

## STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD

Presented at

“The Impact of Illegal Immigration on Social Services”

Submitted to

**U.S. House Committee on the Judiciary Subcommittee on  
Immigration Integrity, Security, and Enforcement**

Submitted by

Cris Ramón  
Senior Policy Advisor, Immigration Policy Project

Laura Vazquez  
Director, Immigrant Integration

**UnidosUS**  
Raul Yzaguirre Building  
1126 16<sup>th</sup> Street, NW, Suite 600  
Washington, DC 20036-4845

January 11, 2024

## Introduction

UnidosUS, formerly the National Council of La Raza, is the largest national Latino civil rights and advocacy organization in the United States. For more than 50 years, we have worked to advance opportunities for Latino families to enhance their significant contributions to the social, economic, and political tapestry of our great nation. In this capacity, UnidosUS and its Affiliate Network of nearly 300 community-based organizations in 37 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico work to provide education, health care, immigration, housing, workforce development, free tax preparation, and other services to millions of Latinos in the United States each year.

Throughout our history as an organization, UnidosUS has united communities and diverse groups seeking common ground through collaboration and a shared desire to make our country stronger and to achieve an immigration system that is fair, just, and accountable to the rule of law—an immigration system of which we can all be proud.

## The Realities of the Economic and Fiscal Impacts of Immigrants

The premise of this hearing revolves around the notion that immigrants, including recent arrivals to the U.S.-Mexico border, are a drain on federal, state, and local revenues and government services. While real challenges arise in the reception of recent arrivals, a body of work shows that in the near-to-long term these individuals make vital economic and fiscal contributions to the country.

Regarding recent arrivals, we need to look beyond polarizing headlines and rhetoric about these individuals to see the facts on the ground. First, these individuals are not “illegal” immigrants: They enter the country through the asylum system<sup>1</sup> or parole programs and processes based on existing authorities in the Immigration and Nationality Act.<sup>2</sup> Second, it is important to note that most non-citizens—including undocumented immigrants—do not qualify for most federal public benefits.<sup>3</sup> Finally, certain Governors’ decisions to bus these individuals to other cities based on political motivations and without coordination with receiving communities have exacerbated the problem.<sup>4</sup> While border communities have shouldered the task of receiving arrivals—one that we understand through the work of our Affiliates—sending migrants without a plan to other cities has turned a regional challenge into a national one without a workable solution for new arrivals.

A deeper look at these individuals' contributions to their communities belies the idea that new arrivals are drains on their cities. A January 2024 study from FWD.us found that 1.1 million individuals arriving through parole channels between 2021 and 2023 helped fill labor shortages in industries such as construction, transportation and warehousing, and accommodation and

---

<sup>1</sup> American Immigration Council. “Asylum in the United States.” *American Immigration Council*, August 16, 2022. <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/asylum-united-states>.

<sup>2</sup> American Immigration Council. “The Use of Parole Under Immigration Law.” *American Immigration Council*, January 10, 2023. <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/use-parole-under-immigration-law>.

<sup>3</sup> National Immigration Forum. “Fact Sheet: Immigrants and Public Benefits.” National Immigration Forum, August 24, 2018.

<sup>4</sup> Korecki, Natasha. “How Texas Gov. Greg Abbott divided Democrats on immigration with migrant busing.” *NBC News*, December 17, 2023. <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/politics-news/texas-gov-greg-abbott-divided-democrats-immigration-migrant-busing-rcna128815>

food services. The study found paroled immigrants reduced the job openings in industries with acute labor needs by a third since their peak in early 2022.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, reports also show that mid-sized cities are clamoring for new arrivals—especially ones with work permits—to come to their cities to fill labor shortages,<sup>6</sup> showing that city leaders see these arrivals as a wellspring of untapped economic potential for their city’s economies, not as drains on their wallets.

