



THE
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*Building a Prosperous
Virginia for All*

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Immigrant Entrepreneurs Vital to “Main Street” Businesses, Strong Communities

Immigrants are over one-third of Virginia Main Street business owners, yet only make up 12 percent of Virginia’s population, according to a new report by The Commonwealth Institute for Fiscal Analysis.

Main Street businesses provide for a variety of everyday needs and generally have a physical storefront.

“From grocery stores to gas stations, Main Street businesses are the cornerstones of Virginia’s communities,” says Laura Goren, research director of The Commonwealth Institute and coauthor of the report released today. “Support for these businesses not only helps the Virginians who own them, but also strengthens our communities. Main Street businesses can bring in new customers and be the spark needed to revive a struggling area.”

Foreign-born Virginians’ role in Main Street businesses is noteworthy on a national scale. Virginia’s immigrant-owned share of Main Street businesses is 5 percentage points above the national average, a difference that has grown in the past decade.

Relative to their share of the population, immigrants’ substantial presence in Virginia Main Street businesses can be attributed to a couple of factors. Foreign-born Virginians are more likely than those born in the U.S. to be between the ages of 25 and 44, which are prime working years. Furthermore, foreign-born workers in Virginia are more likely than U.S.-born workers to be running their own incorporated business.

This entrepreneurial spirit has been particularly evident in recent years. Since 2000, the share of Virginia’s Main Street businesses owned by immigrants has increased by 11 percentage points.

Among the key findings of this report:

- While most immigrant Main Street business owners in Virginia are people of color, 9 out of 10 U.S.-born Main Street business owners are white, six percent are Black, two percent are Hispanic and one percent are Asian.
- The prominent role of foreign-born Main Street business owners is particularly evident in Virginia's largest metro areas. In the Richmond metro area, immigrants are 7 percent of the population, yet comprise 34 percent of Main Street business owners. In the Virginia Beach metro area, immigrants are 6 percent of the population and 31 percent of Main Street business owners.
- In the Washington, DC metro area, which includes the District of Columbia and parts of Maryland, immigrants' share of the population is 22 percent and their share of Main Street business owners is 56 percent.

“What this study shows is the important role immigrants play in building thriving businesses that serve our local communities,” says Goren. “It’s important to support these Main Street businesses and the Virginians who run them.”

The full report can be found at www.thecommonwealthinstitute.org.

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About The Commonwealth Institute

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.