

IMMIGRATION

Background

July is the month in which St. Louisans join all other Americans in celebrating the vision and process that has made our country a “melting pot” for more than 220 years. This issue of Gateway Trends examines immigration trends and patterns that make our region culturally and ethnically rich.

Historically, settlement patterns for immigrants, both domestic and international, have been primarily influenced by social and economic opportunities. During the first well-documented wave of immigration to the United States in the early 1900s, a majority of new residents settled in port-of-entry cities such as New York, Chicago, and other major metropolitan areas where many of these opportunities were concentrated. More recently, these trends continue with nearly two-thirds of all immigrants arriving between 1985 and 1996 locating within 10 of the nation’s 280 metropolitan areas.¹

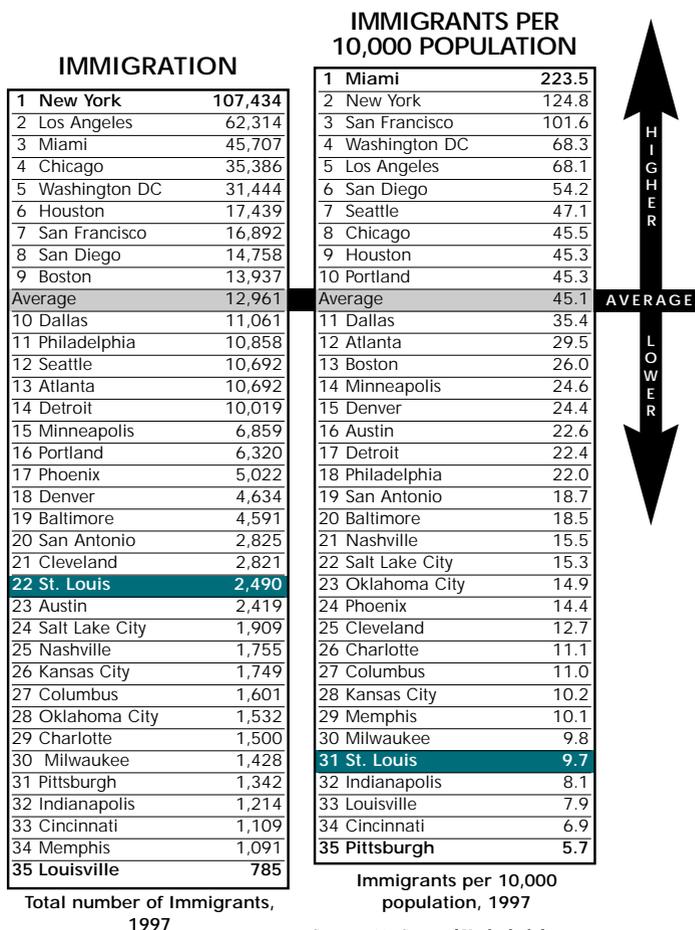
Within metropolitan areas, however, settlement patterns are beginning to shift somewhat from what they were nearly one hundred years ago. Many immigrants are attracted to mature urban core neighborhoods, some of which have strong ethnic identities, but increasing numbers of immigrants are now taking up residence in suburban communities, locating close to areas of high employment and newer residential growth.² Immigrants who settle in the suburbs tend to be more wealthy than those who are attracted to central cities. Today’s immigrants are also more diverse in terms of economic and ethnic backgrounds than the pri-

marily European immigrants who came to the United States at the turn of the 20th Century.

Where We Stand

East-West Gateway has tracked and compared demographic, social and economic trends for more than 30 metropolitan areas since 1992 in the publication *Where We Stand: A Strategic Assessment of the St. Louis Region*. The most recent edition was released in 1999. The charts below, displayed in the trademark *Where We Stand* format, are new to the series.

The first chart illustrates that, among 35 peer regions, St. Louis ranked 22nd in the total number of immigrants newly admitted for permanent residence in 1997.³ This level of immigra-



¹ Fry, William. "Immigration and Demographic Balkanization: Toward One America or Two?" In James W. Hughes & Joseph J. Seneca (Eds.), *Demographic Tapestry: Baseline for the New Millennium* (pp. 78-101). New Jersey: Rutgers University Press.

² See Brad Edmondson's "The New Suburbanites: Immigration Nation," in *Preservation*, the publication of the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

Source: 1997 Statistical Yearbook of the Immigration and Naturalization Service

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tion translates to approximately 10 immigrants per 10,000 residents, ranking St. Louis 31st among the 35. Although St. Louis ranks relatively low, the rate of new resident immigrants per 10,000 population is very similar to several other mid-western regions including Kansas City, Memphis, and Milwaukee and slightly higher than Indianapolis, Louisville, Cincinnati, and Pittsburgh.

