

ISSUE BRIEF **08.30.21**

Pathways to Immigration: Prioritizing the Undocumented Population Residing in the United States

Tony Payan, Ph.D., Françoise and Edward Djerejian Fellow for Mexico Studies, and Director, Center for the United States and Mexico
Pamela Lizette Cruz, Research Analyst, Center for the United States and Mexico

INTRODUCTION

It has been decades since U.S. immigration laws were last changed. And it shows. The immigration system as it stands today has not kept pace with changing times, especially with America's dramatic demographic shifts and its medium- and long-term labor market needs. Despite this, and given the acrimonious nature of immigration policy debates, it will not be easy to determine where the system should begin to change first. This brief argues that the status of America's undocumented immigrants, many of whom have been in the country for decades and have integrated into society, should be prioritized. Doing so will ensure the progressive implementation of legal channels for immigration that ameliorates the country's changing demographics and meets the needs of the U.S. economy. To demonstrate this, we examine different immigration proposals laid out in the 117th Congress for all or certain undocumented immigrants residing in the United States, and the Biden administration's efforts to modernize the U.S. immigration system and allow millions of people the opportunity to gain or earn legal status. Our report looks at comprehensive immigration reform versus piecemeal

approaches, and emphasizes practical and politically feasible ways for this population to remain in the United States.

CONGRESSIONAL INACTION

Despite a long-running debate on immigration, Congress has been unable or unwilling to pass comprehensive immigration reforms (CIR) of any kind for at least a quarter of a century. Legislators have also failed to address the status of the approximately 10.5 million to 11 million undocumented immigrants residing in the United States.¹ But the clock is ticking on the need for reforms that resolve this issue and pave the way for broader reform. The very presence of this workforce highlights the fact that the current immigration system is antiquated and unsustainable. These millions of working individuals are contributing to the vitality of the American economy; raising families and changing in many ways the demographic character of the country; and struggling every day to live as an integral part of American society. As it stands today, undocumented immigrants are already strong economic contributors and work in key industries, including agriculture, construction, food service, manufacturing, and hospitality²—and yet they are stuck in a “permanent



The very presence of this workforce highlights the fact that the current immigration system is antiquated and unsustainable.

sub-citizen status.”³ Deporting them is nearly impossible, as it would require billions of dollars—not to mention rounding up, detaining, and processing for deportation millions of individuals; separating many from family members who are U.S. citizens; and leaving entire economic sectors without the workers on which they rely.⁴ Pretending that they do not exist is also untenable. After all, the undocumented immigrant population largely comprises long-term residents, having lived on average in the U.S. for nearly 20 years. What’s more, over 4.4 million U.S. citizen children under the age of 18 live with at least one parent who is not authorized to be here.⁵ It is time to develop ways to allow those who can meet certain conditions to stay in the U.S. legally. Any serious immigration plan must create pathways to their legal status.

WHAT COVID-19 HAS SHOWN US ABOUT THE UNDOCUMENTED POPULATION

An estimated 5.2 million undocumented immigrants are working in jobs designated as essential during the COVID-19 pandemic.⁶ According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, for example, nearly half of hired crop farmworkers are undocumented, and are on the frontlines of the pandemic response to keep the nation’s food system and supplies moving.⁷ Even so, it is important to note that these jobs have always been essential. Granting legal status and/or work authorization could help America achieve a more stable and larger legal agricultural workforce. The construction industry also relies on undocumented workers, who comprise 13% of its labor force. However, this is not enough to keep up: amid a shortage of building materials, the industry will nevertheless need another 430,000 construction workers to meet rising demand in 2021.⁸ In the service sector, a shortage of workers is jeopardizing the economic recovery of many businesses.⁹ What’s more, as America’s population grows older, there will be a projected

shortage of 355,000 direct-care workers by 2040;¹⁰ approximately one in five immigrant workers in the broader direct-care industry is undocumented. Finally, shifting demographic trends in the coming decades will have to be addressed: the U.S. will face the question of how to adapt to an aging population, declining fertility rates, and the ideal immigration levels needed to sustain the American labor force and economy.¹¹

Rarely does a single event show both the indispensability of a workforce or the importance of addressing a policy issue vital for the country’s future. COVID-19 did just that for immigration. Thus, it is time to find effective solutions to one of the key challenges facing the United States today. If the U.S. does not improve its immigration system, it will miss out on opportunities for future growth and revenue. The undocumented and their families should be a part of America’s economic and social recovery.

