



## New York by the Numbers

Economic snapshots of the five boroughs

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The Center for an Urban Future is New York City's home for independent research and serious thinking about the issues affecting the five boroughs.

## In this issue:

**Low-Wage Jobs:** Nearly a third of all adult workers in New York City are employed in low-wage jobs, but the Bronx is in a league of its own.

After opposing several other mega-developments like the Willets Point redevelopment plan in Queens and Columbia University's proposed new campus in West Harlem, the New York City Council unanimously reversed course last week and accepted a proposal to build a shopping mall inside the Kingsbridge Armory in the Bronx. Although Mayor Bloomberg and other proponents of the plan said the mall would bring new jobs and retail opportunities, community advocates and local politicians opposed the project because it did not guarantee wages of at least \$10 an hour for the retail workers there.

It's not hard to see why the wage issue would prove to be such a sticking point in the Bronx. As we reveal in this issue of New York by the Numbers, the Center for an Urban Future's periodic economic snapshot of the five boroughs, it whopping 42 percent of Bronx workers over the age of 18 are employed in "low-wage" jobs. The data, compiled for us by the Population Reference Bureau using Census data from 2007, show that while the percentage of low-wage workers is high across the city, the Bronx is far and away the leader.

In two other boroughs, more than 30 percent of residents over the age of 18 work in low-wage jobs: Queens (34 percent of the adult workforce in low-wage positions) and Brooklyn (32 percent). The share of low-wage workers—those making less than \$11.54 an hour or \$24,000 a year—is slightly lower in Staten Island (27 percent) and Manhattan (22 percent). Outside New York City, low-wage workers make up 31 percent of the city's adult workforce. As one moves out from the city into the suburbs of New Jersey and Long Island, the percentage of low-wage workers drops off somewhat. According to our data, 26 percent of adult workers in the New York City metro area qualify as "low-wage." The percentage jumps back up to 35 percent for the whole state of New York. In fact, only two other states have a higher percentage of adult workers in low-wage jobs (Rhode Island and Hawaii).

The data underscores three prevailing trends in both the local and national economies: manufacturing jobs that once provided a ticket to the middle class for people with only a high-school degree or less have continued to decline; the lion's share of new middle income jobs today require applicants to have an associate's or bachelor's degree, and un-credentialed workers are increasingly forced into low-paying jobs in the service sector as a result.

Population Reference Bureau (PRB) estimates of the Census Bureau's 2007 Basic Monthly Current Population Survey (CPS). The PRB data are collected for us by the Willets Point Project, a foundation-funded national initiative that works with 24 nonprofit organizations to strengthen data analysis affecting low-income families. CPS is one of the most powerful data sources in the United States.

PRB defined low-wage workers using the following formula: In this report, low wage is defined as an individual 18 and older who is either employed or unemployed about four weeks who earns below a state-specific "low wage" figure (i.e., the federal low wage figure is state cost of living index). The federal low wage figure was based upon the nationwide weighted average poverty threshold for a family of two in 2007 (\$17,000). If a person could afford to live for one year on 40 hours per week for \$2 makes per hour and still have \$17,000 per year, that person could be making \$10.00 per hour in this analysis. The New York State hourly wage the national low wage adjusted by state cost of living was \$11.54 per hour.

Source: New York State Department of Labor, \$10.00 Minimum Wage (2009)

Report - December 2009

## Low-Wage Jobs

This edition of New York by the Numbers reveals that nearly a third of all adult workers in New York City are employed in low-wage jobs. While the percentage of low-wage workers is high across the city, the Bronx is in a league of its own, with 42 percent of the borough's workers in low-wage jobs.

by Jonathan Bowles and David Giles

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