

GUIDE: OVERVIEW OF POSSIBLE IMMIGRATION OPTIONS OUTSIDE THE U.S.

What pathways can I take to pursue a life outside the U.S.?

Now that you are considering leaving the U.S., it is time to think about the pathways you could take to move to another country. In this resource guide, you will learn about three different pathways: applying for a temporary visa, applying for permanent residence status, and moving to your country of birth. You'll also come away with general tips, important considerations, testimonials, lists of organizations, and some groups you can turn to for support.

Throughout this guide, we hope that you'll learn about opportunities you didn't know existed, and that you'll give yourself permission to consider a variety of different options.

Studying/Working Outside the U.S.

Applying for Non-Immigrant/Temporary Visas

One possible path for many undocumented individuals that want to leave the U.S., is to study or work in another country.

When it comes to **studying outside the U.S.**, the big advantages are the variety of options, the possibility to legalize after you complete your degree, and the ability to bring your spouse/children with you. Studying abroad is a viable path regardless of whether you have a college degree. Keep in mind that people complete their undergraduate or graduate degrees abroad all the time. In many cases, an international student visa will allow you to work while you are a student, and, oftentimes remain in the country with a work permit after you finish your studies, if you work in the field that you study. In most countries, you can apply to bring your dependents (spouse and/or children) with you as part of your visa. Some visa-friendly countries even allow your dependents to obtain a work visa if they come with you, or at the very least, allow them to obtain legal status through your visa, even if they don't get their own work permits.

To afford university as an international student, it's crucial that you create a financial plan. Higher education outside the U.S. tends to be cheaper, but scholarship opportunities are more scarce. If you've attended university in the U.S. as an undocumented

student, you already know how hard it is and you'll be better positioned to tackle this next challenge.

In order to study in another country, you need to be accepted by an accredited university, one that can sponsor an international student visa for you. When choosing which university program to attend, take the time to understand not only the program, but also how that field of study is growing in the particular country you are considering. After all, you might decide to work in the same country after graduating, so you should understand potential opportunities in advance. We suggest you research the countries where there are notable professors/universities and a booming job market in your field.

If you decide to **work outside the U.S.**, you will first need to get a job with an employer that is willing to sponsor you for a visa before you can get a [work permit](#). We recommend you look for opportunities on job search websites that people who live in the area use. Work visa sponsorships are not very easy to get, but if you have a unique skill set in a country that needs it, it is possible for you to get sponsored to go to that country. Bear in mind that it might be necessary that you speak the language of the country that you intend to work in to be eligible to get a job there. In terms of skill sets, they can range widely: some people get sponsored to teach, some to pursue scientific research, and lots of other professions in between.

You can also decide to be an **entrepreneur outside the U.S.** Recently, [startup and entrepreneurship visas](#) have become more widely available. Some countries offer temporary visas for entrepreneurs to start their businesses there, as a way to attract talent and innovation to their countries. If you have a business that can grow from being in another country because that's where your workforce or consumers are, then it is a win for that country, your company, and you.

Another benefit of moving to a new country to study, work, or launch a business is that there could, in certain countries and after a certain period of residence, be a path to permanent residency. And once you are on a path to permanent residency, there is a path to citizenship. It might be a few years down the road, but, in the meantime, you can hold legal status and be able to study and work.

Things to Consider Regarding Non-Immigrant Visas

Student, work, and entrepreneurship visas fall under the category of non-immigrant visas. One tricky situation about applying for non-immigrant visas is that some countries don't allow you to apply for them from the U.S., if you don't have permanent legal status here. To apply for non-immigrant visas, you don't have to be in your country of birth yet, it is usually easier to apply from within a country where you hold citizenship. For example, if you were to pursue academic or career opportunities in Canada, it is likely that you would have to go to the country where you hold citizenship to apply for your student/work/entrepreneur visa from there. Each country's policies will vary; for instance, some consulates might allow you to process your visa in the U.S. if you have DACA, TPS, or another form of temporary legal status, however, it is important to check with the consulate to confirm whether this is possible.

If you need to leave the U.S. and return to the country where you hold citizenship (most often your country of birth) in order to apply for a visa to go to another country, this can be tricky because, for most undocumented individuals, it will mean triggering the 3-year or 10-year bar. This would mean that once you leave the U.S., you cannot return for three or ten years, unless you apply to come with a non-immigrant visa and are granted a D3 waiver. For more information about opportunities to visit or come back to the U.S. once abroad, read our resource [GUIDE: Returning to the U.S. After Leaving](#).

