

# New Americans in Roanoke

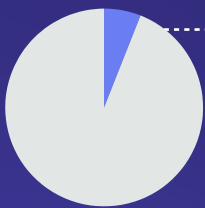
The Demographic and Economic Contributions of Immigrants in the Region<sup>1</sup>



State & Local

## Population Growth

Immigrants made up



**5.5%**  
of the total population  
in the Roanoke region  
in 2017.

**35.2%**

of total population growth in  
the region was attributable  
to immigrants.

Between 2012  
and 2017, the  
immigrant  
population in  
the region  
increased by:

**8.6%**,  
from 10,906  
to **11,842**.

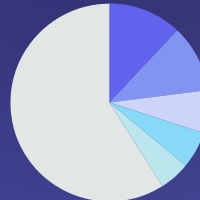
The overall  
population grew by:

**1.2%**,  
from 214,553  
to **217,212**.

**11,842**

immigrants lived in the region in 2017. Their top five countries of origin were:

1. Mexico ..... **11.6%**
2. Honduras ..... **10.7%**
3. Haiti ..... **6.5%**
4. India ..... **6.2%**
5. Philippines ..... **5.3%**



## 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:

**\$303.9M**

**\$52.0M**  
went to federal taxes.<sup>2</sup>

FEDERAL

**\$23.1M**

went to state and  
local taxes.<sup>3</sup>

STATE AND LOCAL

Leaving them with **\$228.7M** in spending power.

## Spending Power & Tax Contributions (Continued)

Immigrants in the region also supported federal social programs. In 2017, they contributed **\$31.0M** to Social Security and **\$8.3M** to Medicare.

**23.6%**

of immigrants in the region received Medicare or Medicaid, compared with

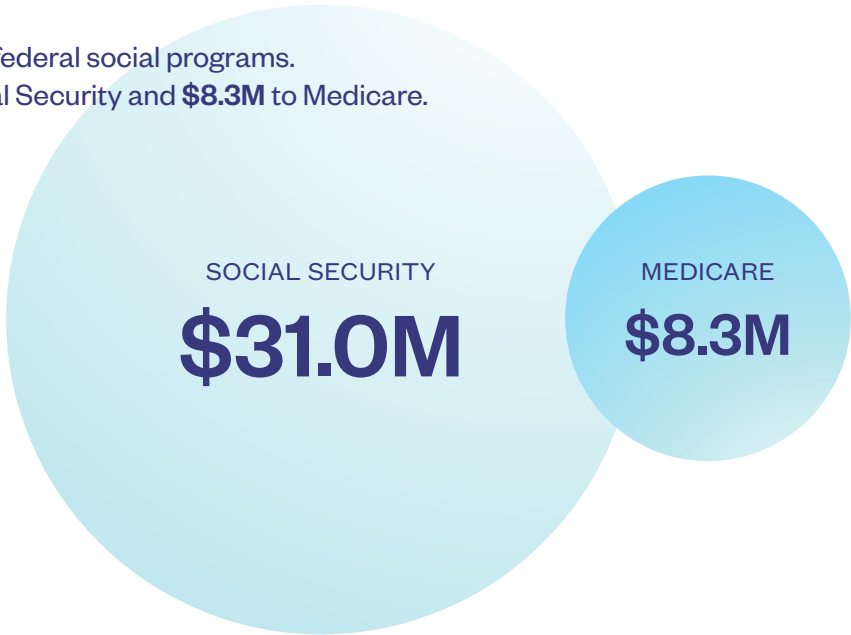
**35.0%**

of U.S.-born residents in 2017.

IMMIGRANTS



U.S.-BORN



**55.6%**

of immigrants had private healthcare coverage, while

**23.9%**

had public healthcare coverage in 2017.

