February 15, 2024

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report describes Idaho's unauthorized workforce and how their work, spending and taxes relate to Idaho's economy.

The University of Idaho James A. and Louise McClure Center for Public Policy Research examined existing data and research on unauthorized immigrants, both nationally and in Idaho. The most recent data on the number of unauthorized immigrants in the United States and Idaho are from 2021, with more detailed data only available for earlier years.[1]

This report summarizes conclusions from existing data and does not update estimates or collect new quantitative data. It integrates perspectives and up-to-date information on Idaho's unauthorized workforce from Idaho professionals in agriculture, dairy and hospitality industries.

The McClure Center conducts independent, evidence-based research. Publications contain no policy recommendations.

KEY FINDINGS FOR IDAHO

The population of unauthorized immigrants in Idaho remained stable from 2005 to 2021.
There were approximately 35,000 unauthorized immigrants in Idaho in 2021.[2] This number is the same as in 2005.[3] More than half of unauthorized immigrants in Idaho remain for at least 16 years.[4] This is the longest length of stay in the nation.[5]

Unauthorized immigrant workers contribute to Idaho's economy by meeting labor needs in Idaho industries.
Finding workers is a key concern for Idaho businesses today.[6] In Idaho, 86% of unauthorized immigrants are working.[7] This is higher than the national average of 74%.[8] In Idaho, most unauthorized immigrants work in agriculture, construction and service industries.[9] Idaho industry professionals report that in agriculture, dairy and hospitality industries, businesses employ unauthorized workers to meet their labor needs because authorized workers cannot be found. They also report that businesses adapt to lack of workers by foregoing business growth opportunities, cutting back production or even closing. Such decisions can have a detrimental effect on the economy.

The Unauthorized Immigrant Workforce and Idaho's Economy

University _of_ Idaho
McClure Center for
Public Policy Research

Unauthorized immigrant workers contribute to Idaho's economy through their spending.

Unauthorized immigrant workers' spending, like all consumer spending, ripples through Idaho's economy by supporting jobs and stimulating additional spending. Recent estimates of unauthorized immigrants' contribution to Idaho's economy through their labor and subsequent spending are unavailable, but are likely in the billions of dollars and tens of thousands of jobs.[10]

Unauthorized immigrants pay taxes and are ineligible for most taxpayer-funded programs.

Unauthorized immigrants in Idaho pay income, sales and other taxes.[11] Unauthorized immigrants are ineligible for most public programs that are funded by tax dollars, including housing and food assistance programs, Medicaid and subsidized health insurance.[12]

The precise fiscal impact of unauthorized immigrants to the state of Idaho is not known.

The fiscal impact, or the difference between unauthorized immigrants' tax contributions and their public expenditures, has not been precisely quantified for Idaho. Where federal law requires services to be provided to everyone regardless of immigration status,[13] federal programs may partially or fully offset the cost to Idaho of fulfilling these requirements.[14]

[1] Jeffrey S Passel and Jens Manuel Krogstad, "Pew Research Center Estimates Based on Augmented U.S. Census Bureau Data, American Community Survey 2021 (IPUMS)," November 16, 2023, https://www.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/SR_23.11.16_unauthorized-immigrants-table-2.xlsx; "Center for Migration Studies Undocumented Immigrants in the United States, by Year, 2010-2019" (Center for Migration Studies, 2022), http://data.cmsny.org/state.html; "Center for Migration Studies Undocumented Immigrants in Idaho, 2010-2019" (Center for Migration Studies, 2022), http://data.cmsny.org/state.html.
[2] Passel and Krogstad, "Pew Research Center Estimates Based on Augmented U.S. Census Bureau Data, American Community Survey 2021 (IPUMS)."
[3] Passel and Krogstad, "Pew Research Center Estimates Based on Augmented U.S. Census Bureau Data, American Community Survey 2021 (IPUMS)."
[4] Jeffrey S Passel and D'Vera Cohn, "Overall Number of U.S. Unauthorized Immigrants Holds Steady Since 2009" (Pew Research Center, 2016), https://www.pewresearch.org/hispanic/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2016/09/PH_2016.09.20_Unauthorized_FINAL.pdf.
[5] Passel and Cohn, "Overall Number of U.S. Unauthorized Immigrants Holds Steady Since 2009."

[6] Craig Shaul et al., "Idaho Employer Business Climate Survey: August 2023" (Idaho Department of Labor, August 2023).

[7] Passel and Krogstad, "Pew Research Center Estimates Based on Augmented U.S. Census Bureau Data, American Community Survey 2021 (IPUMS)."

[8] Passel and Krogstad, "Pew Research Center Estimates Based on Augmented U.S. Census Bureau Data, American Community Survey 2021 (IPUMS)."

[9] Passel and Krogstad, "Pew Research Center Estimates Based on Augmented U.S. Census Bureau Data, American Community Survey 2021 (IPUMS)."

[10] See Appendix C.

[11] Lisa Christensen Gee, Matthew Gardner, and Meg Wiehe, "Undocumented Immigrants' State & Local Tax Contributions" (The Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy, February 2016).

[12] See Appendix E.

[13] "Emergency Medical Treatment and Active Labor Act (EMTALA)," 42 U.S.C. § 1395dd § (1986); "Civil Rights Act," Pub. L. No. 88–352, 78 Stat. 241 (1964); "Equal Educational Opportunities Act," 20 USC § 1701-1758 § (1974); "Constitution of the United States, Amendment XIV," 1868, https://www.senate.gov/about/origins-foundations/senate-and-constitution/constitution.htm#amdt_14_(1868).

[14] "English Language Acquisition State Grants--Title III, Part A. Funding Status and Awards," July 7, 2023, https://oese.ed.gov/offices/office-of-formula-grants/school-support-and-accountability/english-language-acquisition-state-grants/funding-status/; "Federal Education-Related Discretionary Programs: Final Appropriations" (National Education Association, 2023 2020); "U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Assistance: Funding Awards," 2023, https://bja.ojp.gov/funding/awards/list.