American Immigration Council

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Immigrant Workers and the Childcare Crisis: What's at Stake for Families and the Economy

Photo credit: Charles Deluvio/Unsplash

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements

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Executive Summary

Childcare is a cornerstone of economic stability in the United States, enabling millions of parents and guardians, particularly mothers, to participate in the workforce. Despite declining birthrates, the demand for childcare remains high: 18.6 million workers nationally have children under the age of 5, the age group most likely to require full-day care. Yet the sector faces persistent challenges that limit access for families, most notably high costs and staffing shortages expected to worsen in the years to come.

Immigrants are essential to sustaining the childcare workforce. Nationally, one in five childcare workers is an immigrant, with even higher concentrations in metropolitan areas such as San Jose and Miami. Compared with their U.S.-born counterparts, immigrant childcare workers are more likely to be older; to work full-time; and to be self-employed. They bring diverse educational backgrounds and cultural competencies that enrich children's learning experiences and support working families.

However, mass deportation and restrictive visa policies are threatening the stability of this workforce. More than half of immigrant childcare workers are non-citizens, and nearly a third are undocumented. Enforcement actions in previously protected areas such as daycare centers, along with visa processing delays and revocations of work authorization, have disrupted childcare arrangements, forcing parents and guardians to reduce work hours, change jobs, or leave the workforce entirely, with ripple effects on American communities and businesses across the economy.

Key Findings

- **Demand for Childcare:** 11.2 percent of the employed workforce in the United States, or 18.6 million workers, are parents of young children (under the age of 5).
- **Workforce Participation:** Labor force participation among mothers of young children rose from 66.2 percent in 2013 to 70.8 percent in 2023.
- **Impact on Employment:** Due to childcare being unavailable or unaffordable, 12.8 million households with children under the age of 14, or 41.9 percent of those households, had at least one adult whose work was affected, including 2 million households with adults who cut their work hours and 1.3 million households with adults who did not look for a job.
- **Immigrant Workforce:** 282,900 immigrants are employed as childcare workers, comprising 20.1 percent of the workforce; 97.6 percent of them are women. Immigrants make up 31.9 percent of childcare workers in private households, and 18.3 percent in childcare centers.
- **Workforce Profile:** One in five immigrant childcare workers come from Mexico. Immigrant childcare workers overall are more likely to be self-employed, working full-time, and older than their U.S.-born counterparts. Over half are non-citizens, and many are vulnerable to enforcement actions.
- **Texas Spotlight:** In Texas, 22,900 immigrants make up 19.2 percent of the state's childcare workforce, with significant contributions in the Houston and Dallas metro areas.

Photo credit: Karola G/Pexels

Immigrant childcare workers are indispensable to the U.S. economy. They provide essential support to working families, especially in regions with limited childcare alternatives. Policies that destabilize this workforce undermine not only immigrant families but also a national economy that depends on parents' ability to work.

Working Parents and the Demand for Childcare

Photo credit: William Fortunato/Pexels

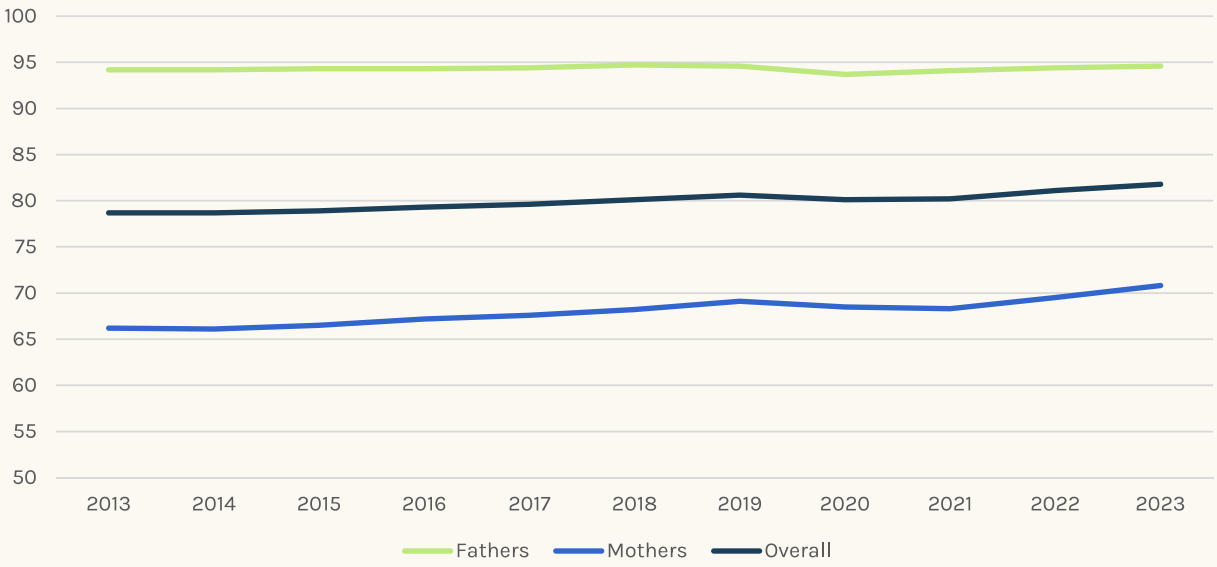
Demand for childcare remains strong in the United States, even as people choose smaller families or postpone having children—factors that have contributed to declining birth rates in recent years.

Nationally, 18.6 million workers, or 11.2 percent of the employed workforce, have children under the age of 5, the age group most likely to require full-day care.[1] The childcare sector, which already faces staffing shortages and rising costs, provides essential services that enable parents to stay employed and businesses to retain workers.[2]

"Societies can't function without children who are taken care of," said Elizabeth Cummins Muñoz, a U.S. Hispanic and women's studies scholar and author of *Mothercoin: The Stories of Immigrant Nannies*. "We have been taught to understand that reproductive labor is outside of the economy. But it's not."[3]

Parents with young children, especially mothers, are participating in the labor force at higher rates than they were a decade ago. Between 2013 and 2023, the labor force participation rate of women with young children rose from 66.2 percent to 70.8 percent.

FIGURE 1: LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION RATE OF WORKING PARENTS WITH CHILDREN UNDER AGE FIVE



Source: American Immigration Council analysis of the American Community Survey, 2013-2023

The share of young children without a stay-at-home parent also increased, from 52.0 percent in 2013 to 60.1 percent by 2023. In some metro areas, the share is even higher. In Portland, Maine, and Madison, Wisconsin, three out of four children live in households where all parents work.

"It is a shadow industry that we rely on," Muñoz said of the childcare sector. "It enables cultures of motherhood that would otherwise be unsustainable, because our culture of work and standards of motherhood have risen, as well as the economic demands on the family."[4]

SPOTLIGHT

Liz's Story: How Immigrant Nannies Make Work Possible for a New York Family

Liz is a fourth-generation New Yorker who found her family's first nanny through a neighborhood parent group, and their second—after a break during COVID-19 when they lived with her parents—through a nanny co-operative. Both nannies were immigrants, simply because, as Liz put it, "The bulk of nannies who are working in Brooklyn are immigrants."[5]

"We decided to go with a nanny when my first son was very young because he had pretty serious food allergies, and managing his food was a pretty concerted effort," she said. Both Liz and her husband work, and both would like to continue doing so.

Liz works in child welfare and philanthropy, helping families across the country care for their children. Her husband is a medical researcher, helping to develop next-generation gene therapies that are already saving lives.

