



# **“Building a Plane While It’s Flying”: Illinois Confronts a New Era of Forced Migration**

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## **About the DePaul Migration Collaborative**

The DePaul Migration Collaborative (DMC), born from DePaul University's commitment to immigrant communities, originated in 1996 with the founding of the Asylum & Immigration Law Clinic. In 2015, the College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences introduced the first U.S. graduate program in Refugee & Forced Migration Studies. The DMC, a joint venture of the College of Law and the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, embodies DePaul's dedication to interdisciplinary research and advocacy in migration and human rights, seeking systemic change through education and collective action, reinforcing DePaul's legacy as an immigrant-serving institution.

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## **Executive Summary**

This analysis examines the impact of “forced migration” on Illinois state government, particularly on the supportive services that the state currently provides to immigrants. “Forced migrants” are persons – many of whom are outside of regular immigration channels – who have been forced to flee their home country due to conflict, extreme violence or to economic or environmental catastrophe.

Forced migration is a critical topic for Illinois because of the large numbers of migrants, their impact on the state’s services, and the fact that forced migration is becoming increasingly common due to global instability. Illinois is a national leader in supporting the integration of immigrants, but forced migrants in their current numbers present a challenge to the state’s capacities and preparedness to serve persons in need.

This analysis is prepared for the DePaul Migration Collaborative, a multidisciplinary initiative of DePaul University that organizes research, teaching, and community engagement around the topic of forced migration to Illinois.

Following are selected findings of the analysis.

### **What Is “Forced Migration”?**

About 69,000 forced migrants arrived in Illinois during the 2022-2023 period in an entirely unexpected and unprecedented way. This analysis uses the term “forced migrants” to describe persons who have been forced from their home country by armed conflict, economic collapse or natural disaster. The great majority are not part of the formal Refugee Resettlement Program.

### **Who Are the Forced Migrants in Illinois?**

The forced migrants include persons from Ukraine fleeing the invasion of their country, individuals from Afghanistan who had assisted the United States during our military occupation of the country, participants in the Refugee Program and tens of thousands of migrants from mainly the Caribbean and Central and South America. The last group is represented by the 35,000 individuals who have passed through or remain in emergency shelters in Chicago since August 2022.

# **What Are Implications of the New Forced Migration for the State of Illinois?**

## **Illinois May Be Facing a “New Normal”**

Illinois may be facing a “new normal” of forced migration. Conditions that lead to forced migration from the Caribbean and Central and South America are unlikely to abate soon. Attempts at Congressional intervention have failed. There appears little likelihood of the war in Ukraine ending soon. Politicians in border states may have decided that they can funnel migrants to states like Illinois with impunity.

## **The Burden of Forced Migration Is Not Shared Equally Across the State**

The impacts of forced migration are not felt equally across the state. Ukrainians with temporary legal residence have largely settled in suburbs in northwest Cook County. In great part because they can legally work, they have a low impact on local communities. The “Southwestern Border Arrivals,” in contrast, have nearly all landed in Chicago, with a large number still in city-operated shelters without the ability to legally seek employment.

## **New “Sponsorship” Models Raise Concerns**

The admission to the U.S. of Ukrainians and participants in a special program for some Central Americans, South Americans and Caribbeans requires migrants to have “supporters” or sponsors that are supposed to provide them with financial and other assistance.<sup>1</sup> Many sponsors prove quite capable, but some sponsors likely avoid their obligations, while others are heavily burdened by their responsibilities. Overall, little is known about the sponsor-migrant relationship.

# **What Has Been the State of Illinois’ Response to Forced Migration?**

## **The State’s Pro-Immigrant Infrastructure Can Ease the Integration of Migrants**

Illinois has a robust system of services to its existing immigrant population, and in recent years the state has served more than 150,000 of those immigrants annually, devoting about a quarter of a billion dollars each year (including some federal monies provided to the state).

## **A Lack of Federal Support Has Contributed to a Mood of Crisis and Alarm**

The federal government provides a range of services and supports to persons in the Refugee Program and to Ukrainians in the “Uniting for Ukraine” program. Restricting the ability of the

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<sup>1</sup> Migrants who have been housed in Chicago shelters are not part of this program; the number of participants in this program, “Processes for Cuban, Haitians, Nicaraguans and Venezuelans,” has not been published by the federal government.

Southwestern Border Arrivals to work or to be eligible for federal benefits has forced the State of Illinois to bear an inordinate burden.

### **“Pro-Immigrant” Should Not Mean “Taken Advantage of by Texas”**

Texas Governor Greg Abbott has attacked Illinois by sending tens of thousands of migrants, unannounced, to the state. Illinois needs to treat its support for humane treatment of migrants as the strength and not allow others to turn it against us. The state seems to have lacked the tools to control the buses and airplane arrivals.

### **Some Existing Sources of Federal Support Are Ending, While Migrants Heavily Impact Some State Programs**

The state has dedicated federal and state funds for a variety of services to the new migrants, particularly the persons arriving from the southwestern border. Some of the programs are expiring with the loss of federal money, while others are state-funded and experiencing enrollment growth from the migrants.

## **How Should Illinois Prepare for the Future?**

### **We Need to Learn to Talk with the Forced Migrants**

To date, more than a year and a half into the SBA crisis, neither the city nor the state have systematically interviewed, surveyed or convened forced migrants to learn from them about their experience, needs and plans. Such an engagement would have powerful implications for the services being set up for them. Lack of information on the migrants, for example, has caused the state to overestimate the number eligible for legal services.

### **Digital Tools Must Be Employed in Communicating with the Forced Migrants**

To date, there has been almost no systematic digital communication established with the SBA migrants. This is despite the city of Chicago collecting the cell phone number and email address of all migrants booked into its shelter system, and migrants signing a waiver allowing their contact information to be used by the city and state. High-quality videos, web material and pdfs exist, but need to be “pushed out” via social media advertising purchases and communication channels like WhatsApp and Facebook.

### **Inter-Group, Competitive Pressures Need to Be Managed**

A human-relations campaign is needed to respond to the genuine frustrations that existing communities may feel when they see newcomers (at least some) have access to housing and employment opportunities denied to longer-term residents.

**It May Be Necessary to Rethink Existing Services**

This may be the most painful question posed by the new forced migration, especially by the Southwestern Border Arrivals. If fiscal pressures of serving the migrants become too great, the state may be forced to consider defining eligibility for its services differently for long-term immigrants vs. new arrivals.



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# “Building a Plane While It’s Flying”: Illinois Confronts a New Era of Forced Migration”

**Rob Paral, Practitioner in Residence**  
**DePaul Migration Collaborative, DePaul University**

*This analysis examines the impact of “forced migration” on Illinois state government, particularly on the supportive services that the state provides to immigrants. “Forced migrants” are persons – often outside of regular immigration channels – compelled to flee their home country due to conflict, extreme violence or to economic or environmental catastrophe. Forced migration is a critical topic because of the large numbers of migrants, their impact on the state’s services, and the fact that forced migration is increasingly common. Forced migration at its current levels presents a challenge to the state government’s capacities to serve persons in need.*

Illinois is one of the great centers of North American immigration, with a storied record of incorporating migrants of many backgrounds and experiences. At every point in Illinois history the impact, needs and contributions of persons from other countries have been a defining feature of the state.

Today Illinois is experiencing unprecedented migration of individuals fleeing war, economic ruin and environmental catastrophe. Within just two years almost 70,000 “forced migrants” have come to our state. Illinois government has responded by setting up supportive services for migrants such as housing, nutrition and legal advice, and by making grants to local governments in need of aid to cope with migrant arrivals. The response has occurred under extraordinary pressure in the face of human need and has frequently been described as “building a plane while it's flying.”

This analysis documents and analyzes the impact of the migrants and the state’s response to them. It also provides suggestions to prepare the state for a possible future of continued forced migration. The goal of the analysis is to foster thoughtful planning to maintain Illinois’ legacy as a welcoming place while it manages a migration flow with inadequate federal support.

## **Defining Forced Migration**

*This section addresses the definition of “forced migration” and argues that Illinois should prepare itself for more.*

## **Introduction to Illinois Immigration**

Immigration is a major feature of our society in the United States, and certainly in Illinois. The state is home to about 1.8 million foreign-born persons, who are about 14 percent or one of six residents. Each year tens of thousands of persons come from abroad to live permanently in Illinois, and many more come here for temporary periods to legally work in industries like manufacturing or technology, or to study in the numerous colleges and universities based in Illinois. Historically, a substantial number have arrived without a legal status and stayed here for decades, working and raising families.

Immigrants in Illinois fall into categories of permanent (with legal status or U.S. citizenship), legal temporary, and undocumented. Naturalized U.S. citizens and legal permanent residents can generally remain in the U.S. indefinitely. Immigrants with a legal but temporary status include workers with specialized and sought-after skills, trainees such as medical interns who were trained abroad and come to this country to complete their training, students who come to study here, and other categories. Some immigrants have a temporary status outside the visa categories, such as Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals or Temporary Protected Status. Undocumented immigrants may live in Illinois for long or short periods, and mostly reside here without having had contact with any federal immigration agency.

Another group falls outside the parameters of legal permanent, legal temporary or undocumented and consists of persons without a legal status and who have been in contact with immigration enforcement agencies. They are often awaiting hearings in immigration court to pursue a claim of asylum, withholding of removal or other relief they may qualify for. Many of the Southwest Border Arrivals, described below, are in this category.

## **Forced Migration**

### **Defining Forced Migration**

The above categories describe immigrants by their ability to remain in the U.S. and their interaction, or not, with the federal government. They help to delineate the legal situations of foreign-born persons and illustrate the complexity of immigration.

Another way to look at immigration is based on the motivation of people to come here. Perhaps most immigrants move to the U.S. primarily to join family members or to work, but others have been pushed away from their country for reasons as weighty as any that attracted them to this one. Their homeland may be rent by war, devastated by economic collapse, or destroyed by natural disaster. These persons are the focus of this analysis, and they are described here as “forced migrants” subject to “forced migration.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The European Union shares a definition of forced migrant as “A person subject to a migratory movement in which an element of coercion exists, including threats to life and livelihood, whether arising from natural or man-made

“Forced migration” and “forced migrants” overlap with the foregoing descriptions of Illinois immigrants. Refugees admitted through the Refugee Resettlement Program are forced migrants. Persons with Temporary Protected Status are forced migrants unable to return to their country of origin. Other immigrants who have successfully found a “regular” immigration channel may also be forced migrants. Still others have no legal channel readily available to them but have come here seeking safety.

Forced migration defies easy categorization. Given the association that many of us would make between “war” and “refugees,” most observers would agree that persons fleeing Russian missile attacks on civilian populations in Ukraine conform to preconceptions of refugees. Persons escaping economic collapse or death threats from police agencies or a category five hurricane might not, fairly or not, fit everyone’s informal sense of what a refugee is, although the migrants themselves have no doubts about their situation. “Forced migrant,” then, is not a legally precise term.

Forced migrants who cannot avail themselves of formal legal channels such as refugees or persons with TPS can be at a severe disadvantage in being able to survive in Illinois. They usually cannot work legally. Local communities may resist their presence. The migrants may have post-traumatic stress and mental and physical health problems. Institutions like schools and medical facilities may find it hard to meet the needs of the migrants, and political actors can instrumentalize them as culprits to stir apprehension and anger.

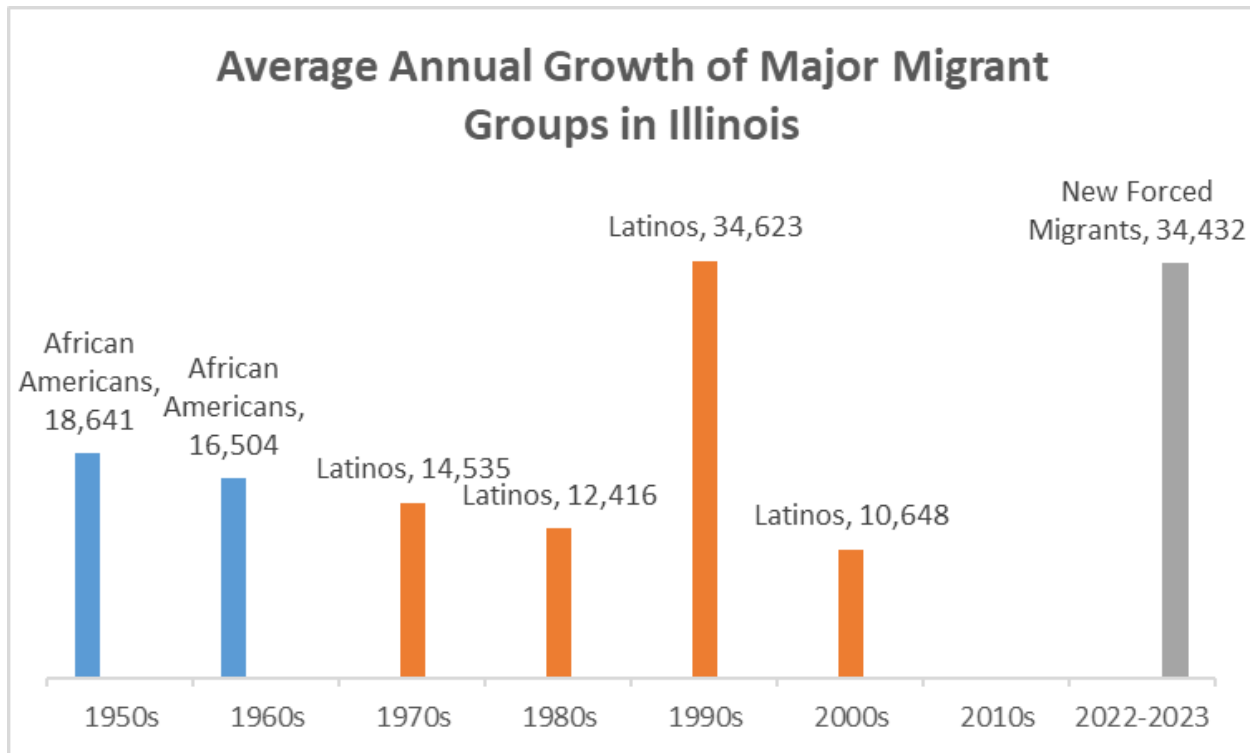
In just the last two years, as will be discussed later, 69,000 forced migrants have come to Illinois. This new migration includes persons from Ukraine who have parole or Temporary Protected Status, and persons from Afghanistan who had their own special immigration “parole” to enter the country. Tens of thousands of forced migrants from the Caribbean and Central and South America have arrived here; some of them will obtain the right to stay here and many likely won’t. Except for the Afghans, who began arriving in the fall of 2021, hardly any of these migrations were taking place prior to March 2022, when Ukrainians began to flee their country.

It’s worth putting the 69,000 number in context, to show how meaningful it is. The actual number, 68,864 represents an average of 34,432 persons in both 2022 and 2023. This annualized number is close to or greater than the annual post-war peaks of the Great Migration of African Americans to Illinois from southern states and the heights of Latino immigration of the 1990s.<sup>3</sup>

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causes.” [https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/networks/european-migration-network-emn/emn-asylum-and-migration-glossary/glossary/forced-migrant\\_en](https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/networks/european-migration-network-emn/emn-asylum-and-migration-glossary/glossary/forced-migrant_en)

<sup>3</sup> The numbers in the chart for African Americans include both migrants, immigrants and births. Data is lacking on Black internal migration to Illinois. Black population change specifically from migration is lower than what is seen in the chart.



Forced migration involves multiple world regions, but in 2024 the two main examples are Ukrainians fleeing war and Latin Americans and Caribbeans seeking asylum for a multitude of reasons. At this writing, neither stream shows signs of abating. Indeed, unpredictable catastrophes could accelerate the flow and/or add new countries to the mix.

### **Becoming Proactive Towards Forced Migration**

Much of the past two years have been spent responding to the new forced migration, but it's time for Illinois to become proactive. This may mean arranging new types of duties or personnel in state government; strategizing to blunt harmful actions of characters like a Texas governor; reconsidering existing state assistance programs in light of new and different types of demands, and coordinating more intentionally with private philanthropy, the private immigration bar, universities and other institutions. This must be done within the context of addressing the ongoing lack of federal immigration reform.

