



## Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) About Immigration

By Joy Brown

Persistent misconceptions about migrants have prompted the Delegation to address specific concerns and beliefs. Reputable agencies, organizations, government entities, and local leaders were consulted, and nonpartisan research results were accessed, to gather facts on the following 15 frequently asked questions.

### **Can migrants vote?**

It depends. In 1996, Congress passed a law prohibiting noncitizens from voting in federal elections, including elections for the U.S. House, U.S. Senate, and presidential elections. This law does not apply to elections for state and local offices. As of June 2024, no state constitutions explicitly allowed noncitizens to vote in state or local elections. Seven states (including Ohio) explicitly prohibit noncitizen voting in state and local elections. The District of Columbia and municipalities in three states allow noncitizens to vote in local elections. Six states approved ballot measures related to citizenship requirements for voting. Eight states will have similar ballot measures in the 2024 elections.

In May, Ohio Secretary of State Frank LaRose issued a directive to the 88 county boards of elections initiating a confirmation and removal process of non-citizens from the state's voter registration rolls. LaRose also announced additional steps by his office to "conduct an annual review of the statewide voter registration database to identify persons who appear not to be United States citizens," as required by state law.

"Election officials in Hancock County and across Ohio are doing everything they can to upgrade security and ensure the November election is fair, orderly and efficient," *The Courier* reported on Aug. 31, 2024.

The elections board held a planning meeting on Aug. 19 with the Hancock County Sheriff's Office, Findlay Police Department, County Emergency Management, and Information Technology Department to review standards and prepare for the general election.

“With the politics now, a lot of things are becoming a little bit complicated or difficult, or like, hostility with politics,” said Lori Miller, Hancock County Board of Elections director. “So, we need to prepare for cybersecurity and actual physical security, too.”

*Sources: Ballotpedia.org; Ohio Secretary of State, The (Findlay, Ohio) Courier.*

### **Can unauthorized immigrants get a driver’s license?**

These laws vary by state, but in Ohio, verification of legal presence is required, according to the Ohio Bureau of Motor Vehicles. Non-U.S. citizens can get driver’s licenses if they have a Permanent Resident Card, or “green card”; offer a social security number if one has been assigned to them; and show proof of residency. Authorized immigrants are required to have “noncitizen” printed on their driver’s licenses and state IDs. An asylum seeker from any country can apply for asylum status and an I-94 asylum document, which serves as the main document for being issued a driver’s license.

### **Do international newcomers commit more crimes?**

There is no solid evidence that they do. According to the National Institutes of Justice, a research, development, and evaluation agency of the U.S. Department of Justice, “recent research suggests that those who immigrate (legally or illegally) are not more likely, and may even be less likely to commit crime in the U.S.”

One such study, conducted in 2023 by Stanford University economist Ran Abramitzky and co-authors, found that immigrants are 30% less likely to be incarcerated than are U.S.-born individuals who are white.

The Marshall Project, a nonpartisan, nonprofit news organization that focuses on the criminal justice system, reported in February 2024 that “national and local data doesn’t support the immigrant crime wave narrative. The Marshall Project has previously reported that there is no evidence linking an increase in immigration to higher local crime rates—whether it’s unauthorized or includes lawful immigrants.”

“A range of studies by academics and think tanks have shown that immigrants do not commit crime at a higher rate than native-born Americans,” Reuters reported in July 2024. “A more limited universe of studies specifically examine criminality among immigrants in the U.S. illegally but also find that they do not commit crimes at a higher rate.”

Locally, the Findlay Police Department says it has seen no crime spikes that it attributes to the increase in international newcomers to the city.

“There’s nothing that is super obvious, that’s hitting us in the face with statistics or anything,” said Lt. Andrew Welch.

### **Can unauthorized immigrants buy guns?**

No – for the most part. Federal law prohibits people in the country illegally from purchasing or possessing firearms, but there are limited exceptions. “A nonimmigrant alien may only purchase a firearm through a licensee where the licensee arranges to have the firearm directly exported. A nonimmigrant alien who falls within an exception may, however, purchase and take possession of ammunition,” the U.S. Bureau of ATF explains.

The Gun Control Act, originally passed in 1968, prohibits licensed gun dealers from selling firearms to anyone who “is illegally or unlawfully in the United States.”

*Sources: Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives; U.S. Law, 18 USC 922: Unlawful Acts.*

### **Are migrants being given preferential treatment by law enforcement?**

Not in Findlay or in Hancock County. Neither the Findlay Police Department nor Hancock County Sheriff’s Office are considered sanctuary jurisdictions, which would offer immigrants some protection from federal officials seeking to arrest or deport them. Law enforcement officials emphasize that everyone, regardless of citizenship or residential status, is expected to obey the laws, and that they treat everyone equally when upholding those laws.