COMPREHENSIVE VS. PIECEMEAL APPROACHES

A crucial question is whether to address the immigration system as a whole or break it into its component parts and address each piece by piece. The undocumented population residing in the United States is a major link in the greater immigration reform chain. Both Democrats and Republicans agree the current immigration system is broken but have reached no consensus on how to fix it legislatively.¹² A comprehensive approach aims to reform the entire system, adequately regulate immigration, and adjust the legal status of the undocumented population (if certain requirements are met).¹³ But since 1986, various attempts to pass major reforms have stalled due to the increasing polarization on the issue.¹⁴ The most recent attempt—President Biden’s comprehensive immigration reform proposal, the United States Citizenship Act of 2021—was introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives on January 18, 2021. The proposed legislation includes provisions

such as establishing an eight-year earned path to citizenship for nearly all of the 11 million undocumented individuals residing in the U.S., increases the number of avenues for legal immigration, reduces visa application backlogs, and improves the functioning of immigration courts.

Many Republican lawmakers and opponents of the bill argue that it lacks sufficient border security funding, and that granting blanket “amnesty” to individuals who broke the law by crossing the border without authorization or who overstayed their visa in the United States will only encourage more people to cross unlawfully. Others argue that the proposed bill fails to include temporary guest worker visas and programs, which means future job seekers will continue to illegally cross into the U.S.

While it is not surprising that a bill like this would be met with opposition, it is worth noting that regularizing the current undocumented population would produce significant economic gains.¹⁵ For example, according to Center for American Progress, providing a pathway to citizenship for the millions of undocumented immigrants currently residing in the U.S. would increase gross domestic product (GDP) by \$1.7 trillion over 10 years and create 438,800 new jobs; in addition, 10 years after implementation, all American workers throughout the economy would see their annual wages increase by \$700.¹⁶ A Baker Institute study using 2019 data found that if undocumented individuals had simultaneous access to the banking, health insurance, and housing markets, the gains in output would be around \$246 billion (representing 1.15% of U.S. GDP), and the tax revenue collected would total \$26 billion.¹⁷ The millions of undocumented workers could bolster the nation’s Social Security and Medicare Trust Fund, and the United States would achieve a stronger and stable legal workforce. However, the path for such a bill is narrow in an increasingly divided Congress, particularly in the Senate, where the proposed legislation would require at least 10 Republican votes to overcome a filibuster.¹⁸

The \$1 trillion infrastructure bill presently moving through Congress assumes a robust post-pandemic economic recovery, of which undocumented workers could clearly be contributors.¹⁹ And amid growing pressure to deliver legislation on immigration, Democrats are considering a path to legal status for some undocumented immigrants through a measure in their \$3.5 trillion budget reconciliation bill that would only require a simple majority (51 votes) in the Senate. A budget bill provision could 1) assert that this workforce would be an important source of funding for the infrastructure bill and 2) seek their full and thorough integration as a legal workforce. It remains to be seen if the Senate parliamentarian can be persuaded that such a provision is permissible under the budget rules.²⁰

The end-run to legal status through the budget bill creates a narrow but feasible pathway that enables the Biden administration to get around a major reform bill that is unlikely to draw support from all Democrats and Republicans. Of course, other smaller bills have also been introduced that could garner more bipartisan support and reduce the number of individuals without legal status residing in the United States.²¹ Among them are the Dream Act of 2021, the Citizenship for Essential Workers Act of 2021, and the Farm Workers Modernization Act of 2021.²² While these bills do not take care of the entire undocumented population, together they go a long way—and proponents of immigration reform argue that some progress is better than no progress.

