

# **PENNSYLVANIA'S FORGOTTEN RURAL IMMIGRANTS**

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## Foreword

Nationwide, the recent influx of Latin American immigrants has radically changed the current and projected demographic nature of the U.S. population, and policymakers, social scientists, and the public have focused attention on a wide range of concerns related to the rapid growth of this Latino population. Moreover, most of these efforts have focused on urban situations where the majority of these immigrants settle

Almost overlooked have been issues related to immigrants from other countries, and (aside from some recent work in this area) those who settle in small towns and rural areas. Although immigrants from Latin America have arrived in increasing numbers in Pennsylvania, those from other countries (Eastern Europe, Asia, the Middle East, etc.) equal or exceed the number of Latinos, and increasingly these new residents are settling in small town and rural areas of the state. We refer to these immigrants as “Pennsylvania’s Forgotten Rural Immigrants” because residentially and ethnically, they have often been ignored both by those seeking to understand the immigrant experience, and those working to develop programs to foster the integration and adjustment of these new residents into the communities of which they are a part.

# **Pennsylvania's Forgotten Rural Immigrants**

## ***Introduction***

According to the 2000 U.S. Census, nearly 57 thousand Pennsylvania residents living in the 48 counties defined as “rural” by the Center for Pennsylvania were foreign-born, and that number has likely increased in the intervening years as the total number of foreign-born in the Commonwealth has grown. Moreover, although nationwide more than half of all immigrants are Hispanic, Pennsylvania's immigrant population is more diverse, with 25% from Latin America, 36% from Asia, 29% from Europe, and the remaining 10% from other nations. Such diversity may increase the difficulty of identifying the differing needs of immigrant groups in an area and providing appropriate services.

Most immigrants do not speak English as a first language and many struggle to acquire English language skills, particularly in rural areas where language classes and public transportation access are limited. In addition to English language acquisition, rural immigrants face a constellation of challenges shaped by features of rural life such as geographic isolation, low population density, and limited social services, challenges which are magnified by limited English proficiency. Jensen's (2006) analysis of Census data revealed that compared to their urban counterparts, rural immigrants are more likely to have lower education levels, to be poor, to own their own home, and to be working yet also underemployed. Although rural immigrants are more likely than urban immigrants to have health insurance (Jensen, 2006), underinsurance and availability and quality of medical and mental health services are significant problems (Azevedo & Bogue, 2001; Portes & Rumbaut, 2006). Other salient challenges include job training (Wrigley et al., 2003); housing cost and conditions (Whitener, 2001); poverty and low wages (Taylor, Martin, & Fix, 1997); and gaining community acceptance (Dalla & Christensen, 2005; Jensen, 2006; Pfeffer & Parra, 2005).

Traditionally, immigrants have relied on supportive co-ethnic social networks to ease their adjustment, exchange information and resources, obtain work, and ensure economic survival (Portes & Rumbaut, 2006). However, the degree of network stability and support varies widely across ethnic groups, depending on the context of reception, reasons for migration, geographic location, gender roles, and generational differences (Menjívar, 2000). Thus, it is unrealistic to assume that rural immigrants can depend on ethnic networks to provide vital social and economic resources. Moreover, few public or private programs and services are available for rural immigrants due to the limited number of service providers in small towns, a lack of specialized assistance for specific linguistic and ethnic groups, and the immigrants' geographic dispersion (Dalla & Christensen, 2005). As a result, “the social and economic infrastructures of rural places are often ill-prepared to handle even comparatively modest increases [in the immigrant population], and significant inflows can quickly overwhelm” (Jensen, 2006, p. 7).

## ***Goal and Objectives***

The goal of this study was to contribute to public understanding of rural immigrants in Pennsylvania. What are their needs? How successfully integrated are they into the fabric of the

communities in which they reside? How can leaders and the public help them to flourish both for their own success and happiness as well as the economic, social and cultural well-being of their communities?

Drawing upon the knowledge of key informants in rural Pennsylvania counties with sizable immigrant populations, the study addressed the following objectives:

- 1) To describe the characteristics of various immigrant groups in selected rural counties of Pennsylvania as perceived by knowledgeable informants in those counties.
- 2) To assess the perceptions of these key informants concerning community receptivity of these immigrants.
- 3) To determine the types of difficulties that informants perceive immigrants encounter and the availability and use of community social services.
- 4) To assess the extent to which immigrants are believed to be integrated into the rural communities of which they are a part.

### ***Methodology***

The project, funded by a seed grant from the College of Agricultural Sciences at Penn State, surveyed professionals working in programs concerned with teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) in selected rural counties in Pennsylvania. Because of their likely associations with immigrants, these people were taken as key informants who were asked to provide information regarding their perceptions of immigrants' needs, barriers to and supports for community integration, and availability of government and human services in their counties.

Following the Center for Rural Pennsylvania, a rural county was defined as one that (according to the 2000 U.S. Census) had a population density of less than 274 persons per square mile (the mean for Pennsylvania). A total of 48 of the state's 67 counties are designated as "rural" by this definition. Thirty of these rural counties had 500 or more residents who (according to the 2000 U.S. Census) spoke English "less than very well," and these counties were chosen for the study.

Key informants in each of the selected counties were contacted by e-mail explaining the purpose of the study, asking for the names of immigrant groups living in their counties, and requesting their assistance in learning about these groups. An immigrant was defined as anyone living in the county who was born in a country outside the United States and his/her children. Informants who responded to the e-mail contact were then sent (via surface mail) a questionnaire asking for additional information on up to five of the immigrant groups they had named in their e-mail responses.

These informants were directors of adult education programs supported by Pennsylvania's Bureau of Adult Basic and Literacy Education and worked closely with ESL programs in their counties (or in multiple counties). Many were also responsible for overseeing other educational services. The informants' primary interaction with the immigrant groups in

their areas was through their work, although many also indicated that they had formed relationships that extended beyond the workplace. Some also mentioned seeing immigrants in town shopping, at immigrants' place of employment (e.g., restaurant, nail salon), or at children's school events.

A total of 22 informants completed and returned the mail questionnaire (Table 1). These informants had identified more than 40 different immigrant groups, with some reporting specific national origins (e.g., Uzbekistan, Poland, Pakistan, El Salvador, Korea, Ireland), and others naming only world regions (e.g., Asia, Latin America, Africa). For each group named (up to five), informants were asked to report their perceptions of the length of time that group had lived in the county, the extent to which they experienced difficulty in accessing various community services, the degree to which they were accepted by and integrated into the larger community, and other items.

Following receipt of the completed questionnaires, telephone interviews were carried out with these informants to obtain more detailed information on their perceptions of each of the immigrant groups named in their counties. In all, 17 interviews were conducted with 22 adult ESL professionals from 21 rural counties. These informants included 19 women and 3 men. All described themselves as of European descent (e.g., Scottish, German, Polish), primarily from the United Kingdom or Eastern Europe, but were not immigrants as defined in this study. The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim and then analyzed to identify recurring themes and differences and similarities among distinct immigrant groups.

