

A PROFILE OF IMMIGRANT VIRGINIANS

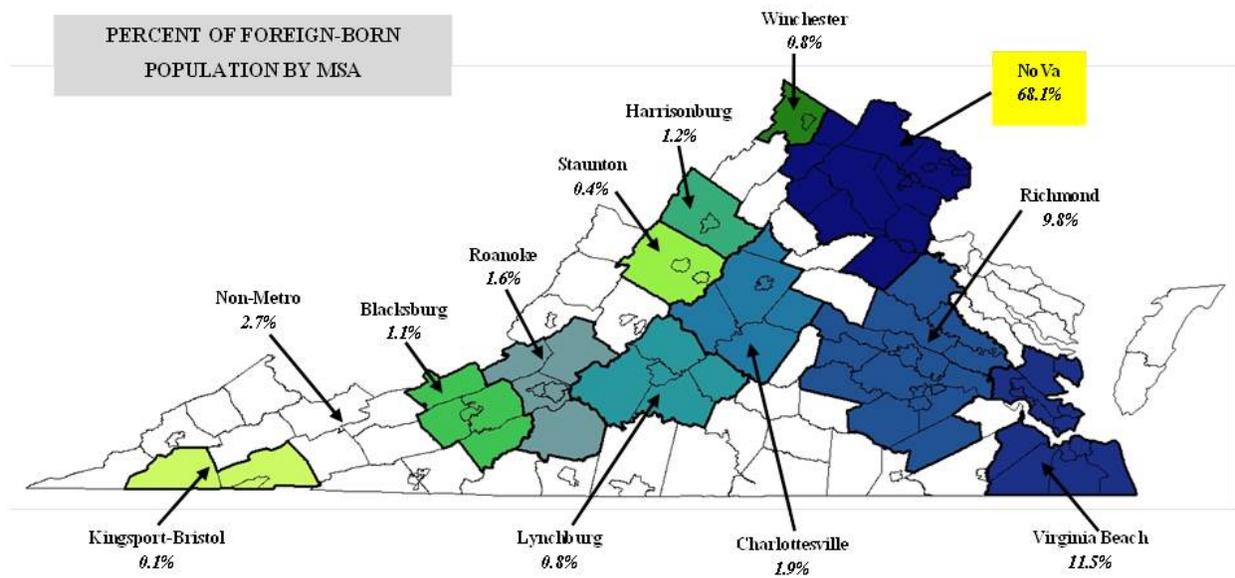
The last known comprehensive examination of the foreign-born population in Virginia was the Joint Legislative Audit & Review Commission (JLARC) report commissioned by the Virginia legislature in 2004. The following profile relies heavily on recent population studies by the Migration Policy Institute (MPI) and issue-focused research by the Commonwealth Institute and other bipartisan think tanks. Although information from the Census Bureau's 2018 American Community Survey has also been included, this profile is by no means comprehensive. This profile is an iterative process requiring additional research from both primary and secondary sources as well as a multi-pronged qualitative community assessment.

I. Demographics

The 2018 American Community Survey estimates the number of foreign-born individuals in Virginia at 1,065,000, representing an 86.8% increase since 2000. Virginia's foreign-born population represents approximately 12.5% of the Commonwealth's total population, or approximately one in eight Virginians. Virginia has the 17th highest foreign-born population out of 50 states. Immigrant Virginians are 39% White, 34.7% Asian and 11.6% Black. Latinxs, considered an ethnicity by the Census Bureau and of any racial background, comprise 33% of all foreign-born Virginians or 351,881 people.

Slightly more than one third of foreign-born Virginians come from Latin America, 41.8% from Asia, and 10.7% from Africa. Their primary regions of origin are (in descending order): Central America, South Central Asia, Southeast Asia, East Africa and South America. Their top home countries are: El Salvador, India, Mexico, Korea, Vietnam, Honduras, Guatemala and Bolivia.

While two-thirds of all immigrants live in Northern Virginia, there are sizable immigrant communities in Richmond, Roanoke and other cities throughout the state.



