

Study Finds That Immigrants Are Central to Long Island Economy

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Highlight: The report, using census data, found that immigrant households on the island made an annual income not far behind that of American-born families.

Body

Immigrants, those who are here legally and illegally, are important contributors to the economy on Long Island and are a relatively affluent group, according to a report to be released on Thursday.

The median income for a family with at least one immigrant adult was \$98,000, compared with \$110,000 for families headed by American-born adults, the report by the Fiscal Policy Institute said.

The report, "New Americans on Long Island" (see also below), states that in Nassau and Suffolk Counties, two of the country's 50 most affluent counties, immigrants represent about 16 percent of the population and add about 17 percent of value to the economy through their work.

The Fiscal Policy Institute - a union-supported, nonpartisan research and advocacy group - based its findings on Census Bureau data from 2009 and 2010.

Illegal immigration, especially as it contributes to the pool of day laborers, has been a flashpoint on Long Island with some towns aggressively policing gathering spots for immigrants seeking temporary jobs.

In 2008, an unarmed Ecuadorean immigrant, Marcelo Lucero, was stabbed to death by a group of teenagers in a racially motivated attack that shone a spotlight on anti-Hispanic crime on Long Island.

Advocates for immigrants said that the report helps debunk arguments made by some elected officials on Long Island that immigrants are a financial drain and instead shows that they are an integral part of the region's economy.

"Immigrants are home owners, business owners, entrepreneurs, hard workers," said Maryann Slutsky, director of Long Island Wins

, an immigrant advocacy group.

Indeed, immigrants perform a variety of jobs, and are slightly overrepresented in jobs in the professional and health fields, though they are very overrepresented in low-income service jobs, according to the Fiscal Policy Institute's study.

Immigrants are also small business owners, with 22 percent of all Long Island small businesses owned by immigrants. Most immigrants live in homes they own - 75 percent, compared with 86 percent of United States-born residents in Long Island - and they pay roughly the same amount as native-born Americans in property taxes.

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The **study** reports that many illegal **immigrants** work in service, while a small number work in construction; over half pay taxes on their income, the **study** said.

Long Island's immigrant population is also diverse.

Immigrants from El Salvador are the largest concentration, representing 12 percent of **immigrants**, followed by those from India, Italy and the Dominican Republic. Natives of Mexico make up only 3 percent of **Long Island's immigrant** population.

Steve Levy, the Suffolk County executive, who has taken a hard line on illegal immigration, contended that the **study** was done by a "left-leaning" group that did not adequately distinguish between documented and illegal **immigrants**.

"No one is denying that legal immigration contributes to our culture and our **economy**," Mr. Levy said in an interview. "It looks like selective data was put into this **study** omitting the drain on services that come about from the illegal population."

But David Kallick, the director of the Fiscal Policy Institute's **Immigrant** Research Initiative, said that the report included "the best data there is about undocumented on **Long Island**."

"I think it's really important for **Long Island** to move on from such an overheated immigration discussion," Mr. Kallick said. "The last thing we want to do is to follow the path of places like Arizona and Alabama where they seem to be going out of their way to create an off-putting climate for **immigrants** and that's hurting them economically and socially."

The Fiscal Policy Institute's **study** was analyzed by Pearl Kamer, the chief economist for the **Long Island** Association, the regions' largest business group.

"The findings are sufficiently detailed to show the role that **immigrants** play in the **economy**," Ms. Kamer said, "and to guide policy makers in serving the **immigrant** community."

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