

Demographic Profile of Undocumented Hispanic Immigrants in the United States

by Evin Millet and Jacquelyn Pavidon

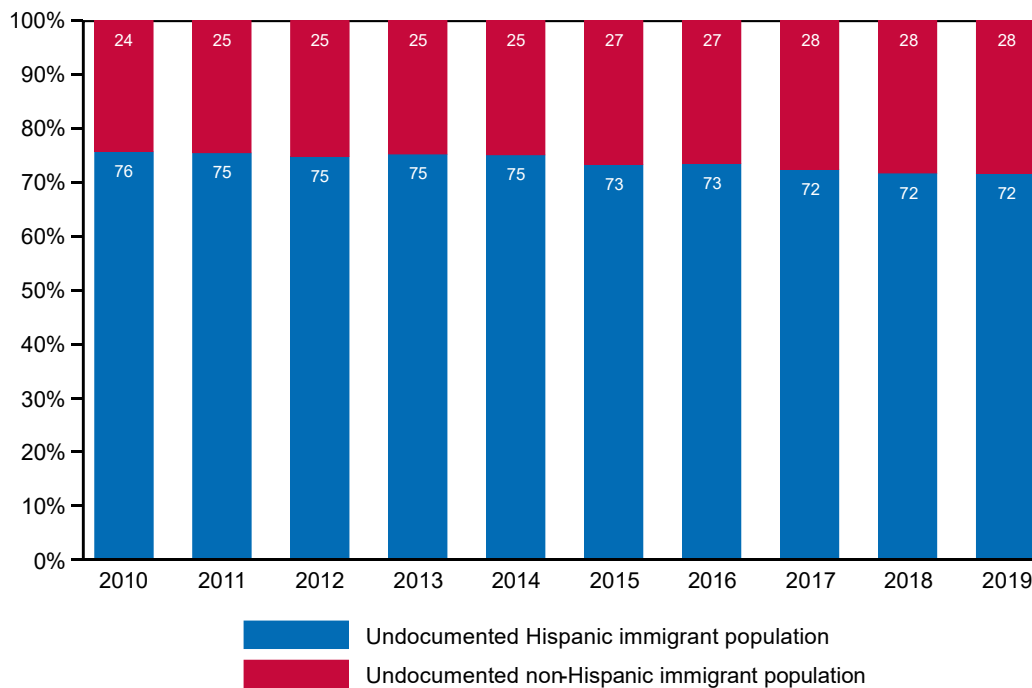
OCTOBER 2022

1 Introduction

Hispanic immigrants make up the largest undocumented immigrant population in the United States. Despite having relatively low levels of education, Hispanic undocumented immigrants have high labor force participation and employment rates, especially in essential occupations. Nevertheless, lack of legal status still serves as a barrier for many, who face wage gaps and are excluded from social safety nets despite their economic contribution. The Center for Migration Studies

of New York (CMS) estimates that approximately 21,036,500 immigrants of Hispanic origin live in the United States, of which 7,410,000 are undocumented, based on one-year 2019 American Community Survey (ACS) data (Ruggles et al. 2021). Figure 1 shows the Hispanic undocumented immigrant population compared to the total undocumented immigrant population from 2010 to 2019. The share of the undocumented population that is Hispanic has remained relatively stable over the last decade, ranging between 72-76 percent.

Figure 1. Total and Hispanic Undocumented Immigrants, by Year, 2010-2019



Source: Center for Migration Studies of New York (CMS). 2022. Democratizing Data Initiative: Undocumented Immigrants in the United States, by Race and Year, 2010-2019 [dataset]. New York, NY: CMS.

2 Demographic Characteristics

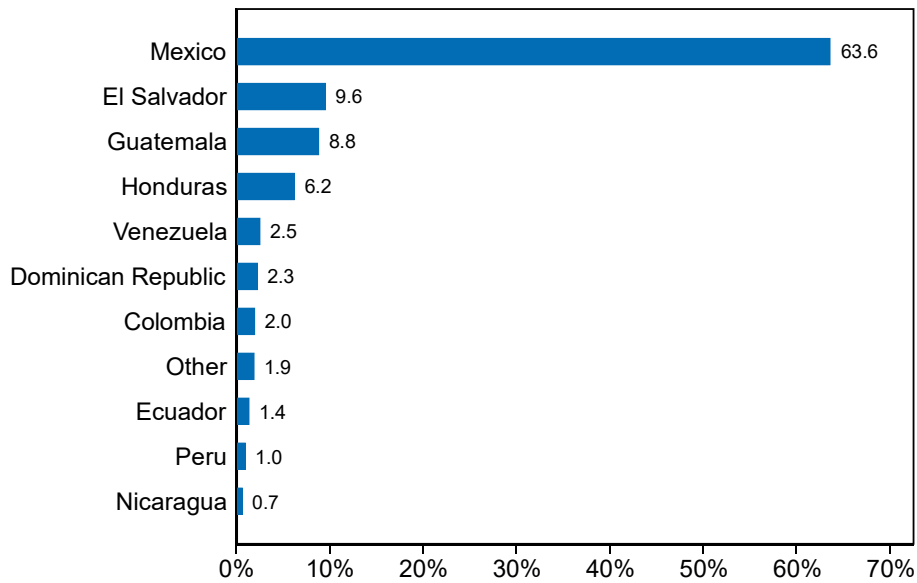
The majority of the undocumented Hispanic population arrived from North America (64 percent) followed by Central America (26 percent), South America (8 percent), the Caribbean (2 percent).¹ Mexicans by far make up the largest share of the Hispanic undocumented immigrant population (63.6 percent). Following Mexico, Hispanic undocumented immigrants in the United States come primarily from El Salvador (9.6 percent), Guatemala (8.8 percent), Honduras (6.2 percent), Venezuela (2.5 percent), Dominican Republic (2.3 percent), Columbia (2.0 percent), Ecuador (1.4 percent), Peru (1.0 percent), and Nicaragua (0.7 percent). These countries together account for almost the entire Hispanic undocumented population (Figure 2).

