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# THE AMERICAN DREAM INDEX

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## Evaluating Interest in the United States

The LCR American Dream Index evaluates a set of countries where skilled nationals have decided to move to the United States. The ranking looks at fifteen countries based on a total number of visas issued in skilled categories such as permanent employment visas, temporary employment visas, and higher education student visas, and ranks them based on the percentage of their population that completes university (tertiary education) degrees.

Making the decision to live, work, or study in the United States is a significant one for foreign nationals. With such significant population differences, adjusting to the number of visas per million skilled citizens allows us to evaluate how important the US is for these countries and how much they see moving here as a way to achieve their full potential.

	2009		2014		2019	
	Total Visas Issued	Visas / million skilled	Total Visas Issued	Visas / million skilled	Total Visas Issued	Visas / million skilled
Mexico	166,866	8,240	184,847	8,529	304,799	13,271
China	123,751	3,099	300,758	7,350	170,069	4,055
South Africa	6,344	2,095	6,020	1,839	10,704	3,046
India	202,117	1,659	313,476	2,419	341,163	2,498
Saudi Arabia	15,564	2,435	42,310	5,702	17,050	2,073
South Korea	69,669	3,819	43,949	2,341	34,418	1,799
Colombia	12,526	1,166	13,955	1,238	10,097	836
Brazil	19,564	561	26,749	733	31,603	832
France	14,615	941	15,358	965	12,728	791
Great Britain & Northern Ireland	27,244	1,187	22,359	939	17,757	720
Japan	34,021	857	32,692	828	25,838	660
Spain	7,030	543	8,986	690	8,137	619
Germany	15,702	660	16,527	706	12,930	537
UAE	1,665	400	1,653	341	1,498	291
Canada	8,291	747	1,357	116	1,710	138

This table summarizes the total number of skilled visas issued per country for the years of 2009, 2014, and 2019. Each "Total" contains three different visa categories: permanent employment-based visas (EB-1, EB-2, EB-3, EB-4, EB-5), temporary employment visas (H and L), and temporary education visas (F). The "Visas / m skilled" presents the number of visas per million people with university degrees. We derived a skilled population from tertiary school attainment percentages per country ages 25-64 years old, provided by the [2020 OECD annual "Education at a Glance" report](#). This percentage is the sum of three tertiary education categories: Bachelor's or equivalent, Master's or equivalent, and Doctoral or equivalent.



## Background

The United States has been an immigration hotspot for years—hosting a myriad of cultures and opportunities for all. Career and educational success are two aspects of the ‘American Dream’ that drive foreign interest. The American Dream Index aims to encapsulate a skilled subset of foreigners who are attracted to America. With this ranking, we can identify various trends amongst different regions and countries that look to America for a better opportunity in developing a strong career and education.

## Top Insights

### *The Mexico and Canada difference*

At first glance, Mexico ranking first and Canada ranking last is surprising considering the stereotypical assumptions of each skilled population per country. The demand for better career opportunities is clearly more dire in the Mexican emigrant's eyes, considering their lower national wages and poverty rates in comparison to the United States. Simultaneously, substantial Mexican demographics in the United States seems to bring comfort to migrating Mexican families. In terms of skilled population numbers, Canada reports a higher percentage of their population to be enrolled in tertiary schooling, but this percentage alone does not come close to surpassing the total number of visas issued and allocated to Mexico. In 2019, the United States issued roughly 178 times more visas to Mexico than to Canada. This corresponds with an extreme amount of demand from Mexico to be one with the American Dream.



### *Impact of temporary work visas*

Among all fifteen countries, temporary employment and temporary education were the two largest drivers of visa numbers. Specifically, Mexico, India, and South Africa (ranked in the top three) were all driven by temporary employment. Visa numbers in countries that ranked lower were also driven by temporary employment, such as the United Kingdom and France. While these visas are issued for a temporary period, their numbers still correlate to an interest in the United States and most certainly lead to many people choosing to stay by applying for permanent residence once their temporary visas expire.



## China and India

China and India are among the countries in the survey with the lowest percentages of individuals with university degrees. Despite this, the number of skilled visas issued still places China and India in the top five. Their immense populations paired with the “skilled” aspect of the index reflect the sizable interest among Chinese and Indian migrants to explore the possibilities of an American education and career.

