

BALTIMORE COUNTY

WELCOMING & BELONGING STRATEGIC PLAN

APRIL 2024

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LETTER FROM THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE



Diversity is our strength in Baltimore County and our growing New American community makes our neighborhoods more vibrant every day.

We're proud to welcome new residents from around the world who are eager to share their values, build new connections, and use their talents to make our county safer, stronger, and more prosperous. We firmly believe that every resident has the potential to succeed regardless of their place of birth and we are committed ensuring that they have the opportunity, access, and support to deliver on the promise of that potential.

We have made it a priority to filter our decisions through the lens of diversity, equity, and inclusion to ensure that we are engaging with and investing in residents who have historically been denied a seat at the table. This work will continue to be robust and transparent so we can work in collaboration with all our residents.

The challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and the recent collapse of the Francis Scott Key Bridge have highlighted the resiliency of our New American community and we've been proud to support them and partner with them to overcome these obstacles. However, we also recognize that we can always do more, which is why we remain committed to working with immigrant communities so that we can be more responsive and supportive at all times. Whether through enhanced language and translations services, more community engagement, or naming Baltimore County's first Chief of Immigrant Affairs, we are already working to make our home a more welcoming place for everyone.

Our Welcome Plan is the product of partnership and reflects the many different voices who believe that a more inclusive Baltimore County is a better Baltimore County. I would like to thank the Gateways for Growth program for engaging private, nonprofit, and philanthropic partners to innovate new solutions for our immigrant and migrant communities. I would also like to recognize and thank our New Americans Task Force for their dedication to make our county a more welcoming place. Everyone deserves the opportunity to see what makes Baltimore County such a special place to call home and we're excited to share that opportunity with our new neighbors.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John A. Olszewski, Jr." The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

John "Johnny O" Olszewski, Jr.
Baltimore County Executive

LETTER FROM GATEWAYS FROM GROWTH

In 2016, a partnership between Welcoming America and New American Economy (now the American Immigration Council) created the Gateways for Growth Challenge to support localities that have a demonstrated commitment to developing an inclusive, accessible, and welcoming community for all residents. Since then, more than 75 communities across 37 states have received tailored economic research on the demographic and economic contributions of immigrants and technical assistance in the development of a multi-sector strategic plan for immigrant inclusion in their communities.

In 2022, Baltimore County was one of only ten communities selected nationally to receive both components of this competitive opportunity. Alongside colleagues in Fort Wayne, Indiana and Santa Fe, New Mexico, Baltimore County received this award because of the commitment from local government, business, and civil society to work collaboratively. This collaboration toward concrete and action-oriented recommendations ensures that the county is addressing both the challenges and opportunities facing the immigrant community and is creating pathways for all residents to succeed.

Baltimore County has worked over the past year to build a multisector task force committed to welcoming and surveyed the community to ensure that the voices of those directly impacted are at the core of the plan. This process identifies opportunities to advance equity and demonstrates a commitment from all those involved to build a more welcoming Baltimore County. We are thrilled to see this plan implemented and look forward to the ways in which Baltimore County becomes a more equitable, prosperous community by ensuring that all residents can thrive.

Molly Hilligoss, Network Director, Welcoming America

Rich André, Director, State & Local Initiatives, American Immigration Council





LETTER FROM THE NEW AMERICANS TASK FORCE

Dear Baltimore County residents,

Immigrant and refugee residents are immensely significant to the economic, social, and civic aspects of life in Baltimore County. Their welcoming and integration into our County not only benefit their communities but also positively affect all residents. This report primarily centers on determining strategies to nurture this sense of belonging among immigrant and refugee populations.

In the fall of 2022, Baltimore County's Office of Community Engagement applied to participate in the Gateways for Growth Challenge (G4G). G4G is a competitive opportunity for localities to receive research support and technical assistance from the American Immigration Council and Welcoming America to improve immigrant inclusion in their communities. In June 2023, the American Immigration Council published the report *New Americans in Baltimore County, The Demographics and Economic Contributions of Immigrants in the County*.

On June 5, 2023, County Executive John A. Olszewski, Jr. issued an executive order establishing a New Americans Task Force. The Task Force was charged with developing an integration and inclusion strategic plan that builds upon the strengths of immigrants, their families, and their institutions and expedites their journey toward integration and inclusion. The plan will further efforts to make Baltimore County a place of welcome, economic opportunity, community well-being, and inclusion. The technical support and research provided by Welcoming America and the American Immigration Council as part of G4G was essential in accomplishing our goal.

Baltimore County embodies a convergence of education, technology, the arts, sports, and business, fostering an environment of innovation and vitality. Its varied landscapes and demographics showcase the richness, ingenuity, and diverse experiences found within Baltimore County. Immigrants and refugees significantly enrich the region's economic, cultural, and social tapestry, adding to its vibrancy. Ensuring that Baltimore County remains an inclusive and hospitable community, providing opportunities and a sense of belonging for all residents, visitors, and workers, is paramount.

Over the past ten months, task force members met to review data, hear from stakeholders, and develop a community engagement strategy, including a community engagement survey and community listening sessions. As a component of the Task Force's efforts, Baltimore County enlisted the services of Cool & Associates, LLC (Cool), a comprehensive outreach and engagement firm. Cool was tasked with conducting a survey of the New American community in the County from November 2023 to March 2024, actively facilitating the encouragement of survey involvement and completion, and delivering a summary report based on the survey findings and listening sessions.

Developing a comprehensive plan necessitates the identification of pathways for advancement. The plan outlines five objectives to address historical disparities: Community and Civic Engagement, Equitable Access, Economic Development & Entrepreneurship, Connected, Safe, and Healthy Communities, and Education. These goals recognize the diverse challenges immigrant residents encounter, acknowledging the influence of race, culture, immigration status, and economic standing on perception and treatment. Consequently, these objectives encompass actionable measures aimed at fortifying our community with culturally sensitive, linguistically accessible services and impartial policies to promote the safety and integration of immigrants and refugees who call Baltimore County home.

We welcome you to join us in bringing this vision to fruition for Baltimore County.

Sincerely,
Baltimore County's New Americans Task Force

NEW AMERICANS TASK FORCE MEMBERS

Alejandra Bálcazar

Towson University

Alejandra Flores Miller

Centro Sol—JHU School of Medicine

Alfredo Santiago

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Baltimore County Public Library

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Valerie Rivera-Maldonado

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Council on American-Islamic Relations

New Americans in Baltimore County

The Demographic and Economic Contributions of Immigrants¹ in the County²

JUNE 2023



Population

103,700

immigrants lived in Baltimore County, Maryland, in 2019.³

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 increased by



during the same time period.

127.5%

of the total population growth in the county was attributable to immigrants. This means that population growth would have been negative without immigrants moving to the county.

Demographics



of households in Baltimore County had at least one foreign-born resident in 2019.

In the county, immigrants were



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.⁴

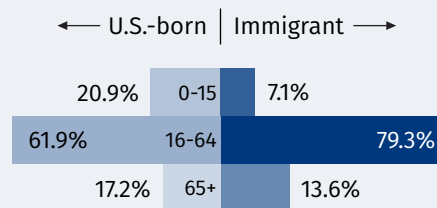


of immigrants in Baltimore County were recent arrivals, with no more than five years of residency in the United States, meaning



of immigrants in the county had resided in the United States for more than five years.

Shares of population by age groups:⁵



1. Estimates provided in this report may slightly undercount the immigrant population. The American Community Survey historically undersamples the foreign-born population, especially among lower income, more recently arrived, and less English-fluent immigrant populations.
2. Unless otherwise specified, data comes from 5-year samples of the American Community Survey from 2014 and 2019 and figures refer to Baltimore County, Maryland.
3. We define "immigrant" as any non-citizen or any naturalized U.S. citizen. They include naturalized citizens, green card holders, temporary visa holders, refugees, asylees, and undocumented immigrants, among others.
4. We define working age as 16-64 years of age.
5. Totals may not add up to 100 percent due to rounding.

Demographics

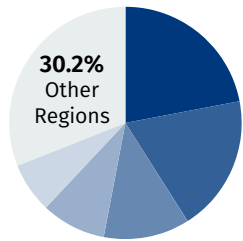
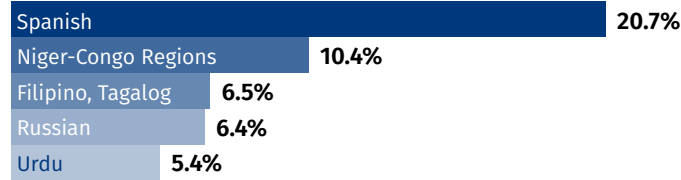
363,200

people worked in the county in 2019, of these,

13.2%

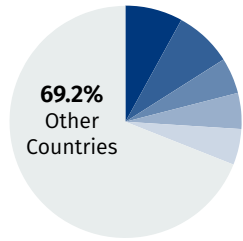
or **47,800** workers were foreign-born.

Among immigrants, the top languages spoken at home other than English were:



The top five regions of origin for immigrants living in the county:

- Mexico, Central America, and Caribbean (21.6%)
- India and Southwest Asia (19.4%)
- West Africa (12.2%)
- East Asia (9.3%)
- Southeast Asia (7.3%)



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

- Nigeria (8.3%)
- India (7.9%)
- Philippines (5.1%)
- El Salvador (5.0%)
- Pakistan (4.5%)

Immigrants with Limited English Language Proficiency

15,700

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



of the immigrant population.⁶

Among those with limited English proficiency, the top languages spoken at home other than English were:



Among those with limited English language proficiency, educational attainment was as follows:

- Less than high-school diploma - **42.7%**
- High-school diploma or some college - **41.1%**
- Bachelor's degree - **10.6%**
- Advanced degree - **5.6%**

Spending Power and Tax Contributions

Immigrants paid a significant amount in federal, state, and local taxes, including property, sales, and excise taxes levied by state and local governments.

In 2019, immigrant households⁷ in Baltimore County earned **\$3.9 billion**



■ **\$677.2 million**

went to federal taxes⁸

■ **\$396.5 million** went to state & local taxes⁹

■ **\$2.8 billion** left in spending power

This means that foreign-born households held



of all spending power in the county.

In 2019, foreign-born residents in the county contributed

\$9.7 billion

to the county's gross domestic product (GDP), or **14.1%** of the total.¹⁰

⁶ For the purpose of this report, we define people with limited English language proficiency as those who do not speak English at all or do not speak English well.

⁷ Immigrant households refer to those with an immigrant as head of the unit.

