



# CHILDREN'S ACTION ALLIANCE

4001 North 3<sup>rd</sup> Street  
Suite 160  
Phoenix, Arizona 85012  
(602) 266-0707  
Fax: (602) 263-8792  
<http://www.azchildren.org>

## Going Beyond the Immigration Hype: Children and Our Shared Destiny FACTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

**Children of immigrants are growing in number** – Between 1990 and 2000, the number of immigrant families in the United States expanded about seven times faster than the number of native-born families.<sup>1</sup> Today, one in five US children lives in an immigrant family.<sup>2</sup> In Arizona, it is even higher, with one in four children living in a family with at least one immigrant parent.<sup>3</sup> Most future population growth in the United States will occur through immigration and through births to immigrants and their descendents.<sup>4</sup> By 2020, almost 30 percent of all children in the United States will have one or more foreign-born parents.<sup>5</sup>

**Nine-out-of-ten children of immigrants are citizens** – Almost all (93 percent) children of immigrants under the age of six are citizens.<sup>6</sup> These children often live in “mixed status” families, with some family members who may be citizens, legal immigrants, or undocumented.<sup>7</sup> 81 percent of children of immigrants under age six have a noncitizen parent; 29 percent have an undocumented parent.<sup>8</sup>

**Children of immigrants will drive our economy** – Since most of Arizona’s 345,000 children of immigrants are citizens, it is reasonable to expect them to continue to live and work in Arizona as they grow older.<sup>9</sup> These same children will become our State’s future workers, voters, parents, and leaders. They will pay into Social Security and Medicare, and contribute to the economic vitality of our economy.

**Children of immigrants face difficulties** – Children of immigrants face difficulties that children of native-born parents do not. Educational attainment of immigrant parents is often quite limited. Nationally, forty percent of children in immigrant families live with a mother or father who has not graduated from high school, compared to twelve percent of children in non-immigrant families.<sup>10</sup> Parents who have completed fewer years of schooling may be less able to help their children with homework. In addition, children of immigrants may be less prepared than their counterparts to start Kindergarten. Nationally, three- and four-year-old children in immigrant families are less likely to participate in nursery school or preschool programs than their peers.<sup>11</sup>

**Language proficiency poses a major barrier** – Limited proficiency speaking English is a major challenge confronting children of immigrants. Children who are English learners may have difficulty learning from and communicating with teachers. Twenty-six percent of children

in immigrant families nationally live in households where nobody age 15 or older speaks English well.<sup>12</sup> English learning programs for children as well as parents are important for improving English language attainment among children of immigrants.

**Many children lack access to healthcare** – Children of immigrants are often uninsured. Nationally, legal immigrant children, while having high levels without insurance (25 percent), are much more likely to have health insurance coverage than undocumented children (59 percent).<sup>13</sup> Even citizen children of immigrants are more likely to be uninsured. Citizen children in low-income mixed-status families experience a 74 percent higher uninsured rate than that of children with citizen parents.<sup>14</sup> Changes made to federal health programs in 1996 have limited access to health care for legal immigrants, requiring them to reside in the country five years before qualifying for benefits. Undocumented children are not eligible for KidsCare or Medicaid (except for emergency Medicaid). Lack of health coverage may help explain health disparities among children of immigrants. Seven percent of young (under the age of six) children of immigrants are reported in fair or poor health by their parents, over twice the rate for children of natives (3 percent).<sup>15</sup>

**Access to other supports also limited** – Children of immigrants also lack access to other supports designed to assist low income families. While 56 percent of young (under the age of six) children of immigrants live in low-income families (incomes under 200 percent of the federal poverty level), legal restrictions and fear prevent many from accessing low-income support services.<sup>16</sup> The 1996 federal welfare reform law made most legal non-citizens ineligible for TANF (“welfare”), Food Stamps, and SSI for a period of five years. Undocumented immigrants are ineligible for most public benefits. Even children who are *legal citizens* may lack access to services. Many eligible citizen children with noncitizen parents are unaware or afraid of the consequences of participating in public programs on their legal status and citizenship.<sup>17</sup> Little is known about the effect of Proposition 200 in contributing to families’ lack of understanding and reluctance to participate in services and supports that are legally available to them.

