



The impact of regularisation measures on people, institutions and wider society

Evidence from research from across the world

Acknowledgments:

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Definitions

‘Undocumented migrants’ or ‘undocumented people’ live in a country where their residence is not officially recognized. Many have had residence permissions linked to employment, study, family, or international protection, but those permits were either temporary or very precarious and their validity expired. There are also children who are born to undocumented parents who inherit this precarious residence status.

‘Regularisation’ refers to any process or procedure through which someone can obtain a residence permit from a relevant government authority authorising – ‘regularising’ – their stay in the country they reside in. The person applies for these procedures from inside the country, including when residing irregularly, in contrast to residence and work permits which must be applied for from another country. Regularisation can also occur through changes in policy that exempt a particular nationality from the requirement to have a residence permit in the country.

Two main subsets of regularisations exist:

- **Regularisation programmes**, which have a limited time period in which to apply and are not part of the existing legal or policy framework;
- **Regularisation mechanisms**, with applications accepted on a rolling basis and already part of the legal or policy framework.



Some identify a third group: **regularisation initiatives (alternatively, regularisation campaigns)**. Regularisation initiatives are anchored in the legal or policy framework and are run during a specific time period, with the aim of proactively implementing an existing regularisation mechanism.¹

For insight into the procedural aspect of regularisations, we invite you to read PICUM, 2023, [Regularisation mechanisms and programmes: why they matter and how to design them](#).

¹ OSCE ODIHR, 2021, [Regularization of Migrants in an Irregular Situation in the OSCE Region. Recent Developments, Points for Discussion and Recommendations](#), p. 4

Introduction

What happens to people when they are regularized? Do they get better jobs? Does their housing improve? How are their children affected? Do governments benefit from regularisations? Are the costs of running a regularisation programme or mechanism offset by increased financial contributions of regularized individuals? What impact overall does regularisation have on society at large?

These are some of the myriad questions that civil society organisations, researchers and governments around the world explore when examining regularisation measures. These questions are also what prompted PICUM to compile research on the impact of regularisation. We drew upon over five decades worth of research on regularisation measures in the Americas and Europe to cover the wide range of effects of regularisation measures on people, societies, governments, and administrations. Some of these effects are to be expected (an improvement in mental health and wellbeing, for instance) while others were not (for instance, an increase in the birthweight of children born after their parents' regularisation).

While we believe existing research provides a solid basis to draw conclusions from, some limitations exist.

First, while the body of research is growing, it is still somewhat limited. So, while we have searched for research on the impact of regularisation measures (programmes or mechanisms), we expanded this where the research was directly applicable. An example of this is the research we included on the impact of the American 'DACA' programme – a 2012 programme that suspended the deportation of 800,000 undocumented children and young people.² While the DACA programme would not necessarily be considered a regularisation (e.g. these young people's future is still uncertain, as their deportation is merely suspended), the programme has resulted in renewable, two-year residence and work permits, which does allow for some longitudinal research and comparisons with some regularisation schemes.

Second, and as researchers have pointed out, there may be "scant empirical evidence about the benefits of prior regularization initiatives because their design or rollout has not allowed proper identification of causal impacts. For instance, most regularization programs incorporate eligibility requirements such as being employed at the time of enactment. This means they benefit a rather small group of [migrants], more often less vulnerable ones, which confounds the impact of the regularization program itself."³ Still, this paper aims to gather the data that does exist – in Europe and beyond – to show the breadth of impacts on the people themselves, on the societies they live in and the governments that administer them.

2 DACA or Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals. See for example KFF, 11 February 2025, [Key Facts on Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals \(DACA\)](#) for more info [checked on 20 August 2025]

3 Ibáñez A.M., Mya A., Ortega M.A., Roza S.V. and Urbina M.J., 2022, *Life Out of the Shadows: Impacts of Amnesties in the Lives of Migrants*, IZA Institute of Labor Economics Discussion Paper no. 15049, p. 3

Third, much of the research assess the impact of regularisation programmes, and it is possible that regularisation mechanisms have different effects than programmes do. Because programmes are per definition timebound, their impact is more easily discernible for researchers, which may have caused researchers to focus on them more than on mechanisms. Their size also matters. The tax, economic and labour-market effects of regularisation programmes that affect a large group of people will be much larger than these same effects of a small-scale programme or mechanism that affects a handful or a couple of thousands of people.

Fourth, the impact of any regularisation measure will be influenced by its design. Expensive application procedures or high fees, for instance, tend to push people into debt in order to regularise.⁴ The debt then impacts their finances, their housing and ability to meet with family living abroad or develop skills through training long after they've been regularised. However, too little research looks into the particular effects of the specific design of regularisation measures, so this paper cannot either. We do, however, clarify these causal relations wherever possible.

Fifth, we cannot exclude that some effects may be correlations rather than the direct consequences of regularisations (causal relationships). We must recognize that not all of the effects in this paper can be attributed solely to people's regularisation and to nothing else. However, the quantitative research collected in this paper controlled for variables, and accessing a permit played a key role in each effect mentioned.

As this paper shows, regularisation has many positive consequences for the individuals themselves, for their families, their neighbours and co-workers and for the governments that organise them. However, the bulk of these effects are short lived if people's permits remain insecure, or when people fall out of status and become undocumented again at a later stage. For people and societies to be able to capitalize on the positive effects, many of which compound over time, people must be able to access a secure residence status/permit, including settled status or citizenship, over time.

4 Migrant Voice, 2022, [Destroying hopes, dreams and lives. How the UK visa cost and process impact migrants' lives](#); PICUM, 2023, [The use of fees in residence procedures in Europe: Pricing people out of a residence permit?](#)

Impact on people

Of the three aspects that we cover in this paper, it is the life of the undocumented person that is the most obviously impacted by a regularisation programme or mechanism. Their mental and physical wellbeing, the work they do and how they are treated, the opportunities to develop themselves, their living conditions and, sometimes, their pathway to citizenship are all affected by accessing a residence permit. Being regularised allows people to look at themselves and

their place in society in a new and different way. It enables them to become more self-sufficient in terms of day-to-day survival, but also to project into the future and develop themselves.⁵ Not only they benefit, but their children do so too. This chapter looks at these impacts, noting how women and men and high-skilled and lower-skilled workers are affected differently.



“The security of knowing that you can actually be outside without worrying that you’ll get deported. It brings a lot of benefits: better job and more work and you can actually apply for healthcare. In a sense, it brings you into the community.”

DACA recipient⁶

5 ULB, Centrum voor Sociaal Beleid Herman Deleeck and Centrum voor Gelijkheid van kansen en voor racismebestrijding, 2008, [“Before and after”, de sociale en economische positie van personen die geregulariseerd werden in de uitvoering van de wet van 22/12/1999.](#)

6 Quote taken from Patler C. and Laster Pirtle W., 7 June 2017, [From Undocumented to DACAmented: Can Changes to Legal Status Impact Psychological Wellbeing?](#), Youth Circulations, blog [checked on 15 August 2025]

Mental well-being and physical health

Being regularised is associated with a positive impact on people's health because people have better access to health care and insurance,⁷ because they are better equipped to find a job that matches their skills and aspirations,⁸ and because the security

of having a permit improves people's mental health.⁹ Receiving a residence permit also has a legitimizing effect on people, improving their sense of security and trust in the future. However, improvements may take some time to take hold.¹⁰

Mental health

That **people's mental health improves** is to be expected. Undocumented people can be more prone to mental health challenges than others because of the intrinsic insecurity of their lives due to irregular migration status and the day-to-day challenges they must overcome.¹¹ While data is scant, undocumented people have reported suffering from anxiety, depression and PTSD, for example.¹² Thirty four percent of undocumented, unaccompanied children seen by psychologists in a local medical center in the outskirts of Paris, France, suffered from psycho-traumatic syndromes.¹³ It is not surprising

then than regularised Venezuelans living in Colombia experienced marked improvements in physical and mental health compared to their non-regularised counterparts (1.8 standard deviations).¹⁴

Research in the United States on people who benefited from DACA¹⁵ and went from being undocumented to being on a two-year suspension of deportation found "a strong, positive, and significant effect of legal status on psychological wellbeing. Receiving DACA reduced the odds of distress, negative emotions, and worry about

7 Research for the World Bank, for example, found that beneficiaries of the Colombian *Permiso Especial de Permanencia* (PEP) had significantly more and better access to health insurance (nearly 50% higher). Source: Florez U., Villarraga M.J. and R., Viviana S., Moya A. and Ibáñez, A.M., 2023, [Least Protected, Most Affected : Impacts of Migration Regularization Programs on Pandemic Resilience](#), Policy Research Working Paper Series 10291, The World Bank

8 Devillanova C., Franco C. and Spada A., 2024, *Downgraded dreams: Labor market outcomes and mental health in undocumented migration*, SSM - Population Health 26 101652 found that undocumented workers who had to undergo 'occupational downgrading' (ie, loss of occupational status after arrival) were at a considerably higher risk of mental health disorders.

9 This was, amongst others, an impact of the US DACA programme. Center for American Progress, Nov 2021, [The Demographic and Economic Impacts of DACA Recipients: Fall 2021 Edition](#)

10 A study asking very recently regularised and undocumented people to rate their own health found that the regularised people did not rate their health better than those who were undocumented. Having social support networks correlated more strongly with self-rated health than residence status, at least right after regularisation. Fakhoury, J., Burton-Jeangros, C., Guessous, I. et al, 2021, [Self-rated health among undocumented and newly regularized migrants in Geneva: a cross-sectional study](#), BMC Public Health 21, 1198

11 See for example Le Courant S., 2015, [Le poids de la menace. L'évaluation quotidienne du risque d'expulsion par les étrangers en situation irrégulière](#), Ethnologie française 2015/1 Vol 45, 123-133 for insight into the day-to-day stressful assessments people must make.

12 Anderson L.M.C., Hjern A. and Ascher H., 2018, *Undocumented adult migrants in Sweden: mental health and associated factors*, BMC Public Health 18:1369. See also PICUM, 2022, [Insecure residence status, mental health and resilience](#) for more on the mental health of undocumented people.

13 Médecins sans Frontières, 2019, *Les mineurs non-accompagnés: symbole d'une politique maltraitante*. See also PICUM, 2021, [Navigating irregularity: the impact of growing up undocumented in Europe](#)

14 Ibáñez A.M., Mya A., Ortega M.A., Rozo S.V. and Urbina M.J., 2022, *Life Out of the Shadows: Impacts of Amnesties in the Lives of Migrants*, IZA Institute of Labor Economics Discussion Paper no. 15049

15 DACA or Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals is a 2012 programme issuing two-year suspensions of deportation to children and young people who had arrived in the United States before a certain date and met certain criteria. While under DACA, they were allowed to study, work access benefits, etc. For more info, see for instance US Citizenship and Immigration Service, [Consideration of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals \(DACA\)](#), webpage [checked on 26 August 2025]

self-deportation by 76-87%, compared to respondents without DACA.¹⁶ Respondents said their mental wellbeing had improved thanks to improved financial stability, access to (higher) education and resources like drivers' licenses, and reduced fear and greater freedom. Other research using a different methodology confirms the positive impact of DACA.¹⁷

Another study shows that people also regain a sense of control over their lives, as well as a sense of freedom and happiness. This is due to the safety of their permit, but also because they can, once they are regularised, freely move around – both within the country and across borders.¹⁸



“And then when I started crossing the border after I got my permit, I felt free... free you know... (...) I felt a bird, free to go.”

– Man in his 30s, 12 months after regularisation¹⁹

Other research, by Baker, found that people could afford to take more time off after regularisation, probably because they earned more per hour.²⁰ It is conceivable that more time to spend with loved ones, resting or on hobbies would also improve mental health.

