



Rooted in the Valley

Immigrants in Napa County's Communities and Economy

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Executive Summary

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In Northern California's Napa Valley, one of the world's most famous wine-growing regions, immigrants have long been an integral part of the workforce and local communities. Of Napa County's 135,000 residents, 21 percent (29,000 people) were foreign born as of 2019–23. Immigrants made up an even greater share of workers in the county—29 percent—when taking into account people who live and work in the county as well as those who commute to it from nearby areas.

This report examines the characteristics of immigrants in Napa County, and how this profile has changed since a prior Migration Policy Institute (MPI) study of this population in 2012. In addition to the overall immigrant population, the report examines the county's Latino residents (both foreign and U.S. born) and its working-age population (ages 18–64). The report employs an economic impact model to estimate the value of all foreign-born workers' contributions to the Napa County wine and hospitality industry, estimated at \$1.5 billion or 11 percent of the county gross domestic product (GDP). Using this model, the study also examines the contributions of unauthorized immigrant workers to the wine and hospitality industry, and by extension, what effects broadly expanded immigration enforcement could have on the local economy.

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An Immigrant Population with Deep Roots

Approximately two-thirds of immigrants in Napa County were born in the Latin American and Caribbean region, with Mexico being by far the top sending country (57 percent of all immigrants in 2019–23). Data from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey paint a picture of an immigrant population that, over the years, has settled down, started families, and become successfully incorporated into local communities.

- ▶ The number of immigrants in Napa County (29,000 people) and the immigrant share of all residents (21 percent) in 2019–23 represent fairly significant declines from 2006–10, given the county's relatively small population.
- ▶ Three-quarters of immigrants in Napa County had lived in the United States for 20 years or more. Latino immigrants were particularly likely to have a long history of U.S. residence, while non-Latino immigrants made up more than half of those in the country for less than ten years. Moreover, relatively few immigrants are recent arrivals: 8 percent of all immigrants in the county had been in the United States for less than ten years.
- ▶ Immigrants in the county tend to be older than U.S.-born residents. Just 3 percent of immigrants were children under 18 years old, while one-quarter of U.S.-born residents were children.

- ▶ At the same time, nearly half (47 percent) of all children in the county had at least one immigrant parent in 2019–23—a share that has remained steady since the 2012 MPI report, highlighting the continued prominence of the second generation among the county's youngest residents.
- ▶ Latinos (both foreign and U.S. born) represented 35 percent of the total county population in 2019–23, an 18-percent increase since 2006–10. This growth was driven primarily by U.S.-born Latinos, many of whom are the children of immigrants.
- ▶ Almost half (48 percent) of immigrants were naturalized U.S. citizens in 2023, a sharp increase from the finding of 30 percent in the 2012 MPI report and a strong marker of integration. In addition to naturalized U.S. citizens, as of 2023, 26 percent of immigrants in Napa County were either lawful permanent residents (also known as green-card holders) or temporary visa holders. The remaining one-quarter were unauthorized immigrants, some of whom had a temporary status that has protected them from deportation and authorized them to work; this includes asylum seekers, humanitarian parolees, Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipients, and Temporary Protected Status (TPS) holders.
- ▶ Nearly half of immigrants ages 5 and older reported speaking English “very well” or as their only language in 2019–23. Slightly more than half of immigrants had limited English proficiency, including about one-quarter who spoke little or no English.

Socioeconomic Well-Being and Disparities

Analysis of the socioeconomic characteristics of Napa County immigrants pointed to both gains and gaps with other county residents.

- ▶ The median household income of county immigrant families was \$108,000—higher than the statewide average for immigrants of \$99,000. The median income of Latino immigrant households in Napa was lower (\$84,000), while that of non-Latino immigrants was higher (\$156,000).
- ▶ While the low-income share of Latino immigrants remains high (that is, those who have a family income lower than 200 percent of the federal poverty level), this share has fallen since the earlier MPI study, from 39 percent to 31 percent.
- ▶ Despite rising housing prices, 58 percent of the county's immigrants lived in owned homes in 2023. Rates varied by legal status. For example, 72 percent of naturalized U.S. citizens lived in owned homes, while 27 percent of unauthorized immigrants did so.
- ▶ Health insurance coverage rates were higher for immigrants in Napa County than in California as a whole. Overall, 89 percent of all immigrants and 86 percent of Latino immigrants in the county had some form of coverage in 2019–23. Statewide, these figures were 87 percent and 79 percent, respectively.
- ▶ At the same time, participation in public benefits programs such as Medicaid, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) remained lower for low-income immigrant families than for their U.S.-born counterparts.