<http://statchatva.org/2014/03/04/virginias-immigrants-where-do-they-come-from-and-where-are-they-now/>

Virginia’s foreign-born community is largely between 18-64 years old with a median age of 37.1 years. Nearly 50% are married and 428,000 children in Virginia (or one in four children) have one or more foreign-born parents.

Almost three-quarters of immigrant Virginians have lived in the state for a decade or more. Twenty-six percent have arrived since 2010. More than half (54% or 575,000) are naturalized citizens, an increase of 60% since 2007. A majority are bilingual.

Virginia’s immigrant residents are extraordinarily diverse. Sixteen percent speak a language other than English at home. Data from the Virginia Department of Education and school district English as a Second Language (ESL) programs demonstrates this diversity. Twelve percent of Virginia’s K-12 students (159,152 youth) are English Language Learners (ELL). Of these, 67% are Spanish speakers with Arabic, Vietnamese, Urdu and Chinese making up the other top five languages. Fairfax County has the most diverse student population with 182 languages spoken at home including Spanish, Arabic, Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese, Tagalog, Amharic, Somali, French, Persian, Hindi, Urdu, German, Telegu, Yoruba, Twi and Bengali.

II. Latinxs in Virginia

It is currently estimated that 820,874 Latinxs reside in Virginia, comprising 9.6% of the Commonwealth’s total population. Around fifty-six percent (56.5%) of Latinx Virginians are U.S. born (including from Puerto Rico). Foreign-born Latinxs are primarily from El Salvador and Mexico with growing numbers from Honduras, Guatemala and Nicaragua, including individuals

who traveled to the southern U.S. border in 2018 and 2019. Virginia has 208,000 students of Latinx heritage and 33% report having Limited English Proficiency (LEP).

Fifty percent of Virginia's Latinx population resides in Northern Virginia while Hampton Roads and Richmond have the second and third largest Latinx populations. The largest Latinx population (188,000) resides in Fairfax County. Latinxs live throughout the state with more than 5,000 residents in 24 jurisdictions including Fauquier, Culpeper and Albemarle Counties and several small cities in the Shenandoah Valley. This estimate does not include an estimated 6,000 migrant workers who travel through Virginia each year according to the Legal Aid Justice Center.

Virginia's Latinx population is projected to increase to 1.6 million by 2030, at which point it will represent 17% of the total state population.

III. Individuals without Papers

Individuals without papers are individuals who reside in Virginia without legal status. Although many have crossed the southern border without presenting to immigration officials, others have simply overstayed student, work or tourist visas. For the purposes of this paper, we will use the more common term "undocumented" immigrants although it is not considered the current usage by many in that community.

It is difficult to ascertain the number of undocumented immigrants living in Virginia. Reliable estimates from the Migration Policy Institute put the number at approximately 269,000 in 2016. The top countries of origin are: El Salvador, Mexico, Honduras, Guatemala and the Philippines. MPI reports that the most frequent languages spoken at home in this population are: Spanish, English, Korean, Tagalog and Chinese.

The majority of undocumented Virginians (75%) have lived in the Commonwealth for 5-14 years. More than half are between the ages of 25-44 years. Twenty-five percent have a high school degree or GED and 25% have bachelors, graduate or professional degrees.

A significant number of undocumented Virginians live in *mixed status* families in which family members hold different citizenship or immigration statuses. One in four undocumented adults lives with a U.S. born child; 18% are married to U.S. citizens.

Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) is a United States immigration policy that allows some individuals with unlawful presence in the United States after being brought to the country as children to receive a renewable two-year period of deferred action from deportation and become eligible for a work permit in the U.S. To be eligible for the program, recipients cannot have felonies or serious misdemeanors on their records. Unlike the proposed DREAM Act, DACA does not provide a path to citizenship for recipients.

DACA students became eligible for Virginia in-state tuition rates after a 2014 memorandum by Virginia Attorney General Mark Herring. As of Fall 2019, the University of Virginia grants

university-based financial aid to in-state, undergraduate students with DACA. The Virginia General Assembly passed a bill in February 2020 granting in-state tuition to all Virginians regardless of immigration status, signed into law by Governor Northam in April 2020. The bill (SB 935/HB 1547) requires that undocumented students attend a Virginia high school (or receive GED) and provide proof of filed taxes for at least two years in Virginia. While students without papers who don't have DACA are eligible for matriculation at many Virginia universities, federal law prohibits the extension of state financial aid to students without papers unless allowed by the state, and there is no such provision in Virginia law as of June 2020.

