

# Immigrants, Refugees, and Languages Spoken in Buffalo

## Few Immigrants, Many Refugees

According to 2000 Census Data, Buffalo ranked last out of 48 major metro areas in gaining immigrants, and the percentage of Buffalo residents born in foreign countries remains relatively low. However, from 2000 to 2010, the Buffalo-Niagara metro area saw a 33% rise in foreign-born population, growing from 4.4% of the total population in 2000 to 6.0% in 2010.<sup>1</sup>

The main reason for this increase is the number of resettled refugees in Buffalo. Refugees are individuals fleeing situations of strife such as war, persecution or natural disaster in their home countries. From 2003 to 2013, Erie County resettled a total of 9,723 refugees.<sup>2</sup> Currently, Erie County receives slightly over one third of the total refugee flow into the state.<sup>3</sup> In addition to these direct resettlements, many other refugees come to Buffalo as secondary migrants from other parts of the U.S.<sup>4</sup>

From 2003-2006 the top countries of origin for immigrants to the Buffalo region were Canada and Yemen,<sup>5</sup> but from 2007-2012 this shifted and countries more typically associated with refugees, such as Burma and India, topped the charts.<sup>6</sup>

Buffalo has a low proportion of foreign-born residents compared to other cities. But an unusually high percentage of the region's foreign-born are refugees. Buffalo has become a top location for refugee resettlement in the nation.

### BUFFALO'S YOUNG FOREIGN-BORN POPULATION

Between 2000 and 2013, the foreign-born population ages 18 to 34 in the Buffalo-Niagara metro area grew by

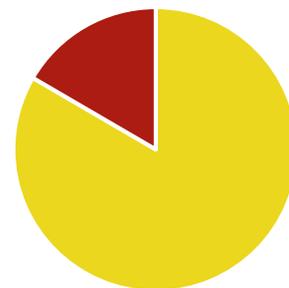
**75%**

At the national level, that group grew by only 6%.<sup>7</sup>

### PERCENT OF PEOPLE 5 YEARS AND OVER WHO SPEAK ENGLISH LESS THAN VERY WELL (CENSUS 2015)

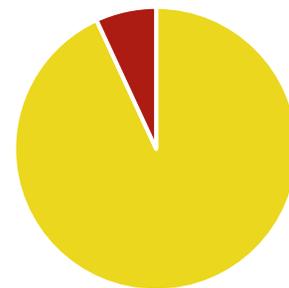
|  |                     |
|--|---------------------|
| City of Buffalo                        | 6.9% <sup>8</sup>   |
| Erie County                            | 3.4% <sup>9</sup>   |
| Buffalo-Cheektowaga-Niagara Metro Area | 3.1% <sup>10</sup>  |
| New York State                         | 13.5% <sup>11</sup> |

### LANGUAGE SPOKEN CITY OF BUFFALO



- English **83.4%**
- Other **16.6%**

### ENGLISH PROFICIENCY CITY OF BUFFALO



- Well **93.1%**
- Not Well **6.9%**

City of Buffalo: English Proficiency and Language Spoken (Census 2015)<sup>12</sup>



**PARTNERSHIP  
FOR THE  
PUBLIC GOOD**

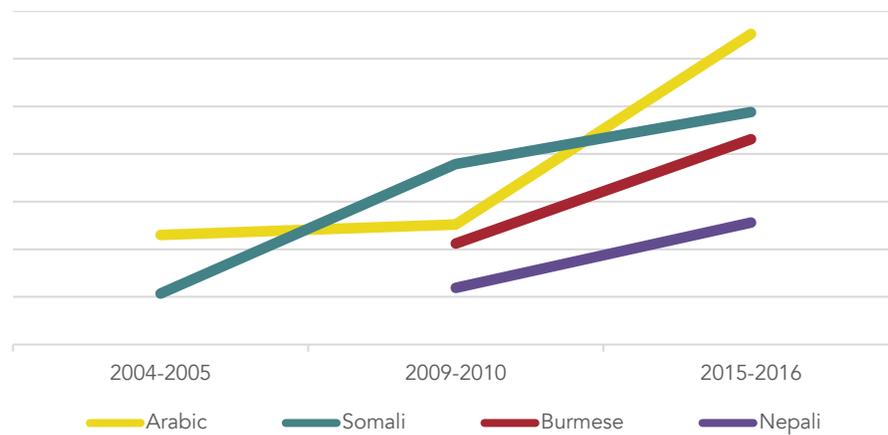
**BUFFALO PUBLIC SCHOOLS  
ELL STUDENTS<sup>13</sup>**

|           | Number of ELL Students | Number of Languages Spoken |
|-----------|------------------------|----------------------------|
| 2009-2011 | 3,541                  | 67                         |
| 2013-2014 | 4,307                  | 63                         |
| 2016-2017 | 5,668                  | 83                         |

The number of current English Language Learner (ELL) students<sup>14</sup> in the Buffalo Public School System has more than doubled in the last decade, increasing from 2,754 in 2006 to 5,668 in 2016.<sup>15</sup> With a large variety of languages, English as a New Language classes have become particularly important. ELL students comprise 15% of the district’s total enrollment, and have an on-time graduation rate of only 24%.<sup>16</sup> This figure contributes to the city’s overall graduation rate (55.5%) being significantly lower than the state average (79.1%).<sup>17</sup>

In addition to language needs, teachers and staff should be mindful of the traumatic experiences and hardships many refugee children have experienced in their classroom instruction.

