



Immigrants, the Economy and the COVID-19 Outbreak

Foreign-born workers are key contributors to the U.S. economy, making up more than 17 percent of the labor force and creating about one-fourth of new businesses. Immigrants provide the manpower and innovative drive needed to fuel economic growth in the economy, working in lower-skilled service sector jobs to high-skilled occupations in health care and other industries. They are disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 recession and can play a key role in helping to recover from it.

Immigrants are concentrated in occupations critical to the food supply chain, public health and key sectors of the economy. Approximately 69 percent work in occupations designated by the federal government as “essential.” This compels them to be at work during widespread stay-at-home orders that shielded many others from the peak risk of infection.

Foreign-born workers also are concentrated in industries that experienced steeper increases in unemployment as a result of the coronavirus recession, such as accommodation and food services. Approximately one-in-five foreign-born workers lost their jobs between February and April 2020.

The impact of the pandemic on immigrant workers has varied greatly. The working poor were hardest hit, particularly Latino immigrants in low-skilled occupations. Even before the spread of COVID-19, many were ineligible for public assistance, earned low wages or lacked basic job benefits such as health insurance. During the crisis, they have had restricted access to COVID-19 relief measures. Some of these inequities would be addressed in the House-passed HEROES Act, which faces an uncertain future in the Senate.

While foreign-born workers face health and financial challenges from COVID-19, they also offer hope for recovery. Immigrant entrepreneurship drives innovation and economic growth. Immigrant-owned companies employ millions of workers and generate billions in revenue and tax payments. However, their businesses also have been more vulnerable to the COVID-19 recession; during the initial phase of the COVID-19 outbreak, foreign-born business ownership fell by 36 percent, compared to a 22 percent decline in business ownership overall.

Since the founding of the nation, immigrants have played a key role in creating a dynamic and growing U.S. economy. This role has become even more important in the pandemic recession, in which foreign-born workers have disproportionately been “essential” in many industries and have suffered from especially high job losses. To foster a stronger and more equitable American economy, economic and labor market policies must address the challenges and build upon the essential contributions of the foreign-born workforce and immigrant-owned businesses.

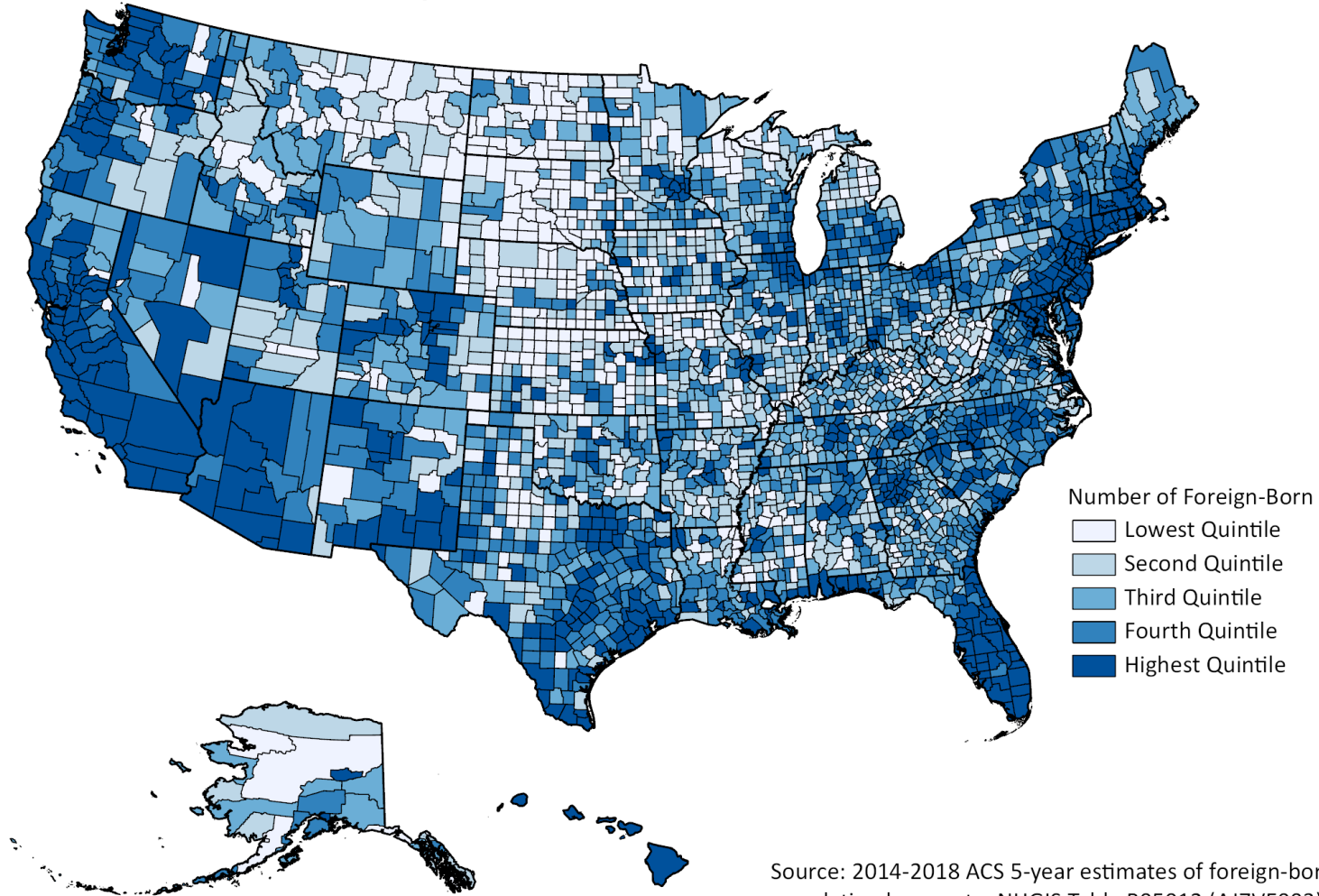
KEY FACTS

- One-in-seven of the total U.S. population is foreign-born (46 million people).
- More than one-in-six workers in the United States are foreign-born (28 million workers).
- Almost half (48 percent) of the foreign-born labor force is Latino; about one-quarter (25 percent) is Asian; 10 percent is Black and 16 percent is White.
- Foreign-born workers are overrepresented in key occupations in the field of health, accounting for 38 percent of home health aides, 29 percent of physicians and 23 percent of pharmacists.
- Immigrants make up 22 percent of all workers in the U.S. food supply chain, even though they comprise only 17 percent of the labor force.
- Primarily as a result of the coronavirus recession, the number of employed foreign-born workers dropped from about 28 million in February to 22 million in April 2020.
- Foreign-born workers are more likely to be in the occupations that reached the highest unemployment rates during the onset of the COVID-19 outbreak:
 - service occupations (27 percent)
 - natural resources, construction and maintenance (16 percent) and
 - production, transportation and material moving (18 percent).
- About three-fourths of undocumented immigrants in the labor force are classified as essential.
- The health insurance coverage rate of all native-born residents is 93 percent, while the coverage rate of foreign-born residents is 81 percent and the rate of noncitizens is 71 percent.
- More than 15 million immigrants and persons living in households of mixed immigration status were ineligible for direct payments under the 2020 CARES Act.
- More than one-in-four noncitizen children live in poverty.
- Immigrants start approximately 25 percent of new firms in the United States.
- The number of immigrant-owned businesses fell by 36 percent during the onset of the COVID-19 outbreak, compared to an 18 percent decline in native-born business ownership.

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Counties with High Foreign-Born Populations Spread Across the United States



THE IMMIGRANT LABOR FORCE

One-in-seven U.S. residents is foreign-born

There are 46 million immigrants in the United States, making up approximately 14 percent of the population.¹ A little over half of all immigrants were born in Latin America. Approximately one-third were born in Asia, one-tenth in Europe and less than one-tenth in Africa or other regions.

