

Immigrant Women's Contributions to Our Economy

BY ASHIR COILLBERG

Immigrant women play a crucial role in the United States economy, making up 7.9% of the U.S. labor force, and a significantly higher share of the workforce in many vital occupations and industries like health care, domestic work, and agricultural packaging and processing.¹ Without immigrant workers, the U.S. economy would likely not have had as high rates of job growth and GDP growth during recent years, and ongoing immigration will be vital in sustaining labor force growth.² But from day one, the Trump administration has targeted immigrants with threats of detention and deportation, without regard for humanity or the rule of law. Under Trump's anti-immigrant agenda, now more than ever, it is critical to recognize the vital contributions of immigrant women to U.S. economic growth and stability.

Note: This analysis was conducted using the most recently available data from the U.S. Census Bureau, 2023 one-year American Community Survey. "Immigrant women" refer to women born outside the United States who were not U.S. citizens at birth, including naturalized citizens, individuals with documented immigration status (such as green card holders or current student or work visa holders), as well as those with undocumented immigration status.³

As of 2023, there are over 23.2 million immigrant women ages 16 or older in the United States, 56.5% of whom (13.1 million) are naturalized citizens.⁴ Almost 60% (58.6%) of immigrant women ages 16 and over are in the labor force, which is comparable to the labor force participation rate of women ages 16 and over as a whole (59.4%), and an additional 8.3% of immigrant women ages 16 and over are enrolled in school of some kind.⁵

While immigrant women make up 7.9% of the overall U.S. labor force, they are a vital share of the workers in many industries and occupations, which could face dramatic labor shortages if immigrant women are detained, deported, or otherwise unable to work due to the destabilizing impacts that anti-immigrant policies will have on immigrant families and communities. In particular, immigrant women make up 36.0% of all workers employed as home health aides, a job that provides millions of people with life-preserving, long-term care.⁶ According to the most recent Bureau of Labor Statistics employment projections, home care workers are projected to experience the largest job growth of any occupation from 2023 to 2033, likely due to high levels of need.⁷ Immigrant women also make up 50.6% of graders and sorters of agricultural products, a vital occupation to the agricultural industry often comprised of low-paid seasonal jobs that are hard to fill.

INDUSTRIES WITH THE HIGHEST SHARE OF IMMIGRANT WOMEN WORKERS

Private households (other services, such as maids & housekeepers)	38.3%
Nail salons and other personal care services	33.2%
Services to buildings and dwellings, except landscaping services	26.7%
Drycleaning and laundry services	24.9%
Cut and sew, and apparel accessories and other apparel	23.4%
Home health care services	22.6%
Apparel, piece goods, and notions merchant wholesalers	19.2%
Traveler accommodation	17.6%
Beauty salons	17.5%
Textile product mills, except carpet and rug	17.4%

Source: National Women's Law Center (NWLC) calculations using 2023 one-year American Community Survey using IPUMS USA: Version 16.0 [dataset]. Minneapolis, MN: IPUMS, 2025. <https://doi.org/10.18128/D010.V16.0>.

OCCUPATIONS WITH THE HIGHEST SHARE OF IMMIGRANT WOMEN WORKERS

Manicurists and pedicurists	57.1%
Graders and sorters, agricultural products	50.6%
Maids and housekeeping cleaners	42.8%
Home health aides	36.0%
Interpreters and translators	35.4%
Sewing machine operators	32.7%
Tailors, dressmakers, and sewers	29.6%
Laundry and dry-cleaning workers	26.6%
Packers and packagers, hand	23.5%
Packaging and filling machine operators and tenders	22.9%

Source: National Women's Law Center (NWLC) calculations using 2023 one-year American Community Survey using IPUMS USA: Version 16.0 [dataset]. Minneapolis, MN: IPUMS, 2025. <https://doi.org/10.18128/D010.V16.0>.

Note: Due to insufficient sample sizes, "Knit fabric mills, and apparel knitting mills" was omitted from the top 10 industries with the highest share of immigrant women workers and "Pressers, textile, garment, and related materials" was omitted from the top 10 occupations with the highest share of immigrant women workers.

Immigrant women also comprise a significant part of the formal early childhood care labor force, currently making up 19.9% of child care workers as an occupation and 16.1% of the child care services industry. The child care sector relies on immigrant women to provide care for young children across all settings including center-based, home-based, family, friend and neighbor (FFN) care, and in private households. However, it is important to recognize that it is likely that a large share of immigrant child care providers operating across home-based settings are not reflected in this data, both due to data limitations on home-based providers and the likely undercounting of individuals classified as “noncitizens” (permanent residents, undocumented immigrants, or temporary migrant workers employed through “nonimmigrant” visas). Similarly, data only captures care workers in the formal economy, and while unpaid care work remains an important component in the production of care, unpaid caregiving duties are not reflected in the data.