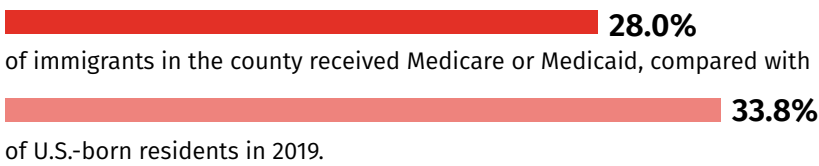
⁸ U.S. Congressional Budget Office, *The Distribution of Household Income and Federal Taxes, 2019* (Washington, DC: 2021), <https://www.cbo.gov/publication/58353>.

⁹ Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy, *Who Pays? A Distributional Analysis of the Tax Systems in All Fifty States* (Washington, DC: 2018), <https://itep.org/whopays/>.

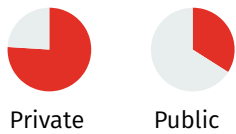
¹⁰ These figures derive from our calculations based on immigrants' share of wage income and self-employment income in the 5-year ACS sample from 2019 and the statistics of GDP from the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis.

Spending Power & Tax Contributions *(continued)*

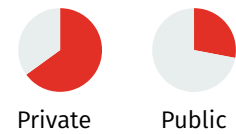
Immigrants in the county also supported federal social programs. In 2019, they contributed



About **76.0%** of U.S.-born residents had private health care coverage, while **34.3%** had public health care coverage.¹¹



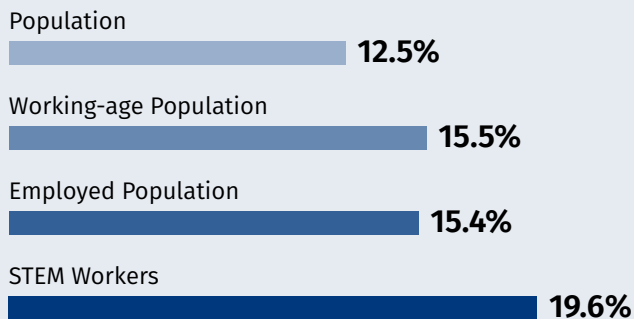
About **64.9%** of immigrants had private health care coverage, while **28.3%** had public health care coverage.



Workforce

Although immigrants made up **12.5%** of the county's overall population, they represented **15.5%** of its working-age population, **15.4%** of its employed labor force, and **19.6%** of its STEM workers in 2019.¹²

Immigrant shares of the...



The immigrant working-age population was **51.2%** female and **48.8%** male.



The employed population was **45.2%** female and **54.8%** male.



¹¹ Including people who have both public and private healthcare coverage.

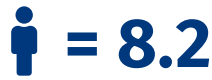
¹² STEM refers to occupations that require background or expertise in science, technology, engineering, or math.

Workforce (continued)

Immigrants in the county were

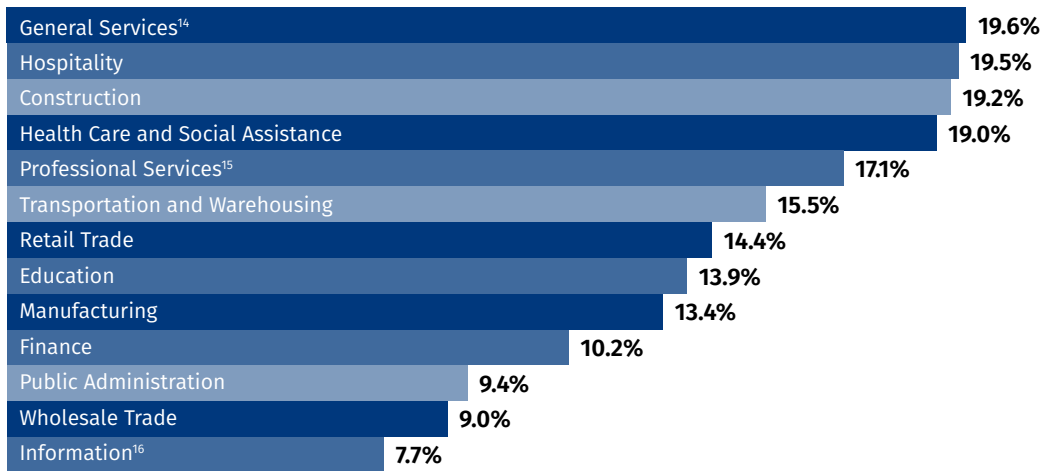


more likely to be of working-age than their U.S.-born counterparts.

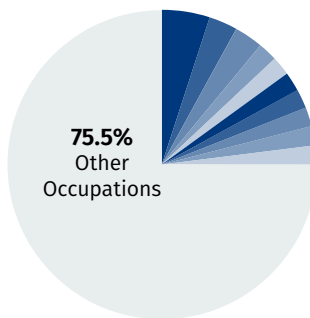
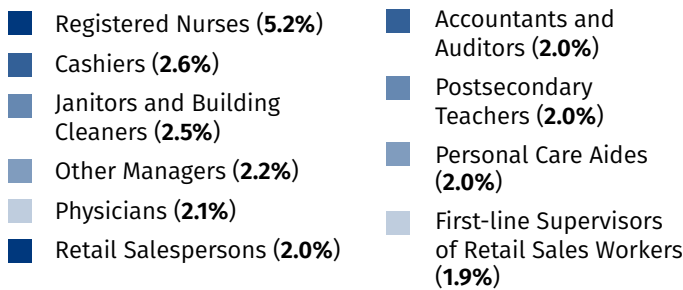


In 2019, there were 8.2 open STEM job postings for every available unemployed STEM worker in the county.¹³

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



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



¹³ Data is obtained from Lightcast for the time period between January 1, 2019 and December 31, 2019.

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

¹⁵ 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.

¹⁶ Information includes: Newspaper, magazine, book, and directory publishers, software publishing, motion pictures and video industries, sound recording industries, broadcasting (except internet), internet publishing and broadcasting and web search portals, wired telecommunications (telephone) carriers, telecommunications (cell phone and mobile) except wired telecommunications carriers, data processing, hosting, and related services, and libraries and archives.

Workforce (continued)

Top Occupations for Female Workers:

Registered Nurses.....	9.4%
Nursing Assistants.....	3.5%
Maids and Housekeeping Cleaners.....	3.3%

Top Occupations for Male Workers:

Other Managers.....	3.1%
Physicians.....	2.7%
Cashiers.....	2.5%

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 helped create or preserve

4,800
manufacturing jobs

that would have otherwise vanished or moved elsewhere by 2019.¹⁷

SPOTLIGHT ON Job Demand In Baltimore County In 2021

Not only immigrants more likely to be of working age in the county, but they also a crucial part of the county's economy, and could help us meet the needs of its fastest growing and most in-demand fields.¹⁸

 = **3.87** job postings

for every available unemployed software developer.

The top 5 occupations with the highest demand for bilingual workers:¹⁹

- | | | |
|--|---|------------------------|
| 1. Customer Service Representatives | 2. Sales Representatives, Wholesale and Manufacturing, Except Technical and Scientific Products | 3. Retail Salespersons |
| 4. Middle School Teachers, Except Special and Career/Technical Education | 5. First-Line Supervisors of Retail Sales Workers | |

Immigrants have helped fill many high-demand roles, especially as the need for bilingual and culturally competent public services and healthcare workers increases.

¹⁷ Jacob Vigdor, *Immigration and the Revival of American Cities: From Preserving Manufacturing Jobs to Strengthening the Housing Market* (New York, NY: Americas Society/Council of the Americas and New American Economy, 2013), <https://www.newamericaneconomy.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/revival-of-american-cities.pdf>.

¹⁸ Data is obtained from Lightcast for the time period between January 1, 2019 and December 31, 2019.

¹⁹ Data is obtained from Lightcast for the time period between January 1, 2019 and December 31, 2019.

Entrepreneurship

7,400

immigrant entrepreneurs generated

\$204.4 million

in business income for Baltimore County.

Immigrant entrepreneurs self-identified as **33.2%** female and **66.8%** male.



Despite making up **12.5%** of the population, immigrants made up



of the business owners in the county in 2019.

In the county, immigrant residents were



more likely to be an entrepreneur than the U.S.-born population.

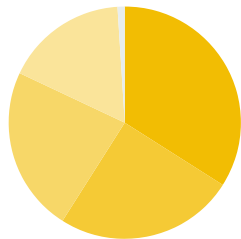
While **7.7%** of the U.S.-born population were entrepreneurs, **11.3%** of foreign-born residents worked for their own businesses.



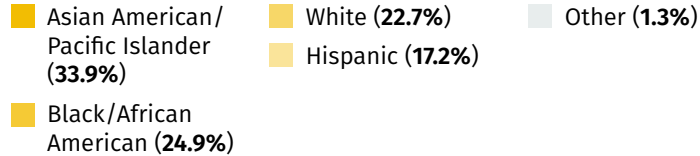
U.S.-born Immigrant

The top countries of origin for immigrant entrepreneurs were

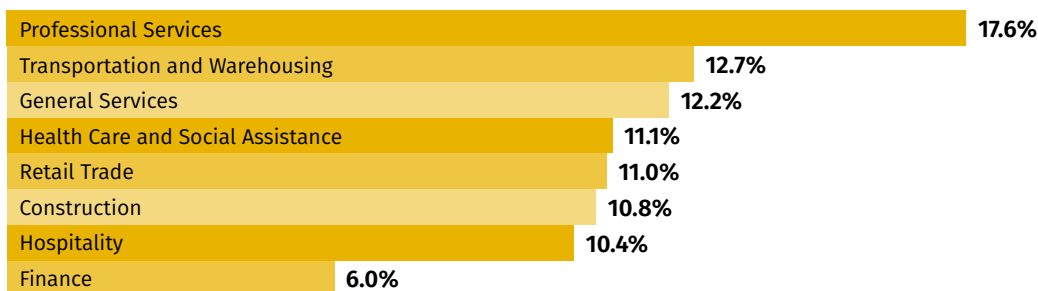
Korea (6.6%)
and India (5.6%).