"I like working. I want to be working. I think that the work I do is worth doing," she said. "If I didn't have somebody who I thought was safe and caring and aligned with my kids every day then I wouldn't be working."

The current nanny, Maria, has worked with the family for four years.[6] She provides daytime care for their three children, ages 2 through 6, for 42 hours a week. She makes $36 per hour plus overtime, equating to about $80,000 per year.

Photo credit: Zeynep Ergin/Pexels

It's certainly a substantial sum, and Liz is grateful that she and her husband can afford it. But, said Liz, daycare is also expensive. Three-child families like Liz's in New York City pay an annual average of $69,000 for daycare.[7]

"The nanny's work makes all the other work happen. My kids adore her, fully and completely, and they're legitimately obsessed with her kid," who the nanny sometimes brings with her, Liz said. "These are essential and important and contributing members to our society and economy."

Interacting with the nanny gives the children exposure to another culture—over and above the occasional informal Spanish lesson. "We live in a diverse city, and I want my kids to know a variety of people from a variety of places, and to value people from different backgrounds," Liz said. The family can trust that Maria will devote the personalized attention their children need: "My son with anaphylactic allergies has never had a reaction with her. And I can't say the same for me."

Lack of Access to Affordable Childcare

In 2023, there were 18.3 million children in America under the age of 5, needing full-day care provided by their parents, through their family, friend, and neighbor (FFN) networks, or by the 1.4 million childcare workers employed nationally. Some parents have to forego employment opportunities because they can't secure reliable childcare through their FFN networks or find affordable childcare services.

A Childcare Crisis

The cost of childcare services remains prohibitive for many families in the United States. Data from the National Database of Childcare Prices (NDCP) at the U.S. Department of Labor shows that in 2022, families spent between 8.9 and 16 percent of their county's median income on full-day childcare for just one child, with the median costs in U.S. counties ranging from $6,552 to $15,600 annually, depending on county size, the age of the child, and the type of care (center-based or home-based).[8] In comparison, the national median annual rent was $16,085 that year.[9]

The most expensive forms of childcare often exceed what families can afford. The Department of Health and Human Services sets the benchmark for "affordable childcare" at 7 percent of family income. In 96.8 percent of counties, the median cost of full-day center-based care for infants (generally the most expensive type) exceeds that threshold for a family earning that county's median income.[10] [11]

Photo credit: Pavel Danilyuk/Pexels

SPOTLIGHT

Supporting Working Families Through Flexible, Affordable Childcare

KidsPark is a national franchise that opened with a simple mission: to provide accessible, responsible hourly daycare for families who can't—or don't want to—use full-day childcare. Parents can drop off their kids anytime during operating hours for as little or as much time as they need. No reservations are required, and parents pay by the hour.

The model proved to be a success. Now, 37 years later, KidsPark is a national franchise, with daycare centers operating in nine states. Sisters Beth Christie and Heather Alanis jumped in 17 years ago, opening the first KidsPark center in the Dallas-Fort Worth area.[12]

"We have families who use us five days a week. or parents who just drop in as needed," said Beth.

KidsPark strives to support low- and middle-income parents, for whom standard childcare may be prohibitively expensive—potentially pushing them out of the workforce for years. Many parents manage to juggle conflicting work shifts to ensure one can always be with the kids. Even so, they still need affordable care during the overlap, when both are at work. "The hourly drop-off allows them to minimize their childcare costs," said Beth.

Currently, parents pay $12 per hour for one child, and an additional $6 per hour for each sibling—less than many independent babysitters. "Having quality staff that can take good care of your children and keeping rates low for parents, it's definitely a balancing act," said Beth.

KidsPark typically hires young people, often college students. All the current teachers are in their 20s. The directors are in their 30s.

From the beginning, immigrants have been vital to the success of KidsPark Arlington. "We've always relied in the childcare industry on people who have come here from another country, or are first- or second-generation," said Heather.

Often these young people are studying to become nurses or schoolteachers. Beth said, "It's just fun to see caregiving as a personality type."

"The young women who work for us tend to be very family oriented," she said. "We have, over the years, hired cousins and sisters because we believe they work so well together, and all of them have come from immigrant families."

Immigrants and children of immigrants also bring bilingual skills, which benefit children from all backgrounds, particularly in a diverse area like Dallas, where immigrant workers serve vital roles in construction, manufacturing, healthcare, and more.[13] "We want our staff to reflect our customers," said Beth. "We've loved having teachers that are bilingual."

"The teachers that have come from immigrant families have generally been the kindest, most diligent, hard workers," said Beth. "I have found myself in awe of some of the young women who have come through the center, their work ethic. And they've brought so much love to the center."

Challenges for Working Parents

A lack of reliable childcare affects the ability of many working parents to meet their employers' needs and to earn enough to support their families. According to the 2023 National Survey of Children's Health, one in ten children under the age of 5 (2.2 million children) live with parents who had to quit, not take, or greatly change a job because of problems with childcare.[14]

"It's just a complete failure, I think, to make it so hard for families, mothers in particular, to have reliable, affordable childcare so we can go to work," said Jen, a mother of two in Brooklyn who without her au pair would have to quit her job. "Just that. It's so simple."[15]

Specifically, when parents of young children who indicated they wanted to work were asked why they had not recently looked for a job, 14.1 percent, or 572,000 people, cited the inability to arrange childcare as the primary reason.[16]

When childcare falls short, household members often give up their own sick or vacation time or lose pay. In 2025, 12.8 million households with children under the age of 14, or 41.9 percent of those households, had at least one adult whose job was affected due to a child's care being closed, unavailable, unaffordable, or potentially unsafe.[17]

This includes 2.5 million households with adults who took unpaid leave, 2 million households with adults who cut their work hours, and 1.3 million households with adults who did not look for a job.[18]

FIGURE 2: ACTIONS TAKEN BY AT LEAST ONE ADULT IN A HOUSEHOLD AFTER LOSING ACCESS TO CHILDCARE*

	Number of Households	Share of Households With at Least One Child Under the Age of 14
Used vacation, sick, or other paid leave	4,736,200	15.6%
Took unpaid leave	2,455,800	8.1%
Other	2,060,000	6.8%
Cut work hours	2,044,100	6.7%
Supervised one or more children while working	1,434,000	4.7%
Did not look for a job	1,251,100	4.1%
Quit a job	601,900	2.0%
Were fired from a job	48,500	0.2%

* When a child's care was closed, unavailable, or unaffordable or there was a concern for safety.

Source: American Immigration Council analysis of the 2025 Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplement (ASEC) Combined Dataset.

SPOTLIGHT

Lisa's Story: Creating Pathways for Families Beyond Early Childhood

Childcare doesn't end when the kids turn 12 or 13. It just evolves.

"You don't put your 14-year-old in daycare, but your 14-year-old still needs to get to activities," said Lisa, a Chicago parent of three schoolchildren**.** Combine increasingly unwalkable neighborhoods, smaller local family networks, and the relentless extracurricular demands of college admissions, and many American parents end up looking more like chauffeurs.[19]

"We have a whole system that is quite broken, I'd say. But in trying to work within it, having household help is quite necessary."

Lisa is an artist and industrial designer specializing in jewelry and housewares, with customers that have included Tiffany & Co. and Walmart. Without childcare, she could not feel secure in her career. Never mind that hers may be viewed as the family's second income—she still needs to work.

"My husband … could lose his job. We could get divorced, I suppose. You just don't know," she said. And once you've left the job, "You can't get back in."

