



Immigrants in Minnesota: An increasingly diverse population

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Introduction

Immigration is a hot topic. Hardly a day goes by without something in the newspaper about new residents of Minnesota. There is a great deal of interest in how many people are here from other countries, where they live and what sort of services they need. Unfortunately, finding answers to these questions is very difficult. Minnesota has immigrants from more countries in 2000 than ever before. The number of immigrants is growing as more and more people move to Minnesota in search of jobs, safety, education or the company of others from their native country.

These immigrants come to Minnesota with widely varying levels of education and training. Some immigrants come with limited knowledge of English, and as a result, schools, hospitals, employers and landlords have had to learn to work with their students, patients, workers and renters in new ways. For schools, especially those with small enrollments, the need to provide English language instruction to non-English speaking students has added new burdens to budgets already stretched thin. Medical providers have had to add interpreters at additional cost. Courts, too, have had to find translators to accommodate non-English speakers.

International immigrants have added to the richness of Minnesota culture. Immigrant entrepreneurs provide jobs, services and goods. In some Minnesota towns, schools and main streets have been revived by the addition of these new residents. And, of course, Minnesota employers welcome the

new workers at a time when employees are hard to find.

Immigration data

In 1999, the State Demographic Center published estimates of some immigrant groups in Minnesota. Those estimates will not be revised in this report. The 2000 Census data will be released within the next two years and will provide the best source of information on Minnesota's immigrant population. Clearly, the number of immigrants living in Minnesota continues to grow. 2000 Census data will give a good picture of total numbers, rates of growth and geographic location of immigrants.

Other sources of data on immigrants to Minnesota are limited. The Immigration and Naturalization Service tracks the number of people who come to the United States every year and publishes the number of immigrants for each state by country of origin in their statistical yearbook. But data in the yearbook has about a two-year lag; the most recent data is from 1998. The INS collects immigration data at the port of entry. INS officers ask immigrants their final destination when they enter the U.S. Immigrants who speak little or no English may not understand the question. Many immigrants answer with the port of entry rather than the place they actually intend to settle. For example, if a Ukrainian enters the U.S. through New York and doesn't understand English well, the answer may be "New York" when, in fact,

the Ukrainian immigrant plans to settle in Osseo, Minnesota. In addition, many immigrants simply don't know where they will live. Immigrants are a very mobile population. They rarely own property, and many have no family here. Nothing holds them to Miami or New York or San Francisco or Seattle; they freely move wherever the economy allows them to get a job or where social service agencies exist to help them adjust to life in the U.S. or where a large group of others from their country live. For these reasons, INS data does not reflect all immigrants to Minnesota.

The Department of Children, Families and Learning collects information about the number of school children who speak a language other than English at home. The data file includes the language spoken, school district and county of residence. Since the only geographic distinction made by the INS is between metropolitan Twin Cities and the state as a whole, school data allows us to locate immigrants within the state. In addition, this data gives us some idea of the movement of immigrants between states, data not captured by the INS. For example, we know that there was a large influx of Hmong from the Fresno, California, area in the late 1990s. The Fresno economy has been far less robust with unemployment rates three to four times higher than in Minnesota. The school district data is the only source of data, other than word of mouth, on how many made the move.

Information from knowledgeable people who work with immigrants or who are

members of the community — word of mouth — is an important source of information on trends in immigration. This kind of information does not give precise data on numbers of immigrants, but often these experts in the community are able to observe trends before they are apparent in the “hard” data sources.

History of immigration to the U.S. and Minnesota

In the nineteenth century, immigration to the United States was dominated by Europeans, with very small numbers coming from other continents. By the middle of the twentieth century, more immigrants from North America — Canada and Mexico — came to the U.S. Europeans were the second largest group. In the latter part of the twentieth century, more Asians came to the U.S. surpassing the number of Europeans. In the last three decades, Africans have made

