2025
Legal Industry Report

State of Immigration

Insights from 2024 and trends shaping the year ahead

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Authored by James Pittman

Introduction

The U.S. immigration system is in a period of rapid change. Shifting policies, evolving enforcement priorities, and new legal challenges are transforming how immigration lawyers practice. With a new presidential administration implementing significant changes, staying informed is more critical than ever.

The 2025 Legal Industry Report: State of Immigration provides a data-driven[1] look at the key trends shaping immigration law and practice today. This is the first edition of what will be an annual report and offers essential statistics on green cards, naturalizations, asylum decisions, deportations, immigration court backlogs, visa approvals, and refugee admissions. By analyzing statistics and data from 2024, immigration attorneys can better understand the shifting landscape, anticipate challenges, and adapt their strategies to serve clients effectively.

More than just a collection of data, this report provides expert insights, visual breakdowns, and key takeaways to help make sense of the numbers in the broader legal and policy context. Whether you are representing clients in removal proceedings, managing employment-based visa applications, or advising individuals on pathways to legal status, these insights will help you stay ahead in a rapidly evolving practice environment.

At Docketwise, we are committed to supporting immigration attorneys with the tools and knowledge they need to navigate this dynamic field. By downloading this report, you gain access to valuable data that can inform your practice and help you better serve your clients.

This is just the beginning—we look forward to making the State of Immigration an annual resource for the immigration law community.

Let's dive into the numbers that defined immigration in 2024.

James Pittman
Former Immigration Lawyer
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[1] For full data sources, refer to Appendix A (p. 20)

Authored by: James Pittman

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Figure 1

Employment-Based Green Card Applications to Adjust Status
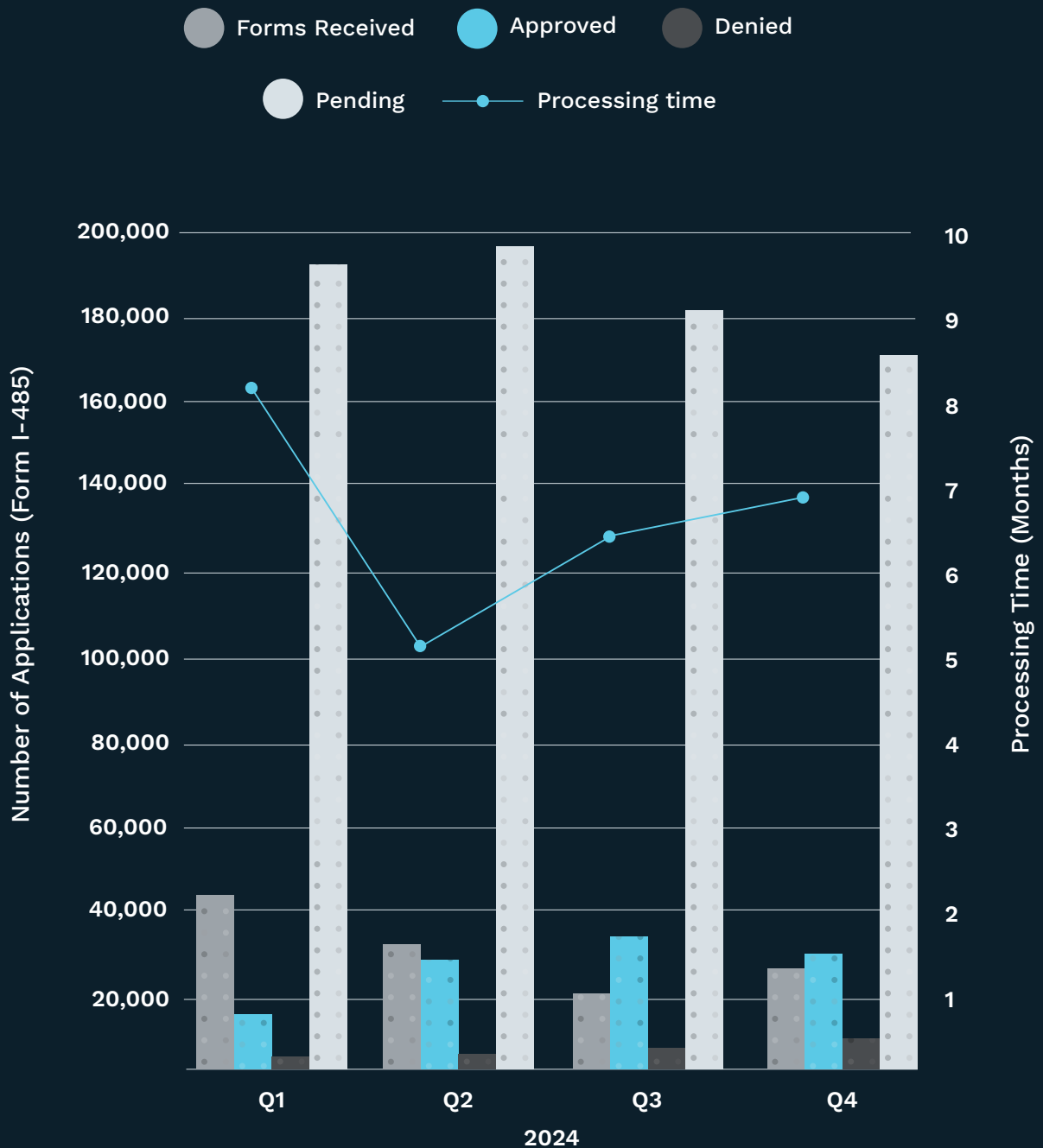
Permanent Residency Statistics

Observations on Permanent Residency (Green Card) Statistics

Employment-Based Green Cards

Data on Employment-based green cards in 2024 (see Figure 1, page 4) reveals significant fluctuations in application volume, approval rates, and processing times. The highest number of applications was received in Q1 (42,780), yet approvals were relatively low (18,855), possibly reflecting case backlogs from prior quarters. Interestingly, Q3 saw a sharp decline in applications (21,588), while approvals peaked at 36,211, suggesting that USCIS was catching up on pending cases rather than processing a surge of new applications.

Processing times improved notably in Q2, dropping from 8.2 months in Q1 to 5.2 months, potentially due to efficiency measures or a temporary decrease in new filings. However, by Q4, processing times had risen again to 6.9 months, indicating ongoing variability in case adjudication.

