

State of Immigrants in LA County

USC
Dornsife
*Equity Research
Institute*



Executive Summary: June 2021





Acknowledgments

The USC Equity Research Institute (ERI)—formerly known as Center for the Study of Immigrant Integration—would like to thank everyone involved in creating the second annual State of Immigrants in L.A. County (SOILA) report. Creating this report through a pandemic that affected both our staff and the immigrant communities we aim to serve was no simple feat. The goal, just as it was last year, was to create something useful for community-based organizations, local governments, and businesses in their immigrant integration efforts. This year, however, the report also had to acknowledge and honor the life-changing impacts that the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences have brought to each of our lives. To that end, we sought the knowledge and wisdom of a range of partners that provided critical data on how immigrant-serving institutions have quickly responded to the changing needs of immigrants across the county.

The data, charts, tables, writing, and analysis throughout the report were prepared by Cynthia Moreno, Dalia Gonzalez, Emma Yudelevitch, Jeffer Giang, Sabrina Kim, Sarah Balcha, and Manuel Pastor at ERI. Graduate research assistants Thai Le and Carolina Otero heavily contributed to chart-creation, writing, and analysis. Manuel Pastor and Rhonda Ortiz at ERI provided invaluable leadership and direction on this report—a thank you goes to them. Efrain Escobedo and Rosie Arroyo from the California Community Foundation (CCF) provided feedback and support that fundamentally shaped this report. Sincere appreciations to Justin Scoggins (ERI) for his thoughtful and thorough data checks. Many thanks to Sabrina Kim (ERI) for doubling as data analyst and designer for SOILA and related presentations and to Emma Yudelevitch (ERI) for supporting design of the executive summary. A big thank you to Eunice Velarde Flores (ERI) and Jamie Flores (ERI) for their help with administration and finances. We also thank Gladys Malibiran (ERI), Lauren Perez (ERI), and Emma Yudelevitch (ER) for organizing communications, promotion, and release of this report. Finally, thank you to CCF, the James Irvine Foundation, and Bank of America for their support which made SOILA 2021 possible. We would also like to extend deep appreciations to the members of the CCF Council on Immigrant Integration for commissioning this report and for their ever-insightful ideas and feedback along the way. Last, we extend a very special thank you to all organizations that contributed their time and expertise to round out our analysis during a time like no other.



Land Acknowledgement

The land we now call Los Angeles County is located within the ancestral homelands of the Chumash, Tataviam, Serrano, Cahuilla, Juaneño, and Luiseño People and Tongva People. We pay our respects to the traditional caretakers of the land, the Tongva Nation, their ancestors, elders, and relations past, present, and forthcoming. Native people continue to reside in and around what we now call Los Angeles County—the county that is currently home to the largest population of Native people in the U.S.¹ While L.A. County and California state are home to many indigenous groups, including people from Tribal Nations,² who were the original inhabitants of California, there are also many Native Americans from other regions of what we now call the U.S. (representing hundreds of non-Californian Tribes and Native Nations, many of whom were forced into California and Californian urban areas via U.S. policies and actions, such as the Indian Relocation Act), and indigenous immigrants (including Canadian First Nations and Inuit, Mexican, Central and South American indigenous peoples, and Pacific Islander nations and people), many of whom were also forced into California due to U.S. foreign policies and actions.

While this report provides data and narrative on immigrant, migrant, and refugee communities, we challenge the uplifting but inaccurate narrative that the state was “built by immigrants.” Instead, we encourage everyone to acknowledge that the land we reside on was taken by a settler-colonial society; one that exploited native, immigrant, migrant, and enslaved people – stealing labor, knowledge, and skills – to build what we now call L.A. County. Immigrant communities and U.S.-born Angelenos alike must grapple with what it means to live on stolen land, understand our role and responsibilities as guests³ on Native American homelands, and be committed to supporting the struggle for Native Nations’ sovereignty and self-determination.

We recognize this land acknowledgment is limited, and requires us to engage in an ongoing process of learning and accountability. For more information and resources on Native American/Indigenous organizing please visit the California Native Vote Project, the Los Angeles City/County Native American Commission, Sacred Places Institute for Indigenous Peoples, UCLA American Indian Studies Center, and the United American Indian Involvement.

Interviewees Overview

To adequately capture how immigrant-serving institutions have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and how they have responded to 2020 uprisings against anti-Blackness and police brutality, we collected survey responses from various institutions in L.A. County. Below is a list of participants. We list organizational affiliations at the time of interviews and for identification purposes only.

- Angelica Salas, Executive Director, Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights (CHIRLA)
- Aquilina Soriano Versoza, Executive Director, Pilipino Workers Center (PWC) of Southern CA
- Bamby Salcedo, President/CEO, The TransLatin@ Coalition
- Carolina Sheinfeld, Immigrant Relations Coordinator, Los Angeles County Office of Education
- Chanchanit Martorell, Executive Director, Thai Community Development Center (Thai CDC)
- Daliah Setareh, Attorney, Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles (LAFLA)
- Lizette Escobedo, National Director of Civic Engagement & Martha E. Gonzalez, CA Program Manager, NALEO Educational Fund
- Salam Al-Marayati, President & Co-Founder, Muslim Public Affairs Council (MPAC)
- Shikha Bhatnagar, Executive Director, South Asian Network (SAN)
- Sonia Campos-Rivera, VP Policy & Public Affairs, UNITE-LA
- Terri Villa-McDowell, LA County Commission on Human Relations (LA vs Hate Program)

In addition to engaging with non-profit leaders, we created case studies for the Stop AAPI Hate effort to highlight the impacts of crimes against Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders—both immigrant and U.S. born. We also created a feature for the L.A. Justice Fund to highlight the importance of continued investment in providing legal representation to immigrants.

To see what interviewees shared with us, please read the full report here: <https://dornsife.usc.edu/eri/state-of-immigrants-in-los-angeles-2021>

Foreword

L.A. County has the honor of being the home to immigrants from all over the world who have created families, pursued careers, and contributed to our society in immeasurable ways. The second annual State of Immigrants in Los Angeles County (SOILA) report aims to measure that impact.

As last year, this report details demographics and then documents how immigrants are faring economically, how they are connected to and engaging in civic life, and how L.A. County creates a welcoming environment. Unlike last year, the COVID-19 pandemic made clear not only how essential immigrants are to L.A. County, but also the disparities that exist in these communities, which have drastically affected our most vulnerable immigrants. SOILA 2021 examines some of those disparities: lack of health insurance coverage, essential workers in high-risk jobs, and the extent of the digital divide.

To capture the costs of the pandemic—for immigrants and the organizations that serve them—the report features input from L.A. County immigrant-serving institutions. In order to continue our goal of addressing systemic racism and centering equity, surveys to organizations also asked how recent conversations and actions for racial justice have progressed among immigrant communities.

SOILA is a project of the Council on Immigrant Integration, a body that pushes for a society fully inclusive of immigrant communities. As such, the council's continued hope is that SOILA represents both what immigrant communities currently look like and lifts up L.A. County's hard work to integrate and answer to the needs of immigrants who call this area home. We hope this report can help move our County forward and push all of us to consider how improving outcomes for immigrants improves the lives of all residents in our collective recovery.

We collaborated with the USC Equity Research Institute (ERI) to challenge and provide nuance to common immigrant narratives by applying a racial justice lens; promoting the mutual interests of immigrant and U.S.-born communities; and supporting interethnic, intersectoral, and cross-movement collaborations in this research. Their work is in line with California Community Foundation's mission to promote a future where all Angelenos thrive—including immigrant community members for all that they bring to our region. With those values in mind, we are excited to produce SOILA 2021. Thank you for joining us in this effort.



