

Immigration Enforcement Officers



Occupational Brief Title Codes:

- D.O.T.: 375.167-042, 375.263-014, 372.567-014
- G.O.E.: 04.01.02, 04.02.01
- S.O.C.: 33-3021, 33-3051, 33-3012
- O*NET™: 33-3021.05, 33-3021.03, 33-3051.01, 33-3012.00
- N.A.I.C.S.: 928120
- H.O.C.: No Code

Occupational Subtitles:

- Criminal Investigators
- Deportation Officers
- Immigration Enforcement Agents

Work Classification Based Related

D.O.T. Occupations:

- Airline Security Representatives
- Correctional Officers
- Detectives
- Police Officers

Interests Based Related

G.O.E. Occupations:

- Customs Patrol Officers
- Fish and Game Wardens
- Intelligence Specialists
- State-Highway Police Officers

Skills Based Related

O*NET Occupations:

- Immigration and Customs Inspectors
- Private Detectives and Investigators
- Security guards
- Sheriffs and Deputy Sheriffs

Noteworthy Quote:

“The ICE works to protect the United States and its people by deterring, interdicting, and investigating threats arising from the movement of people and goods into and out of the United States... ICE’s enforcement mission is carried out by a wide variety of law enforcement, security, and intelligence professionals—all of whom have the opportunity to make a personal contribution to the safety and security of our country. The career opportunities within ICE are wide ranging. In addition to the core law enforcement occupations, there is a wide range of professional and administrative functions.”

— U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Department of Homeland Security, Washington, DC

Immigration enforcement officers (im-mi-`gra-tion en-`force-ment `of-fi-cers) investigate and enforce immigration and citizenship laws of the United States.

On March 1, 2003 the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) merged with the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). Under DHS, the immigration, naturalization, and enforcement services once performed by the former INS were split into three separate bureaus. Today, immigration benefits and services are provided by the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS or CIS). Protection of America’s borders is provided by the U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP). Interior enforcement, including investigations, and detention and removal of illegal immigrants, is now part of the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

Although the organizational structure has changed, the immigration laws and programs of the United States still cover four major fields of responsibilities: (1) aiding persons legally admissible as visitors or as immigrants to the United States; (2) granting benefits under the Immigration and Nationality Act, Refugee Act, and the Immigration Reform and Control Act, as well as assisting those seeking permanent resident status, temporary resident status, citizenship, naturalization, or asylum; (3) preventing the unlawful entry, employment, or receipt of benefits by foreigners not entitled to them; (4) locating and keeping track of all foreigners in the United States, and detaining or enforcing the departure of illegal aliens, or of those whose activities are contrary to the public interest.

Work Performed

Immigration enforcement officers work for the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) bureau—the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE brings together the enforcement and investigative functions of the Customs Service, the former Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), and the Federal Protective Service (FPS). This consolidation brings a unified and coordinated focus to the enforcement of federal immigration laws, customs laws, and, as of November 2003, air security laws.

Immigration enforcement officers investigate and enforce penalties for violations of the criminal and administrative provisions of the Immigration and Nationality Act. They supervise and facilitate the detention and removal of aliens who are in the United States unlawfully, or who are found to be deportable or inadmissible. They also collect, analyze, and disseminate real-time intelligence (information) to domestic and overseas field offices; work with the intelligence community on matters related to national security; and support integrated enforcement operations.

To enforce our nation’s laws regulating immigration and nationality matters, it may become necessary to detain and/or deport certain individuals. Aliens being detained and deported represent a wide variety of individuals from countries all around the world who are subject to exclusion and deportation proceedings.

In general, immigration enforcement officers specialize in one particular area or division. **Deportation officers** provide for the control and removal of persons who have been ordered deported, or otherwise required to depart from the United

States. They closely monitor deportation proceedings from initiation to conclusion, which may mean removal of an individual from the United States. They ensure the timely issuance of passports and travel documents required for deportation. To accomplish this, they must keep close connections with foreign consulates and embassies. Deportation officers may also be required to respond to congressional inquiries (requests).

Immigration enforcement agents perform a variety of law enforcement and administrative tasks involving aliens being detained and/or deported for violations of immigration laws. Their responsibilities include employer sanctions, criminal aliens, and the apprehension of persons trying to hide from deportation proceedings. They locate, apprehend, arrest, transport, safeguard, oversee, and process aliens being detained and/or deported for violations. They may also escort aliens who have been ordered to be removed from the United States to their country of citizenship.

Immigration enforcement agents working in the detention program ensure the care (physical, mental, and civil rights) of aliens in ICE's custody. They handle intake and outtake processing, and supervision and transportation of detained aliens including prison pick-ups, and medical and court transportation and security. These agents also counsel detained aliens regarding personal and family matters.

