

*Massachusetts Immigrant & Refugee  
Advocacy Coalition*



**New Workers, New Voters**

*Why Massachusetts Should  
Recruit, Retain, and Train Newcomers*

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# New Workers, New Voters

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Massachusetts has always been a destination for newcomers from other parts of the world. From the Irish to the Italians to the Portuguese to the Greeks, the cities around the Commonwealth were home to enclaves of newcomers who struggled to learn English, get jobs, and provide for their families. Now is no different. The cities of the Commonwealth: from the burgeoning Somali community in Revere to the thriving Latino communities of the Berkshires to the courageous Cambodian communities of Lowell, are rich with diversity and strength.

### ***Population***

Of the 6.4 million people in Massachusetts, more than 900,000 were born in another country. Foreign-born persons constitute 14.1% of the state's population. Since 2000, net domestic migration (more native-born residents leaving the state than arriving) accounts for a loss of over 46,000 residents per year. During the same time period, the net international migration, (more foreign born persons arriving than leaving) accounted for an influx of 31,770 persons.

This net loss is a key issue to consider because the state's electoral power

rests with the size of its population. If foreign-born residents increasingly comprise the state's population, they will play a large role in securing the Commonwealth's economic and political strength in the US by helping the state retain its ten congressional seats. This is critical to ensure the state is able to secure the maximum possible in terms of federal funding for health care, infrastructure and other key items. The Congressional districts with the largest foreign born populations are District 8 which includes the cities of Cambridge, Chelsea, Somerville, Charlestown, and Boston (currently held by Congressman Capuano) and District 7 which includes Revere, Framingham, Woburn, Malden, Everett and others (currently held by Rep. Edward Markey).

*One of the newest constituents of Congressional District 7 is Maria C. She and her husband had escaped war-torn El Salvador, where human rights were regularly violated and civil society had broken down. In America, life was tranquil though hard. Her husband worked 3 different jobs to put food on the table for his young family.*

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*When her husband suddenly died of cancer, Maria struggled to take care of their 3 children. She went to Centro Latino in Chelsea to get help learning English and to pursue her citizenship. As her English skills improved, she was able to find a higher paying job. After much hard work and long nights of studying, she took her naturalization exam. And passed. She says smiling with pride, "Centro Latino gave me knowledge and opportunity. Now I can do everything I want, including driving a car." Today, Maria C. lives in Lynn and works for an elementary school in Chelsea. Despite all the challenges in her life, she is living her American Dream.*

## ***A Dwindling Workforce***

The Commonwealth faces a critical challenge in recruiting and retaining a workforce that will sustain and drive our economy forward. From 2000-2005, the Massachusetts resident labor force did not grow at all, while the national labor force grew by nearly 5%; putting Massachusetts 48th among the 50 states.

According to Northeastern University's Center for Labor Market Studies, Massachusetts remained dependent on the immigrant labor force in the period 2000 to 2004. In fact, by 2004, immigrants accounted for 17% of the state's workforce, a sharp increase from 1980 when immigrants were only at 8.8%. Looking forward, it is projected through 2015 that the state will continue to be overwhelmingly dependent on foreign immigration for its population and labor force growth.

Likewise as the population changes in the next 40-50 years, workforce aged immigrants will be supporting elders and children. The Pew Research Center just released demographic data on Monday that showed the country's "dependency ratio" is increasing. The "dependency ratio" indicates the relationship between the size of the working-age population, on one side and

the elderly and young population on the other side. The data shows that there will be 72 dependents per 100 working age people in 2050 as opposed to 59 dependents per 100 working people in 2005. This data illustrates the need for immigrants to continue to enter our workforce and provide support for the elderly and younger members of the population.

The Pew Research Center also reveals that the working-age population will increase slowly until 2050 (only 37%) but all that growth will be a result of immigrants and children of immigrants.

Finally, according to The New England Council Commission on the Older Workforce (2007), Massachusetts' population between the ages of 35-44 (prime-age working population) is expected to undergo a 17.7% decrease of approximately 181,000 people. It is incredibly clear the immigrant community plays a crucial role in reversing this trend and securing the economic future of the Commonwealth.

