

Migration Numbers: Unauthorized entries. Undocumented aliens. Legal residents

An emotional summary: It is straightforward. The yearly unauthorized entries at the border are about 1/2 a million. Meanwhile, about a million people overstay their authorized entry into the US. Another 1/2 a million people become legal residents in the US because of family ties. The number of “encounters” last year was 2 and a half million, but encounters are not unauthorized entries into the country! No one talks about Spanish tourists being a problem, one of the worst groups overstaying their visas, or the many US citizens' family members who become legal residents too easily. But there is an outcry about the inflated number of poor brown people risking their lives to cross the desert to sustain the American economy. Why? Because disinformation about a border invasion creates fear and uncertainty and ultimately votes for anyone promising to fix the non-existing problem.

The following is a summary of data available from Homeland Security.

The total number of unauthorized entries in the Southwest border can be estimated between a quarter and a half million, a far cry from the approximately two and a half million reported encounters! The number of visitors overstaying their authorized entry to the US is significantly higher at about one million.

Encounters include apprehensions, inadmissibles, and expulsions. Nationwide encounters are, as of July 2024, about 170 thousand a month, their lowest post-pandemic level. Border encounters are often confused with “border crossings,” “border arrests,” “illegal entries,” or a myriad of other terms.

The number of undocumented aliens living in the United States has hovered around 11 million for the last several years.

The estimated legally resident population is about 30 million or nearly three foreign-born legal residents in the US for each undocumented foreigner.

About one million migrants become US residents legally (half through family ties) each year.

Details follow:

1. Unauthorized Entries

Unauthorized entries cannot be measured directly because they are those who get into the country avoiding detection. No detection, no measurement, therefore they can only be estimated. The US government has not published estimates of the number of unauthorized entries since 2021 because of the limitation in measuring them. The current information released to the public is the number of “Nationwide Encounters” by US Customs and Border Protection (CBP). Encounters include apprehensions, inadmissibles, and expulsions.

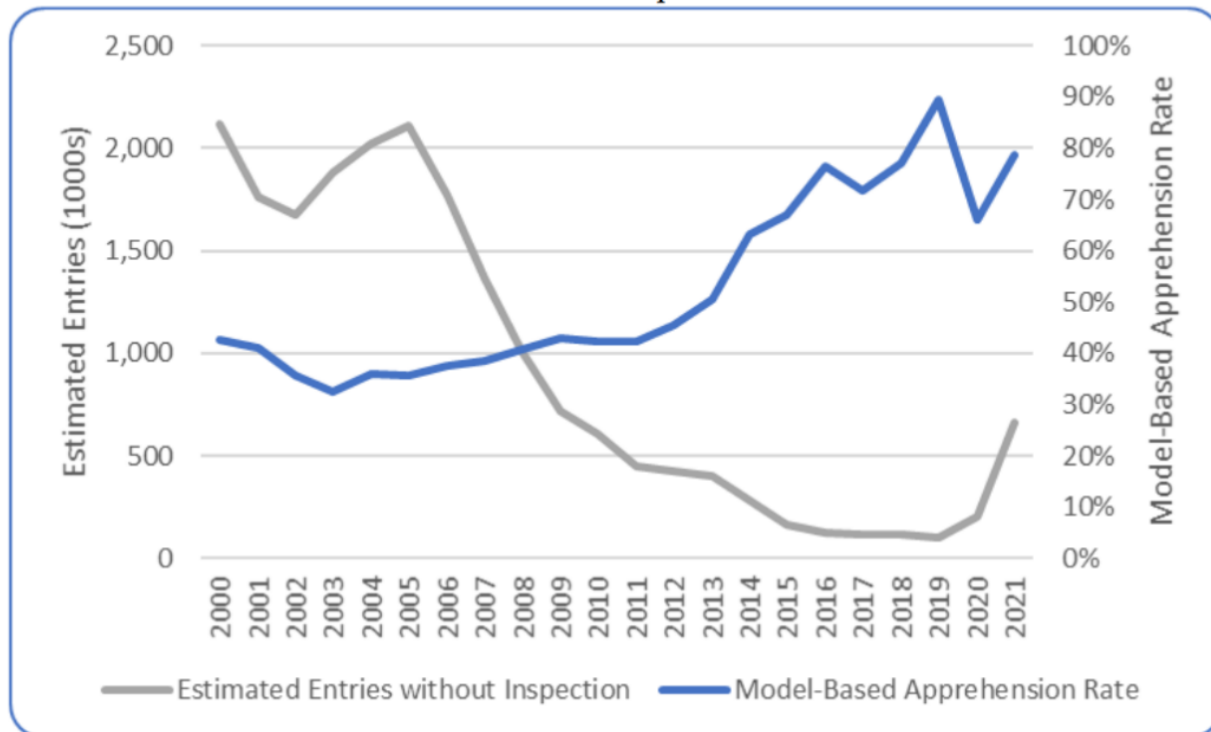
See <https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/nationwide-encounters>

