

# New Americans in Alexandria

A Snapshot of the Demographic and Economic Contributions of Immigrants in the City<sup>1</sup>



ALEXANDRIA  
ECONOMIC  
DEVELOPMENT  
PARTNERSHIP

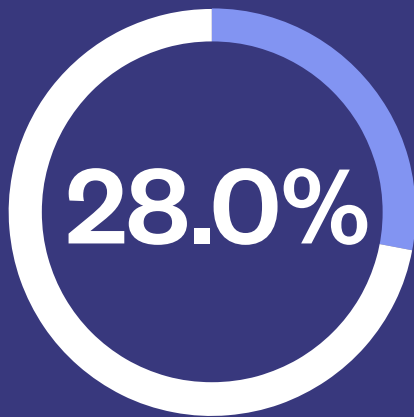


ALEXANDRIA | ARLINGTON REGION



State & Local

## POPULATION GROWTH



Immigrant share of the population, 2016

Between 2011 and 2016, the population in the city grew by **10.8%**.

The immigrant population increased by **22.2%**.

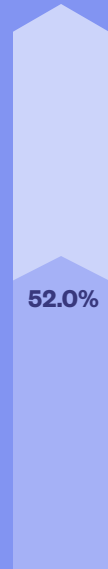
### Total population

136,609 → 151,408



### Immigrant population

34,739 → 42,441



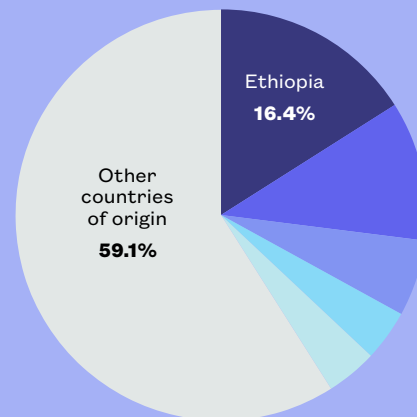
Share of total population growth in the city attributed to immigrants

Number of immigrants living in Alexandria in 2016:

**42,441**

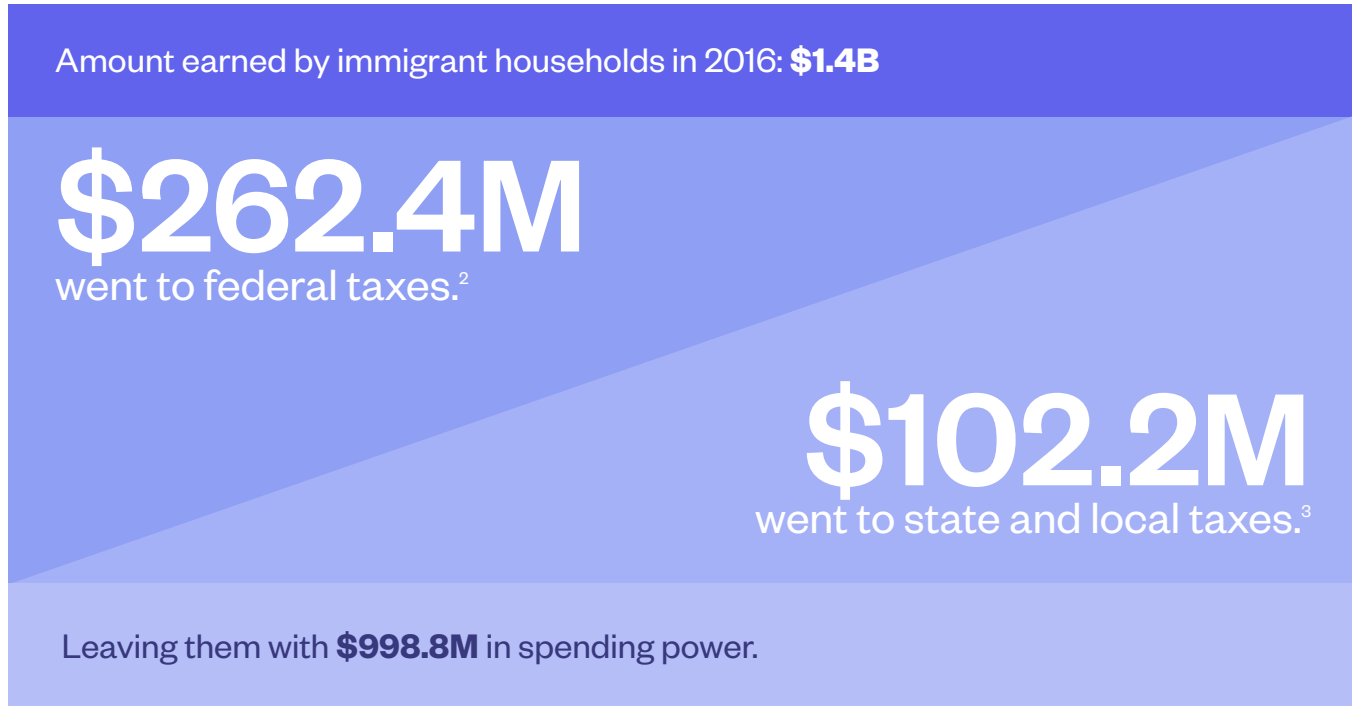
Top five countries of origin for immigrants living in the city:

