

FOREIGN BORN IN BOSTON: COLOMBIANS

City of Boston Planning Department Research Division

"Imagine all the people" is a series of publications produced by the City of Boston's Planning Department's Research Division for the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Advancement. As the East Boston mural above depicts, Boston's foreign born communities make numerous contributions to the city's social, cultural and economic landscape. This series is part of an ongoing effort to celebrate Boston's foreign born populations and gain insight into how they shape our city.

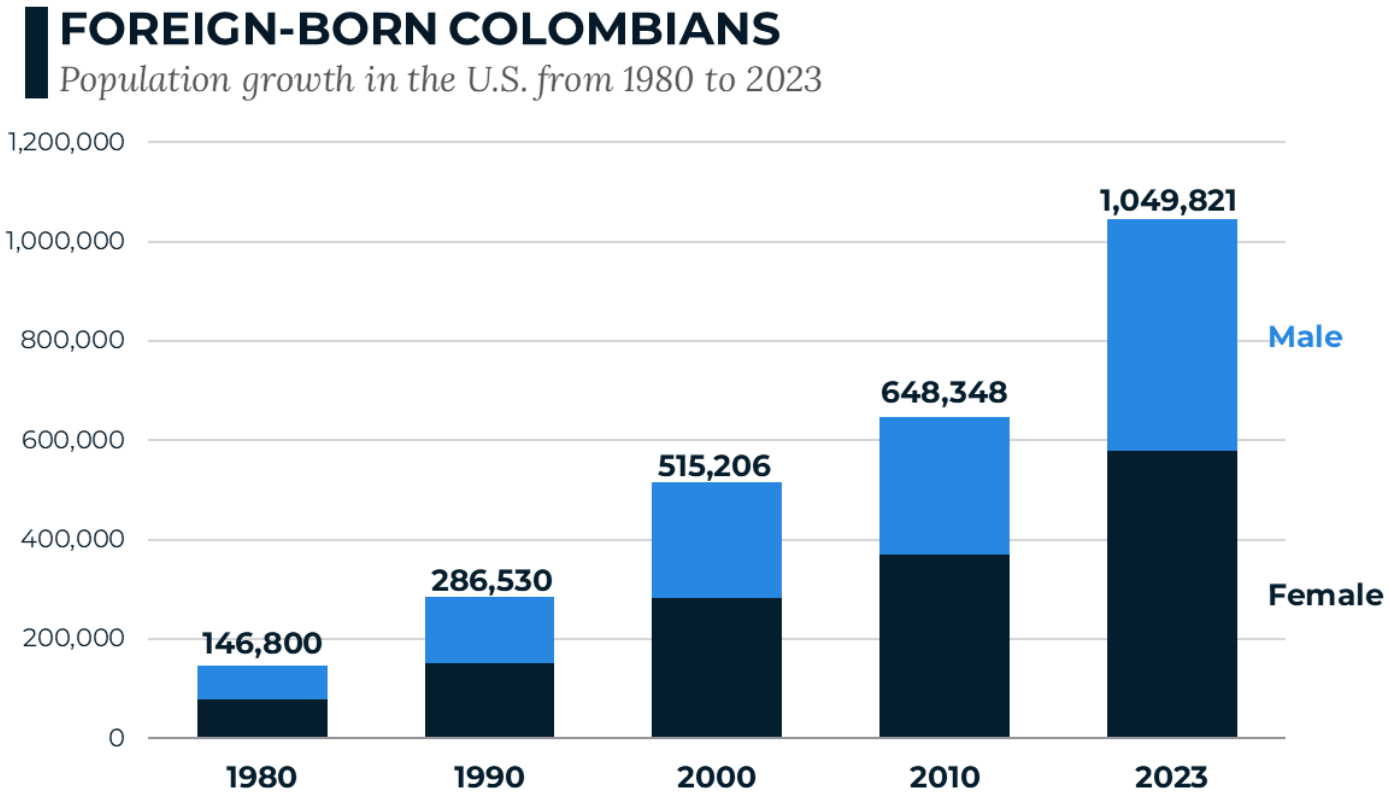
OVERVIEW OF COLOMBIANS IN THE UNITED STATES

Early Colombian migration to the United States started after World War II due to political and economic instability in the country. A period known as La Violencia, (The Violence) 1948-1958, was a civil war between the two political parties in the country that killed more than 200,000 Colombians and destroyed most of the agriculture in the country.[1] By the 1960s, with increasing inequality, Colombia became a producer and trafficker in the global illegal drug trade.[2] By the 1990s, the drug trade became linked to a guerilla group known as FARC (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia). The assassination of public figures increased the migration of

[1] Madrigal, C. (2013) Colombians in the United States: A Study of Their Well-Being. Advances in Social Work. 2013;14(1):26-48.

[2] Osterling, J. P. (1989). Democracy in Colombia: Clientelist politics and guerrilla warfare. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books.

wealthier Colombians to the United States, who often overstayed tourist visas. The implementation of a peace treaty with the FARC in 2016 did little to stem the flow of migration to the United States. Estimates from the 2023 American Community Survey (ACS) shows 1,049,821 foreign-born Colombians residing in the United States. They are the tenth largest foreign-born population in the country. Other primary destinations for Colombian emigrants include Spain, Chile, and France.



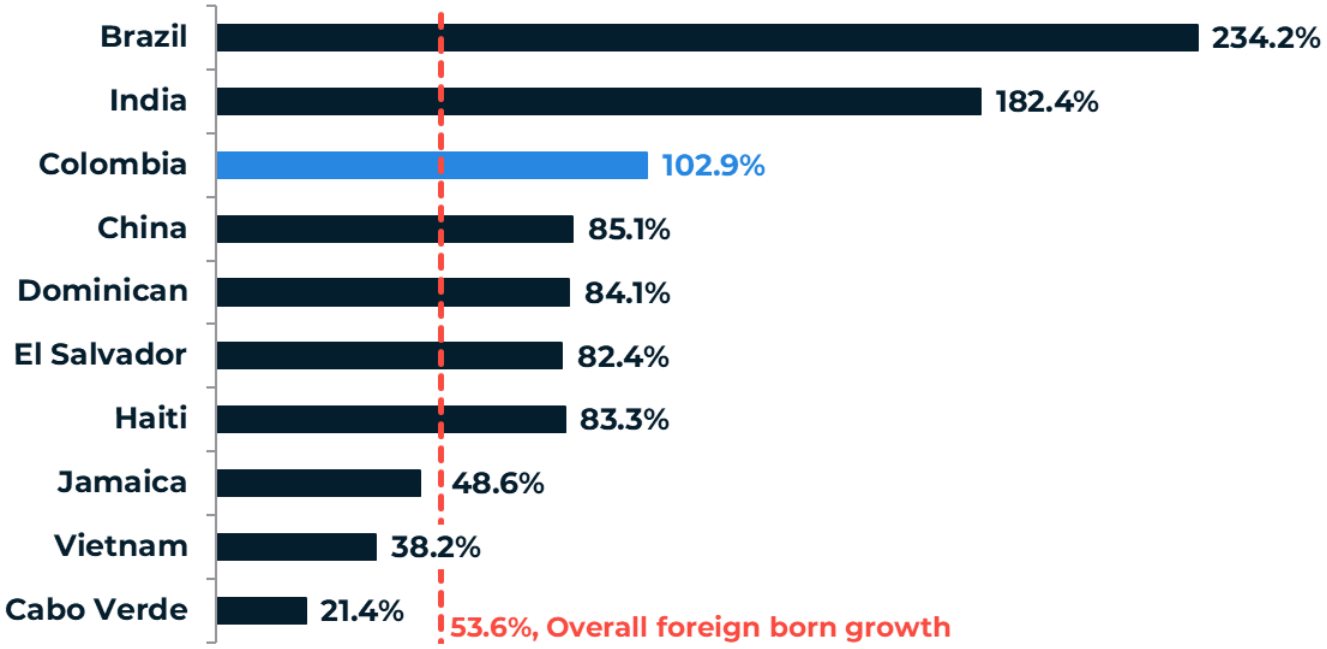
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 1980-2000 Decennial Censuses (IPUMS), 2010 and 2023 1-Year American Community Survey, City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Analysis

More recently, Colombian migration increased to its highest levels after COVID-19, and the Biden Administration instituted a family reunification parole process for eligible individuals.[3] From 2000 to 2023, the foreign-born Colombian population increased by 103 percent faster than 53.6 percent for the overall foreign-born population.

