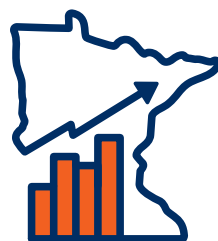




The economic contributions of New Americans in Minnesota

FEBRUARY 2025



Grow Minnesota![®]
Minnesota Chamber Foundation





Overview and findings



Over the past sixteen years, the Minnesota Chamber of Commerce and Chamber Foundation have issued or sponsored five reports examining the role of immigration in the state's economy. While the national discourse and policy debates on immigration have shifted considerably during this time, the economic realities remain unchanged: immigration is an essential ingredient of Minnesota's long-term economic success. New Americans contribute to the economy as entrepreneurs, consumers, taxpayers, and workers, often filling high-demand roles that businesses struggle to staff.

This report shows that immigration has only become more important to Minnesota's economy in the first half of this decade. This is occurring in two ways.

First, New Americans make up an increasing share of Minnesota's overall population and workforce, as the state's population ages and growth slows over

time. Immigration became Minnesota's leading driver of population growth from 2020-2024, accounting for 94% of net gains in population. This has led to outsized impacts on Minnesota's workforce as well. Nearly 60% of the state's total labor force and employment growth came from foreign-born workers from 2019-2023, with immigration helping to mitigate historic workforce shortages in the post-pandemic period.

Minnesota faces a long-term population slowdown, driven by an aging population, declining birth rates and negative net domestic migration.

The underlying need for more immigration is likely to continue in coming years. Minnesota faces a long-term population slowdown, driven by an aging population, declining birth rates and negative net domestic migration. Projections from the state demographer show the unprecedented nature of these changes. For example, Minnesota's population grew by 50% in the fifty-year period from 1970-2020 but is expected to grow by just 7% in the next 50 years.

This poses a substantial challenge to Minnesota's short and long-term economic performance. Minnesota's November Budget and

Economic Forecast, which forecasts a \$5.1 billion budget deficit in the 2028-29 biennium, states, "Payroll employment growth is expected to slow further to an average of 0.3 percent annually from 2025 to 2029, or approximately 10,200 jobs annually. This subdued employment trajectory reflects the constraints of an aging workforce and lower birth rates."

It goes on to say, "Aging and lower birth rates will continue to put downward pressure on labor force growth in the coming years. Whether immigration will be enough to counter these trends remains to be seen."

Already this decade, Minnesota's economy is growing well below the U.S. average, ranking 41st in GDP growth, 40th in labor force growth and 37th in job growth. While Minnesota experienced steady immigration in recent years, it still lags below the national average indicating room for further growth.



Further, data shows that Minnesota's foreign-born population growth has occurred primarily through legal immigration over the past decade. From 2012 to 2022, the state's foreign-born population increased by 26%, while its estimated undocumented population remained flat, despite fluctuations throughout the period. This suggests that concerns about border security and immigration enforcement should not be conflated with Minnesota's longer term immigration trends, which have provided a clear boost to the state's economy.

Second, Minnesota's foreign-born population is becoming



more highly educated, skilled and entrepreneurial, which could spur future innovation and productivity.

The number of foreign-born Minnesotans with a bachelor's degree or higher nearly doubled since 2010, and a declining share has less than a high school education. Similarly, New Americans are increasingly likely to work in mid and high-skilled jobs in health care, manufacturing and professional, scientific and technical services, with declining shares working in lower-skilled service occupations.

Research at the national level shows that foreign-born workers are disproportionately likely to hold advanced degrees, invent new products and start new businesses. For example, a staggering 46% of all U.S. companies on the 2024 Fortune 500 list were founded by immigrants or their children, including 5 of the 10 companies added to the list last year. Likewise, research from Stanford University notes that: "despite immigrants only making up 16% of inventors, they are responsible for 30% of aggregate U.S. innovation since 1976, with their indirect spillover effects accounting for more than twice their direct productivity contribution."

Research at the national level shows that foreign-born workers are disproportionately likely to hold advanced degrees, invent new products and start new businesses.

Minnesota's ability to attract top talent from around the world will be critical to future innovation and growth in key industries, such as health care and life sciences, advanced manufacturing, tech, food and ag science, energy and natural resources, and the state's headquarters economy.

This report explores shifts in immigration patterns in Minnesota so far this decade and examines the evolving role that New Americans play in the state's economy. It also highlights strategies that employers are using to better leverage the strengths of Minnesota's international workforce. Finally, the report provides a curated list of resources to help Minnesota businesses access and engage this vital talent pool.

Highlights

1. Immigration continued to grow in recent years, becoming the largest component of population growth in Minnesota this decade. Following a sharp decline in 2020 and 2021 due to the pandemic, international migration rebounded strongly in subsequent years. International migration accounted



for 94% of Minnesota's net population gains from 2020-2024 and overtook natural population change (births minus deaths) as the leading driver of growth. Despite recent growth, Minnesota ranked only 31st nationally in its rate of international migration per 1,000 people this decade.

2. Minnesota's foreign-born population is driving labor force and employment gains. Employment among foreign-born workers increased by 7% from 2019-2023, compared to just 0.6% for native-born Minnesotans. Foreign-born workers accounted for 59% of net growth in the number of people employed in Minnesota in that period.

3. Minnesota's foreign-born population has among the highest labor force participation rates in the country, with participation growing over time. Minnesota had the 4th highest foreign-born labor force participation rate among states in 2023. Foreign-born Minnesotans also have higher labor force participation rates than native-born Minnesotans, with the difference growing since 2010.

An increasing share of foreign-born workers are employed in skilled occupations, such as management/professional/science/arts, and a decreasing share are in service occupations.

4. Minnesota's foreign-born population is becoming more highly educated over time and is shifting toward higher skilled jobs. The share of foreign-born Minnesotans with very low education levels (less than a high school graduate) decreased by five percentage points since 2010, and the share with a bachelor's degree or higher increased by 7

percentage points. An increasing share of foreign-born workers are employed in skilled occupations, such as management/professional/science/arts, and a decreasing share are in service occupations. However, foreign-born workers continue to be more likely than native-born workers to have not completed high school and work in lower-skilled occupations.

