



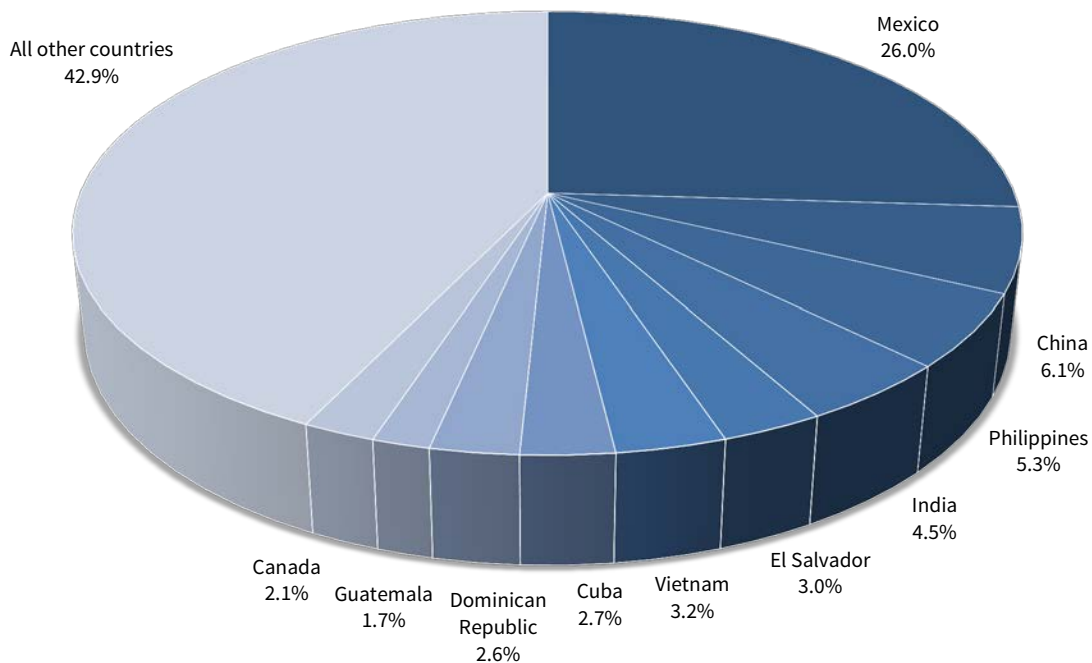
Immigrant Women in the United States: A Portrait of Demographic Diversity

There are more than 20 million immigrant women and girls in the United States today, and they are a formidable presence in U.S. society and the U.S. economy.¹ Immigrant women come from every corner of the globe and slightly outnumber immigrant men. They are more likely than men to come to the United States through the family-based immigration system, and nearly half are naturalized U.S. citizens. More than a quarter of immigrant women have a bachelor's degree or more education, with women from India being the most highly educated, followed by those from the Philippines and China. Foreign-born women account for 15 percent of all employed women over the age of 16 in the United States. In fact, women from the Philippines, El Salvador, Vietnam, the Dominican Republic, and Guatemala have higher rates of participation in the labor force than native-born women. Immigrant women work in every occupation, with one-third being in management and professional occupations, while nearly a third work in service occupations and under a quarter in sales and office occupations. Despite their hard work and educational achievements, immigrant women earn less than foreign-born men, and less than native-born men or women. Given their numbers and diversity, however, the scale of their economic contributions cannot be denied.

Mexico is the Single Largest Country of Origin for Female Immigrants

- Mexico accounted for more than one-quarter (26 percent) of all foreign-born females in 2012, followed by China at 6.1 percent, the Philippines at 5.3 percent, and India at 4.5 percent {Figure 1}.
- In a sign of their diverse range of national origins, more than two-fifths (or 42.9 percent) of foreign-born females came from countries other than the top 10 {Figure 1}.

