

Executive Summary: Children in Immigrant Families

In order for this nation to reach its full potential, every child must be able to reach their full potential. Much of the country's future success depends on whether immigrant families have access to the resources and supports that will help them learn, develop, and contribute. In order to ensure every kid, every family, and every community is thriving, work must be done to break down the barriers that are prohibiting kids in immigrant familiesⁱ from thriving.

Children in immigrant families, like their predecessors in previous centuries, contribute significantly to the collective prosperity of the United States, when given the chance. Research shows that the children of immigrants— the second generation — are among the strongest economic and fiscal contributors in the populationⁱⁱ. The National Academies also found that in the coming years, immigration will be the primary source of labor-force growth in an increasingly aging population.ⁱⁱⁱ

Data

In Wisconsin, there are over 143,000 children in immigrant families, they are 11% of all children. 82% of these children are children of color, (meaning 18% are White), and it is important to note that the vast majority of these children (more that 9 out of 10) are U.S. citizens.

What children in immigrant families need to thrive is what all children need: strong families, economic stability, and high-quality education, so they can meet developmental milestones. The problem is that on top of the systemic and institutional barriers that many children of color face, the children of immigrants face additional barriers. This results in the well-being of children in immigrant families across the nation being significantly lower than children of U.S. born families, particularly in economic and education indicators. That dynamic is mirrored in Wisconsin. For example:

- Wisconsin children in immigrant families are one third less likely to live in families who are economically secure (2x the poverty level) than children in US born families.
- 94% of Wisconsin children in US born families are living with someone with at least a high school degree, compared to 73% Wisconsin children in immigrant families
- The 4th grade reading proficiency of Wisconsin children in US born families is concerning low, only 39%. That compares to an appallingly low rate of 9% of Wisconsin children in immigrant families

Children are traumatized when they are separated from their families. There is a great deal of interest in Wisconsin about toxic stress and trauma and how it is minimized and mitigated. The First Lady and members of the legislature have committed significant time and resource to learning about and addressing this challenge. At the same time, trauma is being perpetuated on thousands of kids in Wisconsin and millions across the nation by harmful rhetoric and detention and deportation policies that rip loving families apart. This must stop.

Recommendations

First and foremost, **immigrant families must be protected**. To those who claim to revere family, that reverence must be extended to immigrant families and their children by supporting policies that keep families together rather than tearing them apart. Let's put children and families at the center of policies, by supporting DREAMers (of which there are 7500 in Wisconsin), not deporting parents with children who are U.S. citizens, and giving access to legal representation during complicated immigration proceedings, particularly for unaccompanied minors.

To help **children reach key developmental milestones**, it must be ensured that that families do not have to fear connecting with critical educational and other services. Also, these services must be high-quality and culturally and linguistically appropriate. It must also be ensured that no immigration enforcement activities take place where services are provided, like schools, child care centers, health clinics or courts.

To increase economic opportunities for immigrant parents and **economic stability for families**, policies must be enacted that prevents wage theft and immigration related retaliation by employers. Immigrant parents should also be provided with access to drivers' licenses, regardless of immigration status, increasing the ability to travel for work and participate in the financial mainstream. Also, government and private sector employers should facilitate access to occupational licenses and credentials to foreign educated immigrants with more advanced skills who would be otherwise underemployed in low wage jobs. And for all families, immigrant and U.S. born alike, the minimum wage should be increased to a family supporting wage, paid family leave should be mandated, and employers should work to develop more predictable and stable scheduling practices.

Wisconsin's leaders have an opportunity and obligation to safeguard the futures of 143,000 children living in immigrant families. Children who endure high levels of trauma, lack support systems, and face structural racism can be blocked from the path to opportunity. The long-term consequences for the well-being of children who have been separated from their parents, particularly under traumatic circumstances, must be avoided to ensure their healthy development. Children from immigrant families are critical to the success of the state and an essential part to achieving a Wisconsin where every kid, every family, and every community thrives.

