



## **Cities and Immigration – Executive Summary**

### **Background**

Over the last three decades, immigration has become a prominent political and policy issue. With the election of President Trump, who made immigration reform a top issue in his campaign, the federal stance on immigration seems to have become tougher than ever. Municipalities across the U.S. have to address on a daily basis a myriad of issues related to immigrants, who are overwhelmingly concentrated in metropolitan areas. With the notable absence of any comprehensive national policy to integrate immigrants into the broader urban community, cities are left to develop their own tools, policies and programs to address the influx of immigrants.

### **The Purpose of This Report**

This brief aims to help elected officials, policymakers, activists, and community-based organizations to advocate for, design, and implement progressive policies toward immigrants at the city level. It provides a broad review of immigrant-friendly, city-level policies, which builds on the cumulative experience of local governments, as well as the knowledge and ideas of policy experts and activists.

### **What's in This Report?**

Before presenting this menu of policies, we begin by offering an analysis of the socio-demographic trends that help explain why immigration issues have become so important. We then provide an overview of the federal policy that has set the stage for local immigration policy, which shows a trend of increasingly hostile legislation. While traditional gateway cities (often ports) have dealt with immigration issues for decades, more and more cities have growing immigrant populations. Finally, we highlight the key reasons why cities should adopt immigration-friendly policy, which encompass economic, security, safety, humanitarian, and moral considerations.

### **Policy Action Items: What Can Cities Do?**

- Center your city's immigrant population in policymaking
- Do not participate in the enforcement of federal civil immigration law,
- Support immigrant communities with words and actions, create and implement plans to be immigrant-friendly.
- Offer supportive services, such as an Office of Immigrant Affairs.
- Ensure language access to all local government services.
- Protect low wage workers, who are disproportionately immigrants, and support entrepreneurs and local small businesses, as immigrants are more likely to start business.
- Improve access to the banking system and provide financial education.
- Provide legal aid or advice on immigration status and citizenship issues.

## **Resources**

### National League of Cities

The National League of Cities (NLC) is a resource and advocate for the nation's cities and their leaders. NLC represents 19,000 cities, towns, and villages, and encompasses 49 state municipal leagues. It provides training to municipal officials, holds conferences, lobbies and provides assistance to cities in educational issues.

<http://www.nlc.org/>

### The National Immigration Law Center

The National Immigration Law Center (NILC) engages in policy analysis, litigation, education and advocacy, to promote a vision of "a society in which all people — regardless of race, gender, immigration or economic status — are treated fairly and humanely."

<https://www.nilc.org/>

### The Migration Policy Institute (MPI)

The Migration Policy Institute (MPI) is a nonpartisan, nonprofit think tank dedicated to analysis of the movement of people worldwide. MPI provides analysis, development, and evaluation of migration and refugee policies at local, national, and international levels. It aims to meet the demand for pragmatic and thoughtful responses to the challenges and opportunities that migration presents to communities and institutions in an increasingly integrated world.

<http://www.migrationpolicy.org/>

### Welcoming America

Welcoming America leads a movement of inclusive communities becoming more prosperous by making everyone feel like they belong. They believe that all people, including immigrants, are valued contributors who are vital to the success of our communities and shared future. Today, a growing number of places recognize that being welcoming leads to prosperity; Welcoming America provides the roadmap and support they need to become more welcoming toward immigrants and all residents.

<https://www.welcomingamerica.org/>

## **Conclusion**

There are many reasons why cities should be welcoming to immigrants, from a morality standpoint to proven economic benefit. Over the last thirty years, immigrant communities have become more vulnerable than ever. A lack of comprehensive federal immigration laws, coupled the proliferation of anti-immigrant rhetoric has made cities, particularly metropolitan centers, the new frontier of immigration. Fortunately, there are many innovative strategies and policies that cities can enact to not only protect immigrants' rights, but also to improve the quality of life for their immigrant residents and for all.

*For more information on ways to introduce immigrant-friendly policies in your city, look out for the full-length version of this report which will be released later this year. Please also take a look at the Mayors Innovation Project webpage on immigration and cities at*

<https://mayorsinnovation.org/policy/civil-rights/immigration-enforcement/>