



# **Business Perspectives on Immigrant Talent & Economic Growth**

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# Executive Summary

## Research Overview

This project examines business perspectives on challenges to immigrant inclusion into the labor market. The research explores variations in business engagement and support for immigrant workforce inclusion via two separate California surveys conducted in spring 2024—one survey of business organizations (e.g., chambers of commerce) and a separate survey of individual employers. The findings highlight business perspectives and needs, including support through targeted resources, technical assistance and policy efforts that could enhance workforce practices, foster collaboration and mitigate structural challenges. This work comes at a time of heightened immigration enforcement, which has created increased uncertainty for immigrant workers and the businesses that rely on their talent. By capturing the business community perspective, this project aims to inform strategies that promote positive economic outcomes for both businesses and immigrant workers.

A photograph of an older man and a younger woman smiling, overlaid with a purple tint and two orange circles. The man is on the left, and the woman is on the right, with her hand on his shoulder. The text is overlaid on the bottom left of the image.

**Employers and business organizations acknowledge the critical roles that immigrants play—as workers and entrepreneurs—in supporting economic activity and solving key industry needs.**



## Key Findings and Implications

The survey results provide insights into the opportunities and challenges associated with immigrant workforce inclusion in California. Employers and business organizations acknowledge the positive roles that immigrants play—as workers and entrepreneurs—in supporting economic activity and solving key industry needs. Employers vary in their knowledge of legal immigration statuses and requirements and business organizations vary in their engagement, interest, dedicated resources and actionable supports for immigrant inclusion. On the next page, we discuss the study's key findings and the potential implications for policymakers, business leaders and workforce development stakeholders.

## Key Findings

### Recognition of Immigrant Roles, but Limited Engagement:

Employers and business organizations generally recognize the positive role that immigrants play in addressing workforce needs and contributing to the economy.

**Survey results reflect these positive perceptions, with 89 percent acknowledging the contributions of immigrant entrepreneurs and 80 percent recognizing the value of immigrant workers. However, 51 percent of business organizations report limited engagement in immigrant workforce inclusion, and many employers face challenges in implementing supportive practices.**

These findings suggest opportunities for initiatives that enhance engagement, such as funding workforce programs, language training and incentives for businesses to support immigrant hiring.

### Barriers to Immigrant Workforce Inclusion:

Both chambers of commerce and employers identified several challenges to more effective immigrant inclusion.

**Chambers of commerce cited funding limitations (83 percent) and staffing constraints (74 percent). Employers also reported barriers such as work authorization issues (53 percent) and language proficiency challenges (32 percent).**

Addressing these challenges will require structural support—such as government incentives, technical assistance and language training programs—to help immigrant workers and entrepreneurs integrate fully into the workforce.

### Interest in Immigrant Workforce Initiatives and Engagement:

While many business organizations and employers acknowledge the importance of immigrant workers, they report limited involvement in initiatives specifically targeting this group.

**For example, 74 percent of business organizations express interest in promoting a multilingual workforce but only three percent of employers currently offer language training programs, and 18 percent provide legal assistance.**

## Implications and Recommendations

The findings suggest several areas where collaboration and policy initiatives would improve business leaders' support for immigrant workforce inclusion.

### Policy Support:

Policy makers may consider increasing investments in workforce training that are inclusive of immigrants, such as language training and legal assistance programs to mitigate structural barriers.

### Capacity Building for Business Organizations:

Business organizations could benefit from additional resources and support to engage more effectively in immigrant workforce inclusion efforts. This may include funding for capacity building, partnerships with community organizations and staff dedicated to immigrant workforce issues.

### Employer Education and Resources:

Employers may benefit from targeted technical assistance and education to better understand immigrant workforce issues, including legal complexities and regulations concerning work permits, visas and different legal statuses.

# Introduction

Immigrant workers have long been integral to California's economy, contributing across a variety of industries. From agriculture to construction to manufacturing to services, immigrant labor plays a key role in addressing workforce gaps and powering economic growth. However, despite their contributions, immigrant workers often encounter challenges integrating into the workforce, including language barriers, legal complexities and limited access to specialized resources and support. These challenges can limit immigrants' ability to fully participate and at the same time prevent businesses from fully benefiting from their skills and talents.

This project examines the perspectives of California employers and business organizations (e.g., chambers of commerce) on the issue of immigrant workforce inclusion. The research explores business community perceptions, practices and barriers related to immigrant inclusion. By collecting insights from both employers and business organizations via separate surveys, the study sought to identify win-wins for the business community and immigrants. We focus on potential collaboration to address challenges, enable and enhance the contributions of immigrant workers to our regional economy and support a more inclusive workforce. These insights come at a time of growing uncertainty, including the recent increase in Immigration raids in Los Angeles that has created fear in immigrant communities and operational concerns for employers and posing risks to regional economic stability.

Ultimately, the research findings underscore the importance of collaboration among employers, business organizations and policymakers so that local economies may benefit from and fully engage immigrant workers' potential. In Los Angeles, this is particularly important at a time when rebuilding communities after the January 2025 wildfires and readying for the 2028 Olympics are pressing priorities. Leveraging immigrant labor's strengths is critical to addressing regional workforce challenges. Providing all workers with the opportunities and resources needed to thrive will also ensure that California's economy continues to prosper.

# Purpose and Scope of Project

This research project explores the business community's perspectives and practices regarding immigrant workers and entrepreneurs in California. Immigrants are a vital part of California's economy, filling essential roles across various industries. However, there are challenges related to their inclusion, including language barriers, work authorization issues and limited access to targeted support. The study seeks to identify both the opportunities and barriers within the business community to better support and include immigrant labor—for the benefit of both immigrants and employers.

We surveyed employers and business organizations to gather a comprehensive understanding of business perspectives on the roles of immigrants and on immigrant workforce inclusion. The study identifies how employers implement workforce policies and practices related to immigrants and how business organizations support or advocate for efforts around immigrant workers and entrepreneurs.

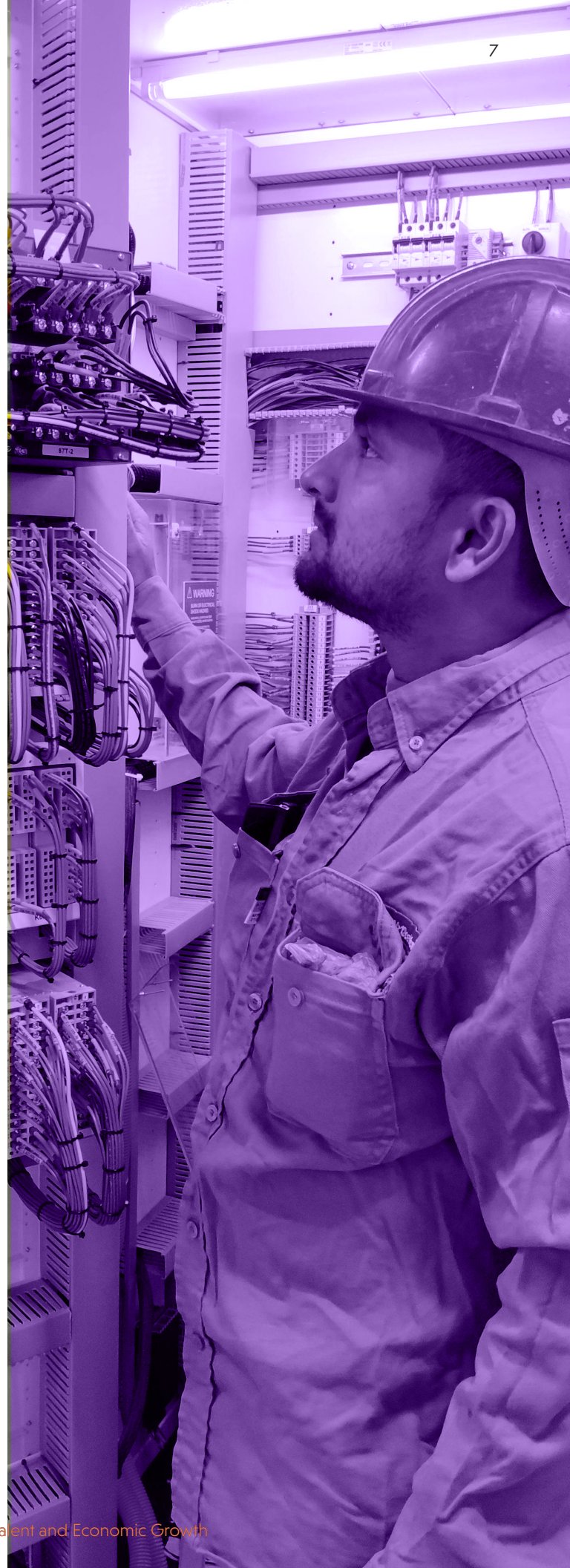
A critical distinction in this study is that between employers and business organizations. Employers are individual businesses, ranging from small to large enterprises, responsible for hiring and managing employees. Their concerns are primarily related to hiring, training and retaining immigrant employees, and they may face challenges such as language barriers, skill gaps and legal complexities around immigration status.

Business organizations, such as chambers of commerce, serve as intermediaries advocating for and supporting their member businesses. They focus on broad initiatives such as workforce development, policy/advocacy and economic growth. These organizations often act as resource hubs, providing technical assistance, networking opportunities and access to best practices. While employers are positioned to implement direct practices, chambers of commerce and other business organizations can support and amplify efforts through advocacy and capacity-building initiatives.

