

The Older Foreign-Born Population in the United States: 2000

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Wan He



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This report was prepared by **Wan He**, Aging Studies Branch, International Programs Center, under the general direction of **Peter O. Way**, Chief, International Programs Center, Population Division, U.S. Census Bureau. **John F. Long**, Chief, Population Division, provided overall direction. Additional direction was provided by **Victoria A. Velkoff**, Chief, Aging Studies Branch. Thanks are extended to **Campbell J. Gibson**, for his helpful comments. Within the Aging Studies Branch, **Valerie Lawson** assisted with graph production and general report preparation. We also gratefully acknowledge **Dianne A. Schmidley** and **Nolan J. Malone's** generous support to this report by providing data programming and comments on earlier drafts.

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For further information on the older foreign born, contact:

Wan He
Aging Studies Branch
International Programs Center
Population Division
U.S. Census Bureau
Washington, DC 20233-8860

301-763-1371

wan.he@census.gov

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U.S. Department of Commerce
Donald L. Evans,
Secretary

Samuel W. Bodman,
Deputy Secretary

Economics and Statistics Administration
Kathleen B. Cooper,
Under Secretary for Economic Affairs

U.S. CENSUS BUREAU
Charles Louis Kincannon,
Director

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Economics and Statistics Administration

Kathleen B. Cooper,
Under Secretary for Economic Affairs



U.S. CENSUS BUREAU

Charles Louis Kincannon,
Director

William G. Barron, Jr.,
Deputy Director

Frederick T. Knickerbocker,
Acting Principal Associate Director for Programs

Nancy M. Gordon,
Associate Director for Demographic Programs

John F. Long,
Chief, Population Division

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The Older Foreign-Born Population in the United States: 2000

In March 2000, the foreign-born population of the United States reached 28.4 million, based on data from the 2000 Current Population Survey (CPS).^{1,2} Eleven percent of this group, or 3.1 million, were aged 65 and over. Although the total foreign-born population expanded from 1960 to 2000 following four decades of low immigration, the older foreign born³ essentially remained stable (Figure 1), so the proportion of older people among the foreign born declined sharply, from 32.6 percent in 1960 to 11.0 percent in 2000.

What has contributed to the changing age distribution of the foreign-born population? Who are the current older foreign born, and will the future be different? This report examines immigration-related factors such as world region of birth, length of residence in the United

¹ This estimate of the foreign-born population is based on the March 2000 CPS, which covers the civilian noninstitutionalized population. The number of foreign born counted in Census 2000 was 31.1 million. The census number, which is for the resident population, is larger in part because it includes armed forces in the United States and the institutionalized population. In addition, the CPS estimate is based on adjusted population controls consistent with the 1990 Census and does not incorporate the results of Census 2000. For more information on CPS, see U.S. Census Bureau and Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2000, Current Population Survey, Technical Paper 63RV, "Design and Methodology," Appendix D, at www.bls.census.gov/cps/tp/tp63.htm.

² 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 statements made in this report have undergone statistical testing and meet Census Bureau standards for statistical accuracy.

³ In this report, "older" refers to ages 65 and over.

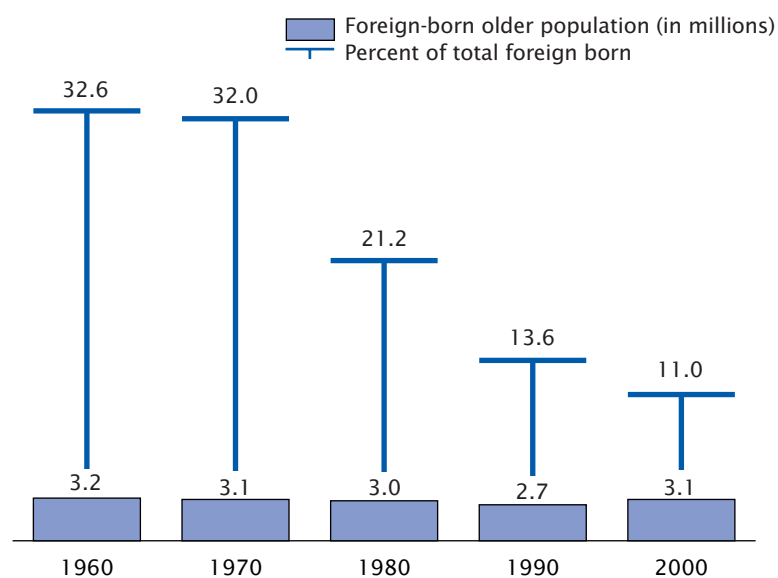
Foreign-born and native populations

Simply put, the foreign born are individuals living in the United States who are not U.S. citizens at birth. The foreign-born population is classified by citizenship status: those who have become U.S. citizens through naturalization and those who are not U.S. citizens. Natives, as defined by the Census Bureau, were born in the United States, in U.S. Island Areas such as Puerto Rico, or in a foreign country of at least one parent who was a United States citizen.

Immigrants and immigration

Immigrants, as defined in the Immigration and Nationality Act, are aliens admitted to the United States for lawful permanent residence. They may be issued immigrant visas overseas by the Department of State or adjusted to permanent resident status in the United States by the Immigration and Naturalization Service. Immigration is defined here as the number of immigrants during a specified period of time, such as a year or a decade.

