

Office of Research and Analysis

December 1997

Background

This report provides a baseline snapshot of those potentially affected by the work requirements and restrictions on benefits to legal immigrants who were receiving benefits prior to the enactment of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996. It provides counts of those potentially affected by the reforms and it provides detailed demographic and economic characteristics of those individuals. This report is a useful first step for those interested in better understanding the circumstances of the populations affected by these changes. It also provides a baseline for future comparisons.

Findings

Childless unemployed adults are a diverse group. Of the 1.3 million persons potentially subject to the work requirements, more than four out of ten are women. Less than half are single men. These participants are relatively old; the average age is 35 and one third are over age 40. Four in ten have not completed high school. Childless unemployed adults are the poorest of the poor. Six out of ten have no income other than food stamps.

Most of the remaining rely on State General Assistance benefits, which average \$225 per month. On average, their gross income is less than one quarter of the poverty line. Only 13 percent possess any financial resources.

Most legal immigrant food stamp participants are permanent residents and potentially subject to the restrictions on benefits to legal aliens. Permanent residents account for 1.4 million participants, 77 percent of all alien participants. These participants are highly concentrated. Over two thirds live in just four States – California, New York, Texas, and Florida.

Most permanent residents live with United States citizens. Nearly two thirds of households containing permanent residents also contain a citizen. Most of these households consist of permanent resident parents living with U.S.-born children.

Permanent residents are more likely to work than other Food Stamp participants. Nearly one third of households with a permanent resident contain a worker, compared with only one out of five among all food stamp households. Other major sources of income include cash welfare, received by about half of the households, and Supplemental Security Income, received by one out of five permanent resident households. Over ninety percent of permanent resident food stamp households live below the poverty line, the same as the general food stamp population.

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