

Empowering Texas: Immigrants' Contributions to the Construction Industry

The Demographic and Economic Contributions of Immigrants¹ in the State's² Construction Industry

The construction sector has long played a crucial role in the Texas economy, providing the infrastructure needed to sustain the daily lives of residents of the state. The industry attracts a variety of workers – including many immigrants – whose unique experiences, knowledge, and skills contribute to a vibrant economy.

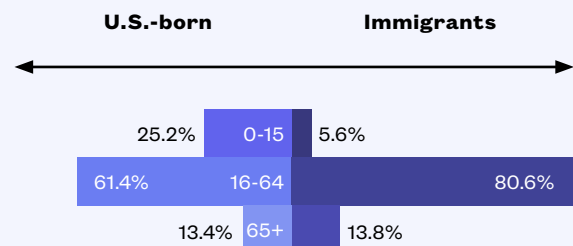
DEMOGRAPHICS

Immigrants have bolstered the state's construction workforce, bringing multicultural perspectives, multilingual skills, and talent across the skills spectrum.³



Immigrant share of the Texas population in 2022. This represented a total of **5.2 million** immigrants living in the state at that time.

Share of population by age:



2022 immigrant shares of the state's:

17.2% Total population

21.4% Working-age population⁴

21.5% Employed labor force

DEMOGRAPHICS (CONTINUED)

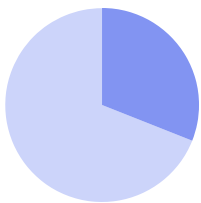
In 2022, immigrants in Texas were

31.3% A bar chart with two bars. The first bar is dark blue and represents 31.3%. The second bar is a lighter blue and is significantly shorter, representing the U.S.-born counterparts.

more likely to be of working-age than their U.S.-born counterparts.

Immigrants in Texas had a labor force participation rate of **75.5%**, further demonstrating their invaluable contributions to the state's labor force and economy.

In 2022, **2,935 degrees** were awarded to international students in construction trades, engineering, or engineering technologies and engineering-related fields in Texas.⁵ This is important because the state will need professionals in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) fields like these if it is to advance research and development in the construction sector. As companies move to Texas, they will look to fill skilled positions. Attracting talent to Texas colleges and universities will be as important as ever.



In 2022, **30.6%** of the immigrant population in Texas reported that they did not speak English well. Of those, the top languages spoken at home other than English were:

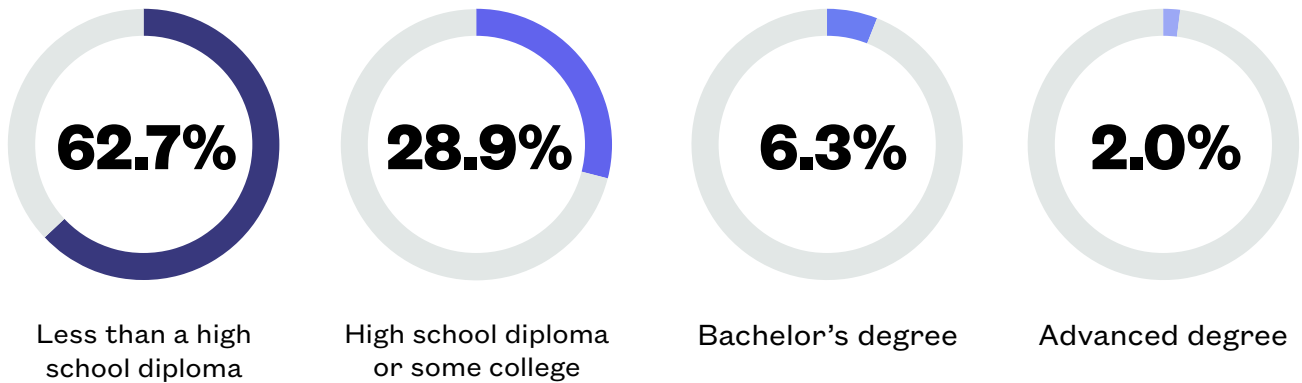
- Spanish - **87.6%**
- Vietnamese - **3.7%**
- Chinese - **1.4%**
- Korean - **0.8%**
- Arabic - **0.6%**
- Other - **5.9%**

87.6%

Share of immigrants that did not speak English well who spoke Spanish at home.

