

Construction Employment Gains Highlight Safety Concerns

Fatality rate in construction is on the rise for Latinos

The U.S. Department of Labor [reported today](#) that U.S. employers added 257,000 jobs in January 2015, another month of strong job growth. The national unemployment rate is 5.7% and the Latino unemployment rate is 6.7% (see Table 1). Construction added 39,000 jobs last month, following an average of 28,000 jobs gained per month. Job growth in construction is good for Latinos, who represent one in four workers in the industry; however, trends in fatal workplace injuries for Latinos in construction are cause for concern.

Table 1. The Employment Situation for Latino Workers in January 2015

Indicators	Latinos, January 2015*
Employed — <i>Working people over the age of 16, including those temporarily absent from their jobs</i>	24.3 million
Unemployed — <i>Those who are available to work, make an effort to find a job, or expect to be called back from a layoff but are not working</i>	1.7 million
Civilian Labor Force — <i>The sum of employed and unemployed people</i>	26 million
Not in the Labor Force — <i>People over the age of 16 classified as neither employed nor unemployed</i>	13.1 million
Unemployment Rate — <i>Share of the labor force that is unemployed</i>	6.7%
Labor Force Participation Rate — <i>Share of the population over the age of 16 that is in the labor force</i>	66.5%
Employment-Population Ratio — <i>Share of the population over the age of 16 that is working</i>	62.1%

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Employment Status of the Hispanic or Latino Population by Sex and Age," *Current Population Survey*, <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/empst.t03.htm> (accessed February 6, 2015), Table A-3.

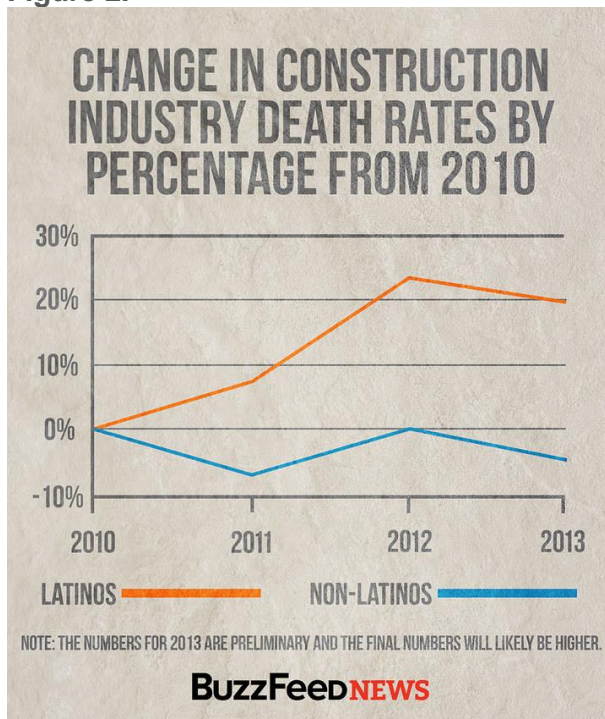
Latino Fatalities in Construction Cause for Concern

Latinos represent 25.5% of construction workers, compared to only 15.6% of the overall workforce. The housing market crash took an acute toll on Latino employment and household income that is only now showing signs of improvement. Yet new data show that employment growth in construction is coming at a cost to Latino workers. A recent analysis by BuzzFeed finds

* Due to changes in how the Census measures populations, it is not advisable to compare December 2014 population figures to January 2015 figures.

that the fatality rates within the industry are on the rise for Latino workers—despite a decline in injury rates for other construction workers.

Figure 2.



