Immigration in Minnesota

Discovering Common Ground

The Minneapolis Foundation

Minnesota State Senator
Mee Moua

To be an American is to believe that I CAN.

I can become anybody. I can do anything. I hold the power to direct my own opportunities and influence my own circumstances.

Twenty-five years ago, my family came to this country with nothing but a couple of backpacks. Yet, we never felt poor or disadvantaged. My parents saw every job as a new opportunity for a brand new beginning to a better future. They lived every day as a second chance to watch their children grow with hope and optimism. Even when they had to pick pickles, clean toilets, mop floors and chop onions on an assembly line to provide my brothers and sister and I with a clean home, hot lunches and school supplies, they were hopeful. They believed that an America that was willing to help people like them was an America that would do more for their children. My siblings and I have reaped abundantly from their sacrifices and their wisdom.

Everyday, I look at my mother and my father, and I am in awe of the terrifying journey they undertook by foot, by rowboat, by bus, and across an ocean on a flying "metal eagle" to find haven in this country. I am humbled by the fears, uncertainties and doubts they had to overcome and courage they had to muster from deep, deep down—the resolve it must have taken to live one day at a time until they felt safe and secure and welcome to call this country home.

When I was elected in January of 2002, a reporter asked my father how he felt about having his daughter elected to the Minnesota State Senate. My father replied, "I am very happy. My daughter, my Senator, my country. I belong."

To be an AmerICAN, is to know that I CAN—a spirit and a hope that must be deeply cherished, but generously shared. It is a spirit that is renewed by every new generation of new Americans. It is a spirit that allowed a little refugee girl, from the mountains of Laos, the opportunity to become a Minnesota State Senator. Thanks, Mom and Dad.

DEFINITIONS

Every year, far more people want to immigrate to the U.S. than are allowed by law. For practical and humanitarian reasons, the federal government distinguishes among people, depending on where they come from, whether they have work skills that are needed in this country, and whether they already have relatives here. These distinctions determine who can come to the U.S., for how long, and under what classification.

Refugee: A person who is unable or unwilling to live in his or her native country because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. Like many countries, the U.S. has made a commitment to allowing refugees to settle here.

Immigrant: A person who moves to a country where he or she intends to settle permanently. Legal immigrants have permission of the government to live in the U.S. Undocumented, or illegal, immigrants do not.

Guest or Temporary Worker: A person who has temporary permission to work in the U.S.

Visa: A legal permit to enter the U.S. There are many different types of visas, granted according to the purpose, such as travel, work, or study.

Foreign-born Person: A U.S. resident who was not a citizen at birth.

Undocumented Worker: A person living and working in the U.S. without legal permission to do so.

Green Card: A colloquial term for the permit that enables someone who is not a citizen to live and work in the U.S.

Family Reunification: The process by which citizens and legal immigrants, including refugees, are allowed to sponsor close relatives, enabling them to come live in the U.S. Every year, approximately two-thirds of this country's legal immigrants join family members already living here.

Naturalization: The process by which an immigrant becomes a U.S. citizen. With a few exceptions (such as the right to run for president), naturalized citizens have all the rights, privileges, and responsibilities as native-born citizens.

Please note that for the sake of simplicity, the term "immigrant" has been used throughout this brochure to describe both immigrant and refugee populations, unless otherwise indicated.

Front cover photo: Immigrants taking oath of citizenship in Minnesota, 1925, Minnesota Historical Society

