

# 2024 5TH ANNUAL STATE OF IMMIGRANTS IN LOS ANGELES COUNTY

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Now halfway through 2024, we face a difficult social and political landscape: ongoing global humanitarian crises, a looming presidential election, and exclusionary immigration policies that have fallen short of the promises of immigration reform. At the state level, budget cuts are infringing on much-needed services to immigrant communities who often have the least access to health and economic opportunities. At the local level, housing affordability remains out of reach for many while barriers to language access exclude immigrant residents from critical services.

Even as this landscape exacerbates existing challenges and creates new ones, immigrant Angelenos of all statuses are settled into our neighborhoods, schools, and workplaces. They find support in a robust ecosystem of immigrant-serving organizations and institutions that then represent their needs to decision makers who are ultimately accountable to making this region a welcoming one. To support their efforts in this crucial moment, L.A. County leaders must build upon previous policy wins and strengthen our commitment to the millions of immigrants that call this region home.

In this fifth annual report, the goal of the *State of Immigrants in Los Angeles County* (SOILA 2024) remains the same: to highlight the realities that immigrant Angelenos experience—through rigorously produced data analysis—and to provide local leaders with enough direction to make tangible and meaningful change. To that end, SOILA 2024 provides analysis on indicators over time; key highlights from a survey administered to immigrant Angeleno communities; and recommendations for L.A. County leaders to keep our region moving forward on the path toward inclusion for all.

Most important: we insist that immigrant inclusion is everyone's business. Immigrant inclusion is a dynamic, reciprocal relationship in which we work together to build safe, thriving, and connected communities. For this reason, we need to leverage our existing infrastructure—of funding, partnerships, programs, and resources—to continue our fight of improving the lives of immigrant Angelenos and prepare for the challenges ahead.

**35%**  
of L.A. County  
are immigrants  
(3.5 mil)

**809K**  
undocumented  
Angelenos in  
L.A. County

**1 IN 5**  
Angelenos are either  
undocumented or  
live with someone  
who is

# DEMOGRAPHICS

## WHO ARE IMMIGRANT COMMUNITIES IN L.A. COUNTY?

Throughout the SOILA 2024 report and executive summary, you will find our analysis of key indicators that investigate immigrant demographics and experiences across nine different issue areas. This data is followed by highlights from our first publicly available survey where immigrant communities themselves shared their perspectives. Each issue area section then concludes with specific recommendations offered to L.A. County leaders in government, philanthropy, business, and beyond.

### ▶ DATA POINTS

### ▶ SURVEY HIGHLIGHTS

In 2021, L.A. County was home to **3.5 million immigrants**:

- 18% naturalized citizens
- 9% lawful residents
- 8% undocumented

Of **830 survey respondents**:

- 61% were immigrants
- 39% were U.S.-born descendants of immigrants

Of the L.A. County immigrant population:

- 55% Latino
- 28% Asian American
- 14% White
- 2% Black

Of all survey respondents:

- 39% Black
- 21% White
- 17% Asian American
- 14% Latino
- 9% Other

Between 2012 - 2021, top 5 countries of origin among immigrants were:

- Mexico
- El Salvador
- The Philippines
- China
- Guatemala

The top 5 regions of origin of all respondents were:

- East Africa (12%)
- Asia (11%)
- West Africa (9%)
- Southwest Asia (8%)
- Europe (7%)

### ▶ RECOMMENDATION

Given the vast diversity of immigrant Angelenos in our region, it is necessary to center and invest in immigrant groups that are often excluded from receiving targeted attention—such as immigrants that are aging, queer, trans, Black, Indigenous, as well as those living with disabilities. The rich array of perspectives and experiences the diverse immigrant communities bring to our region is one of L.A.'s strongest assets. However, these groups are often not adequately represented in data. For example, L.A. County is home to a vibrant Indigenous migrant population that is often not captured in data. Black immigrants are another group that are invisibilized even though there were nearly 60,000 Black immigrants living in L.A. County in 2021. This reality emphasizes the need for intentional approaches to ensure their lived experiences are centered in the creation of programs, policies, and investments. Disaggregating data by race/ethnicity, gender identities, age, and beyond is one way to ensure that diverse communities are captured in the data that leaders use to shape future progressive policies from the county to the federal level.

# CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

## Linguistic Isolation

Asian American and Latino immigrant households have experienced the highest rates of linguistic isolation—at 27% and 22%, respectively, as of 2021.

