



INCOME DISPARITY: Inequality Lower in Large Texas Cities

Within the nation's 50 largest cities, the top-earning households (those making more than 95 percent of all households) earned 11.6 times what households at the bottom earned (those making more than the bottom 20 percent of households), Brookings Institution researchers have found. Overall, the ratio of income at the 95th percentile to the 20th percentile was 9.3, suggesting that the nation's largest cities have greater income inequality than smaller communities and rural areas.

By most measures, U.S. income inequality has consistently grown since the 1970s. Partly in response to record disparity, 14 states and the District of Columbia have recently raised the minimum wage.

Using Census Bureau data, Brookings also ranked the 50 largest cities from most unequal to least. Dallas was seventh—the only one of Texas' seven large cities to make the top 10. Houston was 15th, with Austin, San Antonio, El Paso, Fort Worth and Arlington in the lower half of the ranking. Atlanta led the list.

The household income of those at the 95th percentile in Dallas and Houston significantly advanced from 2012–13, with Dallas increasing 12.2 percent and Houston 6.3 percent. Those at the bottom 20th percentile in Houston and Austin also experienced significant income growth at 7.1 and 8.4 percent, respectively.

—Emily Gutierrez



VISAS: Texas Metros Top List for Temporary Foreign Skilled Labor

Petitions for the 2016 allotment of H-1Bs—temporary work visas for high-skilled labor—reached the annual cap just six days after the filing period opened in April, according to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). With only 85,000 visas available for the private sector and an average of 130,000 petitions filed annually, many applicants are turned away.

Dallas-Fort Worth ranked second among U.S. metros for the highest number of approvals in fiscal year 2014, mostly due to large financial and technology sectors, while Houston placed 12th, according to a Brookings Institution report. College Station, home to Texas A&M University, ranked second nationally for the ratio of H-1B employees per 1,000 workers, while DFW was fifth. Nonprofit research and higher education institutions are exempt from the H-1B visa cap.

H-1B recipients tend to be young, highly educated professionals from Asia. In fiscal year 2014, 58 percent of applicants held a master's degree or higher and 72 percent were 25 to 34 years old. About 70 percent of applicants were from India and 65 percent of applicants worked in systems analysis, computer programming or other computer-related occupations, according to USCIS. Among the largest H-1B employers are Tata Consultancy Services and Infosys—multinational corporations with operations in Dallas.

—Sarah Greer



ENERGY: Record Crude Supply Presses Storage Limits in Cushing, Okla.

Since oil prices began declining in mid-2014, hopeful producers—betting on higher oil prices in the near future—have stored more oil, pushing inventories at the Cushing, Okla., storage hub and elsewhere in the U.S. to levels not seen in more than a decade. Inventories have more than tripled at Cushing, the largest such storage facility in the U.S.

Cushing's working capacity of 70.8 million barrels as of September 2014 equals the current seven-day output of U.S. oil producers. West Texas Intermediate, the domestic benchmark for crude oil, is priced in Cushing for sale to refineries and other downstream producers.

Cushing is a major pipeline transportation hub. Hundreds of thousands of barrels a day pour in from crude producers in the Permian Basin through pipelines such as the Plains All American Basin system, which is capable of carrying 450,000 barrels per day, or more than one-fifth of the basin's current production. Crude oil then flows from Cushing to refiners. The largest outgoing pipelines, including the Seaway, with a capacity of more than 1 million barrels per day, carry crude to Texas Gulf Coast refineries.

High inventory levels put downward pressure on futures prices. If Cushing were to reach capacity, it could cause oil prices to tumble to new lows.

—Kristin Davis