Antonia Hernández
President & Chief Executive Officer
California Community Foundation

Context and Overview

Examining Los Angeles County this year requires us to provide an overview of the nation—and the world—as we recover from a pandemic that has devastated us all. As a nation, 2020 was marked by collective suffering related to the COVID-19 pandemic, its subsequent consequences—including the death of hundreds of thousands of Americans—the uprisings against police brutality in light of the killing of George Floyd (and many more Black Americans) at the hands of police, and widespread systemic anti-Black racism. To review more broadly the unequal context of L.A. County, particularly in the COVID-19 era and in relation to Black life in L.A. County, please see the [No Going Back](#) report published in collaboration with the Committee for Greater LA, the USC Equity Research Institute, and the UCLA Luskin School of Public Affairs in September 2020. In this second annual State of Immigrants in L.A. County (SOILA) report we highlight how immigrants are faring in L.A. County within this challenging context.

The area known as L.A. County is home to three tribes that predate California’s establishment: Tongva, Chumash, and Tataviam.⁴ L.A. City is home to 54,236 Native Americans; the second largest share of Native Americans in the U.S. Meanwhile, L.A. County is home to the largest number of Native Americans/Alaskan Natives, or 140,764 people. Today, L.A. County has a population of over 10 million people. Since the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, immigrants and their children have been deeply linked and formative to the county. Today, 35 percent of Angelenos are immigrants themselves. Additionally, over 22 percent of children live with undocumented parents. Although immigration is generally associated with Asian-American and Latino communities, among Black residents in the county, 10 percent are immigrants and 9 percent are second generation (adult and young) children of immigrants. Immigrants were and are continuing to be impacted by the ongoing pandemic—undocumented immigrants especially, as they have consistently been excluded from receiving federal economic aid.

During this pandemic, what has been laid bare is the disproportionate impact on communities of color, including immigrant communities throughout L.A. County, in all aspects of life, yet especially their vulnerability in the labor market. Immigrants and people of color are disproportionately in the service, hospitality, sales, and retail sectors, sectors characterized with low, stagnant wages and few benefits. These sectors were economically vulnerable during the pandemic in that unlike white-collar work, pivoting to online or limited-contact work was restricted. In L.A. County, immigrants make up 63 percent of workers in construction trades and 50 percent of workers in food preparation and serving.

At the same time, immigrant workers and workers of color were disproportionately in “high-risk,” must-open occupations (e.g., health care, agriculture, and construction). For instance, among workers in different racial/ethnic groups by nativity (i.e., U.S.-born vs. immigrant) across the county, in general, a larger share of workers of color (regardless of nativity) were in non-essential and essential, higher risk categories. The average share of workers in essential, higher risk categories among workers of color was 27 percent (a striking 38 percent for Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander immigrants) compared to 17 percent for white workers. The large share of workers of color in essential work meant that they were at a high risk of contracting COVID-19. County (age-adjusted) cases and death rates related to COVID-19 have consistently been higher for Pacific Islanders and Latinos as well as for Black Angelenos.⁵

Even before the pandemic, however, many immigrants were in a precarious position as income inequality and job polarization continue to increase. Median hourly earnings are lower for immigrants compared to their U.S.-born counterparts, and immigration status also impacts outcomes for immigrants. Looking at housing for all Angelenos, 58 percent and nearly 36 percent of renters and homeowners respectively, are housing burdened, yet immigrants report higher rates of housing burden. Among the undocumented, these margins are the highest with 68 percent of renters and 51 percent of homeowners facing housing burden. Other factors such as recency of arrival also impact the economic mobility and wellbeing of immigrants—the longer-settled immigrants are, the better they fare.

Given the widespread interconnectedness of the economic market, and as the *No Going Back* report also highlights, the pandemic and ensuing economic recession has exacerbated ongoing inequalities in all aspects of life: home, school, the workplace, neighborhoods, and the greater community. Regarding children and youth, Latino youth make up 62 percent of the share of youth in L.A. County. Yet, Black and Latino children in K-12, disproportionately lack computer and high-speed internet access.⁶ Moreover, disparities in the digital divide exist across different statuses. Among undocumented Angelenos, 50 percent are digitally divided and among LPRs, 37 percent are digitally divided. By comparison, among naturalized citizens, 31 percent are digitally divided and among U.S.-born Angelenos, 29 percent are digitally divided.

Understanding how a region's immigrants are faring is a critical move to creating further inclusion in our county and our increasingly diverse state. In this year's report, we continue to build on the framework from SOILA 2020 by making immigrant integration the focus. Understanding how immigrants are faring is critical in the wake of recovering from an economic crisis and a pandemic. Immigrants are here to stay in the United States and particularly in L.A. County. Whether migrating for economic opportunity or to escape political turmoil, they are part of our county's economic and social fabric. Honoring their presence through humane immigrant integration policies and programs, as well as ensuring their recovery from this pandemic, not only benefits immigrants and U.S.-born Angelenos alike, but it is also the way forward for L.A. County and our nation in our collective reemergence.

Immigrant Integration

USC ERI structured this report around our framework for immigrant integration. This is used to assess if, and to what extent, immigrants are integrated well into their receiving community—something that is equally the responsibility of immigrants and the receiving community. We determine how well immigrants are fully integrated into their communities by assessing:

- **Economic Mobility: the ability to fully engage in the economy, obtain quality jobs, start businesses, and thrive economically;**
- **Civic Engagement: the ability to engage and participate in their communities; and**
- **Warmth of Welcome: the extent to which immigrants are welcomed by the receiving society.**

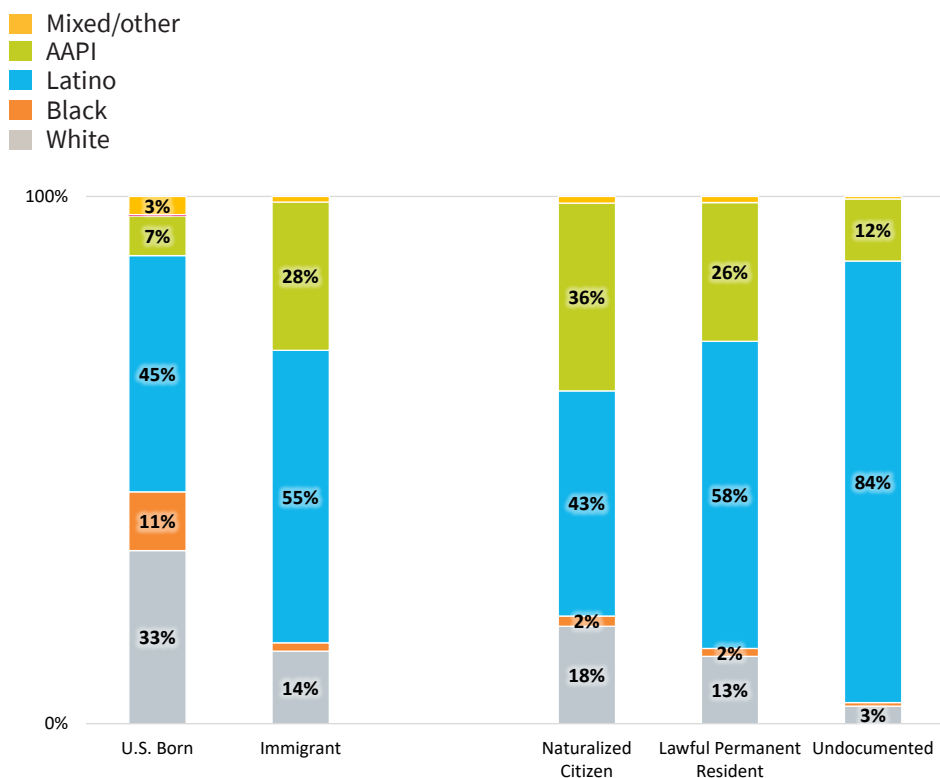
Report Highlights

Immigrants are an essential part of the fabric of L.A. County.

Last year, we emphasized that immigrants are an essential part of our region and future. This remains true for many of the same reasons, but also for some new reasons. Many Angelenos know how important and expansive L.A. immigrants are in our communities—not only for their large numbers, but inherently as people who choose to live their lives, follow their dreams, and provide for their families in L.A. County. With the ongoing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, there is now more urgency to understand who in our county could be most vulnerable to both sickness and a lack of support. Immigrants and their loved ones have suffered particular consequences due to the pandemic⁷ and of the total population of L.A. County (10 million), a whole 35 percent are immigrants (3.5 million residents). Of the L.A. County population, 17 percent of residents are naturalized citizens, 10 percent are LPRs, and 8 percent are undocumented (see Figure 1 in full report).

