Who are Dreamers?

Dreamers are undocumented immigrants who arrived in the United States as children, lived and attended school here, and identify as American. They are integral members of our communities, contributing to various sectors of society through their talents, skills, and dedication. Many live with U.S. citizen children or family members, and most have grown up in the U.S. and were educated in our public K-12 schools. The Dreamer community in higher education includes not just students, but also alumni, faculty and staff.

Despite these characteristics, many Dreamers do not have access to permanent protections. There are a number of bills and proposals that, if implemented, could affect the Dreamer population. In 2021, the Migration Policy Institute (MPI) estimated that close to 3 million Dreamers could potentially benefit from a Dream Act or similar bills.

Dreamers with and without DACA and TPS.

The Dreamer population is diverse, including individuals with and without Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) and Temporary Protected Status (TPS). While there are over 408,000 undocumented students currently enrolled in postsecondary education, less than half (181,000) are DACA-eligible because they arrived in the U.S. after June 15, 2007. Nearly 100,000 additional undocumented students graduate from high school annually.

Over the last 12 years, DACA has enabled roughly 835,094 Dreamers to attend school, work, plan their lives, and contribute to their communities without fear of deportation. According to the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), there are currently 530,110 active DACA holders. This number does not include the 98,786 pending DACA applications (as of December 31, 2023) that cannot be processed due to ongoing litigation. As of December 2023, MPI estimates the immediately eligible DACA population to be 1,161,000 were the program to resume in full.

Legislation and Proposals Related to Dreamers.

Without any form of relief, students may face additional barriers accessing educational and employment opportunities. Based on varying eligibility criteria, proposed legislation could make many of these individuals eligible for permanent protections, allowing them to apply their talents and education to the workforce.

Dreamers Covered by the SUCCEED Act (S.1852)

- In 2021, MPI estimated that, under the Solution for Undocumented Children through Careers Employment Education and Defending Our Nation (SUCCEED) Act introduced by Senators James Lankford (R-OK), Thom Tillis (R-NC), and Orrin Hatch (R-UT), approximately 2,035,000 Dreamers would meet the minimum threshold based on initial age at arrival and length of time in the U.S. criteria.
Dreamers Covered by 2023 Senate Dream Act (S.365)

- In 2021, MPI estimated that 2,994,000 Dreamers would meet the minimum age at entry and years of U.S. residence requirements for the Senate Dream Act.

Dreamers Covered by 2023 Dream and Promise Act (H.R.16)

- In 2021, MPI estimated that 2,763,000 Dreamers would meet the minimum age and educational requirements for conditional permanent residence.

December 2022 Compromise Negotiated by Senators Tillis and Sinema

- Leaked draft provisions could provide ~2 million Dreamers with a path to permanent protection.

- As with other Dream legislation, individuals must meet rigorous educational, financial, character, and criminal thresholds to be considered eligible.

- The Niskanen Center has estimated that in its current iteration, the compromise could offer 2.3 million Dreamers a path to permanent protection.

Documented Dreamers

- Documented dreamers are children and young adults who are dependents of non-immigrant visa holders who age out of their status due to green card backlogs.

- While not included in the 2021 Senate Dream Act, Documented Dreamers were included in the 2021 House Dream and Promise Act (H.R.6). In 2021, MPI estimated that 190,000 Documented Dreamers would meet the age and education requirements.