However, **improvements may be short-lived if the status is insecure**. Giuntella et al. ; for instance, found that, while DACA recipients' sleep patterns

improved significantly,²¹ the positive effect dissipated after 2016, four years after DACA was adopted.²² Patler, Hamilton and Savinar find the same effects: an immediate improvement in mental health after DACA adoption, but a return to pre-DACA levels by 2015. The study, which analyses data from 2009 to 2019, connects this decline to the insecurity of the status (which is only a suspension of deportation), and the increase of anti-migrant rhetoric in American politics by that date.²³

16 Patler C. and Laster Pirtle W., 2017, *From undocumented to lawfully present: Do changes to legal status impact psychological wellbeing among latino immigrant young adults?*, Social Science & Medicine, p. 6

17 Venkataramani A.S., Shah S.J., O'Brien R., Kawachi I. and Tsai A.C., 2017, [Health consequences of the US Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals \(DACA\) immigration programme: a quasi-experimental study](#), Lancet Public Health, 2(4): e175–e181

18 Consoli L., Burton-Jeangros C., Jackson Y.-L. J., 2022, *Transitioning out of illegalization: cross-border mobility experiences*, Frontiers in human dynamics 2022(4)

19 Quote taken from Consoli L., Burton-Jeangros C., Jackson Y.-L. J., 2022, *Transitioning out of illegalization: cross-border mobility experiences*, Frontiers in human dynamics 2022(4), p. 12

20 Baker, S.R., 2013, *Effects of immigrant legalization on crime: the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act*, Stanford University

21 Stress, mental health challenges, depression and poor sleep are connected to each other.

22 Giuntella O., Lonsky J., Mazonna F. and Stella L., 2021, *Immigration policy and immigrants' sleep. Evidence from DACA*, Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization 182, 1–12

23 Patler C., Hamilton E., and Savinar R., 2020, *The Limits of Gaining Rights while Remaining Marginalized: The Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) Program and the Psychological Well-Being of Latina/o Undocumented Youth*, Social Forces 100(1)

These findings underline what PICUM, research²⁴ and people on insecure residence statuses themselves²⁵ have always stated: secure residence permits are fundamental to ensuring people live in safety, thrive as people and fully integrate in and contribute to society.

If the permit allows for family reunification, or if it includes permits for family members, regularisation also means that families can live together, or that

the stress and worry of having a mixed status family lessens. Indeed, research on the mental health impact of DACA shows that recipients remained worried about the safety of their undocumented family members, because the programme did not result in residence permits for family members. So, while beneficiaries' mental wellbeing did improve, the research suggests that "programs that target individuals may not go far enough in addressing the overall wellbeing and needs of immigrant families."²⁶

Physical health

While people's **physical health post-regularisation** seems to have been less researched, there are indications that it **improves or seems unaffected**, at least in the short term after regularisation.²⁷ This can be due to the fact that migrants tend to be younger and healthier than the average population in the country of origin and destination to begin with – something called the 'healthy immigrant effect'.²⁸ However, being undocumented is hard on people's bodies, and people age. So, it is to be expected that people who are regularised may have better health over time, because they can access the care they need to stay healthy. Some studies also found physical health benefits, not for the person itself, but for their children.²⁹

Reversely, some studies have looked at the health impacts of insecure residence status. One study conducted in Australia compared asylum seekers (insecure status) with those with recognized refugee status (secure status). They found that people with a provisional (i.e., temporary and insecure) residence permit were three times less likely to engage in physical activity, like sports, than their compatriots who did have a secure status. They were also more likely to be sedentary for longer on a day to day basis. The researchers found that the insecurity of the status was at the basis, which caused mental health challenges, which in turn led to more sedentary behaviour.³⁰

24 Nickerson A., Byrow Y., O'Donnell M., Bryant R.A., Mau V., McMahon T., Hoffman J., Mastrogiovanni N., Specker P. and Liddell B.J., 2023, *The mental health effects of changing from insecure to secure visas for refugees*, Australian & New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry, Vol. 57(11) 1486– 1495; Jutvik K. and Holmqvist E., 2025, *Precarious Residence? A study on the Impact of Restrictive Migration Policy on Migrants' Subjective Well-Being and Stress*, Nordic Journal of Migration Research, 15(4): 1, pp. 1–19; Lind, J., Hansen C., and Khoury N, 2023, *The Impact of Temporary Residence Permits on Young Refugees' Abilities to Build a Life in Sweden*, Social Sciences 12: 143.

25 We Belong, 2020, [Mental health check](#)

26 Patler C. and Laster Pirtle W., 2017, *From undocumented to lawfully present: Do changes to legal status impact psychological wellbeing among Latino immigrant young adults?*, Social Science & Medicine, p. 2

27 Refle, J.-E., Burton-Jeangros, C. & Jackson, Y., 2024, *Sortir de la clandestinité. Les conséquences de la régularisation des travailleurs sans-papiers*.

28 For more on this, see for example ScienceDirect, [Healthy Immigrant Effect](#), webpage [checked on 26 August 2025]

29 See section on 'intergenerational impacts'

30 Rostami R, Wells R, Solaimani J, Berle D, Silove D, Rosenbaum S, Steel Z, 2025, *Visa Status, Physical Activity and Mental Health Among Farsi/Dari Speaking Refugees, Immigrants and Asylum Seekers in Sydney, Australia*, Health Promot J Austr 36(2)

Working life

Many undocumented migrants work to some degree. They tend to be highly concentrated in a small number of sectors or jobs, often characterised by a certain degree of informality, high competition, low profit margins and small firm sizes.³¹ Most commonly, people work in agriculture, domestic work, child care, sex work, hospitality and/or construction.³² Many carry out seasonal work, too.³³ However, not everyone works while undocumented, either because they are too afraid of the consequences when they do, or because they are not able to.³⁴

Regularisation thus offers paths towards formal employment, at least that is the case when the residence permit includes the right to work. Indeed, the jobs they do, how much they are paid and how they are treated are impacted by the residence permit that they receive after their regularisation.

This section focusses on three distinct aspects of working life that are impacted by regularisation according to the literature: people's employment rate, their labour mobility and their household finances (both income through work and debt).

Employment rate

UK-based research finds that **regularisation increases the likelihood of employment**,³⁵ with 38% of their respondents having started to work and contribute to the country's economy only after their regularisation.³⁶ Another study shows that the 2017 PEP programme for Venezuelan migrants³⁸ resulted in a 10% increase in the beneficiaries' formal

employment, which is considered high given the high prevalence of informal work in the Colombian labour market.³⁹ In Spain, the employment rate of young unaccompanied people (16-to-23-year-olds) rose from 33% to 54% within the first year after a legal change which gave them access to a residence and work permit.⁴⁰

31 FRA, 2012, *Regularisations – an instrument to reduce vulnerability, social exclusion and exploitation of migrants in an irregular situation in employment?*, working paper

32 Many of these sectors are essential, too. See for example, Lisiecki M., 2025, [The Role of Undocumented Workers in High-Growth Occupations and Industries Across the United States](#), Center for Migration Studies

33 Orrenius and Zavodny (2004), mentioned in Baker, S.R., 2013, *Effects of immigrant legalization on crime: the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act*, Stanford University.

34 4,674 of the 6,548 applications for the 2022 regularisation programme in Ireland included information on the applicant's employment status. Two thirds worked (55% said they were in employment and 11% were self-employed), 25% said they were unemployed, 7% selected 'other' and 1% were students. Source: Stapleton A., Cunniffe E. and Quinn A, 2024, [Non-EU nationals in regular employment in Ireland](#), ESRI Research Series no. 189

35 This will, in part, be due to the fact that having a residence and work permit can find it easier to find a job. At least, that is what 75% of respondents to the American 'Legalised Population Surveys' of 1989 and 1992 reported. Source: Baker, S.R., 2013, *Effects of immigrant legalization on crime: the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act*, Stanford University

36 Portes and Ventura-Arrieta, 2022, [The impact of regularisation](#), Citizens UK

37 Some people may however leave the work force or decrease their working hours after regularisation, for instance the elderly. Papademetriou, D., O'Neil, K., and Jachimowicz, M., 2004, *Observations on regularization and the labour market performance of unauthorized and regularized immigrants*, paper prepared for the European Commission, DG Employment and Social Affairs, in FRA, 2012, *Regularisations – an instrument to reduce vulnerability, social exclusion and exploitation of migrants in an irregular situation in employment?*, working paper, p. 14.

38 In 2017, Colombia created the Special Permanence Permit (Permiso Especial de Permanencia - PEP) to regularize the stay of Venezuelans residing in the country. The two-year permit granted access to social services and the labour market, and has since been renewed several times.

39 Ibáñez A.M., Mya A., Ortega M.A., Roza S.V. and Urbina M.J., 2022, *Life Out of the Shadows: Impacts of Amnesties in the Lives of Migrants*, IZA Institute of Labor Economics Discussion Paper no. 15049

40 PICUM, 4 April 2023, [Spain: over 16,000 young migrants obtain residence permits thanks to 2021 reform](#) [checked on 21 August 2025]



People are more likely to stay employed down the line too. Research by the Spanish Social Security Institute shows that about 80% of the people regularised in 2005 were employed one year on,⁴¹ while other research found that the beneficiaries of a 2002 regularisation programme in Italy were much more likely to be in formal employment a decade on than those who had not benefited.⁴² A study which surveyed 3,200 regularised migrants in France in the 1980s found that 87% were employed two years after the regularisation programme,⁴³ only a slight decrease from the 95.3% employment rate at the time of regularisation.⁴⁴

Previous experiences working in the country may have an impact on later employment. Research from Belgium found that if people had worked regularly in the past (before becoming undocumented and subsequently regularising), they were more likely to work later on than those who had not previously worked regularly.⁴⁵ They also found a gendered result: 80% of regularised men who had been *unemployed* before their regularisation were employed seven years later, while that was the case for only 40% of the previously unemployed women.⁴⁶ This research indicates how other aspects can have an impact on employment, including aspects like gender identity

and/or roles, and how difficult it can be to find employment to begin with, especially without prior (formal) experience and knowledge of the local job market, opportunities and job searching procedures.

Unsurprisingly, regularisation programmes that require the applicant to be employed when they submit their application have an impact on people's employment rate. Devillanova et. al., who analysed the effects of the 2002 Italian regularisation programme, found that applicants who met the eligibility requirements⁴⁷ were 30% more likely to be employed than undocumented migrants who did not meet these eligibility requirements for the regularisation (the control group).⁴⁸ This does not mean, however, that all of these people were in employment later on, as contract-based regularisation measures tend to cause a rise in fake contracts being sold for exorbitant prices.⁴⁹

41 Cited in Finotelli C., and Arango, J., 2011, [Regularisation of unauthorised immigrants in Italy and Spain: determinants and effects](#), Documents d'anàlisi geogràfica, 57(3), 495-515.

42 Deiana C, Giua L and Nisticò R, 2022, *Legalization and Long-Term Outcomes of Immigrant Workers*, Cento Studi Luca D'agliano Development studies working papers n. 80

43 Marie C. V., 1984, *De la clandestinité à l'insertion professionnelle régulière*, Travail et emploi, 22, 21-29., in Borjas G.J. and Edo A., 2023, [Monopsony, Efficiency, and the Regularization of Undocumented Immigrants](#), IZA discussion paper series no 16297;

44 French Ministry of Social Affairs and National Solidarity, 1984, *The employment market and immigrants in an irregular situation: lessons from the recent legalization exercise in France*, International Migration Review, 18(3), 558-578, in Borjas G.J. and Edo A., 2023, [Monopsony, Efficiency, and the Regularization of Undocumented Immigrants](#), IZA discussion paper series no 16297;

45 Centrum voor Gelijkheid van Kansen en voor Rasimebestrijding, 2006, [Before and after, De sociale en economische positieve van personen die geregulariseerd werden in uitvoering vna de wet van 22/12/1999](#)

46 Ibid.

47 These were 'minimum time of residence in Italy' and 'being employed at the time of the application'.

48 Devillanova C., Fasani F. & Frattini T., 2014, *Employment of Undocumented Immigrants and the Prospect of Legal Status: Evidence from an Amnesty Program*, IZA Discussion paper series.

49 Caritas International, 2021, [Demystifying the regularisation of undocumented workers](#), policy paper; PICUM, 14 December 2021, [Italy: the 2020 regularisation scheme leaves many behind](#), blogpost

Some studies did find that **certain regularisation programmes did not** lead to (higher) employment rates in the long term. For example, only half of the people who were regularised in the early 2000s in Belgium were employed five years later.⁵⁰ Another example are regularisation measures that require a promise of work, which incentivize malicious employers and middlemen to promise work contracts to hopeful undocumented people – jobs that either turn out to be exploitative or non-existent.⁵¹ People may also not be able to find or keep employment because of the state of the country's economy or structural issues. Third country nationals living in Belgium, for example, have a higher than average rate of inactivity (44.2%) compared to the rest of the EU⁵² (29%), indicating a systemic issue of employment and labour market integration in Belgium which goes beyond the design of the regularisation scheme or the profile of the regularised individuals. And, where permit renewals depend on people being in work, being financially self-sufficient or not using benefits at the time of renewal, unemployment could lead to people losing their residence permit and becoming undocumented once again.

In other words, **the exact impact of regularisation schemes depends both on the design of the measure, the state of the labour market of and broader employment policies in the country at that time.**

Nonetheless, regularisation does impact people's labour conditions, the jobs they do and the sectors they work in. It also changes their job seeking strategies, as they are no longer relegated to their networks alone and can reach out to agencies, job-seeking services, send in applications and participate in formal job application procedures.

