

Fact Sheet

Work and Employment for Immigrants in Oregon

Immigrants play a vital role in Oregon's economy

- Foreign-born workers comprise approximately 11.3 percent of the Oregon workforce.
- Immigrants are represented throughout Oregon's economy and are especially prominent in construction, agriculture, and the high technology industry.
- Immigrants have been active in starting their own businesses, with over 400 Slavic entrepreneurs owning businesses in the Portland area and over 6,000 Latino business owners emerging throughout Oregon.
- Representing 43 percent of the foreign-born population of Oregon, the experience of Mexican immigrants in the labor force warrants special attention.
- It is estimated that 70,000-88,000 of the immigrant workers in the Oregon workforce are undocumented.

Immigrant participation rates in the labor market are high

- Data on the ten largest immigrant groups by country of origin show an average workweek of 36-41 hours.
- The unemployment rates for the ten largest immigrant groups range from 4 to 6 percent, with Mexicans and Ukrainians the only groups to average over 10 percent unemployment.

The occupational distribution of immigrants in Oregon is varied

- The highest percentage of immigrants in Oregon is employed in professional, production, and service occupations respectively.
- Mexican immigrants tend to be clustered more in farm, production, and service occupations than other immigrants, but data suggest some mobility into higher paying employment.
- English fluency, higher levels of education, citizenship, and the amount of time spent in the United States strongly correlate with rising incomes, lower poverty rates, and occupational mobility for all immigrants.
- Mirroring the situation among native-born workers, female immigrants tend to earn less than their male counterparts doing the same kinds of work.

Working Conditions for Immigrants Pose Challenges

- State statistics show that a disproportionate number of foreign-born Latino immigrants suffer job fatalities. These statistics mirror national data that show similar results. Accidents and injuries by immigrant workers tend to be underreported due to high turnover rates, language barriers, and lack of legal status.
- Immigrants, especially Latinos, are clustered in occupations where wage and hour violations are more frequent and especially in cases where workers lack legal status. They are also more subject to work arrangements based on subcontracting and diffusion of employer responsibility that are more likely to result in exploitative practices.
- It is estimated that 10 percent of all union members in the United States are foreign born. Although no precise data exist for Oregon, there is evidence that some labor unions are conducting vigorous outreach towards immigrant workers.