



FOREIGN BORN IN BOSTON: BRAZILIANS

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 BRAZILIANS IN THE UNITED STATES

Large-scale migration from Brazil is a relatively recent phenomenon. Brazil has historically been a host country for immigrants from many nations. From the early 19th century to the mid-20th century, Germans, Swiss, Italians, Spaniards, Poles, Czechs, Russians, Japanese and others joined the Portuguese in searching for new opportunities in Brazil.¹

After the military coup of 1964, thousands of Brazilians went into exile. Although most of these exiles returned to Brazil after the amnesty of 1979, economic migration grew in the 1980s. An

¹<https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/brazilian-immigrants-united-states#:~:text=There%20were%20approximately%20178%2C000%20unauthorized,unauthorized%20immigrants%20in%20the%20country.>

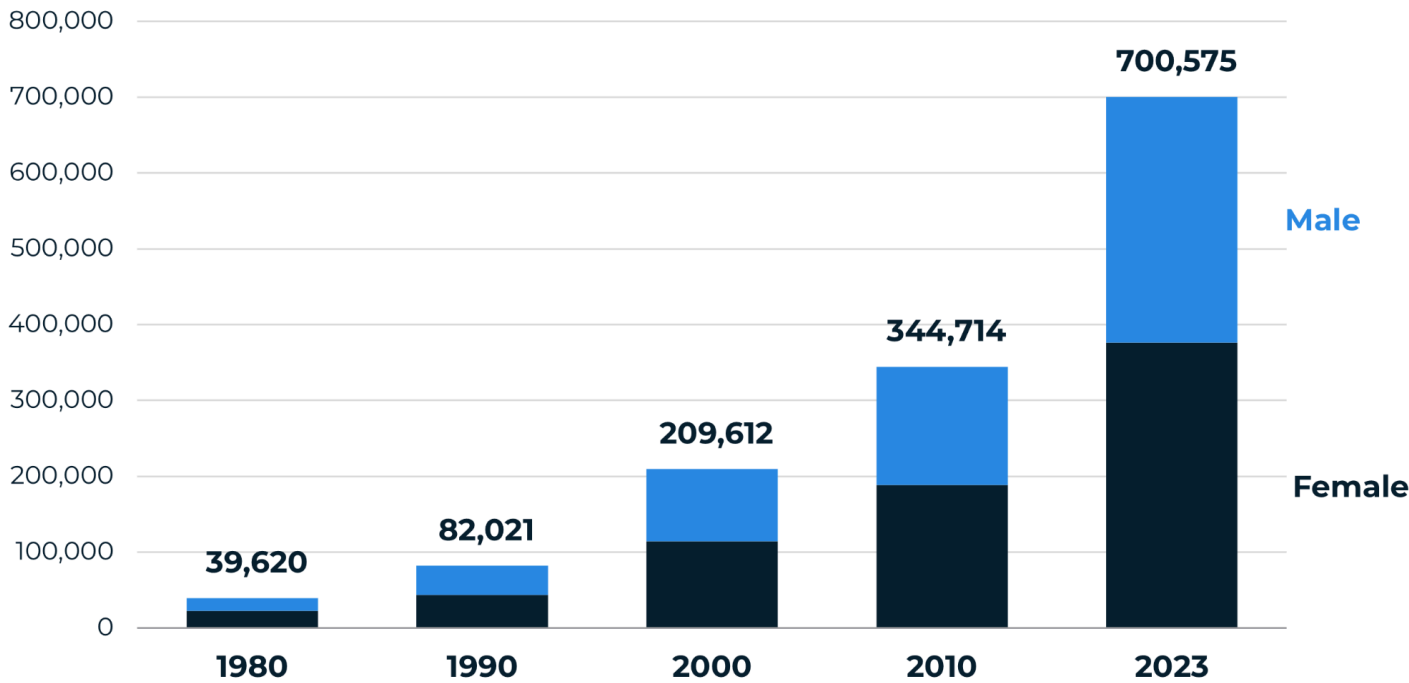


estimated 2.5 million Brazilians lived outside the country by 1995.² During the early years of this migration, people from Minas Gerais dominated the immigration flow to the United States. Now, Goiás, Paraná, and Santa Catarina have also become major immigrant exporting regions. Since 2012, Brazilian immigration to the United States has increased. In 2024, an estimated 4.4 million Brazilians live outside the country.³

Estimates from the 2023 American Community Survey show that 700,575 foreign-born Brazilians reside in the United States, which is a leading destination for Brazilian emigration along with Portugal, Paraguay, the United Kingdom.

FOREIGN-BORN BRAZILIANS

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



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

² The Brazilian Geography and Statistics Institute registered the statistical "absence" of 1,379,928 Brazilians between the ages of 20 and 44 from the 1991 Brazilian Census, a fact that can only be explained by emigration. Brazilian Geography and Statistics Institute (IBGE) (2000).

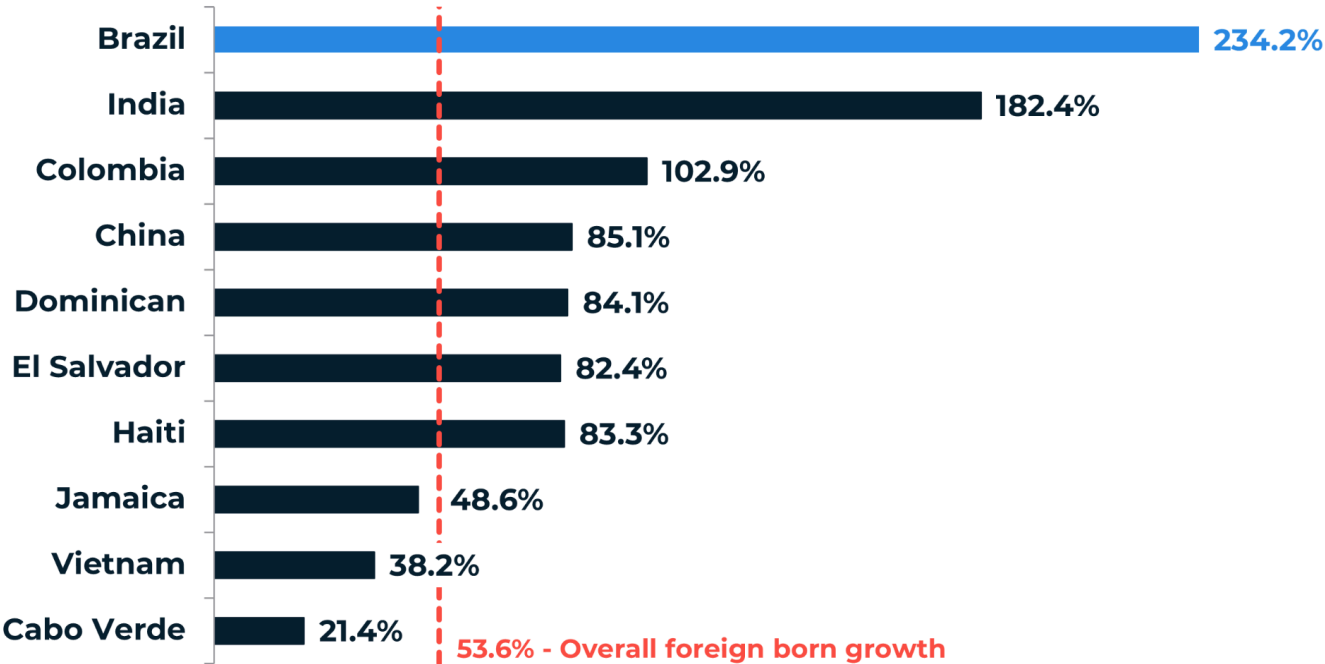
³ <https://www.gov.br/mre/en>



From 2000 to 2023, the foreign-born Brazilian population in the U.S. increased by 234 percent, faster than 53.6 percent for the foreign-born population as a whole.

