

# Leaving Behind the Newest New Yorkers



**AFRIKANA**  
**HESTER ST**



Shortcomings to Welcoming Asylum Seekers  
to New York City in 2024

**MAY 2024**

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Photos: Josh Pachecho (cover), Afrikana (left)

# Introduction

## New York is a city of immigrants.

For centuries, those seeking a better life have sought safety in New York’s vibrant and diverse communities, and the city has been indelibly shaped by their contributions. As millions of people around the world are displaced due to rising conflict, violence, and persecution, thousands have made their way to New York in the latest chapter of the city’s history.

In the past two years, nearly 183,000<sup>1</sup> asylum seekers have arrived in New York City. In 2024, Make the Road New York, Afrikana, and Hester Street surveyed hundreds of asylum seekers to get a full sense of the difficulties facing individuals as they settle in the city. Unfortunately, many of the challenges documented in our 2023 survey<sup>2</sup> have only increased. The Mayor has continued to cut critical services for new arrivals and created additional barriers that have made it even harder for many to settle in New York City, which has been a sanctuary city for over three decades. This study documents the devastating impacts of such policy decisions.

Our 2023 survey showed evidence of increased migration from regions other than Latin America, so we prioritized surveying more than 100 migrants of African countries in 2024. Responses for 586 surveys were collected and synthesized to shed light on specific challenges faced by asylum seekers in accessing legal services, work, education, healthcare, and basic resources in New York.

By systematically examining the data collected, we aim to identify the extent of the challenges facing new arrivals and propose solutions to address these resource gaps.

1 [NYC Comptroller: Asylum Seeker Census](#)

2 [2023 Report](#)



# Respondent profile

**In February of 2024, we surveyed 586 migrants.**

Global displacement trends are fluid and constantly changing. While Venezuela is still the largest migrant group represented in our survey, they no longer make up the majority. We saw a greater share of responses from migrants from Ecuador and overall we received much more responses from migrants from Africa.

While we are excited to share our survey findings, with 121 Black migrants surveyed, we recognize that our findings may not be representative of the experiences of the full population of Black migrants in New York.

## Top countries of origin

% of respondents



3 In 2023, 64% of respondents were from Venezuela, which was 23% points higher than 2024. All 2023 data comparisons in the rest of this report refer to percentage points.

Map: World Bank  
Official Boundaries

## Intended to come to NYC<sup>4</sup>

**68%**

Families with kids  
**61%**

Single adults  
**77%**

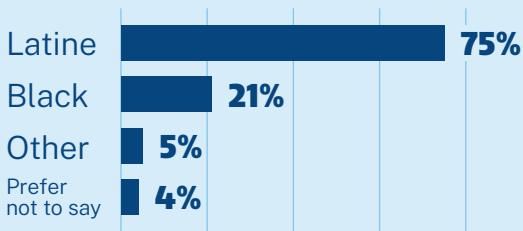
4 7% of those who did not intend to come to NYC were forced to come

**RESPONDENT PROFILE**

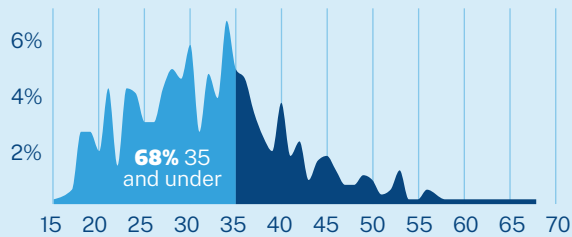
Most of the migrants surveyed were Latine and under 35 years old. This population reflects the migrants who were present in shelters at the time the survey was being conducted.

Black migrants who were surveyed were more likely to not speak any English than Latine migrants who were surveyed.

