



Immigrants in Wisconsin

Wisconsin has a small but growing community of immigrants, many of whom emigrated from Mexico. One in 20 Wisconsin residents was born in another country, while about the same share of residents are native-born Americans with at least one immigrant parent. Across sectors, foreign-born residents support the state's economy and are vital to the state's labor force. For example, 15 percent of all Wisconsin farmers, fishers, and foresters are immigrants, as are 13 percent of residents working in the computer and math sciences. As neighbors, business owners, taxpayers, and workers, immigrants are an integral part of Wisconsin's diverse and thriving communities and make extensive contributions that benefit all.

Five percent of Wisconsin residents are immigrants, while another 5 percent of residents are native-born U.S. citizens with at least one immigrant parent.

- In 2018, 297,928 immigrants (foreign-born individuals) comprised 5 percent of the population.¹
- Wisconsin was home to 132,392 women, 141,858 men, and 23,678 children who were immigrants.²
- The top countries of origin for immigrants were Mexico (28 percent of immigrants), India (8 percent), China (5 percent), Laos (4 percent), and the Philippines (3 percent).³
- In 2018, 315,683 people in Wisconsin (5 percent of the state's population) were native-born Americans who had at least one immigrant parent.⁴

Nearly half of all immigrants in Wisconsin are naturalized U.S. citizens.

- 142,489 immigrants (48 percent) had naturalized as of 2018,⁵ and 55,443 immigrants were eligible to become [naturalized U.S. citizens](#) in 2017.⁶
- Four in five (80 percent) immigrants reported speaking English "well" or "very well."⁷

Immigrants in Wisconsin are distributed across the educational spectrum.

- Nearly a third (32 percent) of adult immigrants had a college degree or more education in 2018, while over one-quarter (28 percent) had less than a high school diploma.⁸

Education Level	Share (%) of All Immigrants	Share (%) of All Natives
College degree or more	32	30
Some college	18	32
High school diploma only	23	31
Less than a high school diploma	28	7
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2018 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates.		

Nearly 56,000 U.S. citizens in Wisconsin live with at least one family member who is undocumented.

- 75,000 [undocumented immigrants](#) comprised 24 percent of the immigrant population and 1 percent of the total state population in 2016.⁹
- 115,747 people in Wisconsin, including 55,957 U.S. citizens, lived with at least one [undocumented family member](#) between 2010 and 2014.¹⁰
- During the same period, about 3 percent of children in the state were U.S. citizens living with at least one undocumented family member (43,101 children in total).¹¹

Wisconsin is home to thousands of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipients.

- 6,540 [active DACA recipients](#) lived in Wisconsin as of March 2020, while DACA has been granted to 8,205 people in total since 2012.¹²
- As of 2019, 58 percent of [DACA-eligible immigrants](#) in Wisconsin had applied for DACA.¹³
- Fewer than 2,000 residents of the state would satisfy all but the educational requirements for DACA, and fewer than 1,000 would become eligible as they grew older.¹⁴

Immigrants are vital members of Wisconsin’s labor force in a range of industries.

- 191,163 immigrant workers comprised 6 percent of the labor force in 2018.¹⁵

- Immigrant workers were most numerous in the following industries:

Industry	Number of Immigrant Workers
Manufacturing	56,934
Health Care and Social Assistance	23,387
Educational Services	21,171
Accommodation and Food Services	20,674
Retail Trade	16,352

Source: Analysis of the U.S. Census Bureau's 2018 American Community Survey 1-year PUMS data by the American Immigration Council.

- The largest shares of immigrant workers were in the following industries:¹⁶

Industry	Immigrant Share (%) (of all industry workers)
Administrative & Support; Waste Management; and Remediation Services	10
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing, and Hunting	9
Manufacturing	9
Accommodation and Food Services	8
Mining, Quarrying, and Oil & Gas Extraction	7

Source: Analysis of the U.S. Census Bureau's 2018 American Community Survey 1-year PUMS data by the American Immigration Council.

