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New York City's Construction Industry Got Younger And More Diverse In 2015

In Reversal, Latest Census Data Shows Hispanics Make up Largest Share of Workforce; Black and Asian Participation Increased by More than 20 Percent

While New York City's construction industry continues to be dominated by male residents of the five boroughs, its quarter-of-a-million-person workforce is gradually getting younger and more diverse, according to a New York Building Congress analysis of the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS).

A total of 253,984 men and women were employed throughout the five boroughs in a construction industry occupation, as defined by the survey, an increase of just over 6 percent from 2014.

The ACS Survey is based on personal responses and incorporates both union and non-union labor as well as participation by "off the books" workers. In addition to physical construction labor and other construction-related blue-collar operations, the survey also counts construction-related sales and service occupations as well as white-collar jobs, such as architects, engineers, and management, as part of the overall construction workforce.

Race, Gender, and Age

For the first time since at least 2005, when the Census Bureau started tracking this data, the number of Hispanics in the New York City construction industry workforce outpaced White Non-Hispanics by a narrow margin in 2015 (the latest year for which data is available).

Workers who self-identify as Hispanic reached 95,874, or 37.75 percent of the workforce, compared to 95,841, or 37.74 percent, who self-identified as White. Back in 2008, which was the previous high-water mark for industry employment, Whites comprised 43 percent of the workforce while Hispanic workers made up 31 percent.

According to the survey, the number of workers who self-identify as Black, jumped by 25 percent between 2014 and 2015 (from 28,236 to 35,354). The number of workers who self-identify as Asian increased by 21 percent over the same period (from 20,744 to 25,075). Hispanics saw a 6 percent increase, while workers who self-identify as White saw a decline of 2 percent from 2014.

The share of women in the construction industry rose only slightly – from 16,764 (7 percent of the total workforce) in 2014 to 19,274 (7.6 percent) in 2015.

The workforce got slightly younger in 2015. Workers aged 20-39 increased from 41 percent of the workforce in 2014 to 44 percent in 2015, while workers aged 40-59 dropped from 50 percent of the workforce in 2014 to 46 percent in 2015.

“While it is wonderful that the construction industry is getting increasingly more diverse, we still have quite a way to go, especially when it comes to recruiting and mentoring New York City women for successful careers in design and construction,” said New York Building Congress President and CEO Carlo A. Scissura. “This must be an ongoing priority for the entire building community.”

Wages and Benefits

Approximately 40 percent of all building industry workers lived in households with incomes greater than \$100,000 in 2015, a decrease from 42 percent in 2014. Approximately 36 percent of workers reported household earnings between \$50,000 and \$100,000; 16 percent reported earnings between \$25,000 and \$49,000; and 8 percent reported household earnings of less than \$25,000 annually.

The number of workers who reported having health insurance decreased slightly from 56 percent in 2014 to 53 percent in 2015. The increased percentage of uninsured reflects the fact that virtually the entire increase in construction employment occurred among blue-collar occupations without health insurance.

“New York City’s current building boom has opened up additional employment opportunities for thousands of New Yorkers,” noted Mr. Scissura. “The building community, working with our partners in government, must do our best to ensure that these workers are getting the wages, benefits, and training they deserve, especially those who may be working on the fringes of the industry.”

Residence v. Place of Employment

Of the 253,984 men and women who reported working in the New York City building industry in 2015, 74 percent hailed from one of the five boroughs. Residents of Long Island and New Jersey each made up 9 percent of the City’s construction workforce.

Among New York City residents working in the industry, 36 percent lived in Queens, followed by Brooklyn at 32 percent, the Bronx at 15 percent, Manhattan at 10 percent, and Staten Island at 7 percent. The Building Congress also found that 38 percent of the New York City residents employed by the building industry worked in the very same borough in which they lived in 2015.

Additional Findings

Physical construction and other blue-collar operations accounted for 81 percent of the industry workforce, with the remainder being employed in construction-related sales and service occupations as well as white-collar jobs, such as architects, engineers, and management.

Nearly 58 percent of all respondents said they speak a language other than English as the primary language in their homes. After English speakers, the most prevalent languages are Spanish (35 percent), Chinese (4 percent), and Hindi (3 percent).

Approximately 66 percent of the building industry workforce never attended college, and 46 percent of all workers ended their education after earning a high school diploma. College degrees were earned by 12 percent of all workers, with 4 percent of the workforce going on to obtain a post-graduate degree.

Of those who responded to the survey question about citizenship status, 60 percent said they were not United States citizens.