

Building Integrated Communities in  
Sanford and Lee County,  
North Carolina:

Demographics and Perspectives of  
Immigrant Residents



## Executive Summary

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THE LATINO **MIGRATION** PROJECT

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## Executive Summary: Resident Input and Recommendations

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The report section that immediately follows this summary presents a demographic profile of Sanford and Lee County's immigrant residents (see full report at <http://migration.unc.edu/programs/bic>). Readers who are interested in the make-up of this immigrant community—which included an estimated more than 11,000 Hispanic/Latino residents in Lee County in 2014 [1]—should review that profile for information such as countries of origin, occupational trends, education and English language levels, and U.S. residency and citizenship statuses.

Here, we highlight the valuable input of the many local immigrant residents who took part in this assessment through either **immigrant resident surveys** or **resident discussion groups**. The 307 residents who completed surveys, or the *survey respondents*, represented a diverse sample of immigrants from homes in all areas of the City of Sanford as well as greater Lee County. This included both English- and Spanish-speaking foreign-born residents from 14 different countries of origin, as well as 45 U.S.-born children of immigrant parents and 30 youth under the age of 18. In addition, about 230 immigrant residents took part in a total of nine discussion groups at three bilingual public meetings.

Together, these residents, or *participants*, shared important information about their experiences living in Sanford and Lee County, as well as their recommendations for supporting local *immigrant integration*. We use *immigrant integration* to refer to a two-way process in which both immigrant residents and receiving residents work together to build stronger, more inclusive communities that benefit from immigrants' increased civic participation, economic mobility, and access to mainstream institutions.

Many survey respondents wrote that they had moved to Sanford and Lee County in search of peace and safety, greater work opportunities, and/or a generally better future for themselves and their families. Some had moved to be closer to their families already living in the area. They overwhelmingly described the area as a peaceful and safe place to live. They also praised the friendliness of their neighbors, the lower costs of living, the area's trees and parks, and the closeness of schools and stores.

In addition, survey respondents clearly identified several major difficulties that are affecting local immigrants and their integration (see *“Immigrant Survey Findings”*, pp. 36-38). These same difficulties were also named by the majority of resident discussion groups as the “greatest challenges” facing local immigrants (see *Table 6.1*, pp. 43-46).

Below, we describe these major issues as well as residents' related recommendations for improving integration. We also include other types of data from this report, such as demographic and employment data, a review of local resources, and local health department findings, to support a better understanding of these issues. Issues are listed in alphabetical order.

- **Access to Health Care** – The 2014 health assessment report from the Lee County Public Health Department describes some of the county's overall challenges with respect to the local health care resources available for county residents in general [2]. For example, in 2012, the number of Lee County health professionals for every 10,000 county residents fell behind the rates throughout the state in every category except dental hygienists and practical nurses. In particular, there were only 0.5 psychologists and 0 psychological associates for every 10,000 county residents [3].

Our review of resources in section 3 shows that local health care resources for immigrants in Lee County are even more limited. Additionally, both survey respondents and discussion groups voiced several problems with accessing those limited local resources. These barriers include residents' inability to obtain health insurance; high costs of local medical, dental, and hospital services; lack of driver's licenses or public transportation for traveling to clinics; language barriers; and lack of response from mental health care providers. Both participant types also voiced problems specific to Central Carolina Hospital, including a lack of financial assistance, neglect of Hispanic/Latino patients, and long processes to obtain emergency care. Finally, both participant types reported that they must travel to UNC Medical Center hospitals in Chapel Hill, NC (about 35 miles away) for care.

Survey respondents specifically named community health clinics, as well as lower cost medical, dental, and mental health care services, as resources that can be provided to support immigrant integration (*see "Major Resident Recommendations", pp. 38-39*).

- **Driver's Licenses and Alternative Identification (ID)** – Current N.C. state law does not allow residents without proof of U.S. citizenship or residency status to obtain driver's licenses [4]. It is not surprising that licenses were identified by both survey respondents and discussion groups as a dominating concern for local immigrants. Residents explained that the lack of both licenses *and* public transportation (*see "Public Transportation" below*) means that local immigrants are left without any way to travel to work, health clinics, community business, or schools and other institutions, and/or that they are forced to drive without a license and face risks of costly tickets and detention. Committee members report that many residents have collected thousands of dollars in fines for driving without a license to their place of employment.

Resident discussion groups built upon their discussion of driver's licenses when they explained that the lack of *any* ID—such as a college ID or an alternative, faith-based or city/county ID—adds to immigrants' general fear of authorities, slows integration, and gets in the way of basic daily activities. It prevents them from filling medicines, returning purchases, and even picking up their children from school. Survey respondents and other residents suggested that local government can improve integration and unity in the community by issuing an alternative photo ID to undocumented residents.