Family-Based Green Cards

Family-based green cards followed a different trajectory (Figure 2, page 6), with significantly higher application volumes than employment-based cases. Each quarter saw over 110,000 new applications, peaking in Q3 at 124,926 applications received and 113,472 approvals. The steady increase in approvals across the year suggests improved processing efficiency, though denial rates remained substantial, with nearly 50,000 denials across the year.

One notable trend is that processing times declined steadily from 10.1 months in Q2 to 7.7 months in Q4, reflecting efforts to reduce backlogs. However, the consistently high number of pending cases (over 500,000 each quarter) highlights the ongoing demand for family-sponsored immigration and potential bottlenecks in the system.

Overall, while **employment-based green cards experienced erratic approval trends and shifting processing times, family-based applications saw a steadier trajectory,** with gradual improvements in efficiency but persistent backlog challenges.

Figure 2

Family-Based Green Card Applications to Adjust Status
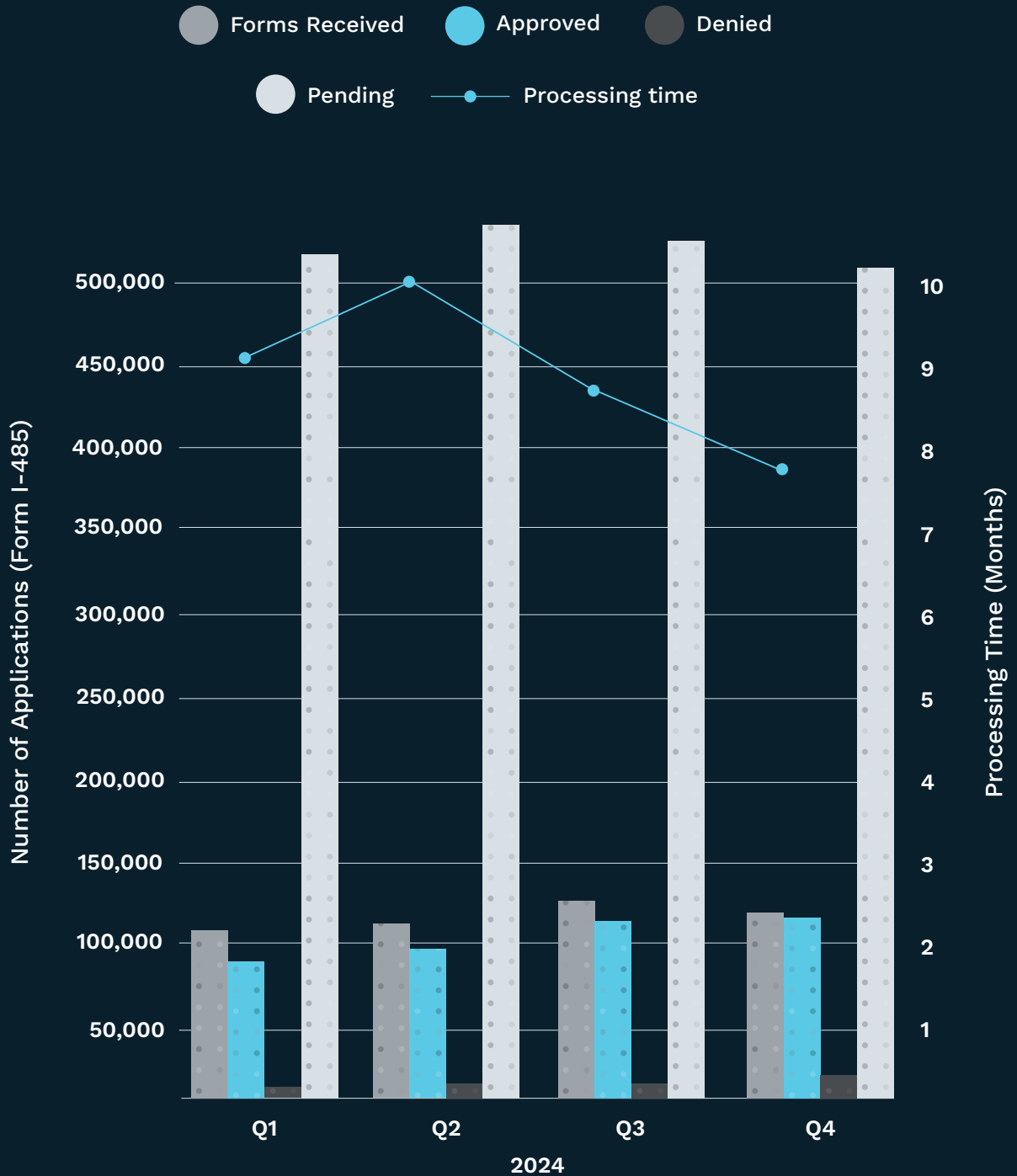
Naturalization Statistics

Observations on Naturalization Trends

2024 naturalization data (Figure 3, page 9) reveals a strong demand for U.S. citizenship, with nearly 1 million applications received over the year. The volume of applications fluctuated significantly, peaking in Q2 (281,882 applications) and dipping in Q3 (239,520 applications) before rising again in Q4 (276,008 applications). These shifts could reflect the influence of external factors such as the upcoming elections or increased outreach efforts encouraging eligible permanent residents to apply.

The approval rate remained consistently high, with over 816,000 applicants successfully naturalized throughout the year. Notably, the denial rate steadily declined from 11.91% in Q1 to 9.99% in Q4, suggesting possible factors at work such as improvements in case processing, better applicant preparedness, or subtle shifts in adjudication standards.

A key takeaway is that while naturalization applications surged in Q2 and Q4, USCIS managed to keep denial rates relatively stable, ensuring a steady flow of new citizens.

The overall denial percentage for the year (10.58%) suggests that most applicants were well-qualified, though nearly 86,000 individuals faced denials, underscoring the challenges some immigrants encounter in meeting naturalization requirements. More research on the reasons for naturalization denials could help applicants better prepare.

With the demand for naturalization remaining high and the denial rate gradually decreasing, efforts to streamline the process and reduce barriers could further enhance accessibility for eligible applicants in the coming years.

While naturalization applications surged in Q2 and Q4, **USCIS managed to keep denial rates relatively stable,** ensuring a steady flow of new citizens.

Observations on Naturalization by Country of Birth

The naturalization trends for FY 2024 (Figure 4, page 9) reveal a diverse pool of new U.S. citizens, with immigrants from Mexico leading the way, comprising 13.2% of all approved naturalizations (107,700 individuals). This aligns with long-standing migration patterns, as Mexico has historically been the largest source of immigrants to the U.S.

