Nearly 1 in 11 Americans are foreign-born

In 1994, 8.7 percent of the population of the United States was foreign-born — nearly double the percent foreign-born in 1970 (4.8 percent). While the percent foreign-born is at its highest level since before World War II, much greater proportions of the U.S. population were foreign-born during the early part of this century. From a high of 14.7 percent in 1910, the percent foreign-born declined to a low of 4.8 percent in 1970. Since that time, the percent has steadily increased.

One-third of the foreign-born live in California...

The foreign-born population is not distributed evenly throughout the country. California is home to 7.7 million foreign-born persons — more than one-third of all immigrants to the U.S. and nearly one-quarter of all California residents. New York ranks second with 2.9 million and Florida ranks third with 2.1 million foreign-born. Three other States have over 1 million foreign-born residents — Texas, Illinois, and New Jersey.

"Natives" are persons born in the United States, Puerto Rico, or an outlying area of the U.S., such as Guam or the U.S. Virgin Islands, and persons who were born in a foreign country but who had at least one parent who was a U.S. citizen. All other persons born outside the United States are “foreign-born.”

Year of entry

Twenty percent of the foreign-born population came to the U.S. in the last 5 years. Twice as many came per year during the 1990’s than during the 1970’s—4.5 million persons arrived in the 5-year period between 1990 and 1994 while 4.8 million came during the decade of the 1970’s. Nearly as many came per year during the 1980’s (8.3 million total) as in the last 5 years. The remainder of the foreign-born came to the U.S. prior to 1970.

Country of birth...

Of the 22,568,000 foreign-born persons living in the United States in March 1994, 6.2 million came from Mexico. Mexico was by far the country of origin with the
The largest number of immigrants. The next largest group was from the Philippines—1,033,000.

**... by year of entry**

Of the 4.5 million most recent immigrants, over a quarter (1.3 million) came from Mexico and an additional 243,000 came from Russia. Other countries with large numbers of recent immigrants include Vietnam, the Dominican Republic, the Philippines, India, and El Salvador.

During the 1980’s, the largest numbers of immigrants came from Mexico (2,671,000) and the Philippines (424,000). China, Korea, the Dominican Republic, and Cuba also contributed large numbers. Prior to 1970, Mexico was still the most frequent country of origin (768,000), but the other top countries of origin were very different from today. They included Germany, Cuba, Italy, Canada, and England.

**Citizenship**

Foreign-born persons over the age of 18 can become “naturalized citizens” of the United States after they have lived here for a minimum of 5 years and have passed a citizenship exam. Spouses of U.S. citizens (and certain others) can become naturalized after 3 years and children who immigrate generally become citizens when their parents are naturalized. About 31 percent of the foreign-born population in the United States are naturalized citizens.

**Foreign-born persons are older than natives...**

The median age of all foreign-born persons in the United States (37 years) is higher than the median age for natives (33 years). But when the foreign-born population is divided into those who are naturalized citizens and those who are not citizens, a very different picture is formed. Only naturalized citizens are older on average (48 years) than natives.

**... and younger than natives**

Age and year of entry have obvious connections. The most recent immigrants are younger on average than natives. Those who came to the United States between 1990 and 1994 have a median age of only 26 years.

**Race and Hispanic origin**

More than two-thirds of the foreign-born population are White, about 1 in 5 are Asian or Pacific Islander, and only 7.1 percent are Black. The remainder reported their race as either “American Indian, Eskimo, or Aleut” or “other race.” Nearly half (45.5 percent) of all foreign-born persons are of Hispanic origin.

Nearly two-thirds of the Asian and Pacific Islanders in the United States are foreign-born and most of the immigrants (91.7 percent) entered this country since 1970. Although 38.5 percent of the persons of Hispanic origin in this country are foreign-born and most have lived in the U.S. long enough to qualify for naturalization, only 18.3 percent are naturalized citizens.

**Fertility**

In June 1994, there were 6.2 million foreign-born women 15 to 44 years old, representing 10.4 percent of all women in the United States in the childbearing ages. These women had borne 1.5 children each compared with 1.2 children borne to native-born women. About 68 percent of these women in childbearing ages immigrated to the United States after 1980. Women who became naturalized citizens had borne an average of 1.5 children each, not significantly different from the average reported by non-citizens.

