

# Making it in America: The Immigrant Success Index

*a PETlab project with PRI and the Migration Policy Institute*

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## **The Big Idea**

Immigrants have been the engine of growth for the US since its founding as a nation. But that engine may be stalling after years of bitter debate over how to treat immigrants.

The Immigrant Success Index aims to add hard facts and aha's to the public debate about immigrants and immigration reform. Today's debate and media coverage frames issues as "us" versus "them", as legal versus illegal, and as faceless people versus neighbors, friends and colleagues. The political climate is opening now for a richer discussion and we want to enrich the debate. We plan to do that by telling personal stories about immigrant life here and uncovering the cities where immigrants are more likely to succeed and what policies, services and factors help or hurt them.

## **The Partners**

**Public Radio International** (PRI) is the second leading distributor of public radio shows after NPR. We produce and/or distribute shows like *This American Life*, *The World*, *Afropop*, *Studio360* and *Tavis Smiley*. Our mission is to give people the information, insights and cultural experiences they need to live in a diverse, interconnected world. And we have a major initiative to reach and engage immigrants in the US to bring their voices into public debate, provide unbiased stories of their role and experiences in our society, and get all Americans involved in figuring out our approach to immigrants and immigration. PRI is creating the Index as a way to help local journalists and citizens tell true stories about immigrant life in America as well as city policy makers who are interested in attracting and engaging their immigrant populations.

**The Migration Policy Institute** (MPI) is an independent, nonpartisan, nonprofit think tank in Washington, DC dedicated to analyzing the movement of people worldwide. It believes that sound immigration and integration policies result from balanced analysis, solid data, and the engagement of a spectrum of stakeholders — from community leaders and immigrant organizations to the policy elite — interested in immigration policy and its human consequences. MPI is gathering the data and providing the analytic smarts to ensure the Immigrant Success Index is as accurate, honest and revealing as possible.

## **The Immigrant Success Index**

MPI and PRI will create the Index by gathering as much information as possible to compare the immigrant experience in 25 cities. The data falls into three areas:

1. What are the important characteristics about the immigrants as a group in each city? (age, job skills, education, English language skills, % of population, ethnicities...)

2. What are the laws, policies and services in each city that most directly affect immigrants? (access to and quality of postsecondary education, loans for small businesses, access to health care, requirements for carrying ID's...)
3. What are the social, economic and political indicators that measure immigrant success or lack of success in integrating? (income level, being over skilled for the job, bilingual ability, political activity like voting, whether the city attracts "creative class people" ...)

The final choice of data will depend on what information we deem to be relevant characteristics of people and indicators of success, **and** whether we have good comparative data at the city level that is already being collected in the US census or other surveys. Research like this is never perfect since we have to rely on available data, along with some reporting on relevant laws and policies. We'll weight the data by importance and create report cards for each city.

### **The Cities (selected out of the 100 most populous cities in the United States)**

Baltimore, MD ***	Birmingham, AL **
Boise City, ID ***	Boston, MA *
Boulder, CO ***	Cape Coral, FL **
Charlotte, SC **	Chicago, IL *
Columbus, OH **	Dallas, TX *
Dayton, OH ***	Detroit, MI ***
Washington DC *	Houston, TX *
Indianapolis, IN **	Lakeland, FL **
Los Angeles, CA *	Louisville, KY **
Miami, FL *	Nashville, TN **
New York, NY *	Raleigh, NC **
Richmond, VA **	Riverside, CA *
San Francisco, CA *	

*\* Ten cities with largest concentration of foreign-born population*

*\*\* Ten cities with fastest growing foreign-born population*

*\*\*\* Five cities most actively recruiting the foreign born*

### **Your Challenge**

PETlab and you are the creative geniuses that will take data and analysis about immigrant lives and make it real, understandable, and fascinating to your friends, parents, grandparents and complete strangers. You are the data toy producers – the people who find a way to have the data tell a multitude of stories about immigrants depending on how people choose to “play” with the toy.

However, you are producing a prototype. You won't have the full, rich data and options we expect for the Index. PRI is raising money to do that research with MPI and to fund PETlab to create the fully functioning data toy for the Index. So you have it both good and bad. Good, in that you can let your imaginations soar and you won't have to plug a ton of data into the prototype. Bad, in that your model won't be quite as interesting or complex because you'll be working from limited data. So your creativity in helping the information tell stories is key.

