

# The Foreign-Born Population in the United States: 2003

Issued August 2004

## Population Characteristics

P20-551

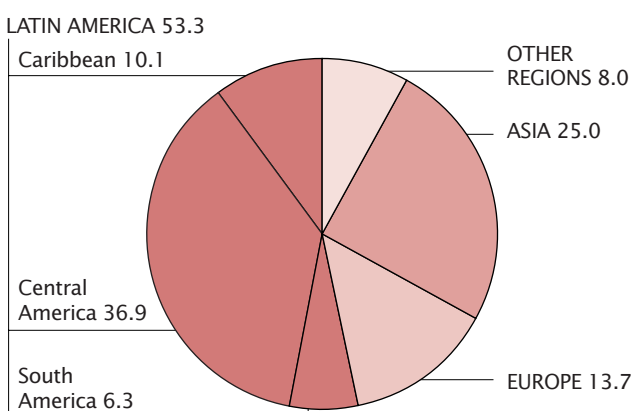
## Current Population Reports

By  
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This report describes the foreign-born population in the United States in 2003. It provides a profile of demographic and socio-economic characteristics, such as region of birth, geographic distribution in the United States, age, educational attainment, earnings, and poverty status. These characteristics are compared with those of the native population and, because the foreign born are a heterogeneous group, variability within the foreign-born population is also discussed. The findings are based on data collected by the Census Bureau in the Current Population Survey (CPS).<sup>1</sup>

Figure 1.  
**Foreign Born by World Region of Birth: 2003**

(In percent)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2003 Annual Social and Economic Supplement.

The foreign born are those who were not U.S. citizens at birth. Natives are those who were born in one of the following areas — the United States, Puerto Rico, Guam, American Samoa, the U.S. Virgin Islands, or the Northern Mariana Islands — or were born abroad of at least one parent who was a U.S. citizen.

### Population Size and Composition

In March 2003, the civilian noninstitutionalized population in the United States

<sup>1</sup> The data in this report are from the Annual Social and Economic Supplement (ASEC) to the 2003 Current Population Survey. The population represented (the population universe) is the civilian noninstitutionalized population living in the United States. See Source of the Data at the end of this report for further details.

included 33.5 million foreign born, representing 11.7 percent of the U.S. population.<sup>2</sup> Among the foreign born, 53.3 percent were born in Latin America, 25.0 percent in Asia, 13.7 percent in Europe, and the remaining 8.0 percent in

<sup>2</sup> The estimates in this report are based on responses from a sample of the population. As with all surveys, estimates may vary from the actual values because of sampling variation or other factors. All comparisons made in this report have undergone statistical testing and are significant at the 90-percent confidence level unless otherwise noted. For information about CPS estimates of the foreign-born population and how they differ from census numbers, see A. Dianne Schmidley, U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Reports, Series P23-206, *Profile of the Foreign-Born Population in the United States: 2000*, Appendix B, Source and Accuracy of the Estimates, and Appendix C, Comparison of Population Universes. See also, Source of the Data at the end of this report.

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other regions of the world.<sup>3</sup> The foreign-born population from Central America (including Mexico) accounted for more than two-thirds of the foreign born from Latin America and more than one-third of the total foreign born (Figure 1).

### Geographic Distribution

In 2003, 11.3 percent of the foreign-born population lived in the Midwest, 22.2 percent in the Northeast, 29.2 percent in the South, and 37.3 percent in the West. In contrast, among the native population, 24.1 percent lived in the Midwest, 18.5 percent in the Northeast, 36.5 percent in the South, and 21.0 percent in the West (Figure 2).<sup>4</sup>

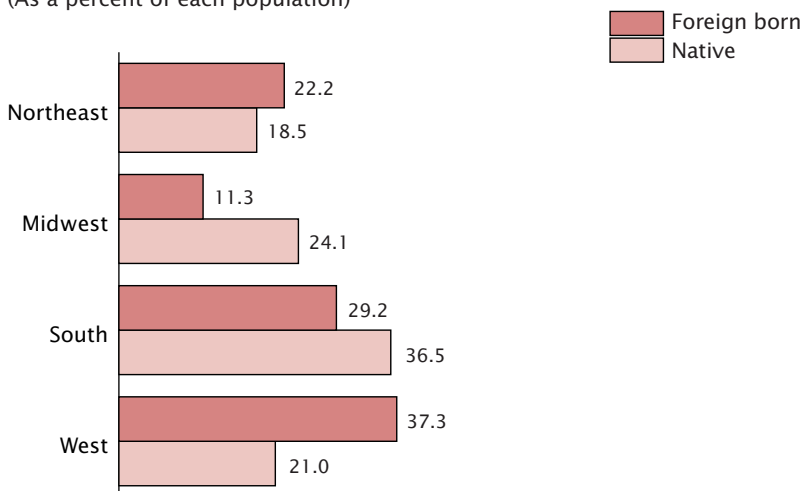
The foreign born from both Latin America and Asia were more likely to live in the West (38.6 percent and 44.5 percent, respectively) than in any other region of the United States. The foreign born from Central America were concentrated in the West (52.7 percent) and the

