

# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVING NEW YORK'S RECEPTION AND RELOCATION SYSTEM FOR NEW ARRIVALS

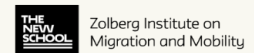
## INTRODUCTION

Since Spring 2022, more than 225,000 New Arrivals<sup>1</sup> have come to New York City, with nearly 52,000 currently residing in the City's shelter system as of December 2024.<sup>2</sup> While New York City has been shaped by immigration throughout its history, benefitting culturally and economically, the increasing number of people arriving without support systems and requiring assistance has generated significant concern. However, over two years into the increase in the number of New Arrivals needing assistance, there continues to be a lack of movement by the City and State toward sustainable solutions and integrated coordination of reception services and systems. With the pledges of the incoming presidential administration to carry out mass deportations, it is incumbent upon New York to ensure that New Arrivals receive support to expedite exit from shelter into permanent housing and pursue any available immigration relief.

In this discussion, reception services are defined as the “policies, programs, services and other assistance (set out by law or available in practice) that establish how asylum seekers and migrants are treated from their arrival through the adjudication of their cases, including in the satisfaction of basic needs, access to migration legal processes, and protection of rights.”<sup>3</sup> Such services include meeting basic and immediate needs of new arrivals (including emergency shelter), the provision of robust information and legal assistance, and support to help new arrivals achieve housing and stability – all coordinated under a government response that is comprehensive, adequately funded, and well-integrated with community-based organizations (CBOs).

Despite spending \$3.8 billion on emergency shelters and some reception services,<sup>4,5</sup> there has been limited government coordination. The urgent need for a more coordinated and coherent approach towards reception and relocation is underscored by the tens of thousands of New Arrivals who have no place to reside other than New York City shelters,<sup>6</sup> and by the underperformance of the State's sole program for helping New Arrival households transition into permanent housing outside of New York City, the Migrant Relocation Assistance Program (MRAP).

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<sup>1</sup> “New Arrivals” are defined as those who have arrived in the U.S. from other nations since March 15, 2022, are afraid to return to their home country and are seeking shelter from the City, as per the stipulation of settlement to the City's and State's court challenge to the Callahan consent decree.

<sup>2</sup> New York City Comptroller. Annual State of the City's Economy and Finances 2024, December 15, 2024. <https://comptroller.nyc.gov/services-for-the-public/accounting-for-asylum-seeker-services/asylum-seeker-census/>.

<sup>3</sup> Core Reception Principles, International Rescue Committee, July 2024.

<sup>4</sup> The City will have spent an estimated \$3.8 billion in FY2024 on New Arrival costs, including shelter, food, and legal services. New York City Independent Budget Office. Asylum Seeker Cost Projections for Fiscal Years 2025 & 2026. May 2024. <https://ibo.nyc.ny.us/iboreports/lbo-asylum-seeker-projections-as-of-the-executive-budget-may2024.html>.

<sup>5</sup> New York City Independent Budget Office. Asylum Seeker Cost Projections for Fiscal Years 2025 & 2026. May 2024. <https://ibo.nyc.ny.us/iboreports/lbo-asylum-seeker-projections-as-of-the-executive-budget-may2024.html>.

<sup>6</sup> Noting that the stipulation of settlement to the Callahan challenge permits the City to impose certain conditions on the provision of shelter to New Arrivals.

With the threats of mass deportation from the incoming presidential administration, New York State and New York City have critical roles to play in developing a systematic reception and relocation model for New Arrivals to move people quickly out of shelter and screen every eligible New Arrival for available immigration relief and work authorization. Drawing from the existing Refugee Resettlement Model and the expertise of dozens of nonprofit service providers, advocates, and academics, this document offers recommendations for the stable, long-term reception, relocation, and integration of asylum seekers, who constitute a significant portion of the New Arrivals.<sup>7</sup> The recommendations serve as a roadmap of immediate-, medium- and long-term actions the City and State should take to establish an equitable and efficient reception system that recognizes the contributions of New Arrivals and understands migration beyond the current crisis framing as an essential part of economic development for New York City and New York State.

The recommendations<sup>8</sup> are organized as follows: 1) Government Coordination 2) Service Coordination and Case Management 3) Legal Services, 4) Workforce Initiatives, and 5) Housing and Relocation.

## 1) GOVERNMENT COORDINATION

Given the nature and scope of the crisis created by the rapid increase in the number of New Arrivals coming to New York since March 2022, a comprehensive and proactive operational response by New York State - working in close cooperation with New York City - was needed. Thus far, however, the State has played a limited role in coordinating a comprehensive response, leaving planning and operational responsibility almost solely to the City. In a crisis of such magnitude, State leadership is essential to coordinate resources and operationalize a statewide response.

While the State has sensibly allocated billions of dollars to address the crisis, it is critical that those funds – and the efforts of the many governmental agencies and CBOs working on this issue – are utilized and coordinated in a way that best helps New Arrivals move out of shelters, stabilize, and integrate in the community. This outcome benefits New Arrivals, New York City, New York State, the economy, and our communities. For this to happen, we look to the Governor’s office to design and implement a comprehensive statewide reception and relocation plan. Given the large scale of the crisis, the numerous governmental and non-government entities that must play a role in addressing it, the historic lack of affordable housing in New York and labor shortages across the state, it is the Governor who is uniquely positioned to implement the needed solutions.

