

CREDENTIALS FOR THE FUTURE

Mapping the Potential for Immigrant-Origin Adults in the United States



By Jeanne Batalova and Michael Fix

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Executive Summary

Almost 58 million U.S. adults are from immigrant families. This includes 35.2 million first-generation immigrant adults (those born abroad) and 22.5 million members of the second generation (U.S.-born citizens with at least one foreign-born parent.) Together, these two groups form the growing U.S. immigrant-origin population. As of 2017, immigrant-origin individuals made up 28 percent of all working-age adults, up from 22 percent in 2000. The immigrant-origin adult population grew at a much faster pace during this period than the third/higher generations (U.S.-born persons with only U.S.-born parents): 47 percent versus 6 percent, respectively.

These divergent growth rates have made and will make the immigrant-origin population the primary source of future U.S. labor-force growth. The aging of the U.S. population and the slow growth of the U.S. workforce, along with increasing labor-market demand for higher levels of education and skills, raise an important policy question: Are immigrant-origin adults, who are the main replacement source for retiring workers, prepared to fully engage in the knowledge-based U.S. economy?

As of 2017, immigrant-origin individuals made up 28 percent of all working-age adults, up from 22 percent in 2000.

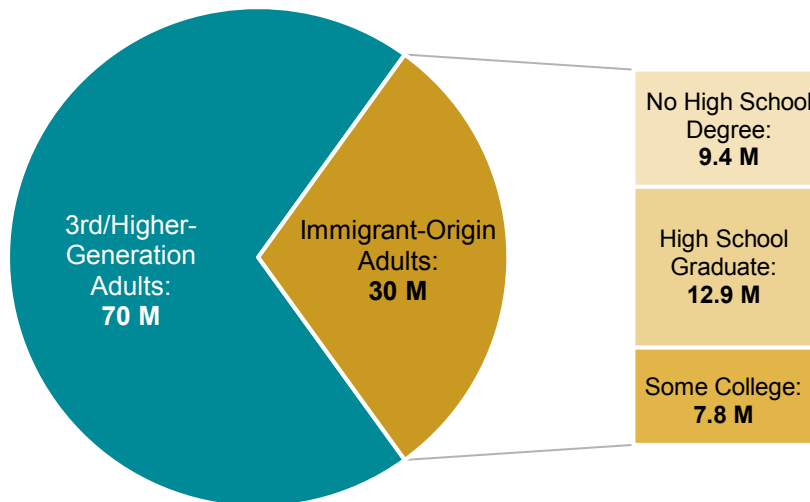
To shed light on this question, this report analyzes data on the postsecondary degree and nondegree credential attainment of first- and second-generation adults (ages 16 to 64), exploring the relationship between these credentials and adults' economic outcomes. The report's focus is the 30 million immigrant-origin adults who lack postsecondary credentials¹ and who are not enrolled in high school. Data are drawn from the 2017 Current Population Survey, which uniquely provides information on nondegree credentials such as professional certifications and occupational licenses. The report also analyzes 2016 American Community Survey data to examine the relationship between legal status, English proficiency, and degree attainment.

Among the key findings of this analysis are:

- ***Immigrant-origin adults are a large and strategically important population for targeting efforts to boost credential attainment.*** Immigrant-origin adults compose a large but often under-recognized share of U.S. adults (ages 16 to 64) not in high school and without marketable postsecondary credentials as they make up 30 percent of the 100 million adults without such credentials. Of these 30 million immigrant-origin adults, 19.4 million are first-generation immigrants and 10.6 million are members of the second generation. Three immigrant-origin subpopulations stand out for the high number of adults without postsecondary credentials and the shares they represent of the overall U.S. immigrant-origin population: those no high school degree, those with one but no further education, and those who have completed some postsecondary education but stopped short of receiving a credential, license, or degree for it (see Figure 1).

¹ Postsecondary credentials are education or training earned beyond high school, such as a college degree, apprenticeship certificate, or occupational license. See Box 1 for more details.

Figure 1. Number of U.S. Adults (ages 16 to 64) without Postsecondary Credentials,* by Immigrant Generation and Educational Attainment, 2017



* Refers to persons ages 16 to 64 with less than an associate degree and without a certification or license. These estimates exclude young adults (ages 16 to 24) who were enrolled in high school at the time of the survey.

Note: The term “immigrant origin” includes both persons born abroad who have immigrated to the United States and those born in the United States to at least one immigrant parent.

Source: Migration Policy Institute (MPI) tabulation of 2017 data from the annual Current Population Surveys (CPS), collected by the U.S. Census Bureau for the U.S. Department of Labor’s Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS).

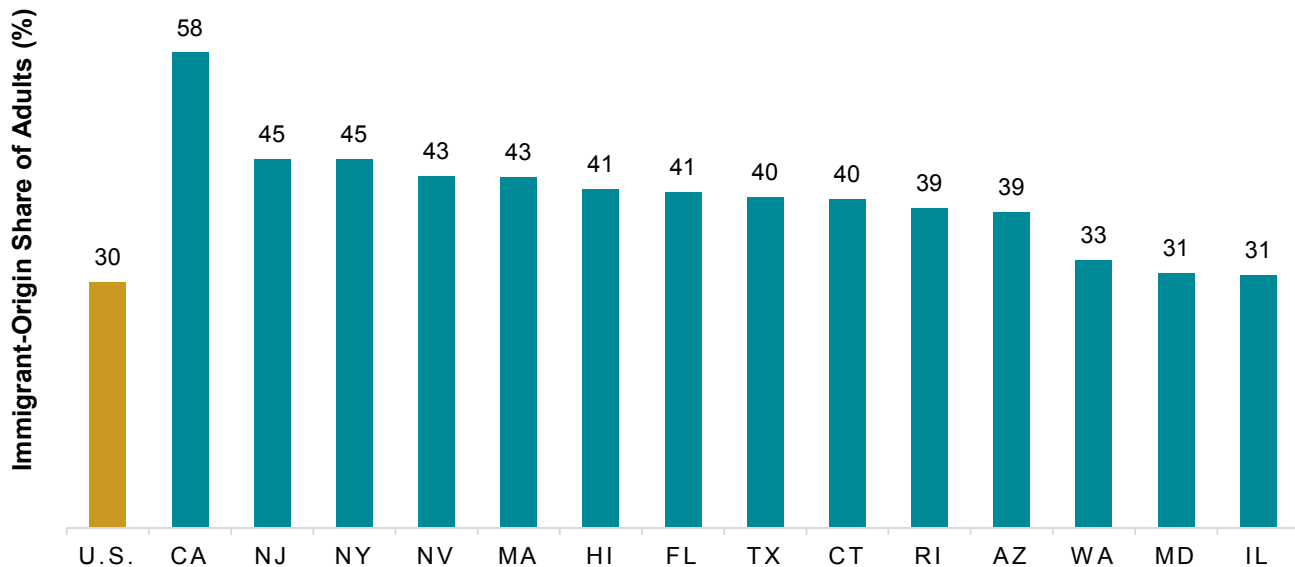
These subgroups represent important targets for credentialing initiatives led by governments, postsecondary institutions, employers, and philanthropic organizations.

- ***The majority of immigrant-origin adults without postsecondary credentials are racial and ethnic minorities.*** Hispanics represent the largest group (64 percent of the 30 million immigrant-origin adults without postsecondary credentials as of 2017), followed by Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPI) and Blacks (15 percent and 7 percent, respectively). In absolute terms, 19.1 million Hispanic, 4.4 million AAPI, and 2.1 million Black immigrant-origin adults lack postsecondary credentials. Given the rapid growth of the immigrant-origin population, a rising share of adults who stand to benefit from support in pursuing postsecondary credentials will be minorities from immigrant families.
- ***Immigrant-origin adults account for at least 30 percent of adults without postsecondary credentials in 14 states.*** These states include traditional immigrant destinations, such as California, Texas, and New York, as well as newer destinations and less immigrant-dense states, such as Nevada, Connecticut, and Washington (see Figure 2).² Most of these states have set ambitious goals to raise credential attainment among their residents overall. These quantifiable goals, set out in statute or strategic plans, are intended to guide state policy regarding investment in and alignment of K-12 and postsecondary education and training.

² Detailed U.S. and state-level data profiles of adults without postsecondary credentials, broken down by immigrant generation and other characteristics, will be available in late March 2019 at: www.migrationpolicy.org/research/immigrant-origin-adults-postsecondary-credentials-50-states.



Figure 2. Immigrant-Origin Share of All Adults (ages 16 to 64) Lacking Postsecondary Credentials:* United States and Top 14 States, (%), 2017



* This refers to persons ages 16 to 64 with less than an associate degree and without a certification or license. These estimates exclude young adults (ages 16 to 24) who were enrolled in high school at the time of the survey.

Note: The term “immigrant origin” includes both persons born abroad who have immigrated to the United States and those born in the United States to at least one immigrant parent.

Source: MPI tabulation of 2017 data from the U.S. Census Bureau’s annual CPS.

- Nondegree credentials provide positive labor-market returns.** Immigrant-origin adults holding certifications or licenses in occupations ranging from barbers to licensed practical nurses—particularly those without a postsecondary academic degree—have higher levels of labor-force participation, higher incomes, and lower rates of unemployment than their counterparts who lack them. These positive outcomes underscore the value of increasing access to nondegree credentials as a strategy for promoting mobility and accelerating immigrant integration.
- Many first-generation immigrants face barriers to obtaining postsecondary credentials.** More than 60 percent of immigrant adults without postsecondary credentials are Limited English Proficient, and almost one-third are unauthorized. Both raise a range of policy issues regarding the interrelationship of language skills, training, and credential assessment.

Regardless of their background, many adults face challenges accessing postsecondary education and training—from the costs and time involved, to program transparency, to the need for child care and transportation. Immigrant-origin adults, like their third/higher-generation counterparts, will benefit from accessible and affordable pathways to high-quality postsecondary credentials as well as on-ramps and practical supports along the way that enable them to take a break from and return to training as needed to meet family and work obligations. A growing range of federal state and local policies have begun to address these challenges, including the now maturing implementation of the 2014 *Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act*. Other policies that aim to support those seeking marketable credentials include the reform efforts underway across the nation to streamline credential licensing requirements with the goal of removing inefficient barriers to entry into occupations, linking credentials to career and educational pathways, and making credentials portable across state lines.



But in some ways, immigrants face new challenges that are particular to them: challenges linked to immigration policies advanced by the Trump administration. These policies could create barriers to earning credentials, complicating the labor-market integration of some immigrants and depriving employers and local economies of a valuable labor source. They include the rescission of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program and the ending of Temporary Protected Status (TPS) designations for nationals of six countries—actions that, should they clear legal hurdles, could end work authorization for more than 1 million immigrants. They also include proposed changes to the public-charge regulation that would penalize immigrants who are not yet U.S. citizens or green-card holders, and who have used or are deemed likely to use public benefits, potentially chilling enrollment in publicly funded programs that provide the skills and language training needed for credential acquisition.

These findings hold far-reaching implications for how credentialing programs are designed and targeted. This is the case both for organizations that expressly seek to integrate immigrants into the U.S. economy and society, and for mainstream skills and education providers that seek to promote the economic mobility of the nation's low-income and minority populations. As the immigrant-origin population continues to grow in size and labor-market importance, the success of these initiatives in supporting immigrants and their children will have wide-reaching impacts on employers, institutions of higher learning, nongovernmental organizations, and U.S. and state economies.

I. Introduction

It is widely recognized that obtaining a high-quality, marketable postsecondary credential—whether a college degree, an apprenticeship certificate, or an occupational license—increases a worker's income and economic opportunities.³ Increasing human capital within the workforce should also help employers and the U.S. economy bridge a widely reported gap between the number of skilled jobs available and the number of workers qualified to fill them.⁴ And should more U.S. workers pursue degrees and other credentials, the United States may make up the ground it has lost in recent decades to other industrialized countries whose workers are significantly more likely to hold postsecondary credentials.⁵ This boosting of credentials—and the competencies they signal to employers—can unlock untapped talent, especially among groups under-represented in skilled work, including minorities, women, and adults from immigrant families.

