

Missing in Action

Immigrant Women's Pay Disparities in the Workforce

INTRODUCTION

As the labor landscape shifts, it is more critical than ever to examine who is holding up the U.S. workforce — and who is being left behind. Immigrant women are a vital yet often invisible pillar of the U.S. economy. Today, they make up [over 16% of all working women](#), and their presence in essential industries like healthcare, education, and caregiving has grown significantly over the past decade.

Yet despite their increasing contributions, immigrant women remain largely absent from national conversations about wage equity. The gender pay gap in the U.S. persists: in 2022, white women earned [82 cents for every dollar](#) paid to white men, with even deeper disparities for women of color, including 67 cents for Black women and 57 cents for Latina women.

But the data on immigrant women is incomplete, making their economic impact — and the inequities they face — easier to ignore. This lack of visibility has real consequences, contributing to their continued underpayment and exclusion from critical policy interventions.



THE WAGE GAP FOR IMMIGRANT WOMEN

For 25 years, Upwardly Global has supported thousands of immigrant women in securing professional roles. Our analysis of 2,800 immigrant women's starting salaries (2018–2024) reveals significant wage disparities, particularly for those with advanced degrees. Despite their qualifications, immigrant women consistently earn less than both U.S. workers and immigrant men. Notably, language was not a significant factor, as Upwardly Global only works with proficient English speakers.

**With a bachelor's degree,
for every \$1 earned by U.S. men:**

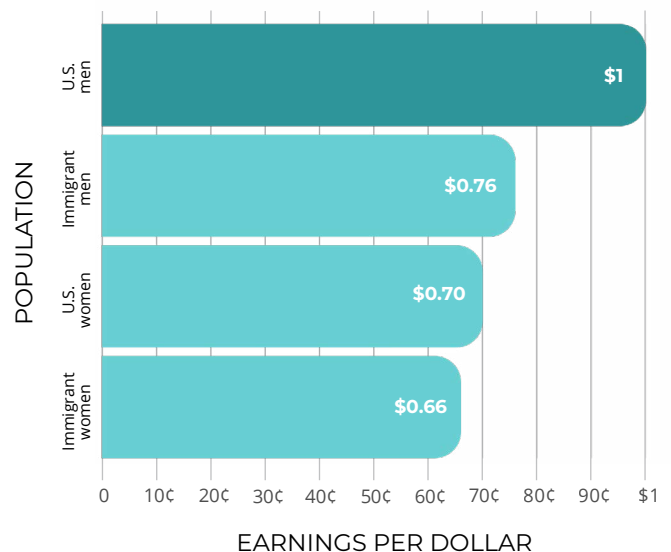
Immigrant men earned \$0.76
U.S. women earned \$0.70
Immigrant women earned \$0.66

**With a master's degree,
for every \$1 earned by U.S. men:**

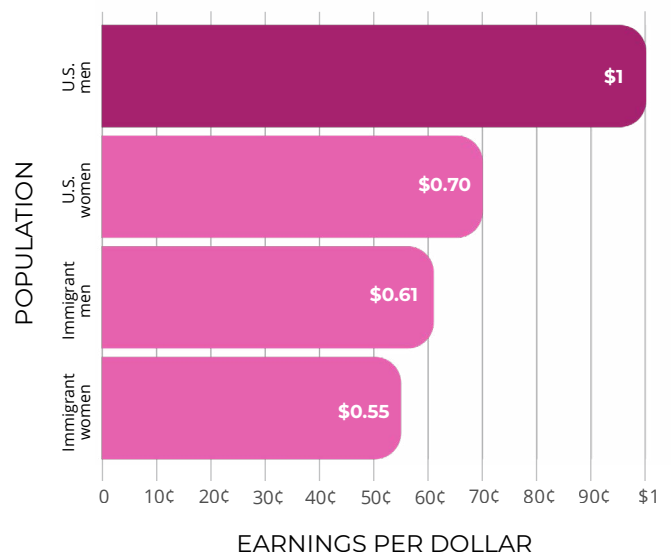
U.S. women earned \$0.70
Immigrant men earned \$0.61
Immigrant women earned \$0.55

Education is often seen as a path to economic mobility — but for immigrant women, that path narrows with each additional degree. While U.S. women saw a \$17,669 income boost between a bachelor's and master's degree, immigrant women's median income increased by just \$3,870, a difference of over 350%. In effect, the more educated immigrant women become, the more sharply the wage gap grows.

