


2023 STATE OF IMMIGRANTS IN L.A. COUNTY



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the throes of changing immigration flows and stalling federal policy, L.A. County finds itself in between great opportunity and great challenge. On one hand, the end of Title 42—that ended expulsion of asylum seekers at the southern border—was met with stricter policies that carry potentially harsher consequences for migrants forced to leave their homes. On the other hand, we have witnessed historic immigrant-led wins such as Medi-Cal expansion for undocumented immigrants at the state level and implementation of Represent LA, a comprehensive legal and social service program in L.A. County.

While we operate under an often hostile federal context—that continues to fail on delivering comprehensive immigration reform—state and local initiatives have achieved life-changing wins for immigrant communities.

This year's State of Immigrants in L.A. County (SOILA) captures the work of immigrant-serving institutions—alongside quantitative data on how immigrants are faring—and shares recommendations for further work directly from the field. SOILA 2023 details how Los Angeles can continue to lead on immigrant inclusion with racial equity values at the forefront by exploring nine issue areas impacting immigrant communities. We offer recommendations to push for a new phase of immigrant inclusion that utilizes investments to their fullest capacity and pushes for more to ensure that immigrant Angelenos can *Achieve* their potential; feel *Empowered* to engage in civic life; and experience a sense of *Welcome* in our region.

Here we highlight a few key trends and efforts from the larger report that are making this possible.

34%

of L.A. County
are immigrants
(3.5 million)

OVER 800K

undocumented
immigrants in
L.A. County

1.1 MIL

L.A. residents live
with someone who
is undocumented

ACHIEVING: HOW IS L.A. COUNTY PROVIDING EQUITABLE ACCESS TO RESOURCES?

To examine *Achieving*, we assess: 1. Economic inclusion and employment, 2. Options for undocumented individuals with and without DACA, 3. College readiness and access.

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If we're able to help improve the economic viability of these populations that we're trying to target whether it's immigrants, African Americans, Latinos...if we put more resources there it will yield huge economic gains for us as a region.

- Abigail Marquez, City of LA

40%

of all workers across the county are immigrants

79,900

DACA recipients in LA, Long Beach, Anaheim metro area

ACHIEVING HIGHLIGHT

Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) has created life-changing access to work authorization and deportation protection for undocumented immigrants—impacting both immigrants and their communities. Without comprehensive immigration reform, benefits created by DACA are in jeopardy, and many either lack eligibility or access to the program. Organizations are working around these challenges to ensure that young people can achieve and thrive in Los Angeles. The Dream Resource Center equips undocumented immigrant youth with leadership and professional development opportunities, organizing and power-building strategies, and policy advocacy skills. The groundbreaking success of the Opportunity for All Campaign demonstrated the possibilities of collective organizing and institutional coalitions to remove barriers and generate systemic changes, setting a precedent for public institutions in California and beyond. Immigrants Rising demystifies entrepreneurship as another systematic solution to address employment barriers faced by undocumented college graduates and older immigrants in the workforce. In this endeavor, L.A. County, non-profit organizations, and institutions play an essential role as providers of funding, legal and technical training, and community outreach and services.

EMPOWERING: HOW DOES L.A. COUNTY CREATE THE CONDITIONS FOR IMMIGRANTS TO THRIVE?

To examine *Empowering*, we assess: 1. Closing the digital divide; 2. Budget accountability to immigrants; 3. Language access and justice.

50%

of undocumented individuals in L.A. County lack high-speed internet or a computer at home

\$10.7B

contributed to state and local taxes by immigrants in 2019

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L.A. County immigrants are so diverse. It's not just Spanish speaking immigrants. It's not just folks who are undocumented. It's different services, different areas of the county, different groups of immigrants that we need to reach...any and every service at the county level should be thought through that lens, because immigrants are people with full lives just like anyone else in L.A. County.

- Nora Preciado, Tzunu Strategies & IRLA

WELCOMING: HOW IS L.A. COUNTY CREATING A WELCOMING PLACE FOR ALL IMMIGRANTS?

To examine *Welcoming*, we assess: 1. Mental and physical wellbeing; 2. Refugees, asylum seekers, and new arrivals; 3. Safe and affordable housing

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We found out that the immigration issue was one of the main factors that contributed [to immigrants'] mental illness, or mental health issues...[so] we started providing direct immigration services and other legal services...because we cannot separate the issues surrounding immigration and the mental health issues.

