



NORTH SHORE ALLIANCE
For Economic Development



Future of Work Overview Trends 2023

North Shore Alliance for Economic Development
2023

Overview of the North Shore Alliance

The **North Shore Alliance for Economic Development (the Alliance)** commissioned the Center for Economic Development & Sustainability (CEDS) at Salem State University to produce the following *Future of Work: Overview of Trends Report*. The **Alliance** will use this Report and share its clear and compelling data to advance our economic development efforts that promote economic sustainability and growth.

The **Alliance** is a regional convener and catalyst on the North Shore that supports economic development initiatives through collaboration, advocacy and regional communication. The Alliance brings regional leaders from 30 communities together to explore and take action on economic development issues that can help grow the region, including those that advance the Commonwealth as a whole. It is critical that the actions taken, decisions made and resources offered be driven by the examination, understanding, and sharing of data on the general composition of the businesses and industries in the region and those of its 30 communities. This report advances that goal.

Data Collection

This research explores the competitiveness of the businesses located on the North Shore. Specifically, data was gathered and analyzed in response to the changing landscape of business and employee-employer dynamics. Researchers explored best practices, models, and underutilized labor sources and federal and state legislative workforce policies, at the local, regional, New England and national scales to assist in understanding the regions business climate including:

- Assessing best practices for the future of work.
- Exploring workforce trends among successful businesses and organizations.
- What are businesses and organizations doing to succeed in the future?
- Policy research aimed at understanding underutilized labor sources, workforce regulation and practices.
- What are the key skills employers are seeking from the workforce of the future?

This work is based on research that employed the following methods: Interviews with business owners, management and employees; Surveys of college students on the North Shore, Massachusetts; Additional insights into employer needs from recent **Alliance** and MassHires survey data and Social media posts, newspaper and industry journal articles.



Executive Summary



The rapid changes and disruptions of recent years have had a significant impact on the modern workplace. Technological advancements, changing demographics, and shifting social norms have all played a role in shaping the workplace of today, and will continue to influence the future of work. The emergence of new industries presents both opportunities and challenges for employers and employees alike. As employers struggle to find workers and workers struggle to find jobs they like, it is critical to understand the factors that have shaped the labor market in the past and how they may shape it in the future. By exploring the supply and demand sides of the labor market through content analysis and surveys, this research sheds light on the changing nature of work and may help employers and employees navigate these complex changes and tighten the gap between the two.

The future of work is an increasingly important topic as changing attitudes towards work and technological advances continually reshape the employment landscape. Today people are seeking jobs that offer flexibility, creativity, and purpose. Employers are attempting to understand why open positions go unfilled and ultimately seek individuals who possess skills that are relevant to the digital age, including technological literacy, adaptability, and the ability to collaborate. This report explores current trends and future direction of work, as well as what employers want, what types of jobs people are seeking, and how the divide can be bridged. Some report highlights include:

- Employers are looking for individuals who possess digital literacy, creativity, and adaptability.
- The future of work is characterized by agility, flexibility, and innovation. Companies should consider: Embracing technology; Focusing on upskilling and reskilling; Prioritizing diversity, equity, and inclusion; Supporting employee well-being, and offering a flexible work environment.
- People seeking jobs prioritize flexible work options (including hybrid), work-life balance, a sense of purpose, and opportunities for growth and development.
- The underutilized labor market can fill the job vacancy gaps. This potential labor pool refers to a group of individuals who are not fully employed but have the potential to participate in the labor force and include: people with disabilities, older workers, prior justice system involvement individuals, immigrants, and individuals challenged with location and/or transportation
- It is important for employers to understand immigration policy and process and how immigrants can contribute to the workforce.
- Successful companies are those that invest in their current workforce and create a culture of continuous learning and development.

There is a declining Hispanic/Latinx labor force participation across New England while the overall Hispanic/Latinx population is increasing.

