



THE IMPACT OF ANTI-IMMIGRANT POLICIES ON CHILDREN, FAMILIES & THE CHILD CARE AND EARLY EDUCATION WORKFORCE

RACHEL WILENSKY, KARLA COLEMAN-CASTILLO, AND WENDY CERVANTES | JUNE 2025

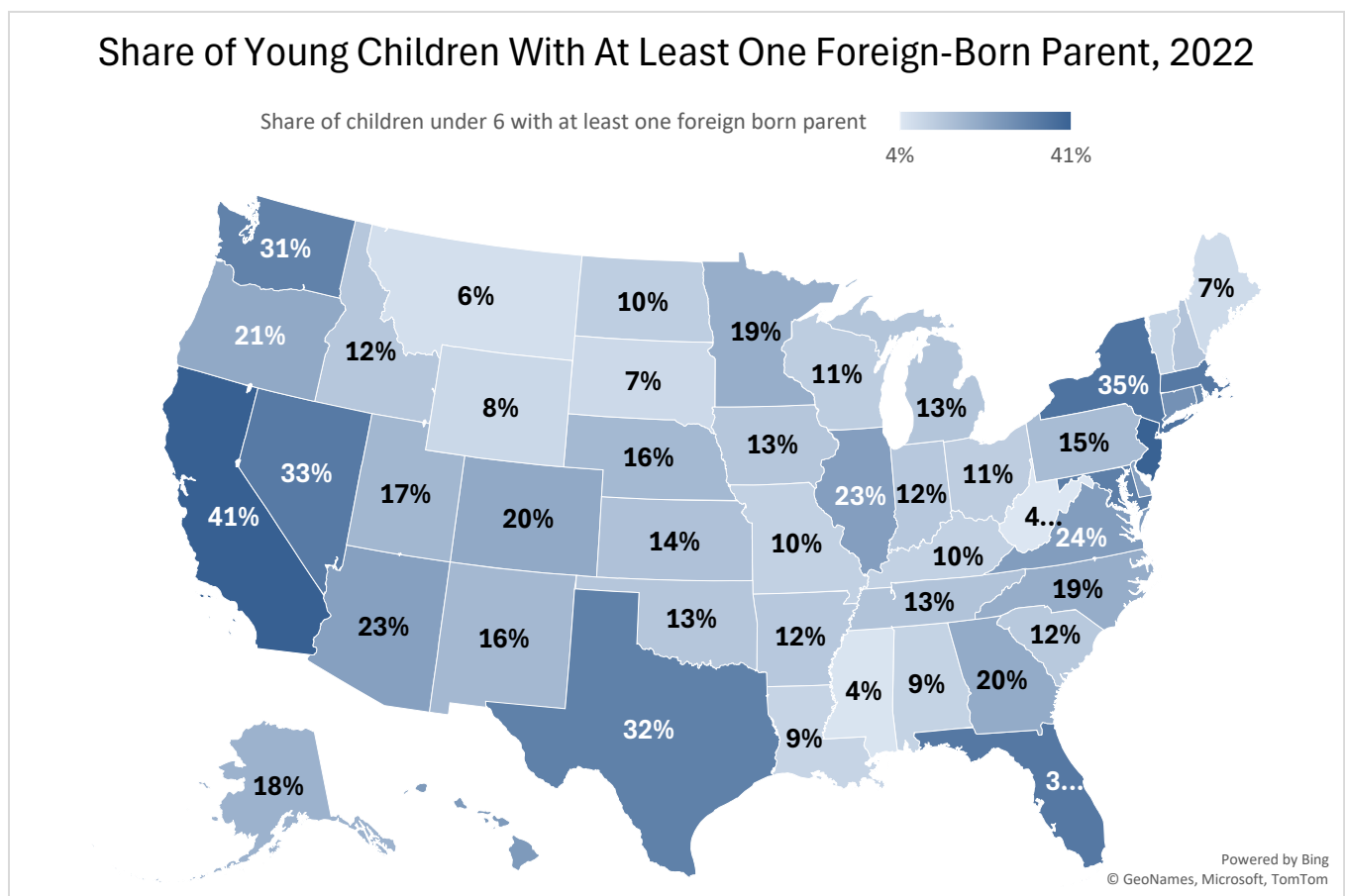
INTRODUCTION

In the months since inauguration, the Trump Administration has leveled a staggering number of threats on social programs—from executive orders to funding freezes and staff layoffs—that are already harming child care and early learning programs. These assaults on social infrastructure and aggressive moves to reshape the government are accompanied by increasing attacks on immigrants, many of whom rely on or provide child care and early education (CCEE). With a quarter of children under six coming from immigrant families and almost 20 percent of child care providers and early educators being immigrants, anti-immigrant policies directly affect families with young children and CCEE programs.¹ This resource will briefly summarize the available data on immigrant children, families, and child care providers and early educators and examine the impact of the Trump Administration's anti-immigrant policies on CCEE to date.

DATA OVERVIEW

IMMIGRANT CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

One-quarter of all young children in the United States under the age of 6 are children of immigrants, meaning they have at least one foreign-born parent.² They also represent the fastest growing population of young children in this country.³ The vast majority of these children are U.S.-born citizens, meaning they are entitled to all the rights and benefits of citizen children.⁴ This diverse population lives in communities across the country.



Source: Urban Institute, retrieved 2025.

The majority of immigrant families in the U.S. are mixed-status, meaning that people in the same family have different immigration statuses.⁵ As of 2018, approximately 5.2 million children in the country, 85 percent of whom are U.S. citizens, have at least one parent who is undocumented.⁶ More than half a million U.S. citizen children have at least one parent with Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) or Temporary Protected Status (TPS).^{7,8} While DACA and TPS differ in who they serve and for what length of time, both programs offer access to temporary work authorization and some form of protection from deportation.^{9,10} Additionally, as of 2022, 850,000 children under the age of 18 were undocumented (Dreamers).¹¹ There were also 99,381 unaccompanied children released to sponsors in the U.S. in fiscal year 2024.¹²

IMMIGRANT CHILD CARE PROVIDERS & EARLY EDUCATORS

