



Research Note

What We Learned from the Program for the
International Assessment of Adult Competencies:

Skills and Economic Outcomes of U.S. Immigrants and Their U.S.-Born Offspring

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What We Learned From the Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies: Skills and Economic Outcomes of U.S. Immigrants and Their U.S.-Born Offspring

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Introduction

The United States has been a leading global destination for immigrants for decades. More than 46.2 million immigrants reside in the United States,¹ and their successful integration plays a pivotal role in bolstering the nation’s robust economy, fostering innovation, and enriching its vibrant culture.² As the United States confronts the challenge of low birth rates and an aging population, immigrants and their U.S.-born offspring—collectively referred to as the immigrant-origin population (see exhibit 1 for definitions)—assume even greater significance. As of 2022, this population stood at 87.8 million and accounted for 27 percent of U.S. adults.³ According to government projections, they will be the sole source of net growth in the U.S. working-age population over the next decade.⁴

Exhibit 1. Definitions of key terms

Immigrants (used interchangeably with “foreign born”) – In the context of the Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), the term “immigrants” refers to individuals who were not born in the United States. Immigrants include naturalized U.S. citizens, lawful permanent residents (or green-card holders), refugees and asylees, certain legal nonimmigrants (including those on student, work, or other temporary visas), and persons residing in the country without authorization.

U.S. born – The term “U.S. born” refers to people born in the United States.

Immigrant generation/immigrant-origin population – The immigrant/immigrant-origin population comprises two generations. The first generation refers to the foreign-born individuals. The second generation refers to individuals born in the United States to one or more immigrant parents. (Individuals born in the United States to second-generation, U.S.-born parents are referred to as the third or higher generation.)

Foundational skills – These refer to the skills tested in the PIAAC, such as literacy, numeracy, and problem solving in technology-rich environments (digital skills for short).

¹ Author’s tabulation of the U.S. Census Bureau’s 2022 American Community Survey.

² National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. (2015). *The Integration of Immigrants into American Society*. The National Academies Press. <https://nap.nationalacademies.org/catalog/21746/the-integration-of-immigrants-into-american-society>.

³ U.S. Census Bureau. (2022). Table 4.1. Population by Sex, Age, and Generation: 2022. *Foreign-Born: 2022 Current Population Survey Detailed Tables*. <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2022/demo/foreign-born/cps-2022.html>.

⁴ Holzer, H.J. (2019). Immigration and the U.S. Labor Market: A Look Ahead. Migration Policy Institute. <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/immigration-us-labor-market-look-ahead>; Orrenius, P.M., Zavodny, M., and Gullo, S. (2020). *How Does Immigration Fit into the Future of the U.S. Labor Market?* IZA Institute of Labor Economics. <https://www.iza.org/publications/dp/13013/how-does-immigration-fit-into-the-future-of-the-us-labor-market>.

These evolving demographic and labor force dynamics raise fundamental questions about whether immigrant-origin adults have the essential skills required to fully participate in the U.S. knowledge-based economy and how these skills translate into economic outcomes such as earnings and occupational status. They also raise questions about the policy measures needed to (a) harness the strengths that immigrant-origin adults bring and (b) support those who encounter barriers to labor market integration.

Addressing these questions is imperative not only for the individual economic well-being of immigrants but also for the enduring prosperity and global economic competitiveness of the nation. One unique source of empirical evidence concerning the critical skills of working-age adults—including immigrants—that encompasses literacy, numeracy, and digital competencies is the international survey known as the Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC).⁵ This research note highlights major findings from 24 national and international reports and research studies based on both PIAAC and other datasets that explore the skills and education profiles of immigrant-origin adults as well as how these skills relate to their economic outcomes, including employment and wages. PIAAC's U.S. results generally align with other U.S. studies exploring immigrant integration outcomes. They underscore the diversity in characteristics and outcomes among the immigrant-origin population, presenting both reasons for optimism and areas of concern.

What Are the Skills of Immigrant-Origin Adults?

U.S. adults scored below the OECD averages on numeracy and digital skills; however, immigrants' lower proficiency does not entirely explain U.S. adults' relatively poor performance on the PIAAC.

