



Children of Low-Income, Recent Immigrants (DECEMBER 2004)

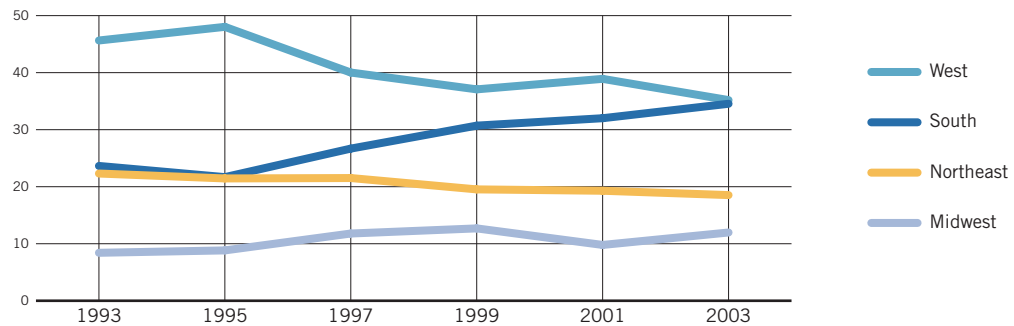
Overview

Two-thirds (65%) of children of recent immigrants¹—2.1 million—are low-income.² For these children the challenges in academic, physical, emotional, and social development usually associated with economic insecurity are likely to be exacerbated by language barriers, the process of migration and acculturation, and restrictions on access to safety-net programs.

The South and the West are home to most children of recent immigrants.

- 35% live in the South, up from 24% a decade ago.³
- 34% live in the West, down from 46% a decade ago.

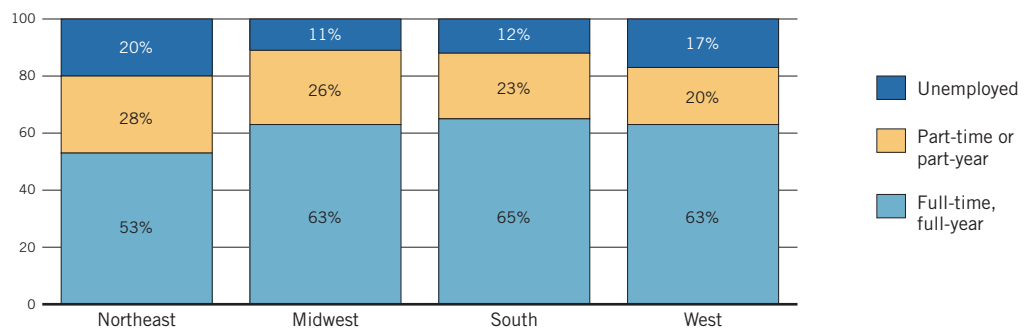
Percent of children living with recent immigrant parents, by region, 1993-2003



Most children of low-income, recent immigrants have parents who are employed.

- 62% of children of low-income, recent immigrants have a parent who is employed full-time, year-round, compared to 51% of children of low-income, native-born parents.
- Parental employment is high across all regions.

Percent of children living with low-income, recent immigrant parents, who are employed, by region, 2003



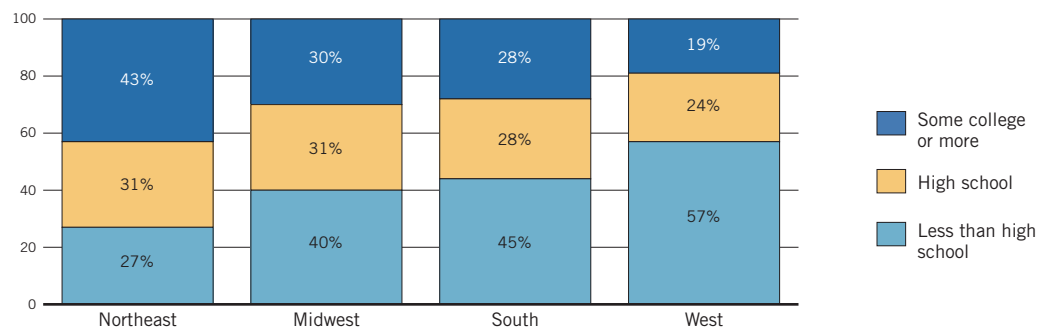
Most children of low-income, recent immigrants live with married parents.

- 71% of children of low-income, recent immigrants live with married parents, compared to 42% of children of low-income, native-born parents.
- Marriage rates are high across all regions: 68% are married in the Northeast, 71% in the Midwest, 69% in the South, and 73% in the West.

Many children of low-income, recent immigrants have parents who lack a high school degree.

