# III. IMMIGRATION

BY THE NUMBERS

16% Share of population that is foreign born, 100 largest metro areas, 2008

1.13

Ratio of immigrants with college degrees to those without high school diplomas, New York metro area, 2008

Share of children with at least one immigrant parent, Los Angeles metro area, 2008

63 areas (out

Metro areas (out of 95) in which majority of foreign born live in suburbs, 2008





### **OVERVIEW**

- **About one in eight Americans in 2008 was an immigrant.** This represented a dramatic rise from 1970, when fewer than one in 20 Americans was foreign born, and reflects a tectonic shift in sources of U.S. immigration away from Europe and toward Latin American and Asia in the late 20th century.
- Metropolitan areas in the Southeast gained immigrants at a faster rate than most other regions during the 2000s. Many metro areas in the Great Plains, Texas, inland California and the Mountain West also had above average growth. Immigrant growth across all metropolitan areas was strong but down from the breakneck pace of the 1990s, and appeared to subside further with the onset of the recession in 2008.
- High and low-skilled immigrants distribute unevenly across U.S. metro areas. Immigrants with the lowest levels of English language ability and educational attainment cluster in Texas, inland California, and Sun Belt markets that experienced fast growth during the decade's housing boom. More highly-educated immigrants populate former gateways like Pittsburgh and Baltimore, and high-tech economies like the San Francisco Bay Area. Major metro areas in the Southeast, as well as established gateways like Chicago and New York, draw a mix of immigrants by skill level.
- The "second generation" represents a large share of the child population in several established metropolitan gateways. In the Los Angeles, Miami, and San Francisco metro areas, more than half of children have at least one foreign born parent or are themselves foreign born. The New York area has 1.8 million such children, 44 percent of all children metro-wide.
- More than half of the foreign born live in large metropolitan suburbs, up from 44 percent in 1980. In metropolitan areas with a more recent immigration history, such as Atlanta, Las Vegas, and Washington, D.C., immigrants account for a similar or higher share of suburban than city population. More than one in three immigrants in large metro areas lives in the high-density suburbs that surround cities, and nearly one in five lives in mature, mid-20th century suburbs.

## NATIONAL TRENDS

High levels of immigration in the 2000s increased the foreign-born population from 31 million to 38 million as of 2008. Despite that increase, the pace of growth in this decade was slower than the rapid immigrant population growth of the 1990s. The steep downturn in the economy that began in late 2007 has had an impact on migration worldwide,

and immigration to the United States appeared to have slowed by 2008. While some of these changes in flows may be momentary, other changes signal longer-term trends.

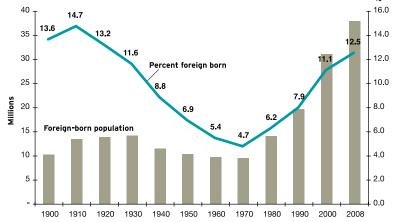
This chapter highlights immigrant settlement trends, particularly in new destination areas and suburbs. It also explores social, economic, and migration characteristics of the foreign born at various The steep downturn in the economy that began in late 2007 has had an impact on migration worldwide, and immigration to the United States appeared to have slowed by 2008. geographic levels. Examining immigration trends in metropolitan areas, and their cities and suburbs, is helpful for understanding how places will weather the current economic downturn, and how immigrants may respond to changing labor demands once recovery is underway.

As of 2008, 38 million immigrants lived in the United States, or 12.5 percent of the population, a rising share but still lower than in the early part of the 20th century (Figure 1). Immigrant settlement trends during the early part of the century largely followed economic activity in cities and suburbs. Industrial and commercial growth in the Northeast and Midwest drew population, including immigrants, in large numbers, until the Great Depression stalled immigration.

