ANALYSIS: Latino and Asian American/Pacific Islander Immigrants Are Critical Contributors to Virginia’s Economy

Important challenges exist for each community, according to a pair of new reports

RICHMOND, VA – Latino immigrants and Asian American/Pacific Islander (AAPI) immigrants work in every major Virginia industry, and many are entrepreneurs, according to a set of new reports released today by The Commonwealth Institute, an economic policy research organization based in Richmond.

Over 19,000 foreign-born Latino and Hispanic Virginia workers and over 20,000 foreign-born AAPI Virginia workers are operating their own businesses. Together, Latino/Hispanic and AAPI immigrants account for about one in every eight Virginia entrepreneurs.

“Virginia’s immigrant communities are very diverse, but one thing we see in common is that the majority of foreign-born Virginians are in their prime working years and are currently working,” says Institute President Michael Cassidy. “This means that rather than being in school or retired, most immigrants in each of these groups is currently in their peak years of economic contributions.”

The majority of Virginia’s immigrant workers and their families live in Northern Virginia, but AAPI and Latino immigrants also make up important parts of communities in other areas of the state, including the Hampton Roads, Richmond, Harrisonburg, and Winchester metro areas.

Both AAPI and Latino immigrants also face challenges around access to health insurance, housing costs, and language barriers. But there are also some differences between AAPI and Latino immigrants in terms of income and education.

“While most Asian American and Pacific Islander immigrants living in Virginia are very well educated and are rewarded with high incomes, Latino and Hispanic immigrants often have lower incomes, even though they also have high rates of employment,” says Cassidy. “By looking separately at the experiences of AAPI and Latino immigrants, we’ve been able to identify some of the key challenges facing each group as well as some potential avenues for public policy to help address these challenges.”

Among the key findings in the report on Latino and Hispanic immigrants:
There are more foreign-born and native-born Latino Virginians than there were in 2007, and growth in the number of Latino Virginians accounts for 38 percent of Virginia’s total population growth between 2007 and 2013.

Latin American immigrants living in Virginia are from a wide array of countries. El Salvador is the most common country of origin, but even Salvadorans account for just 27 percent of all Virginians who were born in Latin America.

Two-thirds of foreign-born Latino Virginians have been in the United States for more than a decade, and about 30 percent are U.S. citizens.

But many immigrant Latino-headed Virginia households have relatively low incomes and more than half of immigrant Latino Virginians have no health coverage.

Among the key findings in the report on Asian American/Pacific Islander immigrants:

- India is the most common country of origin for Virginians who were born in Asia, but no country accounts for more than 20 percent of all Virginia immigrants from Asia.
- More than 60 percent of foreign-born Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) Virginians are naturalized U.S. citizens.
- Nearly 1 in 10 foreign-born AAPI workers in Virginia are running their own businesses, compared to less than 1 in 13 non-immigrant workers in Virginia.
- Almost 1 in 4 households headed by foreign-born AAPI Virginians has an income over $150,000, and another 21 percent have a household income between $100,000 and $150,000.
- But despite high incomes, 3 out of every 10 of these households are paying very high shares of their incomes toward housing.

“The fact is immigrants bring critical experiences and skills to our economy and communities,” says Cassidy. “We know that our economy and communities are stronger when everyone can thrive, and that includes people who were born in other countries but who live here now. We need to make sure public policy in Virginia is working to help us all succeed, no matter what we look like or where we were born.”


NOTE: This analysis builds on prior work by The Commonwealth Institute about all immigrant workers in Virginia. That report can be found here.

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The Commonwealth Institute for Fiscal Analysis provides credible, independent, and accessible information and analyses of fiscal and economic issues with particular attention to the impacts on low- and moderate-income persons. Our products inform fiscal and budget policy debates and contribute to sound decisions that improve the well-being of individuals, communities and Virginia as a whole. Visit www.thecommonwealthinstitute.org for more information.