Immigrants in the Workforce

In 2019–23, 71 percent of Napa County's immigrant residents were of prime working age (25 to 64), a much larger share than U.S.-born residents (46 percent). That said, not everyone who works in Napa lives in the county: 34 percent of all people who worked in Napa County in 2019–23 commuted in from nearby areas, most notably Solano County. This figure, which includes both immigrants and native-born residents, has increased since MPI's 2012 report.

- ▶ Among immigrants who work in Napa County, the share who also live in the county declined by 11 percent between 2006–10 and 2019–23, while the share who commute in from outside the county rose by 13 percent. And though the number of both native- and foreign-born commuters increased, immigrant workers were more likely to be commuters (38 percent) compared to U.S.-born workers (32 percent). Though many factors may explain these changes, these trends echo concerns of population displacement due to lack of housing and the rising cost of living in the county.
- ▶ Looking at the Napa County workforce overall—both those who live and work in the county and commuters—immigrants were overrepresented. They made up 21 percent of the county population in 2019–23 but 29 percent of workers ages 18–64. Similarly, Latinos (both native and foreign born) made up 35 percent of the county's residents but 40 percent of its workers.
- ▶ The top five industries of employment for immigrants in Napa County as of 2019–23 were manufacturing (in which 17 percent of all employed immigrants worked), health care (13 percent), agriculture (12 percent), accommodation and food services (10 percent), and professional services (10 percent). Many manufacturing and accommodation and food services jobs are related to the wine industry. Across industries in 2023, the majority of workers were U.S. born, except in agriculture, in which 71 percent of workers were immigrants.
- ▶ Immigrant men and women were more likely to work full time, year round than their U.S.-born counterparts. Nonetheless, immigrants' median earnings were 77 percent those of U.S.-born workers in 2019–23.
- ▶ Relatively high shares of immigrant workers did not have a high school diploma: 39 percent of immigrant men and 29 percent of immigrant women in 2019–23, compared to 6 percent of U.S.-born workers (men and women combined). On the other hand, 30 percent of immigrant women workers had a university degree, a significantly higher share than immigrant men (19 percent).

The Contributions of Immigrant Workers to the Napa County Economy

To estimate the contributions of all immigrant workers and of unauthorized immigrant workers specifically to Napa County's wine and hospitality industry,¹ a leading sector within the local economy, MPI researchers

¹ In this analysis, the wine and hospitality industry comprises agriculture, manufacturing, and food and accommodation services. See Section 4 and the Appendix of this report for details on the methodology used for the simulation.

used an input-output model to simulate scenarios in which all jobs held by these workers disappear. These hypothetical scenarios generated several important insights into the local economy:

- 1 Considering both direct and multiplier effects, it is estimated that immigrant workers in the wine and hospitality industry (including naturalized U.S. citizens, lawfully present noncitizens, and the unauthorized) contribute \$1.5 billion to Napa County's GDP annually. By comparison, the 2012 MPI report found that immigrants' economic contributions to the county at the time had a lower-bound estimate of \$317 million and an upper-bound estimate of \$1.07 billion.
- 2 In light of heightened immigration enforcement across the country, the researchers also used the model to calculate the economic impacts specifically of unauthorized immigrant workers in Napa County's wine and hospitality industry. This simulation found that unauthorized immigrants add an estimated \$366 million in value annually to the local GDP, when considering both direct contributions (their labor) and indirect contributions (their work's impact on other sectors). Removing this group of workers from the wine and hospitality industry would generate job losses in other service activities that support agriculture as well as warehousing and tourism-related services. These negative impacts would go beyond unauthorized immigrants and affect U.S.-born and lawfully present foreign-born workers.
- 3 Even under the assumption that unauthorized immigrant workers do not pay payroll taxes (though in reality some do), Napa County and subcounty tax revenues would decline by approximately \$28 million annually due to lower collections from property, sales, and special assessment taxes.

The demographic and workforce profiles in this report, along with the economic impact simulation, provide information that could help inform local policy choices and planning at a time when the region is facing a range of challenges—from the high cost of living, to stagnating population growth, to changing demand and supply-side trends in the wine industry, to stepped-up immigration enforcement.

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To read the full report, see:

www.migrationpolicy.org/research/immigrants-napa-communities-economy

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