PRIVATE



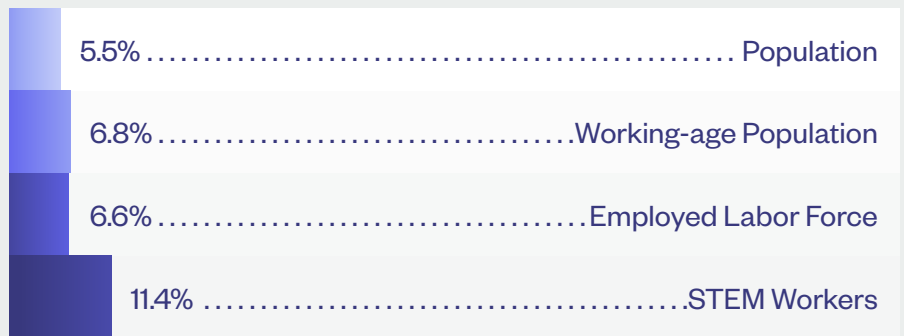
PUBLIC



## Workforce

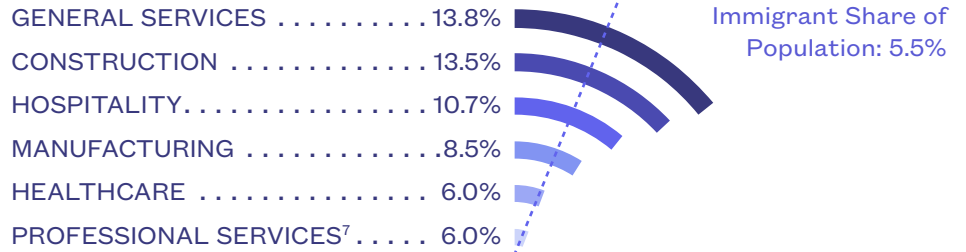
Although the foreign-born made up **5.5%** of the region's overall population, they represented **6.8%** of its working-age<sup>4</sup> population, **6.6%** of its employed labor force, and **11.4%** of its STEM<sup>5</sup> workers in 2017.

Immigrant shares of the...

