

# Children of Immigrants

## *Economic Well-Being*



Brief No. 4

THE URBAN INSTITUTE 

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This data brief is the fourth in a series that profiles children of immigrants using up-to-date census data and other sources.<sup>1</sup> The first brief highlighted the fast growth of the immigrant population and important demographic trends. The second described the family circumstances of children of immigrants, and the third highlighted the circumstances of young children age 0 to 8. The current brief focuses on immigrant families' incomes, economic well-being, and use of public benefits.

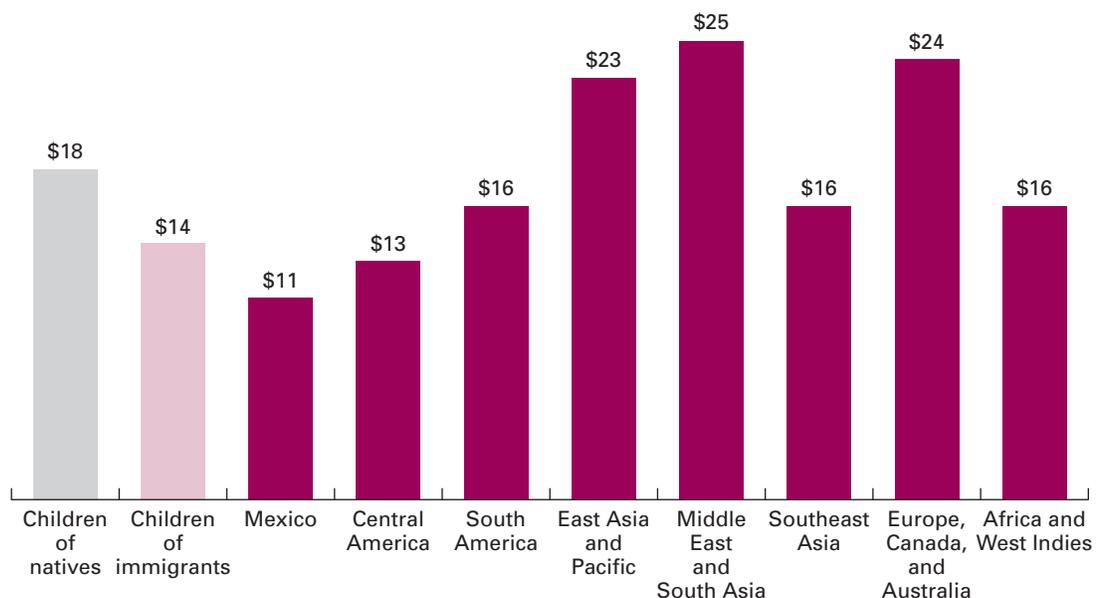
### Immigrants Families Have Lower Wages and Incomes

■ Despite the high work effort of immigrant families, immigrant parents earn significantly less than native-

born parents, and children of immigrants live in families with lower income levels.<sup>2</sup> However, hourly wages and family incomes vary significantly for different countries and regions of origin. In 2008, the median hourly wages for all wage and salary earners in immigrant families were lower than the median wages for native families (\$14 versus \$18, figure 1).<sup>3</sup> Wages were very low for Mexican (\$11) and Central American families (\$13), who earned about half as much hourly as workers in families with origins in the Middle East and South Asia (or "Middle East," \$25); Europe, Canada, and Australia ("Europe," \$24); and East Asia and the Pacific ("East Asia," \$23).

■ Children of immigrants live in families with median incomes 20 percent lower than the family incomes of

