

Making Ends Meet: Hmong Socioeconomic Trends in the U.S.

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Abstract

This article examines Hmong socioeconomic trends from 1990 to 2010. A review of economic indicators across states and in relation to the U.S. population reveals that on an aggregate level, the Hmong American population's socioeconomic status has improved significantly. The increases in income and earnings have, however, been shortchanged by external factors brought about partially by the financial crisis and its aftermath. Consequently, this begs us to question the extent to which such developments contribute to the overall economic wellbeing of Hmong Americans.

Keywords: Hmong Americans, socioeconomic status, income, poverty

Introduction

Today Hmong Americans are found throughout the United States. Internal migrations have resulted in the establishment of large and small communities, and the Hmong seem to thrive in certain locations more than others (Vang, 2010). Although they are a small proportion of the U.S. population, the exponential growth of the Hmong American community and their concentration in a few states makes them stand out. What factors have contributed to differences in socioeconomic status of Hmong Americans in the various communities? To what extent has the U.S. economic recession impacted Hmong Americans? Given their concentration in certain industries, how has their employment status been affected by significant job losses in those industries? While there are no simple answers to these questions, this article explores changes in

social and economic characteristics over the last few decades to attain a snapshot of how the Hmong American community is faring at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

Methodology

Using Census data from 1990, 2000, and 2010,¹ this study examined indicators of socioeconomic status across geographic locations and in relation to the overall U.S. population.² Greater attention is given to developments in the three states with the largest Hmong populations: California, Minnesota, and Wisconsin. When information is available, comparisons are made with states that have smaller population sizes.

Indicators of Economic Wellbeing

Education, income and occupation are commonly used to measure socioeconomic status. Since the majority of foreign-born Hmong Americans arrived in the U.S. with little or no formal education, few have been able to access high paying jobs. The situation is exacerbated by the recent economic recession. Similar to other Americans, it is difficult for many Hmong Americans to be optimistic about the U.S. economy when they are faced with limited job opportunities at the local level, and gloom often dominates state and national employment forecasts. In his August 26, 2011 speech at the Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City Economic Symposium, Federal Reserve Bank Chairman Ben S. Bernanke asserted:

[It] is clear that the recovery from the crisis has been much less robust than we had hoped. From the latest comprehensive revisions to the national accounts as well as the most recent estimates of growth in the first half of this year, we have learned that the recession was even deeper and the recovery even weaker than we had thought; indeed, aggregate output in the United States still has not returned to the level that it attained before the crisis. Importantly, economic growth has for the most part been at rates insufficient to achieve sustained reductions in unemployment, which has recently been fluctuating a bit above 9 percent.

The Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) further contends in its May 2012 forecast that despite moderate employment gains and an increase in pace of consumer

spending during the first half of 2011, real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth in the U.S. was projected to increase only gradually in 2012 and 2013. The housing demand had increased noticeably, but the overhang of unsold homes and the tide of foreclosures will restrain the revival in residential investment (2012). Such assessments result from the fact that job creation has not kept up with labor demands. Despite many Americans' willingness to work, the number and types of jobs that they seek continues to dwindle.

Employment Status

The United States Department of Labor defines people with jobs as employed while people who are jobless, looking for jobs, and available for work are considered unemployed. People who are neither employed nor unemployed are not in the labor force. The sum of the employed and the unemployed population (16 years and over) constitute the civilian labor force.³ When examining Hmong labor force participation, notable increases in the percentage of those who are employed are evident. The gap between Hmong employment and that of the U.S. population narrowed from 1990 to 2010, as shown in Table 1. In 1990, there was a 40% difference, but by 2000, it had decreased to 15%, and then to 9% in 2010.