The middle of the twentieth century saw immigration to the United States wane as the supply of labor from Europe dwindled during that region's rapid recovery after World War II. The nadir in absolute

Figure 1. The Foreign-Born Share of U.S. Population Is Rising, but Still Below Levels from the Early 20th Century

Foreign-Born Population and Share of Population that is Foreign Born, United States, 1900-2008



Source: Brookings analysis of decennial census and 2008 American Community Survey data

terms coincided with the baby boom, yielding a national population that was less than 5 percent foreign born in 1970. This period also marked the rapid growth of the metropolitan Sun Belt, when many Americans were lured to warmer year-round climates and open space, spreading from the Southwest to the Southeast. By the end of the century and continuing into the current decade, the South saw burgeoning growth in its metropolitan areas, and immigrant settlement has mirrored this recent trend.

U.S. immigration policy changed in 1965, with the abolition of national origin quotas, and instituted a preference system for sponsored relatives of American citizens and workers with certain skills. Coincident with these changes was the economic growth and development of many Latin American, Caribbean, and Asian nations, leading to substantial out-migration from those world regions. In addition, civil and political strife induced emigration from various countries in those same regions beginning in the 1970s. By the end of the 1990s, outflows of students, professionals, and refugees from Africa increased dramatically, and in this decade, Africans are arriving in the United States at a higher rate than immigrants from any other world region.

These economic, political, and policy dynamics induced a dramatic shift in the origin of America's immigrant population over time (Figure 2). In 1970, among the 9.6 million foreign-born U.S. residents, fully 60 percent were from Europe, largely a manifestation of earlier waves of immigration. At that point, only 8 percent of the total were from Mexico, and another 11 percent were from the rest of Latin America and the Caribbean. Nine percent came from the countries of Asia, another 8 percent from other North American countries (mostly Canada), and less than 1 percent from the African continent. By 2008, the dramatic transformations in opportunities across

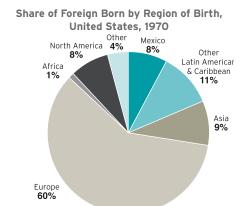
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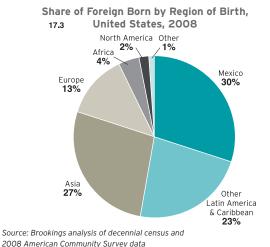
the world are apparent in the composition of the 38 million U.S. foreign born: only 13 percent are from Europe; Mexican immigrants comprise fully 30 percent of the total with another 23 percent from other Latin American and Caribbean countries; 27 percent are from Asia; Africans represent nearly 4 percent of the total; and only 2 percent are from North America.

## Figure 2. The Region of Origin for U.S. Immigrants Shifted Dramatically Over Time

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## **METROPOLITAN TRENDS**

### Location of the Foreign Born

The U.S. foreign-born population concentrates disproportionately in large metropolitan areas. In 2008, about 85 percent of U.S. immigrants lived in the 100 largest metro areas, compared to 66 percent of total population. This proportion was down slightly from 87 percent in 1990, reflecting a greater spread of the foreign-born population across the U.S. landscape over time. The remainder in 2008 lived in smaller metropolitan areas (10 percent) and micropolitan and other non-metropolitan areas (5 percent). The disproportionate share of immigrants living in large metro areas gave those areas a considerably higher foreign-born population share in 2008 (over 16 percent) than the nation as a whole.

New York and Los Angeles top the list of metropolitan areas with the largest number of immigrants, with 5.3 and 4.4 million, respectively, followed by other well-established destination areas including Miami and Chicago (see Table 1, upper panel). However, when metro areas are ranked by the percentage of foreign born, nine of the top 10 are in the Sun Belt states, all with long-standing immigrant populations (Table 1, lower panel). Six are in California (San Jose, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Stockton, Oxnard and San Diego); two lie along the Texas border (McAllen and El Paso); and Miami and New York round out the top 10.