**Educational attainment**

While it seems a paradox, the foreign-born are both more educated and less educated than natives. Recent immigrants 25 years and over are more likely to have a college degree than either natives or earlier immigrants. While 11.5 percent of recent immigrants have a graduate or professional degree, only about 7.5 percent of natives and immigrants in earlier years have such degrees. Recent immigrants are also more likely to have bachelor’s degrees (20.9 percent) than either natives (14.7 percent) or earlier immigrants (13.9 percent).¹

On the other hand, immigrants are also less likely to have graduated from high school than natives. Only 17.1 percent

¹The percentages for natives and earlier immigrants are not significantly different from each other. Educational attainment by race and Hispanic origin and by country of origin are available in the detailed tabulation package.
of natives over the age of 25 are
not high school graduates while
36.0 percent of immigrants do
not have high school degrees.

Labor force status

The foreign-born population
has a higher unemployment rate
than do natives (9.1 percent
versus 6.8 percent, respectively).
However, the unemployment
rate of naturalized citizens is
no different statistically from
that of natives. Foreign-born
persons who are not citizens
have the highest unemployment
rate (10.7 percent).

Income in 1993

Foreign-born persons as a
group had a lower median income
in 1993 than natives ($12,179
versus $15,876) but this difference
seems to be related to length
of residence. Foreign-born persons
who immigrated during the 1970's
have median incomes no different
than that of natives. Recent immi-
grants have the lowest median
income ($8,393) of all immigrants
by period of entry into the United
States.

Receipt of public assistance

Recent immigrants are more
likely to receive public assistance
income than natives (5.7 percent
versus 2.9 percent). The rates
drop significantly for immigrants
who have been here for 5 or more
years. The rates for foreign-born
persons who entered during the
1970's and 1980's are not signifi-
cantly different from those of
natives or recent immigrants.
And immigrants who arrived
before 1970 are less likely to
be receiving public assistance
(1.4 percent) than natives.

Aid to Families with Dependent
Children (AFDC) is the primary
source of public assistance
income in the CPS data; most
natives and immigrants who are
receiving some kind of public
assistance are receiving AFDC.

Poverty status

While the data on income and
receipt of public assistance are
limited to persons ages 16 and
over, poverty status is based
upon family income and persons
of all ages are tallied as to
whether or not they are in a
family above or below the
poverty line. The foreign-born
are 1.6 times more likely to be
in poverty that natives (22.9
versus 14.4 percent). And recent
immigrants are over twice as likely
to be in poverty (37.1 percent).
Only persons who immigrated
prior to 1970 are less likely
than natives to be in poverty
(10.8 percent).

Tenure

Homeownership is one indica-
tor of economic well being. While
over two-thirds of natives live in
owner-occupied housing units,
less than half of the foreign-born
live in owner-occupied housing.
Homeownership among immi-
grants increases with length
of residence; while persons who
immigrated before 1970 have
homeownership rates higher
than natives, only 17.5 percent
of recent immigrants are living
in their own homes.

Source of the data

The Current Population Survey
began collecting monthly data on
nativity in January of 1994. Each
respondent was asked where they
were born and the country of birth
of each of their parents. Persons
born outside of the United States
were also asked their citizenship
status and the year they came to
the United States to live. Most of
the characteristics of the foreign-
born population shown in this
brief report are from the March
1994 supplement to the Current
Population Survey; the data
for fertility are from June 1994.

The foreign-born population
in this report include some undocu-
mented immigrants, refugees,
and temporary residents such as
students and temporary workers
as well as the legally admitted
immigrants included in data from
the Immigration and Naturalization
Service.

More information

A package of tables showing
detailed characteristics of the
foreign-born by country of birth
and selected states is available on
floppy disk for $40 or on paper
for $63 from Population Division's
Statistical Information Office at
301-457-2422. The table package
is also available on the Internet
(www.census.gov); look for
Migration Data from the
Population Division. Technical
information about the collection,
processing, and quality of the
nativity data from the CPS is
available in “Evaluation of Nativity
Data from the Current Population
Survey” by Gregg Robinson (forth-
coming). Public Use Tapes of the
Current Population Survey can be
purchased from Customer
Services at 301-457-4100.