50 GVA, 2 August 2008, [Hoe evalueren illegalen na hun regularisatie?](#) [checked on 20 August 2025]

51 Reyneri, E., 2001, *Migrants' Involvement in Irregular Employment in the Mediterranean Countries of the European Union*, University of Milan-Bicocca Working Paper; also in Bansak C. and Pearlman S., 2021, [The impact of legalizing unauthorized immigrants](#), Institute of Labor Economics (IZA), Bonn

52 Universiteit Gent, 2022, [Inactiviteit onder migranten in België: uitgediept via cijfers en studiewerk](#), policy brief nummer 5

Income and debts

We cover two aspects of acquiring a residence permit: the impact that it has on people's income through work and whether or not people incur debts.

Income through work

Research from the United States, Europe⁵³ and South America shows that, in general, **people earn more after they are regularised**.⁵⁴ For example, the Inter-American Development Bank found that the first PEP temporary permit programme⁵⁵ in Colombia resulted in a 30% increase in income for the regularised migrants,⁵⁶ while a 2021 regularisation programme in Peru led to a 12.1% increase in income for the beneficiaries.⁵⁷ A study looking at an Italian regularisation programme for workers ('Bossi-Fini'), in turn, found that previously undocumented men's annual occupational earnings increased 13% more than those who never were undocumented. Women's earnings increased too, but less so: four to six percent, depending on whether they entered irregularly or overstayed a visa.⁵⁸

Research into the 1986 'IRCA' regularisation programme in the United States⁵⁹ showed that the measure "meant higher wages, improvement of workforce skills, and a level playing field for other workers."⁶⁰ Higher wages or household income, in turn, usually **results in less food insecurity and more resilience to negative economic shocks**, like the COVID-19 pandemic.⁶¹ It also allows better living conditions.

However, several studies find that **not everyone benefits to the same degree**. Two studies find that **relatively higher-skilled undocumented migrants' work and earnings improve more than those of their lower-skilled counterparts**.⁶² The researchers speculate that this is because higher skilled workers have better chances to negotiate higher wages to begin with (because of better language skills, for instance), and that their regularisation opens the door to labour market opportunities they couldn't previously access. Kaushal drew similar conclusions when she researched the effects of the 1997 NACARA programme that regularised about 450,000 people from Nicaragua, Cuba, Guatemala and El Salvador living in the United States. She found that

53 For example, Marie C. V., 1984, *De la clandestinité à l'insertion professionnelle régulière*, Travail et emploi, 22, 21-29., in Borjas G.J. and Edo A., 2023, *Monopsony, Efficiency, and the Regularization of Undocumented Immigrants*, IZA discussion paper series no 16297; Portes J. and Ventura-Arrieta M., 2022, *The impact of regularisation*, Citizens UK

54 Do note however that, even though people earn more per hour, regularised people often still earn less than the national average. The Belgian 'Before and After' study, for example, found that 95% of the regularised people in their study earned less than 110 euro per day in 2007 [equivalent to 164 euro in 2024], while that was the case for only 60% of the total Belgian population. Source: Centrum voor Sociaal Beleid, Université d'Anvers, Groupe d'études sur l'ethnicité, le racisme, les migrations et l'exclusion, Université Libre de Bruxelles, 2008, *Before and after: La situation sociale et économique des personnes ayant bénéficié de la procédure de régularisation en 2000 (Loi du 22 décembre 1999)*. Inflation calculated on 29 August 2025 on 'Belgium Inflation Calculator'

55 'PEP' stands for 'permiso especial de permanencia' or 'special residence permit' in English.

56 Quoted in IRC, 30 October 2023, *A step Forward: Lessons from Colombia's Temporary Protection Status for Venezuelans*.

57 Luzes M., Rivera Rivera A., Rodríguez Guillén L., and van der Werf C., 2024, *Impacts of a Regularization Program in Peru*, Inter-American Development Bank Migration Unit discussion paper n° IDB-DP-01067

58 Martino E.M., Naticcioni P. and Di Porto E., 2019, *The impact of regularising migrant workers*, website [checked on 10 July 2025]

59 The 1986 IRCA programme ('Immigration and Reform Control Act') regularised the status of nearly three million undocumented people living in the USA. See Wikipedia, *Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986* for more info [checked on 20 August 2025]

60 Kossoudji S.A., 2013, *Back to the future: the impact of legalisation then and now*, Immigration Policy Center, p. 4

61 Ibáñez A.M., Mya A., Ortega M.A., Roza S.V. and Urbina M.J., 2022, *Life Out of the Shadows: Impacts of Amnesties in the Lives of Migrants*, IZA Institute of Labor Economics Discussion Paper no. 15049

62 Lofstrom, M., Hill, L. and Hayes, J., 2011, *Labor Market Effects of Immigrant Legalization in the Post-IRCA Era*; Monras, J., Vázquez-Grenno J., and Elias F., 2018, *Understanding the Effects of Granting Work Permits to Undocumented Immigrants*, CEPR Discussion Paper No. DP12726

only the wages of people with a high school degree or higher increased significantly after regularisation (statistically speaking).⁶³

The research shows that **men and women can benefit differently or to different degrees from regularisation**. For example, research on the USA,⁶⁴ Italy⁶⁵ and Switzerland indicate that women benefit to a lesser degree from regularisation than men, for instance because their wages increased less compared to men's. The 'Parchemins Study', Swiss longitudinal research on the impact of 'Operation Papyrus',⁶⁶ found that undocumented women in Switzerland are more likely to work in the domestic sector – a sector where employees find it challenging to earn enough to begin with. Even after regularization, the women persistently reported a lower capacity to contribute to social insurance (which depends on the number of hours worked). They also continued to earn less than the regularized men. It seemed that the women remained in a situation of greater professional instability throughout the study, including working fewer hours than regularized men and being more likely to work while ill.⁶⁷

This aligns with Kreisberg and Jackson's findings on the interactions between gender, residence status and labour market stratification. They find that being undocumented impacts the jobs available to men more than it does women, including in the long run (after regularization). In fact, while regularized men's careers do indeed continue to suffer from their time being undocumented,⁶⁸ having been undocumented is associated with an "increasing disadvantage" among women.⁶⁹ This is because undocumented migrant women tend to be highly concentrated in precarious sectors, like domestic, cleaning and care work, and have difficulty leaving these sectors after regularization. These sectors in themselves also give workers fewer opportunities for "later upward mobility."⁷⁰

The impact regularisation has on people's labour conditions and wages depends on the design of the scheme and the permit.⁷¹ "[W]age effects for newly authorized immigrants depend on how much mobility is granted under [regularisation] programmes, the pre-existing size of the informal sector, and other barriers to formal employment," write Bansak and

63 Those who did not graduate from high school did not see their wages increase significantly (only 1% increase); it seemed to stay stable. Kaushal, N., 2006, *Amnesty programs and the labor market outcomes of undocumented workers*, Journal of Human Resources 41(3), 631-647, in Fasani F., 2014, [Understanding the Role of Immigrants' Legal Status: Evidence from Policy Experiments](#), IZA Discussion paper series

64 Kossoudji S.A. and Cobb-Clark D., 1999, *Did Legalization Matter for Women? Amnesty and the Wage Determinants of Formerly Unauthorized Workers*, Gender Issues 17, no. 4: 3-14, in Kossoudji S.A., 2013, [Back to the future: the impact of legalisation then and now](#), Immigration Policy Center; Auedo-Dorantes C. and Bansak C., 2011, [The Impact of Amnesty on Labor Market Outcomes: A Panel Study Using the Legalized Population Survey](#), Center for Research and Analysis of Migration, Discussion Paper Series CDP No 06/11

65 The Bossi-Fini regularisation programme, see elsewhere.

66 For more on Operation Papyrus, see e.g. PICUM, 20 April 2020, [Geneva: Operation Papyrus regularised thousands of undocumented workers](#), blogpost [checked on 1 September 2025]

67 Refle, J.-E., Burton-Jeangros, C. & Jackson, Y., 2024, [Sortir de la clandestinité. Les conséquences de la régularisation des travailleurs sans-papiers.](#)

68 Because they 'lost' valuable years working in their fields, could not build (additional) skills while undocumented and/or because of the stigma of having been undocumented.

69 Kreisberg N.A. and Jackson M., 2023, [Durable Disadvantage: Gender and the Mark of Unauthorized Status in Immigrants' Occupational Trajectories](#), Social Perspect 66(1): 145-172, p. 15

70 Ibid., p. 16

71 For more on the design of regularisation measures, see PICUM, 2023, [Regularisation mechanisms and programmes: why they matter and how to design them](#)

Pearlman.⁷² They list two examples, one from France and one from Colombia, where people's wages did not significantly improve after regularisation. Another study highlights the danger of employer-dependent regularisations, which can make working conditions (hours, wages) worse for people.⁷³ It is important, therefore, that permits are not tied to a single employer or sector.

However, even when the wages of some do not increase much immediately after regularisation, for example because they cannot find better paid jobs,⁷⁴ their overall labour or life conditions do improve either immediately or eventually. Regularisation brings mental security and access to services and supports, including training to improve or certify skills, which in turn improve earning power or job security down the line.

Debt

It is known that some undocumented people go into debt in order to apply for a residence permit. This is certainly the case in countries with prohibitively high application fees, like the UK,⁷⁵ but can also be the case in countries with more affordable regularisation-related costs.⁷⁶ Ill-intentioned employers or lawyers may ask for money up front, for example, even when an application has low chances of success.⁷⁷

However, there are also indications that some incur additional debt after acquiring a residence permit.⁷⁸ The debt can be a direct consequence of acquiring a residence permit (new taxes to pay), and indirect consequences (trip to the country of origin to visit family, higher rents when moving to better housing) or because of family obligations (remittances). Moreover, people will have to learn the ins and outs of the administrative and legal obligations and rights regular migrants have. Not knowing or understanding (often complex) benefits systems also prevents people from asking for help and can cause them to rely on loans instead.

These debts not only create an obvious financial burden on the household, but also stress. And, if the debt becomes too large, can become an obstacle to keeping one's residence permit. As a recently-regularised woman explains, "The worry is how to keep your permit when you can't afford it."⁷⁹

72 Bansak C. and Pearlman S., 2021, [The impact of legalizing unauthorized immigrants](#), Institute of Labor Economics (IZA), Bonn

73 Markova E., Paraskevopoulou A. and McKay S., 2019, *Treading lightly: regularised migrant workers in Europe*, Migration Letters 16(3), 451-461.

74 See for example Le Courant S., 2014, « Être le dernier jeune » *Les temporalités contrariées des migrants irréguliers*, Terrain 63, 38-53.

75 Migrant Voice, 2022, [Destroying hopes, dreams and lives: How the UK visa costs and process impact migrants' lives](#)

76 PICUM, 2023, [The use of fees in residence procedures in Europe: Pricing people out of a residence permit?](#)

77 See for example Le Courant S., 2015, *Le poids de la menace. L'évaluation quotidienne du risque d'expulsion par les étrangers en situation irrégulière*, Ethnologie française 45(1), 123-133 ; Markova E., Paraskevopoulou A. and McKay S., 2019, *Treading lightly: regularised migrant workers in Europe*, Migration Letters 16(3), 451-461.

78 Refle, J.-E., Burton-Jeangros, C. & Jackson, Y., 2024, [Sortir de la clandestinité. Les conséquences de la régularisation des travailleurs sans-papiers.](#)

79 Translated from French. Refle, J.-E., Burton-Jeangros, C. & Jackson, Y., 2024, [Sortir de la clandestinité. Les conséquences de la régularisation des travailleurs sans-papiers](#), p. 47

Governments can do three things to limit the burden of debt. First, national governments can make residence procedures affordable and waive fees for certain groups of people.⁸⁰ Second, they can strengthen their pro deo and legal aid systems to help undocumented people navigate regularisation

procedures without having to revert to ill-advised or expensive legal assistance. Third, national and local governments can include financial literacy and budgeting classes in the measures they roll out in parallel to a regularisation measure (mechanism or programme).⁸¹

Labour mobility

Research shows that **undocumented people are more likely to change jobs or occupation after regularisation than regular migrants** (on the condition that the permit is not tied to a specific job, employer or sector⁸²). This is not surprising, as undocumented people are, in general, working in low-wage jobs and would want to transition into higher paid positions.

One study looking at the beneficiaries of the 1986 IRCA regularisation programme in the United States found that those who entered the country irregularly were more likely to change jobs than those who had entered regularly.⁸⁵ This finding illustrates that other, broader and preexisting factors play a role in people's labour mobility after regularisation.

