Though emigration from Colombia has been a significant social force dating back to the 1960s, when it was primarily economically motivated, it has increased markedly in recent years due to political turbulence and instability in Colombia. It is estimated that between 1996 and 2003, 1.6 million Colombians left their home country and did not return. Nearly half of this number migrated between 1999 and 2001, which corresponded with both a significant drop in Colombia’s gross domestic product and a surge in its unemployment rate. By 2001, unemployment reached 18% in urban centers, where the bulk of Colombians reside. Another contributing factor to emigration from Colombia are the increasing acts of violence targeting civilians in the country’s decades old civil conflict over territorial control, particularly over coca-growing regions. The situation surrounding this conflict has both displaced thousands of people and acted as a catalyst for thousands more to leave the country.

Venezuela and the United States have long been the most popular destination for Colombian emigrants and continue to be so today. Florida, because of its close proximity to Bogota, has been a natural destination for many Colombians arriving in the United States. From there Colombians have begun to disperse nationally, with significant numbers moving up the east coast to New York, New Jersey, and Massachusetts.
Results from the 2005-2007 American Community Survey (ACS)² show that there are approximately 584,000 foreign-born individuals from Colombia living in the United States.³ Besides the U.S. and Venezuela, other population global destinations for Colombian immigrants are Spain, Ecuador, Panama and Canada.⁴

The top destinations for immigrants from Colombia moving to the U.S. are the states of Florida (which accounts for 34% of the country’s Colombia-born population), New York (18%), New Jersey (12%), California (6.6%) and Texas (5.7%). The Commonwealth of Massachusetts ranks sixth, comprising 3% of the country’s total Colombian population.⁵

There are over 7,200 Colombians living in Boston.⁶⁷ According to the 2005-2007 ACS, Colombians make up the seventh-largest share of immigrants in Boston - about 4.3%.⁶⁸⁹ Comparatively, the Chinese constitute the largest segment of the city’s foreign-born population (8.6%), Haitians (8.5%) rank second and the Dominican Republic rank third (7.9%). The other top countries of origin among Boston’s foreign-born population include Vietnam, El Salvador, Cape Verde, Jamaica Brazil and Mexico.¹⁰

According to the 2000 Census, Boston’s Colombian immigrants, though scattered throughout the city, are mostly concentrated in the neighborhood of East Boston, where 58% of the city’s foreign-born Colombians reside. There are also significant numbers of foreign-born Colombians in Allston-Brighton and Jamaica Plain.

While we can look at the most recent ACS for estimating the total Colombian population, the most reliable cross-tabular data for relatively small groups, such as the foreign-born communities in Boston in the 2000 Census.¹¹ In 2000, 51% of Colombian immigrants in Boston are male. Over 60% of all Colombian immigrants in Boston are either married (49%) or divorced/separated (13%). Close to 39% of all Colombians in Boston are between the ages of 20 and 34. The vast majority of Colombian immigrants (80%) are not naturalized U.S. citizens; 20% are citizens by naturalization.

### Share of Colombian Population by State

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Share</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Florida</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Jersey</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Massachusetts</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connecticut</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other States</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ACS 2005-2007, BRA Research Division Analysis
Educational Attainment for Population 25 Years and Older

Source: U.S. Census 2000, Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) 5%, BRA Research Division

Fifty-eight percent of Colombian immigrants have received at least a high school diploma.
Over 40% of Colombians residing in Boston who are in the labor force work in service occupations. The next highest occupational category is technical, sales and administrative support occupations (19%), followed by managerial and professional occupations (17%) and production occupations (12%).

Colombian immigrants are over-represented in service occupations, which accounts for only 25% of jobs for all foreign-born workers. The high level of participation in service occupations is likely driven by the relatively low levels of educational attainment among Colombians in Boston. Conversely, Colombians are underrepresented in managerial and professional occupations when compared with the overall foreign-born workforce, 26% of whom work in managerial and professional positions, and in technical, sales and administrative support occupations, which also comprise 26% of Boston’s foreign-born workforce.

In total, 57% of Colombian immigrants participate in the labor force, compared with 60% of the total foreign-born population and 65% of the native-born population. The unemployment rate among the Colombian-born labor force in Boston is 7%, similar to the unemployment rate among the overall foreign-born labor force (7.1%) and about one percentage point lower than the rate among the native-born population (7.8%).

An estimated 55% of Colombia-born immigrants in Boston work for a private, for-profit company. An additional 4.6% work for a private, nonprofit organization. A total of 3.8% are employed by the public sector (local, state and federal government).

Source: U.S. Census 2000, Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) 5%, BRA Research Division
self-employed

An estimated 4.3% of Colombian immigrants in Boston are self-employed. This compares with a rate of 5.8% for the entire foreign-born labor force and 6.1% for the native-born labor force.\(^{15}\)

Share of Self Employed

Source: U.S. Census 2000, Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) 5%, BRA Research Division
More than 584,735 Colombians live in the U.S.