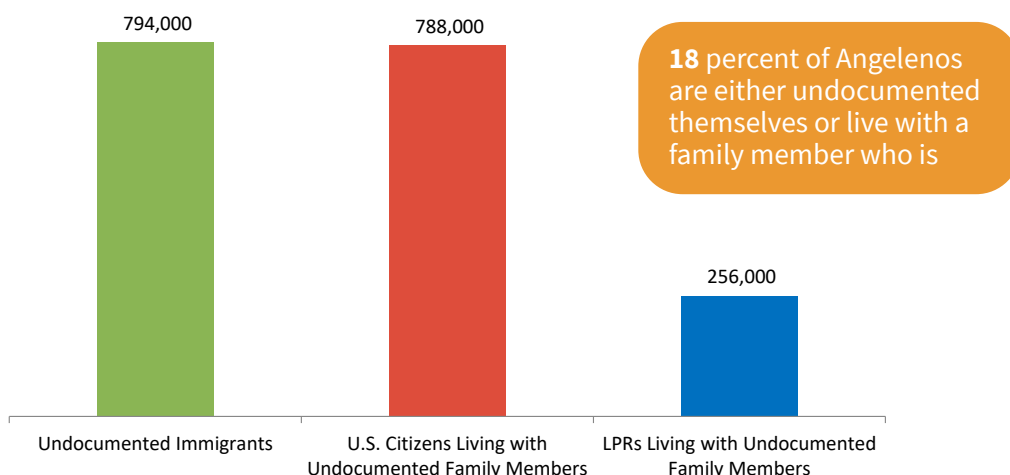
The majority of L.A. County's population (73 percent) are people of color, identifying as Black, Native American, mixed race, or from another community of color. When looking at both the immigrant and U.S.-born population, nearly 50 percent of L.A. County's population identifies as Latino, while about 15 percent of the county identifies as Asian American or Pacific Islander (AAPI), 8 percent identify as Black, three percent identify as mixed race or other, and one percent are Native American (see Figure 2 in full report). Although Black immigrants do not comprise a large portion of the foreign-born population, they do make up a sizable percentage of Black residents in L.A. County (see Figure 4 in full report). L.A. County is also home to a wide array of Indigenous migrants from different parts of what we now know as Latin America (see Figure 5 in full report). Immigrant Angelenos are long settled in L.A. County and have established families. Over 1 million immigrants migrated over 30 years ago (see Figure 11). About 70 percent of L.A. County's undocumented community has lived here for over a decade (see Figure 12) and 18 percent of residents in the county are either undocumented themselves or live with someone who is.

Figure 1. Immigration Status by Race/Ethnicity, 2018



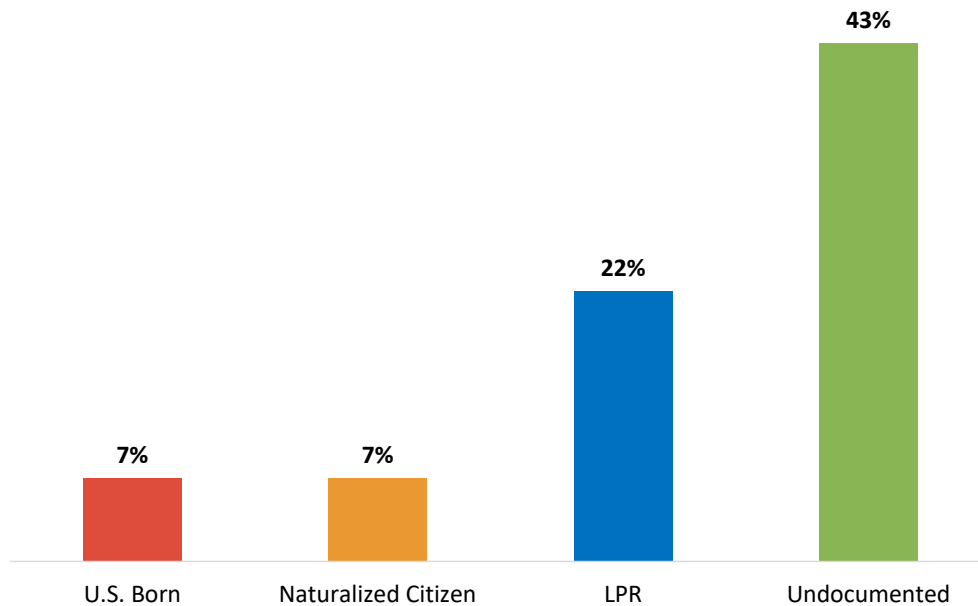
Source: USC Equity Research Institute analysis of 2018 5-year American Community Survey microdata from IPUMS USA and the 2014 Survey of Income and Program Participation. Note: See “Data and Methods” section in full report for details on estimates of the undocumented and LPR population. Data represent a 2014 through 2018 average.

Figure 2. Immigration Status and Family Ripple Effects, 2018



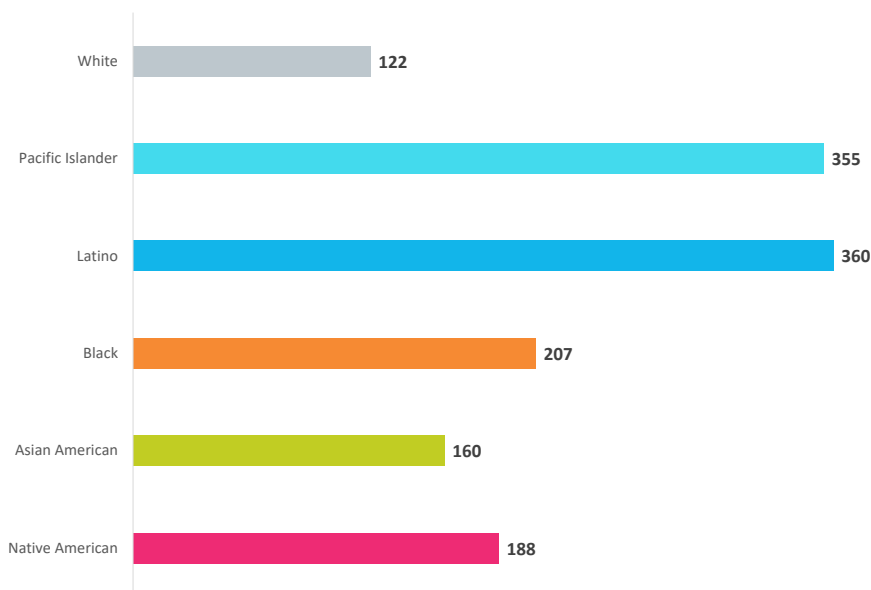
Source: USC Equity Research Institute analysis of 2018 5-year American Community Survey microdata from IPUMS USA and the 2014 Survey of Income and Program Participation. Note: Universe includes all households (no group quarters). See “Data and Methods” section in full report for details on estimates of the undocumented and LPR population. Data represent a 2014 through 2018 average.

Figure 3. Share of Population without Health Insurance, 2018



Source: USC Equity Research Institute analysis of 2018 5-year American Community Survey microdata from IPUMS USA and the 2014 Survey of Income and Program Participation. Note: Universe includes all households (no group quarters). See “Data and Methods” section in full report for details on estimates of the undocumented and LPR population. Data represent a 2014 through 2018 average.

