



Issue Brief

Immigrant Community Assessment

**Metropolitan
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Purpose of the 2003 Immigrant Community Assessment

In 2002, the Metropolitan Government of Nashville and Davidson County issued an RFP for an Immigrant Community Assessment “to better understand the needs of Nashville’s immigrant community”; “to gauge the adjustment of immigrants in the Nashville-Davidson county area”; “to assess the availability of a wide range of public and private, social welfare and economic services to immigrants in the area”; and to obtain “a comprehensive assessment of immigrant service accessibility status.”

The Metropolitan Government emphasized the growth to national prominence in the size of Nashville’s immigrant community. The proposal selected was from a collaboration of Vanderbilt University, Meharry Medical College and Tennessee State University, which also obtained input from the immigrants and others in the community.

The **Immigrant Community Assessment** was released in August, 2003, and noted the changing demographics from the U.S. Census.

It indicated that the number of Nashville-Davidson County residents who were born outside of the United States tripled between 1990 and 2000, having grown to roughly 40,000 or 7% of the county population by

2000. Many originated in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Of all foreign-born Nashville residents in 2000, two-thirds had arrived in the U.S. during the 1990s, three-fourths were not citizens, 20% were officially poor (compared to 13% of Nashville’s native-born population), and 61% were born in Mexico or Central America.

The Vanderbilt collaboration completed:

1. A statistical analysis of U.S. Census data on 1990-2000 changes in the size, composition, and settlement patterns of Nashville’s foreign-born population;
2. A survey of 64 directors of social service agencies and community organizations in Nashville;
3. A total of 16 focus groups conducted in seven languages with a total of 137 Nashville immigrants and refugees from Africa, Asia, and Latin America;
4. A study of several best practices that serve the immigrant and refugee communities in greater Atlanta, GA, Charlotte, NC, and Memphis, TN.

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IMMIGRANT COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT DEMOGRAPHIC CONCLUSIONS

- Roughly 7% of people currently residing in the area are foreign-born—a threefold increase from 2% in 1990,
- Some groups have changed in absolute number but not in percentage contribution to the total number of foreign-born individuals (e.g., South Americans) because the total foreign-born population has become larger and more diverse over time,
- The largest increase in the foreign-born population occurred among individuals originating from Central America and Mexico,
- Foreign-born people do classify themselves using standard racial and ethnic categories as presented in the U.S. Census,
- Foreign-born people tend not to live in the Census tracts with other foreign-born individuals but are relatively integrated with native-born whites and blacks at the Census tract level,
- Foreign-born individuals who are not citizens are more likely than naturalized foreign-born individuals and native-born individuals to live below the poverty line, and
- Census tracts in the southeast corridor are places where there is density and diversity in terms of foreign-born population groups.

The Assessment's recommendations were organized around seven themes on strengthening the incorporation of immigrants and refugees in Nashville-Davidson County that emerged from the research.

The immediate objectives of this set of recommendations are to maximize mutual communication and understanding between native and foreign-born residents and increase the supply, accessibility, and culturally sensitive delivery of services for foreign-born residents of Nashville-Davidson County.



Maximus Performance Audit

The Performance Audit of MSS recommended that the department provide leadership in implementing the recommendations of the 2003 Immigrant Community Assessment. It recommended that the new business model include a Program Planning and Coordination position dealing with immigrant and refugee services as a functional area of key policy interest. The new business model approved by the MSS Board of Commissioners includes an Immigrant Services Coordinator who will develop a plan for implementation of the recommendations.

The audit noted that such a change would result in a change in the scope of Metropolitan Social Services activities in two ways:

- The focus of service would shift from direct service delivery, case support and coordination for individual and/or refugee families and community advocacy to overall service planning and coordination and community advocacy.
- The target population would expand from refugees to immigrants and refugees.

The audit also identified various ways in which MSS could provide leadership in many of the planning and coordination efforts.



SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

The Immigrant Community Assessment made the following recommendations for Nashville, and the performance audit identified ways that MSS could assume leadership in planning and coordinating to address many of the goals.

- Development of instructional resources about cultural traditions and local contributions by the immigrant community
- Increase in existing instructional opportunities
- Encouragement to employers to be culturally sensitive
- Support for public inter-cultural events and programs
- Increase in English-language instruction
- Increase supply of childcare services for adult immigrant students and adults visiting social service agencies
- Encourage development of community based, multi-service social agencies
- Increase transportation frequency
- Increase supply of bilingual advocates
- Improved service collaboration
- Establishment of an on-going countywide organization dedicated to immigrant and refugee affairs



The Immigrant Community Assessment

noted that immigrants and refugees were often aware of their vulnerabilities and that their lack of knowledge about social services may place them at a disadvantage.

Immigrants and refugees displayed varying levels of knowledge about social services, the majority expressed views that reflected major gaps in knowledge or misinformation about matters such as how to use services, who qualifies for services, and how to address inadequacies in services.

