

College-Educated Immigrants: Avoiding Brain Waste Through Admission and Integration Policies

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About MPI

Migration Policy Institute – An independent, nonpartisan, nonprofit think tank in Washington, DC dedicated to analysis, development, and evaluation of migration and refugee policies at the local, national, and international levels. We focus on:

- *US Immigrant Integration*
- *US Immigration*
- *International Migration*
- *Migration and Development*
- *Mobility and Security*

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MPI Study: Raising Important Questions

- What is the extent of brain waste in the United States?
- What are the barriers college-educated immigrants experience that limit their full economic contribution?
- How can these barriers be removed?



MPI Studied

- College-educated immigrants: unemployed or in unskilled jobs
- Unskilled jobs: require no more than modest on-the-job training (e.g., construction laborers, file clerks, taxi drivers, nannies)



Major Findings

More than **1.5 million** college-educated immigrants are unemployed or working in unskilled jobs.

21% of all college-educated immigrants – or 1 out of every 5 highly skilled immigrants – are working in unskilled jobs

*17% of college-educated **native born** are in unskilled jobs*

Another **22%** of immigrants are in semi-skilled jobs
– carpenters, electricians, massage therapists, etc.

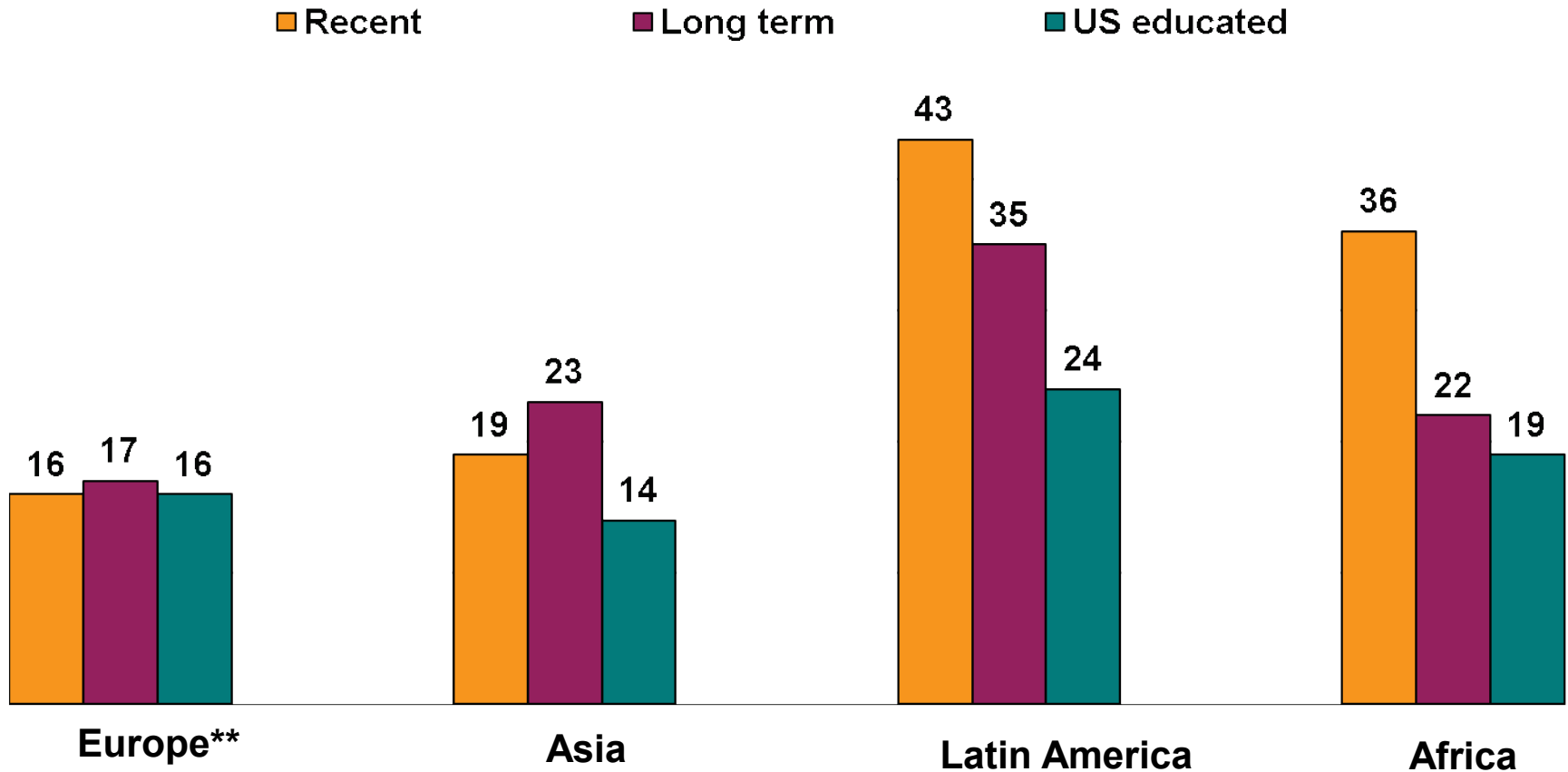
➔ Brain waste is a reality

Notes: Refers to adults 25 and older with at least a bachelor's degree.

Source: MPI analysis of 2009 American Community Survey.

