



FOREIGN BORN IN BOSTON: DOMINICANS

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 DOMINICANS IN THE UNITED STATES

The end of the Trujillo Era in 1961 marked a major turning point in the history of the Dominican Republic and unleashed waves of migration. Over the last five and a half decades, the Dominican Republic has experienced continued domestic migration from rural to urban areas and increasing migration to other countries.¹ Even though this migration originally settled in the Washington Heights neighborhood in New York City, smaller numbers of Dominicans arrived in Boston and settled in Puerto Rican neighborhoods in Roxbury and the South End.²

¹ Hernández R. *The Mobility of Workers Under Advanced Capitalism: Dominican Migration to the United States*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2002.

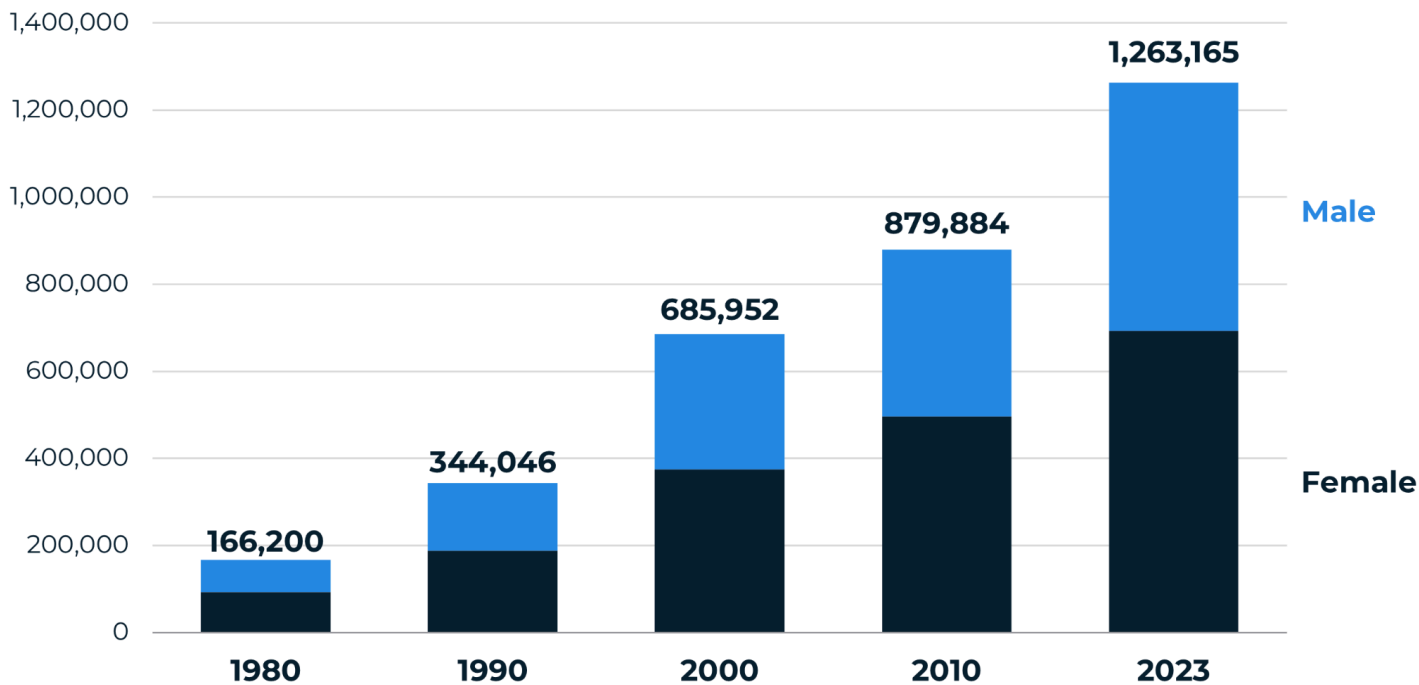
² <https://globalboston.bc.edu/index.php/home/ethnic-groups/dominicans/>



From 1960 to 1990, the Dominican population grew rapidly while the country’s economic growth slowed. A total fertility rate of over seven births per woman in the 1960s created the momentum for increased population and labor force growth two decades later. From 1960 to 2000, the country’s population increased 163 percent. As the growing population from this increased nativity entered the labor force in the 1980s, they encountered the “lost decade” caused by the Latin American debt crisis. At the same time, the U.S. economy needed more service workers, who filled roles providing childcare and other housework previously filled by U.S. women who were entering the labor force at higher rates.³ As a result, lower-income Dominican women from increasingly rural areas migrated to the United States.⁴

FOREIGN-BORN DOMINICANS

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, City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Analysis

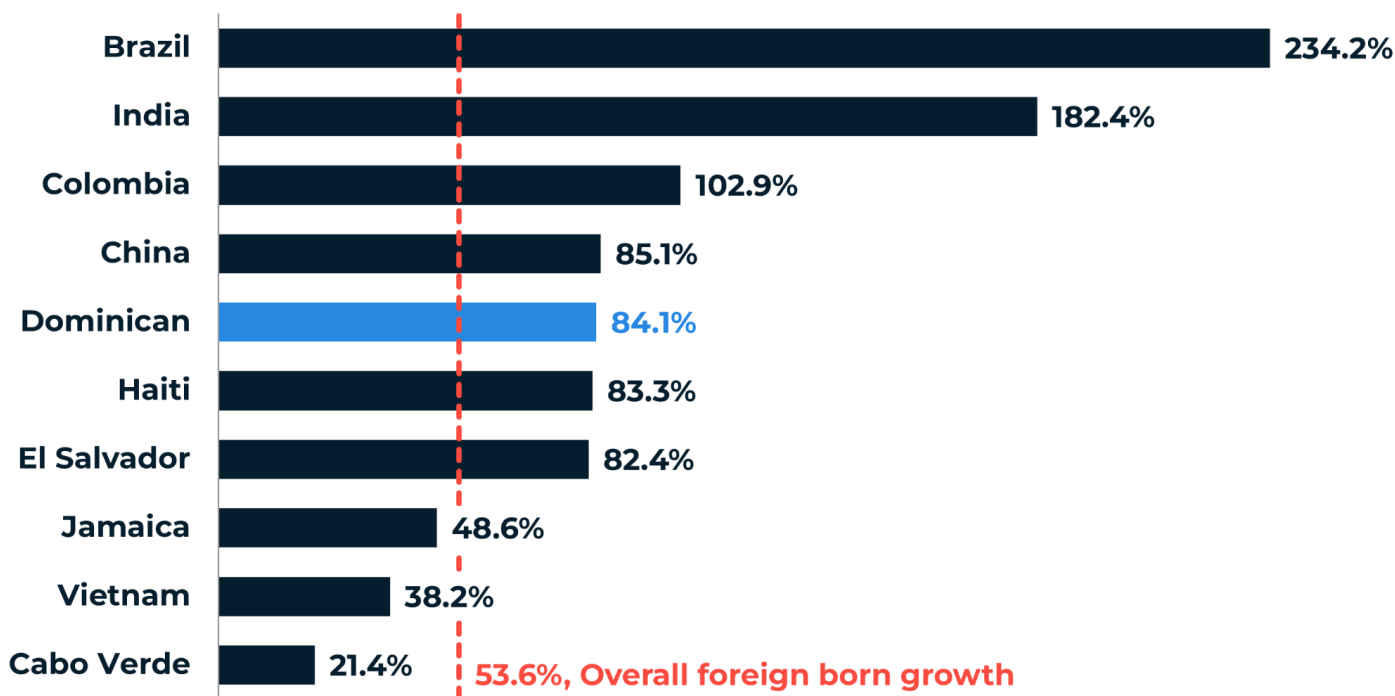
³ Paulina Lucio Maymon, “The Feminization of Migration: Why are Women Moving More?” Cornell Policy Review (May 5, 2017).

⁴ Jie Zong and Jeanne Batalova, “Dominican Immigrants in the United States”, *Migration Information Source*, April 11, 2018. <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/dominican-immigrants-united-states-2016>

From 1980 to 2000, the foreign-born Dominican population in the United States increased by 313 percent. From 2000 to 2023, the foreign-born Dominican population increase slowed to 84 percent, still faster than the 54 percent population growth for the overall foreign-born population. Dominicans benefited from the U.S. immigration policy that promotes family reunification, and this policy drove Dominican migration as few Dominicans entered through employment-based visas.⁵

