

US-Bound Migration and Indigenous Languages

CLINICAL INTERPRETATION & TRANSLATIONS IN THE US:

The Civil Rights Act of 1964, Executive Order 13166, and Affordable Care Act 1557 established and protect the right to qualified interpretation in healthcare settings in the US, but for native speakers of indigenous American languages, like Mixteco or Mam, provision of a qualified interpreter has often been anything but guaranteed. This has long been recognized as a gap in health equity, but in recent years, on account of the COVID pandemic and the increasingly severe immigration crisis at the US-Mexico border, this gap is quickly widening. Due to a variety of political, environmental, and economic factors, including armed hostilities, indigenous language-dense regions in Guatemala and southern Mexico are seeing historic highs in asylum seekers headed for the US border.

DEMOGRAPHIC FOCUS: GUATEMALA

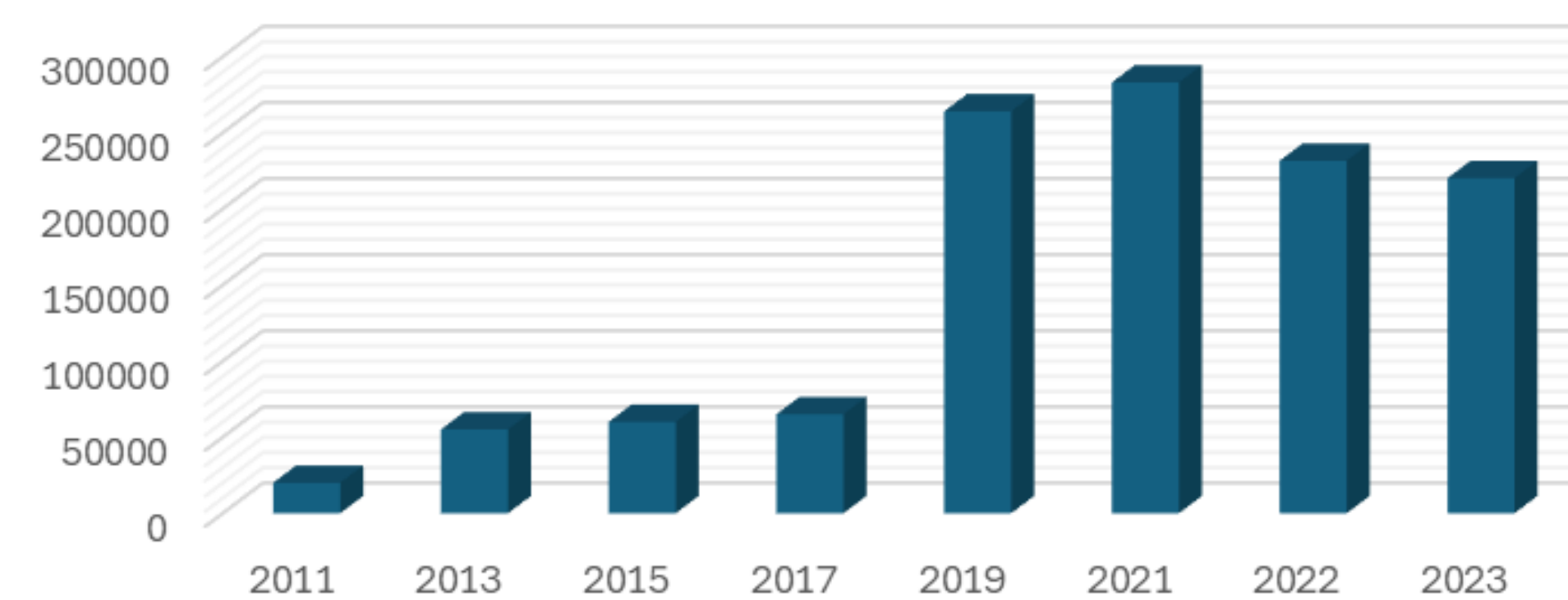
Guatemala is home to the largest percentage of indigenous language speakers in Latin America, growing to 44% in 2018. While indigenous language speaking migrants arrive in the US from many Latin American nations, Guatemala's large indigenous population, proximity to the US, and history of political violence and inequality have resulted in a markedly higher impact on US social services. Demographic data collected at the US-Mexico border and by the Guatemalan census bureau also indicates that international migration has been steadily rising (Fig. 1). Importantly, over 25% of incoming indigenous language speakers are monolingual in their native language (Fig. 2). It is this substantial group that is most effected by inadequate interpretation resources in the US healthcare system.

