

# Estimates of the Legal Permanent Resident Population in 2010

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This report presents estimates of the legal permanent resident (LPR) population living in the United States on January 1, 2010. The LPR population includes persons granted lawful permanent residence, for example, “green card” recipients, but not those who had become U.S. citizens. The estimates are shown for the total LPR population and the LPR population eligible to apply to naturalize by country of birth, state of residence, and the year LPR status was obtained. Data for the estimates were obtained primarily from administrative records of U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). The methodology used for the 2010 estimates is similar to that used in previous DHS estimates (see Rytina, 2010).

In summary, an estimated 12.6 million LPRs lived in the United States on January 1, 2010. 8.1 million of those LPRs were eligible to naturalize.

## BACKGROUND

Data on the size and characteristics of the foreign-born population are needed to assess the impact of immigration and integration of immigrants into U.S. society. The decennial census and monthly household surveys of the Census Bureau include questions on place of birth, citizenship, and year of entry into the United States. These data provide a wealth of information on the total foreign-born population, naturalized citizens, and non-citizens. However, national population data on the major subcategories of non-citizens, including LPRs, students, temporary workers, and unauthorized immigrants, are not readily available from any source and must be estimated. An alien registration program requiring all legally resident aliens to report their status annually to the legacy Immigration and Naturalization Service was discontinued by Congress in 1981. Immigration data collected by DHS measure administrative events such as the number of aliens granted lawful permanent residence or the number approved for asylum, but not the population of legal permanent residents or the population of asylees living in the United States at a point in time. Estimates of the LPR population have been derived primarily from Census and DHS data by estimating a base population as of a certain date and adding subsequent components of population change (see Passel and Clark, 1998; Hoefler,

1996). A variant of this approach has been used by DHS since 2002 to estimate the resident LPR population.

## METHODOLOGY

Separate population estimates were developed for LPRs who entered the United States before 1980 and during the 1980-2009 period. The two sets of estimates were added together to obtain the overall estimated population as of January 1, 2010.

### Estimates for LPR Entrants Prior to 1980

It was assumed that all non-citizen residents of the United States in 2010 who entered before 1980 were legal permanent residents. Under the registry provisions of immigration law, aliens of good moral character who are not ineligible to naturalize, are not removable on terrorism grounds and have lived in the United States continuously since January 1, 1972 are eligible for LPR status. Additionally, certain persons living in the United States before 1982 as unauthorized residents were permitted to adjust to LPR status under the provisions of the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986. DHS estimates of the unauthorized immigrant population, using the same rationale, assume that the foreign-born population entering the United States before 1980 is legally resident (see Hoefler, Rytina, and Baker, 2011). Estimates of the LPR population in 2010 that entered before 1980 were obtained from data from the 2009 American Community Survey (ACS) of the U.S. Census Bureau on non-citizen residents with a year of entry prior to 1980. The ACS data were tabulated by year of



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entry (assumed to be the year that LPR status was obtained), country of birth, and state of residence.

### Estimates for LPR Entrants from 1980 through 2009

Data on LPRs who entered the United States between January 1980 and December 2009 were obtained from application case tracking systems of USCIS. Information on persons obtaining LPR status is supplied on two applications. The Application for Immigrant Visa and Alien Registration (DS-230) of the U.S. Department of State is used by aliens living outside the United States. DS-230 applicants who subsequently become LPRs are known as “new arrivals.” The Application to Adjust Status to Permanent Residence (I-485) is used by aliens already living in the United States. I-485 applicants who become LPRs are referred to as “adjustments of status.” Information on the naturalization of LPRs comes from the Application for Naturalization (N-400). The N-400 application is used by persons aged 18 years and over. Basic applicant information maintained in the case tracking systems includes alien identification number (A-number), date of birth, country of birth, gender, U.S. address, date LPR status or naturalization was obtained, and category of admission for LPR status.