The largest risk is that you won't be able to guarantee that your visa will be approved before you leave the U.S. Visa officers in the country where you're seeking to live will need to determine if your reasons for moving to this new country are legitimate, and if there will be any risk of you overstaying your visa and falling out of status. It is possible to mitigate the risk of visa denial by establishing ties to the country where you hold citizenship. Establishing ties means proving that you are connected to the country that you are living in and you have the intention to return to it. Examples of establishing ties include proof of owning assets (property, bank account, vehicle), family relationships, or steady income (job, business income, rental income) in the country that you are living. It might be necessary for you to go to the country where you hold citizenship for a few months to a year to establish those ties before you apply for a visa. With those ties, immigration officials might be less concerned about you overstaying your visa in the new country.

Additional Resources

Learn About Visa Requirements

- [The Ultimate Guide to Visa & Immigration Laws of the Best Countries to Study Abroad](#)
- [Six Countries Where It's Easy to Snag a Work Visa](#)

Find Academic Opportunities

- [Study in Canada](#)
- [Study in Europe](#)
- [Study in Australia](#)
- [Study in New Zealand](#)
- [Study in Japan](#)

Find Work Opportunities

- You can look for job opportunities through [Indeed](#) (change the location of the job in the search field to explore jobs in other countries).

Moving To a New Country

Applying for Legal Permanent Residency

Immigrating to a new country is another way to leave the U.S., but one that often requires meeting certain eligibility like academic credentials, age, language proficiency, and income. In order to immigrate to another country, you have to be approved by that country's government. Although this is a more selective path, it is a rewarding one since permanent residency is granted right away and, once you get residency, you will no longer have to worry about renewing your visa or finding other ways to maintain your status every few years. Most importantly, permanent residency in a new country typically opens up a path to citizenship.

When applying to immigrate to another country, you can add dependents to your application. Once you are a permanent resident, you can eventually petition for your parents to join you as well.

Most of the information concerning applying for legal permanent residence in this resource will be related to moving to Canada because many undocumented individuals in the U.S. have applied and obtained permanent residency in Canada. However, it is important to know that there are other countries that provide opportunities to seek permanent residency as well.

Many undocumented individuals have moved to Canada due to different factors like proximity to the U.S., language, and immigration system. Canada has a point-based immigration system, in which if you get enough points, you are eligible to apply to immigrate there. The

criteria ranges from age, work experience, language, and academic credentials, which makes many educated undocumented individuals strong candidates.

Things to Consider About Moving to Canada

You might meet the eligibility requirements to immigrate to Canada under the [Express Entry program](#). One of the advantages of the program is that you are not required to leave the U.S. and go to the country where you hold citizenship to process your application.

Additional Resources

Learn More About the Express Entry Program & Other Options

- [As Trump and Congress Fail Dreamers, Canada Might Be An Option For Some](#): Forbes article refers to the Canadian Express Entry program as an opportunity for DACA recipients to seek a new life.
- [Pathways to Canada for Dreamers](#): Blog post published by Green and Spiegel Law firm about a number of Canadian immigration avenues that may be open to skilled undocumented individuals looking to obtain legal status in Canada.
- [From DACA to Canada](#): Blog by a former DACA recipient with advice on how to apply to the Express Entry program and how to move from the U.S. to Canada.
- [Karen's Timeline and Advice](#): An informational sheet by a former DACA recipient, that provides a general guideline about the process of applying to the Express Entry program.

Find a Community

- [The Leaf Network](#): Facebook group for undocumented individuals looking to move from the U.S. to Canada.

Returning To Your Country of Birth

Returning to your country of birth is a possibility since you likely already hold legal status there. However, returning may bring up a lot of anxiety and, sometimes, a lack of support from family members. After all, your family had their reasons for deciding to move to the U.S. in the first place and they will likely be invested in you staying. It is important for you to take their perspectives into consideration while at the same time listen to your intuition and what you want for your future. When considering your country of birth, research its economy, political situation, level of security, and job opportunities because these aspects might have changed since you and your family left. Moreover, recognize that you are now fluent in English, know how

to navigate between different cultures, and maybe even have a degree from a U.S. university and have work experience. You have credentials, skills, and experience that will likely open opportunities for you in your country of birth.

