

## INTRODUCTION

Immigration and immigrant policy is about immigrants, their families and the rest of us. It is about the meaning of American nationality and the foundation of national unity. It is about uniting persons from all over the world in a common civic culture.

The process of becoming an American is most simply called “Americanization,” which must always be a two-way street. All Americans, not just immigrants, should understand the importance of our shared civic culture to our national community. This final report of the U.S. Commission on Immigration Reform makes recommendations to further the goals of Americanization by setting out *immigrant* policies to help orient immigrants and their new communities, to improve educational programs that help immigrants and their children learn English and civics, and to reinforce the integrity of the naturalization process through which immigrants become U.S. citizens.

This report also makes recommendations regarding *immigration* policy. It reiterates and updates the conclusions we reached in three interim reports—on unlawful migration, legal immigration, and refugee and asylum policy—and makes additional recommendations for reforming immigration policies. Further, in this report, the Commission recommends ways to improve the structure and management of the federal agencies responsible for achieving the goals of immigration policy. It is our hope that this final report *Becoming An American: Immigration and Immigrant Policy*, along with our three interim reports, constitutes a full response to the work assigned the Commission by Congress: to assess the national interest in immigration and report how it can best be achieved.

## **MANDATE AND METHODS**

Public Law 101-649, the Immigration Act of 1990 [IMMACT], established this Commission to review and evaluate the impact of immigration policy. More specifically, the Commission must report on immigration's impact on: the need for labor and skills; employment and other aspects of the economy; social, demographic, and environmental conditions; and the foreign policy and national security interests of the United States. The Commission engaged in a wide variety of fact-finding activities to fulfill this mandate. Site visits were conducted throughout the United States. Commission members visited immigrant and refugee communities in California, Texas, Florida, New York, Massachusetts, Illinois, Arizona, Washington, Kansas, Virginia, Washington, DC, Puerto Rico and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands. Some Commission and staff members also visited such major source countries as Mexico, the Dominican Republic, Cuba, Haiti, and the Philippines. To increase our understanding of international refugee policy issues, members and staff of the Commission visited Bosnia, Croatia, Germany, and Kenya, and consulted with Geneva-based officials from the U.N. High Commission for Refugees and the International Organization for Migration. We held more than forty public hearings, consultations with government and private sector officials, and expert roundtable discussions.

## **TODAY'S IMMIGRANTS**

The effects of immigration are numerous, complex, and varied. Immigrants contribute in many ways to the United States: to its vibrant and diverse communities; to its lively and participatory democracy; to its vital intellectual and cultural life; to its renowned job-creating entrepreneurship and marketplaces; and to its family values and hard-work ethic. However, there are costs as well as benefits from today's immigration. Those workers most at risk in

### Immigrant Admissions by Major Category: FYs 1992-1996

Category of Admission	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>810,635</b>	<b>880,014</b>	<b>798,394</b>	<b>716,194</b>	<b>909,959</b>
<b>SUBJECT TO THE NUMERICAL CAP</b>	<b>655,541</b>	<b>719,701</b>	<b>662,029</b>	<b>593,234</b>	<b>771,604</b>
<b>FAMILY-BASED IMMIGRANTS</b>	<b>502,995</b>	<b>539,209</b>	<b>497,682</b>	<b>460,653</b>	<b>595,540</b>
Immediate Relatives of U.S. citizens	235,484	255,059	249,764	220,360	350,192
Spouses and children	170,720	192,631	193,394	171,978	283,592
Parents	64,764	62,428	56,370	48,382	66,600
Children born abroad to alien residents	2,116	2,030	1,883	1,894	1,658
Family-sponsored immigrants	213,123	226,776	211,961	238,122	293,751
Unmarried sons/daughters of U.S. citizens	12,486	12,819	13,181	15,182	20,885
Spouses and children of LPRs	90,486	98,604	88,673	110,960	145,990
Sons and daughters of LPRs	27,761	29,704	26,327	33,575	36,559
Married sons/daughters of U.S. citizens	22,195	23,385	22,191	20,876	25,420
Siblings of U.S. citizens	60,195	62,264	61,589	57,529	64,897
Legalization dependents	52,272	55,344	34,074	277	184
<b>EMPLOYMENT-BASED IMMIGRANTS</b>	<b>116,198</b>	<b>147,012</b>	<b>123,291</b>	<b>85,336</b>	<b>117,346</b>
Priority workers	5,456	21,114	21,053	17,339	27,469
Professionals w/ adv. deg. or of advanced ability	58,401	29,468	14,432	10,475	18,436
Skilled, professionals, other workers, (CSPA)	47,568	87,689	76,956	50,245	62,674
Skilled, professionals, other workers	47,568	60,774	55,659	46,032	62,273
Chinese Student Protection Act (CSPA)	X	26,915	21,297	4,213	401
Special immigrants	4,063	8,158	10,406	6,737	7,831
Investors	59	583	444	540	936
Professionals or highly skilled (Old 3rd)	340	X	X	X	X
Needed skilled or unskilled workers (Old 6th)	311	X	X	X	X
<b>DIVERSITY PROGRAMS</b>	<b>36,348</b>	<b>33,480</b>	<b>41,056</b>	<b>47,245</b>	<b>58,718</b>
Diversity permanent	X	X	X	40,301	58,174
Diversity transition	33,911	33,468	41,056	6,994	544
Nationals of adversely affected countries	1,557	10	X	X	X
Natives of underrepresented countries	880	2	X	X	X
<b>NOT SUBJECT TO THE NUMERICAL CAP</b>	<b>155,094</b>	<b>160,313</b>	<b>136,365</b>	<b>122,960</b>	<b>138,323</b>
Amerasians	17,253	11,116	2,822	939	954
Cuban/Haitian Entrants	99	62	47	42	29
Parolees, Soviet and Indochinese	13,661	15,772	8,253	3,120	2,283
Refugees and Asylees	117,037	127,343	121,434	114,632	128,367
Refugee adjustments	106,379	115,539	115,451	106,795	118,345
Asylee adjustments	10,658	11,804	5,983	7,837	10,022
Registered Nurses and their families	3,572	2,178	304	69	16
Registry, entered prior to 1/1/72	1,293	938	667	466	356
Other	2,179	2,904	2,838	3,692	6,318

