



TRANSATLANTIC FORUM ON INCLUSIVE EARLY YEARS

INVESTING IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF YOUNG CHILDREN FROM MIGRANT AND LOW-INCOME FAMILIES

Accessibility of Early Childhood Education and Care Services in the United States for Children of Immigrants of Diverse Origin Background Paper: Transatlantic Forum on Inclusive Early Years Meeting 1

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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to provide a brief overview of the current state of access to early childhood education and care (ECEC) opportunities for children of immigrants in the United States. The United States currently pursues an overall policy of targeted rather than universal access to ECEC services through their public provision, seeking to reach primarily at-risk children rather than all children. Within this context, where many 3- and 4-year olds are not participating in any public ECEC programs, this paper will investigate the degree to which, within the at-risk population, usage rates vary by immigrant group. Given the focus on access at this meeting, this paper will not substantially address issues of program quality, as it will be explored in later meetings, but will center specifically on rates of enrollment as a measure of access. The paper draws from recent academic research to summarize what is known regarding access rates to ECEC for 3- and 4-year olds, and discusses potential explanations of disparities and their implications for national and state policy.

Background: United States' ECEC

Despite high rates of female labor force participation and parental leave policies that only legally guarantee 12 weeks of unpaid leave, families in the United States have historically been left on their own to provide care and learning opportunities for their young children. The federal government's role in ECEC provision continues to be relatively limited compared to most OECD countries, and there is no comprehensive national system of child care and early childhood education. Along with most aspects of public education, ECEC is primarily a state responsibility, with the notable exception of the federally administered Head Start program. Compulsory schooling begins only at age 6 in the US, though all states now offer free kindergarten for 5-year olds, and over 90% of children aged 5 are now enrolled in at either half-day or full-day kindergarten.¹

For all young children ages birth through 5, models of child care provision in the US fit into the three following categories:

¹ OECD, *Starting Strong II: Early Childhood Education and Care* (OECD Publishing, 2006)



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- In-home care provided by a family member (relative care)
- In-home care provided for one or more children by a nanny or babysitter or other non-family member (non-relative care)
- Center-based care provided by non-profit or for-profit centers (center-based care)

Most of these various models of child care operate under a purchase of services system run by private non-profit and for-profit entities.

Pre-kindergarten, or pre-K, meanwhile, typically serves children at ages 3 to 4, and refers to more formalized early learning centers often provided by school districts through state-run programs. While it is generally understood that pre-K refers to center-based programs that have a strong educational component, this does not necessarily mean that a program's self-definition as a pre-kindergarten program indicates a particular level of educational experience or quality, particularly within the private sector. Conversely, while "child care" has been understood primarily as a means of providing care to allow for parents' work force participation, the need for appropriate development and learning activities within child care is increasingly recognized, and high-quality child care is expected to include developmentally appropriate activities, further blurring the line between the two informally defined worlds of child care and pre-kindergarten. Because pre-K is focused on providing an educational experience rather than on enabling workforce participation, hours of provision can be significantly shorter than for child care and may be as little as 2.5 hours per day, significantly restricting accessibility for many families who require longer or more flexible hours of care.

While public provision of both child care and pre-K services remains limited in the United States, publicly funded ECEC programs targeted to at-risk children have expanded significantly over the past several decades. As recently as 1960, only 10 percent of 3- and 4-year olds were enrolled in early learning programs in a classroom setting. By 2008, 50 percent of 3-year olds and 75 percent of 4-year olds were enrolled in early learning experiences, with approximately half enrolled in public programs.² Altogether, the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) estimates that ECEC provision in the United States is currently supported by nearly \$40 billion annually including federal, state, and local expenditures.³ Currently, the largest public investments being made in early education are:

- **Head Start**, a federal program serving low-income families. Head Start serves 8 percent of 3-year olds and 11 percent of 4-year olds while an estimated 26 percent of children aged birth to 5 currently live below the federal poverty level. Thus, Head Start serves roughly half its eligible population. Moreover, children from families that have slightly higher incomes but may require significant public assistance to gain access to quality child care are not eligible for the Head Start program. The Early Head Start program also serves children aged birth to 3 in low-income families as well as vulnerable low-income pregnant women.

