

Why immigrant workers are critical to the economic recovery

By [J.D. Harrison](#)

Foreign-born workers represent an exceptionally high share of the labor force in roughly half of the country's fastest-growing and largest-growing sectors, according to new analysis of government data, suggesting that immigrants have a critical role to play in the ongoing economic recovery.

U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics projections show that [15 occupational fields](#) are expected to grow by at least 42 percent between 2010 and 2020, and among those, immigrant labor currently makes up a disproportionately large percentage of employment (greater than the overall share of foreign-born workers) in seven sectors. Similarly, they represent an exceptionally high share of the labor force in eight of the [15 sectors](#) expected to add the greatest number of jobs during the decade.

The Partnership for a New American Economy and the Brookings Institution conducted [the analysis](#) using data from the 2010 census and several related surveys. Their report also shows that the total immigrant workforce has grown at a faster pace over the past 40 years (from 4.9 percent to 16.4 percent) than the foreign-born share of the population during the same period (from 4.8 percent to 12.9 percent), evidence that immigrants are increasingly of working age as the decades pass.

“Our economy is changing faster than ever, and we need to ensure that we have people with all the skills we need to compete in an increasingly global, increasingly specialized, and increasingly complex marketplace,” New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg, co-chair of the Partnership for a New American Economy, said in a statement. “This study 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.”

Both low-skill and high-skill occupations are among those rapidly growing sectors highly saturated with immigrant workers, including jobs like cashiers and truck drivers (minimal education required) as well as teachers and market analysts (post-secondary degrees or training required). Personal care aides and home health aides also appeared on both BLS forecast lists (highest numerical and percentage growth), and both fields are disproportionately comprised of foreign-born labor.

The report comes amid heated political sparring over several immigration reform proposals at the federal level, including the [DREAM Act](#), which would provide a path to citizenship for foreign-born youths in college or in the military, and the [Fairness for High-Skilled Immigrants Act](#), which would eliminate per-country quotas on work visas. Meanwhile, lawmakers are [working on legislation](#) that would provide visas to immigrants who earn advanced degrees in science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

But the bills face opposition both on the Hill and potentially in the White House, depending on which way the election goes in November. Mitt Romney, for instance, has [said he would veto](#) the DREAM Act if it passes while he's in office, and a couple senators, one from each side of the aisle, are already [putting the brakes](#) on the Fairness for High-Skilled Immigrants Act.

http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/on-small-business/post/why-immigrant-workers-are-critical-to-the-economic-recovery/2012/03/16/gIQAZvuyGS_blog.html