



Maine's Immigrant Communities

Diverse Origins, Characteristics, and Challenges

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October 2025

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Executive Summary

Maine's immigrant population, though relatively small at about 53,000 people in 2023, has distinctive characteristics compared to those in other states and the nation at large. Canadians were among the earliest immigrants to Maine, and today one in five immigrants in the state was born in Canada. Thanks to a shared border, easier entry requirements for Canadians compared to other nationalities, and special treaties that allow Indigenous people to cross the border more freely, Canadian immigrants and visitors have a notable presence in the state and impact on its economy. But Maine's immigrant population has also grown and diversified over time, including the recent arrival of immigrants from various countries in Africa and, in smaller proportions, from new sending countries in Asia and Latin America.

The challenges associated with migrant arrivals without strong U.S. ties—a focus of national media attention in recent years—might be predicted to be greater in a state such as Maine, where long-standing housing, transportation, and other infrastructure

challenges exist. However, a closer look indicates that only a sliver of Maine's immigrants have strong service needs, and that a tapestry of immigrant-serving organizations has tailored the work they do as needs, like arrivals, have become more diverse. Rather, Maine's immigrant communities represent a valuable resource for a state facing demographic challenges: providing essential labor and skills at a time when the U.S.-born workforce is shrinking, and cultural richness and support for newer arrivals' ability to integrate and succeed.

Maine's immigrant communities represent a valuable resource for a state facing demographic challenges.

This report draws primarily from Migration Policy Institute (MPI) analysis of U.S. Census Bureau data from the 2019–23 American Community Surveys, the most recent available, to examine the demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of Maine's immigrant population. MPI researchers also interviewed staff of nine immigrant-serving organizations based in Maine to better understand the services needed by immigrants, including both newcomers and established communities.

The data analysis revealed the following important trends:

- ▶ **Immigrants, who make up a small share of Maine residents, mostly live in major metropolitan areas but are also spread across rural parts of the state.** Immigrants represented 4 percent of Maine residents in 2023, much lower than immigrants' 14 percent share of the national population. Maine is largely a rural state, and as of 2019–23, 28 percent of its immigrants (14,400 people) were living outside major metropolitan areas, as were 42 percent of the U.S. born. By comparison, 72 percent of immigrants lived in one of three metro areas: 28,100 in the Portland area, 5,600 in the Lewiston area, and 4,400 in the Bangor area. Immigrants made up a particularly notable share of residents in the City of Portland: 11 percent.
- ▶ **Maine's immigrant communities are a mix of well-established residents and newer arrivals, hailing from a wide range of world regions.** In 2019–23, nearly half of all immigrants in Maine had lived in the United States for 20 years or more. However, some groups were more likely to be

newcomers than others. For example, two-thirds of African immigrants in Maine had lived in the country for fewer than ten years. Compared to the nation as a whole, where about half of immigrants come from Latin America and the Caribbean, only 10 percent of Maine's immigrants were from that region as of 2019–23; much higher shares came from Asia (25 percent), Europe (24 percent), Africa (20 percent), and Northern America (19 percent), primarily Canada.

- ▶ **A large majority of immigrants in Maine have a secure legal status.** According to MPI estimates, in 2023, half of immigrants were naturalized U.S. citizens, another 24 percent were legal permanent residents (also known as green-card holders), and 8 percent were temporary visa holders; by contrast, 18 percent were unauthorized immigrants, some of whom had a temporary status protecting them from deportation.¹ The vast majority of children in immigrant households—84 percent in 2019–23—are U.S. citizens, either by birth or naturalization. Among recently arrived immigrants, there is a greater chance of holding a temporary status (some of which offer a path to permanent residence while others do not) or a humanitarian status (such as refugee or asylee status)—populations that vary in their integration and other service needs.
- ▶ **Maine's immigrants show strong signs of integration, including high levels of English proficiency, education, and home ownership.** Three-quarters of immigrants in Maine spoke English very well or spoke only English at home in 2019–23. This was more likely to be the case for long-term residents than newcomers; 42 percent of those with less than ten years of U.S. residence had limited English proficiency. Immigrant men were particularly well educated, with 43 percent holding a bachelor's degree or higher (compared to 32 percent of U.S.-born men). Overall, 64 percent of immigrants owned their homes, but naturalized U.S. citizens had a higher home ownership rate (73 percent) closer to that of U.S.-born residents (79 percent). At the same time, immigrants were more likely than the U.S. born to rent homes, and they faced slightly higher rental costs on average.
- ▶ **Immigrants are critical to Maine's workforce, though gender disparities are apparent.** With Maine's working-age population projected to shrink in the coming years (by 5.3 percent between 2020 and 2030), immigrants are poised to play an increasingly important role in the state workforce; 45 percent of immigrants in Maine were of prime working age (25–54) in 2019–23, compared to 36 percent of the U.S. born, and immigrants had high employment rates similar to those of their U.S.-born counterparts. However, while immigrant men had high full-time, year-round employment rates and higher-than-average earned median income in 2019–23, immigrant women had lower employment rates and earnings than U.S.-born women, U.S.-born men, and immigrant men. Since women make up more than half of Maine's immigrant population (57 percent in 2019–23), these gender gaps have implications for communities across the state as well as for the income and stability of immigrant families.
- ▶ **One-third of immigrants and one-quarter of the U.S. born in Maine are part of low-income households, but low-income immigrants are less likely to have health insurance or use public benefits.** In 2019–23, the low-income share of immigrants ranged from 24 percent in rural areas to as high as 49 percent in the Lewiston metro area. Nine out of ten immigrants in Maine, of all income

¹ In this data analysis, unauthorized immigrants include some individuals with liminal statuses that are temporary, grant work authorization, and protect from deportation, such as Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipients, Temporary Protected Status (TPS) holders, humanitarian parolees, and asylum applicants.

levels, were covered by some form of health insurance. However, among low-income individuals, only 44 percent of immigrants and 51 percent of the U.S. born were enrolled in MaineCare, the state's Medicaid program. Largely due to eligibility rules that disqualify immigrants with certain legal statuses as well as those who are unauthorized, low-income immigrants generally participate less in social safety net programs than the U.S. born. This was true for MaineCare, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (often called food stamps), and Supplemental Security Income in 2019–23.

While most immigrants in Maine are well-integrated and self-sufficient, interviews with immigrant-serving organizations highlighted a few key challenges, especially for some recent arrivals, as well as notable trends in integration support. These include:

- ▶ **Language barriers are a crosscutting issue.** For people with limited English proficiency, accessing affordable housing and health care, navigating public transportation, and gaining employment can be challenging. Immigrant-serving organizations often provide translation and interpretation services, but they also named expanding language assistance to more languages—to reflect the growing diversity of Maine's immigrant population—as a priority.
- ▶ **Finding affordable housing and accessing public transportation are difficult for many Mainers but pose distinct challenges for immigrants.** Amid a housing shortage, immigrants can find it particularly difficult to access housing if they lack a credit history or cannot fulfill document requirements (e.g., a social security number). Some new arrivals rely on temporary housing, but this system is already under strain from Maine's persistent homelessness crisis. Meanwhile, the state's limited public transportation, especially in rural areas, makes employment, health care, and services less accessible. Service providers have sought creative solutions for transportation hurdles, including providing mobile services in rural areas and offering virtual programming.
- ▶ **Health care remains a top concern, despite efforts to expand immigrants' access.** In recent years, Maine expanded health services and access to MaineCare for some immigrant populations. Still, administrative obstacles can keep eligible individuals from accessing MaineCare and free medical care programs. At the same time, language barriers and a lack of culturally sensitive care can discourage immigrants from seeking care altogether.
- ▶ **Immigrant communities have built support systems that provide both long-term integration services and assistance for newly arrived immigrants.** Throughout the state, earlier generations of immigrants often offer newcomers support, links to culture and language, and help finding jobs and housing, in collaboration with formal service providers, faith-based organizations, and other actors. This can be seen, for example, in the Mexican community in the town of Milbridge, Cambodian temples where refugees from the 1980s connect with newer arrivals, and organizations formed by African immigrants that help welcome refugees.
- ▶ **Immigrant workers are vital to industries throughout the state and some employers have become vocal champions, but farmworkers remain largely invisible.** Immigrants are vital to many of Maine's core industries, often filling jobs that would otherwise remain vacant. Those in metropolitan areas who work in aquaculture, health care, and industrial factories have been publicly recognized

by their companies for their important contributions. However, farmworkers, who often work in rural areas, are further removed from public attention, despite their importance to Maine's economy.

In a fast-evolving immigration policy landscape characterized by political and funding uncertainty, Maine offers an example of many of the issues states across the country must grapple with in the coming months and years. Chief among these, state and local policymakers face the challenge of finding ways to promote immigrants' integration and capitalize on their vital economic and other contributions, while balancing the effects of policy changes and funding cuts made by the Trump administration.

1 Introduction

Located between New Hampshire and Canada, the rural state of Maine seems far from the migration challenges at the U.S. southern border that have captured national attention in recent years. Nonetheless, Maine and its approximately 53,000 immigrants, who made up a modest 4 percent of state residents in 2023, are in many ways a microcosm of the evolving U.S. immigration landscape. Like many other states and localities, Maine has experienced an influx of asylum seekers and other newcomers. Newer arrivals have joined an established immigrant community that is notably different in terms of demographic characteristics, socioeconomic outcomes, and service needs.

Highly diverse immigrant arrivals are integrating with a host population that is, in comparison, rather homogenous. More than 90 percent of U.S.-born Mainers identified as non-Latino White in 2019–23, one of the highest proportions of any state in the country.² The racial and ethnic makeup of immigrants in the state is far more diverse, and many parts of the world are well represented among immigrants' origin countries.

Maine also faces a common conundrum seen around the country: its aging population, one of the oldest in the United States, will leave thousands of jobs unfilled in the coming years. With many of its foreign-born residents of prime-working age, the state economy reaps the benefits of immigrants' employment, particularly in industries such as agriculture and aquaculture that are increasingly reliant on immigrant workers. At the same time, immigration has of late become highly visible to Mainers, in part because it highlights some of the state's structural issues. Aging infrastructure, lack of housing supply, and post-pandemic market factors have all contributed to a housing shortage that has driven up housing costs,

FIGURE 1
Map of Maine and Selected Cities



Source: Migration Policy Institute (MPI) illustration.

² U.S. Census Bureau, "Quick Facts," accessed June 30, 2025.

especially for rentals, and affected immigrants and the U.S. born alike. For immigrants, these and related challenges, such as limited public transportation, can hamper activities important for newcomers' integration, including getting a job, attending adult education classes, or finding child care.

As Maine's policymakers and institutions work to address these and other challenges facing immigrants and the communities in which they live, this report provides insights into the composition of the state immigrant population and efforts underway to assist those most in need of support. To do so, this study leverages both quantitative data, primarily from the U.S. Census Bureau, and qualitative information gathered from immigrant-serving organizations across the state (see Box 1 for details). This analysis offers an interesting case study of a small but highly diverse immigrant population, its contributions to Maine's communities, and how organizations are adapting to changing population characteristics and service needs.

BOX 1 **About This Study and Its Data Sources**

To provide a well-rounded picture of Maine's immigrants and the opportunities and challenges immigration holds for the state, this study employs both quantitative and qualitative data sources. The first half of the report presents a sociodemographic profile of immigrants in Maine, primarily by analyzing data from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Surveys for 2019–23, the most recent available. Using pooled data for five years rather than single-year data makes it possible to draw conclusions about smaller geographic areas and populations. However, because the immigration landscape has shifted considerably in recent years, this report also draws on other sources of data, where possible, to shed light on recent arrivals (such as data from immigration courts on asylum seekers).