Fortunately, the state of Illinois may be well-positioned to reorient itself. State and local governments have taken numerous steps to declare themselves in support of immigration, including by passing multiple laws that clarify and expand the rights of immigrants. Most of these initiatives predate the arrival of the forced migrants.

The Illinois General Assembly has a large cohort of immigrant-supportive elected officials, and the state's governor frequently cites his ancestor's migration to the state. Illinois voters have

rewarded candidates supporting immigration, and few if any hardline, anti-immigrant candidates have won statewide elections in recent memory.

## **Who Are the Forced Migrants in Illinois?**

*This section describes the origins and types of forced migrants, providing population numbers and a description of each of the major groups that are a part of forced migration today.*

The forced migrants are diverse in terms of where they come from, their specific reasons for coming here, and in the ways by which our federal government supports them or not. Diversity among forced migrants is not new. It characterized the 19th Century Irish, German and Jewish immigrants fleeing starvation, repression and persecution. It defined the Southeast Asian refugees of the 1970 and 1980s, who came from Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos.

Today's forced migrants similarly reflect multiple nationalities and cultures. The largest group comprises about 35,000 persons here called Southwestern Border Arrivals. About 70 percent of them in Chicago are from Venezuela, though multiple other countries are found among them, including Haiti, Colombia, Honduras and Guatemala. These are individuals who began to arrive in Chicago in August 2022, at the instigation of Texas Governor Greg Abbott, who has chartered buses to move migrants from Texas to a handful of northern cities including Chicago.

The other large group of forced migrants consists of about 26,000 persons who have fled the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Other groups include participants in the Refugee Resettlement Program, which has existed for many decades and has resettled more than 125,000 persons since 1975;<sup>4</sup> a recent six-year period saw about 5,700 refugees come to Illinois. About 2,200 Afghans in Illinois escaped that country as the Taliban assumed control with the departure of American military forces in 2020.

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<sup>4</sup> Illinois Governor Pritzker Gubernatorial Disaster Proclamation, January 4, 2024  
<https://www.illinois.gov/content/dam/soi/en/web/illinois/documents/government/asylum-seekers-dis-proc-01-05-24.pdf>

<b>Forced Migrants in Illinois as of January 2024</b>	
<b>Total</b>	<b>68,864</b>
Southwestern Border Arrivals	35,000
Ukrainians	26,000
Persons in Refugee Resettlement Program (2018-2023 arrivals only)	5,664
Afghans	2,200

### **SBA Numbers May Be Higher Than Realized**

While the City of Chicago reports that as of January 2024 35,000 migrants had arrived there by bus or airplane, mostly from Texas,<sup>5</sup> there are indications that the actual number of migrants is higher. According to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS), U.S. Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) had released **63,296** migrants between January 2022 and September 2023 who reported that Illinois was their destination.<sup>6</sup>

The discrepancy of almost 30,000 persons may reflect that Chicago’s reported recent arrival data only includes migrants that were sent to Illinois by the State of Texas, by Texas charitable organizations like Catholic Charities of San Antonio, or who have arrived to Chicago on their own. The additional persons may be from more established migrant communities from Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador, rather than the more recent groups from Venezuela and Colombia. The discrepancy could also reflect the fact that some migrants cite Chicago as a destination but travel elsewhere, although DHS states that 86 percent of migrants who note a destination do go to that destination, based on the agency’s examination of data.

There may be tens of thousands more SBAs in Illinois than have been reported.

## **Southwestern Border Arrivals (SBAs)**

### **A New Dynamic at the Border**

Forced migrants arrive at points across the breadth of the United States by land border crossings, by sea journeys to coastal areas and by airplane landings in the interior of the nation. A typical Ukrainian who makes it to Illinois flew here from Warsaw. But much of what can be called forced migration today takes place at the U.S. southwestern border.

<sup>5</sup> Dashboard, [www.chicago.gov/city/en/sites/texas-new-arrivals/home/Dashboard.html](http://www.chicago.gov/city/en/sites/texas-new-arrivals/home/Dashboard.html). Accessed 30 Jan. 2024.

<sup>6</sup> Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security memorandum “Reported Intended Destination Data.”

Over the last decade a new migration phenomenon has developed at the U.S. southwestern border. Some of the new arrivals at the border have been able to enter the U.S. under formal procedures, but many others have turned themselves in to immigration authorities, hoping to seek asylum, while others have attempted to enter without authorization and were apprehended.

The statistics on border apprehensions by U.S. Customs and Border Protection tell the story. The number of annual apprehensions rose from well below a million in the 2014-2018 period to an average of almost two million in the 2019-2023 period, as seen in the table below. These attempts to enter have taken place after a decline in the overall undocumented population (which mainly consists of persons from Mexico) was occurring: between 2010 and 2019 the national unauthorized immigrant population fell from 11.4 to 10.2 million.<sup>7</sup> This suggests that groups other than Mexican workers and their families are seeking entrance to the U.S.

Indeed, much of the growth in border encounters over the last decade came from countries other than Mexico. The Mexican share fell steadily from 57 percent in 2015 to 29 percent in 2023 (except for one year, 2020). At the same time, other countries such as Venezuela and Colombia became more prominent, especially after 2020. Venezuela represented less than one percent of encounters in 2014 but 11 percent by 2023, rising from only 78 encounters to 266,071. Colombia rose from less than one percent to six percent, or from 330 encounters to 159,536.

The table below shows the top five countries of origin of migrants appearing at the border as of 2023. It also makes clear that “Other” is a growing category, showing the diversification of arrivals.

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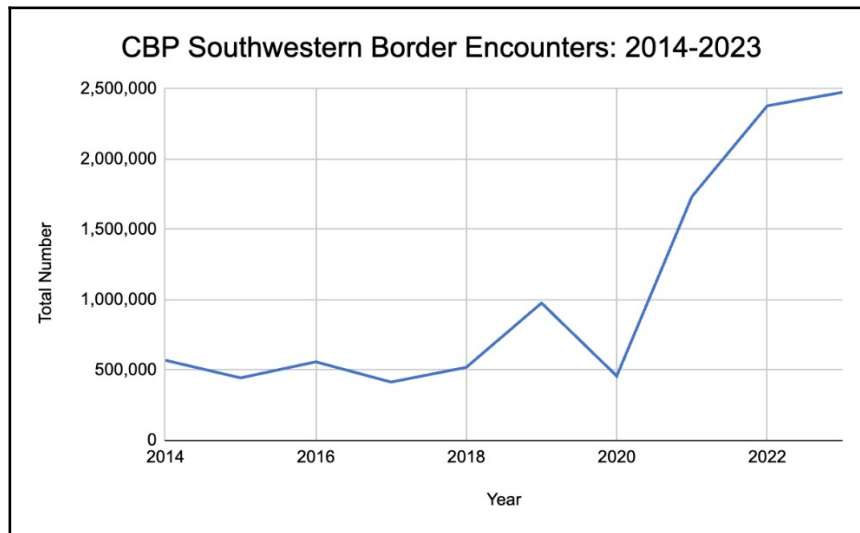
<sup>7</sup> Passel, Jeffrey S. “What We Know about Unauthorized Immigrants Living in the U.S.” Pew Research Center, Pew Research Center, 16 Nov. 2023, [www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2023/11/16/what-we-know-about-unauthorized-immigrants-living-in-the-us/](http://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2023/11/16/what-we-know-about-unauthorized-immigrants-living-in-the-us/).



**CBP Southwestern Border Encounters 2014-2023**

		Total	Mexico	Ven.	Guat.	Honduras	Colombia	Other
2014	570,048	100%	50%	0%	15%	17%	0%	18%
2015	444,856	100%	57%	0%	14%	8%	0%	21%
2016	558,991	100%	46%	0%	16%	11%	0%	28%
2017	415,199	100%	44%	0%	18%	13%	0%	25%
2018	519,944	100%	43%	0%	26%	17%	0%	15%
2019	977,229	100%	24%	1%	28%	27%	0%	21%
2020	458,082	100%	65%	1%	10%	9%	0%	15%
2021	1,734,683	100%	38%	3%	16%	18%	0%	24%
2022	2,378,944	100%	34%	8%	10%	9%	5%	34%
2023	2,475,669	100%	29%	11%	9%	9%	6%	36%

Source: U.S. Office of Homeland Security <https://www.dhs.gov/ohss/topics/immigration/enforcement-and-legal-processes-monthly-tables>



**Temporary Entry at the Border and Requests for Asylum**

Most of the SBAs requested asylum when they presented themselves to an immigration authority or were apprehended near the border. Under U.S. immigration law, asylum may be granted to an individual who demonstrates that their life or freedom is threatened on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. Asylum may be sought regardless of the manner of entry into the U.S., although the process is more difficult for persons who have entered without authorization.

At the border, persons who enter “without inspection,” i.e. who have not been admitted or paroled into the U.S., can face a process of “expedited removal” in which they are ordered removed from the U.S. without normally being able to appeal their removal.<sup>8</sup> If a person in

<sup>8</sup>“A Primer on Expedited Removal.” American Immigration Council, 14 Dec. 2023, [www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/primer-expedited-removal](http://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/primer-expedited-removal).

expedited removal says that they face persecution or torture at home they are normally given a “credible fear interview” which may or may not allow them to apply for asylum.

Other migrants may or may not have experienced expedited removal and may not have claimed asylum. CBP and ICE release large numbers of migrants because the agencies are unable to process the large volume of persons arriving at the border.<sup>9</sup>

CBP publicizes a CBPOne app that allows persons to schedule an appearance at a port of inspection. The demand for these appearances far outnumbers the slots available, and the number of appointments successfully scheduled via the app is low, averaging about 31,000 per month in 2023.<sup>10</sup> For Venezuelans the average was a mere 6,400. The fact of inadequate CBPOne appointments explains why many migrants do not qualify for work authorization, as discussed later.

An asylum claim is the only option that many at the southwestern border may feel that they have to gain permanent residence in the U.S. Given the categories under which asylum may be granted (life or freedom threatened on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion), it is questionable how many will ultimately obtain it, in part because of the difficulty in finding and paying for legal representation for their asylum claim. In a recent three-month period, October-December 2022, 28 percent of completed asylum cases resulted in an affirmative grant of asylum in the Chicago immigration court.<sup>11</sup>

For many of the asylum seekers, permanent legal residence in the U.S. is unlikely. Temporary Protected Status will provide a temporary shield against deportation, but only in short (usually 18-month) increments. TPS is subject to the willingness of future or current presidential administrations to renew it.

### **Southwestern Border Arrivals Reach Illinois**

Illinois first saw large numbers of Southwestern Border Arrivals in August 2022 when Texas Governor Greg Abbott began to place migrants on buses to Chicago. He had already sent buses of migrants to New York City, Washington, DC, and other northern cities and states to force them to experience the effects of the border situation that he said were being felt by Texas.

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<sup>9</sup> U.S. Has Released More than 2.3 Million Migrants at Border since 2021 ..., [www.washingtonpost.com/immigration/2024/01/06/biden-migrants-us-mexico-border/](https://www.washingtonpost.com/immigration/2024/01/06/biden-migrants-us-mexico-border/). Accessed 2 Feb. 2024.

<sup>10</sup> Source: Office of Homeland Security Statistics analysis of CBP OFO PSPD Enterprise Reporting data.

<sup>11</sup> Source: Office of Homeland Security, I-589 Affirmative Asylum Summary Overview FY2022 Q1 (Oct 1, 2021 - Dec 31, 2021) at [https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/document/data/Asylum\\_Division\\_Quarterly\\_Statistics\\_Report\\_FY22\\_Q1\\_V4.pdf](https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/document/data/Asylum_Division_Quarterly_Statistics_Report_FY22_Q1_V4.pdf)

Abbott sought to embarrass cities and states that considered themselves to be “welcoming” locations for immigrants by straining their resources as they sought to help migrants in accordance with their stated values. Texas is not among the U.S. states that publicly endorse immigration, unlike Illinois and other states that have been creating multiple policies to help migrants adjust, such as providing access to drivers' licenses and healthcare and limiting immigrant detention. Abbott was undoubtedly aware that the Democratic National Convention would be held in Chicago in August 2024, and that the presence of a migrant crisis in the city would divide and antagonize the Democratic Party as it sought unity prior to a presidential election.



*Figure 1: Migrants in El Paso, Texas, awaits buses for northern cities. December, 2023.*

The author visited the El Paso, Texas, areas in early December 2023 to learn about how migrants cross the border and reach Illinois. At the Paso del Norte bridge, migrants who were not detained and who used the CBPOne app to obtain an appointment with CBP exited the border checkpoint on foot and were met by staff of a non-profit organization, Border Servant Corps (BSC).

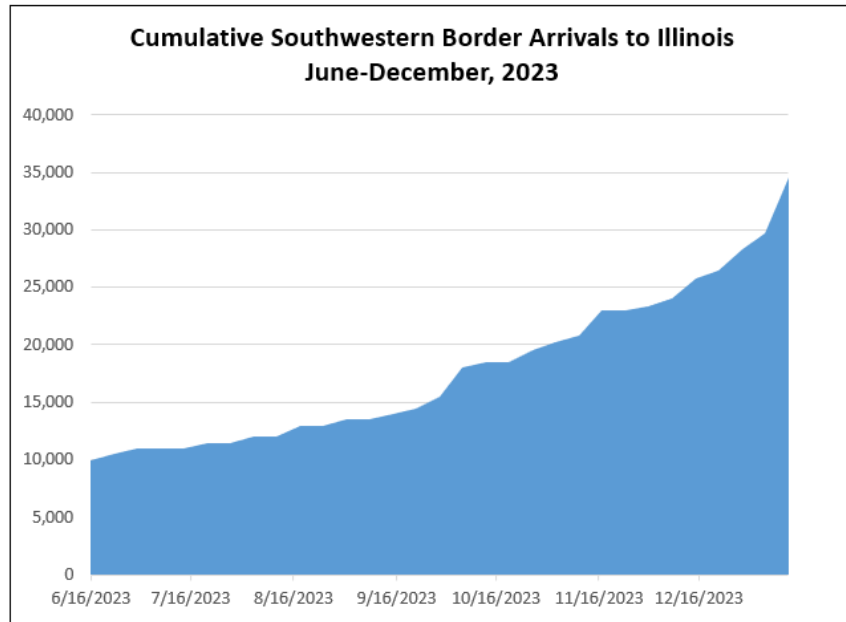
The BSC staff escorted the migrants to an office a few blocks away in the old downtown area. There they were offered snacks and water and seated in a waiting room. Personnel of U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) had been seconded to work with BSC at the site. The USCIS staff took the migrants' photos and completed some of the information necessary for

the migrants to apply for work authorization. The application could be completed later when the migrant had a mailing address in the north.

After USCIS had completed its processing, BSC staff offered the migrants the opportunity to voluntarily board a bus that would take them to a shelter. Most of the migrants accepted the offer, but others chose to depart on their own. Some of the latter had people waiting for them while others may not have.

Migrants who have been detained by CBP or ICE and eventually released are sometimes delivered to shelters in El Paso, though local advocates told us that sometimes CBP or ICE simply dropped migrants off at odd hours in unexpected locations. There is a certain amount of coordination between the federal agencies and the non-profit sector, though representatives of the latter said that it was generally exceedingly difficult to achieve cooperation from CBP and ICE. With federal FEMA money, BSC was in the process of opening a large temporary shelter for migrants, as was another organization, Annunciation House. But these shelters were intended to be temporary way stations, and it was clear, as we were told repeatedly in our El Paso interviews, that migrants move quickly away from the border, partly from their own desire, and partly because there was a system in place to move them.

Indeed, migrants move out of El Paso and specifically to Chicago not by accident, choice or random chance but because the state of Texas funnels migrants to Illinois. Texas Governor Greg Abbott pays bus companies to deliver migrants from El Paso to a small set of locations including Chicago, New York and Denver. The non-profit sector inevitably becomes complicit in this arrangement because they respond to the migrants' desire to get away from the border and into the interior of the country.