This Report delves into the above highlights and examines the future of work trends with more detail in the following 10 areas:

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1. Employer Needs

Employers today indicate that they are unable to hire sufficient employees, job vacancies go unfilled, and turn-over rates are higher than ever. In interviews and from surveys, it was revealed that employers are looking for individuals who possess a combination of technical and soft skills. According to a 2021 survey conducted by LinkedIn, the top three most in-demand skills are digital literacy, creativity, and adaptability (LinkedIn, 2021). The demand for digital literacy has increased as organizations have adopted new technologies, including cloud computing, artificial intelligence, and machine learning. Creativity is valued because it enables individuals to think outside the box and generate innovative solutions to problems. Adaptability is necessary because of the rapidly changing work environment and the need to pivot quickly in response to new challenges.

The adoption of new technologies is likely to create new job opportunities in areas such as artificial intelligence, data science, and cybersecurity.

Employers are also seeking individuals who possess strong interpersonal skills. The ability to communicate effectively, work collaboratively, and manage relationships is increasingly important in a work environment that is characterized by teamwork and cross-functional projects. Additionally, employers are looking for individuals who demonstrate leadership potential, regardless of their current position in the organization. This includes individuals who can take initiative, make decisions, and inspire others.

2. Best Practices for the Future of Work

The future of work is characterized by agility, flexibility, and innovation. Companies that want to succeed must adopt best practices that are aligned with these values. Some of the best practices for the future of work include:

1. **Embracing Technology:** Technology is a key driver of innovation and efficiency. Successful companies must embrace technology and invest in digital infrastructure that supports remote work, collaboration, and data-driven decision making.
2. **Focus on Upskilling and Reskilling:** The pace of technological change means that employees must continuously upskill and reskill to remain competitive. Successful companies invest in training programs that enable employees to acquire new skills and adapt to new technologies.
3. **Prioritizing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion:** A diverse workforce is critical to innovation and competitiveness. Successful companies prioritize diversity, equity, and inclusion by creating a culture of belonging, investing in training programs, and promoting diversity at all levels of the organization.
4. **Supporting Employee Wellbeing:** Employees who are happy and healthy are more productive and engaged. Successful companies prioritize employee wellbeing by offering flexible work arrangements, mental health support, and wellness programs.
5. **Flexible Work Environment:** Employers who consider flexible work schedules, hybrid and remote options will continue to be critical in attracting and keeping employees.

3. Job Seekers' Priorities

The priorities of job seekers are shifting in response to changes in the work environment. According to a 2021 survey conducted by Deloitte, the top three factors that job seekers prioritize are work-life balance, a sense of purpose, and opportunities for growth and development (Deloitte, 2021). Work-life balance is important because it enables individuals to maintain a healthy work-life balance, which is associated with greater job satisfaction and lower levels of stress. A sense of purpose is valued because it enables individuals to feel that their work is meaningful and has a positive impact on the world. Opportunities for growth and development are important because they enable individuals to learn new skills and advance their careers.

Remote work has also become a priority for many job seekers in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. According to a 2021 survey conducted by Buffer, 97% of remote workers would recommend remote work to others (Buffer, 2021). Remote work is valued because it offers greater flexibility, eliminates commuting time, and enables individuals to work from anywhere.

Flexible work arrangements, including remote work and flexible hours, are also likely to become more widespread. According to a 2021 survey conducted by PwC, 72% of executives expect to offer employees more flexible work options in the future (PwC, 2021). This shift towards flexibility is likely to be driven by changing attitudes towards work-life balance, as well as the need to attract and retain top talent.

Highlights of the surveys of students currently attending a 4 year college or university on the North Shore:

- With almost half of the college respondents (48.4%) indicating they would prefer to remain on the North Shore post-graduation, there exists a significant number of potential employees.
- Almost 1/3 of the respondents (32%) do not have a specific career goal post-graduation and consider flexibility and benefits of the position more important than the title, pay or industry.
- Although many students in college on the North Shore are currently employed, there were 16% not employed and actively seeking a job, with a further 8% not employed and currently not seeking a job. Possibly neither of these groups would be captured in the unemployment numbers as they were not fully employed prior to/or since attending higher education.
- 45% of respondents will be seeking a remote (5%) or hybrid (40%) job upon graduation and would move if the opportunity does not exist to remain on the North Shore.



