

# New Americans in Contra Costa

The Demographic and Economic Contributions of Immigrants in the County<sup>1</sup>

MAY 2021



## Population

**295,400**

immigrants lived in Contra Costa, California in 2019.

Immigrants made up



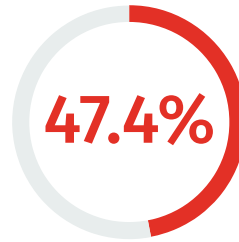
of the total population in the county in 2019.

Between 2014 and 2019, the total population in the county increased by



The immigrant population grew by

**+7.3%**



of the county's total population growth, between 2014 and 2019, was attributable to immigrants.



## Demographics



of immigrants in Contra Costa are recent arrivals, with less than 5 years of residency in the United States, meaning

In the county, immigrants are

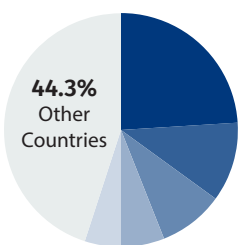
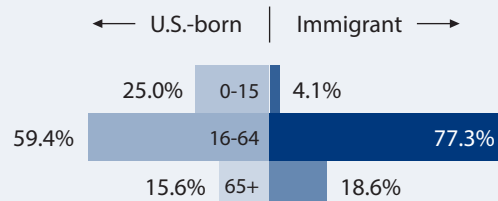


more likely to be of working age than their U.S.-born counterparts, allowing them to actively participate in the labor force and contribute to the economy as taxpayers and consumers.<sup>2</sup>



of immigrants in the county have resided in the United States for longer than 5 years.

### Shares of population by age groups:<sup>3</sup>



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

- Mexico (24.0%)
- India (9.3%)
- El Salvador (5.2%)
- Philippines (11.1%)
- China (6.1%)

<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise specified, data comes from 1-year samples of the American Community Survey from 2014 and 2019 and figures refer to Contra Costa County, California.

<sup>2</sup> We define working age as 16-64 years of age.

<sup>3</sup> Totals may not add up to 100 percent due to rounding.

## Demographics *continued*

In 2019,

# 415,900

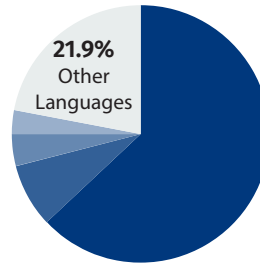
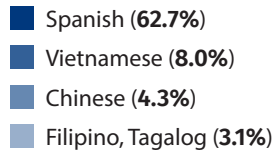
commuters worked in the county. Of these,



or **123,400** commuters, were foreign-born.

# 59,400

immigrants living in the county had limited English proficiency, making up **20.3%** of the immigrant population. Among them, the top five languages spoken at home other than English were



<sup>4</sup> These regions are defined by Public Use Microdata Areas (PUMAs), geographic units that contain at least 100,000 people in the U.S. Census.

<sup>5</sup> These regions are defined by Public Use Microdata Areas (PUMAs), geographic units that contain at least 100,000 people in the U.S. Census.

<sup>6</sup> We are unable to provide language breakdowns for these regions because of small sample size.

### SPOTLIGHT ON Concentration of immigrants in Contra Costa County

Region <sup>4</sup>	Number of Immigrants	Share of All Immigrants
Far Southwest—Richmond (Southwest) & San Pablo Cities	<b>50,400</b>	<b>17.1%</b>
Far Northwest—Richmond (North), Hercules & El Cerrito Cities	<b>32,400</b>	<b>11.0%</b>
Northwest—Concord (West), Martinez & Pleasant Hill Cities	<b>30,300</b>	<b>10.3%</b>
West—Walnut Creek (West), Lafayette, Orinda Cities & Moraga Town	<b>23,400</b>	<b>7.9%</b>
South—San Ramon City & Danville Town	<b>45,500</b>	<b>15.4%</b>
Central—Concord (South), Walnut Creek (East) & Clayton Cities	<b>25,700</b>	<b>8.7%</b>
North Central—Pittsburg & Concord (North & East) Cities	<b>42,700</b>	<b>14.4%</b>
Northeast—Antioch City	<b>28,500</b>	<b>9.6%</b>
East—Brentwood & Oakley Cities	<b>16,500</b>	<b>5.6%</b>

