More than 11 Million: Unauthorized Immigrants and Their Families

Fact sheet

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In 2012, the population of unauthorized immigrants in the US was estimated at 11.7 million.1 The “11 million” has become a common reference in media and policy discussions alike. The possibility of a pathway to citizenship for unauthorized immigrants2 is one of the most controversial issues in current discussions of immigration reform. But the effects of a legalization program go well beyond the 11 million, because it is certain to affect not only the undocumented but also their families.

This fact sheet presents information on unauthorized immigrants’ households, putting in clear view the widespread effects of a legalization program for the currently undocumented. The family members of undocumented immigrants—the majority of whom are US-born citizens and under the age of 18—are a large but often overlooked group with a fundamental stake in legalization.

This sheet uses data from the 2012 Annual Social and Economic Supplement of the Current Population Survey to assign immigration status and it focuses on households containing at least one unauthorized immigrant.3

The analysis highlights several fundamental points that are often overlooked in existing policy debates:

- Our procedure estimated 11 million unauthorized immigrants. These immigrants co-reside with 8.7 million people, US- and foreign-born alike. Thus, a total of almost 20 million people could be directly affected by a legalization program.

- The large majority of unauthorized immigrants co-reside with people that are not unauthorized. Excluding those who live alone, only 22 percent live in households where everybody is undocumented.

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2 The terms *unauthorized* and *undocumented* are used interchangeably.

• Of those co-residing with unauthorized immigrants, 6.2 million (74%) are US-born citizens.

• 5.2 million (60%) of the people co-residing with the unauthorized are children aged 0 to 17. Most of these children (4.1 million) are younger than 13.

• Most undocumented residents (73%) are the head of household or a close relative—either the spouse or child of the head of household.

• Over half (53%) of unauthorized residents have children of their own residing in the household.

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<th>Household relationship of unauthorized immigrants</th>
<th>Percent</th>
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<tr>
<td>Percent of unauthorized immigrants who are head of household or spouse or child of the head of household</td>
<td>73%</td>
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<td>Percent of unauthorized immigrant heads of household with own children in the household</td>
<td>53%</td>
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<td>Percent of unauthorized immigrants not living alone, residing only with other unauthorized immigrants</td>
<td>22%</td>
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