² W. Steven Barnett, *Preschool Education and Its Lasting Effects: Research and Policy Implications* (Boulder, CO and Tempe, AZ: Education and the Public Interest Center & Education Policy Research Unit, September 2008), http://nepc.colorado.edu/files/PB-Barnett-EARLY-ED_FINAL.pdf

³ W. Steven Barnett and Jason T. Hustedt, *Improving Public Financing for Early Learning Programs*. (New Brunswick, NJ: NIEER, 2011), <http://nieer.org/resources/policybriefs/24.pdf>



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- **The Child Care Development Block Grant (CCDBG)**, a federally funded subsidy for parents, administered by states, whose purpose is to assist working families with the cost of providing child care by providing funding to help parents pay for the care of their choice. States are permitted to provide assistance to all families whose income does not exceed 85 percent of the state median income. The program does not involve direct provision of care, and can be used for any legally operating child care provider, whether home-based or center-based, including providers whom the state has determined do not need to be licensed. CCDBG funds are disbursed to families primarily through vouchers and certificates. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, current funding levels for the CCDBG provide assistance to one out of every 10 eligible children.
- **State-funded pre-kindergarten (pre-K)** is now available in most (39) states, with 6 of them being universally offered to all children. These programs enrolled 4 percent of 3-year olds and 28 percent of 4-year olds in 2011.⁴

This paper will concentrate on access to center-based care and pre-K for 3- and 4-year olds in order to focus the discussion on public rather than private services. Services for children aged birth to 2 will not be addressed in this discussion due to the relatively sparse level of services currently provided to this group.

Description of the immigrant population in the United States

Both the number and share of children in immigrant families under the age of 5 has grown rapidly in recent decades, and all of the net growth in the United States' population of young children since 1990 has been driven by this population.⁵ The population of children under 6 living in immigrant families nearly doubled from 2.9 million children in 1990 to 5.6 million in 2009 in the past 20 years, and this growth is no longer restricted to traditional immigrant-receiving states; growth has been particularly rapid in "new destination" states in the US, primarily in the Southeast and Midwest regions. Currently, over one in four young children throughout the country now live in an immigrant family. Most of those children (over 90 percent) are U.S. citizens.⁶

Meanwhile, the families who make up this growing newcomer population come from diverse national origins, with the top three countries of birth of the foreign born in the United States being Mexico (29.3 percent of the immigrant population), India (4.5 percent), and China (4.5 percent).⁷ While the US has

⁴ W. Steven Barnett, Megan E. Carolan, Jen Fitzgerald, & James H. Squires. *The State of Preschool 2011: State Preschool Yearbook*. (New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research, 2011), <http://nieer.org/sites/nieer/files/2011yearbook.pdf>

⁵ For the purposes of this paper, the term "children of immigrants" has been defined as those who are foreign-born or native-born with at least one parent being foreign-born, thereby representing both first- and second-generation immigrants.

⁶ Karina Fortuny, Donald J. Hernandez, and Ajay Chaudry, *Young Children of Immigrants: The Leading Edge of America's Future* (Washington, DC: Urban Institute, 2010), <http://www.urban.org/publications/412203.html>

⁷ Migration Policy Institute, *MPI Data Hub*, <http://www.migrationinformation.org/datahub/state.cfm?ID=US>



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always been a nation of newcomers, in recent decades flows have shifted away from those of European origin and are now dominated by immigrants from Latin America and Asia, leading to today's racial-ethnic transformation of America. Latin American immigrants currently make up the great majority of the immigrant population in the United States, comprising 53 percent of all newcomers. Asian immigrants make up the second largest group of immigrants at 28 percent, followed by 12 percent of immigrants from Europe, and 4 percent from Africa.⁸ The multitude of national origins and languages spoken among immigrants as well as their unprecedented dispersion across states presents a new demographic reality that must be contended with at both a national and state level. As immigrants from different countries of origin have a tendency to concentrate in particular communities, each state differs in its proportions of children in immigrant families with the same national origins, creating differing opportunities and policy challenges.⁹

Equally important, diverse immigrant groups come to the US bringing distinctive strengths as well as needs that affect their experiences and those of their children. While much research has focused on the Hispanic population in the United States given their numbers, the early childhood experiences of children living in families from other regional origins have been less studied.

