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Kyung Jin Lee/MEDILL

*Immigrants and native-born Americans may benefit from comprehensive immigration reform, according to recent reports.*

## Study finds the economy would benefit from legalizing undocumented immigrants

by KYUNG JIN LEE

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Comprehensive immigration reform would produce at least \$1.5 trillion in added U.S. gross domestic product over 10 years, according to a new report by a UCLA professor. Based on this report and other studies, Illinois would see significant economic gains from legalizing undocumented immigrants.

The report, published by the Center for American Progress and Immigration Policy Center, gleaned its results from analyzing a legalization program in 1986. It said that the average hourly wage for immigrants who became legal residents increased by 15.2 percent by 1992. Further, the report said the program was implemented during an economic recession and yet, it still helped raise wages and stimulate growth in investments by the new legal residents.

In Illinois, approximately 325,000 undocumented immigrants made up 4.5 percent of the state's labor force, according to a report by the Pew Hispanic Center in 2009.

A study by the University of Illinois-Chicago's Center for Urban Economic Development in 2001 said the undocumented immigrant population spent a total of \$5.45 billion annually in the Chicago metro area.

The UCLA report supports similar findings in 2009 by the Cato Institute, known for its right-leaning, libertarian principles.

David Griswold, a trade and immigration expert at the Cato Institute, said comprehensive immigration reform would net \$180 billion annually "The fact is that more opportunities are created for native-born Americans in middle-class jobs," Griswold said.

Griswold said the UCLA findings reinforce Cato's. "There are two groups using two methodologies with the same results," Griswold said.

Darren Lubotsky, an associate professor of economics at the University of Illinois-Urbana Champaign, agreed. He said having both lower- and higher-skilled workers creates higher productivity by the higher-skilled workers.

"Some people believe immigrants lower wages for all workers. The evidence is pretty clear that the level of lowered income only affects jobs that other immigrants are doing," Lubotsky said.

Most undocumented immigrants work in low-wage agricultural, service and manufacturing industries, according to both the Pew Research Center and the UIC studies.

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