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# An Analysis of the Employment Patterns of Somali Immigrants to Lewiston from 2001 through 2006

Maine Department of Labor

Maine Center for Workforce Research and Information

Maine State Planning Office

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*An Analysis of the*  
**Employment Patterns**  
**of Somali Immigrants**  
*to Lewiston from*  
*2001 through 2006*



A Publication of:  
**Center for Workforce  
Research and Information**  
**Maine Department of Labor**  
  
**Maine State Planning Office**

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## Executive Summary

In 2001, large numbers of Somali immigrants began moving to the Lewiston/Auburn area. While some came directly to Lewiston from Somalia, many others came from large cities in the United States. They came to Maine for the same reasons that many people move here: the quality of life and strong family values that make the state a good place to raise a family. The Lewiston/Auburn community has experienced some growing pains while taking in this new population. Employment has been one of the key issues.

The Maine Department of Labor (MDOL) made arrangements with the City of Lewiston General Assistance (GA) program to analyze the employment outcomes of the immigrants who received general assistance. This is an initial descriptive analysis that does not purport to answer all of the questions pertaining to the employment of this population but will outline areas for further study and recommend some first steps.

- ✓ A total of 1,963 immigrants from Somalia registered for General Assistance in Lewiston through the end of 2006, with most arriving after 2001. Most of the immigrants appear to be members of young families.
- ✓ Of the 1,118 working-age Somali immigrants, 552 had employment at some point during their time in Maine. This is an overall employment rate of 49 percent.
- ✓ On average, it took two years for Somali immigrants to find employment after their arrival in Maine. Following their first occurrence of employment, immigrants were employed approximately 78 percent of the time.
- ✓ When immigrants receive employment counseling, one of the suggestions often given is to work for one employer for at least a year before changing jobs. Consistent, stable employment is said to lead to higher earnings. On average, immigrants with consistent employment earned annual wages that were approximately \$2,240 higher and immigrants with stable employment earned nearly \$5,700 more each year.
- ✓ A quarter-by-quarter examination of employment rates shows that overall, employment increased from the beginning of 2001 through mid-2002 and then declined from mid-2003 through the end of 2006. In addition, there is a very strong seasonal trend, with higher employment in the summer and lower employment in the winter.
- ✓ Very little was known about the educational attainment, language skills, and literacy of the immigrants. The lack of this data presents a challenge for developing training and employment strategies. Knowledge of the written and spoken English-language capabilities as well as the native-language literacy of an individual is important when determining whether and what type of training are necessary. Similarly, knowledge of an individual's level of formal education can help determine what type of training and employment strategies to use.
- ✓ Only six percent of the Somali immigrants received training and services from the CareerCenters. While the exact reasons are unknown, it is likely that language and cultural barriers contributed to the low participation rate.

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to Lewiston from 2001 through 2006**

A Publication of:

Center for Workforce Research and Information  
Maine Department of Labor

and

Maine State Planning Office

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## Preface

The Maine economy is undergoing constant change. The forces of foreign competition, technology innovation and business restructuring contribute to dynamic work environments and changing labor markets. Some industries are declining and shedding jobs while new industries are emerging and creating new employment opportunities. The impacts of these shifts have challenged individuals, families and entire communities. Across the spectrum of Maine workplaces, more is being demanded of workers in terms of knowledge, skills, and abilities required for job performance. Increasingly, Maine's competitiveness is determined by the quality and availability of human capital.

Maine's demographics are also in flux. An aging population and the impending retirements of baby boomers will profoundly impact our labor markets and reshape long standing patterns of demand for goods and services.

Understanding these dynamics is fundamental to making effective public policies and developing sound public and private investment strategies. Business, education and training systems and workers must consult economic, demographic and labor market information in making critical choices with limited resources. These choices will have enormous implications for Maine's prospects in the years ahead. The Maine Department of Labor, Center for Workforce Research and Information, is committed to examining the dynamics of Maine's economy and the associated impacts on the workforce and labor markets in helping to chart a more prosperous future for all Maine citizens.

John Dorrer, Director  
Center for Workforce Research and Information  
Maine Department of Labor

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## **Introduction and Project Overview**

In 2001, large numbers of Somali immigrants began moving to the Lewiston/Auburn area. While some came directly to Lewiston from Somalia, many others came from large cities in the U.S. They came to Maine for the same reasons that many people move here: the quality of life and strong family values that make the state a good place to raise a family. However, these Somali immigrants have experienced intense scrutiny, because they come from a culture that is unfamiliar to most Maine natives and their language, race, and style of dress make them a highly visible minority population.

The Lewiston/Auburn community has experienced some growing pains while taking in this new population. Employment has been one of the key issues. Many claims have been made about the unemployment rate of the Somali immigrants, but, to date, no analysis has been completed. The Maine Department of Labor (MDOL) made arrangements with the City of Lewiston General Assistance (GA) Program to analyze the employment outcomes of the immigrants who received general assistance. In addition, the recently completed report, *Employment and Earnings Outcomes for Recently Arrived Refugees in Portland, Maine*,<sup>1</sup> was used as a reference.

The goal of this analysis is to clarify an understanding of the employment patterns of the Somali immigrants. This is an initial descriptive analysis that does not purport to answer all of the questions pertaining to their employment but will outline areas for further study and recommend some first steps.

