

U.S. Census: St. Louis area loses immigrants

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By MARIA ALTMAN

The immigrant population in the St. Louis region has been declining in recent years.

The [U.S. Census released 2014 numbers](#) on Thursday. In St. Louis' metropolitan statistical area it showed an estimated loss of about 10,000 foreign-born residents between 2011 and 2014.

The survey also indicated a loss of immigrants from the state of Missouri during the same time period. Onésimo Sandoval, a sociology professor who studies population trends at St. Louis University, said that's while other more rural states have added immigrants.

"If Nebraska can attract immigrants every year, Missouri should be able to," said Sandoval. "I think there's a trend here that's a little bit worrying."



A citizenship ceremony held at the International Institute of St. Louis.

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WAYNE CROSSLIN

Sandoval said the foreign-born population is especially important as cities and states compete to grow. That growth comes from births and migration, and with families having fewer children, cities and states are looking to immigrants.

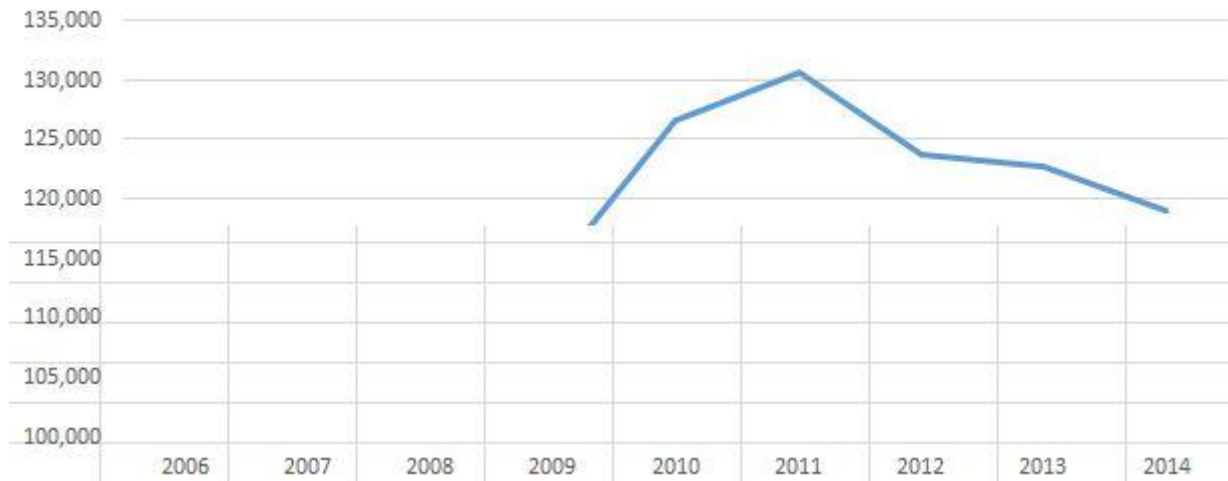
"So if you look at cities that are really growing, they're growing from immigration," Sandoval said. "If you want to maintain importance as a state and cities within the state, you're going to need your fair share of immigrants to relocate there."

That knowledge spurred the creation of the St. Louis Mosaic Project back in 2013. The organization, a part of the St. Louis Economic Development Partnership, is working to attract immigrants to the region and help those who are here.

Executive director Betsy Cohen said the Census numbers bolster the need for the program, which she said launched most of its initiatives just last year. She said it will take more than a year to see results.

"When you make a region attractive, it's more than something like buying a consumer product," Cohen said. "We're talking about people moving here and making their lives in St. Louis."

Foreign-Born Trends for Saint Louis MSA



The estimated number of foreign-born residents with the St. Louis metropolitan statistical area, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

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The St. Louis Mosaic Project is working with area businesses to help them hire international students. It's also helping foreign-born entrepreneurs connect with St. Louis' startup ecosystem. Cohen said being a welcoming community for recent immigrants, including Syrian refugees, can help set the stage for bringing their family and friends in the future.

"We saw with the Bosnians the International Institute settled 10,000 here, but then an additional 10,000 moved here because they saw the success of their friends who had come here, because of the cost of living, the quality of life, the schools, the parks, the housing stock," she said.

Both Cohen and Sandoval agree, though, that the message from Jefferson City can sometimes be a drag on efforts made by the St. Louis region. This summer, for instance, legislators passed a bill preventing residents who came to Missouri with [undocumented parents from receiving in-state tuition or state scholarships](#). Sandoval said while immigrants find St. Louis a good place to live, the actions at the state level doesn't help.

"The national narrative is that Missouri is anti-immigrant," he said.