Note: X = Not Applicable. Excludes persons granted LPR status under the provisions of the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986.  
Source: Immigration and Naturalization Service, Statistics Division.

our restructuring economy—low-skilled workers in production and service jobs—are those who directly compete with today’s low-skilled immigrants. Further, immigration presents special challenges to certain states and local communities that disproportionately bear the fiscal and other costs of incorporating newcomers.

## Characteristics of Immigrants

In FY 1996 (the last year for which data are available), more than 900,000 immigrants came to the United States from 206 nations, for a variety of reasons and with a diverse set of personal characteristics. Not surprisingly, the characteristics of immigrants from different sending countries vary, as do their effects on the U.S. There are also differences between immigrants admitted under different classes of admission. These differences generally reflect the statutory provisions that guide admissions. [See Appendix for description of IMMACT’s more specific provisions and its effects.]

### 1996

#### Top Ten Countries of Origin of Legal Immigrants

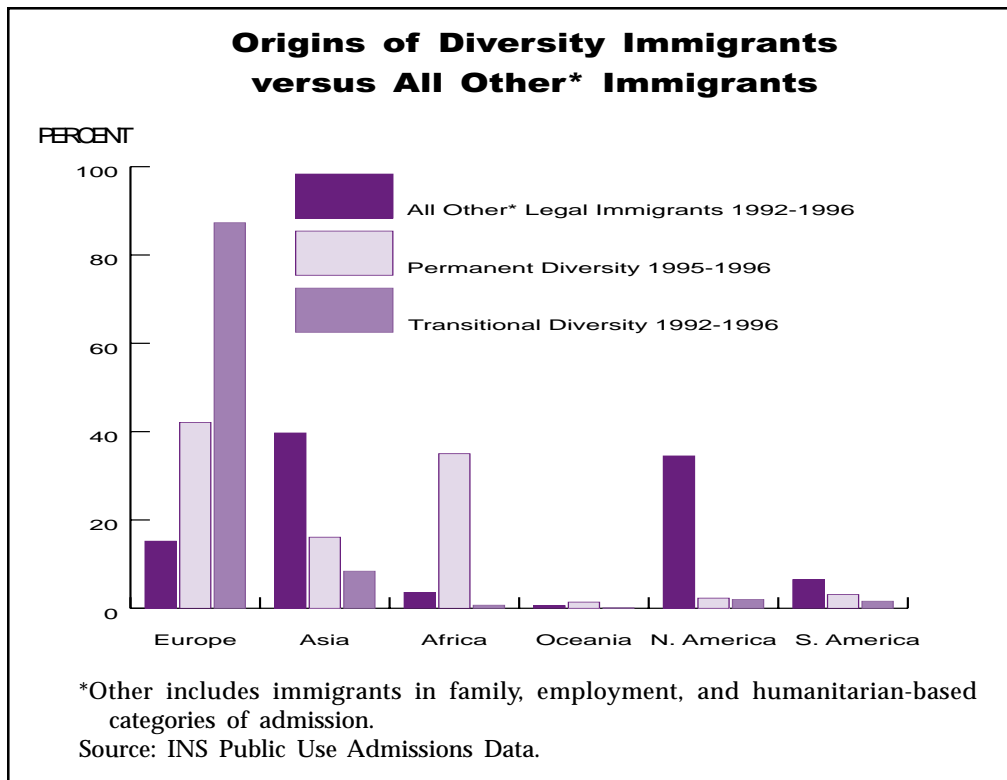
Mexico	159,731
Philippines	55,778
India	44,781
Vietnam	42,006
Mainland China	41,662
Dominican Republic	39,516
Cuba	26,415
Ukraine	21,051
Russia	19,646
Jamaica	19,029

Source: INS FY 1996  
Public Use Admissions Data.

**Places of Origin.** Asia and North America (i.e., Mexico, Canada, the Caribbean, and Central America) remain the sending regions with the largest share of immigrants. Mexico remains the largest sending country and its share of total legal immigrants to the U.S. increased from an average of 12 percent in the 1980s to more than 13 percent in FY 1994 and up to 18 percent in FY 1996. The effects of the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 [IRCA], which resulted in the legalization of about two million formerly illegal Mexican residents, explains this trend. Even though the special admission category for the spouses of legalized aliens’ dependents has been discontinued, Mexico benefits from the IMMACT’s removal of per-country limits on the numerically limited spouse and children class of admission (FB-2A).

IMMACT established a transitional and a permanent “diversity” category for countries whose admission numbers were adversely

affected by the Immigration Act of 1965. The transitional program was in effect from FY 1992 to 1994, but unused visas were carried over through FY 1996. The permanent program went into effect in FY 1995. European countries benefitted the most from the transitional program, which mandated that as many as 40 percent of the visas could go to nationals of Ireland. Actual Irish admissions reached only 35 percent, with Polish immigrants accounting for an even larger share (38 percent). Under the permanent diversity program, 42 percent of the immigrants came from European countries and 35 percent came from Africa. The effect on African admissions is particularly noteworthy as Africans account for less than 1 percent of immigrants in other admission categories.