"Then people don't trust you. You need to stay on top of it and stay in the game."

To help manage the demands of parenting and work, the family has hired an au pair from France. The au pair can take the children to their activities and simply be there for the kids when Lisa is addressing a deadline or meeting remotely with international clients at all hours.

"Focused time is what you need to work effectively, and it's very difficult when you have a million distractions and are required to go somewhere and come back. And this is a reality for many working families," Lisa said. "Many women don't work because there is not a schedule that is functional for them."

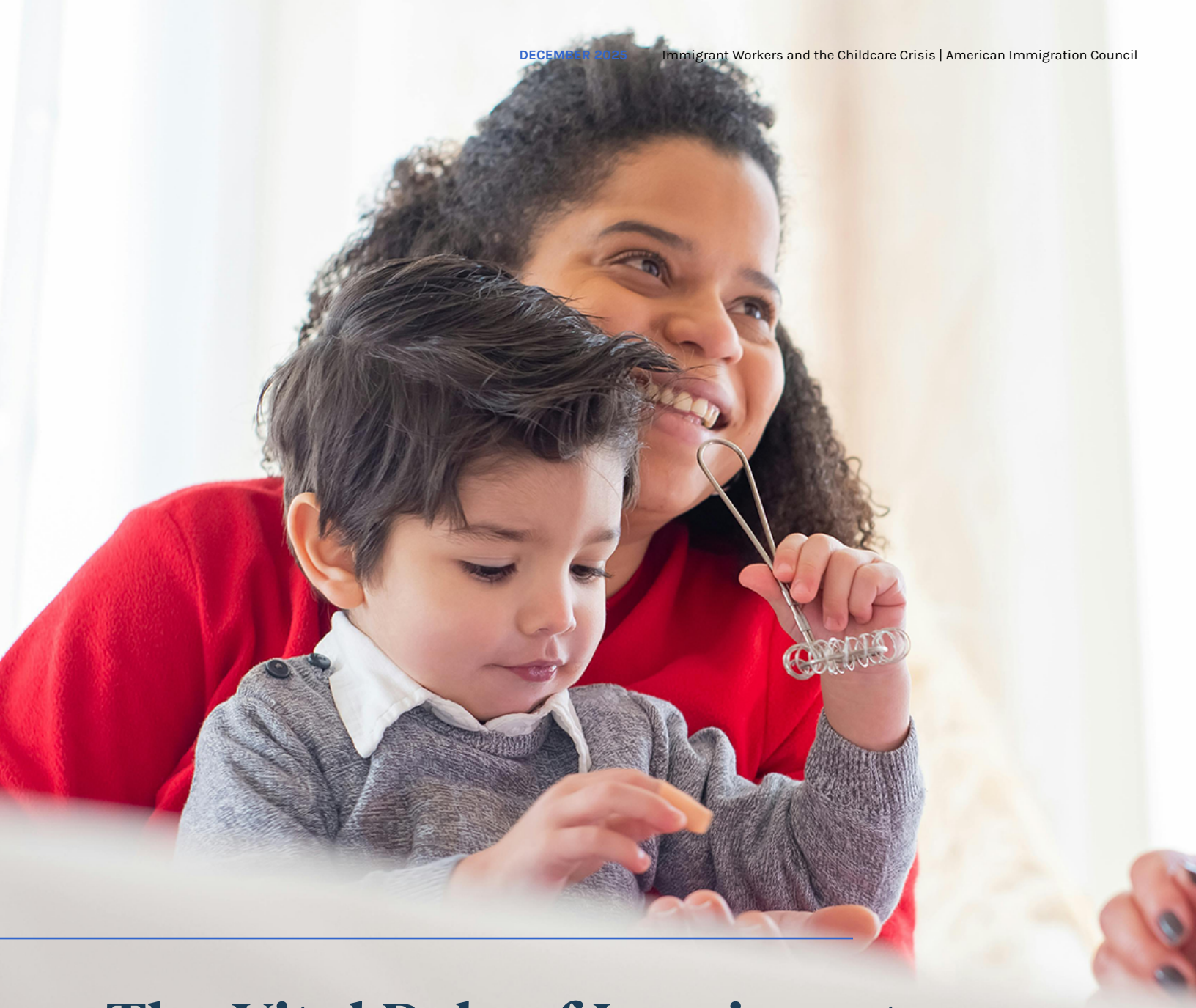
"I know people who are, like, 'I couldn't manage the job and the kids' scheduling.' They're working as their children's personal assistants. Without pay."

Au pairs typically arrive on a one- or two-year contract. Lisa's family has hosted three previously, from Spain and France. Their current au pair is on a gap year before college. These young women—au pairs are overwhelmingly female—introduce children to new foods, new languages, and new perspectives.

To bring an au pair into their home, Lisa and her husband had to pay the agency $8,000 upfront for medical insurance, travel, and fees. Under agency guidelines, the au pair may work up to 45 hours per week.

While the cost is significant, Lisa noted that it is not as costly as a typical full-time babysitter or daycare. "The au pair, if you have the space, is the least expensive option. Especially if you have more than one kid," she said.

Immigrant childcare workers make it possible for mothers like Lisa to stay in the workforce. Without affordable childcare, many women have to choose another path. "I've talked to women who miss work and would like to go back to work," said Lisa. "But they can't."



The Vital Role of Immigrant Workers in Childcare

Over the next decade, an estimated 160,200 childcare jobs will open each year due to workers retiring or transferring to other industries.[20] Without enough workers to fill those jobs, a labor shortage will continue to reduce access to childcare services and push up prices, forcing many parents to opt out of the workforce or reduce their work hours in order to care for their children. In a sector that is already stretched thin, immigrants are vital to the sustainability of the care workforce that keeps the economy afloat.

Photo credit: Kampus Productions/Pexels

SPOTLIGHT

From Babysitter to Business Owner: Muna's Journey of Resilience and Care

As many as 1 million people have died in Somalia's decades-long civil war.[21] Many more have fled, often without a country to go to. Most have ended up in refugee camps, sometimes for decades.

Since the African country collapsed into civil war in 1991, the United States has offered refuge to many Somalis through Temporary Protected Status (TPS), which allows recipients to live and work in the United States while their country is considered too dangerous to return to.

Muna was one of them. She landed in San Diego in 1999, her 6-month-old baby in tow, knowing no one, knocking on doors to ask if anyone needed a babysitter. Now she is a U.S. citizen and runs her own daycare business. But it was a tough slog to get here.[22]

Muna's story exemplifies the resilience and perseverance that is common among immigrants, as well as the role immigrant women often fill as caretakers to America's children. "Everything is hard," Muna said. "Nothing is easy to become an American and get your papers."

In her first four years in the country, Muna lived in 20 different houses, working as a nanny and housekeeper at a starting wage of $6.45 per hour. Sometimes she slept on the floor. "When people see you don't have nothing, they can do anything," she said.

"I didn't mind—but when they started hitting my daughter it was too much," she said.

"Every house had kids, and the boys, some of them, would hit."

While doing domestic work, Muna did manage to swing a little time for herself, during which she worked at a store within walking distance of the house. She saved enough money between the two jobs to rent an apartment, and settled into life as a full-time retail salesperson, working her way up to store manager. She met and married a U.S. citizen, had a second daughter, and became a naturalized citizen in 2023.