Among the 100 largest metropolitan areas, the foreign born grew by 21.3 percent between 2000 and 2008. That equated to a robust annual growth rate of roughly 2.4 percent, though it was down from the swift 4.5 percent annual growth rate of the 1990s. Metropolitan areas in the Southeast gained immigrants at a faster rate than most other regions

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Metro Areas Ranked by Foreign-Born Population and Population Share, 2008

#### Largest Number of Immigrants

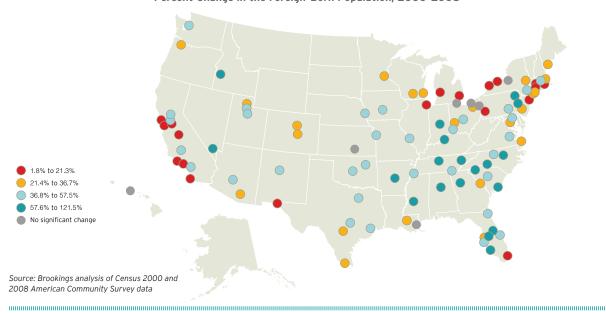
Rank	Metro area	Immigrants	
1	New York-Newark, NY-NJ-PA	5,328,033	
2	Los Angeles-Long Beach-Santa Ana, CA	4,374,583	
3	Miami-Fort Lauderdale-Pompano Beach, FL	1,995,037	
4	Chicago-Naperville-Joliet, IL-IN-WI	1,689,617	
5	San Francisco-Oakland-Fremont, CA	1,258,324	
6	Houston, TX	1,237,719	
7	Dallas-Fort Worth-Arlington, TX	1,121,321	
8	Washington-Arlington-Alexandria, DC-VA-MD-WV	1,089,950	
9	Riverside-San Bernardino-Ontario, CA	894,527	
10	Boston-Cambridge, MA-NH	731,960	
	All large metro areas	32,425,888	

	Highest Foreign-Born Population Share	
Rank	Metro Area	% Foreign Born
1	Miami-Fort Lauderdale-Pompano Beach, FL	36.8
2	San Jose-Sunnyvale-Santa Clara, CA	36.4
3	Los Angeles-Long Beach-Santa Ana, CA	34.0
4	San Francisco-Oakland-Fremont, CA	29.4
5	McAllen, TX	29.2
6	New York-Newark, NY-NJ-PA	28.0
7	El Paso, TX	27.3
8	Stockton, CA	22.8
9	Oxnard-Thousand Oaks-Ventura, CA	22.3
10	San Diego, CA	22.1
	All large metro areas	16.3

Source: Brookings analysis of 2008 American Community Survey data

during this decade (Map 1). Many metro areas in the Great Plains, Texas, inland California, and the Mountain West also had above-average growth. Conversely, metropolitan areas in the Great Lakes and industrial Northeast, and along the West Coast saw slower-than-average growth or no significant change at all. Further, many metropolitan areas saw immigration slow considerably toward the end of the 2000s as the economy entered recession. Among the 15 metro areas with the largest number of immigrants, only four posted significant, positive growth in their foreign-born populations between 2007 and 2008 (Houston, Dallas, Atlanta, and Seattle). The

Map 1. Metro Areas in the Southeast Had the Highest Rates of Immigrant Growth in the 2000s
Percent Change in the Foreign-Born Population, 2000-2008



remainder, mostly well-established destination areas, saw either a significant decline (Los Angeles and Phoenix) or no change (New York, Miami, Chicago, San Francisco, Washington, Riverside, Boston, San Diego, and San Jose). The deepening of the recession in late 2008 suggests that this stall in immigration may have spread further the following year.

# **Migration Characteristics**

Immigrant tenure and whether they become naturalized citizens both have implications for immigrants themselves, their families, and the communities in which they live. In many newer destination areas, residents worry that newcomers may overwhelm schools, health care systems, and other local services. These areas often lack the developed infrastructure to assist immigrants and their families in the integration process that long-standing

destination metropolitan areas facilitate.