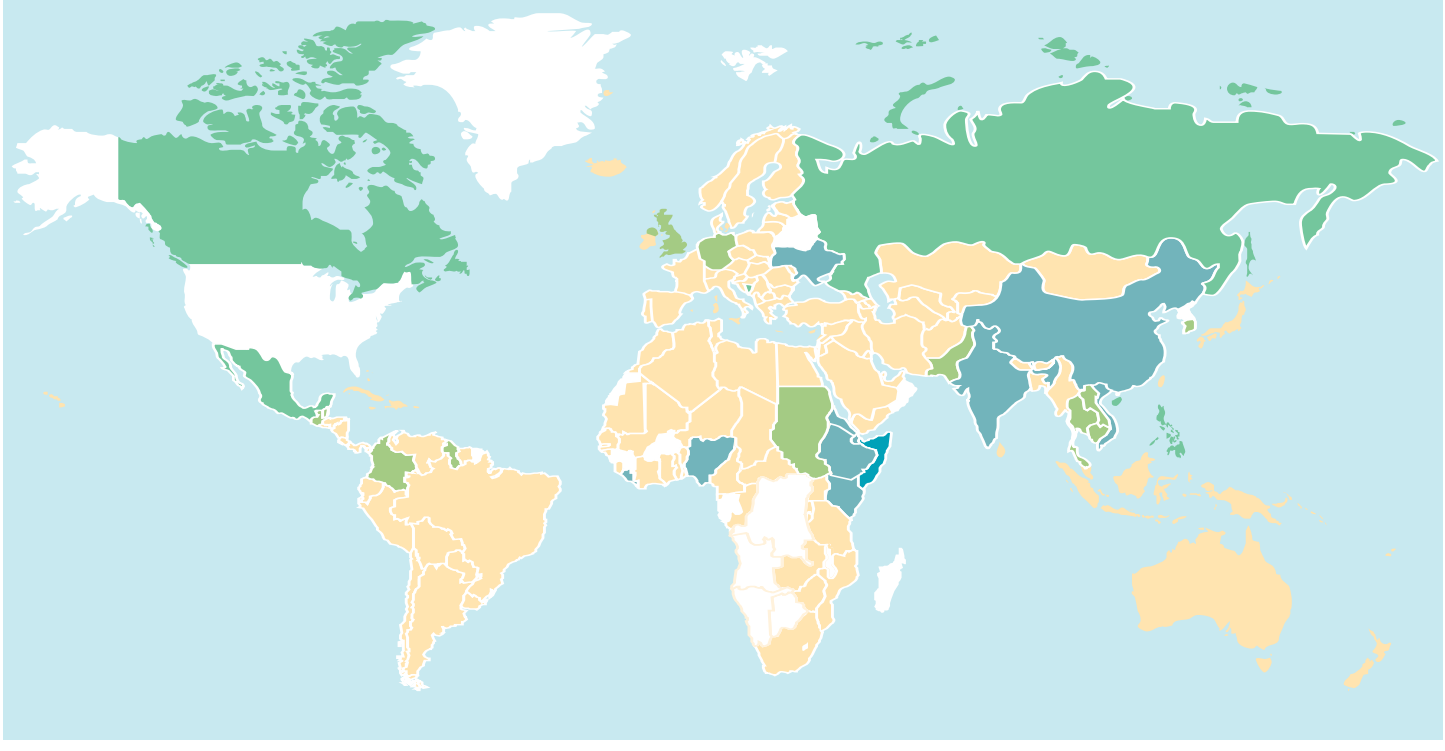
Richard Marshall, St. Paul Pioneer Press

Immigration in Minnesota

Over the past several decades, tens of thousands of immigrants have arrived in Minnesota. They have come from all over the world, and settled throughout the state.

They've come for the same reason that attracted immigrants in the past: opportunity. And they experience the same difficulties of adjusting to life in a new country—language barriers, culture shock, a sense of loss, and isolation.

Established Minnesotans, for the most part, are eager to welcome and learn more about these new members of our community. Certainly there are challenges inherent in incorporating new languages and customs into the fabric of Minnesota life. However, the economic and cultural benefits enrich our schools, neighborhoods, businesses, and communities. And make Minnesota a more interesting place to live.



Immigration to Minnesota in 2002 by country of origin

Zero | 1 to 110 | 111 to 214 | 215 to 601 | 602 to 1,001 | 1,002 to 1,588

Why Minnesota?

During the 1990s alone, Minnesota's foreign-born population more than doubled, from 110,000 to 240,000.

For many immigrants, Minnesota provides the first glimpse of life in the United States. Others settle briefly elsewhere in America, but relocate to Minnesota because of family ties, economic and educational opportunities, or for other reasons.

Minnesota is attractive to immigrants for the same reasons it is attractive to the rest of us: a strong economy, good quality of life, educational opportunities, and a thriving civic and cultural life.

Minnesota also has a history of active volunteerism regarding immigration and refugee resettlement, led primarily by faith-based organizations.

History of Immigration in Minnesota

	1900	2000
Total population	1,751,394	4,919,479
Number of immigrants	505,318	260,454
Percent of population	29%	5.3%
Number who don't speak English well or at all	75,071	79,341
Percent who don't speak English well or at all	1.8%*	5.7%**
Family size, number of persons	4.9	2.5

COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN:
1900: 2/3 came from three countries, Germany, Sweden, and Norway.
2000: 17% from Europe, 40% Asia, 24% Latin America, and 13% Africa

* includes persons age 10 and older; non-English speakers include some American Indians
** includes persons age 5 and older

Craig Borck, St. Paul Pioneer Press

Immigrants strengthen Minnesota's economy through taxes, workforce growth, neighborhood revitalization, entrepreneurship, and consumption. They also contribute intellectual capital—offering innovative ideas that will help transform the arts, sciences, and other disciplines.

Contributions

Tensions may arise as new immigrants establish themselves socially and financially.

Some established Minnesotans may feel resentment or competition towards relative newcomers who appear to be surpassing them economically. Others may fear that already scarce resources will be spread even more thinly as services such as job training and English language instruction are provided to new immigrants. And some people are simply intolerant of cultural differences.

Yet, the contributions of immigrants benefit us all in many ways:

Work—filling jobs and providing services. Some industries, such as food processing and meat packing, are almost entirely dependent on immigrant labor.

Economic development—revitalizing neighborhoods and communities that had previously been abandoned, depressed, and unsafe. These new businesses and amenities help re-establish a healthy tax base, generating more resources for the entire community.

