



American Conference on DiversitySM

VALUING DIVERSITY, EDUCATING LEADERS, PROMOTING RESPECT

IMMIGRATION: AN ISSUE FOR OUR TIMES

Given the changing growth of our population, issues involving immigration and immigrant integration issues will be with us well into the future.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT IN NJ?

Immigrants make up 19.9 percent of the population in New Jersey, whereas they make up 12.5 percent of the total U.S. population. According to the 2000 United States Census, over 41 percent of immigrants living in New Jersey arrived in the United States between 1990 and 2000. Ninety-two percent of the population increase in New Jersey between 2000 and 2005 was the result of immigration. New Jersey also ranks sixth in the nation in the number of foreign-born residents and third in the ratio of foreign-born residents to total population.¹

In 2007, the American Conference on Diversity commissioned a statewide survey of New Jersey residents' attitude and behavior on inter-group relations. Questions on immigrants and immigration show that New Jersey residents feel that immigrants are an asset to the Garden State. According to the 2007 American Conference on Diversity survey, "about 6 in 10 New Jerseyans say immigrants strengthen our state, because of their talents and hard work..." On a national level, when asked if immigrants strengthen or burdened our nation, "4 in 10 feel that immigrants strengthen our nation, because of their talents and hard work..." (New Jersey: A Statewide View of Diversity, 2007).²

The state is also one of six gateway states for entry into the United States. Since 2000, Bergen, Somerset, Hunterdon, Mercer and Sussex Counties and the city of Newark have experienced the largest growth in immigrant population in the state, with their foreign-born populations increasing by at least thirty-five percent. However, Bergen, Essex, Hudson, Middlesex, Passaic, and Union are still the counties with the highest immigrant populations.³ In 2007, researchers from the Rutgers University Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy published data indicating that were it not for immigration to New Jersey from foreign countries, the state would have experienced a significant population decline between 2002 and 2005.⁴

¹ U.S. Census Bureau (2009), retrieved from <http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/foreign/cps2008.html>.

² C. Zukin, T. Thonhauser, & J. Applebaum (2007), *New Jersey: A statewide view of diversity*. New Brunswick: Bloustein Center for Survey Research, Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey *New Jersey: A Statewide View of Diversity*.

³ I.N. Gang & A.M. Piehl (2008), *Destination, NJ: How Immigrants Benefit the State Economy*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey Eagleton Institute of Politics; F. Fessenden (2006, August 27), The new crossroads of the world. *New York Times*.

⁴ J.W. Hughes, J.J. Seneca, W. Irving (2007), *Where have all the dollars gone? An analysis of New Jersey migration patterns*. New Brunswick: Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey.

Data from the 2010 Census will certainly continue to inform immigration issues.

KEY BACKGROUND INFORMATION⁵

- 15.6 percent of workers in the United States are immigrants.
- Nationwide, unemployment rates for immigrants are higher than for native-born workers. However, in New Jersey, the rates are about even.
- Immigrants are far more likely to hold lower-wage jobs than native-born workers. According to the Urban Institute, half of all immigrants—as compared to 33% of native-born employees—earn less than \$21,500 annually.
- The median income of immigrant families living in New Jersey is over \$13,000 less than the median income of native-born families.
- Most immigrants to New Jersey are from Latin America, South America, and the Caribbean. The next highest concentration comes from Asia.
- Immigrants from Europe and Asia have the highest median earnings for any immigrant groups, whereas immigrants from Mexico and Central America have the lowest median earnings.
- New Jersey immigrants are both more likely to possess a college degree *and* more likely to lack a high school diploma than their native-born counterparts.
- New Jersey has the second-highest percentage of immigrant-started technology and engineering companies in the country
- Nearly one-quarter of the wages earned by New Jersey employees was earned by immigrant workers.
- One-fifth of New Jersey businesses are owned by immigrants.
- Fifteen percent fewer immigrant families living in New Jersey own their own homes as compared to their native-born counterparts.
- Almost 33% of children residing in New Jersey have at least one family member who is an immigrant.
- Twenty percent of New Jersey’s children come from homes in which no adults speak English well.
- Eighty-seven percent of the state’s children from immigrant families are U.S. citizens.
- An estimated 5% of residents living in New Jersey do not have legal status.
- An estimated 62 % of *low-wage* immigrant laborers are limited English proficient.

