

# Avoid Immigration Scams and Get Real Help



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## Avoid Immigration Scams and Get Real Help

Are you looking for help figuring out the immigration process or filling out immigration forms? There are legitimate organizations that can help you, but there also are scammers looking to trick you into giving them money and sensitive information.

### ► Notario Scams

In other countries, a notario público, notary public, or notario can be someone who has a lot of legal training. But in the United States, a notary or notario público is a witness to the signing of official documents. Notarios in the U.S. are not licensed attorneys and can't give you legal advice. If you need legal advice about your immigration status, you need to speak with an attorney. People who are designated as accredited representatives also can help. But if you go to a notario, and the notario is not an accredited representative, that person is just taking your money. Sometimes, that will hurt your chance to immigrate lawfully. Read the graphic novel "How Myriam and Pedro Learned About Notario Scams," at [ftc.gov/fotonovelas](https://www.ftc.gov/fotonovelas) to see a few ways a notario scam can happen. You can order free copies to distribute in your community at [ftc.gov/bulkorder](https://www.ftc.gov/bulkorder).

## What to know:

- Don't go to a notario for immigration or legal help. See the tips on page 5 on how to get real help.
- Don't sign blank immigration forms, or forms that have false information about you or your situation. A dishonest notario may ask you to do this.
- Don't pay for immigration forms. The official forms from the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) are free. Find them at [uscis.gov/forms/all-forms](https://uscis.gov/forms/all-forms).
- Don't let a notario or anyone else keep your original documents.

### ► Fake Immigration Websites

When you're looking for immigration help, you may find websites that look like they're connected with USCIS — but they're not. They may use names like "U.S. Immigration" and show pictures of American flags or the Statue of Liberty. But if the website address doesn't end in .gov, that means it's not a federal government website and not connected with USCIS. The site might charge you for forms that are free from the government, and might steal your personal information.

## What to know:

- Real U.S. government website addresses end with .gov.
- USCIS forms are free. If you have to pay to download government immigration forms, you're not on a legitimate website.

- You'll find real immigration information in the USCIS' website at [uscis.gov/tools](https://uscis.gov/tools).

## ► Diversity Lottery Scams

The U.S. Department of State manages the Diversity Visa Immigrant Program. You can find information on eligibility requirements and how to apply at [travel.state.gov](https://travel.state.gov). (Using quotation marks, search for “diversity visa program.”) Some people call this program the “visa lottery.” It's free to enter. The winners, picked at random, win the chance to apply to become lawful permanent residents. But scammers try to trick people by charging money to apply to the program, promising special access, or promising to increase someone's chances of winning the lottery.

### What to know:

- You can enter the visa lottery:
  - only once a year
  - only at [dvprogram.state.gov](https://dvprogram.state.gov)
  - only if you're from an eligible country and meet the educational or work requirements.
- You don't have to pay to apply for the visa lottery.
- The winners are picked at random and no one can influence the results.
- You can only find out the status of your entry at [dvprogram.state.gov](https://dvprogram.state.gov).

## ► Scams Against Refugees

Refugees — people who are forced to leave their country to escape war, persecution, or natural disaster — also are targets for scams. Refugees have a different legal status than other immigrants, but scammers don't care. They tell refugees, for example, that they're eligible for a special government grant. But, to get the money they have to pay a fee first. Or scammers say they're from the IRS and need the person's bank account number to deposit the grant money.

But there is no special grant. You know this is a scam because the government doesn't call, text, or email to ask for your bank account number. And if someone tells you to pay them by gift card, money transfer, or cryptocurrency — to help you with your immigration status or for any reason — that's also a scam.

### What to know:

- If you are a refugee and someone reaches out to you about government aid, talk to the case manager at your resettlement agency immediately.
- Don't pay anyone who asks you to pay by gift card, money transfer, or cryptocurrency for immigration help. You're probably dealing with a scammer.
- Get more information for refugees from the USCIS website [uscis.gov](https://uscis.gov). (Using quotation marks, search for "refugees and asylum.")

