

THE EXPERIENCE OF ASYLUM SEEKERS AND MIGRANTS IN NEW YORK CITY IN 2023

Displaced and Disconnected



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PHOTO: DIANE GREENE LENT

PHOTO: ALISDARE HICKSON

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the global community has witnessed an unprecedented surge in forced displacement, with millions of individuals seeking asylum in countries across the world.

New York, known for its cultural diversity and thriving immigrant population, has become a significant destination for asylum seekers. However, it is crucial to note that the ongoing surge in New York City is a direct consequence of politicians utilizing asylum seekers as mere political pawns and callously subjecting them to days-long bus rides, often without knowledge or input into where they're going. Despite New York City's reputation as a beacon of hope and opportunity, many asylum seekers face immense challenges due to the lack of access to basic resources. This report presents the findings of a comprehensive survey conducted to understand the experiences asylum seekers have had and the resource gaps they face in New York.

Administered in conjunction with Make the Road New York's (MRNY) asylee aid phone distribution program, the survey is meant to provide additional information and a fuller perspective around asylum seekers experiences - assessing their needs, identifying how they're navigating

AT A GLANCE

766 asylum seekers took the survey.

95% of all respondents intend to seek asylum.

the process, and highlighting areas that can be improved within the existing network of support services, programs, and processes available.

This survey is a continuation of MRNY's 2022 connectivity program, which aims to provide help through improving communication and connection to services for new migrants, including basic support and essentials.

Responses for over 700 surveys were collected and synthesized to shed light on specific challenges faced by asylum seekers in accessing healthcare, education, work, and basic resources in New York. Exit interviews with volunteers who administered the surveys captured additional insight that was not captured by the survey questions.

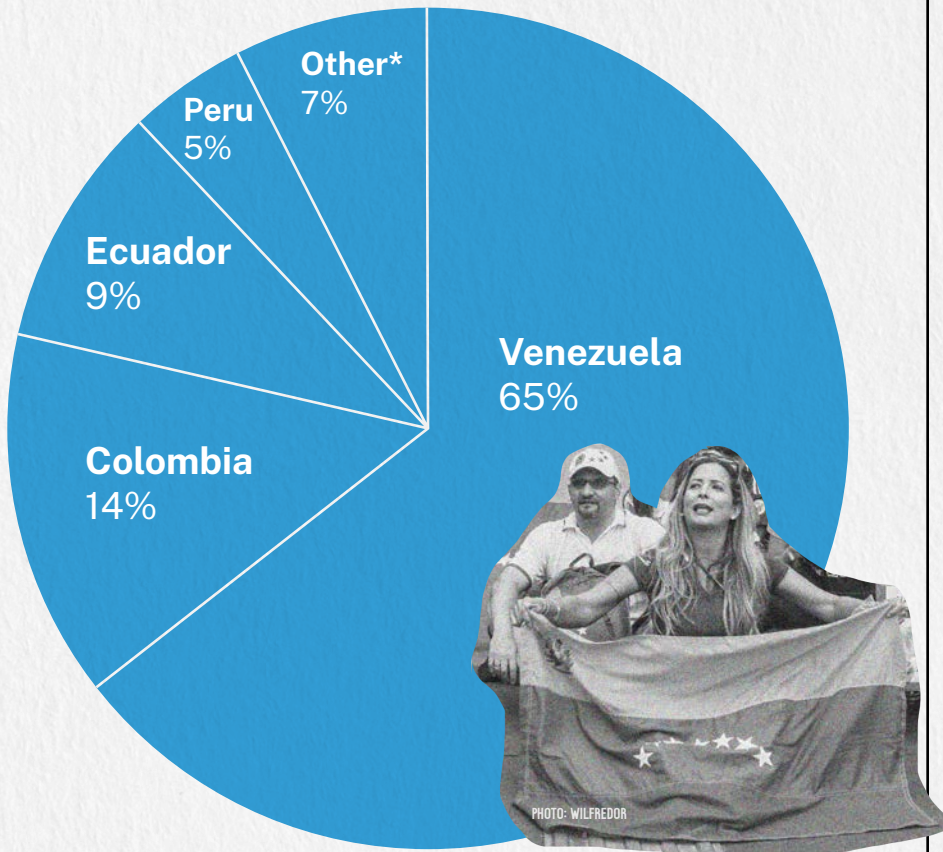
By systematically examining the data collected from the survey, as well as insight from those who interacted directly with the asylees, we aim to identify the extent of the problem and propose solutions to address these resource gaps.