- 1 Ethiopia .....16.4%
- 2 El Salvador ..... 11.3%
- 3 Honduras..... 5.8%
- 4 Philippines..... 3.9%
- 5 Bolivia.....3.5%

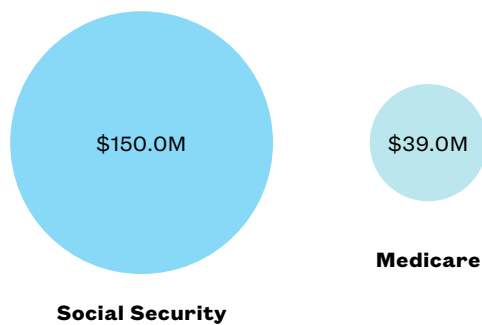


## SPENDING POWER & TAX CONTRIBUTIONS

Given their income, immigrants contributed significantly to state and local taxes, including property, sales, and excise taxes levied by state or municipal governments.



Immigrants in Alexandria also support federal social programs. In 2016, they contributed **\$150.0M** to Social Security and **\$39.0M** to Medicare.



**12.3%** of immigrants in the city received Medicare or Medicaid, compared with **18.4%** of U.S.-born residents in 2016.



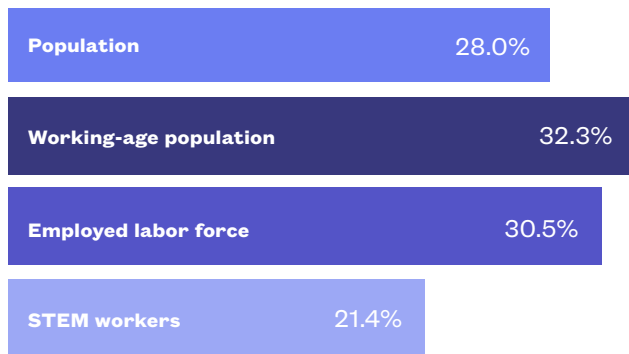
About **55.8%** of immigrants had private healthcare coverage, while **12.9%** had public healthcare coverage.



## LABOR FORCE GROWTH

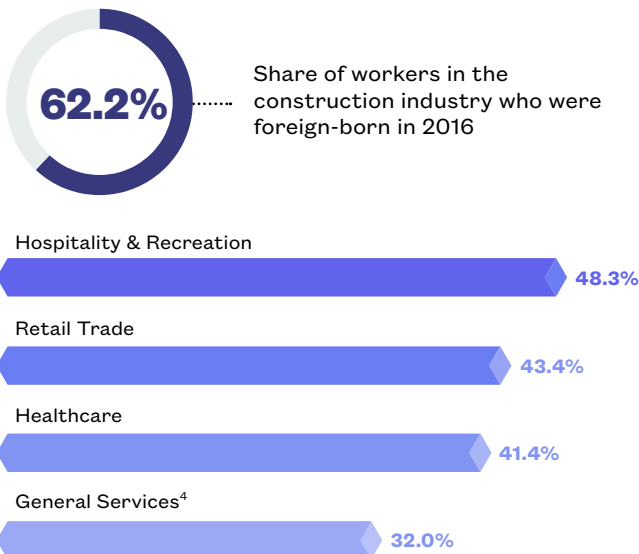
Although the foreign-born made up **28.0%** of the city’s overall population, they represented **32.3%** of its working-age\* population, **30.5%** of its employed labor force, and **21.4%** of its STEM\*\* workers in 2016.