## More About the Data File

The data we prepared for the prototype include the following characteristics of each of our cities:

In each of the three years (2000, 2005, and 2010):

- \* Number: Total population
- \* Number of immigrants
- \* Immigrant share (%)
- \* % immigrants who are recent arrivals (arrived within the last 10 years)
- \* Among immigrant adults (pop. 25+): % low-, middle-, and high skilled
- \* Among native adults (pop. 25+): % low-, middle-, and high skilled
  
- \* Number of all employed workers (pop. 16+)
- \* Number of immigrant employed workers (pop. 16+)
- \* Number of native employed workers (pop. 16+)
- \* Immigrant share (% among all employed)
- \* % Unemployed (of total pop.)
- \* % in Poverty (of total pop.)
- \* % Speakers of languages other than English. % Black, % Asian, % Latino, and % who are non-whites (these as proxies for ethnic/linguistic diversity) (of total pop.)
  
- \* % 'Creative class' (i.e., share employed in professional occupations and have at least a bachelor's degree among all employed)<sup>1</sup>
- \* Scores from the Best-Performing Cities Index<sup>2</sup> (the Milken Institute index, 2010)
- \* Scores from the City Well-Being Index<sup>3</sup> (the Gallup Poll index, 2010)

One of the storylines that could be explored is whether cities attracted immigrants with certain skills during the 2000s. We could focus on learning more about the changes in the size of immigrant populations and the types of immigrants (low-, middle-, and high-skilled) the cities attracted between 2000 and 2005 (the pre-recession period) and then between 2005 and 2010 (the post-recession period). Eventually we plan to explore other factors that might affect migration flow at the metro/city level, including:

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<sup>1</sup> For more on the *creative class* see Richard Florida who argued that there is a strong connection between a large-scale presence of the creative class of workers – people who work in science and technology; business and management; arts, culture and entertainment; medicine and education – and the prosperity of cities. See <http://www.washingtonmonthly.com/features/2001/0205.florida.html>

<sup>2</sup> The Best-Performing Cities index ranks US metropolitan areas by how well they are creating and sustaining jobs and economic growth. The components include job, wage and salary, and technology growth. In most years, these give a good indication of the underlying structural performance of regional economies. For more see <http://bestcities.milkeninstitute.org/bestcities2012.taf?rankyear=2010&type=rank200>

<sup>3</sup> The Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index score is an average of six sub-indexes, which individually examine life evaluation, emotional health, work environment, physical health, healthy behaviors, and access to basic necessities. The overall score and each of the six sub-index scores are calculated on a scale from 0 to 100, where a score of 100 represents the ideal. In 2010, the national average score was 66.8. For more see <http://www.gallup.com/poll/145913/City-Wellbeing-Tracking.aspx>

**Demographic**

- Rate of growth of native and foreign-born populations against 1) geography studied; 2) state; 3) U.S.
- Recency of arrival
- Length of residence by recency of arrival (“stickiness”)
- Are recent immigrants international versus internal movers?
- Diversity of migration flows around geography
- Diversity across skills spectrum
- Sectoral concentration (top sectors per geography)
- Dispersal

**Economic Success/Business Climate (Gap analysis)**

- Immigrant-led business with more than X employees
- Growth of immigrant-led business in past 5, 10 years
- Percent high-skilled underemployed (brain waste)
- Incomes
- Poverty
- Home ownership
- Affordable housing
- Overcrowding
- English language learner performance

**Civic Engagement**

- Immigrants in elected political positions
- Immigrants in appointed political positions
- Percent of those eligible for citizenship who are naturalized
- Voter registration by country of origin

**Climate of Reception**

- Dedicated public institutions to assist immigrants
- Immigration-specific local ordinances (employment, enforcement, housing, licensing)
- Regional welcome initiative: Global Detroit, Welcome Dayton, Welcome Baltimore, etc.
- Eligibility for in-state tuition
- Eligibility for public benefits
- Eligibility for driver’s licenses
- Deportations via 287(g); Secure Communities
- Density of non-governmental organizations; coalitions, diaspora organizations
- Density/diversity of ethnic media
- Access to public transportation