

2021

HIDDEN IN PLAIN SIGHT:

**KOREAN AMERICAN POVERTY IN
THE NEW YORK METRO AREA**



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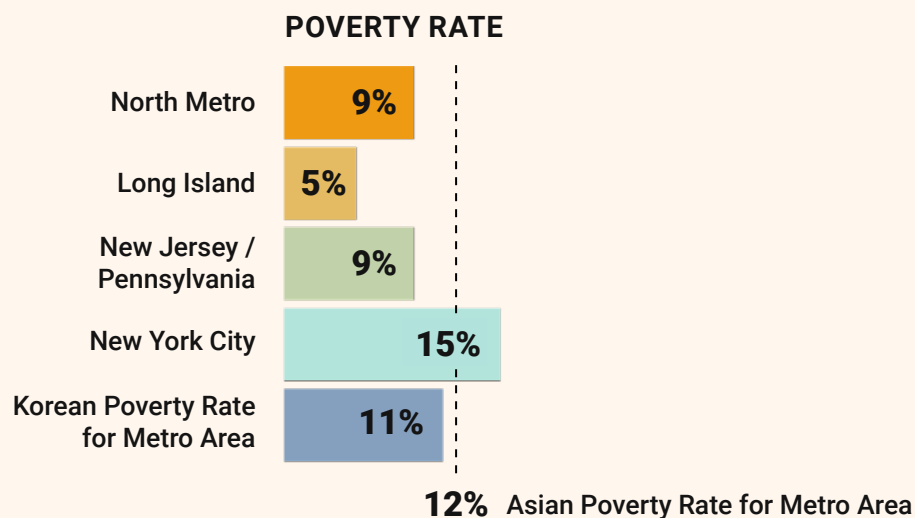
Cover photograph by Matt Peters. Photos on pages 3, 8, and 11 are from KACF.

INTRODUCTION

This supplement to our 2021 report, *Hidden in Plain Sight: Asian American Poverty in the New York Metro Area*, examines the changing demographics of Koreans living in poverty. Since the last Census, new population estimates show that the growth in the Korean community in the New York metropolitan area has largely occurred outside of New York City. Our analysis will show that the Korean population in poverty has been steadily migrating out to the suburbs of the metropolitan area. This supplement will present the important socioeconomic measures associated with Korean poverty in the metro area from the American Community Survey (ACS) and highlight key differences between the findings for the Asian community as a whole and the Korean population. We are grateful to the Korean American Community Foundation for their generous support of the main report, this supplement, and our on-going research into Asian American and Korean American communities.