Intellectual capital—benefiting from the ideas and innovations of immigrant scholars. Today's immigrants will contribute tomorrow to advancements in science, technology, health care, and other fields.

Arts, culture, and cuisine—sharing new ideas and customs with Minnesotans to enrich our lives. Today we can choose from a robust variety of food, music, and artistic offerings—such as salsa, spaghetti, fortune cookies, jazz, murals, and soccer—that were all either introduced or influenced by other cultures.

Economic Impact

Immigrants contribute to the economy in multiple ways: by paying taxes, filling job vacancies, engaging in entrepreneurial activities and neighborhood revitalization, and also through the consumption of goods and services. Since the majority of immigrants arrive at a young working age, they contribute to the economy for decades, often while remaining ineligible to receive some social service benefits.

For example, more than 16,000 Asian-Indians living in Minnesota have a consumer base of nearly $500 million, pay $5.2 million in real estate taxes and $2.3 million in rent, and own 400 companies, employing more than 6,000 people. 97% of Minnesota's Asian-Indians have received no public assistance.

It's true there are significant short-term costs associated with immigration. With the resettlement of refugees in particular, education, job training, health care, and other support systems must adapt to meet new and complex needs. The long-term economic benefits, however, more than offset those costs.

Studies continue to emerge that document the net financial gains that immigration produces. Economics, however, are just one aspect of immigration; civic and humanitarian, intellectual and artistic, and other important contributions are difficult to quantify.

For more information on immigration in Minnesota, please visit www.MinneapolisFoundation.org.

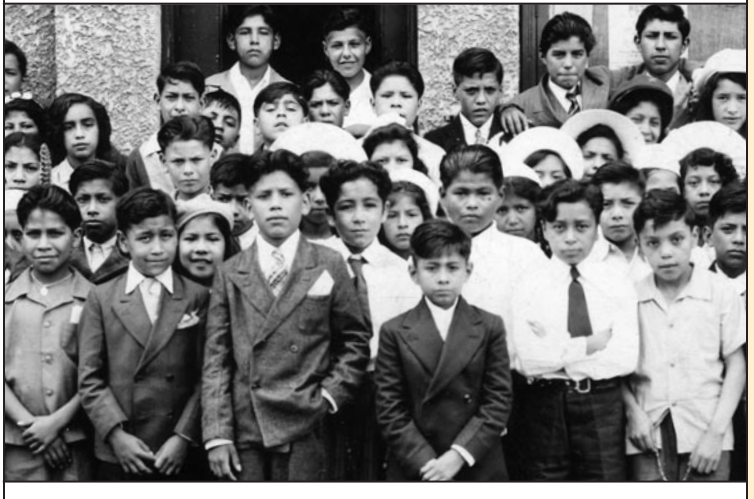
Terms and Assumptions

Asian-American, African-American, Latino—who do you think of when you hear these terms? The Census, like most tools for dissecting information demographically, relies on these broad categories. Yet they do not distinguish between established residents and recent immigrants or distinguish among nationalities within racial groups. That contributes to the difficulty in "counting" populations and alters the substance of statistics typically relied upon to measure a racial or ethnic community's health and progress (*e.g.*, housing, income, and educational achievement).

It also obscures the differences between individuals who share a geographic or cultural origin. Immigrants—even from the same nation or ethnic group—arrive in Minnesota with varying levels of literacy, educational attainment, professional experience, family support, and physical and psychological health.

While some mass resettlement efforts (such as those of the Hmong and the Somalis) have brought greater attention to immigration in Minnesota, it is worth remembering that people from all around the world have made their home in Minnesota for generations. For example, Latinos have been living in Minnesota since the mid-19th century, yet established Latino residents often find themselves being treated like newcomers to this state, rather than long-time contributors to and shapers of the Minnesota we live in today.

Finally, it is worth noting that "we" are not all immigrants, contrary to a common assertion among some well-meaning Minnesotans. Although the majority of Minnesotans today claim European ancestry, the first Minnesotans were Native Americans, most notably the Ojibwe and Dakota. And African-Americans first came to the United States—and thereafter to Minnesota—through slavery, a forced migration. While it may be uncomfortable to discuss these distinctions and, more importantly, what they mean, it is critical to discussions of who we are as Minnesotans, especially when the discourse turns to divisions between "us" and "them."



Minnesota Historical Society

First generation Mexican-American children in Minnesota, 1942, St. Paul. Latinos have been living in Minnesota since at least 1860.

Family Life

Wing Young Huie

Due to economic pressures, many immigrants must adjust to changing family dynamics. Families may be expected to take care of their aging parents at home but need to find alternative care instead, or some grandparents may be enlisted as child-care providers as parents work full-time outside of the home.

