

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

# HOW CAN I GET MY PAPERS? LESSONS FROM A DECADE OF ONLINE LEGAL INTAKES FOR UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANTS

By analyzing ten years of legal intakes for almost 3,000 undocumented immigrants through the Immigrant Legal Intake Service (ILIS), this report presents new findings regarding barriers to immigration relief, an assessment of available relief, and informative demographic trends. For many, ILIS represents a lifeline to immigration remedies and the ability to stay and contribute to our nation. As one respondent put it, “[m]y husband and I have talked to numerous lawyers and no one has been able to give us any hope of legalizing my situation . . . I feel that I am at a red light that is never going to turn green.” This report seeks to demonstrate that undocumented immigrants have the opportunity to turn that light green. The report’s key findings include:

## IMMIGRATION REMEDIES

---

- **Forty-eight percent** of all respondents were potentially eligible for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), when initially screened.
- **Sixteen percent** of respondents indicated they did not apply for DACA because the administration rescinded DACA.
- Outside of DACA, respondents were potentially eligible for some sort of permanent relief, such as family sponsorship (**21 percent**), U nonimmigrant status (**seven percent**), or an employment visa (**five percent**).
- In terms of temporary protections, **46 percent** of respondents held DACA, while **nine percent** held Temporary Protected Status (TPS).
- A staggering **93 percent** of respondents would be eligible for relief if Congress were to pass the Dream Act or similar legislation, with **28 percent** being immediately eligible for lawful permanent status (LPR).
- Approximately **half of respondents** who submitted an intake through ILIS and subsequently completed another intake on a later date became eligible for additional forms of relief due to changed circumstances in the respondent’s life.

These rates of relief demonstrate that even in the absence of comprehensive immigration reform, immigration remedies do exist for undocumented immigrants. Like a health check-up, undocumented immigrants should engage in regular legal screenings, particularly as their circumstances change over time.

## LEGAL ASSISTANCE

---

- Nearly **one third (29 percent)** of respondents found the intake online, signifying the importance of search engines and online reach in identifying and screening undocumented immigrants for relief.
- The top four reasons for respondents completing ILIS were **cost (28 percent)**, **accessibility (23 percent)**, **confidentiality (19 percent)**, and **quality (15 percent)**.
- Only **41 percent** of individuals previously received legal assistance.
- Of those that received previous legal assistance, **22 percent** were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the previous legal assistance received.
- **Nineteen percent** of respondents cited ILIS’s confidentiality as the primary reason for completing the intake, while **11 percent** cited anonymity.

These data demonstrate that there are significant barriers that prevent undocumented immigrants from accessing legal representation to secure immigration remedies, including cost, accessibility, and negative experiences with previous legal service providers. Trusted providers can play an important role in helping undocumented young people and their families overcome barriers; with these percentages demonstrating that the community considers ILLS a reputable service provider. As a respondent shared, “[t]his service is a potential life line and I am glad there is something like this available to those of us hounded by constant concern for our future at such a young age.”

## EDUCATION

---

- **Eighty-nine percent** were between 16 and 34 years of age, **39 percent** of respondents 25 and older had a high school degree or higher, and **32 percent** had a bachelor’s or higher.
- The high school graduation rate for respondents is about ten percent greater than the national average (**29 percent**).
- While **10 percent** of the national population had attained an associate’s degree as their highest degree, **16 percent** of respondents fall within this same category.
- **Thirty-two percent** of respondents 25 and older received a bachelor’s degree, compared to **22 percent** of the broader population.

The youth and educational achievement of respondents may directly contribute to the social capital of the undocumented immigrants who completed the survey; and lend itself to the identification and pursuit of immigration remedies. Social capital increases people’s access to information, resources, and support, all of which can lead to them being aware of and pursuing different immigration remedies, thus obtaining an education is an important way to increase social capital. These data also demonstrate that respondents tend to have higher rates of educational attainment than the broader, national population—indicating a strong commitment to education in spite of the barriers related to immigration status.

## CRIMINAL HISTORY

---

- **Ninety-three percent of respondents** report having no misdemeanor convictions; and **99 percent** of respondents have no felony convictions.
- Upwards of half of the subset of respondents who had felony or misdemeanor convictions were still potentially eligible for some form of immigration relief, including family-based petitions, U nonimmigrant status, or asylum.

While there is no existing data to compare misdemeanor convictions, the felony conviction rate for respondents is **lower** than the national average.

## IMMIGRATION HISTORY AND DEMOGRAPHICS

---

- **Fifty-three percent** of respondents initially entered without inspection (e.g. an entry without being detected, stopped, detained, or otherwise questioned by immigration officials) and resided in the United States for an average of **ten years**, with **91 percent** of respondents residing in the United States 10 or more years.
- **Sixty-four percent of respondents** were from Mexico, **57 percent** resided in California, **82 percent** were Hispanic or Latino, **10 percent** were married, and **9 percent** identified as LGBTQ.

## AUTHORS

---

- Katharine Gin, Co-Founder & Executive Director, Immigrants Rising
- Iliana Perez, Director of Research & Entrepreneurship, Immigrants Rising
- Alejandra Guillen, Legal Services Director, Immigrants Rising
- Jose Magaña-Salgado, Founder, [Masa Group](#), with assistance from Katherine Montañez-Montes