

**imagine
all the
people**

Colombians

CITY OF BOSTON
Martin J. Walsh
Mayor

2016

Colombians in Boston

“imagine all the people” is a series of publications produced by the Boston Redevelopment Authority for the Mayor’s Office of Immigrant Advancement. The series provides a comprehensive profile of Boston’s diverse immigrant communities and their numerous contributions to the city’s social, cultural and economic landscape. It is part of an ongoing effort to celebrate immigrants and gain insight into how they shape our city.

Photos: Fernandito Bossa

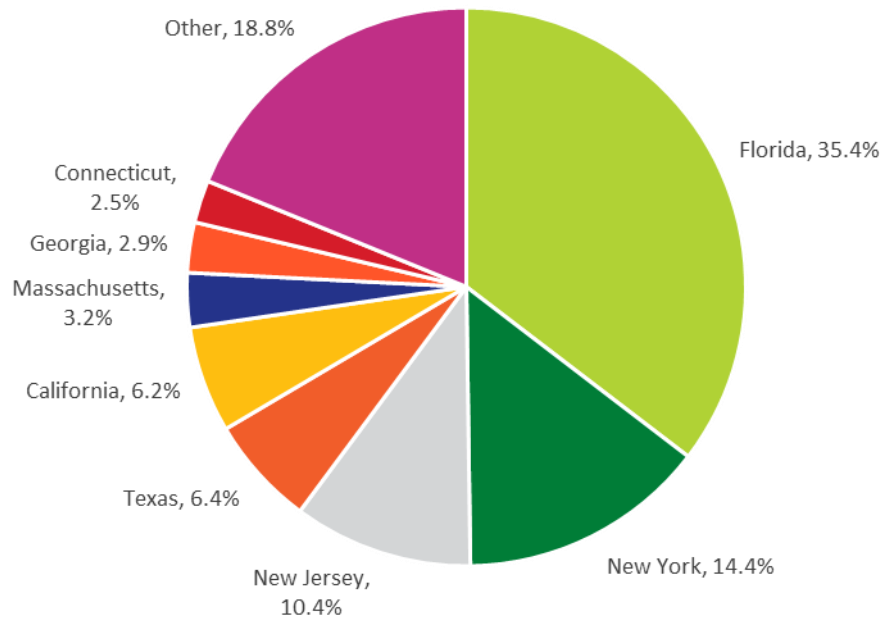


Introduction

Significant emigration from Colombia began in the 1960s because of economic problems, but later increased due to violence and political instability. Between 1996 and 2003, 1.6 million Colombians left their country and did not return. Nearly half migrated between 1999 and 2001, which corresponded with a significant drop in Colombia’s gross domestic product and a surge in its unemployment rate.¹ Colombian migration to the United States has slowed since the Recession of 2008-2009 in part due to changes in the U.S. economy but also in response to the Colombian government’s attempts to keep migrants connected to the country and facilitate return migration.²

Venezuela, the United States, and Spain are the leading destinations of Colombian migration.³ Massachusetts has the sixth largest share of foreign-born Colombians living in the United States (3 percent). States with the largest concentrations of Colombians include Florida (35 percent), New York (14 percent), New Jersey (10 percent), Texas (6 percent), and California (6 percent).⁴

Share of Foreign-Born Colombian Population by State



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2014 American Community Survey, PUMS, BRA Research Division

Of the 21,968⁵ foreign-born Colombians residing in Massachusetts in 2014, approximately 4,851⁶ reside in Boston. This makes Colombia the 8th largest country of origin among Boston’s foreign-born population. Overall, foreign-born Colombians in Boston constitute 2.8 percent of the city’s total foreign-born residents.

Boston’s foreign-born Colombians mostly live in the neighborhood of East Boston (75 percent). Smaller shares of the population live in Dorchester (3 percent), Jamaica Plain (3 percent) and the South End (2 percent).⁷