The process of boarding migrants onto buses bound for Chicago takes place at the Amtrak station in El Paso. During a visit on a brisk weekday morning in December 2023, small buses of migrants were observed getting dropped off by buses coming from shelters such as one owned by Border Servant Corps in Las Cruces, New Mexico. A few migrants arrived on foot, and it was unclear if they were sent to the station or arrived on their own.

Migrants lined up in three lines, one corresponding to Chicago, one for New York, and one for another city. One Venezuelan migrant said he, his wife, and their small child were going to Chicago, though later in the week he reported that he was sent to New York. Migrants we spoke with seemed to have little information about what would happen in Chicago. They were unaware that they would be sleeping on the floor of a police station until a shelter bed was available (which was the city policy until early December 2023).

A staff member of Texas Emergency Management shared that migrants were sent to only five cities: Chicago, New York, Denver, Salt Lake City and one other city which he would not reveal but which may be Philadelphia.



*Figure 2: Venezuelan man and child en route to Chicago from El Paso, Texas. December, 2023.*

### **Countries Among the Illinois SBAs**

As noted earlier, Venezuelans are a growing share of persons seeking entry at the southwestern U.S. border, and they are the great majority of Southwestern Border Arrivals in Illinois. Venezuelans were 70 percent of the shelter population in Chicago as of January 2024, and 88 percent of persons requesting shelter between June 2023 and January 2024.<sup>12</sup> After Venezuela, Colombia is the next largest group among Chicago SBAs, at four percent of the total. Ecuador, Haiti and Peru are all about one percent of arrivals.

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<sup>12</sup> “New Arrivals Data Dashboard.” 40th Ward of Chicago, 29 Jan. 2024, [40thward.org/cirr/new-arrivals/new-arrivals-data-dashboard/](https://40thward.org/cirr/new-arrivals/new-arrivals-data-dashboard/).

Migrant Arrivals in Chicago Shelters as of 01-05-24		
	Total	% of Total
Total	15,617	100%
Venezuela	10,963	70%
Unknown	3,316	21%
Colombia	623	4%
Ecuador	217	1%
Haiti	155	1%
Peru	114	1%
Honduras	63	0.40%
Angola	35	0.20%
Nicaragua	31	0.20%
Mauritania	24	0.20%
Guatemala	22	0.10%
Mexico	18	0.10%
Chile	13	0.10%
Brazil	12	0.10%
Cuba	11	0.10%

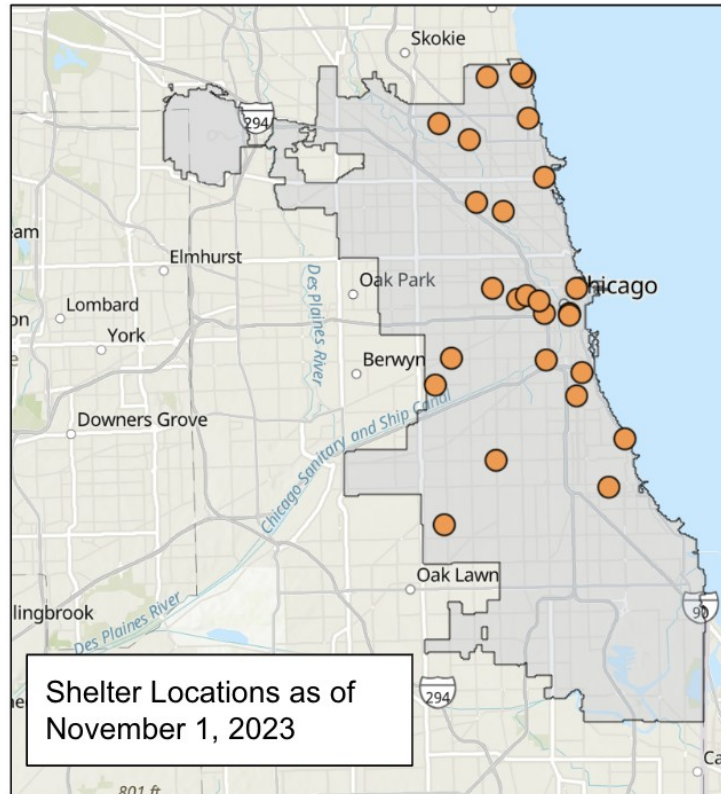
Source: <https://40thward.org/cirr/>

### Locations of SBAs

The State of Illinois paid for temporary hotel stays for the first SBAs that arrived on buses in 2022. The locations and numbers of persons have not been made available, and the hotels were no longer available after a few months.

Chicago set up shelters for the migrants not long after they began to arrive in 2022. By June 2023 the city had twelve shelters in place and the number had risen to 30 by mid-January 2024. Apart from the shelters, SBAs were permitted up until December 2023 to sleep on the floor of police stations, while others stayed in similar accommodations at O’Hare and Midway Airports. Some SBAs found shelter of one kind or another in suburban locations such as Oak Park, and an unknown number of churches, mutual aid organizations and other groups found places for a limited number of SBAs to live.

The State of Illinois has provided some time-limited rental assistance for SBAs, though the locations have not been published. The January 2024 locations of City of Chicago shelters show that shelters were generally near the lakefront, with some concentration close to downtown.



### **The Uncertain Future**

As will be discussed later, most Southwestern Border Arrivals are likely not eligible for Temporary Protected States or employment authorization and face an uphill battle in attaining asylum. Virtually all of these persons have pending removal (deportation) hearings in immigration court. As these court hearings arrive, a growing population will lose any claim to remaining here.

For the State of Illinois and its local governments there will come difficult questions of how to respond to federal immigration enforcement (again, deportations) of thousands of migrants. The tension could tightly strain federal-state relations and inflame the public, forcing decisions on the state as to whether to assist with, actively thwart or attempt to ignore any large-scale federal deportation effort.

### **Ukrainians**

Illinois is home to about 60,000 persons of Ukrainian ancestry according to the U.S. Census Bureau. Ukrainian and other large-scale European migration occurred in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In the years after the Second World War and the occupation of the eastern states of Europe by the U.S.S.R., a certain number of asylees were received in Illinois. The Lautenberg



Amendment<sup>13</sup> made it possible for citizens who are members of a religious minority group in former Soviet Union countries, including Ukraine, to be sponsored by family members.

Prior to February 24, 2022, when Russia attacked Ukraine in a “full-blown war and occupation,” there had been little precedent for a large-scale refugee-type movement of any European country to Illinois since the Second World War (although the 1990s in the former Yugoslavia resulted in Illinois resettling the nation’s largest number of Bosnian refugees).<sup>14</sup> By the end of 2023, 22,000 Ukrainian civilians had been killed in the war and more than 5 million – or more than 10 percent of the entire population – were displaced within the country.<sup>15</sup> More than 40 percent of the country’s population is estimated to be in need of humanitarian assistance, and 6.3 million Ukrainians have fled their nation as refugees.

The number of Ukrainians in Illinois because of the war, as discussed later, is about 26,000. To place this number in perspective, it far exceeds the annual number of refugees from all nations that arrive in Illinois, which has been about 1,800 per year over the last decade. This number does not include Ukrainians who were already in Illinois before Russia's war with Ukraine, or those who have received Temporary Protected Status, which allows them to stay in the U.S. but limits the support they can receive. (The federal government provides no statistics on these persons in Illinois.) The 26,000 number is also much larger than the number of legal permanent residents in a year from any given country. In 2022, for example, about 7,300 persons from Mexico arrived in Illinois as legal residents, as did 6,100 persons from India.<sup>16</sup>

### **Uniting for Ukraine Program**

On April 21, 2022, President Biden announced a process to allow Ukrainian citizens fleeing the war to come to the U.S. under the Uniting for Ukraine (U4U) program. U4U provides Ukrainians with an immigration parole status for two years. This status allows Ukrainians to remain legally in the U.S. and to work here once they apply for work authorization. Ukrainians are also eligible for state and federal public assistance programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, or food stamps) and Medicaid (health insurance for low-income persons).

U4U participants are provided with resettlement services that mirror those offered to persons permanently coming to the U.S. via the Refugee Resettlement Program.<sup>17</sup> These include job search and placement assistance, classes to learn English, and initial health examinations. The

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13 P.L. 117-103, Division K, Title VII, §7034(l)(5),  
<https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/2471/text>

14 “Ukraine War: UN Humanitarians Launch \$4.2 Billion Appeal for Most Vulnerable | UN News.” United Nations, United Nations, [news.un.org/en/story/2024/01/1145517](https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/01/1145517). Accessed 2 Feb. 2024.

15 “War in Ukraine | Global Conflict Tracker.” Council on Foreign Relations, Council on Foreign Relations, [www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/conflict-ukraine](https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/conflict-ukraine). Accessed 2 Feb. 2024.

16 “Yearbook of Immigration Statistics 2022.” Yearbook 2022 | Homeland Security, [www.dhs.gov/ohss/topics/immigration/yearbook/2022](https://www.dhs.gov/ohss/topics/immigration/yearbook/2022). Accessed 2 Feb. 2024.

federal government provides monetary support to Illinois to assist the Ukrainians in U4U. By the summer of 2023, the U.S. Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) had distributed \$20.4 million to Illinois.

ORR funds in Illinois pass through the State to the Jewish United Fund (JUF), which is the state’s primary contractor and fiscal agent for the Refugee Resettlement Program. JUF in turn subcontracts services to organizations such as RefugeeOne. The State of Illinois provided its own funds to the Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights (ICIRR), which subcontracted the funding to organizations that would provide direct services. One of these, SelfReliance, has a long history in the Ukrainian Village area of Chicago, where it is located near the SelfReliance Financial Credit Union. The credit union has various suburban locations as well. The social service arm of SelfReliance had never been a contractor in the Refugee Resettlement Program, but was able to use its many contacts with the community to reach the new arrivals.

### **Sponsorship of Ukrainians**

U4U requires participants to have a U.S. sponsor (technically called a “supporter”) who agrees to support them financially while they are in the U.S.<sup>18</sup> Sponsors are supposed to receive the Ukrainian beneficiaries when they arrive in the U.S., transport them to housing, assist them with program paperwork, ensure that their healthcare needs are met, enroll their children in school and provide other kinds of support.



*Figure 3: Sponsors of Ukrainians. Chicago, May 2023.*

Under the U4U program, 39,010 applications to sponsor a person from Ukraine were filed by Illinois residents as of December 2023. Illinois was second in applications only to New York (at about 42,000) and was home to 12 percent of all supporters at that time.

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<sup>17</sup> U.S. Office of Refugee Resettlement Policy Letter 22-13 of May 23, 2023 “Ukrainian Humanitarian Parolees Eligible for ORR Benefits and Services”

<sup>18</sup> “Uniting for Ukraine.” USCIS, 5 Dec. 2023, [www.uscis.gov/ukraine](http://www.uscis.gov/ukraine).

<b>Location of U.S.-based Ukrainian Sponsors by Top States</b>		
State	Total	% of Total
New York	42,457	13%
Illinois	39,010	12%
California	37,662	11%
Washington	28,894	9%
Florida	26,336	8%
Pennsylvania	18,043	5%
New Jersey	16,828	5%
Ohio	11,496	3%
Texas	11,141	3%
Michigan	7,860	2%
Other	92,138	28%
<b>Total</b>	<b>331,865</b>	<b>100%</b>
Source: U.S. Department of Human Services: Weekly Partner Update: Uniting for Ukraine (U4U), December 27, 2023.		

Federal data shows that about two-thirds of applicants matched are approved. At this rate, the 39,010 sponsors in Illinois would translate into about 26,000 U4U beneficiaries living in the state.<sup>19</sup>

The U4U program permits Ukrainians to enter the U.S. if they are otherwise eligible and can secure a sponsor. The sponsor can be a U.S. citizen or legal resident, with the expectation that they will provide support to the Ukrainian fleeing war.

Some Ukrainians are related to or know their sponsor, but others find sponsors through appeals to strangers via social media. Facebook pages have multiple examples of Ukrainians reaching out for sponsorship. In reality, the sponsor requirements are neither binding nor enforced.

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<sup>19</sup> The federal government does not publish statistics about the number of actual Ukrainian arrivals by state.

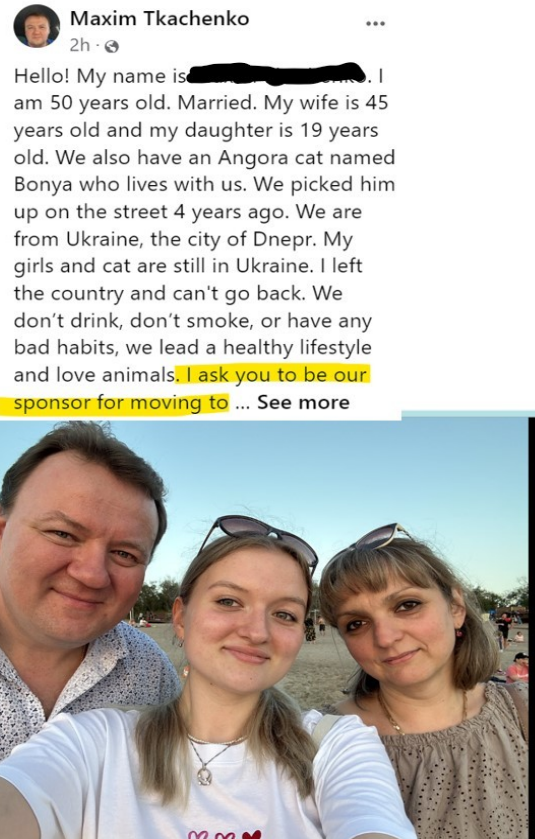
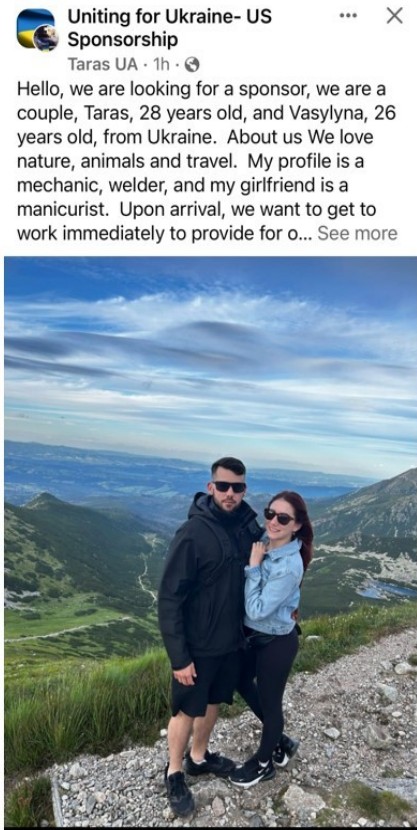


Figure 4: Seeking Sponsors via social media.

Some sponsors, likely a minority based on the author’s interviews with Ukrainians, do not help the migrant and indeed sometimes the sponsor and migrant never meet. But others have been exceedingly generous and helpful. Dawn Summers lives near Dixon, Illinois. She had never had a Ukrainian relative nor any connection to Ukraine but told herself one day after the war began that she had to do something. She applied to sponsor U4U participants and eventually became responsible for 19 Ukrainians with whom she became deeply involved, finding them jobs, education, human services and housing.

