



FOREIGN BORN IN BOSTON: VIETNAMESE

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 VIETNAMESE IN THE UNITED STATES

The first significant wave of Vietnamese immigrants to the United States came following the Vietnam War and the collapse of South Vietnam’s government in 1975. The vast majority of Vietnamese who came to the United States in the years that followed came as refugees fleeing persecution and political oppression. Many who had worked for the U.S. government or were otherwise associated with the U.S. involvement in the war were evacuated by the military.

The hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese who emigrated during this time were ultimately spread throughout the United States through the U.S. government’s Refugee Dispersion Policy, which sought to provide better opportunities for refugees and lessen the impact of populations arriving in one place by securing voluntary sponsors (often in the form of nonprofit organizations or churches) to assist them.

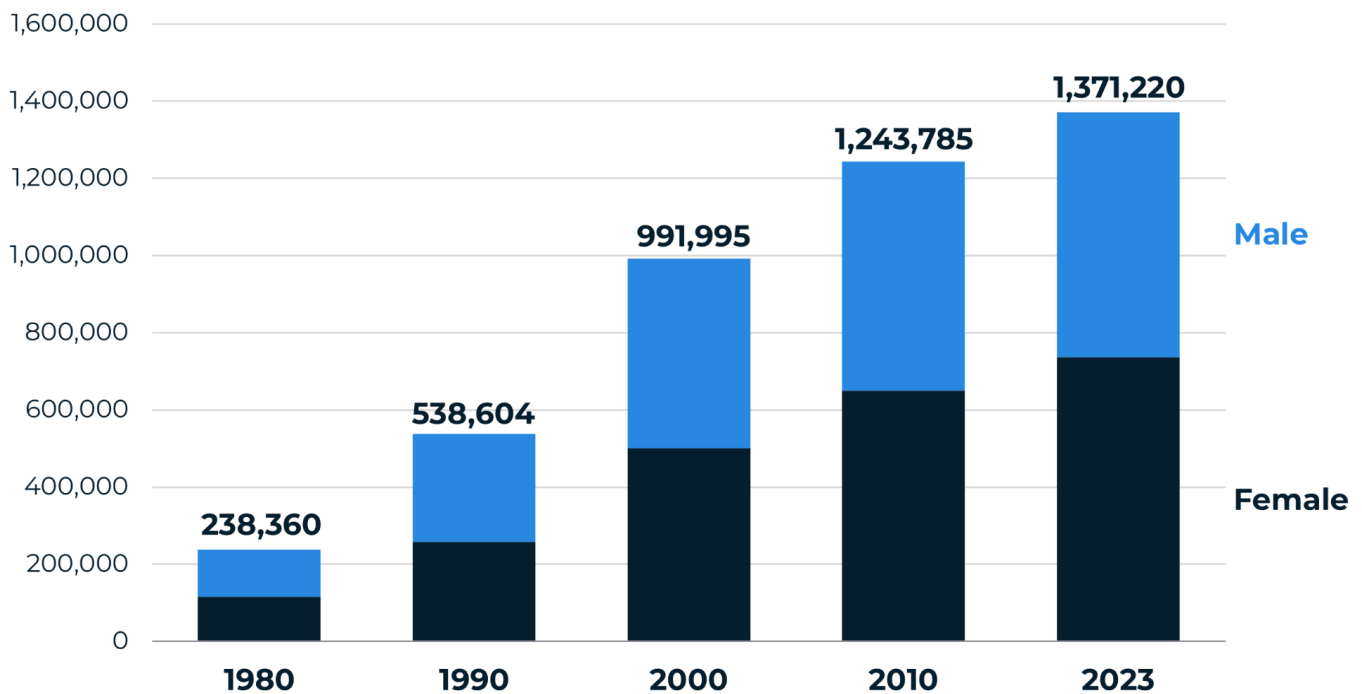


City of Boston
Planning Department

RESEARCH DIVISION

FOREIGN-BORN VIETNAMESE

Population growth in the U.S. from 1980 to 2023



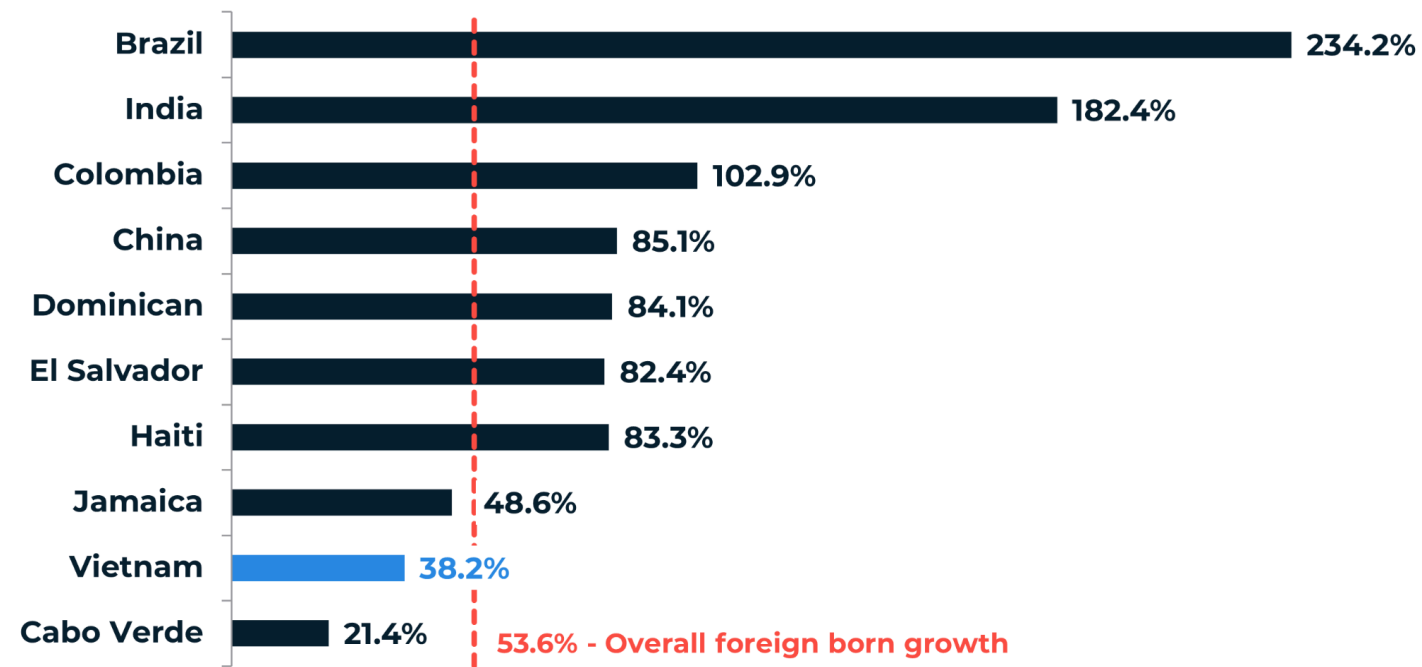
Source: U.S. Census Bureau 1980–2000 Decennial Censuses (IPUMS), 2010 and 2023 1-Year American Community Survey (PUMS), City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Analysis



From 2000 to 2023, the foreign-born Vietnamese population increased by 38 percent, slower than the 53.6 percent population growth for all foreign born in the country.