FUTURE OF INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE INTERPRETATION:

- The Department of Homeland Security recently released its [first language access plan](#) specific to indigenous languages.
- Public awareness for this issue has grown in recent years, meriting feature articles in major publications, e.g., [The New York Times](#) and [The New Yorker](#), and the [ACLU](#).

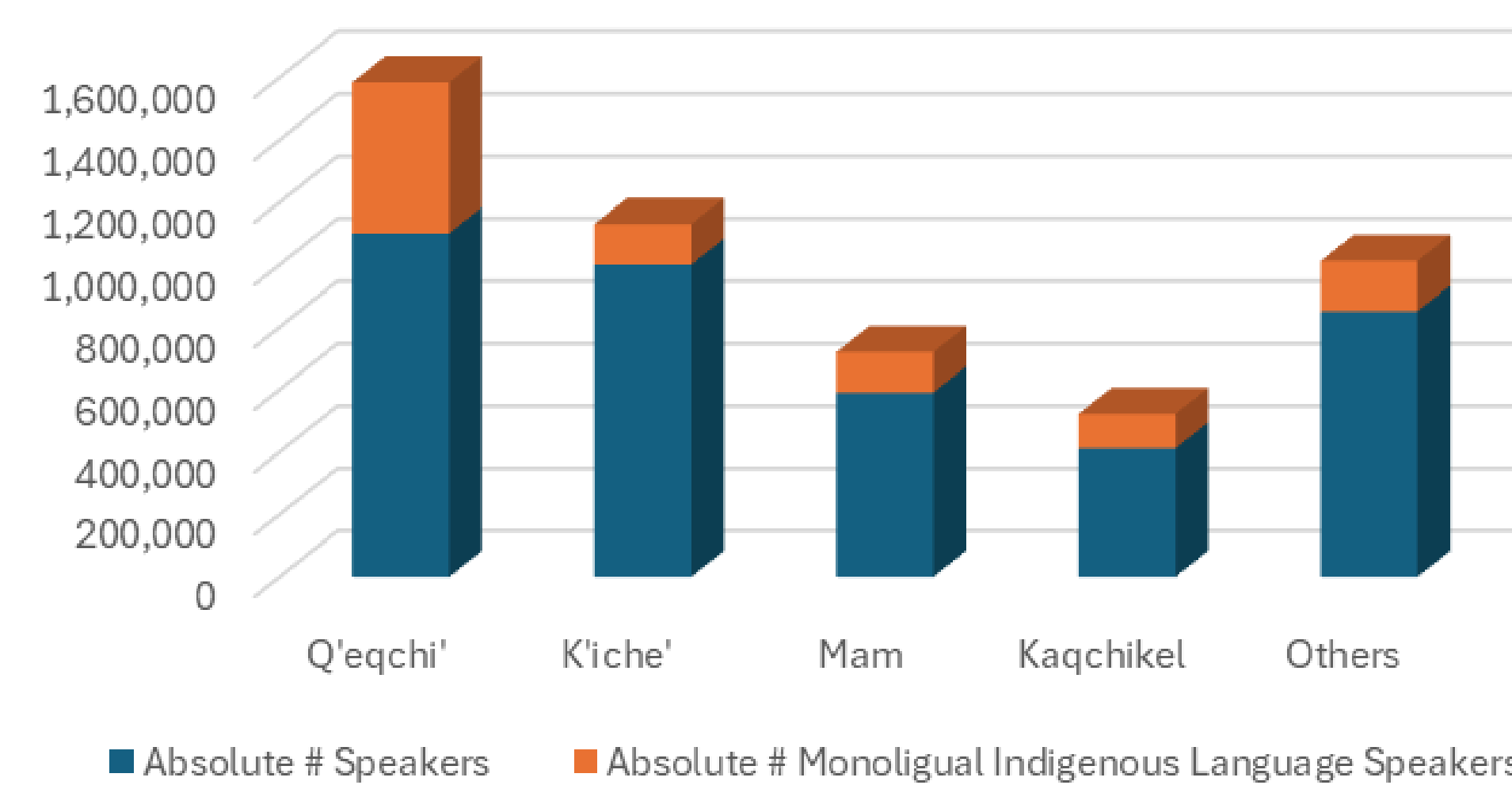
Migration Driven Population Growth of LATAM Indigenous Language Speakers

