

**A PROFILE OF THE FOREIGN-BORN IN THE NASHVILLE ECONOMIC  
MARKET**

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## I. Introduction

The Building the New American Community (BNAC) demonstration project is an experiment in refugee and immigrant integration in which the cities of Lowell, Massachusetts; Nashville, Tennessee; and Portland, Oregon formed coalitions to identify integration challenges in their communities and address them collaboratively.<sup>1</sup> These cities were assisted by a national team of policy analysts, advocates, and researchers from the National Conference of State Legislatures, the National Immigration Forum, the Southeast Asia Resource Action Center, The Urban Institute, and the Migration Policy Institute.

To assist the coalitions in understanding the size, composition, and characteristics of their newcomer communities, The Urban Institute has prepared a demographic profile of the foreign-born population for each site. These profiles include data on immigrant population growth, diversity, settlement patterns, English language ability, poverty, and citizenship trends. Data on immigrants and refugees can be used as a tool by the coalitions to attract future funding opportunities, target services such as English as a Second Language classes or job training, and strengthen media outreach and advocacy efforts.

This is a profile of the Nashville Economic Market, which consists of Maury and Montgomery Counties plus the eight counties of the Nashville Metropolitan Statistical Area (Cheatham, Davidson, Dickson, Robertson, Rutherford, Sumner, Williamson, and Wilson). The city of Nashville is within Davidson County and shares the same metropolitan government as Davidson County. Throughout this profile, this area is referred to as “Nashville-Davidson.” The Nashville Economic Market’s profile is accompanied by The Urban Institute’s publication, *The New Neighbors: A User’s Guide to Data on Immigrants in U.S. Communities*, which can further assist coalition members in finding and using data on the foreign born in their communities.

## II. Data Sources

The data in this profile are from the 2000 Census. Census data make it possible to map settlement patterns in great detail and to analyze their implications for communities at the national, state, and even local levels. Detail on numbers of immigrants,<sup>2</sup> their

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<sup>1</sup> Funding for the Building the New American Community coalitions is provided by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Refugee Resettlement.

<sup>2</sup> In Census data, the foreign-born population corresponds to what is usually defined as the “immigrant” population. The foreign-born population includes only those people born outside the United States (and its territories) who were not U.S. citizens at birth, whether they are currently U.S. citizens or not. Often, local estimates of the immigrant community include U.S.-born children and spouses of the foreign-born plus other second- or third-generation adults. (The second generation encompasses U.S.-born individuals with one or two foreign-born parents; the third and higher generations include those born in the United States with both parents born in the United States.) These differences in defining who is an immigrant can make local estimates appear larger than the Census numbers. Census 2000 did miss some people (and counted a number of people more than once). In general, the net undercount in Census 2000 is thought to be rather small but can vary from place to place. The Census Bureau has published some estimates of Census 2000

countries of origin, the languages they speak, and their English proficiency is available down to the level of the Census tract—a geographic area no larger than many city neighborhoods.

Another data source used in this profile is the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) *Statistical Yearbook*, which reports on annual legal immigrant admissions to the United States.<sup>3</sup> The INS public-use data are administrative data drawn from records of legal immigrant admissions. Because undocumented immigrants—those without authorization to stay in the United States legally—are not included in these data, the INS data represent only a portion of the annual flow into the country. Through comparing the INS and Census data on foreign-born country of birth, it is possible to identify indirectly the presence of undocumented immigrants in an area.

### III. Profile of the Foreign-Born in the Nashville Economic Market

#### A. Rapid and Recent Growth of the Foreign-Born

**Figure 1. Period of Entry for the Foreign-Born in the Nashville Economic Market**

Period of Entry	National Share of Foreign-born	Nashville Economic Market Share of Foreign-born
Total	100.00%	100.0%
1995 to 2000	24.37%	39.8%
1990 to 1994	17.99%	19.8%
1985 to 1989	15.08%	12.0%
1980 to 1984	12.14%	9.6%
1975 to 1979	8.64%	5.7%
1970 to 1974	6.43%	3.7%
1965 to 1969	4.77%	2.9%
Before 1965	10.59%	6.7%

Source: Census 2000

undercounts and overcounts, mostly for race groups. For further information on net estimates of the Census 2000, see <http://landview.census.gov/dmd/www/pdf/pp-54r.pdf>.