DEMOGRAPHICS (CONTINUED)

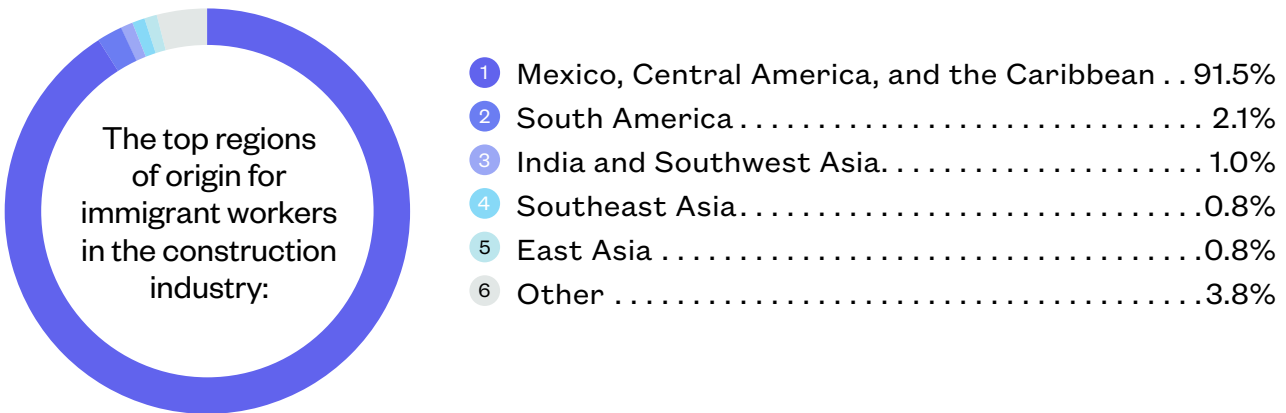
The educational level of immigrants who said they did not speak English well was:



LABOR FORCE

As the Texas population continues to grow, it will bring businesses and jobs to the state that will require new infrastructure to house arriving families and accommodate new and existing businesses. The state needs to leverage both U.S.-born and immigrant talent to fill construction jobs that power the Texas economy.

Immigrants play a critical role in the Texas construction industry. In 2022, more than 507,700 immigrants worked in the construction sector, representing 40.0 percent of all employees in the sector. Of these workers, approximately 295,400 were undocumented, representing 23.3 percent of all employed workers in the industry.



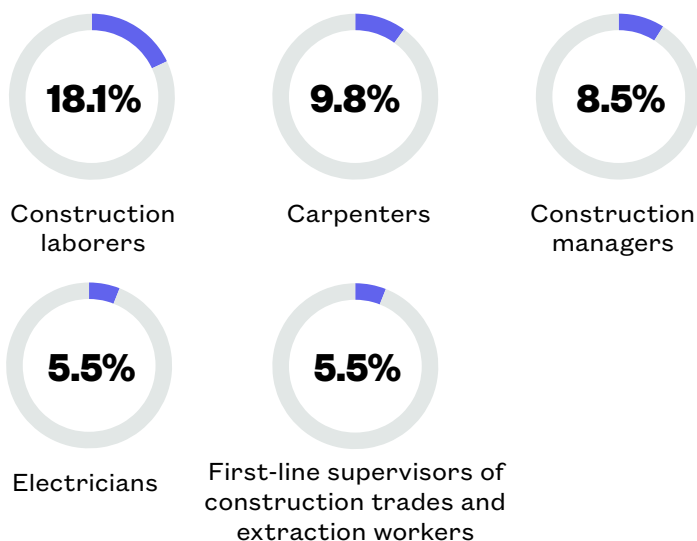
LABOR FORCE (CONTINUED)

In 2022, there were

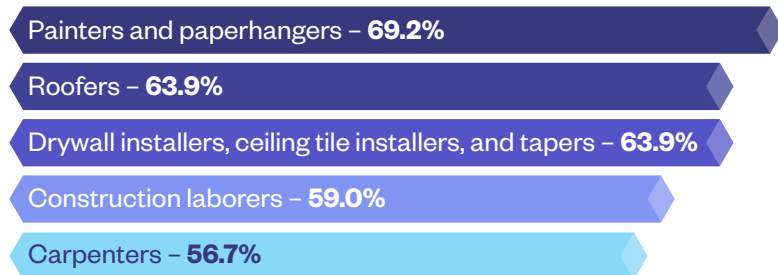
108,400

immigrant entrepreneurs in the construction industry in Texas, comprising **39.7%** of all entrepreneurs in the sector.⁶

The construction industry needs workers with different skills to fill a variety of occupations. The top occupations in the construction industry in Texas are:



Immigrant workers made up significant shares of the workforce in the following occupations⁷:



SPOTLIGHT

Emely Roque

Operations Manager, Yellowstone Marble and Granite

Emely Roque's father, Jose, emigrated from Mexico with his siblings when he was just 16 years old and immediately went to work, first as a dishwasher at Luby's then as a landscaper, a mechanic's helper, and a forklift operator at a Houston fabrication shop.