THE BIDEN STRATEGY: A PIECEMEAL APPROACH

To avoid further gridlock, reform advocates—legislators and immigration experts alike—have also proposed smaller bills, targeting key subgroups with irregular legal status: those in the U.S. under the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program and “DREAMer” immigrants; Temporary Protected Status (TPS) recipients; and farm workers and

We should start to prepare now by putting policies in place that aid future growth and strengthen our workforce—and immigration policy is a key component of that effort.

Segments of the undocumented population are in much need of a permanent solution, one that only Congress can provide, and working across the aisle for viable compromises is essential.

other essential workers. The down side of a piecemeal approach is that myriad issues go unresolved. But it is a viable alternative to ongoing disagreements on the shape and implementation of a 21st century U.S. immigration system.

The next two sections consider these bills and how they could help resolve the issue at hand.

Protections for Dreamers

Congress is currently considering two bills that would create a path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants brought to the United States as children: the Dream Act of 2021 (S. 264), introduced by Sens. Dick Durbin (D-IL) and Lindsey Graham (R-SC); and the American Dream and Promise Act of 2021 (H.R. 6), introduced by Rep. Lucille Roybal-Allard (D-California).²³ The Dream Act was first introduced back in 2001 and has seen at least 11 versions introduced over the years; each failed to pass despite strong bipartisan support. It is estimated that S. 264 would provide relief to upwards of 2 million DREAMers.²⁴ Segments of the undocumented population are in much need of a permanent solution, one that only Congress can provide, and working across the aisle for viable compromises is essential.

In another possible path to citizenship, the American Dream and Promise Act—which passed in the U.S. House of Representatives on March 18, 2021—could make up to 4.4 million people eligible for conditional permanent residence.²⁵ This group includes DREAMers, Temporary Protected Status (TPS) holders, and individuals granted a temporary stay of removal under Deferred Enforced Departure (DED) protections. Studies show that, if signed into law, the American Dream and Promise Act would lead to solid economic and social gains over a 10-year period: the United States would see its GDP increase by \$799 billion, the creation of over 285,000 new jobs, and a \$400 a year hike in American workers' wages.²⁶

Most of the American public supports a path to legal status for undocumented immigrants already in the U.S if they meet certain requirements.²⁷ The DACA program has given a glimpse of the benefits of providing work authorization: DACA recipients and their households pay \$8.7 billion per year in federal, state and local taxes annually, and have a combined \$24 billion in spending power to put back into the economy.²⁸ And as part of the U.S. workforce, they have been on the frontlines of the COVID-19 pandemic: over half a million essential workers in the U.S. are DACA-eligible immigrants and TPS holders.²⁹ There are opportunities for bipartisan compromise and meaningful achievable action for this population; reform advocates and other experts remain hopeful.³⁰

Essential Workers

There is no doubt that the pandemic highlighted the critical contributions of immigrants, particularly in essential sectors such as health care, food, agriculture, and construction. The Citizenship for Essential Workers Act—introduced by Sen. Alex Padilla (D-CA) in the Senate (S.747) and Rep. Joaquin Castro (D-TX) in the House (H.R.1909)—recognizes their continuing service and sacrifice to the United States. This proposed legislation provides a path to permanent resident status for undocumented workers deemed essential by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) or a state or local government.³¹ Over 5 million undocumented individuals are frontline workers who provide invaluable assistance during an unprecedented global crisis. The road to economic recovery must include them.

Another bill focusing on essential workers is the bipartisan Farm Workforce Modernization Act of 2021 (H.R.1603), reintroduced by U.S. Reps. Zoe Lofgren (D-CA) and Dan Newhouse (R-WA) and passed on March 18, 2021. It is the first agricultural reform bill to pass in the House since 1986; it would make needed reforms to the H-2A agricultural guest worker program and allow qualified undocumented

farmworkers to earn a path to legal status via a newly created Certified Agricultural Worker (CAW) visa. The visa is conditioned on continued agricultural work, strict background checks and other admissibility requirements, and includes the possibility of becoming a lawful permanent resident (LPR). It makes mandatory employment verification (through E-Verify) for all agricultural employment.³² If enacted, the bill would provide a lengthy, earned path for the estimated 1.2 million essential undocumented farmworkers and their dependents.³³ The bipartisan bill was negotiated with input from agricultural employers and stakeholders who understand the labor needs and immigration challenges that prevent them from securing a reliable workforce. In lieu of comprehensive reforms, the best approach to solving issues in our immigration system is through piecemeal legislation. However, the current polarization in the U.S. political landscape may derail even the best negotiations at the table.