4. Underutilized Labor Market: Who are They?

The underutilized labor market refers to a group of individuals who are not fully employed but have the potential to participate in the labor force. This group includes individuals who are unemployed, underemployed, and those who are not actively seeking work but are available to work if a job opportunity arises. Some examples of underutilized labor markets and what needs to happen to bring them into the labor force are:

1. **People with disabilities:** According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), people with disabilities have a lower labor force participation rate than those without disabilities. To bring this group into the labor force, employers can offer flexible work arrangements, provide accommodations in the workplace, and offer training programs to develop skills that are in demand.
 - The BLS reported in 2022, that 21.3% of persons with a disability were employed, up from 19.1% in 2021.
 - The unemployment rates for persons with a disability (7.6%) and persons without a disability (3.5%) both declined in 2022.
 - People with a disability comprise 12% of the civilian noninstitutional population.
 - They tend to be older than people with no disability, reflecting the increased incidence of disability with age.
 - In 2022, half of the people with a disability were age 65 and over, compared with 18 percent of those with no disability.
 - Employed persons with a disability were more likely to be self-employed than those with no disability.
2. **Older workers:** Defined as those over age 55, may face challenges in finding work due to age discrimination, health issues, or lack of relevant skills. To bring this group into the labor force, employers can offer age-friendly work environments, provide training opportunities to update skills, and create targeted recruitment programs to attract older workers.
 - although they make up a smaller number of workers overall, the 65- to 74-year-old and 75-and-older age groups are projected to have faster rates of labor force growth annually than any other age groups (BLS).
3. **Prior justice system involvement:** Individuals with criminal records face significant barriers to employment, including discrimination and lack of access to training programs. To bring this group into the labor force, employers can offer training and apprenticeship programs, partner with re-entry programs that provide job readiness training, and offer second chance hiring opportunities.
4. **Immigrants:** Immigrants may face language barriers, lack of access to education and training programs, and discrimination. To bring this group into the labor force, employers can offer language training and translation services, provide targeted recruitment programs, and offer apprenticeship and training programs.
5. **Mismatch between populations and job opportunities:** Individuals living in certain areas may have limited access to transportation, training programs, and job opportunities. To bring this group into the labor force, employers can offer hybrid work options, partner with higher education, community colleges and vocational schools to provide training programs, and offer transportation assistance.

Overall, bringing underutilized labor markets into the labor force will require a concerted effort from employers, educational institutions, and policymakers. By providing targeted training programs, flexible work arrangements, and removing barriers to employment, we can create a more inclusive and diverse labor force that benefits both workers and employers.

5. Underutilized Labor Market: How do we Access Them?

There is a growing body of policy research aimed at understanding underutilized labor sources and how to better integrate them into the workforce. The current focus is on immigration policies, disabled (or uniquely-abled), prior justice system involvement, workforce regulation, and practices.

1. **Immigration policies.** Immigration policies play a significant role in shaping the composition of the labor force. Immigration can have positive effects on economic growth and productivity, and can help fill labor shortages in certain industries.
2. **Connecting people with disabilities to jobs and support mechanisms.** Understanding the potential of people with disabilities is an area that has not seen adequate attention. People with disabilities are more than capable of meaningful employment. There is often a stigma that needs to be eliminated to allow people with disabilities to succeed. Additionally, many employers do not understand how to access this population and set up any needed support mechanisms.
3. **Connecting people with prior justice system involvement to jobs and support mechanisms.** Understanding the potential of people and the opportunities to re-engage people who have had prior justice system involvement is another area that needs further examination. This population has many skilled, talented and motivated individuals seeking employment opportunities.
4. **Workforce regulation.** Workforce regulation, such as minimum wage laws and overtime regulations, can have significant impacts on workers' wages, working conditions, and employment opportunities. Minimum wage increases can have positive effects on workers' wages and reduce poverty but can also lead to job loss and reduced hours. Overtime regulations can help ensure that workers are fairly compensated for their time but can also create administrative burdens for employers and reduce employment opportunities for workers.
5. **Workforce practices.** Workforce practices, such as training programs and flexible work arrangements, will help better integrate underutilized labor sources into the workforce. Training programs can assist workers develop new skills and increase their earning potential. Flexible work arrangements, such as hybrid, remote and flexible scheduling, can help workers balance work and caregiving responsibilities and improve their work-life balance.



