

A Demographic Profile of Occupational Outcomes for the Working Age Immigrant Population
in the Saint Louis Metropolitan Region

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Research by Saint Louis University has shown that there has been a 171% increase in the foreign-born population in the St. Louis metropolitan region from 1990 through 2016. The St. Louis region now has a foreign-born population that is estimated to be 135,074. With the increase in the foreign-born population, new questions have arisen about the changing characteristics of the foreign-born population that are making St. Louis their home.

This report builds on the research currently being conducted at Saint Louis University, which uses micro data from the American Community Survey (a.k.a. IPUMS). The micro dataset provides information on individual level responses to the American Community Survey. The IPUMS data allows researchers to answer questions that can't be adequately answered using aggregate data from American FactFinder because the premade tables provided by the U.S. Census don't provide the necessary details.

The focus of this report is on occupational outcomes for the working age foreign-born population in the St. Louis metropolitan region. Specifically, there were four objectives for this report:

1. Create a detailed profile of the unemployed foreign-born population;
2. Create a detailed profile of the employed foreign-born population;
3. Create a detailed profile of the working underemployed foreign-born population; and
4. Create a detailed profile of the foreign-born population working in STEM occupations.

Major Findings

There were 79,149 working age foreign-born residents that were actively in the labor market. The analysis showed that the immigrant population living in the St. Louis region is diverse; 135 countries are represented by the working age foreign-born population. Asian immigrants represented 36% of this population followed by White immigrants (32%), and Latino immigrants (20%). It is important to note that immigrants from the same country did not self-identify using the same racial categories. Some of this difference can be explained by years living in the U.S., exposure to how U.S. racial categories are used, educational level, and the globalization of the immigrant population coming from countries that use different racial categories. In terms of

education level, 56% of the immigrants had less than a college level education followed by post-college educated immigrants (25%). Slightly more than half of the immigrants were non-citizens (52%). About 1 out of 10 (11%) immigrants reported an income that put them below the poverty level. However, about 3 out of 4 (77%) immigrants living below the poverty level were employed. The majority of the immigrants (54%) arrived before 2000. Finally, slightly more than 4 out of 5 (82%) immigrants reported that they did not move within the past year. The remaining immigrants were classified as immigrants moving to the St. Louis region within the past year from another part of Missouri or Illinois, another state, or another country. The findings showed that race and education level were significant variables that explained occupational patterns among immigrants.

Unemployed

The analysis presented in this report showed that of the 79,149 workers, 5,301 (6.7%) were unemployed. The largest number of unemployed immigrants reported their occupation to be military and protective services (n=1,273 or 24%). In fact, 96% of the immigrants in a military and protective service occupation were unemployed. White immigrants represented the largest unemployed immigrant population (36%) followed by Asian immigrants (27%). Seventy-one percent of the unemployed population had an education level less than college. The largest concentration of immigrants without a college degree were classified in the occupation of military and protective services (n=1,050 or 28%). Thirty-eight percent of the unemployed population reported an income below the poverty level. Of those unemployed immigrants living in poverty, 26% (n=536) were in services, representing the largest concentration for that group.

Employed

The analysis presented in this report showed that of the 79,149 workers, 73,848 (93.3%) were employed. The largest number of employed immigrants reported their occupation as business, finance, arts, and science (28%). Asian immigrants represented the largest employed immigrant population (36%) followed by White immigrants (31%). Unlike the unemployed immigrants, a larger percentage of employed immigrants had a college degree (18%) or post-college degree (26%). More than half (54%) of the employed post-college educated immigrant population reported their occupation to be classified in business, finance, arts, and science.

Underemployed

Two definitions of underemployed were used: (1) working and living in poverty; and (2) skills mismatch (e.g., working in an occupation that under-utilized the educational attainment of the immigrant). Thirteen percent (n=9,604) of the employed were identified as underemployed. About three out of four (71% or (n=6,830)) of the underemployed were living in poverty. The analysis in this report will focus on this segment of the underemployed (living in poverty) immigrant population. Seventy-six percent of the underemployed immigrants were non-citizens. White (23%) and Asian (23%) immigrants made up 46% of the underemployed population. Moreover, 76% of the underemployed immigrants had less than a college degree. The largest number of underemployed immigrants reported their occupation as services (30%). Although the service occupation was the dominant occupation for many demographic groups, there were some major differences especially by education level. For example, 46% of post-graduate underemployed immigrants were in business, finance, arts, and science.

STEM Occupations

Of the working age foreign-born population in St. Louis, 20,948 (28%) reported that they were in a STEM occupation. The top ten STEM occupations accounted for 13,019 foreign-born residents (62% of all STEM occupations). The top STEM occupation was post-secondary teaching (2,401) followed by physicians and surgeons (2,353), and software developers (1,939). Sixty-three percent of the workers in STEM were Asian. Moreover, 67% of the workers in STEM had a post-college education. Five percent of the workers in the top 10 STEM occupations were underemployed and more than half were non-citizens (54%).

This report is an important contribution to the growing literature on the foreign-born population in the St. Louis metropolitan region. This is the first report that uses micro data to provide a detailed demographic analysis of occupational outcomes for immigrants. Our hope is that non-profit organizations and city officials can use this data to understand the changing characteristics of the immigrant population, which will continue to grow not only in terms of numbers but also in diversity. This report serves as a baseline to study how the population will change in the coming years. Finally, the methodology used in this report provides a unique opportunity, at some point in the future, to study how St. Louis compares to peer-cities across the U.S. to see if other regions are similar or different, and to determine why differences or similarities exist.