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Employment Status and Labour Income of Turkish and Other Immigrants in the United States

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Abstract

Turkish immigrants are a growing part of the US labour market. This article explores the employment status and labour income determinants of the Turkish immigrants in the US between 2000 and 2019, using data from the American Community Survey and comparing them with other immigrants. The estimation findings show that gender, age, marital status, English level, citizenship status, education level, occupation, and years spent in the US are significant determinants of the employment status and labour income of immigrants in the US. Although Turkish immigrants earn more on average than other immigrants, once other factors (such as gender, age, education level, years spent in the US, citizenship status, proficiency in English, and occupation) are taken into account, the regression analysis demonstrates that some Turkish immigrants earn exceptionally high salaries in the US; in contrast, the remainder earn average or below-average amounts.

Keywords: *Employment; high-skilled migration; labour income; the United States; Turkey-born immigrants*

Introduction

As of 2019, over 117,000 Turkey-born people[2] live in the US (United States Census Bureau, 2021). This population is highly engaged in the US labour market and includes extraordinarily successful and well-known businesspeople such as Hikmet Ersek, the CEO of the Western Union Company since 2010; Hamdi Ulukaya, the founder and CEO of the Chobani Yogurt Company since 2005; and Eren Ozmen and Fatih Ozmen, the co-owners of the Sierra Nevada Corporation since 1994. However, Turkish immigrants in the labour market of the US predominantly consist of wage earners and small business owners (Kaya, 2003).

The aim in the present article is to compare the factors determining the employability and labour income of Turkey-born and other immigrants, using data from the American Community Survey based on the Integrated Public Use Microdata Surveys (IPUMS USA) database (Ruggles et al., 2021). Thereby, this article includes only immigrants who reside in the US. The estimation findings show that gender, age, marital status, English level, citizenship status, education level, occupation, and years spent in the US are significant determinants of the employment status and labour income of immigrants in the US. Although Turkish immigrants earn higher on average, the regression analysis demonstrates that some Turkish

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[2] The foreign-born population includes anyone who was not a US citizen at birth, regardless of current US citizenship. In other words, an immigrant might be a US citizen by naturalization, or a non-citizen with a work permit (i.e., green card holder) or other kind of work permit (i.e., visa).

immigrants earn exceptionally high salaries in the US; in contrast, the remainder earn average or below-average amounts.

This article contributes to the literature by showing the position of a particular immigrant group, Turkish immigrants, in the US labour market by examining a large micro dataset and comparing it with other immigrants. Since the Turkish immigrants in the US include highly skilled immigrants, this article contributes to the high-skilled migration literature. It presents a review of the literature, introduces the data, and presents the methodology and the estimations of the regression analysis. After the discussion, the article ends by presenting the conclusions.

Literature Review

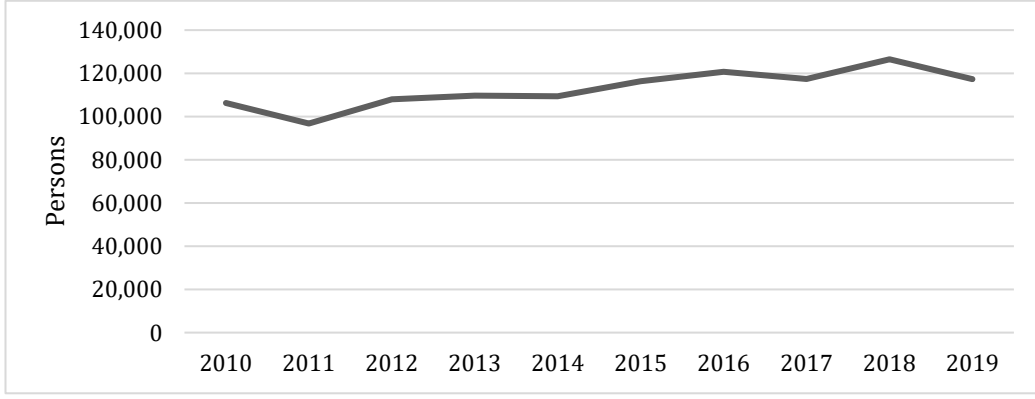
The employment status of immigrants is directly linked to their legal status, which may allow them to work in the host country. Immigrant-friendly regulations of the host countries (Anderson & Huang, 2019; Carling, 2002; Piyapromdee, 2020; Martin, 2020) and migration networks (Beine et al., 2010) make it easier for immigrants to find jobs. The characteristics of the host countries (with abundant low-skill jobs, dense immigrant population, and high GDP per capita) and the home countries (wealthier, more politically stable and developed) also affect positively the employment status of immigrants (Fleischmann & Dronkers, 2010). Trailing immigrants like spouses, children, and elderly relatives are less likely to be employed (Williams, 2009). The lack of recognition of qualifications (Barbone et al., 2013), asymmetric information about work experience between employers and immigrants (Akerlof, 1970; Bauer & Zimmermann, 1995), and labour-market discrimination (Constant & Massey, 2005; Přívara et al., 2019) also decrease the probability of immigrants getting employment. Even if naturalization eases the integration of immigrants into the labour market—sending a signal to employers about the language proficiency and cultural familiarity of immigrants (Anderson & Huang, 2019)—the job applicant's name signals their ethnicity, religion, and race and may thus reduce the likelihood of their gaining employment (Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004; Leckcivilize & Straub, 2018).

