



# INDIGENOUS MIGRANTS IN LOS ANGELES COUNTY

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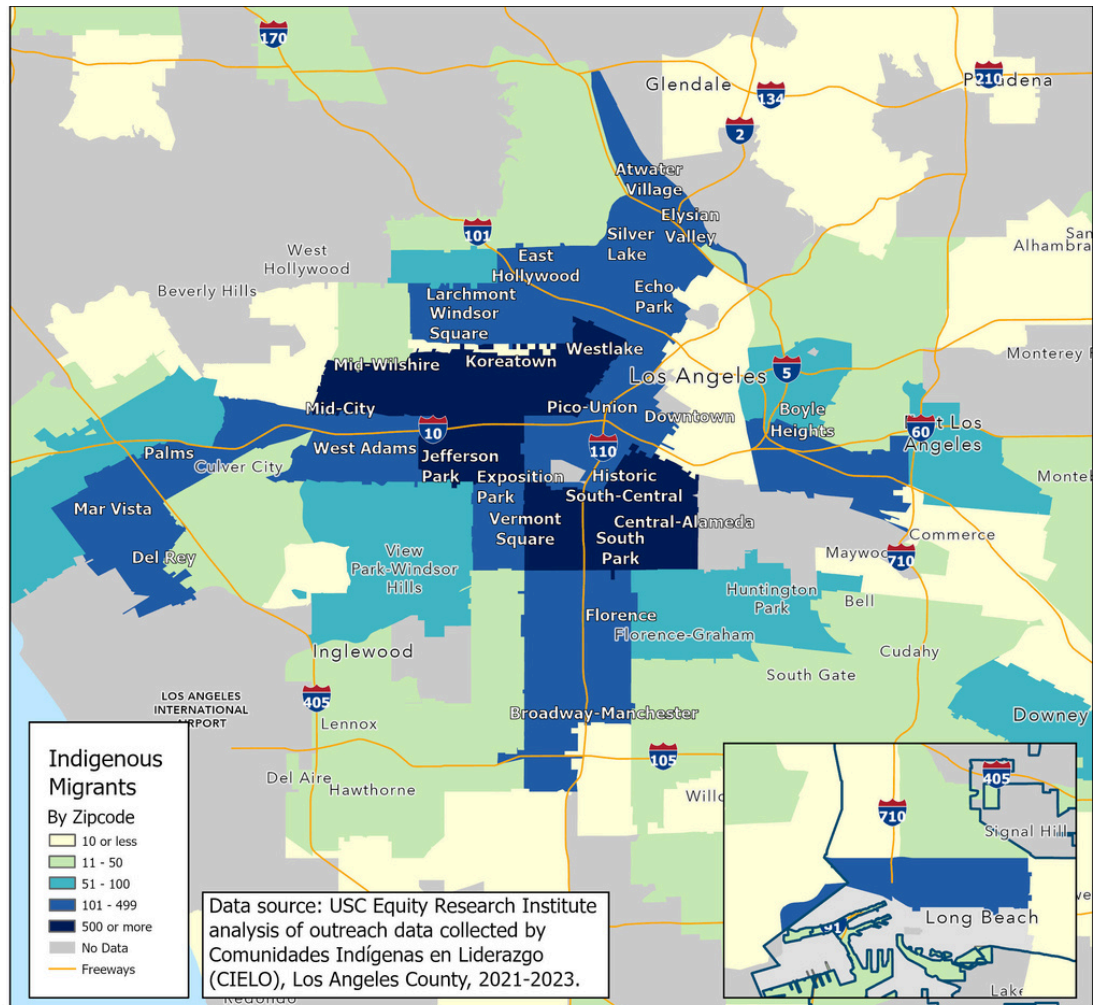
## A note about the data

There is little disaggregated data on Indigenous Migrant groups in administrative datasets such as the U.S. Census Bureau. By having trusted community messengers administer surveys in Indigenous languages, CIELO's staff were able to gather data on their communities in ways that larger governmental survey and polling efforts have not. These data, gathered during a variety of community outreach events, including food distribution and vaccination outreach efforts, provide important insights into the lives of Los Angeles County's Indigenous Migrant communities often not seen in data reports on immigrant communities that rely on data produced only for broad racial groups.

Los Angeles County is home to many immigrant communities from across the globe including "Indigenous Migrants" who are indigenous peoples from what is now known as Mexico and Central America. Often misclassified or grouped into the Latinx category, Indigenous Migrant communities have long fought for visibility in data, separate from the broad Latino umbrella. Though some population data are available through the U.S. Census Bureau, more detailed data are fairly limited in scope. Most of the data in this brief rely on survey responses collected by CIELO between 2021 and 2023 during their outreach events. Community data gathering efforts such as survey data from CIELO's outreach events offer a unique opportunity to better understand the diversity of Indigenous Migrant communities throughout Los Angeles County. This brief seeks to provide preliminary data and insights for those seeking to better understand and serve Indigenous Migrant communities in Los Angeles County. A full report will be released in early fall of 2024.



