

# New Americans in Erie County

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



## Population

**11,200**

immigrants<sup>2</sup> lived in Erie County, Pennsylvania, in 2019. They made up



of the total population in the county in 2019.

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



The immigrant population in the county decreased by



In comparison, immigrants made up **7.0%** of the total population in the state of Pennsylvania in 2019.<sup>3</sup>

The immigrant population in Pennsylvania state increased by



## Demographics



of immigrants in Erie County are recent arrivals, with less than 5 years of residency in the United States.

In 2019,

**130,500**

commuters worked in the county. Of these,



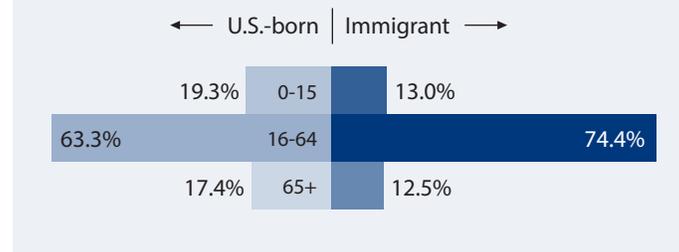
or **5,200** commuters, were foreign-born.

In the county, immigrants are

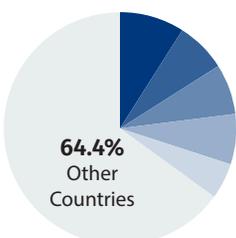


more likely to be of working-age than their U.S.-born counterparts,<sup>4</sup> allowing them to actively participate in the labor force and contribute to the economy as taxpayers and consumers.<sup>5</sup>

### Shares of population by age groups<sup>6</sup>



The top five countries of origin for immigrants living in the county were



- Bhutan<sup>7</sup> (8.7%)
- India (7.3%)
- Mexico (7.2%)
- China (7.1%)
- Nepal (5.3%)

1 Unless otherwise specified, data comes from 5-year samples of the American Community Survey from 2014 and 2019 and figures refer to Erie County, Pennsylvania.

2 In this report, we use the terms “immigrant” and “foreign-born” interchangeably. Immigrant and foreign-born terms include the refugee population. Immigrants can be naturalized U.S. citizens or non-citizens, regardless of legal status. For the purposes of this report, people born abroad to U.S. citizen parents are not considered “immigrants” or “foreign-born” as they automatically receive the right to U.S. citizenship through their citizen parent(s).

3 New American Economy. 2021. “Map the Impact: Pennsylvania.” <https://www.newamericaneconomy.org/locations/pennsylvania/>

4 We define working age as 16-64 years of age.

5 In Pennsylvania, immigrants are 27.9 percent more likely to be of working age than their U.S.-born counterparts as of 2019. Learn more at Map the Impact: Pennsylvania: <https://www.newamericaneconomy.org/locations/pennsylvania/>

6 Totals may not add up to 100 percent due to rounding.

7 The information is based on birthplace instead of ethnicity. Bhutan refugees include ethnic Nepalis who were expelled or fled from Bhutan.

## Demographics *continued*

**1,800**

immigrants living in the county had limited English language proficiency, making up



of the immigrant population. Among them, the top language spoken at home other than English was Nepali (**26.4%**).

Top languages for **all residents** who spoke English as a second language in Erie County in 2019:

- Spanish (**34.7%**)
- Nepali (**5.7%**)
- Arabic (**5.5%**)
- German (**4.1%**)
- Russian (**4.0%**)

Top languages for **immigrants** who spoke English as a second language in Erie County in 2019:

- Spanish (**14.6%**)
- Nepali (**10.8%**)
- Arabic (**7.4%**)
- Russian (**6.9%**)
- Chinese (**5.2%**)

## 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

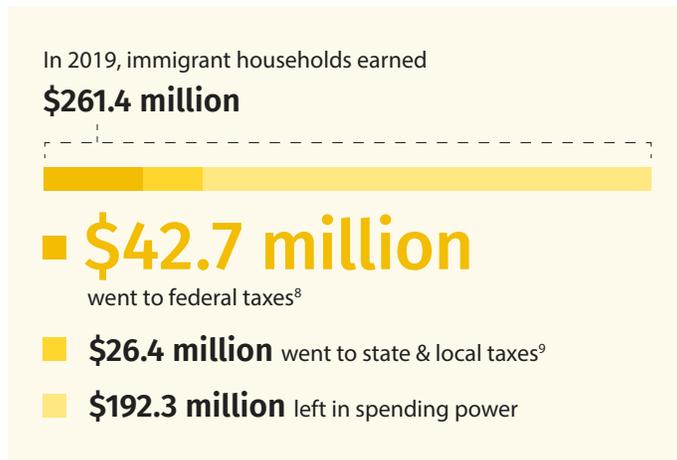


of all spending power in the county.

