

## A Pathway to Citizenship Means A Safe Passage to Adulthood

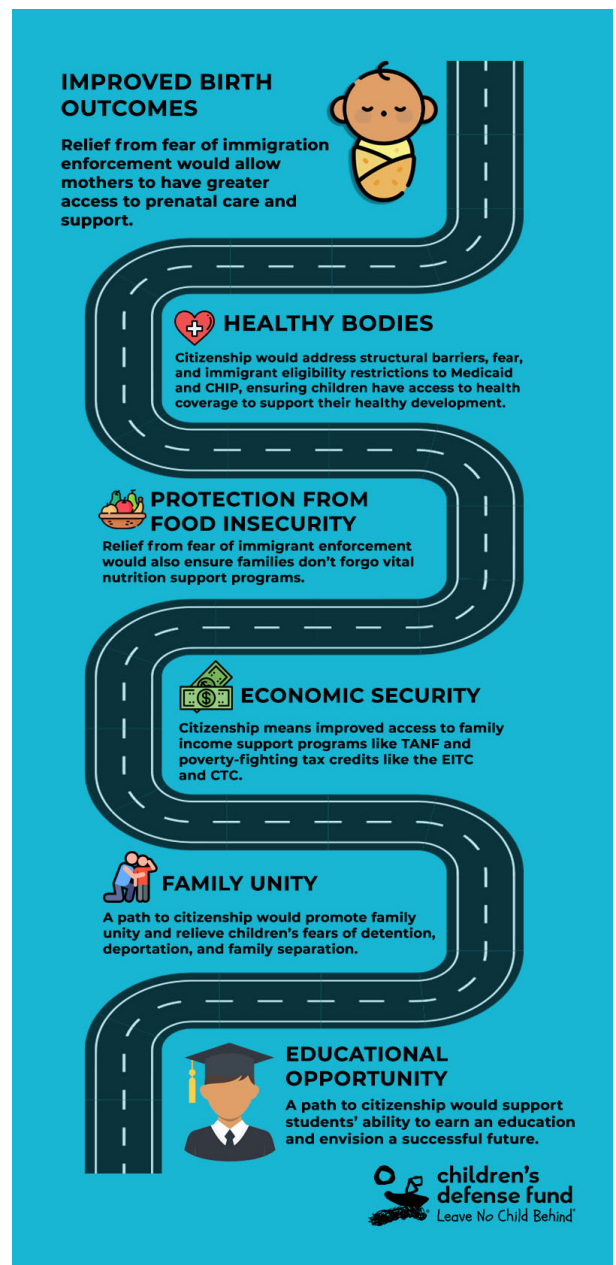
More than 1 in 4 (26 percent), or approximately 18 million, U.S. children lived with at least one immigrant parent in 2019.<sup>1</sup> And more than 5 million children ages 17 and under are estimated to have at least one undocumented parent.<sup>2</sup>

Every child deserves a successful passage to adulthood with the help of caring families and communities. For children in immigrant families, a pathway to citizenship means better opportunity for:

**Improved Birth Outcomes.** Research finds heightened immigration enforcement has troubling impact on babies, including decreased use of prenatal care for immigrant mothers and declines in birth weight.<sup>3</sup> Relief from fear of immigration enforcement would allow mothers to have greater access to care and support.

**Healthy Bodies.** Structural barriers, fear, and immigrant eligibility restrictions to Medicaid and CHIP interfere with many immigrant families' access to health insurance.<sup>4</sup> More than 1 in 5 immigrant children did not have health coverage in 2020 (20.9 percent compared to 5.2 percent of native-born citizen children).<sup>5</sup> Access to health and mental health coverage that's comprehensive, affordable, age-appropriate, and easy to get and keep would support children's healthy development.

**Protection from Food Insecurity.** Fear of immigration-related consequences also cause immigrant families to forgo vital nutrition support programs. In a qualitative study of 32 geographically diverse organizations in Texas, CDF-Texas found that anti-immigrant policies caused many mixed-status families to fear enrolling even their citizen children.<sup>6</sup> A nationally representative survey found that 11.4 percent of adults in immigrant families with children reported they or a family member avoided a nutrition program in 2019.<sup>7</sup>



**Economic Security.** Citizenship means improved access to family income support programs like Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) as well as poverty-fighting tax credits like the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and Child Tax Credit (CTC). It is estimated that a path to citizenship would lift more than 250,000 children out of poverty.<sup>8</sup>

**Family Unity.** Children's feelings of personal safety are linked to the perceived safety of those who care for them.<sup>9</sup> Immigration detention and deportation are threats to personal safety and fuel fears of family separation. A path to citizenship would promote family unity as well as relieve the fears of being undocumented or having an undocumented parent.