For example, research looking at the Italian Bossi-Fini regularisation programme of the early 2000s showed that 75% of regularised workers were still employed four years later, but most had changed jobs or sectors by then. Around half had also moved to a different province.⁸³ The same research finds that regularised migrants are much more mobile than other workers: at least 35% more likely to change employer and 18% more likely to change province in the years after regularisation.⁸⁴

A qualitative study looking at the UK also noted **upward social mobility** post-regularisation and an increase in "medium to high skill employment" amongst regularised respondents.⁸⁶ For example, they noted many people having work titles that included terms such as 'leads', managers, supervisor or chef.

The **mobility** is not only occupational/professional or geographic, it is also across sectors (permits allowing). Undocumented workers tend to be

80 For more detailed recommendations, see PICUM, 2023, [The use of fees in residence procedures in Europe: Pricing people out of a residence permit?](#)

81 Key element 10 "The regularisation measure prevents irregular stay and work and is accompanied by support measures" see PICUM, 2022, [Regularisation mechanisms and programmes: Why they matter and how to design them](#)

82 see also Markova E., Paraskevopoulou A. and McKay S., 2019, *Treading lightly: regularised migrant workers in Europe*, Migration Letters 16(3), 451-461.

83 Martino E.M., Naticcioni P. and Di Porto E., 2019, [The impact of regularising migrant workers](#), website [checked on 10 July 2025]

84 *ibid.*

85 Lofstrom, M, Hill, L and Hayes, J, 2011, *Labor Market Effects of Immigrant Legalization in the Post-IRCA Era*

86 Portes and Ventura-Arrieta, 2022, [The impact of regularisation](#), Citizens UK

concentrated in a small number of jobs or sectors,⁸⁷ including agricultural work, domestic work, child care, sex work and construction, and many change **to sectors that either align better with their skills or aspirations or offer better labour conditions**. Still, many also stay in their initial sector: about half of the people who benefited from Spain's 2004 regularisation programme stayed in their sector, for example.⁸⁸ However, a major farmers association said that only 10 to 20% of the agricultural workers were still working in their sector at the end of 2007,⁸⁹ denoting that changes might also depend on sector to sector.

These positive consequences do not happen from one day to the next. **Regularised workers will continue to work in the same, often low-paid, sector or job for a while after regularisation if they have difficulties accessing other, better-paying jobs.**⁹⁰ For example, Swiss longitudinal (5-year) research into the impacts of 'Operation Papyrus' noticed that changes of sector were rare and that the majority of workers (nearly all women) continued to work in the same field as they did before their regularisation. They also found that only a minority of people undertook training to further their career

development. The researchers concluded that this low mobility between employment sectors could be due to the fact that it was hard for people to have the professional qualifications recognised.⁹¹

This can indeed be a factor, as can language barriers, needing to learn how to navigate the formal job market and discrimination against racialised communities⁹² or certain gender identities. In other cases, people can be or feel pressured to stay in certain jobs because it could help them get or keep a residence permit, even when it would have no impact on the immigration office's decision.⁹³ Labour immobility also happens when a person's regularisation was meant to regularise their undeclared work or undeclared relationship with their employer, after which they have to stay with that employer to keep their residence permit.

So, importantly, being regularised does not resolve every obstacle to finding well-paid, skill-appropriate employment. An economic downturn and a lack of jobs will impact regularised migrants' integration into the labour market,⁹⁴ as will discrimination on the labour market and employer-tied residence permits.

87 Often sectors characterised by high competition, low profit margins and small firm sizes. Source: FRA, 2012, *Regularisations – an instrument to reduce vulnerability, social exclusion and exploitation of migrants in an irregular situation in employment?*, working paper

88 Monras, J., Vázquez-Grenno, J., & Elias, F., 2020, *Understanding the effects of granting work permits to undocumented immigrants* (Working Paper No. 1228). Barcelona GSE.

89 In Finotelli C. and Arango J., 2011, *Regularisation of unauthorised immigrants in Italy and Spain: determinants and effects*, Documents d'anàlisi geogràfica, 57(3), 495-515.

90 For example, Brun F., 1999, *Les sans-papiers et le travail: La justification paradoxale*, in Laacher, S. (ed.), *L'Etat français et l'immigration irrégulière*, Migrants, In Reyneri E., 2005, *Migrants' involvement in irregular employment in the Mediterranean countries of the European Union*, International Labour Organisation

91 Refle, J.-E., Burton-Jeangros, C. & Jackson, Y., 2023, *Sortir de la clandestinité. Les conséquences de la régularisation des travailleurs sans-papiers*.

92 For examples, see e.g., Markova E., Paraskevopoulou A. and McKay S., 2019, *Treading lightly: regularised migrant workers in Europe*, Migration Letters 16(3), 451-461.

93 Chauvin S, Le Courant S and Tourette L, *Working with Irregular Status: Undocumented Migrants and the Moral Economy of Employment*, Revue européenne des migrations internationales vol. 37 - n°1 et 2

94 Badre A., 2024, *Morocco Country Brief on Irregular Migration Policy Context*. MlrreM Report. Krems: University for Continuing Education Krems (Danube University Krems).

Housing conditions

The housing or living conditions of undocumented people are often precarious, inadequate and insecure.⁹⁵ For example, 70% of a Swiss study's undocumented participants were subletting their accommodation and 66% thought they would have to move in the short term. People also lived in more crowded housing⁹⁶ – twice more crowded than the general Genevan population – and undocumented women lived in even more crowded housing than men.⁹⁷ Undocumented people are also more prevalent in many cities' rough sleeper populations, especially when shelters are unsafe or do not accept undocumented people.⁹⁸

While acquiring a residence permit should offer people more possibilities of finding safe, secure and affordable housing, few researchers have looked into the question. Two studies – one looking at the impact of a regularisation initiative in Belgium and one in Switzerland – found that many people moved shortly after regularising.⁹⁹ And, while a very limited number of undocumented people in Geneva, Switzerland, had rental contracts to their name before regularisation, their number increased significantly in the years after, indicating that they no longer sublet and enjoyed tenants' rights. Thus, the quality of their home improved while overcrowding decreased in the five years after regularisation.¹⁰⁰ The Belgian study found that of its 116 respondents, most continued renting, but some (21) moved to social housing, while another 24 became homeowners in the five years after regularisation.¹⁰¹

95 See for example, PICUM, 2021, [Navigating Irregularity: the impact of growing up undocumented in Europe](#); PICUM, 2013, [Housing and Homelessness of Undocumented Migrants in Europe: Developing Strategies and Good Practices to Ensure Access to Housing and Shelter](#); PICUM, 2021, [PICUM's contribution to the consultation of the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to adequate housing on housing discrimination and spatial segregation](#)

96 Research looking at the situation in Colombia found a similar issue of overcrowding: regularised Venezuelans had 9.5% more rooms per family members than their non-regularised compatriots. Source: Urbina M.J., Roza S.V., Mya A., and Ibáñez A.M., 2023, [Least Protected, Most Affected : Impacts of Migration Regularization Programs on Pandemic Resilience](#), Policy Research Working Paper Series 10291, The World Bank

97 Refle, J.-E., Burton-Jeangros, C. & Jackson, Y., 2024, [Sortir de la clandestinité. Les conséquences de la régularisation des travailleurs sans-papiers.](#)

98 See upcoming PICUM and FEANTSA report on access to adequate housing, shelter and self-organised solutions (forthcoming 2026).

99 Centrum voor Gelijkheid van Kansen en voor Rasimebestrijding, 2006, [Before and after, De sociale en economische positieve van personen die geregulariseerd werden in uitvoering vna de wet van 22/12/1999](#); Refle, J.-E., Burton-Jeangros, C. & Jackson, Y., 2024, [Sortir de la clandestinité. Les conséquences de la régularisation des travailleurs sans-papiers.](#)

100 Refle, J.-E., Burton-Jeangros, C. & Jackson, Y., 2024, [Sortir de la clandestinité. Les conséquences de la régularisation des travailleurs sans-papiers.](#)

101 Centrum voor Gelijkheid van Kansen en voor Rasimebestrijding, 2006, [Before and after, De sociale en economische positieve van personen die geregulariseerd werden in uitvoering vna de wet van 22/12/1999](#)



Family life: travelling abroad and/or setting up a home

One of the most cited benefits of being regularised is, according to regularised people themselves, the fact that they can travel abroad and visit their families. These visits often happen early on after regularisation, usually after prolonged periods of separation, sometimes even decades.¹⁰³ For example, 61% of newly regularised migrants participating in a study visited their country of origin shortly after their regularisation. It was the first return visit ever for 22% of them.¹⁰⁴

These trips are a joyous and much anticipated occasion. However, they also come with many expectations¹⁰⁵ (bringing gifts, for instance), logistical challenges (taking time off work, etc) and new financial burdens (travel costs, taking time off work, etc).¹⁰⁶ The visits home can also be emotionally challenging, because family dynamics will have changed while the person was abroad, even if they stayed in regular contact with their parents, siblings or children.¹⁰⁷

For some, becoming documented also means they can date more freely¹⁰⁸ or feel safe enough to set up a family.¹⁰⁹ The researchers of the Parchemins study find that "[r]egularisation seems to stabilise family life, particularly for men, as their residence permits give them access to life transitions in terms of unions (marriage or divorce) and parenthood."¹¹⁰ They note that the stabilizing effect is probably more notable for the men in their study, because many of the women who participated in the study and 'Operation Papyrus' have children in the countries of origin (i.e., the women had migrated to meet their children's needs).

102 Consoli, L., Burton-Jeangros, C., Jackson, Y., 2022, [Transitioning out of illegalization: cross-border mobility experiences](#). In: *Frontiers in human dynamics*, vol. 4.

103 Levinson, A., 2005, [The regularisation of unauthorized migrants: Literature survey and country case studies](#), Oxford: Centre on Migration, Policy and Society, University of Oxford.

104 Consoli, L., Burton-Jeangros, C., Jackson, Y., 2022, [Transitioning out of illegalization: cross-border mobility experiences](#). In: *Frontiers in human dynamics*, vol. 4.

105 Le Courant S., 2014, « Être le dernier jeune » [Les temporalités contrariées des migrants irréguliers](#), *Terrain* 63, 38-53.

106 Consoli, L., Burton-Jeangros, C., Jackson, Y., 2022, [Transitioning out of illegalization: cross-border mobility experiences](#). In: *Frontiers in human dynamics*, vol. 4.

107 Refle, J.-E., Burton-Jeangros, C. & Jackson, Y., 2024, [Sortir de la clandestinité. Les conséquences de la régularisation des travailleurs sans-papiers](#); Fresnoza-Flot A., 2009, [Migration status and transnational mothering: the case of Filipino migrants in France](#), *Global Networks* vol 9 issue 2

108 Pila, D. 2014, ["I'm not good enough for anyone": legal status and the dating lives of undocumented young adults](#), *Legacy Theses & Dissertations* (2009 - 2024). 1236.

109 People's decision on whether or not to have (more) children can also be influenced by regularisation. One longitudinal study found that regularised couples were less likely to have children than their undocumented counterparts in the three years after regularisation. The researchers hypothesised that this was due to better access to fertility care (including family planning services) and the fact that regularisation enabled women to work (i.e., the opportunity cost of having a child became larger). Source: Amuedo-Dorantes C., Ibáñez A.M., Roza S.V. and Traettino S., 2024, [Regularization Programs and the Fertility of Forced Migrants: Insights from a Panel Study of Venezuelan Migrants in Colombia](#)

110 Translated from French. Refle, J.-E., Burton-Jeangros, C. & Jackson, Y., 2024, [Sortir de la clandestinité. Les conséquences de la régularisation des travailleurs sans-papiers](#), p. 52



"They called me I was a prodigal daughter because I didn't go home for so many years... and when I went home, they had a party, we had a reunion, so it was a memorable one. So, it's like it healed them. (...) I could not explain why I could not go home. (...) I always gave them hope that one day I will come home. (...) My parents cried... oh... it's like there is a needle in their heart that was removed..."

– woman, seven months after regularisation

Personal development

Undocumented people often feel like their lives are on pause, like their potential is being wasted while they are undocumented.¹¹¹ So, once regularised, people feel they can invest in themselves, in hopes of making up for some of the time they 'lost'.

This is true for everyone, but maybe even more so for children and young people who have grown up in the country, despite being undocumented. The fact that their options to study, work and develop are much more limited than their classmates often becomes exceedingly clear when they're about to graduate high school or turn 18 years old.¹¹²



"When I got my status... oh my god, it was something very wonderful. I was so happy, it was a dream come true. I managed to travel back to my country to visit relatives after a long time, I got married to a long-time fiancé who was waiting for me for a long time in Walawi. I was able to finish my degree which I couldn't finish because I was undocumented. This is very wonderful."