Region <sup>5</sup>	Share of Immigrants with Limited English Proficiency	Top Language for Immigrants with Limited English Proficiency
Far Southwest—Richmond (Southwest) & San Pablo Cities	<b>37.4%</b>	<b>Spanish (87.3%)</b>
Far Northwest—Richmond (North), Hercules & El Cerrito Cities	<b>13.6%</b>	<b>N/A<sup>6</sup></b>
Northwest—Concord (West), Martinez & Pleasant Hill Cities	<b>22.0%</b>	<b>N/A</b>
West—Walnut Creek (West), Lafayette, Orinda Cities & Moraga Town	<b>7.3%</b>	<b>N/A</b>
South—San Ramon City & Danville Town	<b>6.2%</b>	<b>N/A</b>
Central—Concord (South), Walnut Creek (East) & Clayton Cities	<b>10.2%</b>	<b>N/A</b>
North Central—Pittsburg & Concord (North & East) Cities	<b>25.5%</b>	<b>Spanish (76.6%)</b>
Northeast—Antioch City	<b>35.5%</b>	<b>Spanish (47.6%)</b>
East—Brentwood & Oakley Cities	<b>10.4%</b>	<b>N/A</b>

## 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.

Foreign-born households held

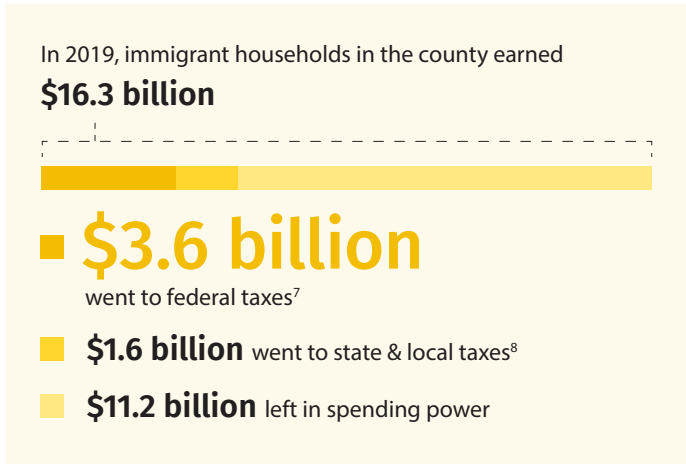


of all spending power in the county, more than their **25.6%** share of the population.

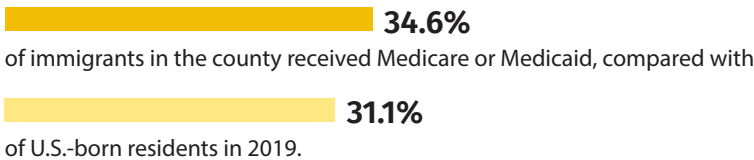
In 2019, foreign-born residents in the county contributed

**\$24.7 billion**

to the county's GDP, or **30.8%** of the total.<sup>9</sup>

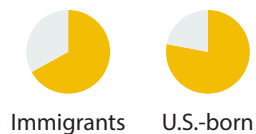


Immigrants in the county also supported federal social programs. In 2019, they contributed



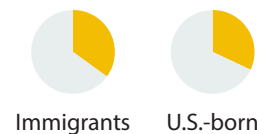
### Private Healthcare Coverage

About **66.7%** of immigrants had private healthcare coverage, while **77.5%** of U.S.-born had private healthcare coverage.<sup>10</sup>



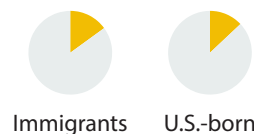
### Public Healthcare Coverage

About **34.8%** of immigrants had public healthcare coverage, while **31.6%** of U.S.-born had public healthcare coverage.



### Poverty Threshold

Given their household incomes, **15.3%** of immigrants lived at or below 150% of the federal poverty threshold as compared to **12.9%** of U.S.-born residents.



<sup>7</sup> U.S. Congressional Budget Office. 2020. "The Distribution of Household Income and Federal Taxes, 2017."

<sup>8</sup> Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy. 2018. "Who Pays? A Distributional Analysis of the Tax Systems in All Fifty States."

