

FOUR THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT HOW IMMIGRATION IMPACTS CARE WORK

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IMMIGRANT WOMEN ARE ESSENTIAL FOR CAREGIVING

In the United States, our economy depends on care work, with parents and family caregivers relying on early educators, direct care workers, and other professionals to care for their loved ones so they can participate in the labor force. The care sector, in turn, depends heavily on women, particularly women of color and immigrant women, who receive among the lowest pay across industries. Despite being essential for children, older adults, and people with disabilities, care work¹—which includes center-based child care, home-based child care, family, friend, and neighbor care (FFN), and home and community-based services—remains undervalued, underpaid, and plagued by workforce shortages as a result of poor job quality. **Anti-immigrant policies further threaten this already fragile system, jeopardizing the well-being of families and communities nationwide.**

1. Without Immigrant Workers, Our Care Infrastructure Will Crumble

Immigrants are a cornerstone of the care workforce—fulfilling both paid and unpaid caregiving duties. Among paid care workers, **20 percent of early educators² and 27 percent of direct care workers³ are immigrants. The vast majority are immigrant women, which includes naturalized women and women classified as “noncitizens,” a term inclusive of legal permanent residents, undocumented immigrants, or temporary migrant workers employed through “nonimmigrant” visas.⁴** Note, the true number of immigrant care workers is expected to be higher given that data does not fully capture undocumented workers.

Immigrants, especially immigrant women, are essential to addressing the severe workforce

shortages that plague these vital sectors, which have been strained to a breaking point because of underinvestment.

- **Immigrant Workers in Child Care:** Immigrants currently make up 20 percent of early educators, up from 5 percent in 1980.⁵ The largest share of the immigrant child care workforce are center-based early educators (26 percent), followed by preschool teachers (23 percent), family-based child care providers (21 percent), private home-based child care providers (20 percent), teachers’ assistants (7 percent), and program directors (3 percent).⁶ Immigrant women are a significant percentage of the child care workforce across the country, **making up nearly half of all female early educators in areas like Los Angeles and New York City.⁷**

- **Immigrants Workers in Aging and Disability Care:** Direct care workers provide millions of families with quality long-term care for older adults and disabled people—serving as personal care aides and home health aides (home care workers) and nursing assistants in people’s homes and communities in long-term care facilities like nursing homes. Over one in four (27 percent) direct care workers are immigrants, **up from 21 percent in 2011.**⁸ The share of immigrant workers is even higher in home care, the community-based setting many older adults prefer: 32 percent of home care workers are immigrants.⁹ In several states the share of the immigrant direct care workforce **is nearly half or more:** New Jersey (54 percent), Maryland (55 percent) and New York (74 percent) have a high share of immigrants working as home health aides.¹⁰

2. Immigrant Care Workers Enable All Families to Thrive, Yet Face Multiple Barriers to Entering and Staying in the Workforce

Care work is the work that makes all other work possible and enables all families to thrive. Yet, care work is among the lowest paid of all low-wage professions¹¹ and has historically been underfunded and undervalued.¹² Despite their vital role, care workers, particularly immigrant women, face compounded barriers for entering and remaining in care workforce, including:

- **Low Wages and Barriers to Support:** Overall, the median hourly wage of early educators and home care workers in 2023 were \$14.6¹³ and \$16.1,¹⁴ respectively. As a result, many care workers rely on public assistance in order to survive: three out of five home care workers¹⁵ and 43 percent of early educator families¹⁶ rely on some kind of public assistance like SNAP or Medicaid to survive on these insufficient wages. Importantly, not all immigrant care workers are eligible for essential support through public assistance due to their immigration status, given existing barriers to access for most lawfully residing immigrants and nearly all undocumented immigrants.¹⁷ This leaves many low-paid, immigrant care workers without essential supports to afford the basic necessities, such as food and housing, despite the fact that they pay taxes from their wages to support these public programs.^{18,19}

- **Precarious Employment and High Turnover Rates:** Decades of underinvestment have led to low wages, lack of benefits, and high workforce shortages in care sectors. On top of this, many immigrant caregivers work under temporary visa programs, which tie them to specific employers and limit their ability to negotiate fair wages and make them more vulnerable to exploitation. Job insecurity and poor working conditions drive high turnover rates, where workers leave jobs they feel are unsustainable. For early educators, the turnover rate was 15 percent in 2022, **which was 65 percent higher than in a typical job.**²⁰ For home care workers, the turnover rate is an astonishing 80 percent,²¹ indicating a crisis point for the industry. In addition to demonstrating the severely low job quality of these care jobs,²² **high turnover rates deprive people of quality care.** In long-term care facilities, for example, direct care workers who are stretched thin covering the staffing gaps left by turnover struggle to give attentive care that many older adults and disabled people need. Without staffing support, turnover can increase the likelihood that care recipients will go without the hours of care they need.²³
- **Economic Instability:** Like all workers, care workers have families that rely on them as providers. **29.3% of women direct care workers have children under 18 years old in their homes.**²⁴ And a quarter of direct care workers are also unpaid family caregivers for older adults in their lives.²⁵ Low wages and job insecurity threaten their ability to take care of themselves and their families, as well as provide care to their loved ones.

