

Researcher: Immigrants do work that might not otherwise get done, bolstering the US economy

February 14 2024, by Ramya Vijaya

Nearly 1 in 5 US workers was born somewhere else

The share of immigrants in the national labor force grew from 15.3% in 2006 to a record high of 18.1% in 2022, despite small declines during the Great Recession and the Trump administration.

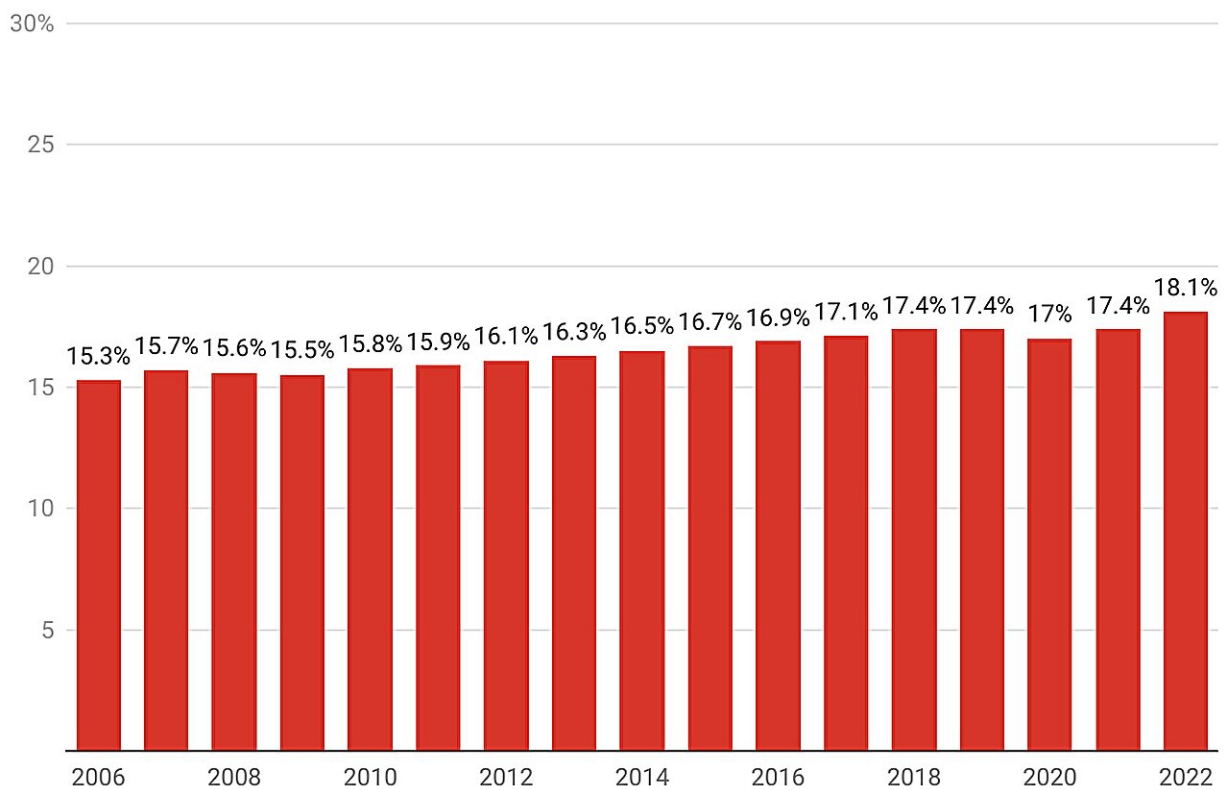


Chart: The Conversation, CC-BY-ND • Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics • Created with Datawrapper

Credit: The Conversation

Although Congress is failing to pass laws to restrict the number of migrants arriving in the U.S., a majority of Americans—about 6 in 10—[believe there's an immigration crisis](#) along the Mexico-U.S. border. Politicians who want fewer people to move here often cast those arriving without prior authorization as a [burden on the economy](#).

As an [economist who has researched immigration and employment](#), I'm [confident that economic trends](#) and research findings contradict those arguments.

The U.S. is [experiencing a labor market shortage](#) that is likely to last well into the future as the U.S.-born population gets older overall, [slowing growth in the number of workers](#).

Rather than a drain on the economy, an uptick in immigration presents an opportunity to alleviate this shortage. Data from [my own research](#) and studies conducted by other scholars shows that [immigrant workers](#) in the U.S. are more likely to be active in the [labor market](#)—either employed or looking for work—and tend to [work in professions with](#) the most unmet demand.

Help really wanted

The U.S. had [9 million job openings](#) in December 2023, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. The [government agency](#) also found that there were [6.1 million unemployed people](#) actively seeking paid work.

Economists generally compare the two numbers to calculate the [labor shortage](#). It currently stands at nearly 3 million workers, and the bureau expects this gap to grow as [the population ages and people have fewer children](#) over the next decade.

In other words, the U.S. faces a long-term shortage of people looking for

employment.

That shortfall would be much bigger without foreign-born workers, who accounted for a [record high of 18.1%](#) of the U.S. civilian labor force in 2022, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

More likely to be active in the workforce

Another reason why immigrants can help fill that big hole in the U.S. labor market is that so many of them tend to be employed or are looking for work.

About [65.9% of all people who were born elsewhere](#) were either employed or actively looking for work as of 2022, in comparison to 61.5% of people born in the U.S.

This difference has been [consistent since 2007](#), according to research by the Peterson Foundation, a think tank that focuses on long-term budget problems.

In a [study I conducted a few years ago](#), I found that immigrants who arrive in the United States as refugees fleeing violence and persecution in their home countries are eventually more likely to be employed or looking for work than people who are born in the U.S.

More home health aides and janitors

Some of the labor market's biggest shortages are especially acute in professions that tend to attract immigrants, such as home health aides.

The [health care](#) and social services sector as a whole has about [1.8 million](#) open jobs, the largest number of job openings currently

available.

This is followed by professional and [business services](#) with 1.7 million open jobs. This [category encompasses everything from legal services to janitorial work](#), including cleaning and grounds maintenance.

Currently, about [22% of employed immigrants work](#) in one of those two high-demand categories or another service occupation.

Making it easier to age in place

A team of economists has found that the [cost of home health care and support services is lower](#) than average in places with large numbers of immigrant service workers. This in turn makes it more likely that [older adults](#) can avoid institutionalization and stay in their own homes.

But, to be sure, immigrant workers providing these vital community support services often [endure exploitative](#) working conditions.

The labor market data not only makes it clear that the U.S. economy can absorb large numbers of immigrants, but it shows that these newcomers could be a much-needed solution to a labor supply crisis.

And yet people arriving in the U.S. as political asylum applicants are enduring [backlogs and facing hurdles in securing employment authorization](#), which is delaying their entry into the workforce.

Wouldn't it make more sense for Congress to expand pathways for legal employment access for migrants? From an economic perspective, that seems to be the most prudent course of action.

This article is republished from [The Conversation](#) under a Creative Commons license. Read the [original article](#).

Provided by The Conversation

Citation: Researcher: Immigrants do work that might not otherwise get done, bolstering the US economy (2024, February 14) retrieved 28 April 2024 from

<https://phys.org/news/2024-02-immigrants-bolstering-economy.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.