Collaboration between these groups is essential to align priorities and effectively address barriers. The Employer Survey illuminates employers' views on the benefits and challenges of hiring immigrant workers. The survey addresses key topics such as hiring practices, the impact of language barriers, the role of immigrant workers in addressing workforce shortages and the types of support employers need to effectively include and benefit from the immigrant workforce. The survey also explores employers' familiarity with immigration policies, their strategies for including immigrant workers and their commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI). By examining employers' direct experiences, the project elucidates practical challenges and opportunities to inform policies and practices.

The Business Organization Survey assesses the role of chambers of commerce and other business organizations in supporting immigrant workforce inclusion through policy advocacy, resources and training. Questions focus on business organization involvement in immigrant workforce issues, supporting immigrant entrepreneurs, multilingual workforces and immigration reform. The survey also explores the capacity of business organizations to support these efforts (considering staffing and funding constraints) and their perspectives on the importance of immigrant workforce inclusion for regional economic growth.

The overarching goal of this project is to provide actionable insights into how both employers and business organizations can better support and leverage the immigrant workforce to improve business outcomes, regional economic growth and individual economic mobility. By identifying barriers such as work authorization issues, legal complexities, language barriers and limited engagement from business organizations, the study aims to uncover strategies for overcoming challenges faced by employers as well as by immigrants themselves. Additionally, the study explores opportunities to expand support systems for immigrant workers, ultimately improving access to workforce opportunities, promoting economic mobility and contributing to California's economic growth.



# Research Design

Our cross-sectional survey research design provides a snapshot of the current state of immigrant workforce inclusion within California. The design aims to achieve three key objectives: (1) understanding the perspectives of employers concerning the benefits and challenges of hiring immigrant workers, (2) understanding business organizations' engagement and interest in immigrant workforce issues, and (3) identifying resources and supports that can help business organizations and employers address these challenges in order to create a win-win for immigrants and the business community in promoting economic prosperity. By surveying both employers and business organizations, the study also examines alignments between supports offered by business organizations and the practical needs of employers.

The survey development process focused on identifying critical issues around immigration for the business community. We obtained input from key stakeholders, including representatives from community organizations, immigrant advocacy groups and workforce development experts, to ensure the questions addressed salient issues from the perspectives of each of these experts.

The surveys glean insights from both employers and business organizations regarding their perceptions, practices and challenges related to the immigrant workforce. The surveys were structured with a mix of question types, including multiple-choice, Likert scale and open-ended questions, allowing respondents to provide both quantitative and qualitative insights.<sup>1</sup>

In late spring and early summer 2024, UNITE-LA disseminated the surveys to a targeted sample of employers and business organizations through email invitations, intentionally seeking to reach a diverse range of respondents. We distributed the Business Organization Survey to a select group of key chambers of commerce and business organizations throughout the state. We sent the Employer Survey directly to a convenience sample of both small businesses and large corporations; in addition, a range of business organizations assisted in dissemination to employers, resulting in a small number of additional responses.

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1. Survey instruments available on request.

To maximize participation, both surveys were available online. UNITE-LA staff periodically sent personal reminders to encourage participation and increase response rates. Respondents were assured that their answers would remain confidential and be used solely for research purposes. The Business Organization Survey included 35 business organizations across the state, representing an 85 percent response rate. The Employer Survey utilized a convenience sample of 34 employers from a wide range of industries. Please see the Appendix for detailed information on the two survey samples.

## Key Survey Themes Explored



### Perceptions of Immigrant Workforce Value:

Employers' and organizations' views on the contributions of immigrants to workforce gaps, entrepreneurship and economic growth.



### Engagement in Immigrant-Specific Initiatives:

The extent to which organizations were involved in activities like legal assistance, multilingual workforce promotion and DEI efforts tailored for immigrant populations.



### Resource Allocation and Challenges:

For business organizations, levels of funding, staffing and policy support dedicated to immigrant inclusion initiatives. For employers, work authorization issues, visa issues and English proficiency.



### Untapped Interest and Future Potential:

Opportunities for greater collaboration and capacity-building to support immigrant workers.

A large, light-colored dashed line curves from the top center towards the left, framing the word 'Findings'. In the top right corner, there is a purple square with a white border, partially overlapping an orange square. In the bottom right corner, there is a large orange circle.

# Findings

Results from the Business Organization Survey and Employer Survey provide a comprehensive view of how the business community perceives and engages with the immigration workforce. The findings highlight not only views of the significant value immigrant workers bring to California's economy but also persistent challenges and gaps in support. We uncover actionable insights and opportunities to bridge the gap between recognition and meaningful engagement.

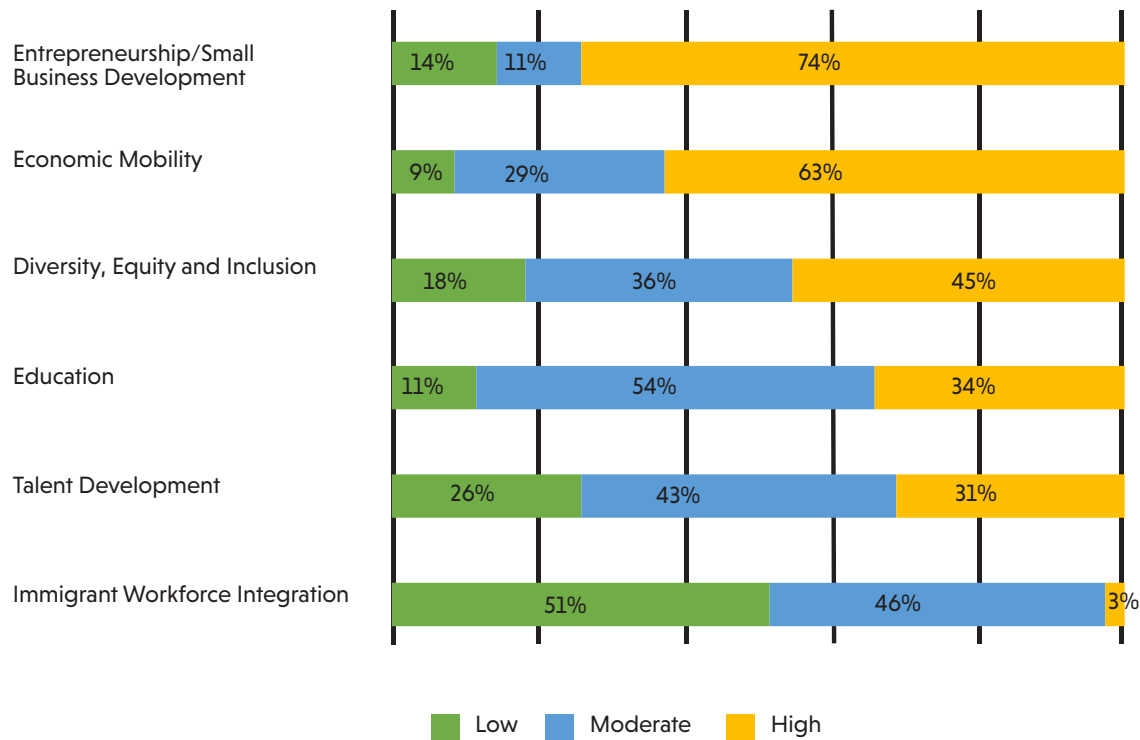
# Key Findings from Business Organizations

Business organizations, as key advocates for business interests, play an important role in shaping local economic priorities and supporting local establishments. Respondents exhibit an understanding of the vital role of immigrants, yet limited current organizational engagement in immigrant workforce inclusion.

## Low Engagement Despite Recognition

While business organizations widely acknowledge the economic value of immigrants, their engagement in workforce inclusion remains limited. More than half (51 percent) report low involvement in immigrant workforce initiatives, even as they remain heavily involved in supporting entrepreneurship (74 percent) and economic mobility (63 percent) (Figure 1). The limited focus on immigrant workers suggests that chambers of commerce may not fully recognize immigrants' potential as a solution to workforce shortages across industries.

Figure 1: **Organizations' Issue Involvement**  
Business Organization Survey

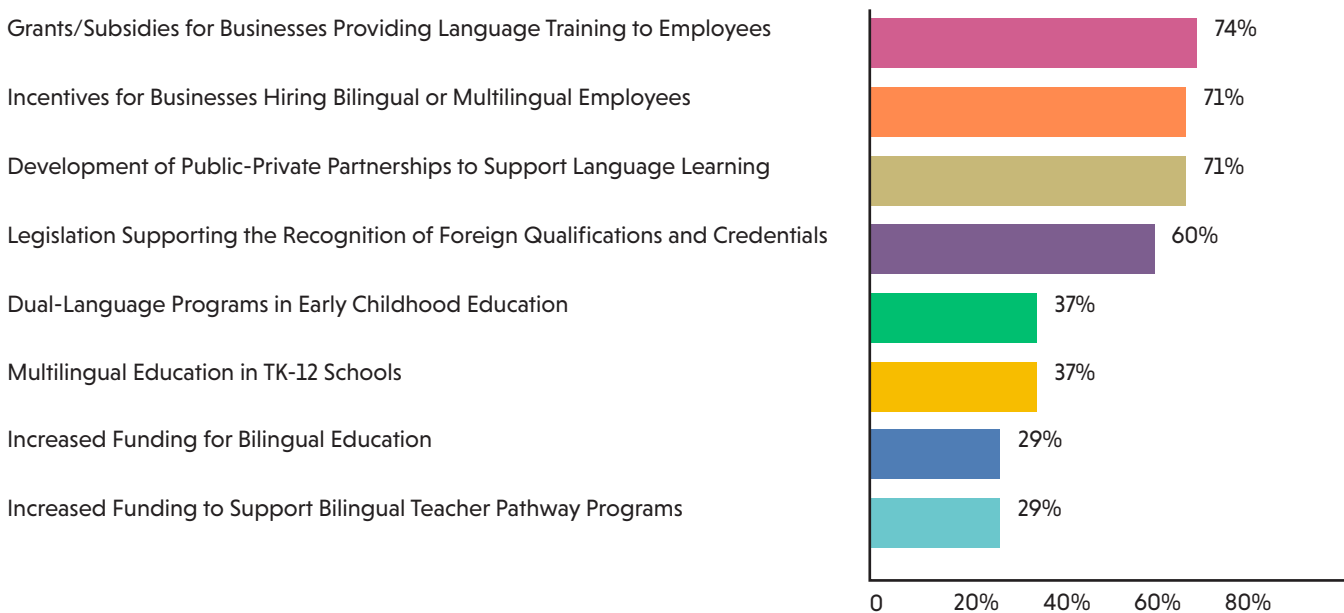


## High Interest in Immigrant-Related Topics

Despite their current low engagement, business organizations express strong interest in addressing immigrant workforce issues (Figure 2A). For instance:

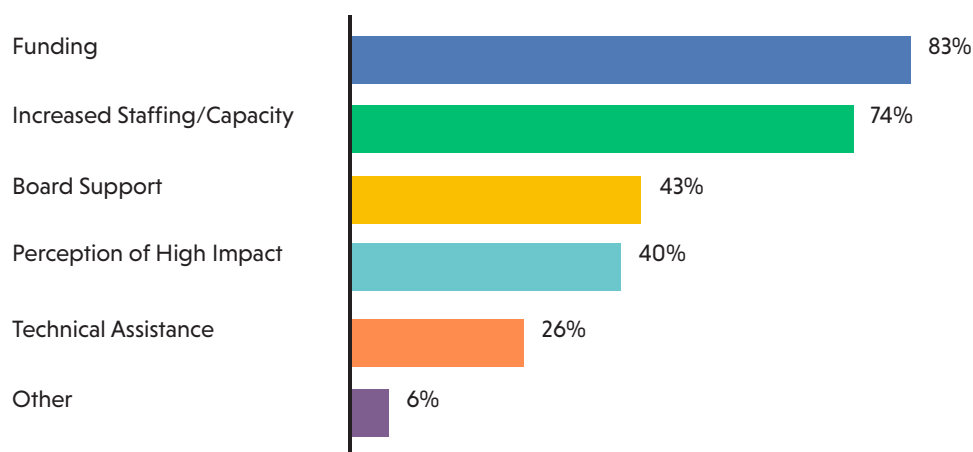
- Seventy-four percent favor grants for language training programs.
- Seventy-one percent support public-private partnerships to provide incentives for hiring bilingual workers.

**Figure 2A: Preferred Assistance for Bilingual Talent**  
Business Organization Survey



This enthusiasm signals an opportunity to activate business organizations as key players in immigrant workforce inclusion. However, chambers of commerce often cite funding (83 percent), staffing (74 percent) and board support (43 percent) as barriers to deeper engagement. Targeted resources and strategic partnerships could unlock their potential to support immigrant workers more effectively (Figure 2B).

**Figure 2B: Primary Support Needs for Boosting Engagement in Immigrant Topics**  
Business Organization Survey





**“Immigrants are a key force in starting new companies. Immigrants are twice as likely to become entrepreneurs as native-born Americans.”**

**- Business Organization Survey Respondent**

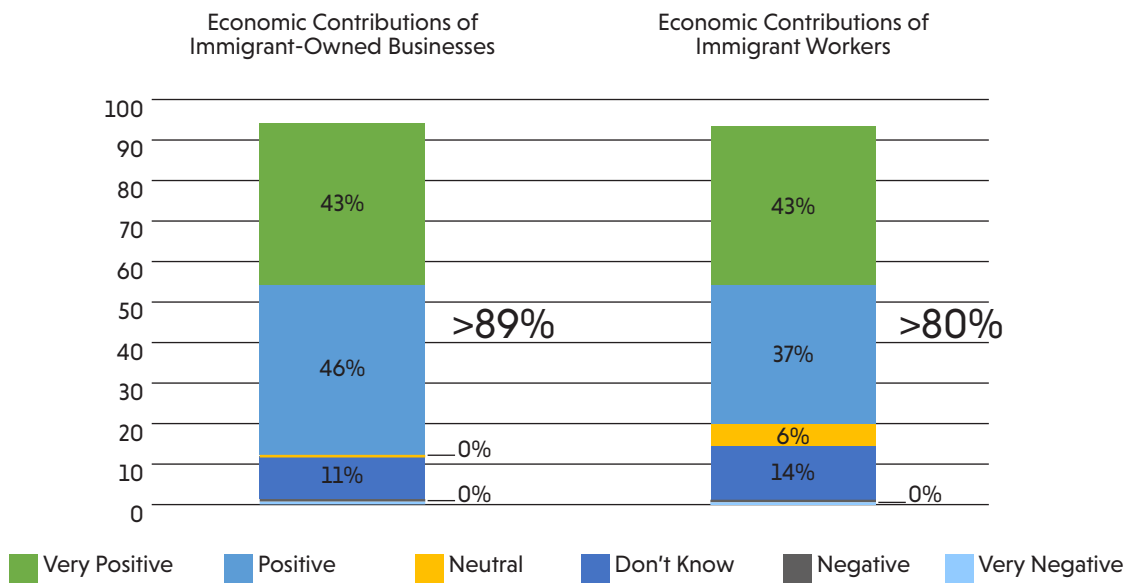
## Positive Perceptions of Immigrants' Economic Contributions

Business organizations overwhelmingly view immigrants as vital contributors to the local economy.

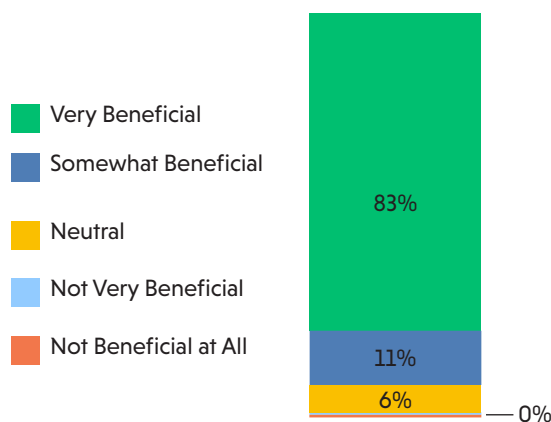
- Positive views of the economic contributions of immigrant-owned businesses (89 percent) and immigrant workers (80 percent) (Figure 3).
- Eighty-three percent rate creating a welcoming environment for immigrants as highly beneficial to economic growth (Figure 4).


These positive perceptions could form the foundation for new concrete actions and engagement, underscoring the potential to bridge this gap through targeted initiatives and advocacy.

**Figure 3: Perceptions of Immigrant Role in Economy**  
Business Organization Survey



**Figure 4: Views on Creating a Welcoming Environment for Immigrants**  
Business Organization Survey





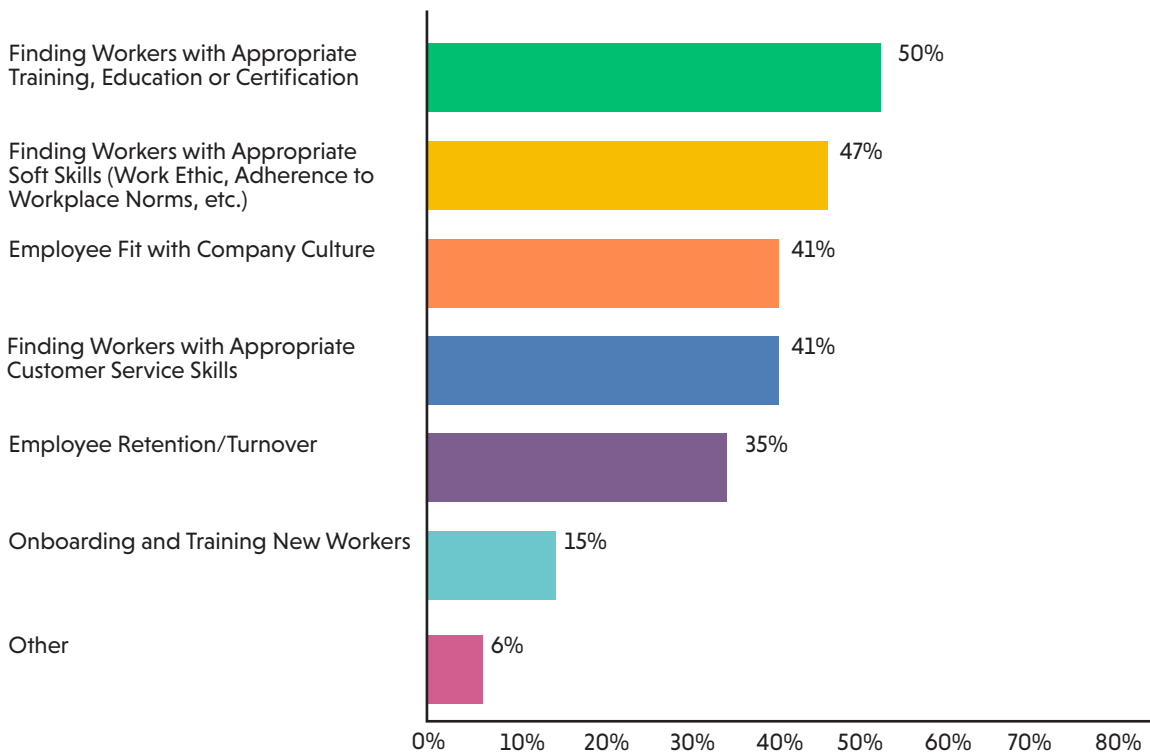
**"As evident during ...  
COVID-19, many immigrant  
workers are essential  
workers who keep our  
economy functioning."**

**- Business Organization Survey Respondent**

## Key Findings from Employers

Employers are at the forefront of workforce inclusion, with direct responsibility for hiring, training and retaining employees. The survey findings reveal that employers face persistent challenges with finding and retaining workers (Figure 5). These findings align with the broader issue of workforce shortages across industries, suggesting that immigrant workers could play a pivotal role in filling these gaps.