Border encounters are often confused, unintentionally or as disinformation, with “border crossings,” “border arrests,” “illegal entries,” or a myriad of other terms. Border arrests are a small fraction of border encounters. Lacking the proper visa to enter the US and consequent denial of entry is a more frequent border encounter, for example. Here’s an example of misinformation (wrong information without intending harm): ProPublica’s report from June 10, 2024, “What’s Next for U.S. Immigration Policy on the Southern Border?” which states, “border apprehensions or encounters” confounding encounters with arrests! It further says, “it’s estimated that there is going to be between 1.6 to 1.7 million arrests. The high-water mark was 1.6 million in 2000 for the longest time. When the numbers went up in 2022 and 2023 to 2.2 million.” <https://www.propublica.org/article/us-immigration-policy-2024-mexico> The number of arrests has never been in the millions!

Border encounters go up if the percentage of unauthorized entries goes down! The better at stopping unauthorized entries, the higher the number of border encounters. The apprehension rate is estimated to be currently 80 to 90% while it was about 40% in the period 2000-2010 according to the Department of Homeland Security. See https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/2022-09/2022_0818_plcy_southwest_border_enforcement_report_fy_2021.pdf

The estimated unauthorized entries according to the above report dropped steadily from 1 million starting in 2008, after being as high as over 2 million in 2000 and 2005, as follows:

Estimated Southwest Border Entries without Inspection: FY 2000–FY 2021



CPB has made clear that repeat encounters have inflated the number of encounters significantly, as follows: “The number of total encounters overstates the number of unique people attempting to cross the border. Prior to the pandemic, about one in eight border encounters involved a person previously

encountered during the prior year. However, since CBP began expelling noncitizens under the CDC's Title 42 public health order to limit the spread of COVID-19, the repeat encounter rate jumped to more than one in three encounters, including almost half of single adult encounters. Thus, while total enforcement encounters increased 82 percent between 2019 (the last pre-pandemic year) and 2021, the number of unique individuals encountered at the border increased 30 percent." From

<https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/national-media-release/cbp-releases-operational-fiscal-year-2021-statistics>

The Southwest border encounters reached a total of "2,475,669 Enforcement Encounters" or approximately 2 ½ million in 2023. Assuming an apprehension rate of 80%, the number of unauthorized entries would have been about half a million. Considering the influence of repeat encounters, the apprehension rate could be estimated at 90% reducing the number of unauthorized entries to about a quarter of a million. **The total number of unauthorized entries in the Southwest border can therefore be estimated between a quarter and half million, a far cry from the approximately two and half million encounters!** **The number of visitors overstaying their authorized entry to the US is significantly higher at about one million.** Undocumented aliens are more likely to be foreigners who overstay their visas rather than people who enter the country undetected. Two to one!!

According to DHS: "As noted, CBP determined there were 23,243,127 in-scope nonimmigrant admissions to the United States through air or sea POEs with expected departures occurring in FY 2022, which represents the majority of air and sea annual nonimmigrant admissions. Of this number, CBP calculated a total overstay rate of 3.67 percent, or 853,955 overstay events." See

https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/2023-07/23_0707_FY22_FY23_CBP_Integrated_Entry_Exit_Overstay_Report.pdf

Nationwide encounters are, as of July 2024, about 170 thousand a month, their lowest post-pandemic level.