Undocumented immigrants pay taxes too! The Institute on Tax and Economic Policy estimates that undocumented immigrants paid \$96.7 billion in federal, state, and local taxes—\$8,889 per person—in 2022. In fact, undocumented immigrants generally pay more taxes than similarly situated U.S. citizens, and more than a third of tax dollars paid by undocumented immigrants go toward payroll taxes to fund programs, such as Social Security, SNAP, TANF, and other basic needs support programs whose benefits they are not permitted to access.⁸

Immigrant women as a whole brought in an estimated total of \$740 billion in earned income in 2023.⁹ The median yearly income for immigrant women was \$35,000 in 2023; based on this income, and as a crude estimate assuming individual single taxpayers status, an immigrant woman typically pays \$3,995 in annual federal income tax, not including state and local taxes, or sales taxes on consumer goods, which means immigrant women pay tens of billions in federal income taxes every year.¹⁰

Policies should recognize and uplift the invaluable labor of the immigrant women who are the backbone of so many industries. Anti-immigrant policies hurt everyone, destabilizing the economy and making life harder for workers and consumers alike.

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FOOTNOTES

- 1 National Women's Law Center (NWLC) calculations using U.S. Census Bureau, 2023 American Community Survey (ACS) one-year estimates using IPUMS USA: Version 16.0 [dataset]. Minneapolis, Minn.: IPUMS, 2025. <https://doi.org/10.18128/D010.V16.0>. The universe includes respondents ages 16 and older.
- 2 Edelburg, Wendy and Tara Watson. 2024. "New Immigration Estimates Help Make Sense of the Pace of Employment." The Hamilton Project, March 2024. https://www.hamiltonproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/20240307_ImmigrationEmployment_Paper.pdf.
- 3 Using this data we are not able to distinguish between immigrants with documented legal status and those who have undocumented immigration status. It is also important to note that those with undocumented legal status are likely substantially underrepresented in this survey. See Baker, Bryan. 2021. "Estimates of the Unauthorized Immigrant Population Residing in the United States: January 2015-January 2018." U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Office of Immigration Statistics: Population Estimates. https://ohss.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/2023-12/unauthorized_immigrant_population_estimates_2015_-_2018.pdf.
- 4 NWLC calculations using 2023 ACS one-year estimates using IPUMS USA: Version 16.0 [dataset]. Minneapolis, Minn.: IPUMS, 2025. <https://doi.org/10.18128/D010.V16.0>.
- 5 NWLC calculations using 2023 ACS one-year estimates using IPUMS USA: Version 16.0 [dataset]. Minneapolis, Minn.: IPUMS, 2025. <https://doi.org/10.18128/D010.V16.0>.
- 6 NWLC calculations using 2023 ACS one-year estimates using IPUMS USA: Version 16.0 [dataset]. Minneapolis, Minn.: IPUMS, 2025. <https://doi.org/10.18128/D010.V16.0>.
- 7 U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), "Occupations with Most Job Growth, 2023 and Projected 2033," Table 1.4 in August 2024 Employment Projections (Washington, DC: April 3, 2025), <https://www.bls.gov/emp/tables/occupations-most-job-growth.htm>. "Home care workers" refers to the occupation category of "Home health and personal care aides."
- 8 Davis, Carl, Marco Guzman, and Emma Sifre. 2024. "Tax Payments by Undocumented Immigrants." Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy, July 2024. <https://itep.org/undocumented-immigrants-taxes-2024/>.
- 9 NWLC calculations using 2023 ACS one-year estimates using IPUMS USA: Version 16.0 [dataset]. Minneapolis, Minn.: IPUMS, 2025. <https://doi.org/10.18128/D010.V16.0>. Reported income in 2023 ACS was from the 12 months prior to when the respondent was interviewed, spanning across 2022 and 2023.
- 10 NWLC calculations using 2023 ACS one-year estimates using IPUMS-USA: Version 16.0 [dataset]. Minneapolis, Minn.: IPUMS, 2025. <https://doi.org/10.18128/D010.V16.0>. The typical income tax is calculated as a percentage of the median income using tax year 2022 marginal federal income tax rates and brackets for individual single taxpayers of 10% tax on income up to \$10,275, then 12% tax on the remainder of the \$35,000 median income. Federal income tax rates for tax year 2022 are available here: <https://www.irs.gov/newsroom/irs-provides-tax-inflation-adjustments-for-tax-year-2022>. The typical income tax is calculated as a percentage of the median income using tax year 2022 marginal federal income tax rates and brackets for individual single taxpayers of 10% tax on income up to \$10,275, then 12% tax on the remainder of the \$35,000 median income. Federal income tax rates for tax year 2022 are available here: <https://www.irs.gov/newsroom/irs-provides-tax-inflation-adjustments-for-tax-year-2022>.