Figure 1.
Older Foreign-Born Population and Percent of Total Foreign-Born Population: 1960 to 2000



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 1960, 1970, 1980, 1990 censuses and Current Population Survey, March 2000.

States, and citizenship. It also provides a profile of demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of the current older foreign born, and a glimpse of the future.

INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION AND DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

More than one-third of the older foreign born is from Europe.

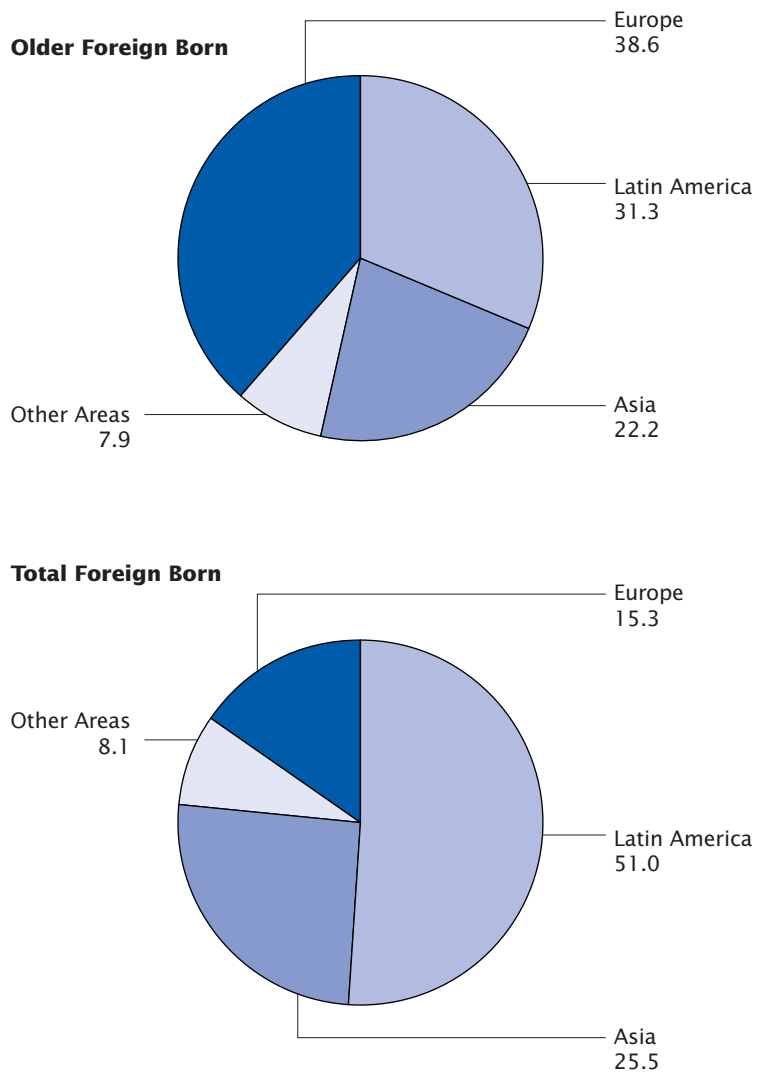
Among the 3.1 million older foreign born in 2000, 1.2 million, or 38.6 percent, were born in Europe,⁴ compared with 15.3 percent of the total foreign-born population (Figure 2). In contrast, people from Latin America accounted for only 31.3 percent of the older foreign born but 51.0 percent of the total foreign born.

This contrast reflects the historical trends and shifting world regions of birth of the U.S. foreign born. Historically, Europe was the primary source of the foreign born. With national origin quotas that favored Northern and Western Europe, the 1924 Immigration and Naturalization Act imposed severe numerical limits on immigration

⁴ Categories of ethnicity and race are not interchangeable with the world regions of birth. For example, the March 2000 CPS data show 15.3 percent of the foreign born were born in Europe; however, 67.9 percent of the foreign born were White, and 24.8 percent were White non-Hispanic. Also, a race category such as Asian may be foreign born or native.

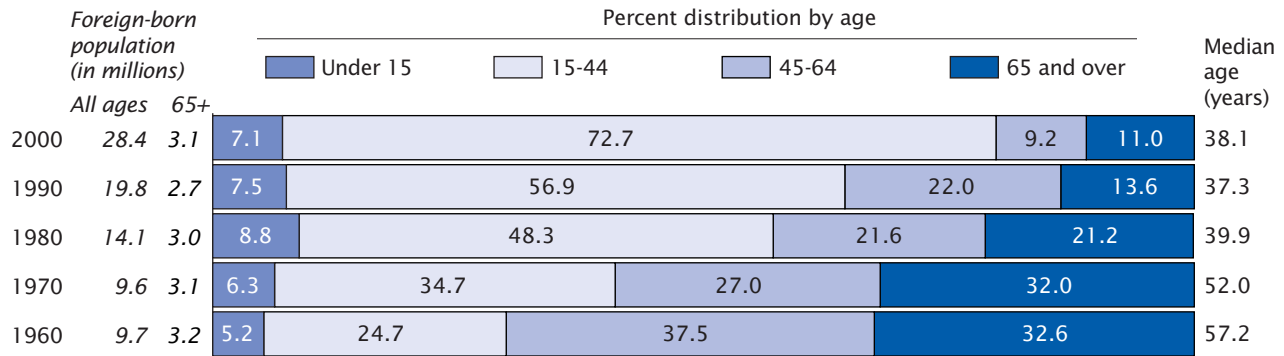
Figure 2.
Foreign-Born Population by Region of Birth: 2000

(In percent)



Note: Other Areas include Africa, Oceania, North America, and Region not reported.
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, March 2000.

