

IMMIGRANTS VULNERABLE TO FRAUD FROM SCAMMERS PROMISING WORK PERMITS



The euphoria and rapture that President Barack Obama amnesty scheme, that ended deportations of many illegal immigrants who entered the country as children, brought to the people whom the scheme reprieved was short-lived, as it has brought other unforeseen problems in its wake. There is still a lot of uncertainty prevailing over the new law and the biggest worry is that the youth, hopeful and in anticipation of a bright future, could be cheated and deceived by fraudsters out to con these vulnerable and gullible people, who have for years, lived in the shadow of doubt and fear. "The biggest risk of a scam is right now," said Jorge Baron of the Seattle-based Northwest Immigrant Rights Project. "Because right now we have to tell people, 'We don't know.'" Baron said he's worried that unprincipled cheaters will convince the youth that they can file their applications, even though there is no process yet, and solicit money from them. They can also falsely misguide and delude immigrants who don't qualify, that they could be put on the eligible list, for a price. "Part of the problem is because immigration law is so complex. There is this inevitability of wanting to hear good news. There are people who want to believe that," Baron said. Even though the new law is complex, its basic surmise is simple and it would be good and safe for all migrants who want to know if they fall under the plan or they don't. The administration plan, says that illegal immigrants brought to the United States before they turned 16 and are younger than 30, have been in the country for at least five years, will be given immunity and protection from deportation. Candidates who merit these criteria, must also have no criminal history, and must have graduated from a U.S. high school or earned a GED or served in the military. Getting work permits are the biggest draw and tempting tool for the fraudsters. The migrants must understand that at best you can apply for a temporary work permit, that will be valid for two years and can be renewed innumerable times. Beyond that, whatever is told to you by a go-between is the untruth. Baron said that his legal aid office was inundated with calls from people who are asking if they can apply for the new immunity. But that is something that can be known, after the government clarifies it and it is expected to take at least another 6 weeks. Baron says applicants "need to be patient," and not fall into traps of fraudsters who promise them the moon and seek qualified help when the actual process starts. The nation's immigration system is fraught with fraud and scams. Many a time illegal immigrants are known to use forged documents to get work. Many a time, it is found that employers, desperate for migrant workers for their farms, encourage them to indulge in these unlawful activities. For these fraudsters, the migrants are easy targets, owing to their inability to speak English and their reluctance to report swindling to the regulatory authorities. In 2003, misguided by a phoney woman lawyer, 150 people were deported. The fraudulent lawyer was banned from providing immigration services and ordered to pay more than \$47,000 to the clients she had cheated. There have been umpteen other cases, when immigrants have been cheated and not only did they lose their money but were also deported. Mohammad Abdollahi, a member of DreamActivist.org in Washington, D.C., said that his organization would be providing critical information to the immigrants that could save them from being swindled. "Since we've been using it for advocacy people already know that it's a trusted place to go," he said. Abdollahi's service will come in very handy to the 800,000 young immigrants who stand to be impacted by the plan. Most of them have grown up in the US, can speak English fluently and are computer-savvy. However, Abdollahi says, for all their smartness they are still susceptible to a scamster's wiles and also could be made to cough up ruthless lawyer fees. He says that he plans to charge them average lawyer fees as a guideline. President Ronald Reagan had also undertaken a major immigration amnesty program in 1986. Where Obama's plan offers work permits, Reagan's program was based on providing legalization to migrants who had been farm workers and those who weren't. Doris Meissner, a senior fellow at the non-partisan Migration Policy Institute and a former immigration official, said the Farmworker provision in Reagan's Act resulted in people forging documents, because the rules were written rather loosely. For a migrant to be able to apply, one of the rules was that he should have been a farm worker for 90 days. "We're in an entirely different world today," Meissner said. "Background information is available to the government. It's not an entire paper-based process...With this program, there is much more independently valid evidence that people can show. They can show school records, high school diplomas. That's not stuff that you gin up."