The total number of immigrants who intended to establish permanent residence in the St. Louis region in 1997 comprises only a fraction of a percent of the total number of 798,378 immigrants admitted as permanent residents to the United States in 1997. The five metropolitan areas at the top of the chart—New York, Los Angeles, Miami, Chicago and Washington D.C.—attracted 35 percent of all new legal resident immigrants, while the other 30 metropolitan areas included in the comparison together had only 21 percent of all new immigrants with permanent resident status.

Recent Trends in Immigration

The number of individuals immigrating to the U.S. in the last decade of the 20th Century may surpass the historical record set in the first decade of the Century, when nearly 8.8 million immigrants came to United States.⁴ The official immigration counts for the 1990s that the Immigration and Naturalization Service will soon release do not include hundreds of thousands of foreign nationals who are in the United States on temporary work visas, illegal immigrants, persons legally living and working in the U.S. while their paperwork is being processed, or the newest refugees and persons seeking asylum who must wait a year before they can apply to be legal immigrants.

There are several reasons why a person may immigrate to the United States. During the period between 1993-1997, four classifications covered nearly 83 percent of all of our nation's immigrants. The largest category, representing

37.8 percent of the legal immigrants for the period, was for persons with an immediate family relationship with a U.S. citizen. Sponsored spouses and children of permanent resident immigrants were the second largest category, with 16.6 percent of the total immigrants. Refugees and persons seeking asylum were 14.6 percent of the total immigrant population and immigrant admissions based on employment needs in the United States accounted for 13.5 percent.

The number of immigrants who have begun a new life as permanent residents of the St. Louis metropolitan area has been relatively steady in recent years, averaging nearly 2,750 a year from 1993 to 1997.

Included in this number are persons previously living abroad who obtained immigrant visas and became legal permanent residents as well as former undocumented immigrants, refugees and persons seeking asylum who have adjusted their status after entry to the country. It does not include persons who were legally admitted to the United States on temporary "non-immigrant visas" for work.

Immigrants to the St. Louis Area 1993-1997

1993	2,745
1994	2,669
1995	2,488
1996	3,342
1997	2,490
Total	13,734

Immigrants' Countries of Origin

St. Louis is rich with a history of ethnic diversity. First, there were the Native American Indians and then later Spanish and French settlers followed by individuals from Germany, Ireland and Italy. More recently, from 1993 to 1997 people from China, India, Russia, Vietnam, and the modern day Balkans⁵ combined comprise 45 percent of all the immigrants who came to the St. Louis area. The following map identifies the influx of immigrants to St. Louis from fifteen of the top twenty countries of origin for the nation for this five-year time frame.

³ Metropolitan areas were selected for comparison as our "peers" if they met one of two criteria: the area had a population of 950,000 or more and was within 500 miles of St. Louis or the area had an economic function similar to that of the St. Louis region.

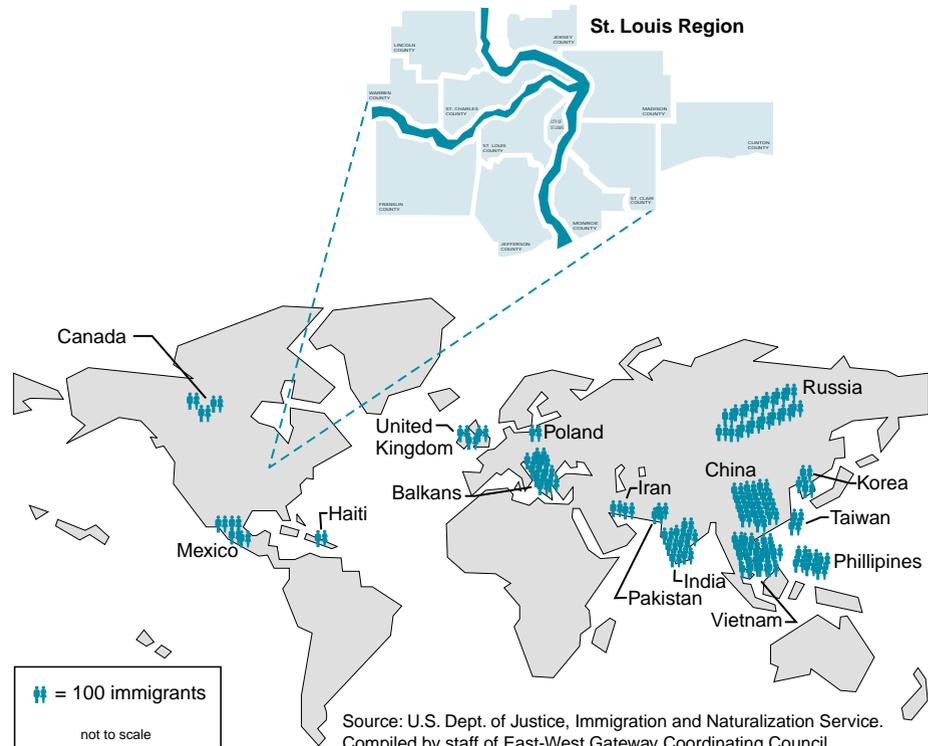
⁴ 1991-1998 Statistical Yearbooks of the Immigration and Naturalization Service

