



Immigrant integration: diversifying the American Dream

The National Immigrant Integration Conference 2012 (NIIC 2012) is the largest national conference to bring together immigration leaders and advocates from across the country. NIIC 2012 is designed to take the public dialogue on immigration beyond the border enforcement headlines and dive deep into the effort to diversify the American Dream by ensuring that immigrants have the opportunity to become integral members of the U.S. communities they call home.

The conference brings together a broad cross-section of professionals whose day-to-day work can inform this conversation, including experts on immigration and refugee policies, service providers, academics, government officials and advocates — all of whom are committed to finding innovative and effective ways to develop policies and programs that promote active citizenship and a just and welcoming democracy for all.

What is immigrant integration?

One in eight people in the United States is an immigrant.¹ Immigrant integration is a two-way process with a focus on strengthening the systems and tools that allow immigrants who are already in the U.S. to participate fully in their communities, and also to build healthy and valued lives for themselves and their families.

The goal of immigrant integration is to ensure that everyone has an opportunity to fully participate in the civic activities that define our country and allow us to pursue the American dream. Important components of immigrant integration include access to:

- **Health care** — About half of immigrants are uninsured, compared to 16 percent of U.S.-born citizens.²
- **Education** — Nearly one in four youth are the children of immigrants.³
- **Employment** — The typical immigrant earns 22 percent less per week than the typical native-born worker.⁴ Immigrants have high rates of entrepreneurship and make up nearly 17 percent of new business owners.⁵
- **Programs and services** — About 4.5 million income-earning adult heads of households have limited English proficiency⁶ and may face barriers to accessing programs and services not available in their native languages.

¹ ["Strength in Diversity: The Economic and Political Power of Immigrants, Latinos, and Asians,"](#) Immigration Policy Center, Jan. 2012

² ["Medicaid and the Uninsured,"](#) Kaiser Family Foundation, Feb. 2012

³ ["Children of Immigrants: Growing National and State Diversity,"](#) Urban Institute, Oct. 2011

⁴ ["Foreign-born Workers: Labor Force Characteristics — 2011,"](#) Bureau of Labor Statistics, May 2012

⁵ ["Estimating the Contribution of Immigrant Business Owners to the U.S. Economy,"](#) Small Business Administration, Nov. 2008

⁶ ["Moving to U.S. and Amassing a Fortune, No English Needed,"](#) The New York Times, Nov. 2011



- **Citizenship and naturalization** — A full 93 percent of children of immigrants are U.S. citizens.⁷ Citizenship promotes stable communities and brings significant social benefits.
- **Safe communities** — Many immigrants fear law enforcement because of their immigration status or do not understand the American justice system. The result is often that crimes such as domestic partner violence go underreported: Fewer than 20 percent of undocumented women who are victims of domestic violence seek help from law enforcement, compared to over 50 percent of female victims of violence in the general population.⁸

Why is immigrant integration important?

Immigrants are key contributors to building and strengthening our economy.

- Eighteen percent of all small business owners in the U.S. are immigrants.⁹ In addition, immigrants start businesses at nearly double the rate of the native-born.¹⁰
- Immigrants have started 23 percent of the companies backed by venture capitalists.¹¹
- Nearly eight percent of immigrants are self-employed, compared with 6.6 percent of native-born Americans.¹²
- A Census Bureau report shows that 33 percent of engineers; 27 percent of mathematicians, statisticians and computer scientists; and 24 percent of physical scientists are immigrants.¹³
- However, immigrant workers also suffer from high rates of workplace violations: A survey of low-wage workers in three major U.S. cities revealed that foreign-born workers are nearly twice as likely as their native-born counterparts to have a minimum wage violation. Undocumented immigrant women are especially vulnerable.¹⁴
- Immigrants boost demand for local consumer goods. By 2015, Latinos and Asians, many of whom are immigrants, will have a combined \$2.275 trillion in purchasing power.¹⁵

Who benefits from immigrant integration?

⁷ [“Basic Facts on Children of Immigrants,”](#) Urban Institute, June 2010

⁸ [“Legal Momentum in Brief, March 2011,”](#) Legal Momentum, March 2011

⁹ [“Immigrant Small Business Owners: A Significant and Growing Part of the Economy,”](#) Fiscal Policy Institute, June 2012

¹⁰ [“Immigrant Entrepreneurs and Small Business Owners, and their Access to Financial Capital,”](#) Small Business Administration, May 2012

¹¹ [“American Made: The Impact of Immigrant Entrepreneurs and Professionals on U.S. Competitiveness,”](#) National Venture Capital Association

¹² [“Ten Ways Immigrants Help Build and Strengthen Our Economy,”](#) The White House Blog, July 2012

¹³ [“Ten Ways Immigrants Help Build and Strengthen Our Economy,”](#) The White House Blog, July 2012

¹⁴ [“Broken Laws, Unprotected Workers: Violations of Employment and Labor Laws in America's Cities,”](#) New York Immigration Council, Nov. 2008

¹⁵ [“Ten Ways Immigrants Help Build and Strengthen Our Economy,”](#) The White House Blog, July 2012



We all benefit when everyone in our society has the opportunity to contribute to their fullest capacity to their families, jobs and communities.

- Foreign-born workers make up 15.9 percent of the U.S. labor force.¹⁶
- There are 12.6 million legal permanent residents living in the U.S.; about 8.1 million of those are eligible for naturalization.¹⁷
- Only 7.7 percent of the residents eligible for U.S. citizenship became citizens in 2010.¹⁸ Cost is often a barrier to U.S. citizenship. The cost of an application is \$680, equivalent to two weeks and two days' worth of wages for a minimum-wage employee.
- More than 4.5 million native-born, U.S. citizen children have at least one parent who is an undocumented immigrant.¹⁹
- Nearly one quarter of all children in the U.S. have parents who are immigrants. About 44 percent of these children have parents who are noncitizens.²⁰

For more information on immigrant integration, or to set up a background call with one of the steering committee members for NIIC 2012, please contact Diane Quest at diane@caminopr.com or 212.255.2575.

¹⁶ [“Foreign-born Workers: Labor Force Characteristics — 2011,”](#) Bureau of Labor Statistics, May 2012

¹⁷ [“Estimates of the Legal Permanent Resident Population in 2010,”](#) Office of Immigration Statistics, Oct. 2011

¹⁸ “The Need for National Citizenship Campaign,” National Partnership for New Americans

¹⁹ [“Unauthorized Immigrant Population: National and State Trends, 2010,”](#) Pew Hispanic Center, Feb. 2011

²⁰ [“Strength in Diversity: The Economic and Political Power of Immigrants, Latinos, and Asians in the U.S.,”](#) Immigration Policy Center, June 2012