

## Immigrant Union Members Numbers and Trends

Since 1990, the number of foreign-born persons living in the United States has been increasing rapidly. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, that number reached 33.7 million in 2003. Today, immigrants make up approximately 12 percent of the total population and 14 percent of the total civilian labor force. Immigrants often work in those sectors of the economy that traditionally have been unionized, such as manufacturing and construction, or in occupations that are increasingly organized, such as services – yet little is known about their patterns of union representation. Given the continued growth of the foreign-born population, gains in union participation by immigrants could be important for the future growth of the labor movement in the United States.

The Migration Policy Institute has compiled the following information on the union affiliation (including membership and non-member coverage by unions) of immigrant workers from the 1996 to 2003 Current Population Survey. All of the information presented below refers to wage and salary workers who are employed and are age 16 and over.

### **Of the 17.7 million foreign-born wage and salary workers in the United States, 1 in 10 are members of unions.**

There were approximately 17.7 million foreign-born wage and salary workers in 2003. Of those, 1.8 million or 10 percent were members of unions. An additional 202,000 or 1.1 percent were covered by a union or employee association contract. Combined, 2.0 million or 11 percent had union representation. *(See Table 1)*

### **Native wage and salary workers are more likely to be union members than foreign-born workers.**

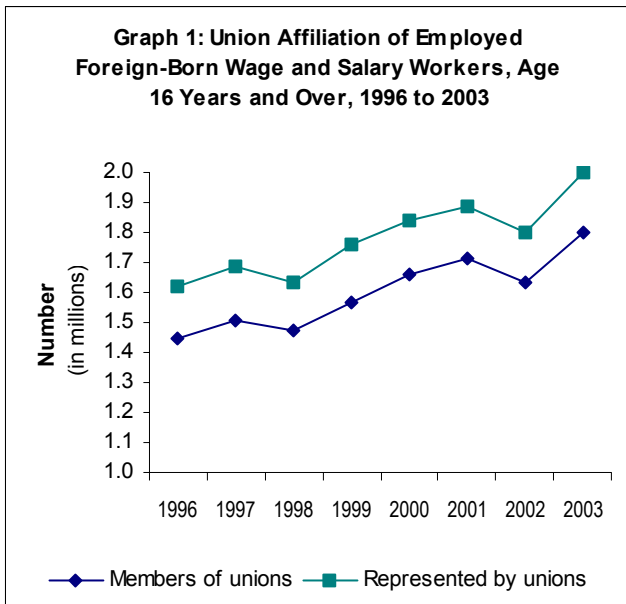
In 2003, of the 104.7 million native wage and salary workers in the United States, 14.0 million or 13 percent were members of unions. An additional 1.5 million or 1.4 percent were covered by a union or employee association contract. Combined, 15.4 million or 14.8 percent had union affiliation through membership or coverage. *(See Table 1)*

### **The number of foreign-born union members has increased since 1996.**

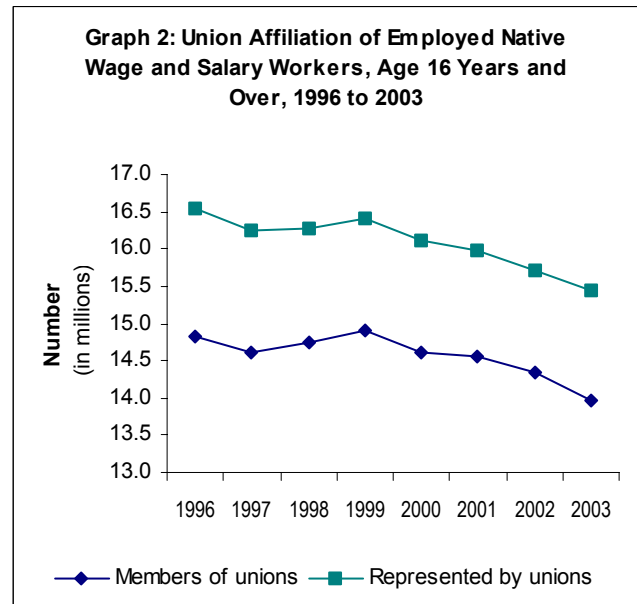
The number of foreign-born union members rose from 1.4 million in 1996 to 1.8 million in 2003, or by 24 percent. The number of working immigrants with union representation increased from 1.6 million in 1996 to 2.0 million in 2003, or by 23 percent. *(See Table 1 and Graph 1)*

