



Harvest of Justice 2024: Farm Workers & Immigration

Week One: Overview of Farm Workers & Immigration

While farm workers run the gamut of being U.S. citizens, legal permanent residents, seasonal laborers on special guest worker visas, or undocumented workers, most are affected by immigration status; it is estimated that the majority of our country's farm workers are undocumented. The reasons for migrating to the U.S. vary, but many come to the U.S. looking for a livelihood they cannot attain in their own country. Sadly, our current immigration system is set up so that a pathway to citizenship is nearly impossible for many of our nations' farm workers. Watch our video [“Farm Workers And The Struggle For Immigration Reform”](#) to learn more.

Discussion Questions:

- What are the benefits of immigration for the immigrant and host country?
- Do you agree with the current stance on immigration in the U.S.? If you disagree, what should change?
- How does your community and/or state treat immigrants?

Prayer: To the one who makes all life in the spirit of love, today we remember those who have crossed the border to help us harvest our food and whose work literally feeds us – farm workers, their families and all others who contribute to our society. Amen.

Take Action: Tell Congress workers need a reasonable path to citizenship!

Week Two: Immigration and Agriculture Timeline

The agricultural system in the U.S. has a long history of relying on forced labor (see more) as well as immigrant labor. Learn more about the impact of immigration and farm worker policy in the U.S. by [downloading this timeline](#).

Discussion Questions:

- Why do you think the U.S. has a history of restricting immigration from certain areas?
- What were/are some of the benefits and consequences of NAFTA?
- Do you believe there is a labor shortage in the agricultural industry?

Prayer: To the one who created everything and holds it together, we lament that our own agricultural system relies on the exploitation of immigrant farm workers to accommodate the shamefully high salaries of corporate management. Forgive us. Help us support farm worker campaigns to change their living and working conditions. Amen.

Take Action: Support farm worker led campaigns. Learn more at nfwm.org/take-action/.

Week Three: Combatting Immigration Myths

America has a mixed history of both welcoming and having a lot of animosity towards immigrants, especially depending on where an immigrant is coming from, how they look, or what they have to offer. Therefore, there is a lot of misinformation and myths about immigrants and the immigration system. Below are quick answers to some common questions and myths about immigrants in the U.S.

Where are most immigrants coming from?

The largest group of immigrants living in the U.S. are from Mexico with around 10.7 million. However, there are [fewer Mexican immigrants today](#) than a decade ago. The other [top countries of origin](#) are India, China, Philippines, El Salvador, Vietnam, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Guatemala, and Korea.

Are more immigrants than ever coming to the U.S.?

According to the [1900 census](#), nearly 14% of the population were immigrants. The latest [census estimates](#) also show around 14% of the U.S. population are immigrants. The majority of immigrants are not [unauthorized](#).

What is the process of entry for immigrants?

There are multiple types of visas for those wanting to immigrate to the U.S., and each visa has their own set of eligibility requirements. The processing time varies by the type of visa, with family-based immigration often taking less time. The U.S. government considers each applicant on a case-by-case basis, so many find themselves years waiting for approval. These long wait times force many immigrants to look for undocumented methods of entry into the country so they have an opportunity for a better life.

What is the crime rate for immigrants?

Immigrants are not more likely to commit crimes than those born in the United States. According to research out of [Stanford University](#), immigrants are 30 percent less likely to be incarcerated than are U.S.-born individuals who are white. A study from the [Department of Justice](#) found that relative to undocumented immigrants, U.S.-born citizens are over 2 times more likely to be arrested for violent crimes, 2.5 times more likely to be arrested for drug crimes, and over 4 times more likely to be arrested for property crimes.

What is the frequency of drugs being seized from immigrants at the border?

While the number of drugs being seized at the border, particularly fentanyl, has increased since 2020, [cartels are hiring U.S. citizens](#) and authorized Mexican citizens to smuggle the drugs through ports of entry. Nearly 90% of fentanyl is being seized at official border crossings and [over half](#) of those seizures were being smuggled by U.S. citizens. Migrants are not recruited as drug mules because the cartel prefers experienced border crossers who won't be detained.

Do undocumented immigrants pay taxes?

Undocumented immigrants pay taxes like everyone else who lives and works in the U.S. They have federal and state tax withholdings from their paychecks and [ultimately pay billions](#) of dollars in taxes and social security contributions, which they cannot access. And immigrants, like the rest of us, pay sales tax on purchases they make while here in the US.

Do undocumented immigrants receive welfare and other government benefits?

Immigrants are categorized into [“qualified” and “not qualified”](#) for welfare and government benefits; undocumented immigrants are considered “not qualified” for these programs. However, some states have enacted health programs and other benefits regardless of a person's status.

Does immigration hurt the US economy?

In short, no. Many industries, including agriculture, heavily rely on immigrants (including undocumented immigrants). According to the [Penn Wharton Budget Model](#), immigration leads to more innovation, a better educated workforce, greater occupational specialization, better matching of skills with jobs, and higher overall economic productivity.

Are immigrants stealing jobs from US-born workers?

No, immigrants are not stealing jobs from native born workers. There is not a fixed number of jobs, and immigrants often create jobs as they form businesses here in the U.S. and spend their money on U.S. goods. According to “Streets of Gold” by Ran Abramitzky and Leah Boustan, there is also little evidence to support that immigration depresses wages for U.S. workers.

Discussion Questions:

- What are some influences that affect your attitude toward immigrants?
- What are some of the most common myths you hear about immigrants in your community?
- How can fixating on one immigrant's story lead to a narrow perspective of the immigrant experience or perpetuate stereotypes?

