

# Impact of Immigrants and Refugees in the Quad Cities

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## I. Introduction

Throughout its history, immigrants and refugees have shaped the social, cultural, and economic landscape of the Quad Cities. Beginning in the mid-1800s, immigrants from Germany, Sweden, Belgium, and other European nations helped to construct the first industries in the region. Mexican immigrants first moved to the Quad Cities in the early 1900s to work on the rail yards of Silvis, followed by immigrants from Eastern Europe. As immigrants built thriving neighborhoods across the Quad Cities, they laid the foundation for economic growth and further transformation of the region. In recent decades, immigrants and refugees from Africa, Asia, and Latin America have again come to play a significant role in the Quad Cities. In the wake of the farm crisis and deindustrialization, newcomers represent an important source of population and economic growth. Like many cities across the Rust Belt, the number of immigrant and refugee residents in the Quad-Cities has grown faster than the U.S.-born population. In 2019, approximately 19,827 foreign-born residents lived in the

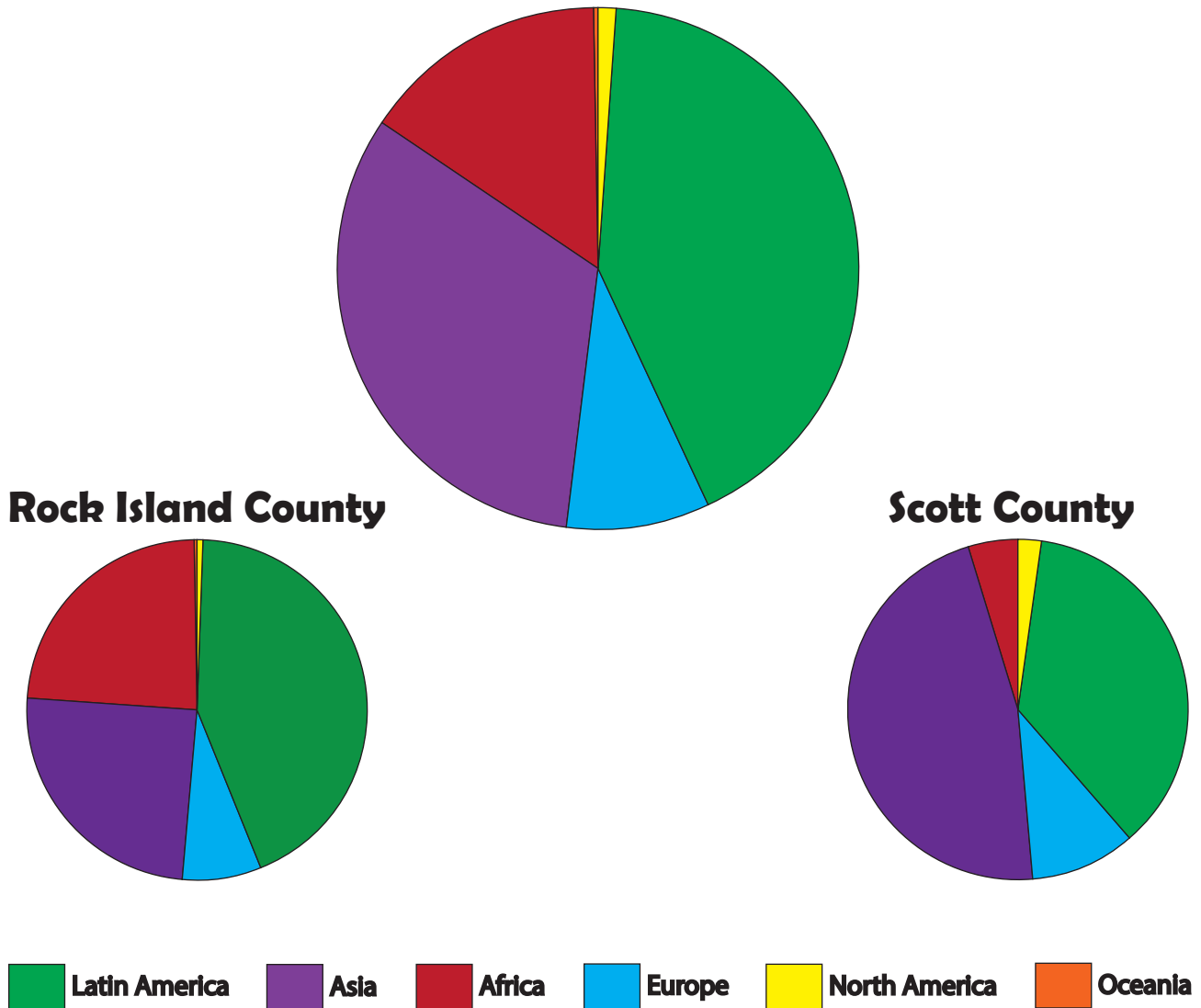
Quad Cities metropolitan area, representing **5.2 percent** of the region's total population (US Census Bureau 2020). From 2010 to 2019, the total population of the Quad Cities metropolitan area increased by only **1.1 percent** (376,736 381,175), while the foreign-born population grew by 3,694, an **18.6 percent increase** (16,133 19,827).