At Jose's last job, the boss trained him to cut and install stone, skills at which Jose excelled. "He's really good at visualizing the stone," Emely says. "He can visualize every vein, seam and pattern, allowing him to create art."

Jose was also driven to chase the American Dream.

After several years on that job, at the age of 27, he and his wife, Angelica, decided to open their own stone fabrication and installation business. They named it Yellowstone Marble and Granite, after the U.S. national park in Wyoming, Montana, and Idaho—a park they wouldn't get a chance to visit for another two decades.

Today their shop has 25 full-time employees, nearly all of whom are either immigrants or the children of immigrants from Central or South America. Only the office jobs seem to attract non-Latino workers, says Emely.

"Every other fabrication shop in Houston that I've gone to or know of, they're mostly immigrants or look of Latino descent," she says. In fact, she adds, it is the case on nearly every construction site, too, in the greater Houston area. "It's usually only the supervisors or the ones talking directly to the customer who might not be an immigrant."

"If you're getting someone that's from here, they went to school, have a degree, they're coming out with the expectation that they're going to make a certain amount," she says. "And that's not always realistic, especially in the construction industry."

Emely studied management information systems at the University of Houston, and she now manages Yellowstone Marble and Granite for her father. The business has a low turnover rate. Yellowstone pays its workers comparatively well—they can support their families—and keeps them on salary regardless of the incoming workload. "Even if we faced a scenario where we didn't have work, we would try to figure something out," she says. "We understand this industry and what these workers have been through."

In other words, they're good jobs. They're also physically demanding. Fabricators have to maneuver 1,000-pound blocks of stone and carefully guide the correct cut. Installers have to carry the final pieces—just as heavy—into homes. And they must do so slowly and carefully. "A lot of people think stone is very strong in all ways," Emely says. "But whenever you work with stone you have to be very delicate."

"These are very labor-intensive jobs, that mostly immigrants are willing to take on," she says.

Without immigrant labor, Emely imagines the price of labor, and the products and services Houstonians buy, would notably increase.

"The immigrants are the driving force behind the construction industry, at least here in Houston," Emely says. "They are the people who are pushing forward a lot of the labor-intensive work."

JOB DEMAND IN CONSTRUCTION

From 2018 to 2023, there were

508,200

unique job postings in Texas. During that time, the median advertised annual salary rose⁸ **19.2%** from

\$43,700 to \$52,100

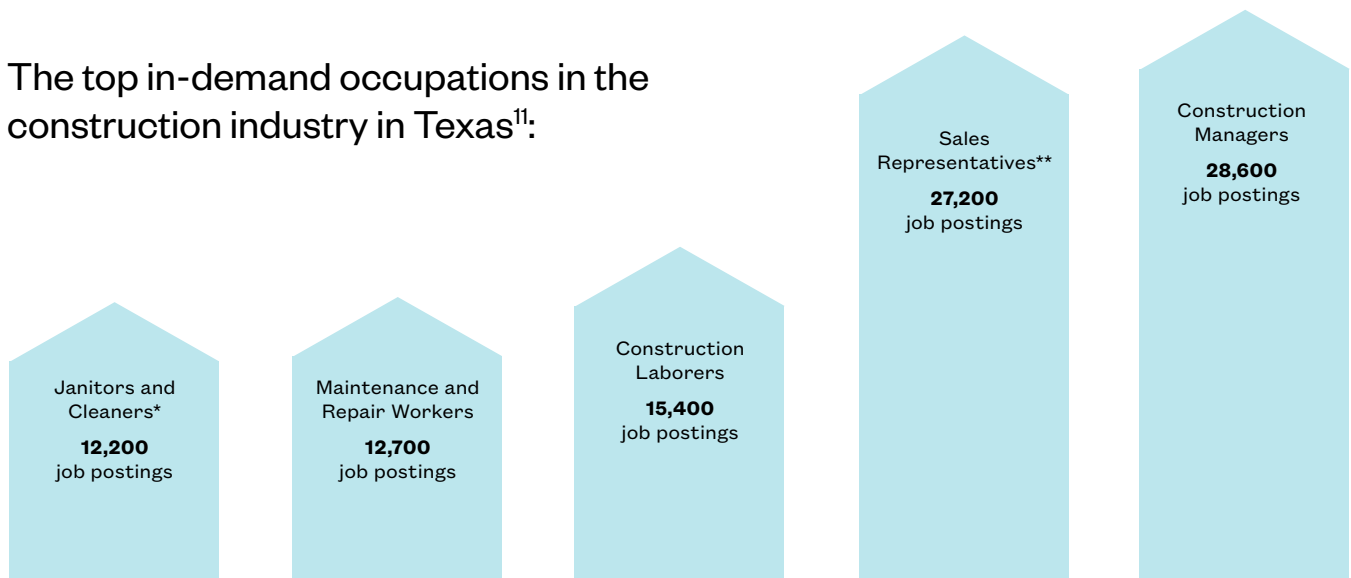
Between 2018 and 2023, the top Texas employers that listed job postings in the construction industry⁹ were:

