

The Feasibility of Providing Services in Seattle for Immigrants and Refugees  
Pursuing Gainful Employment in Professional Occupations

**Breaking Barriers and Building Bridges:**  
**Career Pathways to Economic Stability & Quality Jobs**  
**for**  
**Seattle's Immigrant and Refugee**  
**Workers & Professionals**

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary.....	3
I. The Immigrant Workforce and Underemployment.....	12
Case Study 1: Immigrant Underemployment in the Healthcare Workforce.....	25
II. Economic Trends and Key Barriers to Career Mobility.....	29
III. Seattle/ King County Workforce: Where are the Jobs?.....	48
Case Study 2: Building Pathways into Teaching for Immigrant Professionals.....	58
IV. <u>Breaking Barriers and Building Bridges:</u>	
Best Practices in Serving the Specific Needs of Immigrant Professionals.....	66
Case Study 3: The Puget Sound Welcome Back Center.....	70
V.. Recommendations.....	75
<u>Appendices</u>	
A. Index of Tables and Figures.....	77
B. Educational Underemployment by Industry Sector.....	78

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### INTRODUCTION

This study was conducted in 2016 by the Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs (OIRA) in response to a request from the Seattle City Council to explore the feasibility of establishing services in our City for internationally-educated immigrants and refugees who are seeking professional occupations in the U.S. Early on in this study, we extended our focus to include immigrants and refugees educated here in the U.S. and those who started but did not finish their education in their home countries. We also determined that for us to adequately develop our findings and recommendations it would be necessary to widen our research focus to include structural changes in the labor market, altered patterns of career mobility, racial disparities in the workforce and the impact of these concurrent trends on the economic stability of immigrant and refugee workers and professionals.

This broader focus then enabled us to develop a deeper analysis of the overall workforce including changing patterns of social and career mobility – for native-born and immigrants alike – and to better capture and depict the circumstances, barriers, and needs of immigrants and refugees in the context of our current local economy, labor market, and Seattle’s workforce and economic development strategies and investments. Thus, we developed a greater understanding of the underlying systemic problems that keep lower-wage earners from achieving economic mobility and how those problems create more acute challenges for immigrant and refugee workers.

### IMMIGRANT INTEGRATION AND ECONOMIC STABILITY

The full integration of immigrants and refugees into the civic life of our city and region is a core goal and a central component of Seattle’s economic planning, community development, workforce investments, and racial and social justice goals. The City of Seattle recognizes that immigrant integration is a dynamic, two-way process in which newcomers and the receiving society work together to build secure, vibrant and cohesive communities.<sup>1</sup> This study addresses the Mayor’s and City Council’s concerns about displacement and the overall negative effects of economic instability on the pace, trajectory, and extent of immigrant integration in the City of Seattle and King County.

Several factors determine whether families in Seattle achieve economic stability, including access to a range of social benefits and human services, and ongoing connections to social capital. Securing and holding a quality job remains the key to economic stability for immigrant and refugee families. The attainment of stable, quality jobs supports a range of processes of community integration: secure and stable housing, access to social benefits and social capital, public safety, and civic engagement.

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<sup>1</sup> Grantmakers Concerned with Immigrants and Refugees <https://www.gcir.org/integration>

**RESPONSE TO COUNCIL QUESTIONS**

<p>What are the numbers of immigrants and refugees in Seattle and surrounding communities that would benefit from such a program?</p>	<p>Several hundred after the initial startup phase of services</p>
<p>What sectors or industries should such be the focus of these services?</p>	<p>Existing services in our region for Seattle immigrants and refugees seeking are primarily focused in the health care industry. Our study recommends a three-pronged approach – with investments primarily but not solely focused on the teaching profession extending from pre-K through 12 in alignment with the goals of the Mayor’s Education Summit. We also recommend as a secondary focus the STEM fields (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) Thirdly, public sector employment with the City of Seattle.</p>
<p>What is the best location of the services?</p>	<p>For maximum access, such services would be most effectively provided on Seattle College Campuses supplemented by the deployment of staff at other educational institutions and at key CBOS in Seattle serving the immigrant and refugee communities.</p>
<p>What would be the cost of these services?</p>	<p>\$150,000 Annually to support to support case management and employer engagement services</p>
<p>What are the potential partnerships with non-profit organizations, businesses, and public sector institutions?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Several CBOS providing employment services serving immigrant and refugee communities</li> <li>• City of Seattle Departments and Offices including the Workforce IDT, DEEL, OED, SHRD, FAS and others over time</li> <li>• The Workforce Development Council</li> <li>• The Seattle Colleges and Puget Sound Welcome Back Center at Highline College and the WA Board for Community Technical Colleges</li> <li>• WA Office of Refugee and Immigrant Assistance</li> <li>• Skilled Immigrant and Refugee Support Network</li> <li>• Key employers in identified sectors</li> </ul>
<p>How will the services be integrated with services provided by the Seattle Colleges?</p>	<p>The Seattle Colleges teachers, counselors and administrative staff would make these services available to immigrant and refugee students and they would serve as a key referral source Welcome-back services would be provided on Seattle College campuses</p>

## **LABOR EQUITY AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT**

The core goal of workforce development investments, policies and programs is to provide well-trained applicants to employers. Federally-funded workforce development programs and policies typically reward community organizations and other agencies for achieving rapid job entry for their job-seeking clients, but this process too often leads to poor quality, unstable jobs with low wages and little or no benefits. At the heart of this study is an exploration of the creation of workforce and educational programs and policies that would even the playing field to create a more diverse pool of job applicants by lowering institutional barriers that prevent immigrant and refugee jobseekers from fully participating and succeeding in the labor market. Our goal is to support the development of a more clearly articulated and equitable career-pathways framework, one that aligns and coordinates education, training, credential attainment, and early job-exposure opportunities to serve immigrant workers and professionals across wage levels, occupations, and sectors. In addition to emphasizing traditional career pathways, our findings also indicate a need to direct workforce and economic development investments towards the improvement of job quality in our growing sectors of low-wage occupations in which immigrant and refugee workers are disproportionately employed. Many immigrant professionals who won't be able to return to a professional level career with the appropriate supports can secure an economically stable job.

## **RACIAL DISPARITY AND BARRIERS TO CAREER MOBILITY**

The structural economic and labor market changes described in this report have resulted in the constriction of pathways of career mobility for both immigrants and for the native-born. While native-born and immigrant workers and professionals alike share the burdens of these ongoing economic realities, labor market competition disproportionately people of color, whether native- or foreign-born. Our traditional concepts and beliefs regarding “upward mobility” and thus many of the policies that guide our workforce and education programs do not account for the everyday reality that people of color – *both immigrants and native-born* – do not have the same opportunity that is made available to many white, native-born Washingtonians.

## **BARRIERS FOR IMMIGRANTS AND REFUGEES SEEKING PROFESSIONAL OCCUPATIONS**

This study reports a variety of institutional and social barriers that hold back mobility and undermine the full integration of immigrant and refugees into the life of our community. These barriers are examined in detail in this report and include: financial and language barriers, lack of access to immigrant specific career and employment services, explicit and implicit bias in educational institutions and employer hiring practices, limited access to professional networks and bridging social capital; and ESL programs that meet their learning needs. To achieve labor equity, immigrants and refugees need specific forms of support in overcoming these barriers and to gain mobility into professional occupations.

## UNDEREMPLOYMENT AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

While our study examined the overall labor market in Seattle and King County, we specifically focused on the scope, impact, and dynamics of underemployment in the Seattle and King County labor market for both native-born and immigrants. The United States Department of Labor (USDOL) conceptualizes underemployment as occurring when workers are pursuing full-time work but can only obtain part-time, irregular, or contingent jobs (“involuntary part-time workers”) or are discouraged and not actively seeking work. In this study, we refer to this as “work-hours” underemployment. Another distinct and significant form of underemployment, not captured by the USDOL, occurs when people have had to settle for employment which is significantly below their education, skill, or experience level such as the immigrant engineer driving a cab or a native-born degree holder working as a waiter. While this is often referred to as “brain waste” we use the term “educational underemployment” when the educational requirements of a job are not commensurate with a worker’s level of educational attainment.

In 2009, researchers detailed the lasting and damaging implications of persistent underemployment for immigrants and refugees.<sup>2</sup> Noting that most first-generation immigrants primarily find themselves in low-skill positions, their study asserts that the inability to move out of these positions at the bottom of the ladder has and lasting effects and,

*affects social cohesion, since integration and assimilation are difficult when immigrants are marginalized in the labor market. And it affects economic performance, since individuals who can invest in their human capital and use their skills productively can contribute more to the economy. As for the children of immigrants, the argument is even more compelling: fairness and social cohesion dictate that children born in the host country should not suffer simply because their parents were born abroad.*<sup>3</sup>

## OVERALL SCOPE OF EDUCATIONAL UNDEREMPLOYMENT IN SEATTLE AND KING COUNTY

We found that the rates of educational underemployment in Seattle and the rest of King County are very close. We estimated that 69,000 underemployed individuals work in the City of Seattle. In King County as a whole, over 162,000 individuals are educationally underemployed. This number represents nearly 27 percent of college degree holders and 16 percent of the total workforce. Nearly 40 percent of King County’s associate degree and 25 percent of its bachelor’s degree holders are educationally underemployed.

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<sup>2</sup> Demetrios G. Papademetriou, Will Somerville, and Medeleine Sumption, “The Social Mobility of Immigrants and Their Children,” Migration Policy Institute, June 2009, [www.migrationpolicy.org/pubs/socialmobility2010.pdf](http://www.migrationpolicy.org/pubs/socialmobility2010.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

## COMPARISON OF FOREIGN-BORN AND NATIVE-BORN RATES OF UNDEREMPLOYMENT

We identified more than 36,000 individuals born outside the United States, including more than 10,000 in Seattle, who we consider to be educationally underemployed. The overall educational underemployment rates for the foreign-born are close to those for US-Born citizens. In the total King County workforce, 15.8 percent of the native-born and 14.5 percent of the foreign-born are educationally underemployed per our criteria. In the Seattle workforce, we found that 19.4% of the native-born and 15.9% of the foreign-born are educationally underemployed. However, when we isolated the population of degree holders in the workforce, the foreign born have higher rates of educational underemployment. We found that among degree holders, 26.6 percent of County-wide native-born graduates are underemployed compared to 27.2 percent of the foreign-born. Similarly, in the Seattle workforce, we found that 27.1% of native-born graduates are educationally underemployed compared to 28.9% for the foreign-born.

Beyond the above numbers, while comparing rates of underemployment of the native and foreign born we considered our findings in this larger context:

1. Seattle's native-born population far exceeds all other groups in college attainment (Bachelor's degree or higher), besting the foreign-born population by over 20 percentage points<sup>4</sup> producing a much larger share of college graduates in the labor market compared to the foreign-born.
2. In comparing rates of underemployment we used the term "foreign-born" rather than "immigrant and refugee." The large number of H1-B temporary worker non-immigrant visa holders in our city and region are counted in the number of the foreign born in the workforce data available to OIRA for the scope of this study. This is an important distinction because the inclusion of the temporary visa workforce in the data if not qualified can contribute to a false impression that immigrant and refugee professionals are more well represented in high wage jobs in larger numbers than is actually the case. Nearly all the H1B visa holders are in high wage jobs and are not underemployed. Disaggregating the H1B visa holder numbers from our research would produce a more precise count of the number and distribution of legal permanent residents and naturalized citizens among the underemployed.

## COMPARISON OF IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEES WITH THE NATIVE-BORN IN LOW WAGE JOBS

When we examined rates of educational underemployment within individual occupations we found very significant disparities in the proportions of native born and immigrants working in low wage jobs: Twelve (12) of the seventeen (17) occupations in which 500 or more educationally underemployed immigrants are working are low-wage including: health aides in nursing, psychiatric, and home care services, childcare workers, taxi drivers and chauffeurs; waiters and waitresses, cashiers, personal care aides, drivers and truckers, maids and housekeeping cleaners, and cooks. We found:

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<sup>4</sup> United States Census Bureau, 2014 American Community Survey, <http://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/news/data-releases/2014/release.html>.



- Of the top ten jobs employing naturalized citizens five are low-wage.
- Of the top ten jobs employing non-citizens six are low-wage'
- Of the top ten jobs employing U.S. native born one is low wage.

A key challenge for underemployed immigrants who work initially in low-wage jobs is the barriers to finding jobs – including survival jobs - in their chosen profession and the high incidence of working more than one part-time position. In addition to disparities in their representation in low wage jobs, we also found that immigrant and refugees have significantly lower rates of attainment of college degrees.

### **BUILDING ON CURRENT INITIATIVES AND CAPACITY**

Our recommendations below are intended to support the efforts of various City of Seattle Departments as well as key employer, community, education, and workforce stakeholders and networks to target and fully address the needs of various immigrant groups in the workforce. These City departments include: Office of Economic Development (OED), Human Services Department (HSD), Seattle Department of Human Resources (SDHR), Financial and Administrative Services (FAS); Labor Equity Program, the Department of Education and Early Learning (DEEL); and the Office of Labor Standards (OSL).

Currently, the State of Washington, the Seattle Colleges, Highline College, and the Workforce Development Council of Seattle and King County are developing and implementing programs designed specifically to address the needs of immigrant and refugee workers and professionals. Examples of these programs include: OIRA's Ready to Work Program; the State of Washington Office of Refugee and Immigrant Assistance Limited English Proficiency (LEP) Pathways Program; the Workforce Development Councils' (WDC) investments in Bridges to Careers Program for English Language Learners; and the Seattle Colleges-Seattle Housing Authority's Workforce Opportunity Systems Initiative.

An important regional approach is offered by the Puget Sound Welcome Back Center (PSWBC) at Highline College, which provides career and language services to immigrant and refugee degree holders seeking careers in professional occupations. PSWBC is part of a national network of organizations providing education, career and employment services to foreign-educated immigrants serving those who hold B.A., M.A. and Ph.D degrees from other countries. PSWBC works closely with the state nursing board and advocates for changes in licensing processes that enables internationally-educated nurses to sit for the national nursing exam and re-enter the nursing field as quickly as possible. PSWBC also works with Boards of Education and their professional standards units to articulate pathways by which internationally-educated teachers can re-enter the teaching profession, and internationally-educated professionals in other fields can begin the process of becoming certified teachers.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### **A. OIRA participate in new inter-departmental team (IDT) for Workforce Entry and Employment Pathways.**

This IDT will be working to develop and implement a consistent city-wide approach to internships, apprenticeships, youth employment, access and job training that reduces barriers, especially for people of color and other marginalized groups--to regular employment at the City of Seattle and with Seattle employers. The IDT's efforts will align and coordinate education, training, credential attainment, and early job exposure opportunities at various stages of the job continuum, creating pathways into high quality jobs. OIRA can assist by providing supporting a targeted immigrant outreach and program strategy focused on career advancement and training models leading to employment for immigrant workers.

### **B. OIRA work in partnership with key City of Seattle departments and external stakeholders to help build community based on-ramps into emerging career pathways in various sectors for immigrants and refugees and support an employer engagement strategy that focuses on placement into quality jobs.**

Two examples include pre-apprenticeship construction programs supported by the priority hire work of the City's Financial and Administrative (FAS) Service's Labor Equity Team and the Department of Education and Early Learning's (DEEL) efforts to support pathways into the teaching profession for people of color along the education continuum from pre-k and K-12. OIRA can support these efforts to diversify our teaching and construction trades workforce by helping increase immigrant participation. It is an approach that integrates key workforce development, public education, and racial and social justice goals to generate public goods. Such efforts build pathways to living wage jobs and set in motion a multiplier effect that generates high returns in the form of increased mobility in future generations for children and youth of color. OIRA can also work with other City departments to support similar efforts to support immigrant and refugee pathways to City jobs.

### **C. OIRA work with the King County Skilled Immigrant and Refugee Support Network.**

This Network which includes King County, the City of Kent, the State's Office of Refugee, and Immigrant Assistance ("ORIA") the Puget Sound Welcome Back Center, One America and several community-based organizations providing career services to immigrant and refugees with college degrees from their home countries. Work with this network to pursue funding and other opportunities to increase Welcome Back type services in the City of Seattle.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

**D. Consider investing in the future in the expansion of the Puget Sound Welcome Back Center to provide a regional framework and service delivery model that could offer programs and services in Seattle College campuses and potential community sites in partnership with the Seattle Colleges, and other stakeholders including a focus in additional sectors.**

Existing services in our region for Seattle immigrants and refugees seeking are primarily focused in the health care industry. Our study recommends a three-pronged approach – with investments primarily but not solely focused on the teaching profession extending from pre-K through 12 in alignment with the goals of the Mayor’s Education Summit. We also recommend as a secondary focus the STEM fields (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) Thirdly, public sector employment with the City of Seattle.

Extending these service models into the City of Seattle would result in greater participation in training, education, credentialing, and employment services regardless of where immigrant participants live and work in Seattle and adjacent counties – what we refer to as a “no-wrong door” policy and practice. A regional approach would increase workforce system responsiveness to participants and help overcome potential geographic and institutional barriers. Increasing the scope and impact of such services could measurably move the needle on immigrant integration by institutionalizing best practice models which facilitate significantly larger numbers of immigrants into gainful employment in their chosen professions. The costs of such an expansion would be approximately \$150,000 annually for additional case management and employer engagement activities and services in Seattle and could serve hundreds of clients once brought to capacity.