[3] https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/colombian-immigrants-united-states

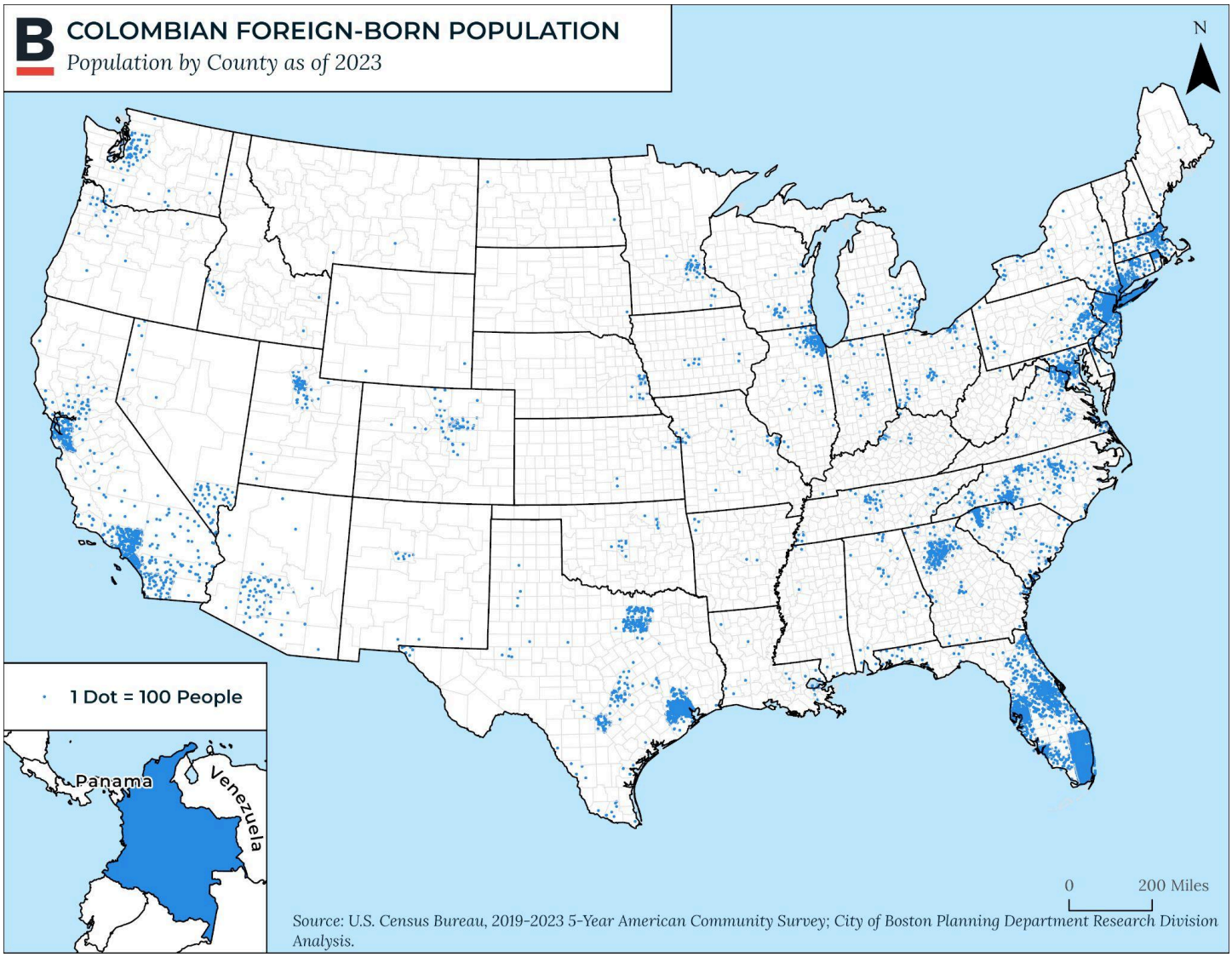
INCREASE IN FOREIGN-BORN POPULATION

Percent increase in foreign born population in the U.S. from 2000 to 2023

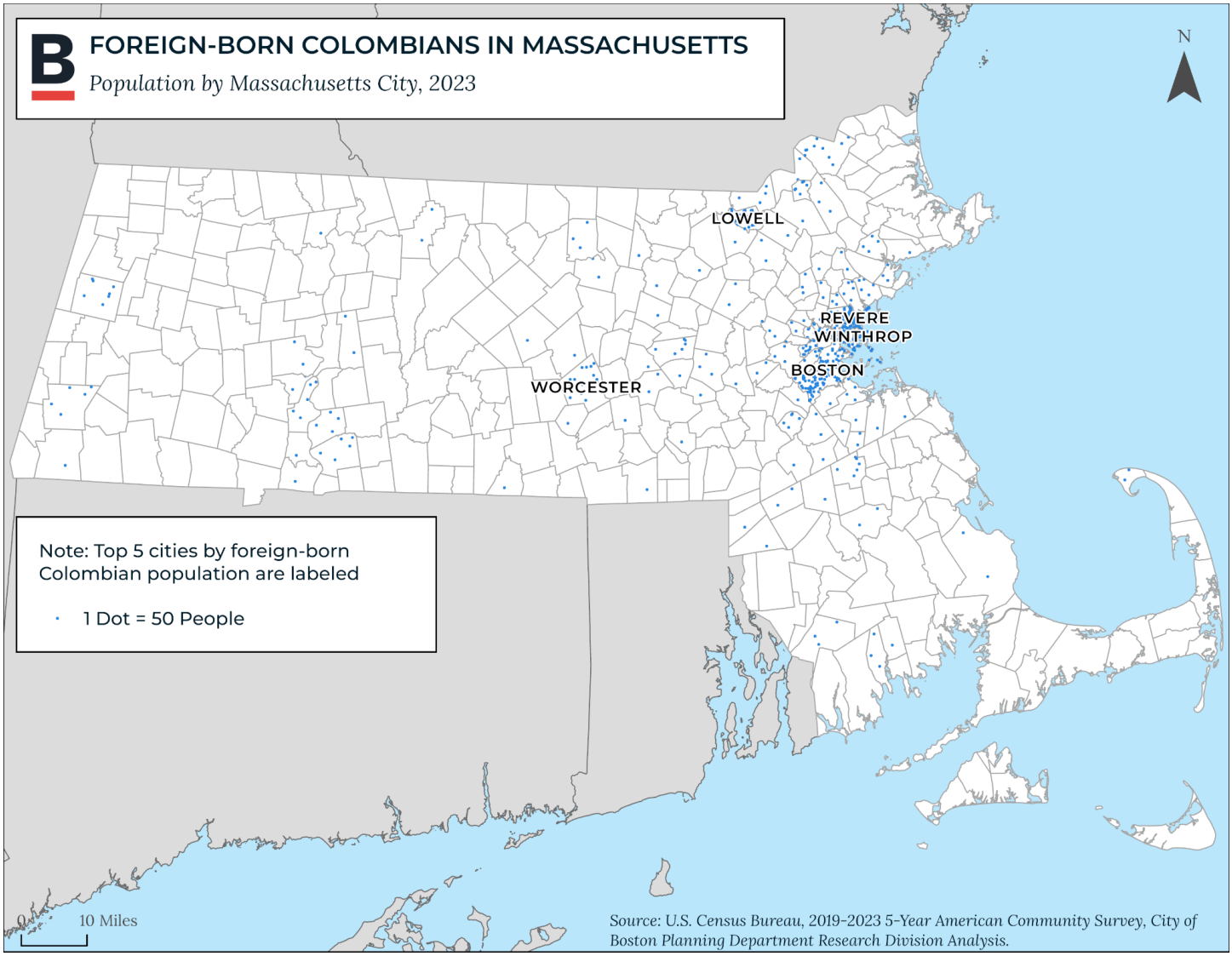


Source: U.S.Census Bureau, 1980-2000 Decennial Censuses (IPUMS), 2023 1-Year Amercian Community Survey (PUMS), City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Analysis

Massachusetts has the eighth largest foreign-born Colombian population in the United States behind Florida, New York, New Jersey, California, Texas, Georgia, and North Carolina.



In Massachusetts, Boston (26 percent) has the largest share of the state's foreign-born Colombian population followed by Revere 18 (percent), Lowell (5 percent), Winthrop (4 percent), and Worcester (3 percent).



