International medical graduates (IMGs) seeking residency positions in the United States applied in smaller numbers but had more success finding postgraduate year 1 (PGY-1) positions in 2018, according to data from the National Resident Matching Program (NRMP).

NRMP data indicated that although fewer U.S. citizen and non-U.S. citizen IMGs registered for the Match than in 2017, they matched at a higher rate. U.S. citizen IMGs matched at a 57.1 percent rate, and non-U.S. citizen IMGs matched at a 56.1 percent clip. Those rates are the highest since 1993.

The AMA offers information on how IMGs can enter a U.S. residency program, and a list of IMG observership programs that can help with adapting to practicing medicine in the U.S.

When it comes to IMGs matching into PGY-1 programs, not all medical specialties are created equal. Here’s a look at some of the most popular specialties among IMGs in the 2018 Match.

Of the PGY-1 specialties that offered 50 or more positions and had at least seven matched or unmatched IMG applicants, these were the most IMG-friendly.

Pathology

- **Percentage of PGY-1 positions filled by IMGs:** 45.2 percent.
- **Notable:** In total, 257 IMGs filled available pathology PGY-1 positions. Nearly two-thirds of non-U.S. IMGs who listed pathology as their preferred specialty were able to match in pathology. That’s the highest specialty preference match rate among that group.
Internal medicine

**Percentage of PGY-1 categorical positions filled by IMGs:** 43.2 percent.
**Notable:** Nearly 3,200 IMGs matched in PGY-1 positions in internal medicine. About one in five IMG applicants who matched in the field had a PhD or another advanced degree.

Neurology

**Percentage of PGY-1 positions filled by IMGs:** 35 percent.
**Notable:** One hundred eighty-nine IMGs matched in PGY-1 neurology positions. Non-U.S. citizens who matched in neurology did plenty of legwork, with an average of nearly eight abstracts, presentations or publications, six jobs and four volunteer positions.

Family medicine

**Percentage of PGY-1 positions filled by IMGs:** 30.3 percent.
**Notable:** Family medicine has experienced position increases every year since 2008. In 2018, family medicine offered 3,629 PGY-1 positions total, and 1,065 were filled by IMGs.

Other things for IMGs to note

**Where most IMGs work.** The five states with the most IMG matches in 2018 were New York (1,384), Florida (529), Michigan (496), Pennsylvania (462) and New Jersey (399). Alaska, by contrast, awarded only a single residency position to an IMG.

**There is hope for IMGs who don’t Match.** The Supplemental Offer and Acceptance Program (SOAP) is a vehicle through which eligible unmatched applicants in the Main Residency Match apply for and are offered positions that were not filled when the matching algorithm was initially processed.

The competition, however, is stiff. In 2018, a little more than 200 IMGs found positions through SOAP, while nearly 9,000 were eligible.