Family Size Like the European immigrants who arrived more than a century ago, many of Minnesota's newest immigrant groups tend to have larger families. In their countries of origin, more children meant more assistance with family farms and businesses and more resources to take care of young, old, and sick or disabled family members. In the U.S., however, more children often translates into economic hardship—in terms of daily provisions (food, clothing, etc.), the need for paid child and senior care, and increased health care and housing costs.

Family Separation Immigrants often endure separation from family members. Even as they establish new roots and relationships in Minnesota, immigrants struggle to maintain close ties to relatives in their country of origin, often sending a portion of their incomes back home where economic opportunities are scarce. This financial support has received close scrutiny after September 11th as federal investigators fear that some funds are being transferred—whether intentionally or unknowingly so—to support terrorist activities.

Changing Family Dynamics Many immigrants must adjust to changing cultural and family dynamics. In Somalia, for example, women don't traditionally work outside of the home, men are the decision-makers, and physical punishment of children is acceptable. These norms are changing for Somali residents of Minnesota, due to economic and social pressures. In many cultures, adult children are expected to take care of their aging parents, but in Minnesota they may need to find institutional care instead as the adult children need to work full-time (often multiple jobs) to make ends meet. Alternatively, many grandparents are enlisted as child-care providers as parents find work outside of the home.

Education

Minnesota's public school students now speak more than 70 different languages at home. Some students were born in the U.S. and speak English fluently, although their parents speak their native language at home. Others—more than 50,000 children in the 2003-04 school year—are classified as "English Language Learners" (ELL).

Because they have a limited ability to speak, read, and write English, ELL students often struggle academically. But even the children who speak English fluently confront challenges. Many immigrant parents find it hard to communicate with teachers and school administrators about homework and other important matters. For these students, getting help with homework at home—even math, with its current emphasis on word problems—is often difficult if not impossible.

This language barrier has implications for parent-child relationships beyond the daily completion of school assignments. As children gain fluency more quickly than their parents, they become major conduits for a range of information parents need.

Although St. Paul and Minneapolis have by far the most students who speak a language other than English at home (more than 17,000 and 12,000, respectively), this phenomenon is not exclusively urban. Suburban school districts from Anoka to Burnsville, Wayzata to White Bear Lake must find a way to educate hundreds or even thousands of such students. In parts of Greater Minnesota —Marshall, Long Prairie, Faribault—more than one of every 10 students doesn't speak English at home. In a few small districts, such as Sleepy Eye, Pelican Rapids, and St. James, the figure is one of four.

Throughout American history, education has been essential to helping immigrants gain a foothold in the U.S. economy and fully participate in civic life. Access to higher education will continue to be critical to helping the children of today's immigrants become productive workers, citizens, and leaders.

Immigrant adults, too, pursue education—including English language classes and job training—often in conjunction with full-time work and family life.

Saint Paul Public Schools

A Changing Political Landscape

Terrorism and National Security

From Mexico to Laos, Bosnia to Somalia, events half a world away often determine who comes to Minnesota as immigrants and refugees. Once in America, they find that world events continue to influence their lives in the form of federal and local policies that regulate immigration, documentation, and mobility.

Since September 11th, the phrase "national security" has been invoked as the impetus for many of these changes. For example, male temporary visitors from more than a dozen Muslim countries—most of them in the Middle East—have been photographed and fingerprinted by the federal government. In Minnesota, as elsewhere throughout the country, policy debates about national security and human and civil rights are often emotional and divisive. In some respects, this is reminiscent of the anti-German and Japanese campaigns during the first and second world wars.

Wing Young Huie

As with previous generations, the children and grandchildren of immigrants will help shape Minnesota's political future.

Civic and Political Life

After adjusting to a new way of life, immigrants begin to participate in and exercise their civic privileges, from voting and volunteerism to running for elected office. Immigrant groups are increasingly being recognized for their political influence. Much has been written nationally about the "Latino vote," which has begun to bear weight locally, as well. Minnesota is also home to the nation's only two Hmong state legislators, both of whom came to the U.S. as child refugees.

Like most Minnesotans, immigrants are typically inspired to join the political process to improve circumstances for their family, neighborhood, or community; however, they serve and represent all of their constituents equally. Over the next several decades, the demographic composition of Minnesota's political and civic leadership will change to more closely reflect the demographics of the state.

Tibetan American Foundation of Minnesota

Immigrants don't only learn traditional "American" customs: they co-mingle with other immigrant groups, as well, further blurring the lines between cultures. While tensions may arise as cultures rub up against one another, with open minds and through careful planning, communities can successfully integrate multiple cultures.

GETTING ALONG

As Minnesotans—both long-time residents and recent immigrants—live, work, and socialize in an increasingly diverse environment, they often seek cues or guidance for interacting with people from other cultures.

While it's true that people from the same nation, ethnicity, or religion may share many customs and practices, these can vary from family to family, and often become less pronounced over time. It is important to not presume everyone from one country or region adheres to the most traditional cultural practices, but rather to be respectful and aware of possible cultural differences.