KOREAN AMERICAN POVERTY



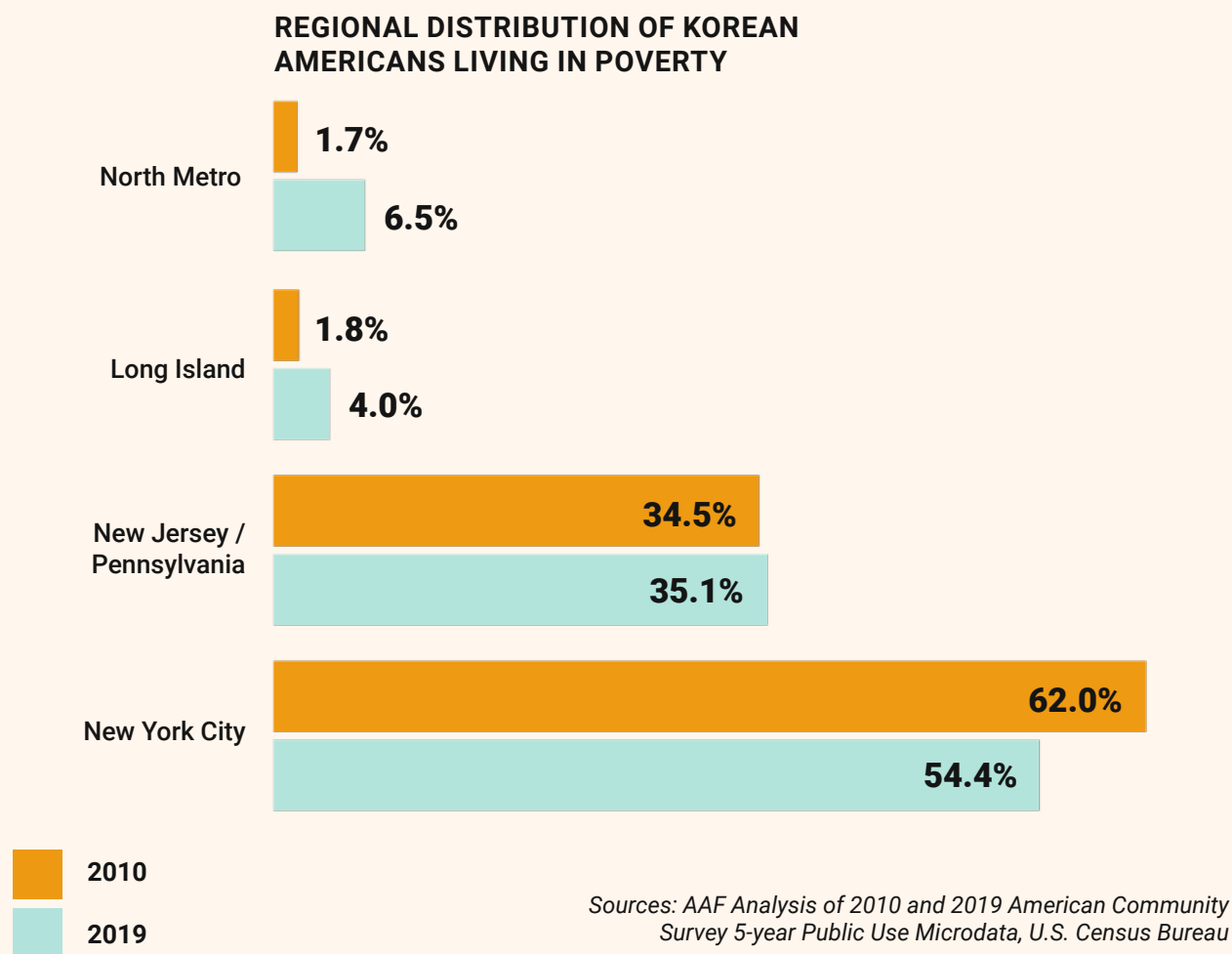
Source: AAF Analysis of 2019 American Community Survey 5-year Public Use Microdata, U.S. Census Bureau

MORE KOREANS IN POVERTY CHOOSING SUBURBS

Korean Americans were the third largest Asian group in the New York metropolitan area. Our analysis of the Korean population across the New York metro area split the metro area into four regions: New York City, Long Island, New Jersey-Pennsylvania, and North Metro (comprising Hudson Valley and western Connecticut). These regions were defined so that each region had a sufficient number of survey samples to produce statistically stable estimates.

While the Korean poverty rate in the metro area declined from 13.5 percent in 2010 to 11.1 percent in 2019, the regional distribution of the Korean population living in poverty has seen important shifts. New York City had the highest poverty rate for Koreans at 15 percent, but the metro area saw a steady outward migration of Korean poor to the suburbs (Chart 1A). The share of Koreans in poverty living in the North Metro region grew from 1.7 percent to 6.5 percent and grew in Long Island from 1.8 percent to 4.0 percent (Chart 1B).

KOREAN AMERICAN POVERTY



The data on housing mobility (i.e., the population of people who changed housing in the previous 12 months) indicates that Koreans living in poverty were more likely to choose the suburbs over New York City in

2019 than in 2010. Chart 2 shows that the share of poor Koreans opting for the suburbs when moving rose to 45 percent in 2019 from 39 percent in 2010.

