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New England's Foreign-Born Population Today



From at least the 1600s, immigrants have been drawn to New England. Groups arriving today are similar to past immigrants in that most come seeking economic and educational opportunities, and they cluster in a few cities and counties. Parts of the region would be losing population and economic vitality if not for increases in this population. That is why New England policymakers are increasingly welcoming immigrants.

To understand more about the region's foreign-born residents and how the current scenario compares both to past regional trends and to current national trends, let's start by looking at the changes. (See "Foreign-Born Population: Average Annual Percentage Change.")

In the 1990s, growth of New England's foreign-born population was 2.8 percent per year, a rate that was significantly lower than the 4.6 percent nationwide average. Between 2000 and 2005, the average rate of growth continued at 2.8 percent regionally while the nation's came down to the same level. In 2005, there were 1.6 million foreign-born in New England (out of just under 13.8 million), representing 11.5 percent of the total population, lower than the national average (12.4 percent).

Historical Perspective

Foreign-born residents have always played a significant role in New England. Among the nine U.S. Census divisions from 1900 to 1950, New England had the highest percentage of foreign-born, with the percent peaking in 1920, before restrictive federal immigration policies were put in place. The nadir was in 1970, before the removal of some restrictions. New England's foreign-born population level has slowly moved back toward its 1920s peak but is a significantly lower portion of the region's total population (just over one-ninth as opposed to one-quarter in the 1920s).

However, New England no longer is a leader in attracting immigrants. In 2005, it ranked fourth among the nine census divisions in percentage of total population that is foreign born. (See "Foreign-Born Population in New England, 2005.")

Variations in New England

Within the region there are significant differences in the foreign-born population, with the southern New England states (Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Connecticut) having significantly higher numbers and concentrations than the region's northern states or the nation as a whole.

Foreign-Born Population: Average Annual Percentage Change



Foreign-Born Population in New England, 2005

Rank	State	Foreign-Born Population (percent)	Foreign-Born Population	Total Population
9	Massachusetts	14.4	891,184	6,182,860
11	Rhode Island	12.6	130,517	1,032,662
12	Connecticut	12.5	423,254	3,394,751
26	New Hampshire	5.7	72,480	1,272,486
37	Vermont	3.6	21,843	602,290
41	Maine	3.0	38,727	1,283,673
	New England	11.5	1,578,005	13,768,722
	United States	12.4	35,622,125	287,863,019

Children with a Parent of Foreign Origin in New England

Rank	State	Percent of Children with a Foreign-Born Parent
10	Rhode Island	25
12	Massachusetts	22
16	Connecticut	18
29	New Hampshire	9
39	Maine	5
39	Vermont	5
	New England	18
	United States	21

Top 10 New England Counties of Foreign-Born Population, 2005

Rank	County	Foreign-Born Population (percent)	Foreign-Born Population	Total Population
1	Suffolk (MA)	28.0	173,454	620,053
2	Fairfield (CT)	18.7	165,476	884,050
3	Middlesex (MA)	18.5	260,424	1,405,511
4	Providence (RI)	17.3	105,858	610,539
5	Norfolk (MA)	14.7	93,894	636,632
6	Essex (MA)	13.4	96,709	721,625
7	Hartford (CT)	12.8	108,853	850,068
8	Bristol (MA)	12.7	67,769	533,310
9	New Haven (CT)	11.3	92,150	817,828
10	Worcester (MA)	10.3	78,280	759,409

Growth in Foreign-Born Population of New England Counties, 2000 to 2005

Rank	County	Foreign-Born Population		
		2000	2005	Percent Change
1	Barnstable (MA)	10,982	17,716	61.3
2	Hillsborough (NH)	25,793	38,225	48.2
3	Plymouth (MA)	29,592	41,762	41.1
4	Litchfield (CT)	9,898	13,809	39.5
5	New London (CT)	14,002	19,352	38.2
6	Rockingham (NH)	10,390	13,938	34.1
7	Worcester (MA)	59,063	78,280	32.5
8	Merrimack (NH)	4,351	5,747	32.1
9	Franklin (MA)	2,610	3,339	27.9
10	Hampden (MA)	33,033	41,817	26.6

Top Origins of U.S. Foreign-Born Population, 2005

Country	Foreign-Born Population	Percent of Foreign-Born Population
Mexico	10,969,941	30.7
Philippines	1,593,421	4.5
India	1,422,492	4.0
China	1,415,177	4.0
Vietnam	1,066,085	3.0

There are also differences in the percentage of children with a parent of foreign-born origin. In Rhode Island, 25 percent of children have at least one foreign-born parent—a percentage higher than the national average. The three northern states have percentages well below the national average. (See “Children with a Parent of Foreign Origin in New England.”)