**COMMON LANGUAGES SPOKEN BY REFUGEES IN BUFFALO PUBLIC SCHOOLS**



Though the prevalence of foreign languages in the school system has increased overall, the makeup has shifted over the past years. Some languages, such as Russian, Vietnamese, and Albanian, have decreased while others, such as Burmese, Somali, and Arabic have increased rapidly.

**BUFFALO PUBLIC SCHOOLS TOP 10 NON-ENGLISH LANGUAGES**

| Language Spoken | 2004-2005 | Language Spoken | 2009-2010 | Language Spoken | 2014-2015 |
|-----------------|-----------|-----------------|-----------|-----------------|-----------|
| Spanish         | 1,742     | Spanish         | 1,566     | Spanish         | 1,861     |
| Arabic          | 230       | Karen           | 461       | Arabic          | 652       |
| Somali          | 107       | Somali          | 379       | Karen           | 545       |
| Vietnamese      | 84        | Arabic          | 252       | Somali          | 488       |
| Kurdish         | 56        | Burmese         | 212       | Burmese         | 431       |
| Albanian        | 42        | Nepali          | 119       | Swahili         | 279       |
| Serbo-Croatian  | 36        | Kirundi         | 77        | Nepali          | 256       |
| French          | 29        | Vietnamese      | 63        | Bengali         | 194       |
| Russian         | 27        | Kpelle          | 40        | Mai Mai         | 114       |
| Lao             | 24        | French          | 351       | Kinyarwanda     | 104       |

**ERIE COUNTY: TOP 14 COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN FOR IMMIGRANTS AND REFUGEES FROM 2008 TO 2016**

| Country of Origin            | Total Number (2008-2016) |
|------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Afghanistan                  | 140                      |
| Burma                        | 4,057                    |
| Bhutan                       | 1,888                    |
| Burundi                      | 79                       |
| Congo                        | 56                       |
| Democratic Republic of Congo | 958                      |
| Cuba                         | 96                       |
| Ethiopia                     | 77                       |
| Eritrea                      | 321                      |
| Iraq                         | 1,322                    |
| Iran                         | 54                       |
| Somalia                      | 1,851                    |
| Sudan                        | 176                      |
| Syria                        | 280                      |

**REFUGEES RESETTLED FFY 2016<sup>18</sup>**

|                                   |             |
|-----------------------------------|-------------|
| Total resettled in New York State | 5,028       |
| Resettled upstate <sup>19</sup>   | 4,745 (94%) |
| Resettled in Erie County          | 1,361 (34%) |

## Sources

- 1 Audrey Singer and Jill Wilson, "Immigrants in 2010 Metropolitan American: A Decade of Change," The Brookings Institution. Available from: <https://www.brookings.edu/research/immigrants-in-2010-metropolitan-america-a-decade-of-change>.
- 2 WRAPS December 2013, Provided by Journey's End Refugee Services.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Personal communication, Christine Lemonda, Journey's End Refugee Services.
- 5 Regional Institute, University at Buffalo, "Upstate's Recent Arrivals" (January 2008).
- 6 U.S. Department of Homeland Security, "Profiles on Legal Permanent Residents." Available from: <https://www.dhs.gov/profiles-legal-permanent-residents>.
- 7 U.S. Census Bureau, "New Census Bureau Statistics Show How Young Adults Today Compare with Previous Generations in Neighborhoods Nationwide," 2014. Available from: <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2014/cb14-219.html>.
- 8 U.S. Census Bureau, 2015 American Community Survey: Buffalo City, NY. Available from: <http://factfinder2.census.gov>.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 U.S. Census Bureau, 2015 American Community Survey: New York State. Available from: <http://factfinder2.census.gov>.
- 12 2015 American Community Survey: Buffalo City, NY.
- 13 "Buffalo Public Schools" refers to the schools within the Buffalo City School District. Data from Buffalo Public Schools.
- 14 Former ELL students have greater English proficiency, but are still checked up on to ensure the necessary services are being provided for their continued educational growth.
- 15 Nadia A. Nashir, Multilingual Education Department, Fast Facts on English Learners: 2016-2017 (February 2017) (Buffalo, NY: Buffalo City School District, 2017).
- 16 Jay Rey, "85 languages spoken in Buffalo schools as 'New Americans' enter classrooms," *The Buffalo News*, November 27, 2016. Available from: <http://buffalonews.com/2016/11/27/new-americans-force-changes-at-central-registration>.
- 17 Tiffany Lankes, Denise Jewell Gee, and Sandra Tan, "No growth in Buffalo graduation rate," *The Buffalo News*, December 18, 2014. Available from: <http://buffalonews.com/2014/12/18/buffalo-graduation-rate-holds-steady>. See also, NY State Graduation Rate Data, 4-Year Outcome. Available from: <https://data.nysed.gov/gradrate.php?year=2016&n-%20stid=800000052968>.
- 18 Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance, Bureau of Refugee and Immigrant Assistance (BRIA). BRIA Population Data for Federal Fiscal Year 2016. Available from: <http://otda.ny.gov/programs/bria>.
- 19 Includes Erie, Onondaga, Monroe, Albany, Oneida, and Broome Counties.