**Figure 1.** Median Hourly Wage of Workers in Immigrant Families with Children, by Parents' Region of Origin, 2008

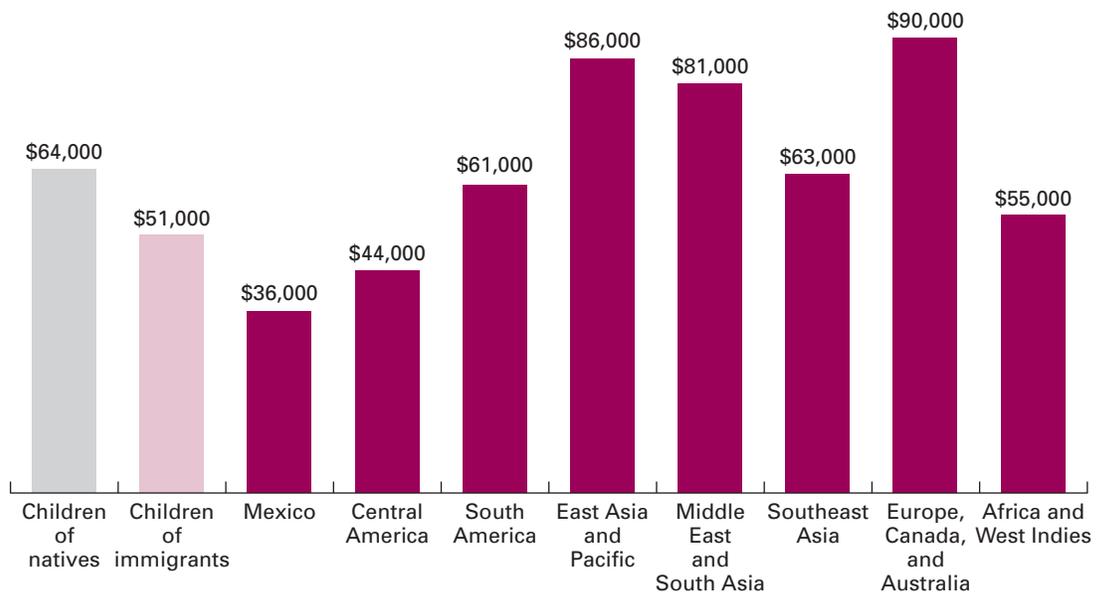


Source: Urban Institute tabulations from the IPUMS datasets drawn from the 2008 ACS.

Notes: Wages are averaged across wage and salary earnings of all workers in the family and weighted by the number of children in the family. Wage and salary earnings are reported for the past 12 months.



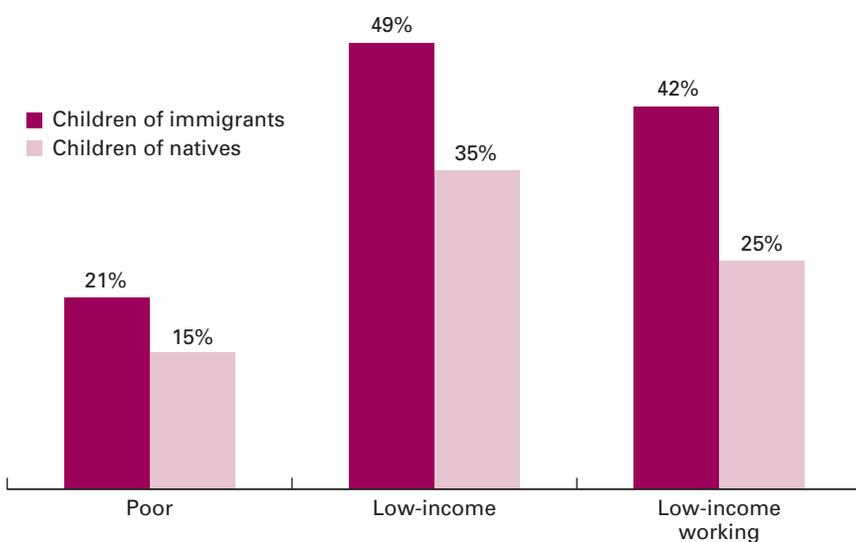
**Figure 2.** Median Family Income of Children of Immigrants, by Parents' Region of Origin, 2008



Source: Urban Institute tabulations from the IPUMS datasets drawn from the 2008 ACS.

Note: Family income includes income from all sources for the previous 12 months for all members of the family.

**Figure 3.** Share of Children of Immigrants in Poor, Low-Income, and Low-Income Working Families, 2008



Source: Urban Institute tabulations from the IPUMS datasets drawn from the 2008 ACS.

Notes: Poor is family income below the federal poverty level, and low income is family income below twice the federal poverty level. Family income includes income from all sources for the previous 12 months for all members of the family. In working families, adults worked 1,800 or more hours combined.

