



UNDERSTANDING IMMIGRATION TERMINOLOGY



Immigrant vs. Immigrant of undocumented status

Immigrant: This term continues to be inclusive, referring to foreign-born individuals who have moved to a new country intending to reside permanently. It includes people who may be here through legal processes, unauthorized status, or humanitarian visas.

- *Clarification:* The distinction between immigrants coming voluntarily or involuntarily (due to factors like violence, poverty, or disasters) remains accurate. However, the immigration landscape may be changing as many people migrate due to factors such as climate change, economic instability, and human rights violations.

Immigrant of undocumented status: The description of immigrants without legal status is still accurate. The use of the term “undocumented” is widely advocated over “illegal,” as the latter is considered stigmatizing. The analogy with a pedestrian not following the law is a helpful one to highlight why the term “illegal” is inappropriate.



Refugee vs. Asylum Seeker

Refugee: The definition remains correct. Refugees are individuals who are outside their country of origin and have fled due to well-founded fears of persecution.

Asylum Seeker: The distinction between refugees and asylum seekers remains accurate. Asylum seekers apply for asylum or refugee status after entering a new country, and they must demonstrate that their fear of persecution is genuine.



Dreamers vs. DACA

The DREAM Act (Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors): continues to be a central piece of proposed legislation, but it has not passed into law. While the term “Dreamers” commonly refers to undocumented immigrants brought to the U.S. as children (usually under 18), the status is evolving as part of broader immigration debates.

DACA: This program still exists, though it has faced challenges in the courts. As of January 2025, DACA protections remain in place for recipients, but the program has not been expanded, and a permanent legislative solution has not been enacted. DACA recipients can still receive protection from deportation and obtain work authorization, but the lack of a clear pathway to citizenship remains a significant issue.



Resources used:

- 1. U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS):** This is the official government website for U.S. immigration information. It provides current, authoritative details on immigration, asylum, and DACA policies.
 - Link: [USCIS - Immigration and Citizenship](#)
- 2. American Immigration Council:** A nonprofit organization that provides research and analysis on immigration issues in the U.S. Their reports often cover key topics like refugees, asylum seekers, and DACA.
 - Link: [American Immigration Council](#)
- 3. Pew Research Center:** This organization frequently publishes studies and reports related to U.S. immigration trends, including information on refugees, asylum seekers, and DACA recipients.
 - Link: [Pew Research - Immigration](#)
- 4. National Immigration Law Center (NILC):** They provide resources and policy updates on issues related to immigration, including refugees, DACA, and undocumented immigrants.
 - Link: [National Immigration Law Center](#)
- 5. International Rescue Committee (IRC):** This organization provides information and resources about refugees and asylum seekers, including definitions and policy discussions.
 - Link: [International Rescue Committee](#)

For scholarly and legal definitions, you can also cite academic articles or legal sources, such as those found in:

- **Google Scholar** or **JSTOR** for academic papers on immigration terminology.
- **Cornell Legal Information Institute** for legal definitions related to asylum, refugees, and immigration law.
 - Link: [Legal Information Institute - Immigration](#)