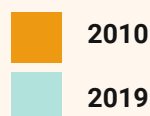
POPULATION FLOW OF KOREANS

SUBURBAN SHARE OF KOREAN AMERICANS MOVING TO A NEW HOME IN THE METRO AREA

Below Poverty



At or Above Poverty



Sources: AAF Analysis of 2010 and 2019 American Community Survey 5-year Public Use Microdata, U.S. Census Bureau

RECENT KOREAN IMMIGRANTS MORE LIKELY TO BE POOR

Immigration impacted the Korean community in similar ways to the overall Asian community as shown in the main report. The majority of the Korean population in the metro area (71 percent) were immigrants, and among them non-U.S. citizens were the poorest immigrants. Detailed statistics on metro area Korean immigrants in poverty revealed:

- The Korean poverty rate for non-U.S. citizens was lower than their non-Korean counterparts, 15 compared to 18 percent.
- Among Korean immigrants, the poverty rate was highest for those who arrived in the U.S. 0-4 years ago, with those arriving 10 or more years ago having the lowest poverty rate (Chart 3).

POVERTY RATE AMONG KOREAN IMMIGRANTS BY YEARS IN THE U.S.

0-4 years



5-9 years



10 or more years



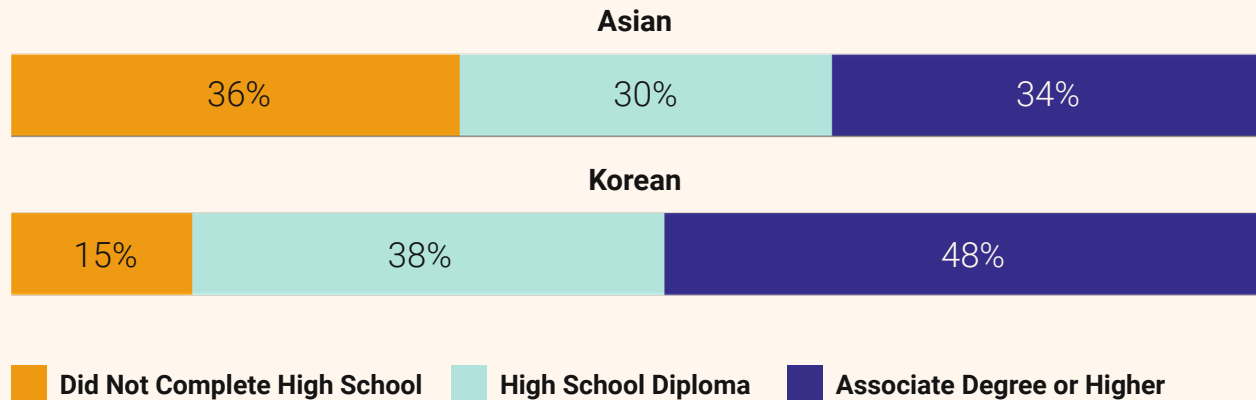
Source: AAF Analysis of 2019 American Community Survey 5-year Public Use Microdata, U.S. Census Bureau

KOREAN POOR HAVE HIGHER EDUCATION LEVELS

One significant difference between the Korean community and the rest of the Asian community is that poverty among the Korean population is not limited to those with lower educational levels. Poor Korean immigrant adults in the metro area were more likely than their Asian counterparts to have a higher educational level. Chart 4 shows that only 15 percent of Korean adults in poverty did not have a high school diploma compared to 36 percent of Asians in poverty.

Despite having higher educational attainment among adults, language access remained an issue for the Korean immigrant community living in poverty. Similar to Asian Americans as a whole, Koreans living in poverty faced significant language barriers with limited English proficiency (LEP). LEP refers to any person aged 5 and older who reported speaking English less than "very well" on the ACS survey. Across the metro area, 67 percent of Korean immigrants in poverty had limited