Figure 3.
Population, Age Distribution, and Median Age of the Foreign-Born Population: 1960 to 2000



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 1960, 1970, 1980, 1990 censuses and Current Population Survey, March 2000.

from other parts of Europe and the rest of the world, and effectively barred immigration from Asia.⁵ As a result, the Asian-born population remained small and grew slowly through the 1960s. The 1924 Act also severely restricted immigration from Eastern and Southern Europe for the ensuing four decades.⁶

The Immigration and Nationality Act Amendments of 1965 and subsequent legislation eliminated the national origins quota system and opened U.S. immigration to more of the world.⁷ These laws brought about an increasing influx of migrants from Asia beginning in the 1970s. Coupled with increased immigration from Latin

America since the 1960s, the proportion of the foreign born from Latin America and Asia increased sharply. Those born in Latin America accounted for one in ten (9.4 percent) of the total foreign born in 1960 but half (51.0 percent) of the total foreign born in 2000, and the proportion Asian-born increased from 5.1 percent to 25.5 percent, during the same period of time.

The substantial increase in the number of immigrants allowed to enter the United States affected the age distribution of the foreign born, because a large share of international migrants move in their young or middle adulthood. The proportion of foreign born in the age group 15 to 64 expanded from 62.2 percent in 1960 to 81.9 percent in 2000. While the proportion of the foreign born under age 15 changed only slightly over these decades, the proportion aged 65 and over decreased considerably — from 32.6 percent in 1960 to just 11.0 percent in 2000 (Figure 3). As a result, the median age of the total foreign born

declined from 57.2 years in 1960 to 38.1 years in 2000.

In the future, the older foreign born are more likely to be from Latin America or Asia.

Although migrants from Europe still constitute the largest group of the older foreign born, this is likely to change in the near future. In 2000, Latin American born represented one-third of the older foreign born. However, the majority of Latin American born and Asian born were in the “young old” ages (65-74) in 2000, younger than the European-born older population, of whom only 48.2 percent were of the “young old” ages. In addition, among the foreign born aged 45 to 64 in 2000, about three-fourths were born in Latin America and Asia (43.6 percent and 28.9 percent, respectively). If the current immigration pattern continues, it is likely that in the next 20 years the older foreign born will be mainly from Latin America and Asia instead of Europe.

⁵ Anderson, Margo J. (ed.), 2000, *Encyclopedia of the U.S. Census*, CQ Press, A Division of Congressional Quarterly Inc., Washington, DC.

⁶ For an example of background on U.S. international migration history and information about the Immigration Act of 1924 and the national origins quota system, see Daniels, Roger, 2001, “Two Cheers for Immigration,” in Roger Daniels and Otis L. Graham, *Debating American Immigration, 1882-Present*, Lanham, Boulder, New York, Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

⁷Anderson, Margo J. (ed.), 2000, *ibid.*

Table 1.
Place of Birth and Year of Entry of the Foreign-Born Population Aged 65 and Over: 2000

(Numbers in thousands)

Characteristic	Foreign born	Region of birth			
		Europe	Asia	Latin America	Other areas
Total	3,115	1,203	690	976	245
90-percent confidence interval	2,888 - 3,342	1,057 - 1,349	551 - 829	805 - 1,147	178 - 312
Year of entry:					
1970 or later	1,189	172	516	441	59
Before 1970	1,926	1,031	173	535	187
Percent distribution by year of entry:					
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
1970 or later	38.1	14.2	75.0	45.2	24.0
Before 1970	61.8	85.7	25.1	54.8	76.0
Percent distribution by place of birth:					
1970 or later	100.0	14.5	43.5	37.2	5.0
Before 1970	100.0	53.5	9.0	27.8	9.7

Note: Figures may not sum to totals because of rounding.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, March 2000.

Almost two-thirds of the older foreign born in 2000 have lived in the United States for more than 30 years.

In 2000, most of the older foreign born had lived in the United States for more than 30 years (Table 1), although the length of residence varied by their region of birth. The majority of the European-born older population came to the United States before 1970, while only a quarter of the Asian-born older population migrated that early. Conversely, international migrants from Latin America and Asia made up the majority of the older foreign born who had entered the United States since 1970, while migrants from Europe made up around half of the older foreign born who entered before 1970.

The older foreign born are almost twice as likely to be naturalized citizens as the foreign born of all ages.

