

Analysis of Newly Arrived Immigrant Youth in New York City

February 2022

In response to a request from the New York Immigration Coalition, the Migration Policy Institute's (MPI) National Center on Immigrant Integration Policy examined the number of newly arrived immigrants age 14 to 21 who could potentially benefit from high school programs in the five boroughs of New York City. Using U.S. Census Bureau data, MPI identified roughly 3,900 such youth during the period 2015 to 2019.

Newly Arrived Immigrants Age 14 to 21 in New York City Without a High School Diploma, 2015–2019

Borough	All Youth	Enrolled in school	Not enrolled in school
Bronx	6,600	5,200	1,400
Brooklyn	5,600	4,700	900
Manhattan	2,700	2,200	*
Queens	6,700	5,600	1,000
Staten Island	*	*	*
Total NYC	21,900	18,000	3,900

* Numbers are below the sample size threshold.

Note: Newly arrived immigrant youth includes foreign-born individuals who were age 14 to 21 and had resided in the United States between 0 and 3 years at the time of the survey.

Source: Migration Policy Institute analysis of U.S. Census Bureau pooled 2015–2019 American Community Survey (ACS) data.

To identify the relevant population, MPI first sought the total number of foreign-born youth age 14 to 21 who had lived in the United States for 0 to 3 years at the time they were surveyed, and who had not yet received a high school diploma or equivalent. Among the 21,900 young people with these characteristics, 18,000 were enrolled in school and 3,900 were not. Most of the non-enrolled youth were on the older end of the range: Only 500 were 14 or 15, while 3,400 were between 16 and 21.

The analysis also revealed that the largest group of the newly arrived youth who were not in school lived in the Bronx, followed closely by Queens and Brooklyn. The number of newly arrived immigrant youth and their school enrollment status could not be estimated for Manhattan and Staten Island since the sample size threshold was not met.

Although the American Community Survey—from which the data were taken—includes questions on English proficiency, these data were not included in our analysis since they are not valid and reliable in the context of K-12 assessment and instruction. Census questionnaires simply ask individuals to rate their own language proficiency (or for parents to rate their children); as a result, responses are subjective and not aligned to any valid English proficiency scale, including how English proficiency is measured by the New York State Education Department. Nevertheless, given the high level of academic English required to be classified as English proficient on the state's assessment and the migration background of these youth, it is reasonable to expect that most of the 3,900 non-enrolled recent immigrants would require some level of language support were they to enroll in school.

Obtaining a high school diploma is a critical step on the path to immigrant integration and economic self-sufficiency. Unfortunately, English learners nationwide graduate high school at lower rates than nearly every other group of students. In New York State, 39 percent of ELs graduate in four years,

compared to 86 percent of non-English learners.¹ Recent immigrants may face even greater obstacles to graduating than other students. For example, they often face pressure to work or take on responsibilities caring for younger family members.² Newcomers with limited or interrupted formal education shoulder an especially heavy burden, as they try to build their English language proficiency, fill gaps in their academic skills, and learn the norms of school culture and study habits.³ As a result, providing well-designed high school programs for recently arrived immigrant youth is crucial to keeping them on track for education and career success during a particularly vulnerable and high-stakes period in their life trajectory.

¹ New York State Education Department, "NY State Graduation Rate Data 4 Year Outcome as of August 2019," accessed February 14, 2020, <https://data.nysed.gov/gradrate.php?state=yes&year=2019&cohortgroup=0>.

² Rabia Hos, "The Lives, Aspirations, and Needs of Refugee and Immigrant Students With Interrupted Formal Education (SIFE) in a Secondary Newcomer Program," *Urban Education*, 2016, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085916666932>.

³ Julie Sugarman, *Beyond Teaching English: Supporting High School Completion by Immigrant and Refugee Students* (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2017), www.migrationpolicy.org/research/beyond-teaching-english-supporting-high-school-completion-immigrant-and-refugee-students.

The [Migration Policy Institute](http://www.migrationpolicy.org) (MPI) is an independent, non-partisan, non-profit think tank in Washington, DC dedicated to analysis of the movement of people worldwide. MPI provides analysis, development and evaluation of migration and refugee policies at the local, national and international levels. MPI's [National Center on Immigrant Integration Policy](http://www.migrationpolicy.org/national-center-on-immigrant-integration-policy) is a crossroads for elected officials, researchers, state and local agency managers, grassroots leaders, local service providers and others who seek to understand and respond to the challenges and opportunities today's high rates of immigration create in local communities.