

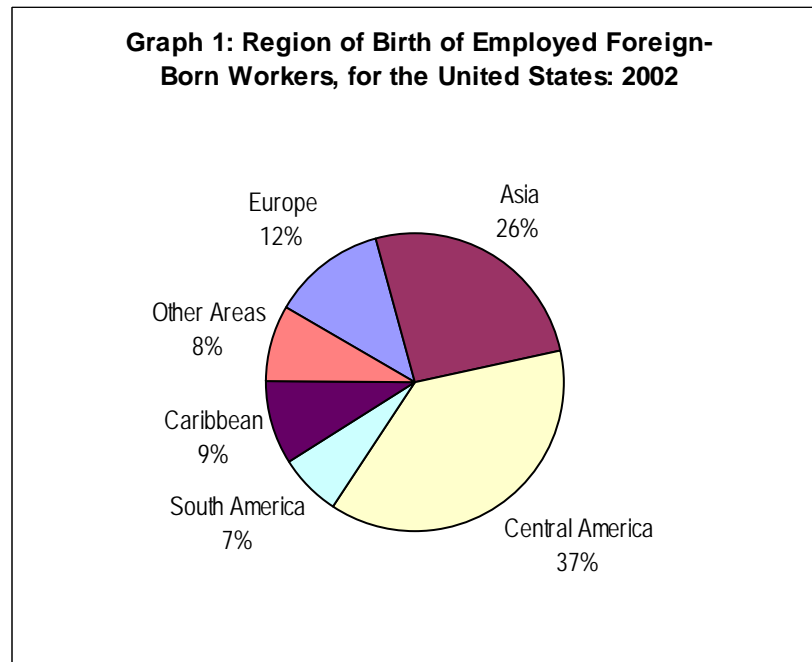
## What Kind of Work Do Immigrants Do? Occupation and Industry of Foreign-Born Workers in the United States

Approximately 14 percent of the civilian labor force in the United States is foreign born, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. But what kind of work do immigrants do? The Migration Policy Institute has compiled the following information on the occupation and industry of foreign-born workers from the 2002 Current Population Survey. All of the information presented below refers to employed workers age 16 and over.

### *Origins of Foreign-Born Workers*

**Over one-third of all employed foreign-born workers are from Central America.**

Of the 18.9 million employed foreign-born workers, 7.1 million (37 percent) were from Central America, primarily Mexico, but also from Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Panama. Approximately 4.9 million (26 percent) of all employed immigrant workers were from Asia, 2.4 million (12 percent) from Europe, 1.7 million (9 percent) from the Caribbean, and 1.3 million (7 percent) from South America. (See *Graph 1 and Table 1.*)



Source: Current Population Survey, March Supplement, 2002. Refers to employed workers age 16 and over. Immigrants from "Other Areas" are from Africa, Oceania, Bermuda, and Canada.

**Table 1. Foreign born employed workers age 16 and over by world region of birth, for the United States: 2002**

(in thousands)

World region of birth	Number	Percent
Total	18,933	100.0
Europe	2,360	12.5
Asia	4,899	25.9
Latin America	10,094	53.3
Caribbean	1,739	9.2
Central America	7,091	37.5
South America	1,264	6.7
Other areas	1,580	8.3

Source: Current Population Survey, March Supplement, 2002.