In this report, the terms “immigrant” and “foreign-born” are used interchangeably. Per the U.S. Census Bureau and Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), the foreign-born include all those born outside of the United States who were not U.S. citizens at the time of their birth, including naturalized citizens and noncitizens.² Noncitizens include lawful permanent residents, asylees, temporary residents (including students and workers) and those who do not have legal immigration status.

According to the latest (2017) estimates available from the Pew Research Center, nearly half of all immigrants are naturalized citizens (20.7 million), 27 percent are lawful permanent residents (12.3 million) and 5 percent are temporary residents with legal status (2.2 million).³ Overall, about three-fourths of the foreign-born population are authorized immigrants. Less than one-fourth (10.5 million) are undocumented immigrants.

Most undocumented immigrants entered the country with a temporary legal status that later expired. Others immigrated to the United States without authorization at the time of entry.⁴

Immigrants are more likely to be of prime working age

Even before COVID-19, foreign-born workers were in high demand in the labor market. Immigrants help balance out the age composition of the nation’s population. The median age of foreign-born U.S. residents is 45 years old, which is nine years older than the median age of the native-born population. The foreign-born are less likely to have children under age four or of school age. Only 6 percent are under 18 years old, compared to 26 percent of the native-born. About an equal percentage of foreign-born and native-born people are over the age of 65 (15.4 percent and 16.4 percent, respectively). As many migrants come to the United States to participate in the labor market, immigrants are more likely to be in the prime working ages of 25 to 54.⁵

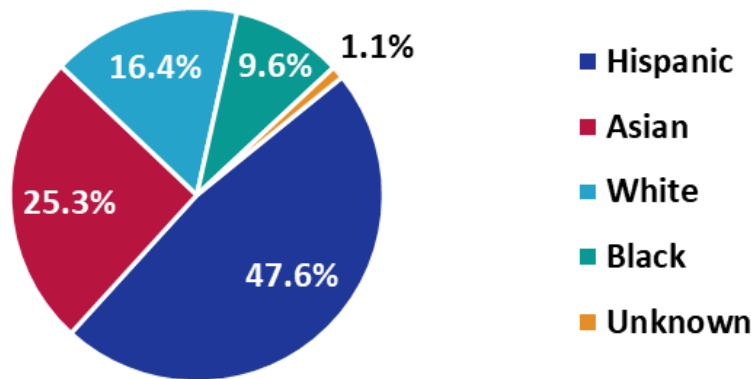
Immigrants contribute to the economy by supporting economic growth, technological advancement and innovation. They increase the overall labor supply, filling in low- and high-end skill gaps.⁶ According to 2019 BLS estimates, there are 28.4 million foreign-born workers in the United States, accounting for 17.4 percent of the labor force.⁷

The foreign-born are racially and ethnically diverse

Latinos comprised almost half (47.6 percent) of the foreign-born labor force in 2019, the last year for which data are available.⁸ Among non-Hispanic immigrants in the labor force, 25.3 percent are Asian, 16.4 percent are White and 9.6 percent are Black.

Foreign-Born Labor Force is Racially Diverse

Percent of Foreign-Born Labor Force by Race, 2019



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, published May 2020

Immigrants are concentrated on the coasts and the Southwest, but increasingly live in the South and Midwest

The largest number of immigrants are concentrated in high-density coastal areas. However, counties with the highest immigrant populations are spread throughout the nation (see map). The share of foreign-born workers is higher in the West (23.5 percent) and the Northeast (20.2 percent) than in the South (16.5 percent) and the Midwest (9.7 percent).⁹ Yet the South has the highest number of foreign-born workers (9.8 million), compared to other regions (8.9 million, 5.6 million and 3.3 million in the West, Northeast and Midwest, respectively).

While large numbers of immigrants are still more common in coastal areas and the Southwest, the fastest-growing foreign-born populations are more dispersed across the country. For example, the five metropolitan areas with the largest populations each have over 1.5 million immigrant residents — New York, NY; Los Angeles, CA; Miami, FL; Chicago, IL; and Houston, TX. However, the immigrant populations of some smaller cities has grown rapidly; Charlotte, NC; Columbus, OH and Nashville, TN each grew by more than 30 percent between 2010 and 2018.¹⁰

Foreign-born workers who have completed only high school earn less than their native-born peers; those with college degrees earn slightly more

Among those aged 25 and over, immigrant workers are more likely not to have completed high school (20.4 percent versus 3.9 percent, respectively). The share of the foreign-born labor force with a high school degree is about the same as their native-born peers (24.9 percent compared with 25.5 percent). Foreign-born workers are less likely to have some college or an associate degree (16.2 percent compared with 28.6 percent). The foreign-born are also slightly less likely to have a college degree or higher (38.6 percent compared with 42 percent).

According to BLS, the median usual weekly earnings of foreign-born full-time wage and salary workers is 85 cents on the dollar compared to native-born workers. Foreign-born full-time workers who have completed high school earn 88 cents on the dollar compared to their native-born peers. Foreign-born workers with a higher level of education have a pay advantage. Native-born workers with a bachelor's degree or higher earn 96 cents on the dollar compared to their foreign-born peers.

Research shows that many international students stay to live in the United States after graduating, increasingly joining the U.S. labor force.¹¹ Many work in high-skilled jobs. In science, technology, engineering and math (STEM fields), international students account for more than half of the master's degrees (54 percent) and slightly under half (44 percent) of the doctorate degrees attained.¹² Employers often recruit high-skilled foreign-born workers when there is a shortage of native-born workers. The unemployment rate in STEM fields for native-born and foreign-born adults tends to be lower than in non-STEM occupations. Research shows that foreign-born workers can be complements to native-born workers, helping to create more jobs in the economy for native-born Americans.¹³

FRONT-LINE AND ESSENTIAL WORKERS

Immigrants are overrepresented in front-line health care occupations

Foreign-Born Workers Provide Essential Health Care Services			
Occupation	All Workers	Foreign-Born Workers	
		Number	Share
Home Health Aides	476,000	182,000	38%
Physicians	808,000	233,000	29%
Personal Care Aides	1,138,000	289,000	25%
Nursing Assistants	1,363,000	301,000	22%
All Health Care Services	18,721,000	3,099,000	17%

Source: "Immigrant Workers: Vital to the U.S. COVID-19 Response, Disproportionately Vulnerable" by Migration Policy Institute. Occupations that have a disproportionately higher share of foreign-born workers compared to their overall share in the labor force (>17.4%) shown.

The current pandemic accelerates the rising labor demand in sectors that face skill gaps at the low-end and high-end of health care occupations, from home health aides to physicians. Public-facing health care jobs — including nurses and medical assistants — often require non-English language skills. Most medical interpreters are immigrant workers.¹⁴

As Baby Boomers age and the health care system faces increasing demand due to COVID-19, immigrants will be even more critical to some of the fastest-growing health care occupations, such as licensed registered nurses and certified home health aides.¹⁵ Immigrants are over-represented in the occupations of home health aides, physicians, personal care aides and nursing assistants — jobs that require they care for and keep in close contact with the sick and highest-risk during the pandemic. Millions of foreign-born workers have helped to continue critical operations on the front lines in health care and social services during the pandemic.

The COVID-19 response placed a higher burden on “essential” workers

On March 19, 2020, the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) released guidance to help state and local jurisdictions and the private sector identify the “essential” workforce. Under the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), CISA states that essential workers are those employed in industries that are crucial to “ensuring continuity of functions critical to public health and safety, as well as economic and national security.” Federal and state guidelines directed others to stay home to slow the spread of the coronavirus.¹⁶

The classification of being an essential worker involved a disproportionate burden on low-skilled workers. Many already had greater occupational exposure and lower-paying jobs. A study by the Center for Employment Equity found that 43 percent of essential workers are in low-wage jobs.¹⁷ A study by Brookings estimates that there are 97.7 million essential workers that meet the federal definition, and most are in occupations where it is not typical to work from home.¹⁸

According to the Brookings study, workers that are likely to be able to telework disproportionately earn more and have higher educational attainment. They are also more likely to be White. For this reason, during the stay-at-home or shelter-in-place phases of the initial outbreak, lower-income, less-skilled and nonwhite workers were more likely to be exposed to the coronavirus that causes COVID-19 (Sars-CoV-2).