Over half of the Hispanic undocumented population resides in five states: California, Texas, Florida, New York, and Illinois (Figure 3). Over the past decade (2010-

2019), these five states have remained the top five states of residence, and California and Texas have stayed as the first and second states, respectively, that host the largest share of the Hispanic undocumented population (CMS 2022).

The Hispanic undocumented population is relatively gender-balanced and approximately half are long-term residents. Forty-six percent of Hispanic undocumented immigrants are female, and 54 percent are male. Half are unmarried, 45 percent are married with a spouse present, and 5 percent are married with a spouse absent (among those aged 15 and older.) Slightly more than half (52 percent) have been living in the United States for 15 years or more. Half of the undocumented Hispanic population speaks English well, very well, or only English. Newly arrived immigrants may still be building their English-language skills in the United States.

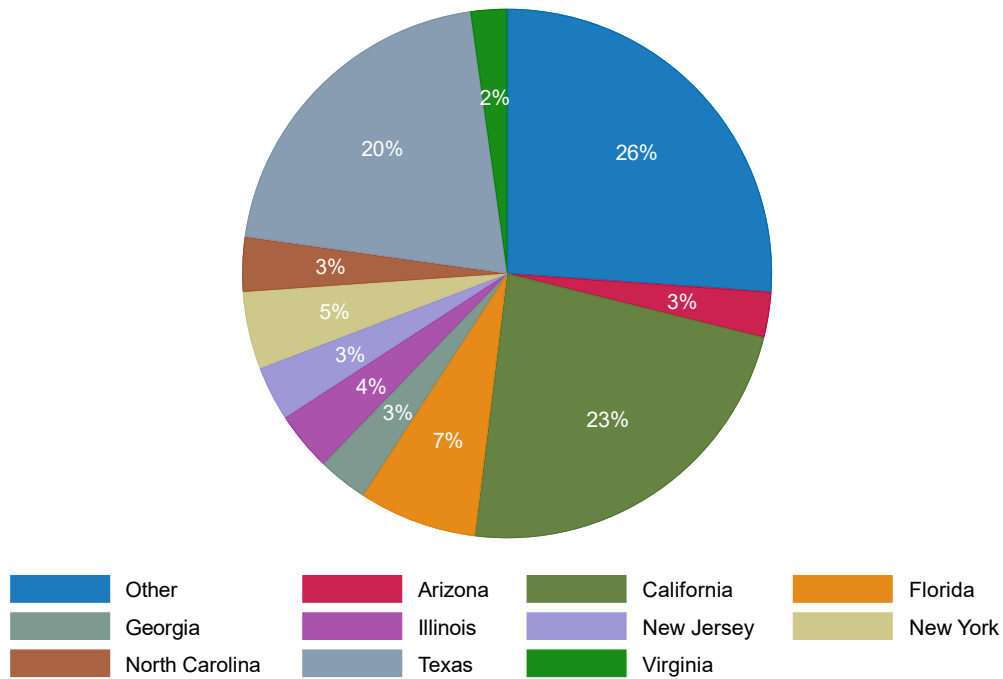
Figure 2. Hispanic Undocumented Immigrants, by Country of Origin



Source: CMS estimates using the one -year 2019 American Community Survey (ACS) data, Ruggles et al. (2021).

