

Pillars of the Northern Virginia Community: A Profile of Our Immigrant Neighbors



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Our neighbors who are immigrants are integral to Virginia's communities and economy. They move to Virginia for many of the same reasons as people born in other areas of the United States — job opportunities, good schools, and thriving communities. They also help create and maintain those aspects of our community. This has been made even more evident as the state economy and

labor market grapple with the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, in Virginia, 16% of all front-line, essential workers are immigrants.

Immigrant Virginians are, of course, important members of local communities across the commonwealth, contributing in ways that include and go beyond the purely economic. It is clear now more

than ever that immigrant and non-immigrant Virginians are interdependent, and it is important to understand and recognize immigrant residents and their contributions. The analysis below presents a profile of immigrants in the Northern Virginia region using the most recent available data, which is from before the 2020 recession and other challenges related to COVID-19.

Northern Virginia immigrants are diverse, long-standing pillars of the community

In the Northern Virginia region, there are about 728,700 immigrants. Foreign-born Virginians make up 25% of the region's residents — about twice the rate of the state's foreign-born population (13%) and higher than the national average of 14%. Seen another way, about two-thirds of all foreign-born Virginians live in Northern Virginia. And about half of immigrants in the region reside in Fairfax County and the independent cities of Falls Church and Fairfax that are within Fairfax County.

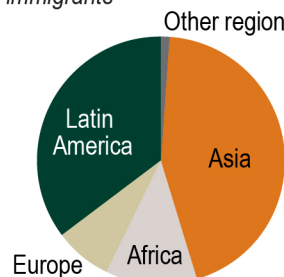
Northern Virginia's immigrant residents come from a variety of places. Almost 8 in 10 immigrants in the area were born in Asia or Latin America, with most being from Asia. El Salvador is the most common country of birth among area immigrants, accounting for 12% of all foreign-born residents. Following El Salvador in common countries of birth are India, Korea, Vietnam, and Ethiopia. Other common countries of birth are the Philippines, Bolivia, and China (excluding Taiwan and Hong Kong).

The race and ethnicity of immigrants is also diverse. More than 8 in 10 immigrants in the region are people of color. More specifically, around 36% self-report their race and ethnicity as non-Hispanic Asian or Pacific Islander, slightly greater than the third of immigrants who self-report as Hispanic and any race. Around 1 in 10 immigrants self-report as Black, slightly less than those who identify as white (16%).

Over half (56%) of foreign-born residents of Northern Virginia are naturalized citizens, slightly higher than the statewide and nationwide rates. This means that they have completed a lengthy process including several years of residence and passing a test on U.S. history, laws, and customs, among other requirements. And most area immigrants are not newcomers: about a quarter have resided in the area since before 1990, and half entered the United States between 1990 and 2009.

Diverse Origins

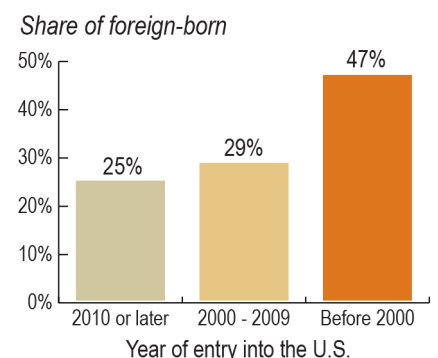
Regions of birth for Northern Virginia immigrants



Source: TCI analysis of ACS 2014-2018 5 year data

Been Here Awhile

About three quarters of immigrants living in Northern Virginia entered U.S. before 2010



Source: TCI analysis of ACS 2018 data

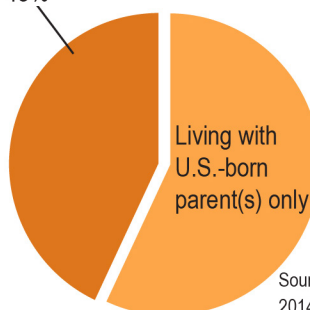
Methodology Note: These reports define the "U.S.-born" population as those who were U.S. citizens at birth, including those born in any of the 50 states, the District of Columbia, Guam, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands, and those born to U.S. citizens abroad. The term "foreign-born" and "immigrants" are used interchangeably within these reports to refer to those who were born abroad and were not U.S. citizens at birth.