## City of Seattle: A Vision of Economic Equality and Racial and Social Justice

*While Seattle is economically strong and getting stronger, the benefits of our thriving city are not jointly shared. We live in a time of increasing economic inequality and widening income disparities. Every day we witness inequities as Seattle experiences growth as a city. We see inequities between those who benefit from it and those displaced by it; inequities in prosperity between those who can afford to live here and those being pushed out...*

*We see inequities in our workforce with the simultaneous growth of both high-paying, high-skilled jobs along with low-wage jobs without a career path to economic stability. Cutting across all these disparities is the most challenging inequity of all – racial inequity and with it, high levels of unemployment among our youth of color. Seattle has placed a renewed emphasis on and commitment to equity in planning, including our economic development and workforce strategies. We have made progress with the minimum wage, priority hire, paid sick leave and secure scheduling. Growth in our city must be about placing without displacing, while recognizing race and social justice as core values in our plans.*

**Mayor Ed Murray, 2015**

## I. THE IMMIGRANT WORKFORCE AND UNDEREMPLOYMENT

*In Section I, we introduce the immigrant and refugee communities in our region: Who are they? How diverse are they? What is their socioeconomic status in our city and region? They contribute significantly to our economy and workforce, and we describe their contributions.*

*Next, we define and characterize the problem of underemployment and its impacts on immigrant and refugee families. We look at the scope of the problem, including how it effects the income and economic stability attained by these workers.*

*We conclude with a case study of immigrant underemployment in the high growth health care field which offers substantial career advancement opportunities and several high and middle wage career opportunities*

### IMMIGRANT COMMUNITIES IN SEATTLE

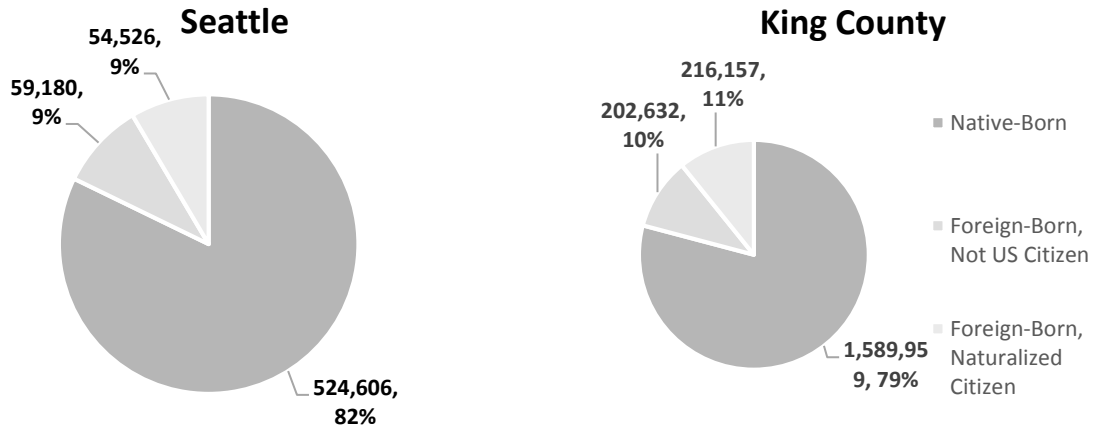
Immigrants and refugees account for nearly one in five Seattle residents and one in eight Washingtonians. They represent the fastest growing population in Seattle<sup>5</sup> with school district data showing that there are now 108 languages in Seattle Public Schools.<sup>6</sup> Immigrants and refugees represent a wide diversity of nationalities, ethnicities, first-languages, and religions and vary in their levels of English proficiency, work experience, talents, skills, career goals, occupations, incomes, and educational levels. They bring new cultural models and funds of knowledge, and in their pursuit of social connections, economic stability and a healthy and productive quality of life, immigrants and refugees significantly enhance and enrich the culture, civic life and economy of our City and State. The figures below provide a snapshot:

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Nelson Julie and Glenn Harris, "Report 2008: Looking Back, Moving Forward." (City of Seattle Race and Social Justice Initiative, Seattle Office for Civil Rights, December 2008). Found at: <http://www.seattle.gov/Documents/Departments/RSJI/RSJI-2008-LOOKING-BACK-MOVING-FORWARD-Full%20Report-Final.pdf>

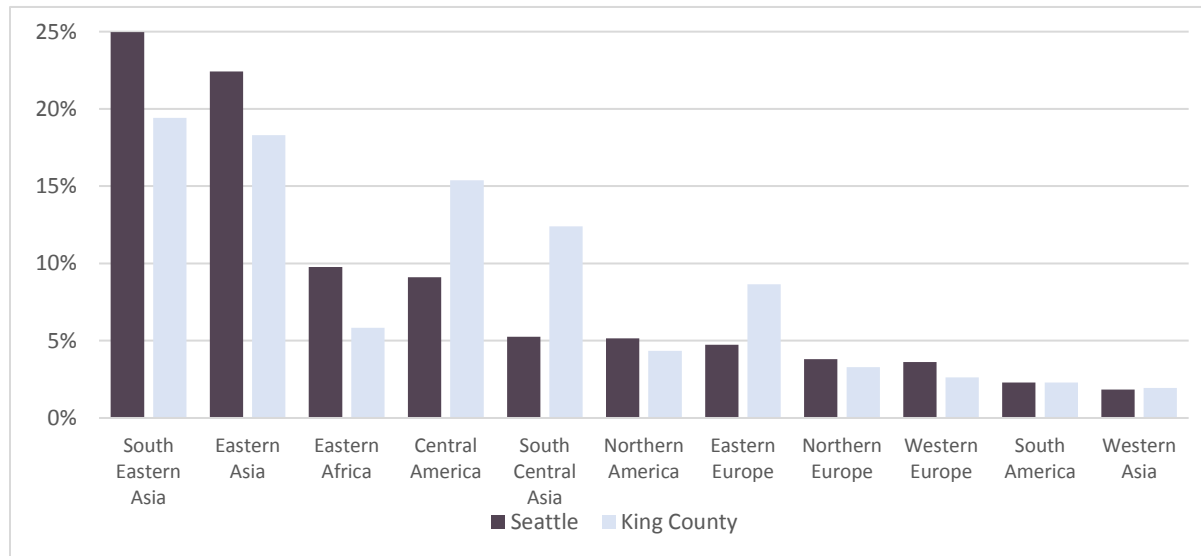
<sup>6</sup> Seattle Public Schools. *English Language Learners and International Services*. Available at: [https://www.seattleschools.org/students/support/english\\_language\\_learners/](https://www.seattleschools.org/students/support/english_language_learners/)

**Figure 1: Seattle and King County: Population by Birthplace<sup>7</sup>**



More than 415,000 King County residents were born outside the U.S., accounting for 21% of the population. More than 113,00 Seattle residents are foreign-born, accounting for 18% of the local population. More than one-quarter of the county’s foreign-born live in Seattle.

**Figure 2 : Region of Birth for Seattle and King County Immigrant and Refugee Residents<sup>8</sup>**



<sup>7</sup> 2014 5-year American Community Survey Microdata

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

## IMMIGRANTS AND REFUGEES IN POVERTY

While immigrants and refugees in our State and City comprise an increasing portion of our workforce and on average are better educated than their immigrant and refugee counterparts across the United States, they are still more likely to live in poverty than their U.S.-born counterparts. In 2015, approximately 12.2% of Washingtonians were living in poverty. While the City of Seattle fared slightly better with a poverty rate of 12%, 17.3% of its foreign-born residents were living in poverty.<sup>9</sup>

## WHAT IS UNDEREMPLOYMENT?

Immigrants and refugees labor in a wide range of occupations across all the key sectors of our economy. While their contributions to our economy as workers amount to billions of dollars in tax revenue and consumer purchasing power, they could contribute significantly more value in the workforce and as consumers and taxpayers if their underemployment were reduced. The term “underemployment” refers to the underutilization of labor power in the labor market, and it directly impacts the health of the labor market as well as long term economic growth.<sup>10</sup> Interestingly, there is no standard, widely accepted definition of underemployment which fully captures the phenomenon.

While our study examined the overall labor market in Seattle and King County, we specifically focused on the scope, impact, and dynamics of underemployment in the Seattle and King County labor market for both native-born and immigrants. The United States Department of Labor (USDOL) counts workers as being underemployed when they are pursuing full-time work but can only obtain part-time, irregular, or contingent jobs (“involuntary part-time workers”), or when they are discouraged and not actively seeking work. In this study, we refer to this a “work-hours” underemployment. Another distinct and significant form of underemployment, *not captured by the USDOL*, occurs when people have had to settle for employment which is significantly below their education, skill, or experience level such as the immigrant engineer

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<sup>9</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, 2015 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates

<sup>10</sup> The Federal Reserve Board monitors and views levels of underemployment as one of several key indicators of labor market health

driving a cab or a native-born degree holder working as a waiter. While this is often referred to as “brain waste” we use the term “educational underemployment” throughout this study as occurring when the educational requirements of a job are not commensurate with a worker’s level of educational attainment. Using this definition, we estimate that more than 36,000 (or about 25%) immigrants in King County, including more than 10,000 (or about 24%) in Seattle, are educationally underemployed.<sup>11</sup>

## **THE CONSEQUENCES OF UNDEREMPLOYMENT IN IMMIGRANT & REFUGEE COMMUNITIES**

In 2009, researchers showed underemployment’s lasting and damaging implications for immigrants.<sup>12</sup> Noting that most first-generation immigrants primarily find themselves in low-skill positions, their study asserted that the inability to move out of these positions at the bottom of the ladder,

*affects social cohesion, since integration and assimilation are difficult when immigrants are marginalized in the labor market. And it affects economic performance, since individuals who can invest in their human capital and use their skills productively are able to contribute more to the economy. As for the children of immigrants, the argument is even more compelling: fairness and social cohesion dictate that children born in the host country should not suffer simply because their parents were born abroad.*<sup>13</sup>

The generational challenges of underemployment are also often overlooked. MPI found that though second-generation immigrants fare better in the labor market for the most part compared to their predecessors, not all second-generation groups are able to achieve parity with native-born children.

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<sup>11</sup> It is important to note that these numbers do not capture personal choice and preference in the labor market but remain a good indicator of the scope of educational underemployment among immigrant degree holders in Seattle and King County. Also, these numbers do not distinguish between degrees obtained here in the U.S. and those obtained abroad. Simply because an immigrant worker is deemed educationally underemployed by our definition does not mean that he or she considers themselves as such nor does it mean that they are actively engaged in pursuing further education or are still wanting to pursue a professional job in the United States. Further research is needed to distinguish domestic and foreign degrees and to project the number of educationally underemployed actively seeking career advancement.

<sup>12</sup> Demetrios G. Papademetriou, Will Somerville, and Medeleine Sumption, “The Social Mobility of Immigrants and Their Children,” Migration Policy Institute, June 2009, [www.migrationpolicy.org/pubs/soialmobility2010.pdf](http://www.migrationpolicy.org/pubs/soialmobility2010.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.



## WHY LOOK AT UNDEREMPLOYMENT RATES AND NOT SIMPLY UNEMPLOYMENT?

Traditional economists that focus primarily on the official unemployment rate as a measure of the overall strength and health of the labor market often ignore the impact of underemployment. For example, workers who are either discouraged or marginally attached to the labor market do not count in the official unemployment rate nor do unemployment rates reflect the degree of involuntary part-time work or the under-utilization of labor caused by underemployment. In order to gain a fuller understanding of the Seattle and King County labor market, we examined the scope, impact, and dynamics of underemployment for both native-born and immigrants. For this study, we utilized two designations to specify two inter-related but distinct forms of underemployment described above:

- **Work-hours underemployment** (sometimes termed “involuntary part-time work”) refers to when a worker is willing and able to work full-time but can only obtain part-time work, or is forced to work one or more part-time jobs, or has “given-up” actively pursuing work.<sup>14</sup>
- **Educational underemployment** refers to a circumstance in which someone is working in a job for which the educational requirements are lower than their demonstrated level of educational and/or skill achievement.

We reviewed overall underemployment in the Seattle and King County workforce, and then honed in on the specific characteristics of the underemployed immigrant workforce and the extent to which their labor is underutilized in the workplace. First, we looked at the number of immigrants and their distribution in the workforce among the *educationally underemployed*. However, the rates of educational underemployment that we calculated is not a true measure of the full scope of the overall underutilization of labor because it ignores workers who are involuntarily working part time, the work hours underemployed. And in fact, we found that many of the “educationally underemployed” are also “work-hours underemployed,” further contributing to their economic instability – working in one or more part-time, low-wage time jobs while holding a college degree.

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<sup>14</sup> Official Federal statistics count workers who work more multiple part time jobs and work 35 plus hours as being employed “full-time” resulting in a under estimation of the scope and impact of underemployment.

## **OVERALL SCOPE OF EDUCATIONAL UNDEREMPLOYMENT IN SEATTLE AND KING COUNTY**

We found that the rates of educational underemployment in Seattle and the rest of King County are very close. We found that the rates of educational underemployment in Seattle and the rest of King County are very close. We estimated that 69,000 underemployed individuals work in the City of Seattle. In King County as a whole, over 162,000 individuals are educationally underemployed. This number represents nearly 27 percent of college degree holders and 16 percent of the total workforce. Nearly forty percent (40%) of King County's associate degree and twenty-five percent (25%) of its bachelor's degree holders are educationally underemployed.

## **COMPARISON OF FOREIGN-BORN AND NATIVE-BORN RATES OF UNDEREMPLOYMENT**

We identified more than 36,000 individuals born outside the United States, including more than 10,000 in Seattle, who we consider to be educationally underemployed. The overall educational underemployment rates for the foreign-born are close to those for US-Born citizens. In the total King County workforce, 15.8 percent of the native-born and 14.5 percent of the foreign-born are educationally underemployed per our criteria. In the Seattle workforce, we found that 19.4% of the native-born and 15.9% of the foreign-born are educationally underemployed. However, when we isolated the population of degree holders in the workforce, the foreign born have higher rates of educational underemployment. We found that among degree holders, 26.6 percent of County-wide native-born graduates are underemployed compared to 27.2 percent of the foreign-born. Similarly, in the Seattle workforce, we found that 27.1 percent of native-born graduates are educationally underemployed compared to 28.9 percent for the foreign-born.

Beyond the above numbers, while comparing rates of underemployment of the native and foreign born, we considered our findings in a larger context:

1. Seattle's native-born population far exceeds all other groups in college attainment (Bachelor's degree or higher), besting the foreign-born population by over 20 percentage

points<sup>15</sup> producing a much larger share of college graduates in the labor market compared to the foreign-born.

2. The large number of H1-B temporary worker non-immigrant visa holders in our city and region are counted in the number of the foreign born in the workforce data available to OIRA for the scope of this study. This is an important distinction because the inclusion of the temporary visa workforce in the data if not qualified can contribute to a false impression that immigrant and refugee professionals are more well represented in high wage jobs in larger numbers than is the case. Nearly all the H1B visa holders are not underemployed. Disaggregating the H1B visa holder numbers from our research would produce a more precise count of the number and distribution of legal permanent residents and naturalized citizens in the workforce and among the underemployed.<sup>16</sup>

### **H1-B: Non-Immigrants Authorized to Temporarily Work in the U.S.**

While legal permanent residency visas allow immigrants to live and work in the United States permanently, guest worker (non-immigrant) visas like H-1B allow “guest workers” to live and work in the United States only temporarily and under very restrictive circumstances. Holders of work permits, such as the H-1B visa have temporary status and their work permit is tied to their employers and are not permanent legal residents (although an employer can apply for Green Card status of their H-1B employees.) More research is needed to determine the number and percentage of H1-B visa holders who become legal permanent residents in Washington State to determine the effectiveness of the H1-B as a pathway to legal permanent residency and citizenship.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> United States Census Bureau, *2014 American Community Survey*, <http://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/news/data-releases/2014/release.html>.

<sup>16</sup> The data sources that we used for this study included H1-B professionals and they are counted in as part of the immigrant workforce even though they are not permanent legal residents or naturalized citizens and are holding temporary work visas. More research would be needed to refine these findings to distinguish how many naturalized citizens and legal permanent residents are represented in high wage occupations and sectors – separate from H1-B holders.

<sup>17</sup> The H-1B ‘non-immigrant’ temporary foreign guest worker program is generally considered a tool for employers to attract and retain immigrants in the science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) fields. However, in 2012 a study by the Economic Policy Institute, by Ron Hira, (2010) documented that the 10 employers receiving the largest number of H-1B visas nationally were **all** in the business of outsourcing and offshoring high-tech American jobs. The top 10 H-1B employers were granted 40,170 visas; nearly half the total annual quota. More research is needed to determine the full impact and uses of this program in Washington State and its impact on immigrant and refugee pathways to professional jobs.

In 2014, the USDOL certified, or approved 32,010 positions for H1-B visas in Washington State with nearly 80 percent of those positions were deployed in three cities – Redmond, Seattle, and Bellevue. The top five occupations for H-1B visas in Washington were software developers, computer systems analysts, computer programmers, network and computer systems administrators, and other computer occupations.

Table 1: Top Three H1B Cities in Washington for H-1B Visas, 2014	H-1B Positions Certified	Average Wage Offer
Redmond	10,195	\$93,319
Seattle	9,474	\$91,406
Bellevue	5,493	\$90,442

Source: Office of Foreign Labor Certification, Employment and Training Administration, U.S. Department of Labor

## **A CONCENTRATION OF UNDEREMPLOYED IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE WORKERS IN LOW AND MIDDLE WAGE OCCUPATIONS**

While immigrant and refugee workers and professionals are employed in a range of jobs across a variety of industry sectors, we identified those occupations in which the most underemployed immigrants are currently employed. We selected for closer scrutiny those occupations in which at least 500 underemployed immigrants work. In King County, nearly half (17,080) of King County’s (36,000) educationally underemployed foreign-born workers are congregated within 17 specific occupations totaling 212,084 jobs none of which are high-wage.. *Two-thirds of these jobs are low-wage and one-third (1/3) are middle-wage.* Because the presence of non-immigrant temporary H1-B visa holders is negligible in the low and middle wage occupational groups, we use the term “immigrant and refugee” in the section of the study rather than the “foreign-born”.

*Twelve (12) of the seventeen (17) occupations in which 500 or more educationally underemployed immigrants and refugees are working are low-wage including: Nursing, psychiatric, and home health aides, childcare workers, taxi drivers and chauffeurs; waiters and waitresses, Cashiers, Personal Care Aides, Drivers and Truckers, Maids and Housekeeping Cleaners, and Cooks.* The challenge for most underemployed immigrants who work initially in low-wage jobs (beyond low wages and lack of benefits) is the barriers to finding jobs – including survival jobs - in their chosen profession. The table below details the wage level, number, and proportion of educationally underemployed immigrants in each of these occupations in King

County. Again, these numbers do not reflect the full impact caused by the combination of educational and “work hours” underemployment.

**Table 2: Underemployment in Occupations with Over 500 Educationally Underemployed Immigrants**

Occupation	Wage Level	Overall Workforce			Immigrants and refugees		
		Number Employed	Number Under-Employed	Percent Under-Employed	Number of Immigrant Employed	Number of Immigrants Under-Employed	Percent of Immigrants Under-Employed
First-Line Supervisors of Office Admin. Support Workers	Middle	7,754	3,567	46%	1,104	676	61%
Inspectors, Testers, Sorters, Samplers, and Weighers	Middle	4,773	2,352	49%	1,557	935	60%
Customer Service	Middle	17,526	7,965	45%	2,872	1,510	53%
Supervisors of Retail Sales Workers	Middle	19,793	9,923	50%	3,602	1,745	48%
Retail Salespersons	Low	23,815	10,251	43%	3,577	1,382	39%
Secretaries & Ad. Assistants	Middle	16,891	5,862	35%	1,825	639	35%
Nursing, Psychiatric, and Home Health Aides	Low	7,879	2,677	34%	3,173	1,084	34%
Childcare Workers	Low	10,482	3,511	33%	2,844	827	29%
Taxi Drivers & Chauffeurs	Low	3,391	1,171	35%	2,686	766	29%
Food Service Mgrs	Middle	6,051	2,004	33%	1,975	576	29%
Waiters/ Waitresses	Low	13,221	4,545	34%	2,933	750	26%
Cashiers	Low	17,017	3,654	21%	4,860	1,194	25%
Personal Care Aides	Low	9,834	2,399	24%	5,889	1,435	24%
Driver/Sales Workers, Truckers	Low	14,338	2,963	21%	4,283	883	21%
Maids and Housekeepers	Low	9,366	1,377	15%	6,770	1,032	15%
Janitors Cleaners	Low	15,029	2,536	17%	7,994	1,038	13%
Cooks	Low	14,924	2,360	16%	7,971	608	8%
Totals		212,084	69,117	33%	65,915	17,080	26%

Source: SJI analysis of 2014 5-Year American Community Survey Microdata and O\*NET OnLine Job Zones.

