

# How to Better Welcome Refugees and Secondary Migrants

A CASE STUDY OF BUFFALO, NY

August 2022

An aerial, black and white photograph of the Buffalo, NY skyline. The image shows a dense urban landscape with various buildings, including a prominent skyscraper with a spire in the center. The sky is filled with scattered clouds. The photograph is partially obscured by a large red shape at the top of the page.

Prepared by  
Laila Rahbari  
2022 Democracy Summer Fellow



## Biography

Laila Rahbari is a 2022 High Road Fellow and Democracy Fellow placed with the office of New York State Senator Sean Ryan. She is an undergraduate student at Cornell University studying Industrial and Labor Relations with minors in Near Eastern Studies and Law & Society.



## Acknowledgments

The Cornell University ILR School High Road Fellowship was launched in 2009 as a new way to connect students with practitioners and local leaders driving change in the local economy. Students are immersed in a dynamic model of collaborative outreach and extension that drives innovative, sustainable, and equitable economic development in a global economy. <https://www.ilr.cornell.edu/Bufalo-co-lab/student-opportunities/high-road-fellowships>

The Office of NYS Senator Sean Ryan is located in New York's 60th Senate District, which includes parts of the City of Buffalo, the City of Tonawanda, and the Towns of Brant, Evans, Grand Island, Hamburg, Orchard Park, and Tonawanda, as well as the Villages of Angola, Blasdell, Hamburg, Farnham, Kenmore, and Orchard Park. Sean M. Ryan was elected to the NYS Senate in 2020 and served in the NYS Assembly from 2011 to 2020. While Senator Ryan's office has funded multiple listed organizations, none of the research topics addressed in this report deal with Senator Ryan as an individual or political office, preventing a conflict of interest. <https://www.nysenate.gov/senators/sean-m-ryan>

The Cornell University School of Industrial Labor Relations (ILR) was founded in 1945. The ILR School today is advancing the world of work through teaching, research, and outreach. ILR's mission is to prepare leaders, inform national and international employment and labor policy, and improve working lives, but as the world of work evolves, the school's focus broadens to keep pace with that change. <https://www.ilr.cornell.edu/about-ilr>



**ILR School**

The ILR Buffalo Co-Lab advances an equitable economy and democratic community, collaboratively integrating scholarly and practical understanding to strengthen civic action. Since 1946, ILR has played a vital role in the region, working in partnership with businesses, unions, government, education, and community organizations to build an economy that works for all. Always aligned with high road principles, ILR consistently promotes radical collaborations in response to economic change and in pursuit of the common good. <https://www.ilr.cornell.edu/Buffer-co-lab>

Partnership for the Public Good is a community-based think tank in Buffalo, NY, that builds a more just, sustainable, and culturally vibrant community through action-oriented research, and policy development, and citizen engagement. PPG aims for a revitalized Buffalo in which the nonprofit community and citizens have a stronger voice in public policy and are better able to promote the public good. Long term goals include community building on assets such as diversity, historic neighborhoods, and natural resources, making progress on problems such as poverty, inequality, and pollution, and finding solutions that bring greater accountability and democracy to local government. <https://ppgbuffalo.org/>

Buffalo Commons is a joint collaboration between Partnership for the Public Good and Cornell ILR Buffalo Co-Lab as a model of university-community produced knowledge for the public good. It is an engaged learning center and digital library sharing about Buffalo Niagara via reports, policy briefs, fact sheets, radio shows, and artistic expressions. Offering a variety of technical assistance and capacity-building workshops, it also hosts a researchers network of over 175 policy fellows and partners dedicated to WNY-based research. <https://ppgBuffalo.org/Buffer-commons/about/>

Special thanks to Gabrielle Harrington and Micaela Lipman for their incredible knowledge, guidance, and support. An additional thanks to all of the interview participants for their time and contributions. For further information on this report, direct emails to [lr448@cornell.edu](mailto:lr448@cornell.edu) and [ks844@cornell.edu](mailto:ks844@cornell.edu).

**ILR Buffalo Co-Lab**



**PARTNERSHIP  
FOR THE  
PUBLIC GOOD**

**BUFFALO Commons**



## Table of Contents

<b>Biography</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>Acknowledgments</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>Executive Summary</b> .....	<b>8</b>
Abstract .....	8
Assets .....	8
Challenges .....	9
Recommendations & Next Steps.....	9
<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>11</b>
An Introduction to Refugees and secondary migrants:.....	11
Why are refugees important? .....	12
Why are secondary migrants important? .....	13
Why are refugees and secondary migrants important in Buffalo specifically? .....	15
<b>Methodology</b> .....	<b>18</b>
<b>Existing Supports</b> .....	<b>18</b>
Social networks .....	19
Resettlement services .....	19
Business support .....	19
Public benefits.....	20
Affordable housing.....	21
Climate safety.....	21
<b>Current Impediments</b> .....	<b>22</b>
Availability of Housing.....	22
Transportation.....	23
Language Access.....	26
Lack of Basic Infrastructure .....	28
General lack of funding .....	29
Other Issues.....	29
<b>Way Forward</b> .....	<b>30</b>
Housing.....	30
Transportation.....	30
Language Access.....	33
<b>Infrastructure</b> .....	<b>34</b>
Revitalized Office of New Americans .....	34
Advisory Committee.....	34
Marketing .....	34
Programming.....	35
Certified Welcoming.....	35
Other Infrastructure Solutions .....	35
<b>Recommendations</b> .....	<b>36</b>
<b>Conclusion</b> .....	<b>39</b>
<b>Works Cited</b> .....	<b>40</b>



## Executive Summary

### *Abstract*

One-third of all refugees in New York State resettle in Buffalo. However, there is little data on the experiences and services offered to the secondary migrant population. This report explores existing supports, current impediments, and ways forward for Buffalo's refugee and secondary migrant population. Findings were developed based on 14 semi-structured interviews and a literature review. The existing supports for refugees in Buffalo include social networks, resettlement services, business support, public benefits, affordable housing, and climate safety. The challenges for refugees in Buffalo surround the lack of availability of affordable housing, insufficient transportation, lack of language access, lack of basic infrastructure, lack of funding, and numerous other issues. The way forward given the listed challenges includes proposed solutions to housing, transportation, language access, and infrastructure.

### *Assets*

- **Social Networks.** Many key respondents stated that existing family and friends share their experiences and resources in Buffalo with other refugees through word of mouth. These networks are important because they influence many families on where to live and serve as a communication point for refugee communities in Buffalo to share the benefits of living in Buffalo for other refugees.
- **Resettlement Services.** Another key support for the refugee community is the multiple existing resettlement services and cultural spaces.
- **Business Support.** Another key support is that in Buffalo, there are many jobs and business opportunities with an opportunity for upward mobility.
- **Public Benefits.** NYS also has higher public benefits relative to other states, which attracts secondary migrants to Buffalo. Buffalo's size makes it easier to start a new business, as Buffalo is named one of the top-five fastest-growing startup cities in the US.
- **Affordable Housing.** Compared to other places in the United States, housing and rent are relatively cheap in Buffalo. Buffalo housing is 63% lower than the state average and 6% lower than the U.S average.
- **Climate Safety.** Buffalo is a climate-safe city, meaning it avoids the worst effects of natural disasters and has the infrastructure to support a larger population compared to other cities in the US.

## *Challenges*

- **Availability of Affordable Housing.** Though housing in Buffalo is more affordable than in comparable cities, changes to the housing market in recent years make it difficult for resettlement agencies to find affordable units on short notice in neighborhoods with cultural centers where refugees want to live.
- **Transportation.** Buffalo lacks reliable, efficient public transportation. There are many available jobs in Buffalo, but refugees report difficulties finding affordable transportation options to reach job locations.
- **Language Access.** There is little language-access infrastructure at the city or county level in Buffalo. Multiple respondents stated the City of Buffalo Office of New Americans is responsible for language access, and the office is currently vacant, leaving the area with minimal language access services and no coordinated office supporting such efforts.
- **Lack of Basic Infrastructure.** The city of Buffalo does not have an operating office that works with the New American population, and the existing Office of New Americans has not had a director for nearly three years. Another issue is that resettlement agencies and cultural community centers have no formalized networked relationship with one other.
- **General Lack of Funding.** The two largest underfunded areas pertaining to refugees are 1) staffing and 2) language access.
- **Other challenges.** A myriad of other issues exists for the refugee population, such as lack of affordable daycare, limited financial literacy, disorganized school systems, delays in school registration, and lack of understanding of American healthcare, financial systems, school systems, and legal court systems, among other issues.

## *Recommendations & Next Steps*

- Housing.
  - Expedite waitlists and make applications for the Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Program more accessible to new Americans.
  - Establish a preference for refugees and parolees to receive livable, safe housing in the form of public housing through Public Housing Agencies.
  - Establish a task force of City Government, County Government, Buffalo Public Housing, and resettlement agencies to meet starting in 2022 on at least a monthly basis to talk about housing issues faced by refugees in the Buffalo community and work on solutions.

- Transportation.
  - Extend and create NFTA bus lines from the west side of Buffalo to the top five industrial factories that employ people in the Buffalo area and the Buffalo-Niagara airport. Collaborate with Citizens for Regional Transit Buffalo to implement railway lines throughout Buffalo.
  - Extend the NFTA services to increase the frequency of bus stops, extend bus lines, and add additional express lines.
  - Establish a task force of city government, county government, NFTA services, refugee community leaders, Citizens for Regional Transit, and anyone else from the Public to meet starting in 2022 on at least a monthly basis to talk about transportation faced by refugees in the Buffalo community and work on solutions.
- Language Access.
  - Pass a language access bill at the city level and the county level, similar to New York City executive order 120, to unilaterally provide services in the top six languages spoken by Buffalonians.
  - Refugee resettlement agencies (Catholic Charities Buffalo, International Institute of Buffalo, Journey's End Refugee Services, Jewish Family Services of WNY), as well as drop-in clinics (Jericho Road Hope Drop-In Center), and small business support organizations (WEDI, Buff State Small Business Development Center) need sustained funding for full-time translators in the ten top languages in the City of Buffalo. The funding must be sourced from the City Government as this is language access at the city level.
- Infrastructure.
  - Redefine and restaff an office for New Americans at the city level. The office needs efficient staffing to serve Buffalo's large and expanding new American community. There needs to be a subdivision for secondary migrants, which can serve as a walk-in center for secondary migrants seeking services and support. The office also needs to have a monthly one-hour meeting with resettlement agencies in the area to develop a communicative and collaborative relationship with local networks for New Americans.
  - Establish a city advisory committee for refugees in the Office of New Americans. A majority of committee seats should be reserved for refugees that are community leaders, with a minority of seats reserved for representatives of resettlement agencies, nonprofit organizations, the state, the City of Buffalo, Erie County, and cultural community centers.
  - Develop and maintain a website to market Buffalo to refugees. The website should include sections delineating what services are offered, what are the existing cultural community organizations, language access information, cost of living, and other essential information that would incline a refugee to migrate to Buffalo.
  - Pursue certified welcoming status to make Buffalo a designated welcoming city for refugees.