**Figure 5: Primary Talent Issues**  
Employer Survey



## General Workforce Challenges and Talent Shortages

Employers report significant struggles with hiring and retaining qualified workers (Figure 5):

- Fifty percent cite difficulty finding workers with appropriate training or certifications.
- Forty-seven percent highlight challenges related to soft skills.

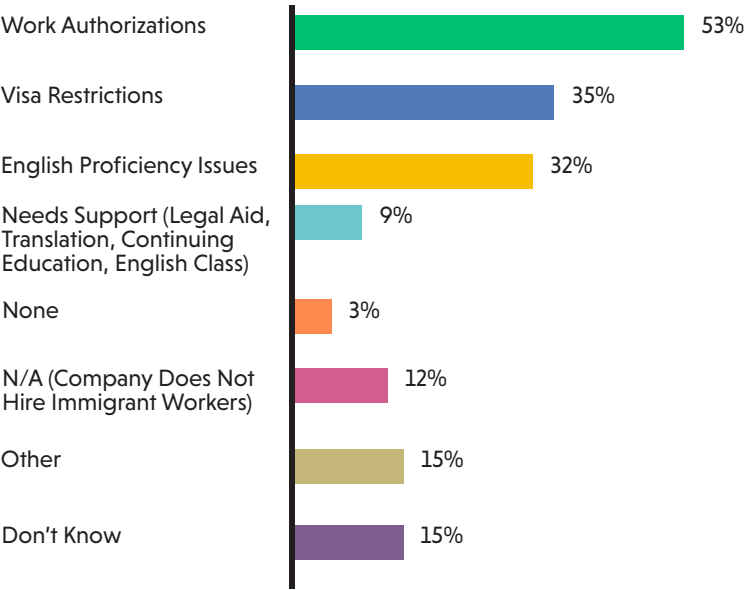
# Challenges and Benefits of Hiring Immigrant Workers

Findings on challenges of hiring immigrants suggest that barriers such as work authorization issues (53 percent), visa restrictions (35 percent) and language proficiency challenges (32 percent) continue to impede progress (Figure 6).

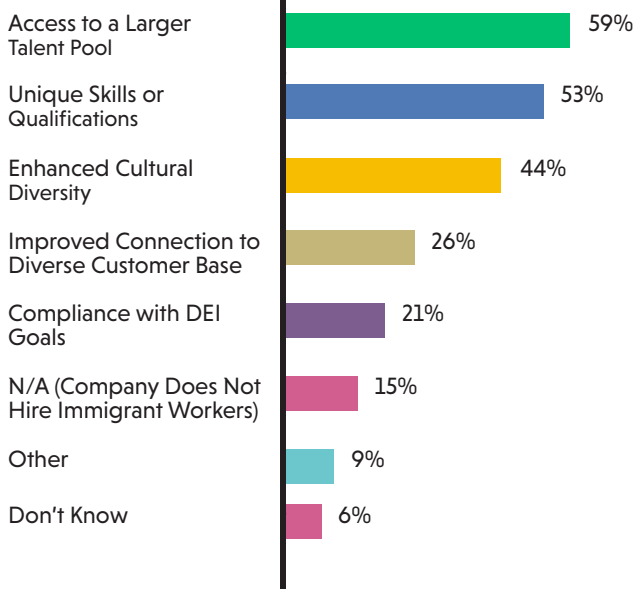
Employers recognize multiple benefits of hiring immigrant workers (Figure 7):

- Fifty-nine percent value the expanded talent pool.
- Fifty-three percent appreciate the unique skills and qualifications immigrants bring.
- Forty-four percent highlight the cultural diversity contributed by immigrant workers.

**Figure 6: Challenges of Hiring Immigrant Workers**  
Employer Survey



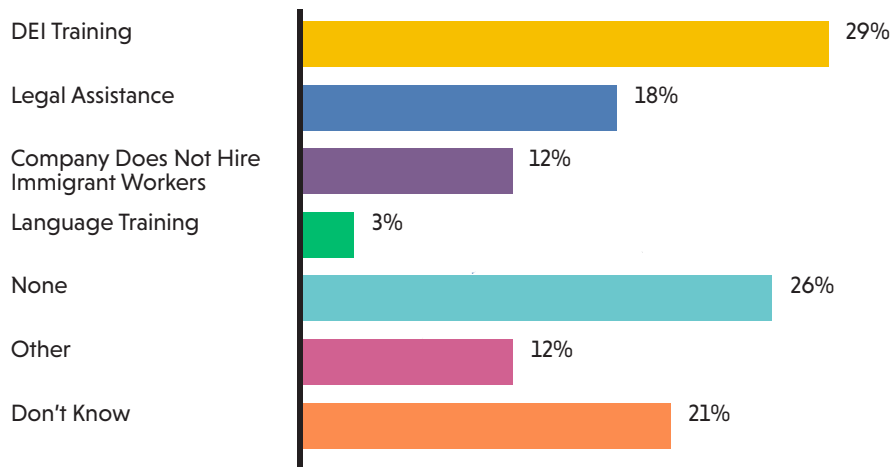
**Figure 7: Benefits of Hiring Immigrant Workers**  
Employer Survey



## Limited Structural Supports

Despite these benefits, many employers lack the structural supports needed to fully leverage immigrant talent. For instance, only three percent of employers currently offer language training programs and 18 percent provide legal assistance, leaving significant room for improvement (Figure 8). The limited strategies for immigrant integration indicate a critical gap in addressing the unique challenges faced by immigrants, such as navigating workplace cultures, overcoming language barriers and accessing legal resources.

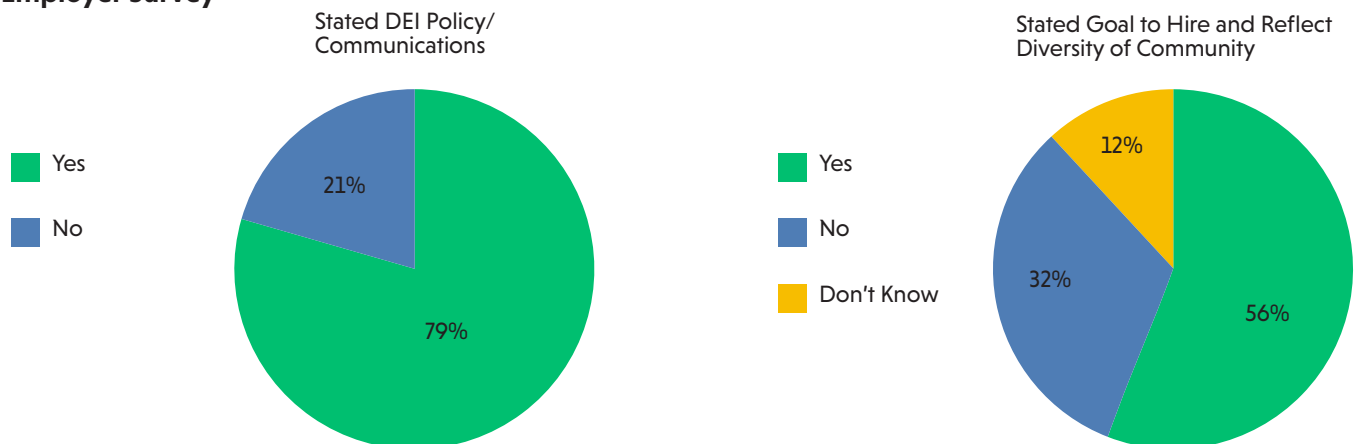
**Figure 8: Existing Strategies for Immigrant Integration**  
Employer Survey



## Commitment to DEI, but Limited Immigrant-Specific Efforts

While 79 percent of employers report having a DEI policy, only 56 percent report having a stated goal to reflect the diversity of their local communities (Figure 9). Expanding DEI initiatives to include immigrant-specific components could enhance workplace inclusion and retention, particularly as employers aim to reflect the diversity of their local communities (56 percent).