ⁱ Children are considered to be in immigrant families if at least one parent or the children themselves are immigrants.

ⁱⁱ National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. (2017). *The economic and fiscal consequences of immigration*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/23550>.

ⁱⁱⁱ National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. (2017).

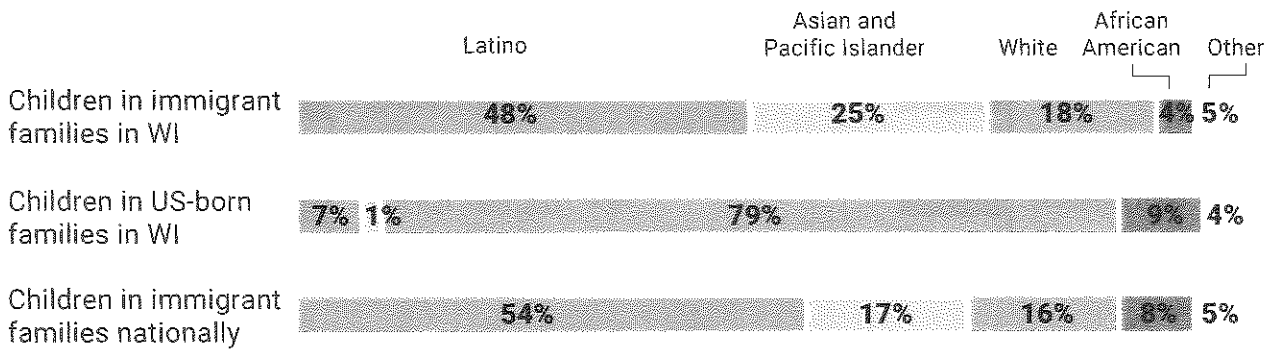
Children in Immigrant Families

Children are considered to be in immigrant families if at least one parent or the children themselves are immigrants. In Wisconsin, 91% of the children in immigrant families are citizens.

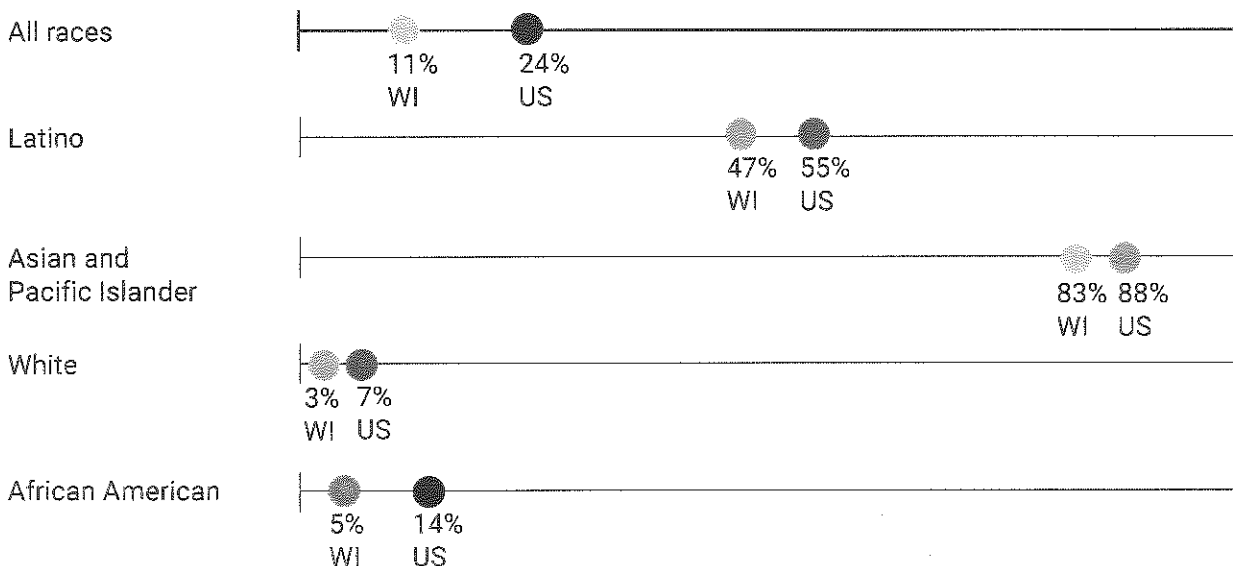
Figures are from Kids Count, an initiative of the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