This report focuses on the economic impact of New Americans (immigrants and refugees) residing in Rock Island County (Illinois) and Scott County (Iowa). A number of recent studies have shown that immigrants and refugees make significant economic contributions to local communities and economies. New American Economy, a non-partisan organization, found that in 2019, immigrants in Illinois paid **\$21.4 billion** in taxes and had a total spending power (income minus federal, state and local taxes) of **\$50.2 billion**. In Iowa, immigrants paid **\$1.6 billion** in taxes and had a spending power of **\$4.3 billion** in 2019 (New American Economy). In Illinois's Congressional District 17, which covers all of Rock Island County in addition to parts of Peoria, Rockford, and several rural counties in northwest Illinois, immigrant residents contributed **\$230.4 million** in taxes and have a combined **\$611.6 million** in spending power (income minus federal, state and local taxes) (New American Economy 2019a). Immigrants in Iowa's second Congressional District, which covers Scott County and much of southeast Iowa, immigrants paid **\$276.2 million** in taxes and have **\$802.8 million** in spending power.

## II. The Impact of New Americans in the Quad Cities

To estimate the economic impact of New Americans in the Quad Cities, we analyzed data from the American Community Survey (ACS) 5-year estimates from 2015-19. According to the ACS, foreign-born residents make up approximately **5.2 percent** of the Quad Cities metropolitan region. More than **40 percent** of foreign-born residents in the metropolitan area are from Latin America, while approximately **32 percent** are originally from Asia. Most foreign-born residents in Scott County are from Asia (**46.6**) and Latin America (**36.4 percent**) while foreign-born residents from Latin America (**41.9**), Asia (**24.7 percent**) and Africa (**23.7 percent**) make up a higher percentage in Rock Island County.

