

The Importance of Immigration in the Twin Cities Metro Area

The Twin Cities is now home to **just under 3.15 million residents**, after welcoming **almost 300,000 new people** since 2010. The 7-county planning region enjoyed a positive rate of natural increase – more births than deaths – of 25,000 more people from 2020 to 2022. That was offset as the metro area suffered domestic **out-migration of 53,380 people** but welcomed **international net in-migration of 14,054 additional foreign-born residents**. In sum, the region lost about 14,000 residents from 2020 to 2022.

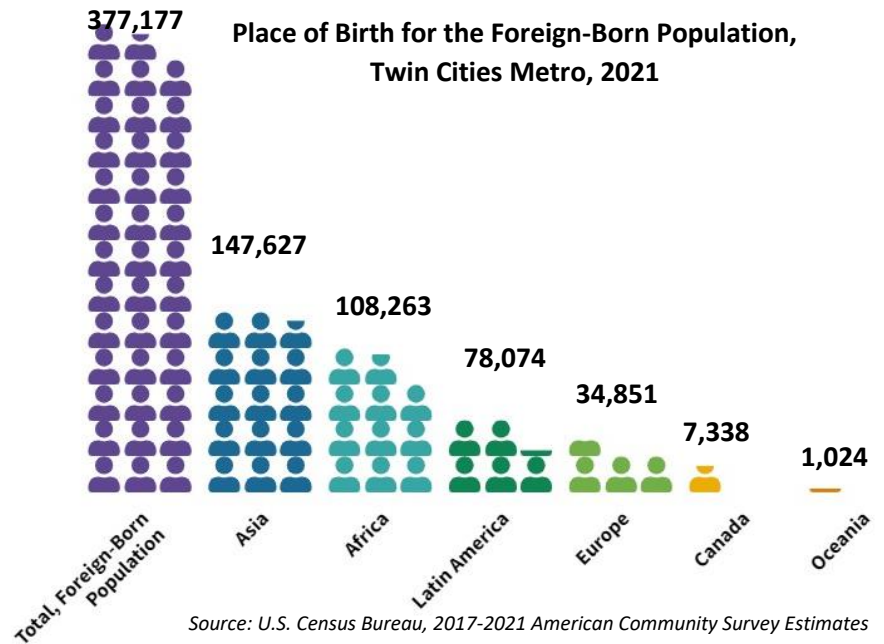
Cumulative Estimates of the Components of Population Change in Twin Cities Metro Area, 2020-2022							
2022 Population Estimate	2020-2022 Estimated Population Change	April 1, 2020 to July 1, 2022					
		Vital Events			Net Migration		
		Natural Increase	Births	Deaths	Total	Inter-national	Domestic
3,149,205	-13,908	+25,042	81,739	56,697	-39,326	+14,054	-53,380

Source: [U.S. Census Bureau, Population Estimates Program](#)

Over time, immigration has been a vital part of the Twin Cities’ on-going population growth. According to the U.S. Census Bureau’s 2021 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, the Twin Cities is now home to just over **377,000 foreign born residents**, or about **12% of the total population**. The number of immigrants in the region increased by **+29.1%** from 2010 to 2021, similar to the statewide growth rate of +30.6%.

About 40% (147,627 people) of the region’s foreign born residents were from **Asia**. Over half of these immigrants came from Southeastern Asia, primarily from **Laos, Vietnam, and Thailand**; but the fastest growth was coming from South Central Asia, most notably from **India**.

The second largest number and the fastest growing wave of new immigrants to the Twin Cities came from **Africa**, which increased by nearly 47,000 people from 2010 to 2021, a 76.5% jump, pushing the region’s African population to 108,263 people. The largest contingent – about 68,204 people – is from Eastern Africa, primarily **Somalia and Ethiopia**.



The next largest number of foreign born residents were from **Latin America**, including 38,889 people from **Mexico**. However, the flow of immigrants from Latin America slowed to just 4.9% growth since 2010, a gain of less than 3,600 additional people.

Another 34,851 foreign born residents were from **Europe**, which was a slight 3.6% increase since 2010. The Twin Cities also saw a small decline in the number of immigrants from **Canada** from 2010 to 2021, now comprising just 7,338 people. The smallest number (1,024 people) of foreign born residents in the region was from **Oceania**, which includes Australia and New Zealand.