## Introduction

### *An Introduction to Refugees and secondary migrants:*

According to the United Nations, 100 million individuals have been forcibly displaced worldwide due to persecution, conflict, violence, or human rights violations [58]. As the world faces the highest levels of displacement on record, there is a need to act now to better support refugees and secondary migrants [58].

**Refugees:** Refugees are people who “have fled war, violence, conflict or persecution and have crossed an international border to find safety in another country” [58]. Refugees must apply in advance from their home country before moving across borders and typically must wait an extended period of time before their application is approved [09]. Most refugees approved for resettlement first stay at a refugee camp in an interim location, “where the average stay is 17 years” [09]. The world's top 10 most populated refugee camps are in Kenya, Jordan, South Sudan, Tanzania, Pakistan, and Ethiopia [58]. These camps serve as an intermediate location for refugees before permanent resettlement and often neighbor the countries refugees fled [58]. The refugee admissions process takes 18 months to two years before refugees are approved to enter the US [20]. Within the first 90 days of resettlement, refugees are a part of the State Department’s Reception and Placement Program, which “provides funds to cover refugees’ rent, furnishings, food, and clothing for an initial 90-day period” [40]. After 90 days, the state department does not fund resettlement agencies to provide housing, food, and clothing assistance.

**Asylum seekers:** While refugees are pre-approved to arrive in the US, asylum seekers go to a foreign country’s border, fearing persecution in their home country and applying for immediate asylum [09].

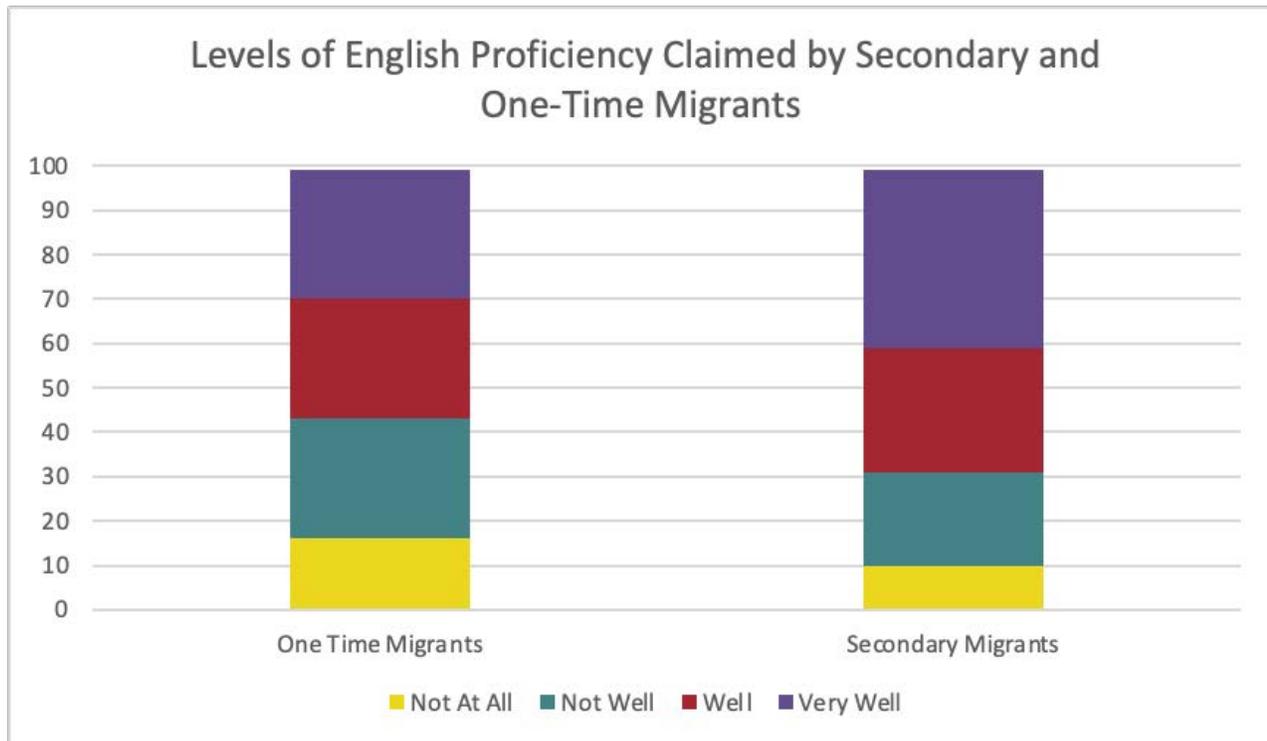
**Secondary migrants:** A secondary migrant is a newer term for a refugee’s movement from the original city, state, or country of resettlement to another city, state, or country [31]. Often refugees move from their original place of resettlement and become secondary migrants due to an established ethnic community at their new location, socioeconomic factors, educational opportunities, the possession of human capital, and access to social capital [31]. Secondary migrants fall under the umbrella of refugees and often face the same issues [40]. As a result, much of the information presented in this paper will refer to “refugees,” which also includes secondary migrants.

### *Why are refugees important?*

Refugees are critical to the US as they provide cultural diversity and a young and hard-working population [38, 46]. Economically, refugees are revitalizing cities in the US. Through their added consumer spending and business start-ups, refugees contribute “billions of dollars each year to the [US] economy, resulting in a net positive fiscal impact” [21]. Refugees compose an important part of the American workforce by filling needed jobs [38]. They also have a higher employment rate than the US-born population [38].

- From 2009 to 2011, male refugees of working age had a 67 percent employment rate, while native-born males had only a 60 percent employment rate during the same time [38].
- Refugee women were just as likely as native-born women to be employed [38].
- Refugees are also more likely than the U.S.-born population and other immigrants to be of working age (25-64 years) [38].
- Refugees are employed in various industries. The top three fields include manufacturing (20.3 percent), health care (14.2 percent), and general services (10 percent) [38].
- Within the professional world, secondary migrants have more established work experience than one-time migrants. They are more likely to obtain professional and skilled jobs with higher earnings than one-time migrants [58].
- Statistically, secondary migrants claim to be more fluent English speakers than first-time migrants [58]. This fluency is important for overall literacy in multiple topics, from financial literacy to navigating the US healthcare system [58].

Thus, refugees have long-run benefits to the American economy.

**Figure 1: Levels of English proficiency claimed by secondary migrants and one-time migrants.****Figure 1** Source: the Migration Policy Institute [58]. The y-axis represents the number of respondents.

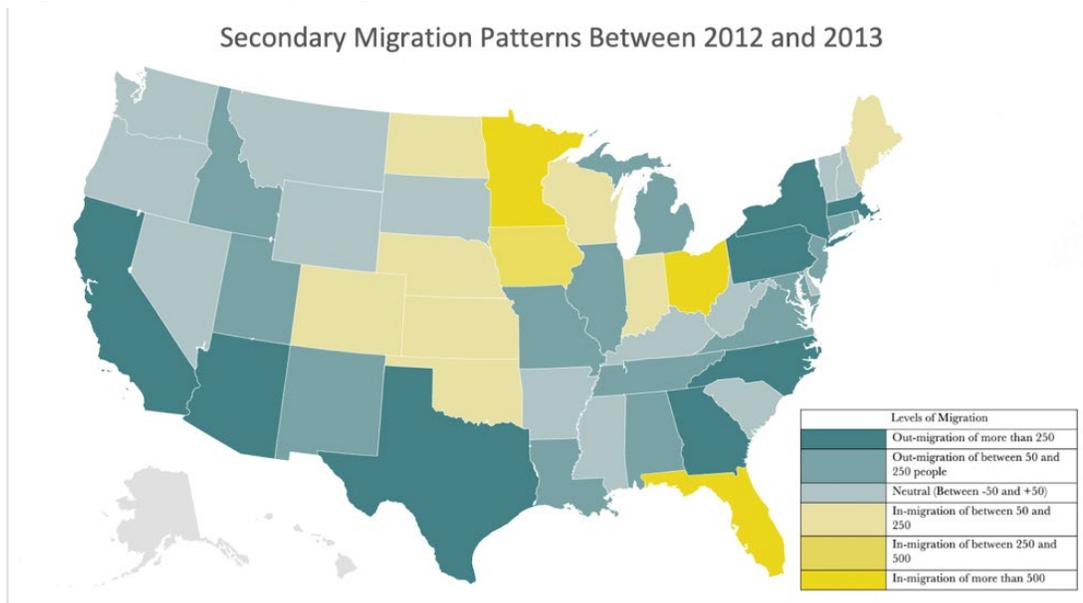
In addition to the thousands of refugee-owned small businesses around the US, several refugee-created businesses are among the most well-known companies in the U.S., including Google (Sergey Brin), WhatsApp (Jan Koum), and PayPal (Max Levchin) [38].

Refugees also help the US overcome the challenges of an aging population. The refugee population is responsible for an increase in the number of working people below the age of 65 who pay federal taxes and don't draw from social security, extending the solvency of the Trust Fund [38]. While between 2000 and 2014, the U.S.-born population declined by 4.9 percent, the foreign-born population grew by 32.3 percent, helping offset the population decline [33].

### *Why are secondary migrants important?*

The number of secondary migrants is increasing as society becomes more mobile. In the US, between 2012 and 2013, more than 17% of newly resettled refugees moved within eight months of arrival [31].

**Figure 2: Secondary Migration Patterns between 2012 and 2013**



**Figure 2** Source: 2020 Secondary Migration Study of Refugee Services Collaborative of Greater Cleveland [31].

Figure 2 represents the domestic secondary migration patterns in the US in 2013 [31]. Based on the figure, many refugees move from the southeast and west coast of the US to more mid-western states after their initial resettlement. This migration pattern represents refugees moving from more densely populated to less densely populated areas. This migration may benefit areas with smaller economies that receive an influx of refugees and, thus, workers [31].