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<sup>7</sup> While this document focuses primarily on New Arrivals who are seeking asylum, the Symposium participants also highlight the need to develop methods for serving and stabilizing those who are not seeking or not eligible for asylum.

<sup>8</sup> The recommendations are drawn from the “Resettlement Symposium: Building Effective Strategies for Asylum Seekers and other New Arrivals,” held on June 13, 2024 by a coalition of civil society organizations to analyze challenges and potential solutions to New York City’s and New York State’s reception response. The organizing committee includes Coalition for the Homeless, Catholic Charities, Trinity Church Wall Street, WIN, Center for Migration Studies, Make the Road NY, Zolberg Institute on Migration and Mobility, and International Rescue Committee

## A. IMMEDIATE RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Governor Hochul should appoint a Reception and Relocation Czar.** The Governor should appoint a qualified and experienced person who has the authority, resources, responsibility, accountability, and mandate to implement a functioning adequately funded reception and relocation system for New Arrivals. The Reception and Relocation Czar must call together and coordinate the wide range of State and City agencies and CBOs playing a role in reception and relocation services. An effective reception and Relocation Czar should have:
  - A clear mandate from the Governor.
  - The appropriate level of cross-agency and intergovernmental authority to ensure coordination and responsiveness among different state agencies, and authority to work with federal partners like the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, Executive Office for Immigration Review, and the U.S. Department of Labor.
  - The ability to foster collaboration between the City, State, and CBOs.
  - Knowledge of immigration law, housing services, and complex service provision.
  - The ability to provide actionable insights that support decision-making based on best practices developed by organizations and agencies with experience welcoming and integrating New Arrivals.
  - Adequate resources to effectively provide a coordination role and oversee the deployment of the resources and funding committed by the State.
  - Accountability for the proper functioning and success of the reception and relocation efforts.
2. **Overturn xenophobic and illegal county executive orders.** The Governor should exercise her authority under NY Executive Law 29-a to invalidate executive orders in roughly 40 counties throughout the state that refuse to accept New Arrivals<sup>9</sup> – orders that are not aligned with the putative goals of the State and that hinder reception and relocation efforts.
3. **Be transparent about agency roles.** The State and City should create and maintain updated directories of which agencies are playing which roles and what organizations they are contracting/subcontracting with, as well as publish points of contact.
4. **Analyze data collected.** The State and City should analyze data being collected across agencies to better understand the needs of New Arrivals and determine trends that can inform program design as well as evidence-based best practices in the provision of services. In addition, the State and City should collect and publish data on the economic importance of immigration to NYS. All such efforts must be conducted in a way that protects the identity of New Arrivals.

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<sup>9</sup> McDonough, Annie and Sahalie Donaldson, "Which Counties Are Closing Their Doors to Asylum-Seekers?" City and State NY, 23 Sep 2022, <https://www.cityandstateny.com/policy/2023/09/which-counties-are-closing-their-doors-asylum-seekers/386314/>. Accessed 19 Aug 2024.

5. **Make funding recommendations in coordination with agencies and local governments.** This can include offering grants or other financial incentives to communities willing to host and support New Arrivals.
6. **Mayor Adams should create a clear management structure across agencies, and coordination across the CBOs working with the City.** Five city agencies (DHS, H&H, HPD/HRO, DYCD, and NYCEM) are currently providing shelter and contracting for limited case management. This creates significant difficulties in training staff, rolling out new policies, and communicating coherently to the new arrivals. The confusion and inconsistency between the systems not only impacts the public perception of the City's response (leading to unnecessary controversy), but creates unnecessary challenges for the New Arrivals.

#### **B. Medium-Term Recommendations:**

1. **Push for federal reform.** The City and State should advocate for federal policies that streamline the asylum process, reduce bureaucratic delays, and provide clear pathways to residency and employment.
2. **Increase public awareness.** The State should launch public awareness campaigns in communities throughout New York to help humanize New Arrivals, educate potential host communities about the realities they face and the contributions they can make when supported with adequate integration services.

## **2) SERVICE COORDINATION AND CASE MANAGEMENT**

New Arrivals who have experienced violence, persecution, and economic hardship in their home countries, followed by exploitation and abuse along the journey here, also face systemic challenges in the U.S., including a complex, under-resourced, and backlogged immigration system, delays in work authorization, and a barrage of misinformation. A trauma-informed casework approach should be centered on acknowledging migration-related stressors and systemic barriers to stabilization and integration – including racism and xenophobia – and on designing approaches that address these barriers at the individual level.

Trauma-informed case management services provide specialized culturally and linguistically competent services as well as specialized attention and referrals to particularly vulnerable groups including individuals with disabilities, children, LGBTQ populations, Black, and indigenous migrants.

Casework should help address urgent needs such as safe accommodations, medical referrals, school enrollment, and benefits navigation/access, as well as accessing legal counsel, family reunification (where feasible), community orientation and integration, and securing employment and permanent housing. To ensure quality services, caseworkers should receive specialized training related to clients facing removal proceedings, including how to review immigration documents, how to provide a basic orientation on the importance of appearing at all hearings and appointments, the importance of securing legal counsel, and avoiding the unauthorized practice of law.

