



## **The Consequences of Net Negative Migration in 2025: Implications for the U.S. Economy, Workforce, and Global Competitiveness**

### **Introduction**

In 2025, the United States experienced a [historic shift](#) in migration patterns. For the first time since the Great Depression, more [people left](#) the United States than those who came in. This phenomenon is known as [net negative migration](#). According to recent estimates, the U.S. lost an estimated [150,000 people](#) due to 2025's reduced immigration and increased emigration rates. This reversal reflects a sharp decline in new arrivals, combined with an increase in emigration by U.S. citizens and noncitizens.

Negative net migration in 2025 is expected to have a [negative impact on the economy](#) and the labor market in the future. Broader economic literature shows that [reduced immigration](#) could undermine economic growth, [weaken tax revenues](#), [strain Social Security](#), and [exacerbate workforce shortages](#). It also poses risks to national security by diminishing the United States' ability to [compete](#) with other global powers.

The challenges posed by net negative migration reinforce the [arguments](#) advanced by the National Immigration Forum in recent years. Since 2021, we have extensively [highlighted](#) that immigration is essential to sustaining population growth and economic vitality. We have repeatedly emphasized that increasing immigration levels can offset demographic decline, strengthen the workforce, and fortify public finances.

Net negative migration in 2025 illustrates what happens when immigration falls below what the economy and society require. It underscores the urgency of implementing policy reforms that expand legal pathways, modernize visa systems, and align immigration policy with long-term national interests.

This paper examines the social, economic, and demographic implications of net negative migration in 2025. It also situates this development within the Forum's longstanding argument that expanding robust legal immigration pathways is essential to sustaining U.S. prosperity, demographic stability, and global leadership.

### **Understanding Net Negative Migration in 2025**

Recent Census data [confirms](#) a dramatic decline in U.S. net migration, driven by both reduced inflows and increased outflows. In 2025, only 2.6 million people [immigrated](#) to the United States, a sharp decline from the 5.8 million who entered in 2023 and the 4.6 million who entered in 2024. At the same time, U.S. citizens [relocated](#) abroad at record

numbers. In addition, over [2.2 million](#) noncitizens self-deported from the U.S. in 2025, on top of approximately [675,000](#) noncitizens who were deported last year.

An [analysis](#) from the Cato Institute highlights that recent immigration policy changes have disproportionately restricted legal immigration pathways rather than unauthorized migration. The analysis found that while unlawful border crossings declined after 2025, many of those declines reflected trends already underway before the change in administration. By contrast, new federal actions sharply reduced lawful immigration channels, including refugee admissions, asylum processing at ports of entry, family-based immigrant visas, student visas, and certain employment-based visas. According to the analysis, reductions in legal immigration flows were significantly larger than declines in unauthorized entries, suggesting that recent enforcement efforts have had their most immediate effect on restricting lawful pathways for immigrants seeking to enter or remain in the United States.

Similarly, the National Immigration Forum's [research](#) on nonimmigrant visa issuance shows a marked decline in work visa approvals in 2025, reducing the inflow of essential workers across sectors. Together, these trends have produced a [contraction](#) in foreign-born population growth, which has historically fueled U.S. economic expansion.

### **Economic Consequences: Reduced Growth and Tax Revenue**

Immigration has long been a key driver of [economic growth](#) in the United States. Immigrants contribute to the labor force, increase consumption, and expand the tax base. Net negative migration could disrupt all three channels.

First, a shrinking inflow of working-age adults [reduces](#) labor force growth at a time when native-born population growth is stagnating. This contraction constrains economic output, because noncitizen workers comprise approximately one-fifth of the U.S. labor force. This means that fewer workers are available to fill jobs, start businesses, and drive innovation. The National Immigration Forum has extensively [highlighted](#) how restrictive immigration policies have already led to labor shortages in key sectors such as agriculture, healthcare, construction, and hospitality. Similarly, a recent Deloitte [report](#) highlights that recent declines in net migration may already be affecting the labor force. Payroll growth averaged just 29,000 jobs per month between October and December 2025, down sharply from 166,000 per month in 2024. In addition, Deloitte [points out](#) that industries that rely heavily on immigrant workers — including construction, transportation, and manufacturing — have also experienced sharper hiring slowdowns than other sectors.

Second, reduced immigration directly affects tax revenues. Immigrants contribute [over \\$1.3 trillion dollars](#) annually in federal, state, and local taxes. With fewer immigrants entering the workforce, governments face diminished revenue streams. This reduction comes at a time when fiscal pressures are increasing due to an [aging population](#).

In addition, [several](#) reports [indicated](#) that many undocumented immigrants were reluctant to file taxes in 2026 due to concerns that the [IRS had shared](#) sensitive taxpayer information with Customs and Border Protection. These reports are concerning because undocumented immigrants contribute around [\\$100 billion dollars](#) annually in federal, state, and local taxes, including income taxes, payroll taxes, property taxes (directly or through rent), and sales taxes. The combination of negative net migration and reduced tax filing by those in the United States will only heighten fiscal pressures across multiple levels of government.