– man, one year after regularisation¹¹³

111 Le Courant S., 2014, « Être le dernier jeune » *Les temporalités contrariées des migrants irréguliers*, Terrain 63, 38-53; Le Courant S., 2015, *Le poids de la menace. L'évaluation quotidienne du risque d'expulsion par les étrangers en situation irrégulière*, Ethnologie française 2015/1 Vol 45, 123-133; Vuilleumier L., 2021, *Lost in transition to adulthood? Illegalised male migrants navigating temporal dispossession*, Social Sciences 10, 250-264

112 See PICUM, 2022, *Turning 18 and undocumented: supporting children in their transition into adulthood* and other resources like the Dutch campaign *DreamersNL* to learn more about the precarious transition into adulthood of undocumented children and young people.

113 Migrants Rights Center Ireland, 2023, *Albert St Patrick's Day 2023*, video [checked on 29 August 2025]

Once regularised, people can invest more in themselves and in their development because they can access courses, including university,¹¹⁴ and because they may have more free time to do so.¹¹⁵

Baker found that the average length of education increased by a year within five years following regularisation (through the 1986 American IRCA programme). Indeed, approximately one third of IRCA beneficiaries took English classes,¹¹⁶ while over one seventh undertook other academic pursuits.¹¹⁷ Reversely, research by the Centro Studi Luca D'Agliano found that people who did not benefit from an early 2000s regularisation programme in Italy were far less fluent in Italian a decade on than the people who did.¹¹⁸ They connect this, amongst others, to their segregation on the workplace and social life in general. People who had not regularised were 18% less likely to interact with native colleagues, for instance.¹¹⁹

That said, accessing a work permit can also incentivize undocumented students (in countries where studying while being undocumented is possible) to drop out of college or reduce the number of classes they take in order to work (more). This probably to supplement family income when they are the only or one of the few family members who can officially work.¹²⁰

International travel for leisure, studies, work or to do administration, also, becomes possible once a person receives a residence permit. Travel is especially facilitated within the EU with the free movement regime allowing tourists to move around. Increased mobility of people who are regularised enables both self-fulfilment and a sense of normality: being like everyone else. Some also take the opportunity of return trips to resolve some administration that has remained pending and has blocked their personal development, like putting their name on property bought with remittances, formalising divorces or investing in new businesses.¹²¹

114 Several respondents to a qualitative study in the UK said they were able to finish university degrees after regularisation. Portes and Ventura-Arrieta, 2022, [The impact of regularisation](#), Citizens UK

115 Baker, S.R., 2013, *Effects of immigrant legalization on crime: the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act*, Stanford University

116 The American regularisation programme of 1986, IRCA, benefitted mostly Mexicans with lower skills and lower English fluency. Source: Barcellos S.H., 2010, *Legalization and the Economic Status of Immigrants*, RAND Labor and Population working paper series

117 Baker, S.R., 2013, *Effects of immigrant legalization on crime: the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act*, Stanford University

118 Deiana C, Giua L and Nisticò R, 2022, *Legalization and Long-Term Outcomes of Immigrant Workers*, Centre Studi Luca D'agliano, Development studies working papers n. 80

119 Ibid.

120 Hsin A. and Ortega F., 2017, *The Effects of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals on the Educational Outcomes of Undocumented Students*, IZA Discussion paper series

121 Consoli, L., Burton-Jeangros, C., Jackson, Y., 2022, [Transitioning out of illegalization: cross-border mobility experiences](#). In: *Frontiers in human dynamics*, vol. 4.



"I enjoyed it very much, because I can go to places in Europe, which was my dream ... (...) We went to Italy, we went to lake Como, we went to Rome, yes ... and we went to Budapest (...), for me it is fulfillment"

– woman, 33 months after regularisation.¹²²

Residence status and nationality

The single most obvious impact of regularisation is the change of residence status: from irregular to regular. **Regularised people may feel a stronger drive to naturalise, as citizenship is the most secure residence status one can have.**¹²³ Indeed, 75 of the 116 respondents to a Belgian impact study acquired the Belgian nationality since regularising. And of the 41 others, 26 had applied to acquire it.¹²⁴

Some data is found in the US context. The US Immigration and Naturalization Service also found that two in every five people who benefited from the 1986 IRCA programme had become US citizens by

2001.¹²⁵ And other researchers looking at the impact of the programme found that regularised people were 10% more likely to naturalise down the line than other migrants.¹²⁶

Naturalisation not only creates certainty for the person. It also brings about long-lasting improvements in political integration, with persons becoming more likely to vote and developing considerably higher levels of political efficacy and political knowledge.¹²⁷

¹²² *ibid.*, p. 12.

¹²³ However, note that not all residence permits count towards settled status or, ultimately, citizenship, so not all regularised people will be able to access citizenship down the line.

¹²⁴ ULB, Centrum voor Sociaal Beleid Herman Deleeck and Centrum voor Gelijkheid van kansen en voor racismebestrijding, 2008, ["Before and after", de sociale en economische positie van personen die geregulariseerd werden in de uitvoering van de wet van 22/12/1999](#)

¹²⁵ Rytina N, 2002, [IRCA Legalization Effects: Lawful Permanent Residence and Naturalization through 2001](#), Office of Policy and Planning, US Immigration and Naturalization Service

¹²⁶ Barcellos S.H., 2010, *Legalization and the Economic Status of Immigrants*, RAND Labor and Population working paper series

¹²⁷ Hainmueller J., Hangartner D. and Pietrantuono G., 2015, [Naturalization Fosters the Long-term Political Integration of Immigrants](#), Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, 112 (41), 12651–12656.

Intergenerational effects

A parent's residence status and their migration history or trajectory impacts their children, both in the short and the mid to long term. This is the case for both parents, but **especially the mother's situation is decisive**. Bean et al, for example, found that the children of undocumented mothers enjoyed less schooling than the children of undocumented mothers who regularised and of mothers who never became undocumented. They found a 1.5 to 2 years difference in the length of schooling – a significant chunk of time.^{128 129}

The intergenerational impacts can start from (and even before) birth. At least two studies find that regularisation had a positive effect on babies' birth-weight (a measure of health at birth and a predictor of later-life achievement and wellbeing¹³⁰). The Bossi-Fini regularisation in Italy in the early 2000s, which resulted in the regularisation of 650,000 people, is associated with a 1.2% to 2.7% point decline in low birthweight prevalence within the migrant population eligible for regularisation.¹³¹ The researchers' hypothesis was that the regularisation programme "reduced immigrants' socio-economic vulnerability and fostered fertility choices", like increased prenatal

medical checks and care which are very difficult for undocumented women to access.¹³² A US-focussed study found a similar effect: regularising mothers increased babies' weight at birth. However, they noted that this increase preceded better access to prenatal care and hypothesised that the increase was also caused by the mothers being less stressed thanks to the regularisation, in addition to increased income.¹³³

Also, the increase in household income and access to services did not lead to more babies being born, only to them being healthier. In fact, one study found that regularised couples were less likely to have children than their undocumented counterparts in the three years after regularisation. The researchers hypothesised that this was due to better access to fertility care (including family planning services) and the fact that regularisation enabled women to work regularly. In other words, the opportunity cost of having a child¹³⁴ became larger – even too large for some.¹³⁵

128 Research in an American context. Bean F.D., Leach M.A., Brown S.K., Bachmeier J.D., & Hipp J.R., 2011, *The Educational Legacy of Unauthorized Migration: Comparisons Across U.S.-Immigrant Groups in How Parents' Status Affects Their Offspring*, International Migration Review Volume 45 Number 2 (Summer 2011):348–385

129 Note that, across the globe, a mothers' educational level is consistently associated with better infant and child health outcomes. The reasons behind it are that the mother is more likely to know and understand health and nutrition, how to access help, and have better health, financial and social literacy. See for example Mensch, B.S., Chuang K.E., Melnikas A.J., and Psaki S.R., 2019, [Evidence for causal links between education and maternal and child health: systematic review](#), Trop Med Int Health 28;24(5):504–522.

130 See for example, University of Michigan, 5 June 2007, [Born to lose: How birth weight affects adult health and success](#), press release [checked on 27 August 2025]

131 Salmasi S. and Pieroni L., 2015, [Immigration policy and birth weight: Positive externalisations in Italian law](#), Journal of Health Economics Volume 43, pp. 128–139

132 Quotes from Salmasi S. and Pieroni L., 2015, [Immigration policy and birth weight: Positive externalisations in Italian law](#), Journal of Health Economics Volume 43, pp. 128–139

133 Casio E.U., Cornell P. and Lewis E.G., 2024, [The intergenerational effects of permanent legal status](#), National Bureau of Economic Research, NBER working paper series

134 The opportunity cost of having children includes forgone income, career advancement, and personal time that could have been invested in education, hobbies, or other pursuits.

135 Amuedo-Dorantes C., Ibáñez A.M., Roza S.V. and Traettino S., 2024, [Regularization Programs and the Fertility of Forced Migrants: Insights from a Panel Study of Venezuelan Migrants in Colombia](#)

Impact on society

Regularisation measures have spillover effects: they have an impact on other people and society as a whole. This chapter looks at some of the effects that have been recorded, notably how regularisation

helps to build a safer, more equal society, a positive impact on the economy and the country's GDP, the impact on workers' wages and labour conditions, and a decrease in survival crime.



"I've worked in organisations that deal directly with undocumented migrants. I've often sat down one-on-one with people to try and navigate a path to normality, only for doors to remain shut. However, this scheme will open doors and open opportunities for thousands of people to step out of the shadows and allow them to be full members of the society they have already contributed to."

– Irish Minister of State for Community Development and Charities, Joe O'Brien TD, on Ireland's 2022 regularisation programme

More equal, healthier, and safer society

One effect, albeit likely happening incrementally and with some delay, is that society should be expected to become safer and more equal in the long run. This equalizing effect is caused by different aspects. Because people tend to earn more after regularisation, for instance, it is plausible that **social inequality decreases (at least slightly) when a sizeable group of undocumented people are regularised**. The general population will also benefit from the positive impacts that regularisation has on people's wages, the economy and GDP.¹³⁶ And more equal societies tend to have less social problems.¹³⁷

Another equalizing effect has to do with education – both of the regularised child or young person and that of their classmates. **The educational ambitions**

and achievements of students in schools with largeish cohorts of undocumented pupils **improves after regularisation**. DACA, an American suspension of deportation programme for undocumented young people, has been shown to improve the academic attainment and performance of both non-eligible undocumented children and young people and of US-born (i.e., citizen) students.¹³⁸ The improvements of fellow undocumented children is likely caused by the fact that they started seeing and believing that investing in their education could yield them good returns, while that of the documented pupils is thought to be a spillover effect. The documented pupils benefit because their undocumented pupils do better, and students tend to do better if they are part of a high-achieving class.¹³⁹



"I feel like I am on equal footing with other people now. Before, I was 'Tarik the undocumented one', but not anymore."

– man in his 30s, approximately one year after regularisation¹⁴⁰

Another aspect has to do with crime – both the impact that regularisation has on people who commit low-level infractions to meet basic needs, as well as the impact of having regular status on the reporting

of crime that regularised migrants experience. Being undocumented can lead to so much social exclusion and marginalisation and make it so difficult to make ends meet, that some undocumented people feel

136 See sections on 'Increased income through taxes' and on 'Supports a thriving economy'.

137 Dorling, D., 2017, *The Equality Effect: Improving Life for Everyone*, New Internationalist Publications Limited.

138 Ballis B, 7 October 2024, [Research shows that DACA benefits both Dreamers and their US-born peers](#), *Brookings* [checked on 19 August 2025]

139 See for instance Canaan, S., Mouganie, P., & Zhang, P., 2024, [The long-run educational benefits of high-achieving classrooms](#), *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 1–27.

140 Translated from French. PICUM, 2024, [Regularisation works, and it's the right thing to do](#), video

compelled to resort to survival crime to make ends meet.¹⁴¹ Regularisation, and the access to the formal labour market it brings (should bring), means that some people no longer need to resort to petty crime to survive. Research from the United States confirms this. Scott Baker found a national decrease in crime of approximately two to five percent for each one percent of the local population that is regularised.¹⁴² This “fall in crime is equivalent to 160,000 - 400,000 fewer crimes committed each year due to legalisation¹⁴³.”¹⁴⁴ Baker himself explains that much of this drop in crime can be explained by the labour market opportunities that being regularised brings, and thus less economic pressure to commit (property/economic) crimes.

