

# Not 'Second-Class Human Beings': Immigrants Sidelined By Coronavirus Get Cash, Community Support

BY JOSIE HUANG ON APRIL 20, 2020

Jobs started to dry up for Eva, a taco maker from Boyle Heights, as germs and fears over the coronavirus traveled through the city.

A quinceañera canceled. A company barbecue called off.

Then last month, her husband was furloughed from his sewing job at a garment factory.

Suddenly, April rent was looking impossible to make.

Like more than two million other Californians, both Eva and her husband are in the country illegally — that's why she doesn't want to use her last name. Without social security numbers, neither can receive unemployment insurance or a federal stimulus check to tide their household over until the pandemic passes.

"It just makes me feel very sad that we don't have that [government] support," said Eva, who came to the U.S. from Mexico in 2001. "We pay our taxes and do our part."

During a Zoom meeting with other parents, Eva despaired about keeping a roof over the heads of her two teenage kids. Afterward, a community activist on the call from [Parent Revolution](#) told her about a newly-created fund.

To her joy and relief, Eva got a \$500 check in the mail — nearly a third of the \$1,600 she needed to cover April's rent.

## 'A LITTLE BIT OF HOPE'

Across L.A., local leaders and non-profits are identifying holes in the safety net for immigrants without legal status and have created relief funds backed by philanthropists and grassroots donors.

The [Koreatown Immigrant Workers Alliance](#) has been delivering food boxes and cash assistance. So has the [Pilipino Workers Center](#). In Malibu, a [GoFundMe campaign](#) has been started for the day laborers who clear brush and clean oceanside homes.

The Pasadena-based National Day Laborer Organizing Network has created a "[Safety Net](#)" Fund. So far, \$10,000 has gone to each of the 10 worker centers in SoCal to award in increments of \$250. Some recipients have made videos of appreciation.

"The money is not a lot, but you cannot imagine the reaction of workers when they get these resources," said NDLO's executive director, Pablo Alvarado.



*Luis Guzman, who lost his job as California went into shutdown, relies on the bus to get around. As an undocumented worker who will not be receiving any money from the federal stimulus package. (Chava Sanchez/LAist)*

Eva's check came from the One Family L.A fund, launched just weeks ago by community leaders such as Ana Ponce, the head of Great Public Schools Now. Ponce acknowledged the one-time sums are short-term fixes.

"But it does give families a little bit of hope," she said. "It does make families feel like there are some people that care about what's happening to them."

Ponce said more than a half-million dollars has been raised and so far 200-plus families have benefited. The goal is to help a total of 4,000 households make it through the pandemic.



Boxes of food and goods sit ready to be handed out to by volunteers to immigrants in Chelsea, Mass. (Joseph Preziosa /AFP via Getty Images)

### #RECALLGAVINNEWSOM

Efforts such as One Family L.A. are part of a California ethos where the highest levels of government are recognizing the undocumented workers who toil in farms, factories and restaurants — some continuing to do so as other Californians stay at home.

On April 14, L.A. Mayor Eric Garcetti introduced the Angeleno fund to provide debit cards worth \$700 to \$1,500 to needy households, regardless of immigration status.

The next day, Gov. Gavin Newsom rolled out a \$125 million relief fund for "undocumented" immigrants — \$75 million in taxpayer dollars and \$50 million in philanthropic donations.

"We feel a deep sense of gratitude for people that are in fear of deportation, but are still addressing the essential needs of tens of millions of Californians," Newsom said.

The governor pointed out that immigrants without legal status — about one in 10 California workers — paid more than \$2.5 billion dollars in local and state taxes last year. (Immigrants can file taxes using an "Individual Taxpayer Identification Number," which is a commonplace practice.)

Soon after the announcement, #RecallGavinNewsom started trending on Twitter as critics of illegal immigration blasted the governor for using taxpayer funds to give qualifying households between \$500 to \$1,000 each.



[Melissa A. @TheRightMelissa](#)

Not all U.S. citizens qualify for bailouts based on our income & other factors

But Newsom wants to give \$125 million of taxpayer money to illegal aliens Regardless of their income!

Wow! That's a new low even for a Democrat [#RecallGavinNewsom](#)

5,107

[6:26 PM - Apr 15, 2020](#)

[Twitter Ads info and privacy](#)

[2,992 people are talking about this](#)

Mark Krikorian, executive director of the Center for Immigration Studies, said that by offering financial assistance to immigrants here illegally, government officials are sanctioning law-breaking.

"To essentially pay illegal immigrants to stay in the United States is unconscionable," Krikorian said. "We should be helping them go home. If they lost their jobs, their reason to stay is gone."

### **TIME TO 'DO THINGS DIFFERENTLY'**

Pablo Alvarado, executive director of the National Day Laborer Organizing Network, said the debate over whether "undocumented people should be protected [during national crises] is not new."

"This is not the moment to say, 'Hey, these are second-class human beings,'" Alvarado said. "This is our moment to do things differently."

Alvarado belongs to a camp of immigrant rights supporters pressuring state government to do more than make one-time cash payments that, given limited funds, will only make it to a fraction of the state's million-plus workers without legal status.



*Day laborers and their supporters gather April 14 to call on Gov. Gavin Newsom to ensure that undocumented workers benefit from federal CARES Act monies given the state. (Robyn Beck/AFP via Getty Images)*

They support campaigns to implement rent and mortgage forgiveness and to funnel more money to food banks and school districts so they can feed more needy families.

Another idea is to open up the [California Earned Income Tax Credit \(CalEITC\)](#) program to immigrants who haven't been able to get the rebate in the past because they file taxes using an Individual Taxpayer Identification Number rather than a social security number.

That's a change advocated for by the likes of the Latino Legislative Caucus and religious leaders with [The Industrial Areas Foundation](#). In addition, the IAF coalition is [asking](#) Newsome to authorize pandemic payments of \$1,200 to all low-income workers who qualified for the tax credit, regardless of immigration status. That's the amount many individual taxpayers are receiving in federal stimulus checks.

"Our immigrants make California a beautiful state," said IAF coalition member Father Arturo Corral, who ministers to parish members without papers in downtown L.A. "We need to always ask [the governor] to do his best."

### **'A PLACE TO BE SAFE'**

No one knows when most people can safely get back to work. What's clear is that the current lull means demand for help is outstripping available funds.

That's been witnessed with Garcetti's [Angeleno fund](#). The website and phone lines got overloaded as [more than 450,000 people](#) rushed over a three-day-period to make the deadline for the first round of applications. Eva, the taco maker from Boyle Heights, applied for the Angeleno card but is not counting on being among those randomly selected.

She now trying to figure out how to May rent. Keeping her apartment feels more critical to her than ever before.

"Having a home and a place to be safe is really important," Eva said