Immigrant entrepreneurs by race and ethnicity:

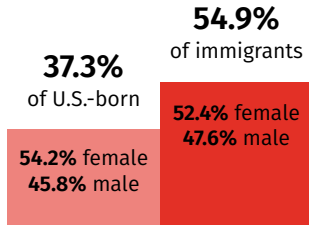


Immigrant entrepreneurs tended to work in these key industries:

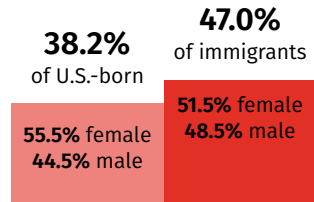


Education

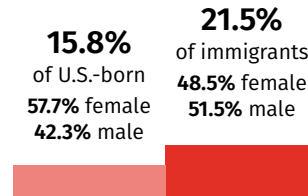
Share of the county's population aged 25 or above that had a **high school education or some college** in 2019:



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:



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



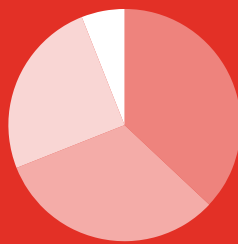
of K-12 students in the county were children of immigrants in 2019.²⁰

SPOTLIGHT ON

University Population

2,900

students enrolled in colleges and universities in Baltimore County in fall 2021 were temporary U.S. residents.²¹



The breakdown of international students is as follows:

- Full-time undergraduate students (1,082)
- Part-time undergraduate students (740)
- Full-time graduate students (942)
- Part-time graduate students (136)

The universities with the largest international student populations were:

University of Maryland, Baltimore County	1,427 international students
Community College of Baltimore County	1,023
Towson University	361

406

international students graduated with STEM degrees from colleges and universities in the county in the 2020-21 academic year.

673

jobs in higher education and other areas including accommodations, food, and transportation were supported by international students in the county.

\$73.4M

was spent by international students in the 2021-22 academic year in the county.²²

²⁰ Children of immigrants includes both U.S.-born and foreign-born people who are under the age of 18 with at least one foreign-born parent.

²¹ Data on student enrollment in the county 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.

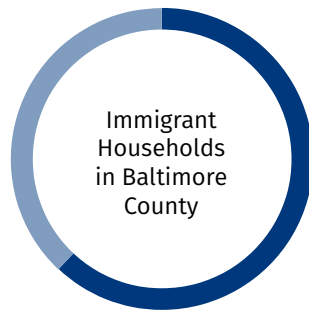
²² Economic data is derived from the International Student Economic Value Tool maintained by NAESA, the Association of International Educators.

Housing

In 2019, **53.8%** of immigrant households in Baltimore County owned their own homes, compared with **67.4%** of U.S.-born households.



Immigrant U.S.-born



Lived in Houses
25,700, or **61.8%**

Lived in Apartments
15,900, or **38.2%**

Total property value of immigrant households was

\$7.3B



46.2% of immigrant households were renters. Their total annual rent paid was

\$262.7M

85.5% of immigrant households in the county had access to broadband connection in their place of residence as compared with **88.8%** of U.S.-born households in 2019.²³



Immigrant U.S.-born

The average household size for foreign-born residents is **3.0** compared to **2.3** for U.S.-born residents.



Foreign-born households



U.S.-born households

Naturalization



52.5% Naturalized Citizens (54,500)

14.1% Likely Eligible to Naturalize (14,600)

33.4% Not Eligible to Naturalize (34,600)

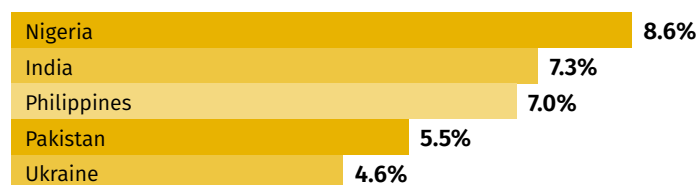


Nationally, **48.7%** of immigrants are naturalized citizens, **15.9%** are likely eligible to naturalize, and **35.4%** are not yet eligible.

If all immigrants in the United States who are eligible to naturalize became U.S. citizens, the earning potential of those eligible to naturalize would increase by

+8.9%²⁴

Top five countries of origin for naturalized citizens in Baltimore County were:



²³ This data point reports whether the respondent or any member of their household subscribed to the Internet using broadband (high speed) Internet service such as cable, fiber optic, or DSL.

²⁴ Maria E. Enchautegui and Linda Giannarelli, *The Economic Impact of Naturalization on Immigrants and Cities*, Urban Institute, 2015, <https://www.urban.org/research/publication/economic-impact-naturalization-immigrants-and-cities>.

Refugees

6,200

residents,²⁵ or **6.0%** of the foreign-born population in Baltimore County, were likely refugees.²⁶

About **36.9%** of refugees held at least a bachelor's degree, while **15.1%** held an advanced degree.



Bachelor's Degree Advanced Degree

64.0%

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



Refugees tended to work in these industries:

- Health Care and Social Assistance (**18.8%**)
- Professional Services (**13.1%**)

DACA-Eligible Population

In 2019, **2,400** DACA-eligible people made up

2.3%

of the immigrant population in Baltimore County.

In 2019, refugee households in the county earned

\$228.5 million

\$35.8 million

went to federal taxes²⁷

\$23.8 million went to state & local taxes²⁸

\$168.8 million left in spending power

Top countries of origin for the county's refugee population:



In 2019, undocumented immigrant households earned

\$68.6 million

\$10.3 million

went to federal taxes²⁹

\$6.8 million went to state & local taxes³⁰

\$51.6 million was left in spending power

25 Refugee households refer to those with a refugee as the head of the unit.

26 New American Economy, *From Struggle to Resilience: The Economic Impact of Refugees in America*, (New York, NY: 2017), <https://research.newamericaneconomy.org/report/from-struggle-to-resilience-the-economic-impact-of-refugees-in-america/>.

27 U.S. Congressional Budget Office, *The Distribution of Household Income and Federal Taxes, 2019* (Washington, DC: 2021), <https://www.cbo.gov/publication/58353>.

28 Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy, *Who Pays? A Distributional Analysis of the Tax Systems in All Fifty States* (Washington, DC: 2018), <https://itep.org/whopays/>.

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30 Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy, *Who Pays? A Distributional Analysis of the Tax Systems in All Fifty States* (Washington, DC: 2018), <https://itep.org/whopays/>.

SPOTLIGHT ON

Rocio Herrera

Owner, Herrera's Cleaning Service

Rocio Herrera grew up in the shadow of an active volcano in a picturesque but impoverished region of central Mexico. She and her husband worked hard—she sold beauty products and cared for elderly people, and her husband was a carpenter—but they struggled to make ends meet. In 2004, they crossed the border wall into the United States in search of a better life.

“We dreamed of having a house—just a place of our own, with a kitchen and a bedroom,” Herrera says.

Building a life in Baltimore was hard. Herrera had previously enjoyed being her own boss, but in America she had to work backbreaking shifts in laundries and factories. “I’d work from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m., with just a 30-minute break for lunch, ironing 450 shirts every day,” she recalls. “I’d come home saying, ‘I can’t go back!’”

Things got even harder when Herrera’s husband, a carpenter, injured his hand and was unable to work. But the couple persisted, and Herrera worked night shifts in a variety of different jobs to support the family—including her two young U.S.-born daughters—while her husband went through surgery and rehabilitation.

Finding support wasn’t always easy, especially early on. Many organizations in Baltimore County offer language classes and help newcomers access government services, but Herrera would like to see more targeted support for Spanish speakers, especially those who are undocumented and nervous about using public services. “I was lucky—we had a neighbor who’d help out with things I didn’t understand,” she says. “But it isn’t easy if you don’t speak good English.”

Over time, though, Herrera was able to volunteer with church and neighborhood groups, work on her English skills, and take a computer class. “I was always looking for ways to grow,” she explains. With her daughters in school, Herrera also began thinking about starting a business. “I’d been working on other people’s schedules for years,” she explains. “I wanted to do something of my own.”

Today, Herrera runs a cleaning service for local homes and offices. Her daughters and husband pitch in, and Herrera employs two people full time, and also offers a training program for local teenagers. “It’s important for young people to see what it’s like to work,” she explains. “It encourages them to study hard.”

After many years of renting cramped apartments, Herrera was recently able to buy her own home. “It’s been a difficult journey, but we’re so grateful and fortunate,” she says. “We achieved our dream, and we’ve given my daughters the opportunity to study and have careers here in America.”

SPOTLIGHT ON

Narayan Khakurel

Owner, Coffee Talk Cafe

Narayan Khakurel grew up in a farming community in rural Nepal, where his family raised cattle and crops like tobacco and sugarcane. He never felt particularly deprived but, looking back, he recalls walking to school barefoot and not being able to afford a book bag.

Today, though, Khakurel is a college graduate and the owner of Coffee Talk Cafe in downtown Towson, and his young daughters are thriving in the local public schools. “I’m incredibly grateful to have been able to build a life here in Maryland,” he says.

It’s been a long journey. After gaining degrees in commerce in Nepal and hospitality studies in Singapore, Khakurel traveled to over 30 countries, including parts of Europe, the United Arab Emirates, and Hong Kong to gain work experience in the service industry. He also traveled to the United States, where his deaf brother was studying at Montgomery College in Rockville. There, he met a local restaurant owner who offered to sponsor his green card and hire Khakurel to support his food and beverage operations team.

While Khakurel waited for his visa to be processed, he returned to Kathmandu and opened several successful coffee shops. Then in 2015, disaster struck: a huge earthquake razed much of the city, including Khakurel’s shops, forcing him to close his businesses.

Fortunately, soon afterward his green card finally came through. Khakurel returned to the United States, first supporting restaurant operations in Virginia, then moving to Towson to start Coffee Talk Cafe in 2016. At first, he didn’t need much help from local organizations. But when the COVID-19 pandemic struck, local government agencies helped him access the loans and grants he needed to stay in business. The Towson Chamber of Commerce also stepped up, using social media and hosting events to encourage local residents to support businesses like Coffee Talk Cafe.

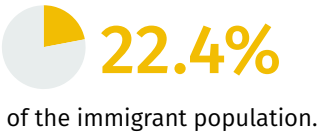
During the worst of the pandemic, Khakurel spent 13 hours a day driving an Uber and Lyft in order to pay rent and prevent the cafe from going under. “It was a real struggle,” he says. But with a Small Business Association loan, support from other local businesses, and the backing of Maryland’s 20,000-strong Nepali-American community, he was able to stay in business.

Today Coffee Talk Cafe is bustling, and Khakurel is seeking to hire new workers to support his two-person team. He is grateful for the community’s support and has chosen to repay that debt by supporting other local entrepreneurs. He purchases all the café’s food, from coffee beans to bread and ice-cream, from businesses in and around Baltimore County. “We want to make a contribution to the community,” he explains. “Every day is a challenge for an entrepreneur, but I feel incredibly lucky that our doors are still open.”