INCREASE IN FOREIGN-BORN POPULATION

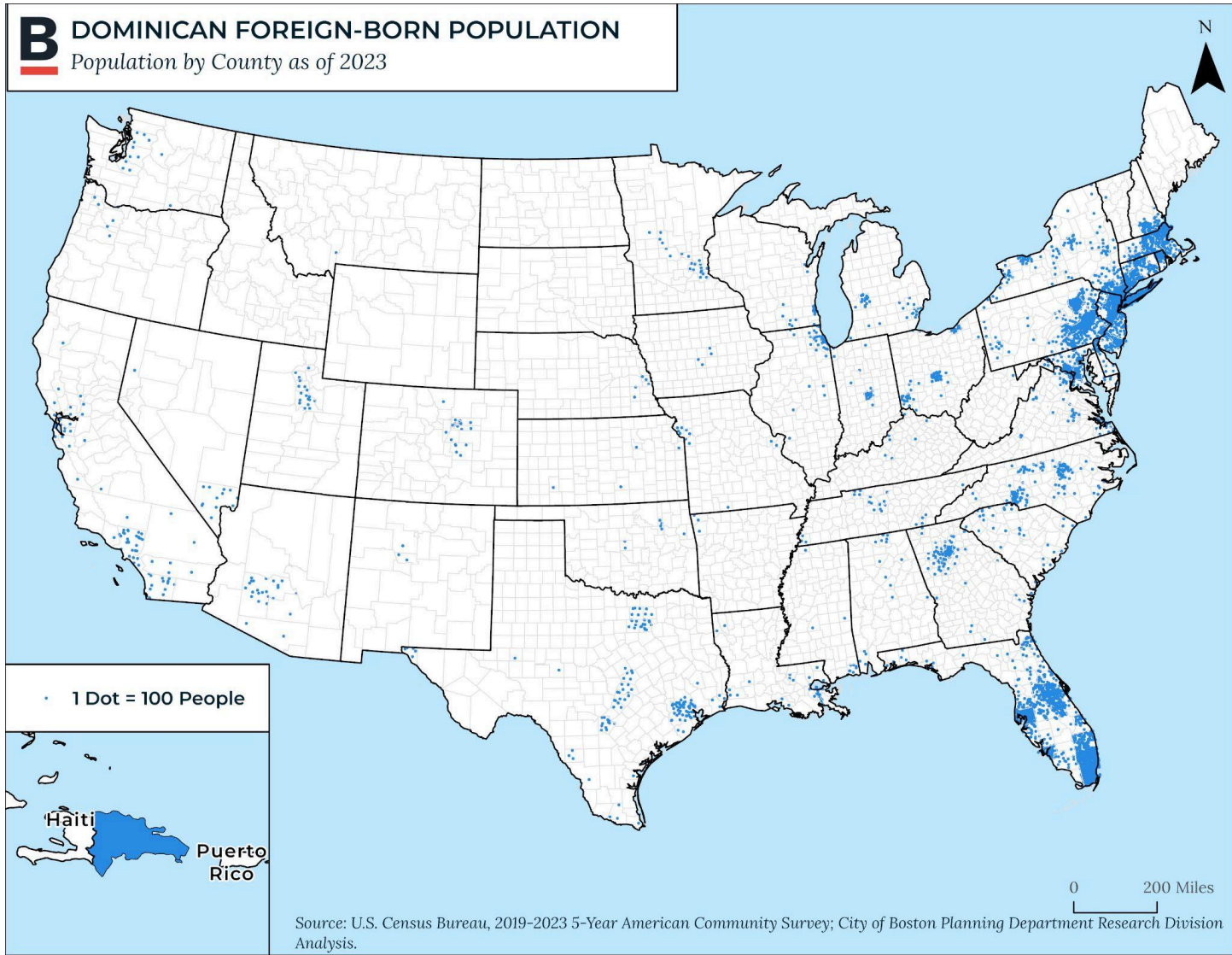
Percent increase in foreign born populations in the U.S. from 2000 to 2023



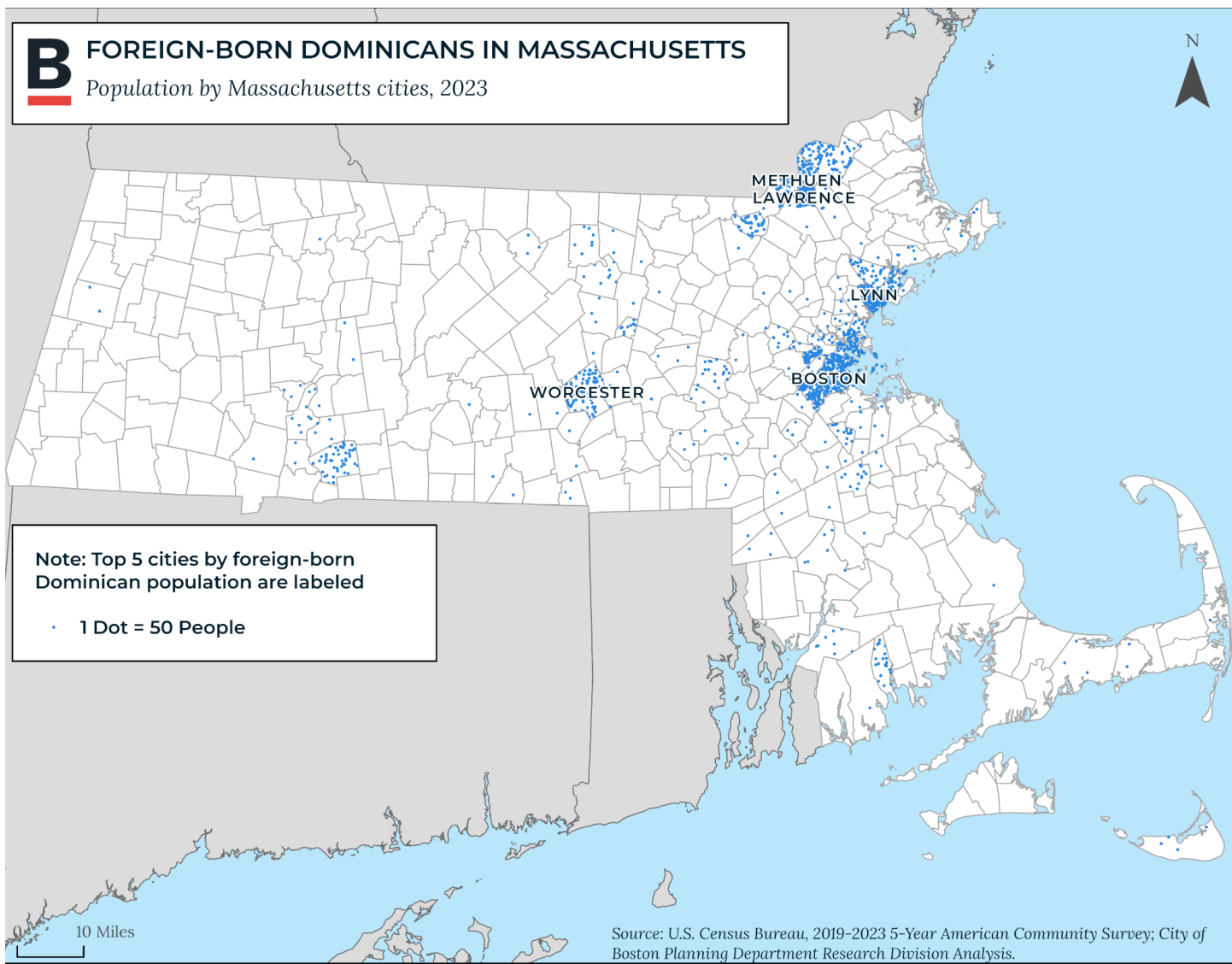
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 1980-2000 Decennial Census (IPUMS), 2023 1-Year American Community Survey (PUMS), City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Analysis

⁵ The estimate of the unauthorized Dominican population in Metropolitan Boston in 2007 was 8.1 percent of the population. Marcelli, E., et al. Permanently Temporary? The Health and Socioeconomic Integration of Dominicans in Metropolitan Boston, Center for Behavioral and Community Health Studies, 2009.

Estimates from the 2023 American Community Survey (ACS) show that 1,265,231 foreign-born Dominicans reside in the United States, which has been the leading destination for Dominican emigrants. Other primary destinations include Spain, Italy, and Venezuela. Massachusetts has the fifth largest foreign-born Dominican population in the United States behind New York, New Jersey, Florida, and Pennsylvania.



Within Massachusetts, only Lawrence has a larger share of the total foreign-born Dominican population (29 percent) than Boston (22 percent), with Lynn (10 percent), Methuen (6 percent), and Worcester (4 percent) rounding out the top five Dominican cities in the state.