## ***Immigrant Entrepreneurs***

Many of the newcomers that play a large role in the Massachusetts workforce and Massachusetts industry are immigrant entrepreneurs. Just like their ancestors, this speaks to the pioneering spirit of the newcomer community. In fact, according to a national study, Massachusetts is among the states with an above-average rate of immigrant founding engineering and technology companies.

Seventeen percent of the workforce in the state is newcomers. Immigrants occupy positions in industries as varied as education, biotechnology, and healthcare (from physicians to home health workers). Between 2000 and 2004, the state's labor force would have shrunk if it weren't for new immigrants coming to work.

Recently, a report by the Immigrant Learning Center that focused on Allston/Brighton and Fields Corner in Dorchester, highlighted the work of entrepreneurs

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in these neighborhoods. In both areas, immigrant entrepreneurs used much of their own startup funds, employed new workers, and had long hours of operation for their businesses (up to 70 hours per week.) These entrepreneurs were also likely to donate money to neighborhood festivals and form their own ethnic specific business associations. In Fields Corner Vietnamese immigrants own 126 of the area's 225 businesses (56 percent) and in Allston Village, immigrants own 131 of the community's 283 businesses (46 percent). In the biotech industry in MA, a quarter of all the biotech companies were founded by at least one foreign born person. Even more beneficial to the Commonwealth, these companies produced over \$7.6 billion in sales and employed over 4,000 workers.

*Kim, from Korea is an excellent example of an immigrant entrepreneur and her contributions to the community. When she arrived in the US, she had a college degree but did not speak English. Yet, she was able to open a Korean lunch restaurant downtown with her husband. They worked hard and slowly she learned English at the Irish Immigration Center. Eventually, she decided that her goal was citizenship and she worked hard learning civics and improving her English to prepare for the exam. Finally, this past November, she passed the exam and was naturalized. Shortly after she and her husband bought another Korean restaurant in Dedham. Kim's story is a good example of the educated immigrant that has transferable skills if given the opportunity to learn English and use those skills. Her story highlights the need for more English classes in a variety of settings including workplace programs.*

## *Naturalization*

Forty-seven percent of the state's foreign-born population is naturalized. Between 1996 and 2005, over 165,000 immigrants in the Commonwealth became US citizens. In fact, the Commonwealth had the largest percentage increase in the number of Latinos from the Caribbean over the age of 18 who were naturalized between 2000 and 2005. The increase was 92% compared to 28% in Texas and 10% in Florida. The state also had the 6th largest number of Asians from Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, over the age of 18 to become naturalized. Fifty-seven percent more Vietnamese, Laotians, and Cambodians were naturalized in 2005 increasing the number from 18, 639 to 29,272.

More recently, with the creation of the national Ya Es Hora (It Is Time) Campaign, a collaboration among SEIU, Univision, and National Council of La Raza, people all over the country are working to get naturalized and get registered. Since March 2007, when SEIU set up a Ya Es Hora website to provide information about naturalization, 2700 people from the Commonwealth visited the site, the 6th highest number of visitors nationally. This indicates a strong desire of the newcomers of our state to become citizens. In fact, on one July day last summer, 300 people came to Boston to complete their naturalization application. Despite the cost and the complicated application, immigrants from all over are submitting their naturalization applications. So many, in fact, that there is a current backlog at the US Citizenship and Immigration Service.

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*Hang Lim is one such naturalized immigrant from Cambodia. After surviving the horrors of Pol Pot's regime in Cambodia and barely subsisting in a refugee camp in Thailand, she was able to come to safety in Amherst with her husband and her six children. Though she did not speak English, Hang worked very hard at the Nourse Farms in Whately, MA from when she arrived. She put her children through school successfully and sent them to college. She also found the time to learn English, a difficult and long journey for someone who is middle aged and not literate in her own language. But she succeeded and she was just sworn in as a new citizen on January 24th. Though her status as a citizen gives her some new freedom to travel, Hang knows that home is Amherst, MA, where she has lived and worked for almost 20 years.*

## Voters

Of course the workforce and demographic changes alone don't tell the whole story about the impact immigrants are making on the Commonwealth. Newly registered citizens are making and will continue to make an impact on Massachusetts elections. In the 2004 election, 225,000 first generation and 468,000 second generation immigrants voted, representing 22.5% of the ballots cast here. Nationally, it was only 14%. Between 1999 and 2005, the Chinatown vote tripled. The Coalition of New American voters was created in 2005 to promote the goals of immigrants and refugees by educating and empowering voters and encourage greater participation in the electoral process. Leading up to the gubernatorial election in 2006, MIRA along with its members and allies registered over 6,000 new voters and educated almost 55,000 voters about

the candidates' views on immigration issues. All this data shows that the immigrant population is increasingly becoming a larger player in Massachusetts electoral politics and one that candidates and lawmakers must heed.

