

# Rural Migration News

## Blog 223

JUNE 2021

### Foreign-born Workers in 2020

There were 27.3 million foreign-born workers in the 161 million strong US labor force in 2020, down from 27.5 million in the 164 million strong labor force in 2019. Foreign-born workers were 17 percent of all US workers in 2020, but they accounted for almost 40 percent of the decline in the US workforce between 2019 and 2020.

The unemployment rate of foreign-born workers was lower than the rate for US-born workers in 2019, 3.1 versus 3.8 percent for US-born workers, but higher in 2020, 9.2 versus 7.8 percent for US-born workers. A higher share of foreign-born workers lost jobs in 2020.

Foreign-born men have higher labor force participation rates than US-born men, 77 percent compared to 66 percent in 2020. Foreign-born women have a lower participation rate, 53 percent compared to 57 percent for US-born women. Foreign-born workers are mostly male, 57 percent compared to 52 percent of US-born workers, and more likely to be in the 25-54 age group, 73 percent compared to 62 percent for US-born workers.

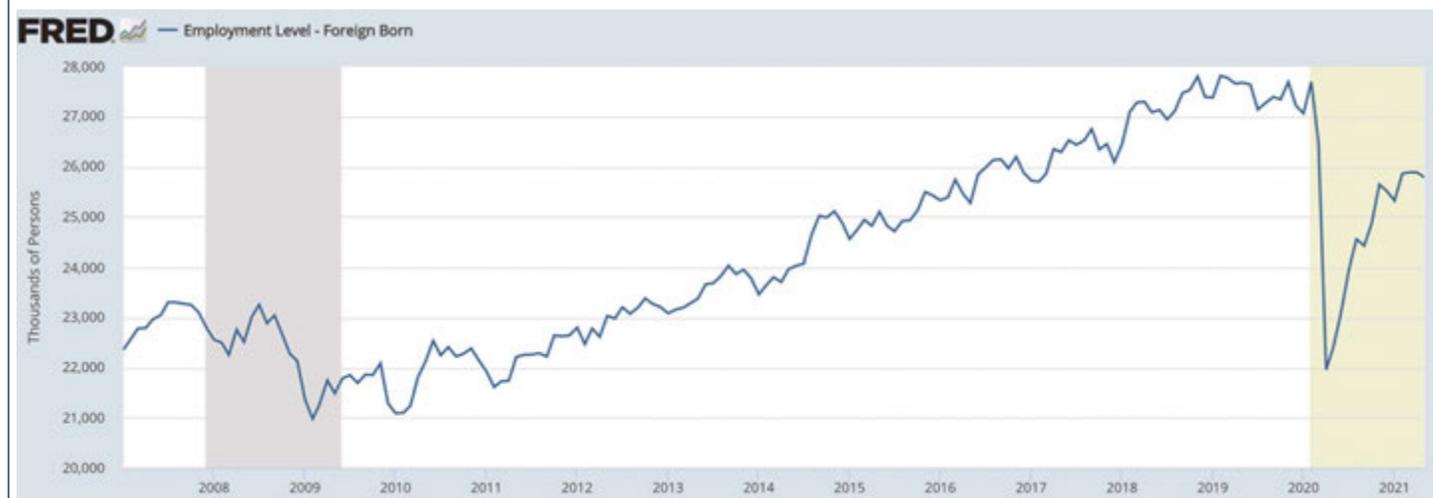
Over 19 percent of foreign-born workers 25 and older did not complete high school in 2020, compared with four percent of US

born workers. About 40 percent of foreign-born adult workers, and 44 percent of US born adult workers, had college degrees in 2020.

Foreign-born workers were concentrated in particular occupations, including agriculture, construction, and maintenance occupations that have a higher share of foreign-born than US-born workers. Two percent of foreign-born men, compared to 0.8 percent of US-born men, were in farming. Similarly, 15 percent of foreign-born men, compared to eight percent of US-born men, were in construction occupations. Among women, nine percent of foreign-born women, compared to two percent of US-born women, were in cleaning and maintenance occupations.