The second half of the report, which draws on interviews with staff of immigrant-serving organizations, explores challenges faced by immigrants with the greatest service needs. This is a subset of the overall immigrant population described in the earlier section and includes humanitarian arrivals such as asylum seekers and refugees, long-time residents who face cultural and language barriers, temporary workers (such as farmworkers) who are less visible in immigration debates, and unauthorized immigrants. The immigrant-serving organizations are part of a diverse ecosystem offering services for individuals at various stages of integration. Like many nonprofits, these organizations work with limited staff and financial resources, must determine how best to serve clients spread across the state, and are navigating funding uncertainty.

2 Profile of Maine's Immigrant Population

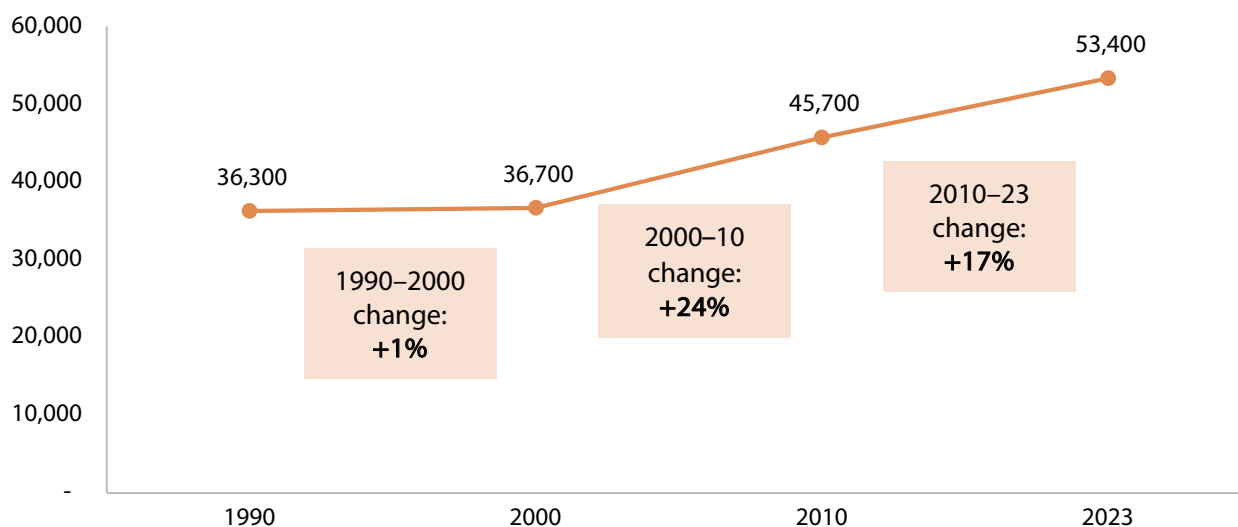
Maine's immigrants hail from a wide range of countries and cultures. This section provides a detailed sociodemographic profile of immigrants in the state. It describes, among other things, the population's size and origins, family characteristics, English proficiency, educational attainment, workforce participation and income, and public benefits enrollment. Unless otherwise stated, this analysis is based on microdata from the U.S. Census Bureau's 2019–23 American Community Surveys.

A. *Population Size and Regions of Residence*

The immigrant population in Maine numbered 53,400 in 2023, equivalent to 4 percent of the state's total population (1,366,200).³ Compared to the nation overall, where foreign-born individuals made up 14 percent of the population, this makes immigrants a relatively small slice of the state's residents. Still, between 1990 and 2023, Maine's immigrant population grew from 36,300 to 53,400 (see Figure 2). For the first decade, from 1990 to 2000, the size of the foreign-born population remained relatively the same. The highest period of growth occurred between 2000 and 2010, when the immigrant population grew by 24 percent. The most recent period for which data are available, from 2010 to 2023, also saw an increase but at a lower growth rate of 17 percent.

FIGURE 2

Change in the Size of the Immigrant Population in Maine, 1990 to 2023



Source: MPI analysis of single-year data from the U.S. Census Bureau's 2023 American Community Survey (ACS) and of Table B05006 from the U.S. Census Bureau's 1990, 2000, and 2010 decennial census estimates. See MPI, "[State Immigration Data Profiles—Maine](#)," accessed April 21, 2025.

Most immigrants in Maine live in the state's three major metropolitan areas of Portland, Lewiston, and Bangor (72 percent as of 2019–23). Immigrants are more likely to live in one of these metro areas than U.S.-born Mainers. In 2019–23, 28 percent of immigrants lived in rural areas, compared to 42 percent of the U.S. born.

An estimated 28,100 immigrants lived in the Portland metropolitan area in 2019–23, representing about 5 percent of all residents (see Table 1). In the City of Portland, the immigrant share was more than double that,

³ These total population figures for Maine and the United States are based on single-year data from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS) for 2023. See Migration Policy Institute (MPI), "[State Immigration Data Profiles—United States and Maine](#)," accessed April 21, 2025. For more detailed analysis, including of smaller geographies and populations, most of the rest of this section uses five-year ACS samples, which show a slightly different total due to the pooled nature of that data.

at 11 percent. The number of immigrants in the Lewiston and Bangor metropolitan areas was less than 6,000 each, representing 5 percent and 3 percent of the population, respectively.

TABLE 1
Metropolitan, City, and Rural Areas of Residence of Immigrants in Maine, 2019–23

	Number of Immigrants	Immigrant % of Total Population
Maine (total)	52,500	4%
Portland metropolitan area	28,100	5%
<i>City of Portland</i>	7,600	11%
Lewiston metropolitan area	5,600	5%
Bangor metropolitan area	4,400	3%
Rural areas	14,400	3%

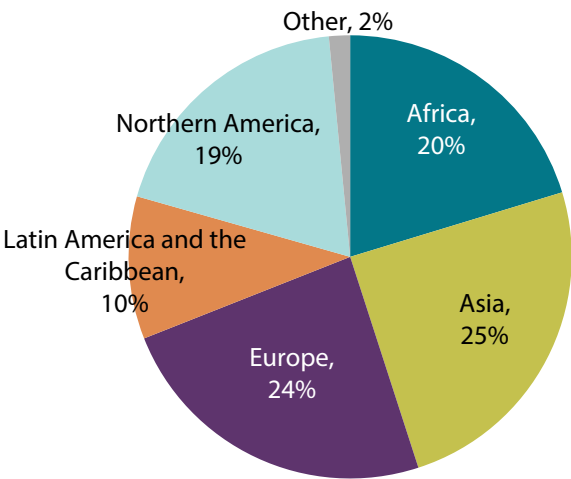
Note: Rural areas are those outside the three major metropolitan areas in Maine, as designated by the U.S. Census Bureau. Estimates of the foreign-born population were not available for the Cities of Lewiston and Bangor proper.
Source: MPI analysis of 2019–23 ACS data, pooled for the metropolitan areas, and Table S0501 from the U.S. Census Bureau’s 2019–2023 estimates for Portland city.

B. Immigrant Origins: Regions and Countries of Birth

The immigrant population in Maine is more diverse in its origins than the overall U.S. immigrant population. While in 2023, half of immigrants nationwide were born in one region—Latin America and the Caribbean⁴—the picture in Maine was more mixed. In Maine, only 10 percent of immigrants were from Latin America and the Caribbean as of 2019–23; the largest shares came from Asia (25 percent) and Europe (24 percent). Further, 20 percent Maine’s immigrants were born in Africa (compared to 6 percent nationally) and 19 percent were born in Northern America (versus 2 percent nationally).

Migration to Maine from neighboring Canada has a long history: records indicate that as early as the 1860s, French Canadians from Québec and New Brunswick migrated to Maine to fill jobs in the

FIGURE 3
Regions of Birth of Immigrants in Maine, 2019–23



Note: In ACS data, Northern America includes Bermuda, Canada, and Greenland. Mexico is included in Latin America and the Caribbean.
Source: MPI analysis of 2019–23 ACS data, pooled.

4 In 2023, 51 percent of the U.S. immigrant population was comprised of individuals born in Latin America and the Caribbean, 31 percent in Asia, 10 percent in Europe, 6 percent in Africa, 2 percent in Northern America, and 1 percent in Oceania. See MPI, “State Immigration Data Profiles—United States: Demographics & Social Indicators,” accessed May 15, 2025.

textile mills of Lewiston.⁵ Over the years, agreements between the Canadian and U.S. governments have also allowed some Indigenous people to move relatively freely between the two countries.⁶ Canada remains, by far, the top country of origin for immigrants in the state, with one out of every five immigrants in Maine in 2019–23 having been born in Canada. The next top countries of origin accounted for smaller proportions of immigrants: the United Kingdom (6 percent), Germany (4 percent), China (4 percent),⁷ the Philippines (3 percent), and Vietnam (3 percent). Though individually too small for meaningful statistical analysis, East African nations were also common countries of origin, and this region accounted for nearly half of all African immigrants.⁸

The origins of immigrants living in Maine's major metropolitan areas varied somewhat compared to both the state average and each other. In Portland, individuals from Asia, Europe, and Africa each represented about one-quarter of the immigrant population in 2019–23, followed by those born in Northern America (11 percent) and Latin America (10 percent). The smaller sample sizes for the other metropolitan areas limit detailed analysis, but about 28 percent of immigrants in Bangor were from Northern America and 50 percent of immigrants in Lewiston were from Africa.

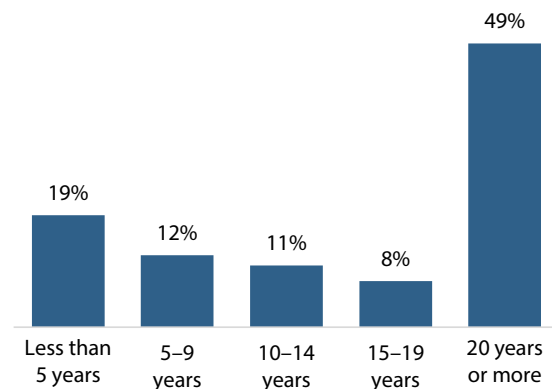
In rural areas, the origin mix of immigrants was again different, with Northern America representing the largest share of immigrants (34 percent) in 2019–23. Other top regions of origin were Europe (27 percent) and Asia (23 percent). Meanwhile, the share of immigrants in rural areas who came from Africa (5 percent) was far smaller than the share statewide and in Portland, while the share of immigrants from Latin America and the Caribbean was about the same (11 percent).

C. *Time in the United States and Changing Immigrant Origins*

Maine's immigrant population is composed of a mix of long-established communities and more recent arrivals. In 2019–23, nearly half of Maine's immigrants had been in the United States for 20 years or more, while close to one-third had been in the country for fewer than ten years (see Figure 4).

The origins of Maine's immigrant community have changed significantly over time. In 2019–23, 77

FIGURE 4
Length of U.S. Residence of Immigrants in Maine, 2019–23



Note: Length of residence in ACS data is self-reported, with survey respondents asked to describe how long they have been present in the United States, regardless of legal status.
Source: MPI analysis of 2019–23 ACS data, pooled.

5 Maine Mill, "Immigration," accessed April 21, 2025. For a profile of Canadian immigrants in the United States overall, see Valerie Lacarte, "Canadian Immigrants in the United States," *Migration Information Source*, June 11, 2025.

6 Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada, "Supporting Cross-Border Mobility for Indigenous Peoples" (press release, October 10, 2024).

7 This figure for China excludes Hong Kong and Taiwan.

8 Based on data available in the 2019–2023 ACS, 46 percent of African immigrants in Maine were from East Africa, which is defined in Census Bureau data as including Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Somalia, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe, and other unspecified Eastern African countries.

percent of Northern American immigrants (mostly Canadians) and 66 percent of European immigrants were long-term residents, having been in the United States for 20 years or more (see Table 2). In contrast, most African immigrants were newcomers: 45 percent had been in the United States for fewer than five years, and another 22 percent had spent between five and nine years in the country.