**Figure 3: Population of secondary migrant refugees in various mid-sized metropolitan areas across the midwest of the US**

Metropolitan Area	(1) Total Population	(2) Secondary Migrants	(3) Total Refugees	(4) Share (2)/(3)
Chicago-Naperville-Elgin, IL-IN-WI	7,078,310	833	7,481	0.11
Cleveland-Elyria, OH	1,574,752	316	1,884	0.16
Columbus, OH	1,470,902	1,375	7,933	0.17
Denver-Aurora-Lakewood, CO	2,271,109	575	1,759	0.33
Des Moines-West Des Moines, IA	518,884	205	1,947	0.11
Detroit-Warren-Dearborn, MI	3,233,810	1,335	8,196	0.16
Indianapolis-Carmel-Anderson, IN	1,497,025	1,684	4,862	0.35
Kansas City, MO-KS	1,614,011	118	2,548	0.04
Louisville-Jefferson County, KY-IN	956,374	1,147	4,509	0.25
Minneapolis-St. Paul-Bloomington, MN	2,715,547	1,619	7,619	0.20
St. Louis, MO-IL	2,137,605	282	2,059	0.14

*Notes:* The estimates are weighted to represent the associated metropolitan area using the person level sampling weight. Source: Authors' calculations based on 2018 ACS data collected by the US Census Bureau, made available by IPUMS USA.

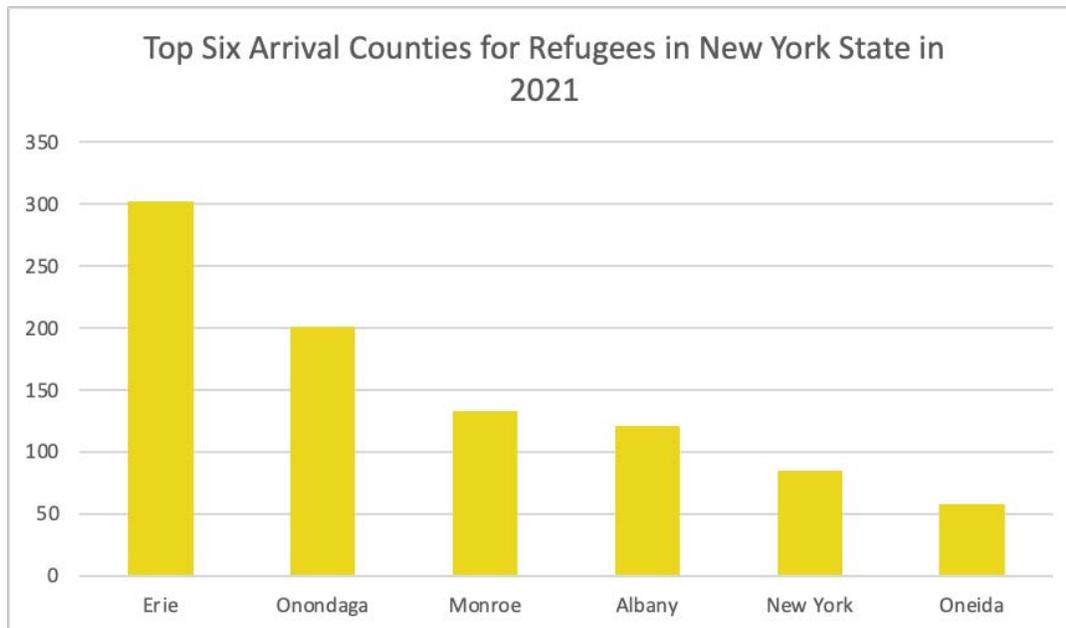
**Figure 2** Source: 2020 Secondary Migration Study of Refugee Services Collaborative of Greater Cleveland [31].

Figure 3 represents the share of secondary migrant refugees in various mid-sized metropolitan areas across the midwest of the US [31]. The table shows that secondary migrants comprise as much as 35% of the total refugee population in cities such as the Indianapolis metropolitan area. In the year 2000, 12.5% of all the immigrants admitted to the US were from countries other than the countries where they were born [58]. In other words, in 2000, 12.5% of immigrants admitted to the US were secondary migrants [58].

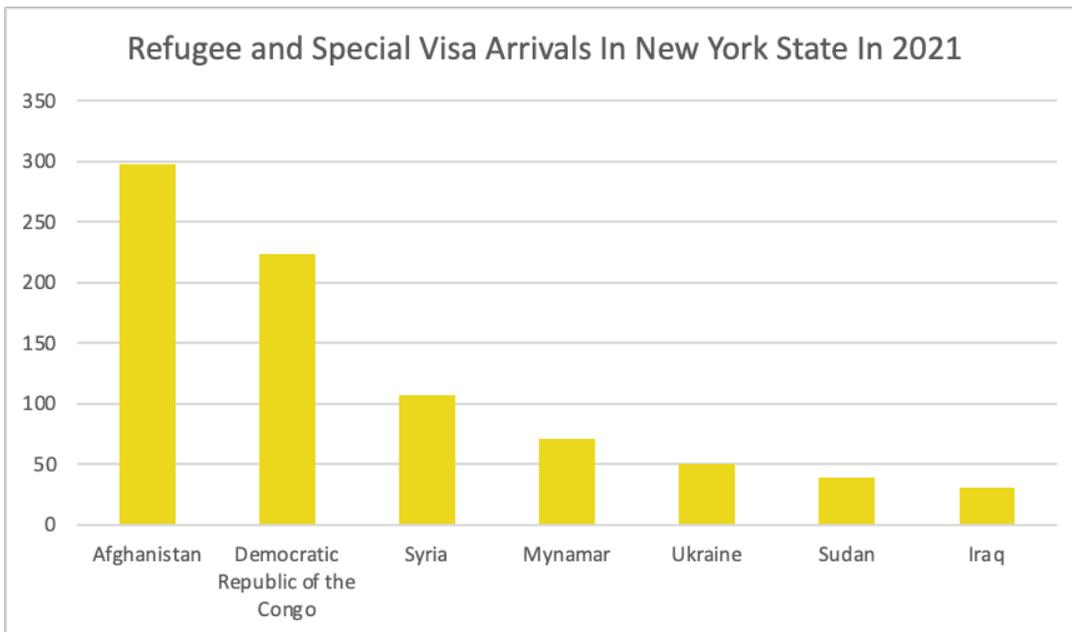
### *Why are refugees and secondary migrants important in Buffalo specifically?*

More than 16,000 refugees since 2002 have come to the City of Buffalo [58]. Refugees and secondary migrants are important to the Buffalo community as more than 90% of refugees coming into New York settle in upstate communities [58]. Erie County resettles about one-third of all refugees resettled within NYS among the top six counties in upstate New York that receive refugees [42]. In 2021 alone, 900 refugees were resettled in NYS, with 203 in Erie County, as displayed in Figure 4 [42].

**Figure 4: data from the NYS Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance [42].**



**Figure 4** Source: NYS Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance [42]. The y-axis represents the number of refugees resettled. The x-axis represents the top six arrival counties for refugees in New York State in 2021.

**Figure 5: data from the NYS Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance [42].**

**Figure 5** Source: NYS Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance [42]. The y-axis represents the number of refugees and special visa arrivals in NYS in 2021. The x-axis represents the seven countries refugee and special visa arrivals are from in New York State in 2021.

Outside of stemming population losses in Buffalo, refugees are most notorious for helping economic growth through opening small businesses and working locally [48]. A study from the New American Economy on New Americans in Buffalo and Syracuse highlights the extensive contributions of new Americans to the Buffalo community. The report highlights the following key statistics:

- Foreign-born residents in Buffalo contributed \$3.1 billion of the metro area’s GDP in 2014 [33].
- Foreign-born households in Buffalo contributed \$408.7 million in federal taxes and \$223.3 million in state and local taxes in 2014. \$1.4 billion in spending power is also held by foreign-born households [33].
- Foreign-born residents contributed \$146.4 million to Social Security and \$42.1 million to Medicare in the Buffalo metro area in 2014 [33].
- Foreign-born residents contributed \$121 million in business income in 2014 was generated by the 2,691 foreign-born entrepreneurs in Buffalo [33].
- Between 2000 and 2014, the increase in the foreign-born population raised the total housing value in metro Buffalo by \$964.5 million.” [33].
- “Because of the role foreign-born residents play in the workforce helping companies keep jobs on US soil, the foreign-born residents in metro Buffalo helped create or preserve 3,116 local manufacturing jobs that would have otherwise vanished or moved elsewhere” within the last 50 years [33].

Within the past five years, the global refugee population has nearly doubled [58]. This research is relevant because the US received an influx of humanitarian parolees from Ukraine and Afghanistan. Between 2021 and 2022, the US received 74,000 Afghans and 100,000 Ukrainians [57]. Many of the humanitarian parolees received would like to be resettled in areas with their family members, making secondary migration an important phenomenon to be aware of. This phenomenon is often caused by the fact that refugees do not have autonomy over where they are first resettled, leading to secondary migration [58]. The influx of new Americans leads to an increase in secondary migrants [46]. Resettlement agencies and other organizations must be better equipped to handle an influx of refugees and secondary migrants. This research is especially timely for Buffalo as the city receives an influx of refugees and humanitarian parolees from Afghanistan and Ukraine [46].

## Methodology

This report addresses the following research questions: 1) What are existing supports for refugees and secondary migrants in Buffalo? 2) What are the current impediments for refugees and secondary migrants in Buffalo? And 3) what are actionable solutions to those impediments to better support refugees and secondary migrants?

A series of 14 semi-structured interviews and a literature review were conducted to answer the research questions above. All of the interviews were conducted over a period of 45 minutes to an hour and a half. The interviews were with the following institutions:

- Partnership for the Public Good
- The office of Assemblymember Jonathan Rivera
- Catholic Charities Buffalo
- International Institute of Buffalo
- The Westminster Economic Development Initiative (WEDI) Buffalo
- Journey's End Refugee Services
- The Small Business Development Center (SBDC) at SUNY Buffalo State
- Hope Refugee Drop-In Center by Jericho Road Community Health Center
- Helping Everyone Achieve Livelihood (HEAL) International
- Jewish Family Services of WNY
- Stitch Buffalo
- Karen Society of Buffalo
- The Office of Global Michigan
- Citizens for Regional Transit

The report first begins by analyzing the existing support refugees have. Then analyzes the impediments of the support or lack of support refugees have. Finally, the report analyzes the way forward for refugees by proposing solutions addressing the refugees' current challenges. A limitation of this report is the eight-week research time frame. The limited time prevented the researcher from validating findings with more groups of refugees, secondary migrants, and community leaders.

## Existing Supports

This section addresses what attracts secondary migrants to Buffalo. It is important to note the support and services already established in Buffalo for refugees. This basis is a starting point to develop improvements to existing supports and adequately leverage existing resources. Existing supports also exemplify the factors Buffalo already has that may motivate refugees to stay in Buffalo and secondary migrants to move to Buffalo.