Note: Individuals counted as underemployed when their educational attainment exceeds the level associated with their occupation's job zone.

## **EMPLOYMENT BY INDUSTRY BY IMMIGRATION STATUS**

While researching industry employment by immigration status, we also looked at industries employing at least 10% of one of the population groups—U.S.-born citizens, naturalized citizens, and non-citizens. The top industry sector employing U.S.-born citizens is Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services.<sup>18</sup> The top industries employing naturalized citizens and non-citizens are Health Care and Social Assistance, and Accommodation and Food Services, respectively.

## **IMMIGRANTS DISPROPORTIONALLY WORK IN LOW WAGE, LOW QUALITY JOBS**

*Five and six out of the top 10 jobs held by naturalized citizens and non-citizens, respectively, are low-wage, compared to only one job among the top 10 for U.S.-born citizens.* The picture is similar in King County for U.S.-born and naturalized citizens; however, it is worse for non-citizens. Six out of the top 10 jobs employing non-citizens in King County are low-wage. *Because so many immigrant workers are consigned to low-wage jobs, the City of Seattle can respond in new ways about how to improve job quality in these occupations.*<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Professional, and Technical Services: NAICS 54,” *United States Department of Labor*. Activities associated with this sector include but are not limited to: legal advice and representation; accounting and bookkeeping; architectural, engineering, and design services; computer services; consulting services; research services; and advertising services.

<sup>19</sup> Steve Dawson in the Pinkerton Papers, discusses the numerous ways that a poor-quality job can be improved—in addition to increased compensation—and that many of those “better job” interventions cost less in dollars and more in ingenuity and time. Examples include:

- A redesign of scheduling procedures to provide greater consistency and predictability of hours.
- Access to financial literacy and financial planning assistance.
- Review and enforcement of strong safety standards.
- A company-sponsored emergency loan fund to cover a few hundred dollars in an employee’s unforeseen expenses.
- Employer-facilitated access to public benefits and tax credits—particularly the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), which can provide a working family more than \$6000 in federal cash benefits annually, and even more in those localities that offer state and local EITC programs.
- A robust system of soliciting recommendations from frontline staff for improvements in efficiency and customer satisfaction.

More sophisticated investments can include on the job training, peer mentoring, on site ESL classes, job redesign, internal career ladders

<b>Table 3: Top 10 Jobs of Native Born and <i>Naturalized</i> and Non-Citizen Immigrants (Low Wage: Bold &amp; Italicized)</b>		
<b>Top Ten Occupations US Born (2016)</b>	<b>Estimated Employed</b>	<b>Median Wage</b>
Miscellaneous Managers	12,679	\$52.48
Software Developers, Applications and Systems Software	8,711	\$56.34
Postsecondary Teachers	7,726	\$38.03
<b><i>Retail Salespersons</i></b>	7,274	<b><i>\$12.24</i></b>
Lawyers and Judges, Magistrates, and Other Judicial Workers	7,203	\$56.85
First-Line Supervisors of Retail Sales Workers	5,696	\$21.09
Elementary and Middle School Teachers	5,450	\$30.00
Physicians and Surgeons	5,427	\$102.63
Accountants and Auditors	5,332	\$34.97
Designers	5,305	\$23.78
Subtotal	70,803	
<b>Top Ten Occupations: Naturalized (2016)</b>	<b>Estimated Employed</b>	<b>Median Wage</b>
<b><i>Personal Care Aides</i></b>	1,166	<b><i>\$11.64</i></b>
<b><i>Janitors and Building Cleaners</i></b>	1,166	<b><i>\$14.02</i></b>
Software Developers, Applications and Systems Software	1,045	\$56.34
<b><i>Nursing, Psychiatric, and Home Health Aides</i></b>	976	<b><i>\$14.13</i></b>
<b><i>Maid and Housekeeping Cleaners</i></b>	892	<b><i>\$11.53</i></b>
Registered Nurses	848	\$41.13
<b><i>Cooks</i></b>	826	<b><i>\$13.81</i></b>
Miscellaneous Managers	754	\$52.48
Accountants and Auditors	745	\$34.97
Postsecondary Teachers	703	\$38.03
Subtotal	9,121	
<b>Top Ten Occupations (Non-Citizens) 2016</b>	<b>Estimated Employed</b>	<b>Median Wage</b>
Software Developers, Applications, and Systems Software	2,855	\$56.34
<b><i>Cooks</i></b>	1,587	<b><i>\$13.81</i></b>
Postsecondary Teachers	1,231	\$38.03
<b><i>Janitors and Building Cleaners</i></b>	1,137	<b><i>\$14.02</i></b>
<b><i>Cashiers</i></b>	929	<b><i>\$11.91</i></b>
<b><i>Maid and Housekeeping Cleaners</i></b>	927	<b><i>\$11.53</i></b>
<b><i>Food Preparation Workers</i></b>	839	<b><i>\$11.43</i></b>
Miscellaneous Managers	778	\$52.48
Chefs and Head Cooks	734	\$23.25
<b><i>Personal Care Aides</i></b>	679	<b><i>\$11.64</i></b>
Subtotal	<b>11,696</b>	

Source: SJI analysis of 2014 5-Year American Community Survey Microdata and O\*NET OnLine Job Zones. Note: Individuals counted as underemployed when their educational attainment exceeds the level associated with their occupation's job zone.



## FIELD OF STUDY OF EDUCATIONALLY UNDEREMPLOYED IMMIGRANTS

Having documented the scope, occupational distribution, and causes of underemployment, we turned our attention to identifying the various fields of study and degrees of immigrant workers most affected by educational underemployment.<sup>20</sup> We identified the fields of study/degrees that were completed by at immigrant workers who have an educational underemployment rate of at least one-third (33%).<sup>21</sup> Overall, thirty-two (32) fields of study from 12,620 bachelor’s degree holders are represented in this group.<sup>22</sup> Within this group, the top (10) ten bachelor’s degrees are Business Management (1,620); Accounting (1,269); Psychology (1,029); General Education (983); History (716); English Language and Literature (705); Political Science and Government (650); Sociology (584); Marketing and Research (532); and Communications (518). These ten fields of study include (8,482) educationally underemployed immigrants.

**Table 4: Top (10) Bachelor’s Degrees Earned by Educationally Underemployed Immigrants (King County) 2016**

Field of Study with Obtained Bachelor’s Degree	Number Educationally Underemployed
Business Management	1,620
Accounting	1,269
Psychology	1,029
General Education	983
History	716
English Language and Literature	705
Political Science and Government	650
Sociology	584
Marketing and Research	532
Communications	518
Total	8,482

<sup>20</sup> The numbers depicted in Tables 4 and 5 include immigrants who obtained college degrees both here in the U.S. or abroad.

<sup>21</sup> More research is required to develop a full list of the degrees held by immigrants since our research excluded those working in occupations with a educational underemployment rate of less than 33%

<sup>22</sup> Source: SJI analysis of 2014 5-Year American Community Survey Microdata

<b>Table 5: Degrees of Immigrants with an Educational Underemployment Rate of at Least 33%</b>		
<b>Bachelor's Degree Field of Study</b>	<b>Number Underemployed</b>	<b>Portion of Workers with Degree Underemployed</b>
General Agriculture	140	89%
Early Childhood Education	174	72%
Human Services & Community Organization	183	71%
History	716	69%
Engineering Technologies	104	68%
Transportation Sciences and Technologies	107	60%
Metallurgical Engineering	102	59%
General Education	983	59%
Drama and Theater Arts	108	59%
Liberal Arts	388	54%
General Social Sciences	110	53%
Fine Arts	408	52%
Communications	518	52%
Criminal Justice and Fire Protection	225	48%
Humanities	113	45%
Marketing and Marketing Research	532	45%
Miscellaneous Health Medical Professions	102	44%
Sociology	584	44%
Medical Technologies Technicians	228	44%
Family and Consumer Sciences	184	43%
Geography	151	43%
Political Science and Government	650	40%
Hospitality Management	123	39%
Elementary Education	186	38%
Philosophy and Religious Vocations	259	38%
Theology and Religious Vocations	204	38%
Management Information Systems	172	38%
Linguistics/Comparative Language/Literature	252	37%
Psychology	1,029	36%
English Language and Literature	705	35%
Business Management and Administration	1,620	34%
Accounting	1,269	33%
<b>Total</b>	<b>12,629</b>	<b>45%</b>

Source: SJI analysis of 2014 5-Year American Community Survey Microdata

**IMMIGRANT UNDEREMPLOYMENT IN THE HEALTHCARE SECTOR**

The healthcare sector employs a significant number of immigrants and is one of the few high-growth industries with clear career advancement pathways for the underemployed. We provide now a case study of the immigrant healthcare workforce.

**CITIZENSHIP STATUS AND DISPARITIES IN WAGES IN THE HEALTHCARE SECTOR**

U.S.-born citizens make up 80% of Seattle's healthcare labor force, while naturalized citizens fall in at 14% and non-citizens 6%. Immigrants are slightly more represented in King County: U.S.-born citizens' share of this workforce is 5% lower than in Seattle. Naturalized citizens see the largest uptick in representation as their share of the workforce increases by three percentage points.<sup>23</sup>

*In the health care sector, 42%% of U.S.-born citizens are employed in high-wage occupations, 12 and 16 percentage points higher than naturalized citizens (30%) or non-citizens (26%), respectively. The latter also experience inequity in middle-wage healthcare jobs. Only 26% of non-citizen-held jobs are middle-wage. This figure is nearly 10 percentage points less than ether U.S.-born (36%) or naturalized citizens (35%). U.S.-born citizens are also much less likely to be employed in low-wage healthcare jobs with (22%) low-wage jobs.<sup>24</sup>*

The skill and wage level of the jobs in healthcare have serious repercussions when it comes to earning power. U.S.-born citizens' median wage totaled \$45,000 in 2014.<sup>25</sup> This is 5,000 greater than that earned by naturalized citizens (\$40,000), and vastly higher than that earned by non-citizens (\$27,000).

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<sup>23</sup> 2014 5-Year American Community Survey Microdata

<sup>24</sup> Ibid

<sup>25</sup> United States Census Bureau, 2014 American Community Survey, <http://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/news/data-releases/2014/release.html>.

## **NATIONALITY AND LANGUAGES SPOKEN BY THE HEALTHCARE IMMIGRANT WORKFORCE**

Filipinos comprise 20% of the immigrant health care workforce. No other immigrant group captures half their total. The next closest are Ethiopians at 9%, Vietnamese (7%), Canadians (6%), Koreans (5%), and Chinese (5%). All other groups make up less than five percent of the immigrant healthcare workforce.<sup>26</sup> Within this workforce, a majority of immigrants are considered to speak English “very well” (52%). One-fifth (21%) speak English “well”, while almost 10% speak it “not well” (8%) or “not at all” (1%). Limiting the field to those immigrants considered to speak English at the level of “well” or less, we found the following prominent languages spoken by this workforce: Tagalog (a Filipino language) is the most spoken language, barely edging out Amharic (a language spoken by some Ethiopians). Ten percent of immigrant healthcare workers speak Vietnamese; 10% speak Spanish, and 8% are Chinese speakers.

## **EDUCATIONAL UNDEREMPLOYMENT IN HEALTHCARE WORKFORCE**

To determine the scope of educational underemployment in the immigrant healthcare workforce, we looked at the educational attainment of those 25 years and older. We found that U.S.-born citizens employed in the healthcare industry are more likely to hold a four-year college degree or higher, outpacing naturalized citizens by eight percentage points (59% to 51%), and by 15 percentage points over non-citizens. U.S.-born citizens are also less likely to hold only a high school diploma or less (10%). A quarter of non-citizens (26%) and nearly a fifth of naturalized citizens (18%) hold a high school diploma or less.<sup>27</sup> Immigrants in the healthcare workforce have lower educational attainment levels than U.S.-born citizens but are underemployed at similar or higher levels within the healthcare industry. Naturalized citizens make up 17% of the entire healthcare workforce in King County, but comprise 21% of the educationally underemployed individuals in the industry. More research would be needed to determine the representation of H1B visa holder in the healthcare workforce.

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid

**Table 6: Highest Number of Underemployed Immigrants in Health Care Occupations, KC (2014-2015)<sup>28</sup>**

Occupation	Number of Underemployed Immigrants in Occupation	Portion of Underemployed Immigrants in Occupation	Occupation	Number of Underemployed Immigrants in Occupation	Portion of Underemployed Immigrants in Occupation
Registered Nurses	2,246	33.7%	Receptionists Information Clerks	110	1.6%
Nursing, Psychiatric, & Home Aides	976	14.6%	Bookkeeping, Accounting, Auditing Clerks	105	1.6%
Personal Care Aides	627	9.4%	Licensed Practical and LVNs	96	1.4%
Diagnostic Related Technologists/TEchs	256	3.8%	Dental Assistants	93	1.4%
Medical Assistants	217	3.3%	Cooks	78	1.2%
Maids and Housekeeping Cleaners	207	3.1%	Miscellaneous Office, Administrative Support Workers	76	1.1%
Billing and Posting Clerks	173	2.6%	Respiratory Therapists	67	1.0%
Health Diagnosing, Treating Practitioner Support Technicians	145	2.2%	Interviewers, Except Eligibility and Loan	65	1.0%
Janitors & Building Cleaners	127	1.9%	Office Clerks, General	63	0.9%
Dental Hygienists	112	1.7%	Production, Planning, and Expediting Clerks	61	0.9%

## **EXAMPLES OF HEALTHCARE WORKER FOCUSED WORKFORCE INITIATIVES**

While our case study shows that immigrants participating in the healthcare field are educationally underemployed and face significant barriers to advancement, healthcare professions nonetheless continue to offer substantial opportunities for career advancement and career and income mobility for immigrant workers and professionals in nursing and other allied health professions and other quality jobs in the sector.

Programs like the Puget Sound Welcome Back Center at Highline College have institutionalized models for overcoming barriers to achievement in healthcare and other occupations. We describe this program fully in Section IV.

Joint labor-management educational program such as the SEIU 1199 NW Multi-Employer Training Fund have institutionalized career ladder and financial assistance programs available to incumbent workers in regional hospital systems and have achieved significant results over the past few years.

In the home care field, the SEIU 775 Training Partnership is the largest organization in the country dedicated to the development and education of Home Care Aides. They serve more than 45,000 home care aides a year and offer a wide range of learning opportunities to learn skills and advance careers.

## II. ECONOMIC TRENDS AND BARRIERS TO CAREER MOBILITY

*In the previous section, we reported on the scope and impact of underemployment among immigrant and refugee jobholders and documented the occupations in which they work. In Section II of the study, we analyze the key labor market trends and structural economic changes that have re-shaped the trajectories and potential for mobility in our city and regional labor markets. We then examined the key barriers to mobility for immigrants and refugees and native-born people of color.*

The Economic Opportunity Institute, (EOI) a Seattle-based research organization, published two recent papers which examined the inter-related issues of income inequality and disparities in economic outcomes for people of color and immigrants in our local and regional economy. These studies, Chutes and Ladders: How Economic Mobility is Changing in an Inequality Society, 2014 and Uneven Ground, How Race and Origin Impact Economic Opportunity in Washington State, 2015 provide an vital framework for how policy makers consider issues of labor equity.

The EOI reports describe economic mobility as one way to measure a society's level of success in ensuring equal opportunity for all its people. Economic mobility measures how likely a person is to move up or down the income ladder over time. If opportunity is broadly available to demographically different segments of the population, each would be expected to show similar degrees of mobility in comparison to the others. However, if one or more groups consistently receive more opportunity, their outcomes (as measured by mobility) will differ markedly from those with less opportunity. Absolute mobility compares a person's income to another in the past – for example, to that of their parents at the same age. Relative mobility compares a person's income relative to their peers, based on the income bracket they were born into<sup>29</sup>. While Americans

### **Labor Market Trends**

*The long-term fallout from the Great Recession and larger trends have led to structural changes in the wage structure in our workforce and in the ongoing constriction of traditional arteries and patterns of job, income, and social mobility. In crafting policies and programs to address inequities in our labor market and larger systems, it is essential for local and regional policymakers to consider these larger trends.*

*EOI Report*

<sup>29</sup> Uneven Ground, How Race and Origin Impact Economic Opportunity in Washington State, Economic Opportunity Institute, 2015

commonly believe, a person can be born poor and – with hard work – attain wealth, the reality is this degree of upward relative mobility is extremely uncommon.

Policies and programs directed at increasing economic stability and mobility for immigrant and refugee workers and professionals must consider the trends that shape our labor market and levels of underemployment. Below, we take a deeper look at (1) the overall economic trends facing Seattle and King County workforce (including immigrants) that block career mobility, (2) racial disparities that have the effect of blocking and slowing mobility for people of color (including immigrants), and (3) barriers specifically faced by refugees and immigrants as they try to continue their career trajectories from their countries of origin in their employment searches here.

## **Economic and Labor Market Trends Impacting the Overall Workforce**

### **INCOME**

The U.S. Census reports that the median household income for the Seattle-Tacoma-Bellevue Washington metro area was \$75,331 in 2015, the latest figures available. Seattle median household income is \$11,202 higher than the median Washington household income and \$19,556 greater than the US Median household income.<sup>30</sup> *Seattle's growing wealth, consistent job growth, and impressively low unemployment, however, do not represent the economic reality for tens of thousands of Seattle and King County residents who are economically unstable because of underemployment, high costs of living, and growing income inequality.* The simultaneous growth of low wage jobs and increasing living costs in Seattle and our region have contributed to increased economic instability for the working poor and most working class families in Seattle, increasing displacement out of the city and to the growth of suburban poverty throughout King County.

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<sup>30</sup> The Census ACS 1-year survey



**Big-Picture Context: Growing Income Inequality**

The Seattle metro area has had one of the biggest declines in the share of adults in middle class households: from 59% in 2000 to about 53% in 2014.