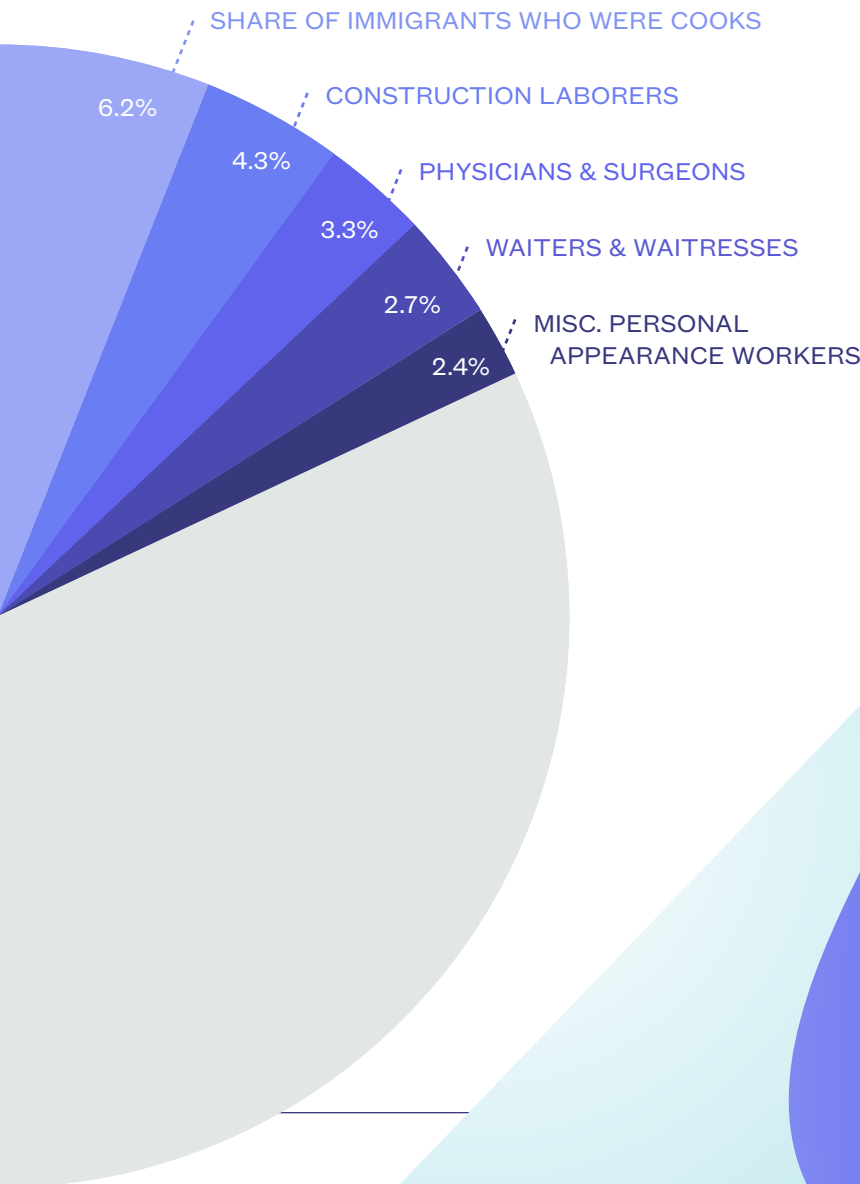


## Workforce (Continued)

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



Immigrants tended to work in these **occupations** in the region in 2017:

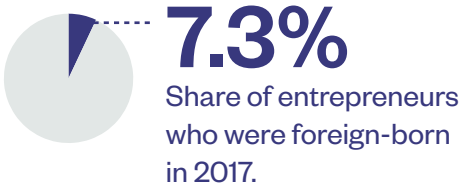


Because of the role immigrants play in the workforce helping companies keep jobs on U.S. soil, we estimate that:

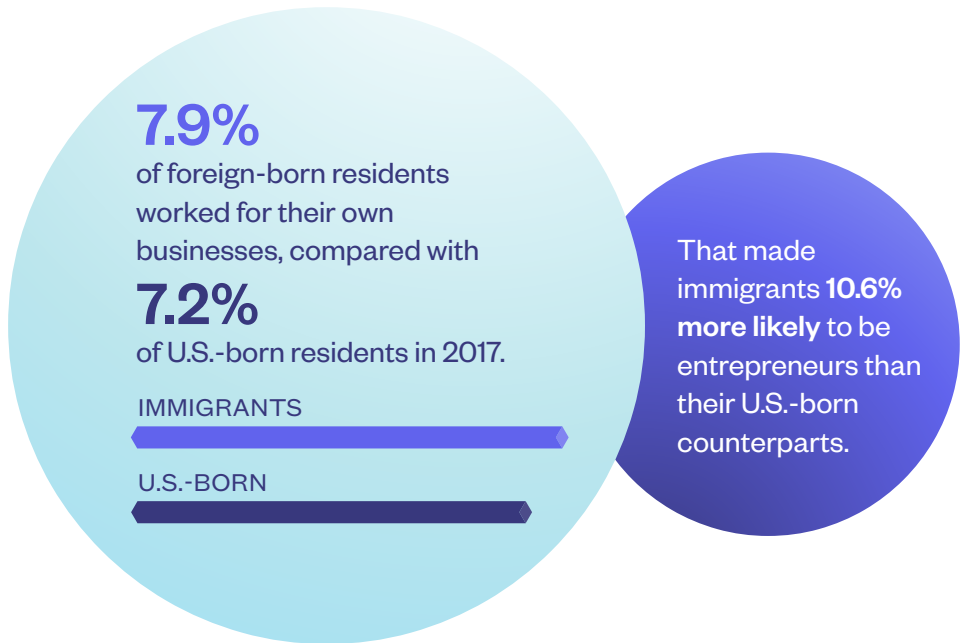
*Immigrants living in the region helped create or preserve **545 local manufacturing jobs** that would have otherwise vanished or moved elsewhere by 2017.<sup>8</sup>*

## Entrepreneurship

Despite making up **5.5%** of the population, immigrants made up **7.3%** of the business owners in the region in 2017.