According to the most recently available 2017 PIAAC assessment results, U.S. adults, overall, scored higher than the PIAAC OECD average score in literacy but lower in both numeracy and digital problem-solving skills.⁶ Across all three domains, the United States lagged significantly behind top performing countries such as Japan, Finland, and Australia.⁷ Nevertheless, earlier PIAAC research shows that even when excluding immigrants' results, U.S. adults demonstrated lower proficiency levels compared with adults in OECD countries overall.⁸

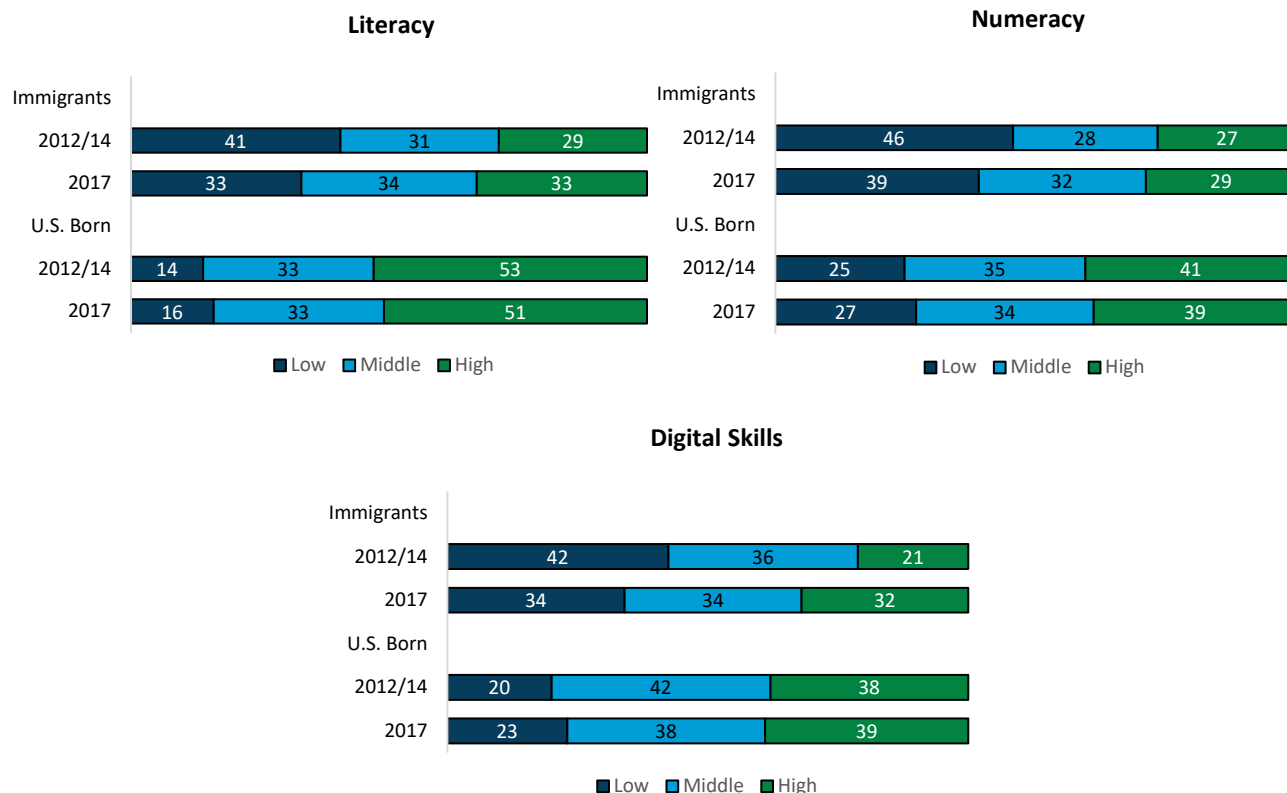
⁵ Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. (2016). Skills Matter: Further Results from the Survey of Adult Skills. <https://www.oecd.org/skills/skills-matter-9789264258051-en.htm>; Hanushek, E., Schwerdt, G., Wiederhold, S., and Woessmann, L. (2015). Returns to Skills around the World: Evidence from PIAAC. *European Economic Review*, 73: 103–130. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0014292114001433>.

