

Immigrant Families in Michigan: A State Profile

Michigan has long been home to thousands of immigrants from all over the world. Immigrants in Michigan are neighbors, students, workers and Main Street business owners. They help our state maintain a strong, modern economy and they enrich our communities.

Michigan has seen a significant increase in the number of immigrants in our state over the past several decades. Between 2000 and 2015, the immigrant population in Michigan increased by almost a quarter (24.5%), and has nearly doubled since 1990. The majority of immigrants in Michigan (51.4%) arrived to the state before 2000, with only 20.8% having arrived since 2010.¹ Michigan's immigrant population is high among states with similarly sized total populations, but still smaller than many more heavily populated states like Illinois. Furthermore, the rate of growth of the immigrant population in Michigan remains outpaced by growth at the national level.² About half of immigrants in Michigan are naturalized citizens (51.1%) while some maintain some form of legal status such as a temporary visa or permanent residency. As of 2014, 97,000 immigrants in Michigan were undocumented or had no form of legal status.³

MICHIGAN IMMIGRANTS HAVE VARIED ORIGINS AND EXPERIENCES

From Latin America to South Asia, immigrants in Michigan come from regions all over the world, helping to enrich the Great Lakes state. Almost half of Michigan immigrants (48.4%) arrived from Asian countries, making it the most common world region of origin for immigrants in the state. The top Asian countries of origin are: India, Iraq, China, Korea and Lebanon. The other top three regions of

origin for Michigan immigrants were: Europe (21.7%), followed by Latin America (18.9%) and Africa (4.3%).

Immigrants who come from the same world region can have vastly different experiences in the United States due to race, socioeconomic status and level of English language proficiency. Immigrants of color, in particular, are more likely to experience discrimination and barriers to opportunity than their White counterparts. These barriers often take the form of residential segregation, limited access to well-paying quality jobs, and poorly funded schools in their communities among others. Public policies that address racial inequities in health and economic well-being are needed to ensure that more families of color, both immigrant and U.S.-born, can thrive.

A GROWING GENERATION OF YOUNG IMMIGRANTS

Table 1

Children of Immigrants in Michigan Represent All Races; Many Experience Poverty		
Race & Ethnicity	Children of Immigrants	Children of Immigrants in Families Experiencing Poverty
Asian	24.9%	13.8%
Black	5.6%	5.2%
Hispanic	23.9%	39.1%
Native American	0.14%	0.10%
White	45.6%	41.9%

Source: Urban Policy Institute analysis of U.S. Census Bureau data of 2014 ACS

Children of Immigrants

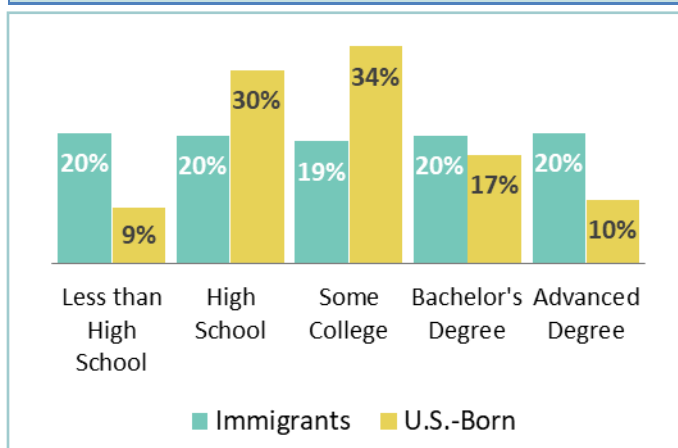
In Michigan, among all native-born children under age 6, 6.9% (51,112) have at least one immigrant parent, and 14.9% (4,846) of children with at least one immigrant parent are immigrants themselves. Like the rest of Michigan children, children of immigrants also need access to healthy food, a stable home and a quality education to succeed. Many children of immigrants, however, face a higher risk of having poor health and economic outcomes if their parents are experiencing poverty or are undocumented.⁴ Among children of immigrants in Michigan, 14.8% were experiencing poverty and struggling to get by in 2014 (the most recent year available).⁵ As Table 1 shows, Hispanic children of immigrants are disproportionately more likely to experience poverty than other non-White racial and ethnic groups. Furthermore, more than half of all children of immigrants in Michigan are children of color who are more likely to face barriers to success that stem from structural racism. These longstanding disadvantages impact everything from the quality of education in schools to access to health institutions and community resources.

