

Immigrants, Refugees, and Languages Spoken in Buffalo

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Few Immigrants, Many Refugees

According to 2000 Census Data, Buffalo ranked last 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 2010.¹

The main reason for this increase is the number of refugees being resettled in Buffalo. Refugees are people fleeing war, persecution or natural disaster in their home countries. From 2003 to 2014, Erie County resettled a total of 9,723 refugees.² Currently, Erie County receives slightly over one third of the total refugee flow into the state.³ In addition to these direct resettlements, many other refugees come to Buffalo as secondary migrants from other parts of the U.S.⁴

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

From 2003-2006 the top countries of origin for immigrants to the Buffalo region were Canada and Yemen⁵, but from 2007-2012 this shifted and countries more typically associated with refugees, such as Burma and India, topped the charts.⁶

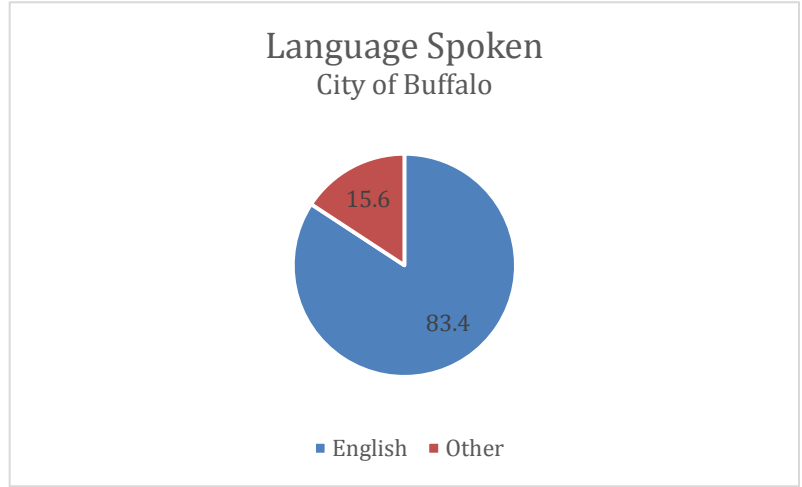
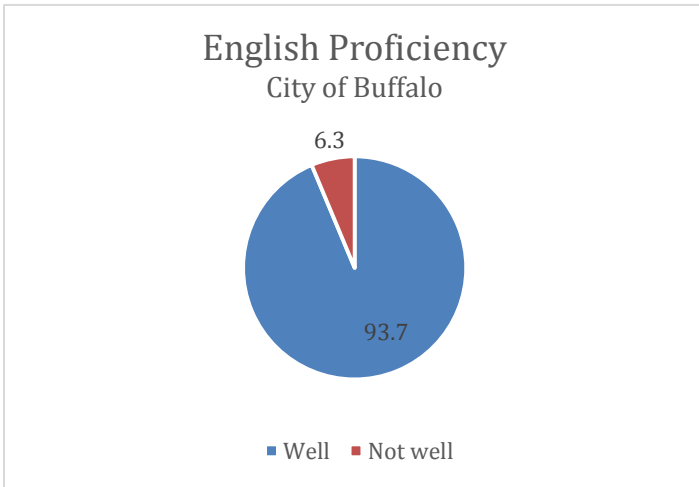
Buffalo's Young Foreign-Born Population

Between 2000 and 2013, the foreign born population ages 18 to 34 in the region grew by 75 percent.¹ At the national level that group grew by only 6 percent.⁷

Percent of People 5 Years and Over Who Speak English Less than Very Well (Census 2013)

City of Buffalo	6.3% ⁸
Erie County	3.4% ⁹
Buffalo-Niagara Metro Area	3.0% ¹⁰
New York State	13.4% ¹¹

City of Buffalo: English Proficiency and Language Spoken



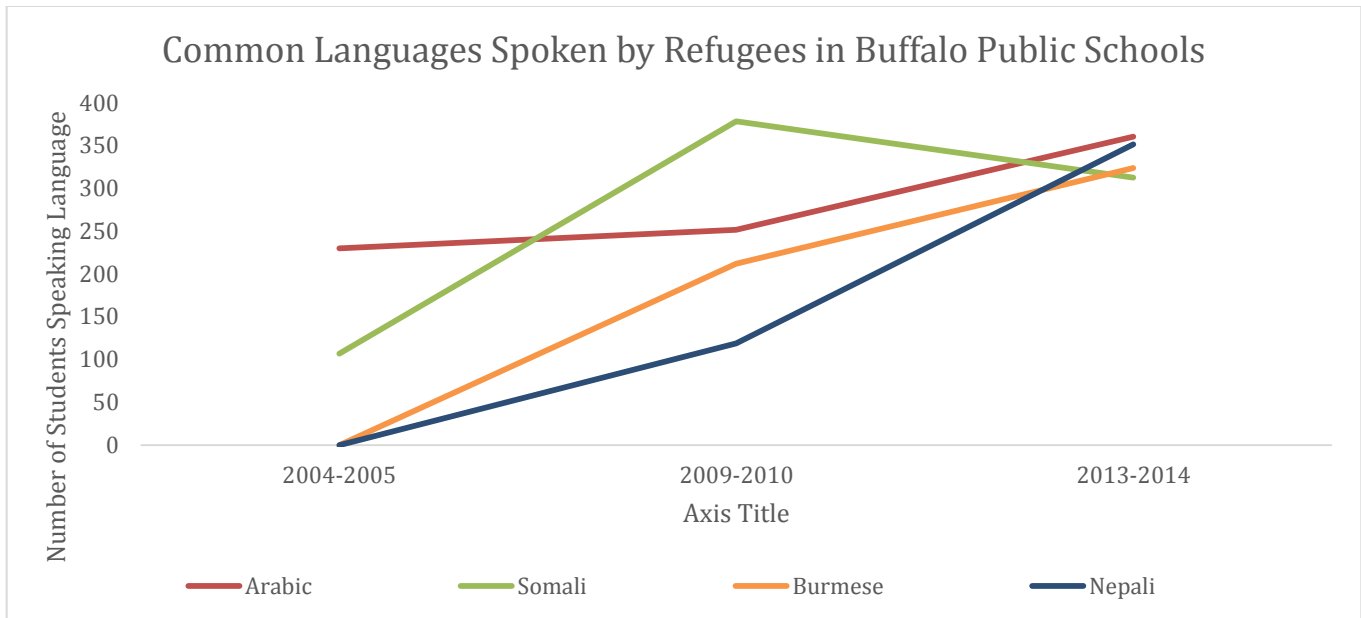
Buffalo Public Schools LEP/ELL Students¹²