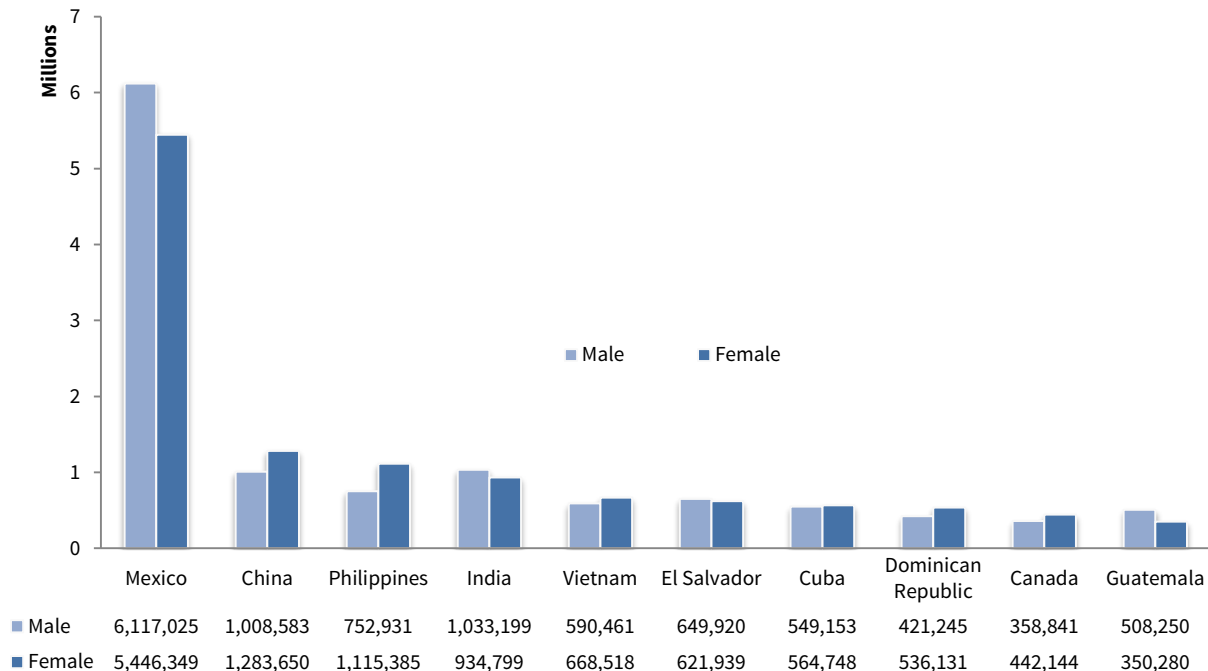
Figure 1: Female Foreign-Born Population by Country of Origin, 2012



Immigrant Females Slightly Outnumber Immigrant Males

- There were 20.9 million female immigrants in the United States in 2012, accounting for just over half (51.3 percent) of the total foreign-born population. Similarly, females accounted for roughly half (50.7 percent) of the native-born population.
- Immigrants accounted for slightly more than 13 percent of the female population.
- Males outnumbered females among immigrants from Mexico, India, El Salvador, and Guatemala {Figure 2}.
- Among immigrants from China, the Philippines, Vietnam, the Dominican Republic, Cuba, and Canada, females outnumbered males {Figure 2}.