## **Economic Context and Cultural Background**

Maine's demographics are changing as its population ages. The baby boomers, those born between 1946 and 1964, are beginning to retire and create a large gap in the labor force. Since the generations following the baby boomers are smaller and cannot fill the gap, growth in the labor force must come from other sources. One of the most likely sources is immigrants to the state.

The large number of Somali immigrants in Lewiston provides an excellent opportunity to analyze the employment challenges and outcomes of a population that will likely be a future source of labor. These immigrants face some barriers to entering the workforce. First and foremost, there is a significant language barrier. Most Somali immigrants do not speak English, and the jobs open to non-English speakers are limited. Additionally, there are cultural barriers. Most Somali immigrants have religious prohibitions that limit their employment in certain occupations, many of which are entry-level. And, for immigrants with professional degrees, the process of becoming certified in the U.S. can be daunting.

It is in the state's best interest to make the transition for these immigrants as smooth as possible. These immigrants, particularly those who are young and have years of productive employment ahead of them, will be able to help fill the gap in the labor force.

## Methodology

The methodology for this report is very similar to that for several previous reports issued by the former Division of Labor Market Information Services, now the Center for Workforce Research and Information (CWRI). MDOL wage records are combined with various other administrative records to provide a rich source of information for analysis.

For this report, MDOL wage records were combined with administrative records from the Lewiston GA program and administrative data from the Bureau of Employment Services' CareerCenters. In order to combine these data, individuals from the GA program were matched separately to both the MDOL wage records and the CareerCenters' records for Workforce Investment Act services.

MDOL wage records provide one of the most effective means for tracking employment and earnings of most workers in Maine. The records include earnings reported (in accordance with Maine Employment Security Law<sup>11</sup>) by employers for each quarter of the year. They also indicate employment tenure and industry affiliation. Monitoring of wage records over time permits the analysis of employment and earnings dynamics. Increasingly, more use is being made of these records, especially when they are combined with other administrative data that provide additional characteristics of individual wage earners.

There are some limitations to the data used in the analysis. The wage records are limited to Maine Covered Employment, and, therefore, exclude those who were working out of state, in the federal government or military, or self-employed. The wages have not been adjusted for inflation. The data from the GA program were carried over from a previous database in late 2002; intake dates prior to this time are missing. Some information, particularly relating to educational attainment, simply is not known or collected for each individual. However, the combination of these data sources still can greatly benefit the understanding of these populations.

Since this analysis focuses primarily on Somali immigrants, it was necessary to undertake a multi-step process to identify these individuals in the GA records. Individuals with a status of "immigrant" or "refugee," along with those whose country of origin was not the U.S., were identified as immigrants. Their family members also were identified as immigrants. The immigrants were then grouped into those with Somalia as their country of origin and those with other countries as their country of origin. Family members of Somali immigrants also were grouped with Somali immigrants.



## Characteristics of the Study Population

The City of Lewiston identified 2,461 immigrants who moved to the city and enrolled in the GA program prior to January 2007. More than half were female. (See Table 1).

Age was determined based on the date of entry into the country or intake to the GA program. Once the date of entry/intake was established, the age of each individual at that date was calculated from the birth date. If the entry/ intake date was given only for the head of household, that date was used for all members of the family. For some, the entry/intake date was before their date of birth, because they were born after their parents immigrated to the U.S. and so are categorized as not yet born at the date of entry/intake.

Most of the immigrants appear to be members of young families. Almost 26 percent were under the age of 10 at the entry/intake date, and another 13 percent were between the ages of 25 and 34. In addition, 35 percent were the head of household and another 53 percent were either the son or daughter of the head of household.

Examining the immigrants by country of origin reveals a few differences between Somali immigrants and those from other countries. Nearly 80 percent of the immigrants came from Somalia. The immigrants who did not come from Somalia came from a variety of countries around the world. Very few came from western Europe or Canada. Many came from Ethiopia, Puerto Rico, and Sudan. The immigrants from other countries have a slightly higher percentage of females than the Somali immigrants. (See Table 2). On average, the Somali immigrants are younger than the immigrants from other countries, although a higher percentage of the Somali immigrants are of unknown age.

**Table 1 - Characteristics of All Immigrants**

	Number	Percent
<b>Gender</b>		
Female	1,393	56.6
Male	1,011	41.1
Unknown	57	2.3
<b>Age at Date of Entry/Intake</b>		
Under 5	341	13.9
5 to 9	296	12.0
10 to 13	176	7.1
14 to 18	183	7.4
19 to 21	152	6.2
22 to 24	142	5.8
25 to 34	319	13.0
35 to 44	195	7.9
45 to 54	91	3.7
55 to 64	38	1.5
65 and over	25	1.0
Not yet born	114	4.6
Unknown	389	15.9
Average (mean) age		20.0
<b>Relationship to Head of Household</b>		
Brother	16	0.7
Custody	5	0.2
Daughter	624	25.3
Grandchild	12	0.5
Head of household	866	35.2
Husband	100	4.1
Mother	7	0.3
Nephew	9	0.4
No relation	15	0.6
Partner	18	0.7
Relative	9	0.4
Sister	13	0.5
Son	675	27.4
Stepchild	5	0.2
Wife	79	3.2
Other *	8	0.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,461</b>	<b>100.0</b>

\* Other includes father, grandmother, mother-in-law, and niece.