India (6.1%) and the Philippines (5.0%) follow as the next largest groups, reflecting the strong presence of employment-based and family-sponsored immigration from these nations. The Dominican Republic (4.9%), Cuba (4.1%), and Vietnam (4.1%) also feature prominently, highlighting the continued naturalization of individuals from countries with significant refugee, asylum, or family reunification pathways.

Notably, China, El Salvador, Jamaica, and Colombia each contributed between 2% and 3% of new citizens, reinforcing the broad geographic distribution of naturalized immigrants. The "All Others" category accounts for more than half (52.4%) of all naturalizations, indicating that U.S. citizenship is being granted to individuals from a vast array of backgrounds, not just from a handful of high-volume countries.

These trends underscore the long-term impact of diverse immigration pathways, including employment-based, family-sponsored, and humanitarian migration. With ongoing changes in immigration policy, particularly under the current administration, the composition of future naturalization cohorts may shift further, making continued monitoring of these trends essential for immigration practitioners.

Figure 3

Overall Naturalization Outcomes

- Received
- Approved
- Denied

Number of Applications
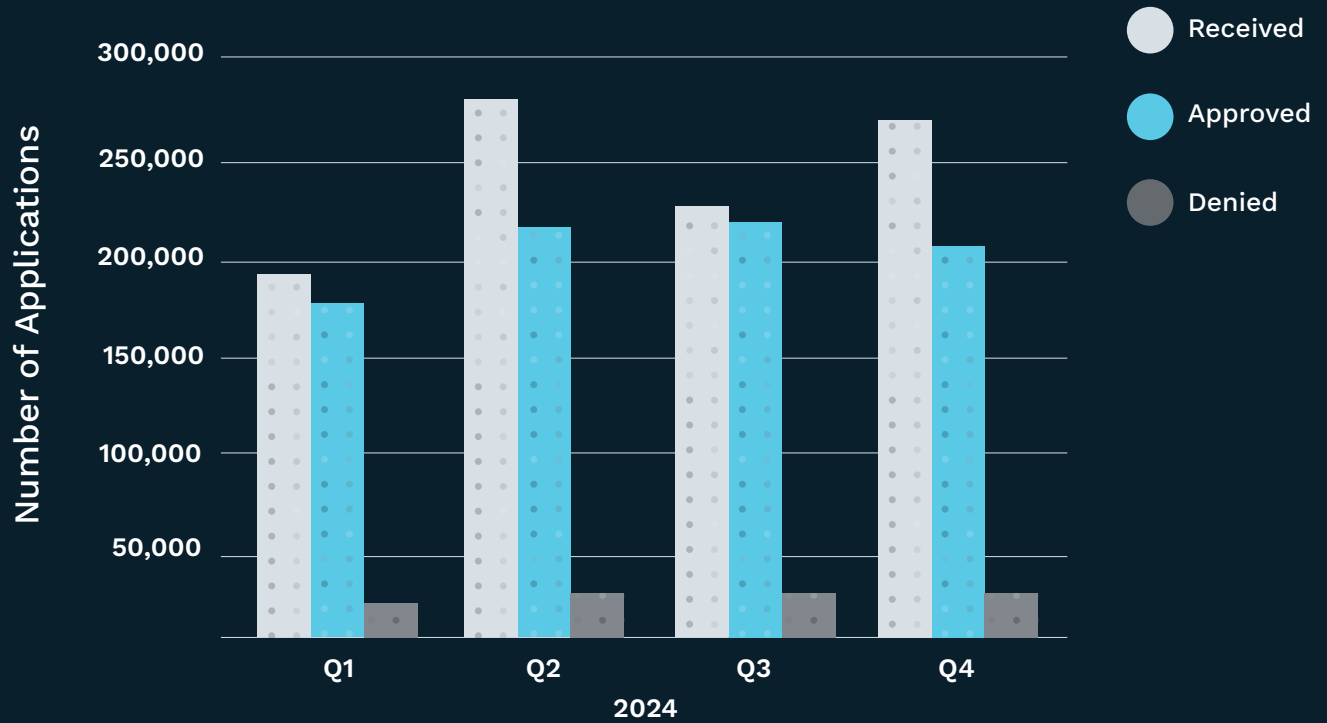
2024

Figure 4

Approved Naturalizations for FY 2024 by Country

13% Mexico: 107,700

6% India: 49,700

5% Philippines: 41,200

5% Dominican Republic: 39,900

52% All Others: 428,800

4% Cuba: 33,700

4% Vietnam: 33,400

3% China: 24,300

3% El Salvador: 21,900

2% Jamaica: 20,000

2% Colombia: 17,900
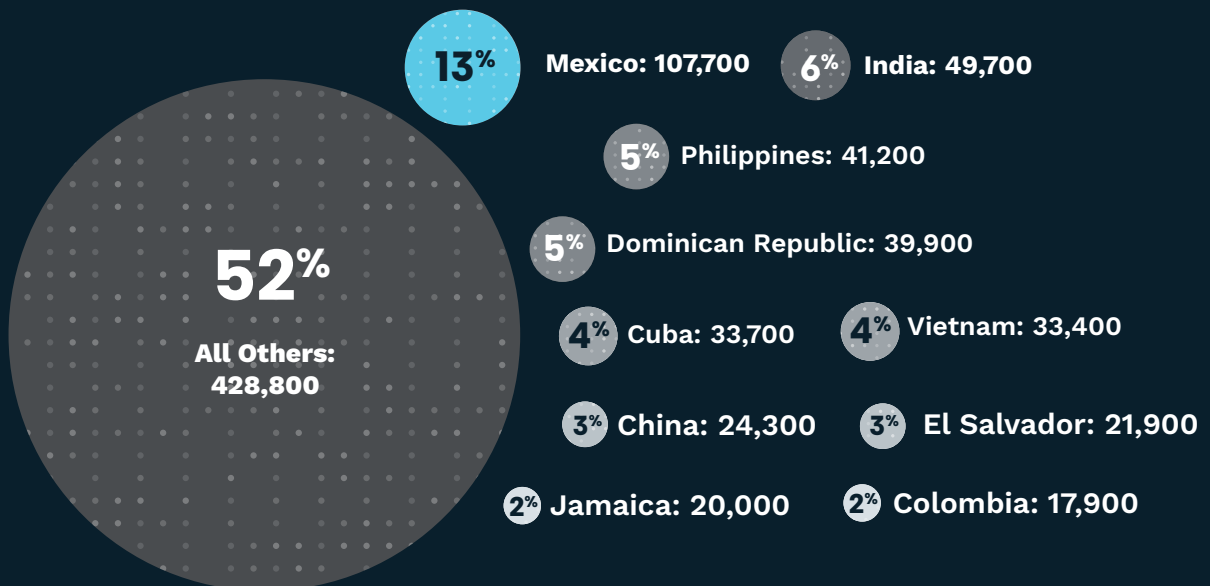
Figure 5

Visas Issued in 2024

Visitors, Transit and Family

B-1	32,034
B-2	12,635
B-1/B-2	6,568,898
C-1/D	325,938
K-1	45,214
K-3	2
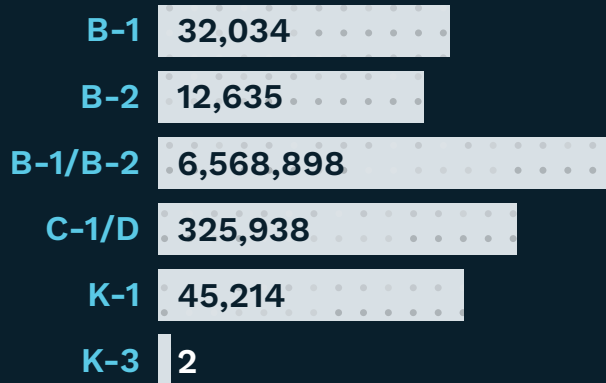
Diplomatic and Official

A-1	10,018
G-1	4,897
G-2	16,949
G-3	436
G-4	22,643
NATO-1	37
NATO-2	8,672
NATO-3	3
NATO-4	340
NATO-5	70
NATO-6	1,944
NATO-7	1

Student and Exchange

F-1	401,903
J-1	323,508
M-1	6,407
