TOOLKIT ON ASYLUM-SEEKER RECEPTION

Best Practices in Receiving Asylum-Seekers in Communities throughout the United States

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Introduction

Seeking asylum is a human right and is enshrined in the Refugee Act of 1980 for asylum-seekers entering the United States.

The asylum process in the United States is complex and difficult to understand and navigate, especially for asylum-seekers who may not speak English, who are settling in an entirely new place, who are unfamiliar with the U.S. immigration system, who may have a history of trauma, and who likely have experienced a harrowing and perilous journey. Without support that ensures their basic needs are met, asylum-seekers may not be able to exercise their right to seek asylum meaningfully. Accordingly, it is incumbent upon the U.S. federal government, states, and localities to ensure that reception services are in place to assist asylum-seekers.

Currently, most asylum-seekers entering the United States through its southern border move quickly to other destinations around the country, where they either seek to reunite with family, friends, and other established support systems or to search out support if they have few personal connections. A significant increase in newly arrived asylum-seekers without family or friends in the United States able to assist them—many of whom were bused from the border to interior cities starting in 2022—has highlighted the urgent need for national and local preparedness. In this context, receiving communities must contend with how to welcome

these newcomers in both the immediate and long term. The need for sustained coordination, across stakeholders within and between destination cities, has emerged as a high priority to enable reception systems to expand, contract, and pivot effectively.

Much of the available guidance regarding reception for asylum-seekers in the United States—including UNHCR's own Border Shelter Toolkit: Best Practices in Sheltering Asylum-Seekers at the U.S. Southern Border – focuses on short-term reception at the U.S. southern border and the facilitation of rapid onward travel. Far fewer resources focus on how to best coordinate and sustain reception activities in the interior of the country, including in communities where asylum-seekers hope to settle. In the absence of comprehensive federal or state-level reception guidance and coordination, many localities assumed the responsibility for the design and implementation of their own reception strategies for arriving asylum-seekers. Many lessons have been learned through the implementation of these locality-specific efforts.

This toolkit seeks to support communities in developing or expanding their reception responses. It draws on international guidance as well as observations gleaned from interviews with service providers in the private and public sectors at the local and state level and with asylum-seekers themselves. It also builds from the guidance and many practice examples in the Border Shelter Toolkit. More specifically, this toolkit:

- **Outlines guidance and approaches** to asylum-seeker reception and offers tools to strengthen asylum-seeker reception in destination communities, with a particular emphasis on coordination at the local level.

- **Addresses key questions** regarding challenges related to coordinating and implementing access to resources and social services, legal services, and housing and shelter.

- **Showcases how to consistently integrate the principle of Accountability to Affected People (AAP)** into reception activities across all

UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, is a global organization with the mandate given by the United Nations General Assembly to protect and promote respect for the rights of refugees, asylum-seekers, and stateless people. UNHCR seeks to fulfill this mandate by working closely with national, state, and local governments, civil society, and impacted populations to ensure that anyone who fears persecution or is fleeing conflict or violence in their home country has the right to seek asylum and find safe refuge in another country.

service areas and adopt an age, gender, and diversity (AGD) approach for equal treatment of diverse groups.

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The 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol define who is a refugee and outline nations' obligations to provide protection to people who meet those criteria. A refugee is a person who is unable or unwilling to return to his or her home country due to past persecution or a well-founded fear of future persecution

on account of their race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group.

The United States is party to the 1967 Protocol, and by incorporation articles 2–34 of the 1951 Convention, and thus bound to comply with the duties deriving from those articles. Those obligations were codified into domestic law in the 1980 Refugee Act, which established two pathways to obtain international protection, either from abroad as a refugee resettled to the United States or through the asylum process after entry into the country. If an individual is granted asylum, they are known as an "asylee," and, along with resettled refugees, asylees are eligible to later become lawful permanent residents and eventually become naturalized U.S. citizens.

Under international human rights law, everyone everywhere has certain minimum core rights, among them the right to seek asylum and the right to adequate standards for humane treatment and reception while undergoing the asylum process.[2] In their country of refuge, asylum-seekers have certain rights under international refugee law. Sometimes, they have the same rights as nationals, and in other cases they have the same rights as similarly situated non-nationals.[3] Notably, international law recognizes that people fleeing persecution may need to cross borders irregularly and that asylum-seekers should not be punished for

doing so or be detained purely for seeking asylum.[4] Asylum-seekers are also protected from forms of discrimination, such as on the basis of race, color, sex, language, religion, or political or other opinion, to name a few relevant grounds under international human rights law.[5]

Of particular importance to this toolkit, asylum-seekers possess rights to:

- Equal protection before the law, full access to courts of law, and equal treatment pertaining to access to legal assistance as citizens.[6]

- *Non-refoulement*, the right not to be removed to their country of origin, or any other country where they are at risk of persecution, torture, or other forms of serious or irreparable harm.[7]

- Freedom of movement and choice in their place of residence.[8]

- Work, including self-employment.[9]

- Receipt of identity documents.[10]

- Family unity, specifically to unite and live with, care for, and be cared for by family members.[11]

- Receipt of public relief and services, including housing assistance.[12]

- Public education.[13]

- Enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, including access to treatment and rehabilitative health care services.[14]

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What is Asylum-Seeker Reception?

Reception activities for asylum-seekers who have reached their destination communities are those which support the safety and wellbeing of asylum-seekers, both immediately post-arrival and in the longer term, affirm their human rights and dignity, and enable their full and informed participation in their legal case for protection.

Asylum-seekers come from all parts of the world, having overcome significant hardships prior to and during their journeys to the United States. Reception activities should ensure conditions that allow for asylum-seekers to achieve stability, addressing their material and psychosocial needs, while they pursue their claims for asylum. Reception activities are mutually beneficial to the asylum-seeker and the community, in particular where they are premised on the capabilities of asylum-seekers to realize self-reliance (when provided with opportunity) and with the goal of fostering integration.[15]

The Global Compact for Refugees (GCR) presents a cooperative framework for strengthening the response to refugee situations, including response to asylum-seekers arriving to host countries as part of wider, mixed migratory movements. The GCR refers to States' responsibilities to provide for the reception of asylum-seekers and refugees and ensure access

to basic services. In addition, UNHCR guidance specifically highlights the needs of asylum-seekers for support directly after arrival and throughout the asylum process and suggests a variety of interventions to meet these needs.[16]

There are certain hallmarks of a good reception system, including inclusivity and empowerment, equality, coordination, transparency and accountability, flexibility, and the principle of "do no harm."

Combining international standards with observations on the implementation of various local reception systems, the reception activities for asylum-seekers across five domains—housing, legal, health, education, and community integration—are outlined below along with the access to social services that facilitate having the needs of asylum-seekers met in each domain. Of these areas, the toolkit focuses only on access to social services, legal support, and housing due to the alignment of the urgency of the needs in those areas and UNHCR expertise. Many of the international resources referenced, however, also address reception activities in the other domains and offer relevant guidance.

In addition, the toolkit does not address in detail the situation of unaccompanied children who are also integrating into local communities while their immigration proceedings are ongoing. There is a separate and distinct process for U.S. officials to receive and shelter them and to facilitate their unification with a sponsor living in the United States, most often a family member, who is to care for them. While there are legal and social service organizations dedicated to serving unaccompanied children in many large cities, the needs of the children and their sponsors should be included when communities assess the needs of asylum-seekers. For recommendations to strengthen support for this population, see Four

Strategies to Improve Community Services for Unaccompanied Children in the United States, by UNICEF and the Migration Policy Institute.

Key activities related to each domain include:

Social Support Services

- Provide immediate support services at the point of arrival, and throughout the asylum procedure as needed, that meets basic needs, including food, clothing, and basic accommodation.[17]

- Provide individualized support for particularly vulnerable asylum-seekers due to age, disability, medical needs, or other specific vulnerabilities.[18]

- Enroll individuals in social welfare programs where eligible and, when not eligible, provide in-kind support for food, clothing, pocket money, childcare assistance, etc.[19]

- Provide proof of legal identity and adequate documentation needed to facilitate access to social support services, housing, other community services, and community integration more broadly.[20]

Housing

- Provide short-term shelter support that respects family unity and privacy as well as ensures a minimum standard of care, including healthcare and appropriate sanitation facilities.[21]

- Provide longer-term shelter assistance for particularly vulnerable asylum-seekers.

Legal Access

- Provide legal information about the asylum process and other related immigration processes, and empower individuals to be agents in their own protection from exploitation and other harm through awareness of their rights and how to access systems in place that offer protection.

- Provide legal representation to ensure timely and expert filing for asylum and employment authorization.

- Provide legal assistance to ensure individuals without representation are also able to participate in and successfully navigate the asylum process.

Healthcare

- Ensure access to basic physical healthcare at a minimum for all asylum-seekers, including age-appropriate care for asylum-seeking children, and advanced medical support as needed.[22]

- Ensure access to psychosocial and mental health services for vulnerable asylum-seekers.[23]

Education

- Assist with school enrollment and provide ongoing support for minor asylum-seekers, accompanied and unaccompanied.

- Invest in workforce skills development, and promote accounting and recognition of individual competencies and foreign qualifications.[24]

Community Integration

- Empower asylum-seekers to achieve full inclusion and social cohesion in the receiving community.[25]

- Eliminate all forms of discrimination and promote evidence-based, public discourse to shape perceptions of forced displacement and migration.[26]

There is no universal model for asylum-seeker reception, as each community must tailor its reception efforts to its own context, considering available community resources, the level of local and state involvement, the local political environment, rates of arrivals, and other factors. However, there are certain hallmarks of a good reception system, including inclusivity and empowerment, equality, coordination, transparency and accountability, flexibility, and the principle of "do no harm." Delivering support to asylum-seekers in a way that aligns with these principles requires the involvement of diverse stakeholders, from grassroots groups to large institutions, each with its own knowledge and expertise, operational experience, ability to marshal different types of financial and human resources, and status within the asylum-seeker community and local host communities.

For more information on humanitarian principles related to reception of asylum-seekers along with specific practice examples of short-term reception activities, see the UNHCR Border Shelter Toolkit.

The Need for a Coordinated Approach to Reception

The reception of asylum-seekers in U.S. communities exists at the intersection of a federal asylum system, a national, state, and local humanitarian response, and community efforts to support asylum-seekers' local integration while undergoing the asylum process. In this complex landscape, coordination is essential across all levels of government and between and within receiving communities.

UNHCR recognizes that many localities are already operating reception systems that engage governmental and non-governmental actors at various levels who endeavor to meet the needs of arriving asylum-seekers. This section provides guidance on developing a coordination plan where there is not one in place. It may also be used by localities already engaged in reception work to further strengthen their approach.

Four elements are essential to establishing and sustaining a coordinated approach that is responsive to the shifting needs of asylum-seekers over time:

- Stakeholder Analysis

- Reception Coordinating Committee

- Situational Analysis

- Assessment of Accountability to Affected People (AAP)

These analyses and assessments are most useful when conducted on a recurring basis.

Stakeholder Analysis

To plan and execute a coordinated response, it is essential to identify the stakeholders needed to implement a comprehensive set of reception activities. As no one entity can be solely responsible for reception activities, a small group of governmental and non-governmental actors can begin conducting an impartial stakeholder analysis, which may identify additional actors for inclusion and help determine the makeup of a Reception Coordinating Committee (hereafter referred to as the Coordinating Committee).

The stakeholder analysis should endeavor to answer, at a minimum, the following questions:

- What government entities exist at the local, county, and state level whose mandate includes serving asylum-seekers (such as offices of immigrant affairs, departments of education, departments of human services, and others)?

- What non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and grassroots organizations are or have been involved in working with asylum-seekers, including those already conducting reception or related activities?

- Who are the local immigration legal service providers?

- Which NGOs have programs that may include asylum-seekers in the overall population served but not as their primary focus (such as federally qualified health clinics, food pantries, workforce development programs, shelter providers, and others)?

