

Illegal immigration hit record 14M in '23



A family claiming to be from Guatemala and a man stating he was from Peru, in pink shirt, walk through the desert after crossing the U.S.-Mexico border in 2023 near Lukeville, Ariz. MATT YORK — ASSOCIATED PRESS FILE

BY MIKE SCHNEIDER

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

The number of people in the U.S. illegally surged to an all-time high of 14 million in 2023, a research group said Thursday, a major increase that falls well short of estimates from President Donald Trump and some critics of immigration.

The Pew Research Center's closely watched gauge rose from 11.8 million a year earlier and surpassed the previous high of 12.2 million in 2007. The increase was driven by some 6 million who were in the country with some form of legal protection. Trump has stripped many of those protections since taking office in January.

Pew, whose estimates date to 1990, said that, although 2023 is its latest full analysis, preliminary findings show the number rose in 2024, but at a slower rate after then-President Joe Biden severely restricted asylum at the border in June of that year. The number dropped this year under Trump but is still likely above 14 million.

The overall U.S. immigrant population, regardless of legal status, reached an all-time high of more than 53 million in January 2025, accounting for a record 15.8% of the U.S. population. The number has since dropped, which Pew said would be the first

time it has shrunk since the 1960s.

Although the findings are unlikely to settle debate, Pew's report is one of the most complete attempts to measure illegal immigration. Nearly all the increase came from countries other than Mexico. Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras and India accounted for the largest numbers after Mexico. Totals from Venezuela, Cuba, Colombia, Nicaragua, Ecuador, Ukraine and Peru each more than doubled in two years.

The Center for Immigration Studies, a group that favors immigration restrictions, reported that there were 14.2 million people in the U.S. illegally last month, down from a peak of 15.8 million in January. Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem touted the reported drop of 1.6 million in six months. "This is massive," she said in a news release last week.

Noem's department, through its Office of Homeland Security Statistics, estimates there were 11 million people in the U.S. illegally in 2022.

Pew's findings, based on data from the U.S. Census Bureau survey and Department of Homeland Security, reflect an increase in people crossing the border illegally to exercise rights to seek asylum and Biden-era policies to grant temporary legal status. Trump has ended those policies.