The median earnings of foreign-born workers were 12 percent lower than the median earnings of US-born workers, \$885 a week compared to \$1,000 in 2020. The gap in earnings was larger for foreign-born men than for foreign-born women, who earned 88 percent as much as US-born women, \$798 versus \$903. Similarly, the earnings gap was larger for older workers: foreign-born workers 55 to 64 earned \$869, which was 76 percent of the \$1,137 of US-born workers in the same age group. Foreign-born

The Foreign-born U.S. Labor Force Shrank in 2020

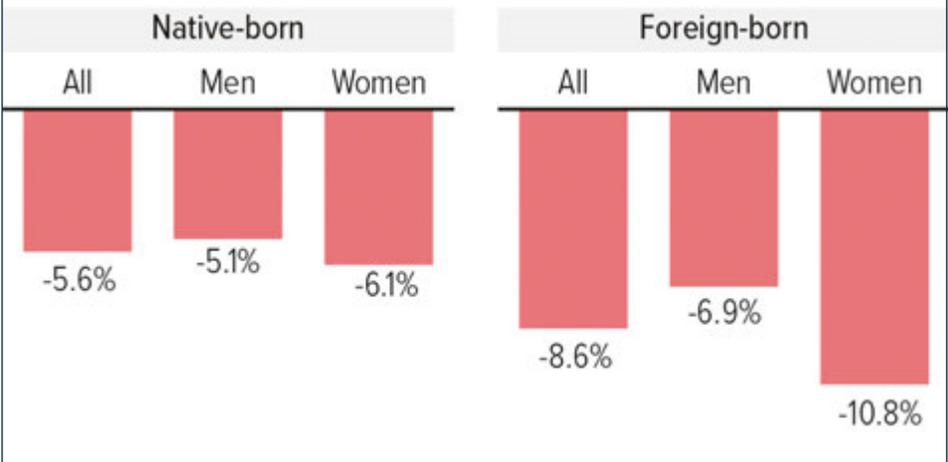


workers aged 25-34 earned \$885 a week, which was 98 percent of the \$907 of similar US-born workers.

The gap between the earnings of foreign-born and US-born reverses as education rises. Foreign-born workers with less than a high-school education earned an average \$601 a week in 2020, compared to \$655 for similar US-born workers. However, foreign-born workers with college degrees earned an average \$1,492 a week, more than the \$1,409 of similar US-born workers.

Almost half of foreign-born workers were Hispanic and a quarter were Asian in 2020. Hispanics were 12 percent and Asians were two percent of US-born workers in 2020.

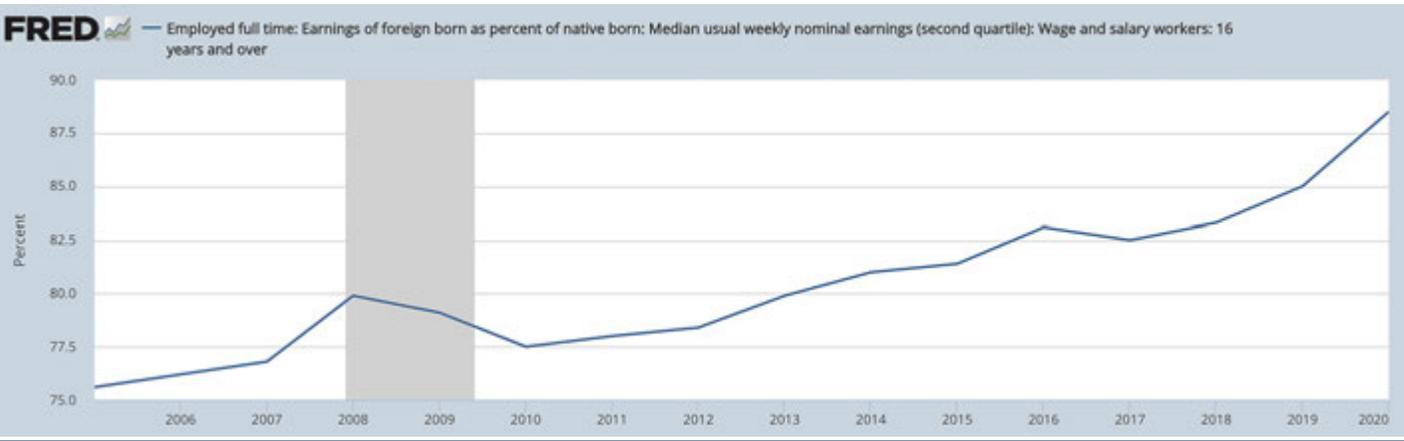
**A Higher Share of Foreign-born Workers Lost Jobs in 2020 (Percentage Decline in Employment Between Feb 2020 and Jan 2021)**