Close to half (47 percent) of the Asian immigrant community had been in the United States for 20 or more years as of 2019–23. However, there has also been a recent uptick in immigration from Asia, reflected in the fact that one-third of Asian immigrants in Maine had been in the United States for fewer than ten years. Similarly, while two-fifths of immigrants from Latin America and the Caribbean had been U.S. residents for 20 plus years, close to one-quarter were newcomers with fewer than five years in the country.

TABLE 2

Length of U.S. Residence of Immigrants in Maine, by Region of Origin, 2019–23

	World	Northern America	Europe	Asia	Africa	Latin America and the Caribbean
Less than 5 years	19%	–	–	18%	45%	23%
5–9 years	12%	–	–	15%	22%	–
10–14 years	11%	–	–	10%	–	–
15–19 years	8%	–	–	10%	–	–
20+ years	49%	77%	66%	47%	10%	42%

Notes: In ACS data, Northern America includes Bermuda, Canada, and Greenland. Mexico is included in Latin America and the Caribbean. Length of residence in ACS data is self-reported, with survey respondents asked to describe how long they have been present in the United States, regardless of legal status. Categories marked “–” have a sample size too small to generate statistically meaningful results.

Source: MPI analysis of 2019–23 ACS data, pooled.

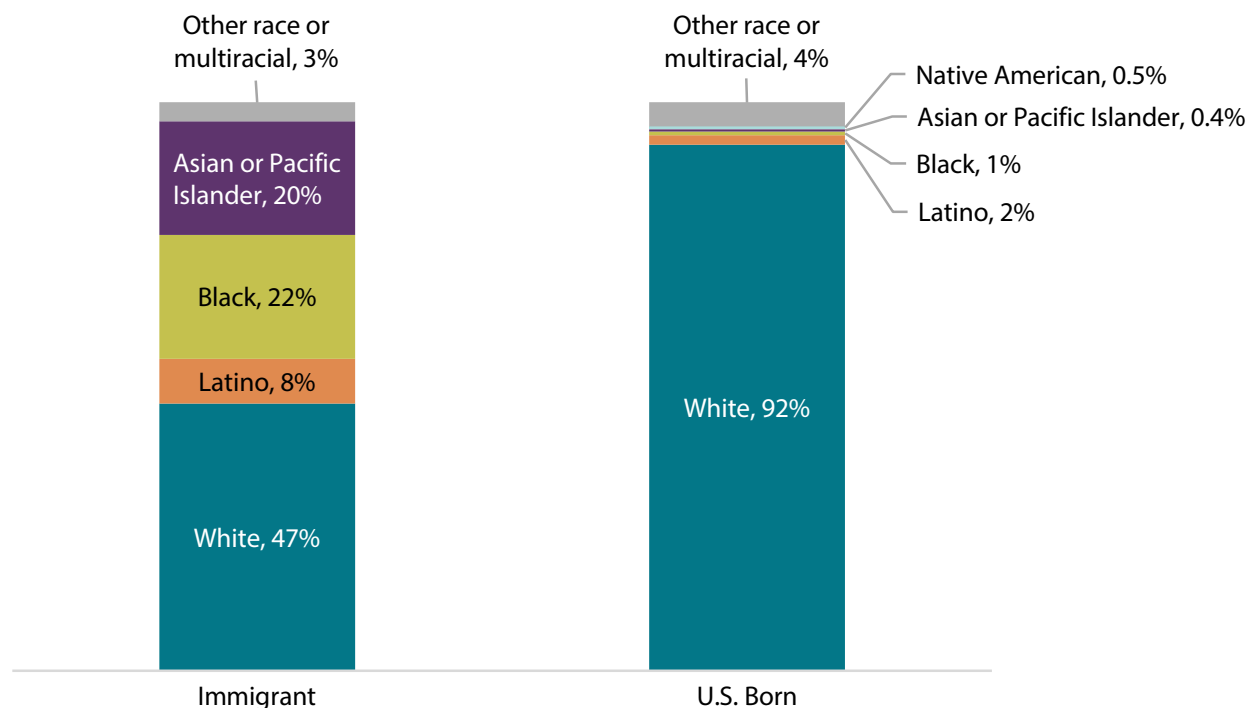
D. Race and Ethnicity

Maine’s immigrant population is racially and ethnically more diverse than both U.S.-born Mainers and the immigrant population nationwide.⁹ More than 90 percent of U.S.-born Mainers identified as White (non-Latino) in 2019–23 (see Figure 5). Non-Latino White individuals were also the largest group among immigrants in Maine, but they only made up 47 percent of that population. However, that is still a much higher share than the U.S. average, where 17 percent of the foreign-born population self-identified as non-Latino White in 2019–23.

Compared to the immigrant population nationwide, the share of immigrants in Maine who identify as Latino is much smaller, 8 percent versus 45 percent. However, this was still a larger share than the Latino share of U.S.-born Mainers (2 percent). Other racial and ethnic groups also had more representation within Maine’s immigrant population than its U.S.-born population, such as Black (22 percent compared to 1 percent) and Asian or Pacific Islander (20 percent compared to less than 1 percent).

⁹ For a breakdown of the racial and ethnic profile of the U.S. immigrant population in 2023, see MPI, “State Immigration Data Profiles—United States: Demographics & Social Indicators.”

FIGURE 5

Race or Ethnicity of Immigrants and U.S.-Born Individuals in Maine, 2019–23

Notes: Numbers may not add up to 100 percent due to rounding. In this figure, all racial and ethnic categories are exclusive, and all Latinos are included in that category regardless of their race. The Native American category is excluded for immigrants due to small sample size.

Source: MPI analysis of 2019–23 ACS data, pooled.

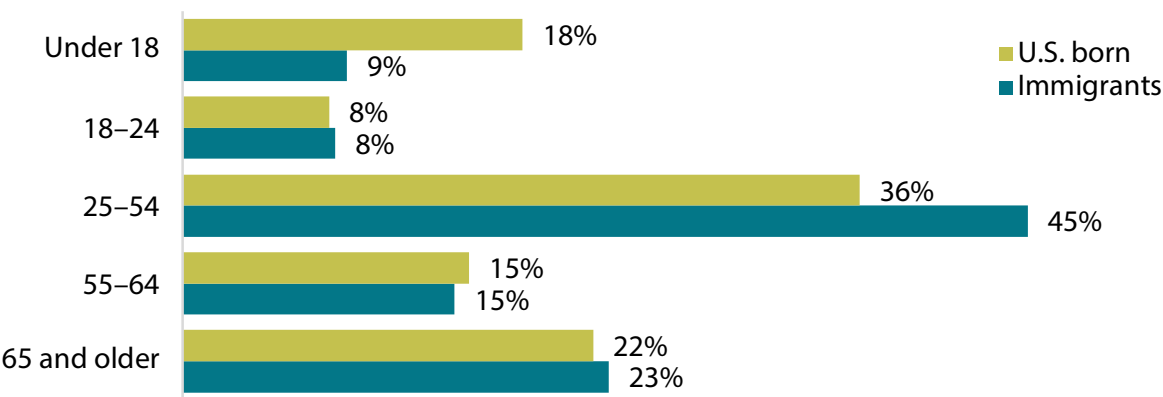
E. Age Distribution

The largest share of immigrants in Maine are of prime working age: an estimated 23,800 (or 45 percent of immigrants) were between 25 and 54 years old in 2019–23 (see Figure 6). In contrast, a smaller share of U.S.-born Mainers, 36 percent, fell into that age range. As the baby boom generation continues to retire, it is projected that Maine’s working-age population will shrink by 5.3 percent between 2020 and 2030.¹⁰ With many immigrants of working age and having high employment rates (see Section 2.J.), this population can potentially help address Maine’s growing labor shortage.

Overall, immigrants in Maine tend to be slightly older than U.S.-born Mainers, largely because a much smaller share of immigrants are children under 18 years old—in 2019–23, just 9 percent compared to 18 percent of the U.S.-born population. At the other extreme, the shares of individuals ages 55–64 and age 65 and older were roughly the same for immigrants and the U.S. born.

¹⁰ Maine Department of Administrative and Financial Services, Office of the State Economist, *Maine Population Outlook, 2020 to 2030* (Augusta: Maine Department of Administrative and Financial Services, 2023).

FIGURE 6
Age Distribution of Immigrants and U.S.-Born Individuals in Maine, 2019–23



Note: Numbers may not add up to 100 percent due to rounding.
Source: MPI analysis of 2019–23 ACS data, pooled.

F. Immigrant Families: Children and Marriage

As of 2019–23, only 4,600 children living in Maine had been born outside the United States. However, about 18,000 children had at least one immigrant parent (see Table 3). Thus, in Maine, most children living in households with an immigrant parent are U.S.-born citizens.

Overall, the share of Maine children living with one or more immigrant parent (7 percent) is far lower than in the nation as a whole (26 percent). Of Maine children with immigrant parents, 84 percent were U.S. citizens either by birth or naturalization. This high share suggests that immigrant-origin members of Maine’s future generations are less likely to be affected by obstacles related to lack of U.S. citizenship.¹¹

TABLE 3
Children under Age 18 in Maine, by Parental and Child Citizenship Status, 2019–23

	Number	Share of Children
Total children under age 18 with parents in the home	244,700	100%
U.S.-born parents only	226,700	93%
At least one foreign-born parent	18,000	7%
<i>Among children with at least one foreign-born parent...</i>		
Child is a U.S. citizen (by birth or naturalized)	15,100	84%
Child is not a U.S. citizen	2,900	16%

Notes: Children without parents in the home are excluded from this analysis.
Source: MPI analysis of 2019–23 ACS data, pooled.

¹¹ Jeanne Batalova and Michael Fix, *Understanding Poverty Declines among Immigrants and Their Children in the United States* (Washington, DC: MPI, 2023); Brandon Marrow and Jeanne Batalova, “Naturalized Citizens in the United States,” *Migration Information Source*, July 10, 2024.

In Maine, the marriage rate is higher among immigrants than the U.S. born. In 2019–23, 58 percent of immigrants were married, compared to 51 percent of U.S.-born Mainers (see Table 4). And of immigrants who were married, eight in ten had a spouse who was a U.S. citizen, either by birth or naturalization.

TABLE 4

Marital Status of Immigrants and the U.S. Born (age 15 and older) in Maine, 2019–23

	Immigrants	U.S. Born
Never married	22%	29%
Divorced, separated, or widowed	19%	20%
Married	58%	51%
<i>Among those married...</i>		
Spouse is a U.S. citizen (by birth or naturalized)	79%	99%
Spouse is a noncitizen	21%	1%

Note: Numbers may not add up to 100 percent due to rounding.

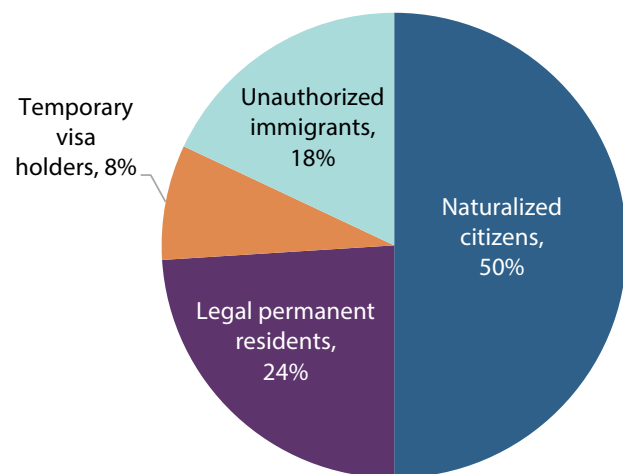
Source: MPI analysis of 2019–23 ACS data, pooled.

G. Legal Status

The vast majority of immigrants in Maine have a legal, permanent status in the United States. The Migration Policy Institute (MPI) estimates that in 2023, half of immigrants in Maine were naturalized U.S. citizens and another 24 percent were legal permanent residents (also known as green-card holders), a group of noncitizens with a path to becoming U.S. citizens. As Figure 7 shows, another 8 percent of Maine's immigrants were temporary visa holders, including international students, temporary workers, and refugees and asylees who had not yet adjusted to legal permanent resident status.