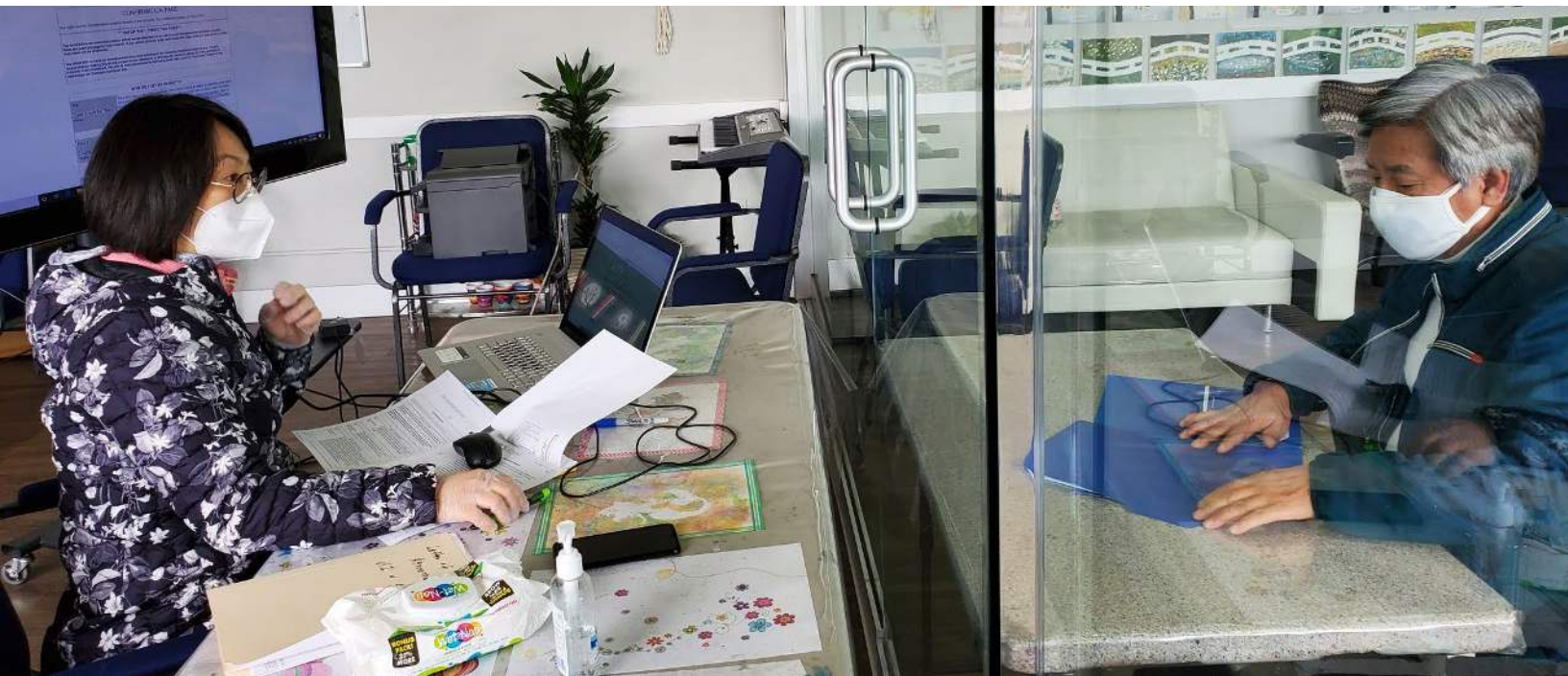
EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT FOR ADULTS AGE 25 YEARS OR OLDER LIVING IN POVERTY



*Note: Due to rounding, percentages may not appear to add up to 100%.
Source: AAF Analysis of 2019 American Community Survey 5-year Public Use Microdata, U.S. Census Bureau*

English proficiency compared to 63 percent of their non-Koreans counterparts. The disparity in LEP rates was greatest in New York City,

where 71 percent of poor Korean immigrants had limited English proficiency compared to 63 percent of poor non-Koreans.



