



Migration profile

THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

A. Executive Summary

In 2020, the United States of America (USA) accounted for 15.9% of the global gross domestic product (GDP). The USA is the world's top economy, as well as a cultural superpower due to centuries of immigration flows, and that makes it particularly attractive to migrants from virtually every single country on earth, both regular and irregular, unavoidably causing greater risks of human trafficking on the back of desperation or poverty. As described by the US Department of State, the USA hosts more immigrants than any other country, with more than one million people arriving every year as permanent legal residents, asylum-seekers and refugees, or belonging to other immigration categories.ⁱ 40 million people living on US territory were born in another country, representing one fifth of the world's migrant population. The USA is home to a substantial Catholic community (20% of the population) that is growing thanks to the many migrants, asylum seekers and refugees coming especially from Latin America. Therefore, there has historically been a strong commitment from various actors within the US Catholic Church, among many others, in both combating human trafficking and advocating for refugee rights.

B. Country Profile

I. Basic Information

Spanning over 9,147,593 sq km and located in North America, the United States of America (USA) is the 4th largest country on the planet. The USA shares a border with Mexico, which is the entry gate of most migrant flows, and with Canada. With a 334,998,398 (July 2021)ⁱⁱ strong population, and historically a country of migrations, the USA is home to countless ethnic and religious communities from all over the world, whose presence can date back a few centuries, and to Native Americans. In 2010, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB)'s standards on race and ethnicity described the US population as follows: Caucasian 72.4%, Afro American 12.6%, Asian 4.8%, Amerindian and Alaska native 0.9%, native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander 0.2%, other 6.2%, two or more races 2.9%. Hispanic people can belong to any of these groups and are estimated to include 16.3% of the population. According to 2014 figures, religious affiliation in the USA is reported as follows: Protestant 46.5%, Roman Catholic 20.8%, Jewish 1.9%, Mormon 1.6%, other Christian 0.9%, Muslim 0.9%, Jehovah's Witness 0.8%, Buddhist 0.7%, Hindu 0.7%, other 1.8%, unaffiliated 22.8%, don't know/refused 0.6%ⁱⁱⁱ.

II. International and Internal Migrants

With 40 million people living in the USA but foreign born, the country is home to more immigrants than any other country and accounts for one fifth of the world's migrant population. They represent 13.7% of the US population, three times more than in 1970.^{iv} According to 2019 estimates, the Lawful Permanent Resident (LPR, also called Green Card holders) population in the USA amounted to 13.6 million, and the subpopulation eligible to naturalise was 9.2 million. These figures have proven somewhat stable over the past years. About 45% of them naturalised, while 5% obtained citizenship from a parent before turning 18 years old. Of the remaining 17 million LPRs, around 4.8 million are estimated to have died or emigrated, leaving a stock of 12.4 million. Adding another 1.2 million non-citizens who entered before 1980 indeed yields a total estimated stock of 13.6 million LPRs living in the USA on January 1, 2019. Of those LPRs, about 9.2 million are adults, who acquired LPR status long enough to be potentially eligible to apply to naturalise. These 9.2 million adults include 2,490,000 Mexicans, 490,000 Chinese, 370,000 Filipinos, 350,000 Cubans, 340,000 Dominicans, 310,000 Indians, 250,000 Canadians, 220,000 Salvadorians, 220,000 Britons, 220,000 Vietnamese and 200,000 South-Koreans. Gender repartition is rather equal, with 4,660,000 females and 4,470,000 males. A third of LPRs are based in the States of California and New York, and 60% of them are between 35 and 65 years of age. The largest increases from 2015 to 2019 were for China (25%), Cuba (17%), India (15%), and the Dominican Republic (9%). The potentially eligible-to-naturalise population from Mexico fell by 4%.^v

77% of international migrants regularly live in the USA, while almost a quarter are unauthorised, according to new Pew Research Center estimates based on census data adjusted for undercount, with Mexicans now accounting for less than a half of the irregular stock of people.^{vi} Although the amount of the unauthorised immigrant population tripled in size between 1990 and 2007, this figure recently declined to finally get to 10.5 million people in 2017, with a 1.7 million decline in 10 years. In contrast to the prior decade, between 2013 and 2018 more Mexican migrants arrived in the USA than those who left the USA for Mexico, with a net migration of about 160,000 people from Mexico to the USA.^{vii}