A little under 10,000 foreign-born individuals in the state were unauthorized immigrants in 2023, making up 18 percent of Maine's immigrant population. Some of these migrants held liminal statuses that are temporary, grant work authorization, and protect from deportation; examples include Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipients, Temporary Protected Status (TPS) holders, asylum seekers, and humanitarian parolees.

FIGURE 7

Immigration Status of Immigrants in Maine, 2023

Notes: Temporary visa holders include international students, H-1B high-skilled workers, and H-2A low-skilled agricultural workers, among others; short-term visitors such as tourists are not included. The temporary visa holder group also includes a small number of refugees and people granted asylum who have not yet obtained a green card for lawful permanent residence. Unauthorized immigrants include Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipients, Temporary Protected Status (TPS) holders, holders of humanitarian parole, and asylum applicants.

Source: These 2023 estimates result from MPI analysis of U.S. Census Bureau data from the pooled 2019–23 ACS and the 2023, 2022, and 2008 Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), weighted to 2023 unauthorized immigrant population estimates provided by Jennifer Van Hook of The Pennsylvania State University.

As immigration of many kinds rebounded after the pandemic slowdown, and as heightened numbers of migrants began arriving at the U.S. southern border, Maine also saw an increase in newly arrived migrants with a precarious or no status. Migrants can apply for asylum affirmatively with U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, or they can do so defensively at a U.S. immigration court if they are in removal proceedings. While no state-specific data are available on affirmative asylum petitions, data from immigration courts on the issuance of notices to appear (NTAs) can shed some light on the defensive asylum process. NTAs initiate removal proceedings against noncitizens. Some people served an NTA will subsequently apply for asylum as a defense against removal, while others may seek permission to remain in the United States via other humanitarian or familial pathways; those granted asylum or found to qualify for another status can remain in the country, while those found not to qualify are generally returned to their country of origin. Analysis of court data shows that between fiscal year (FY) 2019 and FY 2024, more than 10,000 NTAs were filed in immigration courts serving Maine (see Table 5).¹²

TABLE 5

Number of Notices to Appear (NTAs) Issued to Immigrants in Maine, Top Five Nationalities, Fiscal Years 2019–24

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Total	1,163	768	568	2,012	3,990	2,453
1	Democratic Republic of the Congo (336)	Angola (322)	Democratic Republic of the Congo (124)	Angola (800)	Angola (2,253)	Angola (962)
2	Angola (297)	Democratic Republic of the Congo (207)	Angola (80)	Democratic Republic of the Congo (232)	Democratic Republic of the Congo (319)	Ecuador (262)
3	Republic of the Congo (228)	Republic of the Congo (52)	Honduras (56)	Republic of the Congo (214)	Brazil (190)	Democratic Republic of the Congo (153)
4	Honduras (68)	Brazil (34)	Brazil (55)	Brazil (176)	Republic of the Congo (168)	Venezuela (139)
5	Guatemala (54)	Rwanda (21)	Republic of the Congo (35)	Honduras (71)	Ecuador (137)	Republic of the Congo (125)

Notes: This table uses data obtained via Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests on NTAs filed in immigration court. NTAs are a good proxy for where newly arrived unauthorized immigrants might be going, with two important caveats: 1) immigrants may decide to move from the state they indicated to immigration officials they would live in, and 2) NTAs are often issued with a delay so the numbers above may not fully reflect all migrants who were apprehended at the border in fiscal year 2024 and had an intended destination of Maine.

Source: MPI analysis of data from the Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse (TRAC) Immigration, “[New Proceedings Filed in Immigration Court](#),” accessed July 25, 2025.

¹² This number is consistent with media reporting in 2023 suggesting that, in part due to backlogs, there were between 8,000 and 10,000 asylum seekers in Maine with petitions pending in immigration court. See Randy Billings, “[What Can Maine Do?](#),” *Portland Press Herald*, March 22, 2024.

The number of NTAs spiked in 2022 and grew further in 2023 after years of relatively low numbers. In recent years, the top countries of origin of people in Maine issued NTAs have included Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Republic of the Congo, Brazil, and most recently, Ecuador and Venezuela. Interviews with service providers suggest that recent arrivals from Angola and the Democratic Republic of the Congo have come to Maine in part due to recent conflicts in those countries, knowledge of employment opportunities in the state, and the existence of established African refugee communities (see Section 3 for more insights from local organizations).

According to the Office of Maine Refugee Services (OMRS), in FY 2024, at least 1,019 immigrants who arrived in Maine belonged to humanitarian populations with access to publicly funded support services.¹³ OMRS, a federally designated agency that coordinates refugee resettlement services across the state of Maine, reported that 71 percent of these newcomers came through the U.S. refugee resettlement program, 10 percent were Cuban/Haitian entrants, 10 percent were Special Immigrant Visa holders (for Afghans and Iraqis), 8 percent were asylees (individuals granted asylum), and 1 percent were Afghan parolees. Across these humanitarian populations, the top three countries of origin in FY 2024 were Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Syria. Data from the first six months of FY 2025 indicate similar trends, with close to three-quarters of humanitarian arrivals coming to Maine through the refugee program, though a slightly increased share were Special Immigrant Visa holders (13 percent) and slightly smaller shares were Cuban/Haitian entrants (5 percent) and asylees (4 percent).¹⁴

H. English Proficiency and Languages Spoken

Immigrants in Maine have a high level of English proficiency. In 2019–23, three-quarters of immigrants age 5 and older either spoke only English at home or spoke English very well (see Figure 8). The other quarter, approximately 12,400 immigrants, were Limited English Proficient (LEP)—that is, they reported speaking English either “well,” “not well,” or not at all. Language barriers were higher for recent immigrants (those with less than ten years in the country), 42 percent of whom were LEP. At the national level, 46 percent of all immigrants 5 years and older were LEP in 2019–23.

After English, the languages spoken most frequently at home by Maine’s immigrants were French (12 percent of immigrants), followed by Spanish (6 percent), Portuguese (4 percent), and a Chinese language (3 percent).¹⁵

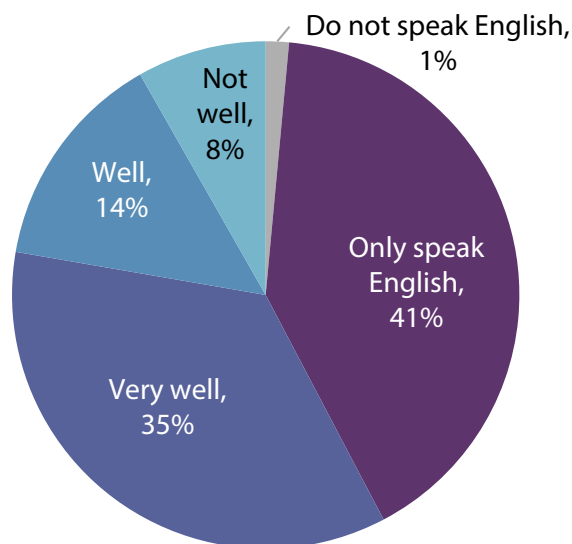
13 The Office of Maine’s Refugee Services (OMRS) oversees statewide resettlement services. The data presented in this paragraph include services provided to clients by Catholic Charities Maine Refugee and Immigration Services, Jewish Community Alliance of Southern Maine, Maine Immigrant Refugee Services, and through private sponsorships. See OMRS, “[Data and Statistics—FY24 End of Year Arrivals](#),” updated May 1, 2025.

14 OMRS, “[Data and Statistics—FY25 March Cumulative Arrivals](#),” updated May 1, 2025.

15 The category “Chinese” in U.S. Census Bureau data includes individuals who said their language was “Chinese” as well as those who named one of various Chinese languages, including Mandarin and Cantonese.

FIGURE 8

English Proficiency of Immigrants (age 5 and older) in Maine, 2019–23



Notes: The U.S. Census Bureau asks ACS respondents if they speak a language other than English at home. For those who answer that they do, the survey then asks them to self-assess their spoken English proficiency. Limited English Proficient (LEP) refers to persons age 5 and older who report speaking English less than “very well,” either “not at all,” “not well,” or “well.”

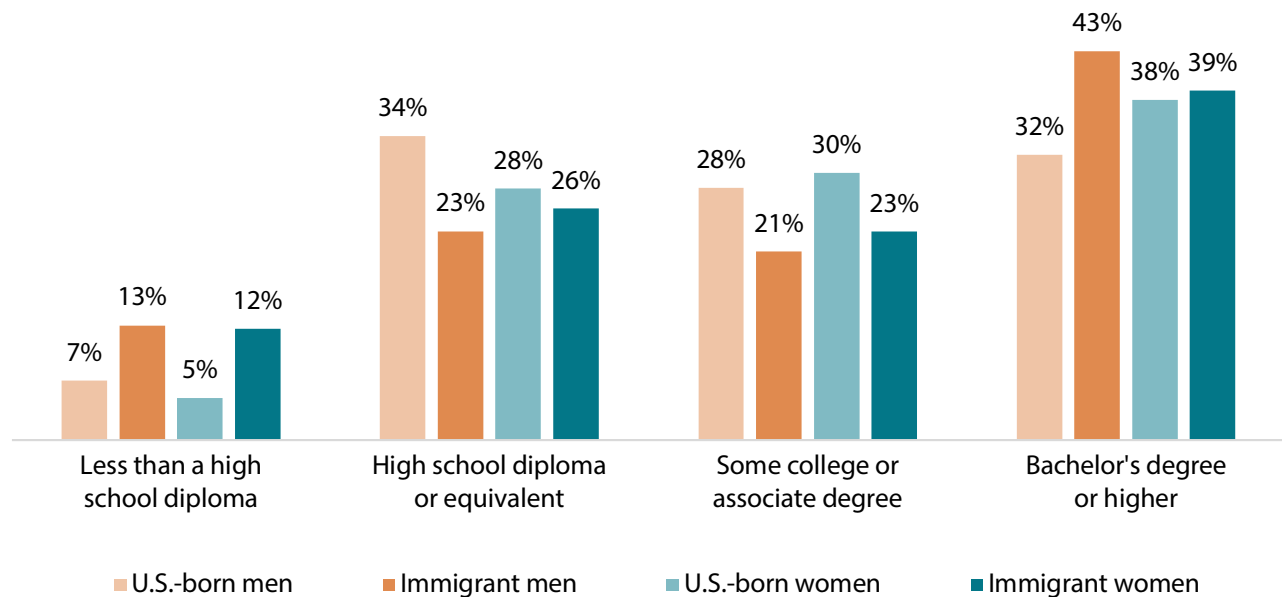
Source: MPI analysis of 2019–23 ACS data, pooled.

I. Educational Attainment

Educational attainment within Maine’s immigrant population is marked by both high and low levels of achievement and divergent outcomes by gender. In 2019–23, the share of immigrant men with a college education was significantly higher than for U.S.-born men (see Figure 9). In this period, 43 percent of immigrant men versus 32 percent of U.S.-born men had a bachelor’s degree or higher. In fact, 22 percent of immigrant men had a graduate degree—double the share of U.S.-born men (not shown in this figure). However, immigrant men were also more likely than U.S.-born men to have less than a high school diploma: 13 percent versus 7 percent, respectively.

Among women, the share with less than a high school diploma was more than double for immigrant women (12 percent) compared to U.S.-born women (5 percent). Similar shares of U.S.-born and immigrant women had college and graduate degrees in 2019–23.

FIGURE 9

Educational Attainment of Immigrant and U.S.-Born Men and Women (age 25 and older) in Maine, 2019–23

Source: MPI analysis of 2019–23 ACS data, pooled.