Over the long run, in-depth studies show that immigrants strengthen the country’s economy and contribute to the U.S. government’s fiscal health. In September 2016, the National Academy of Sciences released a comprehensive report that has served as the definitive study on these issues.<sup>7</sup> In terms of the economic impact of migrants, the report found that immigrant workers expand the size of the U.S. economy by an estimated 11 percent annually, which translates to \$2 trillion in 2016. Dr. Francine D. Blau, the study’s chair, noted the study “revealed many important benefits of immigration—including on economic growth, innovation, and entrepreneurship—with little to no negative effects on the overall wages or employment of native-born workers in the long term.”

Most importantly, the study shows that when we invest in immigrants, our nation reaps enormous dividends from the contributions of their families. The study found **the children of immigrants were found to be the largest net fiscal contributors among any group, native or foreign-born, creating significant economic benefits for every American.** The investments we make in immigrant parents or immigrants who may become parents are a worthy investment in our nation’s future workers and contributors. Furthermore, the study found that an immigrant and a native-born person with similar characteristics will likely have about the same fiscal impact, showing that an individual’s circumstances play an equal or greater role than their immigration status.

Recent studies reinforce these findings. A March 2023 Cato Institute study that updated NAS analysis of the fiscal impacts of immigrants on government revenue also found that immigrants have an overall positive impact on federal government finances.<sup>8</sup> It also found that immigrants have a lower fiscal impact on state and local revenue regardless of their education level and age group due to the different tax and spending structures on that level of government. The study also presented its own model for assessing these fiscal impacts that found immigrants consistently have more positive impacts than native-born Americans, producing a near doubling of the taxes they pay based on their education level.

These findings show that when we live up to our values as a country by welcoming immigrants and treating them with dignity, our nation is socially and economically stronger.

---

<sup>5</sup> FWD.us. “Industries with critical labor shortages added 1.1 million workers through immigration parole.” *FWD.us*, January 3, 2024. <https://www.fwd.us/news/immigration-labor-shortages/>.

<sup>6</sup> De Peña, Kristie. “Mid-sized cities are clamoring for migrants.” *Niskanen Center*, December 5, 2023. <https://www.niskanencenter.org/mid-sized-cities-are-clamoring-for-migrants/>.

<sup>7</sup> National Academies of Science. “New Report Assesses the Economic and Fiscal Consequences of Immigration,” September 21, 2016. <https://www.nationalacademies.org/news/2016/09/new-report-assesses-the-economic-and-fiscal-consequences-of-immigration>.

<sup>8</sup> Nowrasteh, Alex, Sarah Eckhardt, and Michael Howard. “The Fiscal Impact of Immigration in the United States.” *The Cato Institute*, March 21, 2023. <https://www.cato.org/white-paper/fiscal-impact-immigration-united-states>.

## **The Experience of UnidosUS Affiliate Network with Immigrants**

These benefits can be seen daily throughout the UnidosUS Affiliate Network, where recently arrived immigrants, as well as immigrants who have been in the U.S. for decades, and the children of immigrants participate in numerous programs.

UnidosUS Affiliates are the descendants—and, in a couple of cases, original members—of the Settlement House Movement. Beginning in the mid-1800s, coinciding with major immigration to the U.S., social reformers began building and operating settlement houses. Their programs and operations were extremely diverse, but most offered room and board, English classes, childcare, kindergarten for the kids too young to go to school, and community meeting spaces.

Although supported by local charities and civic groups, the heart of the movement was its volunteers. By 1920, there were some 500 settlement houses in the U.S. The integration of these immigrants, typically over one or at most two generations, is one of our country's greatest success stories. It is celebrated by historians, elected officials, and commentators across the political spectrum as a major “proof point” of American exceptionalism. One of our country's greatest success stories—the successful incorporation of millions of immigrants over six decades a century ago—was heavily driven and supported by government, private philanthropy, and the nonprofit sector.

Today, when immigrants arrive in our communities, much of the support they receive is through local community-based organizations, like UnidosUS Affiliates, that provide critical services such as food, clothing, shelter, and immigration legal services. Our community-based immigration legal service providers are leading an unprecedented effort to coordinate federal and local government agencies, organize the legal services community, and recruit volunteers to assist thousands of recently arrived immigrants in applying for work permits. This assistance is critical to ensuring that immigrants who are eligible for work permits can get them in a timely fashion so they can fill vacant jobs and provide for themselves and their families.

