Citizenship and the Affordability Agenda

A Path to Better Jobs, Higher Wages, and Prosperity for All

AFL-CIO
AMERICA'S UNIONS

ACLU

Contents

Executive Summary

While some may measure the health of the economy based on gross domestic product (GDP) or the stock market, working people focus on the family budget — and these days it is stretched extremely thin. Across the country, working families worry that they can't afford groceries, childcare, rent, gas, and other essentials. Our economy is failing working families, and policymakers must act with urgency, using every available lever, to help ensure they can make ends meet.

The Trump administration's mass deportation campaign is exacerbating the affordability crisis for working families. It is killing jobs and driving up prices for everyone. The beneficiaries of the mass deportation campaign are not working families — they are the corporate CEOs and tech billionaires who profit from massive, often no-bid contracts for surveillance, detention, and deportation.

It doesn't have to be like this. Policymakers who want to fix the affordability crisis and support American workers should adopt a new vision for transformative immigration reform, **centered around a broad pathway to citizenship. This would produce economic benefits for all working families, including better jobs and the ability to afford to live well and thrive.**

After nearly four decades of punitive enforcement-focused immigration policies, it is time to rebalance our system. This is the third in a series of ACLU reports making the case for transformative immigration reform, and the first time the AFL-CIO and ACLU have partnered in a report.

Key Findings:

The affordability crisis is a result not just of increased prices, but also stagnant and declining wages and benefits. Workers are not earning a fair share of the wealth they help to create. Prices for a wide range of essential goods and services continue to rise, but wages are not keeping up and families struggle just to make ends meet.

Trump's immigration agenda is worsening the affordability crisis for everyone:

- **Mass deportations create an "economy of fear"[1] that:**
  - **Enables workplace exploitation.** A turbo-charged mass deportation campaign that invests 91 times more to find, arrest, detain and deport immigrants than to enforce labor laws makes all workplaces less safe and drives down wages and standards for all workers.
  - **Stunts business activity and revenue creation.** The harms have been particularly acute in cities targeted for enforcement surges, as well as in key industries that rely on an immigrant workforce such as construction, hospitality, and caregiving, as our case studies show.
  - **Drives up prices.** While core prices are rising overall, vital immigrant labor-intensive goods and services are going up at much higher rates.
  - **Kills jobs.** Continued pursuit of the mass deportation agenda risks wiping out nearly 6 million jobs, nearly half of which are currently held by U.S. citizens.
- **Unprecedented mass de-documentation of workers compounds these harms and**

increases the imperative for Congress to act. Needlessly ripping millions of people with Temporary Protected Status (TPS) and other forms of protection out of the formal economy harms workers, unions, industries, and the economy as a whole.

- **Dramatically increasing Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) budgets and corporate contracts while gutting healthcare and other key programs shifts costs onto working families.** Taxpayers are losing access to vital services while paying an average of $2,358 per year[2] to support this agenda that pads corporate profits and runs directly counter to the economic interests of working families.

By contrast, a broad pathway to citizenship would improve jobs, wages and affordability for everyone:

- **Citizenship — not temporary protection — is the way to ensure stability for families, the workforce and the economy.** Programs like TPS and Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) demonstrate both the tremendous economic benefit of expanding rights and protections, and the risk inherent in relying on temporary solutions that are subject to political whims.
- **Citizenship will create jobs, raise wages, and narrow the affordability gap.** Creating a pathway to citizenship for all would generate hundreds of thousands of new jobs and lift wages for all workers. Many of the newly created jobs would be held by U.S.-born workers. Boosting family income is perhaps the most reliable and direct way to promote affordability, and citizenship is a key tool to do that.
- **Citizenship will level the playing field in our economy and serve as a means to:**
  - **Empower workers.** Bringing millions of new Americans into the formal economy will prevent exploitation, raise wages, and stabilize key industries.
  - **Support families.** At least 6.7 million U.S. citizen spouses and kids currently rely on an undocumented family member.
  - **Stimulate communities.** Enhanced workplace rights and workforce stability will spur increased production, consumer spending and tax revenues.
  - **Expand income and opportunity for all.** Create millions of new jobs and lift wages and standards for all workers around the country.