College-Educated Immigrants in Unskilled Jobs in the US

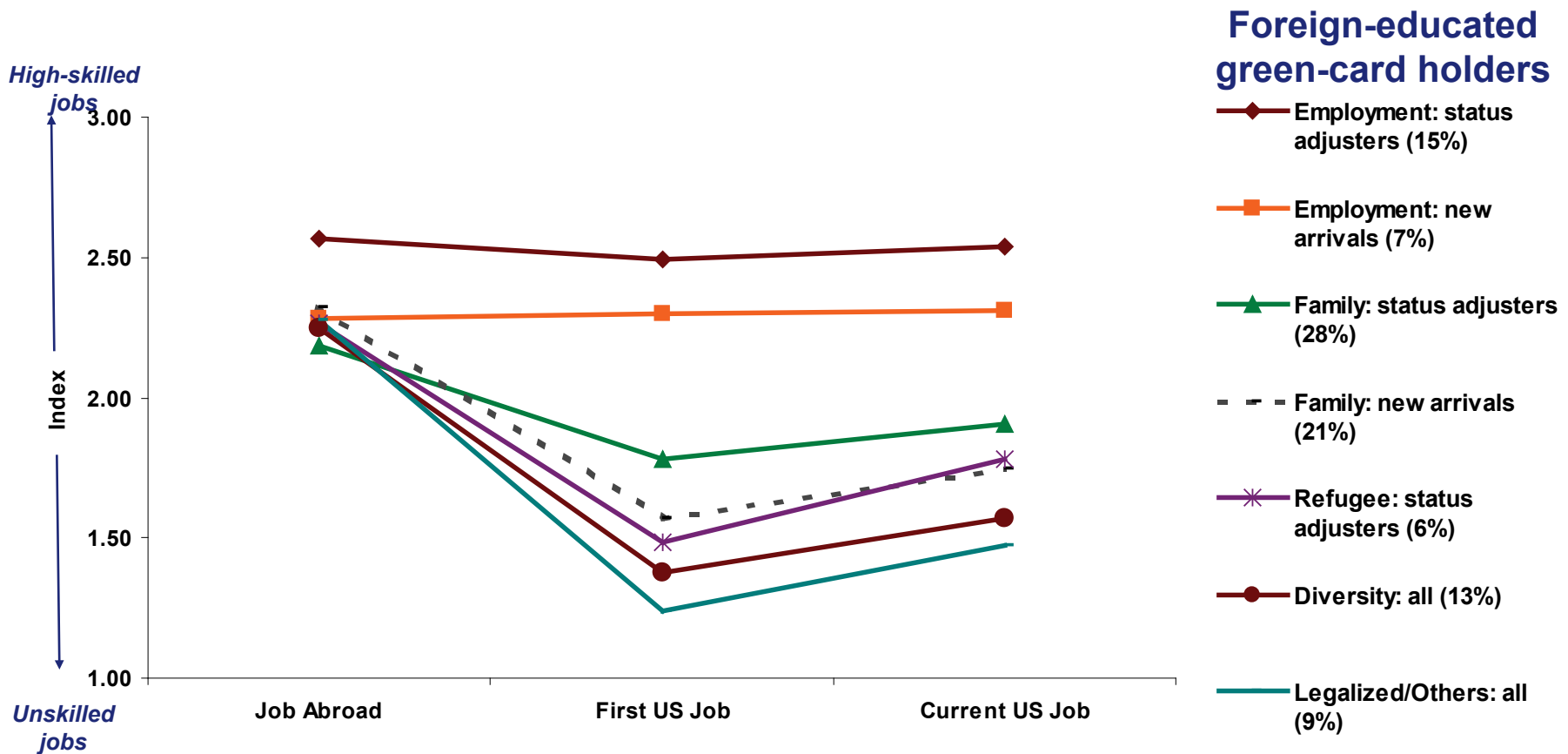
Percentage Employed in Unskilled Jobs*



Notes: *Among foreign-educated, “recent” refers to immigrants who came to the US ten or fewer years ago, while “long-term” refers to immigrants who have been in the US for 11 years or longer. “US educated” are immigrants who have at least a BA degree and who came to the US before age 25. **“Europe” refers to Europe, Canada, and Oceania.

Source: MPI analysis of 2009 American Community Survey.

Occupational Transitions by Admission Category*



Notes: *The percentages shown for each of the admission category represent the share of a given category of the NIS sample of the foreign-educated legal permanent residents who received their green cards in 2003. The green card gives a permission to reside in the United States permanently, to work legally, and to become US citizens after residing for at least five years and passing a citizenship test.

Source: 2003 New Immigrant Survey analysis from Batalova & Fix, *Uneven Progress: The Employment Trajectories of Skilled Immigrants in the United States* (MPI 2008).



Brain Waste in the United States: Risk Factors

- Lacking English skills
- Having only foreign degree
- Lacking US work experience
- Entering under non-employment visa category
- Coming from Latin America or Africa
- Experiences periods of unauthorized residence
- Lacking US professional and social networks
- Facing institutional barriers:
 - Nonrecognition of foreign-earned credentials
 - Lack of quality English classes teaching work-related language



Brain Waste in the United States: Public and Private Response

Immigrant integration

Firm level

- Incorporating language training into in-house communications skills training programs

State level

- State workforce agency partnerships with other stakeholders
 - Mentorship and internship programs
 - Accredited work-skills training and English language programs
 - Effective bridge programs that serve immigrants and employers
- *Spillover benefits to other groups of workers*

National level

- Funding for innovative/successful programs
- Information sharing



Brain Waste in the United States: Rethinking Admission

Immigrant admission

Provisional visas

- are an opportunity for both employers and prospective foreign workers to “test the waters”
- give foreign workers the right to self-petition for permanent residence
- introduce transparency in the process of switching between “temporary” and “permanent” statuses

Standing Commission on Labor Markets and Immigration

- analyzes local and regional labor-market needs, trends, worker-supply chains, and the effects of recent immigration flows
- makes regular recommendations to Congress and the President for adjusting immigration levels
- introduces flexibility and responsiveness into the system regarding future needs and trends



For More Information

**Find data, reports, and other analysis
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www.migrationpolicy.org

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