Today, less than half (48 percent) of U.S. adults ages 25 to 64 have a postsecondary credential, with state attainment rates varying from 36 to 38 percent in West Virginia and Nevada; to 49 percent in Iowa, Florida, and California; to a high of 65 percent in the District of Columbia.⁶ Concern about talent shortages at the national and state levels has refocused attention on ways to support more U.S. adults in pursuing postsecondary credentials. More than 40 states have established credential attainment goals for their residents.⁷ Yet the scale of the challenge is considerable. The Lumina Foundation, for example, suggested

3 Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), *Skills Matter: Further Results from the Survey of Adult Skills* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2016), <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264258051-en>; Anthony P. Carnevale and Stephen J. Rose, *The Undereducated American* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, 2011), <https://cew.georgetown.edu/cew-reports/the-undereducated-american/>; James Rosenbaum, Caitlin Ahearn, Kelly Becker, and Janet Rosenbaum, *The New Forgotten Half and Research Directions to Support Them* (New York: William T. Grant Foundation, 2015), <http://wtgrantfoundation.org/library/uploads/2015/09/The-New-Forgotten-Half-and-Research-Directions-to-Support-Them.pdf>.

4 Anthony P. Carnevale, Tamara Jayasundera, and Artem Gulish, *America's Divided Recovery: College Haves and Have-Nots* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, 2016), <https://cew.georgetown.edu/cew-reports/americas-divided-recovery/>.

5 OECD, *Getting Skills Right: Assessing and Anticipating Changing Skill Needs* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2016), <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264252073-en>.

6 Lumina Foundation, *A Stronger Nation* (Indianapolis: Lumina Foundation, 2019), <http://strongernation.luminafoundation.org/report/2019/#page/downloads>.

7 Ibid.



the United States should aim to increase the share of U.S. adults with postsecondary credentials to 60 percent by 2025—a goal that would require an additional 16.4 million adults to gain a quality, marketable credential between 2017 and 2025.⁸

Little research to date has focused on the role the immigrant-origin population—that is, both immigrants and the children of immigrants—could and should play in these important efforts. This report seeks to place the 57.6 million immigrant-origin adults (ages 16 to 64), 30 million of whom lack postsecondary credentials, more firmly within policy discussions over credentialing and licensing. In so doing, the report seeks to expand the literatures on talent development and immigrant integration.

Box 1. Key Terms

Immigrant generation: Immigrants, or the first generation, are persons with no U.S. citizenship at birth. Immigrants include naturalized U.S. citizens, legal permanent residents (or green-card holders), refugees and other humanitarian immigrants, persons on certain temporary visas (e.g., skilled foreign workers and international students), and unauthorized immigrants. The second generation is composed of persons born in the United States to one or more immigrant parents. Together, the first and second generations make up what this report describes as the immigrant-origin population. In contrast, adults born in the United States with only U.S.-born parents are described here as the third/higher generation.

Postsecondary credentials: There are two types of postsecondary credentials—degree and nondegree credentials. Degree credentials include associate-level vocational and academic degrees, as well as bachelor's, master's, doctoral, and professional degrees (such as those for medical doctors or lawyers). Common types of nondegree credentials include certificates awarded by educational institutions, apprenticeship certificates, professional (or industry) certifications awarded by a nongovernmental body, and occupational licenses awarded by a government licensing board or agency. Business licenses are not included. (See Appendix A for more details.)

A Pressing Challenge in Changing Times: Demographic, Economic, and Policy Context

The renewed focus on efforts to develop the talent and skills of the U.S. workforce is being shaped by several powerful forces, from broad demographic, labor-force, and education trends to changes in immigration policy that have potential labor-market implications.

The U.S. workforce is aging, Baby Boomers are retiring, and birthrates among younger generations are declining, all with implications for the availability of workers.⁹ The total growth in the working-age population over the next two decades combined is projected to be lower than any single decade since the 1960s. According to some estimates, between 2017 and 2027, the United States faces a shortfall of 8.2 million workers, representing the most substantial gap in 50 years.¹⁰ There is also some evidence that

8 Lumina Foundation, *Lumina Foundation: Strategic Plan for 2017 to 2020* (Indianapolis: Lumina Foundation, 2014), www.luminafoundation.org/files/resources/strategic-plan-2017-to-2020-apr17.pdf.

9 Harry Holzer, *The Potential Role of Immigration in the U.S. Labor Market: A Look Ahead* (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, forthcoming).

10 Jeffrey S. Passel and D'Vera Cohn, *Immigration Projected to Drive Growth in U.S. Working-Age Population through at Least 2035* (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, 2017), www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/03/08/immigration-projected-to-drive-growth-in-u-s-working-age-population-through-at-least-2035/.



these labor shortages have been accompanied by skills mismatches—that is, where the skills and training of workers seeking employment are misaligned with available jobs.¹¹ These mismatches can be seen in the overall economy, where the number of available jobs exceeds its historical peak.¹²

A focus on helping workers, and especially those from disadvantaged groups, secure high-quality credentials should also be viewed within the context of widely recognized failures of the higher education system. A 2014 study estimated that more than 31 million students who attended college between 1993 and 2003 left without receiving a degree or certificate.¹³ And some scholars have found that students who attend college but leave without obtaining an occupational or other credential do no better in terms of income and employment than adults with only a high school degree.¹⁴ The waste of time, money, and motivation is considerable. In addition, the resulting accumulated debt can itself serve as a barrier to further study and training.

Calls to simplify and harmonize highly fragmented licensing and credentialing regimes at state and occupational levels may make it easier for all workers to access credentials.

For ethnic and racial minorities, the shortcomings of the higher education sector intersect with persistent inequalities of access and outcomes. These concerns are highly pertinent to the analysis of the educational and employment trajectories of immigrant-origin adults, as 77 percent of immigrants and their children are ethnic or racial minorities.¹⁵ Research by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine finds broad education and economic progress across generations for all immigrant groups. However, many Latino and Black immigrant-origin children and adults face greater barriers to education access and completion compared to their Asian and White counterparts.¹⁶

Discussion of the credentialing of immigrant-origin adults also raises questions about how the current policy climate could affect these adults' motivations and ability to pursue postsecondary credentials. On the one hand, calls to simplify and harmonize highly fragmented licensing and credentialing regimes at state and occupational levels may make it easier for all workers to access credentials and receive recognition for them across state lines, and for foreign-trained professionals to validate credentials earned abroad.¹⁷

11 Andrew Weaver and Paul Osterman, "Skill Demands and Mismatch in U.S. Manufacturing," *The ILR Review* 70, no. 2 (2017): 275–307; Peter Cappelli, "Skill Gaps, Skill Shortages and Skill Mismatches: Evidence for the US" (working paper no. 20382, National Bureau of Economic Research, Cambridge, MA, August 2014), www.nber.org/papers/w20382.

12 Committee for Economic Development of the Conference Boards, "Immigration Policy That Works: Bringing Foreign-Born Workers into High Shortage Occupations" (policy brief, Conference Board, Washington, DC, June 2017), www.ced.org/reports/immigration-policy-that-works.

13 Doug Shapiro et al., *Some College, No Degree: A National View of Students with Some College Enrollment, but No Completion* (Herndon, VA: National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2014), https://nscresearchcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/NSC_Signature_Report_7.pdf.

14 Rosenbaum, Ahearn, Becker, and Rosenbaum, *The New Forgotten Half*.

15 Authors' estimate of the share racial and ethnic minorities represent among the 86 million immigrant-origin individuals of all ages is based on 2017 data from the annual Current Population Survey (CPS), collected by the U.S. Census Bureau for the U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS).

16 National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, *The Integration of Immigrants into American Society* (Washington, DC: National Academies Press, 2015), <https://doi.org/10.17226/21746>.

17 National Conference of State Legislators (NCSL), *The State of Occupational Licensing: Research, State Policies, and Trends* (Washington, DC: NCSL, 2017), www.ncsl.org/Portals/1/Documents/employ/Licensing/State_Occupational_Licensing.pdf.



But at another level, policies introduced nationally that aim to restrict immigration may be having concrete impacts on efforts to increase the number of first-generation adults with marketable credentials. For example, as the Trump administration lowered the ceiling for refugee resettlement in fiscal year (FY) 2017 and FY 2018, the number of refugees admitted dropped to historic lows¹⁸ and already limited funding for the nonprofit agencies that help these and other immigrant adults access job training and postsecondary education has been scaled back as a result.¹⁹ Similarly, some occupational training and English programs that enroll immigrants who receive Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and Medicaid have reported noticeable levels of disenrollment amid news of planned revisions to the “public-charge” rule that would prevent some noncitizens who access these benefits from getting a green card or renewing a temporary visa.²⁰ At the same time, the administration’s decision to end Temporary Protected Status (TPS) designations for nationals of six countries²¹ and efforts to rescind the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program²² would, if they clear legal challenges, end work authorization for more than 1 million immigrants in the next couple years, pushing them into the informal economy, limiting their ability to obtain or use postsecondary education and credentials, and depriving employers and local economies of a valuable pool of labor.

Policies introduced nationally that aim to restrict immigration may be having concrete impacts on efforts to increase the number of first-generation adults with marketable credentials.

Given these intersecting social, labor-market, and policy trends, this report aims to shed light on how immigrants and their children fit within broader discussions of how to build the skills and credentials of the U.S. workforce. It begins by describing demographic trends within the immigrant-origin population and estimating the number of immigrant-origin adults with and without postsecondary credentials. Next, it examines the sociodemographic characteristics of immigrant-origin adults who lack postsecondary credentials (i.e., their immigrant generation, race and ethnicity, legal status, and English proficiency) and their distribution by state. The report then explores the value of postsecondary credentials, as measured using markers such as labor-force participation, unemployment, and wages. It concludes with a discussion of the implications of these findings for education and immigrant integration policy.

18 Migration Policy Institute (MPI) Migration Data Hub, “U.S. Annual Refugee Resettlement Ceilings and Number of Refugees Admitted, 1980-Present,” accessed February 13, 2019, www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/data-hub/charts/us-annual-refugee-resettlement-ceilings-and-number-refugees-admitted-united.

19 Priscilla Alvarez, “America’s System for Resettling Refugees Is Collapsing,” *The Atlantic*, September 9, 2018, www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2018/09/refugee-admissions-trump/569641/.

20 While a public-charge rule already exists, the rule proposed in October 2018 (but not yet implemented) would expand the number and types of health, nutrition, and other benefits immigration officials consider when determining whether a noncitizen is likely to use public benefits and thus become a “public charge.” In this case, immigration officials may deny applicants a green card or renewal of a temporary visa. Evidence from the 1990s welfare reforms suggests that some immigrant families not directly affected by the rule may nonetheless limit their use of public benefits out of confusion or fear. See Jeanne Batalova, Michael Fix, and Mark Greenberg, *Chilling Effects: The Expected Public Charge Rule and Its Impact on Legal Immigrant Families’ Public Benefits Use* (Washington, DC: MPI, 2018), www.migrationpolicy.org/research/chilling-effects-expected-public-charge-rule-impact-legal-immigrant-families.

21 These countries are El Salvador, Haiti, Honduras, Nepal, Nicaragua, and Sudan. See Jill H. Wilson, *Temporary Protected Status: Overview and Current Issues* (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2018), <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/homesecc/RS20844.pdf>.

22 The Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, launched in 2012 by the Obama administration, offers temporary protection from deportation and work authorization to roughly 699,000 eligible unauthorized immigrant youth and adults, according to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) data from August 2018. See USCIS, “Approximate Active DACA Recipients: Country of Birth” (data table, USCIS, Washington, DC, August 31, 2018), [www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/USCIS/Resources/Reports%20and%20Studies/Immigration%20Forms%20Data/All%20Form%20Types/DACA/DACA Population Data August 31 2018.pdf](http://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/USCIS/Resources/Reports%20and%20Studies/Immigration%20Forms%20Data/All%20Form%20Types/DACA/DACA%20Population%20Data%20August%2031%202018.pdf).

**Box 2. Data Sources and Considerations**

To explore the demographic and labor-market questions at the heart of this study, this analysis uses data collected by the U.S. Census Bureau and the U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS).

