

Immigration Reform is Central to Women's Equality: A Fact Sheet

It is a little-known fact that three-quarters of all immigrants to the United States are women and children. Immigrant women make vital contributions to the rich social, cultural, intellectual, and economic fabric of their new home country, starting businesses, taking care of families (their own and others) and knitting together their families and communities. And immigrant women will only play a *greater* role in America's economy and culture going forward as industries dominated by women—such as home care and domestic work—continue to grow and expand.ⁱ This fact sheet lays out the key statistics on women and immigration, why immigration reform is central to women's equality, and why any immigration reform bill must be inclusive of women's priorities.

Women and Immigration

- Women make up more than half (51%) of immigrants in America today,ⁱⁱ and women and children together make up three quarters of all immigrants.ⁱⁱⁱ
- There are an estimated 5 million undocumented women^{iv} and 1.5 million undocumented children living in the United States. Together, they make up about 47% of the undocumented population in the U.S. today.^v
- Nearly 60% of undocumented women work in the informal economy including as domestic workers or caregivers.^{vi} In less than 20 years, 75 million Americans will have reached retirement age and the overall demand for direct-care workers, who are predominantly women, is projected to increase by 48% over the next decade.^{vii}
- A pathway to citizenship that requires proof of employment would exclude millions of hard-working women. In a survey of over 4000 low-wage workers in three largest cities in the US – New York, Chicago and Los Angeles—workers in occupations with high percentages of women did not receive pay stubs with their pay. 98% of surveyed undocumented nannies, 92% of maids and housecleaners, and 77% of garment workers did not receive any pay stubs.^{viii} Any pathway to citizenship should be based on presence, not proof of employment or include alternative ways to prove employment and other contributions to our country.
- Nearly 70% of all women immigrants who have legal status obtain that status through the family immigration system, sponsored by a close relative.^{ix} That system is burdened with 4.3 million people who are stuck in the visa backlogs waiting years, and even decades, to be reunited with their families.^x The burden of backlogs falls disproportionately on women and families.^{xi}
- The average wait for a U.S. permanent resident to sponsor an unmarried son or daughter from Mexico is 11 years.^{xii} The average wait for a U.S. citizen to sponsor a child over 18 or a sibling from The Philippines is up to 20 years.^{xiii}
- One of every four children in the U.S. is a child of immigrants. 24% of children of immigrants have at least one undocumented parent. 82% of children with undocumented immigrant parents are U.S. citizens, with the share rising to 91% for children under 6 years old.^{xiv}
- Immigrant women contribute to the economy as workers and entrepreneurs. Women immigrants are significantly more likely than their native-born sisters to start a business.^{xv}
- Even though women are a majority of immigrants, only 27% of work visas granted to women are as the principal visa holders.^{xvi} The majority of women who enter on a work visa are dependents of the principal visa holder and do not receive authorization to work while in the U.S., making them economically dependent and vulnerable to abuse.
- The large disparity between men and women principle visa holders persists despite native-born and foreign born women having similar levels of education attainment (21.4% and 20.3% respectively have a bachelor's degree).^{xvii}

Women Immigrants and Children

- Between 2010 and 2012, nearly 205,000 parents of U.S. citizen children were deported.^{xxviii} These deportations left an estimated 152,426 U.S. citizen children to live without one or both of their parents in FY2012 alone.^{xxix}
- At least 5,100 children are currently separated from loving parents and in the foster care system because their parent(s) have been detained or deported.^{xx}
- Thirty percent of undocumented parents reported that their children were afraid either all or most of the time and nearly three-fourths of undocumented parents reported a child showing symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder because of their children's fear that their parent may be suddenly detained or deported.^{xxxi}
- When primary earners are deported, they leave an estimated 83,000 partners (mostly women) behind to deal with lost wages, increased risk of poverty and hunger, and a lower life-expectancy.^{xxii}
- An estimated 43,000 U.S.-citizen children will experience a decline in their health status after the change in household income associated with the absence of a primary earner because of detention or deportation.^{xxiii}
- U.S.-born children of undocumented parents are twice as likely to lack health insurance as children born to citizen parents.^{xxiv}

Women Immigrants, Violence and Trafficking

- Immigrant women are three to six times more likely to experience domestic violence than US-born women, regardless of their partner's immigration status. Abusers often use their partners' immigration status, isolation or economic dependence because of visa restrictions as tools of control in order to force a woman to remain in a relationship.^{xxv}
- Estimates are that 70% of women crossing the border without family members are sexually assaulted en route to the U.S.^{xxvi} Sexual assault is so common that women are urged to take birth control prior to traveling to the U.S. to prepare for assault.^{xxvii}
- More than twice as many women who are survivors of domestic violence qualified for U-visas than the cap allowed in the last year, leaving many survivors in legal limbo. Many immigrant women are unable to access support such as emergency shelters or food or help from police because of language barriers, fear and discrimination around immigration status.^{xxviii}
- Many domestic workers, a profession dominated by women immigrants, work in appalling conditions. One study found that one third of domestic workers in New York City had experienced some form of physical or verbal abuse, often because of their race or immigration status.^{xxix}

ⁱ Note: In less than 20 years – 75 million Americans will have reached retirement age and the overall demand for direct-care workers, who are predominantly women, is projected to increase by 48 percent over the next decade.