FOR EXAMPLE:

Avoid relying on children as family interpreters. Immigrant children are often exposed to age-inappropriate information when asked to translate for parents and other older relatives who don't speak English. This is especially important in matters of health, finance, social services, and other sensitive areas.

Be mindful of body language. In some cultures, people tend to stand very close together in conversation, while in others people prefer some physical distance—especially between men and women. Making or receiving direct eye contact can be uncomfortable for some people. Watch for physical clues to learn what's comfortable and be conservative with touches such as hugs and handshakes.

Family involvement in decision-making can vary. In some cultures, major decisions are reached by the family patriarch, in consultation with clan elders, or through other collaborative processes. This means that sometimes an individual may not be able to make an immediate decision, but may need time to discuss it with other family or community members.

Be sensitive to and accepting of religious differences. Religion can influence dress, diet, schedule, choice of profession, and numerous other aspects of daily life. Treat these practices with the same respect you would expect to receive for your own.

For more information on immigration in Minnesota, please visit www.MinneapolisFoundation.org.

Mexico, Central and South America

Counties of origin of many recent immigrants

Area of focus Other countries of origin

At a Glance

- **Latinos have been living in Minnesota for generations—the first record of Latino residents dates back to 1860. Since the 1990 Census, the state's Latino population has more than tripled, increasing from about 54,000 to more than 175,000 people in 2004.**
- **The majority of Minnesota Latinos are not immigrants—60% are native-born U.S. citizens. More than 11,000 others are naturalized citizens.**
- **According to the Census, fewer than half of all Latinos living in Minnesota in 2000 were foreign-born. Still, the number of foreign-born Latinos did grow exponentially during the 1990s, from 9,200 to more than 62,000 individuals.**
- **The majority of Minnesota's Latinos trace their ancestry to Mexico; others have come from Cuba, Puerto Rico, and other Central and South American countries. Many of the most recent immigrants are from Colombia, Ecuador, El Salvador, and Guatemala, in addition to Mexico.**

Focus on Latinos

Why Latinos Come to Minnesota

Most Latinos come to the United States in search of a better life for themselves and their families. For many immigrants, Minnesota offers more opportunities for work and education than their home countries. Many Latino families—especially Mexican immigrants—support family members still living in their country of origin.

Latinos fill all professional occupations, from real estate to technology to law to architecture. The most recent Latino immigrants, however—especially those who do not speak English well or at all—often work in meat-packing and food processing; roofing and construction; janitorial services; food service; and the hotel and hospitality industry. Many of these industries are reliant on the state's growing Latino workforce.

Demographics

Although most Latinos live in the metropolitan area, Latinos are more geographically dispersed throughout the state than any other immigrant group. According to the 2000 Census, Latinos were almost evenly divided between the core cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul, the surrounding suburbs, and Greater Minnesota.

Minnesota's Latino population is relatively young: more than one in three Latinos is younger than 18, compared to about one in four for Minnesotans overall. This means a large school age population as well as a significant segment of Minnesota's future workforce. Demographic trends also indicate a continuation of rapid population growth, as more Latinos reach child-bearing age.

Like other immigrants not yet fluent in English, many Latinos new to Minnesota are working hard to improve their language skills—often in addition to working one or more jobs and taking care of their families.

Minneapolis Public Schools Adult Basic Education

The Minneapolis Foundation

In addition to expanding Minnesota's workforce, Latinos are generating new services and tax dollars for Minnesota through entrepreneurial and economic development activities. More than 1,000 Mexican-American businesses alone operate in Minnesota, generating an estimated $200 million in sales.

Economics

In addition to expanding Minnesota's workforce, Latinos are generating new services and tax dollars for Minnesota through entrepreneurial and economic development activities.

The Latino-driven revitalization of Minneapolis' East Lake Street, formerly a run-down, neglected business corridor, has been widely celebrated. Anchored by Mercado Central, a cooperative shopping and cultural center, more than 200 Latino businesses now line this thriving city artery.

Other, less publicized redevelopment efforts are also taking place throughout the state, serving a mix of Latino and non-Latino customers. More than 1,000 Mexican-American businesses alone operate in Minnesota, generating an estimated $200 million in sales.

In rural parts of the state, Latinos also contribute significantly to the economy: in south central Minnesota alone, researchers have estimated that Latino workers employed in agricultural industries add nearly $25 million to the local economy.

For more information on immigration in Minnesota, please visit www.MinneapolisFoundation.org.

Life in Minnesota: Challenges and Considerations

Economic and Political Clout—Minnesota Latinos have become a desirable demographic for local businesses. In the Twin Cities metro area in 2000, Latino buying power exceeded $1.25 billion. New businesses and media are being created to serve Latino consumers, while political parties are vying for their votes.

Workers' Rights—Whether legal or undocumented immigrants, permanent or migrant residents, Latino workers in low-wage occupations face regular threats to and abuses of their human and civil rights. Overtime pay, worker safety, and housing conditions (when housing is provided) are just a few areas in which abuses occur. Workers often fear retaliation for efforts to ensure safe and fair employment conditions.