- **Postsecondary nondegree credentials.** While large bodies of administrative and survey data track outcomes tied to K-12 and college completion, data on nondegree credentials are more limited. In response to growing interest in their value, the Census Bureau and BLS in 2015 added questions to the Current Population Survey (CPS) that make it possible to estimate the number of people with active professional certifications and industry/occupational licenses, and their demographic characteristics and labor-market outcomes. While studies have shown the benefits of nondegree credentials, especially for women and racial minorities, little research of this kind has focused on immigrant-origin adults. This report thus uses 2017 CPS data to analyze postsecondary degree and nondegree credential attainment among first- and second-generation adults.
- **Immigrant generations.** Unlike most U.S. population surveys, the CPS collects information about whether someone is the child of immigrants (i.e., part of the second generation). Understanding the educational and economic trajectories of the second generation is important for several reasons. One is their rapidly expanding presence within the workforce, as the children of the large number of immigrants who have entered the United States since the 1980s grow into adulthood. Second, research has shown that while members of the second generation make educational, economic, and other gains compared to their parents, this success is often limited. For example, while second-generation Hispanic women may attend college at the same rate as third/higher-generation non-Hispanic White women, their completion rates are significantly lower.
- **Legal status and language skills.** This report aims to fill another knowledge gap by examining the legal status, English skills, and levels of bilingualism of immigrant adults who do and do not have degrees and other credentials. This is done by analyzing Census Bureau 2016 American Community Survey (ACS) data using a unique methodology developed by the Migration Policy Institute (MPI) for assigning legal status to noncitizens in ACS data.

Notes: Details on CPS data are available in Appendix A. For more information on MPI's method for assigning legal status in ACS data, see Jeanne Batalova, Sarah Hooker, Randy Capps, and James D. Bachmeier, *DACA at the Two-Year Mark: A National and State Profile of Youth Eligible and Applying for Deferred Action* (Washington, DC: MPI, 2014), www.migrationpolicy.org/research/daca-two-year-mark-national-and-state-profile-youth-eligible-and-applying-deferred-action.

Sources: BLS, "Adding Questions on Certifications and Licenses to the Current Population Survey," updated November 2016, www.bls.gov/opub/mlr/2016/article/adding-questions-on-certifications-and-licenses-to-the-current-population-survey.htm; Peter Q. Blair and Bobby W. Chung, "Job Market Signaling through Occupational Licensing" (working paper no. 24791, National Bureau of Economic Research, Cambridge, MA, July 2018), www.nber.org/papers/w24791; National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, *The Integration of Immigrants into American Society* (Washington, DC: National Academies Press, 2015), <https://doi.org/10.17226/21746>; Jeanne Batalova and Michael Fix, *Up for Grabs? The Gains and Prospects of First- and Second-Generation Youth Adults* (Washington, DC: MPI, 2011), www.migrationpolicy.org/research/prospects-first-second-generation-young-adults-up-for-grabs.

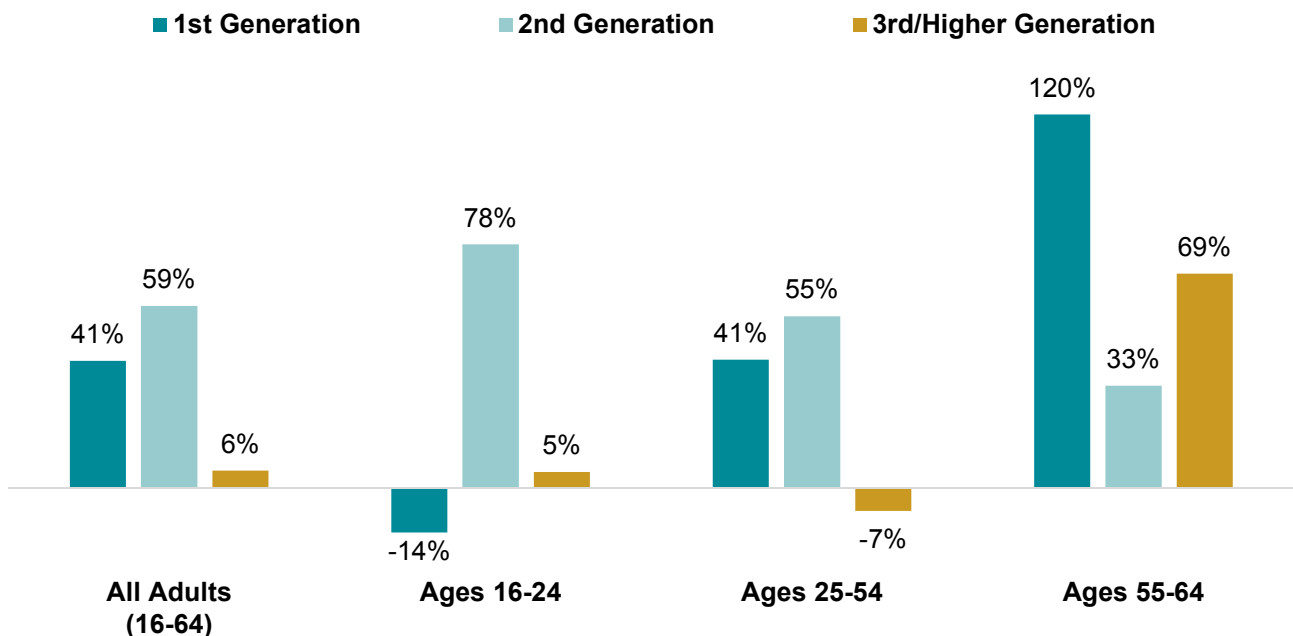


II. Characteristics of the Immigrant-Origin Adult Population

In 2017, 57.6 million adults ages 16 to 64 in the United States were of immigrant origin: 35.2 million were members of the first generation and nearly 22.5 million members of the second generation. These immigrant-origin adults made up 28 percent of the nation's 205.6 million adults—up from 22 percent in 2000. Several broad trends within this population stand out, with implications for immigrant-origin adults' workforce participation and pursuit of postsecondary credentials.

The immigrant-origin population has grown considerably in recent years. Between 2000 and 2017, both the first and second generations grew rapidly, particularly when compared to U.S.-born adults with U.S.-born parents (i.e., the third/higher generation). Over this time period, the second generation increased in size by 59 percent and the first generation by 41 percent, while the third/higher generation grew by only 6 percent (see Figure 3). Looking at the prime working-age population (adults ages 25 to 54), the centrality of the growth of the immigrant-origin population becomes even more apparent: between 2000 and 2017, there is significant growth in both the first and second generations but a decline of 7 percent in the number of third/higher-generation adults.

Figure 3. Population Change (%) by Age Group and Immigrant Generation between 2000 and 2017



Source: Migration Policy Institute (MPI) tabulation of 2000 and 2017 data from the annual Current Population Surveys (CPS), collected by the U.S. Census Bureau for the U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS).

In thinking about the future of the U.S. labor force, it is important to focus on the trajectories of younger adults (ages 16 to 24) who are completing schooling and entering the workforce. Between 2000 and 2017, the second generation grew by 78 percent while there was little change among the third/higher generation and a decline of 14 percent among the first generation (see Figure 3). This divergence has meant that the number of the second-generation young adults is now twice the size of the first-generation population of the same age (7.1 million versus 3.5 million). These generational trends are critical from a workforce development point of view as members of the second generation enjoy the rights of U.S. citizenship, generally have higher education attainment, and are much more likely to be fully English proficient than first-generation individuals.



These generational shifts are likely to continue, given the slower pace of immigration today than in the 1990s and 2000s, and the higher fertility rates among immigrant families compared to families headed by U.S.-born adults.²³ As a result, a growing share of immigrant-origin adults between ages 16 and 54 will be U.S. born. At the same time, foreign-born individuals will account for an increasing share of older U.S. adults (ages 55 to 64), as shown in Figure 3. For older adults seeking to make a transition from manual labor to less physically taxing forms of work, gaining postsecondary credentials may be particularly valuable.

The immigrant-origin share of adults from different racial and ethnic groups varies widely. In 2017, 90 percent of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPIs) and 75 percent of Hispanics were of immigrant origin, as compared to Blacks (17 percent) and Whites (9 percent) (see Table 1). The breakdown of these groups by immigrant generation reveals high concentration of AAPIs in the first generation and of Hispanics in the second and higher generations.

Table 1. Adults Ages 16 to 64 by Race/Ethnicity and Immigrant Generation, (%), 2017

	Total	Hispanic	Black	AAPI	White	Other
Total	205,569,800	37,238,600	27,284,800	14,295,200	124,049,000	2,702,200
By immigrant generation (%)						
1st generation	17.1	45.5	11.9	65.0	4.5	1.8
2nd generation	10.9	30.0	5.2	25.4	5.0	3.6
3rd/higher generation	72.0	24.5	82.9	9.6	90.5	94.6

AAPI = Asian American and Pacific Islander.

Note: "Other" category includes persons identifying as American Indian or unspecified multiple races.

Source: MPI tabulation of 2017 data from the U.S. Census Bureau's annual CPS.

Having legal immigration status or U.S. citizenship can play an important role in an individual's educational trajectory, access to services and benefits, and economic mobility.²⁴ Indeed, legal status is required to obtain most certifications and licenses and, of course, to work legally.²⁵ While the majority of first-generation adults ages 16 to 64 were legally present in the United States as of 2016, 26 percent, or close to 9.8 million adults, were unauthorized.²⁶ Most unauthorized immigrants were of prime working age: 75 percent were between the ages of 25 and 54, with smaller shares between ages 16 to 24 (15 percent) and 55 to 64 (10 percent). Second-generation adults, by contrast, are U.S. citizens by birth and thus eligible for the same public benefits and services as the third/higher generation. Yet because some live in households with unauthorized immigrant family members, they may nonetheless face limited household access to benefits and services and a greater risk of poverty.

Limited English proficiency can also be a barrier to obtaining postsecondary credentials.²⁷ The 21.1 million adults (ages 16 to 64) who were Limited English Proficient (LEP) as of 2016 include 1.9 million young adults (ages 16 to 24); 15.3 million adults ages 25 to 54; and 4 million ages 55 to 64.²⁸ Looking at two key minority groups, nearly 43 percent of Hispanic and 36 percent of AAPI prime-working-age adults

23 Gustavo López, Kristen Bialik, and Jynnah Radford, "Key Findings about U.S. Immigrants," Pew Research Center, November 30, 2018, www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/11/30/key-findings-about-u-s-immigrants/.

24 National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, *The Integration of Immigrants*.

25 Unauthorized immigrants are ineligible for most federal and state benefits and for work permits.

26 Authors' estimates of the number of unauthorized immigrants and their share among immigrant adults (ages 16 to 64) are based on 2016 ACS data with MPI's legal status imputations.

27 Julie Strawn, *Policies to Promote Adult Education and Postsecondary Alignment* (Washington, DC: National Commission on Adult Literacy, 2007), <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED506594.pdf>.

28 Authors' estimates of the number of Limited English Proficient (LEP) immigrants and their share among all adults, not only immigrants, are based on 2016 ACS data. Unlike CPS, ACS asks respondents if they speak a language other than English at home. For those who answer that they speak a foreign language at home, the survey then asks them to self-assess their spoken English proficiency. The term "Limited English Proficient" refers to persons who report speaking English "not at all," "not well," or "well." These estimates are based on analysis of 2016 ACS data that adjust the size of the total immigrant population to take into account undercounting of immigrants in the ACS.



(ages 25 to 64) were LEP. At the same time, younger adults are more likely than older ones to be fully proficient in English while at the same time retaining their home language or languages.²⁹ Differences in English proficiency are particularly striking among Hispanics: in 2016, 56 percent of young adults (ages 16 to 24) reported being bilingual (i.e., speaking English very well and speaking another language at home) versus 36 percent of those over 25.

III. Profile of Immigrant-Origin Adults without Postsecondary Credentials

An extensive, multidisciplinary literature demonstrates that education beyond high school is key to economic opportunity and social mobility.³⁰ While in the past, many jobs requiring a high school diploma or less paid family-sustaining wages, a shift away from a manufacturing and toward a service economy, technological advancements, declining unionization, and global competition have eroded this path to a middle-class life. Having marketable postsecondary credentials has become more of a necessity in today's economy, where more than half of jobs are middle skilled (i.e., they require education beyond high school but less than a four-year degree). This growth in the labor-market importance of higher levels of education is likely to continue: According to projections by the National Skills Coalition, 48 percent of job openings between 2014 and 2024 will be middle skilled, with another 20 percent high skilled.³¹

Having marketable postsecondary credentials has become more of a necessity in today's economy, where more than half of jobs are middle skilled.

With these broad trends in the characteristics of the overall immigrant-origin population as context, the subsections that follow will examine key demographic and social characteristics of those without postsecondary credentials.