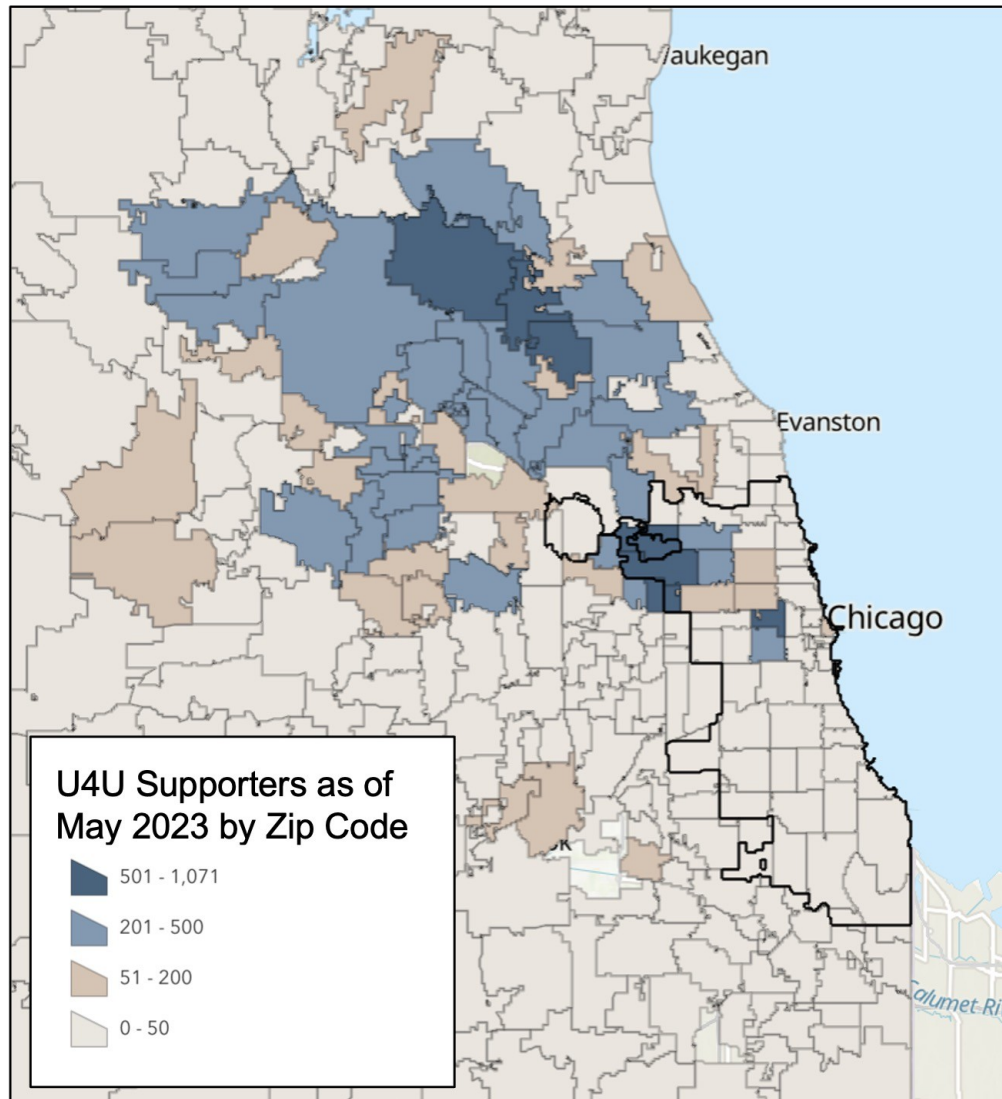


*Figure 5: Dixon, Illinois: Sponsored Ukrainians*

Sponsors can do a lot of the heavy lifting in supporting Ukrainians, but they get little help from the federal government or the State of Illinois. One young couple accepted into their home a Ukrainian woman who was mistreated by a sponsor in another state. The migrant had significant mental health needs that the sponsors struggled to get help for.

### **Locations of the Ukrainians**

Most U4U supporters live in the northwest suburbs of Chicago or in the Ukrainian Village area of Chicago, near Western and Chicago Avenues on the city's near northwest side. The northwest suburbs of Chicago may be said to be "resource rich" in terms of household incomes, employment opportunities, and the funding levels of school districts, parks, libraries and local governments, and while these features correspond with higher rents, the area presents opportunities for new arrivals to find work, get their children good schools and live amid relative prosperity.



## Persons with Refugee Status

Refugees have been recognized as a class of immigrant at least since 1891, when Congress created the Bureau of Immigration and included “refugees” among persons who could be admitted to the U.S.<sup>20</sup> In the 1910-1920 period large numbers of refugees arrived in the U.S. as a result of the Mexican Revolution.

After the Second World War, the U.S. gave special consideration to admitting displaced Europeans. A Refugee Relief Act of 1953 set aside visas for persons leaving communist countries including China. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, about 58,000 Cubans entered the U.S. under the Attorney General’s parole authority.<sup>21</sup> Finally in 1980 a comprehensive set of

<sup>20</sup>“Refugee Timeline.” USCIS, 7 Feb. 2023, [www.uscis.gov/about-us/our-history/stories-from-the-archives/refugee-timeline](http://www.uscis.gov/about-us/our-history/stories-from-the-archives/refugee-timeline).

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*

laws regarding the admittance and resettlement of refugees and asylees was created by the Refugee Act of 1980.

In general, U.S. law considers a refugee to be a person outside of the U.S. who is of special humanitarian concern, demonstrates persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution, is not resettled elsewhere, and is admissible to the U.S.<sup>22</sup> The term “refugee” is used in multiple contexts, but here we refer to a person who has been determined to meet the above requirements and who is a participant in the U.S. Refugee Resettlement Program or who has one of a variety of special humanitarian-related immigration statuses, including Cuban/Haitian entrants, Special Immigrant visa holders, humanitarian parolees, asylees and victims of human trafficking.<sup>23</sup>

### **The Refugee Program in Illinois**

Illinois has resettled over 125,000 refugees from over 60 countries since the mid 1970s.<sup>24</sup> The state typically received several thousand refugees annually prior to the administration of Donald Trump, who slashed the national refugee admission ceiling from 85,000 to 18,000. COVID-era restrictions further limited refugee arrivals. Admittance of refugees has yet to recover from the Trump evisceration, with admissions running substantially below the higher ceilings authorized during the Biden Administration.<sup>25</sup> Illinois received about a thousand or fewer refugees in each year of the 2018-2022 period. In 2023 the number was about 2,400 persons.<sup>26</sup>

The Bureau of Refugee and Immigrant Services of the Illinois Department of Human Services administers the Illinois Refugee Resettlement Program, which is funded by the federal Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR). Refugees in Illinois are eligible for short-term cash assistance and health screenings. They may also receive employment and social services administered by various nonprofit organizations and a community college. The Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago manages overall operations of employment and social services, as a fiscal agent for the state. Some 11 organizations are part of the network of refugee service providers in Illinois, and nine groups provide health-related services.

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22 “Refugees.” USCIS, 26 Oct. 2022, [www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/refugees-and-asylum/refugees](http://www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/refugees-and-asylum/refugees).

23 Illinois Refugee Resettlement Program, State Fiscal Year 2023 Annual Report. Jewish United Fund.

24 [Illinois.gov/content/dam/soi/en/web/ready/sitecollectiondocuments/disasterproclamationasylumseekers.pdf](http://Illinois.gov/content/dam/soi/en/web/ready/sitecollectiondocuments/disasterproclamationasylumseekers.pdf). Accessed 2 Feb. 2024.

25 Migration Policy Institute (MPI) analysis of WRAPS data from the State Department Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration. Available at [www.wrapsnet.org/admissions-and-arrivals/](http://www.wrapsnet.org/admissions-and-arrivals/).

26 Refugee Processing Center at <https://www.wrapsnet.org/admissions-and-arrivals/>

**Refugee Arrivals in Illinois: 2018-2023**

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Total	708	1,005	351	366	896	2,338
<a href="#">Burma</a>	242	303	68	46	148	549
DRC	208	355	117	115	231	523
Syria	3	37	31	57	226	392
Afghanistan	27	18		24	34	196
Sudan	4	27	11	23	78	106
Guatemala			14		37	72
Iraq	21	35	22	29	25	69
Venezuela					7	62
Colombia	8				13	58
Ukraine	60	53	15	10	22	29

DRC= Democratic Republic of the Congo

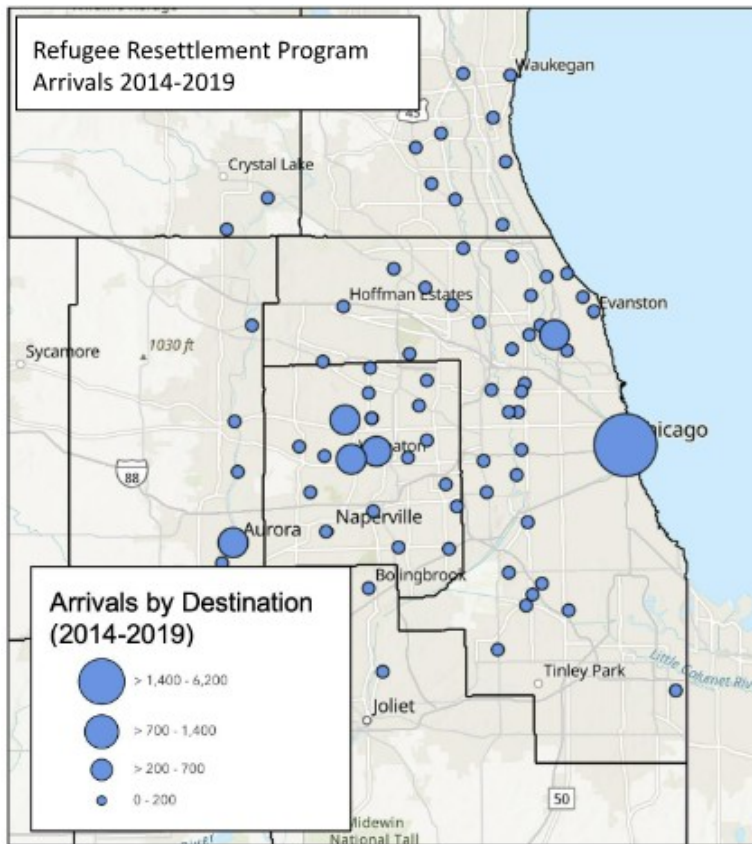
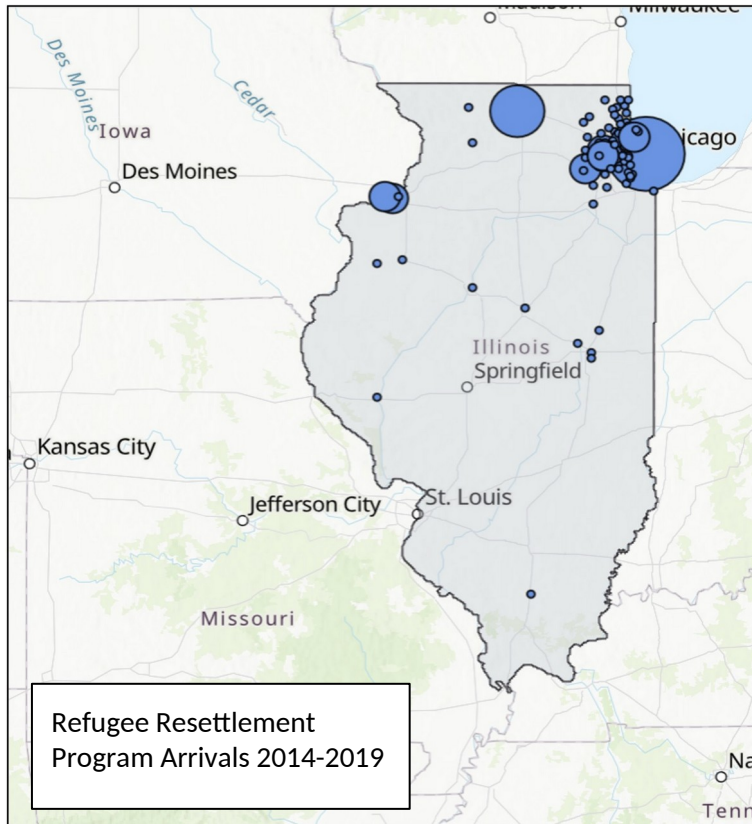
Source: Ill. Dept. of Human Services; Refugee Processing Center at <https://www.wrapsnet.org/admissions-and-arrivals/>



<b>Refugee Service and Health Providers in Illinois: 2023</b>	
Service Providers	Health Screening and Health Promotion
Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Chicago	Antillas Clinic
Ethiopian Community Association of Chicago	Aunt Martha’s Clinic
Heartland Alliance Health	Champaign-Urbana Public Health District
Heartland Human Care Services, Inc.	Community Health Care, Inc.
Jewish Community and Family Services Chicago	Hamdard Health Alliance
RefugeeOne	Rock Island County Health Department
World Relief - Chicago	Tapestry 360
The Refugee Center	Winnebago County Health Department
Rock Valley College	World Relief Chicagoland
World Relief - DuPage/Aurora	
World Relief - Quad Cities	
Source: Illinois Refugee Resettlement Program, State Fiscal Year 2023 Annual Report. Jewish United Fund.	

**Locations of Refugees**

Unlike the recently arrived Southwestern Border Arrivals and the Ukrainian U4U participants, persons in the Refugee Program are more dispersed across the state, though still concentrated in metropolitan Chicago. In part this is due to the locations of the agencies that resettle them, which include organizations like World Relief with an office in western Illinois, and groups in the Rockford and Champaign areas that assist refugees.



## Other Forced Migrant Populations

Southwestern Border Arrivals, Ukrainians in U4U, and participants in the Refugee Resettlement Program are numerically the largest populations of forced migrants in Illinois. There are other numerically smaller but no less significant groups.

### Afghans

The longest war in U.S. history began in Afghanistan in October 2001 when the U.S. launched a bombing campaign against the Taliban regime in connection with its support for al-Qaeda, which had organized attacks on the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington, DC.<sup>27</sup> U.S. troops would remain in Afghanistan until President Joseph Biden withdrew all military forces on August 30, 2021.

The Biden Administration shortly thereafter instituted Operation Allies Welcome, which evacuated Afghans who had assisted the U.S. prior to its departure from their country. The operation provided immigration parole to the Afghans, most of whom were first moved onto military bases in the U.S. About 50,000 Afghans were expected to be resettled nationwide but ended up being closer to 70,000.<sup>28</sup>

The Afghans were assigned to non-governmental organizations and states for resettlement. About 2,200 Afghans were eventually resettled in Illinois. Unlike in refugee resettlement, where NGOs handle the entire process of helping arrivals find housing, employment and other assistance, the State of Illinois utilized staff at the state Department of Human Services (IDHS) to provide some processing of the Afghans for housing and other assistance including placing staff at some hotels to monitor the resettled Afghans. RefugeeOne was one of the agencies that assisted with resettlement, but Muslim Women's Resource Center and Arab American Family Services and the Ethiopian Community Association of Chicago also accepted cases for assistance.

Afghans certainly face challenges to their initial resettlement and integration based on prejudice based on religion and skin color. As a group, Afghans already in the U.S. are less likely to speak English and have lower levels of formal education and participation in the labor force than other immigrants or the native-born population.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup>"Timeline: U.S. War in Afghanistan." Council on Foreign Relations, Council on Foreign Relations, [www.cfr.org/timeline/us-war-afghanistan](http://www.cfr.org/timeline/us-war-afghanistan). Accessed 2 Feb. 2024.

<sup>28</sup>Batalova, Jeanne Batalova Jeanne. "Afghan Immigrants in the United States." Migrationpolicy.Org, 9 Sep. 2021, [www.migrationpolicy.org/article/afghan-immigrants-united-states](http://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/afghan-immigrants-united-states).

<sup>29</sup> *ibid.*

## **Persons with Temporary Protected Status**

Temporary Protected Status was established by the 1990 Immigration Act and affords temporary residence to persons who are in the U.S. and are unable to return to their country of origin because of instability there, such as armed conflict, environmental disaster, or extraordinary and temporary conditions.<sup>30</sup> Persons with TPS are generally eligible for a work permit and the designation provides protection from deportation.<sup>31</sup>

TPS has at one time or another been available to persons from sixteen countries.<sup>32</sup> The status is available for persons in the U.S. during certain periods, and is not a blanket status available to all nationals of a given country. As of late 2017, about 4,073 persons in Illinois had TPS. The top countries of origin were El Salvador, 1,577; Honduras, 1,498; and Syria, 391.<sup>33</sup>

## **Processes for Cubans, Haitians, Nicaraguans, and Venezuelans**

Under a Biden Administration policy, the U.S. can grant advance travel authorization to the U.S. to up to 30,000 persons per month total from a set of countries: Cuba, Haiti, Nicaragua and Venezuela.<sup>34</sup> Similar to the sponsor-based (“supporters”) in the Uniting for Ukraine Program, participants must have a person in the U.S. who agrees to provide them with financial support. As with TPS, the federal government provides no data on the number of persons in this program in Illinois.

