



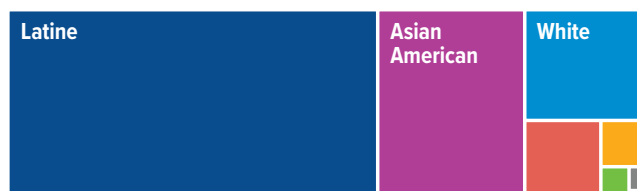
Children in Immigrant Families

Every child deserves the opportunity to grow up healthy, safe, and supported, regardless of race, ethnicity, immigration status, or zip code. Yet systemic racism and other forms of discrimination continue to deny that opportunity to too many California children, shaping where they live, the schools they attend, the air they breathe, and their access to resources. At the same time, our communities are not defined by these challenges, but by their resilience, cultural strength, and power—assets to be honored and built upon as we work toward a California where every child can just be a child.



POPULATION

- ▶ **Almost half (44%) of California's 8.6 million children under age 18 live with at least one parent who was born outside the U.S.** This translates to over 3.7 million children living in immigrant families, over 9 in 10 of whom were born in the U.S. (90%) and/or are U.S. citizens (93%).
- ▶ 1 in 6 children in immigrant families (17%) are age 3 or younger. Across age groups, children in immigrant families are racially and ethnically diverse.



- ▶ **More than half (55%) of children with a foreign-born parent are bilingual**, compared with 13% of children with only U.S.-born parents.
- ▶ **Overall, more than 1 million California children are estimated to have an undocumented parent.**
- ▶ Over 1 in 4 children in immigrant families (28%) are U.S. citizens with only non-U.S. citizen parents—one type of mixed-status family.
- ▶ More children in immigrant families have parents from Mexico than from any other geographic or linguistic region:
 - Over 45%: Mexico
 - Over 10% each: East Asia/Pacific; South Asia/Middle East
 - Over 5% each: Southeast Asia; rest of Central America/ Spanish Caribbean; Europe/Canada/Australia/New Zealand
 - Under 3% each: South America; Africa/West Indies
- ▶ **California is home to over 141,000 active DACA recipients—more than any other state.**

UNDERSTANDING KEY TERMS

A guide to terminology used in this snapshot.
Note that definitions may vary across data sources.

- ▶ **Children in immigrant families:** Children ages 0–17 living with at least one foreign-born parent.
- ▶ **Foreign born or immigrant:** People born outside the U.S.
- ▶ **Mixed-status families:** Families in which members have different immigration or citizenship statuses.
- ▶ **Undocumented immigrants:** Foreign-born people living in the U.S. without legal documentation or authorization.
- ▶ **Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipients:** Immigrants who came to the U.S. as children and have been granted a temporary period of protection from deportation and eligibility to work.
- ▶ **Dual language learners:** Young children ages 0–5 with at least one parent who speaks a language other than English at home.

ECONOMIC WELL-BEING

- ▶ **Children in immigrant families make up a disproportionate share of children in poverty—17% (over 600,000) live below the federal poverty threshold**, compared with 13% of children with only U.S.-born parents.
- ▶ Among non-U.S. citizen, low-income adults (living below 200% of the poverty threshold) with children, nearly half (49%) could not afford enough food for their family in the previous year.
- ▶ Almost half of children in immigrant families (47%) live in households burdened by housing costs; half (50%) live in households that do not own their home.

HEALTH NEEDS, COVERAGE & ACCESS

- ▶ 97% of children in immigrant families have health insurance coverage, similar to their peers with only U.S.-born parents. This leaves over 130,000 children in immigrant families uninsured. 47% of children in immigrant families with coverage have public insurance only, compared with 32% of children with U.S.-born parents, and 53% have private insurance, compared with 69% with U.S.-born parents.
- ▶ **1 in 5 children in immigrant families have special health care needs.**
- ▶ Over 1 in 7 children in immigrant families ages 1–17 experienced oral health problems—such as frequent or chronic toothaches, bleeding gums, or decayed teeth or cavities—in the previous year.
- ▶ **29% of children in immigrant families did not receive a preventive care visit in the previous year,** compared with 19% of children with only U.S.-born parents.
- ▶ Two thirds of children in immigrant families (67%) do not receive care within a medical home—a model of primary care that facilitates partnerships between patients, families, providers, and community resources.

COMMUNITY & FAMILY

- ▶ 96% of children in immigrant families have access to a broadband-connected device in their household, similar to the share of children with only U.S.-born parents (97%).
- ▶ **Among adults born outside the U.S. who have children, 1 in 5 non-U.S. citizens (20%) avoided applying for government benefits in the previous year due to fears related to immigration or public charge—**compared with 1 in 20 naturalized citizens (5%).

MENTAL HEALTH

- ▶ In 2020–2024, 19% of non-U.S. citizen adolescents ages 12–17 needed help for emotional or mental health problems in the previous year. Data from the same survey for 2023–2024 show that in the previous year almost a third (32%)* of teens in this group delayed or did not receive the care they needed.
- ▶ Nationally, nearly 1 in 5 immigrant parents (18%) reported their children had experienced problems with behavior (12%), sleeping or eating (14%), or school attendance or performance (12%) since January 2025 due to worries about a family member's immigration status.
- ▶ **In a 2024 national survey of DACA recipients, more than 4 in 5 parents reported thinking daily about being separated from their children (82%) or not seeing their children grow up (81%) because of deportation.**

PROTECTIVE FACTORS

Protective factors are community-defined strengths, cultural assets, and resilience that can mitigate risks to well-being. These factors are critical in addressing health inequities, guiding interventions that meet the unique needs of children in immigrant families, and building solutions that center community power.

MULTILINGUALISM

Speaking multiple languages in childhood is linked to enhanced attention, memory, problem-solving, and emotional regulation. Multilingual and heritage-language instruction can help close learning gaps for children in immigrant families and support their academic and social development.

FAMILY COHESION

Strong family bonds and sense of family obligation within immigrant communities can support children's ethnic identity, cultural values, and mental health, while buffering against stressors such as bullying, discrimination, and threat of family separation.

CONNECTION TO HERITAGE AND CULTURE

For families navigating life across multiple cultures, shared heritage and values can strengthen family cohesion and support children's mental health and identity development.

SCHOOL SUCCESS & SAFETY

- ▶ Over half a million foreign-born adults with children (15%) have been asked to provide a Social Security number or proof of citizenship when enrolling themselves or a child in school, a practice that is illegal in California.
- ▶ **59% of young children ages 0–5—over 1.5 million—are dual language learners,** meaning by the time they enter English-speaking programs they are developing and using multiple language systems.
- ▶ An estimated 112,000 undocumented children ages 5–18 and 67,000 undocumented young adults ages 19–24 are enrolled in school.
- ▶ **Over a million (17%) of the state's 5.8 million public school students are English learners, representing hundreds of diverse languages and language groups.** Over 80% of English learners speak Spanish as their primary language, over 2% speak Mandarin, and over 1% each speak Vietnamese, Russian, Farsi, or Arabic.
- ▶ An estimated 11,000 undocumented immigrants graduate high school annually in California. These students represent 15% of all graduating unauthorized immigrants nationally, with only Texas graduating more (16%).