INCREASE IN FOREIGN-BORN POPULATION

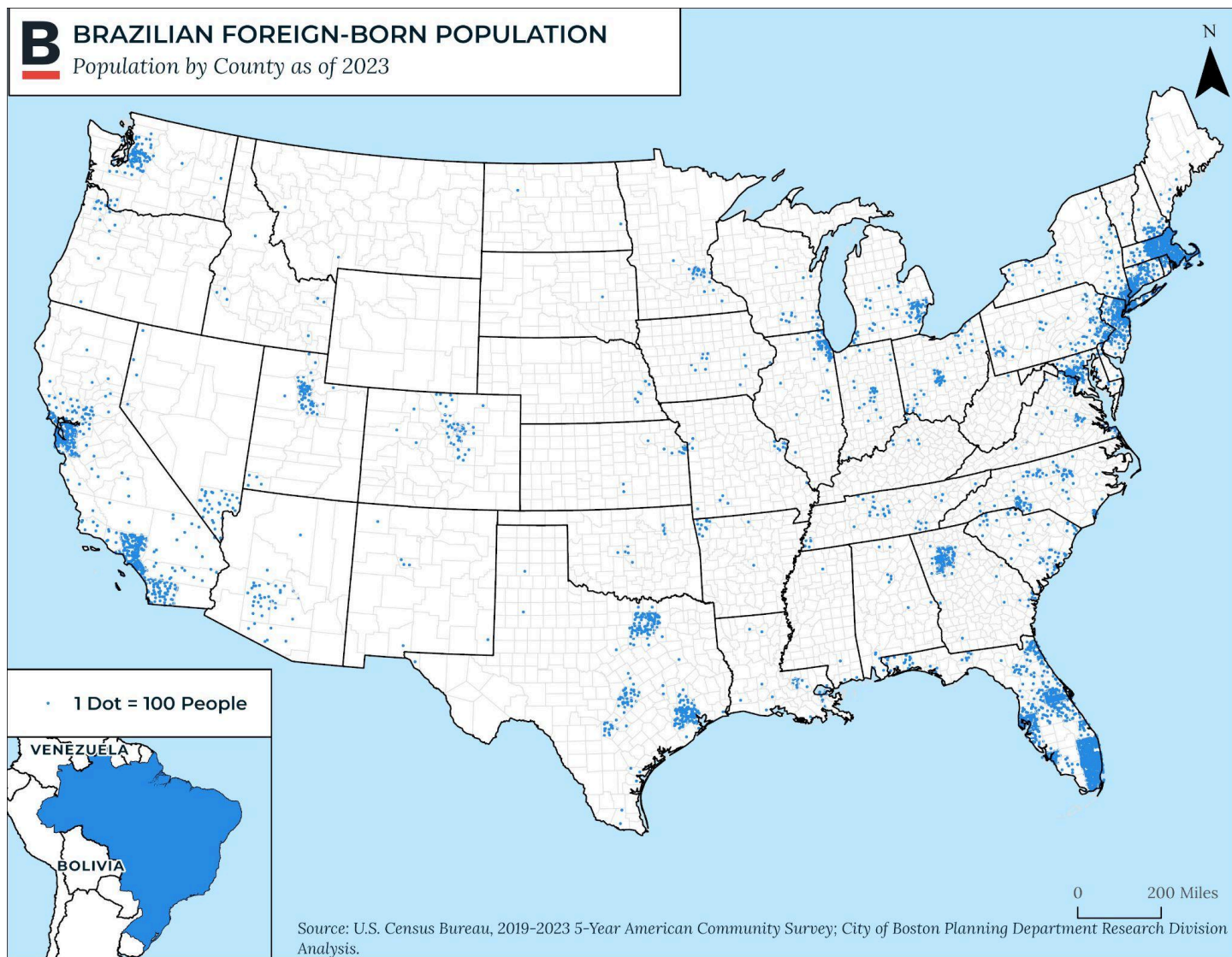
Percent increase in foreign born population in the U.S. from 2000 to 2023



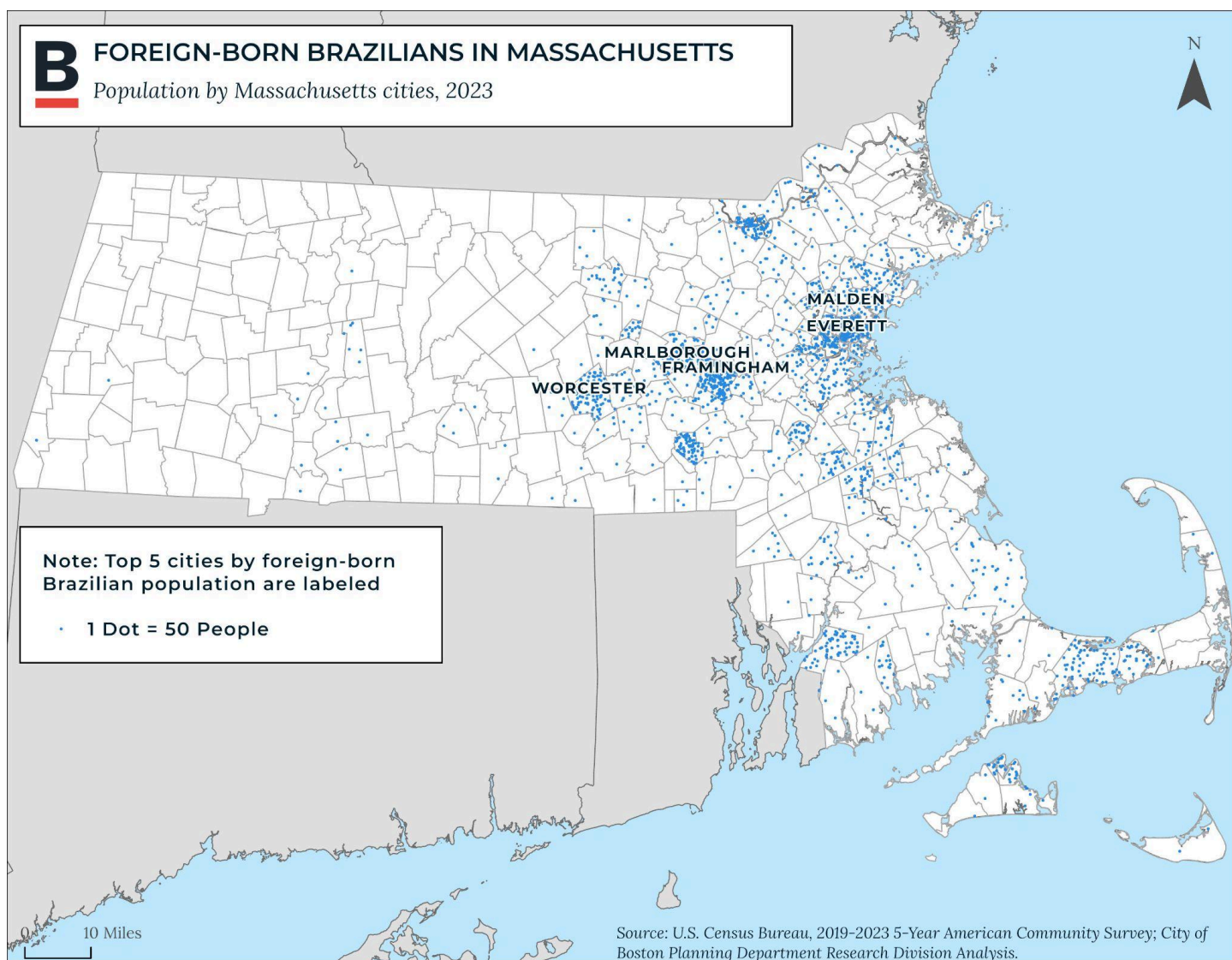
Source: U.S. Census Bureau 1980-2000 Decennial Censuses (IPUMS), 2023 1-Year American Community Survey (PUMS), City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Analysis



Brazilians are the 17th largest foreign-born population in the United States. Massachusetts is the state with the second largest foreign-born Brazilian population behind Florida, with California, New Jersey, and Texas, rounding out the top five states.



Brazilians originally settled in Boston's Allston neighborhood but have dispersed throughout Eastern Massachusetts. The migration of Brazilian foreign born is concentrated in several cities and towns where lower housing costs helped Brazilian immigrants purchase homes and open small businesses in the 1990s. Boston currently has the eighth largest foreign-born Brazilian population (3 percent) in Massachusetts behind Framingham (8 percent), Everett (6 percent), Worcester (5 percent), Marlborough (5 percent), Malden (4 percent), Lowell (4 percent), and Milford (4 percent).