When she was ready to start her own business, in 2018, she turned to childcare. She opened a small daycare center in her home, licensed to care for eight children at a time. Her afternoon slots are always full—"I have to turn people away"—and she is saving to buy a bigger house so she can become licensed to watch more children. Her daughter works as her assistant.

"It's a lot of kids to run," she said, laughing. "But it's worth it."

As owner-operator, Muna tends to babies, drives children to and from school, brings kids to the park and the library, and helps them with their homework. She also serves on the board of Global Village, a commercial and residential housing project currently in development, and volunteers for the Partnership for the Advancement of New Americans, where she helps new refugees. But for the first time since coming to America, she has weekends off.

"In the seven years, I know what the Saturday-Sunday thing is," she said, laughing. "It's so nice, so nice."

The Immigrant Childcare Workforce

In 2023, 20.1 percent, or 282,900, of all employed childcare workers in the country were immigrants. In some metro areas, this share was even higher; over two-thirds of childcare workers in San Jose (69.5 percent) and Miami (67.9 percent) were immigrants.

FIGURE 3: IMMIGRANT CHILDCARE WORKFORCE IN THE UNITED STATES AND TOP METRO AREAS, 2023

	Immigrant Share of Childcare Workers
United States	20.1%
San Jose-Sunnyvale-Santa Clara, CA	69.5%
Miami-Fort Lauderdale-West Palm Beach, FL	67.9%
San Francisco-Oakland-Fremont, CA	48.3%
New York-Newark-Jersey City, NY-NJ	47.4%
Los Angeles-Long Beach-Anaheim, CA	46.8%

Source: American Immigration Council analysis of the 2023 American Community Survey

"I've seen how immigrant childcare workers are absolutely essential to enabling American families—particularly working parents in demanding careers—to contribute to our economy," said Ruth Jennifer Cruz, a technology entrepreneur and founder of Wolf King USA. "In the tech sector specifically, many of our most productive employees rely on immigrant caregivers who bring incredible dedication, cultural richness, and often multilingual capabilities that benefit the children in their care."[23]

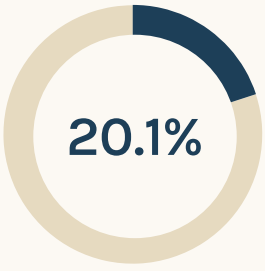
Without this workforce, many innovative companies in the United States would struggle to retain talented parents who need reliable, quality childcare, Cruz said.

In 2023, 223,400 immigrants provided childcare services either at a facility (center-based) or operated out of a caregiver's home (home-based), making up 18.3 percent of that care sector. An additional 59,500 immigrant childcare workers were directly employed by private households as nannies, au pairs, or babysitters, comprising 31.9 percent of the sector.

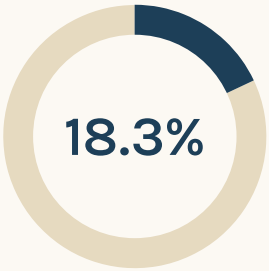
Immigrant childcare workers were more likely to be self-employed than their U.S.-born counterparts, either running their own childcare businesses or working as independent contractors. Immigrant businesses owners create employment opportunities for both U.S.-born and immigrant workers, and independent contractors help further ease the childcare shortage. In 2023, 30.9 percent of immigrant childcare workers were self-employed, compared with 18.6 percent of U.S.-born childcare workers.

Immigrant childcare workers were also more likely to work full time in the childcare sector (69.5 percent) compared with their U.S.-born counterparts (61.6 percent).

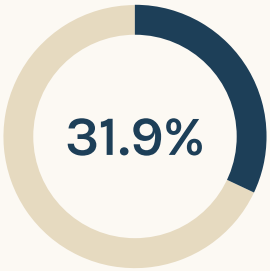
2023 immigrant share of...



All employed childcare workers in the United States

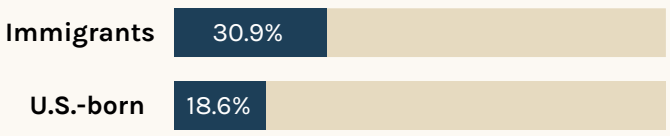


Center-based or home-based caregivers in the United States



Private household caregivers in the United States

In 2023, **30.9%** of immigrant childcare workers in the United States were self-employed, compared with **18.6%** of their U.S.-born counterparts.



Immigrants **U.S.-born**

69.5% of immigrant childcare workers worked full time compared with **61.6%** of their U.S.-born counterparts in 2023.

SPOTLIGHT

A Life Rebuilt Through Caregiving: Laura's Path in Bentonville, Arkansas

It was Laura's late husband who moved the family to the United States—to help his parents start a ministry in Bentonville, Arkansas. His parents were retired missionaries who had immigrated to the United States years earlier and were, by then, U.S. citizens.[24]

"I didn't want to come," Laura said, but for three years her in-laws kept pushing. "They were insisting."

Five years after Laura agreed to relocate, her husband was killed in an accident, leaving her with two children who had integrated into their new life in the United States. "I started doing any kind of job I could do because I needed to support myself," she said. "I knew that not having a social security number I couldn't apply anywhere."

Unauthorized to work in the United States, Laura did what so many immigrant women in her situation do: she worked as a babysitter and nanny. There was always plenty of work, and she was, and still is, good at it, she said. "Every single day I show up." When a family asked if she knew anyone who cleaned houses, she said, "I know no one, but I can do it."

Laura spent 14 years taking care of other people's children. Most of the parents, all U.S.-born, worked for Walmart, which has its headquarters in Bentonville.

Last year, when Laura became authorized to work in the United States, she took a full-time job at a friend's office. But she still works part-time for the family she had been nannying for. "I take my lunchtime at 3:30 p.m., and I pick up the kids from school." She remains in high demand for her childcare work. "A lot of families know me."

Photo credit: Laura

Laura is grateful for the babysitting work, and to have been able to help these American families. "The family I worked for for many years, that family was a blessing," she said. "They paid me very well. Every year they gave me a bonus. They valued my work."

A Demographic Profile

Most immigrant childcare workers are women. In 2023, 97.6 percent, or 276,000 immigrant childcare workers, were women, comprising 19.6 percent of all childcare workers in the country.

FIGURE 4: IMMIGRANT WOMEN IN CHILDCARE WORKFORCE, 2023

	Immigrant Women Share of Childcare Workforce
United States	19.6%
San Jose-Sunnyvale-Santa Clara, CA	69.5%
Miami-Fort Lauderdale-West Palm Beach, FL	66.2%
San Francisco-Oakland-Fremont, CA	46.3%
New York-Newark-Jersey City, NY-NJ	46.1%
Los Angeles-Long Beach-Anaheim, CA	45.7%

Source: American Immigration Council analysis of the 2023 American Community Survey

Immigrant childcare workers tend to be older than those born in the United States—80.2 percent fell into the age group of 25 to 64, compared with 63.6 percent of the U.S.-born. Meanwhile, U.S.-born childcare workers were more likely to fall into the age group of 16 to 24—31.1 percent of them were in that age group, compared with 12.3 percent of immigrant workers.

Immigrant childcare workers are also more likely to be at either end of the educational spectrum than U.S.-born childcare workers—they are both more likely to lack a high-school diploma and more likely to have a college or advanced degree.

FIGURE 5: EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT OF CHILDCARE WORKERS IN THE UNITED STATES

Education Level	Share of Immigrant Childcare Workers	Share of U.S.-Born Childcare Workers
Below high-school diploma	17.0%	7.0%
High-school or some college	53.3%	69.8
Bachelor's degree or advanced degree	29.7%	23.2%

Source: American Immigration Council analysis of the 2023 American Community Survey

"In Chile, my mom worked as an architect," said Maria Rojas.[25] But when the family came to the United States, "her degree didn't count," said Rojas who immigrated as a child.