These new voters will play a key role in certain districts across the state like the Second Hampden and Hampshire districts that include Chicopee, Holyoke and smaller towns like Southhampton and the Sixteenth Essex District which includes Lawrence.

*Seiji, a young Japanese man who studied for his naturalization exam in Lawrence, recently voted for the first time. Though he lives in Chelmsford and works as an engineer at Nortel, this student studied civics and prepared for his naturalization exam at St. Patrick's School in Lawrence. He was just sworn in as a citizen on January 17th and voted for the first time on Super Tuesday. According to his wife who attends English class at St. Patrick's, her husband was thrilled and proud about being able to vote.*

## Children of Immigrants Becoming Eligible to Vote

The changing electorate, however, does not only include newly naturalized citizen voters. It also includes the growing number of children of immigrants who will be turning 18 before the November elections and will be eligible to vote. In Massachusetts, there are over 22,000 US born children of immigrants who will be voting age by the 2008 election. This follows the trend of over 44,000 18-24 year old children of immigrants who registered in 2006. According to a recent study by the Pew Research Center, immigrants who arrive after 2005 and their US-born descendants, will account for 82% of the US population. It is important to realize that a growing number of these US citizen children may have undocumented immigrant parents. And as more and more younger voters get civically engaged, especially during this presidential election year, their vote is going to be increasingly significant.

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## Conclusion

Massachusetts continues to be a destination for many immigrants as it has been throughout the state's history. Like immigrants of generations passed, the newcomers of today come to work, raise their families, contribute to our economy, and pursue the American dream.

Today's Commonwealth is enriched by the changing demographics, changing electorate, and changing workers. The myriad of policies being debated by lawmakers across the state needs to be considered within this changing context.

Lawmakers should consider expanding such successful policies like the Citizenship for New Americans program that helps legal immigrants become citizens. This two-years-old program has already assisted nearly 2,200 people on their path to citizenship. In fact, in the short time frame from October to December of 2007, 153 people were naturalized. Programs like these aid in the recruitment and retention of immigrant workers by showing Massachusetts' commitment to immigrant families.

Additionally, policies need to take into account the growing number of newcomers who need to learn English skills. A number of employers have invested in their workers by offering workplace English classes. The state should consider how it could effectively bolster and supplement the efforts of these employers to better train our workforce. Policies need to reflect this growing constituency of workers, taxpayers, voters and their children.

The policymakers of today need to recognize and appreciate that to help the Massachusetts of tomorrow succeed.

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# MIRA Coalition Organizational Members

## Cape Cod

1. Interfaith Council for the Homeless of Lower Cape Cod
2. Community Action Commonwealth of Cape Cod and Islands
3. Massachusetts School Counselors Association

## Central Massachusetts

4. Law Office of Yanneth B. Camp
5. Law Office of Randy Feldman
6. Notre Dame Health Care Center, Inc.
7. Refugee Apostolate, Inc.