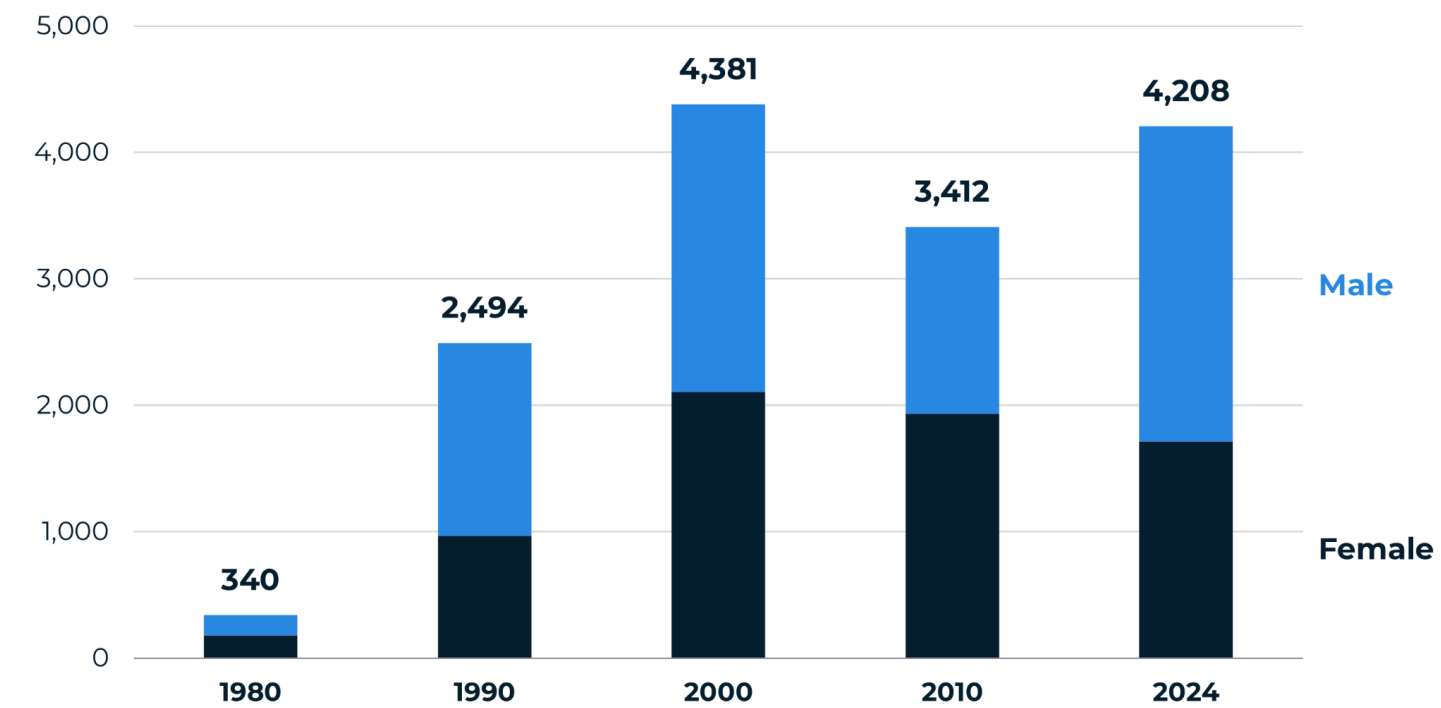
FOREIGN-BORN BRAZILIANS IN BOSTON

DEMOGRAPHICS

The foreign-born Brazilian population in Boston grew exponentially until 2000. Following the 2008-2009 recession, Boston saw a decline of the Brazilian foreign-born population. By 2024, the foreign-born Brazilian population in Boston had grown again to 4,208; 59.3 percent were female and 40.7 percent were male.

FOREIGN-BORN BRAZILIANS

Population growth in Boston, from 1980 to 2024

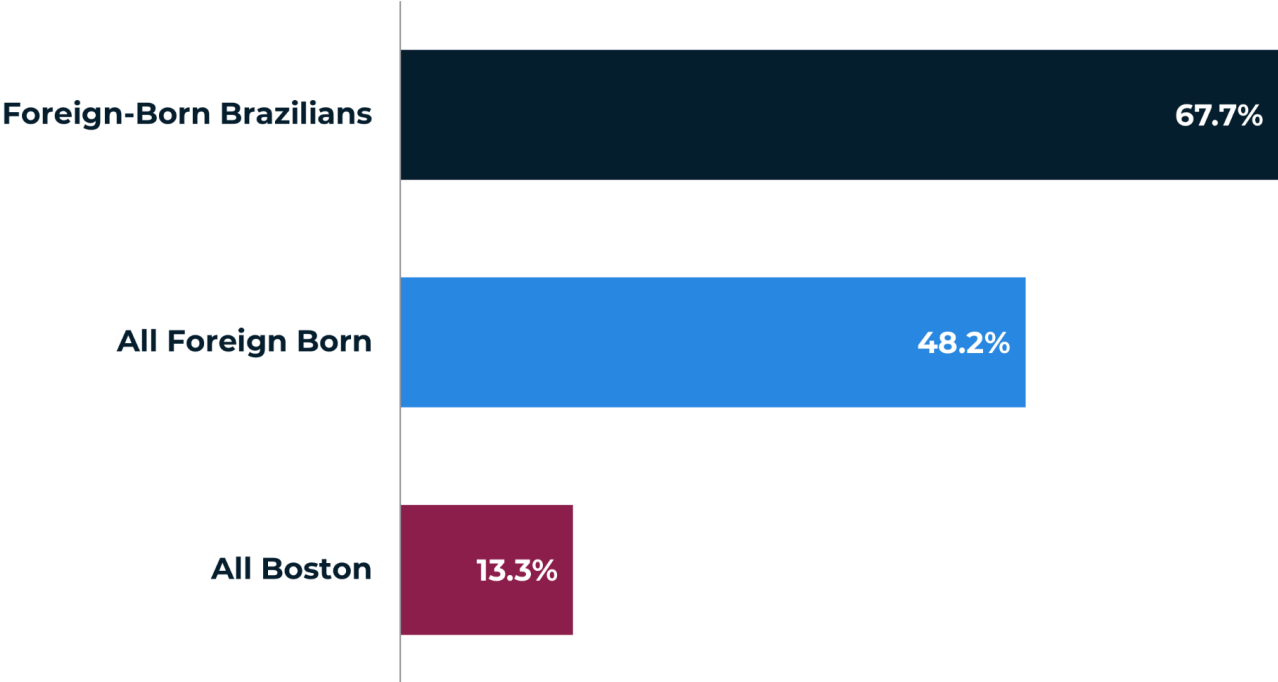


Source: U.S. Census Bureau 1980-2000 Decennial Censuses (IPUMS), 2010 1-Year American Community Survey (PUMS), 2024 City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Population Estimates, City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Analysis

Because of their lack of opportunities for authorized migration, almost two-thirds of foreign-born Brazilians in Boston are noncitizens, despite significant migration flows going back to the 2000s.

