

Do migrants take the jobs of native workers?

Migrants rarely take native workers' jobs, and they boost employment effects in the long term

Keywords: employment, job creation, native workers, job upgrading, immigration impact, economic complementarity, competition

ELEVATOR PITCH

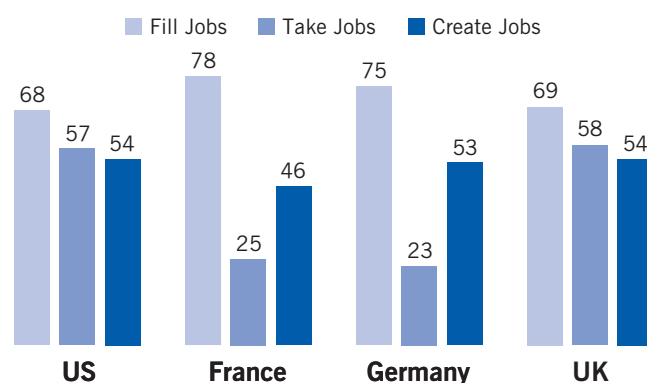
Neither public opinion nor evidence-based research supports the claim of some politicians and the media that immigrants take the jobs of native-born workers. Public opinion polls in six migrant-destination countries after the 2008–2009 recession show that most people believe that immigrants fill job vacancies and many believe that they create jobs and do not take jobs from native workers. This view is corroborated by evidence-based research showing that immigrants—of all skill levels—do not significantly affect native employment in the short term and boost employment in the long term.

KEY FINDINGS

Pros

- + Immigrants who are self-employed or entrepreneurs directly create new jobs.
- + Immigrant innovators create jobs indirectly within a firm, leading to long-term job growth.
- + New immigrants fill labor shortages and keep markets working efficiently.
- + High-skilled immigrants contribute to technological adaptation and low-skilled immigrants to occupational mobility, specialization, and human capital creation; both create new jobs for native workers.
- + By raising demand, immigrants cause firms and production to expand, resulting in new hiring.

Public opinion on immigrants and jobs, 2011



Source: Based on Figure 1.

IZA
World of Labor

Cons

- Low-skilled immigrants may compete in the short term, but the effect is small and not statistically significant.
- If low-skilled immigrant workers only supplement the work of high-skilled native workers, they may be trapped in low-skill, low-paying jobs.
- If low-skilled immigrant labor is employed in lieu of physical capital, technological advances and capital upgrading are impeded.
- A country that becomes dependent on low-cost immigrant workers may have to outsource jobs when these workers are not available.
- Immigrants may increase production without boosting productivity.

AUTHOR'S MAIN MESSAGE

Immigration's positive effects far outweigh any negative impact. Migrants choose locations with available jobs and fill labor shortages. Whether high- or low-skilled, migrants rarely substitute directly for native workers. Instead, migrants often complement native workers or accept jobs that natives don't want or can't do. They create new jobs by increasing production, engaging in self-employment, and easing upward job mobility for native workers. The presence of immigrants increases demand and can spur new businesses to open, creating more jobs for immigrant and native populations.