Records for LPR entrants from January 1980 through December 2009 were matched by A-number with naturalization records for the same time period in order to exclude LPRs who subsequently naturalized. Several adjustments were then made to reduce the aggregated total of 1980-2009 LPRs to a 2010 LPR population of 1980-2009 entrants. The adjustments for emigration and mortality are methodologically the same as those used in DHS unauthorized immigrant population estimates. An adjustment for derivative citizenship is unique to the LPR population estimates.

LPRs who entered the United States before 1980 were excluded as these persons were counted in the pre-1980 entrant population from the ACS. The date of entry for “new arrival” LPRs is the date of approval for LPR status. For “adjustment of status” LPRs, however, the entry date is usually not recorded directly so the year of last entry prior to adjustment of status was selected as an approximation. Year of last entry was imputed where missing (approximately 40 percent of adjustment of status records during 1998-2005) using category of admission, year of LPR adjustment, and known last entry date. Additional adjustments, described below, were made for LPR children who had derived citizenship, mortality, and emigration.

**Derivative Citizenship.** Most LPRs become U.S. citizens by applying for naturalization (using the N-400 form) when they are at least 18 years old. Some LPRs, however, become U.S. citizens by deriving citizenship upon the naturalization of a parent and may, but are not required to, apply for a certificate of citizenship (using Form N-600). The number of LPRs deriving citizenship was estimated from applications filed for certificate of citizenship from 1980 through 2009. This approach, like its predecessor,<sup>1</sup> produces a conservative estimate of derivative citizenship but was adopted

<sup>1</sup>For LPR population estimates for years prior to 2009, OIS assumed that the cumulative “citizenship” rate (derivative citizenship plus naturalization) for LPRs who were less than 16 years of age when they became LPRs was the same as the rate for persons who were 16 years of age when obtaining LPR status.

because it is straightforward and produces a slightly larger and presumably more accurate estimate for recent years.

**Mortality.** LPRs were survived to 2010 by age (when LPR status was obtained) and gender using mortality rates by age and sex from 1989-91 life tables (National Center for Health Statistics, 1997). The median age of foreign nationals at the time they become LPRs is about 31 years (Monger and Yankay, 2011). As a result, mortality has very little impact on the estimates for recent LPRs but a greater impact for those who became LPRs during the 1980s.

**Emigration.** Most observers agree that a sizable number of LPRs emigrate from the United States. The U.S. government has not collected official statistics since 1957. National data that directly measure emigration do not exist. This report uses an average annual rate of emigration of approximately 1 percent based on estimates for the foreign-born population from Census data (Ahmed and Robinson, 1994). The rates vary by years of residence in the United States and naturalization status. (LPRs who subsequently naturalized were not considered at risk of emigration until after becoming citizens). LPRs who entered the United States as asylees and refugees were assumed not to emigrate.

After adjusting for derivative citizenship, mortality, and emigration, estimates for 1980-2009 entrants were tabulated by the year LPR status was obtained, country of birth, and state of residence. The use of state of residence provided on the application for permanent residence ignores subsequent internal migration and affects the state-level estimates to the extent that migration to and from each state is not the same.

### LPR Population Eligible to Naturalize

LPRs are eligible to apply for naturalization after meeting U.S. residency and other requirements. This report estimates the LPR population eligible to naturalize based on residence requirements using class of admission and the year LPR status was obtained. Most LPRs are required to meet a five-year residency requirement for naturalization. Spouses of U.S. citizens are eligible to apply in three years. There are several other exceptions to the five-year residency requirement, most of which affect small numbers of immigrants.

It was assumed that all LPRs are required to meet a five-year residency requirement except for those whose permanent resident status was as a spouse of a U.S. citizen. Certain categories of immigrants receive credit for the period prior to the actual grant of lawful permanent resident status. The credited time or earlier dates are not included in the LPR records used for this analysis and must be estimated. Asylees are credited one year in asylum status toward lawful permanent resident status. Asylees were therefore assumed eligible to naturalize four years after approval of the adjustment of status application.