### Immigrant shares of the...



\* Working-age refers to people ages 16-64 years old.  
 \*\* Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math.

Immigrants play a critical role in several **key industries** in the city. This includes:



## SPOTLIGHT ON

# Fernando Torrez

## Owner, *NanoTech*

**G**rowing up in La Paz, Bolivia, Fernando Torrez was fascinated with American super hero cartoons. In 1996, when he was 12, his parents brought him and his older sister to Colorado in search of the American dream. There, he encountered real-life American heroes: cadets at the U.S. Air Force Academy. “I saw them marching and admired their discipline and camaraderie,” says Torrez. “I wanted to be part of the most powerful military in the world.”

Before he could serve his new country, though, Torrez had to help his family adjust to American culture. As a young teenager, he quickly learned English to help his parents translate their mail and, eventually, help them open a catering business. “Now that I’m older I really appreciate the risk my parents took in leaving behind everything they knew,” says Torrez, now 36.

In 1997, the family moved to the Arlington, VA area, and Torrez joined the junior ROTC program affiliated with Washington Lee High School. “That program gave me the direction and structure I craved,” he said. Torrez also earned a private pilot’s license before finishing his freshman year of high school.

After graduation, Torrez served in the Air Force for nine years and achieved the rank of Senior Airman. In 2003, he received the prestigious Air Force Space Command Supply Airman of the Year award. The same year, he became a U.S. citizen. “It felt so good to fully belong to the country that had welcomed me and my family with open arms,” he says.

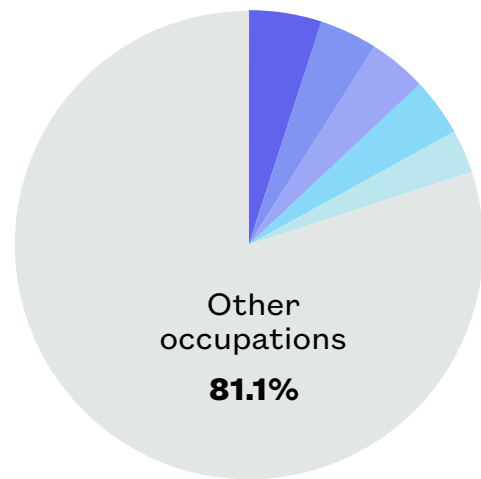
After his honorable discharge, Torrez founded NanoTech, an Alexandria-based computer repair shop. “I really believe the honor I brought from my military service gave customers a sense of trust and security in me,” he says. Today, after a decade in business, NanoTech has 10 employees, offers IT support and cyber-security services, and serves accounts across Virginia. In 2015, the Alexandria Chamber of Commerce awarded Torrez the veteran-owned business of the year.

Torrez also credits his success to Alexandria’s open-minded community—one that embraces diversity, including Latinos, East Africans and Eastern Europeans. He married a Polish immigrant, and they are raising a daughter and son. “Alexandria has such a welcoming atmosphere,” Torrez says. “It doesn’t matter where you’re from. People here appreciate what immigrants bring to the table.”

**LABOR FORCE GROWTH CONT.**

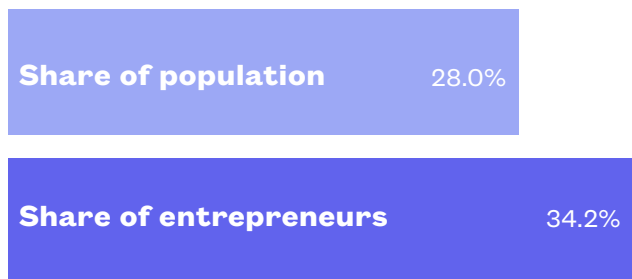
Immigrants tend to concentrate in these **occupations** in the city:

- 1 Janitors & Building Cleaners . . . . . 4.6%
- 2 Maids & Housekeepers . . . . . 4.3%
- 3 Cashiers . . . . . 3.6%
- 4 Taxi Drivers & Chauffeurs . . . . . 3.5%
- 5 Childcare Workers . . . . . 2.9%