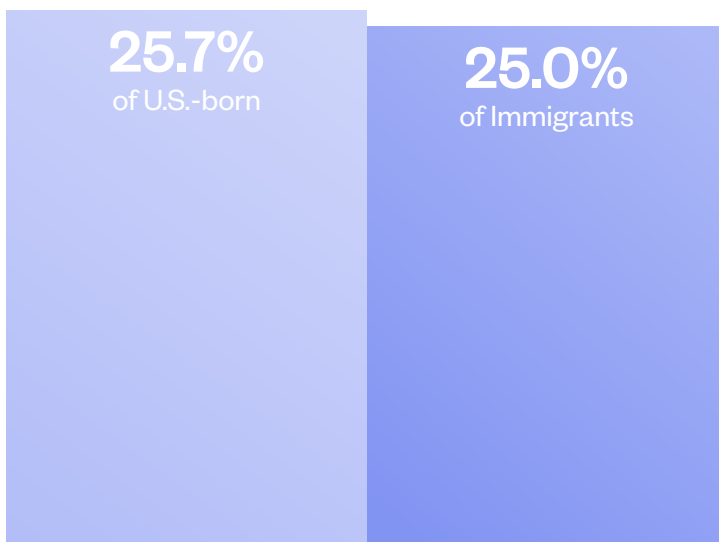


Businesses in the Region, 2012	Sales Revenue	Number of Paid Employees
AFRICAN AMERICAN-OWNED	\$54.2M	557
ASIAN-OWNED	\$181.5M	1,745
HISPANIC-OWNED <sup>9</sup>	\$42.0M	58

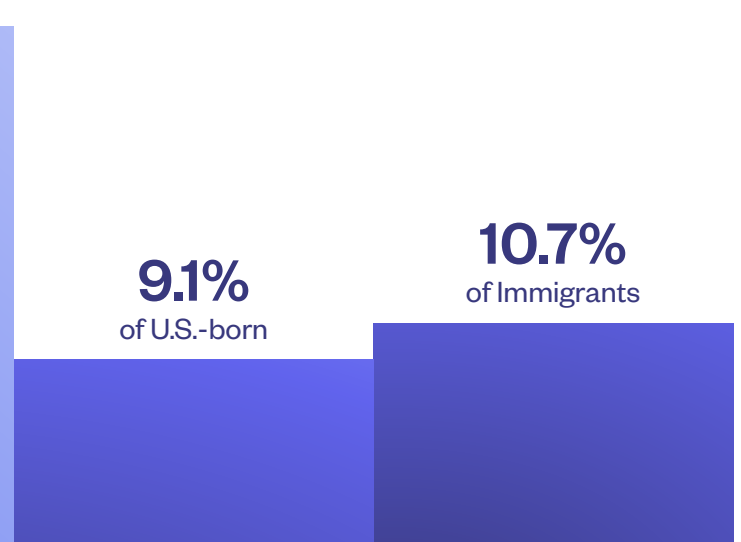


## Education

Share of the region's population aged 25 or older that held a **bachelor's degree or higher** in 2017:



Share of the region's population aged 25 or older that held an **advanced degree** in 2017:



SPOTLIGHT ON

## Rebecca Chang

PROFESSOR, ROANOKE COLLEGE

Rebecca Chang moved to Roanoke to be with her husband, whom she met while on a work assignment in the United States. This was in 1990, when few from mainland China called Virginia home. Her husband had to briefly travel a few months after she arrived, leaving her alone with her young daughter. Christmas was approaching, and the pair would walk to the grocery store.

One day they saw a wreath with white flowers on a front door. Chang cautiously explained to her four-year-old that someone had died, which is what this would mean at home, in China. A few days later, she saw another wreath and, soon, more. "I thought, What kind of a block is this? Everybody had somebody die," she says. "At the time I didn't have much language, and I was missing home. So I really felt alone."

It wasn't too long before a nice neighbor brought Chang an early Christmas gift—a wreath with white flowers. "My mind just raced," she says. "From there I realized there were so many things I didn't know."

Chang tells this story to illustrate the immense volume of detail a new immigrant must absorb when moving to a new place. Those details can quickly overwhelm someone from another culture.

"In my early years here I felt I was struggling to survive. I didn't know if I would survive," she says. "There was no organization to receive me, and not many people from mainland China."

Chang, an electrical engineer in China, hardly lacked for effort. In Roanoke, she took dozens of community college classes in a wide range of subjects, earned a bachelor's degree in business management and a master's degree in education, and plans to defend her PhD this year. At the same time, she and her husband went into business together and raised two children—one is a high school teacher, one a medical resident—and she also volunteered. She now teaches at Roanoke College.

