

New Americans in Kent County

A Snapshot of the Demographic and Economic Contributions of Immigrants in the County¹



POPULATION GROWTH



Immigrant share of the population, 2016

Between 2011 and 2016, the county's population grew by **4.6%**.

The immigrant population grew by **15.3%**.

Total population

601,797 → 629,309



Immigrant population

43,532 → 50,176



Share of total population growth in the county attributed to immigrants.

In 2016, **358,780** commuters worked in Kent County. Of these,

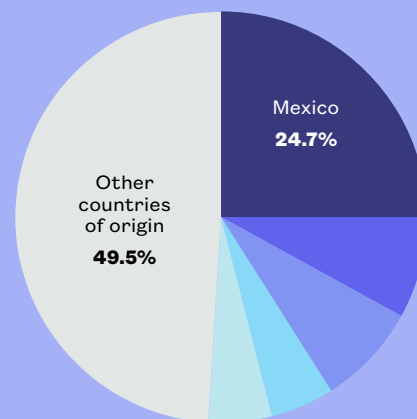
7.8%, or **27,824**, were foreign-born.

Number of immigrants living in Kent County in 2016:

50,176

Top five countries of origin for immigrants living in the county²:

- 1 Mexico 24.7%
- 2 Guatemala..... 8.3%
- 3 Vietnam7.8%
- 4 Bosnia..... 4.9%
- 5 Canada..... 4.8%



SPENDING POWER & TAX CONTRIBUTIONS

In 2016, foreign-born residents in Kent County contributed **\$3.3B** to the area's GDP.³

Given their income, immigrants contributed significantly to state and local taxes, including property, sales, and excise taxes levied by state or municipal governments.

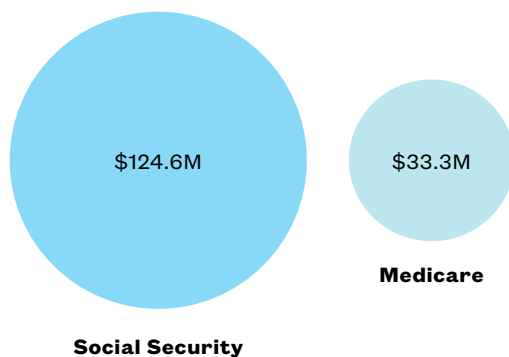
Amount earned by immigrant households in 2016: nearly **\$1.3B**

\$219.4M
went to federal taxes.⁴

\$101.5M
went to state and local taxes.⁵

Leaving them with **\$943.7M** in spending power.

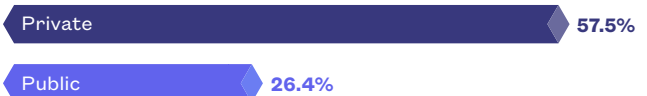
Immigrants in Kent County also support federal social programs. In 2016, they contributed **\$124.6M** to Social Security and **\$33.3M** to Medicare.



26.3% of immigrants in the county received Medicare or Medicaid, compared with **31.3%** of U.S.-born residents in 2016.



About **57.5%** of immigrants had private healthcare coverage, while **26.4%** had public healthcare coverage.

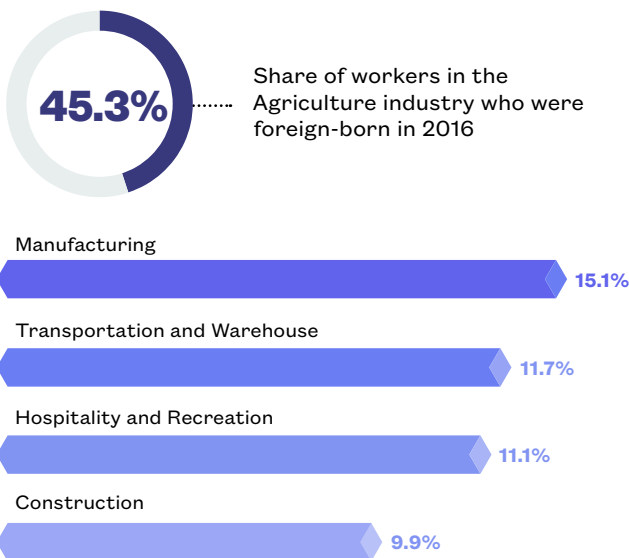


LABOR FORCE GROWTH

Although the foreign-born made up **8.0%** of the county’s overall population, they represented **9.9%** of its working-age* population, **9.4%** of its employed labor force, and **9.9%** of its STEM** workers in 2016.

