

Improving Data Collection and Research Related to Immigrant Integration Recommendations for the Task Force on New Americans

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In late 2022, the Task Force on New Americans (TFNA) was launched pursuant to President Joe Biden's Executive Order 14012.¹ Led by the White House's Domestic Policy Council (DPC), the task force's mission is to strengthen and coordinate federal, state, and local efforts to support the integration and inclusion of immigrants and refugees. The Migration Policy Institute's National Center on Immigrant Integration Policy (NCIIP) has long argued for the need to create an office within the White House to analyze immigrant integration challenges and opportunities and identify ways the federal government can address them. The creation of the TFNA is a welcome development in this regard, and its efforts will hopefully model new and effective ways the federal government can build its capacities to understand and address integration issues that flow from the country's immigration policies.

Drawing from NCIIP's extensive record of research, policy analysis, and technical assistance for government entities, this document describes pressing issues related to data collection and research on immigrant integration that exist across the federal government. It is part of a broader set of recommendations for the TFNA that also covers topics such as language access and can be found at www.migrationpolicy.org/research/task-force-new-americans.

Government programs at the national, state, and local level rely on data collected by the federal government. These data are used to inform the strategies and priorities of policymakers and government agencies and are regularly incorporated into myriad processes connected to the delivery of public services at all levels of government. The demographic transformation that high levels of immigration has brought about in the country's population over the previous 50 years, however, also requires the federal government to review and update its practices related to the collection of data in federal programs and via the Census. For the topic of immigrant integration, more effective data are particularly essential to help government agencies, institutions, systems, and programs understand the share that immigrants comprise of populations targeted for service and how to best serve those communities. In addition, more high-quality population- and program-level data are also necessary to support agencies' efforts to ensure that immigrants are equitably served in the programs for which they are eligible.

¹ White House, "Executive Order on Restoring Faith in Our Legal Immigration Systems and Strengthening Integration and Inclusion Efforts for New Americans" (executive order, February 2, 2021).

The following recommendations are offered to support the task force’s deliberations on how to address challenges in this critically important arena:

- ▶ **The TFNA should systematically tap into the knowledge stores and recommendations of other DPC and agency-level teams working to implement executive orders promulgated by Biden that seek to improve equity, relevance, and/or quality of federal agency programs for underserved communities, including through better collection and dissemination of data.** With DPC and agency experts already working for well over a year to implement several executive orders whose efforts directly overlap or are adjacent to those of the TFNA, consolidating inputs, research, deliberations, and recommendations across the TFNA and these executive orders will more efficiently use federal resources and maximize the impact of efforts associated with each. In particular, TFNA efforts should be integrated with those related to:
 - **Executive Order 13985: Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government.**² This executive order aims to address inequities in executive departments and agencies that present barriers to opportunities for underserved communities. TFNA should consult with the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) assessment of equitable policies across agencies to deepen the task force’s understandings of how agency policies may be affecting the integration trajectories of racially and ethnically diverse immigrant populations. The task force should also tap into agency-level teams tasked with implementing this executive order to collaborate in mapping significant areas of mission and population overlap and produce recommendations that fully reflect issues and concerns related to immigrant-background populations.
 - **The Equitable Data Working Group.**³ Pursuant to provisions in Executive Order 13985 and chaired by executive branch officials from the Office of Science and Technology Policy and OMB, the Equitable Data Working Group is conducting rigorous assessments on how data collection methods can be improved to better capture demographic data on underserved communities, which in turn can be used for evidence-building equity efforts. The TFNA should coordinate with the Equitable Data Working Group to both share and acquire insight into best practices, strategies, and methodologies for improving the collection and dissemination of high-quality data, and to collaborate in strengthening and harmonizing recommendations emanating from the TFNA and this working group.
 - **White House Initiative on Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders (WHIAANHPI).**⁴ Pursuant to Executive Order 14031, this initiative has developed a robust plan to advance equity, justice, and opportunity for Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander communities that highlights the need for improved data collection and usage. In collaboration with the Equitable Data Working Group, WHIAANHPI is assessing how disaggregated data can be better collected and utilized at federal, state, and local levels

2 White House, “Executive Order on Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities through the Federal Government” (executive order, January 20, 2021).

