Press Release

The Budgetary and Economic Tradeoffs of Reducing the Immigration Backlog

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There are about 8.6 million immigration benefit applications pending before United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), of which 5.2 million are considered part of the agency's backlog. In new research, Director of Fiscal Policy Gordon Gray estimates the funding and staffing needs required to eliminate the backlog, as well as the economic and fiscal effects of a backlog reduction scenario.

Key points:

- While USCIS has faced backlogs before, disruptions posed by the COVID-19 pandemic substantially increased benefit- application backlogs.
- Eliminating the backlogs will require significant and sustained additional congressional funding; examining a number of different staffing scenarios, eliminating the backlog could take as little as two years or as long as eight years and could cost between $3.0–$3.9 billion.
- Eliminating the backlog would add new workers and immigrants to the U.S. economy and could contribute as much as $110 billion per year in additional real gross domestic product; this new national income would likely have positive budgetary effect over the next decade.
- The positive budget effects from this new economic could potentially more than pay for the estimated cost of backlog elimination.

Read the analysis