

A Generation at Risk: The Threats to Florida in the Current Immigration Landscape



In its 2019 report, *Beyond the Border: Family Separation in the Trump Era*, UnidosUS demonstrates how the current trajectory of the nation's immigration policies is threatening to sabotage the future of an entire generation of American children. Today, 80% of Latinos* are U.S. citizens¹ and half of those remaining are legal permanent residents.² While the portion of Hispanic adults who lack permanent legal immigration status is small, the impact of punitive immigration policies is felt by millions of families and has an outsized impact on American children. A growing body of research finds that indiscriminate immigration enforcement reaches well beyond immigrant families, affecting Americans of Hispanic descent and their communities³ by harming their physical and mental health,⁴ undermining their trust in government,⁵ and stoking fear for their families' safety.⁶

This issue brief on Florida is part of a series that builds on this analysis by exploring what is at stake at the state level if the immigration policy status quo prevails. It compiles available population estimates to sketch a portrait of children in Florida's Latino immigrant families. For instance, while 91% of Latino children in Florida are U.S. citizens, half have at least one immigrant parent. Furthermore, Florida's Latino children account for more than 30% of the state's youth and are thus crucial to Florida's future success across various measures. Today, 28% of workers in Florida are Latino,⁷ as are 20% of its voters;⁸ thus, federal and state-level anti-immigrant policies that undermine the life outcomes of an entire generation of Florida's Latino children also depress a key engine of the state's economic and political future. The implications of restrictionist immigration policies extend well beyond harming children and their families in Florida: the long-term economic, social, and political health and vibrancy of the nation is at stake.

91% of Hispanic children in Florida (ages 0-17) are U.S. citizens.



49% of Hispanic children in Florida (ages 0-17) have at least one foreign-born parent.



* The terms "Hispanic" and "Latino" are used interchangeably by the U.S. Census Bureau and throughout this document to refer to persons of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central and South American, Dominican, Spanish, and other Hispanic descent; they may be of any race. This document may also refer to this population as "Latinx" to represent the diversity of gender identities and expressions that are present in the community.

Hispanic Children in Florida (Ages 0-17) and Their Families

One in three children in Florida is Hispanic.⁹ The overwhelming majority of Hispanic children in Florida are U.S. citizens, as are most Hispanic adults.¹⁰ If we scratch the surface, half of all Hispanic children in Florida have at least one foreign-born* parent.¹¹ This points to a sizeable population of Hispanic parents in Florida who were born outside of the U.S. and ultimately naturalized. It is thus concerning that a growing body of research shows that the children of Hispanic immigrants, including naturalized citizens, experience the diffuse harms of punitive immigration enforcement policies,¹² such as fearing U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), toxic stress, and discrimination based on immigration status—even though the vast majority of Latino children are U.S. citizens.¹³

Table 1: Child Populations

	Population, Ages 0-17		Hispanic Population Share
	Total	Hispanic	
FL	4,227,875	1,343,085	32%
U.S.	73,352,242	18,638,707	25%

Source: UnidosUS calculations using U.S. Census Bureau, “2018 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates,” American Community Survey, data.census.gov (accessed October 21, 2019).

- 91% of Hispanic children in Florida (ages 0-17) are U.S. citizens.¹⁴
- 49% of Hispanic children in Florida (ages 0-17) have at least one foreign-born parent.¹⁵
- 74% of Hispanic adults in Florida are U.S. citizens;¹⁶ of those who are not, roughly 62% are legal permanent residents.¹⁷

Based on the best available research,[†] below are some characteristics of Florida’s nonresident (non-green card holding) Hispanic and immigrant populations and their children:

- Approximately 457,000 Hispanic Floridians lack legal immigration status. They are roughly 70% of Florida’s undocumented population, but only 9% of the state’s Hispanic population.¹⁸
- An estimated 276,000 U.S.-born children in Florida live with at least one undocumented family member.¹⁹
- Roughly 25,190 Floridians are Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA)[‡] recipients.²⁰ Research suggests that 26% of DACA recipients have at least one U.S.-born child;²¹ estimates show as many as 7,200 U.S.-born children in Florida may have a DACA recipient parent.²²
- As of 2017, 12,300 Hispanic Floridians had Temporary Protected Status.[§] They are thought to have at least 9,300 U.S.-born children.²³
- In 2017, the Florida Legislature Office of Economic and Demographic Research touted population growth as the primary driver of the state’s strong economic growth,²⁴ half of which came from growth of the state’s Hispanic population.²⁵ The report notes the threat of the Zika virus to Florida’s economy, citing “tourism-related revenue losses” as “the greatest potential risk.”²⁶ Arguably, the homegrown threat that aggressive immigration enforcement poses to every third child in Florida will have more significant unintended consequences for the state’s economy than Zika ever could.