Figure 2: Foreign-Born Population by Gender & Select Countries of Origin, 2012

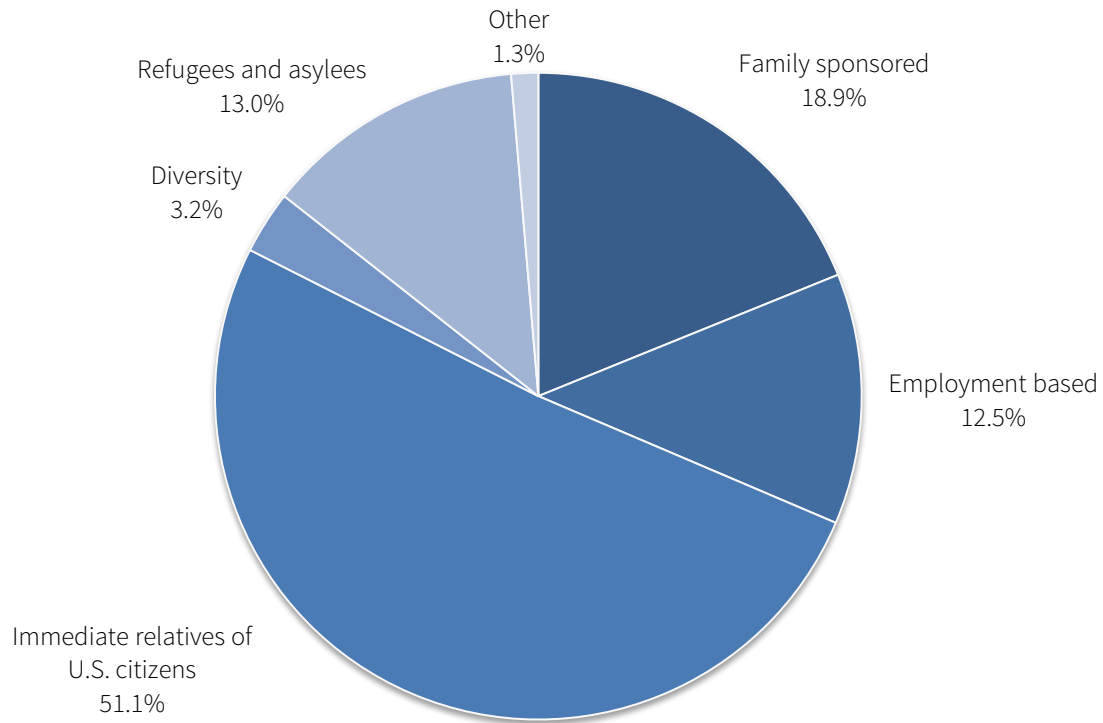


- The Pew Hispanic Center estimates that 4.1 million unauthorized-immigrant women comprised approximately 39 percent of the adult unauthorized population in the United States in 2008.² This is in line with a 2009 survey of immigrant women by New America Media, which found that 35 percent of respondents identified themselves as undocumented.³

Immigrant Females Are More Likely Than Males to Come to the United States Through the Family-Based Immigration System

- Data from the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) indicate that female immigrants are more likely than male immigrants to come to the United States through the family-based class of admissions, rather than through employment {Figure 3}.