<sup>3</sup> The world regions used in this report — Europe, Asia, Latin America, and Other Regions — are based upon those defined by the United Nations. For this report, entries in the Other Regions category have been collated from the world regions Northern America, Africa, and Oceania, while the Latin America category has been divided into the sub-regions Central America (including Mexico), South America, and the Caribbean. For more information, see United Nations, 1996. *1995 Demographic Yearbook*. Department for Economic and Social Information and Policy Analysis, Statistics Division. New York, NY, pp. 30-31.

<sup>4</sup> The Census Bureau categorizes the 50 U.S. states and the District of Columbia into four geographic regions. The Northeast Region comprises nine states (Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Vermont); the Midwest Region comprises twelve states (Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, and Wisconsin); the West Region comprises thirteen states (Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming); and the South Region comprises sixteen states (Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia) and the District of Columbia.

Figure 2.  
**Population by Region of Residence and Nativity: 2003**

(As a percent of each population)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2003 Annual Social and Economic Supplement.

Figure 3.  
**Population by Age Group and Nativity: 2003**

(As a percent of each population)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2003 Annual Social and Economic Supplement.

South (30.8 percent). In comparison, the Latin American foreign born from the Caribbean and from South America were concentrated in the Northeast (50.9 percent and 44.4 percent, respectively) and the South (44.3 percent and 38.6 percent, respectively).

### Areas of Residence

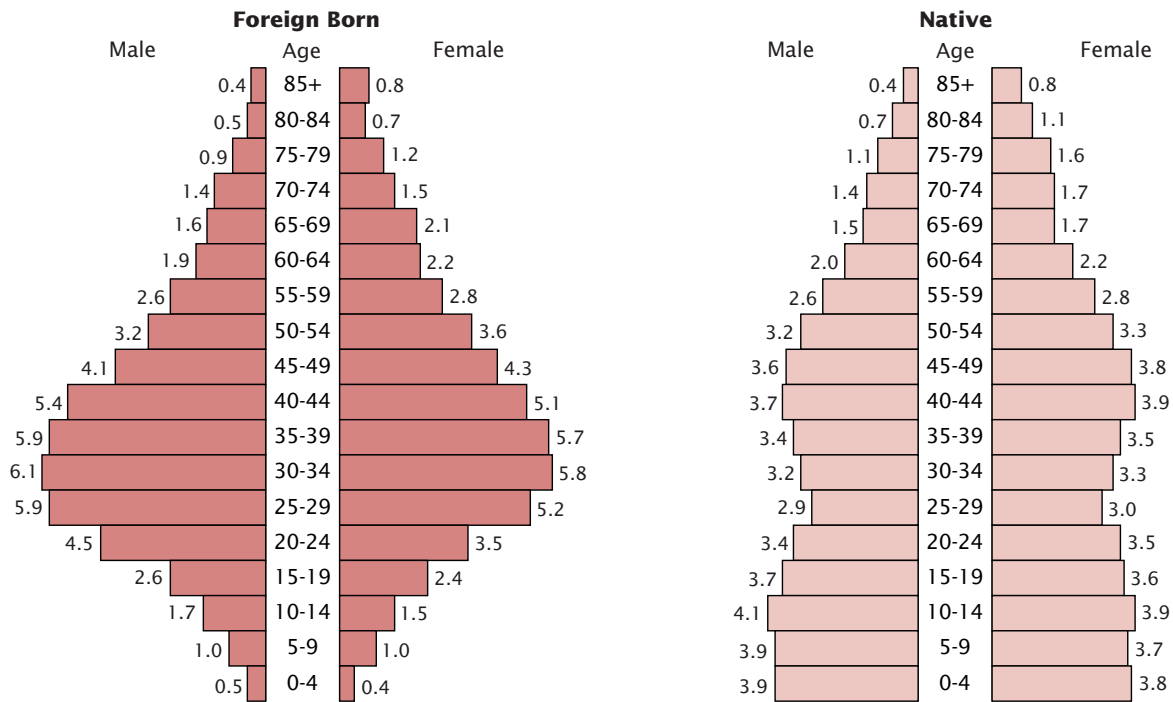
More than two-fifths of the foreign born lived in a central city in a