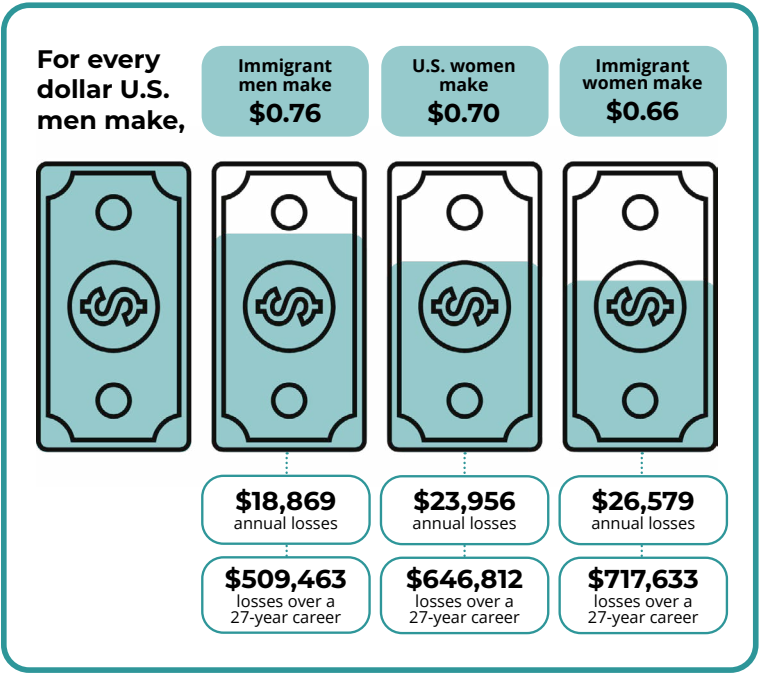
BACHELOR'S DEGREE WAGE GAPS



MASTER'S DEGREE WAGE GAPS



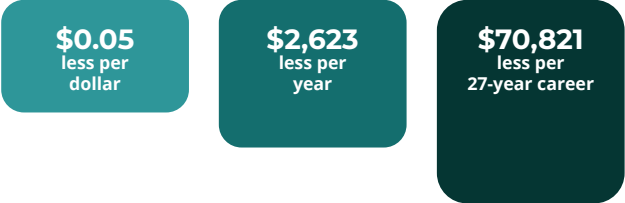
BACHELOR’S DEGREE WAGE GAPS (BASED ON OVERALL MEDIAN INCOME)



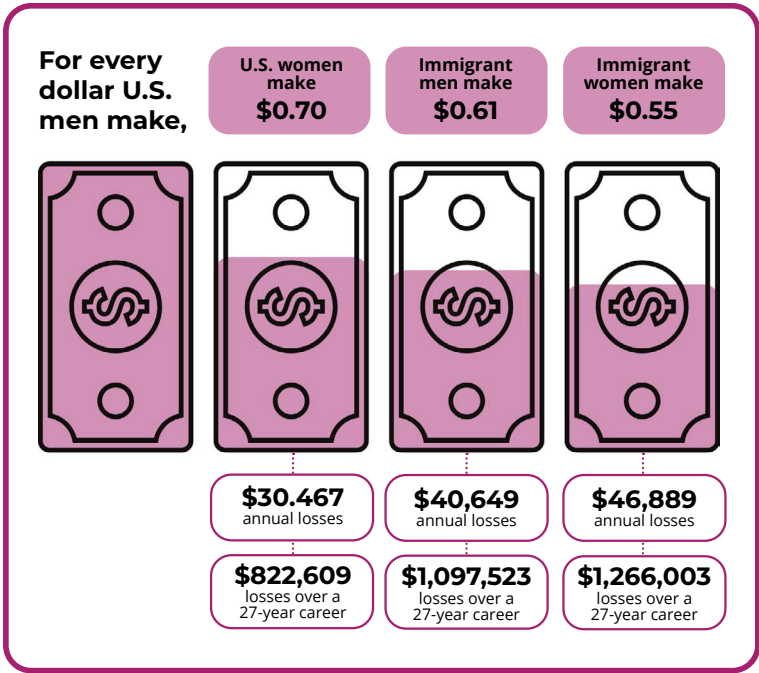
Immigrant women make less than immigrant men



Immigrant women make less than U.S. women



MASTER’S DEGREE WAGE GAPS (BASED ON OVERALL MEDIAN INCOME)



Immigrant women make less than U.S. women



Immigrant women make less than immigrant men



THE CYCLE OF ECONOMIC DISADVANTAGE

The data is clear — immigrant women face compounded barriers tied to both gender and immigration status, which intensify as they pursue higher-paying, specialized roles. Those with advanced degrees often experience credential devaluation, especially if their education was obtained abroad, and are more likely to encounter bias in hiring and limited access to professional networks, keeping them out of leadership and higher-paying positions.

This persistent wage gap restricts immigrant women's ability to support their families, invest in education or homeownership, and build long-term financial security. Despite their qualifications, many remain trapped in low-paying roles with limited mobility. On a broader scale, their underpaid labor weakens the U.S. economy by sidelining a competent workforce, stifling productivity, and reducing consumer spending. Closing this gap isn't just a matter of fairness — it's also vital in stabilizing the country's economic future.

HOW TO CLOSE THE GAP

Employers, policymakers, and workforce organizations must implement collaborative initiatives to bridge this gap; Upwardly Global recommends the following:



EMPLOYER-LEVEL CHANGE

- › Provide childcare and eldercare benefits, as well as paid family leave, particularly at larger organizations where resources are available.
- › Address pay disparities and implement pay transparency policies.
- › Invest in resources tailored to immigrant women, such as credential evaluation services, industry-specific certification programs, mentorship and networking opportunities, and leadership development programs.
- › Adopt and expand skills-based hiring, including among senior roles, to increase career opportunities for immigrant women.
- › Build cross-industry coalitions to share best practices and foster a more inclusive workplace culture.



STATE AND FEDERAL POLICY CHANGE

- › Implement state and federal policies enforcing pay transparency and fair pay practices.
- › Expand paid family leave and childcare support.
- › Encourage investment in career coaching and workforce development programs that equip immigrant women with industry-specific skills.



WORKFORCE ORGANIZATION CHANGE

- › Create peer-to-peer, women-only workforce sessions that allow women to share experiences, strengthen confidence, and provide emotional support to one another.
- › Develop structured mentorship or sponsorship programs that connect immigrant women with U.S.-born women in their field.
- › Provide targeted salary negotiation training.

In today's political climate, it is more important than ever for employers, policymakers, and advocacy groups to act in coalition to ensure that immigrant women are fairly compensated for their contributions. With growing challenges and systemic barriers facing this group, the path forward demands bold action and systemic change. Closing the gap is essential in strengthening our workforce, promoting social stability, and fostering long-term economic resilience.

Learn more about Upwardly Global's [Economic Power Initiative](#).