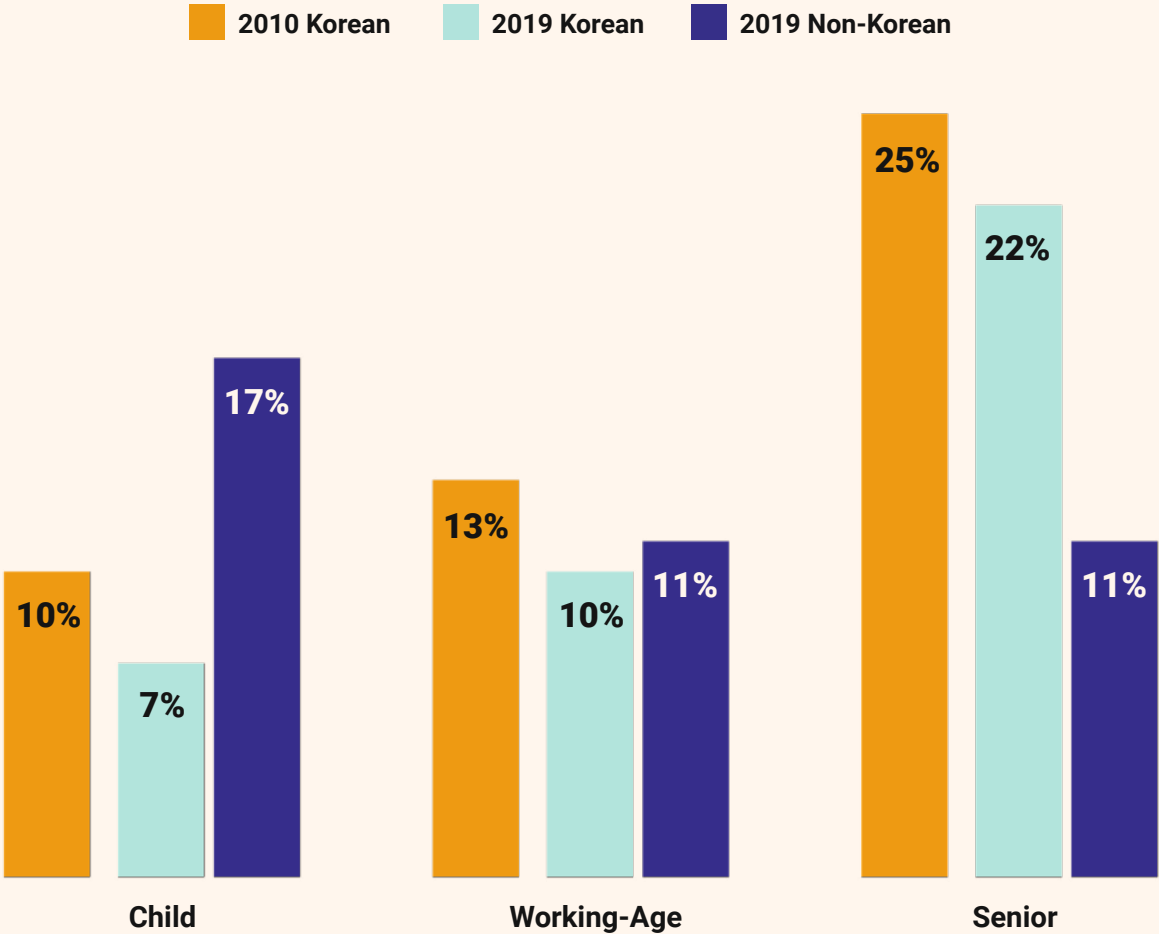
KOREAN SENIORS SUFFER HIGHEST POVERTY RATES

Breaking down the poverty data by age groups reveals that while Korean children had lower poverty rates compared to non-Korean children, the opposite is true for Korean seniors, where their poverty rates were much

higher than non-Koreans. This section will highlight important differences of the Korean population in poverty by age groups: children, seniors, and working-age adults.

CHART 5

POVERTY RATES BY AGE GROUP



Sources: AAF Analysis of 2010 and 2019 American Community Survey 5-year Public Use Microdata, U.S. Census Bureau

Children

Social characteristics of Korean children were similar to other Asian American children regarding living arrangements, likelihood of living in an immigrant household, and language barriers, as cited in the main report. However, Korean children had lower poverty rates when compared to the rest of the population across all regions in the New York metro area (Chart 5). New York City had the highest poverty rate for Korean children, 14 percent, which was comparatively lower than the 25 percent poverty rate of non-Koreans.

Among Korean children living in poverty, 37 percent lived in linguistic isolation compared to 20 percent of non-Korean children. Regionally, New York City had the highest

rate of linguistic isolation for Korean children, 59 percent compared to 21 percent of non-Korean children (Chart 6). Linguistic isolation is defined as living in a household without someone 14 years or older who speaks English “very well.”