Recommendations:

As the devastating human and economic toll of the mass deportation agenda mounts, we call on Congress to act with urgency to defend and support working families and stabilize our workforce and communities. Specifically, we urge elected officials to:

Create a broad path to citizenship. After decades of immigration policies and funding focused on punitive enforcement, it is time to address the core structural issue that has enabled worker exploitation for far too long. Extending full and permanent rights to millions of people will generate a huge economic stimulus for the nation. The more people we bring into the formal economy, the bigger the boost will be to the workforce as a whole. Policies that are temporary or piecemeal are not enough to address the scale of the problem and will instead continue to keep us locked in crisis mode, for families and the economy.

Reject approaches that increase reliance on temporary work permits or work visas in lieu of citizenship. Congress alone has the power to grant a pathway to citizenship and should not enact statutory measures that fall short of that. The only way to level the playing field is by expanding permanent rights and protections to all those whose labor helps our country to prosper. As we have seen from the last year and a half, the impermanence of temporary humanitarian protections and work visas creates chaos for families, industries and the economy — leading to conditions rife for exploitation and job loss. Only citizenship will ensure that working people have full and durable rights on the job and in the community.

Inequality Drives the Affordability Crisis

As a nation, we are experiencing a period of profound economic and political disruption that is causing pain and hardship for working families. As we fight for a more just future, the measure of the health of our economy should be based on how well it serves the people, not corporations. Working people, after all, are what make the country run. The system should be designed to meet our needs and interests.

For far too long, misguided economic priorities have driven a policy agenda that has created the runaway inequality that imperils us today. Many traditional macroeconomic measures suggest that our economy is thriving — over the past several years, GDP has been strong and the stock market has hit multiple record highs. Yet when the top 1 percent own 50 percent of stock and the bottom 50 percent own 1 percent of stock, a booming stock market is not an effective barometer of working people's health. For decades, the benefits of our growing economy have become more concentrated in the hands of the few, while the rest of us struggle to make ends meet. As the AFL-CIO's 2026 "Executive Paywatch" Report shows, CEOs now take home 312 times more than working people.[3]

Unjust immigration policy is one of the many economic factors contributing to rising wellbeing for a few and an affordability crisis for the many. Ultimately, our affordability crisis and inequality are linked. Increasingly concentrated power asymmetries lead to goods and services being rationed to the highest bidders, while jobs are rationed based on the lowest wages.

The Affordability Crisis Is a Result Not Just of Increased Prices, but Also Stagnant and Declining Wages and Benefits

To build an economy that actually works for working people, we need to focus not just on how much things cost, but also on how much people are able to earn for their labor. These are both critically important components of ensuring that people can afford a good quality of life, but consideration of workers' wages and benefits is often missing from policy discussions.

Prices are rising. According to recent polling, 95 percent of Americans believe there is an affordability crisis in the United States, and the prevailing sentiment is that the economy is getting worse, not better.[4] The high cost of living is a top concern, with respondents citing a long list of unaffordable goods and services, including gas, groceries, utilities, housing, healthcare, childcare, and many other necessities as core financial concerns.[5] Moreover, price inflation is far outpacing wage increases, with the annual rate of inflation rising to 4.2 percent in May while average hourly earnings actually dropped 0.7 percent from the year before.[6]

Incomes are not rising. Real wages have been stagnating for decades while corporate profits soar; as a result, workers are currently earning the lowest share of national income in history.[7] This is not due to a lack of hard work — had wage gains kept up with productivity, the average worker would be earning 40 percent more today.[8] To make matters worse, in many industries and parts of the country, jobs are harder to come by or workers are finding it harder to get the number of hours needed to make a living, resulting in additional blows to family incomes. Moreover, attacks on workers' rights to organize and collectively bargain seek to erode the most effective tool workers have to improve wages and working conditions.

This steady erosion of equity in our economy was not inevitable. It is the foreseeable result of a long series of misguided policy choices, and it will take intentional policy choices to reverse it. The good news is that there are a wide range of tools available to help rebalance our economy. Boosting family income is perhaps the most reliable and direct way to promote affordability,[9] and that should be a key focus of lawmakers.