- Are there other organizations that serve related populations, such as resettled refugees, who may bring relevant expertise and whose work could be expanded to include asylum-seekers?

- Are there local ethnic community organizations, in particular relevant diaspora communities, or well-established asylum-seeker or immigrant communities that wish to be involved in reception coordination? How have they historically contributed to the reception of new arrivals?

- What local organizations or entities are most trusted by asylum-seekers for information and assistance? Where do asylum-seekers go or who do they call when they need assistance?

- What government and private entities have historically funded or currently fund work with asylum-seekers?

- What entities are well-positioned to conduct data collection, monitoring, and evaluation activities?

- Are any of the identified entities (governmental or non-governmental) perceived as politically affiliated, and how could this impact asylum-seekers' perception of the reception activities?

Based on research and site visits to communities receiving significant numbers of asylum-seekers, UNHCR compiled the following, non-exhaustive list of stakeholders and identified common ways in which each might contribute to a coordinated reception system.

- **Federal, state, county, and city governments** create policies and regulations; provide services and resources such as housing and healthcare that are core elements of asylum-seeker support; make funds available to non-governmental entities to provide services; monitor the efficacy of reception services; address non-compliance with laws and policy; and determine remedial actions. They can convene conversations with stakeholders and engage them to provide services. Some governments, primarily state and local, set up offices with a specific mandate to address immigration issues and pro-actively engage immigrant and refugee communities.

Governmental entities are also critical messengers whose leadership sets the tone for a welcoming community.

- **NGOs** are a source of expertise in various aspects of asylum-seeker reception and can be contracted to design and manage services. They can serve as fiscal sponsors for smaller community, faith-based, and grassroots groups that are or could be involved in service delivery. Such partnerships enable public and private funding to flow to groups that may lack the necessary administrative infrastructure to manage it. They can also convene the NGO and community group actors to ensure a coordinated approach among them.

- **Grassroots organizations and faith-based communities** are often a major source of dedicated volunteers who can provide a range of services and can mobilize emergency in-kind and financial donations and support. They convene groups around a common cause, respond to needs quickly, and can engage directly with immigrant communities. These efforts can be strengthened through partnerships with NGOs to provide technical assistance, guidance, and oversight.

- **Ethnic community-based organizations and community leaders** offer cultural and linguistic knowledge that can inform policy and programmatic decisions. With close ties to ethnic communities, these organizations are often trusted by asylum-seekers and can serve as important communication intermediaries.

- **Academic organizations and think tanks** can conduct needed research and analyze data to inform reception planning and can monitor and evaluate service programs. Partnerships with academic programs can also provide low-cost expertise and skilled labor through students and staff for various reception services, including legal, social work, and health services, among others.

- **Private sector entities** (foundations, for-profit companies, and other for-profit entities) can provide financial support, including for innovative public-private programming,

and may partner with others for workforce development, housing, and legal services.

- **Media organizations** can amplify positive local and state messaging regarding asylum-seeker reception and promote the value of integrating asylum-seekers into the community; they can be a channel for getting information to asylum-seekers and alert them to changes in policy that may impact them.

When conducting the stakeholder analysis, casting an inclusive net is crucial to ensuring that voices from the impacted communities are represented. Inclusivity also allows one to plan for activities most effectively in domains that are commonly under-resourced, like housing and access to legal services. As evidenced in the responses to asylum-seekers bused from the U.S. southern border, local community and grassroots actors have been among the first to step in to meet asylum-seekers and remain a critical support in addressing long-term housing and other needs of these new arrivals. Many of these groups have been conducting ad hoc reception activities for years, even decades, and have relationships with regional and national networks of community groups. Oftentimes benefitting from asylum-seekers and/or asylees within their membership and commonly serving as a resource navigator for recent arrivals, such groups are generally trusted by asylum-seekers.

In addition to identifying the cast of actors who do or could support reception activities, a thorough stakeholder analysis also helps identify potential candidates for membership in a Reception Coordinating Committee.

Coordinating Committee for Asylum-Seeker Reception

An established Coordinating Committee helps ensure an effective, transparent, and accountable reception effort. Including the diversity of actors needed to liaise with all providers across the various service sectors and with the asylum-seeker population is central to its effectiveness.

Typical roles for the Coordinating Committee may include convening all involved stakeholders

for planning, check-ins, and updates; establishing coordinating sub-committees; ensuring situational analyses are completed on an ongoing basis; liaising between stakeholders and state and federal entities; providing oversight of financial decisions; and overseeing program monitoring and evaluation activities.

While there is no single recipe for an effective Coordinating Committee, below are the stakeholders that typically have a role to play:

- Office of immigrant affairs.[27]

- Public agencies or departments, such as Health and Human Services, Public Health, Homeless Services, Education, and other relevant local offices.

- NGOs with experience serving asylum-seekers.

- Grassroots and/or faith-based groups that have historically supported arriving asylum-seekers and/or other arriving immigrants and refugees.

- Established community leaders and/or representatives from ethnic community organizations.

- Members of academia experienced in program development and evaluation.

Situational Analysis Guidance and Tools

Conducting a situational analysis is a necessary step to designing and maintaining an informed reception response. Situational analyses can be conducted at any point, but most importantly when real-time information is needed to guide design of a new reception system and to assess the effectiveness of an existing one. Thereafter, situational analyses can be conducted at periodic intervals to help ensure that all financial, physical, and human resources are being effectively deployed and asylum-seekers' needs are being met. Conducting a situational analysis is also an opportunity to assess the extent to which reception activities are aligned with humanitarian principles contained in the Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in

Coordination in Action

The San Diego Rapid Response Network (SDRRN), a coalition of more than 40 immigrant rights and social service organizations, attorneys, and faith and community leaders, was launched in 2017 with the goal of protecting and supporting immigrants and their families in the San Diego border region. The structure of the SDRRN – a diverse group of partner organizations with one organization, Jewish Family Service of San Diego, serving as fiscal sponsor – allows for the quick mobilization of resources and expertise to respond to immigrants' and asylum seekers' immediate needs. As examples, SDRRN efforts opened a respite shelter for asylum-seekers released in the region, established a pro bono legal services team and launched a legal helpline, and developed and delivered Know Your Rights (KYR) trainings to new arrivals, among other activities.

Humanitarian Response (the Sphere Standards), the Operational Guidance on Accountability to Affected People (AAP), and guidance on an Age, Gender and Diversity (AGD) approach.

The Coordinating Committee can assess whether the whole committee, representatives therein, or outside entities (such as a contractor or academic group) are best positioned to conduct the analysis. Factors in the decision should include knowledge of the local context and impartiality.

A checklist of suggested questions to include, at a minimum, when undertaking a situational analysis specific to asylum-seeker reception follows:

Demographics

☑ What are the current demographics of arriving asylum-seekers, including age, gender, and nationality?

☑ How many asylum-seekers are arriving, and how are they arriving?
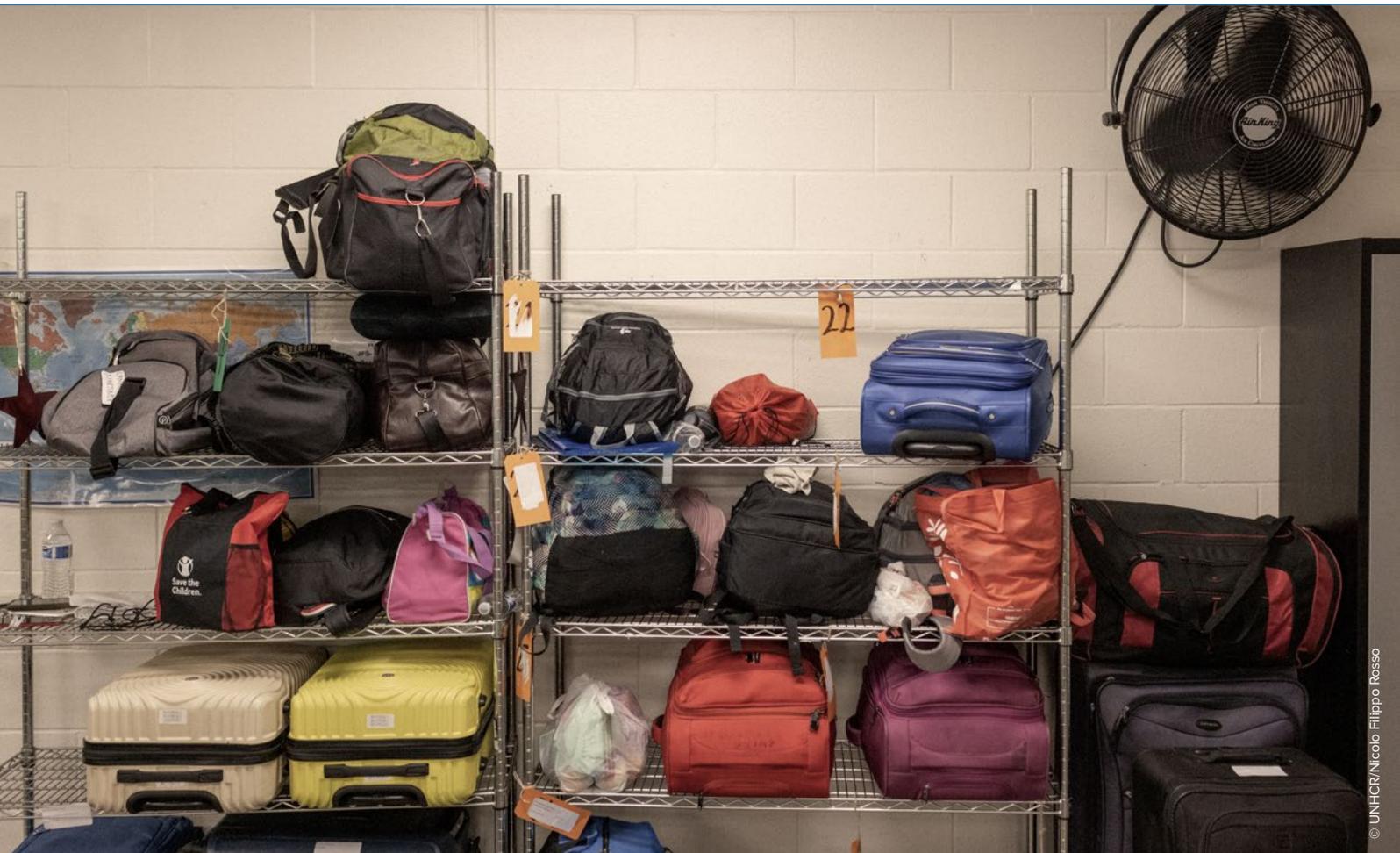
☑ What percentage of asylum-seekers are moving elsewhere versus settling locally?

☑ What information on demographics and individuals' specific needs (medical, disability, family separation, and others) is available ahead of arrival and from whom?

Existing programs and infrastructure

☑ What formal structures and programs are currently operational to provide reception services? What is their capacity to provide services?

  ☑ Who is greeting asylum-seekers upon arrival, what is their capacity? Can capacity be adjusted to meet changes in demand?

  ☑ Who is providing support to asylum-seekers moving on to other destinations, and is/how is this support funded?

  ☑ Who is providing what services immediately upon arrival versus over the longer term?

☑ What federal, state, and local public social welfare programs are open to asylum-seekers (specifically healthcare, housing, food, and childcare programs)? How accessible are these programs to asylum-seekers?

☑ What additional support programs are available to meet asylum-seeker needs across the key domains (social services, housing, legal, healthcare, education, and community integration)?

☑ Are there quality assurance concerns with any formal or informal reception assistance, and how can these be mitigated?

☑ To what extent are AAP principles upheld in the current reception system, particularly regarding transparency and communication?

☑ Are there programs that serve other immigrant or refugee groups that could pivot or expand to support asylum-seekers?

☑ What physical resources and infrastructure exist to support reception activities, including intake activities upon arrival, short- and long-term housing, and integrated service centers? Can these only be deployed during a period

of higher-than-average arrivals, or also during steady-state arrivals?