FY

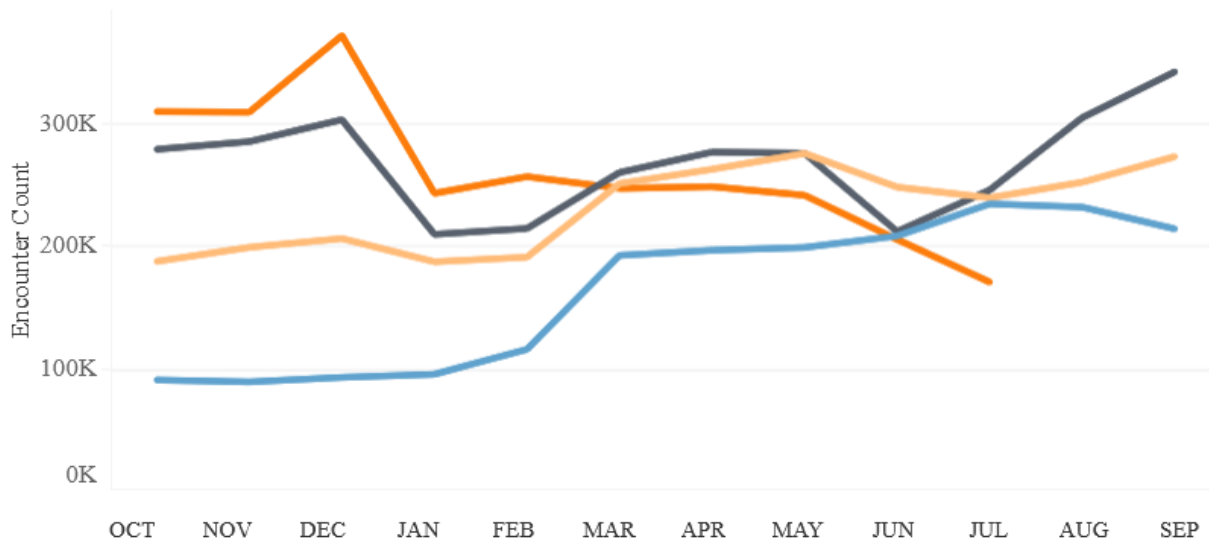
2021

2022

2023

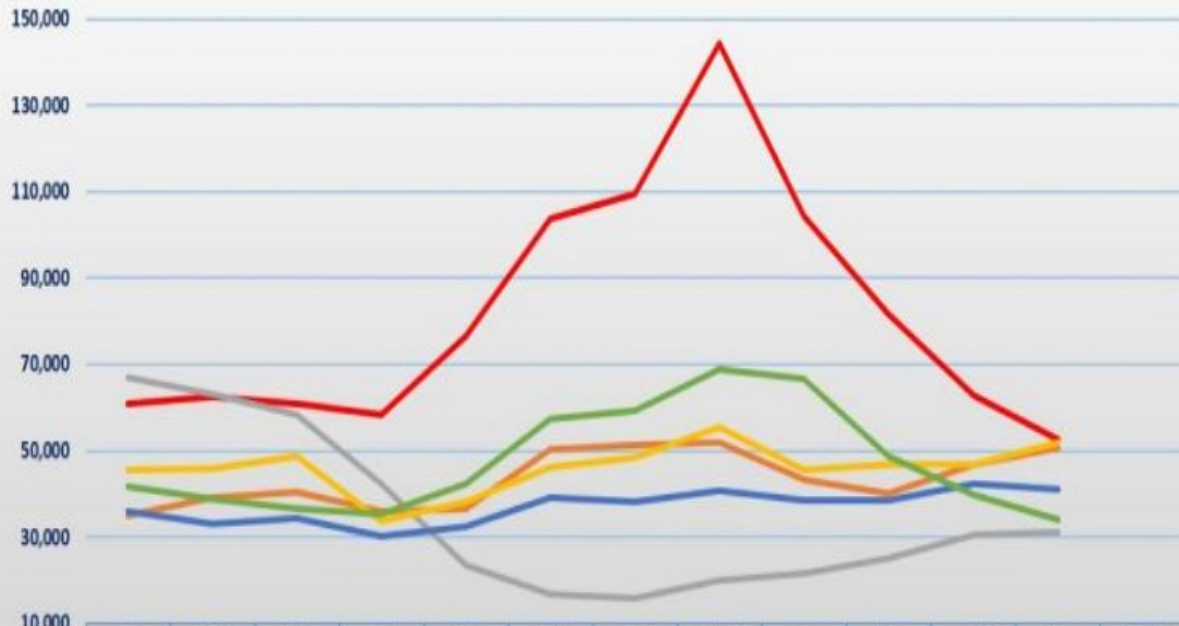
2024 (FYTD)