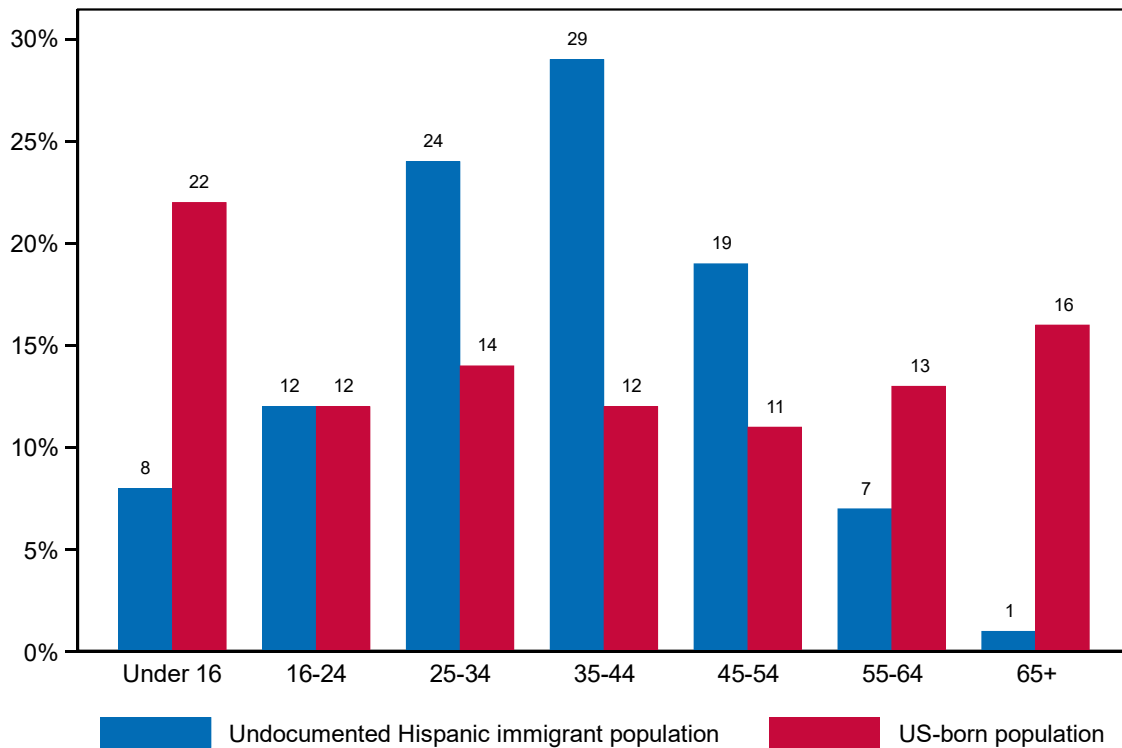
¹ Caribbean countries include Anguilla, Antigua and Barbuda, Aruba, Bahamas, Barbados, Bonaire, British Virgin Islands, Caribbean Netherlands, Cayman Islands, Cuba, Curacao, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Dutch St. Maarten, French St. Maarten, Grenada, Guadeloupe, Haiti, Jamaica, Martinique, Montserrat, Netherlands Antilles, Saba, Sint Maarten, St. Barthelemy, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Eustatius, St. Martin, St. Vincent, Trinidad and Tobago, Turks and Caicos Islands, Virgin Islands.

Figure 3: Hispanic Undocumented Immigrants, by State



Source: CMS estimates using the one-year 2019 American Community Survey (ACS) data, Ruggles et al. (2021).

Figure 4. Age Distribution of Hispanic Undocumented Immigrants and the US-born Population



Source: CMS estimates using the one-year 2019 American Community Survey (ACS) data, Ruggles et al. (2021).

Hispanic undocumented immigrants are overall younger than the US-born population (Figure 4). The vast majority of Hispanic undocumented immigrants are of working age (16-64) (91 percent), and most are of prime working age (25-54) (72 percent). By contrast, less than two-thirds of the US-born population (62 percent) are of working age, and just over a third are of prime working age (37 percent). Age gaps between countries can drive migration as younger persons in sending countries seek opportunities in receiving countries. These younger workers bring human capital and fill open jobs in the United States, a country with an aging workforce. population compared to the total undocumented immigrant population from 2010 to 2019. The share of the undocumented population that is Hispanic has remained relatively stable over the last decade, ranging between 72-76 percent.

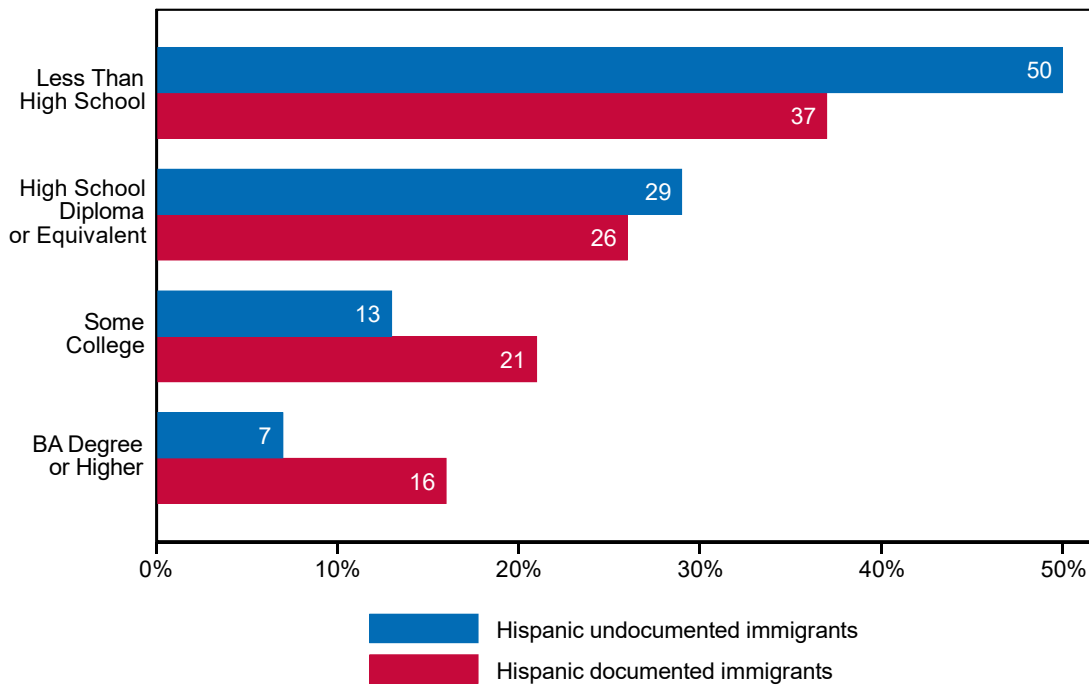
3 Education and Labor Force Participation