Returning to Your Country of Birth: Advantages to Consider

- **Cost of Living:** An advantage of returning to your country of birth is that the living cost there might be more affordable than the costs you will have to pay for moving to a new country and getting established. Returning to your country of birth is especially more convenient and affordable if you have family members and friends that can help you get established there.
- **Legal Pathway:** Another advantage of returning to your country of birth is that, in some cases, it is the only way to move legally to another country. Once you have established ties there, you can think about pursuing a degree or career in another country and apply for a visa. It could also potentially be the only route that will allow you to eventually return to the U.S. legally.

Returning to Your Country of Birth: Challenges to Consider

- **Reverse Culture Shock:** Returning to a country you don't know or one that you have left long time ago can lead to a state of loss or disorientation. Readjustment will require proactive outreach. You can try finding support communities online or in-person (we have included some in this guide) even before you return. You can anticipate that the first few months will be about traveling, reconnecting with family and friends, meeting people, and relearning the culture. Once you feel more comfortable, finding a new job will feel less overwhelming.
- **Third Culture Identity:** Once you have returned to your country of birth, you may be treated like a foreigner. You may feel stuck in a limbo between two cultures: not from here, nor from there. Even though it will be frustrating in the early stages of moving, you should try your best to embrace your dual identity and feel like you are from both places: from here and from there. The book [Los Otros Dreamers](#) is an anthology of stories and photos about the experience of those who returned or were deported to Mexico after having grown up in the U.S. Those who are worried about the journey back "home" can learn about the challenges, injustices, and triumphs that individuals have experienced as

they return or are deported to their countries of birth.

- **Stigma:** In some countries, returning home after being in the U.S. can carry a stigma and a feeling of failure. Some people might not understand why you are deciding to go back. Remember that you do not need to explain yourself to everyone, your reasons are your own. Not everyone in your family and country of birth will understand how difficult it is to be undocumented in the U.S. Do not be discouraged by others about your decision to return to your country of birth. Trust your intuition and that you are doing what feels right to you.

*We understand that returning to a country of birth is not an option for everyone. Make sure to ask family members and do some research to evaluate whether it is safe or feasible to return to your country of birth.

Additional Resources

Learn More

- [Young Migrants' Return to Mexico Is More 'Exile' Than Homecoming:](#) New York Times article tracks how people who have been deported from the U.S. are building a community to help one another get adjusted to their country of birth.

Find a Community

- **EducationUSA** is an international network of organizations that helps students from different countries study in the U.S. They are usually located in the largest city of a country. They might know a lot of people who attended university in the U.S. and who are back in your country of birth.
- **The International Student Office** at the university you graduated from can connect you to an alumni community that is living in your country of birth and that you can contact prior to your arrival.
- **InterNations:** A website that helps you find and connect with people from across the world that now live in your country of birth. You can also find people on Facebook, who used to live in the U.S. and are now living in your country of birth by searching "Americans in [your country of birth]".
- **Returnee Communities:** These groups are mostly made up of people who were deported from the U.S. (forcely returned) and therefore had

limited choice on whether to leave the U.S. or not. However, because of their collective power and willingness to come together to support one another, they can also be a great resource for people who choose to leave the U.S. Below are some returnee groups in Mexico:

- [Otros Dreamers en Acción](#)
- [New Comienzos](#)
- [HOLA CODE](#)
- [Dream in Mexico](#)
- [Los Otros Dreamers](#)

The world is full of possibilities. After reading this resource guide, we hope you have identified personal, professional, and educational opportunities that are available to you outside of the U.S. You might even choose to pursue multiple paths in different parts of the world. Continue doing research and apply to the opportunities that meet your criteria. Before you leave the U.S., we recommend that you develop multiple back-up plans so you have your bases covered as circumstances and policies shift. Regardless of the path you choose, prepare yourself and your loved ones well before you depart, and plan your arrival as well as you can. You deserve to fulfill your potential wherever you decide to be.

Good luck on your journey!

This resource is part of the "Life Outside the U.S." project. It was created by Beleza Chan with editing support from Claire Calderón. Visit LifeOutsideTheUS.org to learn more. Find all the resources created and gathered for this project at immigrantsrising.org/LifeOutsideTheUS-resources.

Immigrants Rising helps you make decisions based on your potential, not your perceived limits. Visit our website so you can see what's possible: www.immigrantsrising.org. For inquiries regarding this resource, please contact Katharine Gin, Co-founder and Executive Director, at kathy@immigrantsrising.org.