- Senait Admassu, African Coalition

36%

of undocumented individuals do not have health insurance

60%

of immigrant renters are rent burdened—spending 30% or more of their income on housing

WELCOMING HIGHLIGHT

Compounding world events have created lasting impacts on the ways that immigrants care for their health. The threat of being labeled a public charge for accessing certain public benefits has left many uneasy about accessing services. Critical components to providing care for immigrants include access to affordable healthcare coverage, offering more culturally competent services to counter the stigma around mental health, employing staff that reflect the communities they serve, and increasing access to programs such as CalFresh that alleviate poverty and reduce food insecurity. The South Asian Network hires therapists from South Asian backgrounds; St. John's Community Health's Transgender Health Program is driven by trans staff and partners to identify needs specific to undocumented trans community members; BAILA serves as a resource to reduce gaps in enrollment between immigrants and non-immigrants who access public programs; LMU's Coelho Center for Disability Law, Policy and Innovation underscores the experiences of immigrants with disabilities; and CIPC has pushed for Food for All to end the exclusion based on immigration status from the CalFresh monthly food assistance program. These are just some examples of how organizations are working to allow immigrants to see themselves and their experiences reflected throughout our systems.

EMPOWERING HIGHLIGHT

Language plays a critical role in sharing and detailing information across all aspects of life from civic engagement, to applying for housing, to receiving adequate healthcare services. The L.A. County Office of Immigrant Affairs is actively developing a comprehensive countywide language access plan to strengthen and streamline language access services across all County departments, as approved by the Board of Supervisors in March 2023. At the city level, too, former Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti signed Executive Directive 32 mandating every City department to designate a Language Access Liaison to assist in the implementation of a language access plan and engage in the newly developed Citywide Language Access Working Group. These wins are in large part due to the advocacy from organizations like CIELO who is at the forefront of advocating for language justice, and training interpreters in Indigenous languages through their Interpreter Project and annual National Indigenous Interpreters Conference. Other organizations provide important translation and interpretation services such as, CHIRLA who is working with immigrants in detention or facing removal proceedings as part of Represent LA; and the South Asian Network and African Coalition who have stepped in to provide services in multiple languages to increase representation in healthcare settings. The lack of language accessibility for vital services and information has inflicted significant harm upon immigrant communities, pointing to the need to view language access as a human right.

LOOKING FORWARD

In just over a year, we will face another presidential election cycle that will reference immigrants as targets for both promises and attacks. Pro-immigrant leaders often respond by pointing to immigrant contributions—and we agree that there are many. The challenge is that this sets up: 1) a harmful “good” vs “bad” immigrant narrative that casts some immigrants as flawed or undeserving when, in reality, we all inherently have value; and 2) promotes a view of “integration” that has immigrants “hopscotching” over other marginalized groups to reach a better spot in society. Instead, we need an approach that places *immigrant inclusion* within the broader fight for *racial justice*. Having a strong coalitional infrastructure that supports equity for all, including immigrants, will help our region respond to any changing federal context. And so, we must bear in mind what immigrants and the organizations that serve them tell us. We have gathered from the field the following recommendations:



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- 1 Produce more expansive and accurate data** to understand challenges and track investments in issue areas like digital equity, housing resources, and healthcare provision.
- 2 Consider the full range of issues impacting immigrant lives**, including physical and mental well-being in order to address needs beyond immigration.
- 3 Address language access and cultural competency** throughout all interactions, such as housing, healthcare, and more, to ensure all immigrants can access, participate, and thrive.
- 4 Promote both entrepreneurship and workplace standards**, eliminating barriers to achievement and family prosperity.
- 5 Increase long-term investments in community-led efforts** with reduced bureaucratic hurdles, especially for coalition-based efforts, to ensure lasting and meaningful immigrant inclusion.
- 6 Provide general and flexible support** for immigrant-serving organizations to increase wages, make the work more sustainable, and reduce staff burnout.
- 7 Step up focused investments in diverse immigrant communities** that have received less attention, such as immigrants who are LGBTQ+, disabled, Black, and Indigenous immigrants.
- 8 Anticipate key future trends**, such as the potential for increasing numbers of refugees and immigrants without status, and aging among the immigrant population.
- 9 Stress the need to go beyond integration to inclusion**, transforming systems to be equitable and racially just for both immigrants and communities of color.
- 10 Continue to create innovative policy and investments** that help Los Angeles lead the country on immigrant inclusion.