Many immigrants do the low-paying jobs that native workers do not want in the US (Schwartzman, 2009), and the low-wage immigrant workers mostly work in precarious conditions (Bruno, 2015). Wages are related to labour productivity as determined by several characteristics, such as education level, work experience, language ability (Anderson & Huang, 2019; Constant & Massey, 2005), age, marital status, home country, education level (Sirkeci & Açık, 2015), proficiency in the host country's language (Adserà & Pytliková, 2016), the length of time that an immigrant has spent in that country (Carliner, 2000), and proficiency in English (Chiswick, 1998). The low wages of immigrants result from the imperfect transfer of immigrants' education and work experience to another country (Anderson & Huang, 2019). Postmigration investment in human capital, such as improvements in job-related skills and participation in the destination country's education system, is a positive factor increasing the labour income of immigrants (Constant & Massey, 2005). On the other hand, international migration is also a response to labour shortages and a need to fill the lowest positions in the social hierarchy (Piore, 1979). However, the labour market is not completely open and competitive for immigrants due to legal barriers such as guest-worker programmes that limit the duration that work is permitted or visas that impose other restrictions (Anderson & Huang, 2019; Martin, 2020).

Employment status and labour income are analysed together using the concept of reservation wage, the minimum wage that an individual demands for doing a particular job (Coen et al., 2010). Being older, having a working partner/spouse, being highly educated, living where the unemployment rate is low, generous unemployment benefits (Ahn & García-Pérez, 2002), wealth (Bloemen & Stancanelli, 2001), and citizenship status (Nanos & Schluter, 2014) are factors with a strong influence on the reservation wage.

In the 2000s and 2010s, attention was drawn to the increase in the number of highly skilled people immigrating to the US from Turkey. Studies on this subject (Aydin, 2012; Elveren & Toksöz, 2019; Görgün, 2018; Güngör & Tansel, 2008; Koser Akcapar, 2007; Yigitturk Ekiyor, 2018) have highlighted several determining factors in the decision of highly skilled Turkish immigrants to remain in the US: improved living, working, and research conditions, such as greater technological resources and wider employment opportunities for highly skilled people in the US; the economic instability of Turkey; gender inequalities in Turkey; a desire for better governance and civic society; immigrant-friendly US policies such as the 'green card' scheme; and favourable educational opportunities, improved job satisfaction, and greater freedoms in the US. The Turkey-born population in the US is steadily growing (Graph 1), with approximately 3,000 Turkey-born people naturalizing as US citizens each year (Graph 2). Therefore, it is estimated that a high number of naturalized, Turkey-born US citizens—Turkish-Americans—are to be found within the total Turkey-born population in the US.