5. Self-employment rates increased sharply this decade for Minnesota's foreign-born population, closing the gap with the state's native-born population. However, Minnesota's immigrant entrepreneurship rates are still among the lowest in the country. Minnesota has the 23rd highest foreign-born population share in the U.S., but the 44th highest share of immigrant business owners.



Definitions:

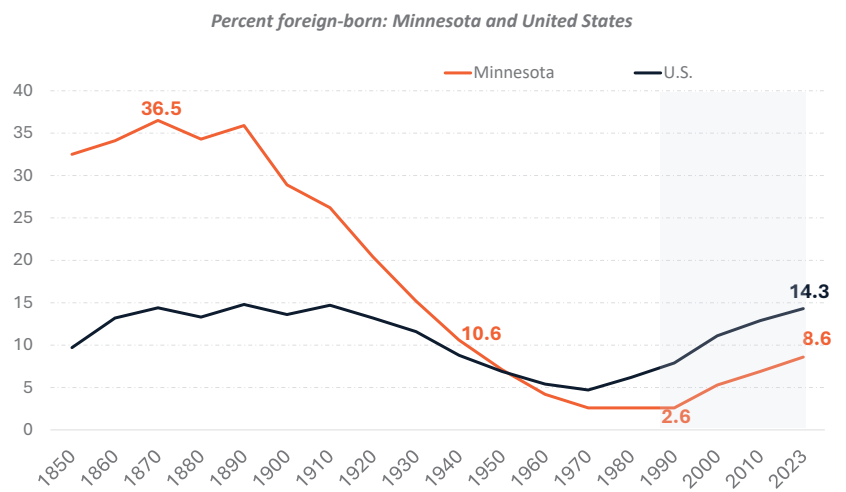
This report uses the terms “immigrant”, “foreign-born” and “New American” interchangeably. These terms refer to a person who does not have U.S. citizenship at birth and encompasses naturalized U.S. citizens, lawful permanent residents, temporary migrants, refugees, asylees and unauthorized immigrants. The term “native-born” refers to a person who was born in the United States, Puerto Rico or a U.S. Island Area. The term “refugee” refers to a person forced to leave their country in order to escape war, persecution or natural disaster. This report will also use the terms “unauthorized immigrants” and “undocumented immigrants” interchangeably, choosing whichever term matches the data source referred to in the sentence. Both terms refer to foreign-born non-citizens who are not legal residents. “Naturalized citizens” are lawful permanent residents who are not native-born but have been granted U.S. citizenship.

Historical trendline of immigration in Minnesota

Minnesota experienced dramatic changes in immigration patterns over the past 150 years. In the early decades of statehood, over one third of Minnesota’s population was born outside the United States. After peaking in 1870, however, Minnesota’s immigrant population share fell steadily over the next hundred years, as growth in the state’s native-born population accelerated and total immigration levels began declining after 1910. As recently as 1990, Minnesota’s foreign-born residents made up just 2.6% of the total state population. The largest immigrant groups at that time came from Southeast Asia, Canada and Europe.

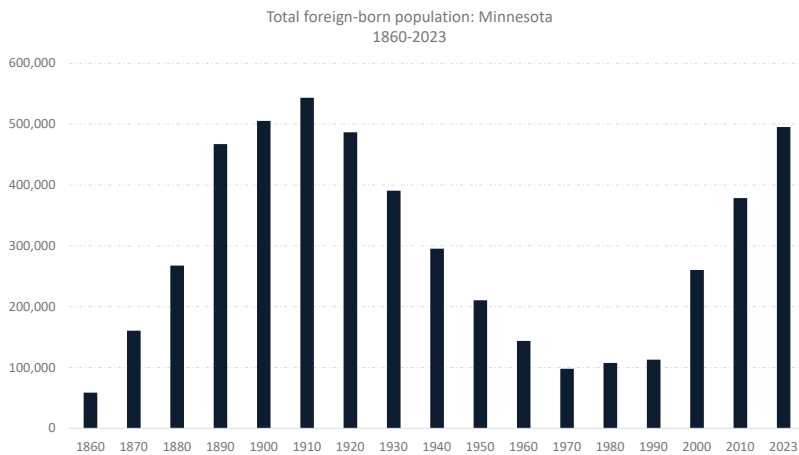
Immigration in Minnesota began changing in the 1990’s. The state’s foreign-born population share more than doubled between 1990 and 2000 and continued to increase over the next two decades, hitting a high of 8.6% in 2023. Minnesota was home to an estimated 495,352 foreign-born residents in 2023, up by nearly 117,000 since 2010 and reaching the highest levels since 1910.

The share of Minnesota’s population that is foreign-born is at its highest level since 1940



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Decennial Census and Population Estimates

Minnesota was home to over 495,000 foreign-born residents in 2023, the highest number since 1910



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Decennial Census and Population Estimates

International migration is driving population growth in Minnesota this decade

Immigration has become increasingly important to Minnesota in recent years, as the state faces underlying demographic changes that are slowing its population and labor force. Population growth is the sum of three components: natural population change (births minus deaths), net domestic migration and net international migration. In past decades, natural population change was the leading component of growth for Minnesota. This shifted in recent years, however. Since 2007, natural population growth steadily declined in Minnesota and experienced a sharp drop during the COVID-19 pandemic due to higher-than-usual mortality rates and fewer births. While Minnesota fared better than many states – ranking 10th in natural population growth since 2020 – the recent slowdown in natural population change made immigration the leading growth component in 2022, 2023 and 2024. Projections indicate that natural growth will decline further in coming decades, and by 2065 Minnesota will have more deaths than births.

Falling natural population growth has been compounded by persistent net domestic migration losses. Minnesota experienced negative net domestic migration in 20 of the past 24 years, with losses worsening this decade. From 2020-2024, nearly 48,000 more people left Minnesota than moved to Minnesota from other states, ranking 41st among states. While this trend could change, there is little reason to expect any near-

term changes that would dramatically improve overall population growth through domestic migration. The combination of negative domestic migration and slowing natural change makes Minnesota increasingly reliant on immigration to sustain population growth going forward.

Within this context, immigration has taken on a larger role in Minnesota’s population and economy. Data from the U.S. Census Population Estimates shows the following trends since 2020:

- After experiencing four consecutive years of falling international migration from 2017 to 2021, immigration rebounded strongly in the subsequent two years of 2022 and 2023.
- 2024 was a turning point for international migration to Minnesota, spiking well-beyond typical levels. Nearly 30,000 new arrivals came to Minnesota between July 2023 and July 2024 – two and half times the average levels from the past decade.