According to a Pew Research Center study on the religious beliefs of immigrants, 68% identify themselves as Christians (39% Catholic, 15% Evangelical Protestant, 7% Mainline Protestant, 3% Historically Black Protestant, 1% Mormon, 1% Christian Orthodox, 1% Jehova's Witness and 1% other). Non-Christian faiths account for 12% and unaffiliated people account for 20%, noting that people prefer to say they believe in nothing in particular than formally claim being Atheistic or Agnostic.^{viii}

The US Administration has been communicating on the efforts recently undertaken to reform the global immigration system and legal pathways to citizenship.^{ix} In 2020, the share of the US civilian labour force that was foreign born was 17.0 percent, down from 17.4 percent in 2019. Nearly 8 Americans out of 10 think that migrants, whether regular or irregular, take jobs that Americans do not want.^x

Internal migrations also drive population changes across the nation, as around 13.6% of American residents move within the USA each year, according to the United States Census Bureau. Out of the global American population, 2.3% have moved from one state to another over the past year,^{xi} and these figures are an all-time low since the 1940s.

III. Emigration and Skilled Migration

There are fewer people leaving the USA than people entering it. According to a University of Connecticut study, around 8 million US citizens live outside the USA. Although not fully investigated by the media, the reasons why people leave the USA according to the study are instrumental and expressive. Instrumental reasons include starting a new business, taking a new job, improving the standard of living or enrolling in a school. Expressive reasons include, among others, returning to a spouse's homeland or for a religious, humanitarian, or missionary objective, as well as the search for adventure or travel, but only to a lesser extent for reasons of alienation.^{xii} Since 2001 for security reasons, the US Department of State has not disclosed detailed figures about Americans living abroad anymore. However, around 800,000 US citizens are believed to reside in Mexico, and 300,000 in Canada. This can be explained by the immediate geographical proximity of those countries and the large Mexican community in the USA, as many American-Mexican binationals have returned to Mexico. Other nations with large American migrant communities include Australia, France, Greece, Israel, Italy, Japan, Philippines, the United Kingdom and the Dominican Republic.^{xiii}

IV. Forced Migrants (internally displaced, asylum seekers, refugees and climate displaced people)

The Internal Displacement Monitoring Center (IDMC)'s figure for internally and climate displaced people in the USA is 1.7 million, all due to extreme weather events and wildfires, with 585,000 being forced out of their homes by the August 2020 hurricane Laura. Additionally, a multitude of California residential areas were impacted by the 2020 wildfires, accounting for the rest of displaced people. IDMC estimates the annual number of IDPs in the USA to be 232,658. It is noteworthy to underline also the seismic risk as a major factor of potential internal and climate displacement in the future in the USA.

The Migration Policy Institute explains in a May 2021 spotlight report that refugee admissions fell dramatically under the Donald Trump administration, placing the USA behind Canada in terms of numbers, and deviating from the region-based formula for allocating refugee slots, instead favouring certain categories of people, such as the religiously persecuted. In 2020, the USA resettled fewer than 12,000 refugees, as opposed to the nearly 80,000 resettled annually in previous years, and the record number of 207,000 refugees admitted in 1980. The Biden-Harris administration that came into power in early 2021 pledged 62,500 places in 2021 and 125,000 resettlement places in 2022, although the emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic and the related movement restrictions and lockdowns make it unlikely that the 2021 figure will be attained. In addition, the new administration opted to return to the previous regional allocation system.