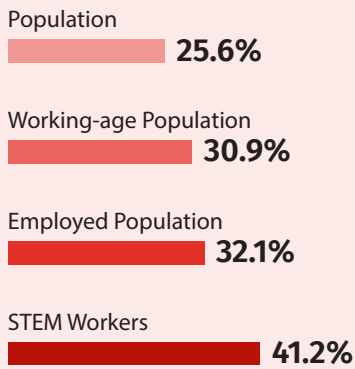
<sup>9</sup> These figures derive from our calculations based on immigrants' share of wage income and self-employment income in the 1-year ACS sample from 2019 and the statistics of GDP from the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis.

<sup>10</sup> Including people who have both public and private healthcare coverage.

## Workforce

Although the foreign-born made up **25.6%** of the county's overall population, they represented **30.9%** of its working-age<sup>5</sup> population, **32.1%** of its employed labor force, and **41.2%** of its STEM<sup>11</sup> workers in 2019.

### Immigrant shares of the...



Immigrants in the county are

**30.1%**

more likely to be working age than their U.S.-born counterparts.

The immigrant working-age population was **52.8%** female and **47.2%** male.



The immigrant employed population was **45.8%** female and **54.2%** male.



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

**38.8%**

of workers in the construction industry were foreign-born in 2019.



<sup>11</sup> STEM refers to occupations that require background or expertise in Science, Technology, Engineering, and/or Math.

<sup>12</sup> 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.

<sup>13</sup> General services include personal services (e.g. laundry services, barber shops, and repair and maintenance), religious organizations, social services, and labor unions.

<sup>14</sup> Data is obtained from Burning Glass Technologies for the time period between April 1, 2020 and March 31, 2021.

### SPOTLIGHT ON Job Demand In Contra Costa In 2021

Not only are immigrants more likely to be of working age in the county, but they are also a crucial part of the city's economy, and could help us meet the needs of its fastest growing and most in-demand fields, especially as the need for bilingual and culturally competent public services and healthcare increases.

#### The top 5 industries with the highest demand for bilingual workers:<sup>14</sup>

1. Health Care and Social Assistance

2. Finance and Insurance

3. Information

4. Retail Trade

5. Educational Services

## Workforce *continued*

### SPOTLIGHT ON Immigrant Essential Workers

Immigrants have also been playing vital roles in critical industries that have kept the country functioning throughout the COVID-19 crisis. Immigrants in the county continue working in these frontline and essential industries:

#### Essential Services<sup>15</sup>

**11,900**  
immigrants made up



#### Food Service

**14,800**  
immigrants made up



#### Construction

**16,100**  
immigrants made up



#### Healthcare

**20,300** immigrants made up **35.4%** of the workforce

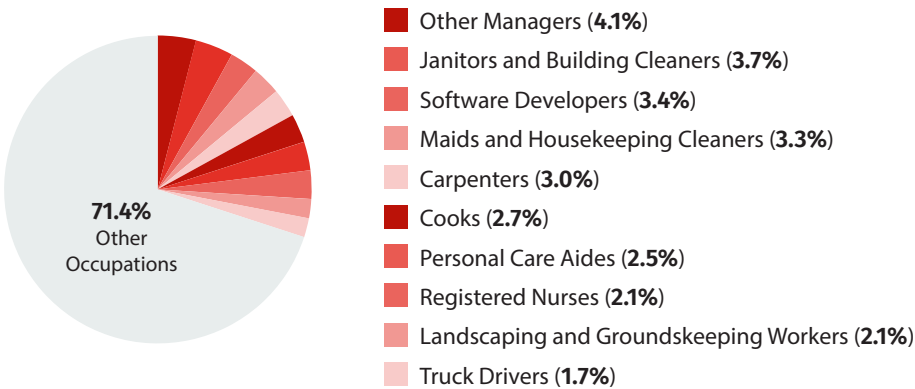
#### Transportation and Warehousing

**8,300** immigrants made up **33.6%** of the workforce

#### Essential Retail Trade

**4,400** immigrants made up **21.5%** of the workforce

Immigrants tended to work in these occupations in the county in 2019:



Top Occupations for Female Workers	Share of Workforce
Maids and Housekeeping Cleaners	5.7%
Personal Care Aides	5.0%
Registered Nurses	3.9%

Top Occupations for Male Workers	Share of Workforce
Carpenters	5.5%
Software Developers	4.9%
Other Managers	4.7%

Due to 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

**13,600**

manufacturing jobs that would have otherwise vanished or moved elsewhere by 2019.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> These include services essential for daily living, such as building cleaning, waste management, auto repair, and veterinary services.