FOREIGN-BORN COLOMBIANS IN BOSTON

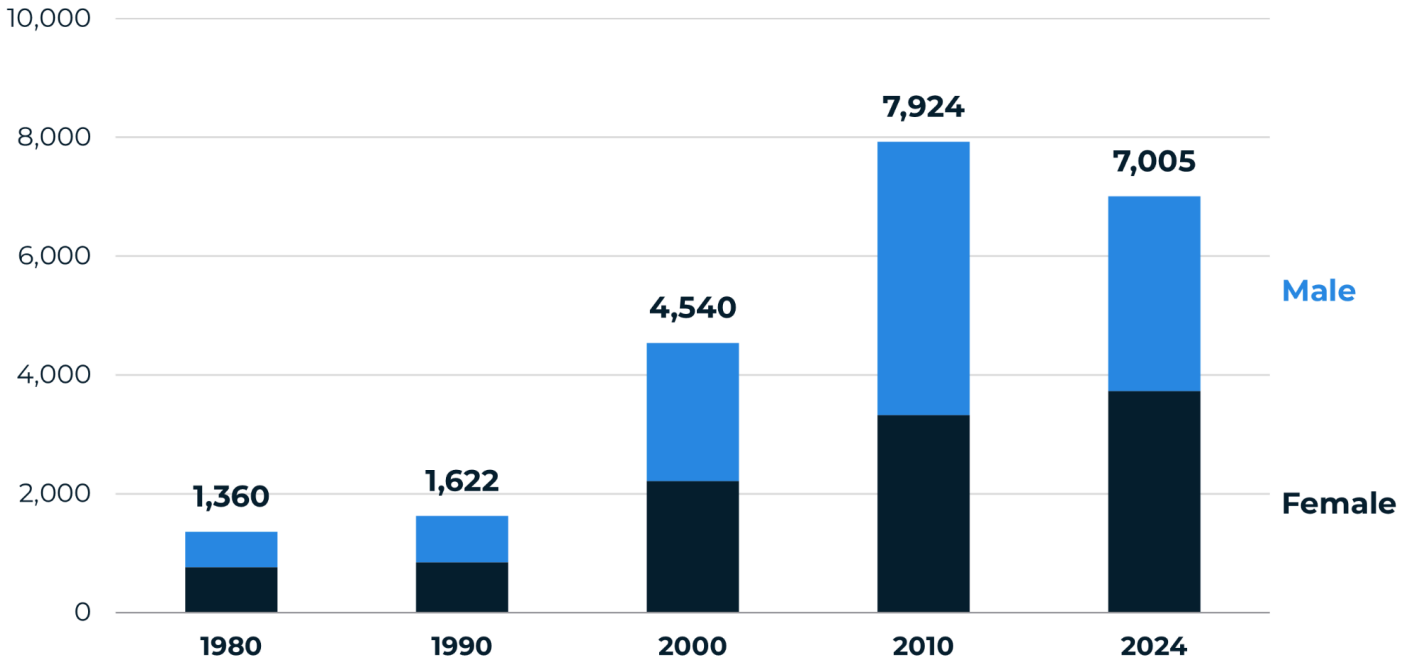
DEMOGRAPHICS

Colombians started arriving in Massachusetts during the 1970s. They arrived in both Lowell to work in the textile industry and in Boston to take advantage of the city's educational and medical institutions. By the 1980s, the textile industry declined in Lowell, and the Colombian

population began to concentrate in East Boston.[4] More migrants from Colombia began arriving in the 1980s because drug violence increased in Colombia.[5] The foreign-born Colombian population in Boston increased dramatically from 1990 to 2010, before falling somewhat to 7,005 residents in 2024. The decline in the Colombian population in Boston from 2010 to 2024 is not unique to the population. Foreign-born populations are attracted to more economically vibrant metropolitan areas like the Boston Cambridge Newton metropolitan area. However, foreign-born populations often disperse within the region as they become more economically and socially integrated.[6] Unless steady migration flows continue, the original destination of the migration can lose people to the surrounding cities and towns.

FOREIGN-BORN COLOMBIANS

Population growth in Boston, from 1980 to 2024



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 1980-2000 Decennial Censuses (IPUMS), 2010 1-Year American Community Survey, 2024 City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Population Estimates, City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Analysis

[4] https://globalboston.bc.edu/index.php/home/ethnic-groups/colombians/

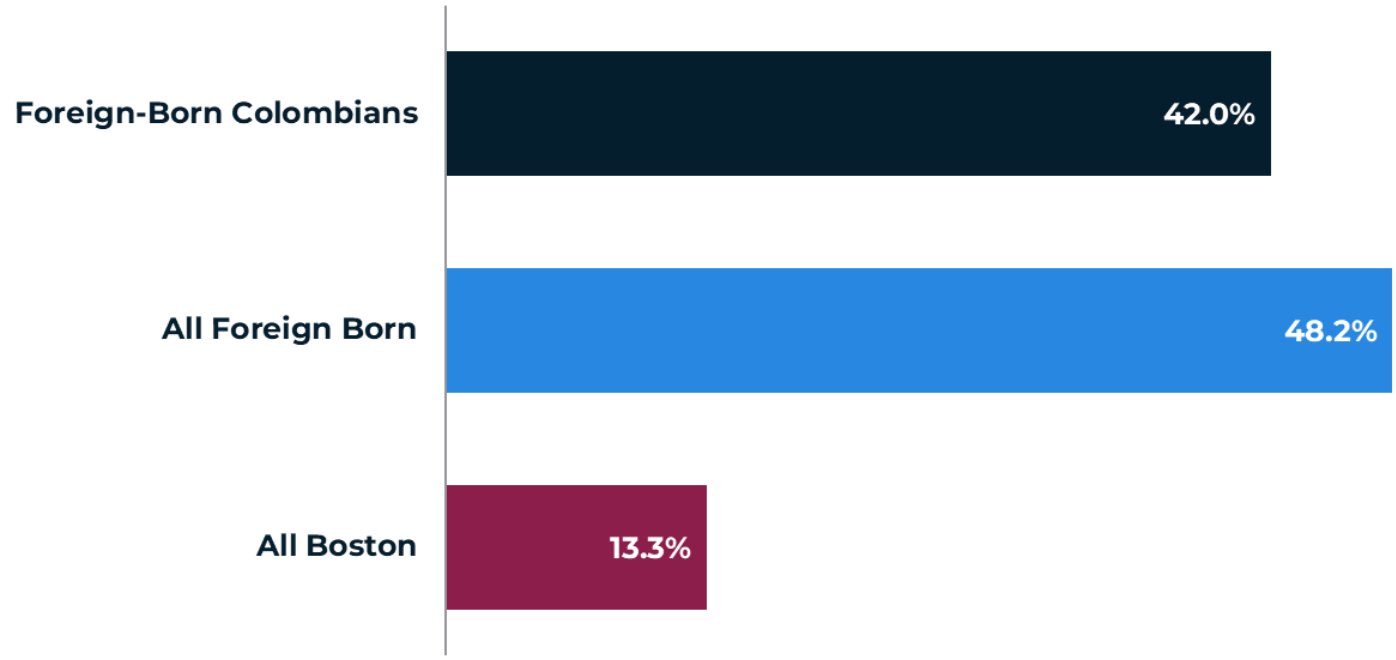
[5] Uriarte, Miren; Granberry, Phillip; Halloran, Megan; Kelly, Susan; Kramer, Rob; Winkler, Sandra; Murillo, Jennifer; Wagle, Udaya; and Wilson, Randall, "Salvadorans, Guatemalans, Hondurans, and Colombians: A Scan of Needs of Recent Latin American Immigrants to the Boston Area" (2003). Gastón Institute Publications. 134.

[6] Flippen C, Farrell-Bryan D. New Destinations and the Changing Geography of Immigrant Incorporation. Annu Rev Sociol. 2021 Jul;47(1):10.1146/annurev-soc-090320-100926.

The majority of Colombians in Boston are naturalized citizens, and foreign-born Colombians are less likely, in comparison to the total foreign-born population, to be noncitizens.

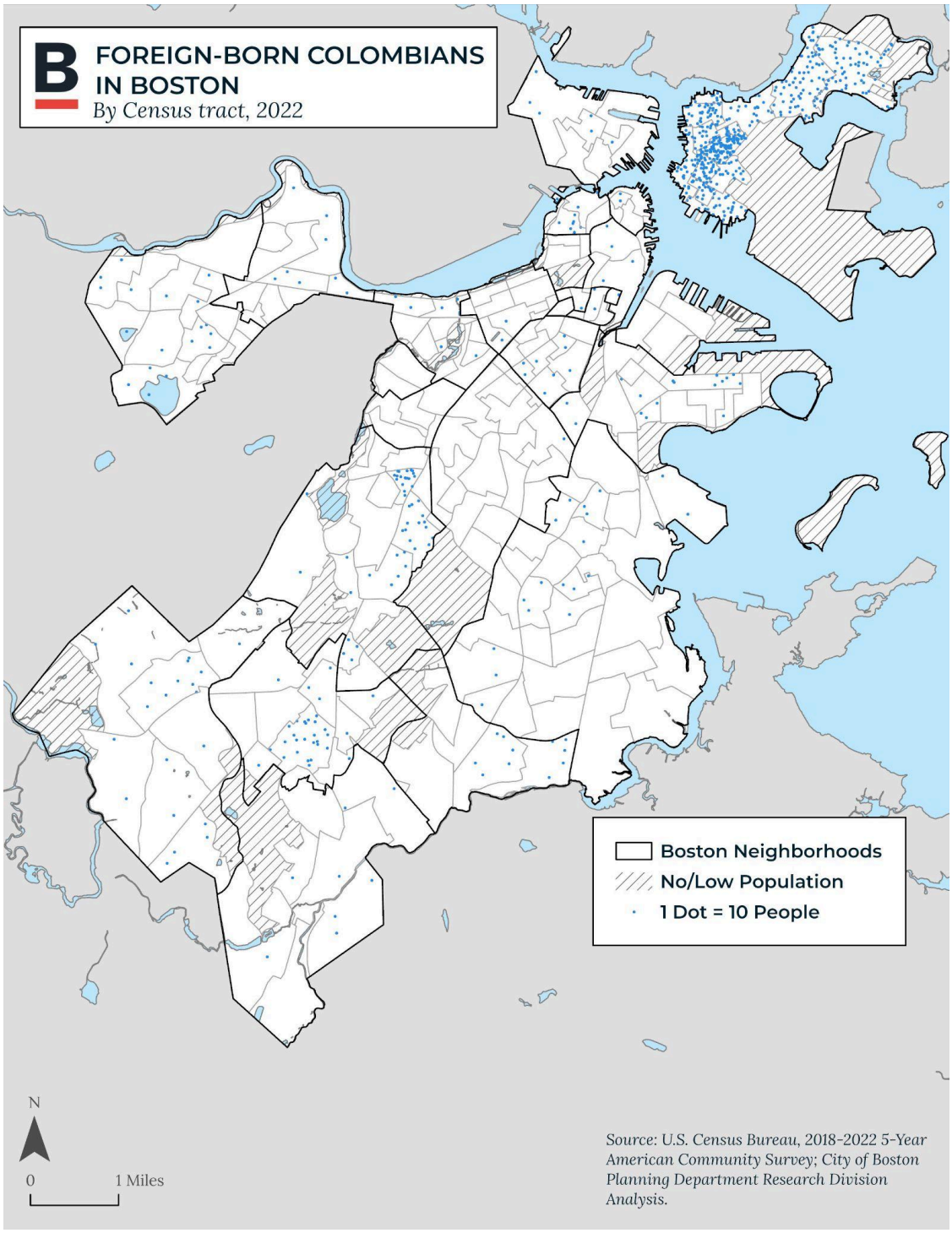
NON-U.S. CITIZENS

Share of non-U.S. citizens



Source: 2024 City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Population Estimates, CIty of Boston Planning Department Research Division Analysis