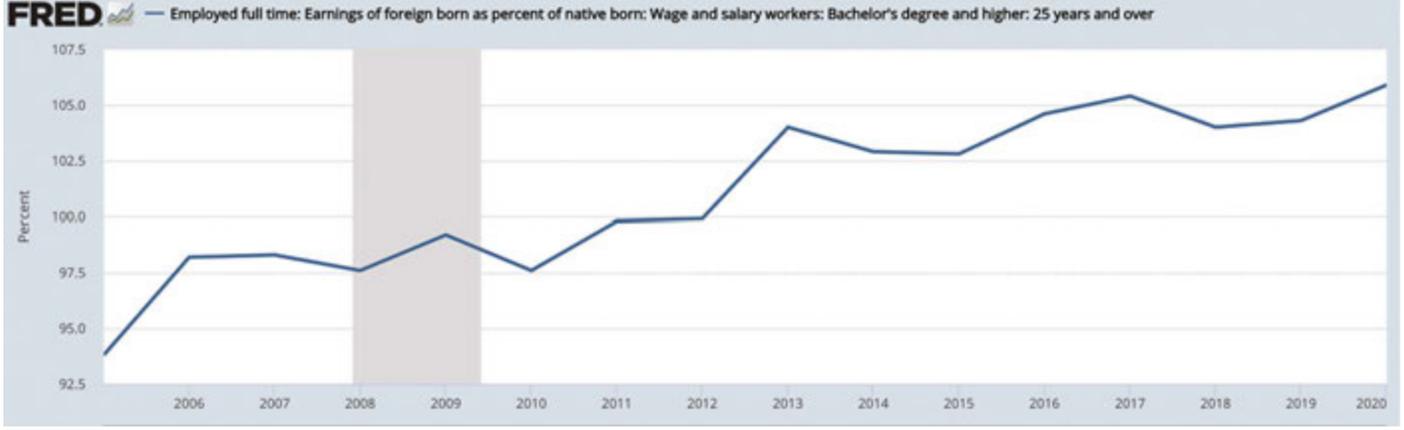
There were 13 million foreign-born Hispanic workers in 2020, and 16 million US-born Hispanic workers. Foreign-born Hispanic workers with less than a high school education were much more likely to be in the

labor force than similar US-born Hispanics: 56 percent of foreign-born Hispanics without high school diplomas were in the labor force in 2020, compared to 36 percent of US-born Hispanics.

**Foreign-born Workers Earn Less than U.S.-born Workers, but the Earnings Gap is Narrowing**



**Foreign-born Workers with at Least BS Degrees Earned More than U.S.-born Workers with at Least BS Degrees**



DOL's July 26, 2019 Regulations Would Have Raised Wages for Ag Equipment Operators and Truck Drivers by Switching from the FLS to the OES

**Table 1. Employment status of the foreign-born and native-born populations by selected characteristics, 2019-2020 annual averages**  
[Numbers in thousands]

