

USCIS Fee Hike: How Immigrants Are Affected

A Boundless report uncovers what the U.S. government's proposed fee increases mean for immigrants

IMPORTANT UPDATE – July 31, 2020: Effective Oct. 2, 2020, government filing fees will increase for marriage-based green card applications filed from *within the United States*, as well as for naturalization applications. Total fees for green card applications filed from *outside the United States* will decrease very slightly. See our breakdown of the new fees [here \(/blog/fee-hikes-citizenship-immigration-forms/\)](/blog/fee-hikes-citizenship-immigration-forms/).

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) plans to enact its **second ~20% fee increase in four years**, paid for (<https://www.boundless.com/blog/who-pays-immigration-fees/>) primarily by U.S. citizens, U.S. businesses, and citizenship applicants—with **over 60% of its new expenses unexplained**. Where will the money come from, and where will it go? This report explores the data in depth.

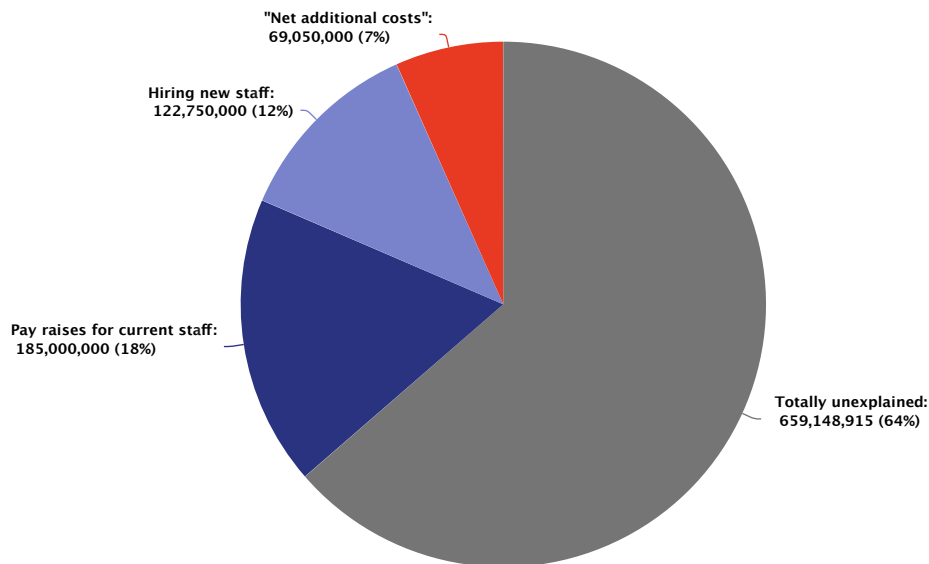
U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) (<https://www.uscis.gov/>) is the federal agency primarily in charge of legal immigration to the United States. Part of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), this agency handles most visa applications, green card applications, and naturalization, and provides many other immigration services. USCIS currently employs about 19,000 workers and has around 90 field offices across the country. USCIS—distinct from Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and Customs and Border Protection (CBP)—is charged with the administration of immigration applications, not deportations or border security.

Unlike most government agencies, USCIS is funded almost entirely through **user-paid fees**, not taxpayer dollars. Every two years, USCIS is required to reevaluate their current fees and make appropriate adjustments. The last fee adjustment in 2016 increased fees by an average of 21%. The **new rule** (<https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2020/08/03/2020-16389/fee-schedule->

and-changes-to-certain-other-immigration-benefit-request-requirements) would hike fees by another 20% overall, beginning on October 2, 2020. USCIS estimates that the status quo, with no fee increases, would leave the agency underfunded by about \$1 billion dollars annually.

Why does USCIS claim to need this additional revenue?

Planned Expenses (\$)



This pie chart displays how USCIS claims it will spend the new revenue it generates from higher fees.

USCIS plans to use the extra fees for new hires, pay raises, and “net additional costs” (including non-pay general expenses associated with onboarding staff, secure mail shipping, increased background investigations, headquarters consolidation, and other “additional resources to sustain current operations necessary for achieving USCIS’ strategic goals”).

Remarkably, the allocation of about 63% of new revenue is completely unexplained in public documentation about the new fee rule.

USCIS has also publicly stated that this increased revenue will not decrease immigration application backlogs nor decrease application wait times any time soon. From the **proposal** (<https://www.regulations.gov/document?D=USCIS-2019-0010-0001>): “USCIS does not believe the level of effort for future adjudications will decrease ... USCIS estimates that it will take several years before USCIS backlogs decrease measurably.”