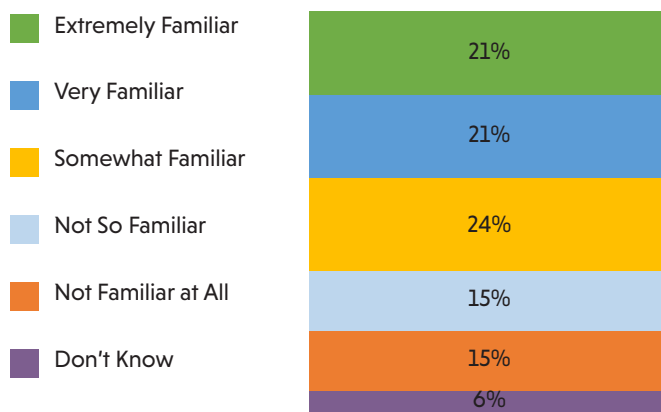
**Figure 9: Stated Goals for Diverse and Inclusive Hiring**  
Employer Survey



## Knowledge Gaps Regarding Immigrant Legal Statuses

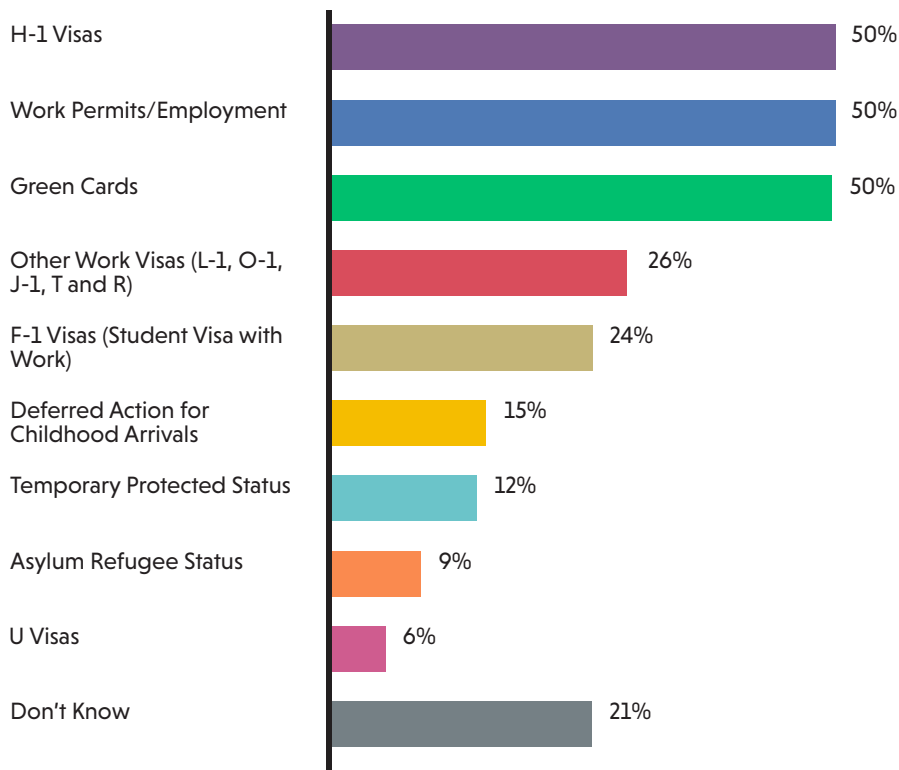
Employers demonstrate varying levels of familiarity with immigration-related legal processes. About two-thirds of employers report a familiarity with issues related to employing immigrant workers (Extremely Familiar-21 percent; Very Familiar-21 percent; Somewhat Familiar-24 percent) (Figure 10).

**Figure 10: Familiarity with Issues Related to Employing Immigrant Workers**  
Employer Survey

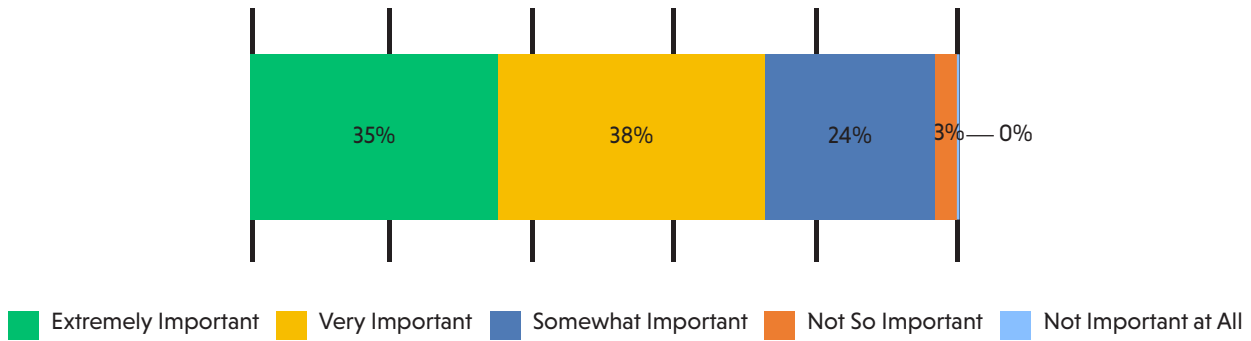


While half of respondents are familiar with work permits, H-1 visas and green cards, fewer understand programs like Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA—15 percent) or Temporary Protected Status (TPS—12 percent) (Figure 11). This lack of knowledge may hinder their ability to hire and support immigrant workers.

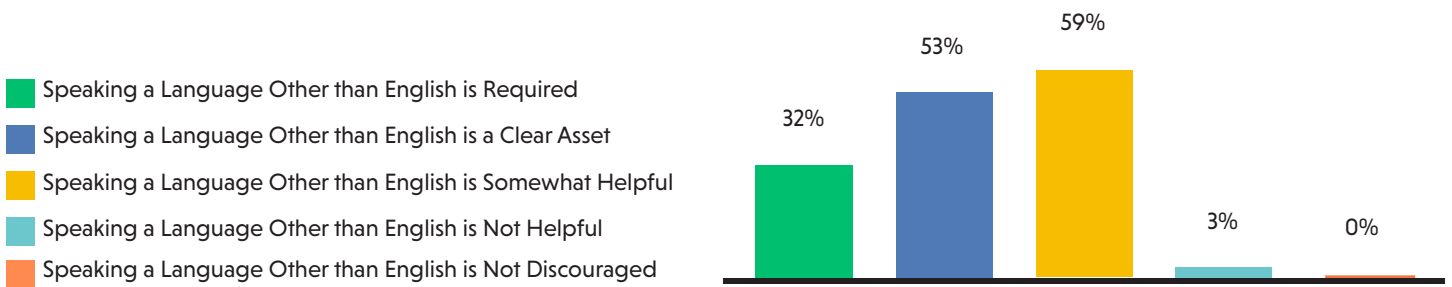
**Figure 11: Knowledge of Immigrant-Related Legal Documents and Statuses**  
Employer Survey



**Figure 12: Language Use and Value  
Employer Survey**



**Importance of Multilingualism for Different Jobs**



**Valuing Multilingual Skills**

Employers and business organizations recognize the value of multilingual abilities:

- Employers report that 32 percent of positions require speaking a language other than English, and multilingualism is a clear asset for 53 percent of jobs (Figure 12).

Enhancing the utilization of multilingual talent could strengthen business operations, improve customer interactions and facilitate immigrant workforce inclusion. It is also notable that business organizations express support for initiatives such as grants and partnerships to promote bilingual hiring.

# Common Threads

Both employers and business organizations acknowledge the contributions of immigrant workers but face challenges in providing adequate support. For business organizations, these challenges often relate to capacity limitations, while for employers, they are frequently linked to resource constraints or a lack of awareness. Addressing these gaps will require targeted investments in technical assistance, education and increased resources as well as partnerships with state agencies, such as the Governor's Office of Business and Economic Development, to help fold opportunities into statewide efforts.

# Complementary Opportunities

The findings highlight both the economic and workforce potential of immigrant workers, as well as existing gaps in business engagement and support. Business organizations can play a key role in advocating for resources and fostering stronger networks, while individual employers can adopt inclusive practices that expand access to opportunity. By removing structural barriers to participation and investing in strategies that promote inclusion, the business community can help build a more equitable and resilient labor market. These efforts not only support immigrant communities but also strengthen business operations and the broader regional economy.

This work is especially urgent in light of the 2025 Los Angeles wildfires, which destroyed more than 16,000 structures and created an immediate need for large-scale rebuilding.<sup>2</sup> To respond effectively, the region must leverage all available labor resources, including its significant immigrant workforce, particularly in the construction sector.

Our research findings indicate that business leaders recognize immigrant talent as essential to meeting workforce demands and driving long-term growth. Yet, recent federal immigration enforcement actions are undermining this progress, disrupting local economies and limiting employers' ability to respond effectively. Addressing these challenges will require aligning workforce strategies with immigration policy and ensuring that employers can fully and safely engage the immigrant workforce. Doing so is not only vital for immediate recovery—it is foundational to building a more competitive, inclusive and sustainable economy.

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2. Li, Zhiyun, and Williams Yu. Rep. Economic Impact of the Los Angeles Wildfires, March 3, 2025. <https://www.anderson.ucla.edu/about/centers/ucla-anderson-forecast/economic-impact-los-angeles-wildfires>



**By addressing barriers and investing in multilingual education, the business community can contribute to building a more inclusive workforce.**



# Recommendations for Further Research

The business organization and employer surveys contribute to our understanding of a wide range of issues, including talent development, diversity, equity and immigrant workforce inclusion. The results capture business perceptions of workforce opportunities, immigrant contributions and challenges. Future research that builds upon this work could delve into regionally specific policies or the unique workforce needs of certain industries, such as agriculture, construction, manufacturing, health care and various technical and professional services. By design, our survey questions did not differentiate among immigrant groups (workers from different countries, documented or undocumented workers, or between immigrants employed in different sectors). Such distinctions in future research could provide more granular insights into the opportunities and barriers specific to different segments of the immigrant workforce.

