

# Children in Immigrant Families

## AN ACTION FOR CHILDREN NORTH CAROLINA EMERGING ISSUES REPORT

February 2010

### Introduction

All children deserve access to good health, safety, a sound education and the stability that comes with family financial security. And yet for far too many of the 340,000 children in immigrant families in North Carolina, this access has been denied. Children in immigrant families comprise 15 percent of the child population of the state, and the vast majority of them are U.S. citizens, but many of them are blocked out of the health care system, pushed out of school, and relegated to the economic margins.

From 2000 to 2007, every state in the South has seen at least a 70 percent increase in the number of children in immigrant families.<sup>1</sup> With the continuing growth of a vulnerable population in our state and our nation, it is vital for our economic and social structures that we take a more in-depth look at the well-being of these children.

*This report is based on data from the U.S. Census, the 2008 American Community Survey and data from state agencies, unless otherwise noted. For this report, "children in immigrant families" is defined as children under age 18 who are themselves foreign-born or reside with at least one foreign-born parent.*

### Data Highlights

- 84 percent of children in immigrant families are U.S. citizens.
- The national origins of North Carolina's children in immigrant families are diverse, with families coming from Latin America, Africa, Asia and Europe.
- 78 percent of school-age children in immigrant families are fluent in English; 45 percent are bilingual.
- 84 percent of children in immigrant families live in two-parent households, compared to 69 percent of U.S. born families.
- Although the majority of immigrant parents in North Carolina work, children in immigrant families are more likely to live in low-income households than non-immigrants.



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## North Carolina Demographics

Children of immigrants are the fastest growing segment of the population under age 18 in the United States, representing more than one in five U.S. children.<sup>2</sup> In 2008, there were almost 340,000 children (ages 0-17) in immigrant families in North Carolina – 15 percent of all children in the state. Eighty-four percent of these children are U.S. citizens.

### The vast majority of children in immigrant families in North Carolina are U.S. citizens

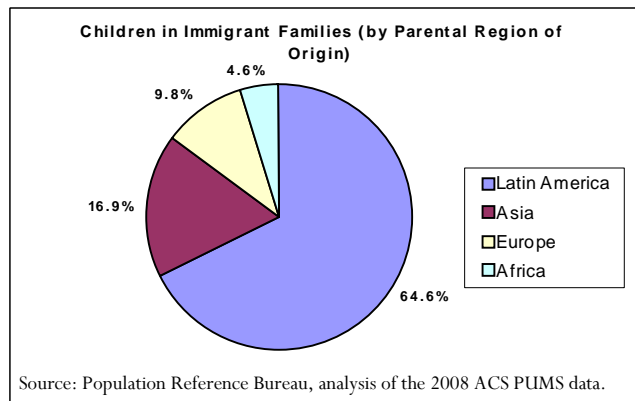
	Children in immigrant families		Children in immigrant families who are U.S. citizens	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
N.C	339,920	15%	284,852	84%
U.S	16,709,286	23%	14,496,816	87%

Source: Population Reference Bureau, analysis of the 2008 ACS PUMS data.

Almost half of children in immigrant families are living with parents who are U.S. citizens; however, 54 percent live in mixed-status families—meaning that neither of their parents is a U.S. citizen.<sup>3</sup> Studies find that children living in mixed-status families are more likely to experience isolation and lack of access to benefits they may qualify for.<sup>4</sup> Barriers faced by these families are a lack of familiarity with and challenges in navigating programs and services.