### ***Occupations of Foreign-Born Workers***

**Foreign-born workers are employed in a broad range of occupations.**

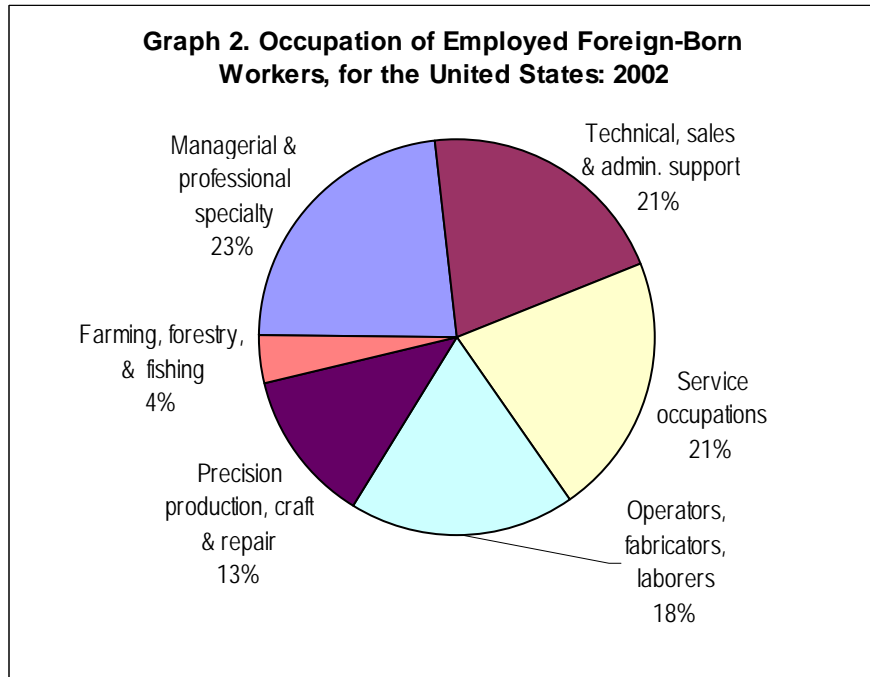
Of the 18.9 million foreign-born employed workers, 4.4 million (23 percent) were in managerial and professional occupations, 3.9 million (21 percent) in technical, sales, and administrative support occupations, and 4.0 million (21 percent) in service occupations. An additional 3.5 million (18 percent) worked as operators, fabricators, and laborers, while only 0.7 million (4 percent) worked in farming, forestry, and fishing occupations. *(See Graph 2 and Table 2.)*

**By comparison, native employed workers are concentrated in managerial and professional and technical, sales, and administrative support occupations.**

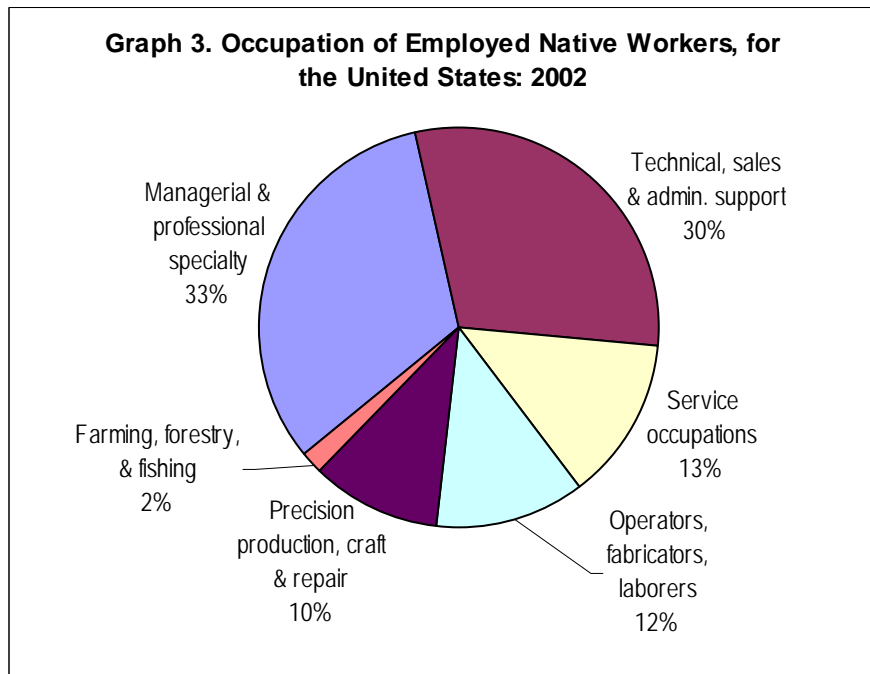
Of the 116.2 million native employed workers, 38.0 million (33 percent) were in managerial and professional occupations, while 34.8 million (30 percent) were in technical, sales and administrative support occupations. Combined, these two occupation groups account for 63 percent of all employed native workers, compared with 44 percent of all employed immigrant workers and 19 percent of employed immigrant workers from Central America. *(see Graph 3 and Table 2.)*

**Over half of all foreign-born workers from Central America work as operators, fabricators, and laborers or in service occupations**

