

Facts About Immigrants

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Immigrant families make up a large share of the U.S. population.

- According to the 2000 Census, there are over 30 million immigrants in the U.S., representing 11 percent of the total population.¹
- One in five children in the U.S. is the native- or foreign-born child of an immigrant.²
- Immigrants are settling in communities throughout the U.S. During the 1990s, the immigrant population in “new immigrant” states grew twice as fast (61 percent versus 31 percent) as the immigrant population in the six states that receive the greatest numbers of immigrants.³
- Immigrants and citizens live together in families: 85 percent of immigrant families with children are mixed status families (families in which at least one parent is a non-U.S. citizen and one child is a U.S. citizen).⁴
- Between 1970 and 2000, the naturalized citizen population increased by 71 percent.⁵

Immigrants contribute significantly to the U.S. economy.

- According to the National Academy of Sciences, the total net benefit to the Social Security system if immigration levels remain constant will be nearly *\$500 billion* for the 1998–2022 period, and nearly *\$2 trillion* through 2072.⁶
- In New York, also in 1997, \$13.3 billion (69 percent) of the \$19.3 billion in taxes paid by immigrants went to the federal government in the form of income taxes, Social Security taxes, and unemployment insurance.⁷
- In 2000, the foreign-born population accounted for nearly 15 percent of the total civilian labor force.⁸
- In 2000 foreign-born men 16 years old and older had a higher labor force participation rate (80 percent) than native-born men (74 percent).⁹

Immigrants rely disproportionately on low-wage, low-benefit jobs.

- Even though 7.1 percent of all workers are noncitizens, almost 20 percent of all low-wage workers who live in low-income families with children are noncitizens.¹⁰
- Almost 43 percent of immigrants work at jobs paying less than \$7.50 an hour, compared to 28 percent of all workers.¹¹
- Only 26 percent of immigrants have job-based health insurance.¹²



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Immigrant families use benefits at lower rates than citizen families, and benefits are not a factor in decisions to migrate to the U.S.

- Use of public benefits by lawfully present immigrant families with children who earn less than 200 percent of the federal poverty level fell sharply between 1994 and 1999.¹³
- Nearly 33 percent of low-income native citizens used Medicaid in 2001, compared with only 13.2 percent of low-income noncitizens.¹⁴
- Low-income immigrant families with children have lower TANF-use rates than low-income citizen families with children (8.7 percent versus 11.6 percent).¹⁵ (TANF is the acronym for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families.)
- Welfare does not drive migration patterns. Between 1995 and 2000, the number of immigrant families with children grew four times faster in states with the least generous “safety nets” for immigrants (such as Arkansas and Texas) than it did in states with more generous safety nets (such as California and Massachusetts).¹⁶

Limited English proficiency is associated with lower earnings.

- Approximately 15.5 million adults between the ages of 18 and 64 are considered limited English proficient, and 62 percent of low-wage immigrant workers are LEP.¹⁷
- Immigrants and refugees who are fluent in oral and written English earn about 24 percent more than those who lack fluency, regardless of their qualifications.¹⁸
- The final report to the U.S. Dept. of Education on the National Workplace Literacy Program, which integrated job training with language acquisition, found that after employees participated in the program, employers reported drops in attendance problems, better production, increased job retention, and increased quality control.
- A study in Los Angeles by the Economic Roundtable found that former welfare recipients who were English proficient earned a higher wage than former welfare recipients who did not speak English or who were LEP.¹⁹

Restrictions on support services immigrants can receive hurt children.

- One-third of all children in the U.S. who are eligible for Medicaid, but not enrolled, are children in immigrant families.²⁰
- Even though U.S. citizen children living with noncitizens remained eligible for food stamps, between 1994 and 1999 their participation in the Food Stamp Program declined 35 percent.²¹
- The children of immigrants are more likely to be disadvantaged than the children of natives. They are more likely to be poor (24 percent versus 16 percent); more likely to be uninsured (22 percent versus 10 percent); more likely to have no usual source of medical care (14 percent versus 4 percent); and more likely not to have a steady source of food (37 percent versus 27 percent).²²

¹ Michael Fix, Wendy Zimmerman, and Jeffrey Passell, *The Integration of Immigrant Families in the United States* (Urban Institute, July 2001).

² Urban Institute, *Check Points* (September 2000).

³ Fix, Zimmerman, and Passell.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ U.S. Census Bureau, *Profile of the Foreign-Born Population in the United States: 2000* (U.S. Department of Commerce, December 2001).

⁶ National Academy of Sciences, *The New Americans: Economic, Demographic, and Fiscal Effects of Immigration* (1997).

⁷ Jeffrey Passell and Rebecca Clark, *Immigrants in New York: Their Legal Status, Incomes, and Taxes* (Urban Institute, April 1998).

⁸ Sum, Khatiwada, Harrington, et al., *New Immigrants in the Labor Force and the Number of Employed New Immigrants in the U.S. from 2000 through 2003: Continued Growth Amidst Declining Employment Among Native Born Population* (Center for Labor Market Studies, Northeastern University, December 2003).

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Michael Fix, Urban Institute tabulation of Current Population Survey (November 2001).

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Leighton Ku and Shannon Blaney, *Health Coverage for Legal Immigrant Children: New Census Data Highlight Importance of Restoring Medicaid and SCHIP Coverage* (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, October 2000).

¹³ Michael Fix and Jeffrey Passell, *The Scope and Impact of Welfare Reform's Immigrant Provisions* (Urban Institute, January 2002).

¹⁴ John Holahan and Marie Wang, *The Decline in Medicaid Use by Noncitizens since Welfare Reform* (Urban Institute May 2003).

¹⁵ Fix and Passell.

¹⁶ Michael Fix, "Should Legal Immigrants Receive Public Benefits" (presentation at the Brookings Institution's Welfare and Beyond Forum, February 2002).

¹⁷ Capps, Fix, Passell, et al.

¹⁸ A. Gonzalez, *The Acquisition and Labor Market Value of Four English Skills: New Evidence from NALS* (Contemporary Economic Policy, July 2000).

¹⁹ Mark Drayse, Daniel Flaming, and Peter Force, *The Cage of Poverty* (The Economic Roundtable, September 2000).

²⁰ Leighton Ku and Shannon Blaney, *Health Coverage for Legal Immigrant Children: New Census Data Highlight Importance of Restoring Medicaid and SCHIP Coverage* (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, October 2000).

²¹ United States Department of Agriculture, *The Decline in Food Stamp Participation: A Report to Congress* (July 2001).

²² Randy Capps, *Hardship among Children of Immigrants: Findings from the 1999 National Survey of America's Families* (Urban Institute, February 2001).