

NOW's Principles for Comprehensive Immigration Reform

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The National Organization for Women has been a leading advocate in the United States for the rights of women for over forty years. NOW's mission is to fight against discrimination and seek to bring full equality to girls and women regardless of their age, race, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, physical and intellectual abilities, marital or socio-economic status.

NOW members and supporters all across the country are organized to promote feminist issues through advocacy and education, supporting policy initiatives, legislation and actions at the local, state and federal levels to advance the rights of women and girls. In this effort, NOW has joined the debate on the need for comprehensive immigration reform legislation. NOW insists that any "reform" legislation dealing with immigrants must be inclusive and contain provisions that address the specific needs and challenges specific to immigrant women and their children who work and live in the United States.

For NOW, fair, comprehensive immigration reform legislation must include:

- A **legalization** program that will allow undocumented immigrants living in the United States to apply for residency. This should be a process free of unreasonable fines, penalties, and without the need to leave a job and family and return to one's native country for the purposes of being issued a re-entry visa. Temporary workers, including agricultural workers, should be issued worker's permits that would count towards permanent residency. Those that want to work without becoming permanent residents should be allowed to apply for temporary work permits. "Guest workers" should have a path to citizenship and not be indentured to their employers or treated as second-class residents and sent home when their usefulness is over.
- **Enforcement of existing federal labor laws** for all workers, including domestic workers, most of whom are female. Domestic service is a category of work that must be addressed, not ignored and excluded from labor standards afforded to other workers. Immigrant workers must be protected from exploitation, servitude and hostile working conditions.
- **Improvements in the family reunification program.** The 1996 immigration provisions in the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (welfare bill) raised sponsorship requirements to 125% of poverty level. These financial tests must be reformed to allow families to bring relatives to the U.S. who could help immigrant families with financial and care-giving obligations.
- **Adequate health care for children** — all children — including U.S. born children of the undocumented. Currently, children born in the U.S. to an

undocumented parent or parents have the right to one year of Medicaid benefits, but under the current anti-immigrant atmosphere in the country, many of those in the undocumented community are fearful of reprisals, criminal penalties and deportation if they expose themselves through their U.S. born children and seek health care coverage

- **Reproductive health care coverage** must be provided to all immigrant women regardless of legal and economic status. This includes comprehensive sex and sexuality education, access to family planning, birth control and Emergency Contraception, and linguistically and culturally competent information about reproductive health.
- **Adoption of the provision of the WISH Act** which provides safe harbor and safety net benefits to immigrants victims of sexual and domestic violence.