A much higher proportion of the older foreign born than of the total foreign born are naturalized citizens (70.2 percent compared with 37.4 percent respectively in 2000), in part because typically they have lived in the United States longer (Figure 4).⁸

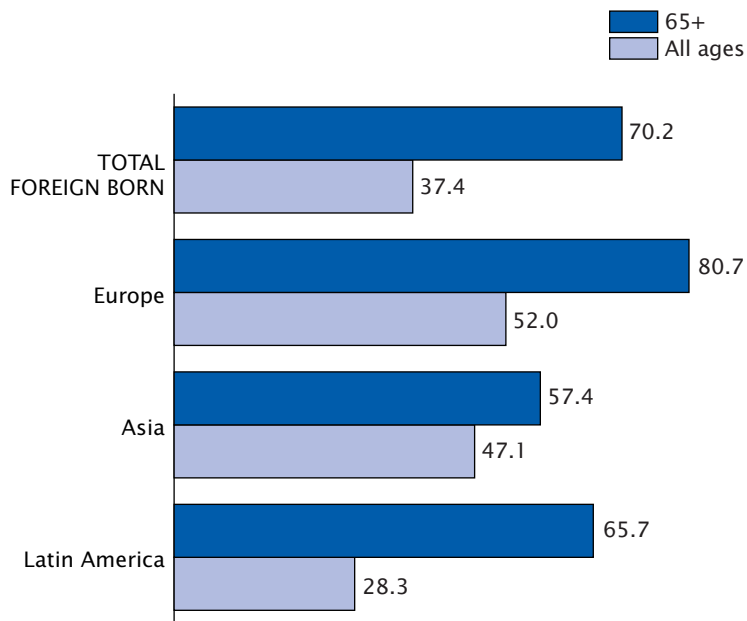
In 2000, the older population from Europe had the highest proportion of naturalized citizens, 80.7 percent, compared with 57.4 percent of the older Asian born. The lower proportion of naturalized citizens among

⁸ The naturalization process requires that the foreign-born applicant reside continuously in the United States for 5 years (or less for special categories of immigrants) following admission as a legal permanent resident.

the older Asian born may be due partly to their shorter length of residence in the United States, given that the major wave of Asian immigration did not take place until the 1970s. Among the older Latin American born, 65.7 percent were U.S. citizens in 2000,⁹ compared with 28.3 percent of the total Latin American-born population. One factor that contributed to the low rates of naturalization for the total Latin American-born population is that more than half (54.2 percent) are from Mexico and Mexicans tend to have low rates of naturalization (20.3 percent) compared with the foreign born from other regions.

⁹ The difference in proportions who are citizens for older Asian born (57.4 percent) and older Latin American born (65.7 percent) is not statistically significant.

Figure 4.
Percent U.S. Citizens of the Older and Total Foreign-Born Populations by Region of Birth: 2000



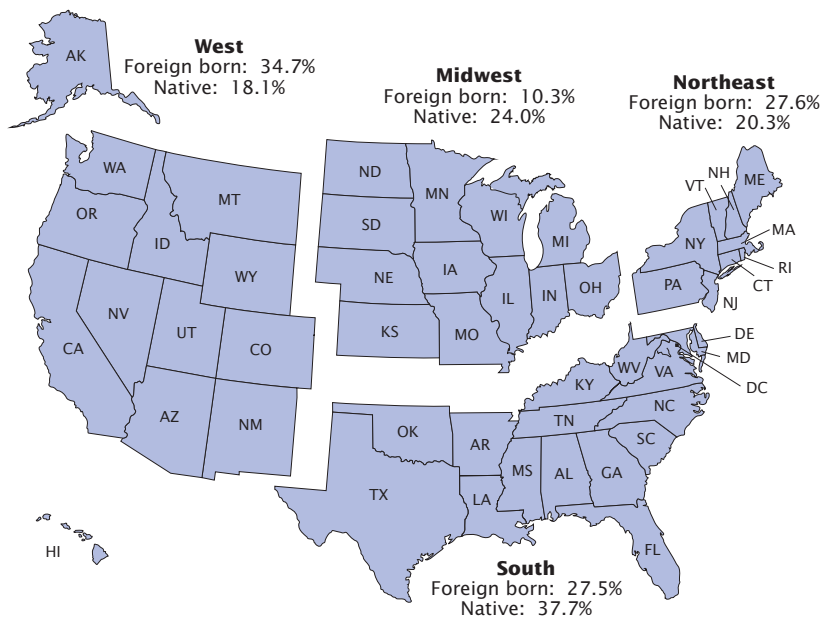
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, March 2000.

About one-third of the older foreign born live in the West ...

In 2000, 34.7 percent of the older foreign born resided in the West, 27.6 percent resided in the Northeast, and 27.5 percent resided in the South (Figure 5).¹⁰ Only 10.3 percent lived in the Midwest.

This geographic distribution of residence of the older foreign born is notably different from that of their native counterparts. In 2000, more than one-third (37.7 percent) of the older native population resided in the South, reflecting their interest in living in the sunbelt states.¹¹ For the older foreign born, on the other hand, the presence of immigrant networks and communities is a primary determinant of geographic location of residence or internal migration.¹²

Figure 5.
Percent Distribution of the Older Foreign-Born and Native Populations by Region: 2000



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, March 2000.

¹⁰ The proportions living in the Northeast and in the South are not significantly different.

¹¹ For an example of research on internal migration for the older native population, see Frey, William H., Hao-Lee Liaw, and Ge Lin, 1998, "State Magnets for Different Elderly 'Migrant Types'," Report No. 98-420, Population Studies Center, University of Michigan.

¹² For examples of research on internal migration for the older foreign born, see Kritz, Mary M., and June Marie Nogle, 1994, "Nativity Concentration and Internal Migration among the Foreign-Born," *Demography*, 31:509-524; Zavodny, Madeline, 1999, "Determinants of Recent Immigrants' Locational Choices," *International Migration Review*, 33:1014-1030.

... and the West also has the highest proportion of foreign born among the total older population.

