



PRESS RELEASE

IMMEDIATE RELEASE
December 4, 2014

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Study by Center for Migration Studies Indicates that Significant Percentage of Unauthorized Immigrants May Be Eligible for Permanent Status

New York, NY - On Thursday, December 4, 2014 the Center for Migration Studies of New York (CMS) released the results of a survey on unauthorized immigrants who were found to be potentially eligible—during screening for the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program—for permanent immigration status. By contrast, DACA provides a temporary reprieve from removal and work authorization.

Anecdotal evidence has long suggested that a significant percentage of unauthorized immigrants in the United States may be eligible for immigration benefits or relief, but they either do not know it or are not able to pursue lawful immigration status for other reasons. To test this proposition, during the summer and fall of 2014, CMS, the Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc. (CLINIC), and the National Immigrant Justice Center (NIJC) – via a survey conducted by Professor Tom Wong of the University of California, San Diego – attempted to determine the percentage of unauthorized immigrants who, during the course of seeking out services for DACA, were determined to be potentially eligible for some other form of immigration benefit or relief.

The Potential Eligibility for Relief Survey of Non-Profits or “PERSON” survey targeted organizations that provide legal services to immigrants. Based on responses from 67 organizations, it found that 14.3 percent of DACA-screened unauthorized immigrants were potentially eligible for some other immigration benefit or form of immigration relief, which could put them on path to lawful permanent residence and citizenship. The most common legal remedies available were family-based immigration petitions (25.5 percent), U-Visas (23.9 percent), and Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (12.6 percent). In addition, a far higher percentage of unauthorized persons screened in legal offices - apart from the DACA program—were deemed to be potentially eligible for immigration status.

“These findings highlight the importance of thorough legal screening of applicants for the DACA and recently announced Deferred Action for Parental Accountability (DAPA) programs,” said Donald Kerwin, CMS Executive Director. DAPA applies to unauthorized immigrant parents of US citizens and lawful permanent residents. “Legal screening of unauthorized immigrants has the potential to put many on a path to citizenship,” continued Kerwin. “While the immigration debate often treats immigrants in binary terms, drawing a bright line between legal and unauthorized immigrants, the study highlights the fluidity of immigration status and the fact that (for many) a path to status may be only a legal screening away.”

The study, entitled, “Paths to Lawful Immigration Status: Results and Implications from the PERSON Survey,” is now available in the *Journal on Migration and Human Security* at <http://jmhs.cmsny.org/index.php/jmhs/article/view/37>. Interviews with the authors are available upon request by contacting Rachel Reyes at (212) 337-3080 x. 7012 or rreyes@cmsny.org.

The study was made possible through the support of the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation.

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The Center for Migration Studies (CMS) is a New York-based educational institute devoted to the study of migration, to the promotion of understanding between immigrants and receiving communities, and to public policies that safeguard the dignity and rights of migrants and newcomers. For more information, please visit www.cmsny.org.