Proven benefits of high-quality early learning opportunities

As participation in high-quality early learning experiences has been recognized as a major factor influencing later personal and academic success, scrutiny of issues of access to these services has risen. Participation in center-based care and preschool programs has the potential to establish substantial short- and long-term benefits, and children's early educational experiences are gradually becoming more clearly understood as being linked to their future academic outcomes.¹⁰ Children who receive high-quality instruction in their early years enter kindergarten better prepared to learn, and have been shown to be more autonomous, emotionally adept, confident and eager to learn than children who receive little or poor instruction prior to entering kindergarten.¹¹ Moreover, children with quality educational experiences during these preschool years perform better academically over the long-term, are significantly more likely to graduate from high school, and ultimately to achieve higher levels of socioeconomic status.¹²

⁸ Migration Policy Institute, *MPI Data Hub*.

⁹ Donald J. Hernandez, Nancy A. Denton, and Suzanne E. Macartney. *Children in Immigrant Families – The U.S. and 50 States: National Origins, Language, and Early Education*. (University at Albany, SUNY: Child Trends & the Center for Social and Demographic Analysis, 2007), http://www.childtrends.org/files/child_trends-2007_04_01_rb_childrenimmigrant.pdf

¹⁰ Katherine A. Magnuson, Marcia K. Meyers, Christopher J. Ruhm, and Jane Waldfogel, "Inequality in Preschool Education and School Readiness," *American Education Research Journal* 41 (2004): 115-57

¹¹ Robert C. Pianta, W. Steven Barnett, Margaret Burchinal, and Kathy R. Thornburg, "The Effects of Preschool Education: What We Know, How Public Policy Is or Is Not Aligned with the Evidence Base and What We Need to Know," *Psychological Science in the Public Interest* 10, No. 2 (2009): 49 – 88.

¹² Joy Valenti and Diane Tracey, "Full-Day, Half-Day and No Preschool: Effects on Urban Children's First-Grade Reading Achievement," *Education and Urban Society*, 41, No. 6 (2009): 695 – 711; Arthur J. Reynolds, Judy A. Temple, Suh-Ruu Ou, Irma A. Arteaga, and Barry A. B. White, "School-Based Early Childhood Education and Age-28 Well-Being: Effects by Timing, Dosage, and Subgroups," *Science* 333 (2011): 360 – 364.



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Children of immigrants, particularly those who speak a language other than English in their homes, especially stand to benefit from high-quality early learning experiences obtained through formal prekindergarten or center-based care.¹³ For instance, an evaluation of Oklahoma’s universal pre-K program, an example of state-funded pre-K, found that while children from all racial groups exhibited academic gains, the program led to a narrowing of the achievement gap for Hispanic children, with Hispanic participants showing some of the highest gains in test scores among all subgroups.¹⁴

An achievement gap between children of immigrants and native-born children persists in United States schools even after these children have spent five or six years in the education system. Data show that this disparity often begins even prior to kindergarten entry, with evidence suggesting that children of immigrants enter school at an academic disadvantage compared to their native peers.¹⁵ A recent study by Jessica De Feyter and Adam Winsler of low-income 4-year olds, for example, showed that children of immigrants scored lower on measures of school readiness relative to their co-ethnic counterparts from non-immigrant families.¹⁶

Additionally, while ECEC access for children of immigrants has been viewed primarily through the lens of school readiness and later academic success, the participation of children of immigrants in early learning programs in the public arena may have broader implications for immigrant integration. Exposure to an early learning experience can provide immigrant families with the opportunity to understand how the educational system works, and provide access to additional resources and public services that they may not realize are available to them otherwise.

What is known about overall ECEC enrollment rates in the United States

This paper uses rates of enrollment in center-based care and pre-K as a proxy for measuring access to relatively high-quality early learning experiences, due to data limitations. Though information is not available regarding the relative quality of the different ECEC programs referred to in the following data, for children ages 3 and 4, center-based programs and pre-kindergarten are likely to provide higher-quality learning experiences than those that are home-based.¹⁷

Because rates of access to center-based care and pre-K in the US remain relatively low compared to similarly developed countries, it is important to understand overall enrollment rates before looking at

¹³ Ruby Takanishi, “Leveling the Playing Field: Supporting Immigrant Children from Birth to Eight,” *The Future of Children* 14, No 2 (Princeton, New Jersey: The Future of Children, 2004),

http://futureofchildren.org/futureofchildren/publications/docs/14_02_04.pdf.