Graph 1. Number of Turkey-Born Persons in the US by Years, 2010-2019



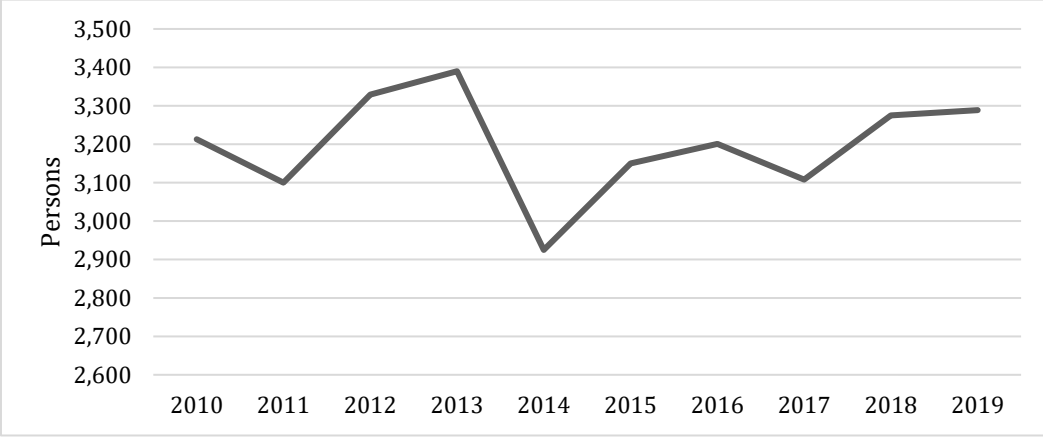
Source: United States Census Bureau (2021).

The Turkish migration network in the US is important in enabling low-skilled Turkish newcomers to find a job. More established Turkey-born business owners and entrepreneurs employ Turks who have recently immigrated to meet demand for Turkish products and services among the Turkey-born community. Thus, the Turkey-born community in the US has strengthened its own business over time. Some of these workplaces, such as restaurants, bookstores, and coffee houses, are also public spaces that keep Turkish culture alive. The formation of districts with a strong concentration of businesses run by Turkey-born entrepreneurs may signal a degree of ghettoization (Kaya, 2009).

Turkish migrant associations in the US—such as the Federation of Turkish-American Associations, the Assembly of Turkish-American Associations, and the Assembly of Turkic

American Federations—help newcomers at micro (individual) level by functioning as professional groups and some organize English language courses (Koser Akcapar, 2009), which strengthen the social capital of the immigrants (Yigitturk Ekiyor, 2018) and thereby their participation in the US labour market.

Graph 2. Number of Turkey-Born Naturalized Persons in the US by Years, 2010-2019



Source: Homeland Security (2021).

Data

The present article uses the total data of the American Community Surveys (ACS 1 % sample) based on the IPUMS USA database (Ruggles et al., 2021) from 2000 to 2019. The sample consists of 2,785,438 immigrants, including both naturalized US citizens and those without US citizenship, made up of 2,779,727 who are 15-64 years old and were not born in Turkey or the US and speak mostly a language other than English at home and 5711 who are Turkey-born immigrants 15-64 years old who speak mostly Turkish at home.

Dependent Variables

For employment status, the first dependent variable is 'Employment Status', which has the categories 'Employed' and 'Unemployed'. For labour income, the second dependent variable is 'Labour Income', which refers to money received as an employee for the previous year including annual wages, salaries, commissions, cash bonuses, and tips. Since this article used 20-year data, it considered the effect of inflation. Therefore, 'Real income' was calculated by using the consumer price index (World Bank, 2021) to adjust 'Labour Income' from the base year of 2000. 'Real Income' was used for the final analysis.

Independent Variables

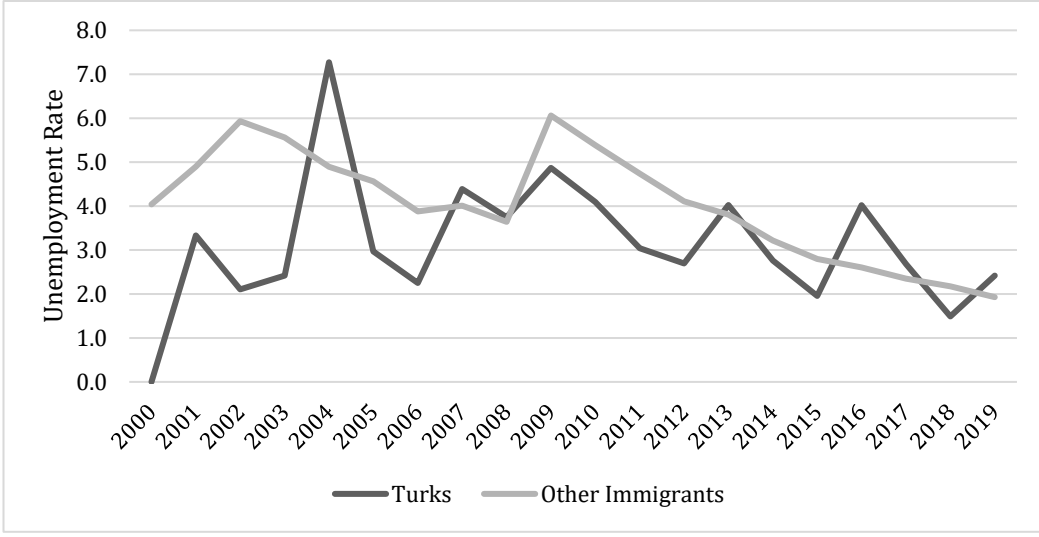
The independent category variables are gender (Male and Female), citizenship (Naturalized and Non-US Citizens), marital status (Married and Single), education (No Degree, High School Degree, College Degree, Bachelor's Degree, Master's Degree, and PhD Degree), English level (Only English, Very Good English, Good English, Not Good English, and No English), occupations (Management, Business, Science, and Arts; Service; Sales and Office; Construction and Maintenance; and Production and Transportation), and population (Turkish

