

Unions Protect Employment and Raise Earnings, Including for Workers Who Are Immigrants

Immigrant workers play an essential role in the American economy, helping to fill current labor shortages and further the country's economic progress. At [18.1%](#) of the workforce, immigrants strengthen the economy by working in high-demand industries and participating in the labor force at high rates. Immigrant workers' contributions are further bolstered when they have access to union representation, which provides stable employment, higher earnings, better benefits, and safer workplaces to both immigrant and native-born workers alike. The United States can improve the lives of all workers by removing barriers that prevent both immigrant and non-immigrant workers from gaining union representation.

Immigrant workers strengthen the economy, but structural barriers reduce their access to union representation

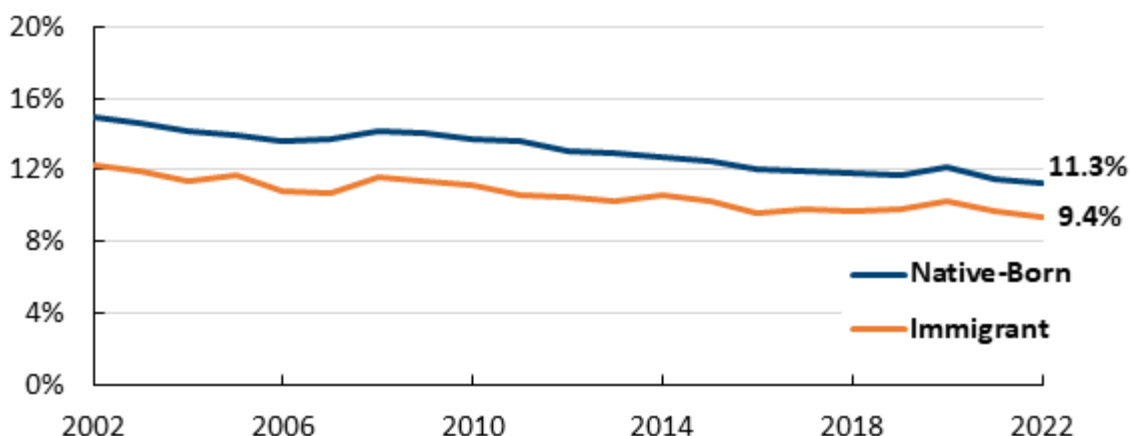
Immigrants contribute to a broad range of industries, including sectors like [health and care work](#) where the American economy faces a shortage of available workers. They are also overrepresented in essential industries such as [agriculture and transportation](#), and in fields that drive economic innovation such as [Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math](#) (STEM). Immigrants also make up [21%](#) of manufacturing workers and a [quarter](#) of workers in construction, two sectors where jobs are expected to proliferate due to critical investments in the [Inflation Reduction Act](#) and the [CHIPS and Science Act](#).

To ensure that the prosperity immigrants bring is shared more widely, immigrant workers must have equal access to pursuing union representation. While overall unionization rates have been falling for all workers over the last 20 years, the unionization rate for immigrant workers is consistently lower than the rate for native-born workers.

Over the years, structural barriers have hindered organizing among immigrants, including [language barriers](#) and [rampant wage theft](#) along with [intimidation and threats](#) from employers. Undocumented immigrants face even steeper challenges because since 2002, employers have been able to legally [withhold reimbursement](#) for lost wages to undocumented workers who have been illegally fired for union organizing. Overall, these obstacles continue to reduce unionization among immigrant workers by allowing their employers to threaten their jobs and livelihoods.

Immigrant Workers Are Less Likely to Have Union Representation

Percentage of workers with union coverage for immigrant and native-born workers, 2002 to 2022



Source: Current Population Survey, Outgoing Rotation Group (2002 to 2022)

Notes: Individual workers are classified as having union coverage if they are a union member or work in a union-covered workplace, but are not a union member.



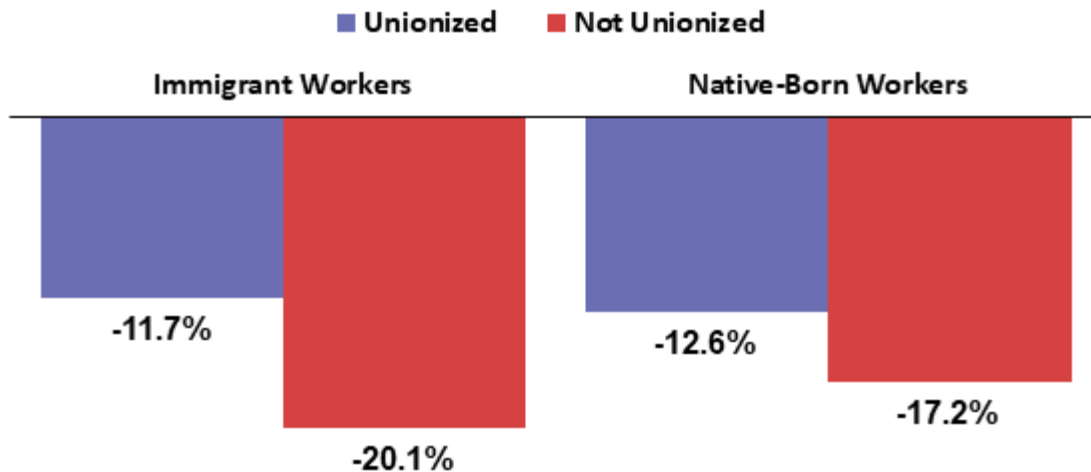
Union representation protects both immigrant and native-born workers' job security during economic crises

Unions protect jobs during times of economic crisis, especially for immigrant workers. This security is [attributed](#) to unions' ability to negotiate for furloughs and work-share arrangements that save jobs during recessions. This dynamic was showcased in the recent economic crisis spurred by COVID-19.