The Hispanic undocumented immigrant population overall has relatively low levels of education. Lack of legal status is a barrier to higher educational attainment in the

United States. However, despite this relatively low level of education, Hispanic undocumented immigrants are crucial to filling key occupations in the US economy.

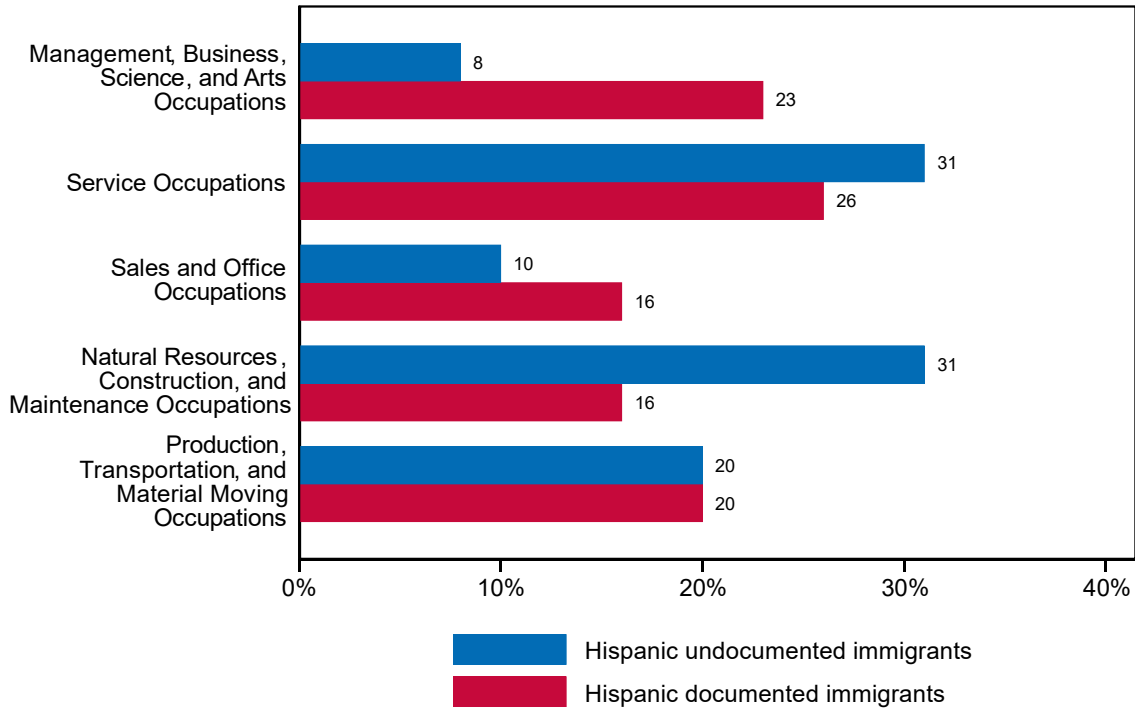
Half of the Hispanic undocumented population, ages 18 and over, have less than a high school education. Twenty-nine percent have completed high school, 13 percent have some college education, and 7 percent have a college degree or higher education (Figure 5). Hispanic undocumented immigrants from Mexico are less likely to have an education level beyond a high school degree (17 percent) compared to those from other countries (26 percent). Legal status can be a barrier to education. Figure 5 shows that educational attainment increases substantially with legal status: only 37 percent of Hispanic documented immigrants, ages 18 and over, have less than a high school education, 26 percent have completed high school, 21 percent have some college education, and 16 percent have a college degree or higher education.

Figure 5. Educational Attainment of Hispanic Immigrants (Ages 18 and Older), by Immigration Status



Source: CMS estimates using the one -year 2019 American Community Survey (ACS) data, Ruggles et al. (2021).