Trump's Mass Deportation Is Worsening The Affordability Crisis For All Of Us

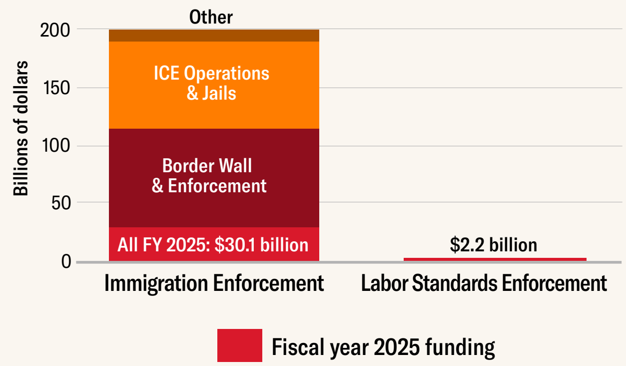
The Mass Deportation Campaign Enables Workplace Exploitation, Driving Down Wages and Standards for All

Mass deportations enable worker exploitation in two major ways. First, by investing far more in civil immigration enforcement against workers than in enforcing labor standards, the federal government enables employers to more easily abuse workers' rights. Second, unscrupulous employers use the threat of immigration status-based retaliation to crush worker organizing and scare workers into silence. No worker should have to risk deportation for speaking up about wage theft, unsafe working conditions, discrimination, or other abuse on the job, but that is exactly the reality today.[10]

The Trump administration's massive, unprecedented expansion of arrests and raids have heightened both these problems significantly. The resulting environment contributes to the power asymmetries that permit low wages and also translate into higher prices. Indeed, one study revealed that more than a quarter of all workers in low-wage industries experienced minimum wage violations, and over three-quarters of those who worked overtime did not receive the proper payment for that work.[11] While violations were highest amongst immigrant workers, they were rampant across low-wage industries, negatively affecting both immigrant and U.S.-born workers.

Trump Has $200 Billion for Immigration Enforcement; 91 Times More Than for Protecting Labor Standards

U.S. government funds appropriated for immigration enforcement in H.R.1 and in FY 2025, compared with all FY 2025 labor standards enforcement funding (in billions)[12]



Notes: The total for 2025 existing funding for immigration enforcement, not including new funds via reconciliation, includes funding for U.S. Customs and Border Protection, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, and the Office of Biometric Identity Management, all of which are in the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

Source: Economic Policy Institute analyses of U.S. Department of Labor and U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Budget in Brief (multiple years), and H.R. 1, the One Big Beautiful Bill Act.

Amid the targeting of our current workforce in key industries, we have also seen an expansion of temporary work visa programs that have proven rife with abuse. Failure to reform our unjust immigration system while ramping up enforcement and increasing employer-controlled visas that constrain rights[13] is fuelling unacceptable levels of labor exploitation.

Escalating Immigration Enforcement Harms Working People, Local Businesses and Economies

One prominent economist has asserted that the current immigration enforcement dynamics create an "economy of fear" and documented the intense and far-reaching harm that resulted from 5,388 ICE raids conducted in the first year of the administration. In communities with heightened immigration enforcement, people stayed home from school and work, and business activity reduced dramatically. The cumulative economic impact included 8.1 billion fewer visits to businesses, billions of dollars of foregone spending, and business closures and lost business across a range of industries and neighborhood demographics. Key findings are summarized in this chart.[14]

ICE Raids

Chilling Effect

- Fear and Hiding
- School Absenteeism
- Reduced Commerce
- Work Absenteeism
- Lower Foot Traffic
- Business Closure

Economic Impact

- **8.1 billion** fewer visits to businesses
- **$3–14 billion** in forgone spending per year
- **Financial harm** to workers, customers, and business owners regardless of immigration status or political alignment
- **Lost business** across all industries and neighborhood demographics

> That's what's really dangerous about this: It threatens to kick off a downward spiral. Because if fewer people are showing up to work, they're making less income, they're spending less. If they're spending less, businesses have to cut back in hiring and selling, and it's really quite damaging. I mean, what you're doing here is you're essentially creating an ***economy of fear***. When a business closes, you can't just snap your fingers and open it back up, right? Workers have moved somewhere else. The capital is gone. It takes a while for us to recover that. So, I think if anything, the larger long-term effects could be more damaging.[15]
>
> **Exeuqiel Hernandez**
> *Economist*

These enforcement actions have a negative impact on businesses in targeted locations that also hurt city and state budgets. In just eight weeks following the ICE raids in Los Angeles, the metro area experienced more than $625 million in lost sales, and a resulting nearly $60 million in lost sales tax revenue.[16] The sweeping harms of Operation Metro Surge in Minnesota are still being quantified, but early estimates suggest a loss of nearly $80 million per week for the state's economy[17] amid all the devastating human impact. Reports also suggest that nearly half the workers in industries such as childcare and construction failed to show up for work.