As is the case nationwide, New England’s foreign-born are highly concentrated geographically. Five of the region’s 67 counties are home to more than half of its foreign-born.¹ (See “Top 10 New England Counties of Foreign-Born Population, 2005.”) Suffolk County, Massachusetts, has the highest percentage. Without large and growing foreign-born populations, several counties would have declining populations.

The presence of immigrants is expanding in the region. (See “Growth in Foreign-Born Population of New England Counties, 2000 to 2005.”) Several New England counties that once had few foreign-born residents are now experiencing significant growth, including Barnstable and Plymouth in Massachusetts and Hillsborough in New Hampshire. New immigrants are diversifying formerly homogenous populations, and the increased cultural and social diversity has begun to lure workers from the creative economy and the knowledge industry.

Different Origins and Cultures

The foreign-born population in New England differs in character and countries of origin from that of the average foreign-born population nationwide. In New England, no single country accounted for more than 7 percent of the total foreign-born population. That percentage contrasts with the 30 percent figure for Mexico as the top country of origin nationwide. (See “Top Origins of U.S. Foreign-Born Population, 2005.”)

In New England, Brazilians make up the largest foreign-born group, and China and India are in the top five countries of origin. For the northern New England states, the largest country of origin is Canada. Vermont and New Hampshire also are seeing increasing numbers of people from India. (See “Top Origins of New England’s Foreign-Born Population, 2005.”)

In one point of difference from the rest of the nation, New England’s foreign-born are generally more educated. The higher percentage of foreign-born population 25 years and older with a bachelor’s degree probably relates to the region’s postsecondary-education infrastructure and its knowledge-based

industries. (See “Education Level of Native-Born and Foreign-Born, 2005.”) In New Hampshire and Vermont, more foreign-born individuals 25 and older have a bachelor’s degree—a higher percentage than for the native born—and are therefore a source of skilled workers and entrepreneurs.

Given their education levels, it is perhaps not surprising that New England’s immigrants also have a median income greater than the national average for the foreign-born. As a result, successful New England immigrants are contributing more to the local economy. (See “Median Income of Native-Born and Foreign-Born Populations, 2005.”)

The New England region’s long tradition of attracting foreign-born populations continues, but with a new character and some new implications.

For example, northern New England states are benefiting from increased exposure to other cultures as they begin to engage more with the global economy. Southern New England, meanwhile, would have had more than 1 percent lower growth in population if not for the foreign-born. In fact, many areas of New England would be losing population and economic vitality if not for growth in the foreign-born population.

That is why the region’s policymakers are increasingly welcoming the foreign-born. New England is well-positioned to reap benefits of immigration.

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Endnote

¹ The American Community Survey provides data only for areas with a population of more than 65,000. Thirty-seven of the 67 New England counties have 2005 data. The counties for which the data were unavailable were grouped together by state, and the computed figures (state figures minus counties in the state with data) were presented.

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Top Origins of New England’s Foreign-Born Population, 2005

Country	Foreign-Born Population	Percent of Foreign-Born Population
Brazil	104,354	6.6
Portugal	93,801	5.9
Canada	87,059	5.5
China	84,658	5.4
India	68,454	4.3

Education Level of Native-Born and Foreign-Born, 2005

Rank among 50 states of people age 25 and older with a bachelor’s degree

Rank	State	Percent of Foreign-Born Population	Percent of Native-Born Population
1	New Hampshire	24.1	19.8
5	Vermont	20.7	20.1
19	Maine	16.5	17.0
25	Connecticut	15.9	20.9
26	Massachusetts	15.7	22.5
41	Rhode Island	13.7	18.7
	New England	16.1	20.8
	United States	15.8	17.5

Median Income of Native-Born and Foreign-Born Populations, 2005

Rank	State	Foreign-Born Population Income	Native-Born Population Income
2	New Hampshire	\$27,436	\$28,446
4	Connecticut	27,078	32,377
6	Vermont	26,015	24,507
8	Massachusetts	25,167	30,837
25	Rhode Island	20,881	28,332
37	Maine	18,991	22,684
	New England	25,208	28,875
	United States	\$21,255	\$24,933