Fig. 1 Guatemalan US-bound Migration 2011-2023 (odds years)¹



Indigenous Language Migration: Focus on Guatemala

Fig. 2 Indigenous Language Speakers and Monolingualism²



Gaps in Care: Where Organizations are Falling Short

HEALTH OUTCOMES & LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENCY:

- **Mortality:** LEP linked to +31% increased mortality odds.⁴
- **Readmission:** Interpreters lowered readmission by almost 5%.⁵
- **Timely Care:** LEPs spent 10+ minutes extra in waiting room.⁶

CONCERNS MAGNIFIED FOR INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES:

- **Data:** Inaccurate reporting on Indigenous languages due to trust, census reporting issues, and mislabeling
- **Mislabeled:** Providing Spanish interpreters for Indigenous language speakers either delays care or doesn't provide care
- **Available Interpreters:** Language of lesser diffusion tend to have difficulty with finding available and qualified interpreters
- **Migration:** Indigenous people may be affected at higher rates due to discrimination, unrest, and climate change

Did you know? 13% of the Indigenous people in Mexico can only express themselves in their mother language.⁷

Did you know? There are ~560 indigenous languages spoken throughout Latin America and the Caribbean.⁸

Taking Action: Creating a Language Access Plan

1. Train staff to be aware of LATAM languages beyond Spanish.
2. Provide frontline staff with ways to identify indigenous languages, such as indigenous language / *Speak* cards/posters.
3. Make sure to incorporate training in regular onboarding to combat turnover – especially for high turnover roles.
4. Consider creating a separate language access plan for Indigenous Languages to incorporate unique approaches.
5. Post your language access plan in a central location to allow ease of reference for your staff and be sure to post information detailing available linguistic resources for your patients.

1. Data drawn from U.S. customs and border patrol made available by the Freedom of Information Act.
 2. Data drawn from the 2018 Guatemalan Census and includes the national population age 4 and older. More information and detailed analysis can be found in "Pueblos indígenas en Guatemala: desafíos demográficos, lingüísticos y socioeconómicos: análisis comparativo de los censos 2002 vs 2018" by US, Mendoza, and Guzman.
 3. "Root Causes of Migration from Guatemala: Analysis of Subnational Trends" Burmeo, Leblang, Alviero (2019).
 4. Jacobs ZG, Prasad PA, Fang MC, Abe-Jones Y, Kangelaris KN. The Association between Limited English Proficiency and Sepsis Mortality. J Hosp Med. 2020 Mar;15(3):140-146. doi: 10.12788/jhm.3334. PMID: 31891556; PMCID: PMC7064297.

5. Karliner LS, Pérez-Stable EJ, Gregorich SE. Convenient Access to Professional Interpreters in the Hospital Decreases Readmission Rates and Estimated Hospital Expenditures for Patients With Limited English Proficiency. Med Care. 2017 Mar;55(3):199-206. doi: 10.1097/MLR.0000000000000643. PMID: 27579909; PMCID: PMC5309198.
 6. Lim, T. et al. 72 association of limited English proficiency and increased emergency department waiting room lengths of stay. Annals of Emergency Medicine 80, (2022).
 7. INEGI, Estadísticas a Propósito Del... Día Internacional De Los Pueblos Indígenas 2016.
 8. Languages at risk in Latin America and the Caribbean. World Bank Available at: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/infographic/2019/02/22/lenguas-indigenas-legado-en-extincion>.

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