

REPORT IN BRIEF

Supporting Underserved Communities Amid COVID-19

Insights from Louisville's COVID-19 Community Impact Survey





About New American Economy

New American Economy is a bipartisan research and advocacy organization founded to educate, empower and support policymakers, influencers, and citizens across the country that see the economic and social benefits of a smart approach to immigration reform. NAE has created a coalition of civic, business, and cultural leaders who span the political spectrum and represent all 50 states. NAE makes the case for smart immigration reform in four ways: 1) we use **powerful research** to demonstrate how immigration impacts our economy, 2) we **organize champions** at the grassroots and influencer levels to build support for immigration, 3) we **partner with state and local leaders** to advocate for policies that recognize the value immigrants add locally, and 4) we show **immigrant contributions to American culture** through film, food, art, sports, comedy, and more. Visit www.NewAmericanEconomy.org to learn more.

About the Louisville Metro Office for Globalization

Housed within Louisville Forward, the city's integrated approach to economic and community development, the Office for Globalization was established by Mayor Greg Fischer in 2011 to help Louisville compete in an international and multicultural world by empowering immigrants to seize economic, educational and cultural opportunities. Working with partners from the social service, education, government and business sectors, the Office for Globalization offers programs, resources and a cross-sector platform to support foreign-born entrepreneurship, assist job-seekers, inform communities, celebrate cultures, train community leaders, and get the word out to those seeking the great quality of life that Louisville provides. Visit louisvilleky.gov/government/globalization to learn more.

Acknowledgments

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Executive Summary

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a **disproportionate impact** on vulnerable people across the United States, including racial and ethnic minorities and immigrants. Many have faced challenges in retaining employment and meeting the basic needs of their families. In order to better support Louisville's underserved communities and expand equitable access to services for all residents, New American Economy (NAE) partnered with the City of Louisville to survey residents about their experiences during the pandemic. The COVID-19 Community Impact Survey, conducted between February and May of 2021, asked Black, Indigenous, and other people of color (BIPOC) and immigrant communities in Louisville about their essential needs, the impact of COVID-19 on their wellbeing, and what assistance they have received to support their families through the crisis.

KEY FINDINGS

COVID-19 has had a significant impact on employment.

More than one in five BIPOC and immigrant respondents said they were unemployed at the time of the survey; one in four reported losing a job during the pandemic; and one in three had their hours reduced. At least two out of every five BIPOC and immigrant respondents indicated they did not have access to paid sick time if they became ill.

Respondents reported certain barriers when accessing medical care during the pandemic.

About 8 percent of BIPOC and immigrant respondents did not receive the medical care they needed. Among the respondents who received medical care, one in four BIPOC respondents and one in five immigrant respondents indicated high co-payments or fees were a challenge, while one in seven BIPOC respondents experienced overcrowded facilities when accessing care.

Many disadvantaged households face severe financial strain.

When thinking about the future, BIPOC and immigrant respondents were most worried about paying utilities and other bills (44 percent of BIPOC respondents and 47 percent of immigrant respondents), paying down debt (41 percent of BIPOC respondents and 36 percent of immigrant respondents), and paying for healthcare and medicine for their family (38 percent of BIPOC respondents and 37 percent of immigrant respondents).

Local organizations provide much-needed assistance, but more can be done to support vulnerable communities.

The majority of BIPOC and immigrant respondents felt that there was a local organization they could turn to if they needed help with healthcare, housing, food, or other basic needs. However, more than 7 percent of BIPOC respondents and 9 percent of immigrant respondents reported not having a local organization they could rely on for assistance.

Impact of COVID-19 on Vulnerable Communities in Louisville

The COVID-19 pandemic and the recession that followed have severely impacted economically disadvantaged communities. Many families have struggled to pay bills, to access medical care, to secure food for their families, and to provide adequate childcare. To better understand their essential needs and any gaps in assistance they have experienced, New American Economy worked with the City of Louisville and local community groups to conduct the COVID-19 Community Impact Survey, which focused on communities of color and those hit hardest by the pandemic. The survey results, which highlighted the major health and economic challenges faced by the BIPOC and immigrant communities overall, will help identify ways that the city could address disparities in service.