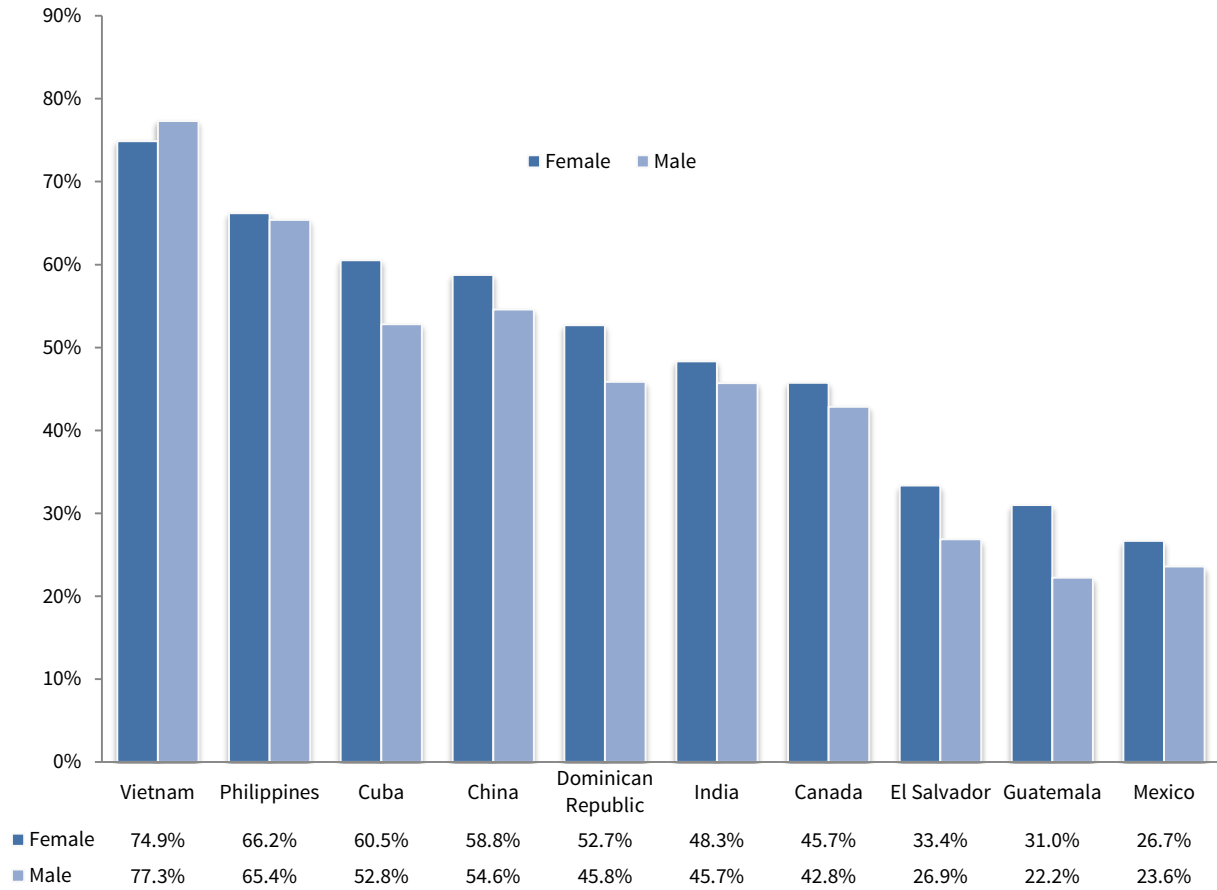
 - In Fiscal Year (FY) 2012, 106,458 females obtained legal permanent resident (LPR) status under family-based “preference” categories, compared to 95,554 males. Likewise, 287,926 females obtained LPR status because they were an immediate relative of a U.S. citizen, compared to only 190,839 men.⁴
 - In contrast, 73,312 men obtained LPR status under employment-based categories, compared to 70,684 women.⁵



Immigrant Females from Vietnam and the Philippines Have Particularly High Naturalization Rates

- Nearly half (48.4 percent) of female immigrants were naturalized U.S. citizens in 2012, compared to 43 percent of male immigrants.
- Three-fourths (74.9 percent) of female Vietnamese immigrants were naturalized U.S. citizens in 2012, as were two-thirds (66.2 percent) of female immigrants from the Philippines. Among female immigrants from Cuba, the naturalization rate was 60.5 percent, among those from China it was 58.8 percent, and for Dominicans it was 52.7 percent.
- According to interviews conducted by New America Media, 84 percent of the immigrant women interviewed expressed interest in becoming a citizen of the United States.⁶
 - The main reasons given for wanting to become an American citizen were “to make sure I’m never separated from my children” (24 percent), to be able to vote (21 percent), and to be able to live in the United States for the rest of their lives (16 percent).⁷
- Immigrant women were more likely to be naturalized U.S. citizens than immigrant men for nine out of the top 10 countries of origin {Figure 4}.