Based on accumulated experience serving this population, the primary challenges New Arrivals face are access to legal services—which in turn means longer time waiting in legal limbo and without work authorization—and lack of access to stable housing.<sup>10</sup> Acute health or mental health issues and concerns related to family separation are also common stressors for this population. Casework services should be designed to identify these and other barriers to stability and address them through individualized service planning, information provision and referrals to specialized support services.

Service plans should explore individuals' existing family or community ties in the United States and the perceived ability for those ties to support their integration from a community belonging standpoint, as well as with financial or in-kind supports. Needs such as family reunification, financial support, and acute factors that may be affecting client functioning such as mental health, safety concerns, and family conflict should be addressed throughout service provision.

Casework staff should work closely with legal service providers to apply a highly tailored approach to legal referrals (acknowledging, of course, the existing capacity limits of the extremely overburdened legal services providers). These tailored referrals to legal services, coupled with the legal orientation embedded in casework approach, can aid eligible New Arrivals in obtaining work authorization and facilitate early integration.

Caseworkers should provide warm hand-offs by establishing contact with the provider ahead of referral, ensuring their ability to consult with a New Arrival as soon as possible and following up with them to verify successful enrollment. When challenges arise, caseworkers should advocate, resolving any issues with and on behalf of migrant clients.

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<sup>10</sup> As noted above, not all New Arrivals are eligible for asylum or will have a pathway to obtaining work authorizations, and so approaches must be developed to assist these families and individuals.

Critically, caseworkers must have adequate contact to assist New Arrivals move toward stability and integration. Artificial limitations on shelter placements and evictions of New Arrivals from shelters severely limit the effectiveness of case management and negatively impact progress toward desired outcomes.<sup>11</sup>

#### **A. Immediate Recommendations:**

1. **Fund case management services at a sufficient level to connect people with the services they need.** The level of case management needed to help people find stability and exit shelter cannot be accomplished in two or three meetings, as the City currently provides. Intensive case management is needed, and must be available after individuals exit shelter.
2. **Avoid unnecessary disruptions to case management.** The City should immediately cease its destabilizing policies of time-limiting shelter placements for New Arrivals.
3. **Train case managers.** Case managers should be trained sufficiently to provide basic legal information and connect New Arrivals with the appropriate legal services, as well as culturally and linguistically competent services.
4. **Provide warm hand-offs when referring to services.** Lists of services provided on paper are insufficient to meet each person's unique needs and don't ensure that those services are actually available.
5. **Ensure sufficient culturally appropriate case management services are available and case managers are not overburdened.** Caseloads should be no more than 30-40 clients per caseworker, and less for high-needs caseloads.
6. **Provide funding and support to the smaller CBOs who have been on the frontlines helping to meet the immediate needs of New Arrivals.**

#### **B. Medium-Term Recommendations:**

1. **The City and State should fully fund interpretation and translation services.** Interpretation and translation are necessary to assist any case managers who lack language skills to communicate with their New Arrival clients.
2. **Issue Multi-Year Contracts that Fully Cover Costs.** Long-term funding from City and State governments is needed for case management, instead of year-to-year contracts. Multi-year contracts will provide stability for providers, allowing them to plan and operate more effectively and adequately provide services as the number of New Arrivals fluctuates. Further, contracts with nonprofit providers must cover the full true costs of services so that providers are not operating at a loss.

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<sup>9</sup> New Arrivals with minor children must leave their shelter placement and reapply for shelter at the Arrival Center every 60 days. The City may evict New Arrivals without minor children from shelters after 30 days (60 days for those under 23), unless the New Arrival has PRUCOL status or can succeed in convincing the City of "extenuating circumstances" that merit an extension.

### C. Long-Term Recommendations:

1. **The City and State should develop a pipeline of case workers by leveraging existing community resources.** This effort could include both coordination with social work programs seeking internships or other placements for their students and recent graduates as well as recruiting individuals with lived experience who are seeking employment (particularly individuals who themselves migrated to the US and have successfully navigated the process themselves).

## 3) LEGAL SERVICES

Legal services are critical in supporting new arrivals as they navigate the challenges of rebuilding their lives in a new country. Securing legal status - and even engaging in the initial steps needed to do so - is foundational to accessing housing, benefits, employment, healthcare, and other essential services. But, New York currently lacks sufficient legal service infrastructure to provide each New Arrival with the comprehensive services needed for thorough, and in turn more successful, applications for asylum, TPS and other forms of immigration relief.

There are simply not enough immigration lawyers in New York City to meet the demand and ensure that people are receiving adequate legal advice and representation. However, non-lawyers can assist with information gathering for asylum, TPS, and other immigration applications, which enables lawyers to handle more complex cases and provide final review. But providers must be careful to avoid the unauthorized practice of law, which is a felony.<sup>12</sup> Funding is needed to support the necessary level of legal services, with sufficient resources for lawyers and for non-lawyers - including case coordinators, paralegals, and accredited representatives - working under the supervision of a lawyer.