Demographics

There were 219 valid responses to the COVID-19 Community Impact Survey from Louisville. Of those, 184 responses were from BIPOC residents and 192 responses from immigrant residents. The majority of respondents (83.6 of BIPOC respondents and 85.3 percent of immigrant respondents) were considered of working age, or between the ages of 25 and 64. More than 56 percent of BIPOC and immigrant respondents identified as female.

219

valid responses to the survey.

184

responses were from BIPOC residents.

192

responses were from immigrant residents.

More than

56%

of BIPOC and immigrant respondents identified as female.

SHARE OF RESPONDENTS WHO WERE OF WORKING AGE (25 - 64)

BIPOC Respondents



Immigrant Respondents

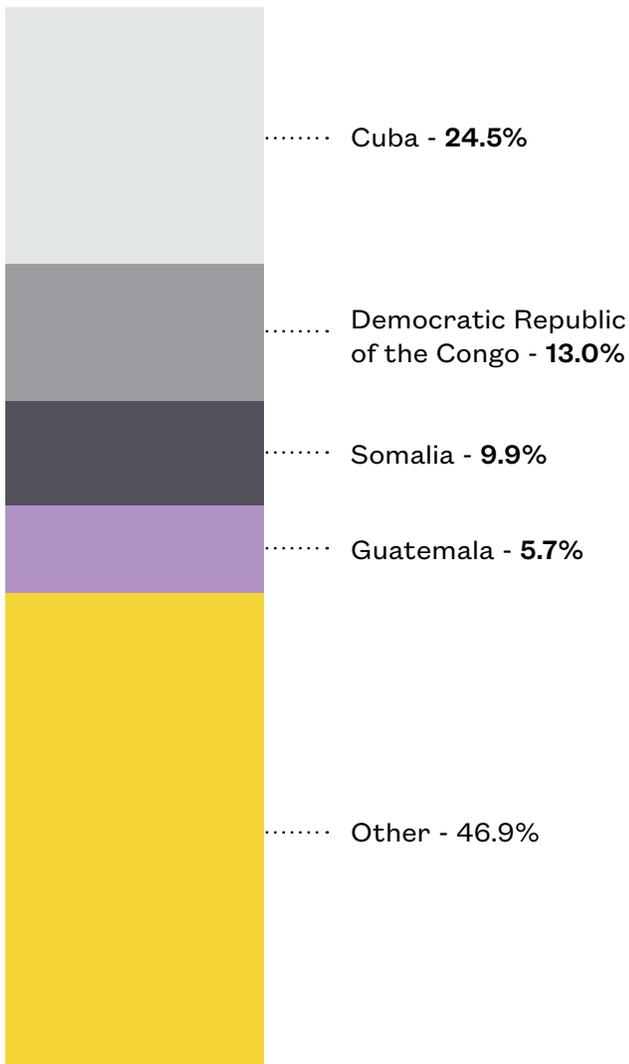


1. BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and other people of color) refers to respondents who self-identified as racial and ethnic minorities that include Blacks, non-white Hispanics, and Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, regardless of their immigration status. It includes individuals who are U.S.-born and foreign-born. We define immigrants as anyone who was born outside United States.