Demographics and Education

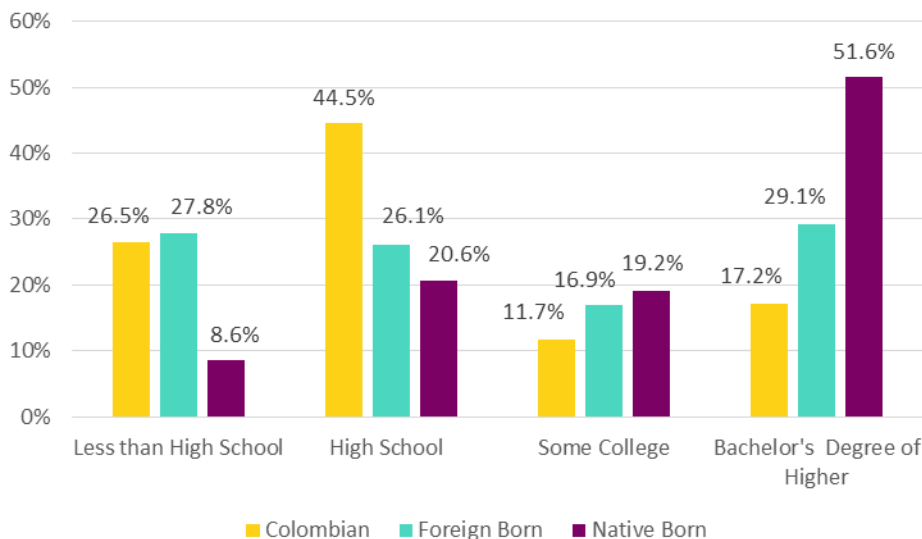
The U.S. Census Bureau's ACS Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) allows for the detailed socio-economic analysis of specific populations. For smaller populations like foreign-born Colombians in Boston, a 5-year sample is required to limit variation due to sampling error. The analysis that follows uses 2009-2013 ACS PUMS data.

Unlike many other foreign-born populations in Boston, Colombians have more males, and 54 percent of foreign-born Colombians are male compared to 48 percent of all foreign born. Approximately 36 percent of foreign-born Colombians are married and 23 percent are widowed, separated, or divorced. Slightly less than 55 percent of all foreign-born Colombians are between the ages of 35 and 64, and the median age of the population is 39 years. A greater share of foreign-born Colombians in Boston arrived in the United States after 2000 (47 percent) compared to all foreign born (43 percent). The majority of foreign-born Colombians (74 percent) are not naturalized U.S. citizens.

Similar to other foreign-born populations in Boston, 27 percent of foreign-born Colombians age 25 or older lack a high school education and 45 percent have a completed high school as their highest educational attainment. Approximately 29 percent of foreign-born Colombians have attended college, with slightly more than 17 percent having completed at least a bachelor's degree, compared with 29 percent of the entire foreign-born population and 52 percent of the native-born. Only 8 percent of Colombians living in Boston hold a graduate or professional degree, compared with 14 percent of all foreign-born and 22 percent of the native-born.