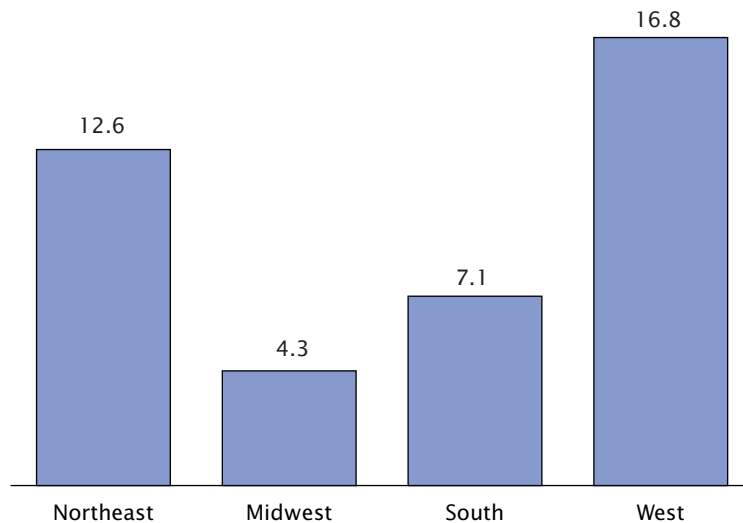
Of the 6.4 million people aged 65 and over living in the West in 2000, 1.1 million, or 16.8 percent, were foreign born (Figure 6). This was the highest percent foreign born of the total older population in any region. The Midwest had the lowest proportion (4.3 percent). In the South, 7.1 percent of the population aged 65 and over was foreign born, compared with 12.6 percent in the Northeast.

SOCIOECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS

Almost half of the older foreign born has not completed high school.

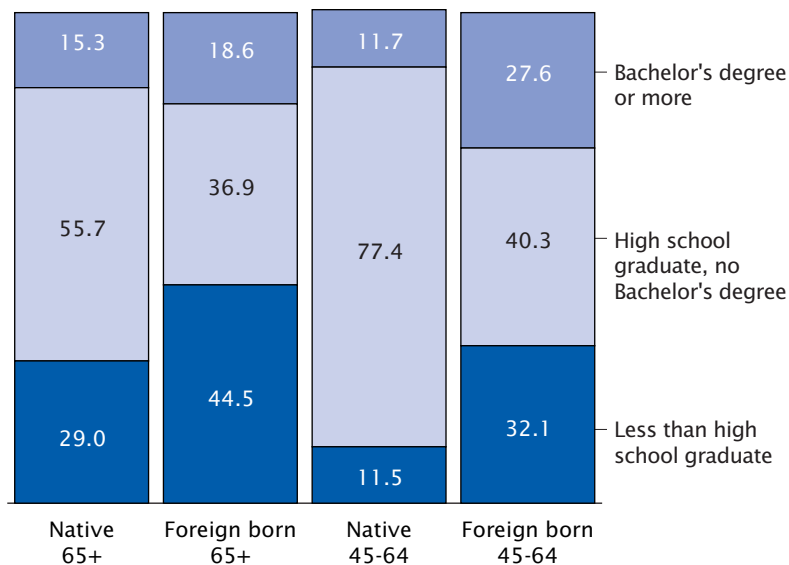
In 2000, 18.6 percent of the older foreign born had a bachelor's degree or higher compared with 15.3 percent of their native counterparts (Figure 7). However, the older foreign-born and native populations differed greatly at lower education levels. Nearly half (44.5 percent) of the older foreign born had not completed high school, whereas less than one-third (29.0 percent) of the older native population lacked a high-school education.

Figure 6.
Percent Foreign Born of Total Older Population by Region: 2000



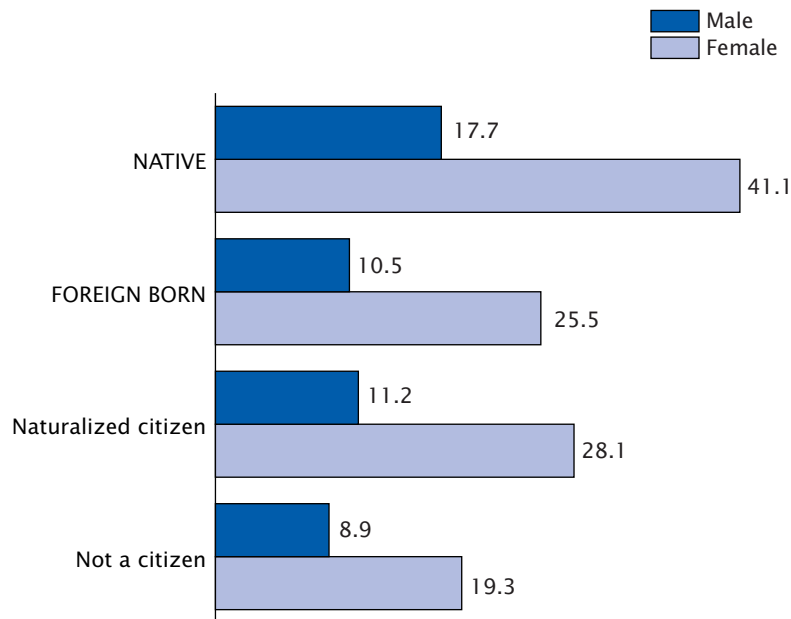
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, March 2000.