Funding

☑ How are these interventions funded (e.g. emergency allocations, limited scope federal funding, local government allocations, private sector funds, foundation grants, or other sources)? How does the funding impact the scope and sustainability of services?

☑ Is there a need to establish additional governmental offices or entities to support coordinated reception efforts?

Accessibility of resources and information

☑ How do arriving asylum-seekers receive information, including about how to pursue their immigration case and access available support services?

☑ What have been asylum-seekers' expectations of assistance prior to or following arrival?

☑ What are the perceived and actual barriers to accessing services? Perceived barriers might include fear of engagement with government entities, concerns about language access and cultural responsiveness, or service provider reputation in the community. Actual barriers might include location, cost, transportation, availability of services (waitlist), lack of language access, and lack of staff familiarity with serving asylum-seekers, to name a few.

☑ Where do asylum-seekers go/who do they reach out to when they have an urgent need? A non-urgent need?

 ☑ Is this a formal or informal communication relationship, and is it sustainable?

 ☑ Who are trusted sources of information in the asylum-seeker community, and are those sources communicating accurate information?

☑ What gaps are there in programs and interventions across the key domains, and how can those gaps be filled (e.g. no funded legal access program or inability of legal access program to meet demand)?

Protection concerns and supports in the community

☑ Are there urgent protection concerns that need to be addressed (particularly involving risks to children or other particularly vulnerable groups)? How are these concerns identified?

☑ What informal employment systems exist locally, and are there exploitation concerns?

☑ Are education systems equipped to meet the needs of asylum-seeker children?

☑ What community integration supports exist formally or informally (religious communities, sport or other recreational activities, cultural groups, and others)?

For additional guidance on how communities in the United States can build their humanitarian reception of asylum-seekers, see the following resources:

• Advancing A Welcoming Infrastructure for Humanitarian Relief: How to Invest in Long-Term Migrant Inclusion & Equity at the Local Level – Welcoming America and Welcoming International

• Local Power to Choose Welcome: Supporting New Arrivals with Dignity – Local Progress Impact Lab

• White Paper on San Diego Rapid Response Network Migrant Shelter Services – Jewish Family Service of San Diego and the Women's Refugee Commission

Also, the UNHCR Emergency Handbook covers a range of topics critical to providing a coordinated, thorough response to displaced peoples' needs during an emergency. The section on preparedness and response includes various tools, such as for risk analysis and monitoring as well as contingency planning. Additional resources on engaging affected people throughout a reception response, including in the steps to ensure a coordinated approach, are included in the following section.

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Accountability to Affected People (AAP) and Protection of Vulnerable Populations

> **"Being accountable to affected people is to ensure that our responses include continuous and meaningful engagement with persons of concern, understand their needs and protection risks, build on their capacities and reflect their perspectives and priorities."**[28]

Centering affected people in all aspects of a humanitarian response is essential to its effectiveness and to ensuring a rights-based approach. Valuing and responding to the needs and experiences of affected people fosters greater trust between these individuals and involved stakeholders. This trust can bolster systems aimed at mitigating risk of and preventing exploitation and trafficking and lead to better support for particularly vulnerable populations.

In a reception response, asylum-seekers have the right to participate in decisions that affect them, they must be informed of and able to easily access programs meant to support them, and they have the right to be protected from harm and have recourse if they have been harmed. Accountability to asylum-seekers "refers to the responsible use of power (resources, decision-making) by humanitarian actors, combined with effective and quality programming that recognises the community

of concern's dignity, capacity, and ability to be independent."

The UNHCR Accountability to Affected People (AAP) framework offers guidance and best practices that can be applied to asylum-seeker reception. When structures for effective engagement are in place from the start, it is easier for stakeholders to identify and respond to urgent protection concerns. It facilitates obtaining more and better-quality data to guide programmatic decision-making. Engaging affected people in the programmatic process gives agency and ownership back to the people within a process where it is so often absent.

AAP is also a key component of ensuring that reception services are designed and delivered in an equal and equitable manner for all the diverse groups with asylum-seeker populations. UNHCR's Policy on Age, Gender and Diversity (AGD) builds from the AAP framework to ensure that asylum-seekers and other displaced persons "can enjoy their rights on an equal footing" through an understanding of the

AAP Tools

Key resources from UNHCR's Operational Guidance on Accountability to Affected People (AAP) and related toolkit (numerous additional tools available related to the four AAP building blocks):

- AAP Self-Assessment Tool
- The UNHCR Tool for Participatory Assessment in Operations
- Listen and Learn: Participatory Assessment with Children and Adolescents
- Menu of AAP questions for needs assessment

impact each person's intersecting personal characteristics have on their lives, particularly their experience of forced displacement.[29] While prioritizing AAP in humanitarian responses is challenging, doing so is essential.
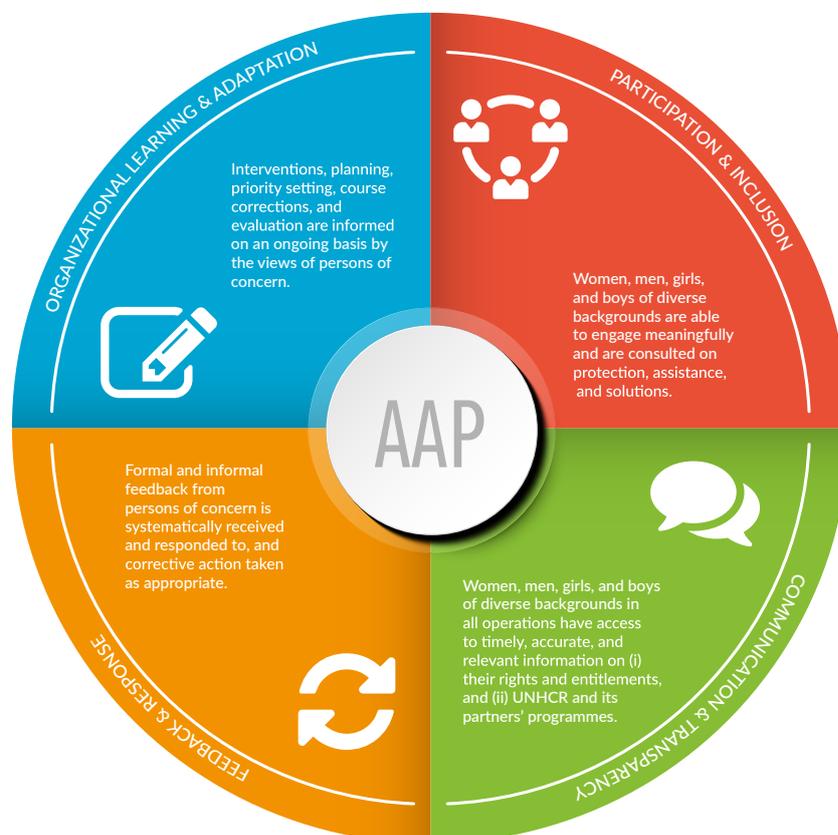
Source: AAP Operational Guidance, UNHCR

Building Blocks of AAP

UNHCR's AAP guidance is based on four key building blocks: **participation and inclusion, communication and transparency, feedback and response,** and **organizational learning and adaptation**.

Participation and inclusion

"Enable persons of concern to play an active role in the decision-making processes that affect them through the establishment of clear practices to engage them appropriately and ensure that the most marginalized and affected are represented and have influence."[30]

The participation and inclusion of all affected people helps ensure they can access protection services meant to support them, and that diverse community members and individuals are able to inform and play an active role in decision-making that affects them.

An inclusive and participatory approach employs a variety of tools and interventions, including community mapping, participatory assessments, and situational analyses. These tools help identify the barriers to participation as well as the enablers of participation in protection interventions. They also help assess how to effectively plan and evaluate interventions.

What Did Asylum-Seekers Say?

In interviews conducted by UNHCR, asylum-seekers spoke of the challenges they experienced trying to access certain programs and services that were put in place to assist them. In one city, asylum-seekers expressed difficulty registering for public health insurance because local public social services offices were unaware of the expansion of health insurance coverage to certain non-citizens. In other localities, asylum-seekers have faced difficulties obtaining services and benefits because they did not possess identification after their own documents had been confiscated upon entry to the country. Other asylum-seekers reported difficulty accessing food pantries because of lack of transportation. The majority interviewed reported that they had not yet received any sort of in-person legal orientation information. Such challenges point to the importance of engaging individuals in identifying what factors can facilitate their access to support and help ensure programs are designed in light of the practical realities of asylum-seekers.

Inclusive Approaches in Action

Effective inclusion of refugees: Participatory approaches for practitioners at the local level, a toolkit by UNHCR and Migration Policy Group, presents guidance for municipal authorities and local actors focused on the integration of asylum-seekers and refugees into the community. The toolkit's resources were field tested in various countries in Europe and include examples of good practices, step-by-step questions to guide asylum-seeker and refugee inclusion, practical checklists, and indicators to measure progress and assess the impact of integration initiatives. The resources are organized around six key areas of a comprehensive approach to integration and inclusion: 1) Have clarity about the support needed; 2) Ensure support caters to the needs of all; 3) Create services for the long run; 4) Work not only for the people, but with them; 5) Involve local communities and support volunteerism; and 6) Strive for comprehensive integration support.

Effective inclusion of refugees
Participatory approaches for practitioners at the local level

UNHCR MPG

1| HANDBOOK

Participatory assessments, for instance, call for stakeholders in a reception response to engage in structured conversations with all demographic groups of affected people to identify particular protection risks, their underlying causes, and what they believe are potential solutions.

Communication and transparency

"Information is a form of assistance in itself: access to accurate information allows persons of concern to make informed decisions for their safety and protection, to shape and adapt to their environment, and to hold humanitarian actors accountable."[31]

"Accountability is not a one-off event. It requires direct and sustained engagement with communities, through transparent and continuous two-way communication."[32]

This AAP building block deals with the extent to which communication within a humanitarian response is timely, transparent, open, and reciprocal. This includes communication regarding the humanitarian response broadly, as well as communication between the stakeholders providing services and the recipients of those services. Are affected people informed of their rights and responsibilities within a humanitarian process? Are they aware of what supports are available to them, and are they able to communicate effectively with service providers? Are they made aware of changes in policy which may impact their current rights or access to various support programs? Are they aware of coordination, oversight structures, mechanisms for feedback and response, and how to use them?

When reception stakeholders plan how best to facilitate open and transparent communication with asylum-seekers, certain considerations are key. Local context analyses should consider who comprise the trusted sources of information and which communication mediums are the most effective for the current landscape. It is best practice to ensure that information is communicated via multiple modes in order to reach the target audience from various trusted sources, at various times, and at various stages

What Did Asylum-Seekers Say?

When asked where they went to obtain trusted information or ask for assistance, most asylum-seeker interviewees indicated they received information through word-of-mouth from family and friends or from non-governmental and community organizations. Interviewees also indicated a high level of trust in those groups that provided immediate support services at the time of arrival in the community. Some reported returning to their point of arrival, whether it was the bus station or another receiving point, to seek additional information from these groups.

post-arrival. Commonly utilized communication tools include social media (principally Facebook and TikTok), WhatsApp, and Facebook Messenger. Some asylum-seekers have access to email, while others may have local telephone numbers and may be able to use SMS messaging. Other asylum-seekers may get important information from community meetings, public information boards, radio or TV, and face-to-face conversations.

When communication is not effective, asylum-seekers may not be able to exercise their rights fully or access available services. Some case managers interviewed, for example, noted how a communication mode mismatch between healthcare providers and asylum-seeker patients impeded efforts to empower clients to manage their own healthcare appointments. The healthcare provider's system could only send appointment notifications via SMS text messages, but asylum-seekers who did not yet have a local telephone number were unable to receive them.

Language access and other accessibility concerns should be planned for at the outset of any program design. All stakeholders should have ready access to interpretation services, and written information should be translated into any

What Did Asylum-Seekers Say?