Senior administration officials and their allies claim that fewer immigrant workers is good for U.S.-born workers, creating job opportunities and improving wages, but the data tells a very different story. U.S.-born unemployment is higher under Trump,[18] wages are not even keeping up with inflation,[19] and the disruption of immigration enforcement displaces additional costs onto working families. The loss of childcare workers, for example, forces some providers to cut hours or close classrooms, causing economic consequences for parents who are forced to pay higher rates or lose work as they stay home with their children due to lost coverage.[20]

Escalating Immigration Enforcement Drives Up Prices for All of Us

These policies have also affected the prices of basic goods and services for consumers across the economy. A recent report showed that over 12 months ending in June 2026, while core prices (excluding food and energy) rose 2.6 percent, immigrant labor intensive goods and services ran well above that: lettuce up 32.1 percent, canned fruit 7.9 percent, fresh citrus 6.3 percent, apples 7.1 percent, home health care 10.7 percent, landscaping 10.8 percent, and whole milk 9 percent.[21]

Mass Deportations Are a Job Killer for All Workers

While raids harm the job and work hours of immigrants and Black and brown workers most deeply, the ripple effects are felt throughout the workforce. Studies consistently find no positive labor market outcomes for U.S.-born workers, and in fact associate increased ICE activity with a decline in the employment rate of all citizen workers.[22] The negative job impact is slightly higher for men, with male construction workers facing the largest reduction in work.[23] Inability to work obviously affects income, further straining family budgets.

In contrast to claims from this administration that mass deportation policies would create more jobs for U.S. citizens, the Economic Policy Institute estimates that continued pursuit of this anti-immigrant agenda will result in the loss of 6 million jobs, with nearly half of people put out of work being U.S. citizens.[24]

Why would immigration enforcement affect U.S. citizen workers? In our interdependent labor market, harm to one group of workers spills over to all those who labor alongside them or within the same supply chain, regardless of immigration status. Roughly one in five workers in our country is an immigrant, spanning all sectors of the economy. Targeting this large and vital segment of the workforce sharply reduces the supply of labor, threatening the ability of employers to generate revenue and cover business expenses, including the wages of any remaining workers.

The Trump Administration's Mass De-documentation Project Is Ripping Millions of Workers Out of the Formal Economy, Worsening the Affordability Crisis

In addition to the highly visible mass arrests in our communities, the Trump administration has unleashed an avalanche of policies and actions designed to strip millions of people of their legal status and work authorization, including people who have worked and contributed to our nation for decades but for whom Congress has enacted no viable path to citizenship. Most significantly, the Trump administration has moved to strip 1.3 million people of TPS and work authorization in the largest de-documentation project in modern American history. By ripping millions of workers out of the workforce, this part of the mass deportation campaign is needlessly disrupting key industries and creating chaos for workers and employers alike.

The executive branch has a number of tools to provide humanitarian protections and work permits to people facing danger or hardship, including TPS, a form of relief signed into law by George H.W. Bush in 1990 and used regularly by presidents of both parties, until recently. This administration has instead chosen to revoke TPS and other forms of temporary protections from nearly 2 million people, many of whom have lived and worked in the United States legally for decades.

Prominent economists have sounded the alarm about the far-reaching impact of terminating TPS for all beneficiaries. In a recent brief to the Supreme Court, they find that removing TPS holders will eliminate 660,000 jobs, and would depress, not enhance, employment opportunities for U.S. workers.[25] Specifically, they estimate that for every immigrant worker removed, 0.77 jobs held by U.S. nationals will be eliminated, so the larger the pool of immigrant workers removed, the deeper the impact on the workforce will be as a whole due to overall reduction in business activity.[26] Again, because jobs held by immigrants and U.S.-born workers are economically linked, reducing the number of immigrants who are able or willing to work can adversely affect employer demand for jobs overall. Moreover, reduction in immigrant employment leads to reduced earnings, which negatively impacts consumer spending on goods and services, risking job reductions in affected industries.[27]

Industry Case Studies Highlight the Broad Economic Harm of Anti-Immigrant Policies

We highlight three industries — construction, hospitality and caregiving — where the one-two punch of mass de-documentation and mass deportation has caused severe workforce and economic disruption, with profound implications for consumers, local economies, and all workers.