3 White House, “The Release of the Equitable Data Working Group Report” (press release, April 22, 2022).

4 White House, *National Strategy to Advance Equity, Justice, and Opportunity for Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander Communities* (Washington, DC: White House, 2023).

to inform policy and program design and strengthen outcomes for these communities. Senior White House officials and agency experts coordinating WHIAANHPI's work should be incorporated in TFNA issue exploration and decision-making processes.

- ▶ **The TFNA should explore and provide recommendations for improvements in Census Bureau data collection, dissemination of existing data, and expanded use of Census data in federal program designs in order to better understand and improve equity and responsiveness of programs for immigrants and their children.** This exploration should utilize the following approach:
 - **TFNA efforts should focus on actions the Census Bureau can take to significantly expand public provision of disaggregated and cross-tabulated data that are pertinent to advancing access and equity in key federal programs.** The Census Bureau has a great deal of data on key socioeconomic characteristics of individuals that should be shared in an appropriately disaggregated manner with government and community stakeholders in order to support improvements in the responsiveness of federal programs to those they are intended to serve, including immigrants and their children. Actions the Census Bureau should take include:
 - *Expanding public provision of data related to attainment of a high school diploma or equivalent to include educational attainment of: less than nine years, less than five years, and zero (no formal education).* With many federal antipoverty, education, and economic advancement programs using the lack of high school completion as an indicator for service eligibility, and immigrants disproportionately likely to have very low or no formal education as compared to native-born individuals, providing easy access to data that disaggregate lower levels of formal educational attainment would allow federally funded programs to better understand and incorporate into program designs the needs of individuals with lower levels of formal education.
 - *Expanding public provision of data related to Limited English Proficient (LEP) adults to include measures for those answering that they speak English “well,” “not well,” and “not at all.”* Migration Policy Institute (MPI) research indicates that the service and programming needs of respondents saying they speak English “not well” or “not at all” often differ from those who report speaking English “well,” even though all are considered to be LEP.⁵ Yet when English proficiency data are leveraged in federal programs, they generally only refer to the larger LEP population. The English proficiency of potential service populations is an important factor in nearly all federal program designs and in calculating certain federal funding streams. Providing easy access to Census data indicating the levels of proficiency for those who report speaking English less than very well would greatly aid efforts by federal agencies and their state/local partners to both comply with federal requirements to remove language barriers to federal programming and to ensure equitable access to language

⁵ Jeanne Batalova and Michael Fix, *Through an Immigrant Lens: PIAAC Assessment of the Competencies of Adults in the United States* (Washington, DC: MPI, 2015).

learning supports for those with different levels of proficiency. Such provision of data could include annual publications by the Census Bureau in coordination with other agencies or the Justice Department detailing this data proactively for the state and county level.

- o *Increasing public provision of data tables that cross-tabulate poverty with other key characteristics such as LEP status, educational attainment, linguistic isolation, health insurance coverage, and digital access challenges, including by race/ethnicity subgroups.* Cross-tabulations of Census data should be coordinated with agencies and major public facing programs to determine what characteristics would be most powerful in ensuring more equitable access to the services these entities deliver.

→ **Agency-level TFNA efforts should analyze and provide recommendations on actions to incorporate disaggregated data in their federal program operations, including via state plans submitted as a condition for receiving federal program funds, federal and state grant programs, and program reporting requirements.** Many federal antipoverty, education, and economic advancement programs rely on legacy designs rooted in the 1960s war on poverty era that have not been updated to reflect the demographic transformation of the country's population in recent decades. This has left key federal programs with blind spots that can result in inequities in service access and quality for individuals as well as inequities for service providers who attempt to serve those with higher needs. These, in turn, can significantly erode the overall impact and success of federal program designs. To address these issues, TFNA efforts at the DPC and agency levels should weave the use of the following data into agency program design and operations:

- o Disaggregated educational attainment data (high school diploma or equivalent, less than nine years, less than five years, zero formal education) in place of high school completion data points;
- o Disaggregated LEP data (speaks English well, not well, not at all); and
- o Cross-tabulated data pertinent to program goals and populations intended to be served.