### **By comparison, the number of native union members has declined since 1996.**

During that same period, the number of native union members decreased from 14.8 million to 14.0 million, or by 6 percent. The number of natives with union representation decreased from 16.5 million in 1996 to 15.4 million in 2003, or by 7 percent. *(See Table 1 and Graph 2)*



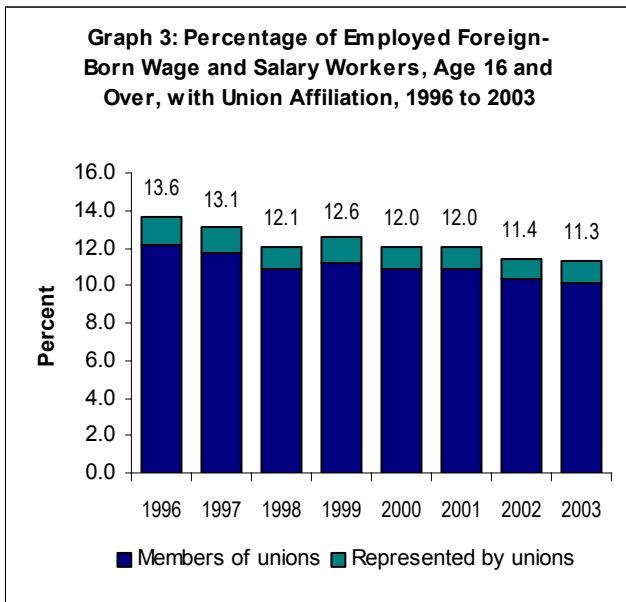
Source: Current Population Survey, 1996 to 2003 (annual averages)



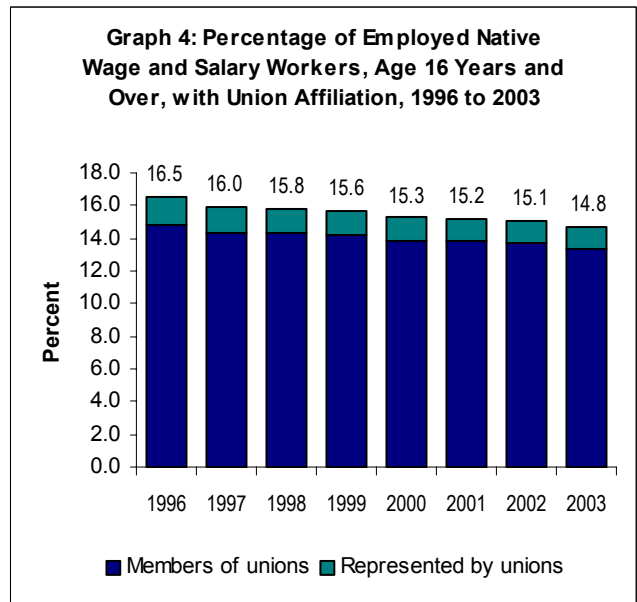
Source: Current Population Survey, 1996 to 2003 (annual averages)

**The proportion of both immigrant and native workers who are union members has declined in recent years.**

Union membership among wage and salary workers as a whole has declined since 1996. For immigrants, 12 percent were members of unions in 1996, compared with 10 percent in 2003. For natives, 15 percent were union members in 1996, compared with 13 percent in 2003. The percentage of immigrant and native workers with union representation has also declined. For the foreign born, 14 percent had union representation in 1996, compared with 11 percent in 2003. For natives, 17 percent had union affiliation in 1996, compared with 15 percent in 2003. (See Table 1 and Graphs 3 and 4)