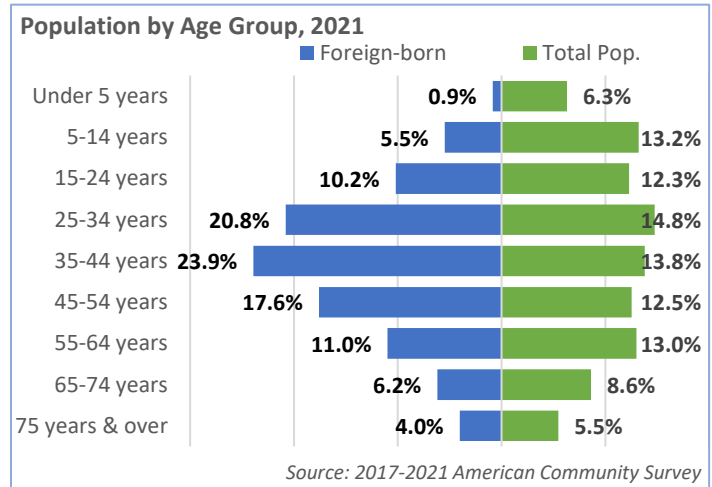
Based on year of entry, **the Twin Cities’ foreign born population was “newer”** than the rest of the nation. Just over 29% of the region’s immigrants entered the U.S. since 2010 and another 30% entered since 2000. The remaining 40.5% of immigrants in the Twin Cities region settled in the U.S. prior to 2000. Forty-one percent (41.9%) of foreign born residents in the Twin Cities metro area were not U.S. citizens, compared to 44.3% of immigrants in the state. The other 58.1% of immigrants in the region have become naturalized citizens.

Ready and Willing to Work

Immigrants have a much younger age profile than the native born population. In 2021, 62.3% of the foreign born population were in their prime working years between 25 and 54 years of age, compared to 41.1% of the total population. About one in every five (20.8%) immigrants in the region was between 25 and 34 years of age, which was 6% higher than the share of the region’s total population. In contrast, just 10.2% of the region’s foreign born population was 65 years and over, compared to 14.1% of the total population.

Population by Age Group for the Foreign Born Population, 2021			Total Population
Twin Cities Metro Area	Number	Percent	Percent
Under 5 years	3,236	0.9%	6.3%
5-14 years	20,624	5.5%	13.2%
15-24 years	38,473	10.2%	12.3%
25-34 years	78,453	20.8%	14.8%
35-44 years	90,138	23.9%	13.8%
45-54 years	66,342	17.6%	12.5%
55-64 years	41,424	11.0%	13.0%
65-74 years	23,293	6.2%	8.6%
75 years & over	15,194	4.0%	5.5%
Total, Foreign Born	377,177	100.0%	100.0%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2017-2021 American Community Survey



In the face of increasingly tight labor markets, a growing scarcity of workers is now recognized as one of Minnesota’s most significant barriers to sustained economic growth. Because of these constraints, it has become evident that immigration has been and will continue to be a vital source of the workforce that employers need to succeed. Immigrants have become critical to Minnesota’s economy, providing a rapid stream of new workers in the face of an aging native-born workforce.

Statewide, 74.3% of the foreign born population aged 16 years and over was actively participating in the labor force, which was higher than the labor force participation rate for the native born population (69.2%). And while the state’s overall labor force growth was slowing, the number of immigrant workers in the state increased by more than **80,000 workers** from 2011 to 2021, a **+31.5% increase**. In comparison, the native born workforce expanded by 75,500 workers, a +2.8% increase. In sum, immigrants accounted for over half of the state’s labor force growth between 2011 and 2021.