From 2020 to 2021, Black immigrant households that experienced linguistic isolation more than doubled—from 4% to 10%.

43%

of immigrants surveyed require translation or interpretation services at least some of the time.

26%

of immigrants surveyed say it is difficult to feel connected due to language barriers.

L.A. County has already made dedicated investments in language justice—and the data shows that further investment remains critical, specifically for Asian American and Latino immigrant households, and increasingly for Black immigrant households. Asian American and Latino immigrant households stand to benefit greatly from language access resources as they have consistently faced the highest rates of linguistic isolation among immigrants in our region. Black immigrant households have recently seen a pronounced increase in linguistic isolation, as well, revealing increased need within this community that local leaders should take into account. Commitments like the Countywide Language Access Plan are promising steps in the right direction and continued attention to this issue will only propel the region further in the fight for language justice and accessibility.

## Naturalization

As of 2017-2021, the rate of naturalization for those above 150% FPL\* was 75% compared to 65% below 150% FPL.

Of immigrants who are eligible to naturalize, Latino immigrants have the lowest rate of naturalization when compared to other groups at 64%.

58%

of those surveyed believe that it is difficult for immigrants to naturalize.

21%

of immigrants surveyed feel they do not have access to enough info on how to apply for citizenship.

Naturalization remains key for immigrants to engage civically and thrive economically—and yet, different immigrant groups naturalize at disproportionate rates—indicating that we must continue to reduce barriers by advocating for reduced fees and investing in local naturalization programs. As a region with a high number of immigrants, County officials and electeds must invest in naturalization efforts and promote civic participation in local, state, and federal elections. This is particularly important to reach those that qualify for free or reduced fees under the new U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services naturalization fee structure. As the 2024 federal elections approach, it is key to ensure that immigrants continue to naturalize and those that can, are prepared to participate in the upcoming presidential election. Given the significantly lower rates of naturalization among Latino eligible-to-naturalize adults and the large numbers that qualify under the new fee structure, they would stand to benefit from targeted naturalization support.

\*FPL = federal poverty level, a measure used to determine eligibility for public programs or benefits.

## Digital Divide

Since 2017, undocumented households have experienced the highest levels of digital inaccessibility at 42% as of 2021, compared to only 24% of U.S. born households.

In 2021, 49% of immigrant households at or below 200% FPL lacked digital access compared to only 26% of immigrant households above 200% FPL.

26%

of immigrant respondents do not have reliable access to internet services at least sometimes.

68%

of immigrants surveyed chose social media as a method through which they get voting information.

Recent programs to address the digital divide (lacking reliable access to computers and internet) have likely contributed to decreased rates of digital inaccessibility—yet the issue remains important for undocumented and low-income households. Given that the internet is has become essential in our society, L.A. County leaders must continue to create programs that promote digital access and literacy. The data shows that digital access has increased for immigrant Angelenos over time—likely due in part to programs like L.A. County’s Delete the Divide or the federal Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP). However, inequities persist for undocumented households and low-income immigrants. Continuing and adding to existing investments (especially as the ACP winds down) can better situate L.A. County to overcome disparities and provide immigrants with affordable internet access and digital literacy.

INCOME ♦ HOUSING ♦ EMPLOYMENT

## ECONOMIC MOBILITY

### Income

More time spent in the U.S. tends to yield increased median household income, yet, as of 2017-2021, immigrant-headed households living in the U.S. for over 25 years earned a median of \$65,800—notably less than the median for all Angeleno households (\$75,000).

Undocumented households have had the lowest median household income at \$46,500 as of 2017-2021.

28%

of immigrants surveyed say they cannot comfortably afford their daily needs.

35%

of immigrants surveyed feel their income has not adequately increased to keep up with the cost of living in the last year.

Median household incomes have increased over time, but disparities remain among immigrant households depending on their status. This reveals that local leaders must continue to work towards ensuring immigrant communities have the access to and training necessary for jobs that pay livable wages. Undocumented households have consistently had the lowest median household income at \$46,500 in 2021, compared to \$75,000 among all Angelenos. Additionally, greater accessibility to information about how to properly start and sustain small businesses is critical for those immigrants looking to become entrepreneurs—especially undocumented immigrants who face barriers to employment opportunities and often resort to the informal sector or seek self-employment.

## Housing

As of 2017-2021, 16% of undocumented immigrants are living in overcrowded housing.