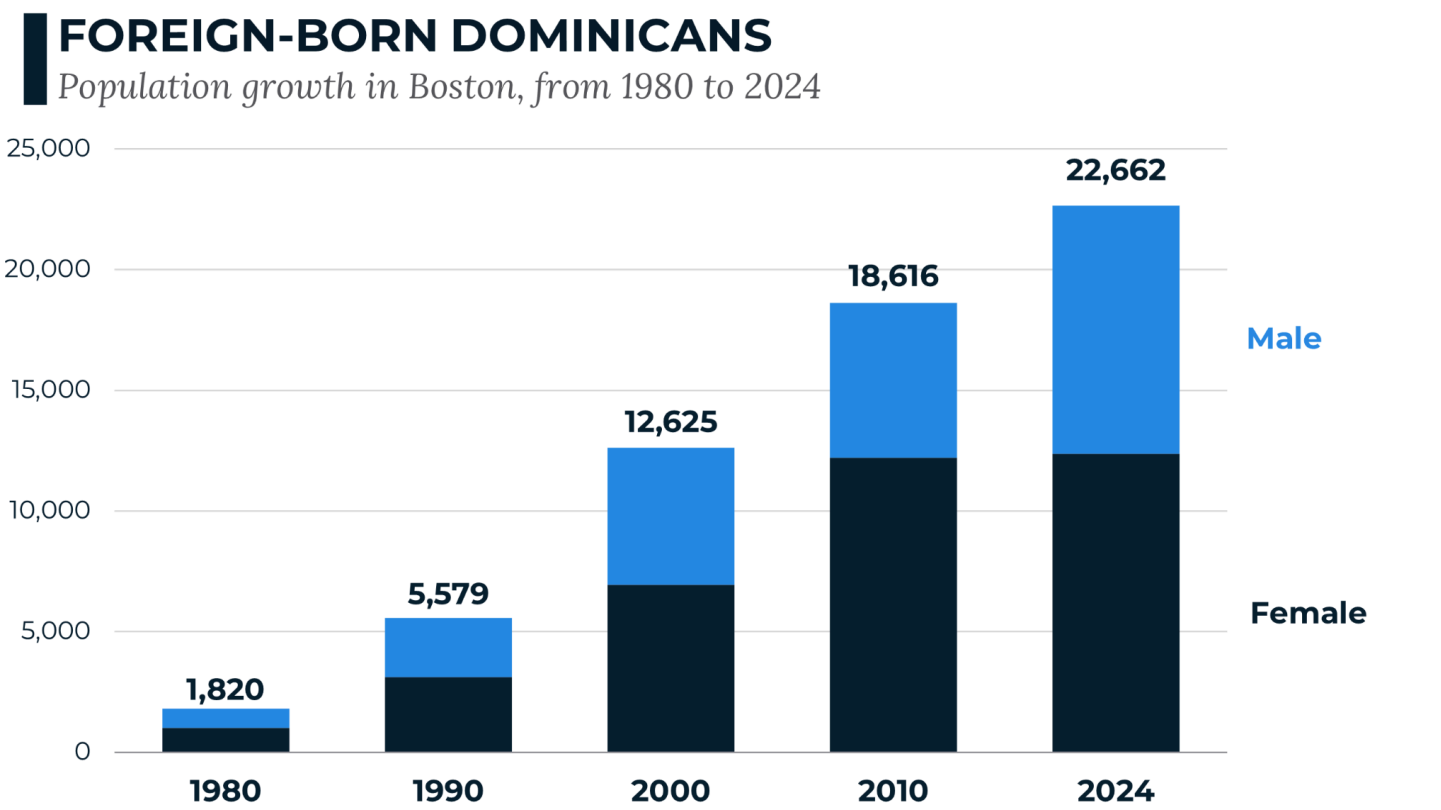


FOREIGN-BORN DOMINICANS IN BOSTON

DEMOGRAPHICS

Since 1980, Boston has seen a large increase in its foreign-born Dominican population. In 1980, there were roughly 1,800 foreign-born Dominicans. In 2024, the City of Boston Planning Department Research Division estimates that 22,662 foreign-born Dominicans reside in Boston, which is a 1,144 percent increase from 1980.

The share of women among foreign-born Dominicans in 2024 is higher than that of other populations. Of foreign-born Dominicans, 55 percent identify as female, compared to 52 percent of the foreign-born population and 53 percent of Boston's total population.⁶

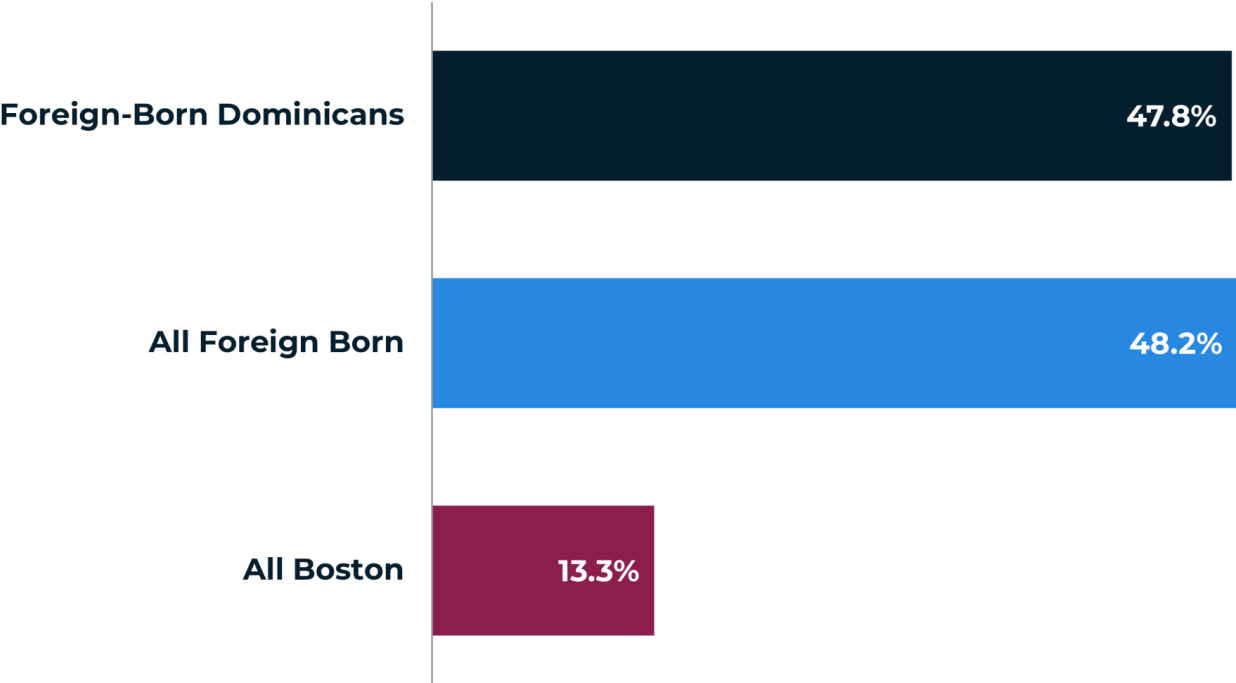


Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 1980–2000 Decennial Censuses (IPUMS), 2010 1-Year American Community Survey, 2024 City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Population Estimates, City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Analysis

⁶ 2024 City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Population Estimates

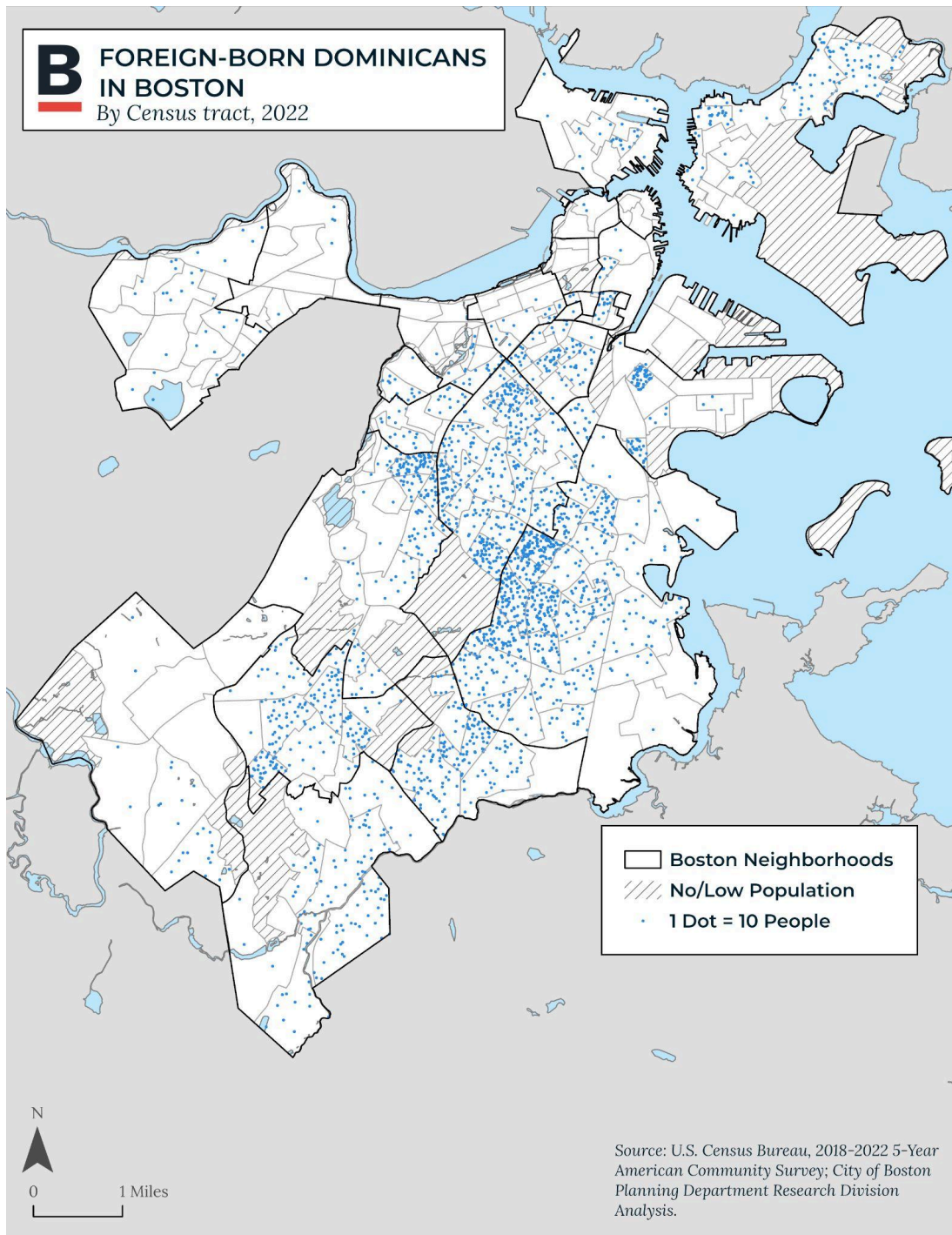
Foreign-born Dominicans are similar to Boston’s total foreign-born population in that around 48 percent are not U.S. citizens.

