



PHILADELPHIA
WORKS INC.

Philadelphia's Immigrant Workforce

An Econometric Analysis

AGENDA



Demographic View



Spatial View



Labor Force & Economic Mobility



Language Isolation & Barriers



Recommendation

Storymap



Research Brief



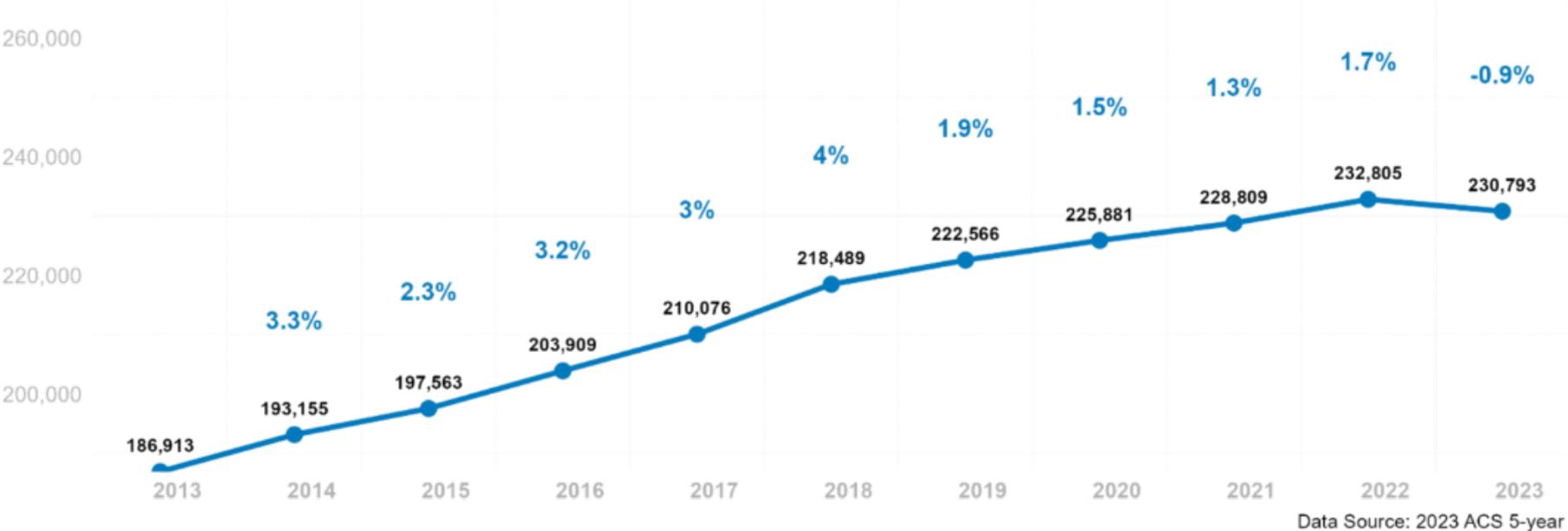
Demographic View

From 2013 to 2022, Philadelphia County witnessed steady growth in its foreign-born population, with annual increases ranging between 1.3% and 3.3%.

However, in 2023, this upward trend reversed slightly, dipping by 0.9%—the first such decrease observed in over a decade. This reversal was not unique Philadelphia, but this drop was also among the largest declines of any big U.S. city at the time.

Growth in the Foreign-Born Population in Philadelphia County (2013-2023)

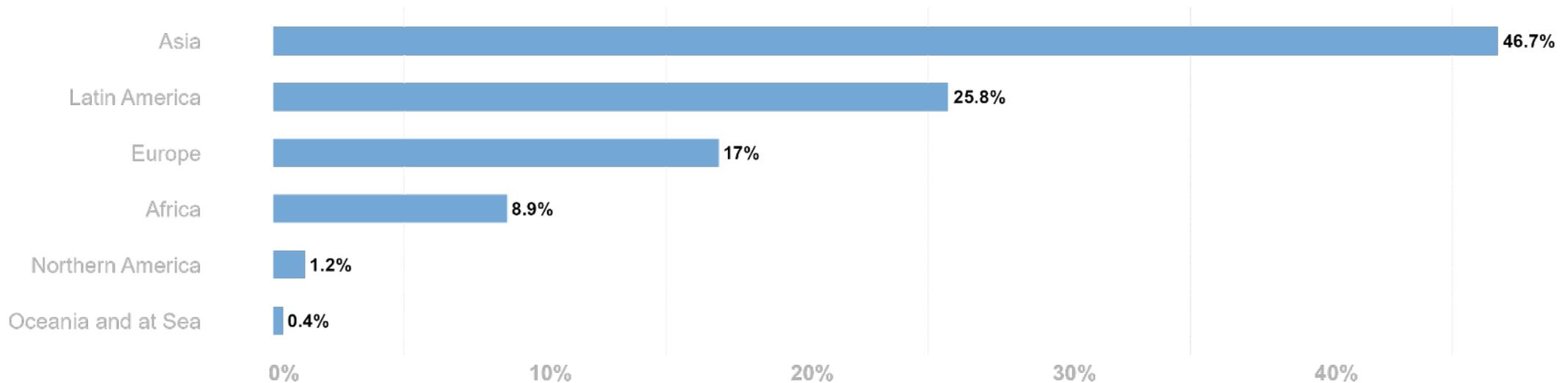
Year-over-year percent change indicated above each point



