

2009

Workforce Trends



Affecting the Social Work Profession

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The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) established the Center for Workforce Studies in 2004 to provide the social work profession with a current look at its labor force. In addition, the Center was charged with examining a dynamic labor market landscape and noting shifts in demands for social work services. This report is based on information from a number of sources, including the following: member inquiries, government reports, reports from leading social policy institutes, and the media.

As educators, policy makers, and public and private workforce planners begin looking ahead, the NASW Center for Workforce Studies encourages them to acknowledge and support the critical role of social work, now and in the future.

Changes in the Demographic Landscape

From 1995 to 2050, the population of the United States is expected to increase from 263 million to 394 million (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008). Concomitant with this expected population increase, it is projected that the nation will experience significant demographic shifts that will likely result in a population characterized more by its diversity than by any other factor.

Minority populations currently account for approximately one-third of the total population of the United States. In the 1990s, more than 14 million people immigrated to the United States, the highest immigration influx in any decade in the nation's history. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, more than 30 million immigrants in the United States account for approximately 11 percent of the total population (National

■ **The non-Hispanic, Caucasian population is projected to decrease from 66 percent of the total population in 2008 to 46 percent of the total population in 2050**
(U.S. Census Bureau, 2008).

■ **By 2023, minorities will comprise more than half of all children**
(U.S. Census Bureau, 2008).

■ **The African American population is expected to reach 65 million in 2050**
(U.S. Census Bureau, 2008).

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Immigration Law Center, 2004). By 2050, 54 percent of the nation is projected to comprise minority populations (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008).

The number of children under the age of 18 in the United States has also grown from 47.3 million in 1950 to 73.5 million in 2005. By the year 2030, that number is expected to grow to 85.7 million (Child Trends, n.d.). It is likely that this growth in the number of children will generate a critical need for adequate child care services, appropriate educational opportunities, and community health and social services for children and youths.



At the same time, the number of older adults in the United States is anticipated to be unprecedented. The U.S. Administration on Aging (AoA) has predicted that by 2030 the country will contain roughly 71 million people over the age of 65—more than double the amount in 2005 (AoA, 2007). Older adults will also be more diverse in the future than they are today; the population of aging Hispanics, African Americans, and Asian Americans is projected to grow faster than that of older Caucasians.

Status of the Social Work Profession

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), social work is one of the professions expected to grow at a faster-than-average rate through 2016 (BLS, 2008a, 2008b). BLS estimated the need for 595,000 social workers in 2006 and the need for 727,000 social workers in 2016. These projections are based on a likely increase in the need for social work services, particularly in aging and behavioral health.

■ **The Asian American population is projected to increase from 16 million to 41 million by 2050. In addition, American Indians and Alaska Natives are projected to grow from 5 million to 9 million by 2050** (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008).

■ **Fourteen million people are projected to immigrate to the United States between 2000 and 2010** (Fix & Passel, 2003).

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