### **Are international newcomers receiving government benefits and social services that are taking resources away from U.S.-born citizens?**

No. Multiple local organizations have reported higher numbers, including international newcomers, seeking assistance, but emphasize that no one group is getting denied help because another group is using up resources. Entities such as Hope House, which helps with housing, and Blanchard Valley Health System, say that every eligible individual who needs help is receiving it.

“The major federal public benefits programs have long excluded some non-U.S. citizens from eligibility for assistance,” the National Immigration Law Center (NILC) explains. “Programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly known as the Food Stamp Program), nonemergency Medicaid, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and its precursor, Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), were largely unavailable to undocumented immigrants and people in the United States on temporary visas.” Changes to such laws during welfare reform in 1996 enacted more restrictions. “In 2000, Congress established a new category of noncitizens — survivors of trafficking — who are eligible for federal public benefits to the same extent as refugees, regardless of whether they have a qualified immigrant status.”

“States can receive federal funding for TANF, Medicaid, and CHIP to serve qualified immigrants who have completed the federal five-year bar. Refugees, people granted asylum or withholding

of deportation/removal, Cuban/Haitian entrants, certain Amerasian immigrants, Iraqi and Afghan Special Immigrants, and survivors of trafficking are exempt from the five-year bar, as are qualified immigrants who are veterans or active-duty military and their spouses and children,” according to the NILC.

Some states offer more expansive benefits to immigrants regardless of their immigration status. For instance, “several states offer or will offer health coverage to older adults regardless of their immigration status,” NILC states. “And five states (California, Colorado, Minnesota, Oregon, Washington) and the District of Columbia offer or will offer public or private health coverage with state subsidies to all otherwise eligible immigrants regardless of their immigration status.

“No, migrants do not receive \$2,200 each month from the federal government,” the Associated Press reported in October 2023. It continued, “People who enter the U.S. illegally are not eligible for federal cash assistance, with the exception of certain Cubans and Haitians, immigration experts told The Associated Press. Refugees and people granted asylum, as well as some other humanitarian migrants, are entitled to certain public benefits, including cash assistance related to their initial resettlement, though it is not as high as \$2,200 each month.”

### **Are international newcomers receiving healthcare at free or reduced cost?**

Yes. Unauthorized newcomers are not eligible to receive Medicaid, but Ohio law allows for them to receive free assistance under certain circumstances. “An individual who is not a U.S. citizen or national and not in a satisfactory immigration status may be eligible for alien emergency medical assistance for certain situations,” for instance, if they have an “emergency medical condition,” Ohio law states. They must apply for such assistance.

For authorized immigrants, an individual who is not a U.S. citizen or national must be in a satisfactory immigration status—such as a refugee, asylee, a pregnant woman, a child, or a Haitian emigrant—to be eligible for medical assistance.

Some authorized immigrants can receive Medicaid if they meet certain criteria. They must also meet state residency and income rules to be eligible for this program. Most lawful permanent residents must wait five years after obtaining qualified status before they can enroll in Medicaid. However, some immigrants are exempt from this five-year bar, including refugees, asylees, Cuban/Haitian entrants, and certain other groups.

However, Blanchard Valley Health System (BVHS) representatives say that those requiring medical care are receiving treatment, regardless of their insurance status or ability to pay. Dr. William Kose, V.P. of Special Projects at BVHS, said that, while aligned with the medical profession’s pledge to provide care while “doing no harm,” these accommodations are straining the system in terms of time spent with each international newcomer (due to language and cultural differences) and in terms of finances.

Some medical systems in other communities have been designated as “federally qualified health centers,” which enables additional federal funding for treatment, medications, and reimbursement, but Findlay is “too affluent” to achieve such a designation, Dr. Kose said.

BVHS is working with other local healthcare providers to try to find solutions that will better help newcomers. Proactive and preventive healthcare options that are easily understood and more accessible to the newcomer population would ease these strains, they think.

*Sources: Healthcare.gov, National Immigration Law Center, Ohio Legislative Service Commission, and Blanchard Valley Health System.*

### **Are migrants taking away jobs from U.S. citizens?**

No. In 2017, the Brookings Institute, a non-profit public policy organization, reported that “immigrants often fill the jobs that Americans don’t want.”

“The impact of immigrant labor on the wages of native-born workers is low... However, undocumented workers often work the unpleasant, back-breaking jobs that native-born workers are not willing to do,” said Brookings Senior Fellow Vanda Felbab-Brown in an essay. She wrote that many of the positions occupied by unauthorized workers in the United States are physically demanding jobs that Americans do not want.