Figure 4. Adjusted Rate per 100,000 of COVID-19 Deaths by Race/Ethnicity, May 25 2021



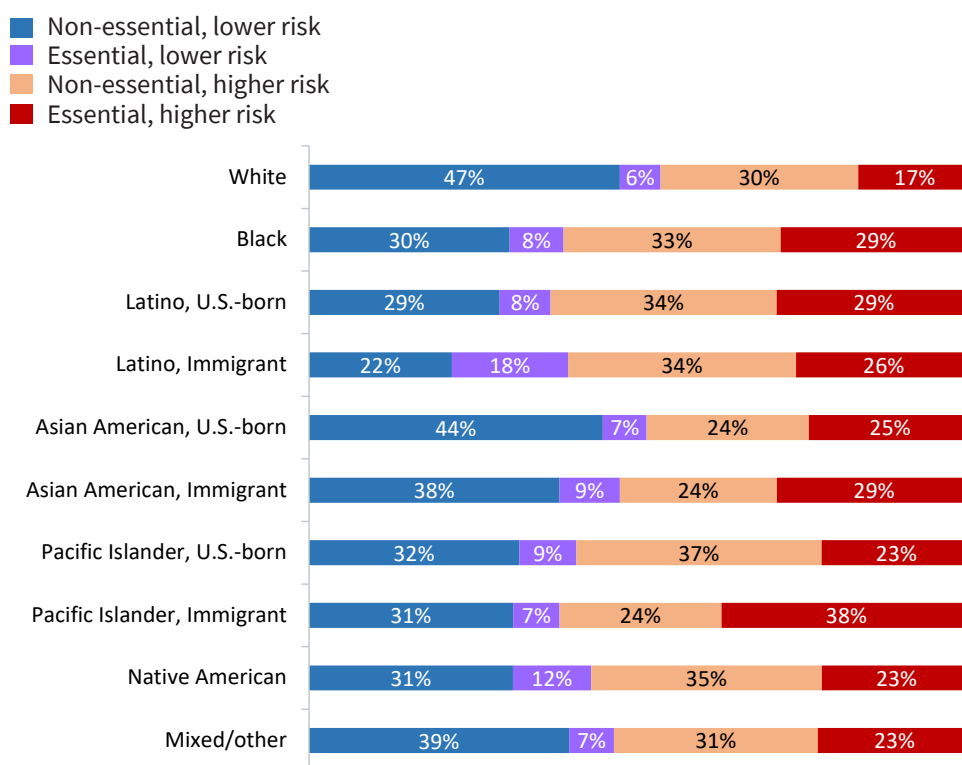
Source: Los Angeles Department of Public Health, LA County COVID-19 Surveillance Dashboard. Notes: Excludes Long Beach and Pasadena. Adjusted rates are per 100,000 population and are adjusted for age. Numbers reflect data through 05/25/2021.

Immigrants are the bedrock of L.A. County's economy.

Immigrants are a large part of L.A. County and it is imperative that they engage and thrive in the economy, particularly as we continue to navigate and recover from the pandemic. Workers and the economy are tied together and L.A. County cannot have an economic recovery without caring for the essential workers that have helped the rest of us weather through the pandemic. A county where immigrants are able to integrate economically is one where immigrants can access living wages, employment opportunities, and resources to start businesses and generate economic activity. Although immigrant Angelenos comprise 35 percent of the total population, they make up about 42 percent of all workers 16 years or older.⁸

In L.A. County, some immigrants are experiencing job loss while others are working in essential, higher risk occupations. Immigrant women have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic (see Figure 23, Case Study #4, and Figure 37 in full report). Housing burden, exacerbated by the pandemic, is often higher among immigrants, especially undocumented immigrants (see Figure 43 and Figure 45). Immigrant Angelenos significantly contribute to taxes—about \$22 billion in federal taxes—and are contributors to entrepreneurship and small businesses—16 percent of immigrants are self-employed, compared to 11 percent of the U.S.-born population (see Figure 47 and Figure 49 in full report).

Figure 5. Workers by Race/Ethnicity/Nativity, Employment in Essential Occupations and Occupational COVID-19 Risk, 2018

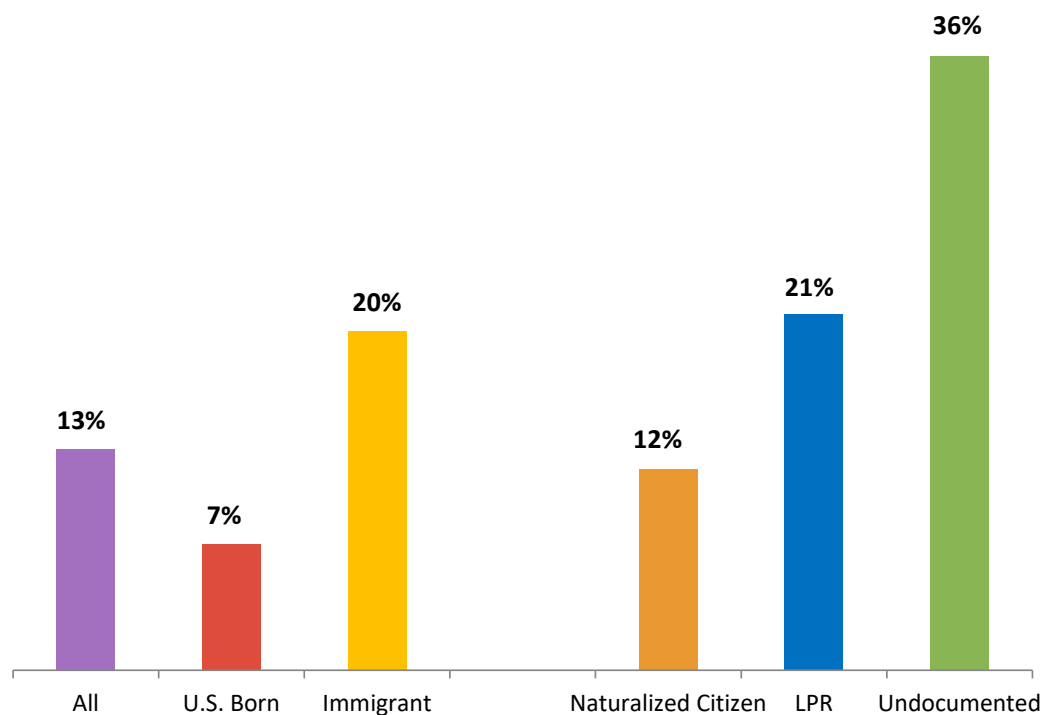


Source: USC Equity Research Institute analysis of data from the 2018 5-year American Community Survey microdata from IPUMS USA and O*NET. Note: Universe includes employed civilian noninstitutional population age 16 or older in occupations with valid data for the O*NET physical proximity score. Essential occupations were identified based on an assessment of information from federal and state sources. Higher-risk occupations are defined as having an O*NET physical proximity score of greater than 3.25. Data represent a 2014 through 2018 average.

Wage inequalities provide more context to data on poverty. As seen in Figure 28 of the full report, the median hourly wage across all full-time wage and salary workers in L.A. County is \$21, while the median hourly wage for immigrant workers is \$18. When looking at the median hourly wages by race and nativity, we see that large disparities exist. Among immigrants, white immigrant Angelenos have the highest wages at \$31. For Asian-American immigrants, that number drops to \$25; for Black immigrants it is \$24; and for Latino immigrants it is \$14. Wage disparities are also present for immigrants when accounting for educational attainment, see Figure 36 of the report. With the exception of naturalized citizens, whose wages are (for the most part) on par with their U.S.-born peers across educational levels, LPR and undocumented immigrants make measurably less regardless of education.

Another way to examine and understand poverty is to look at “working poverty” rates, which means workers that work full-time but still have a family income below 200 percent of the federal poverty level. 36 percent of undocumented workers fall in this category—nearly three times the working poverty rate of the overall population and five times the rate of U.S.-born workers. When examining working poverty by race/ethnicity and nativity, we see that immigrant workers of color experience working poverty at higher rates than U.S.-born workers. For example, 28 percent of Latino immigrants, 10 percent of Black immigrants, and 9 percent of AAPI immigrants experience economic insecurity, as compared to 4 percent of white U.S.-born workers (see Figure 41 in full report).