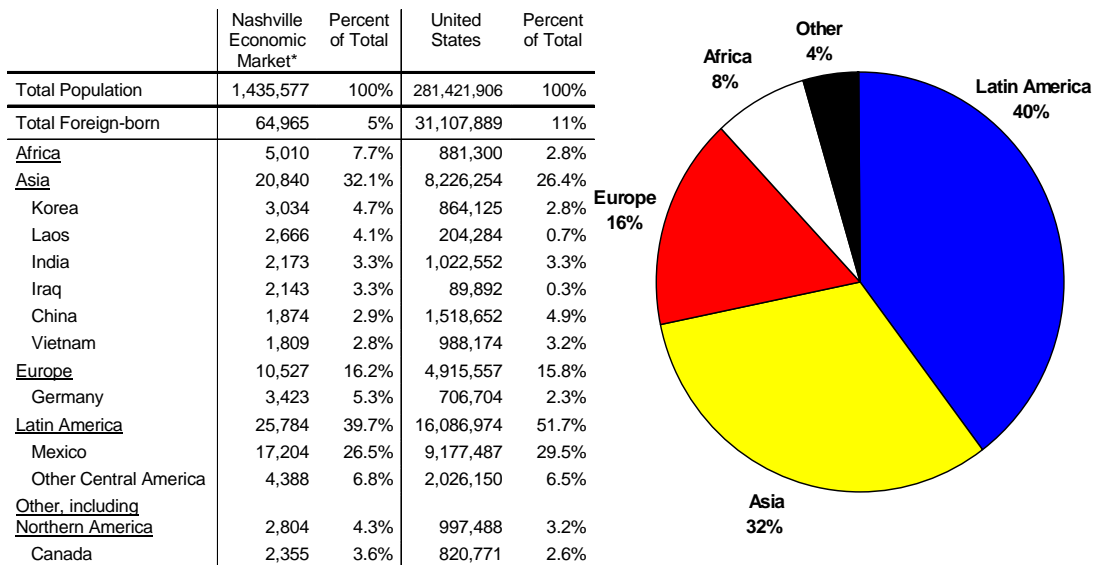
<sup>3</sup> On March 1, 2003, all functions of the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) were transferred from the Department of Justice to the Department of Homeland Security. The INS was split into separate agencies for enforcement and for processing of immigration and naturalization applications. The Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services is the new agency responsible for processing of immigration and naturalization applications.

While the share of the Nashville Economic Market’s foreign-born population (5 percent) is less than half the national average (11 percent), immigration to the region grew rapidly: the foreign-born population grew by 203 percent between 1990 and 2000, almost four times as fast as the national average (57 percent).<sup>4</sup> Forty percent of the Nashville Economic Market’s immigrants arrived after 1995, compared with 24 percent nationally (figure 1). The share of the foreign born in Nashville-Davidson is slightly higher (7 percent) and grew by 213 percent during this period. The state of Tennessee’s foreign-born population grew by 169 percent between 1990 and 2000. In 2000, the state ranked sixth in the nation in the rate of its immigrant population’s growth. Nonetheless, despite rapid growth, only 3 percent of the state’s population in 2000 was foreign-born.

**B. Latin Americans Are the Largest Group, but Other Regions Are Represented**

Latin Americans constitute the largest foreign-born population in the Nashville Economic Market (40 percent), but there are also significant representations from other immigrant-sending regions: Asia (32 percent) including the Middle East; Europe (16 percent); and Africa (8 percent). Mexico is by far the largest sending country (27 percent), followed by Germany, Korea, Laos, Canada, India, and Iraq. The African population (8 percent) in the Nashville Economic Market is more than double the national average (3 percent). The largest African groups are from Nigeria, Egypt, Ethiopia, and East Africa.