Immigrants are more likely to be “essential”

Immigrants disproportionately work in essential jobs. The Center for Migration Studies found that there are 19.8 million foreign-born workers qualified as essential. Compared to 65 percent of the native-born labor force, a higher percentage (69 percent) of immigrants are in the essential work categories.¹⁹ About three-fourths of undocumented immigrants in the labor force are in sectors classified as essential.

According to 2019 BLS data, immigrants account for a disproportionate labor share of several industries that are primarily classified as essential, including agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting (23 percent); construction (27.6 percent); manufacturing (18.6 percent); transportation and utilities (20.5 percent); professional and business services (20.7 percent); and leisure and

hospitality (20.6 percent).²⁰ Overall, immigrants account for just over 17 percent of the labor force.

The federal guidelines included many of the occupations in these sectors, with a large number of foreign-born workers being in accommodation and food services. More than 3-in-10 cooks, chefs and housekeepers are foreign-born. Immigrants account for about 1-in-5 food service managers, food preparation workers and cashiers.

Immigrant workers play a critical role in the food supply chain

The nation's food sector relies on millions of foreign-born workers. These workers are spread across the supply chain — growing crops, harvesting fruits and vegetables, meat processing, transportation, wholesale trade and retail.²¹ According to the Migration Policy Institute, immigrants account for 22 percent of all workers in the U.S. food supply chain. In some areas, foreign-born workers are even more concentrated, comprising more than 3-in-10 workers in agriculture, crop production, meat processing and commercial bakeries. Among agricultural laborers, graders and sorters, the share of foreign-born workers is over half.²² In some states, the majority of food workers are immigrants: 69 percent of the agricultural workers in California, 70 percent of the seafood processing workers in Alaska and 66 percent of the meat processing workers in Nebraska are foreign-born.²³

The global food supply chain depends on immigrant labor.²⁴ As migrant workers help to ensure food is on the table in households across the world, they face elevated occupational exposure to the virus while lacking adequate protections or benefits, as demonstrated in the meatpacking industry. Workers at one large meatpacking facility reported that the initial notice about the coronavirus outbreak was only posted in English, putting the mostly non-English speaking workforce at higher risk due to inadequate information about the COVID-19 outbreak.²⁵

In meat processing — where immigrants are 34.7 percent of the workers, the industry reached a crisis point soon after the outbreak. The chairman of a major food corporation warned on April 26 2020, that the food supply chain is breaking. Soon after, President Trump signed an executive order to classify meat processing plants as essential infrastructure that must remain open, invoking the Defense Production Act. Yet the federal government failed to issue any mandatory or enforceable worker protections. At the time, there was a 25 percent drop in the nation's meat supply due to the closure of 17 plants.

Amid fears of food shortages and rotting produce, few policies were enacted to improve the conditions for those contributing to the food supply chain. The availability of food in American households is primarily reliant on low-paid, immigrant workers — many undocumented.²⁶ Unsafe work and living conditions exacerbate other risk factors that migrant workers face.²⁷ Many who are undocumented lack access to health insurance, unemployment assistance and adequate housing or job benefits, such as paid sick leave.

Migrant workers — even those with H-2A visas, which enable noncitizens to work in the agricultural sector — have little leverage to seek improved working or living conditions for fear

of deportation or the risk of losing their visas if they leave their job.²⁸ Others report going to work due to economic necessity despite the unsafe conditions.²⁹

EXPOSURE TO THE CORONAVIRUS

High poverty levels make the foreign-born more vulnerable to COVID-19

Noncitizen immigrants are twice as likely to be poor as the overall population.³⁰ Compared to less than 1-in-10 families overall, a larger share of noncitizen family households is below the federal poverty level (18.4 percent). The poverty rate among female-headed, noncitizen households is even higher, at 40.9 percent. More than 1-in-4 (26.6 percent) noncitizen children are poor, compared to 15.9 percent of native-born children and 16.3 percent of naturalized foreign-born children.

Research shows that those in poverty are more likely to have underlying health conditions associated with higher rates of hospitalization from COVID-19. For example, Americans living below the poverty line and with lower household incomes are 50 percent more likely to see their treatment for asthma fail.³¹ Another study found that 16.5 percent of individuals living at or below the poverty level were at high risk of developing heart disease, compared to 9.5 percent of high-income individuals.³² Low-income individuals are twice as likely to have diabetes and four times more likely to smoke (36 percent compared to 8.8 percent).³³

Immigrants live in places where COVID-19 deaths and infection rates are highest

While the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) does not provide data on COVID-19 infection or mortality rates by nativity or citizenship status, places that have a larger immigrant population — such as urban coastal areas — have higher COVID-19 mortality rates (see map).

However, when the rates of COVID-19 cases or deaths are adjusted by population size, the concentration becomes more spread out across the Midwest and South. The pattern for the population-adjusted rates may reflect the higher infection and mortality rates among African-American and Native American populations in these regions. However, available data are incomplete and often do not adjust for other demographic characteristics, such as age. The pattern of infection and mortality is still unfolding.

Latinos are far more likely than Whites to contract COVID-19

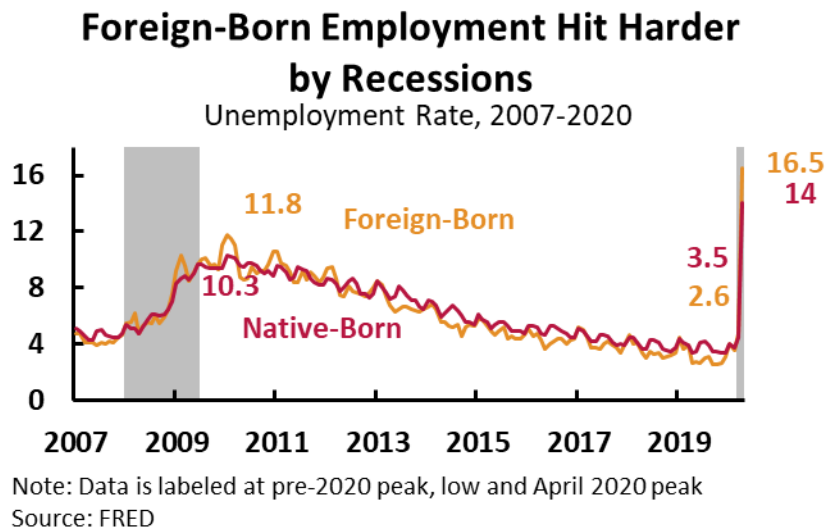
Data recently released by the CDC by race and ethnicity show Latinos to be disproportionately affected by a greater margin than the earlier data suggested. In some states and local areas, Latinos are much more likely than Whites to get infected. In Virginia, 49 percent of cases are Latino despite Latinos making up only 10 percent of the population of the state.³⁴ In Durham County, North Carolina, the Latino share of coronavirus cases increased dramatically, from 12 percent to 67 percent from April to the end of May.³⁵ Latinos comprise 13 percent of the population in this county.

The jump in cases among Latinos may indicate a lag in seeking treatment or other underlying indicators of vulnerability that might foretell increased risk among the immigrant population, especially given that just under half of immigrants are of Latino descent.

