



FOREIGN BORN IN BOSTON: CAPE VERDEANS

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 CAPE VERDEANS IN THE UNITED STATES

Cabo Verde is an archipelago of nine islands off the coast of West Africa. From their settlement by Portuguese sailors in the late 15th century until 1975, the islands were a Portuguese colony. Large-scale migration to the United States, especially to Massachusetts and Rhode Island started in the 1800s, when Cape Verdeans migrated to New Bedford to work in the whaling industry. Cape Verdeans remained in the region and worked in the cranberry industry after the decline in whaling. The 1924 National Origins Act restricted new Cape Verdean migration to Massachusetts, but the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act reduced this restriction. By 1975

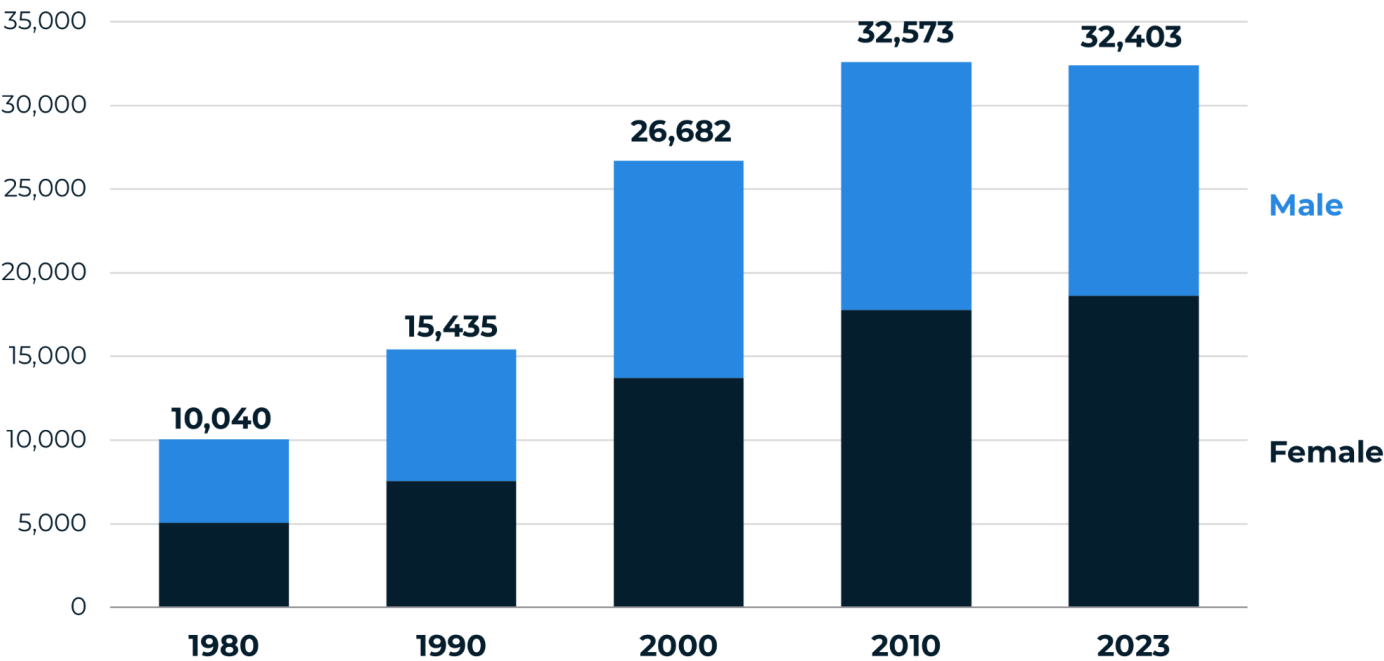


when Cabo Verde gained its independence, Cape Verdean migration to the U.S. increased.¹ From 1980 to 2000, the Cape Verdean population of the U.S. increased by about two and half times.

Estimates from the 2023 American Community Survey show that 32,403 foreign-born Cape Verdeans reside in the United States, which is a leading destination for Cape Verdean emigration, along with Portugal. Other primary destinations include France, the Netherlands, Angola and Senegal.

FOREIGN-BORN CAPE VERDEANS

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

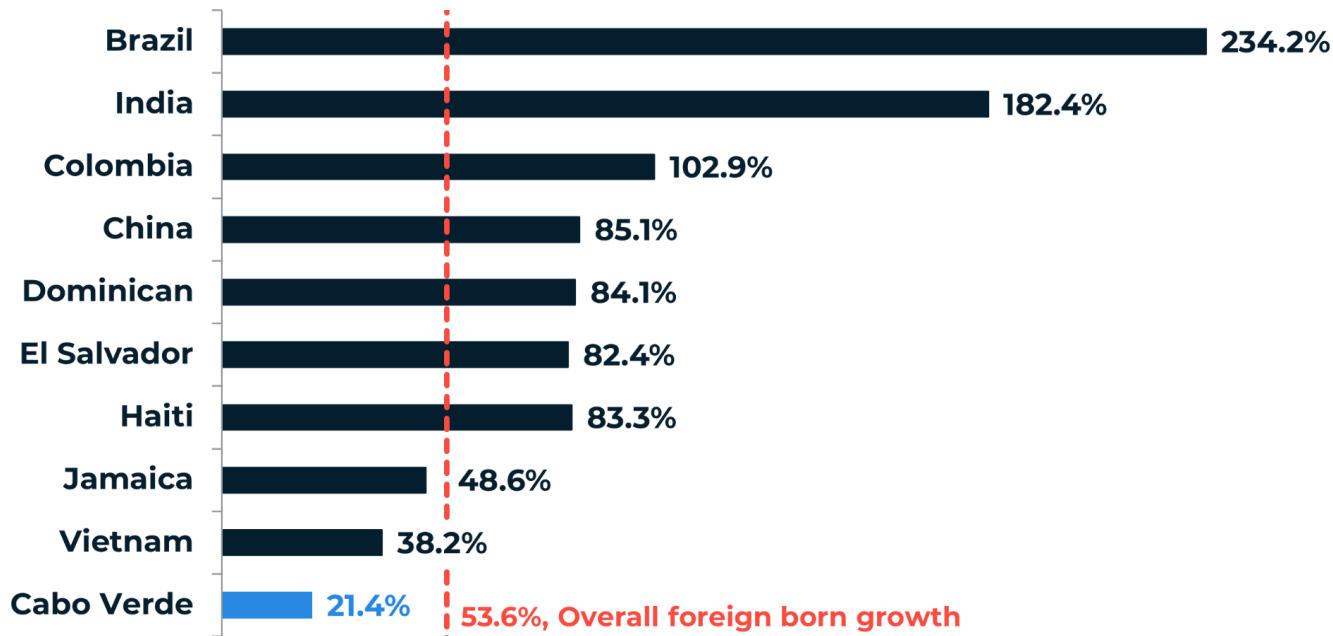
¹ <https://globalboston.bc.edu/index.php/home/ethnic-groups/cape-verdeans/>



From 2000 to 2023, the foreign-born Cape Verdean population increased by 21.4 percent, slower than the 53.6 percent overall foreign-born population growth. All of this growth occurred between 2000 and 2010, and the foreign-born Cape Verdean population declined slightly from 2010 to 2023.

