

For Immediate Release

December 18, 2018

Contact: Carly Anderson, cpanderson@brookings.edu

Report: <https://brook.gs/2Ce151w>

New Brookings research analyzes industries that provide pathways to good jobs in metropolitan America

Report recommends cities focus on developing jobs and industries that enable workers to achieve upward mobility

Washington, D.C. – The Brookings Metropolitan Policy Program released new research today that examines the presence of “good jobs” that provide stable employment, middle-class wages and benefits across occupations and industries in the nation’s 100 largest metropolitan areas, particularly for the 38 million prime-age workers in these areas without a bachelor’s degree. Importantly, the new report identifies not only good jobs that provide those advantages today, but also “promising jobs” that provide stepping stones to good jobs and the middle-class economic security they offer.

The report, titled ***Opportunity Industries: Exploring the industries that concentrate good and promising jobs in metropolitan America***, finds that while 11.4 million workers without a bachelor’s degree had a good job in 2017 in the nation’s 100 largest metro areas, this represents only 20 percent of all workers without a bachelor’s degree. These good jobs pay well—at least the median salary for workers without a bachelor’s degree—and offer benefits including employer-sponsored health insurance.

Additionally, the research finds that 9.4 million workers without a bachelor degree had a promising job in 2017, defined as entry-level positions from which workers can reach a good job within 10 years. This figure represents only 13 percent of workers without a bachelor degree.

Combined, only one-third of workers without a bachelor’s degree hold a good or promising job, whereas 70 percent of all workers with a bachelor’s degree have good or promising jobs in the nation’s 100 largest metro areas. This disparity reinforces the value of higher education in enabling upward mobility.

The report’s findings on good and promising jobs reveal that, while most workers will change occupations within 10 years, certain occupations provide disproportionate shares of both good and promising jobs for workers without a bachelor’s degree, including the fields of maintenance, construction, production, transportation, management, business, computer engineering, and health care.

This report identifies *opportunity industries*, those industries in which good jobs represent an above-average share of all jobs. Industries exposed to trade competition, including manufacturing, logistics, and professional services, tend to concentrate good jobs, accounting for a hefty 38 percent of good jobs held by workers without a bachelor degree. Consumer-oriented industries, such as hospitality, retail, and health care, provide relatively few good jobs for workers without a bachelor’s degree, but provide many promising entry-level positions, accounting for 71 percent of all promising jobs held by these workers.

Lead author Chad Shearer, senior research associate at the Brookings Metropolitan Policy Program, said, “By analyzing the local career pathways individuals follow to obtain good jobs, we’re able to reveal compelling evidence that the prevalence of good jobs is critical to upward mobility within regions. This key insight should inform how local leaders think about developing a more inclusive economy.”

Notably, the nation’s 100 largest metro areas vary considerably in the share of their jobs that are good or promising based on (a) the educational attainment of local workers; (b) the presence of opportunity industries in local economies; and (c) company specializations, skill requirements, and pay levels. For example, good or promising jobs held by workers without a bachelor’s degree represent 35 percent of jobs in the Spokane, Wash. metro area, but just 9 percent of jobs in the Washington, D.C. metro area, reflecting in part the difference in educational attainment levels between these metro areas (30 percent of Spokane adults hold a four-year bachelor degree, compared to 51 percent of Washington, D.C. adults).

The report’s authors identify three key strategies for leaders in cities and regions to improve workers’ mobility to better jobs and the middle-class, particularly as technological change continues to reshape work and shift the value and abundance of certain industries and occupations:

- Refocus economic development on opportunity industries
- Partner between government and business to improve job quality
- Retool education and workforce development for a more dynamic labor market

The report, including interactive industry and occupation data for the nation’s 100 largest metropolitan areas, is available here: <https://brook.gs/2Ce151w>.

###

The Metropolitan Policy Program at Brookings delivers research and solutions to help metropolitan leaders build an advanced economy that works for all. To learn more, please visit brookings.edu/metro. Follow us on Twitter at twitter.com/brookingsmetro.