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## The Labor Supply of Undocumented Immigrants

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### Abstract

Over 11 million undocumented persons reside in the United States. This paper examines the labor supply of this population. Using newly developed methods that impute undocumented status for persons in the Current Population Surveys, the study documents a number of findings. The labor force participation rate of undocumented men is larger than that of natives or legal immigrants; this gap widened over the past two decades; and the labor supply of undocumented men is more inelastic than that of other groups. In contrast, the participation rate of undocumented women is far below that of both legal immigrants and natives.

Keywords: Labor supply; immigration; undocumented immigration; labor supply elasticity

### I. Introduction

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) estimates that 11.4 million undocumented persons reside in the United States (as of January 2012).<sup>1</sup> In the past few years, Congress considered a number of proposals to regularize the status of this undocumented population and provide a “path to citizenship,” while President Obama issued executive orders, which were never fully implemented due to interventions by the judicial system, that attempted to grant some form of amnesty to about half of this population.

Given the size of the undocumented population, any future change in the immigration status of this group may have significant effects on the labor market, on the number of persons that qualify for various government-provided benefits, on the timing of retirement, on the size of the population receiving Social Security benefits, and on the funding of almost all of these government programs.

Any evaluation that attempts to predict the economic impact of the regularization of immigration status for the undocumented population immediately runs into a major roadblock: It

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<sup>1</sup> More recent estimates by the Pew Research Center (Passel and Cohn, 2016) suggest that this number has held steady since the end of the Great Recession.

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