A major factor was the collapse of international immigration during the COVID-19 pandemic.

According to 2023 ACS 5-Year PUMS dataset, immigrants in Philadelphia hail from across the globe, **about half originate in Asia, 25.8% from Latin America and 17 % from Europe**, representing diverse backgrounds and skill sets.

Proportion of Immigrants by World Area of Birth

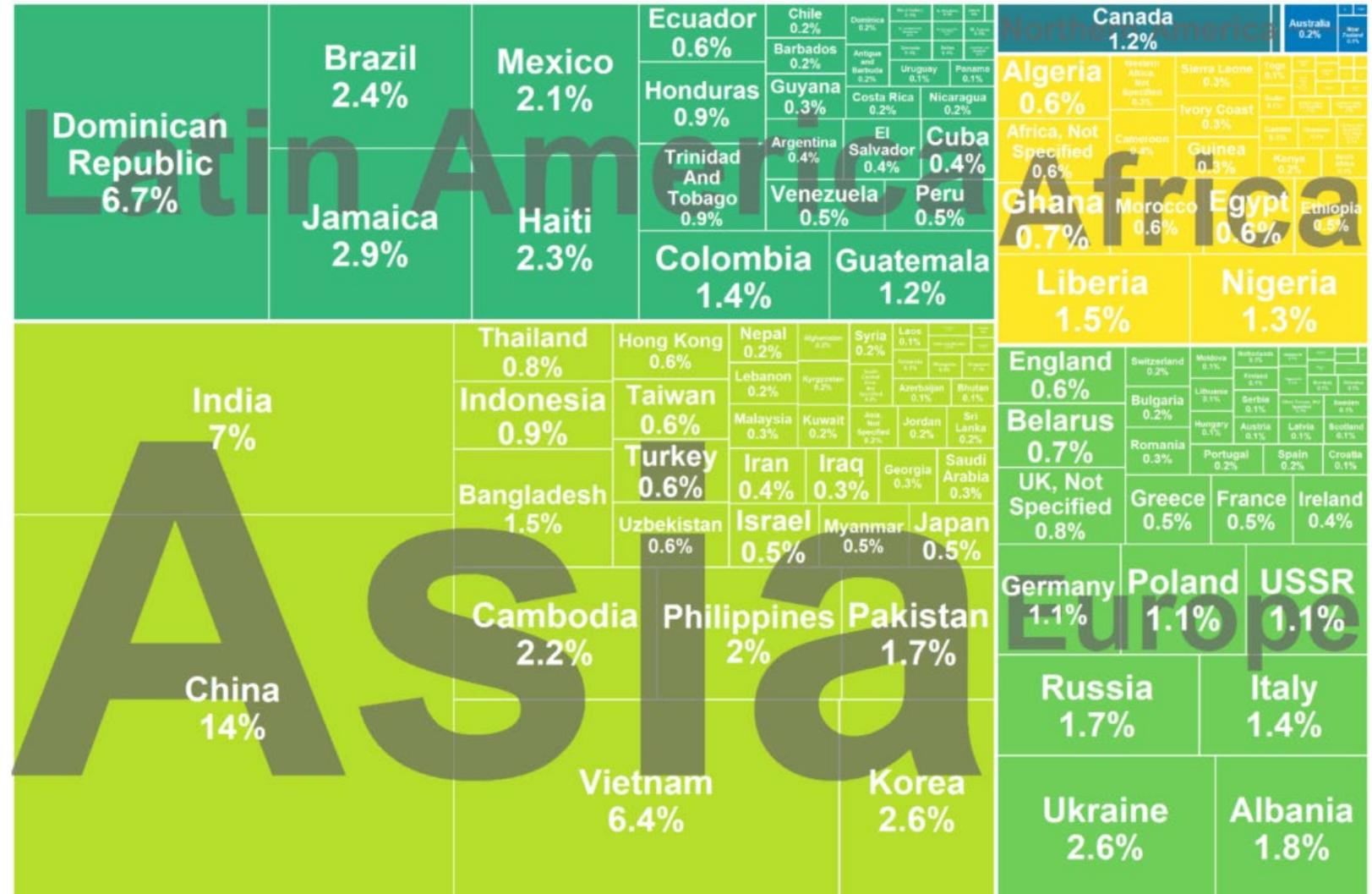


Data Source: 2023 ACS 5-year PUMS

Demographic View