FY Nationwide Encounters by Month

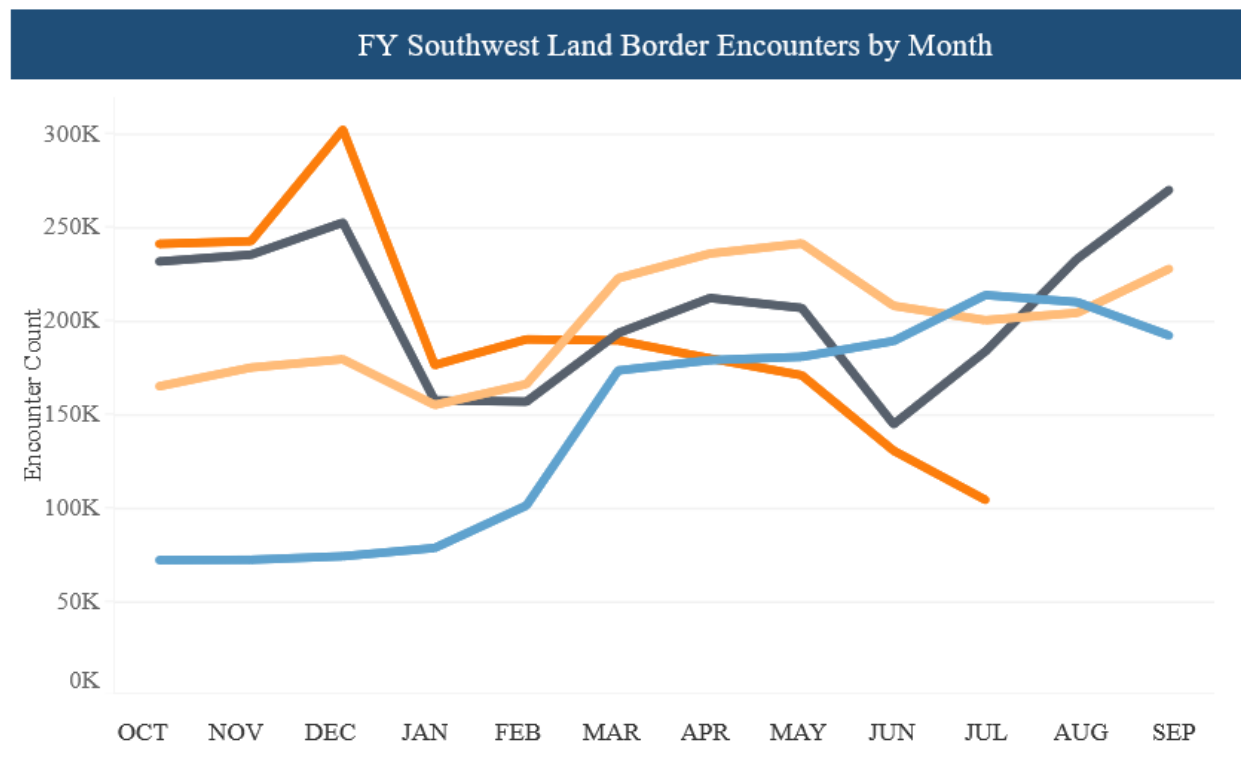


2019 was the first year with a marked increase in apprehensions and inadmissibles at the Southwest Border compared to the period from 2014 to 2018. As shown by the following CBP graphs:

CBP Southwest Border Total Apprehensions / Inadmissibles



	OCT	NOV	DEC	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	Total
FY19	60,781	62,469	60,794	58,317	76,545	103,731	109,415	144,116	104,311	81,777	62,707	52,546	977,509
FY18	34,871	39,051	40,519	35,905	36,751	50,347	51,168	51,862	43,180	40,149	46,719	50,568	521,090
FY17	66,842	63,218	58,379	42,359	23,557	16,794	15,798	19,966	21,673	25,069	30,582	31,280	415,517
FY16	45,516	45,755	48,742	33,657	38,311	46,118	48,511	55,386	45,671	46,909	46,909	51,893	553,378
FY15	35,903	33,032	34,243	30,180	32,550	39,162	38,296	40,683	38,619	38,611	42,415	41,165	444,859
FY14	41,828	38,685	36,695	35,181	42,399	57,405	59,119	68,804	66,541	48,819	39,758	34,003	569,237