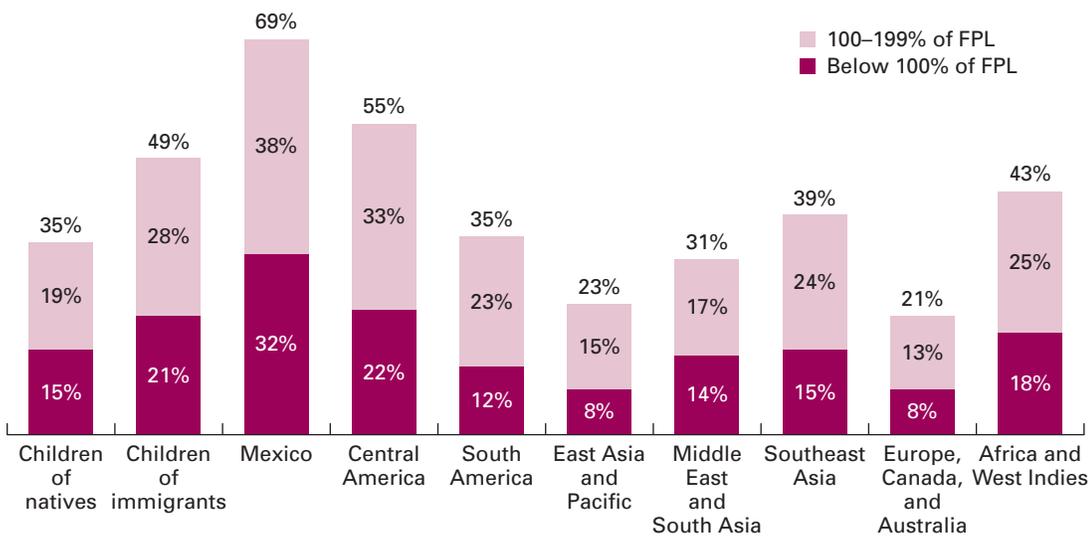
children of natives (\$51,000 versus \$64,000, figure 2). Differences in family income follow the differences in wage levels across immigrant origins. Children with European, East Asian, and Middle Eastern parents have family incomes 60 to 80 percent higher than the family incomes for children of immigrants generally. Children with Mexican (\$36,000) and Central American (\$44,000) parents have family incomes well below the average for children of immigrants overall.

### Children of Immigrants Are More Likely to Be Poor and Low-Income

- Children of immigrants are more likely than children with native-born parents to have family incomes below the federal poverty level, or FPL. In 2008, 21 percent of children of immigrants were poor, compared with 15 percent of children of natives (figure 3).<sup>4</sup> Almost half (49 percent) of children of immigrants were low income (family incomes below twice the FPL), compared



**Figure 4.** Share of Children of Immigrants Living in Poor and Low-Income Families, by Parents' Region of Origin, 2008



Source: Urban Institute tabulations from the IPUMS datasets drawn from the 2008 ACS.

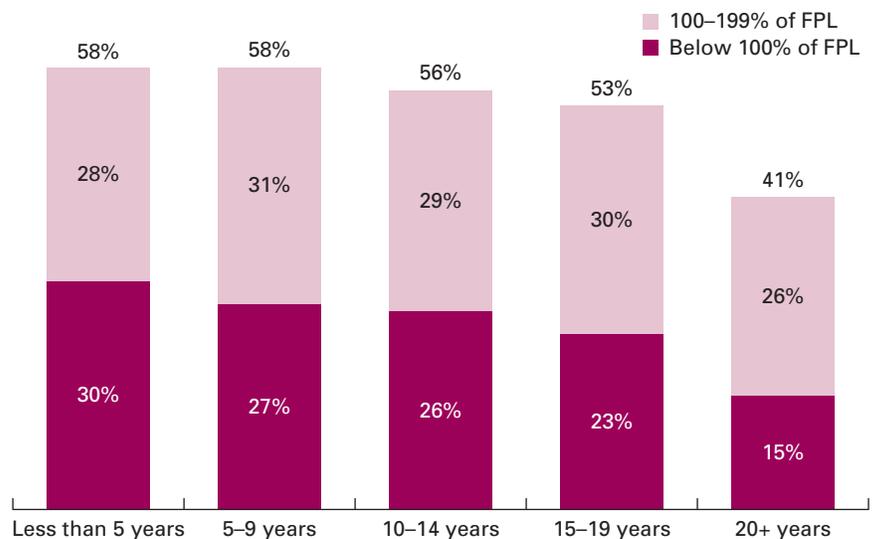
Note: Poor is family income below the federal poverty level (FPL), and low income is family income below twice the FPL. Family income includes income from all sources for the previous 12 months for all members of the family.

with 35 percent of children of native-born parents. While children of immigrants are approximately 40 percent more likely to live in families that are poor or low income, they are nearly 70 percent more likely to live in low-income families with working parents.