Contacts

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The statistics in this report are
subject to sampling variability,
as well as survey design flaws,
respondent classification errors,
and data processing mistakes.
The Census Bureau has taken
steps to minimize errors, and
analytical statements have
been tested and meet statistical
standards. However, because of
methodological differences, use
caution when comparing these
data with data from other sources.
For information on the source
of data and the accuracy of
estimates, including the use
and computation of standard
errors, see the “Source and
Accuracy Statement” that
accompanies the tabulation
package.

2The CPS does not include the value
of non-cash benefits, such as food stamps,
as public assistance income.
Table 1.  
Selected Characteristics of Natives and the Foreign-Born Population by Citizenship and Year of Entry: 1994
(Numbers in thousands)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Foreign born</th>
<th>Year of entry</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age Total</td>
<td>237,184</td>
<td>22,568</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under 5 years</td>
<td>20,160</td>
<td>298</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 to 17 years</td>
<td>47,118</td>
<td>2,190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 to 24 years</td>
<td>22,839</td>
<td>2,636</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 to 29 years</td>
<td>17,034</td>
<td>2,592</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 to 34 years</td>
<td>19,643</td>
<td>2,677</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35 to 44 years</td>
<td>37,006</td>
<td>4,522</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45 to 64 years</td>
<td>45,245</td>
<td>5,014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65 years and over</td>
<td>28,139</td>
<td>2,640</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median age (years)</td>
<td>32.9</td>
<td>37.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex Male</td>
<td>115,782</td>
<td>11,132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>121,402</td>
<td>11,436</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race and Hispanic origin White</td>
<td>199,793</td>
<td>15,428</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>31,443</td>
<td>1,596</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian or Pacific Islander</td>
<td>2,813</td>
<td>4,630</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic origin¹</td>
<td>16,376</td>
<td>10,270</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fertility² Women 15 to 44 years</td>
<td>53,849</td>
<td>6,239</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children ever born per 1,000</td>
<td>1,208</td>
<td>1,539</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Attainment Total 25 years and over³</td>
<td>147,067</td>
<td>17,445</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not high school graduate</td>
<td>25,166</td>
<td>6,274</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school grad/some college</td>
<td>89,382</td>
<td>7,147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor's degree</td>
<td>21,660</td>
<td>2,596</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate or professional degree</td>
<td>10,859</td>
<td>1,428</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labor Force Status Total 16 years and over⁴</td>
<td>176,607</td>
<td>20,559</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the civilian labor force</td>
<td>116,281</td>
<td>12,883</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>108,402</td>
<td>11,706</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>7,880</td>
<td>1,176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not in the labor force</td>
<td>59,411</td>
<td>7,635</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income in 1993 Total 16 years and over⁵</td>
<td>176,067</td>
<td>20,559</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Without income</td>
<td>10,540</td>
<td>2,802</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With income</td>
<td>166,027</td>
<td>17,757</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$1 to $9,999 or loss</td>
<td>57,416</td>
<td>7,283</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$10,000 to $19,999</td>
<td>39,905</td>
<td>4,909</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$20,000 to $34,999</td>
<td>36,994</td>
<td>3,067</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$35,000 to $49,999</td>
<td>17,122</td>
<td>1,252</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$50,000 or more</td>
<td>14,629</td>
<td>1,248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median income (dollars)</td>
<td>15,876</td>
<td>12,179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Received Public Assistance⁶</td>
<td>5,076</td>
<td>758</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Received AFDC</td>
<td>4,082</td>
<td>550</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty Status⁷ In poverty</td>
<td>34,086</td>
<td>5,179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not in poverty</td>
<td>202,659</td>
<td>17,355</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenure In owner-occupied unit</td>
<td>162,805</td>
<td>10,416</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In renter-occupied unit</td>
<td>74,379</td>
<td>12,152</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹Persons of Hispanic origin may be of any race. ²Data from the June 1994 CPS. ³Includes persons in Armed Forces, not shown separately. ⁴Persons for whom poverty status is determined.

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Footnotes:

1. Persons of Hispanic origin may be of any race.
2. Data from the June 1994 CPS.
3. Includes persons in Armed Forces, not shown separately.
4. Does not include non-cash benefits such as food stamps.
5. Persons for whom poverty status is determined.