## **Recommendations**

- More research needs to be done on the effect of Prop 200 and other immigration laws on Arizona children (particularly citizen children) and their access to services.
- Public agencies should review current methods of delivering services to citizen children of undocumented parents. Is it clear, to public employees as well as to the customers, what services are available to citizen children of undocumented parents and legal immigrants? Do they understand how receipt of public services will (or will not affect) their ability to become citizens? Do current methods of delivering services for highly mobile children of immigrants work? Could other methods be developed?
- Congress should support passage of the Immigrant Children’s Health Improvement Act (ICHIA). If passed, this federal legislation would help legal and citizen children of immigrants obtain better access to health insurance coverage.
- No measures should be enacted that limit access to English instruction of parents, whether they are documented or undocumented. Such measures will profoundly affect the potential of children to succeed as citizens.

- The Arizona Legislature and the Governor should work to settle *Flores v. Arizona*, and to provide English language learners with adequate opportunities to learn English in our schools.
- Federal, state, and local education agencies should expand the availability of quality preschool and special education programs and strengthen outreach efforts to encourage more children of immigrants to attend preschool, and to access special education resources when appropriate.

---

<sup>1</sup> Brookings-Princeton “Future of Children” Briefing. Brookings Institution, December 16, 2004.

<sup>2</sup> Children’s Action Alliance staff analysis of Census 2000 data.

<sup>3</sup> Haskins, R, Greenberg, M, Fremstad, S. “Federal Policy for Immigrant Children: Room for Common Ground?” The Future of Children, Summer, 2004.

<sup>4</sup> Brookings-Princeton “Future of Children” Briefing. Brookings Institution, December 16, 2004.

<sup>5</sup> Capps, R, Fix, M, Ost, J, Reardon-Anderson, J, Passel, J. “The Health and Well-Being of Young Children of Immigrants.” Urban Institute, 2004.

<sup>6</sup> Capps, R, Fix, M, Ost, J, Reardon-Anderson, J, Passel, J. “The Health and Well-Being of Young Children of Immigrants.” Urban Institute, 2004.

<sup>7</sup> Haskins, R, Greenberg, M, Fremstad, S. “Federal Policy for Immigrant Children: Room for Common Ground?” The Future of Children, Summer, 2004.

<sup>8</sup> Brookings-Princeton “Future of Children” Briefing. Brookings Institution, December 16, 2004.

<sup>9</sup> Children’s Action Alliance staff analysis of Census 2000 data.

<sup>10</sup> Brookings-Princeton “Future of Children” Briefing. Brookings Institution, December 16, 2004.

<sup>11</sup> Haskins, R, Greenberg, M, Fremstad, S. “Federal Policy for Immigrant Children: Room for Common Ground?” The Future of Children, Summer, 2004.

<sup>12</sup> Brookings-Princeton “Future of Children” Briefing. Brookings Institution, December 16, 2004.

<sup>13</sup> Passel, J. “Unauthorized Migrants: Numbers and Characteristics.” Pew Hispanic Center, June 14, 2005.

<sup>14</sup> Capps, R, Kenney, G, and Fix, M. “Health Insurance Coverage of Children in Mixed-Status Immigrant Families.” Urban Institute, 2004.

<sup>15</sup> Capps, R, Fix, M, Ost, J, Reardon-Anderson, J, Passel, J. “The Health and Well-Being of Young Children of Immigrants.” Urban Institute, 2004.

<sup>16</sup> Capps, R, Fix, M, Ost, J, Reardon-Anderson, J, Passel, J. “The Health and Well-Being of Young Children of Immigrants.” Urban Institute, 2004.

<sup>17</sup> Capps, R, Hagan, J and Rodriguez, N. “Border Residents Manage the U.S. Immigration and Welfare Reforms.” In *Immigrants, Welfare Reform, and the Poverty of Policy*. Westport, CT: Praeger, 2004.