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

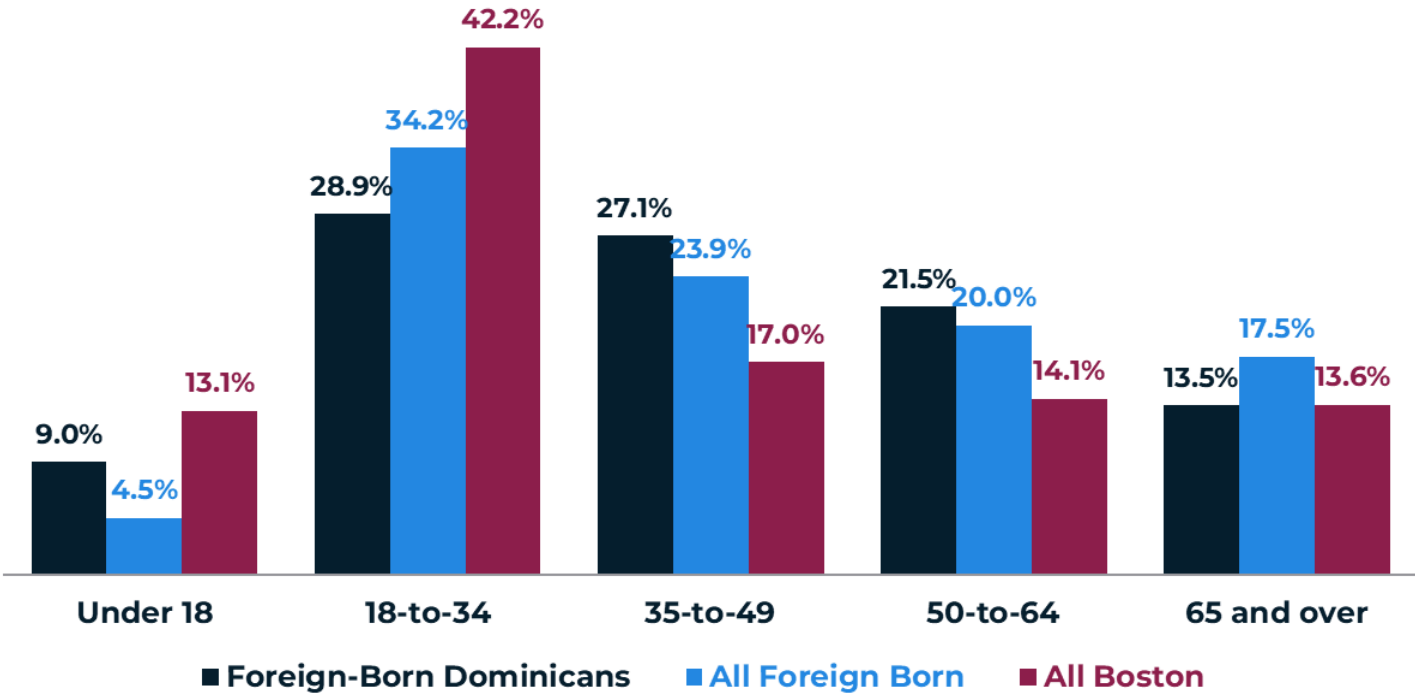
Within Boston, foreign-born Dominicans originally settled in Roxbury, the South End, but the majority now live in Dorchester (31 percent), Roxbury (21), Mattapan (7 percent), and Hyde Park (7 percent).



Foreign-born Dominicans have a slightly older age profile than the other populations in Boston. Over 27 percent of foreign-born Dominicans are 35-to-49 years old. This share is higher for all foreign born (24 percent) and Boston’s total population (17 percent). 22 percent of foreign-born Dominicans are aged 50-to-64 years compared to Boston’s total population (14 percent). Among Boston’s largest age cohort, 18-to-34 year olds, the foreign-born Dominican share is 29 percent. This is lower than all foreign born (34 percent) and Boston’s total population (43 percent). Also standing out in this age profile is the large share of foreign-born Dominican children, which is twice as large as all foreign-born children in Boston.

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

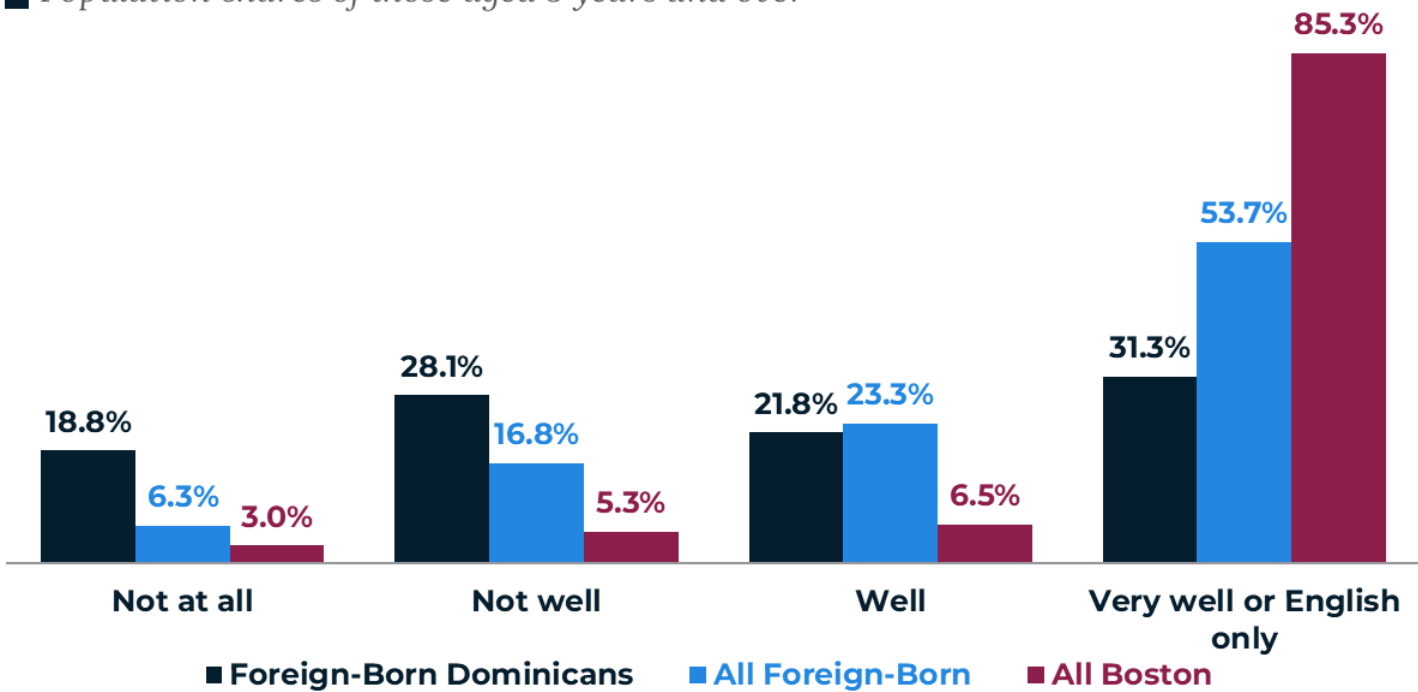
Among the foreign-born Dominican population, most identify as Hispanic or Latino, but 6 percent identify as Afro-Latino.

LANGUAGE AND EDUCATION

The foreign-born Dominican population has varied levels of English-speaking proficiency, but 31 percent speak English very well or English only. In comparison, 54 percent of all foreign born in Boston speak English very well or English only. Of the foreign-born Dominicans 4 percent speak only English at home and 96 percent only speak Spanish at home.⁷

ABILITY TO SPEAK ENGLISH

Population shares of those aged 5 years and over



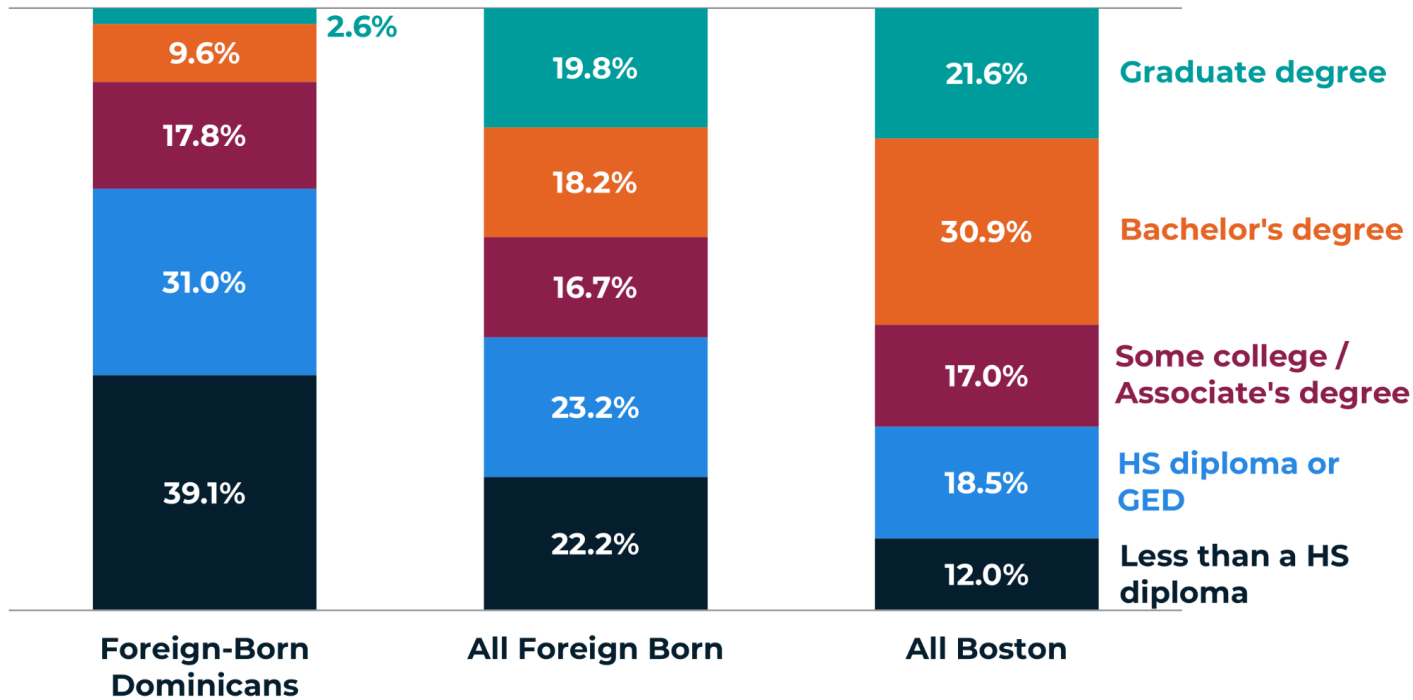
Source: 2024 City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Population Estimates, City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Analysis