## **Other Statuses**

Certain other processes or statuses may include forced migrants in Illinois. Withholding of Removal, for example, may be granted by an immigration judge to a person who has been ordered removed (deported) from the U.S. Such cancellation leaves the individual without a particular immigration status. Nationally, cancellation of removal likely involves only a few thousand new cases each year.

## **Long-Term Undocumented Immigrants**

Undocumented immigration Illinois has occurred over many years. There are about 400,000 undocumented immigrants in Illinois, the majority of whom have been in the state for more than

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<sup>30</sup>“Temporary Protected Status: An Overview.” American Immigration Council, 12 Dec. 2023, [www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/temporary-protected-status-overview](http://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/temporary-protected-status-overview).

<sup>31</sup> TPS status has no derivative benefits such that family members abroad cannot reunify with the TPS recipient.

<sup>32</sup> Afghanistan, Burma (Myanmar), Cameroon, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Haiti, Honduras, Nepal, Nicaragua, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Syria, Ukraine, Venezuela, and Yemen. See <https://www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/temporary-protected-status>

<sup>33</sup> Source: United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) I-821, Application for Temporary Protected Status Approved Individuals By State and Country of Citizenship As of October 12, 2017 at [https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/document/data/USCIS\\_TPS\\_data\\_by\\_State\\_and\\_Nationality\\_as\\_of\\_January\\_19\\_2018.pdf](https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/document/data/USCIS_TPS_data_by_State_and_Nationality_as_of_January_19_2018.pdf)

<sup>34</sup>“Processes for Cubans, Haitians, Nicaraguans, and Venezuelans.” USCIS, 20 Sep. 2023, [www.uscis.gov/CHNV](http://www.uscis.gov/CHNV).

a decade. These persons include those who entered without authorization and those who had a temporary status such as a student or visitor visa and who stayed in the U.S. after their temporary permission expired.

Some undocumented immigrants fit the description of forced migrants because they departed situations of violence, extreme poverty and other dire conditions. The same can be said for some “regular” legal immigrants that get a permanent residence based on having relatives here or special skills, but the situation of undocumented immigrants is less tenable because they have less access to safety-net programs, cannot easily find jobs in line with their skills, and are subject to wage theft and unfair work conditions.

About 75% of Illinois’ undocumented immigrants are from Mexico, a nation of approximately 126.7 million people, although many other countries have significant populations in the state. The fact of 10.7 million Mexicans in the U.S. supports the idea that life in Mexico is often unsustainable. Of the Mexican undocumented flow, some are victims of trafficking or have received asylum. About 1,400 Mexicans received asylum in the U.S. in 2022. Many SBAs can be expected to join the ranks of the long-term undocumented if any temporary legal status they may have expires, and if they are unable to transition to permanent legal residence via asylum or other channels.

## **Discussion**

Illinois has little control of the characteristics of the new migrants or the federal support provided to them, in contrast to the state’s control over its programs and services, addressed in the next section. This discussion addresses some of the implications for the state of Illinois that arise from the nature of the new forced migration.

### **Illinois May Be Facing a “New Normal”**

Numerically large, sudden, and unexpected: the new forced migration challenges Illinois to consider whether it confronts a new type of normal. In recent years, immigration has been waning in the state. Classic Polish immigration has been declining. More undocumented Mexican immigrants were leaving than arriving. The foreign-born population rose by an anemic two percent between 2010 and 2020 in Illinois, and fell by more than four percent in Chicago.

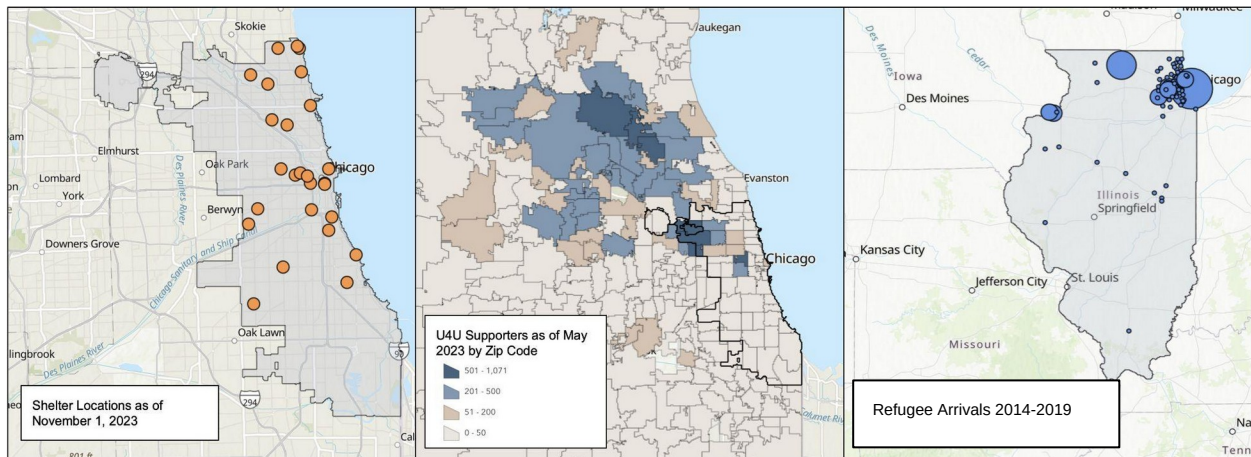
Fast forward to 2024: schools, police departments, social service organizations and the gearing of service infrastructure are being re-calibrated to accommodate brand-new populations of unexpected languages and cultures. A grade school in West Humboldt Park has a majority-Venezuelan kindergarten class. A Ukrainian community association realizes that it needs to provide resettlement services.

How well do the new arrivals fit into the state’s existing architecture of immigrant-welcoming services? Are new types, quantities and locations of immigrant services called for or is the state at its limit?

More broadly, how does the new normal complicate, or not, the existing battles for equity and inclusion in Illinois? For decades the political struggle over resources has been led by African American, Asian and Latino (mainly Mexican) communities. What happens when the newcomers don’t fit neatly into that arrangement?

### **The Burden of Forced Migration Is Not Shared Equally Across the State**

It is illustrative to reproduce, together, the maps shown earlier of the three largest forced-migrant populations in Illinois and look at the distinct patterns they reveal when viewed side by side. As of early 2024 the Southwest Border Arrivals shelters are concentrated in Chicago and mostly within a few miles of Lake Michigan (virtually no information is available on locations of migrants who have left shelters, though it may be assumed that most are in Chicago). The Ukrainian U4U participants are largely in neighborhoods on the far northwest side of Chicago and then in mainly contiguous areas stretching into northwest Cook County and then Lake and McHenry counties. The participants in the Refugee Resettlement program, meanwhile, are disproportionately in Chicago city and metro Chicago, but with notable populations in north central, northwest, and central Illinois.



The maps show that the impact of the SBAs (in the map on the left) is almost exclusively on one municipality – Chicago – while the U4U participants (map in the middle) are in a middle-class region. The refugees (map on the right) are somewhat more dispersed across the state.

The maps embody another reality. A scan of news articles over the past two years finds scant reference to the 26,000 Ukrainians. There are few examples of pushback from local mayors anxious to keep them out, few stories of schools struggling with what must surely be a set of new demands on teachers and administrators, and an overall lack of high-temperature response or crisis.

Obviously, a magic ingredient of the Ukrainians' relatively warm welcome is the fact that they can work legally. Palatine Village, home to Immaculate Conception Ukrainian Byzantine Church and a center of Ukrainian culture, had an unemployment rate of only 3.3 percent in December 2023. In fact, Palatine's unemployment rate fell by almost a half percentage point in 2023, during the midst of Ukrainian arrivals.<sup>35</sup> The Ukrainian arrival occupies so little space in the public mind that it conveys a sense of being on a kind of autopilot.<sup>36</sup>

Contrast that with the almost daily news of developments involving the SBAs, whose arrival is the subject of local, state and national reporting. The tense environment complicates coming up with a rational response. Developing a calm atmosphere of debate may hinge on many developments, none of which may be entirely possible or, to some degree, palatable: finding a way to slow down the number of arrivals, obtaining more work authorizations, moving migrants into independent housing, and facilitating resettlement in other states.

### **What Plans Do the Migrants Have?**

Arguably less is known about the long-term plans of Southwestern Border Migrants than of those of other groups. The Refugee Program has been in effect for many years and, based on experience, the majority of refugees can be expected to remain in Illinois, even though some choose to eventually relocate within the U.S. In the case of U4U participants, the great majority have an immigration parole status. This can be retracted with the requirement that they leave; but if their TPS is extended, as seems likely given the ongoing destruction in their home country, it would not be surprising if they remain in Illinois, with its sizable Ukrainian-American population and leaders committed to helping the migrants.

In the case of the Southwestern Border Arrivals, their long-term trajectory at this point is anyone's guess. Illinois is not home to a sizable Venezuelan population. Caracas is only ten degrees north of the equator, and Venezuelans may well be more attracted to South Florida, already home to more than a quarter million Venezuelans.

### **New "Sponsorship" Models Raise New Concerns**

With the Uniting for Ukraine program, a new model of "sponsor" support for forced migrants has been put into play by the Biden administration. And while there appear to be few guarantees that sponsors have to live up to their expectations, the great majority appear to do so.

The sponsorship model somewhat mirrors family-based immigration, where a relative can petition for a visa on behalf of a family member who wants to immigrate. Sponsorship has a

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<sup>35</sup> Illinois Department of Employment Security "Current Monthly Unemployment Rates"  
<https://ides.illinois.gov/resources/labor-market-information/laus/current-monthly-unemployment-rates.html>

<sup>36</sup> The racial dimensions of Ukrainian acceptance are a topic for another day.

logic: that sponsors ease an immigrant’s integration into U.S. society. In family-based immigration, however, a sponsored immigrant could often choose to return to their home country if their sponsor was unhelpful. For Ukrainians, returning home is not the same viable option.

Interviews with Ukrainians in the summer of 2023 heard descriptions of “ghost sponsors” who hardly had any contact with the U4U participants. Concerns about human trafficking involving sponsored Ukrainians are sufficiently prevalent that the U.S. State Department and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe chose to convene private discussions in Illinois in early 2024 to investigate ways to combat it.<sup>37</sup>

The vaguely named “Processes for Cubans, Haitians, Nicaraguans and Venezuelans (CHNV)” program also utilize supporters or sponsors, but take the situation a step further than U4U. Participants in CHNV get a sponsor, and can apply for authorization to work,<sup>38</sup> but they don’t receive the Refugee Program-like services, such as help with job placement or English language instruction.

Descriptions of ghost sponsors from the migrants and concern about trafficking raise concerns about whether sponsorship of humanitarian migrants has sufficient oversight. The question is how much the Illinois government needs to be vigilant of sponsorship abuses.

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<sup>37</sup> February 1, 2024 discussion with Marta Hoilman, Senior Multilateral Affairs Advisor in the Department of State Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons

<sup>38</sup> United States Citizenship and Information Services “Processes for Cubans, Haitians, Nicaraguans, and Venezuelans” <https://www.uscis.gov/CHNV>



## How Well Has Illinois Responded to Forced Migration?

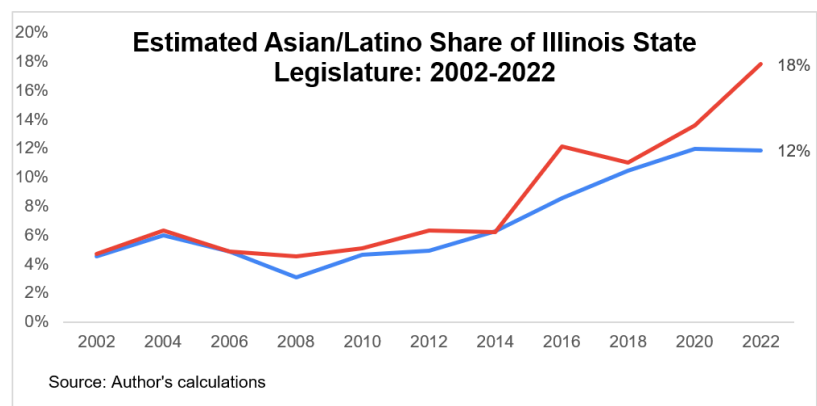
*This section describes Illinois' response to forced migration, including the state's programs and policies, especially for the largest group, the Southwestern Border Arrivals. Description of City of Chicago services is included here, as Chicago has played a major role, often with state financial support.*

### A Pro-Migrant Infrastructure

Forced migrants in Illinois are fortunate to be in a state that has an extensive record of seeking to incorporate immigrants regardless of their legal status. The state's legislative record is among the most supportive in the nation as far as immigrants are concerned.<sup>39</sup>

There may be multiple reasons for the state's well-known acceptance of immigrants. Its political leaders have often been part of communities that had been oppressed abroad and found sanctuary in Illinois. This includes Irish political families such as the Daleys, Polish leaders like the former U.S. Representative John Kluczynski, and Jewish leaders such as the current governor J.B. Pritzker, who frequently refers to his great-grandfather coming to America.

Perhaps more saliently, there is a growing prominence in state politics of legislators who are members of the Asian and Latino communities and who are often children of immigrants or immigrants themselves. Persons of Asian or Latino descent are nearly one in five members of the Illinois House of Representatives as of 2022, and a Latina woman, State Representative Elizabeth Hernandez, is chair of the Illinois



Democratic Party. (Of the state's Congressional Delegation, four of the 17 U.S. Representatives and one of the state's U.S. Senators are themselves immigrants.)

Illinois has become an increasingly "blue" state over the past half century, with Republican presidential candidates, for example, failing to win more than 44 percent of the electorate in any race since 1988.<sup>40</sup> Given this trend, it is no surprise that state policies are aligned with those of the national, pro-immigrant Democratic party.

<sup>39</sup> <https://robparal.com/wp-content/uploads/il-immigrant-task-force-2023.pdf>

<sup>40</sup> Paral, Rob 2022 [Where Is Illinois Going Now?](#) for The Paul Simon Institute.

Lastly, welcoming immigrants is a wise posture for a state given its need to attract more residents. Illinois has one of the lowest rates of growth in the nation, and was one of only two states to experience population decline between the 2010 and 2020 censuses.

The State of Illinois has passed over 19 pieces of legislation over the past decade that enhance the rights of immigrants. These range from relatively technical changes, such as purging the term “alien” from all Illinois statutory provisions, to quite expansive and costly programs such as providing state-funded healthcare to undocumented immigrants over the age of 42.<sup>41</sup> In 2023, health and human service programs targeted to immigrants and funded entirely with state (as opposed to federal) dollars served as many as 166,467 people (some persons may have received services from more than one program).

### **Illinois State Programs Serving Immigrants: 2023**

	Persons Served
Total	166,467
Health Benefit for Immigrant Seniors 65+ <sup>1</sup>	15,000
Health Benefits for Immigrant Adults 55-64 <sup>1</sup>	15,000
Health Benefits for Immigrant Adults 42-54 <sup>1</sup>	35,000
Cash assistance for immigrants not eligible for federal and state assistance	3,750
Welcoming Centers	19,616
Access to Justice	17,648
New Americans Initiative	28,150
Illinois Family Resource Program	32,303

Source: Reproduced from Illinois Department of Human Services and University of Illinois at Chicago 2023 “Report of the Illinois Immigrant Impact Task Force” at <https://www2.illinois.gov/sites/gov/Documents/il-immigrant-task-force-2023.pdf>

1. Updated from Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services <https://hfs.illinois.gov/info/reports.html>

Spending on immigrant services equaled about \$1 billion in 2023, as seen in the table below. The number is important because it shows that the state is serious about providing services. An important caveat to the budget data is that it includes federal dollars related to the COVID-19 epidemic, and those resources will not be available in the future.<sup>42</sup>

The infrastructure built with these kinds of state investments will ease the integration of the forced migrants. Programs such as Access to Justice (which assists immigrants with immigration-related legal needs) and the Welcoming Centers can be expected to serve migrants in future years.