## Impact by Visa Type

The two most impactful visa categories were temporary education and temporary employment. The United States receives educated, proficient workers who heavily influence various industries. An [Immigration Facts](#) sheet published by the Migration Policy Institute focuses on the case of Mexico, whose workers are especially influential in the service occupations, precision production, and the operators/fabricators/laborers field. These laborers help to fill a vital gap in various industries. Simultaneously, the great demand for educational-preference visas coincides with the idea that foreign students are attracted to the careers enabled by an elite American education, which later entices them to reapply for a temporary or permanent resident visa. China, second in the ranking, “is the main source of foreign students enrolled in the U.S. higher education” ([Chinese Immigrants in the United States](#)). The United States offers endless opportunities for people and families to attain greatness unavailable in their home countries.



## Specific Country Notes

- In 2009, 2014, and 2019, [Mexico](#) ranked first in the index. The number of visas per million skilled workers has increased over time, and these numbers differ significantly from the other countries' numbers. Temporary employment visas contributed most to Mexico's high ranking. It has the highest number of skilled temporary workers with 277,473 visas issued, over twice as many issued to Indian workers. This number reflects the economic inequality, poverty, and lower wages in Mexico that ultimately motivate Mexicans to migrate north to better opportunities.
- [China](#) ranked second in 2019, falling short of Mexico by a large margin of 9,216 skilled people per million moving to the US. This shortfall, however, hides how significant the US education system is to the Chinese. According to a recent Migration Policy Institute article titled [Chinese Immigrants in the United States](#), “China is the leading sending country of international students in the United States: In the 2018-19 school year, close to 377,000 students from mainland China, Hong Kong, and Macau were enrolled in U.S. higher education institutions, according to the Institute of International Education.” In our data set, the United States issued the most F visas to China (107,974), which is seventeen times the number of F visas issued to Mexican recipients.

- **South Africa** placed third behind China. Temporary employment was the biggest contributor to South African visa issuances, with increasing numbers from 2014 to 2019.
- **India** placed fourth in the overall 2019 ranking, but first in the total number of skilled visas issued (341,163). The importance of education is also clear as India for all three years evaluated had the second-highest number of F education visas after China. Temporary employment visas contribute the most to their placement. India has made great strides in advanced American industries—specifically in the technology sector. With the H1-B visa program, Indians have been able to secure highly advanced, steady-income jobs. America is receiving a highly skilled immigration population that is beneficial for all parties involved.
- **Saudi Arabia** and **South Korea** followed in fifth and sixth place, respectively, with education visas driving these numbers forward. The United States possesses some of the most elite universities in the world; we can instantly assume this is a primary factor pushing foreign students to apply for F-1 visas.
- **Brazil** ranked eighth in 2019; the number of Brazilian immigrants has exponentially grown in the past forty years. Initially, and still today, American education has been the main draw. And fortunately, as the Migration Policy Institute article [Brazilian Immigrants in the United States](#) states, “Today, Brazilian immigrants tend to have higher educational attainment and household incomes than the overall foreign- and U.S.-born populations. Compared to the overall immigrant population, Brazilians are less likely to be naturalized citizens and more likely to be proficient in English.” Educational opportunities in the United States have opened many doors for Brazilians who choose to pursue rigorous courses of study, paving the way for profitable futures.
- While the **United Kingdom’s** rank has remained relatively stable across the three periods measured, it has most recently hit its lowest number of visas per million skilled workers, at 720. Once again, the desire for temporary employment in America pushes visa demand in the United Kingdom.
- **Canada** ranked last in the 2019 rankings, with only 138 visas issued per million skilled workers. Geographically speaking, a great majority of Canadians live along their southern border with the United States. [The World Population Review](#) sums up the primary reasons for this: “The first is that the most hospitable part of Canadian territory is in the south. Summers are warm and winters are not too harsh, making the area suitable for agriculture. The second reason is the majority of Canada’s trade (both import and export) is with its US neighbor, and it makes sense for the majority of Canadians to live as close to the US border as possible.” While Canada places last in the ranking, its proximity to the United States generates various opportunities for Canadians in terms of agriculture and accessibility, while simultaneously creating better economic outcomes for the country through foreign investment.