Figure 7.
Educational Attainment of the Foreign-Born and Native Populations Aged 65 and Over and Aged 45 to 64: 2000
(In percent)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, March 2000.

Figure 8.
Percent of Older Population Living Alone by Nativity, Citizenship Status, and Sex: 2000



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, March 2000.

The future older foreign born may have higher educational attainment than the current older foreign born, because among those aged 45 to 64, 67.9 percent had completed a high school education or more, compared with 55.5 percent of the current older foreign born. However, the educational attainment of the future older foreign born will also depend on the educational level of future international migrants and emigration trends of the foreign born.

The older foreign born are more likely than their native counterparts to live in family households.

The older foreign born tended to live with their families, whether for economic or cultural reasons. Among the 1.7 million households¹³ headed by an older foreign-born person, 62.3 percent

¹³ A household is a person or group of people who occupy a housing unit. A family is made up of two or more people living together who are related by birth, marriage, or adoption.

were family households, compared with 52.5 percent of the households with an older native householder. The older foreign born are also more likely to live in larger households: in 2000, 20.4 percent lived in a family household with three or more people, while only 9.0 percent of the native older householders did.¹⁴ The living arrangements of the older foreign born did not differ significantly by citizenship status.

Older foreign-born women are much more likely to live alone than older foreign-born men.

While the older foreign born were less likely than the older native population to live alone, gender differences were similar in both groups. Only one in ten older foreign-born men, but one in four older foreign-born women, lived alone (Figure 8). This gender difference, that older women were more than twice as likely as older men to live alone, was similar for natives, the foreign born, and naturalized citizens. While gender did affect whether the older noncitizens lived alone, the difference was smaller.¹⁵

¹⁴ The householder is usually the household member, or one of the household members, in whose name the housing unit is owned or rented. Households are classified as foreign born or native based on the nativity of the householder, regardless of the nativity of other household members.

¹⁵ The proportion of older noncitizen women living alone was significantly different from the proportion of older noncitizen men; however, the comparison of "more than twice" was not statistically significant.

Eight of ten older foreign-born men are married; nearly half of older foreign-born women are widowed.

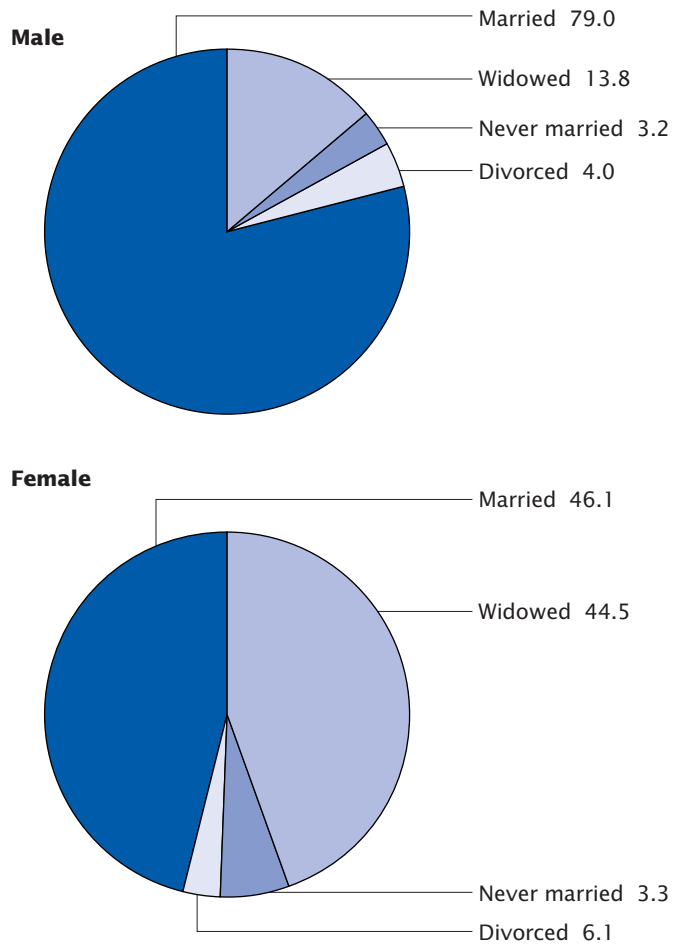
In 2000, three-fourths of older foreign-born men were married,¹⁶ in sharp contrast to older foreign-born women, fewer than half of whom were married (Figure 9). Among older foreign-born women, 44.5 percent were widows, compared with 13.8 percent of their male counterparts. This percent distribution by marital status is similar to that of the older native population. The large difference in marital status between older men and older women is due to a combination of factors, including higher life expectancy for women, the tendency for women to marry men who are slightly older, and higher remarriage rates for older widowed men.¹⁷

¹⁶ The marital status shown in this report reflects the person's status at the time of the survey. For example, the category "married" represents only those at the time of the survey who reported being "married, spouse present," "separated," or "other married, spouse absent." It is not a count of marriages that occurred in 2000, nor does it differentiate between first marriages and remarriages.

¹⁷ See Kinsella, Kevin and Victoria A. Velkoff, U.S. Census Bureau, Series P95/01-1, *An Aging World: 2001*, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC, 2001.

