria designed to block new immigrants.

The 75 countries on the Jan. 14 "freeze" list are Afghanistan, Albania, Algeria, Antigua and Barbuda, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bahamas, Bangladesh, Barbados, Belarus, Belize, Bhutan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Burma, Cambodia, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Colombia, Cote d'Ivoire, Cuba, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Dominica, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Fiji, The Gambia, Georgia, Ghana, Grenada, Guatemala, Guinea, Haiti, Iran, Iraq, Jamaica, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kosovo, Kuwait, Kyrgyz Republic, Laos, Lebanon, Liberia, Libya, Moldova, Mongolia, Montenegro, Morocco, Nepal, Nicaragua, Nigeria, North Macedonia, Pakistan, Republic of the Congo, Russia, Rwanda, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Syria, Tanzania, Thailand, Togo, Tunisia, Uganda, Uruguay, Uzbekistan, and Yemen.

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[8] See also https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/News/visas-news/immigrant-visa-processing-updates-for-nationalities-at-high-risk-of-public-benefits-usage.html.

December 16 Proclamation: Under a Dec. 16 proclamation, nationals of 19 countries cannot enter the United States on immigrant or temporary visas: Afghanistan, Burkina Faso, Burma, Chad, Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Haiti, Iran, Laos, Libya, Mali, Niger, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Syria and Yemen.

Nationals of 19 additional countries cannot enter the United States on an immigrant visa or in four temporary visa categories (B, F, M and J): Angola, Antigua and Barbuda, Benin, Burundi, Cote d'Ivoire, Cuba, Dominica, Gabon, The Gambia, Malawi, Mauritania, Nigeria, Senegal, Tanzania, Togo, Tonga, Venezuela, Zambia and Zimbabwe. (Nationals of Turkmenistan cannot enter on immigrant visas, and individuals cannot enter the United States on travel documents from the Palestinian Authority.)

The most significant impact of the Dec. 16 proclamation will be on the individuals affected, U.S. citizens who want to sponsor close relatives for immigration from the 39 countries, employers that wish to hire them and U.S. universities that want to enroll these individuals as students.

U.S.-Born Workers Not Benefitting From Immigration Decline

While helping American workers is put forward as a reason to reduce immigration, there is no evidence that U.S.-born workers have benefited from the recent decline in the number of foreign-born workers. The unemployment rate for U.S.-born workers was 4.1% in December 2025 compared to 3.7% in December 2024.[9] The 12-month comparison is the most valid because the Bureau of Labor Statistics does not seasonally adjust its estimates separated by nativity. The seasonally adjusted unemployment rate for all workers is up since Trump took office, from 4.0% in January 2025 to 4.4% in December 2025.

There is no sign that U.S. workers have reentered the labor market in response to the withdrawal of foreign-born workers. The labor force participation rate for the U.S.-born aged 16 and older fell slightly from 61.4% in December 2024 to 61.2% in December 2025. The seasonally adjusted labor force participation rate for all individuals aged 16 or older dropped slightly since Trump took office, from 62.6% in January 2025 to 62.4% in December 2025.

The same BLS data show an increase of 2.0 million in U.S.-born employment since January 2025, but there are reasons to question this figure. Census projected an increase in the population of the U.S.-born over age 16 of just 1.4 million between 2024 and 2025, but BLS shows an increase in the U.S.-born population over age 16 of 3.7 million between January and December.

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[9] The unemployment rate for foreign-born workers fell slightly from 4.3% in December 2024 to 4.1% in December 2025.

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The Bureau of Labor Statistics household survey shows a decline of 881,000 foreign-born workers since the start of the Trump administration in January 2025, and a drop of 1.3 million since a peak in March 2025, according to an NFAP analysis of government data. The most recent BLS report covers through December 2025.[10]

The Congressional Budget Office and the Social Security Administration had assumed more than 2 million net immigrants into the United States in 2025, which would translate into approximately 1.3 million more workers, or a gap of more than 2 million workers compared with the most recent BLS data.[11] From 2014 to 2024, more than half of American labor force growth came from the increase in immigrant workers.

NFAP ANALYSIS OF THE ECONOMIC IMPACT OF IMMIGRATION REDUCTIONS

Labor force growth is essential to an economy. Economic growth, which raises a country's living standards, relies on labor force growth and productivity growth, and immigrants are essential to both. "The Trump administration's policies on illegal and legal immigration would reduce the projected number of workers in the United States by 6.8 million by 2028 and by 15.7 million by 2035 and lower the annual rate of economic growth by almost one-third, harming U.S. living standards," according to an October 2025 analysis by the National Foundation for American Policy.

Due to fewer workers in the labor force, the Trump administration's immigration policies would lead to a potential labor loss to the U.S. economy of approximately 19 million worker years by 2028 and 102 million worker years by 2035, according to the analysis. The policies would reduce the projected cumulative goods and services produced

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[10] The same technical issues that lead to overestimates of the U.S.-born labor force may also lead to overestimates of the foreign-born population, thereby potentially underestimating foreign-born labor force losses. When BLS does not find as many people in a population category as it expected based on Census data, it adjusts its estimates to reflect its prior expectation. This is a standard and well-accepted survey practice, but it means that if BLS finds fewer foreign-born individuals, it will increase the weight given to both U.S.-born and foreign-born individuals with similar characteristics. Between January 2025 and November 2025, the weights on Hispanics in the Current Population Survey increased by 11.8% for both the US-born and the foreign-born If the reason BLS finds fewer foreign-born individuals is that they left the country, this will lead to an overestimate of both the U.S.-born and the foreign-born populations.

Some have posited an alternative explanation for the size of the estimated foreign-born loss: a disproportionate increase in nonresponse among the foreign-born. The weight given to U.S.-born respondents will increase when immigrants are missing from the sample, whether because they left the country or refused to answer the survey. However, estimates of a large decline in the immigrant labor force come from months with very different response rates at the household level. For example, the response rate was lower in January 2025 (68.8%) than in August 2025 (69.5%) and September 2025 (68.9%), with both months showing more than a million fewer foreign-born workers than in January. The peak estimate of immigrants in the labor force in 2025 occurred in March, which had a relatively low response rate of 66.7%.

It is possible for U.S.-born and foreign-born response rates to move in opposite directions, so nonresponse could still produce an overestimate of immigrant decline. However, no consistent pattern is found between changes in foreign-born estimates and changes in the overall survey response rate.

[11] While there are high standard errors in the monthly survey, this was the fourth consecutive monthly estimate to show a decline of more than 1 million foreign-born workers since January. Each monthly estimate showed a statistically significant decrease since January, and their consistency lends support to the magnitude of the change being fairly accurate.

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(GDP) in America by $1.9 trillion, or $5,612 per person, from 2025 to 2028, and by $12.1 trillion, or $34,369 per person, from 2025 to 2035.[12]

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[12] NFAP may update these and other estimates as additional information becomes available on the impact of the administration's immigration policies.

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. Advisory Board members include Columbia University economist Jagdish Bhagwati, Cornell Law School professor Stephen W. Yale-Loehr, Ohio University economist Richard Vedder and former INS Commissioner James 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. X.com: **@NFAPResearch** Bluesky: @NFAPResearch.bsky.social