

# Vital for Prosperity

## The facts about immigrants and their contributions to the economy of the Shenandoah Valley

By Laura Goren and Michael Cassidy

The Shenandoah Valley's 26,000 immigrants make critical contributions to the region's economy and are an integral part of family life and communities. But like other residents of the region too many struggle with low wages, lack of access to health insurance, and high rates of poverty.

Most foreign-born residents of the Shenandoah Valley region were born in Latin America, but there are also many immigrants in the region from Asia and Europe. Mexico is the most common country of birth, but no single country accounts for more than one-quarter of the region's foreign-born residents.

Immigrants in the Shenandoah Valley region have mostly been in the United States for many years. Almost 4 in 10 have been in the U.S. for more than 20 years, and more than half have been in the U.S. for more than 15 years.

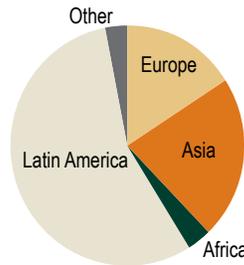
About 1 in 3 foreign-born residents of the region are naturalized U.S. citizens, a



In this report, the Shenandoah Valley region is defined as including the following localities: Rockingham, Highland, Bath, Augusta, Rockbridge, Clarke, Frederick, Page, Shenandoah, and Warren counties; and the cities of Harrisonburg, Staunton, Waynesboro, Lexington, Buena Vista, and Winchester.

### Diverse Origins

Regions of birth for Shenandoah Valley immigrants



Source: American Community Survey, 2008-2013

lengthy process that requires many years of legal residence and passing a test on U.S. history, laws, and customs, among other requirements.

Immigrants in the Shenandoah Valley are primarily working age, and there are relatively few foreign-born children in the Shenandoah Valley. However, many of the region's immigrant workers have U.S.-born children: 14,000 children in the region have at least one foreign-born parent. That's about 1 in 8 kids. This is actually a lower share of all children than is typical in Virginia and the country as a whole.

The high share of immigrant residents who are working-age adults helps balance the large number of elderly native-born residents of the region.

As we would expect, most adults in the Shenandoah Valley—immigrants and non-immigrants—are working. More than 6 in 10 foreign-born adult residents of the Shenandoah Valley region are employed, a slightly higher rate than that of non-immigrant residents of the region.

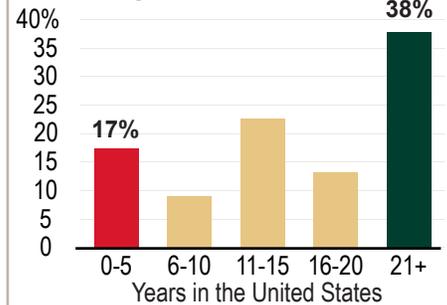


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### Been Here Awhile

Length of residence in the United States among immigrants living in the Shenandoah Valley

Share of foreign-born



Source: IPUMS-USA

Their higher employment rate is likely partly due to the lower number of retirement-age immigrants.

Among the Shenandoah Valley's immigrant workers are almost 2,000 who are self-employed. That's about one out of every 11 entrepreneurs in the area.

And immigrant residents of the region, like their non-immigrant peers, work in a variety of fields, including all of the region's most important industries. Immigrant workers are somewhat over-represented in manufacturing and in typically high-skill professional and scientific services jobs. Just 3 percent of immigrant workers in the region are in the agriculture and forestry sector, a similar share to the 2 percent of other workers in the region in that sector. However, immigrant workers are underrepresented in public employment.

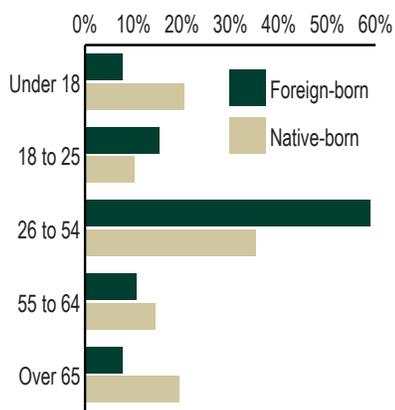
The lower-than-expected share of immigrant workers who are in the agricultural sector may be partly the result of undercounting, but even generous assumptions about undercounting do

not result in agricultural workers being a significant share of all immigrant workers in the region.