2. Undocumented Aliens living in the United States

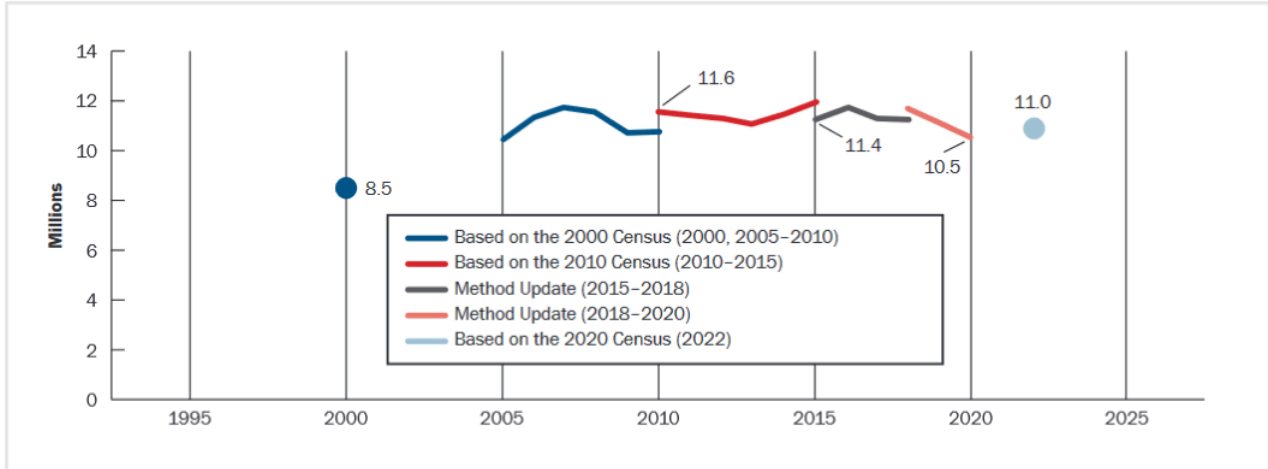
Homeland Security publishes estimates of the number of undocumented aliens living in the United States. Remarkably, the number has hovered around 11 million for the last several years. California and Texas account for about 5 million or almost half of this population.

The population of undocumented aliens has steadily aged over the last few years. Most likely due to some people having remained in the country undocumented for many years, while fewer younger people have entered the country without authorization.

Source: https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/2024-05/2024_0418_ohss_estimates-of-the-unauthorized-immigrant-population-residing-in-the-united-states-january-2018%E2%80%93january-2022.pdf