<b>Table 2 - Characteristics of Immigrants by Country of Origin</b>				
	<b>Immigrants from Somalia</b>		<b>Immigrants from Other Countries</b>	
	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<b>Gender</b>				
Female	1,098	55.9	295	59.2
Male	821	41.8	190	38.2
Unknown	44	2.3	13	2.6
<b>Age at Date of Entry/Intake</b>				
Under 5	273	13.9	68	13.7
5 to 9	240	12.2	56	11.2
10 to 13	146	7.4	30	6.0
14 to 18	153	7.8	30	6.0
19 to 21	130	6.6	22	4.4
22 to 24	115	5.9	27	5.4
25 to 34	250	12.7	69	13.9
35 to 44	139	7.1	56	11.3
45 to 54	52	2.6	39	7.8
55 to 64	24	1.3	14	2.8
65 and over	19	1.0	6	1.2
Not yet born	90	4.6	24	4.8
Unknown	332	16.9	57	11.5
Average (mean) age		19.1		23.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,963</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>498</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Educational attainment information was available only for a small portion of the immigrants. (See Table 3). Data from the GA program and the CareerCenters were combined. The GA program educational attainment information was only available for the head of household. The CareerCenters' was only for those who registered for Workforce Investment Act services. While educational attainment of more than 85 percent of the immigrants was unknown, most of the remaining immigrants had attained a high school diploma or less. In Portland, better educational attainment information was available. Of immigrants from Africa, educational attainment of only 19 percent was unknown.

<b>Table 3 - Educational Attainment of All Immigrants</b>		
	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Less than high school	122	4.9
High school diploma or equivalent	191	7.8
Some college	19	0.8
College degree	29	1.2
Unknown	2,100	85.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,461</b>	<b>100.0</b>

A higher percentage of immigrants from other countries had a known educational attainment, with approximately 15 percent having a high school diploma or equivalent. (See Table 4).

In addition to limited educational attainment data, a key piece of information unavailable for this analysis was reliable literacy and language data. The GA data did contain some information on whether a translator was necessary and whether immigrants had been assigned to ESL classes, and the data from the CareerCenters included information on limited English proficiency. However, there was enough inconsistency and subjectivity to the information to keep it from being used in this analysis.

Inclusion of literacy and language data, whether through improved collection efforts by current sources or identification of additional sources, would improve future analysis.

The lack of educational attainment, language, and literacy data presents a challenge for developing training and employment strategies. In order to create an effective training program, it is important to know the overall literacy level of a population. Knowledge of the written and spoken English-language capabilities as well as the native-language literacy of an individual is important when determining whether and what type of training are necessary. Similarly, knowledge of an individual's level of formal education can help determine what type of training and employment strategies to use.

**Table 4 - Educational Attainment of Immigrants by Country of Origin**

	Immigrants from Somalia		Immigrants from Other Countries	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Less than high school	96	4.9	26	5.2
High school diploma or equivalent	115	5.8	76	15.3
Some college	11	0.6	8	1.6
College degree	14	0.7	15	3.0
Unknown	1,727	88.0	373	74.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,963</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>498</b>	<b>100.0</b>

## Employment Patterns

Of the total immigrants identified, 1,963 were from Somalia and 498 were from other countries. Immigrants were determined to be of working age if they were between the ages of 16 and 64 at any point between the date of entry/ intake and the end of 2006. During this period, of those of working age, 1,118 were Somali immigrants and 309 were immigrants from other countries. (See Table 5).

A slightly larger percentage of both the working-age immigrants from Somalia and the working-age immigrants from other countries were female. As is expected with such a large percentage of children in the entire population of immigrants identified, the working-age immigrants were about eight years older on average than the total immigrant population.

As with the entire population of immigrants identified, most working-age immigrants were the heads of household. More of the working-age immigrants had a known level of educational attainment. (See Table 6). Nearly all of the immigrants from the total population with known educational attainment were of working age.

**Table 5 - Characteristics of Working-age Immigrants by Country of Origin**

	Immigrants from Somalia		Immigrants from Other Countries	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
<b>Gender</b>				
Female	662	59.2	211	68.3
Male	425	38.0	85	27.5
Unknown	31	2.8	13	4.2
<b>Age at Date of Entry/Intake</b>				
Under 5	3	0.3	*	*
5 to 9	25	2.2	*	*
10 to 13	38	3.5	10	3.2
14 to 18	150	13.4	30	9.7
19 to 21	130	11.6	22	7.1
22 to 24	116	10.4	27	8.7
25 to 34	250	22.3	69	22.3
35 to 44	139	12.4	56	18.1
45 to 54	52	4.6	39	12.6
55 to 64	24	2.2	14	4.5
65 and over	0	0.0	0	0.0
Not yet born	0	0.0	7	2.3
Unknown	191	17.1	32	10.4
Average (mean) age		26.9		31.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,118</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>309</b>	<b>100.0</b>

\* Data do not meet federal or state disclosure criteria but are included in the total.