### A. Immediate Recommendations:

1. **Fund Immigration Legal Services.** Allocate additional funds for legal service providers. Currently, for every charitable immigration attorney, there are 1,400 people needing legal representation.<sup>13</sup>
2. **Sufficiently Fund Case Coordination as a Core Part of Legal Services.** Case coordination/management should focus on fulfilling non-legal administrative functions to ensure attorneys can focus solely on their legal duties. This will increase the capacity of legal services providers to manage the current influx of cases and provide immediate support to those at risk of homelessness and exploitation.

<sup>12</sup> New York. Education Law §6512, Unauthorized Practice of a Profession.

<sup>13</sup> Kerwin, Donald, and Evin Millet. 'Charitable Legal Immigration Programs and the US Undocumented Population: A Study in Access to Justice in an Era of Political Dysfunction'. *Journal on Migration and Human Security*, vol. 10, no. 3, SAGE Publications, Sept. 2022, pp. 190-214, <https://doi.org/10.1177/23315024221124924>.

3. **Support More Organizations to Train Staff to become DOJ Accredited Representatives.** The Department of Justice (DOJ) Recognition and Accreditation Program provides authorization to organizations to have trained non-lawyers represent clients before U.S. immigration agencies. The City and State should provide grants to organizations providing accreditation training and to organizations that wish to apply for recognition, in addition to funding DOJ Accredited staff positions.
4. **Support Pro-Se Models of Representation in Conjunction with Full Representation.** Fund, and expand existing *pro se* (self-representation) models that provide training and resources to new arrivals, enabling them to handle basic legal proceedings independently while still having access to professional advice or referrals to representation for more complex issues.
5. **Diversify Types of Representation.** Promote a variety of legal representation models in RFPs, including community-based and pro bono services, to meet the diverse needs of New Arrivals. Encouraging partnerships between large legal firms and smaller, community-focused organizations can also help bridge service gaps.
6. **Language Support.** The City and State should fully fund interpretation and translation services to assist those providing legal services who lack language skills to communicate with their New Arrival clients.

#### **B. Medium-Term Recommendations:**

1. **Issue Multi-Year Contracts.** Long-term funding from City and State governments is needed to support legal representation for the entire immigration process, which can take several years. Multi-year contracts will provide stability for legal service providers, allowing them to plan and operate more effectively.
2. **Streamline RFP Processes.** Make Request for Proposals (RFPs) more accessible to small organizations working directly with impacted communities. Simplifying these processes can enhance the ability of grassroots organizations to secure funding and deliver targeted services.
3. **Support Know-Your-Rights Education.** Develop and implement widespread educational initiatives to inform new arrivals of their legal rights and available resources. This can help new arrivals understand their rights and responsibilities in their new home, prevent exploitation and wage theft, and avoid unintentional legal involvement.
4. **Legal Services Providers and CBOs Should Partner with Paralegal Programs and Law School Clinical Programs to Expand the Pool of Resources Available to Assist New Arrivals.** Valuable skills for legal professionals to develop include client interviewing and fact-gathering, both of which can be achieved through working with New Arrivals to collect information needed by attorneys to prepare immigration filings.



### C. Long Term Recommendations:

1. **Increase the supply of immigration attorneys and judges.** The extreme backlog of immigration cases is largely due to a shortage of attorneys and judges. New York City and State should fund programs to train and incentivize law students to become immigration attorneys through clinical programs, enhanced loan forgiveness for work in public service, and specialized fast-tracked programs.
2. **Pass the NY Access to Representation Act (ARA).** The ARA would guarantee legal representation for all immigrants in removal proceedings. This act will ensure that no one faces deportation without the benefit of legal counsel.

## 4) WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Employment is critical to the long-term success of New Arrivals. Helping New Arrivals enter the workforce also benefits local and state governments – and the economy more broadly. Like generations of migrants before them, the newest arrivals to New York have come here explicitly seeking jobs and economic opportunity. Now that they are here, a job is the ticket out of the City’s shelters, allowing them to earn the income needed to rent a private apartment. This in turn relieves overburdened shelter systems and social safety net organizations.

New Arrivals have consistently expressed a desire to join the workforce. A survey of 586 New Arrivals conducted by Make the Road New York, Afrikana, and Hester Street released in May 2024 showed that just 3% of New Arrivals have found steady work even though 92% are looking for work. Ninety-one percent say they would take any job, even though many have experience in management, building maintenance, and food service.<sup>14</sup>

While affordable housing is scarce in New York, jobs are not. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, there are more than 515,000 unfilled jobs in New York State.<sup>15</sup> The New York State Department of Labor identified approximately 40,000 jobs with more than 1,000 employers open to hiring New Arrivals across the state through an open call.<sup>16</sup> This is especially true in upstate communities like Rochester, Syracuse, Albany, and Buffalo, where the number of jobs available exceeds the labor supply.

At the root of the employment challenge for New Arrivals is the need to obtain work authorization from the federal government. Attaining work authorization remains a major obstacle. Just 32% of the New Arrivals surveyed by Make the

<sup>14</sup> Make the Road New York, Afrikana, and Hester Street. Leaving Behind the Newest New Yorkers. May 2024. <https://maketheroadny.org/leaving-behind-the-newest-new-yorkers/>

<sup>15</sup> United States, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Northeast Information Office. New York Job Openings and Labor Turnover – December 2023. 28 Aug 2024. [https://www.bls.gov/regions/northeast/news-release/jobopeningslaborturnover\\_newyork.htm](https://www.bls.gov/regions/northeast/news-release/jobopeningslaborturnover_newyork.htm). Accessed 3 January 2025.