UNHCR heard time and again from stakeholders and asylum-seekers that resource navigators would assist an asylum-seeker with locating a resource or service for which they were eligible and provide a transportation plan. Upon arrival at the local service provider's office, however, the asylum-seeker could not access the service because the registration forms were only available in English, and staff were not familiar with utilizing an interpretation service.

of the predominant languages of arriving asylum-seekers. There is no replacement for face-to-face communication and dialogue, and, whenever possible, information should be disseminated and feedback collected in person.[33]

In accordance with AAP best practices, UNHCR observed that, where there was greater creativity and transparency in communication methods, asylum-seekers felt more protected and stakeholders were more informed of asylum-seekers' current needs and concerns. For example, when city officials coordinate with local diaspora groups to meet with asylum-seekers in community spaces (such as community centers, churches, or schools) in order to present information and to listen, in turn, to asylum-seekers' needs, concerns, and other feedback, this in-person exchange allows for meaningful two-way communication in locations accessible to the population. Also, sharing accurate and reliable information through WhatsApp and Facebook groups helps ensure information quickly reaches its audience.

Feedback and response

"Receiving complaints and responding to them is central to accountability, impact, and learning. A good community complaints mechanism will serve several ends. First, it assists with transparency by creating a channel for people to register concerns. Second, it provides a mechanism for people to report misconduct and the abuse of power by the organization or staff, e.g. the exploitation and abuse of vulnerable groups. Third, it provides unique and invaluable sources of information to be used for better project management and outcomes."[34]

For programs to be accountable, clear and functional mechanisms must be established for soliciting, receiving, and responding to feedback and complaints from affected people, with confidentiality assured when necessary. Feedback mechanisms should be easily identifiable and accessible, and, whenever possible, parallel or duplicate mechanisms should be avoided. For example, in a temporary shelter setting, asylum-seekers should be made aware from the time of their intake which entity or entities are responsible for receiving feedback and complaints and how asylum-seekers can report to them.

Programs should seek feedback proactively, which can be done through mechanisms such as community meetings, structured interviews or focus groups, confidential and/or anonymous electronic or material complaint boxes, information desks, hotlines, and SMS campaigns. As part of a situational analysis, the Reception Coordinator or an assigned subgroup should map existing methods for asylum-seekers to communicate feedback and receive a reply in turn, including feedback channels set up by other stakeholder agencies and local authorities. This will make clear what channels can be built on rather than creating duplicate systems and what barriers different groups face in providing feedback or reporting complaints. Following the mapping exercise, stakeholders should develop standard operating procedures (SOPs) that define stakeholder duties and responsibilities related to implementing and publicizing feedback as well as complaint mechanisms and how asylum-seekers may engage with those mechanisms.

In addition to ascertaining the best way to solicit and receive feedback, it is also important to determine how to respond, in effect closing the feedback loop, both at the individual and

ACCESS TO INFORMATION ▸ ACCESSIBLE AVENUES TO MAKE COMPLAINTS ▸ REFERRAL PATHWAYS ▸ RESOLUTION ▸ FEEDBACK
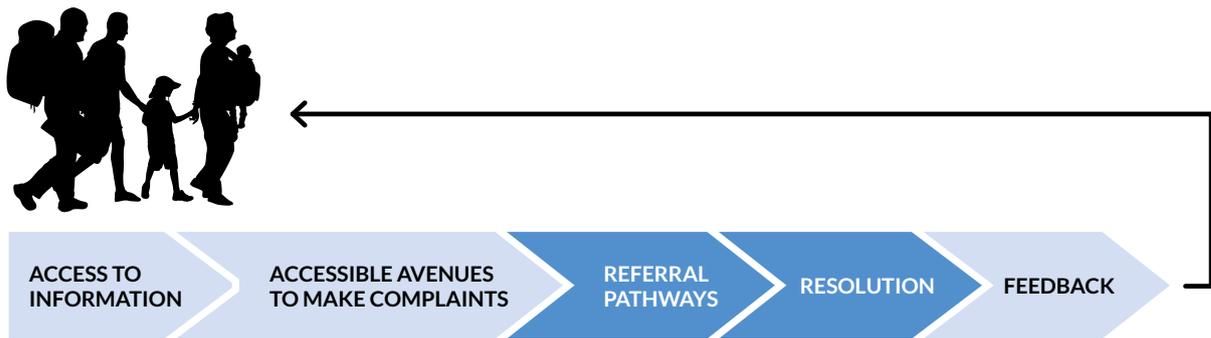
Source: AAP Operational Guidance, UNHCR

community level. It is often a challenge for stakeholders to respond in a meaningful way to individuals' complaints and feedback due to various constraints. Nevertheless, maintaining communication with the reporting individual or community group helps build and maintain trust through transparency and accountability.

Learning and adaptation

"Design, monitor and evaluate the goals and objectives of programmes with the involvement of persons of concern, feeding learning back into the organization on an ongoing basis and reporting on the results of the process."[35]

"The ultimate goal of AAP is programming that is informed by, and adapted to, the voices, perceptions and needs expressed by affected people."[36]

To achieve this AAP standard, humanitarian programs must develop clear procedures to collect, store, analyze, report on, and disseminate feedback data. In this way, programs can ensure they are systematically listening and responding to the views of affected people. Programmatic changes and decisions that are made may be clearly linked to community participation and feedback.

Recalling the importance of establishing a feedback loop, humanitarian stakeholders build trust by clearly explaining changes that have been made because of feedback. Transparency is also maintained when explanations are given as to why certain actions or responses were not taken. Even when the desired response cannot be given, it is important to close the feedback loop. Not receiving any response can heighten

frustration and erode trust in the feedback mechanisms overall.

Protection of Particularly Vulnerable Groups and Prevention of Exploitation

People on the move in mixed movement situations, including asylum-seekers, are at a heightened level of vulnerability.[37] Asylum-seekers, by definition, fear or have experienced persecution, conflict, or violence at home and have left their home country to seek safety. Some may be survivors of gender-based violence. Some may be survivors of torture. Pregnant people, the elderly, disabled individuals, and those seeking protection because of their gender identity or sexuality also have particular needs for protection. Asylum-seeking children—in particular those who made the journey unaccompanied—face additional challenges, as their lives are disrupted during key developmental stages and their key supports, family and home, are at risk. Without appropriate supports, asylum-seekers remain vulnerable even once they reach their destinations.

All individuals have the right to be protected from exploitation and abuse. However, newly arrived asylum-seekers may be unaware of their rights or how to assert them in the United States. To ensure asylum-seekers are protected and not re-traumatized, reception systems must plan for their protection from sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) and other risks. Such planning must include means to ensure that targeted assistance and support is available to individuals who have been victims of SEA and that asylum-seekers know how to access

those means. Furthermore, measures should be taken to implement safeguards to prevent such harm from occurring within any program directly serving asylum-seekers.

Key safeguards include:

- Informing individuals of their rights to be protected from exploitation and abuse, regardless of their immigration status (including federal, state, and local rights related to employment, healthcare, education, personal safety, interactions with law enforcement, and protection for people with disabilities, children, elder adults, and LGBTIQ+ individuals);

- Thorough recruitment of staff and volunteers (including background checks, orientation on zero-tolerance policy on SEA, and a signed code of conduct);

- Training for staff and volunteers on protection from SEA (PSEA), trauma-informed care, and related topics; and

- Ensuring a complaint process is in place and accessible to all so that asylum-seekers may safely and confidentially report complaints. Building accountability into programming supports both the service providers and those receiving services.

Through an AAP approach that includes deliberate engagement with the most

Training is key to staff and volunteers' ability to create a protective environment in shelters and in other settings where individuals are served, to identify individuals who have experienced harm or are at risk of harm, and to provide appropriate assistance.

vulnerable, the protection concerns across the population of asylum-seekers can be best identified. Asylum-seeker input is also integral to designing and implementing services and specific interventions that are responsive and accountable to their various needs and vulnerabilities. Such services and interventions must be accessible to everyone no matter their age, gender, preferred language, and other characteristics.

Training on working with vulnerable individuals

The strengthening of staff and volunteer expertise enables better-quality care and services to asylum-seekers, helping ensure their immediate safety and wellbeing as well as that of the staff and volunteers. Many

Spotlight on Labor Exploitation

Asylum-seekers, both adults and children, are at a heightened risk of labor exploitation due to lengthy waiting periods to obtain work authorization, lack of awareness of worker protections in the United States, vulnerability due to lack of permanent immigration status and fear of reprisal by employers, and the documented failures to fully enforce labor laws in the United States. Unauthorized workers often face employer non-compliance with mandatory minimum wage laws and child labor laws, wage theft, and overwork, but are not aware of remedies to address these abuses. Children, especially those who arrived unaccompanied, are particularly vulnerable to work exploitation and trafficking. Local asylum-seeker reception systems should ensure that all arriving asylum-seekers are provided with at least a basic orientation to U.S. labor laws and protection mechanisms.

The U.S. Department of Labor's YouthRules! Initiative provides information about state and federal labor laws that apply to youth workers, including in the Young Worker Toolkit, which presents fact sheets and Know Your Rights (KYR) videos in Spanish and English among other resources.

individuals providing immediate support are volunteers or professionals without formal training related to working with survivors of trauma or other vulnerable populations; yet these volunteers may encounter individuals who are in crisis, have recently undergone traumatic experiences in their home countries or during their journeys, or who may be vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. This applies to all staff, including shelter security staff, who may have frequent client contact at shelters or community centers and may be called upon to respond to an urgent situation but who have not had prior experience with asylum-seeking populations. Training is key to staff and volunteers' ability to create a protective environment in shelters and in other settings where individuals are served, to identify individuals who have experienced harm or are at risk of harm, and to provide appropriate assistance.

Introductory training for volunteers and staff should include principles of trauma-informed care and psychological first-aid skills. It is important to also provide guidance on how to identify and respond to specific protection concerns when they arise (i.e., sex or labor trafficking, domestic abuse, and other harm), including how to report these concerns to the appropriate supervisory structures. In addition, guidance on how to provide culturally sensitive services along with tips for communicating through interpreters can help avoid miscommunication. It is also important to train frontline staff, volunteers, and managers to recognize and respond to signs of burnout and vicarious trauma in themselves and each other, and to ensure that frontline workers know how and where to seek further support when needed.

UNHCR's Border Shelter Toolkit includes numerous relevant resources for individuals and organizations working with asylum-seekers, in particular in the following chapters: Safety and Security, Onboarding and Training Procedures for Staff and Volunteers, Mental Health and Psychosocial Support, and Protection from Exploitation and Abuse.

Additional resources for service providers include:

Guidance

- The UN Children's Fund's (UNICEF) field guide, Mental Health & Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) for Families at the US-Mexico Border.

- UNHCR's tip sheets on applying the UNHCR Age, Gender and Diversity Policy for LGBTIQ+ persons, youth, persons with disabilities, older people, minorities and indigenous peoples, and children.

- UNHCR and the Human Rights Center at UC Berkeley School of Law, The Silence I Carry: Disclosing gender-based violence in forced displacement, and the report's associated Practitioners' Toolkit for Mexico, by the Center for Human Rights, Gender and Migration at Washington University's Institute for Public Health.

- The Antares Foundation's Managing Stress in Humanitarian Workers: Guidelines for Good Practice.

Trainings

- UN (UNICEF, UNHCR, UNDP, UN Women, UNFPA) training: Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA).

- UNHCR and IOM's training package: SOGIESC and working with LGBTIQ+ persons in forced displacement (12-module safeguarding course).

- Kaya, the global learning platform of the Humanitarian Leadership Academy, offers numerous free courses by UN agencies, international NGOs, and other organizations on a variety of humanitarian topics.