Rojas' mother found work in the childcare sector: "She had to work odd jobs as a maid or nanny or waitress so we could get by." Now, Maria has followed in her mother's footsteps, working as an elementary school teacher and a church preschool leader in Kentucky.

More than half (53.9 percent) of immigrant childcare workers identified as Hispanic in 2023, followed by Asian and Pacific Islander (16.7 percent), non-Hispanic White (12.8 percent), and Black and African American (10.8 percent).

Immigrants from Latin America made up a large share of childcare workers. Eight out of the top ten countries of origin of immigrant childcare workers are in Latin America. Immigrants from Mexico make up the largest share of foreign-born childcare workers (20.3%), followed by those from El Salvador (5.5%), Colombia (5.3%), the Dominican Republic (4.9%), and India (4.4%).

FIGURE 6: TOP COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN AMONG IMMIGRANT CHILDCARE WORKERS

Country of Origin	Number of Childcare Workers	Share of Immigrant Childcare Workers
Mexico	57,400	20.3%
El Salvador	15,600	5.5%
Colombia	15,100	5.3%
Dominican Republic	14,000	4.9%
India	12,500	4.4%
Guatemala	10,500	3.7%
Brazil	10,000	3.5%
Cuba	9,800	3.5%
China	7,200	2.5%
Ecuador	6,900	2.4%

Source: American Immigration Council analysis of the 2023 American Community Survey

Immigrants who arrived in the United States in the past five years are overrepresented in the childcare workforce. Although, overall, 16.4 percent of the nation's immigrants arrived in the United States within the last five years, 20.6 percent of immigrant childcare workers did. Meanwhile, 79.4 percent of immigrant childcare workers have lived in the United States for more than five years.

SPOTLIGHT

Preschool for All—But Not Enough Teachers

When it comes to preschool, Washington, D.C., is in a relatively strong position. The district offers free preschool for every 3- and 4-year-old, regardless of family income, through the Pre-K Enhancement and Expansion Program (PKEEP). Additionally, the Early Childhood Pay Equity Fund ensures that PKEEP teachers earn the same pay as their elementary school counterparts.

As a result, studies have found more children, particularly disadvantaged children, are being set up to succeed in kindergarten and beyond; more parents, usually women, are joining the workforce; and families enjoy greater economic security and the ability to grow. All in all, the effort has been considered a community-wide success.

But even the best-designed can't succeed if the federal government undercuts providers' ability to find and keep qualified workers by revoking work authorizations, limiting visas, and deporting immigrants en masse, efforts that ultimately reduce the number of kids childcare providers can serve. Every child may be eligible for preschool, but only if they can get a spot.

Prior to the recent changes in federal immigration policy, hiring was "challenging, but doable," said Raúl Echevarría, the co-founder, president, and CEO of CommuniKids, a language immersion preschool that also offers after-school care and summer camp. Now, however, the renewed enforcement efforts to expel immigrants "are having a significant impact on our teachers and team members."[26]


Photo credit: CommuniKids

By fall 2025, federal rule changes had reclassified a "small but significant number of teachers" at the preschool as ineligible to lawfully work in the United States. Because daycares and preschools operate under strict licensing requirements, those teachers were forced to quit.

"It's created a lot of anxiety, and put some pressure on our human resources staff to make sure we can bring in teachers at the last minute," Echevarría said. Children, too, "who are very sensitive to who their teachers are," have been affected, he said. "They have lost their teacher."

CommuniKids has been serving families in the D.C. area since 2005. Today it operates four centers in the District, accepting children ages 18 months to 5 years; and one in Virginia, accepting children ages 2 1/2 through 5. In total, some 500 students are enrolled—but hundreds more are on waitlists.

Nearly all of the students are U.S. citizens, and more than three-quarters are from homes where English is the dominant language, typically because one or both parents were born in the United States. CommuniKids is the largest community-based provider in PKEEP, and about half of its students are in the 3- to 4-year-old age bracket covered by the program. Some spend up to 50 hours a week at a CommuniKids center, almost always so their parents can go to work.

What sets CommuniKids apart—and makes it particularly vulnerable to federal immigration policy shifts—is that it is a fully immersive language program. Teachers need not only be licensed for preschool employment, which includes being authorized to work in the United States, but they must also be a native speaker of either French, Mandarin, or Spanish. "Those languages are spoken in the classrooms at all times," said Echevarría. "Students develop a significant amount of fluency by the time they enter kindergarten. … The special nature of our program requires that the teachers be native speakers."

Even with the high pay—to be commensurate with public school teacher salaries, the average preschool teacher salary is $75,000 plus benefits, some of the highest daycare wages in the country—people with such qualifications can be very hard to find. CommuniKids currently has 117 teachers, nearly all of whom are female immigrants and who together represent 25 nationalities and all the world's major religions.

"We're always looking for ways to find and nurture teachers who bring those skills to our classrooms," said Echevarría. "We will always do all we can to get the best teachers for our program."

Implications of Immigration Enforcement on the Childcare Workforce

It is impossible to imagine the future of childcare without immigrants, but increases in aggressive immigration enforcement tactics are disrupting the immigrant childcare workforce and, with it, the lives of children and families they serve and the ability of those parents to work—further straining the U.S. economy.[27]

More than half, or 54.9 percent, of immigrant childcare workers are non-citizens; 30.5 percent of immigrant childcare workers are undocumented.

SPOTLIGHT

Rosa: A Life of Care in the Shadows

For more than 20 years, Rosa has worked as a nanny in New York City, helping raise children who still visit her when home from college. Now, despite continued demand for her childcare services, she's planning to leave the country. Like her partner of 16 years, a construction worker, she will self-deport—he to Colombia and she to Guatemala. "Then he can come visit me," she said.[28]

"At least we will not have that feeling that someone is chasing us, coming after us. Because that's how we feel, both of us," she said. "Every day on Spanish TV the ads say, 'If you're illegal, we're going to get you. We're going to kick you out.' That's the message we hear every day. Every day. It affects you."

"It's like a little drop of water hitting on a stone. Sooner or later it starts making a hole," she said. "People don't know what we're going through."

"It's like a little drop of water hitting on a stone. Sooner or later it starts making a hole. People don't know what we're going through."

Before coming to the United States, Rosa was a single mother of two in Guatemala. She taught at a language school for tourists and sold jewelry for a large U.S.-based company. Then a recession hit, leaving her without work and a 2-year-old and a 4-year-old to feed. She accepted an invitation to join a childhood boyfriend and U.S. citizen living in New York, leaving her children behind with her mother until she could secure visas for them later. But once in New York, her boyfriend was not able to support her and her tourist visa expired.

"I had nothing, so I began looking for work," she said. As an undocumented woman, she followed a common path, taking jobs as a nanny and house cleaner. "It was good money and I was sending money back to feed my kids," she said.

She has heard talk of moms who smuggle their children across the border. "But I wouldn't do that. It's too hard, too dangerous," she said. "I wanted to do it the legal way, but I couldn't. I've been talking to lawyers since I got here."

Her children remained her top priority. "I couldn't go back because we needed the money. They needed the money to go to school." Now grown and still in Central America, her son is an engineer and her daughter is graduating with a law degree. They were able to bypass the extreme overcrowding in public schools and the guns and violence that embroils so many teenagers.

