

ADDRESSING HOUSING INSECURITY FOR NEWLY-ARRIVED IMMIGRANTS IN METROWEST

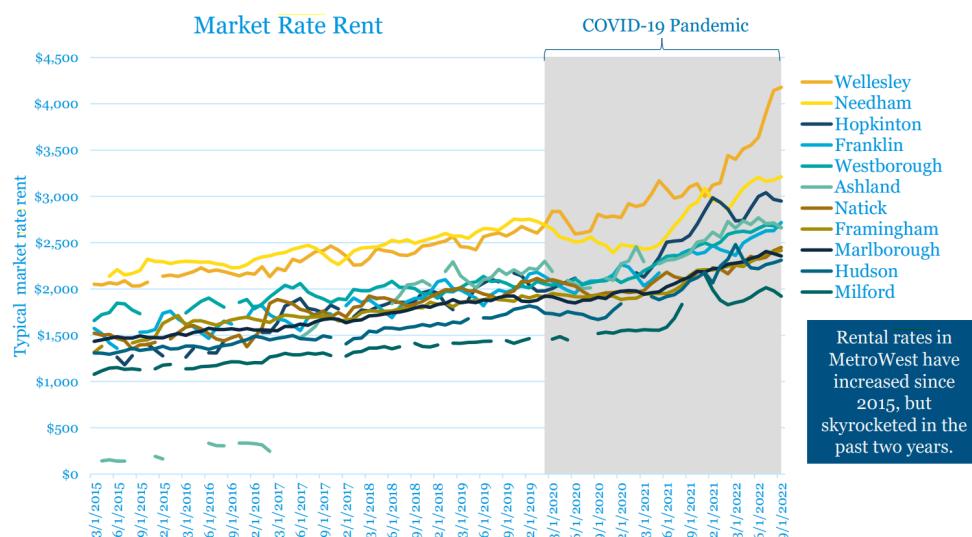
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The Issue

Newly arrived immigrants in MetroWest face significant housing insecurity due to eligibility barriers, lack of affordable housing units, and the continued influx of newly-arrived immigrants in Massachusetts.

A Housing Crisis in MetroWest

Massachusetts, with a particular focus on the MetroWest region, finds itself grappling with a severe housing crisis. Skyrocketing rental costs and a scarcity of affordable housing options have left many residents, especially vulnerable populations like newly-arrived immigrants, struggling to secure stable living arrangements (MetroWest Health Foundation, Community Health Assessment, 2023). The demand for housing has far outpaced the supply, intensifying competition and exacerbating housing instability. In the last decade, a staggering two-thirds of MetroWest communities reported rental vacancy rates below 5%, indicating an incredibly tight rental market with limited availability (MetroWest Health Foundation, "Shut Out" 2022). Although efforts have been made to increase the number of housing units in the region, few remain designated as "affordable." Moreover, rental rates in MetroWest have been on an upward trajectory since 2015, with a particularly sharp increase in the past two years. Unfortunately, incomes in the area have failed to keep pace with the rising home values, further compounding the affordability crisis (MetroWest Health Foundation, "Shut Out", 2022).

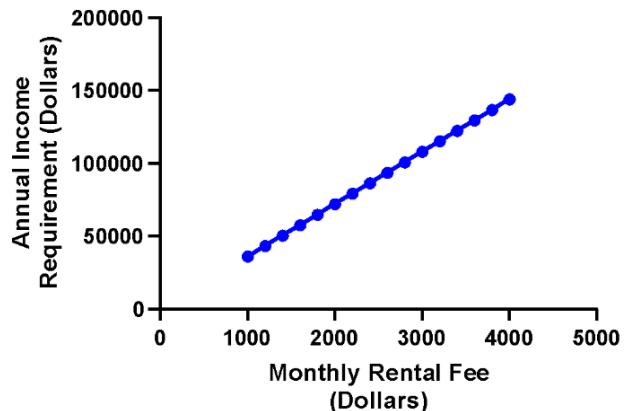
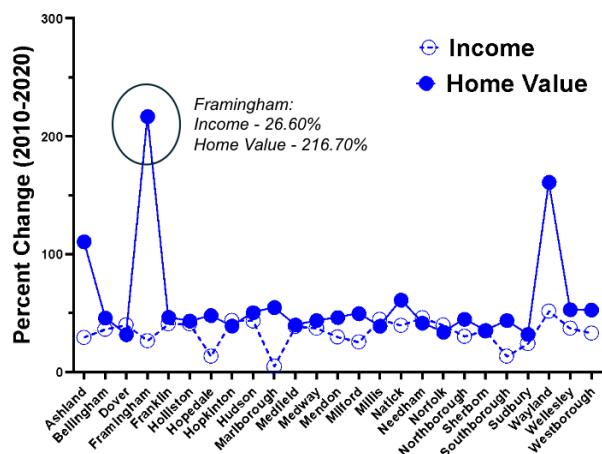