RESPONDENT PROFILE

COUNTRY OF ORIGIN

Venezuela is the country of origin for 65% of respondents.



***Other countries with less than 2% respondents each:** Dominican Republic, Nicaragua, Honduras, Mexico, Togo, Haiti, Guatemala, Cuba, Perú, Panama, Hong Kong, El Salvador, Congo, Argentina, Angola

Based on 759 responses

RACE AND ETHNICITY

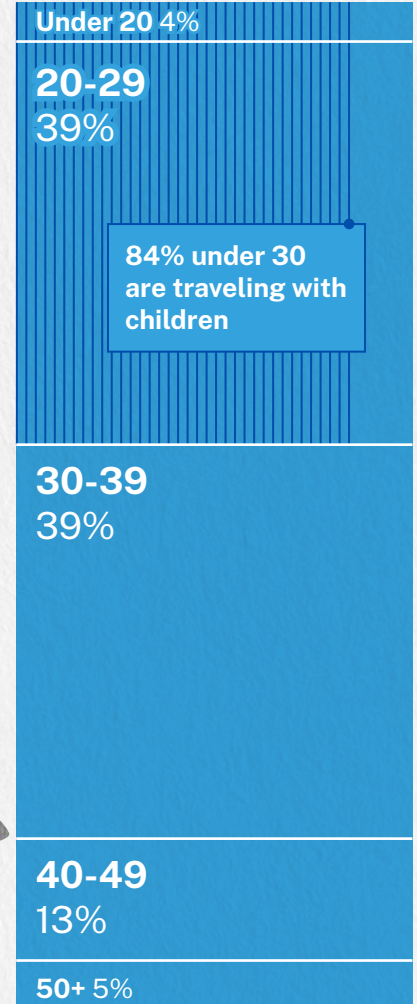
88% of respondents are Latin(a/o/x).



Respondents could select more than one race / ethnicity identifier
Based on 752 responses

AGE

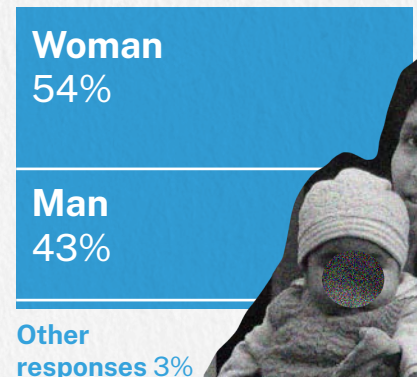
43% are under 30 years old.



Based on 766 responses

GENDER

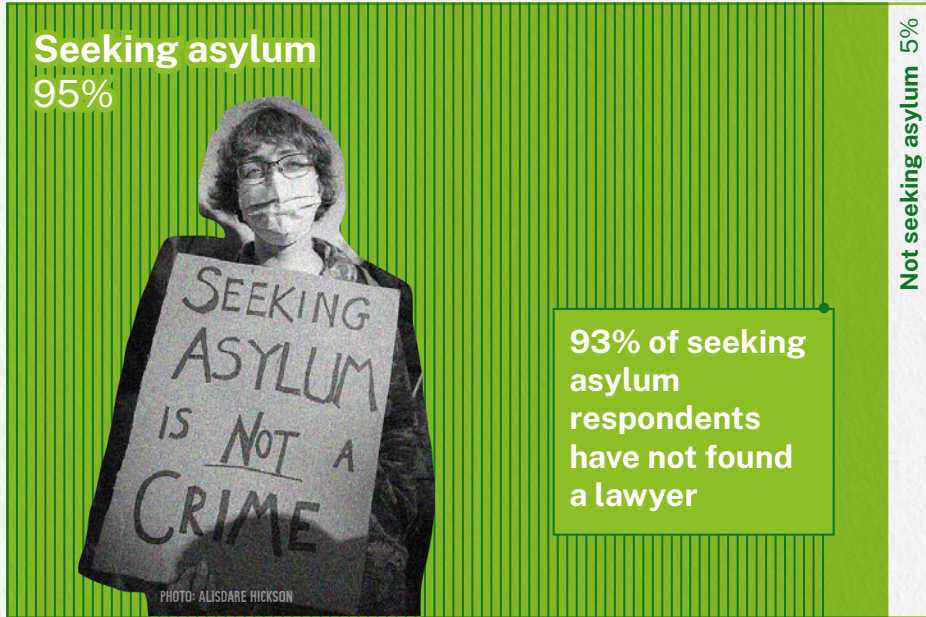
54% are women.