**Indigenous Migrant Communities live in neighborhoods across Los Angeles County, with many living in the City of Los Angeles and Long Beach.**



Basemap Credit: County of Los Angeles, California State Parks, Esri, TomTom, Garmin, SafeGraph, METI/NASA, USGS, Bureau of Land Management, EPA, NPS, USDA, USFWS, City of Long Beach, County of Los Angeles, California State Parks, Esri, TomTom, Garmin, SafeGraph, METI/NASA, USGS, Bureau of Land Management, EPA, NPS, USDA, USFWS

“Most people talk about everything Mexican, Guatemalan, Salvadoran. They talk as if we are in a bottle and that we are Latinos. We have many languages here in Los Angeles. Many of them think that they recognize us as being Latino and that’s it, and they don’t see us as Indigenous. **They see us as Latinos and that we all speak Spanish and that we all come from Guatemala. But it’s a very diverse culture. We have many cultures here.**”

- Angel Novelo, Maya Yucateco organizer

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**There are at least 25 distinct Indigenous Communities that live in Los Angeles County, speaking at least 36 different languages.**

Los Angeles is home to the largest number of Indigenous residents from Mexico or Central America statewide. At least 34,000 identify as being from an indigenous community from Mexico or Central America countywide, according to 2020 U.S. Census data. Maya, Zapotec, and Purépecha are the three largest groups according to the Census data. CIELO’s survey data shows Zapotec as the largest group they have reached followed by K’iche’, Chinanteco, Mixteco, Mixe, Maya, Q’anjob’al, Náhuatl, Mam, and Akateco. These communities often do not speak Spanish or English and instead speak at least one of the many languages spoken by indigenous communities in Mexico and Central America such as Zapoteco (61%), K’iche’ (12%), Chinanteco (8%), Mixe (5%), and many others.



**Indigenous Communities**

- Achi
- Kaqchikel
- Náhuatl
- Akateco
- Mam
- Popoloca
- Amuzgo
- Maya
- Purépecha
- Ch’ol
- Mazahua
- Q’anjob’al
- Ch’orti’
- Mazateco
- Tarahumara
- Chatino
- Mazatenango
- Tlapaneco
- Chinanteco
- Mixe
- Tzotzil
- Huichol
- Mixteco
- Zapateco
- K’iche’

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**LA County’s Indigenous Migrant communities reached by CIELO’s services and outreach efforts are larger and younger on average. The average household size of those Indigenous Migrants surveyed was 4.5 compared to the countywide average of 2.89.**

About 86 percent of households surveyed by CIELO had children under 18. In comparison, about 32 percent of all LA County households had children under 18, according to the 2022 American Community Survey 5-year estimates.

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Many Indigenous Migrant workers surveyed by CIELO were employed in jobs considered “essential work” during the COVID-19 pandemic.

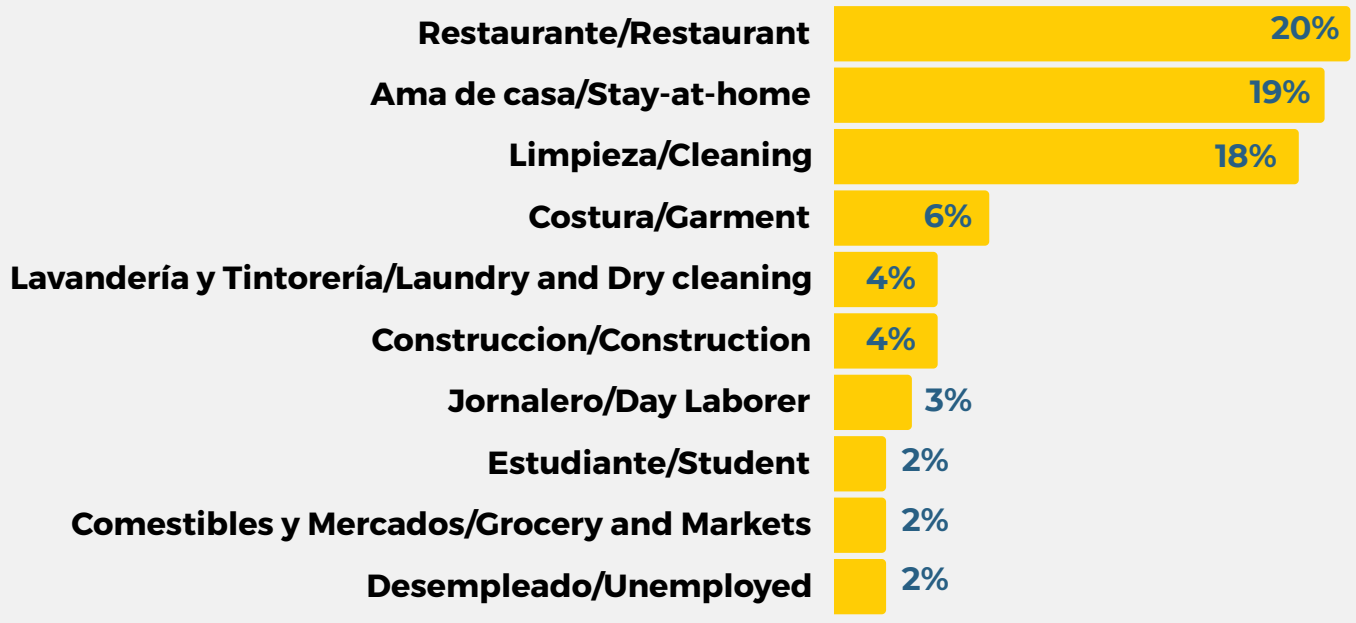


About 35 percent of those surveyed were “essential workers” during the pandemic shutdowns.



