

# RESEARCH



# FACTS and

# FINDINGS

A collaboration of Cornell University, University of Rochester, and the New York State Center for School Safety

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## The Changing Face of NYS: Immigrant Youth in Every Community

by Maud Easter and Dina Refki

When the number of immigrants and children of immigrants reached one-third of New York State's population by 1995<sup>1</sup>, youth programs statewide began discovering they needed answers to new questions about adolescents in their community.<sup>2</sup>

- What languages do our county's teens speak at home?
- What cultural traditions shape the way they and their parents see adolescence?
- How does the immigration experience both strengthen and challenge these teens?

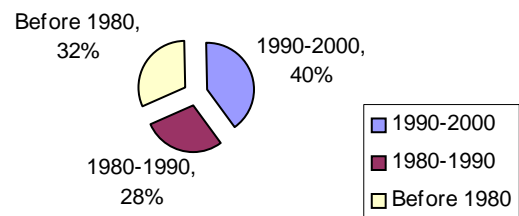
The 2000 Census shows that immigrants have settled throughout upstate and downstate New York, in rural, suburban and urban communities. Understanding the rapidly growing and geographically expanding population of immigrant families all across the state is critical to designing effective youth development programs, with the cultural and linguistic proficiencies needed to help immigrant adolescents thrive in their new communities.

### New York: Becoming Global State

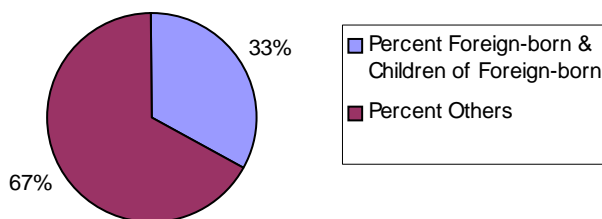
- Families from over 150 countries around the world now live in NYS.
- Immigrant families have moved to every county of NYS.
- NYS has the second largest immigrant population in the nation.
- More than 40% are new immigrants, having arrived since 1990.
- Upstate counties with high proportions of new immigrants:

• Tompkins	65%	• Albany	39%
• Oneida	54%	• Westchester	39%
• Onondaga	43%	• Monroe	36%

### Foreign-born in NYS by Year of Entry



### New York State Population, 1995

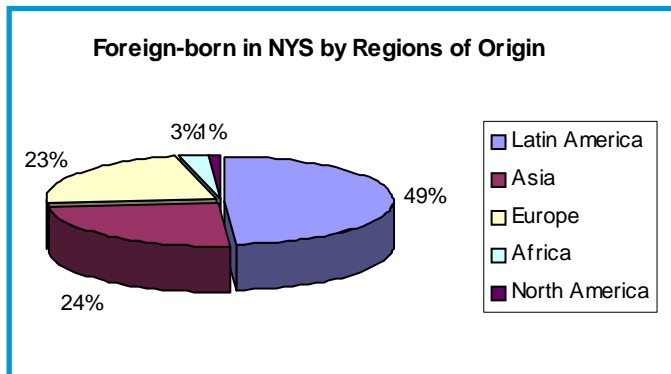


<sup>1</sup> Passel, Jeffery, and Clark, Rebecca. *Immigrants in New York*. Urban Institute, 1998.

<sup>2</sup> Unless otherwise noted, statistics are based on the 2000 Census and include persons counted by the Census without regard to immigration status. The term "immigrant" refers to foreign-born persons, except in specified cases in which foreign-born and children of foreign-born are combined.

## NYS Immigrants: Three-fourths from Latin America, Asia and Africa

- Between 1970 and 2000, the regions of origin of immigrants in NYS changed dramatically, bringing new racial and ethnic diversity to communities statewide. This is similar to a pattern occurring across the entire United States.



## Immigrant Family Challenges

Immigrant youth are impacted greatly by the migration experience and by pressures facing newcomer families, including:

- Poverty:** Since 1990, poverty rates among children of immigrants have been 50% higher than those of children of US-born parents.<sup>3</sup>
- Hunger:** One-third of NYC immigrant families have difficulty affording food.<sup>4</sup>
- Health Insurance:** Immigrant children are 3 times as likely to lack health insurance as children with US-born parents.<sup>5</sup>
- Immigration Status Fears:** Families fear that participation in public health programs could negatively impact immigration interests.<sup>6</sup>
- Environmental Dangers:** Immigrant families face overcrowded housing, asthma-causing conditions, agricultural pesticides.<sup>7</sup>
- Language and Cultural Barriers:** Youth and their families must deal with language and cultural barriers in youth programs, schools and health care programs.<sup>8</sup>

## The Language Challenge

In order to communicate effectively and comfortably with immigrant teens and parents, youth programs are learning they need new language capacities, either through bilingual staff or subcontracting with bilingual immigrant community-based agencies.