Source: City of Seattle Office of Planning and Development (2016)

**MIDDLE WAGE JOB GROWTH**

Labor market data confirm the widely-held belief that there are simply too many jobs in Seattle that do not pay enough to generate sufficient income to meet the costs of living in Seattle for the working poor and for Seattle’s middle wage earning working class families. Even though our study found that 40% of the jobs in Seattle are considered middle wage, the growth of both low and high wage jobs has led to intense competition in the labor market for most (but not all) middle-wage jobs which is occurring despite low unemployment and well-known pockets of skills mismatches and labor shortages in specific occupations.<sup>31</sup> Underemployed degree holders – native born and immigrant workers and professionals alike and recent college graduates – are confronted with the intensity of this labor market competition. In recent years, the biggest driver of downward economic mobility in our economy is low job growth in middle-wage jobs. Overall job growth has been strong over the past decade and over the last two decades and many of Washington’s industries have seen similar growth trends to those of the U.S. as a whole. However, Washington’s nonfarm jobs have grown at a faster pace, increasing by 34% between

<sup>31</sup> The Workforce Development Council of Seattle and King County website provides a useful tool for tracking projected job opening by occupation and sector in Seattle and King County. The issue of specific labor shortages is complex and is not necessarily due to any across the board skills gap. Employer recruiting and hiring practices also play a key role. Labor equity concerns suggest that policymakers should consider how to influence more equitable hiring practices.

1990 and 2012, compared to 22% for the U.S.<sup>32</sup> The Seattle Jobs Initiative in 2014 issued a report, “Mid-Wage Jobs: Slow Recovery Means Growing Income Inequality”<sup>33</sup> This report concluded,

- The dearth of mid-wage jobs left by the recession and the recovery of low- and high-wage work will exacerbate income inequality in King County.
- Job losses industries, such as construction and administrative work, created a void in mid-wage jobs that has not yet been filled during the recovery.
- High-wage job growth in King County is largely driven by the regional advantage in the tech industry.
- The occupation groups within the mid-wage category that are projected to have the highest growth through 2017 include: customer service representatives; computer user support specialists; construction laborers; bookkeeping, accounting, and auditing clerks; and, medical secretaries.
- Despite the relatively higher growth in low-wage and high-wage occupations, mid-wage jobs are projected to constitute approximately one-third (31 percent) of industry growth and job openings through 2017 (an estimated 62,500 jobs).

## **CHANGING PATTERNS OF JOB AND INCOME MOBILITY**

Along with the rise of employment in high-wage industries low-wage industries have grown significantly. Many of these low wage jobs serve as an entry point to the workforce for immigrant jobseekers and represent permanent jobs for Seattle’s and King County’s working poor. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics projects the following occupations will have the largest growth in the coming decade:

- Retail sales persons
- Home health aides
- Food prep and food service workers
- Landscapers and groundskeepers
- Security guards, and
- Child care workers.

Most of these jobs are not only low-wage, but they often have irregular and erratic hours, few employment benefits, and limited advancement possibilities with those workers in union-represented jobs faring better and achieving more stability and career advancement opportunities than those in non-union settings. The Leisure and Hospitality sector between 1990 and 2012, grew

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<sup>32</sup> Chutes and Ladders: How Economic Mobility is Changing in an Inequality Society, Economic Opportunity Institute, 2015

<sup>33</sup> Beyond the Headlines – Mid-Wage Jobs: Slow Recovery Means Growing Income Inequality, Seattle Jobs Initiative, January 2014

by 45%, compared to total nonfarm job growth of 34%. *Washington's occupations are growing more quickly at the top and the bottom of the income spectrum than in the middle.* The Employment Security Department projects that among the fastest growing occupations between 2011 and 2021 are both high wage engineers and low-wage home health aides.<sup>34</sup> *Income disparities have grown wider and will continue to do so as a direct result of this bifurcated growth.*<sup>35</sup>

## **A NARROWING OF TRADITIONAL ARTERIES OF UPWARD MOBILITY**

The ongoing high growth in the number of low wage jobs and the simultaneous low growth of middle wage occupations contributes to the narrowing of the traditional arteries of upward career mobility. As the traditional conduits of mobility have constricted in recent years, the direction of these arteries of mobility have also become more “lateral” and less “upward.” Low-wage workers in pursuit of living wage occupations often move between and across industry sectors in pursuit of living wage occupations because of the limited vertical mobility, opportunities, and career ladders to higher-level jobs within their current low-wage occupations. Those unsuccessful in moving upward into middle or high wage jobs must often move laterally for just the slightest advancement. When workers do move up vertically in low wage fields, they are mostly at such a low starting point that their increased wages often remain very low over time, though still higher than they were in their previous positions. Low-wage workers in these circumstances remain economically unstable because of a combination of long-term low wages, involuntary part time work and lack of benefits.

Another trend that has altered the trajectory of mobility is the number of years on average that it now takes recent college graduates to move into and gain a foothold in the professions for which they were educated. Access to good jobs for these young individuals is especially critical, as stable employment allows them to build a career or pay for further schooling. This hold true for

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<sup>34</sup> Employment Security Department, Long-term occupational projections (2011-2021), retrieved November 2013 from <https://fortress.wa.gov/esd/employmentdata/reports-publications/industry-reports/employment-projections>.

<sup>35</sup> Emily Beller & Michael Hout, “Intergenerational Social Mobility: The United States in Comparative Perspective,” *Opportunity in America* (2006) 16(2), 19-36,

<http://futureofchildren.org/publications/journals/article/index.xml?journalid=35&articleid=85&sectionid=513>

both immigrant and native-born young people. While unemployment and underemployment rates among young graduates have improved, they remain higher than before the 2008 recession began. The Federal Reserve Board of New York recently reported that the percentage of recent graduates who are unemployed or “underemployed”—working in a job that typically does not require a bachelor’s degree—has risen, particularly since the 2001 recession. The Board’s research also found that the quality of the jobs held by the underemployed has declined, with today’s recent graduates increasingly accepting low-wage jobs or working part-time.<sup>36</sup> *This finding again underscores the need for policymakers to consider the issue of how to work with the workforce system and with employers to improve job quality in low wage occupations in addition to current efforts to enforce and expand labor standards such as minimum wage, paid sick leave, secure scheduling nad safety standards.*

## **INVOLUNTARY PART-TIME WORK AND ALTERNATE WORK ARRANGEMENTS**

Workers in several occupational groups – mostly in low wage jobs - face the persistent and increasing challenge of involuntary part-time work (work-hours unemployment).<sup>37</sup> Because the Bureau of Labor Statistics’ estimates of involuntary part-time work understate the pervasiveness of this category of employment, more rigorous research is needed to determine the actual percentage and number of Seattle’s workers engaged in involuntary part-time labor.”<sup>38</sup> Some estimates indicate the as few as 60% of all jobs in the U.S. are held by single job full-time employees. Conversely this estimate indicates that as many as 40% are part-time “contingent” workers - some portion of whom may accumulate full time hours.<sup>39</sup> More definitive research is required in to identify the scope and consequences of such a large contingent work force in Seattle and King County and its resulting impact on economic instability. Locally, growing numbers of low wage-workers (including immigrants) are commuting into Seattle’s low wage jobs from South King

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<sup>36</sup> Federal Reserve Bank Of New York current issues in Economics and Finance Volume 20, Number 1 ❖ 2014 ❖ [www.newyorkfed.org/research/current\\_issues](http://www.newyorkfed.org/research/current_issues)

<sup>37</sup> Economic Policy Institute Report, Still Falling Short on Hours And Pay: Part-Time Work Becoming New Norma, 2016. <http://www.epi.org/publication/still-falling-short-on-hours-and-pay-part-time-work-becoming-new-normal/#epi-toc-1>

<sup>38</sup> The USDOL asserts that of those who worked part-time, 79 percent worked part-time for non-economic reasons and 21 percent worked part-time for economic reasons, meaning their hours were cut back or they were unable to find full-time jobs (i.e., involuntary part-time work). Similarly, in Seattle, approximately 81 percent of employed workers age 25 and older typically worked at least 35 hours per week, per the 2014 5-Year American Community Survey microdata. Again, interesting statistics but a serious understatement of the scope and impact of involuntary part time work.

<sup>39</sup> Yes Magazine, The Gig Economy – The Vanishing 9 to 5, Issue #79 - Fall 2016

County. One of every four workers whose primary job is in Seattle commute to work from their homes outside of the city.<sup>40</sup>

In addition to the problem of involuntary part time work, Princeton University researchers recently found a significant rise in the incidence of alternative work arrangements in the U.S. economy from 2005 to 2015. The percentage of workers engaged in alternative work arrangements – defined as temporary help agency workers, on-call workers, contract workers, and independent contractors or freelancers – rose nationally from 10.1 percent in February 2005 to 15.8 percent in late 2015.<sup>41</sup> More research is required to determine the portion of immigrant and native-born workers engaged in alternate work arrangements in Seattle and King County and its impact on their economic instability.

### **Racial Disparity & Mobility**

While native-born whites and immigrant workers and professionals alike share the burdens of these ongoing economic realities, labor market competition disproportionately impacts immigrants and native born people of color. Our traditional concepts and beliefs regarding “upward mobility” and thus many of the policies that guide our workforce and education programs do not account for the everyday reality that people of color – both immigrants and native-born – do not have the same opportunity that is made available to many white, native-born Washingtonians. Americans generally experience high absolute mobility, meaning

#### ***Falling Short on Hours and Pay***

*The Economic Policy Institute found that the monthly rate of workers in the U.S. labor market who are working “part time for economic reasons”—who are considered “involuntary” part-timers because they want to and are available to work full time—is the most consistent indicator of such underemployment. That rate is higher now than it was before the Great Recession and during the depths of the early 2000s recession. That it remains stubbornly high indicates that there is more labor market slack [i.e., more workers than jobs] than is captured by the unemployment rate alone. In addition to cyclical forces (in this case, lingering effects of the recession), there is an ongoing structural shift in many businesses toward more intensive use of part-time employment, driving the elevated rate of involuntary part-time employment. Increased employer use of part-time positions is particularly evident in industries in which part-time jobs are already more prevalent, such as retail, and hotels and food service.<sup>1</sup>*

**Economic Policy Institute**

<sup>40</sup> More research is needed to determine the wages and types of occupations of workers who commute to work from outside the City of Seattle.

<sup>41</sup> The Rise and Nature of Alternative Work Arrangements in the United States, 1995-2015, Lawrence F. Katz Harvard University and NBER Alan B. Krueger

they generally have higher incomes than their parents did at the same age – and low relative mobility, meaning those born into one income group are unlikely to move significantly up or down the income ladder in their lifetime. Only 4% of those born in the bottom income quintile make it to the top.<sup>42</sup>

In general, people born at the bottom and top of the income ladder tend to stay there. A full 70% of Americans born at the bottom of the income ladder never make it to the middle. Educational attainment and employment are unquestionably key factors that promote economic security. A college degree is one of the strongest indicators of upward economic mobility in our country. But a person’s status at birth, including race, ethnicity, nativity, and gender, also plays a significant role.<sup>43</sup>

## **DISPARITIES IN EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT**

Seattle has one of the top levels of educational attainment in the U.S. with nearly six of every 10 adults over 25 holding a bachelor’s degree and 17 percent with some college and certification.<sup>44</sup> Added to this pool are the significant numbers of professionals moving to Seattle because of the high demand for specific educational credentials, degrees, and skill sets. Seeking mobility into new fields, 14% of the Seattle College’s Fall 2016 students hold bachelor’s degrees and are gaining additional degrees. King County ranks higher than Seattle in terms of individuals earning a high school diploma or less, at 25% to 18%, respectively.

***In analyzing educational attainment by nativity, however, disparities are evident.***

Seattle’s native-born population far exceeds all other groups in college attainment (Bachelor’s degree or higher), besting the foreign-born population by 20 percentage points. This group

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<sup>42</sup> Chutes and Ladders: How Economic Mobility is Changing in an Inequality Society, Economic Opportunity Institute, 2015

<sup>43</sup> As reported by the Economic Opportunity Institute, Americans generally experience high absolute mobility, meaning they generally have higher incomes than their parents did at the same age – and low relative mobility, meaning those born into one income group are unlikely to move significantly up or down the income ladder in their lifetime. Only 4% of those born in the bottom income quintile make it to the top. In fact, in general, people born at the bottom and top of the income ladder tend to stay there. Seventy percent of Americans born at the bottom of the income ladder never even make it to the middle. Educational attainment and employment – are unquestionably key factors that promote economic security. A college degree is one of the strongest indicators of upward economic mobility in our country. But a person’s status at birth, including race, ethnicity, nativity, and gender, also plays a significant role

<sup>44</sup> United States Census Bureau, 2014 American Community Survey, <http://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/news/data-releases/2014/release.html>

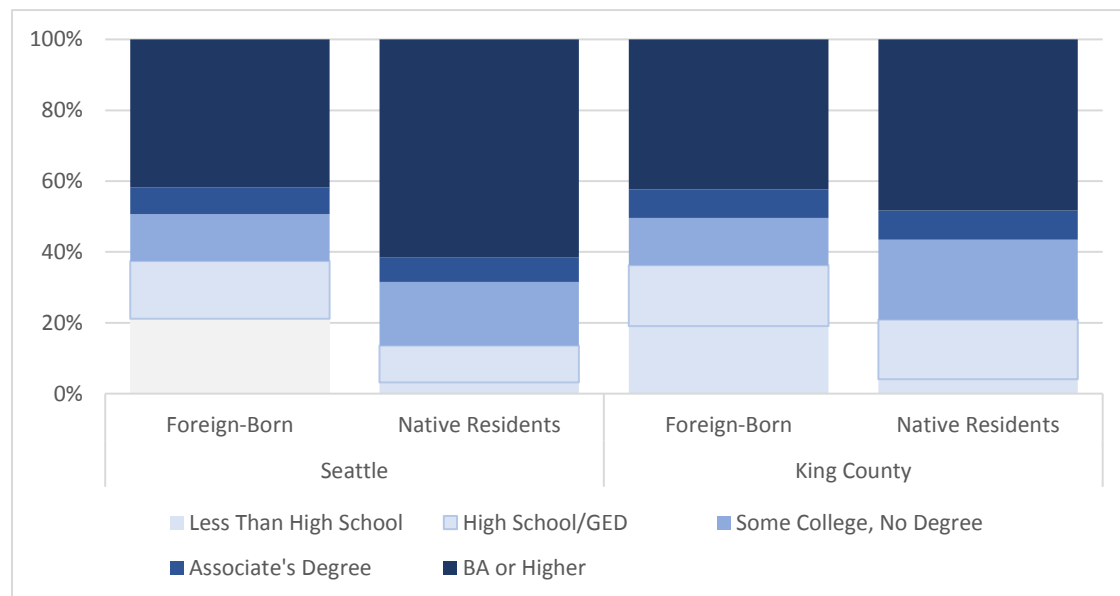
surpasses King County’s native-born population with a rate of 62% to 48%. Moreover, Seattle and King County’s foreign-born populations exhibit especially low attainment rates. One-fifth of this population in Seattle and King County has not earned a high school diploma.

**Disparities in Mobility**

*A wide variety of measures of economic security and indicators of upward mobility show that on average, whites consistently experience better outcomes than people of color, and the native-born population consistently experiences better outcomes than the foreign-born population. Children of color and those in immigrant families are more likely than white or native-born children to be in poverty, face academic challenges in school, and be suspended or expelled. They are likewise more likely to fall through the cracks before graduating high school, and they are much less likely to get into, can pay for, or complete college. They are also more likely to grow up and work in low-skilled and physically demanding jobs that pay less and provide less financial security overall. This is true in some cases regardless of educational attainment. One in five immigrants works in a job where their education or experience is under utilized*

**Economic Opportunity Institute Report, How Race and Origin Impact Economic Opportunity in Washington Report, December 23, 2015 |**

**Figure 3: Educational Attainment by Nativity in Seattle and King County**



## **Institutional and Cultural Barriers to Mobility for Immigrants**

For this study OIRA conducted a focused dialogue with staff from the Asian Counseling and Referral Service (ACRS), the Puget Sound Welcome Back Center, Jewish Family Services, Seattle Central College, and the Welcome Back Initiative based in San Francisco to identify the primary barriers that immigrant and refugees seeking professional jobs encounter. Qualitative data from these focused discussions have been supplemented with experiences gleaned from day-to-day interactions that OIRA has with underemployed immigrants, including those enrolled in our Ready to Work program. The primary barriers specific refugees and immigrants can be characterized as:

- Financial barriers
- Lack of access to immigrant specific, informed career and employment services
- Bias in educational institutions and employer hiring practices
- Lack of access to professional networks and “bridging” social capital
- Linguistic barriers

### **FINANCIAL BARRIERS**

One of the primary barriers to career mobility faced by internationally educated professionals is economic necessity – the need to support their families financially while working in a low wage entry level or middle wage job. Lack of time, multiple part-time jobs, and inflexible schedules make the most basic steps in career development difficult to carry out. Work and commuting schedules can make it very difficult to find the time needed to take ESL and other classes, navigate complex relicensing and certification systems, and to build a professional network.

Many of these professionals must navigate expensive degree programs and re-licensure systems that have no financial assistance attached to them, with the costs of re-licensure typically paid 100% out-of-pocket. An internationally educated nurse wanting to complete the process of regaining her credentials in the U.S. must pay as much as \$1500, with none of these costs covered by traditional financial aid. Traditional forms of financial aid are for tuition and books and are generally reserved for students who do not hold a B.A. degree. The federal financial aid system is intended to support the achievement of a Bachelor’s level of education and such degrees or higher



are not eligible for PELL grants. If professionals want to take more classes in the U.S., they must either pay for these courses themselves or not declare their degrees to get financial aid.<sup>45</sup> Some employers provide tuition and continuing education benefits; however, most underemployed immigrants do not work in jobs which provide these benefits.

## **LACK OF ACCESS TO INFORMED CAREER SERVICES**

How well and how fast foreign-born adults adjust and acquire the support they need to fully integrate depends on many factors, including a welcoming attitude towards “outsiders” in the host community, opportunities to communicate with those outside of one’s ethnic neighborhood, as well as the extent of trauma experienced by an individual due to violence and strife or other life challenges, and subsequent fear and disengagement. Many of these factors have a direct bearing on the ability to understand the system of education and training and how to access the appropriate services.

