

The Temporary Worker System Needs Reform

Many immigrants, coming to the U.S. to fill voids in our workforce, risk danger, and even death, to do so. Often, these hardworking immigrants are then subject to abuse by unscrupulous employers who exploit unauthorized workers, overshadowing and undermining the efforts of decent employers.

- ***A new worker visa system is needed so that immigrants can come to work through proper legal channels.*** The lack of worker visas is a root cause of our current immigration problems. Even if we legalize everyone here today, this would do nothing to stop others from coming illegally tomorrow unless we can create legal channels for needed, wanted workers to enter lawfully. Current employment-based immigration visas do not fill the needs of U.S. employers and, as a result, thousands of workers arrive without documentation each year. We must replace the flow of unauthorized workers with a legal flow. We must do so in a way that protects both foreign and U.S. workers—we must not create a new underclass of exploitable foreign workers.
- ***Our current system has made illegality the norm.*** Our current “hard” border has spurred the growth of a black market that profits from undocumented workers, as migrants increasingly have come to rely on professional smugglers to find their way past border guards. Once they arrive in this country, many are trapped here, unable to return. We need a program that would significantly diminish future illegal immigration by providing people with a legal avenue to enter the U.S., and return, as many wish, to their home countries, communities, and families.
- ***We need a fair temporary worker program.*** Past temporary worker programs were fraught with abuses and exploitation, and did not provide full labor protections, labor mobility, the right to organize, and a path to permanent residence. We need a worker program that provides legal visas, family unity, full labor rights, labor mobility, and a path to permanent status.
- ***We need to address employers’ need for temporary workers without displacing U.S. workers.*** These “essential workers” would fill unmet needs in hotels, construction, restaurants, and other sectors that rely heavily on unskilled and semi-skilled labor for temporary or seasonal positions. Employers seeking these temporary workers must show that they can’t find U.S. workers to fill the jobs, and that hiring these temporary workers won’t displace or adversely affect U.S. workers.
- ***We need to provide temporary workers with full labor protections.*** Temporary workers must be afforded all of the labor protections U.S. workers have, including the right to organize, the right to change jobs freely—not only between employers, but across economic sectors—and the fully enforced legal protection of their wages, hours, and working conditions. We must protect workers who pursue legal redresses against unscrupulous employers who violate labor protection laws.
- ***We must provide temporary workers with the opportunity to obtain permanent legal status.*** Many foreign workers prefer to work in the U.S. for a period of time and then return to their home countries. But others who choose to make the U.S. their permanent home should have the opportunity to do so. Temporary workers must be provided with the opportunity to become permanent residents, and eventually citizens, should they so desire.