Immigrant child care providers and early educators are a critical pillar of the child care workforce and meet the unique needs of rapidly diversifying younger generations and their families. Yet these providers and educators face additional barriers to entering and staying in CCEE for a variety of reasons, including the impacts of anti-immigrant policies and rhetoric. As of 2023, immigrants comprised nearly 20 percent of the child care workforce in the U.S., up from 5 percent in 1980.^{13,14} The largest share of the immigrant child care workforce are center-based child care providers and 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).¹⁵ Immigrant women are a significant percentage of the child care workforce across the country, making up nearly half of all female child care providers and early educators in areas like Los Angeles and New York City.¹⁶ Notably, immigrant child care providers and early educators are more likely to have professional credentials like the Child Development Associate (CDA) and invest in more professional development events every month.¹⁷ Despite this, immigrant early educators earn a median income of \$11.54 an hour, while the median hourly wage for all child care providers and early educators in child care is \$15.41.^{18,19}

Studies have found that increased immigration enforcement can reduce the supply of workers as well as drive down the wages of both immigrant and native workers and even reduce the number of center-based facilities overall.²⁰ Ultimately, increased immigration enforcement can further destabilize an already precarious industry, threatening child care supply for all families.

The fear incited by the previous Trump Administration and escalated by the current one has compounded challenges for both immigrant families and child care providers. Studies, including research conducted by CLASP, have found that during the first Trump Administration there were drops in early care and education program attendance, lower levels of parent engagement, and difficulty enrolling new families.²¹ In interviews with child care providers in 2017, CLASP found that many felt helpless trying to support families and navigating all the changing policies. Many respondents were also in mixed-status families or immigrants themselves, including DACA recipients, and worried about losing their own status and their employment.²²

FEDERAL POLICY THREATS TO IMMIGRANTS

Since the second Trump Administration began in January, it has issued several executive orders on immigration that speak to the administration's desire to increase fear and intimidate immigrants so they self-deport and leave the country. The administration is taking the three main approaches outlined below.

1. INCREASED ENFORCEMENT

The administration has increased immigration enforcement, both at the border and within the country to make it harder for asylum seekers to enter and to create fear in immigrant communities.²³ Efforts have included seeking to expand the number of collaborative agreements between Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and local police and to penalize sanctuary jurisdictions that have elected to not enter into such agreements.^{24, 25} The administration is also planning to expand its capacity to detain and deport as many immigrants as possible, including those that have resided in the U.S. for years and are parents of U.S. citizen children.