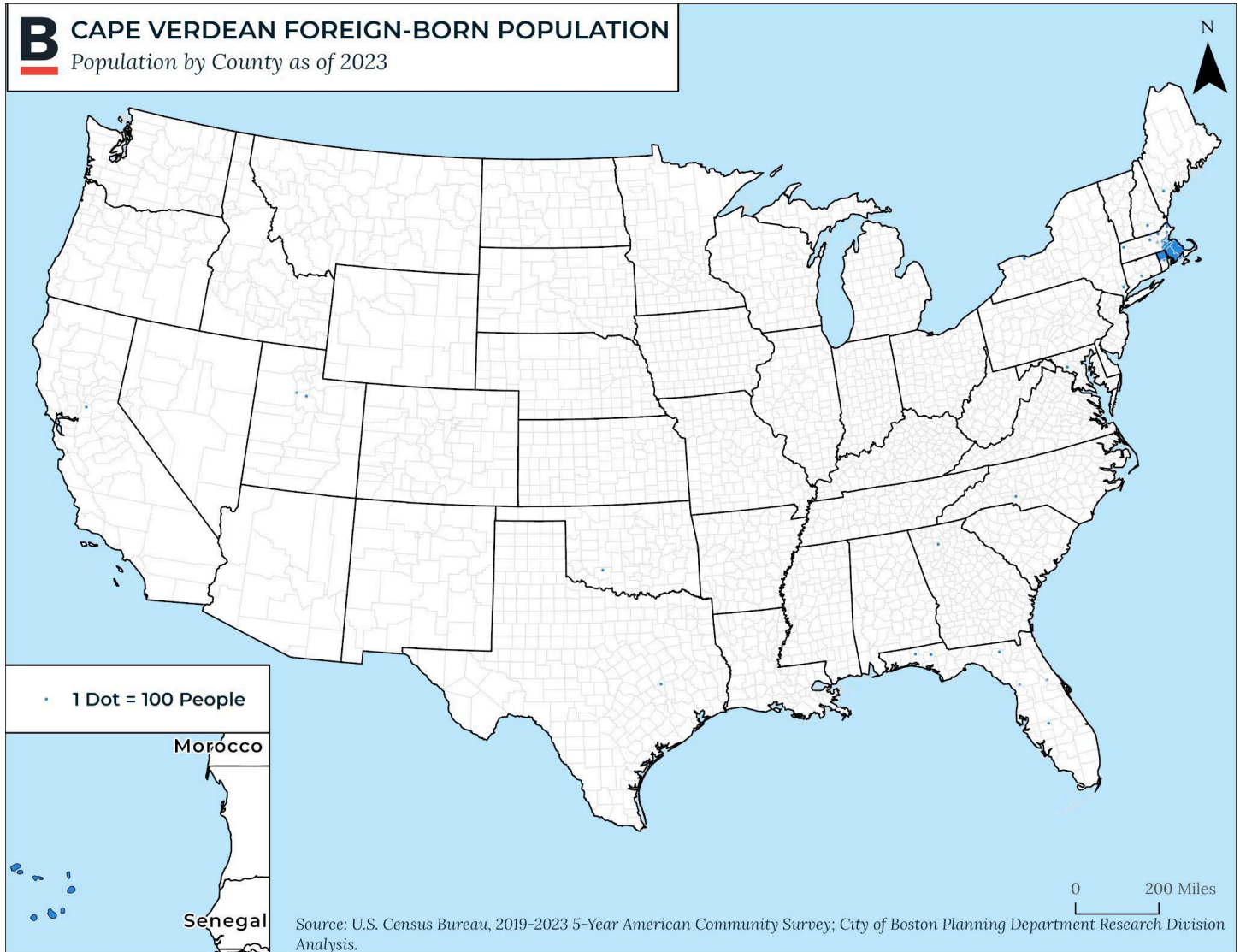
INCREASE IN FOREIGN-BORN POPULATION

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

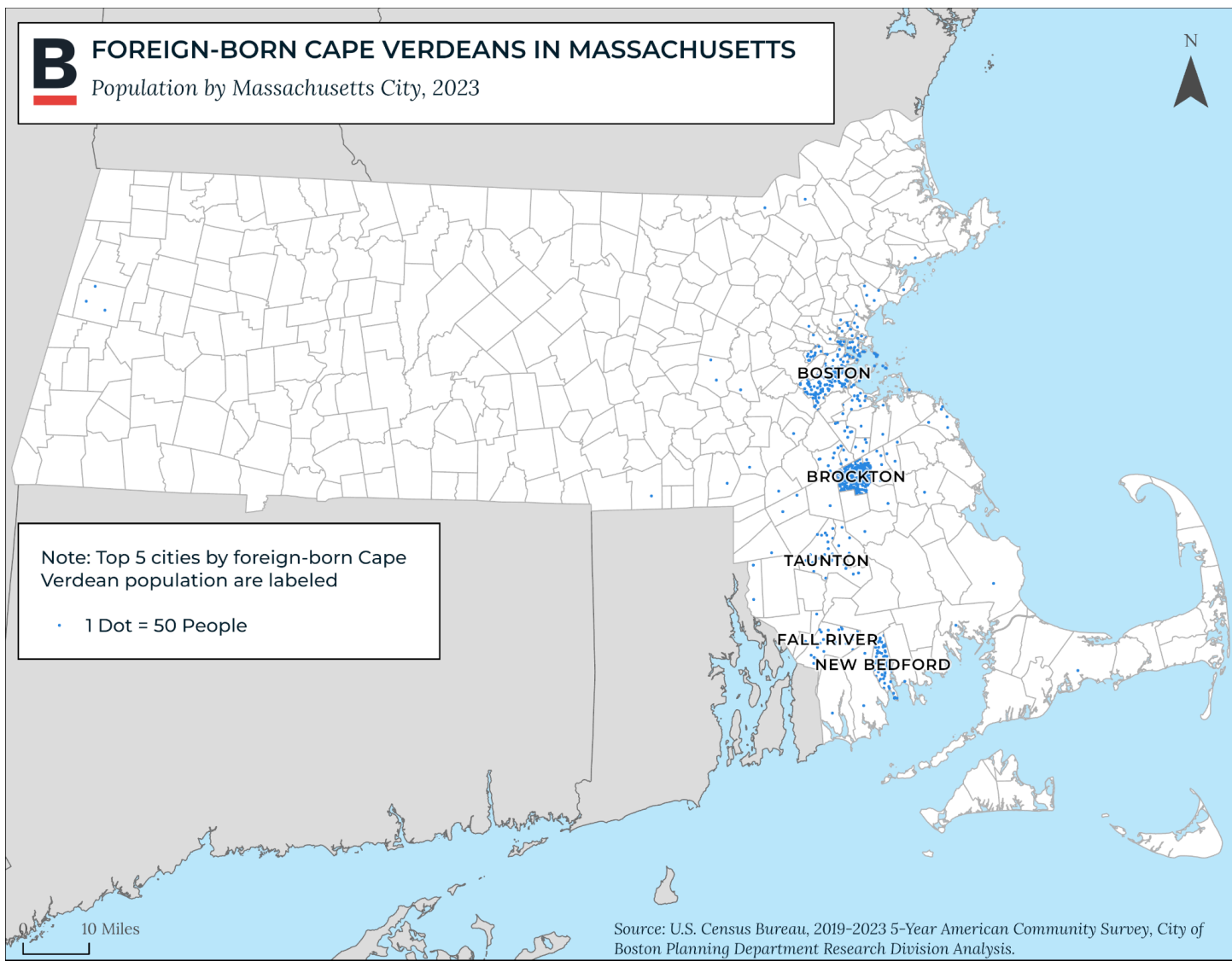


Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 1980-2000 Decennial Censuses (IPUMS), 2023 1-Year American Community Survey (PUMS), City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Analysis

Because of their 19th century migration linked to the whaling industry, the post-1975 Cape Verdean migration flowed to Southern New England. The majority of Cape Verdeans in the United States live in Massachusetts (75 percent), Rhode Island (16 percent) and Connecticut (1 percent).



In Massachusetts, Brockton has the largest foreign-born Cape Verdean (39 percent) population followed by Boston (25 percent), New Bedford (10 percent), Taunton (4 percent), and Fall River (4 percent).



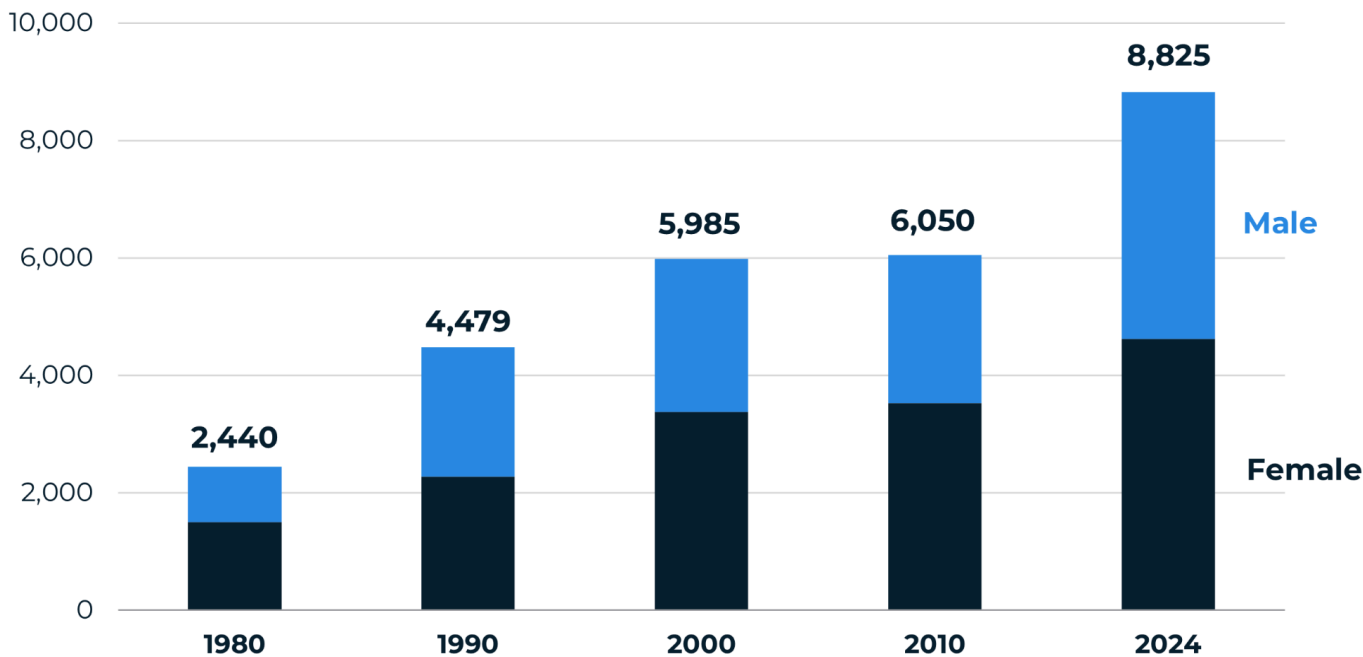
FOREIGN-BORN CAPE VERDEANS IN BOSTON

DEMOGRAPHICS

Foreign-born Cape Verdean’s migration into Boston has been on the rise since 1980. Much of the immigration began in 1975 after its independence. In 1980, Boston had 2,440 Cape Verdeans, and by 2024, there were 8,825.