**Table 6 - Educational Attainment of Working-age Immigrants by Country of Origin**

	Immigrants from Somalia		Immigrants from Other Countries	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Less than high school	95	8.5	24	7.8
High school diploma or equivalent	115	10.3	67	21.7
Some college	11	1.0	7	2.3
College degree	14	1.2	15	4.8
Unknown	883	79.0	196	63.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,118</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>309</b>	<b>100.0</b>

The immigrants were matched to MDOL wage records<sup>1</sup> to determine how many of the immigrants had wages. Of the working-age Somali immigrants, 553 had wages at some point in time prior to October 2006, as did 182 of the working-age immigrants from other countries. Dividing the number of working-age immigrants with wages by the total number of working-age immigrants gives an overall employment rate of just less than 50 percent for those from Somalia and just less than 59 percent for those from other countries. In other words, half of the Somali immigrants had wages at some point between the date of entry/intake and October 2006.

However, while we know the number of working-age immigrants and the number of immigrants with wages, it is highly improbable that all of the

working-age immigrants were in the labor force (where the labor force is the total number of employed persons and persons with no employment who were available for work and had made specific efforts to find employment). It is likely some of the working-age immigrants were parents who stayed at home with children or were newly arrived immigrants who had not yet started looking for work. Therefore, the use of working-age immigrants as a proxy for the labor force likely causes the employment rate to appear lower than it really is. The closest comparison for employment is the Census 2000 employment/population ratio<sup>2</sup> for Lewiston, which gives the best comparable estimate of employment at just under 70 percent. In Portland, around 83 percent of the refugees were found to have at least one employment occurrence.

The gender distribution for the immigrants from other countries is nearly the same for those with wages as for those of working age. (See Table 7). The percentage of males from Somalia is slightly higher for those with wages than for those of working age. The average ages are very similar for Somali working-age immigrants and immigrants with wages while for immigrants from other countries, the average age was 1.5 years older for those with wages.

<sup>1</sup> MDOL wage records are currently the best source for employment data, but they do have some limitations. Employers report wages paid to their employees on a quarterly basis as required by the Maine Employment Security Act. While most workers are covered, there are some not included in the wage records, such as individuals who are working out of state, in the federal government or military, or self-employed.

<sup>2</sup> The U.S. Census Bureau defines the employment/population ratio as: A measure derived by dividing the civilian noninstitutional population 16 to 64 years who are employed by the total civilian noninstitutional population 16 to 64 years and multiplying by 100.

**Table 7 - Characteristics of Immigrants with Wages by Country of Origin**

	Immigrants from Somalia		Immigrants from Other Countries	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
<b>Gender</b>				
Female	303	55.0	125	68.7
Male	240	43.4	49	26.9
Unknown	9	1.6	8	4.4
<b>Age at Date of Entry/Intake</b>				
Under 5	*	*	*	*
5 to 9	13	2.4	0	0.0
10 to 13	13	2.4	0	0.0
14 to 18	60	10.9	12	6.6
19 to 21	71	12.8	14	7.7
22 to 24	67	12.1	20	11.0
25 to 34	124	22.4	39	21.4
35 to 44	62	11.2	35	19.2
45 to 54	15	2.7	27	14.8
55 to 64	8	1.5	7	3.8
Not yet born	0	0.0	3	1.6
Unknown	118	21.3	24	13.2
Average (mean) age	26.3		33.3	
<b>Total</b>	<b>552</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>182</b>	<b>100.0</b>

\* Data do not meet federal or state disclosure criteria but are included in the total.

There are fewer immigrants with wages whose level of educational attainment is unknown compared to the total immigrant population. (See Table 8.) For Somali immigrants, most with a known educational attainment had a high school diploma or less. For immigrants from other countries, most had a high school diploma or equivalent.

The immigrants from other countries had higher rates of employment than the Somali immigrants when distributed by gender and age. (See Table 9). Among the Somali immigrants, the lowest rates of employment were among those with unknown gender, of whom many were children or between 45 and 64 at the date of entry/intake.

The date when immigrants arrived in the state was estimated using data from the GA program. Two dates were provided. The first was a date of intake when the immigrant registered with the GA program. Due to the conversion from one computer database to another, dates are unknown for immigrants who registered prior to 2002. In cases where the date of intake was unknown, the date of entry into the U.S. was used. In many cases, the immigrants entered the U.S. in another location first and moved to Maine later. For some immigrants, neither the intake nor entry date was known.

