New Americans in Mecklenburg County

The Demographic and Economic Contributions of Immigrants in the County

Population Growth

Immigrants made up 15.1% of the total population in Mecklenburg County in 2017.

Between 2012 and 2017, the population in the county increased by 11.0%. The immigrant population grew by 18.9%.

In 2017, 717,528 commuters worked in the county. Of these, 14.9%, or 107,071, were foreign born.

162,463 immigrants lived in the county in 2017. Their top five countries of origin were:

1. Mexico ................................................................. 15.5%
2. India ................................................................. 13.2%
3. Honduras ......................................................... 8.3%
4. El Salvador ....................................................... 4.6%
5. Colombia ......................................................... 4.0%
New Americans in Mecklenburg County

Spending Power & Tax Contributions

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

Amount earned by immigrant households in 2017:

$4.9B

Leaving them with $3.7B in spending power.

Foreign-born households contributed $16.0B to the county’s GDP, or 14.6% of the total. Immigrants in the county also supported federal social programs. In 2017, they contributed $527.6M to Social Security and $140.8M to Medicare.

14.7% of immigrants in the county received Medicare or Medicaid, compared with 26.5% of U.S.-born residents in 2017.

55.9% of immigrants had private healthcare coverage, while 14.9% had public healthcare coverage in 2017.

FEDERAL

$867.1M went to federal taxes.2

STATE AND LOCAL

$398.7M went to state and local taxes.3

SOCIAL SECURITY

$527.6M

MEDICARE

$140.8M
## Workforce

Although the foreign-born made up 15.1% of the county’s overall population, they represented 18.6% of its working-age population, 17.8% of its employed labor force, and 25.0% of its STEM workers in 2017.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Immigrant shares of the...</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>15.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working-age Population</td>
<td>18.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed Labor Force</td>
<td>17.8%</td>
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<tr>
<td>STEM Workers</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
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</table>

Immigrants played a critical role in several **key industries** in the county. This included:

- **44.7%** of workers in the construction industry were foreign-born in 2017.
- 26.0% of workers in the manufacturing industry were foreign-born.
- 21.1% of workers in the general services industry were foreign-born.
- 20.5% of workers in the hospitality industry were foreign-born.
- 18.8% of workers in the transportation industry were foreign-born.
- 17.5% of workers in the professional services industry were foreign-born.
- 16.2% of workers in the wholesale trade industry were foreign-born.
- 14.2% of workers in the finance industry were foreign-born.
- 14.0% of workers in the retail trade industry were foreign-born.
- 11.5% of workers in the education industry were foreign-born.

Because of the role immigrants play in the workforce helping companies keep jobs on U.S. soil, we estimate that:

*Immigrants living in the county had helped create or preserve 7,473 local manufacturing jobs that would have otherwise vanished or moved elsewhere by 2017.*
Workforce (Continued)

Immigrants tended to work in these occupations in the county in 2017:

- SHARE OF IMMIGRANTS WHO WERE CARPENTERS: 3.8%
- MAIDS & HOUSEKEEPING CLEANERS: 3.6%
- PAINTERS AND PAPERHANGERS: 3.3%
- COOKS: 3.1%
- SOFTWARE DEVELOPERS: 3.0%
- MISCELLANEOUS MANAGERS: 2.7%
- COMPUTER PROGRAMMERS: 2.7%
- FOOD PREPARATION WORKERS: 2.6%
- JANITORS: 2.6%
- CONSTRUCTION LABORERS: 2.0%
- Other Occupations: 70.6%

Entrepreneurship

Despite making up 15.1% of the population, immigrants made up 16.4% of the business owners in the county in 2017.

IMMIGRANT SHARE OF POPULATION IN THE COUNTY

IMMIGRANT SHARE OF ENTREPRENEURS IN THE COUNTY

8,326 immigrant entrepreneurs lived in Mecklenburg County in 2017.