J. Workforce Characteristics

Maine's aging population is creating critical workforce needs, given current and expected labor shortages.¹⁶ While investments in worker training programs, productivity gains, and efforts to activate individuals not currently in the labor force will be important means of addressing these shortages, immigration and effective immigrant integration will also be part of the solution. Indeed, immigrant workers already play an important role in the state's economy.

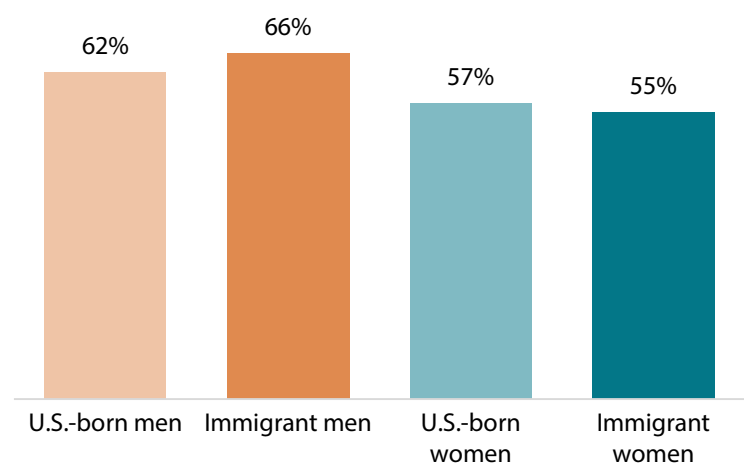
In 2019–23, roughly 29,000 immigrants age 16 and older were part of Maine's civilian workforce. Accounting for women and men together, 59 percent of immigrants age 16 and older were employed, 4 percent were unemployed but looking for work, and 38 percent were not in the labor force. The same shares were found in Maine's U.S.-born population.

Looking at gendered differences in the labor market, immigrant men had the highest employment rate (66 percent)—4 percentage points higher than U.S.-born men (see Figure 10). The reverse was true for immigrant women, whose employment rate was below that of U.S.-born women (55 percent versus 57 percent). These gendered differences are especially relevant in the context of Maine, where the female-to-male ratio among immigrants is relatively high. In 2019–23, 57 percent of immigrants in Maine were women and 43 percent were men (in comparison, the female-to-male ratio for the U.S. born was 51 percent to 49 percent).

¹⁶ Maine Department of Administrative and Financial Services, Office of the State Economist, *Maine Population Outlook*.

One out of four employed immigrants worked part time (fewer than 35 hours per week) in 2019–23. Full-time, year-round work (at least 35 hours per week and 42 weeks per year) is usually linked to more stable employment and higher earnings. Typically, men are more likely to be full-time, year-round workers, in part due to women taking on more caregiving responsibilities, especially child care.¹⁷ These general findings held for Maine’s labor market, with employed immigrant and U.S.-born men having the highest shares of full-time, year-round work (both 74 percent; see Table 6). Among employed women, the share of full-time, year-round workers was slightly higher for immigrants compared to the U.S. born (64 percent and 62 percent, respectively).

FIGURE 10
Employed Share of Immigrant and U.S.-Born Men and Women (age 16 and older) in Maine, 2019–23



Note: This figure shows the share of people employed out of the total civilian population.
Source: MPI analysis of 2019–23 ACS data, pooled.

Gender gaps also exist when comparing the median earnings of full-time, year-round workers. In 2019–23, immigrant men working full time, year round earned slightly higher incomes (\$62,500) than U.S.-born men (\$59,600), and considerably more—about \$12,000—than U.S.-born women (\$50,600) and immigrant women (\$47,200). Overall, immigrant men and women find themselves at opposite extremes of the earnings spectrum.

TABLE 6
Employment and Median Income of Immigrants and the U.S. Born in Maine, by Gender, 2019–23

	Civilian Population (age 16 and older)	Full-Time Year-Round Worker % of Civilian Population	Median Income of Full-Time, Year-Round Workers
Immigrants			
Men	20,700	74%	\$62,500
Women	28,200	64%	\$47,200
U.S. born			
Men	538,800	74%	\$59,600
Women	562,500	62%	\$50,600

Source: MPI analysis of 2019–23 ACS data, pooled.

Foreign-born workers made up 4 percent of all workers in Maine in 2019–23 (see Table 7), a figure proportionate to the immigrant share of the state’s total population. Close to 5,400 immigrants worked in health care, the top industry of employment for immigrants. Immigrants were slightly overrepresented in health care: they were 6 percent of workers in that industry, compared to 4 percent of the total workforce.

¹⁷ Chizuko Wakabayashi and Katharine M. Donato, “The Consequences of Caregiving: Effects on Women’s Employment and Earnings,” *Population and Policy Review* 24 (2005): 467–488.

Other top industries of employment for Maine's immigrants included manufacturing; educational services; professional, scientific, management, administrative, and waste-management services; and retail trade. Though employed in smaller numbers, immigrant workers were overrepresented (at 6 percent of all workers) in accommodation and food services and in other services.

TABLE 7

Number and Share of Immigrant Workers (age 16 and older) in Maine, Top Immigrant Industries of Employment, 2019–23

Industry of Employment	Number of Foreign-Born Workers	Foreign-Born % of All Workers
Total	29,000	4%
Health care	5,400	6%
Manufacturing	3,300	5%
Educational services	3,200	4%
Professional, scientific, management, administrative, and waste-management services	3,100	5%
Retail trade	3,000	4%
Accommodation and food services	2,300	6%
Other services	1,800	6%
Finance and insurance, real estate, and rental and leasing	1,400	3%

Source: MPI analysis of 2019–23 ACS data, pooled.

While not featured in this data analysis due to their smaller numbers, interviews with immigrant-serving organizations highlighted that immigrants in Maine also play an important role in aquaculture (fishing, shrimping, and lobster) and in agriculture (see Section 3 for details). There are more than 7,000 farms in Maine, and according to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, in FY 2024, 41 employers across Maine petitioned for temporary immigrant agricultural workers through the H-2A visa program, resulting in 767 newly approved temporary workers.¹⁸ However, this accounts for only a fraction of immigrant farmworkers in Maine, given the presence of workers with various other immigration statuses that confer work authorization as well as the prevalence of unauthorized immigrant workers on U.S. farms.¹⁹

K. Household Income

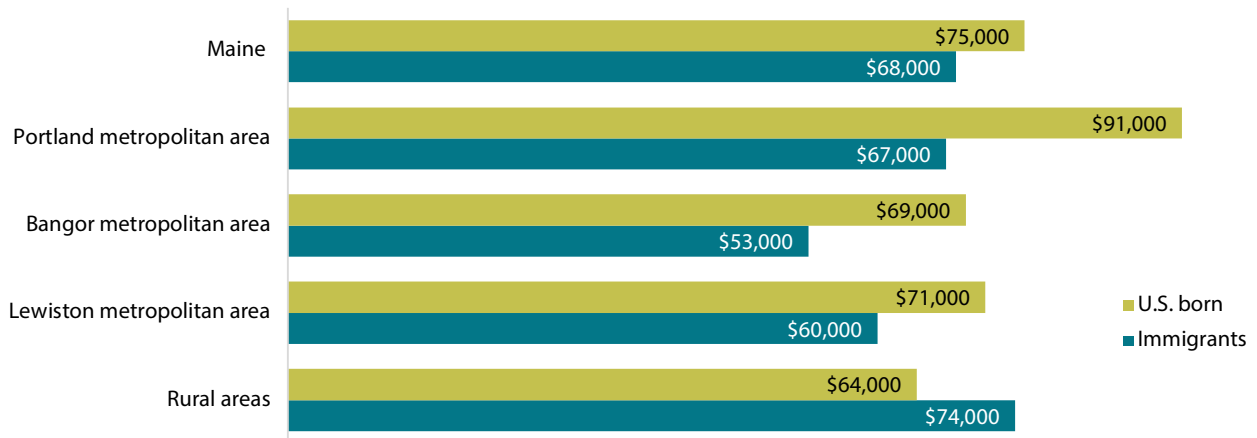
In Maine, immigrants' median household income was \$68,000 in 2019–23 (see Figure 11). And while the U.S. born generally had a higher median household income (by about \$7,000), there were important differences across the state. The U.S.-born/immigrant differences were greater in the Portland and Bangor metro areas, where immigrants' median household incomes were \$24,000 and \$16,000 lower, respectively, than those of the U.S. born. However, in rural areas, immigrants had a \$10,000 higher median household income than the U.S. born.

18 For a description of farms and farmworkers, see Arthur Phillips, "Farmworker Rights – An Explainer," Maine Center for Economic Policy, August 29, 2024. For H-2A data, see U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, "H-2A Employer Data Hub," updated September 30, 2024.

19 Hannah Tremblay and Jessica Kurn, "Immigration and the Food System" (fact Sheet, Farm Aid, January 9, 2025).

FIGURE 11

Median Household Income for Immigrants and the U.S. Born in Maine, 2019–23



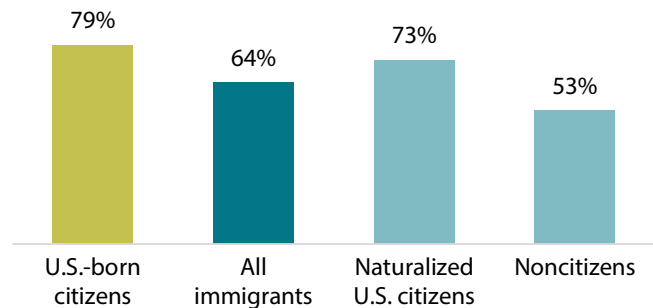
Source: MPI analysis of 2019–23 ACS data, pooled.

L. Home Ownership and Rentals

Maine ranks at the top of U.S. states in terms of residents owning their own homes,²⁰ but home ownership rates are lower for the foreign-born population than for native-born Mainers. Overall, 79 percent of the U.S. born owned their homes in 2019–23, compared to 64 percent of immigrants (see Figure 12). There are, however, important differences in ownership rates between immigrants who have become U.S. citizens and those who have not. Naturalized U.S. citizens had much higher home ownership rates (73 percent) than noncitizens (53 percent), underscoring the known positive effects of citizenship.²¹

FIGURE 12

Share of Maine Residents Living in Owned Homes, by Citizenship Status, 2019–23



Source: MPI analysis of 2019–23 ACS data, pooled.

Relatedly, immigrants are more likely to rent homes than the U.S. born. Given the current housing crisis in Maine, this means immigrants are more exposed to the rapidly rising costs of rentals.²² About 36 percent of immigrants in Maine were renting their homes in 2019–23, a share 15 percentage points higher than the rate for the U.S.-born population (21 percent).

Immigrants also faced higher rents than U.S.-born households. In 2019–23, the median gross monthly rent in Maine was \$1,300 for immigrants, approximately \$100 more than for the U.S. born (see Figure 13). Rent

20 Giulia Carbonaro, “Map Shows US States with Highest, Lowest Homeownership,” *Newsweek*, April 11, 2024.

21 Madeleine Sumption and Sarah Flamm, *The Economic Value of Citizenship for Immigrants in the United States* (Washington DC: MPI, 2012).

22 Since the COVID-19 pandemic began in 2020, Maine has experienced a housing crisis characterized by high housing costs, a rise in homelessness, and low supply of adequate housing. See Maine State Housing Authority (MSHA), *State of Maine Housing Production Needs Study* (Augusta: MSHA, 2023).

was higher in the Portland metropolitan area (close to \$1,500) and lower in the Lewiston area (\$1,100) for both groups. However, outside of metropolitan areas, immigrant renters typically paid more than U.S.-born renters.

FIGURE 13

Median Gross Monthly Rent for Immigrants and the U.S. Born in Maine, 2019–23



Note: Bangor is not included in this figure because the sample sizes were too small to generate statistically meaningful results.
Source: MPI analysis of 2019–23 ACS data, pooled.