## ***Social networks***

Many of the key respondents stated that existing family and friends share their experiences with supportive resources in Buffalo with other refugees through word of mouth [46, 47]. Word of mouth has an extensive reach—in some communities, refugees and immigrants have national phone calls among their leaders. For example, one respondent recalled that the Somali community in Buffalo has a national phone call with other Somali communities in the US [46].

Another example would be in the Afghan community, where over 12,000 Afghan refugees are on a WhatsApp group messenger thread [46]. These networks are important because they influence many families on where to live and serve as a communication point for refugee communities in Buffalo to share the benefits of living in Buffalo for refugees [46].

## ***Resettlement services***

In addition to social networks which support refugees in Erie County, another key support for the refugee community is existing resettlement services and cultural spaces. Buffalo has a significant amount of cultural community spaces for each of the refugee communities [46, 47]. As a result, there are many cultural celebrations and religious institutions serving the needs of the refugee communities [47]. Buffalo also has preexisting support services and an existing community of expertise regarding refugee services and resettlement [39]. For example, the state department provides funds to resettlement agencies to help with providing various housing needs, food, and clothing for the initial 90-day period through the Reception and Placement Program [40]. However, after the end of the 90-day resettlement period, refugees can receive assistance at a facility called the Hope Drop-in Center—a program of the Jericho Road Community Health Center [39]. Jericho Road provides holistic healthcare for the underserved and marginalized communities in Buffalo and has served the Buffalo community since 1997 [39]. Thus, Buffalo has additional services to support the refugee community after the federal 90-day period, making the city a more supported environment for refugees than other peer cities.

## ***Business support***

There are also many jobs and business opportunities in Buffalo with an opportunity for upward mobility. One respondent recalled that there are established connections between many employers, resettlement agencies, and refugees in the community due to the historical existence of a new American community in Buffalo. For example, Stitch Buffalo is an organization that provides sewing

materials to refugee women to create and sell products [57]. The organization also provides sewing classes as learning how to sew is an employable skill [57]. Many women at Stich Buffalo learn how to sew or maximize their skills and then work for other companies [57]. Stich Buffalo also provides small-scale manufacturing resources for refugee women who wish to increase their sales [57]. A few small-scale manufacturers work with Stich Buffalo to take the products refugee women make and design and then manufacture them for a larger audience and a larger profit [57].

In addition to Stich Buffalo, another example of a supportive business resource is the West Side Bazaar, a small business incubator in Buffalo which offers grants for refugees to open small businesses in a kiosk location [01].

Maria del Carmen Rodriguez, the owner of Kiosko Latino, grew her business so successfully in the incubator space that she eventually opened her brick-and-mortar storefront on 345 West Ferry Street [18]. The transition from a shared vendor space to her own storefront exemplifies the opportunities for upward mobility Buffalo offers to refugee entrepreneurs.

Outside of support services, Buffalo's size makes it easy to start a new business [05]. In 2022 Buffalo was named one of the top five fastest-growing startup cities in the US [05]. This fact is no different for refugees. For example, the Westminister Economic Development Initiative (WEDI) provides microloans for small business incubator support to refugee business owners [01]. A key respondent stated that WEDI is an attractive service to refugees because being self-employed is very popular in many countries refugees are migrating from [46]. Refugees can start their own businesses in Buffalo because of organizations like WEDI and the Buffalo State University Small Business Development Center, which have a similar focus but on a larger scale [46]. Getting the certifications necessary to start a business is faster in Buffalo than in many big cities, as the smaller scale of Buffalo makes it easier to navigate [47]. For example:

*“A Burmese man came to Buffalo and applied for food stamps and was on assistance. Within a year, he successfully opened a restaurant, Sun Cuisine, and hired ten employees. He was able to open a company and now has three locations.”*

### ***Public benefits***

NYS also has higher public benefits relative to other states, which attracts secondary migrants to Buffalo. According to one NYS assembly member, “the average state offers 12 to 14 welfare benefits,

[while] New York offers about 35 different benefits” [57]. Such benefits include NYS Family Assistance (FA), which provides cash assistance to low-income families, and NYS Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), which provides “monthly food stamp benefits to help low-income people and families buy the food they need for good health,” [34, 35].

### ***Affordable housing***

Further, compared to other places in the US, housing and rent are relatively cheap in Buffalo [11]. The cost of housing in Buffalo is 63% lower than the state average and 6% lower than the US average [11]. A key respondent stated that the low cost of housing attracts families from other cities to Buffalo since they can access better living conditions. For example, a refugee resettlement worker shared the following anecdote:

*A group of Bangladeshi cab drivers secondary migrated to Buffalo about ten years ago from NYC through word of mouth. They came to Buffalo because they heard it is cheaper to live there and buy a house. Now Bangladeshis are completely changing the landscape of the Broadway-Fillmore area of Buffalo [46].*

There are also other existing resources, such as the NYS Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) Program [46, 47]:

*“The Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) Program enables the lowest income households in NYS to rent or purchase decent, safe housing in the private housing market by providing rental and homeownership assistance. The program also assists senior citizens and disabled persons on fixed incomes, displaced families, and homeless individuals with disabilities” [57].*

By providing Housing Choice Vouchers to eligible households, this program exemplifies the existing support for affordable housing for refugees in Buffalo [57].

### ***Climate safety***

Across the world, people are affected by climate change [41]. The climate change risk index measures the extreme heat, drought, wildfires, coastal flooding, and inland flooding likely to reach certain regions in the next decade [03]. In the US, climate change affects the Southern and Western regions with the highest climate change risk index [03]. In contrast, the northeast region, where Buffalo is, has the lowest climate change risk index, making it an attractive place to settle long-term [03]. Buffalo specifically is also a climate-safe city [41], meaning that it avoids the “worst effects of

natural disasters and has the infrastructure to support a larger population” [23]. The city is at low risk from hurricanes, and there is less wildfire risk in Buffalo than in the Western region of the US [41]. Although there may be an increase in summer droughts, the city has a significant source of freshwater in Lake Erie [41]. Thus, based on where Buffalo is geographically in the US and the available resources around Lake Erie, the city is relatively climate safe compared to other places in the US. Further, climate safety is an attractive factor for anyone to stay or migrate to Buffalo.

The refugee community in Buffalo has many existing supports, including social networks, resettlement services, business support, public benefits, relatively affordable housing, climate safety, and more. It is important to understand the existing supports as they help understand the drive for secondary migrants in Buffalo. Existing supports also play a key role in laying the foundation for the way forward in improving the services for refugees in Buffalo.

## Current Impediments

While many existing supports make Buffalo an attractive place for refugees and secondary migrants, there are a few current impediments. Such impediments include the quantity of housing, transportation, language access, lack of basic infrastructure, and lack of funding, among other issues. Addressing these impediments will allow for a path to a way forward for refugees in Buffalo.

### *Availability of Housing*

Although housing in Buffalo is more affordable than in nearby cities, such as NYC, changes to the housing market in recent years make it difficult for resettlement agencies to find affordable units [11]. Specifically, it is difficult to find affordable units on short notice in neighborhoods with cultural centers where refugees want to live [11]. One respondent remarked on the challenge resettlement agencies face in finding accommodations for refugees with only three days to two and a half weeks' notice [46]. Housing availability is an issue for refugees because they only have 90 days of assistance from resettlement agencies. This 90 day period also pertains to secondary migrants. Thus, if a secondary migrant is resettled anywhere in the US, regardless of their domestic migration, they also only receive 90 days of assistance [11]. If a refugee is in the US for over 90 days and secondary migrates to Buffalo, they do not receive housing assistance [11]. Therefore, housing is a greater challenge for secondary migrants that likely receive less assistance [46]. Refugees are left to their own networks to secure housing if finding suitable accommodations in this period is unsuccessful [40, 46]. Currently, there is a lack of available housing in Buffalo that is affordable and livable for refugees

[46, 47]. Within this paper, livable housing pertains to homes with safe living conditions—this means homes free of safety hazards such as lead, asbestos, radon, and Volatile Organic Compounds (VOC) often found in older people's homes [43].

The main housing issues resettlement agencies include occupied affordable housing, non-livable housing, absent or difficult landlords, and competing with three other resettlement agencies to find housing for newcomers [46, 47]. As a result, many resettlement agencies are placing refugees into temporary housing. Temporary housing includes hotel and motel rooms and college dormitories. Resettlement agencies are also struggling to expand housing outside of West Buffalo because it is hard to find families willing to live in areas without as many community centers for their culture or religion [46]. There are a few exceptions to this concept, such as the Bangladeshi community relocating to the Broadway-Fillmore district of East Buffalo [12]. Essentially, refugees do not want to live in areas without their community, and housing in high-demand communities is sparse [46].

Although there are housing voucher programs, such as the NYS Section 8 Housing Voucher, to assist with housing affordability, the program has an extended waitlist and is not easy to navigate [46, 59]. The average wait time for households receiving a voucher in NYS is 31 months [59]. This process also includes repeated follow-up and a clear understanding of the technical application process, which may be difficult for new Americans to operate [46, 59].

### ***Transportation***

Many refugees cannot afford a car and rely on public transportation [19]. However, many respondents state Buffalo lacks reliable, efficient public transportation [46, 47].

A study from the Partnership for the Public good states, “low-income persons in Buffalo and Erie County are ‘left behind,’ unable to keep personal appointments, search for housing, secure a job, and attain self-sufficiency due to problems with accessing transportation” [30]. Currently, Buffalo has the Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority (NFTA) Metro Bus and a single rail system that runs south from the University of Buffalo to the First Niagara Center. Yet, a car is mainly the most efficient way to travel in Buffalo [04]. Further, in February of 2022, the NFTA cut eight of its 12 express routes due to staffing shortages, causing longer wait times and increased inefficiencies [13]. The infrequency of bus lines and the extended timing it takes to transport people are primary issues both the refugee and overall Buffalo community face [47].

Transportation and employment go hand in hand. In Buffalo, the quantity of available jobs is not an issue, but rather getting refugee workers to those jobs [46, 47]. Many companies are hiring in Buffalo, especially those looking to hire industrial workers, such as Buffalo Wire Works, Confer Plastics, and Avanti Advanced Manufacturing [16]. Further, if workers are unable to get a job in the local Buffalo area, the Buffalo-Niagara airport also supplies many jobs [46]. However, Figure 7 displays that it takes about one hour and fifteen minutes to go from the west side of Buffalo, where the majority of migrants live to the airport using public transit. With a car, the trip from the west side to key employment areas would be roughly five times faster.

