

APRIL 2020 | BY SARA KIMBERLIN AND AUREO MESQUITA

No Safety Net or Federal COVID-19 Relief: California's Undocumented Workers and Mixed Status Families Are Locked Out of Support

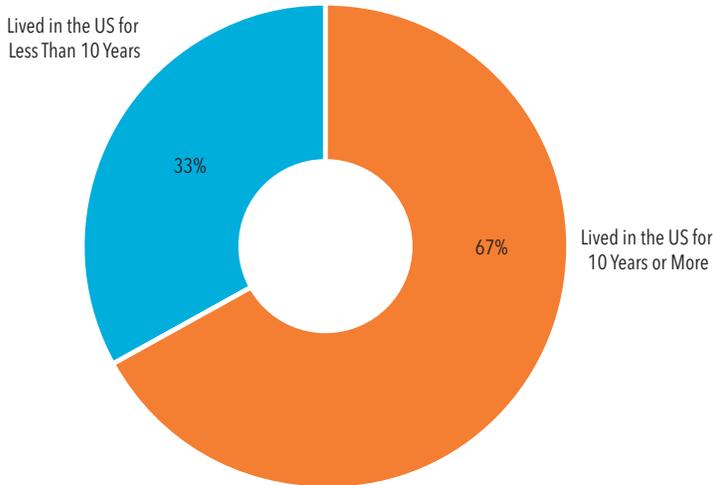
California is home to an estimated 2 to 3.1 million individuals who are undocumented immigrants, making up approximately 6% of the state's total population.^{1,2} These workers, parents, children, and their family members – many of whom are US-born citizens – are deeply integrated in the state's communities and vital to the state's economy. California's undocumented workers are especially hard-hit by the economic effects of the COVID-19 crisis, and yet they are locked out of most of the federal and state public supports available to help workers and their families weather this pandemic. State leaders should prioritize supporting this essential group of Californians who are at severe risk of financial and health hardship but blocked from COVID-19 public relief efforts.

1 Undocumented Immigrants Are Deeply Integrated in California's Communities

Most individuals in California who are undocumented have lived in the United States for many years. An estimated 2 in 3 have lived in the US for more than 10 years, and an estimated 30% came to the US as children, according to Budget Center analysis. The vast majority of undocumented Californians live in "mixed-status" households that also include US citizens. About an estimated 1 in 3 undocumented residents is a parent, and almost an estimated 90% of these parents live with US-born citizen children. More than 1 in 8 school-aged children in California may have a parent who is an undocumented immigrant.³

2 in 3 Californians Who Are Undocumented Have Lived in the US for a Decade or Longer

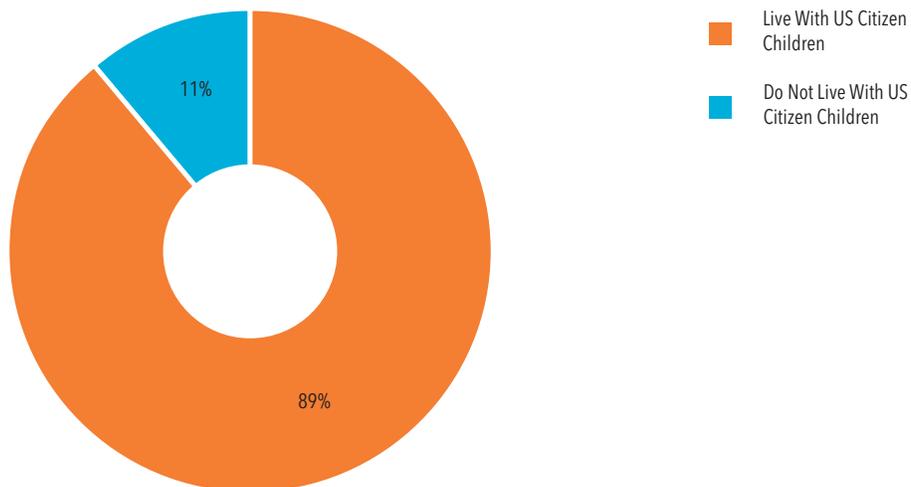
Estimated Share of Undocumented Californians, 2018



Source: Budget Center analysis of US Census Bureau, American Community Survey public-use microdata downloaded from IPUMS USA (University of Minnesota, www.ipums.org), with immigration status imputed using methods developed for the California Poverty Measure, a joint project of the Public Policy Institute of California and the Stanford Center on Poverty and Inequality

Nearly 9 in 10 Undocumented Californians Who Are Parents Live With US Citizen Children

Estimated Share of Undocumented Parents, 2018



Source: Budget Center analysis of US Census Bureau, American Community Survey public-use microdata downloaded from IPUMS USA (University of Minnesota, www.ipums.org), with immigration status imputed using methods developed for the California Poverty Measure, a joint project of the Public Policy Institute of California and the Stanford Center on Poverty and Inequality