<sup>16</sup> Lisa, Kate. “DOL: Nearly 40K Jobs Identified for NY Migrants.” Spectrum Local News. 18 Dec. 2023. <https://spectrumlocalnews.com/nys/central-ny/politics/2023/12/19/dol-nearly-40k-jobs-identified-for-ny-migrants>. Accessed 24 July 2024.

Road New York had applied for work authorization, and only 7% had received it.<sup>17</sup> City data showed that less than a quarter of New Arrivals had applied for work permits through City help centers as of March 2024.<sup>18</sup>

There is widespread agreement among advocates, State officials, and local officials that more must be done to expand work authorization, but there is a significant need for workforce development action for all New Arrivals.

#### A. Immediate Recommendations:

1. **Tailor workforce development programs to the needs of New Arrivals.** In the six or more months between application and approval of work authorization, workforce development programs should prepare New Arrivals by offering English language instruction, computer skills training, and employment preparation workshops. They can also create plans for securing employment and achieving financial stability once the work authorization arrives. These programs could help New Arrivals access resources that will also help them attain work, such as IDNYC. Workforce development for new arrivals can be improved by measures such as:
  - Paying stipends for participation in workforce development programs, which can ensure that New Arrivals gain the skills to access to higher-paying jobs, including in industries where there are employee shortages, rather than having to prioritize immediate needs by accepting unstable or exploitative work opportunities.
  - Tap into, and provide adequate funding for, established immigrant communities that can share wisdom from their own integration experiences and may have relevant language skills, even if they have different legal status. Paying established communities for their expertise can help reduce tension between them and newcomers. Training models can incorporate alumni, pairing new students with those who have previously completed the program but have similar cultural or linguistic profiles. This could help improve access for African migrants, for example, who are especially underserved by existing New Arrival programs.
2. **Support more OSHA and site-safety training.** Service providers report high demand for training that leads to Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) certifications. Nine percent of New Arrivals report prior experience in the construction industry, yet there are few OSHA trainers or materials in languages other than English and Spanish. The State should fund and oversee an initiative to support OSHA certifications in more languages.

<sup>17</sup> Make the Road New York, Afrikana, and Hester Street. Leaving Behind the Newest New Yorkers. May 2024.

<https://maketheroadny.org/leaving-behind-the-newest-new-yorkers/>

<sup>18</sup> Donaldson, Sahalie. "Over 37,000 Migrants Applied for Asylum and Work Authorization Through City Help Centers." City & State NY, 5 Mar. 2024. <https://www.cityandstateny.com/policy/2024/03/over-37000-migrants-applied-asylum-and-work-authorization-through-city-help-centers/394708/>. Accessed 23 July 2024.

<sup>19</sup> Make the Road New York, Afrikana, and Hester Street. Leaving Behind the Newest New Yorkers. May 2024.

<https://maketheroadny.org/leaving-behind-the-newest-new-yorkers/>

3. **Protect worker rights and prevent wage theft.** Without adequate legal work options, some New Arrivals have become day laborers taking on precarious work for below minimum wage. Increasing the availability of Know Your Rights trainings would help prevent exploitation.
4. **Expand access to childcare.** Like other New York parents, New Arrivals cannot participate in employment opportunities or workforce development programs without child care. This is especially challenging for women and those who have children with special needs. This could be accomplished in part by expanding Promise NYC, a City-funded program that makes child care services available to families who are ineligible for federally subsidized child care due to their immigration status. All 600 of the child care vouchers were claimed in the first 60 days of the program, demonstrating the high demand.<sup>20</sup>
5. **Fund grants for providers who offer child care during non-traditional hours.** This would allow New Arrivals to work jobs with early morning, evening, night, and weekend shifts.<sup>21</sup>
6. **Create a more effective job portal and holistic support for employers and applicants.** It is unclear how updated and effective the State Department of Labor (NYS DOL)'s job portal for New Arrivals is. Instead of one-time forms, the State should build more holistic scaffolding to engage employers about the portal and incentive them to participate. For example, NYS DOL could offer a certification program to recognize businesses welcoming New Arrivals. This must be coupled with funding for workforce development programs to work with new arrivals to connect them with available jobs and provide the necessary support during the initial stages of employment.
7. **Develop resources for employers to learn about working with New Arrivals.** Many employers, even those desperate for workers and eager to help, are ill-informed. Develop resources for employers to learn about working with New Arrivals. Many employers, even those desperate for workers and eager to help, are ill-informed about immigration and asylum policy. High-level overviews delivered via two-page handouts and webinars can help combat misinformation.

## B. Medium Term Recommendations:

1. **Directly engage business groups and employers.** Statewide business associations and local chambers of commerce alike have indicated that their members are interested in hiring New Arrivals. Beyond an online jobs portal, the State should help facilitate the creation of direct partnerships between these groups, nonprofit service providers, and the New Arrivals they serve.