Construction

Economists estimate that nearly 20 percent of the construction workforce could be lost to the mass deportation agenda, killing 1.4 million construction jobs, 860,000 of which are currently held by U.S.-born workers.[28] This massive workforce disruption threatens projects around the country, and the harm is compounded by needless TPS terminations. Most recently 23 percent of TPS holders were working in construction,[29] and many of them have held good union jobs for decades. Filling the gaps with guestworkers, whose status is controlled by contractors and labor brokers, is neither a sustainable nor a politically viable solution. The H-2B visa often used in construction is rife with exploitation, and has proven to be a tool to systematically suppress wages and conditions for all workers in relevant industries,[30] working directly counter to the affordability agenda.

Continuing to target, rather than support, construction workers is bad both for the workforce and consumers, given that housing scarcity and high rents are frequently cited as a key source of concern with the affordability crisis. Research from a previous period of mass deportations finds that escalated immigration enforcement caused nearly 2,000 fewer homes to be completed per state per year, resulting in an 18 percent increase in new home prices.[31]

Hospitality

U.S. immigration policy is also clearly harming the hospitality sector. In a recent study, "Inhospitable,"[32] UNITE HERE detailed those harms, and the findings emphasize three main trends:

1. Fewer people are traveling to the United States despite a worldwide boom in tourism.
2. Employment is down in the tourism and hospitality sector.
3. Hotel revenue is almost flat, growing at its slowest ever rate outside of recessionary periods and the pandemic.

All workers in the industry are suffering as a result: 98,000 fewer people were employed in leisure and hospitality in December 2025 than at the same time in 2024. There are both supply- and demand-side explanations for this job loss. On the demand side, fewer tourists mean fewer jobs. The industry has also been hit hard by termination of TPS and other types of protected statuses, and the resulting decline in the overall number of immigrant workers employed by the industry accounts for some of its supply-side crunch.[33]

These negative effects on the hospitality industry are being felt around the country, including in top tourist destinations such as Washington D.C., Miami, and Las Vegas. Militarized immigration surges have also caused major disruption. For example, in just the first three months of 2026, Minnesota lost 4,600 hospitality jobs, and workers who remained in the industry saw a drop in weekly hours. The result was 3.8 million hours of lost work and $71 million in lost wages for workers.[34]

Caregiving

The mass deportation agenda is worsening the crisis in the caregiving industry, which already strains to meet the workforce needs of a rapidly aging population and charges families often prohibitive costs. The administration's mass deportation agenda is only making it worse. Research indicates that if the administration succeeded in its goal of deporting 4 million people over the next four years, the direct care sector (which includes home health aides, personal care aides, orderlies, psychiatric aides, and some nursing assistants) would lose almost 400,000 jobs.[35] Although a heavily immigrant workforce, 120,000 of the jobs lost would be to U.S. citizens.[36]

The termination of TPS will have an outsized impact on this industry as well. While TPS holders make up about 2.1 percent of the total immigrant population, they represent 15 percent of all noncitizen healthcare workers.[37] The loss of status among these workers will only deepen workforce shortages across aging, disability, home care, and long-term care.[38] This harms the quality and availability of care for all of us, and imposes a significant economic and emotional toll for family members who must try to fill these caregiving gaps.

The Mass Deportation Agenda Serves Corporate Interests While Gutting Health Care, Food Assistance, and Other Vital Support for Working Families

Recent partisan maneuvers with the federal budget have given a virtual blank check to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to pursue the mass deportation agenda while it abandons enforcement of worker rights. We now spend more on ICE alone than all but 15 countries spend on their militaries.[39] These unprecedented increases in immigration enforcement spending came at the expense of vital programs on which working families rely. Rather than ensuring that working people have access to affordable healthcare, nutrition, or housing, Republican members of Congress used the partisan reconciliation process to inject an unprecedented $240 billion in funding to DHS immigration enforcement. This was a choice to invest taxpayer dollars in the arrest, detention, and deportation of working people, much of which will further enrich for-profit corporations and CEOs.

Indeed, not everyone's belts are tightening amid this economy of fear. Billionaire political donors have secured astonishingly large, often no-bid contracts to profit off the detention of workers, children and families, and the mass surveillance of our protected First Amendment activities.[40] The eye-watering $240 billion allocated through the federal budget for the deportation industrial complex[41] will largely be implemented by private contractors with virtually no guardrails, oversight, transparency, or accountability.

Instead of spending

$268,999,966,016

ON MASS DEPORTATIONS

or **$2,358 per taxpayer,** the U.S. could fund:[60]

931,963	School Teachers
1,046,926	Firefighters
11,998,386	People on Medicaid
5,055,947	Veterans' Medical Care
6,725,420	Head Start Slots
717,070	Registered Nurses

Source: Economic Policy Institute, The Cost of Deportations Calculator.