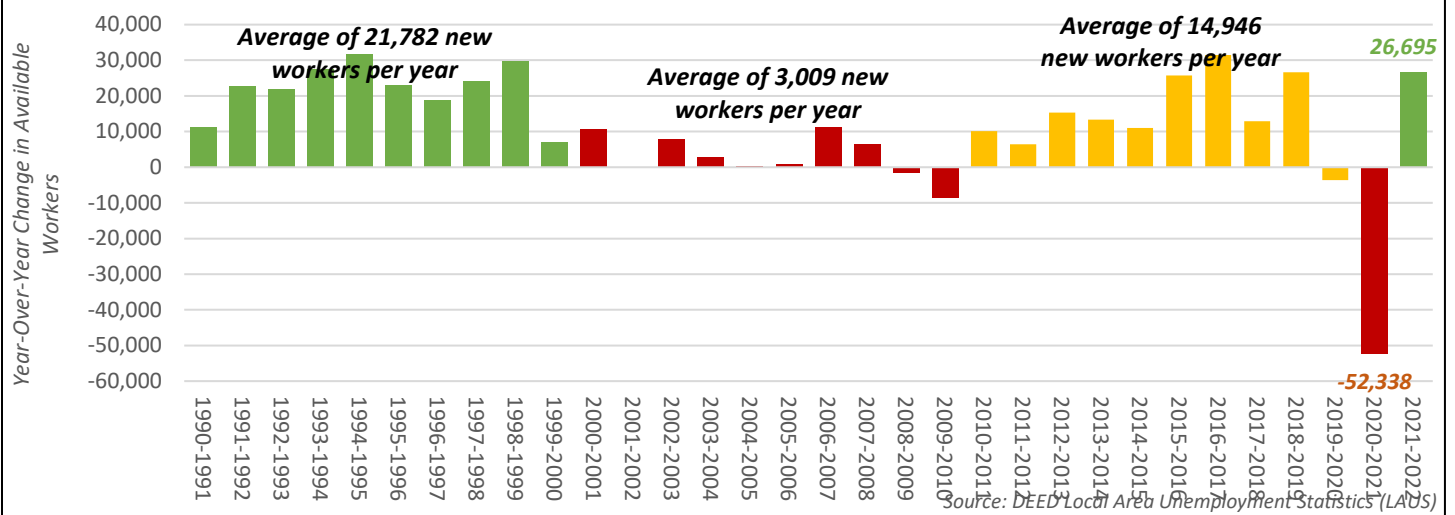
	Minnesota Labor Force Change		Change from 2011-2021	
	2011 Labor Force	2021 Labor Force	Number	Percent
Total	2,955,746	3,115,022	+159,276	+5.4%
Native	2,702,643	2,778,107	+75,464	+2.8%
Foreign Born	254,573	334,774	+80,201	+31.5%

Source: American Community Survey, S0501

In the Twin Cities, that would equal about **256,800 available immigrant workers**, comprising **14.5%** of the region’s workforce in 2021. If the region matched state growth rates, that would be an addition of nearly 61,800 additional workers over the past decade, which would have been a vital source of growth.

After averaging a net gain of 21,782 additional labor force participants per year between 1990 and 2000, Twin Cities employers were able to tap into a large and growing pool of talented workers. However, from 2000 to 2010, labor force growth began to slow in the Twin Cities, averaging 3,000 new workers per year. After reaching a new peak with 1,742,842 workers in 2019, the Twin Cities averaged almost 15,000 new workers per year from 2010-2020. More recently, from 2020 to 2022, there was a drop of 25,643 people in the labor force, primarily due to the economic impact from the pandemic.

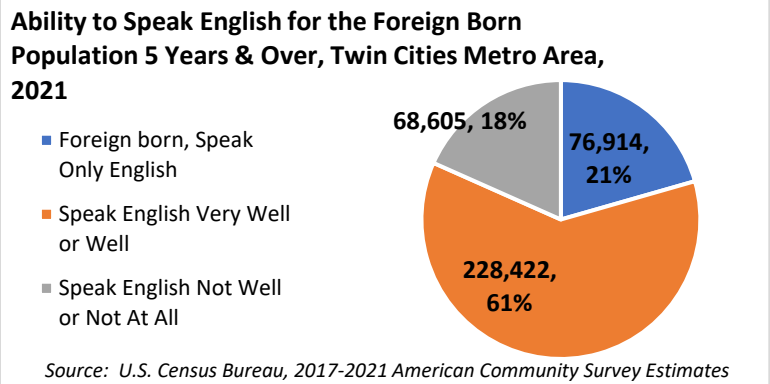
Twin Cities Annual Change in Labor Force, 1990-2022



Recently released labor force projections from the Minnesota State Demographic Center suggest this trend will become even more apparent, with **the Twin Cities expected to add about 76,980 workers between 202 and 2035**, an average of 7,698 new workers per year. This will make it more challenging for employers to grow, but will also shine a light on the importance of immigration.