Immigrants are an integral part of the Wisconsin workforce in a range of occupations.

- In 2018, immigrant workers were most numerous in the following occupation groups:¹⁷

Occupation Category	Number of Immigrant Workers
Production	37,461
Transportation and Material Moving	18,748
Food Preparation and Serving Related	17,844
Office and Administrative Support	14,433
Educational Instruction and Library	13,780

Source: Analysis of the U.S. Census Bureau's 2018 American Community Survey 1-year PUMS data by the American Immigration Council.

- The largest shares of immigrant workers were in the following occupation groups:¹⁸

Occupation Category	Immigrant Share (%) (of all workers in occupation)
Farming, Fishing, and Forestry	15
Computer and Mathematical	13
Life, Physical, and Social Science	11
Production	10
Building and Grounds Cleaning & Maintenance	10

Source: Analysis of the U.S. Census Bureau's 2018 American Community Survey 1-year PUMS data by the American Immigration Council.

- Undocumented immigrants comprised 2 percent of Wisconsin's workforce in 2016.¹⁹

Immigrants in Wisconsin have contributed billions of dollars in taxes.

- [Immigrant-led households in the state paid](#) \$1.7 billion in federal taxes and \$968.3 million in state and local taxes in 2018.²⁰
- Undocumented immigrants in Wisconsin paid an estimated \$156.9 million in federal taxes and \$101.1 million in [state and local taxes](#) in 2018.²¹
- Wisconsin [DACA recipients](#) and DACA-eligible individuals paid an estimated \$15.9 million in state and local taxes in 2018.²²

As consumers, immigrants add billions of dollars to Wisconsin's economy.

- Wisconsin residents in immigrant-led households had \$7.1 billion in [spending power](#) (after-tax income) in 2018.²³

Immigrant entrepreneurs in Wisconsin generate hundreds of millions of dollars in business revenue.

- 15,458 immigrant business owners accounted for 6 percent of all self-employed Wisconsin residents in 2018 and generated \$295.9 million in business income.²⁴
- In the following Wisconsin metropolitan areas in 2018, immigrants accounted for:
 - 32 percent of business owners in the Chicago/Naperville/Joliet metro area (which extends from Illinois to Wisconsin and into Indiana);
 - 11 percent in Minneapolis/St. Paul/Bloomington (which spans Minnesota and Wisconsin); and
 - 5 percent in Milwaukee/Waukesha/West Allis.²⁵