<sup>20</sup> Parra, Daniel. "Subsidized Child Care Pilot for Undocumented Families Renewed in City Budget Deal." City Limits, 29 June 2023, <https://citylimits.org/2023/06/29/subsidized-child-care-pilot-for-undocumented-families-renewed-in-city-budget-deal/>. Accessed 23 July 2024.

<sup>21</sup> United States. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families. OPRE Report #2023-219. <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/opre/Nontraditional-hour%20Care%20highlight%20508.pdf>

2. **Engage workforce development intermediaries to create job pathways for new arrivals.** Employers have limited capacity for training. They will feel more encouraged to hire New Arrivals if nonprofit service providers can take on legal and logistical concerns.
  - Community colleges, such as those in the SUNY and CUNY systems, already have experience developing workforce development programs in partnership with employers.
  - In New York City, Workforce1 Career Centers can move beyond serving as a simple clearinghouse through the American Dream Works initiative to developing specific work training and career pathways.
  - Labor unions, too, can play a role in job training for prospective new members.
3. **Improve language access through multilingual training and ESOL programs.** Some workforce development programs are seeing success in offering their training in multiple languages, and integrating English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes alongside job training. Increased competition for food service jobs means that employers are screening for higher levels of English competency than they have previously.

#### C. Medium Term Recommendations:

1. **Increase workforce development funding.** The City and State should increase funding for workforce development consortiums, moving to multi-year programs and improving their contracting processes. Increasing funding for employment programs available to other migrants can also relieve tension between groups.
2. **Remove barriers to job certifications and pass the Empire State Licensing Act.** The State can also, through executive action, remove unnecessary barriers to job certifications (e.g., to obtain a Commercial Driver License you must have a NYS drivers' license for at least two years). The state should also pass the Empire State Licensing Act that would allow all New Yorkers, regardless of immigration status, to access the State's professional and occupational licenses and permits.
3. **Develop housing-related employment programs.** New Arrivals with experience and interest in construction careers could help the state address its housing shortage by rehabbing housing upstate and helping construct modular housing across the state.
4. **The City and State should continue to push Congress to pass the Asylum Seeker Work Authorization Act.** The bill would allow migrants to work 30 days following their application for asylum. Expansions of Temporary Protected Status (TPS) and other programs would also create pathways to work authorization for more of the newest New Yorkers.

## 5) HOUSING AND RELOCATION

Helping New Arrivals transition from shelters to permanent housing and stability should be a top priority for the City and State. While providing shelter is a critical component of a comprehensive reception and relocation system, the goal should be to provide sufficient case management and programmatic support to move households out of shelter and into stability as quickly as possible. Helping people move into permanent housing is not only the sensible and humane solution, it is the more economically sound approach – especially when one factors in the inefficiencies in the City’s initial approach of using emergency, no-bid contracts with for-profit companies that have little or no experience in resettlement.<sup>22</sup>

Yet, affordable housing is scarce in New York City – a problem decades in the making, starting long before the increase in New Arrivals. The city has a vacancy rate of less than 0.4 percent for apartments at the lowest rents of \$1,100 or less.<sup>23</sup> Thus, the City’s and State’s response must include a viable program to help relocate outside of NYC, particularly in areas that have experienced population decline and could benefit from an increased workforce.

With more than 50,000 refugees resettled in towns and cities throughout upstate since 2002,<sup>24</sup> New York has already witnessed how resettlement of refugees has demonstrably slowed population decline in many upstate areas. For example, from 1910 to 2000, Utica, a small industrial city northwest of Albany, lost almost half its population. Since 1981, the city has resettled over 16,500 refugees from 31 nations, which has helped stabilize the city demographically and economically and reversed its population decline.<sup>25</sup> Given worker shortages in many areas of New York, a State-coordinated reception and relocation strategy could similarly help reverse population decline, fill worker shortages, and thereby provide a huge boost to local economies.

While some New Arrivals have specific ties to New York City, or reasons that they prefer to settle there (including the diversity, tolerance, and economic opportunity that has drawn immigrants to NYC throughout its history), many came to New York based on a vague recommendation or because they were bused here from the Southern border.<sup>26</sup> A comprehensive reception and relocation plan must address the housing needs of those wishing to stay in New York City, while offering supported options for households to settle in other parts of the state or elsewhere.

<sup>22</sup> New York City Comptroller. Asylum Seeker Staffing Contract Comparison and Review. 27 Feb. 2024.

<https://comptroller.nyc.gov/reports/asylum-seeker-staffing-contract-comparison-and-review/#conclusion>.

<sup>23</sup> New York City, Dep’t Of Housing Preservation & Development. New York City Housing and Vacancy Survey Selected Initial Findings (2024). <https://www.nyc.gov/assets/hpd/downloads/pdfs/about/2023-nychvs-selected-initial-findings.pdf>.

<sup>24</sup> Fein, Scott. Refugees in Upstate New York: A Little Known Success Story. 5 Oct. 2021. <https://nysba.org/refugees-in-upstate-new-york-a-little-known-success-story/>.

<sup>25</sup> Fein, Scott. Refugees in Upstate New York: A Little Known Success Story. 5 Oct. 2021. <https://nysba.org/refugees-in-upstate-new-york-a-little-known-success-story/>.