In March 2025, the administration also revived the harmful practice of jailing families in detention centers, including newly arrived migrants as well as long-residing immigrants and their children. The practice of family detention had ended under the Biden Administration following concerns from health experts over the unsuitable conditions and poor medical care in these facilities, as well as consistent documentation of the severe physical and mental health harms for children, particularly young children.^{26, 27} Detaining all members of the family can have dire if not fatal consequences for children like Mariee, an 18-month-old who died in detention due to lack of proper medical treatment for a respiratory infection.²⁸ The Department of Homeland Security (DHS)'s own advisory committee had concluded in 2016 "that detention or the separation of families for purposes of immigration enforcement or management, or detention is never in the best interest of children."²⁹

The administration has also rescinded the Protected Areas policy (also known as sensitive locations), that was previously in place at the DHS.³⁰ This policy has been in place in some form for more than 30 years to restrict immigration enforcement actions in places that provided vital services important to an individual's well-being. Without this policy, immigrants and their loved ones no longer feel safe accessing essential services like health care, child care, education, places of worship, or even their neighborhood playground.³¹ Without these protections in place families are already choosing not to send their children to child care or school, and child care providers are feeling the impact for themselves, their employees, and the families they serve.^{32, 33} When more people are afraid to access critical services, or more child care providers are afraid to go to work, families and communities suffer. There have been some legislative efforts in states to create local guidance around immigration enforcement of formerly sensitive locations, including in California, Maryland, and New York.^{34, 35, 36}

The administration has also put out a message asking all noncitizens to register with the government.³⁷ The rule, in effect as of April 2025, explicitly names the goals of tracking undocumented people and forcing them to self-deport. Immigration advocacy leaders emphasize that registering could lead to detention, deportation, or criminal prosecution; however, given that the rule is in effect and has not been stopped by litigation, undocumented immigrants should consult with an attorney.³⁸

2. REMOVING AND REDUCING LEGAL PROTECTIONS AND STATUSES

The administration has attempted to remove and reduce legal protections and status to increase the number of what it considers undocumented immigrants in the U.S. and thereby increase the number of people vulnerable to deportation. Under this Trump Administration, the refugee program has been eliminated and avenues to claim asylum at the border have been significantly narrowed.³⁹ Attempts by the Administration to cut funding for legal representation for unaccompanied children—which helps ensure their right to due process and increase their access to immigration relief—remain a threat.⁴⁰ An executive order was also issued that would restrict birthright citizenship; which if implemented, could lead to more than 250,000 stateless babies being born each year with limited access to health care and other benefits that are critical to child development, especially in the early years.⁴¹

The current Trump Administration has also terminated and amended TPS for several populations, including terminating TPS for more than 350,000 Venezuelans under a 2023 designation and shortening the duration of a TPS designation for 500,000 Haitians. More than 260,000 U.S. citizen children have at least one parent with TPS. Loss of TPS status would subject TPS holders to deportation to a country that may continue to have dangerous conditions and strip them of their work permits, with direct consequences to their family's economic security.⁴²

3. RESTRICTING OR ELIMINATING ACCESS TO CRITICAL PUBLIC BENEFITS

The administration has worked to reduce access to and use of critical public benefits and supports like health care for immigrants including U.S. citizen children with immigrant parents. For example, an executive order from the administration sought to cut funding to states and localities that provide undocumented immigrants access to federal programs.⁴³ However, undocumented immigrants are already ineligible for most federal public benefits.⁴⁴ Yet the order has created confusion among providers, raising questions about whether the executive order means that immigrant eligibility for various programs has changed even though it has not.

Despite all of the administration's new guidance and policies, everyone, regardless of immigration status, is still protected by the U.S. Constitution. The Fourth Amendment protects the right to be free from unreasonable searches and seizures of persons and objects, and the Fifth Amendment ensures the right to remain silent when confronted by law enforcement.