$184.6M in business income was generated for the county by immigrant entrepreneurs that year.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Businesses in the Region, 2012</th>
<th>Sales Revenue</th>
<th>Number of Jobs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AFRICAN AMERICAN-OWNED</td>
<td>$1.5B</td>
<td>9,280</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASIAN-OWNED</td>
<td>$2.5B</td>
<td>10,273</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HISPANIC-OWNED</td>
<td>$960.3M</td>
<td>5,214</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Education

Share of the county’s population aged 25 or above that held a bachelor’s degree or higher in 2017:

- 47.7% of U.S.-born
- 34.9% of immigrants

Share of the county’s population aged 25 or above that held an advanced degree in 2017:

- 15.2% of U.S.-born
- 14.5% of immigrants

3,298 students who were enrolled in colleges and universities in the county during the fall of 2015 were temporary residents.\(^\text{12}\)

807 local jobs were supported by international students.

$72.1M was spent by international students in the 2017-18 academic year.\(^\text{13}\)

Housing Wealth

In 2017,
- 43.6% of immigrant households in the county owned their own homes, compared to 59.3% of U.S.-born households.
- 56.4% of immigrant households were renters.

IMMIGRANT HOUSEHOLDS
- 54.3% Lived in Houses
- 43.7% Lived in Apartments
- 2.0% Lived in Other Types of Housing

Total property value of immigrant households: $7.8B
Their total annual rent paid: $416.8M
Ngoie Joel Nshisso
FOUNDER, CONGOLESE PATRIOT

In the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ngoie Joel Nshisso served as deputy secretary general of the United Bible Societies, a global network that translates and distributes the Bible. It was a respected position in his homeland. As such, Nshisso says he could not remain silent in the face of widespread human rights violations committed by his government. Under President Laurent-Desire Kabila (1997 to 2001), political opponents, journalists, leaders of civil society, and others were imprisoned, tortured, disappeared, and killed.

“As a high profile Christian, you have to say something,” Nshisso says. Doing so, however, made him and his family targets. To survive, Nshisso applied for political asylum in the United States, and moved to Charlotte in 2001, where he had a brother and found people welcoming. His wife and seven children, who had fled to Zambia, were able, under U.S. immigration rules, to join him two years later.

In the meantime, Nshisso got to work starting over. Because his business degree from the Congo was not recognized in the United States and his English was poor, he secured a job at a gas station/convenience store, often working the 5 a.m. or midnight shift. At home he’d had a personal driver. Now he was cleaning gas pumps. “But I didn’t complain,” he says. “Because I understood: If those who are born here, the kids of this country, can do it, why should I not do it, too?”

“This is where I learned that Americans can give a good example to others: You just endure it and then work your way up.”

His way up was through education. Nshisso improved his English, secured work at a bank, earned an MBA and a Phd, and co-opened an import/export business. Five of his children have finished college; three have master’s degrees. Nshisso is now focused on his nonprofit, Congolese Patriot, which is working with the Charlotte International Cabinet on economic development. “My objective is to help immigrants learn as much as possible about the country we are living in,” he says. “To know you have a right, but you also have an obligation.”

Hasta Pradhan
FOUNDER, BHUTANESE COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION OF CHARLOTTE

When Hasta Pradhan’s family fled violent political oppression in Southern Bhutan and made their way to a refugee camp in Nepal in 1992, they were told they would be there four or five months. But bilateral talks on refugee repatriations broke down. They were there for 17 years.

“For only one or two families it would be a severe blow,” Pradhan says. “But when everybody around you faces the same problem, that becomes the normal life.”

The camp swelled to 21,000. Pradhan, 23 when he arrived, married, had children, and missed the most productive work years of his life. At least, he says, he'd attended some high school. “Others were from remote villages where they didn’t have schools, or dropped out due to political instability,” he says.