**1996:****Top Ten  
Intended States  
of Residence  
of Legal  
Immigrants**

California 199,221  
 New York 153,731  
 Texas 82,229  
 Florida 79,067  
 New Jersey 63,162  
 Illinois 42,154  
 Massachusetts 23,017  
 Virginia 21,329  
 Maryland 20,683  
 Washington 18,718

Source: INS FY 1996  
 Public Use Admissions Data.

**Top Ten  
Intended  
Metro Areas  
of Residence  
of Legal  
Immigrants**

New York 133,168  
 Los Angeles 64,285  
 Miami 41,527  
 Chicago 39,989  
 Washington DC 34,327  
 Houston 21,387  
 Boston 18,726  
 San Diego 18,226  
 San Francisco 18,171  
 Newark 17,939

Source:  
[http://www.ins.usdoj.gov/  
 stats/annual/fy96/997.html](http://www.ins.usdoj.gov/stats/annual/fy96/997.html)

**Intended U.S. Destinations.** Immigrants in FY 1996 continue to select just a few states as their destinations. About two-thirds intend to reside in California, New York, Texas, Florida, and New Jersey. One-quarter of admissions are to California alone with another one-seventh to New York. New York City retains its place as the pre-eminent immigrant city with 15 percent of immigrants intending to go there. About 7 percent of immigrants intend to go to Los Angeles, and Miami and Chicago are in third place with about 4.5 percent each of the total. There has been little change in these leading destinations since IMMACT. However, some new destinations have emerged in recent years. For example, during the past decade, such midwestern and southern states as Mississippi, Nebraska, Kansas, Georgia and North Carolina saw more than a doubling of the number of immigrants intending to reside there. Although the numbers are significantly smaller than the more traditional destinations, absorbing more new immigrants can be a challenge for these newer destinations that often do not have the immigration-related infrastructure of the traditional receiving communities.

**Age.** Immigrants in FY 1996 remain young, with the largest proportion being in their later teens or twenties. A little more than one-fifth are children 15 years of age or younger, and another one-fifth are 45 years or older. More than one-half of family-based immigrants are younger than 30 years of age, reflecting the predominance of spouses and children. Because of beneficiaries, employment-based immigrants have just as many minor dependents age 15 years and younger as other groups, but more than two-fifths of these employment-based immigrants themselves are 30-44 years, the experienced and highly productive working ages. Diversity immigrants have a similar, yet somewhat younger, age distribution than other classes of admission. In contrast, and in large part due to those admitted as refugees from the former Soviet Union, humanitarian admissions tend to be somewhat older than other immigrants.

**Age Groups of 1996 Legal Immigrants  
(Principals and Derivative Beneficiaries)**

GROUP	ALL	FAMILY	EMPLOYMENT	DIVERSITY	HUMANITARIAN
15 yrs. & younger	22%	23%	20%	22%	20%
16 through 29 yrs.	31%	34%	23%	33%	27%
30 through 44 yrs.	27%	23%	44%	34%	24%
45 through 60 yrs.	15%	14%	12%	10%	21%
65 years & older	5%	5%	0%	1%	8%

Source: INS FY 1996 Public Use Admissions Data.

**Gender.** Females were 54 percent of admissions in FY 1996. There had been an essentially even balance of men and women during the decade of the 1980s. The increased share of females in the 1990s parallels the historical tendency toward more female immigrants throughout much of the post-World War II period. It also reflects the admission of the spouses of legalized aliens who were predominantly male. In FY 1996, family-based admissions were predominantly female (57 percent) and employment-based admissions (including beneficiaries) were evenly balanced by gender. Diversity (45 percent female) and humanitarian (48 percent female) admissions, in contrast, had more male immigrants. That a slight majority of FY 1996 humanitarian admissions were male is somewhat surprising given that worldwide refugee populations are disproportionately female.

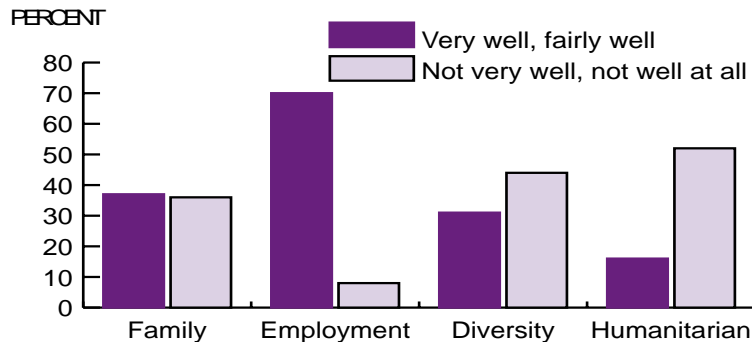
**English ability.** The Immigration and Naturalization Service [INS] admissions data do not include information on English language ability (or education, as discussed below). The following analysis draws instead on preliminary data from the New Immigrant Survey [NIS],<sup>1</sup> which studied a sample of immigrants admitted in FY 1996. The NIS is a pilot study designed to test the feasibility of a longi-

<sup>1</sup> Jasso, G.; Massey, D.S.; Rosenzweig, M.R.; Smith, J.P. 1997. The New Immigrant Survey [NIS] Pilot Study: Preliminary Results. Paper presented at the Joint Meeting of the Public Health Conference on Records and Statistics and the Data Users Conference, Washington, DC. (July.)

tudinal immigrant survey. Although the data are not yet published, analysis indicates that it offers promise of providing certain information about immigrants that has not previously been available.