⁵ Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia and Montenegro, Slovenia, and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

St. Louis Immigrants from Around the World

Top 15 Countries of Origin

Canada	353
China, mainland	1333
Haiti	152
India	964
Iran	171
Korea	308
Mexico	398
Pakistan	225
Philippines	595
Poland	128
Russia	1491
Taiwan	212
United Kingdom	314
Vietnam	1604
Balkans	799



Refugees: A Subset of the Immigrant Population

One small segment of foreign nationals who come to the St. Louis area seeking residency are refugees—individuals fleeing persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality or other specific reasons. Since 1975, nearly 39,000 refugees have settled in the St. Louis area, according to the International Institute of St. Louis. More than 75 percent of these individuals first settled in the City of St. Louis and they tend to remain within the City over time. Of those who have settled in the City since 1979, approximately 85 percent still live in the City.

The International Institute observes that the majority of the refugees who live in St. Louis County are Russian Jews and Vietnamese who arrived before 1979. In recent years, there has been a major in-migration of Bosnians, Middle Easterners, Somalis and Vietnamese. The following table provides a more complete breakdown of the nationality of origin of the St. Louis area refugee population.

Table 1
St. Louis Area Refugee Population

Cultures of Origin	Total Refugees since 1975
Bosnian-Herzegovian and Kosovar	20,000
-Other Eastern European	850
Cambodian	50
Cuban/Haitian	780
Ethiopian/Eritrean	600
-Other African (including Somali)	2,250
Laotian	800
Middle Eastern	2,750
Russian Evangelical	680
Russian Jews	2,675
Vietnamese	7,412
Total	38,847

Source: The International Institute of St. Louis

Some Questions for the Region

- ✓ Our history books and museums paint a picture of St. Louis at the turn of the 20th Century abounding with diverse ethnic neighborhoods and community centers. Beginning the 21st Century, the region ranks quite low among metropolitan areas in the rate of continuing immigration, although several regional agendas include the theme: “value diversity.” Are new strategies and activities warranted in order to make our metropolitan area more attractive to immigrating individuals and families?
- ✓ Labor market experts predict continuing worker shortages over the next several decades, and some analysts have suggested that the Midwest will be particularly hard hit because of projected slow labor force growth. Will the St. Louis region want to pursue proactive immigration strategies to increase the pool of skilled labor needed to attract and expand key targeted industries?

For more information

For more information on immigration, the reader may want to consult the following web sites.

U.S. Census Bureau

<http://www.census.gov>

Immigration and Naturalization Service

<http://www.ins.usdoj.gov>

International Institute St. Louis

<http://www.intlinst.org>

The Road to Citizenship

Although several formal classifications are used by the Immigration and Naturalization Service, we can summarize them by saying that most immigrants come to the United States with the hope of a better life through increased job opportunities, personal freedoms, and a higher standard of living. Many foreign nationals who make their way here make the choice to apply for permanent residency through the visa process. The visa journey is one that takes much time, in that there are many classifications and limits imposed per year—leading to the waiting list in most cases. This process will take at least one year and in many cases, more.

After several years have passed (usually five years, but if the resident has married a U.S. citizen, three), immigrants who have been granted permanent resident status may choose to apply for citizenship. Here the resident has to prove he or she is 18 years old or older, has been living as a legal permanent resident for the required number of years, is of good moral character, is able to comprehend the English language, and can demonstrate knowledge of U.S. History and Civics.

Annually, approximately 1,200 immigrants in the St. Louis area accomplish this mission, and earn a new title: United States Citizen. The citizenship ceremony takes place at the federal courthouse every month, and on special occasions, such as the recent Flag Day celebration, the ceremony takes place at the Old Courthouse. Usually, there are approximately 100 participants, each called forward by name and nationality. A judge presides over the patriotic event, and many honored speakers lead the new citizens in an Oath of Allegiance, the Pledge of Allegiance, as well as the National Anthem.