6. Immigration

In Massachusetts immigrants make up 17% of the state's population, constituting one in five workers. The largest share are working in blue-collar jobs, while technology industries tend to give more opportunities to immigrants comprising 28 percent of all workers in Computer and Mathematical occupations. This may be an indication that the political climate in New England areas is in favor of providing more opportunities for immigrants.

Immigrants face both challenges of getting the legal permit to work and the hesitation of the hiring companies because of the information gap. Though through the past few years, society and companies tend to have a more welcoming approach towards immigrant workers, while federal government statistics shows a tendency to tighten the opportunities for immigrants, limiting work permits for temporary visa holders and creating administrative hurdles along the way. This is done to the disadvantage of the future of the workforce since immigrant workers play important roles in every industry.

6.1 Role of Refugees/Immigrants (legal and undocumented) in Workforce

The United States has more immigrants than any other country in the world with more than 46 million immigrants that account for 13.7 percent of the total population.

According to the Census Bureau, there are 161 million workers in the American workforce, and immigrants tend to participate more in the labor force than U.S.-born workers with an overall labor force participation rate for immigrant workers at 65.2%, higher than the 62.3 percent rate for those born in the U.S.

More than half of immigrant workers in the U.S. (56%) work in four major industry groupings:

- Educational services, health care, and social assistance.
- Professional, scientific, management, administrative, and waste management services.
- Arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation, and food services.
- Manufacturing.

It is important to note that one-third of immigrant workers are undocumented and do not have authorization to work legally. According to Pew Research Center, undocumented immigrants are estimated to make up a significant percentage of workers in industries of construction, hospitality, landscaping, and business services such as cleaning.

Undocumented immigrants are eligible to apply and receive permits for work in Massachusetts, but many are not aware of this opportunity. Further, Massachusetts has passed a law that allows undocumented immigrants to obtain a driver's license. However, reaching undocumented immigrants with information regarding the opportunities that exist is a challenge.

6.2 Immigration Visas and Policies

According to the official website of the U.S. Department of Labor, there are seven kinds of immigrants work visas depending on their status and occupation: D-1, E-3, H-1B, H-1B1, H-1C, H-2A and H-2B. The most awarded is the H-1B visa that applies to employers seeking to hire non-immigrant foreign professionals as workers in various occupations such as accounting, architecture, engineering, law, or graphic designers, and across the board in executive level positions. To apply for the H-1B visa, a bachelor's degree or its equivalent is required. Once granted, the employee can work for three years with the employer who sponsored the visa application. However, once the visa expires it is difficult to renew and often workers are sent back to their home countries leaving further gaps in the workforce. For example, in Massachusetts, Brooke Thomson, a vice president at Associated Industries of Massachusetts, recently spoke to an employer who spent years training a recent Northeastern University engineering graduate, only to have him required to return to India when his visa expired.