* Working-age refers to people ages 16-64 years old
** Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math

Immigrants play a critical role in several **key industries** in the county. This includes:



Because of the role immigrants play in the workforce helping companies keep jobs on U.S. soil, we estimate that, by 2016, immigrants living in the county had helped create or preserve

2,308

local manufacturing jobs that would have otherwise vanished or moved elsewhere.⁶

SPOTLIGHT ON

Sonal & Ramesh Patel

Owners, *India Market*

When Sonal and Ramesh Patel built a house in Cascade, in southeast Grand Rapids, in 2011, they quickly noticed something missing: an Asian grocer on that side of town.

The couple, from a small town in Gujarat, in western India, had been in West Michigan since 2004, when Ramesh was hired by a rural clinic unable to find a physical therapist applicant in the United States. His wife, Sonal, an electrical engineer, followed a few months later. When her engineering credits didn’t transfer, she earned an associate’s degree in nuclear medicine technology while raising three young children and managing a hotel.

And although the latter was her only business experience, she couldn’t help but to start looking for a retail space after their move to Cascade. “I grew up in a business family,” says Sonal. “And somehow my destiny came back to that.”

The couple found a space on 28th Street SE, installed new flooring, painted, and built shelves, all themselves, and opened India Market in 2015. Today about 40 percent of customers are non-Asians, and they have a lot of questions. “They want to learn Indian cooking, but they don’t know what to buy,” she says. “Even though I try to explain, they were looking around going, ‘Is there an Indian restaurant around this place?’”

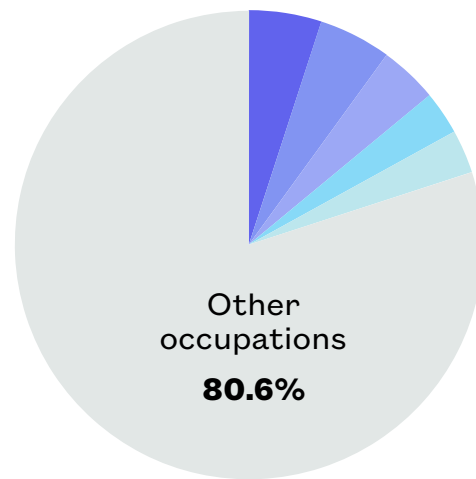
When the business next door closed, Sonal knew immediately what to do: She and Ramesh opened an Indian restaurant. They hired a Nepalese chef who grew up in Bombay, and prepares authentic, mostly northern, Indian dishes. Indian Masala now has seven employees; India Market has two. After the restaurant opened, in early 2017, sales at the grocery store increased by 25 percent. “Whoever comes for the restaurant, they want to try the food and cook and they go to the store. And whoever comes to the store wants to try the food and so goes to the restaurant,” Sonal says.

Sonal enjoys being able to give back to Grand Rapids. “The community, my neighbors, everyone has been super supportive,” she says. “I never felt like an outsider. That’s what I love about the Grand Rapids community.”

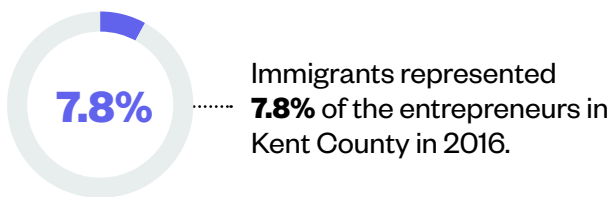
LABOR FORCE GROWTH CON'T.