"When you become an immigrant it's like you're a tree being pulled up by all your roots," she says. "You have to reroot yourself, and that's a very complex process."

SPOTLIGHT ON

## Elvir Berbic

STUDENT AFFAIRS MANAGER, VIRGINIA TECH

Elvir Berbic's family fled Bosnia when war broke out in 1992. "One day I went to school, and out of four grades—so about 80 students—10 showed up to class," Berbic says. "They told us, 'School is over. We don't know when it's going to be open. Go home. Be safe.'"

But to stay in Derventa, their hometown, was also to risk the family's life.

"We were playing one time, and a MiG [military plane] just flew over us and knocked us all on the ground because it was so low," he says. "There was a lot of talk about whose house is targeted, whose house is safe, whose house has a basement to hide in. My dad would guard our apartment with an AK-47 and a pistol, which is nothing when people are about to roll in with tanks."

Adding to the threat, the Berbics were Muslim, the subject of an ethnic cleansing campaign by the Serbian majority. Before this time, Berbic, 11, didn't even know they were Muslim.

The family drove to Croatia in a refrigeration truck, doling out soda to bribe checkpoint guards. When 13 relatives took refuge in their Croatian aunt's one-bedroom apartment, his family moved into a nearby refugee camp, where their stay, and the war, dragged on for three years. His parents thought they would be home in a few months. Instead, they accepted refugee status and relocation to the United States.

Berbic, by then 14, and his brother had learned English in the camp. Youth, too, helped them integrate. His parents, however, had a tougher time, and have since returned home.

"It was depressing for them: no language skills; doing a job they were never trained to do; starting life all over," he says.

Berbic earned a master's degree and now helps other newcomers acclimate to life in Roanoke, serving as student affairs manager at the Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine and as a volunteer for local support organizations. His brother is a doctor in New Jersey.

"If you want to invest in anything, it's people," Berbic says. "It has to be in people. If we are investing, they will invest."

## Education (Continued)

**264**

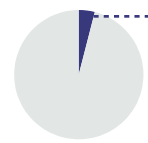
students who were enrolled in colleges and universities in the region during the fall of 2015 were temporary residents.<sup>10</sup>

**60**

local jobs were supported by international students.

**\$9.9M**

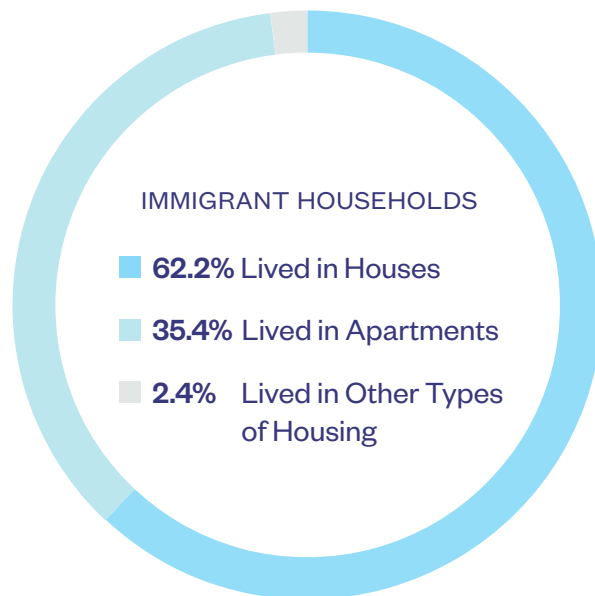
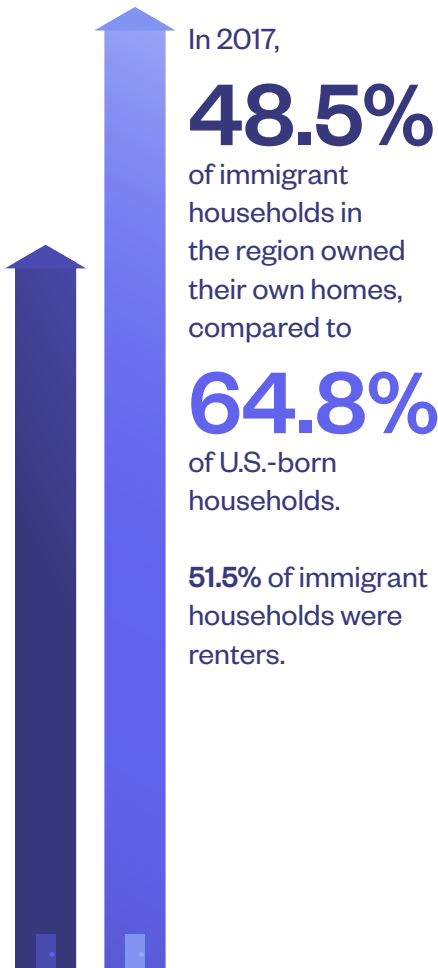
were spent by international students in the 2017-18 academic year.<sup>11</sup>



