



Introduction

Section I of the
2006-2007 Travis County Immigrant Assessment

Conducted by
**Travis County Health and Human Services & Veterans Service
Research and Planning Division**

Questions and comments regarding this report may be directed to
rachel.coff@co.travis.tx.us or koren.darling@co.travis.tx.us



Introduction

Purpose of the Assessment

Travis County has experienced significant demographic change over the past 15 years. Between 1990 and 2005, Travis County experienced a 230% increase in its foreign-born population (from 45,080 to 148,239). Foreign-born residents now make up 17% of County population. Change of this magnitude underscores the need for a better understanding of the community conditions that affect the diverse immigrant populations in Travis County.

In late 2005, community partners, recognizing the significance of these trends, made a commitment to examine, identify, and report the current conditions and needs of immigrants in Travis County. At this time, a collection of key stakeholders discovered a common interest in pursuing this challenge; these included Catholic Charities of Central Texas, the Travis County Health and Human Services & Veterans Service, City of Austin Commission on Immigrant Affairs, and the Community Action Network. The Research & Planning Division of Travis County Health and Human Services & Veterans Service stewarded this project with support of an assessment steering committee made up of representatives of the community partners mentioned above, as well as community volunteers.

R&P staff, the steering committee, and a great number of community volunteers have worked for over a year to complete this unique project. Together, these contributors have endeavored to find and present a balanced, accurate, and useful picture of foreign-born residents in Travis County. This process found foreign-born residents across all socio-economic levels, and discovered both difference and, more importantly, similarities between foreign-born and native-born residents. Recognizing that foreign-born residents are integral to our community, we have tried to identify overarching community goals and assess the state of foreign-born residents within the context of these goals.

Definition of Immigrant

There is no one definition for the term immigrant that crosses all sources or all issues. For the purposes of this assessment, we have adapted the following working definition from the U.S. Census Bureau definition of foreign born:

An immigrant is anyone who is not a U.S. citizen or a U.S. national by birth. Thus for purposes of this assessment the term immigrant is synonymous with foreign born. The foreign-born population includes but may not be limited to:

- ***Naturalized U.S. citizens***
- ***Lawful permanent residents*** (individuals sponsored by family or employers for lawful permanent resident status; refugees and asylees)
- ***Individuals with a temporary visa*** (e.g. foreign students, temporary workers)
- ***Undocumented immigrants***

Even this broad definition does not address the full scope of immigrant issues. In particular, this process has tried to deal with the complexities of **mixed-status families**. These are families that have at least one parent who is a non-citizen and at least one child who is a citizen. They may consist of any combination of legal, undocumented and naturalized immigrants. When policies, practices, or environmental factors create barriers for non-citizens in mixed-status families, citizens in such families also inherit at least some of those barriers.

About the Report

Through this lengthy process the following key issue areas emerged:

- Immigration Policy, Process, and Legal Rights
- Public Safety
- The Economic Safety Net
- Housing
- Health
- Education
- Workforce

In addition, the assessment includes two overarching sections to bookend these issues. We begin with a general **Profile of Foreign-Born Residents** in Travis County, and close with **Conclusions and Next Steps**. While we are hopeful that readers will have time to read the whole assessment, we recognize that it is a large document and strongly encourage reading at least the opening profile section and closing conclusions section in addition to any specific issue sections of individual interest.

In each area, broad level community goals are identified. These goals are drawn from the existing work of authorities within our community and are used to place the state of immigrant residents in a broader community context. Regardless of place of birth, native or foreign born, it is in the interest of the whole community to promote these goals for all residents.

This assessment process included a forum for local service providers, and 18 focus groups with immigrant residents of Travis County. (For details on methodology, refer to the Appendix of this report.) We included results from this primary research in text boxes throughout the report. We have tried to preserve, as best we can, participants' responses and presented them as authentically as possible.

What's Next

The Conclusions and Next Steps Section is a departure from what has been found in previous community assessments. Rather than pointing clearly to actions, the work completed so far points to more questions. While this document does not go as far some might like, it goes as far as the findings will allow. This places us at a critical junction in community process; it is now time for stakeholders in the community to look at what has been found, consider the questions

that follow, and start thinking for themselves about what this means to them, and what they think it means for the community.

We hope to transition this work from assessment to convening stakeholders in a community process to figure out what actions are needed. We encourage each of you to consider the information presented, think about what it means to you, and bring your individual perspectives into the next stages of community process that will follow this assessment.