and Other Immigrants). 'Years in the US', which refers to how many years the immigrant has resided in the US, and age are the numerical variables.

Descriptive Statistics

The unemployment rate of Turkish immigrants differed between 0% and 7.7% from 2000 to 2019, while the unemployment rate of other immigrants has been decreasing since 2009 (Graph 3).

Graph 3. Unemployment Rate of Turkish and Other Immigrants in the US, 2000-2019

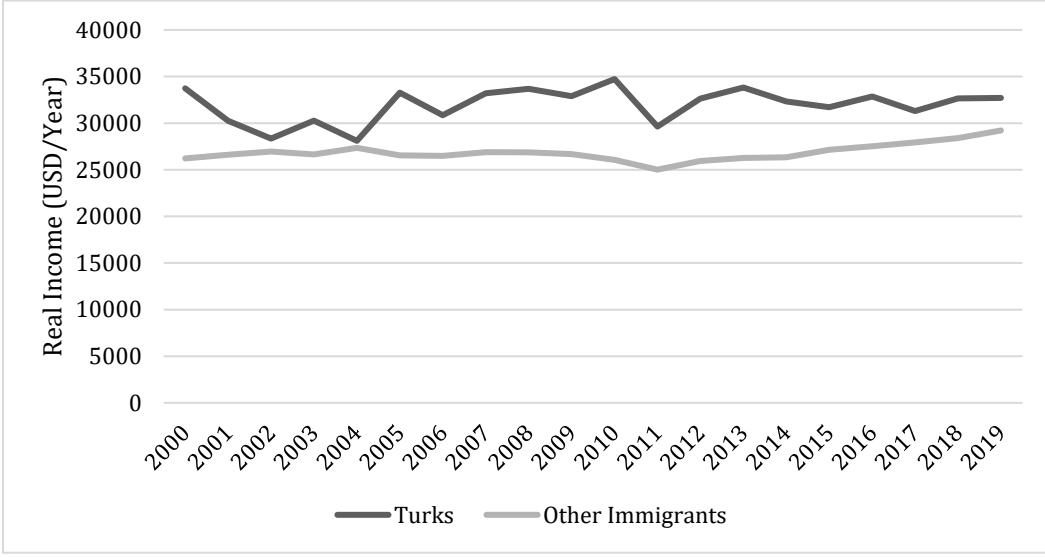


Source: Ruggles et al. (2021).

The average annual real labour income of Turkish immigrants (ranging between 25,000 and 35,000 USD) has been higher than the average annual real labour income of other immigrants (ranging between 25,000 and 30,000 USD) since 2000 (Graph 4). However, the average annual real labour income of other immigrants has been increasing since 2011.

In general, as long the education level increases, the average labour income increases for all populations. In other words, those with a doctorate (PhD) earn more than those with other educational degrees for immigrants overall, as expected. At the doctorate level, the average labour income of Turkish immigrants is higher than that of other immigrants. Similarly, the average labour income of Turkish immigrants with no degree or a high school degree is higher than that of other immigrants at the same educational level. However, the average labour income of other immigrants with a college, bachelor's, or master's degree is higher than that of Turkish immigrants at the same educational level. On the other hand, the share of Turkish immigrants with no degree or a high school degree is lower than that of other immigrants at the same educational level. These descriptive findings indicate that the greater share of Turkish immigrants with a PhD (10.5%) compared to that of other immigrants with a PhD (2.2%) results in the mean labour income of Turkish immigrants being higher than that of other immigrants (Table 1).