FOREIGN-BORN CAPE VERDEANS

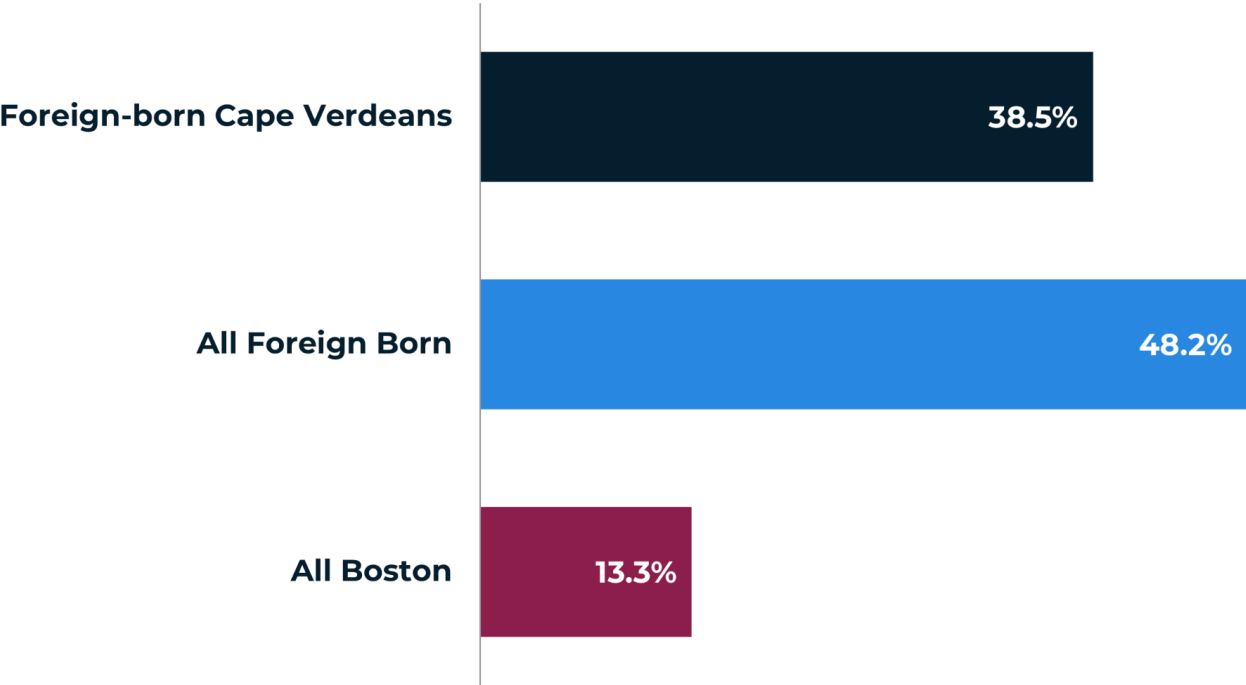
Population growth in Boston, from 1980 to 2024



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

The median years spent as an Legal Permanent Resident for all citizens naturalized in fiscal year 2024 was 7.5 years.² Because 40 percent of Cape Verdeans in Boston have been in the United States for over 20 years and nearly 75 percent have been in the United States for 10 years, the majority of foreign-born Cape Verdeans are naturalized citizens and only 39 percent are noncitizens.

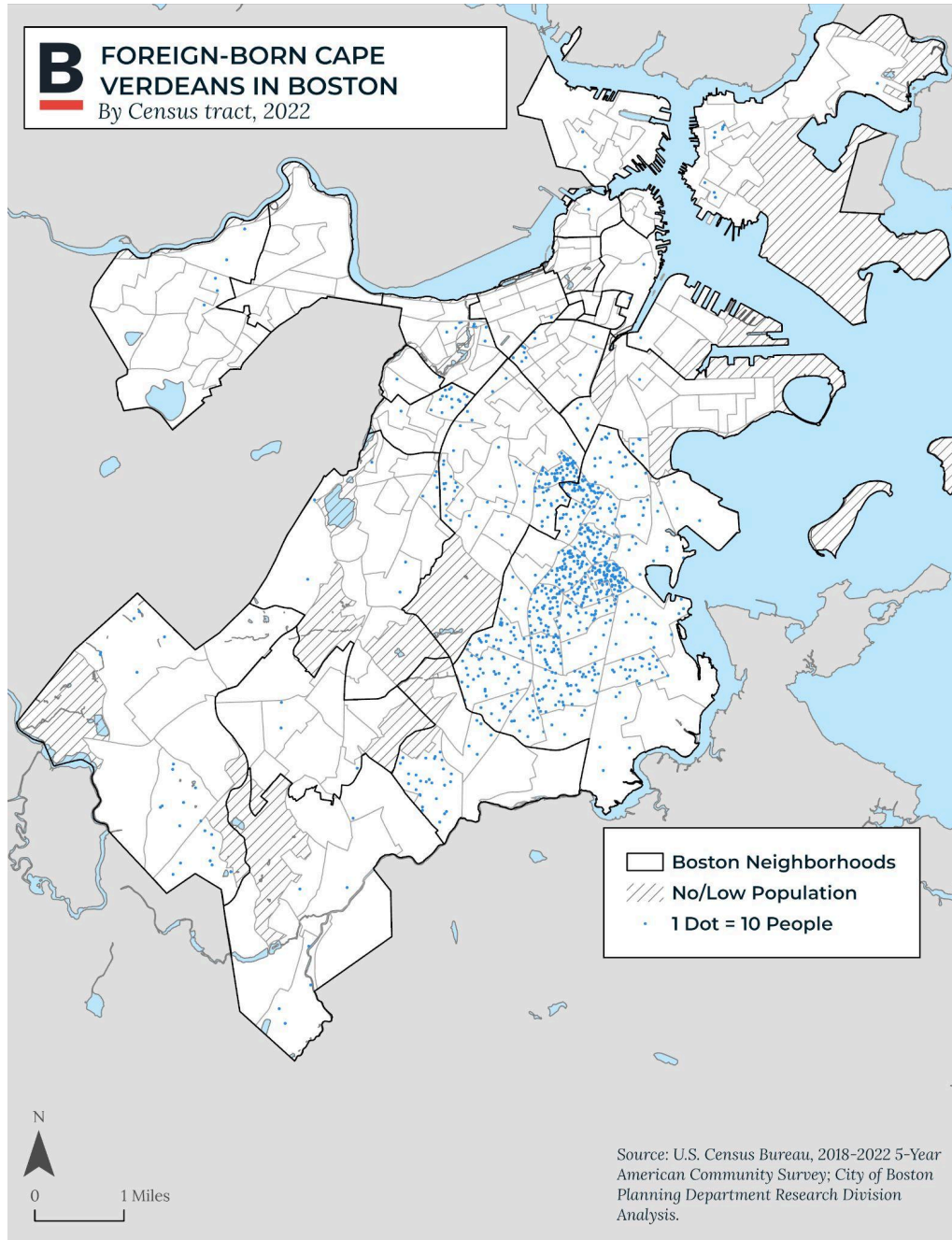
NON-U.S. CITIZENS
Share of non-U.S. citizens



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

² <https://www.uscis.gov/citizenship-resource-center/naturalization-statistics>

Even though New Bedford was home to migration from Cabo Verde in the 19th Century, the foreign-born Cape Verdean populations in Boston arrived after Cabo Verde won its independence from Portugal in 1975.³ Their population is concentrated in Dorchester (67 percent) and Roxbury (15 percent), in particular between Bowdoin and Dudley Streets.