**4.0%**

of public school students under 18 were born abroad.

## Housing Wealth



The total property value of immigrant households:

**\$506.0M**

Their total annual rent paid:

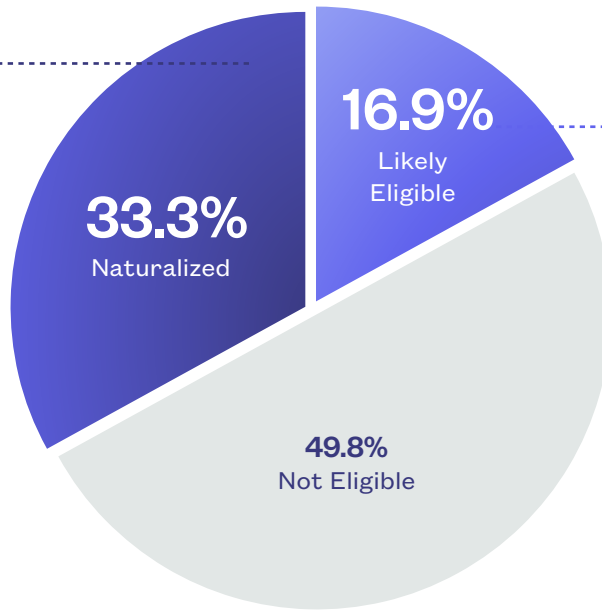
**\$22.0M**

## Naturalization

Share of immigrants in the region who were naturalized U.S. citizens. This represents a total of

**3,941**  
immigrants.

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



Share of immigrants who were likely eligible for naturalization. This represents a total of

**2,006**  
immigrants.

## Refugees

**1,963**

immigrants were likely refugees in 2017.<sup>12</sup>

**16.6%**

of the foreign-born population were likely refugees.

## Undocumented Immigrants

Amount earned by undocumented immigrant households in 2017:

**\$63.6M**

After taxes, this leaves them with **\$57.3M** in spending power.

**\$3.7M**

went to federal taxes.

FEDERAL

**\$2.6M**

went to state and local taxes.

STATE AND LOCAL



- 1 Unless otherwise specified, data comes from 5-year samples of the American Community Survey from 2012 and 2017 and figures refer to the Roanoke region in Virginia, including Roanoke County, the City of Roanoke, and the City of Salem.
- 2 U.S. Congressional Budget Office. 2018. "The Distribution of Household Income, 2015."
- 3 Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy. 2015. "Who Pays? A Distributional Analysis of the Tax Systems in All Fifty States."
- 4 We define working age as 16-64 years of age.
- 5 Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math
- 6 General services include personal services (e.g. laundry services, barber shops, and repair and maintenance), religious organizations, social services, and labor unions.
- 7 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.
- 8 Vigdor, Jacob. 2013. "Immigration and the Revival of American Cities: From Preserving Manufacturing Jobs to Strengthening the Housing Market." *New American Economy*.
- 9 2012 Survey of Business Owners, U.S. Census Bureau.
- 10 Data on total student enrollment in the region 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.
- 11 Economic data is derived from the International Student Economic Value Tool maintained by NAFSA, the association of international educators.
- 12 *New American Economy*. 2017. "From Struggle to Resilience: The Economic Impact of Refugees in America."