Figure 6. Working Poverty Rate by Immigration Status, 2018



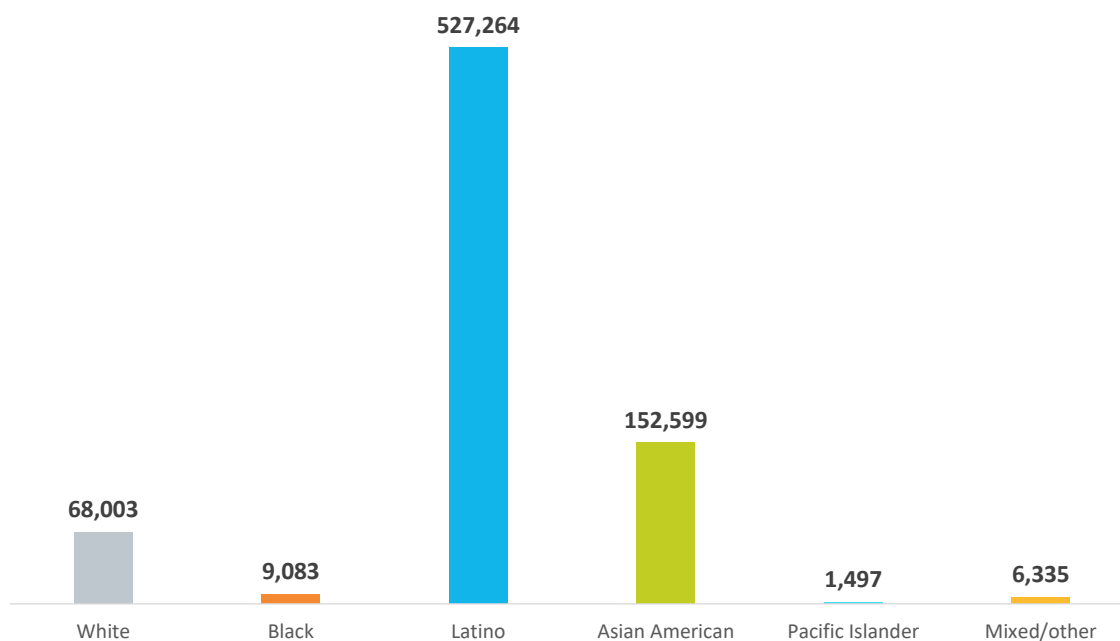
Source: USC Equity Research Institute analysis of 2018 5-year American Community Survey microdata from IPUMS USA and the 2014 Survey of Income and Program Participation. Note: Universe includes the civilian non-institutional population ages 25-64 not living in group quarters who worked at all during the year prior to the survey. See “Data and Methods” section for details on estimates of the undocumented and LPR population. Data represent a 2014 through 2018 average.

Immigrants are an untapped civic force.

Civic engagement is a key way that immigrants are woven into the fabric of our civil and electoral society. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, civic engagement is also a critical means by which immigrant communities receive imperative public health and safety information and services. Due to the fact that local governments rarely collect and release data on immigrant participation in civic programs, our analysis focuses on naturalization, language, and digital connectedness. These indicators have real implications on the well-being of immigrants in L.A. County, from access to COVID-19 related information in their native language, to receiving financial relief, to being able to connect online while staying safe inside.

There is more that can be done to strengthen the civic and political voice of immigrants throughout the county. Encouraging naturalization, identifying those who are eligible to naturalize, and building up a stronger immigrant electorate, for example, are aspects of civic engagement that could fundamentally shape politics and programs in L.A. County. Eligible-to-naturalize (ETN) individuals are immigrants who meet all citizenship requirements set by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). As seen below, there are about 765,000 immigrant adults eligible to naturalize who have not yet done so. A large proportion of these adults are Latino (about 69 percent) and Asian American (about 20 percent). However, there are clear racial inequities within the naturalization process. While Latino and AAPI immigrants comprise the majority of ETN individuals, white immigrants had the highest naturalization

Figure 7. Eligible-to-Naturalize Adults by Race, 2018



Source: USC Equity Research Institute analysis of 2018 5-year American Community Survey microdata from IPUMS USA and the 2014 Survey of Income and Program Participation. Note: Universe include all eligible-to-naturalize adults. See “Data and Methods” section for details on estimates of the eligible-to-naturalize population. Data represent a 2014 through 2018 average.

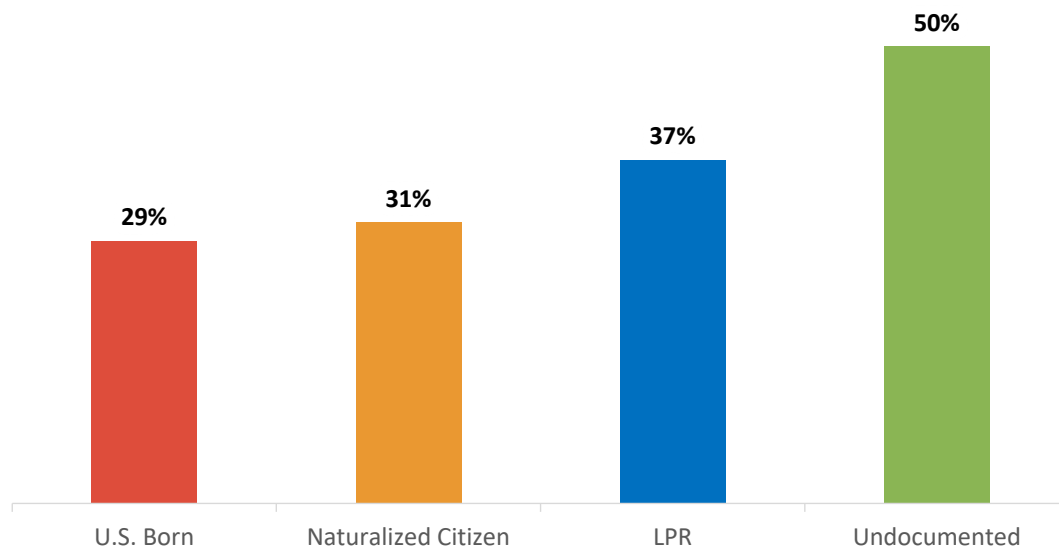
rate of 83 percent in 2018, while Latinos had a naturalization rate of 59 percent – a 24 percentage-point difference (see Figure 61). Naturalization often brings with it increased wages, better employment opportunities, enhanced security, and greater civic engagement. Immigrants who naturalize can also vote on policies that affect them at local, state, and national levels. During the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting economic downturn, naturalization is one of only a few avenues to access federal, federal-state safety net assistance and programs, such as stimulus checks and unemployment benefits.

Additionally, 29 percent of all immigrant-headed households are linguistically isolated, defined as having no member age 14 or older who speaks English at least "very well." This figure is similar for households headed by LPRs at 31 percent, and rises to 40 percent for households headed by someone who is undocumented (see figure 57 in full report). During a global health crisis, linguistic isolation can contribute to delayed communication and miscommunication, leading to serious consequences for the health and safety of immigrant communities. Language barriers for immigrants existed pre-pandemic for many immigrants – especially Indigenous migrants who are often left without adequate translators or interpreters even in the best of times – but were magnified by COVID-19. For the wellbeing of immigrants and their families, civic leaders must meet the language access needs of those who currently are, and have historically been, isolated – for an equitable recovery.

Another important element to measuring civic engagement is tracking the digital divide. This issue, though relevant pre-pandemic, has been exacerbated and brought to the forefront of inequity issues because of the pandemic and 'Safer At Home' orders. Digital divide means whether or not an individual has reliable access to a computer and high-speed internet at home. Families who do not have access to a computer or high-speed broadband are not able to adapt seamlessly to working and schooling from home. The digital divide affects 29 percent of U.S. born residents, while the divide increases to about 37 percent for LPRs, and 50 percent for undocumented Angelenos. At a time where most, if not all, information is available via the internet, having access to technology and reliable broadband is necessary for immigrants of all statuses. However, the data reveals that more coordinated efforts are needed to close the digital divide for the undocumented community.