- This strong post-pandemic inflow made international migration the largest component of growth for the state, accounting for 94% of net population growth from 2020-2024.

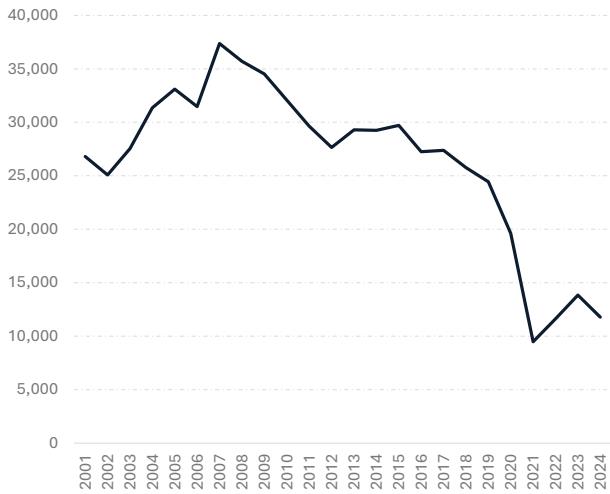
Despite the recent increase in immigration, foreign-born residents remain a modest share of the state’s total population and immigration levels lag well below the U.S. average. For example:

- In 2023, foreign-born Minnesotans made up 8.6% of the state’s population, compared to 14.3% in the U.S.
- Minnesota ranked 20th in total international migration and 31st among states in the rate of international migration per 1,000 people. This suggests room for further growth going forward.
- Further, while the estimated number of undocumented immigrants has ebbed and flowed over the past decade, the share of Minnesota’s foreign-born population that is undocumented has declined since 2012. From 2012-2022, Minnesota’s total foreign-born population grew by 26% but its undocumented population was flat, according to estimates by Pew Research. The evidence suggests that recent growth in the state’s foreign-born population, therefore, has not been primarily driven by an increase in unauthorized immigration.



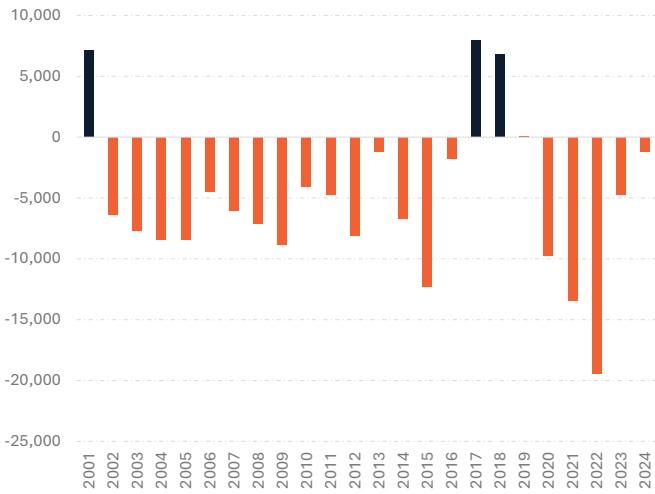
Declining birth rates and net domestic migration losses contributing to slow population growth in Minnesota

Natural population change (births – deaths): Minnesota, 2001-2024



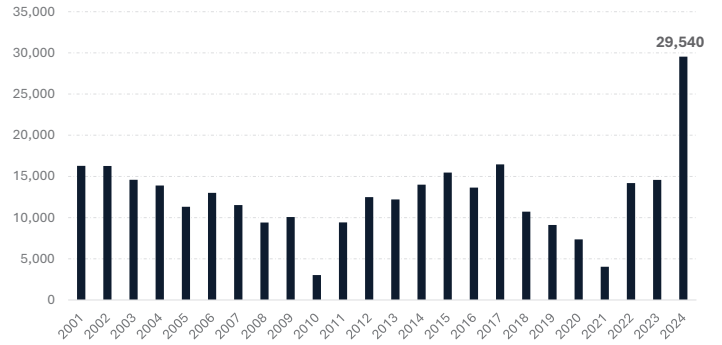
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Population Estimates

Net domestic migration: Minnesota 2001-2024



International migration to Minnesota surged in 2024

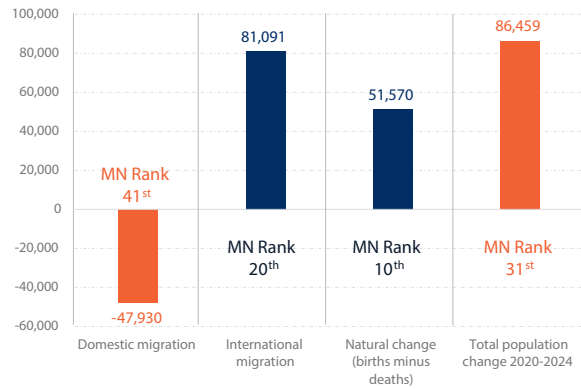
Net international migration: Minnesota 2001-2024



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Population Estimates

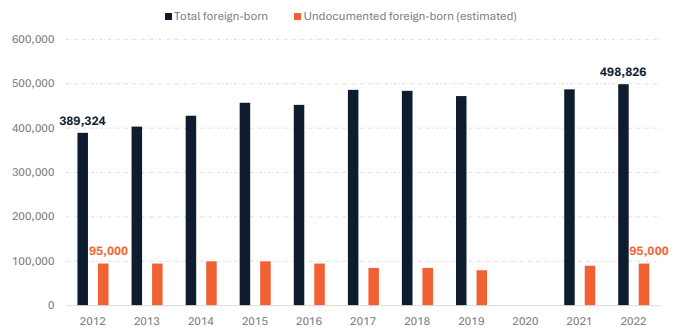
International migration accounted for 94% of Minnesota's net population growth from 2020-2024

Components of population change: Minnesota (2020-2024)



Minnesota's total foreign-born population grew by 26% from 2012-2022; undocumented population was flat

Total foreign-born and undocumented foreign-born residents in Minnesota: 2012-2022



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Pew Research

Regional variation in international migration trends

Immigration is concentrated in certain counties and regions in Minnesota. For example:

- The top 10 counties with the highest percentages of foreign-born residents host 80% of Minnesota's total new American population. These counties are largely concentrated in the Twin Cities metro and southern regions of the state.