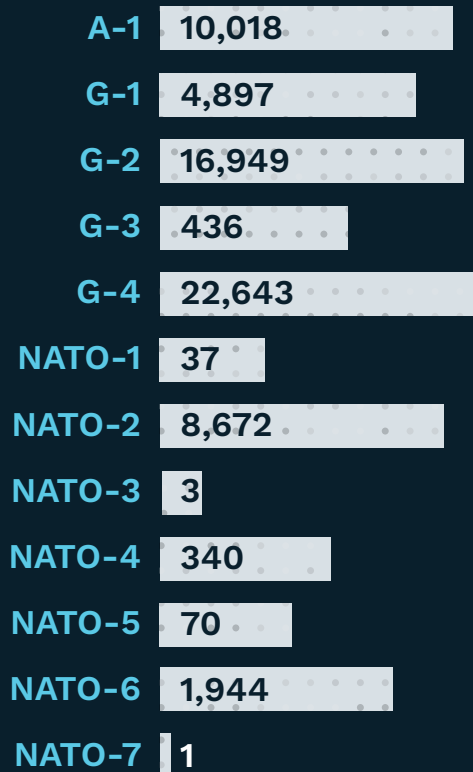
Business and Employment

E-3	4,504
H-1B	220,124
H1-B1	3,103
H-2A	315,953
H-2B	139,971
H-3	930
H-4	104,220
TN	15,751
L-1	72,077
L-2	73,535
O-1	19,544
P-1	24,582
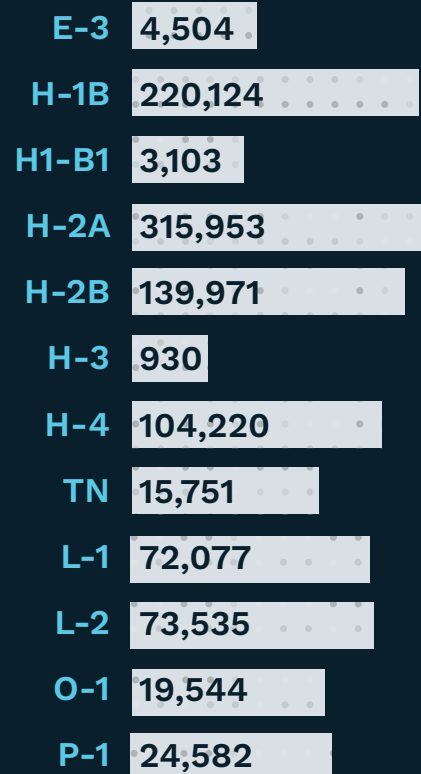
Investment and Trade

E-1	5,710
E-2	55,543

Humanitarian and Special Circumstances

S-7	3
T-2	73
U-1	157
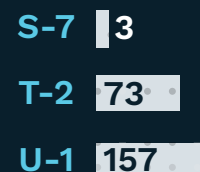
Other Special Purpose

I	13,045
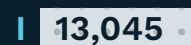
*For full visa descriptions, refer to Appendix B (p. 22).

Logarithmic scale used to show wide value differences clearly — each step increases by a factor of 10.

Nonimmigrant Visa Statistics

Observations on Nonimmigrant Visa Issuance in 2024

The 2024 nonimmigrant visa statistics (Figure 5, page 10) highlight the dominant role of visitor visas, employment-based visas, and exchange programs in shaping temporary migration to the U.S.

The B-1/B-2 visitor visa category overwhelmingly leads, with a staggering 6.57 million visas issued, demonstrating the continued demand for short-term travel to the U.S. for business and tourism. In contrast, employment-based visas such as H-1B speciality workers (220,124 visas), L-1 intracompany transferees (72,077 visas), and E-2 investor visas (55,543 visas) also represent a substantial share of nonimmigrant admissions, reinforcing the U.S.'s reliance on skilled foreign labor and investment.

The F-1 student visa category (401,903 visas) stands out as another major contributor, reflecting the enduring appeal of U.S. educational institutions to international students. Similarly, J-1 exchange visitor visas (323,508 visas issued) play a crucial role in cultural and professional exchange programs, showing the U.S.'s commitment to educational diplomacy.

In the temporary work sector, H-2A agricultural worker visas (315,953 issued) and H-2B non-agricultural worker visas (139,971 issued) underscore the U.S.'s reliance on foreign labor for seasonal and essential industries. The relatively high H-4 (140,220 visas) issuance also indicates that many H-1B holders are bringing dependent family members to the U.S.