- The share of children of immigrants that lives in poor or immigrant families varies greatly by parental origins (figure 4). Roughly a third of children with Mexican origins were poor in 2008, and slightly more than a third were near-poor, with family incomes 100–199 percent of FPL; this is a significantly higher share of children living in lower-income families than any other immigrant group or children of native-born parents. The distribution for children in families with South American and Southeast Asian origins, by contrast, was very similar to the distribution for children with native-born parents: roughly one in seven were poor, and one in four or five were near-poor, while close to two-thirds had incomes above 200 percent of FPL.
- Children in recently emigrated families are more likely to be poor or low income than children of immigrants with longer tenure in the United States (figure 5). Thirty percent of children whose parents have lived in the United States for fewer than 5 years are poor.

In contrast, just 15 percent of children whose immigrant parents have lived in the United States for more than 20 years are poor, comparable to the rates for children of native-born parents. The share of immigrant

**Figure 5.** Share of Children of Immigrants Living in Poor and Low-Income Families, by Parents' Tenure in the United States, 2008



Source: Urban Institute tabulations from the IPUMS datasets drawn from the 2008 ACS.

Note: Poor is family income below the federal poverty level (FPL), and low income is family income below twice the FPL. Family income includes income from all sources for the previous 12 months for all members of the family.

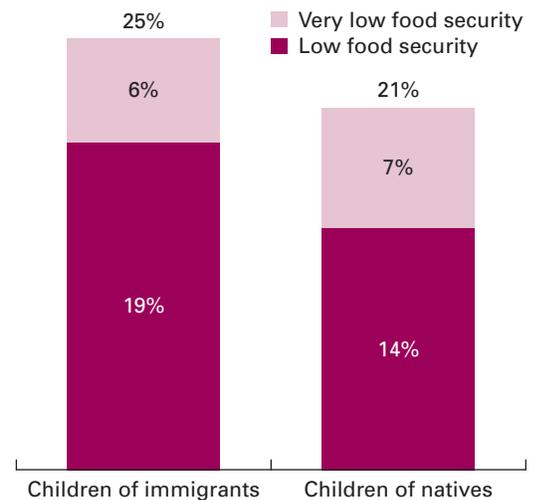


families that is low income declines the longer parents live in the United States: it is 58 percent for children with parents with 5–9 years of tenure, 56 percent when parents have 10–14 years of tenure, and 53 percent when parents have 15–20 years of tenure. The share is significantly lower when parents have lived more than 20 years in the United States (41 percent), though it is still above the rates for children with native-born parents (35 percent).

### Children of Immigrants Are More Likely to Experience Economic Hardship

- Children of immigrants are at a greater risk than children of natives for inadequate nutrition, as previous research suggests (Capps et al. 2009). In 2008, 25 percent of children of immigrants lived in households that were food-insecure at some point during the year, compared with 21 percent of children of natives (figure 6).<sup>5</sup> Food-insecure households experience uncertainty about or inability to acquire enough food to meet everyone's needs because of lack of money or other resources. Food-insecure behaviors can range from worrying that the food might run out to not eating the entire day. Food insecurity can result in inadequate nutrition to meet the needs for healthy child development, as when children eat less varied diets or skip meals. Many households cope with food insecurity by participating in federal food assistance programs, such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), or getting emergency food from food pantries. In households with very low food security, however, some or all adults and children actually reduce their food intake—for example, cutting the size of meals or skipping meals. In 2008, children of immigrants were as likely as those with native-born parents to live in households with very low food security (6 percent compared with 7 percent).<sup>6</sup>
- In many households with food insecurity, only the adults might disrupt their eating patterns, while the children are protected from substantial reductions of food. In households with very low food security, however, the children can also lack adequate food. In 2008, 14 percent of children of immigrants lived in households where the children were food insecure, compared with 11 percent of children of

**Figure 6.** Share of Children in Households with Low and Very Low Food Security, by Parents' Nativity, 2008



Source: Urban Institute tabulations from the December 2008 Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement.

