

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Excerpted from the National Immigration Law Center, Guide to Immigrant Eligibility for Federal Programs (4th ed., 2002). Last updated April 2004.

ASYLEE: A person who has applied for and been granted ASYLUM. In the United States, asylees may apply for LAWFUL PERMANENT RESIDENT (LPR) status one year after they were granted asylum.

ASYLUM: A lawful status permitting individuals to remain in a country other than their own because they either have been persecuted or have a well-founded fear that they would be persecuted (on account of race, nationality, religion, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group) in their home country. Technically, an applicant for asylum in the United States must meet the same legal standard as a REFUGEE. The difference is that an asylum applicant applies for this status while in the U.S., whereas a refugee is granted refugee status before arriving in the country. A person who has been granted asylum is an ASYLEE.

FOREIGN BORN: A term referring to people residing in the United States who were not U.S. CITIZENS at birth.

GREEN CARD: A term commonly used when referring to any PERMANENT RESIDENT CARD, despite the fact that it has been years since the DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY issued green versions of this card.

IMMIGRANT: A person who leaves his or her country to settle permanently in another country. In the context of United States immigration law, the term refers to any NONCITIZEN in the U.S. except any individual who was ADMITTED TO THE UNITED STATES as a NONIMMIGRANT and continues to maintain that status.

LAWFUL PERMANENT RESIDENT (LPR): An IMMIGRANT who has been granted a status that allows him or her to reside and work permanently in the United States. LPRs can travel abroad and return to the U.S., as long as they have not abandoned their U.S. residence or committed acts that would make them inadmissible under immigration law. An LPR can apply for NATURALIZATION to U.S. citizenship after living in the U.S. for five years (three years if married to a U.S. CITIZEN, and one year for certain persons in the military and Veterans).

NATURALIZATION: The process by which IMMIGRANTS become U.S. CITIZENS. To be eligible to apply for naturalization, an individual must have lived in the United States as a LAWFUL PERMANENT RESIDENT for five years — or three years if married to a U.S. citizen, or one year for certain persons in the military and VETERANS.

NONIMMIGRANT (International): A NONCITIZEN who has been granted a nonimmigrant status that allows him or her to remain in the United States temporarily for a specific purpose. There are more than two dozen nonimmigrant categories, each of which has specific requirements concerning the purpose of the individual's stay in the U.S. Most nonimmigrant categories require as a condition of the status that the individual have the intent of returning to a residence abroad.

REFUGEE: A NONCITIZEN given permission to come to the United States because he or she was persecuted, or has a well-founded fear of being persecuted (on account of race, nationality, religion, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group), in his or her home country. Refugees are given this status before coming to the U.S., usually when they are temporarily located in a third country. A refugee is granted the right to live and work in the U.S. and, after a one-year period, may apply to become a LAWFUL PERMANENT RESIDENT (LPR).

U.S. CITIZEN: Any person, with the exception of the children of certain diplomats, who was born in the United States or its territories, certain persons born abroad whose parents are U.S. citizens who qualify for acquisition of citizenship, and NONCITIZENS who become citizens through NATURALIZATION.

VISA: An official authorization appended to a passport that permits the person to whom it is issued to enter and travel or settle within a particular country. NONIMMIGRANT VISAS allow only temporary stays in the United States, whereas IMMIGRANT VISAS provide for permanent residence.