Many people continue to choose Virginia as their new home, with about a quarter of immigrant residents moving to the after 2010. And while there are few foreign-born children in Northern Virginia, many native-born children have parents who were born outside of the U.S. About 43% of children in the area have at least one foreign-born parent, demonstrating that many Virginia immigrants put down roots, build families, and are raising tomorrow's community leaders and innovators.

Many Northern Virginia Kids Have Immigrant Parents

Share of Northern Virginia children ages 0-17

Living with at least one foreign-born parent: 43%



Source: TCI analysis of ACS 2014-2018 5 year data

Northern Virginia immigrants work in a variety of occupations & support the labor force

Immigrants play a large role in Virginia's labor force and economy. Area immigrants are primarily working age (age 20 through 59), and this is reflected in their labor force participation. About 73% of foreign-born immigrants in the region are employed — slightly higher than the 71% of U.S.-born area residents that are employed. And they work in a variety of occupations, including the region's biggest employment sectors. Of those who are employed, over 1 in 5 area immigrants work in service occupations, which covers a wide variety of work from home health aides to restaurant servers, dental assistants, and more.

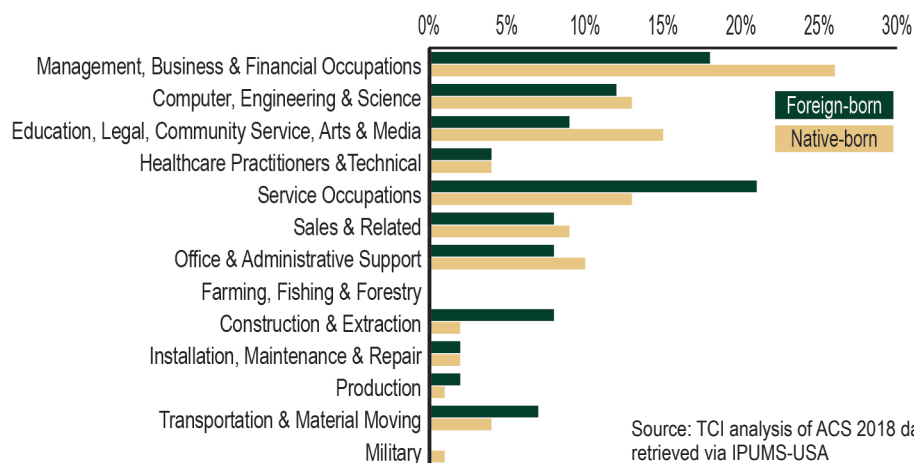
Many Northern Virginia immigrants work in "white-collar" occupations, rather than "blue-collar" occupations that typically require manual labor. Only about 20% of the working population works in what are considered blue-collar occupations. Following service occupations, 18%

of foreign-born immigrants work in management, business, and financial occupations. While it is the second most common sector of work that area immigrants are employed in, they are still underrepresented when compared to the native-born population. Around

26% of U.S.-born area residents make up that sector of the labor market, which tends to be highly-paid. Finally, many area immigrants work in computer, engineering, and science occupations (12%) and education, arts, and media occupations (9%).

Immigrants Work in the Region's Major Industries

Share of native-born and foreign-born employment in Northern Virginia



Source: TCI analysis of ACS 2018 data retrieved via IPUMS-USA

While well educated, earnings lag for area immigrants

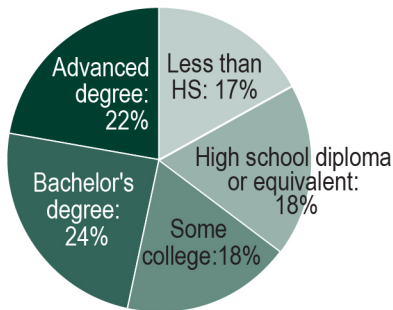
Many area immigrants are also well educated. Two-thirds of the foreign-born population in Northern Virginia have attained at least some college education or higher, and almost half have a bachelor's degree or a professional degree — far higher rates than for the

foreign-born population nationally. In fact, a higher share of foreign-born area residents have attained high-school diplomas or equivalent than their U.S.-born counterparts. Yet even with higher graduation rates, immigrant residents are more likely to have only attained some