- **Education and Schools** – In Sanford in 2010, 75% of Latino men and 43% of Latina women ages 18-24 had less than a high school diploma or GED equivalency [5]. Discussion groups highlighted problems with local schools, higher education, and adult education as major challenges for local immigrants. In the local schools, problems include the relationships between English- and Spanish-speaking students and also the needs for more school communication with immigrant parents, more information about college financial aid, and increased school security. With respect to adult and higher education, residents described a need for affordable and inclusive adult education (including education beyond GED) as well as scholarships and financial aid for Hispanic/Latino students.

Additionally, survey respondents specifically named English language education as a service that can improve local immigrant integration. In 2008-2012, about 17% of the Lee County population over age 5 reported that they speak Spanish at home; about 5,693 of those Spanish-speaking residents reported that they speak English less than "very well" [6]. Discussion groups pointed to language barriers as a cause of major problems for residents' relationships in the community.

- **Government Communication** – Discussion groups emphasized a need for improved communication, including more Spanish-language communication, of information about basic city/county regulations and services, civic rights and responsibilities, and community resources. Some residents further suggested that improved communication of laws and police procedures could specifically improve immigrant relationships with police. Report section 4 outlines immigrant survey findings that local government can use to increase the reach of its communication (see *“Communicating with Immigrant Residents”*, p. 39).
- **Police Activities** – Many survey respondents expressed positive opinions about local police as a whole. Additionally, BIC Committee members have observed that both the Chief of the Sanford Police Department and the Lee County Sheriff have been very helpful in supporting and completing law enforcement certifications for local immigrants who have suffered from a crime in the U.S. and may be eligible for a temporary U visa (Sanford BIC Planning Committee Meeting, June 30, 2015).

However, both survey respondents and discussion groups overwhelmingly identified perceived mistreatment by police as a major problem for their communities. They specifically repeated and emphasized the issue of racial profiling. They described racial profiling as taking place through police stationing driver checkpoints in Hispanic/Latino neighborhoods and/or targeting Hispanic/Latino drivers to pull over and ticket. The map of Hispanic/Latino population concentrations that is provided in this report (see *Figure 3.3*, p. 15) may provide useful information for addressing these major issues.

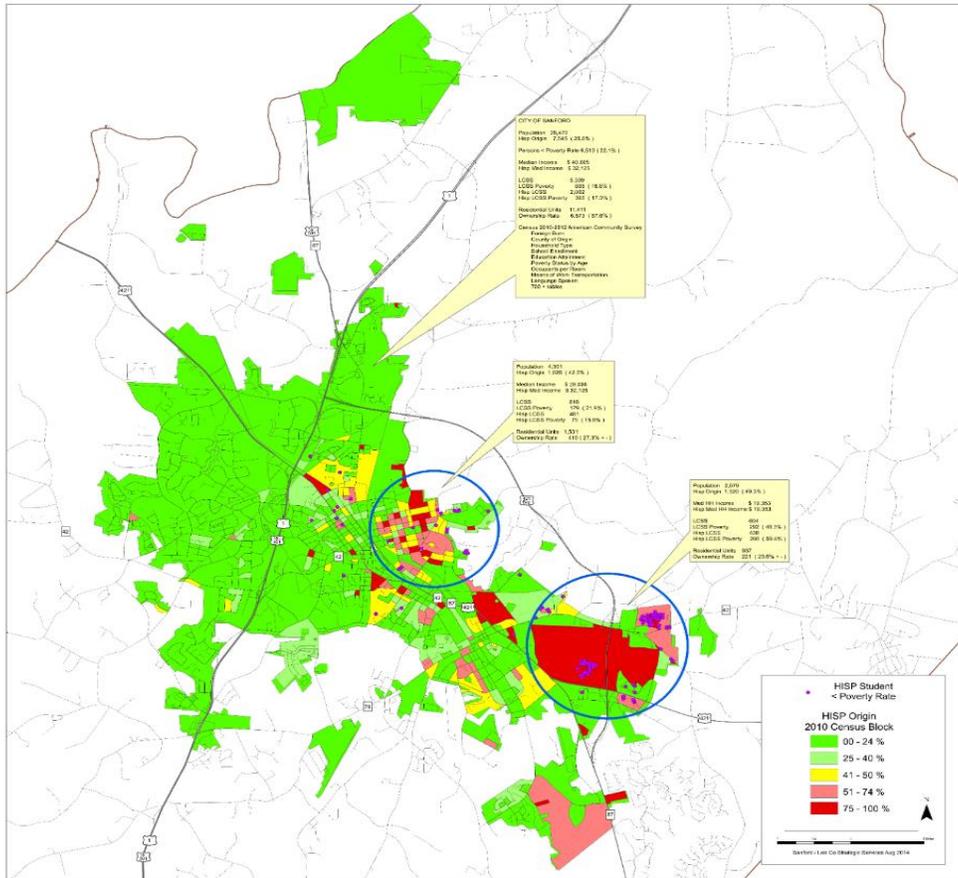
Discussion groups also shared their perception that there is a lack of positive police involvement in their communities. They described a lack of police follow-up to crime reported by immigrants as well as to police asking for documentation in order to file a report. They further showed uncertainty about police procedures by asking questions about whether the police have the right to ask for a Social Security Number and what happens if a resident does not have immigration papers.