## Conclusion

A cursory look at visa allocations per country might lead us to conclude that individuals from China and India have been granted the most visas. But a deeper analysis of the subset of visas issued per million skilled workers from each of the fifteen countries within our survey tells a different story, one that deviates significantly from the conventional story told in the general press. These hidden trends reveal the large

number of persons seeking global experience and career development in the United States.

The competitiveness further strengthens foreigners all across the world for the opportunity to work with and study among some of the world's finest. These findings reveal the persistence of the American Dream among a force of skilled international workers who have chosen to apply for US visas that promise to reward their education and skill and to open a world of opportunities for them.

## Appendix

### *Methodology*

- To approximate a skilled population, we started with the population of each country during each year (2009, 2014, 2019) from the World Bank database. We then used the percentage of adults with a tertiary level of education (bachelor's or equivalent, master's or equivalent and doctoral or equivalent) attained from Table A1.1 in the OECD "Education at a Glance" report. Using the most recently updated percentages, we attributed them to all the years of study (making the assumption these percentages have not fluctuated significantly).
- With these three sets of numbers for each country, we divided the total number of visas as reported by the State Department by the product of the population of each country and the percentage of tertiary school degree holders of each country. Then, we adjusted that number per million people. This resulted in our final numbers which we used to rank each country from greatest to least.
- We drew from the Travel State Government Immigrant Visa and Nonimmigrant Visa Statistics and the World Bank databases to compute our final number.



## Visa Types

CATEGORY	VISA NAME	DESCRIPTION
Temporary Education	F1	student (academic or language training program)
	F2	spouse or child of student
	F3	border commuter academic or language student
Temporary Employment	H1B	temporary worker or distinguished merit and ability
	H1B1	free trade agreement professional
	H1C	shortage area nurse
	H2A	temporary worker performing agricultural services
	H2B	temporary worker performing other services
	H3	trainee
	H4	spouse or child of H1B/B1/C, H2A/B, or H3 visa holder
	L1	intracompany transferee (executive, managerial, and specialized personnel continuing employment with international firm or corporation)
	L2	spouse or child of intracompany transferee
Permanent Employment	E1	priority workers and persons of extraordinary ability
	E2	professionals holding advanced degrees and persons of exceptional ability
	E3	skilled workers, professionals, and unskilled workers (other workers)
	E4	certain special immigrants
	E5	immigrant investors

## Sources of Data

1. Visa Statistics:  
<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/legal/visa-law0/visa-statistics.html>
2. 2020 OECD annual “Education at a Glance” report:  
<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.TER.ENRR>
3. Immigration Facts:  
[https://www.migrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/publications/five\\_industry\\_occupation\\_foreign\\_born.pdf](https://www.migrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/publications/five_industry_occupation_foreign_born.pdf)
4. Chinese Immigrants in the United States:  
<https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/chinese-immigrants-united-states-2018>
5. Brazilian Immigrants in the United States:  
<https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/brazilian-immigrants-united-states-2017>
6. The World Population Review:  
<https://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/canada-population>



## Full Data Set

2009

	Permanent Employment		Temporary Employment			Temporary Education	Population	Tertiary Education Attainment (% net)	Visas / Million Skilled Workers
	Employment Grand Total	H	L	Total	F	Total Visas			
Mexico	65,202	89,692	4,374	94,066	7,598	166,866	112,500,000	18%	8,240
South Korea	15,895	5495	3,488	8,983	44,791	69,669	49,310,000	37%	3,819
China	22,437	12,826	4,074	16,900	84,414	123,751	1,331,000,000	3%	3,099
Saudi Arabia	327	61	585	646	14,591	15,564	26,630,000	24%	2,435
South Africa	1,403	3,299	926	4,225	716	6,344	50,480,000	6%	2,095
India	32,881	90,702	50,145	14,0847	28,389	202,117	1,218,000,000	10%	1,659
Great Britain & Northern Ireland	7,610	4,997	10,159	15,156	4,478	27,244	62,040,000	37%	1,187
Colombia	5,763	1,800	850	2,650	4,113	12,526	44,750,000	24%	1,166
France	2,110	2,172	4,466	6,638	5,867	14,615	64,710,000	24%	941
Japan	2,932	4,025	9,891	13,916	17,173	34,021	128,000,000	31%	857
Canada	7,787	146	165	311	193	8,291	33,630,000	33%	747
Germany	2,437	1,997	3,878	5,875	7,390	15,702	82,000,000	29%	660
Brazil	3,516	2,564	3,942	6,506	9,542	19,564	193,900,000	18%	561
Spain	634	1,004	1,401	2,405	3,991	7,030	46,240,000	28%	543
UAE	325	4	9	13	1,327	1,665	7,917,000	52.60%	400

