

United States Immigrant and Refugee Terminology and Jargon Guide

Social Justice Jargon:

Equity – While diversity and inclusion focus, respectively, on people and process, equity is about outcomes and impact. Improving equity means promoting justice, impartiality, and fairness within the procedures and processes of institutions or systems, as well as their distribution of resources. Tackling equity issues requires an understanding of the underlying or root causes of outcome disparities within our society.

Two-Way Power Sharing – Two-way power sharing is the intentional collaboration and learning between grantor and grantee. It involves democracy, accountability, authenticity, transparency, and openness and begins with increasing the two-way exchange of information between donor and grantee. This form of power sharing is a cooperative structure where members, both donors and past and potential grantees, help to determine the strategy of the fund and who receives funding. The system allows the funders to empower and provide decision making authority to the community which they wish to help such that the community will benefit from the investment. This relationship is based on trust, understanding, and the idea that knowledge comes in many forms. The foundation should promote a culture of learning rather than knowing and therefore bring community members into the conversation.

People and Immigration Status:

Asylee - A foreign national in the United States or at a port of entry who is unable or unwilling to return to his or her country of nationality, or to seek the protection of that country because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution. Persecution or the fear thereof must be based on religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or political opinion. A person is deemed an asylee once they have fled and landed in a country where they are seeking refuge.

Citizen - A U.S. Citizen is defined as an individual born in the U.S., an individual whose parent is a U.S. citizen*, a naturalized U.S. citizen, or an individual born in Puerto Rico, Guam, or the U.S. Virgin Islands.

**The Child Citizenship Act, which applies to both adopted and biological children of U.S. citizens, provides for the automatic acquisition of U.S. citizenship when certain conditions have been met. Specifically, these conditions are:*

One parent is a U.S. citizen by birth or through naturalization, the child is under the age of 18, the child is residing in the United States as a lawful permanent resident and is in the legal and physical custody of the U.S. citizen parent, and if the child is adopted, the adoption must be final.

Emigrant - A person who leaves their own country in order to settle permanently in another country.

Foreign-born - The foreign-born population includes anyone who is not a U.S. citizen at birth, including those who become U.S. citizens through naturalization. The native-born population includes anyone who is a U.S. citizen at birth.

Immigrant - A person who migrates to another country, usually for permanent residence. However, The Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) broadly defines an immigrant, in the U.S., as any non-citizen in the United States.

Internally Displaced Persons - People who are forced to flee their homes, often for the very same reasons as refugees - war, civil conflict, political strife, natural or man-made disasters, and gross human rights abuse - but who remain within their own country and do not cross an international border. They are therefore not eligible for protection under the same international system as refugees. There is no single international body entrusted with their protection and assistance. According to the UNHCR, there are 65.3 million forcibly displaced people in the world.

Lawful Permanent Resident - Any person who is not a citizen of the United States but who is living in the U.S. under legally recognized and lawfully recorded permanent residence as an immigrant. Also known as “permanent resident alien,” “resident alien permit holder,” and “Green Card holder.”

Migrant Worker - The UN Convention on the Rights of Migrants defines a migrant worker as a “person who is to be engaged, is engaged or has been engaged in a remunerated activity in a State of which he or she is not a national.”

Mixed-status family - A family in which one or more parents is a noncitizen and one or more children is a citizen. The Center for American Progress reported, in 2012, that 16.6 million people in the U.S. were living in mixed-status families at that time.

Refugee - A person who is outside his/her country of nationality or habitual residence; has a well-founded fear of persecution because of his/her race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or political opinion; and is unable or unwilling to avail himself/herself of the protection of that country, or to return there, for fear of persecution. The UNHCR has deemed that there are 21.3 million refugees throughout the world.

Temporary Labor Migrants - Temporary labor migrants (also known as guest workers or overseas contract workers) are people who migrate for a limited period of time in order to take up employment and likely send money or goods home as remittances.

Unauthorized/undocumented immigrant - An immigrant who has entered the United States without authorization or proper documentation or a person who entered the United States legally but who has fallen “out of status.” There are approximately 11 million undocumented people currently residing in the U.S.

Policy and Programs

DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) - A U.S. immigration policy passed by the Obama Administration that allows certain undocumented immigrants who arrived in the US before their sixteenth birthday to apply for a deferral of their deportation for two years. The status lasts for 2 years, is renewable and applicants are eligible for employment authorization.

Diversity Visa Program - The Department of State has an annual lottery for immigration to the United States. Up to 55,000 immigrants can enter the United States each year from countries with low rates of immigration to the United States.