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Facilitating Access to Immediate Support, Resources, and Social Services

Everyone, including asylum-seekers, has the right to realize an adequate standard of living.[38] Food, housing, medical care, including for mental health, and education, among other needs, should be made available to those in need. In attaining these rights, asylum-seekers have the right to freely receive services and participate in reception activities.[39]

Asylum-seekers by and large exhibit tremendous resourcefulness to have made their way to the United States, persevering despite the harm they may have experienced both in their home countries and during their journeys. When confronted with new systems in a new language and in a new place, the help of supportive services, both at arrival and as needed throughout their legal process, greatly increases individuals' ability to meet their basic needs and get on a path to stability.

A comprehensive reception system includes a spectrum of immediate reception and ongoing social services support while recognizing the importance of flexibility in interventions, as everyone's circumstances and needs are different. Along with one's personal characteristics, additional factors impact what type of support is needed, such as family composition and size, availability of a support network, personal assets, education and work experience, physical and emotional health, and

an individual's reasons for leaving their home country, including a potential history of trauma or torture. Coordinated reception systems generally focus on an initial period after an individual's arrival. However, it is important that asylum-seekers who have been living in the community for some time and those who may have been released from short- or long-term immigration detention also know how to access services if a need arises. It is important that asylum-seekers who have been in the United State for some time are not barred from accessing the same services and support offered to recent arrivals.

Each intervention described below requires distinct levels of funding, oversight, staffing, and stakeholder involvement. Localities' consideration for how best to deploy human, financial, and infrastructural resources should be informed by their situational analysis, answering among other questions:

- What resources, programs, and benefits should be available to asylum-seekers in the short and long term?

- Which stakeholders can carry out needed interventions at each level of support?

- What are the actual and/or perceived barriers to accessing available resources and programs?

In its conversations with stakeholders and asylum-seekers, UNHCR observed that social services' support interventions are most successful when they engage all service providers together in a conversation with the goal of ensuring services are complementary.

Immediate Support to Meet Basic Needs

Immediate support to asylum-seekers encompasses those services aiming to meet an individual's urgent needs at a particular moment in time. This type of support most commonly is delivered at the time of first contact with a newly arrived asylum-seeker, but urgent basic needs can arise at any point. Immediate support interventions typically provide access to such

Source: Age, Gender and Diversity, UNHCR

things as food, water, basic first aid, childcare products, personal hygiene products, and seasonal clothing and shoes. They also connect individuals with urgent medical care and emergency and/or short-term shelter supports.

The following are possible immediate support interventions that coordinated response entities may consider implementing:

New arrival greeting programs at transportation hubs:

In locations where groups of asylum-seekers arrive regularly by bus or airplane after being processed at the southern border, UNHCR observed that local groups (often grassroots or community organizations, sometimes accompanied by local officials) greet asylum-seekers upon arrival and provide basic, immediate support, including connecting individuals with urgent medical needs to emergency care. Coordinating entities might establish basic resource pantries near transportation hubs, which greeters may use to provide such things as nonperishable food, seasonal clothing, and childcare and hygiene items. For individuals seeking to settle elsewhere, the local groups can help facilitate onward travel and provide assistance contacting family or friends. For individuals settling locally, they can direct new

arrivals to a shelter if needed and provide basic legal and orientation information.

Localities with generally steady or low rates of arrivals might consider the creation of a local telephone hotline that asylum-seekers may use upon arrival to get connected with shelter support and urgent medical care. When evaluating the utility of this intervention method, coordinating entities must determine how to make the hotline maximally accessible. This perhaps may be accomplished by installing a direct-line telephone at main points of arrival

Appropriately trained and supervised volunteers, community members, and paraprofessionals can act as resource navigators who provide much-needed support to asylum-seekers. They can help to fill a gap in localities where there are insufficient resources or professional personnel to launch formal case management programs.

and by conducting community outreach and engagement programming with management at transportation hubs so that they can identify arriving asylum-seekers and provide them with this hotline number.

Ultimately, immediate support providers and programs should be connected and in open communication with broader reception coordination entities. Thereby, there can be clear and up-to-date communication regarding asylum-seeker arrivals (including numbers, demographics, immediate needs, and more) that can better inform local decision-making. Additionally, continued coordination enables better financial support and oversight of immediate support interventions already in implementation, which is essential since these

programs often are provided by volunteer community groups.

Resource Navigation Support

Resource navigation interventions are those which connect individuals to needed material resources or other support services in the community to advance their self-reliance and wellbeing. Resource navigation interventions are non-clinical and do not involve ongoing monitoring or follow-up with individuals. They are, therefore, an economical approach as part of a reception response that also includes more involved interventions when needed. Commonly, resource navigators will meet with an asylum-seeker a limited number of times to assist that asylum-seeker with accessing a needed resource or service. Resource navigators can do this by:

- Orienting a newly arrived individual to certain services in a community and providing basic information on how to access those services.

- Assisting an individual with applying for a resource or benefit for which they are eligible. Common barriers include the unavailability of an application in the asylum-seeker's native language, an online only application process, and other specific instructions that may be difficult for a new arrival to follow precisely.

- Providing asylum-seekers a warm handoff (usually via an email or telephone call) to a local service provider. This method is for those asylum-seekers who may benefit from additional assistance but who may not need formal case management services (as described below).

- Assessing whether an individual has particular vulnerabilities or needs requiring ongoing support, and making a referral to case management or clinical services programs where appropriate.

In order to design and implement effective resource navigation programs, coordinated reception entities must understand the range of resources asylum-seekers may need to access

during their legal process. Situational analyses and participatory assessments that consult local stakeholders and asylum-seekers directly can inform localities of which resources are most needed. Asylum-seekers will likely need to access a variety of resources across the domains (legal, housing, healthcare, education, and community integration).

Ultimately, resource navigation support is only useful when it can connect asylum-seekers to supports that exist in the community. Where assessments show that a commonly needed resource is unavailable or inaccessible to asylum-seekers, such as with legal assistance or healthcare programs, coordinated response entities may determine how they might increase availability and/or accessibility through policy action or resource allocation.

Best practices in resource navigation

Resource navigation interventions are incredibly versatile, as they can be staffed in a variety of ways and delivered in various settings. Appropriately trained and supervised volunteers, community members, and paraprofessionals can act as resource navigators who provide much-needed support to asylum-seekers. They can help to fill a gap in localities where there are insufficient resources or professional personnel to launch formal case management programs.

Localities may consider funding local NGOs for both resource navigation and case management services, so that in complement they can more efficiently assist asylum-seekers. With appropriate training, resource navigators may conduct vulnerability assessments to identify individuals' needs for ongoing social services support and make referrals to case management or clinical services programs. As part of the assessment, resource navigators can ask individuals if they received psychosocial or other assistance in their home countries or along the journey, and if so, whether they would want the navigator to help connect the past and current service providers. Such a step can help minimize possible re-traumatization. For global guidance on vulnerability assessments in the context of asylum and migration systems, see the Vulnerability Screening Tool, jointly developed by UNHCR and the International Detention Coalition.

Resource navigators should be aware of asylum-seekers' most common needs for support, of local resources, and how to access those resources. They should also have an awareness of the challenges that asylum-seekers face in meeting their ongoing needs independently, including cultural and linguistic considerations, and should work to mitigate barriers to access and empower asylum-seekers to advocate for their own needs. Paraprofessionals, especially

Resource Navigation in Action

La Colaborativa, an immigrant services non-profit organization, provides resource navigation support through several complementary interventions in communities in and around Boston, Massachusetts. La Colaborativa provides walk-in services to new clients in which an asylum-seeker is assessed for any emergency needs. If there are urgent needs, the individual is referred directly to the in-house crisis support team, which includes trained case managers and clinicians. In non-urgent situations, clients are given follow-up appointments with program staff for resource navigation support and are invited to participate in bi-weekly community outreach events. These bi-weekly community outreach events bring together multiple local stakeholders, including representatives from the local school system, nurses, legal services professionals, to act as a one-stop resource shop for newly arrived asylum-seekers. At these events, presentations orient newcomers to the Chelsea community. La Colaborativa has also partnered with local immigration legal service providers to provide, at a minimum, Know Your Rights (KYR) presentations to everyone interested. Sometimes it has also been able to facilitate pro bono legal consultations for asylum-seekers in attendance.

those with relevant, lived experience (such as asylees or refugees), can be invaluable assets to the resource navigation process, as they may more readily understand barriers to access and how to mitigate these at the individual and systemic levels.

In addition to their presence at bus stations and other transportation hubs, resource navigators can be deployed to work in various other settings to best reach the asylum-seeker population. These include but are not limited to:

- **Welcome centers:** Various localities, including New York City and Chicago, have operated dedicated resource centers to provide resource navigation support and access to city and community services onsite to asylum-seekers. At these centers, individuals can easily access co-located resources, such as public benefit enrollment support, urgent medical care, legal help, and identification and transportation assistance. Various considerations, such as accessibility and the manner and rate of asylum-seeker arrivals, will govern whether centers are best operated as a standalone site or hosted at participating community organizations. Ideally, the model seeks to be an effective and efficient way for asylum-seekers to access information and services and for city and community stakeholders to deliver them, particularly in communities receiving significant numbers of new arrivals.

- **Social services centers:** A community's network of neighborhood-based social services hubs, often operated by local departments of health and human services to handle applications for public benefits, can be adapted to also serve as a sort of resource center for asylum-seekers. Coordinating entities may assess the feasibility of co-locating resource navigation support staff or providing direct service providers (such as legal, medical, school enrollment, or case management providers) at such sites in neighborhoods where many asylum-seekers settle.

- **Respite shelters:** Where localities provide short-term, respite shelter to all arriving asylum-seekers, these shelters can be a key locus for resource navigation and case management. Resource navigators at short-term shelters commonly assist asylum-seekers with enrollment in health insurance where available and with food and childcare assistance programs, even during abbreviated shelter stays. They can track which asylum-seekers have received legal information or assistance and work to ensure all are provided legal information prior to departing the short-term shelter.

Case Management

Case management programs provide ongoing, individualized support to individuals or families who need assistance beyond what immediate support or resource navigation programs can provide. Case management programs typically serve clients with multiple concurrent needs that they are unable to meet independently. Such programs endeavor to meet a client's urgent needs while increasing that client's confidence and self-sufficiency over time. While case management services may include a resource navigation component, they are longer in duration and greater in scope of services. At the outset, a case manager will conduct an initial needs assessment to identify a client's strengths and needs. This helps the case manager develop a service plan with the individual in order to meet their goals over a predetermined timeline of engagement. Case management interventions should be strengths-based and should emphasize the belief that everyone has the right to self-determination and has inherent capacity to achieve their goals.

Effective case management programs are trauma-informed as well as culturally and linguistically responsive. All program staff and managers must be familiar with the realities and challenges faced by asylum-seekers en route to and once in the United States. Case management staff should also be trained to identify mental health warning signs (including signs of self-harm), provide non-clinical support where needed, and determine when it is

necessary to connect clients with clinical or therapeutic services.

Case management programs are more resource- and staffing-intensive than immediate support and resource navigation programs. However, they can provide essential support to particularly vulnerable asylum-seekers whose past trauma or current realities are hindering them from pursuing their claim for legal protection. Case managers can provide a sense of safety and stability for clients in an overwhelming situation.

What Did Asylum-Seekers Say?

"[My case manager] understands what I have been through, and she is there when I need her, so I trust her." —a single mother from Venezuela

Clinical and Therapeutic Services

Given that asylum-seekers have almost universally survived some form of harm or trauma in their home countries or while en route to the United States, it follows that many may need clinical services. Commonly, asylum-seekers may experience symptoms such as anxiety, depression, sleep disturbances, feelings of isolation, hopelessness, confusion, fear, and even memory or cognitive challenges, among other emotions and behaviors. It is important to understand that many stress responses and mental health symptoms are normal human reactions to abnormal situations and should not be considered irregular or inappropriate.

The mental health needs of asylum-seekers are an important consideration in the delivery of reception services. Outside of a mental health screening, trained case managers are generally the best suited among typical reception service providers to identify when an individual would benefit from clinical services. There is a great need for linguistically and culturally competent mental health providers and for mental health providers generally. It is important that communities seek, to the greatest extent possible, to expand access to clinical and therapeutic services for asylum-seekers through better identification of existing programs for which an individual might be eligible, through expanded eligibility criteria, and through investment in additional services. While clinical and therapeutic interventions require professional staffing and oversight, it is important that asylum-seekers who are experiencing emotional or psychological challenges and who want to access services are supported so they may find stability and move their legal cases forward.