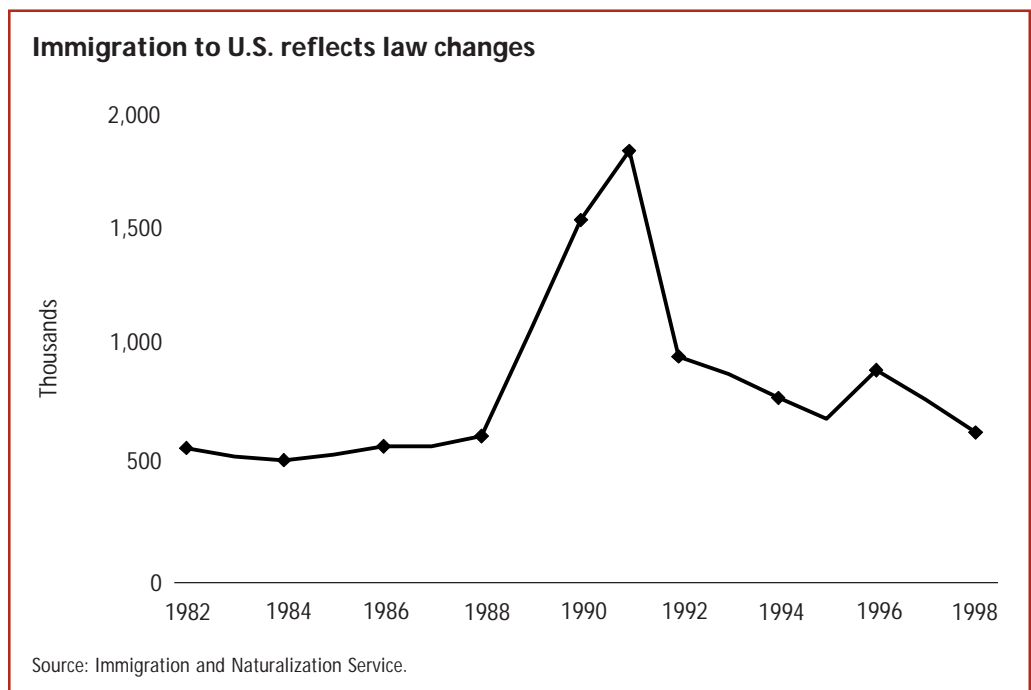
up a more significant part of the immigrant flow.

The Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 allowed illegal aliens to adjust or legalize their status without any negative consequences. As a result, the U.S. had exceptionally large numbers of legal immigrants in those years, many of whom were already resident in the U.S. Immigration numbers were quite stable in the 1980s, and since IRCA, the totals in the 1990s have declined slightly.

Minnesota trends are very similar to the U.S. In the nineteenth century, most immigrants came from Europe. In the twentieth century, the number of European immigrants started to decline, and Minnesota began to have a more diverse immigrant population. From 1956 to 1979, immigration to Minnesota ranged from one to three thousand each year. There is no data for 1980 and 1981, a period when large numbers of refugees came from southeast

Asia following the Vietnam war. There was a slowing of immigration to Minnesota after the early 1980s. Undoubtedly, many people came from southeast Asia, but since Minnesota wasn't their first stop, the INS did not count them as immigrants to Minnesota. In 1982, there were 9,192 legal immigrants to Minnesota according to the INS. Numbers were much lower in the late 1980s, reaching a low of 4,665 in 1988. The total climbed to 8,977 in 1996 but dropped off again in 1997 and 1998. The collapse of the Soviet Union resulted in large numbers of refugees coming to Minnesota, and African refugees began to come to Minnesota in the mid-1990s.

Mexico sends the most immigrants to the U.S. Large numbers also come from India, China, southeast Asia and the Philippines followed by Europe, Canada, and some countries in South America. The picture for Minnesota, however, is very different. Only since 1995 has



Total Immigrants

Year	Minnesota	United States
1982	9,192	594,131
1983	6,103	559,763
1984	5,243	543,903
1985	4,995	570,009
1986	5,189	601,708
1987	5,621	601,516
1988	4,665	643,025
1989	5,704	1,090,924
1990	6,627	1,536,483
1991	7,461	1,827,167
1992	6,851	973,977
1993	7,438	904,292
1994	7,098	804,416
1995	8,111	720,461
1996	8,977	915,900
1997	8,233	798,378
1998	6,981	660,477

Source: Immigration and Naturalization Service

Mexico been among the top countries of origin, moving from ninth in 1994 to third in 1998. In 1998, the former Soviet republics sent the highest number of immigrants (651), followed by Somalia (582). Somalia sent the most immigrants in 1997 (1,008). In Minnesota, large numbers also come from southeast Asian countries, China, India, Ethiopia and Mexico — a very different profile than for the United States as a whole.

