

APPENDIX

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This appendix documents the methodology underlying the report, such as how the underlying survey was designed and fielded, how variables and vulnerable-group classifications were constructed, and the statistical and econometric methods used to analyze the data.

It is important to note that the appendix describes the full analytical workup conducted in support of the report. However, consistent with standard practice for public-facing impact reports, not every regression specification, within-group breakdown, or descriptive table produced during the analysis is reproduced in the main report or on the project website: some were superseded by more robust specifications, some addressed exploratory questions outside the report's core narrative, and some were omitted for length and readability. This appendix is intended to give readers, reviewers, and replicators a transparent account of the methodology in full, regardless of which specific results were ultimately featured in the report's findings.

A.1 Survey Design and Data Collection

The primary data source is a self-administered online community survey distributed through immigrant advocacy networks and community organizations between February and March 2026. This is a deliberate trade-off: it allowed rapid data collection from a hard-to-reach, legally vulnerable population, but it also means the sample is not randomly drawn from the universe of individuals affected by the processing pause. Respondents are more likely to be engaged with community organizations, more likely to be aware of how the pause affects their case, and plausibly more likely to have experienced, or to perceive themselves as having experienced, hardship.

The survey targeted individuals directly affected by the USCIS processing pause implemented in late 2025 and expanded in January 2026. A total of 189 completed survey forms were initially collected. For the core econometric and demographic analyses, this pool was refined to an analytic sample of 149 valid respondents by excluding records that had missing values for core demographic variables.

The questionnaire was designed to capture a holistic view of the processing pause's impact, eliciting information across seven specific domains:

- Demographics (gender, age bracket, marital status, country of birth, U.S. state of residence)
- Educational attainment
- Employment status and household income
- Immigration status, application type, and length of time in the United States
- Financial impacts (e.g., inability to pay rent, afford food, healthcare, or childcare; new debt)

- Legal and family impacts (status uncertainty, travel restriction, family separation)
- Health and future migration intentions (stress, anxiety/depression, considering or planning to leave the U.S.)

The modules were sequenced to move from background characteristics through to future intentions, following an established approach in survey design whereby respondents are asked first about stable factual matters (education, employment history) before being asked to reflect on more sensitive or evaluative topics (financial hardship, health, departure consideration). Multi-select items were used where respondents might simultaneously experience more than one consequence within a domain for example, financial impacts, where the instrument listed ten discrete hardship types (including savings depletion, credit card debt, personal loans, family borrowing, missed housing payments, and inability to afford food, healthcare, or utilities) and respondents were instructed to select all that applied. This enables analysis of both the incidence and the cumulative count of simultaneous hardships.

Open-ended qualitative fields were embedded at key points in the instrument, inviting respondents to describe their circumstances in their own words as shown in section 5 of the report. These fields were not required; completion was voluntary. In practice, a substantial proportion of respondents provided detailed narrative responses, which constitute the primary source of qualitative data analysed in the study.

A.2 Variable Construction

Dependent Variables: Three multi-item impact indices were constructed as additive counts of binary sub-items drawn from multi-select survey questions. Each sub-item equals 1 if the respondent endorsed that specific impact and 0 otherwise:

- Financial hardship count (0–8 or 0–9 depending on the analysis): aggregates items covering expenditure inability, asset depletion, and credit deterioration (e.g., cannot pay rent/mortgage, cannot afford food, cannot afford healthcare, incurred new debt).
- Legal impact count (0–5): sums items related to immigration status uncertainty and travel restriction (e.g., fell out of status, fear of deportation, cannot travel outside the U.S.).
- Family impact count (0–5 or 0–6): aggregates items covering family separation and disrupted life events.

In addition to the count indices, a set of standalone binary outcomes (incurred new debt, any financial hardship, housing hardship, considered leaving the U.S., seriously considering leaving, anxiety/depression, unemployed without authorization) and two scaled outcomes (self-reported stress, 1–10; ability to meet basic needs, 0–3, where 0 = cannot meet basic needs and 3 = comfortably) were analyzed directly.

Independent Variables: A common set of predictors was used across most regression models, spanning five conceptual domains:

- Life-stage and family structure: age bracket (ordinal), marital status (binary), has dependents (binary)
- Human capital: educational attainment (ordinal, high school through doctorate)
- Economic resources: household income bracket (ordinal)
- Settlement depth: length of time in the United States (ordinal)
- Administrative immigration status: unemployed due to lack of work authorization (binary), pending adjustment of status (binary)

All Ordinal regressors (age, education, income, length of U.S. residence) were treated as continuous variables under the assumption of approximately equal interval spacing.

