

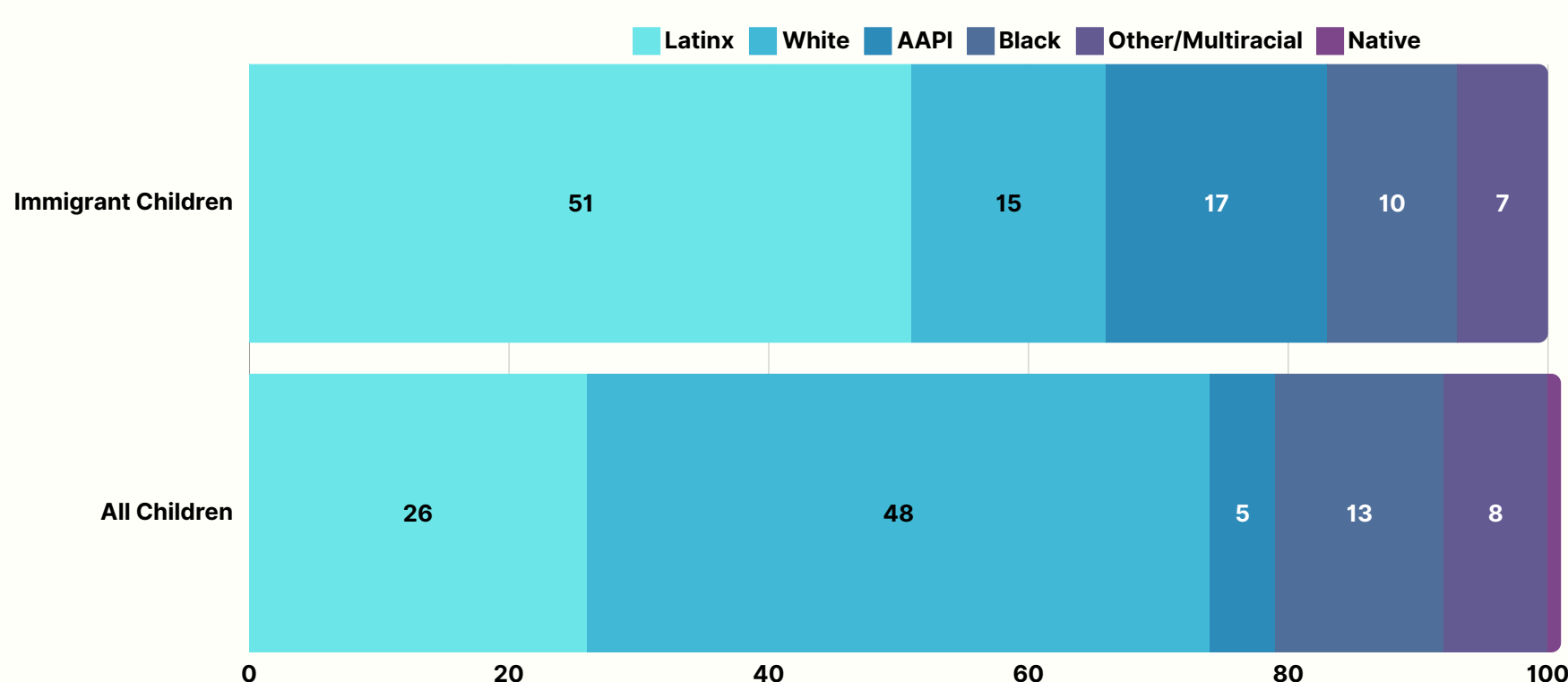


Children in Immigrant Families & Threats to their Well-being

Who are children in mixed-status immigrant families?

Mixed-status immigrant families are those where not all members of the family have the same immigration or citizenship status. Mixed-status families can include (but are not limited to) U.S. citizens, immigrants with legal permanent residency (also known as LPRs or green card holders), temporary visas (e.g., work/student/tourist visas, visas for crime or trafficking victims), Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), and Temporary Protected Status (TPS), as well as undocumented immigrants.

According to 2022 Census data, an estimated 18.4 million children under age 18—or about 1 in 4 children nationwide—have one or more parents who were born outside of the U.S.; among them, 6.3 million live in households where neither parent is a U.S. citizen. Regardless of their parents' status, the vast majority of children in immigrant families are U.S. citizens by birth or naturalization. A small share of children (roughly 13 percent) are immigrants themselves. Most immigrant parents (75%) have been living in the U.S. for over a decade. Children in immigrant families are contributing to the U.S. child population's increasing racial and ethnic diversity. Among children with an immigrant parent, 51% are Latinx, 17% are AAPI, and 10% are Black.