- **ABM Industries** (17,100 job postings)
- **Johnson Controls** (6,200)
- **Kiewit Corporation** (6,100)
- **TDIndustries** (5,800)
- **D.R. Horton** (5,300)



- ① Management occupations 14.4%
- ② Construction & extraction occupations 13.3%
- ③ Sales and related occupations 9.8%
- ④ Installation, maintenance, & repair occupations 9.8%
- ⑤ Office and administrative support occupations 9.5%
- ⑥ Other 43.2%

The top in-demand occupations in the construction industry in Texas¹¹:



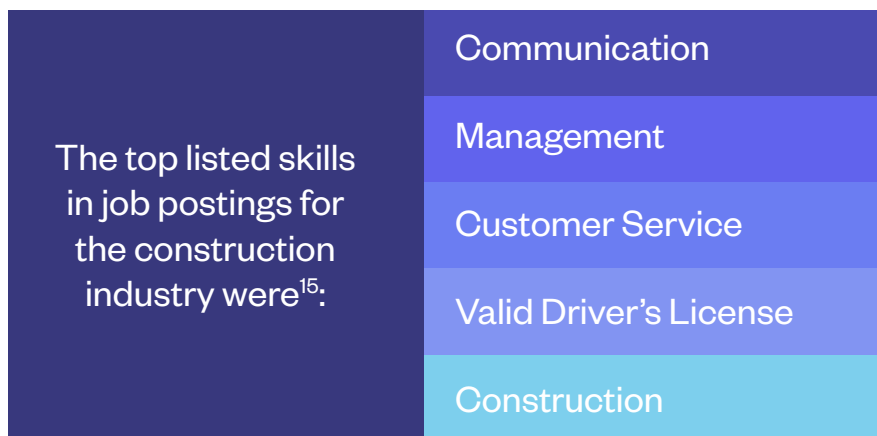
**Except Maids and Housekeeping Cleaners*

***Wholesale and Manufacturing, Except Technical and Scientific Products*

JOB DEMAND IN CONSTRUCTION (CONTINUED)

Immigrants across the skills spectrum are needed to fill jobs in the growing construction industry in Texas.¹² These roles require a variety of educational levels and on-the-job training for competency. The top in-demand occupations in the construction industry in Texas required the following qualifications:

- Construction Managers**
 Bachelor's degree • Moderate-term on-the-job training¹³
- Sales Representatives, Wholesale and Manufacturing, Except Technical and Scientific Products**
 High school diploma or equivalent • Moderate-term on-the-job training
- Construction Laborers**
 No formal educational credential • Short-term on-the-job training¹⁴
- Maintenance and Repair Workers, General**
 High school diploma or equivalent • Moderate-term on-the-job training
- Janitors and Cleaners, Except Maids and Housekeeping Cleaners**
 No formal educational credential • Short-term on-the-job training