Immigration helped mitigate population loss in the Twin Cities and southern regions of Minnesota from 2020-2023

	Total population change (2020-2023)	Total international migration (2020-2023)	% of population growth driven by international migration
Southern section of Minnesota	-843	+29,807	More than 100%
7-county metro	-2,624	+24,490	More than 100%
Southwest	-1,714	+2,146	More than 100%
Southeast	+3,495	+3,171	91%
Northern section of Minnesota	+31,954	+4,817	15%
Northeast	+1,339	+306	23%
Northwest	+6,287	+1,170	19%
Central	+24,328	+3,341	14%

- International migration exceeded total net population growth in the Twin Cities metro and southwest Minnesota from 2020-2023 and made up 91% of population growth in the southeast region. Immigration accounted for only 15% of population growth in Minnesota's central and northern regions by contrast.

Smaller counties in Greater Minnesota may disproportionately benefit from the added population base that immigration provides. Fifty-one of Minnesota's 87 counties had more deaths than births from 2020-2023, making them entirely dependent on migration (both domestic and international) to sustain local economies and communities. In many of these areas, New Americans fill essential roles in key industries like agriculture, health care, and manufacturing. Mower and Kandiyohi counties, for example, each experienced small positive gains in total since 2020. But without immigration, total population in these counties would have been negative, declining by -506 and -431 people respectively.

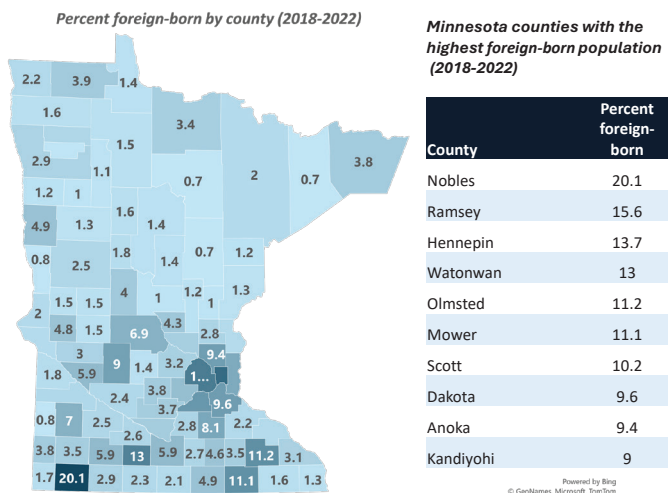
Minnesota's foreign-born population is driving labor force and employment gains

Minnesota's total labor force and employment gains this decade have been largely driven by immigration. Minnesota added over 100,000 foreign-born workers to the labor force from 2010-2023, hitting a total of over 344,000 participants in 2023. Since 2019, the state's foreign-born workforce increased by over 20,000.

Data from the U.S. Census American Community Survey demonstrates the outsized role of immigration in Minnesota's labor market so far this decade:

- Employment among foreign-born workers grew by 7% since 2019, compared to just 0.6% for native-born Minnesotans.
- From 2019-2023, foreign-born workers accounted for 59% of total growth in the state's total labor force and employment.
- While foreign-born Minnesotans experienced higher unemployment rates than the native-born population in past years, this disparity declined since 2010 and by 2023 was nearly identical for foreign and native-born Minnesotans. Unemployment rates for foreign-born Minnesotans declined from a high of 7.1% in 2011 to a low of 2.2% in 2023.

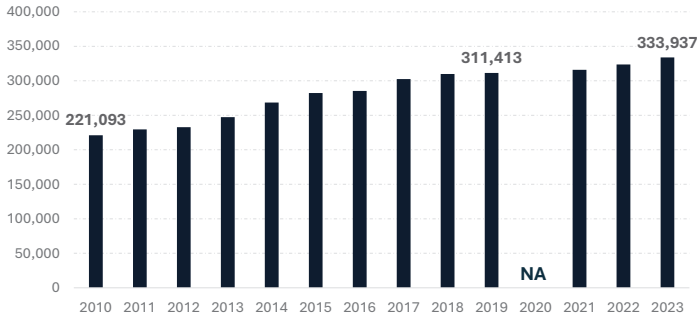
10 counties make up 80% of Minnesota's total foreign-born population





The number of employed foreign-born workers grew by nearly 113,000 since 2010 and by over 22,500 since 2019

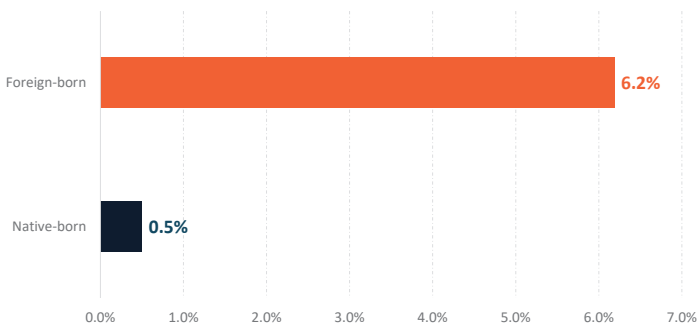
Total number of employed foreign-born workers in Minnesota: 2010-2023



Source: U.S. Census, ACS 1-year estimates

Minnesota's foreign-born labor force grew over 6% from 2019-2023, outpacing growth among native-born workers

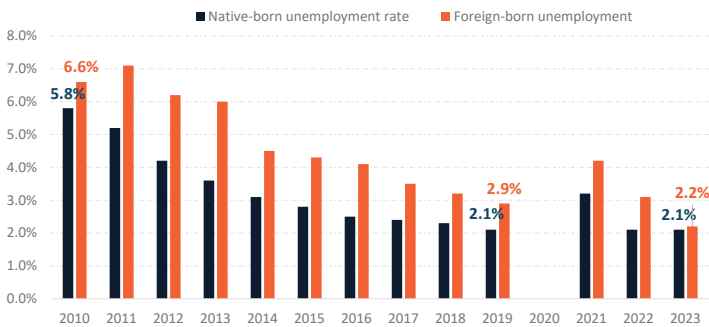
Percent change in total labor force by nativity: Minnesota 2019-2023



Source: U.S. Census, ACS 1-year estimates

Foreign-born unemployment converging with native-born rates this decade, hitting a low of 2.2% in 2023