M. Low-Income Families

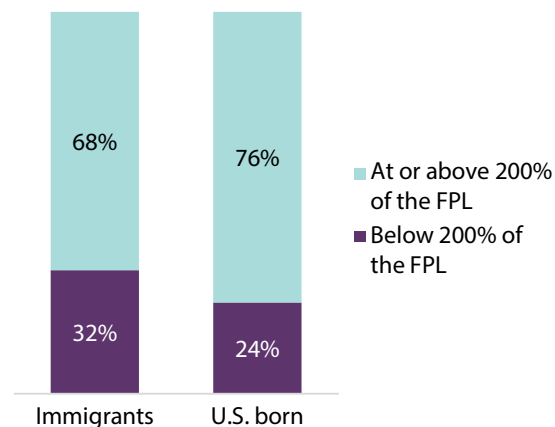
In 2019–23, the federal poverty level (FPL) was equivalent to \$30,900 for a family of two adults and two children.²³ Close to one-third of immigrants in Maine (32 percent) lived in families with incomes below 200 percent of the FPL in 2019–23. That low-income share of immigrant families was 8 percentage points higher than the share among U.S.-born Mainers (see Figure 14).²⁴ The low-income share was lower for immigrants living in rural areas (24 percent), higher in the metropolitan areas of Portland (33 percent) and Bangor (36 percent), and highest in the Lewiston area (49 percent).

Of the 16,300 immigrants in Maine who were low income, slightly more than half (7,300) had a family income below 100 percent of the FPL.

A sign of immigrants' integration is a decline in the share who are low income the longer they spend in the United States. In Maine, 25 percent of immigrants who had lived

FIGURE 14

Low-Income Share of Immigrants and the U.S. Born in Maine, 2019–23



Note: "Low income" is defined as a family income below 200 percent of the federal poverty level (FPL).
Source: MPI analysis of 2019–23 ACS data, pooled.

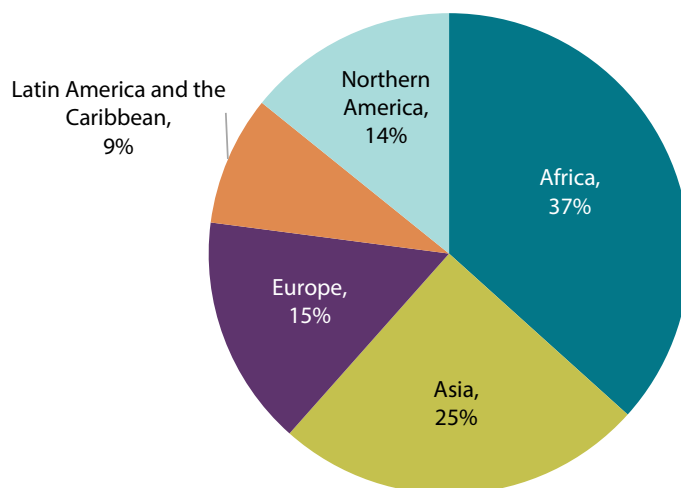
²³ U.S. Census Bureau, "Poverty Thresholds," updated January 23, 2025.

²⁴ The low-income shares of Maine residents were about the same as the shares at the U.S. level: nationwide, 31 percent of immigrants and 24 percent of the U.S. born were low income in 2019–23, according to MPI analysis of 2019–23 ACS data, pooled.

in the country for 20 years or more had low incomes, compared to 29 percent among immigrants with 10 to 19 years of U.S. residence, and 46 percent for those who had spent less than 10 years in the country.

The origin mix of the low-income immigrant population differs from that of the overall immigrant population in Maine. In 2019–23, Africans were overrepresented among low-income immigrants, making up 37 percent of that population, versus 20 percent of the total immigrant population (see Figures 15 and 3). At the same time, Europeans and Northern Americans were underrepresented in the low-income population (15 percent versus 24 percent of the total immigrant population, and 14 percent versus 19 percent, respectively). Immigrants from Latin America and the Caribbean and from Asia represented about the same shares of the low-income and overall immigrant populations.

FIGURE 15
Regions of Birth of Low-Income Immigrants in Maine, 2019–23



Notes: In ACS data, Northern America includes Bermuda, Canada, and Greenland. Mexico is included in Latin America and the Caribbean. “Low income” is defined as a family income below 200 percent of the FPL. Source: MPI analysis of 2019–23 ACS data, pooled.

N. Health Insurance and Social Safety Nets

In terms of health insurance, coverage rates are relatively high in Maine: 91 percent of immigrants and 93 percent of the U.S. born, of all income levels, were covered by some form of health insurance in 2019–23, including publicly funded programs (Medicaid, Medicare, or Department of Veterans Affairs insurance), employer-sponsored private insurance, or other programs. The incidence of disability, which may require some form of public assistance, tends to be lower among immigrants than the U.S. born (13 percent compared to 17 percent), such that in 2019–23, an estimated 7,000 immigrants had self-reported some form of disability.

Low-income immigrants in Maine had slightly lower participation rates than the U.S. born in some of the largest social safety net programs, namely the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, often called food stamps) and MaineCare (the state’s Medicaid program), as shown in Figure 16. Less than half (44 percent) of immigrants with family incomes below 200 percent of the FPL were enrolled in MaineCare, while the share was 51 percent for low-income U.S.-born individuals.

Welfare programs such as Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and cash assistance programs such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and General Assistance (GA) cover fewer people. In the case of SSI in particular, federal law restricts most noncitizens’ access to the program.²⁵ Maine’s state- and

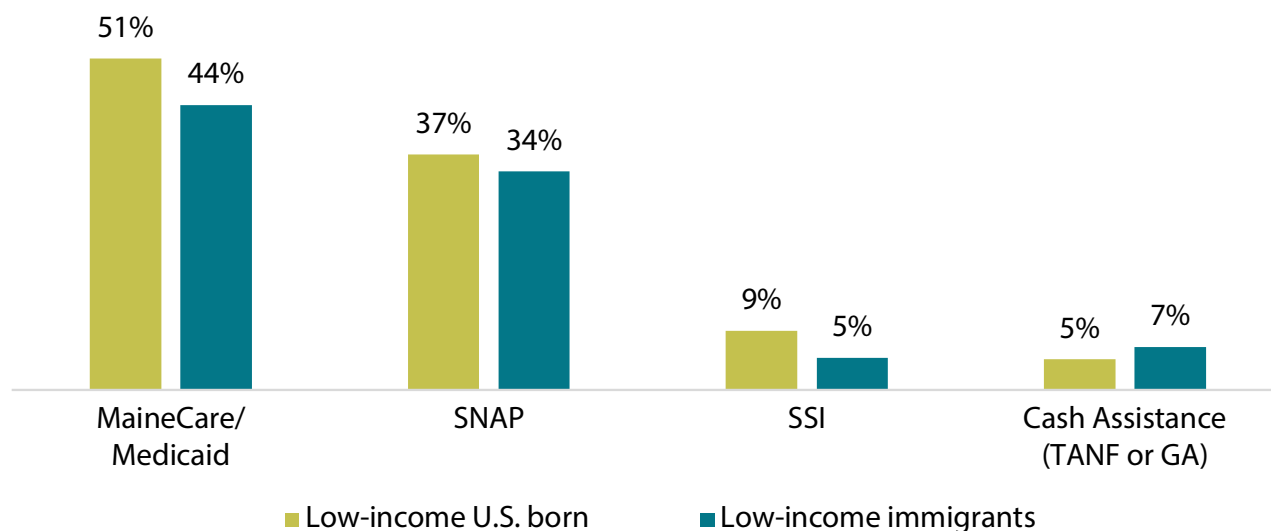
²⁵ For an overview of different immigrant groups’ eligibility for public benefits programs, see Valerie Lacarte, Julia Gelatt, and Ashley Podplesky, *Immigrants’ Eligibility for U.S. Public Benefits: A Primer* (Washington, DC: MPI, 2024).

municipal-funded GA is meant to serve all Maine residents in need, thus providing broader access to low-income noncitizens, a population that includes many recent arrivals, who often have greater needs for support and particularly so in the context of Maine's housing crisis (see Section 3 for a discussion of these challenges).

Still, even among low-income U.S.-born Mainers—who do not face immigration-status-related restrictions on benefits access—less than 10 percent participated in SSI and cash assistance programs (TANF and GA). Low-income immigrants also participated at very low rates in those programs. For cash assistance programs, the share of low-income immigrants participating was slightly higher than the share of the U.S. born, 7 percent versus 5 percent, but this represented fewer than 1,000 immigrants and 12,000 U.S.-born individuals.

FIGURE 16

Share of Low-Income People Participating in Public Benefits Programs, Immigrants and U.S. Born, 2019–23



GA = General Assistance; SNAP = Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program; SSI = Supplemental Security Income; TANF = Temporary Assistance for Needy Families.

Notes: Based on the ACS, for MaineCare (Maine's Medicaid program) and SNAP, data are for residents of all ages with a family income below 200 percent of the FPL. For TANF, GA, and SSI, data are for residents age 15 and older with a family income below 200 percent of the FPL. Being in a low-income household does not necessarily guarantee eligibility for any of these public benefits due to immigration status and program and/or state-specific requirements.

Source: MPI analysis of 2019–23 ACS data, pooled.

3 Immigrant-Serving Organizations and Insights on Service Needs

As evidenced by the data profile in the prior section, Maine's immigrant community is a mix of established immigrants mostly from Canada and Europe, notable populations from various parts of Asia and Latin America, and newer arrivals from Africa. To assess the needs of these diverse immigrant communities and

the services landscape in Maine, MPI researchers conducted nine semi-structured interviews in Fall 2024 with staff of immigrant-serving organizations across the state,²⁶ including community health workers, legal service providers, and civic engagement organizations (e.g., organizations focused on voting, local political activity, and promoting a sense of belonging).²⁷ Most of the organizations are small to midsize in terms of their staffing, but each serves several hundred to more than 1,000 people per year. Since most of the interviews occurred prior to the 2024 presidential election and immigration policy has shifted considerably since the second Trump administration began, interviewees were invited to fill out a follow-up questionnaire to capture information on more recent changes; seven out of the nine interviewees did so.

This section presents analysis of key insights from the interviews, including on the landscape of service providers, the main immigrant populations served, and common barriers to integration that immigrants in Maine face.

Insight 1. The immigrant services provided in Maine reflect the diversity of needs and nationalities of both newly arrived and well-settled immigrants.

Across the interviews conducted, a picture emerged of a strong network of immigrant services throughout the state of Maine. Immigrant-serving organizations are diverse in their makeup and focus, with many groups offering a variety of services and composed of staff who are members of immigrant communities themselves. Broadly speaking, these organizations include:

- ▶ **Community health workers.** Interviewed staff described these organizations as offering services akin to those of social workers, such as helping clients navigate a variety of systems including public benefits, education, transportation, and health care. Some primarily serve in a navigator role, with case workers offering individualized support, while other health organizations have trained doctors and mental health professionals who directly provide health services.
- ▶ **Cultural and civic engagement organizations.** These groups were described as offering activities such as cultural celebrations, language workshops for children of immigrants, engagement with local officials (including elected officials and law enforcement personnel), and voter registration for eligible immigrants.
- ▶ **Legal service organizations.** Interviewees described a variety of immigration-related services offered by such service providers, including assistance applying for asylum, TPS, T and U visas for victims of trafficking or crimes, and Special Immigrant Juvenile visas. Legal aid organizations also engage in civil litigation, generally focused on immigrants' access to social services.

Across the spectrum of services, the organizations interviewed tend to work with their clients over a long period of time. While initial vulnerabilities, immediate needs, and navigating state and local systems are an important focus, organization staff also expressed a commitment to supporting immigrants' integration

²⁶ These interviews were conducted via video call and lasted between 1 and 1.5 hours.