Immigrants tend to concentrate in these **occupations** in the county:

- 1 Assemblers and Fabricators 4.5%
- 2 Agricultural Workers 4.5%
- 3 Production Workers 3.9%
- 4 Cooks 3.3%
- 5 Packers and Packagers 3.2%



ENTREPRENEURSHIP



1,971 immigrant entrepreneurs earned **\$47.6M** in business income.

While **8.2%** of the U.S.-born population in Kent County were self-employed, **6.7%** of the foreign-born population worked for their own businesses.



In 2012, African American-owned businesses in the county generated

\$132.6M
in sales and paid
727
employees.



Asian American-owned businesses generated

\$492.2M
in sales and paid
2,941
employees.



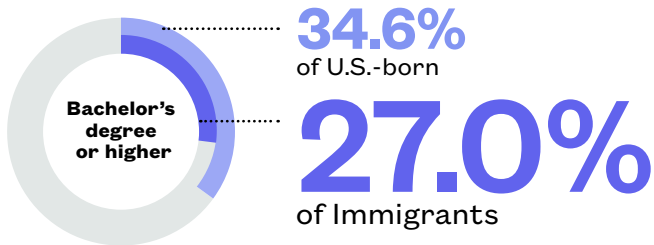
Hispanic American-owned businesses generated

\$326.7M
in sales and paid
2,139
employees.⁷

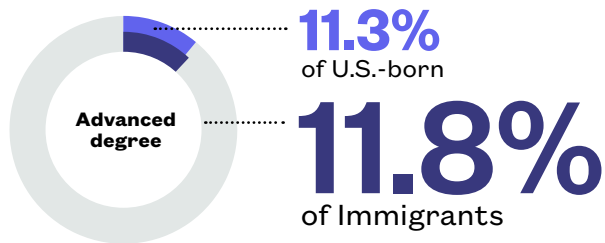


EDUCATION

Share of the Kent County population aged 25 and over with a **bachelor's degree or higher** in 2016:



Share of the Kent County population aged 25 and over with an **advanced degree*** in 2016:



* Master's degree, professional degree, or doctorate

910

students who were enrolled in colleges and universities in the county during the fall of 2015 were temporary residents.⁸ International students supported

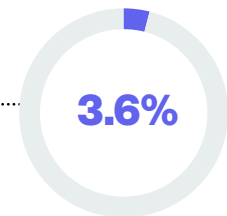
151

local jobs and spent

\$25.2M

in the 2016-2017 academic year.⁹

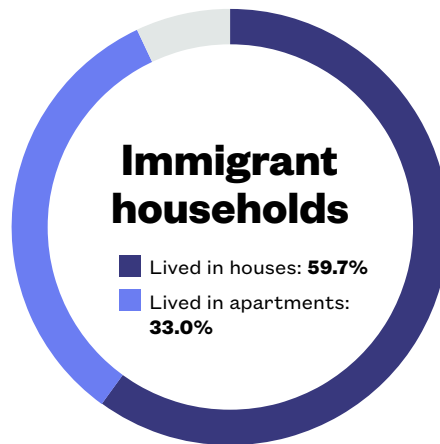
Immigrants make up **3.6%** of students under age 18 who attended public schools in the county in 2016.



HOUSING WEALTH

In 2016, **54.5%** of immigrant households in Kent County owned their own homes, compared to **66.5%** of the U.S.-born.

41.7% of immigrant households were renters.