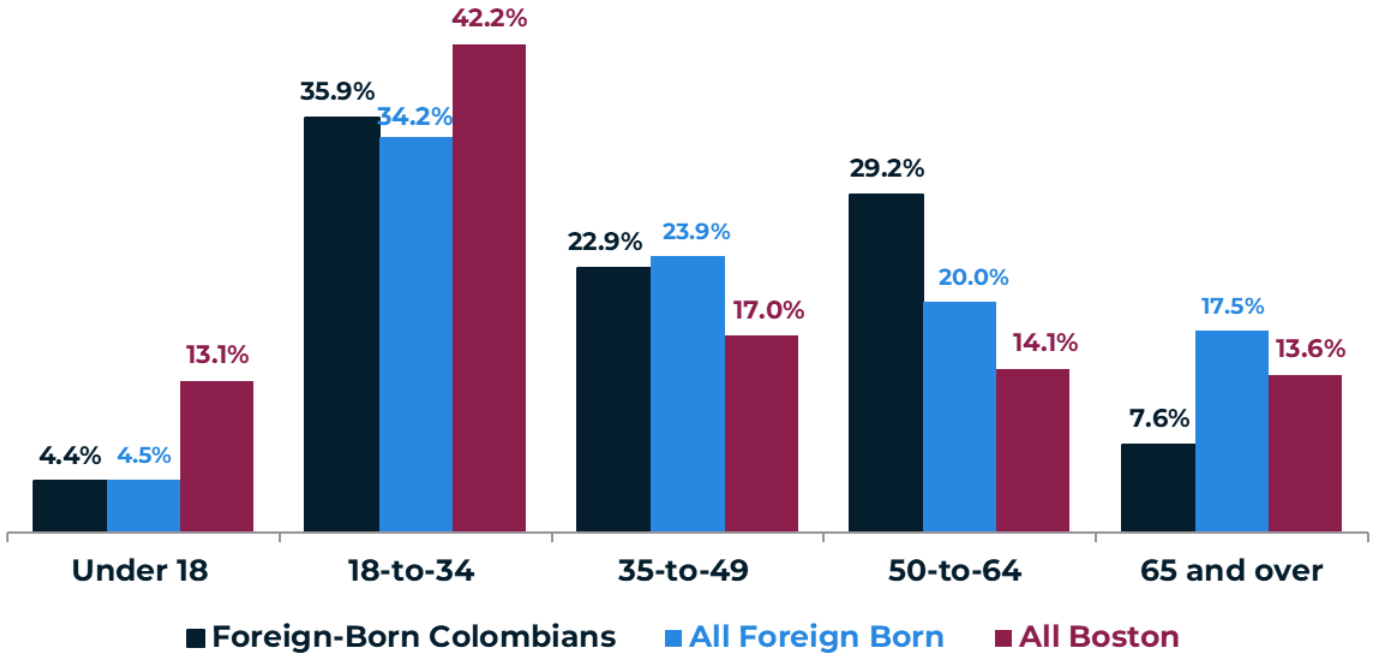
Colombians originally settled and continue to live in East Boston: 67 percent of foreign-born Colombians that live in Boston reside in East Boston.



Foreign-born Colombians who arrived in Boston as young adults in the 1990s and 2000s are now in their fifties. Approximately 29 percent of foreign-born Colombians are aged 50-to-64. Only 8 percent of the Colombian foreign-born population is 65 years or older, in comparison to 18 percent of the total foreign-born population.

AGE DISTRIBUTION

Share of population by age group



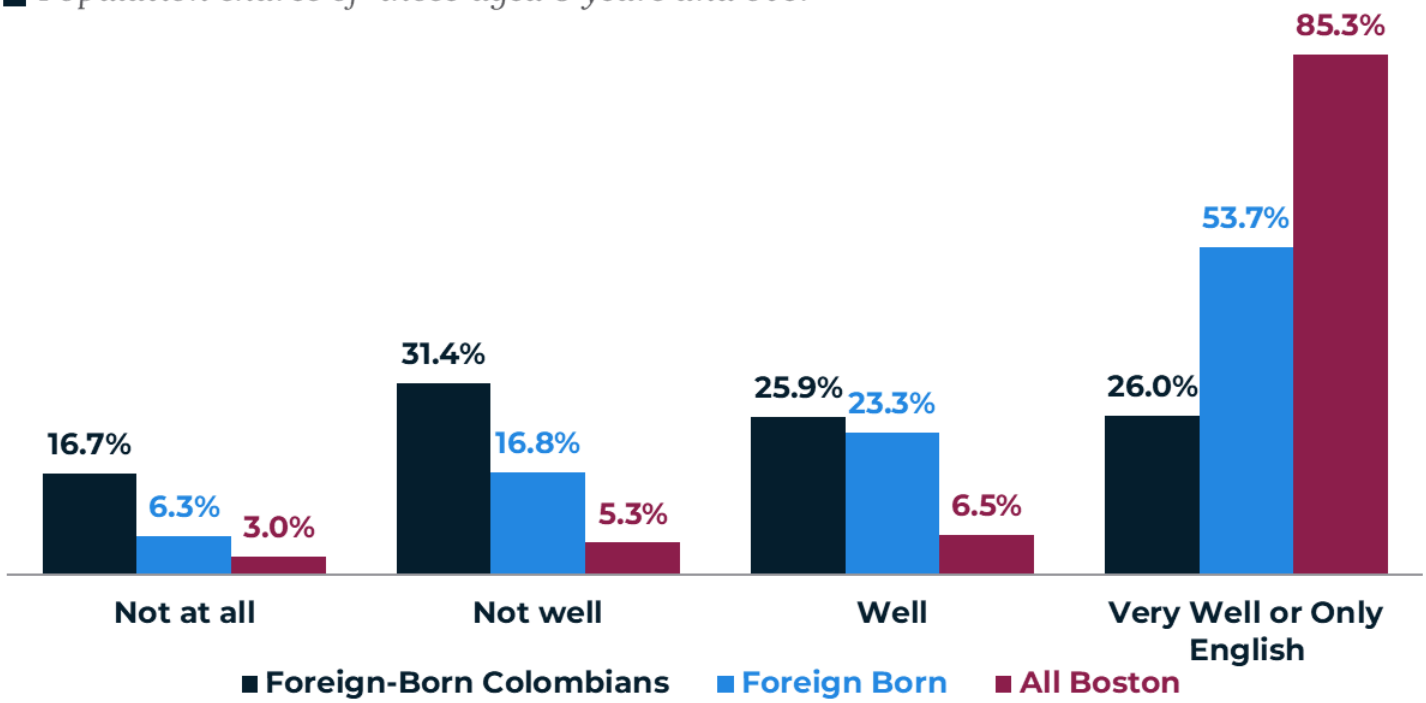
Source: 2024 City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Population Estimates, City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Analysis

LANGUAGE AND EDUCATION

Foreign-born Colombians are slightly less likely to be proficient in English. Approximately 17 percent do not speak English at all, and 31 percent speak English "not well". These are both higher rates than those of the total foreign-born population. Of the foreign-born Colombians only 4 percent speak English at home and 95 percent only speak Spanish at home.[7]