THE ECONOMIC IMPACT OF COVID-19

Foreign-born workers have suffered higher job losses from the onset of the recession

The onset of COVID-19 contributed to the start of a recession in the United States in February 2020.³⁶ The dramatic labor market effects of the start of the outbreak can be captured by comparing monthly data from the beginning of the downturn to two months outward — April 2020. Much of the initial slowdown is not apparent in the data available for March 2020 because household and establishment surveys were conducted before the stay-at-home orders took effect. While preliminary data show an uptick in employment in May as businesses started to call back workers and reopening phases began in various states, the economic implications of the pandemic and progress toward recovery are still unfolding.



Pre-pandemic, the preceding decade-long economic expansion had resulted in historically low unemployment levels. The unemployment rate for foreign-born workers was 2.6 percent and 3.5 percent for native-born workers in February 2020. That changed quickly when the coronavirus hit the United States. From February to April 2020, the unemployment rate for native-born workers increased from 3.5 percent in February 2020 to 14 percent in April 2020. Foreign-born workers experienced an unprecedented increase, with the unemployment rate climbing from 2.6 percent to 16.5 percent. In April, the foreign-born unemployment rate was higher by 2.5 percentage points.

The number of employed immigrants declined from 27.6 million to 21.9 million from February 2020 to April 2020. One-in-five in the workforce lost their jobs. Employment rebounded somewhat to 22.4 million in May.³⁷ Foreign-born workers disproportionately work in the

occupations that reached the highest unemployment rates during the initial labor market collapse in April 2020: service occupations (27.1 percent, NSA), natural resources, construction and maintenance (16.3 percent, NSA); and production, transportation and material moving (18.2 percent, NSA).³⁸ Both native-born and foreign-born workers in these industries faced unemployment spikes during the outbreak.

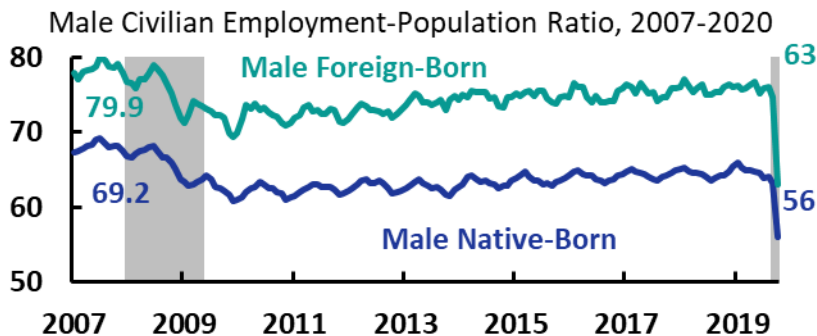
Still, immigrants are more likely to work in these sectors and specific sub-sectors that were even more profoundly affected by the economic collapse. In just food services (and drinking places), there was a 5.2 million total loss in jobs in April 2020. Immigrants are also more likely to work in leisure and hospitality, personal and other services as well as in retail — which also suffered deep job losses.³⁹ Personal services saw an overall decline of 53 percent. Retail shed more than 2 million total jobs, with losses in furniture and home furnishings and in clothing and clothing accessories of 46 percent and 60 percent, respectively.

Employment of foreign-born males dropped precipitously

Another way to measure job loss is to look at the rate of employment among the total population. This measure of the employment rate is called the “employment-population ratio.” Unlike the standard unemployment rate, this indicator is not dependent on the size of the labor force or whether persons entered or exited the labor market. It is a direct reflection of the share of the population that is employed.

Employment among foreign-born and native-born men never fully rebounded during the nearly 10 years of economic expansion after the Great Recession. However, in April 2020, the historical gap of foreign-born men having a higher employment rate than native-born men narrowed to 7 percentage points from 10 percentage points a decade earlier. Employment among foreign-born men plummeted to 63 percent in April 2020, down almost 17 percentage points from its pre-Great Recession high, while the employment-population ratio for native-born men fell to 56 percent.

Foreign-Born Male Employment Plummeted, But Rate Still Higher than Native-Born Men



Note: Data are labeled at pre-2020 peak and April 2020 low
Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics; Haver Analytics

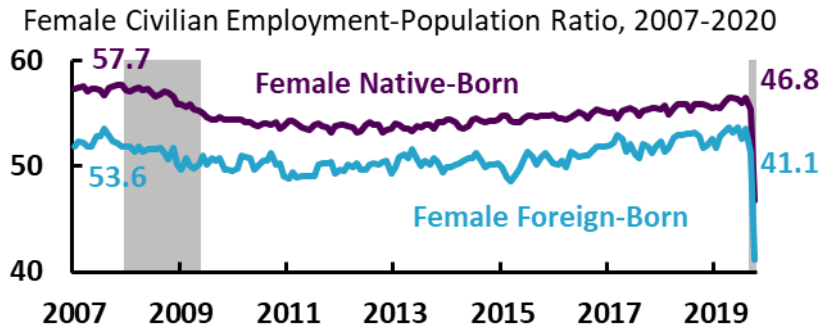
Employment of foreign-born women plummeted, widening the gender gap

Unlike with men, foreign-born women historically have experienced lower rates of employment than native-born women. The pre-Great Recession peaks in the employment rate were 53.6 percent and 57.7 percent for foreign-born women and native-born women, respectively — a gap of 4.1 percentage points.

In April 2020, the decline in the employment rate was steep for foreign-born women — dropping to 41.1 percent. The employment gap experienced by foreign-born women widened to 5.7 percentage points lower compared to native-born women and 21.9 percentage points lower than that of foreign-born men. Notably, the employment-population ratio for both foreign-born and native-born women dropped below 50 percent. The drop is a marked change from the end of 2019 when the percentage of women in the labor market had just surpassed the share of men.

The steep declines and lower employment-population ratio among women highlight the substantial impact of the downturn by gender and the economic precarity of foreign-born households, many of which rely on women's and men's income to escape poverty.

Foreign-Born Women Faced Steepest Drop in Employment, Widening Gap



Note: Data are labeled at pre-2020 peak and April 2020 low
Source: Bureau of Labor Statistic; Haver Analytics

AN INADEQUATE SAFETY NET

Low-wage and undocumented immigrants often lack access to the federal safety net

Low-wage migrant workers have minimal access to relief during the pandemic, even as the nation's economy and American households depend on them for essential services. Undocumented immigrants generally are ineligible for income support, health insurance or food assistance programs. Immigrant residents with legal status can also face restricted access to public benefits.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, states passed laws limiting undocumented immigrants from receiving local public benefits, such as health care. For example, California promulgated Proposition 187 in 1994.⁴⁰ In 1996, the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation (PRWOA) Act restricted immigrant residents with legal status from receiving federal means-tested programs for the first five years of U.S. residence.⁴¹ PRWOA also made clear that undocumented immigrants are ineligible for federal public assistance. In the early 2000s, measures expanded state's discretion in providing prenatal coverage to mother's irrespective of their immigration status and in restoring access to Medicaid before the five-year waiting period (as established by the PWROA Act).⁴² However, undocumented immigrants still are generally ineligible for federal programs such as Social Security, Medicare and SNAP. Despite their indicators of vulnerability, immigrants have limited to no access to government assistance programs available to nonimmigrants, making it more difficult to weather the personal impacts and widespread disruptions of the pandemic.

Noncitizens are least likely to have access to health insurance

The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the importance of access to health insurance and health care in protecting public health. To speed the public health and economic recovery from the pandemic, the most vulnerable communities — even those that are undocumented — require adequate and affordable access to testing, treatment and preventive care.

However, the immigrant population — particularly noncitizens — have faced declining health insurance coverage rates. In 2018, only 81.1 percent of foreign-born individuals had health insurance, while more than 93.2 percent of the native-born population had health insurance. Noncitizens were even less likely to have any health insurance (71.4 percent).⁴³ These rates of coverage are significantly worse than they were in 2017.