metropolitan area (44.4 percent), compared with slightly more than one-quarter of the native population (26.9 percent). The proportions of the foreign-born and native populations living outside central cities but within a metropolitan area differed slightly (50.3 percent and 52.9 percent, respectively). The percentage of the foreign born living in nonmetropolitan areas (5.3 percent) was much smaller

Figure 4.

**Native and Foreign-Born Populations by Age and Sex: 2003**

(In percent)<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup>Each bar represents the percent of the foreign-born (native) population who were within the specified age group and of the specified sex. Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2003 Annual Social and Economic Supplement.

than the percentage of natives (20.2 percent).

**Age**

In 2003, 80.1 percent of the foreign born were 18 to 64 years of age, whereas 60.0 percent of natives were in this age group (Figure 3). More specifically, 45.1 percent of the foreign born, but 27.0 percent of the native population were aged 25 to 44. Among the foreign born, 24.7 percent were 45 to 64 years old, compared with 23.5 percent of natives (Figure 4).

The proportion of the foreign born that was aged 65 and over differed slightly from that of the native population (11.1 percent compared

with 12.1 percent). In contrast, 8.9 percent of the foreign born, but 27.8 percent of the native population were less than 18 years of age. The small proportion of foreign born in the youngest age group occurred because most of the children of foreign-born parents were born in the United States and thus are natives.

**Year of Entry**

Among the foreign born in 2003, 13.6 percent entered the United States since 2000, 36.6 percent came in the 1990s, 24.0 percent came in the 1980s, 13.7 percent came in the 1970s, and the remaining 12.2 percent arrived before

1970.<sup>5</sup> Among those who arrived before 1970, 80.9 percent had obtained citizenship by 2003. Of those who entered from 1970 to 1979, 69.6 percent had obtained citizenship by 2003, compared with 48.3 percent of those who entered from 1980 to 1989 and 14.7 percent of those who entered in 1990 or later (Figure 5).<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> The proportion of foreign-born people who entered the U.S. since 2000 is not statistically different from the proportion of those who entered between 1970 and 1979.

<sup>6</sup> Generally, at least 5 years of residence is required for U.S. citizenship, so rates for the more recently arrived foreign born will almost always be lower. For more information, see *Profile of the Foreign-Born Population in the United States: 2000*, Section 7, "Citizenship Status."

## Family Household Size

In 2003, 25.0 percent of family households with a foreign-born householder included five or more people.<sup>7</sup> In contrast, only 12.5 percent of family households with a native householder were this large. Among foreign-born family households, the proportion with five or more people varied from 39.3 percent when the householder was from Central America to 9.8 percent when the householder was from Europe (Figure 6).

Among the population 15 years and older, the foreign born were more likely than natives to be currently married (57.2 percent compared with 52.2 percent).<sup>8</sup> Among the foreign born, a larger proportion of naturalized citizens than noncitizens were married (66.3 percent compared with 57.5 percent).<sup>9</sup>

## Educational Attainment

The foreign born aged 25 and over were less likely to have graduated from high school than natives the same age (67.2 percent and 87.5 percent, respectively). Foreign-born naturalized citizens were more likely to have graduated from high school than noncitizens (77.3 percent and 59.5 percent, respectively). More than one-fifth of the foreign born had less than a ninth-grade education (21.5 percent), a higher proportion than that of the native population (4.1 percent). The percentage of the foreign born with a bachelor's degree or more education

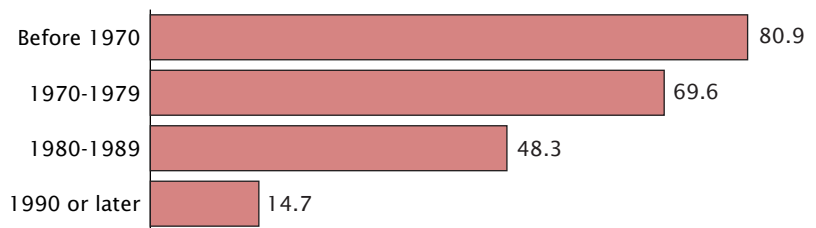
<sup>7</sup> Family households consist of two or more people, at least one of whom is related to the householder (the person who owns or rents the housing unit) by birth, marriage, or adoption. Foreign-born households have a foreign-born householder.