The undocumented community faces particular challenges. One in five individuals lives below the poverty line and 46% live at or below 200% of poverty. Fifty-two percent lack health insurance.

In March 2020, the Virginia General Assembly passed Senate Bill 34, allowing undocumented individuals to apply for Driver Privilege Cards. Driver Privilege Cards differ from licenses in that they must be renewed annually and applicants must file a tax return or be listed as a dependent on one in order to qualify. Privilege cards specifically state that they are not to be used for voting or federal benefits.

Virginia has not passed legislation limiting state cooperation with the federal government's Office of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). ICE was established in 2003 as part of the United States Department of Homeland Security to enforce immigration law, which is a federal responsibility.

Through the 287(g) program (named for Section 287(g) of the Immigration and Nationality Act) state and local police officers collaborate with the federal government to enforce federal immigration laws. As of June 2020, only Culpeper County in Virginia still maintained a 287(g) agreement with ICE. However, some jails maintain ICE beds through Intergovernmental Service Agreements (IGSA).

In 2017, House Bill 2000 passed the General Assembly and prohibited the implementation of "sanctuary policies," declaring that no locality in Virginia could adopt any ordinance, procedure, or policy that restricts the enforcement of federal immigration laws.

In spring 2020, Senate Bill 941 passed, requiring local law enforcement to ask and report the citizenship status of any arrestee who is charged with a felony. Local jail authorities were required to vote to discontinue routine ICE notifications of individuals arrested and charged with misdemeanors.

IV. Immigrant Contributions to the Virginia Economy and Tax Base

Immigrants are significant contributors to the Virginia economy, a fact that will increase in importance as the Commonwealth's population continues to age. Most immigrant Virginians are between the ages of 25-54 years. They have a 72% labor force participation rate, compared to 65% for native-born citizens. Immigrant households have an average of 1.71 workers per household while U.S. born households average 1.26. Almost two-thirds of immigrants in Virginia speak English fluently. They are slightly more likely to have bachelor's degrees than those born here and 6% more likely to have completed graduate school.

Immigrants play a significant role in Virginia's economy:

- 12% of immigrants are self-employed
- A third of all "main street" businesses (groceries, dry cleaners, clothing stores and gas stations) are owned by immigrants
- Immigrants generated \$1.6 billion in business income in 2014
- Nineteen of Virginia's Fortune 500 companies were founded by immigrants or children of immigrants
- The agricultural sector accounts for \$2 billion of Virginia's economic output; immigrants make up 32% of the Commonwealth's farm workers
- The 2014 purchasing power of Virginia's Latinx population was \$20.6 billion, an increase of 849% since 1990
- Virginia's foreign-born students contributed \$487 million to the state's economy in 2013-2014

Immigrants also make sizable contributions to the Commonwealth's tax base, having paid \$2.7 billion in state and local taxes in 2013. Many undocumented immigrants who are ineligible for social security numbers have Individual Taxpayer Identification Numbers (ITINs) issued by the Internal Revenue Service. Using an ITIN, they pay taxes and contribute to Social Security and Medicare. However, due to their legal status they are ineligible for any public benefits. In 2014, undocumented immigrants in Virginia earned \$4.9 billion, generated \$555 million in business income, and paid \$193 million in state taxes, \$382 million to Social Security and \$95 million to Medicare.

V. Challenges in Accessing Public Services

Understanding eligibility and access to public services are the first vital steps in addressing the needs of immigrant communities and families. Eligibility is a complex and ever-shifting landscape, with complicated federal and state laws, policies and requirements. In February 2020, US Citizenship and Immigration Services implemented the Inadmissibility on Public Charge Grounds final rule. Previously, the use of most public benefits was not a barrier to legal status in the United States but the new rule implements penalties for receipt of vital health, housing, and nutrition

programs, including federally-funded Medicaid, SNAP benefits (formerly known as food stamps), and Section 8 housing benefits. This policy has resulted in immigrants being deemed inadmissible for certain legal status if they have accessed or are deemed likely to access public benefits. As a result, individuals may be hesitant to seek services for fear that they will lose their legal status or face deportation.