Foreign-born adult residents of the Shenandoah Valley have education levels that are closer to national averages than to the typical high levels in Virginia as a whole. Eighteen percent have a bachelor's degree, slightly lower than the 23 percent rate for non-immigrant residents of the region, and 7 percent have an advanced degree. Three in 10 foreign-born residents of the region do not have a high school degree or equivalent, a much higher rate than the one in seven native-born residents in the valley who does not have a high school degree.

### Working Age

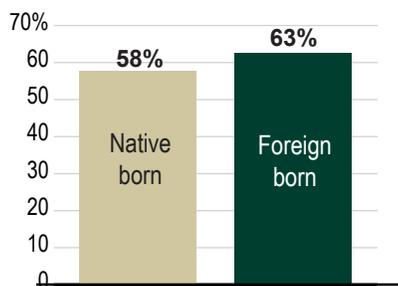
Share of foreign-born and native-born residents of Shenandoah Valley by age



Source: IPUMS-USA

### Most Valley Residents Work

Share of adults who are working



Source: IPUMS-USA

Despite high employment levels, most immigrant-headed households in the Shenandoah Valley have relatively low household incomes. Eighty-two percent of the region's households headed by immigrants have incomes below \$75,000 a year, compared to 69 percent of native-born households in the region. And about 3 in 10 immigrant workers in the region make less than \$10.10 an hour, a somewhat higher share than that of non-immigrant workers.

As a result of their relatively low incomes, almost 1 in 5 foreign-born residents in the Shenandoah Valley area lives in poverty, a higher rate than that of non-immigrant residents of the region and similar to the national average for foreign-born residents of the United States.

A majority of immigrants in the Shenandoah Valley area speak English very well—30 percent—or exclusively—23 percent. These rates are similar to those of all foreign-born residents of the United States, but it is important to consider the

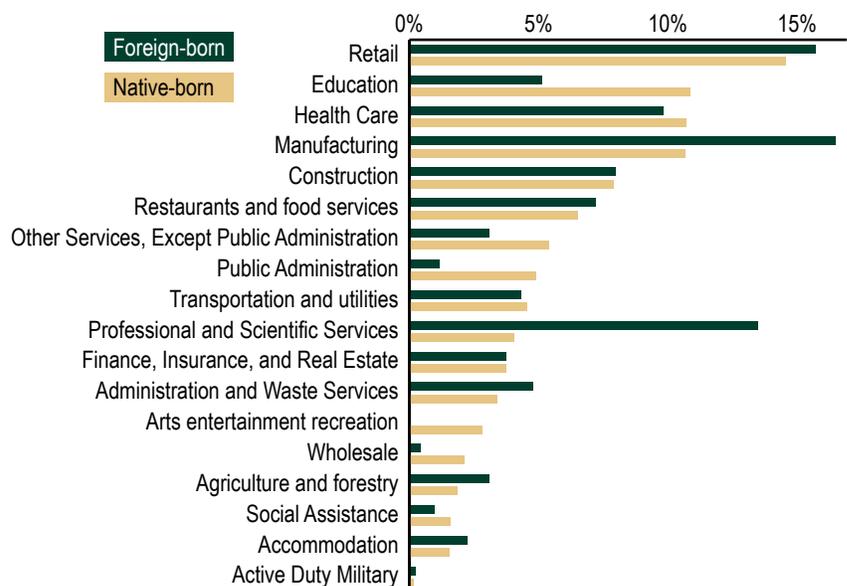
needs of the 48 percent of foreign-born residents of the region who do not speak English at least “very well.” Services like English language instruction and bilingual public information can help non-English speaking adults build their skills and take a bigger role in the area's economy and its civic life.