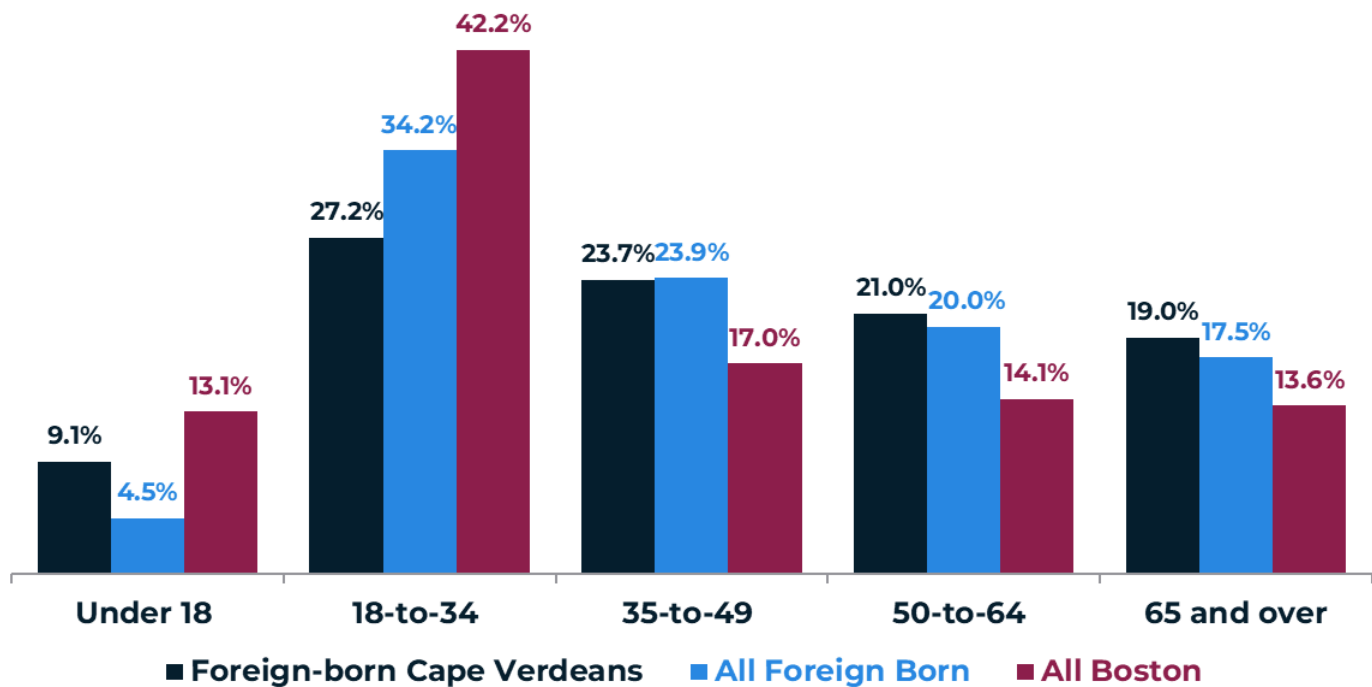
³ <https://globalboston.bc.edu/index.php/home/ethnic-groups/cape-verdeans/>



The foreign-born Cape Verdean population tends to be older: 40 percent are aged 50 or above. Approximately 9 percent of foreign-born Cape Verdeans are children under age 18.

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

People from Cabo Verde are classified in the United States as “some other race.”⁴ As a result of a 1997 Office of Management and Budget Directive, the Census Bureau can reclassify Cape Verdeans depending how they respond to the race question on Census Bureau forms. As a result, over 70 percent of Boston residents born in Cabo Verde are identified as “two or more races” in the 2023 American Community Survey. For more information about the Census race classifications, see [Race and Ethnicity in the 2020 Census: Self-Identification or Classification?](#).

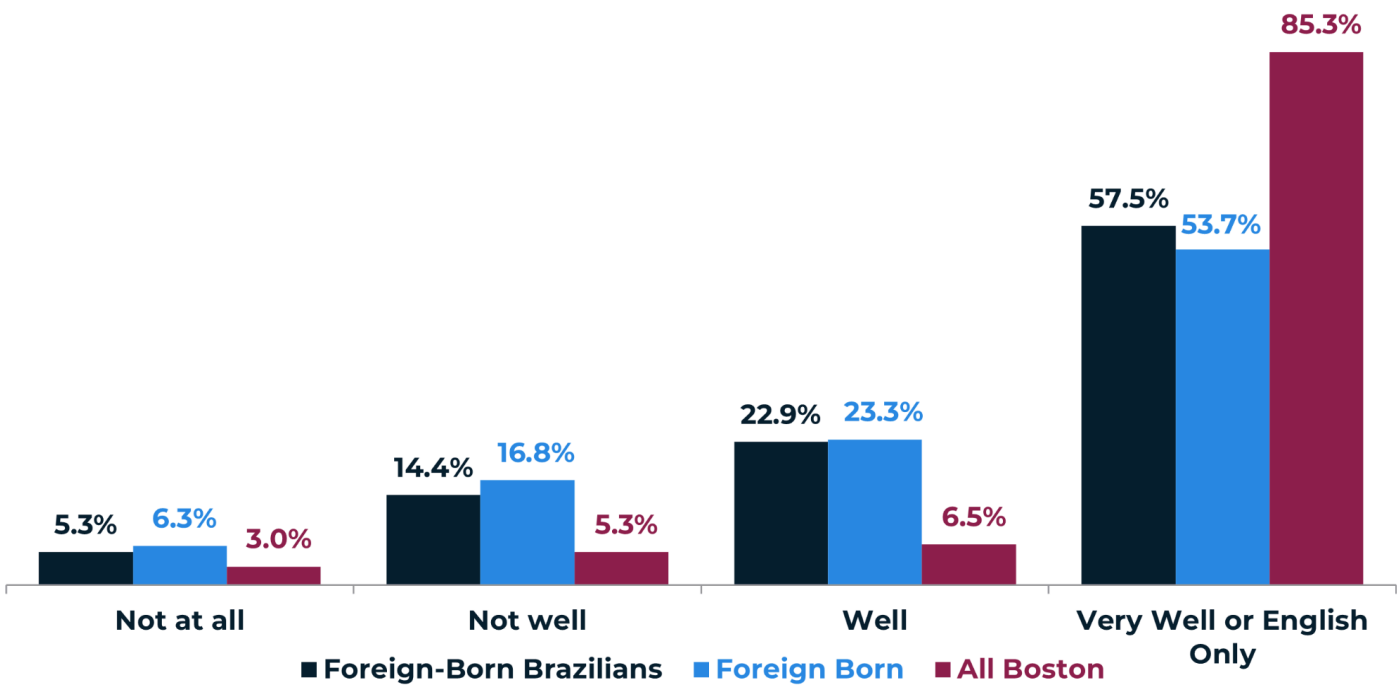
⁴ https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/omb/fedreg_1997standards

LANGUAGE AND EDUCATION

Foreign-born Cape Verdeans tend to have lower levels of English proficiency in comparison to the total foreign-born population: over 60 percent have limited English proficiency. Of the foreign-born Cape Verdeans, 7 speak only English at home, 83 percent only speak Kabuverdianu, often referred to as Cape Verdean Creole, at home, and 8 percent only speak Portuguese at home.⁵

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

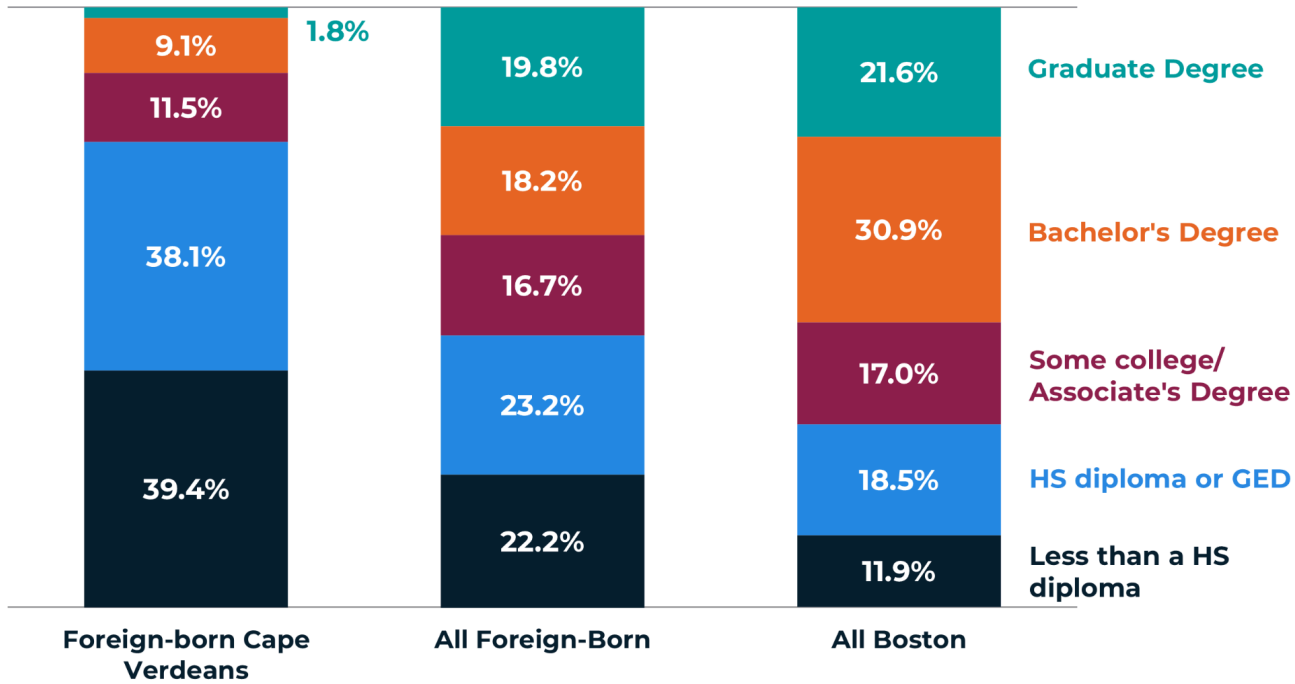
⁵ 2024 City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Population Estimates



The educational attainment of adult foreign-born Cape Verdeans tends to be lower. Only around 22 percent of foreign-born Cape Verdeans have education higher than a high school degree, and almost 40 percent did not finish high school.

