

Recent Immigration Laws

- The **Refugee Act** of 1980 was prompted largely by the arrival of more than four hundred thousand refugees from Southeast Asia between 1975 and 1980. The legislation sought to create greater consistency in refugee policy by allowing for both a regular flow of refugees and emergency admissions.
- In 1986, the **Immigration Reform and Control Act** tackled the issue of undocumented immigrants. To stem the flow of unauthorized immigration, the act imposed penalties on employers who knowingly hired workers without proper documentation. It also allowed undocumented immigrants who had lived in the United States since 1981, including agricultural workers, to become citizens. Under the amnesty program, about 3.2 million immigrants gained legal status.
- The **Immigration Act** of 1990 raised the limit on annual admissions from 290,000 to 675,000 immigrants. (The 1965 act had set the limit of 290,000.) The act also nearly tripled the number of spots reserved for newcomers with prized job skills and their families. Like the 1965 act, the Immigration Act of 1990 made family reunification the guiding principle of U.S. immigration policy.
- The **Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act** of 1996 grew out of the economic troubles of the early 1990s. In its original form, it would have reduced overall annual immigration to 535,000 (including refugees and asylum seekers) and strengthened border control efforts. By the time the bill became law, the economic outlook had brightened and Congress had narrowed the focus of the act to curbing illegal immigration. The 1996 act streamlined procedures for deporting undocumented immigrants and rejecting asylum claims. The number of deportations doubled as a result. Critics warned that the law placed too much power in the hands of government agencies and denied legitimate refugees a fair hearing.
- The **Real ID Act** of 2005 was based on recommendations of the 9/11 Commission. Its goal is to strengthen national security by implementing stricter standards for obtaining state-issued IDs. The law requires that states implement new federal documentation requirements for issuing driver's licenses and state-issued identification cards. Proponents of the act hope that new regulations to verify identity will make it more difficult for immigrants without "lawful status" to receive a fraudulent ID. Compliance with the law has been spotty. As of 2013, only nineteen states had met the new federal standards for issuing IDs.