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Immigration Agencies and Basic Terms: Effective Communication

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A Selection of Important Immigration Law Terms and Acronyms

A-number	A unique number assigned to a non-citizen by the U.S. immigration system. For example, a person who submits an application to USCIS gets an A-number as does a person who is arrested by ICE .
AAO	Stands for <i>Administrative Appeals Office</i> . The AAO is part of USCIS and can consider appeals from certain negative decisions by USCIS officers.
Adjudicator's Field Manual	This is a compilation of USCIS policies and procedures. Portions of it are available to the public at https://www.uscis.gov/ilink/docView/AFM/HTML/AFM/0-0-0-1.html .
Admissibility	This refers to whether a person is eligible to enter the U.S. Some individuals who are already in the U.S. must be admissible in order to obtain certain immigration benefits. The grounds of inadmissibility are set out in section 212 of the INA (8 U.S.C. §1182). Waivers are available in some circumstances
Affidavit of support	Certain applications must include an affidavit of support to demonstrate that the applicant will not become a public charge .
AILA	Stands for <i>American Immigration Lawyers Association</i> . As the name suggests, it is a national association of immigration lawyers.
Adjustment of status	Adjustment of status is the process by which a person who is already in the United States and who meets eligibility requirements can apply for permanent resident status (a green card) in the U.S. <i>Cf.</i> Consular Processing .
AOS	<i>See Adjustment of Status.</i>
Arriving alien	The term refers to someone who has sought admission at the border. Some people who are already in the U.S. are considered arriving aliens, such as individuals who arrive at a POE seeking asylum.

Asylee	An asylee is a person who has been granted asylum. Asylum can be granted only to a person who is in the United States. <i>Cf. Refugee.</i>
Asylum	Asylum is a form of protection granted to a person in the U.S. who has shown a fear of persecution in his or her home country based on political opinion, race, religion, nationality or membership in a particular social group.
BALCA	Stands for <i>Board of Alien Labor Certification Appeals</i> . BALCA, which is part of the DOL , mainly reviews denials of PERM labor certification cases.
BIA	Stands for <i>Board of Immigration Appeals</i> . The BIA is part of the EOIR . The BIA reviews appeals of decisions by Immigration Judges. BIA decisions can be appealed directly to federal circuit courts.
BIA accredited representative	The BIA accredits qualified non-lawyers to represent aliens on behalf of recognized non-profit organizations. Some accredited representatives may represent individuals before DHS only. Others may represent individuals before both DHS and EOIR .
Biometrics	A person who files an application with USCIS will generally receive a notice of a biometrics appointment. At the appointment, USCIS will take fingerprints and photographs.
CAM	Refers to the Central American Minors Refugee/Parole Program, which is a program administered by the State Department and the Department of Homeland Security. It allows certain qualified children in El Salvador, Guatemala, and El Salvador to receive refugee or parole status. The State Department has announced that the program will be expanded in the coming months.
CAT	Stands for <i>Convention Against Torture</i> . The United Nation's Convention Against Torture prohibits member countries from removing (deporting) an individual if there are substantial grounds for believing that the individual would be in danger of being tortured. There are two forms of CAT protection: withholding of removal and deferral of removal. (see regulations at 8 CFR 208.16). CAT protects individuals from removal but offers fewer benefits than asylum.

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