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# Hunger and Poverty in the Latino Community

## What's the Problem?

There are more than 58 million Latinos<sup>1</sup> 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 12.3 percent, 18.3 percent of Latinos, 18.6 percent of households headed by an undocumented person, and a startling 34.3 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 (24 percent vs. 14 percent).<sup>2</sup>

### FOOD INSECURITY

|                                       | General Population | Latinos            |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| All households                        | 11.8%              | 18.0%              |
| Households with children              | 15.7%              | 21.1%              |
| Female-headed household with children | 30.3%              | N/A*               |
| Undocumented-headed households        | 18.6%              | N/A*               |
| Migrant and seasonal workers          | N/A                | 62.8% <sup>3</sup> |

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

Source: Food Security in the United States, 2017. U.S. Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service.

## INEQUITY CONTRIBUTES TO HUNGER AND POVERTY IN THE LATINO COMMUNITY.

- Unemployment, low wages, and seasonal work
- Less access to quality and affordable education
- Limited pathways to citizenship, legal status, and work authorization
- Higher healthcare costs
- Higher levels of incarceration and deportation



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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.

The median income of Latino households is \$17,000 less than the median income of white households.

**\$50,486**  
Latino households

**\$68,145**  
white households

As a result, Latinos are almost **TWICE** as **LIKELY** as whites to face food insecurity.

**1 in 6**

Latino households have at least one person going hungry at some point during the year, compared to 1 in 11 white households.<sup>4</sup>

## ADDITIONAL INEQUITIES CONTRIBUTING TO HUNGER AND POVERTY:

### 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.<sup>5</sup>
- 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.<sup>6</sup>

### MEDIAN INCOME

|                                 | General Population    | Latinos                           |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Median Income (household)       | \$61,372              | \$50,486                          |
| Men (individual)                | \$51,220*             | \$36,608*                         |
| Women (individual)              | \$42,380*             | \$32,292*                         |
| Undocumented-headed households  | \$36,000 <sup>7</sup> | Believed to be less than \$36,000 |
| Migrant farm or seasonal worker | Less than \$7,500     | Less than \$7,500                 |

\*Calculated based on estimates from the Bureau of Labor Statistics Table 3. 2018 Median Weekly Earnings by Age, Race, and Sex and U.S. Census data.

Source: Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2017. U.S. Department of Commerce, U.S. Census Bureau, September 2018.

### Poorer Education

Many lower-resourced 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.

- Latinos have the highest high school dropout rate (14 percent) of all racial/ethnic groups.
- 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.<sup>8</sup>

### 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.”](#)

### Poorer Health

Less income to purchase nutritious foods and essential health care, combined with a greater likelihood of working in unsafe environments, contribute to a higher rate of serious medical problems among Latinos, including cancer, obesity, and diabetes.

- One in three Latinos under 65 is uninsured and thus less likely to receive essential medical attention. Being uninsured also means that families may be forced to go into debt to pay for medical care, leaving fewer resources for food and other necessities.<sup>10</sup>

### Mass Incarceration and Deportation

Soaring incarceration rates from over-policing and immigrant raids split families and deplete resources in the Latino community.

- The family of someone in prison owes an average of \$13,000 in court costs alone. The family of someone detained by immigration officials must pay up to \$10,000 in bonds to get the person released. These costs place a burden on already struggling families since they must borrow money and/or have less money for basic living expenses.<sup>11</sup>

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> We use the term *Latino* throughout this fact sheet, but some sources use *Hispanic* to refer to this data.

<sup>2</sup> “Latino Hunger Facts.” May 2017. <http://www.feedingamerica.org/assets/pdfs/fact-sheets/latino-hunger-fact-sheet.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> “Prevalence and Predictors of Food-Insecurity in Migrant Farmworkers in Georgia.” U.S. National Library of Medicine. [www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3076419/](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3076419/)

<sup>4</sup> Food Security in the United States, 2018. U.S. Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service.

<sup>5</sup> Bread calculations based on data from Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2017. U.S. Department of Commerce, U.S. Census Bureau, September 2018.

<sup>6</sup> “Migrant Farm Workers.” Cornell University Cooperative. October 2015. <http://articles.extension.org/pages/9960/migrant-farm-workers-our-nations-invisible-population>

<sup>7</sup> “Unauthorized Immigrants in the U.S.” Pew Hispanic Center. April 2009. [www.pewhispanic.org/files/reports/107.pdf](http://www.pewhispanic.org/files/reports/107.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> “5 Facts About Latinos and Education.” Pew Research Center. May 2015. [www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/05/26/5-facts-about-latinos-and-education/](http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/05/26/5-facts-about-latinos-and-education/)

<sup>9</sup> “Unauthorized Immigrants in the U.S.” Pew Hispanic Center. April 2009. [www.pewhispanic.org/files/reports/107.pdf](http://www.pewhispanic.org/files/reports/107.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> “Health of Hispanic or Latino Population.” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. February 2016. [www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/hispanic-health.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/hispanic-health.htm)

<sup>11</sup> “Paying the Price: The Impact of Raids on America’s Children.” National Council of La Raza and the Urban Institute. 2007. [www.urban.org/sites/default/files/alfresco/publication-pdfs/411566-Paying-the-Price-The-Impact-of-Immigration-Raids-on-America-s-Children.pdf](http://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/alfresco/publication-pdfs/411566-Paying-the-Price-The-Impact-of-Immigration-Raids-on-America-s-Children.pdf)