Educational Attainment for the Population

25 Years and Older

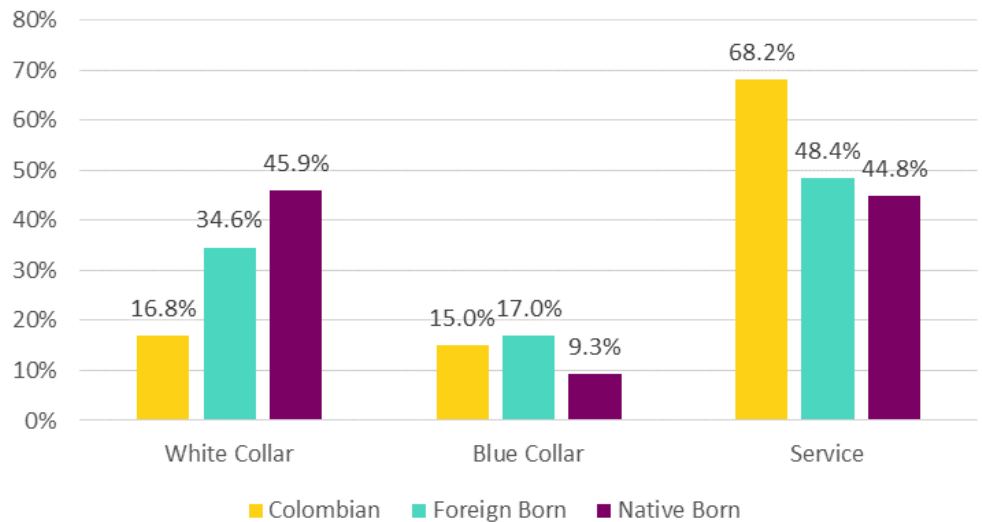


*75% of
Colombians in
Boston live in East
Boston.*

Labor Force Participation

The labor force participation rate⁸ of Colombians is 81 percent compared to 68 percent for all foreign born and 69 percent for the native-born population. A disproportionate share of foreign-born Colombians living in Boston are employed in service-related occupations.⁹ Over two-thirds work in service occupations, compared to 48 percent of all foreign born. Of all foreign-born Colombians who work in this broad services category, 34 percent work in food preparation and serving occupations and 12 percent work in building and grounds cleaning and maintenance occupations. Colombians are underrepresented in white-collar occupations compared to both the native born and all foreign born. A greater share of foreign-born Colombians work in blue-collar occupations compared to the native born, but a smaller share do when compared to all foreign born.

Occupations by Nativity



U.S. Census Bureau, 2009-2013 American Community Survey, PUMS, BRA Research Division Analysis

Type of Employment

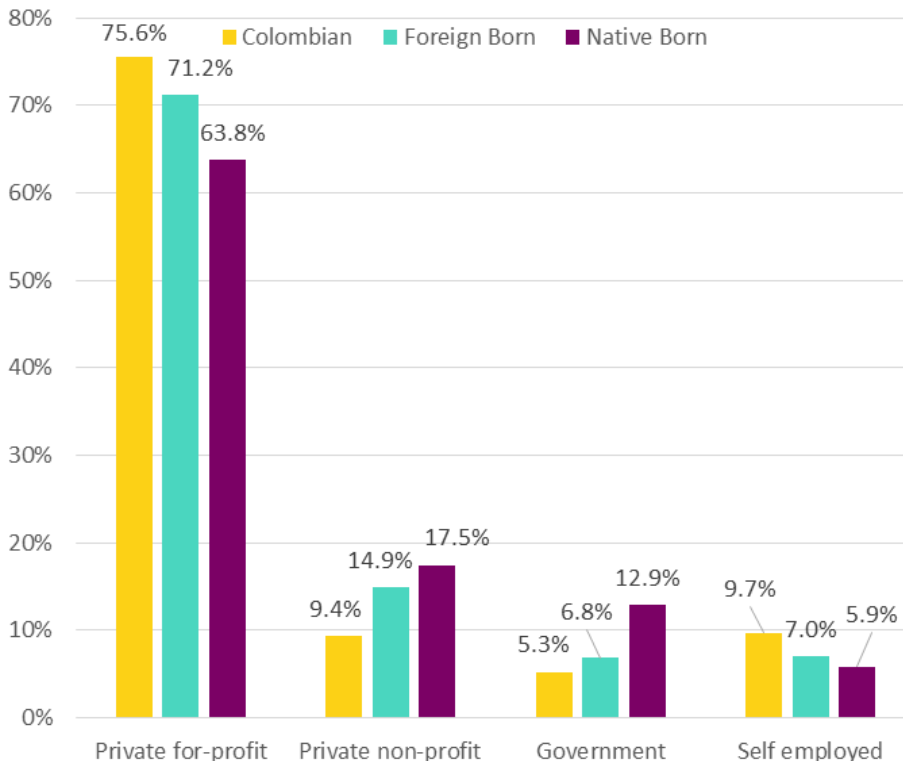
The majority (76 percent) of foreign-born Colombian workers (excluding unpaid family members) work for private for-profit companies, a higher share than other foreign-born populations.

Only 9 percent of foreign-born Colombians work for a private not-for-profit organization, and only 5 percent work in the public sector. These shares are lower than for the native-born and other foreign-born populations.

Almost 10 percent of foreign-born Colombians are self-employed. This share is higher than for other foreign-born populations and for the native born.