For analysis purposes these immigrant groups were classified into the following categories:

1. **Latin America:** Central America (including Mexico and unidentified countries), the Caribbean, and South America (Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and other unidentified countries)
2. **Eastern and Central Europe:** Russia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Albania, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, Ukraine, and Slovenia)
3. **Western Europe:** Ireland, Italy, Germany
4. **East Asia and Southeast Asia:** East Asia (China, Japan, and Korea); Southeast Asia (Cambodia, Indonesia, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam)
5. **South and Southwest Asia:** South Asia (India and Pakistan); Southwest Asia (Afghanistan and Turkey, including Kurds).
6. **Africa:** respondents only named these immigrants as "African"

Because informants were asked to report on the major immigrant groups in their respective counties, it seems likely that they responded in terms of those that were most visible and/or numerous. Indeed, 45% of the groups that were named and described were estimated to number 100 or more persons.

Twenty informants provided information on one or more groups from Latin America for a total of 29 mentions. Nineteen informants reported on one or more Eastern European immigrant groups, providing information on a total of 23 separate groups. Eighteen county informants listed altogether 20 immigrant groups from East or Southeast Asia. Eleven informants

listed 11 groups from South and Southwest Asia. Six informants provided information on immigrant groups from Western Europe (a total of 8 groups). There were only three mentions of African immigrants. Informants' perceptions of these 94 mentioned groups were compared and described below, along with more detailed information obtained from the follow-up interviews.

### ***Characteristics of Immigrants***

Our informants were asked to characterize when and why various immigrant groups had moved to their respective counties, as well as the nature of their educational and occupational characteristics.

#### **Arriving in Rural Pennsylvania**

Overall, immigrants from Eastern Europe, East and Southeast Asia, and the various Latin American countries were the groups most likely to be mentioned as living in these rural counties, with the majority arriving during the last five years. Immigrant groups from Western Europe were nearly all perceived as coming more than ten years ago, and over half of those from South/Southwest Asia and Africa were seen as arriving more than five years ago.

Immigrants migrate due to a combination of push and pull factors, or circumstances that prompt people to *leave* their country of origin and to *arrive* in a new place, having selected that destination over other alternatives. According to respondents, rural immigrants left their country of origin primarily for economic reasons. Immigrants were seeking “a better life,” “a better quality of life,” and “more opportunities” (including education) for themselves and their children. Several informants cited politics, war, and persecution as reasons for immigrants to their counties moving to this country — categories typically used to describe refugees rather than voluntary immigrants. Latin Americans, Southwest Asians, Eastern Europeans, Africans, and Vietnamese immigrants were listed under this category. Several respondents noted marriage as a reason for women to immigrate to the U.S. (e.g., as foreign brides or military spouses); this group included Latin Americans, Eastern and Western Europeans, and East/Southeast Asians.

Often immigrants settle in areas where they have social contacts such as relatives or extended social networks from their country or community of origin (Portes & Rumbaut, 2006). Our informants believed that immigrants moved to their county primarily for jobs. Joining family or a pre-existing community of immigrants from the same country was the second most common reason. Often the two were closely aligned. For example, a family would move in and start a business (e.g., Chinese restaurant); once the business was established other family members would come to work in the business. Informants identified church sponsorship as another common reason for moving to a particular county, and several noted marriage as a reason for some women (particularly Latin Americans, Eastern Europeans, East and Southeast Asians, and Western Europeans) to immigrate to the U.S.

Sometimes immigrants will leave their spouses or partners and/or children in their home countries while they live in the U.S. Of the various immigrant groups assessed in this study, only those from Latin America were perceived as widely participating in this pattern. More than 70% of the Latino groups were seen as having some or all of their members living in the U.S. while their families remained in their home country.

## Multiple Routes to Rural Pennsylvania

Some immigrants were believed to have come directly to rural Pennsylvania from their home countries; others may have lived in other states or other areas of Pennsylvania. Some informants reported that immigrants in their counties likely arrived and lived in New York for a short while before moving to rural Pennsylvania. This was reported most often for South and Southwest Asians, but also for other immigrant groups. Job availability was seen as shaping immigrants' mobility. South/Southwest Asians were seen as both coming directly from their home country, or (primarily Indians) from another part of the U.S. after finishing their education (e.g., medical degree). Some groups (e.g., Kurds) came directly from their home country or via another country through a religious organization. Our informants perceived recent Eastern European immigrants as having the greatest variation in how they came to rural Pennsylvania. However, earlier Eastern European immigrants and Western European immigrants in general were thought to have come directly to Pennsylvania from their home countries

When asked to indicate what proportion of each of the immigrant groups living in their counties were here legally, informants reported that "most or all" of the immigrants from Eastern Europe were documented; and 80% of the Asians were believed to be living in the county legally. However, just 55% of the Latino groups in these counties were perceived as being mostly or all legal immigrants.

## Perceptions of Immigrants' Linguistic Characteristics

Informants were asked to indicate what proportion of the adults in each immigrant group spoke English "very well." Perhaps reflecting their longer residence in the U.S., almost all groups of immigrants from Western Europe were seen as speaking English "very well." A slightly smaller percentage (more than 60%) of those from South/Southwest Asia and nearly 40% of those groups from Eastern Europe were perceived as having "most" or "all" of the adults able to speak English "very well." However, for only 3% of the Latino groups did the informants feel that "most" or "all" of the adults had such English proficiency.

In all cases, for a majority of the immigrant groups "most" or "all" of the children were believed to be bilingual, with East/Southeast Asians seen as the most likely and those from Western Europe the least likely to have bilingual offspring. Of those children who were not bilingual, more were believed to speak their parents' language than English, except those whose parents came from Western Europe. In the latter case, the children were overwhelmingly reported as speaking English rather than their parents' native tongue.

ESL professionals believed it was difficult for immigrants to live in the local community without knowing English and they believed that most of the immigrants regarded learning English as "very important." However, informants believed that for about one in ten of the Latino groups learning English was "not important," and an additional 27% considered it "somewhat" important. Although none of the other immigrant groups were perceived as thinking that learning English was "not important," more than a fourth of the Eastern European immigrants and about 10% of the Asian and Western immigrants were believed to place only "some" importance on English acquisition.



Constraints on daily living implied by limited proficiency in English were seen as at least partially alleviated by the presence of others of the same or similar ethnic groups. All of the informants reported that immigrants in their counties used various social networks (family and non-family) to help meet their needs. In particular, immigrants who spoke better English or understood how the American system worked were vital to these networks. Many informants stated that it was not simply language that created problems; rather, culture, appearance, and community understanding hampered immigrants' ability to maneuver in the community. Immigrants with higher levels of education were perceived as better able to meet their daily needs, especially South Asians who had studied in the U.S. or had been exposed to a British educational system. Some informants suggested that Latino immigrants who did not speak English had an easier time than other nationalities because (in some cases) there were more bilingual services available (e.g., TV programming, products, signs, translators) and they had a larger social network to draw upon. Eastern and Western Europeans were also seen as having an easier time negotiating daily needs in communities where residents had similar ethnic heritages.

