

# Vital for Prosperity

## The facts about immigrants and their contributions to the central Virginia economy

By Laura Goren and Michael Cassidy

Central Virginia's 81,000 immigrants make critical contributions to the region's economy and are an integral part of family life and communities. Foreign-born residents make up 8 percent of the region's residents. Although this is a smaller share than in Virginia or the United States as a whole, the region's immigrants, like their non-immigrant peers, are generally well-educated, have high levels of employment and are well-paid.

Contrary to some popular misconceptions about immigrants, central Virginia's foreign-born residents are from a wide variety of places. Three-quarters of them were born in Latin America or Asia, but there are also immigrants in the region from Europe, Africa, and Canada. India is the most common country of birth among area immigrants, accounting for 11 percent of all foreign-born residents, followed by Mexico and El Salvador.

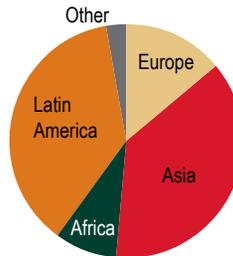
Central Virginia immigrants are most likely to live in Henrico County, where about 4 in 10 of them live, followed by Chesterfield County, home to about 3 in 10 immigrants. Henrico and Chesterfield are also the largest localities in central Virginia.



In this report, the Central Virginia region is defined as including the following localities: Hanover, Powhatan, Goochland, New Kent, King William, Charles City, Henrico, and Chesterfield counties; and the city of Richmond.

### Diverse Origins

Regions of birth for central Virginia immigrants



Source: American Community Survey, 2008-2013

Most foreign-born residents of the region have been in the United States for many years. More than a quarter entered the country before 1990, and half have been in the U.S. for more than 15 years.

Forty percent of foreign-born central Virginians are naturalized U.S. citizens, a lengthy process that requires many years of legal residence and passing a test on U.S. history, laws, and customs, among other requirements. This rate is similar to that of all foreign-born Virginians.

Immigrants in central Virginia are primarily working age. As a result, there are relatively few foreign-born children in central Virginia. However, many working-age immigrant Virginians have children who are native-born Americans, indicating that most immigrants in the area have strong ties to the community. Within the region, 33,000 children have at least one foreign-born parent. That's about 1 in 7 kids, a lower share than is typical in Virginia and the country as a whole.

Seven out of every 10 foreign-born adult residents of central Virginia are working, a higher rate than that of non-immigrant

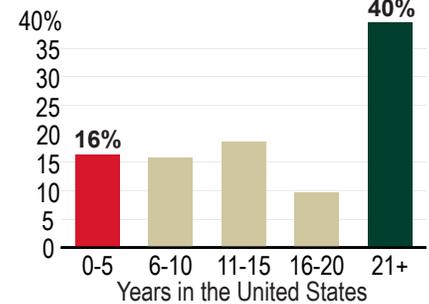


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### Been Here Awhile

Length of residence in the United States among immigrants living in central Virginia