⁶ Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. (2017). *United States: Adult Skills (Survey of Adult Skills, PIAAC)*. <https://gpseducation.oecd.org/CountryProfile?plotter=h5&primaryCountry=USA&treshold=5&topic=AS>.

⁷ National Center for Education Statistics. (2020). *U.S. Performance in International Context*. https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/piaac/international_context.asp.

⁸ Batalova, J., and Fix, M. (2015). Through an Immigrant Lens: PIAAC Assessment of the Competencies of Adults in the United States. Migration Policy Institute. <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/through-immigrant-lens-piaac-assessment-competencies-adults-united-states>; Lind, P., and Mellander, E. (2016). *Relations between Immigration and Adult Skills: Findings based on PIAAC* (Working Paper Series 2016: 21). Institute for Evaluation of Labour Market and Education Policy. https://ideas.repec.org/p/hhs/ifauwp/2016_021.html.

Figure 1. Percentage distribution of U.S. adults (ages 16 to 65) at selected levels of proficiency for the PIAAC literacy, numeracy, and digital skills domains, by nativity: 2012/14 and 2017



SOURCE: National Center for Education Statistics. (2020). Highlights of U.S. National Results.
https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/piaac/national_results.asp.

Immigrants' skills lag those of U.S.-born adults, but there was a notable improvement over time.

Examining skills by nativity shows that immigrants trailed their U.S.-born counterparts in each of the three domains. In 2017, some 33 percent of immigrant adults scored at the low levels in the literacy domain, compared with 16 percent of their U.S.-born counterparts (a 17 percentage point difference) (figure 1).⁹ Both groups had worse outcomes on the numeracy and digital skills domains compared with the literacy domain, but the nativity gaps remained.¹⁰ For instance, 39 percent of immigrants scored at the low numeracy levels compared with 27 percent of their U.S.-born peers (a 12 percentage point difference).

⁹ It should be noted, however, that the PIAAC's skill assessment was conducted only in English. This may have put immigrants with limited English proficiency at a disadvantage and contributed to this skills gap.

¹⁰ National Center for Education Statistics. (2020). Highlights of U.S. National Results.
https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/piaac/national_results.asp.

Immigrants represent significant shares of the low-performing adults. Although immigrants make up 14 percent of the total working-age population, they represent about a third of low-skilled U.S. adults. However, immigrants displayed improvement in their skills over time. On average, immigrant adults scored higher in both literacy and digital skills in 2017 compared with 2012/14.¹¹ In terms of proficiency levels, 33 percent of immigrant adults achieved higher proficiency levels in literacy in 2017, an increase from 29 percent in 2014 (figure 1). The most notable gains were in digital skills, with 32 percent of immigrant adults reaching high proficiency levels in 2017, up from 21 percent in 2014. Numeracy skills improved too—whereas the share of low-performing immigrants was 46 percent in 2012/14, it decreased to 39 percent in 2017. The shifting demographic profile of the U.S. immigrant population, characterized by higher levels of education and greater English proficiency since 2010,¹² contributed to these improvements. However, it is essential to note that around 33–34 percent of immigrant adults still exhibited low literacy and digital skills, while 39 percent scored low in numeracy.

Immigrants who are younger, Asian or White, U.S. educated, or arrived as young children tend to have better skills.

PIAAC data also revealed that skills of immigrants vary by key demographics:

- Age: Younger immigrants (ages 16–26) exhibited stronger literacy skills than their older counterparts (ages 55–65), suggesting skill improvement within the labor force’s younger generation of immigrants.¹³
- Race/ethnicity: Asian and White immigrants outscored their Black and Hispanic counterparts.¹⁴
- U.S. experience: Immigrants with U.S.-earned education and those who arrived as young children displayed English literacy and numeracy scores similar to their U.S.-born counterparts.¹⁵

U.S.-born adults from immigrant families have similar foundational skills as those from U.S.-born families.

Immigrant-origin adults, including those born in the United States, represent a demographically significant population that has gained increasing policy relevance for U.S. policymakers, educational institutions, and workforce practitioners. For instance, students from immigrant

¹¹ National Center for Education Statistics. (2020). Highlights of U.S. National Results.

https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/piaac/national_results.asp.