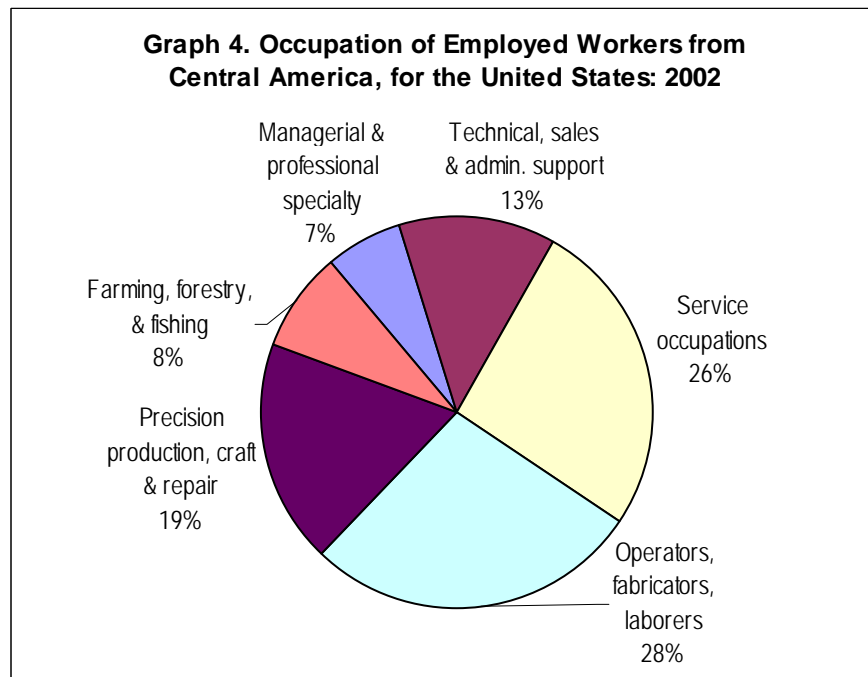
Of the 7.1 million foreign-born employed workers from Central America, 2.0 million (28 percent) worked as operators, fabricators, and laborers, while 1.8 million (26 percent) worked in service occupations. Combined, these occupation groups account for 54 percent of all employed workers from Central America, compared to 39 percent of all employed immigrant workers and 25 percent of native employed workers. An additional 19 percent, or 1.3 million, of employed workers from Central America worked in precision production, craft, and repair occupations such as mechanics, repairers, and construction workers, compared with 13 percent of all employed immigrant workers and 10 percent of employed native workers. *(See Graph 4 and Table 2.)*



Source: Current Population Survey, March Supplement, 2002. Refers to employed workers age 16 and over.



Source: Current Population Survey, March Supplement, 2002. Refers to employed workers age 16 and over.



Source: Current Population Survey, March Supplement, 2002. Refers to employed workers age 16 and over.

**Table 2. Occupation of Employed Native and Foreign-Born Workers, Age 16 and Over, for the United States: 2002**  
(in thousands)

Occupation group	Native		Foreign born		Born in Central America	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total	116,221	100.0	18,933	100.0	7,091	100.0
Managerial and professional specialty (total)	37,990	32.7	4,437	23.4	464	6.5
Executive, administrative, managerial	18,625	16.0	1,971	10.4	277	3.9
Professional specialty	19,365	16.7	2,466	13.0	187	2.6
Technical, sales and administrative support (total)	34,787	29.9	3,908	20.6	918	12.9
Technicians and related support	3,915	3.4	510	2.7	59	0.8
Sales occupations	14,108	12.1	1,740	9.2	425	6.0
Administrative support, clerical	16,764	14.4	1,658	8.8	433	6.1
Service occupations (total)	15,226	13.1	4,003	21.1	1,849	26.1
Private household	415	0.4	271	1.4	153	2.2
Protective service	2,339	2.0	195	1.0	45	0.6
Other service occupations	12,472	10.7	3,537	18.7	1,651	23.3
Precision production, craft and repair (total)	11,982	10.3	2,403	12.7	1,329	18.7
Mechanics and repairers	4,133	3.6	533	2.8	206	2.9
Construction trades	4,898	4.2	1,160	6.1	776	10.9
Other production, craft and repair	2,950	2.5	710	3.8	346	4.9
Operators, fabricators, laborers (total)	13,878	11.9	3,471	18.3	1,953	27.5
Operators, assemblers, inspectors	5,029	4.3	1,464	7.7	828	11.7
Transportation and material movers	4,863	4.2	776	4.1	350	4.9
Other laborers	3,987	3.4	1,232	6.5	774	10.9
Farming, forestry, and fishing (total)	2,359	2.0	711	3.8	578	8.2
Farm operators and managers	1,126	1.0	55	0.3	26	0.4
Other farming, forestry, and fishing	1,233	1.1	656	3.5	553	7.8

Source: Current Population Survey, March Supplement, 2002. The majority of those born in Central America are from Mexico.

