

Last updated: August 5, 2011

## Immigration Myths and Facts

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

**Fact:** Visas for employment-based immigration have limited and static numerical caps. Immigrants who travel to the United States for employment purposes must often have very specific qualifications that make them “persons of extraordinary ability.”<sup>1</sup> Employers and migrant employees must undergo a lengthy and costly process to verify that no U.S. worker is available to fill the position. The total number of employment-based visas allocated is 140,000 each year.<sup>2</sup> The business community has called this number too low and the process cumbersome.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, even though the U.S. economy relies on millions of low-skilled migrant workers, every year only 5,000 green cards are available for this population.<sup>4</sup>

➤ **Myth: Immigrants come to the United States and then bring their extended families join them, causing a chain of migration to the U.S.**

**Fact:** Immigration law allows U.S. citizens to petition for their spouses, children, parents, and siblings. Green card holders may petition for their spouses, unmarried adult children and parents, but not their siblings or married adult children.<sup>5</sup> The ability to petition, however, in no way guarantees an easy or speedy reunification for these families. There are currently millions of family members waiting to be reunified with their close family members in the United States, some of whom face waits of years, even decades.<sup>6</sup>

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

**Fact:** Of the roughly 40.2 million foreign-born residents in the United States, 68% are living in the country either as U.S. citizens or legal permanent residents (“green card holders”).<sup>7</sup> Of the remaining 32%, 28% are undocumented and 4% are legal temporary workers.<sup>8</sup>

➤ **Myth: Undocumented immigrants give birth to children in the United States to avoid deportation.**

<sup>1</sup> “Employment-based Immigration to the United States: A Fact Sheet,” (Immigration Policy Center, March, 29, 2011), <http://www.immigrationpolicy.org/just-facts/employment-based-immigration-united-states-fact-sheet> (accessed August 3, 2011).

<sup>2</sup> “Creating a “Brain Gain” for U.S. Employers: The Role of Immigration” (Brookings Institution, Policy Brief, January 2011), [http://www.brookings.edu/papers/2011/01\\_immigration\\_west.aspx](http://www.brookings.edu/papers/2011/01_immigration_west.aspx) (accessed August 2, 2011).

<sup>3</sup> Stephanie Gleason “U.S. Business Leaders Press Senate Panel for More Work Visas” Wall Street Journal, July 27, 2011. <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424053111903999904576470212661178134.html> (accessed August 3, 2011).

<sup>4</sup> “Employment-based Immigration to the United States: A Fact Sheet,” (Immigration Policy Center, March, 29, 2011), <http://www.immigrationpolicy.org/just-facts/employment-based-immigration-united-states-fact-sheet> (accessed August 2, 2011).

<sup>5</sup> Frequently Asked Questions on Family Immigration” *Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service*, Oct. 2009.

<http://www.lirs.org/atf/cf/%7Ba9ddb5e-c6b5-4c63-89de-91d2f09a28ca%7D/FACTSHEETFAMILYBASEDUSIMMIGRATION.PDF>

<sup>6</sup> Visa Bulletin, Volume IX, Number 34, July 2011. [http://travel.state.gov/visa/bulletin/bulletin\\_5489.html](http://travel.state.gov/visa/bulletin/bulletin_5489.html) (accessed August 2, 2011)

<sup>7</sup> “The Unauthorized Population Today” (Immigration Policy Center, March 22, 2011) <http://www.immigrationpolicy.org/just-facts/unauthorized-population-today> (accessed August 2, 2011).

