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Media Contact:
Contact: David R. Jones
Telephone: 212-614-5324
Email: djones@cssny.org

“Housing the City of Immigrants”

CSS Report Says Housing Conditions for Immigrants Are Diverse and Difficult

Immigrants as a whole experience worse housing conditions than other New Yorkers, according to a new report released today by the Community Service Society of New York (CSS). The report reveals that immigrants pay a larger share of their income in rent, and they are twice as likely to live in crowded conditions. The policy brief also finds that housing experiences of different immigrant groups vary widely.

The policy brief, **“Housing the City of Immigrants,”** to be presented at a forum tomorrow sponsored by *The Community Service Society of New York* and *The New York Immigration Coalition*, contains important new research findings about housing challenges faced by immigrant New Yorkers. The policy brief explores the housing conditions experienced by the city's immigrant communities, whose numbers total more than 2.98 million New Yorkers.

The policy brief found that Mexicans and Dominicans, and those from the former Soviet Union, are affected most by affordability. A different but overlapping group, Mexicans, South Asians, and those from Central and South America, is most affected by crowding. A third group, Dominicans, Puerto Ricans, Africans, and those from the Caribbean, is most affected by substandard maintenance.

The key findings for the report explore the housing experiences of Dominicans, Mexicans, Central and South Americans, Caribbeans, Africans, Chinese, Taiwanese, Koreans, Indians, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis, other Asians, and immigrants from the former Soviet Union and other Europeans.

“Housing stresses don’t just affect individual households, they affect communities,” said David R. Jones, president and CEO of the Community Service Society of New York. “Housing issues have emerged as a major policy concern that must be addressed by New York legislators, particularly as New York’s immigrant communities continue to grow.”

According to the policy brief, the housing experiences of different immigrant groups vary widely and are partly explained by income differences among the groups. But they also appear to depend on the unique immigrant histories in New York City. Some immigrant groups such as Dominicans and Mexicans tend to have low incomes, similar to those of non-immigrant black and Latino households.

There is a wide variation in housing stresses among immigrant groups, with many experiencing very high stresses, the report finds. When a group is exposed to badly maintained apartments, for example, it is usually not just something that happens to a few low-income families. Instead, it is a common fact of life for the community as a whole.

The report surveys housing conditions affecting immigrant and non-immigrant households in the city, focusing on affordability, crowding, the type and quality of housing, as well as the geographic distribution of immigrant groups across the city map. Using the U.S. Census Bureau's 2008 New York City Housing and Vacancy Survey, it distinguishes ten groups of immigrant-headed households defined by country or region of origin, as well as three groups of second-generation households headed by the children of immigrants, and three groups of third or higher generation households defined by race and ethnicity.

"Communities of New Yorkers who are struggling to pay housing costs, particularly immigrant New Yorkers, pay a larger share of their income in rent, and they are twice as likely to live in crowded conditions," said Tom Waters, CSS housing policy analyst and co-author of the policy brief.

The report presents a complex picture that affects both low and higher income members of the immigrant community and continues from the first to the second immigrant generation. The report explores five areas:

1. Substantial income differences among immigrant groups affect their housing.
2. Each immigrant group evolves a different locational pattern that affects its housing conditions and opportunities.
3. Immigrants as a whole are less likely to live in assisted housing and more likely to be rent-regulated tenants than non-immigrants.
4. There is a wide variation in housing stresses among immigrant groups.
5. The overall pattern suggests that any assessment of housing conditions needs to be specific to individual immigrant groups.

The Community Service Society, in its conclusions and policy recommendations, determined that because housing conditions vary widely among immigrant groups, there is no universal policy agenda that addresses the critical needs of every group. Therefore, the overall recommendation is that there should be distinct but overlapping groups that work on policy and advocacy for their particular concerns while jointly pushing for policy changes for the entire immigrant community.

In closing, the report also recommends immigrants must play significant roles in a wide variety of housing advocacy efforts, joining with other housing advocates to preserve the city's rent-regulated and subsidized housing stock and to address issues of affordability, access, and housing quality.

"Immigrants are a vibrant part of New York," Jones said. "They create a landscape of cultures and ethnicities that capture diversity at its highest level. The city should work towards including immigrants in the tapestry of New York, not exclude them."

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For 165 years, the Community Service Society of New York has been the leading voice on behalf of low-income New Yorkers and continues to advocate for the economic security of the working poor in the nation's largest city.