### **Perceptions of Immigrants' Educational Characteristics**

There were considerable differences in the perceived educational levels of the various immigrant groups. Forty percent of the Latin American immigrant groups were described as having half or more of their members with no more than a primary school education. A few informants suggested that a small proportion of Latinos did have college degrees, but the incidence of higher education among this group was seen as low. There were some difference within the Latino category in the perceived educational level depending upon the country of origin. Mexicans and Central Americans were generally categorized as having 3 to 12 years of education, whereas South Americans were perceived to have higher levels of education.

The educational levels of the Eastern European and Western European immigrants were viewed as highly variable, with some groups having half or more of their members with only a primary school education, and some with college degrees. These groups, however, were seen as having mostly persons with high school-level educations, with some having college or professional training, including certifications as dentists, doctors, engineers, etc. Older Eastern and Western Europeans who came during the height of the mining industry were thought to have only finished grade school.

Overall, East and Southeast Asian groups were perceived as having higher education, with about one fifth of the groups characterized as having half or more of their members with college degrees. However, a number of these groups were seen as having lower levels of education, and appeared to vary by nationality. Responses for Chinese immigrants ranged from "less than high school" to "post-doctoral." Koreans and Vietnamese were described as having completed high school, with some having studied in college. Southeast Asians (except for the Vietnamese) were seen as having completed low (but unspecified) levels of education.

South Asian groups (India and Pakistan) were the most likely to be characterized as having college degrees, and many were seen as having completed post-graduate studies and were currently employed as doctors, college faculty, or other professionals. The few groups from Southwest Asia (Afghanistan, Turkey) were considered to have lower levels of education,

possibly because they interrupted their education to move to the U.S. In both groups the men were considered more educated than the women.

Africans were thought to have less than a high school education to no formal education.

## **Perceptions of Children's Educational Achievement**

Informants were asked to characterize how well the children of the various immigrant groups in their counties did in school compared to children whose parents were not immigrants. Many indicated that they had no knowledge of the school performance of immigrant children, especially those from Eastern Europe, Latin America, or Africa. Those who did have some information here reported in the survey that Latin American children tended to do "worse" in school than other children. However, in interviews these children were described as doing "just as well" as non-immigrant children. One informant noted a high Latino dropout rate in high school. Several commented that children whose cultural values matched those of the U.S. would be most successful and Latin Americans were seen as having the greatest disconnect in this regard.

Overall, children of both Eastern European and Western European immigrants were seen as doing the "same" or "somewhat better" than others in school.

East/Southeast Asian and West/Southwest Asian children were consistently viewed as doing "somewhat better," "much better" or the "same" in school as nonimmigrant children. Very few were judged to be doing "worse." Asian immigrant children were perceived as having a great deal of family pressure to succeed in school, reflecting Americans' widespread view of Asian immigrants as the "model minority."

## **Perceptions of Immigrants' Economic Activities**

Informants described the multiple ways that immigrant groups support themselves economically. Immigrants were believed to find jobs through their social networks, employer recruitment, or (less frequently) through social service organizations. Most immigrants (except professionals, generally described as South Asians) were said to employ multiple strategies to make ends meet (e.g., sharing households, sharing or limiting material goods, forgoing vehicles, relying on public assistance). Immigrants were perceived as being very hard working, taking jobs that other (U.S.-born) people will not, and working more than one job to survive economically.

The ESL professionals also made some comments pertaining to specific ethnic groups:

- The older, established populations (Eastern and Western Europeans) were originally employed in the mining industry but were now retired, living off of pensions. They were seen as having a stable lifestyle (although one respondent expressed concern that pensions might be reduced, imposing hardship on this group).
- Recent arrivals from Western Europe were said to be married to Americans, own their own businesses, or work in service jobs. They were generally seen as making ends meet.
- South Asians were again distinguished from the Southwest Asians, with the former (Indians, Pakistanis) described as having few economic problems because they hold professional jobs,

mainly as doctors or engineers. Southwest Asians were generally believed to hold laborer positions or skilled vocational positions. They used employment services or sponsoring church members to find employment. They were perceived as earning more than other groups, which our informants attributed to their more “strategic” approach to finding jobs.

- Latin Americans were believed to hold a variety of labor jobs (construction, landscaping, roofing, agricultural, meat packing, cleaning, warehouse), service jobs (servers at restaurants, bilingual employees for social services), skilled labor (carpentry, heating), and a few professional positions (business owners, baseball players, researchers). Many of these workers were perceived as being illegally employed, which curtailed their use of public assistance. They were described as one of the least economically stable groups, with many moving frequently to follow jobs, thus limiting their ability to take advantage of educational or job training opportunities. Additional survival strategies included food pantries, churches, and shared childcare resources.
- For East and Southeast Asians, small businesses—in particular, Chinese restaurants and nail salons—were identified as the main sources of employment. Other jobs, particularly for non-Chinese immigrants, were unskilled labor (meat packing, factory, cleaning, housekeeping, landscaping), skilled labor (welding), service industry (Verizon), graduate study, or small businesses. Our informants believed this group did not use public assistance and could make ends meet because they were strategic about using resources.
- Eastern Europeans were thought to hold a variety of jobs, including unskilled labor (cleaning, factory, grocery stores, line cooks), semi-skilled labor (maintenance, truck drivers, bakery), service industry (resort work, retail, nursing, babysitting), professional jobs, and “any job they can find.” Several informants noted that some women were seamstresses and worked out of their homes. Respondents also categorized many Eastern Europeans as skilled workers or having prior professional experience. Therefore, respondents believed they could obtain better jobs than some of the other immigrant groups, particularly once they increased their language skills. However, they were seen as economically unstable and therefore had to rely on public assistance, food banks, sponsors, pooling incomes. Most informants thought they were able to negotiate the public assistance system.
- Africans were described as students or working mainly in cleaning or restaurant positions.

Our informants reported that, for some groups, employment patterns for men and women differed:

- Eastern European immigrant women were reported to hold jobs, but the type of employment differed from men’s (e.g., cottage industries such as sewing, light factory work, cleaning, restaurant work). Work exchange programs (e.g., in grocery stores) primarily attracted men. Interestingly, Kazakh women were perceived as not holding jobs outside the home, despite financial difficulties.
- South and Southwest Asian immigrant women generally did not work out of the home.
- African women worked but held low wage jobs such as warehouse work, cleaning jobs, secondary line cooks.
- East and Southeast Asian women were primarily reported as working long hours outside the home. The answers varied regarding whether they held the same kinds of jobs, but generally they all worked in a Chinese restaurant. Some participants thought that men cooked, while women were hostesses and servers, while other respondents reported the opposite. Another

respondent reported that the Vietnamese and Cambodian women stayed at home, whereas the Chinese women worked outside the home. One person answered, “sometimes the roles get spun around because they need the money and maybe a factory will hire a woman.... Sometimes the man will be home taking care of the children.” This example illustrates the changes immigrants often undergo in order to survive.