→ **To track integration outcomes of new immigrants and the barriers they face, the Census Bureau should reinstate a version of the New Immigrant Survey (NIS).**⁶ NIS was a nationally representative, multicohort longitudinal study of new legal immigrants and their children admitted for U.S. permanent residence. The survey sample was based on nationally representative samples of the administrative records, compiled by the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS). The questionnaires covered a wide range of indicators of integration and inclusion, including employment, health, income and assets, housing, and intention to naturalize. It also included information about immigrants' pathways to the United States and pre-migration experiences (e.g., prior occupation, place of education, place of

6 Data Sharing for Demographic Research (DSDR) Project, "New Immigrant Survey Series," accessed February 28, 2022.

residence, work experience). The new NIS could focus on a cohort of new arrivals (and their children) regardless of their legal status. This approach would bring two benefits. First, the survey's results would provide up-to-date, comprehensive information about current arrivals to the United States. Second, expanding data collection to new immigrants regardless of their status would reflect the complexity and variety of legal and permanent or temporary statuses of today's immigrants, which have a significant impact on their future integration prospects. Importantly, the survey should also track the outcomes of the same individuals over time, given that integration is not a one-time experience. From the start, the Census Bureau could design this survey so it can be linked to the agency's existing surveys and thus focus only on the questions not covered by those other surveys.

→ **The TFNA should review and consider the recommendations proposed in the National Academy of Sciences report *The Integration of Immigrants into American Society*.⁷**

Undertaken by a committee of experts appointed by the National Research Committee and sponsored by the Carnegie Corporation of New York, Department of Homeland Security (DHS), National Science Foundation, and the Russell Sage Foundation, this study sought to facilitate a fact-based discussion around U.S. immigration issues, including by highlighting gaps in existing knowledge and data collection. The TFNA should particularly consider the following recommendations from the report⁸ related to data and research:

- The Census Bureau should add a question on the birthplace of parents to the American Community Survey (ACS).
- The National Institutes of Health should offer continuing support for population health surveys. It should ensure that these surveys contain questions on date and age of arrival, time spent in the United States, and whenever possible and practical, legal status.
- U.S. Immigration and Citizenship Services (USCIS) and the DHS Office of Immigration Statistics should make more administrative data available to researchers and the public. Sensitive data should be made available to Secure Data Centers.
- The Census Bureau and USCIS should create a system that links administrative data to Census Bureau-administered surveys, including the Decennial Census, the ACS, and the Survey of Income and Program Participation, following protocols that have recently been used to link Internal Revenue Service data to Census Bureau data and/or following protocols developed for the American Opportunity Study.

► **The TFNA should embed data and research considerations into all of the topic and policy areas its work focuses on.** In particular, the task force should incorporate the following research and data recommendations into its work connected to language access, early childhood education and care, K-12 education, and adult skills and workforce development services for immigrants:

7 National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, *The Integration of Immigrants into American Society* (Washington, DC: National Academies Press, 2015).

8 National Academies, *The Integration of Immigrants into American Society*, 429–33.

- **Improve provision of data on English proficiency and languages spoken in states and localities to better promote language access in government services.** The TFNA should consult with experts to explore data sources that can be leveraged by the federal government to create and share more accurate data on language diversity and LEP communities, including newly arriving immigrants and refugees, to assist efforts by federal agencies as well as state and local governments to provide these communities with better access to services.
- **Ensure that Dual Language Learners (DLLs) are systematically identified in early childhood programs.** Major federal early childhood capacity-building initiatives such as the Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge and the Preschool Development Grants program have not required or meaningfully included equity or quality measures for DLLs (young children who live in households where a language other than English is spoken). The task force should engage with the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the Department of Education (ED) to ensure that new and existing federal policies and funding measures involving early childhood services include a DLL identification requirement and relevant metrics in program reporting.
- **Make immigrant and DLL families visible in program data and ensure that Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) funds and programs equitably serve these populations.** The TFNA should develop strategies for the equitable inclusion of immigrant- and DLL-relevant indicators in MIECHV statewide needs assessments to ensure equitable access for families of diverse backgrounds. The TFNA should also prioritize Home Visiting Evidence of Effectiveness (HomVEE) efforts and calls for research that examine the efficacy and relevance of home visiting models for specific DLL and immigrant populations to promote culturally relevant services. To the extent that HHS officials may have identified and developed solutions for these needs as part of efforts to implement Executive Order 13985, a collaborative exploration of these issues and joined-up approaches for addressing them should take place.
- **Improve inclusion of immigrant-background students in data and knowledge management systems used in K-12 education.** Parents, educators, and policymakers need accessible and actionable data in order to improve equity for immigrant-background children, many of whom are English Learners (ELs). ED should monitor state report cards and data dashboards for compliance with requirements to publish information on ELs. To improve the utility of EL data, the department should also provide guidance on how to contextualize data on dashboards. Additionally, practitioners and advocates are increasingly interested in analyzing data for recent immigrant students separately from all ELs in order to ensure schools are meeting their unique educational needs. The Office of English Language Acquisition (OELA) can provide leadership in this arena by encouraging states to publish the count of recent immigrant students, a data point it collects for federal reporting, and convening an expert panel to make recommendations on how to improve and expand efforts to collect, report, and use data on subsets of students, including recent immigrants and students with limited or interrupted formal education. States should also publish information on ELs they already collect for biennial reporting to the federal government that is not required to be