Undocumented Immigrants

23,200

undocumented immigrants³¹ lived in Baltimore County in 2019. They made up

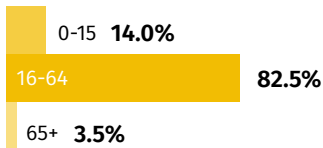


Undocumented immigrants were highly active in the labor force. About



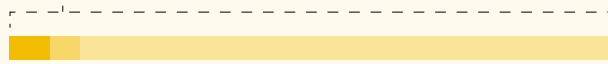
were of working-age in the county.³²

Undocumented immigrants by age groups:³³



In 2019, undocumented immigrant households earned

\$443.5 million



■ **\$30.8 million**

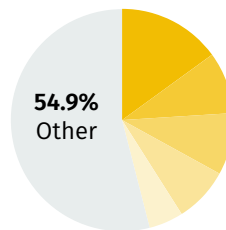
went to federal taxes³⁴

■ **\$22.7 million** went to state & local taxes³⁵

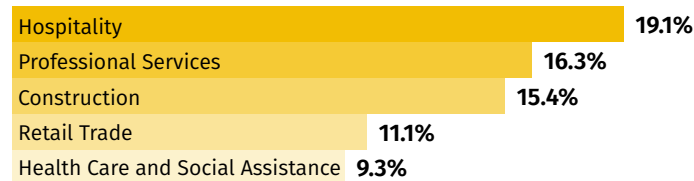
■ **\$390.1 million** was left in spending power

Top countries of origin for the undocumented in the county:

- El Salvador (14.9%)
- Nigeria (9.1%)
- India (8.6%)
- Mexico (7.8%)
- Guatemala (4.7%)



Undocumented immigrants tended to work in these key industries in the county.



³¹ Undocumented immigrant households refer to people living in a housing unit with an undocumented immigrant being the head of their unit.

³² We define working age as 16-64 years of age.

³³ Totals may not add up to 100 percent due to rounding.

³⁴ U.S. Congressional Budget Office, *The Distribution of Household Income and Federal Taxes, 2019* (Washington, DC: 2021), <https://www.cbo.gov/publication/58353>.

³⁵ Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy, *Who Pays? A Distributional Analysis of the Tax Systems in All Fifty States* (Washington, DC: 2018), <https://itep.org/whopays/>.

H-1B and H-2B Visas

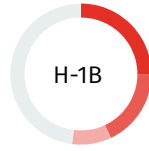
1,372

H-1B visas were certified³⁶ in Baltimore County during Fiscal Year 2022.

504

H-2B visas were certified³⁷ in Baltimore County during Fiscal Year 2022.

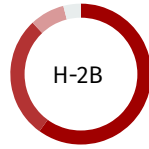
The top occupations among certified H-1B and H-2B visa applications were:



■ Software Developers, Applications (340 certifications)

■ Computer Occupations, All Other (137)

■ Physical Therapists (245)



■ Landscaping and Groundskeeping Workers (304)

■ Nonfarm Animal Caretakers (38)

■ Construction Laborers (139)

³⁶ Before an employer can file a petition with United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) to hire an employee using an H-1B visa, the employer must take steps to ensure that hiring the foreign worker will not adversely affect U.S. workers. To do this, employers file a labor condition application (LCA) to be certified by the Department of Labor (DOL), which ensures that employment of the H-1B worker will not adversely affect the wages and working conditions of similarly employed U.S. workers. The number of certified H-1B visas is therefore a good indication of the demand for foreign-born workers of a given occupation in a given region. More information on the H-1B process can be found here: <https://www.uscis.gov/working-in-the-united-states/h-1b-specialty-occupations>.

³⁷ Similar to the H-1B process, in order for an employer to obtain an H-2B certification, the DOL must determine that there are not enough U.S. workers available to do the temporary job being petitioned for, and that employing H-2B workers will not adversely affect the wages and working conditions of similar workers. Additionally, the need for the worker must be temporary. Certified jobs are not necessarily the jobs filled, though they do indicate a level of demand for temporary foreign-born workers in a particular occupation. More information on the H-2B process can be found here: <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/foreign-labor/programs/h-2b>.



New American Community Engagement Analysis

Condensed Findings

Survey and Listening Session

November 2023 – March 2024

Introduction

On June 5, 2023, County Executive John A. Olszewski signed an executive order which established the Baltimore County New Americans Task Force¹, with the purpose of developing a New Americans Integration & Inclusion Strategic Plan that builds upon the strengths of immigrants, their families, and their institutions, and expedites their journey towards integration and inclusion. The goal of this plan is to further support efforts to make Baltimore County a place of welcome, economic opportunity, community well-being, and inclusion.

In order to develop a plan that accurately reflects the needs of Baltimore County's diverse immigrant community, which comprises more than 12.5%² of Baltimore County's total population and is rapidly growing, Giuliana Valencia-Banks, Chief of Immigrant Affairs, led the Task Force in launching a discovery phase to gather the input of the population that this strategic plan is intended to serve. As part of the Task Force's initiatives, Baltimore County contracted Cool & Associates, LLC (Cool), a full-service outreach and engagement firm. Cool was engaged to survey the New Americans community within the county from November 2023 through March 2024; the Cool team actively supported the promotion efforts to participate and complete the survey, as well as participating

in the listening sessions. The final deliverable is this summary report.

The 21-question survey, developed with simple and direct questions to increase comprehension and participation, had a 73% completion rate, with a total of 514 participants representing close to thirty countries. Along with English, the survey was translated into five languages: Arabic (Iraq), Chinese (Simplified), Korean, Russian, and Spanish.

To complement the digital survey, five in-person listening sessions were hosted in partnership with trusted community-based organizations to facilitate candid and open discussions. An estimated one hundred individuals participated, grateful for the County's interest in their feedback and candid about needed improvements.

This report details the survey development, outreach, listening sessions and the analysis of the results of these initiatives. In an effort to provide holistic solutions for effectively integrating the immigrant population in Baltimore County, Cool also provided strategic recommendations, which can be found in the *full version of Cool's New American Community Engagement Analysis*.

Qualifications



Cool & Associates, LLC (Cool) is a full-service outreach and engagement consulting firm that brings strategy, workforce development, education, marketing, and outreach to the forefront of any organization. Veronica Cool, CEO and founder of Cool & Associates LLC, is a recognized expert in the field of Hispanic and DEI strategy, with over 30 years of experience.

Cool has successfully executed engagement and outreach campaigns, cultural competency trainings, extensive translation and language projects, and a variety of diverse consulting initiatives for clients across industries, which have included government agencies, the private sector, and non-profits. Cool has an experienced bilingual and bicultural team, extensive expertise in coalition building and community outreach, trusted access to community organizations, partners, and stakeholders, and marketing expertise in diverse segment content development and strategy.

Cool has the following certifications:

- MDOT Woman-owned MBE
- MDOT Hispanic owned MBE
- MDOT DBE
- SBA – Small Business Enterprise
- Maryland SBR – Small Business Reserve
- State of Maryland Approved Emergency Vendor - Language Services
- ATA (American Translators Association) Certified

Cool supported in the development, translation, and management of the community survey, and the development, translation, and design of a set of digital assets and accompanying text copy to promote the survey and listening sessions directly to the community and through partner organizations. Additionally, Cool supported the execution of digital outreach efforts, and the execution and recording of the series of listening sessions. Subsequently Cool compiled, synthesized, and analyzed the results of both the community survey and listening sessions, providing tactical recommendations to the County for immigrant integration and inclusion. Cool also provided consulting support throughout the project regarding survey content, listening session structure, outreach strategies, and overall project execution.

¹ Executive Order No. 2023-001 Baltimore County New Americans Task Force

² U.S. Census, 2020

Summary Findings

The report contains findings from the survey and listening sessions. This summary provides a high-level listing of the salient findings.



LOGISTICS

- 73% Completion rate
- 514 Completed surveys
- 5 Listening sessions
- 85% Baltimore County Residents
- Timing: Dec. 2023- Feb. 2024



DEMOGRAPHICS

- 6 Languages
- 73% Ages 25-54
- 65% in U.S. 10+ years
- 6% in U.S. less than 1 year
- 30 Countries
 - 48% Hispanics
 - 24% Chinese
 - 6% Korean
 - 5% Nepali
 - 6% African Countries



SAFETY & BELONGING

- 33% Trust County government
- Most comfortable: Places of Worship & Schools
- Most trusted: Police, School and Fire Dept.



EDUCATION

- 55% Some higher education
- <20% Less than HS
- 68% Hispanic, HS or less
- 54% participated in ESL classes
- 62% Hispanics difficult access



LANGUAGE

- 34% Lacked English fluency
- 47% Spoke English Well/Very Well



HEALTHCARE

- 49% Difficult access
- 67% Hispanics difficult access
- Barriers include Language, Culture and Access
- Additional priorities include Mental Health, Elder Care & Food Insecurity



HOUSING

- 71% Satisfaction
- Misconception: Homeownership requires citizenship



ENTREPRENEURSHIP & WORKFORCE

- 68% In paid-work
- 12% unemployed vs. 3.7% National average
- 74% of total unemployed are Hispanic
- 47% Always financially stable
- 48% More likely to be entrepreneurs
- 28% More likely to be working-age



CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

- 40% Registered to vote
- 52% Not eligible or unsure
- 16% Hispanics - registered to vote
- 27% Hispanics unsure of eligibility
- 36% regular voters
- 58% Never voted
- 64% Chinese participation

Engagement Methodology

Engaging the New American population in Baltimore County entailed two primary efforts: a community digital survey and a series of in-person listening sessions, as detailed below. These outreach efforts were designed to gather the input of the immigrant population regarding various topics.

However, it is worth noting that it is possible that more recent arrivals may not yet be involved in their respective community organizations, and thus may not have been aware of activities such as the listening sessions held at partner organizations, which were also key distribution points for the survey.

Community Survey

The Baltimore County's Immigrant Affairs team collaborated with the Cool team to develop a digital community survey to gather insights into the needs of Baltimore County's New American community. The survey, conducted through SurveyMonkey, consisted of twenty-one questions covering Demographic Information, English Language Fluency, Education and Work, Housing, Access to Services, Sense of Belonging, and Civic Engagement. Please refer to Appendix: Community Survey for a complete list of the survey questions.