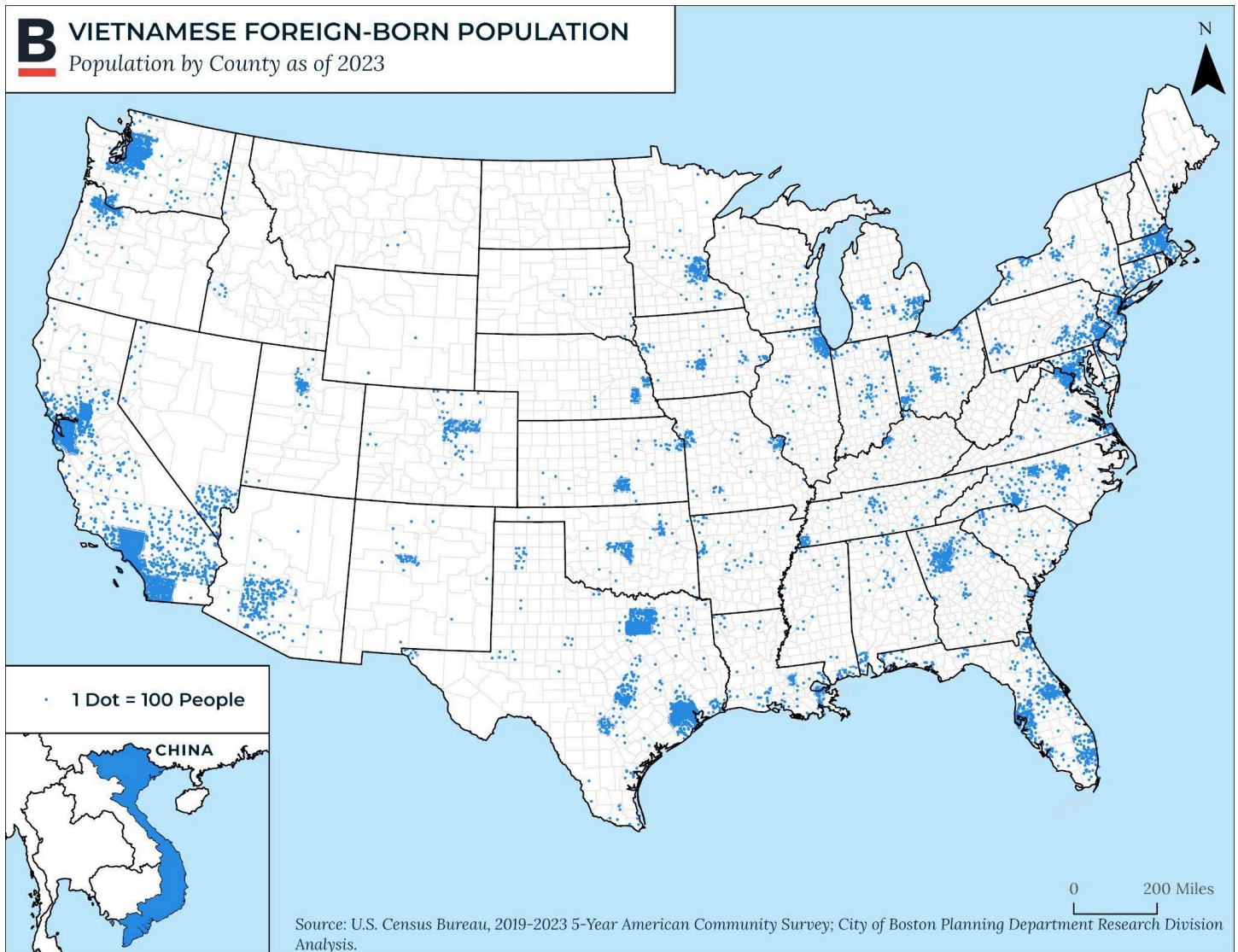
INCREASE IN FOREIGN BORN POPULATION

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

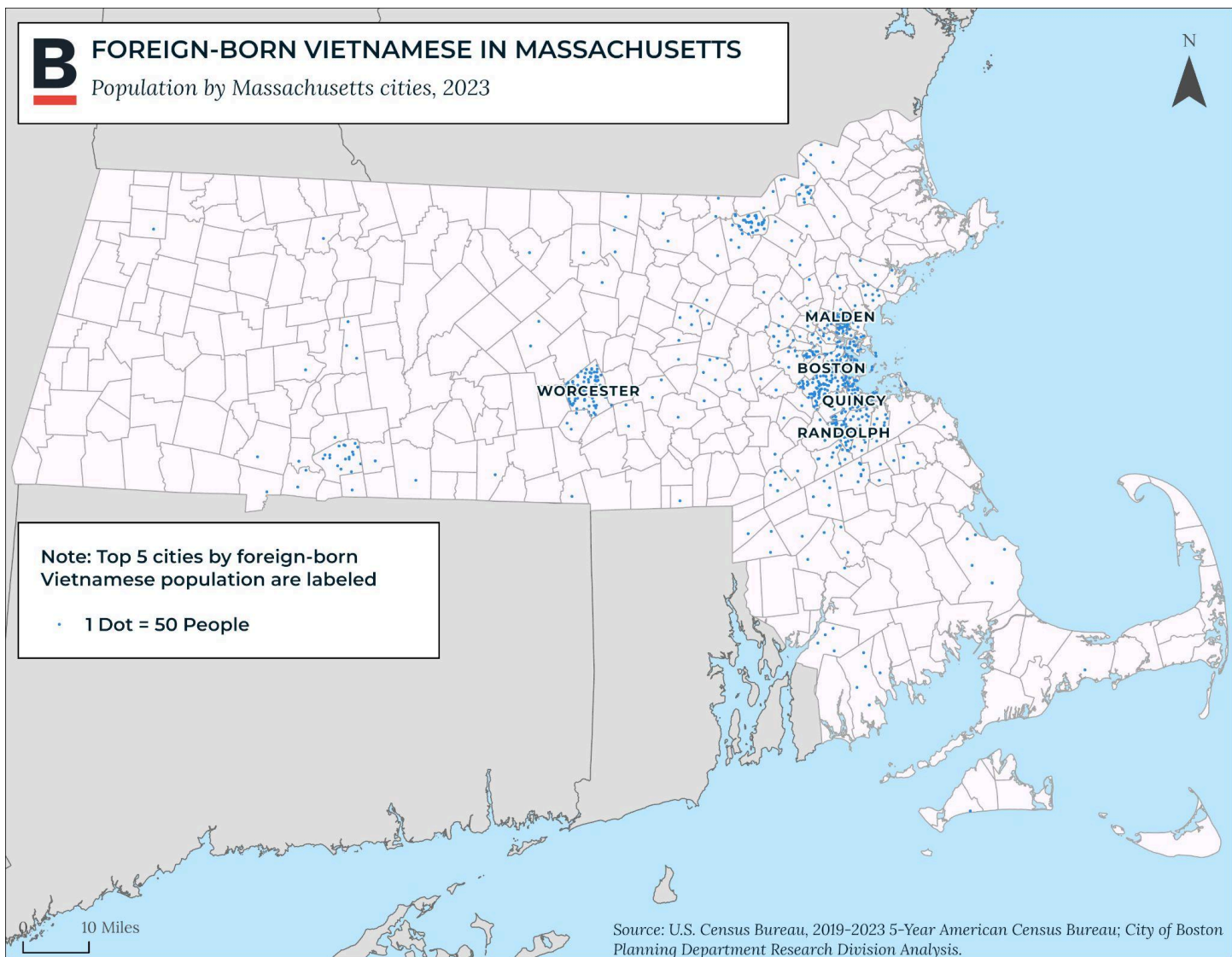


Source: U.S. Census Bureau 1980-2000 Decennial Censuses (IPUMS), 2023 1-Year American Community Survey (PUMS), City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Analysis

Estimates from the 2023 American Community Survey (ACS) show that almost 1.4 million foreign-born Vietnamese reside in the United States, which is the leading destination for Vietnamese emigrants. Other primary destinations include Australia, Canada, and France. Since the 1980s, Vietnamese immigrants have relocated and gravitated toward states such as California and Texas, which have had the largest concentration of Vietnamese immigrants. Massachusetts has the seventh largest foreign-born Vietnamese population in the United States behind California, Texas, Florida, Washington, Georgia, and Virginia.



In Massachusetts, Boston (23 percent) has the largest share of the state’s foreign-born Vietnamese population followed by Worcester (12 percent), Quincy (9 percent), Randolph (5 percent), and Malden (5 percent).



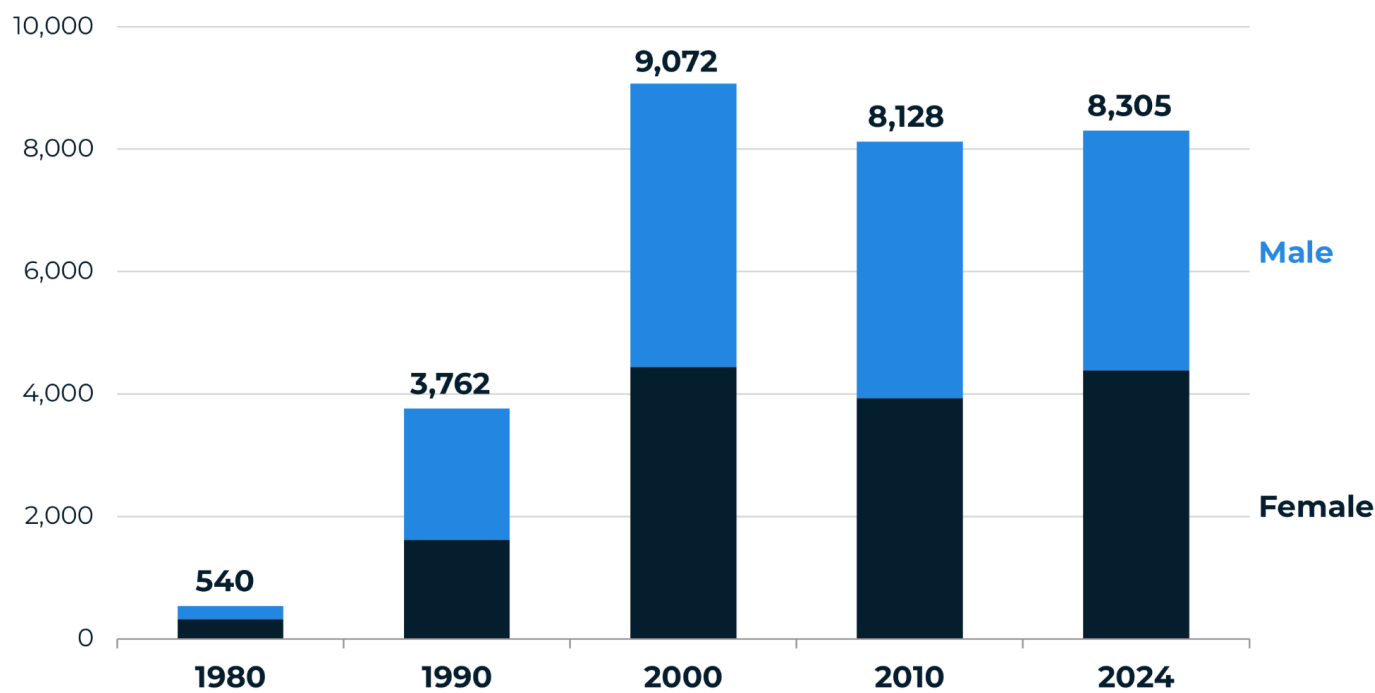
FOREIGN-BORN VIETNAMESE IN BOSTON

DEMOGRAPHICS

The Vietnamese foreign-born population grew quickly in Boston before 2000, but their growth slowed in the following years. In 2024, there were 8,305 foreign-born Vietnamese residing in Boston; 52.8 percent were female and 47.2 percent were male.

