



News from the Fiscal Policy Institute

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Contact:

David Dyssegaard Kallick, Senior Fellow
646-284-1240 (cell)
212-721-7164 (office)

Jo Brill, Director of Communications
914-671-9442 (cell)
brill@fiscalpolicy.org

Immigrants Create Almost a Quarter of New York State Economic Output Report shows foreign-born New Yorkers in jobs all across the economic spectrum

Immigrants added \$229 billion to the New York State economy in 2006, according to a new report by the Fiscal Policy Institute. That represents 22.4 percent of the state's Gross Domestic Product, according to the report, *Working for a Better Life: A Profile of Immigrants in the New York Economy*.

"These figures should wipe away any impression that immigrants are holding the New York economy back," said David Dyssegaard Kallick, senior fellow of the Fiscal Policy Institute and principal author of the report. "In fact, immigrants are a central component of New York's economic growth."

Immigrants make up 21 percent of people living in New York State—37 percent in New York City, 18 percent in the downstate suburbs, and 5 percent in upstate in 2005, according to the report. Immigrants also make up 31 percent of people who commute into New York State to work.

"Immigrants' contribution to economic output in New York State is about the same as their share of the population," notes James Parrott, chief economist of the Fiscal Policy Institute. "That's because immigrants start businesses, invest in New York, and work in jobs all across the economic spectrum—the same as other New Yorkers."

"This report clearly proves that immigrants fuel growth and vitality in every economic sector and every geographic area in New York," said Chung-Wha Hong, executive director of The New York Immigration Coalition. "For us to maximize immigrant contributions to the economy, we must stop treating immigrants like criminals and terrorists. Instead, we need to change our immigration laws so that undocumented immigrants can come out of the shadows of the underground economy and future immigrant workers can immigrate legally to fill jobs that our economy requires."

The report also finds that immigrants are subject to the same economic forces as everyone else in New York’s highly polarized economy. “We can see that low-wage workers—both immigrants and U.S.-born—are not sharing in the economy’s growth,” said David R. Jones, president and CEO of the Community Service Society of NY. “The right answer is to enforce basic standards that are good for all low-wage workers, not to pit one group of workers against another.”

“This study finds that over one third of all children growing up in New York State are part of an immigrant family,” noted Alan B. Lubin, executive vice president of the New York State United Teachers. “This stunning statistic shows how immigrants and their families are interwoven into the fabric of our schools and our communities.”

“And it doesn’t stop at high school graduation, either,” he continued. “On the other side of the classroom, the teaching side, the study shows that immigrants contribute mightily toward our higher education efforts.”

Joe Gomez, an electrical contractor from Albany, came from Cuba in 1961 as a political refugee. “For me, America was the land of opportunity. I found success, and I think I can say at this point that I have given back,” he said. “I’ve helped fellow immigrants, yes, but I’ve also been able to contribute to the entire community, strengthening the local economy, providing jobs and building new homes and businesses.”

Eduardo Giraldo, an insurance agency owner from Queens, first came to the United States from Colombia as an exchange student. Giraldo chairs the New York Statewide Hispanic Chamber. “What I can tell you is that immigrants are here to work hard,” he said. “They are very entrepreneurial and productive, and as we see from today’s report they make a tremendous contribution to the economy as a whole. With supportive policies, my fellow immigrant entrepreneurs can and will make the great New York State economy even stronger.”

Over time, the report shows, immigrants become fully participating members of New York’s communities.

- The majority of immigrants living in New York State speak English, and their English gets significantly better over time.
- Immigrants are entrepreneurs. The number of Hispanic- and Asian-owned businesses is growing rapidly, one rough indication of immigrant entrepreneurship.
- About two thirds of immigrants in the upstate and downstate suburbs own their own homes.
- Fully 34 percent of New York’s children are growing up in families with at least one foreign-born adult—8 percent in upstate New York, 31 percent in the downstate suburbs, and 57 percent in New York City.

FPI’s study, *Working for a Better Life: A Profile of Immigrants in the New York Economy*, is available at <http://www.fiscalpolicy.org/immigration2007.html>.

The Fiscal Policy Institute (FPI) is a nonpartisan research and education organization that focuses on tax, budget, and economic issues that affect the quality of life and the economic well being of New York State residents. FPI reports are available at www.fiscalpolicy.org.

Additional Information

Working for a Better Life looks at the state as a whole, and in addition analyzes the state in three parts: New York City, the downstate suburbs, and upstate New York.

In New York City, where immigrants make up 37 percent of the population and 46 percent of the labor force, immigrants are bolstering the middle class. Immigrants in New York City are more likely than U.S.-born residents to live in families in the middle income brackets, and less likely to live in families with very high or very low incomes. Immigrants make up a quarter of CEOs who live in New York City, half of accountants, a third of office clerks, a third of receptionists, and a third of building cleaners. In sector after sector, immigrants are found in the top, middle, and bottom rungs of the economic ladder, from finance to real estate to medicine.

In the downstate suburbs, 18 percent of all residents are foreign-born, with immigrants making up 23 percent of the labor force. Immigrants in the downstate suburbs are doing better, economically, than immigrants in other parts of the state. Median income for families with at least one immigrant adult is \$71,000, compared to a statewide median of \$45,000 for families with at least one immigrant (the statewide median for people in U.S.-born families is \$53,000). More immigrants work as registered nurses than in any other occupation. In addition, 41 percent of physicians and surgeons in the downstate suburbs are foreign-born, as are 28 percent of college and university professors, 22 percent of accountants and auditors, and 19 percent of financial managers.

In upstate New York, five percent of the population is foreign-born, but immigrants play a disproportionately important role in some areas that are key to the region's economy, culture, and history. In *universities*, immigrants make up 20 percent of all professors, four times their share of the overall population. In *health care*, the fastest-growing sector in upstate New York, immigrants make up 35 percent of physicians and surgeons. In scientific fields, related to upstate's strength in *research and development*, immigrants make up 20 percent of computer software engineers and 13 percent of computer scientists and systems analysts. And in *farming*, important to rural communities and to the cultural heritage of the region, immigrants make up an estimated 80 percent of the seasonal workers who pick the crops. Perhaps surprisingly, the three most common countries of origin for upstate immigrants are Canada, India, and Germany. Mexico, the focus of so much public attention in the immigration debates, comes fourth.

Persons quoted:

James Parrott, Deputy Director and Chief Economist, FPI, 212-721-5624

Chung-Wha Hong, Executive Director, The New York Immigration Coalition,
212-627-2227

David R. Jones, President and CEO, Community Service Society of New York,
212-254-8900

Alan B. Lubin, Executive Vice President, New York State United Teachers,
518-213-6000

Joe Gomez, Gomez Electrical Contractors, Inc., 518-427-8365

Eduardo Giraldo, New York Statewide Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, 718-899-4418