<sup>8</sup> Includes cases in which the spouse is absent, but excludes those who are separated. Also, marital status data are for those aged 15 and over.

<sup>9</sup> The percentage of currently married noncitizens is not statistically different from the percentage of currently married total foreign-born people (57.5 percent and 57.2 percent, respectively).

Figure 5.  
**U.S. Citizenship of the Foreign-Born Population by Year of Entry: 2003**

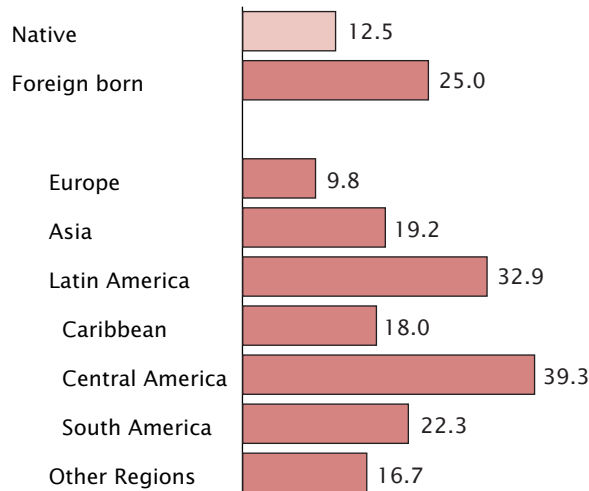
(In percent)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2003 Annual Social and Economic Supplement.

Figure 6.  
**Family Households with Five or More People by Nativity and by World Region of Birth: 2003**

(In percent)<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup>Each bar represents the percent of family households, whose householder was born in the specified area, that consisted of five or more people.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2003 Annual Social and Economic Supplement.

(27.3 percent) was not statistically different from that of the native population (27.2 percent, Figure 7).

The highest percentages of high school graduates among the foreign born were from Asia, Europe, and Other Regions (87.4 percent, 84.9 percent, and 83.5 percent, respectively).<sup>10</sup>

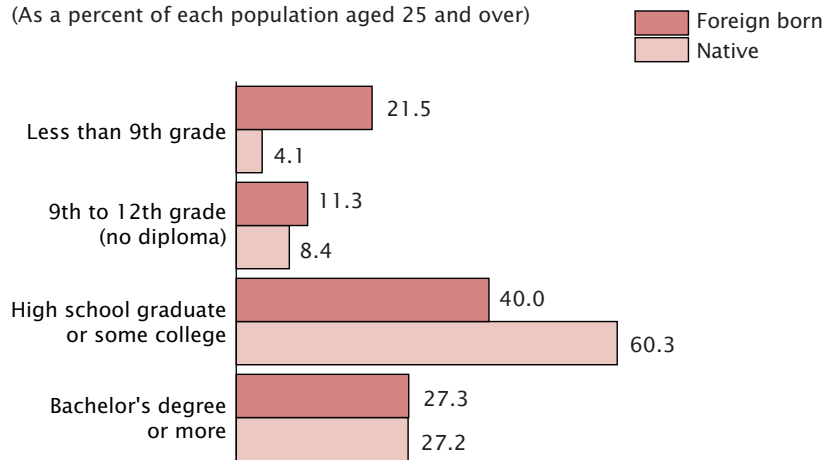
<sup>10</sup> The proportion of high school graduates among the foreign born from Europe (84.9 percent) was not statistically different from that of the foreign born from Other Regions (83.5 percent).

In sharp contrast, the percentage of high school graduates from Latin America was much lower (49.1 percent). Among the foreign born from Latin America, those from South America were the most likely to have graduated from high school (79.3 percent), and those from Central America were the least likely (37.7 percent), as shown in Figure 8. The proportion that had attained a bachelor's degree or more ranged from

Figure 7.

