

**See Also:** Americans with Disabilities Act; Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990; Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, United Nations; Disabilities, International Variation in Attitudes Toward; Disability Services; Disability Studies; Disabled Clients.

### Further Readings

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## South American Immigrants

Hispanics comprise the largest ethnic minority in the United States, with 53 million or 17 percent of the total population according to the 2010 U.S. Census. Projections of the U.S. Census Bureau indicate that, by the year 2060, approximately 128 million Hispanics will reside in the United States and will make up 31 percent of the population. The National Institutes of Health defines Hispanics as individuals from Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba, South

or Central America, and members of a Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race. Hispanics in the United States, nonetheless, are usually perceived as a monolithic group and considered to have homogeneous characteristics. In addition, when speaking of Hispanics in the United States, a great deal of attention is placed mostly on individuals of Puerto Rican, Cuban, or Mexican ancestry. Human services professionals are recognizing that an increasing number of Latin American immigrants are coming from South American countries including Colombia, Peru, and Ecuador. Identifying and understanding the needs of South Americans in the United States may help human services professionals develop policies and offer programs that can meaningfully impact that population.

### South America

South America is the world's fourth-largest continent in terms of area and fifth in terms of population, which has been estimated to be in excess of 371 million. It is comprised of 12 independent countries. Of those, nine countries showed increased representation in the United States as reported by the 2010 U.S. Census Bureau: Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela. The three largest groups of South Americans in the United States include Columbians, with 1,039,923 people living in the United States, followed by Ecuadorians (662,663) and Peruvians (594,418). Although considered a fast-growing group of immigrants, South Americans encompass less than 7 percent of the total immigrant population in the United States.

South Americans come from a multifarious cultural, ethnic, racial, and linguistic background. European colonization and immigration, combined with indigenous people of the continent and the influx of Africans and Asians who immigrated or were brought to South America for economic purposes, contribute to the group's vast racial and ethnic diversity. South Americans who immigrate to the United States can be of African, Chinese, English, German, Italian, Japanese, or Jewish cultural backgrounds to name a few. This blending of cultures in the South American continent has generated a unique ethos that highlights the complexity of its cultural composition. In addition to cultural diversity, South Americans have diverse political ideologies that influence the regions' political and

economic programs. South Americans who emigrate from Bolivia, Ecuador, Nicaragua, or Venezuela, countries heavily influenced by socialism, may have different understandings and expectations of governmental and social services agencies.

The literature indicates that, when arriving in the United States, South Americans have a variety of human services needs, especially health coverage, employment and education, transportation, and immigration and legal counsel.

### **Health Coverage**

Many South American immigrants in the United States face challenges related to health care coverage. Although private health insurance coverage has increased significantly in South America—more than half of the population in Uruguay and Colombia and more than 25 percent of the population in Chile and Brazil, for example, are covered through private health insurance—in many of the countries, the public sector still finances health insurance for the poor, elderly, and unemployed. Upon arrival, South American immigrants of low-income backgrounds may lack appropriate health coverage and may find it difficult to navigate the health insurance complexities in the United States. Another concern for this population is absent or insufficient health insurance coverage for their children. In South America, health disparities abound in terms of health coverage for children and adolescents, a trend that may continue as immigrants relocate. This may have implications for public health as children may lack immunizations, may be more prone to contract or carry communicable diseases, and may face more hospitalizations due to poor medical care or disease management.

### **Employment and Education**

Educational level usually determines the types of employment that people seek. In the United States, South American immigrants are found at different levels in the job market. Argentinians and Venezuelans have been identified as having a high percentage of employees in high analytical positions such as those in the science, technology, engineering, and math fields. However, a great number of South American immigrants in the United States are employed in manual labor or routine jobs due to low educational attainment. Employment status influences immigrants' ability to change their

economic status in the future. The progression of upward mobility within this group is enhanced through opportunities that increase literacy skills and educational attainment for immigrant workers and their children. Concerted cultivation efforts for the children, as well as an increased number of programs that promote intergenerational mobility, may be necessary to ensure that immigrants have the opportunity to advance from manual or routine jobs to higher-paying positions requiring more complex thinking and decision making.

### **Transportation**

South American immigrants and other ethnic minorities of low economic background heavily depend on public transportation for mobility. In the suburbs and rural areas, where public transportation is lacking due to a greater dependence on automobiles, it is more difficult for immigrants to get around. Low-income South Americans with limited access to transportation services also have limited housing and employment opportunities. In addition, undocumented immigrants are limited by immigration laws that preclude them from obtaining a driver's license. Limited transportation options in many U.S. cities restrict the ability of South American immigrants to find and retain a job, access healthy foods, seek medical care and treatment, or participate in social and community events.

### **Immigration Services**

Improving the economic outlook of their nuclear or extended families continues to be one of the main reasons South Americans immigrate to the United States. Occasionally, political instabilities or wars, as well as drug wars stemming from coca production in Bolivia, Colombia, and Peru, are additional reasons for pursuing immigration. The majority of immigrants from South America arrive in the United States legally holding immigrant visas. However, nonimmigrant visas are also granted to students or travelers planning to return to South America once they have completed their courses or travel. Those with immigrant visas expecting to stay in the United States, however, may require assistance navigating the U.S. immigration and naturalization process. Both legal and unauthorized immigrants may seek advice on how to become temporary legal residents, permanent legal residents, or naturalized

citizens. Complex factors, involving family-sponsored and employment-based preferences, as well as the region and country of birth, may influence the outcome.

### Legal Counsel

English-language proficiency for South American immigrants varies by country. Although, in general, South Americans in the United States claim good or adequate levels of English-language proficiency, language barriers may be an issue for immigrants arriving from Bolivia, Ecuador, and Paraguay, where the poverty level is high and education level is low. Limited English proficiency becomes an issue for low-income immigrants from South America experiencing discrimination, sexual harassment, or civil rights violations, for example. For these individuals, the need for advocates as well as legal counseling and legal representation is critical.

South Americans represent a small percentage of the total Hispanic immigrant population in the United States; however, the number of immigrants from South America has increased significantly within the past decade. Their varied cultural, ethnic, linguistic, political, and economic backgrounds greatly influence their immigrant experience. When considering their human services needs, South Americans should not be considered as a monolithic group. Instead, careful consideration must be given to the populations' heterogeneity and unique profile.

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**See Also:** Behavior Support and Management; Caribbean Immigrants; Hispanic Americans; Uninsured Clients; U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

### Further Readings

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## Southern Communities and Cultural Competence

What is cultural competence? Being competent regarding culture would seem the natural response. Suffice it to say that there are too few hours in a day for a person to become competent in every culture and every aspect of culture in the United States. Ethnicity is probably what most people think of when they think about culture. Then there is the culture of gender, age, orientation, religion, and so on. There is also the culture of geography. The culture for a white, straight, 30-year-old Methodist female living in Oklahoma (a southern state in the United States) is quite different from a white, straight, 30-year-old Methodist female living in Iran. It is simply the nature of culture and the culture of geography. Humans are puzzles made up uniquely of their cultural puzzle pieces.

The U.S. Census Bureau defines the southern states as Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, Florida, North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, West Virginia, Tennessee, Kentucky, Maryland, and Delaware. Close to 117 million people live in these states. Five of these states are a part of the original 13 colonies.

### Oneself

When speaking of southern cultural competency, professionals must factor in their own cultures, subcultures, frames of reference, and geography. This includes being aware of one's own values, beliefs, and cultural biases. Our human services provider puzzle is made up of the cultural pieces that, if not understood, evaluated, reevaluated,