



Metropolitan Policy Program at BROOKINGS

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http://www.brookings.edu/papers/2011/0804_immigration_suro_wilson_singer.aspx

RISING IMMIGRANT POVERTY A CHALLENGE FOR AMERICA'S SUBURBS

Brookings report shows a new metropolitan landscape with immigrants experiencing greater suburban poverty

WASHINGTON, DC—Residential settlement patterns have combined with the economic turmoil of recent years to increase poverty in suburban communities. Immigrants, like their U.S.-born counterparts, are part of this trend, according to a new report from the Brookings Institution Metropolitan Policy Program.

The report, *Immigration and Poverty in America's Suburbs*, uses data from the U.S. Census Bureau's 2009 American Community Survey (ACS) and the 2000 decennial census and to analyze poverty trends among immigrants and the native-born in the cities and suburbs of 95 large metropolitan areas.

“The suburbanization of poverty is a powerful example of how immigrant trajectories are shaped by trends in the broader society,” said Roberto Suro, a Non-Resident Senior Fellow with the Program and lead author of the report. “This, in turn, is putting increasing pressure on the social-service networks in suburban communities; because they have less experience and less capacity to deal with these changing trends.”

The report notes that, “Demographic change and economic tumult have changed the geography of poverty . . . Suburban governments, nonprofits, and private funders—many with already-stretched budgets—will need to modify and extend their programming to reach immigrants living in poverty.”

Among the report's findings:

- **Foreign-born residents of America's suburbs experienced markedly higher poverty rates than residents born in the U.S.** Data for 2009 show 14.1 percent of foreign-born residents living in suburbs were poor, compared to 9.8 percent for residents born in the U.S. The 2.7 million foreign-born poor in the suburbs represented one of every five suburban residents living in poverty.

- **However, most of the growth in suburban poverty is among residents born in the U.S.** Immigrants accounted 30 percent of overall population growth in the suburbs from 2000 to 2009, but only 17 percent of the increase in the poor population. The suburbanization of poverty accelerated most among the U.S.-born, who accounted for 83 percent of the growth in suburban poverty.
- **Foreign-born poor in the suburbs are less educated, but more likely to be employed, than their native-born counterparts.** The families of the suburban immigrant poor also are more likely to be married couples with children, rather than female-headed households, as is most common among the U.S.-born poor.
- **Immigrants currently living in suburban areas who arrived in the U.S. prior to 2000 had a lower poverty rate in 2009 than those who had arrived more recently.** Sixty-one percent of all foreign-born who arrived prior to 2000 were living in suburban areas by 2009; likewise, a majority (53 percent) of new arrivals who are poor also lived in the suburbs.
- **Between 2000 and 2009 immigrants contributed more to the growth of the suburban poor population in the South than in other regions. The West was the only region where the poverty rate of suburban immigrants decreased between 2000 and 2009.** In Washington, D.C., for example, 40 percent of the growth in the suburban poor was due to immigrants. The highest regional share of immigrants among suburban poor was in the West (27 percent) and the lowest in the Midwest (10 percent). However, in terms of increase in the suburban immigrant poverty rate, Atlanta saw the largest (6.5 percent), while three large immigrant-destination metros—Los Angeles, Riverside, and McAllen—experienced decreases.

“This is a complex situation involving two contentious areas of public policy—immigration and poverty,” said Audrey Singer, a Senior Fellow with the Metropolitan Policy Program and a co-author of the report. “At a time when public service agencies are already stressed to, or even past, their limits, addressing growing suburban poverty, particularly among immigrants, will require thoughtful leadership. These are new challenges for a system long geared towards poverty in cities.”

“We have to keep in mind that many of the suburban poor are working,” said Jill Wilson, a Senior Research Analyst with the Program and a co-author. “As our economy recovers and re-structures itself, immigrants will play a significant role in workforce growth, so it is our self-interest to develop policies based on the realities they face.”

As the new report notes, “The suburbanization of poverty is now a defining characteristic of the American metropolis. And it is accelerating.”

The Metropolitan Policy Program at Brookings—Created in 1996, the Metropolitan Policy Program (MPP) provides decision-makers with cutting-edge research and policy ideas for improving the health and prosperity of metropolitan areas including their component cities, suburbs, and rural areas. To learn more visit: www.brookings.edu/metro.