

# Involuntary and Voluntary Migrant Algorithm

## By Rachel Cassidy\*

The Assignment by Migrant Status project will produce estimates of migrant groups, such as lawful permanent residents (LPRs) and refugees, using algorithms to assign likely migrant statuses to the foreign-born population. This proposal describes the intended methodology for the project's first algorithm, which will identify voluntary and involuntary migrants in the U.S., using both Census 2000 and American Community Survey (ACS) data.

### Definitions

*Involuntary migrants* are defined for this project as any foreign-born people who have migrated to the U.S. because they have been displaced from their home country, have a fear of persecution, or have been moved by deception or coercion. *Voluntary migrants*, sometimes also referred to as "economic migrants," include all other international migrants who have moved as a result of their own desires and motivations (Hansen 2003).<sup>1</sup> The main difference, then, between voluntary and involuntary migrants is the reason they decided to leave their home country. Unfortunately, classifying people into these categories is not always easy; by definition, migration usually involves some kind of voluntary decision on the part of the migrant, despite the original motivation for the move. On the other hand, many "voluntary migrants" move because they are seeking better economic and social conditions than are available in their home country; while they might not be displaced by war or famine, one could argue that they are forced to move because of circumstances that are beyond their control.

Despite the potential theoretical problems associated with classifying people as voluntary or involuntary migrants, producing estimates of these two groups could be valuable for better understanding and measuring international migration. These groups represent a dichotomy of international migration: all foreign-born people can be classified as either involuntary or voluntary migrants. The estimates produced with this algorithm will therefore provide at least some more detailed information about the foreign born than is currently available from the decennial census and most surveys. Further research could then be conducted into potential differences in behaviors and circumstances of voluntary and involuntary migrants. Identifying people as voluntary or involuntary migrants not only takes into consideration all foreign-born people (instead of just non-U.S. citizens), it also provides a better starting point for assigning more detailed migrant statuses later in the course of the project.

Table 1 shows the types of migrants included in the involuntary and voluntary migrant categories. Both categories include naturalized U.S. citizens and non-U.S. citizens; non-U.S. citizens are then

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<sup>1</sup> For this project, an international migrant is defined as any person who changes his or her country of usual residence to the United States for a period of at least two months. A person's country of usual residence is defined as "the country in which a person lives, that is to say, the country in which he or she has a place to live where he or she normally spends the daily period of rest" (United Nations 1998).

**Table 1. Involuntary and Voluntary Migrant Categories**

<p><b>Involuntary Migrants:</b></p> <p>Naturalized U.S. Citizens</p> <p>Non-U.S. Citizens:</p> <p>    Humanitarian Migrants:</p> <p>        Refugees</p> <p>        Asylees and asylum-seekers</p> <p>        People granted Temporary Protected Status (TPS)</p> <p>        Parolees</p> <p>    Lawful Permanent Residents (LPRs):</p> <p>        Employment-based</p> <p>        Family-sponsored</p> <p>        Unauthorized migrants allowed to become LPRs under special provisions</p> <p>        International adoptions</p> <p>        Other LPRs (refugee adjustees, parolee adjustees, some country-specific adjustees, etc.)</p> <p>    Unauthorized Migrants</p> <p>        (includes people who enter the U.S. illegally to escape persecution, asylees who become ineligible to retain their status, etc.)</p> <p><b>Voluntary Migrants:</b></p> <p>Naturalized U.S. Citizens</p> <p>Non-U.S. Citizens:</p> <p>    Humanitarian Migrants:</p> <p>        People granted Temporary Protected Status (TPS)</p> <p>    Lawful Permanent Residents (LPRs):</p> <p>        Employment-based</p> <p>        Family-sponsored</p> <p>        Unauthorized migrants allowed to become LPRs under special provisions</p> <p>        International adoptions</p> <p>        Other LPRs (Diversity program LPRs, some country-specific adjustees, etc.)</p> <p>    Temporary Migrants:</p> <p>        Students</p> <p>        Scholars and trainees</p> <p>        Temporary workers</p> <p>        International organization employees</p> <p>        North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) workers</p> <p>        Diplomats</p> <p>    Unauthorized Migrants</p> <p>        (includes people who enter the U.S. illegally, who violate the terms of their legal admissions, etc.)</p>
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further classified into more detailed migrant categories, which will be assigned with future algorithms. It should be noted that slightly different concepts are demonstrated in Table 1: the classification of a person as a voluntary or involuntary migrant is based on the original circumstances of and motivation for their move, while the more detailed migrant categories (e.g. humanitarian migrant, unauthorized migrant, etc.) indicate a person's current migrant status.

