

Identity documents (IDs) are vital keys necessary to open the doors to so many parts of everyday life. However, there are key system-level failures that create significant obstacles to IDs for many people, causing severe, yet avoidable harm. This infographic highlights some of the unique impacts on immigrant communities. See MAP's [new report](#) to learn more about the obstacles to ID, the harms caused from a lack of ID, and recommendations for improving ID access for everyone.

## SYSTEM FAILURES CREATE OBSTACLES TO ACCURATE ID



**Burdensome documentation requirements** for IDs can be challenging for many people of all backgrounds to meet, but especially so for immigrants, who often face even stricter requirements. Unfortunately, and often due to the circumstances such as war or corruption that led many immigrants to leave their home countries, many of the millions of immigrants to the United States lack basic documents like a non-U.S. passport or birth certificate, making it nearly impossible to prove who they are or meet the burdensome requirements imposed here.



**Financial costs** of getting or updating an ID can be especially challenging for lower-income people. Given the obstacles to citizenship or legal residency, as well as discrimination, immigrant communities face severe obstacles to employment, lower-paying jobs, and higher rates of poverty—making the costs of ID even more out of reach.



**Discrimination** has been and remains a central experience for immigrants, particularly those who are people of color. This includes both interpersonal discrimination and discriminatory government policy. For example, immigrants may fear applying for a state-issued ID, even if they are eligible, because they fear discrimination or mistreatment from government staff.



**The patchwork of state policies** poses additional burdens, as the requirements, costs, and even eligibility for IDs vary from one state to the next. This complexity may be additionally difficult to navigate for non-native English speakers.

## LACK OF ID CAUSES CONCRETE, YET AVOIDABLE HARM



Not having an accurate ID means that it can be **virtually impossible to access basic needs**, from housing to healthcare and employment. Even driving to work, school, or the grocery store can be out of reach without a valid ID, and those who are forced by economic necessity to drive anyway may face criminal punishment or even deportation. It is estimated that at least 4.5 million U.S.-born citizen children have at least one undocumented parent who may struggle to have accurate ID. Research shows that unauthorized immigrant parents who lack valid ID are less likely to enroll their children, even when the children are eligible, in vital programs like health insurance for fear it may lead to deportation or other harm to their families.

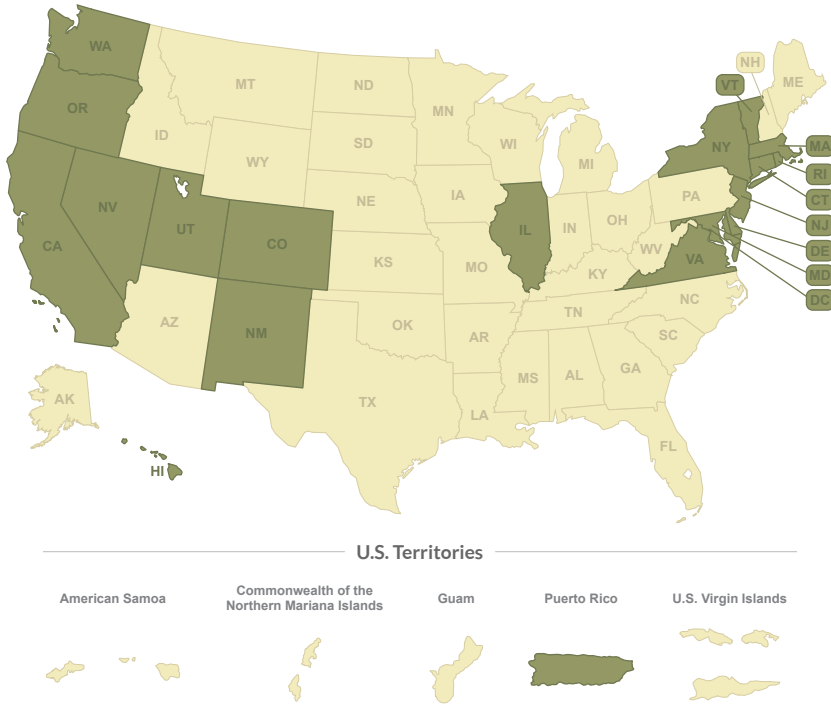


Lack of ID or accurate ID **limits access to essential services**, like opening a bank account, which is critical for building economic stability. As of 2019, 12.2% of Hispanic households lacked any bank account, more than twice the nationwide rate of 5.4% of households. Immigrants to the United States come from all parts of the world, with roughly 44% identifying as Hispanic or Latino. Additionally, and as discussed on the next page, IDs are often required even for crisis or disaster relief efforts, leaving those without ID without access to these vital services even in times of emergency.



Lacking a valid ID can **harm public health and safety**, not just for individuals but for entire communities. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, immigrants were turned away from some vaccination clinics because they couldn't show specific documentation like a driver's license. Being denied a vaccine simply due to a lack of ID put those individuals' health at risk, and further jeopardized the health and safety of those around them. Similarly, when people can't or aren't allowed to obtain driver's licenses, they may be forced to drive without a license and the safety training and/or insurance a license requires, posing risks to both themselves and others on the road.

## ONLY 18 STATES, D.C., AND PUERTO RICO ALLOW ALL QUALIFIED RESIDENTS, REGARDLESS OF CITIZENSHIP, TO GET A DRIVER'S LICENSE



Source: [National Immigration Law Center](#). Data as of Sept 2022.

Currently, only 18 states, D.C., and Puerto Rico have enacted laws that allow undocumented immigrants to get driver's licenses. As reported by the [National Conference of State Legislatures](#), these states issue a license if the applicant provides documentation such as a foreign birth certificate or passport and evidence of current residency in the state.

While these state IDs cannot be used for federal identification purposes, they nonetheless promote better safety, health, and economic wellbeing for all state residents by improving driver safety and training, the ability of all residents to move freely (including to get needed medical care), access to better jobs irrespective of location, and the ability to participate in and contribute to community life and businesses.

## PHOTO ID REQUIRED FOR CLEAN WATER DURING CRISIS IN FLINT, MICHIGAN

In Flint, Michigan, lead-poisoned water has plagued residents since at least 2014, when the city government changed its water source to cut costs. Failing to take appropriate safety measures to treat and test the new water supply, the city caused its aging pipes to leach lead into the water, exposing the city's more than 80,000 residents—a majority of whom are Black—to severe and lasting harm. As the dangerous and even fatal consequences of these choices emerged and continued for years, residents were forced to rely solely on bottled water and/or high-end water filtration systems.

The state government (often by court order) distributed water and filtration supplies free of charge to Flint residents—but it also required a photo ID to receive these vital supplies. In Michigan, however, state law prevents undocumented immigrants from getting a driver's license, and as a result many immigrant Michiganders lack a photo ID. This left many in Flint with little to no way to access clean water in the midst of crisis, and local advocates reported many instances of community members being turned away from water distribution sites due to lack of ID.

While the state later removed the ID requirement to access water and filters, community advocates reported the damage had largely been done, with many undocumented members of the community avoiding distribution sites and other sources of crisis-related information or relief due to fear or expectation they'd be turned away—or worse.

Adapted from: Niraj Warikoo. Feb 4, 2016. "Flint immigrants struggle to get help, info on water." *Detroit Free Press*.

Learn more about identity documents in MAP's new report:

### THE ID DIVIDE: HOW BARRIERS TO ID IMPACT DIFFERENT COMMUNITIES AND AFFECT US ALL

<http://www.mapresearch.org/id-documents-report>

