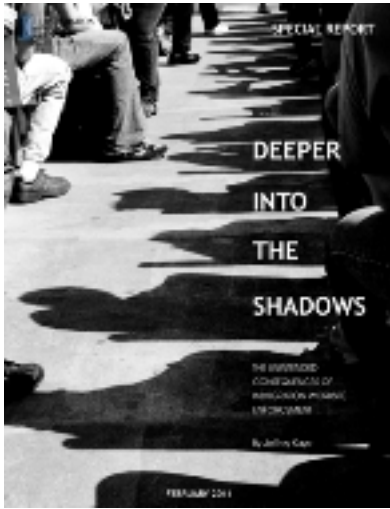


## Deeper into the Shadows



[1]By [Jeffrey Kaye](#) [2]

Before the onset of the Great Recession, immigrant labor was cited as a boom to the U.S. economy. In towns and cities across the country, immigrant labor—documented or otherwise—filled positions in growing businesses and industries where demand outpaced the supply of native-born workers. Since the onset of the economic downturn in 2008 and the rise in U.S. unemployment, some analysts and politicians—looking for a convenient scapegoat—have turned on that immigrant workforce and their employers, arguing that deporting eight million undocumented immigrant workers will create eight million new jobs for the native-born. This over-simplified equation ignores the complicated and inter-dependent roles that immigrants play in our economy. A 2010 study by the Fiscal Policy Institute on the economic contributions of immigrants in the 25 largest metropolitan areas in the United States makes the point well:

The results were clear: immigrants contribute to the economy in direct relation to their share of the population. In the 25 largest metropolitan areas combined, immigrants make up 20 percent of the population and are responsible for 20 percent of economic output. Together, these metro areas comprise 42 percent of the total population of the country, 66 percent of all immigrants, and half of the country's total Gross Domestic Product.

Immigrant workers are an important part of our labor force. Those who are undocumented, in many cases, entered the workforce when demand was high and have lived in this country for many years, setting down roots and becoming productive members of their communities. Ripping them from their jobs and families or driving them deeper underground will only hurt the U.S. economy.

As Daniel Griswold of the Cato Institute recently testified before Congress, “We cannot deport our way out of unemployment.” Undocumented immigration is not the cause of high unemployment. Deporting undocumented immigrants will not automatically create new job openings for unemployed Americans. High unemployment is not associated with high levels of immigration at the regional, state, or county levels, and immigration is not associated with high levels of unemployment among minorities. Recently arrived immigrants and unemployed U.S. workers live in different areas, have different levels of education and experience, and work in different occupations. Some long-time unemployed Americans may be willing to take lower-skilled, low-paying jobs out of desperation, but that is hardly a long-term solution to our economic problems.

Furthermore, undocumented immigrants are workers, taxpayers, and consumers; forcing them to leave an area means a decrease in tax revenue, economic output, and consumer purchasing power. Economists have estimated that mass deportation would cost the U.S. economy \$2.6 trillion in

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Published on Immigration Policy Center (<http://immigrationpolicy.org>)

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cumulative lost Gross Domestic Product (GDP) over 10 years, not including the actual cost of deportation.

Unauthorized workers are also human beings with families, hopes, and dreams. Many lived in “mixed-status” families, which means they are married to U.S. citizens or legal immigrants and have U.S.-citizen children. Deporting undocumented immigrants means separating American families, and tearing parents away from their children. It means that people who have been living in the U.S. for years and have established strong roots here are suddenly displaced.

What is the solution? While there are unscrupulous employers who should be the priority for immigration enforcement, the practical reality, so often overlooked in this debate, is that the vast majority of employers are attempting to do their best to make a good life for themselves and their employees. They want to comply with the law—including our immigration laws, and in many cases are devastated to learn that the immigrants who have been working for them for many years are undocumented. Ironically, it is these employers who are frequently the target of worksite actions, with negative consequences for both employer and employees.

This article by noted journalist Jeffrey Kaye illustrates the dilemmas involved in our current worksite enforcement strategy. What happens to local businesses and economies when audits result in mass firings of workers? What happens to those workers and their families when they are fired? Does the current system really benefit anyone?

The Immigration Policy Center believes that the answer to the last question is “no,” and that only by overhauling our current immigration system and replacing it with one that meets the needs of the 21st century will we get past the hardships and quandaries Mr. Kaye so ably details in his report.

Published On: **Wed, Feb 09, 2011** | [Download File](#) [1]

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[2] <http://www.immigrationpolicy.org/jeffrey-kaye>