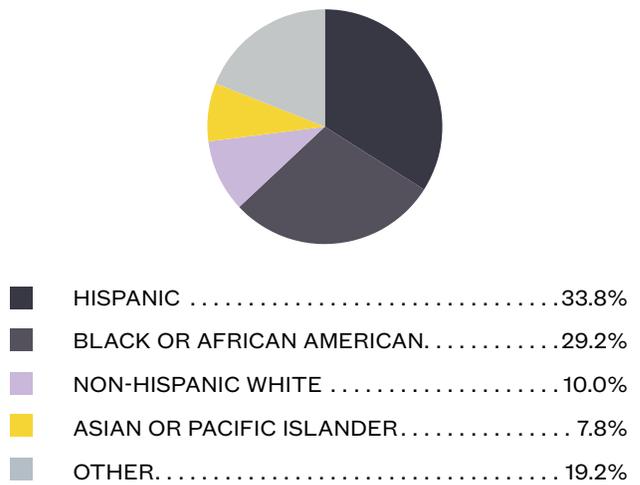
Breaking it down by race and ethnicity, Hispanic respondents made up the largest share (33.8 percent), followed by Black or African American respondents (29.2 percent), non-Hispanic White respondents (10.0 percent), and Asian or Pacific Islander respondents (7.8 percent).

Looking at just immigrant respondents, they represented 46 countries of origin, with the top four being Cuba (24.5 percent), the Democratic Republic of Congo (13.0 percent), Somalia (9.9 percent), and Guatemala (5.7 percent). More than half of immigrant respondents (52.8 percent) came to the United States within the past decade, including 11.1 percent who had been in the United States for one year or less at the time of the survey.

DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS BY COUNTRY BY BIRTH



RACE AND ETHNICITY OF RESPONDENTS



of immigrant respondents came to the United States within the past decade, including



who had been in the United States for one year or less at the time of the survey.

Of the immigrants surveyed, 22.7 percent indicated that they had limited English proficiency (LEP). This was defined as people who couldn't easily communicate in English about everyday things, who understood only a few English words, or who did not speak English at all.

Over half of BIPOC respondents (52.5 percent) and immigrant respondents (53.5 percent) had a bachelor's degree or higher. Despite high levels of education, 62.5 percent of BIPOC and immigrant respondents reported household income below \$40,000 in 2019, which is roughly 150 percent of the federal poverty level for a household of four.

This is due, in part, to the fact that 63.4 percent of immigrant respondents with a post-secondary degree or certification from an institution outside of the United States were not employed in the field in which they were educated or trained. In many cases, these immigrants were relegated to lower-paying jobs or were unable to secure employment at all.



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SHARE OF RESPONDENTS WHO HAD A BACHELOR'S DEGREE OR HIGHER



Employment and Workplace Safety

Job losses during COVID-19 hit BIPOC and immigrant workers particularly hard. When the NAE survey was given between February and May 2021, about 22.9 percent of BIPOC respondents and 22.1 percent of immigrant respondents said they were unemployed. Almost one out of four BIPOC respondents reported losing a job during the pandemic and one out of three had their hours reduced. Similarly, at least a quarter of immigrant respondents lost a job, and just over one-third had their hours reduced.

TABLE 1: HOW HAS THE PANDEMIC AFFECTED YOUR EMPLOYMENT OR BUSINESS?

	BIPOC Respondents	Immigrant Respondents
Lost a Job	24.5%	25.9%
Had Hours Reduced	33.6%	34.3%
Had pay cut	12.7%	13.9%
Had to quit a job or reduce hours to care for family members	13.6%	13.9%

At the time of the survey, about one in three BIPOC and immigrant respondents were allowed to work remotely. Among the respondents who said remote work was not an option, nearly 90 percent of BIPOC and immigrant respondents indicated that there were proper health measures in place to safeguard against COVID-19 infection.

However, when it came to paid sick leave, approximately two out of every five respondents (41.6 percent for BIPOC respondents and 42.0 percent for immigrant respondents) reported that they did not have access to paid sick time if they became ill.

“It has made our community less connected and threatened jobs, school and businesses. I am very worried about people being able to stay safe and keep their lives together. Although we have been able to help each other, it is very difficult to keep up with all needs. It feels like we were approaching a breaking point, but vaccines and good safety measures seem to be helping to slow down the virus.”