Categories of admission

In Minnesota, a high proportion of immigrants come as refugees. In data from the INS from 1987 to 1998, the proportion of refugees among Minnesota immigrants ranged from 24.3 percent in 1998 to 46.2 percent in 1987. For the U.S., the percentages range from 6.3 in 1990 to 15.9 in 1995. In 1998, about eight

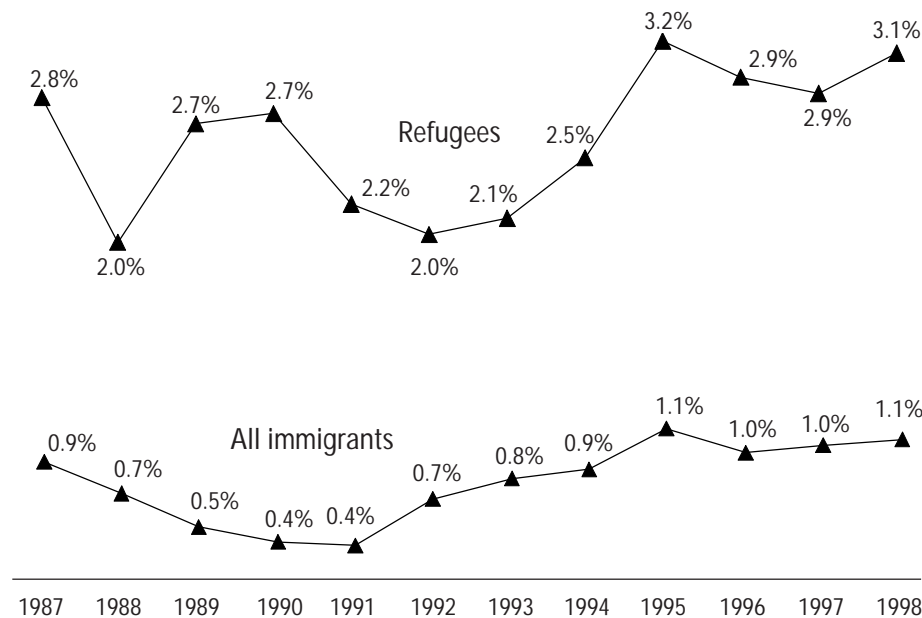
percent of immigrants to the U.S. came as refugees. Nationally, more people come under family preference than any other category of the immigration law. While Minnesota has a large proportion of immigrants who are refugees, Minnesota's share of refugees is very small — averaging 2.7 percent of the national total for 1987-1998. Minnesota ranks 16th among states in total immigration, or less than one percent of all immigrants for this period. Immigration is much higher than our neighbors, but compared to states like California, Texas, Florida, New York, New Jersey and Illinois, Minnesota has a very small immigrant population.

Immigrants who have skills needed by American employers may enter under employment preference. The need for employment preference in immigration, especially for

high tech workers, is often debated by policymakers. Most workers who enter the U.S. (only national totals are available) under employment preference are professional or technical workers — about 16,740 in 1998. This number includes workers in health care occupations and teachers. In addition, there are managers, sales personnel, and skilled and unskilled laborers. These people are allowed to bring their families with them. As a result, the majority of employment preference immigrants are dependents who do not work.

Orphan immigrants adopted by U.S. citizens are one group of immigrants that is sometimes forgotten. In 1998, Americans adopted 14,867 children from other countries. About half of them were infants (less than one year old), and nearly two-thirds were girls. Changes in the numbers of orphan immigrants arise as a result of political change in the country of origin. If it becomes less popular to allow orphans to be adopted by Americans, the numbers decline. Between 1994 and 1998, the numbers from Europe and Asia more than doubled, whereas the numbers from South America declined by more than half. Overall, the number of orphans adopted by Americans has increased about 81 percent since 1994. There is no information on immigrant orphans by state of residence.