Annual unemployment rate by nativity: Minnesota



Source: U.S. Census, ACS 1-year estimates

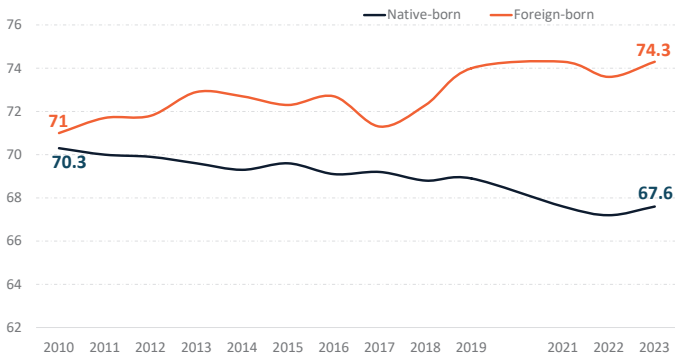
Minnesota's foreign-born population has among the highest labor force participation rates in the country, and participation rates continue to grow over time

Overall labor force participation rates have been declining in Minnesota since the early 2000's as more workers reach retirement age with fewer younger workers backfilling to take their place. This trend accelerated during the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to a sharp drop in overall workforce levels and creating severe labor shortages throughout much of the state. Amidst these changes, immigration has played a mitigating role to prevent further declines. Minnesota's foreign-born population has significantly higher labor force participation rates than its native-born population, due largely to its younger age composition, and participation rates have increased steadily since 2010.

- In 2023, Minnesota's foreign-born labor force participation rate was 74.3%, compared to 67.6% for native-born Minnesotans.
- Minnesota's foreign-born population also has higher workforce participation rates compared to other states. Minnesota had the 4th highest immigrant labor force participation rate in the country in 2023, significantly higher than the U.S. foreign-born average of 67.3%.
- In 2010, labor force participation rates were similar for foreign-born and native-born Minnesotans, with participation rates of 71% and 70.3% respectively. However, the trendlines diverged since then, with participation rates growing to 74.3% for foreign-born Minnesotans and declining to 67.6% for the state's native-born population.
- These differences in labor force participation rates may be largely due to differences in age demographics. In 2022, 80.5% of Minnesota's foreign-born population was of working-age (18-64) compared to just 58.1% of the state's native-born population.

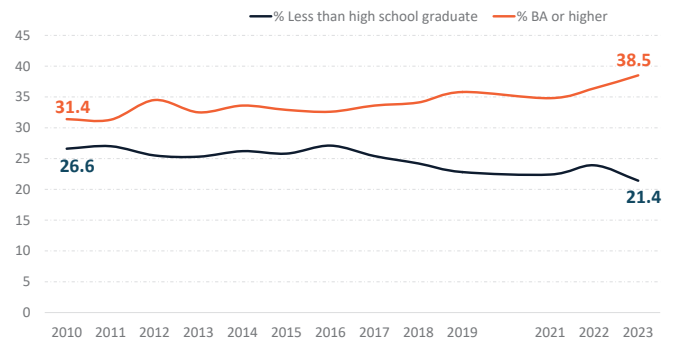
Labor force participation rate among foreign-born Minnesotans is growing over time, while declining for native-born Minnesotans

Labor force participation rate by nativity: Minnesota 2010 - 2023



Education levels are increasing for Minnesota's foreign-born population

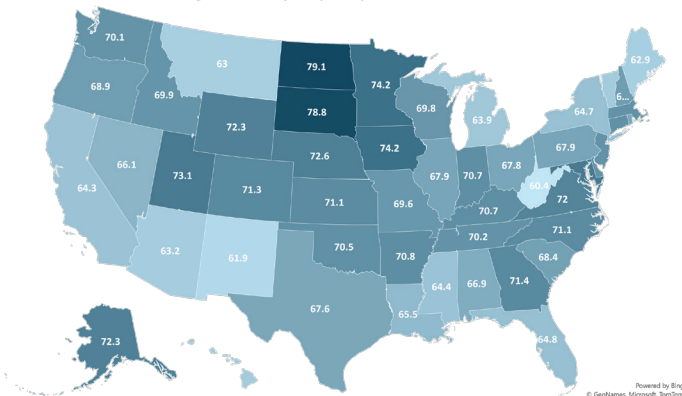
Foreign-born population (25 and older) by education level: Minnesota 2010-2023



Source: U.S. Census, ACS 1-year estimates

Minnesota had the 4th highest foreign-born labor force participation rate in 2023

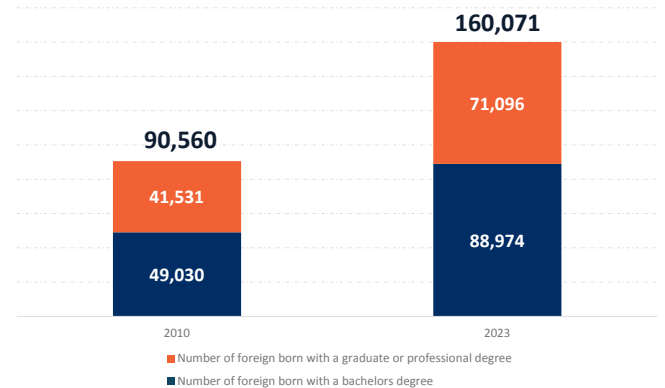
Foreign-born labor force participation rate: 2019-2023



Source: U.S. Census, ACS 5-year estimates

Total number of foreign-born Minnesotans with a bachelor's degree or higher grew by 1.8x since 2010

Total number of foreign born Minnesotans with a bachelors or graduate/professional degree



Source: U.S. Census, ACS 1-year estimates

Minnesota's foreign-born population is becoming more highly educated over time and is shifting toward higher skilled jobs

Past Minnesota Chamber Foundation research found that disproportionate shares of foreign-born residents are in very low or very high educational categories. While New Americans are still overrepresented on both ends of education spectrum, these differences are lessening over time. Overall education levels increased steadily for Minnesota's foreign-born population since 2010. For example:

- The share of foreign-born Minnesotans with less than a high

school education fell by more than 5 percentage points from 2010-2023, declining from 26.6% in 2010 to 21.4% in 2023.