<sup>16</sup> Vigdor, Jacob. 2013. "Immigration and the Revival of American Cities: From Preserving Manufacturing Jobs to Strengthening the Housing Market." *New American Economy*.

SPOTLIGHT ON

## Susun Kim

While in high school in the 1980s, Susun Kim witnessed South Korea's student democracy movements that eventually toppled the nation's military dictatorship. But when the family immigrated to the United States under the sponsorship of an aunt, they struggled. "We had real financial struggles during our first year and my parents didn't know enough to apply for any government assistance," Kim recalled. "They didn't know about food banks."

The desire for no other immigrant to feel as unsupported or lost, motivated Kim to pursue a career in social justice. She attended New York University School of Law and spent 17 years as a domestic violence attorney (10 years of which as a legal aid attorney in Contra Costa County). While there, she strove to make a "collective impact," marshalling social service providers, policy makers, and community members.

Her work helped found a county-wide housing service collaborative, a court-based housing law clinic, and a reentry initiative for the formerly incarcerated. She has led trainings for the American Bar Association Commission on Domestic Violence, has been a member of the steering committee for the County's Alliance to End Abuse Initiative and is currently serving on the Measure X Community Advisory Board. She is proud that the county has taken lead on providing vital community resources to its more marginalized members. Today, Kim is executive director of the Family Justice Center (Center) of Contra Costa County, which offers an array of services to abuse survivors, from legal advice to safety planning and housing assistance. "I no longer represent people in court, but I can fully meet the needs of the community in a more comprehensive way," she says. Her personal goal is to make sure every Contra Costa resident knows about the public-private partnership, so, she says, survivors and loved ones can find help.

Kim says county support has been invaluable for the Center, but the nonprofit needs to increase its legal and counseling service capacity. "We just got a grant from the state to offer mental health services," Kim says. "We have a lot of programs going really well, but the two real needs are simple: legal assistance and flexible financial assistance."

SPOTLIGHT ON

## Jose Rizo

Jose Rizo's story began before he was born. When his family was forced to move to the U.S. due to the revolutionary war in Nicaragua, upon arriving, his brother almost died. His undocumented mother couldn't find a hospital that would treat her infant. Eventually, the family was granted asylum and made a life for themselves. Rizo became determined to help other vulnerable families.

His family temporarily moved to his mother's native Guatemala, where Rizo provided translation support for visiting doctors. Three years later, they returned to California. In 2004, Rizo earned a Computer Information Technology degree from Heald College and went to work for Verizon. Later, Rizo became involved with Stand Together Contra Costa, a county-backed initiative providing legal services, for immigrants, including undocumented individuals. There, he educated undocumented residents about their rights during interactions with law enforcement.

In 2019, Rizo, called by his Christian faith, became Program Director at Village Community Resource Center (VCRC), a nonprofit offering language assistance, tutoring, a mobile health clinic, mental wellness support and food distribution to socioeconomically disadvantaged families in Northern California. Rizo also put his college education to use in the nonprofit's computer upcycling program, where he refurbishes laptops for underprivileged students. In 2021, 20 computers were provided to students in Brentwood and Byron.

While Contra Costa County has made strides forward, like underwriting the defense of undocumented immigrants, there's still work to be done. Rizo says, "local county-provided services are in thin supply and so is the availability of non-profits like ours. That's why we are also now involved in community organizing around education and parent leadership."

Rizo wants Americans to understand that VCRC's clients aren't taking handouts. "We request that parents volunteer at our center, at their children's school, and at our food distribution events," he says. "These parents continue the legacy of co-creation that began when VCRC was formed 24 years ago."

Rizo is currently training community volunteers to educate underserved populations about COVID-19 vaccinations. "If there's a need, we try to figure out a solution," he says. "There really is no limit to how we can help our community."