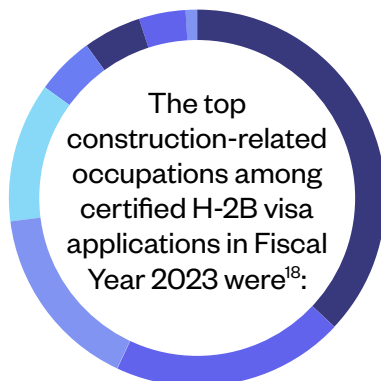
BILINGUAL SKILLS

From 2018 to 2023,

23,200

unique job postings in the construction industry, or **4.6%**, listed knowledge of at least one other language as a desired skill.¹⁶

H-2B VISAS¹⁷



- 1 Construction Laborers 714 certifications
- 2 Cement Masons and Concrete Finishers 408
- 3 Welders, Cutters, Solderers, and Brazers 335
- 4 Structural Metal Fabricators and Fitters 251
- 5 Plumbers, Pipefitters, and Steamfitters 115
- 6 Fence Erectors 106
- 7 Carpenters 91
- 8 Hazardous Materials Removal Workers 12

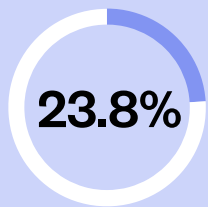
SPOTLIGHT

Houston Metro Area¹⁹

DEMOGRAPHICS

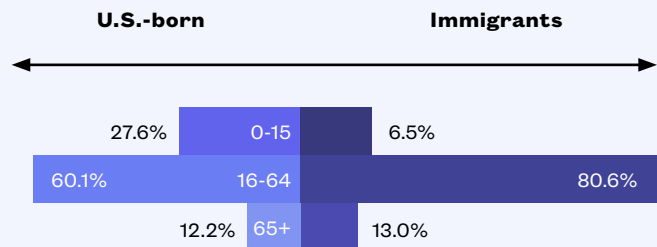
1.8M+

Number of immigrants living in the Houston Metro Area in 2022.



Immigrant share of the metro area's total population in 2022

Share of population by age:²⁰



In 2022, **31.6%** of the immigrant population in the Houston metro area reported that they did not speak English well. Of those, the top languages spoken at home other than English were:

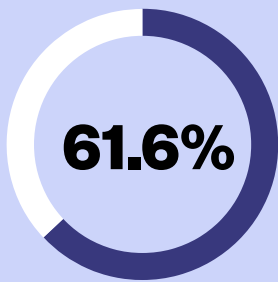
- Spanish - **84.8%**
- Vietnamese - **5.3%**
- Chinese - **2.2%**
- Urdu - **0.9%**
- Korean - **0.8%**
- Other - **6.0%**

84.8%

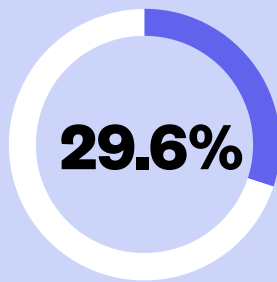
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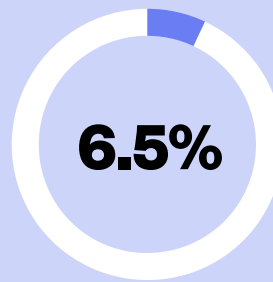
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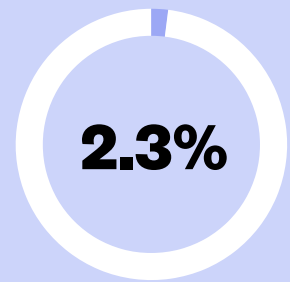
Less than a high school diploma



High school diploma or some college

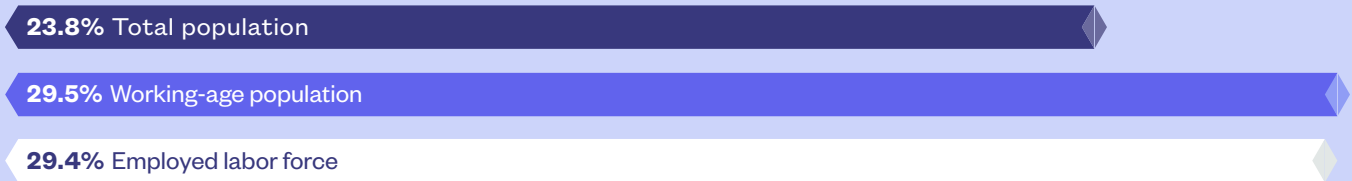


Bachelor's degree



Advanced degree

2021 immigrant shares of the metro area's:



In 2022, immigrants in the Houston metro area were



more likely to be of working-age than their U.S.-born counterparts.

