

Welcoming Immigrant & Refugee Families

“Everywhere immigrants have enriched and strengthened the fabric of American life.”

— John F. Kennedy

The Data

- **The presence of immigrant and refugee families.** The 2000 Census counted 28 million first-generation immigrants in the U.S. — 10% of the current population and a 57% growth since 1990. By the 1980s more than 80% of newcomers came from Latin America and Asia. (R. Martinez, *The New Americans*, The New Press, 2004)
- **The distribution of immigrant and refugee families.** Traditional gateway cities and states for newcomers are being supplanted by newly emerging gateways, and the immigrant and refugee populations are more dispersed than ever. (Center on Urban and Metropolitan Policy, *The Rise of New Immigrant Gateways*, The Brookings Institution, February, 2004)
- **Vulnerability of immigrant and refugee children and families.** Twenty-four percent of immigrant children lived in families with incomes below the poverty level compared to 15% of children of natives. (J. Reardon-Anderson et al., *The Health and Well-Being of Children in Immigrant Families*, Urban Institute, 2002) These children and their families are more likely to experience food hardship, pay more than half their income on housing, live in crowded housing, and lack health insurance. (R. Capps, *Hardship Among Children of Immigrants*, Urban Institute Press, 2001)

The Issues

- **Language acquisition.** Almost 30 million working age adults speak another language at home, and about 10 million children live in low English proficiency households. (I. Lee, Annie E. Casey Foundation, MYR 2004) Both school success and job success are premised on English proficiency.
- **School segregation and school outcomes.** There is a high level of linguistic segregation in schools, with children with limited English proficiency clustered together. Dropout rates for immigrant children exceed those of U.S.-born students. (M. Fix et al., *The Integration of Immigrant Families in the United States*, PRDU Research Brief 3, Annie E. Casey Foundation)
- **Jobs and wages.** The unemployment rate of foreign-born adults is higher than non-Black U.S.-born adults, and the jobs they do find are worse than their U.S.-born counterparts. (M. Fix et al., above) One-fifth of the nation's low-wage workforce is comprised of immigrants. (CLASP Update, *The Future of Immigrant Children*, Oct/Nov 2004)
- **Policy exclusion.** The 1996 changes in federal welfare law significantly restricted access to assistance that had previously been available to low-income immigrants who are lawful permanent residents and to refugees. (*Immigrants' Eligibility for Federal Benefits*, Clearinghouse Rev, Sept. 2004)
- **Erosion of protective factors.** Immigrant adolescents are less likely than their U.S.-born counterparts to engage in risk behaviors like early sexual intercourse, delinquency, and substance abuse, but this advantage tends to decline with length of time in the U.S. and from one generation to the next. (D.J. Hernandez and E. Charney (eds), *From Generation to Generation*, National Academies Press, 1998)

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Options for Philanthropy

- **Promoting understanding through knowledge and data.** When communities undergo significant demographic shifts, it is important for the established community to understand newcomers. Examples of tools that can assist that effort are *The New Neighbors: A Users Guide to Data on Immigrants in U.S. Communities* and *Mapping the Immigrant Infrastructure* (both available through Annie E. Casey Foundation, www.aecf.org). The latter also identifies how philanthropic support can bolster immigrant and refugee associations and organizations to support families in transition.
- **Supporting the development of culturally competent programs and outreach.** Local agencies are likely to need training to ensure effective interaction with immigrant and refugee populations. Agency materials may require translation into additional languages. Newcomers need to understand their rights and responsibilities. The National Immigration Law Center provides community education materials in multiple languages to support such efforts (www.nilc.org/ce/ceindex.htm).
- **Investing in English language proficiency services.** Because English proficiency is a key predictor of transition success, programming for adults and their children is an investment with long-term positive benefits. The Center for Adult English Language Acquisition offers a Toolkit to help family literacy service providers and adult educators adapt their methods to new-English learners (www.cal.org/caela).
- **Preventing intergroup tensions.** Because demographic changes have the potential to stress communities, support for activities that promote intergroup understanding is recommended by GCIR (see below). These might include creation of or support for goal-focused multiethnic coalitions, evaluation of what works to foster positive intergroup relations, and efforts to introduce journalists to newcomer communities and information sources.

Key Resources

- **Grantmakers Concerned with Immigrants & Refugees (GCIR).** Offers the philanthropic community a clearinghouse of useful information (data, fact sheets, media resources, policy updates) to address the needs of increasingly diverse immigrant and refugee populations. (www.gcir.org)
- **Office of Refugee Resettlement, USDHHS.** Gives data about arrival locations and numbers and an overview of federal policy and programs available to assist in resettlement. (www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/orr)
- **California Tomorrow.** Develops and makes available resources to respond to changing demographics. Resources are sensitive to cultural and linguistic diversity and the strengths of newcomer communities. Especially strong on educational issues. (www.californiatomorrow.org)



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