Thus, there are available jobs, but refugees report difficulties finding affordable transportation options to reach job locations. Often, there are no bus lines between resettlement locations and job sites, and if public transportation is available, routes are unreasonably long with many transfers [46, 47]. Out of the top five largest Buffalo manufacturers, as displayed in Figure 6, three have no bus route or other public transport (Moog, Thermo Fisher, Cummins). The other two manufacturers take anywhere from 30 minutes to an hour and a half via a bus, from West Buffalo, depending on the time of the day. Yet, a company such as Moog hires 4,200 employees in the area [25]. The volume of workers working at these facilities does not match the poor or nonexistent transportation options available.

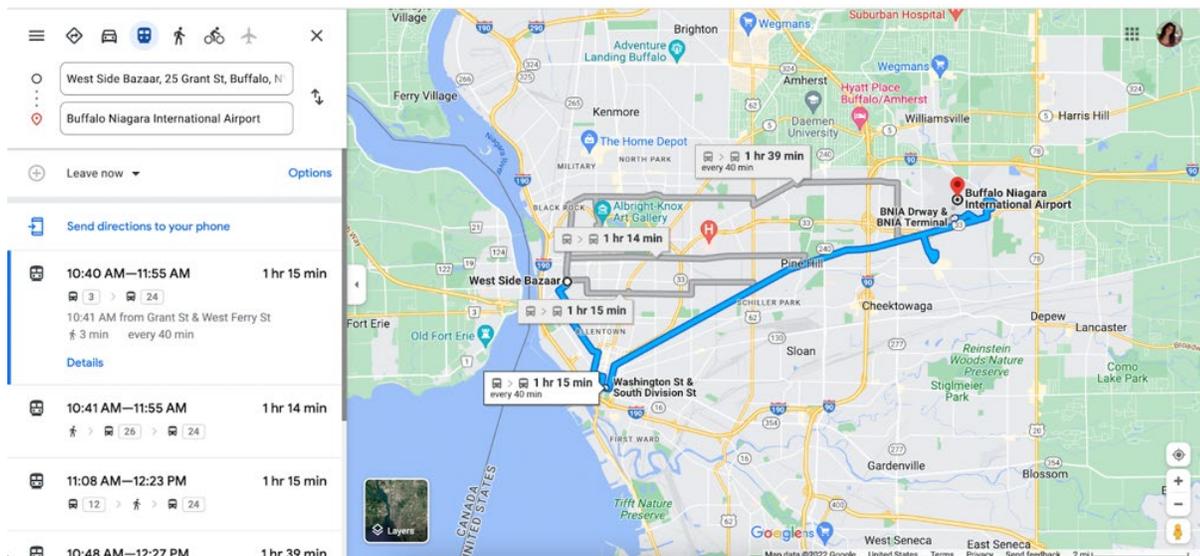
**Figure 6: Top five largest Buffalo manufacturers.**

	NAME/ PRIOR (*NEW OR NOT RANKED)/ URL	ADDRESS	LOCAL MANUFACTURING EMPLOYEES ↓	PRODUCTS PRODUCED	2021 REVENUE	TOP LOCAL EXECUTIVE
1	MOOG INC. moog.com	400 Jamison Rd. East Aurora, NY 14052 716-652-2000	4,200	Aerospace and defense, industrial, energy, marine and medical devices	\$2.85 billion	John Scannell
2	GENERAL MOTORS gm.com	2995 River Rd. ① Buffalo, NY 14207	3,453	Automotive engines and components	\$127 billion	Luis Cervantes Neal Evans Ken Johnson
3	TESLA INC. tesla.com	1339 South Park Ave. Buffalo, NY 14220 716-374-2727	1,636 ②	Electric vehicles, clean energy generation and storage devices	\$18.76 billion	Ryan Nungesser
4	THERMO FISHER SCIENTIFIC thermofisher.com	3175 Staley Rd. Grand Island, NY 14072 716-774-6700	1,600	Cell culture media	\$40 billion	Kate Torchilin
5	CUMMINS INC. cummins.com	4720 Baker St. Ext. Lakewood, NY 14750 716-456-2111	1,400	Diesel and natural gas engines and engine components	\$25 billion	Anna Dibble

**Figure 6** Source: The Business Journal [25].

Furthermore, it takes at least an hour and 15 minutes through public transportation from West Buffalo to the Buffalo-Niagara airport, where many immigrants are employed.

**Figure 7: Map of public transit from the west side of Buffalo to the Buffalo-Niagara Airport.**



**Figure 7** Source: from google maps [17].

Another employment issue is that refugees come to the US with work credentials from other countries that do not transfer over. Although the NYS Office of New Americans has job coaching for highly skilled new Americans, not all work credentials are the equivalent of an American education degree, making it difficult for credentials to transfer into workforce positions in the US [44]. Therefore, many refugees cannot find jobs that utilize their training, skill sets, and previous work experience. Refugees that are entrepreneurs and business owners also lack financial literacy in their employment or business, which can lead to a lack of job growth.

*For example, one respondent recalls a client who was a tailor in their previous country of Uganda but is now working in manufacturing wood pallets. The client's credentials as a business owner did not transfer, resulting in him working in the manufacturing field [46].*

### ***Language Access***

Language accessibility is another significant issue for refugees in Buffalo. At the NYS level, legally, vital government documents must be provided in the ten most common non-English languages spoken by individuals with limited-English proficiency across NYS. City-wise, in Buffalo, this standard is not being implemented. There is little language-access infrastructure in Buffalo at the city or county level [46]. Many respondents further remarked that the City of Buffalo Office of New Americans is responsible for language access and is currently vacant [37, 46]. The Partnership for the Public Good Language Access Advocacy Working Group is trying to push for language access infrastructure in Buffalo at the city level but has been unsuccessful due to resistance from the city government [29].

Some resettlement agencies and nonprofit organizations have resorted to using resources such as LanguageLine Solutions [46].

LanguageLine Solutions is a company that “provides on-demand and onsite language interpretation and document translation services

One story that exemplifies the consequences of a lack of language access:

*“A client with six kids was at home when child protective services knocked at the door. They had said that there was a report of a child in distress. They took away the child before the mother had an opportunity to explain due to a language barrier and having no one to translate. After a week of distress and inability to see her child, an organization stepped in with a translator to explain the situation. Finally, the mother was able to have her child back. This situation could have all been prevented if there had been proper interpretation services.*

There is a lack of communication between the city, county, community businesses, and the refugee population on what language access resources are available.

worldwide for law enforcement, healthcare organizations, legal courts, schools, and businesses,” which is both an expensive and inefficient alternative to having local translators [10]. The City of Buffalo has a small budget for language access, and resettlement agencies severely lack translators and interpreters [46]. Furthermore, because of this lack of infrastructure, most of the city relies on translators from the four resettlement agencies and refugee drop-in centers [46]. Often people of the city also resort to cultural community centers for translation services, including Helping Everyone Achieve Livelihood (HEAL) International, Karen Society of Buffalo, Afghan Society of Buffalo, and more.

One respondent shared:

*A few years ago, a large group of refugees stormed the City of Buffalo Police and Buffalo Common Council's Police Oversight Committee, demanding more translation services [02]. The police station now has one staff member working twice a week who speaks one other language besides English. The language access situation is still horrible.*

*One family of refugees "went to the police station but were told they couldn't get help because no one understood," said an interpreter for Mustafa. "The family doesn't speak English. They only speak Arabic" [02].*

Thus, language access serves a purpose beyond civic understanding but also safety in the Buffalo community. As the NYS Language Access Policy states, “LEP status presents potential barriers to accessing important government programs and services,” and it is essential that every person in NYS have language access [28].

At the county level, funding for language access is not unilateral. There is funding for translation services for federal social services such as food stamps, but not for other governmental services unrelated to social services, such as parking tickets. Due to the lack of translation services, another issue that arises is that institutions rely on community members to spread necessary governmental and casework information [46]. In other words, government agencies sometimes rely on community members to translate and spread information in their communities. This reliance on community translators is a problem because community members are often not compensated for this work and do not have the training to answer all technical questions, which, in some cases, may lead to disinformation. To clarify, community members are not responsible for doing government-mandated work. While communities will always be there to support, it burdens the refugee community with time constraints and administrative constraints. The lack of translation services at the county level has also made most refugee services inaccessible [46]. For example, there is a lack of accessibility for the County Grant Program as the application is only in English.

Many employers in Buffalo also lack translators, limiting refugees’ abilities to find stable jobs. For example, Buffalo State University’s Small Business Development Center does not have a single

language translation service. This oversight eliminates the non-English speaking refugee population from being able to access their services. WEDI also shares this issue.

When community services hold translation services, sometimes this resource is not properly communicated to the refugee population [46]. For example, M&T bank has bilingual bankers in multiple locations of which immigrants are unaware [32, 47]. Throughout the City of Buffalo, M&T bankers speak Burmese, Nepali, Swahili, and Arabic [32].

### ***Lack of Basic Infrastructure***

As previously mentioned, the City of Buffalo does not have an operating office that works with the New American population, and the existing Office of New Americans has not had a director for nearly three years [37]. There is even a longstanding reputation among resettlement agencies and nonprofit organizations that the Office of New Americans is insufficient and does not provide needed services [46, 47]. The Office of New Americans in the City of Buffalo claims to make Buffalo a “welcoming city” [37]. However, Buffalo lacks many qualifications of a welcoming standard to be a certified welcoming city, such as Government Leadership, Equitable Access, and Connected Communities [06]. A certified welcoming city is a formal designation for cities and counties that “create policies and programs reflecting their values and commitment to immigrant inclusion” [06]. Most respondents show significant frustrations with the city and county governments' lack of engagement in the refugee community and the services organizations and agencies [46, 47]. Many respondents exhibit anger due to the lack of engagement from the city government [46, 47].

Having an Office of New Americans that is functioning is vital to attracting secondary migrants and maintaining the existing refugee population in Buffalo [47]. Multiple key respondents remarked that many of the issues the refugee population in Buffalo faces can be attributed to the failed Office of New Americans [46, 47]. Such issues include the lack of language access infrastructure, and lack of financial support to the understaffed resettlement agencies and nonprofit organizations focused on supporting refugees [46, 47].

Another issue is that resettlement agencies and cultural community centers have no formalized relationship [46]. There is little formal communication between the network of entities despite refugees being the population that resettlement agencies serve. Many cultural community centers are often underfunded despite the essential work they provide for their communities [47]. This lack of funding is related to the lack of formal networks between resettlement agencies, various levels of government, and cultural centers.