Figure 6. Occupational Composition of Hispanic Immigrants (Ages 16 and Older), by Immigration Status



Source: CMS estimates using the one-year 2019 American Community Survey (ACS) data, Ruggles et al. (2021).

Hispanic undocumented immigrants are concentrated in certain sectors. Hispanic undocumented immigrants are more likely to be in the labor force (78 percent) than the US-born Hispanic population (68 percent), or the overall US-born population (63 percent). More than 96 percent of Hispanic undocumented immigrants in the labor force are employed. Nearly two-thirds of the overall Hispanic undocumented population is employed in either *Service occupations* or *Natural resources, construction, and maintenance occupations* (Figure 6). Legal status plays a role in the type of occupations in which immigrants are employed. Only 8 percent of undocumented Hispanic immigrants are employed in *Management, business, and arts occupations* as opposed to 23 percent of Hispanic documented immigrants. On the contrary, 31 percent of Hispanic undocumented immigrants are employed in each of the occupational categories, *Service occupations* and *Natural resources,*

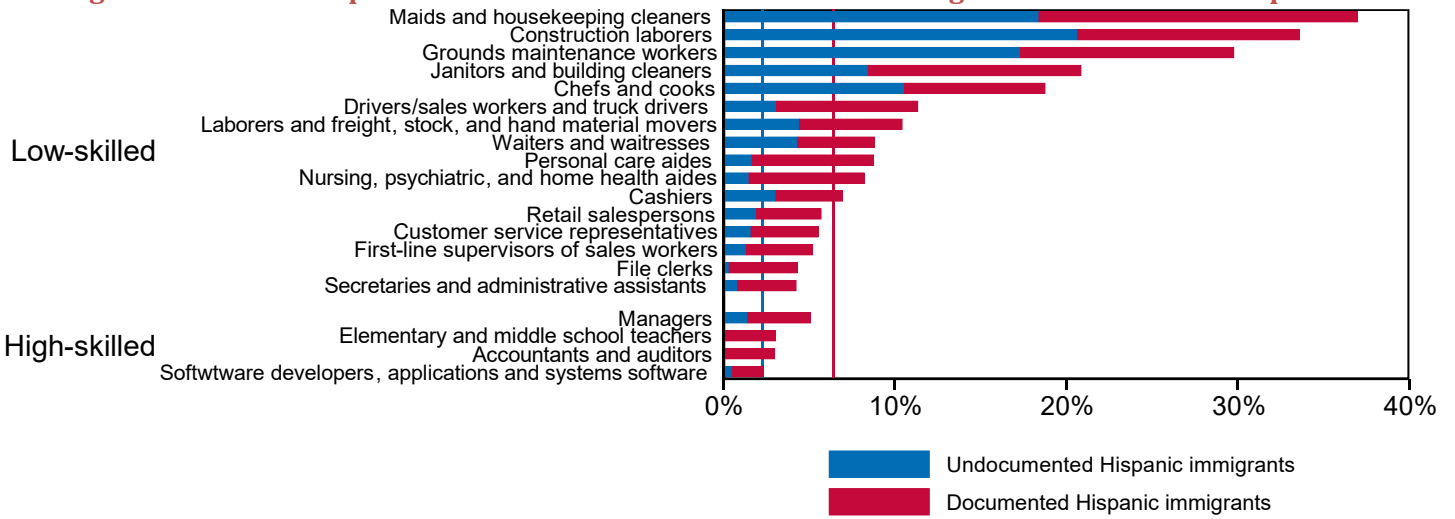
construction, and maintenance occupations, compared to 26 percent and 16 percent of Hispanic documented immigrants, respectively.

Many Hispanic undocumented immigrants help fill jobs which do not require a high level of education yet are nevertheless categorized as essential. Figure 7 shows the top 20 detailed essential occupations² which employ the largest number of persons in the United States. Undocumented Hispanic immigrants, and Hispanic immigrants overall, represent a larger share of the workforce in many of the top key low-skilled occupations, relative to their share of the overall US population. Hispanic undocumented immigrants are overrepresented in the following occupations:

- Construction laborers
- Maids and housekeeping cleaners
- Grounds and maintenance workers

² Essential occupations are those in those industries classified as essential by the Department of Homeland Security Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency.

