

## Illegal immigrants on home buying spree in Texas

Affordable home prices in Texas and the US government's restrictive immigration policies are leading to increased number of illegal immigrants buying homes.

North Texas has become attractive for illegal immigrants because homes are becoming more and more affordable.

'After a while you realise that you're here for a long time, and you don't want to throw your money away by renting,' said Márquez, an illegal migrant from Mexico.

'It's a way to set roots and invest in the future,' he said.

Experts say that foreigners who are not eligible for social security cards can apply for an individual tax identification number (ITINs), which enable them to pay taxes in US.

About 8 million ITINs have been issued since 1997, and an ITIN can be an illegal immigrant's ticket to buying a home.

In the past, immigrants traveled back and forth across the border to visit relatives and to stay in touch with their homeland. But as crossing the border has become more difficult, dangerous and expensive, immigrants are preferring to stay back in the US, despite their illegal status, according to Dallas News newspaper.

Rick Troutman, president and CEO of hispaniclending.com, a Dallas-based group that specialises in lending money to Hispanics estimates that as many as 105,000 illegal immigrants live in Dallas County alone, plus tens of thousands more throughout North Texas.

And with home prices relatively low in North Texas - compared with other places favored by immigrants such as Los Angeles, Chicago or Miami - Troutman believes many of them are potential buyers.

While it's illegal to hire undocumented workers in the US, there's nothing wrong with lending them money.

According to the newspaper, federal and state governments are subtly encouraging banks to issue home mortgages to illegal immigrants through little-known individual tax numbers.

Banks are also training employees to speak foreign languages to interact with new customers.

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