Community and Labor Center
at the University of California Merced

Policy Report

May 2020

Massive Job Losses among Non-Citizens in California and the US

By Edward Orozco Flores, Ana Padilla, Karina Juarez and Rabia Qaiser[1]

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

We examine COVID-19 pandemic-related job losses in California and in the US, by age, sex, race and nativity/citizenship. We analyze US Census Bureau- Current Population Survey February and April 2020 data, and estimate job loss following the pandemic among various demographic groups. We estimate the highest job loss among California non-citizen women in non-essential work—a decline of more than one-third between February 15 and April 18. In addition we estimate steep population decline among California's non-citizen immigrant population, particularly among those of prime working age, and recommend the state invest in economic aid to support workers and the state's economic recovery.

KEY FINDINGS

1. Pandemic-related job loss was highest among non-citizens, in California (23.9%) and in the US (24.1%).

2. California non-citizen workers lost 688,000 jobs. Non-citizens in the rest of the US lost 2.6 million jobs. We estimate California undocumented worker job loss at 289,059.

3. Job loss was especially acute among non-citizen immigrant women both in California (30.2%) and in the rest of the US (27.4%).

4. California non-citizen women in non-essential work experienced the highest rates of job loss—more than one in three lost their job.

5. The non-citizen population acutely declined in California (8.0%) and in the rest of the US (2.4%). California has lost about 390,000 non-citizen migrants since the pandemic commenced.

6. The largest decline in California's non-citizen population included persons of prime working age. About 225,000 non-citizens aged 15-49 have left the state since the pandemic commenced.

[1] Direct correspondence to: Edward Orozco Flores, University of California Merced. Email: eflores52@ucmerced.edu

RECOMMENDATION

California policy-makers should consider instituting a wage replacement program for undocumented immigrants, similar to traditional unemployment benefits. About 688,000 non-citizen immigrants have lost their jobs, and an uncertain (but nonetheless large) number are undocumented; we estimate that 289,059 of California's non-citizen workers are undocumented, have lost their jobs due to the pandemic (as of April 18—though this does not include those who have had their hours reduced) and do not qualify for traditional unemployment benefits. While an economic crisis may intensify reverse migration, investment in relief for undocumented immigrants may provide aid, stem the tide of reverse migration, maintain the size of the workforce, and thereby provide critical support advancing the state's economic recovery efforts.

THE STUDY

BACKGROUND

On April 15, 2020, the Office of California Governor Gavin Newsom announced $125 million in disaster relief assistance for workers excluded from unemployment insurance. The fund was intended to provide one-time aid of $500 per adult (with a cap of $1,000 per households) to about 150,000 undocumented adult Californians affected by COVID-19 and unable to receive federal unemployment insurance or a federal stimulus check.

The Disaster Relief Assistance for Immigrants program was overwhelmed the moment it started. On May 18, 2020, immediately after opening, the website hosting the Disaster Relief Assistance for Immigrants program crashed for two-and-a-half hours.[2] In this paper we examine job losses among non-citizens, estimate the number of undocumented workers unemployed due to the pandemic, and discuss the relevance of aid for broader issues of pandemic-related public policy.

DATA AND METHODS

We analyzed US Census Bureau- Current Population Survey (CPS) February 2020 and April 2020 data.[3] We examined job loss as it related to demographic variables, such as age, sex, race and citizenship/nativity. However, we also drew upon California's "essential" work classifications (see table 1). We coded 2020 census "Industry" and "Occupation" classifications in the CPS data as "essential," "non-essential," or "unknown." For example, we coded physicians or food service workers in medical settings as "essential," but bartenders or restaurant hosts/hostesses as "non-essential." Categories not clearly definable (e.g. manufacturing unspecified metal parts) were coded as "unknown." We analyzed differences among age, sex, race and citizenship/nativity groups, as well as categorizations of essential and non-essential workers.

[2] See Yesenia Amaro, "Undocumented workers rush to apply for coronavirus aid, overwhelming California system." *Fresno Bee*, May 18, 2020. Retrived online: https://www.fresnobee.com/news/coronavirus/article242817371.html

[3] The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2020) published a note regarding the impact of the pandemic on The Employment Situation for March 2020, suggesting March data reflected the onset of the pandemic.