Barriers impacting children in mixed-status immigrant families

Mixed-status immigrant families are more likely to experience economic and material hardship than families in which all members are U.S.-born. More than half of all children in immigrant families live in low-income households. Many face barriers to participating in publicly funded health, nutrition, and educational services, which are exacerbated by harsh immigration policies at the state and federal levels. These challenges are especially pronounced for children with an undocumented parent. For example, U.S. citizen children with an immigrant parent are twice as likely to be uninsured over U.S. citizen children with U.S. citizen parents. Non-citizen children are over six times more likely to be uninsured over U.S. citizen children with citizen parents. Unaccompanied children face similar challenges in accessing critical services and lack guaranteed legal representation in immigration court.

Children in Immigrant Families By the Numbers

18.4 million, or 1 in 4 children have an immigrant parent

5.2 million children younger than age 18 have an undocumented parent

850,000 children under 18 are themselves undocumented

Over half a million U.S. citizen children have a parent with TPS or DACA status.

98,356 unaccompanied children were released to sponsors in the U.S. in FY 2024.

94% of children under age 6 with at least one foreign-born parent are U.S.-born citizens.



Major Trends Threatening the Well-being of Children in Mixed-Status Immigrant Families

The Trump Administration, Congress, and states are taking actions that pose threats to immigrant children and children in immigrant families, including:

Promoting hate-filled rhetoric. The Trump Administration and other public officials are using hateful, racist, and xenophobic rhetoric—stoking deep-seated fears and biases among segments of the American public—to justify their policy choices. Children are internalizing these messages, with direct consequences for their emotional well-being, healthy development, and safety.

Increasing enforcement in the interior and at the border. As done under Trump 1.0, the current Administration is significantly ramping immigration enforcement, including a mass deportation agenda. Among the actions already taken in 2025 include: deprioritization of immigration enforcement which puts all undocumented immigrants—including parents of U.S. citizens—at risk of deportation; use of *expedited removal* to expel immigrants; rescission of the *Protected Areas/Sensitive Locations* policy; increase in the number of *287(g) agreements*; threats to federal funding for states with *sanctuary policies*; denying asylum claims at the border and stopping refugee admissions; restarting the practice of *family detention*; erosion of *due process*, including through the invocation of the *Alien Enemies Act* to bypass immigration and refugee laws to carry out deportations; and attempts to gather information from federal agencies for immigration enforcement purposes. These actions put millions of children at greater risk of having a loved one detained or deported and being separated from a parent/caregiver.

Threatening Birthright Citizenship and terminating legal protections and status. The Trump Administration has made clear through their Executive Order (EO) on *birthright citizenship* that they aim to strip children in immigrant families born on U.S. soil from access to U.S. citizenship. They have also ended or accelerated the end of protections for immigrant communities, such as for people with TPS, *Parole*, and *DED*. Many young *Dreamers*, face limited opportunities upon graduation from high school without access to relief through a program like DACA. The future of the DACA program is uncertain as it remains in legal limbo and is no longer accepting new applications. Access to lawful status for children and their parents, including the work authorization that comes with status, supports stability and economic security.

Reducing access to public benefits, services, and education. The Trump Administration is once again attempting to punish immigrant families for accessing programs that support their basic needs and scaring immigrants and their children from applying for benefits they may be eligible for. So far, the Trump Administration has: introduced an EO intended to make providers think they should be collecting immigration status information and barring undocumented immigrants from accessing services; introduced an EO to make English the official language of the United States, in an attempt to limit what information the government translates for communities; ended the refugee resettlement program; initiated reversal of the *DACA ACA* rule; and compromised the ability of *unaccompanied children* to be placed with sponsors due to fears of possible immigration enforcement. Additional actions are expected, including further restricting access to public benefits and programs, including Medicaid, *CHIP*, *SNAP*, and the *Child Tax Credit*; cutting funding for federal programs that are inclusive of immigrants; reinstating the “*public charge*” rule; challenges to *Plyler v. Doe*, which guarantees access to K-12 education for all children; and defunding services to unaccompanied children, including legal representation. The actions taken so far, and the threats on the horizon, are already creating a *chilling effect* which is cutting children off from programs and services that are essential to their healthy development.