¹² Batalova, J., and Fix, M. (2023). Understanding Poverty Declines among Immigrants and Their Children in the United States. Migration Policy Institute. <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/poverty-declines-immigrants-united-states>.

¹³ Batalova, J., and Fix, M. (2015). *Through an Immigrant Lens: PIAAC Assessment of the Competencies of Adults in the United States*. Migration Policy Institute. <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/through-immigrant-lens-piaac-assessment-competencies-adults-united-states>.

¹⁴ Batalova, J., and Fix, M. (2015). *Through an Immigrant Lens: PIAAC Assessment of the Competencies of Adults in the United States*. Migration Policy Institute. <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/through-immigrant-lens-piaac-assessment-competencies-adults-united-states>.

¹⁵ Bonfati, S., and Xenogiani, T. (2014). Migrants’ Skills: Use, Mismatch and Labour Market Outcomes – A First Exploration of the Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC). *Matching Economic Migration with Labour Market Needs*. Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264216501-11-en>; Batalova, J., and Fix, M. (2015). *Through an Immigrant Lens: PIAAC Assessment of the Competencies of Adults in the United States*. Migration Policy Institute. <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/through-immigrant-lens-piaac-assessment-competencies-adults-united-states>.

families accounted for almost 80 percent of the increase in the total number of U.S. college students in the past 2 decades.¹⁶ Since most of the immigrant-origin adults have been raised and educated in the United States, their outcomes are viewed as an additional “benchmark” for successful integration policy. PIAAC data illustrate substantial progress in acquiring the necessary skills across immigrant generations. The literacy and numeracy skills of U.S.-born adults from immigrant families were similar to those of adults from native families. These results hold for both the total (ages 16–65) and young (ages 16–34) adult populations.¹⁷ At the same time, the skills of U.S. young adults, from immigrant and native families alike, fell short of the results of the respective groups in other large immigrant destination countries such as Canada and Germany.¹⁸

U.S.-born young adults from immigrant families with lower educated parents are about as likely to be enrolled in college as those with higher educated parents.

Unlike most other U.S. population surveys, PIAAC enables exploration of the relationship between parental education and educational outcomes such as college enrollment.¹⁹ PIAAC data shows a positive relationship between parental education and college enrollment for the foreign-born (immigrant) young adults (ages 18–34). At the same time, the college enrollment of the second generation seems to be less contingent on parental education.²⁰ Research shows, however, that compared with their U.S.-born counterparts, students from immigrant families tend to face higher barriers to high school graduation²¹ and to completion of college and other postsecondary programs due to financial reasons or lack of legal status, which makes it harder to access in-state tuition and financial support.²²

¹⁶ Batalova, J., and Fix, M. (2023). Shared Gains: Immigrant-Origin Students in U.S. Colleges. Migration Policy Institute. <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/immigrant-origin-students-gains>.

¹⁷ Batalova, J., and Fix, M. (2015). *Through an Immigrant Lens: PIAAC Assessment of the Competencies of Adults in the United States*. Migration Policy Institute. <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/through-immigrant-lens-piaac-assessment-competencies-adults-united-states>; Batalova, J., and Fix, M. (2016). Literacy and Numeracy Skills of Second-Generation Young Adults: A Comparative Study of Canada, France, Germany, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Migration Policy Institute.

https://static1.squarespace.com/static/51bb74b8e4b0139570ddf020/t/578d1e95579fb360acc952bf/1468866198724/Batalova_Fix_PIAAC.pdf.

¹⁸ Batalova, J., and Fix, M. (2016). Literacy and Numeracy Skills of Second-Generation Young Adults: A Comparative Study of Canada, France, Germany, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Migration Policy Institute.

https://static1.squarespace.com/static/51bb74b8e4b0139570ddf020/t/578d1e95579fb360acc952bf/1468866198724/Batalova_Fix_PIAAC.pdf.

¹⁹ Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. (2019). Country Note: Skills Matter: Additional Results from the Survey of Adult Skills: United States. <https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/about/programmes/edu/piaac/country-specific-material/cycle-1/USA-Country-Note-Cycle1-Round3-2019.pdf>.

²⁰ Batalova, J., and Fix, M. (2023). *Shared Gains: Immigrant-Origin Students in U.S. Colleges*. Migration Policy Institute. <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/immigrant-origin-students-gains>.