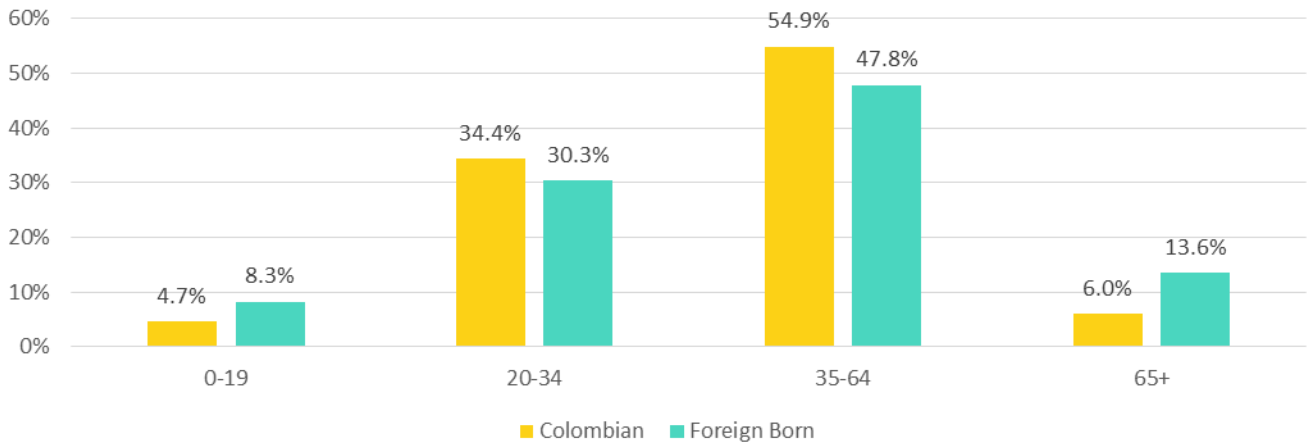
76% of Colombians work for private for-profit companies, mostly in service occupations.

Employment by Type of Employer

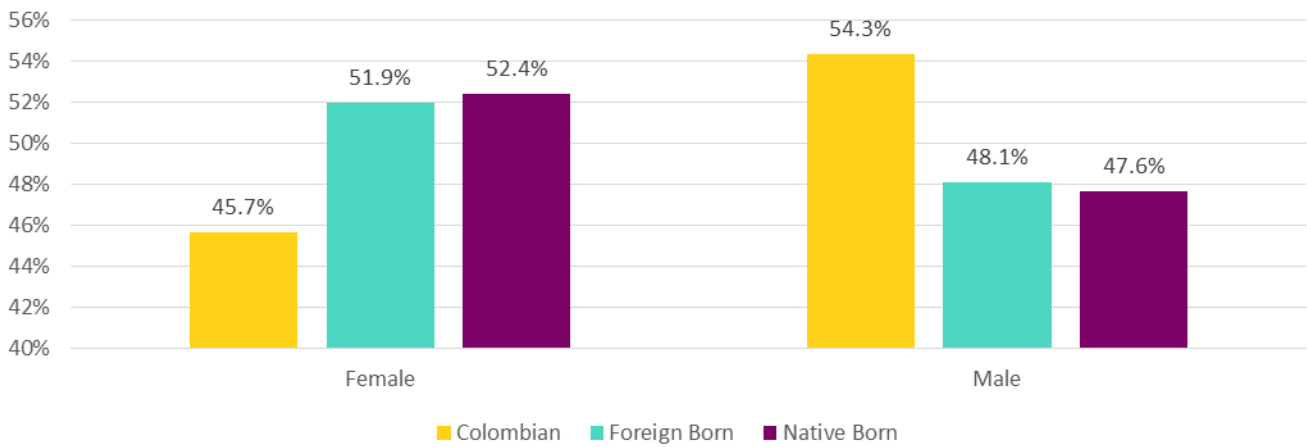


Imagine all the people:

