

Report - March 2025

5 Ideas for Retaining NYC's Young Families

New York's enduring appeal to young adults remains one of the city's greatest strengths—and in today's talent-based economy, it presents a massive opportunity to set the city up for years of future economic success. But to fully capitalize on this opportunity, city policymakers need to take concrete steps to make sure New York can do far better in holding onto young people as they age into their thirties and start families.

by Eli Dvorkin and Jonathan Bowles

- The following is the introduction from 5 Ideas for Retaining NYC's Young Families.
- Click here to explore the full report and check out all five ideas.

Despite an array of challenges that emerged or accelerated during the pandemic, New York City has only solidified its status as the nation's pre-eminent destination for young people in their twenties. College students and recent graduates from across the nation and around the world continue to flock to the city in large numbers. Indeed, NYU received more than 120,000 applications for admission into its fall 2025 class, more than ever before and more than any other private U.S. university. The population of New Yorkers ages 18 to 21 has increased since 2021, even as the city's total population shrank by 2.5 percent.[1]

New York's enduring appeal to young people remains one of the city's greatest strengths—and in today's talentbased economy, it presents a massive opportunity to set the city up for years of future economic success. But to fully capitalize on this opportunity, city policymakers will need to take concrete steps to make sure New York can do far better in holding onto young people as they age into their thirties and start families.

In recent years, few cities have suffered as large an exodus of young families. Between April 2020 and July 2023, the population of children under the age of five in New York City declined by a staggering 18.3 percent. This was far more than the nationwide decline (-4.6 percent), the average decline in large urban counties (-8.1 percent), and more than peer cities such as San Francisco (-15.4 percent), Los Angeles (-14.2 percent), and Chicago (-14.6 percent).[2]

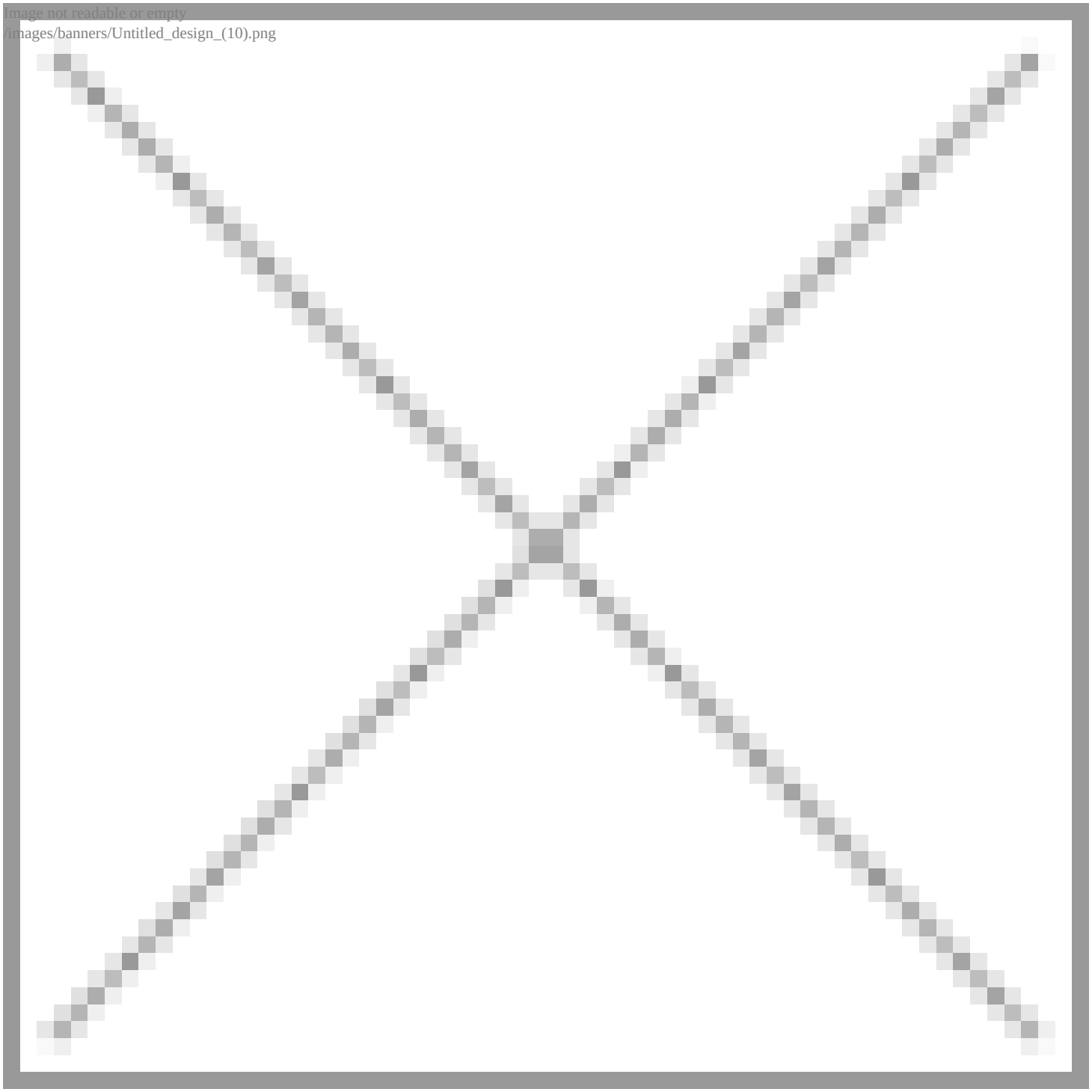
While a portion of this may be explained by the declining birth rate, data suggests that a large number of families have relocated to the suburbs and to other states—largely due to affordability and quality of life issues. Families with children under six were more than twice as likely to leave New York City since 2020 as were households without young children, with movers citing housing quality and affordability as the top concern.[3]

Staunching the outmigration of young families will be critical to keeping the city competitive in the decade ahead. While New York benefits immensely from its consistent ability to draw single adults in their 20s, losing those adults as they enter their prime earning ages hurts the city's economy and finances. As they raise children, families also tend to be especially invested in the long-term success of the city. They contribute to stable communities by increasing civic engagement, boosting local economies through spending, and driving demand for family-friendly amenities like quality schools, parks, and safe neighborhoods.

Fortunately, there is a growing consensus among the city's leaders that New York needs to address this challenge. Earlier this year, Mayor Adams made a commitment to make New York the best place to raise a family, and many of the other candidates for mayor have made similar pronouncements. But while there is an emerging agreement on the need to stem the outmigration of families, there is not yet consensus on the specific policies and investments that would have an impact and could be achieved.

This report aims to fill that gap, laying out five innovative but extremely actionable ideas to help New York City retain—and attract—families. Our five concrete proposals could all be launched this year or in the next few years and, if implemented, would each make a tangible difference in making New York more affordable and more attractive to families.

Our five ideas include:



Read the full report and all five ideas here.

5 Ideas to Retain NYC's Young Families is a publication of the Center for an Urban Future. Written by Eli Dvorkin and Jonathan Bowles. Additional research by Nicole Lu and Ben Cresto. Edited by Dorian Block. Designed by Sarah Tan.

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