

New Voices from the Bluegrass
A Portrait of Kentucky's Children in Immigrant Families

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
2007

Kentucky Youth Advocates

This report was made possible by generous financial support from the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

Kentucky emerged as one of the nation's top ten states in the rate of increase in the foreign-born population from 1990-2000 and 2000-2005.^{1,2} The success of our state depends upon public policies that provide bright futures for all Kentucky children regardless of their or their parents' country of birth. If we respond proactively, Kentucky will be an exemplar of policy and practice for the nation.

Kentucky Youth Advocates (KYA) has conducted the first statewide effort to collect, assess and disseminate data and input from immigrant and refugee families. The outcome of these outreach and listening efforts is documented in *New Voices from the Bluegrass: A Portrait of Kentucky's Children in Immigrant Families* with the purpose of informing policymakers and community leaders in the health care, education, and social service systems. The underlying message for Kentucky policymakers is this: integration of our newest Kentuckians is paramount to the safety, viability and health of Kentucky's future.

All quantitative data presented in this report is based on the most recent U.S. Census Bureau data, processed by the Kentucky State Data Center at the University of Louisville, unless otherwise noted. For the purposes of the report, the term "children in immigrant families" is defined as children born outside the U.S. or children born in the U.S. with at least one parent who was born outside the U.S. Foreign-born children adopted by U.S. families are therefore included in "children in immigrant families". Also, for the purpose of consistency, the term "Hispanic" is used to describe "persons of Hispanic or Latino identity" as defined by the U.S. Census Bureau.³

A Portrait of Kentucky's Children in Immigrant Families

Kentucky's total child population is decreasing; at the same time the number of children in immigrant families is increasing. Kentucky's racial and ethnic population patterns are changing as our state is becoming increasingly diverse. Understanding the demographics of Kentucky's children is vital to assessing equitable access and analyzing the impact of current policies and practices on child well-being.

Findings in the report include:

- One in twenty-three children, or approximately 43,000, is either an immigrant or the child of an immigrant;
- The majority of Kentucky's children in immigrant families, 68 percent, are U.S.-born citizens;
- More than one-third are under age five; and,
- Approximately 85 percent live in two-parent households.
- The rate of births to foreign-born mothers makes up about 6 percent of Kentucky's total births, well below the national rate of 24 percent.
- Approximately one in three children in immigrant families is white;
- Hispanic children represent another 32 percent; and,
- The fastest growing racial group of children in immigrant families is black, representing countries from Africa and the Caribbean.
- Kentucky's 11,000 English Language Learner students represent more than 95 languages.

Family Economic Well-Being and Community Integration

"[I]f there's an economic situation, someone can make a budget every month and explain how they are going to have less problems. You have to share responsibility. Like Saturday will be family day and Sunday is church and grocery. We try to keep it balanced."

Immigrant families bring strengths and assets to the Commonwealth, including high rates of two-parent households and home ownership. Immigrant families in Kentucky are investing in their communities through home-ownership at a rate of 59 percent.

The poverty rates for all families in Kentucky, including immigrant families, increased between 2000 and 2005. Still, poverty rates remain lower among children in immigrant families in Kentucky, which does not follow the national trend. While there are fewer children living in families with incomes below the federal poverty line, many children live in families earning between 100 and 200 percent of the federal poverty line and face similar barriers to making ends meet.⁴ In 2000, 40 percent of Kentucky children in immigrant families lived in low-income households, defined at less than \$39,600 for a family of four.

Educational attainment for parents is a significant indicator for child well-being outcomes. Thirty-five percent of children in immigrant families have a parent with a college degree. However, another 30 percent have a parent with no high school degree.

Community integration is an essential process to ensuring the safety, health and prosperity of Kentucky's future. Employment provides an important step towards community integration for immigrants. Employers also benefit from hiring multi-lingual,

multi-cultural employees. In 2005, 75 percent of children in immigrant families had fathers who work full-time and 25 percent had mothers working full-time.

Health

“I had to miss school to go with my mom to a hospital to translate. It’s really hard to translate medical terms to your parents. One time I had to go to the cancer hospital. They were just too busy so I had to translate. I was afraid I would not give them the right information in the face of white people. It was really hard ... I had to tell my mom she had cancer. I had to know first. I had to tell her first.”