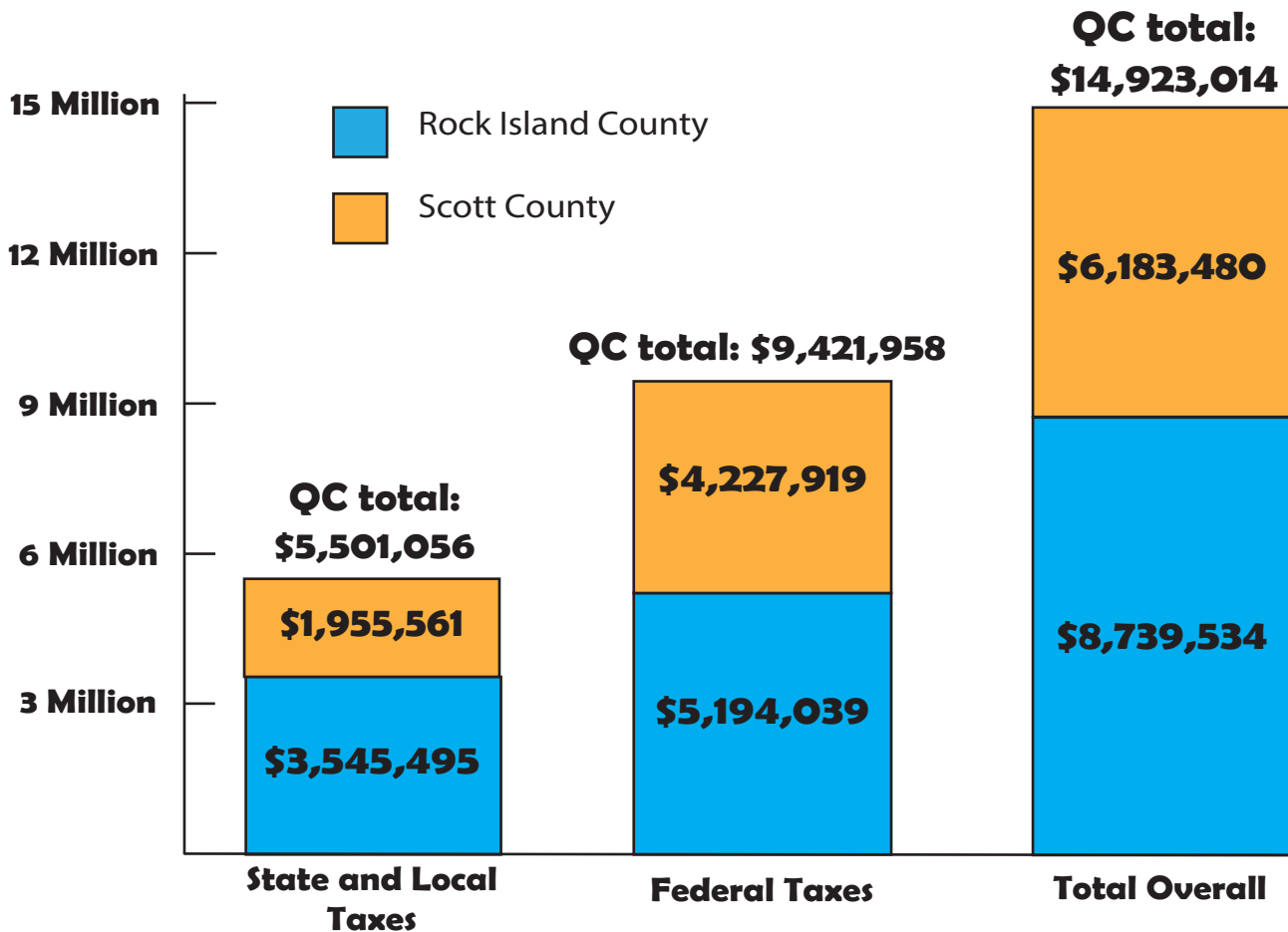
# New Americans in the Quad Cities Metropolitan Area (American Community Survey 5-year estimates 2015-2019)



To estimate the taxes and spending contributions of New Americans, we identified 654 immigrant and refugee households (1,263 people total) from the 2015-2019 American Community Survey. We selected all foreign-born residents (non-citizens and naturalized citizens but excluding residents who were born abroad to American citizen parents). Weighted, these households represent 12,111 people, which is approximately **3.8 percent** of the total population in Rock Island and Scott counties, which make up the Quad Cities metropolitan area (316,319).

We found that New Americans make significant economic contributions to local and state economies. We estimate that foreign-born residents in the Quad Cities pay almost **\$15 million** in taxes annually, including **\$5.5 million** in state and local taxes, **\$9.4 million** in federal taxes and have an estimated spending power (income minus taxes) of **\$36.5 million**.