Documented vs. Undocumented Status—An estimated 18,000 to 45,000 undocumented Latinos live and work in Minnesota. This should not be confused with migrant workers, the majority of whom either are permanent U.S. citizens or have legal permission to work in the United States. Documentation is a contentious issue for Latinos and non-Latinos alike. And related issues such as access to health care, higher education, and family mobility impact the workers, their families, and the community.

Africa

Counties of origin of many recent immigrants

Area of focus Other countries of origin

At a Glance

- **In 1990, fewer than 5,000 Minnesota residents had been born in Africa. A decade later, that figure had increased to more than 34,000.**
- **By 2002, nearly 9,000 additional immigrants arrived in Minnesota directly from various African nations.**
- **In fact, 13% of Minnesota's foreign-born residents in the 2000 Census were from Africa—a higher percentage than any other state in the country.**
- **Most of these individuals have come to the United States as refugees fleeing civil strife in Liberia, Somalia, and the Sudan. Other relatively large African populations recently arrived in the U.S. include Nigerians, Ethiopians, and Eritreans.**

Focus on Somalis

Why Somalis Come to Minnesota

The modern nation of Somalia gained its independence in 1960. For much of the next three decades, Somalia was entangled in Cold War politics. Civil war erupted while the Soviet Union was collapsing; atrocities and natural disasters—famine, flood, drought—forced more than a million Somalis to seek refuge in neighboring countries such as Kenya and Ethiopia. Somalia has not had a recognized government since 1991. Most Somalis who now live in Minnesota came to the United States as refugees.

About one-third of Minnesota's Somali residents came directly from refugee camps; others settled first in another state and then relocated to Minnesota. The reasons for this are many, but primarily (1) the existence of an established Somali community, which meant that health care, educational, and other systems were already prepared to address the particular needs of Somalis; and (2) the availability of unskilled jobs that don't require English fluency or literacy.

Demographics

Minnesota is home to the country's largest population of Somali residents. Most Somalis live in the metro area, particularly in Minneapolis: nearly a third of Minnesota public school students who speak Somali at home attend Minneapolis public schools. Smaller numbers of Somalis have moved to Rochester, Owatonna, and other suburban and Greater Minnesota communities.

Some Somalis in Minnesota came from coastal, agricultural and/or nomadic regions in Somalia; others were urban residents.

Economics

Because resettlement of Somali refugees in Minnesota began as recently as the mid-1990s, the economic impact of this population is growing on a smaller scale than that of other, longer-established immigrant groups.

Nate Howard

At right, a Sudanese man plays with his son in their Austin, Minnesota, home.

Saint Paul Public Schools

Due to civil war, displacement, and other hardships, many Somali children were deprived of a formal education—a condition that Somali families in Minnesota are anxious to rectify. Today's Somali school-age population, however, increasingly comprises children born in Minnesota; their parents, too, are actively engaged in school leadership.

At present, Somali influence on Minnesota's economy primarily includes filling positions that don't require strong English skills, providing businesses and services to other Somali immigrants, and a variety of entrepreneurial efforts. Today more than 120 African-owned businesses can be found along Minneapolis' Lake Street corridor.

Underutilization of professional skills is a problem for many African immigrants. Professional licensure obtained abroad is often not recognized in the U.S. As a result, many former doctors, nurses, engineers, teachers, and lawyers are earning a living through manual labor, which, while providing an important service, prevents Minnesota from benefiting from their professional skills.

Life in Minnesota: Challenges and Considerations

Worship Accommodations—Most Somalis are Sunni Muslims. In Minnesota—especially at school and in the workplace—Somalis find they must negotiate for time and space to pray (at five predetermined times a day, facing Mecca), for permission to wear the hijab (a head covering, a religious observance of modesty for Muslim women), and for understanding as they fast from dawn to dusk during the month of Ramadan (a lunar month near the end of the calendar year). Islam also prohibits charging or paying interest, which makes it difficult to purchase homes or otherwise participate in Western economic life.

Community Diversity—While Minnesotans may view Somali immigrants as a monolithic group, Somali society is actually composed of multiple groups, affiliated by language, culture, geography, or other commonalities.

Mental and Emotional Health—In addition to learning a new language, a new culture, and otherwise wrestling with the ordinary challenges of life in a new country, they must confront the physical and emotional effects of their experiences in Somalia and refugee camps. A number of self-help organizations have been established by recent immigrants to assuage the effects of these experiences.