⁷ 2024 City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Population Estimates

Around 10 percent have a Bachelor's degree and 3 percent have a graduate or professional degree. Nearly 40 percent of foreign-born Dominicans adults do not have a high school diploma.

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

Share of population aged 25 years and over

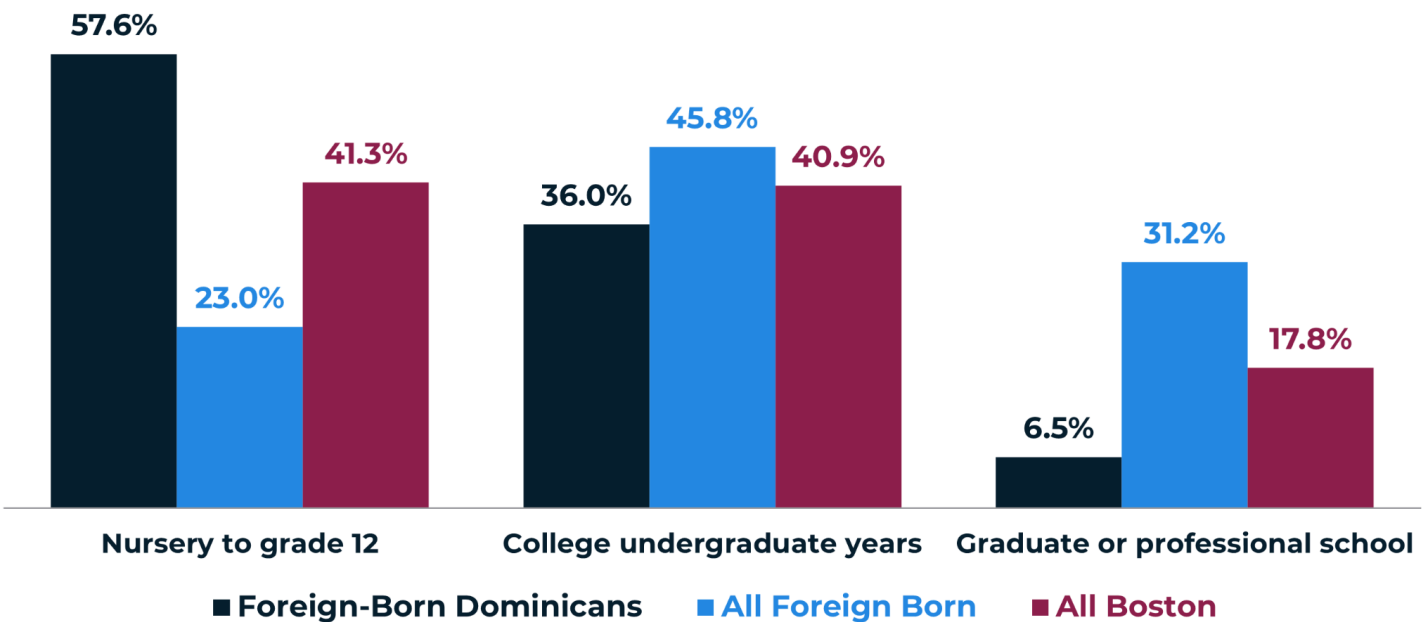


Source: 2024 City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Population Estimates, City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Analysis

Of foreign-born Dominicans enrolled in school, only 6 percent are enrolled in graduate or professional school, which is a lower share than both all foreign born in Boston and all Boston residents. Additionally, foreign-born Dominicans enrolled in school have a higher share of those enrolled in nursery school to the 12th grade than both all foreign born in Boston and all Boston residents. Dominicans do not primarily migrate to the U.S. for education, but rather for employment, and those workers have lower-levels of educational attainment.

SCHOOL ENROLLMENT

School enrolled population by level, aged 3 years and over

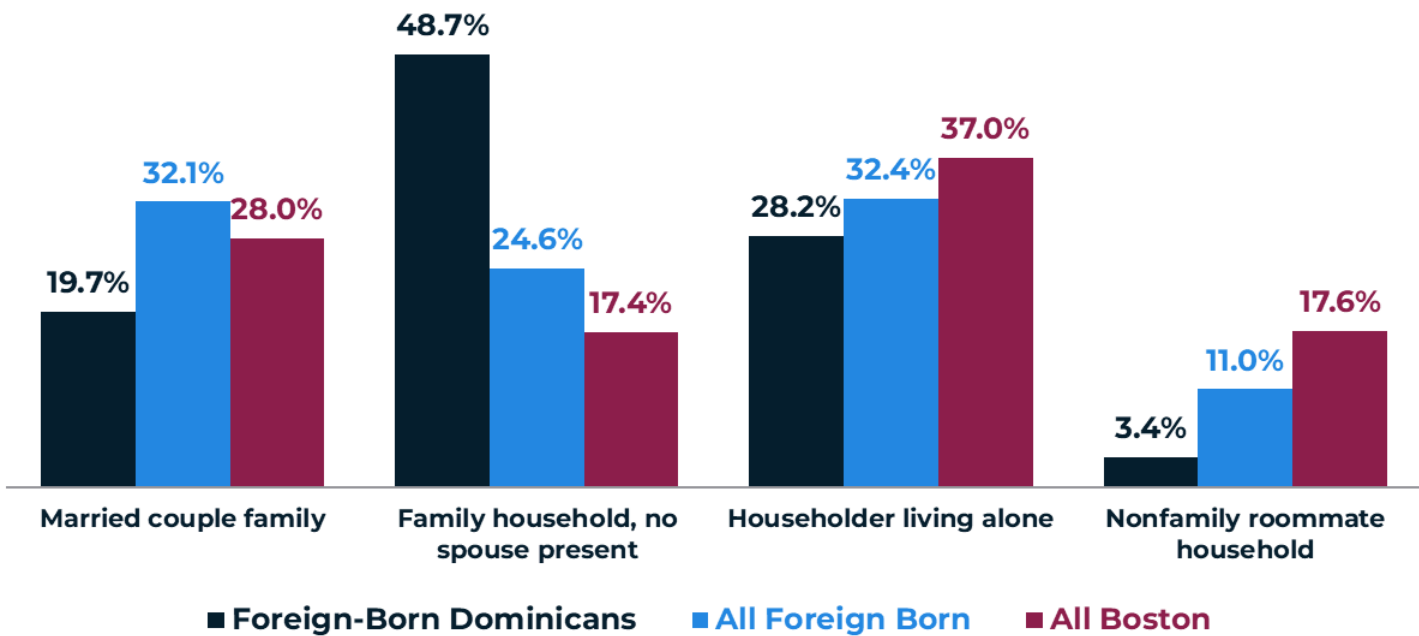


Source: 2024 City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Population Estimates, City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Analysis

Almost half of households headed by a foreign-born Dominican are family households without a spouse present, which is substantially higher than other populations. Only 3 percent of Dominican foreign-born householders live with a nonfamily roommate, which may be due to the lower share of young adults in the Dominican foreign-born population.