Table 1.1 "Essential" Infrastructure Sectors
Healthcare/ Public Health
Emergency Services Sector
Food and Agriculture
Energy
Water and Wastewater
Transportation and Logistics
Communications and Information Technology
Other Community-based Government Operations and Essential Functions
Critical Manufacturing
Hazardous Materials
Financial Services
Chemical
Defense Industrial Base

Source: California Coronavirus (COVID-19) Response

MASSIVE JOB LOSS ACROSS THE US

The COVID-19 pandemic devastated employment rates across the US beyond any economic disaster in the nation's history. While unemployment rates were higher during the peak of the Great Depression, the pandemic caused immediate and massive job losses without any precedent in modern history.

Table 2.1 reveals how the US population (not counting California) remained very stable between the two points of time in this study—the week ending February 15 and the week ending April 18. The nation experienced very little population growth during this time, increasing only by 218,161, or 0.1% (see table 2.1). However, the US lost 21.7 million jobs during this time period, a decline of 15.5% of the active workforce in February.

US job loss, during the pandemic, was substantial among all age groups. Job loss was most acute among those aged 15-34, resulting in a decline of 10.3 million. This amounted to 21.3% of the aged 15-34 workforce in February. The rate of job loss was also high among workers aged 65 and older—but at much smaller numbers. Such workers lost 1.8 million jobs, or 18.1% from February.

US pandemic job loss was sharper among women than men, and people of color more than whites. More than one in six women workers lost their job (17.6%), compared with more than one in seven men (13.5%). In addition, while 14.1% of non-Hispanic whites lost their job, Blacks and Asians lost jobs at higher rates (16.0% and 16.4%), while Latinos lost jobs at the highest rate. One in five US Latinos (20.1%), about 4.3 million workers, lost their jobs during the pandemic.

Lastly, pandemic job loss was higher among immigrants, but especially acute among non-citizens. Nearly one in four (24.1%) non-citizens lost their job, compared to almost one in six naturalized citizens (17.9%) and almost one in seven (14.5%) native-born US citizens.

Table 2.1 Characteristics of Job Loss in the US (Excluding California)

		February	April	Feb-Apr Change	% Change
Population		285,150,732	285,368,893	218,161	0.1%
Workers		139,861,240	118,205,388	-21,655,852	-15.5%
Age	15-34	48,616,258	38,271,324	-10,344,934	-21.3%
	35-49	43,183,516	38,357,271	-4,826,245	-11.2%
	50-64	38,176,420	33,484,130	-4,692,290	-12.3%
	65+	9,885,046	8,092,664	-1,792,382	-18.1%
Sex	Female	66,777,451	54,996,690	-11,780,761	-17.6%
	Male	73,083,789	63,208,698	-9,875,091	-13.5%
Race	White	90,761,937	77,926,551	-12,835,386	-14.1%
	Latino	21,261,092	16,998,018	-4,263,074	-20.1%
	Black	17,143,958	14,399,724	-2,744,234	-16.0%
	Asian	7,459,778	6,236,669	-1,223,109	-16.4%
Citizenship	Native-born	117,965,939	100,883,888	-17,082,051	-14.5%
	Naturalized citizen	11,252,767	9,239,759	-2,013,008	-17.9%
	Non-citizen	10,642,533	8,081,741	-2,560,792	-24.1%

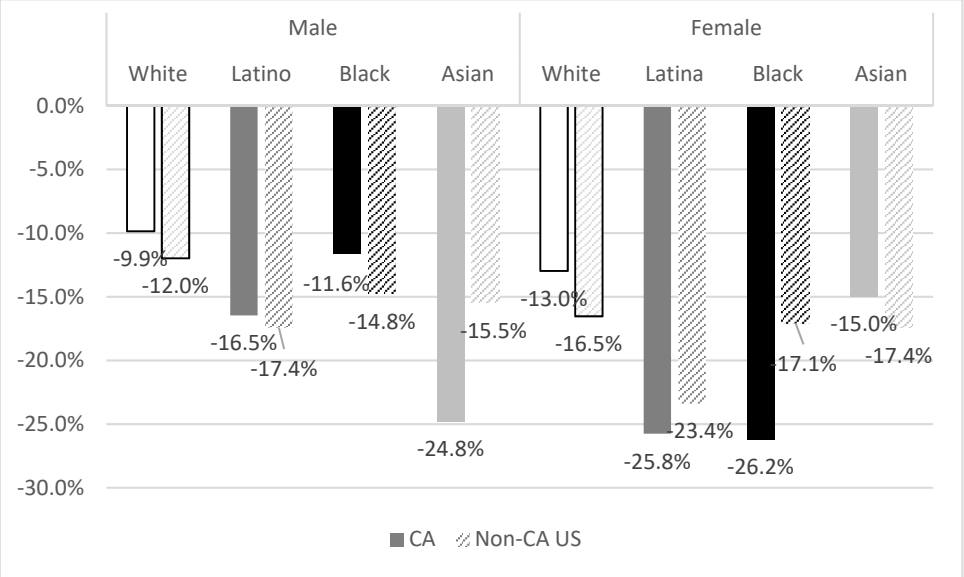
Source: UC Merced Community and Labor Center analysis of
US Census Bureau- Current Population Survey February and April 2020 data