- 45% of children of low-income, recent immigrants live with parents who do not hold a high school degree, compared to 18% of children of low-income, native-born parents.
- Children of low-income, recent immigrants in the West are particularly likely to have parents with low education levels.⁴

Parental education among children of low-income, recent immigrants, by region, 2003



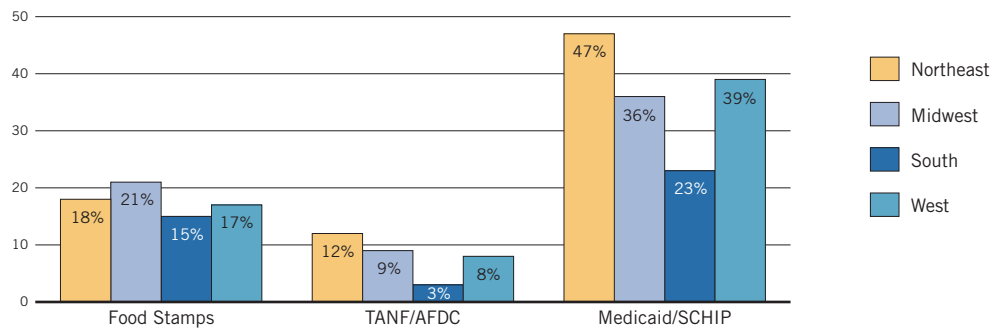
Almost half of children of low-income, recent immigrants are under age 6.

- 47% of children of low-income, recent immigrants are under 6 years old, compared to 36% of children of low-income, native-born parents.
- Children of low-income, recent immigrants are likely to be young in every region: 42% are under age 6 in the Northeast, 50% in the Midwest, 50% in the South, and 45% in the West.

Public benefit use is low among children of low-income, recent immigrants despite need.⁵

- 17% of children of low-income, recent immigrants live in households receiving food stamps, compared to 35% of children of low-income, native-born parents.
- 7% of children of low-income, recent immigrants live in households receiving TANF, compared to 13% of children of low-income, native-born parents.
- 34% of children of low-income, recent immigrants are insured by Medicaid or SCHIP, compared to 41% of children of low-income, native-born parents.
- Children of low-income, recent immigrants are unlikely to utilize public benefits, particularly in the South.⁶

Public benefits utilization among children of low-income, recent immigrants, by region, 2003



Policy Implications

The majority of children of low-income, recent immigrants, across regions, have employed, married parents. Marriage-related anti-poverty strategies and programs to increase labor force participation, the foci of recent TANF reauthorization bills, are unlikely to benefit this population. Programs that make work pay for low-income families, such as increasing the minimum wage, the protection and expansion of the Earned Income Tax Credit, and continued expansion of child care subsidies offer greater supports for children of low-income, recent immigrants.

Immigrant parents, in particular, would benefit from programs that increase English-language proficiency.⁷ TANF reauthorization provides a valuable opportunity to utilize English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) instruction to move vulnerable immigrant families toward economic security.⁸

The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA) restricted the majority of legal immigrants from participation in any federal means-tested benefits programs for five years after arrival in the United States. Since then, the federal government has partially restored access to selected programs (namely SSI and food stamps), for certain immigrants. Still, many legal immigrants who came to the United States after 1996 remain ineligible for public assistance programs.⁹

Working immigrants, like native-born citizens, are taxpayers. They help bear the costs of education, infrastructure, and programs for families in need. Recent immigrants, particularly those that have lived in the United States for 5 years or less, would benefit from a restored government safety net. If TANF and Medicaid benefits are not fully reestablished during PRWORA reauthorization, states could provide federally funded cash assistance and health care benefits to recently arrived immigrants.

Endnotes

Estimates in this fact sheet were prepared by Ayana Douglas-Hall and Heather Koball of NCCP, based on the U.S. Current Population Survey (CPS), 2004 Annual Social and Economic Supplement.

1. Recent immigrants are those who came to the United States within the past 10 years. This fact sheet uses the same definition of immigrants as the U.S. Census Bureau. Individuals born in the United States, in Puerto Rico, or in an outlying U.S. territory are defined as native-born. All other individuals are defined as immigrants. Only children living in households in which all parents are immigrants are included. Children living with mixed-status parents (i.e., with one native-born parent and one recent immigrant parent) are excluded. Analyses indicate that this group differs significantly on a number of demographic characteristics. They comprise less than 5% of the children living with low-income parents in the United States.
2. Low income is defined as twice the federal poverty level, or \$37,700 for a family of four in 2004.
3. The U.S. Census definition of regions is used in this fact sheet.
4. Percent of low-income, recent immigrant parents who do not hold a high school diploma is statistically significantly higher in the West, $p < .05$.
5. Rates of receipt of public benefits derived from CPS data are not comparable to those derived from administrative data sources (e.g., the figures reported in NCCP's 50-State Policies database).
6. Use of each public benefit is statistically significantly lower in the South, $p < .05$.
7. Fremstad, S. (2002). *Immigrants and welfare reauthorization*. Washington, DC: Center on Budget and Policy Priorities <www.cbpp.org/1-22-02tanf4.pdf>.
8. Singer, A. (2004). Welfare reform and immigrants: A policy review. In P. Kretsedemas & A. Aparicio (Eds.), *Immigrants, welfare reform, and the poverty of policy*. New York, NY: Praeger Publishers <www.brook.edu/dybdocroot/urban/pubs/200405_singer.pdf>.
9. Greenberg, M. & Rahmanou, H. (2004). Looking to the future: A commentary on children of immigrant families. In M. K. Shields (Ed.), *Children of immigrant families. The Future of Children*, 14(2), pp. 139-145 <www.futureofchildren.org/information2826/information_show.htm?doc_id=240619>.