The Economic Progress of Hmong Refugees in the U.S.

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Hundreds of thousands of Hmong refugees arrived in the U.S. starting in 1975. Using large, richly detailed U.S. Census microdata samples, we can describe the economic progress of Hmong Americans over the subsequent forty-five years. Most Hmong refugees arrived with low levels of education and English language fluency, so it was difficult to find work at first, and many took low-skill jobs at low wages. Over time, Hmong refugees achieved slow but steady economic progress, with their median household incomes rising to the level of native-born families after about 2000. Second-generation Hmong Americans have far surpassed their refugee parents in socioeconomic status.