Immigrants adjusting to LPR status as refugees, Lautenberg parolees, or through cancellation of removal also receive credit for residence in the United States prior to the actual grant of lawful permanent residence based, respectively, on the date of entry into the United States as a refugee, the date of parole, and the date of cancellation of removal. It was assumed that two years elapse between the earlier dates and the date of approval of the

application for permanent residence so that these LPRs are eligible to apply for naturalization approximately three years after approval of their application for adjustment.

## FINDINGS

### Overview

An estimated 12.6 million legal permanent residents (LPRs) were living in the United States on January 1, 2010 (see Table 1). Of the 12.6 million, an estimated 8.1 million were eligible to naturalize. Between January 2008 and 2010, the total LPR population and LPR population eligible to naturalize remained about the same. In general, the size of the LPR population changes less rapidly than the total legally resident population because increases in the number of persons becoming LPRs each year are offset by persons naturalizing.

**Table 1.**

#### Size of the Legal Permanent Resident Population

| Legal permanent residents            | 2008       | 2009       | 2010       |
|--------------------------------------|------------|------------|------------|
| Total . . . . .                      | 12,600,000 | 12,450,000 | 12,630,000 |
| Eligible to naturalize . . . . .     | 8,160,000  | 7,870,000  | 8,070,000  |
| Not eligible to naturalize . . . . . | 4,440,000  | 4,590,000  | 4,570,000  |

Note: Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.

Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

Components. The entries in Table 2 show the contribution of each data source and adjustment to the final estimated LPR population in 2010. According to USCIS administrative records, 25.2 million foreign nationals obtained LPR status between 1980 and 2009. By the end of 2009, an estimated 9.7 million (38 percent) had naturalized; 1.3 million (5 percent) had derived citizenship before becoming 18 years old; and 3.2 million (13 percent) had died or emigrated. An estimated 4.6 million LPRs had not met the residency requirement for naturalization, leaving 8.1 million LPRs eligible to apply to naturalize in 2010.

**Table 2.**

#### Components of the Legal Permanent Resident Population: 2010

| Category   | Number     |
|--|------------|
| LPR status obtained between 1980–2009 . . . . .  | 25,150,000 |
| <i>minus</i> Naturalizations 1980–2009 . . . . .                                       | 9,660,000  |
| <i>minus</i> Derivative citizenship 1980–2009 . . . . .                                | 1,260,000  |
| <i>minus</i> Emigration and mortality 1980–2009 . . . . .                              | 3,230,000  |
| <i>equals</i> LPRs survived to 1/1/2010 . . . . .                                      | 11,000,000 |
| <i>plus</i> LPR status obtained prior to 1980 (ACS) . . . . .                          | 1,630,000  |
| <i>equals</i> Estimated LPR population as of 1/1/2010 . . . . .                        | 12,630,000 |
| <i>minus</i> LPRs not eligible to naturalize as of 1/1/2010 . . . . .                  | 4,570,000  |
| <i>equals</i> Estimated LPR population eligible to naturalize as of 1/1/2010 . . . . . | 8,070,000  |

Note: Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.

Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

Error. The major sources of error in the estimates are the assumptions made about emigration, mortality, and derivative citizenship. Errors in the estimate of these components affect the 1980–2009 entrants portion of the 2010 LPR estimate. The estimates derived from the 2009 ACS for LPRs entering before 1980 are subject to both sampling and nonsampling error. The estimated margin of error at the 90 percent confidence level for the 1.6 million

estimate is less than plus or minus 0.1 million (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2010). Estimates by country of birth and state of residence are based on smaller numbers of observations and are affected more by sampling error. Major sources of non-sampling error include possible misreporting of citizenship status and year of entry by ACS respondents.

