

# Immigrants Increase to 16.3 Percent of U.S. Workforce, Setting New High

By Larry Swisher

Foreign-born workers increased in 2013 as a share of the U.S. labor force, for the fourth consecutive year, to 16.3 percent, Labor Department figures showed May 22.

That was the highest proportion of immigrants on record since DOL's Bureau of Labor Statistics began collecting data in 1996. From 10.8 percent that year, the share has risen steadily except during the 2007-2009 recession, when it declined slightly.

The 2013 increase reflects a faster rate of job growth among immigrants than native-born workers as well as a steeper decline in unemployment, according to BNA's analysis of the figures. The labor force combines workers who are employed and those who are unemployed and actively seeking jobs.

## Historic Pattern

The number of immigrants ages 16 and older who were in the labor force grew by 1.2 percent last year to 25.3 million, while the native-born labor force of 130.1 million was up 0.1 percent.

Since 1996, the foreign-born labor force has expanded by nearly 11 million, or 75 percent.

Jobs held by foreign-born workers, either part- or full-time, rose 2.5 percent, while those held by the native-born climbed 0.7 percent.

The unemployment rate fell faster and farther for immigrants (1.2 percentage points to 6.9 percent) than among the native-born labor force (0.6 point to 7.5 percent). The rate was the same for both groups in 2012 at 8.1 percent.

The foreign-born jobless rate historically has been lower than the native-born rate, but after the housing market collapse that led to the recession, the pattern was reversed after 2007. Construction and production occupations, which tend to have disproportionate shares of foreign-born workers, experienced heavy job losses.

The figures include legally admitted immigrants, non-citizen immigrants, and temporary foreign workers, but figures for each group are not provided.

## Hispanics Dominate

Compared with the native-born labor force, a higher share of foreign-born workers in 2013 were male adults in their prime working ages of 25 to 54.

By race or ethnicity, almost half of all foreign-born workers were Hispanics (48 percent), while the next largest share were non-Hispanic Asians (24 percent). Just under 10 percent of native-born workers were Hispanics and about 2 percent were non-Hispanic Asians.

By region, the West (24 percent) had the highest share of immigrants in the labor force, followed by the Northeast (19 percent), while proportions were lowest in the Midwest (8 percent) and South (15 percent).

Among workers ages 25 or older, the foreign-born were more likely than their native-born peers to have less than a high school education (24 percent versus 5 percent), while similar shares of each group had a bachelor's or higher degree (34 percent versus 37 percent).

By occupation, the share of workers who are foreign-born is higher than the proportion of native-born in natural resources, construction, and maintenance occupations; production, transportation, and material moving jobs; and service occupations.

On the other hand, foreign-born workers are less likely than their native-born counterparts to work in management, professional and related occupations and sales and office jobs.

### Earnings Gap

Among full-time workers, the earnings grew faster among immigrants than the native-born in 2013, narrowing the gap between the groups.

Median usual weekly earnings of foreign-born workers increased to \$643, or about 80 percent of the \$805 earned by native-born workers. The median is the halfway point, at which half earn more than that amount and half earn less. Earnings of foreign-born workers as a share of those of native-born rose for both men, to 75 percent, and women, to 85 percent.

“Differences in earnings reflect a variety of factors,” including differences in educational attainment, occupation, industry, and geographic location of the foreign-born and native-born workers, BLS said.