## The majority of children in immigrant families have origins in Latin America

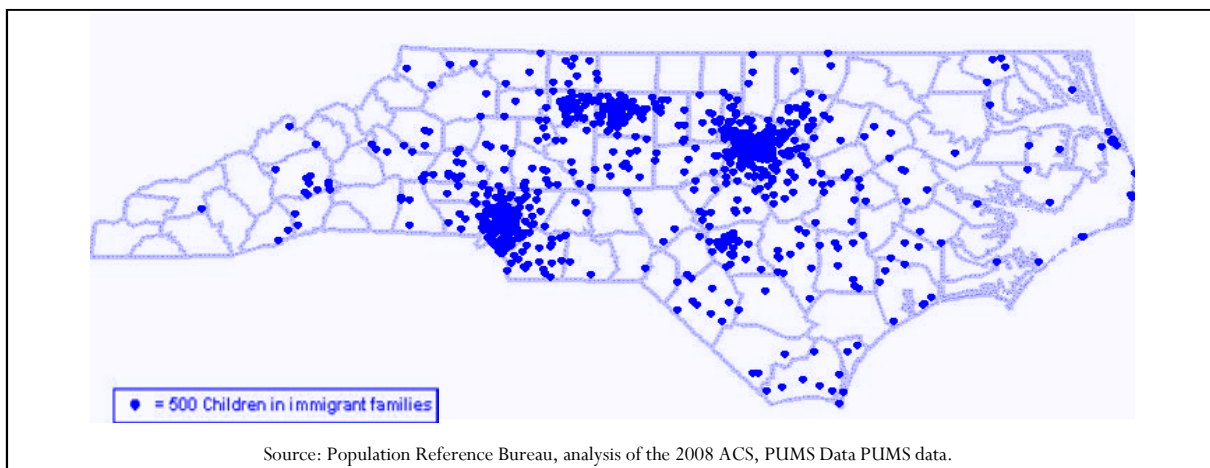
The national origins of North Carolina's children in immigrant families are diverse. In 2008, the largest groups of children in immigrant families have origins in Latin America, Asia, and Europe. In fact, sixty-five percent of North Carolina's children in immigrant families have at least one parent from Latin America.



The map of North Carolina below highlights the dispersion of children of immigrants living throughout the state. Children in immigrant families reside in nearly all 100 counties but are concentrated in the Triad, Triangle, and Charlotte Metropolitan areas.

Children in immigrant families are more likely to live in two-parent families than children in U.S.-born families—84 percent to 69 percent.<sup>5</sup> Children in two-parent households usually benefit both emotionally and economically, which can play a key role in child development.<sup>6</sup>

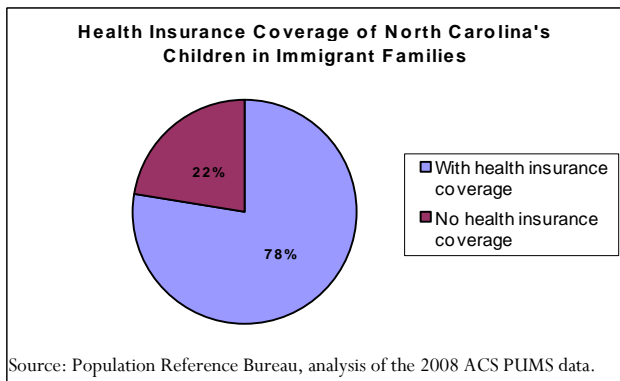
### Children in immigrant families are concentrated in major urban areas



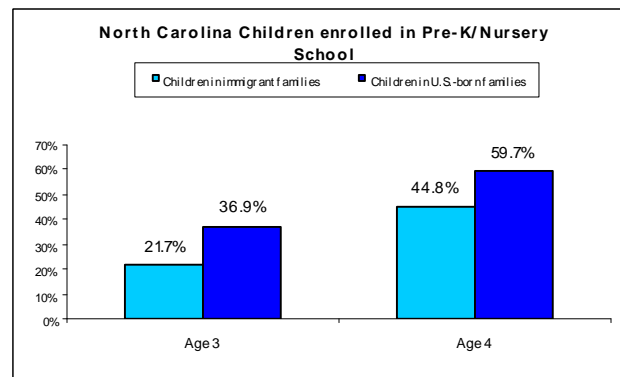
## Children of immigrants face barriers to services

More than half of North Carolina's children in immigrant families live in mixed-status families, making them especially vulnerable since parents without U.S. citizenship are often reluctant to interact with government agencies and miss out on basic services available for their children.<sup>7</sup>

Almost a quarter of North Carolina's children in immigrant families have no health insurance coverage, compared to only eight percent of children in U.S.-born families. Twenty states have removed the five-year waiting period for public health insurance program eligibility for legal resident immigrant children. North Carolina is considering such a change.