FOREIGN-BORN VIETNAMESE

Population growth in Boston, from 1980 to 2024

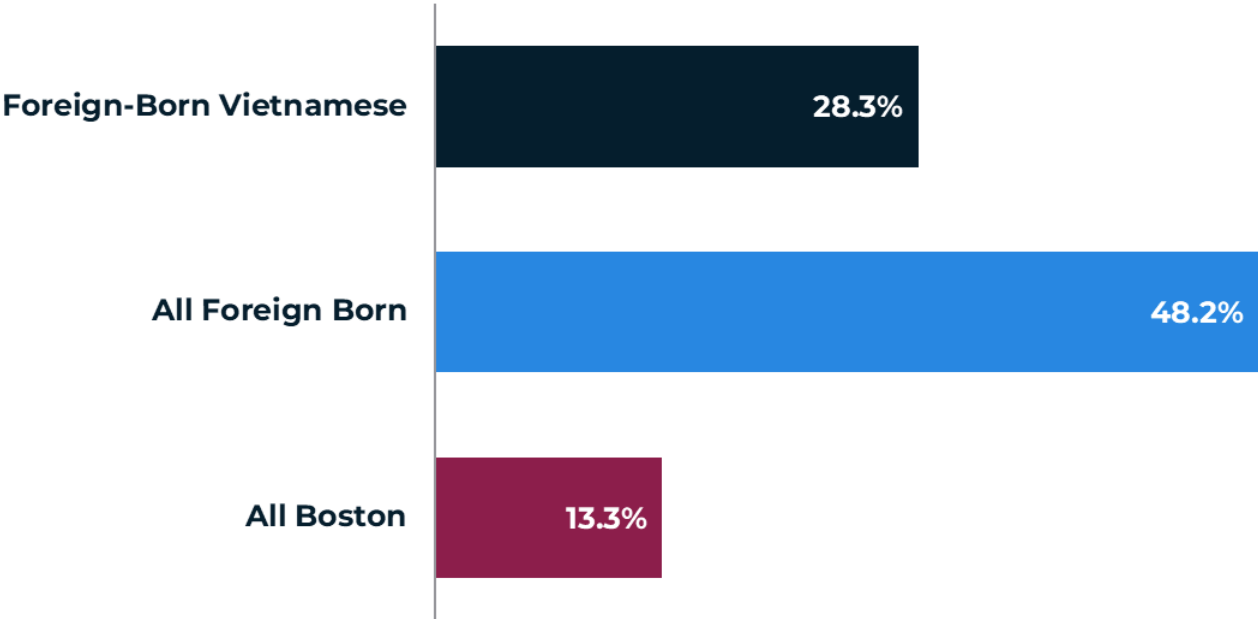


Source: U.S. Census Bureau 1980–2000 Decennial Censuses (IPUMS), 2010 1-Year American Community Survey (PUMS), 2024 City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Population Estimates, City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Analysis

Because U.S. immigration policy allows refugees to apply for green cards after a year of residency in the country, this speeds up the naturalization process compared to non-refugees. As a result, the majority of Vietnamese in Boston are naturalized citizens (71 percent).

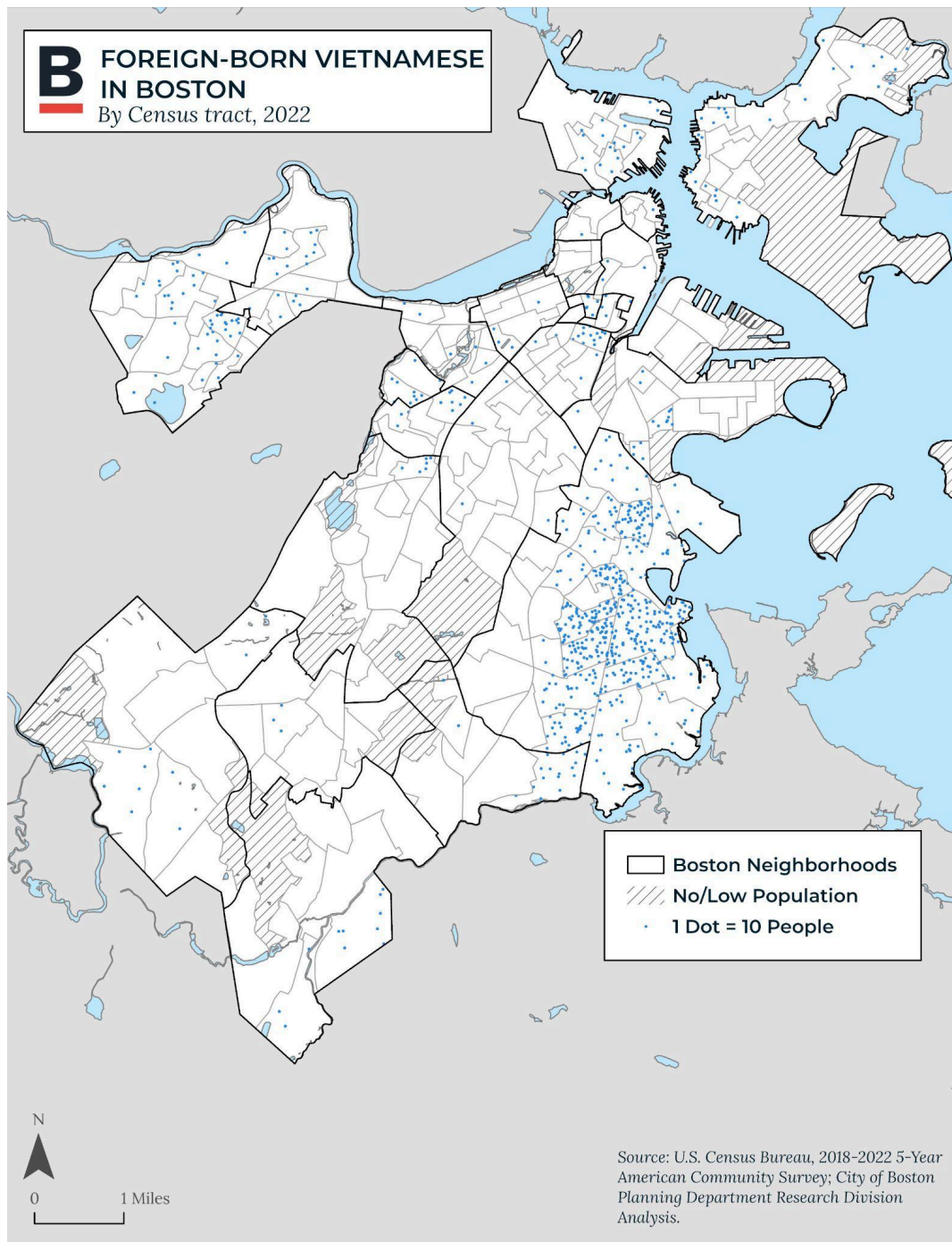
NON-U.S. CITIZENS

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

Foreign-born Vietnamese coming to Boston originally settled in several neighborhoods, but soon clustered in Dorchester, contributing to the establishment of restaurants, businesses, and community.¹ Today, 67% of the population lives in Dorchester. The Mass Cultural Council designated Fields Corner in Dorchester, Boston's Little Saigon, in 2021.



