

# Immigration: Basic Terminology

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**Immigrant:** An individual living in a country who was born elsewhere and started as a non-citizen (perspective of the “receiving country”).

**Emigrant:** An individual who leaves the country where they were born and moves to a different country (perspective of the “sending country”).

**Migrant:** An individual who has moved to another place, or is residing temporarily somewhere away from their point of origin, often for their work. May plan to settle, move again, or return home.

**Note:** Any of these terms may be useful depending on the context. *Migrant* may be most useful as it acknowledges that many are in motion, whether by choice or forced (as people, plants, and animals have always been). It puts everyone in the same category, including US citizens, who often move very freely about the world.

Immigration Term	What does this term mean?	Status granted before or after arrival?	Can they legally work in the U.S.?
<b>Asylum-seeker</b>	An individual who has fled their home due to fear of persecution based on their race, religion, political opinion, nationality, or membership in a particular social group. An asylum seeker is not yet legally recognized as a refugee. Currently, it is very hard to apply for asylum at a border entry as prescribed by law. Thousands of asylum seekers are stranded on the Mexican side of the border.	After. Must apply for asylum within one year after arrival. U.S. law requires an asylum seeker to be in the U.S. at a port of entry station or within the borders in order to apply.	Can apply for employment authorization 180 days after having applied for asylum; typically another 2 months or more wait before it is granted.
<b>Asylee</b>	Someone who has been granted asylum by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services or an Immigration Judge.	After arrival	Able to work and have a pathway to adjust to full citizenship, but are not typically eligible for resettlement program funding, programs, and public assistance.
<b>Refugee</b>	An individual who has fled their home due to fear of persecution based on their race, religion, political opinion, nationality, or membership in a particular social group. Refugees are resettled across the world by voluntary agencies, but each country’s government decides how many refugees to admit in a year. The U.S. ceiling is set yearly and is currently at 125,000 refugees per year.	Before. Unlike asylees, refugees are granted their status before arriving in their country of resettlement.	Able to work and have a pathway to adjust to full citizenship. Eligible for resettlement program funding, programs, and public assistance.

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<b>Parolee (humanitarian)</b>	An individual who is given permission to enter the U.S. for a temporary period (often for humanitarian reasons, for example if they are a displaced child) but has not been formally admitted into the U.S. for purposes of immigration law. Currently, 2 years of Humanitarian Parole is being offered to Ukrainians, Cubans, Haitians, Nicaraguans, and Venezuelans who can find a U.S. citizen or permanent resident to sponsor them before they enter the country.	Before arrival; U.S. citizen or permanent resident sponsor required	Can apply for employment authorization immediately.
<b>Green Card/ Permanent Resident</b>	An individual not born in the U.S., but allowed to live and work indefinitely in the U.S. (unless they are found guilty of a crime).	After arrival	Allowed to live and work indefinitely in the U.S. (unless they are found guilty of a crime).
<b>Naturalized Citizen</b>	An individual who becomes a full U.S. citizen through the naturalization process, not by birth in the U.S.	After arrival (requires a civics & U.S. history test, language proficiency in English, and an oath of loyalty).	Yes
<b>Temporary Protected Status (TPS)</b>	A temporary form of immigration status someone may request if they are a citizen or national of a country the Department of Homeland Security has designated for TPS, they have been present for a certain period of time, and meet other requirements. DHS allegedly designates countries for TPS for humanitarian reasons; conditions in the country prevent an individual from returning safely. Currently, TPS benefits remain effective for persons from El Salvador, Haiti, Honduras, Nepal, Nicaragua and Sudan at least through June 2024. TPS recipients have to reapply periodically as directed, and TPS can be rescinded.	After arrival	Yes
<b>Special Immigrant Visa (SIV)</b>	Allows individuals who worked with the U.S. Armed Forces as a translator/interpreter in Iraq or Afghanistan to lawfully enter the United States and apply for permanent residence.	Before arrival	Yes

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<b>Operation Allies Welcome (OAW)</b>	Program allowing parole of Afghans into the U.S. since August 2021.	Before arrival	Afghan evacuees authorized to work incident to status, meaning with an I-94.
<b>Undocumented Immigrants</b>	Individuals who do not have any official immigration status that gives them permission to live, work and enjoy benefits of U.S citizens, permanent residents, and refugees. This includes nearly 2.3 million persons known as Dreamers (DACA recipients) who were brought to the U.S. as children by their undocumented parents and know no other home. There are an estimated 12 million undocumented immigrants living in the U.S. About 2/3 of these have lived in the U.S. for more than 10 years. Undocumented immigrants often pay income taxes and social security payments through Individual Taxpayer Identification Numbers (ITIN) but cannot reap the benefits of Social Security.		DACA recipients are able to work. Other undocumented immigrants are not.

### **Food for Thought**

You may hear the term *New Americans* to describe all who come from other countries and settle in the US. This is problematic because many of these immigrants have been Americans all their life (other North Americans from Canada, Mexico & other countries, Central Americans and South Americans). Why is the U.S. equated with *America*?