Where would the extra revenue come from?

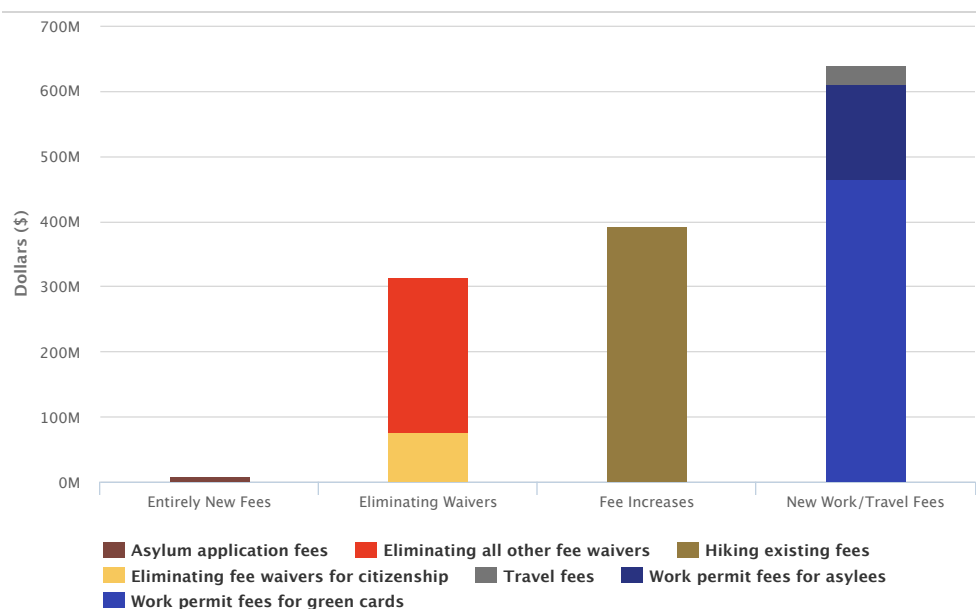
Some of this new revenue (just over \$8 million) would come from **entirely new fees** imposed on asylum applications.

Another big chunk of revenue (about \$300 million) would come from **eliminating fee waivers** for lower-income applicants, including immigrants applying for U.S. citizenship.

The next biggest revenue category (about \$400 million) would come from **hiking existing fees**—see specific examples in the section below.

By far the biggest new source of revenue (about \$640 million) would come from **new fees on travel and work permits** that are currently not subject to fees—including work permits for asylum-seekers and most green card applicants.