**Population by Educational Attainment and Nativity: 2003**

(As a percent of each population aged 25 and over)

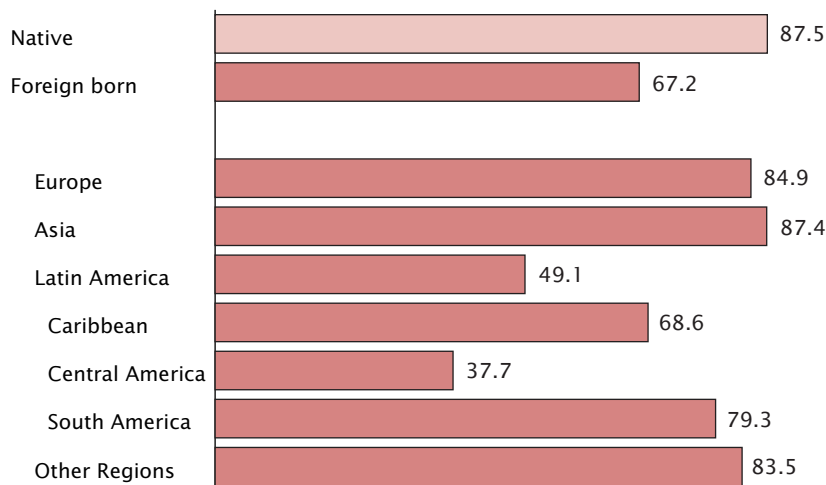


Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2003 Annual Social and Economic Supplement.

Figure 8.

**Population with High School Education or More by Nativity and by World Region of Birth: 2003**

(In percent)<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup>Each bar represents the percent of individuals aged 25 and over, who were born in the specified area, who have at least a high school education.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2003 Annual Social and Economic Supplement.

50.0 percent for those from Asia to 11.6 percent for those from Latin America.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> The proportion of the foreign born from Europe who had acquired a bachelor's degree or more education (35.4 percent) was not statistically different from that of the foreign born from Other Regions (37.2 percent).

**ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS**

**Occupation**

Foreign-born workers were more likely than native workers to be in service occupations (23.3 percent and 14.9 percent, respectively),

whereas native workers were more likely than foreign-born workers to be in management or professional specialty occupations (36.2 percent and 26.9 percent, respectively). Furthermore, occupations related to farming, fishing, and forestry were less common among foreign-born workers (1.6 percent) than any other type of occupation; this distribution also occurred for native workers (0.5 percent).<sup>12</sup>

Among the foreign born, the percentages of male workers were highest in management and professional occupations (25.1 percent) and in production, transportation, and material moving occupations (22.0 percent). Conversely, among foreign-born women, the percentages of workers were highest in service (30.1 percent), management and professional (29.5 percent), and sales and office (25.6 percent) occupations.<sup>13</sup>

The proportion of foreign-born workers in management and professional occupations was highest among those from Asia (47.0 percent) and lowest among those from Latin America (12.7 percent), particularly those from Central America (7.9 percent). Among the Central American foreign born, the proportions of workers were highest in service occupations and occupations in production, transportation, and material moving (29.7 percent and 26.7 percent, respectively).

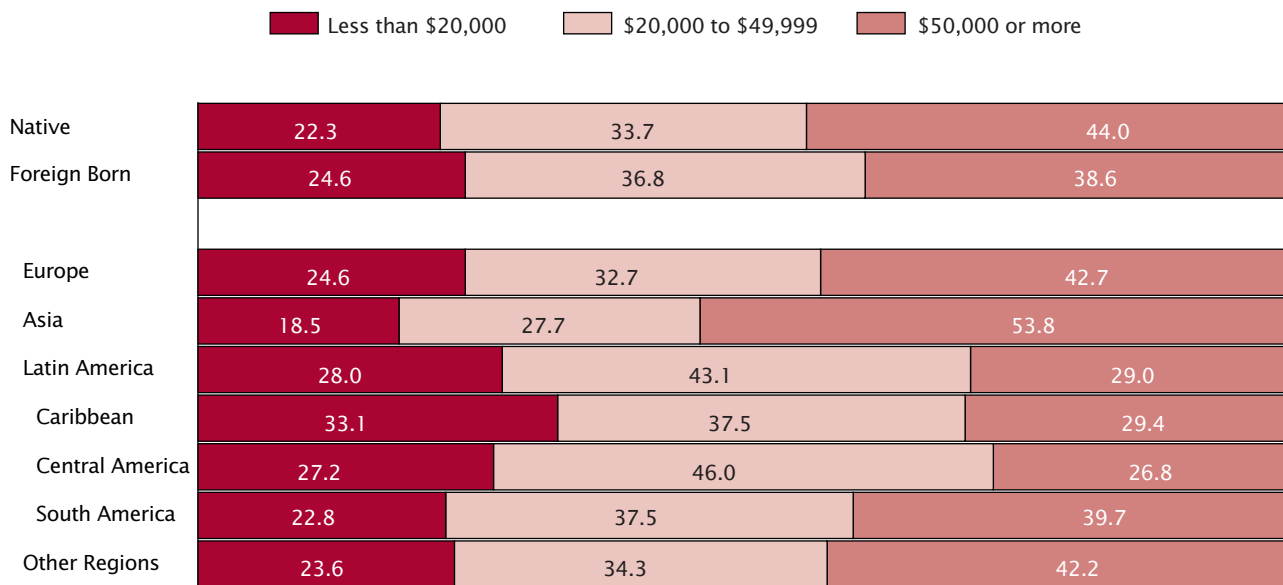
<sup>12</sup> Foreign-born workers were also more likely than native workers to hold occupations related to production, transportation, or material moving (18.4 percent and 12.1 percent, respectively) as well as construction, extraction, or maintenance (11.8 percent and 9.0 percent, respectively), whereas native workers were more likely than foreign-born workers to hold sales- or office-related occupations (27.4 percent and 18.0 percent, respectively).

