New Americans in Santa Fe County
The Demographic and Economic Contributions of Immigrants in the County

Population

16,600
the number of immigrants living in Santa Fe County, New Mexico, in 2019.

Between 2014 and 2019, the total population of the county increased by
1.9%

Immigrants made up 11.1% of the total population of the county in 2019.

Demographics

14.5%
of households in Santa Fe County in 2019 had at least one immigrant resident.

7.0%
of immigrants in Santa Fe County were recent arrivals, with five years of residency in the United States or less, meaning
93.0%
of immigrants in the county had resided in the United States for more than five years.

In the county, immigrants were
42.9%
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.

72,500
people worked in Santa Fe County in 2019.

Of these,
15.4%
or 11,200 workers, were immigrants.

Shares of population by age:

- U.S.-born
  - 0-15: 17.6%
  - 16-64: 58.1%
  - 65+: 24.3%
- Immigrant
  - 0-15: 4.3%
  - 16-64: 83.1%
  - 65+: 12.6%

1. Estimates provided in this report may slightly undercount the immigrant population. The American Community Survey (ACS) historically undersamples the immigrant 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 Santa Fe County, New Mexico.
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.
The top regions of origin for immigrants living in the county:
- Mexico, Central America and Caribbean (73.5%)
- Central and Eastern Europe (4.3%)
- East Asia (3.8%)
- Northern Europe (3.4%)
- South America (2.8%)
- Other (12.2%)

The top countries of origin for immigrants living in the county:
- Mexico (62.3%)
- Guatemala (5.0%)
- El Salvador (4.3%)
- Germany (3.0%)
- Canada (2.3%)
- Other (23.1%)

The top languages spoken at home other than English among immigrants:
- Spanish 85.8%
- German 2.2%

4,400 immigrants living in the county had limited English language proficiency, making up 26.7% of the immigrant population.

Among those with limited English language proficiency, educational attainment was as follows:
- Less than a high-school diploma (53.6%)
- A high-school diploma or some college (42.6%)
- Bachelor's degree (3.8%)

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.
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 households’ in Santa Fe County earned:

- **$488.4 million**
- **$78.8 million** went to federal taxes
- **$43.8 million** went to state & local taxes
- **$365.9 million** was left in spending power

This means that immigrant households held 9.6% of all spending power in the county.

In 2019, immigrants in the county contributed **$1.1 billion** to the county’s gross domestic product (GDP), or 12.3% of total GDP for that year.10

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

- **$49.7 million** to Social Security
- **$13.2 million** to Medicare

24.2% of immigrants in the county received Medicare or Medicaid in 2019, compared with 48.9% of U.S.-born residents.

About 39.7% of immigrants had private health care coverage, while 24.2% had public health care coverage.

About 60.9% of U.S.-born residents had private health care coverage, while 49.7% had public health care coverage.11

Approximately 40.8% of immigrants in Santa Fe County were uninsured.

7. Immigrant households refer to those with an immigrant as head of the unit.
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.
11. Including people who have both public and private health care coverage.
**Workforce**

Although immigrants made up 11.1% of the county’s total population, they represented 15.2% of its working age population, 15.0% of its employed labor force, and 8.7% of its workers in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) fields in 2019.\(^2\)

### Immigrant shares of the...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population</th>
<th>11.1%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Working Age Population</td>
<td>15.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed Population</td>
<td>15.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STEM Workers</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The immigrant working-age population was 48.7% female and 51.3% male.

The immigrant employed population was 41.9% female and 58.1% male.

Immigrants in the county were 42.9% more likely to be of working age than their U.S.-born counterparts.

Immigrants played a critical role in several key industries in the county. The industries with the highest share of immigrant workers were:

- **Construction**: 28.6%
- **Hospitality**: 27.1%
- **Professional Services**: 14.8%
- **General Services**: 14.5%
- **Education**: 13.7%
- **Retail Trade**: 13.2%
- **Health Care and Social Assistance**: 10.0%

The occupations with the largest number of immigrant workers were:

- Maids and Housekeeping Cleaners (7.3%)
- Cooks (6.8%)
- Waiters and Waitresses (4.9%)
- Landscaping and Groundskeeping Workers (4.7%)
- Janitors and Building Cleaners (4.2%)

---

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

13. 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.

14. General services include personal services (e.g. laundry services, barber shops, and repair and maintenance), religious organizations, social services, and labor unions.
New Americans in Santa Fe County

Workforce (continued)

The occupation with the largest number of female immigrant workers was:
Maids and Housekeeping Cleaners ......................... 17.3%

The occupations with the largest number of male immigrant workers was:
Landscaping and Groundskeeping Workers ............ 8.1%

Due to the role immigrants play in the workforce helping companies keep jobs on U.S. soil, our research shows that immigrants living in the county helped create or preserve

800 manufacturing jobs

that would have otherwise been eliminated or moved elsewhere by 2019.15

SPOTLIGHT Job Demand In Santa Fe In 2022

Not only were immigrants more likely to be of working age than the U.S.-born, but they were also a crucial part of the county’s economy and helped meet the needs of its fastest growing and most in-demand fields.16

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

The top five industries with the highest demand for bilingual workers:17

1. Health Care and Social Assistance
2. Educational Services
3. Manufacturing
4. Administrative Support, Waste Management, and Remediation Services
5. Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services

16. Data is obtained from Lightcast Technologies for the time period between January 1, 2022 and December 31, 2022.
17. Data is obtained from Lightcast Technologies for the time period between January 1, 2022 and December 31, 2022.
Iris Madely Alay

**Member of Somos Un Pueblo Unido**

Iris Madely Alay was born to a single mother in rural Escuintla, Guatemala, and dropped out of school at age ten to help raise her siblings. “I liked school, but I had to leave,” she said. “I had a sad childhood because I didn’t have my father around, and my mother had to dedicate herself to work to support us.”