According to the aforementioned Institute, the top 5 countries of origin of refugees were the Democratic Republic of the Congo with 2,868 people (24.3%), Myanmar with 2,115 people (17.9%), Ukraine with 1,927 people (16.3%), Afghanistan with 604 people (5.1%, figure dated May 2021, prior to the evacuation of September 2021), and Iraq with 537 people (4.5%), followed by Syria, Eritrea, El Salvador, Moldova, Sudan and others. In a trend that is depicted as roughly consistent with prior years, refugees' top initial resettlement destinations in the USA were California for 1,190 people (10%), Washington for 1,110 people (9%), and Texas for 900 people (8%), followed by New York, Michigan, Kentucky, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Arizona, and Ohio. States also differ by

resettled refugees' countries of origin, as can be seen with people from Myanmar who, although they are the largest group admitted in the USA since 2010, are only the top group in 19 states. Eight states, including California and Michigan, resettled more Iraqis than any other nationality over the past decade, while Florida and New Jersey welcomed more Cuban refugees than any others. Finally, Ukrainians were the top group only in Washington State. Apart from 2016, when a majority of refugees accepted in the USA were Muslims, Christians have always been the biggest faith among accepted refugees to this day. It is interesting to note that, between 2010 and 2020, 64% of all refugees admitted to the USA were children under the age of 14 (31%) and women (33%), while men over the age of 15 represented 36%.

In contrast to the lower refugee admission figures, the USA granted asylum status to about 46,500 individuals in 2019, being the highest level in decades and a 24% increase year on year. The USA grants humanitarian protection to asylum seekers who present themselves at US ports of entry or claim asylum from within the country. A difference must be made between Affirmative versus Defensive Asylum: an individual seeking entry with a visa or already present in the USA will go through an affirmative process with US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), such category represent 59%, while a foreign national with no lawful means of entering the country will be apprehended as an unauthorised migrant via a defensive application, this category representing 19%. 9,600 immediate family members of principal asylum applicants were given derivative status and allowed in the US on this basis. The top 5 countries of origins of asylees are China with 7,478 people (16.1%), Venezuela for 6,821 people (14.7%), El Salvador for 3,212 people (6.0%), Guatemala for 2,591 people (5.6%), and Egypt for 2,301 people (4.9%), followed by India, Honduras, Turkey, Mexico, Russia and all other countries.^{xiv}

V. Victims of Human Trafficking

Human trafficking cases have been reported in all 50 states and in the District of Columbia, as well as in the US territories. Victims of human trafficking come from every region of the world, however it was identified that the top three countries of origin were the USA, Mexico and Honduras. Although it is very difficult to obtain updated and official figures, it is suggested that around 50,000 people are trafficked into the USA yearly, most often from Mexico and the Philippines. Children, involved in criminal human trafficking cases, were up to 51.6%, as the average age a teenager becomes involved in sex trade in the country is 12 to 14 years old. Many victims - advocates say - are runaway girls who were sexually abused during their childhood. It is reported that there is a growing trend of traffickers using social media to recruit and advertise targets of human trafficking. Interestingly, in 2020 the National Human Trafficking Hotline received more calls from California than from any other state in the US, followed by Texas and Florida. Most likely the reasons for these states to be at the top of this chart are because they are close to Mexico or host significant migrant communities, are very populated and home to large attractive cities.

It has been identified that children are sexually exploited in foreign countries by US citizens using the internet to recruit and advertise victims, especially during the pandemic. The USA's trafficking profile, as published in the Trafficking in Persons Report in June 2021, confirms that human traffickers exploit both domestic and foreign victims in the USA, but American victims are being exploited abroad as well. Traffickers force victims into commercial sex and into work in both regular and irregular industries, including as the reports enumerates, in "hospitality, traveling sales crews,

agriculture, janitorial services, construction, landscaping, restaurants, factories, care for persons with disabilities, salon services, massage parlors, retail, fairs and carnivals, peddling and begging, drug smuggling and distribution, religious institutions, child care, and domestic work.”^{xv}

According to the 2021 Trafficking in Persons Report, NGOs reported an increase in traffickers’ use of the internet during the Covid-19 pandemic in order to recruit victims, as well as an increase in misinformation about human trafficking, which caused an over-burdening law enforcement and victim service providers.^{xvi}

VI. National Legal Framework

Immigration law is dealt with by the US Federal Law and is based on national quotas since the 1952 Immigration and Nationality Act (INA), followed by the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA), increasing criminal sanctions for employers who hired illegal aliens, denied illegal aliens federally funded welfare benefits, and legitimised some aliens through an amnesty program. The 1990 Immigration Act reformed INA, by equalising the allocation of visas across foreign nations. The 1996 Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrants Responsibility Act (IIRAIRA) increased penalties for undocumented immigrants committing crimes while staying on US territory, and also imposing criminal penalties for smuggling and increasing interior enforcement by agencies responsible for monitoring visa applications and visa abusers.