Nationally and in N.C., children in immigrant families are less likely to be enrolled in nursery school than their peers in U.S.-born families.<sup>8</sup> Children learn more during their early childhood years than during any other time in their lives, and children who have early, quality education do better in school and are more likely to graduate high school.

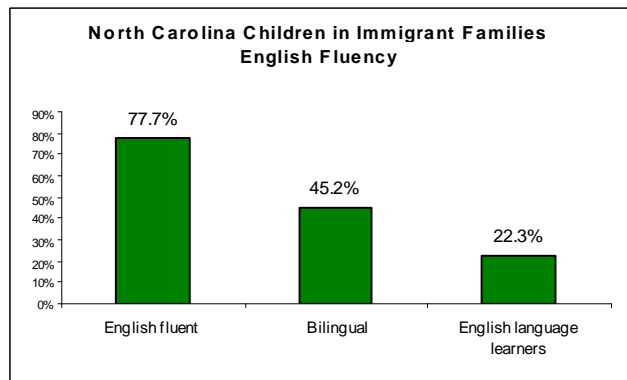


Early education is particularly important to the cognitive and language development of children in families learning English as a second language.<sup>9</sup>

Factors such as employment status, occupation, income level and social status will also influence immigrant parents' access to and utilization of early childhood care and education services.<sup>10</sup> Investing in culturally competent programs and outreach will improve access and utilization rates.

## The majority of children in immigrant families are fluent in English

In North Carolina, 78 percent of school-age children of immigrants (ages 5-17) are English fluent. Forty-five percent are bilingual, meaning that they are English fluent and also speak another language at home. As North Carolina competes in an increasingly global economy, a bilingual workforce is a critical asset.

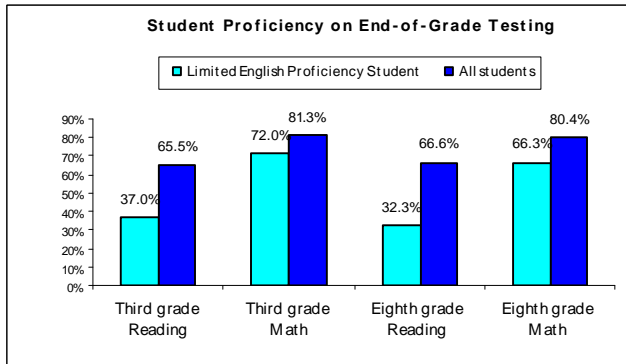


Source: Calculated by Donald J. Hernandez, et al, Center for Social and Demographic Analysis, University at Albany, SUNY, with support from the Annie E. Casey Foundation. ACS 2005-2007 multi-year estimates.

However, a third (34 percent) of children in immigrant families (ages 0-17) live in linguistically isolated households, in which no one over the age of 13 speaks English exclusively or very well. Studies show that this isolation can impact the ability of parents to communicate effectively with their children's teachers and health care providers.<sup>11</sup> Since English proficiency is crucial for success, it is important to provide the appropriate resources to all school children who may be struggling with English language acquisition. Through the development of bicultural language skills—skills that industries in the state can benefit from—children in immigrant families have been found to experience successful educational and social integration.<sup>12</sup>

## Limited English proficiency students score lower on achievement tests than their peers

Children in immigrant families, particularly those with limited English proficiency, face challenges in the classroom which can lead to lower test scores and school dropout.<sup>13</sup> Proficiency in reading and math are critical to the development of academic competencies and life skills.

