

# MYTHS AND FACTS ABOUT IMMIGRATION



## **FACT 1: IMMIGRATION CAUSES THE U.S. ECONOMY TO GROW.**

An estimated 22.5 million immigrants are currently working in the U.S.—accounting for 15% of the total civilian labor force.<sup>1</sup> Approximately 80.5% of immigrants are of working age (between 18-64), while 60% of the native-born population falls within that group.<sup>2</sup> Immigrants are just as likely to be self-employed and start new businesses as the native-born.<sup>3</sup> They generate employment and bring new innovations and creative diversity to our communities. As of 2007, the percentage of immigrants working in the various categories of occupations was as follows: 27.2% in management, professional, and related occupations; 23.1% in service occupations; 18.0% in sales and office occupations; 16.4% in production, transportation, and material moving occupations; 13.4% in construction, extraction, maintenance, and repair occupations; and 2.0% in farming, fishing, and forestry occupations.<sup>4</sup> Immigrants help to keep the U.S. internationally competitive and give U.S. businesses a more global perspective—an outlook that is becoming increasingly necessary in this era of globalization.

## **FACT 2: WHILE ALL IMMIGRANTS ARE REQUIRED TO PAY TAXES – INCLUDING SALES, INCOME, AND PROPERTY TAXES – UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANTS ARE BARRED FROM RECEIVING MOST TYPES OF PUBLIC ASSISTANCE.**

Undocumented persons are not eligible for any federal or state public benefits, with the exception of emergency medical assistance. Certain emergency disaster relief, immunizations and testing/treatment of communicable diseases, and certain in-kind community services (such as soup kitchens and short-term shelters).<sup>5</sup> Thus, for example, unauthorized women are barred from receiving prenatal care under Medicaid, even though her children will be U.S. citizens.<sup>6</sup>

Undocumented persons often do not seek the benefits for which they are eligible. For example, although undocumented persons are eligible for short-term emergency disaster relief, many are afraid to seek assistance because they are still subject to deportation.<sup>7</sup> In addition, the implementation of new citizenship documentation rules to prove Medicaid eligibility have even led to inadvertent denials of coverage for persons who appeared to be U.S. Citizens.<sup>8</sup>

Although undocumented persons are not eligible for most types of public assistance, they must pay federal taxes because the Internal Revenue Service treats both unauthorized and authorized persons the same for purpose of taxation.<sup>9</sup> Undocumented persons must also pay sales tax and property taxes, just like authorized immigrants. Furthermore, immigrants are large contributors to—rather than recipients of—Social Security, and will play an integral role in financing Social Security as the U.S. population ages. A study in 2005 found that undocumented immigrants pay \$6-7 billion in Social Security taxes alone that they will never be able to claim.<sup>10</sup>

## **FACT 3: NEW IMMIGRANTS OFTEN TRANSFORM AND REVITALIZE COMMUNITIES.**

The U.S. Census Bureau reports that “the foreign-born population is more concentrated than the native population in metropolitan areas and in their central cities.”<sup>11</sup> However, areas that receive new immigrants are most often transformed and revitalized by these newcomers. Dominican immigrants revitalized Washington Heights in Manhattan’s Upper West Side. In Minneapolis, an array of new arrivals revitalized Nicollet Avenue (“Eat Street”) and Lake Street, in South Minneapolis. In addition, non-profit and other groups, including the Latino Economic Development Center and the African Development Center, worked together to revitalize the former Sears building near downtown Minneapolis by developing the Midtown Global Market, which offers multi-ethnic shops and restaurants. In Philadelphia, a study indicates that foreign-born entrepreneurs have revitalized the city by starting businesses that offer needed goods and services that were formerly neglected and under-served.<sup>12</sup> These examples are repeated hundreds of times across the country. According to the Alexis de Tocqueville Institute, a study carried out over an 18-year period in Washington D.C. revealed that there is a positive correlation between the number of immigrants in a neighborhood and increasing property values. As one real-estate agent put it, with immigration “there goes the neighborhood—up.”<sup>13</sup>

**FACT 4: THE PERCENT OF IMMIGRANTS IN THE U.S. IS NOT AT AN ALL TIME HIGH.**

Although the actual number of immigrants currently living in the U.S. continues to grow, when considered as a percentage of the population, the levels are not as high as they have been in the past. Currently, about 12.6% of the U.S. population is foreign-born.<sup>14</sup> However, between 1860 and 1920, the percentage of the population that was foreign-born ranged from 13% to almost 15%, with the highest percentage in 1890 at 14.8%.<sup>15</sup>

