Immigration Myths and Facts

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

Fact: Visas for employment-based immigration have numerical caps, require immigrants to fit specific qualifications that demonstrate “extraordinary ability” and require employers to complete a lengthy verification process to ensure no U.S. worker is available for the position.¹

- There are 14,000 employment-based visas allocated annually.²
- Only 5,000 employment-based visas are for low-skilled positions, despite the high demand for these workers.³

Myth: Immigrants frequently bring their extended families with them.

Fact: U.S. citizens can only petition for spouses, children, parents and siblings. Legal permanent residents can petition for spouses, unmarried adult children and parents, but not siblings or married adult children.⁴

Along with the limits on relatives eligible for petitions, the application process is lengthy and complex. Thus, there are millions of family members waiting to reunify with close family members, some of whom face waits of years or decades.⁵

Myth: Most immigrants are here illegally.

Fact: The US has 40.2 million foreign-born residents.

- 68% are US citizens or legal permanent residents
- 28% are undocumented
- 4% are legal temporary workers

More than 70% of immigrants are in the United States legally.⁶

Myth: Undocumented immigrants give birth to children in the United States to avoid deportations.


- In the first six months of 2011, the U.S. deported more than 46,000 parents of U.S. citizen children.⁷
- If a U.S. citizen wants to petition for foreign-born parents, the child must be at least 21 years old.

Myth: Immigrants take jobs away from Americans.

Fact: Immigrants at all skill levels actually create job opportunities for U.S citizens.

- Immigrants are 30 % more likely than U.S.-born citizens to form new businesses.
- Immigrant labor is complementary to native labor, resulting in limited competition in the short-run and increased job opportunities in the long-run.⁸

Myth: Immigrants drain resources without contributing economically or paying taxes.
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.\textsuperscript{ix}
- Taxes paid by both legal and undocumented immigrants exceed the costs of the services these migrants utilize. \textsuperscript{x}

Myth: All migrants choose to leave their home countries and do not integrate into American culture.

Fact: Many migrants, such as refugees or asylum seekers, are forced from their home countries because of conflict or religious and political persecution.
- To be granted refugee 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.

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 resemble those of U.S.-born citizens.
- More than 90% of second generation immigrants speak English, regardless of their country of origin.\textsuperscript{xi}

Myth: Immigrants are uneducated and increase crime rates.

Fact: More than 11% of foreign-born workers have advanced degrees.\textsuperscript{xii}
- 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 due to expensive recertification processes to resume previous careers.\textsuperscript{xiii}
- Crime rates are lowest in states with the highest immigration growth rates.\textsuperscript{xiv}
- The undocumented population doubled from 1994 to 2005 nationally, the violent crime rate declined by 34.2% and the property crime rate fell by 26.4%.\textsuperscript{xv}

\textsuperscript{i} Employment-based Immigration to the United States: A Fact Sheet (Immigration Policy Center, March 2011).
\textsuperscript{ii} Creating a "Brain Gain" for U.S. Employers: The Role of Immigration (Brookings Institution, Policy Brief, Jan. 2011).
\textsuperscript{iii} Employment-based Immigration to the United States: A Fact Sheet (Immigration Policy Center, March 2011).
\textsuperscript{iv} Family of U.S. Citizens (U.S. Citizen and Immigration Services, April 2011).
\textsuperscript{v} Visa Bulletin, Volume IX, Number 42 (U.S. Department of State, March 2012).
\textsuperscript{vi} The Unauthorized Population Today (Immigration Policy Center, March 22, 2011).
\textsuperscript{vii} Shattered Families: The Perilous Intersection of Immigration Enforcement and the Child Welfare System (Applied Research Center, Nov. 2011)
\textsuperscript{viii} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{ix} Julia Preston. Workforce Fueled by Highly Skilled Immigrants (New York Times, April 15, 2010).
\textsuperscript{x} Ten Economic Facts About Immigration (The Brookings Institute, Sept. 2010).
\textsuperscript{xi} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{xii} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{xiii} Uneven Progress: The Employment Pathways of Skilled Immigrants in the United States (Migration Policy Institute, Oct. 2008).
\textsuperscript{xiv} Crime Stats Test Rational Behind Arizona Immigration Law (CNN, April 29, 2010).
\textsuperscript{xv} 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, Oct. 2008).