Criminal investigators (or **special agents**) working in immigration enforcement plan and conduct investigations, often undercover, concerning possible violations of criminal and administrative provisions of the Immigration and Nationality Act. These officers make arrests and prepare investigative reports. They use their intellect to gather intelligence, evidence, and information; to interrogate and debrief suspects and witnesses; and for other ICE collection techniques. Criminal investigators present cases to the United States Attorneys for prosecution, and give testimony in judicial and administrative proceedings. They also maintain contact and work closely with all federal, state, and local agencies.

Working Conditions

Immigration enforcement officers experience varied working conditions. They may work in an office setting conducting research, assembling information, or processing suspected persons or activities. Others are active in searching for or apprehending suspected persons. In some work, officers and agents may travel extensively. Special agents often work undercover.

All immigration enforcement officers carry firearms. They must adhere to grooming and dress standards, and maintain composure and self-control under stressful conditions. Their jobs can also be very physically demanding. They must work under any conditions they encounter. They may conduct surveillance for long periods. At times they may have to chase individuals or use force to apprehend suspects.

Conditions of employment for some agent positions require them to accept appointments at any location as

needed. This includes working on operational details away from home for extended periods of 35 days or more.

Hours and Earnings

Most immigration enforcement officers have a scheduled 40-hour work week, which may include evenings, weekends, and holidays. Deportation officers generally have the most regular work schedule. However, like other law enforcement officers, immigration enforcement agents and criminal investigators often work overtime to complete assignments. Sixty-hour weeks, ten-hour days, and rotating shifts are not uncommon.

As federal employees, immigration enforcement officers are paid on an established government pay scale called the General Schedule (GS). Entry-level positions begin at a GS-5 or GS-7 rating with starting base salaries ranging from around \$25-35,000 a year. However, agents also receive law enforcement availability pay (LEAP)—equal to 25 percent of their grade and step—because of the large amount of overtime that they are expected to work.

With experience and demonstrated skill, ratings increase to higher pay scales. Advancement in non-supervisory positions is to the GS-12 level after successful completion of the preceding grade(s). Base salaries at this level range from around \$55,000 a year to just over \$70,000 a year. Competition is required to move above the GS-12 level, which includes administrative positions. Base salaries at these levels range from around \$70,000 to well-over \$100,000 a year.

In addition to their overall earnings, they receive a uniform allowance. All federal employees also receive a government benefits package including annual paid sick and vacation leave, health benefits, life and long-term care insurance, liberal retirement benefits, a thrift savings plan, continuing education assistance, and tuition reimbursement.

Education and Training

Candidates for entry-level immigration enforcement positions are required to be physically able to perform strenuous duties under rigorous environmental conditions. They must be able to pass a medical examination, including vision, hearing, and endurance tests, as well as drug screening.

The application process includes a three-part entrance examination. The first part covers logical reasoning skills. The second exam is a Spanish language test, or an artificial language test that predicts ability to learn Spanish—because immigration enforcement officers must learn to speak and read Spanish (or another foreign language) competently by the end of the one-year probationary period. The third part is an assessment of job related experiences and achievements.

Minimal qualifications require candidates to have at least one year of work or volunteer experience which demonstrates an ability to perform the tasks of the entry-level

positions (GS-5). This experience does not have to be law enforcement related. However, it must demonstrate an ability to take charge, make decisions, and maintain composure in stressful situations; to maintain interpersonal relationships with coworkers and the public; and the ability to learn both on the job and through formal instruction. Education may also be substituted for all or part of the required experience. A four-year degree in any field, for example, is fully qualifying for the GS-5 grade.

Relevant specialized experience and education in law enforcement or correctional facilities often qualifies applicants for a higher grade. To qualify for the GS-7 grade, applicants must have one year of law enforcement experience or one full year of graduate education in law or a field related to law enforcement (such as criminal justice or police science).

Newly hired officers and agents receive basic training at the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services Academy in Glynco, Georgia. Training for deportation officers and immigration enforcement agents lasts four and one-half months (18 weeks). Special agent training lasts five and one-half months (21 weeks).

Training for all immigration enforcement positions includes instruction in both academics and physical training. Academic courses include immigration law; alien removal process and procedures; fraudulent document detection; Immigration and Naturalization Act statutory (lawful) authorities, duties, and procedures (detention, arrest, etc.); care, escort, and transportation of detainees; crowd control; travel documents; behavioral science; constitutional law; conspiracy law; criminal law; fugitive operations; civil liberties and liabilities; and Spanish language.

Physical training includes trauma management and CPR; non-lethal control techniques for compliant and non-compliant suspects; oleoresin capsicum spray; collapsible steel baton; firearms safety, judgement, qualification, and shotgun safety and judgement. Much of the training consists of hands-on practical exercises. Trainees are also required to participate in physical conditioning during out-of-class hours.

In simulated on-the-job situations, students apply classroom knowledge in dealing with suspects, witnesses, and victims. They learn to become aware of what motivates people and the sources of conflict in human relations. They use this knowledge in interviewing subjects, witnesses, victims, and suspects. They learn to take notes, write reports, and perform other operational tasks. Agents also learn to work with informants, conduct surveillance, execute search warrants, work undercover, use radio communications, and police techniques.