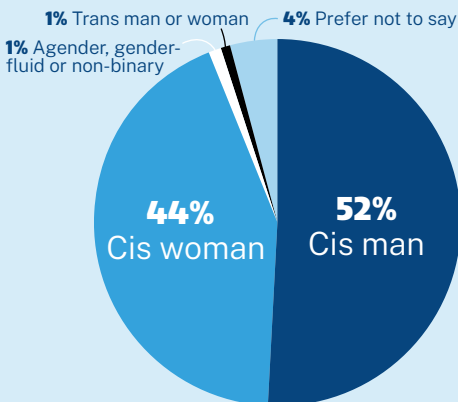
**Race and ethnicity**



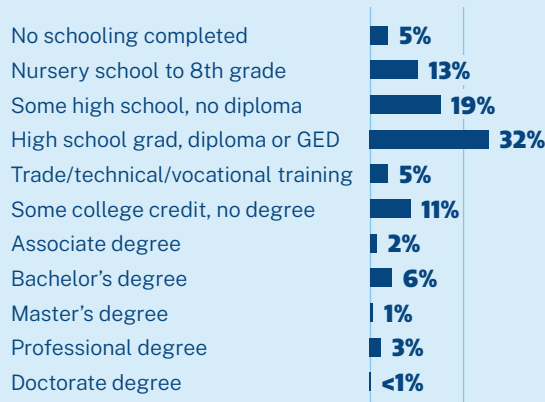
**Age**



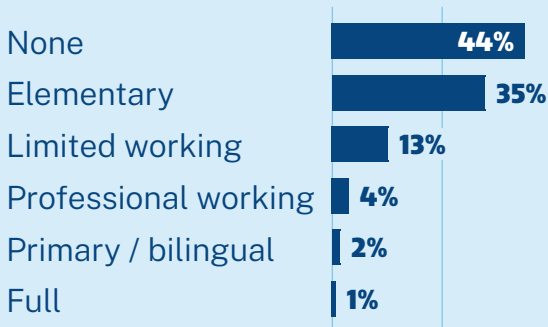
**Gender**



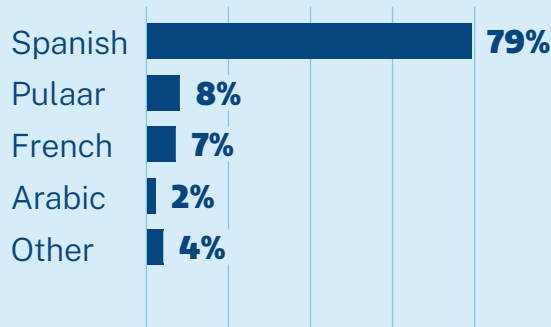
**Education**



**English proficiency**



**Other languages spoken**



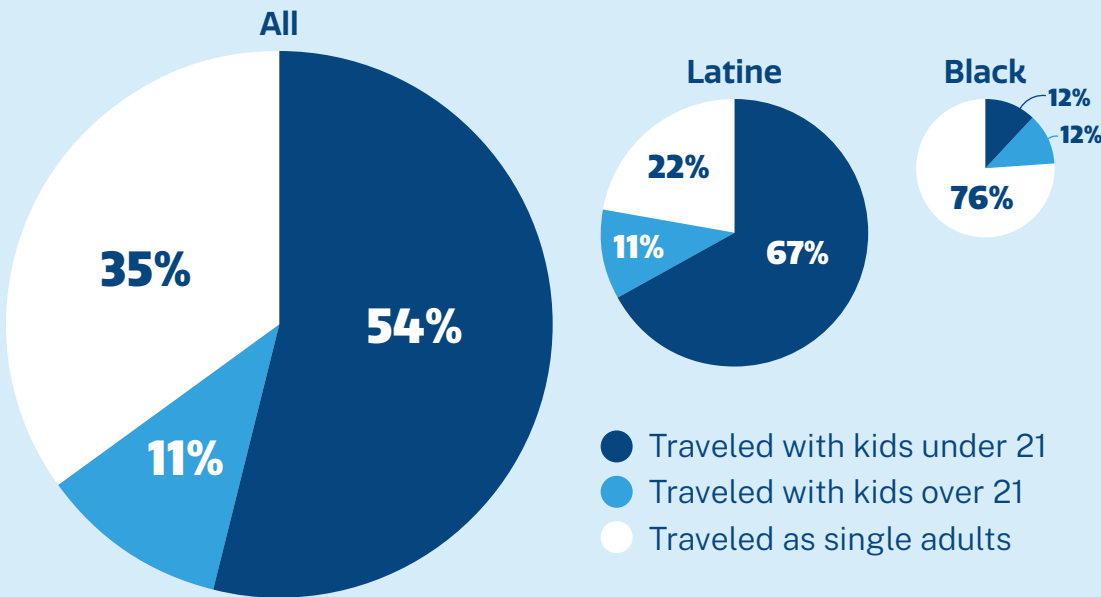
RESPONDENT PROFILE

The majority of all migrants surveyed were traveling with family under the age of 21.<sup>5</sup> However, the majority of Black migrants traveled as single adults. Two out of five migrants have family or loved ones in New York City.<sup>6</sup> For Black migrants, the rate is higher.