- On the other end of the education spectrum, the share of foreign-born Minnesotans with a bachelor's degree or higher increased by 7 percentage points since 2010, increasing from 31.4% to 38.5% in that time.
- The total number of foreign-born residents with a B.A. or higher nearly doubled since 2010, with close to 89,000 having a bachelor's degree and over 71,000 having a graduate or professional degree in 2023.

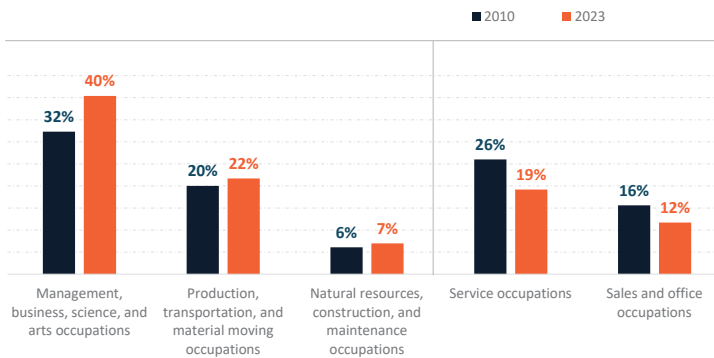


Similar changes took place in the distribution of New Americans across various industries and occupations in recent years.

- Since 2010, an increasing share of New Americans worked in the broad occupational category of management/science/professional/arts, growing from 32% in 2010 to 40% in 2023.
- A decreasing share of New Americans work in service occupations, declining from 26% to 19% since 2010.
- Similarly, a growing share of foreign-born workers are employed in education and health care, manufacturing and professional, scientific and technical services. These sectors

Foreign-born workers are shifting toward management, business, science, arts occupations and away from service occupations

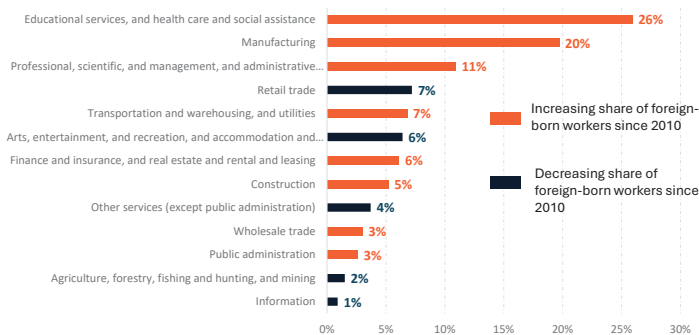
Foreign-born workers by occupation: Minnesota



Source: U.S. Census, ACS 1-year estimates

57% of foreign-born workers in Minnesota are employed in health care, education, manufacturing and professional/business services

Foreign-born workers by industry: Minnesota 2023



Source: U.S. Census, ACS 1-year estimates

alone employ 57% of Minnesota's foreign-born workforce. Conversely, a declining share of New Americans work in local service industries like retail and accommodations and food service.

- Compared to the U.S. average, Minnesota's foreign-born population is disproportionately likely to work in manufacturing and education/health care/social assistance and less likely to work in construction.

The shift toward higher-skilled jobs over time may reflect both the rising education levels within Minnesota's existing immigrant population and the evolving education and skill levels of individuals moving to the state. Some evidence for the latter may be seen in the growing number of H1-B visa approvals in Minnesota. The number of H1-B visa approvals for Minnesota companies doubled over the past decade, drawing high-skilled talent to the state to work in areas like medicine, engineering and technology for Minnesota employers.

Self-employment rates increased sharply this decade for Minnesota's foreign-born population, closing the gap with the state's native-born population. However, Minnesota's immigrant entrepreneurship rates are still among the lowest in the country.

At the national level, New Americans are far more likely than U.S. born residents to start a business and are disproportionately represented as founders of Fortune 500 companies. In 2024, forty-six percent of companies on the Fortune 500 list were founded by immigrants or children of immigrants, including five of the ten companies that joined the list last year.

Past research from the Chamber Foundation showed that while New Americans play an important role in entrepreneurship in Minnesota, the state's foreign-born self-employment rate lagged that of its native-born population and other states. Data from this decade shows emerging changes to these patterns.

- Minnesota's foreign-born self-employment increased from a low of 3.4% in 2014 to a high of 5.5% in 2022, surpassing the self-employment rate of native-born Minnesotans.
- However, Minnesota still trailed other states, having the 49th highest foreign-born self-employment rate in the U.S. in 2023, lagging the U.S. average of 8.2%.

- Similar dynamics are evident among the share of immigrant-owned businesses with paid employees. Minnesota has the 22nd highest share of foreign-born population in the U.S. but the 44th largest share of immigrant-owned employer businesses, according to U.S. Census Annual Business Survey data.

- In 2022, there were 5,918 foreign-born employer businesses in Minnesota that responded to the Census’s Annual Business Survey, representing 7% of total business responses. While this survey does not account for all immigrant-owned businesses, it provides a broad estimate to better understand the rate of business ownership in Minnesota.

- Business ownership rates appear to be driven by broader geographic dynamics, as North Dakota, Nebraska, Iowa, Minnesota and South Dakota make up 5 of the 6 states with the lowest share of immigrant business owners, even when accounting for overall immigrant population share.

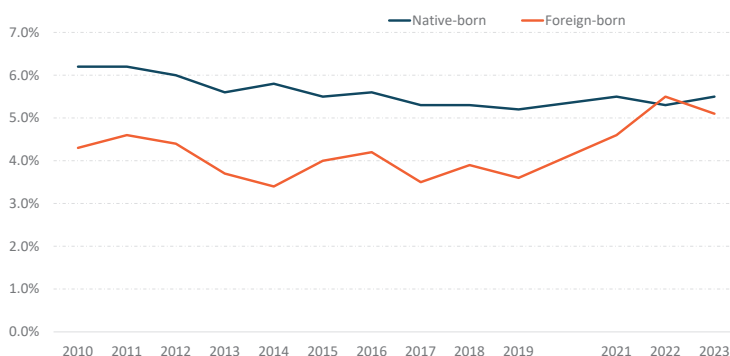
- Further, as noted in other studies, self-employment and business ownership rates do not distinguish between “needs based” and “opportunity based” entrepreneurship, making it challenging to discern the underlying factors driving overall rates. For example, states like Minnesota, North Dakota and South Dakota have among the lowest rates of foreign-born business ownership but the highest foreign-born labor force participation rates. Conversely, New Americans in Mississippi and West Virginia have among the highest immigrant entrepreneurship rates but among the lowest

labor force participation rates. More research is needed to better understand these relationships, but the data suggests that self-employment rates alone may not fully capture the impact of entrepreneurship activities.