Palantir Technologies, for example, was awarded more than $80 million in contracts to track public activities, including those protected under the First Amendment, and help ICE identify arrest targets in the first year of the Trump administration alone. This represented a tripling of the company's DHS contract awards on the heels of contributing nearly $4 million to Trump-aligned PACs and his inauguration, as well as unknown levels of contribution to the ballroom project.[42] In the process, Palantir's CEO, Alex Karp, became $6.8 billion richer in just one year.[43] As of July 26, 2026, ICE had awarded Palantir $143.5 million in contracts in 2026.

Taxpayers are footing the bill for this, and the price tag is steep — we each pay an average of $2,358 per year to support this agenda.[44] The data outlined in this report makes clear that our taxes are being used to roll out a politically-motivated campaign that directly undermines the financial interests of working people.

Consider also what the Trump administration and its allies in Congress chose to defund while they waste billions on mass deportation contracts:

- In less than a year, 4.5 million people, almost half of whom are children, lost food assistance because of funding cuts and changes to the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP).[45]
- Congress's refusal to extend tax subsidies for health insurance purchased on the Affordable Care Act exchange led to doubling or even tripling premium payments for millions of Americans.[46] Not surprisingly, estimates are that at least 3 million people have lost insurance coverage as a result.[47]
- Congress cut Medicaid by more than $900 billion over the next ten years, and created burdensome administrative hurdles making it harder to get and keep coverage.[48]
- The administration has frozen or cancelled tens of billions of dollars of congressionally appropriated funding for infrastructure, transit, and energy projects that would have produced hundreds of thousands of good union jobs in communities across the country.

These cuts result in massive hits to the budgets, well-being, and job opportunities of working families. Fundamentally, our government has chosen to invest its resources in immigration enforcement and militarization, rather than investing in quality jobs and the people who perform them.

A Broad Pathway to Citizenship Would Improve Jobs, Wages and Affordability For All of Us

Enacting a broad path to citizenship would move millions of workers into the formal economy, thus lifting wages, increasing consumer spending, and generating greater public revenue. Moreover, by stabilizing rights and ensuring that workers are able to join together to demand fair pay and conditions, a path to citizenship would promote equitable growth and help to close pernicious racial gaps in income and opportunity.

Citizenship — Not Temporary Protection — Is the Way to Ensure Stability for Families, the Workforce, and the Economy

When we expand rights and protections for immigrant workers, we improve wages and conditions across our industries. Immigrant workers benefit greatly from the ability to safely participate in the formal economy and their wages and working conditions improve. And in turn, this benefits all workers by reducing opportunities for employers to exploit and divide us, and by lifting standards for wages and working conditions.

The majority of workers with DACA, for example, report that they have been able to move to a job with better pay and other benefits such as health insurance.[49] Indeed, over the past nine years, DACA recipients have more than doubled their average hourly wages.[50] Similarly, TPS holders from El Salvador saw substantial wage gains, at an average of 13 percent.[51] Even relatively more recent arrivals who are seeking asylum got a 10 percent wage boost when they were able to access work permits.[52] Of course, the increased earning power from these populations of workers has also created broad economic stimulus through consumer spending, social security contributions, and federal, state, and local tax revenue. This is how affirmative immigration policies create a positive ripple effect that can help improve opportunities and working conditions for all.

These benefits are significant, and should not be discounted. However, the mass dismantling of protections like TPS and the processing delays throwing DACA recipients and others applying for basic renewals and adjustments into limbo highlight the risk inherent in relying too heavily on temporary, administrative policies. When millions of people are dependent upon the good graces of an executive (or their employer) to maintain their work authorization, that exposes our economy to the potential for high levels of disruption and creates a precarious system that makes it difficult for individuals, families, and industries to plan for the future. We are experiencing the devastating human and economic proof of this now, and should take it as a clarion call for more durable, statutory reforms.

Citizenship Will Create Jobs, Raise Wages, and Narrow the Affordability Gap

Creating a pathway to citizenship for all would yield massive economic benefits, including the creation of hundreds of thousands of new jobs,[53] generating hundreds of billions in cumulative tax revenue, and increasing U.S. GDP by nearly $2 trillion over 10 years.[54] In addition to spurring job growth, fixing this structural issue with our economy would lift wages substantially. Millions of workers who were able to achieve permanent status would see a $4,300 annual boost in wages in the first five years, and a $14,000 annual raise 10 years after implementation.

