

Expanding Employment Prospects for Adults with Limited English Skills

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Who, Why, and How

- Who are the limited English speakers in the U.S.? (How do they differ from immigrants in general?)
- Why should TANF providers or workforce development agencies be concerned about them?
- How can this population best be served?

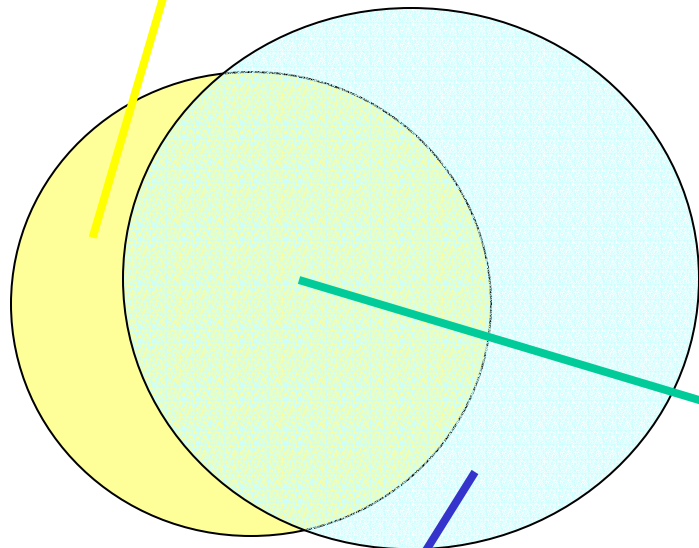
Information on non-English speakers comes from Census 2000

Specifically, information comes from the long form, as captured in the PUMS

- “Do you speak a language other than English at home?”
- If YES, questioned about English ability:
 - Very Well
 - Well
 - Not Well
 - Not At All