Involuntary migrants include humanitarian migrants, lawful permanent residents (LPRs), and unauthorized migrants (see below for detailed definitions). The majority of involuntary migrants are probably humanitarian migrants, although some LPRs and unauthorized migrants are also included in this category. Voluntary migrants also include some humanitarian migrants, LPRs and unauthorized migrants, as well as temporary migrants. Although some temporary migrants might theoretically be involuntary migrants, for this project all temporary migrants are assumed to be voluntary migrants.

Humanitarian migrants are individuals who are admitted into or allowed to remain in the U.S. based on the fact that they are unwilling (because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution) or unable to return to their home country. This category includes refugees, asylees and asylum-seekers, people granted Temporary Protected Status (TPS), and some parolees.

An international definition of refugee was established by the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol to be “a person outside of his or her country of nationality who is unable or unwilling to return because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion.” This definition was formally incorporated into U.S. law with the Refugee Act of 1980. In the U.S., a Presidential Determination may also allow refugees of certain countries (currently Vietnam, Cuba, and the former Soviet Union) to be processed while they are still in their home countries. The U.S. Immigration and Nationality Act and the Refugee Act of 1980 further distinguish between refugees, who are outside of the U.S. when they apply for refugee status, and asylees, who meet the same criteria as refugees but are already in the U.S. when they apply for asylum (see below). Refugees are eligible to adjust to LPR status (see below) after one year. Refugees are the largest humanitarian migrant group: in 2000, 72,143 refugees arrived in the U.S., of which more than half were from Europe (USDHS 2003).

Asylees are people who meet the same criteria as refugees, but are already in the U.S. or at a port of entry when they apply for asylum. Like refugees, asylees are eligible to adjust to LPR status after one year. There were 31,538 people granted asylum in the U.S. in 2000 (USDHS 2003; USEOIR 2004). Asylum-seekers in the U.S. are people who have filed an application for asylum, but have not yet had their cases decided.

Unlike refugees and asylees, people granted temporary protected status and parolees are only admitted to the U.S. on a temporary basis. Temporary Protected Status (TPS) was established by the Immigration Act of 1990 to be granted to non-U.S. citizens in the U.S. who “are temporarily unable to return to their homeland because of ongoing armed conflict, environmental disasters, or other extraordinary and temporary conditions” (USCIS 2003). The U.S. Attorney General designates TPS to eligible individuals from certain countries for a specific period of time. People who register for TPS are not required to leave the U.S., regardless of their prior migration status, and may obtain work authorization. Once TPS has expired for a particular country, all foreigners who were formerly protected return to the same migrant status they had before TPS or acquired while registered for TPS. TPS currently affects approximately 130,000 people from nine countries.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The countries currently under TPS include Burundi, El Salvador, Honduras, Liberia, Montserrat, Nicaragua, Sierra Leone, Somalia, and Sudan. El Salvador’s first TPS designation expired in 1992, and then a second unrelated TPS was designated in 2001, which is still in effect. TPS is scheduled to expire for Sierra Leone effective May 3, 2004.

TPS represent a unique category of humanitarian migrants, because people under TPS were not necessarily involuntary migrants when they first migrated to the U.S. For example, several countries, including El Salvador, Honduras, and Nicaragua, are designated under TPS because of natural disasters that occurred and made it unsafe for people to return. However, people from those countries most likely would have been considered voluntary migrants at the time they came to the U.S., before the natural disasters occurred. Therefore some of the people granted TPS are actually voluntary migrants, and they are the only type of humanitarian migrant included in the voluntary migrant category.

The U.S. Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) includes a provision for parolees to be granted permission for a temporary stay in the U.S. for urgent humanitarian reasons or significant public benefit. There are several categories of parolees, however those included here in the humanitarian migrant category are individuals granted parole in the U.S. as part of an overseas program. Most overseas parolees arrive in the U.S. under special legislation or international migration agreements, where they are granted parole overseas after their refugee applications have been denied, and are allowed to become LPRs after one year (USCIS 2000). Most of them come from Cuba, the former Soviet Union, Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos. Port-of-entry, advance, deferred inspection, humanitarian, and public interest parolees will not be included in this project's estimates of international migrants, because most of them are only in parole status for short periods of time before they leave the country or change their migration status.