CONCLUSION

Addressing immigration reform is not easy, but common ground is possible. As the U.S. navigates the pandemic, economic recovery, and—more gradually—changing demographics, immigration reform becomes crucial as part of an overall strategy. The 2020 Census shows that the U.S. grew at its slowest rate since the 1940s.³⁴ In the coming decades, the U.S. will also be affected by a population that is aging to an unprecedented degree: by 2034, Americans aged 65 and over are projected to outnumber those under the age of 18 for the first time in U.S. history.³⁵ We should start to prepare now by putting policies in place that aid future growth and strengthen our workforce—and immigration policy is a key component of that effort.³⁶ The U.S. needs immigrants. Congress must provide more legal immigration avenues and develop an effective work authorization process in order to expand the tax base and allow more immigrants to contribute to the American economy.

Those opposed to immigration reform commonly argue that such actions will lead to a rise of immigrants at the southern border. And indeed, there is a border crisis³⁷—but the inflexibility of the current immigration system has contributed to it. There are few paths for would-be workers from Mexico and points south to enter the U.S. legally. Conflating the issue of the undocumented population already living in the U.S. with newcomers at the border is unhelpful. There is a need to delink the two, prioritizing solutions for the long-term undocumented workers in the United States; paths for new immigrants can come later. The steps outlined here are modest but could begin solving long-standing challenges to achieve a fair and modern immigration system. To be sure, the border merits separate attention. The authors of this report support better border governance and management and believe that broadening legal immigration avenues would reduce pressure at the border.³⁸ Allowing people to apply for immigration in their home country could help deter individuals, families, and unaccompanied children from making the long and hazardous journey to the U.S. border.

Immigration will again be a top policy issue in the 2022 midterm elections. It has been so for several election cycles already. Democrats are likely to argue for broad immigration reform, including the legalization of the undocumented population. Republicans are likely to take on securing the border as a prerequisite for any future immigration reform. In fact, in their bid to regain the majority in Congress, many Republicans have begun to craft a border-control agenda that is critical of Biden's policies, which include the kind of immigration reforms that most Democrats prefer. We conclude by saying that a focus on the border creates a false debate. It is impossible to secure the border without addressing the broader problems afflicting the U.S. immigration system. Both must be done simultaneously. And Congress must act now.