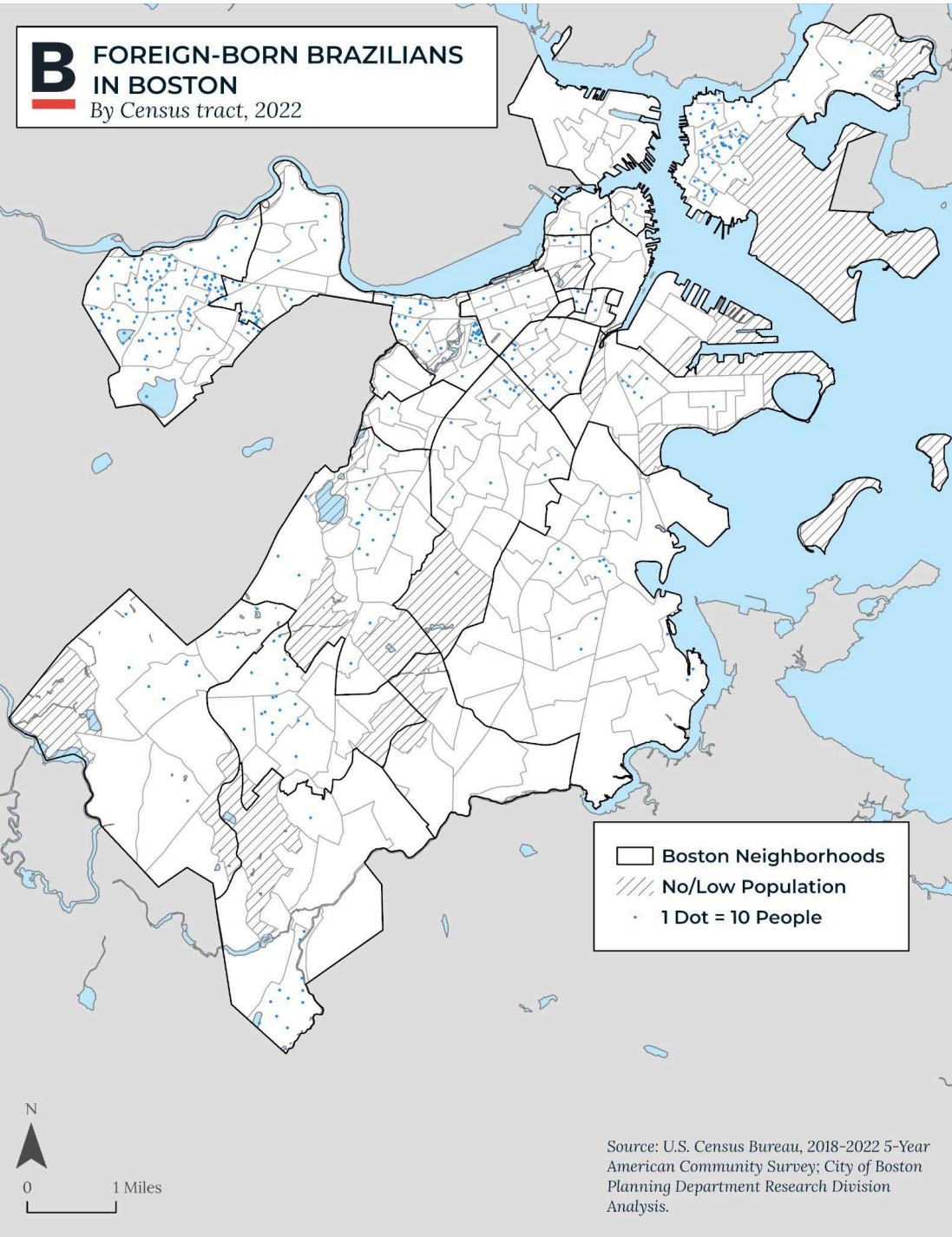
NON-U.S. CITIZENS

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

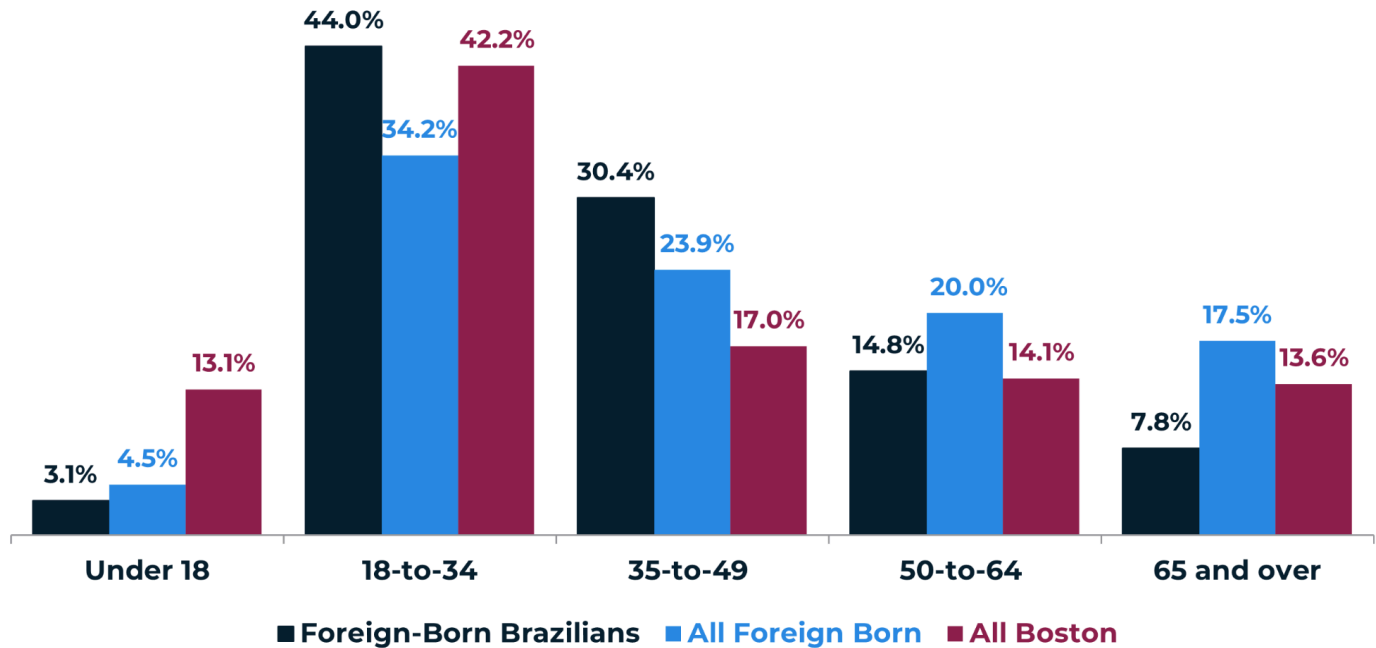
Although Brazilians originally concentrated in Allston, currently the neighborhoods with the largest foreign-born Brazilian populations are Brighton, East Boston, and Fenway.



The foreign-born Brazilian population in Boston has a younger age distribution and a smaller elderly population. Approximately 44 percent are young adults aged 18-to-34, and 30 percent are 35-to-49 year olds. Only 8 percent are 65 years 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

It should be noted that people from Brazil are classified in the United States as “some other race” and cannot identify solely as White, Black, Asian, or American Indian, or with a Hispanic or Latino ethnicity.⁴ As a result of this 1997 Office of Management and Budget Directive, the Census Bureau can reclassify Brazilians depending how they respond to the race question on Census Bureau forms. As a result, 15 percent of Boston residents born in Brazil are identified as “two or more races,” even though they might prefer to identify differently.⁵

⁴ https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/omb/fedreg_1997standards

⁵ For more information, “Race and Ethnicity in the 2020 Census: Self-Identification or Classification?” <https://www.bostonplans.org/getattachment/7f8a7f96-e7f1-4d9c-b5bf-e353c1bc277d>

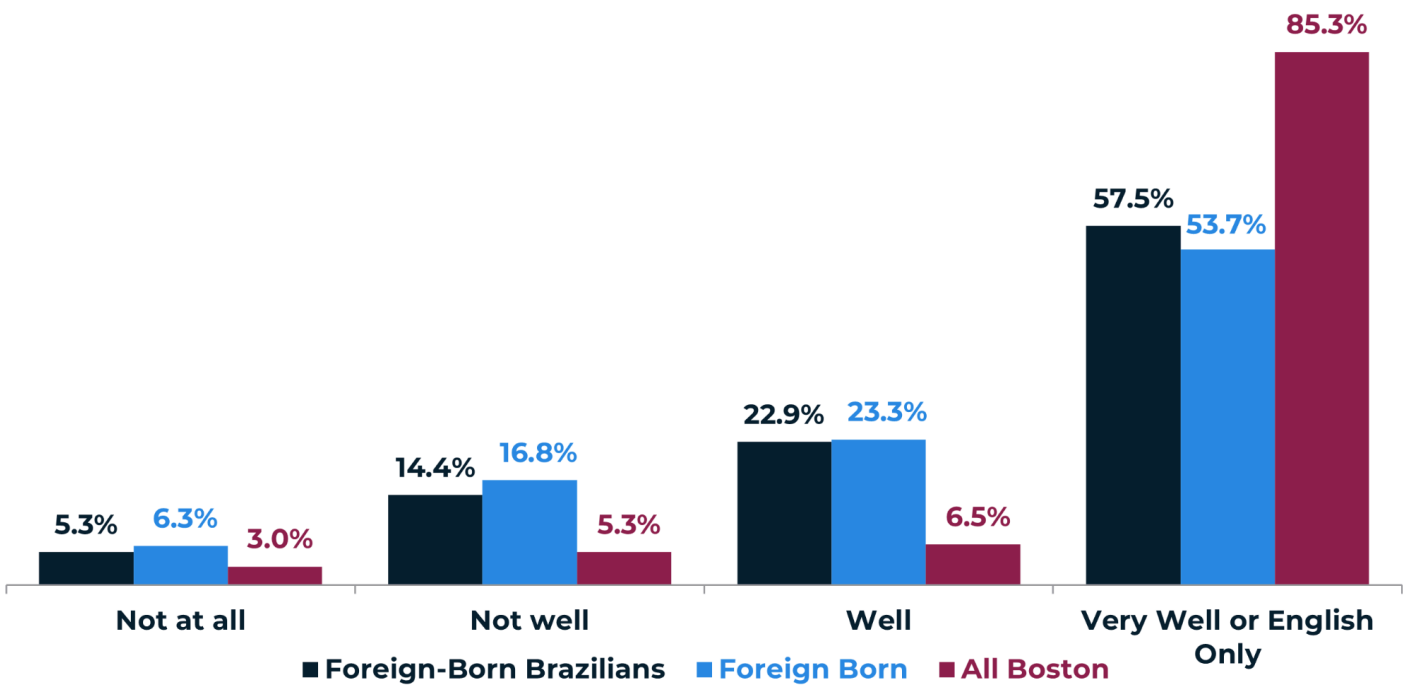


LANGUAGE AND EDUCATION

Foreign-born Brazilians in Boston are most likely to speak English only or very well (57 percent), a similar rate as all foreign born (54 percent). Less than 20 percent of Brazilian foreign born have limited English proficiency. Of the foreign-born Brazilians, 14 percent speak only English at home, 79 percent only speak Portuguese at home, 9 percent only speak Spanish at home, and 3 percent only speak French at home.