A.3 Vulnerable Subgroup Definition and Compound Vulnerability Analysis

To examine whether harm is concentrated among particular populations, four (non-mutually-exclusive) vulnerable subgroups were defined from the survey data:

Group	Definition	Rationale
G1: OPT / STEM-OPT participants	Immigration status = F-1 OPT or F-1 STEM OPT	Work authorization tied directly to a pending EAD renewal; no fallback if it lapses.
G2: Women with dependents	Female AND has dependent children or family members	Primary caregivers whose household income and stability is most directly exposed to processing delay.
G3: Refugees & asylum seekers	Immigration status = Asylum applicant	No country of origin to safely return to; pause affects both income and legal protection.
G4: Families with dependents	Has dependent children or family members (regardless of gender)	Harm extends beyond the respondent to every dependent in the household.

Table A.1: Vulnerable Subgroups Definition and Rationale

Because the groups are not mutually exclusive, a subset of respondents belong to two or three groups simultaneously ("compound vulnerability"). Therefore, a separate, complementary analysis examined what happens when respondents belong to more than one vulnerable group simultaneously. Respondents were assigned a cumulative vulnerability score (0 to 3) to test whether simultaneous risk factors produced additive or synergistic (multiplicative) harm. Because certain groups are structurally nested (e.g., women with dependents are a subset of all families with dependents), interaction-term regression models were used to isolate amplification effects, such as the distinct gendered burden of caregiving. Within-group models (restricting the sample to specific subgroups) were also run to identify internal predictors of hardship.

A.4. Descriptive and Bivariate Statistical Methods

Before multivariate modeling, each outcome was examined descriptively and through simple bivariate tests:

Descriptive Statistics: These were generated to profile the sample characteristics and the baseline prevalence of hardship. Categorical and binary variables (such as gender, employment status, and specific financial or legal impacts) were summarized using frequencies and percentages. Continuous variables, such as self-reported stress levels (measured on a 1–10 scale), were summarized using means and standard deviations. To quantify cumulative harm, the researchers constructed additive count indices (e.g., a 0–9 scale for financial impacts and a 0–5 scale for legal and family impacts) by aggregating binary sub-items from multi-select survey questions. Additionally, ordinal demographic categories, such as age brackets, educational attainment, and income tiers, were treated as continuous and summarized using mean ordinal values to evaluate group profiles.

Bivariate Analysis: To evaluate associations between variables without the parametric assumptions of the full regression framework, three primary bivariate statistical tests were employed:

- **Pearson Chi-Square Tests of Independence:** The study used standard Pearson chi-square tests to evaluate the relationship between pairs of binary and categorical variables. This method was used extensively to compare binary outcomes (e.g., incurring new debt, experiencing housing hardship) across demographic subgroups, compound vulnerability tiers, and specific vulnerable populations.. The chi-square statistic was calculated by comparing observed to expected cell frequencies, without applying Yates' continuity correction, and significance was assessed at standard thresholds ($\alpha = 0.05, 0.01, 0.001$).

- **Welch's t-tests and One-Way ANOVA:** To test whether continuous outcomes (such as mean stress levels or the additive impact indices) differed significantly across distinct groups, the researchers utilized mean-comparison tests. Welch's t-tests were used to compare continuous outcomes between two independent groups, such as testing a specific vulnerable subgroup (e.g., families with dependents) against the rest of the sample. One-way ANOVA was utilized when comparing continuous outcomes across more than two categories, such as demographic strata or the 0–3 cumulative vulnerability score groups.
- **Pearson Correlation (r):** Pearson correlations were used to measure the strength and direction of linear associations between continuous or ordinal variables. Most notably, correlation analysis was used in the dose-response evaluation to test whether outcomes progressively worsened as a respondent's cumulative vulnerability score increased (e.g., showing a significant negative correlation between vulnerability score and the ability to meet basic needs). It was also used diagnostically to check pairwise correlations between independent regressors, ensuring they remained below concerning multicollinearity thresholds prior to OLS and Logit modeling.

A.5. Multivariate Regression Framework

The quantitative analysis employed two primary regression estimators based on the distributional properties of the dependent variables.

- **Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) Regression:** OLS was used for continuous, count, and approximately normally distributed outcomes (e.g., stress levels, hardship indices, and the ordinal “ability to meet needs” scale).

$$Y_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{Age}_i + \beta_2 \text{Female}_i + \beta_3 \text{Married}_i + \beta_4 \text{Deps}_i + \beta_5 \text{Education}_i + \beta_6 \text{Income}_i + \beta_7 \text{Length}_i + \beta_8 \text{UnempNoAuth}_i + \beta_9 \text{PendAdj}_i + \varepsilon_i$$

To account for potential heteroskedasticity inherent in survey data, all OLS models utilized HC3 heteroskedasticity-consistent "sandwich" standard errors. This correction applies a stronger penalty to high-leverage observations, providing improved finite-sample performance.