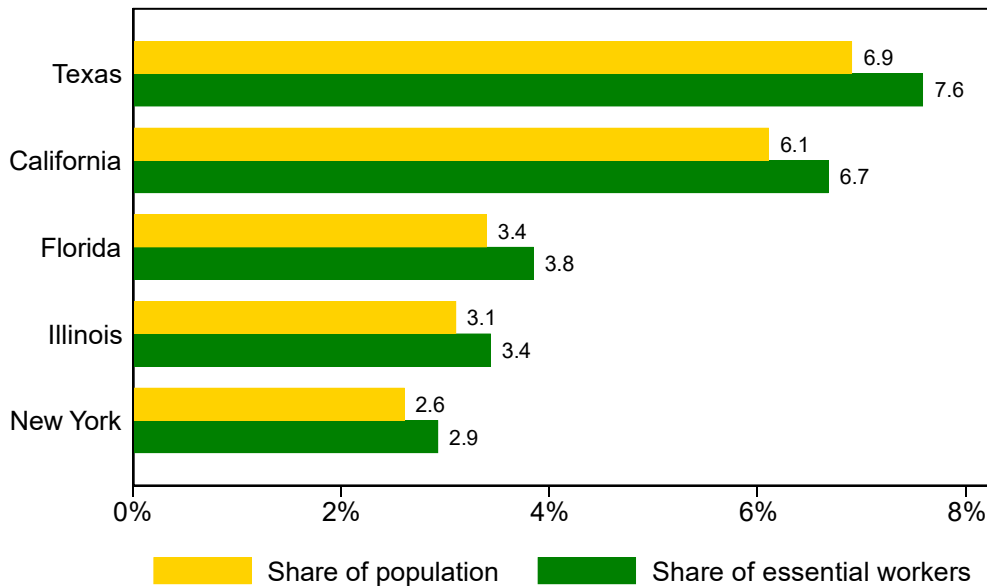
Figure 7. Share of Hispanic Documented and Undocumented Immigrants in Essential Occupations



Note: The occupations are the top 20 essential occupations which employ the largest number of persons in the United States. Essential occupations are classified by the Department of Homeland Security Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency. The blue vertical line represents the share of Hispanic undocumented immigrants in the US population. The red vertical line represents the share of Hispanic immigrants overall in the US population.

Source: CMS estimates using the one-year 2019 American Community Survey (ACS) data, Ruggles et al. (2021).

Figure 8. Share of Hispanic Undocumented Immigrants in the Population and the Essential Workforce, by US State



Note: Essential occupations are classified by the Department of Homeland Security Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency.

Source: CMS estimates using the one-year 2019 American Community Survey (ACS) data, Ruggles et al. (2021)

Table 1. Top Ten Occupations of Hispanic Undocumented Immigrants, by Sex (Ages 16 and Older)

A. FEMALE		B. MALE	
Occupation	Percent	Occupation	Percent
Maids and housekeeping cleaners	15.54%	Construction laborers	11.84%
Cooks	6.74%	Landscaping and groundskeeping workers	6.69%
Janitors and building cleaners	6.51%	Carpenters	5.73%
Cashiers	4.48%	Cooks	4.99%
Other agricultural workers	4.05%	Other agricultural workers	4.95%
Waiters and waitresses	3.67%	Painters and paperhangers	4.29%
Packers and packagers, hand	3.63%	Driver/sales workers and truck drivers	3.34%
Childcare workers	2.95%	Janitors and building cleaners	3.13%
Food preparation workers	2.67%	Laborers and freight, stock, and material movers, hand	2.44%
Retail salespersons	2.08%	Roofers	2.18%
Total	52.32%	Total	49.58%

Source: CMS estimates using the one-year 2019 American Community Survey (ACS) data, Ruggles et al. (2021).

- Chefs and cooks
- Janitors and building cleaners
- Laborers and freight, stock, and hand material movers
- Waiters and waitresses
- Drivers/sales workers and truck drivers
- Cashiers

Hispanic undocumented workers represent a larger share of the essential workforce than their share of the population in the top five US states that host the largest share of this population. Figure 8 shows the share that Hispanic undocumented immigrants comprise of the population and the share they comprise of the essential workforce in Texas, California, Florida, New York, and Illinois. In all five states, Hispanic undocumented immigrants are overrepresented among essential workers. In Texas and California, for example, Hispanic undocumented immigrants comprise 6.9 and 6.1 percent of the population respectively, but 7.6 and 6.7 percent of essential workers.

Hispanic undocumented men are much more likely to participate in the labor force than US-born men, whereas the labor force participation for Hispanic undocumented women is roughly the same as the US-born. Ninety percent of Hispanic undocumented men are employed, 8 percent are not in the labor force, and 2 percent are unemployed. By contrast, among the US-