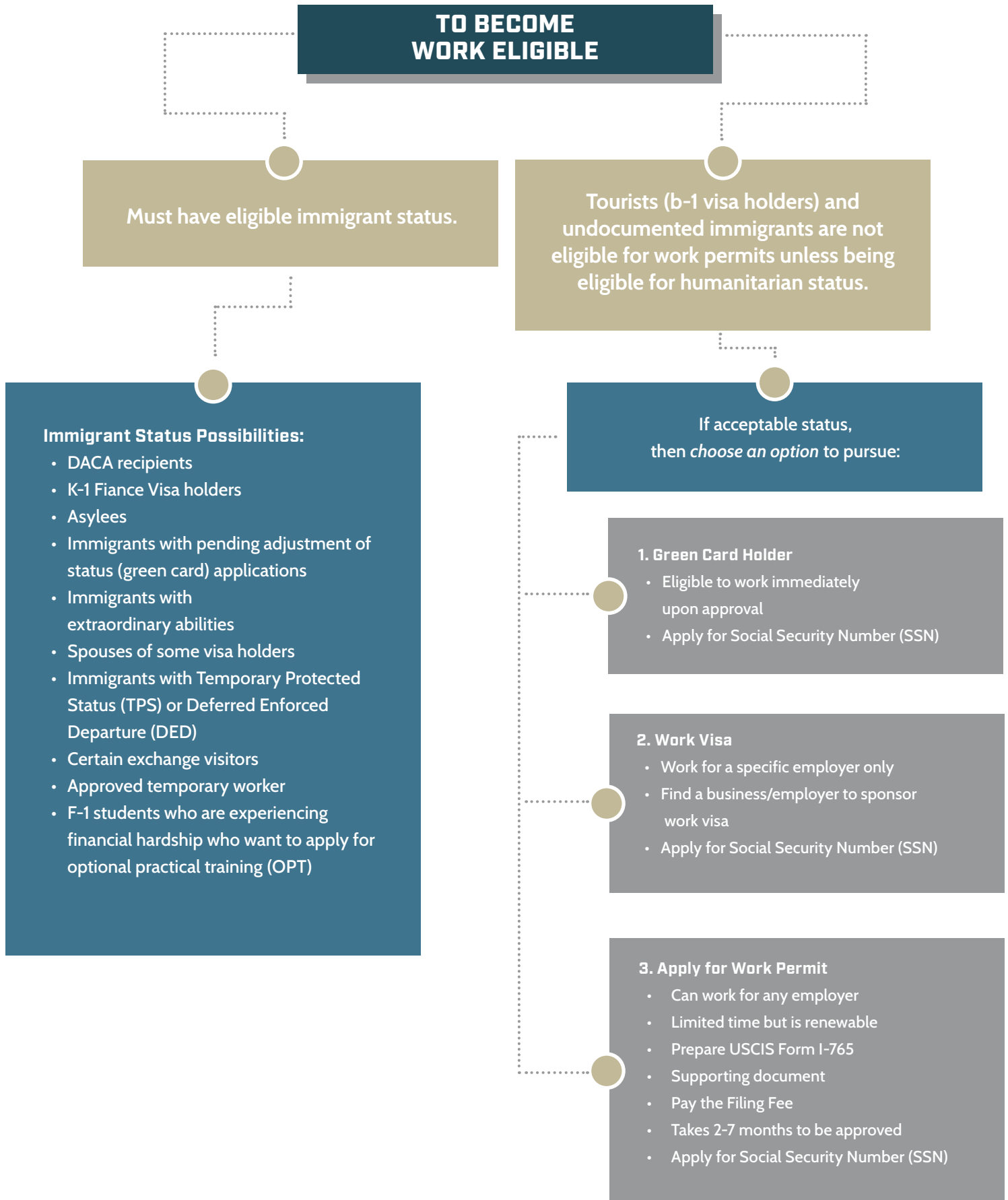
International immigration had been slowing down since 2016 with a tightening of requirements and fewer visas awarded, but then was majorly hit by the pandemic and many business groups need expanded access to work visas to help them fill the growing job vacancies.

The most recent policy developments on immigration in Massachusetts are centered around protecting the rights of undocumented immigrants and providing them with access to public services. Here are some key policy developments:

1. **The Safe Communities Act:** This bill, first introduced in 2017, aims to limit state and local law enforcement cooperation with federal immigration authorities and ensure that immigrants are not targeted based on their immigration status. The bill has been reintroduced in the Massachusetts Legislature in 2021 and is currently under consideration.
2. **The Work and Family Mobility Act:** This bill, which was signed into law in 2020, allows undocumented immigrants in Massachusetts to obtain driver's licenses, which can help them access essential services, such as healthcare and education.
3. **The Student Opportunity Act:** This law, passed in 2019, aims to provide more funding for public schools in low-income areas, including schools that serve immigrant and refugee students. The law includes provisions for English language learner education and support services for immigrant students.
4. **The Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Coalition (MIRA):** This organization advocates for policies that protect the rights of immigrants and refugees in Massachusetts, including access to healthcare, education, and other public services.