### Year LPR Status Obtained

More than one-half (56 percent) of LPRs in the United States in 2010 obtained permanent residence in 2000 or later (see Table 3). Thirty-eight percent gained LPR status between 2005 and 2009, and 13 percent became LPRs before 1980.

**Table 3.**

#### Year LPR Status Obtained for the Legal Permanent Resident Population: 2010

| Year                  | All legal permanent residents |         | Legal permanent residents eligible to naturalize |         |
|-----------------------|-------------------------------|---------|--|---------|
|                       | Number                        | Percent | Number   | Percent |
| Total . . . . .       | 12,630,000                    | 100.0   | 8,070,000  | 100.0   |
| Before 1960 . . . . . | 180,000                       | 1.4     | 180,000  | 2.2     |
| 1960–1969 . . . . .   | 420,000                       | 3.3     | 420,000  | 5.2     |
| 1970–1979 . . . . .   | 1,040,000                     | 8.2     | 1,040,000  | 12.9    |
| 1980–1989 . . . . .   | 1,110,000                     | 8.8     | 1,110,000  | 13.7    |
| 1990–1999 . . . . .   | 2,770,000                     | 21.9    | 2,650,000  | 32.9    |
| 2000–2004 . . . . .   | 2,290,000                     | 18.1    | 2,010,000  | 25.0    |
| 2005–2006 . . . . .   | 1,860,000                     | 14.8    | 660,000  | 8.2     |
| 2007–2009 . . . . .   | 2,980,000                     | 23.6    | —  | —       |

— Represents zero.

Note: Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.

Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

### Country of Birth

Mexico was the leading country of origin of the LPR population in 2010 (see Table 4). An estimated 3.3 million or 26 percent of LPRs came from Mexico. The next leading source country was the Philippines (0.6 million), followed by People’s Republic of China (0.6 million), India (0.5 million), and the Dominican Republic (0.4 million). Forty-two percent of LPRs in 2010 were born in one of these five countries. The 10 leading countries of origin, which also include Cuba, Canada, El Salvador, Vietnam, and the United Kingdom, represented 55 percent of the LPR population.

The leading countries of origin of the LPR population eligible to apply to naturalize are similar to those for the total LPR population. Differences in rankings tend to reflect either country of origin variation in the propensity to naturalize or changes in LPR flows and naturalization eligibility.

### State of Residence

The data in Table 5 show the estimated LPR population for the leading states of residence. Because the data for most of the population are based on residence at the time LPR status was obtained, the relative rankings are more accurate than the actual population estimates by state.

California was the leading state of residence with an estimated 3.3 million LPRs in 2010. The next leading states of residence were New York (1.6 million), Texas (1.2 million), and Florida (1.2 million). These four states were home to 58 percent of LPRs in 2010.