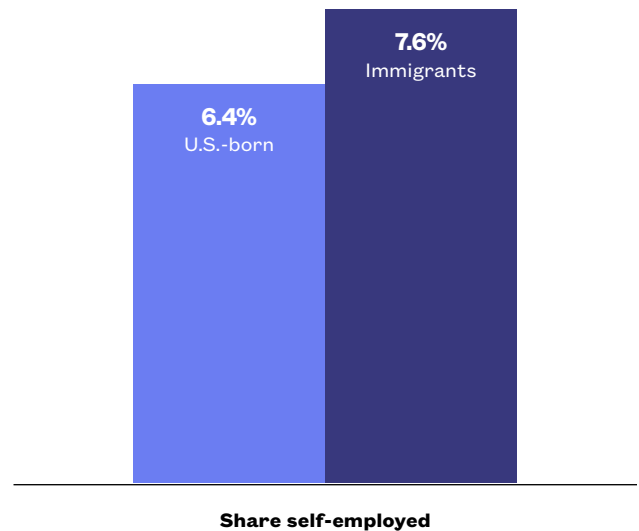


**ENTREPRENEURSHIP**

Despite making up **28.0%** of the overall population, immigrants represented **34.2%** of the entrepreneurs in Alexandria in 2016.



**2,224** immigrant entrepreneurs generated **\$79.4M** in business income for the city.

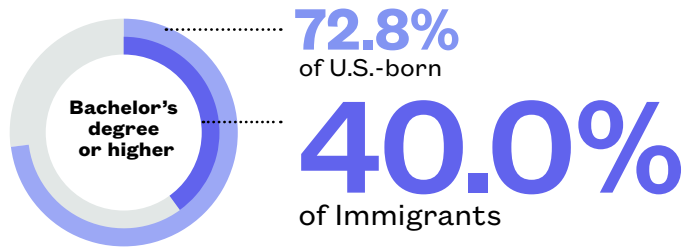


This makes the foreign-born **18.6%** more likely than the U.S.-born to be entrepreneurs.

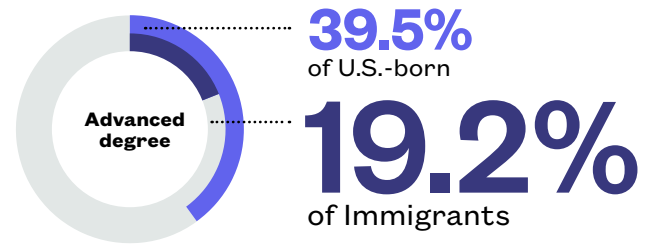
## EDUCATION

In Alexandria, immigrants were less likely than their U.S.-born counterparts to have a bachelor's degree or higher in 2016.

Share of the Alexandria population over age 25 with a **bachelor's degree or higher** in 2016:



Share of the Alexandria population over age 25 with an **advanced degree** in 2016:



## HOUSING WEALTH

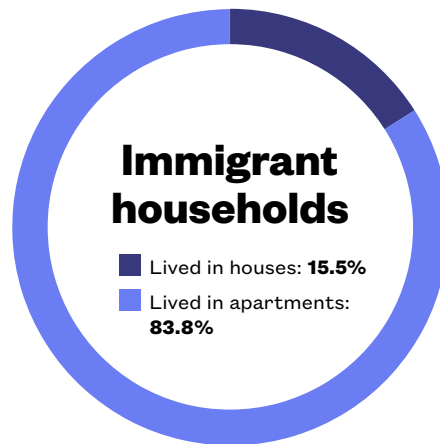
In 2016,

**21.1%**

of immigrant households in the city owned their own homes, compared to **47.7%** of the U.S.-born.

**78.3%**

of immigrant households were renters.



The total property value of immigrant households was

**\$1.6B.**

Their total annual rent was

**\$228.0M.**

## NATURALIZATION

**36.3%**  
Naturalized

Share of immigrants who were naturalized citizens in 2016. This constitutes **15,392** immigrants.

**23.3%**  
Potentially Eligible

Share among the 27,049 non-citizens who were potentially eligible for naturalization. This constitutes **6,304** immigrants.

SPOTLIGHT ON

# Rhoda Worku

Owner, *Caboose Café*

**R**hoda Worku was a college student in Ethiopia when civil war broke out. Her father, a high-ranking member of the government, was executed and her mother was imprisoned. Eventually, Worku's mother was released but life barely improved. "We didn't have anything," Worku says. "The government took everything from us."

In 1982, Worku traveled to the United States on a tourist visa and applied for asylum. "I was missing my family, but I was very eager to work and to do the American Dream," she says. After receiving asylum, she moved to Virginia with her new husband and enrolled in the accounting program at Northern Virginia Community College. She paid her way through school by waitressing at a popular bakery, Bread and Chocolate, and worked her way into accounting and retail positions there. In the 1980s and 1990s, she helped open five new locations across Northern Virginia and Washington, D.C.