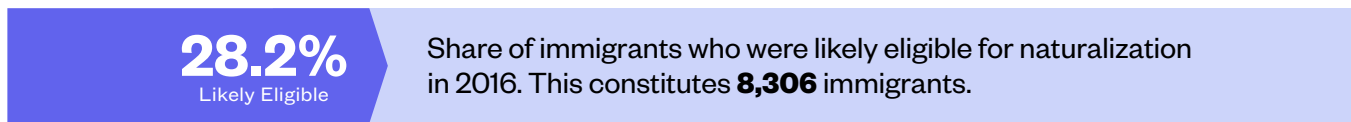
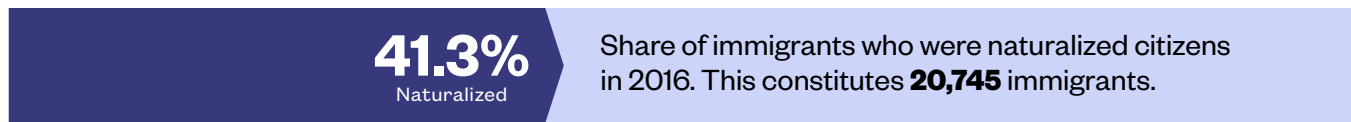
The total property value of immigrant households was

\$1.7B.

Their total annual rent was

\$69.8M.

NATURALIZATION*



* The process by which a foreign citizen becomes a citizen of the U.S.

UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANTS

Number of undocumented immigrants in Kent County in 2016:

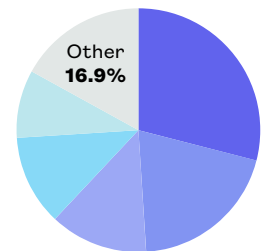
13,384

Undocumented share of the immigrant population:

26.7%

Undocumented immigrants tend to concentrate in these **key industries** in the county:

- 1 Manufacturing 29.3%
- 2 Hospitality and Recreation . . 19.9%
- 3 Construction 12.9%
- 4 Agriculture 11.8%
- 5 Professional Services 9.2%



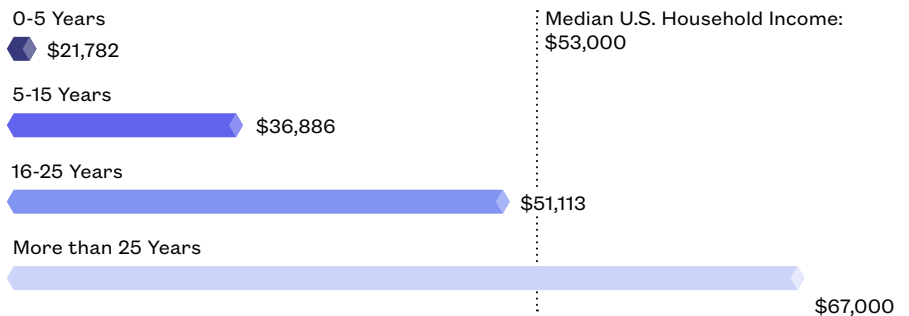
REFUGEES¹⁰

Kent County has a long history of refugee resettlement.

Median income of refugees in Kent County, 2016¹¹:

\$54,045

Median household incomes of refugees, by years in the **United States**, in 2015:



Source: Author's analysis of American Community Survey, 2011-2015.

SPOTLIGHT ON

Ruben Ramos

Partner, *R & R Mechanical Services*

Although Ruben Ramos was born in the United States, his family returned to their village in the Sierra Madre mountains, in Mexico, when he was a baby. When they moved back to the U.S.—to Chicago then Grand Rapids—Ramos was 10 years old and didn't know a word of English. "I consider myself an immigrant, because I basically had to learn the language, had to learn the culture."

In 1990, when his father got a job offer in Grand Rapids, "the Hispanic population here was basically nonexistent," he says. "I really felt those days like an outsider. I couldn't really hold a conversation with the kids at school." For the first year, he and his two brothers largely kept to themselves.

Today Ramos has little trace of an accent and, with his brother, runs a business that is training and hiring dozens of tradespeople in Grand Rapids. R & R Mechanical Services, which installs and services heating, ventilation, and air conditioning systems in residential and commercial buildings, will expand its sales force this summer and move into a new, larger building in Cottage Grove.

Ramos' twin brother, who studied HVAC in trade school, had opened a shop in 2008, and invited his brother to join him in 2010. They had four employees. Today they have 30, all full time with benefits.