Minnesota's share of U.S. immigration is small but proportion of refugees is higher



Source: Immigration and Naturalization Service

Non-English speaking students

According to the Department of Children, Families and Learning, the number of children who did not speak English at home in the 1999-2000 school year was almost

56,000, a 22 percent increase since the 1997-1998 school year. The rapid rise in these numbers is another indication that many immigrants and

their children are coming to Minnesota from other states. All but six counties have some children who do not speak English at home. Northern

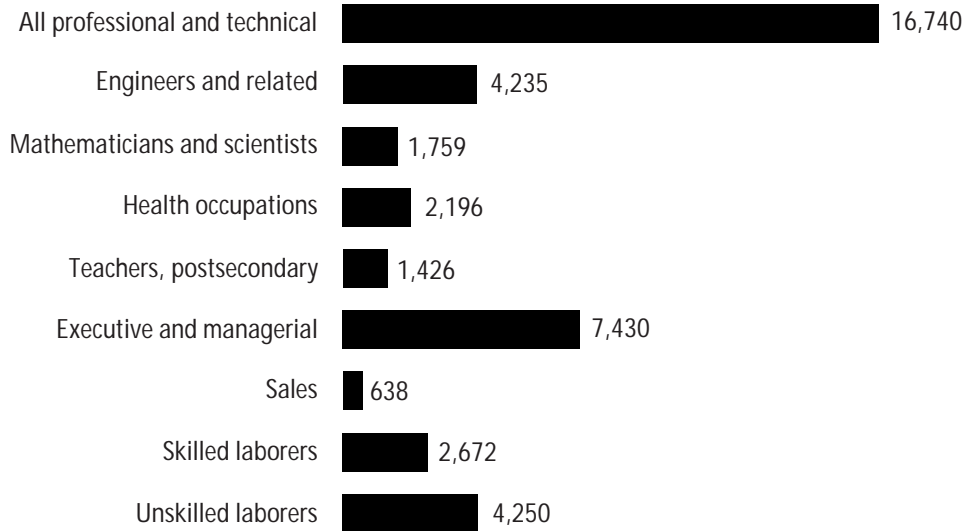
Minnesota counties have the fewest non-English speakers.

Asian languages make up the largest language group spoken

by students. Nearly 32,000 children in the 1999-2000 school year spoke an Asian language at home. The vast majority of these children live in the Twin Cities metropolitan counties of Ramsey, Hennepin, Anoka and Dakota. Olmsted County also has large numbers. Other counties with fairly large numbers of children speaking Asian languages are Nobles, Lyon, Stearns, Clay, St. Louis and Winona. Hmong speakers make up about two-thirds of the Asian language speakers. Localized in Ramsey County, 12,105 of the 20,371 Hmong-speaking children attended school in St. Paul. Many of these children were born in the U.S. and are American citizens — children and even grandchildren of Hmong immigrants.

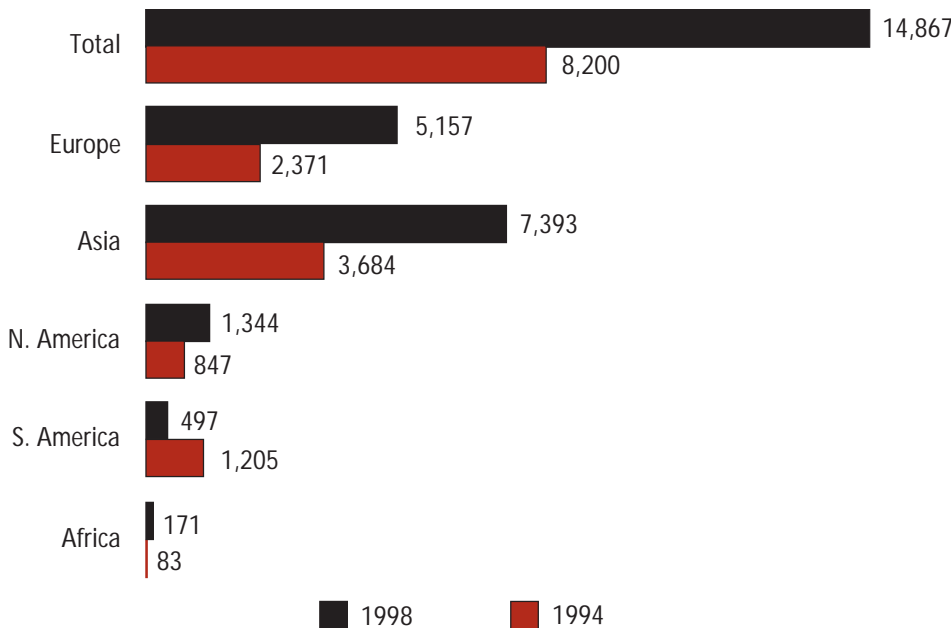
Spanish speakers are the most widely distributed geographically of any language group in Minnesota schools. In 1999-2000, 14,641 students spoke Spanish at home. Some people assume that these are children of migrant workers. However, the number of migrant workers has declined over the past ten to twenty years. The use of technology in agriculture has decreased demand for migrant workers. At the same time, Hispanic workers can find permanent jobs and choose not to migrate. As a result, greater Minnesota has fairly large concentrations of Spanish-speaking people in areas with food processing plants. It should be noted that not all Spanish-speaking workers are international immigrants. Many come to Minnesota from the southwestern border states of Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and California. And like Hmong students, many are American