²¹ Sugarman, J. (2017). Beyond Teaching English: Supporting High School Completion by Immigrant and Refugee Students. Migration Policy Institute. <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/beyond-teaching-english-supporting-high-school-completion-immigrant-and-refugee-students>.

²² Hernandez-Reyes, J., Williams, B., and Jackson, V. (2023). Higher Education Access and Success for Undocumented Students Start with 9 Key Criteria. EdTrust. <https://edtrust.org/press-room/higher-education-access-and-success-for-undocumented-students-start-with-9-key-criteria/>; American Immigration Council and Presidents’ Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration. (2023). *Undocumented Students in Higher Education How Many Students Are in U.S. Colleges and Universities, and Who Are They?*

https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/sites/default/files/research/undocumented_students_in_higher_education_2023.pdf.

Do Skills Matter for Immigrants' Economic Outcomes?

The PIAAC survey underscores the significant impact of strong foundational skills on various economic outcomes, including employment, wages, and job-skill compatibility.²³ Key findings include the following.

Among immigrants overall, lower foundational skills are not a barrier to employment, but these workers need a higher level of foundational skills and better English proficiency to be paid well and obtain higher occupational statuses.

U.S. immigrants with low English literacy and numeracy proficiency are more likely to be employed than their U.S.-born counterparts with similar skill levels.²⁴ Moreover, as shown by PIAAC data, while higher literacy and numeracy skills corresponded to higher employment rates among natives, employment among immigrants did not differ statistically by proficiency level.²⁵ These results remained consistent even when accounting for other influencing factors.²⁶ However, a large share of immigrants were employed in lower paid jobs. In other words, immigrants needed higher levels of competencies in foundational skills and English proficiency to be paid on par with natives.²⁷ Immigrants also tended to have lower occupational status compared with their U.S.-born counterparts. This gap is attributable in part to lower levels of numeracy and in part to lower levels of use of immigrants' soft skills at work (i.e., readiness to learn, influence, and planning skills)—both of which are rewarded in the labor market.²⁸

²³ Li, T., von Davier, M., Hancock, G.R., and Kirsch, I.S. (2016). *The Prediction of Labor Force Status: Implications from International Adult Skill Assessments* (ETS Research Report Series). <https://doi.org/10.1002/ets2.12097>; Pivovarova, M., and Powers, J.M. (2022). Do Immigrants Experience Labor Market Mismatch? New Evidence from the US PIAAC, *Large-Scale Assessments in Education*, 10(9). <https://largescaleassessmentsineducation.springeropen.com/articles/10.1186/s40536-022-00127-7>; Quintini, G. (2014). *Skills at Work: How Skills and their Use Matter in the Labour Market* (OECD Social, Employment and Migration Working Papers, No. 158). https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/social-issues-migration-health/skills-at-work-how-skills-and-their-use-matter-in-the-labour-market_5jz44fdfjm7j-en.

²⁴ Batalova, J., and Fix, M. (2015). *Through an Immigrant Lens: PIAAC Assessment of the Competencies of Adults in the United States*. Migration Policy Institute. <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/through-immigrant-lens-piaac-assessment-competencies-adults-united-states>; Hanson, G., Liu, C., and McIntosh, C. (2017). The Rise and Fall of U.S. Low-Skilled Immigration. *Brookings Papers on Economic Activity*, 2017(1): 83–168. <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/hansontextsp17bpea.pdf>; OECD and European Union Commission. (2018). Settling In 2018: Indicators of Immigrant Integration. https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/social-issues-migration-health/indicators-of-immigrant-integration-2018_9789264307216-en.

²⁵ Batalova, J., and Fix, M. (2015). *Through an Immigrant Lens: PIAAC Assessment of the Competencies of Adults in the United States*. Migration Policy Institute. <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/through-immigrant-lens-piaac-assessment-competencies-adults-united-states>.

²⁶ Bonfati, S., and Xenogiani, T. (2014). Migrants' Skills: Use, Mismatch and Labour Market Outcomes – A First Exploration of the Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC). *Matching Economic Migration with Labour Market Needs*. Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264216501-11-en>.