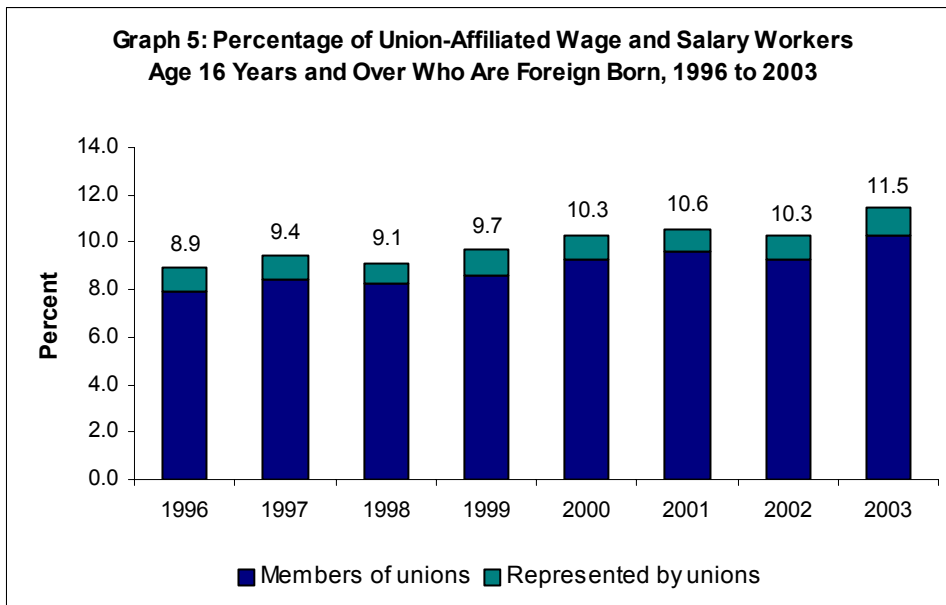
Source: Current Population Survey, 1996 to 2003 (annual averages)



Source: Current Population Survey, 1996 to 2003 (annual averages)

**The percentage of all union members who are foreign born has increased since 1996.**

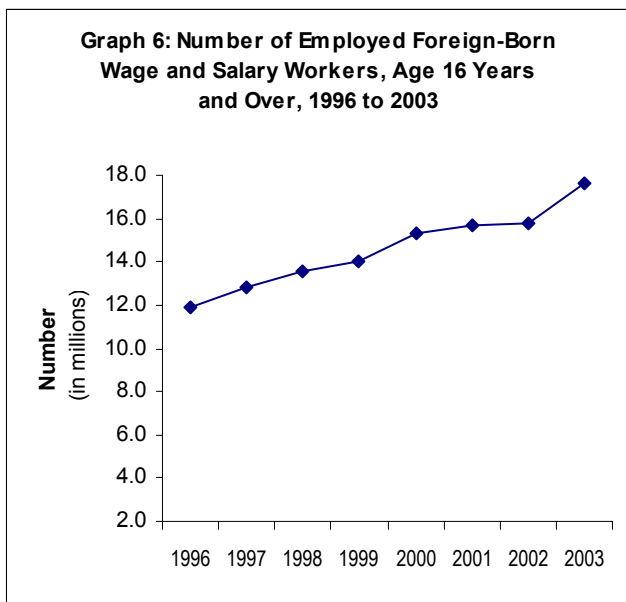
The percentage of all union members who are foreign born has increased from 9 percent in 1996 to over 11 percent in 2003. The proportion of all workers with union representation who are immigrants also increased from 9 percent in 1996 to 11 percent in 2003. (See Table 2 and Graph 5)



Source: Current Population Survey, 1996 to 2003 (annual averages)

**The number of foreign-born wage and salary workers has increased significantly since 1996.**

Between 1996 and 2003, the number of immigrant wage and salary workers increased from 11.9 million to 17.7 million, or by 48 percent. The rapid growth of immigrant workers helps explain why the number of foreign born who are represented by unions is increasing while the proportion of all immigrants with union representation is simultaneously declining. (See Table 1 and Graph 6)



Source: Current Population Survey, 1996 to 2003 (annual averages)

**Table 1: Union Affiliation of Employed Native and Foreign-Born Wage and Salary Workers, Age 16 Years and Over, 1996 to 2003 (in thousands)**

Year	Total			Native			Foreign born		
	Total employed	Members of unions <sup>1</sup>	Represented by unions <sup>2</sup>	Total employed	Members of unions <sup>1</sup>	Represented by unions <sup>2</sup>	Total employed	Members of unions <sup>1</sup>	Represented by unions <sup>2</sup>
NUMBERS									
1996	111,960	16,269	18,158	100,062	14,825	16,536	11,898	1,445	1,622
1997	114,533	16,110	17,923	101,710	14,605	16,237	12,824	1,505	1,686
1998	116,730	16,211	17,918	103,185	14,737	16,282	13,545	1,474	1,636
1999	118,963	16,477	18,182	104,981	14,910	16,421	13,982	1,566	1,762
2000	120,786	16,258	17,944	105,486	14,600	16,104	15,299	1,658	1,840
2001	120,708	16,276	17,880	104,976	14,561	15,992	15,732	1,714	1,888
2002	119,979	15,979	17,502	104,182	14,349	15,699	15,798	1,630	1,803
2003	122,358	15,776	17,448	104,703	13,978	15,448	17,654	1,798	2,000
PERCENTS									
1996	100.0	14.5	16.2	100.0	14.8	16.5	100.0	12.1	13.6
1997	100.0	14.1	15.6	100.0	14.4	16.0	100.0	11.7	13.1
1998	100.0	13.9	15.4	100.0	14.3	15.8	100.0	10.9	12.1
1999	100.0	13.9	15.3	100.0	14.2	15.6	100.0	11.2	12.6
2000	100.0	13.5	14.9	100.0	13.8	15.3	100.0	10.8	12.0
2001	100.0	13.5	14.8	100.0	13.9	15.2	100.0	10.9	12.0
2002	100.0	13.3	14.6	100.0	13.8	15.1	100.0	10.3	11.4
2003	100.0	12.9	14.3	100.0	13.4	14.8	100.0	10.2	11.3

