



Immigrant Welcome Center

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:
**THE EFFECTS OF IMMIGRATION
POLICIES ON IMMIGRANTS
IN CENTRAL INDIANA**

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Summary Prepared By:
Immigrant Welcome Center

Report Prepared By:
Dr. Silvia Garcia, Ph.D.
Immigrant Welcome Center

What We Explored

Since January 2025, **sweeping federal policy changes** have resulted in reduced immigration pathways, expanded inhumane detention, and removal of thousands of individuals previously contributing to the growth and prosperity of communities they have lived and worked in. These changes have been compounded by the **onslaught of anti-immigrant state and local policies**, especially in Indiana. Outcomes of the 2026 Indiana legislative session, recent policies that mandate 287(g) agreements, and restricted access based on immigration status have resulted in loss of employment, uncertainty, fear, and overall withdrawal from community life by immigrant neighbors.

During these challenging times, Immigrant Welcome Center **remains grounded** in its mission and vision. As a trusted partner and advocate for **ALL** immigrants, we are committed to **educating and informing** the general community, elected officials, partners, and other stakeholders. Through this qualitative data report, we endeavor to **create enhanced awareness** about the impact of these policies on the daily realities of immigrant families in Central Indiana. Through the voices of clients and partner organizations, this report provides a **ground-level analysis** of how the current policy landscape shapes the lives, mental health, and economic stability of immigrants in Central Indiana and its ripple effects.

How We Collected Data

Dr. Silvia Garcia, Director of Research and Assessment at Indiana University, designed this qualitative research study, as well as served as a subject matter expert. Selected staff at Immigrant Welcome Center, after receiving training, collected the qualitative data for this study. This approach allowed a nuanced understanding of community sentiment, behavioral shifts, and systemic changes.

All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim to ensure data integrity and linguistic accuracy. The thematic framework for these discussions focused on 10 critical pillars of community life that included impact on income and employment, participation in school and health care including mental health, utilization of resources, and engagement with organizations.

Who Participated

A total of 19 interviews were conducted. Participants included:

- Local service providers spanning the health, education, social services, legal, and faith-based sectors (9)
- Members of the immigrant community, which we identify as “clients” in this report (10)

Key Findings

Climate of Fear Undermines the Well-Being of Immigrant Communities

Fear leads to withdrawal from community life and reduced psychological safety. Service providers also reported increased mental health needs, including heightened anxiety, stress, and trauma-related concerns among immigrant families, with specific emphasis on disruption of school participation and education of children.

“I’ve seen first-hand kids coming to school crying because someone in their family has been picked up, and the kids don’t fully understand what’s going on.” (Service Provider)

Increasing Barriers Across Legal, Employment, and Health Care

Clients reported increased documentation requirements and additional procedural steps, along with fear associated with attending immigration appointments, even for routine check-ins. Unemployment and underemployment linked to shifting work authorization policies, including Temporary Protected Status (TPS), as well as pre-emptive job loss and uncertainty around work eligibility was reported.

“I doubt myself. Am I legal to work or not?” (Client)

In addition, clients noted underutilization of health benefits due to concerns about eligibility, documentation requirements, and fear of engaging with public systems, even among those who qualify.

Key Findings

Disruption of Daily Life and Family Stability

Current immigration policies result in reduced mobility, limited engagement with public spaces, including travel for work. Families are also engaged in crisis planning to prepare for potential separation and other uncertainty-related events.

“You leave [your house] with a lot of worry and precaution...because you are afraid of being out there and...you don’t know if you are going to return to your house or not.” (Client)

Community Organizations Are Critical Stabilizing Forces

Amid ongoing fear and uncertainty, community organizations help to counter misinformation by sharing reliable information through in-person outreach, events, and trusted community networks. Trust is often strongest within the immediate family. While broader sources of support vary, coworkers, faith leaders, school officials, and community organizations frequently provide guidance and credible information.

“I feel like...these policy changes are not treating these humans like humans...” (Service Provider)

Despite these challenges, immigrants consistently express hope for policy change and stronger support systems that improve access to services and reduce barriers across legal, employment, and healthcare systems.

Community Response and Policy Priorities

The results of this report highlight the impact of divisive policies that **create fear** and **perpetuate harm** through increased enforcement and restricting access to basic services, such as healthcare, English Language learning, food, and more.

Further, these policies undo the already **underfunded and stretched** infrastructure and network of immigrant-serving organizations, creating critical gaps in service delivery. When these programs are not supported, they, in turn, **result in an overall decline of community well-being and prosperity**.

Reform of current immigration policies at the federal level is essential. Political will is critical to engage in conversations and develop sustainable solutions that offer clear and legal pathways. **Human-centered policies**, those that create pathways for integration, and shift away from increased enforcement and criminalization will be instrumental in ensuring that immigrants of all backgrounds and statuses feel safe and welcomed in communities they call home. While these are big goals, smaller and achievable steps can be taken at the state and local level.

Tangible strategies include **trust-building** with immigrant communities through engagement at various levels. **Utilizing evidence-based data** to recognize the profound and valuable contributions of immigrants, in all sectors, is another strategy to build awareness and provide tools to champions who are working tirelessly to counter the anti-immigrant rhetoric. **Storytelling** is also a key strategy to change the narrative and build belonging.

About Dr. Silvia Garcia

Dr. Silvia Garcia, Ph.D. serves as the director of research and assessment for the Office of Workforce & Community Engagement at Indiana University Indianapolis. She specializes in impact analysis, evaluating research that addresses complex community issues. She is a founding member of ENGAGE!, IU Indianapolis' first community-based participatory research peer-reviewed journal and is a board member for Patchwork Global. More on Dr. Garcia [here](#).

For a Copy of the Full Report:

Please email Gurinder Kaur at gkaur@immigrantwelcomecenter.org.

About Immigrant Welcome Center

Since 2006, Immigrant Welcome Center, a nonprofit organization based in Central Indiana, has been providing comprehensive immigrant support, community integration, and advocacy. Our mission is to be a trusted partner and advocate for all immigrants. We support this through our Natural Helpers, community partners, and providing programs including English classes, citizenship workshops, trainings and presentations, and more. Learn about Immigrant Welcome Center at immigrantwelcomecenter.org.