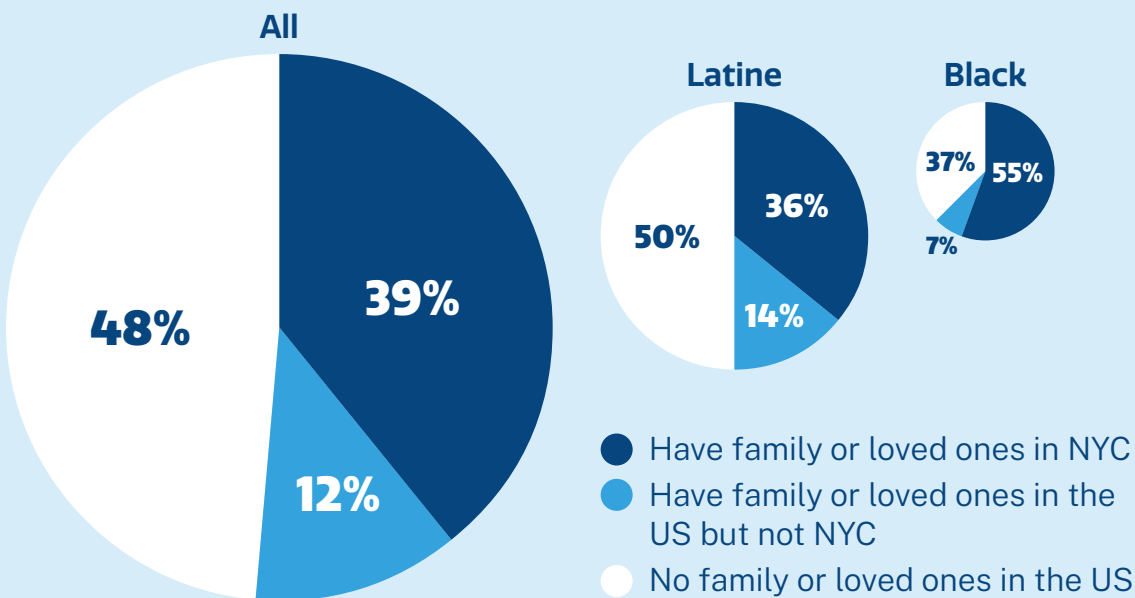
5 -7% from 2023

6 +21% from 2023

Arrived with family



Have family or loved ones in the US



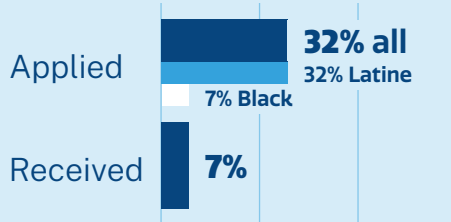
# Systemic barriers to employment

## Far too few migrants have been able to apply for and secure work authorization.

Even those who have been able to apply are still virtually unable to find work because they face additional barriers, including lack of job training opportunities, not having proof of prior work experience, and lack of English language learning opportunities.

Governments must do more to address this key obstacle. Individuals must be able to work in order to build safe and stable lives in New York.

### Work authorization



### Have found steady work<sup>7</sup>



<sup>7</sup> About a third of those with steady work were not getting minimum wage or timely pay, or have felt threatened due to their immigration status.

Authorization increases the likelihood of finding steady work, but other barriers remain.



**SYSTEMIC BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT**

Migrants bring experience and training in many occupations, including cleaning and maintenance, construction, food service retail, and management (such as running a small business).