**Figure 2. Regions of Birth for the Foreign-Born in the Nashville Economic Market**



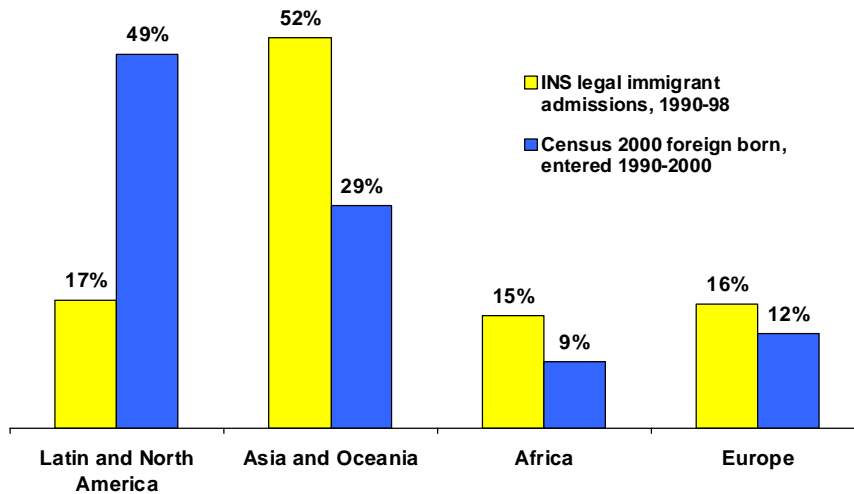
\* Cheatham, Davidson, Dickson, Maury, Montgomery, Robertson, Rutherford, Sumner, Williamson, and Wilson Counties

<sup>4</sup> According to the 2000 Census, there are 64,965 foreign-born persons in the Nashville Economic Market and 39,596 foreign-born persons in Nashville-Davidson.

### **C. Large Undocumented Population**

The INS admissions data paint a different picture of immigrants' countries of birth. The data on regions and countries of birth for the Economic Market displayed in figure 2 include all immigrants, regardless of legal status and when they came to the United States. But INS admissions data only include records for legal immigrants admitted in a given year. In figure 3, we compare immigrants admitted from 1990 to 1998 using the INS data and immigrants who arrived between 1990 and 2000 using the Census 2000 data.

**Figure 3. Comparison of 1990-1998 INS and 1990-March 2000 Census Data, Nashville Economic Market**



According to Census data, 49 percent of the Economic Market's immigrants who arrived during the 1990s were born in Latin or North America, almost three times the 17 percent indicated by the INS admissions data. But at the same time, INS data show 52 percent of 1990s entrants were born in Asia versus only 29 percent shown in the Census. The shares of immigrants born in Europe and Africa are also higher in the INS than the Census data.

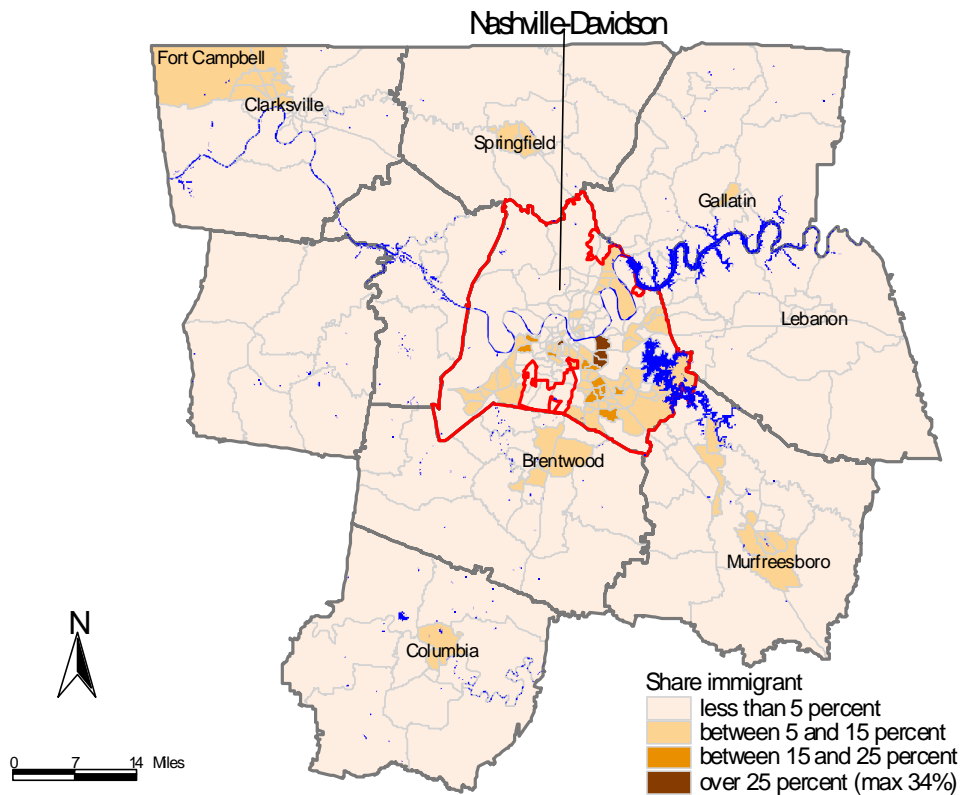
These contrasting data suggest that a significant proportion of the Economic Market's Latin American immigrants are undocumented. The overrepresentation of those born in Asia, Europe, and Africa in the INS data compared with the Census data, in contrast, indicates that immigrants from these regions are mostly legal. While there are other possible explanations for the differing results obtained from the datasets,<sup>5</sup> our basic conclusion is that illegal immigration explains most of the differences in the numbers.