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

Share of population aged 25 years and over



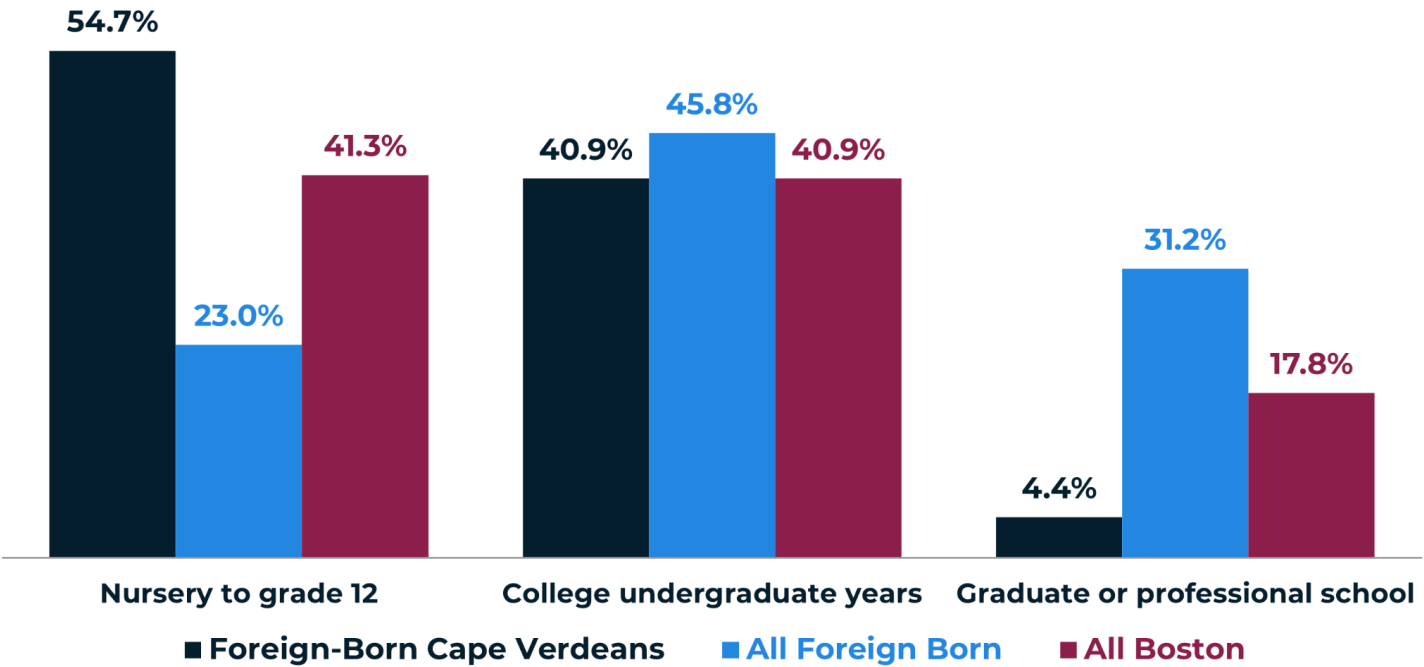
Source: 2024 City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Population Estimates, City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Analysis



Just over 4 percent of foreign-born Cape Verdeans enrolled in school are enrolled in graduate or professional school and more than half are enrolled in nursery to grade 12.

SCHOOL ENROLLMENT

School enrolled population by level, aged 3 years and over

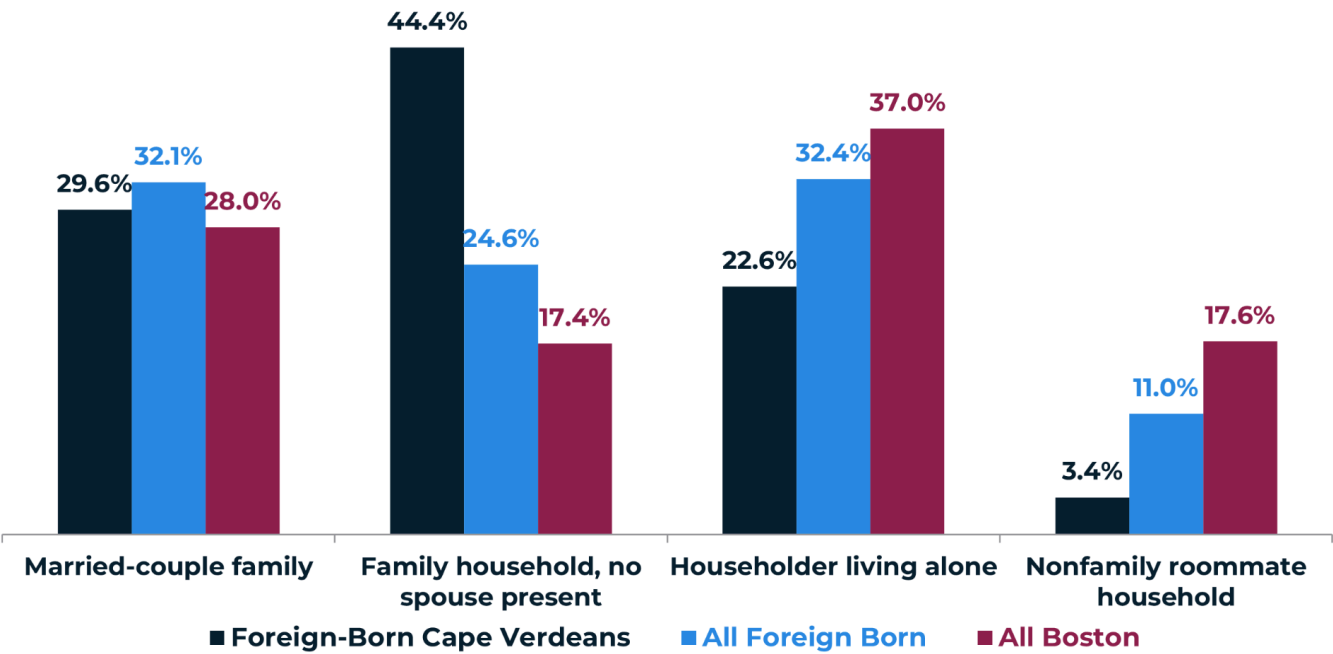


Source: 2024 City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Population Estimates, City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Analysis

Foreign-born Cape Verdeans tend to live in family households, but almost 23 percent of foreign-born Cape Verdean households have one person living alone.

TYPE OF HOUSEHOLD

Share of households



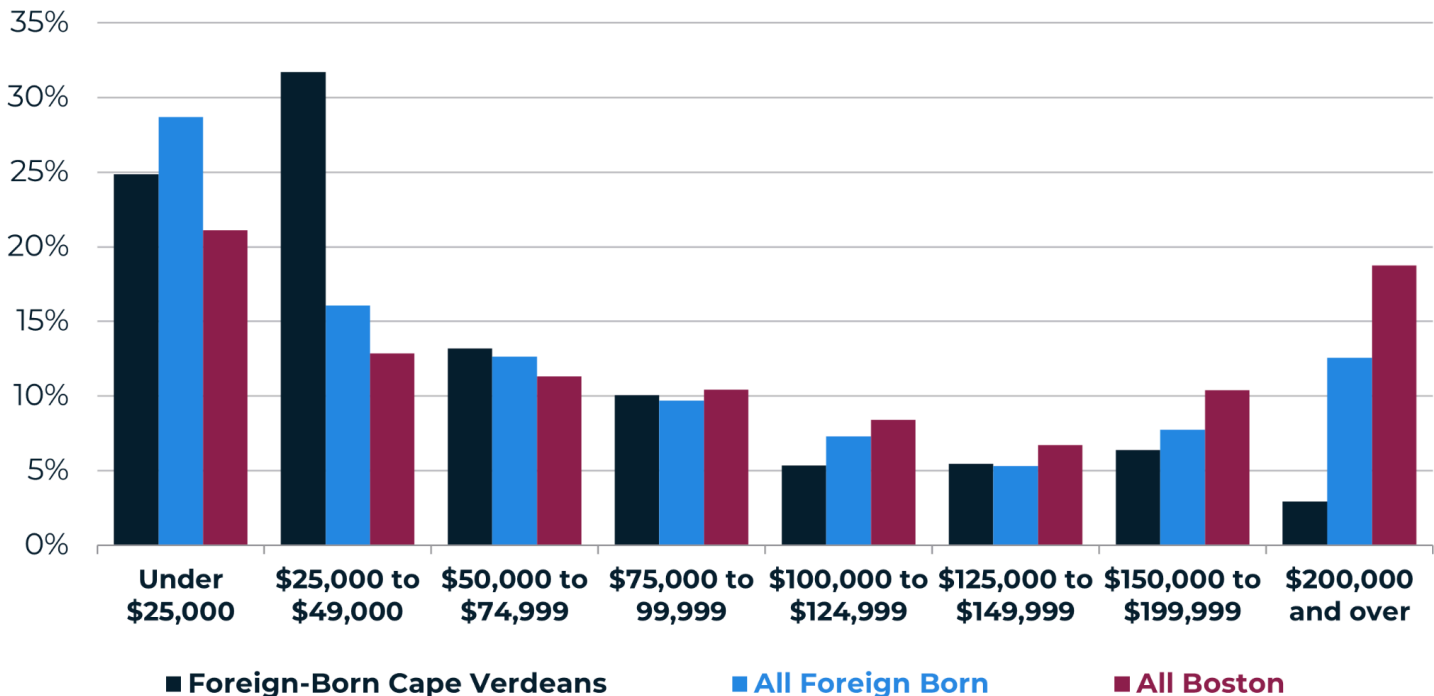
Source: 2024 City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Population Estimates, City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Analysis



More than half of the foreign-born Cape Verdean households make less than \$50,000 a year. The highest proportion foreign-born Cape Verdean households make \$25,000 to \$49,000 (31.7 percent). In comparison, 16.1 percent and 12.9 percent of all foreign-born and Boston households make \$25,000 to \$49,999. Only 20.2 percent of foreign-born Cape Verdeans make more than \$100,000 while 44.2 percent of Boston households make as much.