The USA joined the international refugee regime in 1968 directly by acceding the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees, thereby taking on the 1951 Refugee Convention’s obligations as well. Refugee and Asylum Seekers are dealt with by the 1980 Refugee Act, defining the term "refugee" as an alien with a fear of persecution upon returning to their homelands, stemming from their religion, race, nationality, membership in certain social groups, or political opinions. A person can qualify for refugee status under the persecution provision if they prove actual fear, meeting both a subjective and an objective test. Asylum seekers must show fear that their identity has caused past persecution or is likely to cause it if they return to their country.

The USA signed the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially women and children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organised Crime on December 13, 2000 and ratified it on November 3, 2005. As the 2021 trafficking in people report for the US states, the US Department of Justice (DoJ), the Department of Home Security (DHS), the Department of State (DoS) and the Department of Defense (DoD) are the primary investigating agencies for federal human trafficking and other related offenses. It belongs to the DoJ to prosecute federal human trafficking cases, while DoJ, DHS and DoS provide law enforcement related support to victims. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the DoJ developed a process to conduct remote forensic interviews, under the DHS supervision that developed guidance on forensic interviews.^{xvii}

In December 2021 the Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP), which entered into effect in January 2019 and went through a process of closure throughout 2021, was formally reinstated. Under MPP those arriving at the southern border asking for asylum need to appear in immigration court and are sent back to Mexico. Among the most significant changes adopted before being reinstated, there is the expansion of the process by which someone fearing persecution or torture in Mexico can be removed from the program.

VII. Main Actors

UNHCR, US government agencies, NGOs and other actors are working together in partnership, actively involved from the identification of refugees in need of resettlement in the field to screening, processing and reception and integration of refugees in the USA.

The State

National and State government partners are numerous and their activities are described as follows. The Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) especially provides aid and sustainable solutions for the target population via repatriation, local integration and resettlement in the USA, while the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) offers programs to assist people to become integrated members of the local society. For what concerns the US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), they are the one in charge of overseeing the lawfulness of immigration to the USA. To these actors are added State Refugee Coordinators and State Health Coordinators in each US state.

In another field, the DHS is the federal actor in charge of combatting human trafficking.^{xviii}

The Catholic Church

A large amount of Catholic agencies is involved in the pastoral care of migrants and human trafficking victims in the USA. As a result, due to the multiplicity of actors, all entities might not be referenced hereunder.

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' (USCCB) Migrants and Refugees Services (MRS) committee serves and advocates for refugees, asylees, migrants, unaccompanied children and victims of human trafficking^{xix}. The USCCB also operates the Justice for Immigrants Campaign (JFI), which since 2004 has been mobilising a growing network of Catholic institutions, individuals and other persons of goodwill in support of immigration reform and in creating a culture of welcome, dignity and respect.^{xx} Also the USCCB Committee on Cultural Diversity in the Church has a Subcommittee on the Pastoral Care of Migrants, Refugees and Travellers which is responsible for establishing and facilitating programs for their pastoral well-being^{xxi}. For the last decade the US Bishops have been actively engaged in a cross-border collaboration with the Mexican Bishops, meeting twice a year on each side of the border to coordinate work on pastoral care of migrants based on a joint pastoral letter they co-authored.^{xxii}