Newcomers, no matter how educated they may be, often find themselves in a system that is far from transparent even for those born in the U.S. Complex systems include not only health care and immigration bureaucracies, but also local systems of education and training that appear impenetrable to those new to the U.S. Negotiating the many steps necessary to find a program, fill out on-line education forms, and prepare for and pass admission test is daunting. Immigrants and refugees with degrees from outside the U.S. need help navigating complex and expensive credentialing systems to avoid “starting over” in college course work when alternate routes maybe available. *In the absence of alternate routes, these individuals need informed career counseling to develop a realistic plan.*

In our focused discussions, several of our stakeholders reported that educators and workforce professionals often find themselves in the position of advising internationally educated professionals to return to school and get credits in the U.S. in order to have their skills validated. Internationally educated professionals often feel compelled to start their education over rather than

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<sup>45</sup> In one state, the Department of Labor defined internationally educated professionals as “dislocated workers” since they could not get recognized in their field without further education. These professionals were then able to access monies through a “dislocated workers” funding stream – a wise, clever and allowable WIOA expense that should be considered in Washington State.

pursue alternate pathways. For many, starting over seems like the best and only option available because they have concluded that it is the only way they can get financial assistance for tuition and books or because they do not have access to informed career counseling that can result in informed referrals to such programs. This process perpetuates the mistaken belief that a person needs to have a degree from the U.S. to be considered for a profession. Additionally, “starting over” also takes a slot in an educational program that could go to a domestic student who is less prepared than their immigrant counterpart.

Internationally educated professionals must typically attempt to navigate the pathways back to licensure/re-credentialing in their chosen fields on their own without access to information, advisement and informed referrals from education and workforce professionals.<sup>46</sup> Restarting their education often contributes an unwise use of educational, especially in highly competitive professional programs such as Nursing and Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) fields. These programs often have long waiting lists or a lottery system. Far preferable from both a policy and program perspective is for professionals to obtain their credentials and licenses by other routes, thus freeing up these sought-after programs for students entering the field for the first time.

Many internationally educated individuals want to change their careers necessitating a new degree path, while others need classes to enrich their language or for professional development in their particular field. However, current financial aid, whether PELL grants Stafford loans, only pays for credit bearing courses. Often the appropriate courses for these individuals are specialized and not covered under financial aid. Again, the financial burden often falls on internationally educated professionals who are mostly working a low-wage entry-level jobs.

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<sup>46</sup> Immigrant Bridge NYC

## **A LACK OF FAMILIARITY WITH JOB-SEARCH METHODS IN THE U.S.**

It becomes very difficult for newcomers to make informed decisions regarding the next steps in finding appropriate training leading to work that can help sustain a family. For example, most ESL classes do not have strong relationships with employers (beyond the occasional job fair or mock interview) so that finding out about “quality jobs” is left to individuals. Again, those without networks of family or acquaintances with good jobs are left on their own to find work. Newly arrived immigrants and refugees are often unfamiliar with the job search methods that are common in the U.S. and American resumes entail different information and vocabulary than is expected in one’s home country. Additionally, many immigrants and refugees have not had to submit a cover letter or answer interview questions that are culturally specific to the U.S.

## **BIAS IN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS AND EMPLOYER HIRING PRACTICES**

Within colleges and universities, as in the hiring practices of many employers – immigrants face barriers of both implicit and explicit bias. This is expressed in the lack of recognition and validation of their home country work accomplishments, academic experience, and experiential knowledge. The transferability and value of degrees from other countries--even those evaluated and deemed to be equivalent to degrees from the United States--are often dismissed. These biases are often deep-seated within the organizational cultures and the “known worlds” of human resource managers and educators, who--even with the best of intentions--display preferences for the familiar and well-known experiences and credentials of the native born. There is also a lack of knowledge and professional development for educators and human resource professionals in how to fairly evaluate, acknowledge, respect and welcome immigrants educated in their home countries. In many cases, employers simply are not aware of how the skills and knowledge a foreign educated professional are truly transferable. They simply do not have enough experience with the group to see the benefits beyond the risk. <sup>47</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> The existence of implicit bias is beyond reasonable doubt: A refutation of ideological and methodological objections and executive summary of ten studies that no manager should ignore [John T. Jost<sup>a</sup>](#), [Laurie A. Rudman<sup>b</sup>](#), [Irene V. Blair<sup>c</sup>](#), [Dana R. Carney<sup>d</sup>](#), [Nilanjana Dasgupta<sup>e</sup>](#), [Jack Glaser<sup>f</sup>](#), [Curtis D. Hardin<sup>g</sup>](#) *Research in Organizational Behavior* Volume 29, 2009, Pages 39–69. These studies reveal that students, nurses, doctors, police officers, employment recruiters, and many others exhibit implicit biases with respect to race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, social status, and other distinctions. Furthermore—and contrary to the emphatic assertions of the critics—participants’ implicit associations do predict socially and organizationally significant behaviors, including employment, medical, and voting decisions made by working adults.

## **LACK OF ACCESS TO PROFESSIONAL NETWORKS AND SOCIAL CAPITAL**

In addition to racial bias in hiring and in educational institutions, immigrants of color also face barriers of language, difficulties obtaining recognition for credentials and experience gained abroad, and problems accessing opportunities through social and traditional recruitment networks channels. Refugees and immigrants are often isolated from the larger community. They arrive with few contacts in the U.S. and it is common to have no contacts within their profession. Where U.S.-born, professionals rely on networks for career development strategies, job tips, and references, a major challenge facing foreign-educated migrants is their limited access to U.S. professional networks – a form of social capital critical to career success. Without the support of a professional network, building a career in the U.S. can be a formidable challenge. We found a strong correlation between the size of an immigrant’s self-reported social network and his or her likelihood of achieving success. *Our stakeholder interviews revealed that internships and mentorships, both paid and unpaid, allow professionals to form relationships with others in their fields, to learn more in depth information about their chosen field in the US, and to build new professional relationships. Learning how to network and having the opportunity to “show what you know” is also a critical component of the re-entry process for immigrant professionals.*

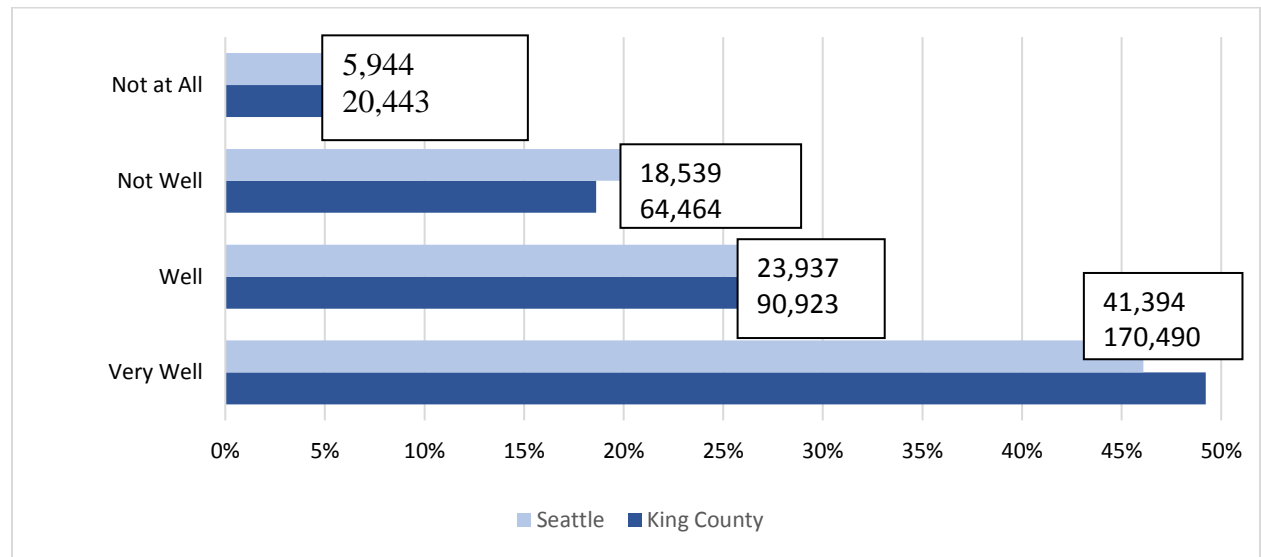
## **BARRIERS OF LANGUAGE: ABILITY TO SPEAK ENGLISH AND PRIMARY LANGUAGES SPOKEN BY IMMIGRANTS**

A lack of English skills or confidence in speaking English among skilled immigrants and refugees also delays their career trajectories. Stronger English language skills are consistently correlated with virtually every possible measure of immigrant economic success. English language learning opportunities exist in many communities for immigrants, yet foreign-educated immigrants have unique learning needs compared to traditional English as a Second Language (ESL) students, in part, because of their need to become fluent in occupationally and technically specific lingo. Successful career re-entry may require more occupationally-specific ESL programs to specifically help high skilled immigrants gain vocabulary in a new language, enabling them to communicate with professional expertise in the workplace.

## IMMIGRANT ABILITY TO SPEAK ENGLISH IN SEATTLE AND KING COUNTY

In our research regarding the ability to speak English, we found that few differences exist between Seattle and King County. Figure 6 below designates the ability to speak English on a scale of “Very Well”, “Well”, “Not Well”, and “Not at All” across the entire foreign-born population. Essentially, the two locations mirror each other. Nearly a majority of immigrants in both areas are able to speak “Very Well”, while about a quarter speak English “Not Well” or “Not at All”.

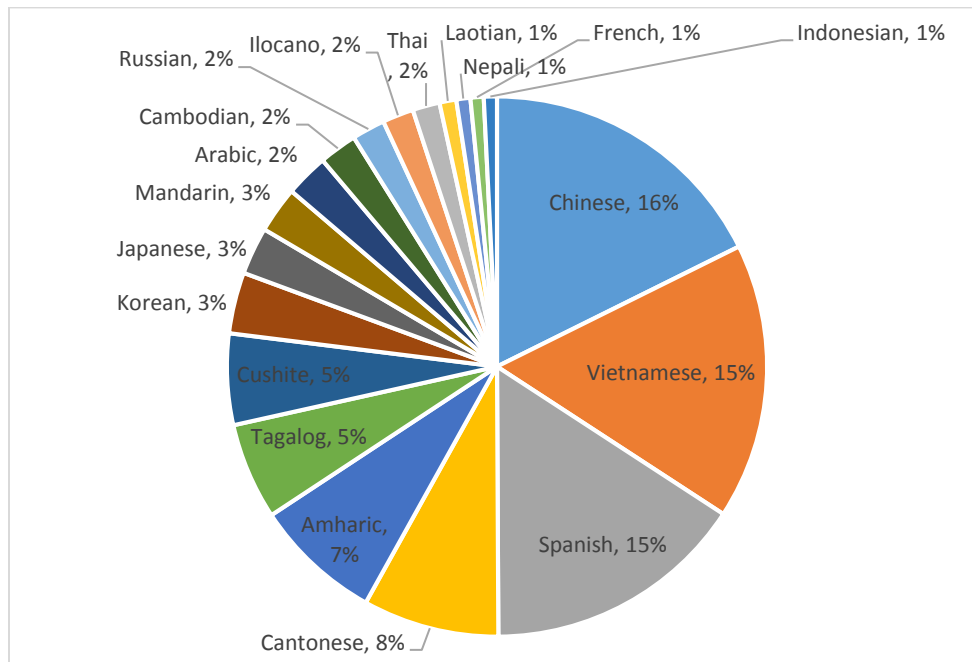
**Figure 4 : Immigrant Ability to Speak English, Seattle and King County**



Source: 2014 5-Year American Community Survey Microdata

Knowing that a sizeable portion of the immigrant population has difficulties speaking English very well, we sought to capture what languages are spoken. SJI researchers analyzed the languages spoken at home for foreign-born individuals who speak English “Well”, “Not Well”, and “Not at All”. Figure 10 identifies the fifteen most spoken languages for these groups in Seattle and King County. The three leading languages are Chinese, Vietnamese, and Spanish.

**Figure: 5**  
**Languages Spoken in Seattle by Individuals Who Do Not Speak English “Very Well”**



Source: 2014 5-Year American Community Survey Microdata Note: an additional 44 languages represented less than 1% of individuals who did not speak English well.

### **SOME PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS AND IDEAS ABOUT FUTURE DIRECTIONS**

While immigrant and refugee professionals and workers share with the native-born increasingly difficult labor market conditions within the overall workforce in Seattle and King County, they also have specific needs and face identifiable barriers. *So long as immigrants and refugees continue to navigate the labor market as individuals without specific institutional supports - the disparities that this report has documented will prevail. Alternately, the provision of career services specific to their unique circumstance as newcomers and institutionalizing best practices with the support of workforce and educational investments can over time reduce disparities and increase the number of immigrant workers and professionals who obtain gainful employment and remain economically stable.*

**A Before-and-After Survey of Seattle College Immigrant Students:**  
**Home Country Education: Professions, Current Jobs, & Future Goals**

To confirm the need and demand for immigrant-focused career services, in the summer of 2016, OIRA worked with the Seattle College District to conduct a survey of immigrants attending Seattle Colleges ESL Programs regarding their past work, education history, current employment status and their future career goals. We completed a survey of 129 immigrant students enrolled in Seattle Colleges, representing a significant sample of the total number of students taking ESL courses in the Summer 2016 Quarter. We asked the respondents to answer questions regarding their age, gender, country of origin, home country occupation, home country educational attainment, current job, future career goal in U.S., and current ESL Level (CASAS). The survey was translated into seven languages (Somali, Amharic, Mandarin, Spanish, Korean, Tagalog and Vietnamese.) The response rate was high because the Faculty of Basic Studies directly communicated with students across the program requesting them to volunteer their time and complete the survey.

**ABOUT THE SURVEY RESPONDENTS**

The 129 respondents hailed from 25 different countries. The top five (5) countries of origin included China (32); Mexico (19); Ethiopia (14); Vietnam (13); Guatemala (11); and four (4) each from Columbia; Eretria; Iran; Somalia; and the Ukraine. Sixty-three percent of the 129 respondents are women and represented a range of ages. One-hundred four (104) of the respondents (81%) are younger than 44 years with fifty-one (51) aged 25-34. Thirty-five (35) of the participants held college degrees with another sixteen (16) having complete college course work. Almost all the respondents were not yet English Proficient as evidenced by their ESL levels as shown in Table 7.

**Table 7: ESL Levels of Seattle College Respondents**

Level	Number	Percentage
1	16	12.40
2	25	19.38
3	40	31.01
4	22	17.05
5	18	13.95
None or Missing	2	6.20
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>129</b>	<b>100.00</b>

## RESULTS

OIRA's survey produced information about the experience and career trajectory of immigrants who worked and were educated in their home countries. *The majority of respondents experienced significant downward mobility relative to their employment status in their home countries.* We determined that about third of the 129 respondents were educationally underemployed and the large majority are in pursuit of a professional occupation and are currently working towards a degree. A smaller sub group is targeting occupations that require less than a college degree. All are enrolled ESL studies to become English proficient.

Of the 129 survey respondents, 118 identified their occupation and employment status in their home country. Of these 118 (86%) reported holding a job in their home countries and only four were unemployed with only 12 identifying as students. By contrast, of the 121 respondents who identified their current occupation and employment status, 87 (72%) are working and attending Seattle colleges, while 31 are unemployed and attending school. *Of the 87 who are currently working, forty-three (43) 49% work in restaurant, housekeeping or custodial jobs.* We then looked at the professional and working class occupations that respondents held in their home countries compared to their current jobs. Ten (10) worked as engineers in their home country, seven (7) as teachers, and three (3) as computer technicians. Here, of these twenty respondents one (1) works as an engineer, two (2) as teachers, and one (1) as a computer technician. In re: middle wage jobs, 11 of the 87 employed students worked in office administration and nine (9) as sales representatives. Here, three (3) work in office jobs and four (4) work as sales representatives. The table below depicts home country job, their current job and their career goal.



**Table 8: Home Country Occupation, Current Job in and Future Career Goals of Seattle College Respondents**

Occupation	Home Country Job	Current Job	Career Goal
Administrative Office Assistant	11	3	8
Engineering	10	1	6
Sales Representative	9	4	5
Entrepreneur	8	4	7
Teacher	7	2	10
Restaurant and Food	7	22	7
Transportation and Driving	6	1	0
Clothing /Fashion Designer	4	1	1
Farmer	3	0	0
Computer Technician	3	1	2
Beautician Stylist	3	3	3
Nurse	2	0	9

Source: OIRA Survey of Seattle College Immigrant Students

### TOP CAREER GOAL OCCUPATIONS IDENTIFIED BY SURVEY RESPONDENTS

We asked the respondents to identify their future career goals. While twelve (12) of the respondents indicated they were unsure of their future career goals, most of the others were more certain of their desired occupations with many targeting professional occupations despite the obvious obstacles. The table below depicts the top occupations selected as future career goals with teaching and nursing topping the list. The wide range of career aspirations reflects the diversity within the larger immigrant workforce. However, the most common short-term goal was their desire and commitment to becoming English proficient as soon as possible.

**Table 9: Career Goals of Seattle College Survey Respondents**

Occupation	Number	Occupation	Number
Unsure	12	Restaurant Food (2Chef)	7
Teacher/Educator	10	Sales Representative	5
Nurse	9	Medical Doctor	3
Administrator/Office Assistant	8	Beautician/Stylist	3
Entrepreneur	7	Cashier	3
Manager/Supervisor	6	Health Care Worker	3
Engineer	6	Interpreter	3
		Factory Worker	3

### III. SEATTLE/KING COUNTY WORKFORCE WHERE ARE THE JOBS?

*For immigrants and refugees the quality of jobs and their career mobility have need significant improvement. Mapping educational and workforce strategies for immigrant workers and professionals requires an understanding of the current deployment of our regional workforce and the dynamics of our labor market.*

*To that end, Section III of our study begins with what we term the “occupational structure” of our workforce including the number and distribution of jobs and occupations in our local and regional economy. We then look at promising occupations for which we could consider development of career pathways and for devising on-ramps to these careers. We conclude with a mini-case study of one profession which shows promise and aligns with a critical need for diversification of the workforce in Seattle—the teaching profession.*

Mayor Ed Murray and the Seattle City Council view the ongoing development of the regional workforce as a vital component of our larger economic and community development strategies. Key efforts of the City include:

- Working with a range of industries and businesses of all sizes to create a longer-term vision for the role of manufacturing, maritime, and trade in Seattle’s economy;
- Building our strategy to attract foreign direct investment; and
- Developing a shared strategy with the business community for how the city can play a more active role in nurturing our business environment and in creating jobs.

Seattle’s diverse economy is creating jobs and keeping unemployment low. However, how we overcome underemployment—a stronger measure of the health of the economy as experienced by all residents, including refugees and immigrants—will be key among the considerations we detail in the next section, the search for solutions.

#### **AN OVERVIEW OF SEATTLE AND KING COUNTY INDUSTRY SECTORS**

The sectors of our economy depicted in Figures 8 and 9 below are distributed within two primary types of industries that produce and distribute goods and services. Goods-producing industries include manufacturing, construction and mining and service. Service-producing industries include healthcare and social assistance; wholesale and retail trade; transportation and warehousing; utilities, information; financial services and activities; professional and business services; leisure and hospitality; other services; and government.