²⁷ Bonfati, S., and Xenogiani, T. (2014). Migrants' Skills: Use, Mismatch and Labour Market Outcomes – A First Exploration of the Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC). *Matching Economic Migration with Labour Market Needs*. Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264216501-11-en>; Batalova, J., and Fix, M. (2015). *Through an Immigrant Lens: PIAAC Assessment of the Competencies of Adults in the United States*. Migration Policy Institute. <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/through-immigrant-lens-piaac-assessment-competencies-adults-united-states>.

²⁸ Liu, H., and Fernandez, F. (2018). *Examining the Ways that Numeracy Skills and Soft Skills are Related to Occupational Status: The Case of U.S. Workers*. https://static1.squarespace.com/static/51bb74b8e4b0139570ddfd020/t/5b50a5d21ae6cfa99e6e444c/1532011986927/Liu_Fndz_Soft_Skills_Report_2018_Final.pdf.

Lower foundational skills are a key barrier to better economic outcomes, such as earnings and job quality, among college-educated immigrants.

The impact of strong foundational skills on economic outcomes extends to both low- and high-educated immigrants. In general, U.S. college-educated immigrants' economic outcomes, such as labor force participation, monthly earnings, skill underutilization, and self-assessed job quality, approximate or even exceed those of U.S.-born graduates. However, immigrant college graduates with low foundational skill levels had markedly lower economic outcomes.²⁹ For instance, college-educated immigrants who scored at low levels on numeracy were nearly four times more likely than those who scored at high levels to see their skills underutilized (44 vs. 11 percent) (figure 2). More than 2 million college-educated U.S. immigrants experience skill underutilization because they are either unemployed or employed in jobs that required no more than a high school education.³⁰ Immigrant college graduates with lower levels of numeracy skills were also less likely to be in the labor force than those with higher levels (figure 2), and they also had much lower monthly earnings (\$5,300 vs. \$8,100).³¹

Compared with their U.S.-born counterparts, immigrants are less likely to participate in adult education and training programs.

Continuous learning throughout one's life is essential to remain competitive in a knowledge-based global economy. Although adult education and training enhance employability and wages, immigrants were found to have lower participation rates in these programs: 38 percent of immigrant adults compared 50 percent of U.S.-born adults reported engagement in formal education or organized learning.³² Additionally, natives displayed a significantly higher likelihood of continuing their learning than did immigrants.

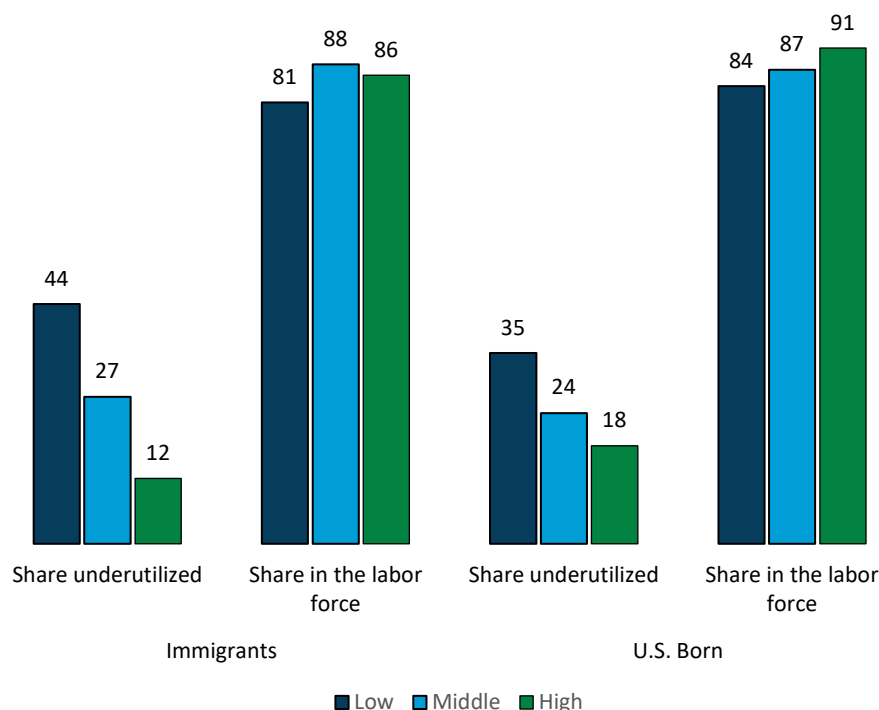
²⁹ Batalova, J., and Fix, M. (2022). *The Importance of Skills and Qualifications for College-Educated Immigrants' Economic Integration*. https://static1.squarespace.com/static/51bb74b8e4b0139570ddf020/t/630fa832b237d10c38686849/1661970487557/MPI_College+Edu_Skills+and+Econ+Integration.pdf.

