

On January 27, President Donald Trump signed an executive order prohibiting nationals from Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen from entering the United States for 90 days. These restrictions have been suspended temporarily by courts. It is uncertain if they will be reinstated and what travel restrictions other groups of nationals will face.

For now, we can examine the role recent immigrants from “the executive order seven” countries currently play in the US labor market as a means of assessing the potential impact of this policy.

In 2015, just over 230,000 non-US citizens from the seven listed countries who had arrived in the past 10 years lived in the US; about 109,000 of whom were participants in the labor market. Studying this group as one unit minimizes the vast differences in terms of characteristics among the listed countries and immigrants coming from them. This analysis reveals that as a group they are a small but disproportionately-skilled and well-educated cohort.

Small metropolitan areas in university towns like Morgantown, West Virginia and College Station, Texas have fairly large “executive order seven” populations relative to their overall sizes. This result is not surprising. Immigrants in the labor force from these listed countries are almost four times as likely as the general population to hold a PhD. Almost half are college graduates compared with less than a third for the labor force as a whole...

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