Employment-preference immigrants dominated by professionals and technicians



Source: Immigration and Naturalization Service, 1998

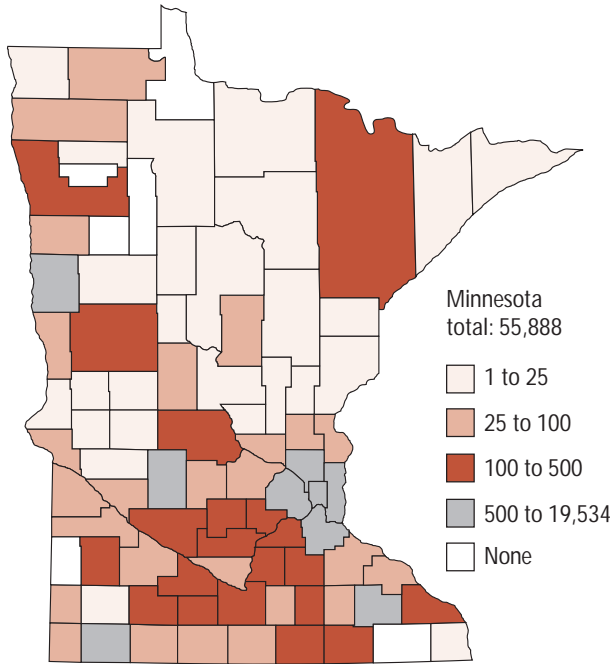
Politics likely cause of change in origin of orphans