The Executive Order on “Ending Taxpayer Subsidization of Open Borders” is aimed at prohibiting undocumented people from accessing “federal public benefits.”⁴⁵ The order does acknowledge that most programs already prohibit this. The definitions and laws outlined in the order refer to the 1998 federal register notice that explains which Health and Human Services programs are “federal public benefits.” This includes post-secondary education as explicitly named in statute. However, Head Start and elementary and secondary education are not listed. Since this administration is operating lawlessly, however, it is hard to predict what it might try to include. The executive order calls for a 30-day survey on what programs undocumented immigrants benefit from so the administration can start “implementing status verification systems and blocking access.” While the 30-day period has passed, at the time of publication, the survey information was not yet publicly available.

SUPPORTING IMMIGRANT CHILDREN, FAMILIES, AND THE CHILD CARE AND EARLY EDUCATION WORKFORCE

While the Trump Administration attempts to marginalize certain populations, CCEE champions and advocates know that all children are worthy of high-quality early childhood education and that all communities benefit from the presence of immigrant children, families, and child care providers and early educators. As such, everyone must stay vigilant about the ways that anti-immigrant policy and rhetoric directly and indirectly affect CCEE and take action whenever possible. A few ways to support immigrant children, families, and child care providers and early educators are:

- Prepare to safeguard early childhood programs against immigration enforcement and protect families’ safety and privacy. Utilize **CLASP’s guide** to learn more about how to create a safe space. With or without a formal DHS policy in place, child care and early education providers can still create their own policy to ensure that the well-being of the children and families they serve, and their staff are thoroughly protected.
- Ensure that spaces such as child care centers, schools, and playgrounds are protected from immigration enforcement. Encourage your Congressional representative and senators to endorse the **Protecting Sensitive Locations Act of 2025** if they haven’t done so already. You can research these policies in your state and advocate for local policies.
- Document and elevate how the Trump Administration’s anti-immigrant agenda is already impacting CCEE. One of the most important actions advocates and policymakers can take is to document and amplify the direct connections between care and immigration. Whenever possible, elevate the importance and value of immigrant caregivers across communities, states, and the country. Ensuring that providers, advocates, and policymakers know the data and stories about the impact of immigration on care will show the real harm of anti-immigrant policies and rhetoric on our communities and the care economy.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

CLASP: A Guide to Creating “Safe Space” Policies for Early Childhood Programs

<https://www.clasp.org/publications/report/brief/guide-creating-safe-space-policies-early-childhood-programs/>

CLASP: Immigration Policy’s Harmful Impacts on Early Care and Education

<https://www.clasp.org/publications/report/brief/immigration-policy-s-harmful-impacts-early-care-and-education/>

CLASP: Immigrant Eligibility for Federal Child Care and Early Education Programs

<https://www.clasp.org/publications/fact-sheet/immigrant-eligibility-federal-child-care-and-early-education-programs/>

CTAN: Children in Immigrant Families & Threats to their Well-being

<https://childrethrivemotion.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Factsheet-on-Children-in-Mixed-Status-Families-and-Current-Policy-Threats.pdf>

CLINIC: Know Your Rights: A Guide to Your Rights When Interacting with Law Enforcement

<https://www.cliniclegal.org/resources/protecting-your-community/know-your-rights/know-your-rights-guide-your-rights-when>

CSCCE: Immigration Policies Harm the Early Childhood Workforce and the Communities They Serve

<https://cscce.berkeley.edu/publications/brief/immigration-policies-harm-ece/>

NWLC: Four Things You Should Know About How Immigration Impacts Care Work

<https://nwlc.org/resource/four-things-you-should-know-about-how-immigration-impacts-care-work/>

NWLC: Caring Through Crisis: Immigrant Caregivers Speak Out

<https://nwlc.org/caring-through-crisis-immigrant-caregivers-speak-out/>

NWLC: Immigrant Women’s Contribution to Our Economy

<https://nwlc.org/resource/immigrant-womens-contributions-to-our-economy/>

Immigration Policy Tracking Project: Tracking Trump Administration Immigration Policies

<https://immpolicytracking.org/>

Journal of Public Economics: Secure communities as immigration enforcement: How secure is the child care market? <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpubeco.2024.105101>

Just Security Litigation Tracker: Legal Challenges to Trump Administration Actions
https://www.justsecurity.org/107087/tracker-litigation-legal-challenges-trump-administration/#post-107087-_3tawe8h1ix3r

ENDNOTES

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