By 14, Madely Alay was married, and by 17, she had two children. In 2001, she and her husband left their kids with family and moved to Santa Fe. They hoped to make enough money to return to Guatemala with enough savings to have their own home and provide for their children. “We dreamed of having our own home,” Madely Alay said. “We dreamed for our children to be OK.”

After arriving in Santa Fe without legal status and not speaking English, the couple struggled, and Madely Alay’s husband began using drugs. Eventually, she left him. To support her children—two in Guatemala and a new son in Santa Fe—she dedicated herself to working. She began cleaning hotel rooms alongside other undocumented women. But the conditions were terrible. “They weren’t giving us cleaning supplies or gloves, and they knew they could take advantage of us since we didn’t have papers,” Madely Alay said. “We weren’t being paid anywhere near enough for the hours we worked.”

By 2005, Madely Alay and most of the women she worked with had quit. They approached Somos Un Pueblo Unido (**Somos**), a community organization that helped them file a formal labor relations complaint against the hotel and the group won back pay for the hours the hotel hadn’t compensated them for.

“Somos helped us understand our rights, and what was possible for us to do,” Madely Alay said. “We couldn’t find any resources. We were stronger together.”

Shortly after the victory, Madely Alay met her future husband, who also lives in Santa Fe, and in 2017, she became a Lawful Permanent Resident in the U.S.

Madely Alay is still active with Somos and after many years of working in the hotel industry as a maid, she now works at a retail thrift store. Madely Alay recently became a U.S. citizen, and now has three American-born children and has finally been able to visit her two adult children in Guatemala.

“This country has given me so much,” she said. But she does wish the city could provide more assistance to service employees. “Santa Fe could be more welcoming for workers if there was more support for families,” she said. She’d like to see better childcare options and youth activities to help kids stay out of trouble.

---

Verónica Velázquez

**Member of Somos Un Pueblo Unido**

In 2005, Verónica Velázquez and her husband moved to the United States from the rural state of Michoacán, México, for better opportunities. They landed in California but had trouble finding work. “I wanted to be able to send money back to my family in Mexico,” she said. But “no one wanted to hire someone who didn’t have a social security number or a work permit.”

When a friend told Velázquez about a restaurant that was hiring in Santa Fe, she and her husband moved. “They paid me $500 every two weeks,” Velázquez said. “And that was for a period of around 132 hours.” The hourly breakdown came out to $3.78. Then, friends told Velázquez about the workers’ rights organization Somos Un Pueblo Unido (**Somos**). There, she learned about the state and federal minimum wage and her rights despite not having legal immigration status. “I realized that I was a victim of wage theft in the workplace,” Velázquez said.

This truly hit home after the restaurant closed, due to workers’ rights violations. With help from Somos, Velázquez and other workers filed a formal complaint. They were successful and won back pay for several workers.

“As time went on, I grew more involved in the organization,” Velázquez said. “I learned so much, and I participated in campaigns about workers’ rights, the struggle to obtain a driver’s license in New Mexico, and Santa Fe becoming a sanctuary city.”

One of the most satisfying victories came in 2022, when Velázquez helped Somos win the right to sick days for all workers in the state, regardless of their immigration status. “We all felt a little more protected,” she recalled. After 18 years in Santa Fe, Velázquez feels proud of the changes she’s helped to make. But she said that the city has opportunities to take more proactive roles in holding bad actors accountable. “There are still certain bosses who don’t comply with the law, and in the future, we want to have workplace trainings to improve working conditions,” she said.
Entrepreneurship

1,800 immigrant entrepreneurs generated $35.6 million in business income in Santa Fe County.

Data obtained from the ACS may not capture those who work in informal jobs and businesses, and as a result may not capture immigrants’ full entrepreneurial contributions within the County.

Immigrants were 1.6% more likely to be an entrepreneur than their U.S.-born counterparts.

Immigrants represented 15.2% of the business owners in the county in 2019 despite making up 11.1% of the population.

17.2% of immigrants worked for their own businesses, while 16.9% of the U.S.-born population were entrepreneurs. Immigrant entrepreneurs self-identified as 43.8% female and 56.3% male.

25.9% of immigrant entrepreneurs worked in the General Services industry. This was the top industry for immigrant entrepreneurs in Santa Fe County.