Immigrants in the Houston metro area had a labor force participation rate of **74.9%**.

LABOR FORCE

180,500

immigrants were employed in the construction industry in 2022, representing **51.3%** of all employed workers in the construction sector.

114,600

employed immigrants in the Houston metro area were undocumented, representing **31.7%** of all employed workers in the industry.



- 1 Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean . . . 87.9%
- 2 South America 3.6%
- 3 India and Southwest Asia 1.5%
- 4 East Asia 1.2%
- 5 Other 5.8%

Immigrant workers made up significant shares of the following occupations²¹:



*Of construction trades and extraction workers

In 2022, there were **29,400 immigrant entrepreneurs** in the construction industry in the Houston metro area. They comprised **47.7%** of all entrepreneurs in the construction industry.

ENDNOTES

- 1** Estimates provided in this report may slightly undercount the immigrant population. The American Community Survey (ACS) historically undersamples the immigrant population, especially among lower income, more recently arrived, and less English-fluent immigrant populations.
- 2** Unless otherwise specified, data comes from 1-year sample of the American Community Survey from 2022, downloaded from IPUMS USA, University of Minnesota, www.ipums.org, and figures refer to the state of Texas.
- 3** We define “immigrant” as any non-citizen or any naturalized U.S. citizen. They include naturalized citizens, green card holders, temporary visa holders, refugees, asylees, and undocumented immigrants, among others.
- 4** We define working age as 16-64 years of age.
- 5** Data on degrees awarded to international students is derived from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System maintained by the National Center for Education Statistics.
- 6** Data obtained from the ACS may not capture those who work in informal jobs and businesses, and as a result, may not capture immigrants’ full entrepreneurial contributions within the state.
- 7** American Immigration Council analysis of the IPUMS microdata from the 2022 American Community Survey, 1-Year sample. IPUMS USA, University of Minnesota, www.ipums.org.
- 8** Data is obtained from Lightcast Technologies for the time period between January 1, 2018, and December 31, 2023. Accessed on April 14, 2024.
- 9** Data is obtained from Lightcast Technologies for the time period between January 1, 2018, and December 31, 2023. Accessed on April 14, 2024.
- 10** Data is obtained from Lightcast Technologies for the time period between January 1, 2018, and December 31, 2023. Accessed on August 5th, 2024.
- 11** Data is obtained from Lightcast Technologies for the time period between January 1, 2018, and December 31, 2023. Accessed on August 5th, 2024.
- 12** On-the-job training: training or preparation that is typically needed for a worker, once employed in an occupation, to attain competency in the occupation. Training is occupation specific rather than job specific; skills learned can be transferred to another job in the same occupation.
- 13** Moderate-term on-the-job training: more than 1 month, and up to 12 months, of combined on-the-job experience and informal training that is needed for the worker to attain competency in the skills needed in the occupation.
- 14** Short-term on-the-job training: 1 month or less of on-the-job experience and informal training.
- 15** Data is obtained from Lightcast Technologies for the time period between January 1, 2018, and December 31, 2023. Accessed on April 14, 2024.
- 16** Data is obtained from Lightcast Technologies for the time period between January 1, 2018, and December 31, 2023. Accessed on April 14, 2024.
- 17** For an employer to obtain an H-2B certification, the Department of Labor must determine that there are not enough U.S. worker available to do the temporary job being petitioned for, and that employing H-2B workers will not adversely affect the wages and working conditions of similar workers. Additionally, the need for the worker must be temporary. Certified jobs are not necessarily the jobs filled, though they do indicate a level of demand for temporary immigrant workers in a particular occupation. More information on the H-2B process can be found here: <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/foreign-labor/programs/h-2b>.
- 18** Department of Labor H-2B Disclosure Data for FY 2023: <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/foreign-labor/performance>.
- 19** Unless otherwise specified, data comes from the 1-year sample of the American Community Survey (ACS) from 2022, downloaded from IPUMS USA, University of Minnesota, www.ipums.org, and figures refer to the Houston-The Woodlands-Sugar Land, Texas, Metropolitan Statistical Area.
- 20** Totals may not add up to 100 percent due to rounding.
- 21** American Immigration Council analysis of the IPUMS microdata from the 2022 American Community Survey, 1-Year sample. IPUMS USA, University of Minnesota, www.ipums.org.



Acknowledgements

The American Immigration Council would like to thank the following organizations for their partnership and support in the release of this report.