The NIS, using the same measure as the U.S. Census, reports on the English language proficiency of adult legal immigrants who are 18 years and older. The initial results show that employment-based immigrants report the greatest English ability—70 percent of employment-based admissions report speaking at least fairly well and less than 10 percent speak very little or no English (the remainder report an “average” speaking ability). About 37 percent of family-based admissions report speaking English at least fairly well and an almost equal proportion report speaking little or no English. The diversity immigrants tend to report even less English ability, despite the requirement that they have at least a high school education. The humanitarian admissions trail the furthest behind in reported English language ability. Only 16 percent report speaking English at least fairly well, while more than 50 percent report speaking little or no English.

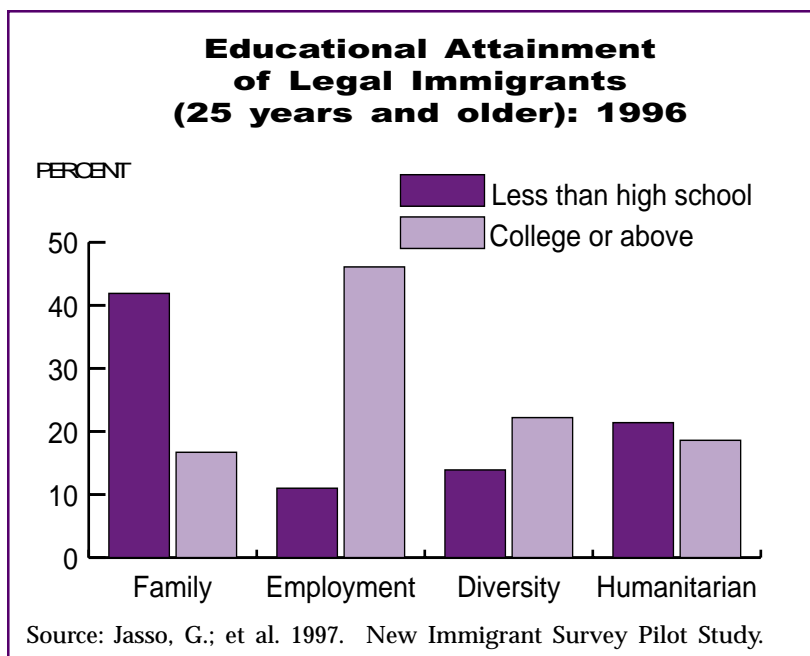
### English Language Proficiency among New Adult Immigrants (18 years and older): 1996



Source: Jasso, G.; et al. 1997. New Immigrant Survey Pilot Study.

**Education.** The years of schooling completed by immigrants is perhaps one of the most critical measures of skill level. The NIS provides our first indicators of years of education of adult legal immigrants at the time of their admission. As found in studies of foreign-born residents, the immigrants surveyed by the NIS tend to cluster at the higher or lower ends of the educational spectrum and differ significantly in their educational attainment by class of admission. Fully 46 percent of employment-based admissions have completed four years of college or a graduate degree. This figure includes principals and beneficiaries, making it likely that well-educated employment-based immigrants tend to have well-educated spouses. In contrast, just 17 percent of family-based immigrants 25 years and older have completed a college-level education while 42 percent have less than a high school education.

Diversity immigrants are required to have a high school education or two years of skilled work experience. The NIS data show that diversity immigrants tend to be better educated than family-based,



but not as well educated as employment-based immigrants. About 14 percent have not completed high school. They may be either principals who meet the work but not the education requirement or the spouses of the principals. Twenty-two percent of diversity immigrants have completed college or done graduate-level education, about the same proportion as among U.S. natives.<sup>2</sup>

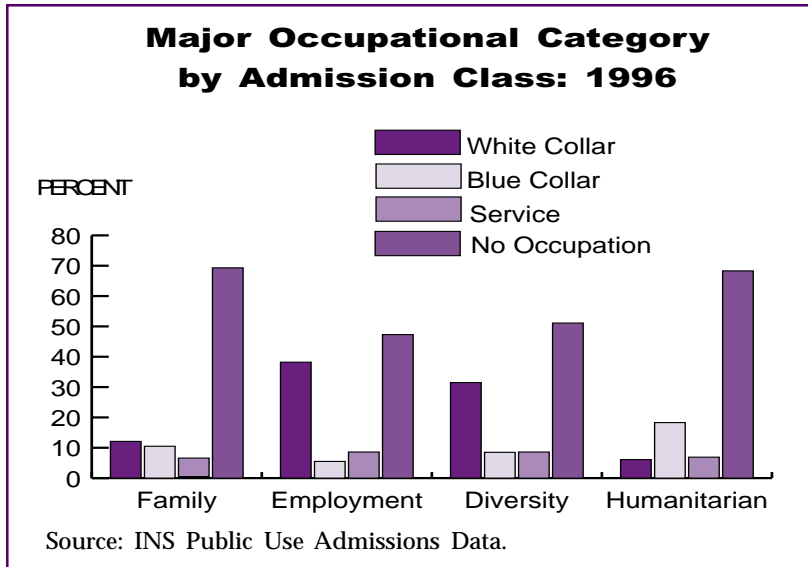
The humanitarian classes of admission are less well educated than the employment-based, but are better educated than family admissions. The large number of relatively well-educated persons admitted as refugees from the Soviet Union may partly explain this finding. About 21 percent have less than a high school education, while about 19 percent have college or higher degrees.

**Occupation.** Ultimately, the English and educational skills that immigrants have are reflected in their occupations. The INS admissions data, which we use here, have only crude occupational classifications. It imperfectly captures the difference between immigrants who adjust into legal permanent resident [LPR] status after working in a U.S. job for several years and those who report an occupation upon admission that tells us more about what the immigrant did at home than what they will do here.

Sixty-five percent of all immigrants in FY 1996 reported no occupation or being a “homemaker,” reflecting the fact that children, parents, and spouses are a large share of all admissions and most do not work at the time of entry.