Select resources:

- The Mental Health Technology Transfer Network has developed an extensive list of mental health resources focused on refugees and asylum-seekers in the United States.

- UNICEF developed guidance specific to asylum-seekers crossing the U.S. southern border, Mental Health and Psychosocial Support for Families at the US-Mexico Border. See this and other related resources included in UNHCR's Border Shelter Toolkit.

- For comprehensive guidance focused on humanitarian settings, see UNICEF's Operational Guidelines: Community-Based Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Humanitarian Settings and the Interagency Standing Committee Guidelines on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings.

Identification Requirements for Asylum-Seekers

Many asylum-seekers arrive in the United States with few possessions and sometimes having limited or no identity documents. It is important that refugees and asylum-seekers be provided documentation to establish their identity,[40] as this facilitates access to a wide range of activities and benefits, such as registering births, contracting marriage, obtaining housing, obtaining employment, enrolling in school, opening a bank account, or enrolling in social benefits programs. In addition, asylum-seekers who are not able to prove their identity are less able to participate in and integrate into their new communities, which can negatively impact their emotional wellbeing.

A growing number of cities offer a municipal photographic identification card that are made available to local residents regardless of immigration status; many also accept a broader list of U.S. and foreign documents to prove identity. One example is the IDNYC program, which provides New York City residents access to city services and buildings, including health, housing, and other public benefits programs; the ability to open bank accounts at select financial institutions; and various other benefits, including serving as a library card and free or reduced admission to area museums and other attractions.

Many social services programs have broadened the identification requirements to allow asylum-seekers without U.S. government-issued identification to prove their identity and residency as another way to facilitate asylum-seeker access. For example, an expanded list of foreign documents can serve as proof of identity. Also, letters attesting to an asylum-seeker's residence are accepted in lieu of commonly required evidence that can be difficult to obtain for asylum-seekers, such as a utility bill.

Legal Services

All individuals are equal before the law and are entitled to protection from discrimination in any field regulated and protected by public authorities.[41] Asylum-seekers have the right to freely seek and receive legal information, advice, and representation.[42] The right to due process in a fair and efficient asylum hearing also includes the free assistance of an interpreter, among other requirements.[43] UNHCR reiterates the right of asylum-seekers to be represented by counsel and its position that government facilitation of and funding for legal aid is a critical safeguard in asylum processing.[44]

An individual's immigration status plays a significant role in their safety, wellbeing, and ability to reunite with family and integrate into the community. Access to legal services is paramount in assisting individuals obtain the immigration status and benefits to which they may be entitled. However, it is easier said than done connecting individuals to the legal support needed to navigate a complex and lengthy process, whether it be for asylum or other forms of protection, or for simple matters that implicate access to protection—such as address changes, employment authorization applications, or even to support asylum-seekers navigating complex alternatives to detention check ins. With nearly 1.6 million pending asylum

applications in the United States[45] and more submitted each year, individuals often must wait years before a decision is made regarding their status. As a result, the demand for free or low-cost immigration legal services exceeds the available help. Nevertheless, legal support at the outset of an individual's case is often pivotal to the outcome, and there are feasible ways for communities to meaningfully bolster asylum-seekers access to such support.

In the interviews UNHCR conducted, recently arrived asylum-seekers shared that legal support is one of their most pressing needs. They saw legal status as integral to finding safety and stability in the long term, alongside the ability to obtain lawful employment, which is a priority in the short term. Interviews with other stakeholders working with arriving asylum-seekers reinforced the point that when asylum-seekers are provided basic legal support early in their immigration process, they are able to seek and obtain employment authorization in a more timely fashion and thereby access jobs with greater accountability to worker protection laws. Asylum-seekers who obtain employment authorization are more likely to achieve financial self-sufficiency, easing community integration and drawing less on financial and social support interventions. They are also less vulnerable to labor exploitation.

To support communities considering how to bolster the available legal support to asylum-seekers, this section does three things:

1 Provides a brief overview of the asylum process;

2 Outlines three main types of legal access interventions and what specific legal needs they address; and

3 Provides best practice recommendations and resources for cities and community stakeholders.

Asylum Process Overview

Under U.S. law, people who flee their countries because they fear persecution or have

In the interviews UNHCR conducted, recently arrived asylum-seekers shared that legal support is one of their most pressing needs. They saw legal status as integral to finding safety and stability in the long term, alongside the ability to obtain lawful employment, which is a priority in the short term.

experienced past persecution on account of their race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group can apply for asylum. A grant of asylum allows the individual to remain in the United States instead of being removed back to their country of feared or experienced persecution.

There are two general pathways to claim asylum in the United States: the affirmative and defensive processes.* The affirmative asylum process is for individuals who are not in removal proceedings and who apply for asylum before U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services. The defensive asylum process is for individuals who are in removal proceedings and who apply for asylum before an immigration judge in the Executive Office for Immigration Review as a defense against removal. Asylum-seekers are required to apply for asylum within one year of arrival unless they can demonstrate extraordinary circumstances that establish their eligibility for an exception (including maintaining

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* In mid-2022, however, in addition to these pathways, the government began to implement a new procedure within the context of expedited removal on a relatively small scale that combines some elements of both. See Procedures for Credible Fear Screening and Consideration of Asylum, Withholding of Removal, and CAT Protection Claims by Asylum Officers, 87 Fed. Reg. 18078 (Mar. 29, 2022). Asylum-seeking adults and families who recently crossed the border and historically were subject to a defensive process now may have the opportunity to have their claim heard first by a USCIS asylum officer in a non-adversarial interview. The asylum officer can either grant protection or refer the case to an immigration judge, who considers the claim anew. The complex procedure involves a rapid timeframe, as it appears all steps are to be completed within six months.

parole status until a reasonable period before filing the asylum application).

Under U.S. immigration law, individuals with a pending asylum application are first eligible to seek employment authorization 150 days after their asylum application was received and are eligible to receive the employment authorization document once 180 days have passed since receipt of the asylum application. There is no fee for an asylum-seeker's initial request for employment authorization. Depending on the circumstances of an individual's situation, there also might be other avenues to pursue employment authorization. One such means is that of individuals who have been paroled into the country and who may be eligible to seek employment authorization immediately based on their parole status. Ensuring access to legal services is critical in order to help individuals promptly identify what their options are.

Once an individual is granted asylum, first and foremost they are protected indefinitely from being returned to their home country. They are authorized to work, incident to their status as an asylee, and can apply for a refugee travel document in order to travel overseas and petition for their spouse and/or unmarried children under 21 to derive asylee status and join them in the United States if currently abroad. After one year, asylees are eligible to become lawful permanent residents and and later naturalized U.S. citizens. Also, asylees are eligible for certain Office of Refugee Resettlement programs and benefits and other public benefits.

It is important to also note that individuals who do not qualify for or who are barred from asylum but can otherwise demonstrate the requisite level of harm suffered or risk thereof may be eligible for other forms of protection, specifically withholding of removal or relief under the Convention Against Torture (CAT). Unlike asylum, which is a discretionary form of protection in the United States, both statuses are mandatory—that is, if the eligibility requirements are met, protection must be granted. Individuals granted withholding of removal or relief under CAT can remain and work lawfully in the United States, but neither status provides a path to permanent residency and citizenship or family reunification. Individuals who are not granted asylum or other form of legal relief may be subject to removal from the United States.

Access to Legal Services

Ensuring asylum-seekers legal access is an effective intervention for both the asylum-seeker and the receiving community. It addresses an asylum-seeker's right to information about the asylum process and provides the necessary support to navigate the process so that they can fully exercise their right to seek asylum. It also supports asylum-seekers with related legal processes, including change of address forms, employment authorization applications, and immigration check-ins for alternative to detention programs. The vast majority of asylum-seekers living in a community while moving through the immigration process attend their immigration court hearings and engage with their legal case

A Network for Legal Empowerment in Asylum Proceedings

Given the strong need and desire for legal access, community organizations may want to consider connecting with the Justice Power network, a group of legal empowerment organizations across the United States. Legal empowerment is a process by which individuals and communities work together to use and shape the law, engaging in creative, community-centered approaches to help asylum-seekers and others get through complex legal processes. The Justice Power network highlights legal empowerment strategies that communities can use to advance asylum-seekers' rights, many of which are discussed in this section. The network, whose creation was supported by UNHCR, provides toolkits for accompaniment, form-filling clinics, hotlines, tech innovations, and more.

processes until their conclusion, in particular when supported with access to appropriate legal support, including representation.[46]

When considering how to coordinate and expand access to legal services strategically, it is helpful to consider what is most needed when and who can provide it across three areas of legal service provision: **information, assistance,** and **representation**.

Legal information

In line with the AAP principles on participation and communication, providing reliable legal information to asylum-seekers is a key intervention that supports the individual's informed decision-making in the short term, which can impact wellbeing and prospects for long-term stability. The provision of legal information orients asylum-seekers through the immigration legal system and informs them of the types of legal relief available as well as their rights and duties within the legal process. Having a better understanding of the process moving forward also helps lower individuals' levels of stress.

Knowing that the lack of affordable legal representation results in the majority of asylum-seekers having to pursue at least the start of their immigration cases *pro se* (meaning on

What Did Asylum-Seekers Say?

All the individuals interviewed expressed the desire for more legal information. Most had been living for more than two months in the city where they were interviewed, but less than half recalled having attended a Know Your Rights (KYR) presentation. Instead, many described having obtained legal information informally from various sources, including other asylum-seekers.

Individuals spoke of the anxiety and stress they felt about possibly missing key steps in their asylum case as it was moving forward, which was only worsened by the number of rumors spreading in their community.

one's own behalf), the provision of accurate legal information soon after an individual arrives in the United States can be particularly useful. Some individuals may receive limited information about their immediate next steps when detained or when passing through one of the shelters working at the southern border, but even so, individuals require a more comprehensive set of information after having arrived in their destination community.

Know Your Rights presentations. A common best practice in the efficient delivery of legal information are Know Your Rights (KYR) presentations given by qualified legal professionals, in which asylum-seekers can ask general follow-up questions and receive written KYR materials to reference. Localities have successfully supported KYR workshops when they are sustainably funded, engage multiple stakeholders, have outreach strategies that ensure asylum-seekers are made aware of their existence, are conducted regularly at locations that are easily accessible to asylum-seekers, or when technology is leveraged to achieve scale.[47]

Telephonic hotlines. Various communities have set up legal information hotlines with operators who can provide basic orientation information pertinent to asylum-seekers and inform callers of other local legal access resources. The Justice Power network has been conducting a multi-year initiative related to legal access for immigrants and refugees, including an assessment of the hotline model and a focus on four legal hotline projects. Two other hotlines featured in the UNHCR Border Shelter Toolkit are CWS' Call Center and RAICES' Canopy Hotline.

Other Legal Information Resources

- UNHCR provides information about the asylum process, along with *pro se* guides and country-of-origin information reports.

- UNHCR and CWS developed a sample "onward movement packet" to orient newly arrived asylum-seekers, available in 14 languages.

- National Immigrant Justice Center (NIJC) in Chicago, IL produced print and video KYR

resources for asylum-seekers, available in English and Spanish.

- Immigrant Legal Assistance Project (ILAP), located in Portland, ME, has produced extensive KYR and *pro se* materials for asylum-seekers, including recorded asylum workshops and a series of self-help videos. It also contributed to the *Self-Help Asylum Guide: Seeking Protection in the United States*, available in English, Spanish, French, and Portuguese.

- The Asylum Seeker Advocacy Project (ASAP), the largest digital network of asylum-seekers nationally, publishes legal information, in particular on employment authorization, in English and Spanish.