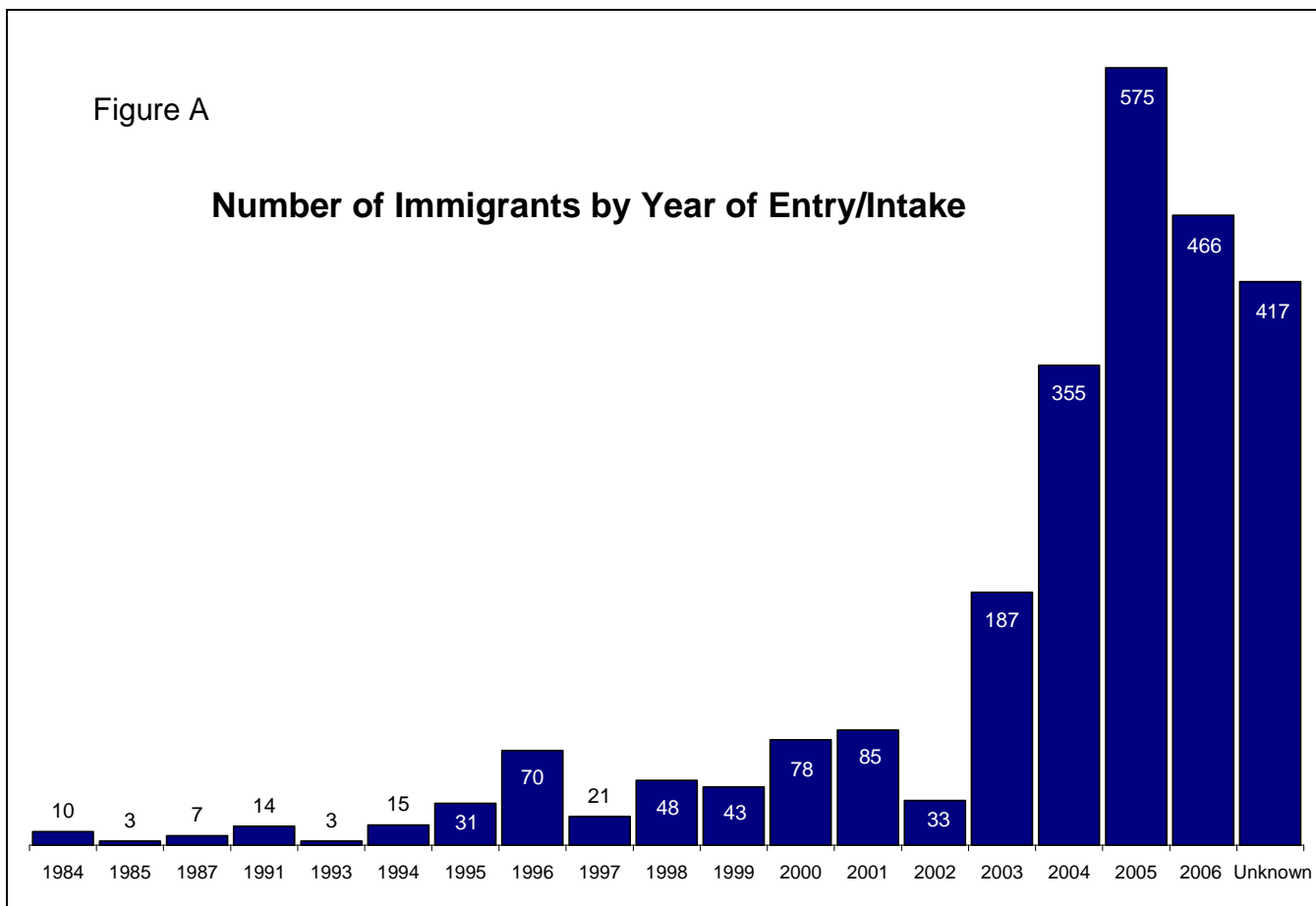
	Immigrants from Somalia		Immigrants from Other Countries	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Less than high school	74	13.4	18	9.9
High school diploma or equivalent	87	15.7	56	30.8
Some college	9	1.6	6	3.3
College degree	11	2.0	12	6.6
Unknown	371	67.3	90	49.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>552</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>182</b>	<b>100.0</b>

	Immigrants from Somalia	Immigrants from Other Countries
	<b>Gender</b>	
Female	45.8	59.2
Male	56.5	57.6
Unknown	29.0	61.5
<b>Age at Date of Entry/Intake</b>		
Under 5	*	*
5 to 9	52.0	0.0
10 to 13	34.2	0.0
14 to 18	40.0	40.0
19 to 21	54.6	63.6
22 to 24	57.8	74.1
25 to 34	49.6	56.5
35 to 44	44.6	62.5
45 to 54	28.8	69.2
55 to 64	33.3	50.0
Not yet born	0.0	42.9
Unknown	61.8	75.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>49.4</b>	<b>58.9</b>

\* Data do not meet federal or state disclosure criteria but are included in the total.

The date of intake and date of entry data fields were combined in order to determine the year of entry/intake. Most of the immigrants arrived in the past four years, even though there are a large number of immigrants whose year of entry/intake is unknown. (See Figure A.) Included in the unknown category are

years with only one or two immigrants and anyone arriving during the first part of 2007. Because the influx of Somali immigrants began in 2001, it is likely that most of the immigrants whose date of entry/intake is unknown arrived between 2001 and 2002.



Since the focus of this analysis is on the Somali immigrants, the remainder looks solely at this group. A picture of the employment patterns of the Somali immigrants can be constructed by calculating a few figures. First, it is important to know how long it took the immigrants to find employment after moving to the area. The estimated date of entry/intake was used in combination with the wage records to determine the length of time prior to employment. In situations

where the immigrant arrived in the U.S. first and moved to Maine at a later date, the time between entry and employment is inflated, because the wage records show Maine Covered Employment only. Additionally, there were some immigrants who had neither an intake nor an entry date. These immigrants were excluded from the calculations for the length of time prior to employment.

**Number of Quarters Prior to Employment: 7.9**

On average, there were 7.9 quarters, or nearly two years, between the time of entry to the country or intake to the program and the first occurrence of wage records. An immigrant may not have been in the labor force and searching for work during this entire time period. This time may have been spent in training or taking English as a Second Language (ESL) classes. Families with small children may have had only one parent looking for work while the other cared for the children. In Portland, the number of quarters prior to employment was only 2.4 on average. This may be attributable to better information in Portland regarding the date of entry.