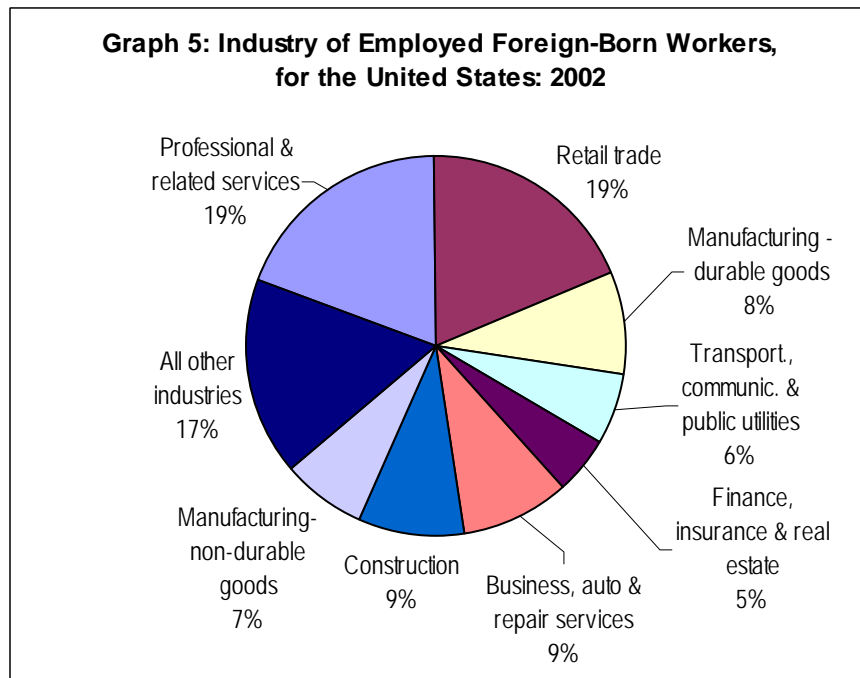
**Industry of Foreign-Born Workers**

**The majority of both employed native and foreign-born workers are clustered in two industries – professional and related services and retail trade.**

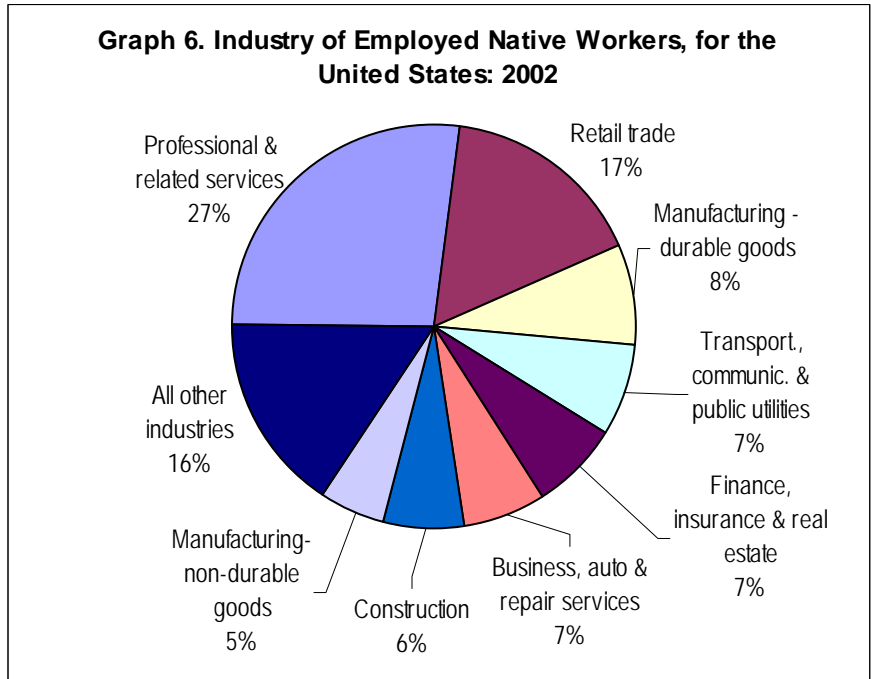
Of the 18.9 million employed foreign-born workers, 3.7 million (19 percent) worked in professional and related industries, such as health care, education, and other professional services, while 3.6 million (19 percent) worked in retail trade. Combined, these two industries account for 38 percent of all foreign-born workers. Of the 116.2 million employed native workers, 31.5 million (27 percent) worked in professional and related industries, while an additional 19.2 million (17 percent) worked in retail trade. Combined, these two industries account for 44 percent of all employed native workers. (See *Graphs 5 and 6 and Table 3.*)

