Both native born and immigrant Hispanics have significantly impacted the American labor force and will continue to do so, Rakesh Kochhar, associate director for research at the Pew Hispanic Center says. “Growth in the labor force from 2000 to 2005 would have been slower [without the influx of Hispanic immigrants], and the labor force would have been older without immigrants.” From 2000 to 2005, the number of people in the prime working age range of 25 to 44 years old fell by 1,177,000. “This drop would have been even more dramatic without Hispanics and immigrants.” The population of non-Hispanic whites in this age range dropped by 4,227,000, while the Hispanic population increased by 2,206,000, with 1,458,000 of those Hispanics being foreign born. In 2007, the highest percentage of Hispanics in the labor force (19.6 percent) was in the 25 to 34 age range.

Hispanics in the United States are generally less educated than whites, but they are dominating growth in the labor force, especially for younger workers. Of all workers in the labor force with less than a high school diploma, 39.9 percent were Hispanic. Whites and non-Hispanic immigrant groups are on average more educated. In contrast, of all workers in the labor force with a college degree, 6.8 percent were Hispanic, and of those with a graduate degree, 4.5 percent were Hispanic.

Currently, there are approximately 40 million foreign-born people in the United States. This figure represents a “rapid growth in the foreign-born population during the 1990s and today.” Looking forward, both the Hispanic and immigrant populations are expected to grow, continuing to have large impacts on the labor market. Kochhar cites a Pew study that projects that the Hispanic population, already the nation’s largest minority group, will triple in size and will account for most of the nation’s population growth from 2005 through 2050. The report also projects that 117 million people will be added to the population from 2005 to 2050 due to immigration. About 67 million will be immigrants themselves, 47 million will be their U.S.-born children, and 3 million will be their grandchildren.

The working-age population, between the ages of 18 and 64, stands at 186 million today. With immigration trends continuing as expected, the Pew Hispanic Center projects that the working age population will reach 255 million by 2050. However, if all immigration were halted, the working age population would decrease to 179 million by 2050.

The top five industries employing both native-born and foreign-born Hispanic workers are all blue-collar industries. In the construction industry, 26 percent of all workers are Hispanic, followed by the eating and lodging industry (21.9 percent), personal services (21.7 percent), nondurable manufacturing (19 percent), and agriculture (18 percent).

Unions have a “big new pool of potential members” in the Hispanic and immigrant communities because some of these industries are traditionally heavily unionized, Kochhar notes. However, “Hispanic are not yet becoming union members at higher levels than other groups,” he adds. The foreign born, including undocumented workers, earn “a lot less than native born workers.” In 2005, the real median weekly wage was $577 for all workers, $600 for native workers, and $480 for foreign-born workers.