

1-1-2013

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Recommended Citation

Caitlyn Sharrow, *Statistically Speaking: Immigration by the Numbers*, 33 CHILD. LEGAL RTS. J. 196 (2013).
Available at: <http://lawcommons.luc.edu/clrj/vol33/iss1/10>

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Statistically Speaking: Immigration by the Numbers

By Caitlyn Sharrow

The United States Department of Homeland Security (“DHS”) collects data on immigration and publishes a variety of annual reports. Two of the reports are the *Estimates of the Unauthorized Immigrant Population Residing in the United States*, (“*Estimates*”) and *Immigration and Enforcement Actions* (“*Enforcement Actions*”). The *Estimates* report provides general demographic information including the total estimated number of unauthorized immigrants, the regions from which they emigrated, the states to which they have immigrated, and their gender and age. The *Enforcement Actions* report details information about the United States Customs and Border Protection (“CBP”) and United States Immigration and Custom Enforcement (“ICE”) actions such as apprehension, arrests, detentions, returns, and removals.

These reports do not convey information specific to youth. However, a report published by the Pew Hispanic Center describes several statistics about immigrant children. All three reports are significant because the information they convey offers some context for the potential impact immigration reform can have on society and an on undocumented youths.

The *Estimates* report uses a residual method to generate the illegal immigrant population estimate. The residual method, as the report indicates, results from the remainder after estimates of the legally resident foreign-born population are subtracted from the estimate of the total foreign-born population. Legally resident foreign-born individuals include legal permanent residents, naturalized citizens, asylees, refugees, and certain aliens who were legally admitted temporarily, such as students. Most of the data used to generate such estimates are derived from the United States Census and the American Community Survey (“ACS”) of the United States Census. Estimating population and demographics for an entire country is challenging and those challenges are amplified when trying to collect data about undocumented individuals. Further, the

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Estimates report notes the variability in the report's data because of sampling error and undercounts in Census information.

Specifically, the 2011 *Estimates* Report states that approximately 11.5 million unauthorized immigrants were living in the United States in January 2011. The report notes that the unauthorized immigrant population likely has not increased since 2007 because the rate of immigration is affected by the U.S. unemployment rate, the economic conditions in Mexico, the number of apprehensions of unauthorized immigrants at U.S. borders, and the level of border enforcement. It is also reported that about 59 percent of the unauthorized immigrant population emigrated from Mexico, while other unauthorized immigrants came from El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and China. The states that had the highest levels of unauthorized immigrant populations were California (2.8 million individuals), Texas (1.8 million), Florida (740,000), New York (630,000), and Illinois (550,000). Finally, the report estimated that 12 percent of the unauthorized immigrant population was less than 18 years old.

The *Enforcement Actions*, is another annual DHS report. This report illustrates the number and type of actions the CBP and ICE offices engage in each year. The report also offers helpful definitions of immigration enforcement terms. For example, the report defines an expedited removal as, "the removal of an alien who is inadmissible because the individual does not possess valid entry documents or is inadmissible for fraud or misrepresentation of material fact . . . The alien may be removed without a hearing before an immigration court." The data reported is collected in a variety of DHS databases and is reported by event, which means that each action, regardless of whether the action is taken against the same individual, counts as a separate record.

The data reported for 2011 indicates the number of apprehensions, detentions, returns, and removals. An apprehension involves being identified by CBP or ICE and often results in removal, return, detention, or being issued a Notice to Appear before the immigration court. In 2011, there were 642,000 apprehensions reported. Detention is "the seizure and incarceration of an alien in order to hold him/her while awaiting judicial or legal proceedings or

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return transportation to his or her country of citizenship.” In 2011, ICE detained 429,000 foreign nationals—an all-time high. The report also indicates that 324,000 foreign nationals returned to their home countries. A return is a confirmed movement of an inadmissible or deportable alien out of the United States not based on an order of removal. Finally, 392,000 individuals were removed, meaning “compulsory and confirmed movement of an inadmissible or deportable alien out of the United States based on an order of removal.”

The Pew Hispanic Center released a report specifically related to youth in 2009 titled, *A Portrait of Unauthorized Immigrants in the United States*. The Pew Hispanic Center is a research organization and project of the Pew Research Center. The Pew Research Center works to provide information on the issues, attitudes, and trends shaping the U.S. and the world. The Pew Hispanic Center conducts studies on a wide range of topics. The 2009 report related to immigrant youth stated that there were 1.8 million unauthorized immigrant children—under age 18—living in the U.S. and that there has been no increase in that number since 2003. The report also stated that children of unauthorized immigrants, “both those who are unauthorized themselves and those who are U.S. citizens, make up 6.8% of the students enrolled in the nation’s elementary and secondary schools.” Additionally, in states such as Arizona, California, Colorado, Nevada, and Texas, at least one-in-ten students have parents who are unauthorized immigrants. Further, the research shows that in 2008, four million U.S.-born children lived with unauthorized parents, and 47 percent of unauthorized immigrant households consist of couples with children.

These three reports offer some numerical context to the large number of individuals that may be affected by immigration reform. As these reports indicate, it is estimated that a large number of unauthorized immigrants reside in the United States, a significant number of children have unauthorized parents, and many individuals are impacted by the enforcement actions of CBP and ICE. Further, these numbers should illustrate the need for immigration reform in the United States.

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