Overall, Massachusetts has taken steps to protect the rights of undocumented immigrants and provide them with access to essential services.





7. Hispanic/Latinx Labor Force

According to the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS), the racial and ethnic breakdown of the population in Essex County as of 2020 was as follows:

- White alone: 69.8%
- Black or African American alone: 6.7%
- Asian alone: 8.6%
- Two or more races: 3.8%
- Some other race alone: 10.9%
- Hispanic or Latinx (of any race): 20.6%

It's important to note that these percentages may not be representative of the labor force specifically and may not capture the experiences of different racial and ethnic groups in the labor market.

There is a declining Hispanic/Latinx labor force participation in New England while the overall Hispanic/Latinx population is increasing. This is a complex issue that has been attributed to several factors. Some possible explanations are:

1. **Aging population:** The Hispanic/Latinx population in New England is generally younger than the non-Hispanic population, but it is also aging. As individuals age, they may be more likely to leave the labor force due to health issues, retirement, or other reasons.
2. **Educational attainment:** The Hispanic/Latinx population in New England is less likely to have a college degree than the non-Hispanic population. This can limit job opportunities and make it harder for individuals to stay in the labor force.
3. **Discrimination:** Hispanic/Latinx individuals may face discrimination in the workplace, which can limit their job opportunities and lead to lower labor force participation rates.
4. **Immigration policy:** Recent changes in immigration policy, such as increased enforcement and the termination of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, may have contributed to a decline in labor force participation among Hispanics. While there have been advances made in Massachusetts for undocumented and legal immigrants, disseminating information continues to be a challenge.
5. **Economic and geographic factors:** There is a slight disconnect between where jobs are available and the potential Hispanic labor force to fill those jobs. Barriers due to geographic dislocation increase the need for transportation, childcare and elder care amongst many multigenerational homes, individuals may be less likely to participate in the labor force as a result.

It is important to note that the declining Hispanic/Latinx labor force participation is not unique to New England, and it is a trend that has been observed and documented in other parts of the country as well. Addressing the root causes of this issue will require a multifaceted approach that addresses education, discrimination, immigration policy, and socio-economic factors.

8. Achieving Success with the Current Workforce

Successful companies are those that invest in their current workforce and create a culture of continuous learning and development. Some of the ways in which companies achieve success with the current workforce include:

1. **Offering Training and Development Programs:** Companies that offer training and development programs enable employees to acquire new skills and adapt to new technologies. This not only increases employee productivity but also enhances employee engagement and retention.

2. **Fostering a Culture of Innovation:** Companies that foster a culture of innovation encourage employees to think creatively and experiment with new ideas. This leads to the development of new products and services, improved processes, and increased efficiency. Understanding that innovation can exist in multiple modalities and does not necessarily rely strictly on in person interactions.
3. **Prioritizing Employee Wellbeing:** Companies that prioritize employee wellbeing create a positive work environment that enhances employee engagement and productivity. This can be achieved by offering flexible work arrangements, mental health support, and wellness programs.
4. **Encouraging Collaboration and Communication:** Companies that encourage collaboration and communication foster a culture of teamwork and mutual respect. This can be achieved by providing opportunities for employees to work together on projects, promoting open communication channels, and recognizing how they can work together in multiple settings.

There are several reasons why people may not be applying for the jobs that are available right now:

1. **Childcare/eldercare and caregiving responsibilities:** Challenges include lack of available care and affordability of care options. This can make it difficult for caregivers to apply for and accept jobs that require them to work regular hours.
2. **Skill and experience mismatch:** Some job seekers may not have the skills or experience required for the available jobs in their area. This can make it difficult for them to find work, especially if they are not able to participate in training or education programs that can help them develop the skills they need.
3. **Lack of access to transportation:** In some areas, lack of access to reliable transportation can make it difficult if not impossible for people to apply for jobs that are located far from their homes. This can be especially challenging for people who live in rural areas or who do not have access to a car.

