

# Opportunities for Upskilling the Immigrant Workforce

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In communities across the country, many employers are having trouble finding enough skilled workers, especially to fill middle-skilled positions that require some postsecondary training but not a four-year college degree. They may be overlooking an untapped resource.

Immigrants in those communities could potentially meet these labor force needs, but many are in lower-skilled jobs with limited access to the education and training they need to advance their careers. Workforce development services could help them develop their skills, earn higher wages to support themselves and their families, and meet employer demand.

**To support upskilling efforts, we took a closer look at characteristics of the immigrant workforce.** What we found suggests how important it is to consider immigrant workers when developing local workforce development strategies.

## Education

As a whole, immigrant workers have lower educational attainment than native-born workers; 26 percent have less than a high school degree compared with 5 percent of native-born workers. But, similar to the native born, roughly a third of immigrant workers have a college or advanced degree.

## Occupations

Despite lower educational attainment, foreign-born workers are just as likely to hold middle-skilled jobs as native-born workers; about 25 percent of both groups have middle-skilled jobs. However, immigrant workers are more likely than native-born workers to have lower-skilled jobs and less likely to have high-skilled jobs.

1 out of 6  
workers in the US  
are immigrants

## WAYS TO SUPPORT IMMIGRANT WORKERS

**State and local policymakers** can put more resources into English language instruction, track gaps in service for immigrants, and actively engage immigrant-serving organizations to ensure policy is grounded in community needs.

**Workforce development service providers** can strive to make programs more accessible and relevant to immigrant community members.

**Funders** interested in supporting equity and economic mobility can work to ensure that grantees engage immigrant populations.

**Employers** can invest in upskilling their immigrant workers and collaborate with immigrant-serving organizations to ensure that industry needs inform training programs.

This fact sheet pulls from our report *Upskilling the Immigrant Workforce to Meet Employer Demand for Skilled Workers*, which explores strategies that organizations in three cities—Dallas, Miami, and Seattle—are using to support immigrant training and advancement.

## OPPORTUNITIES FOR UPSKILLING THE IMMIGRANT WORKFORCE

Among immigrants, the most common lower-skilled occupations are maids and housekeeping cleaners, janitors, construction laborers, cashiers, grounds maintenance workers, retail salespersons, agricultural workers, and waiters. Their most common middle-skilled occupations are cooks; drivers; nursing, psychiatric, and home health aides; and first-line supervisors of retail workers.

### Wages

Immigrant workers in lower- and middle-skilled jobs earn less than their native-born counterparts. They have a median wage of \$21,266 compared with \$24,421 among the native born with lower-skilled jobs. And for those with middle-skilled jobs, immigrants have a median wage of \$28,905 compared with \$36,041 for the native born.

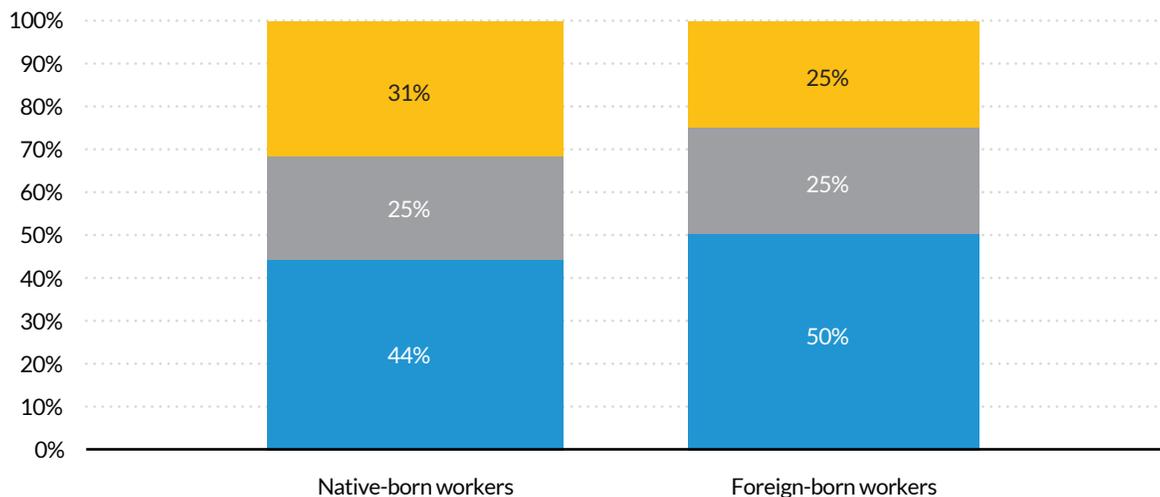
### English proficiency

Just under half of immigrant workers are limited English proficient (LEP), which is more common for those with lower-skilled jobs. The share of LEP workers varies across occupations. In general, lower-paid occupations are more likely to have LEP workers, and higher-paid occupations have fewer LEP workers, but that's not always the case. Some LEP workers are in better-paying construction or first-line supervisor jobs.

These broad trends suggest the importance of investing in education and training for immigrant workers. Their role in local labor markets and their needs should be considered in broader decisionmaking and in local workforce development strategies.

## Current Workforce Distribution

■ Lower-skilled jobs ■ Middle-skilled jobs ■ High-skilled jobs



**Source:** Five-year American Community Survey sample, 2011–15 collected from the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series.

**Note:** Data refer to individuals ages 18–64, in the civilian labor force, and employed during the week before the survey administration.