ENDNOTES

1. Julia Heinzl, Rebecca Heller, and Natalie Tawil, "Estimating the Legal Status of Foreign-Born People," Working Paper Series, Congressional Budget Office, March 2021, <https://www.cbo.gov/system/files/2021-03/57022-Legal-Status.pdf>; Migration Policy Institute, "Profile of the Unauthorized Population: United States," 2018, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/data/unauthorized-immigrant-population/state/US>.
2. New American Economy, "Undocumented Immigrants," <https://www.newamericaneconomy.org/issues/undocumented-immigrants/>.
3. Robert Lynch and Patrick Oakford, "The Economic Effects of Granting Legal Status and Citizenship to Undocumented Immigrants," Center for American Progress, March 20, 2013, <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/immigration/reports/2013/03/20/57351/the-economic-effects-of-granting-legal-status-and-citizenship-to-undocumented-immigrants/>.
4. James Feigenbaum, Jesse Baker, and Austin Brooksby, "A Macroeconomic Analysis of Deportation or Legalization of Illegal Immigrants," Utah State University's Center for Growth and Opportunity, August 2020, <https://www.thecgo.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/A-Macroeconomic-Analysis-of-Illegal-Immigrants.pdf>; Robert Warren and Donald Kerwin, "Mass Deportations Would Impoverish US Families and Create Immense Social Costs," *Journal on Migration and Human Security* 5, no. 1 (2017): 1-8, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/233150241700500101>.
5. American Immigration Council, "Factsheet: U.S. Citizen Children Impacted by Immigration Enforcement," June 24, 2021, <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/us-citizen-children-impacted-immigration-enforcement>; Jeffrey S. Passel and D'Vera Cohn, "Mexicans decline to less than half the U.S. unauthorized immigrant population for the first time," Pew Research Center, June 12, 2019, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/06/12/us-unauthorized-immigrant-population-2017/>.
6. FWD.us, "Estimates Show Immigrant Essential Workers are Crucial to America's COVID-19 Recovery," December 16, 2020, <https://www.fwd.us/news/immigrant-essential-workers/>; U.S. Congress Joint Economic Committee (JEC), "Immigrants, the Economy and the COVID-19 Outbreak," June 30, 2020, https://www.jec.senate.gov/public/_cache/files/9e9c9042-6ff9-4f6c-8d65-fbe2625d2143/immigrants-the-economy-and-the-covid19-outbreak-final1.pdf.
7. Economic Research Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, "Farm Labor," last updated April 22, 2020, <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/farm-economy/farm-labor/>.
8. Associated Builders and Contractors, "ABC: The Construction Industry Needs to Hire an Additional 430,000 Craft Professionals in 2021," March 23, 2021, <https://www.abc.org/News-Media/News-Releases/entryid/18636/abc-the-construction-industry-needs-to-hire-an-additional-430-000-craft-professionals-in-2021>.
9. The Daily, "Stories from the Great American Labor Shortage," *New York Times*, August 3, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/08/03/podcasts/the-daily/coronavirus-hiring-job-vacancies-hospitality-industry.html>; Mitchell Schnurman, "As labor shortage gets worse, why not tap more immigrants?," *Dallas Morning News*, July 18, 2021, <https://www.dallasnews.com/business/jobs/2021/07/18/as-labor-shortage-gets-worse-why-not-tap-more-immigrants/>.
10. Global Coalition on Aging (GCOA) and Home Instead Senior Care, "Building The Caregiving Workforce Our Aging World Needs," July 2021, https://globalcoalitiononaging.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/GCOA_HI_Building-the-Caregiving-Workforce-Our-Aging-World-Needs_REPORT-FINAL_July-2021.pdf; Leah Zallman et al., "Care for America's Elderly and Disabled People Relies on Immigrant Labor," *Health Affairs* 38, no. 6 (June 2019), <https://doi.org/10.1377/hlthaff.2018.05514>; New American Economy, "A Helping Hand: How Immigrants Can Fill Home Health Aide Shortages in America's Rural

Communities,” October 2015, <http://www.newamericaneconomy.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Home-Health-Aides.pdf>.

11. See Kenneth Megan and Theresa Cardinal Brown, “America’s Demographic Challenge: Understanding the Role of Immigration,” Bipartisan Policy Center, August 2017, <https://bipartisanpolicy.org/report/americas-demographic-challenge-understanding-the-role-of-immigration/>.

12. Daniel Tichenor, “The Quest for Elusive Reform: Undocumented Immigrants in a Polarized Nation,” Rice University’s Baker Institute for Public Policy, March 2021, <https://doi.org/10.25613/JDN8-TN64>; Tony Payan, “Immigration Reform: A Comprehensive vs. Piecemeal Approach,” Rice University’s Baker Institute for Public Policy, March 8, 2013, <https://www.bakerinstitute.org/research/immigration-reform-a-comprehensive-vs-piecemeal-approach/>.

13. American Immigration Council, “Comprehensive Immigration Reform: A Primer,” July 24, 2009, <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/comprehensive-immigration-reform-primer>.

14. Tichenor, “The Quest.”

15. Eileen Appelbaum et al., “Economists’ Letter on Legalization and Recovery,” FWD.us, February 11, 2021, www.fwd.us/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Economists-Letter-on-Legalization-and-Recovery.pdf.

16. Giovanni Peri and Reem Zaiour, “Citizenship for Undocumented Immigrants Would Boost U.S. Economic Growth,” Center for American Progress, June 14, 2021, <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/immigration/reports/2021/06/14/500433/citizenship-undocumented-immigrants-boost-u-s-economic-growth/>.