- 27% of NYS children (ages 5-17) speak a language other than English at home.<sup>9</sup>
- Over 7% of NYS children live in linguistically isolated households (no member 14 years or older speaks English very well), thrusting large interpreting responsibilities on adolescents.
- 16 counties have more than 4,000 people living in linguistically isolated households.
- Youth programs in upstate cities like Utica, a city with over 30 languages, are discovering the value of partnerships with refugee centers and ethnic community organizations.
- Youth agencies in NYC, where over 150 languages are spoken, have developed effective programs bringing together teens whose families share the culture and language traditions of one country or region.

<sup>3</sup>Van Hook, Jennifer, Susan Brown, and Maxwell Kwenda. 2003. "One Step Forward, Two Steps Back: The Increase in Immigrant Child Poverty from 1970 to 2000." *CFDR Working Paper*. 2003-01.

<sup>4</sup>New School University, Milano Graduate School, Center for New York City Affairs, *Hardship in Many Languages: Immigrant Families and Children in NYC*. January 2004.

<sup>5</sup>Children's Defense Fund. "Comprehensive Immigrant Outreach through Building Community Partnerships." In *Sign Them Up: A Quarterly Newsletter on the Children's Health Insurance Program*, Fall 2000.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>See the following: - Michael H. Schill, Samantha Friedman and Emily Rosenbaum. "The Housing Conditions of Immigrants in New York City." *Journal of Housing Research*, Volume 9, Issue 2, - Fannie Mae Foundation, 1998. NYC Department of Health. "NYC Vital Signs," August 2003. - NYC Department of Health. *Community Health Profiles: Asthma Facts*, Second Edition, 2001. - NYC Department of Health. *Community Health Profiles: Preventing Lead Poisoning in New York City Annual Report*, 2001. - Robyn Whyatt et al. "Prenatal Insecticide Exposure, Birth Weight and Length among an Urban Minority Cohort." *Environmental Health Perspectives*, Volume 112, No. 3 March 2004. - New School University, Milano Graduate School, Center for New York City Affairs, *New Country, New Perils: Immigrant Child and Family Health in NYC*, April, 2004.

<sup>8</sup>See New School University, Milano Graduate School, Center for New York City Affairs, *Newcomers Left Behind: Immigrant Parents Lack Equal Access to New York City's Schools*, August 2003. New School University, Milano Graduate School, Center for New York City Affairs, *Immigrant Girls: Struggling with Cultural Traditions: A Working Group Report*, 2000. National Center for Education Statistics, 1995, [www.nces.ed.gov/](http://www.nces.ed.gov/)

<sup>9</sup>Seitzinger Hepburn, Kathy. *Building Culturally and Linguistically Competent Services to Support Young Children, Their Families, School Readiness*. Prepared for The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2004.

## Spotlight on Three Different NYS Regions

NYS regions have different immigrant demographics:

**Hudson Valley:** Suburban immigrant growth has been higher (since 1990) than central city immigrant growth. The Hudson Valley received 122,000 new immigrants from 1990-2000. An increasing number of immigrants are making their first US home in NYC suburbs.