<sup>13</sup> The proportion of foreign-born women working in service occupations (30.1 percent) was not statistically different from the proportion of foreign-born women working in management and professional occupations (29.5 percent).

Figure 9.

**Total Household Income by Nativity and by World Region of Birth: 2002**

(Percent distribution)<sup>1</sup>



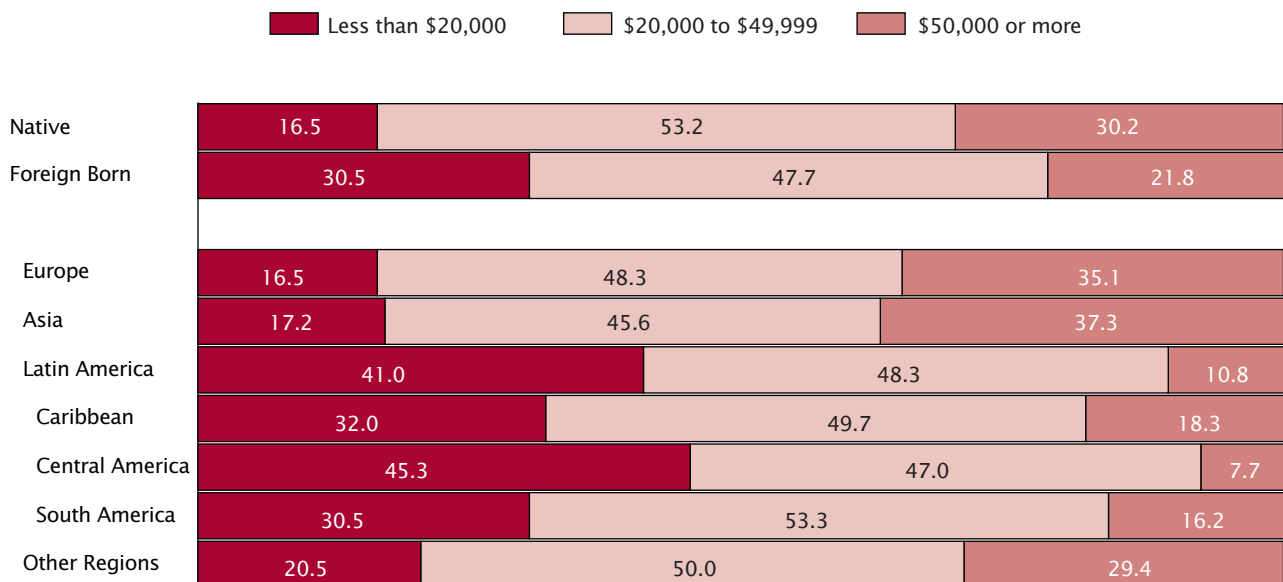
<sup>1</sup> Each section of the bar represents the percent of households whose householder was born in the specified area, whose total household income was within the specified range.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2003 Annual Social and Economic Supplement.

Figure 10.

