

HOUSING PLAN FOR A CITY OF IMMIGRANTS



COVID-19 RESPONSE & RECOVERY

Citizens Housing & Planning Council
By Sheena Kang May 2020

Immigrants have always been a key force driving New York City's success. Newcomers from around the world established New York as a major hub in a burgeoning young America, drove the city's massive population growth throughout the 19th century, and fueled its industrial workforce and booming economy during industrialization. In the 1970s, when New York was starting to struggle with population loss and economic decline, a resurgence in immigration shifted the city's pathway forward, and has since led its transformation into one of the most prosperous cities in the world.

Nearly 4 in 10 New Yorkers were born outside the United States.¹

Today, foreign-born residents account for 37% of New York City's population and 44 % of its workforce.² However, many immigrant New Yorkers are still deprived of equal access to opportunity and quality of life. Foreign-born residents are lower income and experience higher rates of poverty, housing cost burden and overcrowded living conditions than their U.S.-born neighbors.³

These disparities have never been clearer than in this moment, as the city fights its way through a devastating pandemic, in a time when the livelihood of foreign-born Americans was already threatened by anti-immigrant federal policy reform.

A disproportionate share of immigrant New Yorkers are vulnerable to losing their housing due to the economic impacts of COVID-19. Half of the city's small businesses, many of which are suffering crippling financial loss from forced closures, are owned by immigrants.⁴

30% of immigrant-headed households in NYC are severely rent-burdened.⁵

As the city shelters in place, more foreign-born New Yorkers are staying home in overcrowded conditions that are potentially unsafe and make working from home and attending school online especially difficult.⁶

68% of overcrowded households in NYC are headed by immigrants.⁷

Immigrants are also disproportionately represented among the city's essential workers, who do not have the option of staying home and bear greater risk of exposure to COVID-19 as a result. For nearly 1 out of 5 frontline workers born outside the U.S., including 27% of grocery store and bodega workers, lack of citizenship status creates an additional layer of vulnerability.⁸

53% of frontline workers are foreign-born, including 70% of workers in building cleaning services.⁸

Meanwhile, thousands of undocumented residents living in informal housing arrangements are confined to substandard living conditions that can cause and exacerbate illness.

The COVID-19 pandemic has laid bare these inequalities and underscored the importance of eliminating them. As the transformative impacts of this pandemic set in, both foreign-born New Yorkers and continued immigration will be instrumental to the city's recovery.

To continue reaping the benefits that immigrants have provided for centuries, New York needs to ensure that these communities have access to opportunity and quality of life.

Fifty years ago, immigration to New York counteracted urban flight, preventing the city from seeing massive population loss that would have had detrimental impacts.⁹ Beyond adding a critical mass of population that bolstered the city's tax base, immigrants also played a key role in revitalizing New York and fueling its prosperity by buying real estate in disinvested neighborhoods, establishing businesses and growing the local economy, and creating ethnic enclaves that have shaped New York's rich and unique identity.¹⁰

As the city moves through the COVID-19 pandemic and strives to recover, it is essential to align policy with New York's past, present, and future as a city of immigrants. In the short term, this means ensuring that immigrant communities disproportionately impacted by this pandemic are supported accordingly. For example, many foreign-born New Yorkers and mixed status households will not have access to federally provided relief or assistance, and local programs are needed to ensure that these residents can weather the economic impacts of the crisis.

Moving forward, New York needs to leverage its housing policy to meet the unique needs of its incredibly diverse foreign-born population, and to employ every means possible of protecting our immigrant communities.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ U.S. Census Bureau. American Community Survey (ACS) 1-year Estimates, 2018 for Public Use Microdata Areas (PUMA).
- ² New York City Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs (MOIA). *State of Our Immigrant City: MOIA Annual Report for Calendar Year 2018*. New York, NY: NYC MOIA, 2019. Web Report, https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/immigrants/downloads/pdf/moia_annual_report%202019_final.pdf.***
- ³ American Community Survey, 2018 1-year estimates.
- ⁴ MOIA, *State of our Immigrant City*.
- ⁵ American Community Survey, 2018 1-year estimates.
- ⁶ For more on the impacts of overcrowding on families sheltering in place: Toure, Medina. "Remote learning exacerbates longstanding hurdles for low-income families." *Politico*, April 16, 2020. <https://www.politico.com/states/new-york/albany/story/2020/04/16/remote-learning-exacerbates-longstanding-hurdles-for-low-income-families-1276811>.
- ⁷ American Community Survey, 2018 1-year estimates.
- ⁸ Office of the New York City Comptroller. *New York City's Frontline Workers Bureau of Policy & Research*, March 2020. Web Report, https://comptroller.nyc.gov/wp-content/uploads/documents/Frontline_Workers_032020.pdf.
- ⁹ Salvo, Joseph. J. & Lobo, Arun P. Immigration and the Remaking of New York. *Journal of Immigrant and Refugee Services* 1, no. 1 (2002): 5-20. https://doi.org/10.1300/J191v01n01_02.
- ¹⁰ Office of the State Comptroller. The Role of Immigrants in the New York City Economy. Report 17-2010, 2010. Web Report, <https://www.osc.state.ny.us/osdc/rpt17-2010.pdf>.

***The MOIA annual report analyzes American Community Survey 1-yr estimates using a methodology which allows for more detailed information on foreign-born New Yorkers, by identifying sub-populations based on citizenship and documentation status.

NYC'S A NEW LENS FOR HOUSING PLAN

CHPC is leading a research initiative to explore how New York City's next housing plan could look beyond creating and preserving a certain number of affordable housing units, to advance public broader policy goals around issues such as immigration, public health, and race and gender equity. In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, CHPC is exploring the role of housing policy in the crisis and the lessons that New York City policymakers can draw from it.

Read more about the initiative and CHPC's previous issue brief on a Housing Plan for a City of Immigrants at: chcpny.org/newlens.