**Number of Quarters in Employability Period: 8.5**

The period of employability for an immigrant begins with the first employment occurrence. Once an immigrant obtains a job, there is an indication that this immigrant is employable. The employability period ends at the last employment occurrence. In some cases, this may be simply the most recent quarter of wages available. In other cases, the immigrant may have moved out of state or otherwise left the labor force. It is also possible that some of the immigrants whose employability periods end are unemployed and searching for employment, but it is not possible to identify these individuals with the data available.

There were about 8.5 quarters on average between the first employment occurrence and the most recent. Since the majority of the Somali immigrants arrived starting in 2001, and the wage records contain data through 2006, this average seems about right, taking into consideration the nearly two years it takes before an immigrant finds a job. Those immigrants not arriving until 2004 are likely to have very short or no employability periods. In Portland, immigrants began arriving earlier and had more time in the workforce. The average time in the employability period for Portland was 12.5 quarters.

**Number of Quarters with Wages: 6.6  
Average Percentage of Time Employed: 78.0  
Average Quarters without Wages: 1.2**

On average, there were 6.6 quarters with at least one employment occurrence during the employability period. Given that the employability period was 8.5 quarters, the average time employed was just under 78 percent. The number of quarters with at least one employment occurrence is lower than the average time of employability because some immigrants may not have worked during every quarter of their employability period. The average length of the periods without wages during employability was around 1.2 quarters. The average length of unemployment was just over three months. In Portland, the average number of quarters with wages was 11.1, leading to an average time employed of around 87 percent.

**Average Number of Employers: 3.4  
Average Number of Employers per Quarter: 1.2**

Overall, each immigrant had an average of 3.4 employers. While some of these employers were consecutive, others were concurrent. Some immigrants worked for multiple employers during a quarter. The average number of employers during any quarter was 1.2. It is highly likely that immigrants who changed employers did so sometime during the course of a quarter rather than on the first or last day of the quarter. This appears in the wage records as two employers during the quarter with no way of distinguishing consecutive from concurrent employment. In Portland, the average number of employers was 4.7, possibly due to the longer employability period.



## Average Wages and Patterns of Employment Attachment

The overall mean average quarterly wage for Somali immigrants was \$2,199.35, equating to just under \$8,800 per year. The median average quarterly wage is even lower, at just \$1,562.58, indicating that the mean overstates the typical average wages. In order to better examine the average wages and employment patterns, a subset of Somali immigrants was identified. These immigrants had at least four quarters of wages, not necessarily consecutive, during their eligibility period. The average wages for this group were slightly higher, with a mean of \$2,281.16 and a median of \$1,868.93.

When immigrants receive employment counseling, one of the suggestions often given is to work for one employer for at least a year before changing jobs. Consistent, stable employment is said to lead to higher earnings.

Consistent employment means that an immigrant was employed during each quarter of the employability period. There were no gaps in employment lasting a quarter or longer. Due to the nature of the wage records, there could be periods of unemployment lasting less than a quarter which would not be observed. Inconsistent employment had periods without wages during the time of employability. Again, any immigrants with fewer than four quarters of wages have been excluded from this analysis.

### Percent with Consistent Employment: 39.7

More immigrants had inconsistent employment than consistent employment. Only two of every five Somali immigrants with at least one full year of wages were found to have consistent employment. However, the average wage for immigrants with consistent employment was higher by around \$560 a quarter.

### Percent with Stable Employment: 9.9

Stable employment means that an immigrant had at least four quarters of wages from each employer during the employability period. Only 9.9 percent of the immigrants had stable employment. This seems to indicate that immigrants are “job-hopping” or moving quickly from one job to the next. Without more detailed records, it is impossible to know the reasons for the pattern of job-hopping. However, the small percentage of immigrants who stayed at least a year with each employer had significantly higher earnings than those immigrants with unstable employment. On average, those immigrants with stable employment earned \$1,423 more each quarter. These results are consistent with the advice generally given to workers to stay with an employer for at least a year.

There are four possible employment patterns that emerge based on the consistency and stability employment definitions. The first pattern, consistent-stable employment, is most often recommended for higher wages. Slightly more than seven percent of the immigrants had consistent-stable employment and, while their wages were quite a bit higher than the wages for immigrants with unstable employment, the immigrants with inconsistent-stable employment actually had the highest wages of \$4,371 a quarter. (See Table 10.) However, only 2.5 percent of the immigrants fell into this category, so it is difficult to draw conclusions. Most of the inconsistent-stable immigrants were employed in the education and health services industry sector or the retail trade industry. Retail especially can be very seasonal while paying high wages during the peak seasons.

The immigrants with inconsistent-unstable employment made up the largest group of workers, with over half falling into this category. The average wages were the lowest overall, at just under \$2,000 a quarter and less than half the average quarterly earnings for the inconsistent-stable workers. Those with consistent-unstable employment also made up a large percentage of the immigrants, with average earnings: lower

than for either of the categories with stable employment. This seems to indicate that jumping from one employer to another with brief stints at each and having gaps in employment leads to lower wages.