Foreign-Born Population by World Area and Birthplace in Philadelphia

Specifically, China is the largest country of origin, accounting for roughly 14% of all foreign-born Philadelphians (about one in seven).



Spatial View

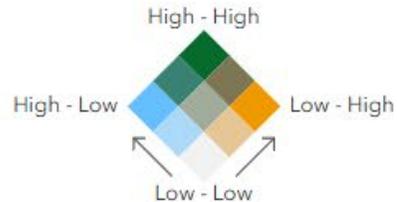
Total Population

Total Population

Relationship

↖ Total Population

↗ Total Foreign Born Population

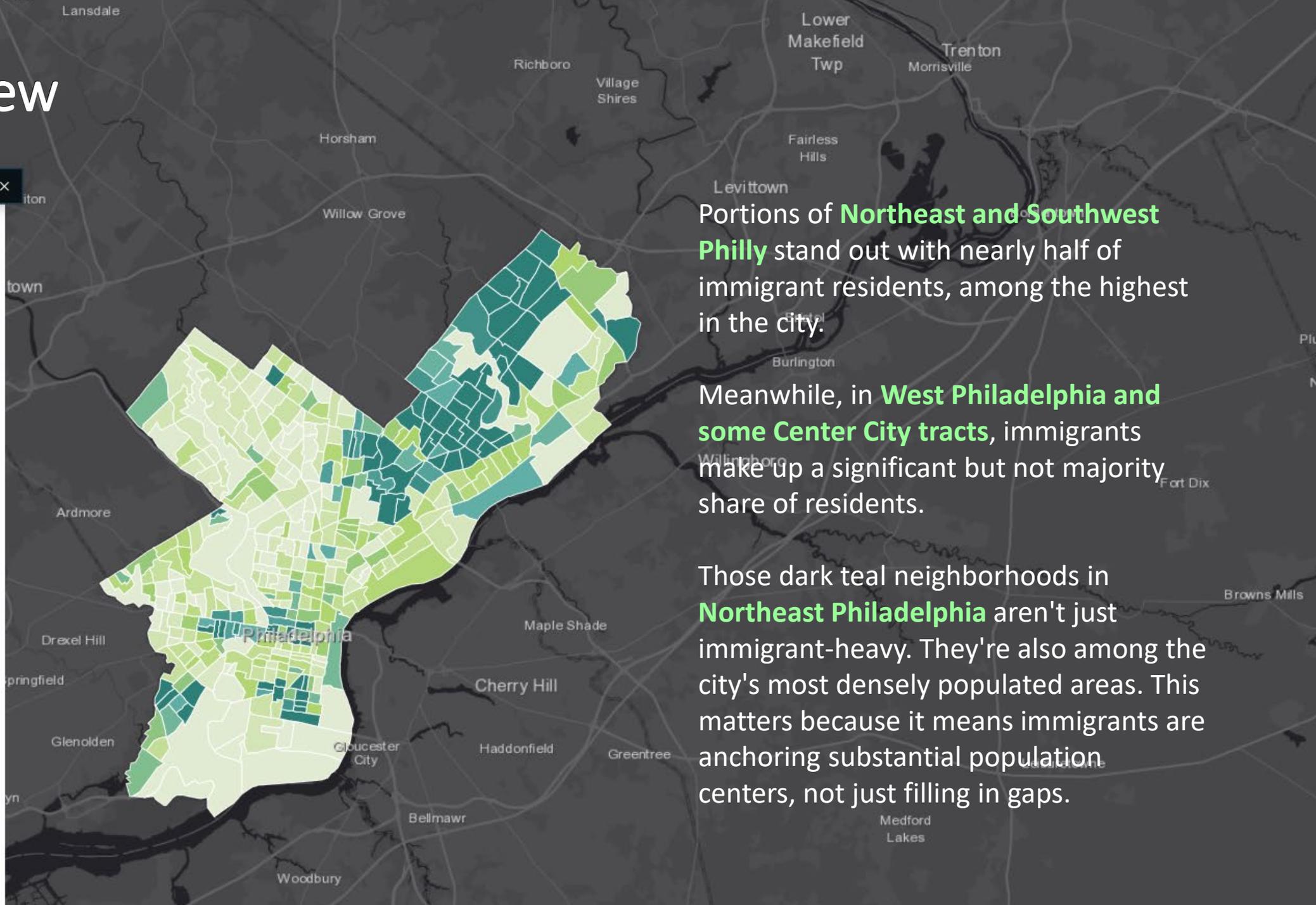
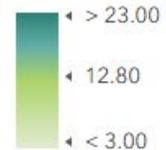