IMMIGRATION PROCESS AND FINDING WORK

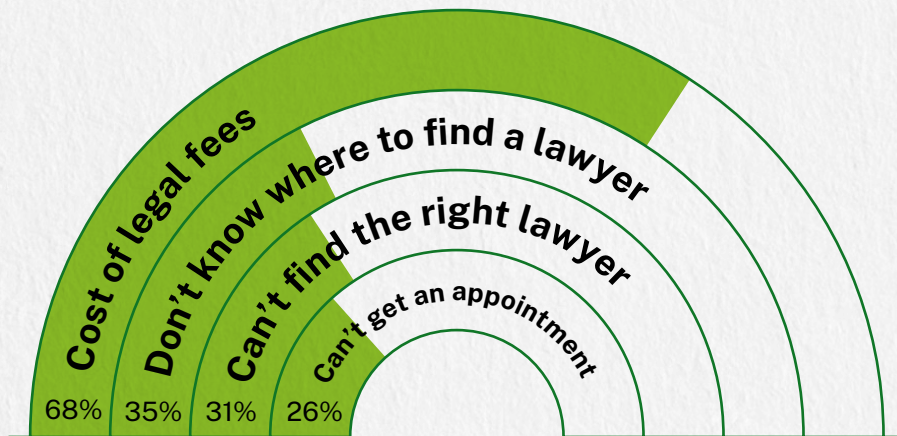
ASYLUM SUPPORT

95% intend to seek asylum.



But more than 93% of asylum-seeking respondents have not yet found a lawyer, the top challenge for which is legal fees.

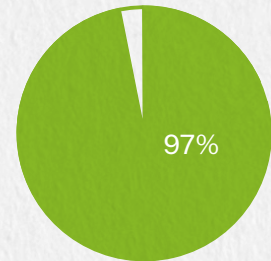
Challenges in finding a lawyer:



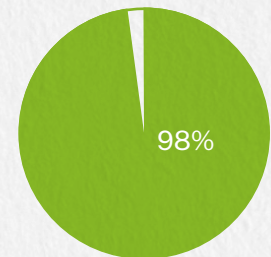
Based on 764 responses

JOB RELIEF

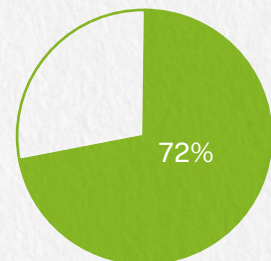
97% have not yet received work authorization to work in the US.



As a result, 98% have not found steady work.



72% have trouble paying for basic living expenses.



Based on 765 responses



ACCESS TO BASIC RESOURCES

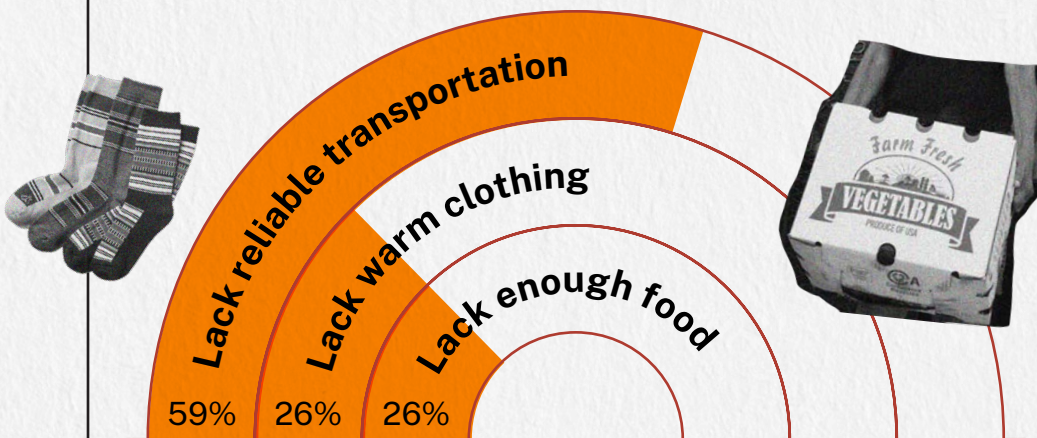
BASIC RESOURCES

59% of respondents don't have access to reliable transportation to make important appointments.