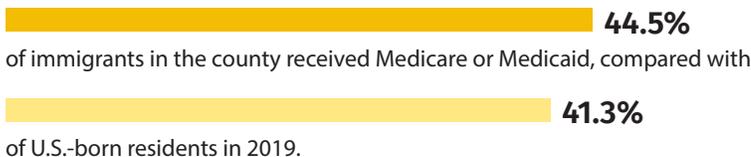
In 2019, foreign-born residents in the county contributed

**\$463.5 million**

to the county's GDP, or **3.7%** of the total.<sup>10</sup>



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



<sup>8</sup> U.S. Congressional Budget Office. 2020. "The Distribution of Household Income and Federal Taxes, 2017."

<sup>9</sup> Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy. 2018. "Who Pays? A Distributional Analysis of the Tax Systems in All Fifty States."

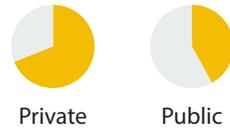
<sup>10</sup> These figures derive from our calculations based on immigrants' share of wage income and self-employment income in the 5-year ACS sample from 2019 and the statistics of GDP from the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis.

## Spending Power & Tax Contributions *continued*

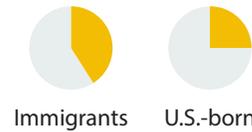
About **58.9%** of immigrants had private healthcare coverage, while **45.1%** had public healthcare coverage.<sup>11</sup>



About **68.7%** of U.S.-born had private healthcare coverage, while **42.2%** had public healthcare coverage.



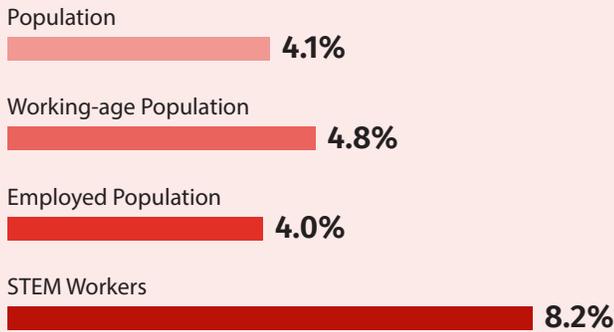
Given their household incomes, **41.0%** of immigrants live at or below 150% of the federal poverty threshold as compared to **25.2%** of U.S.-born



## Workforce

Although the foreign-born made up **4.1%** of the county's overall population, they represented **4.8%** of its working-age population, **4.0%** of its employed labor force, and **8.2%** of its STEM<sup>12</sup> workers in 2019.<sup>13</sup>

### Immigrant shares of the...



The immigrant working-age population was **48.2%** female and **51.8%** male.



The employed immigrant population was **40.4%** female and **59.6%** male.



Immigrants in the county are

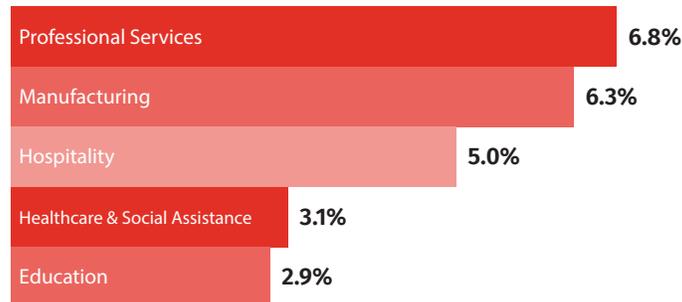
**17.7%**

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

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



of workers in the professional services<sup>14</sup> industry were foreign-born in 2019.



<sup>11</sup> Including people who have both public and private healthcare coverage.

<sup>12</sup> STEM refers to occupations that require background or expertise in Science, Technology, Engineering, and/or Math.

<sup>13</sup> In Pennsylvania, immigrants made up 15.3 percent of STEM workers in 2019.

<sup>14</sup> General services include personal services (e.g. laundry services, barber shops, and repair and maintenance), religious organizations, social services, and labor unions.

## 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:



### SPOTLIGHT ON Job Demand In Erie County 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 industries with the highest demand for bilingual workers:**<sup>15</sup>

- 1. Information
- 2. Real Estate & Rental & Leasing

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

## 500 manufacturing jobs

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

## Entrepreneurship

Immigrants made up **4.9%** of the business owners in the county despite making up **4.1%** of the population.

In comparison, immigrants made up **12.4%** of the business owners in Pennsylvania.

While **7.7%** of the U.S.-born population were entrepreneurs, **9.5%** of foreign-born residents worked for their own businesses.



<sup>15</sup> Data is obtained from Burning Glass Technologies for the time period between April 1, 2020 and March 31, 2021.