When President Trump took office, the Administration began implementing steps to weaken the Affordable Care Act (ACA), starting with Executive Order (EO) 13765. As Trump's first executive order in office it gave states more leeway to delay or adapt the implementation of the ACA. It made it harder for Americans to enroll and allowed states to shrink their programs.⁴⁴

Access to health insurance has continued to decline under COVID-19 as the economic impact of the recession has eliminated jobs and work-based health insurance for many newly unemployed. The Economic Policy Institute estimates that 16.2 million workers have likely lost their employer-provided health insurance as of May 2020.⁴⁵

The steep costs of medical care may deter immigrants from seeking care and testing during the pandemic. The Families First Coronavirus Response Act provided \$1 billion to reimburse health care providers for COVID-19 testing for the uninsured. However, the optional state Medicaid program for testing did not provide for immigrants who are ineligible for federal non-emergency Medicaid. Patients have reported receiving surprise bills for thousands of dollars in out-of-pocket expenses after seeking medical care for COVID-like symptoms.⁴⁶

The fear of deportation can also have a significant chilling effect on health care access for immigrants, including those who are in the United States legally as well as the citizen children of

immigrants.⁴⁷ In December 2018, 13.7 percent of adults in immigrant families reported that they or a family member avoided participating in a non-cash government benefit program for fear of risking future green card eligibility. This figure was higher (20.7 percent) for respondents in low-income families.⁴⁸

The public charge rule, adjudicated by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), states that immigrants who receive public benefits could jeopardize their immigration status and their eventual path to citizenship. In 2019, the public charge rule was expanded to allow USCIS to consider health care, nutrition and housing services in addition to cash assistance programs and long-term care. This change directly affected over 383,000 green card holders and applicants.⁴⁹

USCIS has issued a public notice during the pandemic that new enrollment in emergency Medicaid will not be included in public charge rulings. Still, there has not been a corresponding effort to communicate that change to communities with large immigrant populations. For example, on the USCIS website, the text of the revision to the public charge rule is not included on the “USCIS Response to Coronavirus 2019 (COVID)” webpage. It can only be accessed through an internet search or resources outside of the federal government.⁵⁰

Widespread coverage and access to medical care and health insurance for the duration of the pandemic is essential to ensuring public health. However, many immigrants and communities with large foreign-born populations lack access. Given the dangerous health consequences of lacking insurance, fears of the steep costs of care and concerns about becoming a public charge, COVID-19 cases in immigrant communities likely have been undercounted. Data on infection and mortality rates by nativity and citizenship should be collected and made available for further analysis.⁵¹ Otherwise, the true needs of immigrants and their families will continue to be generally unknown and unaddressed.

Immigrants have restricted access to COVID-19 relief measures

Under the \$2 trillion CARES Act, the federal government restricted Economic Impact Payments to those that filed federal taxes with a Social Security number.⁵² Payments were sent to most taxpayers for up to \$1,200 per adult and \$500 for each minor child, starting in April 2020. In households where anyone had used an Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN) to pay taxes, however, every person in the household was considered ineligible for payment.⁵³ According to an analysis by the Migration Policy Institute, 15.4 million residents — including 9.9 million unauthorized immigrants and 3.7 million of their children and 1.7 million of their spouses — were ineligible.⁵⁴

The reduced number of payments was sizable in many states. In each of the three states with the highest foreign-born populations, more than a million residents did not receive funds that could have spurred the economy and provided a safety net for households during the crisis. In Texas and New York, 2.3 million and 1.1 million residents were ineligible, respectively. In Florida, New Jersey and Illinois, over half a million residents missed out on a payment.

California is the state with the largest number of residents ineligible for the direct payments, at 4.2 million. About 16.9 million California residents received a direct payment for a total of nearly \$27.9 billion.⁵⁵ The state's unemployment insurance (UI) trust fund balance is near insolvency. California's economy and fiscal health could have benefited from the additional payments that would have been distributed to its residents if eligibility had not been based on citizenship status.⁵⁶

Research shows that people immediately increased spending after receiving the Economic Impact Payment, especially among lower-earners.⁵⁷ The economic impact was likely diluted, however, due to the millions that did not receive a payment. Like their native-born peers, immigrants with families or lower household earnings may have a higher marginal propensity to consume.⁵⁸ Preliminary data show that lower-earner households increased spending after receiving a direct payment, while the checks had little effect on higher-earner households.⁵⁹ According to a study by Federal Reserve Bank researchers, those who live “paycheck-to-paycheck” increased spending by almost three times as much as those with a high level of savings.

ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND OPPORTUNITY

Entrepreneurship provides a pathway for upward mobility

Research shows that upward mobility is higher among immigrants.⁶⁰ This is partly because migrants move to places where there are better prospects for their children. Some of the intergenerational mobility is due to the “under-placement” of the first generation in the income distribution. This may be because the credentials and human capital of a migrant may be non-transferable to a new destination, which means that immigrants may be undervalued in the labor market. Self-employment can be an adaptive strategy to avoid such undervaluing; however, it also presents financial risks.

Immigrants often seek economic opportunity by starting new businesses. A study by the New American Economy estimates that immigrants and the children of immigrants have started almost half of all Fortune 500 companies.⁶¹ Data from the Survey of Business Owners shows first-generation immigrants create about 25 percent of new firms in America.⁶² Many of these businesses create employment opportunities for other immigrants and native-born workers.

However, according to the Pew Research Center, immigrants are more likely to own a business in higher-risk industries. They — and their employees — are at higher exposure to financial risk, especially in the current COVID-19 economy.⁶³ Immigrants owned 22 percent of businesses in higher-risk industries in 2016. Entrepreneurs of color own many of these businesses.

Asians disproportionately own businesses in higher-risk industries. Foreign-born immigrants own three-fourths of all businesses owned by Asians. Immigrants own about half of all Hispanic-owned firms and about one-fourth of all Black-owned companies. Among Whites, immigrants are disproportionately less likely to own a business compared to those native-born.

Entrepreneurship, especially ownership of small-sized businesses, is a risky financial endeavor. Only 41 percent of all businesses are healthy after five years or more.⁶⁴ Immigrant- and minority-owned businesses and smaller firms are at an even higher risk. Early research shows that immigrant entrepreneurs were more likely to lose their business during the COVID-19 outbreak, with business ownership falling by 36 percent between February and April 2020.⁶⁵

It is not clear whether immigrant entrepreneurs will receive adequate assistance from the COVID-19 government relief programs. Small Business Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) loans are available to immigrant-owned businesses. However, ambiguity about the eligibility for owners or employees that do not live in the United States could disproportionately exclude immigrants from relief.

Research has shown that entrepreneurship does not always result in higher income for immigrants.⁶⁶ Still, there are many positive cases of entrepreneurship — those that are successful can earn more than those at the high-end of the income distribution for wage or salary employment. Along with higher education, as discussed earlier in this report, entrepreneurship will continue to be an important pathway to upward mobility for immigrants in the COVID-19 recovery and beyond.

Immigrants rebounded more quickly from the Great Recession

Historically, immigrants have rebounded more quickly from recessions.⁶⁷ In the Great Recession, foreign-born workers were hard hit — losing over a million jobs. The foreign-born employment advantage dropped below one percentage point. Yet it rebounded to pre-recession levels within one year.

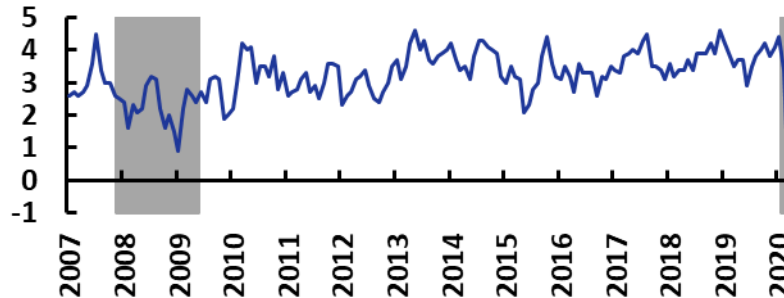
According to an analysis of CPS data by the Pew Research Center, immigrants accounted for all of the job gains in the first year of recovery after the Great Recession (from the second quarter of 2009 to the second quarter of 2010). The foreign-born gained 656,000 jobs and 566,000 entered the labor force. Native-born workers lost 1.2 million jobs and 633,000 exited the labor force.