**Immigrant workers from Central America show a different pattern of industrial participation.**

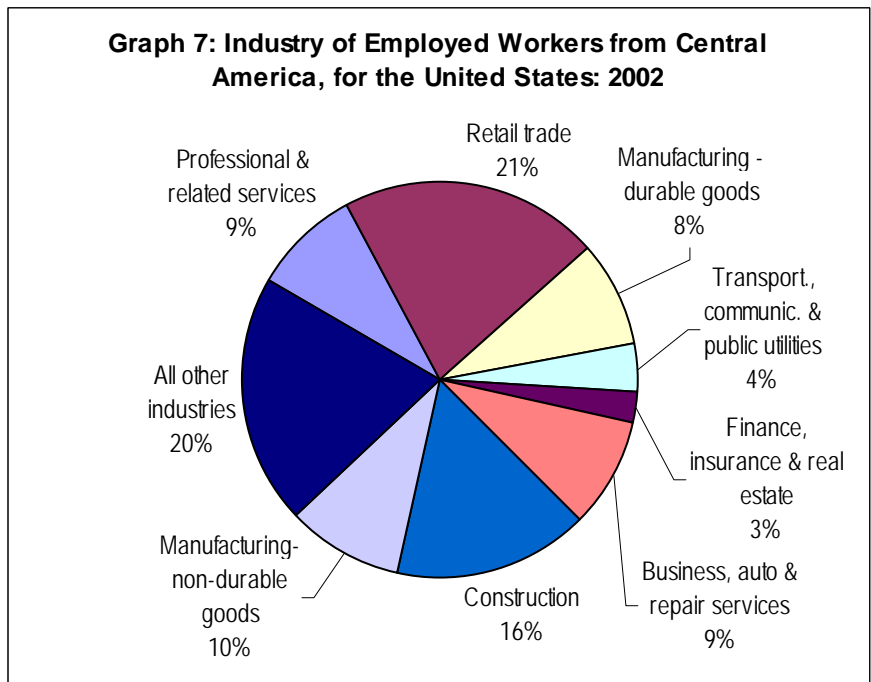
Of the 7.1 million employed workers from Central America, 1.5 million (21 percent) were in retail trade while only 0.6 million (9 percent) worked in professional and related industries. Approximately 1.1 million (16 percent) of Central American immigrants worked in the construction industry. An additional 0.7 million (10 percent) were employed in non-durable goods manufacturing and 0.6 million (9 percent) in business, auto, and repair services. (See *Graph 7 and Table 3.*)



Source: Current Population Survey, March Supplement, 2002. Refers to employed workers age 16 and over.



Source: Current Population Survey, March Supplement, 2002. Refers to employed workers age 16 and over.



Source: Current Population Survey, March Supplement, 2002. Refers to employed workers age 16 and over.

**Table 3. Industry of Employed Native and Foreign-Born Workers, Age 16 and Over, for the United States: 2002** (in thousands)

Industry group	Native		Foreign born		Born in Central America	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total	116,221	100	18,933	100	7,091	100
Agriculture, forestry and fisheries (total)	2,496	2.1	633	3.3	514	7.2
Agriculture	2,362	2.0	624	3.3	506	7.1
Forestry and fisheries	134	0.1	9	0.0	8	0.1
Mining	469	0.4	37	0.2	13	0.2
Construction	7,484	6.4	1,687	8.9	1,121	15.8
Manufacturing - durable goods	9,359	8.1	1,607	8.5	596	8.4
Manufacturing - non-durable goods	5,931	5.1	1,375	7.3	684	9.6
Transportation, communications and other public utilities (total)	8,505	7.3	1,142	6.0	292	4.1
Transportation	5,335	4.6	879	4.6	252	3.6
Communications	1,817	1.6	188	1.0	28	0.4
Utilities and sanitary services	1,353	1.2	75	0.4	12	0.2
Wholesale trade	4,287	3.7	659	3.5	252	3.6
Retail trade	19,205	16.5	3,605	19.0	1,523	21.5
Finance, insurance and real estate	7,993	6.9	934	4.9	178	2.5
Business, auto and repair services	7,653	6.6	1,734	9.2	616	8.7
Personal services (total)	3,390	2.9	1,183	6.2	497	7.0
Private households	473	0.4	294	1.6	162	2.3
Personal services, excluding private households	2,917	2.5	889	4.7	335	4.7
Entertainment & recreation services	2,232	1.9	302	1.6	100	1.4
Professional & related services (total)	31,531	27.1	3,664	19.4	626	8.8
Medical services, excluding hospitals	6,252	5.4	916	4.8	146	2.1
Hospitals	4,737	4.1	691	3.6	86	1.2
Educational Services	11,028	9.5	1,018	5.4	197	2.8
Social services	3,252	2.8	411	2.2	132	1.9
Other professional services	6,262	5.4	628	3.3	64	0.9
Public administration	5,686	4.9	369	1.9	78	1.1

