

POLICY BRIEF

Health Care and Education Access of Transnational Children in Mexico

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STATEMENT OF ISSUE

Over the past two decades, the United States has experienced an unprecedented increase in immigration enforcement, resulting in large numbers of deportees. Many of them were long-term Mexican migrants who had settled in the United States and formed families. Suddenly, they found themselves back in Mexico with their children, who had been born and raised in the United States. These children, a group also referred to as “Los Invisibles” or the “Invisible Ones” in the literature, were estimated to number close to half a million in 2018. This group faces particular health care and education barriers. Limited access to these basic services could seriously hamper their development and growth, breaking the cycle of intergenerational progress that probably motivated their parents to migrate in the first place.

KEY FINDINGS

- Transnational children in Mexico are 28% less likely than their Mexican counterparts to be affiliated with any health care provider
- Among children who are affiliated, U.S.-born children are also less likely to be affiliated with, and receive health care from, a public health care provider and more likely to have a private or other kind of health care provider.
- Lack of proper documentation could explain gaps in health care access. In 2015, this was still a significant barrier among U.S.-born children whose household head arrived in Mexico before 2010.
- There are no significant gaps in the outcomes of primary-school children by place of birth, while there are positive gaps for U.S.-born teenagers compared to their Mexican-born counterparts. Lack of proper documentation is causing this discrepancy, leading some of them to be left behind.
- Education barriers faced by these children have received much more attention in the academic literature than has empirical evidence on their access to health care, possibly contributing to a disparity in awareness among policymakers.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Ease documentation requirements that act as a barrier to health care.
- Rely on school authorities to reach out to transnational children and their families, providing them with support to get their Mexican identification documents and with assistance to sign up for publicly provided health care coverage.
- Continue to ease barriers implemented by the Mexican government through SEP to favor the education access of transnational children.
- Improve the quality of transnational children’s educational experience to ensure that they progress adequately and to prevent them from getting discouraged and dropping out, particularly as they transition to high school and college.
- Change immigration enforcement in the U.S. from a communitywide to a more targeted approach that gives priority to children and provides a path for their families to stay together in the country.

SOURCES AND FULL PAPER



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