Table 2.2 Characteristics of Job Loss in California

		February	April	Feb-Apr Change	% Change
Population		39,034,103	39,037,780	3,677	0.0%
Workers		18,541,419	15,508,535	-3,032,884	-16.4%
Age	15-34	6,631,045	5,173,877	-1,457,168	-22.0%
	35-49	6,018,233	5,348,495	-669,738	-11.1%
	50-64	4,850,732	4,140,892	-709,840	-14.6%
	65+	1,041,409	845,271	-196,138	-18.8%
Sex	Female	8,413,257	6,837,268	-1,575,989	-18.7%
	Male	10,128,162	8,671,267	-1,456,895	-14.4%
Race	White	7,117,506	6,315,689	-801,817	-11.3%
	Latino	7,030,695	5,590,198	-1,440,497	-20.5%
	Black	975,728	788,800	-186,928	-19.2%
	Asian	3,049,611	2,439,309	-610,302	-20.0%
Citizenship	Native-born	12,756,374	10,839,589	-1,916,785	-15.0%
	Naturalized citizen	2,900,350	2,472,488	-427,862	-14.8%
	Non-citizen	2,884,695	2,196,458	-688,237	-23.9%

Source: UC Merced Community and Labor Center analysis of
US Census Bureau- Current Population Survey February and April 2020 data

Figure 1.1 Rate of Job Loss by Sex and Race, California and rest of the US



Source: UC Merced Community and Labor Center analysis of
US Census Bureau- Current Population Survey February and April 2020 data

JOB LOSS IN THE GOLDEN STATE

California's population also remained relatively stable, growing only by a statistically insignificant amount—3,677, or 0.0% (see table 2.2). Nonetheless, the state, much as the nation, experienced the greatest economic crisis in modern history. California lost 3.0 million jobs through April 18—16.6% of the workers it had as of February 15.

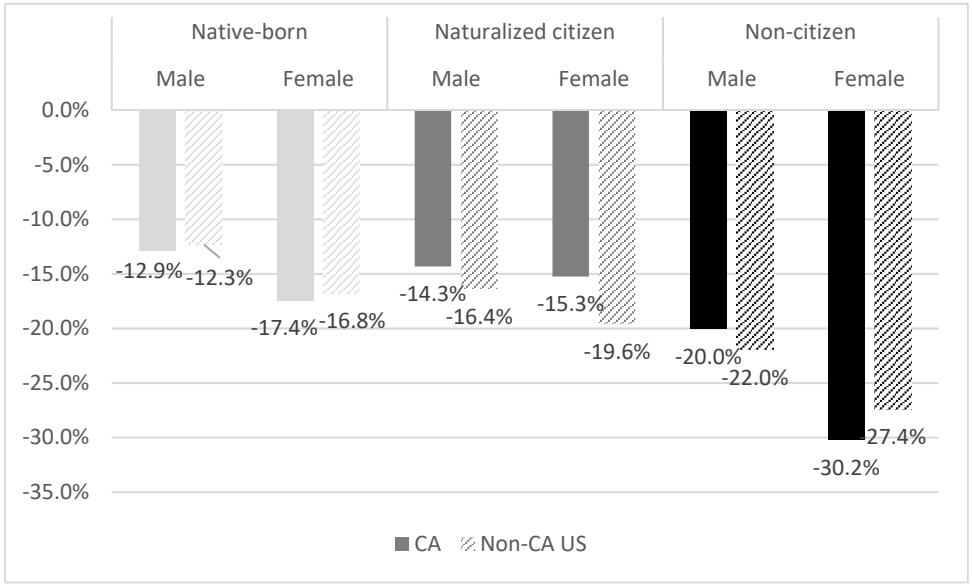
In terms of age, California pandemic job loss was highest among those aged 15-34. In this age range, the CPS counted 1.5 million fewer California workers in April—a decline of 22.0% (see table 2.2). While there was a relatively large decline among workers aged 65 and over (18.8%), this decline, in raw numbers (196,138) was far smaller than any other age range.