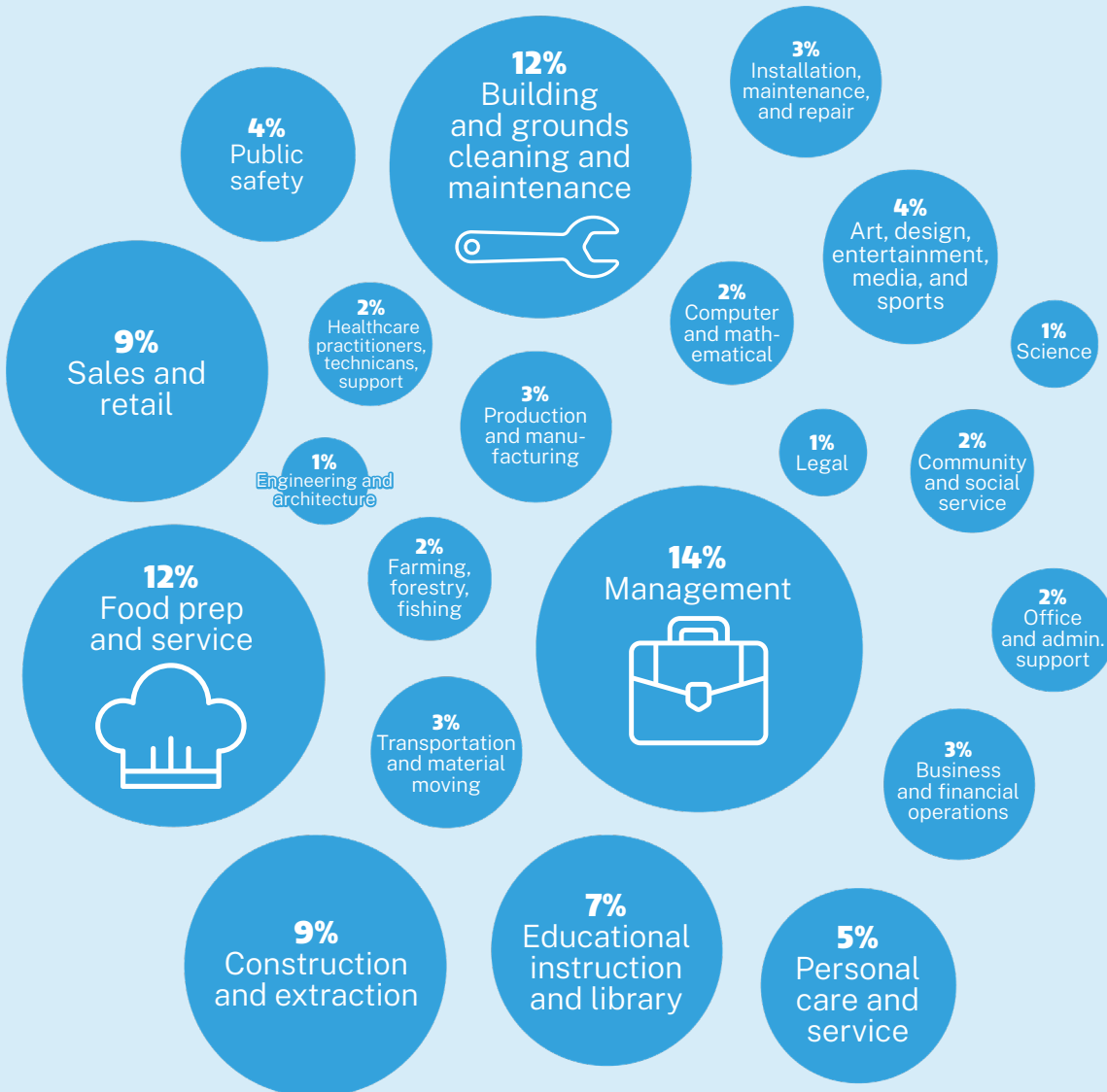
**Looking for work**

**92%**

**Will take any job**

**91%**

**Have prior job experience, certification, or training<sup>8</sup> in...**



8 52% of migrants surveyed have started or finished high school, and 24% have some college credit or received a degree.

Find the complete education data on page 5.

Occupation categories: [U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics](#)



Many migrants are forced to leave their country of origin quickly or in chaotic circumstances. Because of this, they are often unable to produce proof of previous work experience. This can be an enormous challenge to finding work in New York.

A number of other hurdles — including language barriers and difficulties finding childcare — make it nearly impossible for new arrivals to find steady work.