reported on state report cards or data dashboards. ED should encourage states to include information such as the progress of ELs with disabilities and the number of long-term ELs along with other data reporting.

- **Engage with federal agencies to design evidence-based adult skills programming and policies that are inclusive of immigrant populations and promote their integration.** There is a lack of research and evidence regarding the effectiveness and relevance of federal program designs in meeting immigrants' skill development and broader economic integration needs. With knowledge and responsibility for adult skills and economic integration issues residing in multiple federal agencies, the TFNA's exploration of how to build an evidence base for improving existing policies and programming should be organized to tap system experts in ED, HHS, the Department of Labor (DOL), and their key partners in state adult skills systems.
- **Take immigrants into account in research and evidence-building efforts in adult skills systems.** One in every six adults and workers in the United States is an immigrant,⁹ yet evaluations of adult educational and workforce development programs frequently do not account for the success of programmatic models in serving native-born versus immigrant individuals. In shaping future research in the adult skills space, the TFNA should engage with ED and DOL to push federal research activities—including those directed by outside contractors—and those conducted by states to consider nativity as a key factor in evaluating the success and relevance of new and existing service approaches and programs.
- **Leverage data to measure the performance of adult skills programs and provide more equitable access to services for immigrants.** The *Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act* (WIOA), which governs workforce development and adult education systems, uses performance measures that often disincentive serving at-need individuals with lower levels of formal education and English proficiency, who are disproportionately immigrants. This impact should be lessened by a Statistical Adjustment Model (SAM), which states should be able to use to adjust performance targets based on the characteristics of who their programs are serving. However, the implementation of the SAM has been largely ineffective at even capturing—much less serving as a tool to ameliorate—the inequities that WIOA's performance measures can trigger. The TFNA should provide recommendations that would allow the SAM to be more effective in promoting equity in WIOA programming while also engaging with relevant leaders at ED and DOL to explore new tools and mechanisms that can leverage population- and program-level data to improve the delivery of adult skill services to immigrants facing the greatest economic mobility challenges.

9 Migration Policy Institute (MPI) tabulation of 2015–19 pooled data from the U.S. Census Bureau's annual American Community Survey (ACS).

Related Resources

The National Academy of Sciences' *The Integration of Immigrants into American Society*. This 2015 report was developed by a committee of experts appointed by the National Research Committee and sponsored by the Carnegie Corporation of New York, Department of Homeland Security, National Science Foundation, and the Russell Sage Foundation. The study sought to facilitate a fact-based discussion around U.S. immigration issues, including by highlighting gaps in existing knowledge and data collection.

The Census Bureau's *New Immigrant Survey (NIS)*. NIS was a nationally representative, multi-cohort longitudinal study of new legal immigrants and their children admitted for U.S. permanent residence. The survey sample was based on nationally representative samples of the administrative records, compiled by the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS). The questionnaires covered a wide range of indicators of integration and inclusion, including employment, health, income and assets, housing, and intention to naturalize, but it also included information about immigrants' pathways to the United States and pre-migration experiences (e.g., prior occupation, place of education, place of residence, work experience).

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For more information on NCIIP's work, visit the MPI website at www.migrationpolicy.org/integration or contact MPI at info@migrationpolicy.org.

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