Immigrants in Oklahoma

Oklahoma has a small but growing immigrant community, much of which emigrated from Mexico. While 6 percent of Oklahoma’s population was born in another country, foreign-born residents support the state’s economy across sectors and make up a vital share of the labor force. For example, 24 percent of all farmers, fishers, and foresters in Oklahoma are immigrants, as are 16 percent of the state’s construction industry employees. As workers, business owners, taxpayers, and neighbors, immigrants are an integral part of Oklahoma’s diverse and thriving communities and make extensive contributions that benefit all.

Immigrants account for 6 percent of residents in Oklahoma, while more than 5 percent of residents are native-born U.S. citizens with at least one immigrant parent.

- In 2015, 235,350 immigrants (foreign-born individuals) comprised 6 percent of the state’s population.¹
- Oklahoma was home to 102,699 women, 114,596 men, and 18,055 children who were immigrants.²
- The top countries of origin for immigrants were Mexico (48.5 percent of immigrants), Vietnam (6.9 percent), Guatemala (3.7 percent), China (3.6 percent), and the Philippines (3.4 percent).³
- In 2016, 223,293 people in Oklahoma (5.7 percent of the state’s population) were native-born Americans who had at least one immigrant parent.⁴

A third of all immigrants in Oklahoma are naturalized U.S. citizens.

- 78,382 immigrants (33.3 percent) had naturalized as of 2015,⁵ and 36,916 immigrants were eligible to become naturalized U.S. citizens in 2015.⁶
- Nearly 7 in 10 immigrants (69.7 percent) reported speaking English “well” or “very well.”⁷

Immigrants in Oklahoma are found across the educational spectrum.

- More than a fifth of adult immigrants had a college degree or more education in 2015, while over a third had less than a high school diploma.⁸
More than 60,000 U.S. citizens in Oklahoma live with at least one family member who is undocumented.

- 95,000 undocumented immigrants comprised 41 percent of the immigrant population and 2.4 percent of the total state population in 2014.⁹

- 125,989 people in Oklahoma, including 55,665 born in the United States, lived with at least one undocumented family member between 2010 and 2014.¹⁰

- During the same period, 5 percent of children in the state were U.S. citizens living with at least one undocumented family member (47,937 children in total).¹¹

More than 6,000 Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipients live in Oklahoma.¹²

- In 2016, 74 percent of DACA-eligible immigrants in Oklahoma, or 7,488 people, had applied DACA.¹³

- An additional 4,000 residents of the state satisfied all but the educational requirements for DACA, and another 2,000 would be eligible as they grew older.¹⁴

Immigrants are vital members of Oklahoma’s labor force across industries, accounting for 1 in 12 workers.

- 154,133 immigrant workers comprised 8.3 percent of the labor force in 2015.¹⁵
Immigrant workers were most numerous in the following industries:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industry</th>
<th>Number of Immigrant Workers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accommodation and Food Services</td>
<td>26,417</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>25,766</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
<td>22,251</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Care and Social Assistance</td>
<td>13,594</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail Trade</td>
<td>13,307</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Analysis of the U.S. Census Bureau’s 2015 American Community Survey 1-year PUMS data by the American Immigration Council.

The largest shares of immigrant workers were in the following industries:16

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industry</th>
<th>Immigrant Share (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>15.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing &amp; Hunting</td>
<td>15.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accommodation and Food Services</td>
<td>13.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative &amp; Support; Waste Management; and Remediation Services</td>
<td>13.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Analysis of the U.S. Census Bureau’s 2015 American Community Survey 1-year PUMS data by the American Immigration Council.

Immigrants are an integral part of the Oklahoma workforce in a range of occupations.

In 2015, immigrant workers were most numerous in the following occupation groups:17

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation Category</th>
<th>Number of Immigrant Workers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Construction and Extraction</td>
<td>26,203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Production</td>
<td>22,729</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building and Grounds Cleaning &amp; Maintenance</td>
<td>20,595</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food Preparation and Serving Related</td>
<td>18,868</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management</td>
<td>12,755</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Analysis of the U.S. Census Bureau’s 2015 American Community Survey 1-year PUMS data by the American Immigration Council.
The largest shares of immigrant workers were in the following occupation groups:18

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation Category</th>
<th>Immigrant Share (%) (of all workers in occupation)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Farming, Fishing, and Forestry</td>
<td>24.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building and Grounds Cleaning &amp; Maintenance</td>
<td>22.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction and Extraction</td>
<td>17.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Production</td>
<td>16.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life, Physical, and Social Sciences</td>
<td>12.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Analysis of the U.S. Census Bureau’s 2015 American Community Survey 1-year PUMS data by the American Immigration Council.

Undocumented immigrants comprised 3.4 percent of the state’s workforce in 2014.19

Immigrants in Oklahoma contribute more than a billion dollars in yearly taxes.

- Immigrant-led households in the state paid $714.7 million in federal taxes and $346.1 million in state and local taxes in 2014.20
- Undocumented immigrants in Oklahoma paid an estimated $84.8 million in state and local taxes in 2014. Their contribution would rise to $104.6 million if they could receive legal status.21
- DACA recipients in Oklahoma paid an estimated $17.4 million in state and local taxes in 2016.22

As consumers, immigrants add billions of dollars to Oklahoma’s economy every year.

- Okies in immigrant-led households had $3.2 billion in spending power (after-tax income) in 2014.23

Immigrant entrepreneurs represent 1 in 11 Oklahoma business owners, generating hundreds of millions of dollars in combined annual revenue.

- 18,118 immigrant business owners accounted for 9.1 percent of all self-employed Oklahoma residents in 2015 and generated $423.6 million in business income.24
- In 2015, immigrants accounted for 10.5 percent of business owners in the Oklahoma City metropolitan area.25
Endnotes

1 “Foreign born” does not include people born in Puerto Rico or U.S. island areas or U.S. citizens born abroad of American parent(s). U.S. Census Bureau, 2015 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates. The American Immigration Council elected to use data from the 2015 ACS 1-Year estimates wherever possible to provide the most current information available. Since these estimates are based on a smaller sample size than the ACS 5-year, however, they are more sensitive to fluctuations and may result in greater margins of error (compared to 5-year estimates).

2 Children are defined as people age 17 or younger. Men and women do not include children. Ibid.

3 Analysis of the U.S. Census Bureau’s 2015 American Community Survey 1-year PUMS data by the American Immigration Council.


5 2015 ACS 1-Year Estimates.


7 Figure includes immigrants who speak only English. Data based on survey respondents age 5 and over. Analysis of 2015 ACS 1-Year Estimates by the American Immigration Council.

8 Data based on survey respondents age 25 and older. 2015 ACS 1-Year Estimates.


14 Ibid.


16 Ibid.


18 Ibid.


24 “Business owners” include people who are self-employed, at least 18 years old, and work at least 15 hours per week at their businesses. Analysis of 2015 ACS 1-year PUMS data by the American Immigration Council.