## WHERE ARE THE JOBS?

As of the third quarter of 2016, there were a total of 1,371,820 jobs in King County, with the City of Seattle accounting for 51 percent of total King County employment with 700,962 jobs. To policymakers familiar with the Seattle workforce, the number of jobs reported in this report are significantly higher than those typically reported.<sup>48</sup> For example, in June 2016 the Office of Planning and Community Development reported to the City Council Committee on Gender Equity, Safe Communities, and New Americans that there were 482,238 individuals working in their “primary” job in Seattle, 363,209 of whom are Seattle residents.<sup>49</sup>

*In determining the overall number of jobs in Seattle, we included both the primary jobs and all the other jobs that an individual held including additional part-time and self-employed jobs and identified the occupations associated with those jobs.<sup>50</sup>* This approach provides an expansive snapshot of the size and distribution of all the jobs in Seattle and King County depicting a comprehensive picture of the full range of paid employment that makes our economy work. It also provides a comprehensive baseline from which we can understand the full range of occupations in which immigrant workers and professionals currently work. The following figures depict the percentage and number of jobs in Seattle and King County by industry sector.

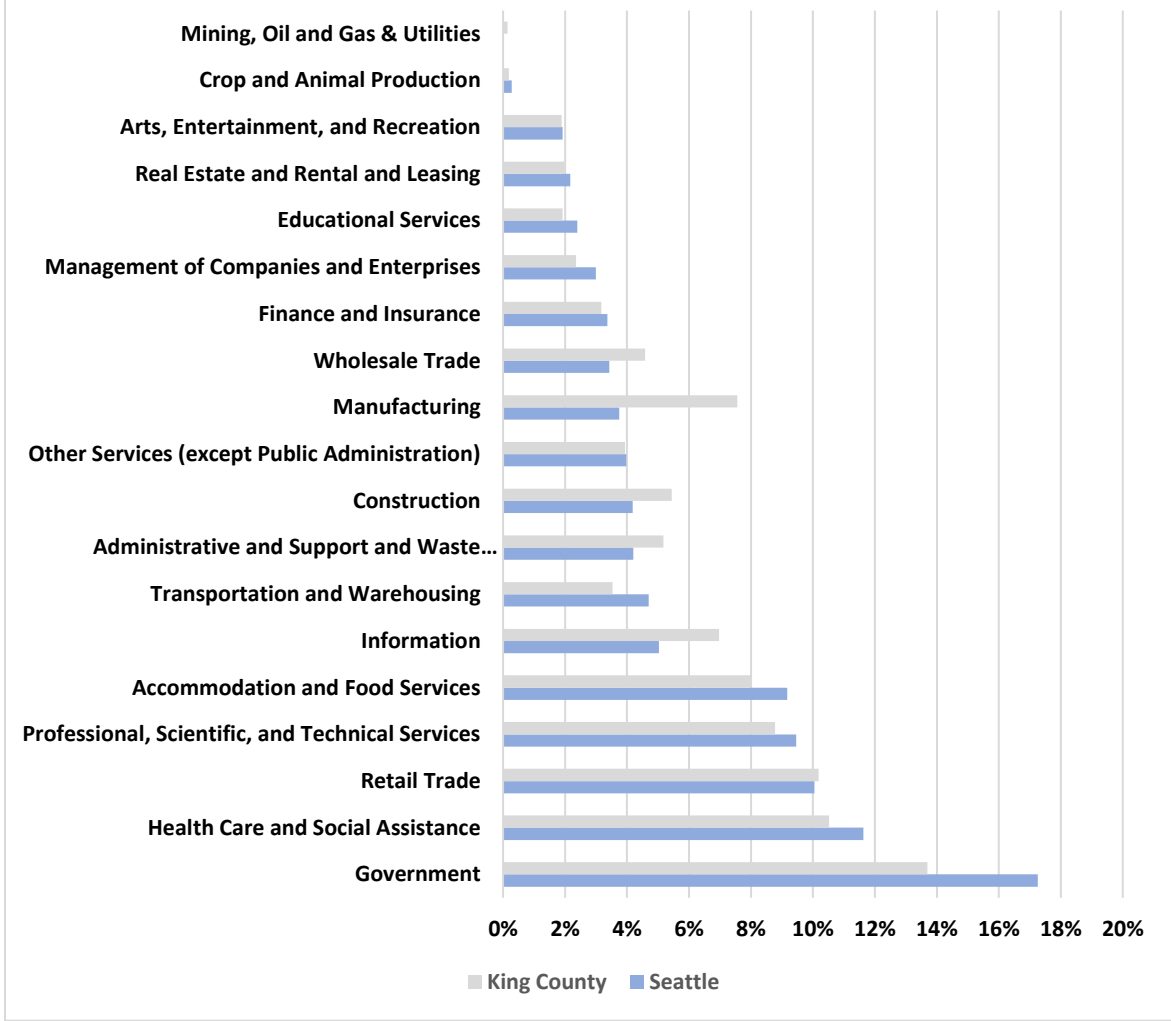
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<sup>48</sup> Different public data sources use different geographic boundaries to define Seattle. The Census Bureau uses official jurisdictional boundaries for some metrics and the Seattle-Tacoma-Bellevue metropolitan statistical area—which consists of King, Snohomish, and Pierce Counties—for others. EMSI relies on a ZIP code approximation of the Seattle jurisdictional boundary. As a result, job totals between these sources and other data sources may not match perfectly.

<sup>49</sup> If a jobholder works at more than one job, the primary job is that one which produces the higher earnings of all the jobs held by a single individual. Isolating and capturing the number of primary jobs is a useful and tried and true method of informing community workforce and economic research and development.

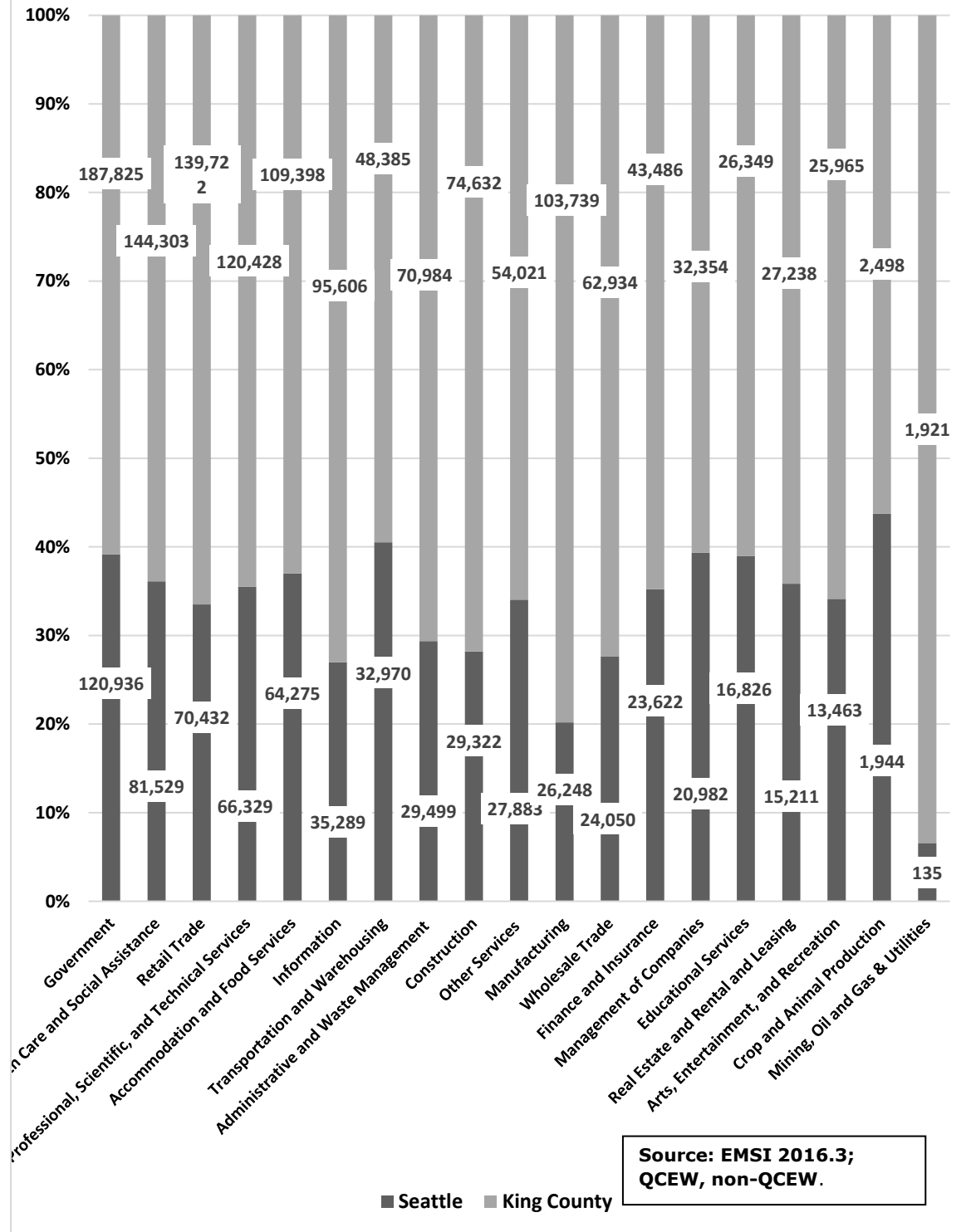
<sup>50</sup> EMSI uses a ZIP code approximation of Seattle’s jurisdictional boundaries to estimate jobs in Seattle. As a direct result, EMSI’s job numbers are different from other estimates of employment in Seattle, such as those published by the Puget Sound Regional Council and the United States Census Bureau.

**Figure 6 : Percentage of Jobs by Industry, Seattle & King County 2016**



Source: EMSI 2016.3; QCEW, non-QCEW.

**Figure 7 : Number of Jobs by Industry,  
Seattle & King County 2016**



Government employment provides the largest share of jobs, accounting for 17% and 14% of all jobs in Seattle and King County, respectively. This finding immediately highlighted the significant potential for constructing employment pathways into several occupations groupings in City and County jobs for people of color, low-income residents and immigrants and refugee professionals.

### **The Promise of Public Sector Employment in Seattle/King County**

*“The public sector must be considered in any conversation around industry sectors that have considerable impact on King County’s workforce and economic health. These jobs include city, county, state and federal government offices and agencies and provide career opportunities in a wide range of careers including accountants, fire fighters, teachers, and environmental scientists. Some occupations are specific to the public sector, such as police officers but many that are represented in the private sector have a public-sector presence as well.*

*Nearly 54% of public employees are nearing retirement age, causing projections for needing new workers to increase. The sector is projected to add over 7,600 new jobs and to see over 40,000 replacement openings through 2024. One major challenge this sector has faced has been attracting and hiring younger workers.*

*There are many long-term incentives to public service including living wage and high wages, outstanding health and retirement benefits, paid holidays, vacation benefits and career progression opportunities.”*

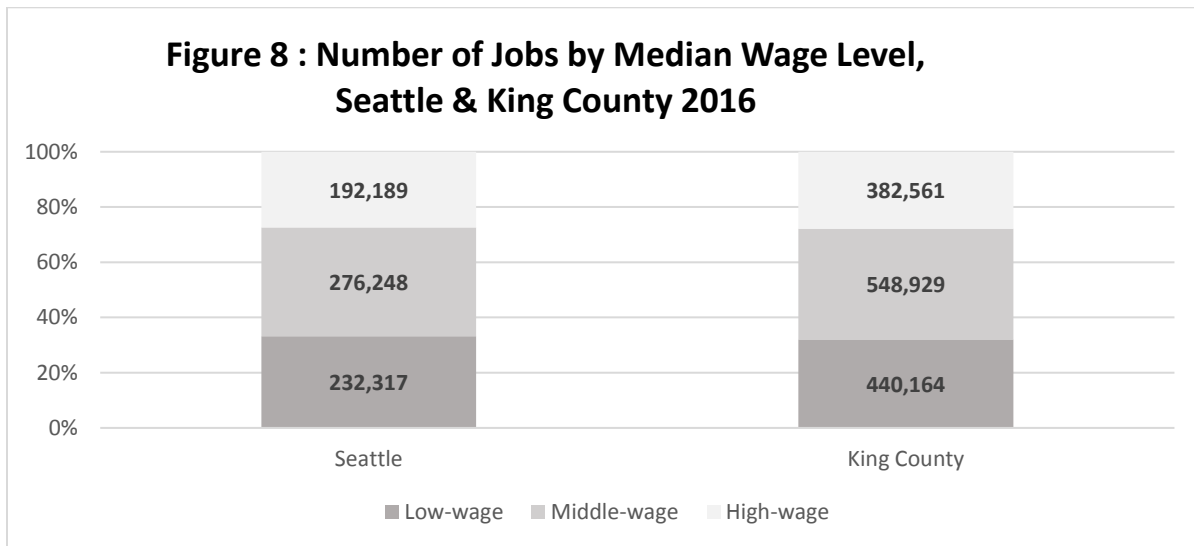
**Workforce Development Council of Seattle-King County**

Healthcare and Social Assistance is the second leading industry category with 11 to 12 percent of total jobs. These sectors also offer potential for future employment pathways. Retail accounts for 10 percent of total jobs in both areas. In manufacturing, King County’s portion is double the rate for Seattle (8% compared to 4%).

## **OCCUPATIONS, WAGE STRUCTURE AND GENERAL EDUCATIONAL REQUIREMENTS IN SEATTLE AND KING COUNTY**

Seattle’s workforce – among the most highly educated in the United States – works in a broad array of blue collar, white collar, and service occupations. We created an overall

framework within which we assigned all the occupations in Seattle and King County into a three-level table based on their median wage. We defined low median wage jobs as those paying less than \$18; middle median wage jobs between \$18 and \$37; and high median wage jobs above \$37.<sup>51</sup> As depicted below, 33% of all Seattle occupations pay a low-median wage, 40% pay a middle-median wage and 27% pay a high-median wage.



It is important to remember that wages alone are not a predictor or reliable measure of workers’ incomes or their degree of economic stability. A case in point is the status of Seattle’s 11,250 post-secondary teachers, nearly 2,000 of whom are immigrant professionals. Though working in a high-status, high-wage occupation, most post-secondary teachers live in a state of constant economic instability, weaving together multiple part-time assignments with different institutions with little if any benefits. More research is needed to determine the full picture of stability and earnings in this group. From the measure of overall income, post-secondary teachers have more in common with low and middle wage workers who work in jobs with lower educational requirements than their fellow high status professionals earning high wages. Thus, simply working in a high or middle wage job is no guarantor of economic stability or what is traditionally thought of a “middle class” life – particularly in Seattle. Many other factors determine the degree of economic stability of individuals and families, including the impact of

<sup>51</sup> The middle third of households in King County earn between approximately \$46,000 and \$97,500 with the average household containing 1.3 people. Therefore, jobs supporting middle-income households pay between \$38,000 and \$77,000 or roughly \$18 - \$37 per hour

involuntary part-time work, specific household needs, family size, and total household income and expenses.

## **EDUCATIONAL REQUIREMENTS AND SKILL**<sup>52 53 54</sup>

In designing career pathways for immigrant and refugees it is essential to understand the specific education and skill requirements associated with individual occupations. However, there are general trends and patterns important to note. *In most cases – but not all - the higher the educational requirements of an occupation the higher the wages or salary it pays.*

### **LOW WAGE JOBS**

The jobs that we assigned to the low-wage category in our workforce level framework are those that pay low wages and generally (but not always) require up to a high school diploma or its equivalent. Some low-wage occupations, however, do require formal certification, such as Homecare Workers, Nursing Assistants, and Child Care Workers, while other do not require a high school diploma.

### **MIDDLE WAGE JOBS**

Middle wage jobs have a wide range of educational requirements –including on the job training, apprenticeship training, vocational school training, an associate’s degree and in a few cases a bachelor’s degree. Middle wage jobs that have few educational requirements include customer service representatives, supervisors of retail workers, and chefs and head cooks – all

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<sup>52</sup> It is important to note that while most occupations fall within just one of these three workforce wage levels, there are others that are represented in more than one level. For example, teachers and office workers both fall into more than one level because wage levels and educational requirements vary depending on the institution and sector in which they work.

<sup>53</sup> Because there are many jobs in which the skill set needed to adequately perform work duties does not correspond to the educational requirements of the job or to the educational attainment of jobseekers, we intentionally avoided classifying jobs by the ambiguous category of “skill level” which tends to conflate educational requirements, skill levels, and the educational attainment of job seekers. We instead focused on the term “general educational requirements” of occupations in part so we could more accurately document the scale and distribution on underemployment in the workforce.

<sup>54</sup> This analysis collapses the Occupational Information Network’s (O\*NET) five job zones into 3 categories. Job Zones 1 and 2, which may or usually require a high school diploma, became the low education category, Job Zone 3, which generally requires vocational school training or an associate’s degree became the middle education category, and Job Zone 4 and 5, which generally require a bachelor’s degree or a graduate degree became the high education category.



large occupational groups. Conversely, middle, and elementary school teachers and designers - occupations that each pay a middle wage have high educational requirements.

## **HIGH WAGE JOBS**

High wage jobs while generally require a Bachelor's degree or higher but there are some exceptions.

Workers in many occupations who have attained less than a Bachelor's degree are mostly consigned to middle and low wage jobs and will continue to encounter stiff competition in the labor market from the underemployed holders of Bachelor's degrees. One feature of our current labor market is the preference of many hiring managers for holders of bachelor's degrees even when those credentials are not a job requirement - a scenario in which jobseekers are more competitive for jobs for which they are over qualified – a trend resulting in high levels of underemployment for B.A. holders - immigrant and native born alike.

Examples of exceptions to this trend include registered nurses whose Associate's degrees provide them with a foothold in a high wage high-demand profession while they work towards a Bachelor's degree to meet rising requirements in an occupation facing perennial shortages. Another exception are several building trades that can pay a high wage – attainable via the route of apprenticeship training programs.

## **WHERE THE JOBS ARE IN SEATTLE: OCCUPATIONAL CLUSTERS AND INDIVIDUAL JOB TITLES**

Seattle's workforce is represented in 735 distinct job titles designated by USDOL, which we collapsed into 54 groups or clusters of similar occupations. Within these 54 occupational groups, we identified those job clusters that employed over 10,000 workers in Seattle. We found 22 occupational clusters in Seattle representing 577,304 jobs - 82% of the jobs in the Seattle workforce. *Eight of every ten jobs in Seattle falls within one of these job clusters.* This is where eighty percent (80%) of the jobs are. Beyond the numbers, this data also tells us much about the

Nursing and the construction trades are both examples of occupations into which immigrant workers and professional can pursue careers that pay a living wage in the City of Seattle.

structure of the current Seattle workforce and helps to determine the distribution of underemployment.