Table 1. Labor Force Participation⁴

| Year | Percent civilian Employed |
|-------------|----------------------------------|
| 1990 | 60% (24%) |
| 2000 | 62% (47%) |
| 2010 | 65% (56%) |

Table 2 shows marked differences in labor force participation in the three states that have the largest Hmong populations. The percentage of Wisconsin's employed Hmong population most closely mirrors the state's overall population (from 2% in 2000 to 1% in 2010). The gap between Hmong and state populations in California and Minnesota are much higher, but it is important to note that the difference in both states decreased from 20% to about 10% between

2000 and 2010. Employment rate variations are found when comparing Hmong populations across the country. Data from 2010 shows that the highest percentage of employment is found in Georgia (79%) followed by Colorado (76%), North Carolina (74%), and Arkansas (74%). The lowest employment rate is in Oregon (57%),⁵ while Hmong civilian labor force rates in California, Minnesota and Wisconsin are 49%, 59% and 63%, respectively.⁶

Table 2: Labor Force Participation in Large Population Concentrations

| State | % Civilian Employed 2000 State (Hmong) | % Civilian Employed 2010 State (Hmong) |
|-------|---|---|
| CA | 58% (38%) | 58% (49%) |
| MN | 68% (48%) | 66% (59%) |
| WI | 66% (64%) | 64% (63%) |

Industry

Industries that dominated Hmong employment over the course of the last three decades include: manufacturing; education services, health care, and social assistance; and retail trade. Hmong Americans have gravitated toward manufacturing jobs at a significantly higher rate than the U.S. population. Whereas the U.S. population’s participation in the manufacturing industry was 18% in 1990, 37% of employed Hmong worked in this industry. In 2000, 43% of Hmong men worked in this industry. Although the manufacturing industry maintained its highest rate of Hmong participation, the percentage in 2010 had decreased to 29% compared to 11% for the U.S. population. When examining 2010 state data closely, significant differences are apparent. In Wisconsin, 18% of the state’s population is employed in manufacturing jobs, while 40% of the Hmong population works in this industry. Minnesota is similar to Wisconsin, with 30% of its Hmong population working in manufacturing, compared to 14% of the state’s total population. In contrast, 10% of California’s total population and 15% of the Hmong in California work in manufacturing. In North Carolina and Oregon, 50% of the Hmong populations work in this industry. Hmong in the state of Alaska have minimal participation in this industry.

The educational services, health care and social assistance industries are the second largest in which Hmong work (19%).⁷ This should not come as a surprise, since the service industry was the driving force behind job growth throughout the 1990s (Hatch & Clinton, 2000). Home health care workers and social service providers added millions of jobs during that time. An increase in formal education led many former refugees and second-generation Hmong to work as teachers, nurses and other health care professionals, and within a multitude of social service positions. Employers who serve Hmong families often hire bilingual staff. Whereas many Hmong Americans work in the education services, health care and social assistance industries in states with large Hmong populations, few do so in states such as Arkansas (2%) and Oregon (5%).⁸

Occupations

As mentioned earlier, important obstacles prevented Hmong Americans from pursuing some occupations. The most common jobs in 1990 were operators, fabricators and laborers (32%); followed by service (20%); technical, sales, and administrative support (19%); and precision production, craft and repair (14%). Few working Hmong Americans held managerial and professional specialty positions (13%). Table 3 shows that Hmong occupations diversified from 2000 and 2010. Clearly the longer the Hmong live in the U.S., the broader their occupation distribution. More men and women had management, business, science, and arts occupations in 2000 and 2010 than in 1990. Although comparison of a few occupations is not straightforward due to label changes, the data shows that Hmong Americans had diversified their occupations by 2010. Sales and office occupations increased for Hmong women. Occupations in management, business, science and arts increased for both. Interestingly, the number of women in 2010 in these occupations was higher than for men (21% compared to 19%). Fewer Hmong women

(2%) work in natural resources, construction, and maintenance occupations when compared to Hmong men (7%).

Table 3: Hmong Occupational Distribution⁹

| Occupations | 1990 | 2000 Male (female) | 2010 Male (female) |
|--|-------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Production, transportation & material moving | -- | 46% (37%) | 38% (22%) |
| Sales & office | -- | 15% (28%) | 20% (32%) |
| Management, business, sci. & arts | -- | 18% (17%) | 19% (21%) |
| Service | 20% | 14% (17) | 16% (23%) |
| Nat. resources, construction & maintenance | -- | 7% (1%) | 7% (2%) |
| Operators, fabricators & laborers | 32% | -- | -- |
| Precision production, craft & repair | 14% | -- | -- |
| Technical, sales & administrative support | 19% | -- | -- |
| Managerial & professional specialty | 13% | -- | -- |

