Hunger and Poverty in the Latino Community

What's the Problem?

There are more than 59 million Latinos1 in the U.S. Some were born in the U.S., while others are originally from Mexico, Central America, or South America. Latinos are culturally and racially diverse and vary in their legal status as U.S. residents. As a group, however, Latinos are more likely to live in poverty and lack regular, reliable access to food needed for good health than other people in the U.S. Latinos are also more likely to be paid sub-minimum wages and to endure sub-par working and living conditions to make ends meet.

The higher rates of poverty and hunger among Latinos are direct results of inequity through racial discrimination, gender discrimination, and discrimination on the basis of immigration status. Compared to the U.S. federal poverty rate of 11.8 percent, 17.6 percent of Latinos, 17.5 percent of households headed by an undocumented person, and a startling 31.1 percent of female-headed Latino households are below the poverty line.

Latinos are more likely to lack access to healthy food.

- 21 percent of counties with a majority-Latino population fall into the 10 percent of counties with the highest childhood food-insecurity rates.
- Latino children are nearly twice as likely to lack access to sufficient nutritious food as non-Latino white children (16.8 percent vs. 10.4 percent).2

Since poverty rates are higher and incomes are much lower both in female-headed Latino households and in households headed by undocumented people, we expect that food-insecurity levels are also much higher among these households.

Food Insecurity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>General Population</th>
<th>Latinos</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All households</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
<td>16.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Households with children</td>
<td>13.9%</td>
<td>16.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female-headed household with children</td>
<td>27.8%</td>
<td>N/A*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undocumented-headed households</td>
<td>17.5%</td>
<td>N/A*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Migrant and seasonal workers</td>
<td>N/A*</td>
<td>62.8%*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The percentages of food-insecure Latinos are believed to be higher than the corresponding food-insecurity levels in the general population.


The median income of Latino households is $19,000 less than the median income of white households.

The median income of Latino households is $51,450.

$70,642

1 in 6

Latino households have at least one person going hungry at some point during the year, compared to 1 in 12 white households.4

As a result, Latinos are twice as likely as whites to face food insecurity.
**Higher Unemployment, Lower Incomes, and Seasonal Work**

Recently, lower unemployment rates have helped reduce hunger and poverty in the Latino community. Still, due to racial, gender and status inequity, Latinos are more likely to be unemployed and more likely to hold low-wage and/or seasonal jobs with few or no benefits.

- 1 out of 4 Latinos live in working households with annual incomes of less than $25,000.5

More than 1 million Latinos are seasonal and migrant farm workers, and 61 percent of U.S. farm workers have incomes below the poverty line. These households are more than four times as likely to face food insecurity as other U.S. households.6

**Limited pathways to citizenship, legal status, and work authorization**

The current barriers to obtaining citizenship, legal status, or work authorization often prevent families from getting jobs that pay a livable wage and benefits, securing health coverage, or sending children to well-resourced schools. Undocumented people often fear that they will be deported if they apply for nutrition or other support that they qualify for as taxpayers.

- 4.5 million children live in households with an undocumented parent; they are twice as likely to live with poverty or hunger.
- To learn about how to reduce hunger among immigrants, read “From Hunger to Hunger: Immigrants Face Hunger on Both Sides of the Border.”

**Mediana Income**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>General Population</th>
<th>Latinos</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Median Income (household)</td>
<td>$61,179</td>
<td>$51,450</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men (individual)</td>
<td>$52,000*</td>
<td>$38,792*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women (individual)</td>
<td>$42,328*</td>
<td>$32,292*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undocumented-headed households</td>
<td>$36,000*</td>
<td>Believed to be less than $36,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Migrant farm or seasonal worker</td>
<td>Less than $7,500</td>
<td>Less than $7,500</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


**Poorer Education**

Many lower-resource schools are located in Latino communities, and research indicates that Latino children are more likely to sacrifice going to college to help support their families.

As a result:

- Latinos students struggle to graduate from high school more than any other racial group (14 percent dropout rate).
- Of Latino high school graduates, 66 percent of those who immediately entered the workforce or military reported not enrolling in college so that they could support their families.8

**Endnotes**

1 We use the term Latino throughout this fact sheet, but some sources use Hispanic to refer to this data.