"You have no idea how many nights I cried because I miss them, because I want to hold them," she said.

But Rosa was there for her American "kids," including a dozen children, across four families, whom she cared for over many years. It was another reason she stayed in the country so long: she felt an obligation to her American families, families that needed two incomes and depended on immigrant caregivers like her for accessible and affordable childcare. Many of the children became attached to her, and she to them. She liked—continues to like—the work.

"I have to be honest: I love children," she said. "They are so curious, so creative. They are really honest with you, with their feelings, with their facts. And they learn from you."

Rosa always paid income taxes, using an Individual Taxpayer Identification Number, or ITIN, contributing to programs like Social Security and Medicare that she will never benefit from, even if she were to stay in the United States. She does not drink, does not use drugs, and has never been arrested. "I've never been in any trouble," she said.

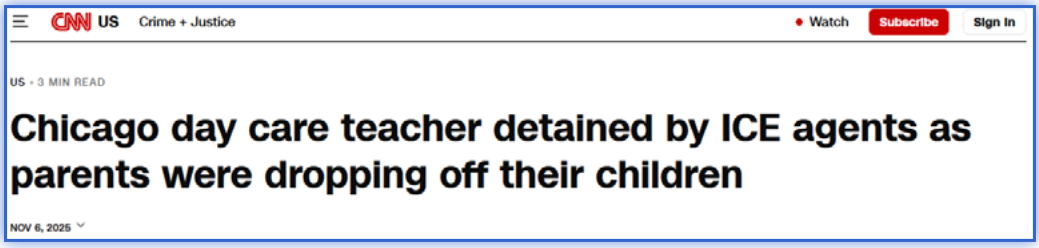
In September, Rosa was still going to work, fulfilling her commitment to a family. But she said she couldn't endure the stress and fear much longer. She tried to avoid rush hour and changed the route she took to and from work. She called a taxi driver friend for ICE alerts. Sometimes he'd give her a ride.

"It's not fair that people who come and work are threatened, scared, humiliated. I would like the freedom to do my work with happiness as usual, without the worry of who is going to take me away, who is going to hurt me and treat me like an animal," she said.

"I'm sad to go home, but we have to have freedom, not live in a cage."

Disruptions to Childcare Workforce and Families

Ramped up worksite raids and ICE's recent aggressive and indiscriminate enforcement tactics are directly threatening the 30.5 percent of immigrant childcare workers who are undocumented, exerting a chilling effect on local communities.[29] As funds and manpower get diverted to the Trump administration's mass deportation agenda, many immigrants find themselves unable to live in the United States without fear of being profiled and detained.[30] Many workers opt to curtail activities that could bring them into contact with government agents.[31]



This is particularly the case when immigration arrests and interrogations are no longer prohibited in "protected areas"[32] where children gather, such as childcare centers, before- and after-school care centers, school bus stops, and playgrounds.[33] Some childcare workers have stopped going to work for fear of raids in their workplaces.[34] In Silver Spring, Maryland, a daycare owner stopped advertising her business and took down bilingual signage for fear that it would draw attention to her business.[35]

Even people who have been legally working in the United States are being forced into the undocumented workforce, or to stop working entirely as a result of the administration's efforts to restrict work authorization. Measures include terminating Temporary Protection Status (TPS) and parole, revoking work authorization, increasing fees for visas, changing work permit processing, and more, all in an effort to reduce immigration.[36]

For example, in May 2025, a halt in the processing of new J-1 visas affected many au pairs and their host families, causing delays for au pairs to start their childcare work even after processing resumed in June.[37] Au pairs come to the United States on a J-1 visa as part of a cultural exchange program.[38] In 2022, about 21,500 au pairs cared for the children of American families through the program.[39]

Many served military families, who are often stationed hours from friends and family and are subject to relocation. "Just like all working families, childcare is really essential for military families," said Eileen Huck, acting director of government relations for the National Military Family Association (NMFA). "[Au pairs] have the flexibility of working outside the normal hours that childcare centers might be operating in. And an au pair can move with you if [the family is ordered to move]."[40]

When caregivers face increasing uncertainty and the threat of detention or removal, it disrupts not only their lives but the stability of the families that rely on them. Losing childcare can drive parents to cut back their hours at work or to leave their jobs entirely. Over time, these disruptions have large ripple effects, reducing overall workforce participation and putting strain on employers.

SPOTLIGHT

Jen's Story: Navigating Work, Family, and Immigration Uncertainty

Jen lives in Brooklyn. She works full-time in the financial district, while her kids go to school in Chinatown. The logistics are more complicated than they might appear.[41]

The commute from home to school takes 50 minutes, and from school to work takes 30 minutes. Jen is in the office until at least 5:30 p.m. School lets out at 2:30 p.m., after which the children, ages 5 and 9, need attention and help with homework.

Without help, "The mornings would be challenging, but the afternoons would make it impossible," she said. "I would either get fired or I would have to quit my job."

The most practical solution for her family: hire a nanny or an au pair. Inevitably, this meant relying on an immigrant provider, because "It's the pool of candidates who are available."

"And nannies are hard to come by," she said. "Friends would say, 'You want to start a year in advance.'"

Jen and her husband are thrilled to have found an au pair from China. The au pair can shuttle the children to and from school, help them learn Mandarin, and ensure the kids are not left unsupervised—a critical safeguard for their well-being. Jen, a financial analyst, can occasionally work from home, but not without distractions. "I hope everyone would understand, even men, that you can't concentrate when children are all around," Jen said. Her husband is an emergency room doctor.

"We are well off … privileged," Jen said. "For someone with less means and time, I don't know how people do it."

Nonetheless, Jen's ability to work is beholden to the whims of immigration policy. In late May, the Trump administration paused interviews for J-1 visas, purportedly to impose new vetting procedures, which resumed in June. The J-1 visa, which includes au pairs, is an educational and cultural exchange visa.

"We are in a small bit of terror right now," said Jen. "As things ratchet up, there's always a little voice in my head, 'Please, please don't revoke visas.' If she goes, then I would have to quit my job."

It's something Jen really doesn't want to do—"for the basic reason that I am my own person," she said.

"I get a lot of satisfaction from my job. … I want to be productive. I want to be part of the workforce," she said. "I'm paying my taxes. I'm producing for my company. That's what I would think they would want."

Immigration Enforcement Reduces Childcare Access and Workforce Participation

Research shows that the link between immigration enforcement and childcare worker shortages is more than hypothetical—it has happened before.

In the late 2000s, the government created the Secure Communities program, which expanded collaboration between local and state police and federal immigration enforcement, increasing the likelihood that undocumented immigrants would be detained and deported.[42]

One study found that between 2008 and 2014, preschool participation in center-based childcare dropped in areas employing Secure Communities, especially among Hispanic children and those from economically disadvantaged families. At the same time, the number of employees at childcare centers dropped. These areas experienced a decline in the number of operating childcare centers, affecting not only the jobs of U.S.-born childcare workers, but also those of parents who relied on these centers for childcare.[43]

Another study narrowed in on the effects of Secure Communities on college-educated women with children under the age of 5.[44] The study found not only that increased immigration enforcement actions reduced the working hours of immigrant childcare workers, but that college-educated U.S.-born mothers of young children—the group most sensitive to changes in price for outsourcing household labor such as childcare—had to reduce their own working hours as well.[45]

Photo credit: Kevork Djansezian/Getty Images

While it is harder to document the impact of immigration enforcement on immigrant parents who rely on family, friends, and neighbors for childcare, it seems reasonable to conclude that they would also be undermined. After all, this network of caregivers is more likely to also be comprised of immigrants.[46] The removal of these reliable caregivers would hurt the ability of immigrant parents to work, jeopardizing industries that heavily rely on immigrant workers, such as agriculture, construction, and hospitality.[47]

This year, the Trump administration began rapidly expanding programs similar to Secure Communities, deputizing local law enforcement to carry out immigration enforcement. Such tactics have been shown to make noncitizens fearful of reporting crime and coming to court and have decreased workforce participation—making communities less safe and economically stable for everyone.[48] The Trump administration's harsh enforcement actions now go above and beyond those of Secure Communities, all but ensuring even more severe ramifications for communities, workers, and businesses across the country.