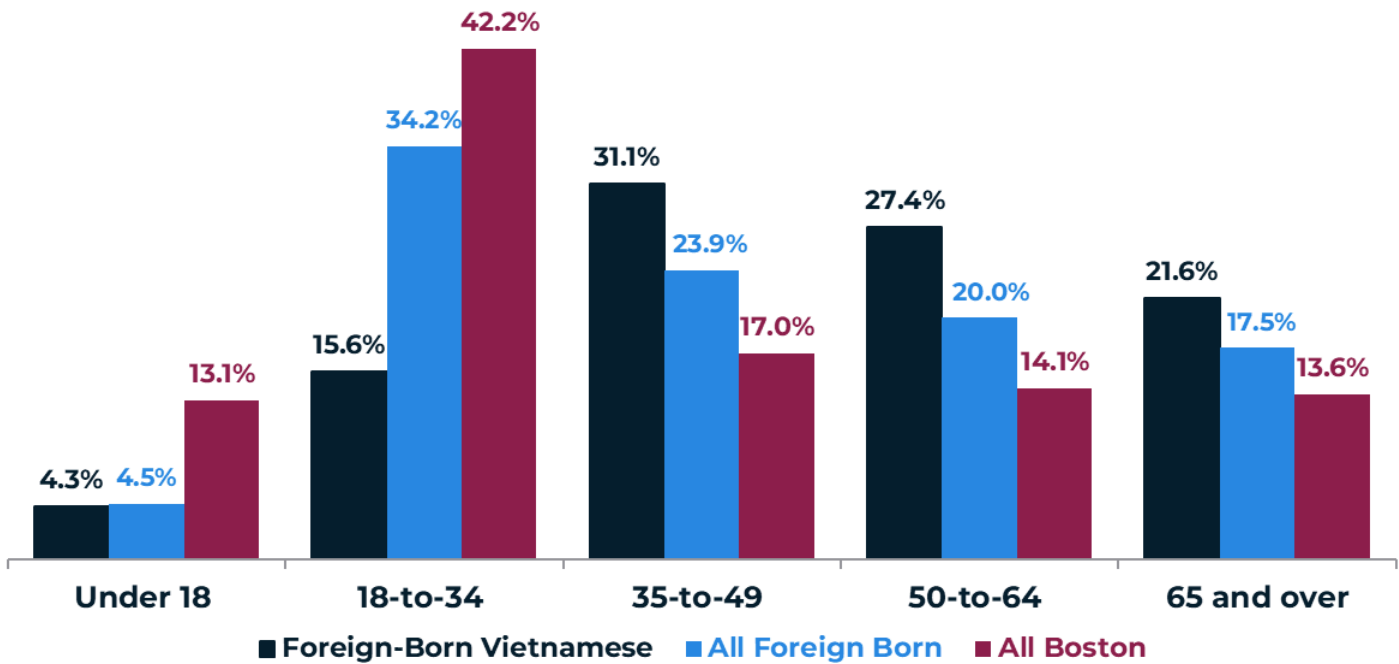
¹ <https://globalboston.bc.edu/index.php/home/ethnic-groups/vietnamese/>



Vietnamese foreign born in Boston tend to be older than the overall population. Almost half of Vietnamese foreign born are aged 50 or older.

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

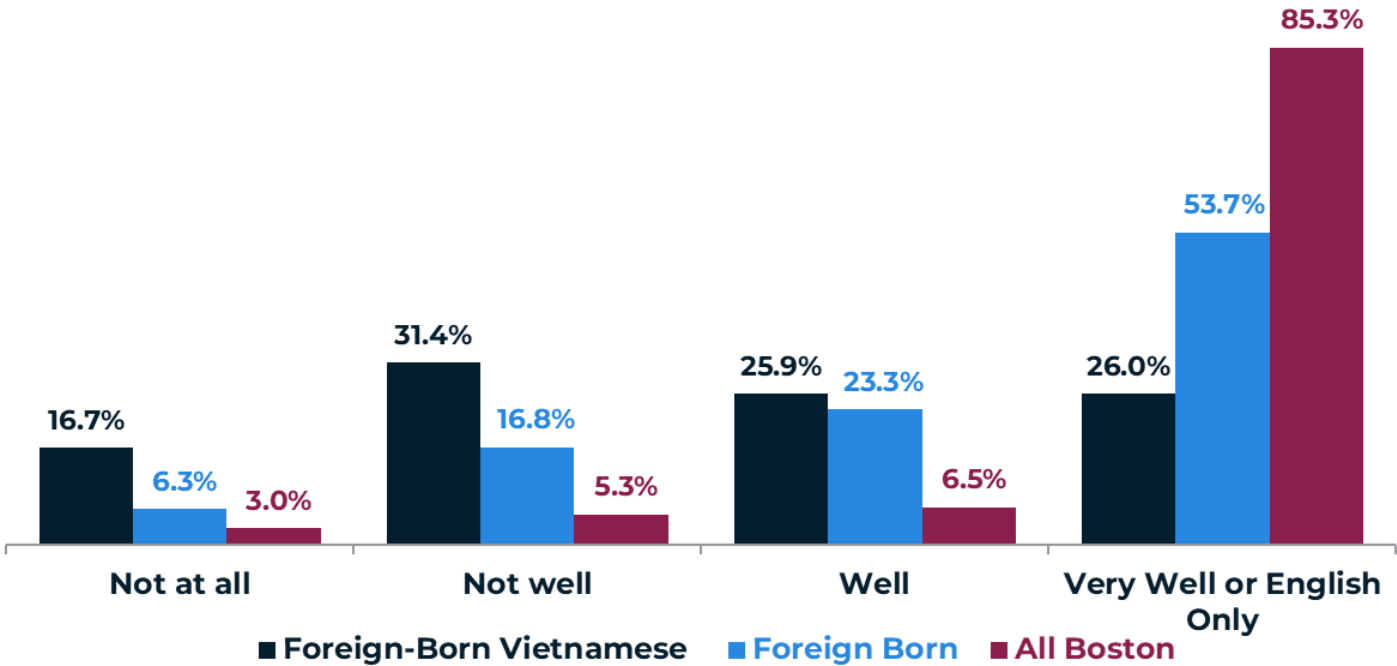
LANGUAGE AND EDUCATION

Foreign-born Vietnamese in Boston are less likely to be English language proficient. Approximately 17 percent do not speak English at all, and 31 percent do not speak English well. However, 26 percent of foreign-born Vietnamese speak English very well or only speak English at home. Of the foreign-born Vietnamese, 7 percent speak only English at home, 83 percent only speak Vietnamese at home, 4 percent only speak Chinese at home, and 3 percent only speak Cantonese at home.

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ABILITY TO SPEAK ENGLISH

Population shares of those aged 5 years and over

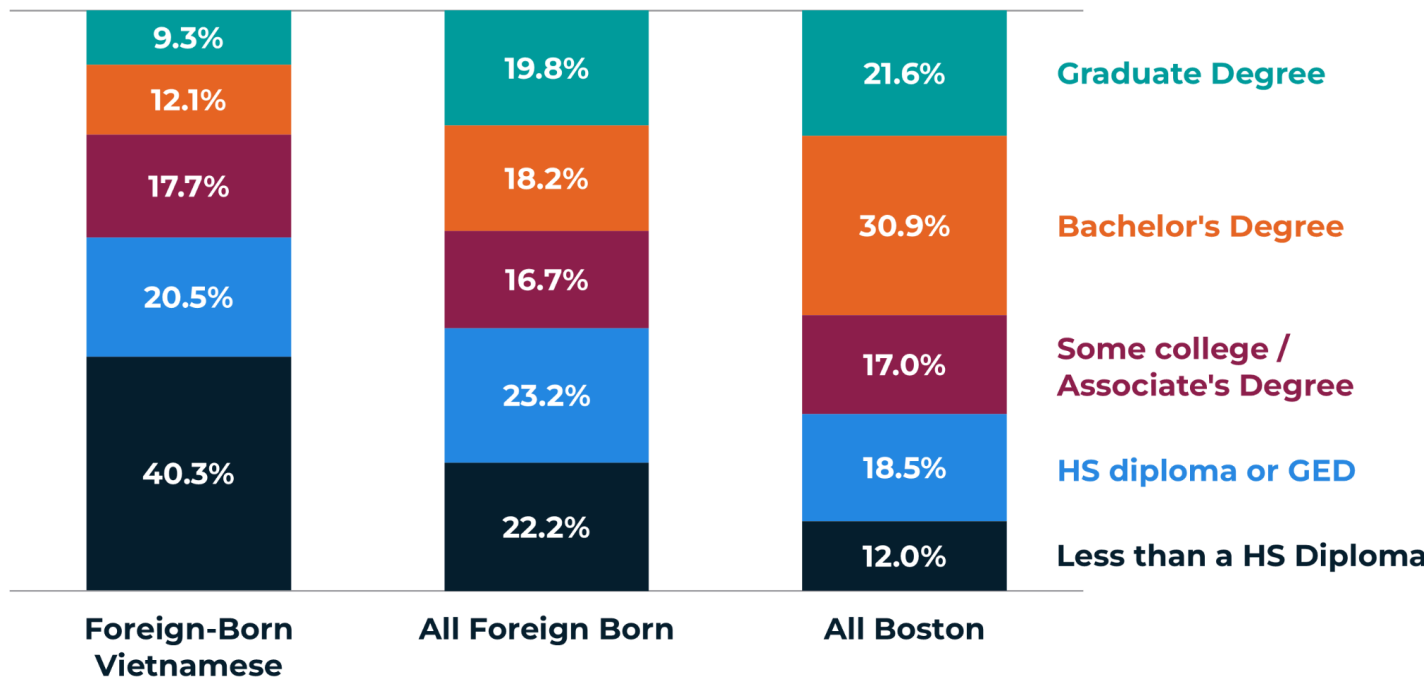


Source: 2024 City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Population Estimates, City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Analysis

² 2024 City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Population Estimates

The Vietnamese foreign-born population is more likely to have lower levels of educational attainment: roughly 40 percent have less than a high school diploma. This share is almost double that of all foreign-born. Only 21 percent of Vietnamese foreign born aged 25 or older have completed a Bachelor’s degree or higher.