Graph 4. Average Annual Labour Income of Turkish and Other Immigrants in the US, 2000-2019



Source: Ruggles et al. (2021).

Table 1. Comparison of the Share of Education Levels among Turkish Immigrants and Other Immigrants by Average Annual Real Income, 2000-2019

Education Level	Average Annual Real Income of Turkish Immigrants (USD)	%	Average Annual Real Income of Other Immigrants (USD)	%
No Degree	21,632	7.2	17,652	24.9
High School Degree	23,491	26.4	22,215	37.3
College Degree	25,846	5.3	28,658	6.8
Bachelor's Degree	32,285	26.1	36,102	18.5
Master's Degree	38,787	24.6	43,883	10.3
Doctorate	**50,075**	**10.5**	**49,244**	**2.2**

Source: Ruggles et al. (2021).

Methodology

This article applied Heckman two-step selection to analyse employment status and labour income determinants. Heckman two-step selection eliminates the selection bias in a regression analysis, handling only the observable portion of the data. For example, while analysing the determinants of wages, the employment status should be considered because the prerequisite of earning a wage is to have a job. The following models were used together:

$$EmploymentStatus_t=\beta_0+\beta_1Gender_t+\beta_2Age_t+\beta_3MaritalStatus_t+\beta_4Citizenship_t+\beta_5Occupation_t+\beta_6Education_t+\beta_7EnglishLevel_t+\beta_8YearsInUS_t+\beta_9Population_t+\varepsilon_t$$

$$In(LabourIncome)_t=\beta_0+\beta_1Gender_t+\beta_2Age_t+\beta_3MaritalStatus_t+\beta_4Citizenship_t+\beta_5Occupation_t+\beta_6Education_t+\beta_7EnglishLevel_t+\beta_8YearsInUS_t+\beta_9Population_t+\varepsilon_t$$

Findings and Discussion

The independent variables explain 25 % of the variance—R^2 is 0.25—in the dependent variable, 'Labour Income'. All variables are highly significant in determining 'Labour Income' (Table 2).

Table 2. Findings of Heckman Two-Step Selection

	Heckman Two-Step Selection	
Variables	**Probit**	**OLS**
Constant	1.794***	9.814***
	(0.003011)	(0.01563)
Female	-0.09802***	-0.2851***
	(0.0002532)	(0.001675)
Age	0.003562***	0.009085***
	(0.00001294)	(0.00007511)
Single	-0.1191***	-0.09354***
	(0.000248)	(0.001966)
High School Degree	0.05683***	0.1031***
	(0.0002994)	(0.001546)
College Degree	0.1154***	0.2469***
	(0.0005669)	(0.00289)
Bachelor's Degree	0.1397***	0.426***
	(0.0004323)	(0.00261)
Master's Degree	0.1721***	0.5828***
	(0.0005715)	(0.003175)
PhD	0.2671***	0.6395***
	(0.001237)	(0.005508)
Service	-0.08303***	-0.3764***
	(0.0004188)	(0.001969)
Sales and Office	-0.1499***	-0.2282***
	(0.0004102)	(0.002425)
Construction and Maintenance	-0.3057***	0.02323***
	(0.0004561)	(0.004385)
Production and Transportation	-0.1931***	-0.09907***
	(0.0004257)	(0.002887)
Non-US Citizens	-0.048***	-0.06931***
	(0.0002843)	(0.001367)
Other Immigrants	0.02777***	0.03692***
	(0.002863)	(0.01217)
Years in the US	-0.0005544***	0.008155***
	(0.00001374)	(0.00005956)
Very Good English	0.02655***	-0.03162***
	(0.0003719)	(0.001626)
Good English	0.05322***	-0.1188***
	(0.0004118)	(0.001886)
Not Good English	0.04232***	-0.1979***
	(0.0004423)	(0.001986)
No English	-0.03752***	-0.2686***
	(0.000533)	(0.002319)
Observations	2,785,438	2,785,438
R^2		0.2507
Adjusted R^2		0.2507
invMillsRatio	-2.73714	

Note: Year effects are controlled for. Standard errors in parentheses; significance denoted by '***' at 1%, '**' at 5%, and '*' at 10%.