Furthermore, within resettlement agencies, there is little infrastructure for secondary migrants [46]. Multiple respondents stated that refugee resettlement agencies are understaffed and do not have the funding or capacity to serve secondary migrants [46, 47].

### ***General lack of funding***

The two largest underfunded areas pertaining to refugees are 1) caseworker staffing and 2) language access [46, 47]. With staffing, all of the agencies and organizations are understaffed. Specifically, resettlement organizations, small business centers, and nonprofit organizations need caseworkers, translators, and specific positions for refugees and secondary migrant refugees.

There is also a significant lack of funding for language access at the city or county level and in all agencies and organizations [46, 47].

### ***Other Issues***

A myriad of other issues exist for the refugee population, from lack of affordable daycare to limited financial literacy. Multiple respondents stated that there is a lack of affordable and culturally appropriate daycares in Buffalo [46, 47]. The City of Buffalo's public school system is also disorganized and causes problems for refugee families [46, 47]. For example, a single refugee mother with five children can have all five in different schools throughout the city. This separation is a huge issue as most refugees can not afford a car and must use inefficient public transportation. Also, temporary housing placements often cause delays in school registration [46]. Finally, refugees lack an understanding of American healthcare, financial systems, school systems, and legal court systems, and resettlement agencies do not have time to explain how to navigate these complex systems during the 90-day initial resettlement period. Refugees and secondary migrants struggle to find support while navigating the complex administrative systems in Buffalo.

The current impediments pertaining to refugee services in Buffalo help paint a picture of the needed changes for a way forward. Understanding the challenges with the availability of housing, transportation, language access, infrastructure, funding, and more reflects the civic need to provide greater support to the refugee and secondary migrant communities and organizations in Buffalo.

## Way Forward

This section describes the solutions and responses to the current impediments refugees and secondary migrants face in Buffalo. Responses address issues with housing, transportation, language access, and infrastructure. A larger community shares some of the issues faced by refugees, such as issues with transportation and the quantity of affordable housing. However, the way forward focuses on solutions for the refugee-specific population.

### *Housing*

The affordable housing crisis is a national issue with no easy solution. However, respondents suggested a few critical solutions for the refugee population in Buffalo. Firstly, improving the NYS Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Program to have expedited and shorter waitlists allows for an increase in affordable housing [47]. Further, making applications for the Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Program more accessible to new Americans is imperative.

An easier navigation process is through less technical terminology on the application for those that are new to the American housing and legal system, and a simplified application process that requires less follow-through over the 31 month period in NYS.

On the note of housing vouchers, having the Public Housing Administration (PHA) establish a preference for refugees would allow low-income refugee families to receive stable housing within 90 days of resettlement assistance [45]. Specifically, the PHA can set preferences based on immigration status through PHA selection preferences in the Admissions and Continued Occupancy Policy (ACOP). The PHA could initiate this recommendation by updating the ACOP or Administrative Plan and then publicizing and posting copies of any newly adopted and implemented tenant selection policies [45].

### *Transportation*

Inaccessible transportation intersects with various issues such as job accessibility and access to essential services such as healthcare. The primary solution is to increase the frequency of bus stops, extend bus lines, and add additional express lines to expand speed and efficiency. In particular, it is crucial to create lines that reach the large industrial factories and employers such as Moog, Thermo Fisher, Cummins, and the Buffalo-Niagara airport, as those are large employers of both refugees and all Buffalonians.

One respondent shares about a transportation success story with an industrial company:

*“There is a private company in Buffalo that works with refugees called Harmac. They obtained a significant amount of entry-level refugee workers by figuring out how to work with the NFTA to get the bus system to schedule rides before workers’ shifts. They have both private and public sectors working together to provide transportation” [46].*

Another solution is to extend the metro rail system to different parts of the city. A model developed by Citizens for Regional Transit suggests an airport extension:

*“Beyond Canalside through the Cobblestone District and eastward above ground to Larkinville, Central Terminal, Thruway Mall, Walden Galleria, and the Buffalo-Niagara International Airport, ending at a Park & Ride on Transit Road near the I-90” [07].*

Citizens for Regional Transit also suggest extending the metro rail system to UB Amherst and other destinations, as depicted in their model in Figure 8 [07].

**Figure 8: Citizens for Regional Transit metro extension plan.**



**Figure 8** Source: Citizens for Regional Transit [07].

Another success story of a large company employing refugees is a private company in Huron, South Dakota. A study from the New American Economy shows that a private manufacturing firm, Molded Fiber Glass Companies, faced challenges in hiring workers for one of their plants. The company wanted to expand its plant, so its senior vice president, David Giovanni, reached out to a Karen community in Minnesota, offering jobs. Through word of mouth, many Karen community members moved to Huron, and eventually, the plant expanded from 150 employees to over 600, half foreign-born [15].

*“If we had not been able to tap into that reservoir of people, we would have had difficulty,” Giovanni says. “Quite frankly, the refugee workers have been critical to our success as a company” [15]. “*

Thus, by making the jobs accessible and working with the refugee community, one company can employ nearly 300 entry-level workers. So a solution is simple: create transportation to industrial companies that makes it easier for refugees to have jobs.

### ***Language Access***

The key to the language access issue in Buffalo entails building infrastructure at the city and county levels. NYC executive order 120 mandates the provision of services in the top six languages spoken by New Yorkers [14]. Passing a language access bill at the city and county levels similar to NYC executive order 120 is a step in the right direction for providing language access to refugees and secondary migrants in Buffalo and Erie County.

Further down the line, it would be ideal to have 10 languages rather than six because of Buffalo’s diverse population of refugees. The NYS language access policy requires state agencies to provide translation services for the top 10 languages for people with Limited English Proficiency (LEP) [36]. NYS’s top 10 languages other than English are Spanish, Chinese, Russian, Yiddish, Bengali, Korean, Haitian Creole, Italian, Arabic, and Polish [36]. Thus, the goal is to align with NYS’s language access policy and provide translation and interpretation services for LEP citizens in the top 10 languages spoken in Buffalo. It is also important to note that this bill must have a unilateral infrastructure. Unilateral infrastructure for language access is essential because translation and interpretation services must apply to all city affairs rather than one office or another [46]. This consistency will ensure people have language access in any city office or agency.

## Infrastructure

### *Revitalized Office of New Americans*

Establishing a successful Office of New Americans at the city level is key to improving the refugee and secondary migrant experience in Buffalo. A successful Office of New Americans: communicates with the community, is well staffed and coordinates refugee affairs at the city government level. This infrastructure is essential to having a successful secondary migrant program. Multiple respondents reported that the city supplied organizations and agencies working with refugees and secondary migrants with little to no funding [46]. Thus, through revitalized infrastructure, an Office of New Americans can be the central location to advocate for a budget to allocate funding to resettlement agencies and other organizations that serve the refugee population. The office also needs to have a close working relationship with resettlement agencies to communicate better the services provided to refugees.

Another missing piece of infrastructure is a sustainability office within the Office of New Americans. Opening a sustainability office to promote migration to Buffalo as it is a climate refuge city will encourage more refugees to migrate to Buffalo as climate change continues to affect the daily lives of many Americans.

### *Advisory Committee*

Another key piece of infrastructure is an advisory committee for refugees at the city level through a revitalized Office of New Americans. Such a committee would give refugees a voice in the community and increase communication between resettlement agencies, nonprofit organizations, the state, the city, and cultural community centers. It would also allow refugees to give feedback to the city and resettlement agencies on improving their services. The advisory committee should also have subcommittees. For example, a subcommittee focused on job growth could encourage people from WEDI and the Buffalo State Small Business Development Center, along with more businesses and offices, to come together and discuss the resources available for refugee entrepreneurs.

### *Marketing*

For refugees to secondary migrate to Buffalo, infrastructure is required to inform refugees and the community about what Buffalo has to offer. The City of Buffalo should market Buffalo by making a website that includes services offered, locations or contacts for cultural community organizations, language access information, a cost of living comparison calculator, and other resources.

Many other successful, welcoming cities have followed a similar pattern.

Some cities have created videos, welcoming pages, and more job resource lists. For example, see the resources provided by:

- City of Dayton, Ohio:  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=47&v=qQTHuJRnzUQ&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=47&v=qQTHuJRnzUQ&feature=emb_logo) ; <http://www.welcomedayton.org/>
- City of Utica, New York: <https://www.thecenterutica.org/about/>
- State of Michigan Employment Resources Page:  
<https://www.michigan.gov/ogm/services/mits/resources>

### ***Programming***

Within resettlement agencies, building entirely new programs for secondary migrants is essential to handle an influx of refugees. This program includes funding, case management, and housing assistance. These programs are important because, at this stage, resettlement agencies are unable to handle an influx of secondary migrants without additional support [46, 47].

### ***Certified Welcoming***

To better serve as a haven for refugees and secondary migrants, the City of Buffalo should pursue a certified welcoming designation. A certified welcoming city is “a formal designation for cities and counties that have created policies and programs reflecting their values and commitment to immigrant inclusion” [06]. The benefit of pursuing this designation is that it will assess Buffalo’s City and County governments on “their efforts to include and welcome immigrants in all areas of civic, social, and economic life in their communities” [06]. This designation will also provide further accountability for areas of improvement if the designation is not received [06]. If the designation is received, “communities distinguish their local efforts, build a competitive advantage, and gain access to opportunities to share their welcoming practices on a regional, national, and global stage” [06]. Essentially, working towards the designation would expedite the process of improving the current impediments in Buffalo. Receiving the designation would attract more secondary migrants to Buffalo and provide a better environment for refugees.

### ***Other Infrastructure Solutions***

Other services include funding resettlement agencies to pay cultural community groups to do

core services such as airport pickups and to help people get their driver's licenses. This service would allow cultural community centers to learn from the resettlement agencies and also compensate for the work they are already doing in their communities.

Other necessary infrastructure includes a Buffalo visitation program for secondary migrants. Many secondary migrants visit the city they are considering moving to before moving.

If we invite refugees to come to visit and provide temporary housing, they would be more likely to move and, in turn, attract more people to move.

The way forward in supporting the refugee and secondary migrant community in Buffalo has multiple different facets, from housing and transportation to language access and infrastructure. Implementing solutions to the current impediments refugees face is essential to improving the quality of life for refugees in Buffalo. Without a way forward, many of the current impediments will continue to exist and transfer to multiple generations of refugees to come.

## Recommendations

The following are recommendations for specific measures to be taken to improve the quality of life for refugees in Buffalo and possibly the greater community. The recommendations are divided into four categories: housing, transportation, language access, and infrastructure.