ABILITY TO SPEAK ENGLISH

Population shares of those aged 5 years and over

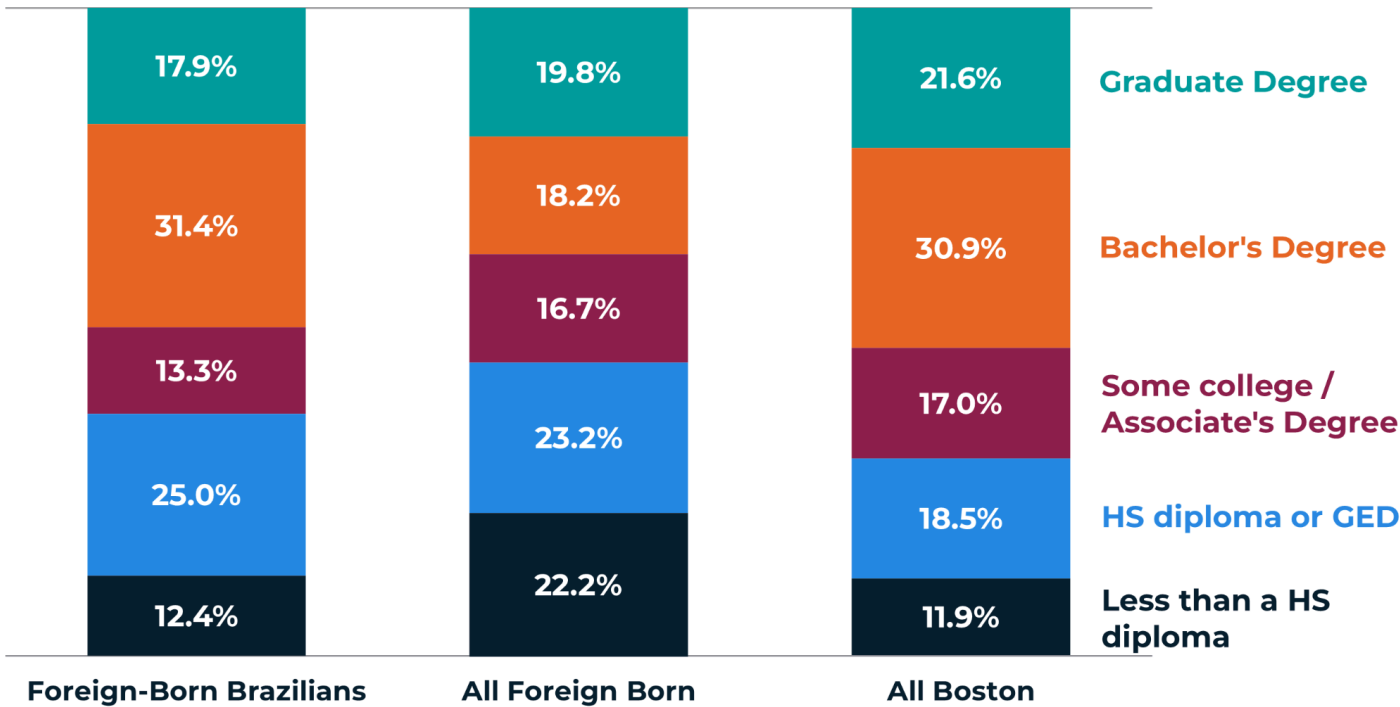


Source: 2024 City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Population Estimates, City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Analysis

Nearly half of the adult foreign-born Brazilians have a Bachelor’s degree or higher and 18 percent have a graduate degree. Only 12 percent lack a high school diploma.

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

Share of population aged 25 years and over



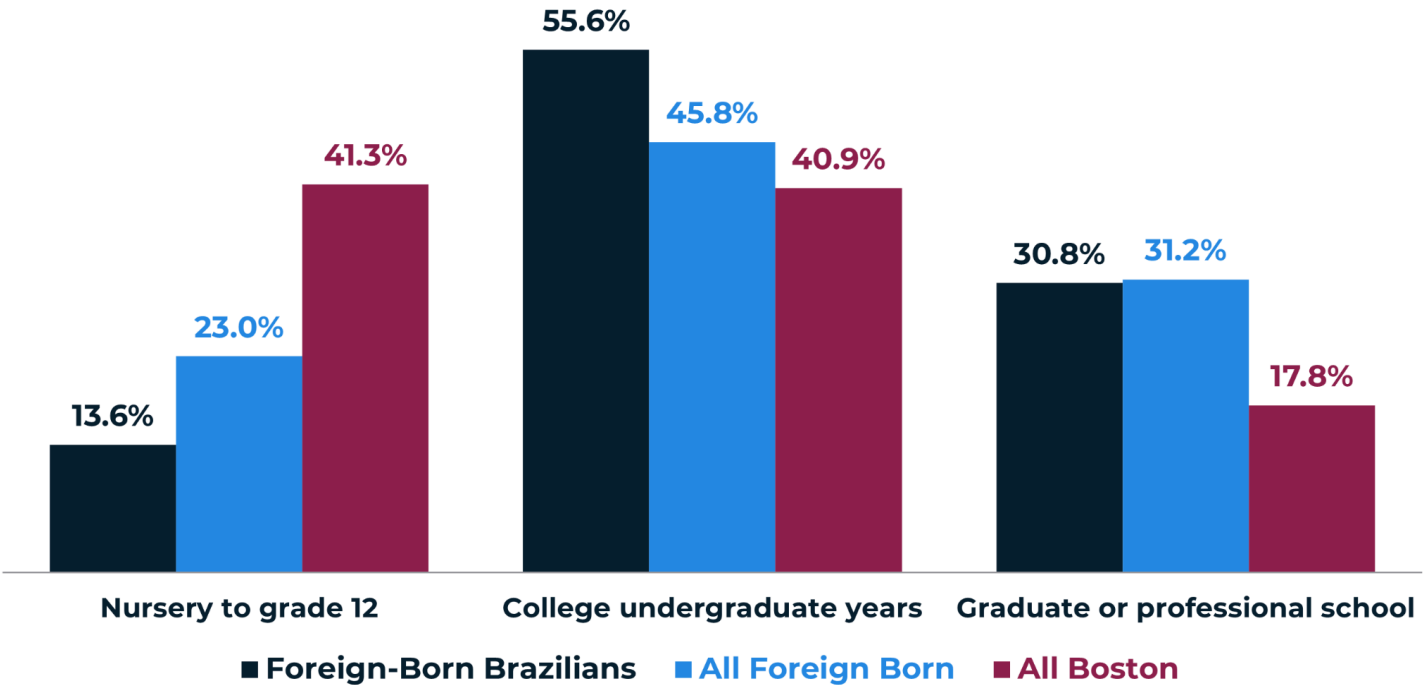
Source: 2024 City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Population Estimates, City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Analysis



Foreign-Born Brazilians have similar enrollment in graduate school compared to all foreign born, lower nursery school through grade 12 enrollment rates, and higher undergraduate enrollment rates. This may be due to the low shares of foreign-born Brazilian children in Boston.

SCHOOL ENROLLMENT

School enrolled population by level, aged 3 years and over



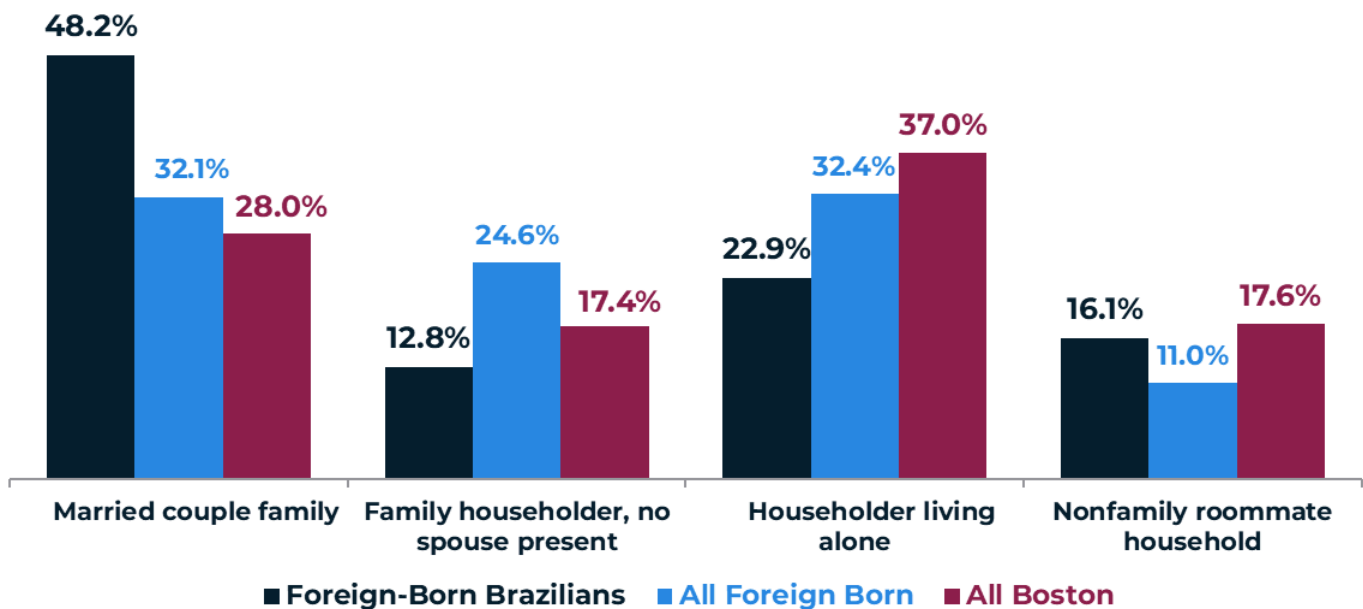
Source: 2024 City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Population Estimates, City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Analysis



Almost half of the foreign-born Brazilians households are married-couple families (48 percent) and only 13 percent are family householders with no spouse present.