The same is true for students who live in a household with at least one immigrant parent. As seen in Figure 65 in the full report, 34 percent of K-12 students in immigrant households are not digitally connected, compared to 26 percent of K-12 students in non-immigrant parent households. Emerging research reveals the challenges that persist for immigrant parents of school-age-children in California. As students were sent home for remote instruction, some parents had to moderate access to remote instruction and served as supplemental educators. Immigrant parents are likely to face challenges in taking on these roles due to limited English proficiency, employment in essential sectors, and the digital divide. Given the important role that parents play in their children's educational trajectory, a two-generational lens in assessing the needs of immigrant families is critical so that parents are equipped with the necessary skills to better support their children.⁹

Figure 8. Percent of Individuals Digitally Divided by Immigration Status, 2018



Source: USC Equity Research Institute analysis of 2018 5-year American Community Survey microdata from IPUMS USA and the 2014 Survey of Income and Program Participation. Note: Universe includes all people in households (no group quarters). Digitally divided is defined as lacking high speed internet or a computer at home. See “Data and Methods” section for details on estimates of the eligible-to-naturalize population. Data represent a 2014 through 2018 average.

There is better, more robust infrastructure for welcoming immigrants, however these structures may not be in place everywhere.

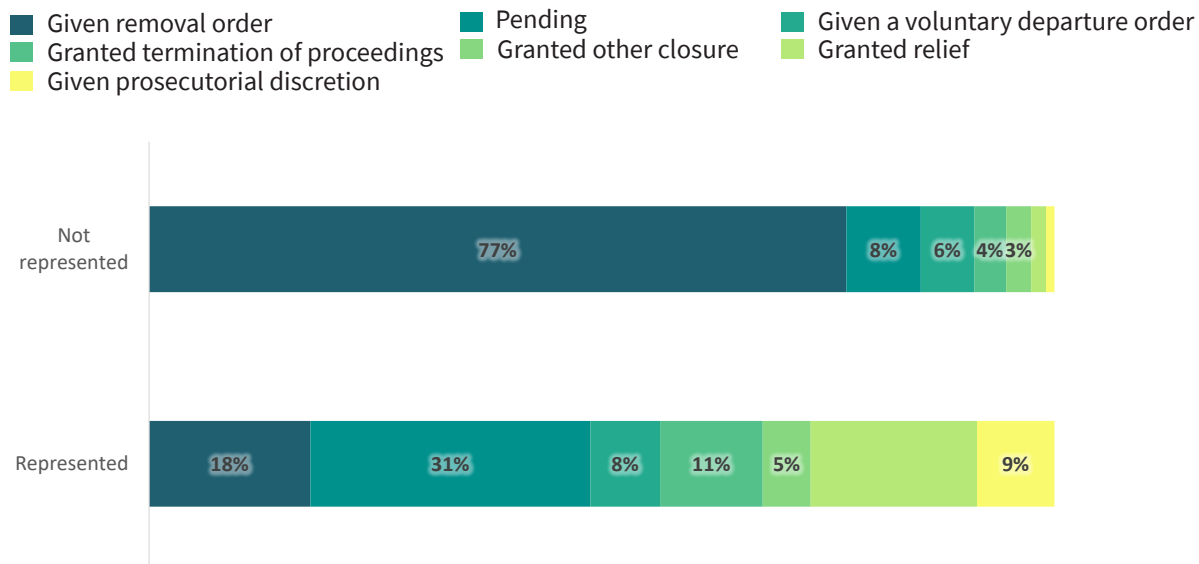
Integral to immigrant integration, warmth of welcome describes how immigrants are received and treated by their new community, society at large, and by the government.¹⁰ Immigrants in a negative context of reception often face difficulties finding employment and establishing healthy social ties which then can hinder integration.¹² This concept can be expanded to assess the intersection of different marginalized identities with immigration status, like Black, transgender, queer, and gender non-conforming communities. Identifying these unique intersections ensures services and policies cater to specific needs. The attacks against the Asian American and Pacific Islander communities during the pandemic shed light on the ongoing discrimination that people of color face in the United States. In that vein, the work of organizations and initiatives like Stop AAPI Hate, the Los Angeles Justice Fund (LAJF), and the L.A. vs. Hate Program are crucial in ensuring that marginalized immigrant communities receive the necessary resources to thrive (see report for full case studies on these organizations and initiatives).

We aim to provide a snapshot of L.A. County's warmth of welcome by focusing on select indicators. These include the nature of hate crimes in the county—where almost half of all hate crimes reported in 2019 were motivated by bias toward the victim's race/ethnicity/national origin (see Figure 68). We also included the number of deportation cases in the last two decades, which has steadily risen since 2016 (see Figure 71). Of course, the nation has recently elected a new president with plans in favor of immigrants across the nation, but only time—and policy—will tell if the new administration keeps its promises. While policy develops, L.A. County's immigrant-serving organizations have continued their incredible work, and have also been called to answer pandemic-related needs that no one in our ecosystem has had to navigate before (please see report for case studies on the work of L.A. County's immigrant serving institutions during the pandemic).

Deportation cases are not always an indicator of warmth of welcome, given that deportation orders are issued by federal actors. Legal representation becomes important both in considering how our immigrant residents may emotionally benefit from the empowerment and knowledge that legal support could supply,¹³ but also in considering how it affects their case outcome. From 2016-2019, about 73 percent of cases initiated during this time period had legal representation (see Figure 73). While representation has increased, the demand for legal services far outweighs the supply. Among deportation cases initiated between 2001-2019, 42 percent were issued a removal order as of July 2020 (see Figure 74).

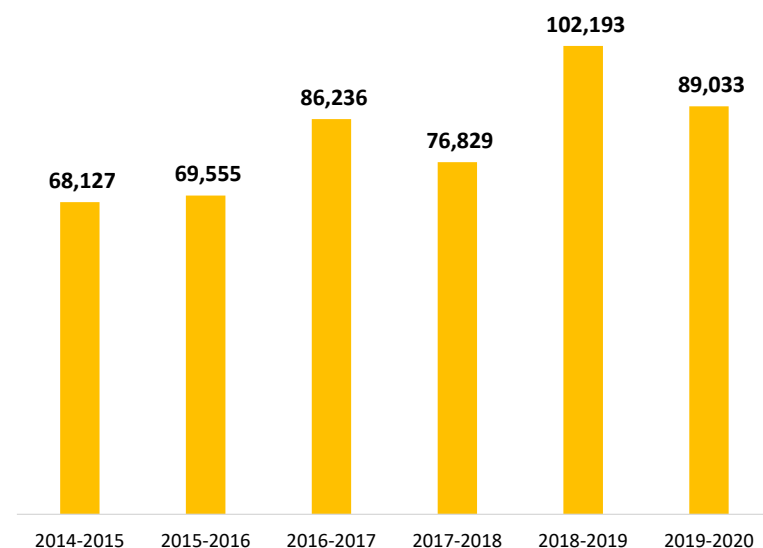
The high proportion of cases that are given removal orders in L.A. County points to the fact that legal representation must continue to be a priority for the County. Among deportation cases that did not have legal representation between 2001-2019, 77 percent were issued a removal order. That percentage shrinks to 18 percent for those cases that had legal representation. Enrollment in English as a Second Language (ESL) courses can also be an indicator of whether or not we are creating a welcoming environment for immigrants. It allows us to assess whether demand for English language services are being met and where there may be opportunities to provide more resources. While ESL enrollment has fluctuated over the years, ranging between 68,127 to 102,193 enrolled adults, enrollment decreased in the 2019-2020 school year. While there was a slight upward trend, the data below suggests there is still significant unmet demand.

Figure 9. Deportation Cases by Representation and Outcome, 2001-2019



Source: USC Equity Research Institute analysis using Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse, Syracuse University, trac.syr.edu, State and County Details on Deportation Proceedings in Immigration Court, <https://trac.syr.edu/phptools/immigration/nta/>. Data also available on the California Immigrant Data Portal, <https://immigrantdataca.org/indicators/court-deportation-proceedings#/?breakdown=5>.

Figure 10. Adult Enrollment in ESL Classes, 2014 - 2015 through 2019 - 2020



Source: CASAS Data Portal, adult enrollment in English as a Second Language (ESL) courses, Los Angeles County, 2014-15 through 2019-20 school years. Data accessed on April 22, 2021. Available at: <https://www2.casas.org/dataPortal/index.cfm?fuseaction=dataPortal.fedTable4>.