**Individual Earnings of Year-Round Full-Time Workers by Nativity and by World Region of Birth: 2002**

(Percent distribution)

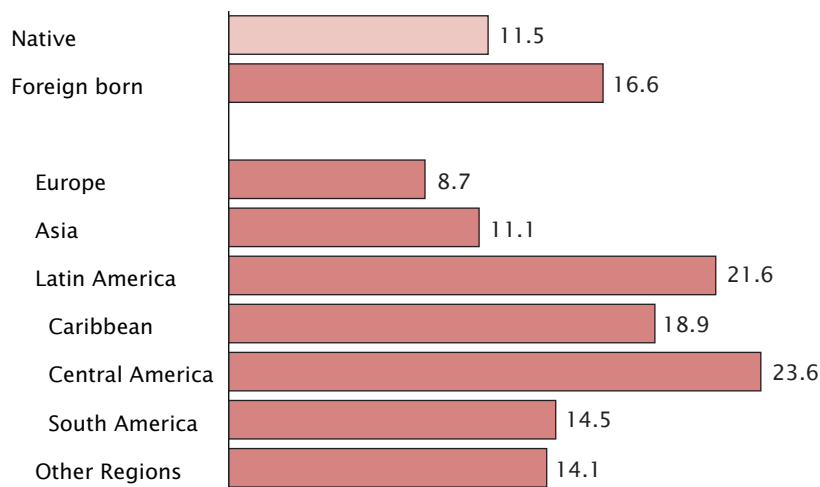


Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2003 Annual Social and Economic Supplement.

Figure 11.

**People Living Below the Poverty Level by Nativity and by World Region of Birth: 2002**

(In percent)<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup>Each bar represents the percent of individuals, who were born in the specified area, who were living in poverty.  
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2003 Annual Social and Economic Supplement.

**Income**

In 2002, 24.6 percent of foreign-born households had an income less than \$20,000, compared with 22.3 percent of native households.<sup>14</sup> Among foreign-born households, 33.1 percent with a Caribbean-born householder had an income less than \$20,000 in 2002; this proportion was much larger than that of households with a householder born in any other region.<sup>15</sup> Overall, a higher proportion of native households (44.0 percent) than of foreign-born households (38.6 percent) had an income of \$50,000 or more; however, households with an Asian-born householder were more likely than native households to have an income of \$50,000 or more

<sup>14</sup> Data on income, earnings, and poverty refer to the calendar year before the survey.

<sup>15</sup> These other proportions, which were not statistically different from one another, ranged from an estimated 27.2 percent of those from Central America to an estimated 18.5 percent of those from Asia.

(53.8 percent and 44.0 percent, respectively; Figure 9).<sup>16</sup>

**Earnings**

In 2002, 30.5 percent of foreign-born full-time, year-round workers and 16.5 percent of such native workers earned less than \$20,000. Among foreign-born workers, the proportions earning less than \$20,000 ranged from an estimated 41.0 percent of those from Latin America to an estimated 16.5 percent of those from Europe.<sup>17</sup> A higher proportion of native workers (30.2 percent) than

<sup>16</sup> The proportions of foreign-born households with householders from Central America or the Caribbean with an income \$50,000 or more (26.8 percent and 29.4 percent, respectively) were not statistically different from each other, nor were the proportions of native households (44.0 percent) and foreign-born households with householders from Europe, South America, or Other Regions (42.7 percent, 39.7 percent, and 42.2 percent, respectively).

<sup>17</sup> The proportions of foreign-born workers from Europe, Asia, and Other Regions earning less than \$20,000 were not statistically different from each other (16.5 percent, 17.2 percent, and 20.5 percent, respectively).

foreign-born workers (21.8 percent) earned \$50,000 or more (Figure 10). Among foreign-born workers, the proportions earning \$50,000 or more ranged from an estimated 37.3 percent for those from Asia to an estimated 10.8 percent for those from Latin America.<sup>18</sup>

**Poverty**

In 2002, 16.6 percent of the foreign born were living below the poverty level, compared with 11.5 percent of natives.<sup>19</sup> Foreign-born noncitizens were twice as likely to be poor as foreign-born naturalized citizens (20.7 percent and 10.0 percent, respectively), whose poverty rate was closer to that of the native population (11.5 percent). Among the foreign born, those from Latin America had the highest estimated poverty rate (21.6 percent) and those from Europe had the lowest (8.7 percent). Among the foreign born from Latin America, the poverty rate was lower for those from South America (14.5 percent) and the Caribbean (18.9 percent) than for those from Central America (23.6 percent, Figure 11).<sup>20</sup>

**Unemployment**

In 2003, 7.5 percent of the foreign born in the civilian labor force were unemployed, compared with

<sup>18</sup> The percentages from Asia (37.3 percent) and Europe (35.1 percent) were not statistically different, nor were the percentages from Europe (35.1 percent) and Other Regions (29.4 percent).

<sup>19</sup> Poverty status is based on a set of money income thresholds that vary by family size and composition (Bernadette D. Proctor and Joseph Dalaker, 2003. *Poverty in the United States 2002*, U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Reports, P60-222).

