

Fact Sheet: The U.S. Military Needs Immigrants

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Increasingly, the U.S. military has struggled to recruit new enlistees. Creating pathways for immigrants to join the military is one answer to this recruitment challenge. Many lawful immigrants have critical skills that would benefit the U.S. military and fill needs such as foreign language expertise and medical practice experience.

What is the Current State of Recruitment in the U.S. Military?

The U.S. Military is facing a serious recruitment problem. In 2021, the U.S. military failed to meet its recruitment goals. Recent news reports have emphasized that the problem is getting worse. The inability to recruit poses a threat to U.S. national security and our nation's readiness to face threats.

- [The Army and Navy](#) couldn't meet their recruiting goals for active duty, reserves, or the Army National Guard.
- The Air Force also [fell short](#) of its goals in National Guard and the Air Force Reserve.
- The Army even offered [\\$50,000 signing bonuses](#) for a six-year commitment.

What Obstacles Stand in the Way of Increasing Recruitment?

Recruiting challenges often arise from changes within the U.S. population and eligibility issues amongst applicants.

- America's population is growing at its slowest rate in history. The population is also aging.
- The [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported](#) 71% of young people cannot meet military recruitment requirements.
- Twenty-five percent of those who are rejected are overweight, and many lack the education requirements, or have mental health or drug abuse challenges.
- The [U.S. population makeup](#) is 13.5% foreign born, but they make up less than 4% of the military. This is largely because the Department of Defense requires a green card for enlistment, which can take decades to receive.



The MAVNI Program Can Help Address these Obstacles

To protect our country and its interests, these challenges must be resolved. The Military Accessions Vital to the National Interest (MAVNI) program was piloted in 2006 during the Bush Administration to allow lawful immigrants to expeditiously join the U.S. military and gain citizenship. The program was very successful when it was implemented. It solved the recruiting challenge by recruiting immigrants with the desired skills to join the U.S. military and receive an expedited path to citizenship.

- The MAVNI program fast tracks the path to military service and citizenship for immigrants who possess the skills needed by the U.S. military. Skills such as foreign language proficiency or medical practice experience are critical. Reinstating the MAVNI Program would help the U.S. military make up for the declining number of recruits due to an overall labor shortage and eligibility challenges.
- Refugees, asylees, or Temporary Protected Status (TPS) recipients would be eligible to join the military under the MAVNI program, if they have the desired skills.

What is the Status of the MAVNI Program?

- The program was temporarily halted in 2009 after a native-born U.S. Army major killed 13 people in a mass shooting in Texas. This resulted in anti-immigrant backlash, halting the program. The major was not an immigrant, but was born in Arlington, VA and three of his victims were immigrants.
- MAVNI was reinstated briefly but ultimately ended again in 2016 due to unsubstantiated “security concerns.”
- The abrupt termination of the program put thousands of immigrants at risk of deportation, and put their legal status on hold.

A program like MAVNI would be instrumental in helping the U.S. address its recruitment challenges, bolster national security, and create a streamlined approach for lawful immigrants to earn citizenship through honorable military service.

This fact sheet was compiled from an op-ed by Margaret D. Stock, which was published by The Washington Post on May 25, 2022.

You can read the op-ed, “What the U.S. military needs is an infusion of immigrants” [here](#).