It was disseminated through multiple channels including Baltimore County's social media platforms, key community partners, in-person outreach at strategic retail locations by the New Americans task force, and during the community listening sessions. And available in six languages, Arabic (Iraq), Chinese (Simplified), English, Korean, Russian, and Spanish. These languages were selected as a reflection of the top languages spoken at home other than English.³

Listening Sessions

The second component of this initiative consisted of a series of 5 listening sessions conducted during December 2023 and January 2024. The session sites were strategically selected by Giuliana Valencia-Banks, Chief of Immigrant Affairs, and were hosted in collaboration with key community partners. Giuliana-Valencia-Banks also facilitated these sessions directly with community members, with support from Riccy Amador, Immigrant Affairs Outreach Coordinator, and members of Cool's team. Sessions were promoted to their respective communities through translated flyers and other communications distributed by Baltimore County and through each respective partner organization. All listening sessions were well attended, with attendance varying from approximately 10 to 30 participants per session.

At each of these listening sessions, attendees were ensured that all responses and feedback were anonymous, and no personal data or identifying information was collected. To ensure equitable language access, interpreters were made available at each of these sessions.

PARTICIPATING COMMUNITY	DATE	TIME	LOCATION	PARTNER ORGANIZATION
Chinese American Community	Dec. 16, 2023	3:00pm-4:00pm	Essex Library 1110 Eastern Boulevard Essex, MD 21221	Chinese American Parent Association of the Baltimore Community
Nepalese American Community	Dec. 17, 2023	12:00pm-1:00pm	BANA 2906 Taylor Ave. Parkville, MD 21234	BANA (Baltimore Association of Nepalese in America)
Hispanic American Community	Jan. 25, 2024	6:00pm-8:00pm	Lansdowne Middle School 2400 Lansdowne Rd. Halethorpe, MD 21227	Lansdowne Middle School
Arab American Community	Jan. 28, 2024	4:00pm-7:00pm	Islamic Society of Baltimore 6631 Johnnycake Rd. Windsor Mill, MD 21244	Islamic Society of Baltimore
Kenyan American Community	Jan. 30, 2024	7:00pm-9:00pm	Elimu Community Center 9600 Pulaski Park Dr #115 Baltimore, MD 21220	Elimu Community Center

Note that variation in session duration was due to adjustments made after observing during the first two sessions that one hour was insufficient to cover all necessary topics. This was not an intentional prioritization of certain communities over others.

³ As cited in the June 2023 report on New Americans in Baltimore County, *The Demographic and Economic Contributions of Immigrants in the County* conducted by Gateways for Growth, the American Immigration Council, and Baltimore County.

Findings

Cool has synthesized insights gathered from Baltimore County's immigrant community through both the distribution of the Community Survey and the execution of the Listening Sessions. Participants expressed gratitude towards the County government's efforts to create a more inclusive environment and were encouraged to provide open and direct feedback.

There was wide diversity among other groups, with all other 27 country of origin groups representing less than 3% of respondents each, with approximately 6% of total respondents hailing from African countries. Most respondents, 73.3%, were aged 25-54, with 65.2% having lived in the U.S. for over 10 years, though approximately 6.0% had been in the country for less than a year.

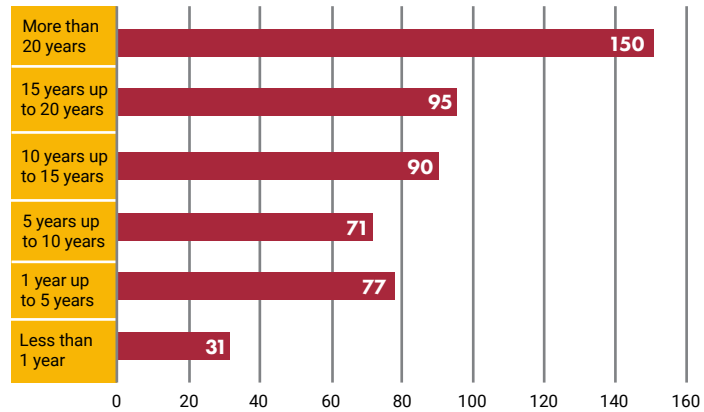
Launched on December 12, 2023, and accessible till February 12, 2024, the survey received 703 total responses, with a 73.1% completion rate. Key demographics revealed that 47.7% of respondents were Hispanic Americans, 23.7% were of Chinese origin, 6.4% were of Korean origin, and 4.5% were from Nepal.

Quantitative data was limited to 21 specific survey questions, while qualitative data from the Listening Sessions highlighted recurring concerns, notably, the lack of awareness of available services among New American community members.

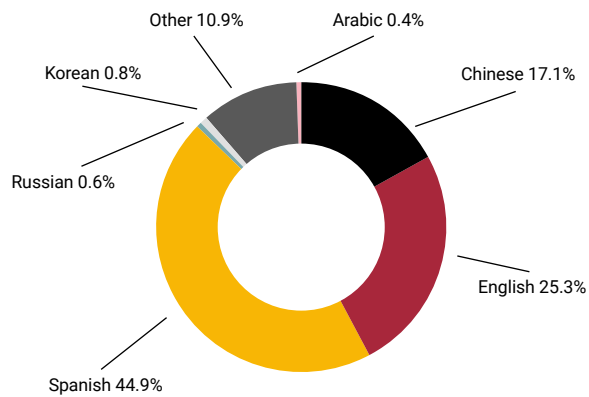
"The information is there, but people don't know how to access it."

Survey Respondent

How long have you lived in the U.S.



Language



Safety and Belonging

Fostering safety and belonging is crucial for integrating New Americans into communities, enhancing their likelihood to contribute positively. However, the survey revealed low overall feelings of belonging, with places of worship and educational centers being notable exceptions.

Trust in institutions varied, with law enforcement, educational institutions, and fire departments being more trusted than others. County government was trusted by approximately a third of respondents. African respondents, particularly from Kenya, expressed distrust towards police, while Hispanics reported a slightly higher sense of belonging but slightly lower trust in authorities compared to the overall respondents.

Participants expressed numerous concerns regarding safety and belonging, including a declining sense of safety in allegedly secure neighborhoods due to reported crimes and a

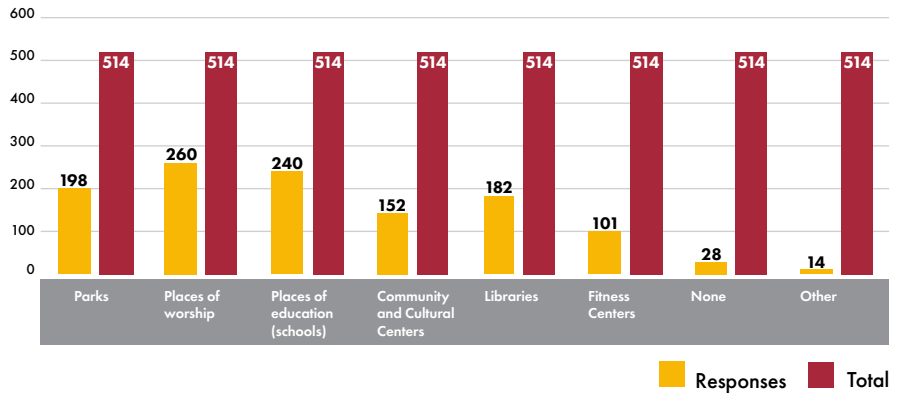
lack of trust in law enforcement, often stemming from fears of repercussions related to their legal status. Immigrant communities also feared targeted crime fueled by xenophobic rhetoric, especially affecting Asian-American business owners, alongside facing the unaffordable costs of legal services and a lack of familiarity with reporting procedures.

Language barriers further hindered access to police assistance, although some Hispanic Americans shared positive experiences with interpretation services. Discrimination, particularly in the workplace, was also highlighted, along with a pervasive lack of belonging, with participants feeling unwelcome in public places but finding solace in their own communities and places where they felt represented, such as through native language signage or employees.

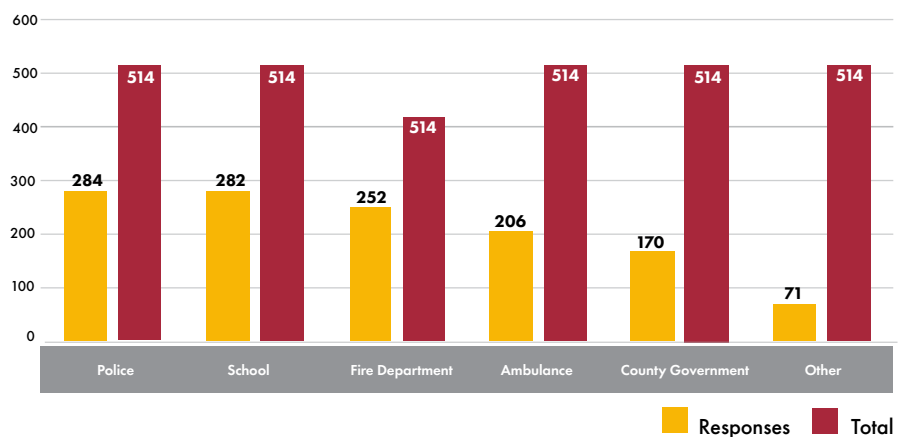
"I often have to go to Howard County or Baltimore City to find entertainment and belonging."

Survey Respondent

What places in Baltimore County do you feel like you are a part of? Select all that apply



What community institutions and organizations do you trust? Select all that apply



Education

The survey covered education-related questions, revealing that 54.9% of respondents had pursued higher education, while less than 20% had less than a high school education. Among ethnic groups, Hispanic Americans tended to have lower levels of formal education, with 67.7% having completed high school or less.

Regarding language proficiency, 33.5% lacked English proficiency, while 46.8% reported proficiency. Participation in language services showed that 54.3% of respondents had taken ESL courses, but Hispanic Americans were slightly less likely (46.6%) to have done so. Accessibility to educational programs was challenging for 47.5% of respondents, with Hispanic Americans notably more affected, with 61.9% finding it difficult to access these resources.

During the listening sessions, respondents expressed significant concerns. Challenges navigating the education system include equipping children for success within U.S. schools, monitoring school activities and student progress, accessing gifted/talented or special education programs, navigating higher education and the college application process, facing limited information on financial aid and scholarships, and experiencing a lack of awareness about adult education opportunities.

Parents express a desire for their children to have more cultural exposure in the educational system, but they face a lack of diversity and representation, leading to feelings of exclusion. This includes insufficient representation among teachers and staff, absence of books in languages other than English in school libraries, and a gap in curricula regarding diverse populations' history, including Asian American history.

Inadequate cultural and linguistic support: BCPS primarily caters to American-born students, neglecting the diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds of non-American students, which marginalizes them and hinders their academic success. Additionally, there's a lack of language access in parent-school communications, leading to an over-reliance on students as translators or interpreters for their families, causing emotional and cognitive strain on immigrant children, diminishing their learning experience, and potentially leading to academic challenges. Moreover, understaffed ESOL programs worsen language barriers, impeding the academic progress of these students.