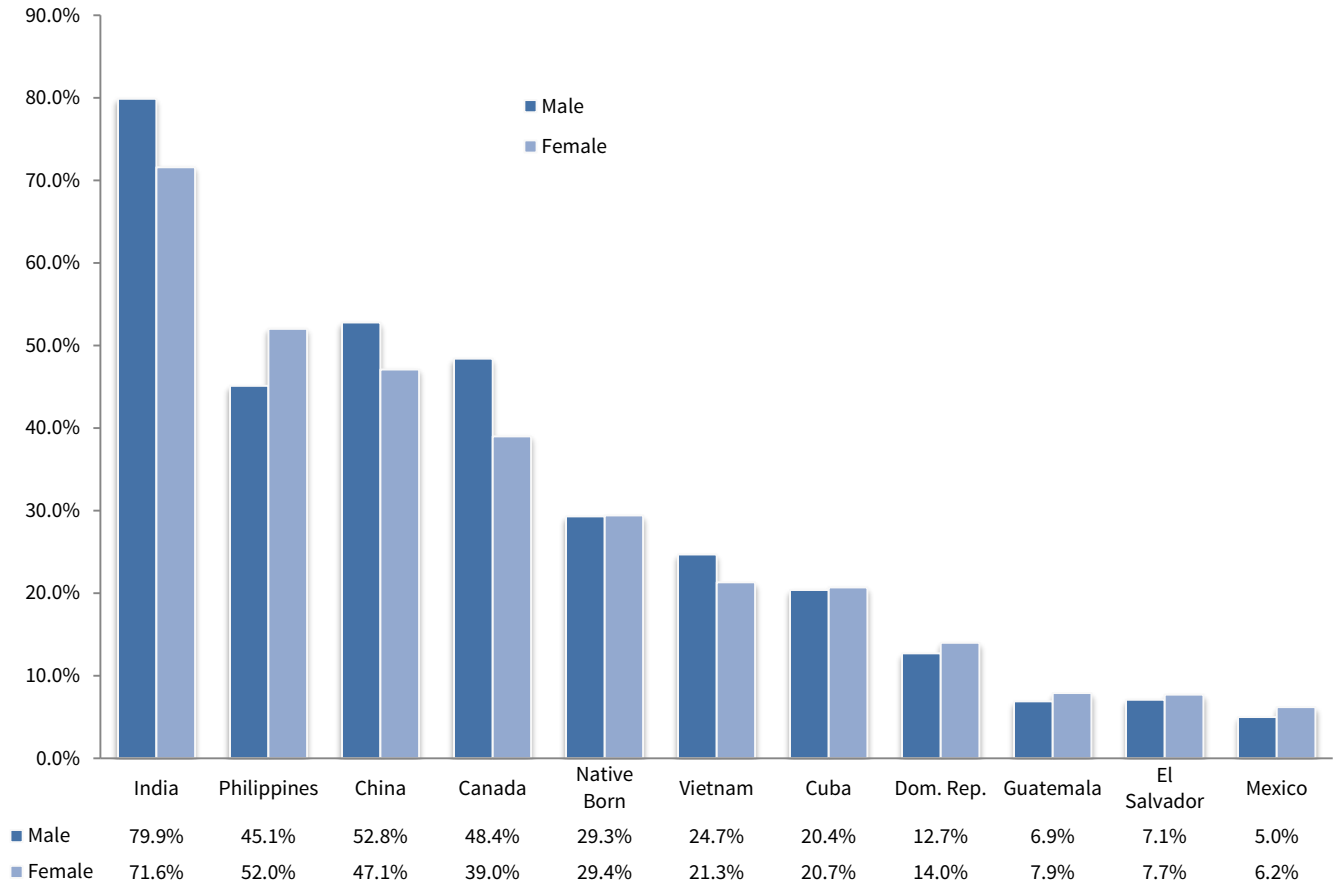
Figure 4: Male and Female Naturalization Rates by Select Countries of Origin, 2012



Immigrant Women from India Are the Most Highly Educated

- Just over one-quarter (27.5 percent) of immigrant women had a bachelor’s degree or more education in 2012, compared to 29.4 percent of native-born women and 28.4 percent of foreign-born men.
- The educational attainment of foreign-born women in 2012 varied widely according to country of origin.
 - Among the top ten origin countries for female immigrants, the highest percentage of female immigrants with a bachelor’s degree or more education came from India (71.6 percent), followed by the Philippines (52 percent), and China (47.1 percent). At the other end of the spectrum were Guatemala (7.9 percent), El Salvador (7.7 percent), and Mexico (26.7 percent) {Figure 5}.
 - Female immigrants had a higher percentage of bachelor’s degrees or higher compared to their male counterparts in six out of ten of the top origin countries for female immigrants {Figure 5}.