Conclusion

The drastic effects of a relentless pandemic now color the state of immigrants in L.A. County. Organizations that work in service of immigrant communities know this far too well, with their just-in-time experiences working to address the economic, social, and health effects of the crisis. The data in this report is important but the data will have to catch up to these pressing realities. What we know in this moment is that in order to reach our goals of creating a society where immigrants from all backgrounds can thrive and where they, too, can recover from all that 2020 brought, we must intentionally and consistently promote integration and inclusion in all sectors, at all levels, and in all recovery efforts.

To accomplish this, our second annual SOILA report included analysis on how the data presented has likely been affected by the pandemic and its consequences. Given how critical immigrants are to our communities, we were called to examine access to health care, access to reliable computers and high-speed broadband, and to the high proportion of immigrants working in high-risk or essential jobs for the sake of our society.

This was our best attempt to take a dive into the topics that COVID-19 has highlighted as important, and yet, this year's work does not capture the full extent of how immigrants are faring both in light of the pandemic and in general. This report lacks data on the experiences of children of immigrants, trans and queer immigrants, as well as data on immigrants with disabilities—both physical and mental. Additionally, this report was only able to scratch the surface on Black and Indigenous immigrant experiences. There are further issues to explore and data that will undoubtedly change in the years to come, but we are hopeful that SOILA 2021 both represents continuity with our previous report and starts the ongoing conversation of how L.A. County's immigrant communities endured one of the most difficult periods of our generation.

As we said last year, L.A. County is where we break bread, work alongside, and build families with immigrant Angelenos. We empower ourselves when we create a safe, welcoming environment, community, and government that centers equity for all. That work becomes more important now as we keep an eye on an equitable recovery for all.

With equity and full inclusion in mind, we encourage L.A. County institutions, organizations, elected leaders, and constituents to consider the following recommendations in our movement toward immigrant integration and inclusion in the wake of COVID-19.



Ten Lessons for our Immigrant Future

1 Address anti-Blackness and center racial justice in all immigrant integration efforts

The white supremacist systems that detain immigrants in horrific conditions and exclude them from all areas of life are the same ones that marginalize Black and Brown communities within our cities. Because of this, immigrant and racial issues are intertwined and should be considered simultaneously. This has and continues to be especially pertinent for immigrants of color, like Black and Asian American immigrants (and their loved ones). Thus, the work of immigrant integration requires that we challenge anti-Blackness and center racial justice in our efforts, especially in the wake of ongoing police brutality and heightened hate crimes. Hate crimes that target people based on race often include anti-immigrant language and vice versa. Many in the immigrant rights field understand that the full integration of immigrants cannot happen without addressing racial inequities that have been exacerbated by the pandemic. However, County leadership has a responsibility to take on these efforts and commit to bringing along immigrant communities into the larger fight for racial equity.

Immigrant-serving organizations interviewed this year identified that this effort could include mass education efforts within immigrant communities on the manifestation of racism and colorism in different racial/ethnic contexts, as well as understanding policing as a tool of white supremacy. It may also look like intentional efforts to invest in Black and Indigenous led organizations, as well as centering the experiences of Black and Indigenous communities in existing and forthcoming immigrant-related work and advocacy. As we said last year, challenging racism—especially anti-Black racism—is immigrants' business.

2 Tailor resources and services to immigrant communities in a linguistically and culturally appropriate manner

Our efforts to address racial justice are intertwined with language justice. As presented in this report, a significant number of immigrant households can be considered linguistically isolated. Additionally, for Indigenous migrants in the county, lacking access to skilled interpreters directly cuts their ability to engage in their surrounding communities and receive the support they require. Ensuring that immigrant families have adequate and timely information is critical, particularly under a global crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic. At a time when vaccines are being disseminated, it is possible that lacking in-language information is a barrier for some immigrants who are weary about the safety of the vaccines due, in large part, to misinformation campaigns, as well as the general mistrust communities have of government entities and public benefits.¹⁴ The County must invest in and proactively promote equitable multilingual spaces, events, outreach, education, benefits, and services for our diverse AAPI,

Black, Indigenous, MENA, and Latino immigrant communities. This includes hiring and compensating qualified interpreters and translators. Importantly, this requires working in partnership with immigrant-serving organizations—instead of unknown vendors—who are already effectively providing these services.

3 Provide intentional and ongoing physical, as well as mental health support to immigrants, as we continue to weather and soon emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic

Across the nation, immigrants have been disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 illness.¹⁵ A combination of fear of catching the virus, prolonged loneliness from social distancing, and stress from the economic downturn—coupled with already existing fears of accessing aid due to public charge and the threat of deportation—have only further impacted the mental health of immigrant communities. While the data on these experiences is still emerging, we need to expand our capacity to address both the physical and mental health needs of our community members. This also includes addressing the ongoing and fundamental needs required for good health: adequate shelter, nutritious food, medication for all types of needs, economic security throughout our recovery, and more. Some support is already out there; local organizations, government agencies, and beyond have taken the time to create resource lists on their websites. However, consistent messaging and outreach from County leadership and their community organization allies, who have already built trust with immigrant communities, is necessary. The County must reduce the barriers at the local level that create fear and doubt for immigrants, preventing them from accessing crucial services that promote good health.

4 Ensure COVID-19 vaccines are widely accessible in immigrant and POC communities

Throughout the pandemic, countless reports have measured the disproportionate impacts of COVID-19 based on nativity and race/ethnicity. Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islanders have experienced the highest COVID-19 death rates in the county—something that local public health leaders partly attribute to pre-existing conditions and multi-generational households.¹⁶ In July of 2020, Pacific Islanders in L.A. County were dying at four times the rate of white residents.¹⁷ An article from December of 2020, detailed that Latinos were nearly three times as likely to be hospitalized from contracting the virus, when compared to white residents, and Black residents were about twice as likely to be hospitalized.¹⁸ A recent study analyzing death certificate data from California, revealed that COVID-19 death rates were higher among the Black and Latino population. Additionally, working-age, foreign-born Latinos had a higher COVID-19 death rate than their Latino, U.S.-born counterparts.¹⁹ Despite this fact, Black and Latino Angelenos received COVID-19 vaccines at significantly lower rates when compared to the rest of the county.²⁰ By May 19, 2021, Latinos comprised about 26 percent of those in L.A. County who have received at least one dose of the vaccine, Black residents comprised 4 percent, and Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islanders comprised only 0.5 percent.²¹ Knowing that immigrants make up significant proportions of Pacific Islander, Black, and Latino communities—and that they experience higher rates of poverty—we know that vulnerable immigrants are largely being excluded from dedicated vaccine efforts in L.A. County. Further, immigrants—especially older immigrants—may not have access to a computer, be familiar with vaccine rollout processes or scheduling websites, and may have a difficult time navigating these online platforms that are confusing for all. County-administered vaccination

efforts need to correct this by going into typically hard-to-reach immigrant and POC communities, not only with vaccinations, but also with in-language information.²²

5 Provide rent relief, cash assistance, and food security for immigrants and other marginalized communities for a collective recovery from COVID-19

As we move forward, L.A. County's collective recovery from COVID-19 must center the most marginalized communities. Prior to the pandemic, housing was already burdensome and the economic divide wide, especially for undocumented and LPR Angelenos. Angeleno immigrants are in need of continued support as a result of the drastic and expansive impacts of the pandemic. Any form of relief should never depend on documentation; throughout the pandemic we have seen the important role state and local government can play in securing relief for immigrants excluded from federal aid. Given that the County's temporary eviction moratorium is set to expire on June 30, 2021, L.A. County should implement rent forgiveness for any rent debt accrued during the pandemic. In addition, the County should make a concerted effort to ensure that it provides wage replacement/cash assistance, expanded services, and food security to immigrant Angelenos, particularly those who have been excluded from federal relief. Inclusive relief also requires small business promotion that includes firms owned by Black, Indigenous, and immigrant business owners, as well as the informal industry, like day laborers and street vendors. Thus, recovery efforts must consider the existing social, economic, and political climate in both the creation and implementation of policies and programs tailored to immigrants. After all, prioritizing the wellbeing of immigrant communities, results in a more united and better off L.A. County.