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT
Share of population aged 25 and over

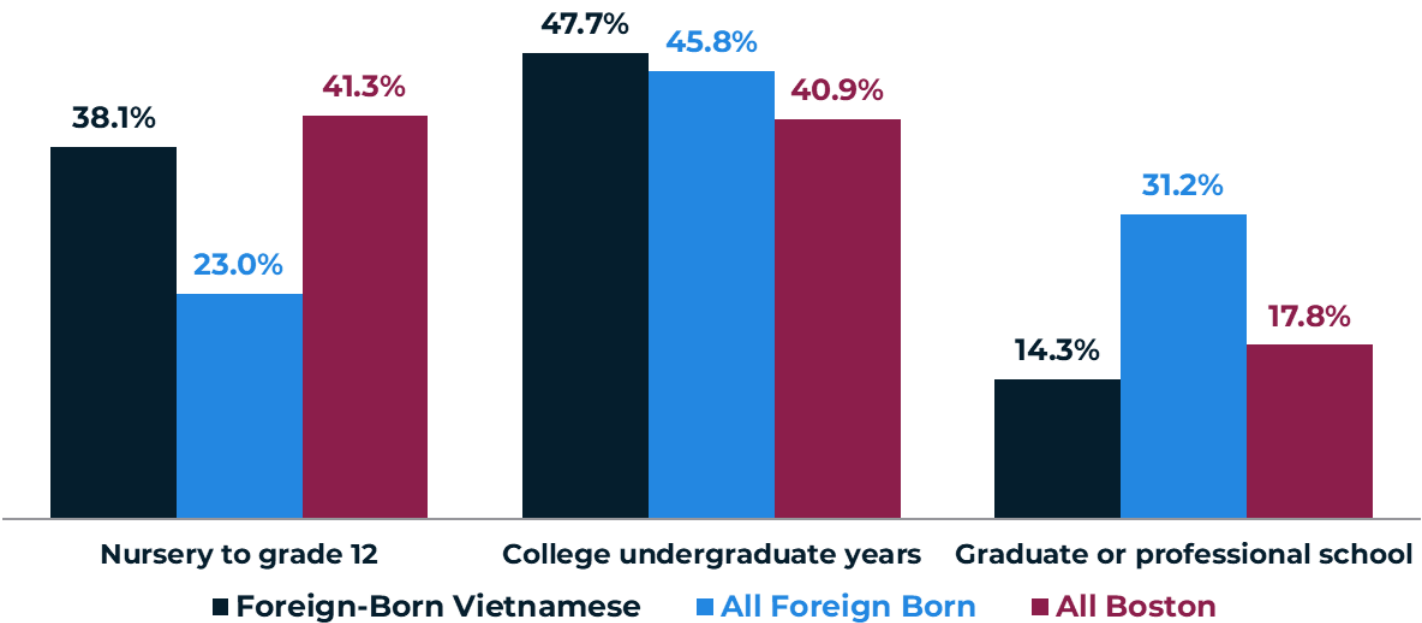


Source: 2024 City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Population Estimates, City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Analysis

Almost half of the foreign-born Vietnamese residents who are enrolled in school, are in college undergraduate years, which is a higher share than both all foreign born in Boston and all Boston residents who are enrolled in school. Moreover, around 38 percent of Vietnamese foreign-born who are enrolled in school are in nursery to grade 12.

SCHOOL ENROLLMENT

School enrolled population by level, aged 3 years and over

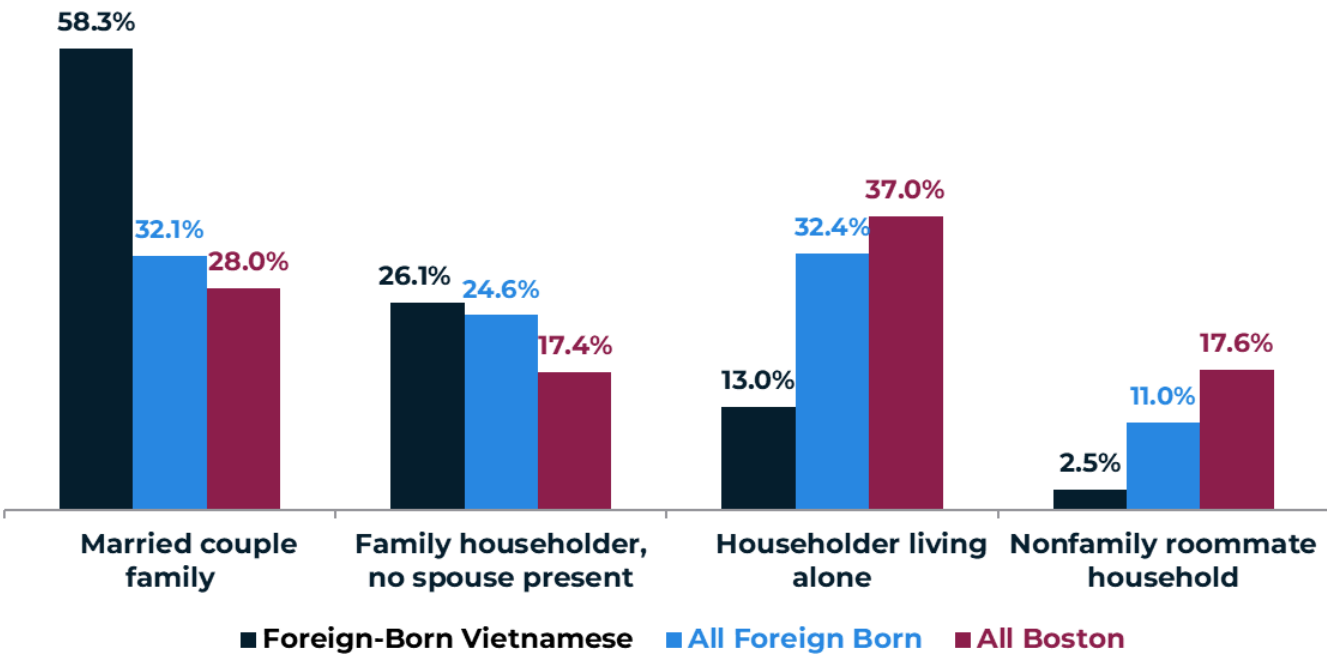


Source: 2024 City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Population Estimates, City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Analysis

Married-couple families make up the majority of households for the Vietnamese foreign born (58 percent). Only 13 percent of Vietnamese foreign-born householders live alone and only 3 percent live in non-family roommate households. This may be largely due to the high numbers of settled Vietnamese refugees following the Vietnam war, coming into the country as a family unit, and lower shares of young adults living in college dorms.