3. President Trump’s Anti-Immigrant Policies Are Devastating for Families and Caregivers

From day one, the Trump administration has acted on their campaign promise to detain and deport as many immigrants as possible. The Trump administration has advanced actions that undermine the safety of our communities and the well-being of families without regard for humanity, the rule of law, or an individual’s lawfully present immigration status.

So far, Trump has expanded the use of expedited removal, worked to increase the number of deportable people by revoking or challenging their lawful status,²⁶ and illegally used wartime authority through the Alien Enemies Act (AEA) to detain and deport immigrants without due process.²⁷ Additionally, Trump has unsuccessfully attempted to bar young children from the benefits that they are entitled to at birth by undermining birthright citizenship²⁸ and removed long-standing protections from immigration enforcement in community spaces designated as protected areas.²⁹ In the first fourteen weeks of the Trump administration, care has already been impacted by:

- **Decline in access to benefits:** Increasing immigration enforcements and threats of mass deportation create a chilling effect for families, leading to a reduction in immigrants utilizing public benefits or engaging in everyday activities for fear of deportation. Whether perceived, or real, the threat of family separation, detention, and deportation can have long-lasting effects on the well-being of children, aging adults, people with disabilities, caregivers, and the economic stability of families—for many mixed-status households the deportation of just one parent would reduce the median household millions into poverty.³⁰
- **More severe care workforce shortages, leading to loss of critical care for families:** Through executive action, the Trump administration has made all undocumented immigrants and many legally present immigrants targets for deportation, noting that there is still harm in these practices, previous administrations had set priority targets focused on individuals who pose criminal or national security threat.³¹ Simultaneously, they removed protections from certain areas sometimes referred to as sensitive locations or protected spaces—like hospitals, schools, places of worship, child care centers, and other places children may gather.³² When more people are afraid to access critical services, or more care workers are afraid to go to work, families and communities suffer. Worker shortages across the country already leave thousands of older adults and disabled people without the services they need, and the demand for long-term care will only increase as they population ages.³³ Threats to the immigrants who currently help provide that essential care will only increase the number of people without their needs met.³⁴

4. Pro-Immigration Policies Will Strengthen Our Caregiving Infrastructure

When harsh anti-immigration policy forces immigrants out of care work, everyone suffers through reduced options for families and reduced pay for all workers.³⁵ Pro-immigration policies in turn strengthen our caregiving infrastructure by providing job and wage stability for care workers who provide critical support for families across the country. Here are some pro-immigration policies that would support immigrant care workers and address our caregiving crisis:

- **Ensure spaces such as schools and hospitals are protected from immigration enforcement:** In the first few days of the Trump administration, Donald Trump rescinded the protected areas policy, which ensured that sensitive spaces such as schools and hospitals were protected from immigration enforcement. Without this long-standing policy, immigrants and their loved ones no longer feel safe accessing essential services like health care, child care, education, their places of worship, or even the playground in their neighborhood.³⁶ Already, families are choosing not to send their children to child care or school³⁷ and are not seeking health care,³⁸ and immigrant care workers are making the difficult decision to leave their jobs or close their businesses rather than risk being deported at work.³⁹ To address this, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) can reinstate the protected areas policy or Congress can codify it by passing the **Protecting Sensitive Locations Act of 2025**.⁴⁰
- **Pass fair and humane pro-immigration policies that will strengthen the care workforce:** Examples of pro-immigrant policies include providing equitable access to benefits like health coverage; increasing pathways to legal status for immigrant caregivers, including Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipients; and implementing and enforcing labor protections to prevent abuse in temporary work visa programs. All of these changes would provide stability to a core segment of the care workforce, allowing for personal economic growth, consistency for families who rely on their care, and better outcomes for recipients of care.⁴¹

IMMIGRATION AND CARE POLICY ARE INTERCONNECTED

Care work makes sure that children are cared for in safe, developmentally appropriate ways and that older adults and people with disabilities receive care that meets their needs and allows them to live with dignity. It is care workers, chiefly underpaid and undervalued women of color and immigrant women, who make this possible. To address the historical inequities that care workers face every day, we must go beyond surface-level solutions. We need a fundamental shift in how we view and value care work and how we view and value immigrant workers. We must amplify the critical importance of immigrants in our care workforce, recognize care work as high-skill labor and vital to the U.S. economy, and ensure all care providers are recognized as essential and skilled workers that deserve fair compensation and protections.

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