¹⁴ William T. Gormley, Deborah Phillips, and Brittany Dawson. *The Effects of Universal Pre-K on Cognitive Development*. (Washington, DC: Georgetown University, 2009).

¹⁵ Katherine A. Magnuson, Claudia Lahaie and Jane Waldfogel. Preschool and School Readiness of Children of Immigrants. *Social Science Quarterly* 87 (5): 1241 – 1262; Robert Crosnoe, *Journal of health and social behavior* 47 (1): 77-93.

¹⁶ Danielle A. Crosby and Angel S. Dunbar, “Patterns and Predictors of School Readiness and Early Childhood Success Among Young Children in Black Immigrant Families,” in *Young Children of Black Immigrants in America*, eds. Randy Capps and Michael Fix. (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2012)

¹⁷ Magnusson et al., “Inequality in Preschool Education and School Readiness,” 115-57.



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specific groups. According to the NIEER, in 2010, it was estimated that 74 percent of all children aged 4 attended pre-K or center-based care compared to 64 percent of low-income children of the same age.¹⁸ 53 percent of children aged 3 attended pre-K or center-based care compared to 41 percent of low-income children in the same year.¹⁹ At age 2, 34 percent of children overall and 26 percent of low-income children had access to pre-K or center-based care²⁰. These numbers do not capture the quality of the programs in question or the average time per week spent in these programs, both of which have substantial bearing on the potential positive impact of participation. Approximately 35 percent of all 3- and 4-year olds in center-based care or pre-K attend these programs for more than 6 hours a day.²¹

Relatively few studies have focused on children of immigrants' rates of enrollment, but recent evidence points to disparities between children from immigrants and native families. Karoly and Gonzalez' analysis of the Early Childhood Program Participation (ECP) module of the 2005 National Household Education Survey (NHES) shows 3-year old children of immigrants enrolled in center-based care at a rate of 45 percent compared to non-immigrant children at 51 percent.²² At 4 years, children of immigrants are enrolled at a rate of 66 percent compared to non-immigrant children at 75 percent.²³

What is known about differential rates of enrollment depending on region of origin

While it is becoming widely understood that children of immigrants in general have lower rates of access to ECEC services, less is commonly known about the early childhood experiences of children of immigrants from various backgrounds. Given the differing characteristics of immigrant groups in the United States, it is important to understand the factors that drive use levels for ECEC services and their implications for policy and practice.

Danielle Crosby and Angel Dunbar, in their analysis of the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study Birth Cohort (ECLS-B) data, a longitudinal data set following a nationally representative cohort of nearly 10,700 children from birth through school entry, investigated children's rates of enrollment in center-based care by region of origin and found that there are, indeed, substantial differences in rates of participation in ECEC programs by different groups.

Crosby and Dunbar's analysis shows that when broken down by region of origin, some immigrant groups have surprisingly high rates of usage of center-based care that are significantly greater than those of the children of U.S.-born parents. African, Caribbean, East Asian, Indian Asian, Middle Eastern and European children of immigrants all participate in center-based care at higher rates than children of U.S.-born

¹⁸ W. Steve Barnett and Milagros Nores, *Estimated Participation and Hours in Early Care and Education by Type of Arrangement and Income at Ages 2 to 4 in 2010*, (New Brunswick, NJ: NIEER, 2012), <http://nieer.org/sites/nieer/files/ECE%20Participation%20Estimations.pdf>

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Lynn A. Karoly and Gabriella C. Gonzalez, "Early Care and Education for Children in Immigrant Families" in *The Future of Children* 21, No 1 (Princeton, New Jersey: The Future of Children, 2011).

²³ Ibid.



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parents, according to their analysis, with children from immigrant families of Caribbean origin showing particularly high rates of use (87 percent). Hispanic and Southeast Asian children of immigrants have significantly lower rates of enrollment at 57 and 53 percent, respectively. The fact that Hispanic children of U.S.-born parents are enrolled at equally low rates in comparison to their immigrant counterparts (57 percent) is also a concern.

Table 1. Primary Child Care Arrangement During Year Prior to Kindergarten

	Children of Immigrants								Children of US-born parents		
	African	Caribbean	Hispanic	East Asian	Indian Asian	Southeast Asian	Middle Eastern	European	Non-Hispanic Black	Non-Hispanic White	Hispanic
Parental care	16%	3%	27%	9%	12%	21%	15%	9%	13%	16%	18%
Home-based care (non-parental)	13%	11%	17%	14%	10%	25%	11%	13%	19%	20%	25%
Center-based care	71%	87%	57%	77%	77%	53%	74%	78%	68%	64%	57%

Note: Table contains descriptive statistics based on analysis of ECLS-B data. For indications of significant difference between children of African and Caribbean parents and other groups of children, see original source.