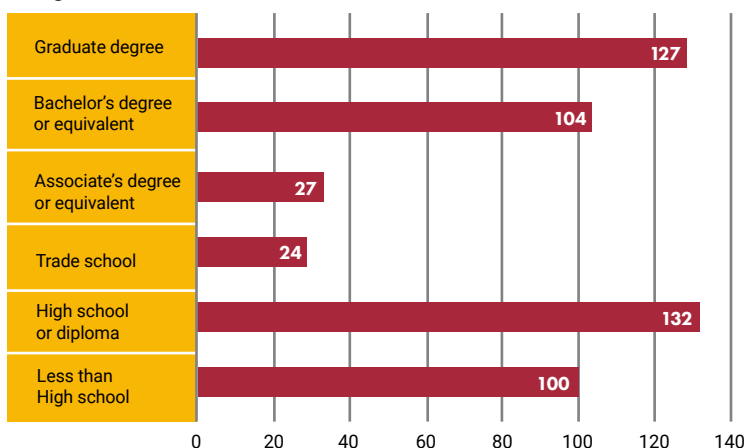
Immigrant students report feeling unsupported by school staff and hesitant to approach teachers or administrators with questions or concerns. Additionally, there's a lack of sufficient academic support or after-school tutoring tailored to meet the needs of immigrant children, leading to disparities. Moreover, recent immigrant children often lack IT literacy, which hampers their academic performance. Accessible extracurricular activities such as sports, arts, and cultural activities are also limited. Furthermore, there are instances of targeted bullying against children due to their diverse backgrounds, contributing to a hostile learning environment.

The communities surveyed are deeply concerned about the lack of support and resources available to non-English-speaking students within BCPS. Addressing these issues is crucial to fostering an inclusive and equitable learning environment where all students can thrive academically and socially.

There is an undue burden on students to be translators for their families, which is unfair. And they are not mentally or emotionally mature enough to handle that burden."

Listening Session Participant

Highest level of education



Healthcare

Ensuring equitable access to healthcare is an essential aspect of immigrant inclusion and integration. However, this is currently a notable gap for New American populations.

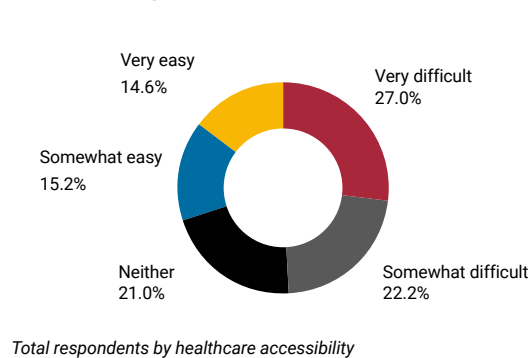
When asked about healthcare, nearly half (49.2%) of survey respondents expressed that accessing a doctor in Baltimore County is difficult. Hurdles accessing healthcare are even more prominent among the Hispanic American population, who represent the majority (61.3%) of those who reported that accessing a doctor is difficult.

Participants voiced several healthcare concerns, including inadequate access to healthcare services for undocumented immigrants and visiting family members, compounded by uncertainties about eligibility and fear of legal repercussions. Additionally, they highlighted a lack of health insurance coverage, difficulty navigating the complex U.S. healthcare system, especially for those with lower literacy and technological skills, and challenges for families seeking specialized care in Baltimore due to language barriers, cultural differences, and limited resources.

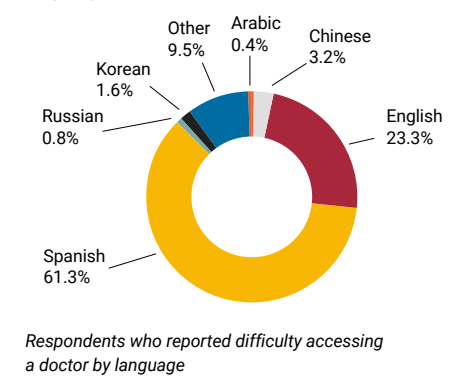
Participants also emphasized insufficient language access across healthcare services, leading to misunderstandings and denials of care. Affordability issues, limited access to culturally competent mental health services, lack of responsiveness from resource-providing organizations, inadequate nutrition resources, and experiences of food insecurity were also reported. Furthermore, elderly immigrants faced a lack of culturally relevant programming, transportation barriers, and documentation issues hindering access to services, thereby impeding their timely healthcare.

The community expresses grave concerns about the barriers immigrants face in accessing healthcare services. Language barriers, documentation issues, and systemic challenges create notable disparities, and significantly impact the quality of care received by immigrant populations, highlighting the urgent need for reforms to ensure equitable access to healthcare for all individuals, regardless of their immigration status or background.

In Baltimore County, how difficult or easy would it be for you to see a doctor?



Language

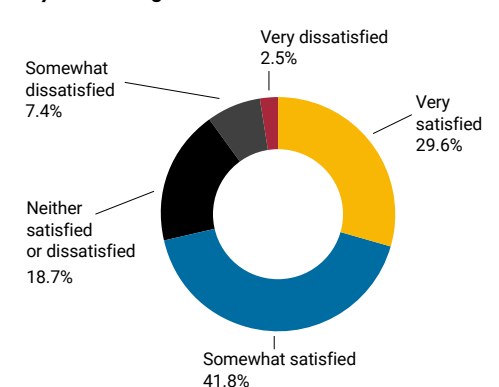


Housing

Accessible and affordable housing is essential for providing stability to the New American community and facilitating immigrant integration. Despite 71.4% of survey respondents expressing some level of satisfaction with their housing quality, significant concerns persist. These include the high cost of living for both renting and buying homes, coupled with a lack of information about home-buying requirements, eligibility, and processes.

Moreover, New Americans lack information about rental resources, renters' rights, and support for utilities. Additionally, there's a notable lack of awareness about existing workshops and resources related to home-buying. Addressing these concerns is pivotal for ensuring adequate housing options and supporting the successful integration of immigrant populations.

How do you feel about the quality of your housing?



There is a common misconception among these communities that you need to be a citizen to buy a home.

Entrepreneurship and Workforce Development

Immigrants play a vital role in Baltimore County's economy, comprising 15.4% of the employed workforce and contributing \$9.7 billion to the county's GDP in 2019⁴. 7,400 immigrant entrepreneurs generate approximately \$204.4 million in business income for Baltimore County annually, and despite constituting 12.5% of the population, they are responsible for 21.2% of business ownership.

them being Hispanic Americans. Additionally, only 47.3% reported consistent ability to pay monthly expenses, reflecting challenges in financial stability. New American communities face various obstacles in workforce and entrepreneurship, including limited access to information, financial support, and education, compounded by language barriers and discrimination.

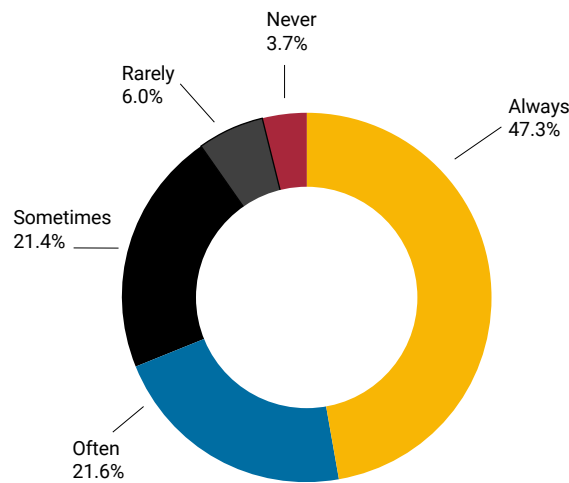
However, they encounter significant hurdles in securing employment and starting businesses. According to survey data, 11.9% of respondents are unemployed, with 73.7% of

Despite their entrepreneurial spirit, they require more support to integrate successfully into the workforce and bolster the local economy.

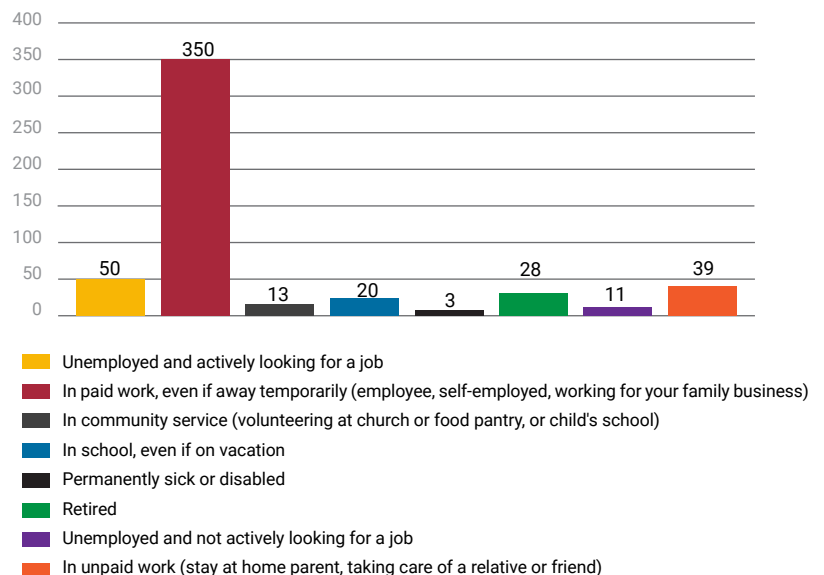
I know quite a number of friends who were teachers, nurses, lawyers and other professionals back home. Who have come here and become cab drivers. Because there's no access to that information [about degree certifications nor evaluations]. If we can have a place that newcomers would be able to access immediately as they arrive, so that they don't have to be washing dishes...so that they don't have to go what I went through. I went through the longest route. And it was unnecessary.

Listening Session Participant

Are you able to pay monthly expenses for you and your family? Monthly expenses include rent/mortgage, electricity, phone, etc.



Which of these descriptions best applies to what you have been doing for the last four weeks? Please select only one



⁴ Source: New Americans in Baltimore County the Demographic and Economic Contributions of Immigrants in the County

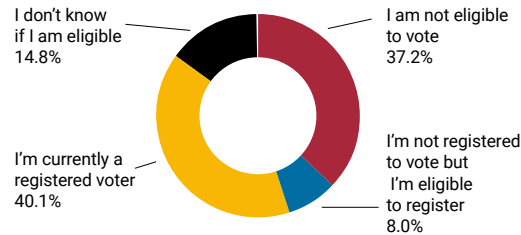
Civic Engagement

Civic engagement is pivotal for successful immigrant integration, providing a sense of agency and belonging.