A. What Share of Adults Lack a Postsecondary Credential?

I. Adults Ages 25 to 64

Nationwide, 78.1 million adults (ages 25 to 64) did not have a postsecondary degree or other credential as of 2017, with some lacking even a high school diploma. This overall number includes 17.2 million first-generation immigrants and 6.6 million second-generation adults.³²

Viewed through a generational lens, first-generation adults were the most likely to lack postsecondary credential (54 percent), as shown in Figure 4. However, second-generation adults were slightly less likely to lack credentials than their third/higher-generation counterparts (43 percent versus 45 percent, respectively). Regardless of immigrant generation, only a small share of adults without a postsecondary degree held a professional certification or an occupational license (between 5 percent and 7 percent).

29 These figures are based on 2016 ACS data. In the survey, bilingual individuals reported both speaking a language other than English at home and speaking English "very well."

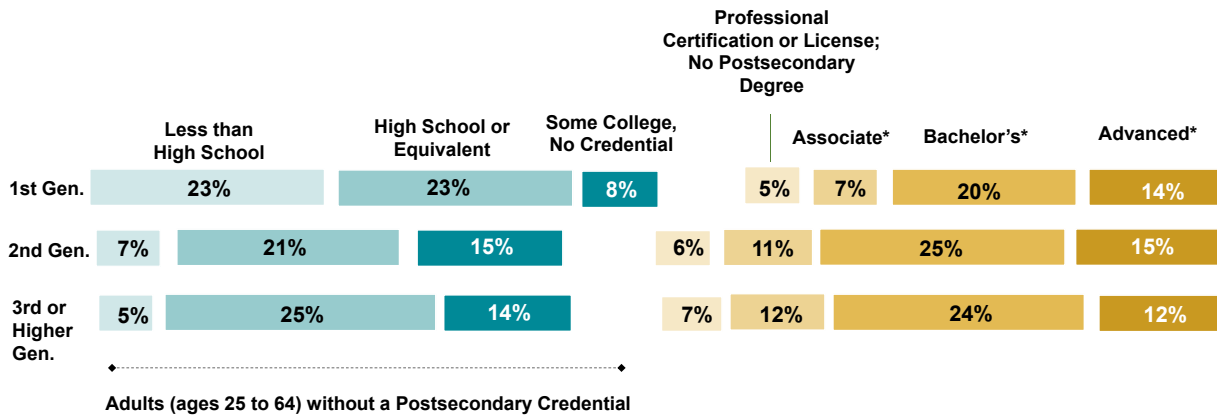
30 National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, *The Integration of Immigrants*.

31 National Skills Coalition, "United States' Forgotten Middle" (fact sheet, National Skills Coalition, Washington, DC, 2017), www.nationalskillscoalition.org/resources/publications/2017-middle-skills-fact-sheets/file/United-States-MiddleSkills.pdf.

32 See Table A-2 in Appendix B for detailed estimates of credential attainment by generation and age.



Figure 4. Credential Attainment of Adults Ages 25 to 64 by Immigrant Generation, (%), 2017



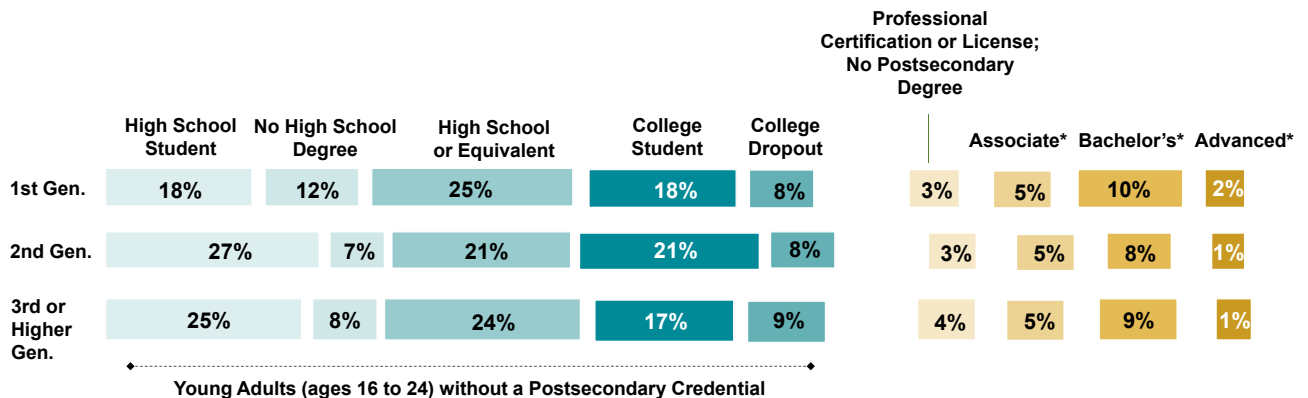
* Some of these adults have a certification or license in addition to having a postsecondary degree.
 Source: MPI tabulation of 2017 data from the U.S. Census Bureau's annual CPS.

2. Younger Adults (ages 16 to 24)

Among younger adults (ages 16 to 24), two groups, each with quite different needs and educational trajectories, should be distinguished. One group is still enrolled in high school.³³ About one-quarter of the second- and third/higher-generation young adults and 18 percent of immigrant young adults were enrolled in school in 2017 (see Figure 5). The main challenge for these students is to remain in school, giving themselves the opportunity to pursue postsecondary credentials in the future.

A second group (about 22 million) is 16-to-24-year-olds without postsecondary credentials who are *not* enrolled in high school.³⁴ As of 2017, this group included almost 1 million immigrant-origin young adults lacking a high school degree and 5.3 million with a high school diploma but no additional credentials. Notably, roughly one-fifth of young adults in each generation were attending college, while almost one in ten were college dropouts. These subgroups of young adults without a postsecondary credential represent important targets for adult education and postsecondary education initiatives.

Figure 5. Enrollment Status and Credential Attainment of Young Adults (ages 16 to 24) by Immigrant Generation, (%), 2017



* Some of these young adults have a certification or license in addition to having a postsecondary degree.
 Source: MPI tabulation of 2017 data from the U.S. Census Bureau's annual CPS.

33 Of the 9.4 million U.S. young adults enrolled in high school, 1.9 million were members of the second generation and 634,000 of the first generation. MPI tabulation of 2017 data from the U.S. Census Bureau's annual CPS.

34 This group includes young adults without a high school diploma or equivalent and not enrolled, high school graduates, students enrolled in college, and college dropouts.



B. What Share of U.S. Adults without Postsecondary Credentials Are of Immigrant Origin?

Approximately 100 million U.S. adults (ages 16 to 64) did not have a postsecondary credential as of 2017,³⁵ including 19.4 million first-generation and 10.6 million second-generation adults (see Table 2).³⁶ These roughly 30 million immigrant-origin adults accounted for 30 percent of all adults ages 16 to 64 without a postsecondary credential—slightly higher than the 28 percent that adults of immigrant origin comprised of the total U.S. adult population. While the largest numbers of immigrant-origin adults without credentials were of prime working-age (almost 19 million), there were also significant numbers of younger (6.3 million) and older adults (4.8 million) without postsecondary credentials.³⁷

Table 2. Immigrant-Origin and All Adults Lacking Postsecondary Credentials, by Age, 2017

	Total Population	Immigrant-Origin Population			
		1st Generation	2nd Generation	Total Immigrant-Origin Population	Immigrant-Origin Share of the Total Population (%)
Total Adults (ages 16 to 64)	205,569,800	35,160,300	22,464,400	57,624,700	28.0
Lacking a postsecondary credential*	100,061,000	19,372,700	10,646,200	30,018,900	30.0
Young Adults (ages 16 to 24)	38,149,500	3,543,200	7,117,300	10,660,500	27.9
Lacking a postsecondary credential	22,003,300	2,210,300	4,076,500	6,286,800	28.6
Prime Working-Age Adults (ages 25 to 54)	125,723,400	25,465,300	12,717,100	38,182,400	30.4
Lacking a postsecondary credential*	56,672,700	13,632,800	5,344,600	18,977,400	33.5
Older Adults (ages 55 to 64)	41,696,900	6,151,800	2,630,000	8,781,800	21.1
Lacking a postsecondary credential*	21,385,100	3,529,600	1,225,100	4,754,700	22.2

* Refers to persons ages 16 to 64 with less than an associate degree and without a certification or license. These estimates exclude young adults (ages 16 to 24) who were enrolled in high school at the time of the survey.

Source: MPI tabulation of 2017 data from the U.S. Census Bureau's annual CPS.

35 This estimate excludes the 9.4 million young adults (ages 16 to 24) who are enrolled in high school.

36 See Table A-1 in Appendix B for estimates of detailed educational attainment by age and immigrant origin.

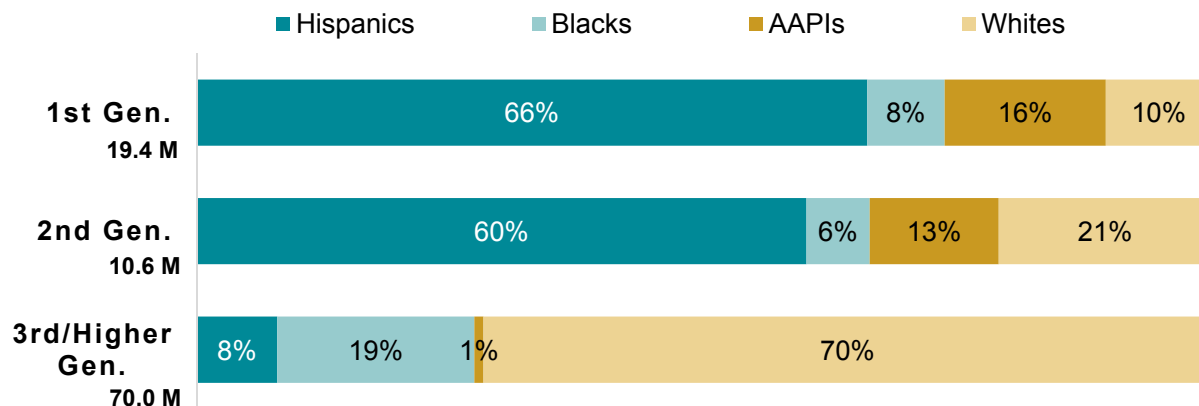
37 Passel and Cohn, *Immigration Projected to Drive Growth*.



C. What Share Are Racial and Ethnic Minorities?

Most first- and second-generation adults without postsecondary credentials are racial and ethnic minorities, with Hispanics comprising the largest group (see Figure 6). This fact, coupled with the rapid growth of certain immigrant-origin populations, especially second-generation young adults, will mean that if current enrollment trends continue, a rising share of future postsecondary students are likely to be Hispanics and Blacks from immigrant families.

Figure 6. Race and Ethnicity of Adults (ages 16 to 64) Lacking Postsecondary Credentials,* by Immigrant Generation, (%), 2017



AAPIs = Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders.

*Refers to persons ages 16 to 64 with less than an associate degree and without a certification or license. These estimates exclude young adults (ages 16 to 24) who were enrolled in high school at the time of the survey.

Note: "Other race" category is not displayed.

Source: MPI tabulation of 2017 data from the U.S. Census Bureau's annual CPS.

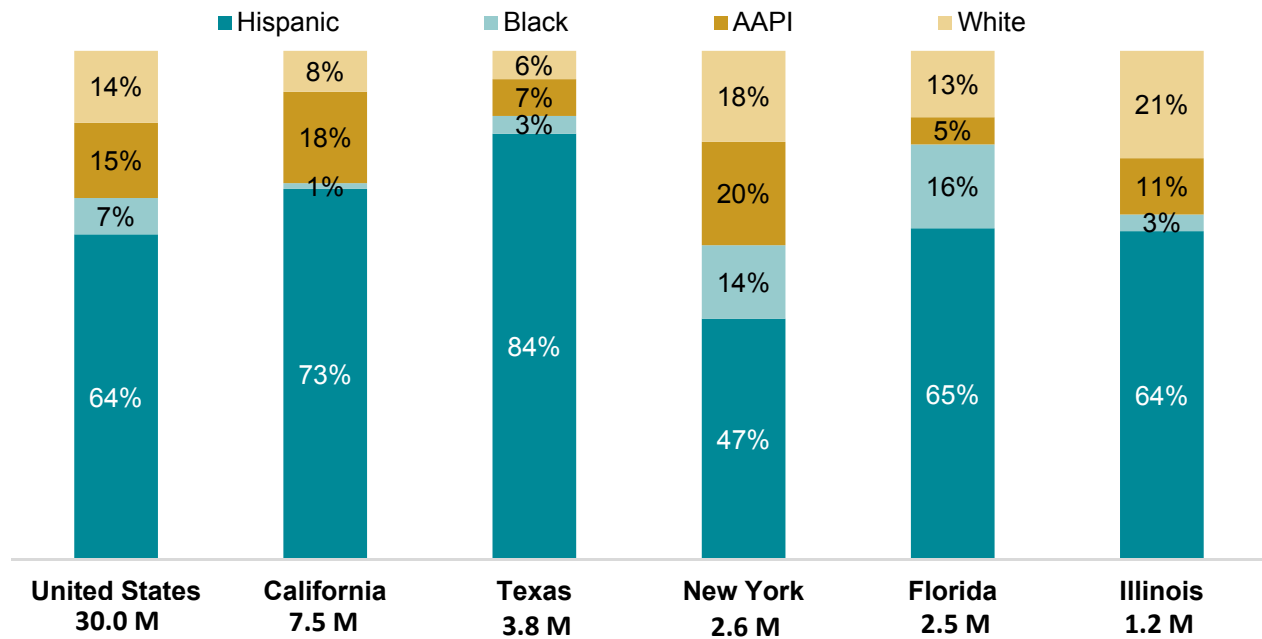
D. Where Do Most Immigrant-Origin Adults without Postsecondary Credentials Live?