## ► Get Real Help

Choosing the right person to help you is almost as important as filling out the right form, or filling it out the right way. Even people who mean well, like a friend or a family member, and want to help you with the immigration process can cause problems for you later. For example, they should only write or translate what you tell them to and should not give you advice on what to say or which forms to use.

To get the help you need, use the information below to find people who are authorized by the U.S. government to help you. Working with them also will help protect you from people who might cheat you.

### Who can help:

Only an attorney or an accredited representative working for an organization recognized by the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) can give you legal immigration advice.

- An attorney must be a member of the professional association in their state. Be sure the attorney you choose is in good standing with the association.
  - To find a free or low-cost immigration attorney, check out [justice.gov](https://www.justice.gov). (Using quotation marks, search for “list pro bono service providers.”)
  - You also can see the list from the American Immigration Lawyers Association at [ailalawyer.com](https://www.ailalawyer.com) to find an immigration attorney in your area.

- An accredited representative is not a lawyer, but is authorized to give immigration advice.
  - The accredited representative must work for an organization recognized by DOJ.
  - Find the recognized organizations in your area on the Recognition & Accreditation Program page on DOJ’s website at [justice.gov](https://www.justice.gov). (Using quotation marks, search for “recognition and accreditation.”) The organization may charge you a fee.

## ► Do It Yourself

You can represent yourself in immigration proceedings, if you choose. You may want to start by reviewing the section, Explore My Options, to the USCIS website at [uscis.gov/forms/explore-my-options](https://uscis.gov/forms/explore-my-options).

### What to know:

- Immigration forms are free. Never pay to get official forms. You probably will have to pay filing fees when you submit your completed forms to USCIS.
- If you have questions, use the Tools section on the USCIS website at [uscis.gov/tools](https://uscis.gov/tools) or get more resources on the USCIS Avoid Scams page at [uscis.gov](https://uscis.gov). (Using quotation marks, search for “avoid scams.”)
- Contact the USCIS Contact Center online at [uscis.gov/contactcenter](https://uscis.gov/contactcenter) or call 800-375-5283

if you can't find the answers you need. (If you are deaf, hard of hearing, or have a speech disability, use the text telephone (TTY) number: 800-767-1833.)

## ► Report Immigration Scams

If you or someone you know has seen or experienced an immigration scam, it's important to report it to the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) at [ReportFraud.ftc.gov](https://www.reportfraud.ftc.gov). When you report the scam, give as much or as little information about yourself as you'd like. Or, ask your immigration attorney to use their name, or the name of their law firm or agency, to report it to the FTC. It can also help to report your experience to your local or state authorities. Find information on how to do that at [uscis.gov](https://uscis.gov). (Using quotation marks, search for "report immigration scams.")

Find more information on common immigration scams at [uscis.gov](https://uscis.gov). (Using quotation marks, search for "common scams.")



## Where To Get Immigration Help

- Get free immigration forms from the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) at [uscis.gov/forms](https://uscis.gov/forms).
- Find online self-service tools from USCIS at [uscis.gov/tools](https://uscis.gov/tools).
- Contact USCIS at [uscis.gov/ContactCenter](https://uscis.gov/ContactCenter) or 800-375-5283.
- Learn about the U.S. State Department’s Diversity Visa Immigrant Program at [dvprogram.state.gov](https://dvprogram.state.gov).
- Find a free or low-cost immigration attorney at [justice.gov](https://justice.gov). (Using quotation marks, search for “list pro bono service providers.”)
- Search for an immigration attorney in your area at [ailalawyer.com](https://ailalawyer.com).

The FTC works to stop deceptive and unfair business practices and scams, and to help consumers like you recognize and recover from them. You can sign up for email updates at [ftc.gov/scams](https://www.ftc.gov/scams).

To report a scam, or a deceptive or unfair business practice, go to [ReportFraud.ftc.gov](https://www.ftc.gov/report-fraud). The FTC enters complaints into a secure online database used by hundreds of law enforcement agencies.



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