Source: Immigration and Naturalization Service

All non-English speakers

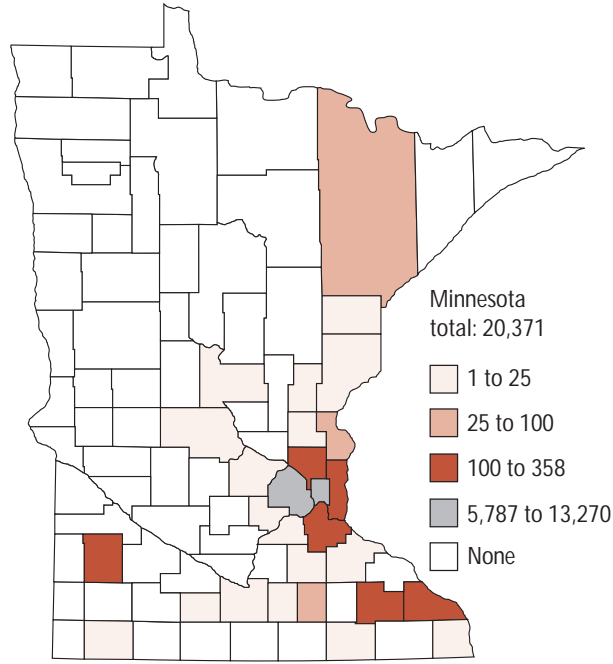
1999-2000 K-12 students



Source: Minnesota Dept. of Children, Families and Learning

Hmong speakers

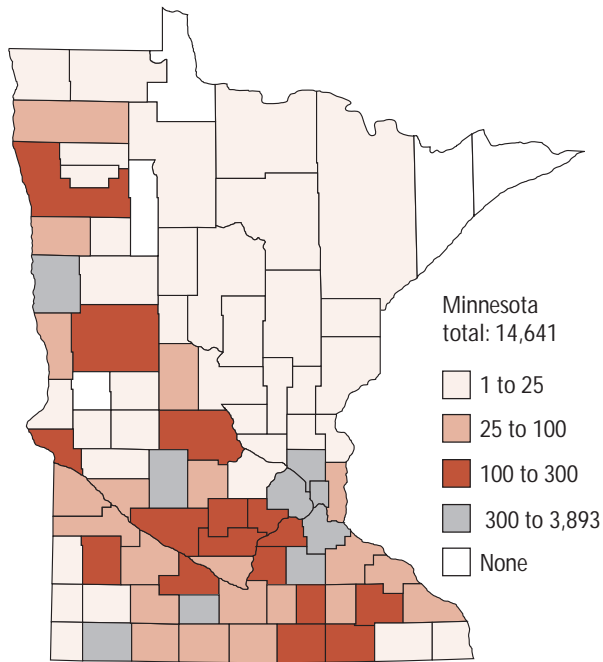
1999-2000 K-12 students



Source: Minnesota Dept. of Children, Families and Learning

Spanish speakers

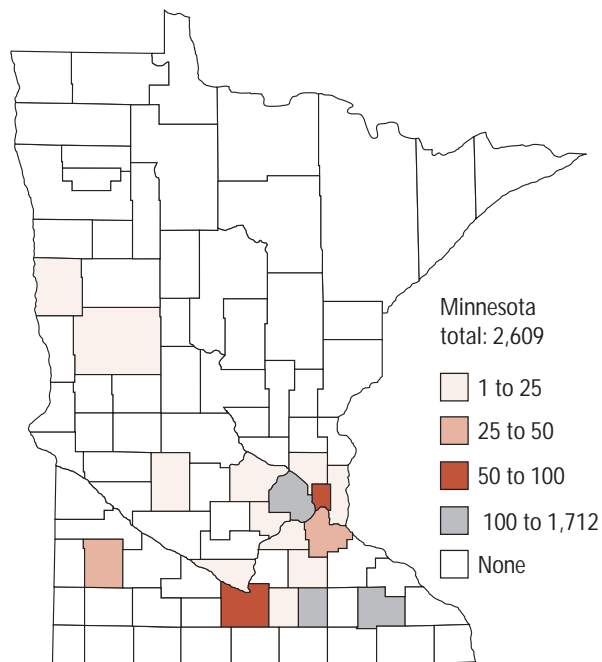
1999-2000 K-12 students



Source: Minnesota Dept. of Children, Families and Learning

Somali speakers

1999-2000 K-12 students



Source: Minnesota Dept. of Children, Families and Learning

born. It is impossible to determine what proportion of Spanish speakers are U.S. citizens.

African speakers represent a very recent immigrant population in Minnesota. Very few African immigrants came to Minnesota before 1990, but since that time African immigrants have become a very important part of Minnesota's immigrant population. In 1997, Somalis were the largest group of immigrants to Minnesota. Somali speakers are concentrated in Minneapolis (1,553 students or 60 percent of all Somali school children). Other districts with large numbers of Somali-speaking students in the 1999-2000 school year were Rochester (462), Owatonna (131), St. Paul (87), Eden Prairie (67) and Mankato (59).

Another group of immigrants that came here in the 1990s are from eastern Europe. Concentrated in the Twin Cities and Rochester, eastern Europeans live in many counties throughout Minnesota. For example, a group of Bosnians work in the turkey plant in Pelican Rapids in Otter Tail County. Some children in the northern part of the state who speak eastern European languages at home may not be recent immigrants. Their parents may be second or third generation immigrants who continue to speak their native languages at home.

Russian speakers are the largest east European group and are concentrated in the Twin Cities area. Large numbers of Russian-speaking students attend suburban Hennepin County school districts including Anoka-

Hennepin, Robbinsdale and Osseo. The number of Russians coming to Minnesota increased sharply after the breakup of the Soviet Union. According to some sources, the earliest Russian immigrants were predominantly Jewish refugees with a much smaller number of Pentecostal Christian refugees. The Jewish refugees tended to be older and have smaller families. Looking at the trend in Russian speakers in schools, the Russian-speaking population may be changing. The number of students speaking Russian at home rose from 1,023 in 1997-98 to 1,519 in 1999-2000. This rapid increase in Russian-speaking children may indicate that more Russian refugees are Pentecostal Christians, a younger population with larger families. However, it could simply mean that more Russians — especially young families of both religions — are coming here from other states. Interestingly, some Russians come to Minnesota from other states because they prefer Minnesota's climate!