Pertaining to race and sex, California job loss was higher among women than men, and people of color more than whites. More than one in six women workers lost their job (18.7%), compared with more than one in seven men (14.4%). And while 11.3% of whites lost their job, Blacks (19.2%), Asians (20.0%) and Latinos (20.5%) lost jobs at a much higher rate—about one in five.

Above all, disparities in pandemic job loss were highest in regards to citizenship status. Between February and April, there were nearly one-fourth fewer (23.9%) non-citizens working, compared to a 15.0% decline of native-born workers and a 14.8% decline of naturalized citizen workers. We apply figures from Pew Research Center's national estimates, which suggest that 42% of non-citizens are undocumented, and estimate that of California's loss of 688,237 non-citizen workers, 42%—or 289,059—were undocumented.[4]

[4] Pew Research Center (2019) estimated undocumented immigrnats to be 42% of the national non-citizen population.

Figure 1.2 Rate of Job Loss by Citizenship and Sex, California and rest of the US



Source: UC Merced Community and Labor Center analysis of
US Census Bureau- Current Population Survey February and April 2020 data

JOB LOSS BY SEX AND RACE

Job loss disparities by sex were much higher after taking race and citizenship into account—particularly for women. The rate of job loss among California women ranged from 13.0% among white women to 25.8% among Latinas and 26.2% among Black women (see figure 1.1). Outside of California, these figures were relatively similar, with the exception of Black women's job losses (17.1%) being lower than those in California.

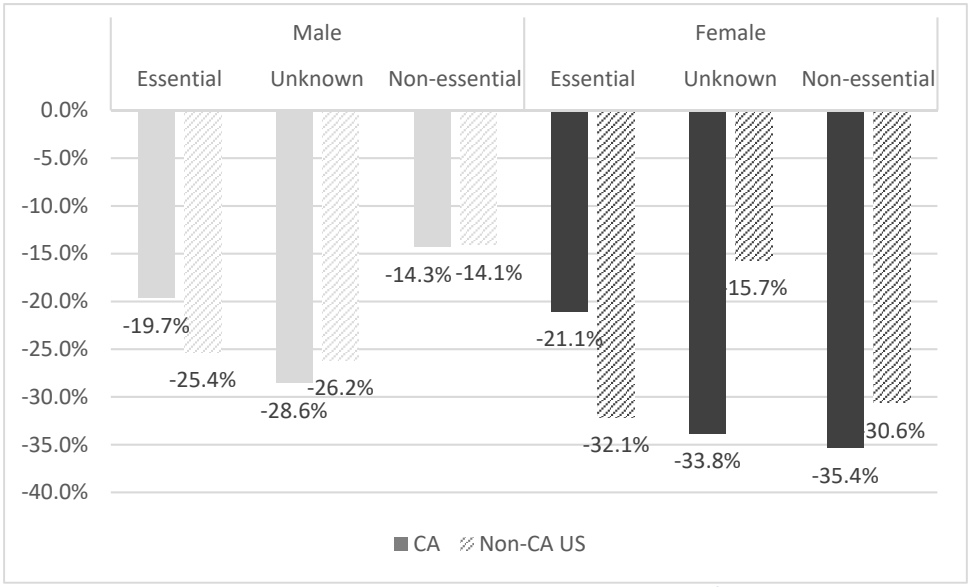
Among men, California job loss rates were lowest for white men (California 9.9%, US 12.0%), slightly higher for Blacks (11.6%, 14.8%), and even higher for Latinos (16.5%, 17.4%). Asian men's job loss rates were markedly higher in California (24.8%) but substantially lower in the rest of the US (15.5%).

JOB LOSS BY CITIZENSHIP AND SEX

Sex disparities in job loss were highest among non-citizens (see figure 1.2). Between February 15 and April 18, California's labor market lost nearly one in three (30.2%) non-citizen female workers. Similarly, in the rest of the US, the labor market lost more than one in four (27.4%) non-citizen female workers.

Non-citizen men's job loss rate was also substantially high, though lower than that of women's. California lost one in five non-citizen male workers (20.0%), and the US lost slightly more than one in five (22.0%), between February and April.