Prayer: To the one who sees all, we acknowledge the terrible realities people experience on our borders as they flee violence, seek economic relief, and long for opportunities in our country. Help us see how alike we are and talk about their realities. Amen.

Take Action: Utilize the above myth busters to change the immigration conversation on social media and in your community.

Week Four: H-2A Overview

The H-2A program, which was established in 1986, allows U.S. employers or U.S. agents who meet specific regulatory requirements to bring foreign nationals to the United States to fill temporary agricultural jobs. The H-2A program has expanded rapidly from 139,832 jobs in 2015 to around 370,000 in 2022. Reports of abuse and exploitation are also growing. Watch our video [“What is the H-2A Guest Worker Program?”](#) to learn more. You can also read more about the [H-2A program](#) on NFWM’s website.

Discussion Questions:

- What are the pros and cons of the H-2A program?
- Why do you think the H-2A program is rapidly expanding? Is it connected to our broken immigration system?
- Do you think that guest worker programs are inherently exploitative? If so, what changes should be made to better protect workers?

Prayer: To the one who gives the breath of life, bless the precious spirits of the seasonal and migrant workers in our communities, because you see them. You hear their cries. Help us welcome them and advocate for their rights while they are with us. Amen.

Take Action: Tell Congress to reform the H-2A program.

Week Five: What Some Faith Traditions Say About Immigration

The National Farm Worker Ministry is proud of its long history being associated with a variety of faith groups. Member organizations who partner with NFWM have released [statements and resolutions](#) relating to farm worker movements and in support of immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers. Faith groups and people of conscience play an important role in welcoming immigrants, read below for some faith traditions stances on immigration.

Various sacred texts of world religions generally exhort their respective faith groups to support those who are socially and economically disadvantaged, such as immigrants. The Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) and their respective scriptures often

prescribe their religious adherents to welcome and care for the immigrant and foreigner. The subject of many Hebrew Bible, Christian New Testament, and Quranic narratives involves nomadic people groups or individual refugees traveling in search of safety and/or a land in which to settle—such as the first humans in the creation story, the Exodus of Moses and the Israelites, and Jesus’ family’s fleeing to Egypt to escape King Herod. The Book of Ruth tells of women who encounter the compound hardships of land migration due to famine and economic loss surviving by gleaning food and marrying to adjust their immigration status. Eastern world religions, such as Buddhism and Hinduism, teach compassion and respect towards all people, including immigrants.

It is important for people of faith and conscience to counter anti-immigration rhetoric and attitudes. Without the efforts of faith-based organizations, especially Christian churches who are this nation's religious majority, these attitudes compound systemic disadvantages for immigrants.

The challenges immigrants face in the United States—cultural isolation, discrimination, harsh working conditions—can also be the grounds for deepened spirituality and intensive worship. For congregations and faith-based organizations that hope to foster core values of anti-racism and solidarity with the oppressed, a good starting point can be addressing the racism in politics concerning migration, as well as the many other difficulties immigrants face in the U.S.

Study Guides/Faith Resources:

A Buddhism Perspective - [We Are All Seeking Refuge](#)

A Christian Perspective - [Bible Verses on Immigration Pulled By SoJourney](#)

A Christian Perspective - [Faithward Resources on Migration & Immigration](#)

A Christian & Sikh Perspective - [\(The Image Of\) God In All Of Us Sikh And Christian Hospitality In Light Of The Global Refugee Crisis](#)

A Hinduism Perspective - [Hindu Americans’ Reflections on Oneness](#)

An Interfaith Perspective - [Offering Refuge: A Discussion Guide For Faithful Americans...](#)

An Islamic Perspective - [The Qur’anic Perspective on Immigrants](#)

A Judaism Perspective - [Immigration & Judaism](#)

Discussion Questions:

- Have you ever been in a situation where you were a newcomer or felt you didn’t belong/weren’t welcome somewhere?
- How does your faith’s teachings impact the way you think about immigrants?
- How can people of faith help immigrants flourish in the U.S.?

Prayer: To the one who created everyone in your image, help us see the humanity in the people who cross our borders, their hard work, their persistence, their resilience and their hope to have a better, safer life. Give us new eyes. Amen.

Take Action: Utilize the above information to change the immigration conversation on social media and in your faith community.

Week Six: Immigration's Impact On Other Farm Worker Issues

Immigration status impacts nearly every facet of a person's working and living conditions. In most states, undocumented farm workers and immigrants lack basic rights such as obtaining a driver's license or getting a higher education. Undocumented immigrants also do not have access to governmental benefits, such as social security, housing or food assistance programs. This means even though farm workers earn some of the lowest wages in the U.S., most cannot supplement their family needs through governmental aid. Additionally, undocumented workers in most states do not have access to any health insurance or health care programs. Sadly, many farm workers, which is one of the most dangerous occupations, avoid seeking health care because they have no way to pay for necessary care.

At work, undocumented status makes workers especially vulnerable to abuse, as some employers and supervisors constantly hold the "deportation card". For instance, if an employer is treating a worker unfairly, a worker who speaks up to their boss can be threatened with deportation. This significantly takes away their rights to stand up for themselves and advocate for their working conditions. Undocumented workers continuously live in fear and isolation. [Read more](#) about how immigration status affects many farm workers and their families.

Discussion Questions:

- What are some of the most common challenges immigrants face in the U.S.?
- Many undocumented immigrants live in constant fear of deportation, what kind of impact do you think that has on their daily lives?
- What can we learn from immigrants in your community and in the U.S.?

Prayer: To the one who loves us all, with or without documents, forgive the egregious political partisanship which makes immigrants scapegoats for our country's problems. Help us pass comprehensive immigration reform that treats immigrants and migrants as human beings. Amen.

Take Action: Tell Congress workers need a reasonable path to citizenship!