

## LEARN

### SEPTEMBER 2017: UNDERSTANDING DACA

The news is filled with information about the White House's elimination of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program. This month we seek to learn the basics of the DACA program and what our Catholic leadership is saying about its elimination.

*"... (To) DACA youth and their families, please know that the Catholic Church stands in solidarity with you. We recognize your intrinsic value as children of God. We understand the anxiety and fear you face and we appreciate and applaud the daily contributions you make with your families, to local communities and parishes, and to our country. We support you on your journey to reach your God-given potential."*

*Bishop Joe S. Vásquez,  
Chair of the USCCB Migration Committee and Bishop of Austin, Texas*

### What is the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals Program (DACA)?

DACA was enacted by President Obama and the Department of Homeland Security in 2012 to provide protection to an estimated 800,000 immigrants who entered the United States illegally as minors. It prevented their deportation and allowed them to continue their education or employment. To qualify, applicants:

- had to have arrived in the US before age 16;
- had to have lived here since June 15, 2007; and
- could not have been older than 30 when the Department of Homeland Security enacted the policy in 2012.

Among the accepted applicants, Mexico is by far the biggest country of origin, followed by El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras.

DACA recipients were able to obtain valid driver's licenses, enroll in college and legally secure jobs. They also paid income taxes. **DACA did not provide a path to become US citizens or legal permanent residents.** Recipients were able to apply to defer deportation and legally reside in the US for two years. After that, they could apply for renewal.

DACA status can be repealed when a DACA recipient is found to be a threat to either public or national safety. About 1,500 people have had their deferral canceled due to a crime or gang-related activity or admission, according to Immigration and Customs Enforcement. That's less than 0.2% of the total number of people accepted into the program.

Sources: [Justice for Immigrants](#), [USCCB](#) and [CNN](#)

## Who are the Dreamers?

The term Dreamers comes from the proposed DREAM Act, which offered legal status in return for attending college or joining the military. It was first introduced in 2001. The latest version was voted down in the Senate in December 2010, but the name has continued to be used to refer to DACA recipients.

Source: [CNN](#)

## Why can't the Dreamers become citizens through existing paths?

Under current immigration laws, there are very few options for legal immigration, the costs are increasingly prohibitive and the wait for any kind of status can be long and frustrating. According to the State Department, that imaginary "immigration line" is already over **4 million** people long and depending on the type of visa sought and the country of origin, the wait can be years to decades long. In some countries, such as the Philippines and Mexico people have been waiting over **20** years for approval of a family-sponsored visa.

There are very strict requirements for obtaining US citizenship and not all DACA recipients qualify.

The Diversity Visa Program makes only **55,000** green cards available to persons from countries with low rates of immigration to the U.S. There are visa quotas which limit immigration from any given country.

Source: [Social Justice Network](#)

## Principles for Just Immigration Reform

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) supports immigration reform that is comprehensive in nature and that facilitates the following goals:

- Provides a path to citizenship for undocumented persons in our country;
- Preserves family unity as a corner-stone of our national immigration system;
- Provides legal paths for low-skilled immigrant workers to come and work in the United States;

- Restores due process protections to our immigration enforcement policies; assurance that our laws are enforced in ways that recognize the importance the sanctity of the human person, the incomparable value of the family and maintains the integrity of our national borders;
- Addresses the root causes of migration, such as persecution and economic disparity.

Source: [Catholic Diocese of Raleigh](#)

## What does the Catholic Church say about the repeal of DACA?

The USCCB issued a statement urging members of Congress to pass the DREAM Act providing a path to citizenship for DACA recipients. They also call on the Catholic faithful to petition their representatives.

*"We implore the administration to show mercy and compassion for those seeking refuge, and to advance the American value of freedom through providing safe harbor to those fleeing tyranny and religious persecution.*

*"In this moment of moral decision, we look to Pope Francis, who in his address to Congress stated: 'We need to avoid a common temptation nowadays: to discard whatever proves troublesome. Let us remember the Golden Rule: 'Do unto others as you would have them do unto you' (Mt 7:12). To this end, we believe that deporting exemplary young people who were brought here as children and who know only the United States as their home – or failing to do all we can to help refugees and their families, who are often driven to exile by war and extreme exploitation – is not in our interests as a moral and generous people. Our country has the right and responsibility to regulate its border. We ask that it be done humanely."*

The USCCB statement in its entirety can be read **[HERE](#)**.