Conclusion

The Trump administration's aggressive and indiscriminate immigration enforcement efforts—aimed ultimately at dissuading immigrants from coming to, or staying in the United States—has deeply detrimental consequences to those who have already built lives in this country and who have become critical to supporting American businesses and their workers. As demonstrated, the childcare sector relies on the experience and availability of immigrant workers, and American parents rely on good, affordable childcare in order to do their jobs.

Immigrants are essential to maintaining stable and accessible care that allows parents—especially women—of all backgrounds to remain in the labor force, providing businesses with the workers they need. If immigrant childcare workers are not available, parents who cannot find other affordable care are forced to cut their working hours or stay out of the workforce altogether, threatening the livelihoods of their families. Ultimately, this is a blow to American employers, who already struggle with worker retention and recruitment.[49]

SPOTLIGHT

Fear and Empty Classrooms: The Human Cost of Immigration Crackdowns

In many ways, the Children's Playhouse Early Learning Center is the heart of its community. And this year, said owner Damaris Alvarado-Rodriguez, the community has been decimated.[50]

Nestled in a low-income, primarily immigrant neighborhood in south Philadelphia, the center provides job tips, educational sessions, donations, and more, in addition to childcare. It is one of three Children's Playhouses in the city, all owned by Damaris, a businesswoman from New York City.

The center's children are all U.S. citizens between the age of 0 and 5. Nearly all are from Hispanic or Asian immigrant families. Before the Trump administration's immigration crackdowns, the center enrolled 158 children—the maximum number permitted. Now, it has 97. Damaris has had to close one classroom and lay off five teachers, all of whom are U.S. citizens and two of whom were born in this country. She worries about the absent children.

Even parents who still have valid immigration status "went into hiding," she said. "There were so many policies at once that they didn't know how they would be affected. They were afraid of dropping their children off at school and having ICE waiting for them."

If the situation continues, Damaris wonders if she'll have to shut this location down, a move that would cost 23 more teachers their jobs. "We haven't been able to fill our classrooms—people are afraid," she said. "Now I'm really second-guessing running the childcare center. If we can't enroll, we can't continue in business."

Photo Credit: The Children's Playhouse, in Philadelphia, 2025

But mostly, Damaris is worried about the families she no longer sees—anywhere. She does not see children out and about, or families at events. The adults don't seem to be going to work; vans that used to bring residents to factory and construction jobs are nowhere to be seen. Some families have self-deported, she said: "Nobody wants to live in fear."

"All of this stuff dismantles so much of the work that we've put into building up our community," Damaris said. "These are hardworking people. They contribute to society. We [the daycare centers] help build that economic growth."

And the children who are no longer at their preschool? Where are they? "I don't know," Damaris said. "I would love to know. I hope they're OK."

The daycare center provided those children with more than socialization and learning. Damaris regularly raises funds so she can give meals, diapers, infant formula, and clothing to families in need. "We like to fill in those gaps."

"We know that most of the children are food-deprived," Damaris said. "I pray that they're OK, that they're good and safe."

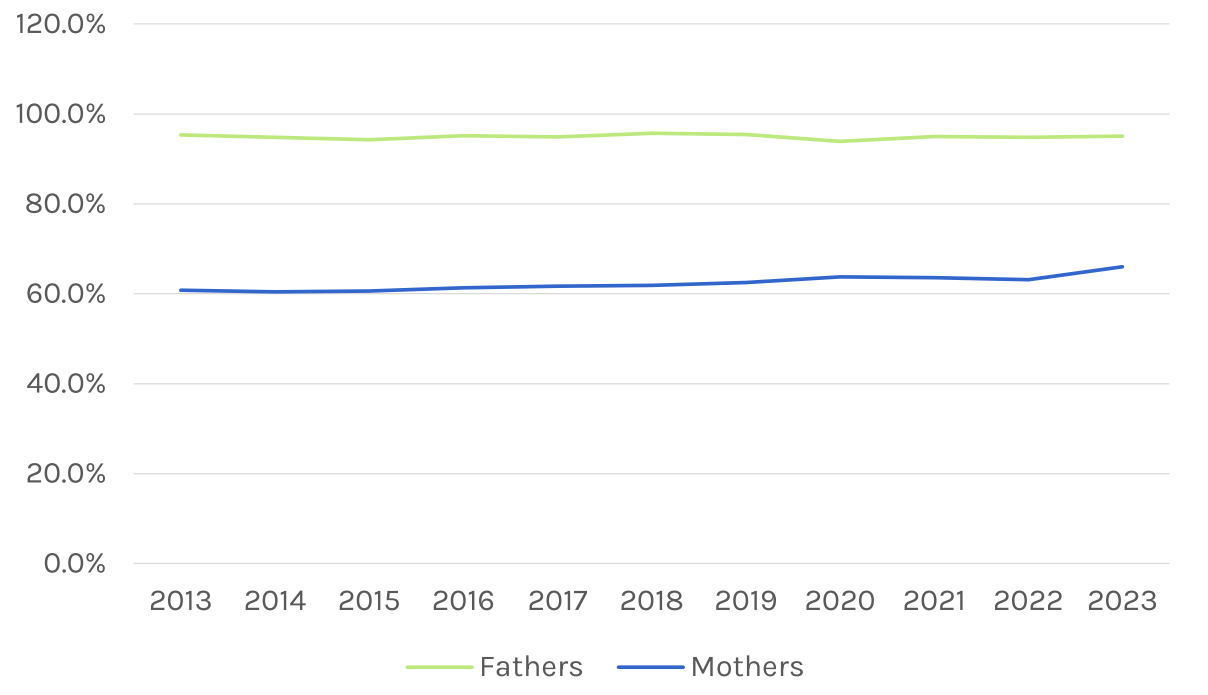
Feature: Immigrant Childcare Workers in Texas

Working Families with Young Children

In Texas, 1.8 million workers have young children, defined as those under the age of 5. These workers comprise 12.1 percent of the state's employed workforce.

While the labor force participation rate of men with young children stayed roughly the same between 2013 and 2023 at around 95 percent, the share of women participating in the labor force increased from 60.8 percent to 66.0 percent.

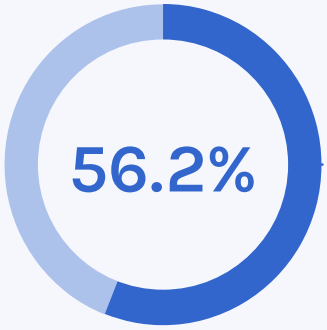
FIGURE 7: LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION RATES OF PARENTS WITH CHILDREN UNDER AGE 5



Source: American Immigration Council analysis of the American Community Survey

Among the 100 largest metropolitan areas in the United States, several in Texas have some of the lowest labor force participation rates among parents of children under the age of 5, such as El Paso (73 percent) and McAllen (73.9 percent). The rates were lower than the statewide rate of 79.4 percent or the national rate of 81.8 percent.