## Greater Boston

8. Brazilian Immigrant Center
9. Brazilian Women's Group, Inc.
10. Action for Boston Community Development, Inc.
11. American Civil Liberties Union of Massachusetts
12. Anti-Defamation League
13. Asian Community Development Corporation
14. Asian Task Force Against Domestic Violence
15. Barker & Loscocco, P.C.
16. BEST Corp.
17. Boston Chinatown Neighborhood Center
18. Boston Public Health Commission
19. Catholic Charities Refugee, Immigration and Interpreter Services
20. ETHOS
21. Greater Boston Labor Council
22. Health Care for All
23. Immigrant Information Center
24. International Institute of Boston
25. Irish Immigration Center
26. Jewish Community Relations Council
27. Jewish Vocational Service, Inc.
28. Jobs with Justice
29. Latin American Health Institute
30. Law Office of Brian J. Lenfest
31. Massachusetts Asian and Pacific Islanders for Health
32. Massachusetts Legal Services Diversity Coalition
33. Mayor's Office of New Bostonians
34. Medical-Legal Partnership for Children (MLPC)
35. Meredith and Associates
36. MGH Social Services
37. Neighbor to Neighbor
38. Pollack & Flanders, LLP.
39. Political Asylum Immigration Representation Project (PAIR)
40. Public Policy Institute
41. Ross, Silverman, and Levy, LLP
42. Russian Community Association of Massachusetts
43. SEIU Local 615
44. The Medical Foundation
45. UNITE HERE
46. Boston Area Rape Crisis Center
47. Cambridge Economic Opportunity Council
48. Community Learning Center, City of Cambridge
49. Massachusetts Alliance of Portuguese Speakers (MAPS)
50. New England Bangladesh American Foundation (NEBAF)
51. Physicians for Human Rights Asylum Network
52. Centro Latino de Chelsea, Inc.
53. Chelsea Collaborative
54. Roca, Inc.
55. Association of Haitian Women (AFAB)
56. Codman Square Health Center
57. Dorchester House Multi-service Center
58. Federated Dorchester Neighborhood Houses, Inc.
59. Freedom House, Inc.
60. Harbor Health Services, Inc.
61. Massachusetts Coalition for Occupational Safety and Health
62. Organizing and Leadership Training Center
63. East Boston Ecumenical Community Council
64. East Boston Harborside Community School
65. East Boston Neighborhood Health Center
66. Neighborhood of Affordable Housing (NOAH)

67. Latinos Unidos en Massachusetts (LUMA)
68. Tri-City Community Action Program, Inc.
69. Haitian American Public Health Initiative (HAPHI)
70. Massachusetts Extended Care Federation
71. Alternatives for Community and Environment (ACE)
72. Crittenton, Inc.
73. SEIU 1199 United Healthcare Workers East, MA Division
74. Urban Edge Housing Corp.
75. Whittier Street Health Center
76. Cambridge Portuguese Credit Union
77. Community Action Agency of Somerville
78. Multicultural Affairs Commission for the City of Somerville
79. Muslim American Society – Boston Chapter
80. SCALE (Somerville center for Adult Learning Experiences)
81. The Welcome Project
82. New England Regional Council of Carpenters
83. Notre Dame Education Center, South Boston
84. SEIU Local 509

## Metrowest

85. Jewish Family & Children's Service
86. National Association of Socially Responsible Organizations
87. REACH Beyond Domestic Violence

## Northeastern Massachusetts

88. Asian Center of Merrimack Valley
89. Lawrence Family Development and Education Fund
90. Northern Essex Community College, Adult Literacy and Transition Program
91. Coalition for a Better Acre
92. Community Teamwork, Inc.
93. Lowell Community Health Center
94. ONE Lowell
95. St. Patrick School and Educational Center
96. Bosnian Community Center for Resource Development, Inc.
97. Lynn Community Health, Inc.
98. Guatemala Solidarity Committee
99. Jessica R. Salinas – Thomas, Esq. & Raul Salinas Ortega Multi-Services

## Southeastern Massachusetts

100. Brockton Family and Community Resources
101. Cape Verdean Association of Brockton
102. Center for Haitian American Civic Rights, Inc.
103. Community Connections of Brockton
104. Greater Brockton Healthy Families
105. Bristol Elder Services
106. Catholic Social Services of Fall River
107. Coalition for Social Justice
108. Saint Anne's Hospital
109. South Coastal Counties Legal Services, Inc.
110. Community Economic Development Center (CEDC)
111. Immigrants' Assistance Center, Inc.
112. Manet Community Health Center, Inc.
113. Randolph Community Partnership ESOL Program
114. The Labor Guild
115. Massachusetts Migrant Education Program (EDCO)

## Western Massachusetts

116. South Berkshire Educational Collaborative
117. Womenshelter / Companeras
118. Center for New Americans
119. Western Massachusetts Legal Services, Inc.
120. Berkshire Immigrant Center
121. Literacy Volunteers of Berkshire County
122. Western Massachusetts Legal Services, Inc.
123. Anti-Displacement Project
124. Catholic Charities Agency
125. Jewish Family Service of Western Massachusetts
126. Western Massachusetts Legal Services, Inc.

## New England Region Organizations

127. Immigrant Legal Assistance Project (ILAP)
128. International Institute of Rhode Island