

Principles and Components of Comprehensive Immigration Reform

Any immigration reform package must be guided by three core principles and include seven critical components.

Core Principles

Reform must promote economic opportunity. Our vision of reform is of immigrants and citizens working shoulder to shoulder, with the same labor protections, access to programs and services, due process and faith in a system that works for them and their families. This is our vision for a stronger America. We must renew our commitment to helping all low-income Americans improve their job prospects and move up the economic ladder. Our vision of reform is that a rising tide lifts all boats.

Reform must be comprehensive. Unless we reform the system as a whole, we will fail to solve the problems at hand. The necessary components are listed below.

Long-term reform requires long-term solutions. We must address the root causes of migration, our relationships with other nations and work in partnership to develop long term strategies that improve the economic conditions in regions that supply large numbers of economic migrants.

Critical Components of Comprehensive Immigration Reform

- 1) **Enhance our nation's security and safety with a sensible enforcement policy.** Once comprehensive immigration reform has been passed, we must ensure there is a sensible enforcement strategy that keeps America safe. This means prioritizing enforcement actions to genuine threats; prosecution of unscrupulous employers who are exploiting vulnerable workers; and preventing exploitation of the immigration system by those who seek to do the country harm. This strategy, however, must be coupled with vigorous enforcement of civil rights and labor and employment laws. An effective strategy must not include continued use of local law enforcement agencies to enforce federal immigration law, indiscriminate worksite and neighborhood immigration raids. Border enforcement must reflect American values, prioritizing the safety and security of border communities and consulting with these communities in the process.
- 2) **Protect fundamental rights for all.** Our immigration enforcement system must reflect the American values of due process and civil rights for all people. Reform must include the right of every individual to a fair day in court. Enforcement must be subject to accountability mechanisms. Alternatives to detention should be considered and special protections provided for vulnerable populations. Detention should be a last resort and there must be legally enforceable detention standards.

QUESTIONS?

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- 3) **A rational and humane approach to the undocumented population.** For the 12 million undocumented immigrants living in this country, we must create a process that leads to lawful permanent resident status and eventual citizenship. Undocumented immigrants working and living in the U.S. must be counted through a registration program that includes reasonable submission to background checks, paying an appropriate fine, paying taxes and studying English. If they satisfy these requirements, they must be given lawful permanent status and a path to citizenship.
- 4) **Keep American families together and reduce immigration backlogs.** Our outdated family immigration channels, which keep close family members separated for decades, must be reformed to restore our commitment to promoting family unity. Those stuck in endless “backlogs” should have their admission expedited, and those admitted on work visas should be able to keep their nuclear families intact.
- 5) **Ensure appropriate ways for workers to come in legally in the future with full worker rights and labor protections.** We must protect all workers’ right to organize and bargain collectively, regardless of whether they were born in the U.S. or abroad. Any employment verification system should determine employment authorization accurately and efficiently while protecting workers and good-faith employers and must contain sufficient due process and privacy protections.
- 6) **Allocate sufficient visas to close unlawful migration channels.** A great failure of our current employment-based immigration system is that the level of legal immigration is set arbitrarily by Congress without regard to real labor market needs. The resulting extra-legal migration channels have created a shadow economy that has allowed unscrupulous employers to manipulate the system to the detriment of workers and reputable employers alike. Any reform package must allocate employment visas through an independent commission that can assess labor shortages and determine the number and characteristics of foreign workers to be admitted, with Congress’ approval.
- 7) **Promote immigrant integration.** The federal government must help new immigrants become citizens if eligible, learn our language and laws, ensure equal opportunity for immigrants to participate in programs and services and support state and local governments’ efforts to help integrate these new Americans.

About OneAmerica

OneAmerica advances the fundamental principles of democracy and justice at the local, state and national levels by building power within immigrant communities in collaboration with key allies.

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