Figure 1

Unauthorized Immigrant Population Estimates by Year: 2000–2022

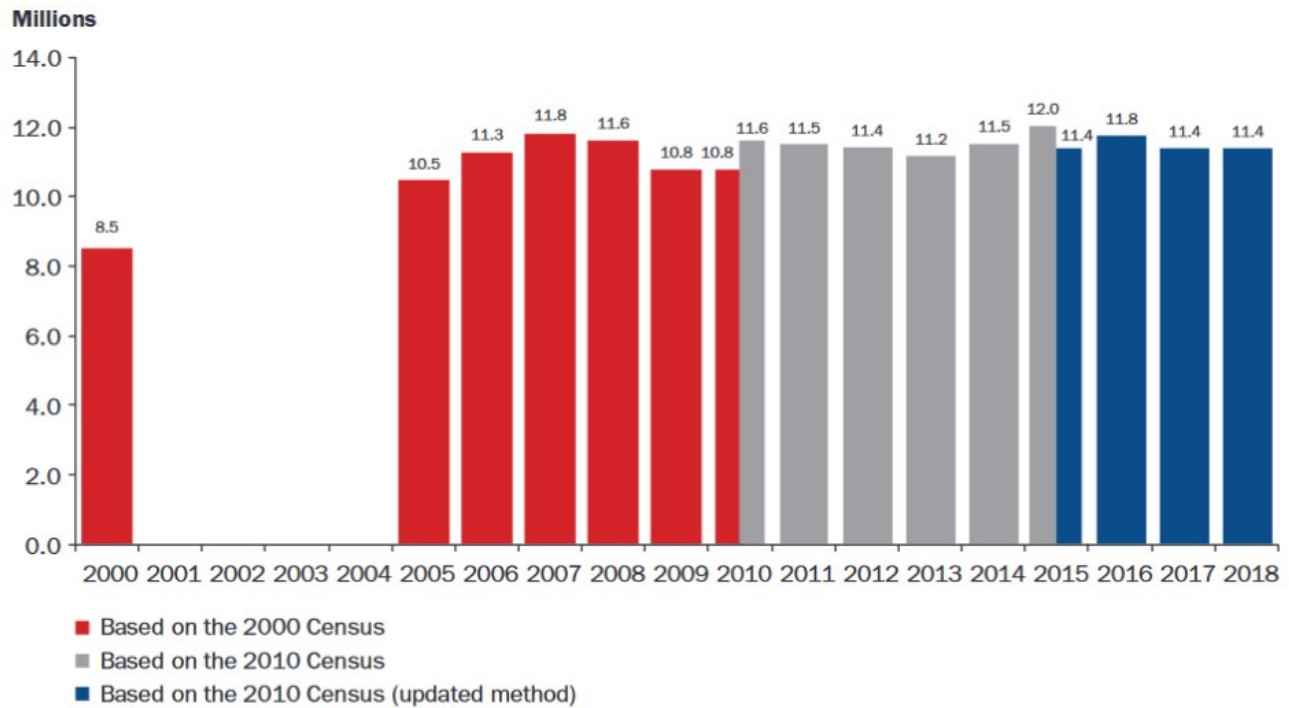


Notes: The estimates for the 2005–2010 series were based on ACS vintages tied to the 2000 decennial census, the estimates for the 2010–2015, 2015–2018, and 2018–2020 series were based on ACS vintages tied to the 2010 decennial census, and the 2022 estimate was based on an ACS vintage tied to the 2020 decennial census. The estimate for 2018 has been updated compared to the previous edition of this report. Estimates for 2001–2004 and 2021 are not available. See Appendix 2 for details and values for each year estimated. Source: Office of Homeland Security Statistics

Figure 1 summarizes OHSS’ estimates of the unauthorized population for 2000, 2005–2020, and 2022. Readers should

Figure 1.

Estimated Unauthorized Immigrant Population: 2000-2018



Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

Table 3

Unauthorized Immigrant Population Estimates by Top 10 States of Residence: 2018–2020 and 2022

State	2018*	2019	2020	2022
Total	11,570,000	11,110,000	10,510,000	10,990,000
California	2,640,000	2,620,000	2,410,000	2,600,000
Texas	1,950,000	1,950,000	1,900,000	2,060,000
Florida	680,000	650,000	610,000	590,000
New Jersey	460,000	390,000	400,000	490,000
Illinois	460,000	440,000	370,000	420,000
New York	600,000	510,000	370,000	410,000
North Carolina	360,000	340,000	360,000	360,000
Georgia	390,000	360,000	360,000	340,000
Washington	310,000	330,000	340,000	340,000
Arizona	340,000	330,000	340,000	290,000
Other or Unknown	3,380,000	3,200,000	3,040,000	3,090,000

