



Metropolitan Policy Program at BROOKINGS

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New analysis of immigrants in America's workforce is available [here](#).

IMMIGRANTS' LARGE—AND GROWING—ROLE IN AMERICA'S WORKFORCE

Foreign-born workers essential to the economy, concentrated in both low- and high-skill jobs

WASHINGTON, D.C.— Immigrants play a large and growing role in America's workforce, but perceptions of the kinds of work they perform are often mistaken, according to a new analysis by the Brookings Institution Metropolitan Policy Program and the Partnership for a New American Economy.

Those perceptions shape laws that affect immigrants and, by extension, our economy, so it is important that they are driven by facts rather than politics and emotion. This new analysis informs the debate by presenting data on immigrants' roles in the U.S. labor force, focusing on eight industries where they have a significant presence.

"Immigrant workers have been a growing segment of the labor force for the past several decades," said Audrey Singer, a senior fellow at the Metropolitan Policy Program. "They are a significant presence in industries that demand high-skilled workers such as information technology and high-tech manufacturing, but also in those that draw low-skilled immigrants such as agriculture, construction and accommodation."

"Our economy is changing faster than ever, and we need to ensure that we have access to all the skills we need to compete in an increasingly global, increasingly specialized, and increasingly complex marketplace," said New York City Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg, co-chair of the Partnership for a New American Economy. "This analysis makes it abundantly clear that having a strong pool of immigrant talent helps us meet the needs of our economy today and tomorrow, and gives us a strong advantage over our competitor nations."

"Immigrants are heavily represented in some of the occupations projected by the Bureau of Labor Statistics to grow the most or the fastest during the next ten years, many of which are lower-skilled construction and healthcare jobs," Singer said. "It is likely that immigrants will continue to disproportionately work in these jobs."

Some of the findings of the analysis include:

Immigrants are a growing share of the US labor force—Many immigrants find jobs in the U.S. during their prime working ages, and their share of the workforce has grown as immigration increased in recent decades. With Baby Boomers becoming senior citizens, continuing immigration will provide workers to fill in the gaps left by retirement.

High-skilled immigrants make up larger shares of the workforce in industries like information technology, life sciences, and high-tech manufacturing than overall—In these industries, workers in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) occupations are more likely to have readily transferable skills than those in other fields, particularly those that require U.S.-centric legal, business, or cultural skills.

Immigrant workers in agriculture, food services, and construction tend to be low-skilled—Foreign-born workers made headway into these jobs because we have a shrinking pool of low-skilled, U.S.-born workers.

Immigrants are heavily-represented in some of the occupations projected to have the strongest growth in the next 10 years—These include many lower-skilled occupations such as health and personal aides, construction workers, food services, and child care.

A larger share of working age adults who are foreign-born have not completed high school than their US-born counterparts—This, in part, reflects demand for workers in certain industries such as food services and agriculture, but it also reflects the rising educational standards of the United States.

Immigrants are just as likely as natives to have a graduate degree—This is a reflection of the U.S. labor market as both a skills incubator and a skills magnet. International students are drawn to the U.S. for study and many stay on after graduation. Others are educated elsewhere and then find jobs in the U.S. because of the lack of opportunities in their home countries and the better prospects in the U.S.

The analysis is based primarily on data from the 2010 Current Population Survey (CPS), decennial censuses, and the American Community Survey (ACS).

The Partnership for a New American Economy is a national bipartisan group of more than 400 business leaders and mayors making the case that smarter immigration laws would create jobs for Americans today. The Partnership's members include mayors who represent over 35 million residents in large and small cities across the country and business leaders who employ more than 4 million people in all sectors of the economy. To learn more, visit www.RenewOurEconomy.org

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