Foreign-born Population

Percent Foreign Born Population



Percent Foreign Born Population



Portions of **Northeast and Southwest Philly** stand out with nearly half of immigrant residents, among the highest in the city.

Meanwhile, in **West Philadelphia and some Center City tracts**, immigrants make up a significant but not majority share of residents.

Those dark teal neighborhoods in **Northeast Philadelphia** aren't just immigrant-heavy. They're also among the city's most densely populated areas. This matters because it means immigrants are anchoring substantial population centers, not just filling in gaps.

Spatial View

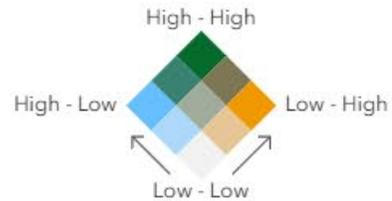
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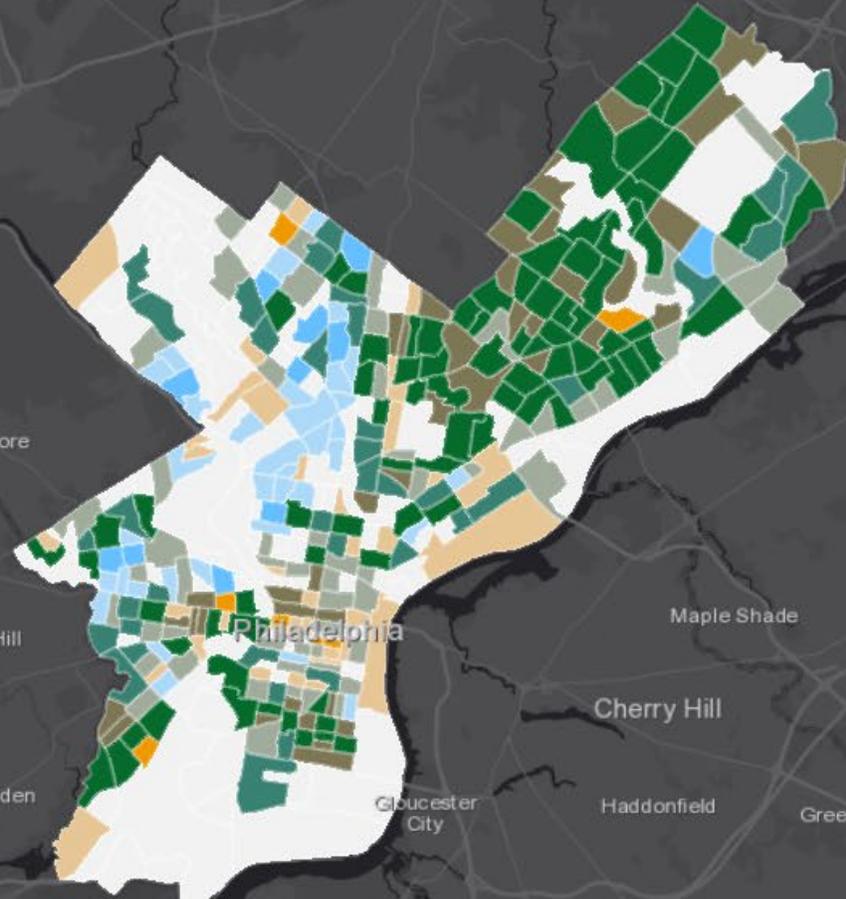


Foreign-born Population

Percent Foreign Born Population



Percent Foreign Born Population



Green areas (High-High) show the significant proportion of population are immigrants.

Blue areas (High-Low) show where population density persists without heavy immigrant presence.