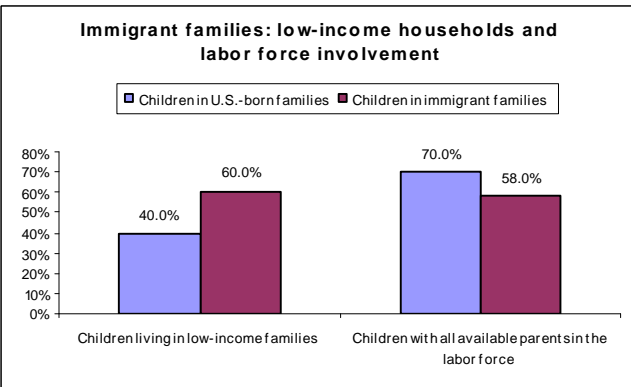


Source: North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, SY2008-09 data.

North Carolina limited English proficiency students have significantly lower reading scores and slightly lower math scores than their peers. The data above suggest a need for academic intervention in order to assure limited English proficiency students have an opportunity to excel and complete their education.

## Despite the fact that the majority of immigrant families work, they are more likely to live in low-income households than non-immigrants

Parents' labor force participation shows a commitment to supporting the U.S. economy and providing for their families. Economists agree that



Source: KIDS COUNT Data Center. Population Reference Bureau, analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 Supplementary Survey, 2001 Supplementary Survey, 2002 through 2007 American Community Survey.

immigrants represent a net positive to the economy due to their contributions to the labor force, payment of taxes and consumer spending.<sup>14</sup> A 2007 White House report found that immigrants increase the U.S. gross domestic product by \$37 billion each year.<sup>15</sup>

Although immigrant parents in North Carolina work, they are more likely to work in low-wage employment than U.S.-born parents. Families and their children are more likely to live in poverty as a result of parental employment which provides low income and few or no benefits.

Children who live in low-income families are more likely than their peers to go hungry, get sick and demonstrate below average academic achievement.<sup>16</sup> Improving parental education and work skills could positively impact the economic well-being of children in immigrant families.

## Conclusion

Promoting positive outcomes for the fastest growing segment of the population under 18 is critical to our state, as they will be a part of our future labor force and grow to be leaders in our communities.

This emerging issues report aims to shed light on immigrant children and their families in North Carolina. In sharing the most current and accurate data available, we hope to educate the public and engage policymakers by highlighting the barriers faced by children, in order to begin a conversation on practical solutions.

## Recommendations

- Outreach to families to inform them about public and private benefits and resources that are available to their children, through appropriate interpretation and translation of information.
- Culturally and linguistically appropriate early education programs.
- English courses made more available to linguistically-isolated households. Improving parental language acquisition can improve academic success for their children.
- Improved enrollment into comprehensive preschool programs in order increase school readiness and proficiency testing.
- Access to job skills training and placement services for living wage jobs.

## USEFUL RESOURCES ABOUT CHILDREN IN IMMIGRANT FAMILIES

### National Resources:

- KIDS COUNT Data Center: [kidscount.org/datacenter](http://kidscount.org/datacenter)
- The Urban Institute: [www.urban.org](http://www.urban.org)
- The Migration Policy Institute: [www.migrationpolicy.org](http://www.migrationpolicy.org)
- Pew Hispanic Center: [www.pewhispanic.org](http://www.pewhispanic.org)
- National Council of La Raza: [www.nclr.org](http://www.nclr.org)
- The Center for Health and Health Care in Schools: [www.healthinschools.org](http://www.healthinschools.org)
- The Opportunity Agenda: [opportunityagenda.org/immigrants\\_and\\_opportunity](http://opportunityagenda.org/immigrants_and_opportunity)
- Public Agenda: [www.publicagenda.org](http://www.publicagenda.org)

### North Carolina Resources:

- North Carolina Justice Center: [www.ncjustice.org](http://www.ncjustice.org)
- El Pueblo: [www.elpueblo.org](http://www.elpueblo.org)
- Adelante Education Coalition of North Carolina: [www.adelante.org](http://www.adelante.org)
- North Carolina Council of Churches: [www.nccouncilofchurches.org](http://www.nccouncilofchurches.org)
- Lutheran Family Services: [www.lfscarolinas.org](http://www.lfscarolinas.org)
- Student Action with Farmworkers: [www.saf-unite.org](http://www.saf-unite.org)
- University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill School of Social Work: <http://sww.unc.edu>  
Institute for the Study of the Americas: <http://isa.unc.edu/>  
The Kenan Institute: [www.kenan-flagler.unc.edu](http://www.kenan-flagler.unc.edu)



### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Mather, Mark. 2009. "Children in Immigrant Families Chart New Path." Washington, DC: Population Reference Bureau.