Metropolitan areas with high proportions of foreign-born newcomers, including even established areas, are grappling with these challenges. Several newer destinations such as Las Vegas and Washington, D.C. have seen large shares of their residents arrive in the United States since 2000, but traditional settlement areas in California, Texas, and New York also continue to draw new immigrants through networks of those already in place (Table 2).

Rates of naturalization provide another measure of the "rootedness" of immigrant populations (Table 2). The decision to become a U.S. citizen has elements of both practicality and emotion; however, the bureaucratic process intentionally takes some time. Eligibility depends on five years of legal permanent residence (three years if married to a U.S. citizen), knowledge of U.S. history and civics, and a degree of



Table 2. Both New and Established Immigrant Gateways Have Large Shares of Foreign-Born Newcomers
Metropolitan Areas Ranked by Share of Total Population Arriving in United States Since 2000, and Percent Naturalized 2008

Highest Foreign-Born Newcomer Share				Lowest Foreign-Born Newcomer Share			
% Pop	ulation	% Foreign-		9/	6 Population	% Foreign-	
Arriving	in U.S.	Born		Arr	iving in U.S.	Born	
Rank Metro Area Since	2000	Naturalized	Rank	Metro Area	Since 2000	Naturalized	
1 San Jose-Sunnyvale-Santa Clara, CA	10.2	49.2	91	Scranton, PA	1.3	40.3	
2 Miami-Fort Lauderdale-Pompano Beach, FL	10.2	48.4	92	Jackson, MS	1.1	33.1	
3 McAllen, TX	8.3	23.4	93	Baton Rouge, LA	1.1	39.5	
4 Los Angeles-Long Beach-Santa Ana, CA	7.4	44.8	94	Toledo, OH	1.1	49.2	
5 San Francisco-Oakland-Fremont, CA	7.4	54.3	95	Augusta-Richmond County, GA-S	C 1.1	47.5	
6 New York-Newark, NY-NJ-PA	7.4	51.4	96	Dayton, OH	1.0	53.2	
7 Washington-Arlington-Alexandria, DC-VA-MD-WV	7.0	44.7	97	Chattanooga, TN-GA	1.0	38.8	
8 Houston, TX	6.9	32.3	98	Pittsburgh, PA	1.0	53.3	
9 Las Vegas, NV	6.7	36.9	99	Portland, ME	0.7	54.1	
10 Bridgeport-Stamford, CT	6.5	41.0	100	Youngstown, OH-PA	0.4	65.6	

Source: Brookings analysis of 2008 American Community Survey data

English language ability. As a result, naturalization rates vary widely by country and region of origin (including proximity to the United States), length of time in the United States, socioeconomic characteristics, and refugee status. Nationwide in 2008, U.S. citizens accounted for 60 percent of foreign-born individuals from Europe, 58 percent from Asia, and 31 percent from Latin American and the Caribbean.

At the metropolitan level, naturalization rates vary considerably, and relate to the level and recentness of immigration. The places with the highest shares of naturalized citizens include older industrial metro areas with very low levels of recent immigration, such as Youngstown, Portland (ME), Pittsburgh, and Dayton. Continuous gateways such as San Francisco and New York also claim at least half of their foreign-born populations as U.S. citizens. On the lower end of the scale are both newer destination areas and those in which a majority of

immigrants hail from Mexico, the proximity of which to the United States has led to lower naturalization rates among that group; Houston and Las Vegas exemplify such areas.

## **Human Capital Characteristics**

Some of the most contentious arguments around immigration concern the role of immigrants in the economy. How skilled are immigrants and where do they fit into the labor market, both nationally and locally? English language ability and educational attainment provide two important markers of immigrants' labor market prospects, and these indicators vary widely across U.S. metropolitan areas.