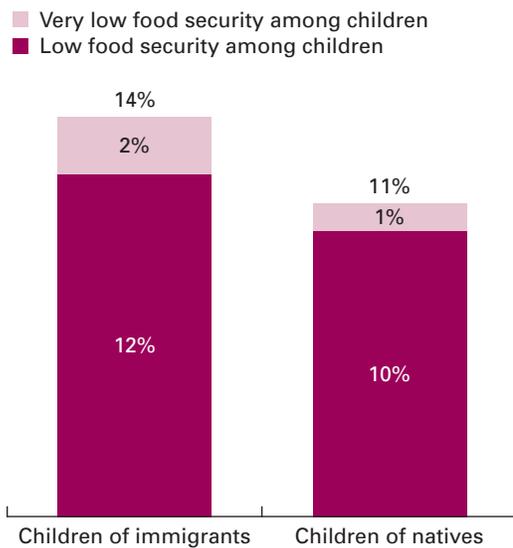
Notes: Households with low food security obtained enough food during the year to avoid substantially disrupting their eating patterns or reducing food intake by using various coping strategies, such as eating less varied diets, participating in federal food assistance programs, or getting emergency food from community food pantries. In households with very low food security, the normal eating patterns of one or more household members were disrupted and food intake was reduced at times during the year because of insufficient money or other resources for food.

native-born parents (figure 7). The share of children with very low food security or those that experienced reduction of food was twice as high for children of immigrants as for children of natives (2 versus 1 percent).

- In 2008, children of immigrants were much more likely than children of natives to live in crowded housing, measured by the number of people per bedroom: 7 percent of children of immigrants lived in housing with more than two people per bedroom versus 2 percent of children of natives (figure 8). Crowded housing conditions were higher for nearly all immigrant groups than for children of native-born parents, but the rates of living in crowded housing conditions varied significantly by immigrant origin. Children with Mexican parents were more than five times more likely to be in crowded housing than children with native-born parents (11 percent), while children with Middle Eastern and South American parents were twice as likely (4 percent).



**Figure 7.** Share of Children in Households with Low and Very Low Food Security among Children, by Parents' Nativity, 2008



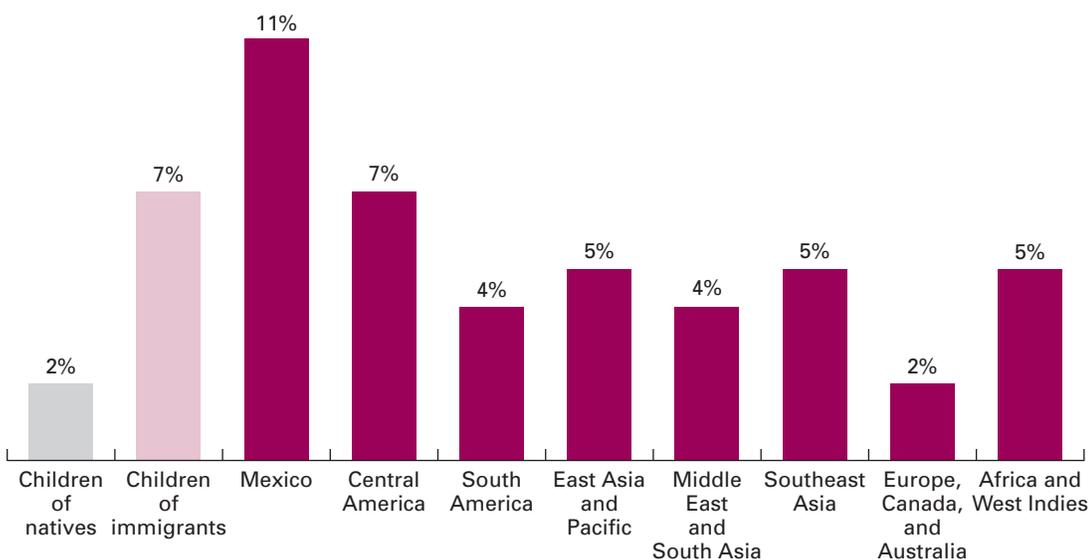
Source: Urban Institute tabulations from the December 2008 Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement.