Hmong occupations seem to be dictated by the types of employment opportunities available in different geographic locations; thus, certain occupations are more common in some states than others. When comparing Hmong occupations in different locations in 2010, the highest percentage of Hmong in management, business, science, and arts occupations was seen in Oregon (27%). Southern states had fewer people in these types of jobs, illustrated by Arkansas, North Carolina and Oklahoma each having only 9%. Alaska had the highest percentage participating in service occupations (33%) when compared to all other states with Hmong populations over 2,000, while the lowest was seen in Colorado (6%). The Hmong population in Alaska population also had the highest percentage of residents working in sales and office occupations (47%), but was the lowest in production, transportation, and material moving occupations (11%). Whereas 31% of the US population had production, transportation, and material moving occupations, the proportion of Hmong Americans in these occupations was

much higher in multiple states: Arkansas (53%), North Carolina (49%), Colorado (46%), Oklahoma (44%), Wisconsin (43%), Michigan (40%) and Oregon (40%).¹⁰

Income

In households with low earnings, it often requires multiple wage earners to make ends meet. According to the Census Bureau, household income includes the income of the head of household, as well as all other individuals over 15 years old in the household, whether they are related to the householder or not. Family income consists of the incomes of all members over 15 years old who are related to the householder.¹¹ The fact that some households have higher percentages of earnings does not necessarily translate into higher income. For example, 91% of Hmong American households in 2010 had earnings, which was higher than the 79% of U.S. households with earnings, but as seen in Table 4, Hmong household income lagged dramatically behind the U.S. population. Since 1990, the gap in household income has narrowed, but the difference between the U.S. population per capita and Hmong per capita income has widened. Larger family size and lower income help to explain the latter.

Table 4: Hmong Household and Per Capita Income

| Year | Household U.S. (Hmong) | Per Capita U.S. (Hmong) |
|-------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1990 | \$30,056 (\$14,276) | \$14,387 (\$2,692) |
| 2000 | \$41,994 (\$32,076) | \$21,587 (\$6,600) |
| 2010 | \$51,200 (\$47,200) | \$26,279 (\$11,766) |

The most recent Census found that among the three states with large Hmong populations, the biggest difference in median household income is seen in California. Whereas the state median household income is \$60,000, the Hmong median household income is \$43,400. In Minnesota, it is \$56,500 compared to \$49,400. The Hmong median household income in Wisconsin of \$49,200 is closer to the state's median household income of \$50,800. As for

Hmong median family income, it is \$15,000 lower than the total U.S. population (\$62,100 compared to \$47,400). The family income differences in California and Minnesota are even greater by \$25,000 (\$67,800 compared to \$42,600) and \$22,000 (\$70,400 compared to \$48,200), respectively. The difference in Wisconsin is \$14,000 (\$64,000 compared to \$50,000).¹² The highest Hmong median household and family incomes are not found in the three states with large Hmong populations – Colorado’s Hmong population leads in both, with a median household income of \$65,100 and a median family income of \$73,300, followed by Georgia with a median household income of \$54,000 and median family income of \$58,600. The lowest is found in Alaska with \$23,700 as the median household income, and median family income of \$24,100.¹³

Hmong earnings in general are significantly lower than that of the U.S. population. When gender and household composition are taken into consideration, the differences are even more significant. In 2000, the median earnings for persons 16 years and over in the U.S. population was \$23,755, while Hmong Americans had median earnings of \$15,835. When the Hmong data is disaggregated, Hmong women have median earnings that are even lower (\$13,056 compared to \$18,221 for Hmong men). For 2010, median earnings for Hmong males doing full-time, year-round work are \$15,500 less than males in the U.S. population (\$30,900 compared to \$46,400). Although women in the U.S. population earn less than men, their earnings are higher than that of Hmong men (\$36,100 compared to \$30,900). Hmong women have median earnings (\$27,800) that are slightly lower than Hmong men.¹⁴ Lack of formal education, in addition to employment concentration in low-paying jobs contributes to this dire condition. Also, a higher percentage of Hmong households receive supplemental security income (SSI) than the U.S. general population (15% compared to 4%).¹⁵