Foreign-born \neq Limited English Limited English \neq Foreign-born

Foreign-born: 23.2 m

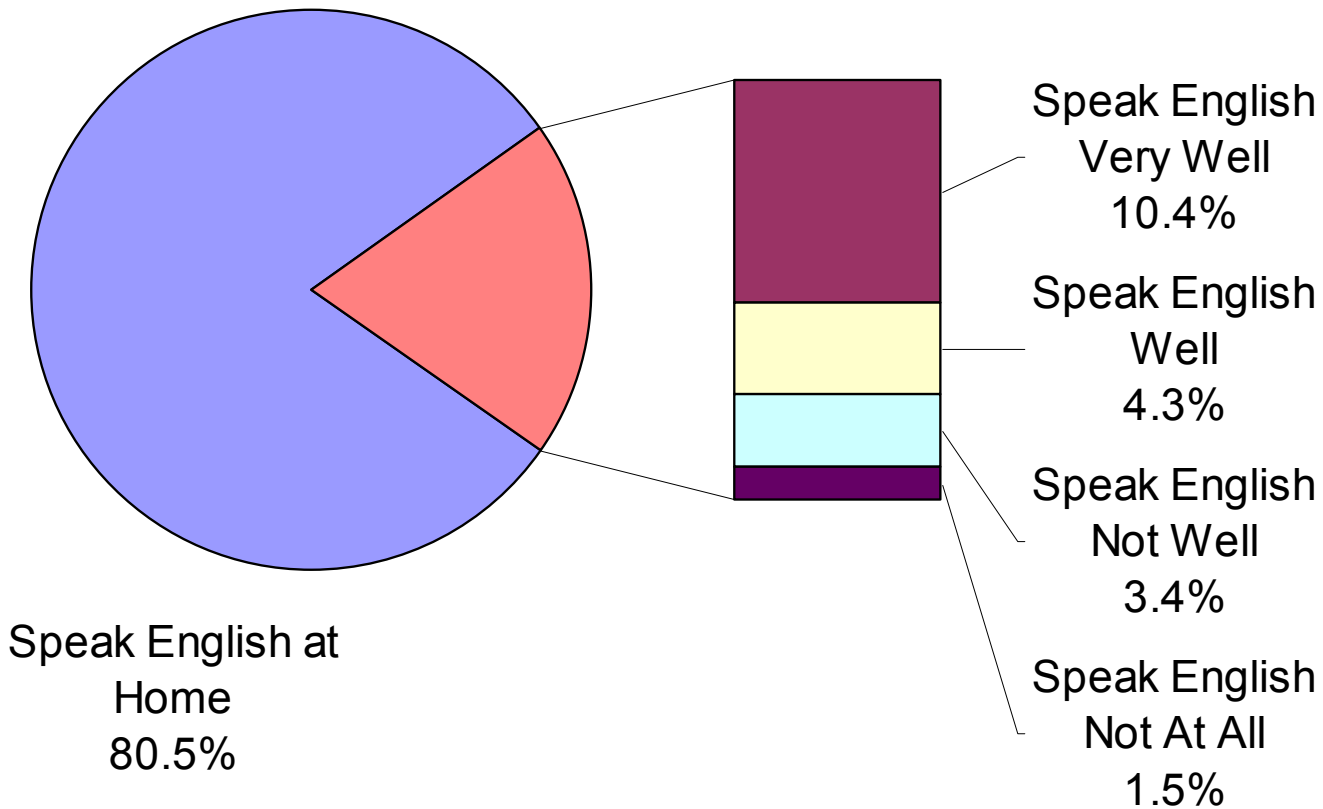


Foreign-born AND Do not speak English at home: 19 m

Do not speak English at home: 29.4 m

There are more adults (age 18 – 55) who do not speak English at home than adults born outside U.S.

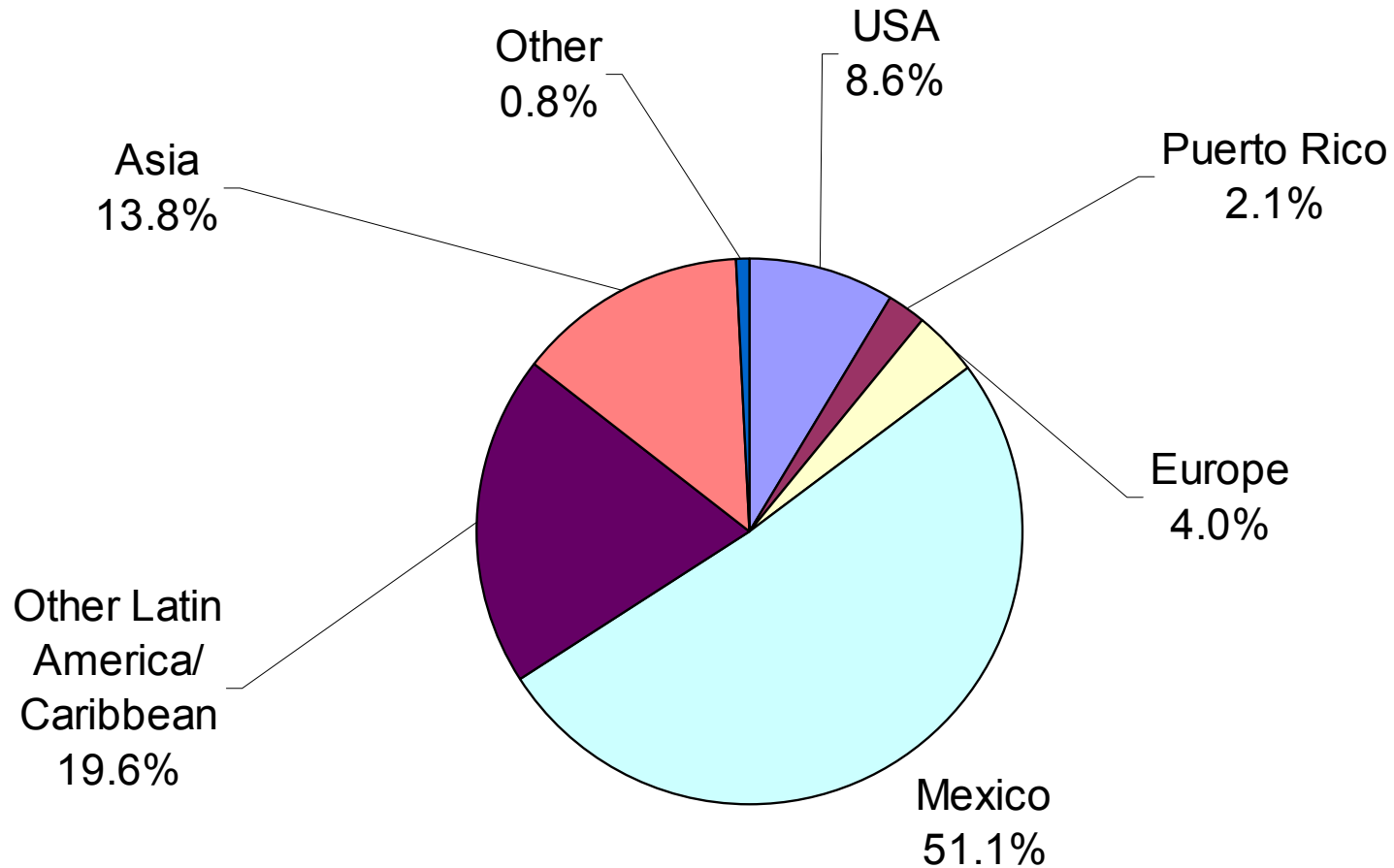
English ability of adults aged 18 – 55 (“working age”) (150 million total)



