

High-Growth Occupations Reliant on Undocumented Immigrant Workers in New York State

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Executive Summary

- The workforce of New York State currently includes 470,100 undocumented workers.
- The majority of undocumented workers have been in the country over 10 years (54 percent), are aged 35-64 (62 percent), and—despite high employment—do not have health insurance (42 percent).
- 56 percent of undocumented workers come from six countries: Mexico, Ecuador, Guatemala, El Salvador, China, and the Dominican Republic.
- 24 occupations currently have at least 5,000 undocumented workers, including construction laborers, maids/housekeepers, cooks, home health/personal care aides, janitors, and delivery drivers.
- The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) projects fast-growing occupations from 2022-2032.
- Twelve occupations are designated by the BLS with “much faster than average” growth over that period, are projected to grow by at least 10,000 new jobs, and currently have high rates of undocumented workers in New York State, including:
 - Cooks
 - Home health/personal care aide
 - Taxi drivers
 - Delivery drivers
 - Medical/physical therapy assistants
- 42 percent of the above occupations feature hourly median wages below New York State’s

minimum wage, and 58 percent feature annual median wages that do not qualify as living wages.

Introduction & context

In recent months, presumptive Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump has taken multiple opportunities [1] to declare his intention [2] to round up, detain, and deport every undocumented immigrant [3] living in the United States. According to estimates from the Center for Migration Studies (CMS) using the latest data available from the American Community Survey, [4] there were 10.9 million undocumented immigrants living in the U.S. in 2022. The Trump campaign and its surrogates cite target populations up to three times that size. [5] Implementing Trump’s plan would be a logistical nightmare and social tragedy, with consequences reverberating beyond the deportees and into the lives of over 20 million people living in mixed-status households, including 5.5 million U.S.-born children suddenly missing one or both parents.

It would also be an economic disaster. The U.S. workforce includes 7.6 million undocumented workers, [6] representing 23 percent of the total immigrant workforce. Immigrants play a crucial role in the U.S. workforce, filling jobs not otherwise covered by U.S. born workers despite often-hazardous conditions and ineligibility for employment-related social services. [7] According to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, in May 2024 there were 8.5 million job openings (as reported by employers) in the U.S., with 6.5 million unemployed

people available to fill said openings. [8] Even with current levels of immigration, there are 2 million jobs that need to be filled. Though states with large immigrant populations (including New York, California, and Texas) tend to have relatively fewer labor vacancies, they still have more vacancies than available workers. [9]

In New York state, we see examples of the role immigrants—including those who are undocumented or lack permanent legal status—can play in revitalizing local economies. In recent years, upstate New York cities like Rochester, Utica, and Syracuse experienced positive economic trends from immigrants resettling in the area. [10] Overall, immigrant workers account for 27 percent of the New York workforce, with undocumented New Yorkers accounting for 15 percent of the total immigrant workforce. This brief looks to understand characteristics of the undocumented workforce in New York. It then reviews labor projections over the next decade to identify the fastest growing occupations with particular need for new workers. Finally, it details the relationship between fast-growing occupations and New York’s undocumented workforce, in order to understand occupations that will rely on undocumented workers to be able to hit projected growth targets.

Unless otherwise indicated, all figures cited in this report were calculated using CMS’s estimates of the U.S. undocumented population [11], derived from the U.S. Census Bureau’s 2022 American Community Survey (ACS). Labor projections are provided by the federal Bureau of Labor Statistics. [12] Unless otherwise noted, we define the workforce as people aged 16 and up who are either employed or unemployed and looking for employment.

Undocumented workforce in New York

In 2022, there were 470,100 undocumented workers in the New York labor force. Table 1 presents a brief profile of socioeconomic characteristics.

Table 1. Profile of Undocumented Immigrants in the New York State labor force (age 16+)

Age	Count	Percent	Country of Origin (Top 15)	Count	Percent
16-24 years	51,400	11%	Mexico	88,700	19%
25-34 years	120,300	26%	Ecuador	40,100	9%
35-44 years	145,500	31%	Guatemala	36,300	8%
45-54 years	95,100	20%	El Salvador	33,700	7%
55-64 years	52,600	11%	China	33,300	7%
65 years or older	5,300	1%	Dominican Republic	30,600	7%
TOTAL	470,100	100%	Honduras	16,500	4%
			Colombia	14,700	3%
			India	14,000	3%
			Jamaica	10,800	2%
			Trinidad & Tobago	8,600	2%
			Bangladesh	7,800	2%
			Philippines	7,000	1%
			Haiti	6,600	1%
			Venezuela	6,600	1%
			All others	114,600	24%
			TOTAL	470,100	100%
			Health Insurance Coverage	Count	Percent
			Has health coverage	271,400	58%
			No health coverage	198,700	42%
			TOTAL	470,100	100%
			Occupational Category	Count	Percent
			Management, Business, Science, and Arts	88,800	19%
			Service	158,200	34%
			Sales and Office	63,600	14%
			Natural Resources, Construction, and Maintenance	86,500	19%
			Production, Transportation, and Material Moving	68,000	15%
			TOTAL**	465,000	100%
			Employment	Count	Percent
			Employed	452,490	96%
			Unemployed	17,613	4%
			TOTAL	470,103	100%