## Entrepreneurship

**19,700**

immigrant entrepreneurs lived in Contra Costa County in 2019, making up

**34.0%**

of the business owners in the region despite making up **25.6%** of the population.

Immigrant entrepreneurs in Contra Costa County generated

**\$674.3 million**

in business income.

Immigrant entrepreneurs self-identified as **44.3%** female and **55.7%** male.



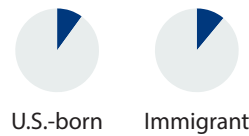
Immigrant entrepreneurs by race and ethnicity:

Hispanic	<b>43.7%</b>
Asian American or Pacific Islander	<b>32.2%</b>
White	<b>18.4%</b>
Other <sup>17</sup>	<b>5.7%</b>

Immigrant entrepreneurs tended to work in these key industries:

Professional Services	<b>32.2%</b>
Health Care and Social Assistance	<b>13.1%</b>

While **9.8%** of the U.S.-born population were entrepreneurs, **10.7%** of foreign-born residents worked for their own businesses.



### SPOTLIGHT ON

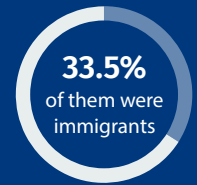
### Small Business Recovery from the Pandemic

While all Americans are struggling to adapt to their new reality in a time of economic shutdown, entrepreneurs within particularly vulnerable industries in the metro area face severe challenges posed by the COVID-19 crisis.

Professional and Business Services

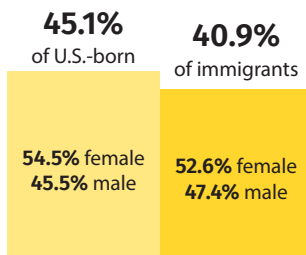
**19,000**

total entrepreneurs

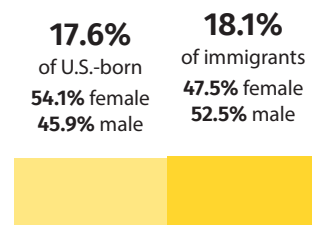


## Education

Share of the county's population aged 25 or above that held a **bachelor's degree or higher** in 2019:



Share of the county's population aged 25 or above that held an **advanced degree** in 2019:



**6.6%**

of K-12 students in the county were foreign-born in 2019.

**45.4%**

of K-12 students in the county were children of immigrants in 2019.

<sup>17</sup> Due to small sample size, we are unable to provide breakdowns for other racial and ethnic groups, including Black or African American, mixed, or other races.

**SPOTLIGHT ON**

**2018-19 University Population**

**1,178**

students enrolled in colleges and universities in Contra Costa in fall 2019 were temporary residents.<sup>18</sup>

**75**

international students graduated with STEM degrees from colleges and universities in the county in the 2018-19 academic year.

**230**

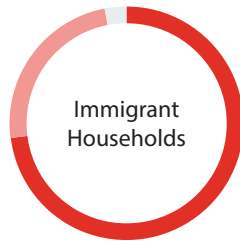
local jobs were supported by international students.

**\$41.9 million**

was contributed to the economy by international students in the 2019-20 academic year.<sup>19</sup>

**Housing**

In 2019, **67.0%** of U.S.-born households in Contra Costa owned their own homes, compared to **61.5%** of immigrant households.



- Lived in Houses **83,900** or **73.4%**
- Lived in Apartments **27,900** or **24.4%**
- Lived in Other Types of Housing **2,500** or **2.2%**

The total property value of immigrant households was

**\$56.8 billion**

**38.5%** of immigrant households were renters. Their total annual rent paid was

**\$920.0 million**



percent of immigrant households in the county had access to broadband connection in their place of residence as compared to **89.6%** of U.S.-born households in 2019.

**Naturalization**

In Contra Costa County ...



- **57.5%** Naturalized Citizens (170,000)
- **17.1%** Likely Eligible to Naturalize (50,600)
- **25.3%** Not Eligible to Naturalize (74,800)

Nationally ...



Nationally, **48.7%** of immigrants are naturalized citizens, **15.9%** are likely eligible to naturalize, and **35.4%** are not yet eligible.

<sup>18</sup> Data on total student enrollment in the city 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.

<sup>19</sup> Economic data is derived from the International Student Economic Value Tool maintained by NAFSA, the association of international educators.



