



breadfortheworld
HAVE FAITH. END HUNGER.

Immigration Is a Hunger Issue

Immigration is a hunger issue on both sides of the United States-Mexico border. Many immigrants are pushed out of their home countries as a direct result of extreme hunger and poverty. Ironically, many immigrants to the U.S. remain at high risk of hunger and poverty even after many years of living and working in the country.

People without documentation who live and work here are among the most vulnerable people in our country. They are more likely to live in poverty and to struggle to put food on the table. Undocumented immigrants are nearly twice as likely as the general population to experience food insecurity (24 percent compared to 14 percent)ⁱ. The national poverty rate is 14.8 percent, while immigrants as a group have a poverty rate of 30 percent. It is likely that the poverty rate of undocumented households is even higher.



Buddy Bleckley for Bread for the World

In addition to high poverty and food-insecurity rates, undocumented immigrants also face the reality of being separated from their families. As a result of increases in raids and detention, many U.S.-born children may live in a household where a parent has been removed from the home. The 4.5 million American children affected by these removals are much more likely to experience hunger.

Three out of every four Americans believe that we need to fix our broken immigration systemⁱⁱ. As a Christian voice since 1974 for people experiencing hunger and poverty, Bread for the World calls for national and comprehensive immigration policy that reduces hunger and poverty on both sides of the border. Addressing hunger and poverty in countries in need, as well as in the U.S., is the only way to effectively achieve lasting solutions around the issue of immigration.

Background

The United States is a nation of immigrants. Throughout its history, people have moved here from all over the world and have contributed to their communities and our national life. Today, as in the past, immigrants are also creating prosperity and enrichment for this nation. In fact, the U.S. food-supply system depends heavily on immigrants. Nearly three-fourths of all farm workers who harvest the majority of our country's fruits and vegetables are immigrants, most of whom are undocumented. Additionally, second generation immigrants are among the strongest contributors to the U.S. economy and pay more in taxes than the rest of the native-born populationⁱⁱⁱ.

Despite their contributions, immigrants face discrimination and barriers to opportunity. This increases their likelihood of struggling with hunger and poverty. Many of them come to the United States to escape extreme poverty, hunger, and violence in their home countries with the hope that they can better the lives of their families through work opportunities.

Bread's Role and Commitment

As a collective Christian voice, we strongly believe in moving our faith into action. Matthew 25:35 says, “[F]or I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me...” Part of loving our brothers and sisters requires us to recognize their inherent dignity and advocate for their well-being. To achieve this, we strongly believe in comprehensive immigration policies that reduce hunger and poverty in the United States and in neighboring countries—not policies that would make things worse.

“...I was a stranger and you welcomed me...”

-Matthew 25:35

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Bread for the World's research and analyses over the past ten years has taught us that we must tackle undocumented immigration on both sides of the border. Many undocumented immigrants to the U.S. are being "pushed" by factors beyond their control in their home countries. "Push factors" are causes that force people to migrate, including deep poverty and hunger, domestic or social violence, civil war, and others. This work will be difficult, but we must identify and address the root causes that are creating this need to escape home countries and enter the United States.

Also, any next step forward must include love. Micah 6:8 says, *"And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."* So, as we partner with other organizations, think about different solutions, and advocate for our brothers and sisters, we commit to doing so with the love that Jesus Christ commands of us. And we commit to also calling everyone, including the American public and our leadership on Capitol Hill and in the administration, to act in love as well when approaching this issue.

"What does the Lord require of you?....."
-Micah 6:8

Bread's Immigration Reform Principles

Our approach to reforming U.S. immigration policy is informed by our Christian faith and commitment to ending hunger and poverty, both domestically and abroad. Immigration at its core is a hunger issue. To ultimately end hunger in the U.S. and abroad, we must have comprehensive immigration policy that addresses the following six guiding principles:

- 1. We support addressing factors that push people to flee their home country.** Immigration is an international hunger and poverty issue. Effective U.S. international policies should help countries address the poverty, food insecurity, inequality, poor governance, internal displacement and lack of economic opportunity that is driving the vast majority of undocumented immigration to the United States.
- 2. We support inclusive policies for immigrants living in the U.S.** Ending hunger in the U.S. requires that our country love and include our neighbors by (1) providing better opportunities for undocumented immigrants living in our country; (2) welcoming communities directly affected by immigration to inform policies and decisions regarding immigration; and (3) including a responsible pathway to earned citizenship.
- 3. We support improving access to the legal immigration system.** Documentation opens doors to opportunities. When parents have opportunities, so do their children. Improving access to a just and legal immigration system can reduce hunger and poverty among undocumented immigrants and their families.
- 4. We support family unity.** As Christians, we appreciate and value the importance of the family unit. Immigration raids and detentions can separate families, which often removes workers from the household. Removing adult workers from the households depletes much-needed family and community resources for children to survive and thrive.
- 5. We support protecting all workers and reducing exploitation.** Immigrants without documentation are more likely to work in unsafe and unhealthy work environments and more likely to be paid less than minimum wage. Without stable work opportunities, the children and families of undocumented immigrants are unable to escape food-insecurity and poverty.
- 6. We support protecting human rights in enforcement practices.** We are called by our faith to ensure that all individuals are treated with dignity. Vulnerable individuals, such as children and asylum seekers, should be sheltered in nonrestrictive environments and never in detention facilities. For those who are detained, ensuring them due process helps protect children from losing their working parents and families from falling deeper into hunger.

We urge our nation's leaders to enact immigration policy that embodies these key principles.

Endnotes

ⁱ "Hunger and Poverty Among Immigrant Communities." Bread for the World. August 2016.

<http://www.bread.org/sites/default/files/downloads/immigrants-fact-sheet-2016.pdf>

ⁱⁱ "Americans' views of immigrants marked by widening partisan, generational divides. Pew Research Center. April 15, 2016.

<http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/04/15/americans-views-of-immigrants-marked-by-widening-partisan-generational-divides/>

ⁱⁱⁱ "Immigration's Long-term Impacts on Overall Wages and Employment of Native-born U.S. Workers very Small, Although Low-Skilled Workers May Be Affected, New Report Finds; Impacts on Economic Growth Positive, While Effects on Government Budgets Mixed." The National Academy of Science, Engineering, and Medicine. September 21, 2016. <http://www8.nationalacademies.org/onpinews/newsitem.aspx?RecordID=23550>