As of 2007, almost 60% of the immigrant population in the United States originated from the following ten countries: Mexico (30.8%), the Philippines (4.5%), India (3.9%), China (3.6%), El Salvador (2.9%), Vietnam (2.9%), Korea (2.7%), Cuba (2.6%), Canada (2.2%), and the Dominican Republic (2.0%). Approximately 47.5% of all immigrants identify themselves as being of Hispanic or Latino descent.<sup>17</sup> Currently, about two-thirds of all immigrants live in six states: California, New York, Texas, Florida, Illinois, and New Jersey.<sup>18</sup>

European immigrants, who historically comprised a large portion of immigration to the U.S, were 11% of newcomers in 2007.<sup>19</sup> When the number of persons obtaining legal permanent resident status in 2007 is broken down by region of origin, 36% of immigrants were from Asia, 32% were from North America (including Central America), 11% were from Europe, 10% were from South America, 9% were from Africa, 1% were from Oceania, and 1% were of unknown origin.<sup>20</sup> The top ten countries origin for persons obtaining legal permanent resident status in the U.S. during 2007 were: Mexico (148,640), China (76,655), the Philippines (72,596), India (65,353), Colombia (33,187), Haiti (30,405), Cuba (29,104), Vietnam (28,691), the Dominican Republic (28,024), and Korea (22,405).<sup>21</sup>

**FACT 5: ACCORDING TO THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY, ONLY 4% OF THE U.S. POPULATION CONSISTS OF UNAUTHORIZED IMMIGRANTS.**

As of January 2007, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security estimated that there were approximately 11.8 million unauthorized immigrants living in the United States – approximately 4% of the total U.S. population.<sup>22</sup> The term “unauthorized immigrants” includes those persons who enter the United States without inspection, those who were admitted temporarily and stayed after their visas expired, and those who are seeking, but have not yet received, lawful permanent residence, asylum, or Temporary Protected Status.<sup>23</sup> Experts estimate that between 25-40% of all undocumented immigrants come legally to this country and become illegal by remaining here after their visas have expired.<sup>24</sup> From 2005 to 2008, the number of undocumented immigrants entering the United States fell below the number of immigrants who arrived as legal permanent residents, reversing the trend that began a decade ago of more undocumented than documented immigrants entering the United States annually.<sup>25</sup>

**FACT 6: MOST IMMIGRANTS ARE LEGALLY ADMITTED TO THE U.S., AND COME TO BE REUNITED WITH IMMEDIATE FAMILY MEMBERS.**

According to U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 1,052,415 immigrants obtained legal permanent resident status in the U.S in FY2007,<sup>26</sup> compared with approximately 500,000 people who entered the U.S. without identification or overstayed visas.<sup>27</sup> The number of legally admitted immigrants includes both people who were adjusting their status and new arrivals.<sup>28</sup>

U.S. immigration policy allows immigration for three main reasons: 1) family, 2) work, and 3) freedom—in that order. Of the immigrants coming legally to the U.S. in 2007, 66% were family sponsored or came to be reunited with immediate family members (parents, children, siblings, or spouses), 15% were sponsored by U.S. employers, and an additional 13% came as refugees or asylees, fleeing persecution and looking for safety and freedom in the United States.<sup>29</sup>

Undocumented people come for a variety of reasons. We often talk about these reasons in terms of “push” and “pull” factors. “Push” factors are the reasons within a person’s home country that cause them to leave—examples include poverty, lack of job opportunities, natural disasters, and political instability. “Pull” factors are reasons that draw a person to a country—examples include increased freedom, job opportunities, and joining family members. Like generations of immigrants before them, all of these immigrants come to this country looking for a better life, and their energy and ideas enrich all of our communities.



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## SOURCES FOR “MYTHS AND FACTS ABOUT IMMIGRATION”

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. “Selected Characteristics of the Native and Foreign-Born Populations.” 2007. American Community Survey. Accessed Dec. 08 from: [http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/STTable?\\_bm=y&-qr\\_name=ACS\\_2007\\_1YR\\_G00\\_S0501&-geo\\_id=01000US&-ds\\_name=ACS\\_2007\\_1YR\\_G00\\_&-\\_lang=en&-format=&-CONTEXT=st](http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/STTable?_bm=y&-qr_name=ACS_2007_1YR_G00_S0501&-geo_id=01000US&-ds_name=ACS_2007_1YR_G00_&-_lang=en&-format=&-CONTEXT=st).

