

Section 1. Introduction

from

All in for a Thriving Connecticut

Opportunities to Support Upward Mobility for the State's Immigrant Families

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1 Introduction

Connecticut was home to 549,000 immigrants in 2019–23, comprising 15 percent of the state’s total population.¹ About half of immigrants in the state were naturalized U.S. citizens. And as of 2023, nearly 30 percent of all children in the state lived in immigrant families.² Immigrants have also driven all of Connecticut’s population and workforce growth since 2006–10.³ In short, the state’s future is closely tied to the success and integration of its immigrant residents.

Connecticut has made important investments in supporting the upward mobility of the state’s low-income residents, U.S. born and immigrant alike. For example, the state’s minimum wage is among the highest in the nation and is indexed to keep pace with inflation, and its Medicaid program provides coverage for many low-income working adults.

However, low-income immigrants—who make up one in five low-income residents in Connecticut⁴—often face unique barriers to their upward educational and economic mobility. Limited English proficiency can make it difficult for some immigrants to navigate schools, health-care systems, and other community institutions. Many immigrants also come from educational or professional backgrounds that do not easily translate into jobs that pay family-sustaining wages in the United States. Others may lack knowledge about their legal rights or about how to engage with their children’s schools, limiting their ability to advocate for themselves and their families.

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For those without durable legal status, these challenges are even more severe. Unauthorized immigrants and others lacking permanent residence in the United States often have limited access to economic assistance during times of hardship. They may also be unwilling—or unable—to report mistreatment by landlords or employers. And they face the constant threat of arrest and deportation.

Although Connecticut has taken important steps to address the needs of its immigrant communities, these efforts remain uneven. They vary by geography, immigrant group, and the degree to which they have become institutionalized in the state. By learning from promising practices in other states and from local-level innovations in Connecticut, the state has an opportunity to enshrine stronger supports for immigrant families within its broader efforts to support all low-income families.

While this report focuses specifically on low-income immigrants, given the distinct challenges they face, most immigrants in Connecticut and across the United States are successful, self-sufficient, and contribute to their state and local economies. For example, more than half of all immigrants in Connecticut in the

1 Migration Policy Institute (MPI) analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey (ACS), pooled for 2019–23.

2 MPI Data Hub, “[Children in Immigrant Families](#),” accessed May 23, 2025.

3 MPI analysis of pooled 2006–10 and 2019–23 ACS data.

4 MPI analysis of pooled 2019–23 ACS data.

2019–23 period had been in the United States for at least 20 years, having built deep roots.⁵ Almost two in five had a bachelor's or higher degree, and more than half of immigrants who arrived in the past five years had this higher level of education. An even greater share—62 percent—reported speaking English very well or as their primary language. Immigrants also work at higher rates than U.S.-born residents of the state and have high rates of home ownership. In fiscal terms, their contributions are significant: one estimate finds that immigrants in Connecticut paid \$3.3 billion in state and local taxes.⁶

However, that success is not guaranteed. This report looks closely at eight policy domains in which the state could strengthen its support for immigrant families: adult education and workforce development, housing, issues affecting low-wage workers, health care and social assistance, small business development, immigration legal services, K-12 education, and early childhood system services. In each domain, the report gives an overview of current policy and practice, including promising initiatives to support immigrant families. This state of play is followed by recommended steps Connecticut policymakers, service providers, government officials, and funders could take to strengthen support for immigrant families' upward mobility.

To inform this study, Migration Policy Institute (MPI) researchers conducted 45 in-depth, qualitative interviews with service providers, nonprofit leaders, government agency officials, community leaders, advocates, and other experts across the state. The study was also enriched by insights shared by an advisory board comprised of community leaders, heads of immigrant-serving organizations, and representatives of advocacy groups (see Appendix B). MPI researchers also reviewed state laws, policies, and administrative data on state activities and trends, where available. Finally, the research team analyzed data from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey to generate a profile of immigrant families in Connecticut, which can be found in Appendix A.

This report comes at a time of significant uncertainty surrounding federal policy, funding levels for basic services, and the broader economic outlook. States and service providers are grappling with deep cuts to federal funding streams they have long depended on, as well as shifting federal rules and requirements. Broader economic turbulence ahead could increase the number of Connecticut families in need of support, even as it reduces state tax revenues and constrains private and charitable resources. Some of the recommendations in this report can be implemented immediately; others may need to wait until a period of greater fiscal and policy stability. Where possible, the report prioritizes recommendations that do not rely on new state appropriations for their success.

In sum, Connecticut is well-positioned to lead in developing innovative supports for immigrant families. The state is building on a strong foundation of policies and social services that support immigrant families, and public support for immigrants is high.⁷ The recommendations that follow are designed to build on this foundation and help ensure that all Connecticut families—immigrant and U.S. born alike—can thrive.

⁵ MPI analysis of pooled 2019–23 ACS data.

⁶ American Immigration Council, "[Map the Impact: Immigrants in Connecticut](#)," accessed May 23, 2025.

⁷ Lydia Saad, "[Surge in U.S. Concern about Immigration Has Abated](#)," Gallup, July 11, 2025.