TYPE OF HOUSEHOLD

Share of households

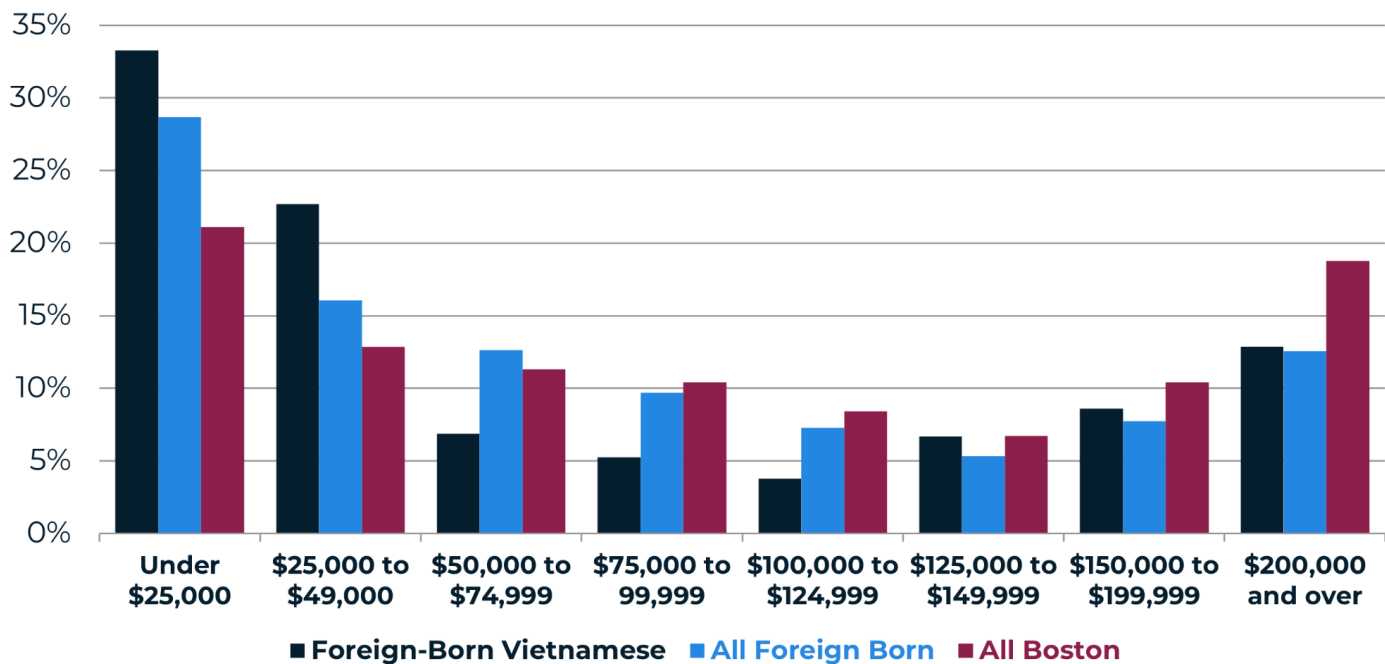


Source: 2024 City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Estimates, City of Boston Research Division Analysis

Vietnamese foreign-born households tend to have lower income, with 33 percent earning less than \$25,000 and 23 percent earning between \$25,000 to \$49,000. Only 37 percent of foreign-born Vietnamese earn more than \$75,000.

HOUSEHOLD INCOME DISTRIBUTION

Share of households

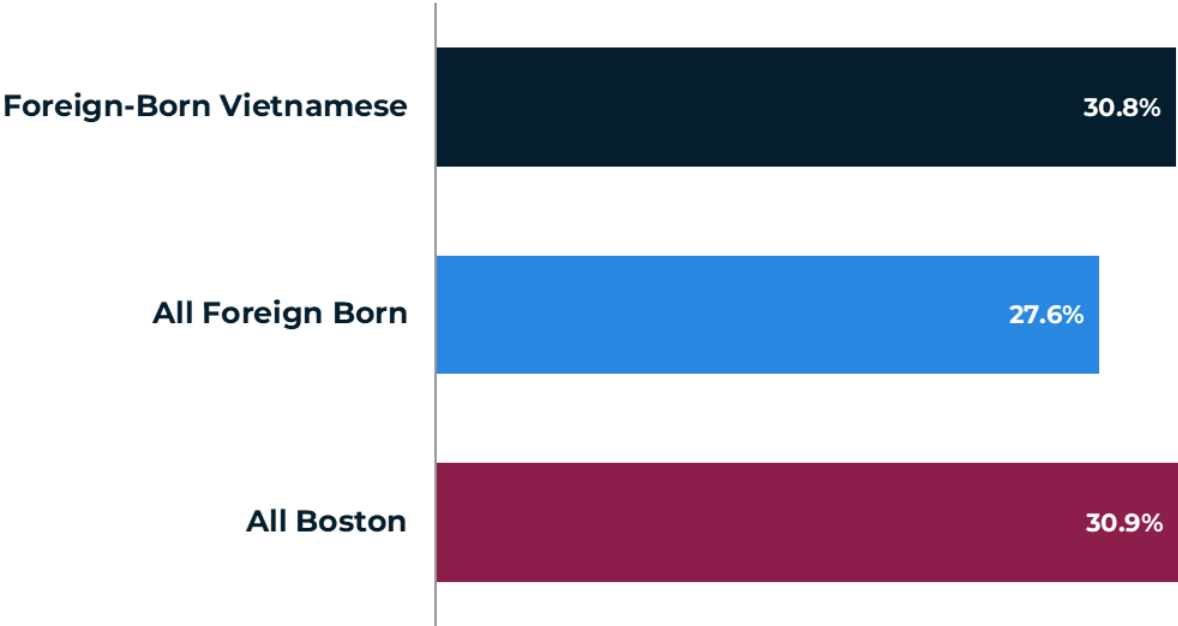


Source: 2024 City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Population Estimates, City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Analysis

Nearly 31 percent of Vietnamese foreign-born households live in owner-occupied housing. This is a higher share than all foreign born and similar as to the whole city. The older population and the majority being naturalized citizens may be contributing factors to high homeownership.

OWNER-OCCUPIED HOUSEHOLDS

Share of householders that own their residence

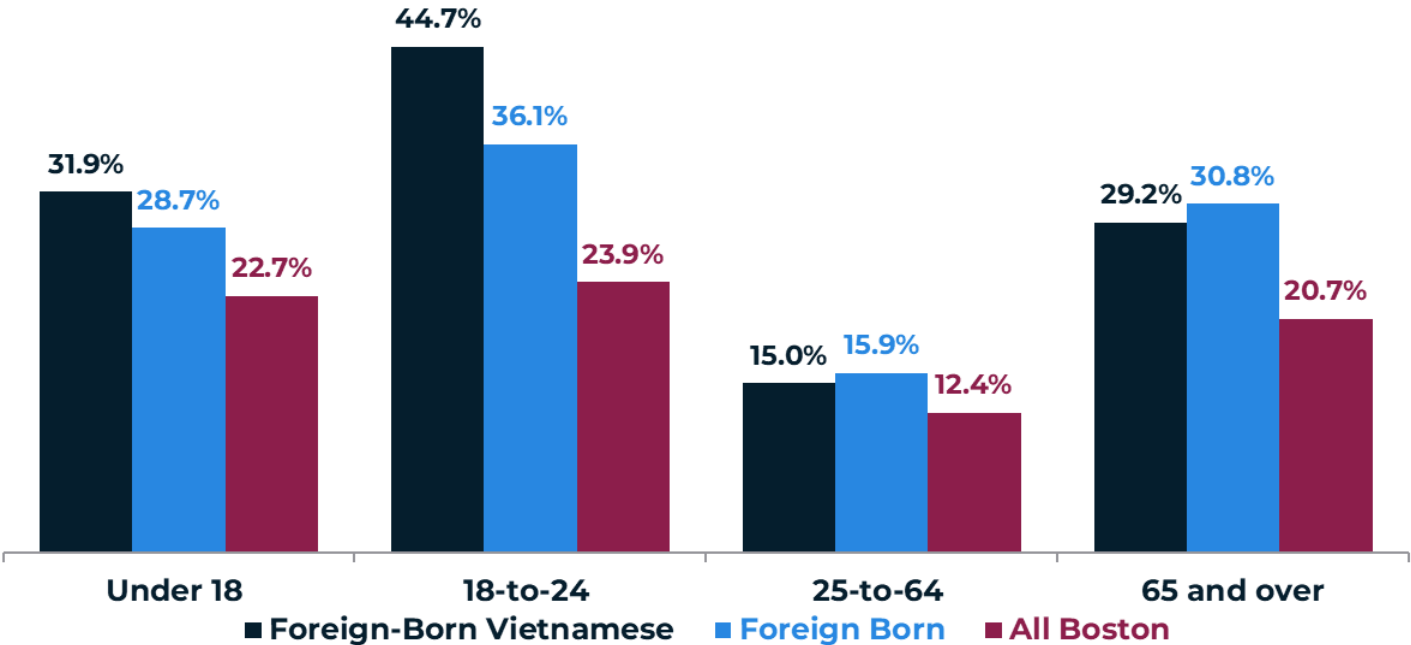


Source: 2024 City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Population Estimates, City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Analysis

Overall, the poverty rate among foreign-born Vietnamese is 21 percent, compared to 22 percent for all foreign born and 17 percent for all Boston residents. Poverty rates are highest among children and young adults and seniors: 32 percent of those under 18, 45 percent of those 18-to-24, and 29 percent of those aged 65 and over live below the poverty line.