In 2017, more than half of the 30 million immigrant-origin adults lacking postsecondary credentials were concentrated in five traditional immigrant receiving states: California (25 percent), Texas (13 percent), New York (9 percent), Florida (8 percent), and Illinois (4 percent).

These top five states varied significantly in the racial and ethnic make-up of their resident immigrant-origin adults without credentials (see Figure 7), reflecting different histories of immigrant settlement. Hispanics accounted for most immigrant-origin adults without a postsecondary credential in the United States (64 percent or 19.1 million) as well as in Texas, California, Florida, and Illinois. California alone was home to 5.5 million immigrant-origin Hispanic adults without a postsecondary credential.



Figure 7. Race and Ethnicity of Immigrant-Origin Adults (ages 16 to 64) Lacking Postsecondary Credentials:* United States and Top Five States, (%), 2017



* Refers to persons ages 16 to 64 with less than an associate degree and without a certification or license. These estimates exclude young adults (ages 16 to 24) who were enrolled in high school at the time of the survey.

Source: MPI tabulation of 2017 data from the U.S. Census Bureau's annual CPS.

Florida and New York, two states with large Caribbean immigrant populations, had much higher shares of Black immigrant-origin adults without credentials than other top states. These two states were home to 37 percent of the 2.1 million Black immigrant-origin adults nationwide who lacked a postsecondary credential.

As of 2017, approximately one-fifth of immigrant-origin adults lacking a postsecondary credential in California and New York were AAPIs. While Asian immigrants and their U.S.-born children have overall achieved substantial educational success in the United States, research shows wide variation in AAPI educational experiences and economic outcomes.³⁸ About 4.4 million AAPI immigrant-origin adults nationwide had no postsecondary credential, of whom 31 percent lived in California and 12 percent in New York.

E. What Share of Adults without Postsecondary Credentials Are of Immigrant Origin in Different States?

Immigrant-origin adults compose at least 30 percent of adults ages 16 to 64 without postsecondary credentials in 14 states. These include the five states discussed in the previous section, as well as New Jersey, Nevada, Massachusetts, Hawaii, Connecticut, Rhode Island, Arizona, Washington, and Maryland (see Figure 8). Except for California and New York, all were among the 42 states that have established goals of increasing the share of their state residents with postsecondary credentials.³⁹ As these efforts move ahead, immigrant-origin adults will be an important target population across U.S. regions, with high

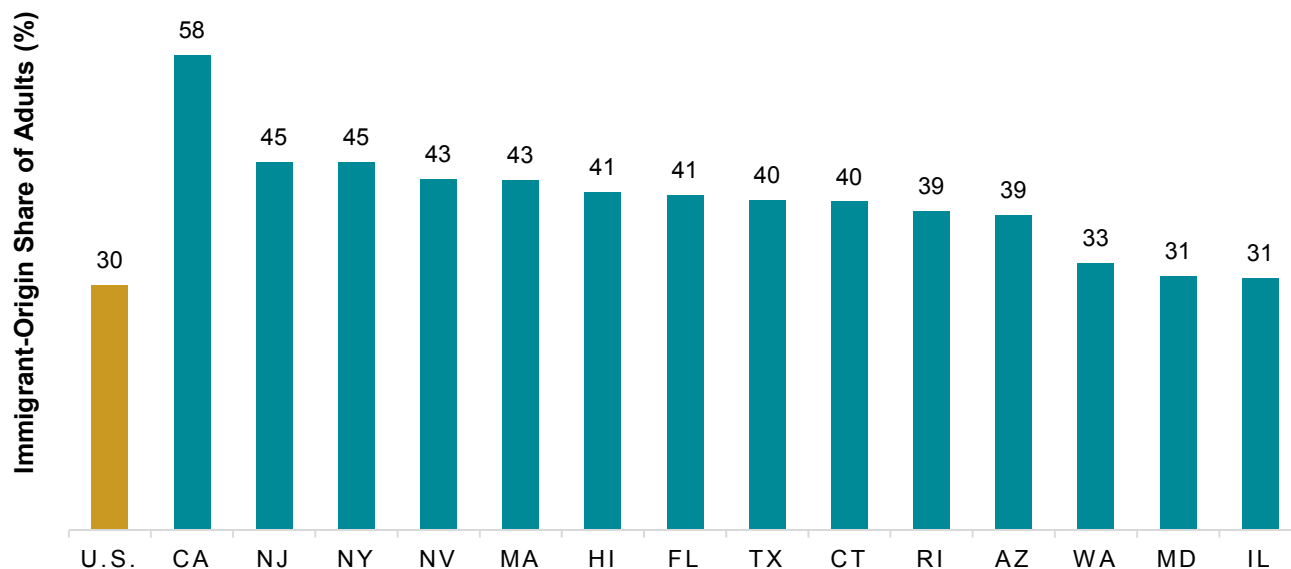
³⁸ Nathan Joo, Richard V. Reeves, and Edward Rodrigue, *Asian-American Success and the Pitfalls of Generalization* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2016), www.brookings.edu/research/asian-american-success-and-the-pitfalls-of-generalization/.

³⁹ Lumina Foundation, "States with Higher Education Attainment Goals" (fact sheet, Lumina Foundation, Indianapolis, February 2019), http://strongernation.luminafoundation.org/report/2019/media/Attainment_Goal_state%20rundown_021519.pdf.



concentrations not just in traditional immigrant destinations such as California but also in the Northeast, the South, and the Southwest.

Figure 8. Immigrant-Origin Share of All Adults (ages 16 to 64) Lacking Postsecondary Credentials:* United States and Top 14 States, (%), 2017



* Refers to persons ages 16 to 64 with less than an associate degree and without a certification or license. These estimates exclude young adults (ages 16 to 24) who were enrolled in high school at the time of the survey.

Note: The 14 states included in this figure are those in which immigrant-origin adults make up at least 30 percent of adults without postsecondary credentials.

Source: MPI tabulation of 2017 data from the U.S. Census Bureau's annual CPS.

F. What Legal Statuses and Levels of English Proficiency Do These Adults Have?

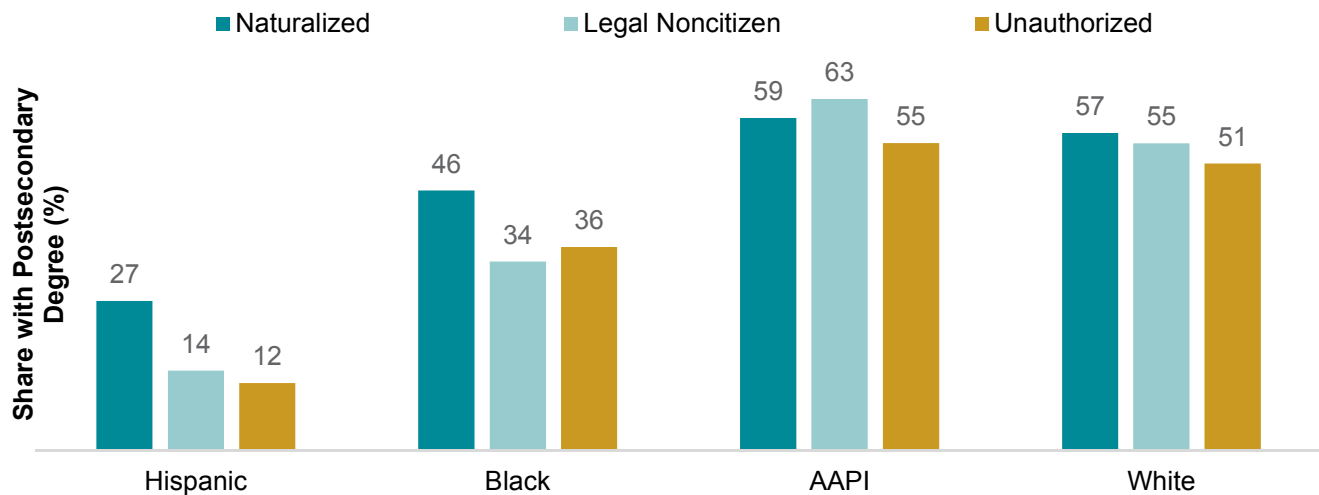
Not surprisingly, for first-generation immigrant adults,⁴⁰ a lack of legal status can present a significant obstacle to attending and completing higher education. Unauthorized immigrants, TPS holders, and DACA beneficiaries are not eligible for federal student financial aid.⁴¹ Their ability to enroll and pay for postsecondary education is also shaped by state policies, with legal protections and financial assistance varying significantly across the nation. Conversely, U.S. citizenship confers access rights to a wide range of postsecondary options. As Figure 9 shows, immigrants who are naturalized citizens are generally more likely to have a postsecondary degree from a college or university than either legally present noncitizens or unauthorized immigrants.

⁴⁰ This section is based on the authors' analysis of the 2016 ACS data, which has implications for who is included in the analysis and which credentials are examined. There are two reasons for using ACS data. First, unlike the CPS data used in most tables and figures in this report, the ACS collects information on respondents' self-reported English proficiency. Second, MPI has developed a unique methodology to estimate noncitizen immigrants' legal status in the ACS. However, while the ACS collects information about respondents' educational (degree) attainment, the questionnaire does not cover nondegree attainment. Also, unlike CPS, the ACS only asks respondents about their U.S. citizenship status and place of birth, but not their immigrant generation. Therefore, estimates based on the ACS data pertain to either immigrants or all adults, and they reflect educational (degree) rates rather than overall credential attainment.

⁴¹ U.S. Department of Education, Federal Student Aid, "Financial Aid and Undocumented Students: Questions and Answers" (fact sheet, U.S. Department of Education, Washington, DC, February 2019), <https://studentaid.ed.gov/sa/sites/default/files/financial-aid-and-undocumented-students.pdf>.



Figure 9. Share of Immigrant Adults (ages 16 to 64) by Race/Ethnicity and Legal Status with Postsecondary Degrees,* (%) , 2016



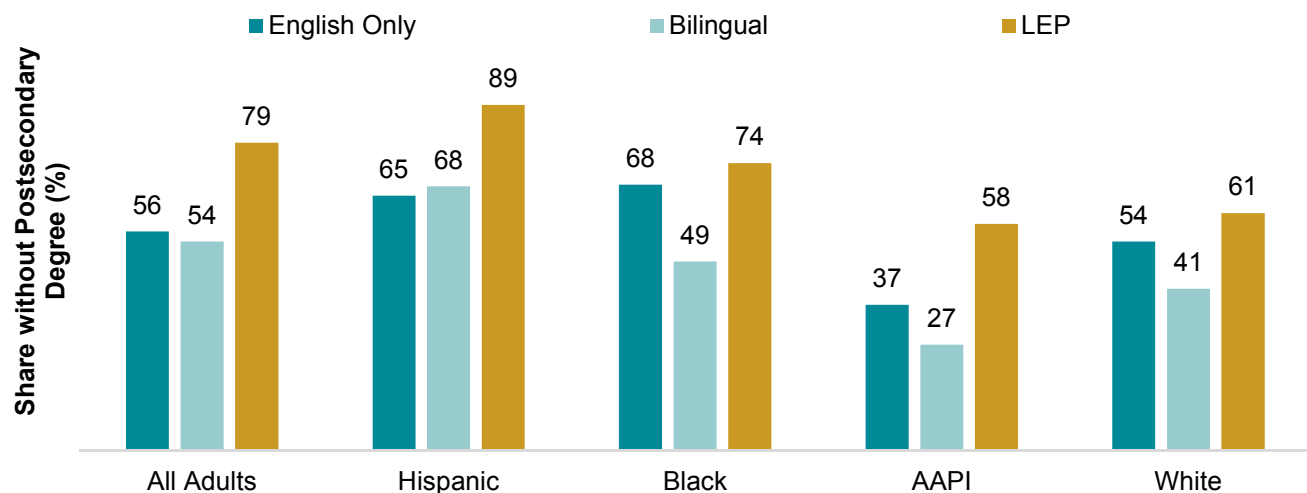
AAPI = Asian American and Pacific Islander.