<sup>26</sup> More than 32,000 new arrivals were bused to NYC by Texas Governor Greg Abbot in order to force a change in national immigration policy and score political points, and to shift the cost of providing emergency relief to people in need from his state to New York.

## 5.1) RELOCATION OUTSIDE OF NEW YORK CITY

The State's MRAP program, launched in July 2023, has fallen significantly short of its initial goal of relocating at least 1,250 households<sup>27</sup> in communities throughout New York State within one year, having moved fewer than 400 families by April 2024. Issues in the design and execution of MRAP have hindered its effectiveness, including the length of rental support offered and the small number of counties in which it is available. The State would have also benefited from consulting more with experienced CBOs when designing the program and contract structure.

Many of the impediments to MRAP's success derive from the real and perceived risks assumed by the landlords, New Arrival families, and CBOs participating, or being asked to participate, in the program.

- One of the most significant obstacles has been that contracted CBOs have been unable to find enough apartments to meet their goals, as many landlords are reticent to rent to a New Arrival family with only one year of rental support from the State; landlords do not want to be left with a tenant with no credit history, no income, or employment who is unable to pay rent while still working toward financial stability.
- Many New Arrivals are worried about moving to an unknown and unfamiliar place, which can appear increasingly destabilizing the longer they have been in New York City establishing support networks and putting down roots.
- Mission-driven CBOs committed to the wellbeing of the people they serve are averse to engaging a system that lacks the required level of support for either the client or the organization.

Any successful redesign or replacement of MRAP should thus find ways of mitigating these risks. MRAP should be revised – or a new relocation program created – that, among other things, provides more flexibility and a longer timeline for participants to achieve stability.

A fully functioning resettlement program would save the City and State money. The average cost of shelter is \$352 per night,<sup>28</sup> or \$128,480 per year and \$256,906 over two years. By contrast, the current MRAP program allows up to \$25,000 per relocated family for one year of services, plus costs for service provision and administration. Total program costs per household range from \$21,000 to \$35,200 under current contracts, varying based on the location of the programs and the cost of living in that area. Thus, the cost of extending MRAP or a similar program would be substantially less than the cost of providing shelter for that time.

<sup>27</sup> Shortly after the program was launched, State officials expressed an openness to relocating well over 1,250 families.

<sup>28</sup> New York City Independent Budget Office. Asylum Seeker Cost Projections for Fiscal Years 2025 & 2026. May 2024. <https://ibo.nyc.ny.us/iboreports/lbo-asylum-seeker-projections-as-of-the-executive-budget-may2024.html>

## A. Immediate Recommendations:

1. **Extend the existing MRAP contracts to provide a second year of support.** This will ensure that current program participants are not further destabilized (possibly returning to the shelter system) and that funds spent to-date are not wasted.
2. **Going forward, fully redesign or replace MRAP.** A relocation program that can operate at full capacity must address the real and perceived risks that have hindered MRAP's success in order to create meaningful integration opportunities for New Arrivals and their host communities. Specific recommendations fall into the five categories below:
  - **Improvements at the front-end of the program**
    - **Expand eligibility.** The relocation program should be open not just to families with children, but also to single adults and families without minor children. These populations are currently subject to time limitations in the NYC shelter system for new arrivals, require smaller apartments, and often have fewer logistical challenges to resettling (issues like school and childcare do not need to be factored in);
    - **Improve marketing.** CBOs in communities outside of NYC and households that have been successfully relocated in those communities should be engaged by the City and State to help communicate the desirability of those communities as homes to households currently residing in NYC shelters.
    - **Provide comprehensive case management in the shelters.** As described above, case management must provide holistic support and warm hand-offs, including sufficient legal services to assist new arrivals in applying for asylum, TPS, or other relief. Once an application has been filed, help new arrivals apply for public benefits available to people who are Permanently Residing Under Color of Law (PRUCOL), including CityFHEPS, which can be used anywhere in New York State.
  - **Increasing landlord participation**
    - The relocation program should not be limited to the five counties currently covered by MRAP, but be offered anywhere in the state where CBOs are willing to work to relocate new arrivals;
    - Contracted CBOs should have flexibility to determine rental payment amounts, which should never be required to be below FMR;
    - The relocation program should not be limited to the five counties currently covered by MRAP, but be offered anywhere in the state where CBOs are willing to work to relocate new arrivals;

- Contracted CBOs should have flexibility to determine rental payment amounts, which should never be required to be below FMR;
  - Contracted CBOs should have flexibility and funding to provide rental payments for relocated households for up to two years;
  - Contracted CBOs should have sufficient funding to offer signing bonuses to landlords as an incentive to rent to new arrival households;
  - Contracted CBOs should be able to offer potential landlords a commitment to help with apartment maintenance and upkeep, and the program contracts should include for funding for the staffing necessary for such;
  - The Governor’s office should work with local chambers of commerce throughout the state to market the relocation program to landlords;
  - The City and State should investigate the use of, and support providers who wish to pursue, a master lease model for a relocation program, as has been implemented successfully in New Jersey;<sup>29</sup>
  - The Governor’s office should coordinate with neighboring states to determine feasibility of funding relocation of new arrivals to communities outside of New York State.
- **Maximizing chances for client stability and integration.** The recommendation above to increase rental support to two years will not only serve to increase landlord participation, but will give the New Arrival household sufficient time to stabilize. This goal would be enhanced by supporting a model that gradually steps down the rental support over a number of months once the household has income. The relocation program design must also include funding and State logistical support to help CBOs address the most commonly identified needs for newly relocated households, including those below (all of which are discussed in more detail in the sections above):
    - Multi-year legal support;
    - Workforce development;
    - Comprehensive case management;
    - Childcare support;
    - Language access;
    - Flexibility in length of social services support.