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<sup>2</sup> The U.S. Current Population Survey [CPS] permits us to compare directly to the native-born, but the foreign-born data do not distinguish by admission status. The CPS data also include illegal aliens who have extremely low levels of education in the foreign-born category. See: Fix, M.; Passel, J.S. 1994. *Immigration and Immigrants: Setting the Record Straight*. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute. These figures for the diversity class of admission correspond to data on education collected by the U.S. Department of State for diversity immigrants only.



Nevertheless, occupational status faithfully reflects the legal requirements of the admission class—the proportion of all immigrants not reporting an occupation is greater among family and humanitarian admissions, about 70 percent of all immigrants in each category. By way of comparison, only about one-half of all employment and diversity admissions have no reported occupation.<sup>3</sup> The skills which immigrants bring to the United States are reflected in their type of occupations. Family and humanitarian immigrants are primarily blue-collar workers. In contrast, employment-based and permanent diversity immigrants are predominantly white-collar workers. These broad differences between the major classes of admission have changed only slightly over the past three decades.

IMMACT has had an effect on occupational distribution within these broad categories. To gauge its effects, a research paper prepared for

<sup>3</sup> The initial results from the NIS pilot show that about 40 percent of adult nonexempt family immigrants are not employed. Alternatively, more than 95 percent of employment-based principals are employed. The INS admission figures for “no occupation” include children and persons who are unemployed, retired, or for whom no information is given.

**FY 1996 Regular Admissions by Occupation:  
Predicted and Actual**

OCCUPATION	PREDICTED (WITHOUT IMMACT)	ACTUAL (WITH IMMACT)	EXCESS OF ACTUAL OVER PREDICTED
WHITE-COLLAR WORKERS			
Professional, Technical, and Kindred			
Health Professionals	10,244	18,986	85%
Other Professionals	9,231	19,477	111%
Technical & Specialty	22,115	33,117	50%
Executives	20,283	30,702	51%
Sales	12,943	13,002	0%
Administrative Support	19,437	19,807	2%
BLUE-COLLAR WORKERS			
Precision Production	21,028	20,116	-4%
Operators, Fabricators, & Laborers	37,702	53,936	43%
FARMING, FORESTRY, AND FISHING	12,251	12,588	3%
SERVICE	48,180	51,797	8%
TOTAL WITH OCCUPATION	165,234	221,731	34%
TOTAL WITHOUT OCCUPATION	261,694	498,583	91%
GRAND TOTAL	426,928	730,314	69%

Note: Predicted numbers in FY 1996 are based on linear projections (from the years between 1972 and 1991), and are kept within numerical limits on nonexempt categories. Humanitarian admissions are not included.

Source: Greenwood, M.; Ziel, F.A. 1997. *The Impact of the Immigration Act of 1990 on U.S. Immigration*. Washington, DC: U.S. Commission on Immigration Reform.

the Commission calculated simple linear projections for all of the admission categories now subject to the worldwide ceiling on admissions. Data from FY 1972-1991 were analyzed and the trends identified, then projected forward to FY 1996. This analysis, therefore, paints a “what-if” picture of what today’s immigration might have looked like if past trends had continued unaffected by IMMACT [see table above].

The actual total number of admissions under the worldwide ceiling in FY 1996 was 720,314 which—compared to the projected figure of

426,929—was 69 percent greater than would have been expected without IMMACT. Admissions were greater than the projected figure because IMMACT increased numerically-limited family, employment, and diversity admissions. The numerically-exempt admissions for the immediate relatives of U.S. citizens would have grown between 1992 and 1996 even without IMMACT. This analysis does not include humanitarian admissions.

Of immigrants who reported an occupation, the actual admissions in FY 1996 were 221,731 which—compared to the projected figure of 165,234—was 34 percent greater than would have been expected if IMMACT had not gone into effect. By contrast, nonworking immigrants experienced a 91 percent increase of actual over projected. This finding is not surprising as FY 1996 family admissions were significantly higher than would have been permissible under previous law. In part this was because IMMACT permitted unused FY 1995 employment-based numbers to be transferred to the FY 1996 family categories. In combination with a growth in immediate relatives (including those who would normally have been admitted in FY 1995 but were caught in processing delays), the additional visas meant more spouses and minor children entered. These immigrants are the least likely to be employed.

As might be anticipated, IMMACT's new emphasis on admitting highly-educated and skilled persons led to growth in professional occupations among those who reported an occupation. As stated above, there was an overall 34 percent increase in persons reporting an occupation. This increase was not evenly distributed, however. The number of health professionals, for example, was projected to be 10,244, but at 18,985 was 85 percent greater. The number of executives also shows a higher than expected increase. Interestingly, projections not shown here indicate that within the employment-based category, family members (beneficiaries) of the principals show the greatest growth in professional occupations. This suggests that when principals with more skills are admitted, they

bring with them spouses who are, likewise, more skilled than in the past. Further, projections not shown here indicate that the skill requirement for permanent diversity immigrants makes for more highly-skilled admissions from eligible countries. In short, IMMACT increased both the numbers of more skilled admissions and their share of immigrants admitted.

Most nonprofessional white-collar and blue-collar occupations show very little or no growth over what might have occurred without IMMACT. The one notable exception is a greater-than-expected increase in the number of “Operators, Fabricators, and Laborers.” There were 53,936 admissions in these occupations compared to the 37,702 that were projected. As the employment-based access for persons with these occupations is highly limited, it appears that much of this increase is attributable to family-based admissions. It is unclear from the data, however, why this pattern has emerged.