* Refers to immigrant adults ages 16 to 64 with at least an associate degree. Unlike the CPS data used in other figures in this report, American Community Survey (ACS) data do not collect information on whether respondents hold nondegree credentials such as certifications or licenses.

Source: MPI tabulation of 2016 data from the U.S. Census Bureau's ACS.

Adults who are Limited English Proficient are much more likely to lack a postsecondary degree: As of 2016, 79 percent of all adults ages 16 to 64 who spoke English less than “very well” did not have a postsecondary degree (see Figure 10). This is the case across all racial and ethnic groups. Notably, adults who reported being bilingual in both English and another language were *more* likely than their English-only counterparts to hold a postsecondary degree overall and among Black, AAPI, and White adults.

Figure 10. Share of All Adults (ages 16 to 64) by Race/Ethnicity and English Proficiency without Postsecondary Degrees,* (%) , 2016



AAPI = Asian American and Pacific Islander; LEP = Limited English Proficient.

* Refers to persons ages 16 to 64 with less than an associate degree. These estimates exclude young adults (ages 16 to 24) who were enrolled in high school at the time of the survey. Unlike CPS data, the ACS data do not collect information about whether respondents hold nondegree credentials such as certifications or licenses.

Source: MPI tabulation of 2016 data from the U.S. Census Bureau's ACS.



IV. The Economic Returns of Nondegree Credentials for Immigrant-Origin Adults

In recent years, policymakers and the public have shown increased interest in understanding the value of nondegree credentials, such as professional certificates and licenses. Taking advantage of a new panel of survey questions in the CPS, this section examines the relationship between nondegree credentials and three important labor-market outcomes: labor-force participation, unemployment, and wages.

Only small shares of adults in the United States hold a professional certification or an occupational license as their only postsecondary credential (as shown in Figures 4 and 5). This section focuses on the broader population of adults with certifications or licenses, regardless of their level of educational (degree) attainment. Among adults (ages 25 to 64), 15 percent of the first generation, 22 percent of the second generation, and 24 percent of the third/higher generation reported having an active professional certification or an occupational license in 2017.⁴²

A. Nondegree Credentials, Labor-Force Participation, and Unemployment

Labor-force participation is higher among prime-working-age adults (ages 25 to 54) with a nondegree credential than those without one across all educational subgroups.⁴³ As of 2017, the differences in labor-force participation rates associated with having a nondegree credential were substantially greater for women than for men in both the first and second generation (see Figures 11 and 12). The labor-force participation rate of first- and second-generation women without a high school degree but with a nondegree credential was more than 30 percentage points higher than that of their counterparts without a credential. Similar gains were seen across all educational levels. Even first-generation adult men—a group that traditionally has high levels of labor-force participation—were engaged in the labor force at higher rates when they held an active certification or license.

The differences in labor-force participation rates associated with having a nondegree credential were substantially greater for women than for men.

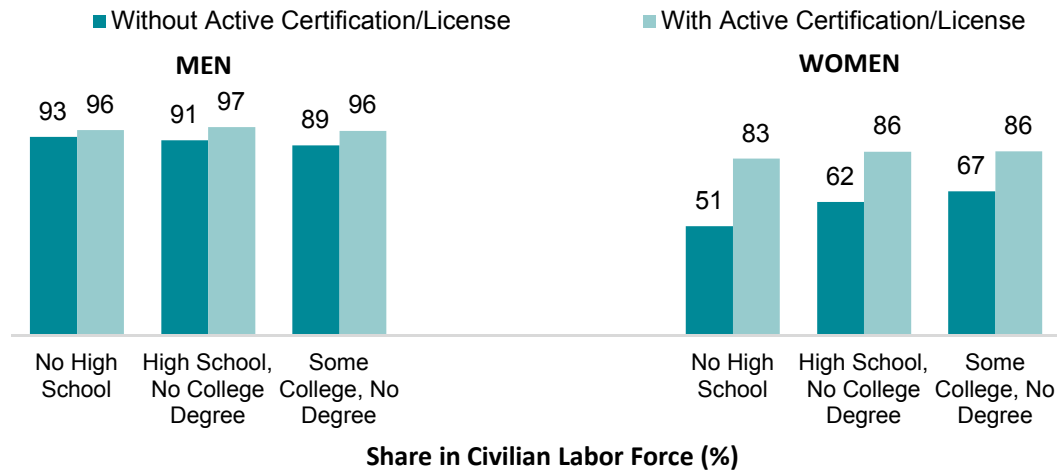
Similarly, unemployment rates were lower among adults with nondegree credentials, as compared to their peers of the same gender and educational attainment (see Appendix Table A-2).

⁴² MPI tabulation of 2017 data from the U.S. Census Bureau's annual CPS.

⁴³ Ibid.

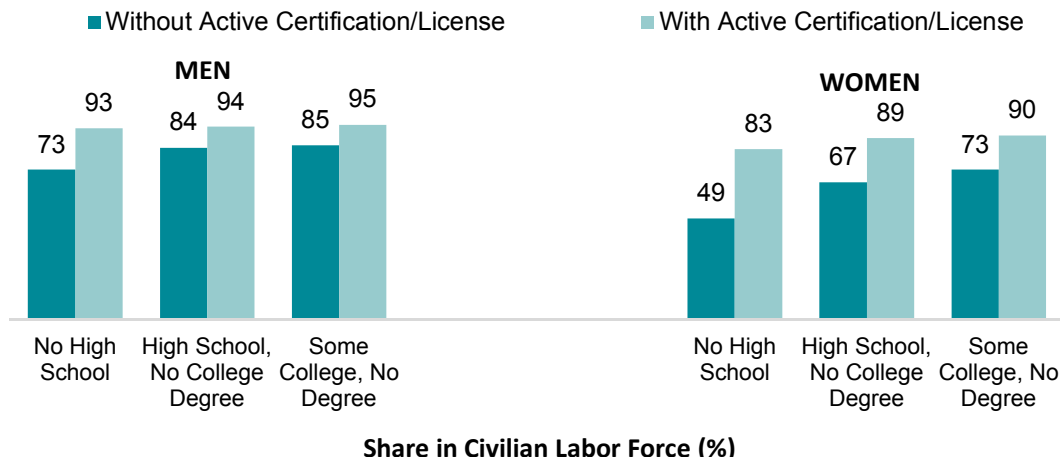


Figure 11. Nondegree Credentials and Labor-Force Participation of First-Generation Adults (ages 25 to 54), by Gender and Educational Attainment, (%), 2017



Source: MPI tabulation of 2017 data from the U.S. Census Bureau's annual CPS.

Figure 12. Nondegree Credentials and Labor Force Participation of Second-Generation Adults (ages 25 to 54), by Gender and Educational Attainment, (%), 2017



Source: MPI tabulation of 2017 data from the U.S. Census Bureau's annual CPS.

Labor-force participation rates for younger and older adults, broken down by immigrant generation and gender, reveal similar patterns: higher labor-force participation and lower unemployment among those with nondegree credentials (see Appendix Table A-2). Gains are higher for women than men among the first generation, and among younger versus older adults for all generational groups.

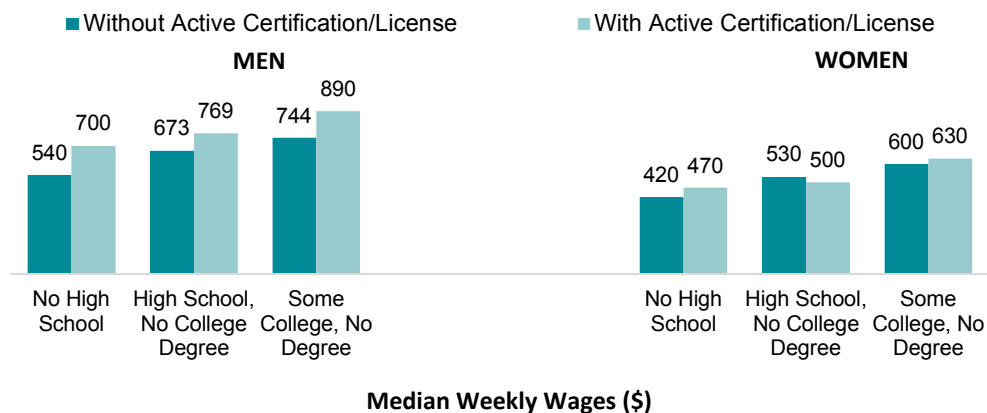
To illustrate, 81 percent of young first-generation women (ages 16 to 24) with a certification or license were in the labor force in 2017, as compared to 45 percent of their counterparts without a credential. Among older first-generation women (ages 55 to 64), labor-force participation was 54 percent for those without a certification or license, but 88 percent for those with one. For older men, the difference was smaller but still substantial: 77 percent versus 90 percent.

B. Nondegree Credentials and Wages

The value of nondegree credentials is also borne out by workers' wages, though the impact varies by gender and immigrant generation. While having a certification or license increased immigrant-origin women's labor-force participation more than men's, gender dynamics differ when it comes to wages (see Figures 13 and 14). Both first- and second-generation men enjoy higher wage premiums associated with holding a nondegree credential than do women. In 2017, first-generation men with no high school degree and second-generation men with some college but no degree had the highest gains. There was one exception to these gender-defined trends: Second-generation women with no high school degree saw the biggest wage differential, with those holding a nondegree credential earning about \$300 per week more than those without one.

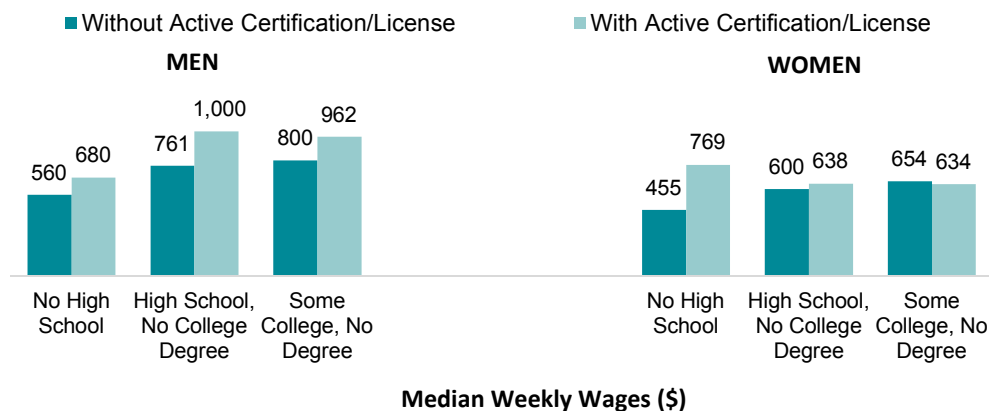
The monetary value of a nondegree credential was high for both younger and older adults (see Appendix Table A-3). For example, first-generation adults ages 55 to 64 earned about \$350–\$355 more per week in 2017 if they held a nondegree credential. Among the younger cohort, second- and third-generation men gained the most (\$153 per week), followed by first-generation women (\$145), when holding a certification or license.

Figure 13. Nondegree Credentials and Median Weekly Wages of First-Generation Adults (ages 25 to 54), by Gender and Educational Attainment, (\$), 2017



Source: MPI tabulation of 2017 data from the U.S. Census Bureau's annual CPS.

Figure 14. Nondegree Credentials and Median Weekly Wages of Second-Generation Adults (ages 25 to 54), by Gender and Educational Attainment, (\$), 2017



Source: MPI tabulation of 2017 data from the U.S. Census Bureau's annual CPS.