<sup>5</sup> Other possible reasons for differences between the two sources include different time spans covered by the data (1990–98 for INS versus 1990–2000 for the Census); incorrect assignment of “intended” place of residence in the INS data; undercounting of some groups in the Census; and possible out-migration of immigrants to other states or outside the country before they appear in the Census data.

### **D. Most Foreign-Born Groups Concentrated in Nashville-Davidson**

The heaviest concentrations of the foreign-born population can be found in the Census tracts representing Nashville-Davidson’s Glenview and Mercy Oaks neighborhoods. Immigrants compose 25 to 34 percent of the total population within these tracts—five times Nashville Economic Market’s average of 5 percent.<sup>6</sup> Higher than average (between 5 and 25 percent) concentrations of the foreign born are also found throughout southeastern Nashville-Davidson and in Fort Campbell, Clarksville, Springfield, Gallatin, Brentwood, Murfreesboro, and Columbia (figure 4). In Nashville-Davidson, particularly the Glenview and Mercy Oaks neighborhoods, the foreign-born populations represent all world regions and are not dominated by one particular group. Outside of Nashville-Davidson, concentrations of Latin American have settled in Fort Campbell, Clarksville, Springfield, Gallatin, Columbia, and Murfreesboro. Asians can be found in Fort Campbell, Clarksville, Brentwood, and Murfreesboro.

**Figure 4. Share of Nashville Economic Market's Total Population that Is Foreign-Born, by Census Tract**

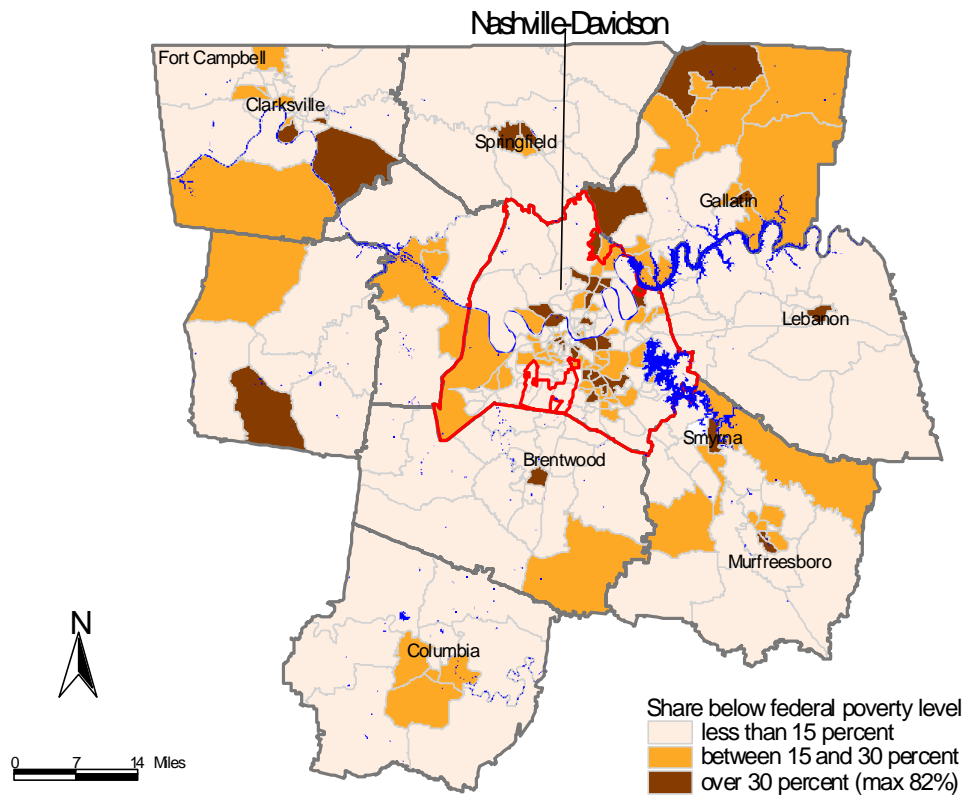


<sup>6</sup> Census tracts are defined by the Census Bureau to approximate neighborhoods. The average Census tract in the Nashville Economic Market has approximately 5,000 people. Nationally, Census tracts usually have between 2,500 and 8,000 people.