Southeast Asia

Counties of origin of many recent immigrants

Area of focus Other countries of origin

At a Glance

- **Minnesota's Asian population nearly doubled in the 1990s, growing to almost 142,000 by 2000. Roughly three-quarters of those individuals were immigrants, born outside of the United States.**
- **Among the newcomers, the most prominent and numerous are the Hmong. But they are by no means the only Asians who have come to Minnesota: among the top countries of origin in 2000 for Minnesota immigrants were China, India, and Korea.**
- **The vast majority of Hmong Minnesotans, however, are not immigrants; they are second or third generation citizens, yet they are often treated as newcomers.**
- **Another common presumption is that Asian-Americans of all ethnicities and nationalities are Hmong. In fact, Minnesota is home to many different Asian nationalities. The Chinese-American community in Minnesota, for example, is well established, and has contributed to the creation and growth of Minnesota businesses throughout the state for decades.**

Focus on the Hmong

Why the Hmong Come to Minnesota

The Hmong are an ethnic group living throughout mountainous regions of southeast Asia, in China, Myanmar (Burma), Thailand, Vietnam, and Laos. The Hmong have a distinct language and traditional customs. Most Hmong who have immigrated to Minnesota originally came from northern Laos.

The first Hmong families emigrated as refugees. During the Vietnam War, the U.S. recruited Hmong villagers and farmers to help fight its "secret war" against communists in Laos. At the war's end, the communists sought revenge on the Hmong for aiding the United States. Tens of thousands of Hmong fled their homes on a perilous journey—many suffering injuries and losing family members along the way—and settled in refugee camps. Beginning in the late 1970s, the U.S. and other nations began resettling the Hmong; Minnesota was among the U.S. destinations. In 2004, the resettlement of several thousand additional Hmong refugees began in Minnesota; the majority are expected to join family members who have already lived here for decades.

Demographics

More than 60,000 Hmong individuals live in Minnesota. At least half of those individuals live in St. Paul, making it home to the largest urban population of Hmong in the world. Other Minnesota communities with sizable Hmong populations include Duluth, Rochester, Taylor's Falls, and the Marshall area.

The Hmong population is relatively young: the median age of the Hmong population in Minnesota is 16, compared to 35 for the entire Minnesota population.

Wing Young Huie

An extended family structure often provides a cooperative path to economic stability and advancement for the Hmong, with relatives pooling their resources to acquire homes and businesses. Revenue generated from Hmong companies in Minnesota is estimated at more than $100 million and homeownership rates among Hmong Minnesotans continue to rise.

Ben Garvin for The New York Times

Like the immigrants who arrived more than a century ago, many of Minnesota's newer immigrant groups tend to have larger families. In their countries of origin, more children meant more assistance with family businesses and more help taking care of young, old, and sick family members. In Southeast Asia, the Hmong lived in agricultural areas, in which larger families brought economic and social advantages.

Economics

The large, close-knit family structure of the Hmong often provides a cooperative path to economic stability and advancement. Hmong relatives often pool their resources and incomes to acquire homes, cars, and businesses. After building up equity, the family can spread out and extend their financial base. This approach, in part, has resulted in relatively high homeownership rates for Hmong Minnesotans—lower than the Minnesota average, but significantly higher than other recent immigrant groups. Revenue generated from Hmong companies in Minnesota is estimated at more than $100 million.

Larger-scale economic development, too, has also been driven by Hmong cooperative and entrepreneurial efforts. The revitalization of University Avenue in St. Paul is a visible example of the regenerative effects of Hmong investment in economically depressed areas.

For more information on immigration in Minnesota, please visit www.MinneapolisFoundation.org.

Life in Minnesota: Challenges and Considerations

Intergenerational Conflict—As with other immigrant groups, conflicts can arise between older generations of Hmong immigrants seeking to preserve their traditional culture and their children and grandchildren who adopt American customs. Finding a balance can be a struggle for members of different generations as they find ways to fully participate in school, neighborhood, and community life while honoring their ancestral, ethnic, and religious traditions.

Family Life—The Hmong social structure is centered on large, extended families within 18 organized clans. Nuclear families average 6.4 persons—although this is changing for Hmong men and women who were raised in the United States. In Southeast Asia, the Hmong lived in agricultural areas, in which large families brought economic advantages, as well as social and spiritual support. The Hmong have traditionally married at a young age, often during the teenage years. Hmong men and women often have the same name and Hmong men traditionally take an adult name, added to their first name, after they marry and their first child is born.

Other Countries of Origin

International Institute of Minnesota

People from around the world will continue to immigrate to Minnesota—some for economic opportunities, others for humanitarian and political reasons. Following is just a sampling of some of the countries of origin of recent immigrants, and the forces that led to their arrival in Minnesota.

India

Nearly 17,000 Asian-Indians lived in Minnesota in 2000 according to the Census—twice as many as were counted in 1990, and more than any other Asian group except the Hmong and Vietnamese. Since then, that figure has grown significantly: In 2002 alone, 1,000 immigrants came directly to Minnesota from India. Minnesota's Asian-Indians live throughout the Twin Cities metropolitan area as well as Rochester, with a scattered few in Greater Minnesota. In recent years, many immigrants from India have come to work in Minnesota's high-tech industries. A significant number of Asian-Indian children have also been adopted by Minnesota families. Most Asian-Indians are Hindu; Hindi is the dominant language of India.