Poverty Status

Given their low earnings and income status, it is understandable that a higher proportion of the Hmong American population would experience poverty. According to the U.S. Federal Poverty Guidelines, a family of four making less than \$23,050 annually is considered to be living in poverty.¹⁶ Table 5 illustrates the considerable decrease in poverty rate among Hmong Americans since 1990. Whereas 64% lived below the poverty line in 1990 (compared to 14% in U.S. population), in 2000 the Hmong poverty rate was reduced to 38% (compared to 12% in U.S. population), and by 2010, the rate had decreased to 25% (compared to 11% in U.S. population).

Table 5: Poverty Rate

| Year | Poverty Rate U.S. (Hmong) |
|-------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1990 | 14% (64%) |
| 2000 | 12% (38%) |
| 2010 | 11% (25%) |

The decreases in poverty rates seen above are notable, but it should not be overlooked that the Hmong American poverty rate is twice as high as that of the general U.S. population in 2010. Furthermore, 2010 data shows that significant differences exist in poverty levels in the three states with largest Hmong populations: the population of California has a poverty rate of 11% compared to the Hmong rate of 31%; Minnesota's general population has a 7% poverty rate while Hmong experiencing poverty is at 26%; and Wisconsin residents have a poverty rate of 8% compared to Hmong poverty rate of 19%. The most impoverished families in both the U.S. and Hmong populations are female-headed households (30% and 44%, respectively). Those with related children under the age of five experience the highest level of poverty (46% in the general U.S. population, compared to 57% within the Hmong population).¹⁷ As illustrated in Table 6, three states with significant Hmong populations have higher percentages of families living in

poverty than California: Alaska (59%), Oklahoma (42%), and Washington (34%). Georgia and Colorado have the lowest percentages of Hmong families living in poverty, at 5% and 2%, respectively.¹⁸ This is not surprising, however, given that the Hmong in these two states have the highest median household incomes (\$65,100 in Colorado and \$54,000 in Georgia).

Table 6: Poverty Status among Hmong Families

| State | All Families | Under 18 years |
|-------|--------------|----------------|
| AK | 59.1% | 52.0% |
| AR | 20.8% | 30.8% |
| CA | 30.7% | 41.9% |
| CO | 2.0% | 3.0% |
| GA | 4.9% | 15.2% |
| MI | 16.0% | 17.5% |
| MN | 26.2% | 34.6% |
| NC | 20.0% | 21.5% |
| OK | 42.0% | 58.8% |
| OR | 21.5% | 20.1% |
| WA | 34.0% | 50.2% |
| WI | 20.3% | 21.0% |

Households with Public Assistance

Studies examining the impoverished lives of the Hmong community have been the norm for years due to the initial reliance on public assistance.¹⁹ The number of Hmong participating in government programs has decreased dramatically since their initial arrival in the late 1970s, but is still significantly higher than the U.S. population. Whereas less than 3% of the total U.S. population receives cash public assistance income, slightly more than 12% of Hmong Americans do. Similar differences exist in California and Minnesota; however, in Wisconsin, where 2% of the state population relies on public cash assistance, 4% of the state’s Hmong population gets such financial support, as shown in Table 7. It is evident that while some families may not receive cash assistance, they depend on food stamps to make ends meet – the general U.S. population has a 10% food stamp usage in comparison to 29% of Hmong households. The

percentage of Hmong in California who use food stamps is 35% while it is 33% in Minnesota and 21% in Wisconsin.

Table7: Households with Public Assistance

| Year | Total U.S. (Hmong) | CA (Hmong) | MN (Hmong) | WI (Hmong) |
|------|--------------------|------------|------------|------------|
| 1990 | 10% (67%) | -- | -- | -- |
| 2000 | 3% (30%) | 5% (50%) | 3% (28%) | 2% (11%) |
| 2010 | 3% (12%) | 4% (19%) | 3% (14%) | 2% (4%) |

Homeownership

Throughout most of the last half of the twentieth century, home ownership in American society had been considered an asset. Owning one’s home constitutes an important part of the “American Dream.” Despite having lower income levels than the general U.S. population, many Hmong families have purchased their own homes. With the average Hmong family size larger than that of the U.S. population (4.5 compared to 2.5 persons), some Hmong are motivated to buy rather than rent because of restrictions placed on the number of people permitted in rental units. While the homeownership rate in the U.S. population remained at 66% from 2000 to 2010, the percentage of home ownership for Hmong Americans increased from 39% to 46% during this period. However, the majority of Hmong Americans are renters (54%).