Equitable access to healthcare promotes overall public health and increases the well-being of the state as a whole. The themes that emerged in focus groups include:

- Lack of healthcare coverage and access that impacts utilization;
- Language barriers and lack of understanding about the healthcare system, especially medical billing; and
- Prohibitive costs that make healthcare unattainable, specifically prenatal care for pregnant women.

Lack of adequate and consistent language interpretation and translation is one of the most significant barriers to quality health care for immigrant families. The unacceptable practice of using children as medical translators is all too common in Kentucky. Children do not possess the technical or medical terminology needed to interpret and in this society are not expected to mediate adult situations. Federal legislation mandates all service providers who receive federal funding (including Medicaid) must take “reasonable steps to provide meaningful access to their programs and activities” including providing information in a language understandable to patients.

Education

“I think we are very segregated. In the cafeteria, you don’t see a whole bunch of whites and blacks and browns sitting together. You could take a picture of the cafeteria and see it as separate flags.”

All of Kentucky’s children need opportunities for education that span early childhood to post secondary education. Programs need to be both intentional and targeted. Attending to language needs and educational needs will ensure that Kentucky’s children in immigrant families have bright futures.

- In 2000, approximately 55 percent of four year-old children in immigrant families were enrolled in preschool.⁵
- Between 1990 and 2005, the number of Kentucky’s English Language Learner (ELL) students increased from about 1,300 to more than 11,000, representing over 95 languages in 176 school districts.

-- ELL students comprise about two percent of the total student population in Kentucky. The most common languages spoken are Spanish (58%), Bosnian (5%), Japanese (5%), Vietnamese (3%), Serbo-Croatian (3%), Arabic (2%), and Chinese / Mandarin (2%)⁶.

-- The Council on Post Secondary Education (CPE) in Kentucky has policies to encourage immigrant youth to enroll in college, including “Eligibility for In-State Tuition Rates,” which allows undocumented immigrants to be considered residents for the purposes of obtaining in-state tuition rates if they have graduated from a Kentucky high school.⁷

Solutions

“I would have more scholarship programs for better education [in Kentucky]. We need to raise the level of education. I would rather educate everyone than [have them] do hard labor. It improves all counties in Kentucky.”

Community leaders, public service providers, educators and immigrant youth and families identified practical solutions for strengthening Kentucky. These include establishing a statewide language access plan for meeting federal Title VI regulations, increasing cultural competency training and resources of healthcare providers, expanding eligibility and outreach to all people interested in pursuing a higher education, and developing legal paths to encourage responsible participation of the newest Kentuckians.



Kentucky Youth Advocates ... The Independent Voice for Kentucky’s Children

Access the full report and the Executive Summary in Spanish at www.kyyouth.org

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¹ Capps, R., Passel, J., Perez-Lopez, D., and Fix, M. (2003). *The New Neighbors: A Users’ Guide to Data on Immigrants in U.S. Communities*. Baltimore, MD: The Urban Institute.

² Migration Policy Institute (MPI). (2007). “States Ranked by Percent Change in the Foreign-Born Population: 1990, 2000, and 2005”. Washington, D.C. Available at <http://www.migrationinformation.org/DataTools/MigrationInformationSource-ACS-2005-PercentChangeForeignBorn.xls>.

³ “For Census 2000 and the American Community Survey: the terms “Hispanic” or “Latino” are self-identified categories listed on the Census 2000 or ACS questionnaire, People of Hispanic or Latino ethnicity may be of any race. Available at http://factfinder.census.gov/home/en/epss/glossary_h.html.

⁴ Annie E. Casey Foundation (March 2007). *Data Snapshot: One in Five U.S. Children in Living in an Immigrant Family*. KIDS COUNT. No. 4. Available at www.aecf.org.

⁵ Donald J. Hernandez, Nancy A. Denton and Suzanne E. Macartney. (forthcoming). Early Childhood Education Programs: Accounting for Low enrollment in Newcomer and Native Families” in Mary Waters and Richard Alba (eds.) *The Next Generation: Immigrant Youth and Families in Comparative Perspective* Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

⁶ Kentucky Department of Education (2006). For additional ELL resources, please visit the Kentucky Department of Education website at <http://www.education.ky.gov/KDE>

⁷ Kentucky Council on Post Secondary Education (CPE). (October 5, 2005). *Postsecondary Access and Affordability Policies Concerning Undocumented Immigrants in Kentucky*.