A similar connection is found in European studies. In Italy, Mastrobuoni and Pinotti found that the 2007 EU enlargement, which meant that undocumented Romanians and Bulgarians suddenly became EU citizens, coincided with a 50% drop in recidivism of released inmates from these countries.¹⁴⁶ In other words, **the impact of insecure residence status (and reversely, secure residence status) on the economic motivations behind crime can be sizeable.**

Despite this data, we must underline that undocumented and regular migrants are less likely to commit

crimes than the general population. Research by Northwestern University, which used incarceration rates as a proxy for crime rates, shows that migrants are 60% less likely to be incarcerated than U.S.-born people, for instance. They also found that migrants with lower levels of education were especially less likely to commit crimes than their US-born peers.¹⁴⁷ Researchers looking at crime rates in Texas, specifically, found that undocumented people were much less likely than citizens to be arrested for violent crimes (twice less likely), drug crimes (2.5 less likely), and property crimes (more than four times less likely).¹⁴⁸ Research looking at crime rates in Germany suggests that more insecure residence statuses are linked to a higher cost for committing a crime, and thus a lower tendency to commit it.¹⁴⁹

In addition, **regularised people are more willing to interact with the police than those with irregular migration status**, for instance to report crime, which improves safety and rule of law for everyone. Comino, Mastrobuoni and Nicolò found that, after regularisation, people were three times more likely to report a crime to the police.¹⁵⁰ Similarly, Pearson found that DACA recipients¹⁵¹ were more likely to report crime or report being the victim of crime because they feared the negative consequences of it less.¹⁵²

141 See for instance Leerkes, A., Engbersen, G. & van der Leun, J., 2012, [Crime among irregular immigrants and the influence of internal border control](#), *Crime Law Soc Change* 58, 15–38

142 “Having one percent of a county composed of IRCA applicants who are legalized lowers crime approximately 2%-5%.” Baker, S.R., 2013, *Effects of immigrant legalization on crime: the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act*, Stanford University, p. 29

143 The term ‘legalization’ is often used in a US context to refer to regularisation.

144 Baker, S.R., 2013, *Effects of immigrant legalization on crime: the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act*, Stanford University

145 IRCA regularised nearly 3 million people, illustrating the fact that undocumented migrants have a low tendency to commit crimes.

146 Mastrobuoni, G. & Pinotti, P., 2015, [Legal status and the criminal activity of immigrants](#), *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics* 2015, 7(2): 175–206

147 Northwestern Now, 12 March 2024, [Immigrants are significantly less likely to commit crimes than the U.S.-born](#), blogpost [checked on 21 August 2025]; National Bureau of Economic Research, 2023, [Law-abiding immigrants: the incarceration gap between immigrants and the US-born, 1870-2020](#);

148 Light M.T., He J., & Robey J.P., 2020, [Comparing crime rates between undocumented immigrants, legal immigrants, and native-born US citizens in Texas](#), *Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. U.S.A.* 117 (51) 32340–32347; National Institute of Justice, 2024, [Undocumented Immigrant Offending Rate Lower Than U.S.-Born Citizen Rate](#)

149 For example, being apprehended for and convicted of a crime may jeopardize the residence permit or access to a more secure residence permit, as a clean criminal record is usually a prerequisite for receiving one. Maghularia R. and Uebelmesser S., 2023, [Do immigrants affect crime? Evidence for Germany](#), *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization* Volume 211, p. 486–512

150 Comino S., Mastrobuoni G., and Nicolò A., 2016, [Silence of the Innocents: Illegal Immigrants’ Underreporting of Crime and their Victimization](#), IZA discussion paper series no. 10306

151 Or people who would be eligible for DACA.

152 Pearson T., 2024, [The impact of immigration status on crime reporting: Evidence from DACA](#), *Journal of Urban Economics*, Volume 143

Supports a thriving economy

Regularisation supports a thriving economy and does this in three ways. First, it allows a better matching between vacancies, jobs and skills. Secondly, bringing large groups of undocumented migrants into the formal labour market benefits both

production and consumption. Third, regularising formerly undocumented workers improves their documented colleagues' working conditions, including their wages.

Better match between jobs and skills

When designed right, regularisation measures **can lead to better matching between jobs and skills in the labour market, potentially decreasing labour or skill shortages**. Regularisation measures mainly have this effect when their resulting residence permit allows the person to work in any sector (i.e., is not tied to a specific sector or employer or contract). As explained earlier, people are then more likely to seek out a job that matches their skills, qualifications and/or aspirations.

Many migrants, including regularised people, also work in sectors and jobs where employers face a shortage of skilled or willing candidates (these shortages are also the reason behind many labour migration policies, including sector-based regularisation measures). Many of these jobs are considered essential for our economies and societies. For example, about 343,000 of the 800,000 DACA recipients in the USA are employed in 'essential jobs', including health care (both care provision and logistics), education and food chain supply.¹⁵³

Production and consumption

Given that the economic impact of regularisations, especially larger-scale regularisation programmes, is a concern for policy makers, it should be encouraging to know that **regularisation has a positive impact on a country's economy and GDP**.

Regularisation contributes to a country's economy and GDP in different ways. An obvious contribution is that **regularized workers produce products**

and services for other consumers. Regularization increases employment rates,¹⁵⁴ and may thus impact production rate. And, when designed right, regularization measures can lighten or resolve the labour market inefficiencies caused by the monopsony of firms (i.e., the power dynamics created by the fact that many undocumented people are vying for few job opportunities, which create labour market inefficiencies that can spill over to other sectors and

153 Center for American Progress, 24 Nov 2021, [The Demographic and Economic Impacts of DACA Recipients: Fall 2021 Edition](#), blog [checked on 12 August 2025]

154 See section on 'Employment rate'.



limit job opportunities for regular workers).¹⁵⁵ Indeed, a large-scale regularization programme would shrink the informal economy, potentially for years. For instance, the 2002 Italian 'Bossi-Fini' regularisation resulted in a 17% drop in undeclared work in the following years, a drop that remained largely stable for the next decade.¹⁵⁶

But people are consumers too and **acquiring a residence permit impacts people's and families' spending behaviour** in the short, middle and long term. Undocumented people tend to consume less than those who have a residence permit, in part because they have less to spend but also because they may want to save more, or have less opportunities to spend.. Some researchers found that undocumented migrants spend roughly 40% less than documented migrants.¹⁵⁷ Once regularized, people spend more, which benefits the overall economy.¹⁵⁸ For instance, beneficiaries of the 2017 PEP programme for Venezuelans in Colombia, for instance, consumed an estimated 60% more than their non-regularised counterparts.¹⁵⁹

Several researchers found or estimated that the **GDP¹⁶⁰ would grow** following the regularisation of a sizeable group of undocumented people:

- The 1981 regularisation of about 130,000 undocumented workers in France raised French GDP by over 1%.¹⁶¹
- In 2009, the Greater London Authority estimated that the regularisation of approximately 412,000 undocumented people nationally, including 294,000 in London, could, in time, "add something like £3 billion per annum (or 0.2 per cent) to GDP."¹⁶² (With inflation, this is about £4.63 billion today/July 2025, equivalent to 5.34 billion euros¹⁶³)
- In 2021, the Center for American Progress estimated that DACA beneficiaries contribute approximately \$42 billion to the U.S. GDP each year.¹⁶⁴ (with inflation, this is about \$48.6 billion in 2024, equivalent to 41.6 billion euros today¹⁶⁵)
- A report for the IMF (International Monetary Fund) estimates that the Venezuelan migration to Latin American countries would, by 2030, add up to 4.5 percent to the countries' GDP.¹⁶⁶

155 Borjas G.J. and Edo A., 2023, [Monopsony, Efficiency, and the Regularization of Undocumented Immigrants](#), IZA discussion paper series no 16297

156 Martino E.M., Naticcioni P. and Di Porto E., 2019, [The impact of regularising migrant workers](#), website [checked on 10 July 2025]

157 Dustman C, Fasani F, and Speciale B, 2016, [Illegal Migration and Consumption Behavior of Immigrant Households](#), IZA Discussion Paper Series

158 See also, PBS Newshour, 26 June 2013, [Economic costs, bonuses of legalizing undocumented workers](#), YouTube [checked on 31 July 2025]

159 Ibáñez A.M., Mya A., Ortega M.A., Roza S.V. and Urbina M.J., 2022, [Life Out of the Shadows: Impacts of Amnesties in the Lives of Migrants](#), IZA Institute of Labor Economics Discussion Paper no. 15049

160 Gross domestic product.

161 Borjas G.J. and Edo A., 2023, [Monopsony, Efficiency, and the Regularization of Undocumented Immigrants](#), IZA discussion paper series no 16297

162 Greater London Authority, 2009, [Economic impact on the London and UK economy of an earned regularisation of irregular migrants to the UK](#), \$30.

163 Inflation calculated on the Bank of England's [inflation calculator](#). Pound to euro conversion via [Xe Currency Converter](#) on 29 August 2025.

164 Center for American Progress, 24 Nov 2021, [The Demographic and Economic Impacts of DACA Recipients: Fall 2021 Edition](#), blog [checked on 12 August 2025]

165 Inflation calculated on [officialdata.org](#). USD to euro conversion via [Xe Currency Converter](#) on 29 August 2025.

166 Alvarez J., Arena M., Brousseau A., Faruqee H., Fernandez-Corugedo E., Guajardo J., Peraza G., and Yépez Albornoz J., 2022, [Regional spillovers from the Venezuelan crisis : migration flows and their impact on Latin America and the Caribbean](#), International Monetary Fund; Fondo Monetario Internacional, 12 December 2022, [Los migrantes venezolanos brindan oportunidades económicas a América Latina](#), blog [checked on 12 August 2025]

Impact on other workers: creation of jobs and increased wages

Some may be concerned about the impact that regularisation has on those who are already working. That makes sense, as regularising groups of people who can work could impact those who are already working.

One study, looking at the impact of the Italian Bossi-Fini regularization programme, found that the large-scale programme had no effect (positive or negative) on the employment or unemployment rates of people who were already active in the formal labour market.¹⁶⁷

However, other studies did find that regularizations have an impact on other workers. A study focusing on the impact of a 1981 regularisation programme in France found that the regularization of about 130,000 undocumented workers, the vast majority of whom lived in Paris, raised the wages of low-skilled French men in the capital by 3 to 5 %.¹⁶⁸ Research looking at Spain found that a 2005 regularisation programme¹⁶⁹ improved work opportunities for workers, although high-skilled workers benefited more than low-skilled workers. More particularly, they found that the wages of natives in high immigration locations increased when there was a one-percent increase in the share of immigrants registered in the social security system.¹⁷⁰ However, they also found that the increased labour costs could lead to some job opportunities disappearing.¹⁷¹

This may be because, as Citizens UK points out, regularisation is more akin to moving someone already living in the country from inactivity to employment, rather than to migration (i.e., bringing a new worker into the country). Their regularisation “increases labour demand but not necessarily one-for-one, since those who are inactive (including irregular migrants) are already consumers and hence are already contributing to labour demand; the increase in aggregate demand is therefore considerably less than the increase in labour income.”¹⁷²

However, Chassamboulli and Perri’s model found that **regularising undocumented people creates more jobs for other (native) low-skilled workers working in the same or adjacent sectors, and increases everyone’s income**. Deporting large groups of undocumented workers, on the other hand, increases unemployment for other (native) workers, both those who are high skilled and those who are low skilled.¹⁷³ The economists state that “while the effects on income and unemployment are quite small, the difference between the restrictive policies¹⁷⁴ (...) and the legalization is very clear: legalization is the only policy that produces an increase in income per native and a decrease in native skilled and unskilled unemployment.”¹⁷⁵

167 Martino E.M., Naticcioni P. and Di Porto E., 2019, [The impact of regularising migrant workers](#), website [checked on 10 July 2025]

168 Borjas G.J. and Edo A., 2023, [Monopsony, Efficiency, and the Regularization of Undocumented Immigrants](#), IZA discussion paper series no 16297

169 Which regularised about 600,000 people.

170 Monras, J., Vázquez-Grenno, J., & Elias, F., 2020, [Understanding the effects of granting work permits to undocumented immigrants](#), Working Paper No. 1228, Barcelona GSE.

171 Monras J., Vázquez-Grenno J., and Elias F., 2018, *Understanding the Effects of Legalizing Undocumented Immigrants*, CATO Institute research briefs

172 Portes J. and Ventura-Arrieta M., 2022, [The impact of regularisation](#), Citizens UK, p. 30

173 Chassamboulli A and Peri G, 2014, [The labor market effect of reducing the number of illegal immigrants](#), National Bureau of Economic Research working paper

174 The paper compares the effects of three restrictive policies and regularisation. The three restrictive policies are: (i) increase in border enforcement to reduce irregular migration, (ii) increasing the costs that undocumented people face when looking for a job (no access to benefits), and (iii) increasing the frequency of deportations.