17. José Iván Rodríguez Sánchez, “Left on the Table: The Unrealized Economic Potential of the Undocumented Population,” Rice University’s Baker Institute for Public Policy, July 2021, <https://doi.org/10.25613/R9EA-ZS45>.

18. Bryan Mena, “Lawmakers are seeking common ground on DACA, but comprehensive immigration reform will be a challenge for Democrats,” *Texas Tribune*, March 15, 2021, <https://www.texastribune.org/2021/03/15/daca-texas-immigration-reform/>.

19. Richard Cowan and David Morgan, “U.S. Senate to vote on passage of \$1 trillion infrastructure bill,” *Reuters*, August 9, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/us-senate-attempts-complete-1-trillion-infrastructure-bill-2021-08-09/>.

20. Jonathan Weisman, Emily Cochrane, and Jim Tankersley, “Democrats Roll Out \$3.5 Trillion Budget to Fulfill Biden’s Broad Agenda,” *New York Times*, July 14, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/07/14/us/politics/biden-social-spending-deal.html>.

21. Hannah Miao, “House won’t vote on Biden’s comprehensive immigration plan this month, will focus on smaller bills,” *CNBC*, March 4, 2021, <https://www.cnn.com/2021/03/04/house-wont-vote-on-bidens-comprehensive-immigration-plan-this-month.html>; Michael D. Shear, “Biden Signals He’s Flexible on Immigration Overhaul,” *New York Times*, February 17, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/17/us/politics/biden-immigration.html>.

22. See H.R. 1603 – Farm Workforce Modernization Act of 2021, 117th Congress (2021–2022), <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/1603>; S. 264 – Dream Act of 2021, 117th Congress (2021–2022), <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/senate-bill/264/committees>; H.R. 6 – American Dream and Promise Act of 2021, 117th Congress (2021–2022), <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/6/text>; S. 747 – Citizenship for Essential Workers Act, 117th Congress (2021–2022), <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/senate-bill/747/text>; H.R. 1909 – Citizenship for Essential Workers Act, 117th Congress (2021–2022), <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117thcongress/house-bill/1909?s=1&r=7>; Raul Hinojosa Ojeda, Marcelo Pleitez, and Rodrigo Dominguez-Villegas, “A Path to Prosperity: The Macroeconomic Benefits of Four Immigrant Regularization Scenarios,” *UCLA Latino*

Policy and Politics Initiative, March 23, 2021, https://latino.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/LPPI_Economic-Benefits-of-Legalization_03.23.21.pdf.

23. S. 264; H.R. 6; Migration Policy Institute, "American Dream and Promise Act of 2021: Who Is Potentially Eligible?" March 2021, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/content/american-dream-and-promise-act-2021-eligibility>.

24. American Immigration Council, "The Dream Act: An Overview," March 16, 2021, <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/dream-act-overview>; Jeanne Batalova and Michael Fix, "A Deeper Look at the DREAMers Who Could Feature in the Legalization Debate in Congress," Migration Policy Institute, February 2021, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/news/dreamers-who-could-feature-legalization-debate>.

25. American Immigration Council, "The Dream Act"; Migration Policy Institute, "American Dream."

26. Peri and Zaiour, "Citizenship."

27. National Immigration Forum, "Polling Update: Americans Continue to Resist Negative Messages about Immigrants, but Partisan Differences Continue to Grow," September 18, 2020, <https://immigrationforum.org/article/polling-update-americans-continue-to-resist-negative-messages-about-immigrants-but-partisan-differences-continue-to-grow/>.

28. Nicole Prchal Svajlenka and Tom Jawetz, "A Demographic Profile of TPS Holders Providing Essential Services During the Coronavirus Crisis," April 14, 2020, Center for American Progress, <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/immigration/news/2020/04/14/483167/demographic-profile-tps-holders-providing-essential-services-coronavirus-crisis/>.