On English language ability, several metro areas along the Mexican border and in California's Central Valley exhibit high levels of immigrants with limited proficiency and large shares of households that are "linguistically isolated" (where no members over the

Table 3. Immigrants in Border-State Metro Areas Exhibit the Lowest Levels of English Language Ability

Metro Areas Ranked by Share of Foreign Born Who are Limited-English Proficient, and Share of Households

that are Linguistically Isolated, 2008

Rank	Metro Area	% Limited English Proficient	% Linguistically Isolated Households
1	McAllen, TX	70.5	22.8
2	Bakersfield, CA	68.3	10.1
3	El Paso, TX	67.5	18.8
4	Modesto, CA	65.8	8.8
5	Fresno, CA	65.1	10.4
6	Stockton, CA	62.3	10.3
7	Los Angeles-Long Beach-Santa Ana, CA	62.2	14.8
8	Dallas-Fort Worth-Arlington, TX	61.9	8.4
9	Houston, TX	61.0	10.9
10	Oxnard-Thousand Oaks-Ventura, CA	60.0	8.0
	All large metro areas	52.2	6.3

Source: Brookings analysis of 2008 American Community Survey data

Note: Linguistically isolated households are those where no members over the age of 14 report speaking English "very well."

age of 14 speak English very well). In these metropolitan areas, foreign-born populations are dominated by Spanish-speakers, and upwards of 60 percent of all foreign-born residents age five and over are considered to be limited English proficient (Table 3). In the border metro areas of McAllen and El Paso, approximately one in five households is linguistically isolated.

Like immigrants themselves on measures of educational attainment (see *Educational Attainment* chapter), metropolitan areas diverge in their immigrant skill profiles. Yet distinctive regional patterns are evident in how immigrants of varying educational attainment distribute across metropolitan labor markets.<sup>1</sup>

Lower-skilled immigrants cluster in fast-growing places, reflecting the changing needs of labor markets there (Map 2). Metro areas throughout the Intermountain West, Texas, and up the I-35 corridor

in the Great Plains states have high shares of immigrants lacking a high school diploma, reflecting educational standards and expectations in their largely Latin American home countries. Many of these immigrants responded to labor market needs in (what was) the booming construction industry and burgeoning service sector in these metro areas that mushroomed before the housing market crash and resulting deep recession set in.

Immigrants with higher levels of educational attainment are overrepresented in metropolitan areas that no longer receive many immigrants, where the foreign born that remain tend to be older, long-term U.S. residents. These destinations are primarily in metropolitan areas east of the Mississippi River, including in the established immigrant gateways in the Northeast (filling niches in finance, healthcare, and technology), in new destinations

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Map 2. High- and Low-Skilled Immigrants Distribute Unevenly Across U.S. Metro Areas
Skill Profile of the Foreign Born, 2008

Source: Brookings analysis of 2008 American Community Survey data and based on analysis by Hall et al, forthcoming; see Endnote 1

Note: The immigrant skill profile reflects the ratio of bachelor's degree holders to those without high school diplomas among the foreign-born population. High connotes a ratio of 1.25 or greater; balanced connotes a ratio of 0.75 to 1.24; and low connotes a ratio below 0.75.

in the Southeast (diverse economies attracting higher-skilled, often "pioneer" immigrants), and in the former industrial metro areas in the Great Lakes region (older foreign-born cohorts that have aged in place). Western coastal "tech" metro areas such as Seattle, San Francisco and San Jose also register as high-skill.

Metropolitan areas with foreign-born populations with more "balanced" skill levels, reflecting both higher- and lower-skilled immigrants, run the gamut of U.S. regions and settlement histories. They include many newly emerging gateways in Southern states such as Nashville, Charlotte, Atlanta, and Orlando, as well as some of the largest immigrant destinations such as Chicago, New York, and Miami.