Share of foreign-born



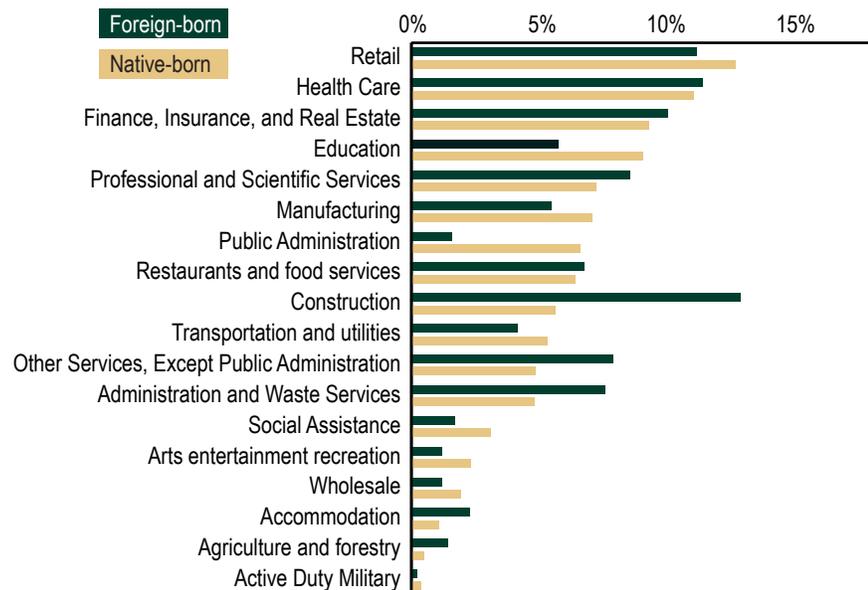
Source: ACS 2013 data via IPUMS-USA

residents of the region. This includes more than 4,100 self-employed workers, which is more than 1 out of every 10 entrepreneurs in the region. And immigrant residents, like their non-immigrant peers, work in a variety of fields, including all of the region's biggest industries. However, immigrant workers are over-represented in construction jobs and under-represented in public employment.

Many foreign-born adult residents of central Virginia are very well educated. As with non-immigrants in the region, more than 1 in 3 has a bachelor's degree, and 17 percent have an advanced degree, about the same education level as non-immigrants in the area. The share of foreign-born residents of central Virginia with at least a college degree is far higher than the typical levels in the United States as a whole. However, foreign-born residents of the region are also more likely than non-immigrant adults in the region to lack a high school diploma or equivalent.

## Immigrants Work in the Region's Major Industries

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



Source: IPUMS-USA

foreign-born residents in central Virginia lives in a household whose income is under the poverty threshold, a higher rate than that of non-immigrant residents of the region.

Some economic challenges in central Virginia can affect even higher-income immigrant families.

Housing costs, although not as extreme as in Northern Virginia, are one of the major challenges for some immigrant households in the region.

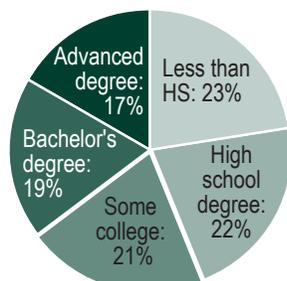
A majority of immigrant-headed households in central Virginia are homeowners, but they are less likely than other households to own their homes free and clear. And immigrant homeowners are more likely than other central Virginians to be paying a very high share of their income toward housing costs. Twenty-three percent of immigrant-headed homeowners spend more than 35 percent of their income on housing costs, compared to 16 percent of non-immigrant-headed households.

Forty-two percent of immigrant-headed households in the region are renters, compared to 35 percent of other households. This is important partly because renters are more likely than other households to face high housing costs as a share of their income. More than 1 in 3 immigrant-headed renter households pay more than 35 percent of their income toward housing.

And although foreign-born residents of central Virginia fare well on most measures of economic well-being and stability, they are far less likely than non-immigrant residents to have health insurance. While 90 percent of non-immigrant residents of the region have health insurance, only 65 percent of foreign-born residents have coverage. The problem is particularly acute for non-citizen immigrants, who have

## Many Immigrants in Region Have Advanced Educations

Share of Foreign Born in Central Virginia



Source: ACS 2013, via IPUMS-USA

As might be expected based on the high levels of education among most immigrants in the region and the large number who were born in India, where English is among the official languages, the majority of immigrants in central Virginia speak English. One in 5 foreign-born residents of central Virginia speaks only English and another 37 percent speak English “very well.”

These rates are higher than those of all

foreign-born residents of the United States and contribute to the employment success of immigrants in the region. But it is important to also consider the needs of the 4 in 10 foreign-born residents of the region who do not speak English at least “very well.” Services like English language instruction and bilingual public information can help non-English-speaking adults build their skills and take a bigger role in the area’s economy and civic activities.

Driven in part by high employment and education levels, both immigrant-headed and other households in central Virginia have relatively high household incomes. Forty percent of the region’s households headed by immigrants have incomes above \$75,000 a year, a similar share as that of native-born households in the region.