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

**Fact:** When an undocumented immigrant gives birth to a child in the United States, that child automatically becomes a U.S. citizen.<sup>9</sup> Undocumented individuals, however, are at risk of being arrested, detained and deported even if they have U.S. citizen children. Between 1998 and 2007, the federal government estimates that it deported more than 108,000 parents of U.S. citizen children,<sup>10</sup> and deportation and detention levels continue to rise. If a U.S. citizen wants to petition for his or her foreign-born parents, U.S. immigration law requires the child to be at least 21 years old.<sup>11</sup>

➤ **Myth: All migrants choose to leave their home countries.**

**Fact:** Many migrants are forced from their home countries because of conflict or religious and political persecution. These migrants are called refugees or asylum-seekers. To be granted refugee<sup>12</sup> status in the United States, individuals must prove that they have a “well-founded fear of persecution” in their home country based on five protected categories: religion, political opinion, membership of a particular social group, race or nationality. If the migrants meet this definition, the federal government grants them protection, work authorization and an eventual path to U.S. citizenship.<sup>13</sup>

➤ **Myth: Unlike previous generations of immigrants, immigrants today do not integrate into American culture,**

**Fact:** Recent immigrants and their children are integrating into the U.S. economy in a similar fashion to previous immigrant families. While first-generation immigrants tend to be employed in narrow economic sectors, their children engage in broader professional fields that closely resemble those of U.S.-born citizens.<sup>14</sup> More than 90% of the children of first generation immigrants speak English, regardless of their country of origin.<sup>15</sup>

➤ **Myth: Immigrants are uneducated.**

**Fact:** While some immigrants do arrive to the United States without high school degrees, more than 11% of foreign-born workers have advanced degrees. More than 1.9% have PhDs, which is a slightly higher percentage than U.S. citizens with commensurate schooling.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, 1 in 5 (more than 1.3 million) 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. In order to resume their former career paths, some may need to complete expensive and lengthy recertification processes.<sup>17</sup>

➤ **Myth: Immigration leads to an increase in crime and violence.**

**Fact:** Crime rates are lowest in states with the highest immigration growth rates. For example, according

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<sup>9</sup> U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service.

<http://www.uscis.gov/portal/site/uscis/menuitem.eyJ1d4c2a3e5b9ac89243c6a7543f6d1a/?vgnextoid=a2ec6811264a3210VgnVCM100000b92ca60aRCRD&vgnnextchannel=a2ec6811264a3210VgnVCM100000b92ca60aRCRD> (accessed August 2, 2011)

<sup>10</sup> U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service.

<http://www.uscis.gov/portal/site/uscis/menuitem.eyJ1d4c2a3e5b9ac89243c6a7543f6d1a/?vgnextoid=a2ec6811264a3210VgnVCM100000b92ca60aRCRD&vgnnextchannel=a2ec6811264a3210VgnVCM100000b92ca60aRCRD> (accessed August 18, 2010)

<sup>11</sup> U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service. February 2010. “A Guide to Naturalization M-476” <http://www.uscis.gov/files/article/chapter4.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> “Definitions and Obligations: Refugee.” *United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees*, 2010 <http://www.unhcr.org.au/basicdef.shtml> (accessed Oct. 12, 2010).

<sup>13</sup> “Resettling Refugees in America” *U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants*.

<http://refugees.org/article.aspx?id=1092&rid=1176&subm=40&area=About%20Refugees> (accessed October 12, 2010)

<sup>14</sup> Michael Greenstone and Adam Looney. “Ten Economic Facts About Immigration.” *The Brookings Institute*, Sept. 2010.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> Michael Greenstone and Adam Looney. “Ten Economic Facts About Immigration.” *The Brookings Institute*, Sept. 2010

<sup>17</sup> Jeanne Batalova and Michael Fix. “Uneven Progress: The Employment Pathways of Skilled Immigrants in the United States,” report (Migration Policy Institute, October 2008), 1, <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/pubs/BrainWasteOct08.pdf> (accessed March 12, 2009).

to federal government statistics, violent crimes in Arizona dropped an estimated 1,500 between 2005 and 2008 and property crimes dropped about 9,000. Meanwhile, Arizona's population grew by 600,000 between 2005 and 2008, much of it through immigration.<sup>18</sup> Nationally, the incarceration rate for native-born men age 18-39 has been five times *higher* than the rate for immigrant men. In addition, while the undocumented immigrant population in the United States doubled from 1994 to 2005, the violent crime rate declined by 34.2% and the property crime rate fell by 26.4%.<sup>19</sup> According to U.S. Census data, native-born citizens are five times more likely than immigrants to be in a correctional facility or mental hospital.<sup>20</sup>