Focus on working-age adults who do not speak English well—very limited English speakers

- Small percentages in previous chart—but still many people
 - 5.1 million speak English “not well”
 - 2.3 million do not speak English at all
- Of the 7.4 million total, 6.5 million are foreign-born (89 percent)
 - *Who are the 800,000 native-born?*
 - *Most are from PR (20%), TX (13%), CA (11%), or NY (7%)*
 - *Most (77%) are Spanish speakers*
- Note: It is very likely that some who say they speak English “well” or even “very well” are actually limited English speakers

Country/Region of origin for adults who speak English less than well



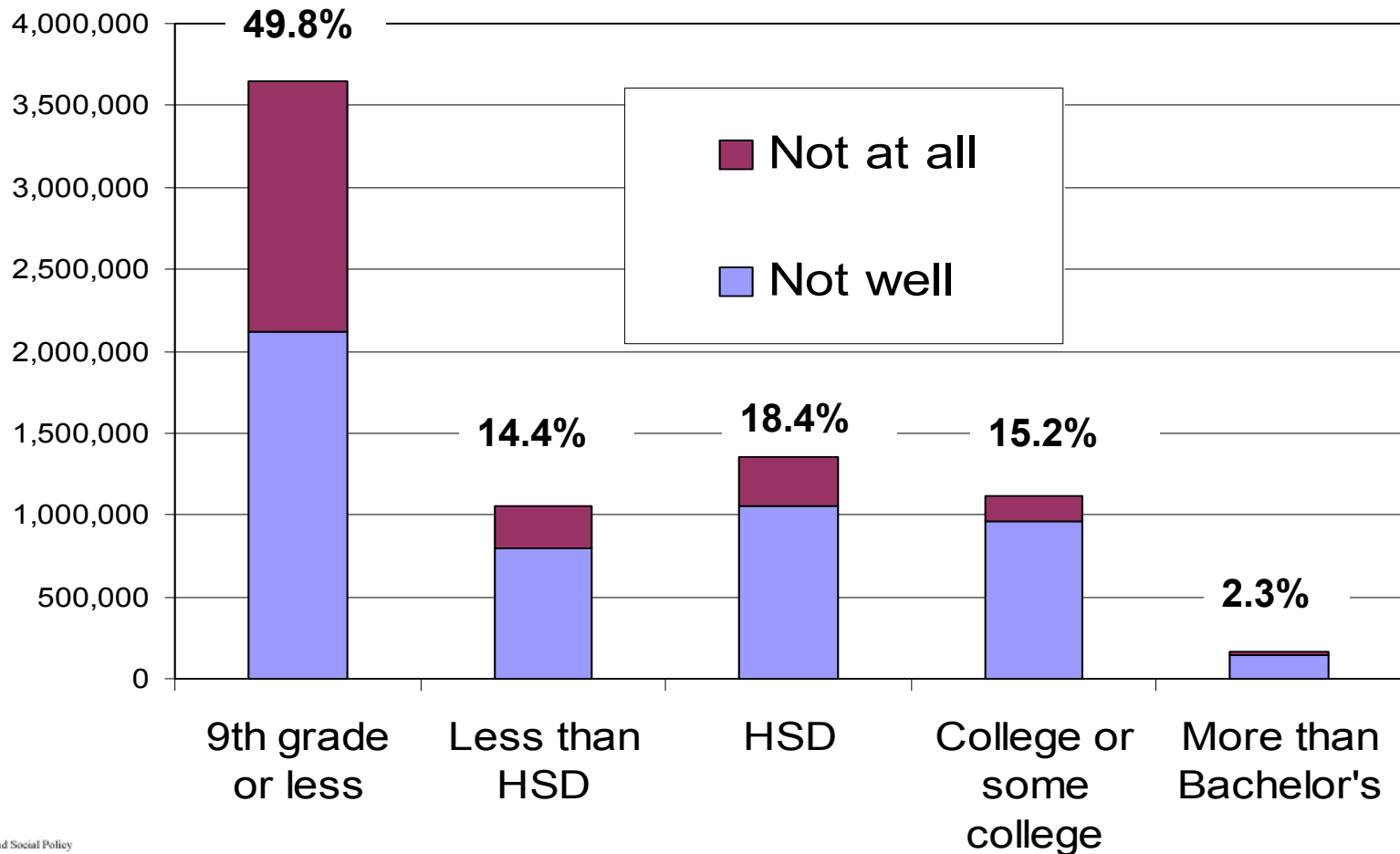
Foreign-born very limited English speakers