Niche visa categories like O-1 (extraordinary ability, 19,544 visas), P-1 (athletes/entertainers, 24,582 visas), and TN (NAFTA professionals, 15,751 visas) continue to serve specialized professional groups, while humanitarian categories such as U-1 (157 visas) and T-2 (73 visas) remain low in comparison, reflecting stringent qualification criteria.

Overall, the data illustrates a broad and dynamic nonimmigrant visa landscape, with key drivers being tourism, education, employment, and seasonal labor. As policy changes shape visa availability and demand, these trends provide valuable insight into the evolving role of nonimmigrant visas and the reasons people around the world have for seeking to come to the U.S. on a temporary basis.

Asylum Statistics

Observations on Affirmative Asylum Case Completions in 2024

The distribution of completed affirmative asylum cases across USCIS asylum offices in 2024 (Figure 6, page 13) reveals significant regional variations, reflecting differences in caseloads, staffing, and local demand for asylum adjudications.

Miami (23,525 cases completed) handled the highest volume, accounting for nearly a quarter (23.4%) of all completed cases nationwide. This aligns with Florida's status as a major destination for asylum seekers, particularly from Latin America and the Caribbean.

Other high-volume offices include Arlington (14,027 cases), Chicago (11,708 cases), and Houston (10,757 cases), indicating that these cities also serve as key hubs for asylum applicants. Notably, Tampa (9,998 cases completed)—a relatively newer asylum office—has quickly risen to become one of the busiest in the country, possibly alleviating some of Miami's backlog.

On the other hand, offices like Boston (2,648 cases) and New Orleans (1,948 cases) handled significantly fewer cases, likely reflecting smaller asylum-seeking populations in those regions or differences in processing capacity.

The New York (7,330 cases) and Newark (7,094 cases) offices together processed about 14,400 cases, indicating that the Northeast remains a major asylum hub, though their combined total still lags behind Miami.

With over 100,000 asylum cases completed nationwide, these figures underscore the heavy workload of USCIS asylum officers and the ongoing challenge of adjudicating cases efficiently. The disparities between offices suggest that processing times and backlogs may vary widely by location, a key consideration for both applicants and attorneys navigating the asylum system.

Figure 6

Affirmative Asylum Cases Completed by Asylum Office

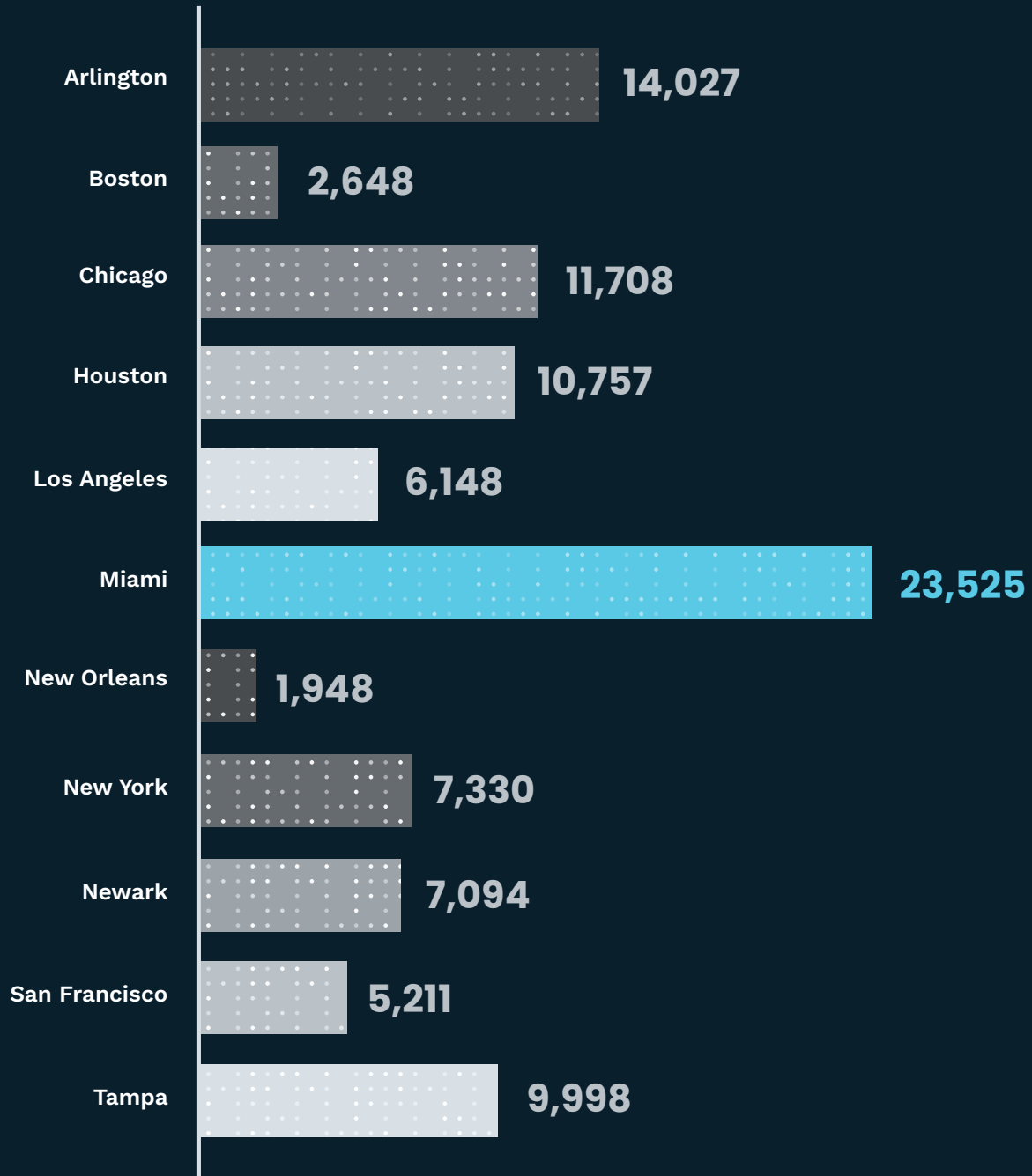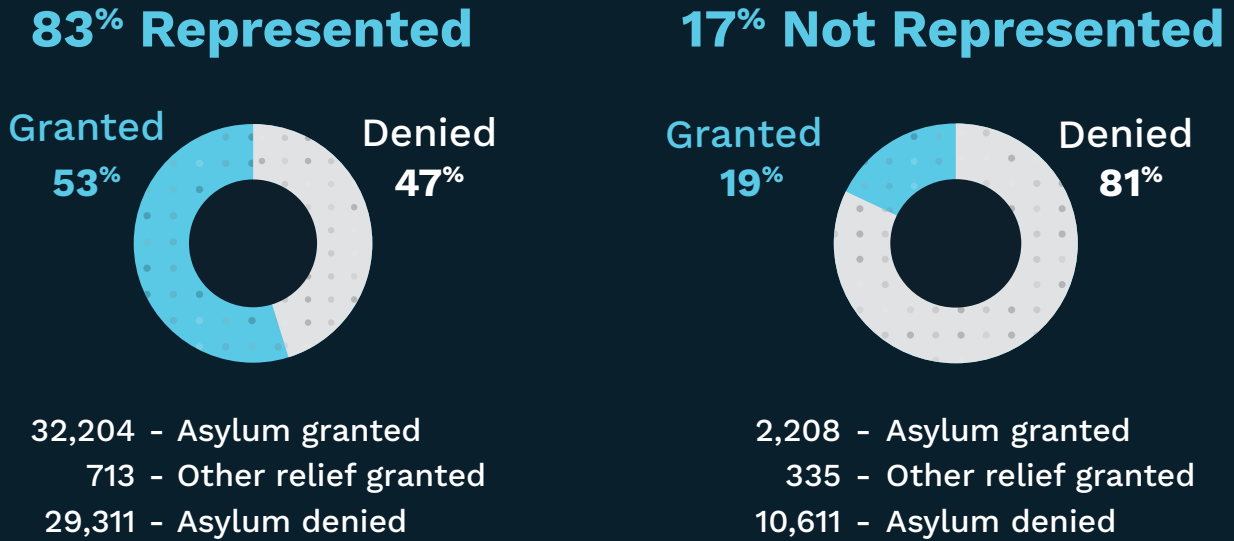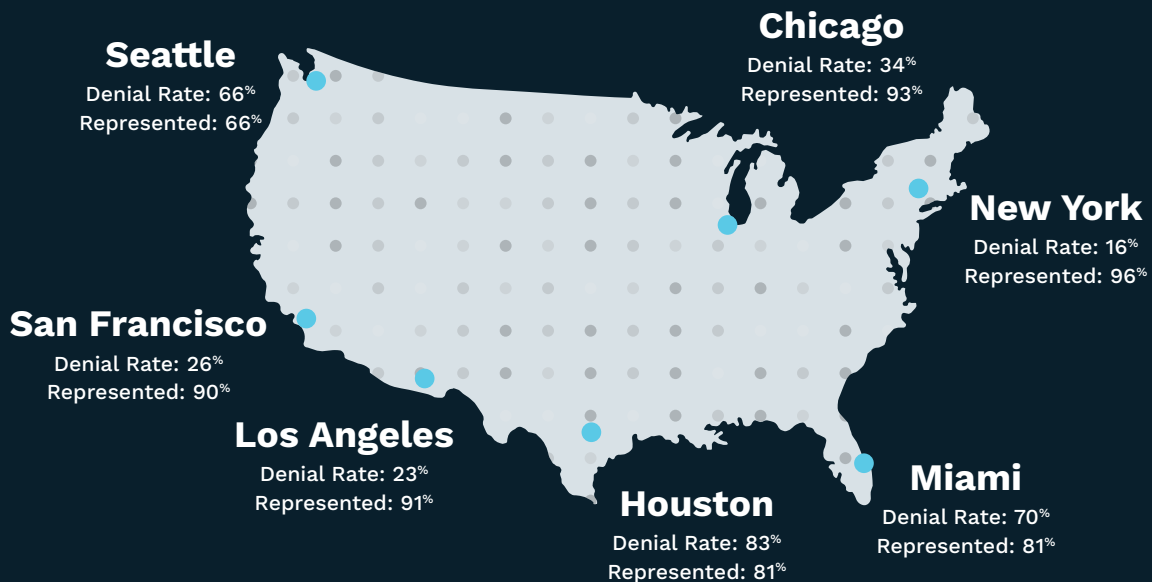| Office	Cases
Arlington	14,027
Boston	2,648
Chicago	11,708
Houston	10,757
Los Angeles	6,148
Miami	23,525
New Orleans	1,948
New York	7,330
Newark	7,094
San Francisco	5,211
Tampa	9,998