* Note: all numbers rounded to the nearest 100
 ** Total includes only those reporting an occupation

Of note in this profile: 62 percent of the undocumented workforce is between the ages of 35 and 64, and 54 percent have been in the U.S. for at least 10 years. Forty-three percent live in a household with at least one of their own children (under the age of 18), which does not include those with adult children or those living with step-children or other family members under 18. Over half (54 percent) have been married at least once. By and large, New York’s undocumented workforce is composed of adults who are established in the country and are responsible for not only themselves but for children, spouses, and other household members.

Educational achievement is mixed. Thirty-two percent of undocumented workers have less than a high school education, while 37 percent have at least some college.

Over three quarters of New York’s undocumented workers come from fifteen countries, with over half (56 percent) arriving from just six: Mexico, Ecuador, Guatemala, El Salvador, China, and the Dominican Republic.

The largest occupational category for undocumented workers is the service industry, with 34 percent of the undocumented labor force employed in service jobs, followed by Management, Business, Science, and Arts (19 percent) and Natural Resources, Construction, and

Maintenance (18 percent). Of note, 4 percent of the labor force was unemployed, slightly lower than the non undocumented statewide unemployment rate of 5 percent (data not shown). Despite 96 percent employment, 42 percent of the undocumented labor force did not have health insurance.

Table 2 provides further details on the occupations held by New York’s undocumented workers, displaying the 24 occupations held by at least 5,000 undocumented workers across the state. All occupations displayed are defined in the U.S. Census Bureau in the ACS. [13]

Table 2. Occupations with at least 5,000 undocumented workers in New York

Occupation	Undocumented	
	Workers	Percent
Construction Laborers	29,500	6%
Maids And Housekeeping Cleaners	20,900	4%
Cooks	16,800	4%
Home Health Aides	16,800	4%
Janitors And Building Cleaners	13,600	3%
Driver/Sales Workers And Truck Drivers	13,400	3%
Carpenters	12,800	3%
Cashiers	10,900	2%
Retail Salespersons	9,300	2%
Waiters And Waitresses	9,200	2%
Food Preparation Workers	9,100	2%
Other Managers	8,400	2%
Taxi Drivers	8,100	2%
Landscaping And Groundskeeping Workers	8,100	2%
Customer Service Representatives	7,100	2%
Chefs And Head Cooks	7,000	1%
Childcare Workers	7,000	1%
Personal Care Aides	6,500	1%
Stockers And Order Fillers	6,500	1%
First Line Supervisors Of Retail Sales Workers	6,200	1%
Painters and Paperhangers	6,200	1%
Laborers And Freight, Stock, And Material Movers, Hand	5,600	1%
Couriers And Messengers	5,200	1%
Security Guards And Gaming Surveillance Officers	5,200	1%

* Note: all numbers rounded to nearest 100

Top occupations amongst the undocumented labor force include construction laborers, maids and housekeepers, cooks, home health aides, and janitors and building cleaners. Other jobs on this list come from similar industries, with concentration in food preparation, delivery, cleaning, care, and service occupations. Of note: food delivery drivers and e-bike riders are one of the occupations included in Driver/Sales Workers and Truck Drivers.

Fastest growing occupations

Each year, the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) releases statistics on projected job growth over the next ten years. [14] These projections, calculated annually, are based on six overlapping components: labor force, aggregate economy, GDP, industry output, and employment at both the industry and occupational level. [15] 832 occupations are included in BLS projections. Table 3 displays the 20 jobs with the highest projected growth rates, along with the growth rate and 2022 median pay.