The five largest job clusters in Seattle include one middle wage cluster (office supervisors and workers); two low wage clusters (retail, and food service workers); and two high wage clusters (IT jobs and assorted managers across several sectors). Looking deeper within these occupational clusters, we then identified the individual occupations in which the largest number of people are working. The following chart depicts the eleven (11) individual job titles/occupations in which the *largest* number of people are working in Seattle and King County. In the City of Seattle, 55% of these jobs pay a low median wage; 17% a middle median wage and 28% a high median wage.

<b>Table 10: Wage Level &amp; Number of Jobs in the 11 Largest Individual Occupations, Seattle &amp; King County</b>				
<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Number Employed in Seattle</b>	<b>Number Employed in King County</b>	<b>Median Hourly Wage</b>	
Software Developers, Applications	15,585	42,129	\$56.33	High
Registered Nurses	13,800	22,214	\$41.13	
Postsecondary Teachers	11,250	14,051	\$38.03	
Subtotal	40,635	78,394		
Secretaries and Administrative Assistants	10,382	18,202	\$20.33	Mid
Customer Service Representatives	14,263	28,131	\$18.06	
	24,645	46,333		
Waiters and Waitresses	13,634	22,425	\$11.06	Low
Combined Food Prep Serving Workers	12,338	24,356	\$10.28	
Laborers, Freight, Stock, & Material Movers	10,985	22,326	\$13.98	
Cashiers	9,311	19,335	\$11.91	
Retail Salesperson	19,764	40,596	\$12.24	
Office Clerks, General	14,363	25,265	\$15.75	
Subtotal	80,395	154,303		
<b>Total</b>	<b>145,675</b>	<b>279,030</b>		

Source: SJI analysis of EMSI 2016.3; QCEW, non-QCEW.

## **PROMISING CAREER PATHWAYS FOR IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE DEGREE-HOLDERS AND WORKERS**

If we are to construct career pathways and onramps specific to the needs and educational levels of immigrants and refugees (especially those who are arriving with international degrees), we should concentrate efforts somewhere. On ramps required “infrastructure” development; and cannot be done everywhere at one time. Our assessment suggests that of the occupations to target in Seattle where jobs are growing, the following should be considered at the forefront of our immigrant-specific efforts.

- Nursing
- Construction
- Government jobs
- Teaching
- Stem Careers (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math)

We include, now, a case study which details a strategy for pathways into the teaching workforce.

*Building Pathways into Teaching for Immigrant Professionals*

The teaching profession in Seattle consists of pre-school teachers, teaching assistants, K-12 teachers, post-secondary teachers, special education, technical, adult education and literacy teachers and several affiliated jobs. One America's 2016 report, *Reducing Brain Waste, Creating Career Pathways for Foreign Educated Immigrants in Washington State* provides a rich resource of data, information as well as programmatic models for this section of our study. As our research demonstrates a significant number of underemployed immigrants and refugees living and working in Seattle/King County were either trained as teachers or hold other bachelor degrees from their home countries. Unfortunately, foreign-educated teachers show the greatest rate of underemployment compared to other immigrant professionals like nurses and engineers.<sup>55</sup> Those who can find work in the education system typically hold jobs that do not reflect their level of education or experience, often employed as instructional assistants or para-educators, and, in some cases, even janitors or school bus drivers.<sup>56</sup>

While the state has a responsibility to screen teacher candidates for competence and essential pedagogical skills, the exclusion of so many potentially highly qualified diverse professionals is a great loss to the educational system and our children and youth of color.<sup>57</sup> As the Brainwaste Report indicated, *"The absence of a clear alternate pipeline for foreign-educated immigrant professionals and advising around navigating the process is a missed opportunity to tap into a bilingual, diverse talent pool our schools so desperately need."* Many foreign-educated immigrants interested in pursuing careers in education thus choose to work as para-educators, or even as volunteers, losing out on the chance to play a leadership role in educating the growing number of children from diverse backgrounds.

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<sup>55</sup> *Reducing Brain Waste: Creating Career Pathways for Foreign-Educated Immigrants in Washington State.*, One America Report 2016

<sup>56</sup> *ibid*

<sup>57</sup> *ibid*

## **ALIGNING WORKFORCE AND EDUCATION POLICY OBJECTIVES**

One of the top priorities of the Murray Administration and the Seattle City Council is the goal of eliminating achievement and opportunity gaps and improving educational and life outcomes for Seattle’s African American/Black youth and underserved children of color (particularly Native American, Pacific Islanders, and immigrant and refugee youth). To that end the Mayor’s Education Summit set forth a set of principles, guidelines, goals, and recommendations to help eliminate achievement and opportunity gaps and improve educational and life outcomes youth and children of color through teacher diversification.

Qualified underemployed immigrants and refugees currently working in a range of low and middle wage jobs comprise a significant candidate pool of skilled knowledge workers from which workforce professionals and educational administrators can recruit to help to fill an urgent need for increased diversity in our teacher workforce.

## **GOAL ORIENTED RECOMMENDATIONS**

OIRA’s recommendations both support and align with the goals of the Education Summit and the City’s commitments to labor equity. Supporting career pathways for immigrants of color in teaching is also wise policy that integrates key workforce development, public education, and racial and social justice goals to generate public goods. Such investments can not only build pathways to living wage jobs but set in motion a multiplier effect that generates high returns in the form of increased mobility in future generations for children and youth of color.

## **CURRENT DISPARITIES IN THE TEACHING WORKFORCE**

In Seattle’s public schools as of the 2015-2016,

### ***State-Wide Disparities***

*While 43% of students in the State of Washington identify as people of color, only 12% of teachers identify as people of color; a 2014 study, Washington ranked 24<sup>th</sup> among the states in the Teacher Diversity Index. The percentage of English language learners has also steadily increased, reaching 10.2% of the student body in 2012-2013, creating a strong market for qualified bilingual teachers. Seattle’s educator workforce, much like the state does not reflect the diverse student population it serves. A review of the workforce data over 25 years shows that the gap between underrepresented minority students and teachers is growing statewide.*

white students comprised less than half (46.5 %) of all students as white teachers held over 80% of the teaching positions while Black/African American teachers held only 4.8% of Seattle’s teaching positions with Black/African-Americans comprising 15.7% of students. Latinos representing 12.3 % of students but held only 3.9% of teaching positions.

## **DIVERSIFY TO CLOSE OPPORTUNITY GAPS AND ADVANCE IMMIGRANT INTEGRATION**

Research indicates that students of color benefit from a diverse educator workforce. For example, educators of color can contribute to deeper understanding of the “funds of knowledge” of students and their families, informing both the practices of their colleagues and the institutionalized structures within a school or a school district. Teachers of color also tend to have higher expectations for their students of color (as measured by higher numbers of referrals to gifted programs). The importance of teacher diversification as a strategy for closing the opportunity gap has been widely recognized in research and by community advocates locally and nationally.

**Table: 11: Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Seattle Public Schools**

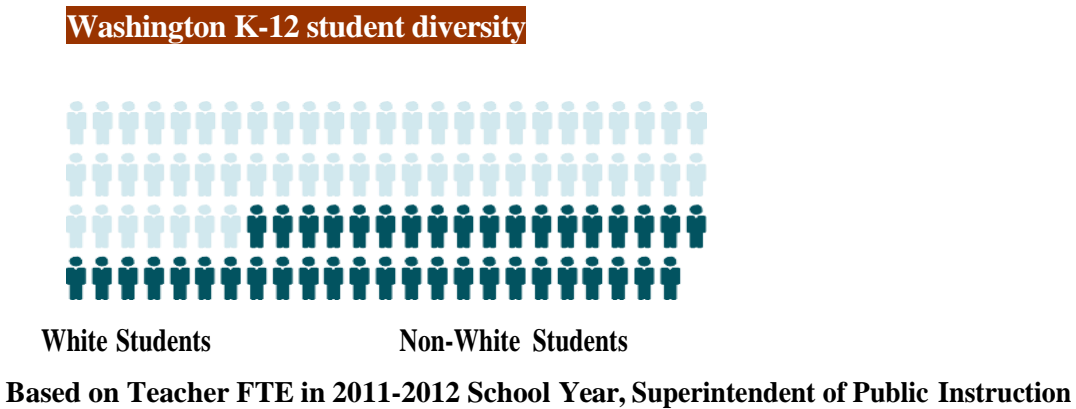
Race/Ethnicity	Students		Teachers	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Hispanic / Latino of Any Race(s)	6,540	12.30%	125	3.94%
American Indian/Alaskan Native	358	0.70%	8	0.25%
Asian	8,077	15.10%	239	7.53%
Black / African American	8,349	15.70%	155	4.88%
Native Hawaiian /Other Pacific Islander	248	0.50%	15	0.47%
White	24,781	46.50%	2,551	80.32%
Two or More Races	4,990	9.40%	83	2.61%

Source: WA State Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, Washington State Report Card, 2015-2016

In addition to being one of the top goals of the Mayor’s 2016 Education Summit, establishing a more representative education workforce is also among the top ten priorities identified by the State for improving educational outcomes. Addressing and implementing efforts to diversify the teaching workforce can bring many improvements and positive outcomes for the morale of students, staff, and schools. Diverse teachers are more likely to understand the

perspectives of marginalized students, which can be a powerful learning experience for students beyond academic curricula.

**Figure 9: Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Washington State Public Schools**



## **ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING AND TEACHER DIVERSITY**

Diverse teachers bring culturally and linguistically based teaching approaches that expand the views represented within a school’s teaching staff. This is particularly true for schools with a high English language learner (ELL) student population who stand to benefit from models of bilingual instruction. Dual language or bilingual instruction, benefits ELL students who learn subject matter content in their native language and simultaneously acquire English skills. ELL students in these classrooms typically outperform their peers by fifth grade when compared to English immersion models.<sup>58</sup> However, districts have consistently reported

difficulty hiring qualified bilingual teacher candidates to teach their ELL students as well as in bilingual/dual language classrooms and world language courses.<sup>59</sup>

## **IMMIGRANT PATHWAYS INTO TEACHING IN WASHINGTON STATE**

As the One America report showed, many Washington State school districts have a strong desire to hire teachers who can add diversity and bilingual instruction to their classrooms. Bringing bilingual, diverse instructors from the immigrant talent pool will, however, require programmatic and systemic supports from state agencies, school districts, schools, and education degree programs to recruit, train, and retain these individuals as teachers in their communities. As a regulated profession, state law governs teaching, which stipulates standards for knowledge, experience, and pedagogical preparation. Determining and administering these provisions are two state agencies: the Professional Educator Standards Board (PESB) and the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI).

Current requirements to obtain a teacher certification and endorsements include: a bachelor's degree (or higher) from a regionally accredited college/university; completion of a state-approved or regionally-approved college/university teacher preparation program; and teacher assessment exams, namely the WEST-B, a basic skills test, and, the WEST-E, which measures content knowledge for teaching endorsements in a particular subject.<sup>60</sup> Applicants who meet these requirements will be issued a Residency Teacher Certificate qualifying them for employment.

For potential teacher candidates who wish to pursue their training via non-traditional paths, the state also permits alternative routes to certification for qualified individuals who meet certain criteria. Washington's Alternate Routes to Teaching Certification program supports "grow your

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<sup>58</sup> Wayne Thomas & Virginia Collier, "A National Study of School Effectiveness for Language Minority Students' Long-Term Academic Achievement," September 1, 2002. Available at: <http://www.usc.edu/dept/education/CMMR/CollierThomasComplete.pdf>

<sup>59</sup> Wayne Thomas & Virginia Collier, "A National Study of School Effectiveness for Language Minority Students' Long-Term Academic Achievement," September 1, 2002. Available at: <http://www.usc.edu/dept/education/CMMR/CollierThomasComplete.pdf>  
John Higgins, "Demand for Bilingual Teachers Especially High in Washington," *The Seattle Times*, August 10, 2015

<sup>60</sup> Teacher certification requirements are detailed on the website of the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction. Retrieved from: <http://www.k12.wa.us/certification/>



own” models for school districts designed to encourage residents to become teachers.

## **SUMMARY OF ALTERNATE ROUTES**

- Para-educators or emergency substitute teachers who wish to transition their associate’s degree to a bachelor’s degree, the education attainment level necessary to qualify as a lead teacher
- Para-educators who already have their bachelor’s degree but still require a teaching certificate;
- Qualified, educated subject matter experts with an advanced degree who are looking for a career change into teaching;
- Those who hold a bachelor’s degree and enter conditional certification agreements with school districts to complete coursework within a set timeframe.

## **SEATTLE TEACHER RESIDENCY PROGRAM**

One example of a highly effective approach is the Seattle Teacher Residency program - a “grow your own” model. The Seattle Teacher Residency recruits, prepares, and supports teachers to make sure that each student excels and feels connected to the school community, regardless of circumstance and has brought in foreign-educated immigrants and refugees to address areas of need while increasing teacher diversity.<sup>61</sup> In this highly successful, competitive, partially subsidized one-year program, forty (40) bachelor degree holders in two cohorts attend an intensive combination of classroom instruction and on the job training, are paired with a mentor-teacher, and are placed in teaching positions. However, slots in this program are limited and a significant number of applicants cannot be accommodated.

## **COST AND PROCEDURAL BARRIERS TO LICENSURE**

Washington’s teacher-licensing procedures can be complex and difficult to navigate,<sup>53</sup> even for U.S.-born or trained candidates. Although state policy allows the evaluation of foreign degrees to satisfy the degree requirement with a list compiled by OSPI of approved external evaluators, procuring the necessary documents can be a lengthy, cumbersome, and expensive process for which state agencies or education colleges offer little support. The requirement for successful completion

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<sup>61</sup> For further information see: <http://www.seattleteacherresidency.org/>

of a state- approved teacher preparation program is also a formidable barrier. These programs are competitive and require a major investment of time and money.

*As the Brainwaste study reported, Washington State can build on the existing alternate routes to its teaching certification infrastructure to strengthen career pathways for foreign-educated teachers or those with a foreign degree who wish to make a career change and pursue teaching.*<sup>62</sup> Community colleges, traditionally places for adult learning and career training, would be a natural place to recruit and support this population’s entry point into continuing their careers in education. With the state’s reputation for innovations in education, Washington can be a trailblazer in marrying the rich resources of the immigrant community with the needs of children in our school systems.

## **CAREER PATHWAYS IN SEATTLE PRE-SCHOOL PROGRAM AND POST-SECONDARY INSTITUTIONS**

The focus in this section of the study was on pathways to positions into teaching profession in K-12. However, the same principles and approaches hold true for the whole continuum of the teaching professions from pre-K through post-secondary schooling. The City’s Department of Education and Early Learning (DEEL) is leading the implementation of Seattle’s

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<sup>62</sup> “Alternate Routes” is a teacher certification program created by the Washington State Legislature and designed by Washington’s professional Educator Standards Board (PESB) in partnership with local universities to address teacher shortages. With the goal of enriching the teaching workforce by encouraging local residents to become teachers, this program is designed to assist classified school district staff and eligible professionals to become lead classroom teachers. According to their education level, candidates must identify which of the four Alternate Routes is the most appropriate and apply (and get accepted) to an approved program. Upon acceptance, candidates will receive a conditional scholarship to complete their course of study. Prior to placement in an Alternate Routes program, candidates must take a teacher assessment exam—the WEST-B, which measures basic knowledge, and the WEST-E, which measures subject area competency, if applicable—and a pre-classroom preparation course. Other steps include securing additional funding, and, for some, continuing to actively teach in a classroom while pursuing their certificate.

Foreign-educated immigrants may qualify for routes 2, 3, and 4, depending on their degree(s) and work history. They either are employed as para-educators with a Bachelor’s degree or have a degree and subject matter expertise, in teaching or another subject, but are not working in the profession. The routes, however, are primarily designed for those educated in the U.S. The addition of an explicit path for foreign-trained educators, which includes recruitment, advising, developing tailored teacher training programs, and securing employment in the field, would open many opportunities for this population and recognize the valuable role they can play in the education of Washington’s children.

pre-School program and is working to achieve key outcomes including eliminating the readiness gap and assuring the development of children’s social, emotional, and pre-academic skills. To that end DEEL is working to build a diverse PRE-K workforce including immigrant educators.

Postsecondary teachers work in public and private colleges and universities, professional schools, junior or community colleges, and career and technical schools. While more research is needed before OIRA can offer recommendations regarding immigrant pathways in post-secondary education, we have determined that nearly 2,000 of King County’s 14,051 post-secondary teachers are immigrants. More research is needed to explore the possibilities of building pathways to other professional occupations for immigrant and refugee degree holders.

### **PROMISING CAREER PATHWAYS FOR IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE DEGREE-HOLDERS AND WORKERS**

If we are to construct career pathways and onramps specific to the needs and educational levels of immigrants and refugees, especially those who are arriving with international degrees, we should concentrate our efforts We should focus on the following occupations to help these workers:

- Nursing
- Construction
- Government jobs
- Teaching
- STEM Occupations (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math.)

## IV. BREAKING BARRIERS AND BUILDING BRIDGES: BEST PRACTICES IN SERVING THE NEEDS OF IMMIGRANT PROFESSIONALS

*In this fourth section of our report, we highlight efforts from elsewhere in the U.S. as well as regionally which are experiencing success in bridging refugee and immigrant degree-holders into gateway jobs in their fields that have a strong potential for career advancement opportunities.*

### NATIONAL BEST PRACTICE HIGHLIGHT: NEW YORK CITY/ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION'S IMMIGRANT BRIDGE PROGRAM

**Immigrant Bridge** is a two-part program designed to help 400 college-educated unemployed or underemployed immigrants with in-demand skills to transition into "gateway jobs" in their field. Participants could include an engineer from Belarus who today is earning low wages by stocking shelves at a grocery store because her degree is not recognized, or a doctor from the Dominican Republic who is driving a cab. The pilot is particularly aimed at serving individuals with training in growing sectors like STEM, accounting, and healthcare.

**The Immigrant Bridge Workforce Program** is a workforce training program providing individualized career plans, contextualized English for speakers of other languages, and job readiness preparation. NYCEDC has partnered with four leading organizations in the field of immigrant integration to run four independent Workforce Program offices: CAMBA, Goodwill Industries of New York and Northern New Jersey, Riverside Language Program, and Upwardly Global. All Workforce Program locations are open to participants from all boroughs. Eligible participants are:

- New York City immigrants with, at least, a Bachelor's degree from an accredited institution in their country of origin
- Earn less than \$30,000 in the last year.
- Have legal permission to work in the US.

**The Immigrant Bridge Loan Fund** provides interested Workforce Program participants and other qualified high-skill immigrants with \$1,000 to \$10,000 loans to support their transition to higher

paying jobs. Loans will be interest only in the first year, repaid over a 5-year period. Loans will have an interest rate of 9.99%. Loans can be used to cover any expense including the cost of necessary licensing exams, training classes, and/or to cover basic life expenses incurred through program participation (e.g., transit expenses, childcare costs, offsetting lost income, etc.).

