

Statement of Principles on Women and Immigration Reform

Immigrant women make great contributions to the rich social, cultural, intellectual, and economic fabric of the United States. They are our mothers, grandmothers, sisters, daughters, spouses, partners, and friends. They are students, teachers, laborers, business owners, lawmakers, and much more. Yet, despite their many contributions to our families and communities, issues of concern to women continue to be left out of conversations about immigration reform, and women continue to suffer injustice, discrimination, family separation, and fear because of our nation's immigration laws.

The face of the migrant in the United States is increasingly that of a woman. Women now make up 51% of the immigrant population,¹ and 100 immigrant women arrive in the United States for every 96 men.² The majority of women migrate to reunite with family, to make a better life for their children, or to escape oppression, discrimination, and violence that prevent them from living full and free lives in their home countries. Current immigration laws, policies, and programs disproportionately disadvantage women, and women are too often left out of policy discussions that affect their lives. In the absence of sufficient legal channels for migration, more than 5 million women in the United States are undocumented and living on the margins of our society.³

Policies that divide communities, separate families, and violate the human and due process rights of migrants reinforce gender inequities and ignore the unique circumstances that compel women, LGBT individuals, and others seeking protection and equality to migrate and dictate their needs after they arrive.

Instead of honoring the contributions of immigrant women to the United States, past efforts at immigration reform have failed to provide for equitable citizenship, adequate protection, and full integration for all women. A reasonable and sustainable solution to current and future immigration needs MUST take into account gender specific perspectives. In addition, the path forward on immigration MUST ensure equality for all immigrants, protect and promote their civil and human rights, and empower aspiring Americans to fully participate in and contribute to our economy and society.

¹United States Census Bureau. 2011 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates. Selected Characteristics of the Native and Foreign-Born Populations. Available at <http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/searchresults.xhtml?refresh=t>. Accessed on January 15, 2013.

² Migration Policy Institute. MPI Data Hub: Foreign-Born Males per 100 Foreign-Born Females, for the United States: 1870 to 2011. Available at <http://www.migrationinformation.org/datahub/charts/final.malesfemales.shtml> Accessed on January 15, 2013.

³ Hoefler M, Rytina N, and Baker B. U.S. Department of Homeland Security. Estimates of the Unauthorized Immigrant Population Residing in the United States: January 2011. March 2012. Available at http://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/statistics/publications/ois_ill_pe_2011.pdf . Accessed on January 15, 2013.

As we begin a long overdue national conversation about immigration reform, we call on policymakers to uphold and incorporate the following principles to ensure that the human rights of all migrants are protected:

- Any pathway to citizenship and integration must be open, affordable, safe, and accessible to ALL immigrant women, including those whose work is in the home and those who are employed in the informal economy.
- Immigrant women must be afforded equal employment-based migration opportunities and workplace protections so that they may safely pursue economic opportunity and support their families with dignity and pride.
- Immigration reform must protect the right of all families to stay together, regardless of immigration status, family structure, sexual orientation, gender identity, or marital status, and provide sufficient family-based channels for migration in the future.
- Immigration reform must advance ALL immigrant women's access to public services and economic support, including comprehensive health coverage and care, and legal and social services that promote equality of opportunity, integration, and the ability to make decisions regarding reproductive and sexual health and the well-being of the family.
- Enforcement, detention, and deportation programs that compromise immigrant women's safety, violate their civil, human, and due process rights, and tear families apart must be replaced by sensible and sufficient legal channels for migration that adequately meet family and labor demands and respect our obligations under international law.
- Reforms to our immigration policies must bring an end to programs that disproportionately impact women by discouraging reporting of crimes to law enforcement and compromising the safety of communities, and must advance protections for women fleeing state and interpersonal violence and victims of trafficking or exploitation.