



School of Law
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Nearly three-quarters of surveyed trans and nonbinary immigrants in Los Angeles face poverty

New research from the Williams Institute at UCLA School of Law, in partnership with the TransLatin@ Coalition, finds that about three-quarters (73%) of immigrant respondents to the LA County Trans & Nonbinary Survey—including 80% of trans Latina immigrants—live at or below the federal poverty level, compared to 44% of non-immigrant respondents.

Nearly six in ten (59%) said they had difficulty covering usual household expenses, and half (50%) experienced food insecurity in the three months prior to the survey.

The study analyzes responses from 98 transgender and nonbinary immigrants who participated in the 2023–2024 LA County Trans & Nonbinary Survey. Findings highlight the experiences of trans Latina immigrants, who made up two-thirds of the sample, and provide comparisons to transgender and nonbinary non-immigrants.

Results show substantial economic disparities between immigrants and non-immigrants. For example, unemployment rates were more than twice as high among immigrant respondents (47%) compared to non-immigrants (22%), with 54% of trans Latina immigrants reporting they were unemployed.

Immigrant respondents were also significantly more likely than non-immigrants to report currently experiencing homelessness. Thirty-nine percent of trans and nonbinary immigrants, including 40% of trans Latina immigrants, reported experiencing homelessness, a rate more than double that of non-immigrant respondents (19%). For reference, just 0.8% of the overall LA County population is currently homeless.

“These findings suggest there are serious and unique disparities faced by many trans immigrants living in LA, even before the current political environment,” said lead author Elana Redfield, Federal Policy Director at the Williams Institute. “Further research is needed to study the population as a whole, to understand how recent changes in federal immigration policy have affected these communities, and to help policymakers develop the best interventions to address these urgent needs.”

ADDITIONAL FINDINGS

Education

- Almost one-third (30%) of immigrant respondents (and 41% of trans Latina immigrants) had less than a high school or GED level of education, compared to only 8% of non-immigrants.

Community

- At the time of our study, prior to the current administration’s policies, 79% of trans immigrant respondents said that the area of Los Angeles where they live is a good place for trans and nonbinary people. Seventy percent said that where they live is good for immigrants.
- Half or more of all immigrant respondents said that cost of living, housing, and debt were serious problems as a trans or nonbinary person in LA County.
- One-quarter of immigrant respondents (25%) and nearly one-third of trans Latina immigrants (29%) reported feeling more comfortable accessing services from government offices than community-based organizations. Among non-immigrants, only 8% reported this.

Employment

- Unemployment was higher among immigrants (47%) than non-immigrants (22%). More than half of trans Latina respondents (54%) reported being currently unemployed.
- Thirty-eight percent (38%) of immigrants reported a negative experience in the workplace because they are trans or nonbinary.

Transportation

- Immigrant respondents were nearly twice as likely as non-immigrants to report primarily using public transportation to commute to work or school (50% vs. 28%).

Health Care

- Immigrants were about four times more likely than non-immigrants to be uninsured (30% vs. 7%).

- Over one-third (36%) of immigrants reported delaying or not receiving necessary medical care in the past 12 months.

Law Enforcement

- Prior to the 2024 election, about one-third (31%) of immigrant respondents reported feeling somewhat or very uncomfortable asking for help from law enforcement in LA County. Forty percent (40%) feared the police might arrest them or someone close to them because of their immigration status.
- Immigrants who were uncomfortable asking for help from law enforcement at the time were about twice as likely as non-immigrants to say they would be more comfortable if they knew there was an LGBTQ liaison available (49% vs. 27%) or police had received training on how to treat trans and nonbinary people (53% vs. 21%).

“LA County’s trans and nonbinary communities—including immigrants and trans Latina immigrants—have the vision, capacity, and commitment to lead efforts that address current disparities and future challenges,” said study author Bamby Salcedo, President and CEO of the TransLatin@ Coalition. “It is essential that these communities are included in county-wide problem-solving and policymaking.”

This report is the first of two reports that examine the lived experiences of LGBTQ Latinas in Los Angeles. The second report will be released later in October. Both reports were made possible through the generous support of [Latina Futures 2050 Lab](#), a research initiative spearheaded by the UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center (CSRC).

Read the report [link TK]

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The Williams Institute at UCLA School of Law, a think tank on sexual orientation and gender identity law and public policy, is dedicated to conducting rigorous, independent research with real-world relevance.