

# Immigration Primer for Kids

## What is Immigration?

*Immigration* is when people go to live in another country permanently. The people who do this are known as *immigrants*. Immigrants living in another country are sometimes known as *aliens* until they obtain citizenship in their new nation.

## Who are Immigrants?

Immigrants may be people of any race, religion, or nationality. Immigrants may be of any age, from older grandparents to tiny newborn babies. Immigrants live in every American state and work in all types of fields, including education, medicine, science, farming, technology, construction, law enforcement, military, government, and the fine arts, such as music, theatre, dance, painting, and sculpture.

## Why Do People Migrate?

There are many reasons why people may choose to leave their country of birth and move to a new country. Sometimes, living conditions in their home country are not good or even harmful. We call these poor conditions 'push' factors when talking about immigration, because they push people away from wanting to live there. In addition, living conditions may be more promising in another country and people want to move there to improve their lives. We call these 'pull' factors because they are pulling people into a new place.

### What Are Some Common Push Factors?

- Not enough jobs or low-paying jobs
- War or high crime rates
- Religious or political persecution (Being bullied for your beliefs.)
- Famine and hunger
- Natural disasters (floods, drought, earthquakes)

### What Are Some Common Pull Factors?

- More jobs and better jobs with good pay and opportunities to advance
- Religious and political freedom to worship and believe what you want
- Affordable land and/or better housing and sanitation.
- Better educational opportunities
- Better medical care

Sadly, moving to a new country is sometimes forced upon people who do not want to leave their homelands. People may be sold into slavery and transported to different parts of the world to work as forced laborers.

## What Is A Refugee?

A *refugee* is a person trying to get away from very dangerous, life-threatening living conditions in their home country, which are usually the result of wars, natural disasters, or persecution for their religious beliefs or race. Refugees often leave their homes with nothing except the clothes they are wearing and whatever they can carry. They sometimes do not know where they will sleep at night or how they will eat, and they rely greatly on the kindness of strangers to provide food and shelter. Refugees want to immigrate to countries where they can live and work safely and not be bullied for who they are or what they believe.

## How Can We Help Immigrants?

It is very hard to make the decision to leave your homeland and start a new life in a different, unfamiliar place. It takes courage to leave behind your friends and family members and move to a new country. Immigrants must learn new customs and a new language. They sometimes need help finding places to live, work, and go to school. Sometimes, new immigrants have trouble adapting to the weather and climate in their new country. We can help them by welcoming them into our homes, neighborhoods, school classrooms, and churches. We can ask if they need anything to help make their transition to life in America more comfortable. We can invite them to eat and play together with us, and introduce them to our friends. Sometimes, immigrants want to keep the customs, religion, food, clothing, and language from their homelands. We can support them by trying to learn more about their culture. Most immigrants are happy to teach us and talk with us about their homeland.

## Your Family's Immigration Story

We all have immigration stories in our family trees. Do you know where your ancestors originally came from? If so, take some time to learn a little bit more about those countries and cultures. What language did your ancestors originally speak? What was life like for them before they came to America? Can you find their homelands on a map? If you don't know where your family's story began, ask an adult to help you try to learn more about where your ancestors came from, and when, why, and how they came to America.