³⁰ Batalova, J., and Fix, M. (2021). *Leaving Money on the Table: The Persistence of Brain Waste among College-Educated Immigrants*. Migration Policy Institute. <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/publications/mpi-brain-waste-analysis-june2021-final.pdf>.

³¹ Batalova, J., and Fix, M. (2022). *The Importance of Skills and Qualifications for College-Educated Immigrants' Economic Integration*. https://static1.squarespace.com/static/51bb74b8e4b0139570ddf020/t/630fa832b237d10c38686849/1661970487557/MPI_College+Edu_Skills+and+Econ+Integration.pdf.

³² Batalova, J., and Fix, M. (2015). *Through an Immigrant Lens: PIAAC Assessment of the Competencies of Adults in the United States*. Migration Policy Institute. <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/through-immigrant-lens-piaac-assessment-competencies-adults-united-states>.

Figure 2. Labor market outcomes of college-educated immigrant and U.S.-born adults performing at each proficiency level for the PIAAC numeracy domain: 2012/2014/2017



SOURCE: Table 4, “Labor Market Outcomes of College-Educated Immigrant and U.S.-Born Adults Performing at Each Proficiency Level in Literacy, Numeracy, and Digital Skills” from Batalova, J., and Fix, M. (2022). *The Importance of Skills and Qualifications for College-Educated Immigrants’ Economic Integration*. https://static1.squarespace.com/static/51bb74b8e4b0139570ddf020/t/630fa832b237d10c38686849/1661970487557/MPI_College+Edu_Skills+and+Econ+Integration.pdf.

Implications of PIAAC Findings

PIAAC and other studies highlight the diversity of immigrant and immigrant-origin adults in terms of their foundational skills and other human capital characteristics.³³ PIAAC findings in particular help identify skill-related barriers that impede the economic prospects of the immigrant-origin population. This information could enable policymakers to implement targeted interventions aimed at enhancing the economic opportunities and contributions of immigrant-origin adults.

³³ Gray, C. (2019). Using Profiles of Human and Social Capital to Understand Adult Immigrants’ Education Needs: A Latent Class Approach. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 69(1): 3–23. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0741713618802271>.

Stronger basic skills are consistently linked to better prospects for securing higher quality jobs and higher wages for immigrant and U.S.-born workers alike. The wage premium associated with basic skills, especially numeracy,³⁴ is notably higher in the United States than in most other OECD countries.³⁵ Therefore, there are compelling incentives to strengthen basic skills, particularly if programs can effectively integrate technical and academic instruction with English learning to prepare immigrant adults who lack basic skills, English proficiency, or both for jobs with occupational mobility. Programs like Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training (I-BEST), which allows immigrant adult students to develop literacy, work, and college-readiness skills while acquiring English skills, have demonstrated significant promise, with students in these programs achieving technical credentials at a higher rate than adult students who did not participate.³⁶ Given the growing interest among policymakers and employers in soft skills, PIAAC's finding that immigrants tend to use their soft skills at work less than U.S.-born workers suggests that educational and workforce programs need to teach immigrant students both work-related and soft skills.³⁷

With high rates of labor force participation among immigrant adults with low skill, there is an important opportunity for skills development programs to reach many of these workers at the workplace. The 2014 Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) singled out English-language learners, people with low levels of literacy, and “individuals facing substantial cultural barriers” as priorities for assistance with education and training. The law, however, did not provide additional funding, leaving it up to the states to carry out the program. As the WIOA is pending reauthorization, a greater emphasis on immigrant workers with different levels of skills and education is needed,³⁸ including opening such programs to immigrant workers regardless of their legal status. Also, since immigrants, those who are especially unauthorized, do so much of the low-wage work in the United States, they would particularly benefit from better enforcement of federal and state labor laws, which would reduce their vulnerability in terms of wage theft and substandard working conditions.³⁹

³⁴ Hanushek, E., Schwerdt, G., Wiederhold, S., and Woessmann, L. (2015). Returns to Skills around the World: Evidence from PIAAC. *European Economic Review*, 73: 103–130. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0014292114001433>.