Many children with immigrant parents also live with the constant fear of separation from loved ones due to immigration status. As of 2014, approximately 28,000 undocumented immigrant parents with at least one U.S.-citizen child under the age of 18 lived in Michigan.⁶ Research shows that children who are permanently separated from parents can experience long-term psychological trauma and economic hardship. Therefore, policies that enable families with mixed legal status to stay together are imperative for ensuring child well-being.

Young Adult Immigrants

Many children of immigrants who have grown up in Michigan are now enrolling in college or entering the workforce. Their contributions as students and workers are vital for maintaining a healthy economy. When it comes to educational outcomes, immigrants in Michigan are more likely to have both an advanced college degree and a bachelor's degree than U.S.-born state residents. However, some immigrants in Michigan are also much less likely to have completed a high school education than

Many Michigan Immigrants Have a College Degree While Many Others Didn't Finish High School



Source: Fiscal Policy Institute analysis of 2015 ACS, IPUMS, for people 25 years and older

their U.S.-born counterparts. Figure 1 provides an overview of educational outcomes among all immigrants in the state. This disparity in educational outcomes demonstrates that while some immigrants have made gains in accessing higher education (though some also arrive with higher education degrees from their countries of origin), many others still face barriers to completing high school and obtaining a college degree.

A subset of the young adult population is known as the “Dreamers”—immigrants who were brought to this country as children and identify as Americans in every sense of the word, but do not have legal status. In 2012, the federal Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program granted temporary reprieve from deportation and a renewable two-year work permit to beneficiaries and became a vital policy for enabling this group of young immigrants to succeed in this country. Approximately 6,430 young undocumented immigrants in Michigan are currently enrolled in the DACA program.⁷ Several studies have confirmed that the DACA program has enabled many beneficiaries to pursue educational and professional dreams, contribute to their family’s household income, and make their first big purchases such as buying a car or a home.⁸

On Sept. 5, 2017, the U.S. Justice Department, under the direction of President Donald Trump, announced the end of the DACA program. Under new instructions set forth by

the administration, the Justice Department announced it would no longer consider new applicants for the program, but would consider renewals for those beneficiaries whose permits expire before March 5, 2018, so long as they submitted renewal applications by Oct. 5, 2017.⁹ The end of the DACA program has left young immigrants feeling uncertain about their futures in this country. Not only does the end of DACA mean harm to thousands of immigrant students and professionals in our state, it also negatively affects local communities and the state's economy.

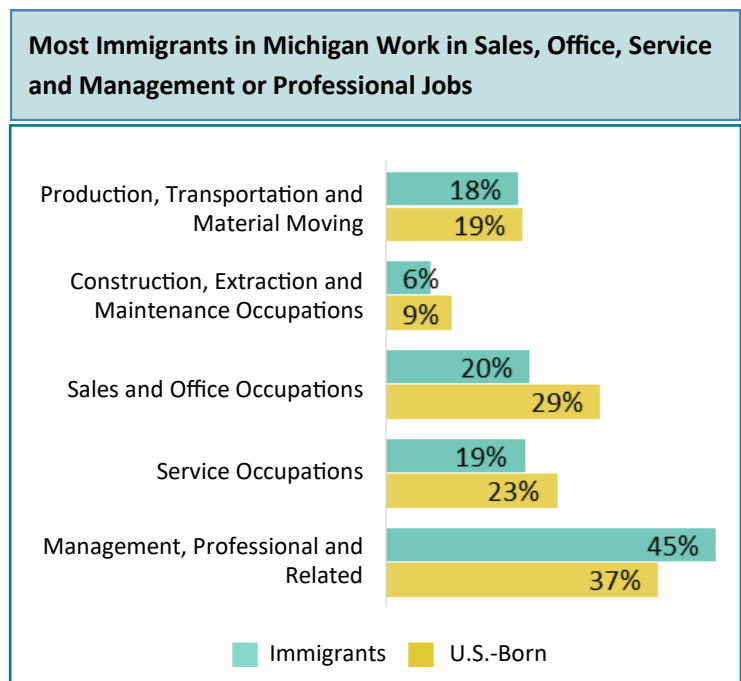
MICHIGAN IMMIGRANTS AND THE ECONOMY

As workers and business owners, immigrants can make regional economies competitive, improving the employment prospects and wages for all workers. From 2006 to 2010, immigrant business owners in Michigan generated \$1.8 billion in net business income.¹⁰ In 2015, immigrants contributed 9% of the total state GDP in Michigan and made up 11% of all business owners in the state.¹¹ Michigan immigrants also contribute millions in tax revenue each year, and in doing so help pay for important public programs and infrastructure in the state. In 2015 for example, undocumented immigrants in Michigan paid approximately \$86.6 million in state and local taxes.¹² Young undocumented immigrants also contribute their share in taxes. In 2015, DACA-eligible immigrants contributed approximately \$15 million in state and local taxes.¹³ While Michigan immigrants should not be valued solely for their economic contributions, it is important to recognize the countless ways in which they help strengthen our state and our local communities.