- 89% of working-age adult very limited English speakers ARE foreign-born. Of them:
 - Over one-third arrived in the U.S. since 1995
 - Most (59%) arrived since 1990
 - More than half (57%) are from Mexico
 - Three-quarters speak Spanish at home

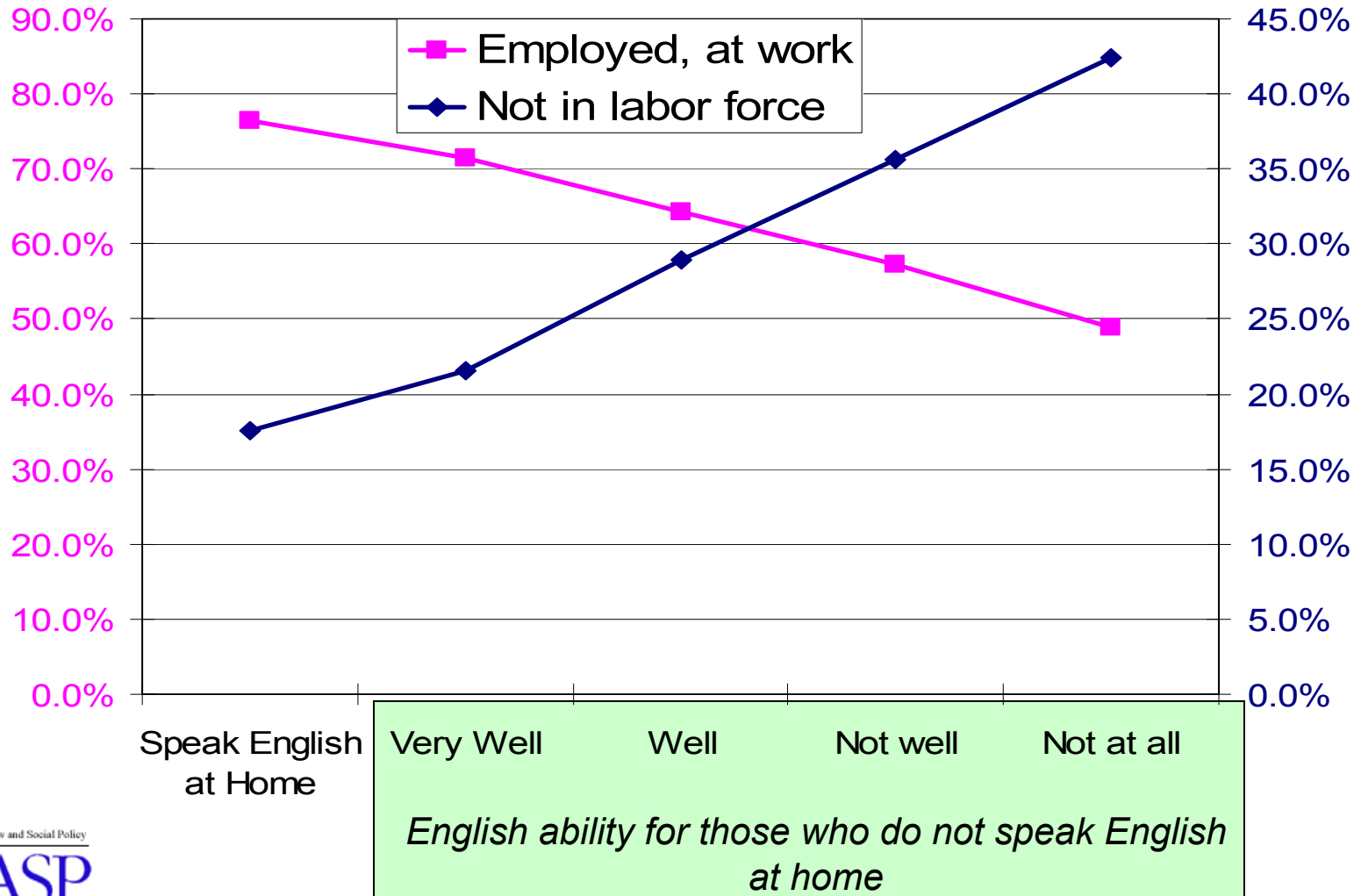
Very limited English speakers are clearly in need of employment-related assistance