As Table 8 outlines, differences do exist in owner-occupied housing units across Hmong communities, as 33% of the Hmong in California, 49% in Minnesota, and 55% in Wisconsin own their homes. The highest rate of owner-occupied housing units is found in Arkansas (81%), followed by Michigan (76%), Georgia (71%), Oklahoma (66%), and North Carolina (64%).²⁰ It is important to note that movement of Hmong to southern states was motivated by their ability to purchase poultry farms, which partially explains the high rates of owner-occupied housing units in these states.

Table 8: Hmong owner-occupied housing units, 2010

| State | AK | AR | CA | CO | GA | MI | MN | NC | OK | OR | WA | WI |
|------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| Percentage | 45% | 81% | 33% | 52% | 71% | 76% | 49% | 64% | 66% | 32% | 38% | 55% |

Discussion

It is frequently pointed out that the recent financial crisis and its aftermath have taken an enormous toll on American families. Though a reality for those affected, it is equally necessary to call attention that these economic problems existed before the crisis, and existed for some more than others. Indeed, income inequality is certainly not a new phenomenon. There is no doubt that the crisis of joblessness has pervaded urban America and small towns that depended heavily on certain industries that have either disintegrated or moved overseas. Hmong who live in areas with distressed labor markets are not immune to economic hardships confronted by other Americans. The lack of jobs to provide full-time employment to the working age population has created conditions wherein many are either working for less pay or not at all.

Hmong Americans' heavy concentration in certain industries that have been impacted by the U.S. economic crisis has affected multiple aspects of their lives. Their concentration in the manufacturing industry made them vulnerable to the declining availability of manufacturing jobs that do not require specialized training. When those with limited formal education lose a manufacturing or production job, the probability that they will find another at the same pay is low. As Youngjoo Cha and Stephen L. Morgan (2010) found in their study of displaced U.S. workers between 2003 and 2008, those who are re-employed suffer from earnings losses in their new jobs. The losses are larger among those who switch industries, especially among those who move to traditional low-wage industries in the service sector.

Hmong Americans have sought professions in educational services, health care, and social assistance industries primarily to provide services to members of their ethnic community. Recent cuts to education and social programs at the state and federal levels have reduced the number of jobs in these industries. The number of nonprofit organizations established by Hmong Americans increased tremendously during the 1990s due to funding by philanthropic institutions and government programs to serve those in need (Vang, 2010). The economy has also impacted philanthropic institutions' ability to support social assistance agencies that create jobs for employees to serve vulnerable populations. Competition between nonprofit organizations to serve the same population, in addition to the decrease in funding available from foundations and corporations, have forced many of these organizations to go out of business or reduce staff drastically. Thus, the employment opportunities in this sector no longer exist at the rate that they did during the 1990s.

Another area of job growth from which many Hmong Americans have benefited is home healthcare services. This industry grew the fastest during the 1990s and made the list of the top 20 in terms of number of jobs gained (Hatch & Clinton, 2000). Medicare expanded benefits to allow more people to be eligible for home healthcare coverage, making the cost associated with care at home less than at hospitals. Since most elderly and disabled Hmong Americans rely on SSI and medical assistance, many are eligible for medical treatment as well as personal care services in the comfort of their home. Minimal requirements at the state level have allowed Hmong Americans to establish personal care agencies that provide job opportunities to people in their community. Mainstream personal care agencies also hired bilingual staff to attract Hmong clients. Often, family members are employed by personal care agencies to assist their elderly and disabled kin. Not only has government cuts reduced the level of funding for services, but

intense competition for clients has negatively impacted the profitability of Hmong personal care agencies. If owners are successful, they often merely break even.