At the outset of the COVID-19 outbreak, the foreign-born to native-born employment gap narrowed again. By April 2020, it neared zero. In May 2020, there was an uptick in the employment rate for both groups. Yet the increase of 1.1 percentage points for the foreign-born was lower than the 1.7 percentage point increase for the native-born. The employment rate of the native-born reached 52.9, compared to 52.8 for the foreign-born.

Sufficient data are not yet available to conclude whether foreign-born workers will experience slower or faster job gains in the long term. Given the higher cyclicity of employment among immigrants, there may be greater variation in employment levels among the foreign-born if there are multiple COVID-19 waves within the pandemic or prolonged uncertainty about the economy and public health risks.

Historically Higher Employment Level Among Foreign-Born Wiped Out by Recession

Difference between Foreign-Born and Native-Born Civilian Employment-Population Ratio, 2007-2020



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistic; Haver Analytics

Note: Data are shown by month from earliest year available

While immigrant workers made job gains, they encountered a decline in earnings during the last recovery after the Great Recession. While wages for native-born workers remained virtually flat in the first year of the recovery, the median weekly wages of foreign-born workers fell by 4.5 percent. Given that some immigrants may not receive COVID-19 government assistance or may not be eligible for unemployment benefits, immigrant and mixed-status households have fewer resources than native-born Americans to weather the crisis. This may cause downward pressures on their wages during the pandemic, which could have negative consequences on consumer spending and aggregate demand.

The spending power of immigrants can help drive aggregate demand and the recovery

Immigrants drive every sector in the American economy, as workers, entrepreneurs and consumers. Over 3 million immigrant entrepreneurs employ almost 8 million American workers across the nation.

According to an analysis of 2018 American Community Survey (ACS) data by the New American Economy, immigrants are 14 percent of the population and they have \$1.2 trillion in spending power.⁶⁸ In some of the largest state economies, the share is higher.

- In California, the immigrant share of the population is 27 percent and immigrant spending power is \$291 billion.
- In New York, the immigrant share of the population is 23 percent and immigrant spending power is \$121 billion.
- In Texas, the immigrant share of the population is 17 percent and immigrant spending power is \$113 billion.
- In Florida, the immigrant share of the population is 21 percent and immigrant spending power is \$99 billion.

Foreign-born workers, entrepreneurs, families and consumers have been hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic. Yet restrictive federal relief efforts and President Trump's hardline stances on

immigration policy have limited the aid and investments that will help the foreign-born position themselves and the nation for recovery.

CONCLUSION

Immigrants play a vital role in the American economy. One-sixth of U.S. workers are foreign-born and approximately one-quarter of new U.S. businesses are started by them.

The COVID-19 crisis has revealed that immigrant workers play a critical function by supplying “essential” services in the service and agricultural sectors, as well as other parts of the economy. They also work on the front lines of the fight against the coronavirus pandemic, particularly in health care. Moreover, they are more likely to be entrepreneurs, hit hard by the coronavirus recession but also well poised to help the recovery.

As a result of their work, foreign-born workers are more likely to be exposed to the coronavirus. Immigrants also are more likely to be poor and less likely to have access to health care, and so they are more vulnerable to the economic impact of the COVID-19 recession. About one-in-five immigrant workers lost their jobs between February and April alone.

Public health and the road to economic recovery requires that all workers – foreign- and native-born – have access to paid sick leave, family and medical leave, health insurance and medical care.⁶⁹ In addition, they must have inexpensive or free testing for COVID-19 without fear of penalty, even deportation. Without these resources, cases of COVID-19 will continue to be undercounted and many will delay or forgo treatment.⁷⁰

Congress has already taken steps to expand these benefits by remedying the misclassification of many workers as independent contractors, and has greatly expanded paid sick leave and paid family and medical leave related to COVID-19.⁷¹ This benefits all Americans, whether native- or foreign-born.

In addition, the House has taken specific action in the HEROES Act to give needed help to front-line immigrant workers, which would provide coronavirus testing and treatment regardless of immigration status, hazard pay for essential workers and protections for farmworkers and meatpacking workers. The legislation awaits action in the Senate. In addition, Congress should build on the recent ruling of the Supreme Court preserving Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) to more fully address the needs of immigrants.⁷²

The coronavirus pandemic has made clearer the important role immigrants play in American society, as “essential” workers, front-line health care professionals, entrepreneurs and more. Extending to them the needed protections will serve the interests of all Americans.

TABLES AND MAPS

Demographic, Economic and Vulnerability Indicators for the Foreign-Born Population by State								
State	Foreign-Born Population (#)	% of Total Population	% of Labor Force	% of All Essential Workers	% Under the Poverty Level	Noncitizens with Health Insurance (%)	Median Household Income	Ineligible for Stimulus Payments (#)*
Alabama	168,111	3.5	4.5	4.5	21.6	53.6	\$25,210	93,000
Alaska	57,399	7.8	10.6	11.4	10.3	73.7	\$28,578	13,000
Arizona	933,152	13.4	17.2	18.9	21.8	64.2	\$24,694	332,000
Arkansas	142,480	4.8	7.3	7.5	20.0	56.2	\$25,562	93,000
California	10,537,529	26.9	33.3	35.9	15.8	73.5	\$26,591	4,246,000
Colorado	542,977	9.8	12.0	12.9	15.1	60.9	\$29,026	236,000
Connecticut	513,646	14.3	18.4	18.7	11.5	70.2	\$32,280	128,000
Delaware	87,378	9.2	12.1	13.2	12.7	72.2	\$32,522	30,000
District of Columbia	96,158	14.0	16.7	18.6	14.4	84.7	\$40,680	28,000
Florida	4,227,210	20.5	26.6	28.2	17.1	61.4	\$23,525	721,000
Georgia	1,035,983	10.1	13.7	14.1	16.3	52.5	\$27,198	488,000
Hawaii	259,586	18.3	22.4	23.6	11.2	87.4	\$29,557	53,000
Idaho	100,996	6.0	8.6	10.2	18.8	57.2	\$24,108	46,000
Illinois	1,797,717	14.0	18.1	19.2	13.5	66.1	\$29,084	684,000
Indiana	341,915	5.2	6.8	6.7	20.7	66.7	\$26,541	131,000
Iowa	161,872	5.2	7.7	8.0	19.3	74.0	\$27,471	55,000
Kansas	206,683	7.1	9.5	9.8	17.8	58.8	\$27,061	96,000
Kentucky	167,110	3.8	5.2	5.5	23.5	64.2	\$24,507	61,000
Louisiana	193,205	4.1	5.5	5.5	20.0	49.7	\$24,964	84,000
Maine	47,946	3.6	4.0	4.3	17.2	86.8	\$25,612	
Maryland	903,533	15.1	20.1	21.2	9.8	66.6	\$35,148	294,000
Massachusetts	1,129,732	16.5	20.8	22.5	14.4	89.9	\$31,587	196,000
Michigan	671,105	6.7	8.2	8.4	17.8	80.1	\$28,704	193,000
Minnesota	461,758	8.4	10.7	11.4	18.5	77.8	\$28,077	117,000
Mississippi	69,752	2.3	3.2	3.2	19.7	47.9	\$25,447	33,000
Missouri	247,788	4.1	5.4	5.5	19.0	68.5	\$27,231	78,000
Montana	22,685	2.2	2.3	2.4	15.3	82.8	\$23,995	4,000
Nebraska	133,424	7.0	9.3	9.9	19.9	65.0	\$26,585	54,000
Nevada	566,400	19.4	25.5	27.4	14.0	58.7	\$27,679	184,000
New Hampshire	81,287	6.0	6.5	6.4	10.3	79.6	\$31,995	10,000
New Jersey	1,968,060	22.2	29.2	30.6	12.4	63.7	\$32,152	686,000
New Mexico	201,234	9.6	12.1	13.5	25.1	55.4	\$21,137	87,000

Sources: 2014-18 American Community Survey: 5-Year Data (tables B05001, B06011, B06012, B17025, B27020); 2020 Center for Migration Studies, NY; 2020 Migration Policy Institute

Notes:
 * Number ineligible for stimulus payments (Economic Impact Payments) under the 2020 CARE Act shown. Calculated by the Migration Policy Institute, estimates include unauthorized immigrants as well as their families irrespective of citizenship status or birthplace. Blank spaces indicate missing estimates due to sample size under 3,000.