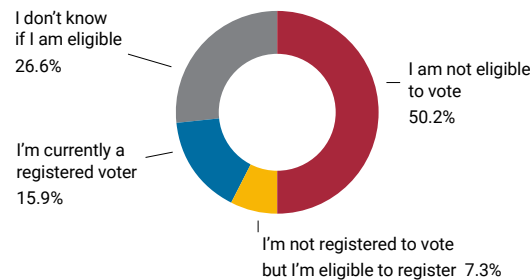
Regarding voter registration, 40.1% of respondents are registered, while 52.0% are not eligible or are unsure of their eligibility. Hispanic Americans have the lowest access to voting, with only 15.9% registered. Chinese Americans exhibit the highest political engagement, with 64.2% reporting regular voting. However, 61.5% overall lack resources for electoral participation.

Communities express a desire for increased civic involvement but face barriers such as inadequate knowledge of local government structures, limited access to civic information, and underrepresentation in local governance. Ensuring equitable access to information and opportunities for civic engagement is crucial for fostering community cohesion in Baltimore County.

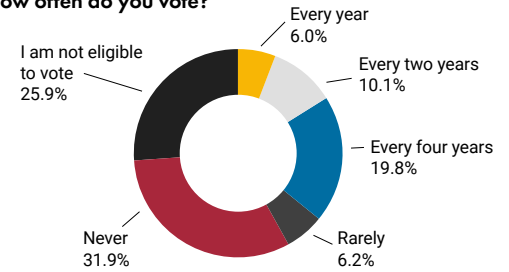
Are you registered to vote?



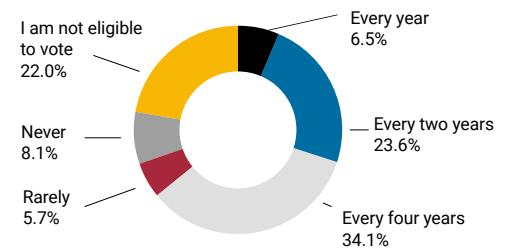
Are you registered to vote? (Hispanics)



How often do you vote?



How often do you vote? (Chinese)



Recreation and Parks

Ensuring accessible and inclusive public spaces like parks and recreational areas is vital for healthy communities, yet only 39% of surveyed immigrant community members feel a sense of belonging in parks. Concerns raised by New Americans include insufficient information about park spaces and programs, limited recreational opportunities for youth and adults, high costs, and lack of information on

obtaining permits for activities like fishing, compounded by language barriers. Discrimination in public spaces further exacerbates feelings of exclusion.

Addressing these concerns is crucial for promoting inclusivity and equitable access to recreational resources for all community members.

Transportation

New American community members voice transportation concerns, citing the inconsistency and unreliability of public transportation, which impacts work and daily life. They note unclear and inaccessible information about bus schedules

and changes. Additionally, they highlight the limited service area for the free Baltimore County Loop Bus and the lack of accessible transportation for students attending magnet schools.

"When we are asked to access services through public spaces like public libraries and rec centers, I myself feel uncomfortable."

Listening Session Participant

Demographic Highlight: Hispanic Americans

While the New American community in Baltimore County is diverse, the majority of immigrants, 21.6%, originate from Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean.

Hispanic Americans within the New American community demonstrate a slightly higher sense of belonging in recreational and educational spaces compared to the overall population yet are slightly less trusting of authorities. They tend to have lower levels of formal education and English-language proficiency, with 67.7% having completed high school or less. Furthermore, they face challenges accessing educational resources and report difficulty in

accessing healthcare, with 66.6% finding it challenging to see a doctor. In terms of housing, Hispanic Americans are slightly more likely to express dissatisfaction with housing quality. Employment-wise, they encounter more barriers, with 73.7% of unemployed respondents being Hispanic. Financially, they struggle more, with 44.8% reporting difficulty paying monthly expenses. Additionally, Hispanic Americans are less likely to participate in elections, with only 12.5% voting regularly.

Addressing these disparities, especially for the largest segment of Baltimore County's immigrants, is essential for effective community support and integration.

Closing

During the Listening Sessions conducted as part of this initiative, a recurring theme emerged across all community groups and topics: there is a significant gap in accessing information, services, and resources.

Community members repeatedly expressed uncertainty about where to find information on various topics, from entrepreneurship to healthcare to recreation, hindering their access to available resources and opportunities. Consequently, participants shared their preferred methods for receiving information and resources, emphasizing the need for streamlined access through a centralized hub. They expressed trust in immigrant community leaders, organizations, faith groups, and schools as credible sources of information and advocated for regular community engagement initiatives in these spaces.

Recognizing the diverse preferences within Baltimore County's immigrant population, participants highlighted the importance of leveraging multiple communication channels simultaneously, including email, social media, text messages, and traditional media. They stressed the importance of simplified systems, processes, and communications to accommodate varying literacy levels and experiences. Additionally, participants emphasized the need for expanded language accessibility across all

communications and services, advocating for interpretation and translation services to ensure effective communication and foster a sense of inclusion and belonging among immigrant communities. This comprehensive approach is vital for the successful integration of immigrant communities in Baltimore County.

In summary, there are significant opportunities for Baltimore County to bolster support for the New American community through targeted initiatives spanning various crucial sectors, including public safety, education, healthcare, housing, workforce development, civic engagement, recreation, and transportation. To enact a truly effective plan for immigrant inclusion and integration, a comprehensive and multi-faceted strategy is imperative. This begins with establishing a permanent Office of Immigrant Affairs, ensuring dedicated County resources. It entails harnessing immigrant community leadership, prioritizing language access, providing mentorship and training programs, fostering community engagement, tailored resources, and actively seeking to understand and accommodate community preferences to enhance engagement and accessibility. Such measures will cultivate an environment where immigrants can thrive and contribute to the community, ultimately fostering a more inclusive and welcoming Baltimore County for all residents.

"[We're] working to ensure that everybody, regardless of the language they speak, how long they've lived in Baltimore County, regardless of immigration status, regardless of race or nationality - feels welcome and included in Baltimore County, because when the immigrant population is thriving, so is the rest of the county and country."

Giuliana Valencia-Banks

COMMUNITY AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

GOAL

Encourage avenues for immigrants and refugees to engage in civic activities by nurturing leadership and promoting active participation within decision-making entities. Increase rates of naturalization and voter registration, and enhance participation in democratic procedures among foreign-born residents.

SHORT-TERM STRATEGIES (YEAR 1-3)

Recommendation 1: Establish a cabinet-level Office of New Americans to coordinate County agencies' efforts, work with partners throughout the community, and ensure that the needs and concerns of immigrant communities are heard at the highest level of County government.

- Draft legislation for establishing the office to present to the County Executive's office and the County Council.
- Secure funding and resources necessary for the office's operation, including personnel (Director, Outreach Coordinator, Language Access Coordinator, Fellow, Interns) and programs via County budget, intergovernmental resources, and philanthropic organizations.

Recommendation 2: Establish a commission on Immigrant Affairs, building on the work of the New Americans Task Force.

- Draft a commission charter outlining the commission's mission, goals, composition, responsibilities, and operating procedures.
- Launch a public awareness campaign to educate the broader community about the commission's goals and the importance of its work.

LONG-TERM STRATEGIES (YEAR 3-5)

Recommendation 3: Inform and empower New Americans with the knowledge and skills necessary to understand and effectively engage in civic and political life.

- In collaboration with the Baltimore County Public Library systems and the Community College of Baltimore County, offer classes to prepare New Americans for the naturalization interview and test. Classes should be offered at multiple locations, days of the week, and times of day to ensure accessibility.
- Partner with Community Based Organizations (CBOs) that have experience providing immigration legal services to host regular citizenship application workshops where New Americans can receive pro/low bono assistance applying for citizenship.
- Partner with CBOs providing immigration legal services to lead regular Know Your Rights Trainings to empower New Americans to make informed decisions, assert their rights, and seek help when needed. Information provided should include: fundamental legal rights, immigration status, encounters with law enforcement, education rights, and community resources including legal aid organizations and advocacy groups.
- Partner with financial institutions and CBOs to provide microloans and grants toward naturalization application costs. Also provide education around income-based application fee waivers.
- In partnership with United States Citizenship and Immigration Services, organize ceremonies to celebrate civic achievements of New Americans, including naturalization and public service participation.

Recommendation 4: Create opportunities for New Americans to become changemakers and role models in their new communities.

- Create a New American Leadership Initiative aimed at inspiring, equipping, and supporting New Americans to participate in public service and leadership roles.
- Provide leadership training and development programs tailored to the unique needs and experiences of New Americans. Program topics should include communication skills, advocacy, and networking. Provide stipends to participants to ensure accessibility and in recognition of participant time and expertise.
- Pair New Americans with experienced mentors and coaches who can provide guidance and support as they pursue their leadership roles. Prioritize identifying mentors with similar lived experiences.

Recommendation 5: Ensure the experiences, contributions, and perspectives of New Americans are actively seen, heard, and understood by the broader Baltimore County community.

- Designate a month each year to recognize and celebrate the multitude of New American cultures, backgrounds, and experiences in Baltimore County through cultural festivals, panel discussions, exhibitions, film screenings, and culinary events. Consider designating the month of September to align with Welcoming Week.
- Identify ways the County can financially and logistically support existing cultural events, networks, and spaces through partnerships with existing local New American community institutions, leaders, and organizations.
- Create profiles, newsletters, interviews, and social media posts featuring immigrant role models and sharing their stories and experiences in multiple languages. Dedicate a staff member or intern/volunteer to oversee the effort.
- Signify the County's commitment to creating an inclusive and welcoming environment for New Americans by becoming a Certified Welcoming Place.
- Integrate New American art and historical narratives into Baltimore County's public and government spaces, fostering cultural understanding, community pride, and representation of New American skills and stories.



EQUITABLE ACCESS

GOAL

Ensure that Baltimore County is inclusive and equitable in its decision-making and its distribution of resources that create opportunities that are accessible to all residents, including newcomers. Ensure that New Americans can readily access County services, healthcare, and legal assistance by proactively eliminating obstacles like language barriers, cultural differences, lack of awareness, and feasibility challenges. Foster trust by diminishing apprehension and exploitative behaviors, and by promoting rights education and facilitating access to safe and affordable legal services.