Figure 7

Impact of Legal Representation on Defensive Asylum Outcomes in FY 2024

83% Represented

Granted **53%**   Denied **47%**

32,204 - Asylum granted
713 - Other relief granted
29,311 - Asylum denied

17% Not Represented

Granted **19%**   Denied **81%**

2,208 - Asylum granted
335 - Other relief granted
10,611 - Asylum denied

Asylum Denial Rates in Major Cities

Seattle
Denial Rate: 66%
Represented: 66%

Chicago
Denial Rate: 34%
Represented: 93%

New York
Denial Rate: 16%
Represented: 96%

San Francisco
Denial Rate: 26%
Represented: 90%

Los Angeles
Denial Rate: 23%
Represented: 91%

Houston
Denial Rate: 83%
Represented: 81%

Miami
Denial Rate: 70%
Represented: 81%

Observations on Asylum Outcomes: Representation Matters

The data on asylum outcomes in 2024 (Figure 7, page 14) highlights the critical role of legal representation in determining the success of asylum claims. A staggering 83% of respondents had legal representation, and their approval rates were dramatically higher compared to those without representation.

Among represented applicants, 52% were granted asylum, while an additional small percentage (1.1%) received other forms of relief. In contrast, only 17% of unrepresented applicants secured asylum, with another 2.5% obtaining alternative relief. This means that asylum seekers with legal representation were more than three times as likely to win their cases compared to those navigating the system alone.

The disparities in denial rates are just as striking. Only 47% of represented applicants were denied asylum, whereas a staggering 81% of unrepresented respondents had their claims denied. This confirms that lack of legal counsel dramatically increases the likelihood of an asylum denial—a key concern given the life-or-death stakes for many applicants.

These findings reinforce what immigration advocates have long argued:

Access to legal representation is **one of the strongest predictors** of a successful asylum outcome.

The data suggests that systemic barriers—such as the cost of legal services, language difficulties, and limited access to pro bono counsel—could be preventing many asylum seekers from obtaining the help they need. Addressing these disparities through expanded legal aid programs could have a profound impact on asylum seekers' chances of securing protection in the U.S.