Source: Danielle A. Crosby and Angel S. Dunbar, "Patterns and Predictors of School Readiness and Early Childhood Success Among Young Children in Black Immigrant Families," in *Young Children of Black Immigrants in America*, eds. Randy Capps and Michael Fix. (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2012).

Donald Hernandez, in his analysis of the US Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS)'s data from 2005-2009, also investigates differential enrollment rates by region of origin and immigrant status, with a look at pre-kindergarten programs rather than center-based care.

Similar to Crosby and Dunbar's findings, Hernandez's analysis shows that children from Black immigrant families, particularly those with Caribbean origins, are enrolled at higher rates, at 56 percent compared to 50 percent for native Black families and 49 percent for native white families. White immigrant families, in turn, are enrolled at higher rates than their native counterparts, at 54 percent. On the other hand, children from Asian immigrant families are enrolled at slightly lower rates than their native counterparts, at 53 and 56 percent respectively, and Hispanic children of immigrants are enrolled at the lowest rate, at 36 percent compared to 42 percent of children from native Hispanic families.



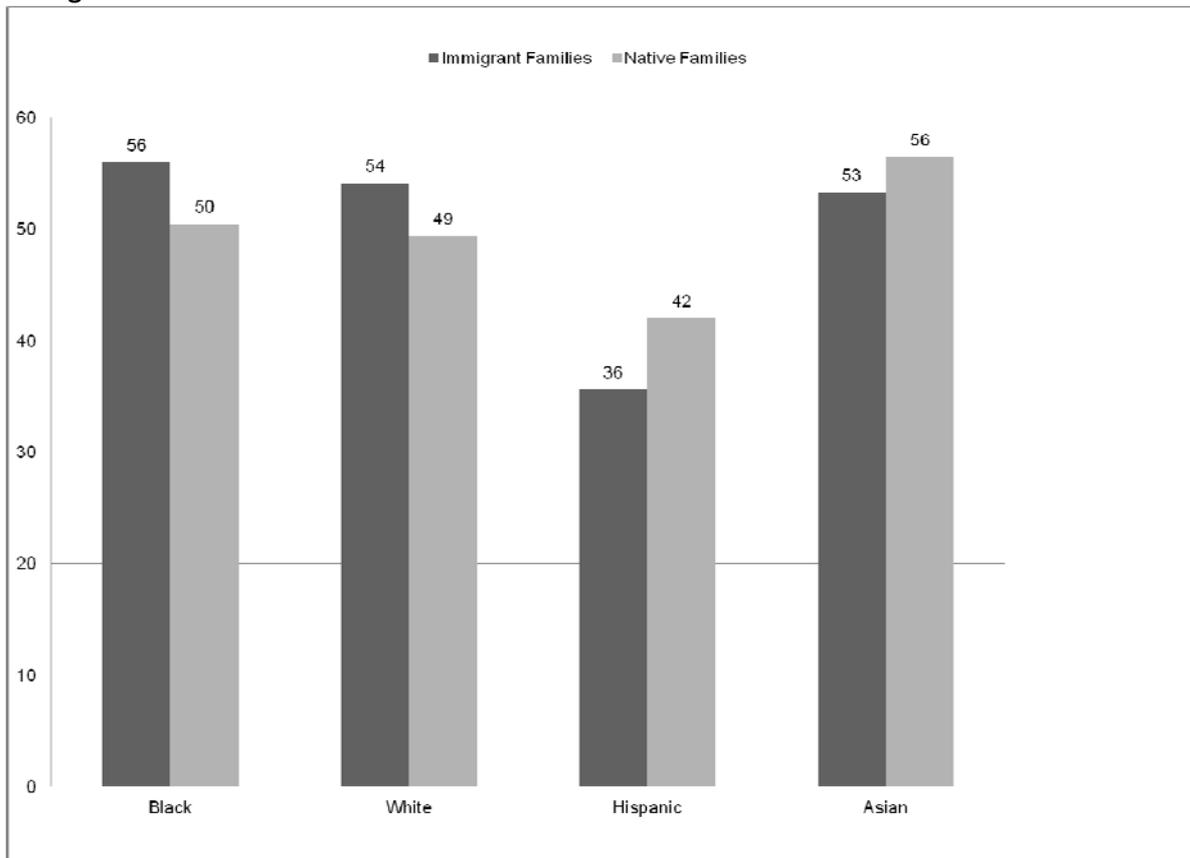


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It seems according to both of these analyses that for some immigrant children, most notably those from Black African, Black Caribbean, and European families, coming from an immigrant family does not diminish ECEC access, and indeed higher use levels may serve as a protective factor in child development and integration. Obviously, these patterns do not hold for children of Hispanic and some Southeast Asian families.

Figure 1. Percent Enrolled in Pre-Kindergarten for Children Ages 3-4, by Race-Ethnicity and Family Immigrant Status



Note: Analysis includes children living with at least one parent.

Source: Donald Hernandez’s analysis of 2005-2009 ACS data, pooled. Donald J. Hernandez, “Young Children in Black Immigrant Families from Africa and the Caribbean” in *Young Children of Black Immigrants in America*, eds. Randy Capps and Michael Fix. (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2012).

Discussion of potential explanatory factors of disparate enrollment

Many factors influence differential rates of enrollment, and each has implications for why some programs target certain groups more effectively than others. There has been a tendency in public discourse, particularly in reference to Hispanic families, to explain differences in early learning experiences as a



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product of cultural preferences, thereby “explaining” disparities as a result of demand rather than supply. However, survey data from a number of sources illustrates that Hispanic parents highly value the early learning experiences offered by center-based care and pre-K, suggesting that structural barriers are more influential than cultural preference in explaining relatively low rates of use.²⁴ Several other factors are known to pose significant barriers and restrict access to ECEC for many, particularly in the context of the United States’ circumstances of limited low-cost supply.

