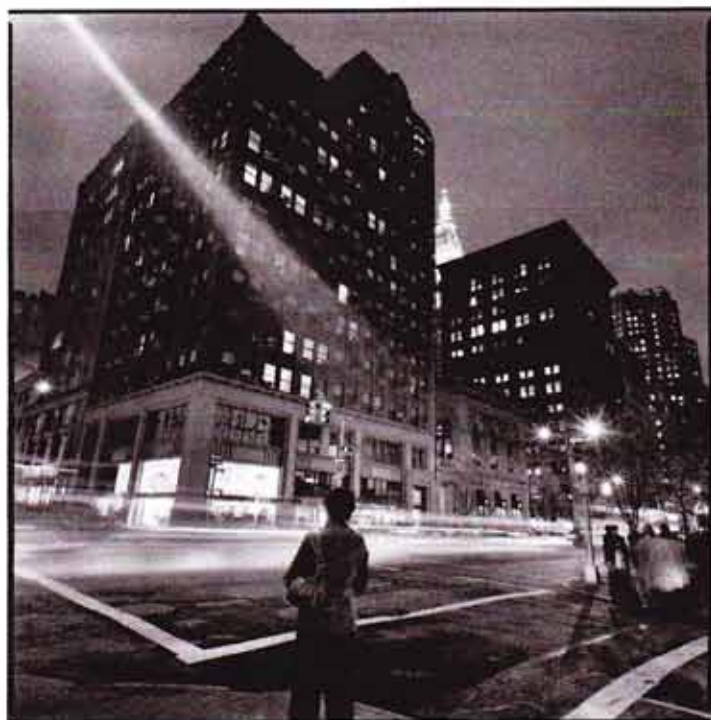


COVER STORY



UNDER ONE ROOF

SHE WAS BROUGHT TO THE U.S. ILLEGALLY AS A CHILD. HER BROTHER WAS BORN HERE AND IS A CITIZEN: A LOOK AT LIFE IN A 'MIXED STATUS' FAMILY.

By David Gonzalez in New York

The father, an engineer, saw no future for his daughter and son in their struggling country, Ecuador. In 2001, he made his way to Mexico and paid smugglers known as “coyotes” to help him sneak across the border into Texas. Then he headed to New York, where his wife and children flew in as tourists and stayed.

But the consequences of that decision—an immigrant’s uprooting his family for the sake of the next generation—have been anything but simple.

His daughter, now 22, graduated from college with honors,

and is still living in the U.S. illegally. While her classmates have good corporate jobs and take foreign vacations, she’s a book keeper for a small immigrant-run business. She fears venturing outside New York City and can’t even get a driver’s license.

