

Immigration Language Guide

Context:

There is terminology created by the government and there are terms used by the immigrant community. It is important to understand all terms and consider the context and audience you are speaking to when deciding which term is appropriate to use.

For example, [USCIS has a glossary of terms](#) that are important to understand when filling out legal immigration related documents.

With regard to the immigrant community, Define American is an immigrant-led national non-profit media and culture organization. On the [Define American website](#), there is a media reference guide with a glossary, available for download, for all immigrant advocates.

Language is ever changing and there are times when terminology is not agreed upon. With that being said, MIRA has created the following list of the most commonly used terms in immigration and understands that the use of these terms may change over time.

Terms and Definitions:

Immigrant: An immigrant is a person living in a country other than that of his or her birth. No matter if that person has taken the citizenship of the destination country.

Immigrate: come to live permanently in a foreign country.

Non-Immigrant: Persons seeking entry into the U.S. for a limited period of time and for a specific purpose and does not intend to leave their home country permanently. For example, those with a visa as a visitor, student, or temporary worker.

New arrival: an immigrant who has very recently arrived in the U.S.

Citizen: A citizen of the United States is a person born in the United States or in certain territories of the U.S., such as Puerto Rico and Guam. Certain persons born abroad are also citizens at birth by acquisition through a citizen parent or parents. One also can become a citizen through derivation of citizenship and naturalization.

Non-Citizen: A person who is not a US citizen.

Mixed-Status Immigrants: A group of people that have different immigration statuses.

Lawful Permanent Resident: a person who has a green card is lawfully authorized to live permanently within the United States.

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Naturalization: The process of going from being a Lawful Permanent Resident (green card holder) to being granted U.S. citizenship. Individuals age 18 or older must answer a number of questions about U.S. history and laws, and demonstrate they can speak English (with some exceptions), among other requirements. The citizenship process culminates in an oath ceremony.

Undocumented or Unauthorized Immigrant: A person who is present in the US without the permission of the US government. The person may have entered without being properly inspected by an immigration officer or entered lawfully on a temporary visa and violated the terms of that visa, usually by remaining in the US beyond their authorized stay.

DACA: In 2012, the Obama administration created Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), a work authorization and deportation relief program for eligible immigrants who came to the U.S. as children.

DACA-Recipient: A person that applied and received temporary protection from deportation through President Obama's 2012 Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) policy. This status allows certain people who came to the United States as children to obtain two-year, renewable work permits and protection from deportation.

Advance parole: Formal permission granted by the Department of Homeland Security to a non-citizen whose application has not yet been decided or who is in some form of temporary status to leave the U.S. temporarily and come back later to resume the application or status the person had before departure.

Refugee: Any person outside their country of nationality who is unable or unwilling to return to that country because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution based on the person's race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. In the U.S., this term applies to someone who has been officially recognized as meeting the definition of a refugee after applying for refugee status from outside the U.S. and has been resettled in the U.S.

Asylum: Asylum is the status given to people who have left their country because they have been or may be persecuted for their political beliefs, race, religion, nationality, or membership in a social group, and who apply for protection while they are at the border or physically in the U.S.

Asylee: A person who has been granted Asylum.

Displaced person: a person who is forced to leave their home because of war, persecution, or natural disaster.

Temporary Protected Status: The secretary of the Department of Homeland Security may designate nationals of a foreign country for Temporary Protected Status (TPS) due to conditions that temporarily prevent the country's nationals from returning safely, or in certain circumstances, where the country is unable to handle the return of its nationals adequately.



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TPS-Holder: A person who has applied for and received Temporary Protected Status.

EOIR: The Executive Office for Immigration Review (EOIR) is an agency within the Department of Justice that adjudicates immigration court cases. EOIR judges decide whether a non-citizen may be removed or deported from the United States or allowed to stay and granted lawful status.

USCIS: U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, an agency of the Department of Homeland Security. The agency adjudicates petitions for immigration benefits (asylum, green cards, citizenship, humanitarian protections, special visas).

ICE: Immigration and Customs Enforcement, an agency of the Department of Homeland Security. The agency includes Immigration Police / Enforcement, Detention & Deportation, and represents the Department of Homeland Security in immigration proceedings

CBP: Customs and Border Protection, an agency of the Department of Homeland Security that is responsible for securing the borders and facilitating the lawful movement of people and goods. The agency enforces at the border and within 100 miles of the border, checkpoints, and ports of entries.

Deportation: A formal removal of a non-citizen from the United States when they have been found removable for violating the immigration laws.

Detainee: A person who is taken into custody by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officers. This is a civil form of detention, not a criminal one.

Sanctuary City: The term refers to a municipality where local law enforcement do not ask for, or disclose, the immigration status of people they come into contact with. This term refers to municipalities that have taken some steps to be immigrant friendly and limit interactions and information sharing between local law enforcement and immigration enforcement. It should be noted these policies do not protect from federal enforcement, in that sense there are no sanctuary cities.

Migrant: Migrants are people on the move either within their home countries or internationally, who do not necessarily intend to stay at their destination indefinitely.

It's important to note that "migrant" is often used as an umbrella term when people's motivation for crossing borders, or their ultimate status after arrival, is unclear. Xenophobes have been using this word as a pejorative. It has begun to carry negative connotations, and in most situations the word "immigrant" can be used instead.

Alien - a pejorative term used to describe any person who is not a citizen or national of the United States.(It is also the term used in U.S. immigration laws).

Illegal Immigrant - a pejorative term used to describe a person who is present in the US without the permission of the US government.