However, as with non-immigrant households there are some who are struggling. About 1 in 5 immigrant workers in the region makes less than \$10.10 an hour, a similar share as that of non-immigrant workers. And about 1 in 6

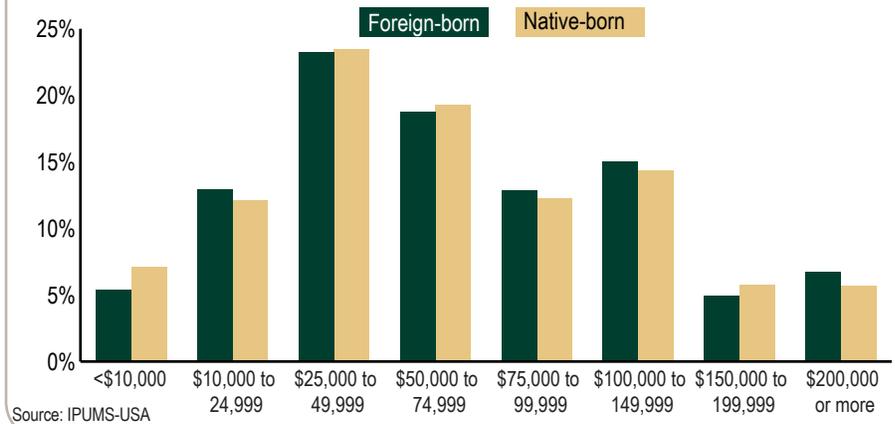
very limited access to public coverage, but even naturalized U.S. citizens have lower coverage rates than their non-immigrant peers.

The differences in public coverage by immigration status are particularly stark—25 percent of non-immigrant residents of central Virginia have public health insurance coverage compared to 22 percent of naturalized U.S. citizens and 7 percent of non-citizens in the region. Half of non-citizens—22,000 area residents—have no coverage. Although this data was gathered before the major coverage expansions of the Affordable Care Act, non-citizens are ineligible for many of those expansions. As a result, many of them are likely to remain uninsured.

Addressing the challenges such as housing affordability and health coverage that are disproportionately affecting immigrants in central Virginia can help make sure all of Virginia’s immigrant workers are able to focus on putting their education and skills to work improving the future of their families and our communities. And it can help ensure all of the region’s children—no matter where their parents were born—have the stability and security that is so important to allowing them to achieve their highest potential. When we build a region that works for all of us, we all win.

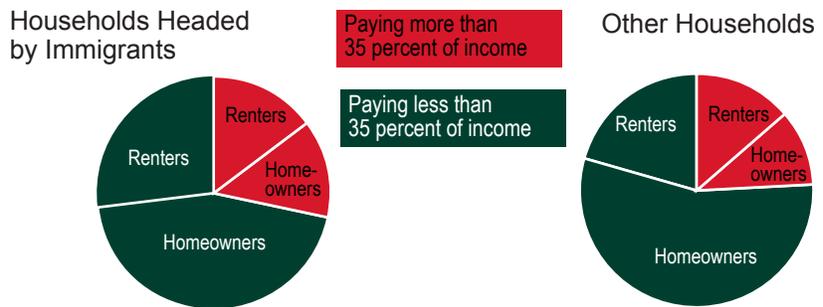
## Immigrant and Non-Immigrant Households Generally Have Similar Incomes

Share of households in central Virginia by income



## Housing Costs Create Challenges in Central Virginia

Share paying more than 35 percent of their income toward housing



### Methodology Note

Data for this report comes from 2008-2013 American Community Survey tables retrieved via American Factfinder and 2013 American Community Survey microdata analyzed via IPUMS-USA, University of Minnesota, [www.ipums.org](http://www.ipums.org).

**Forty percent of the region’s households headed by immigrants have incomes above \$75,000 a year.**

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Part of the analysis in this report relies on data extracted from the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS), Version 5.0, developed by the University of Minnesota. Where used, we have referenced this source as IPUMS.

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