Criminalizing immigrant families and youth. Trump Administration officials consistently make false links between immigration and crime through rhetoric and policy—including targeting immigrant youth by erroneously tying them to violent transnational gangs. This has contributed to states’ increased focus on strengthening gang enhancement laws, which disproportionately target Black and Latinx young people. Most recently, the *Laken Riley Act* was passed into law which further criminalizes immigrant youth and takes away important protections, like due process.



Glossary of Immigration Policy Terms

- **287(g) agreements** - A formal written agreement between ICE and local law enforcement that permits local police officers and agencies to enforce federal immigration law.
- **Alien Enemies Act** - A law passed in 1798 which provides the President authority to detain and deport immigrants during times of war. It has only been used three times in U.S. history, with the most recent time being the incarceration of over 100,000 Japanese people during World War II.
- **Birthright Citizenship** - A legal right under the constitution which provides that anyone born on U.S. soil is a U.S. citizen.
- **Chilling Effect** - The effect of certain policies on individuals and communities that prevents them from engaging in certain activities (e.g., going to the doctor/school, applying for public benefits) because of fear that they or their family members will be detained/deported or their ability to get a green card may be compromised.
- **Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP)** - A government program that provides states matching federal funds to cover uninsured children.
- **Child Tax Credit (CTC)**- The Child Tax Credit is an important credit which provides families with young children with financial support and is an effective tool for reducing child poverty.
- **Deferred Enforced Departure (DED)** - A temporary administrative stay of removal for certain individuals from designated countries facing political or civic conflict or natural disaster.
- **Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA)** - A program that offers work authorization and protection from deportation to eligible undocumented immigrants who arrived as children. This program does not provide a pathway to citizenship, and is no longer accepting new applications.
- **DACA ACA rule** - The DACA ACA rule was implemented under the Biden Administration and expanded access to the Affordable Care Act Marketplace for DACA recipients for the first time.
- **Dreamers** - Undocumented immigrants who arrived to the U.S. as children.
- **Due Process** - Fair treatment in criminal and civil proceedings that reinforces constitutional rights and fair procedures. It is what separates a free society from a police state.
- **Expedited Removal** - A process that allows immigration enforcement to deport certain noncitizens without a hearing from an immigration judge.
- **Family Detention** - The practice of detaining immigrant parents and children, including babies, together in large-scale detention facilities.
- **Five-year bar** - The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA) established a five-year waiting period for legal permanent residents in accessing federal public benefits for which they would otherwise be eligible, and a complete barrier for other immigrants such as those with DACA and TPS.
- **Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN)** - A number used to pay taxes for those who do not have access to a Social Security (SSN)—by limiting things such as the COVID stimulus payments or CTC to those with a SSN, it limits access to immigrant households who may not have one.
- **Laken Riley Act** - A law passed in January 2025 that limits the due process of migrants by requiring federal officials to detain those charged or arrested for nonviolent or violent crimes, including children.
- **Mixed-Status Family** - A family or household in which at least one member of the family has a different immigration status than another member. For example, a household in which the parents are undocumented but their children are U.S. citizens.
- **Parole** - A status granted under the Secretary of Homeland Security's discretion to allow certain noncitizens to enter or remain in the U.S. for a limited period of time.
- **Plyler v. Doe** - a Supreme Court case from 1982 which prevents states from barring undocumented children from public K-12 education.
- **Protected Areas/Sensitive Locations** - A federal administrative policy that has existed in many forms since 1993 until its rescission in 2025 that restricts immigration enforcement in/near areas providing essential services, like schools, hospitals, and houses of worship. These terms are used interchangeably.
- **Public Charge** - A consideration process for determining whether to grant admission to the U.S./green card based on whether a person is likely to primarily depend on certain government benefits.
- **Sanctuary Policies** - A diverse set of policies that many cities, counties, and states have adopted to garner trust between immigrant communities and local governmental actors, including local law enforcement. Many of these policies include limiting local cooperation with federal immigration enforcement.
- **Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)** - A federal government program that provides low-income individuals and families with support to purchase food.
- **Temporary Protected Status (TPS)** - A temporary legal status offered to individuals from certain countries with conditions that make it unsafe for them to return. TPS does not offer a pathway to citizenship.
- **Unaccompanied Child** - An individual under the age of 18 without legal immigration status and no parent or legal guardian who can take care of them in the U.S.