

Economic Implications of Pennsylvania's Foreign-Born Population

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Individuals born outside of the United States represent a significant and growing share of the U.S. population. This is also true of Pennsylvania. Immigrants and their children are driving increases in racial and ethnic diversity in Pennsylvania, and the degree to which they can integrate socially and economically will have a range of social, economic, and political implications across the Commonwealth. Foreign-born Pennsylvanians represent an important and growing set of workers, business owners, taxpayers, and voters.

This research analyzed records from the U.S. Census Bureau and Bureau of Labor Statistics to develop a descriptive profile of the socioeconomic characteristics of the foreign-born workforce in rural Pennsylvania, draw comparisons with the native-born and urban Pennsylvania workforce, and identify trends in these population characteristics that have occurred since the 2000 Census. Specifically, this research produced estimates of the foreign-born share of rural Pennsylvania's workforce (defined as individuals aged 16-64 years) overall and across different regions within the Commonwealth, described their social and economic characteristics, identified their levels and sources of income, and tracked changes in these outcomes over time.

The analyses yielded a number of important empirical findings:

- In 2016, 3.5 percent of rural Pennsylvania's workforce was foreign-born, and this share represents a 1.5 percentage-point increase over 2000 (2%). The foreign-born represent a smaller share of the rural workforce than in urban areas, where 10.7 percent of the workforce is foreign-born.
- The representation of foreign-born individuals in the workforce is spatially uneven across Pennsylvania. In only three of the 23 rural Public Use Microdata Areas (PUMAs)—which are sub-state geographic units containing 100,000 or more people—did the foreign-born share of the workforce exceed 6 percent in 2016, and in only three others did the foreign-born share of the workforce fall between 4 and 6 percent.
- The rural foreign-born workforce is diverse with respect to social and economic characteristics. Foreign-born members of the rural workforce are split with respect to educational attainment. More than 30 percent have a bachelor's degree or higher level of education, and more than eight in 10 members of the rural foreign-born workforce speak English well or very well, or speak only English. However, 20

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created in 1987 under Act 16, the Rural Revitalization Act, to promote and sustain the vitality of Pennsylvania's rural and small communities.

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percent of the rural foreign-born workforce did not complete high school, and a disproportionate share—more than one in five—live in families with incomes below poverty.

- Shifts in the socioeconomic profile of the rural foreign-born workforce population since 2000 suggest growing disadvantages and challenges to socioeconomic integration, with declining levels of educational attainment and English language skills and increasing rates of poverty.
- Foreign-born workers are distributed unevenly across industries. Among foreign-born workers in rural Pennsylvania, more than 20 percent are employed in professional and related services, and more than 10 percent are employed in retail trade and manufacturing.
- Rural foreign-born workers were more likely to have jobs in the personal services, transportation, and agriculture, forestry and fisheries industries than native-born workers.
- The results of this analysis of income sources suggest broad similarities between foreign- and native-born Pennsylvanians living in rural and urban places. What differences do emerge are complex and do not align neatly with any particular narrative of U.S. immigration, whether positive or negative.

The empirical results point to a number of potential focus areas for policymakers. These include renewed efforts to improve and make accessible English language training and adult learning/training opportunities, as well as attention to programs that will reduce poverty. The diverse socioeconomic circumstances among the rural foreign-born also underscore the challenges to developing widely-applicable policies related to the immigrant population.

These findings suggest the need for data-driven and targeted interventions aimed at improving the chances for economic mobility among the most at-risk immigrant populations in rural Pennsylvania.

The full report, *Economic Implications of Pennsylvania's Foreign-Born Population*, is available on the Center's website at www.rural.palegislature.us.

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