#### **Second Generation**

Of growing interest and concern is how the children of immigrants are faring in U.S. schools and the labor market, given the variation in human capital and resources of their parents. The 16 million children (under age 18) in the "second generation," as measured here can be either born abroad or in the United States but live with at least one foreignborn parent. They make up 23 percent of all children in the United States and 29 percent across all large metropolitan areas. In several metropolitan areas, they represent more than half or nearly half of all children (Table 4). New York and Los Angeles have the largest cohorts of second-generation children, nearly two million each. Not surprisingly,

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		Number of	Share of All
Rank	Metro Area	Children	Children (%)
1	San Jose-Sunnyvale-Santa Clara, CA	258,910	61.0
2	Los Angeles-Long Beach-Santa Ana, CA	1,865,272	59.6
3	McAllen, TX	144,779	57.7
4	Miami-Fort Lauderdale-Pompano Beach, FL	619,993	54.3
5	El Paso, TX	110,638	51.5
6	San Francisco-Oakland-Fremont, CA	436,136	49.6
7	Stockton, CA	82,206	45.1
8	Riverside-San Bernardino-Ontario, CA	492,887	44.4
9	San Diego, CA	309,571	43.9
10	New York-Newark, NY-NJ-PA	1,844,762	43.5
	All large metro areas	13,642,110	29.0

Source: Brookings analysis of 2008 American Community Survey data

other established immigrant gateways such as San Francisco and San Diego also figure among the top 10. Of course, not all children of immigrants are in disadvantaged households. However, a large second-generation population undoubtedly has impacts on schools, and at the local level may indicate segregation by limited language proficiency, poverty, and race and ethnicity.<sup>2</sup>

## **CITY AND SUBURBAN TRENDS**

The growth and development of metropolitan areas with extensive suburbs has led to an increasing preference among immigrants for a suburban residence.<sup>3</sup> In 1980, 41 percent of U.S. immigrants lived in the primary cities of the top 100 metro areas. By 2008, that share had decreased to 34 percent. Now, a majority

of immigrants nationwide (51 percent) live in the suburbs of large metropolitan areas, compared to just 44 percent in 1980. These suburban immigrants numbered 19.5 million in 2008.

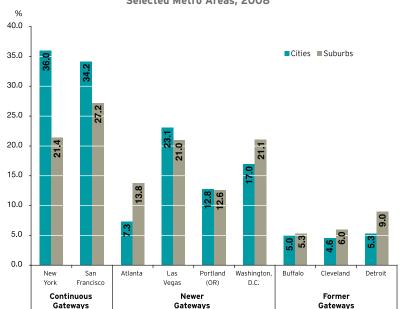
Smaller metro areas (under 500,000 population) and non-metropolitan areas have maintained their shares of about ten percent and five percent, respectively, of the nation's immigrant population. These steady proportions, however, mask the high growth rates in these areas. In fact, between 1990 and 2008, the immigrant population grew fastest in non-metro areas (183 percent), followed by smaller metro areas (122 percent). In suburbs and cities, by contrast, the immigrant population grew by 112 percent and 57 percent, respectively, over the same period, though from a much larger base. Individually, some counties within metropolitan areas, as well as some smaller metro areas and nonmetropolitan

<sup>\*</sup> Children under age 18, born abroad or in the United States, living with at least one foreign-born parent



Figure 3. Immigrants Comprise a Similar or Larger Share of Suburban than City Populations in Many Newer Destinations

Share of Population that is Foreign Born, Primary Cities vs. Suburbs, Selected Metro Areas, 2008



Source: Brookings analysis of 2008 American Community Survey data

counties experienced much faster growth, prompting residents and officials to confront immigration for the first time.<sup>4</sup>

The degree to which immigrants live in suburbs within specific metropolitan areas follows their individual settlement histories. Immigrants still compose a larger share of overall primary city (21 percent) than suburban (14 percent) population, but they have suburbanized over time along with the larger population. In 2008, 63 of the 95 largest metro areas had a majority of their foreign born living in suburbs. Long-established gateways like New York and San Francisco have high shares of foreignborn population overall, and their cities record even higher shares than their suburbs (Figure 3). In newer gateways like Atlanta, Las Vegas, Portland (OR), and Washington, D.C., the foreign born are at least as prevalent in suburbs as in cities, with new arrivals often skipping the city altogether. A similar pattern holds in former immigrant strongholds like Buffalo, Cleveland, and Detroit, but owes more to the long-