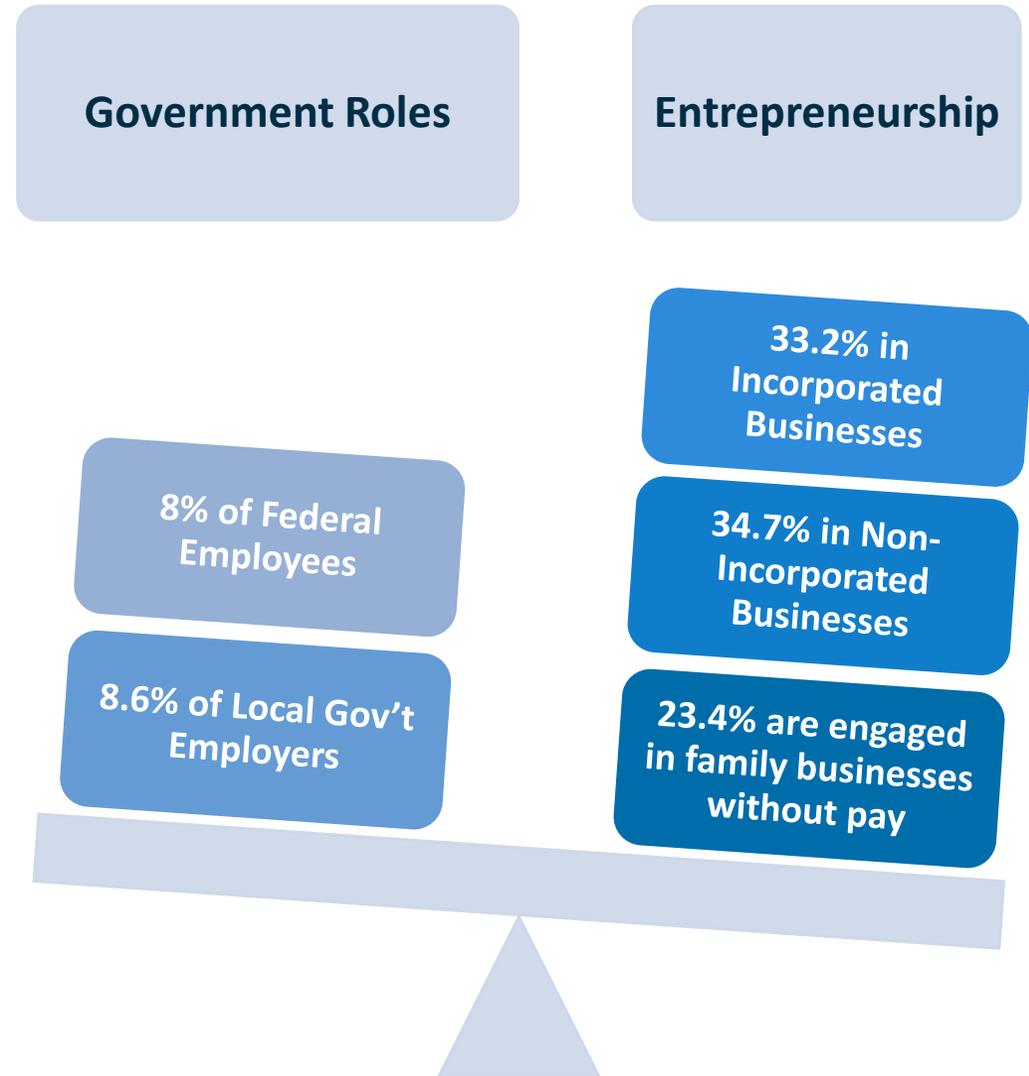
Orange pockets (Low-High) highlight emerging immigrant settlement areas.

Light areas (Low-Low) are simply sparse neighborhoods with few residents of any background.

Immigrant Labor Force & Economic Mobility

Foreign-born workers are significantly **underrepresented** in **government roles**. They are a **dominant force** in **entrepreneurship** and self-employment.

While many immigrants possess a strong entrepreneurial drive, others may turn to self-employment as a **response to barriers in the traditional labor market**, such as difficulties with **foreign credential recognition** or **language fluency**.



Immigrant Labor Force & Economic Mobility

Employs around **12,900** immigrants: **20%** of the sector's workforce.

Retail Trade

Healthcare & Social Assistance

Employs over **25,900** foreign-born individuals: **16.2%** of the sector's total workforce.

Employs over **12,400** foreign-born residents : **29%** of its workforce.