- **Binary Logistic (Logit) Regression:** For dichotomous outcomes (e.g., incurring new debt, experiencing any housing hardship, intent to emigrate), binary logit models were estimated via Maximum Likelihood Estimation.

$$\Pr(Y_i = 1 \mid X_i) = \Lambda(X_i^T \beta) = 1 / [1 + \exp(-X_i^T \beta)]$$

Results were reported as odds ratios (ORs) to indicate the multiplicative change in odds, with OR > 1 indicating higher odds of the outcome and OR < 1 indicating lower odds.

- **Non-Parametric Tests:** Pearson chi-square tests of independence, one-way ANOVA, and Welch's t-tests were used to complement the multivariate models and test for unconditional associations.

A.6 Limitations

All empirical research carries limitations, and intellectual honesty requires that they be stated plainly. The four limitations described below do not undermine the validity of this study's findings the evidence is consistent, coherent, and corroborated across multiple domains but they do define the appropriate boundaries within which those findings should be interpreted and applied.

Purposive Sampling: The sample was recruited through immigrant advocacy networks, community organisations, and professional associations with established ties to the affected population. This was a deliberate and necessary methodological choice: individuals with pending USCIS applications do not appear in publicly accessible sampling frames, and there is no administrative register from which a random probability sample could be drawn. Purposive recruitment through trusted community intermediaries such as: reddit, was therefore the only viable means of reaching this population at scale.

That choice, however, introduces a selection consideration that must be acknowledged. Respondents who engage with advocacy networks may differ in systematic ways from those who do not – potentially in the direction of greater awareness of their legal circumstances, greater willingness to report hardship, or greater exposure to the specific administrative failures that motivated their participation. It is possible, therefore, that the levels of distress and hardship documented in this report are higher among the engaged, networked segment of the affected population than they would be across all individuals subject to the adjudication pause. Equally, it is possible that the most isolated and most severely affected individuals are underrepresented in the sample, especially those who have withdrawn from community networks precisely because of the severity of their circumstances.

Findings should accordingly be understood as documenting the experience of immigrants with pending or affected applications who maintain active connections to community and advocacy structures, rather than as a statistically representative cross-section of every individual affected by the pause. The policy implications are not diminished by this caveat: if this is observable among the reachable population, the full picture may be no less serious.

Self-Reported Bias: All data including income, tax contributions, and the characterisation of impacts are self-reported. While no systematic incentive for misreporting was present in the survey design, self-reported hardship data such as psychological stress and financial loss, are subject to recall bias and social desirability effects. There was no independent administrative verification of earnings, debt, or housing status. The use of banded ranges for income and tax figures mitigates some of this concern.

The sample also skews heavily toward employment-based (EB) adjustment of status applicants relative to family-based (FB) applicants. Nationally, EB applicants account for approximately 60% of adjustment of status cases compared to 40% for FB applicants; respondents in this survey overrepresent the EB category relative to this baseline¹. This skew likely reflects the recruitment channels used and may limit the generalizability of findings to FB applicants, who may experience different financial profiles, employment authorization timelines, and dependency structures. The consistency of findings across domains and analytical methods provides additional confidence in the overall picture, even where individual data points carry uncertainty.

Sample Size and Subgroup Analysis: At 186 respondents, the study is well-powered for descriptive analysis and proportional comparisons but is not designed for inferential modelling with very small subgroups. Regression results for subgroups such as asylum seekers (n=4) and OPT/STEM-OPT participants (n=12) should be interpreted as directionally informative rather than definitively causal. The consistency of direction and magnitude across models provides confidence in these findings, but replication with a larger sample would strengthen causal claims.

Temporal Specificity: Data was collected during the period of the adjudication pause itself. Respondents were therefore reporting on conditions in real time, rather than retrospectively - a methodological strength in terms of immediacy and accuracy, but also a limitation in terms of temporal scope. The long-term consequences of the pause, including cumulative credit deterioration, the downstream career effects of employment gaps, and the ultimate departure decisions of those considering leaving the United States, lie beyond the window captured by this survey and will require longitudinal follow-up to assess fully.

Causal Inference: The cross-sectional nature of the survey prevents strict causal identification, as all data come from a single point in time, with no pre-pause baseline. Key regressors like employment status and income are endogenously affected by the processing pause itself; thus, coefficients represent conditional associations rather than isolated causal effects.

¹Congressional Research Service. (2024, November 4). Permanent legal immigration to the United States: Policy overview (R42866). U.S. Congress. <https://www.congress.gov/crs-product/R42866>