Ivan Palacios, shown July 8, arrived at the Hotel Migrante in Mexicali after spending three days in the desert trying to cross illegally into the United States. It was his first time trying to cross. (Chelcey Adami)

Illegal immigrants make up more than 12 percent of Imperial County’s population, according to a report by the Public Policy Institute of California. That amounts to roughly 21,000 people. Imperial County has the second-highest population percentage in the state, falling behind only Monterey and San Benito counties, which were counted as one in the report.

The study used Internal Revenue Service data to estimate the populations. "It’s generally surprising and informative just to see that unauthorized immigrants are in so many counties in California, not just Los Angeles or Silicon Valley," Hill said. "It just speaks that unauthorized immigrants are integrated into their communities."

The report, co-written by Laura Hill and Hans Johnson, emphasizes how few details are available about California’s illegal immigrant population. "It’s generally surprising and informative just to see that unauthorized immigrants are in so many counties in California, not just Los Angeles or Silicon Valley," Hill said. "It just speaks that unauthorized immigrants are integrated into their communities."

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2:12 p.m.

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By CHELCEY ADAMI
Imperial Valley Press Staff Writer
1:54 a.m. PDT, August 10, 2011

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The study used Internal Revenue Service data to estimate the populations. "These people are working in communities across the state and filing federal and state tax returns," Hill said.
When broken down into ZIP codes, the largest populations of illegal immigrants in the county were found in Calexico and Heber, while the lowest was in Ocotillo.

The report found that illegal immigrants live in every county of California, mostly in highly agricultural or urban areas, and almost 60 percent are from Mexico.

While there’s little information on undocumented immigrant characteristics, what exists shows that most are young, poorly educated men living in poverty with families in the United States.

Research shows the reason illegal immigrants come is for work and to join family, according to the report.

At least 75 percent of adult illegal immigrants work, with 90 percent of male illegal immigrants in the work force. They can be paid much more to work in the U.S.

“For example, the average U.S. wage for production workers in manufacturing is about nine times higher than in Mexico, a ratio that has changed very little in over two decades,” the report writes.

About 9 percent of California workers are illegal immigrants.

San Diego State University-Imperial Valley campus professor Juan Carlos Ramirez-Pimienta said while he was surprised by the high population percentage, “it kind of makes sense,” he said.

“I guess a lot of jobs, low-paying jobs, are taken by them, which in turn reduces the price of some of the services,” he said. “I do believe that not only, especially undocumented migrants, but migrant population to me in general show a higher work ethic in many cases, because they don’t have a lot.”

He said he personally believes that past generations of immigrants have kept the country going.

Imperial County District 1 Supervisor John Renison said the high population percentage surprised him as well on account of the high unemployment in the Valley.

“He are they going to find work?” he said. “Our own residents have trouble finding work.”

He said he believed, however, that illegal immigrants would have a minor effect on unemployment in the Valley, a point referenced in the report.

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