**E. Foreign-Born Poverty Rates Highest, Especially among Noncitizens**

In the Nashville Economic Market, 10 percent of the total population lives below the federal poverty level (\$17,050 for a family of four in 2000), which is slightly lower than the national rate in 2000 (12 percent). The poverty rate among the foreign-born (18 percent) is substantially higher than natives (10 percent). The proportion of naturalized citizens (9 percent) living below the poverty level was lower than that of noncitizens (22 percent) and roughly equal to that of natives. The highest concentrations of the foreign-born living below the poverty level in the Nashville Economic Market are found in Nashville-Davidson, Brentwood, Clarksville, Springfield, Lebanon, Smyrna, and Murfreesboro and in rural areas of Dickson County (West of Nashville-Davidson), Montgomery County (Southeast of Clarksville), and Sumner County (Northwest of Gallatin) (figure 5).

**Figure 5. Share of Nashville Economic Market's Foreign-Born with Incomes Below the Federal Poverty Level, by Census Tract**



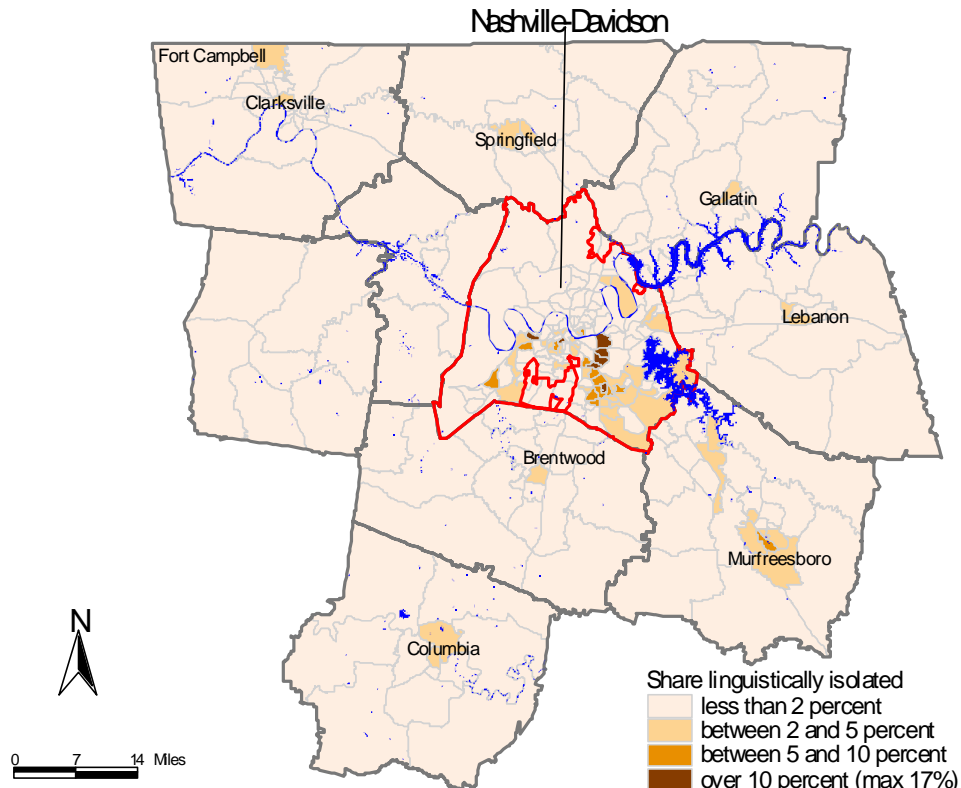
**F. Lower Limited English Proficiency Rates, Mostly Spanish Speakers**

In the Nashville Economic Market, 47 percent of the foreign-born population five years and over are limited English proficient (LEP), slightly lower than the national average (51 percent). We define LEPs using Census questions as persons who speak a language other than English and who do not speak English “very well.” Spanish is the dominant language spoken by LEPs: 60 percent of youth (ages 5 to 17) and 57 percent of adults (ages 18 and over) who are LEP speak Spanish. Asian languages also make up a significant share of the languages spoken by LEP youth (18 percent) and adults (19 percent). Other foreign languages spoken in the region include German, French, Arabic, and African languages.