(and not completed) high school than U.S.-born residents. This may signal that greater efforts should be made to connect students with educational services that meet their needs. Now that in-state college tuition is available regardless of citizenship status, more students who are immigrants

Many Immigrants in Region Have Advanced Educations

Highest level of education attained by foreign-born residents



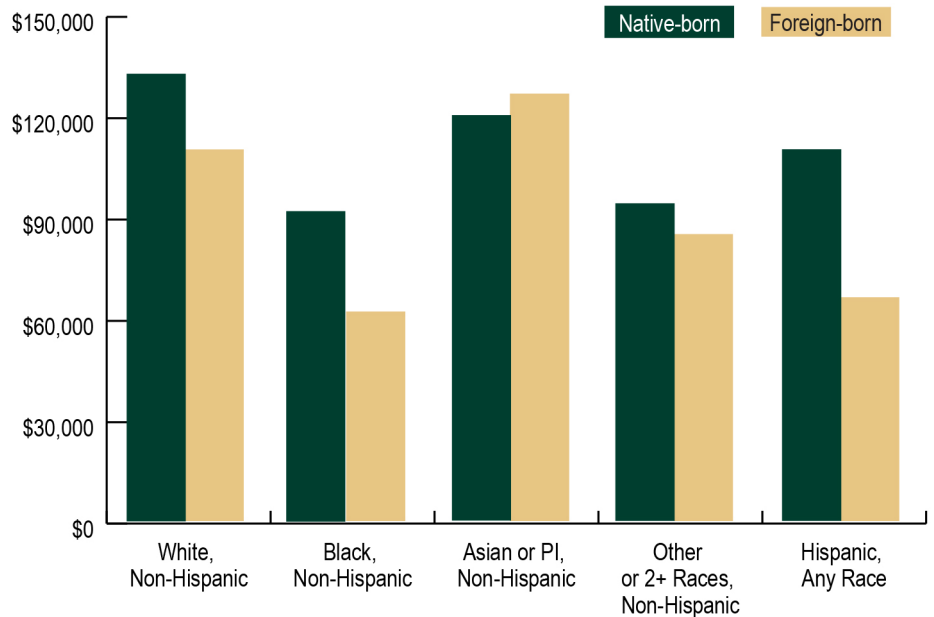
Source: ACS 2018, via IPUMS-USA

may feel that a high school diploma offers a realistic path forward to college and be able to access more affordable higher education which in turn will increase the education levels of Virginia's workforce.

Most immigrants in the region also speak English fluently. Around 60% either speak only English or speak English "very well", which has likely enabled their success in education and the labor force. The rate at which area immigrants speak English "very well" is almost twice as high than for the nation overall. However, many are still learning — about 4 in 10 immigrants in the region speak English at levels lower than "very well", and it is important to recognize their needs.

Median Household Income for Northern Virginia Immigrants

Incomes are much lower for some immigrants of color



Source: TCI analysis of ACS 2018 data, retrieved via IPUMS-USA

Despite being well educated and participating in the labor force at a greater level, median household incomes for immigrants in Northern Virginia (\$91,000) lag behind that of U.S.-born residents in the region (\$124,000). These overall high incomes are likely driven by high employment and education levels in the region, although they differ when data is broken out by race. While the median household income for white, non-Hispanic immigrants reaches to

almost \$110,000, incomes are much lower for some immigrants of color. Median income for immigrants who are Black — about \$62,000 — is nearly half that of immigrants who are non-Hispanic and white. Median income for immigrants who are Latinx and any race are slightly higher at \$66,200. These incomes may present challenges for some immigrants of color to meet the high cost of living in Northern Virginia.

Policy options at the state level can help address barriers to housing and health

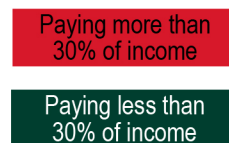
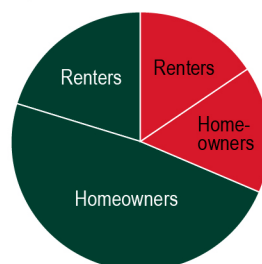
Housing costs a burden particularly for immigrant households

Housing costs in the region are one of the major challenges for all area residents, and particularly for immigrant families. Nearly a third of all foreign-born area residents pay more than 30% of their income towards housing costs, a share that the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development defines as a cost burden. Looking at U.S.-born area residents, around 22% pay more than 30% of their incomes towards housing costs. While it is

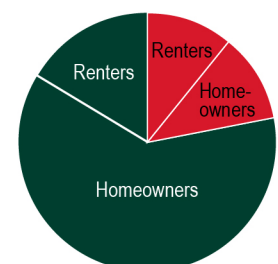
Housing Costs Create Challenges in Northern Virginia

Nearly a third of all foreign-born area residents are considered cost burdened when it comes to housing costs, compared to 22% of U.S.-born area residents.

