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POLICY BRIEF

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Preliminary Census Data Released New Estimates Attempt to Reveal Demographics of U.S.

A recent 2000 Census Bureau report finds an increase in foreign-born residents who are naturalized citizens. Survey data shows the foreign-born percentage of the U.S. population remains constant. Increased homeownership, wages and education indicate immigrants faring well.

Census Breakdown

After a year of examination, the U.S. Census Bureau is beginning to release preliminary information concerning its 2000 survey. The report combines data on age, sex, and country of origin, along with educational attainment, jobs and wages.

Over the next year each area of collected data will be carefully reviewed and reported as it becomes available.

More Immigrants Becoming Citizens

Earlier this month statistics concerning the population of foreign-born residents showed that the U.S. has experienced a steady increase from the previous survey taken a decade ago. In 2000, slightly more than 37 percent of all foreign-born residents were naturalized, a 3 percent increase from 1997.

For over three decades naturalization of the foreign-born has steadily declined. Many experts attribute the prior slow down to welfare and immigration laws that unfairly targeted immigrants. Now, after several legislative reforms in these areas, the percentage of naturalized citizens is back on the rise and it appears the trend will continue.

Immigration experts believe that this new surge in naturalization is the logical result of large amounts of green cards issued in the early 1990s. The mandatory five-year wait for cardholders to naturalize, statistically means that a swell would occur at the end of the decade.

Misleading Numbers

With 56 million, or 20 percent of the current U.S. population estimated as foreign-born, the Census Bureau's report claims these numbers are the highest in history. However, past demographic data shows otherwise. For example, at the turn of the century when the total foreign-born percentage was 13, the first and second generation accounted for nearly 35 percent of the U.S. population - much higher than today's 20 percent. In fact, from 1870 through 1930, the combination of these two generations was even larger, totaling 1/3 of the total population.

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Several of the country's top demographers openly criticized the agency for including native-born children in their estimates as "first generation." Typically "first generation" refers to the immigrants themselves, and their children as "second generation." By doing so, the foreign-born estimations are much higher than expected, pointing out that 80 percent of children born to immigrants are citizens by birth.

Reviving Metropolitan Areas

Another trend explained by census data shows the foreign-born population to be concentrated primarily in nine metropolitan areas. Together, California and New York are home for nearly 1/3 of all foreign-born residents. In these areas immigrants are revitalizing neighborhoods and filling the shortage of labor left by the native-born who have moved to the suburbs.

Labor Implications

Information on specific migration centers is not the only statistic helpful in determining the economic impact of immigration. To thoroughly understand the labor implications of immigration the Census Bureau has also incorporated the mean age of the foreign-born population into its survey.

The effects from the current resurgence of international migration show that the foreign-born population is younger than anticipated. The mean age has dropped from 52 years to 38 in 2000. Although the age structure varies by country of origin, the over-all longevity of the U.S. workforce is increasing due to the large percentage of adolescents immigrating. Many experts believe this influx of foreign-born workers will be an effective solution to a future labor shortage, when "baby boomers" reach the age of retirement.

In March 2000, the foreign-born population accounted for more than 12 percent of the civilian labor force. Of those able to participate in the work force, 66 percent were either employed or actively looking, not significantly different from the 67 percent of natives.

Homeownership & Wages On The Rise

Statistics indicate the duration of time a foreign-born individual resides in the U.S. increases the possibility of citizenship, greater wage earnings and homeownership. While the percentage levels of homeownership and wages do not yet equal those of natives, these statistics are on the rise. For the foreign-born, the homeownership rate for naturalized citizens living in the U.S. for 10 or more years was 68 percent as opposed to 42 percent for those who had lived here less than 10 years. Comparable rates for non-citizens were 43 percent and 22 percent respectively.

As with homeownership trends, wage earnings appeared to increase with duration of residence. On average, workers who had lived in the U.S. for over 10 years earned \$14,000 dollars more a year than those who had resided in the United States under 10 years. Consequently, the same income ratio exists for those workers who are citizens compared to those who are not.

Conclusion

Census Bureau data reveals naturalization of foreign-born residents is steadily increasing. The amount of labor provided by the foreign-born population is a vital portion of the U.S. economy.

Immigration helps revitalize urban centers and neighborhoods. Foreign-born workers relieve domestic labor shortages.