### Struggling to find work

# 95%

### Hurdles in finding work

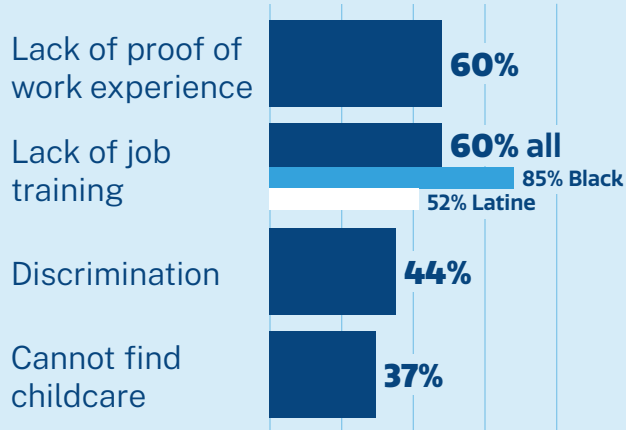


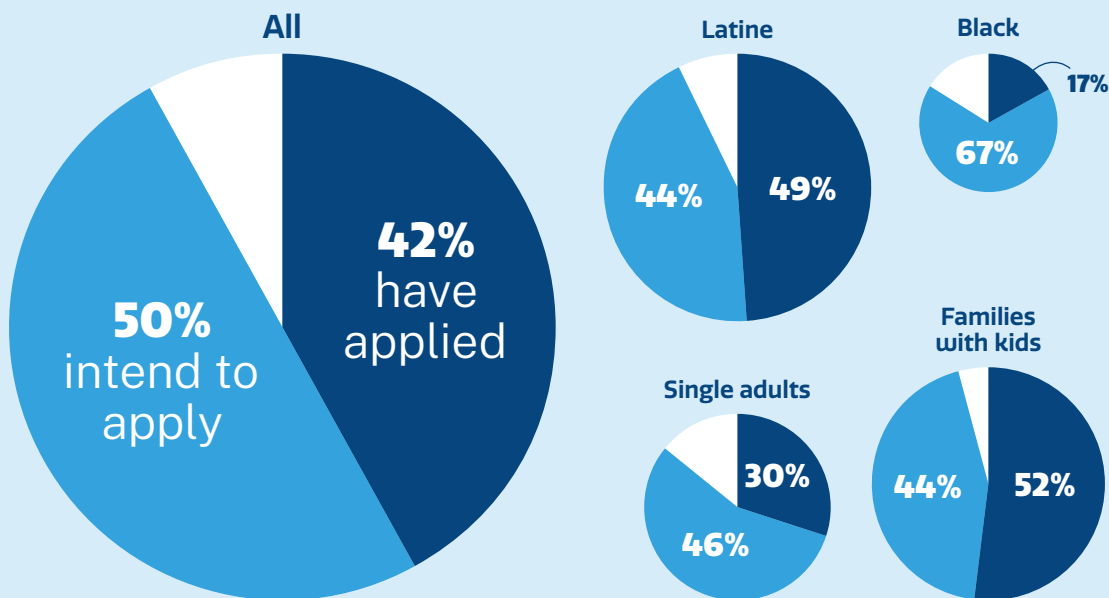
Photo: Rae Breaux

# Immigration system failures

## Asylum and Temporary Protected Status (TPS) are the main immigration paths for migrants.

Asylum is designed for people who have fled their home country due to violence and persecution. TPS is a designation that applies to individuals from specific countries.<sup>9</sup> In the US, TPS eligibility is very limited for people from countries in sub-Saharan Africa.

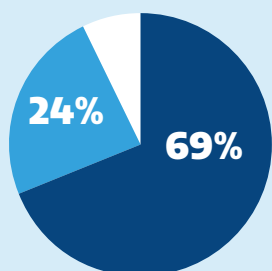
### Applying for asylum<sup>10</sup>



9 In 2023 the Biden Administration extended and redesignated TPS for many Venezuelans.

10 Fewer Black migrants have applied for asylum, despite our finding that an equal percentage of migrants from both Africa and Latin America left because of violence and for political reasons.

### Applying for TPS<sup>11</sup>



● Have applied ● Intend to apply

11 Only 13% of migrants surveyed are eligible for TPS.

Few migrants have been able to access full service representation by an immigration lawyer, though the majority already have an upcoming court date.

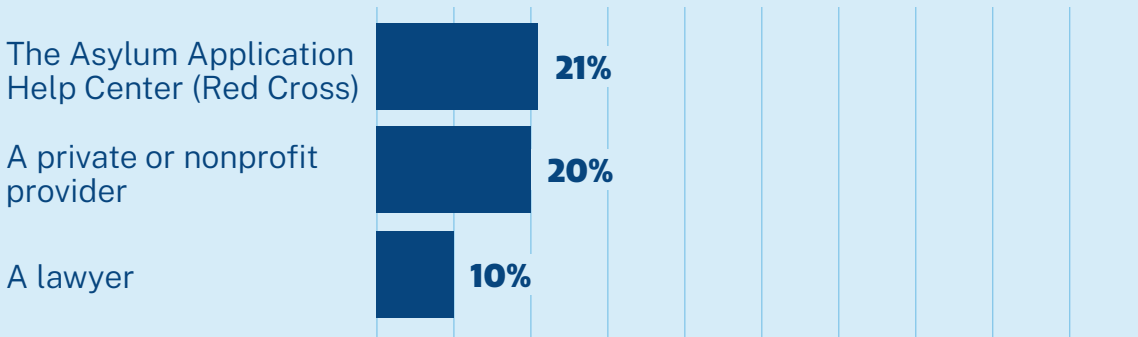
**Have a court date**

**69%**

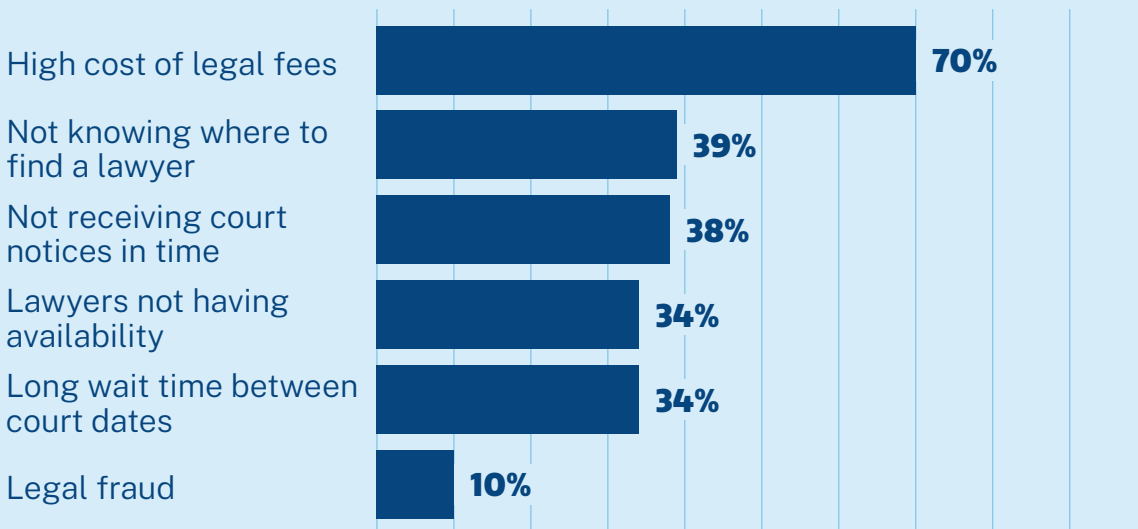
**Have a lawyer to represent them in immigration court**