Having nondegree credentials showed strong positive effects independent of education and other characteristics. Given the strong correlation between educational attainment and holding certifications and licenses, the authors used regression models to test the relationship between nondegree credentials and labor-force participation and wages, while controlling for other characteristics such as educational degrees and immigrant generation captured by CPS data.⁴⁴ This analysis showed that having an active certification or license roughly triples the odds of being in the labor force, independent of one's educational and other characteristics. The effect is strong and statistically significant for both men and women in each of the three age groups examined (ages 16 to 24, 25 to 54, and 55 to 64). In terms of wages, regression analysis showed that the impact of having a nondegree credential is positive and statistically significant, albeit smaller compared to holding an educational degree.

V. Policy Implications

Close examination of the postsecondary degree and nondegree attainment of U.S. adults across immigrant generation sheds light on several overlooked trends that should be taken into account by efforts to meet the skills needs of the U.S. economy. A central finding of this report is the size of the immigrant-origin population without postsecondary credentials: 30 million immigrant-origin adults, representing fully 30 percent of the total 100 million U.S. adults without postsecondary credentials in 2017.

Three immigrant-origin subpopulations stand out for the high number of adults without postsecondary credentials and the shares they represent of the overall U.S. immigrant-origin population:

- those without a high school degree who are not currently enrolled in school (9.4 million adults, or 16 percent of the 57.6 million immigrant-origin adults in the United States);
- those with high school degrees but no further education (12.9 million adults, or 22 percent of the U.S. immigrant-origin population); and
- those with high school degrees and incomplete postsecondary education (7.8 million adults, or 14 percent of all immigrant-origin adults).

The needs of these populations will need to be met in different institutions and in different ways, including through community colleges, adult basic education programs, and other educational institutions, and through workforce development programs and employer-based upskilling initiatives.

Looking to labor-force participation, this analysis reveals the significant value of having licenses and certifications across all age groups and immigrant generations. These gains are especially strong for young adults (ages 16 to 24) and older adults (ages 55 to 64), and for women of all immigrant generations. This analysis also highlights the positive wage returns of holding a certification or license across age groups, immigrant generations, and genders. The proportional wage gains are particularly large for younger and older adults.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ The authors employed a logistic regression to examine the relationship between holding professional certifications or occupational licenses and being in or out of the labor force, while controlling for several other variables that may affect labor-force participation (e.g., age, age squared, gender, race and ethnicity, generation, and educational attainment). Additionally, the authors used a multivariate linear regression model to predict weekly wages of full-time, wage, and salary workers. These analyses were performed separately for male and female workers and by age group (16 to 24, 25 to 54, and 55 to 64). The main independent variable of interest was an active professional certification or license. Tables with results for both sets of models are available upon request.

⁴⁵ While this analysis found substantial returns to credentials among immigrant-origin adults in terms of labor-force participation, unemployment, and wages, this report is not intended as a cost-benefit analysis of the offsetting costs to the study population of obtaining credentials. It is also beyond the scope of this research to explore the possible impacts of raising credential attainment among U.S. adults on the current holders of postsecondary credentials in terms of labor-force competition, or the costs to consumers in the form of higher prices of goods and services.



A. *Immigrant-Origin Adults: An Important Target Group for Credentialing Programs*

Immigrants and their children are projected to account for nearly all labor-force growth in the next two decades.⁴⁶ In a number of states, this reality already exists.⁴⁷ Immigrant-origin adults account for 30 percent or more of adults without postsecondary credentials in the nation overall and in 14 states—including both traditional and new destinations.

The nation and many states will not be able to reach their educational and labor-force goals without ensuring that their immigrant-origin populations are included in these efforts.

Helping a significant share of these 30 million immigrant-origin adults obtain postsecondary credentials can become a critical tool in meeting national and state education goals, addressing current and projected labor shortages, and raising labor productivity. Indeed, the nation and many states will not be able to reach their educational and labor-force goals without ensuring that their immigrant-origin populations are included in these efforts. And because most immigrant-origin adults without postsecondary credential are Hispanic, AAPI, or Black, closing attainment gaps can contribute to breaking the cycle of educational and economic disadvantage and to reducing social inequality.

This analysis points to two key individual barriers to obtaining credentials. One is English proficiency. The 16.7 million adults in the United States who are Limited English Proficient and who lack postsecondary credentials would benefit from skills training that is linked to learning English. There are a number of examples of programs that provide this type of workforce-focused English language instruction, including Washington State's I-BEST program and the Building Skills Partnership in California.⁴⁸

A second barrier is legal status. Data show that almost one-third of the first-generation immigrant adults who do not have postsecondary credentials are unauthorized. Lacking legal status makes it difficult and expensive to obtain postsecondary credentials, even in states that have pathways to education and professional careers for some eligible unauthorized immigrants.⁴⁹ While second-generation adults, who are U.S. citizens by birth, are fully entitled to educational and other social benefits such as federal student financial aid, some have unauthorized parents and other family members, which can limit household

46 Passel and Cohn, *Immigration Projected to Drive Growth*.

47 Pew Charitable Trusts, "Changing Patterns in U.S. Immigration and Population" (issue brief, Pew Charitable Trusts, Washington, DC, December 2014), www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/issue-briefs/2014/12/changing-patterns-in-us-immigration-and-population.

48 Amanda Bergson-Shilcock, *Upskilling the New American Workforce: Demand-Driven Programs that Foster Immigrant Worker Success and Policies that Can Take Them to Scale* (Washington, DC: National Skills Coalition, 2016), www.nationalskillscoalition.org/resources/publications/file/Upskilling-the-New-American-Workforce-1.pdf; Sarah Hooker, Margie McHugh, Michael Fix, and Randy Capps, *Shaping Our Futures: The Educational and Career Success of Washington State's Immigrant Youth* (Washington, DC: MPI, 2013), www.migrationpolicy.org/research/shaping-our-futures-educational-and-career-success-washington-states-immigrant-youth.

49 To date, 20 states have extended in-state tuition and other educational benefits to unauthorized immigrant residents who wish to pursue postsecondary education. Others, such as Arizona, deny in-state tuition benefits to all unauthorized immigrant students, including DACA recipients. With regard to professional licenses, California, Florida, Illinois, Indiana, Minnesota, Nebraska, Nevada, New York, South Dakota, Utah, West Virginia, and Wyoming allow DACA recipients to obtain them for certain professions. California has extended this right to all unauthorized immigrants in most professions, as long as these individuals meet the necessary licensing requirements. Others have limited these opportunities to certain in-demand professions. For instance, New York's Board of Regents allows DACA recipients to apply for licenses and teacher certifications. For more, see NCSL, *Professional and Occupational Licenses for Immigrants* (Washington, DC: NCSL, 2017), www.ncsl.org/research/immigration/professional-and-occupational-licenses-for-immigrants.aspx.



access to benefits and services. Similarly, research shows that students from families with unauthorized members are less likely to enroll in and complete college.⁵⁰

B. Pursuing Credentials in a Shifting Policy Landscape

On one level, immigrant-origin adults share many of the same challenges other adults face when seeking postsecondary credentials and economic mobility. These challenges range from the affordability of training, the time pressures of balancing work and family obligations, access to child care, and a need for assurances that the investments they make will provide the returns promised.

A wide range of federal, state, and local policies aim to address these challenges. They include the now maturing implementation of the 2014 *Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act* (WIOA), though it has been criticized for not effectively serving immigrants in general and English Learners in particular.⁵¹ Under this law, states can use federal funding to support the postsecondary credential attainment of individuals enrolled in WIOA-funded programs. Further, states are required to report on credential attainment as part of WIOA's performance measures. Both provisions may increase providers' focus on supporting the credential attainment of immigrant-origin and other adults, though they could also create disincentives to serve adults furthest from earning a credential or entering the labor market (e.g., those with limited English proficiency or limited prior formal education).

Crucially, programs that provide on-ramps and practical supports along the way that enable adults to take a break from and return to training as necessary depending on their family and work obligations have the potential to benefit immigrant-origin and other adults alike.

Other policies that aim to address the needs of those seeking marketable credentials include the reform efforts taking place across the nation to streamline credential licensing requirements in order to minimize unnecessary barriers to occupational entry and to improve license portability across jurisdictions.⁵² These efforts could benefit both foreign-trained professionals seeking to apply skills and education earned abroad after moving to the United States, and those who receive a professional certification or license in one U.S. state and wish to use it in another.

At the same time, first-generation immigrants may face new obstacles to attaining credentials that are unique to this group and that flow from changes in immigration policies under the Trump administration. Three particular shifts in federal policy will need to be borne in mind.

One is a sharp reduction in the number of refugees admitted to the country and the resulting reduced capacity of service providers in resettlement networks. Some of these providers offer workforce-focused programming not only to refugees but to other immigrants as well.⁵³

A second policy change that has been proposed but not yet implemented is a change in the nation's "public-charge" regulation that could lead to the denial of noncitizens' applications for green cards or renewals of temporary work or student visas for those who use Medicaid, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, also known as food stamps), and other means-tested benefits, in addition to those covered by the existing rule (such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families and Supplemental Security Income). Historically, these social, nutrition, and health benefit programs have provided crucial

50 Carola Suárez-Orozco and Hirokazu Yoshikawa, "The Shadow of Undocumented Status" in *Transitions: The Development of Children of Immigrants*, eds. Carola Suárez-Orozco, Mona M. Abo-Zena, and Amy K. Marks (New York: New York University Press, 2015).

51 Margie McHugh and Catrina Doxsee, *English Plus Integration: Shifting the Instructional Paradigm for Immigrant Adult Learners to Support Integration Success* (Washington, DC: MPI, 2018), www.migrationpolicy.org/research/english-plus-integration-instructional-paradigm-immigrant-adult-learners.

52 NCSL, *The State of Occupational Licensing*.

53 Mark Greenberg et al., *Promoting Refugee Integration in Challenging Times: The Potential of Two-Generation Strategies* (Washington, DC: MPI, 2018), www.migrationpolicy.org/research/refugee-integration-two-generation-strategies; Bergson-Shilcock, *Upskilling the New American Workforce*.



support for immigrant-origin adults as they complete education or workforce development programs that can provide them with marketable credentials.

Finally, the Trump administration’s rescission of the DACA program, which would affect about 700,000 participants, and its termination of TPS designations that currently cover approximately 311,000 immigrants—if they clear the legal challenges they are facing—could weaken national and state-level efforts to increase the number of workers with postsecondary credentials.⁵⁴ In each instance, hundreds of thousands of noncitizen adult workers could have their employment authorization revoked, making them far less likely to pursue postsecondary credentials, depriving employers and state economies of workers at a time of low unemployment, and depriving local economies of the revenues generated by the taxes both workers and employer pay.

In sum, immigrant-origin adults represent a large, diverse, and economically important population for U.S. and state economies. The 30 million first- and second-generation adults without postsecondary credentials and the significant returns to obtaining them make clear that efforts to promote increased credential receipt should be a central strategy for immigrant-integration initiatives at state and national levels. Moreover, the much greater number of mainstream programs that serve low-income and minority populations will need to take into account the fact that 30 percent of adults who could benefit from their services are either immigrants or the children of immigrants.

Immigrant-origin adults represent a large, diverse, and economically important population for U.S. and state economies.

⁵⁴ USCIS, “Approximate Active DACA Recipients”; Wilson, *Temporary Protected Status*.



Appendices

Appendix A. Data on Nondegree Credentials Collected in CPS

A 2018 report by the nonprofit Credentialing Engine estimated that there are more than 330,000 credentials in the United States ranging from degree programs, registered apprenticeships, occupational licenses, and professional certifications, to bootcamp certificates and “nanodegrees.”⁵⁵ While 84 percent of these are degree credentials provided by postsecondary institutions, at least 8,860 are occupational licenses and 5,460 are professional certifications—two kinds of nondegree credentials studied in this report.

Since 2015, the annual Current Population Survey (CPS), conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau and Department of Labor’s Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), has included questions on whether respondents have an active professional certification or state/industry license (business licenses are not included). Certifications and licenses are a type of nondegree credentials that demonstrate a level of skill or knowledge needed to perform a certain kind of job.⁵⁶ The key differences between certifications and licenses are the institutions that issue them and whether they convey a legal authority to perform work:

- **Certifications.** These credentials are issued by a nongovernmental certification body (e.g., industry associations) and are based on an individual demonstrating, usually through an examination process, that they have acquired the designated knowledge, skills, and abilities to perform a specific job. Examples include information technology certifications and project management professional certifications.⁵⁷
- **Licenses.** These are awarded by a government agency or licensing board based on predetermined criteria and convey a legal authority to work in an occupation. These criteria may include some combination of degree attainment, certifications, educational certificates, assessments (including state-administered exams), apprenticeship programs, or work experience. Examples include cosmetology licenses, commercial driver’s licenses, teaching licenses, and medical licenses.