The immigrants with inconsistent-unstable employment had the highest average number of employers overall, at 5.58, while those with consistent-unstable employment had the highest average number of employers per quarter, at 1.42. Those immigrants with

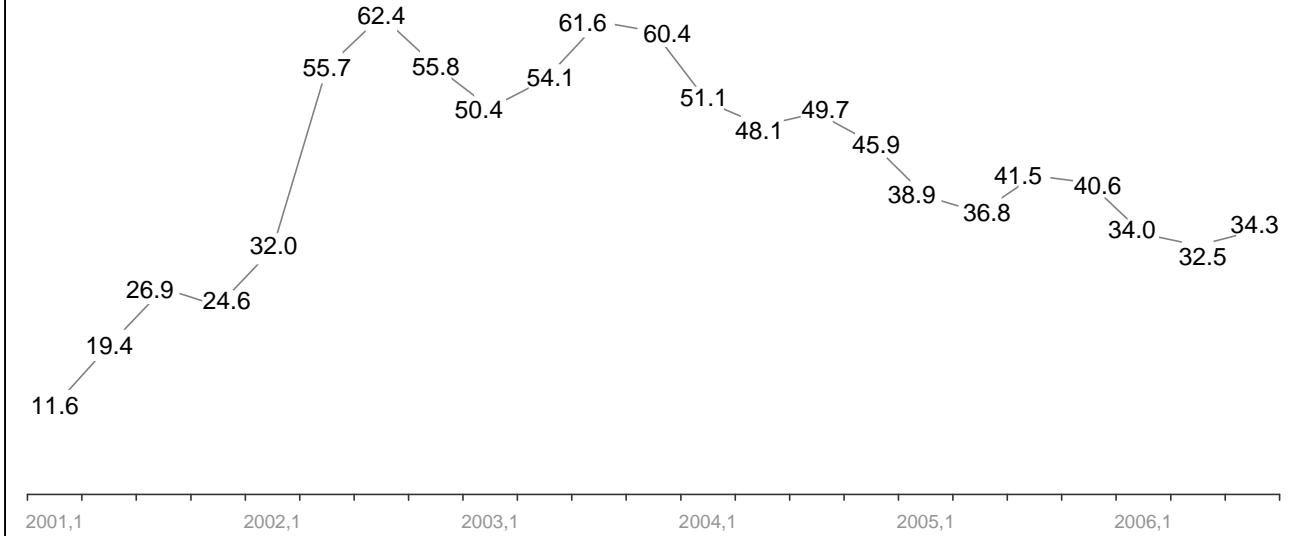
	<b>Percent of Immigrants</b>	<b>Average Quarterly Wage (\$)</b>	<b>Average # of Employers (per Quarter)</b>	<b>Average # of Employers (Total)</b>
Consistent-Stable	7.3	3,296.30	1.02	1.15
Consistent-Unstable	32.4	2,326.20	1.42	3.77
Inconsistent-Stable	2.6	4,371.05	1.02	1.22
Inconsistent-Unstable	57.7	1,993.77	1.27	5.58

As a whole, the wages for Somali immigrants were low. Even the immigrants with the highest average quarterly wages, those with inconsistent-stable employment, only had annualized average wages of around \$17,500. For comparison, the average earnings for new hires in the Lewiston-Auburn metropolitan area in 2006 were around \$22,000.<sup>iii</sup>

the fewest employers per quarter were the stable workers who had higher average quarterly earnings. In order to look at the employment rate over time, the number of immigrants in the subset with wages for each quarter was divided by the number of immigrants considered to be eligible at that time. (See Figure B.) Eligibility was determined based on date of entry/intake, age, and/or receipt of wages.

Figure B

### Percentages of Eligible Somali Immigrants with At Least One Year of Wages by Quarter



The change in the employment rate over time exhibits two traits: a seasonal cycle and a longer-term trend. The seasonal shift is observed as increasing rates of employment from the second to third quarters (April through September) and decreasing rates of employment from the third and fourth quarters to the first quarter of the following year (October through March). The longer term trend is observed as an initial sharp increase, followed by a gradual decline. The employment rate of Somali immigrants increased from the first quarter of 2001, when the influx began, through the third quarter of 2002, with only a slight seasonal dip in the fourth quarter of 2001. However, beginning with the seasonal decline in 2002, the employment rates generally decreased, with only small seasonal increases.

While only anecdotal evidence exists, a story can be told that explains the possible reason behind this longer-term trend. Beginning in 2001, large numbers of Somalis moved to Lewiston. Upon their arrival, many of these immigrants plunged into the labor force, peaking at an employment rate of 62.4 percent in the third quarter of 2002. However, many of these immigrants found it difficult to stay in the labor force. There were barriers caused by cultural and language differences. The jobs they had found were seasonal or temporary. With each seasonal cycle, a few more workers became discouraged, bringing the employment rate down to slightly more than half its 2002 high.

## Training and Services Received from CareerCenters

The lack of stable, consistent work patterns among immigrants seems to indicate that additional training and skills would result in improved employment patterns. In some cases, individuals may have needed basic skills or English language training. In other cases, rudimentary job skills training may have helped immigrants understand the basics of employment in the U.S.. Other immigrants may have benefitted from occupational or on-the-job training pertaining to a specific job. The CareerCenters are commonly used for these types of training. Administrative records for Workforce Investment Act services from the Career-

Centers were matched to the GA program's administrative records to examine the Somali immigrants' use of the CareerCenters. There are CareerCenters located throughout the state, including one in Lewiston.