* The U.S. Census Bureau defines foreign-born as anyone who is not a U.S. citizen at birth, including individuals who later become citizens through naturalization.

† By their nature, it is difficult to measure populations who lack stable immigration status. While these estimates do not provide definitive counts, they rely on the best available research of these populations.

‡ U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) data show that approximately 94% of DACA recipients are of Hispanic origin.

§ Temporary Protected Status is a designation that USCIS can grant eligible nationals who are present in the U.S. at the time that the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) deems their country of residence temporarily unsafe for return, e.g., due to ongoing conflict or natural disaster.

Health Outlook for Florida's Hispanic Children

For more than a decade, significant progress has been made to reduce health coverage gaps for our nation's children, including Latino children. Following the implementation of the Affordable Care Act (ACA), the coverage disparity between Latino children and non-Hispanic White children shrank from 7% to 4% nationwide.²⁷ However, in recent years, this progress has been undermined.

The child uninsured rate in Florida reached a historic low between 2017 and 2018.²⁸ Despite this encouraging trend, 97,000 children have lost Medicaid and Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) coverage in Florida since 2017 (close to 4% of eligible child enrollees).²⁹ There is little evidence that a strong economy—which should correspond with greater participation in employer-sponsored health coverage—is causing dropping enrollments.³⁰ Instead, child health experts believe that some American families, especially mixed-status families, are avoiding necessary health services due to the Trump administration's restrictionist immigration policies, such as the public charge rule.³¹ The impacts of these policies are called “chilling effects” because they create widespread fear that confuses and intimidates people from exercising their rights or accessing services for which they are legally eligible.

Hispanic children in Florida are less likely to have health insurance than their peers. Compounding this, half of all Hispanic children in the state have at least one immigrant parent. This places them at greater risk of chilling, despite 91% being U.S. citizens who live with working parents.³² An estimated 157,900 Hispanic children in Florida had no health coverage of any kind in 2019.

While not the only driver in coverage loss for Florida's children, immigration policies are certainly an important contributor to the challenging environment that children face to enroll in and maintain public coverage.

Table 2: 2019 Uninsured Rates, Children in Florida (Ages 0-17)

U.S.-born Hispanic children of U.S.-born parents	4.2%
U.S.-born Hispanic children of foreign-born parents (all immigration statuses)	7.7%
Puerto Rican children	10.8%
Foreign-born Hispanic children	26.8%

Source: UnidosUS calculations using Sarah Flood, Miriam King, Renae Rodgers, Steven Ruggles, and J. Robert Warren. Integrated Public Use Microdata Series, Current Population Survey: Version 6.0 [ASEC]. Minneapolis, MN: IPUMS, 2019. <https://doi.org/10.18128/0030V6.0> (accessed Nov 22, 2019).

Unique to Florida:³³ It is likely that families escaping Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico and conditions in Venezuela have also contributed to the recent growth in the number of uninsured Hispanic children in Florida. The uninsured rate for Puerto Rican children in Florida is alarmingly high, especially given their eligibility for public health programs as U.S. citizens. It is possible that families escaping natural disaster were confused as to residency requirements for programs in Florida. A 2017 internal memo from Florida's Department of Children and Families on hurricane evacuees from Puerto Rico offers vague guidance to social service program officers that, “[Florida] residency does not exist if the evacuee states they are temporarily staying in Florida and have plans to return to Puerto Rico.” No definition of “temporary” or “plans to return” are given. An estimated 33,000 Puerto Rican children in Florida had no health coverage of any kind in 2019, up from 9,400 children in 2017. UnidosUS noticed the serious increase in uninsured Puerto Rican children due to mislabeled data: Puerto Ricans are categorized as “foreign born” in Current Population Survey (CPS) data available for research via IPUMS.*

* IPUMS describes the variable “nativity” as follows: “NATIVITY classifies each person as native-born or foreign-born...Persons born in outlying U.S. territories and possessions and those born abroad to U.S. parents are treated as foreign-born.” IPUMS-CPS, University of Minnesota, www.ipums.org (accessed December 3, 2019).

Economic Outlook for Florida's Hispanic Children

Hispanic children in Florida are more than twice as likely to live in poverty (22.5%) as their non-Hispanic White peers (10.8%).³⁴ Even though Hispanic workers have a higher labor force participation rate than the U.S. average, they earn the lowest median wage of any ethnic group, regardless of immigration status.³⁵ Consequently, Hispanic families are likely to experience financial shocks more acutely than their peers. During the Great Recession (2005–2009), Hispanic households lost 66% of their collective household wealth, compared to White non-Hispanic households' 16% loss.³⁶ Immigration status compounds these disparities for families and the communities where they live, as observed during the foreclosure crisis of 2005–2012; Hispanic foreclosure rates in counties with higher shares of immigrant detentions and undocumented immigrant owner-occupied homes were significantly higher than in comparable counties in the same time period.³⁷

During the Great Recession (2005–2009), **HISPANIC HOUSEHOLDS LOST 66%** of their collective household wealth.