ABILITY TO SPEAK ENGLISH

Population shares of those aged 5 years and over



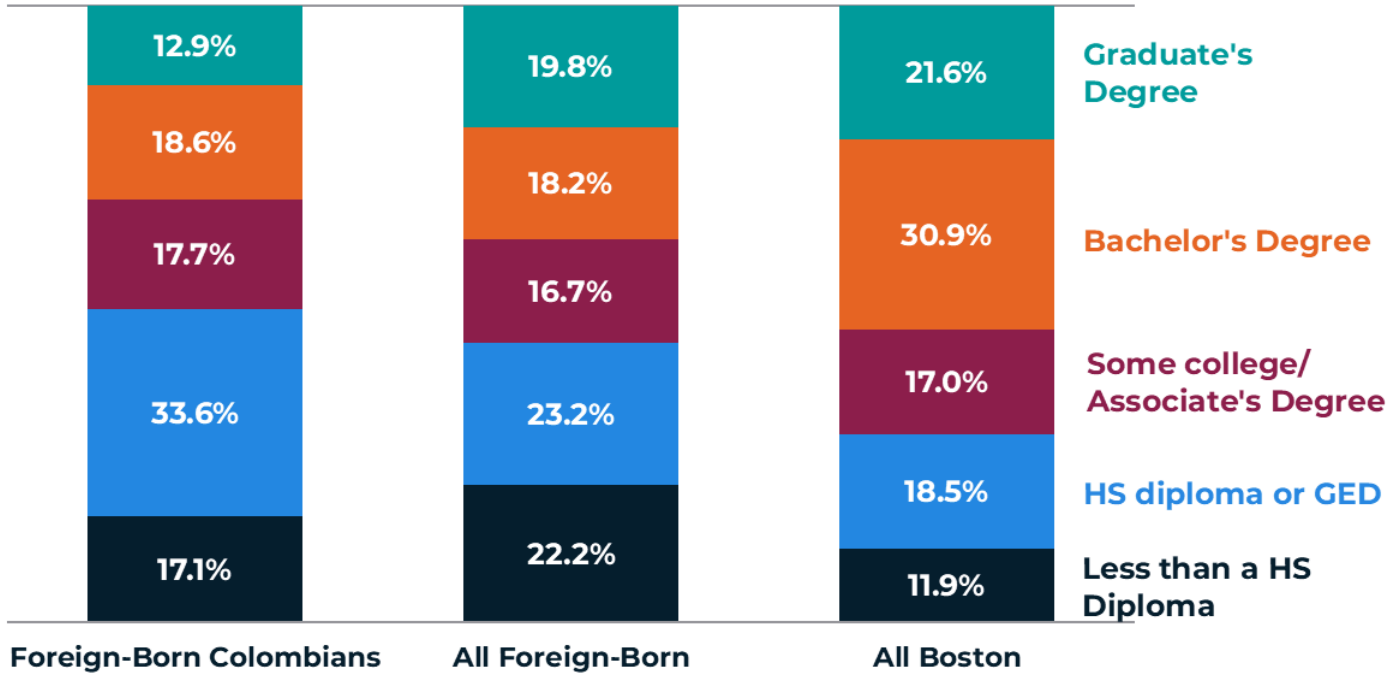
Source: 2024 City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Population Estimates, City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Analysis

[7] 2024 City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Population Estimates

The foreign-born Colombian population tends to have slightly lower levels of educational attainment, particularly pertaining to higher education. Despite this, most (83 percent) have at least a high school diploma, but less than half have any education higher than that.

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

Share of population aged 25 years and over

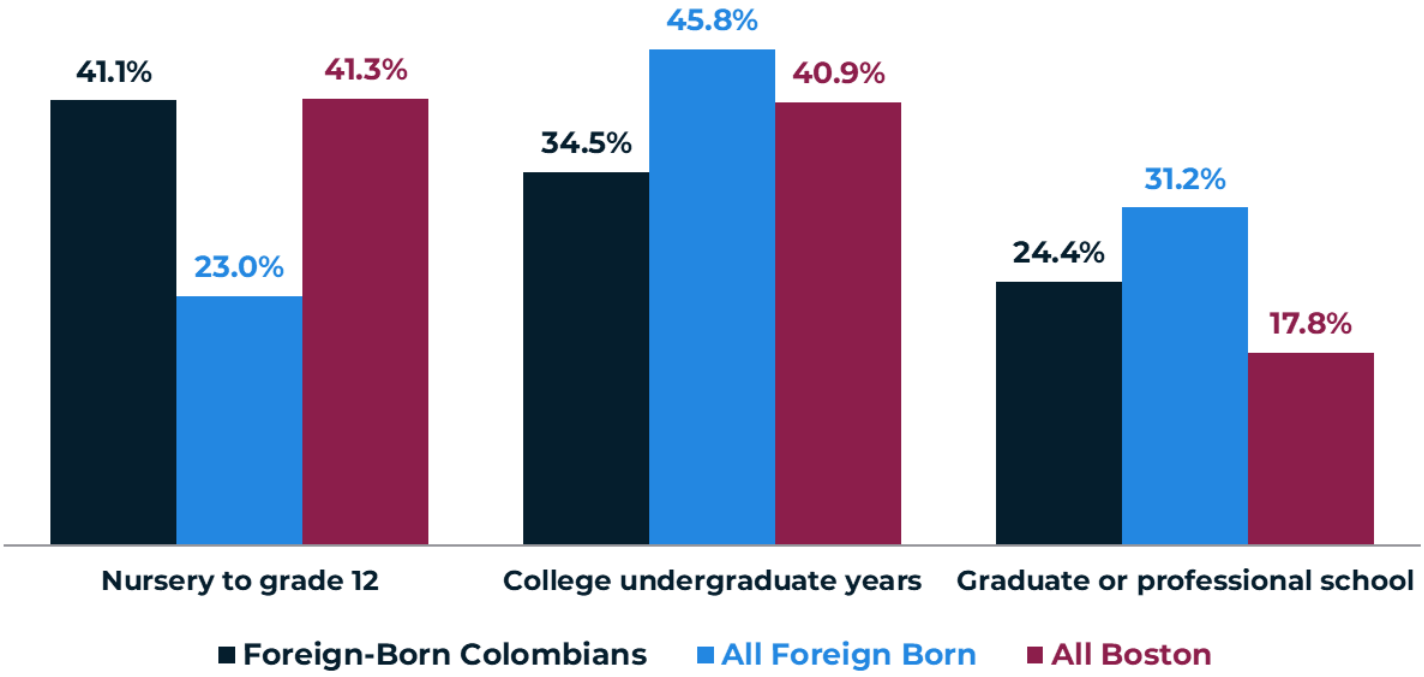


Source: 2024 City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Population Estimates, City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Analysis

Of those enrolled in school, nearly a quarter are enrolled in a graduate, a higher share than all of Boston, and around 40 percent are enrolled in nursery to grade 12.

SCHOOL ENROLLMENT

School enrolled population by level, aged 3 years and over

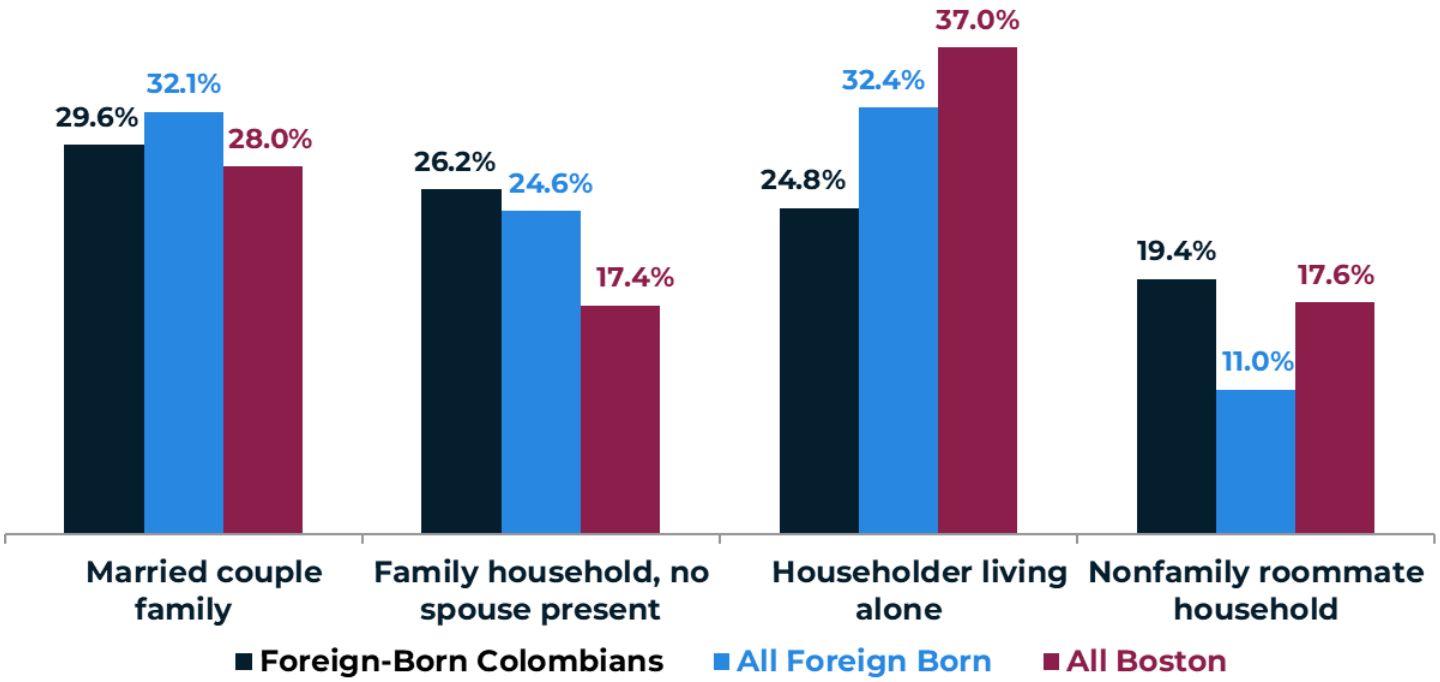


Source: 2024 City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Population Estimates, City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Analysis

Among foreign-born Colombian headed households, there is a higher share of non-family roommate households (19 percent) and a lower share of householders living alone (25 percent) than all Boston residents. Colombian foreign-born married-couple and single-parent households shares are relatively similar to all foreign born in Boston.