At the pandemic's peak in the second quarter of 2020, overall U.S. employment shrank by 17%. In this quarter, immigrant workers who were represented by a union were half as likely (11.7%) to lose their job than those without union representation (20.1%). Unionization also helped native-born workers during this period, as workers represented by a union were almost 1.5 times less likely (12.6%) to lose their jobs than those without union representation (17.2%).

Unionized Workers Were More Likely to Keep Their Jobs at the Peak of COVID-19

Employment change by union status for immigrant and native-born workers, 2020 Q1 to 2020 Q2



Source: Current Population Survey, Outgoing Rotation Group (2020)

Notes: Calculations based on CPS, ORG 2020 data



While the COVID-19 recession impacted all workers, union representation averted substantial job losses for both native-born and immigrant workers during the crisis. This was especially important for immigrants, who were overall [more likely](#) to lose their jobs during the pandemic. The graph above highlights how union representation closes this disparity, helping more workers stay employed regardless of where they were born. Improving immigrant workers' access to union representation now would fortify their job security and sustain their ability to contribute to the economy under a wide range of macroeconomic circumstances.

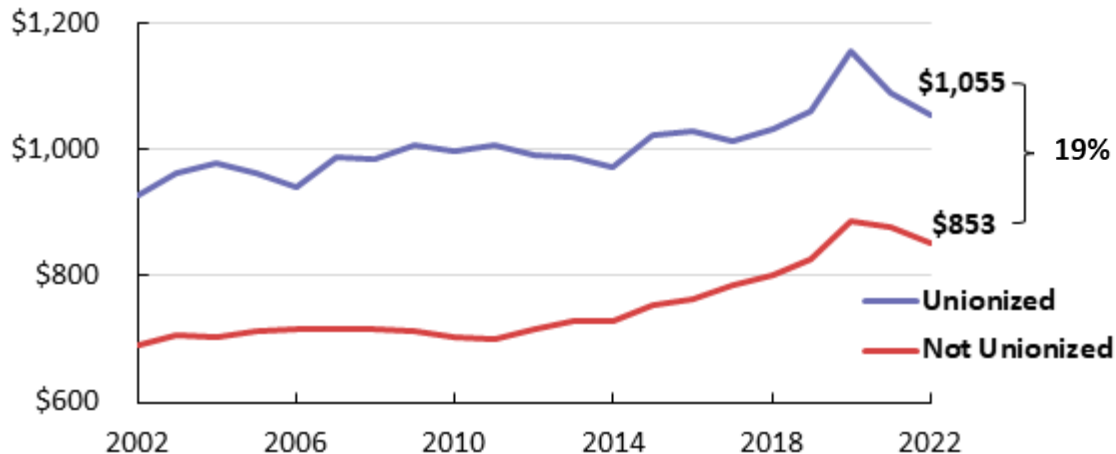
Unionization raises immigrant workers' access to higher earnings and better benefits

Unions can help stimulate economic mobility for low-wage immigrant workers by providing better access to benefits and helping to provide higher wages for workers. Immigrant workers who were represented by a union earned 19% more than their peers without union representation in 2022. They are also [50% more likely](#) to have employer-provided health insurance and [nearly twice as likely](#) to have an employer-provided retirement plan than immigrant workers without union representation. These impacts are especially large in the [15 lowest-wage occupations](#), where immigrants are more likely to work.

For both immigrant and native-born workers, unionized workers earned higher wages than their non-unionized counterparts, even through times of economic instability like the Great Recession and the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2022, immigrant workers who were unionized earned 19% more in median weekly earnings than their non-union counterparts. This pay advantage has held at similar levels since at least 2002 amongst unionized immigrant workers.

Unionized Immigrants Have Sustained Earnings Advantages Over the Last 20 Years

Median weekly earnings by union status for immigrant workers, 2002 to 2022



Source: Current Population Survey, Outgoing Rotation Group (2002 to 2022)

Notes: Earnings are adjusted for inflation according to 2022 levels.



Unionization enhances worker safety and saves lives in dangerous jobs

In addition to protecting employment and earnings, unions also protect the physical safety of workers. This is especially salient for immigrants who [work](#) in [industries](#) with higher injury rates like construction, transportation, agriculture, and manufacturing. A recent [report](#) on the construction industry shows that union worksites are 19% less likely to have federal safety violations and have 34% fewer violations than non-union worksites. By allowing immigrant workers to organize in a union and negotiate for protocols that safeguard their health and safety, they can protect both the employer and workers within the construction industry.

Increasing access to unions can help all workers prosper, especially immigrants

Union representation helps all workers become more prosperous, including those workers who have immigrated to the U.S. As the U.S. economy increasingly relies on immigrant workers to fill labor shortages, these workers must have equal access to collective bargaining rights that protect their well-being. Passing bills like the PRO Act and the Wage Theft Prevention and Wage Recovery Act, along with increasing funding to the National Labor Relations Board, and codifying protections from deportation for victims of workplace retaliation all represent viable solutions. In particular, these policies would help safeguard immigrant workers' rights to union representation, enabling them to boost their contributions to the overall economy.