<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

## Esther Ortiz

Esther Ortiz was born in Mexico and spent her childhood straddling the California border, but she found her home in Erie. In 1994, her parents landed jobs at Plastek, a local plastics manufacturing company and settled in Erie's upper west side neighborhood. Their family of 11—her parents and their nine children—moved into a small two-room apartment. It was a humble home, but her parents knew Erie's affordability would put the middle class within reach. "My parents felt more at peace here," Esther says.

Esther dreamed of opening a business, but with children to support, she was happy to find stable work at Port Erie Plastics, which manufactured CD cases and parts for cars and vacuums. She started as a packer and was later promoted to quality control inspector. Her husband worked at a different shop, and they were able to provide a good life for their three children, who are now 25, 22 and 14.

In 2018, on vacation in Colorado, Esther and her family wandered into a pinata shop and something "just clicked," she said. A business venture was born. In 2020, she opened Esther's Pinata Shop out of her garage. Today, she sells handcrafted pinatas in shapes ranging from Power Rangers to Ruth Bader Ginsburg. Her customers are primarily Erie natives, but she has also been commissioned to create pinatas for a women's expo, an art show and the 2020 United Arts Fund.

She says Erie's supportive community helped her business thrive. Early on, a local developer loaned Esther an empty storefront. When the executive director of Erie Arts and Culture saw her selling pinatas at the flea market, he invited her to join. The organization has helped her with branding, grant applications and business promotion. During the pandemic, they helped her land a virtual gig teaching students how to make pinatas.

Esther is proud to be an integral part of Erie's thriving arts scene. Her pinatas have been featured in local art shows and gallery nights. She has taught students at the YMCA, Charter School of Excellence, and the Pennsylvania Art Education Association. "I feel so much joy sharing my art and culture with people," she says. "It's a beautiful way to build community."

SPOTLIGHT ON

## Mahmoud Albaradan

Mahmoud Albaradan had a thriving used car dealership in Daraa, Syria. But in 2011, anti-government protests propelled the city into civil war. As violence escalated, Mahmoud, his wife and their six children, along with his brother's family of nine, fled for their lives. In 2016, after four years in a Jordanian refugee camp, they were resettled in Erie.

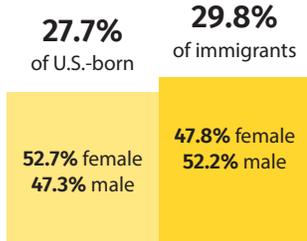
The family was devastated to have lost their beloved home, but Erie welcomed them. A neighbor helped them navigate their new city and fill out the endless paperwork that comes with any big move. The microenterprise program at the U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants of Erie, helped Mahmoud and his brother become small business owners once again. Erie offered "services (that) were very helpful to me," he says. "They gave our business a lot of support." They opened a used car dealership, AMB Auto Sales and Service. Today, Mahmoud's business provides part-time jobs to three employees, contributes to the tax base and allows Mahmoud and his brother to provide for their families.

Today, Mahmoud considers Erie a dream city. "It's very similar to Daraa," he says. "It's safe, affordable and the people here are nice." Mahmoud gave a car to his helpful neighbor. After growing close with another neighbor, Mahmoud would frequently invite him to sumptuous Syrian dinners at his home. When the man died a few months ago, Mahmoud and his family mourned his passing and have been missing him ever since.

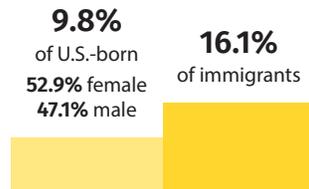
These relationships show how deeply Mahmoud and his family have invested in their community. They love their American friends. They worked hard to integrate and give back. Now Mahmoud's children aspire for careers helping others. His high-school-age children hope want to pursue engineering and pharmacy, and his younger children want to go into medicine, teaching, law enforcement and—fitting for a 6-year-old boy—car racing. It's a future that fills Mahmoud with pride and one made possible by the welcoming community of Erie.

## Education

Share of the county's population aged 25 or above that held a **bachelor's degree or higher** in 2019:<sup>17</sup>



Share of the county's population aged 25 or above that held an **advanced degree** in 2019:<sup>18</sup>



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



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

<sup>17</sup> In the state of Pennsylvania, 19.9 percent of the foreign population aged 25 or above held a bachelor's degree or higher, in comparison to 19.5 percent of its U.S.-born population in 2019.

<sup>18</sup> In the state of Pennsylvania, 20.4 percent of the foreign population aged 25 or above held a Graduate degree, in comparison to 12.2 percent of it's U.S.-born population in 2019. Learn more at Map the Impact: Pennsylvania: <https://www.newamericaneconomy.org/locations/pennsylvania/>

### SPOTLIGHT ON University Population

**593**

students who were enrolled in colleges and universities in Erie County in fall 2019 were temporary residents.<sup>19</sup>

**83**

international students graduated with STEM degrees from colleges and universities in the county in the 2019-20 academic year.