Legal Assistance

Legal assistance provides tailored legal information to individual asylum-seekers who do not have legal representation. Legal assistance

It is important that volunteers who are not qualified legal professionals are trained on the rules regarding the unauthorized practice of immigration law and do not provide legal advice.

can be provided by qualified professionals or volunteers trained and overseen by legal professionals. Legal assistance may be provided on an individual basis or via group workshops held in-person or virtually. On an individual basis, legal assistance usually comprises a one-time consultation with legal service professionals who can help asylum-seekers understand their immigration documents and potentially explore possible forms of legal relief for which the person may be eligible.

Group legal assistance is often organized as workshops where asylum-seekers may have individual consultations with legal service professionals. These professionals may also take an additional step and assist asylum-seekers with moving their legal claims forward pro se. The latter type of workshop, known commonly as a pro se clinic, convenes legal service providers and other community volunteers to provide legal information, case consultations, and assistance with completing and filing immigration documents (such as change of address requests and asylum applications). It is important that volunteers who are not qualified legal professionals are trained on the rules regarding the unauthorized practice of immigration law and do not provide legal advice.

Pro se clinics are an innovative and necessary solution to meet the high level of demand for free and low-cost legal providers. However, they are not a substitute for legal representation, which remains the best course for ensuring an individual can pursue their asylum claim to the fullest extent possible, especially in an increasingly complex process. Rather, pro se clinics should be seen as a valuable tool when full legal representation is not available. For more information on pro se assistance clinics, the Justice Power network explores the impact clinics can have and highlights three different programs. Also, the American Bar Association (ABA) Commission on Immigration developed guidance and resources for legal service providers implementing pro se clinics for Afghan nationals paroled into the United States.

Legal Representation

Having legal representation helps ensure due process is met and strengthens an asylum-seeker's ability to present their claim for protection. Due to the circumstances of their flight, asylum-seekers are typically highly motivated to pursue their legal cases to completion, a trend which is only strengthened with the support of legal representation. Data from the immigration courts shows that 99% of represented asylum-seeking families

attended every court hearing (data collected September 2018 through May 2019)[48] and that representation boosted the appearance rates of all non-detained individuals (not just asylum-seekers) at all court hearings from 83% to 96% (2008 to 2018).[49] Legal representation also has a meaningful impact on grant rates. Asylum-seekers are three times more likely to be granted asylum when represented in their claim (2013–2022).[50]

With the ultimate goal of legal representation for the duration of each individual's immigration proceedings in mind, the following are selected models that can increase asylum-seekers' access to representation:

Universal Representation. While individuals' right to legal representation in immigration proceedings is generally not at government expense, there is a growing movement for government funded universal representation for all individuals in removal proceedings. This work, led by Vera's Advancing Universal Representation Initiative, advocates federally-funded legal representation for anyone facing removal and provides support for state and local jurisdictions, legal service providers, and community advocates to create publicly funded universal representation programs through the SAFE (Safety & Fairness for Everyone) Network. States, counties, and cities have adopted various models to implement universal representation. The Advancing Universal Representation Toolkit highlights the best practices from those programs and equips policy makers and other stakeholders to advance universal representation in their own area.

Department of Justice Accredited Representation Programs. One way that legal service providers have bolstered capacity is by expanding their Accredited Representative programs, through which non-attorney professionals may be certified to practice immigration law. The Department of Justice (DOJ) Office of Legal Access Programs operates the Recognition and Accreditation program, which certifies certain non-profit organizations that serve low-income individuals to employ

Accredited Representative Training Programs

To become accredited, an individual must take at least one immigration law course and demonstrate sufficient experience in immigration law. Below are two approved courses:

- **Catholic Legal Immigration Network (CLINIC) Comprehensive Overview of Immigration Law (COIL) course.** This course is offered several times per year. It is a six-week accelerated e-course that meets the DOJ requirement for accreditation. Learn more here.

- **Villanova Interdisciplinary Immigration Studies Training for Advocates (VIISTA):** Villanova University offers an online, three-module certificate course that meets training requirements for partial and full accreditation. The course begins three times per year; learn more here.

non-attorneys, "accredited representatives," to provide legal representation to immigrants before U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) and in immigration court. All the legal service providers interviewed that employ accredited representatives commented that they have been invaluable assets for expanding representation for asylum-seekers and universally recommended the model.

Organizations can deploy their legal staff strategically so that accredited representatives can provide legal assistance—provide legal information through KYR presentations, conduct individual case consultations, and assist with *pro se* clinics—which eases the demand on attorneys, who can in turn accept additional or more complex cases for asylum-seekers in need. Accredited representation programs are also a way that individuals with lived experience (such as immigrants, refugees, and asylees, who often face barriers to a legal career in the United States) may provide legal access to asylum-seekers.

Limited scope representation

Many legal service providers operate pro bono programs in which they enlist and mentor private immigration or non-immigration attorneys who are willing to provide representation to immigrants throughout their immigration cases.

As the duration of asylum cases increases, it is challenging to attract and retain pro bono attorneys for such long periods of engagement, which has led to broader use of limited scope representation.

The ABA Commission on Immigration and HIAS have partnered to develop a "Pro Se+" program, in which pro bono attorneys engage in limited scope representation for Afghan asylum cases brought before USCIS. In this program, volunteer attorneys represent asylum-seekers through completion and submission of their asylum applications. HIAS and the ABA provide mentorship to volunteer attorneys through weekly office hours, and review the asylum applications before they are submitted to USCIS. In this way, asylum-seekers who might otherwise not have been able to obtain high-quality legal representation received it for at least the key initial phase of their case.

For community organizations fielding interest from volunteer lawyers, they may consider reaching out to the Immigration Justice Campaign at the American Immigration Lawyers' Association, which offers individual mentorship to pro bono attorneys and works with volunteers to offer support to asylum-seekers and grassroots organizations. The campaign works with a network of on-the-ground partners across the country.

Housing and Shelter

Everyone has the right to adequate housing.[51] For asylum-seekers, UNHCR affirms that they "should be given all necessary support covering the basic necessities of life, including food, clothing and basic accommodation," throughout the asylum adjudication process.[52]

Asylum-seekers arrive to the United States with varying levels of support available to assist them with their basic needs while they get settled and move through the asylum process. Some have social support networks in place, such as family members and friends, while others arrive in a more vulnerable position without knowing anyone in a position to help. For those who do not have someone with whom to stay at least for an initial period, finding shelter is an urgent priority.

Of course, asylum-seekers are not the only community members in need of shelter and housing. Receiving communities are therefore tasked with ensuring recently arrived asylum-seekers have access to—at a minimum—short-term, stabilization-oriented shelter while also bolstering housing supports to the wider unhoused population, whether they be U.S. born or not. The obvious challenge facing localities is how to do so in the face of limited resources and often extreme and existing under-met needs.

What Did Asylum-Seekers Say?

The asylum-seekers UNHCR interviewed in multiple cities who had been staying in city-funded hotel-shelters overwhelmingly expressed their gratitude that they had a safe place to stay. Many said it was the first time they had a chance to truly decompress since beginning their journey.

With no easy solution at hand, the situation underscores the need to engage in continuous coordination between multiple public and private stakeholders to best implement housing support. Recognizing the imperative to increase access to housing for all, it is crucial that organizations and community members—including those focused on housing for asylum-seekers and those traditionally focused on non-newcomer populations—are engaged early in the process to work towards that common objective.

Access to safe and stable shelter is inextricably linked to an individual's achieving self-sufficiency. When a person does not have a sense of physical safety, their body enters a heightened state of self-protection that can negatively impact the functioning of physical and emotional systems, including their executive functioning and ability to address other concurrent basic needs as well as conduct long-term planning. For children, living in this "survival mode" for a prolonged period during key developmental stages creates a growing predisposition to serious physical and mental health issues later in life. Unfortunately, many recent arrivals have not had secure and stable shelter for extended periods, whether due to the arduous and dangerous journey to the U.S. southern border or a history of displacement in their home countries and while en route to seeking protection. These experiences often take a physical, mental, and emotional toll.

This section will discuss best practices in planning for asylum-seeker housing and shelter interventions, both during times of influx

and steady state arrivals, as well as present some successful housing and shelter models nationally.

Best Practices in Coordinating Shelter for Asylum-Seekers

Housing and Shelter Assessment and Planning

When seeking to design housing and shelter interventions, conducting a situational analysis that inventories housing and shelter resources at the state and local levels is a necessary early step. The analysis should catalog current housing support programs and relevant eligibility criteria (particularly whether individuals without social security numbers can qualify), including public programs serving the unhoused population, public housing subsidy programs, rental assistance and eviction prevention programs, existing community housing programs for low-income and vulnerable individuals, and housing support programs specifically for refugees and asylum-seekers.

Additionally, an inventory should be developed of available physical infrastructure and financial resources at the state and local level that could be deployed, particularly during periods of increased arrivals, to provide asylum-seekers short- and long-term shelter.* Infrastructure resources could include publicly-owned but unused residential and non-residential buildings or privately-held properties that could be more affordably leveraged over the long term to provide housing at a lower cost than models such as hotel-based shelters.

Coordinating entities should ensure that all stakeholders involved in housing interventions have a collective understanding of federal, state, and local housing support programs that different categories of non-citizens might access, because depending on an individual's circumstances, an asylum-seeker could be eligible. For instance, there are certain federal

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*   For example, a declaration of emergency can help access federal FEMA funding for specific food and shelter related expense reimbursements.

programs that provide support to survivors of trafficking. In some states and localities, survivors of violent crime or trafficking are eligible for public housing subsidy programs. In other localities, mixed-status families composed of asylum-seeking parents with children who are U.S. citizens may be eligible for housing subsidy programs. Some states and localities have expanded eligibility for rental assistance and eviction prevention programs to cover non-citizen applicants or applicants without formal rental agreements. This approach has enabled many asylum-seekers to obtain or retain stable housing.

Planning housing and shelter interventions must consider the range of needs and what type of shelter or housing arrangement is most appropriate for an individual. Likewise, it is necessary to consider how and when to support individuals' transition out of programs and into independent housing.

Programs can use an established set of vulnerability criteria to fairly and consistently assess people's current needs so that an appropriate housing or shelter option is made available. The cumulative results of such assessments also serve to appraise coordinating entities generally of asylum-seeker needs and protection risks, consistent with a person-centered and transparent approach. Vulnerability assessments are also used to assess an individual's readiness to move on from short-term shelter. Individuals who present

high levels of vulnerability will generally require a longer-term transition plan that likely includes connecting the individual with ongoing housing and other support.

Short-term programs should plan for facilities and activities that foster individuals' independence in the current setting and readiness to move on. An important consideration is prioritizing locations readily accessible by public transportation so that asylum-seekers can get to know the community, navigate the area, and more easily access local services, programs, and businesses. Shelter programs that allow for asylum-seekers to manage their daily needs, in particular cooking, offer a degree of normalcy and the comfort of familiar food and culture. Where that cannot be accommodated in a particular setting, programs may consider alternative spaces where kitchen facilities are made available, such as churches or other community spaces. Access to familiar and culturally sensitive cuisine provides important comfort to newly arrived individuals, especially children, and supports their stabilization in a new environment.

At times of high arrival rates, communities may need to resort to some form of temporary emergency shelter operation to quickly increase available shelter space. Organizations such as the American Red Cross support communities in setting up emergency shelter, often in the context of a natural disaster. However, planning to provide emergency shelter for arriving asylum-seekers differs from serving a local displaced population in that the newcomers typically do not have a nearby home to which they intend to return. Rather, the circumstances require that shelter providers develop their strategy for transitioning asylum-seekers out of emergency shelter concurrent with the setting up of the emergency shelter itself. Although various destination communities have resorted to emergency shelter operations in recent years—hotels or small and mass congregate care settings—the experience has revealed the difficulty in moving out of an emergency model. An important goal of any emergency response plan is to transition from emergency to non-emergency systems as soon as possible

The Role of Case Management

Working to pair asylum-seekers with the housing solution that best meets their needs requires the support of a case manager. Case managers can identify when an asylum-seeker fits a specific profile for which there is dedicated housing support and connect them to the relevant program. Case managers also play a key role in the assessment of an individual's vulnerability, which is relevant to identifying and arranging for their housing needs.

to conserve financial resources and support individuals' wellbeing.