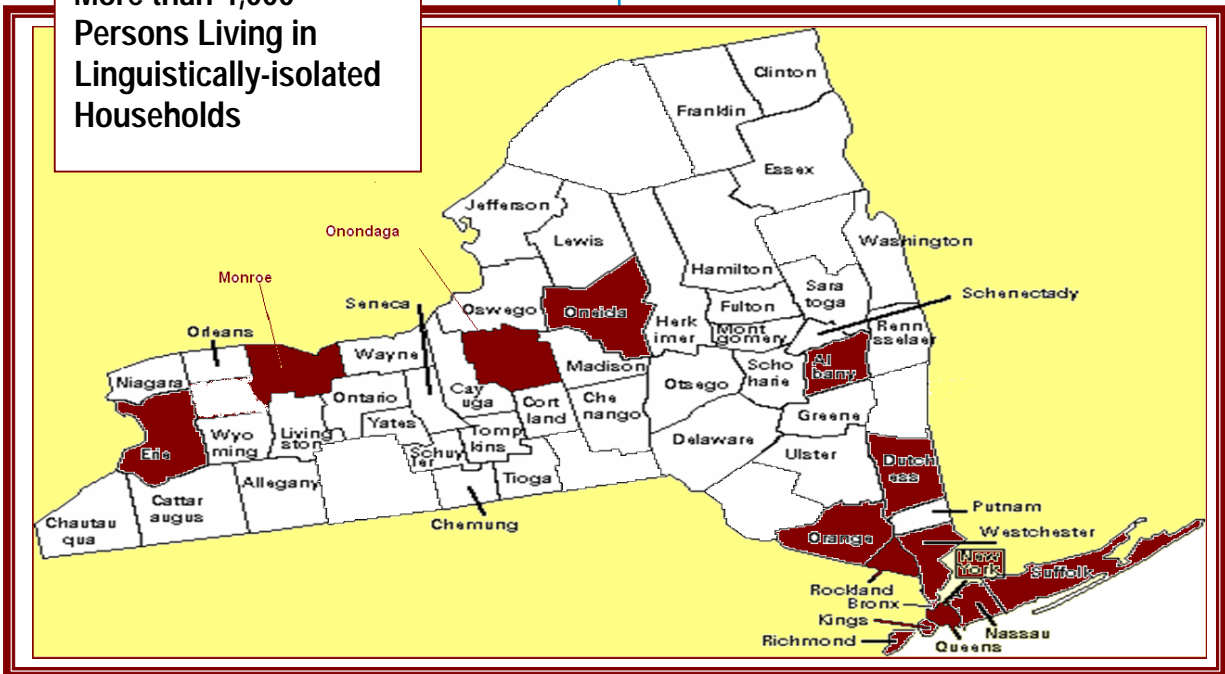
**Rural NYS:** 47,000 migrant farm workers (80% immigrants) come yearly to rural NYS, from the Finger Lakes to Long Island. They are isolated in 1,200 labor camps and often feel unwelcome in local communities. According to Cornell Migrant Program estimates, 52% of farm workers are undocumented, creating barriers to needed health and social services, due to NYS immigration status requirements.<sup>10</sup>

**New York City:** Since the mid-1990s, foreign-born and children of foreign-born have made up two-thirds of New York City's population.<sup>11</sup> By 2000, the New York City metropolitan area had become the #1 destination in the country for new immigrants.<sup>12</sup>

## Assistance Available

This publication is authored by **Voices for Change: Immigrant Women & State Policy**, which works statewide to provide public and private organizations **training, research, demographic information and advocacy** on challenges facing immigrant families. Voices for Change is a program of the Center for Women in Government & Civil Society at the University at Albany. For further information, contact Maud Easter at 518/442-3887 and [Easter@albany.edu](mailto:Easter@albany.edu), or Dina Refki at 518/442-5127 and [DRefki@albany.edu](mailto:DRefki@albany.edu).

### NYS Counties with More than 4,000 Persons Living in Linguistically-isolated Households



<sup>10</sup>Data supplied by Cornell Migrant Program, Victim Resource Center of the Finger Lakes, and National Center for Farmworker Health. See also Hovey, Joseph. *Migrant Health Issues: Mental Health & Substance Abuse*. 2002.

<sup>11</sup> Passel, Jeffery, and Clark, Rebecca. *Immigrants in New York*. Urban Institute, 1998.

<sup>12</sup> Logan, John. *America's Newcomers*. Lewis Mumford Center for Comparative Urban & Regional Research. 2003.

## Youth Program Strategies

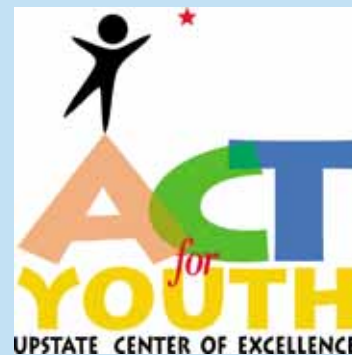
- Learn the ethnicities of immigrant families in your community by analyzing census data and/or conducting a community demographic profile.
- Identify languages spoken at home by your community's teens by reaching out to schools and by conducting formal/informal surveys of teens.
- Partner with immigrant community-based organizations which have the language and cultural competency needed for effective communication with teens and their parents. These organizations can serve as bridges to connect you effectively with the immigrant communities - for needs assessment, cross training and collaborative programs.
- Integrate cultural and linguistic competencies into your organization by embedding competency in your organization's mission, as well as creating strategies at all organizational levels that will help you accomplish these goals.

## Coming Soon

The next issue of PrACTice Matters will also be provided by Voices for Change: Immigrant Women & State Policy. **Immigrant Youth Development: Challenges & Opportunities** will analyze the implications of immigrant demographics for youth development programs. It will discuss the special assets of immigrant youth, the challenge of creating youth programs to support and develop these strengths, and useful program development strategies for work with youth, their parents and their schools.

The Upstate Center of Excellence invites you to visit the ACT for Youth website where additional copies of this newsletter and many other youth development resources are available.

[www.actforyouth.net](http://www.actforyouth.net)



Cornell University  
Family Life Development Center  
Beebe Hall  
Ithaca, NY 14853  
TEL: 607.255.7736  
FAX: 607.255.8562

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