

Illegal, but Fit to Serve: Pentagon to Recruit Undocumented Immigrants

By [RT](#)

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The Pentagon is to start recruiting undocumented immigrants who came into the US as minors and possess valuable skills like speaking Persian and Chinese. The program offering the opportunity is capped at 1,500 recruits per year.

The new policy revealed by the DoD on Thursday expands the existing pilot program called Military Accessions Vital to National Interest, or [MAVNI](#). It has been tried since 2008, offering positions in the US armed forces to foreigners living in America legally as refugees or under a temporary visa.

Starting next fiscal year, MAVNI will also apply to illegal residents who came to US with their parents before age 16, reports the Military Times. The potential recruits would be selected from those eligible for the 2012 Obama administration policy known as Deferred Action for Child Arrivals, or DACA. Getting a DACA illegal immigrant status involves a background check by the Homeland Security Department.

The Pentagon recruits some 5,000 foreigners each year, most of them 'green card' holders. The MAVNI program may account for up to 1,500 recruits annually, although the military services are not required to accept them. In practice the Army has been the only service to accept a significant number, while the Navy and Marine Corps are not seeking applicants under it.

A recruit must meet higher-than-usual standards and have certain skills valued by the US military to get a position. Those include medical training and language expertise. Speakers of Arabic, Chinese, Pushtu, Korean, Russian, Urdu, Hindi and Hungarian are among those in demand.

The expansion of the program to illegal residents adds between 1.2 million and 2.1 million children, teenagers and young adults to the potential talent pool. The recruits would be offered an expedited path to US citizenship as an extra incentive to serve.

But some Pentagon officials have doubt over the number of recruits who would actually qualify for the MAVNI program.

"We're just not sure how many within that existing population of DACA would have the linguistic skills to qualify," said one defense official familiar with the policy change. "These are kids who entered the country at a fairly young age and have basically grown up in the United States, so the limit of their language talents would probably be the language that

they received at home.”

The Pentagon’s move is part of a wider effort by the Obama administration to ease pressure on immigrants and integrate them into American society. It comes amid frustration in the White House with the failure of Congress to pass a substantial immigration reform.

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