## Naturalization *continued*



of households in Contra Costa had at least one foreign-born resident in 2019.

If all immigrants who are eligible to naturalize became U.S. citizens, their earning potential would increase by

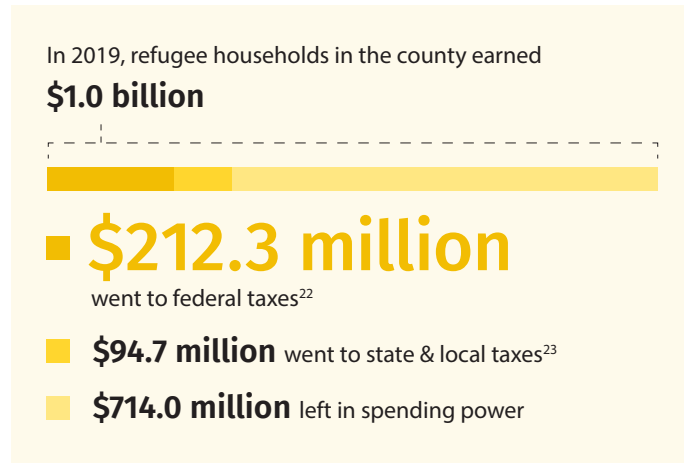


## Refugees



refugees, or **6.2%** of the foreign-born population in Contra Costa County, were likely refugees.<sup>21</sup>

The top countries of origin for the refugee population in the county were Afghanistan (**37.4%**), Vietnam (**24.7%**), and Laos (**11.3%**).



About



of refugees in the area were naturalized U.S. citizens.

About **34.3%** of refugees held at least a bachelor's degree...



...and about **15.4%** held an advanced degree.

## DACA-Eligible Population

In 2019, DACA-eligible people in Contra Costa County made up



of the immigrant population.

<sup>20</sup>Enchautegui, Maria E. and Linda Giannarelli. 2015. "The Economic Impact of Naturalization on Immigrants and Cities." Urban Institute.

<sup>21</sup>New American Economy. 2017. "From Struggle to Resilience: The Economic Impact of Refugees in America."

<sup>22</sup>U.S. Congressional Budget Office. 2020. "The Distribution of Household Income and Federal Taxes, 2017."

<sup>23</sup>Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy. 2018. "Who Pays? A Distributional Analysis of the Tax Systems in All Fifty States."

SPOTLIGHT ON

## Navin Moul

In 1979, when Navin Moul was three, she fled Cambodia after a civil war. Approximately two million people, including her own father, died, but Moul, her sister and mother were lucky to make it to a refugee camp in Thailand and later resettled in Washington State. With help from local nonprofits and faith groups, the family secured housing and Moul's mother found work as a hotel housekeeper. "I realized how lucky we were in the community we got resettled into," she says. "Not everyone had those resources or a sense of belonging." Eventually the family became U.S. citizens.

Years later, while pursuing a master's degree in Comparative Ethnic Studies at the University of California, Berkeley, Moul returned to Cambodia and spent 18 months interviewing "Cambodian-Americans" who had been deported. Like Moul, these individuals came as refugees. Most were resettled in "urban jungles" amidst violence and poverty. "It set them up for failure," Moul says. With limited opportunities, a weak safety net and a community still dealing with trauma, many made poor choices resulting in a criminal record and deportation.

Understanding the challenges still facing Cambodian-American communities, Moul was inspired into action. She co-founded the Devata Giving Circle, a vehicle to raise money to support organizations working with Cambodian women and girls in the U.S. Four years ago, she started at Zellerbach Family Foundation (ZFF) managing the immigration portfolio.

She praises Contra Costa County's efforts to make the county more welcoming to all residents. This includes the critical work of Stand Together Contra Costa County to provide needed information and legal services to immigrants; and the community planning process currently underway to establish the Office of Racial Equity and Social Justice to ensure the county's policies and practices are equitable and inclusive. Moul wants local governments to prioritize long-term integration. "We don't want to only provide services to folks and then say 'Ok, we're done with you.' We need to meaningfully engage folks so they are part of the social fabric of our communities," she says. "We want them to feel like they belong and have a seat at the table."