Although organizations offer services to arriving migrants, due to a lack of capacity—and, at times, inadequate funding by assisting government agencies—many immigrants are still left without proper resources. Immigrants need qualified legal assistance, but the demand for these services is far greater than the supply. Funding for more legal assistance would not only expand access to justice but also make the adjudication of applications more efficient. We believe that the U.S. government must coordinate the reception of these individuals with state and local governments and relevant non-governmental organizations, including increased funding for local organizations.

## **Real Solutions for Moving Beyond Polarizing Rhetoric About New Arrivals**

We believe that Congress and the White House should adopt three sets of policies to address the challenges related to receiving newcomers and maximizing the potential that they offer.

First, the U.S. government needs to have a coherent set of protocols and procedures for coordinating the arrivals between a range of relevant stakeholders. Specifically, the federal government should work with state, local, and non-governmental leaders to assess the needs of communities and their newcomers, develop a plan for deploying resources to support their

reception, and implement these measures and assess their success. This process can take multiple forms, ranging from extending existing FEMA authorities to address migration events<sup>9</sup> to using DHS' Southwest Border Coordination Center (SBCC) and Migrant Information Center for these purposes.<sup>10</sup> Regardless, Congress needs to pass legislation that establishes these processes to ensure that all levels of government can support the work of our local communities in helping new arrivals successfully integrate into their communities.

Second, Congress should ensure timely access to work permits and fund legal services to assist with this process and help individuals navigate the asylum system. While we applauded the Biden administration's decision to redesignate TPS for Venezuela,<sup>11</sup> our Affiliates saw the need for more coordination and funding to help process the increase in demand for work permits. Robust legal services funding also allows our Affiliates to help asylum seekers improve the speed of their adjudications, showing that this funding is essential for improving the asylum system's efficiency. This step should begin with Congress passing legislation that fully funds the Shelter and Services Program as soon as possible so our Affiliates and local communities can continue to help new arrivals.

We agree that managing migration to the border is an essential component of tackling these challenges. But doubling down on restrictions on asylum access, parole authority, and expulsions will fail to stop migration to the border in the long run.<sup>12</sup> Instead, the U.S. government should continue establishing legal pathways to the United States that create viable alternatives to traveling to the border while improving the processing of asylum seekers arriving at ports of entry. The U.S. government should incorporate the aforementioned policies into these measures to ensure communities can successfully receive individuals and help them get on their feet. Coordination and funding—not deterrence—is the path forward for successfully managing these arrivals.

We recognize that these recommendations will take time to adopt and implement, especially when the politics around migration to the border make it harder to agree on a common approach to the reception of new arrivals. But policy solutions to more effectively manage the arrival of immigrants, regardless of how they come to the country, should be driven by the facts and not narrow political agendas or distortions about the existing realities and opportunities. We can and should rise to the challenge and adopt measures that can help U.S. communities and migrants alike seeking safety and new opportunities in the United States.

---

<sup>9</sup> Cardinal Brown, Theresa and Cristobal Ramón. "Solving the Crisis at the Border: Immigration FEMA." *Bipartisan Policy Center*, July 2, 2019. <https://bipartisanpolicy.org/blog/solving-the-crisis-at-the-border-immigration-fema/>.

<sup>10</sup> FWD.us. "Responding to the Increase of Asylum Seekers and Vulnerable Migrants in New York City & U.S. Cities." *FWD.us*, September 8, 2023. <https://www.fwd.us/news/responding-to-the-increase-of-asylum-seekers-and-vulnerable-migrants-in-new-york-city-u-s-cities/>.

<sup>11</sup> UnidosUS. "UnidosUS welcomes extension of TPS for Venezuelans." *UnidosUS*, September 21, 2023. <https://unidosus.org/press-releases/unidosus-welcomes-extension-of-tps-for-venezuelans/>.

<sup>12</sup> Schulte, Todd. "Awful Policy and Terrible Politics: 6 Extreme Demands in the Senate Immigration Talks." *FWD.us*, December 7, 2023. <https://www.fwd.us/news/awful-policy-and-terrible-politics-6-extreme-demands-in-the-senate-immigration-talks/>.