HOUSEHOLD INCOME DISTRIBUTION

Share of households

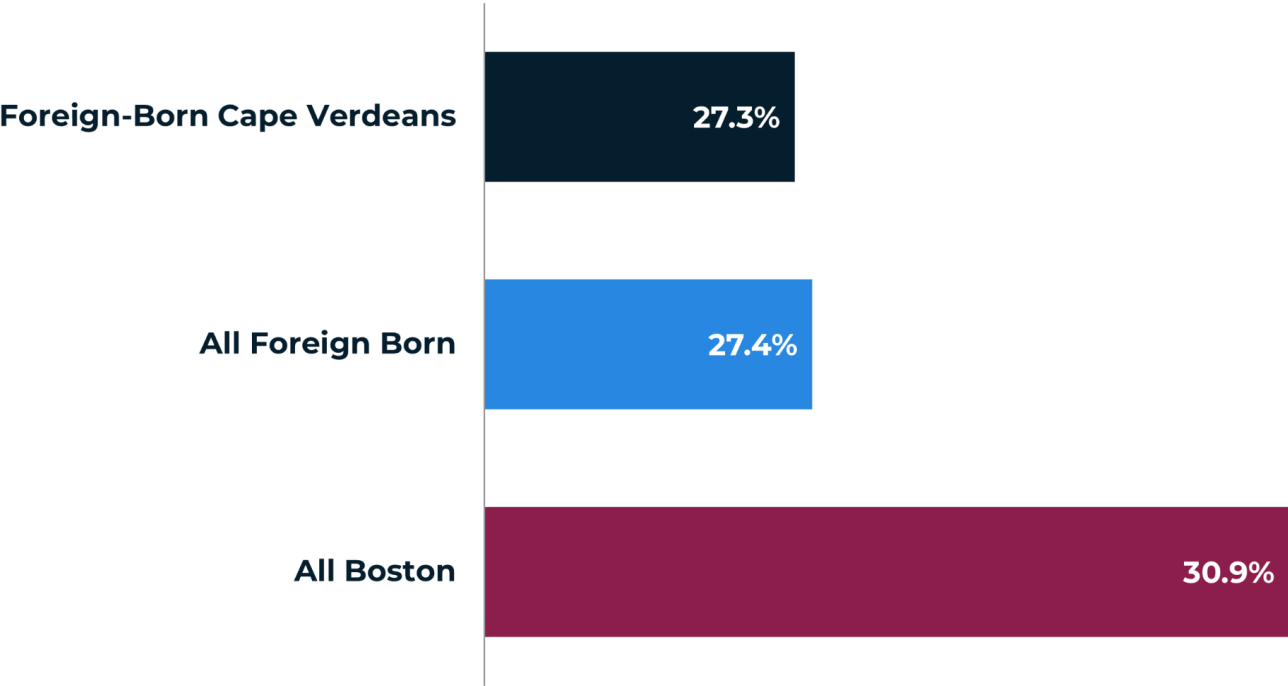


Source: 2024 City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Population Estimates, City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Analysis



Approximately 27 percent of foreign-born Cape Verdean households are owner occupied. Foreign-born Cape Verdean home ownership is generally reflective of the total foreign-born population share of owner-occupied homes.

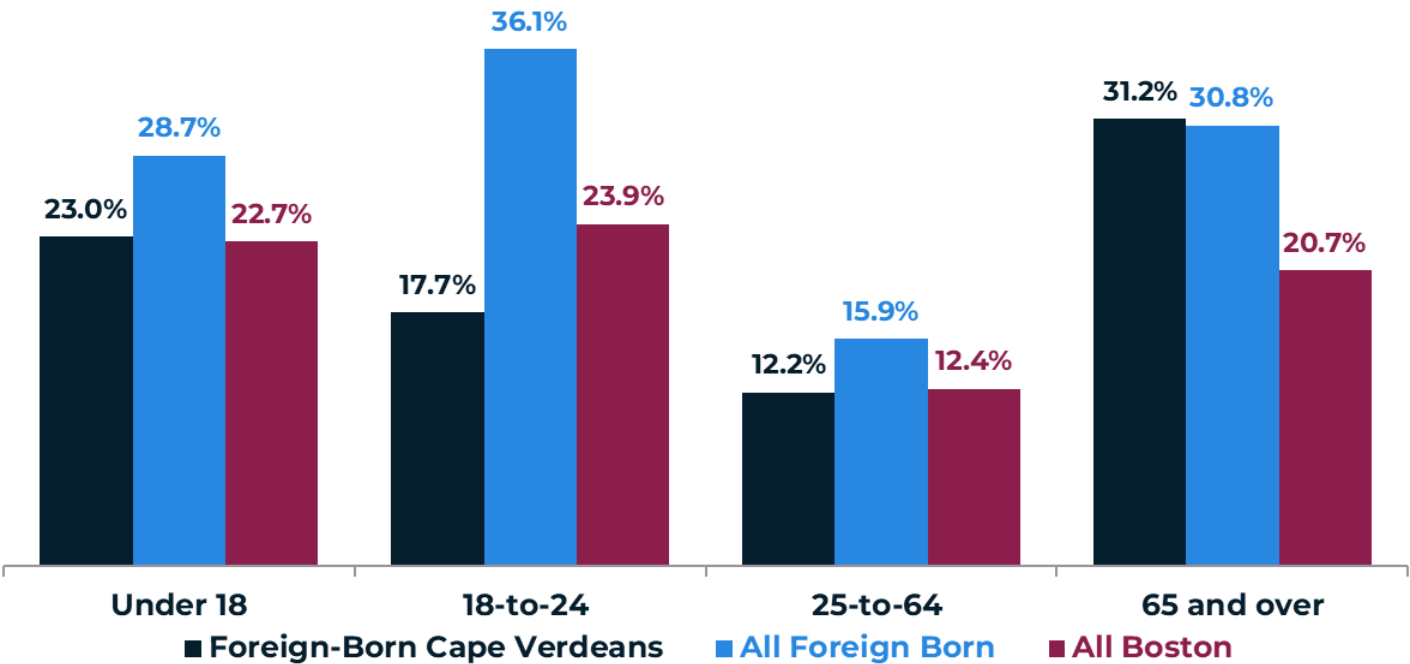
OWNER-OCCUPIED HOUSEHOLDS
Share of householders that own their residence



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

Foreign-born Cape Verdean seniors have a higher poverty rate (31 percent) than other age groups and the overall senior population in Boston.