26% of respondents don't have warm clothing.

26% and their family members don't have access to three full meals a day.

Basic resources lacked:

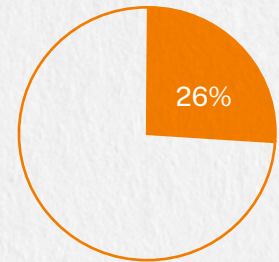


Exit interviews with survey facilitators indicated that provided meals are often too small and lack nutritional value, leaving respondents needing to find alternative options elsewhere.

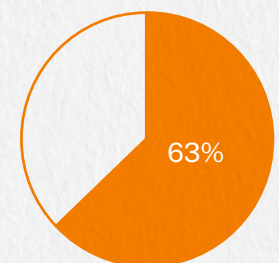
Based on 745 responses

EDUCATION

26% of parents have not been able to enroll all their children into schools.



63% have not been able to access English classes.



Based on 761 responses

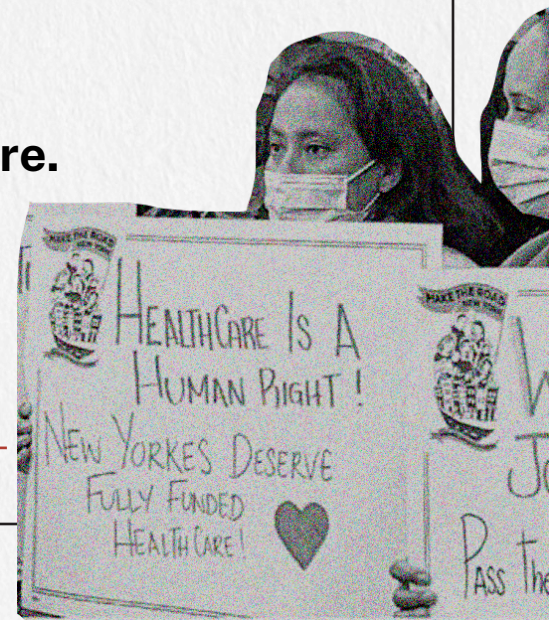
HEALTHCARE

58% of respondents are unable to pay medical bills or get free access to healthcare.

Challenges in accessing healthcare services:



Based on 350 respondents who have tried to access healthcare



FEELING AT HOME

CURRENT LIVING CONDITIONS

97% currently live in NYC shelters.

Respondents living in shelters
97%

93% in shelters cannot afford to move out

Not living in shelters 3%

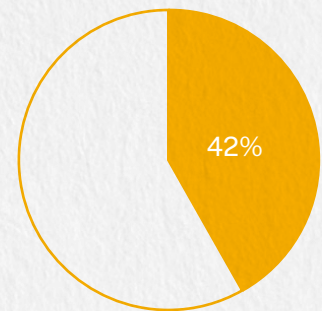
93% of those living in shelters have not been able to move out because they do not have enough income or steady work.

Shelter includes living situations such as those found in Humanitarian Emergency Response and Relief Centers (HERRCs). A majority of respondents are currently ineligible for CityFHEPs housing vouchers because of their immigration status, which inhibits them from moving out of shelters.

Based on 766 responses

MENTAL HEALTH

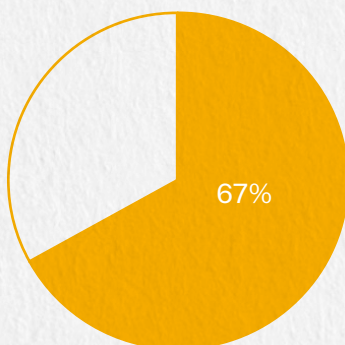
42% said that since arriving, they (or a family member traveling with them) have suffered from anxiety or depression.



Based on 766 responses

NEW YORK

However, despite these challenges and lack of resources, 67% would choose to live in New York, even if they could live somewhere else.



Exit interviews with survey facilitators indicated that respondents often answered questions about their emotional state from a place of gratitude. Some also felt hesitant or fearful to answer questions negatively, as not to put their legal status or future at risk.

Based on 760 responses



CONCLUSION

The survey data sheds light on significant resource gaps faced by this vulnerable population.

City and federal leaders must take immediate action to address these challenges and ensure that asylum seekers receive the support they need.