Table 3: The Burden of Housing Costs*

Florida families who spent 30% or more of monthly income on housing in 2018	Hispanic	Non-Hispanic White
Renters	61%	55%
Homeowners	39%	32%

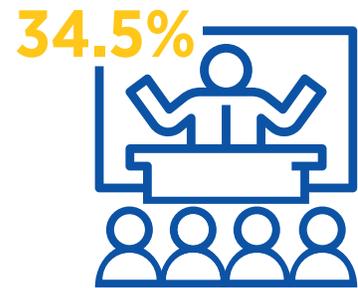
Source: UnidosUS calculations using U.S. Census Bureau, "2018 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates, Table S0201" American Community Survey, data.census.gov (accessed October 21, 2019); Bureau, "2018 American Community Survey 1-Year

Moreover, the intergenerational transfer of wealth is becoming an increasingly important factor in upward economic mobility, or the "American Dream." Growing research shows that income inequality in the U.S. today is likely to play a larger role in future adult outcomes than talent and hard work.³⁸ Not only are American children in immigrant families more likely to live in poverty, their parents' ability to pass on future opportunities will be limited if they continue to be excluded from the economic advantages of naturalized citizenship,³⁹ either by restrictive federal immigration policy, the high cost of naturalization in the U.S.,⁴⁰ or both. The earning potential of more than a third of Florida's future workers will certainly impact prosperity in immigrant communities and the broader economy alike.

* Studies find that children in households with high housing cost burdens have worse health outcomes than their nonburdened peers. Sandra J. Newman, "Housing Affordability and Child Well-Being," *Housing Policy Debate* 25, no. 1 (2015): 116–151, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10511482.2014.899261> (accessed July 25, 2019).

Education for Florida’s Hispanic Children

Despite educational gains in recent decades for many Latino students, there are still significant barriers to universal quality education in the U.S., among them, the stress of an anti-immigrant climate. Studies show that the legal immigration status of parents can undercut educational attainment and is associated with higher levels of anxiety and depressive symptoms in children.⁴¹ Three separate studies from the University of California, Los Angeles detail growth in behavioral and emotional problems in schools with large immigrant populations due to fears associated with immigration enforcement.⁴² Teachers from primarily White schools report increasingly hostile school environments for ethnic minority students at levels unprecedented in their careers.⁴³ School is already a difficult developmental stage for all children; Hispanic children in the U.S.—in addition to experiencing common childhood anxieties—also fear family separation and share collective distress with their impacted classmates.



34.5%
of K-12 students in Florida are Hispanic.

- 34.5% of K-12 students in Florida are Hispanic.⁴⁴
- 23% of Hispanic K-12 students in Florida are designated as English learners (EL).⁴⁵
- 89% of Hispanic youth (ages 0-17) in Florida are U.S.-born citizens.⁴⁶

Table 4: Florida Attainment on the Nation’s Report Card (NAEP 2019)*

Percent of students at or above NAEP Basic*

	Non-Hispanic White	Hispanic (Non-English learners)	Hispanic English learners
4th grade Math	94%	91%	65%
4th grade Reading	80%	77%	33%
4-year HS graduation rate	90%	89.5%	74%
% of college-going HS graduates**	71%	70%	45%

* “The [NAEP] Basic cut score represents the minimal performance to meet the requirements described for that level.” National Center for Education Statistics, 2019.

**Denotes high school graduates who enroll in any form of higher education within 16 months of graduation.

Sources: U.S. Department of Education, “NAEP Data Explorer,” National Center for Education Statistics. Washington, DC, 2019, <https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/ndecore/xplore/NDE> (accessed January 29, 2020); and California Department of Education, “DataQuest,” <https://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/> (accessed January 29, 2020).

* The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) is “the largest continuing and nationally representative assessment”

Immigration-related stress not only undermines Florida's students, it also poses a risk to the state's teachers. In a 2018 UCLA Civil Rights Project survey, 85% of 3,500 educators surveyed across the U.S. reported an "increase in anxiety and stress due to their students' experiences with increased immigration enforcement" in the past year; many exhibited symptoms consistent with Secondary Traumatic Stress.⁴⁷ High levels of stress and lack of institutional support are central drivers in the national teacher shortage crisis, especially in schools where students experience higher rates of poverty and inequality-related factors.⁴⁸ Florida's critical teacher shortages have grown consistently since 2016;⁴⁹ it cannot afford to lose additional qualified educators due to immigration-related stressors. Everyone in Florida loses when students are too stressed to focus, and educators are too stressed to teach.