TYPE OF HOUSEHOLD

Share of households

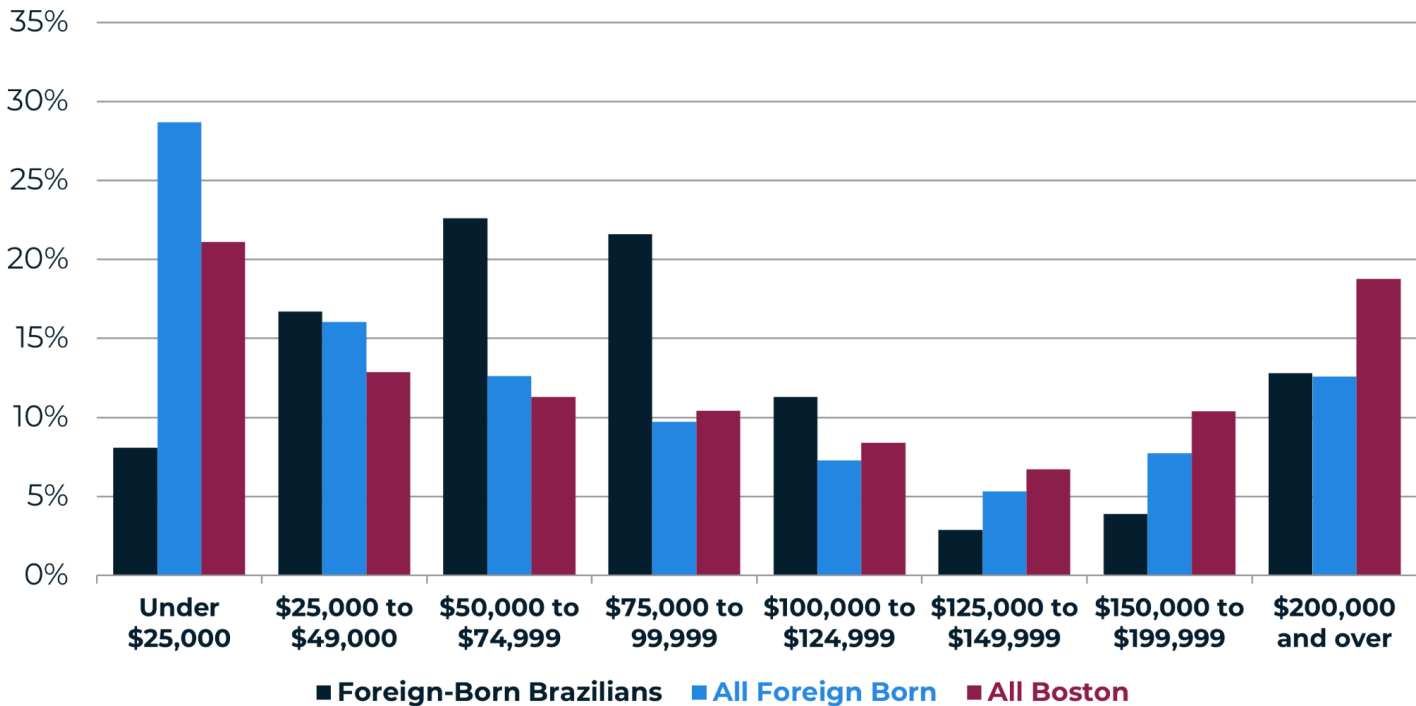


Source: 2024 City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Population Estimates, City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Analysis

Brazilian foreign born have a higher median household income (\$85,366) than all foreign born (\$58,145) and have the highest share of earnings between \$50,000 and \$99,999 (44 percent).

HOUSEHOLD INCOME DISTRIBUTION

Share of households

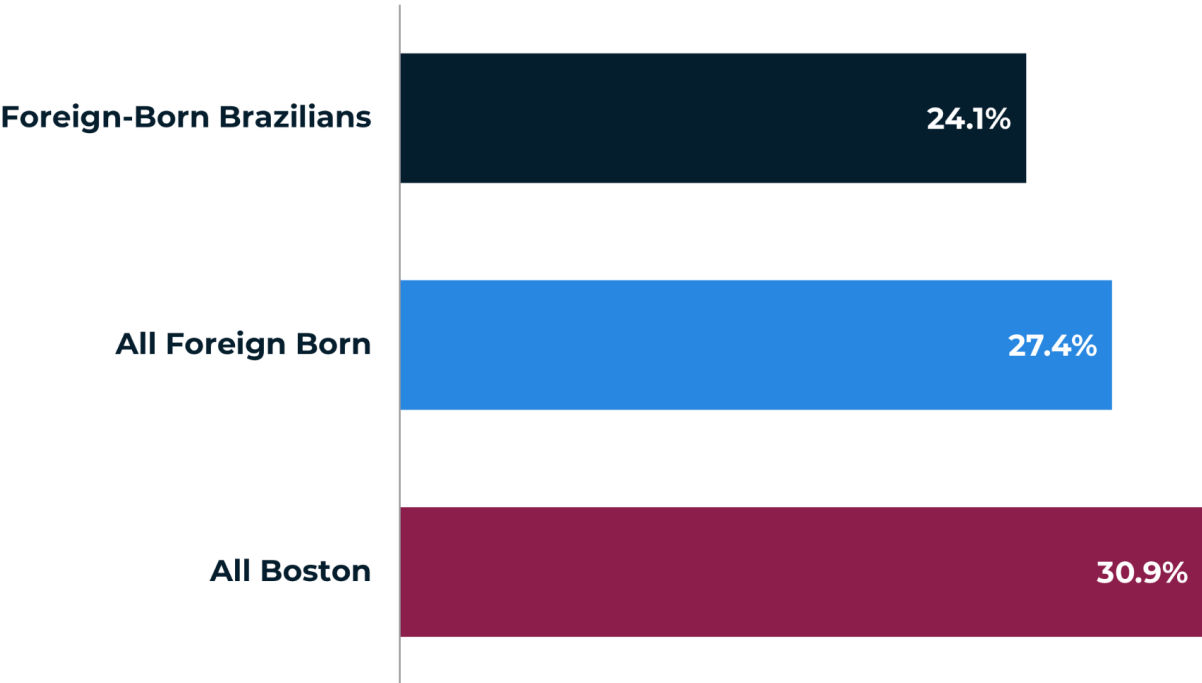


Source: 2024 City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Population Estimates, City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Analysis



Only 24 percent of foreign-born Brazilians householders live in owner-occupied housing. Even though foreign-born Brazilians have lower shares of individuals living below the poverty line and a higher median household income than all foreign born, they have lower homeownership than all foreign born (28 percent) and all Boston (31 percent). This may be because of the high share of noncitizens among Brazil-born residents and overall younger population who are more mobile.

OWNER-OCCUPIED HOUSEHOLDS
Share of householders that own their residence

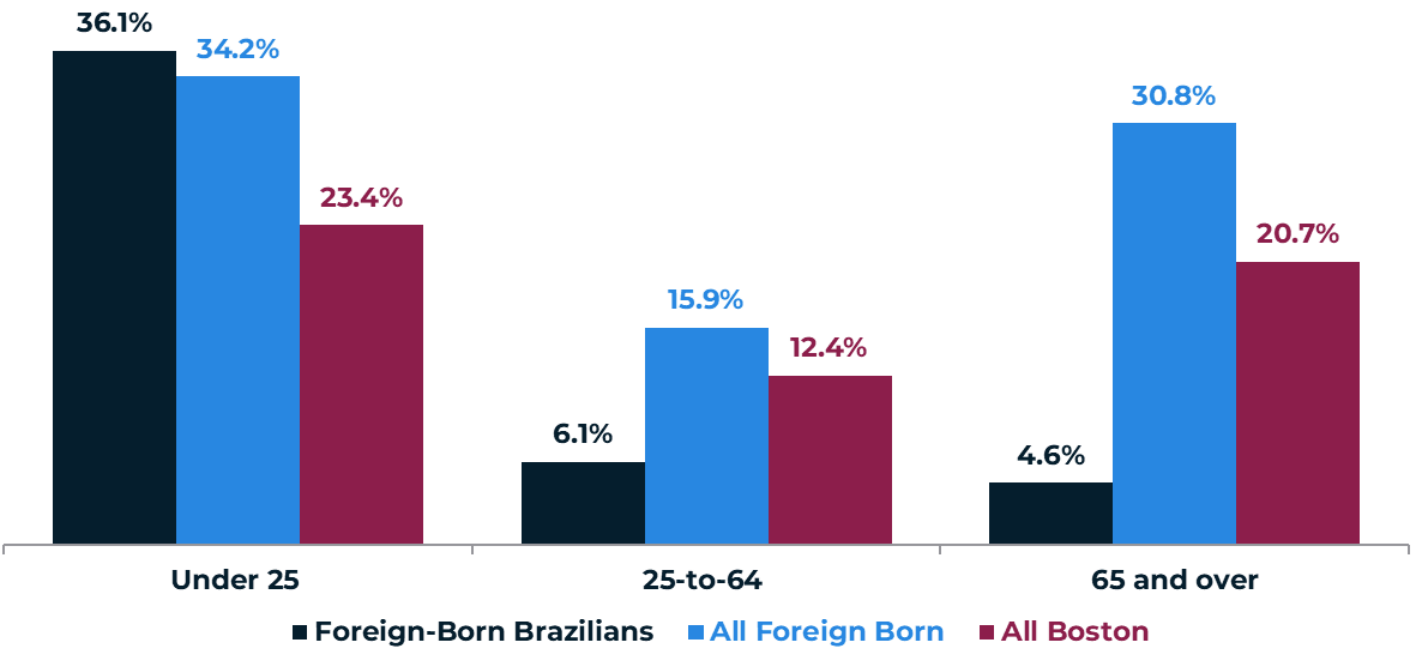


Source: 2024 City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Population Estimates, City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Analysis

Overall, the poverty rate among foreign-born Brazilians is 9 percent. This share is lower than the 22 percent for all foreign born and 17 percent for all Boston residents. Only foreign-born Brazilians under 25 years have a higher poverty rate than the rest of the city compared to other age brackets, as 36 percent of foreign-born Brazilians under 25 years live under poverty. This may be due to 84 percent of the 18-to-24 year olds being enrolled in college.