Overall, the reasons why people may not be applying for the jobs that are available right now are complex and multifaceted. Addressing these issues will require a coordinated effort from employers, government agencies, and community organizations to provide support and resources to job seekers, including childcare, transportation, and training programs.

9. Workforce Trends and Success

Successful companies and organizations are those that adapt to the changing workforce trends. Some of the current workforce trends among successful businesses and organizations include:

1. **Hybrid Work:** Successful companies have embraced hybrid work by investing in digital infrastructure, providing flexible work arrangements, and fostering a culture of trust and collaboration.
2. **Gig Economy:** Characterized by short-term contracts and freelance work. Successful companies are leveraging the gig economy by hiring contractors and freelancers for specialized projects and tasks.
3. **Talent Mobility:** Refers to the movement of employees across teams and functions within an organization. Successful companies are promoting talent mobility by offering training and development programs, encouraging cross-functional collaboration, and providing opportunities for employees to learn and grow.
4. **Purpose-driven Work:** Employees are increasingly seeking purpose-driven work that aligns with their values and beliefs. Successful companies are promoting this by articulating their mission and values, investing in sustainability, and understanding social impacts, and fostering a culture of purpose and meaning.

10. Shifts in Higher Education

Higher education is shifting away from the 'liberal arts' model of education and currently plays a critical role in workforce development by providing individuals with the skills, knowledge, and support needed to succeed in a rapidly changing job market. As industries and technologies evolve, higher education institutions are also adapting their programs to help ensure graduates are equipped with the most up-to-date skills and knowledge.

Higher education institutions also contribute to workforce development by offering degree and certificate programs that are specifically designed to meet the needs of particular industries. For example, some universities in Massachusetts have branched out beyond degree programs to offer non-degree certifications in many areas including computer science, data analytics, sustainability, tourism development and cybersecurity (as examples) to prepare students for careers. While others are offering more program options in nursing, healthcare administration and public health to prepare students for careers in the healthcare industry.

North Shore higher education institutions are increasingly involved in research and development to drive innovation and create new job opportunities. They are partnering with industry leaders to conduct research that can lead to new products, services, technologies, and can help drive economic growth in their communities. Higher education also plays a critical role in workforce development by providing individuals with industry-specific training, transferable skills, and support services for underutilized workers.

The skills that employers are seeking from the workforce of the future are constantly evolving. However, some key skills that are consistently in high demand include:

1. **Digital literacy:** As technology continues to advance, digital literacy is becoming an increasingly important skill for the workforce. This includes skills such as data analysis, social media management, and proficiency with software and tools relevant to specific industries.
2. **Critical thinking:** Employers are looking for workers who can analyze complex problems, evaluate evidence, and develop creative solutions. Critical thinking skills are essential for jobs that require decision-making, problem-solving, and innovation.
3. **Communication:** Effective communication is a crucial skill for the workforce of the future. Employers are looking for workers who can articulate their ideas clearly and collaborate with others effectively. This includes both written and verbal communication skills, as well as the ability to use various communication technologies.
4. **Adaptability:** With the pace of change accelerating in many industries, employers need workers who can adapt quickly to new technologies, workflows, and processes. This includes a willingness to learn new skills and take on new responsibilities as needed.
5. **Emotional intelligence:** Employers are looking for workers who can understand and manage their own emotions, as well as empathize with and relate to others. Emotional intelligence includes skills such as self-awareness, social awareness, and relationship management.

To meet the needs of employers, local educational institutions can play a key role in developing and offering training programs that focus on these essential skills. This requires ongoing collaboration and dialogue between educational institutions and employers to ensure that educational programs align with current and future workforce needs. By working together, employers, educational institutions, and community organizations can help ensure that the workforce of the future is equipped with the skills needed to succeed in a rapidly changing economy.

Appendix

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