**Earnings.** According to the NIS survey, the median earnings of all male immigrants admitted in 1996 was \$15,600 and for women was \$11,960, lower than the median earnings for natives. Compared to the earnings in their last country of residence, male immigrants experienced a 59 percent increase and women a 45 increase in earnings upon admission to the United States. Differences in earnings are, as should be expected, substantial by admission class. Many employment-based immigrants earn a median income of \$36,400 on the date of their admission to LPR status, while the sibling or spouse of an LPR earns \$11,750 and the spouse of a citizen earns \$18,200.

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<sup>4</sup> National Research Council. (Smith, J.P.; Edmonston, B. eds.). 1997. *The New Americans: Economic, Demographic, and Fiscal Effects of Immigration*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

## Effects on the Economy

An independent evaluation of immigration by a panel of eminent social scientists at the National Research Council [NRC], sponsored by the Commission,<sup>4</sup> found that immigration has a positive economic impact on the national level. However, the NRC panel's findings confirm the by now commonplace conclusion that there are tangible costs to certain sectors of the labor market and certain communities. This reinforces the Commission's conclusions on the need for a well-regulated system of immigrant admissions, as well as the need for attention to means of improving integration and reducing friction between newcomers and established residents.

The NRC panel estimates that immigrants may add \$1-10 billion directly to the national economy each year, a small but positive amount in a \$7.6 trillion economy. Many consumers, business owners, and investors benefit from the immigrant labor force. Recent newcomers may be willing to work for lower wages than other U.S. workers, although, with the exception of many immigrants with less than a high school education, most immigrants tend to earn as much as natives after a decade. Many others in the economy benefit, particularly those who do work that is complementary to that performed by immigrants. Immigrants provide the labor that has kept viable entire segments of certain labor-intensive industries, such as garment and shoemaking. Many immigrant entrepreneurs expand trade with foreign countries from which they come, and the language and cultural expertise of many immigrant employees are valuable to U.S. companies doing business abroad.

Immigrants also contribute to the economic revitalization of the communities in which they live. As middle-class natives have left the

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<sup>5</sup> Muller, T. 1993. *Immigrants and the American City*. New York: New York University Press. Winnick, L. 1990. *New People in Old Neighborhoods: The Role of New Immigrants in Rejuvenating New York's Communities*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

inner cities, immigrant newcomers have settled, established businesses, bought homes, and otherwise invested in these areas. Gateway cities, such as New York and Los Angeles, have benefitted particularly from this urban renewal. At the same time, these cities face new challenges related to immigration. Growing immigrant communities require local school systems (some of which may have otherwise faced declining enrollments) to provide sufficient classroom space and teachers. They must also develop programs to teach children who are without English skills or prior education. Overcrowded housing, drug trafficking, gang violence, sweatshops, and public health problems also may be found in many of these inner-city communities.<sup>5</sup>

Immigration particularly affects certain U.S. workers. The NRC panel finds that workers with less than twelve years of education are the most adversely affected by low-skilled immigrant workers. Immigrants may have reduced substantially the wages of high school dropouts, who are about one-tenth of the workforce, by 5 percent nationwide. This is a sizable impact on a group that was already poorly paid before the loss in real earnings it experienced over the past two decades. Most often it is the foreign-born worker, particularly in labor markets with large numbers of immigrants who experience the greatest competition.<sup>6</sup> While the education and skill level of most U.S. workers differs significantly from those of most immigrants (and therefore they are not competing for the same jobs), the new arrivals are often direct substitutes for immigrants who arrived a short time before them.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Greenwood, M.; Tienda, M. 1997. U.S. Impacts of Mexican Immigration. Team Report to Mexico/United States Binational Study on Migration. Greenwood, J.; Hunt, G.L. 1995. Economic Effects of Immigrants on Native and Foreign-Born Workers: Complementarity, Sstitutability, and Other Channels of Influence. *Southern Economic Journal*. 61:4 1096.

<sup>7</sup> Waldinger, R. 1996. *Still the Promised City? African Americans and New Immigrants in Postindustrial New York*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. Waldinger, R.; Bozorgmehr, M. 1996. *Ethnic Los Angeles*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

The evidence on the impact of immigration on native-born minorities nationwide is less clear. The NRC concluded that in the aggregate, the economic opportunities of African Americans are not reduced by immigration because African Americans and immigrants tend to be in different labor markets and reside in different cities. Other research finds small, adverse effects on African Americans.<sup>8</sup> These effects are found most strongly when low-skilled minority workers compete with low-skilled immigrant workers in the same industries and the same geographic areas.

The fiscal effects of immigration also are complicated. Generally, the impacts on the federal government are favorable compared to those on state and local governments. Most studies show that at the federal level, the foreign-born pay more in taxes than they receive in services. When spread across all taxpayers, this characteristic represents a very small, but positive, benefit. At the local level, however, immigrants often represent a net fiscal cost, in some cases a substantial one. Research on the resident illegal alien population finds the clearest examples of fiscal costs to states and localities.<sup>9</sup> In general, much of the negative effect is related to school costs that are considerable because of the larger size of many immigrant families. Although funds spent on education may be considered an investment, not just a fiscal burden, the payoff is not realized for many years.

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<sup>8</sup> Hamermesh, D.S.; Bean, F.D. (eds.) 1998 forthcoming. *Help or Hinderance? Immigration and Its Economic Implications for African Americans*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

<sup>9</sup> Taylor, E.; Martin, P.; Fix, M. 1997. *Poverty Amidst Prosperity: Immigration and the Changing Face of Rural California*. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute Press. U.S. General Accounting Office. 1995. *Illegal Aliens: National Cost Estimates Vary Widely*. Washington, DC. 6. Clark, R.; Passel, J.S.; Zimmermann, W.N.; Fix, M.E. 1994. *Fiscal Impacts of Undocumented Aliens: Selected Estimates for Seven States*. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute Press.