- **Public Transportation** – A lack of public transportation was of overwhelming concern to both survey respondents and discussion groups. They explained that public transportation is particularly needed for residents who cannot obtain driver’s licenses. Again, as stated above (see *“Driver’s Licenses and Alternative ID”*), the lack of both public transportation *and* driver’s licenses means that local immigrants are left without any way to travel to community institutions or even take their children to school and sports practices, and/or that they are forced to drive without a license and face risks of costly tickets and detention.

Both participant types specifically named transportation as a primary service that local government can offer to encourage immigrant integration. The map of Hispanic/Latino population percentages provided in this report (see *Figure 3.3*, p. 15) may provide a starting place for identifying exact geographical areas in most need of transportation service. The report listings of local businesses that employ Hispanic/Latino residents (see *Table 4.1*, p. 20) and of those Lee County industries that are dependent upon large shares of Hispanic/Latino employees (see *Table 3.2*, p. 18) may help also identify local employers and industries that might share a financial interest in improving local transportation options for immigrant employees.

Finally, discussion groups also revealed that not all residents know about the limited transportation services that are currently available through the County of Lee Transit System (COLTS) or what fees and ID are required to request rides on COLTS vehicles. Survey findings that local government can use to improve its communication of existing transportation options are outlined in report section 5 (see *“Communicating with Immigrant Residents”*, p. 39).

(EXCERPT) FIG. 3.3: MAPPED CONCENTRATIONS OF HISPANIC/LATINO RESIDENTS, SANFORD 2010



SOURCE: Sanford/Lee County Strategic Services

- Work and Workers' Rights** – In 2010, approximately 26% of the Hispanic/Latino population in Sanford had an income at or below the poverty level, and it appears that most local Latinos living in poverty are young families with children [7]. Both survey respondents and discussion groups identified worker exploitation and employer discrimination, including unequal wages and *wage theft*, or employers' failure to pay wages that were earned, as major problems for local immigrants. They also expressed the need for more and better paying work opportunities for immigrant residents, as well as work permits for undocumented residents.

Survey respondents provided a number of clear suggestions for ways that local government can improve local work opportunities and workplace conditions in order to encourage immigrant integration (see *“Major Resident Recommendations”*, pp. 38-39). Additionally, the report listings of both the local businesses that employ Hispanic/Latino residents (see Table 4.1, p. 20) and the Lee County industries that depend on large percentages of Hispanic/Latino employees (see Table 3.2, p. 18) may help to identify local employers and industries where any work to address wage inequality and workers' rights might be most relevant.

In addition, a few resident discussion groups also identified major challenges relating to **youth activities**, **community relationships**, the **environment**, and **home ownership**. Resident input about these issues is presented in report Table 6.1, “Major Challenges Reported by Discussion Groups”, on pages 43-46.

## REFERENCES

1. Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW) Employees: EMSI 2014.2 Class of Worker; Generated by Patrick McKemie. U.S. Census Bureau.
2. 2014 Community Health Assessment. 2014, Lee County Public Health Assessment Team and LeeCAN.
3. 2014 Community Health Assessment. 2014, Lee County Public Health Assessment Team and LeeCAN. p. 47-50.
4. State Laws on Driver's Licenses for Immigrants: July 2015. July 1, 2015; Map of enacted laws regarding driver's licenses for undocumented immigrants. Available from: <http://www.nilc.org/driverlicenseamap.html>.
5. 2010 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates; Table B15001: Educational Attainment By Sex By Age; Generated by Don Kovasckitz and Jessica White. U.S. Census Bureau: <http://www.census.gov>.
6. 2012 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates; Table DP02: Selected Social Characteristics in the United States; Generated by Jessica White using American FactFinder. U.S. Census Bureau: <http://www.census.gov>.
7. 2010 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates; Table B19049: Median Household Income; Generated by Don Kovasckitz. U.S. Census Bureau: <http://www.census.gov>.



This assessment was conducted in 2014 and 2015 as part of Sanford Building Integrated Communities (BIC), a collaborative initiative of the City of Sanford, Lee County, community residents and organization leaders, and The Latino Migration Project (LMP) at the University of North Carolina (UNC) at Chapel Hill. The assessment aims to understand the make-up of immigrant communities in Sanford and Lee County, as well as the local resources and issues affecting their integration with the larger community.

Information from this assessment will guide the collaborative creation and implementation of a city-wide action plan for immigrant integration in 2015 and 2016. Residents who are interested in participating in the ongoing initiative are encouraged to contact UNC staff either by phone at 919-966-1484 or by email at [HGill@email.unc.edu](mailto:HGill@email.unc.edu) and [JL4@email.unc.edu](mailto:JL4@email.unc.edu). (*Hablamos español.*)

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