<sup>2</sup> Fortuny, Karina and Ajay Chaudry. 2009. "Children of Immigrants: Immigration Trends." Washington, DC: The Urban Institute.

<sup>3</sup> The Annie E. Casey Foundation, KIDS COUNT Data Center. Available at: [www.kidscount.org/datacenter](http://www.kidscount.org/datacenter). Note: The ACS data do not differentiate between legally present immigrants, such as refugees and permanent residents, and unauthorized immigrants.

<sup>4</sup> Fortuny, Karina, Randy Capps, Margaret Simms, and Ajay Chaudry. 2009. "Children of Immigrants: National and State Characteristics." Washington, DC: The Urban Institute.

<sup>5</sup> Calculated by Donald J. Hernandez, et al, CSDA, University at Albany, SUNY, with support from the Annie E. Casey Foundation. 2005-2007 multi-year estimates of American Community Survey.

<sup>6</sup> Anderson, Kristin, et al. 2002. "Marriage from a Child's Perspective: How does Family Structure Affect Children, and What Can We Do about It?" Washington, DC: Child Trends.

<sup>7</sup> Holcomb, Pamela A., Karen Tumlin, Robin Koralek, Randy Capps, and Anita Zuberi. 2003. "The Application Process for TANF, Food Stamps, Medicaid, and SCHIP: Issues for Agencies and Applicants, Including Immigrants and Limited English Speakers." Washington, DC: The Urban Institute.

<sup>8</sup> Mathews, H and D. Ewen. 2006. "Reaching All Children? Understanding Early Care and Education Participation among Immigrant Families." Washington, DC: Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP)

<sup>9</sup> Gormley, William T. 2008. "The Effects of Oklahoma's Universal Pre-Kindergarten Program on Hispanic Children." Georgetown University: Center for Research on Children in the U.S.

<sup>10</sup> Castro, Dina. 2010. "Defining and Measuring Quality Early Childhood Practices that Promote Dual Language Learners' Development and Learning." Chapter to be published in: Zaslow, M., Martinez-Beck, I., and Halle, T. (Eds). *Measuring Quality in Early Childhood Settings*. Baltimore: Brookes Publishing.

<sup>11</sup> Shields, M. et al. 2004. "Children of immigrant families: Analysis and recommendations," *The Future of Children: Children in Immigrant Families*, 14(2), 4-15.

<sup>12</sup> Children in Immigrant Families in North Carolina Fact Sheet. 2009. The Center for Social and Demographic Analysis. University at Albany, SUNY.

<sup>13</sup> Fry, Rick. 2005. "The Higher Dropout Rate of Foreign-born Teens." Washington, DC: Pew Hispanic Center.

<sup>14</sup> Kasarda, John D. and James H. Johnson, Jr. 2006. "The Economic Impact of the Hispanic Population on the State of North Carolina." Frank Hawkins Kenan Institute of Private Enterprise, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; Tabarrok, Alexander and David J. Theroux, —Open Letter on Immigration. Oakland, CA: Independent Institute, June 19, 2006; and Survey by Cato Institute in Julian L. Simon. 1989. *The Economic Consequences of Immigration*. Oxford, England: Basil Blackwell.

<sup>15</sup> The White House, Council of Economic Advisors. June 20, 2007. *Immigration's Economic Impact*. Washington, DC: Council of Economic Advisors, The White House.

<sup>16</sup> Brooks-Gunn et al. 1997. *Neighborhood Poverty: Contexts and Consequences for Children*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation Press.



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