Lawful Permanent Residents (LPRs) are individuals who are legally admitted to the U.S. for permanent residence. Non-citizens can become LPRs either by receiving an immigrant visa while outside of the U.S. and then entering the country, or by adjusting to LPR status from another migrant status after they are already in the U.S. LPRs are authorized to work in the U.S. and may become U.S. citizens generally after 5 years. They can be either involuntary or voluntary migrants, depending on the circumstances of their migration. In 2000, the U.S. admitted 849,807 LPRs, about half of which were new arrivals (USDHS 2003).

Temporary migrants, also sometimes called "nonimmigrants," are people lawfully admitted to the U.S. for a specific purpose and time, but not for permanent residence (USDHS 2003). This category includes foreign students, trainees, and temporary workers who are usual residents of the U.S.; it does not include people who are in the U.S. temporarily but are not usual residents, such as tourists or business travelers. As mentioned earlier, all temporary migrants are assumed to be voluntary migrants for this project, although in theory some could be involuntary migrants.

Unauthorized migrants include any international migrants who are illegally present in the U.S., either as a result of unlawful entries into the country or violations of the terms of their legal admissions. An unauthorized migrant can be either an involuntary or voluntary migrant. Involuntary unauthorized migrants could include people who enter the U.S. illegally to escape persecution in their home country (such as indentured workers from China who are smuggled into the country), or asylees who commit crimes that make them ineligible to retain asylum status.

### **Algorithm Criteria**

The criteria planned to identify voluntary and involuntary migrants is relatively straightforward. However, as the algorithm is tested and evaluated, these criteria will likely be altered to some extent, and additional identifying characteristics may be added. The identification of involuntary and voluntary migrants is difficult because, as mentioned earlier, these categories refer to the motivation of

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migrants, and not their current migrant status. Some variables, such as year of entry, household relationship, occupation, and educational attainment, can be used to help identify people who are likely in a specific migrant status group. But a person's intentions or motivations are not measured directly with the decennial census or the ACS, so other available variables must be used as a proxy for the original circumstances of a person's migration. Of course, using proxy data to classify migrants relies on the assumption that the proxy data is correct, and therefore can be problematic if there are quality issues with these data. For example, if data on year of entry are not accurately measuring when people first came to live in the U.S., then using that variable to identify types of migrants could result in misclassifying some people. Fortunately, the algorithms created during this project can be updated and revised if data quality issues arise that could affect the results.

The majority of involuntary migrants are probably humanitarian migrants; many of these people who are displaced by war or escaping persecution in their home country can and will be granted admission to the U.S. as refugees, asylees, or other humanitarian migrants. Based on this assumption, the characteristics of humanitarian migrants will be used to identify involuntary migrants in Census 2000 and ACS.

The main criteria for identifying involuntary migrants will be country of birth and year of entry into the U.S. Specifically, people who entered the U.S. from the same countries and during the same years as many humanitarian migrants will be identified as involuntary migrants; people from other countries and years will be classified as voluntary migrants. The logic behind this is that if conditions in a country exist that permit a large proportion of migrants to be admitted into the U.S. as humanitarian migrants, it is likely that other migrants from that country are also affected by those conditions. The years of entry and countries of birth for identifying involuntary migrants will be determined by calculating the proportion of refugees, asylees, and LPRs admitted each year from each country that are refugees and asylees. These numbers are available from administrative data from U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) and Executive Office for Immigration Review (EOIR). For example, refugees and asylees from Somalia comprised 93.5% of total admissions of refugees, asylees, and LPRs (new arrivals) in 2000. The threshold for determining an "involuntary" country and year has not yet been determined, although Passel and Clark (1998), who use a similar method to identify refugees in the Current Population Survey, identify as "refugee countries" those where more than 40 percent of admissions are refugees or asylees.

Some European countries have developed lists of "safe countries," where human rights are presumably respected, and from which asylum applicants will be automatically rejected. Switzerland, for example, includes Norway, Bosnia, Senegal, and Ghana on its list of safe countries. In the algorithm, migrants from these countries could be classified as voluntary migrants.

At this time, country of birth and year of entry will be the main characteristics used to identify voluntary and involuntary migrants. Other variables, such as income, household composition, and state of residence, might also be used to classify the foreign-born population into these two broad categories, but it is unclear if there are distinct enough differences in available variables between voluntary and involuntary migrants. This algorithm will probably be relatively simple, but it is only designed to produce estimates of two broad categories of international migrants. More detailed migrant status estimates will be produced with future algorithms, based on the results of this first project.

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