Foreign-born residents



U.S.-born residents



Note: This analysis excludes households with zero housing cost, zero income, negative income, and/or housing costs above 100% of income.

Source: TCI analysis of ACS 2018 via IPUMS-USA

clear that affordable housing is a challenge for all in the area, foreign-born residents experience more of a burden.

Policymakers can take immediate and long-term steps to address housing challenges

There are a number of policy options that would alleviate some of this housing cost burden. In the short term, and more specifically during the upcoming special session, legislators should restore the funding increases made toward housing-related programs, which were temporarily suspended in response to the economic crises brought upon by the COVID-19 pandemic. This includes the Housing Trust Fund, which provides low-cost loans for affordable rental and homeownership opportunities, eviction defense/diversion and affordable housing pilot programs, and increases in permanent supportive housing. In addition to reenacting these new funds, lawmakers should make continued and increased investments in the Housing Trust Fund and related housing programs in order to make sure that basic needs are met for more people in Virginia.

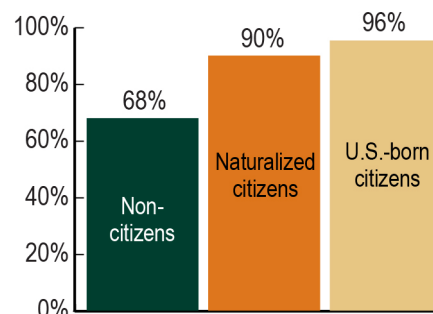
Reducing barriers to new construction of high-density, affordable, and mixed-income housing could also lower housing costs for both immigrant-born and U.S.-born households. Inclusionary zoning and zoning reform policies — the latter of which was proposed in the most recent legislative session — seek to require developers to sell or rent a portion of a residential housing development to people who have lower incomes and allow duplexes in areas zoned for only single-family homes in order to make affordable housing easier to build. These policies, alongside enforcement and strengthening nondiscrimination statutes, will help make sure families are not turned away from a home because of their race, nationality, or immigration status and would help alleviate housing challenges in the Northern Virginia region.

Lack of health coverage a concern, particularly for non-citizens

Access to health care coverage is another challenge for some in the region. While 95% of U.S.-born area residents are insured, only 80% of all foreign-born

Health Coverage Rates Lag for Immigrants

Share of Northern Virginians with any form of health insurance



Source: TCI analysis of ACS 2018 data

area residents have health insurance. This trend is even more pronounced for area immigrants that are non-citizens, who have even lower rates of health coverage than the naturalized foreign-born population. Only half as many non-citizens have public health coverage than U.S.-born area residents. And nearly one-third — 101,569 area residents — of all non-citizens in the region have no health coverage at all.

Lawmakers can remove barriers, make intentional choices to support communities

Although the number of uninsured non-citizens is down from 2014, it is clear that coverage gaps remain. Access to affordable health care coverage in the area was a challenge well before the COVID-19 pandemic, and it may be just one reason why COVID-19 is impacting residents of the region who are Latinx and/or Black at higher rates. Policymakers should make sure that funding to eliminate barriers, such as the “40 quarter” rule, is fully restored during the upcoming special legislative session in order to address

some of the health care access challenges. And additional, intentional health care policy choices should be made that would support immigrants and people of color during this especially challenging moment and beyond.

Northern Virginia’s residents who are immigrants — and immigrants all across the state — are key members of our communities and contributors to our economy. As mostly long-time residents of the region, they have put down roots

and have often found success. However, addressing challenges faced by many in the immigrant community in Northern Virginia — such as lower incomes, lack of health insurance, and language barriers — is critical to ensure the well-being of our communities and to build a Virginia that works for all of us.

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