



## Immigration Myths and Facts

**Myth:** Immigrating to the United States for work or family is easy.

**Fact:** Only 5,000 visas are available for low-skilled workers each year, yet our economy relies on millions of undocumented laborers.<sup>1</sup> Families wait years for reunification. Lawful permanent residents face waits of more than five years for their spouses to get visas and join them. Siblings of permanent residents wait 10–22 years for visas.<sup>2</sup>

**Myth:** Immigrants take jobs away from Americans.

**Fact:** Between 2000 and 2005 the availability of native-born low-wage workers declined by approximately 1.8 million. In the same period the number of low-wage immigrant workers increased by 620,000, thus offsetting the total decline by about a third.<sup>3</sup>

**Myth:** Immigrants don't pay taxes.

**Fact:** All immigrants pay taxes. Even undocumented immigrants pay sales taxes and real estate taxes (either directly as homeowners or indirectly through rent). The Social Security Administration estimates that three-quarters of undocumented immigrants contribute payroll taxes, including \$6–7 billion in Social Security taxes that will never benefit them.<sup>4</sup>

**Myth:** Immigrants are a drain on the economy.

**Fact:** Approximately 26 million immigrants currently residing in the United States arrived after the age of 18 and are in prime working age. They represent roughly \$2.8 trillion to U.S. taxpayers, who receive the benefit of their labor without the cost of their education.<sup>5</sup>

1. Michele Waslin. "Why Don't They Just Get in Line? The Real Story of Getting a Green Card and Coming to the U.S. Legally," report (Immigration Policy Center of the American Immigration Law Foundation, March 2008), <http://www.immigrationpolicy.org/images/File/factcheck/WhyDontTheyGetInLine03-08.pdf> (accessed March 12, 2009).

2. *Visa Bulletin* 8, no. 118, (Department of State, May 2008), [http://travel.state.gov/visa/frvi/bulletin/bulletin\\_4205.html](http://travel.state.gov/visa/frvi/bulletin/bulletin_4205.html) (accessed March 12, 2009).

3. Randolph Capps, Karina Fortuny, Michael E. Fix. "Trends in the Low-Wage Immigrant Labor Force, 2000-2005," report (Urban Institute, March 2007), <http://www.urban.org/publications/411426.html> (accessed March 12, 2009).

4. Eduardo Porter, "Illegal Immigrants Are Bolstering Social Security with Billions," *New York Times*, April 5, 2005, <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/04/05/business/05immigration.html> (accessed March 12, 2009).

5. "It's Tax Time! Immigrants and Taxes: Contributions to State and Federal Cooffers," Immigration Fact Check (Immigration Policy Center of the American Immigration Law Foundation, April 2008), <http://www.immigrationpolicy.org/index.php?content=fc080412> (accessed March 12, 2009).

**Myth:** Immigrants come to the United States to get welfare.

**Fact:** Documented immigrants are prohibited from receiving most federal government benefits for at least five years after they arrive in the United States. They work and pay taxes, but do not receive benefits. Immigrants without papers can get emergency medical care but cannot receive welfare, food stamps or Social Security.<sup>6</sup>

**Myth:** Immigrants send all their money back to their home countries.

**Fact:** While many immigrants do send money back to their families in other countries, they contribute to the U.S. economy in other ways. Through consumer spending and entrepreneurship, immigrants contribute \$162 billion in tax revenue to federal, state and local governments.<sup>7</sup>

**Myth:** Immigrants don't want to learn English or become citizens.

**Fact:** 65% of immigrants over age 5 who speak a language other than English at home speak English "very well" or "well."<sup>8</sup> Many adult immigrants want to become proficient in English, but the demand for ESL instruction far outweighs the supply. Over 1 million immigrants applied for naturalization in 2007, but only 48% were granted approval.<sup>9</sup> This shows not only the desire of immigrants to become citizens but also the limitations they face.

**Myth:** Most immigrants are here illegally.

**Fact:** Out of roughly 31 million foreign-born residents in the United States, 63% are documented. The remaining 37% are undocumented.<sup>10</sup>

**Myth:** Immigrants are uneducated.

**Fact:** More than 1.3 million (1 in 5) college-educated immigrants living in the United States are unemployed or are underemployed in positions such as taxi drivers, dishwashers and security guards. Many educated immigrants are unable to make full use of their academic and professional credentials, but must pursue expensive and lengthy recertification before resuming their former career paths.<sup>11</sup>

**Myth:** Letting in more immigrants leads to an increase in crime.

**Fact:** Research indicates that higher immigration levels either have no effect on crime rates or are associated with lower levels of crime and violence.<sup>12</sup> The incarceration rate of those born in the United States is four times higher than the incarceration rate of the foreign-born.<sup>13</sup>

6. "Separating Fact from Fiction: Refugees, Immigrants and Public Benefits" Immigration Fact Check (Immigration Policy Center of the American Immigration Law Foundation, September 8, 2008), <http://www.immigrationpolicy.org/images/File/factcheck/RefugeesImmigrantsandPublicBenefits9-8-08.pdf> (accessed March 12, 2009).

7. AILA InfoNet Doc. No. 09021836 (American Immigration Lawyers Association, Feb. 18, 2009) <http://aila.org/content/default.aspx?docid=28041> (accessed March 12, 2009).

8. Elizabeth Grieco. "English Abilities of the U.S. Foreign-Born Population," article (Migration Policy Institute, Jan. 1, 2003), <http://www.migrationinformation.org/USFocus/display.cfm?ID=84> (accessed March 12, 2009).

9. *2007 Yearbook of Immigration Statistics*, (Department of Homeland Security, 2008), 51, [http://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/statistics/yearbook/2007/ois\\_2007\\_yearbook.pdf](http://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/statistics/yearbook/2007/ois_2007_yearbook.pdf) (accessed March 12, 2009).

10. Michael Hoefler, Nancy Rytina, and Bryan C. Baker. "Estimates of the Unauthorized Immigrant Population Residing in the United States: January 2008," policy directorate (Department of Homeland Security, Office of Immigration Statistics, February 2009), [http://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/statistics/publications/ois\\_ill\\_pe\\_2008.pdf](http://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/statistics/publications/ois_ill_pe_2008.pdf) (accessed March 12, 2009).

11. Jeanne Batalova and Michael Fix. "Uneven Progress: The Employment Pathways of Skilled Immigrants in the United States," report (Migration Policy Institute, October 2009), 1, <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/pubs/BrainWasteOct08.pdf> (accessed March 12, 2009).

12. Ramiro Martinez Jr. *Immigration and Crime: Ethnicity, Race, and Violence* (New York: New York University, 2006), 10, <http://www.nyupress.org/webchapters/0814757049chapt1.pdf> (accessed March 12 2009).

13. Ruben G. Rumbaut, et al., "Debunking the Myth of Immigrant Criminality: Imprisonment Among First- and Second-Generation Young Men," article (Migration Policy Institute, June 1, 2006), <http://www.migrationinformation.org/Feature/print.cfm?ID=403> (accessed March 12, 2009).