Figure 1.3 Rate of Non-Citizen Job Loss by Essential Worker and Sex, California and rest of the US



Source: UC Merced Community and Labor Center analysis of
US Census Bureau- Current Population Survey February and April 2020 data

Naturalized citizens exhibited disparities much less pronounced than those observed among non-citizens. California, naturalized citizen men (14.3%) had job loss rates only slightly higher than those of native-born men (12.9%); similarly, in California, naturalized citizen women (15.3%) had job loss rates that were actually lower than those for native-born women (17.4%).

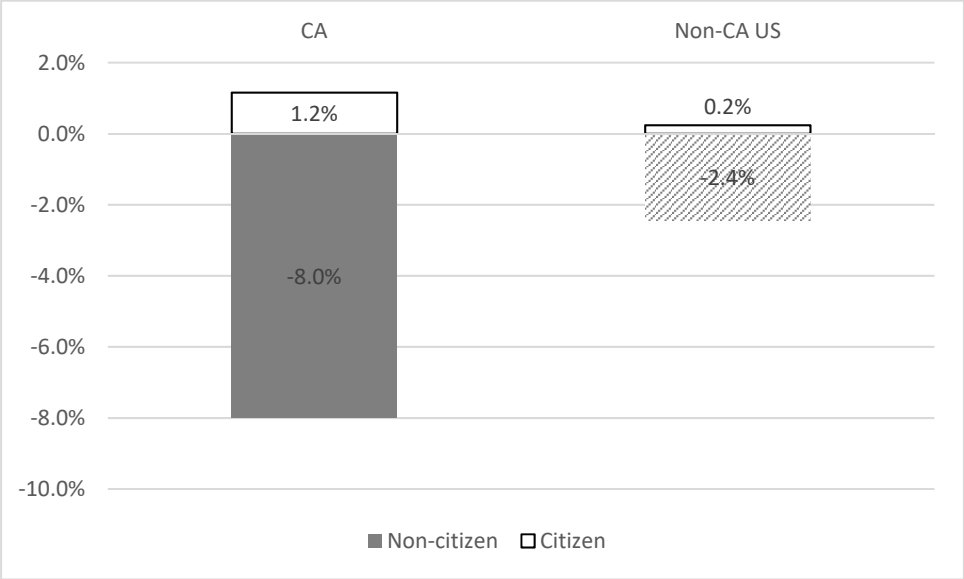
These patterns—markedly higher job loss rates among non-citizens, and higher rates for women than for men within all categories—held consistent outside of California. Native born men and women in the rest of the US had job loss rates (12.3%, 16.8%) that were lower than those of naturalized citizens (16.4%, 19.6%), and non-citizens (22.0%, 27.4%).

JOB LOSS BY ESSENTIAL WORKER STATUS AND SEX

Non-citizen workers outside of essential work experienced even higher rates of job loss (see figure 1.3). Figure 1.3 suggests that California's job loss among non-citizen women in essential work was at a rate of more than one in five (21.1%); however, the job loss rate among unknown status and non-essential workers was still higher. Non-citizen women in unknown status work (33.8%) and non-essential work (35.4%) experienced job loss rates of more than one in three.

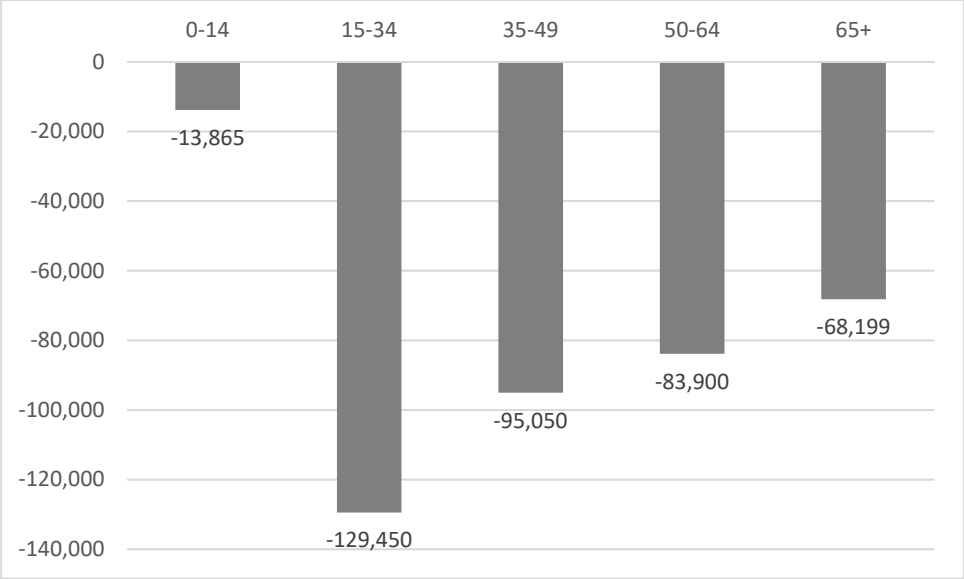
In contrast, although non-citizen women outside of California had a job loss rate in non-essential work that was high (30.6%), their rate of essential work job loss (32.1%) was also very high—and their unknown work status job loss was much lower (15.7%). Among men, job loss rates were somewhat lower in non-essential work than in essential work.