For additional information on planning for security, PSEA, and other related needs, see the Border Shelter Toolkit.

Communication and Transparency

Transparency in decision-making and communication about shelter support is of the utmost importance. In line with the principles of AAP, individuals entering a shelter or other housing arrangement should receive information about their rights and responsibilities while in residence, what support they may expect while there, and a clear process for transitioning to other housing. Such information should be shared periodically and always when there is a change in policy. With such information in hand, there is less uncertainty and individuals are better able to plan.

Selected Approaches to Meeting the Housing Challenge

Some localities around the country have responded to the need for shelter by including asylum-seekers in existing homeless services programs. Other localities have expanded these systems to offer shelters for asylum-seekers specifically. Still others have depended on private hotels to house asylum-seekers following periods of high-volume arrivals. Some localities have supported expansions of community sponsorship programs operated by community organizations. Each of these approaches has inherent advantages and challenges that localities should evaluate with respect to their particular context in order to ascertain the most sustainable approach, or more likely mix of approaches, to providing both short- and long-term shelter support to asylum-seekers. To complement the approaches that follow, the publication A Place to Live, A Place to Stay: A Good Practice Guide for Housing in Refugee Resettlement identifies successful housing approaches for resettled refugees in eight European countries.

> ### What Did Asylum-Seekers Say?
>
> Many of those interviewed experienced high levels of anxiety and stress related to not knowing how long they would be able to remain in their current shelter situation. Some identified the need for more consistent communication from shelter operators regarding changes to shelter policies.

Utilizing Existing Systems

When integrating asylum-seekers into services designed for a more general population, one important consideration is the extent to which the homeless services are prepared to meet asylum-seekers' specific needs in a culturally and linguistically responsive way. In cases where existing systems have not yet adjusted for the particular needs and circumstances of asylum-seekers, coordinating entities, with the inclusion of organizations and community representatives with the particular expertise and/or personal experience, can support with the development of training and capacity building interventions, such as those discussed in the Accountability to Affected People section.

Multi-Stakeholder Housing Support

Short-term shelter interventions are most effective when they leverage the strengths of various public and private stakeholders, wherein stakeholders at every level are engaged to provide the financial, infrastructure, and oversight needed to ensure the provision of humane and efficient shelter. For example, in one community, UNHCR observed asylum-seekers moving from their places of entry to short-term shelters within the existing homeless service system. When one asylum-seeker who had obtained employment sought to move out of this public shelter, a case manager connected that person to a faith-based community organization that used grant funding to cover the security deposit and first month's rent so

the person could lease an apartment. A local grassroots organization that had provided immediate support upon arrival then stepped in to provide in-kind donations of needed household items. This is one of many examples of a multi-stakeholder, public-private approach to housing.

Easing Transitions to Permanent Housing

Some states and localities have taken creative approaches to supporting individuals and families who are exiting emergency shelters. One is to conduct public outreach and education to landlords and utility providers to build support for reducing barriers asylum-seekers often face when trying to move into permanent housing. Meeting the identification, credit score, and security deposit requirements for conventional rental agreements is a challenge for asylum-seekers. Where local government and non-governmental organizations have liaised with landlords and utility providers, more asylum-seekers have been able to move on from emergency or transitional housing arrangements into permanent housing. Other successful programs saw private entities, faith-based organizations, and foundations providing grants to cover security deposits and the first month's rent. In instances where the asylum-seeker's inability to cover these costs was the only barrier the person, as a stably employed individual, faced to obtain permanent housing, such investments have proven to be cost effective means of supporting asylum-seekers as they attempt to procure stable housing and leave resource-intensive emergency shelters.

Community Sponsorship and Housing Support Programs for Asylum-Seekers

When planning for housing in times of steady or low levels of asylum-seeker arrivals, some localities may consider funding for expanding local community sponsorship programs or providing additional support to housing programs that serve asylum-seekers. By partnering with a community sponsorship program, localities can expand the range of

There are programs across the United States that have developed their own variation on the general model, each with its own division of responsibility between the partner organization and volunteers and with varying levels of commitment from volunteers and expectations of the participating asylum-seekers.

housing supports available to asylum-seekers, which can offer much needed solutions for certain asylum-seekers who may not be a suitable fit for a more traditional short-term shelter model.

Community sponsorship for asylum-seekers is a model in which a group of individuals "sponsor" an asylum-seeker, which typically involves providing or covering the cost of housing for a period, assistance with resource navigation to meet basic and longer-term needs, and support integrating into the community. Asylum-seeker community sponsorship programs are based on the growing refugee community sponsorship model, recently introduced as part of the U.S. refugee admissions program and used in various countries around the world to receive resettled refugees. Particularly for asylum-seekers who do not already have a social support network in the United States, community sponsorship programs are effective in helping individuals and families meet their immediate needs while also fostering personal relationships that can jump start an asylum-seeker's integration into a new community and increase community understanding and support for asylum-seekers. This is especially true for asylum-seeking children, who benefit greatly from the presence of new supportive social networks that promote language learning and cross-cultural communication.

Community sponsorship programs that operate through a partner organization, such as a

local non-profit, generally benefit from greater safeguards in place. These programs typically provide volunteers with the program oversight, support with training (including on trauma-informed and culturally sensitive practices), and mentorship that best ensure a successful sponsorship experience for the asylum-seekers as well as the volunteers. There are programs across the United States that have developed their own variation on the general model, each with its own division of responsibility between the partner organization and volunteers and with varying levels of commitment from volunteers and expectations of the participating asylum-seekers. Each has its own unique way of addressing how to provide housing and ensuring program sustainability.

For information resources on supporting new and existing sponsors, Welcome.US, an initiative that was launched to resettle Afghans in the aftermath of the fall of the government in 2021, has published various guides and toolkits. Below are four examples of community sponsorship programs that have been welcoming asylum-seekers.

- Home is Here NOLA is a community sponsorship program in New Orleans that serves as a coordination hub to support the reception and resettlement of asylum-seekers with a focus on release support for those detained in the Gulf South. Specifically focused on housing, it works with individual property owners, landlords, faith institutions, and others to form a network that offers a range of different housing options; offers ongoing coordination and placement support and mentorship to hosts and landlords; accommodates varying levels of housing support from individuals who can offer just one night or a longer commitment of either free or low-rent housing; and cultivates group

co-living opportunities on property owned by faith-based institutions.

- Illinois Community for Displaced Immigrants (ICDI) in Chicago operates a community sponsorship program that, in addition to pairing asylum-seekers with community groups (often from church congregations), also includes access to ICDI case managers to support asylum-seekers with resource navigation and to liaise as needed between the asylum-seeker and community group to alleviate any communication or other challenges.

- World Relief operates the HOME (Housing, Opportunity, Mutuality, and Empowerment) Program in Chicago and San Diego. The program connects asylum-seekers with church groups that provide rental assistance for six months and weekly visits by a team of 3-6 volunteers who provide resource navigation support and a sense of welcome and friendship. In San Diego, the World Relief team has taken on a sort of property management role for buildings that were once motels but have been converted into small apartments for asylum-seekers. In this role, World Relief has liaised with the property owners and worked out an agreement by which World Relief can act as a guarantor for asylum-seekers with cash jobs or who are otherwise unable to meet the requirements to rent independently.

- The Congregational Accompaniment Project for Asylum Seekers (CAPAS), a project of the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee (UUSC), supports congregations who are looking to host or sponsor asylum-seekers. CAPAS can pair congregations with asylum-seekers in need of a host and offers guidance and training to congregations, including through its Handbook for Congregations.

Acknowledgments

UNHCR is grateful to the many individuals, community and faith-based groups, NGOs, local government offices, and others working to strengthen the reception of asylum-seekers in communities across the United States. It is critical work that has impact at the individual level on the lives of asylum-seekers as well as at the systemic level, as the asylum process functions better when asylum-seekers can navigate the process and meaningfully participate in their claim for protection. While the reception of asylum-seekers has gained increased attention in recent years, UNHCR recognizes the many groups, large and small, who have long been working in their communities to welcome newcomers.

This toolkit is informed by observation and conversations with stakeholders working in communities around the United States. UNHCR appreciates the time, knowledge, and perspectives shared by each participant. In particular, UNHCR thanks the organizations that helped facilitate introductions and meetings in the communities visited: Boston, MA; Chicago, IL; New York, NY; Philadelphia, PA; Portland, ME; and Washington, DC. In each location, UNHCR spoke with asylum-seekers who shared their experiences, needs, challenges, and where they have found support while trying to establish their lives in a new place. UNHCR expresses its gratitude to these individuals for sharing their stories in the interest of helping those who may come after them.

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Endnotes

1   UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), What we do: Protect human rights, available from www.unhcr.org/what-we-do/protect-human-rights/protection (last accessed 30 August 2023).

2   G.A. Res. 217 (III) A, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 14 (10 December 1948).

3   *See* Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, 19 U.S.T. 6259, 189 U.N.T.S. 150 (July 28, 1951) [hereinafter Refugee Convention]. The Convention provides for treatment according to various specific standards, cited here parenthetically by article. First, "at least as favourable" as that accorded to their nationals for: religion and religious education (Article 4), protection of industrial & artistic property (Article 14), access to courts (Article 16), rationing (Article 20), public education (Article 22), public relief & assistance (Article 23), labor legislation & social security (Article 24), and administrative assistance when lacking such from a foreign country (Article 25). Second, a refugee-specific obligation for: issuance of identity/travel papers to those without valid documents (Articles 27-28), non-discriminatory fiscal charges (Article 29), and non-refoulement (Article 33). Third, not less favourable than" other similarly situated non-citizens for: acquisition and disposition of im/movable property (Article 13), right of association (Article 15), wage-earning employment (Article 17), self-employment (Article 18), liberal professions (Article 19), and housing (Article 21). The Convention does not impair any rights or benefits conveyed to refugees beyond these (Article 5).

4   Refugee Convention, Article 31; UNHCR, "Legal considerations on state responsibilities for persons seeking international protection in transit areas or 'international' zones at airports", para. 8, available from www.refworld.org/docid/5c4730a44.html (17 January 2019); G.A. Res. 217 (III) A, *supra* note 2, Article 9.

5   International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 26, 999 U.N.T.S. 171 (16 December 1966) [hereinafter ICCPR]; International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Article 2, 993 U.N.T.S. 3 (16 December 1966) [hereinafter ICESCR].

6   Refugee Convention, *supra* note 3, Article 16; G.A. Res. 217 (III) A, *supra* note 2, Articles 7, 8, and 10.

7   Refugee Convention, *supra* note 3, Article 33(1).

8   Refugee Convention, *supra* note 3, Article 26; G.A. Res. 217 (III) A, *supra* note 2, Article 13; ICCPR, *supra* note 5, Articles 12 and 26.

9   Refugee Convention, *supra* note 3, Articles 17–18; G.A. Res. 217 (III) A, *supra* note 2, Article 23; ICESCR, *supra* note 5, Article 6.

10 Refugee Convention, *supra* note 3, Articles 25, 27, and 28.

11 Refugee Convention, *supra* note 3, Final Act para. IV(B); G.A. Res. 217 (III) A, *supra* note 2, Article 16; ICCPR, *supra* note 5, Article 23; ICESCR, *supra* note 5, Article 10; Convention on the Rights of the Child Articles 8–9, Nov. 20, 1989, 1577 U.N.T.S. 3 [hereinafter CRC].

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23 *See* Migrants in Vulnerable Situations, *supra* note 17; Global Compact for Migration, supra note 16, paras. 31–32.

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38 G.A. Res. 217 (III) A, *supra* note 2, Articles 17, 20, and 25; ICESCR, *supra* note 5, Article 11.

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