- Most Latin American women were seen as working outside the home. Most informants stated that women held the same jobs as men (meat packing, service jobs, agricultural work). Several noted that this did not necessarily change the status of the woman in the community (it remained a male-centered society).
- Informants believed Western European immigrants maintained traditional roles whereby women worked in the home and men worked outside the home. It should be noted that most Western European immigrants in this study were already established, not recent immigrants.
- Lastly, several respondents stated that women in all categories were more likely than men to attend ESL classes, regardless of their employment status.

### ***Community Receptivity to Immigrants***

Community features influence the ways in which immigrants become incorporated into a given destination. Nationwide, the context of reception varies considerably among immigrant groups. According to leading immigration scholars, “the most relevant contexts of reception are defined by the policies of the receiving government [i.e., exclusion, passive acceptance, or active encouragement], the conditions of the host labor market, and the characteristics of their own ethnic communities. The combination of positive and negative features encountered at each of these levels determines the distinct mode of newcomers’ incorporation” (Portes & Rumbaut, 2006, pp. 92-93). In this study, we asked our ESL professionals about community residents’ acceptance of immigrants and their children.

### **Receptivity toward Immigrants**

Most of our informants reported that their communities had experienced some tension concerning immigrants, and that residents were often divided between those who “would rather have total[ly] homogeneous communities” and those who thought, “Wow it’s great to have another culture and we can learn about the world and learn about another language.” In other words, respondents tended to qualify their answers by saying that the degree of receptivity depended on the individuals in a given community. Moreover, sizable proportions of the residents in many communities were seen as having no strong feelings either way about the immigrant groups in their midst. Indeed, for more than a fourth of groups described, half or more of the residents were estimated to have no particular feelings concerning their acceptance or rejection. However, informants from only 2 counties reported in interviews that immigrants were welcomed unequivocally.

Respondents believed residents’ receptivity was shaped by discomfort with interacting with foreigners, concern about outsiders taking jobs, racism, perceptions of increased crime, and past experiences with ethnic and racial diversity. They described towns with a university as more open toward immigrants. Additionally, respondents thought particular groups were more or less welcomed depending on how closely local residents believed their values and physical appearance (race) matched the local community. For example, despite their appearance, East and

Southeast Asian immigrants were often welcomed (or at least not rejected) because they were seen as having similar values and work ethic as White, middle-class Americans. Eastern and Western Europeans were generally portrayed as being welcomed into communities partly because they blended in better than other groups, although some informants pointed out that Eastern Europeans were recognizable due to different clothing styles and cultural activities.

Latin American immigrants were perceived as being the most isolated from local communities and having the hardest time gaining community acceptance. For 11 of the 29 Latino groups evaluated, more than half of the community's residents were estimated to be "not accepting" of Latin American immigrants. Some informants attributed this to racism, community residents' perception that all Spanish speakers were Mexican and illegal, and/or that the immigrants already had large social networks and did not attempt to become part of the larger community.

South and Southwest Asian immigrants were differentiated depending on their profession and whether they appeared to be Middle-Eastern (the latter were seen as less welcomed). Professional status brought greater acceptance into the community, whereas some informants reported that other Asian (particularly Kurdish) immigrants had experienced open hostility and a general lack of welcome.

### **Receptivity toward Immigrant Children in Schools**

Overall, our informants believed immigrant children had been accepted in the schools without many problems. While some had heard negative comments (e.g., "Why are we using our tax dollars to educate them?"), they also heard that others "think that it is a great part of our community." Providing services to ESL students in the schools (e.g., finding translators or provision of services) was the most frequently mentioned challenge. Most schools eventually complied with state requirements in this area. Several counties did note tensions at the middle school and high school between immigrant students and the local, non-immigrant population. Our informants attributed these tensions to prejudice, stating that their communities were very white and were just now beginning to learn how to deal with people different from what they had always known.

### **Anti-Immigration Legislation**

Hazleton, Pennsylvania gained notoriety when the city council passed an ordinance "to fine landlords who rented to illegal immigrants and to revoke business permits of employers who hired them" (Savage & Gaouette, 2007, p. A20). Although a federal judge ruled the ordinance illegal, the Hazleton legislation is still pertinent to Pennsylvanians' views of immigrants. Most (16) respondents indicated that, to their knowledge, similar legislation had not been considered in their county. Informal discussion of such legislation occurred in 4 counties, mainly in the form of talk and letters to newspapers. In another county, a proposal similar to Hazleton's was formally discussed at a city council meeting. It was promoted as a way to minimize the prevalence of drugs in the community. The proposal did not come to fruition, but did generate a great deal of conversation. In 2 of the 4 counties, the legislation or discussion targeted Mexicans.

Non-immigrants' responses to the legislation were primarily discussion (i.e., no protests or public information campaigns). Respondents stated that immigrants did not participate in or publicly react to the proposal or discussions.

### ***Perceived Difficulties and Available Social Services***

The challenges that immigrants face as they seek to adapt to their new environments can be daunting: new customs, new laws, new neighbors, a new language, the loss of familiar contacts and cultural surroundings, and the need to locate jobs, sustain income, and access a myriad of services. To function effectively in their new environments, most immigrants seek to adapt to or accept the new but, at the same time, to maintain their own identities by preserving elements of their heritage.

### **Difficulties Encountered by Immigrant Groups**

We asked our informants how much difficulty they believed the various immigrant groups in their counties experienced in each of the following 12 areas as they seek to adjust to life in their rural Pennsylvania communities:

- Negotiating language differences
- Finding employment
- Obtaining sufficient income
- Obtaining adequate housing
- Gaining community acceptance
- Accessing healthcare
- Accessing social services
- Meeting children's educational needs
- Accessing adult education
- Accessing transportation
- Maintaining ethnic customs (foods, dress, practices, etc.)
- Observing religious practices

Overall, negotiating language differences was viewed as presenting the most difficulty, with a large proportion of every immigrant group seen as having "some" or "a great deal" of difficulty in this area. However, immigrants from Latin America and Africa were reported to be the most likely to have "a great deal" of difficulty; Western European and South/Southwestern Asian immigrants were viewed as being the least likely to have such difficulty.

Latin American immigrants were also overwhelmingly the most likely to have difficulty obtaining sufficient income and adequate housing, gaining community acceptance, accessing healthcare, transportation, social services, and adult education, and meeting children's educational needs. They were seen as somewhat less likely than Eastern Europeans and Africans to have difficulty finding employment, although more than 70% of all groups in these three categories were viewed as having at least "some" difficulty locating jobs and earning adequate incomes.

Immigrants from South/Southwest Asia, were least likely to have difficulty finding jobs and obtaining adequate incomes, but a majority of these groups were also seen as having at least “some” difficulty in this area, and a sizable minority had “a great deal” of difficulty. This likely reflects the heterogeneous nature of the South/Southwest Asian population – Indian and Pakistani immigrants with higher educations and Afghans and Turks with less schooling.