Figure 5: Share of Foreign-Born Population with a Bachelor's Degree or Higher, by Select Countries of Origin, 2012



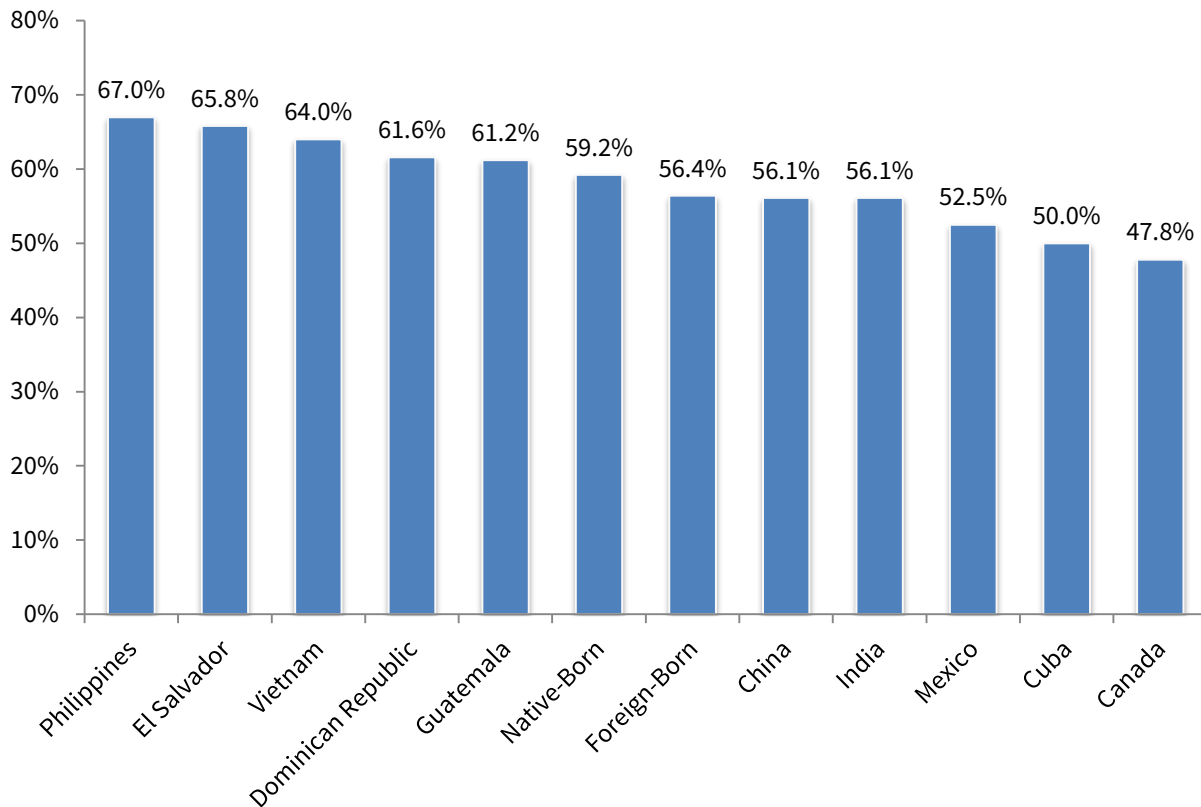
- The share of immigrant women with a bachelor’s degree or more education increased from 22.1 percent in 2000 to 27.5 percent in 2012. The share of native-born women with a comparable level of education also increased from 22.9 percent in 2000 to 29.4 percent in 2012.

Immigrant women are active in the labor force, with some origin countries seeing a higher rate of labor force participation for foreign-born women than for native-born women.

- On average, 56.4 percent of foreign-born women were in the labor force in 2012, compared to 59.2 percent of native-born women.
- Foreign-born women make up 15 percent of employed women over 16 in the United States.
- The labor-force participation rate of immigrant women rose from 50.5 percent in 2000 to 57.1 percent in 2008, and fell slightly in 2012 to 56.4 percent. By way of comparison, the labor-force participation rate of native-born women rose from 58.6 percent in 2000 to 60.6 percent in 2008, and fell slightly to 59.2 percent in 2012.

