

POLICY BRIEF

A Profile of Highly Skilled Mexican Immigrants in Texas and its Largest Metropolitan Areas

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STATEMENT OF ISSUE

Much of the U.S. debate on Mexican immigration has focused on low-skilled immigrants, who have composed the largest share of that population, but recent data suggest that the share of college-educated immigrants among recent Mexican arrivals is rising considerably. The share of college-educated Mexican immigrants—those who are at least 25 years of age and hold at least a Bachelor's degree—has increased in all metropolitan areas. However, there are institutional barriers causing many highly skilled Mexican immigrants to be underemployed. How can we better understand the overall picture of labor market insertion for highly skilled Mexican immigrants in large metropolitan areas in Texas? What are the institutional barriers leading to underemployment of highly skilled Mexican immigrants, and what can be done to remedy or remove those barriers?

KEY FINDINGS

- Over a quarter (27%) of the 670,000 Mexican immigrants with college degrees in the U.S. resided in Texas in 2017.
- Educational attainment of Mexican immigrants has increased faster in the border cities of El Paso, McAllen, and San Antonio than in metropolitan areas further from the border, such as Dallas and Houston, possibly indicating movement of Mexican professionals from U.S. cities near the border.
- The share of Mexican immigrants in Texas with a college degree has jumped from one in ten in the year 2000 to one in five in the year 2017.
- Significant shares of highly skilled Mexican immigrants are not employed in professional occupations, sometimes because of lack of English-language proficiency or legal status, but in other cases because it is too difficult to get their credentials recognized.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Increase accessibility of language training for immigrants who are lacking in English language proficiency, as it is one of the most significant barriers to sufficient immigrant employment.
- Streamline requirements for recognizing professional degrees that were obtained outside of the United States to ensure that immigrants have better access to the jobs that they are qualified for through their education.
- Simplify requirements for recognition of skill certifications that were obtained outside of the United States, as many vocational skills go underutilized or unutilized due to the complexity of the existing recognition processes.
- Update the current frameworks for understanding immigration trends as the profile of Mexican immigrants continues to evolve, facilitating the design of policy strategies that better incorporate highly skilled immigrants.

SOURCES AND FULL PAPER



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