Some factors thought to influence differential enrollment rates are:

Poverty

With waiting lists common for fully subsidized programs such as Head Start, and universal pre-K offered in only a handful of states, mostly just for 4-year olds, costs continue to present a significant obstacle for many families. Without subsidies, full-day child care can cost anywhere from \$4,000 to \$10,000 or more per year. In addition to high fees, associated challenges including the availability of transportation also determine access to these programs. Differential rates of poverty among different immigrant groups may account for much of the disparities in access that we see between groups of different origins: Hispanic children of immigrants, for instance, have a poverty rate of 28 percent, compared to 10 percent for Asian children of immigrants and 19 percent for Black children of immigrants. Hispanic immigrant families are therefore likely to be the most constrained by the high cost of participation in ECEC programs.²⁵

Parental educational attainment

A mother’s educational attainment is highly predictive of educational outcomes overall for children, and is strongly associated in particular with preschool participation. Overall, 25 percent of children of immigrants have parents with less than high school degrees, compared with 8 percent of children of natives.²⁶ Parental education presents a serious risk factor for many children of immigrants, particularly children from Hispanic immigrant families, among whom 48 percent have a mother who did not graduate from high school, compared to a much smaller proportion of 16 percent of children from Black immigrant families, 10 percent of children from Asian immigrant families, and only 8 percent of children from white immigrant families.²⁷ This link between parental educational attainment and preschool participation is particularly important as it means that those children who are most in need of quality out-of-home learning experiences are least likely to obtain them. Moreover, those immigrants with low levels of education are more likely to work in jobs that have nontraditional hours, requiring child care and pre-K programs that offer longer and more flexible hours that may not be available to them.

²⁴ Karoly and Gonzalez, *Early Care and Education for Children in Immigrant Families*.

²⁵ Donald J. Hernandez, “Young Children in Black Immigrant Families from Africa and the Caribbean” in *Young Children of Black Immigrants in America*, eds. Randy Capps and Michael Fix. (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2012).

²⁶ Karoly and Gonzalez, *Early Care and Education for Children in Immigrant Families*;

Miriam Calderon, *Buenos Principios: Latino Children in the Earliest Years of Life*. (Washington: National Council of La Raza, 2007): <http://www.policyarchive.org/handle/10207/bitstreams/17704.pdf>

²⁷ Hernandez, *Young Children in Black Immigrant Families*.