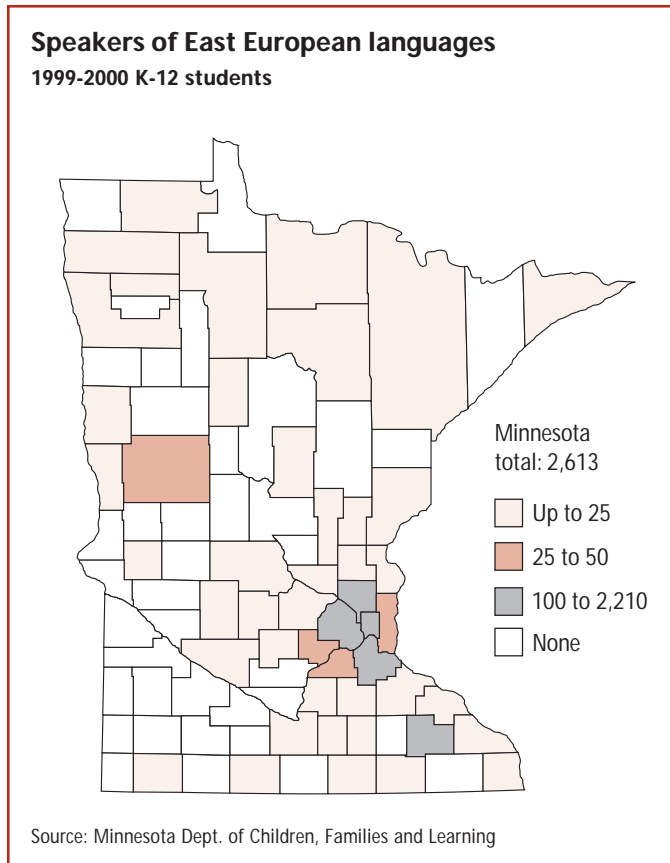
personnel to arrest every illegal alien, the INS has focused on the criminally-involved portion of the illegal immigrant population — those who have committed crimes in addition to entering illegally. In 1990, 46 percent of undocumented persons arrested by the INS had additional criminal involvement. In 1999, the rate had climbed to nearly 70 percent. Obviously, the proportion of illegal immigrants arrested for additional criminal involvement has grown rapidly, but much of the increase is due to the change in approach by the INS.

In 1996, the INS estimated the number of illegal aliens in the U.S. at 5 million. This estimate has not been updated. More than half of all undocumented immigrants are from Mexico, and about 40 percent live in California. It is important to remember that 41 percent of illegal aliens are "overstays." These individuals originally entered legally with work permits, tourist visas or student visas; however, they have stayed after the visa expired.

Undocumented immigrants

Misconceptions about immigrants who enter illegally abound. According to the St. Paul District of the INS, about 1,800 illegal aliens were deported from the three states covered by the district (Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota) in 1998. Because of increased numbers of illegal immigrants and no concomitant increase in INS staff, the INS has changed its approach to illegal aliens. The INS used to arrest any undocumented immigrants. But now with insufficient

The INS St. Paul District estimates conservatively that 25,000 illegal aliens reside in Minnesota. More recently, a report from H.A.C.E.R. (Hispanic Advocacy and Community Empowerment through Research) estimates that there are between 18,000 and 48,000 undocumented Hispanic workers. Information from employers and workers in food processing and other industries indicates that the number of undocumented workers has risen dramatically in the last few years. While there are many reasons for the increase, a primary reason is



Minnesota's strong economy. Minnesota has many low-paying jobs in food processing, meat and poultry packing, agriculture and the hospitality industry. Young Minnesotans are not attracted to these jobs, but an unemployed person from northern Mexico or central America may be willing to risk entering illegally for one of these jobs.

