
TALKING IMMIGRATION



MIGRANTS DO HAVE RIGHTS

All people are entitled to treatment with dignity and respect. Human rights protect everyone, regardless of whether lawfully in a country. The Constitution of the United States protects citizens and non-citizens alike. While some Constitutional protections are limited to citizens, most extend to “persons” and apply regardless of immigration status. The right to remain silent, freedom from unwarranted searches, and the right to due process of law all are guaranteed regardless of immigration status. International human rights law guarantees that everyone, regardless of immigration status, has the right to freedom from arbitrary arrest or detention, interference with privacy, family, home, correspondence, or property. Everyone has the right to due process under law. Human rights law also guarantees respect for the unity of the family, access to just working conditions, protection of refugees, and freedom from discrimination based on race or national origin.

THE PUSH FACTORS: EFFECTS OF HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS ABROAD

Migration to the U.S. is migration *from* somewhere. Migration often is often driven by human rights violations. U.S. immigration law allows a small fraction of the world’s refugees to seek safety here, but refugee status is afforded only to those fleeing persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, social group membership, or political opinion. While undocumented people are characterized as “economic migrants” who “choose” to come to the U.S., this characterization grossly understates the deprivation of the human rights to food, water, shelter, education, and work.

A CALL TO WELCOME THE STRANGER

The Hebrew Bible tells us: “The strangers who sojourn with you shall be to you as the natives among you, and you shall love them as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt” (Leviticus 19:33-34). In the New Testament, Jesus tells us to welcome the stranger, for “what you do to the least of my brethren, you do unto me” (Matthew 25:40). The Qur’an tells us that we should “do good to...those in need, neighbors who are near, neighbors who are strangers, the companion by your side, the wayfarer that you meet” (4:36). The Hindu Taitiriya Upanishad tells us: “The guest is a representative of God” (1.11.2).

IMMIGRATING ISN’T EASY

U.S. immigration policy is far from unlimited. People often complain that undocumented workers should “get in line” for a visa without understanding that there is no line. People may immigrate based only on very close family ties, employer sponsorship, or refugee protection. Only a small number of visas are available for immigration of low-skilled workers each year. Families wait years for reunification. The myth of “anchor babies” conferring status on their undocumented parents is simply untrue – only U.S. citizens who are over 21 years of age can petition for their parents to immigrate.

HATE IN THE DEBATE

The anti-immigrant Federation for American Immigration Reform, a leading source of information in the immigration debate, has been designated as a hate group by the Southern Poverty Law Center. The SPLC notes that FAIR is the creation of a man who operates a racist publishing company and has publicly compared immigrants to “bacteria.” FAIR has employed members of white supremacist groups in key positions and has promotes racist conspiracy theories. FAIR has accepted more than \$1 million from the Pioneer Fund, a racist foundation devoted to eugenics and to proving a connection between race and intelligence.

IMMIGRANTS CONTRIBUTE MORE THAN THEY COST

Restrictionists paint a picture of the “costs” of immigration by comparing taxes paid against benefits used, but they fail to tell the whole story. Left out is the contribution to the economy made by immigrants. Nationwide, Hispanic business owners alone provided jobs to an estimated 1.5 million employees, had receipts of over \$222 billion, and generated \$36.7 billion payroll dollars in 2002 alone. In addition, the roughly 26 million immigrants now in the United States who arrived after the age of 18 represent a windfall of roughly \$2.8 trillion to U.S taxpayers, who get the benefit of their labor without the cost of their upbringing and education.

IMMIGRANTS LEARN ENGLISH

Immigrants are motivated to learn English because of its high economic and social value. Immigrants today learn English at the same rate or more quickly than previous generations of immigrants. Nearly 1.2 million adults attended English as a Second Language classes in 2002-03.

IMMIGRANTS PAY TAXES

Everyone, including legal permanent residents, visitors, students, and undocumented people, pays taxes. Everyone pays sales and property taxes. Every worker on the payroll pays state and federal income taxes. Immigrants are large contributors to Social Security and play a vital role in financing Social Security as the U.S. population ages.

IMMIGRANT WORKER PROTECTIONS RAISE WAGES OF ALL WORKERS

The best way to protect all workers is to ensure that employers follow applicable wage and hour laws and other laws designed to protect workers from exploitation. Instead of blaming immigrant workers for low wages, a better solution is to end the tolerance for exploitative conditions for all workers.

IMMIGRANTS HAVE LITTLE ACCESS TO PUBLIC ASSISTANCE

Only refugees, asylees, and a small category of legal immigrants are eligible to receive any public benefits. U.S. citizens or permanent residents who sponsor family members’ immigration must sign affidavits of support and their income is deemed to be the immigrant’s income when determining eligibility for public benefits. Even those who are eligible are subject to strict time limited. Undocumented people are prohibited from all public benefits, with the exception of emergency medical assistance.

IMMIGRANTS DO NOT CAUSE AN INCREASE IN CRIME

Research indicates that higher levels of immigration either have no effect on crime rates or are associated with lower levels of crime. The incarceration rates of those born in the U.S. are four times higher than of the foreign-born population.