As a result, there may be serious consequences for the lack of accurate information. Immigrants and refugees reported stories of unnecessary misunderstandings, humiliations, and depriva-

tions which have a direct effect in all areas of their

lives. While responsive measures should address policies and make knowledge about social services more available, they should also address the following:

- Immigrants' and refugees' lack of knowledge in regard to service utilization emerged consistently across the five policy areas. This theme suggests the existence of a gap in regard to immigrants' and refugees' knowledge on how to navigate, obtain, and use social services.
- Social service providers' lack of knowledge in regard to how to meet language groups' needs was also apparent.
- Social service providers also need to become informed about practices that are associated with specific language communities
- The critical needs within each social service area highlight the interdependence of each social service area.



The Planning and Coordination Unit of Metropolitan Social Services will coordinate, collaborate and develop a comprehensive plan to implement recommendations from the Immigrant Needs Assessment.

COORDINATION

MSS will coordinate with Metro Government agencies and other organizations to:

- Enhance awareness of services and increase communication among providers
- Prevent overlap and minimize administrative costs to increase resources for services
- Develop resource lists of services provided through the Metropolitan Government for Hispanics and other immigrants
- Enhance information availability to immigrants about available services



PLANNING

MSS will develop a comprehensive plan for the delivery of services by:

- Identifying social service needs of immigrants, including changing demographics
- Identifying available resources and services provided by Metro Government
- Identifying available resources to immigrants through other agencies
- Identifying, gathering and utilizing available information/resources
- Facilitate service gap identification with input from immigrant community
- Identifying persons in need and develop service strategies for gaps/deficiencies that have already been identified
- Providing and facilitate leadership in planning and coordination in response to recommendations in *the immigrant Community Needs Assessment*, including the development of work groups to address the recommendations
- Participating in immigrant efforts/initiatives to enhance MSS involvement and presence

COLLABORATIVE EFFORTS

MSS will promote collaborative efforts to make services available for immigrants by:

- Convening roundtable discussions about relevant issues, including immigrants and law enforcement (including homeland security concerns), immigrant workforce (including day labor), housing, economic asset building and consumer issues, education, childcare, and mental health
- Promoting collaboration among providers, including resource and expertise sharing
- Collaborating with key partners to address identified needs (need for improved outreach to immigrants, lack of available/affordable interpreters, lack of understanding of immigration status and/or program eligibility)
- Facilitating to disseminate resource information to enhance efficiency and access to services
- Identify ways to identify ongoing concerns of immigrant communities and service agencies



Maximus Performance Audit/Comments on Immigrant Community Assessment

Theme 1. Increase countywide, community familiarity with the cultural traditions and contributions of immigrants and refugees in Nashville.

RECOMMENDATION 1.1: Develop instructional resources—for example, brochures, workshop curricula, videos, mini-conferences with immigrants and refugees—about the cultural traditions and local contributions of all foreign-born ethnic groups in Nashville for employers, real estate managers, and professional service providers in all service domains.

Maximus: MSS Refugee Services currently provides community advocacy and some instructional resources with a focus on refugees. As envisioned in the Alternative Service Model, MSS Program Planning and Coordination staff could serve as a source of best practice information on instructional resources as well as community advocacy for immigrant and refugee needs and services in identified domains.

RECOMMENDATION 1.2: Increase the instructional opportunities on the cultural traditions and local contributions of Nashville's foreign-born ethnic groups for employers, real estate managers, and professional service providers in all service domains.

Maximus: MSS Refugee Services currently provides some of these instructional opportunities through community advocacy activities. In the Alternative Service Model, MSS Program Planning and Coordination staff could serve as a source of best practice information, need identification and advice related to instructional opportunities addressed by other Metro agencies and private providers.

RECOMMENDATION 1.3: Encourage employers, real estate managers, and professional service providers in all service domains to avail themselves voluntarily of any instructional opportunities of the kind described in Recommendation 1.2.

Maximus: MSS Program Planning and Coordination staff could advise and support public announcements and other communications related to the importance of voluntary participation in these instructional opportunities.

RECOMMENDATION 1.4: Develop K-12 curricula and materials on global immigration to Nashville for instruction in social studies, geography, history, literature, foreign language, and statistics courses.

Maximus: This service would be most appropriately addressed by Metro Public Schools. MSS Program Planning and Coordination staff could advise.

RECOMMENDATION 1.5: Support more public inter-cultural events and disseminate more public-interest information about global immigration to Nashville and the cultural traditions and local contributions of Nashville's foreign-born ethnic groups.

Maximus: MSS Program Planning and Coordination staff could advise and provide best practice information to other public agencies and private providers that are responsible for the recommended inter-cultural events and public-interest information.

Theme 2. Increase the availability and broaden the curricula of English-language instruction and instruction on daily life in the United States.

Maximus Performance Audit/Comments on Immigrant Community Assessment (continued)

RECOMMENDATION 2.1: Increase English-language instructional opportunities that are offered during non-working hours.