Source: Current Population Survey, March Supplement, 2002. The majority of those born in Central America are from Mexico.

## GLOSSARY

### Who are the foreign born?

The U.S. Census Bureau uses the term *foreign born* to refer to anyone who is not a U.S. citizen at birth. This includes naturalized U.S. citizens, legal permanent residents (immigrants), temporary migrants (such as students), humanitarian migrants (such as refugees), and persons illegally present in the United States.

By comparison, the term *native* refers to people residing in the United States who were United States citizens in one of three categories: (1) people born in one of the 50 states and the District of Columbia; (2) people born in United States Insular Areas such as Puerto Rico or Guam; or (3) people who were born abroad to at least one parent who was a United States citizen.

### Defining the civilian labor force.

The *civilian labor force* includes all civilians 16 years and over who were classified as *employed* or *unemployed* during the reference week of the survey or census.

The term *employed* refers to all civilians 16 years old and over who were either (1) “at work” — those who did any work at all during the reference week as paid employees, worked in their own business or profession, worked on their own farm, or worked 15 hours or more as unpaid workers on a family farm or in a family business; or (2) were “with a job but not at work” — those who did not work during the reference week, but who had jobs or businesses from which they were temporarily absent because of illness, bad weather, industrial dispute, vacation, or other personal reasons. Excluded from the employed are people whose only activity consisted of work around their own house (painting, repairing, or own home housework) or unpaid volunteer work for religious, charitable, and similar organizations. Also excluded are all institutionalized people and people on active duty in the United States Armed Forces.

The term *unemployed* refers to all civilians 16 years old and over were classified as unemployed if they were neither “at work” nor “with a job but not at work” during the reference week, were looking for work during, and were available to start a job. Also included as unemployed were civilians 16 years old and over who: did not work at all during the reference week, were on temporary layoff from a job, had been informed that they would be recalled to work within the next 6 months or had been given a date to return to work, and were available to return to work during the reference week, except for temporary illness. Examples of job seeking activities include registering at a public or private employment office, meeting with prospective employers, investigating possibilities for starting a professional practice or opening a business, placing or answering advertisements, writing letters of application, or being on a union or professional register.

*Not in labor force* refers to all people 16 years old and over who are not classified as members of the labor force. This category consists mainly of students, individuals taking care of home or family, retired workers, seasonal workers enumerated in an off-season who were not looking for



work, institutionalized people (all institutionalized people are placed in this category regardless of any work activities they may have done in the reference week), and people doing only incidental unpaid family work (fewer than 15 hours during the reference week).

The term *labor force* includes all people classified in the civilian labor force (i.e., “employed” and “unemployed” people), plus members of the U.S. Armed Forces (people on active duty with the United States Army, Air Force, Navy, Marine Corps, or Coast Guard).

## **DATA SOURCES**

The data are from the 2002 Current Population Survey, March supplement.

The population universe is the civilian non-institutional population of the United States and members of the armed forces in the United States living off post or with their families on post, but excludes all other members of the armed forces.

The foreign-born population includes anyone in the United States who was not a US citizen at birth. This includes foreign-born naturalized citizens as well as non-citizens. Non-citizens include all foreign born who have not naturalized, for example, legal non-immigrants, such as refugees and persons on student or work visas, and persons illegally residing in the United States.

This information was compiled by Elizabeth Grieco, MPI’s Data Manager, in January 2004. For questions or to arrange an interview with a data expert or policy analyst, please contact Colleen Coffey at 202-266-1910 or [ccoffey@migrationpolicy.org](mailto:ccoffey@migrationpolicy.org). Please visit us at [www.migrationpolicy.org](http://www.migrationpolicy.org).

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