A 2020 story published by the Cato Institute, a think tank that promotes libertarian ideas in policy debates, characterized the idea that there is a fixed amount of work in America as a “fundamental misconception.”

“Most economic research on the effects of immigration on employment find no statistically significant evidence that immigrants push natives out of jobs, even in extreme like the Mariel boatlift that increased Miami’s labor force by 7 percent in 42 days,” the institution pointed out.

A May 2024 Reuters story reported that Ohio unions and businesses have been recruiting migrants for years to fill labor gaps, including in construction, which is booming in places such as Columbus.

From Reuters: “Help accessing immigrant communities to find workers to hire has been among the top three requests the Columbus Chamber of Commerce has fielded from local businesses in recent years, said Kelly Fuller, the chamber's vice president of talent and workforce development.”

“Overall, in Ohio since the start of the 2024 fiscal year, the Biden administration has issued around 16,300 work permits to asylum applicants and certain people who received humanitarian parole, including under the new legal pathways, a Department of Homeland Security official said. Around 3,700 more permits were granted to applicants for Temporary Protected Status,” the news agency specified.

Migrants are one of the primary reasons that the U.S. labor force has grown in recent years, thus fueling the economy, and statistics show that the majority of them work. In 2018, the labor force participation rate of foreign-born adults was 65.7 percent, higher than the 62.3 percent rate for the native-born, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

### **Are unauthorized immigrants working in the U.S. illegally?**

Yes. “The number of unauthorized immigrants in the U.S. workforce grew from 7.4 million in 2019 to 8.3 million in 2022. The 2022 number equals previous highs in 2008 and 2011,” according to Pew Research Center. “Unauthorized immigrants represent about 4.8% of the U.S. workforce in 2022. This was below the peak of 5.4% in 2007.”

In 2022, Ohio had an estimated 75,000 unauthorized immigrant workers, totaling about 1.5% percent of the entire labor force. They mostly worked in the manufacturing and construction industries.

Ohio’s workplace injury law is inclusive, according to the Columbus, Ohio-based law firm Larrimer and Larrimer. The law provides workers’ compensation benefits to all employees, regardless of immigration status.

### **Do they pay taxes?**

Yes. The taxation of an individual who is not a U.S. citizen or U.S. national is dependent on their residency status, the IRS explains.

In general, international newcomers are taxed in the same manner as U.S. citizens on their worldwide income, while nonresidents are generally taxed on U.S. source income and income effectively connected with U.S. trade or business.

An immigrant who obtains a green card—the documentation that allows individuals to live and work in the United States permanently—is treated as a lawful permanent resident and is considered a U.S. tax resident for U.S. income tax purposes.

A 2016 report from the Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy (ITEP) points out, “the best evidence suggests that at least 50 percent of undocumented immigrant households currently file income tax returns using Individual Tax Identification Numbers (ITINs), and many who do not file income tax returns still have taxes deducted from their paychecks.” The report concluded that undocumented immigrants alone “contribute significantly to state and local taxes, collectively paying an estimated \$11.64 billion a year.”

Migrants also pay other taxes, such as state sales taxes and local lodging taxes.

A 2024 report from The Institute on Taxation & Economic Policy, a non-profit, non-partisan organization, stated that unauthorized immigrants alone “paid \$96.7 billion in federal, state, and

local taxes in 2022. Most of that amount, \$59.4 billion, was paid to the federal government while the remaining \$37.3 billion was paid to state and local governments.”

Research conducted by the AIC showed that in 2019, “new Americans” in Allen County, Indiana, where Fort Wayne is located, paid over \$160.0 million in taxes and held \$496.0 million in spending power in 2019.

### **Is Findlay a sanctuary city, if not in name than in function?**

No. There is no legal definition for the term “sanctuary city,” but national consensus characterizes such municipalities as those that tend to protect undocumented immigrants from deportation or prosecution, despite federal immigration law. Some municipalities and jurisdictions, excluding Findlay, have passed laws or otherwise implemented certain protections for undocumented immigrants to prevent detention and deportation by federal agents.

Findlay officials emphasize that Findlay is not a so-called sanctuary city, nor are any local law enforcement agencies sanctuary jurisdictions. Findlay Mayor Christina Muryn says no elected city officials, including herself, are inviting or transporting immigrants to Findlay, nor offering them special legal protections.