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

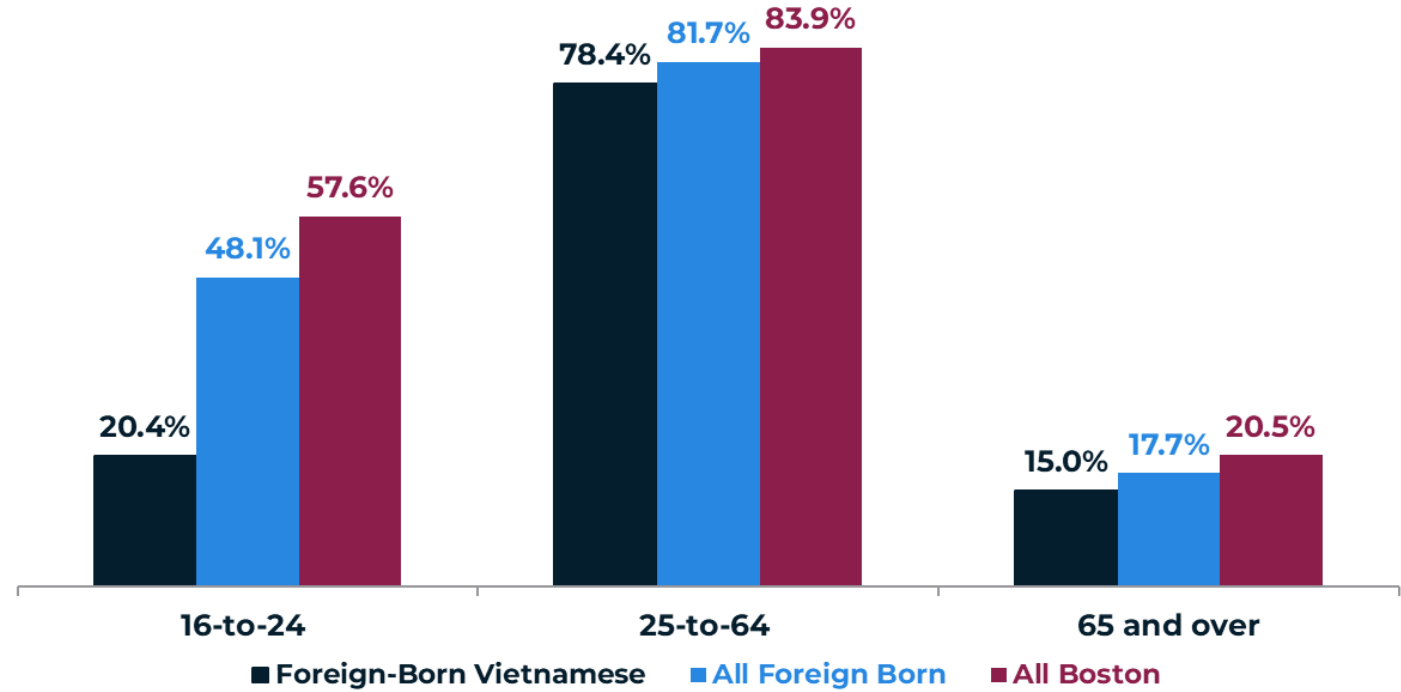


EMPLOYMENT

Approximately 78 percent of 25-to-64 year old Vietnamese foreign born participate in the labor force. This is a similar share with the other populations. Approximately 36 percent of the foreign-born Vietnamese population is not in the labor force, which is slightly higher than all foreign born (35 percent) and all of Boston (32 percent).

LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION

Population shares of those aged 5 years and over

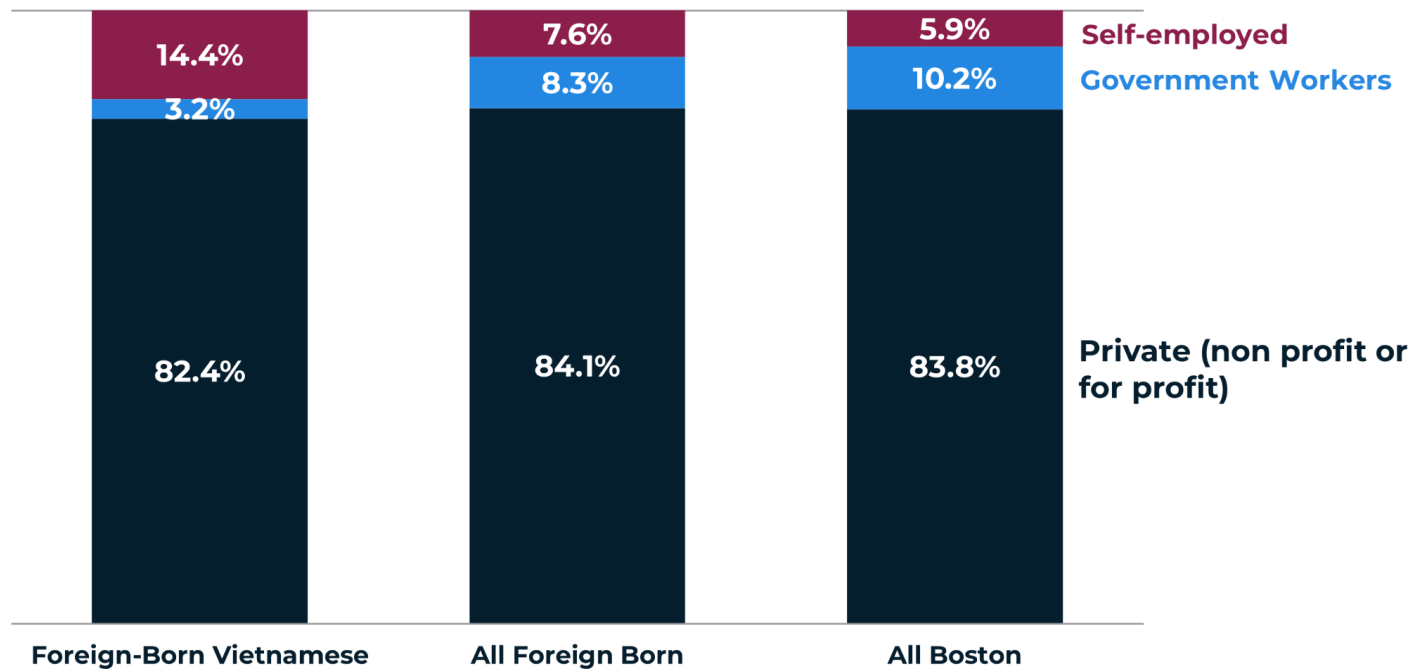


Source: 2024 City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Population Estimates, City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Analysis

The Vietnamese foreign-born population has a significantly higher share of workers who are self-employed (14 percent) than all foreign born and Boston workers. On the other hand, only 3 percent of foreign-born Vietnamese workers are government workers.

CLASS OF WORKERS

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



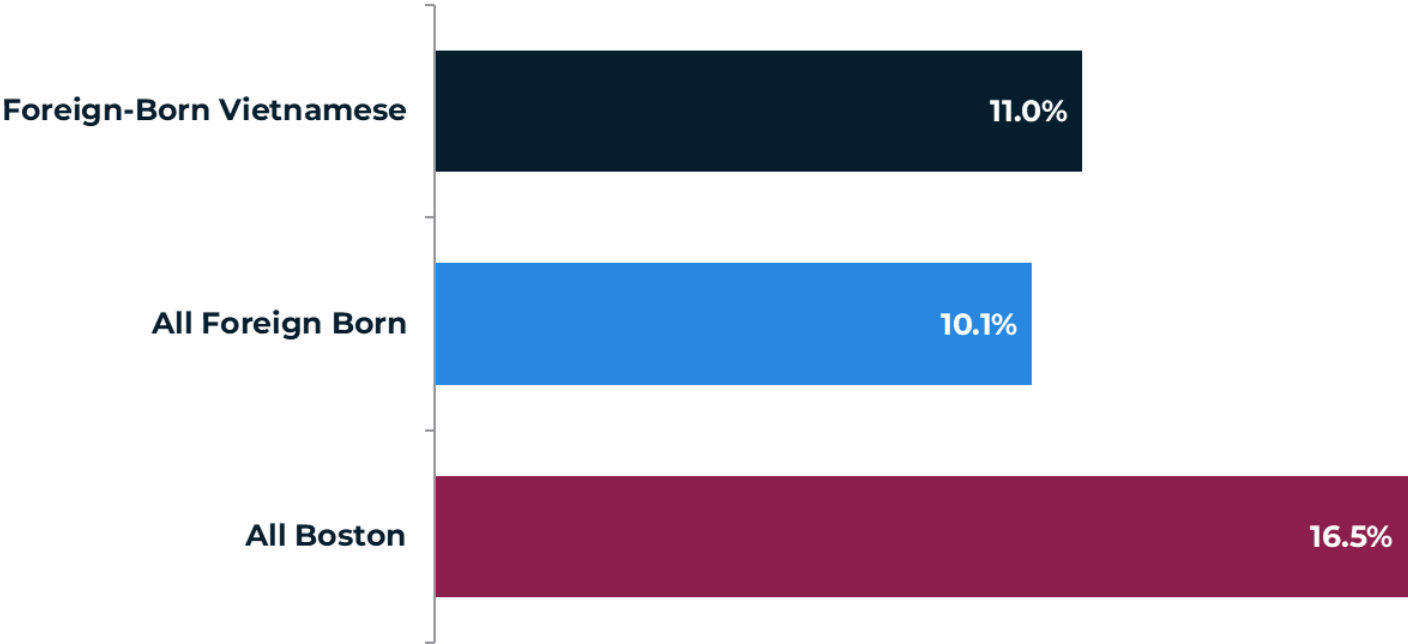
Source: 2024 City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Population Estimates, City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Analysis



Approximately 11 percent of the foreign-born resident Vietnamese workers worked from home. This is slightly higher than the share of all foreign-born workers, but lower than the Boston resident worker’s share which may be due to many foreign-born Vietnamese workers working in the production, construction, and health care industry.