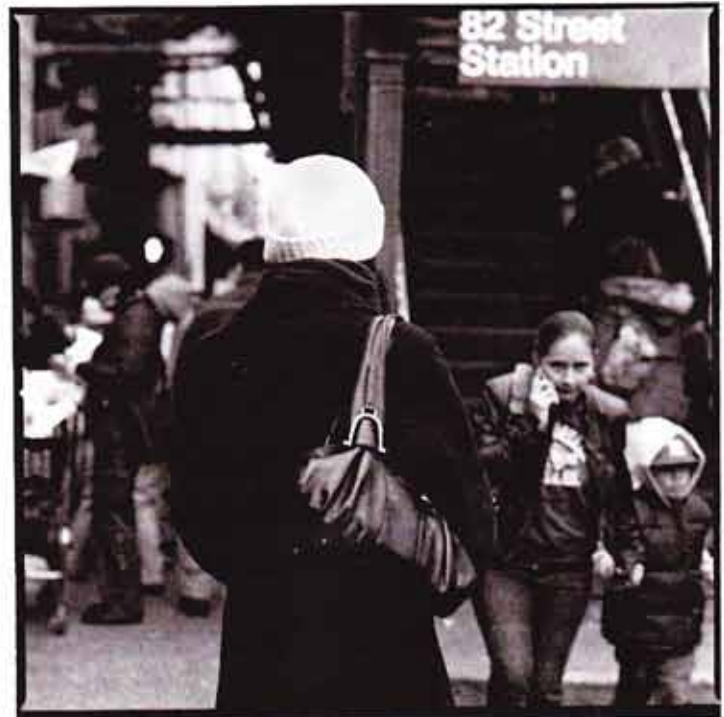
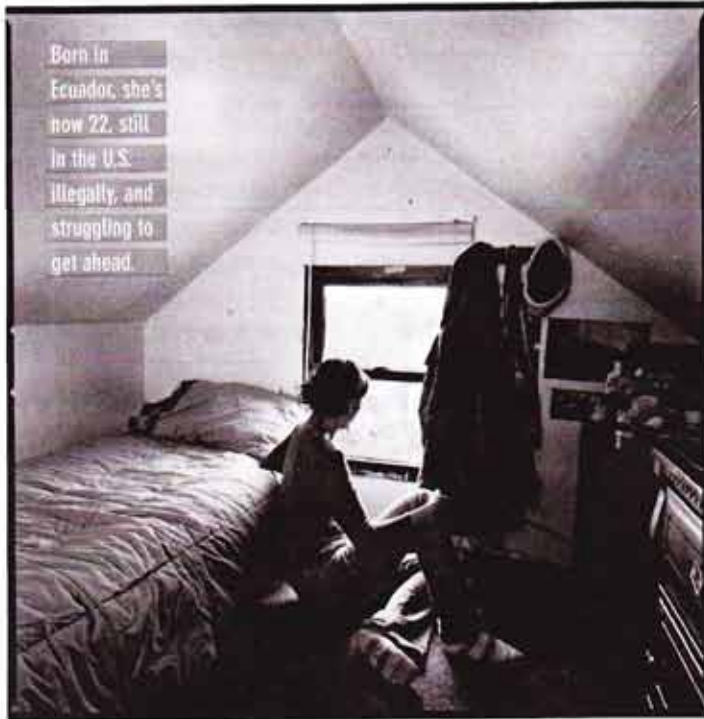
Meanwhile, her 17-year-old brother—who was born in the U.S. and is therefore an American citizen—can do things his family cannot, like spending summers in Ecuador with his cousins. But he’s lonely during the school year here and would like to move back to Ecuador.

“How can he even think that?” asks his mother. “We’re sacrificing ourselves so he can get a better education and a better job. After giving up everything to come here, he—the only one with papers—wants to go back?”

CITIZEN & NON-CITIZEN CHILDREN

This family of four—who let a reporter and a photographer spend time with them only if they were not identified, for fear of being deported—is part of a growing group of what are often called mixed-status families.

Nearly 2.3 million undocumented families—about three quarters of those that are in the U.S. illegally—have at least one child who is a U.S. citizen, according to the Pew Hispanic



LEGAL & ILLEGAL

Center in Washington, D.C.; nearly 400,000 families have both citizen and non-citizen children.

The increase in mixed-status families is due to a tide of illegal immigration and federal laws that deny legal status to illegal immigrants' foreign-born children—who had no say in coming here—while granting citizenship to their American-born siblings.

And as their numbers rise, they are challenging three of the biggest stereotypes of immigrants today.

The first stereotype is that immigrant families are either legal or illegal. The second stereotype is that they either know they're here to stay or bent on returning home. The third is that most immigrants are men on their own, without wives and children.

In fact, most immigrants live in families, and with a blend of legal statuses, opportunities, and plans. This family, in Queens, New York, shows how such disparities within immigrant homes can pull family members in such different directions.

Mother, father, son, and daughter are now split between two households, and between those who expect to stay in the U.S. and those who want to return to Ecuador. The daughter, despite tireless efforts to get ahead, feels she is losing ground and that her brother—who carries the weight of his family's

highest hopes—takes his citizenship for granted.

The mother, 47, who gave up her job in Ecuador as a computer systems analyst and now babysits for a living, has tried in vain to leverage her son's citizenship to get a green card, which would grant her permanent legal residency.

'PASSING INTO ILLEGALITY'

Still, they are better off than many illegal immigrants. They have built a comfortable life in New York, a city that has traditionally welcomed foreigners, regardless of whether they have immigration papers. And the parents are among a rising proportion of illegal immigrants with higher educations—about 25 percent have had some college—abandoning careers back home to come to the U.S. to vault their children into the American middle class.

The daughter showed promise at age 7, when she was already working the cash register at her parents' office-supply shop in Ecuador, and by the time she was 9, she was absorbed in math. As she neared her 14th birthday, her father began to think about taking his family back to the

David Gonzalez is a reporter for The New York Times.