

Immigration and Poverty in the Northwest Area States

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents an overview of the relationship between immigration and poverty in the Northwest Area and makes recommendations for poverty alleviation. The author draws on secondary sources and shows that the influx of foreign-born residents in rural areas contributed to labor force growth, rejuvenated local economies, strengthened tax bases, and reversed declining population and school enrollments. Despite these economic influences, many foreign-born workers did not benefit. High concentrations of immigrants in small towns and high rates of poverty among first and subsequent generations of Latinos have led to stresses on local services and schools. Immigrants face additional barriers for upward socioeconomic mobility, including greater educational disparities with native residents, weakened labor unions, and the segmentation of jobs into those requiring high-skilled workers and those requiring low-skilled workers. The author recommends the following policies: reinstatement of safety nets of eligibility for social benefits for non-citizens that were removed under state and federal welfare reform, support for major school and workplace education reforms, attention to workers' rights, strengthening rural schools and improving Latino graduation rates, and increasing the number of trained interpreters and community advocates, bilingual education programs in schools, and language accessible welfare-to-work and job training programs.