“We who were fortunate enough to get an education, we made a decision that we had to start a sort of school.” He, along with others with a high school education, rounded up a few books from refugees, and each sat a group of students under a tree and read aloud, orally quizzesing the boys and girls afterward. By 1995, an aid agency had started providing money — $5 per person per month — which Pradhan used to buy school supplies. With what remained, he bought bus tickets to India to take his own annual college exams, for which he studied remotely. Trip by trip, he earned a bachelor’s degree and was starting a master’s in education when the family received approval to move to the United States in 2009.

They were resettled in Charlotte. “We didn’t have any work history, so it was not easy to get jobs,” says Pradhan. He got some manual labor work — for a moving company, a warehouse, a pizza delivery — and a part-time translator job for Catholic Charities of Charlotte. His wife is a hotel housekeeper. He is now studying Information Technology.

Mostly he is volunteering to help Charlotte’s Bhutanese community. His nonprofit, the Bhutanese Community Association of Charlotte, takes high school groups on college tours, organizes socials and outings for seniors, and pairs immigrants with opportunities to serve the broader community. “I think our people feel more responsibility to give back,” he says, “because we were in refugee camps and taken care of for so long.”
New Americans in Mecklenburg County

Naturalization

Share of immigrants in the county who were naturalized U.S. citizens. This represents a total of **55,919** immigrants.

Nationally, **49.4%** of all immigrants are naturalized.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Naturalized</th>
<th>Likely Eligible</th>
<th>Not Eligible</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>34.4%</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
<td>52.3%</td>
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Refugees

**17,495** immigrants were likely refugees in 2017.**14**

**10.8%** of the foreign-born population were likely refugees.

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<th>Naturalized</th>
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<th>Not Eligible</th>
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<tr>
<td>42.8%</td>
<td>57.2%</td>
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</table>

**42.8%** of refugees in the county were naturalized U.S. citizens. This represents a total of **7,495** immigrants.
Undocumented Immigrants

Amount earned by undocumented immigrant households in 2017:

**$1.2B**

After taxes, this left them with $1.1B in spending power.

FEDERAL

$80.1M went to federal taxes.

STATE AND LOCAL

$51.3M went to state and local taxes.

Population Growth in the City of Charlotte

138,731 immigrants lived in the city in 2017. Their top five countries of origin were:

1. Mexico ........................................ 16.3%
2. India ......................................... 12.7%
3. Honduras .................................... 9.0%
4. El Salvador .................................. 5.1%
5. Vietnam ..................................... 4.1%

16.1% of the total population in the City of Charlotte in 2017.

29.6% of total population growth in the city was attributable to immigrants.

Between 2012 and 2017, the population in the city increased by 10.8%.

The immigrant population grew by 21.7%.
Spending Power & Tax Contributions in the City of Charlotte

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

Amount earned by immigrant households in 2017:

**$4.0B**

Leaving them with **$3.0B** in spending power.

**$681.9M**

went to federal taxes.

**$324.7M**

went to state and local taxes.

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1. Unless otherwise specified, data comes from 1-year samples of the American Community Survey from 2012 and 2017 and figures refer to Mecklenburg County, North Carolina.  
4. These figures derive from our calculations based on immigrants’ share of wage income and self-employment income in the 1-year ACS sample from 2017 and the statistics of GDP from the National Association of Counties.  
5. To be eligible for Medicare and Medicaid one must be a U.S. citizen or a permanent legal resident who has lived in the United States for at least five years; and, in general, must have worked or have a spouse that has worked long enough to be eligible for Social Security.  
6. We define working age as 16–64 years of age.  
7. Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math  
9. General services include personal services (e.g. laundry services, barber shops, and repair and maintenance), religious organizations, social services, and labor unions.  
10. 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.  
11. 2012 Survey of Business Owners, U.S. Census Bureau. This data includes both people born in the United States and people born abroad.  
12. 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.  
13. Economic data is derived from the International Student Economic Value Tool maintained by NAFSA, the association of international educators.  