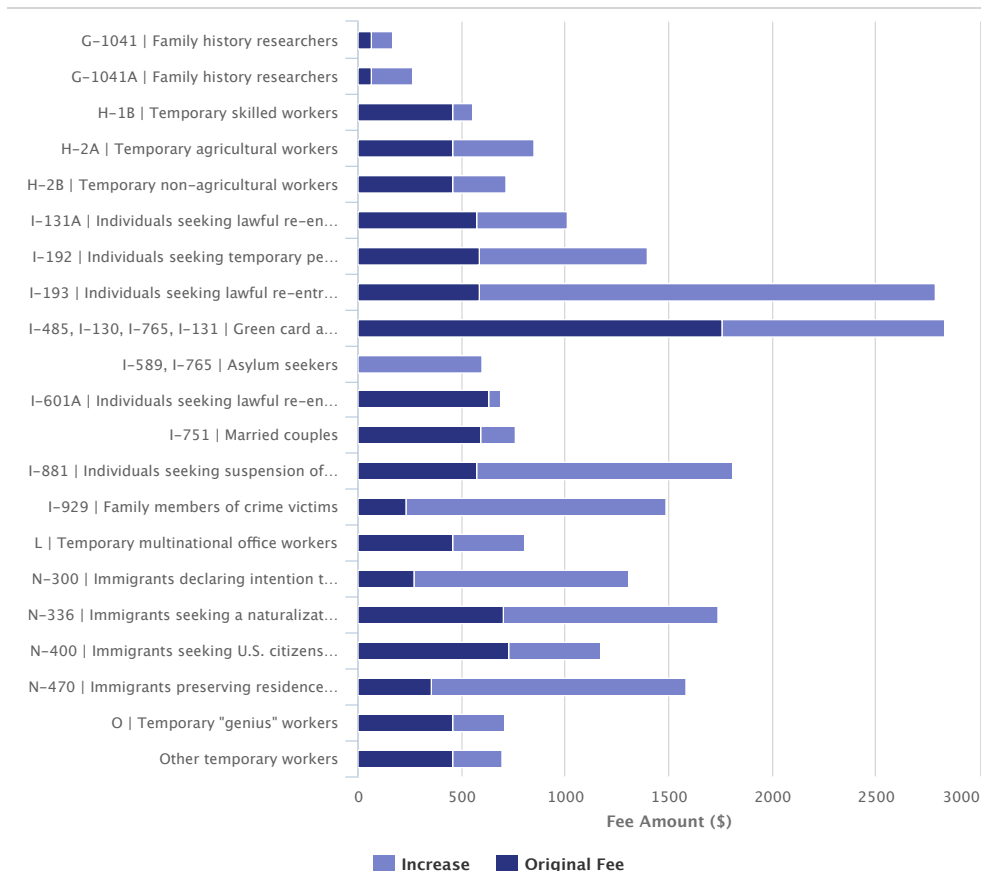
New Revenue Sources



Who would be affected by the fee increases?

While USCIS’s fee rule would change fees for over 60 different form types, this chart focuses on the most dramatic fee increases for relatively high-volume cases.

USCIS Forms: 2020 Fee Increases



Family history enthusiasts would pay \$200 more for genealogy records— more than three times as much as currently—and they are **not pleased** (<https://medium.com/@CleverTitleTK/records-not-revenue-4f331fe2a35f>).

Businesses would pay higher fees for all categories of temporary workers, including skilled workers (H-1B), agricultural workers (H-2A), and non-agricultural seasonal workers (H-2B).

Green card applicants would pay much higher fees, since work and travel permits would now require separate fees. For a spouse seeking a marriage-based green card, the total expenses for the process would **increase by over a thousand dollars**, (<https://www.boundless.com/blog/fee-hikes-citizenship-immigration-forms/>) from \$1,760 to \$2,830. Recently married couples would have an extra fee hike of \$165 to obtain permanent green cards.

Citizenship applicants would pay much higher fees, with the main application for naturalization (N-400) going up by \$530—nearly twice as much as its current cost (although applicants would no longer have to pay a separate \$85 biometrics fee).

Asylum seekers would have to pay an unprecedented new \$50 application fee, as well as the full work permit fee. There would be significant burdens on other humanitarian programs as well, including the **unlawful presence waiver** (<https://www.uscis.gov/family/family-us-citizens/provisional-unlawful-presence-waivers>) (applied for using I-601A) that allows permission to return to the United States after applying for a green card.

The largest percentage fee increase is for the I-929, which grants a temporary visa for **family members of a crime victim**. Applicants will now pay \$1,255 more, making the form over 5 times as expensive as its current cost.

How have USCIS fees changed over time?

The chart below shows how the price for the N-400, the naturalization form required for citizenship, has changed over time compared to the Consumer Price Index (CPI). Here we use the CPI—which tracks how the weighted average price of U.S. goods changes over time—pegged to an initial value of \$85 to match the N-400 form's cost in 1985.

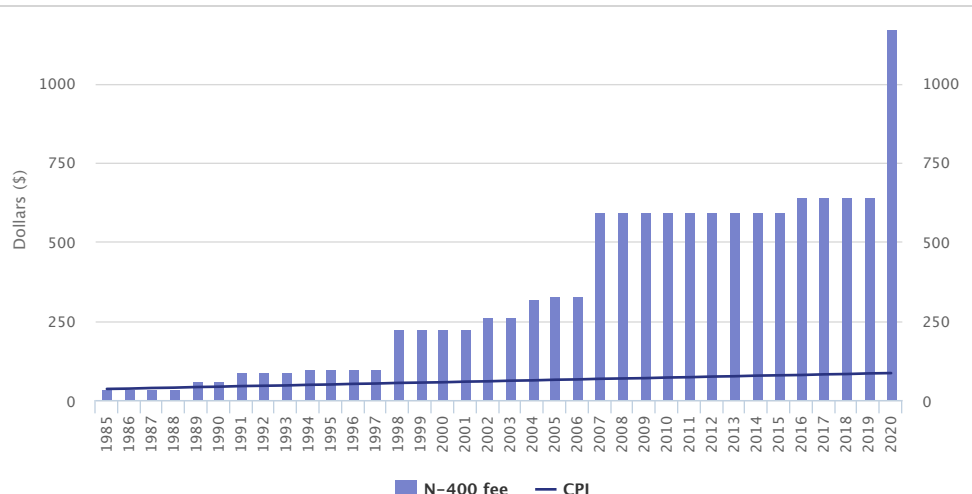


t/) News(/blog/) Services

Log In(https://apply.boundless.com/users/sign_in)

[GET GREEN CARD CHECKLIST \(HTTPS://APPLY.BOUNDLESS.COM/START/MARRIAGE\)](https://apply.boundless.com/start/marriage)

Naturalization Form Fee vs. Consumer Price Index



The N-400 fees have increased much more than the CPI. USCIS is supposed to reevaluate their fee structure every two years, but does not always opt to change fees. The most notable fee increases were in 2007 and now the anticipated increase in 2020.

