

Responding to Questions about Immigrants

- The Mexican government just needs to get its act together.

Immigration is a regional issue that takes a regional response. The current situation is in large part the result of a long history of intervention by the U.S. in Mexico and Central America. It didn't start in any one country but is rather a result of relationships among nations, with the U.S. in a position of power and control. That means the US has greater responsibility than these other countries for both the current situation and finding a way to make it better. U.S. intervention includes decades of economic policies that have devastated local economies in Mexico and elsewhere. It also includes outright acts of aggression such as the Guatemalan coup in the 1950's that ushered in decades of oppression leading to a long and brutal civil war. What is the U.S. doing to help and what is it doing to hinder other countries "getting their act together"? Importantly, the U.S. is funding increased immigration enforcement by the Mexican government. This decreases the number reaching the U.S. border but does not decrease migration or resolve migration issues, and results in greater stress within Central America. The U.S.-Mexico border has people from over 110 countries from around the world who have travelled through multiple Latin American countries to arrive there.

- How is it that undocumented immigrants pay taxes without a SSN?

People without a Social Security Number use an Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN) under which employment taxes are collected. Others use fake SSNs or share SSNs. That's just employment taxes. You don't need a SSN to pay other taxes like sales tax and property taxes. A 2024 study from the Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy (ITEP) found that undocumented immigrants in the United States pay roughly \$11.6 billion in taxes every year.

- They just need to get out of the farmwork industry to make it, or work harder.

Most immigrant farmworkers are either undocumented or on a temporary work visa. For those who are here on work visas, those visas belong to the employer, not the worker. They are not allowed to switch jobs. If they lose their job, they are required to leave the country within 30 days. It is important to note that many come for jobs to support their families since the economies are so bad in their home. They also often go into severe debt before immigrating to pay the recruiters who work with the farming industry to find potential farm workers. Consequently, they must send most of their earnings home to pay off the debt and support their families. They can't afford to save anything here. For the undocumented, they are seldom better off in any other industry that employs them, so switching jobs or working harder has no effect on their situation.

- Why can't they just go through the process of being legalized citizens?

It is very difficult, complicated, and costly to become a legalized citizen. If you want to apply for a green card through work, your employer must file on your behalf and pay around \$10,000 in legal and application fees. That process can take years. For the undocumented, there are very few avenues for legalization and most undocumented are not eligible. For example, if a close family member is already a citizen, you *might* be eligible to apply for a green card, but not always. If you apply, you *might* get approved (and you still must pay all the costs of applying). If you are a victim

of a crime and are cooperating with the police and can get the police to document that, you can apply for a special "U- visa" that can lead to a green card. These U-visas are limited in number and the wait is about 3 years from when you apply. If you are applying for asylum, only about 40% are approved and allowed to stay. For asylum-seekers who do not have a lawyer, the approval rate is less than 1%. All of these pathways and others require an immigration lawyer who can best assess your options and build the best case for your application. The average cost for a lawyer to help someone apply for citizenship is \$6,000 – \$15,000. That comes years after you get a green card, for which you must pay application and lawyer fees.

- They're technically breaking the law so if they get deported then that's on them.

The question should be *What's the reasonable penalty for being undocumented?* Is it reasonable to spit up families for decades or permanently? Is it reasonable for employers to bear the cost of losing the expertise of those workers and replacing them? How does this punishment fit the "crime"? What is the real harm caused, and how can that be addressed justly? Not to mention the problem with the concept of "technically" automatically leading to a pre-determined response - if someone is speeding because their wife is about to give birth, do we expect the officer to write them a ticket?

- What's the difference between legal and undocumented immigrants?

"Legal immigrants are foreign-born people legally admitted to the U.S. Undocumented immigrants, also called illegal aliens, are foreign-born people who do not possess a valid visa or other immigration documentation, because they entered the U.S. without inspection, stayed longer than their temporary visa permitted, or otherwise violated the terms under which they were admitted." - Washington State Department of Social and Health Services.

The term "illegal alien" carries negative and derogatory implications and is often used in a demeaning way. Out of respect for the human dignity of immigrants, consider using instead "unauthorized immigrant" or "undocumented Immigrant."