POVERTY RATES
Share of age group that is living below the poverty line



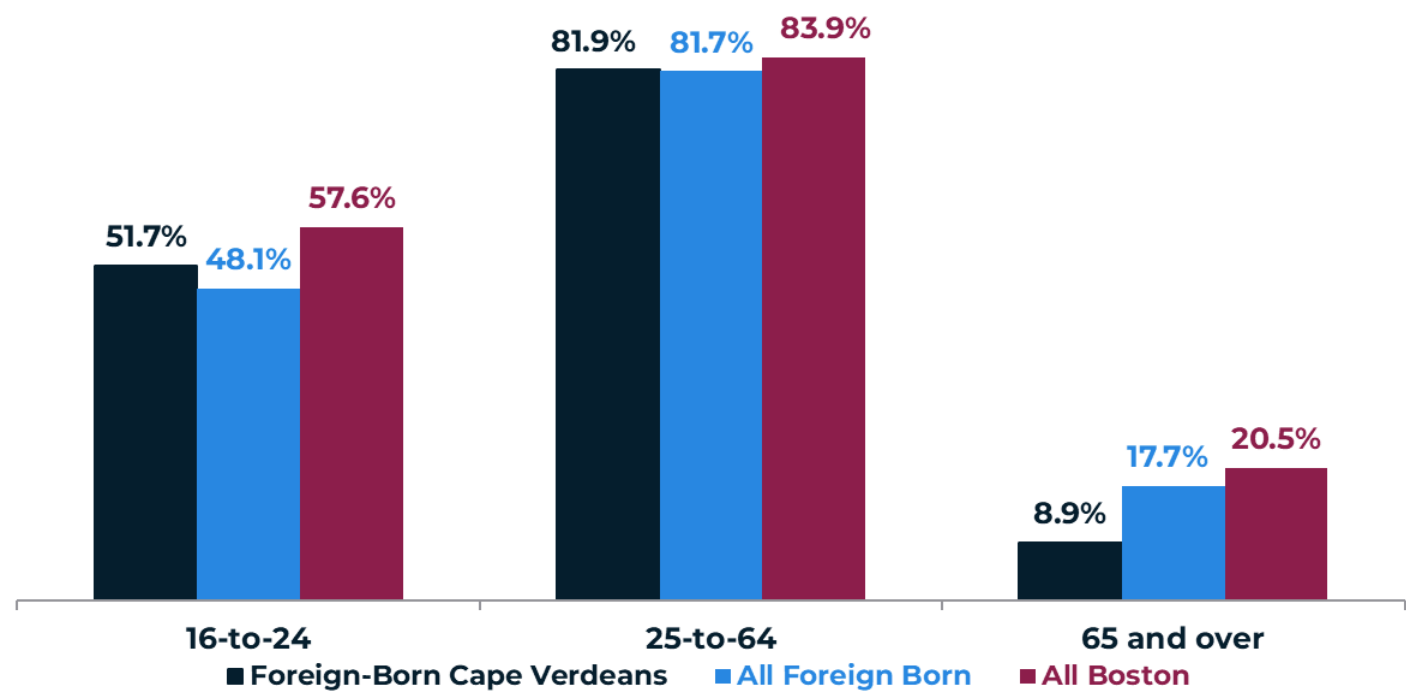
Source: 2024 City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Population Estimates, City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Analysis

EMPLOYMENT

Only 8.9 percent of foreign-born Cape Verdeans over the age of 65 participate in the labor force, which is a much smaller proportion than the total foreign born and total Boston population of that age group. In other age groups, foreign-born Cape Verdean labor force participation is relatively reflective of the total foreign-born population’s participation rates. Overall, labor force participation rate is 62.4 percent, which is slightly lower than overall rates of Boston residents (68.3 percent)

LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION RATES

Share of those participating in the labor force

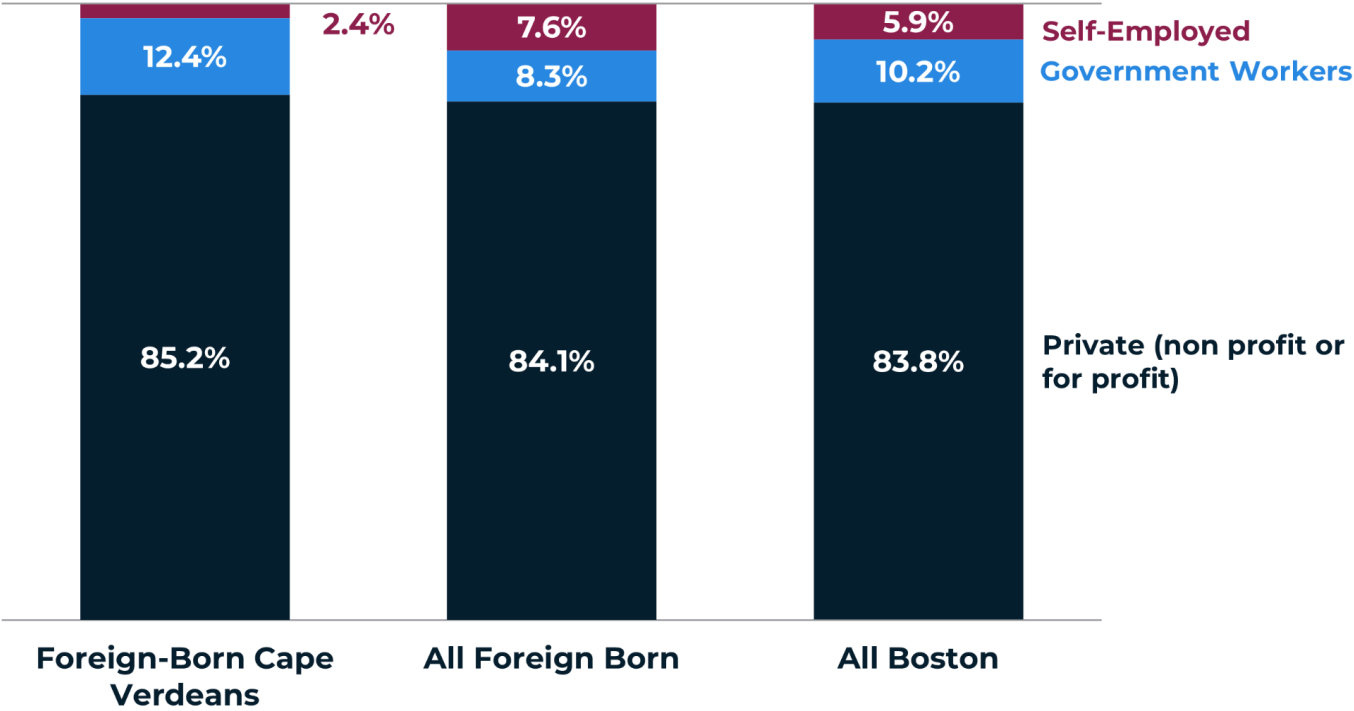


Source: 2024 City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Population Estimates, City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Analysis

The foreign-born Cape Verdean population has a higher share of government workers (12 percent) and a lower share of self-employed workers (2 percent).

CLASS OF WORKERS

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

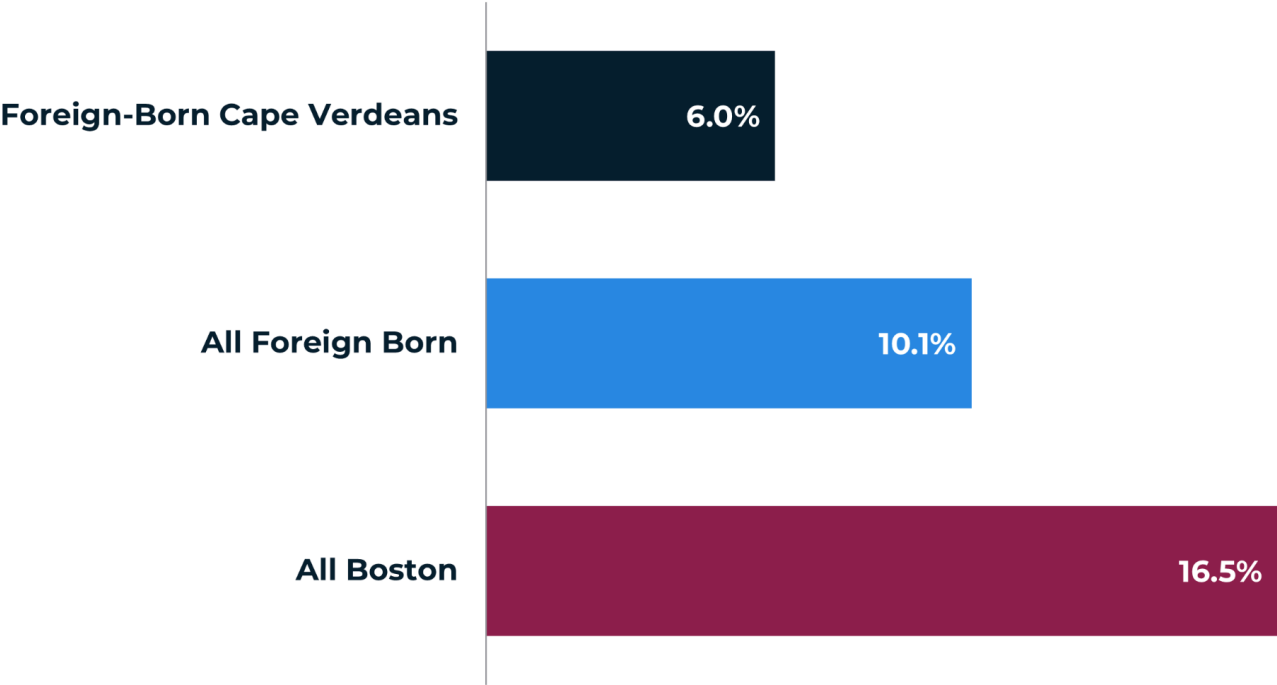


Source: 2024 City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Population Estimates, City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Analysis

Approximately, 7 percent of Cape Verdeans work from home. This is lower than the rates of all foreign born in Boston and lower than all Boston residents. This lower share may be due to their overrepresentation in maintenance occupations, which require in-person work.