Figure 9.
Marital Status of the Older Foreign-Born Population by Sex: 2000

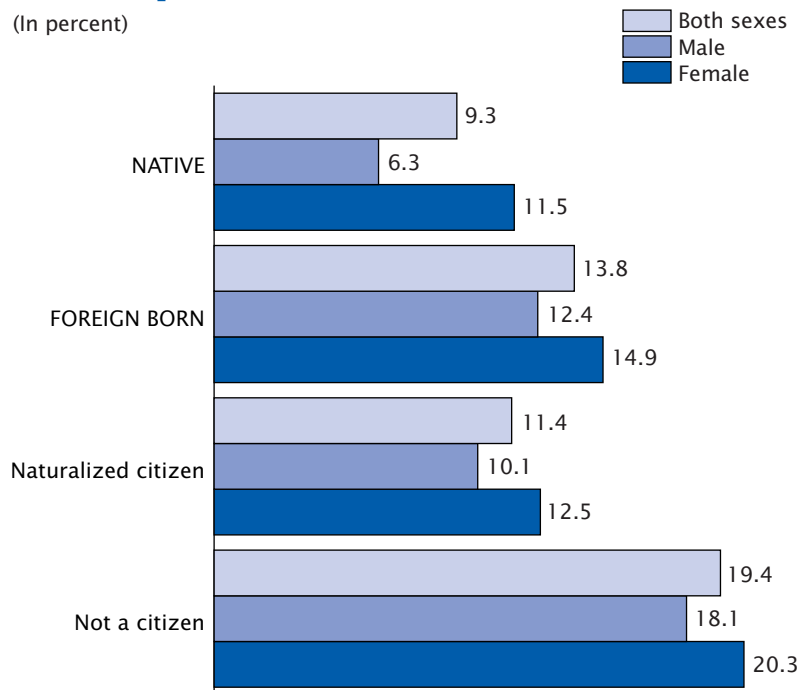
(In percent)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, March 2000.

Figure 10.
Poverty Rates for the Older Population by Nativity, Citizenship Status, and Sex: 1999

(In percent)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, March 2000.

The poverty rate is higher for the older foreign born than for the older native population.

The foreign born aged 65 and over was more likely than their native counterparts to live in poverty.¹⁸ In 1999, 13.8 percent of the older foreign born lived in poverty, compared with 9.3 percent of the older native population (Figure 10). There were no significant differences in poverty rates between older foreign-born men and women, in sharp contrast to the older native population, in which women were almost twice as likely as men to live in poverty.

¹⁸ The poverty definition used by the federal government for statistical purposes is based on a set of money income thresholds that vary by family size and composition and do not take into account noncash benefits or taxes. The average threshold in 1999 for a one-person householder aged 65 and over was \$7,990, and for a two-person household headed by a householder aged 65 and over was \$10,075. For more information, see www.census.gov/hhes/www/poverty.html.

Households with older foreign-born householders participate in means-tested programs at higher rates than households with older native householders.

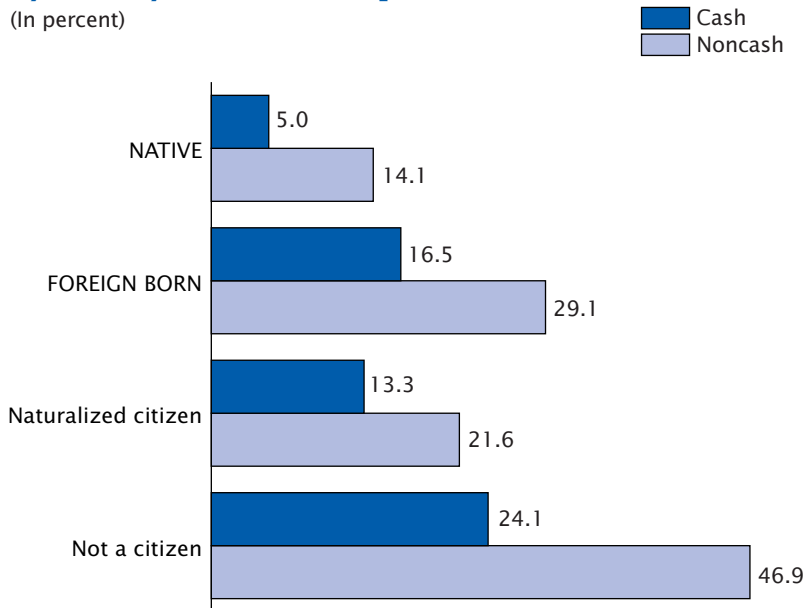
Means-tested programs provide cash and noncash assistance to individuals or families whose incomes fall below specified income or asset thresholds.¹⁹ In 1999, 16.5 percent of households maintained by an older foreign-born householder participated in cash assistance programs and 29.1 percent participated in noncash assistance programs (Figure 11).²⁰ These participation rates were higher than those of households with older native householders, of whom 5.0 percent participated in cash assistance programs and 14.1 percent participated in noncash assistance programs. Participation rates were higher for older noncitizen-headed households than for households with an older householder who was a naturalized U.S. citizen. Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and medicaid were the cash and noncash assistance programs used most frequently by older foreign-born householders.

¹⁹ The noncash programs included here are school lunch, food stamps, housing assistance, and medicaid. The cash programs included here are Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), General Assistance (GA), and Supplemental Security Income (SSI).

²⁰ Households participating in cash programs and households participating in non-cash programs are not mutually exclusive, thus the proportions are not additive. In 1999, nearly all foreign-born households receiving cash benefits also received non-cash benefits.