175 Chassamboulli A. and Peri G., 2014, [The labor market effect of reducing the number of illegal immigrants](#), National Bureau of Economic Research working paper, p. 4

A note on the ‘pull effect’

There is no consistent proof that regularisation mechanisms or (past) programmes alone pull people towards specific countries and not to others. While migrants’ perceptions of migration policies do influence their decision making,¹⁷⁶ migration flows are shaped primarily by economic opportunities, familial and social networks, as well as individual aspirations, rather than the existence of regularisation policies.¹⁷⁷ The most comprehensive study to date on the pull effects of regularisation programmes confirms this.¹⁷⁸ The study analyses the potential pull effect of regularisation programmes in the OECD countries from 1944 to 2023 (which regularised at

least 13.5 million people). They find that regularisation programmes’ effects cannot be generalised as they are heterogenous, depending on the country of destination and of origin. The study only finds one situation in which regularisation programmes can be linked to an increased inflow of people: when they took place in lower-income OECD countries. This confirms that **economic aspects of destination countries influence migrants’ decisions more so than the existence of regularisation programmes, and that the choice of a destination country is a “coming together” of a wide range of factors.**^{179 180}

176 Crawley H. and Hagen-Zanker J., 2018, [Deciding Where to go: Policies, People and Perceptions Shaping Destination Preferences](#), International Migration Volume 57, Issue 1 pp. 20-35

177 Czaika M., Gu, J., Kraler A., and Rössl, L., 2024, WP2 Contribution to D9.5: [Working paper on migration responses to \(non-\)enforcement D2.2](#), FAIR: Finding Agreement in Return; González-Enríquez, C., 2009, Spain, the Cheap Model. *Irregularity and Regularisation as Immigration Management Policies*, European Journal of Migration and Law, 11(2), 139-157; cited in Legarda Díaz-Aguado I., 2025, Chapter 8: *Regularisation in Today's Political Context*, Krems: University of Krems Press, Handbook on regularisation policies: Practices, debates and outcomes

178 Elguezabal P. and Martínez-Zarzoso I., 2024, [Are Immigration Regularization Programs a Pull Factor? Evidence for OECD Countries](#), INFER working paper series no 14

179 Crawley H. and Hagen-Zanker J., 2018, [Deciding Where to go: Policies, People and Perceptions Shaping Destination Preferences](#), International Migration Volume 57, Issue 1 pp. 20-35; Kuschminder K., De Bresser J. and Siegel M., 2015, [Irregular Migration Routes to Europe and Factors Influencing Migrants’ Destination Choices](#), Maastricht Graduate School of Governance

180 Note also that the OECD study only looked at the economic “level”/performance of the countries of origin and destination and not the presence of social networks, for instance.

Impact on institutions and governments

The impact of regularisation measures, both mechanisms and programmes, on a country's administration, public services and public spending seems to be the least covered in research of all three aspects we examine in this paper. Yet it is reasonable for governments and policy makers to want to understand the impact of these measures on their governing bodies and budget.

Despite the lack of data, we identify at least four aspects that are covered in the literature that does exist: well-designed measures alleviate workload and the associated costs for administration; regularisation brings an increase in trust in the government and administrative decisions; governments benefit from increased income through taxes; and they may gain a better understanding of their population and labour markets through regularisation.

Trust in government and institutions

Clear, transparent procedures, including residence application procedures, build trust in their outcomes and the administrations involved in them. Indeed, studies have shown that **migrants adjust their trust levels based on the quality of institutional governance in the host country**, amongst other things.¹⁸¹ A large-scale survey looking at the aspects that impact asylum seekers' generalised and institutional trust find that prolonged procedures degrade trust,¹⁸² while (people's perceptions of) procedural and interactional justice¹⁸³ builds trust.¹⁸⁴ How procedures and decisions are made build trust. Higher levels of trust, in turn, help integration in and building positive

relations with the rest of society.

Detractors might think that trust would only grow when people receive a positive decision to their residence application. This is not necessarily so: being in existential limbo is more detrimental to generalised trust levels than having received a negative decision.¹⁸⁵

181 Dinesen, P. T., 2013, *Where You Come from or Where You Live? Examining the Cultural and Institutional Explanation of Generalized Trust Using Migration as a Natural Experiment*, *European Sociological Review* 29 (1): 114–128; Nannestad, P., Svendsen G.T., Dinesen P.T., and Sønderskov K.M., 2014, *Do Institutions or Culture Determine the Level of Social Trust? The Natural Experiment of Migration from Non-Western to Western Countries*, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 40 (4): 544–565; Sønderskov, K. M., and P. T. Dinesen. 2016. *Trusting the State, Trusting Each Other? The Effect of Institutional Trust on Social Trust*; cited in Kanas, A., van Tubergen, F., & Kosyakova, Y, 2025, [Determinants of refugees' generalised and institutional trust: evidence from Germany](#), *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 1–20.

182 See also Sohlberg, J., Agerberg M., and Esaiasson P., 2024, *Waiting for Asylum: Reduced Institutional and Interpersonal Trust*, *Political Studies* 72 (1): 343–363.

183 Interactional justice is the perception of fair and respectful treatment in interpersonal interactions, particularly during decision-making processes.

184 Kanas, A., van Tubergen, F., & Kosyakova, Y, 2025, [Determinants of refugees' generalised and institutional trust: evidence from Germany](#), *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 1–20.

185 *ibid.*

Better understanding of the population

By regularising people and bringing them in contact with administrations, **governments also deepen their understanding of the people who live on their territories**, the potential they bring and the needs they have. This better understanding **enables better policy making across the board**, from education, to health, to housing, to labour and economic policies and social policies – not only for national governments, but for local and regional governments, too.

Cities, especially, have pointed out how regularisation and including undocumented migrants in (local-level) policies helps achieving municipal social policy objectives.¹⁸⁶ Not the least because it helps ensure that public services are administered efficiently and sufficiently (planning enough places in schools, reduced pressure on local emergency health care services, etc).¹⁸⁷

Increased income through taxes

Regularising people will certainly have financial consequences for governments, on both the revenue and expense sides. One of the most researched effects of regularisations on governments focusses on tax revenue, finding that **regularisations bring in money through taxes**.

Researchers have mostly looked at regularisation programmes to quantify the impact of increased tax revenue, namely:

- **Italy:** About 177,000 domestic workers were regularized through Italy's 2020 regularisation programme, which brought in an estimated 0.3 billion euros (314.2 million) in income tax and contributions to the state. The regularization of 30,000

agricultural workers through the same programme was estimated to bring in 49.3 million euros.¹⁸⁸

- **Spain:** Research looking at the economic impact of a Spanish regularisation programme that regularised nearly 600,000 people in 2005 estimates that every regularised person contributed almost 4,000 euros in payroll-tax revenue (equivalent to 5,979 euros in 2024¹⁸⁹).¹⁹⁰
- **Switzerland:** The Swiss regularisation initiative 'Operation Papyrus' led to the regularisation of nearly 2,400 people, mostly female domestic workers, in 2017-2018. Despite this relatively small number of people the impact was sizeable. The regularised domestic workers brought in 5.7 million Swiss francs for the social security sector through the 'Cheque Service scheme'¹⁹¹ alone.¹⁹²

186 Delvino, N., 2017, *European Cities and Migrants with Irregular Status: Municipal initiatives for the inclusion of irregular migrants in the provision of services Report for the 'City Initiative on Migrants with Irregular Status in Europe' (C-MISE)*, COMPAS, University of Oxford

187 Delvino N., Spencer S., and Cherti M., 2024, *Migrants with Irregular Status in Europe: Guidance for Municipalities*, C-MISE and Oxford University

188 Associazione DOMINA, 24 August 2020, *Lavoro domestico, dalla regolarizzazione 2020 oltre 300 milioni di euro per lo Stato*, press release

189 Inflation calculated on [CPI Inflation Calculator](#) on 31 July 2025.

190 Monras J., Vázquez-Grenno J., and Elias F., 2018, *Understanding the Effects of Legalizing Undocumented Immigrants*, CATO Institute research briefs

191 The 'Cheque Service scheme' is a scheme through which people can employ and correctly remunerate their domestic worker. More info on www.chequeservice.ch

192 Republic and Canton of Geneva, Communication and Information Department, 21 February 2020, *Opération Papyrus: Bilan final et perspectives*

- **UK:** Research done for the Greater London Authority in 2009 estimated that regularising 412,000 undocumented people¹⁹³ would add about £3 billion per annum (or 0.2 per cent) to GDP and generate about £846 million per annum in additional tax revenue (£1,450 per annum per regularized adult). They estimated that this was more than double what it would cost the government: about £410 million in public service costs per annum, which could potentially increase to £1 billion over time as well as a one-off cost of the regularization programme of £300 million.¹⁹⁴

More recent research found similar, slightly higher, results. They made the “reasonable but conservative – albeit highly uncertain” estimate that regularisation would result in approximately £2,015 per person from direct taxes and up to an extra £1,250 per person from indirect taxes.¹⁹⁵ (Note that £1,450 in 2009 would have been about £1,870 in 2021, the time of the second study.¹⁹⁶)

- **USA:** The Center for American Progress estimated that DACA-recipient households pay an estimated \$6.2 billion in federal taxes and \$3.3 billion in state and local taxes annually.^{197 198}

Use of public services

It can be expected that regularising a sizeable group of people will have an **impact on certain public services**, and thus their cost to the government. However, according to research on the UK, **this impact would be minimal at first because undocumented people already have access to certain public services**, such as compulsory education, some level of health care, public transport, infrastructure, culture and leisure services, the fire department, etc.¹⁹⁹ Still, some services and benefits are only accessible for people with a residence permit and it is to be expected that people will access these

once regularised (e.g. child benefits). Indeed, a later UK-based study notes that it “seems plausible” that there’s an increase in claiming benefits after regularisation, which would amount to £1,400 per person per annum on average.²⁰⁰ Another study speculated that regularising most undocumented people might, over time, place a higher demand on social housing,²⁰¹ which in turn may impact waiting lists and the number of units to be built.

Still, the degree to which regularised people will apply for benefits will depend on their own situation

193 The number of undocumented people thought to be eligible for a regularisation programme at the end of 2007.

194 Greater London Authority, 2009, [Economic impact on the London and UK economy of an earned regularisation of irregular migrants to the UK](#)

195 Portes and Ventura-Arrieta, 2022, [The impact of regularisation](#), Citizens UK, p. 24

196 Inflation rate calculated on [Bank of England](#) on 29 August 2025.

197 Center for American Progress, 24 Nov 2021, [The Demographic and Economic Impacts of DACA Recipients: Fall 2021 Edition](#), blog [checked on 12 August 2025]

198 Note that ‘DACA’ is not a regularisation programme in the strict sense, as it suspends people’s deportation rather than giving them a stable residence permit.

199 Greater London Authority, 2009, [Economic impact on the London and UK economy of an earned regularisation of irregular migrants to the UK. Summary Report](#); also quoted in Portes and Ventura-Arrieta, 2022, [The impact of regularisation](#), Citizens UK

200 See for instance Portes and Ventura-Arrieta, 2022, [The impact of regularisation](#), Citizens UK

201 Greater London Authority, 2009, [Economic impact on the London and UK economy of an earned regularisation of irregular migrants to the UK. Summary Report](#)

and the context in which they live. The Swiss government, for example, found that the vast majority of the people who regularized through 'Operation Papyrus'

remained financially self-sufficient one year on, with only 0.8 percent having used social assistance, and this only for a short time.²⁰²

Workload and cost of administration

All regularisation measures, whether mechanisms or programmes, will imply some degree of workload for the country's administration in charge of immigration. Processes will have to be designed, forms created, applications reviewed and grounds assessed. However, the workload itself will depend on the design of the measure, including the clarity of the grounds, the decision making process, and whether it entails reviewing a full application or taking note of a declaration only.²⁰³

Well-designed, easy to understand procedures cause less workload for the administration, and would thus be cheaper.²⁰⁴ The reverse is true as well. Researchers of the Toronto Metropolitan University noted that "[t]he more complex, subjective, discretionary and document-heavy the criteria, the slower, more expensive and inefficient the process for IRCC [the Canadian Immigration Office]²⁰⁵ to administer."²⁰⁶

The cost of rolling out a regularisation measure, whether programme or mechanism, is often also amply covered by the benefits of it. Italy's 2020 regularisation programme for workers in specific sectors is a good example. The administrative management of the regularization alone generated €30.3 million in revenue for the State (equivalent to about 36 million euros today²⁰⁷) – the balance between the flat-rate contributions for the regularisation (€105.5 million in total) and the administrative costs (€75.2 million).²⁰⁸

Research has found that enabling those with irregular status to remain regularly in the country is less costly than deportation. In Canada, the Migrant Rights Network, citing the Auditor General's 2020 report, calculated that the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) receives at least \$46 million per year to carry out deportations, about \$4,750 per person deported, while "it costs about \$3,900 to provide settlement and integration services for a permanent resident."²⁰⁹

202 Republic and Canton of Geneva, Communication and Information Department, 21 February 2020, [Opération Papyrus: Bilan final et perspectives](#)

203 E.g., some regularisation measures are rather declaratory, where a person declares being on the territory and meeting X and Y grounds, after which they receive a provisional residence and work permit until the decision on the grounds is made by the administration.