Immigrant entrepreneurs by race and ethnicity:

- Hispanic (66.2%)
- White (25.8%)
- Other (8.0%)

51.6% of immigrant entrepreneurs were from Mexico. This was the top country of origin for immigrant entrepreneurs in the county.

Female Male

Female Male

Hispanic (66.2%) White (25.8%) Other (8.0%)

Immigrant U.S.-born

18. Data obtained from the ACS may not capture those who work in informal jobs and businesses, and as a result may not capture immigrants' full entrepreneurial contributions within the County.
**Education**

Share of the county’s population aged 25 or above that held a **bachelor’s degree** in 2019:

- **43.1%** of U.S.-born
- 53.6% female
  - 46.4% male
- 22.5% of immigrants
  - 50.8% female
  - 49.2% male

Share of the county’s population aged 25 or above that held an **advanced degree** in 2019:

- **21.1%** of U.S.-born
  - 52.7% female
  - 47.3% male
- 12.0% of immigrants
  - 51.3% female
  - 48.7% male

- **5.4%** of K-12 students in the county were immigrants in 2019.

- **24.8%** of K-12 students in the county were the children of immigrants in 2019.

**SPOTLIGHT** **University Population**

The universities with the largest international student populations were:

- Santa Fe Community College: **136 international students**
- St. John’s College: **63 international students**

The breakdown of international students is as follows:

- Part-time undergraduate students (103)
- Full-time undergraduate students (94)
- Part-time graduate students (1)
- Full-time graduate students (3)

In the 2020-21 academic year, three international students graduated with STEM degrees from colleges and universities. International students supported 11 jobs in the county and these students contributed $2.6 million to the economy in the 2021-22 academic year.

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

20. Economic data is derived from the International Student Economic Value Tool maintained by NAFSA: Association of International Educators.
Housing

In 2019, 65.4% of immigrant households in Santa Fe County owned their own homes, compared with 71.4% of U.S.-born households.

Total property value of immigrant households: $1.5 billion

The average household size for immigrants in Santa Fe County was 2.9 compared with 2.0 for U.S.-born residents.

71.4% of immigrant households in the county had access to broadband connection in their place of residence compared with 78.2% of U.S.-born households that did.21

Naturalization

33.5% Naturalized23 citizens (5,600)
18.3% Likely eligible to naturalize (3,000)
48.2% Not eligible to naturalize (8,000)

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

When eligible immigrants naturalize, their income increased by +8.9% on average.24

Top countries of origin for naturalized citizens in Santa Fe County were:
- Mexico: 40.4%
- Germany: 6.5%

21. "Other" housing includes mobile homes, trailers, boats, tents, vans, and housing that is not considered a single-family home or multi-family building.

22. 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.

23. Naturalization is the process through which one can become a U.S. citizen, dependent on certain eligibility requirements. Learn more here: https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/how-united-states-immigration-system-works.

New Americans in Santa Fe County

**DACA-Eligible Population**

1,300 immigrants, approximately, or 7.9% of the immigrant population in Santa Fe County, were eligible for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) in 2019.

In 2019, DACA-eligible households in the county earned:

- **$22.2 million**
- **$1.8 million** went to federal taxes
- **$2.3 million** went to state & local taxes
- **$18.1 million** was left in spending power

25. Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) is a program established in 2012 which permits certain individuals who were brought to the United States while under the age of 16 and who have resided continuously in the United States since June 15, 2007 to remain in the U.S. and work lawfully for at least two years, so long as they meet certain eligibility requirements. Learn more here: [https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/how-united-states-immigration-system-works](https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/how-united-states-immigration-system-works).

26. Due to ongoing legal challenges to the DACA program, any first-time DACA applications not granted as of July 16, 2021 are unable to be processed, though the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) can still accept these applications. The current court ruling alongside the ongoing uncertainty about the future of the DACA program has resulted in a lack of afforded protections for those who are DACA-eligible but are unable to apply.

**Undocumented Immigrants**

6,900 undocumented immigrants lived in Santa Fe County in 2019. They made up about 41.4% of the county's immigrant population.

In 2019, undocumented immigrant households earned:

- **$128.8 million**
- **$7.5 million** went to federal taxes
- **$6.2 million** went to state & local taxes
- **$115.1 million** was left in spending power


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


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

34. 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.

Undocumented immigrants were highly active in the labor force. The industries with the largest number of undocumented immigrant workers were:

- **Hospitality (40.9%)**
- **Construction (16.2%)**
- **Professional Services (13.8%)**
- **Other (29.1%)**
H-1B and H-2B Visas

H-1B visas were certified\(^{35}\) in Santa Fe County during Fiscal Year 2022.

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

- Software Developers, Applications (35)
- Software Developers (8)
- Bioinformatics Scientists (9)

One H-2B visa was certified\(^{36}\) in Santa Fe County during Fiscal Year 2022. The occupation of this certified H-2B visa application was **First-line Supervisor of Production and Operating Workers**.

35. 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 immigrant 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-unitedstates/h-1b-specialtyoccupations](https://www.uscis.gov/working-in-the-unitedstates/h-1b-specialtyoccupations).

36. 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 similarly employed U.S. 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 immigrant 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](https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/foreign-labor/programs/h-2b).