Maximus: MSS Refugee Services currently provides English-language instruction to some refugees. In the Alternative Service Model, MSS Program Planning and Coordination staff could encourage and advise Metro Public Schools and adult education providers on English-language instructional opportunities.

RECOMMENDATION 2.2: Offer more English-language instruction at proficiency levels higher than the elementary level.

Maximus: MSS Program Planning and Coordination could encourage and advise Metro Public Schools and adult education providers on such instructional opportunities.

RECOMMENDATION 2.3: Offer more instruction on daily life routines in the United States.

Maximus: MSS Refugee Services currently provides refugees this service. In the Alternative Service Model, MSS Program Planning and Coordination staff could advise Metro Public Schools and private providers on this instruction.

RECOMMENDATION 2.4: Increase the supply of affordable and safe childcare services for adult students.

Maximus: MSS Program Planning and Coordination staff could help target needs and advise the development and provision of these childcare services.

Theme 3. Encourage the development of community-based social service agencies in areas where immigrants and refugees tend to reside.

RECOMMENDATION 3.1: Encourage the development and diffusion of community based, multi-service, multi-ethnic social service agencies in the southeast quadrant of Nashville.

Maximus: MSS Program Planning and Coordination staff could help target needs and advise the development, coordination and potential funding (from federal, state and local sources) for these services. MSS Contract and QA staff could help identify service and related funding requirements that warrant the expenditure of Metro contract dollars.

RECOMMENDATION 3.2: Increase the frequency with which transportation services operate between the southeast quadrant and the other areas of Nashville.

Maximus: MSS Program Planning and Coordination staff could facilitate planning and provision of transportation services by MTA.

RECOMMENDATION 3.3: Increase the supply of affordable and safe childcare services for families who visit social service agencies.

Maximus: MSS Program Planning and Coordination staff could advise and promote the need for such services in other Metro agencies. MSS staff could work with contact service providers to explore options for agencies to accommodate parental needs when providing services.

Theme 4. Increase the accessibility of employment, housing, and service providers to immigrants and refugees.

Maximus Performance Audit/Comments on Immigrant Community Assessment (continued)

RECOMMENDATION 4.1: Increase the supply of bilingual advocates—counselors, lawyers, and social workers—who can advocate on behalf of non-English-speaking clients and patients, and on behalf of those who are not fluent in English, during the following interactions and transactions: Adult Education, Children’s Education, Employment, Health, Housing, Safety.

Maximus: MSS Refugee Services staff and interpreters currently serve as bilingual advocates for refugees when dealing with various service providers. In the Alternative Service Model, MSS Program Planning and Coordination staff could help target needs and advise development, coordination and potential funding (from federal, state and local sources) for agencies that can supply bilingual advocates. MSS staff should partner with Metro Schools and other educational programs to foster the development of bi-lingual training programs.

RECOMMENDATION 4.2: Increase the supply of bilingual emergency-service receptionists and providers.

Maximus: MSS Program Planning and Coordination staff could promote and advise other Metro agencies with first responders (e.g., police, fire, EMS, hospital) on the need for bilingual personnel. MSS Client Intake and Referral should include bilingual staff.

Theme 5. Streamline the credentialing of immigrants and refugees for employment in diverse sectors of the Nashville economy.

RECOMMENDATION 5.1: Encourage collaboration among private and public employers, labor unions, employment services, human resource management professionals, professional associations, occupational licensing agencies, vocational and technical education providers, and refugee resettlement agencies in the development of on-going, countywide capacity to interpret foreign, employment credentials earned in all countries of origin and streamline the preparation, communication, and presentation of foreign-born workers’ credentials for employment in the Nashville economy.

Maximus: MSS Program Planning and Coordination staff could advise the Nashville Career Advancement Center (NCAC) and other Metro agencies on how to support and streamline credentialing of immigrants and refugees.

Theme 6. Develop public arenas for immigrants and refugees to express regularly their interests and needs.

RECOMMENDATION 6.1: Establish an on-going forum for the regular expression of interests by immigrants and refugees in Nashville.

Maximus: MSS Program Planning and Coordination staff and/or MSS Client Intake and Referral staff could facilitate, lead, and represent the Metro Government at such a forum.

Theme 7. Strengthen countywide capacity to monitor, plan, coordinate, and address the widest possible range of needs of immigrants and refugees.

RECOMMENDATION 7.1: Establish an on-going, countywide organization dedicated to “immigrant and refugee affairs” to monitor social services needs and plan, coordinate and achieve a mutually beneficial incorporation of the rapidly growing and diversifying community of immigrants and refugees in Nashville.

Maximus: In the envisioned Alternative Service Model, MSS might address this recommendation in one or more of the following ways: 1) Help plan and advise the development of such an organization; 2) Represent the Metro Government on the organization’s advisory board; 3) Facilitate the definition of requirements and the provision of Metro contract dollars to support such an organization; and 4) Serve as a participating agency in a Metro-led organization that serves this mission.