

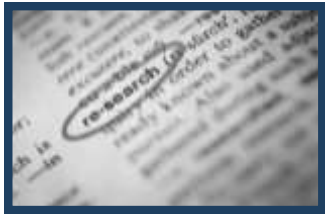
Research Gems

What the Latest Findings Tell Us About Skilled Immigrant Success



Note: This publication summarizes content from a 60-minute webinar. To see the recording and slides, visit www.imprintproject.org.

The Power of Research



Summarizing research on college-educated immigrants, this publication:

- Measures the scope and significance of skilled immigrant issues
- Reviews policies and practices that facilitate skilled immigrant integration
- Identifies gaps in existing research and directions for future research

College-Educated Immigrants In the US

During the last 30 years, the background of immigrants flowing into the US has become increasingly more educated. By 2010, the percentage of high-skilled immigrants surpassed that of low-skilled immigrants (29.6% to 27.8%).¹

Skilled immigrants are dispersed across the country, but there are wide variations by region and metropolitan area.¹

College attainment among immigrants also varies by race and ethnicity. Notably, Asian and African immigrants have the highest levels of attainment.²

Employment Issues Among Skilled Immigrants

The rate of poverty among college-educated immigrants exceeds that of their native-born counterparts, 19% to 11%.³

In a series of five reports, Drexel University researchers Neeta Fogg and Paul Harrington analyzed the 2003 National Survey of College Graduates and found that for college-educated immigrants:

- Unemployment is higher than for their native-born counterparts.⁴
- Involuntary part-time employment is nearly twice as high.⁵
- Mal-employment (also known as underemployment) is more common among foreign degree holders (36% for immigrants vs. 24% for native born). Mal-employment is even higher for those coming from Latin America or Africa and those majoring in the humanities, social sciences, or business.⁶



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Dr. Montalto is the founder of the American Immigrant Policy Portal, a website and newsletter that summarizes research findings and discusses their implications for policy makers and practitioners.

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Working Towards Change

Tackling employment issues for immigrant professionals means tackling barriers such as:

- Difficulties with credential recognition
- Lack of English language skills
- Lack of familiarity with the US labor market
- Weak professional networks in the US
- Gaps in education or experience
- Discrimination against immigrants

It also means understanding the disincentives for change among decision makers. For policymakers, this includes political risks. For service providers, it may include contracts which pressure them to quickly move clients into employment, impeding long-term career planning. Finally, immigrants themselves may be disincentivized by high costs, time constraints, and family obligations.⁷

Addressing Issues in Credential Recognition & Skill Mobility

In a series of five papers, the Migration Policy Institute examines credentialing issues for immigrant healthcare and STEM professionals. MPI researchers found that:

- Credential recognition is less of a problem in some fields. Many immigrant engineers, for example, can work in their fields even without licensure.⁸
- By allowing partial or limited recognition, regulatory authorities can create on-ramps into the professions and reduce the level of skill wastage.⁹
- Strategies for improving knowledge deficits among immigrants include providing access to information and resources, and adapting mainstream workforce programs to meet skilled immigrant needs. All such initiatives should be carefully evaluated.¹⁰
- Increasing medical residency opportunities can help foreign-trained doctors.¹¹
- Mutual recognition agreements (MRAs) negotiated between governments and professional associations in several countries can lessen barriers to foreign credential recognition.¹²



Additional Facts from International Studies



- Professionally trained immigrant women face a “double disadvantage”.¹³
- Canadian employers place a premium on “Canadian experience,” but at the same time, do not offer jobseekers the opportunity to gain local experience.¹⁴
- Immigrant skill underutilization has grown worse in Canada despite the introduction of programs to address the problem.¹⁵
- Employers should include the skilled immigrant issue on the corporate diversity agenda.¹⁶

Research Agenda for the Future

Addressing gaps in existing research, future research endeavors should:

- Quantify the economic costs of underemployment
- Measure the extent and impact of discrimination against skilled immigrants
- Examine the gendered aspects of underemployment
- Gather more data about the long-term effectiveness of specific interventions

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