



How California's Workforce Development System Excludes Immigrants, Why It Matters, And What We Can Do About It

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Immigrants and refugees are an important part of the U.S. workforce. However, they are not sufficiently integrated into the nation's public workforce development system. To make matters worse, they face multiple barriers in accessing workforce development services, including scheduling difficulties with irregular, unforgiving work schedules; linguistic and cultural barriers; lack of socioemotional and institutional support. This has devastating consequences for California, where immigrants comprise one-third of the state's labor force.

Workforce development programs help businesses find qualified job candidates. They also equip people with the skills and opportunities they need to find better jobs, which can help low-income and other disadvantaged groups lift themselves out of poverty. Title I of the United States' main federal workforce development policy – the Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act (WIOA) – covers job training programs like Certified Nursing Assistant training programs and Automotive Service Excellence certificates for mechanics. These programs are legally accessible to authorized immigrants. Title II covers adult education programs such as English as a Second Language courses in community colleges. Title I programs are accessible to authorized immigrants, while Title II programs are silent on immigration status.

However, they are systematically excluded from local workforce development systems through several mechanisms. The mechanism of “creaming,” in which nonprofits are incentivized to serve the most employable clients who are most likely to get a job after program participation, is well-documented. Through recent fieldwork based in the City of Los Angeles, we highlight the additional mechanism of structural creaming—in which nonprofits fail to match the right kinds of clients (especially the most marginalized) with the right kinds of employers, because of network gaps on both ends.