Importantly, these rising tides would lift all boats and result in substantial wage increases for every American worker.[55] Citizenship changes the equation by removing immigration-related retaliation as a tool that employers use to suppress wages and benefits immigrant workers, which in turn eliminates downward pressure on wages for *all* workers, effectively creating a more level playing field for working people.

These estimates build on the real-world evidence of the workforce benefits generated the last time Congress enacted a broad pathway to citizenship 40 years ago under President Ronald Reagan. At the time, the Department of Labor measured a 15 percent increase in wages for immigrant beneficiaries after five years. Economists then calculate an additional 10 percent increase in income in the second five years after acquiring citizenship. In total, they estimate that "the full effect of granting legal status and citizenship to unauthorized immigrants is an income gain of 25.1 percent. Of this boost in income, about three-fifths comes from legalization and about two-fifths is attributable to transitioning from legal status to citizenship."[56] Again, the income increases that come with increased stability fuel increased consumer spending and investment, creating positive ripple effects that help to lift standards for all working families.

Citizenship for All

Empowering Effect

- Equal and enforceable rights on the job, including right to organize and collectively bargain
- Family stability
- Industry stability
- Increased earning power
- Increased spending power
- Full civic participation

Economic Impact

- Hundreds of thousands of new jobs created
- $1.7 trillion in GDP growth
- $367 billion in cumulative tax revenue[57]
- Increased wages for all U.S. workers

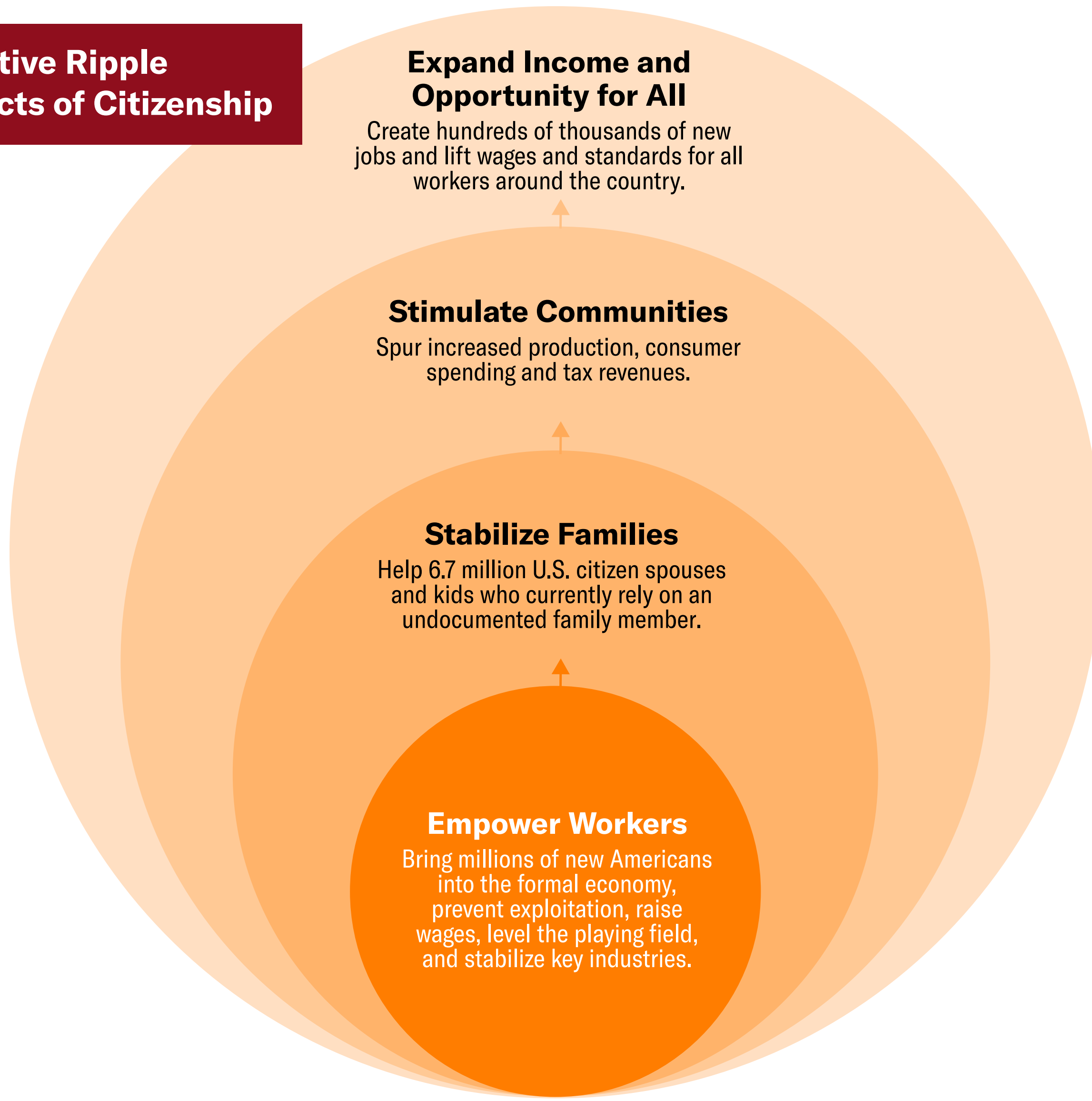
Creating a path to citizenship will support not only the direct beneficiaries, but all those who live and work alongside them. Our current immigrant population has made major societal contributions and established deep social, economic, and familial ties to the United States. The Center for Migration Studies of New York estimates:[58]

