

Immigrant Demographics

- One in five children in the U.S. comes from an immigrant family, with two-thirds of the immigrant population living in six states: California, Texas, New York, Florida, Illinois, and New Jersey.ⁱ
- Between 1992 and 2002, states located in the middle of the country, including many of the Rocky Mountain, Midwestern, and Southeastern states, have experienced a 200% increase in their immigrant population.ⁱⁱ
- Approximately 6.6 million families in the U.S. are of mixed citizenship status. A “mixed-status” family is one in which family members do not all share the same immigration status.ⁱⁱⁱ Almost all children of immigrants under age 6 are U.S. citizens (93%), and most live in “mixed-status” families.^{iv}
- There are an estimated 11.9 million undocumented immigrants in the U.S.^v Of the approximately 5 million children of undocumented immigrants residing in the U.S., an estimated 1.5 million are undocumented themselves and more than 3 million are U.S. citizens.^{vi} Almost half of the undocumented households (47%) are comprised of a couple and children.^{vii}
- Across the country, over 5,000 undocumented immigrants were arrested at their workplaces during 2007 for being undocumented, a tenfold increase over 2002.^{viii} Other arrests – for criminal violations, violations of deportation orders, and by state and local police acting as immigration agents – have increased as well.^{ix}
- Poverty rates are generally higher among children of immigrants than among children of native born children.^x This is concerning given that poverty is one of the most important predictors of negative child outcomes.^{xi}
- Children in immigrant families are considerably more likely to be uninsured, to be reported in fair or poor health, and to lack a usual place where they can get preventative health care.^{xii} Non-citizen documented immigrant parents often do not access public benefits for their children, fearing this may impact their chances of becoming citizens.^{xiii}
- Many immigrant families come to the U.S. with family support, including the presence of both biological parents and extended relatives in the household.^{xiv}

Immigrant Families in Child Welfare

- There are currently no consistent data collection mechanisms across child welfare systems to adequately identify immigrant status, which contributes to a gap in the knowledge base and understanding of this population.^{xv} However, a preliminary analysis by the National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being (NSCAW) found that 9.6% of all children involved with the child welfare system are children of immigrant parents and 2.3% of all children within the child welfare system are immigrants themselves.^{xvi}
- As a result of the growing enforcement activities in the form of workplace and private home “raids” by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), children of immigrant families are at an increased risk of unnecessary child welfare placement.^{xvii}

- There are many cases across the country that have resulted in U.S. citizen children left behind without a parent or guardian to care for them due to ICE “raids.”^{xviii} In child welfare practice, immigration cases are considered some of the most time consuming and challenging because many social workers are unfamiliar with immigration issues and child welfare systems are not equipped to address them.^{xix}
- Immigrant children and children from immigrant households are less likely to be living in relative foster care, and more likely to be living in group homes and institutions as compared to their U.S. born counterparts. They are also more likely to have a case goal of independent living or long-term foster care.^{xx}

Child Welfare Practice And Policy Implications

- The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1990 established the Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS) option, which allows for certain undocumented Court dependent children who are receiving Permanent Placement services from the public child welfare system, and for whom it has been determined that it is not in their best interest to be returned to their country of nationality, the right to remain in the U.S. This legal status eliminates the fear of deportation upon emancipation from the child welfare system.^{xxi}
- Many jurisdictions across the country including several counties in California, Illinois, and New York City have established specialized units within their child welfare system to address the needs of immigrant youth and families. Some of the key practice considerations to improve services to this population include:
 1. Specialized training to include sensitivity to the needs of immigrant families, understanding the impact of migration and acculturation on family experience.
 2. Development of knowledge and protocols to assess potential relief options such as Violence Against Women Act (VAWA),^{xxii} Special immigrant Juvenile Status,^{xxiii} U-Visas,^{xxiv} etc.
 3. The development of special handbooks, memorandums, and protocols with foreign consulates.
- Numerous child welfare jurisdictions across the country can benefit from technical assistance to support capacity building efforts to better serve the needs of this community and address the legal, trans-national and practice implications of this growing and unique population.

Information compiled through the work of the Casey Latino Leadership Group comprised of members from Casey Family Programs, Marguerite Casey Foundation and the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

Footnotes

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- III. Passel, J.S. (2006). The size and characteristics of the unauthorized migrant population in the U.S.: Estimates based on the March 2005 current population survey. Washington D.C.: Pew Hispanic Center.
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- VIII. Urban Institute. (2008). Unauthorized immigrants. Policy Nutshells, No. 5. Retrieved on March 5, 2009 from <http://www.urban.org/decisionpoints08/archive/05immigrants.cfm>
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- X. Capps, R., et al., (2004).
- XI. Duncan, G.J. & Brooks-Gunn, J. (2000). Family poverty, welfare reform, and child development. Child Development, 71, 188-196.
- XII. Capps, R. et al., (2004).
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- XV. Lincroft, Y. (2006). Undercounted. Underserved. Immigrant and refugee families in the child welfare system. Baltimore: Annie E. Casey Foundation.
- XVI. Dettlaff, A.J., et al. (2009).
- XVII. Kremer, J.D., et al. (2009).
- XVIII. Hernandez D.J., et al. (2008).
- XIX. Lincroft, Y. (2006).
- XX. Vericker, T. (2008). Immigration issues in the child welfare system: Findings from Texas. Presented at the Roundtable of the Migration and Child Welfare National Network, April 1-3, 2008. Chicago, IL.
- XXI. Lincroft, Y. (2006).
- XXII. For more information about the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) please go to the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services website at: www.unicis.gov
- XXIII. For more information about Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS) please go to the Bridging Refugee Youth & Children's Services website at: <http://www.brycs.org/sijs>
- XXIV. For more information about U Visas go to the United States Immigration Support website at: http://www.usimmigrationsupport.org/visa_u.html