Immigrants, the Economy and the COVID-19 Outbreak

Demographic, Economic and Vulnerability Indicators for the Foreign-Born Population by State (cont.)								
State	Foreign-Born Population (#)	% of Total Population	% of Labor Force	% of All Essential Workers	% Under the Poverty Level	Noncitizens with Health Insurance (%)	Median Household Income	Ineligible for Stimulus Payments (#)*
New York	4,439,893	22.6	28.2	31.0	16.8	75.3	\$28,070	1,159,000
North Carolina	799,616	7.9	10.9	11.2	19.4	51.9	\$25,726	444,000
North Dakota	29,629	3.9	6.3	6.0	20.0	79.7	\$27,685	
Ohio	520,981	4.5	5.8	5.7	18.0	75.2	\$27,163	151,000
Oklahoma	234,536	6.0	8.1	9.0	19.9	51.1	\$24,931	122,000
Oregon	405,821	9.9	13.2	14.6	17.3	70.9	\$26,248	168,000
Pennsylvania	865,720	6.8	9.2	9.1	16.6	74.0	\$27,557	183,000
Rhode Island	144,197	13.6	16.2	16.4	17.0	76.3	\$26,310	32,000
South Carolina	240,439	4.9	6.6	6.8	19.4	51.0	\$25,007	118,000
South Dakota	30,112	3.5	4.7	5.2	21.1	77.4	\$26,446	7,000
Tennessee	334,062	5.0	7.1	7.7	20.4	51.1	\$25,862	171,000
Texas	4,736,692	17.0	22.4	24.0	19.4	50.8	\$25,478	2,357,000
Utah	256,560	8.4	11.2	12.9	16.4	56.1	\$26,519	113,000
Vermont	28,992	4.6	5.5	5.8	13.4	91.2	\$26,684	
Virginia	1,038,160	12.3	16.8	17.1	11.2	63.7	\$33,352	323,000
Washington	1,020,981	14.0	18.8	19.7	13.8	72.6	\$31,080	330,000
West Virginia	29,640	1.6	1.7	1.5	19.7	80.8	\$24,973	7,000
Wisconsin	287,381	5.0	6.3	6.7	16.9	68.3	\$27,278	126,000
Wyoming	20,276	3.5	3.9	3.6	20.1	57.0	\$25,193	8,000
United States	43,539,499	13.5	17.5	18.3	16.4	66.1	\$26,684	15,392,000

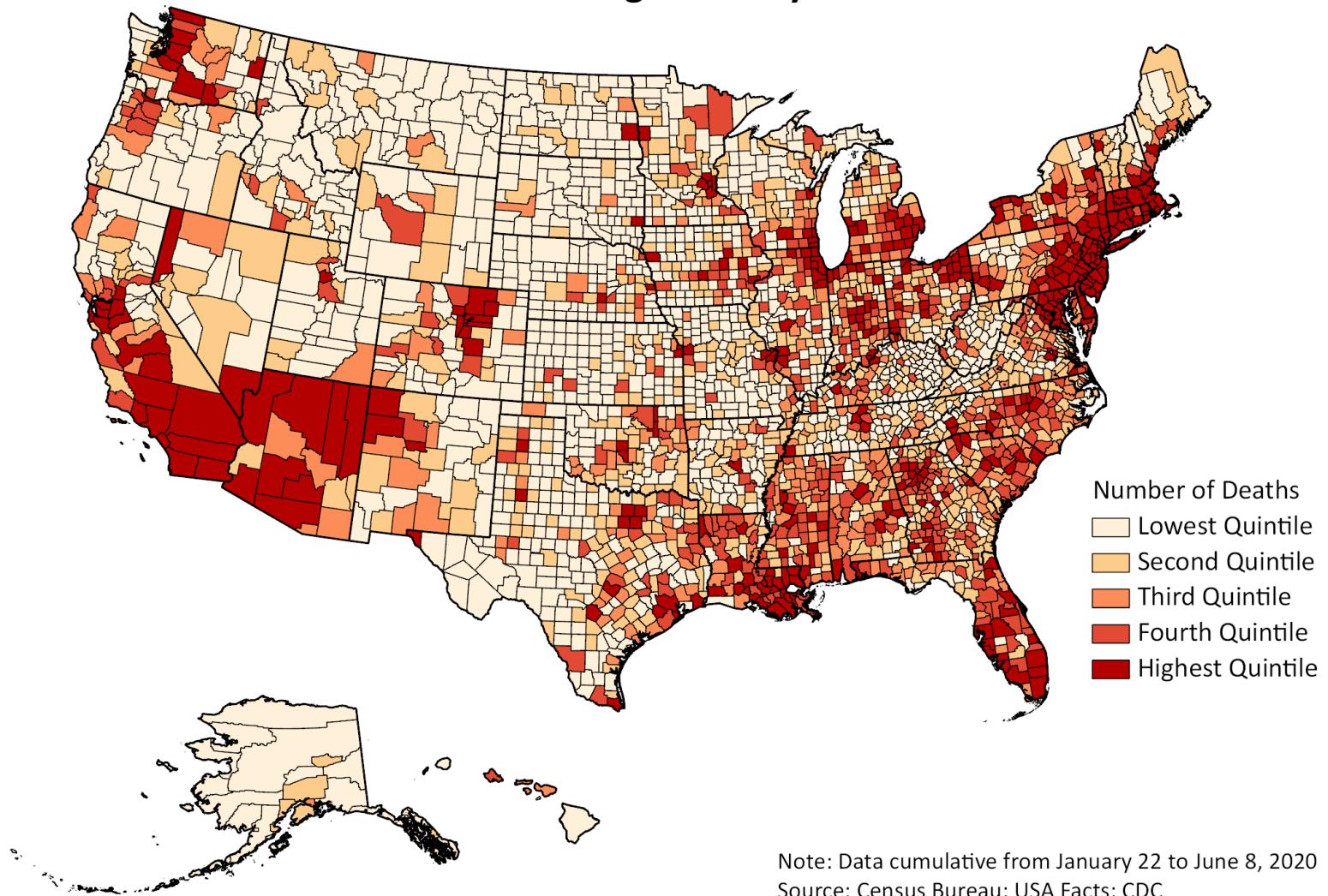
Sources: 2014-18 American Community Survey: 5-Year Data (tables B05001, B06011, B06012, B17025, B27020); 2020 Center for Migration Studies, NY; 2020 Migration Policy Institute

Notes:

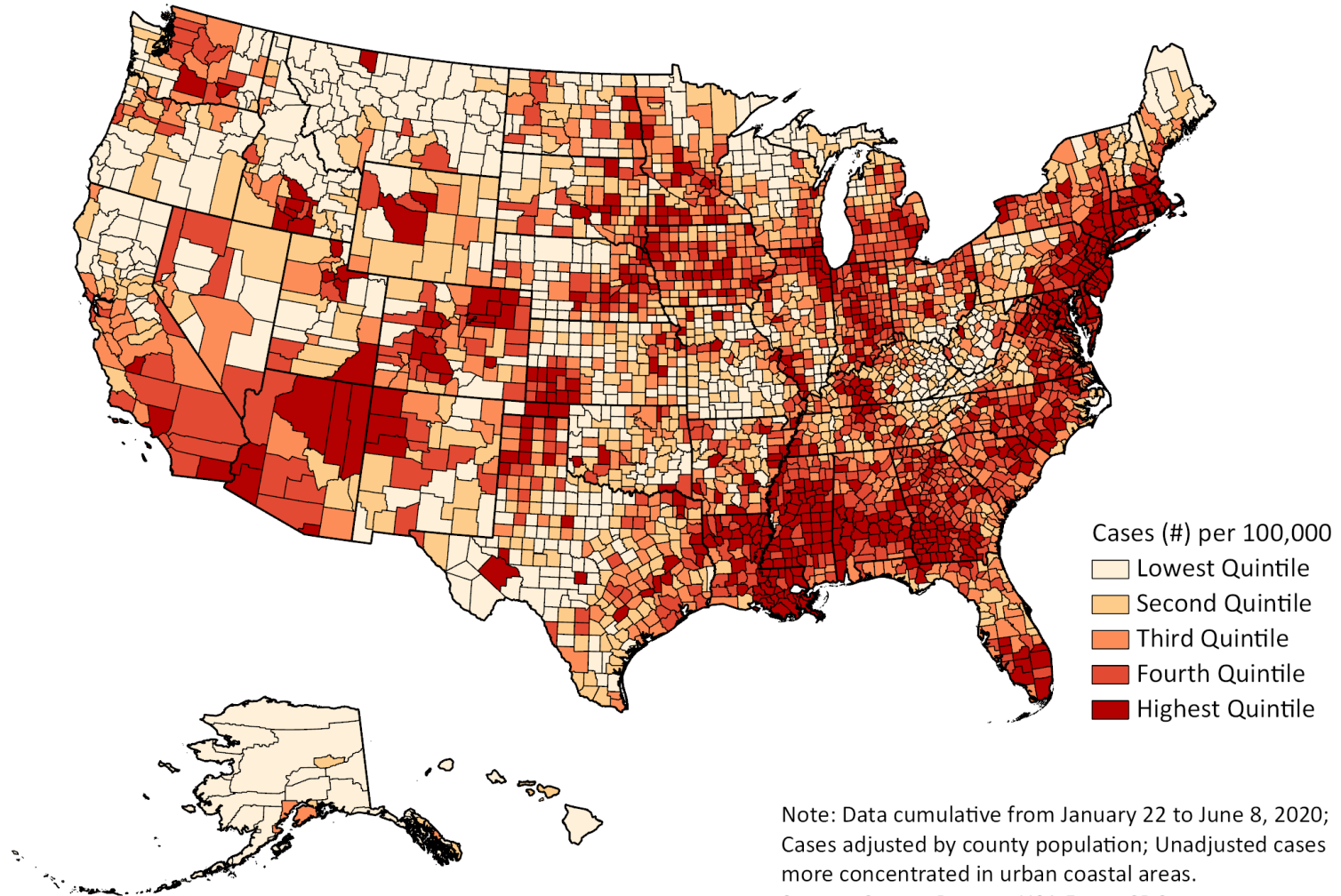
* Number ineligible for stimulus payments (Economic Impact Payments) under the 2020 CARE Act shown. Calculated by the Migration Policy Institute, estimates include unauthorized immigrants as well as their families irrespective of citizenship status or birthplace.

Blank spaces indicate missing estimates due to sample size under 3,000.

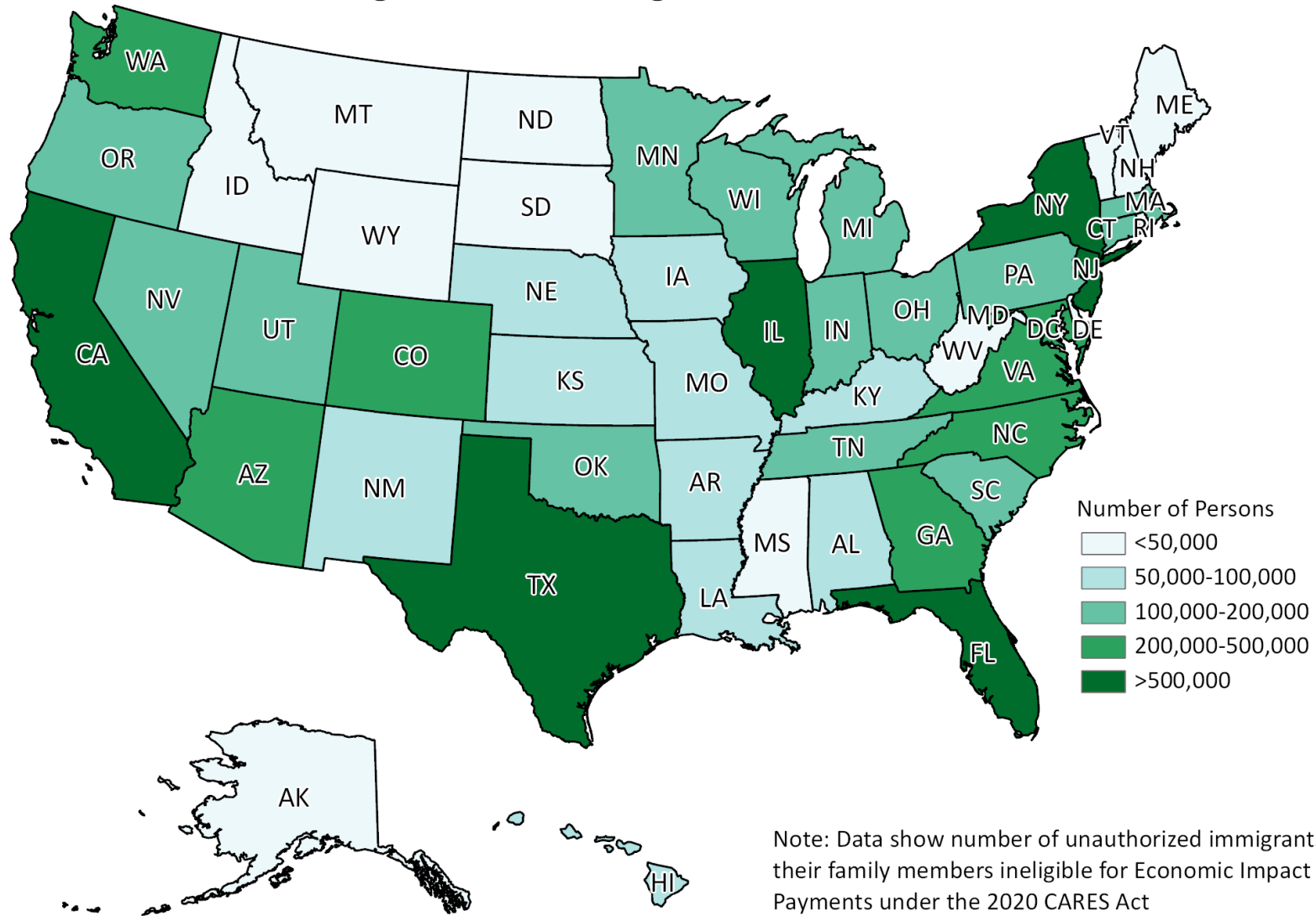
Unadjusted Number of COVID-19 Deaths Concentrated in High Density Coastal Areas



Adjusted Rate of COVID-19 Cases More Concentrated in the South and Midwest



Persons Ineligible for Federal Direct Payments Highest in the Largest State Economies



Note: Data show number of unauthorized immigrants and their family members ineligible for Economic Impact Payments under the 2020 CARES Act
Source: Migration Policy Institute

Immigrants, the Economy and the COVID-19 Outbreak

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