- 43 percent have lived in the United States for 15 years or more.
- 38 percent (3.9 million) are parents of U.S. citizens.
- 16 percent are married to a U.S. citizen or lawful permanent resident,
- 96 percent of those in the labor force are employed, and many of them are union members.

These already significant economic benefits of a broad pathway to citizenship will be further enhanced because a path to citizenship will remove barriers to worker organizing and collective bargaining inherent in the current system. On average, workers covered by a union contract earn 12.8 percent more than nonunion workers, and those increases help to narrow racial and gender gaps in pay and conditions.[59] In short, all workers benefit from a union, but it makes the biggest difference for those, like immigrants, who have been marginalized in our economy.

In sum, the positive ripple effects of creating a broad pathway to citizenship will promote inclusive economic growth that benefits everyone. When immigrants are able to secure better jobs and earn higher wages, that in turn spurs more and better jobs for others. Immigrants are not just workers but also consumers, and their increased consumer spending drives job creation and wage growth across communities and industries, as illustrated below.

Positive Ripple Effects of Citizenship



Recommendations

To address the affordability crisis, Congress must look beyond the cost of goods, and also take steps to promote the ability of workers to earn living wages and fully exercise their rights. Doing this will require a coherent policy agenda that rewires our economy to serve the needs of the people, including through overdue reforms to our unjust immigration system. As the devastating human and economic toll of the mass deportation agenda mounts, we call on Congress to act with urgency to defend and support working families and stabilize our workforce and communities by fixing our unjust immigration system. This is not only the right thing to do, but also the economically smart thing to do, as data shows that when people have rights and resources, they are more productive and able to contribute at even higher levels, generating widespread economic benefits for all.

Specifically, we urge lawmakers to:

Create a broad path to citizenship. After decades of immigration policies and funding focused on punitive enforcement, it is time to address the core structural issue that has enabled worker exploitation for far too long at the expense of all of us. Extending full and permanent rights to millions of people through an earned path to citizenship will create a huge economic stimulus for the nation, and the more people we bring into the formal economy, the bigger the boost will be to the workforce as a whole. Policies that are temporary or piecemeal are not enough to address the scale of the problem and instead will continue to keep us locked in crisis mode, for families and the economy.

- While there are numerous good bills to consider, the most straightforward is the **Renewing Immigration Provisions of the Immigration Act of 1929** (S. 2468, H.R. 4696), which updates existing provisions in immigration law to allow long-term members of our workforce, our communities, and our unions to apply for permanent residence and eventually become U.S. citizens. The one-page bill creates a simple fix for a complicated problem by making more people eligible to apply for citizenship once they have lived in the United States for at least seven years, as long as they are of good moral character. Not only does this bill provide a much-needed mechanism to expand rights for today's long-term immigrants, but it prevents the creation of a new subclass of exploitable workers in the future.

Reject approaches that increase reliance on temporary work permits or work visas in lieu of citizenship. Congress alone has the power to grant a pathway to citizenship, and should not enact statutory measures that fall short of that. The only way to level the playing field is by expanding permanent rights and protections to all those whose labor helps our country to prosper. As we've seen from the last year and a half, the impermanence of temporary humanitarian protections and work visas creates chaos for families, industries, and the economy — leading to conditions rife for exploitation and job loss. Only citizenship will ensure that workers have full rights on the job and in the community.

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