<sup>41</sup> <https://robparal.com/wp-content/uploads/il-immigrant-task-force-2023.pdf>

<sup>42</sup> Also, categories such as Welcome Centers have been reprogrammed to other immigrant-related uses not labeled as such.

<b>Immigrant-Related Budget Items: 2023</b>	
Health Benefits for Immigrant Seniors and Adults	619,000,000
Welcoming Centers	115,000,000
Welcoming Centers	80,000,000
Refugee Settlement Services	50,611,200
For Deposit into DHS State Projects Fund - Welcoming Centers - Reappropriation	40,000,000
Immigrant Integration Services	38,000,000
City of Chicago - Asylum Seekers	20,000,000
ARPA - Welcoming Centers - Reappropriation	4,791,288
Migrant Day Care Services	4,422,400
ARPA - Legal Assistance to Migrants - Reappropriation	4,200,000
ARPA - Immigrant Integration Services - Reappropriation	2,424,678
ARPA - United African Organization Welcoming Centers - Reappropriation	2,000,000
Grants for the Development of Refugee Health Care	1,950,000
Refugees	1,126,700
Operational Expenses to Support Refugee Health Care	514,000
ARPA - Refugee Case Management - Reappropriation	503,769
Refugee Social Services	204,000
Refugee ONE	200,000
Illinois Migrant Council	90,000
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$985,038,035</b>

Source: Illinois Office of Management and Budget; Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services

Unfortunately, Illinois’ deep commitment to supporting immigrants made the state particularly vulnerable to Texas Governor Abbott’s ploy of flooding metropolitan areas with Southwestern Border Arrivals delivered unceremoniously by bus and plane. There is little or no public record of the state, in the earliest months of the bus arrivals, hesitating to accept the migrants. Abbott took advantage of the state’s welcoming stance to severely stress its capacity to practice its values around immigration.

## **The Federal Role Shapes the Migrants’ Reception**

The new forced migration is testing the state’s receptiveness to immigrants. A key factor is the availability, or lack of, federal support.

The federal government supports forced migrants in the Refugee Resettlement Program and Uniting for Ukraine, providing some months of cash assistance and help finding housing and jobs through a network of social service agencies. Washington assumes most of the costs of these services. On a day-to-day basis, the general public hears little about the impact of refugees on the state.

In the case of the Ukrainians, the public has been largely supportive of them in their struggle to fend off the Russian invasion. A fall 2023 national survey by the Chicago Council on Global

Affairs, for example, found that a majority of Americans are in favor of sending aid and weapons to the Ukrainian government.<sup>43</sup>

There is comparatively little federal support for SBAs in Illinois. By October 2023 the state had spent \$330 million supporting them, and in a letter to President Biden, Illinois Governor Pritzker stated that “the humanitarian crisis is overwhelming our ability to provide aid.”<sup>44</sup>

To a great extent, the arrival of the SBAs has been met with a mood of crisis and alarm among the public and political leaders. Headlines from early 2023 reflect the discomfort: “Blacks blast Lightfoot’s plan to house migrants on South Side,”<sup>45</sup> “Plan to house migrants at former Chicago school delayed amid community pushback; mayor says city is at ‘maximum capacity,’”<sup>46</sup> “State running out of money for bused-in asylum seekers,”<sup>47</sup> and “Tensions flare at Chicago City Council meeting over Lightfoot’s handling of the migrant crisis.”<sup>48</sup>

## **How Have the State (and Chicago) Responded to the Southwest Border Arrivals?**

The majority of SBAs served with state resources are in Chicago, and the city has dedicated substantial funds of its own to the crisis. The co-mingling of state and city responsibility and the scale of the impact on Chicago make it important to describe how government resources have been deployed there.

### **Chicago’s Support for Immigrants**

The state’s commitment to immigrants has been discussed, but a similar level of support for immigration has existed even longer in Chicago, one of the nation’s classic “port of entry” cities where immigration and migration are embedded deeply within the city’s DNA. In the modern era, Chicago Mayor Harold Washington in 1985 issued an executive order prohibiting city

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43 Dina Smeltz, Lama El Baz. “American Public Support for Assistance to Ukraine Has Waned, but Still Considerable.” Chicago Council on Global Affairs, The Chicago Council on Global Affairs, 4 Oct. 2023, [globalaffairs.org/research/public-opinion-survey/american-public-support-assistance-ukraine-has-waned-still](https://globalaffairs.org/research/public-opinion-survey/american-public-support-assistance-ukraine-has-waned-still).

44 October 2, 2023 letter from Governor J.B. Pritzker to President Joseph R. Biden, linked to at <https://chicago.suntimes.com/politics/2023/10/2/23900422/jb-pritzker-migrant-crisis-joe-biden-chicago>

45 Johnson, Erick. “Blacks Blast Lightfoot’s Plan to House Migrants on South Side.” The Chicago Crusader, 6 Jan. 2023, [chicagocrusader.com/blacks-blast-lightfoots-plan-to-house-migrants-on-south-side/](https://chicagocrusader.com/blacks-blast-lightfoots-plan-to-house-migrants-on-south-side/).

46 Yin, Alice. “Plan to House Migrants at Former Chicago School Delayed amid Community Pushback; Mayor Says City Is at ‘Maximum Capacity.’” Chicago Tribune, Chicago Tribune, 6 Jan. 2023, [www.chicagotribune.com/politics/ct-migrants-chicago-woodlawn-school-housing-20230106-5kh4hbvwyzff3pf5tzodlxjsu-story.html](https://www.chicagotribune.com/politics/ct-migrants-chicago-woodlawn-school-housing-20230106-5kh4hbvwyzff3pf5tzodlxjsu-story.html).

47 Capitol Fax.Com - Your Illinois News Radar " State Running out of Money for Bused-in Asylum Seekers, [capitolfax.com/2023/01/03/state-running-out-of-money-for-bused-in-asylum-seekers/](https://capitolfax.com/2023/01/03/state-running-out-of-money-for-bused-in-asylum-seekers/). Accessed 2 Feb. 2024.

48 “Tensions Flare at Chicago City Council Meeting over Lightfoot’s Handling of Migrant Crisis.” FOX 32 Chicago, FOX 32 Chicago, 16 Mar. 2023, [www.fox32chicago.com/news/tensions-flare-chicago-city-council-meeting-lightfoot-migrant-crisis](https://www.fox32chicago.com/news/tensions-flare-chicago-city-council-meeting-lightfoot-migrant-crisis).

employees from enforcing immigration laws. Richard M. Daley re-affirmed the order in 1989, and the City Council enshrined it as a city ordinance in 2006.<sup>49</sup> Mayor Rahm Emanuel opened an Office of New Americans during his tenure, and sued the Justice Department over its threats to withhold funds because of the city’s immigration-related policies. Mayor Lori Lightfoot in 2019 joined mayors from around the country in urging the Trump administration not to reduce refugee admissions. The current mayor, Brandon Johnson, has continued his predecessors’ support for immigrant communities.

The primary response by the City of Chicago was to open shelters where the migrants could be safely housed. (Migrant children of school age have also enrolled in the Chicago Public Schools, and migrants have been able to obtain CityKey ID cards which allowed use of public facilities like libraries.) As the number of arrivals grew so did the number of shelters, so that by early January 2024 there were 29 shelters in operation. The staffing and operation of the shelters was managed by Favorite Healthcare Staffing, a Kansas City-based organization, which was awarded a contract by the city. In fall 2023 the City attempted to secure bids from non-profit organizations to take over management of the shelters, but in early 2024 it paused the process with no contracts finalized.<sup>50</sup>



Figure 6: Arrival in Chicago after trip from Texas.

<sup>49</sup>[https://robparal.com/wp-content/uploads/a\\_global\\_welcome\\_immigration-report\\_0.pdf](https://robparal.com/wp-content/uploads/a_global_welcome_immigration-report_0.pdf)

<sup>50</sup> “Procurement Services.” Vendor, Contract and Payment Search - Solicitation Details, [webapps1.chicago.gov/vcsearch/city/solicitationdetails/-9736](http://webapps1.chicago.gov/vcsearch/city/solicitationdetails/-9736). Accessed 2 Feb. 2024.

The shelters soon became a contentious issue. Alderpersons voiced displeasure at the behavior of migrants around the shelters<sup>51</sup> and opposed the opening of shelters in their ward.<sup>52</sup> Residents opposed shelters on the grounds that they would use facilities normally available for youth activities and other community uses, and expressed (largely unsupported) fear about crime.<sup>53</sup>

City residents erupted over Chicago's plan to open a tent city on the near southwest side. At a gathering of residents at the site, a group assaulted the local alderperson, who had to be escorted to safety by police.<sup>54</sup> The tent city idea was laid to rest when the State of Illinois Environmental Protection Agency declared the site unfit because of possible contamination from chemicals and metals resulting from earlier industrial use.<sup>55</sup> The incident was also a notable example of a lack of coordination between the city and the state.

## **The Shelters**

The shelters the City did open were located in a curious set of facilities. They are described here at some length due to their unprecedented nature and the insight they provide into the lives of migrants after they arrived here. They reveal the city's struggle to find adequate facilities. The author was able to tour a half dozen of these locations in the fall of 2023.

One shelter site has been a former Chicago Park District boathouse on the lakefront in the Rogers Park area. Like other locations, it had never been intended to house people overnight. The building may be a century old, with its exterior of "Chicago common" brick, and had not seen major remodeling or upkeep in many decades. Some ceilings had peeling paint, a door lacked a knob, ancient telephone wires snaked along a wall. One group of residents slept in cots in a basketball court. No Wifi was available during the visit, there was no on-site food preparation or kitchen space, and there was no personal storage. A garage-type overhead door was the direct entry from the outside into the eating area; personnel of the private staffing agency said the heat was acceptable during winter despite the entryway. There were no shower facilities, and residents boarded a bus once a day to another shelter to shower. The site held 60 adults and 40 children.

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51 Mercado, Melody. "Downtown Aldermen Push to Close City's Largest Migrant Shelter." Block Club Chicago, 4 Oct. 2023, [blockclubchicago.org/2023/10/03/downtown-aldermen-push-to-close-citys-largest-migrant-shelter/](https://blockclubchicago.org/2023/10/03/downtown-aldermen-push-to-close-citys-largest-migrant-shelter/).

52 Kubzansky, Caroline, and Nell Salzman. "Residents Push Back against Chicago's Race to Open Migrant Shelters as Number Surpasses 18,000." Chicago Tribune, Chicago Tribune, 12 Oct. 2023, [www.chicagotribune.com/news/breaking/ct-migrant-shelter-neighborhoods-20231011-bd4uqubjfcyzf6rmij4vlyuuq-story.html](https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/breaking/ct-migrant-shelter-neighborhoods-20231011-bd4uqubjfcyzf6rmij4vlyuuq-story.html).

53 *ibid.*

54 "Chicago Alderwoman Assaulted during Protest against Migrant Tent Shelter in Brighton Park." FOX 32 Chicago, FOX 32 Chicago, 6 Dec. 2023, [www.fox32chicago.com/news/chicago-alderwoman-assaulted-during-protest-against-migrant-tent-shelter-in-brighton-park](https://www.fox32chicago.com/news/chicago-alderwoman-assaulted-during-protest-against-migrant-tent-shelter-in-brighton-park).

55 Chicago Sun-Times | By Tina Sfondeles. "Pritzker Rejects Toxic Migrant Shelter Site in Chicago's Brighton Park Neighborhood." NPR Illinois, 5 Dec. 2023, [www.nprillinois.org/illinois/2023-12-05/pritzker-rejects-toxic-migrant-shelter-site-in-chicagos-brighton-park-neighborhood](https://www.nprillinois.org/illinois/2023-12-05/pritzker-rejects-toxic-migrant-shelter-site-in-chicagos-brighton-park-neighborhood).



*Figure 7: Migrant shelter in a former boathouse. Chicago, October 2023.*

Nearby to the boathouse, a former motel had been converted to house 294 migrants. The dining area was set up on an asphalt parking lot underneath the building. Individual motel rooms could hold two or three families. Residents had a laundry room, and medical care was available from the County and from a non-profit clinic. Wifi was available, and some bicycles were donated to residents.

Also on the city's far north side, a former YMCA was used to house up to 160 adults. Residents had more supportive amenities than other sites, such as on-site laundry, refrigerators, a locker room, a computer room with nine terminals, and intermittent Wifi. Men slept in a gymnasium. A room for women held 60 cots.

Further west, though still on the north side, a former tuberculosis sanatorium held 180 persons. Residents were bused elsewhere for showers. A well-lit space with large windows that may once have been a ballroom held 130 sleeping cots.

Perhaps the most extraordinary site was in Chicago's Loop, where The Standard Club was once a premier institution, built in 1925 by Jewish professionals and businesspersons who were prohibited from joining other downtown clubs. Some 1,200 adult migrants lived in the formerly grand but now faded facility of coffered ceilings, a library, an empty indoor swimming pool and unused racquetball courts. Hotel-style rooms that hosted overnight guests in the club's heyday with names still reading "The Oriental Room," "The New Yorker Room," and "The Riviera"

each held up to 26 migrants in bunk beds. About 60 people slept on cots beneath the chandeliers of the grand ballroom.

At the Young Women's Learning Academy building on the near south side, a shelter with room for 250 migrants was installed in a former Chicago Public Schools building. Migrants slept in classic CPS classrooms of tan glazed brick and oak trim familiar to generations of Chicagoans; the principal's office served as space for administrators. Well-organized poster boards in the hallways held informational materials from Catholic Charities, along with a separate handwritten sign announcing "Pedir Comida China" ("Order Chinese food") with a phone number to the Happiness restaurant.

Rounding out the variety of shelters that the author visited was a former County health clinic, the Near South Side Health Clinic, which the County closed in 2021 to reduce a budget deficit. Some 147 single, male migrants were in the clinic when the author visited. Three to four migrants slept in examination rooms on either side of a narrow hallway. The spaces retained the sink and cabinetry of medical examining rooms everywhere.

These vignettes give insight into what awaited the migrants in Chicago, but also to the unique burden of large, unexpected migration for a state or local government. Unlike the situation with a hurricane or tornado or other natural disaster that displaces residents – but often temporarily – a migrant crisis requires expansion of existing habitable space. It calls for absorption, not rearrangement, of human lives.

## **Cash, Housing, Case Management and Other Services Provided by the State of Illinois**

The City of Chicago has certainly used its own financial resources to serve the Southwestern Border Arrivals. As of January 2024, the city had expended \$156 million on the crisis, including \$97 million on shelter management by a private corporation.<sup>56</sup> As noted by Governor Pritzker, however, the state has spent approximately \$330 million on the migrant situation. Based on a population of about 35,000 arrivals, City expenditures amount to \$4,427 per migrant, compared with state expenditures of \$9,429 per migrant.

Turning to the State of Illinois and its response to the Southwestern Border Arrivals, it becomes apparent that only the state government has the resources to put many services in place. Only state government has access to some large-scale examples of federal funds, such as for economic support in light of COVID-19. Human services in general are a state responsibility, and mainly Springfield, not local government, pays for assistance to the poor, persons with disabilities and other populations in need.

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<sup>56</sup>Cost Dashboard, [www.chicago.gov/city/en/sites/texas-new-arrivals/home/cost-dashboard.html](http://www.chicago.gov/city/en/sites/texas-new-arrivals/home/cost-dashboard.html). Accessed 2 Feb. 2024.



Following is a discussion of the major state-funded programs that have been assisting the Southwestern Border Arrivals.

### **Asylum Seeker Emergency Assistance Program (ASERAP)**

The American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 authorized the federal government to provide states with funds for emergency rental assistance. A portion of the funding could be used for housing stability services, including for persons who do not have an immigration status.

Beginning in early 2023, the Illinois Housing Development Authority and IDHS created the Asylum Seeker Emergency Assistance Program (ASERAP), which provided up to six months of rental assistance for migrants who were transitioning out of hotel stays.<sup>57</sup> ASERAP and other state funds were later used to support migrants leaving shelters. At the end of 2023, the state announced that rental assistance would be diminished to a maximum of three months, and would not be available to migrants arriving after mid November 2023.