— Survey respondent

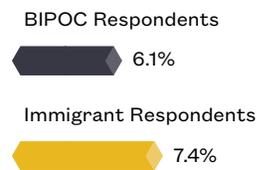
Medical Access

Entering the second year of the pandemic, almost one third (29.8 percent) of BIPOC respondents reported that either they or someone in their household had at some point tested positive for COVID-19. For immigrant respondents, the proportion was slightly higher, at 31.7 percent. The share of likely cases is even higher, after taking into account those who felt sick with COVID-19 symptoms but never got tested. For BIPOC respondents, 6.1 percent said they or their family members had symptoms but never got tested, while the share was 7.4 percent for immigrant respondents.

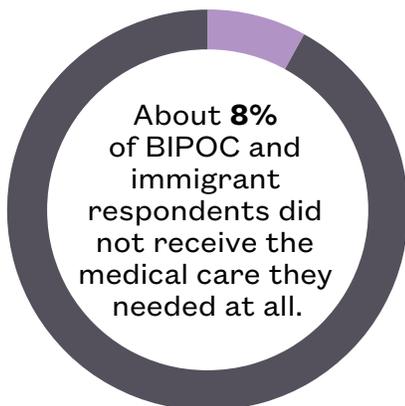
SHARE OF RESPONDENTS WHO REPORTED THEY OR SOMEONE IN THEIR HOUSEHOLD HAD AT SOME POINT TESTED POSITIVE FOR COVID-19



SHARE OF RESPONDENTS WHO REPORTED THEY OR THEIR FAMILY MEMBERS HAD COVID-19 SYMPTOMS BUT NEVER GOT TESTED



Overall, the majority of respondents indicated that medical care has been available to them when needed during the pandemic, but not without barriers. Among those respondents who received medical care, one in four BIPOC respondents and one in five immigrant respondents indicated high copayments or fees were a challenge, while one in seven BIPOC respondents experienced overcrowded facilities when accessing care. Furthermore, about 8 percent of BIPOC and immigrant respondents did not receive the medical care they needed at all.



1 in 7

BIPOC respondents who received medical care experienced overcrowded facilities when accessing care.



1 in 5

immigrant respondents who received medical care indicated high copayments or fees were a challenge.



1 in 4

BIPOC respondents who received medical care indicated high copayments or fees were a challenge.

Household Needs

Slightly more respondents rented their homes (46.4 percent of BIPOC respondents and 48.1 percent of immigrant respondents) than were homeowners (37.4 percent of BIPOC respondents and 36.4 percent of immigrant respondents.) Many said they struggled to pay the rent or mortgage on time during the pandemic.



About 27.0 percent of BIPOC respondents and 30.5 percent of immigrant respondents said that although they were able to pay their rent or mortgage they had to reduce other essential spending to do so. About 9.5 percent of BIPOC respondents and 9.1 percent of immigrant respondents were behind on their rent or mortgage, including people who were facing eviction or foreclosure.

Difficulties paying the bills were reflected in other survey responses, as well. When respondents were asked what they were worried about in the coming month, their top concerns included paying utilities and other bills (44.2 percent of BIPOC respondents and 47.2 percent of immigrant respondents). Additionally, paying for healthcare and medicine for their families, paying down debt, and getting enough food for their families were sources of worry for BIPOC and immigrant respondents.

TABLE 2: WHEN YOU THINK ABOUT THE COMING MONTH, ARE YOU WORRIED ABOUT BEING ABLE TO . . . ?

	BIPOC Respondents	Immigrant Respondents
Pay for healthcare and medicine for your family	38.3%	37.4%
Get enough food for your family	29.9%	28.8%
Pay utilities or other bills	44.2%	47.2%
Pay down debt	40.9%	36.2%
Pay for emergency expenses	29.2%	30.1%
Access shelter for your family	10.4%	9.2%

The pandemic posed extra challenges for families with children. About 20 percent of BIPOC and immigrant respondents with children said they lacked childcare support during school hours. About 20 percent were unsure of how to help their children with schoolwork or the technology required. This may have been exacerbated when school districts did not provide communication in the immigrants' primary language (this was the case for 9.7 percent of immigrant respondents). Overall, almost one-third of BIPOC and immigrant respondents with children worried that their children were academically behind.