<sup>20</sup> The poverty rate of the foreign born from the Caribbean (18.9 percent) was not statistically different from the poverty rates of either the total foreign born or those from Latin America (16.6 percent and 21.6 percent, respectively). Also, the poverty rate of the foreign born from South America (14.5 percent) was not statistically different from the poverty rate of the total foreign born (16.6 percent).

6.2 percent of natives.<sup>21</sup>

Unemployment rates were not different between foreign-born men (7.2 percent) and native men (6.9 percent), but they differed between foreign-born women (7.9 percent) and native women (5.5 percent).<sup>22</sup>

### Source of the Data

The population represented (the population universe) in the Annual Social and Economic Supplement to the 2003 Current Population Survey is the civilian noninstitutionalized population living in the United States. Members of the Armed Forces living off post or with their families on post are included if there is at least one civilian adult living in the household. The institutionalized population, which is excluded from the population universe, is composed primarily of the population in correctional institutions and nursing homes (91 percent of the 4.1 million institutionalized population in Census 2000). In Census 2000, 373,863 foreign born were living in group-quarters housing, which includes the institutionalized population. Most of the data from the ASEC were collected in March (with some data collected in February and April), and the data were controlled to independent

<sup>21</sup> Labor force data shown in this report reflect characteristics of the civilian noninstitutionalized population aged 16 and over for March 2003. Although the official unemployment rates are released by the Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), the data in this report are useful for comparative purposes between the native and foreign-born populations. For more information about the methodological practices of the BLS, see *Profile of the Foreign-Born Population in the United States: 2000*, Section 15, Labor Force Participation, footnote 1.

<sup>22</sup> The unemployment rates of foreign-born men and foreign-born women (7.2 percent and 7.9 percent, respectively) were not statistically different from each other or from the unemployment rate of the total foreign born (7.5 percent).

population estimates for March 2003. Additional information about the CPS, including the population covered in the survey can be found in (1) *Money Income in the United States: 2001*, U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Reports, P60-218, Appendix B. Sample Expansion and Introduction of Census 2000-Based Population Controls at <[www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov)>; and, (2) Current Population Survey: Design and Methodology, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics and U.S. Census Bureau, TP63RV at <[www.bls.census.gov/cps](http://www.bls.census.gov/cps)>.

### Accuracy of the Estimates

Statistics from surveys are subject to sampling and nonsampling error. All comparisons presented in this report have taken sampling error into account and are significant at the 90-percent confidence level. This means the 90-percent confidence interval for the difference between the estimates being compared does not include zero. Nonsampling errors in surveys may be attributed to a variety of sources, such as how the survey was designed, how respondents interpret questions, how able and willing respondents are to provide correct answers, and how accurately the answers are coded and classified. To minimize these errors, the Census Bureau employs quality control procedures in sample selection, the wording of questions, interviewing, coding, data processing, and data analysis.

The Current Population Survey weighting procedure uses ratio estimation whereby sample estimates are adjusted to independent estimates of the national population by age, race, sex, and Hispanic origin. This weighting partially corrects for bias due to undercoverage, but biases may still

be present when people who are missed by the survey differ from those interviewed in ways other than age, race, sex, and Hispanic origin. How this weighting procedure affects other variables in the survey is not known precisely. All of these considerations affect comparisons across different surveys or data sources.

For further information on statistical standards and the computation and use of standard errors, go to <[www.bls.census.gov/cps/ads/2003/S&A\\_03.pdf](http://www.bls.census.gov/cps/ads/2003/S&A_03.pdf)> or contact Jeffrey Stratton of the Census Bureau Demographic Statistical Methods Division on the Internet at <[dsmd.source.and.accuracy@census.gov](mailto:dsmd.source.and.accuracy@census.gov)>.

### More Information

Annual packages of 60 detailed data tables showing selected characteristics of the foreign-born population by nativity, citizenship status, year of entry into the United States, and region of birth are available on the Census Bureau's Web site <[www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov)> or at the telephone number provided below. If using the Web site, click on the "F" under "Subjects A-Z," then select "Foreign-Born Population Data." Locate tables by year. For example, under "Data Tables," choose 2003 Annual Data Tables. Supplemental packages containing over 400 tables based on ASEC data are available for 1997 and 2000. ASEC tables can also be downloaded in either PDF or spreadsheet format at <[www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/foreign/ppl-174.html](http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/foreign/ppl-174.html)>.

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