

WHO ARE GEORGIA'S YOUNG CHILDREN IN IMMIGRANT FAMILIES?

A Snapshot of Georgia's Young Children of Immigrants & Their Importance to Our State



Children of immigrants are and will continue to be part of Georgia's future. Our state's collective prosperity rests on the success and well-being of our increasingly diverse young child population.

GEORGIA SNAPSHOT



More than **1 in 5 (161,034)** Georgia children under age six have at least one foreign-born parent.¹



24% of Georgia's children under six are **dual language learners**, the vast majority of whom are from immigrant families.²



Only **1.4%** of Georgia's children under six were born outside of the U.S.¹

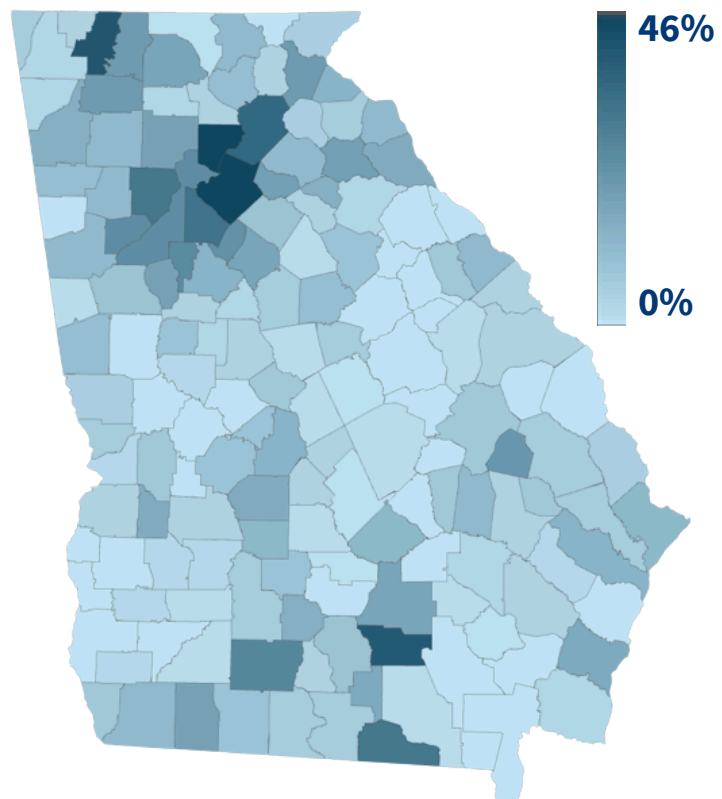
Young children of immigrants in Georgia tend to have deep ties to the U.S. Most are American citizens, have at least one parent who is an American citizen, and have parents who have lived in the U.S. for a decade or longer.³

PERCENTAGE OF CHILDREN AGED 0-5 WITH AT LEAST ONE FOREIGN-BORN PARENT BY COUNTY

Georgia Counties with Highest Percentages of Children Aged 0-5⁴

- | | |
|--------------------|-----------------|
| 1. Gwinnett - 46% | 5. Hall - 36% |
| 2. Forsyth - 46% | 6. DeKalb - 33% |
| 3. Whitfield - 41% | 7. Echols - 32% |
| 4. Atkinson - 40% | 8. Cobb - 32% |