## New Americans Tax Contributions

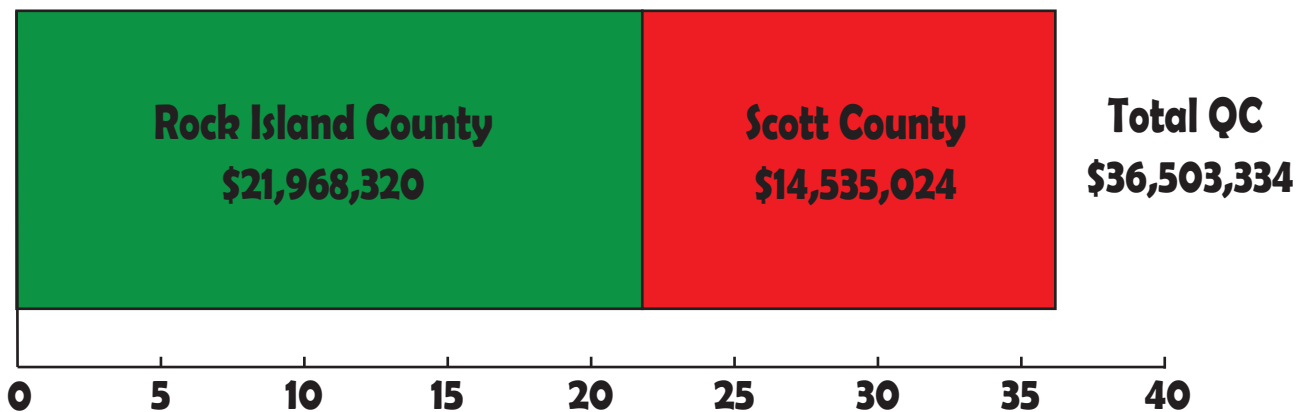


The American Community Survey also shows that most foreign-born residents have been in the United States for at least 10 years. Almost **42 percent** of foreign-born residents in the Quad Cities came to the United States before 2000, while only **10.9** have entered the U.S. since 2010. More than **42 percent** of foreign-born residents are naturalized citizens, and immigrants and refugees are significantly more likely to become citizens the longer they stay in the Quad Cities. Of the New Americans that arrived before 2000, **64.2 percent** are naturalized citizens. According to the ACS sample, 83 percent of foreign-born residents in the Quad Cities speak English well or very well.

## Education:

New Americans are less likely than the U.S.-born population to have a high school diploma. Only **69.1 percent** of New Americans in the Quad Cities over 25 have at least high school diploma or GED, compared to **92.4 percent** of the U.S.-born population over 25 in the Quad Cities. However, New Americans are slightly more likely to have completed at least a bachelor's degree compared to U.S.-born residents (**27.2** of New Americans, **26.9 percent** of the U.S.-born population).

## QC New Americans Spending Power in Millions



## Income and Public Assistance:

The American Community Survey shows that the median household income for New Americans is **\$56,654**, slightly less than the median household income for U.S.-born residents in the Quad Cities (**\$58,642**). New Americans are more significantly likely than US-born residents to be working age (between the ages of 25 and 64). Approximately **71 percent** of foreign-born residents in the Quad Cities are of working age, while only **49.8 percent** of the US-born population in the region is. This translates to much higher rates of labor participation among New Americans. New Americans over the age of 16 are more likely to be in the workforce than the general population in the Quad Cities (**70.4 percent** of New Americans, **62.9** of U.S.-born residents). New Americans in the Quad Cities are most likely to work in manufacturing (**40.3 percent**) and educational services, health care and social

assistance (**13.2 percent**), and arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodations, and food services. New Americans (**5.2 percent**) are also slightly more likely to be of self-employed entrepreneurs than the US-born population (**4.5 percent**) in the Quad Cities. However, New Americans are more likely to be in poverty (**17.2 live below the poverty level**) than the U.S.-born population in the Quad Cities (**12.3 percent**). As a result, New Americans are slightly more likely to be enrolled in the SNAP program (food stamps). **16.5 percent** of New Americans have SNAP benefits, compared to **11.6 percent** of the total Quad Cities population. New Americans are much less likely to be homeowners than the U.S.-born population (**54.9 percent** compared to **71.1 percent**). At the same time, ACS shows that relatively few New Americans rely on public health insurance. While **37.8 percent** of U.S.-born residents in the Quad Cities have Medicaid, Medicare or some other form of health insurance for low-income individuals, only **28.3 percent** of foreign-born residents in the Quad Cities have public health insurance (**64.8 percent** of New Americans have insurance through their employer). Overall, most New Americans (**85.8 percent**) have health insurance, compared with **95.7 percent** of U.S.-born residents in the Quad Cities.

Sources:

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