TYPE OF HOUSEHOLD

Share of households

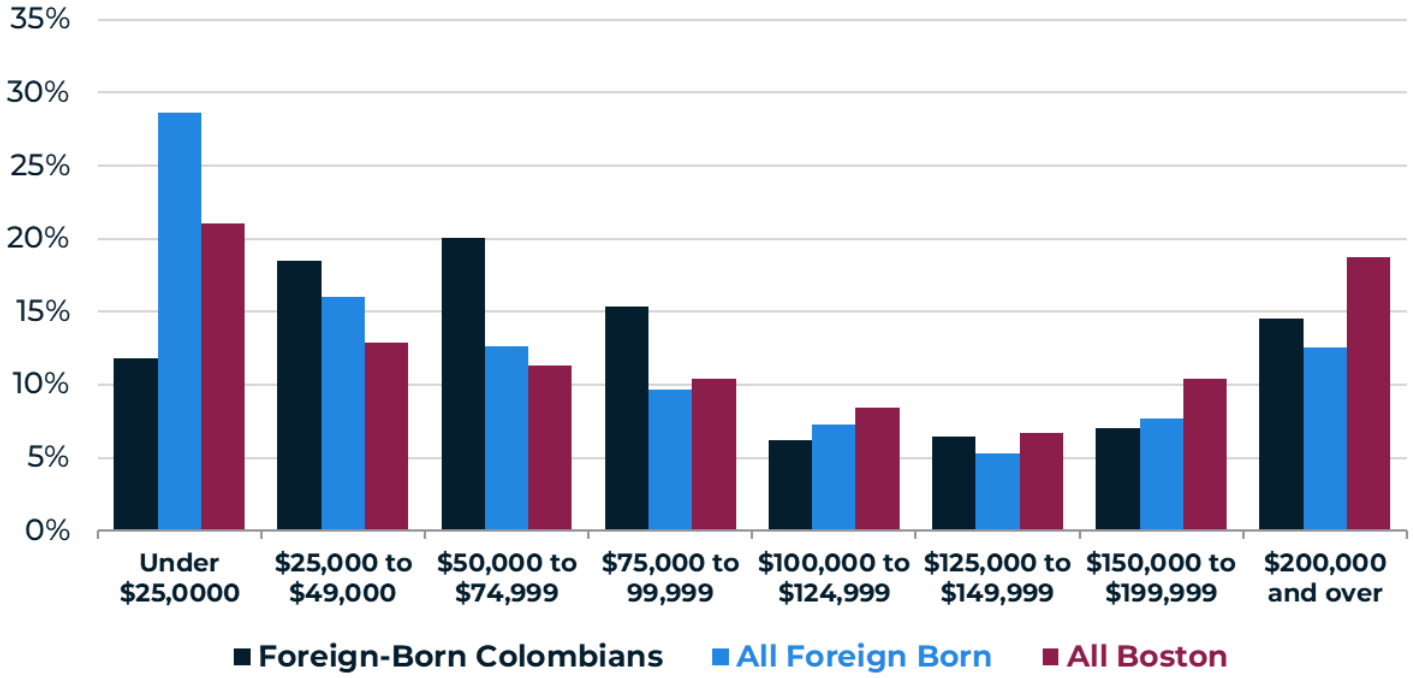


Source: City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Population Estimates, CIty of Boston Planning Department Research Division Analysis

Foreign-born Colombian households tend to be higher income than the overall foreign-born population, which likely has to do with their age and industries of work. Almost 15 percent of foreign-born Colombian households earn more than $200,000.

HOUSEHOLD INCOME DISTRIBUTION

Share of households

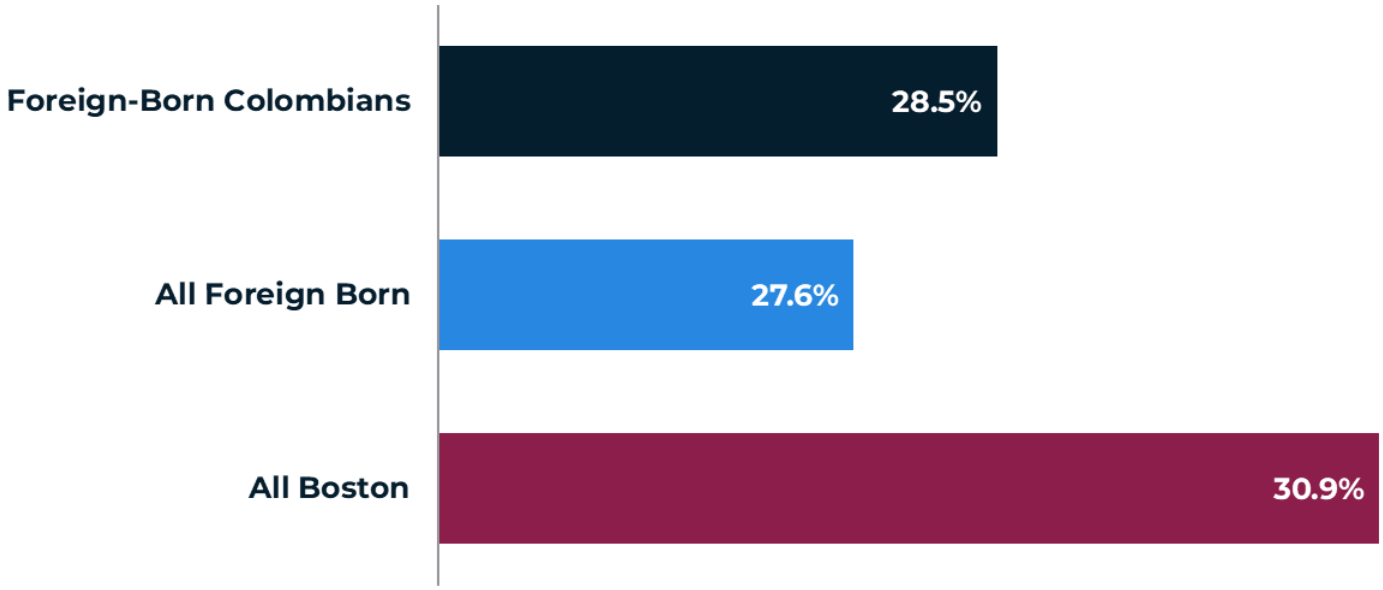


Source: 2024 City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Population Estimates, City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Analysis

Approximately 29 percent of foreign-born Colombian householders own their home. Foreign-born Colombian home ownership is slightly higher than the share of all foreign-born homeownership, but is still less than the entire city's population share.

OWNER-OCCUPIED HOUSEHOLDS

Share of householders that own their residence

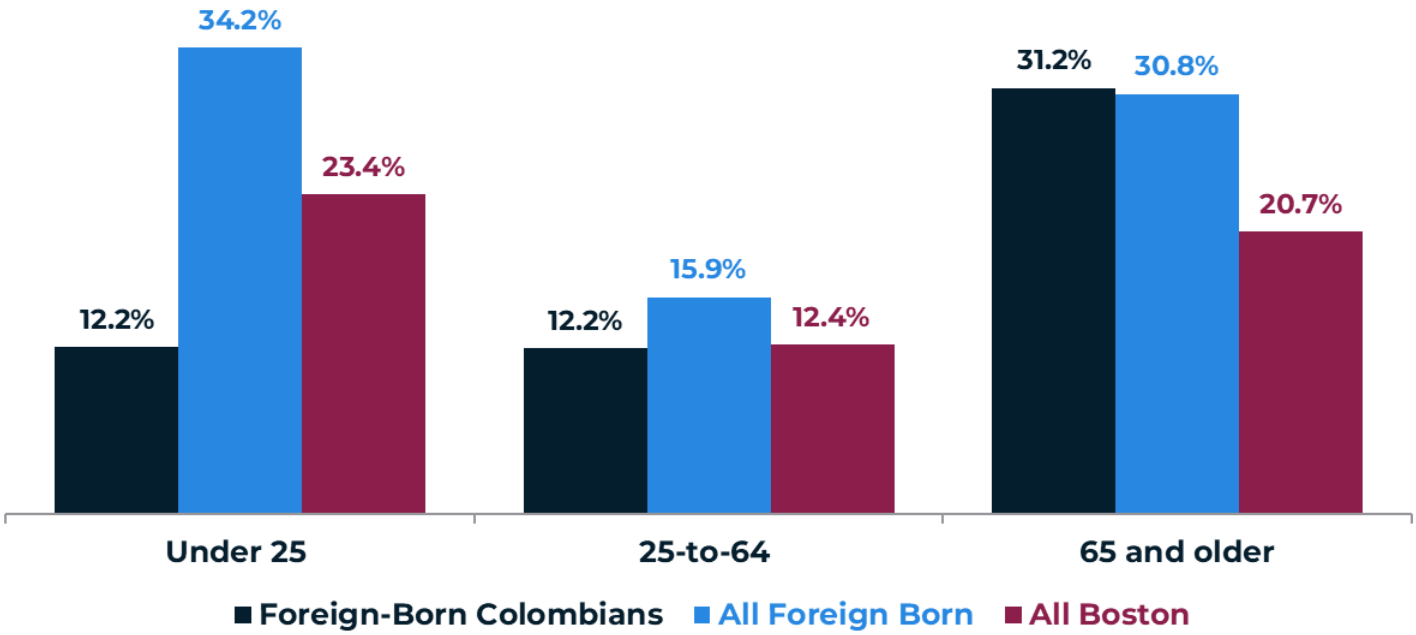


Source: 2024 City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Population Estimates, City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Analysis

The Colombian foreign-born population has an overall poverty rate of only 10 percent, compared to 22 percent in all foreign-born individuals and 17 percent in all of Boston. The poverty rate for foreign-born Colombians over the age of 65 is higher than all foreign born and all Boston rates for the same age group. Comparatively, foreign-born Colombians have lower poverty rates among ages 64 and under. Only 12 percent of those ages less than 25 and 25-to-64 live under poverty.