As expected, gender, age, education level, years spent in the US, citizenship status, proficiency in English, and occupation were effective in determining the labour income of immigrants in the US, including Turkish immigrants.

Female immigrants are affected negatively in terms of employment status compared with male immigrants. The analysis also shows evidence of a labour income gap between women and men: women earn less than men in the US. This finding is consistent with those reported by Mandel and Semyonov (2014) and Alkadry and Tower (2011). Being older means having more work experience; therefore, being one year older affects employment status positively and increases labour income for immigrants. Moreover, being single has a negative impact on employment status and labour income. As suggested by human capital theory (Anderson & Huang, 2019), the analysis shows that higher education level has a large positive effect on employment status and labour income in the US. Alongside education level, in general, occupations related to management, business, science, and the arts, which require more specific training, make it easier to find a job and yield higher labour income for immigrants. Only people who work in construction and maintenance jobs earn more than people who work in management, business, science, and the arts, while having these occupations negatively affects finding a job. This situation means that people who work in construction and maintenance jobs have high reservation wages.

Similarly, having spent an additional year in the US has a negative impact on employment status. In contrast, it has an exceedingly small but positive impact on immigrants' labour income, contrary to what Piore (1979) reported. As several studies (Bellante & Kogut, 1998; Carliner, 2000; Chiswick et al., 2005; Constant & Massey, 2005) have suggested, this positive effect may, however, be related to linguistic proficiency: immigrants who speak only English earn more than those who are not native English speakers. Moreover, having spent an additional year in the US may widen their social network, which makes finding a job easier. As a result, having spent an additional year results in an increase in the reservation wage.

Consistent with the studies by Anderson and Huang (2019) and Constant and Massey (2005), naturalization makes it easier to find a job and increases labour income, compared with being a non-US citizen. Similarly, speaking only English has a positive impact on the employment status and labour income of immigrants. Immigrants who speak English very well, well, or not well have low reservation wages. As expected, immigrants who do not speak English have difficulty finding a job and earn less than other immigrants.

This article is the first to show that the average labour income of Turkish immigrants in the US is higher than that of other immigrants. However, this absolute difference may be misleading because of the possibility of being reversed once other factors (gender, age, education level, years spent in the US, citizenship status, proficiency in English, and occupation) are taken into account. In fact, contrary to the descriptive statistics, the estimation results reveal that being Turkish in the US has a negative impact on labour income compared with being an immigrant from another country. Thereby, the regression analysis demonstrates that some Turkish immigrants earn exceptionally high salaries in the US; in contrast, the remainder earn average or below-average amounts.

Conclusion

The Turkish immigrant community in the US has grown steadily in the 2010s and this growing population is fully engaged in the US labour market. Between 2000 and 2019, Turkish immigrants, interestingly, were highly educated, with approximately 60% of them having bachelor's degrees or above.

The majority of Turkish immigrants in the US in the 21st century is highly skilled and proficient in English. Turkish immigrants, for which the naturalization rate is also high, use efficient migration networks and social organizations to support newcomers. Moreover, businesses owned by previous generations of Turkey-born immigrants are most frequently those offering work to new immigrants from Turkey.

The estimation findings show that gender, age, marital status, English level, citizenship status, education level, occupation, and years spent in the US are significant determinants of employment status and labour income of immigrants in the US. Additional findings provided new information about the labour income of the Turkish immigrants in the US. Surprisingly, the descriptive findings show that the labour income of Turkish immigrants is higher on average than that of other immigrants. However, our estimation indicates that the labour income of the Turkey-born population is lower than that of other immigrants. Some Turkish immigrants in the US are exceedingly high earners; in contrast, the remainder earn average or below-average wages. That is the reason why the labour income of Turkish immigrants is higher on average than that of other immigrants. This income differentiation in the Turkey-born community may be explained by skill differentiation between low-skilled and high-skilled immigrants. It is expected that high-skilled immigrants earn more than low-skilled immigrants. Another explanation for this differentiation may be educational attainment because our estimation results indicate that educational attainment contributes less to the income of Turkish immigrants than it does to that of other immigrants. Therefore, it would be valuable to investigate further in which country Turkish immigrants have received their education; educational differences between the two countries and poor recognition of equivalent qualifications in the US may explain the lower earnings return on educational attainment for Turkish immigrants.

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