Transportation & Warehousing

Accommodation & Food Services

Employs **12,800** foreign-born employees: **26%** of the sector's workforce

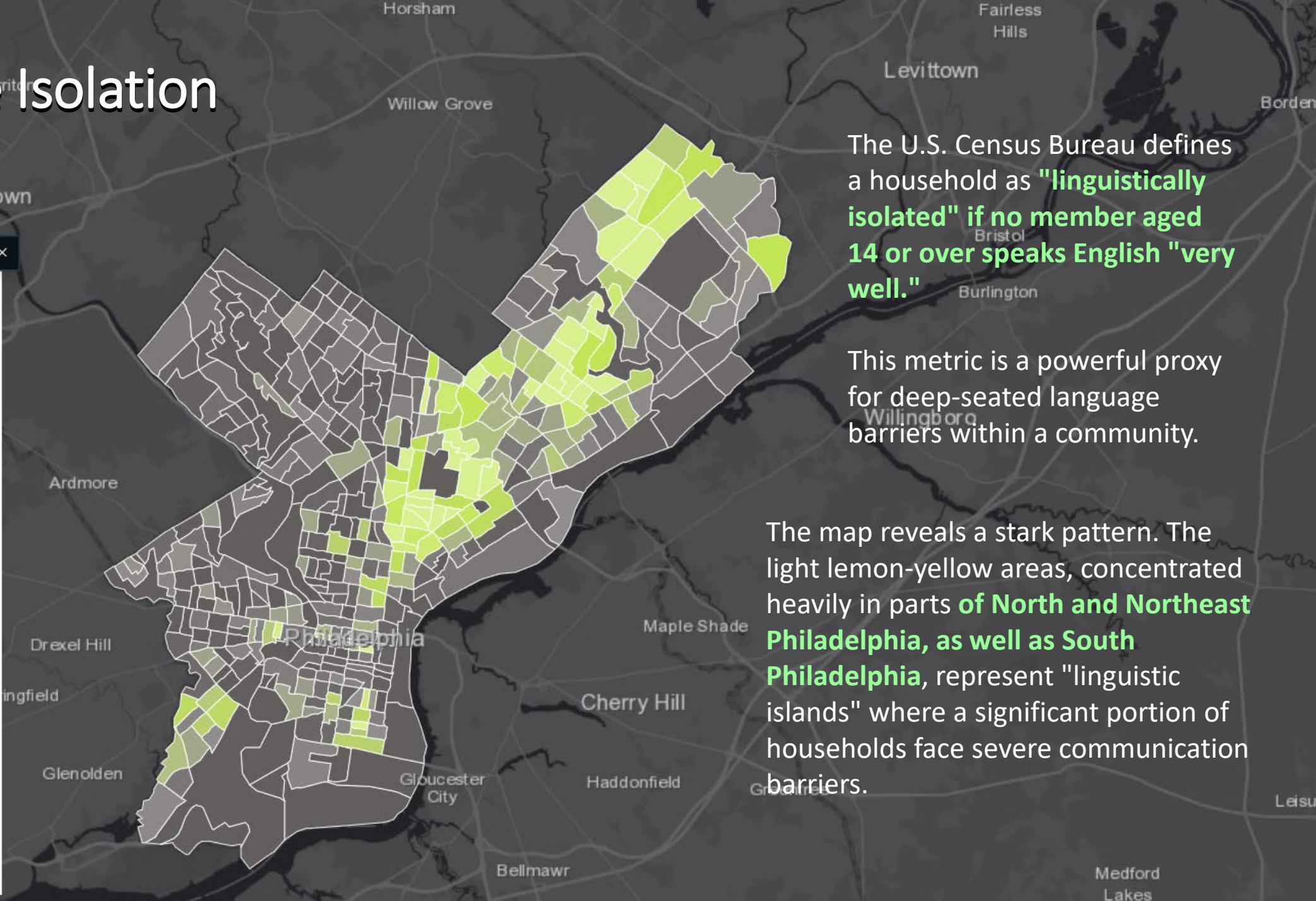
Employs **10759** foreign-born residents: **31.6%** of its workforce

Construction

Manufacturing

Employs 9675 foreign-born residents: **23.0%** of its workforce.

Language Isolation



The U.S. Census Bureau defines a household as **"linguistically isolated"** if no member aged **14 or over speaks English "very well."**

This metric is a powerful proxy for deep-seated language barriers within a community.