	Number of LEP Students	Number of Languages Spoken
2004 – 2005	2,539	46
2009 – 2010	3,481	67
2013 – 2014	4,307	63

The number of LEP students in the Buffalo Public School System has increased from 2,539 in 2004 to 4,307 in 2014 with the number of languages spoken rising from 46 to 63. With such a variety of language ESL classes have become particularly important. In addition, in many cases refugee children have gone through traumatic experiences that teachers and staff should be aware of. Buffalo’s on-time graduation rate of English Language Learners is only 34.3% as of 2012 – an important reason that the city’s overall graduation rate (55.5%) is dramatically lower than the state average (79.1%).¹³

Buffalo Public Schools Top 10 Languages

Language Spoken	2004-2005	Language Spoken	2009-2010¹⁴	Language Spoken	2013-2014¹⁵
Spanish	1742	Spanish	1566	Spanish	1521
Arabic	230	Karen	461	Karen	628
Somali	107	Somali	379	Arabic	361
Vietnamese	84	Arabic	252	Nepali	352
Kurdish	56	Burmese	212	Burmese	324
Albanian	42	Nepali	119	Somali	313
Serbo-Croatian	36	Kirundi	77	Bengali	102
French	29	Vietnamese	63	Swahili	86
Russian	27	Kpelle	40	Other	72
Lao	24	French	35	French	61



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, Karen, Swahili, and Nepali, have increased rapidly.

Erie County: Top 15 Countries of Origin for Refugees Resettled from 2002 to 2014

Ethnicity	Total Number of Refugees (2002-2014)
Afghanistan	121
Burma	3,960
Bhutan	1,671
Burundi	189
Democratic Republic of Congo	516
Cuba	127
Ethiopia	152
Eritrea	292
Iraq	1,119
Liberia	275
Russia	204
Somalia	1,980
Sudan	283
Vietnam	106

Refugees Resettled FFY 2013¹⁶

Total resettled in New York State	3,965
Resettled upstate ¹⁷	3,710 (94%)
Resettled in Erie County	1,361 (34%)

New York State Refugees: Most Common Nations of Origin: 2003-2013¹⁸

Country of Origin	No. of Refugees
Burma	11,362
Bhutan	5,741
Somali	3,664
Iraq	2,614
Liberia	1,533
Russia	1,213
Ukraine	1,013
Sudan	897
Democratic Republic of Congo	681
Eritrea	546
Iran	536
Burundi	528
Uzbekistan	483
Cuba	481
Afghanistan	395
Azerbaijan	346
Ethiopia	303
Vietnam	278
Belarus	277
Sierra Leone	250
China	141
Congo	139
Moldova	131
Rwanda	128
Palestine	123

NOTES

- ¹ Wilson, J. and Singer, A. (2011). *Immigrants in 2010: Metropolitan America: A Decade of Change*. Metropolitan Policy Program at Brookings. Retrieved from http://www.brookings.edu/~media/research/files/papers/2011/10/13%20immigration%20wilson%20singer/1013_immigration_wilson_singer.pdf
- ² WRAPS December 2013, Provided by Journey's End Refugee Services
- ³ Id.
- ⁴ Personal communication, Christine Lemonda, Journey's End Refugee Services
- ⁵ Regional Institute, University at Buffalo, "Upstate's Recent Arrivals" (January 2008)
- ⁶ Department of Homeland Security. *Profiles on Legal Permanent Residents*. Retrieved from <http://www.dhs.gov/profiles-legal-permanent-residents>
- ⁷ <http://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2014/cb14-219.html>
- ⁸ 2013 American Community Survey. (2013). American FactFinder: Buffalo City, NY. Retrieved June 2, 2015, from <http://factfinder2.census.gov>
- ⁹ Id.
- ¹⁰ Id.
- ¹¹ 2013 American Community Survey. (2013). American FactFinder: New York State. Retrieved June 2, 2015, from <http://factfinder2.census.gov>
- ¹² Data from Buffalo Public Schools
- ¹³ <http://schoolzone.buffalonews.com/2014/12/18/buffalo-graduation-rate-holds-steady/>
- ¹⁴ Id.
- ¹⁵ Id.
- ¹⁶ Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance, Bureau of Refugee and Immigrant Assistance (BRIA). *BRIA Population Data for FFY 2013*. Retrieved from <http://otda.ny.gov/programs/bria/documents/population-report.pdf>
- ¹⁷ Includes Erie, Onondaga, Monroe, Oneida, and Albany Counties
- ¹⁸ WRAPS December 2013, Provided by Journey's End Refugee Services

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