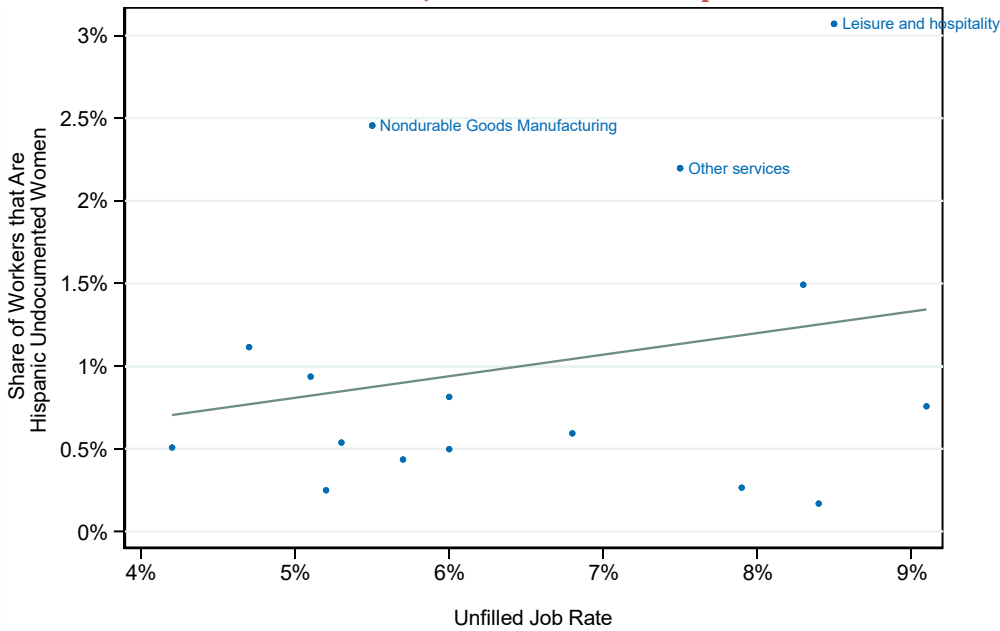
born ages 16 and over, only 64 percent of men are employed, while 33 percent are not in the labor force and 3 percent are unemployed. For women, the employment rate of Hispanic undocumented immigrants and the US-born is 56 percent. For Hispanic undocumented women, 56 percent of women are employed, 40 percent are not in the labor force, and 4 percent are unemployed. By comparison, among US-born women, ages 16 and over, 41 percent are not in the labor force, and 3 percent are unemployed.

Table 1 shows the top 10 occupations in which the largest share of Hispanic undocumented female and male immigrants are employed. Over half of female Hispanic undocumented immigrants (nearly 1.1 million) are employed in the top 10 occupations listed in Panel A. Additionally, half of the male Hispanic undocumented immigrants (over 1.7 million) are employed in the top 10 occupations listed in Panel B.

Hispanic undocumented immigrants, particularly women, help to fill jobs where there are labor shortages. Figure 9 shows there is a positive correlation across occupations between the unfilled job rate³ and the share of workers that are Hispanic undocumented women. In other words, Hispanic undocumented women are more likely to be working in the jobs that are more

³ The unfilled job rate is the share of unfilled jobs over the total jobs (filled and unfilled) in the industry.

Figure 9. Correlation between Share of Workers That Are Hispanic Undocumented Immigrants and the Unfilled Job Rate across Occupations



Note: Each scatter point represents an industry. The unfilled job rate is the share of unfilled jobs divided by the total number of jobs in the industry

Source: CMS estimates using the one-year 2019 American Community Survey (ACS) data, Ruggles et al. (2021) and the US Bureau of Labor Statistics BLS Job Openings and Labor Turnover Survey June2022 monthly national report.

likely to be unfilled. Figure 8 highlights *Leisure and hospitality*, *Nondurable goods manufacturing*, and *Other services* as the industries that employ the largest share of Hispanic female undocumented workers.

Legal status can be a barrier to higher earnings and financial stability, as shown by the wage gap between documented and undocumented Hispanic immigrants.

The mean and median annual wages of Hispanic undocumented immigrants who are employed (ages 16 and above) are \$28,252 and \$25,000, respectively, whereas the mean and median wages for Hispanic documented immigrants are \$40,032 and \$30,000, respectively. Furthermore, 21 percent of the Hispanic undocumented population live at or below the poverty threshold, and only 36 percent own or are buying a house.

4 Legalization under Pending Bills

CMS provides estimates of the undocumented population in the United States, populations that are eligible for special legal status programs, and those that would be eligible for permanent residence (legalization)

under pending bills (Kerwin, Pacas, and Warren 2022). The CMS estimates of the numbers and characteristics of Hispanic undocumented immigrants coming that could be eligible for permanent residence under pending bills are presented in Table 2.

The [American Dream and Promise Act of 2021](#) (ADPA) provides conditional permanent resident status for immigrants who entered the United States as a minor; removal of the conditions on permanent resident status for persons who meet certain requirements specified in the bill, such as completing certain programs at an educational institution, serving in the military, or being

\$25,000:

Median wage of Hispanic undocumented workers

employed; and adjustment to lawful permanent resident (LPR) status for immigrants eligible for temporary protected status (TPS) and deferred enforced departure proficiency levels. Even though they all completed high school, the share of those pursuing higher education is low. (DED).⁴ Hispanic undocumented immigrants who could be eligible for conditional permanent residence and removal of conditions on permanent residence under ADPA are longer-term residents and have high English

Over 2.1 million Hispanic undocumented immigrants could acquire legal status under the [Dream Act of 2021](#), which provides conditional permanent residence and removal of conditions on permanent residence for undocumented immigrants who were younger than 18 years of age on the initial date of US entry, have been continuously physically present in the United States for four years preceding the bill's enactment, and have fulfilled specified educational and other requirements specified in the bill.⁵ Even though nearly all persons eligible for legalization under this Act completed high school, just over a third went on to pursue higher education, indicating that legal status may be a barrier to pursuing higher education.