As of 2021, 67% of undocumented households are rent burdened, compared to 56% of U.S.-born households.

**25%** of immigrant respondents believe they cannot can build a secure future in L.A. County.

**37%** of immigrants surveyed shared that they cannot comfortably afford rent or mortgage.

Housing costs remain challenging for all, and the issue is especially acute for undocumented immigrants. This underscores that efforts to address the housing and houseless crises must intentionally consider the barriers faced by immigrant Angelenos. Indeed, the rate of households that are rent-burdened has remained consistently high between 2012 and 2021. In 2021, 56% of U.S.-born households and 67% of undocumented households were rent-burdened, i.e. paying 30% or more of their income on rent. As housing costs have only worsened over time, County leadership must consider how local housing rates leave many vulnerable to eviction or loss of housing. Additionally, more is still needed to address the large majority of renters who are overburdened and have limited capacity to save up for a home. To address relief for renters and create pathways to permanent housing, local leadership must continue to invest in deeply affordable permanent housing, rent relief, and homeownership programs that connect immigrants—regardless of status—to resources necessary for immigrants to access a secure future in the region.

## Employment

Naturalized U.S. citizens aged 25 to 64 have the highest rate of employment as of 2017 to 2021, with 75% employed.

As of 2017-2021, 84% of immigrant men and 62% of immigrant women, ages 25 to 64, are employed.

**35%** of immigrant women surveyed believe there are not enough job opportunities in L.A. County (28% of immigrant men).

**27%** of immigrant women surveyed have trouble finding training for the jobs they want (28% of immigrant men).

The contributions that immigrants make to our local economy and workforce are undeniable—and it is necessary to provide them with the support necessary to ensure they have access to the economic opportunities they desire. We have long relied on a narrative that portrays immigrants as economic assets to society. While the economic contributions of immigrants are substantial and help make our region as strong as it is, the inherent value of immigrant Angelenos is in the fact that they fellow human beings who also choose to call this region home—and so deserve to be invested in and have the same opportunities as non-immigrants. At the same time, we must shift the narrative to value and support the generational economic growth of immigrant families to foster a truly welcoming L.A. County for all immigrants. We do this through targeted investments in programs that promote workforce development, emphasize workplace standards, and strengthen access to entrepreneurship—with emphasis on immigrant women and undocumented workers. This includes ensuring immigrants receive information about these programs and are provided the technical assistance needed to truly benefit from these interventions.

# WARMTH OF WELCOME

## Access to Services

As of 2022, there are clusters of welfare and legal services in the City of L.A. where high numbers of low-income immigrant residents live.

County Districts 1, 3, and 5 have significant numbers of low-income immigrant residents, yet have less presence of welfare and legal services.

25%

of immigrants surveyed feel they do not have adequate access to County services in their preferred language.

26%

of immigrants surveyed feel that the Supervisor for their district does not prioritize the needs of immigrants.

With millions of immigrants in our region, it is essential to ensure critical safety net services—like welfare and legal services—are physically available where immigrants may require them. Investing in stronger data-collecting mechanisms that capture where immigrants live and where these types of interventions are needed is essential to provide consistent and accessible resources. In this effort, it is important to allocate sufficient time and capacity to partner with L.A. immigrant-serving organizations and institutions to develop strategic methods that reach communities and capture their needs. Certain data collection methods, for example, may inherently hold biases that miss key immigrant groups (e.g. online surveys might skew toward younger generations or those with digital access; and over-sampling certain groups is necessary to capture the experiences of smaller communities)—thus working with trusted organizations is key to overcoming those biases as much as possible and gathering representative samples. Creating these mechanisms will allow L.A. County to consistently meet the needs of immigrants and evaluate its progress over time.

## Deportation

2021 saw less than 10,000 deportation proceedings—a large drop from over 24,000 cases in 2019.

In deportation cases from 2001-2021, removal orders dropped to under 20% for those *with* representation compared to 71% *without* representation.

43%

of immigrants surveyed believe that deportation is a threat for immigrants in the county.

21%

of immigrants surveyed do not feel that local representatives have helped them feel welcome.