Overall, except for immigrants from Latin America, few immigrants were thought to have a great deal of difficulty gaining community acceptance, but all immigrant groups appeared to have at least “some” difficulty in this area. Next to those immigrants from Latin America where 48% of the groups were seen as having “a great deal” and an additional 45% had “some” difficulty, Asians were the most likely to be seen as having difficulty gaining acceptance (12% “a great deal”; 48% “some” difficulty).

Accessing healthcare was seen as posing “a great deal” of difficulty for more than 40% of the Latino groups that were rated; for less than 10% of all other groups was this “a great deal” of difficulty. Latinos were also three times as likely to be seen as having “a great deal” of difficulty in accessing social services as any other group.

Meeting children’s educational needs was somewhat more likely to present “a great deal” of difficulty for immigrants from Latin America and from East/Southeast Asia than for the other groups, but for the majority of all groups, it was rated as being “very little” on only “some” difficulty.

Accessing adult education was seen as representing “a great deal” or “some” difficulty for nearly 80% of the Latino groups, about half of the Eastern European and East/Southeast Asian immigrants, and few of the South/Southwest Asian and Western European immigrants.

Many rural communities have no public transportation facilities and many residents depend upon using their own vehicles to get from place-to-place. Accessing transportation was seen as posing “a great deal” of difficulty for nearly 60% of the Latin American groups, and over 40% of the Eastern Europeans, compared to only about a fourth of the Asians and an even smaller percentage of the Western European immigrants.

There was little indication that immigrants had difficulty maintaining their ethnic customs in their new homes, although both Asian groups were viewed as having “some” or “a great deal” of difficulty observing their religious practices.

## **Access to and Use of ESL Services**

The overwhelming perception that negotiating language differences was the greatest challenge facing most immigrants and the most important factor in fostering their adaption to and integration into their new communities, suggests that there is a critical need for ESL instruction in rural communities where immigrants have settled. Although nearly all of the areas studied had some ESL program in place, the nature of these programs varied widely. When asked whether the ESL programs available in their counties served most of the immigrants who needed to learn English, informants were pessimistic about meeting the needs of these residents. This pessimism was most marked in regard to the needs of Latin American immigrants where more than seven

out of ten of these groups were seen as being inadequately served. More than 60% of the South/Southwest Asian groups were also seen as needing additional services, and half or more of the remaining groups needed additional assistance in learning English.

For all immigrant groups, the most frequently mentioned barriers to enrolling in ESL classes were as follows:

- the need to meet daily needs (e.g., lack of time due to working more than one job or being too tired from work);
- the inability to access classes (e.g., class times conflicted with work schedules, class locations were too far from the immigrants' homes, and immigrants did not know about ESL class offerings);
- lack of transportation (rural counties lack adequate bus systems, and many immigrants could not afford to buy cars);
- the geographically dispersed nature of rural living; and
- lack of motivation (mainly attributed to the amount of energy required just to survive).

Some perceptions of barriers were particular to specific ethnic groups:

- Eastern Europeans were perceived as being uncomfortable going beyond their community, and tended to use ESL services only until their immediate needs were met.
- East and Southeast Asian immigrants were described as experiencing time constraints due to heavy work schedules, having strong networks in place so that they did not need to acquire English language skills, feeling fear and discomfort when interacting with the mainstream community, and moving frequently for their work.
- Perceived barriers for Latin American immigrants were fear of deportation and raids by Immigration and Naturalization Service (several programs reported a sharp drop in Latino ESL enrollment after INS raids of local employers), a migratory lifestyle due to employment, and their ability to rely on proficient English speakers within their social networks.
- Barriers for African immigrants were low literacy skills and visible cultural, ethnic, and racial differences (such as social differences, schooling experiences, and physical appearance) that made it uncomfortable to move beyond the boundaries of their community.
- For Western Europeans and university-educated South and Southwest Asians the major barrier was their ability to rely on more proficient English speakers in their ethnic group. This meant that they did not necessarily have to extend beyond their immigrant community.
- Frequently mentioned barriers for South and Southwest Asian immigrants were fear of racism and cultural barriers. Informants stated that some women faced distinctive barriers such as limited opportunities to move beyond the confines of their home.

Interestingly, a few respondents cited gender roles as a deterrent to enrolling in ESL classes for other immigrant groups. For instance, some respondents believed that education was not considered important for Korean women, whereas more Latina women than men attend ESL classes, and ESL participation is not perceived as a particularly male attribute. Almost all participants stated that Latina women worked as much as men, so their higher rates of ESL participation could not be attributed to employment status.



Although access to ESL classes was often difficult for adults, informants believed that local schools provided ESL or other support services for children of immigrants. Almost all reported that such services were available to immigrant children, regardless of their ethnicity.

### **Inter-group Interaction In and Outside of ESL Classes**

ESL classes often provide a way for immigrants to interact with people outside their ethnic and linguistic group. Our informants generally believed that ESL classes provided a good social outlet and enabled students to move beyond their cultural groups and form supportive relationships. When asked to describe the extent to which specific immigrant groups interacted and become friends with people in their ESL classes who did not speak their language, most indicated that the various groups interacted “a great deal” or “some.” Latino and Western European immigrants were perceived as the most willing to engage with others, while South/Southwest Asians were seen as the least likely to do so. (Informants whose programs only offered only one-on-one tutoring or whose ESL classes served one language group did not answer this question or the following question.)

Although immigrants’ classroom relationships were generally described as friendly, most informants did not believe that these relationships went beyond the classroom, and those that did were primarily within the same immigrant group. Lack of time and rural location were seen as the main reasons that relationships did not transcend the classroom. Those relationships that did go beyond the program tended to be more practical than social—for example, giving each other rides or exchanging information (e.g., helping each other accessing social services, fixing computers). However, students were rarely perceived as unfriendly; rather their social interactions were shaped by lack of time, discomfort, or the primacy of other strong social networks

### **Availability of Other Social Services**

Besides ESL classes, few counties offered social services for immigrants. Existing services mainly included publicly funded migrant programs or support from churches. In one county with a large Latino population, two organizations specifically assisted Latin American immigrants. Similarly, few counties provided services for specific immigrant groups (e.g., mutual aid associations). These services included church support for Eastern Europeans through immigrant sponsorship programs, services for Latin American immigrants (e.g., Migrant Aid programs and local church support), or cultural clubs. Existing programs were primarily geared toward Spanish speakers (e.g., a Latino Task Force, a Spanish language newspaper, a center that works with Latin American immigrants, a Hispanic-American Center). Additionally, several respondents remarked that some federally-funded institutions (e.g., schools, courts, hospitals, welfare offices) did not fulfill their legal obligation to “provide services in the language that the person understands” (e.g., provide interpreters for non-English speaking hospital patients).

