



Grantmakers Advancing
Economic Equity

SUPPORTING THE ECONOMIC SECURITY OF UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANTS



This primer was developed by Asset Funders Network and California Immigrant Policy Center to provide an overview of the intersectional issues impacting economic security for undocumented immigrants in California. It is designed to provide funders, policymakers, advocates, and practitioners with strategies and solutions to support economic mobility and justice for undocumented immigrant communities, and ultimately build a more equitable and resilient California for all.¹

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In California, an estimated 20% of all Californians under the age of 18 live with someone who is undocumented or is undocumented themselves.² A person who is undocumented is a neighbor, community member, colleague, teacher, friend, and loved one.

Since people who are undocumented tend to live in mixed-status households and are deeply integrated in their communities, their economic security benefits their families and community members. Studies of the long term effects of economic security programs for children have been linked to lower rates of health issues, improved education outcomes, and greater economic mobility in adulthood.³ In other words, **economic security for people who are undocumented will lead to reduced instability, trauma and other hardships for the people who depend on and love them, and create greater economic opportunity for the generations to follow them.**

While everyone deserves to be valued for more than their labor, people who are undocumented are also deeply embedded in the economy, bringing skills, talent, and innovation to California's diverse workforce and industries, and contributing \$3.7 billion in state and local taxes every year according to the [California Immigrant Data Portal](#). The COVID-19 pandemic further demonstrated how deeply California's economy relies on the work of people who are undocumented. The vast majority of California's undocumented immigrant workers (78%) were estimated to work in jobs considered to be "essential and critical", as determined by the Department of Homeland Security, during the pandemic.⁴

However, a deep legacy of xenophobia and racism has led to harmful policies—as well as narratives and practices—that deliberately and consistently exclude people who are undocumented from realizing economic security in three distinct, but interconnected ways: **1)** from basic worker protections based on employment status, **2)** from critical safety net programs based on immigration status, and **3)** from opportunities to thrive due to discrimination on the basis of race, ethnicity, class, and gender.

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, the confluence of these exclusions put people at two extremes: On one end, they were more likely to be left without a job and no financial safety net, forced into social isolation, homelessness, hunger, or worse. On the other, they were forced to work even when it was extremely dangerous to do so, putting their lives and the lives of their loved ones at risk.

The COVID-19 pandemic was not the first crisis for California, and it won't be the last. The volatility of our economy, our communities, and our climate necessitates that we make bold investments now to build a California that works for everyone—no exceptions, no exclusions. While California has been a leader on immigrant rights, there is an urgent need to pass bolder policies to address these harmful exclusions and build a more resilient and equitable state. **Our interconnectedness shows us that investing in the economic security of undocumented individuals will strengthen the families and communities who depend on and love them; build greater prosperity for the entire state and economy now and in the long-term; and will help everyone better prepare for an uncertain future.**



ECONOMIC SECURITY: THE ASSURANCE OF A PERSON'S ABILITY TO FINANCIALLY MEET THEIR AND THEIR FAMILY'S NEEDS, NOW AND INTO THE FUTURE.

KEY POLICIES TO ADDRESS THESE EXCLUSIONS AND BEYOND



- 1 Ensure that all workers, regardless of employment status, have jobs and income that enable economic security, mobility, dignity, and voice**
 - » Ensure accurate, proper classification of workers
 - » Enforce anti-discrimination, anti-harassment and anti-retaliation laws
 - » Remove exclusions and barriers to unemployment benefits, paid sick and family leave, and health and safety protections
 - » Establish portable benefits for all workers
 - » Increase support for small businesses, worker ownership, and entrepreneurship
 - » Expand worker decision-making power
- 2 Ensure that all immigrants, regardless of immigration status, have equitable access to public benefits and economic supports**
 - » Ensure that everyone, regardless of status, has access to healthcare, food assistance, cash assistance, and other public benefits
 - » Expand tax credits for all low-income Californians while increasing support for immigrants excluded from federal tax credits
 - » Expand access to workforce development and apprenticeships
 - » Expand access to responsible banking and financial services
 - » Expand access to identification and voting
- 3 Address exclusions based on race, ethnicity, class, and gender**
 - » Expand support for community-based organizations and worker centers that represent and work with diverse undocumented immigrant communities
 - » Expand legal and navigation services to address wealth stripping, including excessive fines and fees, in the immigration system
 - » Expand language access and language justice
- 4 Build toward longer-term solutions**
 - » Expand worker protections and benefits to all workers, regardless of employment or immigration status, starting with unemployment benefits
 - » Create a guaranteed income program that includes or is focused on people who are undocumented
 - » Explore the feasibility of creating a state work authorization

THE ROLE OF PHILANTHROPY

Philanthropy has a powerful role to play in achieving economic security, equity, and justice for all Californians, including people who are undocumented. Data reveals that nationally, *only 1% of philanthropic funding goes to grantmaking specifically for immigration-related issues, and only a fraction of that addresses economic security.*⁵ Success in this area requires dedicated, trust-based, flexible, and committed funding to create a robust ecosystem that can support policy, culture and narrative change, and powerful organizing and leadership development for the long term.

- [Invest in Grassroots Organizing and Building Immigrant Worker Power](#)
 - [Invest in Undocumented Workers Groups' Capacity Building for Policy Advocacy](#)
 - [Invest in Organizations that Serve the Diversity of Immigrant Communities](#)
 - [Invest in Worker Ownership and Entrepreneurship](#)
 - [Fund Work to Change Harmful Narratives and Cultural Norms that Perpetuate Economic Exclusions and Inequities](#)
 - [Fund Community-Grounded Research](#)
 - [Fund Pilots, Testing, and New Models that Support Economic Security](#)
 - [Support Program Implementation and Evaluation to Ensure Meaningful Impact](#)
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