

**Sending Countries of Au Pairs in the United States: Patterns and Implications**  
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We have each conducted scholarly research about the experiences of domestic workers in general (England) and Au Pairs in particular (Reinke) in the US. Our research makes us aware of numerous studies over the years that show that while the purported motivation of the Au Pair designated sponsor organizations<sup>1</sup> is cultural exchange, agencies prioritize providing US families with childcare, often endangering the well-being of Au Pairs themselves in the process (e.g. with overwork, social isolation and even physical abuse).<sup>2</sup>

For this round of rulemaking, we wish to bring attention to an additional aspect of the Au Pair experience – the implications of which countries (and world regions) lead the list of sending countries.

**TABLE 1: Sending Counties of New Au Pair Exchange Visitors, 2019**

Latin America		Africa		Western Europe		Rest of the world	
Brazil	4,405	S. Africa	1,507	Germany	3,005	Turkey	236
Colombia	3,050	Zimbabwe	8	Italy	1,113	Poland	532
Mexico	1,576	Uganda	3	France	1,084	Czech Rep	248
Argentina	534			Austria	535	Russia	74
Ecuador	206			Spain	439	Latvia	5
El Salvador	111			Sweden	432	Armenia	3
Peru	110			Netherlands	221	Kyrgyzstan	3
Paraguay	16			UK	128	Lithuania	3
Guatemala	15			Switzerland	85	China	466
Jamaica	10			Luxembourg	3	Thailand	176
						Japan	147
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>10,033</b>		<b>1,518</b>		<b>7,045</b>		<b>1,893</b>
% All New Au Pairs	<b>46.6</b>		<b>7.0</b>		<b>32.7</b>		<b>8.8</b>
21,551 (2019)							

SOURCE: Program Fact Sheets, “Au Pair” (2020)

<sup>1</sup> There are currently 15 State Department recognized agencies that administer the Au Pair program. See: <https://j1visa.state.gov/participants/how-to-apply/sponsor-search/?program=Au%20Pair&state=any>

<sup>2</sup> See for example, GAO Report (1990) “Inappropriate Uses of Educational and Cultural Exchange and Visas.” <https://www.gao.gov/assets/150/148648.pdf>; Southern Poverty Law Center (2014) “Culture Shock: The Exploitation of J-1 Cultural Exchange Workers.” <https://www.splcenter.org/20140201/culture-shock-exploitation-j-1-cultural-exchange-workers>; Politico investigation (2017) “They think we are slaves.” <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2017/03/au-pair-program-abuse-state-department-214956>; Sondra Cuban (2018) “‘Any Sacrifice Is Worthwhile Doing’: Latina Au Pairs Migrating to the United States for Opportunities,” *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies*, 16:3, 235-254.

We analyzed the current *Program Fact Sheet* about Au Pairs on the US Department of State website (see Table 1).<sup>3</sup> It indicates that in CY 2019 there were 21,551 new Au Pair exchange visitors. The top five sending countries in rank order were: Brazil, Colombia, Germany, Mexico and South Africa (Italy and France were next with about 1,100 each). Other top 20 sending countries include Argentina, Ecuador and Thailand.

The *Fact Sheet* also includes the Top 20 ‘growing countries’ between 2018-2019. Brazil and South Africa appear there too, as do other Latin American and African countries such as Paraguay and Guatemala, and Zimbabwe and Uganda.

In short, in 2019 a sizable share of Au Pairs came from Latin America (46.5%) and Africa (8%), a shift from Au Pairs coming from the ‘traditional’ source countries in Western Europe (32.7%) to countries in the Global South and other regions of the world.<sup>4</sup> For instance, the same data for 2012 indicated that 13,789 new Au Pairs arrived in the US. The Top 10 sending countries were in rank order: Germany (which was well ahead of) Brazil, Colombia, Mexico, France, Sweden, South Africa, Austria, Thailand, and Poland. Together these countries accounted for 67% of all of the 2012 arrivals. Even at that time it was suggested an emerging “demographic shift in the US Au Pair population from primarily consisting of West Europeans to being dominated by East Europeans South Americans and Africans”<sup>5</sup> Thus, the current effort to reduce state and local oversight of the Au Pair program is happening amidst this shift in the trends of which countries send the most participants in the program.

This trend is important to note because it signals what could be a new layer of marginalization: a majority of Au Pairs come from countries where they are very likely to be sending remittances back home to support their families. In some instances they are also paying back loans they or their family took out to pay for placement fees in those countries (evidence points to them being higher than in ‘traditional’ sending countries), and for the airfare and other fees associated with the agency in the US. These expenses that are mediated through private Au Pair agencies, and vary greatly based on the decentralized management of the program, and Au Pairs have little to no recourse in the case of their fees being lost or mismanaged, or in the case of their exit from the program.<sup>6</sup>

We also want to note that the number of migrant workers admitted to the US through the various Exchange Visitor Programs, including the Au Pair program, is at a near record high (see Figure

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<sup>3</sup> US Department of State, Exchange Visitor Program, J-1 Visa Basic, Program Fact Sheets “Au Pair” <https://j1visa.state.gov/basics/> (last retrieved June 16, 2020).