IMMIGRANTS IN THE LABOR FORCE

As workers, Michigan immigrants are highly engaged in the labor force, working in a variety of occupations. In 2016, the employment rate among Michigan immigrants 16 years and older was almost identical to that of their U.S.-born counterparts, and had improved from the previous year. In the same year, 57.9% of Michigan immigrants were employed compared to 57.3% of native-

Figure 2



Source: Fiscal Policy Institute analysis of 2015 ACS, 4-year data, IPUMS

born residents and 57.3% of *all* Michigan residents.¹⁴ Michigan immigrants are also less likely to be unemployed than U.S.-born residents. In 2015, the unemployment rate among Michigan immigrants was 4.7% (the most recent year available), compared to 6.7% among U.S.-born residents. Michigan immigrants also work in a diverse number of industries and occupations in our state. Many serve as teachers, nurses, agricultural workers and more. Figure 2 provides an overview of the occupations held by Michigan immigrants as of 2015. Most Michigan immigrants worked in sales, office, service, and management or professional jobs as of 2015.

CREATING A WELCOMING STATE FOCUSED ON INCLUSION NOT EXCLUSION: POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

When Michigan immigrants succeed, we all succeed. Policymakers can immediately address the lack of policies in place to support our immigrant neighbors. While many immigrants in our state have been able to thrive post-recession, many more are still struggling to make ends meet for their families. Here are some of the ways state

and federal policymakers can strengthen Michigan immigrant outcomes:

**A Step in the Right Direction:
Public Universities in Michigan Adopt
“Tuition Equity” Policy**

Several public universities and community colleges in Michigan have adopted tuition equity policies to make college more affordable for undocumented immigrant students from the state. On July 18, 2014, for example, the University of Michigan adopted a tuition equity policy that would recognize the state residency of undocumented immigrants and introduced a program to provide need-based funding for those students.¹⁵ This change has enabled many young immigrants to enroll in college and be one step closer to achieving professional dreams. All of Michigan’s public and private universities can act immediately to adopt a similar tuition equity policy that can benefit all undocumented immigrant students in the state.

- **In-State Tuition.** The high cost of a college degree continues to be a barrier to higher education for many immigrants, particularly undocumented immigrant students. Most Michigan universities consider undocumented students “out-of-state” residents and require them to pay out-of-state tuition, despite the fact that many have lived in Michigan long enough to otherwise qualify as state residents. Granting in-state tuition to these aspiring students would require a change to our state constitution. A more feasible solution could be that public and private universities adopt tuition equity policies.

- **Access to Occupational and Professional Licenses.** Policymakers can also strengthen outcomes among young undocumented immigrants by making them eligible for occupational and professional licenses. In Michigan, no state law has been passed that specifies DACA beneficiaries as a category of non-citizens eligible for obtaining occupational and professional licenses.
- **Pathway to Citizenship.** Legal status allows immigrants to focus on their careers and families without having to worry about the potential separation from loved ones due to deportation. Providing a pathway to citizenship for thousands of undocumented immigrants in Michigan is a critical step in helping immigrants achieve positive outcomes for their families.
- **Leaving Behind Policies of Exclusion.** The most recent wave of anti-immigrant legislation in our state presents a serious threat to immigrant families and undermines American values of justice and equality. Certain bills, like a proposal to make English the official state language, are introduced for purely symbolic purposes that only serve to divide our communities. Other proposals, like cracking down on sanctuary cities, carry more dangerous implications for undocumented immigrant families. Research shows that inclusive policy is the best way forward for all Michiganders.¹⁶ Members of Congress and state legislators can act immediately to abandon policies of exclusion and introduce policies that eliminate barriers to success for Michigan’s immigrant families.

Unless otherwise noted, all state-level data comes from the Census Bureau’s 2011-2015 American Community Survey. “Immigrant” generally describes a foreign-born person living in the U.S., regardless of their immigration status or whether they have become a U.S. citizen.

ENDNOTES

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