⁵ Sources: E. Newburger, T. Gryn (2009), *The foreign-born labor force in the United States: 2007*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Census Bureau; U.S. Census Bureau (2009); Gang & Piehl (2008); N.V. Montalto (2006), *Out of the many one: Integrating immigrants in New Jersey*, New Jersey: National Immigration Forum; E. Appelbaum & K. White (2003), *Focus on immigrants: Facts about the foreign-born population in New Jersey*. New Brunswick, NJ: Center for Women and Work; R. Capps, J.S. Passel, et. al. (2003), *The new neighbors: A user’s guide to data on immigration in U.S. communities*. Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute.

- It is estimated that half of all immigrant workers are limited English proficient.

Federal Policy

Recent federal legislation regarding immigration has overwhelmingly focused on illegal immigration. In particular, this legislation has typically focused on securing U.S. borders against undocumented migrants and possible terrorists, and addressing work status and avenues for citizenship for immigrants overwhelmingly from Central and Latin America.

However because federal officials have not had much success enforcing already-existing laws that prohibit illegal immigration, and in reaction to the growing number of immigrant populations they are absorbing, state and local officials across the country have increasingly been passing their own laws aimed at curbing the flow of undocumented immigrants into their cities and towns. In the absence of federal immigration legislation, state legislatures created and adopted 206 laws regarding immigration in 2008, according to the *New York Times*. Over 170 immigration-related bills were passed in 2006 by policymakers in 41 states.⁶

Laws directed at immigrants—whether at the federal, state, or local level—impact the lives of all residents. These laws interact with economic and social conditions in communities in multiple ways, both influencing the perspectives of residents, employers, public officials, and law enforcers, and being influenced by these perspectives. Issues involving immigrants are important in communities, in schools, and in the workplace.

President Obama has said that immigration reform is a priority for his administration. In August of 2009, the Obama Administration announced its plans to overhaul the immigration system, specifically the way our nation detains undocumented immigrants. The Obama Administration's plan to transform the detention system, which according to the *New York Times* holds approximately 400,000 detainees throughout the course of a year seeks to create a “truly civil detention system” that provides more oversight of the system, which has been criticized for mistreatment of detainees.

ECONOMIC CONTRIBUTIONS BY IMMIGRANT POPULATIONS⁷

A frequently heard criticism of newly arrived immigrant populations—particularly those who are undocumented—is that they put a tremendous strain on the economies of the communities in which they live, without providing adequate contributions. However, throughout the United States, immigrants have had a positive impact on the economic growth of the communities in which they reside. It has been calculated that roughly 90% of money earned by immigrants gets spent or invested in the United States.

⁶ J. Preston (2007, November 29), 7-year immigration rate is highest in U.S. history. *The New York Times*, p. A-20.

⁷ United States Census Bureau (2009); Gang & Piehl (2008); V. Wadhwa, A. Saxenian, et. al. (2007), *American's new immigrant entrepreneurs*, U.S.A.: Duke University and U.C. Berkeley; M.E. Salinas (2006, November 7), Immigrants' dollars go a long way. *Herald News* (Passaic, NJ), p. B07; K. Krepcio (2006, October 10), *The status of immigrants in New Jersey*, retrieved from <http://www.heldrich.rutgers.edu>.

Typically, immigrants bring their talents, skills, and educational backgrounds to industries underpopulated by native workers. Companies founded by immigrants employed 450,000 workers and reported \$52 billion in sales in 2005. Immigrants living in New Jersey are the most highly educated in the United States. More of New Jersey's immigrants have bachelor's and graduate or professional degrees. Moreover, the state's immigrants have a history of entrepreneurship. New Jersey ranks only second in the nation to California with the percentage of technology and engineering companies that were founded by immigrants.