TYPE OF HOUSEHOLD

Share of households

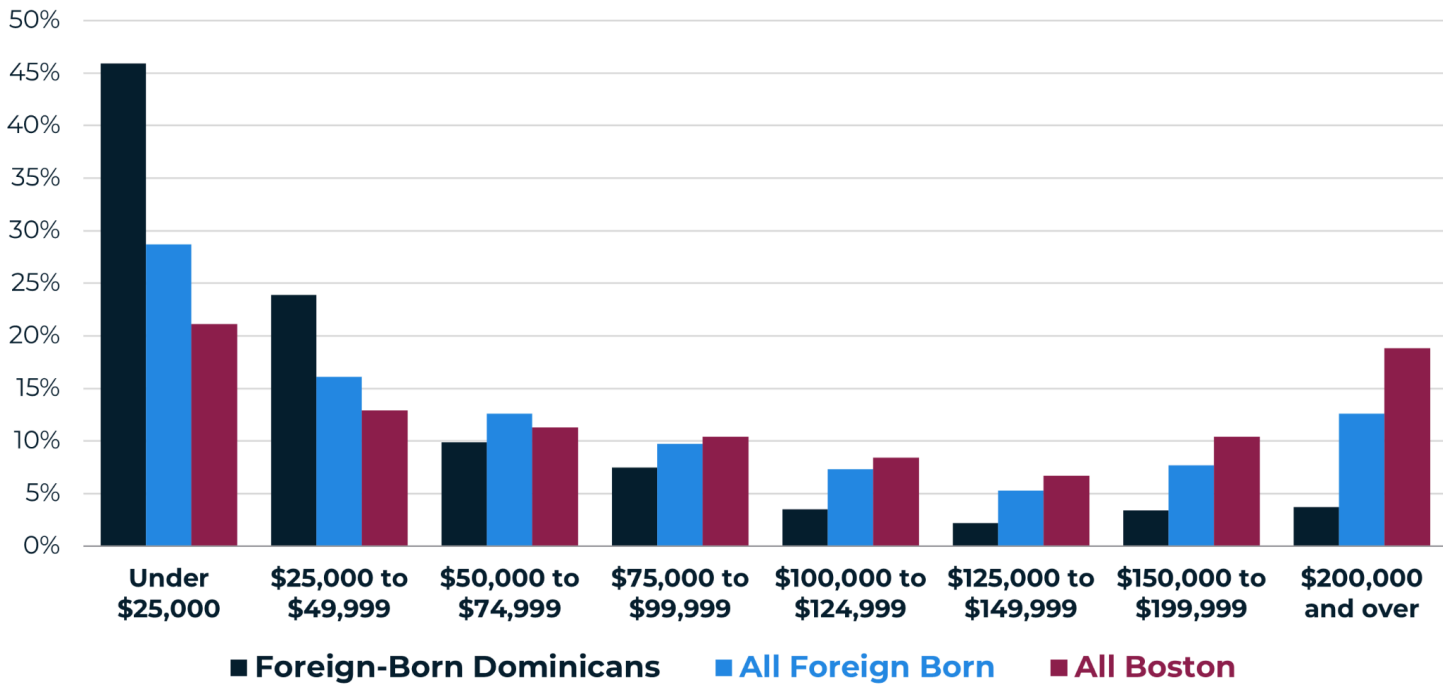


Source: 2024 City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Population Estimates, City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Analysis

Almost half of foreign-born Dominican households have an income of less than \$25,000 and only 13 percent have a household income of \$100,000 or higher.

HOUSEHOLD INCOME DISTRIBUTION

Share of households

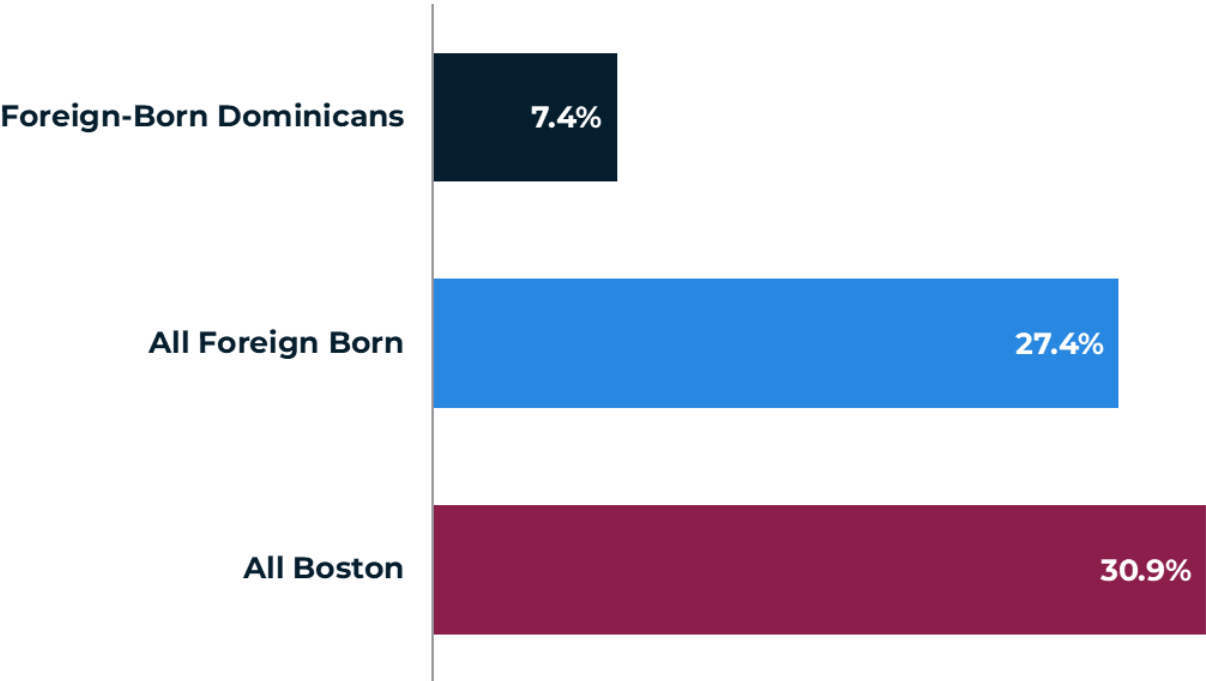


Source: 2024 City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Population Estimates, City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Analysis

Most Dominican foreign-born householders rent their homes, and only 7 percent live in owner-occupied housing. This lower share of homeownership may be related to their lower household income.

OWNER-OCCUPIED HOUSEHOLDS

Share of householders that own their residence

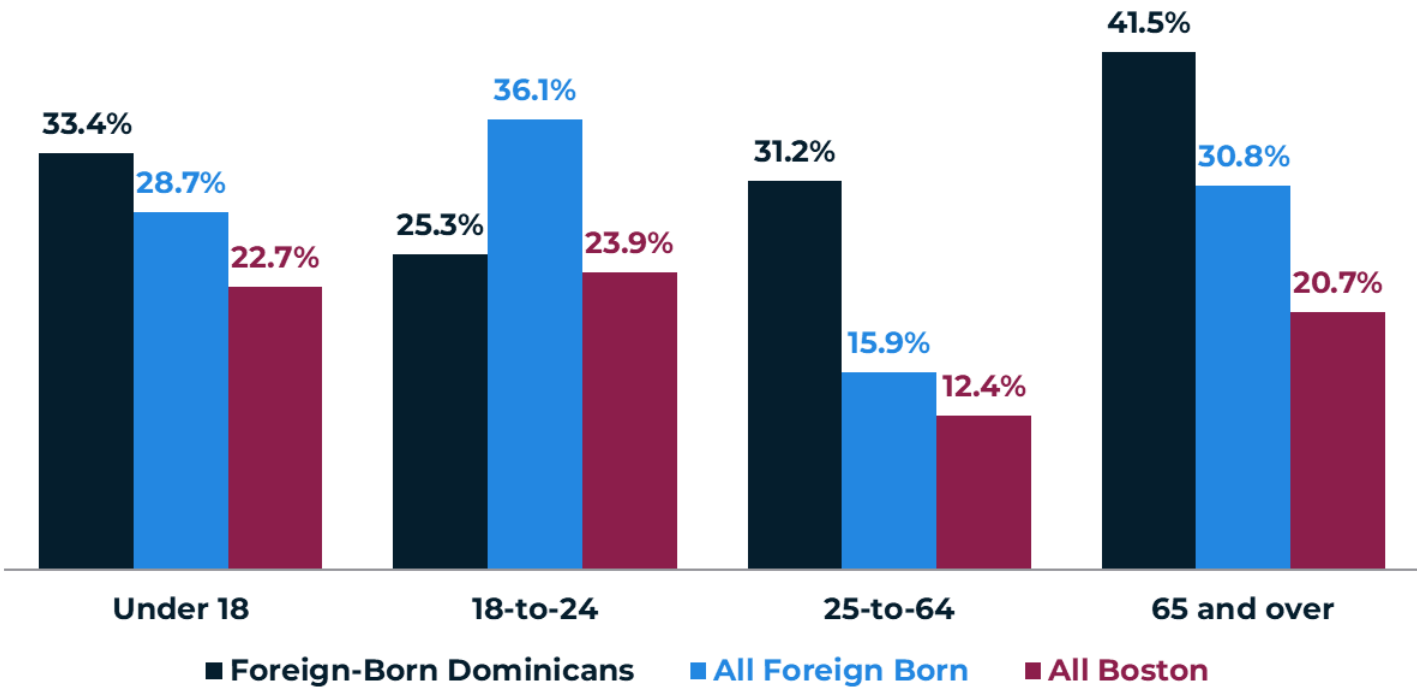


Source: 2024 City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Analysis, City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Analysis

For each age group, foreign-born Dominicans and foreign-born residents in Boston have a higher rate of individuals living below the poverty line than that of all Boston residents. For individuals 65 years and older, the foreign-born Dominican population has a poverty rate of 42 percent, approximately 20 percentage points higher than that of all Boston residents. For the entire population, 32 percent of foreign-born Dominicans live under poverty, a rate 15 percentage points higher than that of all of Boston.