Upon graduation, immigration enforcement officers and agents spend an additional 24 weeks in supervised on-the-job training, including weekly post-academy instruction in immigration law and Spanish. All trainees must also successfully complete a one-year probationary period. During the probationary period, new employees

must pass the six and ten month qualifying exams and undergo periodic evaluations.

Unions and Professional Societies

Many immigration enforcement officers belong to unions and other professional groups that promote their interests. The American Federation of Government Employees is a large union representing around 600,000 federal government workers nationwide and overseas. Another group is the Federal Law Enforcement Officers Association which represents about 25 percent of all the men and women employed as federal law enforcement officers and criminal investigators. These groups offer their members informational, educational, career, and technical services, as well as legislative and labor advocacy.

Personal Qualifications

All candidates for immigration enforcement positions must be in qualifying physical condition. They must be United States citizens, possess a valid driver's license, and pass a background check and drug test. In addition, applicants must not have passed their thirty-seventh birthday upon appointment, unless they presently serve or have served in a Federal civilian law enforcement position.

Officers and agents must possess tact, courtesy, and the ability to deal effectively with individuals or groups, both in speaking and in writing. They must be able to react quickly and use sound judgement, especially in dangerous or stressful situations. They should be able to plan and organize work, analyze problems, gather pertinent data, and recognize solutions.

Occupations can be adapted for workers with disabilities. Persons should contact their school or employment counselors, their state office of vocational rehabilitation, or their state department of labor to explore fully their individual needs and requirements as well as the requirements of the occupation.

Where Employed

Positions are available in the United States and in other countries. The ICE operates eight Service Processing Centers (SPCs) in Aguadilla, Puerto Rico; Batavia, New York; El Centro, California; El Paso, Texas; Florence, Arizona; Miami, Florida; Los Fresnos, Texas; and San Pedro, California. The newest SPC, the Buffalo Federal Detention Facility alone has 300 beds for detained aliens and another 150 beds for use by the U.S. Marshals Service. An additional seven contract detention facilities are located in Aurora (Denver), Colorado; Houston, Texas; Laredo, Texas; Seattle, Washington; Elizabeth, New Jersey; Queens, New York; and San Diego, California. ICE also uses state and local jails on a reimbursable basis, and has joint federal facilities with the Bureau of Prisons, the Federal Detention Center in Oakdale, Louisiana, and the criminal alien contract facility in Eloy, Arizona.

Agents may operate anywhere in their assigned district or region. Many operate along known smuggling routes

nationwide to combat alien smuggling. Some special agents travel to other countries to investigate the activities of smugglers or individuals involved in producing fraudulent documents. Others work in Special Agent-in-Charge (SAIC) Offices and subordinate field offices that are responsible for the administration and management of all enforcement activities within their region.

Employment Outlook

The ICE continues to operate an aggressive recruiting program to bring in new officers and agents. The expanding efforts to stop the entry of illegal aliens into the United States, as well as related activities in terrorism and document fraud will require the efforts of many qualified and committed professionals. ICE and other immigration bureaus continue the effort to eliminate immigration case backlogs and preserve national security through modernizing and speeding-up processing times. In addition, major expansion initiatives are underway at several SPCs. Opportunities will be best for those with the most experience and education, and who have excellent computer and interpersonal skills.

Entry Methods

The ICE offers unpaid training opportunities to high school and college students through its student volunteer program. This program provides work experience related to your academic program, as well as an opportunity to explore career options and develop personal and professional skills.

Most people join the ICE in entry-level positions, and all must go through basic training. The ICE accepts applications only when there are openings. These intervals are called open periods. Those interested in this work should contact their nearest ICE regional office or visit the ICE Web site for more information.

Candidates who meet basic qualifications will be scheduled to take a written exam. If they pass, their names go on a list of eligible applicants. Those chosen for consideration are then interviewed. If the interview is satisfactory, they may be considered for probationary appointments. Before appointment, candidates must pass a urinalysis to reveal any drug use, and undergo a background investigation. Those who meet all standards receive provisional appointments, and those who successfully complete the probationary period receive career appointments.

Advancement

Initial appointments are at GS-5 or GS-7 grades. On successful completion of a probationary period, officers are eligible for promotion to GS-7 or GS-9. All employees go through periodic journeyman level, technical, and/or supervisory and leadership training.

Further progression is based on performance, experience, skill, additional training, and successful completion of the preceding grade(s) up to the GS-12 rating. Higher ratings, however, include management or administrative positions. Advancement to these higher ratings is competitive. That is, those seeking advancement must participate in service-wide competition based upon performance and passing of an examination.

For Further Research

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Department of Homeland Security, 801 I Street, N.W., Washington, DC 20536. Web site: www.ice.gov

Acknowledgments

Chronicle Guidance Publications appreciates the cooperation of the individuals who reviewed the information in this brief.

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