- As English ability declines, so does
 - Education level
 - Employment rate
 - Income
- Keep in mind, however, that there is a subpopulation of non-English speakers who are well-educated, and who would require different types of services

Low education levels among very limited English speakers



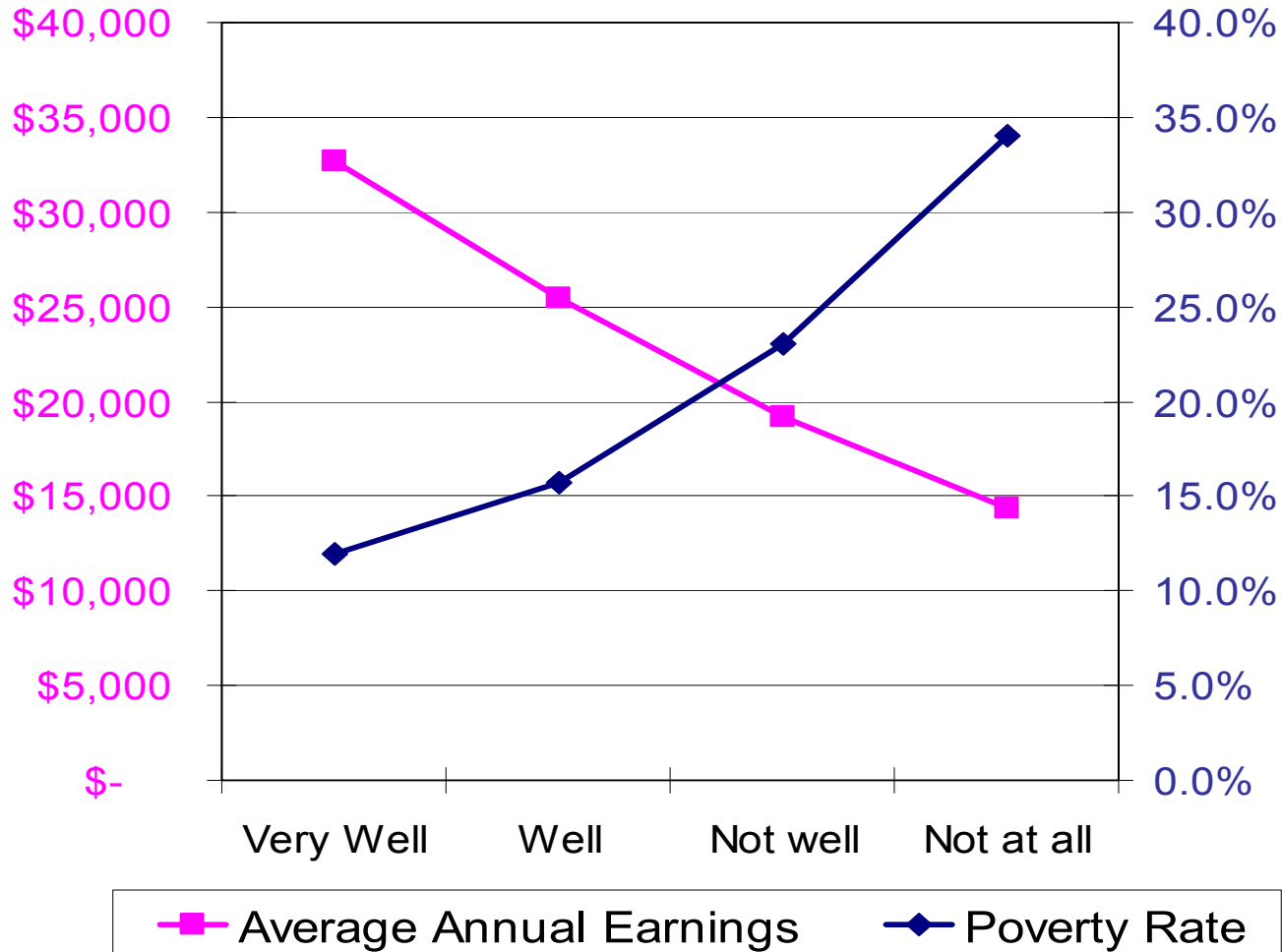
Employment rates decline as English ability declines