Table 5. Immigrants Are Over-Represented in High-Density Suburbs As Well As Cities

Total and Foreign-Born Population by Metropolitan Community Type, 2008

	Total Population	Foreign-Born Population	Foreign-Born Share of Population (%)	Share of Large Metro Areas' Total Population (%)	Share of Large Metro Areas' Foreign-Born Population (%)
Primary Cities	61,828,840	12,943,625	20.9	31.0	39.9
High-Density Suburbs	54,184,145	11,507,510	21.2	27.2	35.5
Mature Suburbs	49,491,155	6,015,360	12.2	24.9	18.6
Emerging Suburbs	23,638,770	1,598,070	6.8	11.9	4.9
Exurbs	10,009,665	361,460	3.6	5.0	1.1
All large metro areas	199,152,575	32,426,025	16.3	100.0	100.0

Source: Brookings analysis of 2008 American Community Survey data

<sup>\*</sup> Metro area names are abbreviated

run suburbanization of older foreign-born workers and families in those metro areas than to settlement

Immigrants distribute unevenly across different types of suburbs, too (Table 5). Across all major metro areas in 2008, 40 percent of the foreign born lived in primary cities, and 60 percent lived in suburbs. The latter included 36 percent living in high-density suburban counties, 19 percent in mature, mid-20th century suburban counties, 5 percent in emerging suburban counties, and just 1 percent in the exurbs. As in cities, immigrants represent an outsized share of population in high-density suburbs; their population share in mature suburbs now approaches the national average.

patterns of newly arriving populations.

## LOOKING AHEAD

Trends in immigration reveal an uneven portrait of the foreign born across America's metropolitan areas. Overall, immigration to the United States is slowing, and some of the fastest-growing places have seen drops in their foreign-born population. The imprint of the recession also shows up in many of the fastest-growing places of the past decade, now reeling from the bursting of the housing bubble. These metro areas, such as Phoenix and Las Vegas in the Intermountain West, saw many immigrant newcomers join the once burgeoning construction sector and associated industries only to witness a significant outflow in the past year. Other Sun Belt metro areassuch as Atlanta, Dallas, and Charlotte, also relatively new destinations-saw continued growth in immigration during the past year. Because immigrants, particularly more recent ones, tend to be fairly mobile, we expect to see some destination shifting as we look ahead to an uneven economic recovery across

metropolitan areas.

In the next decade, certain trends that have taken hold are likely to persist. We will see a continuing spread of immigrants into newer destinations and suburban areas, as immigrants seek opportunities for housing, jobs, and quality of life. The skills differentials across metro areas may also continue as immigrants consolidate further in new destination areas, bringing the next wave of immigrants and highlighting the language and educational aspects of immigrant integration.

The growth of immigrants in the suburbs underscores the need for jurisdictions across metropolitan areas to work together to adequately and coherently respond to changing demographic conditions. This is especially the case for those areas that have well-established, lower-skilled immigrant populations with high shares of children.

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## **ENDNOTES**

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- Ratio of high- to low-skill immigrants from Matthew Hall, Deborah Roempke Graefe, and Gordon F. De Jong, "The Geography of Immigrant Skills: Educational Profiles of Metropolitan Destinations" (Washington: Brookings Institution, forthcoming).
- Gary Orfield and Chungmei Lee, "Racial Transformation and the Changing Nature of Segregation," (Cambridge, MA: The Civil Rights Project, 2006).
- See Audrey Singer, Susan W. Hardwick and Caroline
   B. Brettell, Twenty-First Century Gateways: Immigrant Incorporation in Suburban America (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 2008).
- See, e.g., Audrey Singer, Jill H. Wilson, and Brooke DeRenzis, "Immigrants, Politics, and Local Response in Suburban Washington" (Washington: Brookings Institution, 2009).