Self-employment rates for foreign-born Minnesotans ticked up this decade, closing the gap with native-born residents

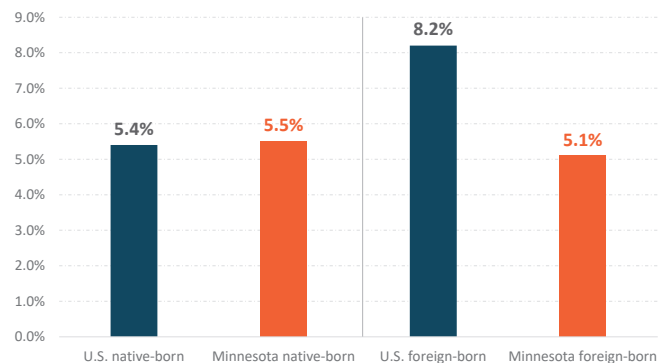
Self-employment rate by nativity: Minnesota 2010-2023



Source: U.S. Census, ACS 1-year estimates

Minnesota's foreign-born population continues to report lower self-employment rates than U.S. foreign-born population

Self-employment rate by nativity: Minnesota and United States 2023



Source: U.S. Census, ACS 1-year estimates



How are businesses leveraging immigration to address workforce needs?

Employers can expand their talent pool by tapping into Minnesota's international workforce. Grow Minnesota! visited with businesses and resource providers to explore effective strategies for hiring, engaging, and retaining New American employees. Below are several practical approaches that businesses can implement.

Increase cultural competency within the organization

A key first step for employers looking to diversify their workforce is to develop cultural competency—an understanding of the diverse backgrounds and needs of employees. A welcoming, inclusive workplace fosters retention and employee referrals while strengthening trust and collaboration.

Employers visited by Grow Minnesota! emphasized the importance of openness and a willingness to learn. They shared examples of how understanding their employees' cultural backgrounds helped address practical challenges

such as transportation access and workplace communication. Beyond asking questions, businesses can support employees by establishing clear workplace policies and expectations. A structured onboarding process is particularly valuable, ensuring employees understand workplace norms, benefits (such as time off and insurance) and career advancement opportunities.

Reduce language barriers through translation and language learning programs

Language differences can present challenges in the workplace, but many businesses have successfully addressed this barrier through targeted strategies. Three key approaches emerged from conversations with employers and resource providers:

1. **Providing on-site English training to employees.** Some businesses offer English language training tailored to workplace needs, often focusing on safety and job-specific terminology. For example, an

agriculture company hired an ESL instructor to teach English to Spanish-speaking employees, allowing them to take classes during work hours while providing full compensation. This accelerated their English skills and led to improved communication at the job site. Similarly, Cambria, a Le Sueur-based quartz manufacturer, launched a widely recognized program that aims to help over 300 foreign-born employees reach English proficiency at an eighth-grade level or higher. A 2020 *Star Tribune* [article](#) highlighted the program's impact on employee morale, productivity and career mobility, with over a dozen participants moving into management roles. While the scale of Cambria's program may not be feasible for all businesses, its model provides a framework that companies can adapt, often in partnership with outside organizations to reduce costs and administrative burden.

2. **Translating workplace documents and training materials.** Businesses can enhance workplace communication by translating key documents and signage, including safety instructions, HR policies and training materials. Providing multilingual resources ensures clarity and compliance while fostering a safer work environment. Some businesses expand their translation efforts by incorporating audio and video content, such as closed-captioned or voice-overs for training videos. While translation requires an initial investment, professional translation services and AI-driven tools are making the process more accessible and cost-effective over time.
3. **Employing bilingual supervisors or offering language training for managers.** Companies have found success by hiring bilingual supervisors or training English-speaking managers in a second language. This approach improves communication, boosts employee engagement and enhances recruitment efforts. One food manufacturer reported that, in addition to translating documents, having bilingual supervisors on every shift significantly improved employee performance and expanded their applicant pool.

Hire international employees through guest worker visa programs

Over the past decade, Minnesota employers have increasingly relied on guest worker visa programs to address local labor

shortages. The number of visa approvals in Minnesota has doubled in categories such as H-1B, H-2B and H-2A since 2015. Below is an overview of key guest worker visa options:

- **H-1B Visa (Specialty occupations)**
 - For highly skilled professionals in specialized fields (e.g., IT, engineering, finance).
 - Requires at least a bachelor's degree.
 - Employer-sponsored and subject to an annual cap.
- **H-2A Visa (Temporary agricultural workers)**
 - For seasonal or temporary farmworkers.
 - Employers must prove a shortage of U.S. workers.
 - Provides temporary legal status for the duration of employment.
- **H-2B Visa (Temporary non-agricultural workers)**
 - For seasonal or temporary roles in industries like hospitality, landscaping and construction.
 - Employers must demonstrate a workforce shortage.
 - Subject to an annual cap.
- **TN Visa (Trade NAFTA/USMCA – Canada and Mexico)**
 - For Canadian and Mexican professionals in fields such as science, law, medicine, teaching, engineering and accounting.
 - No annual cap; Canadians can apply at U.S. ports of entry.
 - Requires a job offer but does not involve employer sponsorship like the H-1B.
- **Hire international students**
 - Employers may also consider hiring international students studying in the U.S. on a F-1 or J-1 visa.
 - Does not involve employer sponsorship. However, some employers may choose to sponsor the student-worker after graduation, commonly through the H-1B visa.
 - International students may work in the U.S. after completing their first year of study and can work for an additional twelve months after graduation if the job is in their major.
 - Information on hiring international students can be found on the University of Minnesota website and Region Nine Development Commission employer toolkit.

More details on all guest worker visas can be found on the [USCIS website](#).



A common misconception is that employers use guest worker visas to cut labor costs. In reality, employers must pay prevailing wages, prove local workforce shortages, and, in some cases, provide housing for workers. Additionally, visa programs involve legal fees and administrative costs. While they expand hiring options, businesses should carefully assess costs and consult an immigration attorney for guidance.