INCOME VS. HOME VALUE IN METROWEST CHANGE FROM 2010-2020

MASSACHUSETTS INCOME REQUIREMENTS FOR RENTAL UNITS

MetroWest Health Foundation (2022)

Jewish Family Services (2024)

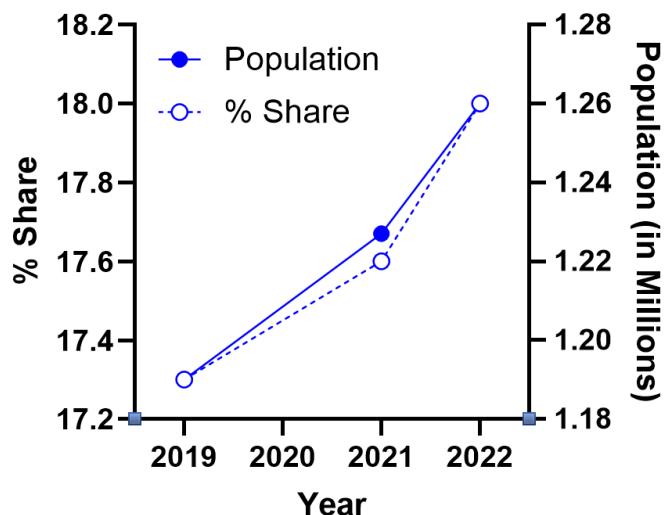
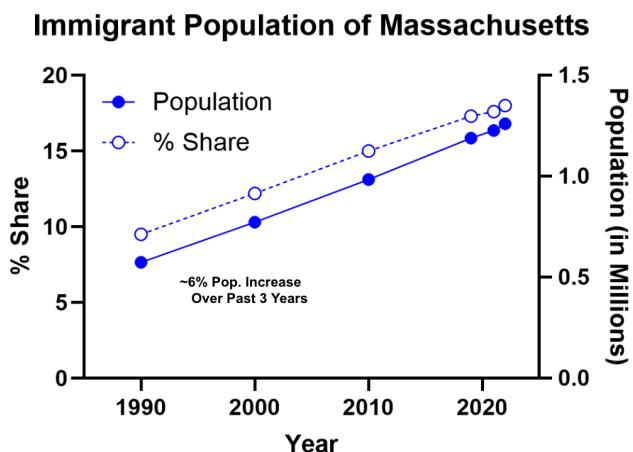


“It is hard to argue that housing is not a fundamental human need. Decent, affordable housing should be a basic right for everybody in this country. The reason is simple: without stable shelter, everything else falls apart.”

~ Matthew Desmond, *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City*

Immigration in Massachusetts & MetroWest

Massachusetts boasts a vibrant and diverse immigrant population, with many newly arriving immigrants choosing to settle in the MetroWest region. Immigrants play a crucial role in the local economy and contribute significantly to the rich cultural tapestry of the area. Over the past twenty years, MetroWest has witnessed a notable influx of newly-arrived immigrants, including refugees from countries such as Haiti, Afghanistan, and Syria (MetroWest Health Foundation, Community Health Assessment, 2023). The Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) has projected a substantial growth in the low-income population of MetroWest by 2040 (MetroWest Health Foundation, “Shut Out”, 2022). They have also cautioned that if economic and housing disparities continue to persist along racial lines, it is highly likely that health disparities will follow suit, further exacerbating the challenges faced by newly-arrived immigrant communities (MetroWest Health Foundation, Community Health Assessment, 2023).