**328**

local jobs were supported by international students in the 2019-20 academic year.

**\$33.6 million**

was spent by international students in the 2019-20 academic year.<sup>20</sup>

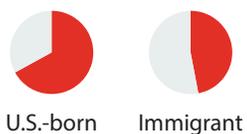
In Pennsylvania,

**50,070**

international students attended colleges and universities in the fall of 2019.<sup>21</sup>

## Housing

In 2019, **66.6%** of U.S.-born households in Erie County owned their own homes, compared to **47.2%** of immigrant households.



The total property value of immigrant households was

**\$342.0 million**



- Lived in Houses **2,400 or 57.2%**
- Lived in Apartments **1,700 or 40.2%**
- Lived in Other Types of Housing **2.6%**

**52.8%** of immigrant households were renters. Their total annual rent paid was

**\$17.5 million**



of immigrant households in the county had access to broadband connection in their place of residence, as did **83.2%** of U.S.-born households in 2019.

<sup>19</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>20</sup> Economic data is derived from the International Student Economic Value Tool maintained by NAFSA, the association of international educators.

<sup>21</sup> New American Economy. 2021. "Map the Impact: Pennsylvania." <https://www.newamericaneconomy.org/locations/pennsylvania/>

## Naturalization



- 45.4%** Naturalized U.S. Citizens (5,100)
- 16.2%** Likely Eligible to Naturalize (1,800)
- 38.5%** Not Eligible to Naturalize (4,300)



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



of households in Erie County 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

**+8.9%**<sup>22</sup>

## Refugees

**3,000**

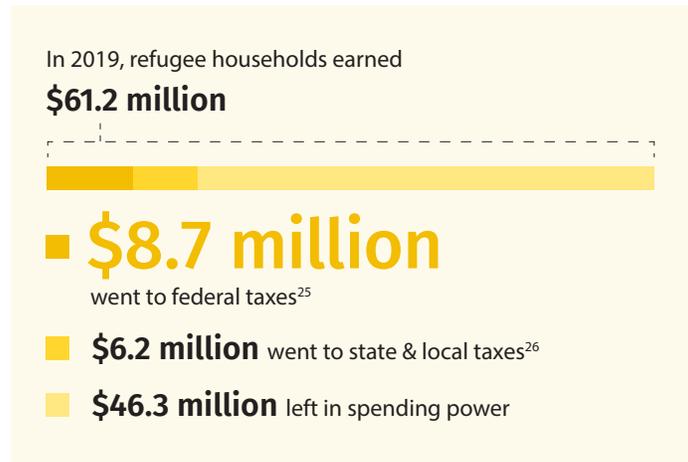
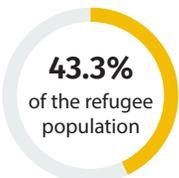
refugees, or **26.9%** of the foreign-born population in Erie County, were likely refugees.<sup>23</sup>

In comparison, there are **61,329** refugees, or **6.9%** of the foreign-born population in the state of Pennsylvania, were likely refugees.<sup>24</sup>

The top country of origin, for **32.4%** the refugee population in the county:

## Bhutan

Refugees tended to work in the Manufacturing industry:



About



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

<sup>22</sup> Enchautegui, Maria E. and Linda Giannarelli. 2015. "The Economic Impact of Naturalization on Immigrants and Cities." Urban Institute.

<sup>23</sup> New American Economy. 2017. "From Struggle to Resilience: The Economic Impact of Refugees in America."

<sup>24</sup> New American Economy. 2021. "Map the Impact: Pennsylvania."

<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."

## Population in the City of Erie

**6,300**

immigrants lived in the City of Erie, Pennsylvania, in 2019. They made up



6.5% of the total population in the city in 2019.

Between 2014 and 2019, the total population in the city decreased by

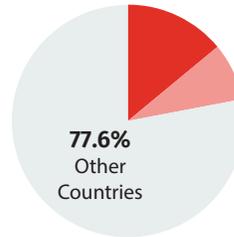


The immigrant population in the city decreased by



The top countries of origin for immigrants living in the city were

- Bhutan (14.3%)
- Nepal (8.1%)



## Spending Power & Tax Contributions in the City of Erie

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



6.0% of all spending power in the city.

In 2019, immigrant households in the City of Erie earned **\$115.3 million**

■ **\$14.5 million**

went to federal taxes<sup>27</sup>

■ **\$12.4 million** went to state & local taxes<sup>28</sup>

■ **\$88.3 million** left in spending power

<sup>27</sup> U.S. Congressional Budget Office. 2020. "The Distribution of Household Income and Federal Taxes, 2017."

<sup>28</sup> Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy. 2018. "Who Pays? A Distributional Analysis of the Tax Systems in All Fifty States."