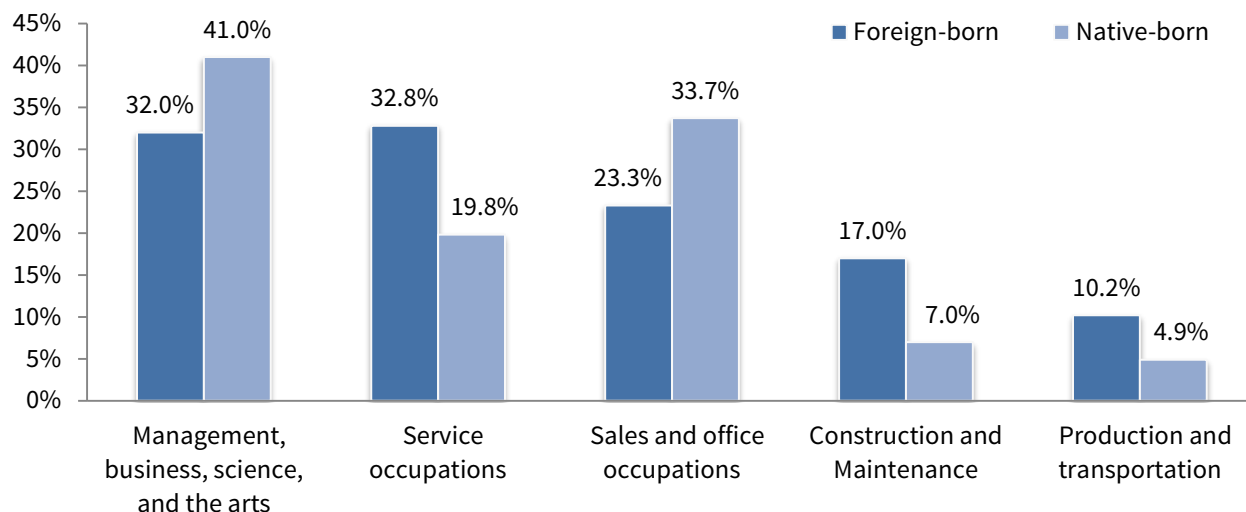
- Of the top ten origin countries for foreign-born women:
 - Women from five of these countries have higher rates of labor force participation than native-born women {Figure 6}.
 - The Philippines (67 percent), El Salvador (65.8 percent), Vietnam (64 percent), the Dominican Republic (61.6 percent), and Guatemala (61.2 percent), compared to native-born women (59.2 percent).
- Immigrant women from Canada have the lowest rate of participation in the labor force among the top ten origin countries at 47.8 percent.
- However, in absolute numbers, there are more native-born women over 16 years old in the labor force (66.7 million) than foreign-born women (11.3 million).

Figure 6: Percentage of Women in the Labor Force, 2012



- About one-third (32 percent) of immigrant women in the labor force worked in management and professional occupations in 2012, while just under a third (32.8 percent) worked in service occupations, under one quarter (23.3 percent) in sales and office occupations, and one-in-ten (10.2 percent) in production and transportation occupations {Figure 7}.

