

Helping Baltimore and Its New Residents

By: [Joe Nathanson](#) January 3, 2022



As noted in a previous column shortly after the release of the 2020 Census data, Baltimore City, while losing population, by another measure has actually been growing in recent years. Yes, the city gained nearly 1,600 households between 2010 and 2020, a reversal of the significant decline (a loss of nearly 8,100 households) experienced in the previous decade.

Smaller Households

The explanation is simple. Larger households either leave the city or grow smaller (adult children leave the nest, couples split, and so on). The households that are being added to the city, choosing to live in either the older housing stock or newly constructed units, typically consist of one or two persons.

As pointed out by the Live Baltimore Home Center, the nonprofit established to grow Baltimore's economy by attracting and retaining residents, since 1950, the primary driver of Baltimore's population loss has been the decline in the average household size (from 3.5 persons per household in 1950 to 2.26 persons per household in 2020). Live Baltimore estimates at least 80% of the City's population loss since 1950 can be attributed to the decline in household size.

A Strategy for a Growing, Diverse and Welcoming Community

Over the years, successive city administrations have taken various approaches to stemming the loss of population and bolstering the city's tax base. One of those approaches is appreciating the benefits of attracting immigrants who want to establish new lives for themselves and their families in this country.

That approach was made explicit under the administration of Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake. In 2013 the mayor established the New Americans Task Force. In September of 2014, that group issued its report, "The Role of Immigrants in Growing Baltimore: Recommendations to Retain and Attract New Americans." The report noted, "Since 2000, Baltimore's reputation as a city of immigrants is being revived. This new wave of immigrants most often arrives not from Europe, as many did a century ago, but from Central and South America, Asia, and Africa. The increase in foreign new arrivals has led the Metropolitan Policy Program at Brookings to name Baltimore a "reemerging gateway."

And the report further noted the role of “immigrants bringing new vibrancy to America’s storied, yet aging, cities.”

Immediate Needs

As we reflect on those comments made seven years ago, there is an immediate crisis underway today. There are still an estimated 50,000 Afghan refugees now located on U.S. military bases who must be resettled into communities around the country by mid-February. About 5,000 Afghans are scheduled to be resettled in the Baltimore-Washington region. The International Rescue Committee, one of the nine national resettlement agencies, expects about five hundred of those refugees to be located in the Baltimore region.

Baltimore’s Catalina Rodriguez-Lima, who heads the Mayor’s Office of Immigrant Affairs, is one of those working with the nonprofit resettlement agencies as they respond to this humanitarian challenge and address America’s moral obligation. These agencies, which were depleted during the previous four years of severely reduced refugee admissions, now have to respond to a wide array of needs posed by these latest arrivals to our shores.

These needs include securing permanent housing during a time of rising housing costs and limited supply; securing employment and a source of reliable income; enrolling children in school; and administering vaccinations and other health and wellness checks. These New Americans will also require a range of social services and cultural orientation.

Rodriguez-Lima explained to me that not all of these refugees will necessarily stay in this area. There will always be secondary migration and people will relocate to other areas, such as Northern Virginia, where there are already established Afghan communities. But some will stay. And this community has an opportunity to be welcoming to them, as well as to members of other immigrant communities who want to bring their talents and establish their families in our city and wider region.

Responding to Needs of the Moment

There are a number of ways for people of good will to respond right now. These organizations aiding immigrants and refugees need your support in the form of volunteer assistance or donations: International Rescue Committee (www.rescue.org) and HIAS, whose motto is “Welcome the Stranger. Protect the Refugee” (www.HIAS.org). Resettlement efforts in the state and region are also being directed by Lutheran Social Services of the National Capital Area (Issnca.org) and locally by the Episcopal Refugee and Immigrant Center Alliance (ERICA) (info@erica-baltimore.org).

Consider contacting one of these organizations to offer your help as part of your New Year’s resolutions for 2022.

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