Education affects fiscal impacts in a second way. Ultimately, the economic success and fiscal contributions of immigrants are determined by their educational level. The NRC panel found that immigrants who complete high school and beyond generally represent a more favorable balance of fiscal costs and contributions than do those with little or no education. Even over their lifetimes, immigrants without education are unlikely to contribute sufficient tax revenues to offset their use of services. Both groups of immigrants tend to use public services in a similar fashion, particularly as related to the schooling of their children, but the more educated immigrants tend to earn more and pay higher taxes.

Educational differences also explain why certain states and localities are more adversely affected by immigration than are others. California immigrants represent a sizeable tax burden (estimated at almost \$1,200 per native-headed family per year) while New Jersey immigrants represent a more modest tax burden (estimated to be \$232 per native-headed family per year). The difference can be explained largely by the differences in the average educational level of the immigrants residing in these states.<sup>10</sup>

English language ability also affects the economic success and fiscal impacts of immigrants. In the 1990 Census, 47 percent of the foreign-born more than 5 years of age reported not speaking English “very well.” Individuals with poor English language skills tend to be confined to the lowest levels of the U.S. job market. By contrast, ability in spoken English markedly improves immigrants’ earnings, especially for Hispanic and Asian adult immigrants.<sup>11</sup> English read-

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<sup>10</sup> See: Espenshade, T. 1997. *Keys to Successful Immigration: Implications of the New Jersey Experience*. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute Press.

<sup>11</sup> Chiswick, B.R. (ed.). 1992. *Immigration, Language, and Ethnicity*. Washington, DC: The AEI Press. 229-96.

<sup>12</sup> Rivera-Batiz, F.L. 1992. English Language Proficiency and the Earnings of Young Immigrants in the U.S. Labor Market. *Policy Studies Review* 11:165-75.

ing comprehension also has been found to improve the earnings of young immigrant adults.<sup>12</sup>

## **Population Growth and Natural Resources**

In recent years there have been about 800,000 legal admissions and an additional estimated 200,000 to 300,000 unauthorized entries, but the net annual increase of the foreign-born population is about 700,000 each year due to return migration and mortality.<sup>13</sup> In 1996, the foreign-born population was 24.6 million, 9.3 percent of the U.S. population. Recent arrivals make up a large share of the resident foreign-born population; about 28 percent arrived after 1990, and an additional 35 percent during the 1980s.

It is estimated that international migration makes up somewhere between one-quarter and one-third of net annual population increase. Given current demographic trends and noting that much can happen to alter long-range forecasts, the U.S. Census Bureau projects the population to increase by 50 percent between 1995 and 2050. Immigration is likely to become a larger proportion of the net increase.<sup>14</sup>

The NRC report also presented estimates of population growth. It found that *without* immigration since 1950, the U.S. population would have been 14 percent smaller than its 1995 size of 263 million. The NRC projected the population to the year 2050 after making certain assumptions about mortality, fertility, and rates of group inter-mar-

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<sup>13</sup> National Research Council. 1997. *The New Americans: Economic, Demographic and Fiscal Effects on Immigration*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

<sup>14</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census. 1996. *Current Population Reports*. (Feb.). Edmonston, B.; Passel, J.S. (eds.). 1994. *Immigration and Ethnicity: The Integration of American's Newest Arrivals*. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute Press.

riage. According to the projection based on these assumptions, the U.S. population would increase by 124 million persons to 387 million, with immigration responsible for two-thirds (82 million) of the increase. Of this 82 million, 45 million are immigrants and an additional 37 million increase is due to their higher assumed fertility.

Immigration affects the age structure as well as the overall population. The NRC panel projected that under current immigration policy, kindergarten through grade eight school enrollment in 2050 would be 17 percent higher than it was in 1995. High school enrollment would rise from 14.0 million in 1995 to 20.3 million in 2050. Immigration also has small effects on the proportion of the population that is elderly. No matter which immigration policies are adopted, according to the NRC, the number of persons aged 65 years and older will double between 1995 and 2050. However, the proportion of older people in the total population will be somewhat smaller with immigration.

The NRC panel's projection of the ethnic distribution of the U.S. population in 2050 shows the Hispanic population increasing from 10 to 25 percent and the Asian population from 3 to 8 percent of the population. These projections are dependent on today's rates of group intermarriage and how persons report their ethnicity. It may be that, like children of immigrants who arrived in the last century, descendants of today's immigrants will choose to report their ethnicity as being different from that of their parents, and that today's ethnic categories will not accurately describe tomorrow's populations.

What broader implications do these growth figures have? Some analysts argue that high immigration levels mean an abundant supply of youthful workers who will be a substantial spur to the economy. From this perspective, population growth is an engine for technological progress and the means to solve environmental problems, effectively spawning change out of necessity. Proponents of

this view argue that human resourcefulness has dealt with population growth in the past and the solutions often have left us better off. Adding more people may “cause us more problems, but at the same time there will be more people to solve these problems.”<sup>15</sup>

Others are concerned about the negative consequences of population growth, particularly on the environment, infrastructure, and services.<sup>16</sup> They see population growth as imposing pressures on our natural resources and quality of life, raising special concerns in the arid regions of the southwest or sites of industries relocating to the south central states.<sup>17</sup> Those concerned argue that our future well-being depends upon both conservation, and stabilizing population growth.<sup>18</sup>

This debate primarily concerns total U.S. population growth, which is strongly influenced by immigration. Still, there is little or no information about whether immigrants have *differential* impacts distinct from the population increase they produce on the U.S. environment.<sup>19</sup>

The Commission did find that rapid inflows of immigrants can pose difficulties for those who must plan for community growth. Schools sometimes receive large numbers of new immigrant students that had not been planned for. Housing and infrastructure development

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<sup>15</sup> Simon, J. 1994. More People, Greater Wealth, More Resources, Healthier Environment. *Economic Affairs* (April) 22-29.

