

# Narrowing The Gap



## Economic Inequality

### Foreign-Born Workers: A Snapshot in the U.S.

According to the [Bureau of Labor Statistics](#), foreign-born workers accounted for nearly 16.5% (25.7 million) of the 155.9 million workers in the civilian labor force in 2014.

This same BLS data provides median personal income of foreign-born versus U.S.-born individuals (\$34,622 versus \$42,757). Weekly earnings follow the same pattern; when comparing foreign-born to U.S.-born individuals (\$664 versus \$820), U.S.-born individuals earn significantly more. When these weekly earnings are further broken down by hourly wages, foreign-born individuals earn \$18.97 an hour versus \$23.43 for U.S.-born individuals.

In a competitive U.S. job market, U.S.-born workers have mixed ideas about immigration. They overwhelmingly believe (74%) immigrants come to the U.S. for economic opportunities according to a recent [Pew survey](#). The majority (51%) believe immigrants “strengthen the country because of their hard work and talents.” But much of the remainder, 41%, say “immigrants are more of a burden because they take our jobs, housing, and health care.”

### What Our Research Shows: From the NYC Equality Indicators Report 2015

Based on our analysis of immigration status and income, foreign-born workers in NYC earn a median personal income of \$35,000 which is in keeping with the national BLS figure on this group (\$34,622). But in NYC, U.S.-born workers earn a median personal income of \$49,879, well-above the national BLS figure (\$42,757) for their group. We can conclude that while U.S.-born workers in NYC earn above the national median personal income, the same is not true for foreign-born workers in NYC.

Our data also show that there are differences in income based on citizenship status: median personal income for foreign-born workers who are citizens is considerably higher (\$40,000) than median personal income for non-citizens (\$28,000)—though it is still not at the level of those born in the U.S.

These differences are not simply due to differences in background: U.S.-born workers out-earn their foreign-born peers, even when both have comparable education and work experience. This may point to employer bias in setting wages, where U.S. employers favor U.S.-born workers.

## Health Inequality

### Lack of Access to Healthcare Results in Poor Health Outcomes

According to the [Migration Policy Institute](#), in the U.S., immigrants are approximately 3x as likely to be uninsured as the U.S.-born population (32% versus 12%) based on their analysis of 2013 American Community Survey data.

Lack of health insurance makes access to medical care difficult for immigrants, who experience an array of negative health outcomes. In 2013 the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) found that approximately half of all new tuberculosis (TB) cases in the U.S. were among foreign-born persons. The TB rate among foreign-born persons was approximately 10x that of persons born in the U.S.

Even when they have health insurance, immigrants are much less likely to utilize it compared to U.S.-born individuals with health insurance. According to the [California Immigrant Policy Center](#), this underutilization can be attributed to confusion about eligibility rules as well as lack of culturally and linguistically competent services.

### What Our Research Shows: From the NYC Equality Indicators Report 2015

In NYC, the foreign-born population is more than twice as likely as the U.S.-born population to have no health coverage (29.9% vs. 11.5%), based on an analysis of the [2013 Community Health Survey](#).

Looking at access to a personal doctor as a function of immigration/gender, we found the foreign-born population to be less likely than the U.S.-born to have a personal doctor. Gender further reduced access. Foreign-born men were 3x more likely to report not having a regular doctor (33.3%) than U.S.-born women (9.1%), although there was no noticeable difference between foreign-born women (18.0%) and U.S.-born men (18.1%).

In keeping with national Centers for Disease Control and Prevention data, our data show that there is a large gap between U.S.-born and foreign-born individuals' TB rates in NYC as well; their rates were 1.7 and 15.5 respectively. China was the most common country of birth for TB patients in 2014 (131 cases), although the TB rate was highest among those born in Nepal (300 per 100,000).

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In this issue of *Narrowing The Gap*, we focus on one of the groups adversely affected by inequality: **Immigrants**. Other issues will describe inequalities faced by children, individuals currently in jail or on probation, individuals living in poverty, individuals with a physical or intellectual disability, individuals with less than a high school diploma, lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender/queer individuals, racial and ethnic minorities, religious minorities, seniors, single parents, and women.