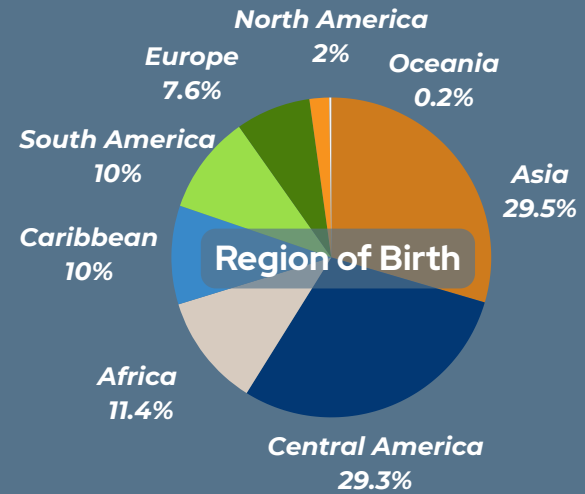
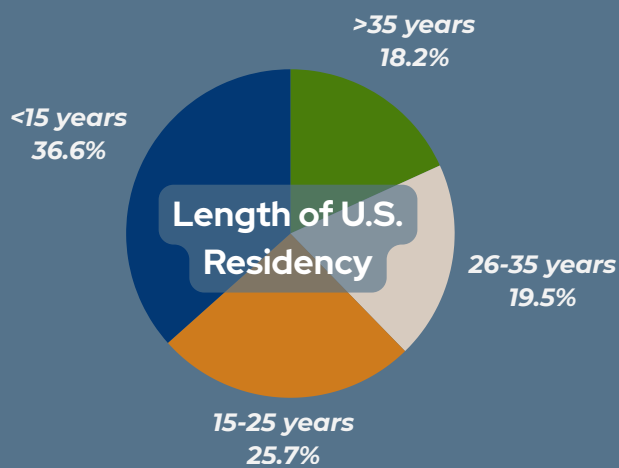
Significant populations of young children in immigrant families live in rural and urban counties across Georgia



ECONOMIC IMPACT OF GEORGIA'S IMMIGRANT COMMUNITY

Immigrants make up a disproportionate number of our state's entrepreneurs, small business owners, and workers, serving crucial industries from manufacturing to agriculture to construction. Georgia's immigrant population generates **\$52.4 billion** in personal income each year, nearly all of which is funneled directly back into the Georgia economy through consumer spending.⁵

The experiences of Georgia's immigrants are diverse, representing a variety of home languages, countries of origin, legal statuses, and cultural traditions.



THE BASICS OF BRAIN DEVELOPMENT

The first few years of life are a **time of exceptional brain development**, laying the foundation for children's **long-term health and well-being**. Young children's brains are particularly flexible and responsive to their environments, making it easier and more effective to prevent harmful experiences in young children than to heal the effects of these experiences in adults.⁶

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are traumatic events, such as abuse, neglect, or loss of a parent, that occur during childhood. While all children experience stress sometimes, ACEs can lead to **toxic, ongoing stress** that affects a child's developing body and brain.⁷ Decades of research have found a persistent correlation between ACEs and negative physical and behavioral health outcomes later in life- with multiple ACEs leading to compounding effects on the harmful impacts of each individual experience.⁸ Children of immigrants may face many sources of distress due to barriers to accessing critical services and discrimination.

Safe, stable, and responsive relationships between adults and children buffer against the harmful effects of ACEs.⁸ In addition to primary caregivers, **child care providers can support healthy development** by creating safe, nurturing environments for children to play, learn, and grow.

IMMIGRANTS IN GEORGIA'S EARLY EDUCATION WORKFORCE

Immigrants are a cornerstone of Georgia's early childhood education (ECE) system. As a disproportionate percentage of the ECE workforce, they play a key role in addressing the early education sector's severe workforce shortages.²

Immigrant teachers and caregivers are uniquely equipped to provide linguistically and culturally responsive care to children in immigrant and refugee families, affording them numerous benefits:

- improved **literacy and language development** in English & the child's home language
- increased **school enrollment and attendance**
- higher **employment rates** among immigrant parents
- **strengthened relationships** between providers, children, and families
- **culturally appropriate support services**

Promoting the well-being and success of Georgia's children in immigrant families is a key step to a brighter future for our state.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1 Keep families AND communities together

Separating parents and children has significant emotional and developmental impacts on young children— in both the short- and long-term. Separating adults from their communities has far-reaching effects. **Even children whose families remain intact** experience trauma when families they know experience separation. The more families a child's parents know who have been separated, the more likely the child is to be diagnosed with a learning, attention, language, or other developmental disorder.⁹

“What happens if they deport my mom? Who will take care of me?”
– Georgia preschooler¹⁴

