

National Foundation for American Policy

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Research: The Number of Foreign-Born Workers Has Continued to Decline, Along with the Overall Labor Force; U.S.-Born Unemployment Rate Has Increased

Arlington, Va. – The Bureau of Labor Statistics [household survey](#) for February 2026 shows a decline of 596,000 foreign-born workers since January 2026, and a drop of 1,008,000 since a peak in March 2025, according to a National Foundation for American Policy [analysis](#). The Congressional Budget Office and the Social Security Administration population estimates made near the start of the Trump administration for immigrants assumed approximately 1.3 million more foreign-born workers. Instead, the latest BLS data show a decline of nearly 600,000 foreign-born workers since January 2025.

The U.S. economy has long depended on immigrants for labor force growth. From 2014 to 2024, U.S. labor force growth averaged more than 1.3 million workers a year, and more than half of that growth came from the increase in immigrant workers. However, rather than gaining 1.3 million workers per year, BLS reports the total U.S. labor force has fallen by 213,000 workers since the start of the Trump Administration in January 2025, according to the BLS [seasonally adjusted estimate](#) of the U.S. labor force.

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

There is no evidence that U.S.-born workers have benefited from the decline in the number of foreign-born workers. The [unemployment rate](#) for U.S.-born workers was 4.7% in February 2026 compared to 4.4% in February 2025.¹ The 12-month comparison is the most valid because the Bureau of Labor Statistics does not seasonally adjust its estimates separated by nativity.²

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 February 2025 to 61.0% in February 2026.

“Most economic research shows that immigration increases employment opportunities for the U.S.-born, so it would not be surprising if reducing immigration harms American workers,” said labor economist and NFAP Senior Fellow Mark Regets.

Given current and projected Trump administration immigration policies, it is likely that a decline in the foreign-born labor force will continue and seems unlikely to be driven solely by the undocumented population. There has always been significant emigration across all classes, including temporary and permanent visa holders. Perception of a less hospitable environment may increase emigration.³ Also, the administration has increased restrictions on legal immigration.

¹ The unemployment rate for foreign-born workers remained constant at 4.7% between February 2025 and February 2026.

² The [seasonally adjusted unemployment rate for all workers](#) is up since Donald Trump took office, from 4.0% in January 2025 to 4.4% in February 2026.

³ Stuart Anderson, “Immigrant Labor Declines As Trump Imposes New Immigration Restrictions,” *Forbes*, December 17, 2025.

Reliability of BLS Estimates

While the monthly household survey has shown a decline in the number of immigrant workers, several reasons caution against treating its numbers as a precise estimate. For example, BLS shows an increase of 2.7 million in the U.S.-born population over age 16 between January 2025 and January 2026, while Census estimates growth of only about half that amount.⁴

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.⁵ 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. This overestimate may compensate for any underestimate that results from fewer immigrants who are still in America answering the survey.

NFAP Analysis of the Impact of Immigration Reductions

“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 [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 (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.

NFAP Estimates of Reductions in Legal Immigration

The Trump administration has reduced the projected level of legal immigration to the United States by more than 600,000 immigrants during Donald Trump’s second term, according to a National Foundation for American Policy estimate. The administration has lowered refugee admissions by more than 100,000 a year, or by at least 400,000 by 2028. NFAP finds that over the next three years, the Trump administration’s ban on the Immediate Relatives of U.S. Citizens from multiple countries via the Dec. 16 [proclamation](#) could reduce legal immigration to the United States by more than 200,000 immigrants.

Under the 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.)

⁴ This is calculated using the revised January 2026 estimate that incorporates sample weights from Census population projections from July 2025.

⁵ 2 Between January 2025 and December 2025, the weights on Hispanics in the Current Population Survey increased by 8.1% for both the U.S.-born and the foreign-born.

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 reduced projected immigration. 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.

According to an NFAP estimate of the Dec. 16 proclamation, prohibiting the entry of the Immediate Relatives of U.S. Citizens (spouses, children and parents) will reduce immigration to the United States by approximately 50,000 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.

About the National Foundation for American Policy

Established in 2003, the National Foundation for American Policy (NFAP) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, nonpartisan 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. X.com: [@NFAPResearch](https://twitter.com/NFAPResearch) Bluesky: [@NFAPResearch.bsky.social](https://bsky.app/profile/nfapresearch.bsky.social)

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