2014

	Permanent Employment		Temporary Employment			Temporary Education	Population	Tertiary Education Attainment (% net)	Visas / Million Skilled Workers
	Employment Grand Total	H	L	Total	F	Total Visas			
India	14,761	195,091	44,954	240,045	58,670	313,476	1,296,000,000	10%	2,419
Mexico	25,172	139,730	9,923	149,653	10,022	184,847	120,400,000	18%	8,529
China	24,307	18,770	8,714	27,484	248,967	300,758	1,364,000,000	3%	7,350
South Korea	2,379	4,387	4,716	9,103	32,467	43,949	50,750,000	37%	2,341
Brazil	2,955	2,243	5,738	7,981	15,813	26,749	202,800,000	18%	733
Japan	272	2,490	10,916	13,406	19,014	32,692	127,300,000	31%	828
Great Britain & Northern Ireland	764	5,323	11,274	16,597	4,998	22,359	64,350,000	37%	939
Saudi Arabia	199	207	517	724	41,387	42,310	30,920,000	24%	5,702
Germany	1,782	1,697	4,198	5,895	8,850	16,527	80,770,000	29%	706
France	169	2,237	5,783	8,020	7,169	15,358	66,310,000	24%	965
South Africa	145	3,786	1,246	5,032	843	6,020	54,550,000	6%	1,839
Colombia	5,271	1,046	940	1,986	6,698	13,955	46,970,000	24%	1,238
Spain	80	1,367	2,745	4,112	4,794	8,986	46,510,000	28%	690
Canada	643	132	316	448	266	1,357	35,440,000	33%	116
UAE	202	22	15	37	1,414	1,653	9,214,000	52.60%	341



2019

	Permanent Employment		Temporary Employment			Temporary Education	Population	Tertiary Education Attainment (% net)	Visas / Million Skilled Workers
	Employment Grand Total	H	L	Total	F	Total Visas			
India	15,780	237,839	41,523	279,362	46,021	341,163	1,366,000,000	10%	2,498
Mexico	21,077	266,357	11,116	277,473	6,249	304,799	127,600,000	18%	13,271
China	18,183	34,247	9,665	43,912	107,974	170,069	1,398,000,000	3%	4,055
South Korea	3,571	2,883	4,158	7,041	23,806	34,418	51,710,000	37%	1,799
Brazil	1,415	1,299	12,438	13,737	16,451	31,603	211,000,000	18%	832
Japan	307	1,333	9864	11,197	14,334	25,838	126,300,000	31%	660
Great Britain & Northern Ireland	878	2,416	10,091	12,507	4,372	17,757	66,650,000	37%	720
Saudi Arabia	359	209	410	619	16,072	17,050	34,270,000	24%	2,073
Germany	248	1,078	5,258	6,336	6,346	12,930	83,020,000	29%	537
France	280	1,427	5,768	7,195	5,253	12,728	67,060,000	24%	791
South Africa	345	7,187	1,967	9,154	1,205	10,704	58,560,000	6%	3,046
Colombia	2442	1,022	1,313	2,335	5,320	10,097	50,340,000	24%	836
Spain	176	1,059	2,753	3,812	4,149	8,137	46,940,000	28%	619
Canada	644	271	444	715	351	1,710	37,590,000	33%	138
UAE	578	4	10	14	906	1,498	9,771,000	52.60%	291