Most illegal aliens in Minnesota are probably gainfully employed and contributing to the state's economy. Estimates of their contribution range widely — the H.A.C.E.R. report estimates 2.4 percent of Minnesota's gross domestic product. Other sources emphasize the cost of providing welfare, education, medical and housing services to these workers. Some employers are trying to convince policy makers to allow more low skilled and unskilled workers in to fill jobs. Employers in health care, especially, are having difficulty filling positions. Many nursing homes are unable to fill all their beds simply because they do not have enough staff. One way to solve that problem, they argue, would be to allow

more foreign workers to enter under employment preference.

The future

What is going to happen in the future? Since so many immigrants to Minnesota come as refugees, the question becomes: where will the next hot spot be and what country will send refugees to Minnesota? A recent example is Kosovo. Very few Kosovars came to Minnesota because the U.S. attempted to settle them in places with a sizable population of Kosovars. Minnesota has very few Kosovars, and as a result, very few came here. Large numbers of Sudanese immigrants settled in Anoka and northern Hennepin counties in the early 1990s, but they did not stay in Minnesota. While Somalis seemed to have found a new home to their liking in Minnesota, few Sudanese stayed here. Most have moved to Iowa or Nebraska.

The world's current hot spots are in Africa and Indonesia. No one knows whether refugees will come to Minnesota or whether they will decide to stay if they do come here.

Minnesota has an active charitable sector and strong social services. Catholic Charities, Jewish Family Service, the International Institute, Lutheran Social Services and many others provide excellent services to immigrants and refugees. These service providers and Minnesota's strong economy will continue to draw immigrants to Minnesota.

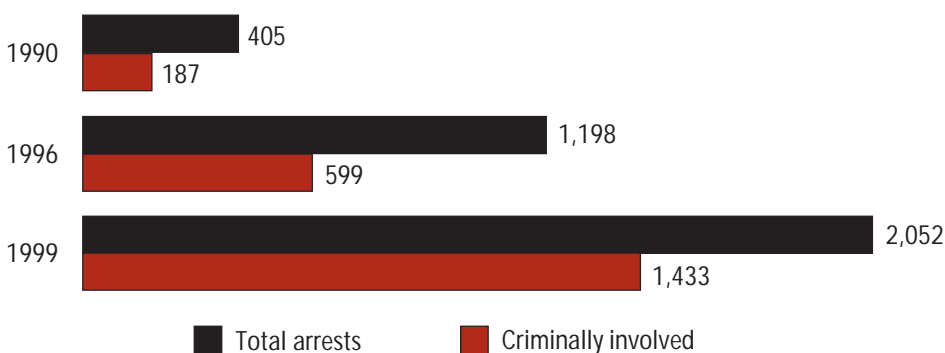
A change in the immigration law in 1997 may lead to increased immigration to Minnesota. The law now allows family members of refugee immigrants from several African countries to enter the U.S. under the family preference provisions of the law. This means that relatives of refugees resident in the U.S. no longer have to go through the rigorous documentation process, required of refugees, to prove that they are subject to persecution in their home country. This change in the law means that many more people will enter from these countries and is probably a factor in the growing number of immigrant children in Minnesota schools.

In early October 2000, the U.S. Senate voted to increase the

number of H1-B visas (for highly skilled foreign workers) from 115,000 to 165,000 for the next three years. If this legislation becomes law, it could have an impact on the number of high skilled workers who immigrate to Minnesota.

These kind of policy decisions at the national level will determine the number of immigrants entering the U.S. and Minnesota. Immigration policy is complicated and feelings run high on whether to change the numbers admitted each year. With a large and growing population of immigrants, Minnesota should expect to continue to see people come from all over the world. The challenge will be to continue to provide housing, jobs, language training and other services to these new residents so that they can participate fully in Minnesota's society and economy.

Arrests of illegal aliens rise in Minnesota



Source: Immigration and Naturalization Service

Immigration terms

Alien - any person who is not a citizen of the U.S.

International immigrant also called *Permanent Resident Alien* - an alien admitted to the U.S. as a lawful permanent resident. May also be called an *in-migrant*.

Refugee - any person who lives outside his/her country of nationality who is unable or unwilling

to return due to persecution or well-founded fear of persecution.

Undocumented immigrant - a non-citizen residing in the U.S. illegally or without inspection. May also be called *illegal alien, illegal immigrant, or undocumented worker*.

For fuller definitions, see <http://www.ins.usdoj.gov/graphics/glossary.htm>



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