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

**Fact:** Immigrants at all skill levels actually create job opportunities for U.S. citizens. Reports have found that, generally, immigrant labor is differentiated and complementary to native labor,<sup>21</sup> resulting in limited competition in the short-run and increased job opportunities in the long-run.<sup>22</sup> Ultimately, immigrants have a positive effect on native workers – they raise average wages and lower the prices of goods and services.<sup>23</sup>

➤ **Myth: Immigrants drain federal resources without contributing economically.**

**Fact:** Over the past two decades, immigrants have played a central role in the cycle of the economic rebirth of American cities. Cities with thriving immigrant populations – with both high-earning and lower-wage workers – have seen increased standards of living for all residents.<sup>24</sup> Research shows that immigrants are 30 percent more likely than U.S.-born citizens to form new businesses.<sup>25</sup> Research also shows that taxes paid by both legal and undocumented immigrants exceed the costs of the services these migrants utilize.<sup>26</sup> Most legal immigrants are prohibited from receiving most federal government benefits for five years after they arrive in the United States, even while they work and pay taxes.

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

**Fact:** All immigrants pay taxes regardless of their immigration status. Undocumented immigrants pay sales taxes and real estate taxes, either directly as homeowners or indirectly through rent. What is more, the Social Security Administration estimates that 50-75% of unauthorized immigrants pay federal, state, and local taxes, including Medicare<sup>27</sup> and \$6–7 billion in Social Security taxes that will never benefit them.<sup>28</sup> Beyond these contributions, households headed by undocumented immigrants contributed an estimated \$11.2 billion in state and local taxes in 2010 alone. That figure includes \$1.2 billion in personal income taxes, \$1.6 billion in property taxes, and \$8.4 billion in sales taxes.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> "Crime Stats Test Rational Behind Arizona Immigration Law," CNN April 29, 2010. [http://articles.cnn.com/2010-04-29/justice/arizona.immigration.crime\\_1\\_sen-russell-pearce-illegal-immigration-immigration-law?\\_s=PM:CRIME](http://articles.cnn.com/2010-04-29/justice/arizona.immigration.crime_1_sen-russell-pearce-illegal-immigration-immigration-law?_s=PM:CRIME) (accessed August 2, 2011)

<sup>19</sup> "Immigrants and Crime: Are They Connected? A Century of Research Finds that Crime Rates for Immigrants are Lower than for the Native-Born" Center for Immigration Policy, October 25, 2008. <http://www.immigrationpolicy.org/just-facts/immigrants-and-crime-are-they-connected-century-research-finds-crime-rates-immigrants-are> (Accessed August 2, 2011).

<sup>20</sup> Michael Greenstone and Adam Looney. "Ten Economic Facts About Immigration." *The Brookings Institute*, Sept. 2010.

<sup>21</sup> Greenstone and Looney.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Julia Preston. "Workforce Fueled by Highly Skilled Immigrants," *New York Times*. April 15, 2010.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/16/us/16skilled.html>

<sup>25</sup> Michael Greenstone and Adam Looney. "Ten Economic Facts About Immigration." *The Brookings Institute*, Sept. 2010.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> "The Impact of Unauthorized Immigrants on the Budgets of State and Local Governments," (Congressional Budget Office Dec. 2007), <http://cbo.gov/ftpdocs/87xx/doc8711/12-6-Immigration.pdf#page=5> (accessed April 26, 2010).

<sup>28</sup> 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 April 27, 2010).

<sup>29</sup> "Unauthorized Immigrants Pay Taxes, Too" Immigration Policy Center, March 18, 2011. <http://www.immigrationpolicy.org/just-facts/unauthorized-immigrants-pay-taxes-too> (Accessed August 2, 2011)