The following list summarizes some of the available social services for immigrants (not all services were available in all counties, nor did each organization provide all services).

- Social service agencies provided ESL classes or tutoring, job, housing, legal, and health care assistance, translators, and/or community education. They relied on a combination of federal, state, and local funding, including local fundraisers.
- Public schools provided ESL classes and family nights.
- Libraries provided tutoring.
- Vocational technology schools provided ESL or ABE classes.
- Volunteer organizations of local residents, churches, or religious groups provided transportation, housing assistance, material assistance (clothing, household items), and food pantries.
- Universities provided cultural programs. These targeted the general non-immigrant population but would, at times, draw on immigrants as resources (e.g., speakers, dancers).

### **Immigrant Use of Social Services**

All but one informant said that social services were underused across immigrant groups. The primary services sought were as follows: ESL classes, citizenship classes, legal help, job training (both language and skills), and, to a lesser extent, housing and health services. Companies sometimes approached these organizations to enlist them in offering ESL classes to their immigrant workers.

According to our informants, work was the primary reason immigrants did not use social services: Many immigrants worked long hours at menial jobs (often more than one) to make ends meet, leaving little time or energy to attend classes. Some organizations served a large geographic region, making it difficult to reach immigrants. Other reasons included immigrants' lack of transportation, lack of knowledge that services were available, ability to rely on their own social networks, perception that services were not relevant to community integration, pride, discomfort asking for help, cultural restrictions for women, and illegal status (or perception that agencies are related to government surveillance such as the Immigration and Naturalization Service). Several respondents mentioned that once immigrants were able to find work or gain some stability they stopped accessing services, since they perceived them as less relevant. For example, once an immigrant learned basic English, further English classes were unnecessary. Immigrants who had good jobs or high levels of education did not use the services; however, informants noted that their wives did access these services for both linguistic and social reasons.

### ***Community Integration***

Although most immigrants choose to retain some important elements of their heritages, integration into their new surroundings is important to fostering their well-being and success. Such integration can also serve to strengthen the larger community by introducing diversity, skills, and new perspectives. Our informants offered insights concerning the challenges to integration faced by various immigrant groups and described ways in which communities in their counties assisted immigrant integration. In addition, informants were asked to rate the extent to which they believed immigrant groups were integrated into their communities.

### ***Challenges in Community Integration***

Respondents reported the following challenges immigrants encountered in adjusting to life in their rural Pennsylvania communities:

- East and Southeast Asian immigrants had difficulty adjusting due to extremely different cultural background (including family structure and gender differences), lack of language skills, isolated and rural nature of counties (lack of immigrant network, dispersed population, availability of ethnic resources, contrast to urban origins), lack of transportation, long work hours, and small social networks (Koreans).
- Africans experienced challenges due to differences in physical appearance (both race and dress), and lack of formal education.
- Latin American immigrants faced economic and language challenges. The antagonism and political climate regarding immigration issues also isolated this immigrant group. Other challenges included counties' rural nature, lack of transportation, and difficulty negotiating public systems (e.g., health care, school system).
- Western Europeans had difficulty due to the counties' rural nature.
- Eastern Europeans encountered differences in family structure and culture. Respondents also stated that this group tended to be insular and more resistant to fitting into local communities. Other perceived challenges were the immigrants' economic situation, language, lack of transportation, and counties' rural nature.
- Established Eastern and Western European groups appeared to be fairly well-adjusted, but newer immigrants has some difficulty in adjusting to American customs.
- Indians and Pakistanis were seen to have few barriers since their education and economic status place them on similar footing as non-immigrants.
- Other Southwest Asians' challenges were due to cultural differences, difficulty finding work, living in poor housing, and a general lack of acceptance by local communities.

### **Aids to Integration**

The most commonly mentioned factors that helped immigrants of all ethnicities become integrated into their local community included living in town (versus out in the country in a more isolated area), having children in school, knowing what services are available, having higher levels of education and English language ability, professional job status, and having a social network. Religious communities were also seen as aids to integration. Several respondents mentioned that meeting with local tutors provided an entrance into the local community. Another factor was the acceptance of immigrant populations; respondents said that university towns had more cultural events and created a more welcoming community. Other aids pertained to specific immigrant groups:

- Many Eastern European families were sponsored by local churches that offered support and local community contacts. Two respondents also mentioned that individuals who had succeeded in school or work supported others and served as an example of what is possible.
- Some East and Southeast Asians' work involved serving the public in restaurants or nail salons, making them very visible in the community and forcing them to interact with non-immigrants, both in business negotiations and in welcoming people into their business.

Informants thought that their work ethic, values, and entrepreneurship were highly regarded by the local community, which helped people accept them. Furthermore, these immigrants came into the community with a job in place and did not need to seek other employment.

- South and Southwest Asian immigrants were perceived as having a fairly easy entrée into local communities since they were highly educated and had financial resources and “suburban values.” An exception was the Kurdish population, who respondents believed had few integration aids.
- Latin American immigrants were aided by the availability of bilingual services and a large, cohesive immigrant population that provided “survival” information such as how to access services and where to live.
- Western Europeans were seen as having an easier time integrating due to their longtime presence in the community, prior exposure to English, and similar values. Being a woman was not an asset to integration; they were perceived as being more isolated than men.

### Assessing Types of Integration

Informants were asked to indicate in the questionnaire whether each of the immigrant groups in their county was “very well integrated,” “somewhat integrated,” or “not well integrated” socially, residentially, occupationally, religiously, and overall. (A “don’t know” response was also provided.) They elaborated on these responses in the interviews.

**Social Integration.** Social integration referred to the extent to which immigrants were believed to interact with others outside their own linguistic or ethnic group. Paradoxically, the main aid to integration for all immigrant groups was also the main barrier: the presence of a social network of their own ethnicity. Although such a network may help and support them, informants believed it also encouraged them to stay within the boundaries of their own group. Other barriers were lack of English language skills and lack of time due to work and economic survival. This also applied to those who were financially secure, since their jobs and the negotiation of workplace tasks with limited language skills were believed to consume a lot of time. An additional barrier was lack of education; respondents believed that immigrants with a higher level of education were able to integrate more easily.

- For Southwest Asians and Latin Americans lack of welcome (including open hostility) was seen as preventing integration into the local community.
- For East and Southeast Asians and African groups the difference between their culture and appearance and that of other community residents was problematic.
- Western and Eastern Europeans and Indians and Pakistani from South Asia were perceived as having fewer barriers largely because of the belief that integration is easier if you look more like other community residents (either physically or economically).