Despite relatively low incomes, a majority of immigrant-headed households in the Shenandoah Valley, like most non-immigrant households in the area, are homeowners. About 1 in 5 immigrant-headed homeowner households in the valley pays a large share of its income—more than 35 percent—toward housing costs, a similar rate to that of other households in the region.

Although the challenges faced by households who are paying large shares of their income toward housing are important to consider, the rate in the Valley is much lower than the rate in more urban areas of the state.

### Immigrants Work in the Region's Major Industries

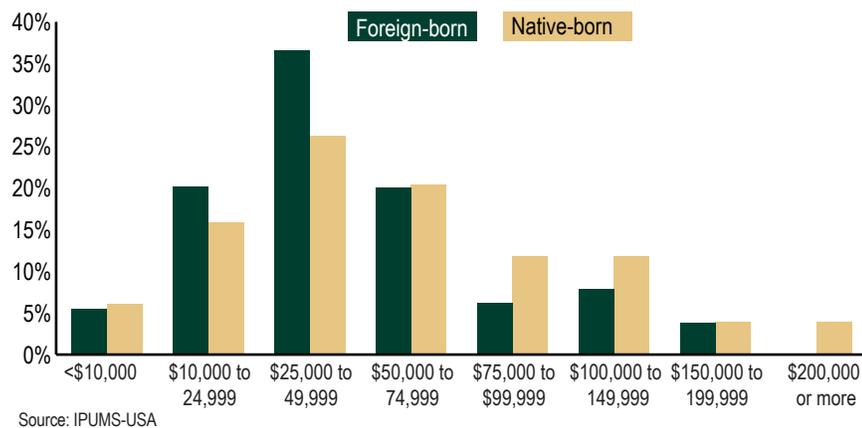
Share of native-born and foreign-born employment in the Shenandoah Valley



Source: IPUMS-USA

## Immigrant Households Tend to Have Lower Incomes

Share of households in the Shenandoah Valley by income



Both immigrant and non-immigrant-headed households who rent their homes are more likely than other households to face high housing costs as a share of their income. Twenty-six percent of immigrant-headed renters in the region pay more than 35 percent of their income toward housing. However, this rate is lower than that of non-immigrant renter households, 37 percent of whom pay a high share of their income toward housing. As with costs for homeowners, the share of immigrant renters in the valley who pay very high shares of their income toward housing is lower than that of Virginia as a whole.

One major area where immigrant families in the valley differ from their non-immigrant peers is access to health insurance. While 88 percent of non-immigrant residents of the region have health insurance, only 62 percent of foreign-born residents have health coverage. The problem is driven by low rates of coverage for non-citizen immigrants, who have low rates of private health insurance and very limited access to public coverage.

The differences in public coverage by immigration status are particularly stark—27 percent of non-immigrant residents of the region have public health insurance coverage compared to 24 percent of naturalized U.S. citizens and 7 percent of non-citizens in the region. Half of non-citizens—8,500 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 the coverage expansions. As a result, many non-citizens are likely to remain uninsured.

Although challenges exist, in many ways immigrant residents of the Shenandoah Valley are similar to their non-immigrant peers—most own their homes, most speak English, most working-age adults are employed, and most have lived in the United States for many years. Acknowledging the important contributions of these workers and the integral place of immigrant families in the valley's communities is not just the right thing to do, it's the only sensible path.

### Methodology Note

Data for this report comes from 2008-2013 American Community Survey (ACS) tables retrieved via American Factfinder and 2013 ACS microdata analyzed via IPUMS-USA, University of Minnesota, [www.ipums.org](http://www.ipums.org). Because the ACS survey is administered throughout the year, its estimates can be considered the average characteristics of an area over the course of a year, including households that may reside in the area for at least two months but not for the entire year. However, ACS data likely undercounts undocumented immigrants by about 10 percent and, more significantly, may undercount rural Latino farmworkers. This report does not adjust for those potential undercounts because there is not sufficient information to provide accurate adjustments.

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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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