²⁷ Though launched in January 2025, after these interviews were conducted, it is worth noting that Maine is one of the most recent states to create an Office of New Americans. See Maine Governor's Office of Policy Innovation and the Future, "[Maine Office of New Americans](#)," accessed June 30, 2025. Based on early information, it appears this office is primarily focused on immigrant workforce integration issues.

over the long term. To that end, nearly all said that they do not work with clients for a specific amount of time; rather, they aim to provide support as long as necessary and to be a place where people can return if future needs emerge.

Service providers described working with clients from a range of nationalities (see Box 2), and one group said they estimate serving nationals from up to 100 countries every year. Many of the service providers noted that the origins of recent immigrant arrivals in the state differ from historical trends, including larger numbers from Africa, namely Angola and the Democratic Republic of the Congo—two countries that have experienced conflict in recent years.

Given this diversity of nationalities, interviewees noted that state entities such as the Bureau of Motor Vehicles and health-care facilities often lack the resources to provide effective language access and culturally sensitive services for many immigrants. For example, while the Maine Department of Health and Human Services has made a public commitment to offering translation services,²⁸ materials such as benefits applications and public information notices were not always readily available in immigrants' native languages and use of translation services was not always expeditious. Interviewees also noted the challenges that differing cultural norms could create, as when immigrant parents do not know how to advocate for their children in the education system because they are used to systems in which the teacher's word is final.

BOX 2

Countries of Origins for Clients of the Interviewed Immigrant-Serving Organizations

Interviewees described their organizations as serving a diverse population of immigrants hailing from all over the globe. The list below, organized alphabetically, is based on interviewees' records. While it may not be exhaustive nor representative of immigrants served in the state, it provides a level of detail on groups in need of assistance that is especially valuable given the limitations of U.S. Census Bureau data, as discussed in Section 2.B.

Africa: Angola, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Djibouti, Kenya, Rwanda, Somalia, and Sudan

Americas: Colombia, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Nicaragua, Peru, and Venezuela, members of Indigenous groups from Canada, and U.S. citizens from Puerto Rico

Asia: Cambodia

Middle East: Afghanistan, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria

Source: Author interviews with staff of immigrant-serving organizations in Maine, Fall 2024.

28 Maine Department of Health and Human Services, "Effective Communication and Language Access," accessed April 21, 2025.

Insight 2. Housing costs and lack of public transit have long plagued Maine residents, and they present particular challenges for immigrant communities.

Access to affordable housing and a lack of public transit are two challenges that burden U.S.-born and immigrant Mainers alike, but that present unique issues for immigrant communities. Due to language barriers, immigrants may struggle to navigate the systems involved, especially without access to translated documents or interpretation services. And some immigrants—particularly those in liminal legal statuses such as TPS holders, humanitarian parolees, and those waiting for work authorization—may find it difficult to secure permanent housing because they often struggle to meet documentary requirements (e.g., having a credit history or social security number) to rent, buy, get a loan, or qualify for public housing.

These issues have become more acute in recent years as Maine, like many states across the United States, is experiencing a housing shortage. A 2023 study found that Maine needs nearly 39,000 new homes to remedy underproduction, and it will need between 38,000 and 45,600 new homes to meet growth by 2030.²⁹ A lack of affordable housing stock and high rental costs have caused some immigrants, particularly new arrivals, to rely heavily on the shelter system. In 2022 and 2023, for example, Maine saw an increase in people placed in emergency motels, partly a result of the influx of COVID-19 relief funds that allowed for such emergency options.³⁰ The data in the 2023 study are not broken down by immigration status, making it impossible to determine the degree to which newly arrived populations contributed to this demand for housing assistance. However, Maine's persistent homelessness crisis is likely to be a major factor in any case.

Limited public transportation in Maine poses another challenge, affecting immigrants, the U.S. born, and service providers alike. In rural areas, there is virtually no access to public transport. And even in urban areas,

These transportation issues can, in turn, create other challenges for Maine's immigrant residents. This can include making it harder to get a job, attend adult education or English classes, or find child care.

public transportation is extremely limited and can be challenging for newcomers to navigate. Interviewees mentioned that rideshare options, such as Uber, are often prohibitively costly for their clients, and some immigrants cannot afford a car, do not know how to drive, or struggle to navigate the Bureau of Motor Vehicles licensing

process.³¹ In fact, one of the main services provided by the interviewed organizations was transportation or help overcoming transportation hurdles.

These transportation issues can, in turn, create other challenges for Maine's immigrant residents. This can include making it harder to get a job, attend adult education or English classes, or find child care. In addition, immigrant service providers appear to be mostly centralized in urban areas, reflecting the larger numbers of immigrants in cities such as Portland and Lewiston. Those living outside of big cities often cannot easily access such services, given the limited transport options available to them. Many interviewees

²⁹ MSHA, *State of Maine Housing Production Needs Study*.

³⁰ MSHA, *2024 Point in Time Count* (August: MSHA, 2025).

³¹ To obtain a driver's license in Maine, a person must provide proof of legal presence in the United States. As such, immigrants with various forms of legal status and asylum seekers with a valid work permit are eligible to apply. Unauthorized immigrants are not. See Maine Department of the Secretary of State, "Bureau of Motor Vehicles—How to Prove Legal Presence for a Non United States Citizen," accessed June 30, 2025; ASAP, "Maine – Driver's Licenses for Asylum Seekers," accessed June 30, 2025.

noted this strong rural–urban divide within Maine and highlighted efforts underway to bring more services to rural immigrant populations.

Insight 3. Service providers have found innovative ways to expand services by overcoming transportation-related barriers.

Some organizations have taken steps to bring services directly to rural communities. For example, health workers have created mobile clinics that are fully equipped for primary care appointments. These clinics go into communities that are far from brick-and-mortar health-care providers and offer direct services, including physicals, medication refills, consultation on new or persistent health issues, and referrals. Interviewees described this service approach as especially important for reaching farmworkers.

Other organizations have turned to technology to overcome the lack of public transportation. Using various platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger, organizations have been able to circulate information, conduct virtual consultations on health care or legal questions, and offer online classes. These digital services not only overcome the geographic barriers created by Maine's limited transportation, they can also help meet the needs of people who for other reasons may be unable to travel, either because of age, health issues, or child-care responsibilities.

In particular, interviewees mentioned the role of technology in providing immigration-related legal services. Legal service providers not only struggle to reach those in rural areas but also face an additional challenge when seeking to support clients in immigration court. The immigration court that serves Maine is located two states away in Chelmsford, Massachusetts, creating transportation issues for service providers and immigrants alike. Though not an innovation by service providers themselves, the immigration court system has made use of the video conferencing platform Webex throughout the country to provide virtual hearings; this has eased transportation-related challenges for some immigrants with legal representation.

Insight 4. Access to health care and health insurance remains a top concern, despite efforts to expand immigrant communities' access.

Interviewees described access to health care and health insurance as key challenges for many immigrants, while also noting this is a policy area that has received substantial attention within the state. Starting in 2022, a large advocacy push expanded MaineCare, Maine's state health insurance for low-income individuals and families, to include unauthorized immigrant children and pregnant women.³² While this represented a significant move toward making care affordable for more state residents, with the potential to benefit public health more broadly and to reduce uncompensated care costs, interviewees noted that many low-income noncitizens still lack public insurance. Moreover, MaineCare is facing funding deficits, and debates around federal and state funding for public health insurance threaten the future of the program.³³

Bureaucratic obstacles were cited in interviews as a major barrier, even though many immigrants are eligible on paper to access some form of health-care assistance. While federal law imposes restrictions on many noncitizens' access to federally funded Medicaid, Maine is among several states that have elected federal

³² Consumers for Affordable Health Care, "Assistance for Immigrants Qualifying for MaineCare Coverage," accessed April 21, 2025.

³³ Billy Kobin, "Future of MaineCare Remains Uncertain Even after Lawmakers Fill Deficit," *The Piscataquis Observer*, April 11, 2025.

options to expand coverage to some lawfully residing noncitizens.³⁴ In addition, Maine has developed financial assistance programs (otherwise known as charity care) in accordance with the *Affordable Care Act* to ensure nonprofit hospitals offer free medical care to all residents whose income is equivalent to or less than 150 percent of the FPL, and some hospitals extend free care to those with incomes up to 200 percent of the FPL.³⁵ Interviewees noted that although noncitizens are not excluded from charity care programs under Maine law, many immigrants struggle to access this care or are not aware of their eligibility for the programs.³⁶ Other issues affect both immigrant and U.S.-born Mainers. For example, reporting indicates that Maine hospitals charge higher-than-normal prices, and that billing patients who are eligible for free care is a recurring problem.³⁷ A new law adopted by Maine’s legislature in July 2025 seeks to address some of these problems to improve access to hospital-provided financial assistance programs.³⁸

Service providers, particularly community health workers, play a central role in helping immigrants navigate these and other obstacles. One issue is access to regular primary care. Many interviewees said they see immigrants relying on emergency services rather than having established providers, often due to a lack of understanding around eligibility rules, particularly for Medicaid. Because of the often-high costs of emergency services, this pattern has created financial issues for many within the state’s immigrant communities, leading to unaffordable bills or being sent to collections.

Service providers, particularly community health workers, play a central role in helping immigrants navigate these and other obstacles.

Other issues cited by interviewees included the need for culturally sensitive health services. Some mentioned situations in which health providers have expressed bias toward immigrants, who may require more education about a diagnosis and intervention. Such cultural divides can result in major gaps between diagnosis and intervention, with the lack of cultural sensitivity discouraging immigrants from seeking further care. Access to mental health services is also often limited, given the topic of mental health remains culturally taboo for many communities.

When combined with other challenges such as language barriers, limited transportation options, and the complexities of the U.S. health-care system, such issues can create a formidable obstacle to care. A number

34 Kaiser Family Foundation, “Medicaid and CHIP Coverage of Lawfully Residing Children & Pregnant Individuals,” accessed July 25, 2025.

35 Medha D. Makhoul, “Charity Care for All: State Efforts to Ensure Equitable Access to Financial Assistance for Noncitizen Patients,” *Houston Journal of Health Law and Policy* 23, no. 1 (2024): 57–110. Maine’s programs go beyond the *Affordable Care Act* (ACA) mandate, which requires nonprofit hospitals to develop financial assistance programs (free or discounted care) without specifying eligibility criteria. Maine law mandates free medically necessary care to individuals with incomes under 150 percent of FPL. MaineHealth—the largest nonprofit hospital system in Maine—offers free medical care for individuals with incomes up to 200 percent of the FPL. See MaineHealth, “Free Care,” accessed May 16, 2025. For the ACA mandate on financial assistance programs, see Susan Singer, Eric Wilson, and Tavi Carare, “Understanding Required Financial Assistance in Medical Care,” Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, July 28, 2022.

36 Dollar For, “Charity Care Law in Maine,” accessed May 16, 2025.

37 See Darbin Wofford, “Fixing Maine’s Broken Hospitals: A Case Study,” *Third Way*, January 4, 2024; Luke Messac et al., “US Nonprofit Hospitals Have Widely Varying Criteria to Decide Who Qualifies for Free and Discounted Charity Care,” *Health Affairs* 43, no. 11 (2024): 1569–77; Darbin Wofford, Kylie Murdock, and David Kendall, “A National Charity Care Law to Improve Nonprofit Hospitals,” *Third Way*, February 13, 2024.

38 BillTrack50, “ME LD1937,” accessed July 25, 2025.

of interviewed service providers said that, in addition to acting as navigators to help clients through the system, they often provide interpretation or transportation services to increase access.

Insight 5. Longer-standing, well-established immigrant communities also form sources of support for newer arrivals.

In addition to immigrant-serving organizations, informal entities also play a key role in supporting immigrants, often working alongside more-formal organizations. These support systems have grown out of immigrant communities that arrived in prior period and that are now well settled in Maine. These well-settled populations provide a comforting link to culture, faith, and language not otherwise found within the state, and are helpful connections for employment, housing, and other necessities.