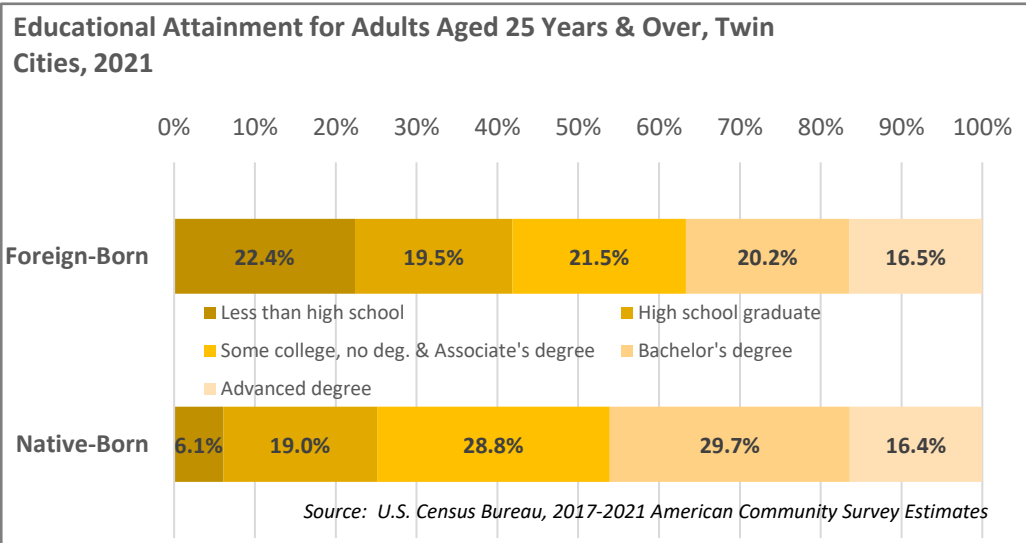
Removing Barriers to Growth

One challenge to assimilating in a new culture is language, but many new Minnesotans have made headway. About 79% of immigrants in the Twin Cities reported speaking a foreign language, but many of them also had some ability to speak English. Over 76.9% reported being able to speak English “well” or “very well”, while the others spoke English “not well” or “not at all.”



Twenty-two percent of foreign-born residents aged 25 years and over did not have a high school diploma. This is a sizeable number and shows that many immigrants may need access to education to be prepared for the workforce, where jobs for high school graduates are in high demand.

However, foreign born adults also had a high percentage of bachelor’s or advanced degrees, helping to fill high demand openings in health care and computer fields.



Perhaps due in part to the language and educational barriers described above, immigrants were more likely to work in certain occupation and industry groups than native born workers. For example, foreign born workers were found more often in service occupations, which includes healthcare support, protective service, food preparation & serving, building & grounds cleaning, and personal care. Immigrants were also more concentrated in production, transportation, and material moving occupations.

Some of these occupations are already showing critical workforce shortages in

Southwest Minnesota, including Nursing Assistants, Home Health and Personal Care Aides, as well as other Healthcare, Production, and Computer-related occupations. Along those same lines, foreign born workers were much more likely to be found in industries like Manufacturing, Leisure & Hospitality, and Administrative Support & Waste Management Services – which includes temporary staffing services. In contrast, immigrants were less likely to be employed in Retail Trade, Public Administration, Finance, Real Estate, and Construction.

Wherever they work, these new Minnesotans are a vital part of the state and region’s economy, providing rapid growth to an otherwise aging and slowing labor force. Immigrants have proven to be ready and willing contributors, with high and rising labor force participation rates. While some have educational and language barriers to certain jobs, there are a variety of occupations, including many that are in critical need of workers, where immigrants already contribute in significant numbers. In the years ahead, it is likely that labor force constraints will require that every employer consider our growing foreign-born population as a source of the workforce they will need.

Top Occupations Employing Foreign Born Workers in Minnesota			
Occupation	Foreign Born Share of Total Employment*	Estimated Regional Foreign Born Employment	Regional Median Hourly Wage
Home Health & Personal Care Aides	25.8%	18,091	\$15.94
Software Developers	26.5%	7,701	\$56.55
Janitors & Cleaners, exc. Maids & Housekeeping	19.5%	4,963	\$18.06
Laborers & Freight, Stock, & Material Movers, Hand	12.2%	4,000	\$21.49
Registered Nurses	10.2%	3,759	\$43.82
Waiters & Waitresses	11.7%	2,631	\$11.83
Packaging & Filling Machine Operators & Tenders	53.3%	1,935	\$18.70
Accountants & Auditors	9.4%	1,929	\$38.59
Electrical, Electronic, & Mechanical Assemblers	33.2%	1,378	\$20.35
Construction Laborers	10.9%	1,344	\$26.75
Food Preparation Workers	14.2%	1,322	\$16.59
Computer User Support Specialists	12.6%	1,189	\$31.00
Licensed Practical & Licensed Vocational Nurses	12.5%	819	28.51
Food Batchmakers	26.6%	806	\$17.28
Inspectors, Testers, Sorters, Samplers, & Weighers	13.5%	788	\$24.32
Cleaners of Vehicles & Equipment	25.2%	723	\$18.09
Clinical Laboratory Technologists & Technicians	17.9%	618	\$31.22
Butchers & Meat Cutters	38.7%	437	\$22.21
Helpers--Production Workers	16.6%	418	\$17.22
<i>Source: U.S. Census Bureau, DEED Occupational Employment & Wage Statistics (OEWS)</i>			
<i>* - foreign-born share of total employment by occupation in Minnesota</i>			



For more information about the importance of immigration in the Twin Cities, contact:

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