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Language proficiency

While federal language access laws mandate that programs like Head Start provide translated materials and interpreters, the reality is such that those who do not speak English well likely have a more difficult time learning about and enrolling in public programs, including ECEC programs. Here, too, children from Black immigrant families from the Caribbean and Africa may benefit due to their parents' relatively high levels of English proficiency compared to those from other groups. Eighty percent of Black immigrants' children have at least one parent who speaks English fluently, compared to 70 percent of Asian and 42 percent of Hispanic parents.²⁸ Meanwhile, 44 percent of children in Hispanic immigrant families live in linguistically isolated households, where all household members aged 13 or older speak English less than very well.²⁹ Parents with limited English proficiency in addition to low levels of educational attainment are likely to be particularly isolated from public systems and provisions, and may require significant intervention in order to become comfortable and familiar with ECEC options for their children.

Citizenship status and mode of entry

While all children of immigrants have, by definition, at least one immigrant parent, their varying family citizenship statuses and modes of entry into the country substantially affect their experiences. In some states, for recently arrived immigrants, lack of citizenship for parents means that they do not qualify for many benefits and services to which others have access, including cash welfare, food stamps, and public health insurance that may ease their access to ECEC programs. Children of white immigrants are most likely to live in a family with at least one citizen parent (79 percent), followed by children of Asian immigrants (71 percent), children of Black immigrants (67 percent), and lastly children of Hispanic immigrants (59 percent).³⁰

Furthermore, the Pew Hispanic Center estimated that in 2007, approximately 30 percent of all immigrants in the United States were unauthorized.³¹ Unauthorized immigrants are increasingly subject to arrests and raids as well as the risk of deportation, leading to what is often a precarious lifestyle. Although Head Start eligibility is not tied to citizenship status, undocumented parents may be fearful or uncomfortable interacting with government services, or being in the public sphere more generally. Hispanics are estimated to constitute approximately 80 percent of the unauthorized population of the United States, constituting a significant risk factor for some children from Hispanic immigrant families regardless of their own citizenship status.³²

Beyond issues of documentation, mode of entry to the United States may present an additional factor influencing program participation: refugees make up 7 percent of all incoming immigrants, and often arrive with very little planning and from highly dangerous circumstances, leading frequently to

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Randy Capps, Kristen McCabe, and Michael Fix. "New Streams: Black African Migration to the United States" in *Young Children of Black Immigrants in America*, eds. Randy Capps and Michael Fix. (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2012).

³² Jeffrey S. Passel, "Demography of Immigrant Youth: Past, Present, Future" in *The Future of Children* 21, No 1 (Princeton, New Jersey: The Future of Children, 2011).



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fragmented lives and often leaving them under-prepared for life in a new country. Among Southeast Asian immigrants, for instance, many are refugees admitted to the United States from Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos from situations of violent conflict.³³ Children from other Asian immigrant families are likely to come from families where parents are more highly skilled, better educated, and with more parental human capital overall than Southeast Asian refugee families, possibly explaining a significant proportion of the disparity between their participation rates in comparison to families of East Asian and Indian Asian origin.³⁴

Family structure and workforce attachment

In some cases, choosing center-based care over home-based care may not be a choice but rather a necessity, driven by family structure. While children from immigrant families overall are more likely than their native counterparts to live in two-parent households, this likelihood varies significantly between groups from different origins. The children of Black immigrants are the least likely among all immigrant groups to live with two married parents and are highly likely to live in single-parent families or with their grandparents rather than their parents, which may necessitate a higher rate of use of center-based care. Children of Caribbean-origin, furthermore, are less likely to live in a household with married parents than those of African origin, potentially contributing to their exceptionally high rates of participation in center-based care.³⁵

In addition to family structure, the likelihood of parents, and in particular mothers, being employed also likely affects rates of participation in center-based care or pre-K. Mothers in Black immigrant families are more likely to be employed within their child's first year compared to most other immigrant groups, further reinforcing their need for out-of-home care, with African immigrant mothers and Caribbean immigrant mothers being employed at rates of 55 percent and 67 percent, respectively.³⁶ Indian Asian and Middle Eastern mothers, meanwhile, are least likely to be employed at rates of 34 percent and 26 percent.³⁷ The issue of workforce attachment is relevant not only due to the likelihood that working mothers are more likely to take advantage of child care, but also because the child care system in general, and Child Care Development Block Grant subsidies in particular, were set up to meet working families' needs. Participation in the workforce may make it easier for mothers to access not only child care, but also child care subsidies.