POVERTY RATES

Share of age group that is living below the poverty line



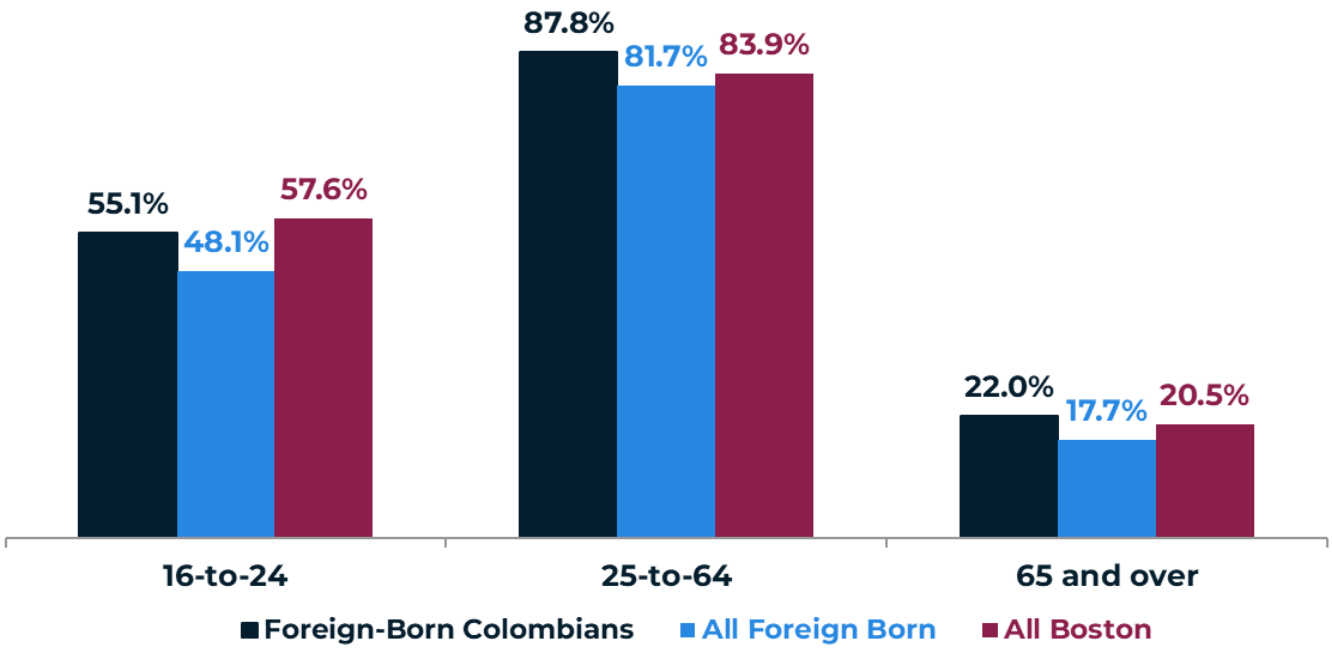
Source: 2024 City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Population Estimates, City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Analysis

EMPLOYMENT

Labor force participation rates for foreign-born Colombians tend to be higher in each age group than the total Boston population or total foreign-born population participation rates. Only 55 percent of 16-to-24 year old foreign-born Colombians, however, participate in the labor force, which is less than the population share of that age group for all Boston (58 percent).

LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION RATES

Share of those participating in the labor force

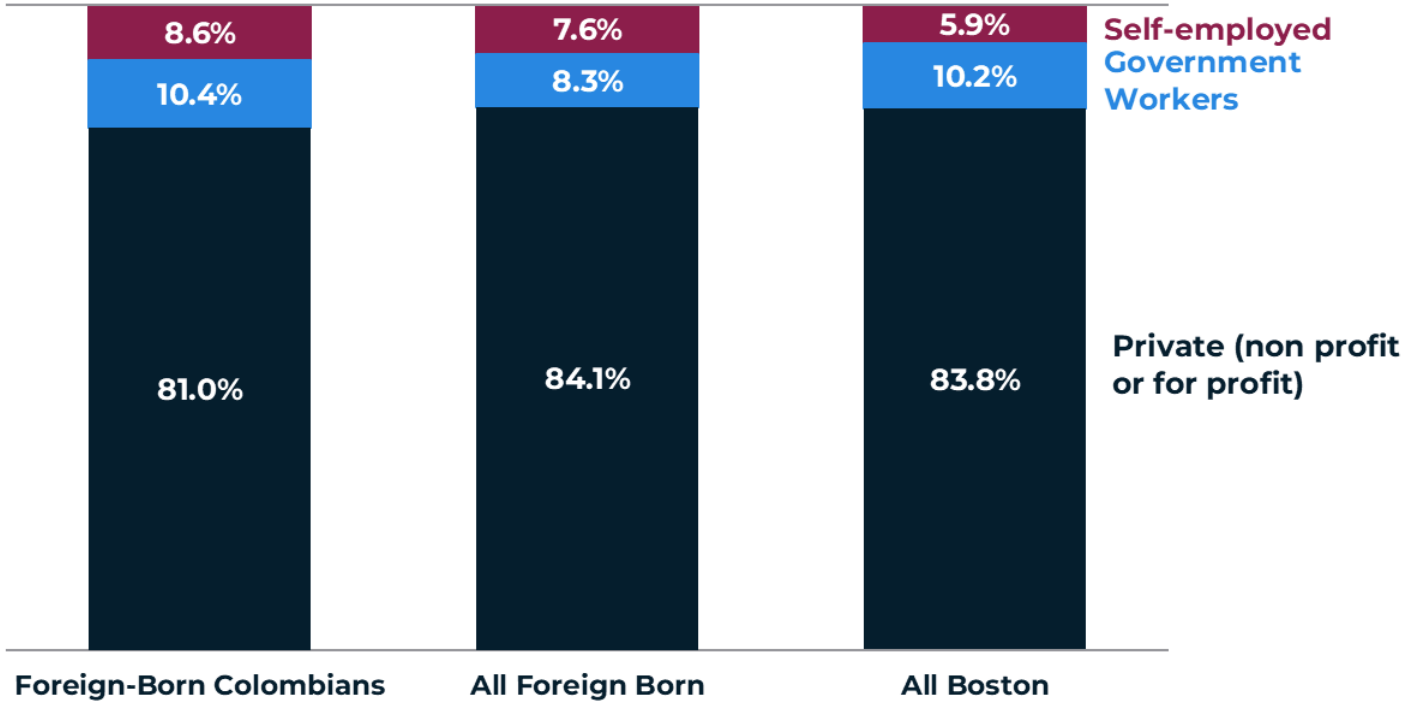


Source: 2024 City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Population Estimates, City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Analysis

Foreign-born Colombian workers are more likely to be self-employed: 10 percent are self-employed compared to just 6 percent of the overall Boston resident workforce.

CLASS OF WORKERS

Shares of those in the labor force, 16 years and over

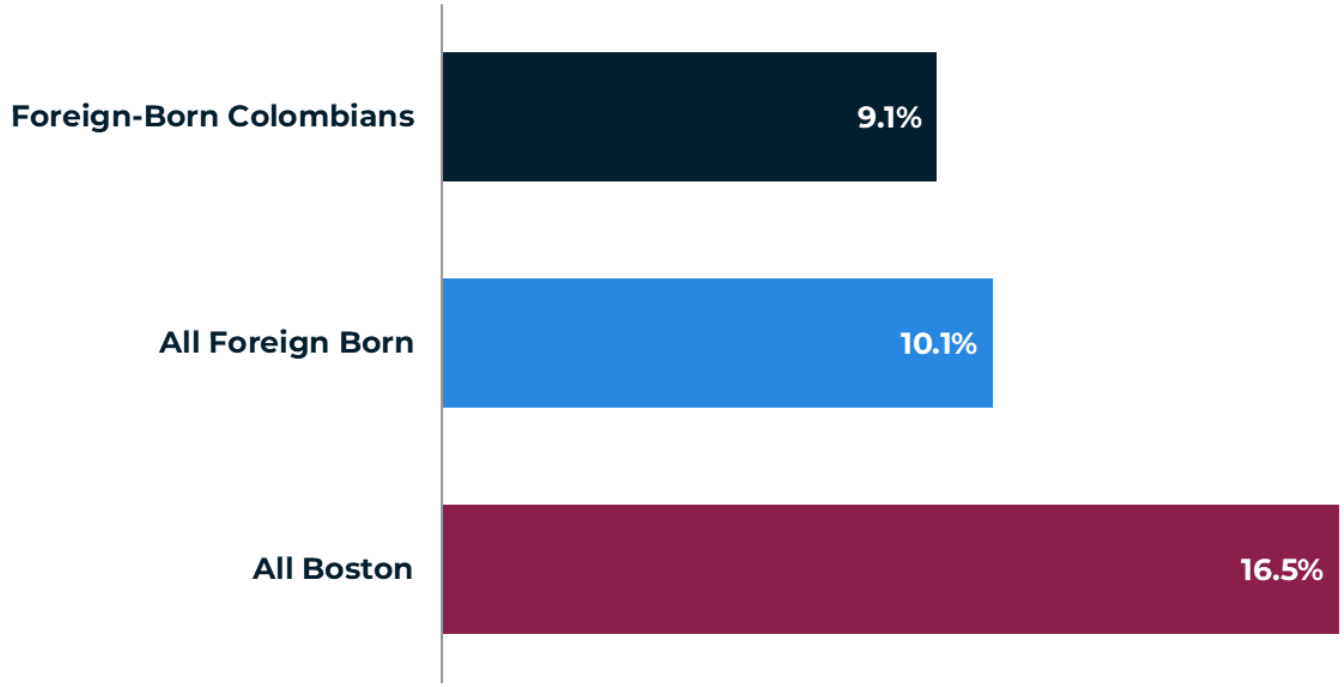


Source: 2024 City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Population Estimates, City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Analysis

Approximately 9 percent of the foreign born resident Colombian workers worked from home. This lower share of Colombian workers working from home compared to all foreign born and all workers in Boston may be related to their work in building cleaning and maintenance, food preparation, and production occupations.