The [Citizenship for Essential Workers Act](#) provides lawful permanent resident status to those who have worked essential jobs during the pandemic and their spouses, parents, and children, as well as to the spouses, parents, and children of immigrants who performed essential labor and died from COVID-19.⁶ The bill would provide more than 4.2 million Hispanic undocumented immigrant essential workers, not including their immediate family members, with the opportunity for

legal status and a path to citizenship. This group is comprised of short-term residents with low English proficiency and education levels, highlighting that often immigrants with lower education levels are those who are performing the essential jobs in the US economy.

An estimated 320,400 Hispanic undocumented immigrants would be eligible for certified agricultural worker (CAW) status under the [Farm Workforce Modernization Act of 2021](#), which would provide undocumented farmworkers and their family members with a path to legal immigration status and citizenship.⁷

Those who could be eligible Those who could be eligible for legalization under this Act also are short-term residents and have low English proficiency and education levels, though nevertheless performing essential work.

CMS estimates that all Hispanic undocumented immigrants would be *prima facie* eligible for a legalization program if Congress passes the [US Citizenship Act of 2021](#), which would provide lawful prospective immigrant (LPI) status to undocumented immigrants who were physically present in the United States on or before January 1, 2021.⁸ The bill also provides lawful permanent resident (LPR) status to eligible noncitizens who entered the United States as a minor or were eligible for TPS or DED. In contrast to the other groups, *DACA recipients and childhood arrivals* or *TPS and DED recipients* who would be eligible for LPR status under the Citizenship Act are longer-term residents and have higher English proficiency levels. However, similar to the other groups, the share that pursue higher education remains low.

⁴ H.R.6 - 117th Congress (2021-2022): American Dream and Promise Act of 2021. (2021, June 15). See <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/6>

⁵ Dream Act of 2021, S. 264, 117th Cong. (2021-2022). <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/senate-bill/264>

⁶ Citizenship for Essential Workers Act, S. 747, 117th Cong. (2021-2022). <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/senate-bill/747>

⁷ Farm Workforce Modernization Act of 2021, H.R. 1603, 117th Cong. (2021-2022). <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/1603?s=1&r=76>

⁸ US Citizenship Act of 2021. H.R. 1177 and S. 348, 117th Cong. (2021-2022). <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/1177>

Table 2. Estimates of the Number and Characteristics of the Hispanic Undocumented Population Affected by Legislative Programs

Program	Total	In the US 15+ years	Speak English well very well or only English	Completed high school	Some college B.A. or higher	Household income above poverty level	Have health insurance
American Dream and Promise Act of 2021							
Conditional permanent residence	1,112,200	74%	82%	100%	38%	86%	47%
Removal of conditions on permanent residence	761,000	80%	82%	100%	37%	91%	50%
Direct adjustment to LPR status for TPS recipients under the Promise Act	262,300	100%	51%	41%	14%	87%	54%
Direct adjustment to LPR status for DED recipients under the Promise Act	177,100	8%	63%	95%	78%	82%	69%
Dream Act of 2021							
Conditional permanent residence	1,634,000	53%	83%	96%	36%	80%	50%
Removal of conditions on permanent residence	492,400	89%	88%	99%	41%	92%	52%
Citizenship for Essential Workers Act							
Essential Workers	4,244,500	57%	49%	49%	19%	86%	39%
Farm Workforce Modernization Act							
CAW status	320,400	54%	26%	30%	9%	83%	37%
US Citizenship Act of 2021							
General legalization program	7,410,000	51%	50%	50%	20%	79%	39%
LPR Status for DACA recipients and childhood arrivals	761,000	80%	82%	100%	37%	91%	50%
DACA recipients	488,500	89%	88%	100%	41%	92%	52%
Other childhood arrivals	272,500	64%	72%	100%	30%	90%	48%
Total TPS-DED recipients	262,300	100%	51%	41%	14%	87%	54%

Note: Figures are rounded to the nearest hundred. Source: CMS estimates using the one-year 2019 American Community Survey (ACS) data, Ruggles et al. (2021).

CMS estimates indicate that Hispanic undocumented immigrants are highly engaged in natural resources, which are potentially low-skilled and lower-paying occupations. Furthermore, our estimates highlight the fact that many Hispanic undocumented workers are filling in essential jobs but not receiving the benefits, compensation, and job security that they could receive if they had legal status. The enactment of pending bills would provide legal status and a path to citizenship to millions of Hispanic undocumented immigrants as they make essential contributions to local communities without access to protection and public services.

5 References

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The Center for Migration Studies of New York (CMS) is a think tank and an educational institute devoted to the study of international migration, to the promotion of understanding between immigrants and receiving communities, and to public policies that safeguard the dignity and rights of migrants, refugees, and newcomers.

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Suggested Citation

Millet, Evin and Jacquelyn Pavilon. 2022. "Demographic Profile of Undocumented Hispanic Immigrants in the United States." Center for Migration Studies of New York (CMS) Report. New York, NY: CMS.

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