## Justice Inequality

### Lower Than Average Volunteering Rates Among Immigrant Youth

According to [Foreign-Born Concentration and Acculturation to Volunteering Among Immigrant Youth](#), a study published in *Social Forces*, America's youth population (15-19 years old) reports higher than average rates of volunteering (more than 1.5x the adult rate). Volunteer experience is seen as a resume-building exercise and preparation for the transition from school-to-work.

However, volunteering rates among immigrant youth lag behind those of U.S.-born youth. Researchers attribute the lag to two factors. The first is the concentration of immigrants of the same ethnic background living in the same neighborhood as the youth: the greater the concentration, the less likely they are to volunteer because they believe there are adequate networks in place to support the community. The second factor relates to socio-economic status. The more affluent the community, the less likely youth in it will volunteer. Affluent immigrant communities have high adult participation rates in civic and voluntary organizations, giving the impression youth volunteerism is not needed to sustain the community.

### What Our Research Shows: From the NYC Equality Indicators Report 2015

Similar to the lower-than-average rates for volunteering by immigrant youth found by the *Social Forces* research, the NYC Equality Indicators found that immigrants were significantly less likely to volunteer (7.6%) compared to their U.S.-born counterparts (15.2%). Within the foreign-born population, there were also differences by citizenship status: non-citizens were half as likely to volunteer (4.8%) as naturalized citizens (9.6%).

Since the prior year, the percentage of immigrants who volunteer increased from 6.5% to 7.6%, yet the increase was even larger among non-immigrants, from 12.8% to 15.2%; as a result the disparities in volunteering rates have increased somewhat. There were also notable differences by race and ethnicity, with Hispanics and Asians, groups that tend to have higher immigrant populations, less likely to volunteer (9.4% for both groups) than blacks (12.4%) and whites (14.6%).

## Education Inequality

### Lack Of Access To Translation And Interpretation Results In Parent Engagement Gap

[The Harvard Family Research Project](#) finds that parental involvement in a child's education is associated with higher achievement outcomes. Immigrant parents face unique barriers in becoming fully involved, primarily because they lack access to appropriate translation and interpretation services.

Although immigrant parents of public school children have a right to translation and interpretation services under federal law, these parents often do not receive appropriate services. A 2015 report from the [New York Immigration Coalition](#) revealed 50% of non-English speaking parents did not receive critical information because it was not properly translated or because an interpreter was not available.



**“The American experience influenced my understanding of individuality, basic human rights, freedom of expression, and the rights and responsibilities of citizens.”**

**Chinese Artist, Ai Weiwei**

### Limited English Proficiency: Language Barriers Hinder Immigrant Students' Academic Performance

The foreign-born population is more likely to have limited English proficiency (LEP) than the U.S.-born population. According to the [Migration Policy Institute](#), around 50% of immigrants ages 5 and older (20.4 million out of 41.3 million) are LEP individuals, compared to 2% of the U.S.-born population. LEP children generally have a difficult time learning in regular classrooms and lag behind other students.

Our NYC research showed more than two thirds (67.5%) of English Language Learners did not graduate high school in four years. In contrast, only a third (31.9%) of students proficient in English took longer than four years to graduate.

According to the [Bureau of Labor Statistics](#), those born outside the U.S. are less likely to graduate from high school compared to the U.S.-born population. In 2014, 23.8% of the foreign-born labor force age 25 and over had not completed high school, compared with 4.6% of the U.S.-born labor force. Also, foreign-born individuals were less likely than those born in the U.S. to have some college or an associate degree (17.5% versus 29.9%).

The Equality Indicators is a project of the [Institute for State and Local Governance \(ISLG\)](#) of the City University of New York.

The project measures progress towards greater equality across six themes related to **Economy, Education, Health, Housing, Justice, and Services** using 96 indicators. Each indicator is scored from 1 to 100, where 1 represents the most inequality and 100 the least inequality. For more information please visit our website at [equalityindicators.org](http://equalityindicators.org) and follow us on twitter [@equalityISLG](https://twitter.com/equalityISLG)