Immigration Court Case Outcomes

Observations on Immigration Court Case Outcomes in 2024

The 2024 immigration court data (Figure 8, page 17) reveals a complex and high-volume adjudication system, with over 900,000 cases resolved—a staggering caseload that underscores the immense strain on the immigration court system.

A significant portion (34.5%) of cases resulted in removal orders, meaning that nearly one in three respondents were ordered deported. Additionally, 8,936 individuals were granted voluntary departure, allowing them to leave the U.S. without a formal removal order, which can have less severe immigration consequences.

At the same time, 323,489 cases (35.4%) were terminated, meaning the charges against the respondent were dismissed. The high number of terminations raises questions about case viability, prosecutorial discretion, and potential issues with Notices to Appear (NTAs), which have been frequently challenged in recent years.
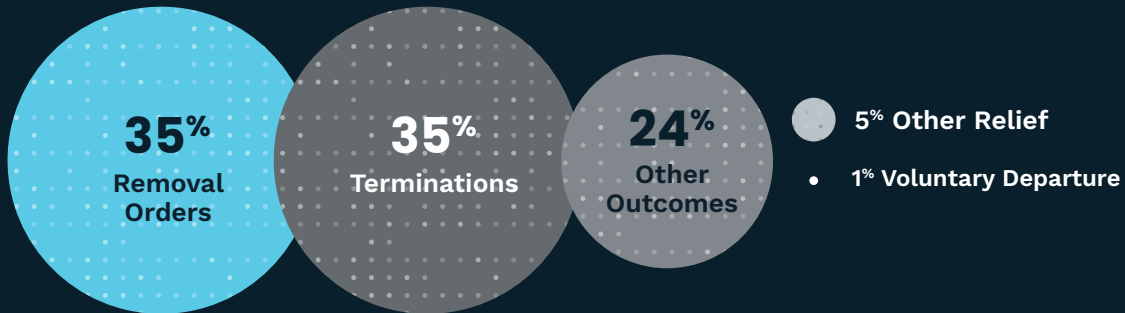
Another 48,952 individuals were granted some form of relief, whether asylum, cancellation of removal, or another form of protection. This figure highlights the critical role immigration courts play in providing due process and a pathway to safety for many noncitizens.

The breakdown by gender shows that nearly two-thirds (64.6%) of all cases involved male respondents, reflecting broader trends in migration patterns where men often migrate first, with women and families following later.
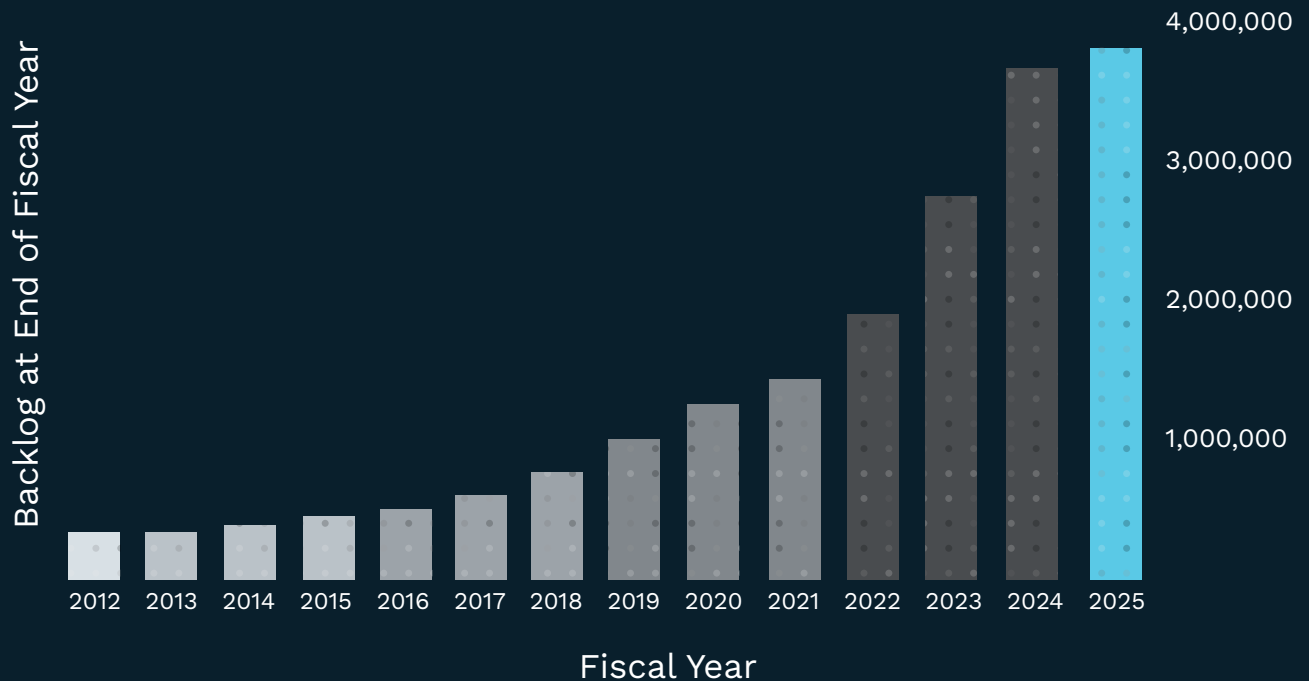
Ultimately, this data highlights the extraordinary volume and diversity of outcomes in immigration court, pointing to challenges such as backlogs, access to legal representation, and the impact of shifting enforcement priorities on case adjudications.

Figure 8

Immigration Court Case Outcomes 2024

35% Removal Orders

35% Terminations

24% Other Outcomes

5% Other Relief

1% Voluntary Departure

Immigration Court Backlog: Historical Trend

Backlog at End of Fiscal Year

4,000,000

3,000,000

2,000,000

1,000,000

Fiscal Year

2012 2013 2014 2015 2016 2017 2018 2019 2020 2021 2022 2023 2024 2025

Refugee Admissions

Observations on Refugee Admissions in 2024

The United States admitted 100,034 refugees in FY 2024, falling short of the 125,000 ceiling set for the year. While this represents a significant number of resettlements, the shortfall suggests that operational, logistical, or policy challenges may have limited the government's ability to meet its own target.

Several factors could explain this gap, including delays in processing, security vetting backlogs, capacity limitations of resettlement agencies, and shifting political priorities. The data also raises questions about whether future refugee ceilings will be fully utilized or if structural barriers will continue to restrict admissions, even in years with high demand for protection.