<sup>16</sup> Beck, R. 1994. *Re-Charting America's Future: Responses to Arguments Against Stabilizing U.S. Population and Limiting Immigration*. Petoskey, MI: The Social Contract Press.

<sup>17</sup> U.S. Commission on Immigration Reform. 1995. Mesa, Arizona U.S. Commission on Immigration Reform roundtable. U.S. Commission on Immigration Reform 1997. Site visit to Garden City, Kansas.

<sup>18</sup> Abernethy, V. 1994. *Population Politics*. New York: Insight Press.

<sup>19</sup> Kraly, E.P. 1995. *U.S. Immigration and the Environment: Scientific Research and Analytic Issues*. Washington, DC: U.S. Commission on Immigration Reform.

may not be adequate in affected urban and rural communities.<sup>20</sup> New immigrant destinations, sometimes to areas that have not had new immigrants for a century or more, can put particular stress on communities that have experienced rapid growth in the past decade.

### **Foreign Policy and National Security Interests**

Immigration matters frequently are intertwined with foreign policy and national security. Today, migration and refugee issues are matters of high international politics engaging the heads of state involved in defense, internal security, and external relations.<sup>21</sup> International migration intersects with foreign policy in two principal ways. The U.N. Security Council has acknowledged that migration can pose threats to international peace and security through economic or social instability or humanitarian disasters. Migration can also build positive relations with other countries and thereby promote national security. As a consequence, migration itself requires bilateral and international attention to help address the causes and consequences of movements of people.

During the Cold War, a foreign policy priority was the destabilizing of Communist regimes. Refugee policy was often a tool to achieve that strategic goal, for instance, by encouraging the flow of migrants from Eastern Europe or Cuba. Elsewhere, political, economic, and military involvement in Southeast Asia and the Dominican Republic had significant migration consequences, as large numbers of Southeast Asians and Dominicans ended up as refugees and immigrants

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<sup>20</sup> Taylor, E.; Martin, P.; Fix, M. 1997. *Poverty Amidst Prosperity: Immigration and the Changing Face of Rural California*. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute Press.

<sup>21</sup> Weiner, M. 1992. Security, Stability, and International Migration. *International Security* 17:3 (Winter) 91-126.

to the U.S. These foreign policy priorities generally have had significant immigration consequences years later.

Alternatively, immigration concerns sometimes have played a significant role in U.S. foreign policy, especially when mass movements to the U.S. are feared. A stated rationale for U.S. Central-American policy in the 1980s was to prevent a mass movement that would occur if anti-American Marxist dictatorships were established in Central America. One of the explicit reasons for the military intervention in Haiti in 1994 was to restrain the flow of migrants onto U.S. shores. And, although the U.S. does not officially maintain relations with Cuba, migration concerns gained priority over diplomatic ones leading to negotiations on the Cuban Migration Agreement and to a reversal of policy regarding the interdiction of Cuban migrants.

Some observers believe that environmental causes now rival economic and political instability as a major source of forced migration throughout the world. There are estimates that as many as one-hundred million people may be displaced, in part, because of degradation of land and natural resources. "That will increase the pressure to migrate to places like the United States."<sup>22</sup> The pervasive deterioration of Mexico's rural drylands may contribute to between 700,000 and 900,000 people a year leaving rural areas.<sup>23</sup> Environmental degradation in Mexico, Haiti, and Central America also are believed to have migration consequences for the U.S. Often environmental problems intersect with other causes. One researcher argues that migrants from Haiti may be considered "environmental refugees" because the root causes of their migrations are land deg-

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<sup>22</sup> Schwartz, M.L.; Notini, J. 1994. *Desertification and Migration: Mexico and the United States*. Washington, DC: U.S. Commission on Immigration Reform.

<sup>23</sup> National Heritage Institute. 1997. *Environmental Degradation and Migration: The U.S./Mexico Case Study*. Report prepared for the U.S. Commission on Immigration Reform.

radation and the Haitian government's unwillingness to act in the interest of the general population."<sup>24</sup>

Stabilizing economic growth and democracy may be an effective means of reducing migration pressures. The Commission for the Study of International Migration and Cooperative Economic Development<sup>25</sup> concluded that, over the long run of a generation or more, trade and investment are likely to reduce migration pressures. Supporters of the North American Free Trade Agreement [NAFTA] argued that NAFTA-related development eventually will reduce unauthorized Mexican migration. The U.S. has provided the reinstalled democratically-elected government of Haiti with a great deal of rehabilitation assistance that should aid the stability of that country.

## CONCLUSION

Properly-regulated immigration and immigrant policy serves the national interest by ensuring the entry of those who will contribute most to our society and helping lawful newcomers adjust to life in the United States. It must give due consideration to shifting economic realities. A well-regulated system sets priorities for admission; facilitates nuclear family reunification; gives employers access to a global labor market while protecting U.S. workers; helps to generate jobs and economic growth; and fulfills our commitment to resettle refugees as one of several elements of humanitarian protection of the persecuted.

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<sup>24</sup> Catanese, A. 1990/91. *Haiti's Refugees: Political, Economic, Environmental*. (Paper 17). San Francisco: Natural Heritage Institute; Indianapolis: Universities Field Staff International.

<sup>25</sup> The Commission for the Study of International Migration and Cooperative Economic Development. 1990. *Unauthorized Migration: An Economic Development Response*. Washington, DC.