**Educational Opportunity.** Immigration enforcement and anti-immigrant rhetoric and policies interfere with students' attendance and ability to focus on learning.<sup>10</sup> A path to citizenship would support students' ability to earn an education and envision a successful future.<sup>11</sup>

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## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Batalova, Jeanne, Mary Hanna, and Christopher Levesque. 2021. "Frequently Requested Statistics on Immigrants and Immigration in the United States," *Migration Policy Institute: Spotlight*, February 11. <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/frequently-requested-statistics-immigrants-and-immigration-united-states#children-immigrants>.
- <sup>2</sup> Capps, Randy, Julia Gelatt, Ariel G. Ruiz Soto, and Jennifer Van Hook. 2020. "Unauthorized Immigrants in the United States Stable Numbers, Changing Origins," p. 9. Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute. [https://www.migrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/publications/mpi-unauthorized-immigrants-stablenumbers-changingorigins\\_final.pdf](https://www.migrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/publications/mpi-unauthorized-immigrants-stablenumbers-changingorigins_final.pdf).
- <sup>3</sup> Tome, Romina, Marcos Rangel, Christina Gibson-Davis and Laura Bellows. 2021. "Heightened Immigration Enforcement Impacts U.S. Citizens' Birth Outcomes: Evidence from Early ICE Interventions in North Carolina." *PLoS ONE* 16(2): e0245020. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0245020>.
- <sup>4</sup> Kaiser Family Foundation. 2021. "Health Coverage of Immigrants." July 15. <https://www.kff.org/racial-equity-and-health-policy/fact-sheet/health-coverage-of-immigrants/>.
- <sup>5</sup> Keisler-Starkey, Katherine and Lisa N. Bunch. 2021. "Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2020," p. 11. Suitland, MD: U.S. Census Bureau. <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2021/demo/p60-274.pdf>. Note: Immigrant children is defined here as foreign-born children who emigrated to the United States and are not yet U.S. citizens.
- <sup>6</sup> Anderson, Cheasty. 2020. "Public Charge and Private Dilemmas: Key Challenges and Best Practices for Fighting the Chilling Effect in Texas, 2017-2019," p. 1. Bellaire, TX: Children's Defense Fund-Texas. <https://cdf.texas.org/protecting-immigrant-communities/public-charge-and-private-dilemmas/>. Note: Mixed-status families is defined here as families whose members include people with different citizenship or immigrant statuses. For example, a mixed status family might include one or two parents that are undocumented and children that are U.S.-born citizens.
- <sup>7</sup> Haley, Jennifer M., Genevieve M. Kenney, Hamutal Bernstein, and Dulce Gonzalez. 2020. "One in Five Adults in Immigrant Families with Children Reported Chilling Effects on Public Benefit Receipt in 2019," p. 6. Washington, DC: Urban Institute. [https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/102406/one-in-five-adults-in-immigrant-families-with-children-reported-chilling-effects-on-public-benefit-receipt-in-2019\\_1.pdf](https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/102406/one-in-five-adults-in-immigrant-families-with-children-reported-chilling-effects-on-public-benefit-receipt-in-2019_1.pdf).
- <sup>8</sup> Child Thrive Action Network. 2021. "A Path to Citizenship is Essential for Children to Thrive." <https://securservercdn.net/104.238.69.231/kpc.cec.myftpupload.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/National.pdf>.
- <sup>9</sup> Cervantes, Wendy, Rebecca Ullrich, and Hannah Matthews. 2018. "Our Children's Fear: Immigration Policy's Effects on Young Children," p. 8. Washington, DC: CLASP. <https://www.clasp.org/publications/report/brief/our-childrens-fear-immigration-policys-effects-young-children>.
- <sup>10</sup> Kirksey, J. Jacob and Carolyn Sattin-Bajaj, Michael A. Gottfried, Jennifer Freeman, and Christopher S. Ozuna. 2020. "Deportations Near the Schoolyard: Examining Immigration Enforcement and Racial/Ethnic Gaps in Educational Outcomes." *AERA Open* 6(2): pp.1-18. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/2332858419899074>.
- <sup>11</sup> Connor, Phillip. 2021. "At Least 600,000 K-12 Undocumented Students Need a Pathway to Citizenship." FWD. US, August 21. <https://www.fwd.us/news/k-12-undocumented-students/>.