Migration Policy Institute (MPI) tabulation of data from U.S. Census Bureau, 2010, 2019, and 2022 American Community Surveys (ACS), and 1990 and 2000 Decennial Census.

-6% Increase in immigrant population of Massachusetts over the past 3 years

Massachusetts continues to struggle with a surge of migrants entering the state, straining the emergency shelter system and state budget, with costs projected to keep rising as federal immigration reform remains stalled. The state is employing various stopgap measures like overflow shelters and stay limits to manage the crisis

-Boston Globe, 2024



Housing Barriers for Newly-Arrived Immigrants

Meeting rental agreement requirements like credit history and employment verification can be difficult for newly-arrived immigrants. Discrimination based on national origin or limited English proficiency adds to the challenge. Newly-arrived immigrants may struggle with rental sector rules, leading to housing instability. Limited income and credit history often force newly-arrived immigrants to rent non-traditional spaces that may not comply with housing regulations.

Newly-arrived immigrants often cannot rely solely on the formal rental market to find housing. Instead, they may need to resort to a combination of formal and informal housing arrangements such as shared bedrooms, basements, attics, garages, and legally converted units that violate housing codes and regulations (Ayano, 2021).

Common Barriers To Housing Access For Newcomers

| Credit Score | References | Income/Income Verification | Deposits (first, last, security) | Personal Information (ID, Social Security, Criminal Record Checks) |
|---|---|---|--|---|
|  |  |  |  |  |

Asylum-seeking migrants in particular face an additional hurdle, as they are barred from working for at least six months after their arrival, making it exceptionally difficult for them to generate income and afford housing (Farah, 2023). Newly-arrived immigrant families also encounter both structural and informational barriers when attempting to access the limited housing assistance available. These barriers include a lack of information in languages other than English, insufficient guidance in navigating the complex housing system, and a scarcity of affordable housing options in the neighborhoods where new arrivals live and work (Bernstein et al., 2021).

“Some of the units are really expensive and not in the best condition. Some apartments are dirty and have trash in them. Sometimes we feel less than because we cannot speak up about basic things like this. We fear having the police called on us [due to our immigration status].”

MetroWest Health Foundation, Community Health Assessment (2023)
Focus Group Participant

Recommendations

To address the housing insecurity faced by newly-arrived immigrants in MetroWest, a multi-pronged approach focusing on changing eligibility policies for rental agreements and establishing a comprehensive landlord incentive program is necessary.

1) The Commonwealth of Massachusetts should develop more expansive landlord incentive programs.

- Provide signing bonuses, broker fees, cleaning fees, unit retention bonuses, and a customer service/navigator to support landlords with resolving housing and tenant issues.
- Provide dedicated tenant support to help with resolving issues and support housing stability.
- Create pathways for landlords to partner with local government agencies and non-profit organizations to secure additional funding and resources.
- Similar incentive programs currently being adopted in Boston and Portsmouth, NH.

2) The Commonwealth of Massachusetts should change policies for rental eligibility.

- Support [House Bill H.197](#) and [Senate Bill S.99](#) An Act Creating a Special Commission to Study the Current Refugee Resettlement Infrastructure and Ensure Successful Integration of Refugees in Massachusetts
- Ensure policies for rental agreements promote inclusivity and flexibility.
- Collaborate with community organizations and immigrant advocacy groups to develop standardized, accessible, and non-discriminatory rental application process that also complies with fair housing laws.
- Develop a process providing landlords education around misinformation and and misunderstanding regarding eligibility, particularly for mixed-status families.

3) The Commonwealth of Massachusetts or a housing non-profit organization should develop a universal, on-line database and application system for affordable housing.

- Eliminate the burden of tenants having to independently find and apply for individual listings, waitlists, and lotteries for publicly and privately held affordable units.
- Create a common application form and database for prospective tenants to find and apply for any available units using one application.
- Allow prospective tenants to find open housing, affordable housing lotteries, and be added to wait-lists in a one-stop-shop.
- Allow landlords to easily market and list their units, at no additional cost.
- Leverage the impact of housingnavigator.org to create single entry point and process that supports both rental management for landlords, as well as streamiles the rental search and application process for prospective tenants.

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