**6%**

**Received legal assistance for asylum and work authorization filing from...**



**Challenges in getting timely legal representation**



# Insecure housing

**The majority of survey respondents have received a 30- or 60-day notice to leave shelter or reapply.**

However, almost none have found a stable housing option after their 30- or 60-day placement.

## Received a notice to leave shelter or reapply

All

**75%**

Latine families with kids

**71%**

Latine single adults

**66%**

Black families with kids

**75%**

Black single adults

**93%**

## Found a housing option outside of shelter

**5%**

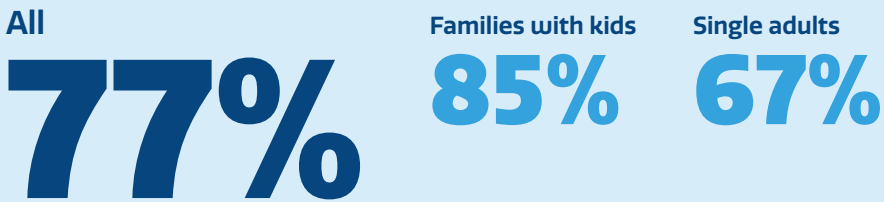


Photo: Make the Road NY

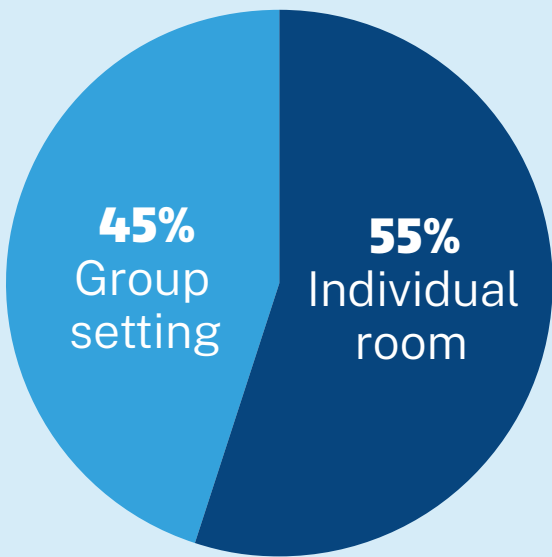
Fewer migrants surveyed are now living in shelter.<sup>12</sup> Some migrants who are not living in shelter and do not have other housing options may be sleeping on the street.

12 **-20%** from 2023

### Live in shelter



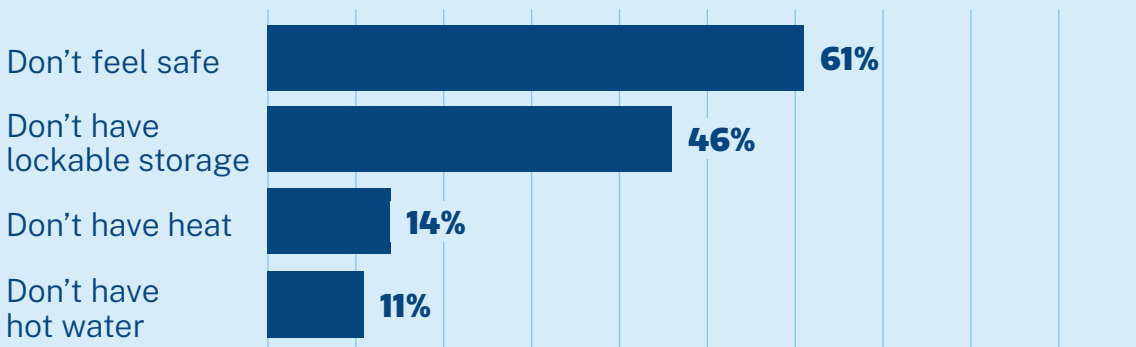
### Type of shelter lived in



### Have lived in multiple shelters

**55%**

### Challenges faced in shelter





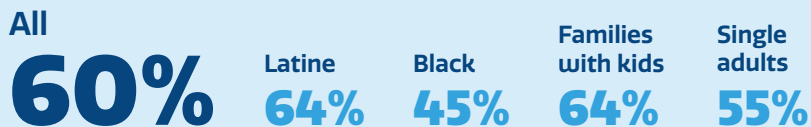
# Access to basic resources

## After NYC cut critical funding in 2024, migrants are struggling even more to meet their most basic needs.

Instead of focusing on efforts that would ensure new arrivals have the tools to stay and thrive in New York, the city government has fallen back on short-term makeshift solutions plagued with mismanagement and corruption. More than a third of migrants who were surveyed don't have access to food, warm clothing, or reliable transportation.