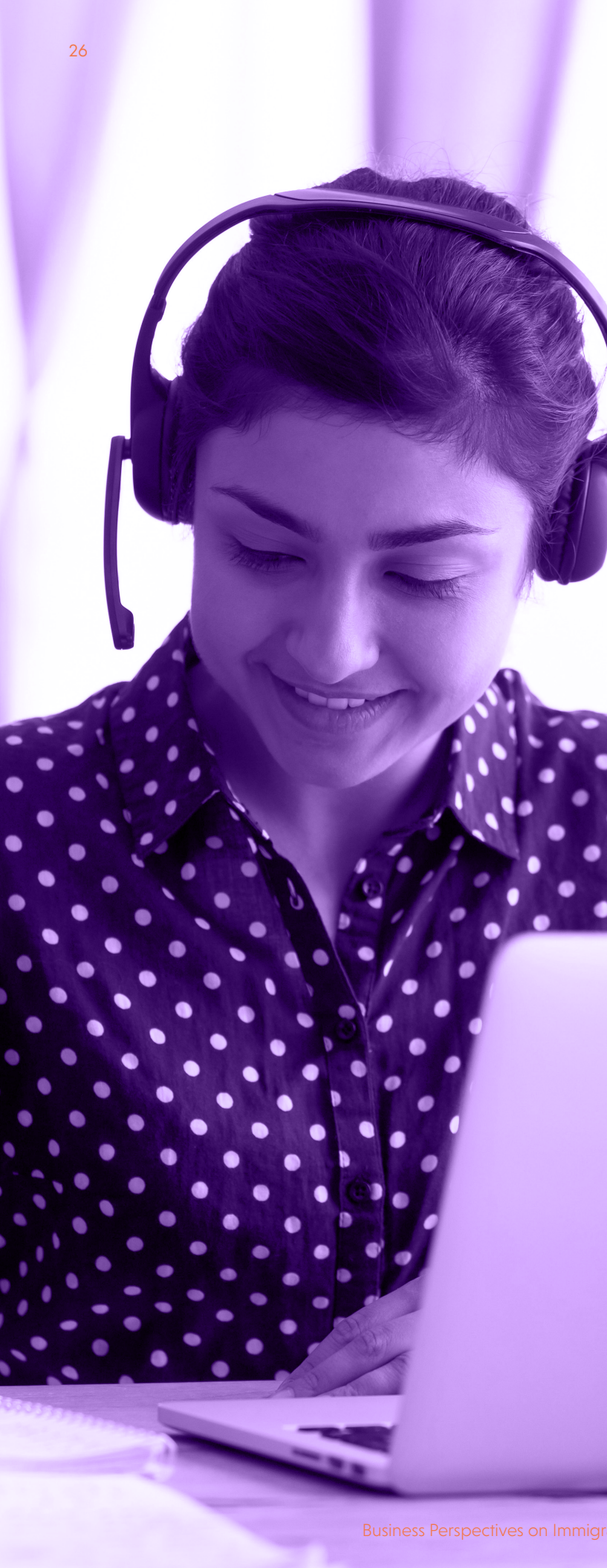
Our research—despite its lack of granular data—significantly advances understanding of business perspectives on immigrant workforce inclusion and informs potential actions on effective policies, strategies and resources.

# Policy Recommendations

As the new administration ushers in an unprecedented political climate, Los Angeles and California stand at a pivotal moment—one defined by the choices we make to foster a stronger, more inclusive future. The importance of dismantling systemic barriers that hinder immigrants from being full players in our collective economic prosperity has never been greater.

Through this survey research, employers and business organizations have voiced pressing concerns, highlighting the growing difficulty in hiring and retaining immigrant talent due to restrictive policies, insufficient funding and the absence of a structured workforce pathway plan specific to immigrants. In the current political environment, California policymakers play a crucial role in advancing key initiatives designed to support immigrants, regardless of status—and thereby maintain and elevate the economic prowess of our state. By leveraging the collective power of business, government and community leadership, Los Angeles and California can continue to lead the nation in workforce innovation and economic opportunity.

The following recommendations outline a bold yet pragmatic approach to strengthening immigrant workforce inclusion and our regional economy. These policy strategies build upon existing efforts while acknowledging our ever-evolving political and economic landscape.



## State Policy Recommendations:

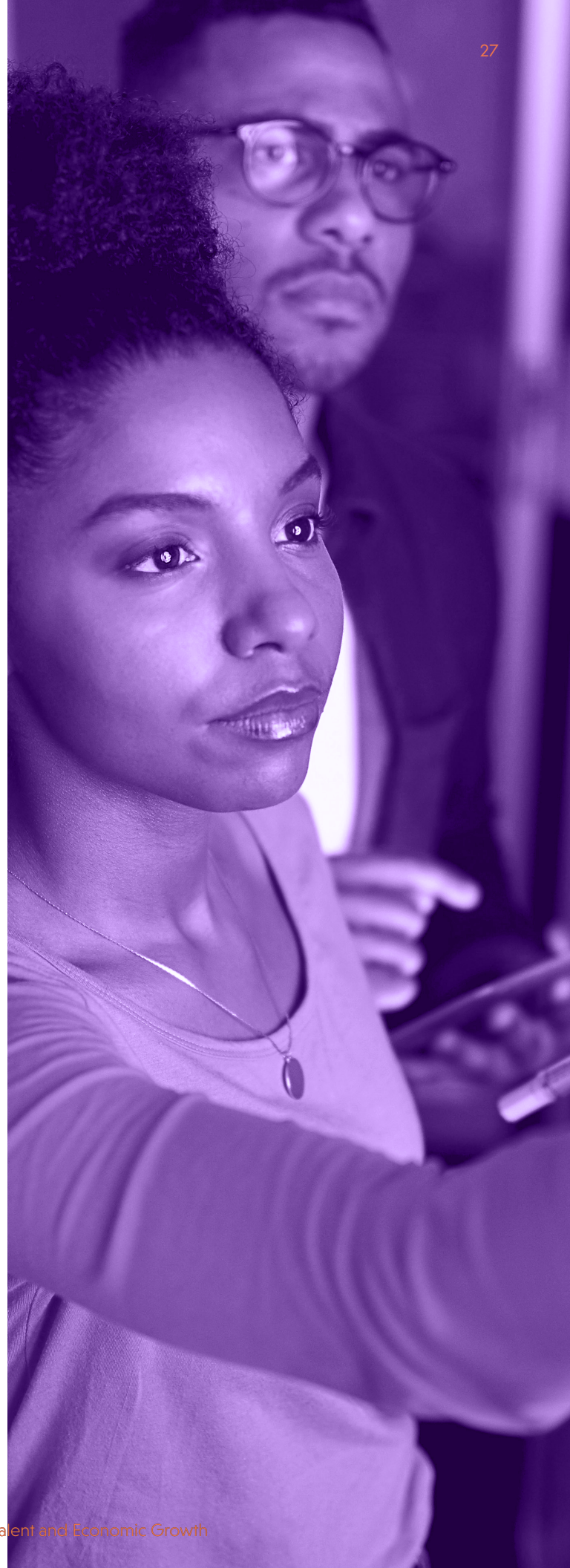
Although California has implemented several initiatives at the state level to support immigrant workers, persistent workforce gaps and inconsistent funding still prevent full workforce inclusion. Enhancing these policies could establish the state as a national leader in promoting immigrant economic mobility. Key strategies include:

- 1.** Ensuring sustained funding for immigrant workforce integration and training model programs.
- 2.** Supporting immigrant entrepreneurs through targeted programs and resources.
- 3.** Recognizing foreign credentials to mitigate workforce shortages.
- 4.** Investing in multilingual education and English proficiency programs.
- 5.** Expanding translation services in workforce development programs.
- 6.** Establishing a California State Office of Immigrant Integration to coordinate these efforts.
- 7.** Utilizing the Governor's Office of Business and Economic Development (GO-Biz) to fold in immigrant workforce and small business policy and investment opportunities.

## Local Policy Recommendations:

Los Angeles has made considerable strides to support immigrant workforce inclusion through local initiatives spearheaded by key immigrant rights organizations dedicated to maintaining L.A. as a welcoming region for immigrants. However, to ensure long-term success, deeper employer engagement and sustainable funding are critical. Key strategies include:

- 1.** Strengthening partnerships among workforce boards, community-based organizations, businesses and local governments to create tailored support networks for immigrant workers.
- 2.** Establishing platforms for sharing best practices in diversity and talent development, inclusive of the immigrant workforce.
- 3.** Increasing funding for small business owners, inclusive of immigrant-led businesses and entrepreneurship initiatives.
- 4.** Enhancing access to flexible English as a Second Language (ESL) programs for working adults.





## Federal Policy Recommendations:

The Federal Government plays a pivotal role in shaping immigration and workforce policies that directly impact economic opportunities for immigrants and, therefore, also impact regional economic prosperity. While some federal mandates aim to support workforce inclusion, others present challenges that require businesses and local governments to adapt. Addressing roadblocks requires targeted advocacy at the federal level and a concerted effort by diverse coalitions and stakeholders united by a shared agenda. Key strategies include:

- 1.** Extending work permit validity for immigrants who meet renewal requirements.
- 2.** Decreasing backlogs in immigrant visa applications.
- 3.** Enacting comprehensive immigration reform.