“The COVID-19 affected a lot of people for my community, especially those who are having kids and they don't speak that much English and they couldn't check how their kids doing school and homework.”

— Survey respondent

Local Support

The majority of BIPOC respondents (66.1 percent) and immigrant respondents (62.8 percent) felt that there was a local organization they felt they could turn to if they needed help getting assistance with healthcare, housing, food, or other basic needs.

Despite this, only 9 percent of BIPOC and immigrant respondents indicated that they received help from the city government to help make payments for necessities, such as utilities, insurance, or car payments, more than one in eight received help to pay for rent or mortgage. A more significant share of respondents (29.8 percent of BIPOC respondents and 30.0 percent of immigrant respondents) accessed assistance from the city government to secure food.

About 70 percent of BIPOC and immigrant respondents felt that their family and friends were receiving adequate help from the city government to protect themselves from COVID-19 and its spread. But respondents felt slightly less supported in other areas. Only one in three BIPOC and immigrant respondents felt that the city government was providing adequate help to meet their essential needs.

BIPOC respondents reported

There was a local organization they could turn to for basic needs



They accessed assistance from the city government to secure food.



Immigrant respondents reported

There was a local organization they could turn to for basic needs



They accessed assistance from the city government to secure food.



“I work with refugees and immigrants and it's very hard to see the difficulties they go through.”

— Survey respondent

Community Outreach

One major challenge for all communities during the COVID-19 pandemic has been figuring out how to get accurate information about the virus and where to get help. Most immigrant respondents to the survey (76.6 percent) felt that they had timely and accurate information in their preferred language during the pandemic. About one out of every seven respondents (13.8 percent), however, said they did not.

Overall, respondents seemed to get information about COVID-19 from a variety of sources, ranging from the federal government (52.2 percent of BIPOC respondents and 49.0 percent of immigrant respondents) to news media (45.7 percent of BIPOC respondents and 41.7 percent of immigrant respondents), and social media (38.0 percent of BIPOC respondents and 33.3 percent of immigrant respondents).

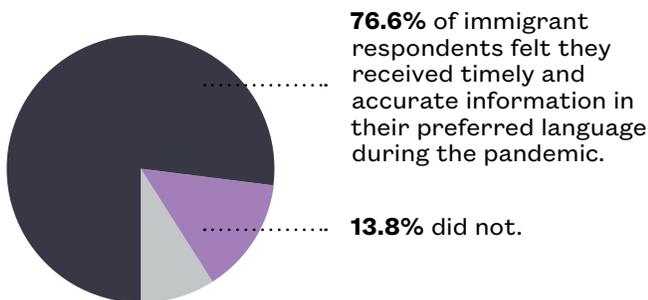
Top information sources differed for immigrants with limited English proficiency (LEP). For this group, the top sources of information about COVID-19 were social media (54.2 percent), family and friends (45.8 percent), and news media (45.8 percent).

“I was greatly affected, especially at the beginning, due to the ignorance, I was very afraid of the contagion and the consequences of contracting the virus, but as we became informed and used both the quarantine and all the sanitary measures, the risks were decreasing and I managed to feel safer despite everything.”

— Survey respondent

TABLE 3: WHAT IS YOUR TRUSTED SOURCE FOR INFORMATION ABOUT COVID-19 AND WHERE TO GET HELP DURING THIS PANDEMIC?

	BIPOC Respondents	Immigrant Respondents
Federal government (e.g., President, CDC)	52.2%	49.0%
News media	45.7%	41.7%
Social media	38.0%	33.3%



TOP SOURCES OF INFORMATION FOR LEP IMMIGRANTS:



Sense of Belonging

Approximately three quarters of BIPOC respondents (76.8 percent) and immigrant respondents (77.4 percent) indicated that COVID-19 has had a negative impact on their sense of safety, wellbeing, or belonging in their community. Most prominently, almost one-third of BIPOC respondents (32.6 percent) and immigrant respondents (33.0 percent) felt a negative impact on belonging.

