# Policy Brief: Immigration & The Recovery of the U.S. Construction Industry

The U.S. construction industry faces daunting challenges in hiring and retaining qualified workers. The reasons for this include lingering effects from the contraction of the construction industry workforce following the 2008 economic crisis, less interest in "blue collar" employment among U.S. workers, and an aging workforce. Texas estimates that the average age for electricians is 53 years old and 51 for plumbers.  Since construction is not an area where work can be outsourced, the industry relies on foreign-born workers.

Skills gaps in residential, commercial, and industrial construction also prevent certain trades from finding workers to meet growing demand.  In 2015-2016, major contractors in all building segments reported serious worksite delays directly related to the lack of skilled trades workers.  One builder in Ohio stopped selling homes for a period because they could not guarantee delivery within the typical 180-day period.

Foreign-born workers account for, on average, 24 percent of the construction industry workforce nationwide, with some states seeing much higher percentages.

**A strong housing construction market is linked to a healthy, growing economy.**  For that to happen, federal policy must allow a legal path for foreign-born workers to participate in the U.S. construction industry.

## We Ask Your Support for These Common Sense Immigration Policy Reforms for the Construction Industry

- ➢ **A Workable Visa System for Entry into the U.S. to Work Construction:**  No current visa program allows foreign workers entry into the U.S. to work in construction on a year-round basis.  The seasonal H-2B visa allows industries (resorts and seasonal employers) in the US to share a mere 66,000 visas per year.  While proposals have been introduced over the years to create a new construction sector visa program, there has been little interest on either side of the aisle for moving a program forward even in the face of obvious demographic changes in the U.S. that make the need dire.

- ➢ **Fair and Efficient Employee Verification System that Works for Small and Large Employers:**  The E-Verify employment verification system is plagued with problems and will not by itself fix the issue of illegal immigration.  Legislation addressing U.S. immigration policy and the E-Verify system should provide additional employer safeguards; prompt government notification to employers when a worker is cleared for employment; and set liability limits for contractors and subcontractors who use the system.

- ➢ **Practical Assessment Mechanism for Existing Immigrants:**  Federal policy should assess those illegal immigrants who are already in the US and establish reasonable conditions that will allow workers to obtain a valid work authorization.  The immediate deportation of all illegal immigrants will likely shock the industry workforce and hurt the U.S. economy.