

Immigrants in California

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California has more immigrants than any other state.

- California is home to 10.5 million immigrants—23% of the foreign-born population nationwide.
- In 2021, the most current year of data, 27% of California's population was foreign born, almost double the percentage in the rest of the country (14%) and the highest share of any state.
- Almost half (46%) of California children have at least one immigrant parent.
- More than a third (35%) of adults of prime working age—those 25 to 54—are foreign born—indeed, more than half (54%) of all foreign-born Californians are in this age group.

Immigration flows increased in the past year, but they remain low by historic standards.

- In the first decade of this century, the population of immigrants increased 12% (1.1 million), but in the past 10 years, the increase was only 5% (about 500,000). By contrast, in the 1990s California's immigrant population grew by 2.4 million—a 37% increase.
- This fall-off in international immigration has contributed to the recent slowdown of California's overall population growth.
- Recent Census Bureau estimates show net immigration to California increasing to 126,000 from July 2021–July 2022. This was almost triple the net flow from July 2020–July 2021 (44,000), the lowest in at least three decades—a consequence of the pandemic and policies that limited travel.

Most immigrants in California are documented residents.

- In 2021, more than half (55%) of California's immigrants were naturalized US citizens.
- Data from the Center for Migration Studies shows that 78% of immigrants in California were either naturalized or had some other legal status (including green cards and visas), and about 22% were undocumented as of 2019.
- From 2010 to 2019, the number of undocumented immigrants in the state fell from 2.9 million to 2.3 million.

California's immigrant population is concentrated in coastal metropolitan areas.

- Immigrants are concentrated in the state's large coastal metropolitan areas. In 2021, foreign-born residents represented at least a third of the population in Santa Clara (40%), San Mateo (35%), San Francisco (34%), Los Angeles (33%), and Alameda (34%) Counties.
- In the far northern counties and the Eastern Sierra region, foreign-born residents made up 7% or less of the population.

Almost half of immigrants are from Latin America, but a majority of recent arrivals are from Asia.

- The vast majority of California's immigrants were born in Latin America (49%) or Asia (39%).

- California has sizable populations of immigrants from dozens of countries; the leading countries of origin are Mexico (3.9 million), the Philippines (825,200), China (768,400), India (556,500) and Vietnam (502,600).
- Among immigrants who arrived between 2012 and 2021, more than half (51%) were born in Asia, while 34% were born in Latin America.

California's immigrants have varying levels of education.

- Among working-age Californians (age 25–64), foreign-born residents accounted for 70% of those without a high school diploma and 32% of those with at least a bachelor's degree.
- Overall, 71% of California's immigrants have completed high school, compared with 93% of US-born California residents. A third (33%) of California's foreign-born residents have a bachelor's degree, compared to 39% of US-born residents.
- However, slightly over half (52%) of immigrants who came to the state between 2012 and 2021—and 64% of those who were born in Asia—have at least a bachelor's degree.

Most of California's immigrants speak at least some English.

- More than two-thirds (70%) of immigrants in California report speaking English very well or well, 20% speak English but not well, and 10% speak no English.
- Even among recent immigrants (those in the US for five years or less), 63% report speaking English well or very well, while 14% speak no English.
- At home, most immigrants speak a language other than English—most commonly Spanish (45%) and Chinese, including Mandarin and Cantonese (9%).

Californians have positive views of immigrants.

- Nearly four in five Californians (78%) believe immigrants are a benefit to the state because of their hard work and job skills, while only 18% believe they are a burden.
- An even larger share (87%) believe undocumented immigrants should have a way to stay in the country legally, and 81% favor a path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants who meet certain requirements (including a waiting period, paying fines and back taxes, and passing criminal background checks).