

## Undocumented Immigrants Subject Of Detailed Study

By Karen Lee Ziner  
Journal Staff Writer

Rhode Island's population of undocumented immigrants essentially remained static between 2005 and 2008, says the coauthor of a new analysis by the Pew Hispanic Center.

That population makes up roughly 2.8 percent of the state's population and 3.6 percent of its work force, according to the report, "A Portrait of Unauthorized Immigrants in the United States." The report does not include comparative work force figures for 2005.

Across the country, the population of undocumented immigrants has leveled off at 11.9 million after growing rapidly from 1990 to 2006, the report states, and the rapid growth of unauthorized immigrant workers has also halted. The population is largely composed of young families, and a growing share of their children — 73 percent — are U.S. citizens by birth.

The report estimates that 30,000 undocumented immigrants were living in Rhode Island in 2008, compared with 35,000 in 2005. But the 2008 estimated range of 20,000 to 35,000 contains too wide a margin of error to pinpoint a decline, said Jeffrey S. Passel, the Pew Hispanic Center's senior demographer.

"I would say the ranges overlap," Passel said. "Basically, it hasn't changed enough for us to be able to measure it."

Rhode Island's population of undocumented immigrants has provoked heated debate and attempts to curb it.

Last year, Governor Carcieri issued an executive order cracking down on what he called "an epidemic flow" of illegal immigrants that he said was draining state resources and burdening taxpayers. He cited what he said were Pew Center figures of 40,000 illegal immigrants living here. He later acknowledged that the number was on the high end.

Some local immigrant advocates say Carcieri's executive order and the state's faltering economy have driven out hundreds of illegal immigrants, although that number is purely anecdotal. A commission the governor appointed to monitor the order's "unintended consequences" on legal immigrants, found that it created "widespread fear" that has made many people afraid to attend church or send their children to school.

Among the Pew Hispanic Center's major national findings:

- Undocumented immigrants are more dispersed around the country than in the past.
- About three quarters (76 percent) of the nation's undocumented immigrants are Hispanic, and the majority of those (59 percent) are from Mexico.
- They make up 4 percent of the nation's population and 5.4 percent of its work force.

## *Undocumented Immigrants*

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- Undocumented immigrants are more likely than either U.S.-born residents or legal immigrants to live in a household with a spouse and children.
- Adults in that population “are disproportionately likely to be poorly educated,” and their median household income was \$36,000, well below the \$50,000 median household income for U.S.-born residents.
- More than half of adult unauthorized immigrants — 59 percent — had no health insurance during all of 2007.

The report uses the term “unauthorized immigrants” throughout, to describe “residents of the United States who are not U.S. citizens, who do not hold current permanent resident visas, or who have not been granted permission to remain in the country under a set of specific authorized temporary statuses for long-term residence and work.”

People with “quasi-legal” status — such as those with pending asylum claims — are included, and could account for as much as 10 percent of the total estimate.

Passel, who co-authored the report with D’Evera Cohn, said it relied on monthly survey data gathered jointly by the Census Bureau and the Bureau of Labor Statistics. It used a “multi-stage” process to extrapolate the estimated number of undocumented immigrants in each state and across the country.

The undocumented population “is now spreading out beyond those top six states” of California, Florida, Illinois, New Jersey, New York and Texas, said Passel. “One of the most striking features to me, when we look at the characteristics of this population, is that it’s largely made up of young families. Most of the children are kids born in the United States, and are U.S. citizens.” The new Pew Hispanic Center report is available on its website, [www.pewhispanic.org](http://www.pewhispanic.org). The center is a non-partisan, non-advocacy research organization based in Washington, D.C.

kziner@projo.com