In CPS data, people may have more than one certification or license, and some people with a license also have a certification. These data exclude business licenses (e.g., liquor licenses); educational certificates issued by colleges and universities; licenses for personal rather than professional activities (e.g., regular driver’s licenses); and certificates of attendance or participation in short-term training.⁵⁸ Whether an occupation requires a license varies by state. In some occupations, having a professional certification or license is helpful but not required.

55 Credentialing Engine, “Counting U.S. Secondary and Postsecondary Credentials” (press release, Credentialing Engine, Washington, DC, April 5, 2018), www.credentialengine.org/Content/Articles/Counting_US_Secondary_and_Postsecondary_Credentials_April_2018.pdf.

56 Elka Torpey, “Will I Need a License or Certification for My Job?” BLS, September 2016, www.bls.gov/careeroutlook/2016/article/will-i-need-a-license-or-certification.htm.

57 U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, “CareerOneStop—Certification Finder,” accessed December 3, 2018, www.careeronestop.org/Toolkit/Training/find-certifications.aspx.

58 BLS, “Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey—Frequently Asked Questions about Data on Certifications and Licenses,” updated April 28, 2017, www.bls.gov/cps/certifications-and-licenses-faqs.htm.



Appendix B. Detailed Data on the Educational Attainment, Labor-Force Participation, and Wages of U.S. Adults

Table A-1. Educational Attainment of U.S. Adults, by Age and Immigrant Generation, 2017

	Total Population	1st Generation	2nd Generation	3rd/Higher Generation	1st Generation Share of Total Population (%)	2nd Generation Share of Total Population (%)
Ages 16 to 24	38,149,500	3,543,200	7,117,300	27,489,000	9.3	18.7
Without a postsecondary credential	31,393,100	2,843,900	5,974,600	22,574,600	9.1	19.0
Less than high school diploma	12,482,700	1,066,000	2,408,200	9,008,400	8.5	19.3
Not enrolled	3,092,800	432,400	510,200	2,150,300	14.0	16.5
Enrolled	9,389,800	633,600	1,898,100	6,858,200	6.7	20.2
High school diploma/equivalent	8,980,400	881,100	1,499,700	6,599,600	9.8	16.7
Some college	9,930,000	896,800	2,066,700	6,966,600	9.0	20.8
Not enrolled	3,262,400	266,900	587,600	2,407,900	8.2	18.0
Enrolled	6,667,600	629,800	1,479,100	4,558,700	9.4	22.2
With a postsecondary credential	6,756,400	699,300	1,142,700	4,914,300	10.4	16.9
Professional certification/license but no postsecondary degree	1,328,000	112,200	209,300	1,006,500	8.4	15.8
Associate degree*	1,799,900	168,100	330,700	1,301,100	9.3	18.4
Bachelor's degree*	3,329,200	349,700	554,800	2,424,700	10.5	16.7
Advanced degree*	299,200	69,300	47,900	182,100	23.2	16.0
Ages 25 to 54	125,723,400	25,465,300	12,717,100	87,541,100	20.3	10.1
Without a postsecondary credential	56,672,700	13,632,800	5,344,600	37,695,300	24.1	9.4
Less than high school diploma	11,046,200	5,707,800	873,700	4,464,700	51.7	7.9
High school diploma/equivalent	29,215,300	5,877,000	2,607,600	20,730,700	20.1	8.9
Some college	16,411,100	2,048,000	1,863,300	12,499,900	12.5	11.4
With a postsecondary credential	69,050,800	11,832,400	7,372,500	49,845,800	17.1	10.7
Professional certification/license but no postsecondary degree	8,500,900	1,168,800	811,400	6,520,700	13.7	9.5
Associate degree*	13,498,800	1,686,000	1,411,200	10,401,700	12.5	10.5
Bachelor's degree*	30,418,200	5,155,400	3,309,600	21,953,200	16.9	10.9
Advanced degree*	16,632,800	3,822,300	1,840,300	10,970,200	23.0	11.1
Ages 55 to 64	41,696,900	6,151,800	2,630,000	32,915,100	14.8	6.3
Without a postsecondary credential	21,385,100	3,529,600	1,225,100	16,630,400	16.5	5.7
Less than high school diploma	3,931,200	1,563,600	268,300	2,099,300	39.8	6.8
High school diploma/equivalent	11,629,200	1,430,400	564,800	9,634,000	12.3	4.9
Some college	5,824,800	535,600	392,000	4,897,200	9.2	6.7
With a postsecondary credential	20,311,800	2,622,200	1,404,900	16,284,700	12.9	6.9
Professional certification/license but no postsecondary degree	2,693,300	313,500	154,000	2,225,800	11.6	5.7
Associate degree*	4,556,000	429,400	301,800	3,824,900	9.4	6.6
Bachelor's degree*	8,161,900	1,154,100	556,500	6,451,300	14.1	6.8
Advanced degree*	4,900,600	725,200	392,700	3,782,700	14.8	8.0
Total Adults (ages 16 to 64)	205,569,800	35,160,300	22,464,400	147,945,100	17.1	10.9
Adults without a postsecondary credential (excluding those enrolled in high school)	100,061,000	19,372,700	10,646,200	70,042,100	19.4	10.6

* Some of these adults have a certification or license in addition to their postsecondary degree.

Source: MPI tabulation of 2017 data from the U.S. Census Bureau's annual CPS.



Table A-2. Share of U.S. Adults in Civilian Labor Force and Share Unemployed, by Age, Gender, Immigrant Generation, and Nondegree Credential, 2017

	Men			Women		
	In Labor Force	Share in Labor Force (%)	Share Unemployed (%)	In Labor Force	Share in Labor Force (%)	Share Unemployed (%)
1st Generation						
Young adults (ages 16 to 24)	1,084,700	59.0	8.2	799,700	47.0	8.9
With certification or license	69,700	88.3	6.4	85,500	80.9	6.4
Without certification or license	1,015,000	57.7	8.3	714,200	44.8	9.2
Adults (ages 25 to 54)	11,574,300	92.1	3.0	8,427,400	65.5	4.5
With certification or license	1,638,200	96.2	2.1	1,750,600	87.6	2.8
Without certification or license	9,936,200	91.4	3.2	6,676,800	61.5	4.9
Older adults (ages 55 to 64)	2,351,200	78.9	3.8	1,871,300	59.2	4.2
With certification or license	367,200	89.6	1.9	431,000	87.9	2.3
Without certification or license	1,983,900	77.2	4.1	1,440,200	53.9	4.8
2nd Generation						
Young adults (ages 16 to 24)	1,813,600	50.9	10.6	1,695,300	48.1	9.6
With certification or license	126,500	89.1	2.5	172,600	83.6	6.6
Without certification or license	1,687,200	49.3	11.2	1,522,700	45.9	9.9
Adults (ages 25 to 54)	5,586,800	88.4	4.2	4,898,700	77.2	3.7
With certification or license	1,254,000	96.0	3.0	1,376,700	91.2	2.3
Without certification or license	4,332,800	86.5	4.5	3,522,000	72.8	4.2
Older adults (ages 55 to 64)	877,400	71.2	3.4	831,800	60.1	3.9
With certification or license	245,700	89.0	1.2	227,300	79.8	2.4
Without certification or license	631,700	66.1	4.2	604,500	55.0	4.4
3rd/Higher Generation						
Young adults (ages 16 to 24)	7,993,800	57.9	10.6	7,838,200	57.2	7.9
With certification or license	657,300	87.3	5.3	940,500	88.0	3.2
Without certification or license	7,336,500	56.2	11.0	6,897,600	54.6	8.5
Adults (ages 25 to 54)	37,670,400	87.7	3.8	34,644,800	77.6	3.8
With certification or license	9,345,400	96.7	2.1	10,883,800	91.7	2.0
Without certification or license	28,325,000	85.0	4.4	23,761,000	72.5	4.6
Older adults (ages 55 to 64)	10,966,500	69.2	3.1	10,151,100	59.4	2.7
With certification or license	2,985,400	89.0	2.2	2,975,200	83.3	1.8
Without certification or license	7,981,100	63.9	3.4	7,175,900	53.1	3.1

Source: MPI tabulation of 2017 data from the U.S. Census Bureau's annual CPS.

**Table A-3. Median Weekly Wages of Full-Time Salary and Wage Workers, by Age, Gender, Immigrant Generation, and Nondegree Credential, 2017**

	Wages for Men (\$)			Wages for Women (\$)		
	1st Generation	2nd Generation	3rd/Higher Generation	1st Generation	2nd Generation	3rd/Higher Generation
Young adults (age 16 to 24)	520	530	542	475	490	480
With certification or license	577	673	673	600	540	596
Without certification or license	500	520	520	455	480	474
Adults (age 25 to 54)	800	1,000	1,000	680	814	807
With certification or license	1,087	1,211	1,192	925	1,050	962
Without certification or license	761	923	962	615	760	750
Older adults (age 55 to 64)	820	1,200	1,153	680	903	865
With certification or license	1,154	1,346	1,308	980	1,153	1,133
Without certification or license	800	1,154	1,080	630	865	795

Source: MPI tabulation of 2017 data from the U.S. Census Bureau's annual CPS.



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About the Authors



Jeanne Batalova is a Senior Policy Analyst at the Migration Policy Institute (MPI) and Manager of the Migration Data Hub, a one-stop, online resource that provides instant access to the latest facts, stats, and maps covering U.S. and global data on immigration and immigrant integration. She is also a Nonresident Fellow with MPI Europe.

Her areas of expertise include the impacts of immigrants on society and labor markets; social and economic mobility of first- and second-generation youth and young adults; and the policies and practices regulating immigration and integration of highly skilled workers and foreign students in the United States and other countries.

Her book, *Skilled Immigrant and Native Workers in the United States*, was published in 2006.

Dr. Batalova earned her PhD in sociology, with a specialization in demography, from the University of California-Irvine; an MBA from Roosevelt University; and bachelor of the arts in economics from the Academy of Economic Studies, Chisinau, Moldova.



Michael Fix is a Senior Fellow at MPI, and previously served as its President. He joined MPI in 2005, as Co-Director of MPI's National Center on Immigrant Integration Policy and later assumed positions as Senior Vice President, Director of Studies, and CEO.

Mr. Fix's research focus is on immigrant integration and the education of immigrant children in the United States and Europe, as well as citizenship policy, immigrant children and families, the effect of welfare reform on immigrants, and the impact of immigrants on the U.S. labor force.

Prior to joining MPI, Mr. Fix was Director of Immigration Studies at the Urban Institute in Washington, DC, where his focus was on immigration and integration policy, race and the measurement of discrimination, and federalism.

Mr. Fix serves on the MPI Board of Trustees and is a Policy Fellow with IZA in Bonn, Germany. In December 2013, he was nominated to be a member of the National Research Council's Committee on the Integration of Immigrants into U.S. Society, which produced a seminal study on the integration of immigrants in the United States.

Previously, he served on the National Academy of Sciences' Committee on the Redesign of U.S. Naturalization Tests and on the Committee on the Health and Adjustment of Immigrant Children. He also served as a member of the Advisory Panel to the Foundation for Child Development's Young Scholars Program. In 2005 he was appointed to the State of Illinois' New Americans Advisory Council, and in 2009 to the State of Maryland's Council for New Americans.

Mr. Fix received a JD from the University of Virginia and a bachelor of the arts degree from Princeton University. He did additional graduate work at the London School of Economics.



The Migration Policy Institute is a nonprofit, nonpartisan think tank dedicated to the study of the movement of people worldwide. MPI provides analysis, development, and evaluation of migration and refugee policies at the local, national, and international levels. It aims to meet the rising demand for pragmatic and thoughtful responses to the challenges and opportunities that large-scale migration, whether voluntary or forced, presents to communities and institutions in an increasingly integrated world.

www.migrationpolicy.org

1400 16th Street NW
Suite 300
Washington, DC 20036

Tel: 001 202-266-1940
Fax: 001 202-266-1900