There are various other factors that prevent an individual from seeking or using available resources. Language barriers are the most significant of these. Despite legal requirements, information from state agencies and private organizations receiving federal funds is not made available in common languages, community media or gathering spaces. Even when linguistically-appropriate information is provided, clients face barriers in communicating with providers, understanding instructions or scheduling follow-up appointments. These are heightened by the unfamiliar complexity of many services as well as a continuing lack of culturally-congruent and culturally-responsive staff in many venues.

Transportation is a challenge, particularly for those without driver's licenses and others living in rural areas where there is no public transit. This is exacerbated by the fact that many immigrants are hourly workers who fear that taking time off will result in being fired. In addition to these constraints, internal factors from individual experiences, such as the migration journey to the U.S. itself and/or living in the shadows as an undocumented individual, play major roles in how people decide to approach and utilize services.

Immigrants, regardless of their reasons for leaving home, have a unique resilience, tenacity and courage. The stress of immigration, in addition to learning how to navigate a new society's social, political, economic, and cultural systems, demands a great deal.

VI. Immigrants and Covid-19: Disparate Impact

The 2020 onset of the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated long-standing racial and ethnic health disparities in the United States. These disparities have negative consequences on the health of Black and Latinx community members, many of whom live below the poverty line. The following focuses in particular on the Latinx population, as the data on Black disparities does not disaggregate U.S. born from foreign-born Black individuals.

It has been clear for decades that low socioeconomic status, high uninsurance rates and language/cultural barriers impede Latinx access to health care. Almost a quarter of Latinx individuals live below the poverty rate in the U.S. Among uninsured Virginians, 25% are Latinx according to the Virginia Health Care Foundation.

Latinxs comprise 16% of the U.S. population but only 7% of healthcare personnel. This gap, the lack of cultural competence education for doctors and nurses together with uneven and poorly enforced language access results in unequal care for many in the Latinx community.

These disparities are highlighted in recent COVID-19 data reported by the Washington Post through an analysis of racial and ethnic incidence by regional jurisdiction. Latinxs comprise 10% of the D.C., Maryland, and Virginia (DMV) population. Yet, overall, Latinxs account for 26% of the total DMV COVID-19 cases. Almost 30% of Latinxs report that they know someone who has died of the virus or complications related to the virus.

In Northern Virginia, Latinxs have been impacted by COVID-19 at an alarmingly disproportionate rate. Latinxs make up almost 17% of Fairfax County's population but 64% of its total COVID-19 cases in reporting that tracks disaggregated numbers. In Prince William County, Latinxs make up 24% of the total population but nearly 77% of the COVID-19 cases where ethnicity is known.

Apart from a lack of health insurance and cultural/linguistic barriers, there are additional social determinants that significantly impact Latinx well-being. COVID-19 has highlighted the negative influence of these intersecting factors. Latinxs are disproportionately represented in occupations that have been deemed "essential" during this crisis. Employment in poultry or meat processing plants, agriculture and sanitation (often in healthcare or assisted living facilities), frequently without proper protection and masks, exposes Latinxs on a daily basis. Dependence on hourly wages may prevent individuals from staying home, even without the legal requirement to work. Many Latinx individuals are forced by low-incomes and legal status to live in crowded, multi-generational housing where social distancing is not possible. Coupled with a lack of timely and linguistically-appropriate public information from local, regional and state agencies, these factors have resulted in a disproportionate impact from COVID-19.

VII: Conclusion

The preceding is a cursory overview. The opportunity to engage in community-based research will benefit the Office of New Americans immensely as it attempts to identify and address the pressing and emerging needs of immigrant communities in Virginia. Engaging in community-based research and outreach will allow the Office of New Americans to build community relationships which will in turn form the bedrock of the office's functionality, efficiency, and accountability.

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(Citation: APA 7th Edition)

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