Almost half (48.1 percent) of BIPOC respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they felt there were tensions in their community related to differences based on race or ethnicity. Similarly, 42.9 percent of immigrant respondents also indicated that they felt tension in their community related to differences based on race or ethnicity.

TABLE 4: HOW HAS COVID-19 IMPACTED YOUR SENSE OF SAFETY, WELLBEING, OR BELONGING?

	BIPOC Respondents	Immigrant Respondents
Felt a negative impact on sense of safety, wellbeing, or belonging in the community	76.8%	77.4%
Felt a negative impact on belonging	32.6%	33.0%
Felt tensions in the community related to differences based on race or ethnicity	48.1%	42.9%

“Ignorance, carelessness and abuse of personal freedom among local population have significantly contributed in spreading the virus, and therefore a total isolation of my family to the outside world, also affected my family sense of belonging in a big way that we thought of relocating.”

— **Survey respondent**

Conclusion

The results of the COVID-19 Community Impact Survey emphasize the importance of expanding outreach to vulnerable populations in Louisville. Louisville's BIPOC and immigrant residents have been acutely affected by the pandemic, with many struggling to pay bills and access community resources. The pandemic has also affected people's sense of safety and belonging. Local government and community organizations are playing a vital role in disseminating information and aid to residents, but more can be done to tailor resources to vulnerable groups, especially to address the immigration status restrictions and language barriers that keep immigrants from [accessing vital services](#). The results of this survey provide preliminary data about what Louisville's residents most need. From here, the city can work to best meet these needs and, by so doing, boost the city and the region's economic recovery.

Methodology

Local officials from five communities — Atlanta, Austin, Denver, Louisville, and Tulsa — oversaw the development and implementation of the COVID-19 Community Impact Survey, with the goal of surveying at least 200 residents in each community.

Data Collection

The 43-item quantitative and qualitative survey was translated into 16 languages: Amharic, Arabic, Burmese, Chinese (simplified), Dari, French, Hmong, Karen, Kinyarwanda, Nepali, Portuguese, Somali, Spanish, Swahili, Vietnamese, and Zopau. Multilingual community leaders and volunteers were recruited to provide interpretation via phone and in-person survey collection.

In collaboration with community partners, the Louisville Metro Office for Globalization organized a campaign to promote participation in the survey among local multicultural communities. The campaign's main goal was to achieve diversity by engaging communities of different international backgrounds, geographical location, and economic sectors through a group of trusted community engagement partners. The Office conducted orientation and feedback sessions to help people understand purpose of the survey and the anticipated outcome. The Office promoted the survey via its existing networks and to schools, immigrant-owned businesses, and local organizations. The office and partners distributed the survey online and in person.

In total, New American Economy (NAE) received 219 valid survey responses from adult residents in Louisville. NAE did not collect personal information through the survey, such as names, telephone numbers, or any potentially identifying information. NAE shared participants' email addresses with Louisville partners but only for the purpose of issuing gift cards as an incentive for their participation in the survey. NAE did not match the email data with the survey data.

When participants responded to write-in or open-ended questions in a language other than English, NAE asked survey staff to translate the responses into English, if they were able, and to input them into the online forms. For all non-English responses, NAE worked with its staff members, members of local organizations, and a professional agency to translate content into English for the analysis.

Data Cleaning

After gathering the survey responses, NAE used a mixed approach of data science and manual review to identify and remove invalid entries. Using machine-learning techniques, NAE looked for patterns and set the criteria for invalid entries based on city, referral organization, zip code, and demographics, as well as responses to the write-in fields and open-ended questions. NAE then went through the manual review of the entries in question and removed those deemed invalid. For duplicate entries — those that shared identical responses to all the questions — NAE kept the first entry and removed those that followed.