WORKED FROM HOME

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

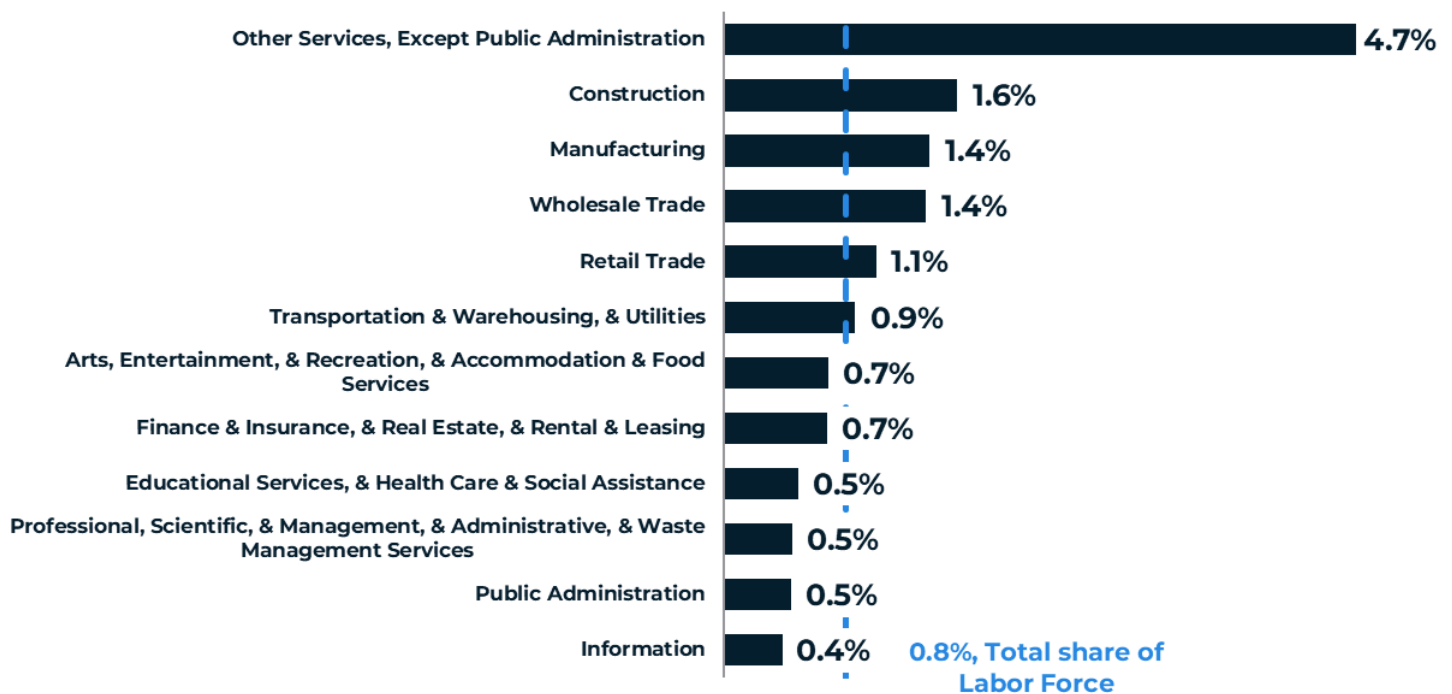


Source: 2024 City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Population Estimates, City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Analysis

There are 8,540 foreign-born Vietnamese employed in Suffolk County, making up 0.8 percent of Suffolk County's workforce. Vietnamese foreign-born workers working in Suffolk County make up 4.7 percent of other services, 1.6 percent of construction, 1.4 percent of manufacturing, 1.4 percent of wholesale trade, 1.1 percent of retail trade, and 0.9 percent of transportation, warehousing, and utilities. They are underrepresented in certain industries such as professional, scientific, management, administrative, and waste management services (0.5 percent), public administration (0.5 percent), and information (0.4 percent).

EMPLOYMENT BY INDUSTRY

Share of workers in Suffolk County by industry, 2022



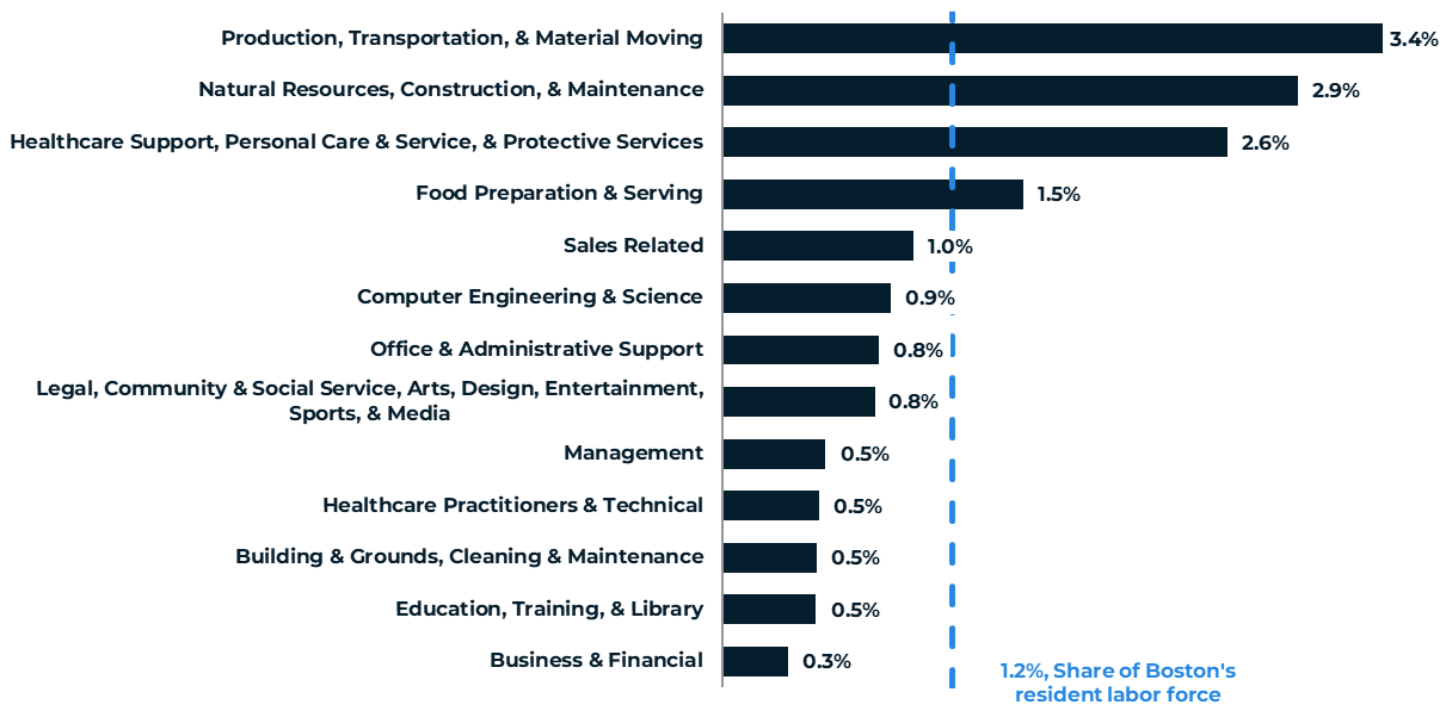
Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2018-2022 5-Year American Community Survey (IPUMS), City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Analysis



Vietnamese foreign-born workers make up 1.2 percent of Boston’s resident labor force. They are overrepresented in certain occupations. Vietnamese foreign-born workers make up 3.6 percent percent of production, transportation, and material moving occupations and 2.9 percent of natural resources, construction, and maintenance occupations. They are underrepresented in other occupations such as education, training, and library (0.5 percent) and business and financial (0.3 percent)

FOREIGN-BORN VIETNAMESE 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 Vietnamese have achieved a middle-class standard of living, compared with 44 percent of Boston’s overall population, and 34 percent of all foreign born. A family income four times the poverty line is used as a proxy for a 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

Vietnamese foreign-born workers contribute to Boston's economy through their labor. Their labor generates an additional 2,962 indirect and induced jobs in Suffolk County. They contribute 1.3 billion dollars to Boston's GCP. Vietnamese foreign-born workers employed in Suffolk County pay \$67 million in federal income tax and \$24 million in state income tax.³

CONCLUSION

Vietnamese are the fifth largest foreign-born population in Boston with 8,305 residents. Foreign-born Vietnamese in Boston contribute widely to the economy, culture, and civic life of Boston, especially in Dorchester. Without foreign-born Vietnamese workers, Boston will lose 3.4 percent of production, transportation, and material moving occupations.

³Research Division estimates using Regional Economic Model, Inc., (REMI), PI+ Massachusetts Regions, City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Analysis



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