# Employer Recommendations:

As the workplace becomes increasingly global, the role of immigrant workers in the U.S. economy cannot be overstated. Employers stand at the intersection of competing for more economic growth, while many industries face significant labor shortages. This requires a robust support system that not only facilitates but also enhances the integration and productivity of immigrant employees. The recommendations provided here aim to equip employers with practical strategies to harness the full potential of immigrant talent, ensuring that businesses not only contribute to but also benefit from a diverse and dynamic workforce. By implementing targeted support and fostering an inclusive workplace, employers can significantly influence the economic and social integration of immigrants, leading to an improved bottom line for individual employers and to broader community benefits and economic prosperity. Key strategies for employers include:

- Enhancing training and certification opportunities through partnerships with training providers and/or educational institutions to offer tailored programs that equip immigrant workers with the necessary skills and qualifications needed in specific industries.
- Supporting HR personnel and management through regular training sessions on immigration laws and regulations, including an understanding of work visas, DACA, TPS and other relevant immigration statuses.
- Providing legal assistance and support to assist immigrant employees with immigration-related issues, including visa applications, renewals and understanding their rights and responsibilities under different immigration statuses.
- Addressing language proficiency challenges by offering in-house language training programs or connecting workers with external programs.
- Integrating immigrant-specific supports in company policies to include cultural competency training, mentorship programs and resources that address unique challenges faced by immigrants.
- Fostering an inclusive corporate culture that not only recognizes but celebrates cultural diversity.
- Engaging immigrant employees in leadership and decision-making processes to reflect the diversity of the workforce in the organizational structure.



# Conclusion

Our research highlights the widely shared view in the business community that immigrants play a critical role in our economy. This view persists in the face of a divisive political climate, where immigration remains a hotly debated issue. Recognition by the business community of the positive contributions of immigrants suggests that business may be an important ally in pressing for the modernization of our immigration system to ensure full participation and inclusion for immigrants. The findings offer a glimpse into our regional challenges and serve as a strategic guide to shape an economy that leverages all talent for regional economic prosperity.

The study findings indicate that many employers face persistent barriers when hiring immigrant workers, including visa backlogs, credential recognition limitations and insufficient workforce training programs. Additionally, there is a rapidly growing segment of workers in the U.S. labor force who either lack formal immigration status or hold temporary status with uncertain renewal prospects. These individuals play an essential role in key industries, such as health care, education, professional services, construction, manufacturing and hospitality.<sup>3</sup> Without the proper policy interventions, labor market barriers will continue to stifle economic mobility and hinder business competitiveness in California and the nation.

The economic contributions and talents of immigrants are critical to California's prosperity and growth.<sup>4</sup> When employment barriers are removed, workforce pathways are intentionally designed for inclusivity and businesses are empowered to invest in immigrant workers, the entire economy benefits: productivity increases, industries grow and communities thrive together. However, meaningful progress requires a coordinated effort across all levels of government, business sectors and workforce development institutions. The policy recommendations in this report provide a practical framework to tackle these challenges, while supporting immigrants who are eager to contribute to our economy and society.

California, and the Los Angeles region in particular, has a prime opportunity to set a national standard in developing an inclusive and future-ready workforce. The time to act is now. To achieve a truly resilient and competitive workforce, it is essential to create an environment that welcomes, develops and retains talent—ensuring sustained prosperity for businesses, workers and communities alike.

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3. USAFacts. "Which US Industries Employ the Most Immigrant Workers?" USAFacts, January 29, 2025. <https://usafacts.org/articles/which-industries-employ-the-most-immigrant-workers/>

4. Kosten, Dan. "Immigrants as Economic Contributors: They Are the New American Workforce." National Immigration Forum, January 23, 2025. <https://immigrationforum.org/article/immigrants-as-economic-contributors-they-are-the-new-american-workforce/>



# Final Call to Action

Bridging the gap between recognition and action requires targeted resources, structural support and enhanced collaboration among business organizations, employers and policymakers. The survey findings highlight key areas for engagement and demonstrate the importance of a coordinated approach. In such a collaborative framework, the business community and policy advocates join forces to address challenges in immigrant workforce inclusion. This collaboration benefits the business community by filling workforce shortages; enables immigrants to thrive; and supports essential contributions to California's robust and evolving economy.

*We are grateful to the California Community Foundation (CCF) for their generous support of this research project and to multiple Los Angeles thought partners for their input on the survey instrument. Note that CCF does not necessarily endorse its findings or recommendations. For questions about the research or policy recommendations, please contact Ajay Lucas ([ajlucas@unitela.com](mailto:ajlucas@unitela.com)) or Sonia Campos-Rivera ([srivera@unitela.com](mailto:srivera@unitela.com)).*

# Appendix

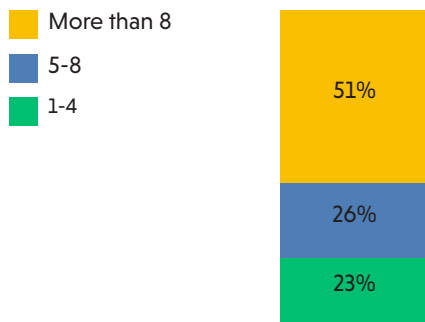
## Description of Survey Samples

### Organization Characteristics

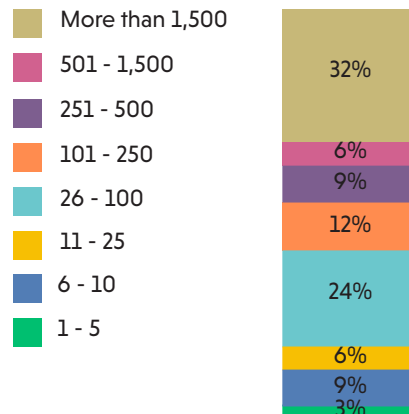
The Business Organization Survey included 35 business organizations across the state, representing an 85 percent response rate. Slightly more than half of the business organizations have more than eight staff members; about a quarter are mid-size; and about a quarter are very small, with one to four staff. (Figure A.1). The Employer Survey utilized a convenience sample of 34 employers, representing a range of industries and capturing information from large, medium and small employers (Figure A.2).

**Figure A.1: Number of Staff**

**Business Organization Survey**

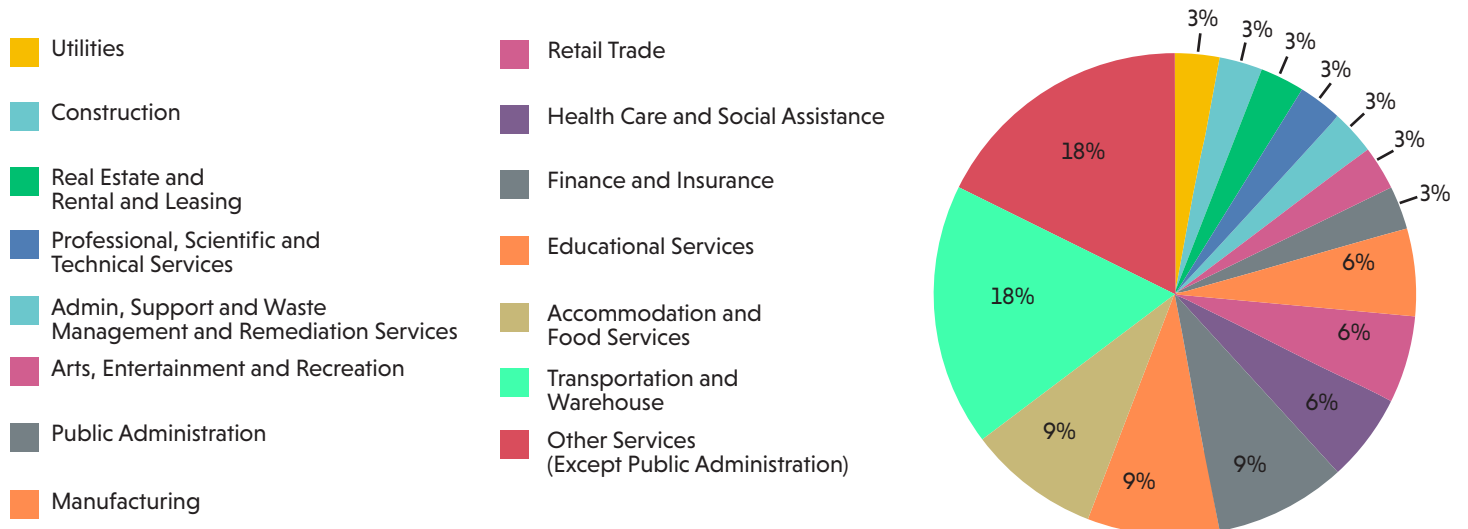


**Employer Survey**



**Figure A.2: Industry**

**Employer Survey**

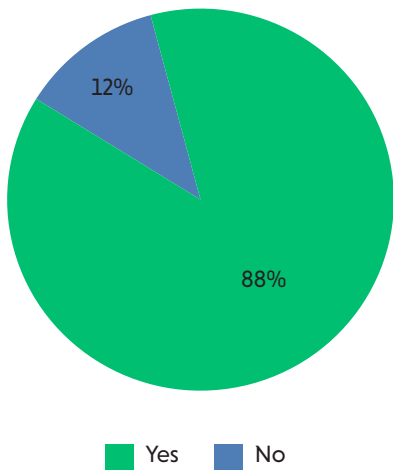


## Professional Roles and Tenure

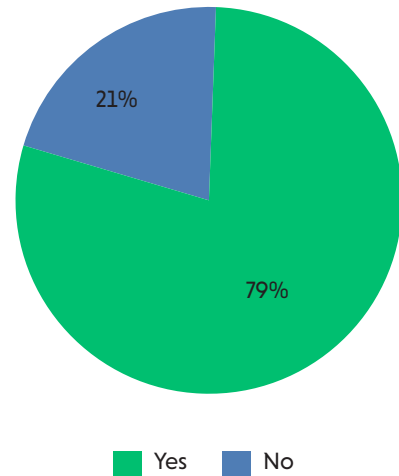
The respondents' professional roles and experience reflect their influence in shaping workforce practices and policies. Among employers, 88 percent reported being directly involved in hiring decisions (Figure A.3), while 79 percent held roles that allowed them to influence broader hiring policies and systems (Figure A.4).