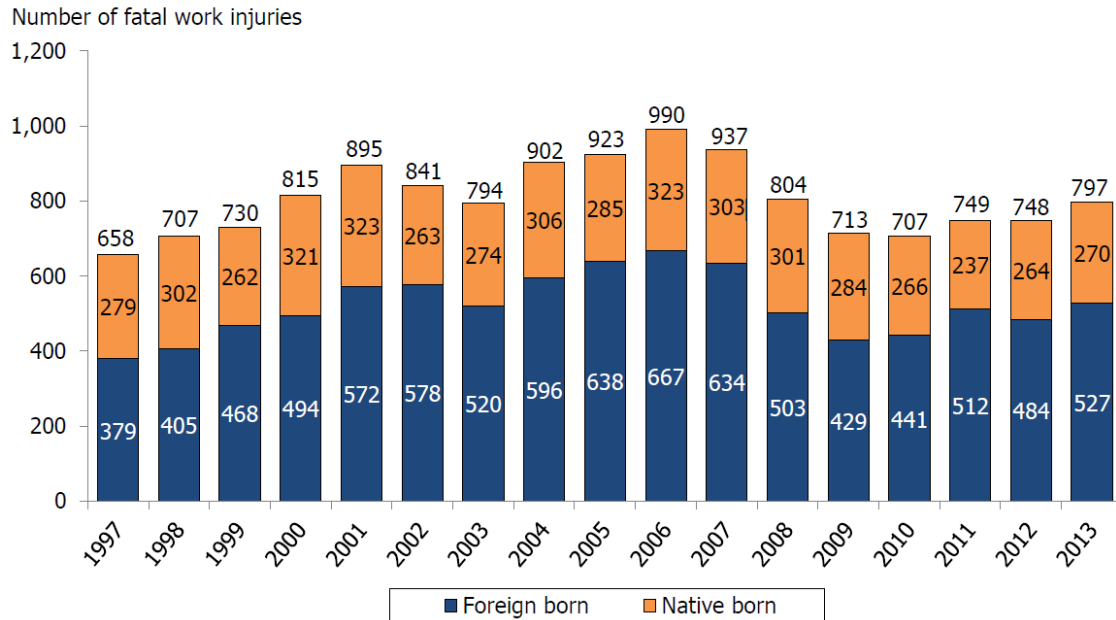
Source: David Noriega, “Construction Work is Getting More Deadly, But Only For Latinos,” BuzzFeed News, January 6, 2015, <http://www.buzzfeed.com/davidnoriega/construction-work-is-getting-more-deadly-but-only-for-latino#.dnaKylaga> (accessed February 2015).

In general, Latino workers are more likely to be killed on the job than non-Latino workers. Latinos represent 15.6% of the employed workforce but 18% of workers who died on the job in 2013. While workplace fatalities were lower for non-Hispanic Whites and non-Hispanic Blacks in 2013 compared to 2012, the number of Hispanic workers killed increased by 7%, from 748 fatalities in 2012 to 797 in 2013. In addition, new evidence suggesting that the overall improvement in construction safety is not translating into lower fatalities among Latinos is cause for concern.

NCLR’s previous analysis of workplace health and safety outcomes for Latino workers finds that Latinos are more likely to work in low-wage occupations where labor laws are frequently violated. Inadequate enforcement keeps workers—including immigrants, who represent the majority of Latinos killed on the job—vulnerable to exploitation.* In the construction industry, for instance, Latinos make up more than 40% of [construction laborers](#), an occupation with a fatality rate of 17.7 per 100,000 workers. Construction laborers are often subject to other violations of workplace rights, including wage theft and misclassification as independent contractors.

* Catherine Singley, *Fractures in the Foundation: The Latino Worker’s Experience in an Era of Declining Job Quality* (NCLR: Washington, DC, 2009), Chapter 5, http://www.nclr.org/index.php/publications/fractures_in_the_foundation_the_latino_workers_experience_in_an_era_of_declining_job_quality (accessed February 2015).

Figure 3. Number of Fatal Work Injuries Involving Latino Workers, 1997–2013



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, “National Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries in 2013 (Preliminary Results),” <http://www.bls.gov/iif/oshwc/cfoi/cfch0012.pdf> (accessed February 2015).

Conclusion

As employment continues to improve in construction, policymakers should place a renewed focus on the laws and regulations that protect workers’ safety and health. Adequate resources for enforcement and innovative outreach to Latino and immigrant workers are critical to preventing fatal workplace injuries in construction.

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