Table 3. 20 Fastest-Growing Jobs in U.S., 2022-2032

Occupation	Growth Rate	2022 Median
		Annual Pay
Wind turbine service technicians	45%	\$57,320
Nurse practitioners	45%	\$121,610
Data scientists	35%	\$103,500
Statisticians	32%	\$98,920
Information security analysts	32%	\$112,000
Medical and health services managers	28%	\$104,830
Epidemiologists	27%	\$78,520
Physician assistants	27%	\$126,010
Physical therapist assistants	26%	\$62,770
Software developers	26%	\$127,260
Occupational therapy assistants	24%	\$64,250
Actuaries	23%	\$113,990
Computer and information research scientists	23%	\$136,620
Operations research analysts	23%	\$85,720
Solar photovoltaic installers	22%	\$45,230
Home health and personal care aides	22%	\$30,180
Taxi drivers	21%	\$30,670
Personal care and service workers, all other	21%	\$34,670
Veterinary technologists and technicians	21%	\$38,240
Veterinary assistants and laboratory animal caretakers	20%	\$34,740

The occupations listed in Table 3 are all projected to grow by at least 20 percent in the coming decade. The two fastest-growing occupations, wind turbine service technicians and nurse practitioners, are projected to grow by 45 percent by 2032. Also of note in Table 3 is the wide range of median salaries. The fastest growing occupations are a mix of higher-paying and lower-paying occupations, with over \$100,000 in annual salary separating the highest- (computer and information research scientists) and lowest-paying (home health and personal care aides, taxi drivers) occupations on the list.

Of the 20 fastest growing occupations, 35 percent (7 of 20) are in the health sector (nurse practitioners, medical and health services managers, epidemiologists,

physician assistants, physical therapist assistants, occupational therapy assistants, and home health and personal care aides). With the inclusion of two veterinary occupations, nearly half of the fastest growing occupations over the next decade are devoted to the care of humans and animals. Salaries for health professions vary widely, ranging from \$30,180/year to \$126,010/year.

Three of the occupations currently held by at least 5,000 undocumented New Yorkers also appear in the BLS fastest growing projections: home health aides, personal care aides, and taxi drivers. (Note: home health aides and personal care aides are categorized as two separate occupations in the ACS and as one occupation—“home health and personal care aides”—by the BLS.) Notably, these occupations are the lowest-paying occupations on the BLS fastest growing list, speaking to the undocumented population’s limited access to occupations paying a living wage.

Relationship between fast-growing occupations and New York’s undocumented workforce

Having explored the characteristics of New York’s undocumented workforce, the occupations most frequently held by undocumented New Yorkers, and the fastest growing occupations country-wide, we now examine the interaction between the three. In Table 4, we start with the list of 98 occupations classified by the BLS as growing “much faster than average.” [16] We then filter to include only occupations with projected growth of at least 10,000 new openings (nationwide) in order to focus on those with high growth rate based on a currently-small workforce. We also focus on occupations where at least 5 percent of the people holding the occupation in New York are undocumented immigrants. The result is a list of 12 occupations with high projected growth (in both rate and total number) that are already reliant on undocumented workers in order to meet New York’s needs. [17]

Table 4. Fast-growing occupations with at least 10,000 new openings and at least 5 percent undocumented

employment in New York State

Occupation	Entry-Level Education	Projected Number of New Jobs	2022 Median Pay (Nationside)	2022 NYS Undoc. as % of Total
Mental health and substance abuse social workers	Master’s degree	10,000 to 49,999	\$40,000 to \$59,999	10.19%
Cooks, restaurant	No formal educational credential	50,000 or more	\$30,000 to \$39,999	15.18%
Data scientists	Bachelor’s degree	50,000 or more	\$80,000 or more	6.67%
Home health and personal care aides	High school diploma or equivalent	50,000 or more	\$30,000 to \$39,999	7.10%
Light truck drivers	High school diploma or equivalent	50,000 or more	\$40,000 to \$59,999	7.78%
Manicurists and pedicurists	Postsecondary nondegree award	10,000 to 49,999	\$30,000 to \$39,999	19.34%
Medical assistants	Postsecondary nondegree award	50,000 or more	\$30,000 to \$39,999	6.10%
Medical scientists, except epidemiologists	Doctoral or professional degree	10,000 to 49,999	\$80,000 or more	5.03%
Physical therapist assistants	Associate’s degree	10,000 to 49,999	\$60,000 to \$79,999	12.65%
Physical therapists	Doctoral or professional degree	10,000 to 49,999	\$80,000 or more	7.23%
Statisticians	Master’s degree	10,000 to 49,999	\$80,000 or more	6.67%
Taxi drivers	No formal educational credential	10,000 to 49,999	\$30,000 to \$39,999	9.73%

As expected, there is overlap between Table 4 and the preceding tables. Five of the occupations listed in Table 2 (cooks, home health aides, personal care aides, taxi drivers, and truck drivers) appear on this list as well. [18] Not only do these occupations currently have high rates of undocumented workers in New York, but they are likely to continue to do so as additional positions open to meet the projected needs of the next decade. Of these five occupations, cooks currently have the highest share of undocumented workers.