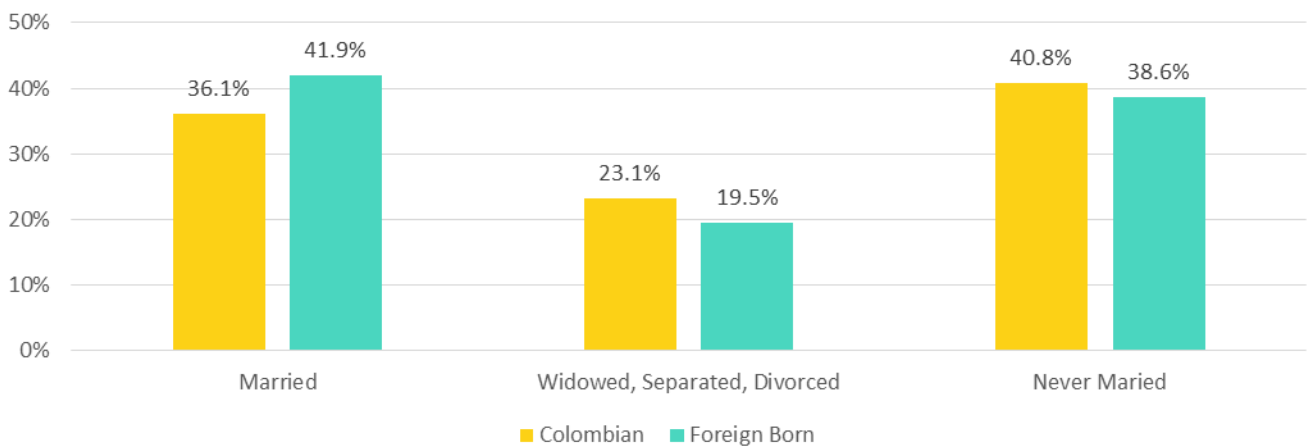
Age



Gender

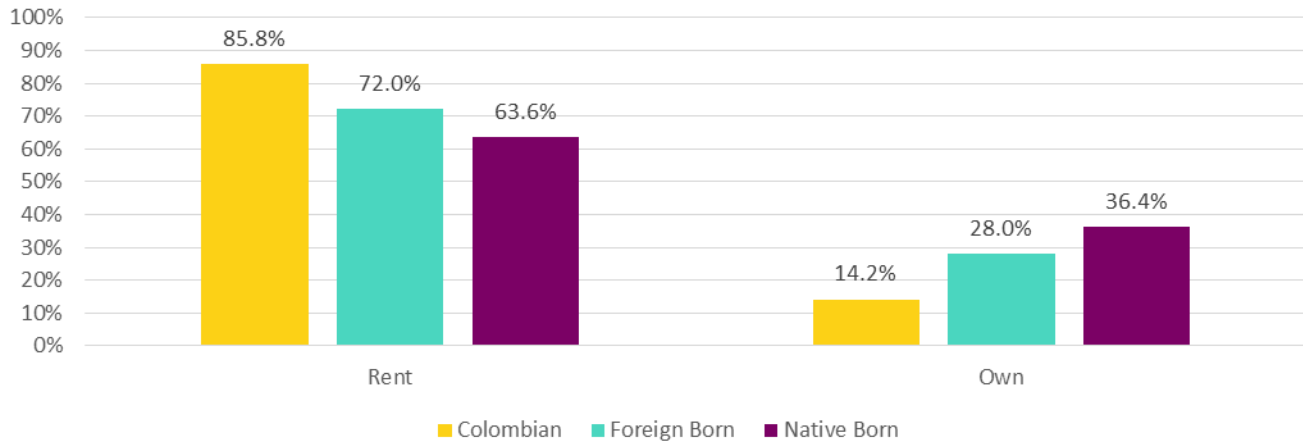


Marital Status

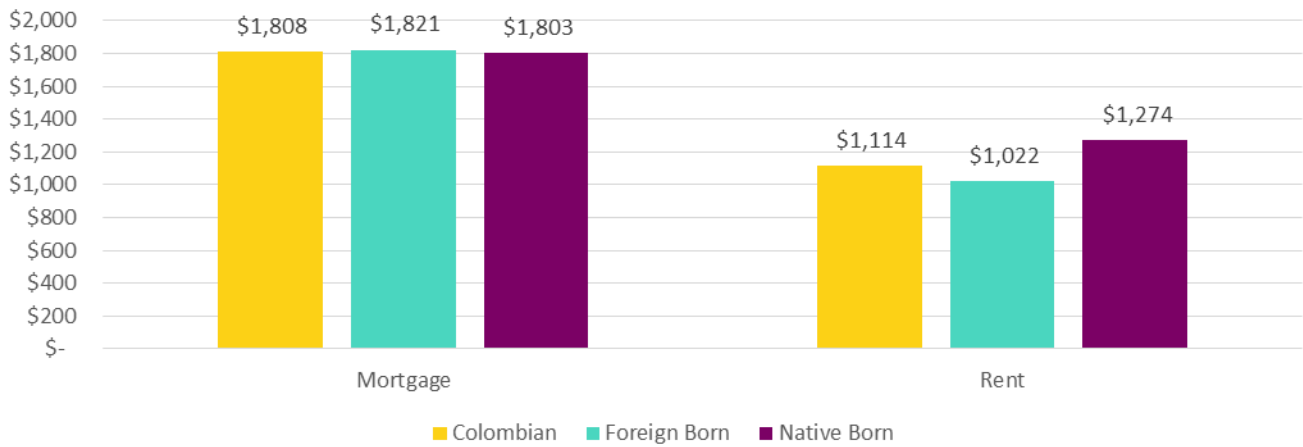


Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2009-2013 American Community Survey, PUMS, BRA Research Division Analysis