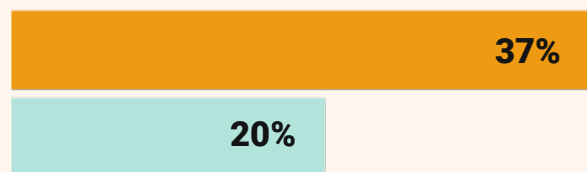
Seniors

Seniors were the most vulnerable group in the Korean population with higher poverty rates than non-Korean seniors across all regions of the New York metro area. For the whole metro area, 22 percent of Korean seniors were living in poverty compared to 11 percent of non-Korean seniors (Chart 5). New York City’s 28 percent poverty rate for Korean seniors surpassed the 18 percent poverty rate for non-

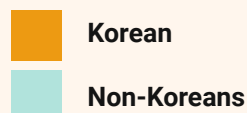
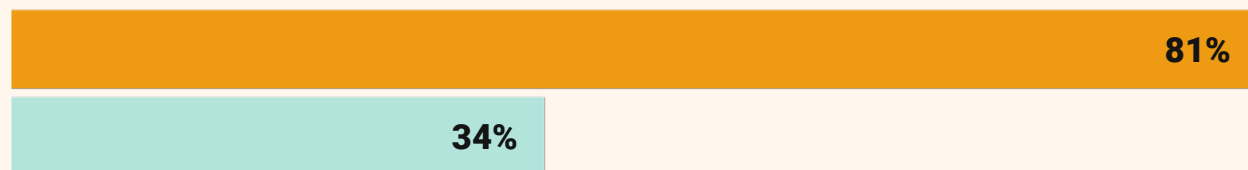
CHART 6

LINGUISTIC ISOLATION OF PEOPLE IN POVERTY BY AGE GROUP

Children



Seniors



Source: AAF Analysis of 2019 American Community Survey 5-year Public Use Microdata, U.S. Census Bureau



Koreans. Seniors were also an increasingly larger proportion of the Korean population living in poverty. In 2010 seniors were 16 percent of all Koreans living in poverty and grew to 27 percent in 2019.

Korean seniors in poverty were almost all immigrants and they experienced significant language barriers. Ninety-eight percent of poor Korean seniors were immigrants. Korean seniors in poverty were also more likely to be non-U.S. citizens, at 20 percent compared to 12 percent of their non-Korean counterparts. Koreans fared worse than non-Koreans in language ability among the poor elderly, as seen by disproportionate LEP rates of 87 percent for Koreans and 42 percent for non-Koreans.

Moreover, 83 percent of poor Korean seniors were living in linguistically isolated households putting them at a serious disadvantage in receiving necessary assistance for social services (Chart 6). A significant number, 41

percent, of poor Korean seniors also lived alone making them vulnerable to social isolation.

Working-Age Adults

Korean workers in poverty had poverty rates similar to the rest of the metro area population (Chart 5) but faced issues in line with the Asian community as a whole in terms of language barriers and over reliance on selected occupations and industries. Across the metro area, New York City had the highest poverty rate for Korean workers at 13 percent, while Long Island had the lowest poverty rate at 5.7 percent.

Language barriers remained a challenge for this population group as 47 percent of working-age Koreans in poverty were LEP compared to 28 percent of non-Koreans. Regionally, the LEP rates for Korean workers in poverty in the New Jersey-Pennsylvania region and New

York City were nearly equal at 50 percent and 48 percent respectively. LEP rates for Koreans in poverty in the North Metro and Long Island were 34 percent and 29 percent respectively.

Working-age Koreans in poverty were less likely to be in the labor force, with a labor force participation rate of only 34 percent, compared to that of non-Koreans of 46 percent. For those individuals living in poverty already in the labor force, the unemployment rate for Korean workers was lower than non-Koreans, 20 percent compared to 23 percent.

A gender breakdown among those in poverty showed that Korean women were less likely to be in the labor force than Korean men, with 30 percent of women active in the labor force compared to 41 percent of men. Further investigation is needed to confirm potential causes of this gender disparity, such as a lack of affordable, high-quality childcare, cultural factors, or a lack of job skill and workforce

development training tailored to Korean women's needs.

The top occupations for poor Koreans were mainly service-related in food services, personal care and retail.

- Personal care service workers were primarily manicurists and pedicurists,
- Food services workers were cooks, chefs, and wait staff, and
- Retail occupations such as sales workers worked as cashiers, retail sales supervisors, and other sales representatives.