Figure 11. **Households With Older Householders Receiving Means-Tested Noncash and/or Cash Benefits, by Nativity and Citizenship Status: 1999**

(In percent)



Note: People participating in cash programs and people participating in noncash programs are not mutually exclusive, thus the proportions are not additive.
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, March 2000.

Table 2. **Health Care Coverage of the Population Aged 65 and Over: 1999**

(Numbers in thousands)

Characteristic	Total	Native	Foreign born		
			Total	Naturalized citizen	Not a citizen
Total population	32,621	29,507	3,115	2,188	927
Percent:					
No health care coverage	1.3	0.8	6.0	1.9	15.8
Health care coverage	98.7	99.2	94.0	98.1	84.2
Medicaid	8.9	7.7	20.9	15.2	34.5
Medicare	95.7	96.4	89.5	93.4	80.4
Private insurance	61.5	63.8	39.1	46.7	21.4
Group insurance	34.2	35.5	22.0	25.9	12.8

Note: Individuals may be covered by more than one type of health insurance.
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, March 2000.

Forty-five percent of the older population with no health insurance is foreign born.

In 1999, almost all (99.2 percent) of the older native population and 94.0 percent of the older foreign born had health insurance for all or at least part of the year (Table 2). However, the older foreign born, who constituted 9.5 percent of the total older population, had a disproportionately large share of the older population with no health insurance (44.5 percent of 422,000 individuals). Older noncitizens had the lowest overall health insurance coverage rate (84.2 percent), and the lowest coverage rate in medicare and various private or group insurance plans except for medicaid.

Both older native and older foreign born participated in medicare far more often than in other types of private and government-funded health insurance plans. Almost two-thirds of the older native population (63.8 percent) had private health insurance coverage and 35.5 percent had group insurance coverage, compared with much lower rates for the older foreign born, 39.1 percent and 22.0 percent, respectively.

For both older native and foreign born, the proportion who had group health insurance coverage was lower than the proportion who had most other major health insurance coverage. The low enrollment in group health insurance may arise because typically group health insurance is offered by employers, and the older population generally has a low labor force participation rate, since most are retired or not working. In March 2000, just 13.8 percent of the older native population and 12.4 percent of their foreign-born counterparts were in the labor force.²¹

SUMMARY

In 2000, more than one-third of the older foreign born in the United States came from Europe, about one-third from Latin America, and one-fourth from Asia. Because of the increase in migration from Latin America and Asia since the 1960s, migrants from these two regions constituted a majority of the total foreign born. This trend suggests that the future older foreign born will have more migrants from Latin America and

²¹ The difference in proportions for older natives (13.8 percent) and older foreign born (12.4 percent) is not statistically significant.

Asia than from Europe. In 2000, the older foreign born from Europe had lived in the United States longer and were more likely to be U.S. citizens than older foreign born from other world regions.

Compared with their native counterparts, the older foreign born were less educated, more likely to live in poverty, more likely to receive government cash and noncash benefits, and less likely to have health care coverage. However, some characteristics were similar for the older foreign-born and older native populations, such as the fact that older women were twice as likely to live alone as older men.

For more information on total foreign-born population, see Schmidley, A. Dianne, U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Reports, Series P23-206, *Profile of the Foreign-Born Population in the United States: 2000*, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC, 2001. Also see wallchart, *The Foreign-Born Population in the United States: 2000*, U.S. Census Bureau.

SOURCE OF THE DATA

Most estimates in this report come from data obtained in March 2000 by the Current Population Survey (CPS), which covers the civilian noninstitutionalized population. The U.S. Census Bureau conducts the CPS every month, although this report uses only data from the March survey for its estimates. Some historical estimates used in this report are based on various decennial census data.²²

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 meet the Census Bureau's standards for statistical significance. 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. The Census Bureau employs quality control procedures throughout the production process — including the overall design of surveys, the wording of questions, reviews of the work of interviewers and coders, and statistical review of reports.

The Current Population Survey employs ratio estimation, whereby sample estimates are adjusted to correspond to independent estimates of the national population by age, race, sex, and Hispanic origin. This weighting partially corrects for bias due to undercoverage, but how it affects different variables in the survey is not precisely known. Moreover, biases may also be present when people who are missed in the survey differ from those interviewed in ways other than the categories used in weighting (age, race, sex, and Hispanic origin). 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, contact Jeffrey Stratton, Census Bureau Demographic Statistical Methods

Division, at 301-457-4220, or e-mail at dsmd_s&a@census.gov.

MORE INFORMATION

A set of detailed tabulations consisting of 16 tables from the 2000 March CPS shows more detailed characteristics of the foreign-born population aged 65 and over. The electronic version of these tables is available on the Internet at the Census Bureau's Web site (www.census.gov). Once on the site, click on "F," then select "Foreign Born Population Data." Under "CPS March 2000," choose "Data Tables."

CONTACT

Statistical Information Office:
pop@census.gov
301-763-2422

USER COMMENTS

The Census Bureau welcomes the comments and advice of data and report users. If you have any suggestions or comments, please write to:

Chief, Population Division
U.S. Census Bureau
Washington, DC 20233

Or send e-mail to: pop@census.gov

²² See Gibson, Campbell J. and Emily Lennon, 1999, "Historical Census Statistics on the Foreign Born of the United States: 1850-1990," Population Division Working Paper No. 29, U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, DC 20233. www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0029/twps0029.html

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