Between 2001 and 2006, 120 Somali immigrants received services from the CareerCenters. This is a small percentage of the total Somali immigrants identified only about six percent. It is likely that the language barrier is one of the causes for the low participation rate. Without better information on the language skills of these immigrants, it is difficult to say for sure.

**Table 11 - Services Received by Somali Immigrants and Average Length of Time Spent in Services**

	Number	Average Length (months)
Adult education, basic skills, and/or literacy activities	78	6.4
Educational achievement services	12	7.0
Leadership development opportunities	24	5.5
Supportive services received	4	6.5
Established individual training account and occupational skills training	36	4.8
On-the-job training and occupational skills training	9	4.7
Other services besides those listed above	195	9.4

The immigrants who did receive services participated in a variety of types including educational achievement services, supportive services, training, and more. (See Table 11.) Each immigrant may have received multiple services. In general, most of the services received were not specified. The average length of time in the unspecified services exceeded nine months, which was longer than the time in any of the other services.

Immigrants spent the least amount of time participating in occupational skills training that in combination with other services.

Most of the immigrants received some type of training, whether basic skills, occupational skills, or on-the-job training. (See Table 12.) More than half of the immigrants participated in occupational skills training, whether on its own or in combination with other training.

**Table 12 - Training Services Received by Somali Immigrants**

	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Basic skills and occupational skills training	37	30.9
On-the-job and occupational skills training	9	7.5
Occupational skills training	19	15.8
Basic skills training	19	15.8
None	36	30.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Of those receiving occupational skills training, the largest percentage trained for occupations in office and administrative support followed closely by service occupations. (See Table 13).

Just less than 20 percent of the immigrants actually found employment in the occupation for which they trained. Overall, only 35 percent of the immigrants who received services had employment.

**Table 13 - Somali Immigrants by Training Occupation**

	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Office and administrative support	24	20.0
Production	19	15.8
Professional and related	5	4.2
Sales and related	9	7.5
Service occupations	21	17.5
Transportation and material moving	8	6.7
Unknown	34	28.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>100.0</b>

## Summary and Recommendations

Many benefits come from better understanding the workforce experiences of immigrants. In the coming years Maine will be facing a shortage of workers. Immigrants from Somalia provide potential workers for the labor force and have been moving to Maine since 2001. Understanding their labor force experiences will help policy-makers, administrators, and service providers improve the outcomes for these workers and for the state.

This report has begun to describe the experiences of these immigrants in the Lewiston/Auburn area. 2,461 individuals were identified as immigrants to the area, with 1,963 from Somalia and 498 from other countries. Most of the immigrants appeared to be families with young children. The greatest influx of immigrants came during the four years from 2002 to 2006. The Somali immigrants had an overall employment rate of 49 percent, with 552 of the 1,118 working-age Somali immigrants having wages at some point before September 2006. The immigrant from other countries had an employment rate of 59 percent, with 182 of the 309 working-age immigrants having wages.

The employment rate for males from Somalia was much higher than that for females, while the rates were much closer for immigrants from other countries. Several employment patterns were identified:

- ✓ Average number of quarters prior to employment: 7.9
- ✓ Average number of quarters in employability period: 8.5
- ✓ Average number of quarters with wages: 6.6
- ✓ Average percentage of time employed: 78.0
- ✓ Average number of quarters without wages: 1.2
- ✓ Average number of employers: 3.4
- ✓ Average number of employers per quarter: 1.2
- ✓ Percent with consistent employment: 39.7
- ✓ Percent with stable employment: 9.9

These patterns indicate that immigrants from Somalia were taking nearly two years to find employment and had just over two years between their first and most recent employment experiences. This matches the approximately four-year span between the time when most immigrants arrived and the latest available wage records. Somali immigrants were generally employed during 78 percent of their employability period, with periods of unemployment generally lasting just over one quarter. Each immigrant worked for 3.4 employers on average with just over one employer each quarter. Around 40 percent of the immigrants worked in each quarter they were employable, but only 9.9 percent had at least four quarters of employment with each employer. This is indicative of job-hopping: immigrants moving quickly from one employer to the next. While it is likely that the job-hopping trend is exacerbated by a lack of skills, English language competency, and support services, it is impossible to determine the reasons behind this trend with the data currently available.

This study has identified several areas for further investigation. In particular, data on language abilities would enlighten much of the results. It is likely that a language barrier is causing the low number of immigrants participating in CareerCenter services, stable employment, and the workforce in general. Further study should also examine the industries in which immigrants were employed and the workforce needs of firms in the area. Additional data on educational attainment and date of entry/intake also would help to round out the picture. This descriptive report is simply the first step in examining the characteristics, employment patterns, and education and training needs of the immigrant population in the Lewiston/Auburn area.

## References

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<sup>i</sup> Allen, Ryan. Employment and Earnings Outcomes for Recently Arrived Refugees in Portland, Maine. Maine Department of Labor, Labor Market Information Services: Augusta, Maine; September 2006.

<sup>ii</sup> Maine Employment Security Law, MRSA, Title 26, Chapter 13.

<sup>iii</sup> Local Employment Dynamics, U.S. Census Bureau; <http://lehd.did.census.gov>, accessed 1/23/2008.