Economic contributions are not just made by highly skilled and educated immigrants or by immigrants living in the country legally. Those classified as unskilled serve as a pool of workers to fast-growing industries such as the restaurant industry. Studies have shown that on average, poor and unskilled immigrants, regardless of their legal status, contribute about the same amount of money to local communities as do their native-born counterparts. Additionally, contrary to popular belief, many undocumented workers pay taxes on their wages. Nationally, nearly all of the approximately \$7 billion of Social Security taxes that goes unclaimed annually is thought to come from the wages of undocumented immigrants, who are unable to collect because of their illegal status. In addition to paying social security tax, undocumented immigrants who are on company payrolls pay personal income and Medicare tax just like their documented counterparts.

WHAT IS THE AMERICAN CONFERENCE ON DIVERSITY'S FOCUS?

The American Conference on Diversity is dedicated to valuing diversity, educating leaders, and promoting inclusion and respect. It is in a unique position to: 1) increase key stakeholders' awareness of the issue, 2) develop strategies to ease community pressures related to the issue, and 3) provide bias prevention training to educators, employers, and community leaders.

See resources and links below for additional information on this issue.

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IMMIGRANT SUPPORT GROUPS

[American Civil Liberties Union of New Jersey](#)

The New Jersey chapter of the national organization is committed to protecting civil liberties. The ACLU-NJ has a pro-immigration stance and works to promote fairness and equal treatment for all people residing in this country, regardless of their legal status.

[American Friends Service Committee](#)

This Philadelphia-based, Quaker-affiliated organization is focused on justice. The AFSC does work throughout the United States and internationally, with service in several counties in New Jersey. A significant part of the work the AFSC does is connected to advocacy for immigrant rights.

[American Muslim Union](#)

The Newark-based Muslim organization is gathering information regarding the number of American Muslims who have been harassed or detained in American airports without cause.

Casa Freehold (Freehold Boro)

This is an organization that provides resources to day laborers. The organization provides some English language instruction, helps immigrants receive the medical care they need, and helps day laborers to negotiate for fair wages.

Community Action for Social Affairs, Inc.

This group provides services to and advocacy for youth and senior citizens, including immigrant populations, in Passaic and Paterson. Services include English language instruction.

[Hispanic Directors Association New Jersey](#)

HDANJ is an umbrella group for over thirty social service organizations serving Hispanic / Latino populations. HDANJ is a source of support and resources to member organizations. It provides information on issues—including those related to immigration—considered important to Hispanic / Latino populations in New Jersey. One of the goals of this organization is to work with other advocacy groups to create a statewide task force geared to protecting the rights of immigrants.

[Immigrant Rights Defense Committee](#)

This is a Paterson-based organization committed to educating immigrants about their rights.

[International Institute of New Jersey](#)

This organization assists immigrants and refugees in establishing productive lives, works on their behalf to secure equity, and informs the public about their contributions to American life.

Latino Leadership Alliance of New Jersey

This is an organization dedicated to representing Latino rights, including those of immigrant groups. It is holding a series of town meetings across New Jersey to garner support for state policies that, among other things, would enable undocumented students to apply for college in the state at in-state tuition rates.

Legal Services of New Jersey

LSNJ is an umbrella organization managing the Legal Services system, a statewide network of non-profit organizations that provides free legal assistance in civil law to low-income New Jersey residents. LSNJ employees are knowledgeable in deportation law, the rights of immigrant workers, and language access.

New Jersey Immigration Policy Network

The New Jersey Immigration Policy Network (NJIPN) is an association of over forty organizations committed to advocating for the rights of immigrants and encouraging inclusiveness of immigrants into the fabric of local and state communities, and the country as a whole.

One People's Project (Jersey City)

This is a grassroots organization that describes itself as fighting the growth of hate groups in New Jersey, including those that target immigrant populations.

Tanweer (Clifton)

This is a center geared to connecting Arab-Americans to a variety of social services.