SHORT-TERM STRATEGIES (YEAR 1-3)

Recommendation 1: Develop a dedicated office of Immigrant Affairs to overcome issues related to limited information about services and resources, and foster relationships with immigrant/refugee communities.

Structure

- Cabinet level office to make recommendations to the highest levels of government
- Codified to be able to exist despite leadership changes
- Oversee language access
- Provide technical support to agencies when working with immigrants
- Advocacy role to ensure services are accessible for immigrants
- Hub for information for residents
- Conduit between local government, advocates, non-profits, civic groups, faith-based institutions to foster relationships to ensure the jurisdiction is more welcoming to New Americans
- Promoting civic engagement
- Ongoing engagement to ensure government is in tune with the changing demographics

Recommendation 2: Develop and implement a language access strategy to provide equitable access to services and resources.

- Develop a Language Access policy for Baltimore County to standardize the process of serving English language learners including a Language Access study (four factor analysis)—policy development and implementation.
- Fund A line item for a staff member to oversee comprehensive language access resources (telephonic interpretation and translation).
- Provide Language Access and cultural competency training across Baltimore County Government.

- Promote accessible language access across CBOs.
- Develop educational materials to inform English language learners about the various language access tools offered across the County.
- Provide policy recommendations to the MD Department of Human Services to make public benefits more accessible to immigrants with language and documentation barriers.
- Launch targeted social media campaigns in languages spoken by New Americans to share important updates and resources. Implement a text messaging service in multiple languages to send timely alerts, updates, and reminders to New Americans who may not have regular internet access.

Recommendation 3: Develop a Community Advisory Board to monitor progress of the plan and its recommendations and support the office.

Structure

- Comprised of members of the task force for institutional knowledge and new members to reflect additional perspectives
- Provide oversight of the plan and serve as an advisor to the office and other County agencies
- Monitor the needs of the community and identify gaps

LONG-TERM STRATEGIES (YEAR 3-5)

Recommendation 4: Improve and expand communication and access to information for New Americans.

- Establish a feedback mechanism for New Americans to share their concerns, suggestions, and feedback about the accessibility and usefulness of information.
- Secure funding to establish Community Resource Centers: Establish community resource centers at Baltimore County Public Library and CBOs where New Americans can access information, attend workshops, and receive assistance in their native languages. Train and deploy community navigators who can help New Americans access healthcare, legal services, housing, and other critical resources.
- Create a user-friendly and up-to-date online portal where New Americans can easily access information about available services, local resources, and important updates in their language. Create newsletters that provide updates, success stories, and information tailored to New American communities.
- Communicate Baltimore County's emergency response plans in multiple languages to ensure New Americans know what to do during crises.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & ENTREPRENEURSHIP

GOAL

Elevate efforts for immigrants and refugees to realize their complete economic potential by acknowledging their skills, talents, and capabilities. Guarantee that economic structures are equipped to utilize both new and existing talent, facilitating prosperity, vitality, and active participation in the local economy for all residents.

SHORT-TERM STRATEGIES (YEAR 1-3)

Recommendation 1: Expand access to financial resources for New American Business owners and employees to achieve economic stability leading to sustainable living wages.

- Facilitate access to federal, state, and local programs and initiatives that support businesses owned by New Americans.
- Promote Baltimore County's small business action team and expand the staff and funding when needed.

Recommendation 2: Develop partnerships to foster investment in Baltimore County based-businesses and attract investment to reach nationwide and global markets.

- Ensure loans and grants are accessible to New American business owners.
 - Ensure loans and grants are promoted widely across various communities and in multilingual ways for equitable access.
- Create a strategic plan to attract investment in New American businesses and provide technical assistance and other support to allow businesses to reach regional, national, and global markets.

Recommendation 3: Advance self-sufficiency and wealth-building among New Americans to generate growth for the County through promoting workplace/worker rights, offering better quality jobs, financial literacy, skills training, expanding entrepreneurship, and inclusive hiring and contracting.

- Leverage existing job skills training, hiring, and placement resources, and access to education provided by Baltimore County's Economic and Workforce Development and Community Based Organizations.
- Develop Partnerships with identified employers, community colleges, universities, trade schools, Towson Start-Up, and emerging Industries to establish pipeline for employment opportunities.
- Partner with community organizations and institutions to create an inclusive financial literacy program made available to New Americans.
- Collaborate with worker rights organizations to develop an education program, provide training and advocacy for workers including trade unions and industry specific groups and organizations.
 - Training such as "Know Your Rights" and "Employment Law 101" provided to New Americans in their primary language are critical to reducing employment abuse and fraud among target communities.
- Launch Mobile Career Program so workforce development and career services are accessible to any and all New Americans in Baltimore County regardless of their English language proficiency.
- Ensure mobile workforce development services have multilingual capabilities and are delivered in a culturally sensitive and aware manner through proper training.
- Strategically partner with local religious institutions, places of worship, schools, public libraries, food pantries and other gathering places for target populations to promote and increase utilization of mobile career navigator services.
- Design and implement a linguistically and culturally aware outreach strategy to promote the Mobile Career Program and DEWD.
- Establish a referral system between DEWD and CBOs that provide wrap around services.

LONG-TERM STRATEGIES (Year 3-5)

Recommendation 4: Ensure representation on Baltimore County's Workforce Development Board is diverse, inclusive, and representative of New Americans. Appoint at least one member of the target community (or communities) to serve on the board.

- Increase outreach to engage New American business owners.

CONNECTED, SAFE, AND HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

GOAL

Ensure New Americans in Baltimore County have access to health care by removing barriers impacting the health of our residents. Promote trust-building and cultivate relationships among long-standing residents, newcomers, local law enforcement, safety agencies, and other first responders.

SHORT-TERM STRATEGIES (YEAR 1-3)

Recommendation 1: Implement comprehensive language access policies across Baltimore County's Health and Human Services.

- Improve the language accessibility of programs.
- Identify and share information about availability of health care navigators across the various health care providers throughout the County.
- Develop a health care navigation program that is available in multiple languages.

Recommendation 2: Increase outreach to English language learner communities about health and human services available throughout Baltimore County.

- Create educational initiatives to promote awareness of health care resources available throughout the County and rights in accessing services.
- Develop a "quick guide" for accessing services from Federally Qualified Health Centers.
- Develop a community health ambassador program to increase information and awareness throughout the community.

Recommendation 3: Implement comprehensive language access policies across Baltimore County's Public Safety Departments.

- Provide cultural sensitivity training to public safety officers and partner with community organization to better serve immigrant community by partnering with diverse community-based organizations.
- Provide comprehensive and ongoing training regarding language access and the federal requirements that guarantee equitable services.
- Increase recruitment of multicultural public safety officers and deploy them to those communities.

Recommendation 4: Increase outreach to New Americans about public safety and develop initiatives to improve engagement with New Americans.

- Increase outreach to immigrant communities through outreach programs, community events, and partnerships with local organizations, schools, and faith-based organizations.
- Engage non-profit organizations to offer know-your-rights education and campaigns.
- Develop education programs that inform communities about the process for reporting a crime.
- Develop clear protocols for reporting and addressing bias incidents or hate crimes targeting New American communities.
- Review and develop policies involving New Americans such as stop, search and arrest, language access, and immigration status.



EDUCATION

GOAL

Create a diverse, equitable, and inclusive educational system where all students feel valued, supported, and empowered to reach their highest potential.

SHORT-TERM STRATEGIES (YEAR 1-3)

Recommendation 1: Increase focus on short-term credentials, which also serve as part of a stackable credential model for further career development.

- Develop certificates/training programs that provide instruction in English literacy and a trade/specific skill simultaneously with cohort specific English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) opportunities.
- Develop community-based organization, employer, and education partnerships to provide training opportunities with language acquisition support. Develop a strong pipeline for referrals and communication between partners, ensuring warm hand-offs and simple transitions for applicants/clients/students between partners.

Recommendation 2: Provide County-wide language services (translation and interpretation) in educational contexts.

- Implement comprehensive language services at all educational levels: K-12, community college, universities.
- Develop programs to incentivize multilingual New Americans in Baltimore County, both within the sphere of education and within the County at large.



LONG-TERM STRATEGIES (YEAR 3-5)

Recommendation 3: Develop partnerships that can provide transcript services to assist prospective college students and graduates in translating prior experience to the U.S. higher education system.

- Develop relationships with organizations that evaluate and translate foreign credentials.
- Develop programs that offer financial support for individuals that require evaluation and translation of foreign credentials.

Recommendation 4: Develop an online hub that offers a single landing page with information about all levels of education and educational opportunities within Baltimore County (K-12, community, higher education) and other County-wide resources (further coordination of services).

- Coordinated information about higher education, K-12, and community educational resources.
- Create an education-focused landing page that is one section of a larger, county-wide hub that provides information about multiple resources for New Americans.
- Provide information about higher education resources for all students, regardless of status, such as the Maryland DREAM Act requirements and MSFAA opportunities.
- Creation of a series of hubs, both in person, and online, that align to all partners and clearly lay out current resources, contact points, and support areas.

Recommendation 5: Bring social, emotional support and resources to people and communities in need.

- Hire counselors with multilingual and multicultural backgrounds at all levels of the education system (community, BCPS, higher education).
- Develop resources for multilingual families so that they understand their rights and the services available if their child/student has a learning difference.
- Ensure that there is dedicated staff assigned to schools or to multilingual families who will work directly with them to make sure they are receiving quality service regardless of language barriers or other obstacles).
- Develop protocol for ensuring families are receiving Individualized Education Plans in the language that they are most comfortable.
- Provide culturally informed support for students with IEPs who are from multilingual families in K-12 not only limited to interpretation services, but also in-person supports.
- Establish and promote mechanisms to file complaints regarding civil rights violations in regards to language access.
- Increase access to diagnostic resources for multilingual students at the college level.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to recognize the chairs of the subcommittees of the New Americans Task Force:

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Thank you to the following organizations for hosting community listening sessions and generously providing photos to be used in the plan:

- Chinese American Parent Association of the Baltimore Community
- Baltimore Association of Nepalese in America
- Lansdowne Middle School
- Islamic Society of Baltimore
- Elimu Community Center

We would also like to thank the following individuals and organizations for their contributions to this Welcoming Plan:

Cassie Harding

Welcoming America

Giuliana Valencia-Banks

Baltimore County

Jessica Cordova

Baltimore County Public Library

Jordyne Krumroy

Welcoming America

Lauren Watley

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Logan Williams

Baltimore County

Micaela McConnell

American Immigration Council

Sean Naron

Baltimore County

Riccy Amador

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