*Sources: Findlay Mayor Christina Muryn, Findlay Police Department, Hancock County Sheriff's Office, and the Center for Immigration Studies.*

### **Are migrants bringing and spreading diseases, thus burdening healthcare systems?**

Some newcomers have diseases when they enter the country, but health officials say infectious disease transmission, particularly to U.S.-born citizens, is minimal. The CDC reported in 2022 that “the risk for spread from imported infections in the United States is low.”

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security and the CDC have health screening and quarantine standards for migrants, but “doctors across the country say it’s rare that migrants receive medical screenings or anything beyond care for medical emergencies when they arrive at the U.S.-Mexico border, and there’s no overarching national system to track the care, either,” the Associated Press reported in November 2023.

Local health officials say they are seeing no increase in infectious disease spread that is directly attributed to migrants.

“There are things that you’re always concerned about with anyone who would come in from an endemic area, including within the United States. It’s the context of how that healthcare is delivered,” said Dr. Kose. “We’ve picked up cases of more latent tuberculosis in the past couple of years, and I think probably some of that is related to immigration, but latent TB is not necessarily contagious. The individuals that come to the emergency room or go to the clinic have pretty much the same healthcare things as the general population—respiratory infections,

certainly pregnancy—those kinds of things. But we may be screening people for things like TB, too.”

Research shows the same is true on a national and international level, with healthcare professionals claiming there is no conclusive evidence that international newcomers are increasing levels of disease contagion.

A 2018 report published in *The Lancet* medical journal, authored by 24 health commissioners across the country, found that “international migrants are less likely than people in their host countries to die of heart disease, cancer, respiratory diseases and other ills,” NBC News wrote of the study. “The exceptions are hepatitis, tuberculosis and HIV. But the study also found these infections are generally only spread within the affected immigrant communities and not to the wider population.”

“There is no evidence to show that migrants are spreading disease,” said Dr. Paul Spiegel, who directs the Center for Humanitarian Health at Johns Hopkins School of Public Health and helped conduct the two-year study. “That is a false argument that is used to keep migrants out,” Spiegel said. “It’s not migrants or migration itself that is spreading disease. It may be the situations that they are in and the lack of access to basic care that may exacerbate the situation.”

#### **Do tens of thousands of migrants live in Findlay?**

No. As of September 2024, the City of Findlay Mayor’s Office estimated that 1,000 live in Findlay.

#### **Are all international newcomers unskilled laborers?**

No. Several immigrants in the U.S., and who live in Findlay and Hancock County, are highly skilled and educated, say those who serve this population and newcomers themselves. Some hold doctoral degrees and range in profession from dentist to engineer. However, many can’t continue to work in the careers they pursued and practiced when they lived in their home countries because certifications, educational requirements, and regulations for most highly skilled jobs differ in the United States. Even some professions that don’t require advanced degrees, such as hairstylist, require schooling and certifications that are regulated by state laws.

“On average, U.S. immigrants have lower levels of education than the U.S.-born population. In 2022, immigrants ages 25 and older were about three times as likely as the U.S. born to have not completed high school (25% vs. 7%),” Pew Research Center reported. “However, immigrants were as likely as the U.S. born to have a bachelor’s degree or more (35% vs. 36%).”

The Migration Policy Institute states that “48 percent of those coming to the United States within the 2018-22 period had a college degree,” and that “the immigrant population overall slightly outperforms on educational attainment, representing 17 percent of all college-educated adults ages 25 and older in the United States, even as they were slightly less than 14 percent of the total U.S. population as of 2022.”



## **What is the correct and preferred terminology to use when referring to this population?**

There are no specific standards, but those who work with migrants overwhelmingly prefer language that supports dignity, respect, and inclusivity. For instance, Melissa LaRocco, a local attorney, said she dislikes the word “alien” because she thinks it’s dehumanizing, even though it continues to be used in some legal verbiage. “Illegals” is another misnomer because she says that “while someone’s actions can be illegal, an individual’s identity cannot be.”

The term “immigrants” is often collectively used, but it doesn’t accurately describe the many nuances of people and their circumstances. For instance, by legal definition, a refugee is different from an asylum seeker.

Many in this region who serve and work with those from other countries prefer the term “newcomers,” regardless of immigration status.

The terms that Catholic Charities of Cleveland and the Ohio Access to Justice Foundation prefer are used for individuals who are living in the U.S. without legal authorization are “undocumented” or “people without legal immigration status.”

“We’re all human and we’re all deserving of love and respect. Quite frankly, I think we all have to do better,” the attorney mentioned above said.

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The Delegation is a local coalition comprised of people who are intentionally dedicated to creating environments of inclusion and belonging across Findlay-Hancock County through language; policies, practices, and programs; and representation.