SPOTLIGHT ON

## Ali Saidi

When Ali Saidi was six, he and his family fled the Iranian revolution and resettled in California. Although they were fortunate to have lawful status, the combination of the Iran hostage crisis and later the Proposition 187 ballot initiative, which targeted undocumented immigrants, filled him with frustration and resolve. "I learned some of the challenges of being a brown immigrant in the U.S," he says. "You never feel like you entirely belong. I wanted to change that."

After receiving a B.A. from the University of California Berkeley and his J.D. from the University of Michigan Law School, he became a public defender for Contra Costa County. He was struck by how few protections and resources were available to immigrants. "In immigration court, unlike criminal court, you don't have a right to an attorney to be appointed to you for free if you can't afford one," he says. "Yet people are subject to indefinite detention and potential deportation—which often means potential death or torture."

In 2015, he became the head of the Contra Costa County public defender's immigration unit and in 2017 he spearheaded the creation of Stand Together Contra Costa, a county-supported partnership between the Public Defender's Office and local non-profits that provides a rapid response hotline and free deportation legal defense services. He says the county is providing important legal assistance but doesn't always understand the ripple effects of deportation, especially when the person deported is the family's primary breadwinner.

"Family separation leads to housing insecurity, food insecurity and a heavy mental and emotional trauma," he says. "Stand Together is a unique model in terms of not just providing legal services, but also in building trust with our immigrant populations through non-profit and county partnerships."

Saidi believes the county should work in tandem with the nonprofit sector to provide healthcare and mental health services in multiple languages, legal representation and educational opportunities. "For me it's always been a real privilege and deep responsibility to ensure that the humanity of our clients is respected," he says. "At the end of the day, it's about transmitting and centering peoples' lived human experience into our dehumanizing and oppressive systems of mass incarceration and mass deportation."

## Undocumented Immigrants

**48,600**

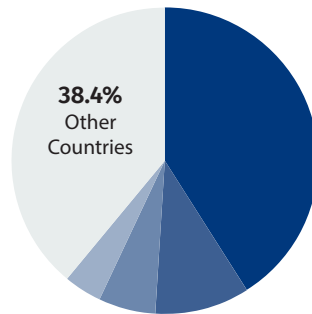
undocumented immigrants lived in Contra Costa in 2019.<sup>24</sup>

They made up



of the foreign-born population in the county in 2019.

Top countries of origin for the undocumented in the county:



- Mexico (41.4%)
- El Salvador (10.3%)
- India (6.3%)
- China (3.6%)

In 2019, undocumented immigrant households in the county earned

**\$1.5 billion**



■ **149.6 million**

went to federal taxes<sup>25</sup>

■ **\$70.6 million** went to state & local taxes<sup>26</sup>

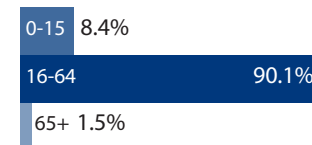
■ **\$1.3 billion** left in spending power

Undocumented immigrants are highly active in the labor force.

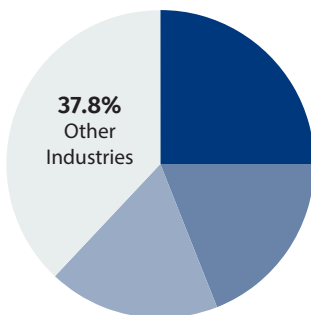


are of working-age in the county.

Undocumented immigrants by age groups:



Undocumented immigrants tended to work in these key industries:



- Hospitality (24.9%)
- Professional Services (19.4%)
- Construction (17.9%)

**26,945**

undocumented immigrants were between the ages of 27-49. They made up



of the undocumented population, and



of the county's immigrant population.

<sup>24</sup> Using data from 1-year samples of the American Community Survey from 2014 and 2019, we apply the methodological approach outlined by Harvard University economist George Borjas to arrive at an estimate of the undocumented immigrant population in the overall United States and individual states. More information about our methodology can be found here: <https://www.newamericaneconomy.org/methodology/>

<sup>25</sup> U.S. Congressional Budget Office. 2020. "The Distribution of Household Income and Federal Taxes, 2017."

<sup>26</sup> Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy. 2018. "Who Pays? A Distributional Analysis of the Tax Systems in All Fifty States."