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<sup>29</sup> “A Jersey Pastor’s Answer to Housing Migrants? Make it Easier for Them to Rent Apartments,” The City, March 19, 2024. <https://www.thecity.nyc/2024/03/19/migrants-apartments-new-jersey-reformed-church-highland-park/>



- **Structure contracts with CBOs in a way that helps reduce the risks to all parties involved:**
  - Allow contracted CBOs to receive more funding upfront, if requested;
  - Give contracted CBOs latitude in shifting money between expense categories in their budget. Allowing a provider to shift money between staffing and program costs allows them to be nimble in responding to the needs of participants.
  - Allow flexibility in program length. Some families may achieve economic self-sufficiency earlier than others. Eliminate hard cut-offs for program services and give programs flexibility to adjust rental assistance based on changing household income and ability to contribute towards housing costs.
  - Seek input of providers on contract requirements. Enable program providers to have more input into contract terms in order to better reflect differences in market conditions and needs. For instance, if landlord incentive payments are not required in a particular market, providers should not be required to offer them and instead should have the flexibility to utilize those funds for other services or to assist additional families.
- **Facilitate communication among providers.**
  - Help contracted CBOs and case management providers in New York City communicate with each other to better match and market appropriate programs to individuals/families.

## 5.2) RELOCATION IN NEW YORK CITY

### A. Immediate Recommendations:

1. **End shelter time limits.** Time limits and reapplication requirements are destabilizing to New Arrival households, have detrimental effects on children, undercut the effectiveness of case management, and are costly to implement – and thus have broad negative economic impacts.
  - IBO estimates that there are up to \$1 billion dollars in economic costs associated with people missing work authorizations and legal documents due to missed mail because of the lack of a stable address.
  - Up to \$870 million in healthcare costs arising from increased unsheltered homelessness
  - Up to \$30 million in costs for transportation to schools for children from being regularly moved to different shelters
2. **Provide in-depth case management.** The City should use State funds to provide adequate case management, as described above. Once an application for asylum, TPS, or other form of immigration relief has been filed, help New Arrivals apply for public benefits available to people who are PRUCOL, including CityFHEPS.

3. **Increase data tracking and service coordination.** The City and State need efficient methods of accurately tracking service provision and outcomes.

#### **B. Medium Term Recommendations:**

1. **Expand CityFHEPS to undocumented families stuck in the shelter system.** The State should pass S1631/A5513 in the 2025 legislative session, which would allow the City to grant CityFHEPS to households where every member is undocumented and without PRUCOL status. Many undocumented families arrived prior to March 15, 2022 and have been stuck in shelters for years. Helping more of these families find permanent housing with CityFHEPS would increase capacity in the shelter system.
2. **Explore cross-state collaboration on relocating New Arrivals.**

## CONCLUSION

New Arrivals will continue to come to New York in the hopes of a safe landing, economic opportunity,<sup>30</sup> and integration into our communities. It is essential for the City and State to go beyond an ad hoc emergency response and toward a long-term vision of incorporating New Arrivals in New York City and our communities across New York State. The Governor’s office must play a central leadership role, and the State has a vested financial interest in ensuring that the \$2.4 billion in State funding allocated in the FY 2025 budget is used wisely.<sup>31</sup> The City’s FY 2025 Adopted Budget has \$4.75 billion budgeted for New Arrivals, including the State funding.<sup>32</sup> The above recommendations, if followed, will make better use of State and City resources and set our state on a path to reap the economic and cultural benefits that have followed past waves of immigration.

#### Endorsed by:

Coalition for the Homeless	The Zolberg Institute on Migration and Mobility
The Legal Aid Society	Win
Catholic Charities Community Services, Archdiocese of New York	Women’s Refugee Commission
African Communities Together	Immigration Research Initiative
International Rescue Committee	Neighbors Link
Afrikana	Jericho Road Community Health Center
Immigrant ARC	Emma’s Torch
Center for Migration Studies	The New York Immigration Coalition (NYIC)
The Interfaith Center of New York	
Hot Bread Kitchen	

<sup>30</sup> Data provided to Coalition for the Homeless by the City of New York.

<sup>31</sup> New York. FY 2025 Enacted Budget Financial Plan. May 2024. <https://www.budget.ny.gov/pubs/archive/fy25/en/fy25fp-en.pdf>. Accessed 26 July 2024.

<sup>32</sup> New York City Comptroller. Comparing Per Diem Hotel and Service Costs for Shelter for Asylum Seekers. 22 July 2024. <https://comptroller.nyc.gov/reports/comparing-per-diem-hotel-and-service-costs-for-shelter-for-asylum-seekers/>. Accessed 26 July 2024.