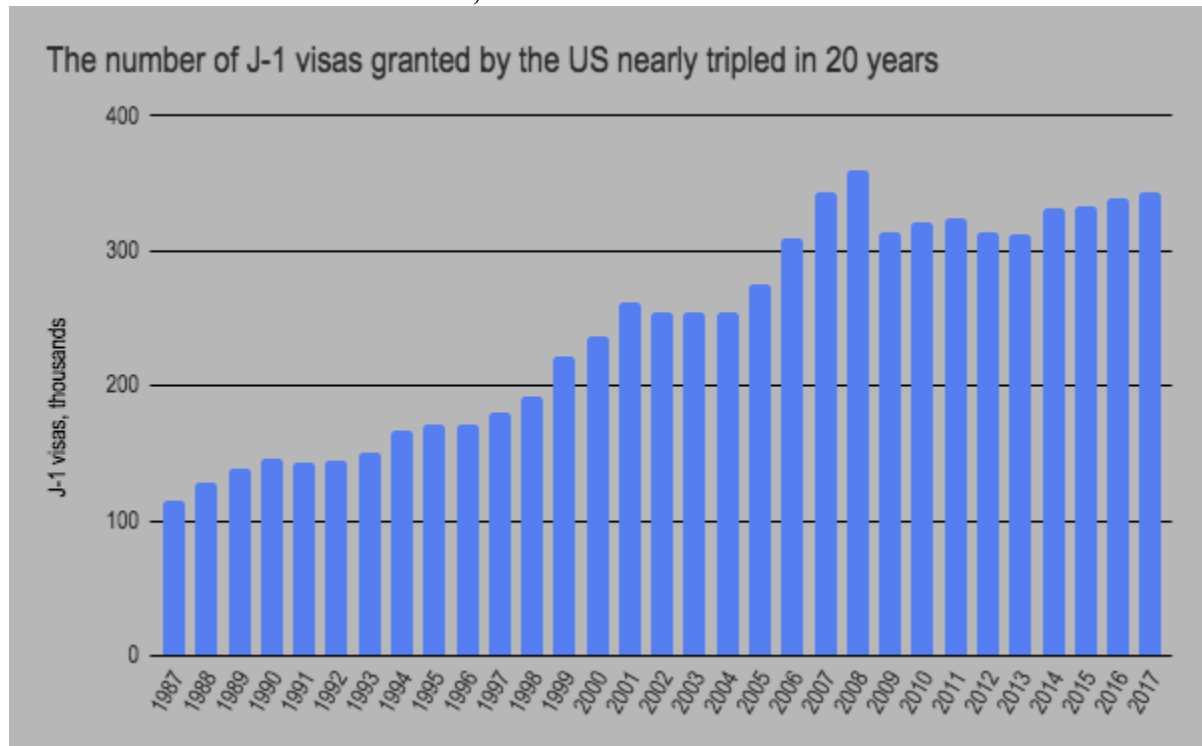
<sup>4</sup> The total is less than 21,551, thus an additional 1,062 Au Pairs presumably came from other countries not listed.

<sup>5</sup> Justice in Motion (2015) *Visa Pages: US Temporary Foreign Worker Visas* [https://issuu.com/justiceinmotion/docs/visapages\\_j1\\_2015update](https://issuu.com/justiceinmotion/docs/visapages_j1_2015update)

<sup>6</sup> For example, see American University International Human Rights Law Clinic, et al (2018) “Shortchanged: The Big Business Behind The Low Wage J-1 Au Pair Program,” <https://cdmigrante.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Shortchanged.pdf>.

1).<sup>7</sup> The Au Pair program in the US dates back to 1987. In the last twenty years alone, the number of J-1 Visas nearly tripled.

**FIGURE 1: Total J-1 Visas issued, 1987-2017**



Obviously not all of those visas are for Au Pairs, but the temporary work that these J-1 migrants take on is complicated by the already relatively light oversight of these work exchange programs. At a time when Au Pairs and J-1 visa holders more broadly are making up a growing proportion of the nation's immigrant workforce, eliminating any additional oversight of state and local governments strikes us as imprudent.

<sup>7</sup> Data derived from: US Department of State, Nonimmigrant Visa Statistics.  
<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/legal/visa-law0/visa-statistics/nonimmigrant-visa-statistics.html>.