<p><b>1. Housing</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. Improve the NYS Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Program to have expedited and shorter waitlists. Making applications for the Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Program more accessible to new Americans through less technical terminology on the application for those that are new to the American housing and legal system, and a simplified application process that requires less follow-through over the 31 month period in NYS.</li> <li>B. Establish a preference for refugees and parolees to receive livable, safe housing in the form of public housing through Public Housing Agencies.</li> <li>C. Establish a task force of city government, county government, Buffalo public housing, and resettlement agencies to meet beginning in 2022 and commit to meeting monthly to discuss housing issues refugees face in the Buffalo community and work on solutions.</li> </ul>
--------------------------	--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

<p><b>2. Transportation</b></p>	<p>A. Extend and create NFTA bus lines from West Buffalo to the top five industrial factories that employ people in the Buffalo area—Moog, General Motors, Tesla, Thermo Fisher, and Cummins—and the Buffalo-Niagara airport. Implement a real-time bus locator system to ensure the tracking of late buses for citizens. Collaborate with Citizens for Regional Transit Buffalo to implement railway lines throughout Buffalo.</p> <p>B. Extend the NFTA services to increase the frequency of bus stops, extend bus lines, and add additional express lines. Increase the frequency of buses before and after shifts to accommodate industries with first, second, and third shifts. Thus increase, bus times are around 5 p.m. and 1 a.m.; 12 a.m., and 8 a.m. [58].</p> <p>C. Establish a task force of city government, county government, NFTA services, refugee community leaders, Citizens for Regional Transit, and anyone else from the Public to meet in 2022 monthly to talk about transportation faced by refugees in the Buffalo community and work on solutions.</p>
<p><b>3. Language Access</b></p>	<p>A. Pass a language access bill at the city and county levels, similar to NYC executive order 120, to unilaterally provide services in the top six languages New Yorkers speak.</p> <p>B. Implement sustained funding for full-time translators in the ten top languages in the City of Buffalo. Direct funding to refugee resettlement agencies [Catholic Charities Buffalo, International Institute of Buffalo, Journey’s End Refugee Services, Jewish Family Services of WNY], as well as drop-in clinics [Jericho Road Hope Drop-In], and small business support organizations [WEDI, Buff State Small Business Development Center].</p>
<p><b>4. Infrastructure</b></p>	<p>A. Redefine and restaff an office for New Americans at the city level. The office needs enough staff to serve Buffalo's large and expanding new American community. There must be at least four full-time staff members, one for every 4000 refugees in Buffalo [24]. There needs to be a subdivision for secondary migrants that is easily accessible. The office also needs to have a monthly one-hour meeting communicating</p>

and collaborating with the four refugee resettlement agencies and Jericho Road's Hope Drop-In Center.

- B. Establish a city advisory committee for refugees in the Office of New Americans. The committee will primarily be composed of refugees that are community leaders but also members from resettlement agencies, nonprofit organizations, the state, and cultural community centers. There need to be at least five refugees on the committee representing different communities of refugees. There also needs to be at least one representative from the four resettlement agencies and nonprofit organizations such as WEDI and PPG. There also needs to be two representatives, at least, from the state-level government within the office of the district assembly member and senator. This committee is important so refugees can give feedback to the city and resettlement agencies on the services they receive. There need to be subcommittees of the refugee advisory council that are small-business oriented and include people from organizations such as WEDI so they can get together and talk about what resources are available for refugee entrepreneurs. There also needs to be subcommittees for childcare, education, transportation, and resettlement agencies/service providers. Each subcommittee must have four representatives and remain open to anyone from the public to provide input.
- C. Develop and maintain a website to market Buffalo to refugees by including existing services, cultural community organizations, language access information, cost of living, and other essential information that inclines refugees to migrate to Buffalo.
- D. Pursue certified welcoming status to make Buffalo a designated welcoming city for refugees.

Goal #1: By December 2022, achieve recommendations 1C, 2C, 3B, and 4C.

Goal #2: By August 2023, achieve recommendations 1A, 1B, 2A, 2B, 3A, 4A, and 4B.

Goal #3: By August of 2024, achieve recommendation 4D.

## Conclusion

This research focuses on the existing supports, current impediments, and the way forward for refugees in Buffalo. Within the last fifty years, refugees have transformed the landscape of Buffalo [08]. Buffalo refugees significantly contribute to the city [46]; they contribute to population increase and urban revitalization, bolster the local economy, and transform the cultural landscape [08]. Working to improve the lives of refugees can improve Buffalo as a city in the long term [08]. From stemming population losses to being responsible for significant economic growth in West Buffalo, refugees substantially impact the City of Buffalo [42, 48]. To quote the City of Buffalo on New Americans:

*We value and understand the contributions and will work with our immigrant and refugee communities to address their unique challenges [08].*

It is now the responsibility of the City of Buffalo, Erie County, and existing organizations working with refugees in Buffalo to maintain their promise and support a way forward. The city is failing New Americans as refugees lack the availability of affordable housing, adequate transportation, and language access. Given the listed challenges, the way forward includes proposed housing, transportation, language access, and infrastructure solutions.

To further develop these recommendations, citizens should encourage leaders at all levels of government to reach out directly to refugee communities to receive feedback and validate these findings through the city advisory committee proposed in recommendation 4B.

## Works Cited

01. "About." WEDI Buffalo. Accessed July 20, 2022. <https://www.wediBuffalo.org/about>.
02. Bazan, Josh. "Immigrants Call Out Buffalo Police for Difficulty over Language Barrier." WKBW. WKBW, January 24, 2017. <https://www.wkbw.com/news/immigrants-call-out-Buffalo-police-for-difficulty-over-language-barrier>.
03. "Best & Worst States for Climate Change." SafeHome.org, August 20, 2021. <https://www.safehome.org/climate-change-statistics/#:~:text=California%2C%20Florida%2C%20Georgia%2C%20North,than%20the%20overall%20U.S.%20average>.
04. "Buffalo Transportation | USNews Travel." USNews & World Report. Accessed July 20, 2022. [https://travel.usnews.com/Buffalo\\_NY/Getting\\_Around/](https://travel.usnews.com/Buffalo_NY/Getting_Around/).
05. Brophy, Natalie, and Derek Gee. "Buffalo Named One of the Top-Five Fastest-Growing Startup Cities." Buffalo News, May 13, 2022. [https://Buffalonews.com/business/local/Buffalo-named-one-of-the-top-five-fastest-growing-startup-cities-what-does-that-mean/article\\_19b90d74-a0ef-11ec-afe9-a3e422a93966.html](https://Buffalonews.com/business/local/Buffalo-named-one-of-the-top-five-fastest-growing-startup-cities-what-does-that-mean/article_19b90d74-a0ef-11ec-afe9-a3e422a93966.html).
06. "Certified Welcoming." Welcoming America, May 19, 2022. <https://welcomingamerica.org/initiatives/certified-welcoming/>.
07. "Citizens Regional Transit Corporation Annual Report 2016" Citizens for Regional Transit. Accessed July 21, 2022. <http://citizenstransit.org/sites/default/files/2016%20Annual%20Report.pdf>.
08. "City of Buffalo New Americans Study." City of Buffalo. Accessed July 25, 2022. <https://www.Buffalony.gov/DocumentCenter/View/2135/City-of-Buffalo-New-Americans-2016-Study-PDF?bidId=>.
09. Clack, Julie. "City of Good Neighbors!: Students Examine Refugee Resettlement in Buffalo, N.Y." Princeton University. The Trustees of Princeton University. Accessed July 14, 2022. <https://www.princeton.edu/news/2018/03/26/city-good-neighbors-students-examine-refugee-resettlement-Buffalo-ny>.
10. "Company Information." LanguageLine Solutions. Accessed July 18, 2022. <https://www.languageline.com/company>.
11. "Cost of Living in Buffalo, NY." RentCafe. Accessed July 18, 2022. <https://www.rentcafe.com/cost-of-living-calculator/us/ny/Buffalo/>.
12. Dewey, Caitlin, and Sharon Cantillon. "Influx of Newcomers Brings 'so Much Energy' to Buffalo Neighborhoods Others Once Fled." Buffalo News, December 16, 2021. [https://Buffalonews.com/news/local/influx-of-newcomers-brings-so-much-energy-to-Buffalo-neighborhoods-others-once-fled/article\\_2c84fe34-06b4-11ec-acc1-af1f3cf7cb3d.html](https://Buffalonews.com/news/local/influx-of-newcomers-brings-so-much-energy-to-Buffalo-neighborhoods-others-once-fled/article_2c84fe34-06b4-11ec-acc1-af1f3cf7cb3d.html).

13. Dudzik, Kelly. "The NFTA Faces Tough Questions about Cuts to Bus Routes." wgrz.com. WGRZ, March 9, 2022. <https://www.wgrz.com/article/news/local/the-nfta-faces-tough-questions-about-cuts-to-bus-routes-Buffalo-wny-travel/71-bbf5e7d9-fe55-4d4e-94ad-a85d11cb6002>.
14. "Emergency Executive Order No. 225 Indoor ... - City of New York." The Official Website of the City of New York. Accessed July 18, 2022. <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/home/downloads/pdf/executive-orders/2021/eo-225.pdf>.
15. "From Struggle to Resilience - New American Economy." New American Economy. Accessed July 18, 2022. [http://research.newamericaneconomy.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2017/11/NAE\\_Refugees\\_V6.pdf](http://research.newamericaneconomy.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2017/11/NAE_Refugees_V6.pdf).
16. Glynn, Matt. "Buffalo Next: Refugee Workers Offer Talent Pool for Employers Struggling to Hire." Buffalo News, April 12, 2022. [https://Buffalonews.com/Buffalo-next-refugee-workers-offer-talent-pool-for-employers-struggling-to-hire/article\\_cf43fdd6-b5e2-11ec-8159-9f10d6490520.html](https://Buffalonews.com/Buffalo-next-refugee-workers-offer-talent-pool-for-employers-struggling-to-hire/article_cf43fdd6-b5e2-11ec-8159-9f10d6490520.html).
17. "Google Maps." Google maps. Google. Accessed July 20, 2022. <https://www.google.com/maps/dir/West+Side+Bazaar,+25+Grant+St,+Buffalo,+NY+14213/Buffalo+Niagara+International+Airport,+Genesee+Street,+Buffalo,+NY/@42.9111299,-78.8809998,12z/data=!3m1!4m1!4m14!4m13!1m5!1m1!1s0x89d3131b41459539:0xf7b64402c84db7c6!2m2!1d-78.8902388!2d42.9148529!1m5!1m1!1s0x89d374c8ccbe865d:0xc0e27200bdc16a88!2m2!1d-78.7295067!2d42.9397059!3e3>.
18. Hall, Lauren. "Restaurant Owners Graduate from West Side Bazaar." wgrz.com. WGRZ, October 12, 2020. <https://www.wgrz.com/article/entertainment/television/programs/daybreak/restaurant-owners-graduate-from-west-side-bazaar/71-5652a73b-7901-491b-bef2-60689594ade3>.
19. Hanna, Mary. "Movement after Migration: Immigrants' Disproportionate Reliance on Public Transportation." migrationpolicy.org, August 31, 2021. <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/movement-migration-immigrants-public-transportation>.
20. "How Does the US Refugee System Work?" Council on Foreign Relations. Council on Foreign Relations. Accessed July 19, 2022. <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounders/how-does-us-refugee-system-work-trump-biden-afghanistan#:~:text=The%20entire%20admissions%20process%20generally,and%20two%20years%20to%20complete>.
21. "Immigrants as Economic Contributors: Refugees Are a Fiscal Success Story for America." National Immigration Forum, November 5, 2018.