For those who have invested their savings in sales and service businesses, the market has also forced many to close their doors. For example, in the early 2000s, the real estate market saw an increase in Hmong real estate brokers and agents in areas with large Hmong concentrations, such as the Twin Cities and the California Central Valley. Despite record low interest rates, joblessness and credit problems prevent many from purchasing homes, thus reducing the need for realtor services. Other businesses established by Hmong to serve members of their ethnic community were successful when only a few existed. Similar to real estate brokerage firms and personal care agencies, law offices, chiropractic clinics, and grocery stores face the challenge of only being able to serve people from the Hmong American community. Along this same line of establishing entities to serve Hmong Americans is the creation of Hmong-focused charter schools. Since the opening of HOPE Academy in St. Paul, Minnesota in 2001, eight charter schools are currently in operation. Most are in the Twin Cities and have grown beyond capacity due to the large Hmong population (Moua, 2008). The first and only charter school in Wisconsin, Hmong American Peace Academy, opened in 2004 and serves nearly 1,000 students in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. In 2010, the first Hmong-focused charter school in California, Yav Pem Suab (Preparing for the Future) Academy, opened in Sacramento. Much excitement exists from education leaders and their supporters. Parents report feeling more comfortable in these learning environments than in mainstream schools where they may not be able to communicate with teachers and administrators. Critics argued against isolation of Hmong students from opportunities to learn and interact with students of diverse backgrounds, thus contributing to public school segregation.²¹ Although quality varies from school to school,

the recent closure of a couple charter schools in Minnesota due to low performance forces us to rethink the opportunities.

It is evident that Hmong Americans have sought many opportunities available to them to improve their lives in America. Taking risks to participate in the small farms industry is no exception. The vast majority of Hmong who reside in southern states (Arkansas, Oklahoma, and North Carolina) are farmers who contract with various companies to raise animals in large-scale operations (i.e. chickens, turkey, and cattle). Initially considered by Hmong Americans as a way to be their own bosses and own land, many flocked to buy poultry and breeder farms in the Ozarks. By the mid-2000s, enormous problems loomed over their operations (Potts, 2011; Vang, 2004). Inflated appraisals, exaggerated income projection on poultry production operations, inclusion of projected income from other sources, and underestimated living expenses contributed to financial crisis for Hmong farmers. The lack of cash flow, high fuel costs and repairs resulted in some not being able to maintain their operations. Some even resorted to filing for bankruptcy instead of borrowing more from banks (Speier, 2006). When they lose their contracts, the Hmong often have no other means of sustaining themselves, since most have exhausted all of their finances to purchase these farms (Vang, 2010, pp. 65-67). In addition to their own savings, some also borrowed money from family and friends, so when they fail, the effect can be extensive.

Income is the most common measurement of wealth, but it is important to note that wealth can be broadly defined depending on people's values and perspectives. The decline in overall poverty in the Hmong population from 40% in 2000 to 25% in 2010 is a sign that they are doing better. However, income remains a significant issue for the community, as today, the Hmong remain one of the poorest ethnic groups in the U.S. Family and per capita income rank

much lower than the general population. The high rate of those living in poverty in states such as Alaska is troubling. With 80% of Alaska's Hmong population working service jobs, sales and office occupations, it suggests that many may be working in low-paying positions, and thus live in poverty despite being employed.

This dire situation requires many to utilize safety net programs for survival. Since its inception, social safety net programs have played an important role in U.S. society. As temporary support until their economic situations improve, government programs have helped to prevent higher rates of homelessness, and have ensured the health and safety of millions of Americans. Although Hmong reliance on public assistance has decreased significantly from their early years in the U.S., a high percentage of Hmong Americans continue to depend on government programs. Households led by women are more likely to experience poverty than those led by men. The increase in divorce among Hmong American couples will likely continue to have a significant impact on female-headed households. Furthermore, the lack of retirement income suggests that poverty will continue for many Hmong Americans. In 1990, only 3% of Hmong households had retirement income. No change has occurred, as Hmong households that had retirement income in 2010 remained at 3%, compared to 17% in the U.S. population. Low paying jobs and large family sizes are possible factors influencing Hmong Americans' inability to save for retirement. If they struggle financially to meet their current basic needs, saving for the future may not be a priority. If Hmong views on aging are taken into consideration, it also may be that some expect their adult children to care for them in old age. However, the current and foreseeable economic challenges do not suggest that Hmong adults will be able to financially care for their elders.