The findings clearly indicate that asylum seekers are not getting the work authorization, legal services, education, healthcare, and basic resources they need to thrive. This puts them and their families at risk and creates significant barriers to their successful integration into society.

Policymakers and stakeholders must prioritize the needs of asylum seekers and work collectively to ensure they have the freedom to work and the freedom to thrive. By addressing the gaps in resources highlighted in this report, New York can live up to its core values as a place of refuge and opportunity, providing a supportive environment where asylum seekers can rebuild their lives and become full members of communities.

By taking federal action to expedite work authorization for asylum seekers and devoting city resources to provide adequate legal services, English classes, health care, and other basics, we can ensure that asylum seekers in New York receive the resources and support they desperately need. That is the best way to ensure they can embark on a new chapter with dignity, resilience, and hope.



NYC POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

LEGAL SERVICES FUNDING

✓ Invest at least \$140M in immigration legal services for migrants

Legal service providers work around the clock to assist NYC's newest migrants, often with little to no additional funding and while maintaining representation of thousands of existing clients. The City must substantially increase funding for immigration legal representation to better protect immigrant communities now and in the future.

HOUSING

✓ Extend CityFHEPS to shelter residents regardless of immigration status

CityFHEPS, a voucher that helps New Yorkers move from homeless shelters to apartments, is limited to a very small number of people. To help more people obtain stable housing, the City must improve CityFHEPS by eliminating unnecessary rules and expanding eligibility to more households, including families where everyone is undocumented.

WORKERS

✓ Renew and expand the Low-Wage Worker Support

Renew and expand the Low-Wage Worker Support (LWWS) initiative to \$3M, including \$1.4M for the City-wide Immigrant Legal Empowerment Collaborative (CILEC) coalition of legal services providers and community-based organizations. The LWWS initiative enables legal service providers and community-based organizations to represent hundreds of workers on wage theft, discrimination, and other claims, and conduct comprehensive, multilingual worker outreach and education programs.

✓ Renew funding for job training and placement

The Job Training and Placement Initiative supports classes for members of unions, CBOs, and providers serving immigrants. Funding must include \$5.255M for the Consortium for Worker Education "Jobs to Build On" program and \$2.375M for Worker Service Centers.

HEALTH

✓ Address access disparities

The City must expand funding for the Access Health Initiative to \$4M and allocate \$2.3M in funding for the Managed Care Consumer Assistance Program (MCCAP). Additionally, the City must maintain funding for Ending the Epidemic at \$7.7M and the Immigrant Health Initiative at \$2M. These programs enable CBOs to provide immigrant families with information about their rights and available resources.

✓ Expand funding for the NYC Care Program

Operated by NYC Health + Hospitals, NYC Care guarantees low-cost and no-cost services to New Yorkers who do not qualify for, or cannot afford, health insurance. NYC Care must receive \$100M per year to continue to implement the program and fund CBOs to conduct outreach, education and direct enrollment. They should also receive additional funding to be able to expand the program to Federally Qualified Health Centers, which was approved under Local Law 107.

NYC POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

EDUCATION

✓ **Reject and reverse any cuts to public education and public libraries**

The Adams administration has already cut more than \$500 million from public school funding, in addition to cutting other vital services. This funding must be restored and the new budget must not include any additional cuts.

✓ **Expand funding to community schools**

Restore \$9.16 million in funding to the 52 community schools bracing for significant budget cuts so they can continue to provide wraparound services to students and families.

✓ **Fully fund adult literacy programs**

Restore and baseline \$20.4M for DYCD RFP-contracted adult literacy programs (\$5.7M in established baseline funding, \$8M in expansion funding baselined in FY22, and \$6.7M added for additional expansion in FY23.) Renew the \$4M City Council Discretionary Adult Literacy Initiative which added flexibility to program rates, and renew and expand the City Council Discretionary Adult Literacy Pilot Project to \$5M under the new title “Adult Literacy Program Enhancement.”

FEDERAL POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

BIDEN ADMINISTRATION

✓ **Expedite work authorization for asylum seekers**

✓ **Send more resources to NY to support asylum seekers**

✓ **Reverse efforts to undermine the asylum system**

These efforts makes refugees ineligible for asylum based on how they enter the United States and whether they applied for protection in a country they transited through on their way to the United States.

✓ **Expand and renew Temporary Protected Status (TPS) and Deferred Enforced Departure (DED) for countries affected by political unrest and natural disasters**



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