³⁵ Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. (2013). *PIAAC Survey of the First Results. Country Note: USA*. <https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/about/programmes/edu/piaac/country-specific-material/cycle-1/USA-Country-Note-Cycle1-Round1-2013.pdf>.

³⁶ Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges. (2020). *Guiding Students from Basic Education Through College and Beyond for Equitable Post-College Outcomes*. <https://www.sbctc.edu/resources/documents/colleges-staff/research/pre-college-research/beda-in-gp-research-report-20-1-final.pdf>; Wachen, J., Jenkins, D., and Van Noy, M. (2010). *How I-BEST Works: Findings from a Field Study of Washington State's Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training Program*. Community College Research Center. <https://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/media/k2/attachments/how-i-best-works-findings.pdf>.

³⁷ Liu, H., and Fernandez, F. (2018). *Examining the Ways that Numeracy Skills and Soft Skills are Related to Occupational Status: The Case of U.S. Workers*. https://static1.squarespace.com/static/51bb74b8e4b0139570ddf020/t/5b50a5d21ae6cfa99e6e444c/1532011986927/Liu_Fndz_Soft_Skills_Report_2018_Final.pdf.

³⁸ Mehta, S., and Andrews, E. (2022). House WIOA Reauthorization Makes Important Strides, but Additional Improvements Needed. The Center for Law and Social Policy. <https://www.clasp.org/publications/report/brief/house-wioa-reauthorization-makes-important-strides-but-additional-improvements-needed/>.

³⁹ Kerwin, D.M., and McCabe, K. (2011). Labor Standards Enforcement and Low-Wage Immigrants: Creating an Effective Enforcement System. Migration Policy Institute. <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/labor-standards-enforcement-and-low-wage-immigrants-creating-effective-enforcement-system>.

National and state policies should also support the 2 million immigrants with college degrees who are underemployed in low-skill jobs or are not employed. To address this issue, licensing laws could be adjusted to recognize internationally earned credentials and skills. Moreover, providing low-cost bridge courses to address educational gaps could open pathways to higher-skilled employment.⁴⁰

Skills are particularly critical for today's youth and young adults aged 16–34, as they will constitute most of the U.S. labor force in the years ahead. While strategies aimed at immigrant-origin, prime working-age adults should focus more on the workplace, young adults who are still in school could be reached through postsecondary education and vocational programs.⁴¹ As previously discussed, having a U.S. credential boosts immigrants' economic outcomes. To promote U.S. postsecondary credential attainment and market-valued work experience for immigrant-origin youth and young adults like apprenticeships, policymakers and practitioners should consider unique barriers and opportunities to attainment among those currently enrolled in colleges and vocation training programs,⁴² immigrant-origin youth (ages 14–18) who are coming up in the postsecondary pipeline, and the immigrant-origin high school graduates currently without a postsecondary credential.⁴³

⁴⁰ Batalova, J., and Fix, M. (2021). *Leaving Money on the Table: The Persistence of Brain Waste among College-Educated Immigrants*. Migration Policy Institute. <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/publications/mpi-brain-waste-analysis-june2021-final.pdf>.

⁴¹ Sugarman, J. (2023). *Unlocking Opportunities: Supporting English Learners' Equitable Access to Career and Technical Education*. Migration Policy Institute. <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/english-learners-career-technical-education>.

⁴² Batalova, J., and Feldblum, M. (2023). *Investing in the Future: Higher Ed Should Give Greater Focus to Growing Immigrant-Origin Student Population*. Migration Policy Institute. <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/news/investing-future-immigrant-origin-students>.

⁴³ Batalova, J., and Fix, M. (2023). *Shared Gains: Immigrant-Origin Students in U.S. Colleges*. Migration Policy Institute. <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/immigrant-origin-students-gains>.

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