

# Frequently Asked Questions about Immigrants



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## Who is an immigrant?

Officially, an immigrant is a foreign-born individual admitted to reside permanently in the United States as a Lawful Permanent Resident (LPR).<sup>1</sup> Unofficially, the term is also used to describe any foreign-born individual regardless of whether he/she is legally present in the U.S. or whether he/she intends to be in the U.S. temporarily.

## Who is an undocumented immigrant?

An undocumented immigrant is a person present in the United States without permission of the U.S. government. They are in the U.S. without the necessary documentation, e.g. crossed a border without document inspection, used false documents or stayed beyond their temporary visa's expiration date. Undocumented immigrants often do not seek the protection of civil rights and anti-discrimination laws, minimum wages, fair labor standards or health care for fear of detention.<sup>2</sup>

## Who is an asylee?

An asylee fears persecution based on race, religion, nationality or political opinion, but has already entered the U.S. and, fearing persecution if he/she returns to their homeland, applies for and is granted asylum in the U.S.<sup>3</sup>

## Who is an asylum-seeker?

An asylum-seeker is a person who has already entered the United States but has not yet successfully completed the process to become an asylee.

## What is a green card?

A green card is a document from the Department of Homeland Security certifying lawful permanent resident status; also known as a permanent resident card, alien registration receipt card or resident alien card;<sup>4</sup> not necessarily green in color, but in the past all such cards used to be green.

## What is naturalization?

Naturalization is the process of becoming a U.S. Citizen after five years of lawful permanent residency in the United States.<sup>5</sup>

## What is a visa?

A visa is a Department of State document authorizing a non-U.S. Citizen to enter and remain in the United States for certain periods of time and for certain purposes.<sup>6</sup>

## How many immigrants are in Nebraska?

The 2005-2007 American Community Survey through the U.S. Census Bureau estimates 99,308 foreign-born individuals live in our state. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 43,162 foreign-born individuals entered Nebraska between 1990-2000.<sup>7</sup>

## Do immigrants pay taxes?

All immigrants pay taxes regardless of their legal status. All persons living in the United States pay sales tax on purchases and property tax on places of residence or these taxes are passed along to renters.<sup>8</sup> Undocumented workers even pay income taxes as evidenced by the Social Security Administration's "earnings suspense file" which tracks taxes that cannot be matched to workers' names and social security numbers.<sup>9</sup> In 2006 immigrant spending resulted in \$1.6 billion worth of total production to Nebraska's economy and immigrant spending generated between 11,874 and 12,121 jobs in total for the state.<sup>10</sup> Additionally, total state production would fall by \$13.5 billion if immigrants were not present in Nebraska.<sup>11</sup>

## Do immigrants come here to take welfare?

Immigrants come to the United States to work and reunite with family. Federal law clearly prohibits undocumented immigrants from receiving public benefits except in certain specified emergency situations.<sup>12</sup>

## Do immigrants take jobs and opportunities away from Americans?

Historically, countries such as Britain, United States, Sweden and Ireland that welcome immigrants have better economic records than countries rejecting immigration.<sup>13</sup> Immigrant entrepreneurs create jobs for U.S. and foreign workers. Bill Gates calculates that every H1B visa given to an immigrant to work in America creates five new jobs for American-born citizens.<sup>14</sup> One-third of Silicon Valley companies were started by Chinese and Indian immigrants.<sup>15</sup> One-third of the Americans who won Nobel prizes in physics during the past seven years were born outside of the United States.<sup>16</sup>

## What is E-Verify?

E-Verify is an electronic database run by the Social Security Administration in conjunction with the Department of Homeland Security. It is used by participating employers to electronically verify new employees' authorization to work legally in the United States. While some have advocated wider use of the system, others oppose it due to the high level of errors in the database. Some states mandate that employers use the system to verify the employment eligibility of people they hire. In Nebraska, use of E-Verify will become mandatory for public (government) employers and companies that contract with the government as of October 1, 2009.

<sup>1</sup> [www.dhs.gov/ximgtm/statistics/stdfdef.shtm](http://www.dhs.gov/ximgtm/statistics/stdfdef.shtm)

<sup>2</sup> [www.lirs.org/InfoRes/Glossary.htm#U](http://www.lirs.org/InfoRes/Glossary.htm#U)

<sup>3</sup> [www.lirs.org/InfoRes/Glossary.htm#A](http://www.lirs.org/InfoRes/Glossary.htm#A)

<sup>4</sup> [www.lirs.org/InfoRes/Glossary.htm#G](http://www.lirs.org/InfoRes/Glossary.htm#G)

<sup>5</sup> [www.lirs.org/InfoRes/Glossary.htm#N](http://www.lirs.org/InfoRes/Glossary.htm#N)

<sup>6</sup> [www.lirs.org/InfoRes/Glossary.htm#V](http://www.lirs.org/InfoRes/Glossary.htm#V)

<sup>7</sup> Decker, Christopher with Jerry Deichert and Lourdes Gouveia. 2008. *Nebraska's Immigrant Population. Economic and Fiscal Impacts. OLLAS Special Report No. 5.* Omaha, NE: Office of Latino/Latin American Studies (OLLAS), University of Nebraska at Omaha. - [www.unomaha.edu/ollas/Econ%20Im%20Report/EconImpact.pdf](http://www.unomaha.edu/ollas/Econ%20Im%20Report/EconImpact.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> National Council of La Raza, *Five Facts of Undocumented Workers*, 2008, p. 3, [www.nclr.org/content/publications/detail/50720/](http://www.nclr.org/content/publications/detail/50720/)

<sup>9</sup> Eduardo Porter, "Illegal Immigrants Are Bolstering Social Security With Billions", *New York Times*, April 5, 2005

<sup>10</sup> Decker, Christopher, et al.

<sup>11</sup> Decker, Christopher, et al.

<sup>12</sup> 8 U.S.C. § 1621

<sup>13</sup> *The Economist*, U.S. Edition, "Help Not Wanted; Lexington," ¶ 4, Section: United States, April 12, 2008

<sup>14</sup> *The Economist*, U.S. Edition, "Keep the Borders Open; Global Migration," ¶ 6, Section: Leader, January 5, 2008

<sup>15</sup> *The Economist*, April 12, 2008

<sup>16</sup> *The Economist*, April 12, 2008