Catholic Charities USA (CCUSA, founded in 1910 under the name of National Conference of Catholic Charities) provides a framework for a collective effort among 164 Catholic organisations throughout the country. The NGO underlines that 393,000 individuals (immigrants, refugees and asylees) have been assisted over the past year by Catholic charities in the country.^{xxiii} CCUSA, in collaboration with USCCB and the Catholic Legal Immigration Network Inc (CLINIC), is working on developing a national standard of practice called "The Border is Everywhere^{xxiv}", a pilot program providing comprehensive referral and social services to asylum seekers entering the USA. The program will provide data-driven reports, as they accompany those concerned with acceding citizenship. CCUSA, Catholic Relief Services (CRS, whose actions are directed towards overseas assistance) and Development and Peace (Canada) together form Caritas North America. Finally, CCUSA is also on the frontline, dealing with immediate disaster relief.^{xxv}

The CLINIC network now includes 380 nonprofit organisations in 49 states, training nonprofit immigration legal service providers to offer affordable, quality legal representation to immigrants since 1988^{xxvi}.

The Scalabrini International Migration Network (SIMN)^{xxvii} in the USA is actively working in 6 centres and parishes in Florida, Massachusetts, New York and Georgia, promoting, supporting, prompting and protecting migrants, refugees and forcibly displaced people in the USA through initiatives and projects in local communities.

The Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) serves 3,400 forcibly displaced migrants in the USA through their Detention Chaplaincy Program and advocates to defend and protect refugees at home and abroad, by representing them to Congress and US government officials. Based in Washington DC, JRS USA provides support to the broader JRS network through funding, oversight, monitoring and evaluation.^{xxviii}

With a liaison office in Washington DC, the International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC) works in the US, as in the rest of the world, to facilitate a network of national Catholic Bishops Conferences and other Catholic NGOs engaged in migration and refugee issues at the local and national level.^{xxix} Over the year 2020 and despite pandemic restrictions, ICMC staff provided case management assistance and medical screening, and pre-departure cultural orientation sessions via remote platforms, helping the USA to resettle 695 forcibly displaced people.^{xxx}

The Knights of Columbus committed at least USD 250,000 in humanitarian aid for migrant shelters, to help those in camps in each of the border states or in adjoining Mexican communities, starting with donations of USD 100,000 to the Diocese of El Paso and USD 50,000 to the Diocese of Laredo, as per 2019 information.^{xxxi}

The Salesians have also expressed their commitment for migrants and refugees through educational programmes in the USA.^{xxxii}

The Order of Malta's 2021 activity report underlines that the American Association operates in more than 30 areas, distributing food, clothes and basic items to the homeless and to migrants.^{xxxiii}

In light of the Northern California fires, the Diocese of Sacramento initiated a "fire assistance fund" to be able to directly help the victims and their families, as a testimony of the Church's adaptation to extreme weather events.^{xxxiv}

The Catholic Church charities are increasingly embracing the cause of climate change and weather disaster related refugees, as required by the Holy Father in recent addresses and encyclicals.

The USCCB also shelters the Coalition of Catholic Organizations Against Human Trafficking (CCOAH), coordinating 30 organisations working together on this topic. Especially active in this area, the US Catholic Sisters Against Human Trafficking (USCSAHT) engages in advocacy to eradicate human trafficking, as well as offers education and supports access to survivor services, including over 100 congregations.^{xxxv xxxvi}

International organisations and other organisations

Non-governmental partners and advocacy organisations also play an important role in the partnership mentioned above. The Refugee Council USA (RCUSA) and InterAction are both coalitions of organisations committed to welcoming and protecting refugees, the latter being the largest, while Refugees International (RI) especially advocates for lifesaving assistance and protection. Finally, the Cultural Orientation Resource Exchange (CORE) is a more technical assistance programme and its mission is to improve the coherence between pre-departure and post-arrival programmes for refugees in the USA.

Resettlement agencies include many faith-based NGOs but not only, especially Church World Service (CWS), Ethiopian Community Development Council (ECDC), Episcopal Migration Ministries (EMM), Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS), International Rescue Committee (IRC), the US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI), the Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services (LIRS), the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), and the World Relief Corporation (WR)^{xxxvii}.

At the intergovernmental level, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) ensures an orderly and humane management of migrations.

Concerning human trafficking, NGOs such as ECPAT-USA^{xxxviii} and The Code^{xxxix} are very active in the field.

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