CONCLUSION

This review of socioeconomic trends during the last few decades illustrates that the economic wellbeing of Hmong families varies across the country. While their overall poverty status has decreased as their earnings and income have increased, like other Americans, the Hmong American community continues to struggle economically. The outsourcing of both unskilled and skilled jobs to developing countries has impacted many in the immigrant generation who lack formal education, as well as recent college graduates. Given the numerous factors that contribute to socioeconomic status, it is difficult to adequately address the issues with short-term strategies. Comprehensive efforts at multiple levels are needed to empower and enable the Hmong to improve their lives. Legislative initiatives at the state and federal level need to include resources not only for job creation, but also job training. At the individual and Hmong community level, education programs to guide and train people for industries with projected job growth will help to ensure that Hmong Americans have the skills needed to meet future job demands, rise out of poverty, and begin to build assets and wealth.

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NOTES

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² This analysis includes American Community Survey (ACS) three- and five-year estimates. Note that three-year estimates are available only for California, Minnesota and Wisconsin. Data included for states with Hmong populations greater than 2000 are from five-year ACS estimates. In addition to CA, MN, and WI these states include: Alaska, Arkansas, Colorado, Georgia, Michigan, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Oregon, and Washington.

³ Definitions can also be found at the United States Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2010 Subject Definitions. http://www.census.gov/acs/www/data_documentation/documentation_main/ (Accessed September 5, 2012).

⁴ See the reports *1990 Census of Population: Asians and Pacific Islanders in the United States*, *Hmong 2000 Census Publication: Data and Analysis* and 2008-2010 American Community Survey three-year Estimates.

⁵ U.S. Census Bureau, 2006-2010 ACS 5-year Estimates. Note that total Hmong population 16 years and over by state varies considerably from 52,323 in California to 663 in Arkansas.

⁶ U.S. Census Bureau, 2008-2010 ACS 3-year Estimates

⁷ U.S. Census Bureau, 2008-2010 ACS 3-year Estimates

⁸ U.S. Census Bureau, 2006-2010 ACS 5-year Estimates

⁹ Note that the category names changed from 1990 to 2000.

¹⁰ U.S. Census Bureau, 2006-2010 ACS 5-year Estimates

¹¹ United States Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2010 Subject Definitions. http://www.census.gov/acs/www/data_documentation/documentation_main/ (Accessed September 5, 2012).

¹² U.S. Census Bureau, 2008-2010, ACS 3-year Estimates

¹³ U.S. Census Bureau, 2006-2010, ACS 5-year Estimates

¹⁴ U.S. Census Bureau, 2008-2010, ACS 3-year Estimates

¹⁵ U.S. Census Bureau, 2008-2010, ACS 3-year Estimates. SSI is a federal program for aged, blind, or disabled people with little or no income. Some Hmong Americans misunderstand this program because many elderly and disabled individuals receive it. They often refer to it as “nyiaj laus”, which is literally translated as money for the elderly. However, SSI is not retirement income.

¹⁶ 2012 Health and Human Services Poverty Guidelines: <http://aspe.hhs.gov/poverty/12poverty.shtml/>

¹⁷ U.S. Census Bureau, 2008-2010, ACS 3-year Estimates

¹⁸ U.S. Census Bureau, 2006-2010, ACS 5-year Estimates

¹⁹ Examples of such studies include, Westermeyer, Joseph; Callies, Allan; Neider, John. “Welfare status and psychosocial adjustment among 100 Hmong refugees”; Chung, R.C. and Bemak, F. “The effects of welfare status on psychological distress among Southeast Asian refugees.”

²⁰ U.S. Census Bureau, 2008-2010, ACS 3-year Estimates

²¹ See Institute on Race and Poverty report, *Failed Promises: Assessing Charter Schools in the Twin Cities*.