WORKED FROM HOME

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

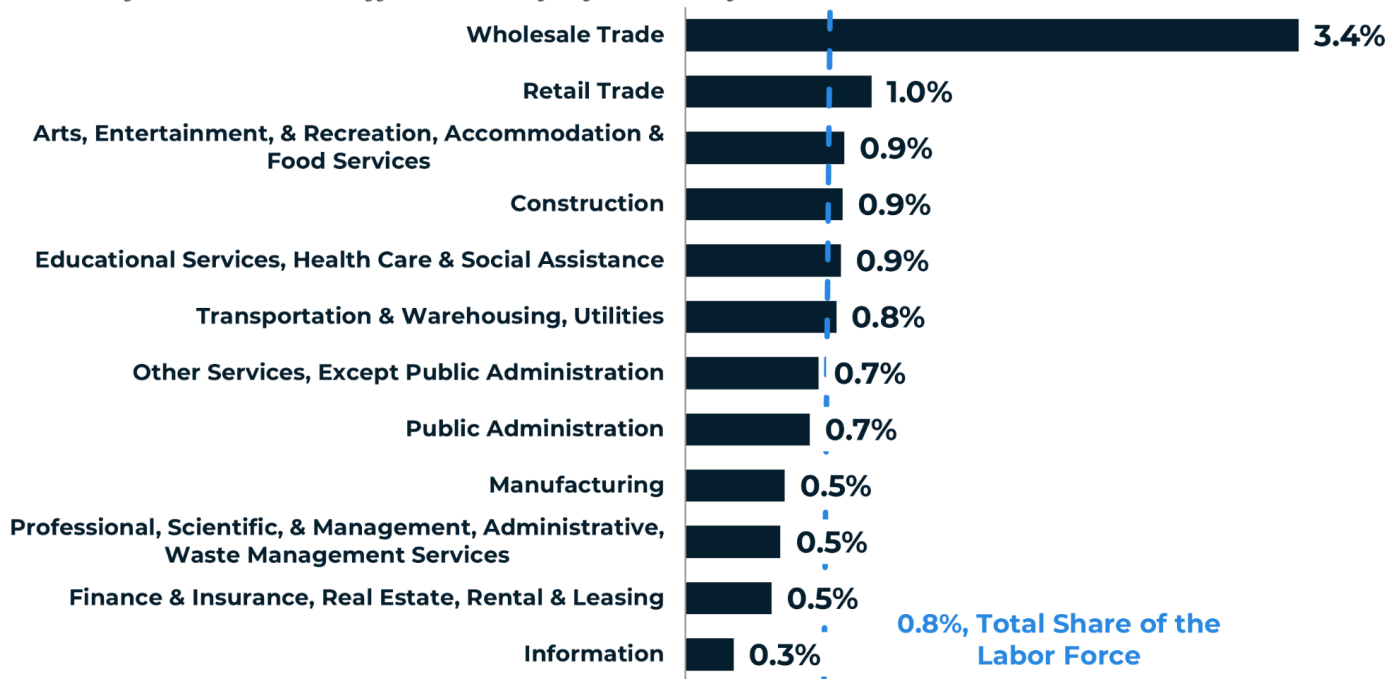


Source: 2024 City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Population Estimates, City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Analysis

There are 4,842 foreign-born Cape Verdean workers working in Suffolk County, making up 2 percent of Suffolk County’s workforce. Cape Verdean foreign-born workers working in Suffolk County make up 5.0 percent of transportation, warehousing, and utilities, 3.3 percent of educational service, health care, and social assistance, 2.8 percent of social trade, and 2.5 percent of agriculture, forestry, fishing, hunting, and mining.. They are underrepresented in certain industries such as manufacturing (0.5 percent), construction (0.4 percent), and information (0.4 percent).

EMPLOYMENT BY INDUSTRY

Share of workers in Suffolk county by industry, 2022



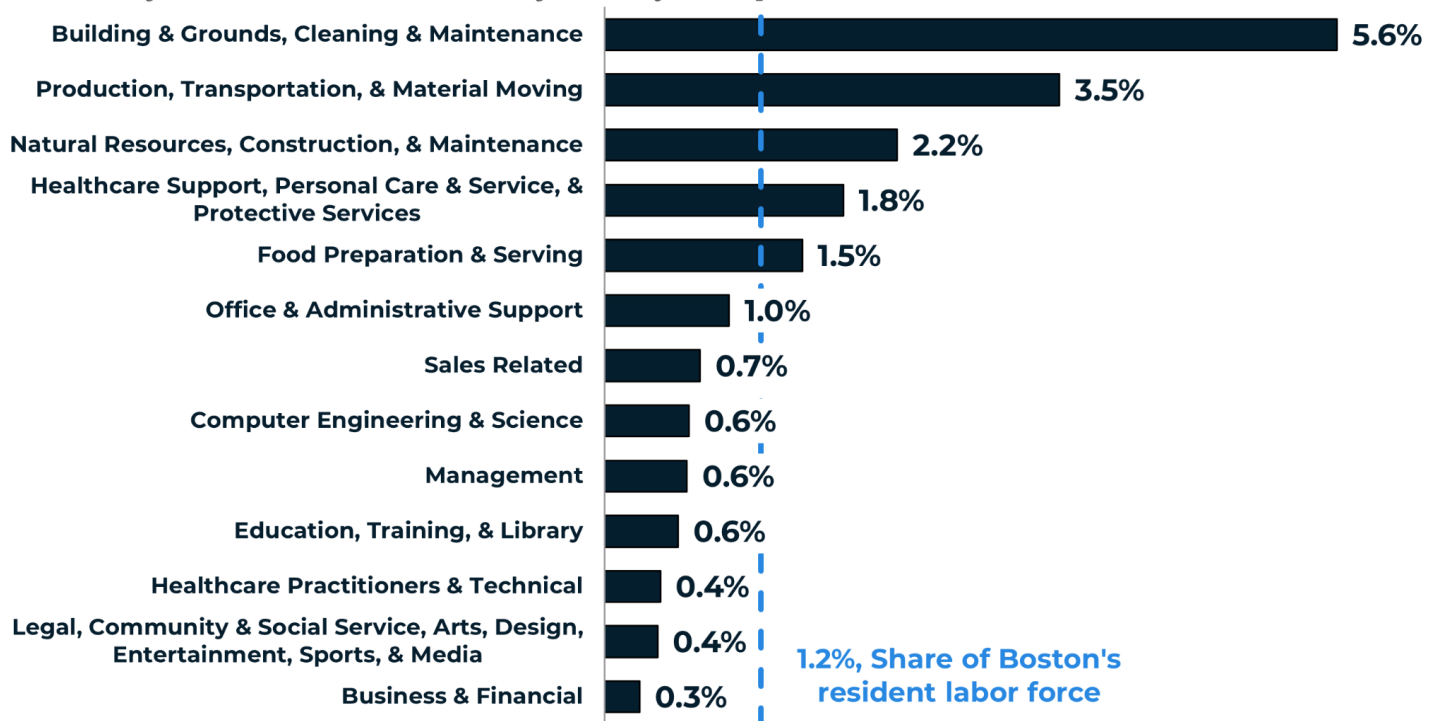
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2018-2022 5-Year American Community Survey (IPUMS), City of Boston Planning Department Research Division Analysis

Foreign-born Cape Verdean workers make up 1.2 percent of Boston’s total resident labor force. They are concentrated primarily in building & grounds, cleaning & maintenance jobs, an industry for which they make up 5.6 percent of the labor force. They are underrepresented in a number of occupations, but most notably business and financial (0.3 percent), legal, community & social service, arts, design, entertainment, sports & media (0.4 percent), and healthcare practitioners and technical (0.4 percent).



FOREIGN-BORN CAPE VERDEAN 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 26.8 percent of foreign-born Cape Verdeans have achieved a middle-class standard of living, compared to 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

Cape Verdean foreign-born workers contribute to Boston's economy. Their labor generates an additional 2,483 indirect and induced jobs in Suffolk County. They contribute 1.1 billion dollars to



Boston’s GCP. Cape Verdean foreign-born workers employed in Suffolk County pay \$18 million in federal income tax and \$12 million in state income tax. ⁶

CONCLUSION

Massachusetts is the leading destination for Cape Verdean migration by a large margin, with Boston having the second-largest Cape Verdean foreign-born population in the state, with 8,825 residents. Their migration is typically based on opportunities for occupation. Around 62 percent of the foreign-born Cape Verdean participate in the labor force and without foreign-born Cape Verdeans, Boston will lose 5.8 percent of building and grounds cleaning and maintenance workers.

RESEARCH DIVISION STAFF

ALVARO LIMA

Director of Research

CHRISTINA KIM

Deputy Director

PHILLIP GRANBERRY

Senior Researcher - Demography

FATIMA AQEEL

Senior Researcher - Economist

JAKE SCHNEIDER

Senior Researcher - Economist

MICHAEL ENDALE

Senior Researcher - Data Scientist

KEVIN KANG

Senior Research Associate

EMILY KOREST

Research Associate

CECILIA TAKACS

Research Coordinator - Data Analyst

SAM KLUGHERZ

Research Assistant

NA YOUNG MOON

Research Assistant

GRACE JULIEN

Research Assistant - Data Analyst

TYLER YANDT

Research Assistant

SAMARA SHANKAR

Intern

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