Of the children in Texas under the age of 5, 1.1 million, or 56.2 percent, live in households without a stay-at-home parent, indicating a strong demand for childcare support.



Share of children under 5 in Texas who live in households without a stay-at-home parent. This represents **1.1 million children**.

Immigrant Childcare Workforce

In Texas, 22,900 immigrants worked in the childcare sector, making up 19.2 percent of the state's childcare workforce. In the Houston metro area, 30.8 percent of all childcare workers were immigrants, while in the Dallas metro area, 19.7 percent were immigrants.

About 18,900 immigrants provide center-based or home-based childcare services in Texas, representing 18.0 percent of the workforce. Meanwhile, immigrants make up 28.7 percent of childcare providers working in private households.

Immigrant childcare workers were also more likely to be self-employed than their U.S.-born counterparts, either starting their own childcare business, and sometimes hiring employees, or contracting their childcare services directly to families. In Texas, 20.9 percent of immigrant childcare workers were self-employed in 2023, compared with 16.5 percent of U.S.-born childcare workers.

Immigrants were also more likely to work full-time in the childcare sector. Nearly 71 percent of immigrants in the childcare sector worked at least 35 hours a week, compared with 60.7 percent of U.S.-born childcare workers.

SPOTLIGHT

Safia's Journey: From Kabul to Houston

Safia's family was doing well in Afghanistan. She earned a college degree and taught math at an elementary school in Kabul. Her husband worked as an electrical engineer. They had three children.[51]

But her husband's job for 17 years had been with the United States, specifically, USAID. When the Taliban retook control of the Afghan government in 2021, he was placed on a death list, putting his entire family in danger.

Safia's family eventually found safety in Houston. They are among the 50,500 Afghan refugees who have received the Special Immigrant Visa (SIV), a program created by Congress to help Afghans who worked for the U.S. government abroad.[52]

While the family is now safe, they are no longer economically secure. Attaining the licensure to work in their professions in the United States will take years. While he works at a lower-level job at an electronics company, the only childcare job she was able to find was as a low-paid helper at a center far from home. Without transportation, it took her too long to get to work.

"I worked one year in pre-K in Afghanistan," Safia said. "I love working with children." She found a free childcare training and licensing class at ECDC – Houston Multicultural Center, a nonprofit that supports refugees and immigrants. But under current funding requirements, the course was only open to Afghan refugees who arrived in the United States between 2021 and 2023. Safia arrived in 2024.

Earlene Leverett, a childcare entrepreneur, managed the ECDC childcare training program for 10 years, when it was operated by its affiliate The Alliance for Multicultural Community Services. She has seen the profound difference it can make, not only for refugees but for the broader community, as well.

"Childcare is in crisis," she said. "Employers are finally realizing the impact that childcare has on the economy. Businesses have jobs, they need employees to fill those jobs, those employees need childcare."

"Childcare is in crisis. Employers are finally realizing the impact that childcare has on the economy."

Leverett estimates that 350 to 400 immigrants graduated from the one-year program during her tenure. Some opened their own childcare businesses, creating options for parents who might not otherwise be able to find care. Most graduates used their licenses to secure employment at existing daycare centers, which often struggle to expand due to staffing shortages.

It's a win for everyone, Leverett said. Parents who are already home with young children—most often mothers—can "add substantially to the household income." So,

too, can other mothers who need to take jobs outside the home and, in the case of immigrants, may prefer providers with a familiar cultural background. Employers—particularly in industries more heavily reliant on immigrant labor, like hospitality and healthcare—can access the workers they need.

The U.S. government provides some financial assistance to refugees when they first arrive in the country, but that assistance comes to a halt rather quickly. Nonprofits and others step in with language classes and job training with a single purpose: refugees must be able to support themselves within six months.

"In order to speed up this self-sufficiency goal, it takes everyone in the household working," said Leverett. "When there is no childcare available to the employees then it becomes a huge economic issue."

Leverett ran her own day care centers in Texas for 16 years. Immigrants, she said, have always filled "a big part of the industry as employees."

Providing training for refugees like Safia to secure childcare licenses works, she said. "We saw that happen, the difference that it made in the community. Because that was one thing people needed was employment."

Currently, Safia is working to improve her English and find another affordable program that will help her get a license to open a childcare facility. "I like children, I'm patient with children," she said. "I really want to improve in this field and work with children."

Demographic Profile of Immigrant Childcare Workers

Immigrant women played a significant role in in the state's childcare workforce. About 22,500 immigrant women worked in childcare in Texas, comprising 98.3 percent of all immigrant childcare workers and 18.9 percent of childcare workers from all backgrounds.

A higher share of the immigrant childcare workers, 79.2 percent, fell into the age group of 25 to 64, compared with 64.3 percent for their U.S.-born counterparts. Meanwhile, nearly one in three U.S.-born childcare workers, 32 percent, were between the ages of 16 to 24, compared with 11 percent of immigrant workers.

DEMOGRAPHICS OF IMMIGRANT CHILDCARE WORKERS IN TEXAS

18.9%

Share of all childcare workers in Texas who are immigrant women

79.2%

Share of immigrant childcare workers who are aged between 25 and 64, compared with **64.3%** for their U.S.-born counterparts

81%

Share of immigrant childcare workers in Texas who have lived in the U.S. for more than five years

38.9%

Share of immigrant childcare workers in Texas who came from Mexico

- Hispanic - **63.2%**
- Asian and Pacific Islander - **17.7%**
- Non-Hispanic White - **12.1%**
- Other

Immigrant childcare workers are also more likely to sit at both ends of the educational spectrum—to either lack a high school diploma or have a college degree—than their U.S.-born counterparts. Less than half have graduated high school but not finished college, compared with three-quarters of U.S.-born childcare workers who are in that position.

FIGURE 8: EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT OF CHILDCARE WORKERS IN TEXAS, 2023

Education Level	Share of Immigrant Childcare Workers	Share of U.S.-Born Childcare Workers
Below high school diploma	19.6%	5.3%
High school or some college	49.5%	75.9%
Bachelor's degree or advanced degree	31.0%	18.8%

Source: American Immigration Council analysis of the 2023 American Community Survey

Hispanics made up nearly two-thirds (63.2 percent) of immigrant childcare workers in Texas, followed by Asian and Pacific Islanders (17.7 percent) and non-Hispanic Whites (12.1 percent). More than one-third (38.9 percent) came from Mexico.

Many immigrant childcare workers are longtime residents of the United States: 81 percent have been in the country for more than five years. More than 41 percent of immigrant childcare workers have become naturalized citizens.

Conclusion

Immigrants, especially immigrant women, are critical to ensuring that Texas families have access to the childcare they need. Indiscriminate immigration enforcement tactics, including community raids and fear-inducing anti-immigrant rhetoric, have prevented many immigrants from living and working in the United States. But in doing so, such actions will ultimately hurt Texas families and Texas businesses. Without the outsized support of immigrants in childcare, many parents without affordable childcare alternatives will be forced to reduce the number of hours they work or leave the workforce altogether—a blow to the financial wellbeing of their families, to the bottom line of businesses, which depend on a strong, reliable workforce, and to the region's economic vitality.

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