US Policy Implications

The data and discussion provided above underscore several key areas of policy and capacity-building challenges that confront those seeking to expand the enrollment of children from immigrant families in high-quality early care and education programs. These include:

³³ Nancy S. Landale, Kevin J.A. Thomas, and Jennifer Van Hook. "The Living Arrangements of Children of Immigrants" in *The Future of Children* 21, No 1 (Princeton, New Jersey: The Future of Children, 2011).

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Hernandez, *Young Children in Black Immigrant Families*.

³⁶ Crosby and Dunbar, *Patterns and Predictors of School Readiness*.

³⁷ Ibid.



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An urgent need to expand access

The low rates of access to early learning opportunities overall, and the relatively low access for children from immigrant and low-income backgrounds in particular present obvious and serious concerns. Low enrollment rates across the board signal that this is not merely a problem of targeting, but also of an insufficient number of slots. Yet according to the NIEER, state funding for pre-K programs is now showing signs of decline after years of steady growth, undermining both access and quality for underserved children. Few states are expanding enrollment in the face of budget difficulties, and funding in 2010-2011 decreased by almost \$60 million, even after accounting for \$127 million in funds injected by the federal government through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.³⁸ Enrollment growth at the national level, meanwhile, has slowed in recent years compared to an overall trend of growth in the past decade.³⁹

Improving strategies to engage at-risk families

As the numbers above illustrate, parents of young children in key at-risk sub-groups continue to enroll their children in program services at low rates. Understanding why this is so and supporting strategies to improve enrollment can begin to be addressed by building the knowledge base about effective strategies, and piloting and evaluating new, innovative approaches. Interventions aimed at building literacy and parenting skills for those parents with low levels of educational attainment and systems knowledge are also necessary to draw in isolated families. Moreover, a reassessment of enrollment requirements with an eye toward understanding those aspects of the enrollment process that may be either overly taxing or alienating to those unfamiliar with the system may yield more equitable participation. A parent who is an unauthorized migrant, for instance, may not have the papers necessary to demonstrate that their family qualifies for a subsidized program if formal paystubs are required as proof of income eligibility.

Measuring the “diversity skill-set” of early care and education programs.

Both child care and pre-K programs must be designed to meet the needs of Dual Language Learners and diverse populations to ensure that relevant learning opportunities are being provided for all. The emergence of Quality Rating and Information Systems (QRIS) across the United States is creating comprehensive state-level frameworks and strategies to standardize and elevate the quality of child care. This presents an unprecedented opportunity to incorporate the needs of children of immigrants in setting quality standards. Well-designed QRIS systems should ensure that programs are held accountable for the success of this population, and that programs that are effectively working with these groups by, for example, providing appropriately trained staff, tailored learning programs, and successful parent engagement approaches, are appropriately rewarded.

Creating an aligned ECEC system at state and federal levels

Several U.S. states have, in recent years, created new offices to coordinate and consolidate all early childhood activities for the first time. This consolidation of governance structure at the state level has the potential to provide a clearer and comprehensive strategy to meet the needs of all children and provide leadership in reaching these goals in place of the current patchwork of systems and services that currently defines the ECEC constellation of programs in most states and at the federal level. Consolidated systems

³⁸ Barnett et al, *State of Pre-K*.

³⁹ Ibid.



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would also facilitate more comprehensive data collection, particularly of the subgroups described in this paper, enabling the formulation of more effective targeted policy. For traditionally underserved subgroups, a coherent national level policy is crucial in setting and achieving goals to reduce long-standing inequalities, and the creation of an aligned ECEC system is a first step in the creation of such a strategy.

Points for Further Discussion

- How have different systems been effective in minimizing structural barriers for immigrant families, whether as part of more general affordability and access policies or practices that affect all children, or policies and practices targeted to their needs?
- What is the current state of data collection specific to children of immigrants at the community, state, national and federal levels, and what opportunities exist to revise and expand these systems to obtain a clearer picture of the status of equal access, and of respective strengths and vulnerabilities of diverse groups?
- Given that parents of immigrant children must generally understand how to navigate and be motivated to engage with child-serving programs, what policies and practices are proving effective in increasing early childhood program knowledge and usage by immigrant families?



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