**Notes:**

1 Data refer to members of a labor union or an employee association similar to a union.

2 Data refer to members of a labor union or an employee association similar to a union as well as workers who report no union affiliation but whose jobs are covered by a union or an employee association contract.

**Source notes:**

Data compiled by the Migration Policy Institute. The data are from the Current Population Survey, 1996 to 2003 (annual averages). Note the data series from 1996 to 2002 were weighted with population controls based on the 1990 census. By comparison, the 2003 data were weighted with population controls based on the 2000 census. This means that the 2003 data are not consistent with earlier CPS data series, and any conclusions about trends through time must be made carefully.

**Table 2: Distribution of Union Affiliation of Employed Wage and Salary Workers, Age 16 Years and Over, by Native and Foreign-Born, 1996 to 2003 (in thousands)**

Year	Members of unions <sup>1</sup>			Represented by unions <sup>2</sup>		
	Total	Percent		Total	Percent	
		Native	Foreign born		Native	Foreign born
1996	16,269	91.1	8.9	18,158	91.1	8.9
1997	16,110	90.7	9.3	17,923	90.6	9.4
1998	16,211	90.9	9.1	17,918	90.9	9.1
1999	16,477	90.5	9.5	18,182	90.3	9.7
2000	16,258	89.8	10.2	17,944	89.7	10.3
2001	16,276	89.5	10.5	17,880	89.4	10.6
2002	15,979	89.8	10.2	17,502	89.7	10.3
2003	15,776	88.6	11.4	17,448	88.5	11.5

**Notes:**

1 Data refer to members of a labor union or an employee association similar to a union.

2 Data refer to members of a labor union or an employee association similar to a union as well as workers who report no union affiliation but whose jobs are covered by a union or an employee association contract.

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## 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 foreign-born naturalized citizens as well as non-citizens. Non-citizens include all foreign born who have not naturalized, for example, 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 the 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.

### Union membership vs. representation.

In the Current Population Survey, *union membership* data includes those who are members of a union or an employee association similar to a union. It is derived from a question that asks: On this job, are you a member of a labor union or of an employee association similar to a union?

Those who are *represented by unions* include union members as well as workers who have no union affiliation but whose jobs are covered by a union or an employee association contract. The data are derived from two questions: (1) On this job, are you a member of a labor union or of an employee association similar to a union? and (2) On this job, are you covered by a union or employee association contract?

### Defining employed wage and salary workers.

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 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.

The term *wage and salary workers* includes those who receive wages, salaries, commissions, tips, payment in kind, or piece rates. This includes those employed in both the private and public sectors but, for the purposes of union membership, excludes all self-employed persons, regardless of whether or not their businesses are incorporated.

## **DATA SOURCES**

The estimates presented in this *Immigration Facts Sheet* are derived from the Current Population Survey (CPS), 1996 to 2003. The survey is conducted monthly for the Bureau of Labor Statistics by the U.S. Census Bureau from a nationally representative sample of about 60,000 households. The universe is the civilian non-institutional population of the United States ages 16 and over.

The union affiliation data are tabulated from one-quarter of the CPS monthly sample and are limited to wage and salary workers. Excluded are all self-employed workers. The annual estimates presented are based on the average of the basic monthly surveys.

Note the data series from 1996 to 2002 were weighted with population controls based on the 1990 census. By comparison, the 2003 data were weighted with population controls based on the 2000 census. This means that the 2003 data are not consistent with earlier CPS data series, and any conclusions about trends through time must be made carefully.

## **Statistical Testing**

All statements made in this report have undergone statistical testing and are significant at the 90 percent confidence level.

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