Between January and December of 2023, ASERAP approved about 4,100 applications. Applications represent cases, which can include more than one person.<sup>58</sup>

### **Cash and Food Assistance for Non-Citizen Victims of Trafficking, Torture, or Other Serious Crimes (VTTC)**

The Survivor Support and Trafficking Prevention Act<sup>59</sup> passed by the Illinois legislature in 2016 provides cash, food and health assistance to foreign-born victims of trafficking, torture, or other serious crimes. Persons may be eligible for VTTC if they have filed or are preparing to file with the federal government an application for a “T” visa for victims of trafficking, a “U” visa for victims of a crime, or for asylum status.

VTTC pre-dates the arrival of the Southwestern Border Arrivals, and was designed to assist a relatively small number of individuals. The SBAs, however, fit the description of eligible persons, and they likely have become a large share of all program participants. As a result, the program has risen in cost. There were 5,337 VTTC open cases during 2023, according to the Illinois Department of Human Services.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>57</sup>Request for Applications (RFA): Housing Stability Services (HSS ... - Ihda, [www.ihda.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/RFA\\_ASERAP\\_3.0\\_final-version\\_-2-2-2023.pdf](http://www.ihda.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/RFA_ASERAP_3.0_final-version_-2-2-2023.pdf). Accessed 2 Feb. 2024.

<sup>58</sup> Source: IDHS response by Associate General Counsel Thomas D. Mulcrone to Freedom of Information Act request.

<sup>59</sup> Public Act 0870 99th General Assembly, [ilga.gov/legislation/publicacts/99/099-0870.htm](http://ilga.gov/legislation/publicacts/99/099-0870.htm). Accessed 2 Feb. 2024.

<sup>60</sup> Source: IDHS response by Associate General Counsel Thomas D. Mulcrone to Freedom of Information Act response.

## Shelter-Based Case Management

The Illinois Department of Human Services contracted with the Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights to coordinate case management services within the shelters set up by the City of Chicago, providing ICIRR with a grant of \$25 million for fiscal year 2024. ICIRR sub-contracted with community-based organizations to be available at the shelters. Caseworkers help shelter residents with school enrollment for their children, with applications for benefits they are eligible for such as VTTC, and with other services to help orient the shelter residents to the state and help move them toward life outside of the shelters.



Figure 8: Earning cash by selling water. Pulaski Road and Addison Street, Chicago, September 2023.

## Legal Assistance

The Southwestern Border Arrivals have often been called “asylum seekers” in the news media. It was assumed (and may still be true) that most SBAs would seek asylum. In part this was based on an expectation that all persons released by CBP and ICE at the border would have said they sought asylum. Preparations were begun to create a system of pro bono asylum assistance for the SBAs.

IDHS staff and representatives of non-profit organizations tried to set up a structure of quasi-oversight and coordination of legal services for the migrants. A steering committee was formed, and plans were made to develop an information hub that would produce and distribute information for migrants and service providers. An effort was made to have members of the philanthropic community, the city of Chicago and the state share information about potential grantees and mutually agree on grantees and projects that had urgency for each of the funding entities. A philanthropic grant was obtained by the Chicago Bar Foundation from the Silicon Valley Community Foundation to fund consultants working on the implementation of these tasks.

Whether or not SBAs sought asylum, they nearly all had an upcoming appearance in immigration court. Persons who are unrepresented in immigration court have a much lower rate of successfully presenting their cases in response to charges made against them. Therefore, if the State wanted to increase the likelihood of SBAs getting a legal status of some kind, it would have an interest in supporting representation for all SBAs. For most of the new arrivals, the legal help they needed most immediately was to change the location of their first hearing if, at the border, they had been assigned a hearing in a place other than Chicago. The SBAs also all needed to inform the immigration court system of their current address.

In September 2023 the Biden Administration announced that Venezuelans who had arrived in the U.S. on or before July 31, 2023, would be eligible for Temporary Protected Status.<sup>61</sup> They and certain other migrants would be eligible for an employment authorization document (EAD) which would allow them to legally work in the U.S. for 18 months.

The announcement of eligibility for TPS and EAD shifted the focus of legal assistance to helping migrants obtain these statuses. At the same time, it became clear that many migrants would not have access to the expensive and lengthy legal assistance needed to mount a case for asylum. This did not mean that all would not have an opportunity. Some might be eligible for some forms of relief and protection, including asylum. But some migrants likely fit under a category of economically dislocated persons, which is not a basis for asylum. Many had also spent long periods in countries outside their home country as they made their way north, a fact that raised the question of whether they had a “settled residence” in one of these nations, which would harm their asylum claim. Other factors are also at work, such as the bar for asylum being higher for persons who enter the U.S. without inspection.

In November 2023 the State chose a primary vendor, the Resurrection Project (TRP), to organize legal clinics where SBAs could apply for TPS and EAD. TRP faced the daunting challenge of

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<sup>61</sup> “DHS Supports Interior Cities by Educating Qualified Noncitizens on Work Permit Eligibility.” DHS Supports Interior Cities by Educating Qualified Noncitizens on Work Permit Eligibility | Homeland Security, [www.dhs.gov/news/2023/09/06/dhs-supports-interior-cities-educating-qualified-noncitizens-work-permit](https://www.dhs.gov/news/2023/09/06/dhs-supports-interior-cities-educating-qualified-noncitizens-work-permit). Accessed 2 Feb. 2024.

servicing many thousands of persons over a relatively short period of a few months, and to stand up a system to properly vet migrants for their eligibility, and accurately complete their applications. Initial workshops were held at Truman and Wright junior colleges of the Chicago City College system, and eventually a permanent location was found at a federal building in downtown Chicago.

The Resurrection Project used its own staff, paid representatives of other non-profits and from the private immigration bar, and the services of attorneys and other legal providers working pro bono at the workshops. The pro bono coordination took place with active leadership from The Chicago Bar Foundation. As of early 2024, about 3,000 persons had completed a TPS or EAD application via the clinics, which were scheduled to continue to the end of April.<sup>62</sup>

In the fall 2023 planning stage for legal services, it was envisioned that as many as 9,000 persons in shelters might be eligible for TPS and/or employment authorization. As workshops were implemented, however, it became clear that far fewer migrants than anticipated, as few as 15 to 20 percent of the shelter population, were eligible for TPS and EAD.<sup>63</sup> In February of 2024 services began to be made available to migrants who were not in city shelters; because these persons included many Venezuelans who had arrived prior to August, 2023, it was anticipated that they would be more likely than the shelter residents to qualify for TPS.

In late 2023, the Legal Aid Society (LAS) of Metropolitan Family Services played a coordinating role comparable to that of TRP, but for legal services and information to help the migrants with their changes-of-address petitions and motions to change the venue of their immigration court hearing. LAS also began to set up workshops that would provide information on asylum to the migrants, identify migrants who might have a fair case but which due to lack of resources would mean the migrant would need to handle their case pro se, and to flag migrants with strong asylum claims who could be connected with asylum experts at the National Immigration Justice Center.

### **“Supporting Municipalities for Asylum Seekers Services” Program**

The state government provided monetary grants to local governments to respond to the crisis. The first set of funds, amounting to \$42.5 million, was announced in August 2023, for a grant term of fiscal year 2024.<sup>64</sup> The Metropolitan Mayors Caucus served as fiscal agent for the

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<sup>62</sup> Source: February 2, 2024 personal communication with Linda Rio, pro bono legal assistance consultant, Chicago Bar Foundation.

<sup>63</sup> City of Chicago New Arrivals Briefing - Community Partners, January 31, 2024, accessed February 2, 2024 at <https://www.chicago.gov/city/en/sites/texas-new-arrivals/home/presentations.html>.

<sup>64</sup> “Cash and Food Assistance for Non-Citizen Victims of Trafficking, Torture, or Other Serious Crimes (VTTC).” IDHS, [www.dhs.state.il.us/page.aspx?item=102017](http://www.dhs.state.il.us/page.aspx?item=102017). Accessed 2 Feb. 2024.

program, distributing final awards. Applicants could use the funds to provide shelter and transitional housing, food, legal assistance and other services.<sup>65</sup>

The majority of funds awarded went to the City of Chicago, for the sum of \$30 million. The City of Elgin and the County of Lake each received about \$1 million, while the City of Urbana and the Village of Oak Park both received some hundreds of thousands of dollars. Notably absent from the awardees (and possibly from the applicants) were certain suburbs likely to receive southwestern border migrants at some point in the future, such as the Town of Cicero, the City of Berwyn, and any other number of suburbs in western Cook County.

A second round of funding was made available by the State in January of 2024, for an amount of \$11 million. The funds would go only to municipalities outside of Chicago, and could not be used to transport migrants to other communities.



Figure 9: Migrant family seeking donations outside of supermarket. Chicago, October 2024.

## Welcoming Centers

Illinois Welcoming Centers are based within 36 non-profit and local government organizations across the state. They are intended to provide a comprehensive set of services to immigrants, with the intention of facilitating their integration.<sup>66</sup> The Welcoming Centers received \$5 million or less, collectively, prior to 2023. For fiscal year 2024, the Centers received an additional \$25 million in state funding, on top of their existing allotments, and in January 2024 the state announced an additional \$4 million for the centers. The additional funds will allow the Welcoming Centers to assist migrants who come to their organizations.<sup>67</sup>

<sup>65</sup> “Supporting Municipalities for Asylum Seeker Services (SMASS) Grants – Round II - Mayors Caucus.” Mayors Caucus - Vision and Focus, 26 Jan. 2024, [mayorscaucus.org/initiatives/diversity/supporting-municipalities-for-asylum-seeker-services/](https://mayorscaucus.org/initiatives/diversity/supporting-municipalities-for-asylum-seeker-services/).

<sup>66</sup> “Illinois Welcoming Center (IWC).” IDHS, [www.dhs.state.il.us/page.aspx?item=146538](https://www.dhs.state.il.us/page.aspx?item=146538). Accessed 2 Feb. 2024.

## Emergency Management

The Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act<sup>68</sup> governs federal assistance to individuals and communities in the wake of a declared disaster. Importantly, the act does not include migration-related occurrences as possible disasters, but rather identifies disasters as either natural catastrophes such as hurricanes or tornadoes, or fire, floods or explosions. The President has no authority to declare a migration crisis and provide federal funds similar to those made available for natural disasters.

Disaster aid via the Stafford Act is unavailable to Illinois for migrant crises, but the Biden Administration has provided funds via the Federal Emergency Management Agency's Shelter and Services Program to states coping with migrants. In 2023, Illinois received \$32 million in funds, primarily to Cook County, compared with \$104 million provided to Texas entities.<sup>69</sup>

In Illinois, Cook County received \$13 million in Shelter and Services grants in 2023, while the Illinois Department of Human Services was awarded \$19 million. No non-governmental agencies in Illinois received direct grants. In contrast, in Texas more than two dozen governmental, non-profit and faith-based organizations received funds, including entities such as Catholic Charities Archdiocese of San Antonio, Iglesia Bautista West Brownsville and Lawyers for Good Government Foundation. It appears that at least some FEMA money directed to Texas groups has been used to send migrants to Chicago.

The Illinois Emergency Management Agency Act ("IEMA", Public Act 87-168) created an emergency management agency in state government to, among other duties, "provide for the rendering of mutual aid among the political subdivisions and taxing districts of the State..." The act defines "disaster" to include, but not be limited to, about two dozen types of events, such as "fire, flood, earthquake" and "public health emergencies, cyber incidents, or acts of domestic terrorism." As with the federal Stafford Act, human migration is not explicitly cited in the act. Furthermore, "migration," "migrants," "refugees" or similar terms are not found in the Illinois Emergency Management Agency's "Illinois Emergency Operations Plan."<sup>70</sup>

The precise wording of the IEMA Act and the state's formal plan do not preclude the Governor from declaring migration-related disasters. Indeed, on a monthly basis Governor Pritzker has reissued a statewide disaster proclamation, directing, among other things, state personnel to meet "the needs of asylum seekers coming to Illinois."

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<sup>67</sup> As noted earlier in the discussion on state budget line items for immigrants, other amounts for the Welcome Centers beyond the additional \$25 million were reprogrammed for other uses.

<sup>68</sup> Public Law 93-288; Approved May 22, 1974, as Amended Through P.L. 117-328, Enacted December 29, 2022.

<sup>69</sup> "Shelter and Services Program Awards." FEMA.Gov, [www.fema.gov/grants/preparedness/shelter-services-program/awards](http://www.fema.gov/grants/preparedness/shelter-services-program/awards). Accessed 2 Feb. 2024.

<sup>70</sup> "Illinois Emergency Operations Plan." Illinois Emergency Management Agency - Office of Homeland Security, [iemaohs.illinois.gov/preparedness/ieop.html](http://iemaohs.illinois.gov/preparedness/ieop.html). Accessed 2 Feb. 2024.

Pursuant to the Governor’s disaster declaration, IEMA has responded to requests from Chicago for assistance. The agency does not distribute funding, but maintains three warehouses from which it has transferred to the Chicago Office of Emergency Management items such as coats, sleeping cots, water and meals.

## **Discussion**

This discussion synthesizes some of the implications of the major governmental responses to migrants in Illinois. The focus is on the Southwestern Border Arrivals, given their large number and the fact that the state shoulders most of the cost of assisting them.

### **“Pro-Immigrant” Should Not Mean “Vulnerable to Texas”**

Illinois and Chicago are undisputedly pro-immigrant, but do they have to be vulnerable to abuse by other states? Say what might be said about Texas Governor Abbott: he astutely saw an opportunity to exploit the state’s receptiveness.

Illinois needs to lift up its support for humane treatment of migrants as a strength and not allow Abbott and others to turn this support against the state. This will require faster and more strategic pushback than the state has managed to date. It took Chicago a year and a half to pass an ordinance regulating bus drop offs.<sup>71</sup> It could have passed such an ordinance much more quickly and framed it as respect for an orderly migration process.

State government, meanwhile, seems to lack the legal tools to regulate the Texas buses by, for example, controlling their dropoff procedures; inspecting them for safety concerns; or insisting on scheduling and notices of impending arrivals. These and other protective measures need to be enacted by the General Assembly and implemented.

### **The Migrants Impact Some Programs More than Others**

Assuming, as is reasonable at this point, that migrants will keep arriving and that the federal government will not provide adequate support, it is hard to escape consideration of what this means for existing immigrant service programs in Illinois. Three types of impacts may be identified: on special programs set up specifically for the migrants, on programming where the migrants may become a majority of participants, and on programs where migrants are not likely to become a majority of enrollees, but where the presence of the migrants begins to shape how the program is viewed or understood.

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<sup>71</sup> Chicago Moves to Crack down on Migrant Buses and Prevent Hate Crimes, [www.axios.com/local/chicago/2023/12/14/city-council-migrant-buses-hate-crimes](http://www.axios.com/local/chicago/2023/12/14/city-council-migrant-buses-hate-crimes). Accessed 12 Feb. 2024.

## **Migrant-Dedicated Programs and Services**

The state has invested in several kinds of services for forced migrants. Illinois used its own resources to help stand up services for the Ukrainian U4U participants, specifically by bringing in additional service providers that could successfully engage with the newcomers. For the SBAs, the state in fiscal year 2024 dedicated at least \$25 million for case management at the migrant shelters, and \$23 million in Asylum Seekers Emergency Rental and Assistance Program. Other resources devoted to the situation included \$11 million to migrant legal workshops focused on TPS, and about \$3 million for legal services beyond TPS, such as help with petitioning for changes of immigration court venue, education about asylum, and representation of asylum cases in a small number of instances.

Expecting these sums to be made available in future years would appear unlikely. Support for the measures could be improved, however, by producing information on the positive outcomes of the efforts. For example, more data might be produced on how many people have had legal counseling, have had children successfully enrolled in school, have obtained secure housing, etc.

## **Existing Program Where Migrants May Be a Majority of Enrollees**

As noted earlier, VTTC existed prior to the presence of Southwestern Border Arrivals. A total of \$43 million in funds supported persons in VTTC in FY2023, though it is unclear how many recipients were recent forced migrants. Annual VTTC enrollment was about 2,000 persons prior to the arrival of the migrants but, as noted earlier, there were more than 5,300 open VTTC cases in 2023.