29. New American Economy, "Spotlight on the DACA-Eligible Population," May 14, 2020, <https://research.newamericaneconomy.org/report/spotlight-on-the-daca-eligible-population/>

30. Rice University's Baker Institute for Public Policy, "Immigration Policy Workshop Report," July 2021, <https://www.bakerinstitute.org/media/files/files/409c968e/usmx-pub-immigration-workshop-070721.pdf>.

31. H.R. 1909 – Citizenship for Essential Workers Act, 117th Congress (2021–2022), <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/1909>; S. 747 – Citizenship for Essential Workers Act, 117th Congress (2021–2022), <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/senate-bill/747/related-bills>.

32. Office of Congresswoman Zoe Lofgren, "Lofgren, Newhouse Introduce the Farm Workforce Modernization Act of 2021," March 3, 2021, <https://lofgren.house.gov/media/press-releases/lofgren-newhouse-introduce-farm-workforce-modernization-act-2021>.

33. Jessica Bolter, Muzaffar Chishti, and Doris Meissner, "Back on the Table: U.S. Legalization and the Unauthorized Immigrant Groups that Could Factor in the Debate," Migration Policy Institute, February 2021, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/us-legalization-unauthorized-immigrant-groups>.

34. U.S. Census Bureau, "Historical Population Change Data (1910–2020)," April 26, 2021, <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/dec/popchange-data-text.html>.

35. U.S. Census Bureau, "Stats for Stories: National Senior Citizens Day," August 21, 2020, <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/stories/senior-citizens-day.html>.

36. Ali Noorani and Danilo Zak, "Room to Grow: Setting Immigration Levels in a Changing America," National Immigration Forum, February 3, 2021, <https://immigrationforum.org/article/room-to-grow-setting-immigration-levels-in-a-changing-america/>.

37. Adam Isacson et al., “Putting the U.S.–Mexico ‘Border Crisis’ Narrative into Context,” Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA), March 17, 2021, <https://www.wola.org/analysis/putting-border-crisis-narrative-into-context-2021/>; Nick Miroff, “At the border, a widely predicted crisis that caught Biden off guard,” *Washington Post*, April 26, 2021, https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/biden-border-timeline/2021/04/26/a5550aa4-a2a8-11eb-8a6d-f1b55f463112_story.html; WOLA, “Unless the United States Deploys These 5 Regional Migration Strategies, COVID–19 Could Portend Another Humanitarian Crisis On Our Border,” June 30, 2020, <https://www.wola.org/analysis/5-regional-migration-strategies-covid-19-united-states/>.

38. See Tony Payan and Pamela L. Cruz, eds., *Binational Commons: Institutional Development and Governance on the U.S.–Mexico Border* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2020).

AUTHORS

Tony Payan, Ph.D., is the Françoise and Edward Djerejian Fellow for Mexico Studies and director of the [Center for the United States and Mexico](#) at the Baker Institute. Payan’s research focuses primarily on border studies, particularly the U.S.–Mexico border. His work includes studies of border governance, border flows and immigration, as well as border security and organized crime.

Pamela Lizette Cruz is the research analyst for the Center for the United States and Mexico at the Baker Institute. She works with the director and affiliated scholars to carry out research on Mexico’s policy issues and U.S.–Mexico relations. Her current project focuses on practical solutions for the immigration challenge.

center for the
united states
and **Mexico**

Rice University’s Baker Institute for Public Policy

See more issue briefs at:

www.bakerinstitute.org/issue-briefs

This publication was written by a researcher (or researchers) who participated in a Baker Institute project. Wherever feasible, this research is reviewed by outside experts before it is released. However, the views expressed herein are those of the individual author(s), and do not necessarily represent the views of Rice University’s Baker Institute for Public Policy.

© 2021 Rice University’s Baker Institute for Public Policy

This material may be quoted or reproduced without prior permission, provided appropriate credit is given to the author and Rice University’s Baker Institute for Public Policy.

Cite as:

Tony and Pamela Lizette Cruz. 2021. *Pathways to Immigration: Prioritizing the Undocumented Population Residing in the United States*. Issue brief no. 08.30.21. Rice University’s Baker Institute for Public Policy, Houston, Texas.

<https://doi.org/10.25613/2SH8-FN10>