While many local leaders are committed to making this region a welcoming home for all, immigrant Angelenos face many challenges. Removal orders are just one of those issues—and ensuring that immigrants have adequate support to fight their cases is one way our County can express its support for immigrants. In light of an upcoming election, it is important that L.A. County is prepared to face a challenging immigration policy landscape once more. Leaders must look to the blueprint of groundbreaking programs like RepresentLA, which provides critical legal representation for immigrants. As the data shows, legal representation in removal order cases makes a striking difference in the outcome of one's case—indicating that current and future investments in this area make all the difference in the futures of immigrant communities and should direct city and county leaders to continue creating bold and robust resources. This type of innovative policy and programming is what will continue to situate Los Angeles as an influential leader in immigrant inclusion for other federal and state actors.





## Hate Crimes

Hate crime events motivated by race, ethnicity, or national origin peaked at 474 in 2022.

Of reported events from 2012-2022 motivated by race, ethnicity or national origin, the top group targeted was African Americans at over 1,500 hate crime events.

39%

of immigrants surveyed feel that immigrants are often the targets of discrimination.

56%

of Black immigrants surveyed feel that the level of welcome in the county is superficial at best.

Fostering a region free of hostility towards immigrants, and all residents, is essential to promoting safety for immigrant Angelenos. However, hate crimes are still a reality and it is necessary for the County to make reporting these crimes easily accessible and safe, and to promote a narrative where immigrants receive the support and dignity they deserve. As the data shows, reported hate crime events motivated by race, ethnicity, or national origin rose significantly to almost 500 reported events in 2022—and yet may still be underreported due to barriers like fear of retaliation, negative experiences with law enforcement, and more. Simultaneously, the demographics of L.A. County are changing—an aging immigrant population and new arrivals from communities of color means that our region will need to allocate resources to ensure these groups feel safe and welcome. In addition to supporting efforts to collect data on crimes against immigrants, this also translates into investing in a robust social safety net, wraparound assistance for new arrivals, adequate inclusion into our educational systems, and beyond. It is essential that leadership across all sectors set the tone for us all to embrace the diverse demographics of our communities—with the goal of ensuring that all Angelenos are safe, welcome, and able to thrive.

## ▶ LOOKING FORWARD

As a county home to millions of immigrants from across the world, it will always be within the best interest of this region to not only address the issues that immigrants and their families face, but to proactively honor their contributions to our society in a way that makes it so they can thrive. As we look to the future with continued global crises, an impending presidential election, and ongoing battles for statewide funds, L.A. County has reasons to be proud and much work left on the table. To continue to push ourselves as a leader on immigrant inclusion, we offer the following recommendations on the next page to local leadership, foundations, and elected officials.

# SOILA 2024 RECOMMENDATIONS

scan the QR code  
to read the full report



1

Our county must **shift the narrative** to value immigrants beyond their economic contributions and instead foster a region that provides the support necessary to build the futures immigrants desire.

2

Given the diversity of immigrant Angelenos in our region, it is necessary to **center immigrant groups that are often excluded from targeted attention**—such as immigrants that are aging, queer, trans, Black, Indigenous, as well as those living with disabilities.

3

L.A. County has made investments in **language justice**—and the data shows that further investment remains critical especially for Asian American and Latino immigrant households, and increasingly for Black immigrant households.

4

**Naturalization** is key for immigrants to engage civically—yet immigrant groups naturalize at disproportionate rates, indicating that the County must continue to reduce barriers by advocating for reduced fees and investing in local naturalization programs.

5

Rates of **digital inaccessibility** have decreased in recent years—yet the issue remains important for undocumented and low-income households—showing us that continued attention in this area is imperative to reaching critical immigrant communities.

6

**Median income** has increased over time, but disparities remain among immigrant households depending on their status—indicating that local leaders must ensure immigrant communities have the access and training necessary for jobs that pay livable wages.

7

**Housing** remains unaffordable for all, and the issue is especially acute for undocumented immigrants, thus County efforts to address the housing and houseless crises must intentionally consider the barriers faced by immigrant Angelenos.

8

It is essential to ensure **critical services—like welfare and legal services**—are available *where* immigrants may require them. Investing in stronger data-collecting mechanisms that capture where these interventions are needed is crucial to providing consistent and accessible resources.

9

Fostering a region free of **hostility towards immigrants** is essential to creating safety for immigrant Angelenos. However, hate crimes are still a reality and the County must make reporting crimes accessible, and also promote a narrative that emphasizes immigrants deserve support and dignity.

10

While many work to make this region a welcoming home for immigrants, some still face challenges such as removal orders. Ensuring that immigrants have **legal support** through programs like RepresentLA is the type of innovative policy and programming that **situate Los Angeles as an influential leader in immigrant inclusion** for federal and state actors.