

THE ECONOMIC CONTRIBUTION OF WISCONSIN IMMIGRANTS

FACT SHEET: NOVEMBER 2017

On February 18, 2016, thousands of immigrants and their supporters gathered at the Wisconsin Capitol. Carrying banners with butterflies that proclaimed “Immigration is Beautiful,” the protest was aimed at two bills under consideration in the Wisconsin legislature, AB 450, ending the practice of “sanctuary cities,” and SB 533, which requires cities to add “not for voting” designation to any local photo identification they issue. The Wisconsin legislature did not pass those bills.

Now Wisconsin faces SB 275, requiring local law enforcement to cooperate with federal immigration agencies and fine cities failing to do so \$500 to \$5,000 a day. If passed, the bill would increase fear in Wisconsin’s immigrant communities. The individual impacts are significant, but they spill into the economy as well. Across economic sectors and in every part of the state, Wisconsin’s immigrants are contributing – as workers, as business owners, as taxpayers, and as community leaders. Welcoming and supporting Wisconsin’s immigrant community can be a force for a stronger economy.

KEY FACTS

- » **In 2015, Wisconsin’s 278,981 immigrants accounted for 4.8% of the state population.** That’s well down from levels a century ago, but higher than in the recent past. While Wisconsin’s immigrant share – accounting for nearly one in twenty residents – is significant, it is well below the national immigrant share, 13%.
- » In 2014, immigrant families in **Wisconsin had \$5.5 billion in spending power and paid \$675.4 million in state and local taxes.**
- » In 2015, **183,626 of the state’s immigrants were workers.** While immigrants make up 4.8% of the population, they account for 5.9% of the state’s labor force. The state’s immigrants are employed in all of the state’s industries and occupations.
- » **Immigrants own 14,800 businesses in Wisconsin.** In 2015, immigrants accounted for 5.4% of self-employed Wisconsin residents, a share greater than their share of the population (4.8%). Wisconsin immigrants’ businesses generated **more than \$240 billion in business income.**
- » Some **80,000 Wisconsin immigrants are undocumented** accounting for 27% of the state’s immigrant population and 1.3% of the total state population in 2014.
- » Over **55,000 U.S. citizens in Wisconsin live with at least one family member who is undocumented.**

The above facts, from the [American Immigration Council](#), make clear the substantial economic contributions of the state’s immigrants. **Wisconsin has long had relatively slow population growth and an aging workforce.** Embracing and supporting the immigrant population is one way to tap into greater economic vitality. Learn more at americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/immigrants-in-wisconsin.

- » In 2015, Wisconsin's **undocumented immigrants contributed \$71,792,000 in state and local taxes**, paying an effective tax rate of 7.5%.
- » Importantly, DACA recipients boost local and state tax revenue, with 87% of DACA recipients being employed (compared to estimated 51% employed for those eligible but not receiving DACA). Further, **DACA recipients earn 8.5% more** on average than those eligible but not receiving DACA (estimated as \$23,901 for DACA recipients vs. \$22,029 for those eligible but not receiving DACA).

This data on undocumented immigrants and DACA comes from the [Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy](#). Learn more about contributions of Wisconsin immigrants at itep.org/immigration/, and more about DACA recipients at itep.org/state-local-tax-contributions-of-young-undocumented-immigrants/.

The improved earnings of DACA recipients are especially important to note. **Immigrants are able to contribute more to the economy when their status is more secure.** When it becomes less secure, fear reduces their ability to fully participate in the economy.

CONCLUSION

Criminalizing hard working families and falling into irrational fear harms all Wisconsin families and the Wisconsin economy. Immigrants are a core part of the Wisconsin economy and contributing to this state through taxes, education, and self-owned businesses. The state should be pursuing ways to welcome and build the skills of this community.

For concrete ideas on how to build skills and opportunity for Wisconsin's immigrants, view our report on the subject here: cows.org/increasing-skills-opportunity-for-wisconsins-immigrants.

ABOUT COWS

COWS is a nonprofit think-and-do tank, based at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, that promotes “high road” solutions to social problems. These treat shared growth and opportunity, environmental sustainability, and resilient democratic institutions as necessary and achievable complements in human development. Through our various projects, we work with cities around the country to promote innovation and the implementation of high road policy. COWS is nonpartisan but values-based. We seek a world of equal opportunity and security for all.

COWS
BUILDING THE
HIGH ROAD