Informant ratings of social integration echoed these observations. Latin American immigrants were seen as poorly integrated. Only one informant rated a Latino group as “very well” integrated socially, while 72% of the groups were seen as “not well” integrated, and an additional 24% were only “somewhat” integrated socially. East/Southeast immigrants fared only a little better with 40% rated as “not well” integrated, and 60% just “somewhat” socially integrated. Most South/Southwest Asians tended to be “somewhat” integrated socially, with just

9% of these groups rated as “very well,” and 18% rated “not well” integrated. A majority of the Eastern European groups were seen as “somewhat” integrated, with about half of the remaining ones rated as “very well” and half “not well” integrated. About half of the Western European immigrants were seen as “very well” integrated, half only “somewhat” so. Altogether, the social integration of all of these immigrant groups was viewed as extremely limited. With the exception of the Western Europeans, the percentage of “very well integrated” was never as great as 25%, and for Latino, Asian and African immigrants the percentage was less than 10%.

***Residential Integration.*** The extent to which immigrants were seen as interspersed throughout the community rather than segregated in the same area as others of their same nationality/ethnicity was referred to as residential integration. Informants identified no residential barriers for Western Europeans and South/Southwest Asians (except Kurdish immigrants). For the other groups the primary barriers to residential integration were affordability and availability of housing and the need to live close to work (also a transportation issue). Affordability dictated both where and how one lived. Many respondents noted that to afford housing South and Southeast Asians and Latin American immigrants lived together in family or social groups. Eastern Europeans were perceived as living in specific neighborhood areas. Residential integration was also impeded by living outside of town. In particular, farm workers, immigrant women who had married into rural American families (i.e., foreign brides), and church-sponsored families were seen as being extremely isolated. Aids to residential integration included access to assistance, better jobs, and increased income.

Latin American immigrants were by far the least likely to be seen as integrated residentially. Nearly half (48%) of the Latino groups described by our key informants were described as “not well” residentially integrated, while only 14% were “very well” integrated. One fourth of the East/Southeast immigrants were not well integrated residentially, suggesting the presence of separated clusters of East Asians in some rural communities; conversely, about the same number were very well integrated in other areas. The majority of South/Southwest Asian groups was “very well” integrated residentially, although a minority were not. There was considerable diversity in the residential integration of Eastern European immigrants – in some areas they were reported to be “very well” integrated, in others “not well.” Community differences, the specific nationalities involved, and the recency of migration may all have influenced the degree to which these groups were integrated residentially.

***Occupational Integration.*** Our informants believed all immigrant groups needed English language skills and education to become occupationally integrated. They perceived that those with low language skills and levels of education fared worse than those with better language skills and/or higher educational attainment. Another perceived barrier was the economy of rural Pennsylvania, specifically, the lack of jobs. Furthermore, racism was mentioned as a barrier to obtaining better jobs, particularly for non-Western European immigrants. As one participant stated, “I have been doing this for years....I have personally sent so many wonderful applicants to so many positions and the end of story was they were not getting jobs, and the only thing that I could see was because they look different....At the end of the day, it happened way too many times for me to ever say it was not anything but a racist decision.”

Western Europeans and highly educated South and Southwest Asian immigrants (doctors and professors) were seen as being well integrated occupationally. Many Western European immigrants were established in the community, whereas newly arrived Western European immigrants and those who were not fluent in English relied on their social networks to integrate them into the workforce.

Occupational integration or the extent to which members of an immigrant group held jobs similar to other residents with similar education and work experience was evaluated for the various immigrant groups in their counties by our key informants. Latinos and East/Southeast Asians were overwhelmingly regarded as “not well” or only “somewhat” integrated in regard to their occupations. While this lack of integration may reflect outright discrimination (as suggested above) other factors such as reliance on co-ethnic employment contacts can also contribute to lack of integration. Eastern European and South/Southwest Asian immigrants were more likely to be occupationally integrated, but even in these groups, half or more were at least “somewhat” lacking in occupational integration.

**Religious Integration.** Rural communities in Pennsylvania often lack a “critical mass” of persons to form and sustain churches and other houses of worship for immigrants with various religious beliefs and practices. As noted previously, churches are often the sponsors bringing new immigrants to rural communities, and, to the extent that this occurs, one might expect that the new residents would choose to attend their host’s house of worship. However for immigrants whose beliefs differ from those of extant community residents, choices are limited. Indeed, the most frequently mentioned barrier to religious integration was the lack of places of worship for non-Christians or for denominations not otherwise represented in the community. Language can also be a barrier. Informants in 8 counties knew of some bilingual Christian church services for Spanish speakers (e.g., Catholic mass). Several counties also had Greek and/or Russian Orthodox churches. However, in most cases these groups would either need to travel to a metropolitan area or gather in a home in order to worship. Of all the types of integration, ESL professionals were the least likely to know about immigrants’ religious integration. In general, they believed such integration was limited.

**Overall Integration.** Finally, informants were asked: “Overall, considering all things together, how well integrated do you believe the adult immigrants from this group are into the communities in which they live (very well integrated; somewhat integrated, not well integrated, don’t know). Immigrants from Latin America were by far the least likely to be viewed as being integrated into their rural communities. Only one respondent reported that Latino immigrants were “very well” integrated into the community; of the remaining 28 evaluations, 16 reported that they were “not well” integrated, while 12 indicated they were “somewhat.” East and Southeast Asian immigrants were also unlikely to be seen as “very well” integrated, with only a single informant reporting that response. However, these immigrants were more likely to be described as “somewhat” (13 responses) rather than “not well” integrated (5 responses). Two informants reported that South/Southwest Asian immigrants were “very well” integrated; both were from India. Two also indicated that 2 such groups were “not well” integrated, and one of these was from the Middle East. The remainder (7 responses) were “somewhat” integrated.

Most of those from Eastern Europe were “somewhat” integrated, with the number of “very well” responses (5) slightly greater than the number of “not well” answers (4). Western Europeans were the most likely to be “very well” integrated, although 3 out of 8 responses indicated they were only “somewhat” integrated.

## **Conclusions**

### **Summary**

The above analysis suggests that immigrants who settle in rural areas in Pennsylvania face a myriad of obstacles to becoming full members and equal citizens in their communities. Acceptance and integration are by no means instantaneous, and may take many years to accomplish. It is noteworthy that the majority of all of the immigrant groups, except those from Western Europe, were characterized as “not well” or only “somewhat” integrated into their local communities. Even many Western European immigrant groups who had lived in Pennsylvania for a decade or more were characterized as only “somewhat” integrated.

However, integration of these immigrant populations into the fabric of their rural communities is important not only for the quality of life of the immigrants themselves, but also because such integration can enhance the well-being of the larger community. In the face of declining rural populations, the arrival of immigrant groups can contribute to community stability, increase the local tax base, provide needed labor force participants, expand entrepreneurial activities, bring new skills to the local area, and enrich the social and cultural diversity of the region (Jensen, 2006). The stereotype of all immigrants as uneducated, unskilled, and “looking for a handout” is patently false. Many have specialized educations, possess technical job skills, and hold professional credentials from their homelands. Still others are eager for opportunities to learn, develop their abilities, and improve their life-situations.

