



# Immigration Policy Priority Brief

## Immigration Integration

### What is Immigrant Integration

Immigrant integration is the process by which immigrants become fully engaged in the economic, social, and civic aspects of their communities. It involves language acquisition, access to education, healthcare, workforce participation, and civic involvement. Programs designed to support integration help immigrants overcome challenges like language barriers and cultural differences, while also guiding them through unfamiliar legal systems. A key part of integration is fostering a sense of belonging, where immigrants feel welcomed and valued as contributors to their community. Ultimately, successful integration benefits both immigrants and society, leading to stronger, more resilient communities through enhanced participation in local economies and governance.

### Immigrant Integration in the South

Immigrant integration policies in the Southern United States are inconsistent, with significant disparities between states. While some Southern states have made [efforts to support](#) immigrant integration, such as offering English language programs and limited workforce development, many lack comprehensive strategies. Language access programs, a critical component of integration, are often underfunded and inconsistent, limiting immigrants' ability to learn English and fully engage in civic and economic life. While some localities have community-based English as a Second Language (ESL) programs, they are not always readily available or adequately funded, which poses a significant barrier to immigrant integration.

Workforce development initiatives tailored to the needs of immigrant populations are also sparse in the region. While general workforce training exists, it often fails to address the specific challenges immigrant workers face, such as credential recognition and job placement. Immigrant labor is crucial in industries like agriculture and construction, making these programs vital to improving economic opportunities for immigrants and ensuring safe, stable employment. Civic engagement is similarly limited due to language barriers, fear of government institutions, and lack of access to legal support, with inconsistent availability of translation services in court settings. Despite state policy gaps, grassroots organizations and advocacy groups have been instrumental in filling these voids by offering education, workforce training, and legal services, though they are often under-resourced

## How Immigrant Integration Can Advance Equity in the South

Supporting immigrant integration is crucial for advancing racial and class equity in the South, where immigrant communities are often marginalized by systemic barriers linked to both racial and economic inequities. Investing in immigrant integration helps Southern states promote inclusion and reduce economic disparities, fostering a more equitable society. Immigrant integration programs such as language acquisition, workforce development, and civic engagement empower immigrants to fully participate in society, find stable employment, and contribute to the economy. These initiatives help address the racial and class inequities that disproportionately affect immigrant communities of color, reducing their social and economic marginalization.

Additionally, immigrant integration strengthens communities by fostering a sense of belonging and promoting inclusion. When immigrants feel welcomed and supported, they are more likely to contribute economically, socially, and culturally to their communities. Workforce development programs that focus on immigrant needs can reduce income inequality by providing better-paying job opportunities, improving economic mobility, and promoting overall economic growth. Furthermore, encouraging civic participation helps immigrants engage in local governance and advocate for their rights, contributing to a more inclusive and democratic society. By investing in such integration initiatives, Southern states can create a more cohesive and equitable society that benefits all residents, regardless of immigration status.

## Legislative Efforts Related to Immigrant Integration

1. **Alabama:** [Senate Bill 108](#) (failed): This bill proposed to invalidate any driver's license issued by another state or country to nonresidents driving in Alabama if the license was issued exclusively to undocumented immigrants unable to prove lawful presence in the U.S. Additionally, nonresident drivers with such licenses would no longer be exempt from Alabama's driver's license requirements.
2. **West Virginia:** [House Bill 5275](#) (failed): This bill sought to require political subdivisions to document funds spent on behalf of certain noncitizen immigrants and to report quarterly on the details of those expenditures. The bill also included language that would deem those who don't provide this information in violation of the state's sanctuary-city laws.
3. **Virginia:** [House Bill 962](#) (vetoed): This bill sought to remove the term "alien" from the Virginia Code and replace it with synonymous language, i.e., noncitizen.
4. **Virginia:** [House Bill 970](#) (failed): This bill would have expanded state-funded healthcare coverage to children under 19 years of age, regardless of their immigration status. The bill also requires the state to work toward distributing information about this program to individuals with limited English proficiency.