POVERTY RATES

Share of age group that is living below the poverty line



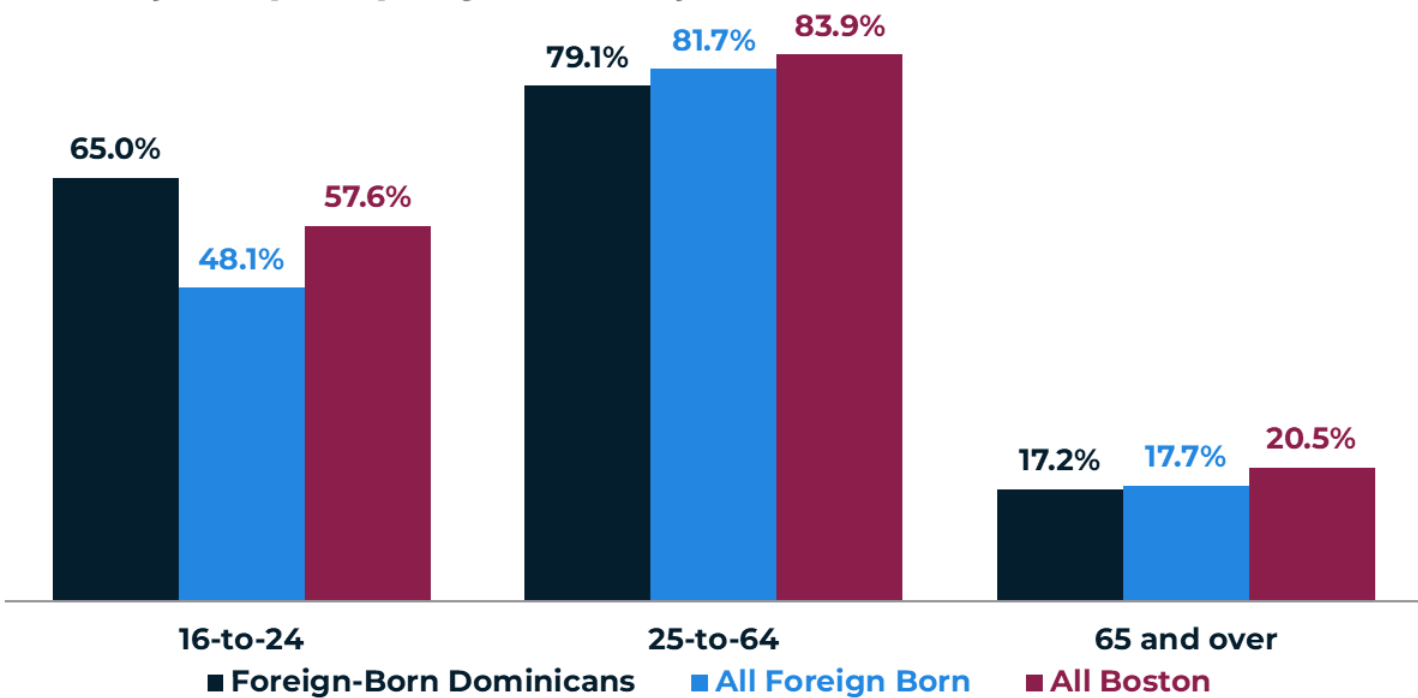
Source: 2024 City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Population Estimates, City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Analysis

EMPLOYMENT

Among those between the ages 25-to-64, 79 percent of foreign-born Dominicans participate in the labor force. This share is lower for those ages compared to all Boston workers and all foreign-born workers of the same age group. For the ages of 16-and-24 years, 65 percent of foreign-born Dominicans participate in the labor force compared to 58 percent for the entire city.⁸ This is consistent with lower rates of college enrollment and employment opportunities as the motivation for immigration. The labor force participation for older foreign-born Dominicans is similar to the other groups.

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

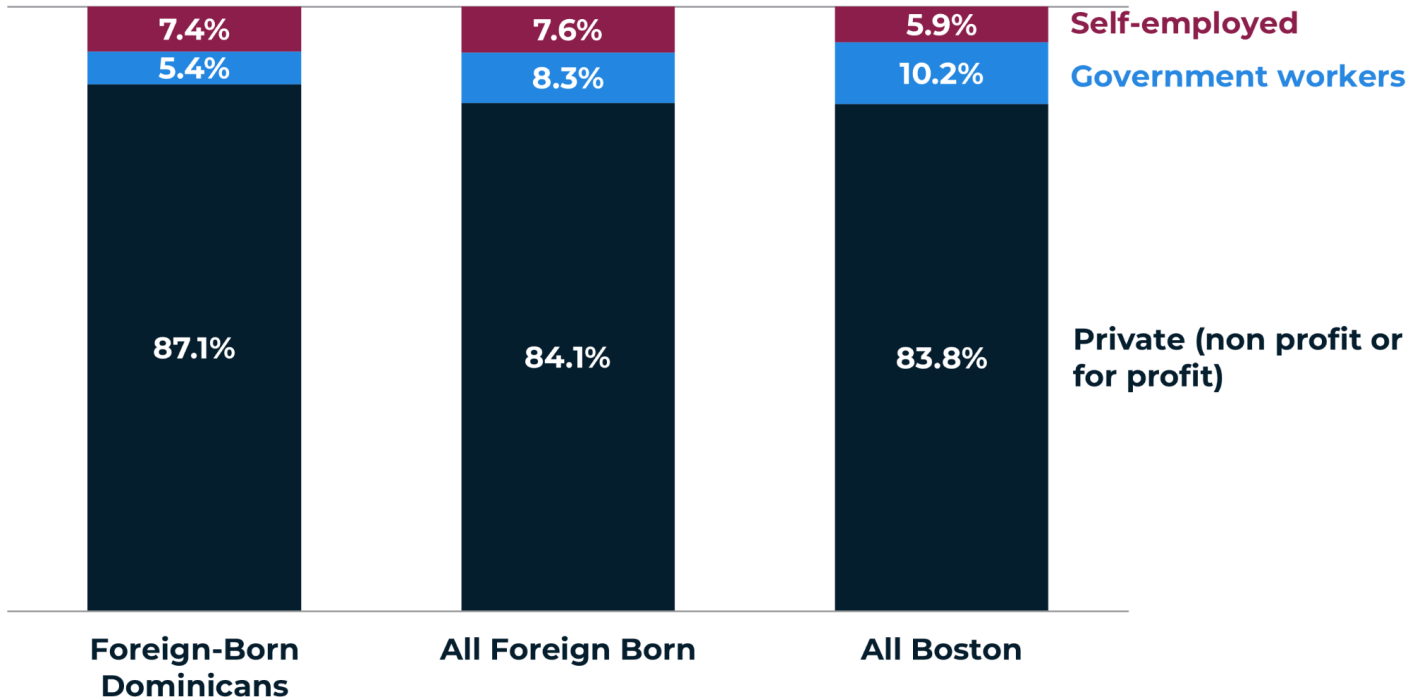
⁸ The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics defines participating in the labor force as the population who is either working or actively looking for work. <https://www.bls.gov/cps/definitions.htm>.



The foreign-born Dominican population has a slightly higher share (7 percent) of self-employed individuals when compared to all Boston workers (6 percent). Among the foreign-born population, foreign-born Dominicans in particular, have a lower share of workers employed in the government. Only 5 percent of foreign-born Dominicans in Boston work within the government, compared to 8 percent of all foreign-born workers and 10 percent of all Boston workers.

CLASS OF WORKERS

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

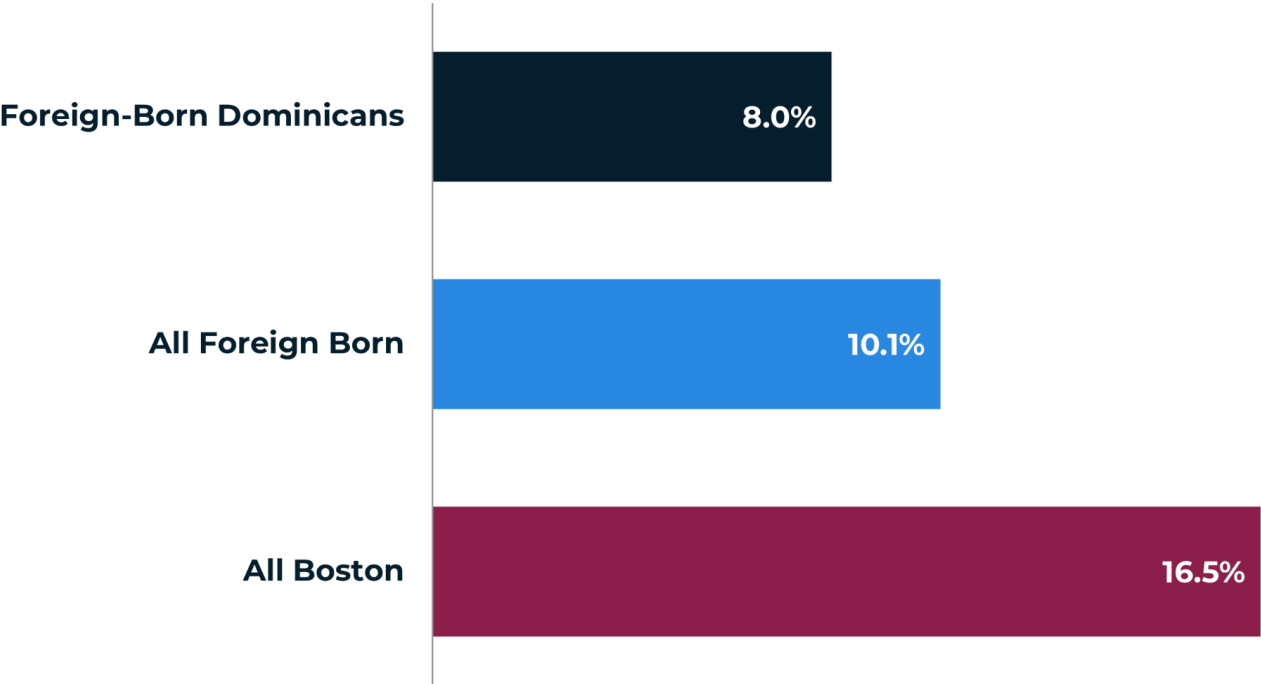


Source: 2024 City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Population Estimates, City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Analysis

Only 8 percent of foreign-born Dominicans are working from home compared to 10 percent of all foreign born workers and 17 percent of all Boston workers. This difference is likely due in part to foreign-born Dominicans over-representation in in-person service occupations.

