

The Integration of Immigrants into **AMERICAN SOCIETY**

ISSUE BRIEF: Families and Children

The United States prides itself on being a nation of immigrants, and it has a long history of absorbing people from across the globe. Today, one of every four members of the U.S. population is either an immigrant or has a parent who is an immigrant. How well they are successfully integrating is an important and pressing question.

A panel of experts appointed by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine examined the available evidence to assess how immigrants are integrating into U.S. society in a range of areas—education, employment and earnings, language, and health, among others. The committee's findings are presented in its report *The Integration of Immigrants into American Society* (2015). The report concludes that across all measurable outcomes, current immigrants and their descendants are integrating into U.S. society.

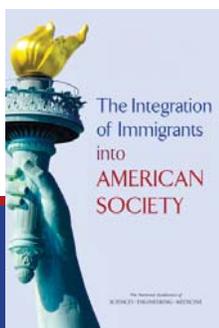


One facet of integration examined in the report is the effects of integration on immigrant families and children.

Integration's Effects on Families

Family networks provide a cultural safe haven for immigrants to this country, but they are also a launching point for integrating their descendants into American society. As integration occurs, immigrants' family patterns tend to change—and not always in ways that are beneficial to immigrants.

- Immigrants' rates of divorce and out-of-wedlock births start out much lower than native-born Americans, but over time and generations these rates increase.
- Immigrant and second-generation children are much more likely to live in families with two parents than native-born U.S. children in general. However, this changes over time and generations. For third and later generation children, the proportion of single-parent families converges toward the percentage for native-born children in U.S. families generally. Two parent families provide children with a number of important advantages: They are associated with lower risks of poverty, more effective parenting practices, and lower levels of stress than are households with only one or no parents.
- Over time and generations, the likelihood of immigrants' living in extended families with multiple generations under one roof declines.



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Effects of Parents' Legal Status on Children

An estimated 11.3 million (26 percent) of foreign-born people in the United States are undocumented. Over five million children live in families with an undocumented parent, and 4.5 million of these children are native-born U.S. citizens. Parents' undocumented status can hinder the integration prospects of their U.S.-born children, even though, as citizens, it is in the country's best interest that these children integrate successfully. In particular, parents' undocumented status can have negative effects on children's socioeconomic outcomes, cognitive development, and mental health. For example, Mexican-American children whose parents remained undocumented attained 1.25 fewer years of completed schooling than their counterparts whose parents transitioned to a documented status.

The Growth of Intermarriage

Immigrants become Americans not just by integrating into neighborhoods, schools, and workplaces, but also into families. Marriages between the native born and immigrants, most of whom are ethnic or racial minorities, appear to have increased significantly over time. Today, about one of every seven new marriages is an interracial or interethnic marriage, more than twice the rate a generation ago. A recent survey reported that more than 35 percent of Americans said that one of their "close" kin is of a different race. Integration of immigrants and their descendants is a major contributor to this large degree of intermixing. Perhaps as a result, the social and cultural boundaries between native-born and foreign-born populations in the United States are much less clearly defined than in the past.

This issue brief is one in a series prepared by the Committee on Population based on the report *The Integration of Immigrants into American Society* (2015). The study was sponsored by the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the Russell Sage Foundation, the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services of the Department of Homeland Security, and the National Science Foundation, with additional support from the National Academy of Sciences Kellogg fund. Any findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the study committee and do not necessarily reflect those of the sponsors.