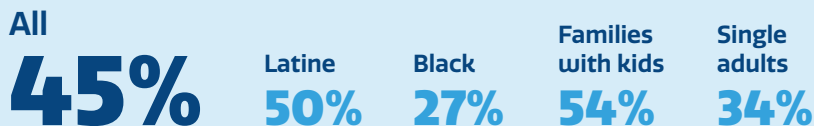
### Access to three full meals a day<sup>13</sup>

13 **-15%** from 2023

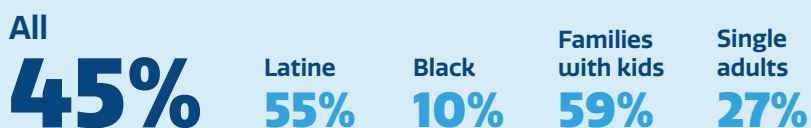


### Access to warm clothing<sup>14</sup>

14 **-8%** from 2023



### Access to reliable transportation



## ACCESS TO BASIC RESOURCES

Low access to English language classes presents a barrier for migrants at every step of their immigration journey. Healthcare access is also low. Despite these challenges, the majority of migrants surveyed want to stay in New York.

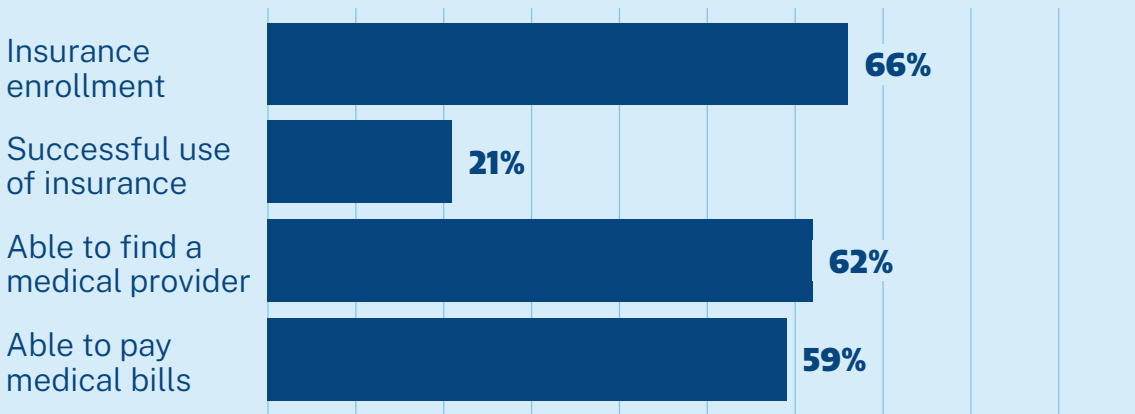
### Able to enroll in English language classes

**22%**

### Able to enroll school-age children in school

**85%**

### Healthcare access



### Want to stay in NYC

All  
**86%**

Latine  
**84%**

Black  
**93%**



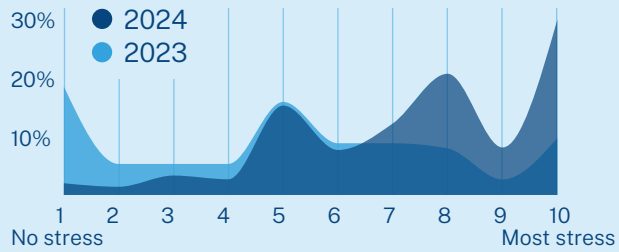
Photo: Karen Smul

The instability and struggle for basic resources is having a profound effect on the people we surveyed. Compared to last year, migrants are reporting drastically higher rates of stress, anxiety, or depression.