Endnotes

1. “Foreign born” does not include people born in Puerto Rico or U.S. island areas or U.S. citizens born abroad of American parent(s). U.S. Census Bureau, 2018 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates. The American Immigration Council elected to use data from the 2018 ACS 1-Year estimates wherever possible to provide the most current information available. Since these estimates are based on a smaller sample size than the ACS 5-year, however, they are more sensitive to fluctuations and may result in greater margins of error (compared to 5-year estimates).
2. Children are defined as people age 17 or younger. Men and women do not include children. Ibid.
3. Analysis of the U.S. Census Bureau’s 2018 American Community Survey 1-year PUMS data by the American Immigration Council.
4. Analysis of data from the 2018 Current Population Survey by the American Immigration Council, using IPUMS CPS. Sarah Flood, Miriam King, Renae Rodgers, Steven Ruggles and J. Robert Warren, *Integrated Public Use Microdata Series, Current Population Survey: Version 7.0* [dataset] (Minneapolis, MN: IPUMS, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.18128/D030.V7.0>.
5. 2018 ACS 1-Year Estimates.
6. Augmented IPUMS-ACS data, as published in “State-Level Unauthorized Population and Eligible-to-Naturalize Estimates,” Center for Migration Studies data tool, accessed April 2020, data.cmsny.org/state.html.
7. Figure includes immigrants who speak only English. Data based on survey respondents age 5 and over. Analysis of 2018 ACS 1-Year Estimates by the American Immigration Council.
8. Data based on survey respondents age 25 and older. Ibid.
9. Pew Research Center, “U.S. unauthorized immigration population estimates, 2016,” February 5, 2019, www.pewhispanic.org/interactives/unauthorized-immigrants/.
10. Silva Mathema, “State-by-State Estimates of the Family Members of Unauthorized Immigrants,” University of Southern California’s Center for the Study of Immigrant Integration and the Center for American Progress, March 2017, www.americanprogress.org/issues/immigration/news/2017/03/16/427868/state-state-estimates-family-members-unauthorized-immigrants/.
11. American Immigration Council analysis of data from the 2010-2014 ACS 5-Year, using Silva Mathema’s “State-by-State Estimates of the Family Members of Unauthorized Immigrants” and IPUMS-USA. Steven Ruggles, Katie Genadek, Ronald Goeken, Josiah Grover, and Matthew Sobek, *Integrated Public Use Microdata Series: Version 7.0* [dataset] (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, 2017).
12. The number of DACA recipients reflects USCIS’ estimate of those with active DACA grants as of March 31, 2020. U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), “Approximate Active DACA Recipients: As of March 31, 2020” [dataset], July 22, 2020, <https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/document/data/Approximate%20Active%20DACA%20Receipts%20-%20March%2031%202020.pdf>. DACA grants reflect USCIS Form I-821D initial requests approved from Aug. 15, 2012-Mar. 31, 2020, as of April 2020. USCIS, “Number of Form I-821D, Consideration of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, Status, by Fiscal Year, Quarter, and Case Status: Aug. 15, 2012-Mar. 31, 2020,” July 22, 2020, https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/document/data/DACA_performance_data_fy2020_qtr2.pdf.
13. Estimates of the DACA-eligible population as of 2019 include unauthorized immigrant youth who had been in the United States since 2007, were under the age of 16 at the time of arrival, were under the age of 31 as of 2012, and who met DACA eligibility requirements as of 2016. Migration Policy Institute (MPI) analysis of U.S. Census Bureau data from the 2012-16 American Community Survey (ACS) pooled, and the 2008 Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), with legal status assignments by James Bachmeier and Colin Hammar of Temple University and Jennifer Van Hook of The Pennsylvania State University, Population Research Institute, as cited in “Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) Data Tools,” accessed April 2020, www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/data-hub/deferred-action-childhood-arrivals-daca-profiles.
14. Ibid.
15. Analysis of 2018 ACS 1-year PUMS data by the American Immigration Council. Categories are based on the 2012 North American Industry Classification System (NAICS), www.census.gov/eos/www/naics/index.html.
16. Ibid.
17. Analysis of 2018 ACS 1-year PUMS data by the American Immigration Council. Categories are based on the 2010 Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) system, www.bls.gov/soc/major_groups.htm.
18. Ibid.
19. Pew Research Center, “U.S. unauthorized immigration population estimates, 2016,” 2019.
20. New American Economy analysis of 2018 ACS microdata using IPUMS. New American Economy, “Map the Impact,” section Taxes and Spending Power, January 31, 2020, <https://www.newamericaneconomy.org/locations/>.
21. Ibid. at sec. Undocumented Immigrants.
22. Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy, *State & Local Tax Contributions of Young Undocumented Immigrants* (Washington, DC: April 2018), Appendix 1, <https://itep.org/state-local-tax-contributions-of-young-undocumented-immigrants>.
23. New American Economy, “Map the Impact,” section Taxes and Spending Power.
24. “Business owners” include people who are self-employed, at least 18 years old, and work at least 15 hours per week at their businesses. Analysis of 2018 ACS 1-year PUMS data by the American Immigration Council.
25. American Immigration Council analysis of 2018 CPS data. Flood, King, Rodgers, Ruggles, and Warren, *IPUMS CPS* dataset.