

## **Pathways to Economic Opportunity Puerto Ricans in Low-Wage Jobs and Labor Markets**

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With generous support from the support of the Ford Foundation, Centro is undertaking an initiative entitled Pathways to Economic Opportunity: Puerto Ricans in Low?Wage Jobs and Labor Markets. The initiative has three interrelated components: a sponsored research competition, a conference, and the publication of a special issue of the CENTRO Journal. The conference seeks to understand those factors which encourage Puerto Rican participation in low wage jobs and labor markets as well as those community strategies and public policies which help to improve the economic outcomes of Puerto Ricans in these sectors both on the island and stateside. Under this project, Centro has commissioned eight research projects looking at various sectors and industries as well as the macro level institutions and community responses. As part of the initiative Centro sponsored a research forum at Hunter College in December of 2009 and the papers presented will be included in a special issue of the CENTRO Journal devoted to this research agenda. A complete list of the projects as well as a summation of the projects follows.

Introduction. M. Anne Visser and Edwin Meléndez

The introductory essay presents an overview of the topic and main findings of the special issue.

Part I Low Wage Labor Markets in Puerto Rico

1. What Skills do Employers Want from Low wage Workers? Maria Enchautegui

This paper uses data from the Censo de Desarrollo Ocupacional y Empresarial (CEDOE) to assess the skills demanded by employers of low wage workers in different regions of the country. The survey includes interviews with 2,494 private employers and includes questions on: employment history and projected growth by occupations and industries, projections of skills needs, income, and geographic location among others. After identifying industries with the highest concentration of low wage workers, the analysis focus on the type of skills demanded by industry by employer size and location (region). The analysis will identify the occupations with the greatest potential for career advancement for low

wage workers by employer size and location, and the type of skills training necessary for career advancement.

## 2. Low Wage Labor Markets and Migration Selectivity. Edwin Meléndez and Anne Visser

Using data from the ramp survey of the PRPB from 1991 to 2002 (or the most recent year available), this paper examines migratory patterns from Puerto Rico to the US and from the US to Puerto Rico focusing on occupational categories that typically require low education and have a disproportionate number of low wage workers. The analysis will focus on the changes in the characteristics of the emigrants and immigrants (from the island to and from the US respectively) from 1991 to 2002 by age and sex, educational levels, labor force status, occupations, and region of destination or departure.

## Part II Low Wage Labor Markets and Stateside Puerto Ricans

### 3. A Leaky Pipeline: Public Education and the Transition to Work. William Velez & Patrick Goldsmith

This paper examines stateside Puerto Rican youth's transition to the workplace. Using the Education Longitudinal Study of 2002 (ELS: 2002), this paper will identify regions (SMSAs) of concentration, the rates of advancement from one level to the next in comparison to other groups, and the areas where exceptionally positive outcomes are observed. In particular, it will examine the types of school and out of school programs that facilitate connections to training and employers in the areas of the country where they are concentrated. Three exemplary programs will be highlighted to illustrate the critical elements of best practices in the transition to work.

### 4. The Stateside Second Chance System for Puerto Ricans. Ramon Bórges

Local workforce development systems vary significantly from region to region. This study will examine how various types of local workforce development systems have responded to the needs of Puerto Rican low wage workers in the various regions. Specifically, it will examine whether variations in the level of service provision to this population are related to the infrastructure of community-based organizations that mediate services, or to the level of targeting and efforts of mainstream organizations in the regions. Finally, the study examines the extent to which local policy and advocacy coalitions play a role in the level of support services and access to employer networks available to low wage Puerto Rican workers.

## Part III Community Responses

### 5. Career Ladders in the Education Industry. Carmen Mercado

This study is based on the comparative analysis of case studies of programs that promote the education and employment of disadvantaged workers in the education industry. The analysis will focus on existing career ladders in teaching and early childhood education, particularly those programs targeting disadvantaged Puerto Ricans and other Latinos. The selection of cases and analysis will also focus on the role of degree granting academic institutions and other leading organizations in the design, management and sustainability of programs targeting low wage workers.

#### 6. Community Based Career Ladders in the Health Industries. Vivian Rivera and Andrés Torres

This study is based on the comparative analysis of case studies of community industry collaborations that have successfully established career ladders for low wage workers in the health industry, particularly those targeting disadvantaged Puerto Ricans and other Latinos. The study will focus on the potential replication of best practices in other regions, especially New York City. The selection of cases and analysis will also focus on the role of degree granting academic institutions and other leading organizations in the design, management and sustainability of programs targeting low wage workers.

#### 7. Community Based Career Ladders in the Social Services Industry. Anthony de Jesus

This study is based on the comparative analysis of case studies of community university collaborations that have successfully established career ladders for low wage workers in the social services industry, particularly those targeting disadvantaged Puerto Ricans and other Latinos. The study will focus on the potential replication of best practices in other regions, especially New York City. The selection of cases and analysis will also focus on the role of degree granting academic institutions and other leading organizations in the design, management and sustainability of programs targeting low wage workers.

#### 8. Community Based Career Ladders in the Environmental Preservation Industry. Víctor M. Torres Vélez

This study will compare case studies of community?university collaborations that have successfully established career ladders for Puerto Rican and Latino low wage workers in the environmental preservation industry. The study will focus on identifying the best promotion practices to “green jobs” for the working poor in other regions that could apply to New York City. Moreover, an emphasis will be placed on understanding the role of degree granting academic institutions such as CUNY and other organizations in the design, management and sustainability of programs targeting low wage workers.

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