



HEARTLAND ALLIANCE

IMMIGRANTS—FACT SHEET

Immigrants are people who have come from another country to live in the United States. Undocumented immigrants are those who live here without legal authorization. Roughly one third to one half of undocumented immigrants have entered the U.S. legally and overstayed their tourist, student or work visas. Many are seeking legal remedies.

IMMIGRANTS IN THE U.S.

- 42 million people in the U.S. are foreign born (13%)
- 18 million of those are naturalized citizens
- 13 million are documented non-citizens
- 11 million are undocumented immigrants

Key terms:

Immigrant: people who come to live permanently in a foreign country

Refugee: people fleeing conflict, danger, or persecution who are defined and protected in international law, and must not be expelled or returned to situations where their life and freedom are at risk.

Asylum seeker: people meeting the definition of refugee, and are already in the U.S., or are seeking admission at a port of entry.

Sources: UNHCR & Google Dictionary

WHY DO IMMIGRANTS COME TO THE U.S.?

Motivations range from fleeing violence, political unrest or environmental disaster, to rejoining family, escaping a life of poverty, or simply seeking opportunity and freedom. The U.S. is a land of immigrants and has been since the beginning for these same reasons.

WHERE ARE U.S. IMMIGRANTS FROM? WHERE DO THEY LIVE?

- IN 2014, 48% of undocumented immigrants in the U.S. are from Asia, Central America, sub-Saharan Africa, and places other than Mexico.
- Fifty-two percent of undocumented immigrants in the U.S. are from Mexico, down almost a million since 2009.
- Six states accounted for 59% of undocumented immigrants in 2014: California, Texas, Florida, New York, New Jersey and Illinois.

One of the greatest fears that undocumented immigrants have is being caught by U.S. immigration authorities and not having a chance to say goodbye to family and loved ones.

Sources: National Immigrant Justice Center, U.S. Department of State, Pew Research, and AmericanProgress.org

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A DOCUMENTED IMMIGRANT?

The definition of who is “legal” – and who is not – changes with the evolution of immigration laws. The U.S. immigration system was very different in the past and families who entered the country easily in past generations might not have been allowed to enter at all under today’s laws. When many families arrived in the U.S., there were no numerical limitations on immigration, no requirements to have family or employment here, and no requirement to obtain a visa prior to arriving. Claims common today by some U.S. citizens that their grandparents and great-grandparents came “legally” are simply inaccurate.



KEY TERMS:

VISA: an endorsement indicating that the holder is allowed to enter, leave, stay, or work for a specified period of time in a country.

GREEN CARD: A green card holder is someone who has been granted authorization to live and work in the United States on a permanent basis.

DEFERRED ACTION FOR CHILDHOOD ARRIVALS: DACA allows for undocumented immigrants who entered the U.S. as minors to receive a renewable two-year period of deferred action from deportation and eligibility for a work permit. Approximately 750,000 “Dreamers” qualified under the 2012 act.

DID YOU KNOW?

Many people living in the United States without authorization today could qualify for a green card by virtue of having a relative who is a U.S. citizen. But laws passed in 1996 would require these individuals to leave the U.S. for at least 10 years before becoming eligible to reunite with their families. As a result many are forced to remain undocumented in the United States to avoid exile from their loved ones.

Millions of U.S. citizens and documented immigrants have undocumented family members. In 2011, 16.6 million people lived in “mixed status” families –those with at least one undocumented immigrant. Nine million of these families had at least one U.S.-born child. In 2012, 4.7 million undocumented adults were parents of minor children living in the U.S., including 3.8 million whose children were U.S. citizens.

Many undocumented immigrants own homes. Among undocumented immigrants who had lived in the U.S. for 10+ years, 45 percent were homeowners in 2008. Among those who had lived in the U.S. for less than 10 years, 27 percent were homeowners in 2008.

According to a 2009 Pew Research Center’s Hispanic Trends Project study of undocumented immigrants, 52 percent have at least a high school diploma and 15 percent have a bachelor’s degree or higher.

Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) can make arrests during work place raids or in homes. Police may also arrest and detain undocumented immigrants at routine traffic stops.

VULNERABLE CHILDREN

At least 5,100 U.S. citizen children were living in foster care in 2011 because their undocumented immigrant parents were detained or deported.

An estimated 205,000 parents of children who are U.S. citizens were deported between 2010 and 2012.



ABOUT HEARTLAND ALLIANCE

We believe that everyone in society benefits when people who experience disparities in safety, health, housing, education, economic opportunity, and justice are able to exit poverty, heal from trauma, and achieve stability; secure their rights; and shape policies that respond to their needs.

Building on decades of experience, Heartland Alliance's goal is to meet the unique needs of immigrants as they establish new lives in the U.S. This includes helping them secure their rights and providing services to meet their immediate needs and to promote long-term self-sufficiency.

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Heartland Alliance | 208 South LaSalle Street | Suite 1300
Chicago, IL 60604 | 312.660.1300 | communications@heartlandalliance.org

For more information or to make a donation: www.heartlandalliance.org

For immigrants needing assistance, please visit: www.immigrantjustice.org

Para los inmigrantes que necesitan ayuda, por favor visitar: www.immigrantjustice.org

The information in this document is not legal advice. Individuals seeking information about their own legal rights and options should contact licensed immigration lawyers. For updates regarding immigration laws and policies, please visit Heartland Alliance’s National Immigrant Justice Center at immigrantjustice.org.