WORKED FROM HOME

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

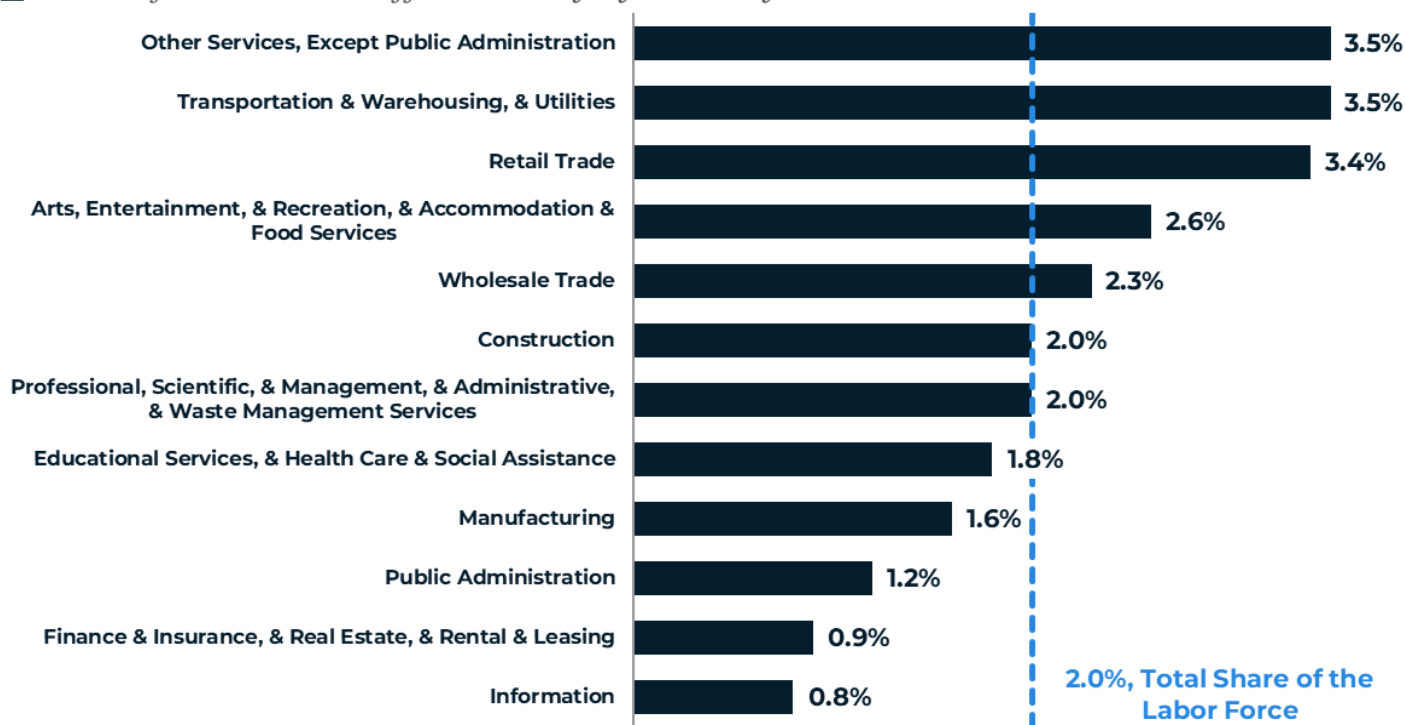


Source: 2024 City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Population Estimates, City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Analysis

There are 13,342 foreign-born Dominicans employed in Suffolk County, making up 2 percent of Suffolk County's workforce. Foreign-born Dominicans in Suffolk County make up 3.5 percent of workers in transportation, warehousing, and utilities industries. Only 0.8 percent of those working in information industries are foreign-born Dominicans. In addition, they are notably underrepresented in manufacturing, public administration, and finance, insurance, real estate, and rental and leasing industries.

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

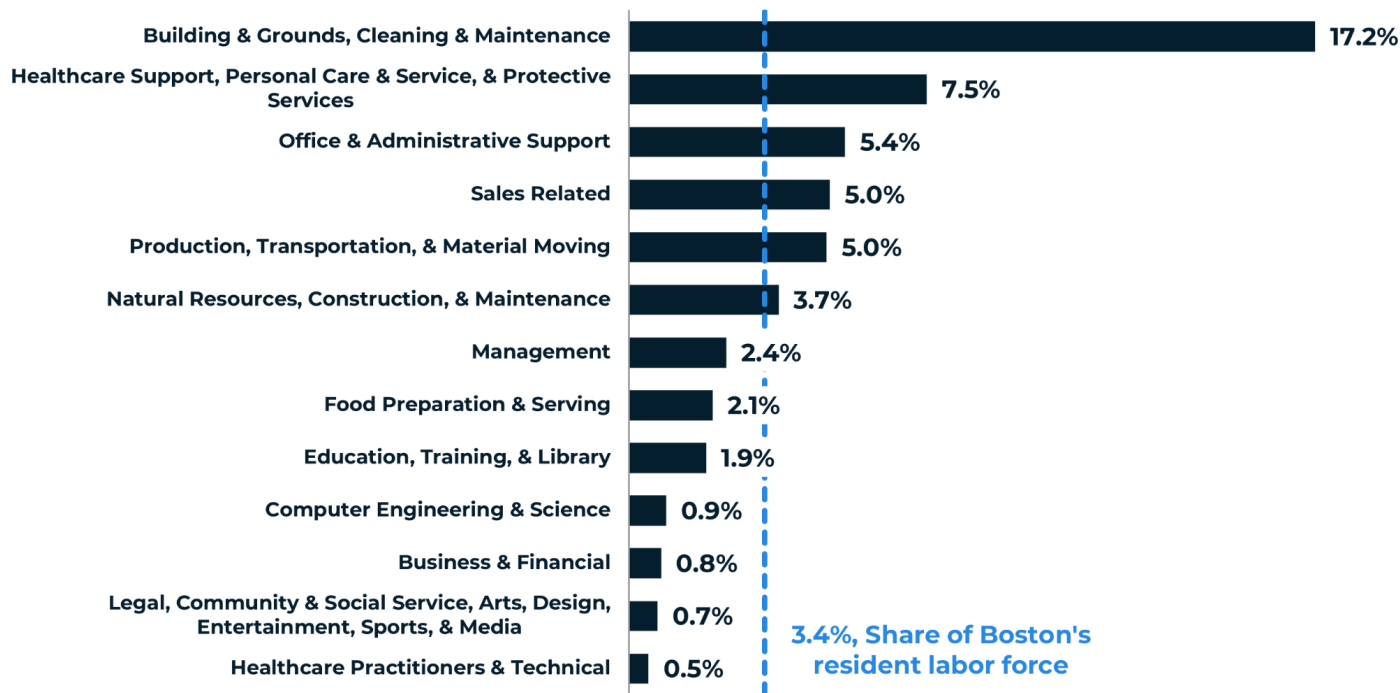
Foreign-born Dominicans comprise just 3.4 percent of the Boston resident labor force but fill 17.2 percent of Boston building and grounds, cleaning and maintenance occupations. These occupations include janitors and building cleaners, maids and housekeeping cleaners, landscaping and groundskeeping workers, and first-line supervisors of housekeeping and janitorial workers. Only 0.5 percent of those working in healthcare practitioners and technical occupations are foreign-born Dominicans. These occupations include physical therapists, clinical laboratory technologists and technicians, pharmacy technicians, and licensed practical and licensed vocational nurses. However, 7.5 percent of Boston workers in healthcare support, personal care and service occupations are foreign-born Dominicans. Within these occupations,



foreign-born Dominicans are most likely to work as nursing assistants, personal care aides, home health aides, or childcare workers.

FOREIGN-BORN DOMINICAN 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

Only 15 percent of foreign-born Dominicans 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

Dominican foreign-born workers contribute to Boston's economy. Their labor generates an additional 5,700 indirect and induced jobs in Suffolk County. They contribute 2.6 billion dollars

to Boston’s GCP. Dominican foreign-born workers employed in Suffolk County pay \$59 million in federal income tax and \$32 million in state income tax.⁹

CONCLUSION

Massachusetts is a leading destination for Dominicans who migrate to the United States, with Boston home to 22,662 foreign-born Dominican residents. Foreign-born Dominicans in Boston actively contribute to the economy, culture, and civic life of their new home. Foreign-born Dominicans have higher rates of labor force participation of almost 68 percent. With their concentration of employment in the personal service and cleaning sectors, making up 17.8 percent, they serve a vital role in the Boston labor market.

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⁹Research Division estimates using Regional Economic Model, Inc., (REMI), PI+ Massachusetts Regions, City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Analysis