WORKED FROM HOME

Share of those in the labor force, 16 years and over

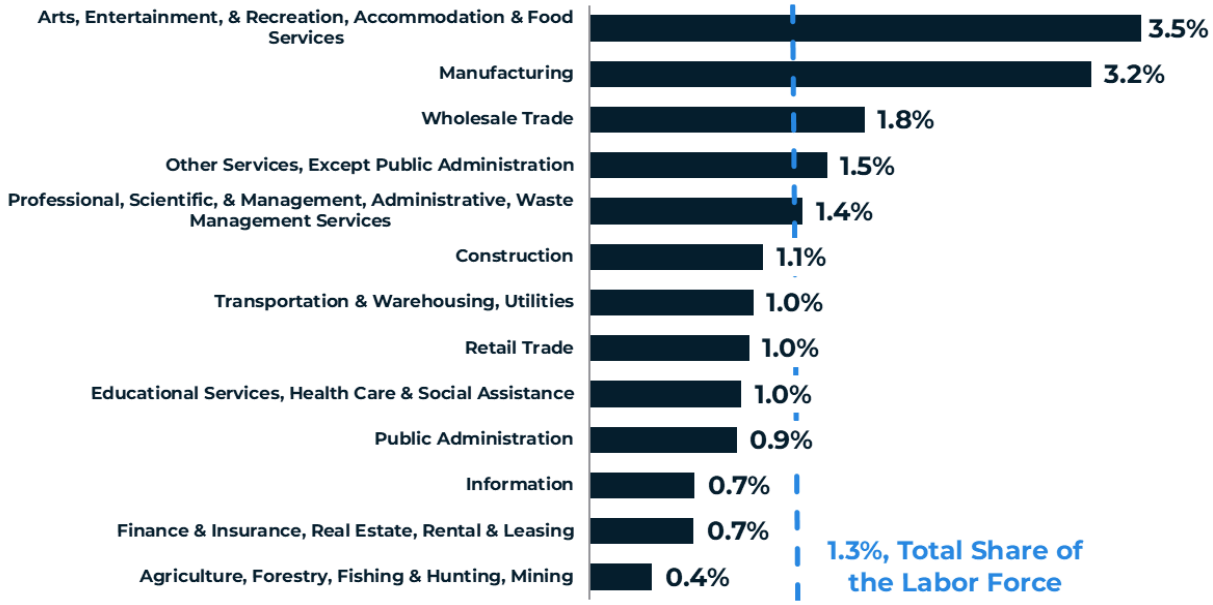


Source: 2024 City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Population Estimates, City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Analysis

There are 12,517 foreign-born Colombians employed in Suffolk County, making up 1.3 percent of Suffolk County's workforce. Colombian foreign-born workers working in Suffolk County make up 3.5 percent of the arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation, and food services industry, and 3.2 percent of the manufacturing industry. They are underrepresented in certain industries such as agriculture, forestry, fishing & hunting, and mining (0.7 percent), finance & insurance, real estate, and rental & leasing (0.7 percent), and information (0.7 percent).

EMPLOYMENT BY INDUSTRY

Share of workers in Suffolk County by industry, 2022

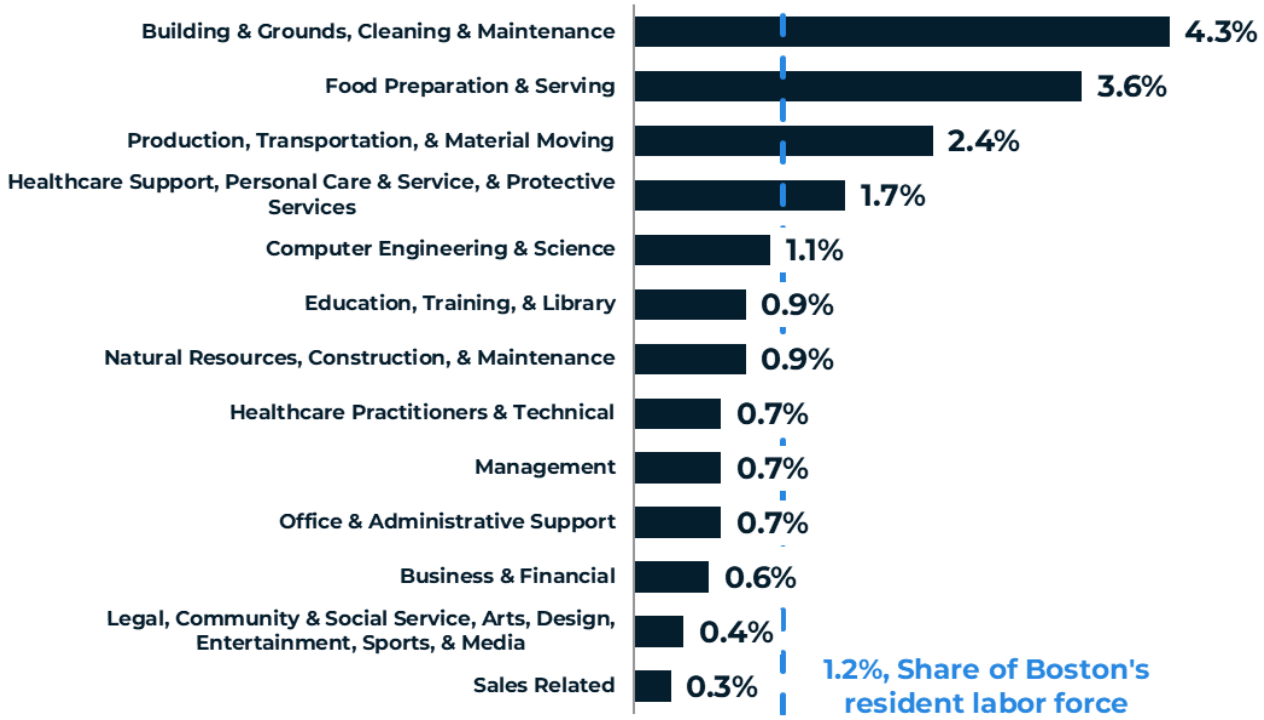


Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2018-2022 5-Year American Community Survey (PUMS), City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Analysis

Colombian foreign-born workers make up 1.2 percent of Boston's resident labor force. They are overrepresented in building & grounds, cleaning & maintenance (4.3 percent) and food preparation & serving (3.6 percent). They tend to be underrepresented in sales related occupations and legal, community & social service, arts, design, entertainment, sports, & media occupations.

FOREIGN-BORN COLOMBIAN OCCUPATIONS

Share of Boston's resident labor force, by occupation



Source: 2024 City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Population Estimates, City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Analysis

STANDARD OF LIVING

Approximately 30 percent of foreign-born Colombians have achieved a middle-class standard of living, compared with 43.5 percent of Boston's overall population, and 33.5 percent of all foreign born. A family income four times the poverty line is used as a proxy for middle-class standard of living. The actual income needed to achieve this standard depends on the size and composition of the family. For a two-person family in 2022, a middle-class income would be at least $75,600.

ECONOMIC CONTRIBUTIONS

Colombian foreign-born workers contribute to Boston's economy. Their labor generates an additional 3,905 indirect and induced jobs in Suffolk County. They contribute 1.8 billion dollars to Boston's GCP. Colombian foreign-born workers employed in Suffolk County pay $43 million in federal income tax and $24 million in state income tax.[8]

CONCLUSION

Boston has the largest foreign-born Colombian population with 7,005 residents. Foreign-born Colombian residents of Boston contribute significantly to the economy and culture of the city, particularly in East Boston, where the majority of them reside. The labor force participation rate for ages 24-to-65 is higher than that of all Boston, and their household income tends to be relatively higher than the total foreign-born population. Foreign-born Colombian workers make up 1.2 percent of Boston's total labor force and will lose 4.3 percent of building and grounds cleaning and maintenance workers without them.

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[8]Research Division estimates using Regional Economic Model, Inc., (REMI) PI+ Massachusetts Regions, City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Analysis