- <https://immigrationforum.org/article/immigrants-as-economic-contributors-refugees-are-a-fiscal-success-story-for-america/>.
22. “Immigrants, Refugees, and Languages Spoken in Buffalo.” Partnership for the Public Good, February 2018. [https://ppgBuffalo.org/files/documents/immigration\\_Buffalo\\_brief\\_final.pdf](https://ppgBuffalo.org/files/documents/immigration_Buffalo_brief_final.pdf).
  23. Jacobson, Lindsey. “Americans Are Fleeing Climate Change - Here's Where They Can Go.” CNBC. CNBC, April 21, 2022. <https://www.cnbc.com/2022/04/21/climate-change-encourages-homeowners-to-reconsider-legacy-cities.html>.
  24. Korfhage, Matthew. “After Decades of Decline, Buffalo Boasts a 'Refugee Renaissance.' Can It Last?” Buffalo NY refugee renaissance joined by Afghan evacuees. Democrat and Chronicle, January 10, 2022. <https://www.democratandchronicle.com/in-depth/news/2022/01/10/Buffalo-ny-refugees-resettlement-gentrification/8766544002/>.
  25. Lane, Paul. “Largest Buffalo Manufacturers 2022.” Bizjournals.com. THE BUSINESS JOURNALS. Accessed July 18, 2022. <https://www.bizjournals.com/Buffalo/subscriber-only/2022/06/24/largest-Buffalo-manufacturers-2022.html>.
  26. “Language Access .” Partnership for the Public Good, August 2014. [https://ppgBuffalo.org/files/documents/equality\\_civil\\_rights/national\\_origin/equalitycivilrights-\\_medical\\_providers\\_fact\\_sheet.pdf](https://ppgBuffalo.org/files/documents/equality_civil_rights/national_origin/equalitycivilrights-_medical_providers_fact_sheet.pdf).
  27. “Language Access Assistance.” Department of Labor State of New York. Accessed July 20, 2022. <https://dol.ny.gov/language-access-assistance>.
  28. “Language Access Policy.” The State of New York. Accessed July 21, 2022. <https://www.ny.gov/language-access-policy>.
  29. “Language Access Working Group.” Partnership for the Public Good. Accessed July 20, 2022. <https://ppgBuffalo.org/news-and-events/events/event:09-24-2020-5-30pm-language-access-in-erie-county-coalition-call/>.
  30. “Left Behind: How Difficulties with Transportation Are a Roadblock to Self-Sufficiency.” Partnership for the Public Good. Accessed July 20, 2022. [https://ppgBuffalo.org/files/documents/environment/transit/environment-\\_left\\_behind.pdf](https://ppgBuffalo.org/files/documents/environment/transit/environment-_left_behind.pdf).
  31. Mata, Theresa, Rachel Ramos, Janelle Newman, and Jeffrey R Bloem. “SECONDARY MIGRATION STUDY 2020.” Rscleveland.org. Refugee Services Collaborative of Greater Cleveland . Accessed July 14, 2022. <http://rscleveland.org/>.
  32. “Multicultural Branches.” Multilingual Branches | M&T Bank, February 23, 2022. <https://www3.mtb.com/homepage/about-us/driving-change/multicultural-banking/multilingual-branches>.
  33. “New Americans in Buffalo and Syracuse.” New American Economy Research Fund. New American Economy. Accessed July 14, 2022. <https://research.newamericaneconomy.org/report/new-americans-in-Buffalo-and-syracuse/>.

34. “New York Assistance Programs, Local Agencies, and Charities.” Helping Americans Find Help, February 23, 2020. <https://helpingamericansfindhelp.org/new-york/>.
35. “New York Temporary Assistance.” Welcome to Benefits.gov | Benefits.gov. Accessed July 19, 2022. <https://www.benefits.gov/benefit/1673>.
36. “Nysif Language Access Policy.” NYS Insurance Fund. Accessed July 21, 2022. <https://ww3.nysif.com/en/FooterPages/Column3/LanguageAccessPolicy#:~:text=New%20York%20State's%20Language%20Access,State%2C%20in%20addition%20to%20English>.
37. “Office of New Americans.” Office of New Americans | City of Buffalo, NY. Accessed July 20, 2022. <https://www.Buffalony.gov/422/Office-of-New-Americans>.
38. Ott, Eleanor. “Get up and Go: Refugee Resettlement and Secondary Migration in the USA. .” UNHCR. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Accessed July 14, 2022. <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/research/working/4e5f9a079/refugee-resettlement-secondary-migration-usa-eleanor-ott.html>.
39. “Our Mission & Vision.” Jericho Road Community Health Center. Accessed July 19, 2022. <https://www.jrchc.org/about/>.
40. “An Overview of US Refugee Law and Policy.” American Immigration Council, September 20, 2021. <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/overview-us-refugee-law-and-policy>.
41. Peters, Adele. “Buffalo Wants to Become a Climate Haven. Is That Even Possible?” Fast Company. Fast Company, April 28, 2022. <https://www.fastcompany.com/90746497/Buffalo-wants-to-become-a-climate-haven-is-that-even-possible>.
42. “Population Data for Refugee and Special Immigrant Visa Holders ...” NYS Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance. Accessed July 14, 2022. <https://otda.ny.gov/programs/bria/documents/population-report.pdf>.
43. “Potential Health Risks of Remodeling an Older Home.” The Oregonian, February 11, 2017. [https://www.oregonlive.com/homeideas/2017/02/potential\\_health\\_risks\\_of\\_remo.html#:~:text=Older%20homes%20are%20notorious%20for,you%20and%20your%20family%20breath](https://www.oregonlive.com/homeideas/2017/02/potential_health_risks_of_remo.html#:~:text=Older%20homes%20are%20notorious%20for,you%20and%20your%20family%20breath).
44. “Professional Pathways for High-Skilled Immigrants – ONA Job Coach Locations.” Department of State. Accessed July 21, 2022. <https://dos.ny.gov/professional-pathways-high-skilled-immigrants-ona-job-coach-locations>.
45. “Questions and Answers Regarding Housing Assistance for Refugees and ...” Office of Public and Indian Housing (PIH) . Accessed July 18, 2022. [https://www.hud.gov/sites/dfiles/FPM/documents/Afghan\\_resettlement\\_Refugees\\_Parolee\\_FAQs.pdf](https://www.hud.gov/sites/dfiles/FPM/documents/Afghan_resettlement_Refugees_Parolee_FAQs.pdf).
46. Rahbari, Laila. “Anonymous Interviews.” June 2022.
47. Rahbari, Laila. “Anonymous Interviews.” July 2022.

48. “Refugees in America.” USA for UNHCR. UN Refugee Agency. Accessed July 21, 2022. <https://www.unrefugees.org/refugee-facts/usa/#:~:text=Refugees%20do%20not%20choose%20the,makes%20recommendations%20to%20select%20countries.>
49. “Section 8 - Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) Program.” Homes and Community Renewal. Accessed July 18, 2022. <https://hcr.ny.gov/section-8-housing-choice-voucher-hcv-program>.
50. “Senator Sean Ryan, Assemblymember Jon Rivera Announce State Budget Doubles Funding for Refugee Resettlement Agencies.” Jonathan Rivera - Assembly District 149 | Assembly Member Directory | NYS Assembly, April 9, 2022. <https://nyassembly.gov/mem/Jonathan-Rivera/story/101578>.
51. “Stitch Buffalo’s Mission.” Stitch Buffalo. Accessed July 20, 2022. <https://www.stitchbuffalo.org/story>.
52. Takenaka, Ayumi. “Secondary Migration: Who Re-Migrates and Why These Migrants Matter.” [migrationpolicy.org](https://www.migrationpolicy.org). Migration Policy Institute, September 21, 2021. <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/secondary-migration-who-re-migrates-and-why-these-migrants-matter>.
53. Terreri Ramos, Jill. “How Generous Is N.Y. With Welfare Aid?” Empire Center for Public Policy, April 10, 2020. <https://www.empirecenter.org/publications/how-generous-is-n-y-with-welfare-aid/>.
54. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. “Figures at a Glance.” UNHCR. UNHCR, The UN Refugee Agency. Accessed July 19, 2022. <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/figures-at-a-glance.html>.
55. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. “What Is a Refugee?” UNHCR. Accessed July 14, 2022. <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/what-is-a-refugee.html>.
56. “What Is Considered 1st 2nd and 3rd Shift.” ZipRecruiter. Accessed July 25, 2022. <https://www.ziprecruiter.com/e/What-Is-Considered-1st-2nd-and-3rd-Shift>.
57. “What Is next for Afghans Who Fled to the United States?” The International Rescue Committee . Accessed July 19, 2022. <https://www.rescue.org/article/what-next-afghans-who-fled-united-states>.
58. “The World’s 10 Largest Refugee Camps.” Inside the World’s 10 Largest Refugee Camps. The UN Refugee Agency. Accessed July 19, 2022. <https://storymaps.esri.com/stories/2016/refugee-camps/#>.
59. Acosta, Sonya, and Erik Gartland. “Families Wait Years for Housing Vouchers Due to Inadequate Funding.” Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, July 22, 2021. <https://www.cbpp.org/research/housing/families-wait-years-for-housing-vouchers-due-to-inadequate-funding#:~:text=Wait%20times%20among%20assisted%20households,to%20five%20years%20in%20Alabama.>



**HIGHROAD**  
FELLOWSHIPS

**DEMOCRACY**  
FELLOWSHIPS

**ILR** Buffalo Co-Lab

[www.ilr.cornell.edu/buffalo-co-lab](http://www.ilr.cornell.edu/buffalo-co-lab)

617 Main Street, Suite 300 Buffalo, New York 14203