



Survey Findings:

Lack of Child Care Keeps Migrant Candy Sellers Underground

Algún Día and the New York Immigration Coalition

OVERVIEW

In January 2024, the *Algún Día* project launched to assess and address the needs of our new immigrant neighbors – **migrant children, and parents who, to survive, started selling candy in the NYC subway.** *Algún Día* is a grassroots volunteer-based initiative comprised of formerly undocumented immigrants, current Dreamers, and first-generation immigrants housed within the New York Immigration Coalition.

In the first three months, *Algún Día* established a network of volunteers and bilingual social workers to build an inclusive project to help address the community needs and identify gaps in government and immigrant providers' services for migrant candy sellers by surveying candy sellers working with their children on the subway, in parks, and in high-traffic public spaces.

FINDINGS BASED ON SURVEYS OF MIGRANT VENDORS

- **42% of those surveyed noted one of the biggest obstacles for them is access to childcare.**
 - Many parents expressed the need to sacrifice jobs because of the lack of care for their children. The surveyed group were all unaware of child care opportunities such as Promise NYC, underutilized child care centers, or pre-K programs.
- **64% of those surveyed are living outside of the shelter system.**
 - 32% of the surveyed individuals are sharing an apartment or room with another family, and 32% are living in their own apartment. 31% are living in a shelter.
 - For those living in shelters, leaving their children in their rooms while they attend work is not an option. Additionally, these families are subjected to 60-day shelter limits, which further restricts their chances of finding stability.
 - For those unhoused or living in temporary housing, they are alone and unable to take their children to their worksite.
- **83% of those surveyed have aspirations to pursue other lines of work and have not been able to due to limitations in child care.**
 - In NYC, families with one child can expect to pay an average of \$20,000 annually for child care, with costs upwards of \$35,000 a year if they do not participate in public subsidy programs.
- **93% of those surveyed have not been assisted by any organization.**
 - New vendors remain almost entirely unconnected to the resources and supports that exist in NYC. They have not received assistance with basic needs like health



insurance or school enrollment for their children, been contacted by state or city agencies, or connected with local community based organizations.

- For those surveyed individuals who were connected to or directed to local community-based organizations, they reported that organizations were at capacity and struggled to support them in a timely manner.
- **88% of those surveyed stated they began vending out of need.**
 - The NYS Department of Labor has identified 40,000 jobs open to migrants, showing labor shortages in home health care, professional/ business services, and hospitality sectors.
 - Due to a lack of access to resources for workforce development and child care, migrants have resorted to vending in high-traffic locations, namely the subway, and parks, and bringing their children, even after attaining work authorization.
- **60% of those surveyed indicate fear of incurring fines and police interaction while vending.**
 - The city prohibits unlicensed selling on the subway and parks, and has issued civil fines to informal vendors, including many of the young migrant candy sellers. One fine can be the equivalent of a full day's work, putting these families in steep financial trouble.
 - The vendors have adjusted their locations and hours of operation to prevent interactions with police officers they have identified as more aggressive.
- **34% are women under the age of 25, with around 75% from Ecuador.**
 - Language barriers due to dialect or written and technological literacy were cited as reasons for lack of connection to services.
 - Of the total surveyed populations, 17% are men, many of whom are single fathers.
- **64% of those surveyed have felt safety insecurity due to violence and recognize that vending is dangerous.**
 - Vendors noted they have been harassed by teenagers and homeless individuals, and experienced or witnessed traumatic experiences.
 - Some have served as witnesses to a crime and helped NYPD officers when documenting the incident.

POLICY SOLUTIONS

The survey results above show the breadth and depth of how the lack of access to critical programs and supports can trap families in a cycle of unlicensed vending, economic insecurity, and disconnection from their new communities. Fortunately, there are multiple opportunities for NYC to set families on a better path to stability.

Invest and Baseline \$25M in Promise NYC: Promise NYC is a successful child care stipend program for children who are ineligible for other forms of child care vouchers due to their immigration status. Promise NYC provides child care stipends to over 600 children annually. An



expansion to \$25M would allow additional children to find safe and affordable child care, allowing their parents the freedom to find better-paying, full-time work. Access to child care was the number one reason why the majority of asylum seeker vendors could not pursue other workforce opportunities.

Restore \$4M in the Immigrant Family Communication and Outreach Initiative: This investment supports the Office of Language Access and Marketing and Communications at New York City Public Schools to help immigrant families with varying levels of literacy and access to digital media receive important school-related information in their own language, enroll in school, and connect to services. This investment is critical to help families connect with New York City Public Schools, support their children, and stay informed about their options.

Prioritize Access to Summer Rising and After School Programs: Parents require care for their children throughout the summer and after the school day ends in order to access full-time work. For the 93% of surveyed individuals who are not connected to organizations or agencies and have yet to have assistance enrolling in school or child care, enrolling in programs with short, set enrollment periods like Summer Rising is near impossible. Summer Rising and City-funded after-school programs should prioritize English Language Learner students and families who most need these programs outside the normal enrollment cycle.

Pass Intro 47 to Decriminalize Street Vending: Intro 47 would remove all misdemeanor criminal penalties for general vendors and mobile food vendors. Vendors who violate such vending requirements would be subject to an offense and civil penalties rather than criminal ones. Families who vend out of desperation should not be criminalized and face deportation for trying to feed their children and build their futures.

METHODOLOGY

The *Algún Día* project began with 20 Bilingual Social Workers, who were trained in outreach, with specific emphasis on resourcing parents with local resources available to them. Social workers directed survey questions to parents and recorded their results in a digital format. Social Workers focused specifically on parents selling candy and fruit with their children at subways, parks, and stations across the City. Outreach was done across five boroughs (Manhattan, Brooklyn, Queens, Bronx, and the South Shore of Staten Island) at all major stations, beginning March 31st. Social workers canvassed stations as well as rode the subway to find and communicate with parents. Survey results cover an initial canvassing effort with 75 unique respondents.