Figure 7: Percentage of Foreign-Born and Native-Born Women by Occupation, 2012

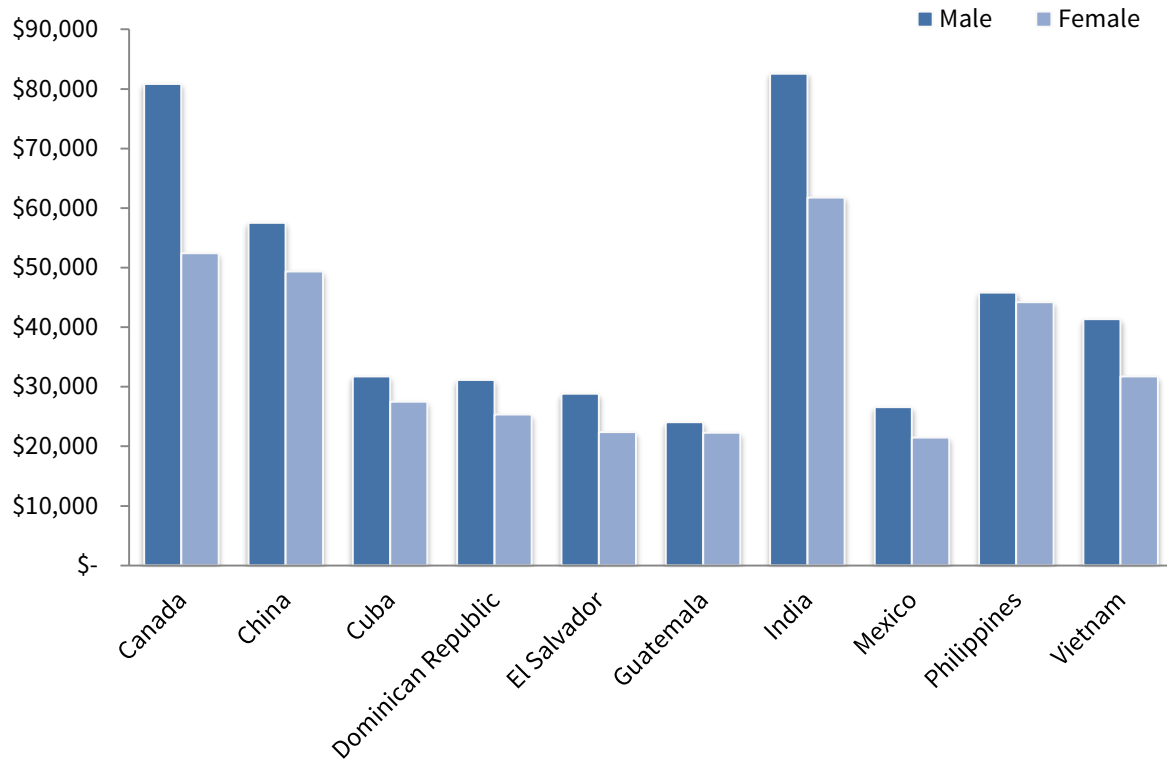


- Over two-thirds of immigrant women from India who were in the labor force in 2012 worked in management and professional occupations (66.3 percent), compared to two-fifths of native-born women (41 percent).
- Over half of immigrant women in the labor force from Guatemala worked in service occupations (53 percent), compared to one-fifth of native-born women (19.8 percent).
- Roughly 40 percent of immigrant business owners were women, and 20 percent of women business owners were immigrants, as of 2010.⁸

Immigrant Women in the Labor Force Earn Less than Any Other Demographic

- Immigrant women in the labor force had an annual median income of \$32,015 in 2012, compared to \$38,514 for native-born women, \$36,802 for foreign-born men, and \$50,283 for native-born men.
- Immigrant women from India who were in the labor force had the highest median annual income (\$61,767).
 - Immigrant women from Taiwan (\$60,650), Australia (\$58,657), Israel (\$57,215), and Ireland (\$57,020) rounded out the top five in annual median income.
 - Women from Mexico, who make up more than a quarter of all female immigrants {Figure 8}, made the least of all female immigrant groups in 2012, with an annual median income of \$21,489. Four other Latin American origin countries rounded out the bottom five for annual median incomes – Guatemala (\$22,303), El Salvador (\$22,380), Nicaragua (\$24,074), and the Dominican Republic (\$25,340).
- In all top 10 countries of origin, immigrant men in the labor force earned more than immigrant women in the labor force {Figure 8}.

Figure 8: Median Earnings of Foreign-Born Men and Women from Select Countries of Origin, 2012



Endnotes

1. Unless otherwise noted, all data for 2012 was taken from the 2012 American Community Survey.
2. Jeffrey S. Passel and D'Vera Cohn, *A Portrait of Unauthorized Immigrants in the United States* (Washington, DC: Pew Hispanic Center, April 14, 2009), p. 4.
3. New America Media, "[Women Immigrants: Stewards of the 21st Century Family](#)," February 2009, p. 13.
4. Office of Immigration Statistics, U.S. Department of Homeland Security, *2012 Yearbook of Immigration Statistics*, [Table 9](#).
5. Ibid.
6. New America Media, "[Women Immigrants: Stewards of the 21st Century Family](#)," February 2009, p. 31.
7. Ibid.
8. Susan C. Pearce, Elizabeth J. Clifford, and Reena Tandon, *Our American Immigrant Entrepreneurs: The Women* (Washington, DC: American Immigration Council, December 2011), p. 2.