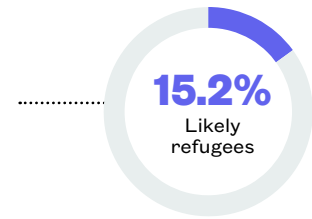
"There hasn't been a year that we haven't grown," says Ramos. It has not been easy. Ramos, who studied computer electronics, had no business experience. The recession hit, halting new construction. And qualified applicants in the trades were, and continue to be, in short supply.

"We were really learning on the go," he says. Trial and error and the use of outside consultants got them through the business management. Adding commercial construction got them through the recession. And creating extensive on-the-job training got them a workforce—and allows them to give back.

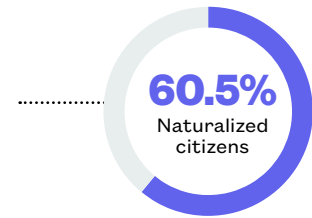
"We've built some of these awesome tradesmen," says Ramos. "It has cost us more to do that. It takes years of training. But we're proud to say that that's something that we're doing to develop our community."

REFUGEES CONT.

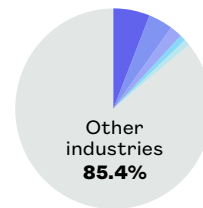
In 2016, **15.2%** of the foreign-born population, or **7,607** people, were likely refugees.¹²



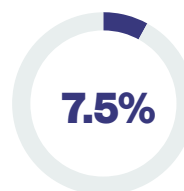
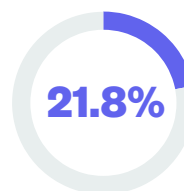
About **60.5%** of these refugees, or **4,600** people, were naturalized citizens.



Refugees tend to concentrate in these industries in the county:



- 1 Transportation and Warehousing 5.9%
- 2 Manufacturing 4.4%
- 3 Professional Services¹³ 1.7%
- 4 Wholesale Trade 1.3%
- 5 General Services¹⁴ 1.3%



For more city, district, and state-level data, visit MapTheImpact.org and explore our interactive map.



- 1 Unless otherwise specified, data comes from 5-year samples of the American Community Survey from 2011 and 2016 and figures refer to Kent County, Michigan.
- 2 The top 6-10 countries of origin are India (4.5 percent), Korea (3.4 percent), China (3.1 percent), the Netherlands (2.7 percent), and the Dominican Republic (2.4 percent).
- 3 These figures derive from our calculations based on immigrants' share of wage income and self-employment income in the 5-year ACS sample from 2016 and the statistics of GDP from the National Association of Counties.
- 4 U.S. Congressional Budget Office. 2016. "The Distribution of Household Income and Federal Taxes, 2013."
- 5 Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy. 2015. "Who Pays? A Distributional Analysis of the Tax Systems in All Fifty States."
- 6 Vigdor, Jacob. 2013. "Immigration and the Revival of American Cities: From Preserving Manufacturing Jobs to Strengthening the Housing Market." New American Economy.
- 7 2012 Survey of Business Owners, U.S. Census Bureau
- 8 Data on total student enrollment in the county is derived from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System maintained by the National Center for Education Statistics. Temporary residents refer to people who are not U.S. citizens or permanent residents.
- 9 Economic data is derived from the International Student Economic Value Tool maintained by NAFSA, the association of international educators.
- 10 By nature of their experience, refugees often arrive with little to no money or possessions. They therefore face a particular set of barriers that affect their economic life in the United States.
- 11 New American Economy. 2017. "From Struggle to Resilience: The Economic Impact of Refugees in America."
- 12 New American Economy. 2017. "From Struggle to Resilience: The Economic Impact of Refugees in America."
- 13 Professional services: Most of these industries include professions that require a degree or a license, such as legal services, accounting, scientific research, consulting services, etc.
- 14 General services include personal services (e.g. laundry services, barber shops, and repair and maintenance), religious organizations, social services, and labor unions.