Additional Resources

The State of New American Citizenship (<https://www.boundless.com/american-citizenship-report/>) | This report from Boundless Immigration explains the citizenship process and the worrisome national trends among processing times, application backlogs, and application denials.

LiveStats: Immigration and Citizenship (<https://www.livestories.com/statistics/immigration-citizenship>) | A comprehensive data hub for immigration statistics, available for every state, county, and city in the United States.

About the Data

Boundless aggregated and analyzed data that **USCIS released to the public** (<https://www.regulations.gov/document?D=USCIS-2019-0010-0001>) in its proposed fee rule, final fee rule, and related documents. CPI values were generated via the Bureau of Labor Statistics' **CPI Inflation Calculator** (<https://data.bls.gov/cgi-bin/cpicalc.pl>).



Powered by **LiveStories**. (https://www.livestories.com/?utm_campaign=cs&utm_medium=footer-link&utm_source=client-side&utm_term=livereports-Boundless)

Immigration Resources

[Immigration Blog](https://www.boundless.com/blog/)
[The Visa Bulletin](https://www.boundless.com/blog/visa-bulletin/)
[Immigration Attorneys](https://www.boundless.com/attorneys/)
[Immigration FAQ](https://www.boundless.com/immigration-resources/faq/)
[Immigration Glossary](https://www.boundless.com/immigration-resources/immigration-glossary/)
[Immigration Research](https://www.boundless.com/research/)
[Help Center](https://help.boundless.com/)

Apply

[Apply for a Marriage Green Card](https://www.boundless.com/green-card/marriage/)
[Apply for Citizenship](https://www.boundless.com/citizenship/)
[Log In](https://apply.boundless.com/users/sign_in)

Marriage Green Cards

[Marriage Green Card Guides](https://www.boundless.com/immigration-resources/guides/)
[Marriage Visa Costs](https://www.boundless.com/immigration-resources/marriage-green-card-cost/)
[Marriage Visa Requirements](https://www.boundless.com/immigration-resources/who-can-apply-for-a-marriage-based-green-card/)
[Marriage Visa Required Documents](https://www.boundless.com/immigration-resources/what-documents-for-marriage-green-card/)

About Boundless

[What Boundless Does](https://www.boundless.com/what-you-get-with-boundless/)
[Careers at Boundless](https://www.boundless.com/careers/)
[Testimonials & Reviews](https://www.boundless.com/stories/)
[Press Coverage](https://www.boundless.com/press/)
[Privacy & Security](https://www.boundless.com/security/)
[Terms of Use Agreement](https://www.boundless.com/terms/)

U.S. Citizenship

[How to Become a U.S. Citizen](https://www.boundless.com/immigration-resources/naturalization-explained/)
[About Naturalization Form N-400](https://www.boundless.com/immigration-resources/form-n-400-explained/)
[Citizenship Fees](https://www.boundless.com/immigration-resources/how-much-does-it-cost-to-apply-for-us-citizenship/)

Featured

[Immigration News](https://www.boundless.com/blog/immigration-news/)
[Immigration Statistics](https://www.boundless.com/blog/immigration-statistics/)
[Immigrant Scholarship](https://www.boundless.com/boundless-american-dream-scholarship-2/)
[The Public Charge Rule](https://www.boundless.com/public-charge-rule/)
[Immigration Forms](https://www.boundless.com/immigration-resources/uscis-gov-immigration-forms-and-fees/)

© 2017–2020 Boundless Immigration Inc.

<https://www.bbb.org/northwest/business-reviews/immigration-consultant/boundless-immigration-inc-in-seattle-wa-1000047147/#sealclick>

Boundless is not a law firm and is not a substitute for the advice of an attorney. Boundless is not affiliated with United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) or any other government agency. Boundless and its services are available for free at the [USCIS website](https://www.boundless.com). Use of the Boundless website and its services are subject to our [Privacy Policy](https://www.boundless.com/terms/) and [Terms of Use](https://www.boundless.com/terms/). Attorney services are provided by independent attorneys and are subject to a separate [Attorney Agreement](https://www.boundless.com/attorney-agreement/).