Half of Employer Survey respondents held HR positions, and another 26 percent were in executive roles (Figure A.5). Well over half of respondents had significant tenure in their organization (including 41 percent with more than 10 years) (Figure A.6). This, along with their leadership positions, suggests that most respondents had a robust understanding of the workings of their company, including needs and challenges.

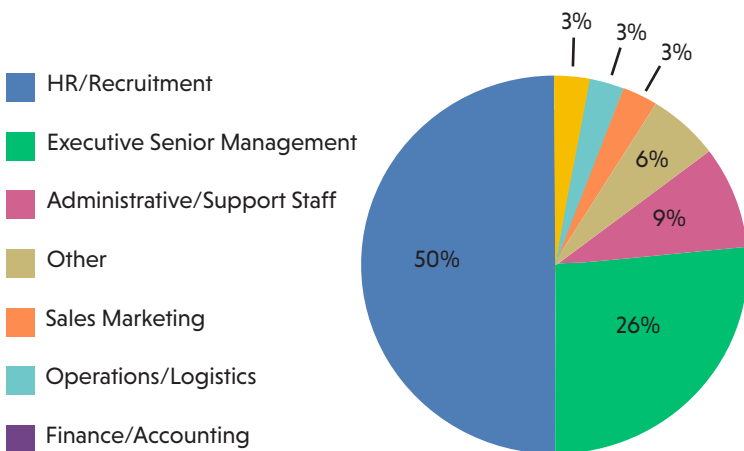
**Figure A.3: Respondent's Influence on Hiring Decisions**  
Employer Survey



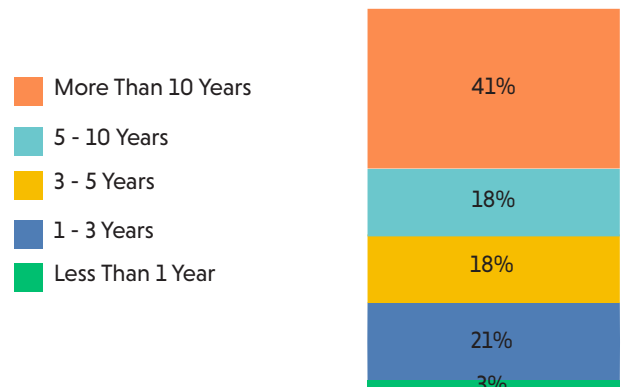
**Figure A.4: Respondent's Influence on Overall Hiring Policies and Systems**  
Employer Survey



**Figure A.5: Respondent's Position in Company**  
Employer Survey



**Figure A.6: Respondent's Tenure with Company**  
Employer Survey

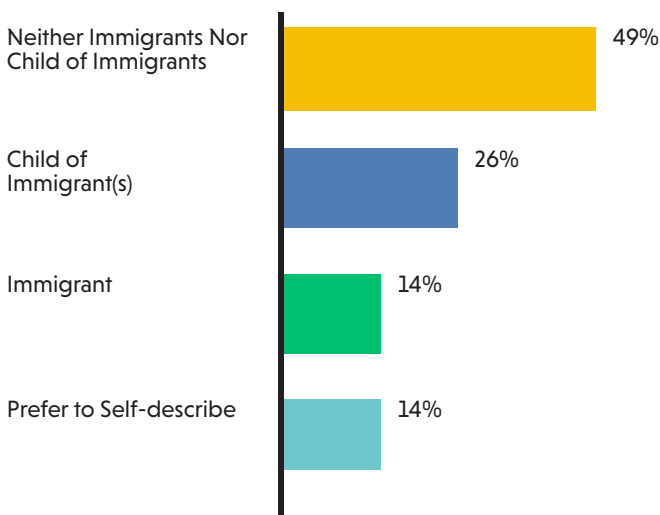


## Respondent Characteristics

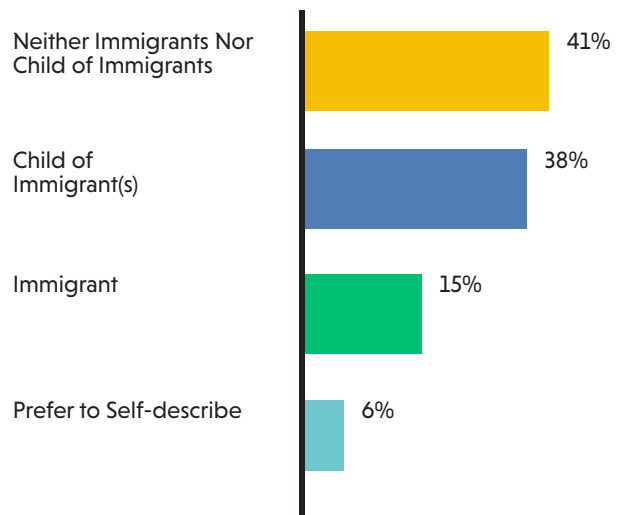
More than half of respondents across both surveys reported being either immigrants or children of immigrants, reflecting a strong connection to immigrant backgrounds (Figure A.7). This proximity to the immigrant community is unsurprising in California, where 27 percent of the population is foreign born.<sup>5</sup> Respondents' personal connection to immigrant experiences likely influences their recognition of immigrant contributions and challenges in the workforce.

Figure A.7: Immigrant Backgrounds of Respondents

### Business Organization Survey



### Employer Survey



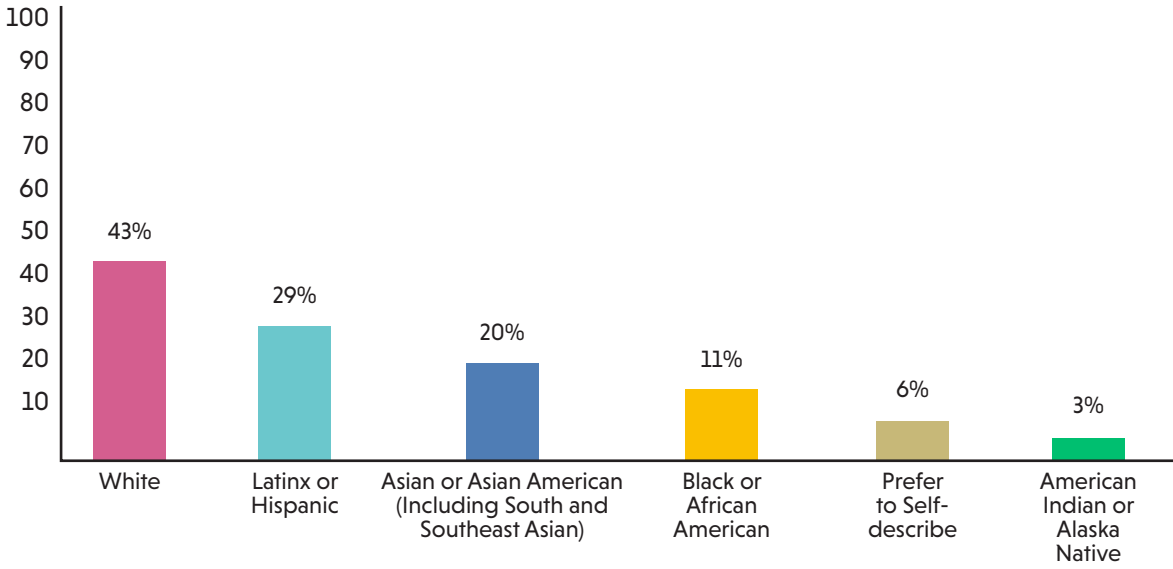
## Racial and Ethnic Diversity

The survey respondents represent a broad spectrum of racial and ethnic backgrounds, reflecting the diversity of California's workforce and business leadership (Figure A.8). Respondents identified overwhelmingly as White (43 percent in Business Organization Survey, 38 percent in Employer Survey) or Latinx/Hispanic (29 percent in Business Organization Survey, 41 percent in Employer Survey), followed by 20 percent as Asian/Asian American (20 percent in Business Organization Survey, 15 percent in Employer Survey) and Black/African American (11 percent in Business Organization Survey, nine percent in Employer Survey), with small shares of American Indians/Native Americans and those who preferred to self-describe. The racial/ethnic diversity of respondents underscores the varied perspectives shaping immigrant workforce inclusion practices across the state.

5. Cuellar Mejia, M., C. Perez, and H. Johnson, January 2025. Immigrants in California. Public Policy Institute of California. <https://www.ppic.org/wp-content/uploads/jtf-immigrants-in-california.pdf>

# Figure A.8: Race/Ethnicity of Respondents

## Business Organization Survey



## Employer Survey