2 Undocumented Immigrants Are Essential to California's Economy

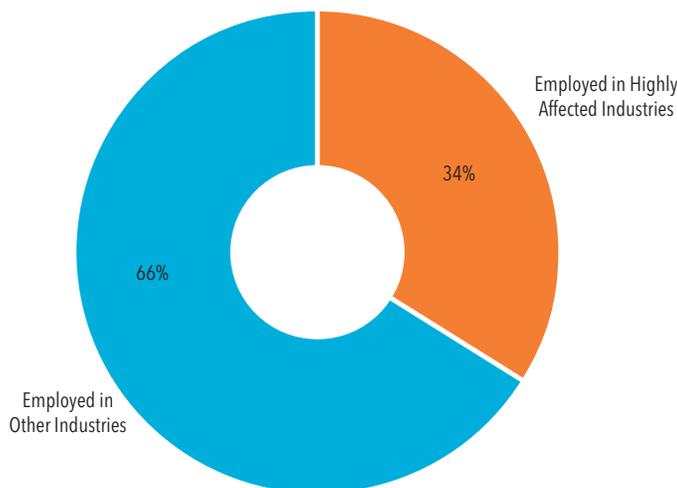
Besides being integrated into families and communities throughout the state, California's undocumented residents are strongly integrated into the state's workplaces and economy. More than 90% of Californians who are undocumented live in working households, and undocumented workers make up as much as 7% of all workers in California, according to Budget Center estimates. In some California industries – such as crop production, food services, building and landscaping services, and construction – as much as 10% to more than 30% of the state's workforce may consist of undocumented workers. California's undocumented immigrants also make important contributions to state and local government revenues, contributing more than an estimated \$3 billion annually to California's state and local taxes.⁴

3 California's Undocumented Workers Are Hit Hard by the COVID-19 Economic Crisis

In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, workers who are undocumented are especially vulnerable to economic hardships. Most work in jobs that cannot be done remotely, and a large share work in service industries immediately hit hard by COVID-19 business reductions and closures. About 1 in 3 undocumented workers in California is employed in an industry that was immediately affected by the COVID-19 economic shutdown – such as food service, child care, building services (like janitorial services) or landscaping.⁵ Of these undocumented workers in the most immediately affected industries, an estimated 40% are parents. An estimated 90% of these parents live with children who are US citizens.

1 in 3 Undocumented Workers in California Is Employed in an Industry Highly Affected by the COVID-19 Economic Shutdown

Estimated Share of Undocumented Workers, 2018



Note: Highly affected industries are defined as industries directly disrupted by business closures and reduced demand due to COVID-19 public health stay-at-home orders, such as retail, restaurants, travel and tourism, arts and entertainment, personal services, and landscaping and building services.
 Source: Budget Center analysis of US Census Bureau, American Community Survey public-use microdata downloaded from IPUMS USA (University of Minnesota, www.ipums.org), with immigration status imputed using methods developed for the California Poverty Measure, a joint project of the Public Policy Institute of California and the Stanford Center on Poverty and Inequality

4 Undocumented Workers and Mixed Status Families Continue to Be Locked Out of Most Public Supports During the COVID-19 Crisis

Despite the many ways undocumented workers, individuals, and their families are a vital part of California's workforce and communities, they have been left out of virtually all parts of the federal response aimed at helping families and individuals hit hardest by the COVID-19 economic crisis. Workers who are undocumented are ineligible for the expanded unemployment insurance benefits put in place by the recent federal CARES Act.⁶ Families that include undocumented individuals – including mixed-status families that include US citizens – also generally will not receive federal recovery rebate checks, because they will be ineligible if any member of the family lacks a Social Security Number.⁷

This failure to include undocumented workers and mixed-status families in the COVID-19 emergency response follows a history of inequitable federal and state policies that have excluded these workers and families from public supports to meet their most basic needs, despite their significant contributions to essential work, key industries, the state economy, and local communities. Undocumented workers are ineligible for standard unemployment insurance as well as the expanded COVID-19 benefits.⁸ They are excluded from the largest federal refundable tax credit for low-income households, the federal EITC, and from both of California's state refundable tax credits for low-income workers and families, the CalEITC and Young Child Tax Credit, even if their families include US citizens.⁹ While children and young adults who are undocumented can access Medi-Cal, California's public health insurance program, undocumented adults age 25 and older remain ineligible, and they are also not eligible to access Affordable Care Act subsidies to help pay for privately-purchased health insurance, even if they have no other access to health insurance and work in jobs with very low earnings.¹⁰ Undocumented individuals are also ineligible for the primary federal food assistance program, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), known as CalFresh in California, and for cash support through CalWORKs, California's welfare-to-work program for families with children.¹¹ Though many undocumented individuals have US citizen family members who are eligible to access some public safety net supports, their families receive less than other families because undocumented family members are not included when determining how much support the family needs and is eligible to receive.