Despite these challenges, the 100,034 refugee admissions mark one of the strongest years for U.S. resettlement in recent history, signaling a continued commitment to humanitarian protection. However, with global displacement at record highs, the data suggests that demand for refugee resettlement far outpaces the number of available slots.

Refugees Actual Admissions by Region 2024

34%
30%
25%
8%
3%
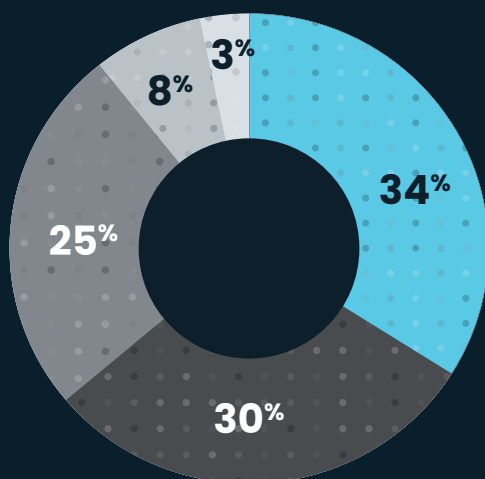
FY 2024 Ceiling: 125,000
FY 2024 Actual Admissions: 100,034

- Africa: 34,017
- Near East/South Asia: 29,939
- Latin America/Caribbean: 25,358
- East Asia: 7,540
- Europe & Central Asia: 3,180

Conclusion

The data presented in this report paints a picture of an immigration system experiencing significant shifts and challenges across multiple areas. From green card approvals to naturalization trends, asylum outcomes, and immigration court decisions, the numbers highlight both the demand for immigration benefits and the constraints of the current system. While some areas, such as naturalization approvals and refugee admissions, reflect steady movement, others—like the high number of immigration court terminations and the disparity in asylum outcomes based on legal representation—suggest deeper structural issues that merit close attention.

Now, well into 2025, the immigration landscape continues to evolve, shaped by policy shifts, administrative priorities including heightened enforcement efforts, and the movement of people across borders due to economic, political, and humanitarian factors. These changes are affecting not only immigration benefits and court outcomes but also the broader practice environment for immigration lawyers and their clients. The coming months will provide further clarity on how these policies are influencing immigration trends. Next year's report will offer an important opportunity to analyze how 2025's data compares to 2024, highlighting emerging patterns and key areas of change within the system.

[Policy] changes are **affecting not only immigration benefits and court outcomes** but also the broader practice environment for immigration lawyers and their clients.

Appendix A: Data Sources

U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration
Refugee Resettlement. *Source*

U.S. Department of Homeland Security, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS)
DACA Active Recipients Demographics. *Source*

USCIS
DACA Processing Times (I-765) quarterly all forms. *Source*

USCIS
Employment Based Pending Applications. *Source*

USCIS
Family Based Pending Applications (I-130). *Source*

USCIS
Lawful Permanent Residents Annual Flow. *Source*

USCIS
Naturalization Application Case Status (Form N-400, Application...). *Source*

USCIS
N-400 Filings and Approvals (FY22 Appropriations Requirement....). *Source*

USCIS
Naturalization Test Performance. *Source*

USCIS
Demographics of Naturalization. *Source*

USCIS
Eligible to Naturalize. *Source*

USCIS
Naturalization Annual Flow Report. *Source*

USCIS
Asylum Application Processing Times. *Source*

USCIS
Refugees and Asylum - Credible Fear/Reasonable Fear Rates. *Source*

USCIS

Asylum Applications. *Source*

USCIS

Employment-Based Petitions (I-140, I-360, I-526). *Source*

USCIS

Work Authorizations (I-765). *Source*

U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE)

Reasons for Removal. *Source*

U.S. Department of Justice, Executive Office for Immigration Review (EOIR)

New NTAs. *Source*

EOIR

Outcomes of Immigration Courts. *Source*

EOIR

Immigration Courts Caseload. *Source*

EOIR

Immigration Judge Reports. *Source*

U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Consular Affairs (CA)

Annual Reports: Visa Grounds for Ineligibilities (Table XIX). *Source*

CA

Visa Bulletin. *Source*

CA

Visa Bulletin. *Source*

CA

Non-Immigrant Visa Statistics. *Source*

CA

Non-Immigrant Visa Statistics. *Source*

CA

Immigrant Visa Statistics. *Source*

Appendix B: Visa Definitions

A-1 - Diplomats and other foreign government officials traveling to the United States on assignment.

B-1 – Temporary business visitors (e.g., meetings, conferences).

B-2 – Temporary visitors for tourism or medical treatment.

B-1/B-2 – Combination visa for business and tourism purposes.

C-1/D – For crew members transiting or entering as part of their duties.

E-1 – Treaty traders conducting substantial international trade.

E-2 – Treaty investors making substantial investment in U.S. businesses.

E-3 – Australian professionals in specialty occupations.

F-1 – Full-time academic students at U.S. institutions.

G-1 – Permanent mission staff of foreign governments to international organizations.

G-2 – Representatives of recognized governments on temporary missions.

G-3 – Representatives of unrecognized or non-member governments.

G-4 – Employees of international organizations (e.g., UN) and eligible family members.

H-1B – Professionals in specialty occupations.

H-1B1 – Professionals from Chile and Singapore under trade agreements.

H-2A – Temporary agricultural workers.

H-2B – Temporary non-agricultural workers in seasonal roles.

H-3 – Trainees in non-degree programs unavailable in home countries.

H-4 – Dependents of H visa holders.

I – Foreign media representatives (e.g., journalists, crews).

J-1 – Exchange visitors in educational or cultural programs.

K-1 – Fiancé(e)s of U.S. citizens entering for marriage.

K-3 – Spouses of U.S. citizens awaiting visa processing.

L-1 – Intracompany transferees to U.S. offices.

L-2 – Dependents of L-1 visa holders.

M-1 – Vocational or non-academic students.

NATO-1 to NATO-6 – NATO officials, staff, and dependents (varying by role).

NATO-7 – Personal employees of NATO visa holders.

O-1 – Individuals with extraordinary ability or achievement.

P-1 – Recognized athletes or entertainment group members.

Q-1 – Participants in international cultural exchange programs.

R-1 – Religious workers entering the U.S. for ministry or service.

S-7 – Witnesses or informants assisting law enforcement.

T-2 – Family members of trafficking victims holding T-1 visas.

TN – Canadian and Mexican professionals under USMCA.

U-1 – Victims of qualifying crimes aiding law enforcement.

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