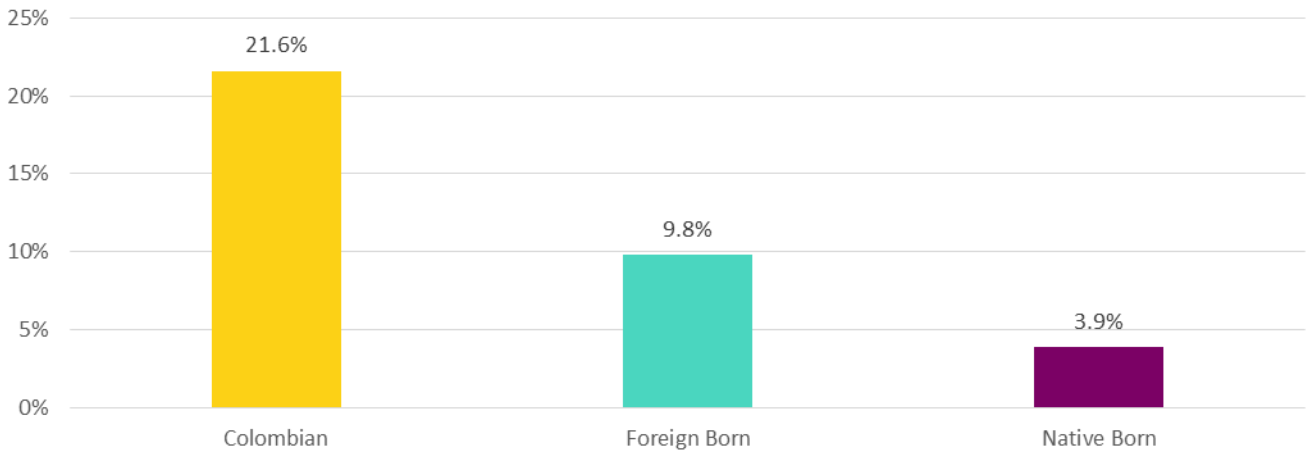
Housing Tenure*



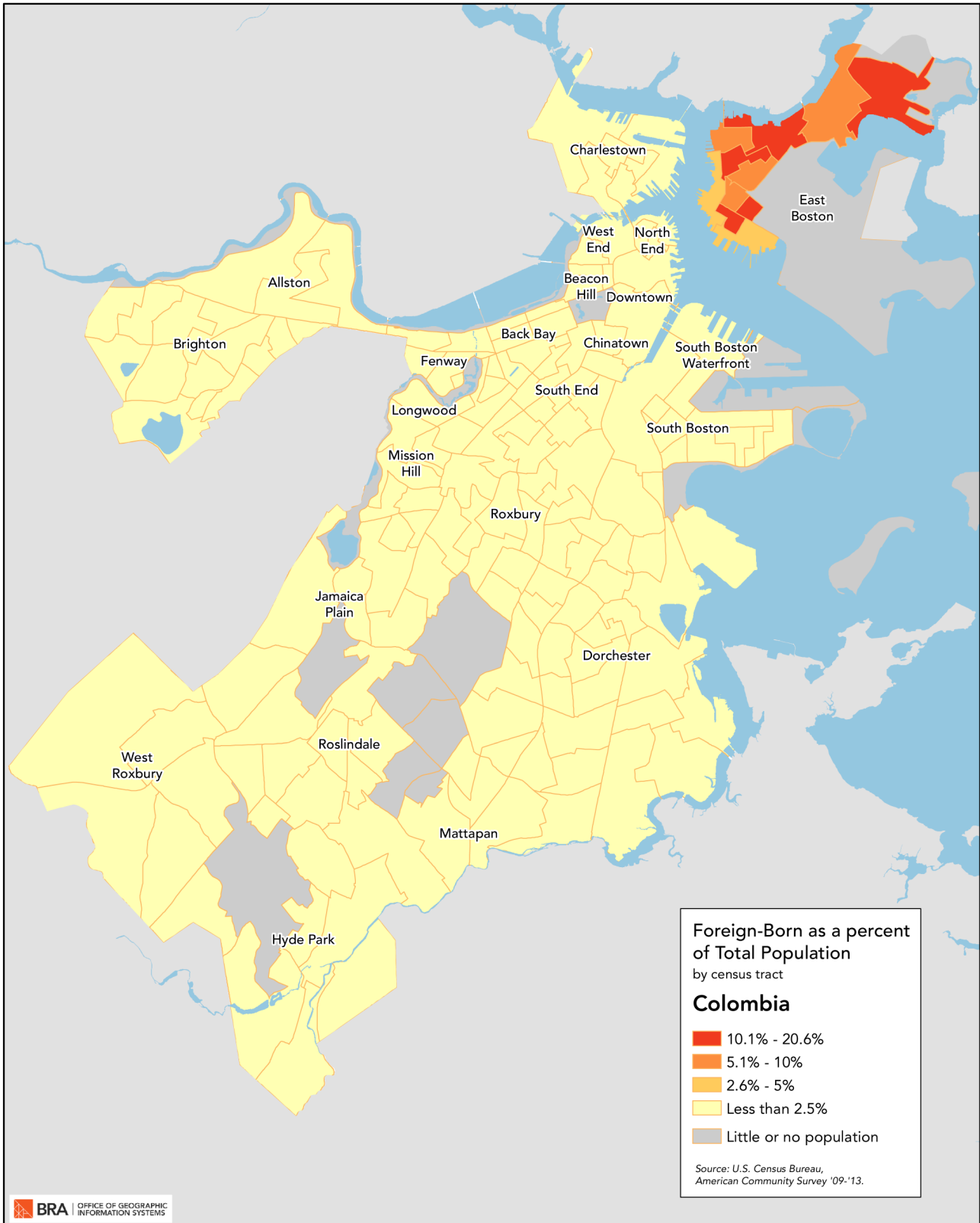
Housing Costs*



Medical Uninsurance



*Housing data are based on the householder's nativity.



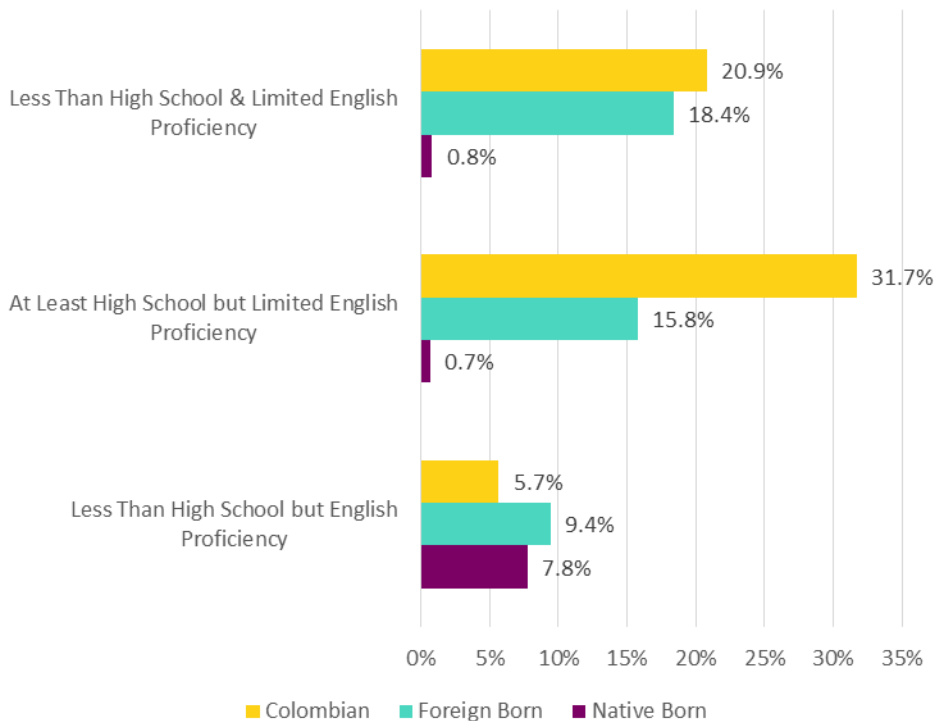
Standard of Living

Approximately 23 percent of foreign-born Colombians have achieved a middle class standard of living, compared with 45 percent of Boston's native-born population, and 29 percent of all foreign born. A family income four times the poverty level 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 2014, a middle class income would be at least \$62,920. In contrast, only slightly less than 13 percent of foreign-born Colombians live below the federal poverty level compared to 20 percent for the city's population.