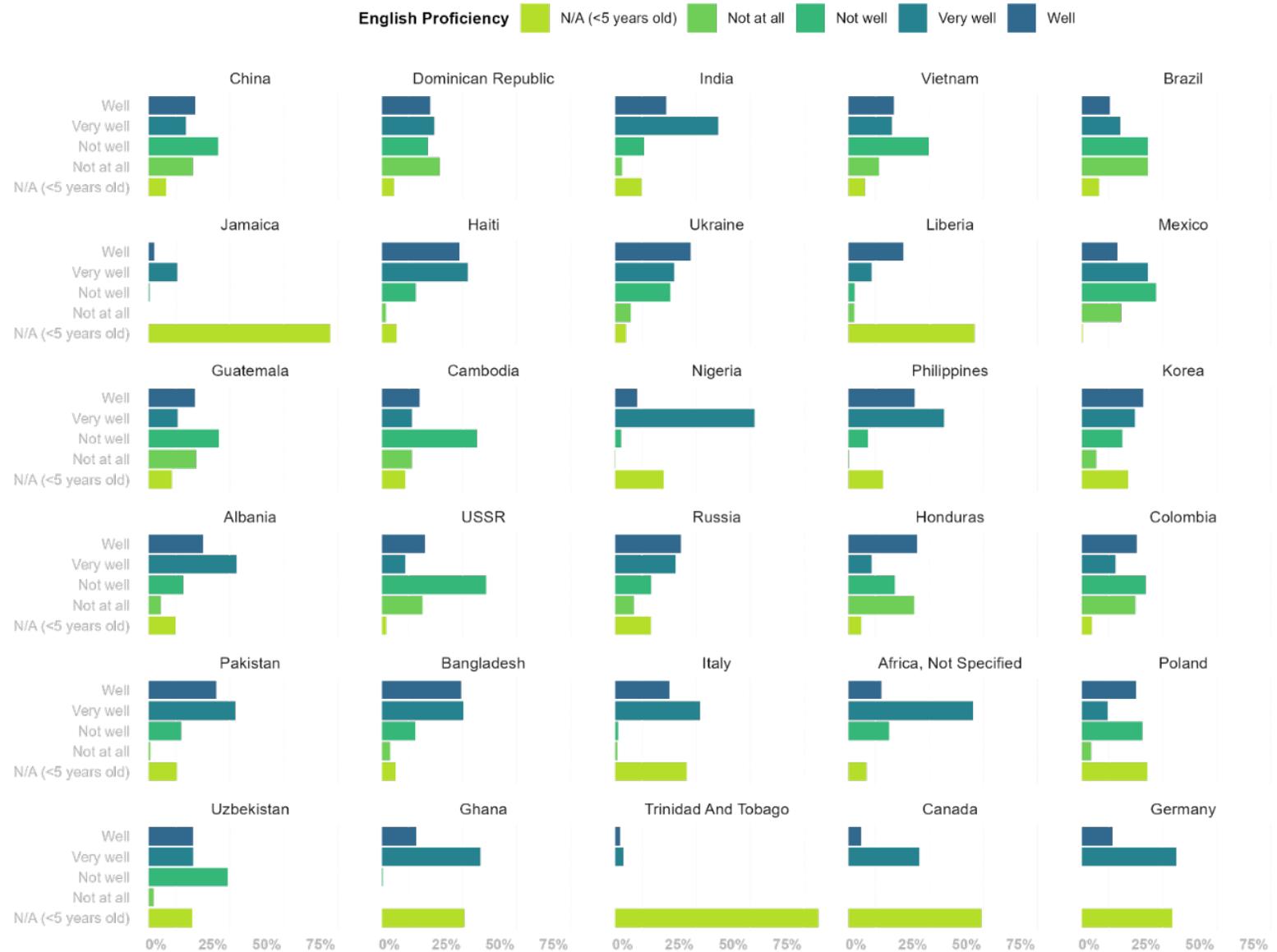
The map reveals a stark pattern. The light lemon-yellow areas, concentrated heavily in parts **of North and Northeast Philadelphia, as well as South Philadelphia**, represent "linguistic islands" where a significant portion of households face severe communication barriers.

Language Isolation

Immigrants from countries with historical ties to English, such as Nigeria, Ghana, and Germany, register very high language fluency, with over half reporting they speak English “very well.”

In contrast, large cohorts from Brazil, Cambodia, and several Latin American countries face significant language barriers, with more than 60% in some groups reporting they speak English “not well” or “not at all.”