Notes: Households with low food security obtained enough food during the year to avoid substantially disrupting their eating patterns or reducing food intake by using various coping strategies, such as eating less varied diets, participating in federal food assistance programs, or getting emergency food from community food pantries. In households with very low food security, normal eating patterns of one or more household members were disrupted and food intake was reduced at times during the year because of insufficient money or other resources for food.

## Children of Immigrants Have Lower Use of Public Benefits

- Children of immigrants are less likely than children of natives to participate in SNAP or to live in households where other family members participate in SNAP (15 percent compared with 18 percent in 2008).<sup>7</sup> The difference in food stamps receipt is greater among children in low-income families: 27 percent of children of immigrants live in households that receive food stamps, compared with 44 percent of children of natives (figure 9). Low-income children with Southeast Asian parents have the highest participation rate of 33 percent, while children with East Asian and South American parents have the lowest (13 and 18 percent, respectively).
- Children of immigrants are as likely as children of natives to live in families that receive income from welfare (4 percent versus 5 percent).<sup>8</sup> Among low-income families, however, children of immigrants are less likely than children of natives to live in families that receive income from welfare (7 percent versus 12 percent, figure 10). Children with Southeast Asian parents are the most likely to receive welfare: twice as many low-income children with Southeast Asian parents receive welfare (15 percent). Predominantly refugees, Southeast Asian immigrants receive social services upon arrival in the United States; they are usually

**Figure 8.** Share of Children in Crowded Housing by Parents' Region of Origin, 2008

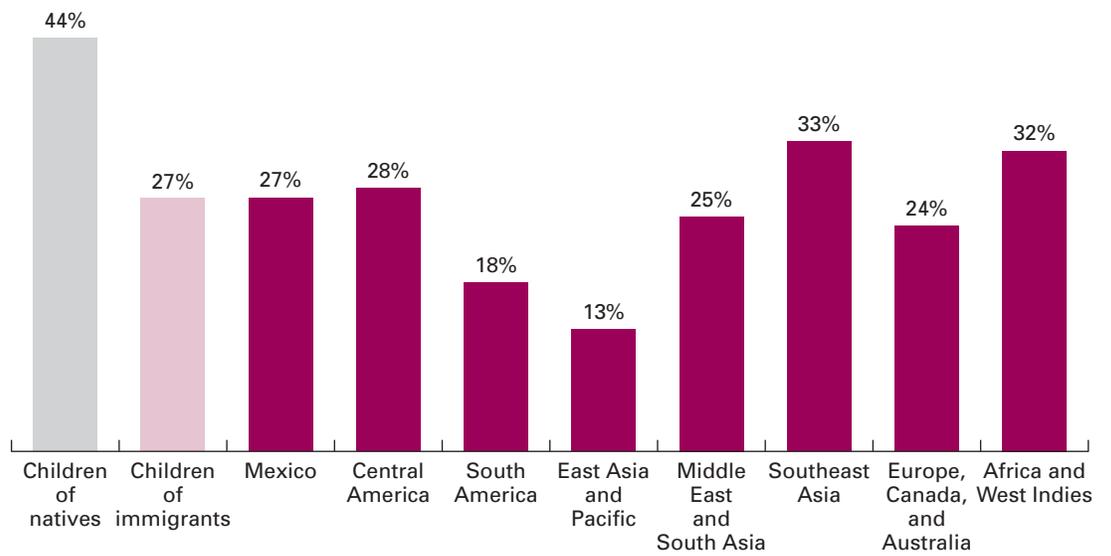


Source: Urban Institute tabulations from the IPUMS datasets drawn from the 2008 ACS.

Note: Crowded housing is more than two people per bedroom.