Former Soviet Republics and Yugoslavia

When the Soviet Union collapsed in December 1991, most Minnesotans probably didn't think about how events in Moscow, 5,000 miles away, would affect our state. But they have. Minnesota's Russian population has grown to 12,500 and more than 2,300 public school students speak Russian at home. Many Russians who immigrated to Minnesota in the late 1980s and 1990s were Jews who had endured decades of repression under the Soviet Union. People from Belarus, Ukraine, and other former Soviet Republics also have immigrated to Minnesota since the fall of communism.

Since the 1990s, Bosnians, Croatians, and others from the former Yugoslavia have also come to Minnesota as refugees from war and ethnic conflicts. More than 2,000 Bosnian refugees alone came to Minnesota, many of whom settled in Fargo-Moorhead and Pelican Rapids. Serbo-Croatian is spoken in the homes of 681 public school students in Minnesota.

Because immigrants from Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, and other eastern European nations are white, they're not always as easily identified as some of Minnesota's other newcomers. Their sense of dislocation, however, is profound.

Tibet

Although the Tibetan population of Minnesota is small—around 1,000—it is the second-largest concentration of Tibetans in the United States. A great many Tibetans, including the Dalai Lama, fled their homeland as a result of the Chinese invasion of 1949 and the systematic repression that followed. Most Tibetans practice a form of Buddhism; the Dalai Lama is their spiritual leader.

Liberia

Minnesota is home to one of the nation's largest Liberian populations. Estimates vary, but at least 3,000 Liberians live in Minnesota. Civil war and political instability during the 1990s led to an exodus of Liberians seeking refuge in other countries, including many West African nations and, ultimately, the United States. Of the total number of Liberian immigrants to the U.S. in 2002, 13.5% came to Minnesota. Many of these individuals have settled in the suburbs of Brooklyn Park and Brooklyn Center.

On Discovering Our Common Ground

There is a false belief, held by some, that immigration is a problem that needs to be "fixed" or "solved." On the contrary, our country's history shows that immigration is an ongoing process that revitalizes and reinvigorates a community. As new residents blend with the old, the mixing of culture, language, and beliefs forms the basis of a new community—that both respects the past and embraces the future.

The Minneapolis Foundation has long recognized its responsibility to assist our state in maximizing the opportunities and minimizing the challenges presented by successive waves of immigrant populations. As early as 1925, the Foundation supported a community relations campaign on immigration, **Give Them a Welcome**, that sought to combat the hostility that immigrants were facing at that time. More recently, the Foundation supported a statewide discussion on immigration, **Minnesota, Nice or Not?**, which focused on educating Minnesotans on the growing numbers of Somalis, Russian Jews, Mexicans, and Hmong who are now part of our community.

Discovering Common Ground is a comprehensive effort by the Foundation and its many partners to create a thoughtful state agenda on immigration based on factual information rather than fear and false assumptions. What makes this effort more difficult than in the past is that, following the tragedy of September 11th, questions of immigration have become intertwined with legitimate concerns about national security.

This brochure is not intended to be a comprehensive resource on immigration in Minnesota, but to provide some basic facts and discussion points to complement other activities relating to immigration. We recognize that not every immigrant group represented in Minnesota or every issue is included in this report.

This report is the Foundation's first step in an ongoing, multi-tiered effort to begin candid discussions based on a common set of facts. This dialogue will continue through the 2004-2005 Minnesota Meeting series, which will focus on shaping a state agenda for immigration. Finally, we will continue to provide funding support for creative efforts by communities, nonprofit organizations, and public institutions to develop strategies to improve the quality of life throughout the state and to help us rediscover our common ground.

Emmett D. Carson

Emmett D. Carson, Ph.D.
President and CEO

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For more information on immigration in Minnesota, please visit www.MinneapolisFoundation.org.

We have done our best to present the most current data from the most credible sources, utilizing the input and expertise of researchers and community representatives. Organizations throughout the state are working to welcome immigrants and providing information on the challenges and benefits of discovering our common ground. To connect with these resources, please visit **www.MinneapolisFoundation.org.**

We would like to thank the following individuals and organizations for their help with this brochure:
Abdisalam Adam, Juan Carlos Alanis, Frank Clancy, Dr. Bruce Corrie, Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis, Claudia Fuentes, HACER, Hmong Cultural Center, Qamar Ibrahim, International Institute of Minnesota, Korean Quarterly, League of Women Voters, Minneapolis Public Schools, Minnesota Historical Society, State Senator Mee Moua, Neighborhood House, Pelican Rapids Library, Mark Pfeiffer, Cheri Reese, Saint Paul Public Schools, Tibetan American Foundation of Minnesota, Triangle Park Creative, United Way

Additional sources:
Minnesota State Demographer's Office, Minnesota Department of Education, Minnesota Planning, Star Tribune, Pioneer Press, Minnesota Public Radio, City Pages, U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services

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October 2004