2 Retain Protected Area status of early childhood programs

Protected areas are sites where immigration agents can only conduct enforcement (e.g., arrests and apprehensions) under special circumstances (for example, to prevent violent crime.)¹⁰

“In 17 years, I've never seen this before. The stress is so high they're biting their fingers.”
– A Georgia preschool director describing children's anxiety about family separation¹⁴

Enforcement in early childhood programs can lead to:

- **Reduced enrollment and attendance** of young children in immigrant families.¹¹
- Increased likelihood of children **witnessing an arrest** of a parent or a classmate's parent.
- **Provider stress**, limiting their capacity to deliver high-quality instruction and care. This is particularly true for immigrant staff, who make up 14% of Georgia's early childhood workforce.¹²

3 Prevent childhood detention

Detention, in any form, exposes young children to significant physical and emotional harm. Experts agree that detention is invariably harmful to children. The American Academy of Pediatrics has determined that **“no amount of time in detention is safe for children.”**¹³

22% of Georgia's young children live in immigrant families. Promoting their healthy development and their families' well-being supports our state's future.

[1] U.S. Census Bureau, "Age and Nativity of Own Children Under 18 Years in Families and Subfamilies by Number and Nativity of Parents." American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates Subject Tables, Table B05009, 2023. <https://data.census.gov/table/ACSDT5Y2023.B05009?t=Age+and+Sex:Native+and+Foreign-Born&g=040XX00US13&d=ACS+5-Year+Estimates+Detailed+Tables> [2] DiGirolamo, Ann M. and Roberta Malavenda, "Equitable early care and learning for refugee and immigrant families in Georgia: a community engagement approach to policy research and action." Georgia State University Research Foundation. [3] "Children of Immigrants Data Tool." 2023. Urban Institute. <https://children-of-immigrants-explorer.urban.org/pages.cfm>. [4] U.S. Census Bureau. (2023). American Community Survey. Retrieved from data.census.gov. [5] "What You Need to Know about Immigrant Workers." 2025. Economic Policy Institute. 2025. <https://www.epi.org/what-you-need-to-know-about-immigrant-workers/#/Georgia>. [6] Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University. 2024. "InBrief: The Science of Early Childhood Development." Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University. December 13, 2024. <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/inbrief/inbrief-science-of-ecd/>. [7] CDC. 2024. "About Adverse Childhood Experiences." U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC. October 8, 2024. <https://www.cdc.gov/aces/about/index.html>. [8] National Conference of State Legislatures. 2022. "Adverse Childhood Experiences." NCSL. August 23, 2022. <https://www.ncsl.org/health/adverse-childhood-experiences>. [9] Vargas, Edward D., and Viridiana L. Benitez. 2019. "Latino Parents' Links to Deportees Are Associated with Developmental Disorders in Their Children." *Journal of Community Psychology* 47 (5): 1151–68. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jcop.22178>. [10] U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 10029.2 Enforcement Actions at or Focused on Sensitive Locations. (October 24, 2011), <https://www.ice.gov/doclib/ero-outreach/pdf/10029.2-policy.pdf>. [11] "Rapid Response Resources - Children Thrive Action Network." 2025. Children Thrive Action Network. February 10, 2025. <https://childrethrivework.org/resources/rapid-response/>. [12] "Nearly Half a Million Early Childhood Educators Are Immigrants - Center for the Study of Child Care Employment." 2025. Center for the Study of Child Care Employment. July 15, 2025. <https://csce.berkeley.edu/publications/blog/nearly-half-a-million-early-childhood-educators-are-immigrants/>. [13] Linton, Julie M., Marsha Griffin, and Alan J. Shapiro. 2017. "Detention of Immigrant Children." *Pediatrics* 139 (5): e20170483. <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2017-0483>. [14] Cervantes, Wendy, Rebecca Ullrich, and Hannah Matthews. 2018. "Our Children's Fear Immigration Policy's Effects on Young Children Compromising Our Nation's Future." https://www.clasp.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/2018_ourchildrensfears.pdf.