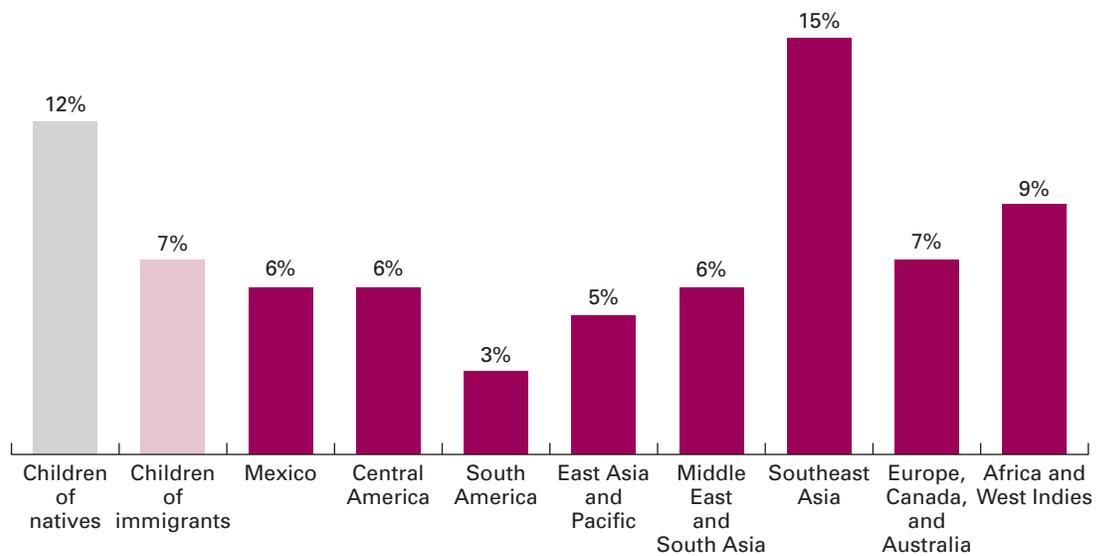
**Figure 9.** Share of Children in Low-Income Households Receiving SNAP, by Parents' Region of Origin, 2008



Source: Urban Institute tabulations from the IPUMS datasets drawn from the 2008 ACS.

Notes: The Food Stamp Program was renamed the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) in October 2008. SNAP receipt is for anyone in the household for the past 12 months.

**Figure 10.** Share of Children in Low-Income Families Receiving Income from Welfare, by Parents' Region of Origin, 2008



Source: Urban Institute tabulations from the IPUMS datasets drawn from the 2008 ACS.

Note: Income from welfare includes Temporary Assistance for Needy Families and General Assistance payments received during the past 12 months. Welfare receipt is for anyone in the family.



screened for TANF eligibility, and their access to benefits may be facilitated if they are eligible. Children with South American parents are the least likely to receive welfare: only 3 percent of low-income children do.

## Notes

1. An immigrant or foreign-born person is someone born outside the United States and its territories. People born in the United States, Puerto Rico, and other territories, or born abroad to U.S.-citizen parents, are native born. Children of immigrant parents have at least one foreign-born parent in the household. Unless stated otherwise, data in this brief are taken from the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS) datasets drawn from the 2008 American Community Survey (ACS, Ruggles et al. 2008).
2. “Family” includes the householder and all individuals living with the householder and related to him/her by birth, marriage, or adoption, as well as the unmarried partner of the householder living in the household. As indicated in *Children of Immigrants Brief 2* (Chaudry and Fortuny 2009), 92 percent of children of immigrants live in families where the adults work at least 1,800 hours combined or the equivalent of full-time, full-year employment.
3. ACS collects survey information continuously throughout the calendar year. As the survey asks about income from various sources received during the past 12 months, the 2008 ACS income data reflect respondents’ economic situation during 2007 and 2008.
4. Poor is family income below the federal poverty level, and low income is family income below twice the federal poverty level. Poverty levels are adjusted for family size. In 2008, the federal poverty level was \$22,025 for a family of four, higher for larger families, and lower for smaller families. Twice the federal poverty level in 2008 was \$44,050 for a family of four.
5. The food security status of a household is determined by the number of food-insecure conditions and behaviors, such as cutting the size of meals because there was too

- little money for food, that the household reports among adults and children. Food-insecure households include those with low food security and very low food security.
6. Households with very low food security are households in which normal eating patterns of one or more household members were disrupted and food intake was reduced at times during the year because of insufficient money or other resources for food.
  7. The Food Stamp Program was renamed the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) in October 2008.
  8. Income from welfare includes Temporary Assistance for Needy Families and General Assistance payments.

## References

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