

## IMMIGRATION GLOSSARY

Courtesy of Immigrant Pathways Colorado

**Immigrant:** The term is often used generally to refer to foreign nationals (or “aliens” as U.S. laws call them) residing in the United States, but its specific legal meaning is a foreign national living in the United States, other than nonimmigrant aliens such as temporary visitors for pleasure or students. “Immigrant” is often used synonymously with lawful permanent resident or “green card holder.”

**Migrant:** Someone who is moving from place to place (within his or her country or across borders), usually for economic reasons, such as seasonal work. Similar to immigrants, they were not forced to leave their native countries because of persecution or violence but rather are seeking better opportunities. Many of those crossing the U.S. border from Central American countries are, in fact, asylum seekers, not migrants. They have a well-founded fear of persecution if they were to return home. (*International Rescue Committee, July 2022*)

**Asylum Seeker/Asylee:** An individual who comes to the United States seeking protection due to persecution or fear of persecution in their home country on account of race, religion, or nationality, membership in a particular social group or political opinion is an asylum seeker. A person approved for this status is referred to as an asylee.

U.S. law allows individuals to apply for asylum at a Port of Entry or while under removal proceedings from the country (for example after attempting to enter without inspection between ports of entry). Individuals may also apply directly for asylum within one year of entry to the U.S. or later, if conditions in their country have changed since their entry.

**Refugee:** An individual who is currently residing outside of the United States, and who demonstrates that they were persecuted or have a well-founded fear of persecution because of race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group.

The United States accepts a designated number of refugees each year from locations outside of the United States who are processed in cooperation with the UN High Commission on Refugees. If accepted for resettlement, the Office of Refugee Resettlement of the Department of Health and Human Services works with designated nonprofit refugee agencies in the United States to determine where they will reside in the United States.

**In contrast to asylees, refugees are only processed while abroad.**

**Visa:** A visa is the document the U.S. gives to a noncitizen to enter the U.S. A person may get a visa from U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) or from a U.S. consular official in another country. Visas for people who are in the U.S. temporarily are called nonimmigrant visas. Most people with immigrant visas will eventually get a card that identifies their immigration status, for example, a “green card.”

**The Special Immigrant Visa (SIV)** is an immigration program that grants permanent residence to people who aided the U.S. government abroad. In the wake of the United States’ departure from Afghanistan, thousands of refugees have been attempting to obtain Special Immigrant Visas (SIVs).

**Resettlement Agency:** The resettlement agencies assist refugees during their initial resettlement in the United States, including enrolling in employment services, registering youth for school, applying for Social Security cards, and connecting them with necessary social or language services.

**Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA):** DACA is a program created by executive action under the Obama administration to allow people who arrived without authorization in the United States as children to apply for an administrative deferment of their deportation, as well as a work permit. They must reapply every two years and maintain a clean record. President Trump tried to end the program but has been stopped by several federal courts in ongoing litigation.

**“DREAMers”:** A general term referring not just to those who were eligible to apply for the DACA program but any unauthorized immigrant in the United States who arrived as a child and has grown up here. The term derives from the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act, which has been introduced in various forms since the early 2000’s.

**Temporary Protected Status (TPS)** is granted by the Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to eligible foreign-born individuals who are unable to return home safely due to conditions or circumstances preventing their country from adequately handling the return. Beneficiaries are not eligible for any public assistance by virtue of their TPS status.