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

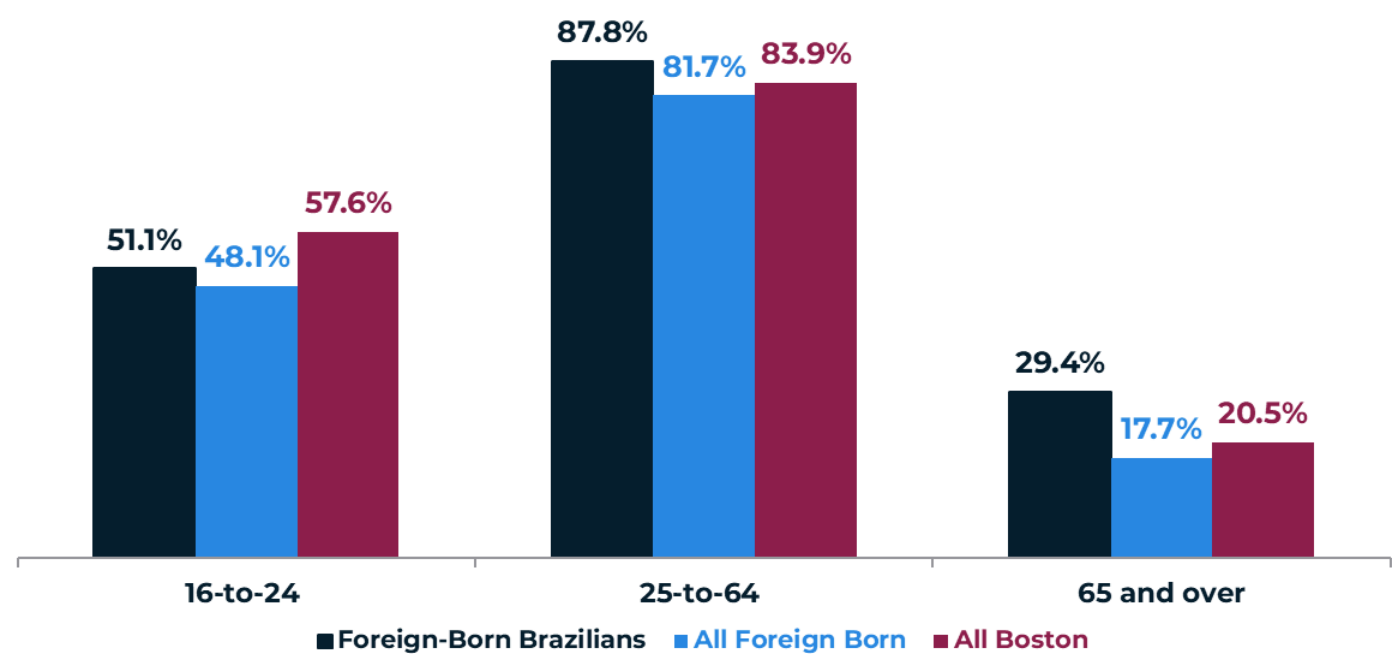


EMPLOYMENT

Around 81 percent of the foreign-born Brazilian population is in the labor force, which is higher than all foreign born (65 percent) and the city as a whole (68 percent). The higher participation rate is reflected in all age brackets, especially those aged 65 and older. Almost 88 percent of 25-to-64 year olds and 29 percent of 65 and older are in the labor force.

LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION RATES

Share of those participating in the labor force

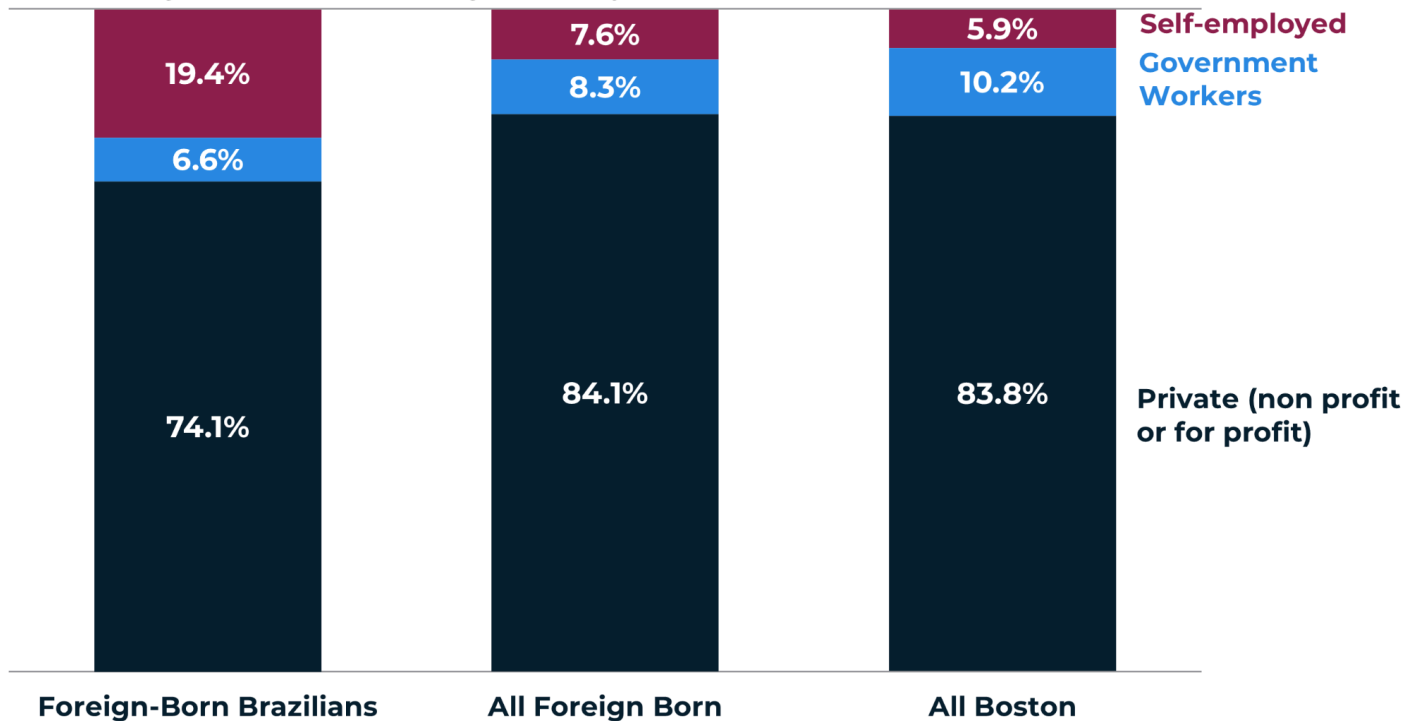


Source: 2024 City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Population Estimates, City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Analysis

More than 19 percent of the Brazilian foreign-born population are self-employed workers; a rate more than two times that of the foreign born and more than three times that of Boston residents. Of the self-employed, 26 percent are maids and housekeeping cleaners, 13 percent are painters and paperhangers, and 12 percent are lawyers or other judicial workers.

CLASS OF WORKERS

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

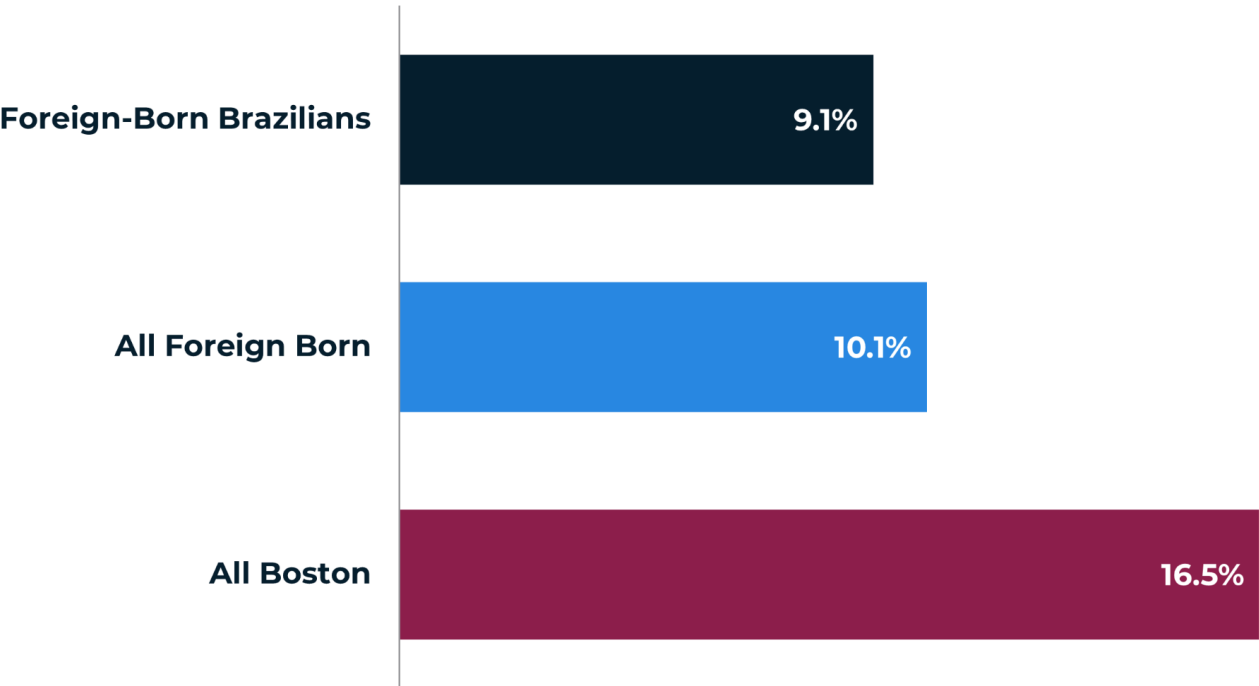


Source: 2024 City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Population Estimates, City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Analysis