Race or ethnicity	Children in immigrant families in Wisconsin
Latino	68,200
Asian and Pacific Islander	35,200
White	26,000
African American	5,500
Other	7,900
Total	142,800

Race and ethnicity of children by family status and location



Share of children that are in immigrant families

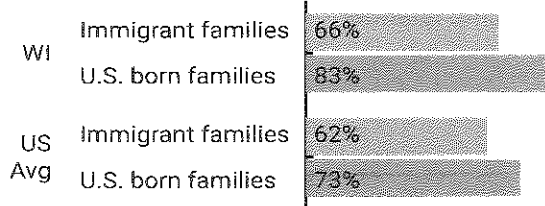


Children in Immigrant Families in Wisconsin

How children fare on indicators selected by Kids Count, an initiative of the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

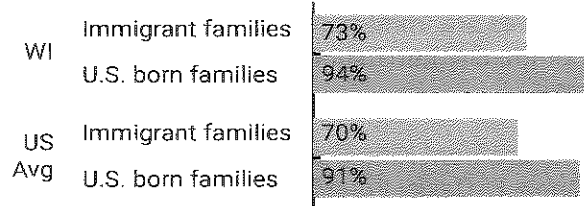
Low poverty areas

Children who live in low poverty areas (<20%), 2011-15



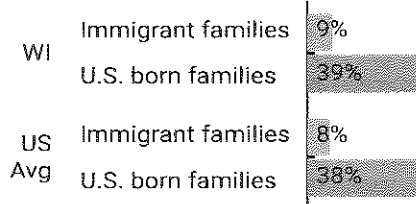
Family education

Children living with someone with at least a high school degree, 2013-15



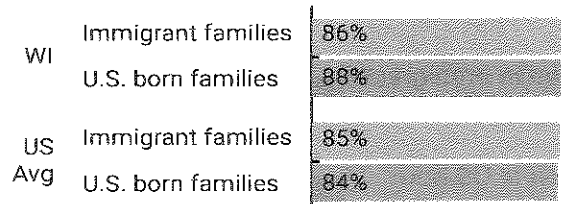
Reading proficiency

4th graders scoring at least proficient in reading, 2015



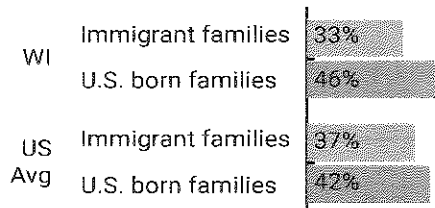
School or work

Young adults ages 19 to 26 in school or working, 2013-15



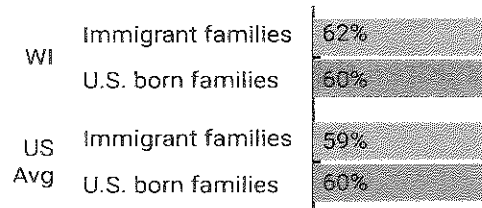
Associate's degree

Adults age 25 to 29 with at least an associate's degree, 2013-15



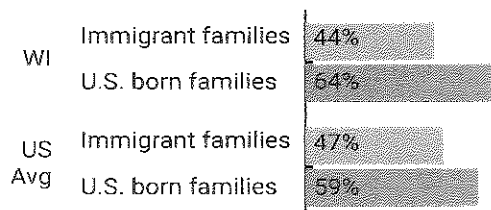
Preschool enrollment

3 to 5 year olds enrolled in preschool or kindergarten, 2013-15



Above 200% of poverty

Children living above 200% of poverty, 2013-15



Two-parent families

Children who live in 2-parent families, 2013-15