For example, the town of Milbridge is home to many Mexican immigrants, many of whom used to be farmworkers and have gone on to start their own businesses and settle in the area. In 2022, 6 percent of Milbridge's population was of Mexican heritage, and 24 percent of elementary school students were of Mexican heritage.³⁹ The Milbridge community plays a key role in building bridges with current farmworkers, including by working closely with several immigrant-serving organizations.

For the Cambodian community, temples are an important source of support, facilitating community engagement and assistance for both Cambodian refugees who arrived in the 1980s after fleeing the Khmer Rouge and newer arrivals. Temples have played an important role in providing support for this longstanding population and come to serve a crucial role in linking newer Cambodian arrivals with earlier generations, instilling cultural traditions, and offering a safe space of inclusivity.

Although present in Maine in smaller numbers, Africans who arrived in earlier periods have created organizations that now support newer humanitarian populations. Earlier generations of Somali, Sudanese, and Congolese immigrants settled primarily in the Portland area and have formed businesses and organizations that are welcoming of newer arrivals. Job fairs, cultural activities, and community events are an opportunity to provide vital information to newcomers, and to bridge cultural differences that may exist within immigrant communities.⁴⁰

Collectively, these examples point to the important contributions long-standing immigrant populations make to supporting newer immigrants' integration. Many of these immigrants are now homeowners, business owners, and contributors to their communities as well as integral lifelines to newly arrived populations, supporting and working alongside immigrant-serving organizations.

Insight 6. Immigrants play an outsized role in industries crucial to the state's economy, but some—notably, farmworkers—remain largely invisible.

Within Maine's agriculture and aquaculture occupations, immigrant workers play an important role. For agriculture, top crops include blueberries, Christmas trees and wreaths, dairy, chicken, and eggs,

³⁹ Roger McCord, "From Mexico to Maine: Change thrives in Milbridge," *The Maine Monitor*, December 11, 2022.

⁴⁰ Bau Graves, Juan Lado, and Patricia Romney, *African in Maine Case Study: Center for Cultural Exchange* (Washington, DC: Animating Democracy, n.d.).

among others.⁴¹ Some employers provide housing for farmworkers on H-2A visas, in accordance with legal requirements, but the quality varies by farm. Employers in some industries only offer housing for individual farmworkers, but those working with certain crops (such as blueberries) offer family housing. And for aquaculture, seafood such as shrimp and soft-shell crab tend to be the top commodities.⁴² Work in aquaculture and other types of factories is typically concentrated in major coastal cities such as Portland, and employers do not typically provide workers with housing.

Several of the organizations whose staff were interviewed for this project work with farmworkers, either exclusively or as part of their broader set of services. Interviewees noted that farmworkers play an important role in Maine's economy but are often one of the most underserved and invisible populations. Farming has a long cultural history within the state, as a practice passed down within families. This legacy of pride has helped market many of Maine's agricultural products as "family-owned." And since consumers who buy produce at grocery stores are far removed from the production process in rural farms, the growing reliance on immigrant farmworkers remains unknown to many.

Given the rural nature of farming communities, some organizations have adapted their service models to go directly to farmworkers. Immigrant-serving organizations have developed relationships with some farm owners, allowing the organizations to provide health-care services, mental-health services, and legal aid. To preserve this access and avoid exacerbating potential frictions between farmworkers and their employers, organizations tend to tread carefully in providing services, though interviewees noted that in some cases, living and working conditions were subpar. The isolated nature of the farming industry also means that other essentials such as transportation and healthy food are hard to access, with many workers living in places with no public transportation and limited options for groceries (sometimes called food deserts).

Recent attempts to introduce greater legal protections for farmworkers have so far failed to gain traction within the state's legislature. Governor Janet Mills introduced a bill in March 2024 to guarantee a \$14.15 minimum wage for agriculture workers. The bill passed, but Mills vetoed it after legislators added language that would allow for lawsuits to be brought directly against farms, stating she would prefer complaints to be handled through the Maine Department of Labor.⁴³ Still, advocacy continues for guaranteed minimum wage, overtime pay, and collective bargaining rights specifically for farmworkers.⁴⁴

While increased worker protections have failed to take root at the legislative level, some companies in Maine have become outspoken allies of the immigrant community. For example, Luke's Lobster participated in a campaign highlighting immigrants' role in the lobster industry. Such campaigns stem partly from advocacy

41 U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), *2020 Maine State Agricultural Report* (Washington, DC: USDA, 2021); Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry (DACF), *Maine Agricultural Overview* (Augusta: DACF, 2023); USDA, "2024 State Agriculture Overview," updated April 23, 2025.

42 Nathan Strout, "Maine Fishers Brought in USD 611 Million in 2023," SeafoodSource, March 29, 2024.

43 State of Maine, Office of Governor Janet T. Mills, "Governor Mills Introduces Legislation to Establish Minimum Wage for Farm Workers" (news release, March 20, 2024); Patrick Whittle, "Maine Governor Vetoes Bill to Create a Minimum Wage for Agricultural Workers," Associated Press, April 23, 2024.

44 Arthur Phillips, "Farmworkers Deserve the Same Rights as All Workers," Maine Center for Economic Policy, May 2, 2023.

work by immigrant-serving organizations but also from recognition by employers that many industries rely heavily on immigrant workers, particularly given Maine's aging population. Interviewees described how various actors in industries such as health care and aquaculture have reached out to their organizations to request help advertising openings to immigrant communities, specifically mentioning MaineMed and Luke's Lobster. Other companies such as Tyson Foods have reached out for help with translation for certain employees.

Insight 7. Immigrant-serving organizations are facing fiscal uncertainties and seeing new fears and needs in immigrant communities since the start of the second Trump administration.

Prior to the 2024 U.S. election, many immigrant-serving organizations in Maine were already grappling with funding constraints and increased needs within the immigrant community. The rapid pace of change in immigration policy under the second Trump administration has added to these challenges. Organizations are now navigating both an increasingly narrow funding landscape and new fears and needs among immigrant communities.

The ample service environment within the state was expanded by COVID-19 relief funds, which in some cases helped establish new services. Many services have since developed a more diverse funding base, including other federal grants or donors, as pandemic-era funding ran out. However, federal funding cuts under the Trump administration are affecting service providers in Maine.⁴⁵ Eligibility for Medicaid has been narrowed, and federally funded health programs (such as those specifically for farmworkers) and grants from the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development have uncertain futures. Moreover, the push within the federal government to cut out programming related to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) has the potential to affect local organizations that have integrated DEI principles into their mission, as many immigrant-serving organizations have.

Beyond funding uncertainty, the administration's immigration policy priorities have had a chilling effect on immigrant communities in Maine, while also altering the needs landscape. High-profile immigration enforcement operations within the U.S. interior by Immigration and Customs Enforcement have left many noncitizens, even those with a lawful status, concerned about arrest, detention, and deportation as well as side-effects of enforcement actions such as family separation. The nationwide climate of increased enforcement and recent arrests within the state⁴⁶ have led some immigrants to avoid regular activities such as going to work, the grocery store, or places of worship.⁴⁷ Some have also been hesitant to go to the doctor or apply for benefits for which they qualify, actions that could have long-term health and well-being impacts.

Given this changed environment, service providers in Maine have shifted their services to meet new demands. Across organizations, interviewees described a goal of conveying accurate and timely information

45 Sloane M. Perron, "Nonprofit Leaders Rally amid Federal Funding Cuts," *Mainebiz*, May 21, 2025; Rya Wooten, "Portland Immigrant Center Closes amid Severe Funding Cuts," *News Center Maine*, June 30, 2025.

46 Steve Robinson, "Tom Homan's ICE Turns 39 'New Mainers' into Deportees: CBP," *The Maine Wire*, May 3, 2025.

47 Valerie Lacarte, "The Health Costs to Children of Stepped-Up U.S. Immigration Enforcement" (short read, MPI, Washington, DC, June 2025).

on immigration policy to help clients navigate a confusing, rapidly changing period. Service providers also reported an increasing need for legal services—which were already in high demand prior to the change in administration. Interviewees described common concerns as the threat of deportation for unauthorized immigrants, the termination of some temporary statuses (e.g., TPS designations for nationals of certain countries and humanitarian parole), and uncertainty about access to social programs and services. Organizations also noted a growing interest among immigrants eligible to naturalize in pursuing U.S. citizenship to ensure more stability for themselves and their families.

4 Conclusion

A quiet state in the northeast, Maine is not typically thought of as a top destination for immigrants. Yet, as immigration has become forefront in policy debates throughout the country, Maine's small but diverse immigrant population has garnered attention at the local and national level. Just 4 percent of state residents (and 11 percent of the City of Portland's population), Maine's immigrant community echoes some of the diversification of the national immigrant population, while also featuring certain unique dynamics—notably, long-standing immigration from Canada. Overall, immigrants in Maine are a mix of well-settled and newly arrived populations, with origins in many world regions.

Maine provides an example of the positive impacts of immigrants' strong integration within local communities. The data show that although recent immigrants face greater language and income barriers, overall immigrants in Maine have high levels of educational attainment, employment, home ownership, and English proficiency, and that they provide critical economic contributions as the state grapples with an aging population and shrinking U.S.-born workforce.

At the same time, immigrant Mainers—both newly arrived and well settled—often face barriers in terms of access to affordable housing, health care, transportation, legal assistance, and culturally and linguistically responsive services. In interviews for this project, staff of immigrant-serving organizations noted these barriers while also highlighting important advances, including expanded health-care access for certain immigrants and innovations in service provision that make it possible to connect with harder-to-reach populations such as farmworkers and others living in rural areas.

In the current political climate, conversations around the support needs of immigrant populations abound. Concerns about strains on housing, public benefits, and health care dominate state policy conversations, with immigrants often at their center. Yet many of these challenges are shared with others in Maine, particularly those in low-income households, which also struggle with the cost of housing, limited public transportation, and access to affordable health care. Moreover, the data profile in this report suggests that a relatively small share of Maine's immigrants are in need of support services, and these are likely to primarily be newer arrivals to the country.

In all of this, Maine offers an example of an important question facing policymakers nationwide—how to manage broad policy challenges, such as housing and labor shortages, while simultaneously assisting communities in need of additional support, immigrant and U.S. born alike. This question becomes

increasingly relevant as states navigate the changing national policy and funding landscape, including large-scale cuts to critical federal programs, increased immigration enforcement, and instability in communities with large numbers of immigrants in liminal statuses (such as humanitarian parole and TPS) that the Trump administration seeks to end. As the impacts of these changes are felt locally, one likely result is that state policymakers and state and local organizations may take on a greater role in shaping immigrants' integration and in determining whether local communities are able to reap the benefits that immigration can bring.

Maine offers an example of an important question facing policymakers nationwide—how to manage broad policy challenges, such as housing and labor shortages, while simultaneously assisting communities in need of additional support, immigrant and U.S. born alike.

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Acknowledgments

The authors thank the interviewed staff of the nine immigrant-serving organizations who shared their time, expertise, and perspectives on immigrant communities in Maine. The authors learned tremendously from every exchange, and these insights enriched the analysis presented in this report.

The authors also thank their Migration Policy Institute (MPI) colleagues Michael Fix, Julia Gelatt, and Ariel G. Ruiz Soto for their guidance on research design and peer review; Lauren Shaw for her careful edits; Michelle Mittelstadt for strategic outreach; and former intern Alejandro Urbina-Bernal for his research assistance.

This publication's research and writing was made possible by a grant from the Maine Health Access Foundation and the All Means All Coalition.

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Design: Sara Staedicke, MPI
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Suggested citation: Lacarte, Valerie and Colleen Putzel-Kavanaugh. 2025. *Maine's Immigrant Communities: Diverse Origins, Characteristics, and Challenges*. Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute.

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