Figure 2.1 Population Growth by Citizenship Status, California and US



Source: UC Merced Community and Labor Center analysis of
US Census Bureau- Current Population Survey February and April 2020 data

Figure 2.2 Non-Citizen Population Decline by Age, California



Source: UC Merced Community and Labor Center analysis of
US Census Bureau- Current Population Survey February and April 2020 data

While the number of California men in essential work declined by 19.7%, job loss rates among California men in non-essential work declined by 14.3%. Similarly, although US men in essential work had high rates of job loss, at 25.4%, those in non-essential work only declined by 14.1%. (This might be explained due to concentration in essential industries impacted by the pandemic, such as in oil or construction.) The job loss rate in work with unknown essential infrastructure status was similar for men in both California (28.6%) and in the rest of the US (26.2%).

POPULATION DECLINE

The final set of tables in this brief suggest that population growth may be stagnating, or even declining, as a result of the pandemic economic downturn. Figure 2.1 suggests that between February 15 and April 18, California's citizen population grew by 1.2%, but that its non-citizen immigrant population declined by 8.0%. Similarly, though less pronounced, the citizen population in the rest of the US grew by 0.2%, while its non-citizen immigrant population declined by 2.4%.

Economists have long noted that population growth is necessary for a sustainable economy, because an economy cannot grow if more workers leave a labor market than enter it. This has had profound consequences for nations struggling with aging populations and declining birthrates. California, and the US, relied for many decades upon a steady inflow of prime-working-age migrant laborers; however, demographers have noted that since 2007, we have entered a trend of reverse migration, with more migrants leaving the US than entering it.

CPS data suggests that 390,464 Californian non-citizens left the state since February (see figure 2.2). However, not only has California's non-citizen population declined, but it is persons close to prime-working-age (as defined between age 25-54) that are leaving the state. The largest outflow of migrants was in the 15-34 year old age range (-129,450), followed by those aged 35-49 (-95,050).

The implications of California population decline, particularly among persons of prime-working-age, could be disastrous for the state's economic recovery. For the state to weather the pandemic economic downturn and experience a speedy recovery, it will be imperative to retain or to expand the size of its workforce—not contract it.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

1. Pandemic job losses are highest among non-citizens, both in California and across the US. In the absence of federal assistance for undocumented immigrants, the state will place an important role in providing economic relief.

2. Job loss was especially acute among non-citizen immigrant women, both in California and in the rest of the US. Because women are more likely to provide economic and social support for family members, expanded economic aid for the undocumented will greatly help many non-citizen women and their families.

3. The non-citizen population has acutely declined in California, in a range of about 390,000 in two months.

4. California's non-citizen population decline includes a substantial number of persons of prime working age: about 225,000 non-citizens aged 15-49.

POLICY RECOMMENDATION

California policy-makers should consider instituting a wage replacement program for undocumented immigrants, similar to traditional unemployment benefits. About 688,000 non-citizen immigrants have lost their jobs, and an uncertain (but nonetheless large) number are undocumented; we estimate that 289,059 of California's non-citizen workers are undocumented, have lost their jobs due to the pandemic (as of April 18—though this does not include those who have had their hours reduced) and do not qualify for traditional unemployment benefits. While an economic crisis may intensify reverse migration, investment in relief for undocumented immigrants may provide aid, stem the tide of reverse migration, maintain the size of the workforce, and thereby provide critical support advancing the state's economic recovery efforts.

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About UC Merced Community and Labor Center

The UC Merced Community and Labor Center is a public service initiative located at the University of California Merced. It conducts research and education on issues of community, labor and employment.

The authors gratefully acknowledge the Irvine Foundation for providing financial support for this project.