## **Existing Programs Where Migrants May Be a Significant Share of Enrollees**

This report focuses on what are called human services, including efforts to support and improve the health, economic stability, nutrition, access to shelter and legal assistance of migrants. Public education, another area where migrant children may be expected to become a large share of participants, particularly in impacted geographies like Chicago and, within a district, especially in language-related instruction. The state allocated \$151 million in funds for English Learner Services in fiscal year 2023.<sup>72</sup>

A data dashboard maintained by a Chicago City Council committee suggests that about a quarter of SBAs are children.<sup>73</sup> Applying that ratio to the 35,000 migrants to date would mean there may be close to 9,000 children among the SBAs. The annual Home Language Survey of the Illinois State Board of Education found an increase of about 2,200 Ukrainian speakers in schools

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<sup>72</sup> Illinois State Board of Education “FY 2023 Additional Investments in Students Requiring English Learner (EL) Services” Report Prepared By State Funding & Forecasting Staff, August 2022

<sup>73</sup> “New Arrivals Data Dashboard.” 40th Ward of Chicago, 29 Jan. 2024, [40thward.org/cirr/new-arrivals/new-arrivals-data-dashboard/](https://40thward.org/cirr/new-arrivals/new-arrivals-data-dashboard/).



between 2021 and 2022.<sup>74</sup> A rough estimate of 11,200 forced migrant children would represent about five percent of the 235,000 English language learners in Illinois public schools.<sup>75</sup>

Illinois uses state funds to provide healthcare for all children who are ineligible for Medicaid, regardless of immigration status. The Healthcare Benefits for Immigrant Seniors (ages 65+) and the Healthcare Benefits for Immigrant Adults (ages 45-64) programs are similar, although the latter two programs are subject to caps on enrollment.<sup>76</sup> It may be assumed that a large share of the SBAs will be eligible for these programs, and may represent a significant portion of enrollees.

### **The Migrants Could Help Us If We Talked with Them**

The state has lacked critical information on the SBAs with which to plan services. As noted, far fewer migrants in shelters turned out to be eligible for TPS and/or employment authorization. Little is known publicly about how many migrants expect to leave Illinois. (After all, Texas forced migrants to Illinois instead of asking where they would prefer to settle.) Many migrants have dates and venues in the immigration court system that need to be changed, but how many need these legal services is not known.

The arrival of the migrants has clearly been overwhelming for the state and its municipalities. Describing the reaction, one City of Chicago official memorably said it was like “Bolting together a plane while it’s flying. And the plane is on fire.” Yet hindsight teaches that the migrants should be interviewed and surveyed. A simple, unscientific sample of 100 migrants across shelters would likely have indicated that most migrants did not successfully use the CBPOne cell phone app to schedule an appointment at the border, rendering many of them ineligible for employment authorization. Conversations could help us learn about migrants’ long-term plans, their legal needs, their work-related skill sets, their likelihood of having someone here they can live with, and many other factors that affect the planning and provision of services.

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<sup>74</sup> Rob Paral and Associates “Uniting for Ukraine in Illinois: Initial Findings on Needs of Ukrainians and Their Sponsors” at <https://robparal.com/wp-content/uploads/Ukrainians-in-Illinois-Final-Report.pdf>

<sup>75</sup> Illinois State Board of Education “English Learners in Illinois: SY 2020-2021 Statistical Report.”

<sup>76</sup> Illinois Healthcare and Family Services press release Friday, June 16, 2023 “HFS Announces Next Steps for Health Benefits for Immigrant Adults and Seniors Programs” <https://hfs.illinois.gov/htcnews/press-release.26601.html>

# How Should Illinois Adjust to a Future of Forced Migration?

*This section discusses options that the state has to prepare itself more effectively for a future of forced migration.*

Given the likelihood that substantial forced migration will continue into the foreseeable future, it behooves Illinois state government to consider adjusting some of its policies related to migration. This means forging a new set of expectations with the federal government, interacting with migrants in new ways, and considering whether the existing state architecture of immigrant services needs to adapt to a new era.<sup>77</sup>

Following are a set of adaptations and strategies that Illinois state government should consider.

## Demand More from Washington

There are a set of requests that the state needs to be demanding of the federal government:

### Insist on Up-to-Date Migration Data

Federal information on forced migration to Illinois is paltry.

- There is **zero** information on the actual numbers of Ukrainians that have been matched with Illinois sponsors and who have come to live in the state. This leaves only back-of-the-envelope estimates of the Ukrainian population based on numbers of sponsors who have begun the sponsorship application process.
- Similarly, the “Processes for Cubans, Haitians, Nicaraguans, and Venezuelans“ program allows up to 30,000 persons nationally into the U.S. The federal government has not published **a single statistic** on how many have come to Illinois.
- In the case of the Southwestern Border Migrants, an enormous discrepancy exists between the **63,000 reported going to Illinois and the 35,000 actually booked into Chicago shelters.**<sup>78</sup> The federal government could use changes of address being filed with the immigration court system to report to Illinois the precise number and location of SBAs in the state.
- Illinois should deliver to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security **a specific set of requests** for data on the migration it is experiencing.

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<sup>77</sup> Some may argue that existing deportation orders will begin to be enforced in the coming years, diminishing the number of migrants in the state (through enforced removal). Such a scenario remains to be seen, and can be offset by continued new arrivals.

<sup>78</sup> Some early migrants were never housed in shelters but were put up in hotels by the state.


### **Achieve Equity for Illinois in Emergency Management Grants**

- Two dozen governmental, non-profit and faith-based organizations in Texas received \$104 million in FEMA grants in 2023 compared to just \$32 million for Cook County and the State of Illinois.
- The amount going to Texas is lopsided given that Texas denigrates migrants, does little with its own resources to assist them, and in fact moves them out of the state quickly: all in stark contrast to Illinois.
- The state should demand a more fair share of emergency assistance.

### **Amend the Stafford Act**

- On the topic of emergency assistance, the Stafford Emergency Assistance Act has an out-of-date definition of emergency based on accidents and natural disasters.
- The Stafford Act needs to be changed to include human migration crises as an emergency. Illinois' federal legislators should amend the Stafford Act.

## Use Social and Mass Communication Media More Actively with Migrant



CITY OF CHICAGO

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DEPARTMENT OF FAMILY AND SUPPORT SERVICES

Consent Form  
Forma de Consentimiento

The City of Chicago is partnering with the State of Illinois, Catholic Charities, the IL Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights (ICIRR), and other partners to assist you in your resettlement efforts, securing housing, and accessing other resources and support services. To assist in coordination, the City of Chicago is requesting your consent to share your information (full name, date of birth, current shelter location, phone number, and email) with the State of Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS), the IL Housing Development Authority (IHDA), Catholic Charities, ICIRR, and other city and state resettlement partners for the purposes of assisting you in your resettlement efforts, securing housing, and accessing other resources and support services.

La ciudad de Chicago se está asociando con el estado de Illinois, las Caridades Católicas, la Coalición de Illinois por los Derechos de los Inmigrantes y Refugiados (ICIRR), y otros socios para asistirle en sus esfuerzos de reasentamiento, asegurar una vivienda, y acceder otros recursos y servicios de apoyo. Para ayudar en la coordinación, la ciudad de Chicago solicita su consentimiento para compartir su información (nombre completo, fecha de nacimiento, ubicación actual del albergue, número de teléfono y correo electrónico) con el estado de Illinois Departamento de Servicios Humanos (IDHS), la Autoridad de Desarrollo de Vivienda de IL (IHDA), ICIRR, Caridades Católicas, y otros socios de reasentamiento de la ciudad y el estado de Illinois con el fin de asistirle en sus esfuerzos de reasentamiento, conseguir vivienda, y acceder otros recursos y servicios de apoyo.

Yes, I consent for the City of Chicago to share my information. Si doy mi consentimiento para que la Ciudad de Chicago comparte mi información.

No, I do not consent for the City of Chicago to share my information. No doy mi consentimiento para que la Ciudad de Chicago comparte mi información.

No systematic digital communication has been established SBAs.<sup>79</sup> This is despite the fact that the city of Chicago collects the cell phone number and email address of all migrants booked into its shelter system, and migrants sign a waiver saying that their contact information can be used by the city and the state.

High-quality videos, web material and pdfs have been made for the migrants by immigrant-serving groups but have not been aggressively *pushed out* via social media advertising purchases on sites like Facebook. Comprehensive social media strategies for communication with the migrants need to be created in Illinois.

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<sup>79</sup> In February of 2024 the Illinois Housing and Development Authority was planning to use Constant Contact software to communicate by email with migrants in private housing temporarily subsidized by the state.

Looking to the future, messaging to migrants could include reaching them on their way here, while still in Mexico. The state could warn migrants of what awaits them: for much of 2023, the honest depiction was of a spot on the floor of a police station, beneath the glare of armed officers.

Once here, migrants could be sent videos and other digital information. For this analysis, a scan was made of 16 Facebook pages and four WhatsApp and Telegram sites used by migrants to Chicago. We found that Facebook sites used by SBAs had many questions about legal aid and border laws. Ukrainian Facebook had questions about sponsors. These sites are rich opportunities for government communication.

The lack of social media and large-scale messaging with the migrants may be legitimately chalked up to the intense pressure to deal with up to 1,000 human beings arriving in Chicago in a given week. It is also true that the human service sector lags in its use of digital tools. Consider the text messaging used by medical offices, or the micro-targeted advertisements on Instagram or Facebook.

## **Give Migrants a Voice**

Using digital media with migrants is one thing. Still another is to convene the migrants and give them a voice in their situation. Neither the city nor the state have convened forced migrants to learn from them about their experience, needs and plans for the future. In the short term, a Migrant Council could be created. More longer term, perhaps with help from private philanthropy, a Venezuelan Mutual Assistance Association could be established..

Such engagement would have powerful implications for the services being set up for them. For example, when plans were being made to create legal clinics where migrants could apply for TPS or employment authorization, the understanding was that as many as 10,000, the majority of migrants in shelters, would qualify. Several months later it was estimated that only about 15-20 percent of the migrants were eligible.<sup>80</sup> As of mid February, 2024, about 5,100 TPS and employment authorization applications had been completed for eligible migrants.

## **Establish Connections with Border Groups**

Immigrant-serving organizations at the Texas border help migrants move northward to Chicago, yet there are insufficient linkages between groups in Texas and Chicago. Promoting ties with the border groups would help to predict arrival numbers. Services provided here would improve with more such ties: as one example, some migrants are getting their biometric procedures

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<sup>80</sup>“City of Chicago Briefing.” Presentations, [www.chicago.gov/city/en/sites/texas-new-arrivals/home/presentations.html](http://www.chicago.gov/city/en/sites/texas-new-arrivals/home/presentations.html). Accessed 31 Jan. 2024.

completed by USCIS personnel working with non-profit organizations at the border. For these migrants, some services are not required once they are here.

## **Prepare to Manage Inter-Group, Competitive Pressures**

As mentioned earlier, a new paradigm may emerge in Illinois as forced migrant groups that are not part of the existing, predominant ethnicities become part of the struggle for equity and inclusion. In this regard another hard reality involves the long-term undocumented immigrant communities of Illinois, so embedded, so well-established, so vital to the state, and yet so distinctly denied the path to citizenship they deserve.

To say the least, a human-relations campaign is needed to respect and respond to the honest frustrations that existing communities may feel when they see newcomers (at least some) gain the right to work here or receive certain benefits. Also needed is a means of communication between migrants and those simply concerned about them.

## **Involve the Suburbs**

Suburban governments may want the migrant situation to stay in Chicago, but this is wishful thinking. Decades of history show that immigrants to Chicago move to the suburbs for jobs and housing. As of spring 2024, advocates report serving migrants in suburbs from Waukegan to Aurora.<sup>81</sup> Suburbs need to engage in planning for growing migrant populations.

## **Involve the Public**

Many Illinois residents and institutions like churches and non-profit organizations have volunteered time and money to assist migrants. The State should consider setting up a mechanism, such as a website or social media presence, to connect interested members of the public with opportunities to help.

## **Consider a “Rethink” of Existing Services**

This may be the most painful question posed by the new forced migration, especially in the case of the SBAs. If asylum seekers continue to come to the state, existing investments may need to change.

Can the VTTC program withstand the scrutiny that legislators will bring to bear upon it, as it apparently is becoming a majority-SBA program? Can Access to Justice, a legal services program funded by the state, be expected to serve forced migrants while maintaining a key feature of its original program design, which is to serve persons without legal status, primarily

<sup>81</sup> Source: March 5, 2024 group discussion organized by the DePaul Migration Collaborative and immigrant legal providers.

the undocumented population that has mostly lived in Illinois for many years? How will the Immigrant Family Resource Program, a program that informs immigrants of their eligibility for services, adjust or expand to meet the needs of forced migrants, many of whom are ineligible for state assistance programs?

In the face of pressures to rein in spending, will the state be tempted to place services to forced migrants on a separate, parallel track as a way to ensure that existing programs serve the populations they were originally conceptualized for? There is strong precedent in immigrant policy for prioritizing longer-term residents over new arrivals. The legalization program of the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 was limited to persons who had been in the country for four years prior to the Act's passage. Length-of-residence requirements are part of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals and in-state tuition for undocumented students. The length-of-residence requirement is only one idea to manage eligibility.

## **Conclusion**

Forced migration in its manifestations such as Uniting for Ukraine, the Refugee Resettlement Program and the Southwestern Border Arrivals is here to stay in Illinois. As this analysis shows, the impact of each group depends partly on its size and partly on whether federal support and work authorization are available.

There is no sugarcoating the situation that Illinois finds itself in with respect to the Southwestern Border Arrivals. At 35,000 and counting there is a strong possibility of continued arrivals throughout 2024. Congressional Republicans rejected an immigration bill in February that would have slowed the entrance of asylum seekers, and any federal legislative relief seems unlikely, to say the least, until after the November presidential election. Perhaps the Illinois General Assembly can enact legislation to control the entry of buses from Texas, but any success in this regard will take place at a future date.

The general public is encountering the SBAs with increasing frequency, as it becomes commonplace in Chicago and suburbs to see mothers with babies on their backs asking for help, or young children selling candies and water bottles at stop lights. It's reasonable to think that residents may become weary of the tragedy, and harden themselves against the idea of supporting the migrants with state dollars.

But the general public may be the state's ace in the hole. Illinois voters have solidly backed the political party that has been supportive of immigration. Voters gave Democratic candidates for Governor and for U.S. Senate lopsided victories of more than 500,000 votes over their opponents in 2022, the most recent statewide elections. Members of the Democratic Party were awarded two-thirds of offices in both the state senate and the state house.

The voters' goodwill toward the party that supports immigrants isn't endless. Elected officials will have to show the public that they are effectively managing a crisis.

With our winters, politics, and even our sports teams, Illinoisans enjoy their identity as hardy and no-nonsense, and they might well appreciate seeing the state defend itself more assertively than it has. It could resound well with voters to see Illinois take stronger action against the bus companies, and hear more full-throated affirmation that we refuse to be a doormat for Texas ideologues. The state could also show that it's putting Illinois on top by extracting a more fair share of federal emergency dollars. The toughness would show that our hard choices to support migrants are part of a larger strategy to defend the state and what it stands for.

Whether elected leaders rally the state to stand up for itself and for our migrants remains to be seen. What's beyond question is the state's capacity to do it. Illinois has a fairly unique standing nationally in developing and delivering services to immigrants, and the multiplicity of responses to the Southwestern Border Arrivals is just one more example. In responding to its migrant challenge: Illinois can do it.



# About Rob Paral

Rob Paral is a demographic and public policy consultant with specialties in immigrant and Latino populations; community needs for health and human service programs; and Midwestern demographic change. As Principal of Rob Paral and Associates, Rob has assisted more than 100 different human service, advocacy and philanthropic organizations in understanding the communities they are trying to serve.

Rob was awarded a Practitioner in Residence position within the DePaul Migration Collaborative for the fall and winter of 2023-2024. He is also a Research Specialist with the Great Cities Institute of the University of Illinois at Chicago and a nonresident fellow in the Global Cities program of the Chicago Council on Global Affairs. More information may be found at <https://robparal.com/>