Unfortunately, our informants reported that local communities have sometimes been less than welcoming. New residents may be met with lack of understanding, distrust, and outright prejudice. Nor are the impediments to integration solely due to lack of local community acceptance. Some informants believed that immigrants may not be able to obtain membership in the larger society due to limited English skills, a focus on day-to-day survival (e.g., working multiple jobs), geographic isolation, and/or reliance on co-ethnic social networks for meeting social, cultural, and economic needs. Additionally, some perceived that specific immigrant groups are reluctant to learn English and do not actively seek integration into the broader community. A challenge for local leaders, public officials, social service providers, and educators is to improve lines of communication, combat stereotypes, and increase understanding so as to encourage the participation and integration of all citizens into the social, economic, and civic activities of the community. The state can also assist by increasing opportunities for and encouraging participation in programs designed to teach English to those with limited proficiency and providing other supporting activities to rural areas.

It is also important to note that immigrant groups differ markedly from one another in their needs, characteristics, and circumstances. If programs are to be directed to assist these new residents and facilitate their community integration, it is critical that these differences be acknowledged and understood.

The integration of immigrants from Latin America may be especially challenging. These were the least likely to be seen as integrated socially, residentially, and occupationally, and were believed to have the greatest difficulty obtaining sufficient income, adequate housing, healthcare, social services, transportation, and adult education. Media attention given to the large number of undocumented Latinos in the U.S. may have led community members to suspect that *all* Spanish speaking residents are “illegals” or that they at least support and foster the influx of other undocumented immigrants. This perception, combined with the view that these immigrants have little education, few job skills, and little interest in interacting with others outside their own ethnic groups, may contribute to lower levels of acceptance by the larger community. Perhaps partially in response to this apparent rejection, Latino immigrants (as well as those from Russia and East/Southeast Asia) were described as establishing their own social networks within which they maintained linguistic and cultural separation from the larger society. Moreover, although they were the most likely of all groups to be characterized as having “a great deal of difficulty” in negotiating language differences, they were also seen as the most likely to feel that learning English was not very important. Combined, these perceived characteristics likely contributed to a perception that these immigrants are rejecting of the local culture and do not “want” to be part of the overall community, while at the same time they may seek to utilize local (often tax-supported) services and facilities. In such situations, tensions between these immigrants and other local residents may run high.

It is important to note that some popular perceptions of Latino immigrants (and other immigrant groups) are not supported by research on immigration. For example, a study of Mexican immigrants in Los Angeles County (Marcelli & Heer, 1998) found that legal immigrants were as or less likely than U.S.-born citizens to use cash and in-kind welfare benefits—and unauthorized Mexican immigrants were even less likely than other immigrant groups and U.S.-born citizens to use such benefits. The 1996 Welfare Reform policies significantly decreased immigrants’ welfare usage. For example, “By 1999, low-income legal immigrant families with children had lower use rates for TANF [cash assistance] and food stamps than their low-income citizen counterparts” (Fix & Passel, 2002, p. 2). Additionally, a nationwide survey of foreign- and U.S.-born Latinos (Pew Hispanic Center, 2006) found that “A clear majority... (57%) believe that immigrants have to speak English to be a part of American society while a significant minority (41%) says that they do not. Latino immigrants are slightly more likely (57%) to say that immigrants have to learn English than native-born Latinos (52%). The view that immigrants have to learn English is held by a majority of Latinos regardless of how much money they make or their level of education.”

All of the other immigrant groups tended also to be connected with social networks consisting of others from similar ethnic, national, or religious backgrounds. However, those from Eastern and Western Europe were far more likely than Latino immigrants to be seen as integrated residentially, occupationally, and religiously and this likely contributed substantially to their greater overall and social integration. Moreover, these groups did not carry the stigma of being perceived as “illegal” immigrants; they “looked” more like the local inhabitants, and were more likely to be perceived as better educated and with more job skills. Western European immigrants had the added advantage of being in the community longer (most had arrived a decade or more earlier) and even for those who came more recently, their intra-ethnic associations were more likely to have greater social connectivity due to longevity in the area.



Language barriers appeared to be the greatest impediment to their integration. However, both Eastern and Western Europeans were perceived as more likely than Latinos to feel that learning English was “very important,” thus suggesting that people believed these European groups were more likely to desire and seek membership in the local community.

Immigrants, from East/Southeast Asia (including those from China, Japan, Korea, Cambodia, Indonesia, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam) were, overall, perceived as less well integrated into the larger community socially, residentially, occupationally, and religiously than any other groups except the Latinos. These Asian groups, however overwhelmingly were seen as feeling that learning English was very important, and were somewhat less likely than Latinos to be perceived as having a great deal of difficulty negotiating language differences. Overall, they were seen as somewhat better educated and willing to work hard to achieve their goals. Their children were viewed as high achievers in school. Occupationally, the most highly educated were doctors, scientists, and college faculty members, while others were seen as entrepreneurs, operating restaurants, and stores. Possibly because of their perceived emphasis on work and achievement they tended to be seen as welcomed or at least accepted in their communities.

Immigrants from South/Southwest Asia consisted of Indians and Pakistanis and a few from Afghanistan and Turkey. The latter two groups were not well represented in our data, but a number of respondents reported the presence of the former. These immigrants were described as having higher educations, often being employed as professionals, and placing a great deal of importance on knowing English and on their children’s school performance. They tended to be welcomed into the community by local residents, and, despite their racial/physical differences, they were described as largely “very well” integrated occupationally, and at least somewhat integrated residentially and socially. They were the least likely of all of the immigrant groups surveyed to have difficulty finding employment, obtaining sufficient income and adequate housing, and accessing healthcare and other community services, but the most likely to have difficulty maintaining ethnic customs and observing religious practices.

## Limitations

A limitation of this study is that our analysis was based on the perceptions of selected ESL administrators or teachers concerning the nature of some of the immigrant groups in 22 rural counties in the state. The number of data points is small, and information from additional locales may suggest alternative findings and/or interpretations. In addition, we asked these key informants to share their *perceptions* of immigrants’ characteristics, needs, and integration. Although ESL professionals would be expected to be excellent key informants concerning these questions, their views may nevertheless have been incomplete or inaccurate. Certainly a more complete understanding of rural immigrants’ attributes and the issues most important to them would best be determined by asking the immigrants themselves. Similarly, questions concerning community acceptance and the extent to which residents view the various groups as part of the local social structure would better be addressed by asking the residents themselves. However, the views of these key informants give a general picture of immigrants in these areas and provide background for later exploration of the ideas suggested in the current summary.

It is also important to recognize that our goal was to paint a general picture of immigrant groups in selected counties in rural Pennsylvania. As a result, we did not distinguish among

specific nationalities or ethnic groups within the broad categories chosen for analysis. However, it is likely that the various groups defined here were not homogeneous. Thus, for example, the Latin American category included immigrants from Mexico, South America, Central America, and the Caribbean islands. These groups are likely to differ in their characteristics, goals, and reasons for moving to the U.S. and to rural Pennsylvania, as well as in their needs and integration. Similarly, the Asian and European groups include important differences across nationality and ethnicity. Clearly, additional research on these issues is needed.

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