Main destinations for Colombian immigrants:
- U.S
- Venezuela
- Spain

7,174 Colombians in Boston

**OCCUPATIONS**
- 40% Service
- 19% Technical, Sales & Administrative Support
- 17% Managerial & Professional
- 12% Production
- 7% Installation, Maintenance, Construction, Extraction & Transportation
- 2% Other
- 2% Community and Social Services
- 1% Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports & Media

**CONTRIBUTING**
- $133 million annual spending
- $124 million to the regional product
- $35 million in state and federal taxes
- 1,084 indirect jobs for the local economy

**Gender**
- Female: 51%
- Male: 49%

**Age**
- 0-19: 21%
- 20-34: 40%
- 35+: 39%

**Marital Status**

**Employment Status**

---

6
Colombian immigrants contribute to the local economy through their labor and subsequent consumer spending.

The total value of their contributions are estimated using a Regional Economic Model (REMI) that calculates the value of goods and services consumed on each dollar spent.

Colombian immigrants spend, from their after tax earnings, over $133 million in Boston annually. These annual expenditures contribute over $124 million towards the gross state product and almost $36 million in state and federal taxes. In total, these expenditures indirectly support 1,084 jobs in the Massachusetts economy.

Beyond the contributions Colombian-born immigrants living in Boston make to the city, state and national economies, they continue to play a vital role in the economy of their home country by sending back remittances of over $8 million each year. This breaks down to an average of approximately $256 per month sent back by each Colombian household. This trend is also witnessed throughout the U.S. and beyond, with Colombians living abroad contributing $3.93 billion, or 2.9% of GDP, to Colombia’s economy in 2006.
standard of living

Approximately 16% of Colombians have achieved a middle class standard of living, compared with 38% of Boston’s native-born population and 25% of all foreign-born.

---

Education and English Proficiency in the Colombian Population (25+)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education/English Proficiency</th>
<th># of Colombian</th>
<th>% Colombian</th>
<th>% Foreign-Born</th>
<th>% Native-Born</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack H.S. Diploma &amp; English Proficient</td>
<td>485</td>
<td>15.6%</td>
<td>16.9%</td>
<td>14.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack H.S. Diploma &amp; Limited English Proficiency</td>
<td>830</td>
<td>26.7%</td>
<td>17.2%</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have H.S. Diploma &amp; Limited English Proficiency</td>
<td>596</td>
<td>19.2%</td>
<td>11.3%</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack H.S. Diploma OR Limited English Proficiency</td>
<td>1911</td>
<td>61.5%</td>
<td>45.4%</td>
<td>16.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

U.S. Census 2000, Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) 5%. BRA Research Division
1 From the Global Migrant Origin Database at the Development Research Center on Migration, Globalisation and Poverty: http://www.migrationdrc.org/research/typesofmigration/global_migrant_origin_database.html

2 The ACS is a yearly survey conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau intended to allow communities to see how they are changing in the years between decennial censuses. The ACS is based on a sample of the population. While the data in this document are reported as specific numbers and percentages, all results from the ACS are subject to sampling error. The data in this report are from the 2005-2007 ACS 3 year averages. These data are the combination of 3 distinct years which reduces the level of sampling error. For more information on the ACS, please see: http://www.census.gov/acs/www/index.html

3 The “foreign-born” population includes all people who are born outside the U.S., naturalized citizens, and non U.S. citizens. The “native-born” population includes all people born in the United States, Puerto Rico, or the U.S. Island Areas and persons born abroad by American parents. BRA Research Division. (2009).


12 The current research breaks all occupations into one of eight general categories: managerial and professional occupations; technical, sales, and administration support occupations; service occupations; installation, maintenance, construction, extraction, and transportation occupations; production occupations; community and social service occupations; arts, design, entertainment, sports and media occupations; and other occupations. Managerial and professional occupations include business operations; computer and mathematical; education, training, and library; architecture and engineering; financial operations; legal; healthcare practitioner and technical; management, professional, and related; and life, physical, and social science occupations. Technical, sales & administration support occupations include healthcare support; office and administrative support; and sales and related occupations. Service occupations include building and grounds cleaning and maintenance; food preparation and serving related; personal care and service; and protective service occupations. Installation, maintenance, construction, extraction & transportation occupations include installation, maintenance, and repair; construction; extraction; and transportation and material moving occupations. Other occupations include fishing and hunting, and forest and logging workers; military specific occupations; and occupations not elsewhere classified. The three remaining categories - production occupations; community and social service occupations; arts, design, entertainment, sports and media occupations – are each occupational groups unto themselves.

13 Defined as the share of the working-age population that is either currently employed or seeking work. U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2005).

14 These unemployment data are from the 2000 Census. It should be noted that unemployment rates are subjected to a much greater level of fluctuation over time than the other demographic data in this report.

15 There is no agreement among researchers regarding the reasons for variations in the self employment rates among different immigrant groups. Reasons cited include human and financial capital of individual immigrants, high rates of solidarity and social capital in some immigrant communities, as well as the opportunity structure encountered by immigrant entrepreneurs.

16 Total gross income of Colombians totaled $175 million in 2007. Adjustments were made for remittances assuming a monthly transfer of $256 per household. This amount is in accordance with Orozco, M. (2002), Remittances, Costs, and Market Competition, presentation of the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago.