Measuring Chilling Impacts in Florida: The Public Charge Case Study

Direct harms produced by anti-immigrant policies are only half the story; their indirect, or chilling, impacts can be far-reaching. For example, following the Welfare Reform Act in 1996 (PRWORA),* restrictions imposed on eligible immigrant access to social safety nets had negative spillover effects, such as disenrollment in assistance programs by eligible U.S. citizens.⁵⁰ The opposite also appears to be true: states that maintained access to health and nutrition safety nets for eligible immigrants post-Welfare Reform saw an increase in high school graduation rates among Hispanic students, including a 10% point boost among students who would not have been subject to changes under PRWORA.⁵¹

More than 20 years later, equivalents include policy changes such as the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) public charge regulation and its progeny. In many cases, the policy underpinnings for these rules expressly incorporate assumptions about their chilling impacts on eligible Americans in mixed-status families,⁵² running contrary to evidence which shows that child poverty causes negative life outcomes that can be mitigated by government antipoverty programs.⁵³ Similar chilling effects can be observed following mass worksite raids and other immigration enforcement activities.⁵⁴

At least 684,000 U.S. citizen children in Florida live with an eligible immigrant family member who participates in a public support program.

THEY ARE MOST AT RISK OF CHILLING UNDER POLICIES LIKE PUBLIC CHARGE.⁵⁵

- The ripple effects of the DHS public charge regulation are expected to cost the Florida economy \$618 million to \$1.2 billion and 4,200 to 8,400 jobs.⁵⁶
- Roughly 23% of Latino households in Florida accessed the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) at some point in 2017.⁵⁷ That same year, SNAP helped lift nearly 500,000 Latino children out of poverty in the U.S.⁵⁸
- Early local government data, notably out of New York City, confirm anecdotal reports of dramatic public charge-related chilling impacts on SNAP enrollment on citizen and noncitizen Latinos alike. Enrollment

of student knowledge and ability in key subjects. The congressionally mandated program is managed by the U.S. Department of Education and is commonly used by researchers to compare academic progress across states.

* Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA), Pub. L. 104-193. August 22, 1996.

by eligible Hispanic citizens in New York City unexpectedly dropped 6.4% between January 2018 and January 2019.⁵⁹ While state and federal government data are not yet available, it is possible that a similar phenomenon will be observed among the 91% of Hispanic children in Florida who are U.S. citizens.

The DHS public charge regulation inspired other policy changes in its image, notably, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) * proposed rule targeting American children in mixed-status households.⁶⁰

- Approximately 13,000 households that are eligible to receive rental supports in Florida have at least one noncitizen member.⁶¹
- Among those families who would lose their homes under the proposed HUD rule, 85% are Hispanic.⁶²
- In 2017, 283,300 Hispanic children were lifted out of poverty in the U.S. by housing assistance.⁶³

Conclusion

With a child population that's more than one-third Latino, the influence and importance of Latinos to Florida's success will only continue to grow. Protecting and growing Florida's achievements will rely in part on investing in and protecting its homegrown Hispanic talent: today, more than 25% of Florida's entrepreneurs are Hispanic, and one in every six of the state's tax dollars comes from a Hispanic family.⁶⁴ Florida's diversity is rich with potential for the state's future, but the state must be careful to safeguard this wealth from anti-immigrant, anti-family policies. History shows that righting this ship is possible, but the stakes are also high if the status quo prevails. Our future as a nation hangs in the balance if we do not cultivate and promote the full health, abilities, and well-being of Florida's Latino children, half of whom live in immigrant families.

About Us

UnidosUS, previously known as NCLR (National Council of La Raza), is the nation's largest Hispanic civil rights and advocacy organization. Through its unique combination of expert research, advocacy, programs, and an [Affiliate Network](#) of nearly 300 community-based organizations across the United States and Puerto Rico, UnidosUS simultaneously challenges the social, economic, and political barriers that affect Latinos at the national and local levels.

For more than 50 years, UnidosUS has united communities and different groups seeking common ground through collaboration, and that share a desire to make our country stronger. For more information on UnidosUS, visit www.unidosus.org or follow us on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), and [Twitter](#).

* HUD's proposed rule would change eligibility under Section 214 of the Housing and Community Development Act of 1980. According to the agency's own analysis, the rule would force at least 55,000 eligible children to choose between eviction from their home and living with an ineligible parent or loved one.

Endnotes

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