English Proficiency Across Top 30 Immigrant Birthplaces in Philadelphia



Data Source: 2023 ACS 5-year PUMS

Language Isolation

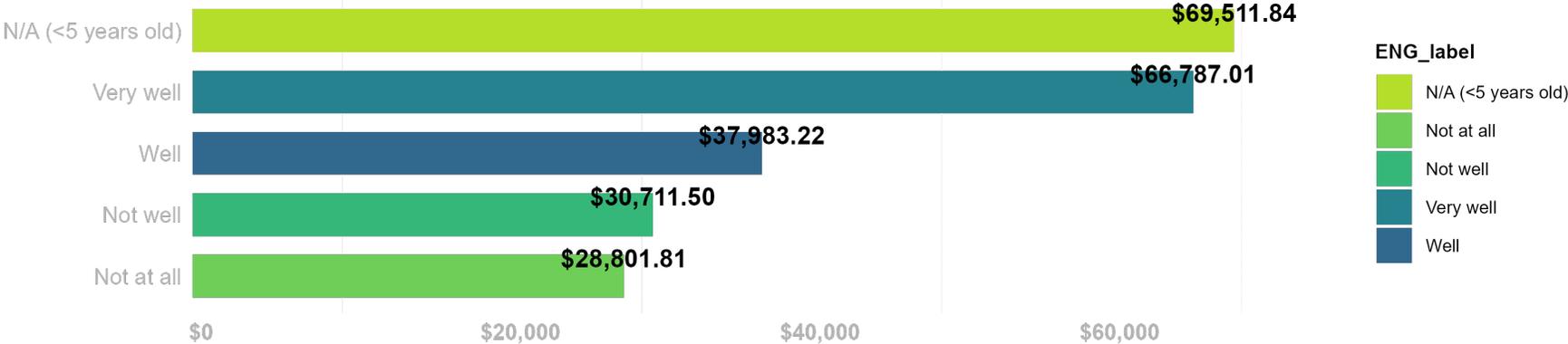
Consequently, **English proficiency is the key that unlocks opportunities**, directly determining employment status and economic outcomes.

For immigrants who speak English “very well,” a commanding **64.1% work in high-skill management and professional occupations**.

For those who speak English “not at all,” nearly half (49%) are not in the labor force, and those who are employed are concentrated in service and manual labor roles.

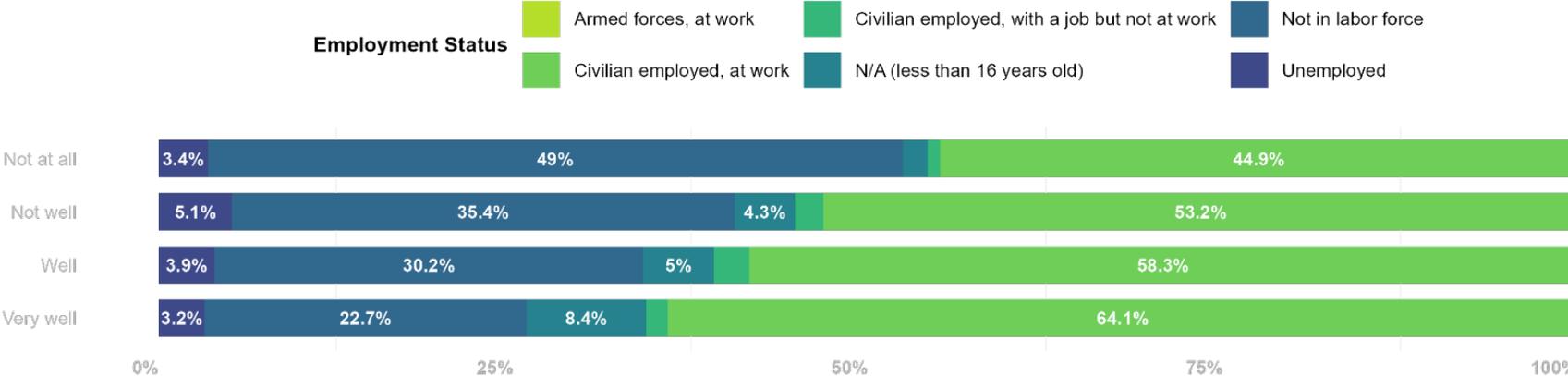
Average Wage by English Proficiency for Foreign-Born Workers

Those speaking 'Not well' earn about \$36,076 less per year on average than those speaking 'Very well'.



Data Source: 2023 ACS 5-year PUMS

Employment Status by English Proficiency



Data Source: 2023 ACS 5-year PUMS

Recommendation - What Philadelphia Can Do

1. Integrate language and job training and embed English instruction directly

into occupational programs in healthcare, manufacturing, and hospitality. Immigrants gain both skills simultaneously, cutting the timeline from arrival to living-wage employment.



2. Support neighborhood career hubs in the neighborhoods who need walkable access to job counseling, training, and childcares available with immigrant residents' first languages.



3. Remove the hidden barriers: Sliding-scale childcare subsidies, wage supplements for low-income new hires, and faster credential recognition address the math that currently keeps people stuck.



THANK YOU!