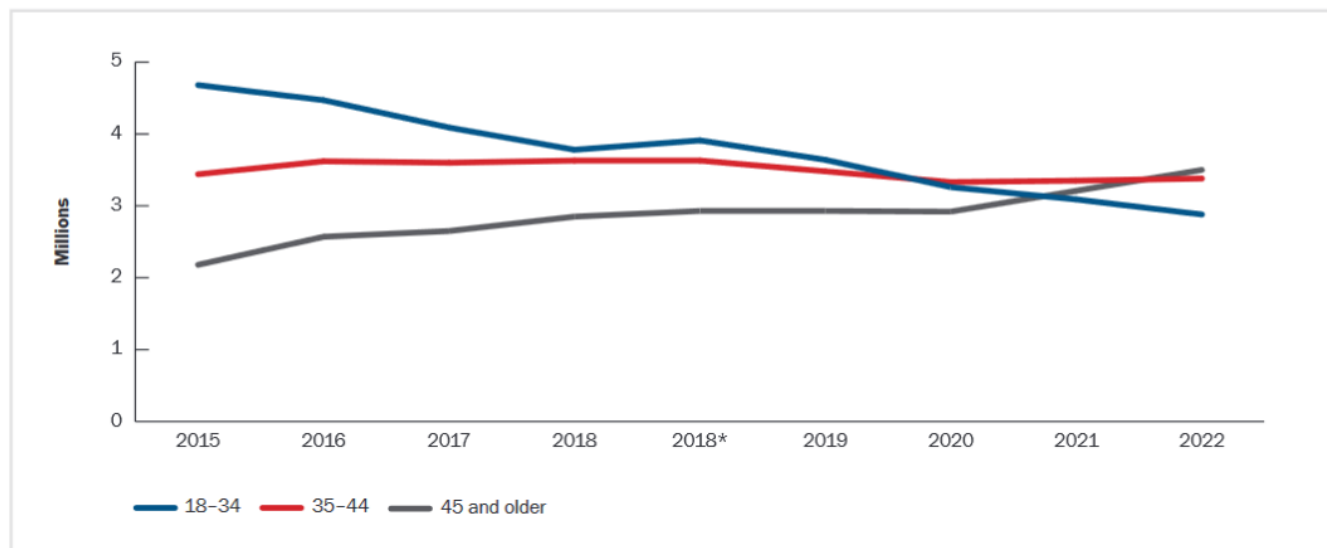
* The estimate for 2018 has been updated compared to the previous edition of this report.

Notes: Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding. Estimates for 2021 are not available.

Source: Office of Homeland Security Statistics.

Figure 4

Unauthorized Immigrant Population Estimates by Age Group: 2015–2022



Note: Estimates for 2021 were not available and are shown as the averages for 2020 and 2022.

Source: Office of Homeland Security Statistics.

3. Legal residents born outside the US.

The estimated legally resident population is about 30 million or nearly three foreign-born legal residents in the US for each undocumented foreigner.

Table A1-1

Component Estimates (in thousands) of the Unauthorized Immigrant Population: 2018–2020 and 2022

Age and Sex	2018*	2019	2020	2022
1) Foreign-born population				
a. Foreign-born population, entered 1980–2021	36,480,000	36,900,000	37,090,000	38,080,000
b. Adjustment for shift in reference date from July 1, 2017 to January 1, 2022	690,000	590,000	550,000	420,000
c. Undercount of nonimmigrants in ACS	260,000	280,000	280,000	280,000
d. Undercount of other legally resident immigrants (LPRs, recent refugee/asylee arrivals) in ACS	610,000	620,000	640,000	650,000
e. Undercount of unauthorized immigrant population in ACS	520,000	470,000	410,000	390,000
f. Estimated foreign-born population, January 1, 2022	38,560,000	38,860,000	38,970,000	39,820,000
2) Legally resident population				
g. LPR, refugee, and asylee flow January 1, 1980–December 31, 2021	32,650,000	33,700,000	34,800,000	36,140,000
h. Mortality 1980–2021	2,570,000	2,780,000	3,000,000	3,450,000
i. Emigration 1980–2021	5,690,000	5,950,000	6,180,000	6,680,000
j. LPR, refugee, and asylee resident population, January 1, 2022	24,390,000	24,970,000	25,630,000	26,010,000
k. Nonimmigrant population on January 1, 2022	2,590,000	2,790,000	2,830,000	2,830,000
l. Estimated legally resident population, January 1, 2022	26,980,000	27,760,000	28,460,000	28,840,000
3) Unauthorized immigrant population				
m. Estimated resident unauthorized immigrant population, January 1, 2022	11,570,000	11,110,000	10,510,000	10,990,000

* The estimate for 2018 has been updated compared to the previous edition of this report.

Notes: Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding. Estimates for 2021 are not available.

Source: Office of Homeland Security Statistics.

About one million migrants become US residents legally (half through family ties) each year.

Legal residency is most commonly obtained by family links. Followed by sponsorship and then because of individual skills.

Legal Immigrants to the United States by Broad Class of Admission, Fiscal Year 2022

Class	Number of immigrants
Immediate relatives of US citizens	428,268
Family-sponsored	166,041
Employment-based	270,284