Amalgamated Bank is the official bank for the Immigrant Bridge Loan Fund. Amalgamated Bank loans will provide an essential resource to help immigrants get the certifications and qualifications they need to find employment that appropriately matches their skills.

### **REGIONAL BEST PRACTICE HIGHLIGHT: JEWISH FAMILY SERVICES' TATWEER MENTORING PROGRAM**

**The Tatweer Program** created is designed to provide refugee professionals a pathway from survival jobs into meaningful careers in Seattle and King County. By building social capital, creating employer and municipal partnerships, and providing navigational support, the Tatweer program helps refugees take the first steps towards meaningful careers in the U.S. The program pairs highly-skilled refugees with volunteer mentors who can provide industry specific career advice and the networking opportunities necessary for advancement. Participants who have found jobs in their fields have done so through connections made by their mentors or through JFS employer partnerships.

**Employer and City of Kent Partnerships** were created when the City provided Tatweer participants informational interviews and observation opportunities. Over time, as the partnership strengthened, the City reached out to the Tatweer program to find qualified candidates with engineering backgrounds. Three Tatweer program participants were hired by the City in August of 2016 as Engineering Technicians. The City of Kent gained highly qualified, motivated, local employees and participants established newfound footholds in their professional field. In December of 2016, Tatweer collaborated with the Coding Dojo, an industry- respected coding boot camp. Thus, conversations are underway to place its Coding Dojo graduates in several large technology companies in the area.

**Navigational and Career Development Services** support Tatweer participants work with a case manager who guides them through their mentorships and works with them on a variety of skills

needed to land a professional job. Practical, culturally-specific skill-building includes applications, resumes, cover letters, goal setting, mentor search, mentor meeting prep, employer research, informational interviewing, education and training opportunities, recertification, and licensing. Highly-skilled refugees often arrive ready to work in their field and working within a case manager within the first two months to create a re-entry plan helps set reasonable expectations based on available opportunities, mitigates frustration and channels energy towards career re-entry.

## **WELCOME BACK CENTERS ACROSS THE U.S.**

We focus next on lessons learned and best practices generated from Welcome Back Centers across the U.S. in which services to foreign-educated immigrants have been institutionalized. OIRA conducted a survey in June 2016 of eleven Centers from nine cities and states: Boston, Maine, Washington State, Colorado, San Francisco, San Diego, New York City, Rhode Island, and Philadelphia.

### **Top Six Best Practices Survey of 11 Welcome Back Centers Across the United States**

- Case management and educational counseling
- In-depth assessment of professional experiences of immigrants and refugees
- Career pathway navigation, networking with employers, internships and job placement
- ESL training, refresher courses for NCLEX and grant funding for participants
- Longer term data collection and program evaluation
- Employer engagement

## **SUMMARY AND KEY ELEMENTS OF WELCOME BACK CENTERS (WBCs)**

Working with each participant individually, educational case managers at the Welcome Back Centers help their clients navigate the relicensing process, understand the U.S. healthcare sector and their career options, and access necessary educational resources and other supports. These services are mostly offered at no cost to the participants.

## **PARTICIPANTS**

In the 15 years since its inception, the national Welcome Back Initiative has served over 15,000 participants from 167 countries. Seventy-three percent are women, and 27% are men. Of this total, 34.4% are physicians, 43.6% are nurses, 8.6% are dentists and the remaining 13.4% are other health professionals. Individuals receiving services in the WBI programs come from all over the world with the highest percentages hailing from Asia, Latin America and Africa. The top six countries of origin for participants are: Colombia, Mexico, China, India, Philippines, Ethiopia, Iraq, and Somalia. Most common profession of participants seeking services with the WBCs are nursing, medicine, dentistry, pharmacy, and allied health professionals. Some centers have begun to offer some services to engineers and attorneys.

## **KEY OUTCOMES**

Achievement of the Initiative's participants include: 4,050 validated their credentials; 2,750 passed licensing exams; 943 advanced in career ladder; 2,300 obtained employment in the U.S. health sector for the first time, and 35 MDs have been accepted into a residency training program. On average, participants increase their income by 155% upon completion of their stated goals.

## **SERVICES OFFERED BY THE WELCOME BACK CENTERS**

Below are some services provided by these Centers:

- case management
- educational intervention, including ESL and TOEFL,
- job search help including resume and cover writing;
- networking opportunities with healthcare recruiters;
- financial assistance
- National Council Licensure Examination (NCLEX) preparation for the registered nursing;
- healthcare internships; and
- job retention counseling.

\* \* \*

The Puget Sound Welcome Back Center (PSWBC) at Highline College opened its doors in 2008.

### **PARTICIPANT ACCESS TO SERVICES**

The PSWBC has done no advertising and referrals are all word of mouth. Seattle residents are eligible to access services at the Des Moines campus but distance and time remain barriers to enrollment. In addition to the faculty and staff at Highline College, several organizations and individuals in Seattle and King County refer clients to the Center including Seattle College ESL teachers and administrators, case managers from community and refugee resettlement agencies, and employment staff at regional Work Source Center locations. The largest referral source is refugee and immigrant community members telling each other about the program.

### **IMPACT OF PROGRAMS AND SERVICES**

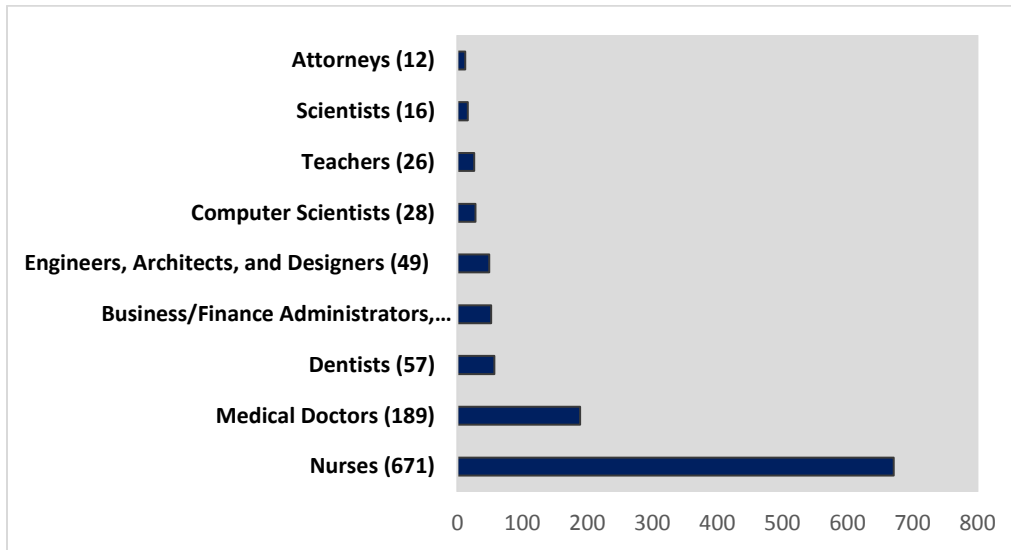
PSWBC focuses primarily on the health professions.<sup>63</sup> Since the program began, 13 Medical Doctors (MDs) have received residencies and three (3) dentists have entered international dentistry programs with support of the PSWBC. One-hundred RNs now hold licenses, 85 of them in Washington State. A significant portion of the Center's participants have returned to their chosen profession, with most at a job level for which they exceed the educational requirements. Typical of such Centers across the United States, PSWBC has a restricted capacity to track and report on participant outcomes. While the Center's navigation services, employment resources and referrals are all free, long-term tracking remains dependent on participants self-reporting when they pass licensing exams, receive licenses, get residencies and admittance to programs or obtain employment.

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<sup>63</sup> The Center also serves those pursuing non-health care occupations but has yet to build the capacity to develop expertise in other professions.



**Figure 10: Career Paths of Past and Current PSWBC Participants<sup>64</sup>**



## **EXPERTISE IN NURSING PATHWAYS**

The largest number of PSWBC participants are registered nurses. Of the Centers' over 1,200 participants served since its founding, 671 are internationally educated nurses. PSWBC staff meets regularly with the education and licensing staff from the state's Department of Health Nursing to advocate for the needs of internationally-educated nurses. The PSWBC learned of a partnership between the WBC in Boston and KAPLAN to offer classes for Internationally Educated Nurses (IENs) to prepare for the national nursing exam NCLEX) In 2013, the PSWBC offered their first KAPLAN NCLEX course..<sup>65</sup>

The national pass rates for first-time internationally educated nurses hovers at around 30%. After taking this special KAPLAN NCLEX Preparation course with PSWBC support, the

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<sup>64</sup> Excludes those sectors/occupations with less than 10 participants

<sup>65</sup> The PSWBC publicizes the course and offers monthly orientations during the summer. The first four months (September to December) of the course are offered online with weekly study sessions and weekly proctored exams by PSWBC staff. The next three months (January to March) are a face-to-face course with a KAPLAN nursing instructor. *The cost is \$450 and the PSWBC is always looking for funding sources to help students who are not able to pay. Some receive funding through their union if they are a part of Service Employees International Union (SEIU).* Some have been helped by the funding from the Health Workforce for the Future Program, funded by Health and Human Services and administered locally by TRAC and Associates.

PSWBC nurses are passing at a rate of over 67%. As demonstrated by this outcome, this course is successful in preparing IENs for the national exam.

## LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

To regain credentials, participants must learn English and the PSWBC uses the following strategies to develop English proficiency.

1. Participants with low English skills are encouraged to go to ESL classes at their local community or technical college while working on the re-credentialing process.
2. Instead of having free TOEFL classes, the PSWBC collaborated with Highline College's Continuing Education program and offered these classes for \$100 per quarter. The PSWBC subsidizes the cost of the class but that cost to the center is lower than the free classes previously offered.
3. The PSWBC focuses on getting participants back into their chosen field as workers. When professionals get jobs in their chosen fields, even entry-level jobs, several things happen: they earn a higher salary, their English skills increase quickly, they can see the workplace from the inside compared to work in their home country, and, most importantly, they can build a professional network of co-workers and supervisors..

### KEY PROGRAM ELEMENTS

- *ESL instructors teach exam preparation classes for the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) and "English for Health Care Professionals".*
- *Cultivating relationships with credit evaluating entities including the Commission on Graduates of Foreign Nursing Schools (CGFNS), the Educational Records Evaluation Service (ERES), and others that evaluate credentials of medical doctors, pharmacists, dentists, medical laboratory assistants and a wide range of health care technicians.*
- *Developing expertise in examinations, internships, clinicals, and residencies in all the health care occupations requiring updating of materials and processes to reflect new rules, regulations and practices.*
- *Individualized case management services*

## EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

Employment is critical for participants as they are navigating the re-credentialing processes and completing their re-licensure. An Employment Specialist helps students with their

resume, cover letter, and interview preparation. Any expansion of Welcome Back services into the City of Seattle and into other non-healthcare sectors would require increased capacity to offer employment services.

## **BRANCHING OUT INTO OTHER NON-HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONS**

The largest number of professionals in the non-health care sector are in business, technology, and the engineering fields. Also, increasing numbers of underemployed immigrants are seeking teaching careers along the whole continuum from pre-K to K-12 to post-secondary. Currently, PSWBC does not have the capacity to provide in-depth educational case management in these various sectors, but PSWBC is creating partnerships to provide these services and build expertise in the STEM fields

## **A REGIONAL MODEL FOR CAREER PATHWAYS INTO PROFESSIONAL OCCUPATIONS**

Our research identified a need for a regional framework and service delivery model that could potentially offer a “no wrong door” approach to accessing programs and services in partnership with the Seattle Colleges, the PSWBC at Highline College, and other stakeholders. Extending these service models into the City of Seattle would result in greater participation in training, education, credentialing, and employment services regardless of where immigrant participants live and work in Seattle and adjacent counties. A regional approach increases workforce system responsiveness to participants and helps overcome potential geographic and institutional barriers. Increasing the scope and impact of such services could measurably move the needle on immigrant integration by institutionalizing best practice models which facilitate significantly larger numbers of immigrants into gainful employment in their chosen professions.

## **BUILDING ON-RAMPS TO CAREER PATHWAYS FOR IMMIGRANTS AND REFUGEES**

In 2014, the Murray administration launched new and expanded programs to support the success and integration of immigrants and refugees in Seattle. Working with a coalition of stakeholders, the City's Human Services Department, OIRA and OED created a policy framework to work together to help ELL students to better prepare for job training and entry . These departments secured the funding to test a new model that might show how to align language acquisition and job placement resources, which led to the development of the Ready to Work (RTW) program<sup>66</sup> About a third of RTW students have education beyond high school including several with college degrees from their home countries; they are strong candidates for advancement into higher wage, specialized occupations. .

This program, recognized as a national best practice model by the United States Department of Labor (USDOL), is building the foundations for dedicated pathways for ELL students with low levels of English proficiency towards proficiency and quality jobs in the short- and long-term. This model helps participants advance into skills training in pre-apprenticeship programs in construction and healthcare and other certificate programs, including I-Best programs. In 2015-2016, program partners included Home Sight, ACRS, the Seattle Colleges and Literacy Source with marketing and outreach support from Horn of Africa, Ethiopian Community, the Islamic Center, and El Centro. The 2017 Adopted Budget continues funding for the program in Southeast Seattle and to expand it into Lake City.

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<sup>66</sup> External organizations that supported the development of the Ready to Work Program on its Steering Committee included; the Seattle College District, South Seattle College, the State Board of Community and Technical Colleges, Office of Refugee and Immigrant Assistance, Washington State Department of Social and Health Services, Workforce Development Council of Seattle and King County, the Seattle Jobs Initiative, Port Jobs, Seattle Housing Authority, Asian Counseling and Referral Service, Neighborhood House, Goodwill, and One America

## V. RECOMMENDATIONS

### **A. OIRA participate in new inter-departmental team (IDT) for Workforce Entry and Employment Pathways.**

This IDT will be working to develop and implement a consistent city-wide approach to internships, apprenticeships, youth employment, access and job training that reduces barriers, especially for people of color and other marginalized groups--to regular employment at the City of Seattle and with Seattle employers. The IDT's efforts will align and coordinate education, training, credential attainment, and early job exposure opportunities at various stages of the job continuum, creating pathways into high quality jobs. OIRA can assist by providing supporting a targeted immigrant outreach and program strategy focused on career advancement and training models leading to employment for immigrant workers.

### **B. OIRA work in partnership with key City of Seattle departments and external stakeholders to help build community based on-ramps into emerging career pathways in various sectors for immigrants and refugees and support an employer engagement strategy that focuses on placement into quality jobs.**

Two examples include pre-apprenticeship construction programs supported by the priority hire work of the City's Financial and Administrative (FAS) Service's Labor Equity Team and the Department of Education and Early Learning's (DEEL) efforts to support pathways into the teaching profession for people of color along the education continuum from pre-k and K-12. OIRA can support these efforts to diversify our teaching and construction trades workforce by helping increase immigrant participation. It is an approach that integrates key workforce development, public education, and racial and social justice goals to generate public goods. Such efforts build pathways to living wage jobs and set in motion a multiplier effect that generates high returns in the form of increased mobility in future generations for children and youth of color. OIRA can also work with other City departments to support similar efforts to support immigrant and refugee pathways to City jobs.

### **C. OIRA work with the King County Skilled Immigrant and Refugee Support Network.**

This Network which includes King County, the City of Kent, the State's Office of Refugee, and Immigrant Assistance ("ORIA") the Puget Sound Welcome Back Center, One America and several community-based organizations providing career services to immigrant and refugees with college degrees from their home countries. Work with this network to pursue funding and other opportunities to increase Welcome Back type services in the City of Seattle.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

**D. Consider investing in the future in the expansion of the Puget Sound Welcome Back Center to provide a regional framework and service delivery model that could offer programs and services in Seattle College campuses and potential community sites in partnership with the Seattle Colleges, and other stakeholders including a focus in additional sectors.**

Existing services in our region for Seattle immigrants and refugees seeking are primarily focused in the health care industry. Our study recommends a three-pronged approach – with investments primarily but not solely focused on the teaching profession extending from pre-K through 12 in alignment with the goals of the Mayor’s Education Summit. We also recommend as a secondary focus the STEM fields (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) Thirdly, public sector employment with the City of Seattle.

Extending these service models into the City of Seattle would result in greater participation in training, education, credentialing, and employment services regardless of where immigrant participants live and work in Seattle and adjacent counties – what we refer to as a “no-wrong door” policy and practice. A regional approach would increase workforce system responsiveness to participants and help overcome potential geographic and institutional barriers. Increasing the scope and impact of such services could measurably move the needle on immigrant integration by institutionalizing best practice models which facilitate significantly larger numbers of immigrants into gainful employment in their chosen professions. The costs of such an expansion would be approximately \$150,000 annually for additional case management and employer engagement activities and services in Seattle and could serve hundreds of clients once brought to capacity.

## Appendix A: Index of Figures and Charts

<b>Number</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Page</b>
Figure 1	Seattle and King County: Population by Birthplace	13
Figure 2	Region of Birth for Seattle and King County Immigrant and Refugee Residents	13
Table 1	Top Three H1B Cities in Washington	19
Table 2	Underemployment in Occupations with Over 500 Educationally Underemployed Immigrants	20
Table 3	Top 10 Jobs of Native Born and Naturalized and Non-Citizen Immigrants	22
Table 4	Top (10) Bachelor's Degrees Earned by Educationally Underemployed Immigrants in King County	23
Table 5	Degrees of Immigrants with an Educational Underemployment Rate of at Least 33%	24
Table 6:	Highest Number of Underemployed Immigrants in Healthcare Occupations, King County (2015-16)	27
Figure 3	Educational Attainment by Nativity in Seattle and King County	37
Figure 4	Immigrant Ability to Speak English, Seattle and King County	43
Figure 5	Languages Spoken in Seattle by Individuals Who Do Not Speak English "Very Well"	44
Table 7	ESL Levels of Seattle College Respondents	45
Table 8	Home Country Occupation, Current Job in and Future Career Goals of Seattle College Respondents	47
Table 9	Career Goals of Seattle College Survey Respondents	47
Figure 6	Percentage of Jobs by Industry, Seattle, and King County, 2016	50
Figure 7	Number of Jobs by Industry, Seattle and King County, 2016	51
Figure 8	Number of Jobs by Median Wage Level, Seattle and King County, 2016	53
Table 10	Wage Level & Number of Jobs in the 11 Largest Individual Occupations Seattle & King County	58
Table 11	Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Seattle Public Schools	60
Figure 9	Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Washington State Public Schools	58
Figure 11	Career Paths of Past and Current PSWBC Participants	60
App. A	Index of Figures and Charts	71
App. B	Educational Underemployment by Industry Sector	75

## Appendix B: Educational Underemployment by Industry Sector