Third, slower population growth weakens overall economic demand. Fewer people means reduced consumption of goods and services, slowing business expansion and investment. Immigrant households help generate around [\\$1.7 trillion dollars](#) in economic activity for the United States, according to an [analysis](#) from the American Immigration Council. In addition, the Congressional Budget Office [projects](#) that elevated immigration levels from 2024 to 2034 will expand gross domestic product (GDP) by \$8.9 trillion.

### **Implications for Social Security and Demographic Stability**

One of the most significant consequences of net negative migration is its impact on the [Social Security system](#). The U.S. population is [aging rapidly](#), with baby boomers [retiring](#) in large numbers. This demographic shift increases the ratio of beneficiaries to workers, placing a strain on Social Security finances.

Immigrants play a critical role in mitigating this imbalance. They are, on average, younger and more likely to be of [working age](#) than the native-born population. They also [contribute](#) significantly to Social Security and Medicare, often [paying into systems](#) that fund benefits they are ineligible to receive. As emphasized in the Forum's reports, [Room to Grow](#) and [Still More Room to Grow](#), immigration has historically helped sustain the worker-to-retiree ratio necessary for Social Security's solvency.

Net negative migration reverses the stabilizing effect. With fewer working-age immigrants contributing payroll taxes, the financial foundation of Social Security weakens. This could accelerate the depletion of the Social Security Trust Fund and necessitate difficult policy choices, such as benefit reductions or tax increases.

Beyond Social Security, broader demographic stability is at risk. Population decline or stagnation can [lead to school closures](#), [reduced housing demand](#), and [diminished economic vitality](#) in communities across the country. The Forum's [prior research](#) has consistently warned that without sufficient immigration, the United States risks entering a period of demographic decline similar to that experienced by countries such as Japan and parts of Europe.

### **National Security Implications: Competition with China and Russia**

Net negative migration also has important implications for U.S. national security, particularly amid strategic competition with China and Russia. A 2021 [paper](#) by the Council on National Security and Immigration (CNSI) argues that immigration enhances national security by strengthening the economy, supporting innovation, and expanding the talent pool.

Historically, the United States has benefited from its ability to attract global talent, including scientists, engineers, and entrepreneurs. This advantage has been critical in [maintaining leadership](#) in technology and defense. Restricting legal immigration pathways risks undermining this competitive edge.

By contrast, net negative migration [signals a retreat](#) from the United States' traditional openness. Reduced inflows of skilled workers can weaken innovation ecosystems, slow technological advancement, and ultimately diminish national security capabilities. In an era of great power competition, maintaining a robust and dynamic population is not merely an economic imperative but a strategic one.

### **Policy Context and the Need for Legal Immigration Pathways**

The emergence of net negative migration in 2025 is not solely the result of global trends; it is also shaped by domestic policy choices. As multiple [analyses](#) suggest, recent years have seen significant reductions in legal immigration channels, including employment-based visas and family-based pathways.

The Forum has consistently [emphasized](#) that expanding legal immigration pathways is essential to addressing workforce needs, supporting economic growth, and ensuring demographic stability. The [decline](#) in nonimmigrant visa issuance, as documented in recent analyses, reflects missed opportunities to align immigration policy with national interests.

Moreover, restrictive policies can have unintended consequences, including increased emigration of both immigrants and native-born citizens seeking better opportunities elsewhere. Recent [reports](#) on rising emigration highlight how economic and policy factors can influence decisions to leave the United States.

### **Reaffirming the Case for Immigration Reform**

The challenges posed by net-negative migration reaffirm the core conclusions of the Forum's earlier research. [Room to Grow](#) and [Still More Room to Grow](#) demonstrate that immigration is a critical driver of population stability and economic strength. As those reports explain, higher levels of immigration can help counteract demographic decline, bolster the labor force, and reinforce the nation's fiscal health.

The experience of net negative migration in 2025 provides a concrete example of the risks associated with insufficient immigration levels. It highlights the consequences of

failing to meet the country's economic and demographic needs. It reinforces the importance of advancing policy reforms that expand legal immigration pathways, modernize the visa system, and better align immigration policy with long-term national priorities.

## **Conclusion**

The shift to net negative migration in 2025 marks a pivotal moment for the United States. Its effects could have negative effects on the economy and labor markets. Broader economic literature shows that declining immigration levels constrain economic growth, reduce tax revenues, place additional pressure on Social Security, and intensify existing workforce shortages. At the same time, this trend could carry broader strategic implications, weakening the nation's capacity to compete effectively with other global powers.

At the same time, these developments underscore the National Immigration Forum's longstanding position that immigration is a cornerstone of U.S. strength. Expanding legal immigration pathways is not merely a policy preference but a necessity for ensuring economic prosperity, demographic stability, and global leadership.

As policymakers confront the challenges of the coming decades, the lessons of 2025 should serve as a guide. A forward-looking immigration system—one that recognizes the essential role of immigrants in American society—will be critical to reversing current trends and securing the nation's future.