

# Building Understanding Creating Change

## Defending the Rights of Immigrant Workers

### Glossary of Terms

**Citizen:** A person who has full legal rights to participate in the affairs of the country. In the United States, citizenship may be acquired through birth or through the process of naturalization.

**Employer sanctions:** The current employer sanctions provision of the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 is intended to prohibit employers from hiring, recruiting or referring for a fee undocumented workers to work in the United States. Violators of the law are subject to a series of civil fines for violations or criminal penalties when there is a pattern or practice of violations. However, the current system has not deterred the hiring of undocumented workers and actually protects employers who violate labor law as a matter of business practice.

**Ethnicity:** Reference to a person's membership in a distinct cultural or national group. Many citizens maintain strong ties both to their country of origin and their ethnic group.

**Guest worker:** A foreign national allowed to enter a country for work for a specified period of time, but not take up permanent residence in that country. There are numerous guest worker visa programs, such as the H1-B visa, a temporary work permit for professional positions (those that require a bachelor's degree or equivalent) that allows foreign nationals to live and work in the United States for up to six years; the H2-A program, aimed at agricultural workers working in seasonal jobs; and the H2-B program, for nonprofessional jobs lasting less than one year.

**Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS):** The U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service

(INS), an agency of the Department of Justice, is responsible for enforcing the laws regulating the admission of foreign-born persons to the United States and for administering various immigration benefits, including the naturalization of qualified applicants for U.S. citizenship. The INS also works with the Department of State, the Department of Health and Human Services and the United Nations in the admission and resettlement of refugees. The INS is headed by a commissioner who reports to the attorney general.

**“Legal” immigrant:** A foreign-born individual admitted to live permanently in the United States as a “lawful permanent resident” (LPR). A government-issued card attesting to the legal permanent resident status of a foreign-born person in the United States is commonly called a “green card.”

**National origin:** The country in which one was born. This may be different from one's ethnic origin, country of citizenship or “racial” designation.

**Naturalization:** “Naturalization” is the process by which eligible immigrants become U.S. citizens. Through the naturalization process, immigrants display a willingness to become full members of our society. The process is not an easy one. It requires that immigrants live in the United States for a certain number of years, learn our language, study our history and government, not commit serious crimes and show they are of “good moral character” and, finally, swear allegiance to the United States. The application process itself usually takes six months or longer—not including the years of study that may be required in order to obtain knowledge of English and U.S. history and government.

**“Nonimmigrant” workers:** A technical term for people from other countries permitted to live temporarily in the United States while providing services to employers, sometimes referred to as “guest workers.” Child care workers (au pairs), teachers, farm workers, nurses and computer programmers are among those admitted through various special visa categories.

**“Race”:** A social and political (rather than scientific) way to categorize people on the basis of such physical characteristics as skin color, shape of eyes, texture of hair, body size and physique.

**Refugees and asylees:** Refugees and asylees are people seeking protection in the United States on the grounds they fear persecution in their homeland. A refugee applies for protection while outside the United States. An “asylee” differs from a refugee because the person first comes to the United States and, once here, applies for protection. In both cases,

the applicant must prove that he or she has a “well-founded fear of persecution” based on his or her race, religion, membership in a social group, political opinion or national origin.

**Temporary protected status:** Legal designation that allows people to remain in the United States because of natural disasters or political turmoil in their homeland.

**Undocumented workers:** People who are employed in a country without the official permission of the government.

**Work authorization:** Documentation of a person’s legal authority to work. In the United States, all citizens automatically have work authorization. Noncitizens receive work authorization either through a temporary foreign worker program or because they are “lawful permanent residents.”