**Table 4.****Country of Birth of Legal Permanent Resident Population: 2010**

| Country of birth                   | Legal permanent residents |         | Legal permanent residents eligible to naturalize |         |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------|---------|--|---------|
|                                    | Number                    | Percent | Number   | Percent |
| Total . . . . .                    | 12,630,000                | 100.0   | 8,070,000  | 100.0   |
| Mexico . . . . .                   | 3,290,000                 | 26.0    | 2,600,000  | 32.2    |
| Philippines . . . . .              | 560,000                   | 4.4     | 300,000  | 3.7     |
| China, People's Republic . . . . . | 550,000                   | 4.4     | 220,000  | 2.7     |
| India . . . . .                    | 500,000                   | 4.0     | 220,000  | 2.7     |
| Dominican Republic . . . . .       | 440,000                   | 3.5     | 280,000  | 3.5     |
| Cuba . . . . .                     | 370,000                   | 2.9     | 240,000  | 3.0     |
| Canada . . . . .                   | 330,000                   | 2.6     | 260,000  | 3.2     |
| El Salvador . . . . .              | 320,000                   | 2.5     | 240,000  | 3.0     |
| Vietnam . . . . .                  | 310,000                   | 2.5     | 190,000  | 2.4     |
| United Kingdom . . . . .           | 290,000                   | 2.3     | 230,000  | 2.8     |
| Korea, South . . . . .             | 270,000                   | 2.2     | 160,000  | 2.0     |
| Haiti . . . . .                    | 240,000                   | 1.9     | 140,000  | 1.7     |
| Colombia . . . . .                 | 230,000                   | 1.9     | 110,000  | 1.4     |
| Jamaica . . . . .                  | 230,000                   | 1.8     | 150,000  | 1.8     |
| Germany . . . . .                  | 180,000                   | 1.4     | 150,000  | 1.8     |
| Guatemala . . . . .                | 180,000                   | 1.4     | 110,000  | 1.4     |
| Poland . . . . .                   | 150,000                   | 1.2     | 100,000  | 1.3     |
| Japan . . . . .                    | 140,000                   | 1.1     | 110,000  | 1.4     |
| Peru . . . . .                     | 140,000                   | 1.1     | 70,000   | 0.9     |
| Pakistan . . . . .                 | 130,000                   | 1.0     | 50,000   | 0.7     |
| Other . . . . .                    | 3,790,000                 | 30.0    | 2,140,000  | 26.5    |

Note: Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.  
Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

**Table 5.****State of Residence of Legal Permanent Resident Population: 2010**

| State of residence       | Legal permanent residents |         | Legal permanent residents eligible to naturalize |         |
|--------------------------|---------------------------|---------|--|---------|
|                          | Number                    | Percent | Number   | Percent |
| Total . . . . .          | 12,630,000                | 100.0   | 8,070,000  | 100.0   |
| California . . . . .     | 3,330,000                 | 26.3    | 2,370,000  | 29.4    |
| New York . . . . .       | 1,560,000                 | 12.4    | 950,000  | 11.7    |
| Texas . . . . .          | 1,240,000                 | 9.8     | 880,000  | 10.9    |
| Florida . . . . .        | 1,210,000                 | 9.5     | 710,000  | 8.7     |
| New Jersey . . . . .     | 570,000                   | 4.5     | 320,000  | 4.0     |
| Illinois . . . . .       | 540,000                   | 4.3     | 350,000  | 4.3     |
| Massachusetts . . . . .  | 320,000                   | 2.5     | 180,000  | 2.3     |
| Washington . . . . .     | 270,000                   | 2.1     | 170,000  | 2.1     |
| Virginia . . . . .       | 260,000                   | 2.1     | 140,000  | 1.7     |
| Arizona . . . . .        | 240,000                   | 1.9     | 170,000  | 2.1     |
| Georgia . . . . .        | 230,000                   | 1.9     | 120,000  | 1.5     |
| Maryland . . . . .       | 230,000                   | 1.8     | 120,000  | 1.5     |
| Pennsylvania . . . . .   | 230,000                   | 1.8     | 120,000  | 1.5     |
| Michigan . . . . .       | 210,000                   | 1.6     | 120,000  | 1.5     |
| Connecticut . . . . .    | 150,000                   | 1.2     | 90,000   | 1.1     |
| North Carolina . . . . . | 150,000                   | 1.2     | 80,000   | 1.0     |
| Ohio . . . . .           | 140,000                   | 1.1     | 80,000   | 1.0     |
| Colorado . . . . .       | 130,000                   | 1.1     | 80,000   | 1.1     |
| Minnesota . . . . .      | 130,000                   | 1.0     | 70,000   | 0.8     |
| Nevada . . . . .         | 120,000                   | 1.0     | 80,000   | 0.9     |
| Other . . . . .          | 1,380,000                 | 10.9    | 870,000  | 10.8    |

Note: Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.  
Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

The next leading states of residence were New Jersey, Illinois, Massachusetts, Washington, Virginia, and Arizona. The 10 leading states represented 76 percent of the LPR population. The leading states of residence of the estimated LPR population and population eligible to naturalize were generally the same.

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