PHI, Fact Sheet: *Occupational Projections for Direct Care Workers 2010-2020*, February 2013, Available at http://phinational.org/sites/phinational.org/files/phi_factsheet1update_singles_2.pdf

ⁱⁱ United States Census Bureau. *2011 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates. Selected Characteristics of the Native and Foreign-Born Populations*. Available at: <http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/searchresults.xhtml?refresh=t>

ⁱⁱⁱ *Facts about the Family Immigration System and Asian and Pacific Islander Women*, National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum, Available at: http://napawf.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/11/NAPAWF_Familyimmigration_factsheet.pdf

^{iv} Passel, Jeffrey and D'Vera Cohn, *A Portrait of Unauthorized Immigrants in the United States*, The Pew Hispanic Center (2009). Available at <http://pewhispanic.org/files/reports/107.pdf>. See also Hoefler M, Rytina and Baker B. U.S. Department of Homeland Security. *Estimates of the Unauthorized Immigrant Population Residing in the United States: January 2011. March 2012* Available at http://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/statistics/publications/ois_ill_pe_2011.pdf

^v Passel, Jeffrey and D'Vera Cohn, *A Portrait of Unauthorized Immigrants in the United States*, The Pew Hispanic Center (2009). Available at <http://pewhispanic.org/files/reports/107.pdf>

^{vi} Passel, Jeffrey and D'Vera Cohn, *A Portrait of Unauthorized Immigrants in the United States*, Pew Research Center, April, 2009. Available at: <http://www.pewhispanic.org/2009/04/14/iv-social-and-economic-characteristics/> See also, National Employment Law Project, *Immigration Status and Pay Documentation*, 2008, Available at http://nelp.3cdn.net/56610295228b59f19a_1km6ibvof.pdf.

^{vii} PHI, Fact Sheet: *Occupational Projections for Direct Care Workers 2010-2020*, February 2013, Available at http://phinational.org/sites/phinational.org/files/phi_factsheet1update_singles_2.pdf

^{viii} National Employment Law Project, *Immigration Status and Pay Documentation*, 2008, Available at http://nelp.3cdn.net/56610295228b59f19a_1km6ibvof.pdf.

^{ix} Asian Pacific American Legal Center, *A Devastating Wait: Family Unity and the Immigration Backlogs* (2008).

^{ix} Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics. *Children of at least one foreign-born parent, 2011*. Available at: <http://www.childstats.gov/americaschildren/tables.asp>.

^x Annual Report on Immigrant Visa Applications in the Family-sponsored and Employment-based preferences Registered at the National Visa Center as of November 1, 2012, U.S. Department of State, Nov, 2012. Available at: <http://www.travel.state.gov/pdf/WaitingListItem.pdf>

^{xi} Ibid.

^{xii} "Visa Bulletin," US Department of State, Bureau of Consular Affairs, Accessed November, 12, 2013. Available at: http://travel.state.gov/visa/bulletin/bulletin_1360.html. Note: estimated wait times based on the Nov 2013 Visa Bulletin. Wait time estimates vary by month.

^{xiii} Milligan, Susan, "The wait is long for US visas: Applicants face years of hurdles," Boston Globe, April 23, 2006. Available at: http://www.boston.com/news/nation/articles/2006/04/23/the_wait_is_long_for_us_visas/

^{xiv} Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics. *Children of at least one foreign-born parent, 2011*. Available at: <http://www.childstats.gov/americaschildren/tables.asp>.

^{xv} Pearce, Susan, Elizabeth Difford and Reena Tandon, *Our American Immigrant Entrepreneurs: The Women*, Immigration Policy Center, (December 2011).

^{xvi} Jefferys, Kelly, *Characteristics of Employment-Sponsored Legal LPRS and Employment-Sponsored Principle LPRS: Fiscal Year 2004*. Department of Homeland Security, October 2005. http://www.advancingjustice-aaic.org/sites/aaic/files/APALC_family_report.pdf

^{xvii} Legal Momentum, *Immigrant Women Program, Women Immigrants and Family Immigration*

^{xviii} Wessler, Seth Freed, "Primary Data: Deportations of Parents of U.S. Citizen Kids," Colorlines, Published December 17, 2012. Available at: http://colorlines.com/archives/2012/12/deportations_of_parents_of_us-born_citizens_122012.html

^{xix} Satinsky, Sara, Alice Hu, Jonathan Heller, and Lili Farhang, *Family Unity, Family Health: How Family-Focused Immigration Will Mean Better Health for Children and Families*, Human Impact Partners (June, 2013). Available at: www.familyunityfamilyhealth.org

^{xx} Applied Research Center, *Shattered Families: The Perilous Intersection of Immigration Enforcement and the Child Welfare System*, (November, 2011).

^{xxi} Yohikawa, Hirokazu and Jenya Kholoptseva, *Unauthorized Immigrant Parents and Their Children's Development*, Migration Policy Institute, (March 2013).

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^{xxiii} Ibid.

^{xxiv} Chaudry, Ajay, et. al. *Facing Our Future: Children in the Aftermath of Immigration Enforcement*, Urban Institute, (February, 2010), Available at: <http://www.urban.org/publications/412020.html>

^{xxv} Tjaden, Patricia and Nancy Thoennes. 2000. *Extent, Nature and Consequences of Violence Against Women: Findings from the National Violence Against Women Survey*. The National Institute of Justice and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Available at: <http://www.ncjrs.org/pdffiles1/nij/183781.pdf>

^{xxvi} Tim Vanderpol, "Price of Admission," *Tucson Weekly*, June 5, 2008. See also Human Rights Watch, *Detained and Dismissed*, March 2009, p. 54.

^{xxvii} Human Rights Watch, *Detained and Dismissed*, March 2009, p. 54.

^{xxviii} Orloff et al., 1995. "With No Place to Turn: Improving Advocacy for Battered Immigrant Women." *Family Law Quarterly*. 29(2):313.

^{xxix} Burnham, Linda and Nik Theodore, *Home Economics: The Invisible and Unregulated World of Domestic Work*, National Domestic Workers Alliance (2012). Available at: <http://www.domesticworkers.org/pdfs/HomeEconomicsEnglish.pdf>