204 For more on the design of regularisation measures, see PICUM, 2023, [Regularisation mechanisms and programmes: why they matter and how to design them](#)

205 Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) is the Canadian Immigration Office.

206 Alboim, N., Macklin, A., & Triandafyllidou, A., 2023, [Out of the shadows: A proposal for the regularization of migrants without status in Canada](#), CERC Migration Policy Brief 11.

207 Inflation calculated via [globalrates.com](#) on 29 August 2025.

208 Associazione DOMINA, 24 August 2020, [Lavoro domestico, dalla regolarizzazione 2020 oltre 300 milioni di euro per lo Stato](#), press release

209 Migrant Rights Network, 7 December 2023, [Migrants Expose and Condemn Surge in Deportations Following PM Trudeau's Pledge for Regularization](#), webpage [checked on 12 August 2025]. Also cited in Hendow, M. et al., 2024, [Compilation of 20 Country Briefs on Irregular Migration Policy Context](#), MirreM Report, Krems: University for Continuing Education Krems (Danube University Krems). Adjusted for inflation: \$55.3 million, \$5,709 and \$4,687 today, or respectively 34.4 million euros, 3,555 euros and 2,918 euros. Inflation calculated on [Bank of Canada](#) website, CAD to euro conversion on [Xe currency converter](#) on 29 August 2025.

Conclusion

Based on the available research, it is safe to say that regularising undocumented migrants benefits both them and their families, our governments and society at large.

People's lives improve, with some aspects improving more quickly than others. People's physical and mental health and sense of wellbeing improves, as does where and how they live. People are more likely to work and are more likely to stay employed down the line, although is also influenced by structural factors beyond their control, like economic downturns or discrimination on the labour market. People usually earn more after regularising and entering formal employment, although better-skilled workers and men benefit from this more than women and lower-skilled workers. They may still earn less than the average worker because it can be difficult to find better-paid jobs. Nonetheless, regularised migrants tend to be highly mobile, moving to new jobs and sectors that align with their skills and aspirations or offer better conditions.

People tend to do two things after regularisation: moving to better housing and preparing a trip to their country of origin to visit family and friends. Return trips and international travel are often cited as a key benefit of acquiring a residence permit, which allow renewing family dynamics and growing as a person. Personal development is also boosted when people get a residence permit, as they enter training

courses and get past qualifications recognized. This not only applies to regularised people themselves, but also to their children as intergenerational effects are apparent.

Societies benefit from regularising undocumented people, too. Because regularising people increases their income and decreases the inequality in a society, societies become safer and healthier. They also become safer because people with regular residence status are more likely to report crimes than undocumented people, and because there is no need to resort to survival crime in order to meet basic needs if people can officially work.²¹⁰ The economy benefits too: when people have free access to the labour market thanks to their residence and work permit,²¹¹ skills and jobs can be matched better, and shortages resolved. Regularising workers also tends to create more jobs and better labour conditions for native workers, although it is not a one-on-one relation because the undocumented people were already contributing to the economy.²¹² All in all, economies tend to grow thanks to regularisation, both because people can formally enter the labour market, and because regularised people spend more than undocumented migrants.

While the impact of regularisation measures on administrations, governments and institutions is not widely researched, several effects can still be discerned. Clear, transparent procedures improve

210 While research shows that undocumented migrants are far less likely than citizens and regular migrants to resort to crime (see section 'More equal, healthier, and safer society'), some undocumented people resort to petty crime like shoplifting to survive.

211 Note that not all residence and work permits allow people to change jobs. Employer-tied and sector-specific permits, however, perpetuate cycles of dependency and marginalisation and should be avoided. See PICUM, 2021, [Designing labour migration policies to promote decent work](#) and PICUM, 2023, [Regularisation mechanisms and programmes: why they matter and how to design them](#) for insight on how to prevent this.

212 Regularisation is more akin to moving someone already living in the country from inactivity to employment, rather than to migration (i.e., bringing a new worker into the country). Their regularisation "increases labour demand but not necessarily one-for-one, since those who are inactive (including irregular migrants) are already consumers and hence are already contributing to labour demand; the increase in aggregate demand is therefore considerably less than the increase in labour income." Source: Portes J. and Ventura-Arrieta M., 2022, [The impact of regularisation](#), Citizens UK, p. 30

general if not institutional trust of migrants. By regularising people, national and local policy makers and administrations deepen their understanding of their communities, which can help them in their policy making and service provision. And, if well designed, regularisation measures can alleviate the workload of certain administrations and institutions. Lastly, **regularisation provides net gains for state finances:** they bring in more in taxes than they cost, both to implement and in the cost of public services that people use after regularisation.

However, the lack of both quantitative and qualitative data on some of these aspects teaches us something: **we need to monitor the roll out of regularisation measures better and for longer.** This is a **task of governments, civil society and academia**, alike, either together or separately. Some minor exceptions notwithstanding, governments have been opaque at best about how their regularisation mechanisms and programmes have rolled out, how many people were regularised and how they have fared since.

Civil society organisations tend to focus on campaigning for new regularisation measures and assisting people in applying when one is rolled out. This time crunch often means that they cannot dedicate time or personnel to setting up a baseline for later monitoring, or kick off a years-long monitoring structure.

Academics, from economists to social and health scientists, have done their best to assess the impact, with the Swiss Parchemins study as a great example of a good practice.²¹³ However, longitudinal research remains scarce, and some aspects merit more research. For example, there is little quantitative or qualitative research on the administration required to implement a regularisation program. Other aspects, like the impact of a regularisation measure's design on people's physical and mental health and their trust in institutions and administrative decision-making, would merit more research too, as would the impact of regularisation measures at large on people's living conditions or housing arrangements, and careers over time.

All of this means that lessons are learned more slowly, and future policies may repeat the mistakes of earlier ones. More and well-designed studies in a range of fields (from anthropology to economics and from psychology to public administration studies) would deepen and fine tune our understanding of the effects that regularisation measures have on people, society and administrations. And, crucially, by integrating monitoring and evaluation processes in the design of any regularisation mechanism or programme, governments, academics and civil society would learn from them in (near to) real time, and be able to adjust them if needed.

213 For more on the Parchemins Study, see Université de Genève, [Parchemins](#), webpage [checked on 28 August 2025]; LIVES, "[Parchemins](#)" Project - [Assessing the health and well-being of undocumented migrants](#) [checked on 28 August 2025] and, for the study itself, Refle, J.-E., Burton-Jeangros, C. & Jackson, Y., 2024, [Sortir de la clandestinité. Les conséquences de la régularisation des travailleurs sans-papiers](#).

Recommendations

Based on the above, and especially the lack of research into certain effects of regularisation measures, we recommend:



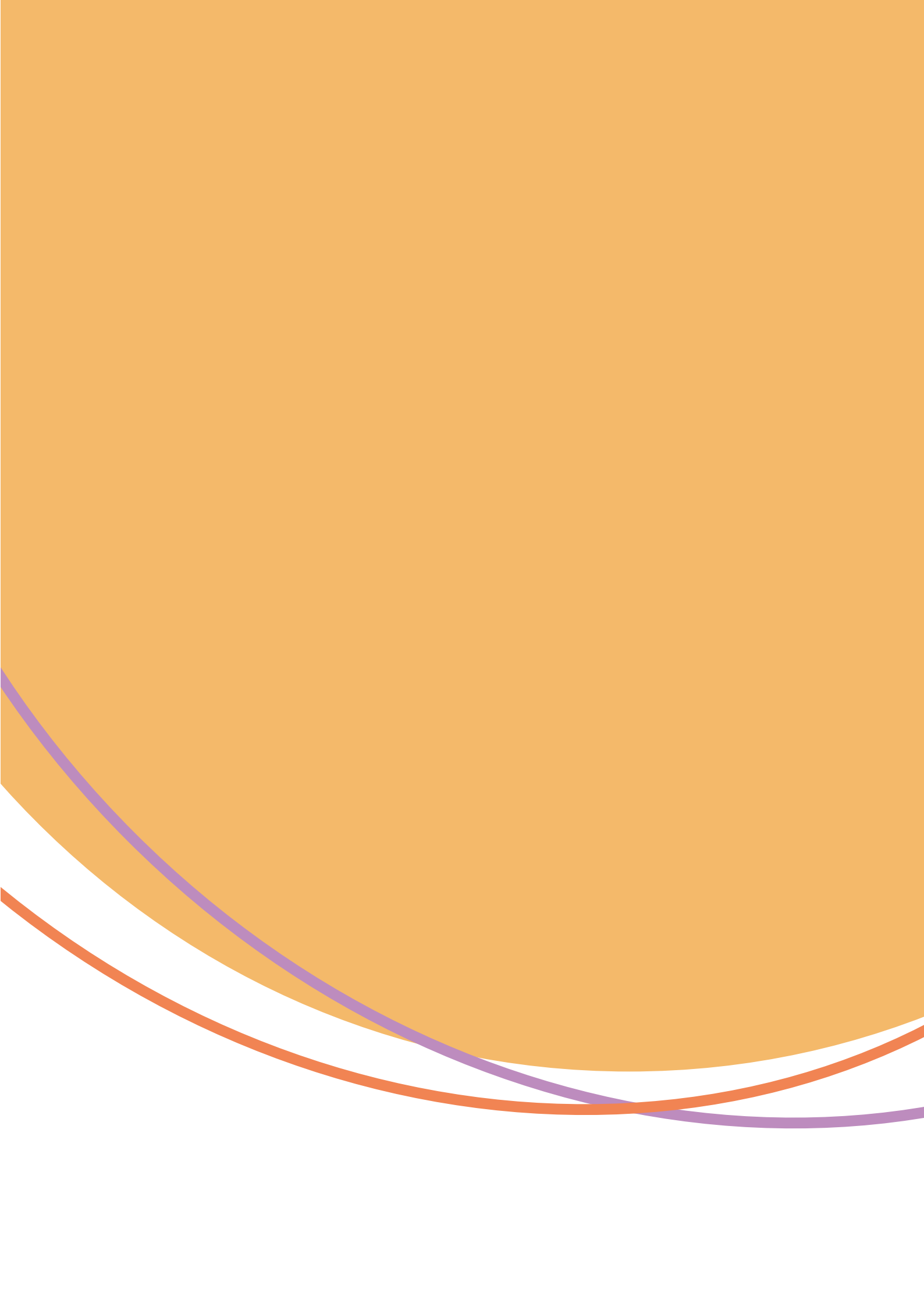
More research on the impact of regularisation measures on people, society and government administrations to be commissioned and funded by institutions and administrations.

- Research on the effects of regularisation mechanisms would be especially useful as most research to date focusses on regularisation programmes.
- Longitudinal studies are especially needed, as some effects may take a while to become visible.
- Particular areas of interest for further research include:
 - » the short and long-term effects of specific design features of a regularisation measure;
 - » health outcomes in the long-term;
 - » living arrangements and housing conditions;
 - » working conditions and labour mobility;
 - » personal development;
 - » educational achievement;
 - » intergenerational effects;
 - » family unity and family dynamics;
 - » access to justice;
 - » use of public services and related costs;
 - » the impact on institutional and administrative workload and (local) policy design.
- The studies should be multi-disciplinary or come from a range of sciences, including anthropology, psychology, public administration, child development, economics, and health, because all aspects of a person's life are impacted.



Monitoring and evaluation processes should be integrated in any regularisation measure, programme or mechanism, implemented by governments.

- The monitoring should focus on all aspects of the procedure and take stock of the situation of the affected people after their regularisation (ideally at least during, one year after and five years after regularisation).
- The findings should be publicly available and accessible.
- Regularised people, civil society organisations and academics should be part of the monitoring and evaluation process.





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for social justice.

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