Family Reunification Program - Only immediate family members are eligible to petition under the family reunification program. Under the U.S. law, an “immediate family member” is the child, spouse, or parent of the person requesting reunification. To be considered a “child,” the person must be unmarried and under 21 years of age. This means that siblings, cousins, and other family members are not eligible to petition under the current family reunification program.

Family Unity - A special program for spouses and children of people who received residency through Amnesty or Cuban/Haitian Adjustment in the late 1980s (Amnesty was a one-time program, benefiting people who had been living or doing farm work illegally in the United States). Through the Family Unity program, these family members receive a temporary right to live and work in the United States while waiting to become eligible for permanent residence through a family visa petition.

Forced migration - In a broader sense, this includes not only refugees and asylum seekers but also people forced to move due to external factors, such as environmental catastrophes or development projects. This form of migration has similar characteristics to displacement.

Immigrant integration - Integration is the process by which immigrants become accepted into society, both as individuals and as groups. This definition of integration is deliberately left open, because the particular requirements for acceptance by a receiving society vary greatly from country to country. The openness of this definition also reflects the fact that the responsibility for integration rests not with one particular group, but rather with many actors—immigrants themselves, the host government, institutions, and communities, to name a few.

Naturalization - The process by which U.S. citizenship is granted to a foreign citizen or national after he or she fulfills the requirements established by Congress in the Immigration and Nationality Act. More than 653,000 immigrants naturalized to become U.S. citizens in fiscal year 2014. There are millions of legal permanent residents who are eligible to naturalize but have not done so.

Refugee resettlement program - Resettlement is the selection and transfer of refugees from a country in which they have sought protection to another country. This differs from the asylum process, whereby individuals who have reached the United States are granted protection. Resettlement can take 18-24 months or longer from referral to arrival in the United States. The refugee resettlement program is a public/private partnership by design.

Sponsor (verb) - To “sponsor” an immigrant is the traditional term for “petitioning” the person to come to the United States—that is, initiating a process allowing the immigrant to apply for legal admission and/or status by virtue of a family relation to the sponsor.

Temporary Protected Status (TPS) - The secretary of the Department of Homeland Security may designate a foreign country for TPS due

to conditions that temporarily prevent the country's nationals from returning safely, or in certain circumstances, where the country is unable to handle the return of its nationals adequately.

The U.S. may grant TPS to eligible nationals of certain countries (or parts of countries), who are already in the United States. Eligible individuals without nationality who last lived in the designated country may also be granted TPS. The secretary may designate a country for TPS due to the following temporary conditions in the country: ongoing armed conflict (such as civil war); an environmental disaster (such as earthquake or hurricane); or other extraordinary and temporary conditions. Grants of TPS are initially made for periods of 6 to 18 months and may be extended. There are currently 300,000 foreign nationals from 13 countries with TPS in the United States.

UNHCR - The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees was created in the wake of World War II in order to help the millions of Europeans who had been displaced. Although the organization was only supposed to last three years, it is still active today and continues to help with the resettlement of refugees, especially those displaced in the Middle East and Africa.

1951 Refugee Convention - A UN document signed by 144 state parties that outlines the rights of displaced people and the legal obligations states have to protect them. The overarching point of the Convention is that no displaced person should be forced to return to a country where their freedom or life is endangered.

Useful Websites:

UNESCO for information on (1) Displaced Person/Displacement (2) Migrant/Migration

UCSIS for a general glossary of terms related to migration, especially (1) Citizenship through Naturalization and (2) Consideration of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA)

Migration Policy Institute for information on (1) Integration: The Role of Communities, Institutions, and the State, (2) Family Reunification, (3) Naturalization Trends in the United States

U.S. Department of State: Refugee Resettlement in the United States

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: Office of Refugee Resettlement, The Refugee Resettlement Program, An Overview

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees: (1) U.S. Family Reunification, (2) The 1951 Refugee Convention, (3) The History of UNHCR, and (4) Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees

United States Census Bureau: “Foreign Born” population terms and definitions

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: Office for the Assistant Secretary of Planning and Evaluation, All Under One Roof: Mixed-Status Families in an Era of Reform

IRS website: Immigration Terms and Definitions Involving Aliens

U.S. Department of State - Bureau of Consular Affairs, U.S. Visas: (1) Glossary and (2) the Diversity Visa Process

D5 Coalition: What is DEI? (For information on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion)

EdgeFund: Models of Power Sharing

Grantmakers in the Arts: Power Imbalance and the Program Work of Philanthropy

PolicyLink, America’s Tomorrow: Equity is the Superior Growth Model

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