**G. Concentrations of Linguistically Isolated Households**

Census data can be used to identify “linguistically isolated households”—defined as those in which no person 14 or older either speaks English as a first language or speaks English “very well.” In the Economic Market 8,436 households (2 percent) are linguistically isolated compared with 4 percent nationwide. The highest concentrations of linguistically isolated households (more than 10 percent of a tract) are found in Census tracts encompassing the Glenview and Mercy Oaks neighborhoods in Nashville-Davidson (see figure 6).

**Figure 6. Share of Nashville Economic Market's Households that Are Linguistically Isolated, by Census Tract**



## **H. Naturalization Rates Lag National Averages, but Many Are Recent Arrivals**

Thirty-one percent of the Economic Market's immigrants are naturalized citizens, lower than the national average of 40 percent.<sup>7</sup> Asians make up the largest group (41 percent) of naturalized citizens in the Nashville Economic Market, followed by Latin Americans (25 percent), Europeans (23 percent), and Africans (7 percent). Lower naturalization rates can be potentially explained by the fact that a large share (40 percent) of the region's immigrants arrived after 1995.<sup>8</sup>

Europeans as a group have the highest naturalization rate (44 percent) in the Nashville Economic Market, still below their national rate of 56 percent, despite the fact that more than two-thirds of the region's Europeans arrived before 1990. Forty percent of the Asian population (which includes countries in the Middle East) is naturalized and more than half arrived after 1990. Nationally, 51 percent of the Asian population is naturalized.

Latin Americans have the lowest naturalization rate (19 percent) in the Economic Market and also lag behind their national rate (30 percent). Seventy percent of Latin American immigrants in the region are new arrivals and, as our comparison of INS data and Census data reveals, many are undocumented and ineligible for citizenship. Twenty-eight percent of Africans in the Economic Market have naturalized, a rate that falls below the national level (36 percent). Again, this may be explained by the fact that 68 percent arrived during the 1990s.

## **IV. Conclusions**

This profile indicates that Nashville Economic Market's immigrant population has a number of defining characteristics that should be taken into account by coalition members and other policymakers:

- The foreign-born population in the Nashville Economic Market is characterized by large numbers of recent arrivals. Fully 40 percent arrived since 1995. Recent arrivals are highly correlated with limited English proficiency, lower incomes, and lower naturalization rates.
- A large share of these recent arrivals is from Mexico; it appears that many are undocumented. Perhaps as a result, poverty rates among the foreign-born population (18 percent) are almost double those of the native-born population (10 percent).

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<sup>7</sup> Census 2000 shows that 40 percent of the foreign-born are naturalized citizens. Various Urban Institute studies have found that naturalized citizenship tends to be overreported in census and survey data (e.g., Passel and Clark 1998). Urban Institute estimates corrected for this overreporting show that 32 percent of the foreign-born are naturalized citizens in 2000 (Fix, Passel, and Sucher 2003).

<sup>8</sup> Immigrants eligible to naturalize include legal immigrants who have been in the United States for at least five years or in the country for at least three years and married to a U.S. citizen.

- The highest concentrations of the foreign-born in the Nashville Economic Market are found in southeastern Nashville-Davidson, although immigrants are dispersed in some of the region's outlying counties. Higher concentrations of foreign-born poverty and linguistic isolation are also found in southeastern Nashville-Davidson. Still, there are settlements of immigrants, particularly Latin Americans and Asians, outside of Nashville-Davidson and these regions also include considerable shares of linguistically isolated and poor households. These settlement patterns have implications for service delivery, because poor immigrants who live outside of Nashville-Davidson's urban areas may not have the same access to services.
- LEP rates are slightly lower than the national average. More than half of the LEP population in the Nashville area speaks Spanish. LEP immigrants tend to hold less desirable jobs, earn lower incomes, and generally fare worse on most indicators of well-being. The Urban Institute has also found that food insecurity and other hardship measures are more closely associated with LEP than with either legal status or length of residency in the United States (Capps, Ku, and Fix 2002).
- The Nashville region's naturalization rates lag national averages—even among groups such as established Europeans who are eligible to become citizens. These findings reinforce the civic engagement focus of the Building the New American Community project.

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