<sup>2</sup> *See id.*

<sup>3</sup> *See id.*

<sup>4</sup> *See id.*

<sup>5</sup> Ruth Ellen Wasem. “Unauthorized Aliens’ Access to Federal Benefits: Policy and Issues.” May 21, 2008. Congressional Research Service. Pages 6-7. Accessed Jan. 09 from: <http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/106160.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> *Id.* at 8.

<sup>7</sup> *See id.* at 17-19.

<sup>8</sup> *See id.* at 15-16.

<sup>9</sup> *See id.* at 7-8, n. 24.

<sup>10</sup> Randy Capps and Michael Fix. “Undocumented Immigrants: Myths and Reality.” The Urban Institute and the Migration Policy Institute. Oct. 2005. Accessed Jan. 06 from: <http://www.urban.org/publications/900898.html>.

<sup>11</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. “Profile of the Foreign Born Population in the United States: 2000.” Dec. 2001. Page 16. Accessed Feb. 06 from: <http://www.census.gov/prod/2002pubs/p23-206.pdf>.

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<sup>13</sup> Bronwyn Lance, Margalit Edelman and Peter Mountford. “There Goes the Neighborhood – Up.” Alexis de Toqueville Institute. Accessed Jan. 06 from: [http://www.adti.net/imm/neighborhood\\_execsumm.html](http://www.adti.net/imm/neighborhood_execsumm.html).

<sup>14</sup> *Supra*, note 1.

<sup>15</sup> Aaron Terrazas and Jeanne Batalova. “The Most Up-to-Date Frequently Requested Statistics on Immigrants in the United States.” December 2008. Migration Policy Institute. Accessed Jan. 09 from: <http://www.migrationinformation.org/USFocus/display.cfm?ID=714>.

<sup>16</sup> *Id.*

<sup>17</sup> *Id.*

<sup>18</sup> Migration Policy Institute. “States Ranked by Percent Foreign Born: 1990, 2000, and 2007.” Accessed Dec. 08 from: [http://www.migrationinformation.org/datahub/files/MPIDataHub\\_ACS\\_2007-PercentForeignBorn.xls](http://www.migrationinformation.org/datahub/files/MPIDataHub_ACS_2007-PercentForeignBorn.xls).

<sup>19</sup> U.S. Department of Homeland Security. “Table 3. Persons Obtaining Legal Permanent Resident Status by Region and Country of Birth: Fiscal Years 1998 to 2007.” Yearbook of Immigration Statistics: 2007. Accessed Dec. 08 from: [http://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/statistics/yearbook/2007/ois\\_2007\\_yearbook.pdf](http://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/statistics/yearbook/2007/ois_2007_yearbook.pdf).

<sup>20</sup> *Id.*

<sup>21</sup> *Id.*

<sup>22</sup> Michael Hofer, Nancy Rytina, and Bryan Baker. "Estimates of the Unauthorized Immigrant Population Residing in the United States: January 2007." September 2008. U.S. Department of Homeland Security: Office of Immigration Statistics. Accessed Jan. 09 from: [http://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/statistics/publications/ois\\_ill\\_pe\\_2007.pdf](http://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/statistics/publications/ois_ill_pe_2007.pdf).

<sup>23</sup> *Id.* at 1.

<sup>24</sup> Jeffery Passel. "Unauthorized Migrants: Numbers and Characteristics." June 14, 2005. Pew Hispanic Center. Accessed Jan. 2009 from: <http://pewhispanic.org/files/reports/46.pdf>.

<sup>25</sup> Jeffery Passel and D'Vera Cohn. "Trends in Unauthorized Immigration: Undocumented Inflow Now Trails Legal Inflow." Oct. 2, 2008. Pew Hispanic Center. Pages i and 2. Accessed Jan. 2009 from: <http://pewhispanic.org/files/reports/94.pdf>.

<sup>26</sup> U.S. Department of Homeland Security. Yearbook of Immigration Statistics: 2007. Accessed Dec. 08 from: [http://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/statistics/yearbook/2007/ois\\_2007\\_yearbook.pdf](http://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/statistics/yearbook/2007/ois_2007_yearbook.pdf).

<sup>27</sup> *Supra*, note 25 at 2-3.

<sup>28</sup> U.S. Department of Homeland Security. "Table 6. Persons Obtaining Legal Permanent Resident Status by Type and Major Class of Admission: Fiscal Years 1998 to 2007." Yearbook of Immigration Statistics: 2007. Accessed Dec. 08 from: [http://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/statistics/yearbook/2007/ois\\_2007\\_yearbook.pdf](http://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/statistics/yearbook/2007/ois_2007_yearbook.pdf).

<sup>29</sup> *Id.*