6 Protect Angeleno immigrants from deportation and support those in deportation proceedings

In the face of slow-moving federal policy, local governments have the opportunity and responsibility to provide a sense of safety and support for immigrant communities. After all, deportations have ripple effects that extend beyond just the individual who is at direct risk of deportation. Deportations impact families, friends, neighbors, employers, and employees. Research shows that family separation creates long-term developmental impacts for children and families, including psychological, social, and health problems that extend beyond reunification.²³ Additionally, one economic indicator measuring the impact of deportations can be the loss of household income. Across the County, among households with an undocumented wage earner, half of the aggregate household income comes from the undocumented wage earner, meaning if an undocumented wage earner is deported, a family can be plunged further into poverty.²⁴

One step that philanthropy along with L.A. City and County have taken in shielding families from the impacts of deportation is the implementation of the L.A. Justice Fund detailed earlier. Additionally, the County Board of Supervisors approved a motion prohibiting the use of County resources in immigration arrests without a warrant to do so. We know that Black immigrants and other immigrants of color are often targeted for arrests, which is why it is crucial that work against deportation be linked up with broader efforts to reduce criminalization of Black and Brown communities. In addition, multiyear

funding to expand and strengthen efforts such as the L.A. Justice Fund should be implemented with revised eligibility and residency requirements that are inclusive of all immigrants, regardless of record. Bold policy efforts that build on the Board of Supervisors actions must continue throughout L.A. County and set an example for the state and the country.

7 Promote robust business and labor engagement in the efforts for immigrant integration

We continue to assert that immigrant integration is everyone's business—but it is especially business' business. Immigrants comprise a significant share of workers in different sectors of our county's economy. Many of our industries would not be as robust if not for our immigrant communities. This has been made all the more clear in the way immigrants have shown up for essential work, helping the rest of us weather through the pandemic. It is long past time for businesses to become more engaged in promoting immigrant integration, immigration reform, and state-level immigrant support but the need is especially acute in the coming year. Workers that have been deemed essential should not be treated as if their lives were dispensable; a path to legalization and decent wages should be prioritized.

The business sector can also step up to the plate when it comes to combatting hate or bias incidents at the workplace or among staff members, and can also promote immigrant entrepreneurship by stepping up purchases from select small businesses. The County can assist by supporting immigrant entrepreneurs via microgrants, training, and other forms of support similar to California's recent Social Entrepreneurs for Economic Development (SEED) grant.²⁵ Labor has worked to protect workers' rights to health and safety during the pandemic and will need to work against any effort to constrain hard-won workers' rights that may be at risk due to the ongoing state of crisis.²⁶

Additionally, there are creative ways the business sector can engage in immigrant integration efforts. For example, UNITE-LA, formerly part of the Los Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce, has turned their attention to the educational impacts that the pandemic has created for young people. As UNITE-LA sees it, more young people are re-thinking their plans to go to college during this time. Business sectors—alongside educational institutions—must continue to encourage this option if we are ever going to be able to close generational wealth gaps. Given that financial aid education continues to be a critical initial step for low-income and first-generation college students, UNITE-LA has pivoted to provide this resource virtually.

8 Continue to lead on immigrant integration through flexible and transparent funding for the region

Immigrant integration is everyone's business, particularly in L.A. County where immigrants compose one third of the population. L.A. County has been a leader in immigrant integration, not just for the Golden State, but also for the rest of the nation. L.A. County has the opportunity to take the necessary steps to emerge out of the COVID-19 pandemic in a unified way, prioritizing efforts that cater to the communities that have been most impacted. In addition, the County has the opportunity to prepare for any changes that emerge at the federal level, such as immigration reform.

While the County should continue to invest in immigrant Angelenos, through funds like the L.A. Justice Fund, and in all the ways recommended on this list, the County must also consider how to engage immigrants in the budget process and final allocations. As it stands, the budget allocation process is difficult to understand and to engage with because these important conversations happen behind closed doors. The process requires more transparency, both with immigrant Angelenos and the organizations that work in service to them. Only when the County creates this type of trust and relationship will its programs fully respond to the various needs of immigrants in the county. A multi-million dollar investment from the County—with community input—for broader, flexible, easily-accessible funding for the region would exemplify our commitment to tangibly supporting immigrants in both policy and budget allocations in a way that is not constantly reactive to our changing context.

9 Invest in extensive and diverse data collection

With the drastic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, we anticipate that some data points presented here are likely to change in the coming years. Data surrounding employment, housing, and even education during the pandemic is emerging and can look very different as a result of the drastic shifts Angelenos have endured in the last year. Thus, up-to-date and accurate data on immigrant communities will become even more crucial to understand the immediate and lasting impacts of the pandemic. Last year, we proposed more data on health access, service utilization, and social climate—all of which continue to significantly increase in importance. To that list, we add data related to assessing the impacts of the digital divide and the mental health consequences of prolonged social distancing and isolation. This data is necessary to assess where immigrants stand in a society re-emerging from a pandemic, allowing the County to better identify emerging needs and where to allocate time and resources. In addition, it is critical to collect data on immigrant communities that have historically been invisibilized, such as Black immigrants, Indigenous migrants, immigrants with disabilities, and trans and queer immigrants. Collecting data on unrepresented immigrant communities will ensure that the resources allocated to immigrant communities are tailored to support each diverse group adequately. Working in partnership with community-based organizations who are already doing this work is key.

10 Partner with community-based organizations to collectively build and strengthen the immigrant services infrastructure, as well as advocate for changes at the state and federal level

Both the state of California and L.A. County have made efforts to address the needs of immigrants in response to the pandemic—and in the face of the federal government sometimes making it difficult to include all Angelenos. What has received the most attention are efforts like relief funds for the undocumented and protections from federal immigration enforcement. Programs like the state relief fund have relied on community-based organizations for dissemination given that they are trusted messengers to immigrant communities. Thus, the County can make a concerted effort to work in partnership with community-based organizations to collectively create and strengthen the infrastructure necessary to support immigrants. Doing so will allow us to arrive at a place where L.A. County can offer critical wrap-around services to its immigrant communities.

This is especially important in light of circumstances that necessitate timely responses, such as a global pandemic, the possibility of pathways to citizenship for undocumented immigrants, and ever-changing migration flows. For example, the Biden administration has proposed legislation that would create a pathway to citizenship for the 11 million undocumented immigrants.²⁷ While this legislation may take time, L.A. County can do the work now to prepare for any changes that may emerge at the federal level.

Additionally, L.A. County has to prepare for changing migration flows such as the increase in the number of unaccompanied children at the border.²⁸ In April of this year, it was announced that the Pomona Fairplex and the Long Beach Convention Center would temporarily house unaccompanied children.²⁹ Providing support in an emergency is appropriate but continuing to detain children is not, and as such, organizations have voiced the need to expedite family reunification so that these temporary facilities do not become permanent, along with other demands.³⁰ To ensure that L.A. County responds rapidly and adequately in situations such as this one, the County must have the infrastructure in place for an effective, collective, and coordinated approach.

While we stress the importance of preparing for rapid response efforts, it is also equally as important to continue supporting the existing work on matters like naturalization and civic engagement. For example, immigrant-serving organizations know that registering voters and facilitating civic engagement among immigrants strengthens the voice and power of immigrants; as such, a multi-sectoral campaign effort would remind eligible immigrants that they can apply in time to naturalize and vote in the 2022 midterm elections. In addition to this, strengthening L.A. County's infrastructure can help community-based organizations hold a united front to support efforts like those of the NALEO Educational Fund who are advocating for a reinvigorated U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) that provides quality service to immigrants, reverts to the previous fee schedule, and reduces the naturalization backlog.

It is the responsibility of L.A. leaders to work alongside community-based organizations to better advance immigrant integration efforts. L.A. County must begin a coordinated effort now, to continue ongoing efforts but also to prepare for future changes that require a rapid response.

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State of Immigrants in LA County 2021

Executive Summary

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