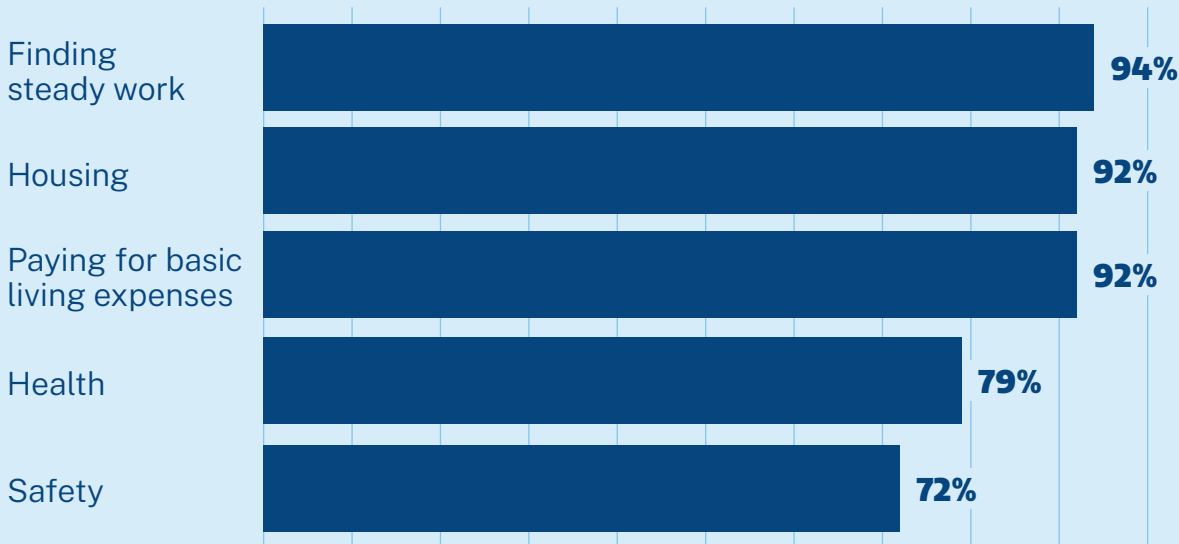
**Experienced anxiety or depression (or traveling with a family member who has)**

**65%**

**Stress level**



**Causes of stress**



# Conclusion

**The newest New Yorkers are not being provided the housing support, legal services, work authorization, vocational training, English language education, and healthcare that they need to thrive in New York City.**

This creates significant barriers to creating a safe and stable home in New York, while exposing them to significant risks to their safety and health. In particular, for the unprecedented number of new African asylum seekers, there has been a lack of investment in community-based organizations that serve them specifically.

Policymakers and stakeholders must prioritize the needs of asylum seekers and collaborate to ensure they have the freedom to work and thrive in their new home. By addressing the gaps in resources highlighted in this report, New York City can live up to its core values as a place of refuge and opportunity, providing a supportive environment where asylum seekers can build stable and robust communities.

By taking federal action to expedite work authorization and devoting city resources to provide adequate baseline resources, we can ensure that asylum seekers in New York receive the support they desperately need so that they can embark on their new chapter with dignity, resilience, and hope.

# New York City policy recommendations

## Housing

- **Restore full Right to Shelter protections**

Pass City Council legislation (Int 0210) that would immediately rescind time limits on Right to Shelter protections so that people can maintain safe housing while seeking stable work, permanent housing, or a resolution to their immigration cases.

- **Implement and expand CityFHEPS**

Fully implement the CityFHEPS expansion, which would help more people transition from shelters to permanent housing.

- **Expand temporary shelter options**

Tap into a wider set of City-owned facilities to provide temporary housing for new arrivals.

- **Allow faith-based institutions to house new arrivals**

Cut red tape that is keeping houses of worship across the city from being able to expand shelter beds for new arrivals.

## Healthcare access

- **Create, fund and sustain a Community Health Worker Project**

Create a program that would fund community-based organizations to hire Community Health Workers, who would partner closely with clinical facilities, and provide 1-1 assistance to help individuals navigate the health system, access care, and access other social services.



## Immigration Services

- **Limit the city's ability to cooperate with ICE**

Pass resolutions at the city level to limit communication between the NYC Department of Correction and ICE, as well as limit the NYPD's ability to hold people on immigration detainers.

- **Boost rapid response legal programs**

Ramp up funding for the Rapid Response Legal Collaborative, a service-delivery model that focuses on providing complex legal representation to all New Yorkers at risk of imminent deportation.

- **Build the infrastructure to support migrants seeking work authorization**

Ensure all immigrants who have a path to work authorization can file an application. This means supporting organizations that have developed programs to screen and support individuals who qualify for work authorization.

## Labor and Workforce Development

- **Expand work authorization for public jobs**

Ease work requirements for New York State and City government jobs, allowing more positions to be filled by asylum seekers with legal work status in the US.

## Education

- **Expand adult literacy programs**

Invest \$50 million into adult literacy programs, which help immigrants overcome language barriers and be prepared to take on high-need jobs.

- **Expand after-school programs**

Expand access to after-school programs for undocumented families.

# Federal policy recommendations

- **Expedite work authorization for asylum seekers**
- **Send more resources to NY to support asylum seekers**
- **Reverse efforts to undermine the asylum system**

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

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