Limited English speakers thus have low earnings and high poverty rates

- Among those who work, work effort (hours and weeks) of non-English speakers are similar to those who *do* speak English
- Despite this work effort, earnings are much lower for workers who do not speak English well
- Lower earnings and lower employment rates lead to higher poverty rates

Low earnings and high poverty among limited English speakers



Very limited English speakers are likely to have children present in their homes

- Adults who speak English poorly are MORE likely to have own children under 18:
 - 52% of those who speak very well
 - 58% of those who speak well
 - 62% of those who speak less than well
- 4.5 million working-age adults do not speak English well, and have own children under age 18

Foreign-born in general share many of these characteristics

- Foreign-born adults, regardless of English ability, are also more likely to be low-wage, less-educated, poor, etc.
- Easier to get information on immigrants than on limited English speakers
- Eligibility issues are based on immigration status, not ability to speak English
- Practically, however, inability to speak English may restrict access to services even for those who are eligible

Why care about limited English speakers?

- High poverty rates and presence of children in the household
- Disproportionate representation in low-wage workforce
- According to the Aspen Institute, foreign-born workers will account for ALL workforce growth among 25-to-54-year-olds in the next two decades—some of these will be limited English speakers

How to help limited English speakers?

- Learning English is clearly important for both employment and earnings
- Eligibility for and access to government programs (both public benefits and services and training) is key to keeping families healthy
- “Chilling effect” may mean extra outreach is necessary to bring families into system

Teaching English to this population is not a simple matter

Hurdles to classroom learning include:



Child care and other barriers

Low literacy levels

Unsuccessful or unfinished formal education

Pressure to work to support family

Current systems which could provide services are not focused on this population, and are poorly integrated

- TANF
 - Eligibility problems for many immigrants
 - Most states are spending very little (less than 2% nationally) on ANY education and training
 - Limited English-speaking recipients may be at risk of hitting time limits faster and thus losing access to services
- Refugee Resettlement Program
 - Limited in scope--only for refugees
 - Some receive education, very few receive job training

Workforce Investment Act (WIA)

- Title I:
 - Immigrants appear to be under-represented among those receiving services
- Title II:
 - Primary funding source for adult English classes
 - 1.1 million adults served in ESL classes in 2001—large number, but small share of those in need
 - Most classes do not provide employment-related English

Regardless of funding stream, outreach and access are key

- WIA and TANF services are often not geared to non-English speakers
- Training programs (even soft skill training) for non-English speakers may be unavailable in immediate area
- When classes are available, often no availability for those who cannot read in native language

Thoughts on how to improve English language ability and related outcomes

- Integrate English language, literacy, and numeracy training with job training (e.g., VESL programs)
- Adapt existing education and training programs to include limited English speakers
- Hire bilingual staff whenever possible
 - Consider bilingual job training
- Ensure the availability of training programs appropriate for limited English speakers

For more information....

See CLASP's forthcoming publication, "The Language of Opportunity", which will be available online (www.clasp.org)

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Other organizations: National Immigration Law Center (www.nilc.org); National Council of La Raza (www.nclr.org)