Characteristic	2019						2020						
	Civilian noninstitutional population	Civilian labor force			Unemployed		Civilian noninstitutional population	Civilian labor force			Unemployed		
		Total	Participation rate	Employed	Number	Unemployment rate		Total	Participation rate	Employed	Number	Unemployment rate	
<b>TOTAL</b>													
Total, 16 years and over.....	259,175	163,539	63.1	157,538	6,001	3.7	260,329	160,742	61.7	147,795	12,947	8.1	
Men.....	125,353	86,687	69.2	83,460	3,227	3.7	125,922	85,204	67.7	78,560	6,644	7.8	
Women.....	133,822	76,852	57.4	74,078	2,774	3.6	134,407	75,538	56.2	69,234	6,304	8.3	
<b>FOREIGN BORN</b>													
Total, 16 years and over.....	42,990	28,390	66.0	27,502	888	3.1	42,361	27,316	64.5	24,809	2,507	9.2	
Men.....	20,814	16,234	78.0	15,791	443	2.7	20,420	15,652	76.6	14,401	1,250	8.0	
Women.....	22,176	12,156	54.8	11,711	446	3.7	21,941	11,664	53.2	10,407	1,257	10.8	
<b>Age</b>													
16 to 24 years.....	3,330	1,735	52.1	1,619	116	6.7	3,149	1,604	50.9	1,373	231	14.4	
25 to 34 years.....	7,665	5,917	77.2	5,726	191	3.2	7,208	5,470	75.9	4,966	504	9.2	
35 to 44 years.....	9,361	7,459	79.7	7,273	187	2.5	9,103	7,150	78.5	6,599	551	7.7	
45 to 54 years.....	8,878	7,219	81.3	7,018	201	2.8	8,793	6,993	79.5	6,367	626	8.9	
55 to 64 years.....	6,699	4,585	68.5	4,450	135	3.0	6,831	4,637	67.9	4,191	446	9.6	
65 years and over.....	7,057	1,475	20.9	1,416	59	4.0	7,278	1,461	20.1	1,312	149	10.2	
<b>Race and Hispanic or Latino ethnicity<sup>1</sup></b>													
White non-Hispanic or Latino.....	7,710	4,651	60.3	4,515	136	2.9	7,377	4,420	59.9	4,087	333	7.5	
Black non-Hispanic or Latino.....	3,837	2,716	70.8	2,606	110	4.1	3,979	2,757	69.3	2,463	294	10.7	
Asian non-Hispanic or Latino.....	11,180	7,187	64.3	7,013	174	2.4	10,966	6,848	62.4	6,252	595	8.7	
Hispanic or Latino ethnicity.....	19,753	13,506	68.4	13,046	460	3.4	19,569	12,978	66.3	11,723	1,255	9.7	
<b>Educational attainment</b>													
Total, 25 years and over.....	39,660	26,655	67.2	25,883	773	2.9	39,212	25,712	65.6	23,436	2,276	8.9	
Less than a high school diploma.....	9,494	5,432	57.2	5,217	214	3.9	8,762	4,886	55.8	4,328	558	11.4	
High school graduates, no college <sup>2</sup> .....	9,983	6,632	66.4	6,454	178	2.7	10,023	6,302	62.9	5,617	685	10.9	
Some college or associate degree.....	6,233	4,312	69.2	4,196	116	2.7	6,192	4,153	67.1	3,767	386	9.3	
Bachelor's degree and higher <sup>3</sup> .....	13,950	10,280	73.7	10,015	264	2.6	14,235	10,371	72.9	9,723	648	6.2	
<b>NATIVE BORN</b>													
Total, 16 years and over.....	216,185	135,148	62.5	130,036	5,112	3.8	217,968	133,427	61.2	122,986	10,441	7.8	
Men.....	104,540	70,453	67.4	67,669	2,784	4.0	105,502	69,552	65.9	64,159	5,393	7.8	
Women.....	111,645	64,696	57.9	62,367	2,328	3.6	112,466	63,874	56.8	58,827	5,047	7.9	
<b>Age</b>													
16 to 24 years.....	34,418	19,358	56.2	17,703	1,654	8.5	34,336	18,603	54.2	15,819	2,784	15.0	
25 to 34 years.....	37,211	31,274	84.0	30,081	1,193	3.8	37,636	31,036	82.5	28,460	2,576	8.3	
35 to 44 years.....	31,599	26,598	84.2	25,854	743	2.8	32,227	26,833	83.3	25,208	1,625	6.1	
45 to 54 years.....	31,566	25,713	81.5	25,024	689	2.7	31,078	25,148	80.9	23,731	1,416	5.6	
55 to 64 years.....	35,542	23,018	64.8	22,443	575	2.5	35,360	22,656	64.1	21,262	1,393	6.1	
65 years and over.....	45,848	9,188	20.0	8,931	257	2.8	47,330	9,152	19.3	8,506	646	7.1	
<b>Race and Hispanic or Latino ethnicity<sup>1</sup></b>													
White non-Hispanic or Latino.....	154,457	96,132	62.2	93,210	2,922	3.0	154,711	94,284	60.9	88,161	6,123	6.5	
Black non-Hispanic or Latino.....	27,105	16,566	61.1	15,497	1,069	6.5	27,296	16,089	58.9	14,237	1,851	11.5	
Asian non-Hispanic or Latino.....	4,720	2,973	63.0	2,874	99	3.3	5,021	3,153	62.8	2,889	264	8.4	
Hispanic or Latino ethnicity.....	23,754	15,547	65.4	14,759	788	5.1	24,614	15,992	65.0	14,229	1,763	11.0	
<b>Educational attainment</b>													
Total, 25 years and over.....	181,767	115,791	63.7	112,333	3,458	3.0	183,632	114,824	62.5	107,167	7,656	6.7	
Less than a high school diploma.....	12,132	4,544	37.5	4,224	320	7.0	11,138	4,043	36.3	3,561	483	11.9	
High school graduates, no college <sup>2</sup> .....	52,476	29,530	56.3	28,383	1,146	3.9	52,098	28,440	54.6	25,989	2,450	8.6	
Some college or associate degree.....	51,280	33,108	64.6	32,086	1,022	3.1	51,135	32,248	63.1	29,803	2,446	7.6	
Bachelor's degree and higher <sup>3</sup> .....	65,878	48,609	73.8	47,640	969	2.0	69,260	50,092	72.3	47,815	2,277	4.5	

<sup>1</sup> Data for race/ethnicity groups do not sum to totals because data are not presented for all races.

<sup>2</sup> Includes persons with a high school diploma or equivalent.

<sup>3</sup> Includes persons with bachelor's, master's, professional, and doctoral degrees.

NOTE: Updated population controls are introduced annually with the release of January data.

## References

BLS. 2021. Labor Force Characteristics of Foreign-born Workers Summary. [www.bls.gov/news.release/forbrn.nr0.htm/labor-force-characteristics-of-foreign-born-workers-summary](http://www.bls.gov/news.release/forbrn.nr0.htm/labor-force-characteristics-of-foreign-born-workers-summary)

FRED. Foreign-born population and employment data. <https://fred.stlouisfed.org/searchresults/?st=foreign%20born>

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