Low educational attainment and lack of English proficiency appear to be hindering foreign-born Colombians' standard of living.¹⁰ Over half of foreign-born adult Colombians lack a high school diploma or English proficiency. Nearly 21 percent of Boston's adult foreign-born Colombian population lack a high school diploma and have limited English proficiency compared to 18 percent for all foreign born.

Over half of adult (age 25+) Colombians lack a high school diploma or English proficiency.

Educational Attainment and English Proficiency Population 25 Years or Older



Economic Impact

Foreign-born Colombians contribute to the local economy through their labor and consumer spending. The total value of their economic contributions was estimated using a Regional Economic Model (REMI) that calculated the value of goods and services consumed on each dollar spent. Foreign-born Colombians in Boston generated total expenditures of nearly \$110 million in 2014.¹¹ These annual expenditures contributed slightly less than \$66 million to the regional product and generated \$3.6 million in state and local taxes.¹² In total, these expenditures supported 475 jobs in the Massachusetts economy.¹³



Colombian restaurant in East Boston—Arley M.

Conclusion

Foreign-born Colombians have developed a strong presence in East Boston. There they actively contribute to the economic, cultural, and civic life of the neighborhood. Even though foreign-born Colombians have lower levels of educational attainment, they have high labor force participation. With their concentration of employment in the service sector, they serve a vital role in the Boston labor market. Even though these service sector jobs may not pay high wages, their high labor force participation helps Colombians have a smaller population share living below the federal poverty level than the population as a whole.

¹From the *Global Migrant Origin Database at the Development Research Center on Migration, Globalisation and Poverty*: http://www.migrationdrc.org/research/typesofmigration/global_migrant_origin_database.html

²Bérubé, M., Colombia: In the Crossfire. Migration Policy Institute (MPI) (2005).

³UNICEF Migration Profiles, 2013.

⁴Bérubé, M., Colombian Diaspora in the United States. MPI (2005).

⁵American Factfinder website Table B05006 reports 21,588 Colombians in Massachusetts with a margin of error of +/- 3,305 in 2014. The 21,968 estimate reported for this analysis was tabulated from 2014 U.S. Census Bureau Public Use Microdata Sample data. Both estimates contain a margin of error due to sampling methodology. Lower survey response rates due to language or documentation issues may result in an undercount of the population.

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For more information on American Fact Finder please see http://factfinder.census.gov/home/saff/main.html?_lang=en.

⁶American Factfinder website Table B05006 reports 4,864 Colombians in Boston with a margin of error of +/- 1,451 in 2014. The 2014 U.S. Census Bureau Public Use Microdata Sample data estimates 4,851 foreign-born Colombians for Boston.

⁷U.S. Census Bureau, 2009-2013 American Community Survey, American Factfinder, BRA Research Analysis (2016).

⁸Defined as the share of the working-age population that is either currently employed or seeking work. U.S. Department of Labor, BLS. (2016).

⁹For a smaller population like foreign-born Colombians in Boston, occupations fall into three broad categories. White collar includes managerial & professional, health care, education, and arts, design entertainment, sports & media occupations. Service includes service, sales, office & administrative support, community & social service occupations. Blue collar includes construction, farming, fishing, and forestry, and production occupations. Military specific occupations and long-term unemployed are excluded from the analysis.

¹⁰The Limited English Proficient includes immigrant adults who do not speak English at all or who do not speak it well.

¹¹BRA Research Division Analysis, 2014, Regional Economic Model, Inc., REMI calculations.

¹²BRA Research Division Analysis, 2014, Regional Economic Model, Inc., REMI calculations.

¹³BRA Research Division Analysis, 2014, Regional Economic Model, Inc., REMI calculations.

End Notes



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FOR IMMIGRANT
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