The high growth occupation with the highest rate of undocumented workers in New York is manicurists/pedicurists, with over 19 percent undocumented workers. Following manicurists/pedicurists are cooks (15.18 percent undocumented), physical therapist assistants (12.65 percent undocumented), and mental health/substance abuse social workers (10.19 percent).

Following the growth of healthcare occupations discussed in the section above, Table 4 suggests that undocumented workers play a significant role in meeting the healthcare sector’s needs. Fifty percent of the occupations listed in Table 4 are in the healthcare sector (mental health/substance abuse social workers, home health/personal care aides, medical assistants, medical scientists, physical therapists, and physical therapist assistants). As the population ages nationwide [19], requiring increasing numbers of healthcare workers, employers across the sector will require undocumented workers to fill vital needs.

The occupations listed in Table 4 also have a mix of educational requirements, ranging from no formal education to doctoral degrees. This mix of education

matches that of the overall undocumented workforce (Table 1), which shows that 68 percent of undocumented workers have at least a high school diploma. 83 percent of the occupations in Table 4 require at least a high school degree, and 75 percent require an associate's degree or higher. From the ACS, we are unable to determine whether an immigrant's education was completed here, in their home country, or in a mix of countries. With many high-growth jobs requiring postsecondary education [20], policies that recognize education and certifications obtained outside the U.S. [21] will be necessary to facilitate the matching of workforce needs with worker qualifications.

An important issue to note regarding high-growth jobs with high rates of undocumented workers is that of wages. 42 percent (5 out of 12) of the occupations in Table 4 are reported by the BLS to have median wages from \$30,000-\$39,999. Two more have median wages of \$40,000-\$49,999. Even with high rates of employment, pay at this rate often means that undocumented workers are not able to make a living wage. According to the MIT living wage calculator [22], a household with two working adults and two children in New York needs both adults to earn an hourly wage of \$33.53. At full-time, year-round employment, that equates to an annual individual salary of \$69,742. An annual salary around \$30,000, such as that displayed for taxi drivers and home health/personal care aides, equates to an hourly wage of \$14.42, which is below New York's official minimum wage. This highlights the need for not only employment for undocumented workers, but also for the provision of a living wage to all workers.

[1] <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/11/11/us/politics/trump-2025-immigration-agenda.html>

[2] <https://www.cnn.com/2024/05/01/politics/trump-immigration-what-matters/index.html>

[3] <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/closer-donald-trumps-2024-vow-deport-millions-migrants/story?id=110469177>

[4] <https://cmsny.org/publications/jmhs-warren-012824/>

[5] https://x.com/senmarcorubio/status/1792220024565821608?s=51&t=9Z7E1D9cUne9GEM-q_aEpg

[6] Defined as undocumented immigrants, age 16 and up, who are either employed or unemployed and actively searching for employment.

[7] <https://www.kff.org/racial-equity-and-health-policy/issue-brief/employment-among-immigrants-and-implications-for-health-and-health-care/>

[8] <https://www.uschamber.com/workforce/understanding-americas-labor-shortage>

[9] <https://www.uschamber.com/workforce/the-states-suffering-most-from-the-labor-shortage?state=>

[10] <https://comptroller.nyc.gov/reports/facts-not-fear-how-welcoming-immigrants-benefits-new-york-city/>

[11] Warren, R. (2024). After a Decade of Decline, the U.S. Undocumented Population Increased by 650,000 in 2022. *Journal on Migration and Human Security*, 0(0). <https://doi.org/10.1177/23315024241226624>

[12] <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/occupation-finder.htm>

[13] The ACS occupation list uses the Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) Manual 2018, published by the Executive Office of the President, Office of Management and Budget (OMB).

[14] <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/fastest-growing.htm>

[15]

<https://www.bls.gov/emp/documentation/projections-methods.htm>

[16] According to the BLS, occupations with “much faster than average” growth are projected to grow by at least 9 percent from 2022-2032. For more, see: <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/about/ooh-faqs.htm#growth1>

[17] In Table 4, data in the first four columns comes from the BLS. Column 5 (2022 NYS Undoc. as % of Total) comes from CMS analysis of the 2022 ACS.

[18] As with above, home health aides and personal care aides are categorized as one occupation by the BLS. In addition, the occupation called “light truck driver” by the BLS is included in “Driver/sales workers and truck drivers” in the ACS.

[19] Jones, C.H., Dolsten, M. Healthcare on the brink: navigating the challenges of an aging society in the United States. npj Aging 10, 22 (2024). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41514-024-00148-2>

[20] <https://cmsny.org/educated-immigrants-millet-080122/>

[21] <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/news/equipping-immigrant-origin-workers-postsecondary-credentials>

[22] <https://livingwage.mit.edu/states/36>

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