About one in five surveyed (20%) worked in restaurants.

**Top 10 Occupations of Indigenous Migrant Individuals reached through CIELO's services and outreach programs, Los Angeles County, 2021 to 2023**

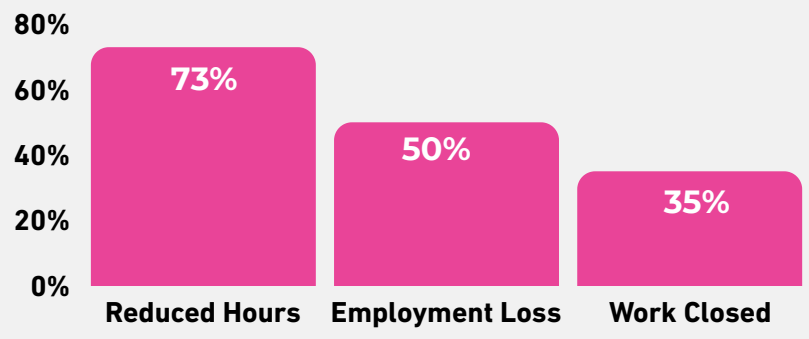


Source: USC Equity Research Institute analysis of outreach data collected by Comunidades Indígenas en Liderazgo (CIELO), 2021-2023. Note: Proportions are based on those who reported their occupation.

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While many Indigenous Migrant workers were risking their lives at their essential jobs during the height of the pandemic and in the years since, many also continued to face job instability.

**Among the Indigenous Migrant workers surveyed:**



Source: USC Equity Research Institute analysis of outreach data collected by Comunidades Indígenas en Liderazgo (CIELO), 2021-2023. Note: percentages are based on those who responded to questions on COVID-19 pandemic affects.

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**In the years following 2020, Indigenous Migrant communities continue to struggle to pay for food and rent.**

During the height of the pandemic in 2020, CIELO provided financial assistance to 2,500 Indigenous Migrant residents who did not qualify for aid as a part of their "Undocu-Indigenous Fund." However in following years, many continued to struggle to make ends meet. Survey data from CIELO's aid events show that most were struggling to pay for rent and food.



**Over 80% of Indigenous Migrants surveyed struggled to pay for food and rent following the height of the pandemic.**

*"A lot of Indigenous Migrants are still facing housing instability, having to share an apartment with two other families because they can't access the resources to housing, either because they're undocumented or they don't know how to read or write... they don't speak Spanish or English... so they're not given interpretation... this creates a place where even though we're not told this, by all of these barriers, we're basically told, 'You don't belong here'."*

- Aurora Pedro, Akateco and Q'anjob'al interpreter

**Considerations**

The ongoing invisibility and misrepresentation of Indigenous Migrant communities has consequences for the community, as Indigenous migrants navigate racialized systems that often lack culturally competent services. For example, many Indigenous migrants do not speak Spanish or English, affecting their ability to access services and navigate community resources. Organizations serving indigenous migrant communities, like CIELO, often fill in the gaps, providing vital services including interpretation and translation when government agencies, educational institutions, and others fail to do so. Expanding immigrant inclusion policies to include Indigenous Migrant communities and other communities, supporting existing organizations and networks that provide critical services including interpretation but remain underfunded, and expanding data collection and reporting for more communities including Indigenous Migrants are some key steps toward building a more inclusive Los Angeles County. We hope this brief, and the forthcoming report, serve as a resource to immigrant-serving organizations, including foundations, government agencies, community-based organizations, and others seeking to improve the lives of all residents across the county.

This brief and the upcoming report is a partnership between the USC Equity Research Institute and Comunidades Indígenas en Liderazgo (CIELO).

The **USC Dornsife Equity Research Center (ERI)** provides forward-looking, actionable research to support community-based organizations, funders, and other stakeholders. ERI's accurate, community-centered data and analysis are the basis of new narratives for equity. Our research supports the ecosystem of change by identifying new opportunities for investments, solidarity, and power building.

**Comunidades Indígenas en liderazgo (CIELO)** is an Indigenous women-led non-profit organization that works jointly with Indigenous communities residing in Los Angeles. One of our priorities is to fight for social justice through a cultural lens. Our fight for social justice includes ending gender-based violence, providing language access rights, cultural preservation, and reproductive justice. CIELO is a link, a resource, and a liaison for migrant Indigenous communities residing in Los Angeles.