5 State Leaders Should Prioritize Addressing the Needs of California's Undocumented and Mixed-Status Families

As the federal response to the COVID-19 crisis continues to take shape, it makes sense for California's state response to focus on filling the gaps left by the federal relief packages and helping the Californians who are locked out of available supports.¹² Workers who are undocumented and mixed-status families are especially vulnerable to the economic fallout of the COVID-19 emergency, while having no or limited access to many public supports that help low-income households meet basic needs. State leaders should make sure that these essential members of our workforce and community have support to not only get through these difficult times but also be able to support their families in the months and years to come. Prioritizing the urgent needs of undocumented immigrants and their families is an important opportunity for California's policymakers to make our state's economy more resilient, to make our support systems more equitably inclusive, and to lead in this time of crisis.

Sara Kimberlin and Aureo Mesquita prepared this 5 Facts. The Budget Center was established in 1995 to provide Californians with a source of timely, objective, and accessible expertise on state fiscal and economic policy issues. The Budget Center engages in independent fiscal and policy analysis and public education with the goal of improving public policies affecting the economic and social well-being of low- and middle-income Californians. General operating support for the Budget Center is provided by foundation grants, subscriptions, and individual contributions. Please visit the Budget Center's website at calbudgetcenter.org.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Recent estimates of the number of undocumented Californians range from 2.0 million (Pew Research Center Hispanic Trends, *Unauthorized Immigrant Population Trends for States, Birth Countries and Regions* (June 2019), downloaded from <https://www.pewresearch.org/hispanic/interactives/unauthorized-trends/> on April 10, 2020), to 2.4 million (Center for Migration Studies, *State-Level Unauthorized Population and Eligible-to-Naturalize Estimates, 2017*, downloaded from <http://data.cmsny.org/> on April 10, 2020), to 3.1 million (Migration Policy Institute, *Profile of the Unauthorized Population: California*, downloaded from <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/data/unauthorized-immigrant-population/state/CA> on April 10, 2020).
- 2 Undocumented individuals as share of the state population based on Budget Center analysis of US Census Bureau, American Community Survey public-use microdata for 2018 downloaded from IPUMS-USA (University of Minnesota, www.ipums.org), with immigration status imputed using a method developed for the California Poverty Measure, a joint project of the Public Policy Institute of California and the Stanford Center on Poverty and Inequality. Unless otherwise noted, all further data cited are based on this analysis.
- 3 Pew Research Center Hispanic Trends, *US Unauthorized Immigrant Population Estimates by State, 2016*, downloaded from <https://www.pewresearch.org/hispanic/interactives/u-s-unauthorized-immigrants-by-state/> on April 10, 2020.
- 4 Kayla Kitson, *California's Undocumented Immigrants Make Significant Contributions to State and Local Revenues* (California Budget & Policy Center: April 2019).
- 5 Highly affected industries are defined as industries directly disrupted by business closures and reduced demand due to COVID-19 public health stay-at-home orders, including retail (excluding grocery, pharmacy, hardware, other essential services, and online), restaurants, travel and tourism, arts and entertainment, landscaping and building services, employment services (e.g., temporary staffing agencies), child care, civic and religious organizations, and personal services.
- 6 California Budget & Policy Center, *Federal Fiscal Relief and COVID-19: Implications for Californians* (April 2020).
- 7 California Budget & Policy Center, *Federal Fiscal Relief and COVID-19: Implications for Californians* (April 2020). Note that there is a very narrow exception for individuals in the armed services if one spouse has a Social Security Number.
- 8 Legal Aid at Work, *Undocumented Workers' Employment Rights*, downloaded from <https://legalaidatwork.org/factsheet/undocumented-workers-employment-rights/> on April 10, 2020.
- 9 Alissa Anderson, *Five Reasons Why California Should Extend the CalEITC and Young Child Tax Credit to Immigrant Families and Communities* (California Budget & Policy Center: November 2019).
- 10 Monica Davalos, Scott Graves, and Adriana Ramos-Yamamoto, *Comprehensive Health Coverage Can Help California's Undocumented Seniors Now and Beyond the COVID-19 Pandemic* (California Budget & Policy Center: April 2020).
- 11 National Immigration Law Center, *Major Benefit Programs Available to Immigrants in California* (January 2020).
- 12 California Budget & Policy Center, *How Should California Support Individuals and Families Hit Hardest by the COVID-19 Crisis?* (March 20, 2020).