Partner with community organizations to support new American employees

Nonprofits and community organizations can help businesses engage New Americans by providing workforce development services, reducing administrative burdens, and addressing barriers such as language and transportation. Employers shared several successful partnership models:

- 1. On-site language training.** Several Minnesota nonprofits offer customized English language training at workplaces. For example, a Twin Cities-based plastics manufacturer partnered with a nonprofit to provide English classes focusing on industry-specific terminology, ensuring employees could better understand safety protocols and job expectations.
- 2. Cultural competency and workplace preparation programs.** One HR leader described how their company collaborates with local cultural organizations to prepare New Americans for employment. These cultural organizations assist with résumé building, mock interviews, and job readiness training and serve as valuable resources for businesses seeking to learn more about different cultural backgrounds and workplace expectations.
- 3. Transportation solutions.** Reliable transportation is often a significant challenge for New American workers. Epimonia, a Twin Cities-based business, partners with employers to provide direct transportation services for employees who lack access to public transit. This initiative helps refugees secure stable employment while giving businesses access to a dependable workforce.



Immigration resources for Minnesota employers

Building cultural competency

The first step to developing cultural competency is learning about the various cultural groups represented in your workforce and community. Building relationships with trusted organizations equips businesses with knowledge and creates opportunities for growth.

- [Minnesota Chamber Foundation's DEI initiative](#)
 - The Minnesota Chamber Foundation offers consulting and resources to help businesses identify workforce opportunities, resources and connections. This can include staff trainings, introductions to community organizations and tailoring a pathway that fits the company needs.
- [Department of Health - Community Based Organizations Directory](#)
- [MN Compass - Data profiles on 27 of Minnesota's largest cultural communities](#)

Workforce training partners

There are numerous non-profit organizations across Minnesota dedicated to supporting New Americans. Many of these organizations offer workforce training programs that address issues like language barriers, technical skills training and job readiness, or credential differences. By partnering with local nonprofits, businesses can leverage existing expertise to build programs unique to their company. The organizations below focus workforce services for New Americans. Learn additional information on how to engage with community-based workforce training partners in this [Grow Minnesota! article](#).

- [International Institute of Minnesota](#)
 - IIMN offers a series of classes and training opportunities, such as citizenship classes, driver's education, English, Customer Service Training, Dietary Aide Training, and more. This includes career advancement training and helping internationally trained professionals earn their U.S. credentials.



Finally, they work with businesses to create customized training pathways as needed.

- Contact form: <https://iimn.org/contact/>

- **MORE Empowerment**

- MORE partners with employers to hold on-site English classes. They develop customized curriculum designed for the needs and terminology of the workplace and the employees.
- Contact 651-487-2728 or info@more-empowerment.org.

- **Arrive Ministries**

- Arrive offers employment counselors that provide support resources, job placement, and language classes. Their services continue after employment, helping provide new employees with the skills needed to thrive in an American workplace..
- Become an employer partner: <https://arriveministries.org/hire-immigrant-neighbors/>

- **LSS - Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota**

- LSS's employment counselors help place new arrivals in their first job, focusing on manufacturing and assembly, hospitality and hotel industry, health care, food services, sanitation and cleaning services, transportation, warehouse and fulfillment, and the service industry. LSS can team with employers when assistance is needed with interpreters, job coaching or cross-cultural training.
- Contact form: <https://www.lssmn.org/services/refugees/contact>

- **CAIRO - Center for African Immigrants and Refugees Organization**

- CAIRO's Gateways 2 Growth program offers training and job placement services in three industry sectors: IT, healthcare, transportation.

- **CAPI USA**

- CAPI's Career Pathways program helps immigrants find employment through credentialed training, individualized career planning, work readiness, job search, placement, and retention services.
- Focus industries include healthcare, hospitality, green energy, internationally trained medical, job readiness.

- **SWMNPIC- Southwest Minnesota Private Industry Council**

- SWMNPIC has career pathway trainings, including

welding, paraprofessional, CNA, CDL and mechanic. They also offer customized on-the-job training opportunities.

- Direct resources for new Americans: [DHS resettlement support program list](#)

State resources for hiring foreign workers

The Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) and CareerForce offer guidance to employers interested in hiring foreign workers through a federally designated program. For agriculture businesses interested in hiring temporary workers, regional outreach representatives can assist in learning more and finding employees.

- [DEED Hiring foreign workers](#)
- [Careerforce hiring temporary agricultural workers](#)
- Minnesota has general workforce support programs, the [Grow Minnesota's Guide to Workforce Resources](#) covers available state resources and additional strategies.

Translation and interpretation firms

Translation and interpretation companies work with businesses to address communication needs based on their individual workforce, priorities and budget. An effective strategy might include translating updates to safety documents, on-demand interpretation, or adding voiceover to training videos, and which can be scaled up over time.

To access a list of translation and interpretation firms, visit the [MN Supplier Match](#) database. To filter for translation companies, check the box under the Exporting and Trade section. Below is a sample of some Minnesota translation firms.

- **INGCO International**
 - Capabilities: Translation, localization, interpreting, simultaneous interpreting, consecutive interpreting, ASL interpreting, over the phone interpreting, OPI, video remote interpreting (VRI), in-person interpreting
- **Weaving Cultures**
 - Capabilities: Interpreting, Translating, Interpreter Training, CEU's offered, Language Testing Oral and written, Medical Certification Testing

- Global Language Connections
 - Capabilities: Translation, localization, interpreting, video remote interpreting (VRI), in-person interpreting, cross cultural navigation

Immigration legal resources

As businesses hire temporary or permanent foreign-born workers, they should consult an immigration lawyer who specializes in business employment law.

- When looking for immigration lawyers, be sure to distinguish between business services and individual services. Organizations like the Immigrant Law Center of Minnesota may have online information for employers, but their services are focused on working with immigrants directly.
- If a business already has a legal team, ask if they offer immigration services or recommend a local firm. There are numerous employment law firms in Minnesota. Below is a sample of some companies that offer immigration services in Minnesota.
 - Cozen O'Connor; Dorsey & Whitney; Fox Rothschild; Faegre Drinker; Frederickson; Littler Mendelson; Nilan Johnson Lewis; Peters & Kappenman; Stinson, Taft Stettinius & Hollister.

Sources:

The primary sources used in this report are:

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