But Worku had always dreamed of owning her own business. In 2004, she and her husband opened Caboose Café in Alexandria's Del Ray neighborhood. They started with soup and sandwiches, but, soon, patrons started asking for more adventurous fare. "Customers would come in and say, 'when are you going to serve Ethiopian food?'" she says. "At that time, there were few other Ethiopian restaurants. We became very popular."

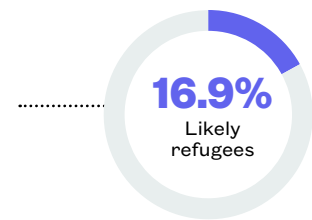
Worku says her modest café made a big contribution to Alexandria. "People are exposed to other cultures and they love it," she says. "American kids would come in and ask for *injera* [traditional Ethiopian bread], which is very healthy."

Eventually, Worku opened a second cafe. A few years ago, City Hall asked her to cater the city's naturalization ceremonies. "They gave me the opportunity to be an example for others," she says. "If you work hard, you get somewhere." Worku is delighted to help the city, because of how they've helped her, even offsetting her café's physical improvement costs.

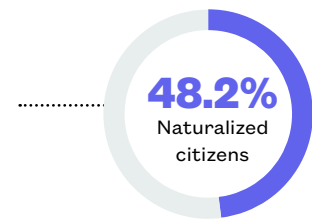
"Alexandria is very nice for a small business," Worku says. "It's been great to raise a family. Kids study in the coffee shop. They used to say, 'Ms. Rhoda, we want to work for you.' I know all their parents. You don't see that much anywhere else."

## REFUGEES

In 2016, **7,191** immigrants, or **16.9%** of the foreign-born population, were likely refugees.<sup>6</sup>

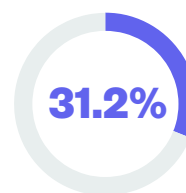


About **48.2%** of these refugees were naturalized citizens.



Median income of refugees in the city, 2016:

# \$43,341



Share of refugees aged 25 and above with at least a bachelor's degree, 2016

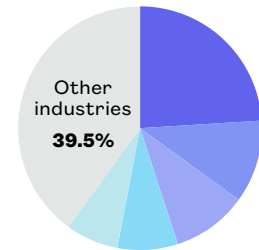


Share of refugees aged 25 and above with an advanced degree, 2016

**REFUGEES CONT.**

Refugees tend to concentrate in these **key industries** in the city:

- 1 Transportation & Warehousing . . . . . 23.9%
- 2 Healthcare . . . . . 11.2%
- 3 Hospitality & Recreation . . . . . 10.4%
- 4 General Services . . . . . 8.4%
- 5 Retail Trade . . . . . 6.6%



**UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANTS**

Number of undocumented immigrants in Alexandria in 2016:

**15,522**

Undocumented share of the immigrant population:

**36.6%**

Top countries of origin for undocumented immigrants in the city:

- El Salvador . . . . . 22.0%
- Honduras . . . . . 13.9%
- Guatemala . . . . . 7.5%
- Ethiopia . . . . . 6.5%
- Saudi Arabia . . . . . 6.3%

Undocumented immigrants tend to concentrate in these key industries in the city:

- Professional Services<sup>7</sup> . . . 23.0%
- Hospitality & Recreation . 22.6%
- Construction . . . . . 17.5%
- Retail Trade . . . . . 9.3%
- General Services . . . . . 8.7%

For more city, district, and state-level data, visit [MapTheImpact.org](http://MapTheImpact.org) and explore our interactive map.



1 Unless otherwise specified, data comes from 5-year samples of the American Community Survey from 2011 and 2016 and figures refer to the City of Alexandria, Virginia.

2 U.S. Congressional Budget Office. 2016. "The Distribution of Household Income and Federal Taxes, 2013."

3 Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy. 2015. "Who Pays? A Distributional Analysis of the Tax Systems in All Fifty States."

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

5 Vigdor, Jacob. 2013. "Immigration and the Revival of American Cities: From Preserving Manufacturing Jobs to Strengthening the Housing Market." New American Economy.

6 New American Economy. 2017. "From Struggle to Resilience: The Economic Impact of Refugees in America."

7 Professional services: Most of these industries include professions that require a degree or a license, such as legal services, accounting, scientific research, consulting services, etc.