In addition, educational services occupations were nearly equal in rank to sales jobs among Koreans in poverty. These were elementary and middle school teachers, as well as post-secondary instructors such as graduate teaching assistants and adjunct instructors.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Of the recommendations made in our 2021 report, *Hidden in Plain Sight: Asian American Poverty in the New York Metro Area*, these three areas should be emphasized for the Korean community.

1. Because Koreans in poverty attain higher educational levels, the main report's recommendation for new pathways to adapt professional credentials and skills from Korea to the American labor market, as well as more language support for those services, is especially relevant.
2. The low labor force participation rate for poor Koreans emphasizes the need for workforce development opportunities, particularly for Korean women living in poverty.
3. The continued reliance of Koreans in poverty on service industry jobs made them vulnerable during the COVID-19 pandemic. We anticipate that upcoming data releases from government sources from 2020 will show an increase in poverty rates among Korean New Yorkers, following nearly a decade of steady declines.

METHODOLOGY

Primary Data Source

This report utilizes data from the Census Bureau’s American Community Survey (ACS), 5-year estimates from 2019 with comparison to 5-year estimates from 2010. Unless specified otherwise, the findings discussed are from the 2019 dataset. The findings pertain to the complete New York metro area unless, specific regions (New York City, New Jersey, etc.) are identified. We examined poverty through the dimensions of age, immigration, gender, language abilities, educational levels, job opportunities, family types, health insurance coverage, geography and Asian ethnicity. We also relied on the Census Bureau’s 2010 and 2019 5-year American Community Survey Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) files which use Public Use Microdata Areas (PUMAs) as their base unit of geography at <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/geography/guidance/geo-areas/pumas.html>.

Geographic Definitions

When utilizing the PUMS data, we included all the PUMA geographies that contained all the counties that lie in the U.S. Office of Management and Budget’s current definition of the New York–Newark, NY–NJ–CT–PA Combined Statistical Area. Because the PUMA geographies in rural parts of the country often combine counties to achieve the minimum population threshold requirements for PUMAs, our analysis includes several outlying counties on the edges of the formal definition of the metro area. Because the additional population included, particularly the Asian population, is quite small relative to the core geographic areas, we chose to be more inclusive in our analysis, to get around the limitations in the PUMA geographic definitions. We also split up the metro area into four regions for some analyses.

1. The **New Jersey-Pennsylvania** region combines PUMA areas from both states. The Pennsylvania counties included are Monroe, Pike, Wayne and Susquehanna. New Jersey counties in the region include Bergen, Essex, Hudson, Hunterdon, Mercer, Middlesex, Monmouth, Morris, Ocean, Passaic, Somerset, Sussex, and Union.
2. **New York City** was delineated by PUMA areas that cover all five counties that comprise New York City: Queens, Bronx, Kings (Brooklyn), Richmond (Staten Island), and New York (Manhattan).
3. **Long Island** was defined by PUMA areas that cover Nassau and Suffolk counties.
4. The **North Metro** region combined PUMA areas covering Dutchess, Orange, Putnam, Rockland, Ulster, Sullivan, and Westchester counties in New York, and PUMA areas in western Connecticut that included the counties of Litchfield, New Haven, and Fairfield.

Poverty Definitions

For this report we use the federal guidelines for determining poverty status as implemented by the U.S. Census Bureau, outlined at: <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/income-poverty/historical-poverty-thresholds.html>. The guidelines define a series of income thresholds based on family size and composition. A family is defined as living in poverty if their total family income falls below the given poverty threshold for the year. For example, the federal poverty threshold for a family of two adults and two children was \$25,926 in 2019. Once a family is categorized as living in poverty, or below the poverty threshold, all members of the family are assigned the designation in the dataset. The term near poverty is used to describe those families with incomes at the poverty threshold all the way up to double the poverty threshold income level. The term low-income refers to everyone in families with incomes that are less than double the poverty threshold. In the case of the family of two adults and two children in 2019, those families with incomes less than \$51,852 would be considered low-income, and those with incomes at \$25,926 and up to \$51,852 would be considered near poverty.

Ethnicities

Korean ethnicity is based on Census ethnicity categories. Non-Koreans in this analysis are any individuals who are not Korean. Therefore, all other racial and ethnic groups are coded into the non-Korean category.

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