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

WORKED FROM HOME

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

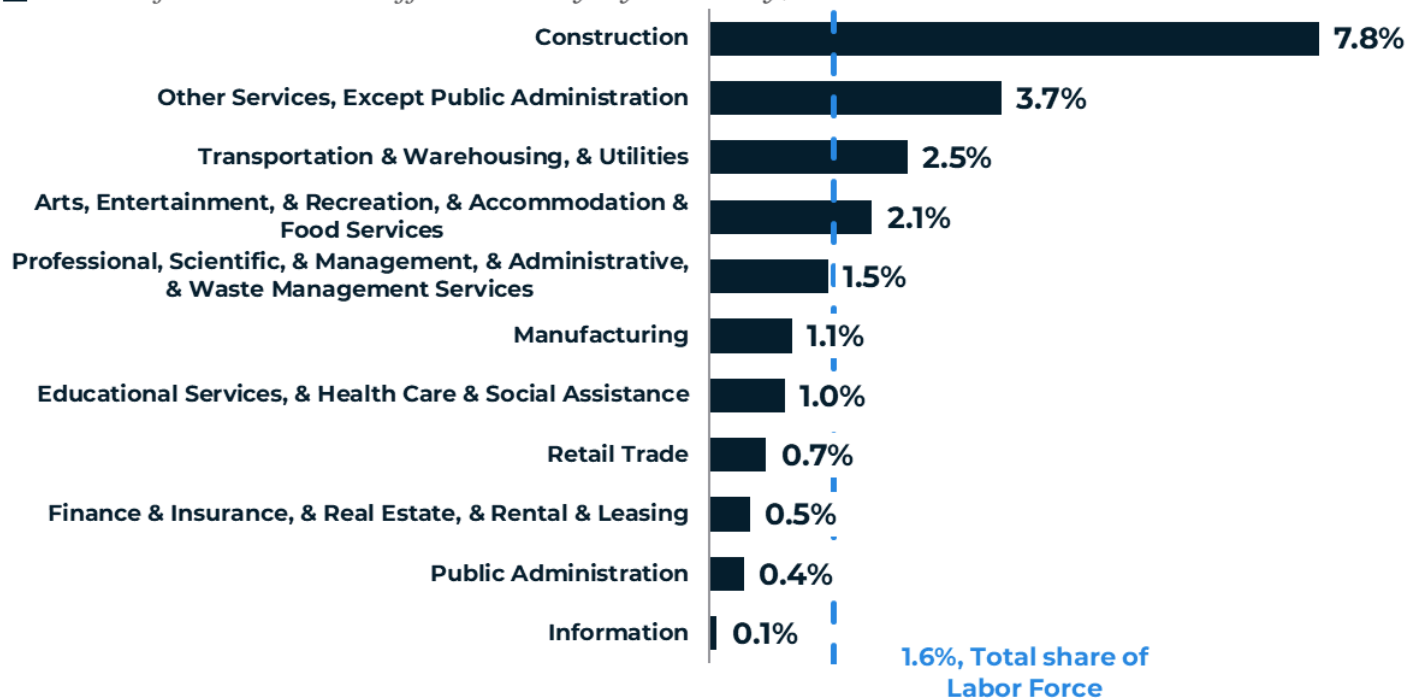


Source: 2024 City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Population Estimates, City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Analysis

There are 10,228 foreign-born Brazilians employed in Suffolk County, making up 1.6 percent of Suffolk County's workforce. Brazilian foreign-born workers in Suffolk County make up 7.8 percent of employment in construction, 3.7 percent of other services, 2.6 percent of transportation, warehousing, and utilities, and 2.1 percent of arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation, and food services industries. They are underrepresented in certain industries such as retail trade (0.7 percent), finance, insurance, real estate, rental, and leasing (0.5 percent), public administration (0.4 percent), and information (0.1 percent).

EMPLOYMENT BY INDUSTRY

Share of workers in Suffolk County by industry, 2022



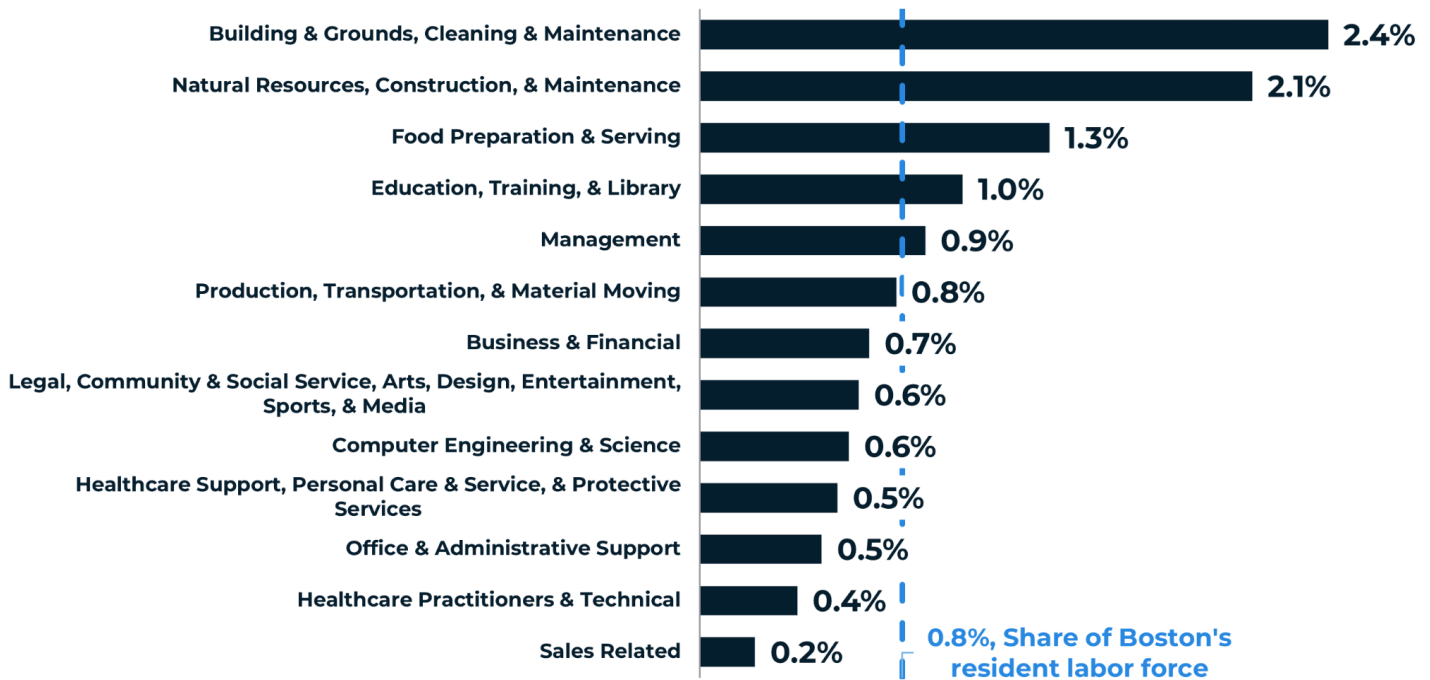
Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2018-2022 5-Year American Community Survey (IPUMS), City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Analysis

Brazilian foreign-born workers make up 0.8 percent of Boston's resident labor force. They are overrepresented in certain occupations. Brazilian foreign born workers make up 2.4 percent of building and grounds, cleaning and maintenance, 2.1 percent of natural resources, construction, and maintenance, 1.3 percent of food and serving, and 1 percent of education, training, and library occupations. They are underrepresented in other occupations such as healthcare practitioners and technical (0.4 percent) and sales related (0.2 percent) occupations.



FOREIGN-BORN BRAZILIAN 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 38 percent of foreign-born Brazilians 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 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

Brazilian foreign-born workers contribute to Boston's economy through their labor. Their labor generates an additional 4,240 indirect and induced jobs in Suffolk County. They contribute 1.9 billion dollars to Boston's GCP. Brazilian foreign-born workers employed in Suffolk County pay \$48 million in federal income tax and \$28 million in state income tax.⁶

CONCLUSION

Massachusetts is a second destination of Brazilians who migrate to the United States and there are 4,208 foreign-born Brazilian residents in Boston. Following the recession of 2008-2009, the foreign-born Brazilian population in Boston declined even though their population increased both nationally and in Massachusetts. Foreign-born Brazilians contribute to Boston's economy through a high rate of entrepreneurship and their high labor force participation rate appears to have been helping them achieve greater financial stability.

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⁶Research Division estimates using Regional Economic Model, Inc., (REMI), PI+ Massachusetts Regions, City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Analysis

