Impacts of U.S. Immigration Policies: A Look at Local Communities’ Responses to National Concerns

What is needed?
- Americans most directly experience the effects of immigration in their towns and communities.
- Even the best conceived national policies are hard-pressed to address the diverse needs of communities attempting to better integrate immigrants into local social and economic life.
- Support for local efforts to integrate immigrants into the social and economic life of communities needs to be part of a comprehensive national policy approach to immigration.

How Many Immigrants Are in the USA?
- Immigrants accounted for about 12.5 percent (38 million) of the population in 2008. The last two decades have seen a rapid entry of immigrants and an estimated 11.9 million newcomers are unauthorized. About 2/3 of the unauthorized population arrived in the U.S. in the last decade.
- The immigrant population is widely dispersed across the U.S. Almost every county in the U.S has newcomers living in a variety of village, towns and cities. Arizona, Nevada, Arkansas, Indiana, Tennessee, Alabama, Georgia, South Carolina and North Carolina experienced the largest growth in foreign-born population from 2000-2006.
- More immigrants come from Mexico than any other country, and approximately 10 percent of all Mexicans live in the U.S. About 60 percent of the unauthorized population comes from Mexico.
- More than 1/5 of all children in the U.S. are foreign-born or children of immigrants. Children of immigrant parents are the fastest growing segment of the U.S. population.

How Are Americans Addressing Immigration Concerns?
- Without comprehensive national immigration policies and programs, states, counties and localities are left to accommodate immigrants. In many cases, immigrants have been a positive addition to towns and cities. But at the same time communities face challenges in providing schooling, housing, and other services.
• In 2009, about 1,500 immigration-related laws were introduced and 222 laws were enacted, according to the National Council of State Legislatures. In 2008, 1,305 bills were introduced and 206 laws enacted. In 2007, 240 state laws concerning immigration were enacted. Almost every state has enacted laws and resolutions addressing immigration issues. Surveys show that Americans are ambivalent about the benefit of immigrants to their communities, and they are most likely to think that unauthorized immigrants are a burden.
• Local governments are enacting ordinances – some southern and northeastern localities have laws explicitly targeting unauthorized immigrants. Other localities have adopted policies to accommodate immigrants.
• Some communities are providing opportunities, such as education, housing, and English language and technical skills training, to integrate immigrants into society and promote self-sufficiency. Research has shown that the more self-sufficient an immigrant is, the greater his or her contributions to society at large.
• Self-reliant immigrants are more successful in obtaining employment, earn higher wages, and have higher household incomes.
• New Yorkers are generally supportive of their own community providing English language training to immigrants, but a majority opposes giving English language training to unauthorized immigrants.
• Due to the large immigrant population and the established presence of immigrant families, there is an ongoing need for communities to integrate immigrants into social and economic life.

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