

# MEMORANDUM



Bellevue Parks &  
Community Services

DATE: October 21, 2024

TO: Human Services Commission Members

FROM: Andrew Ndayambaje, Human Services Planner, Parks & Community Services

SUBJECT: Panel Conversation: Trends and Challenges with Services to Asylum Seekers

## Background

### Definitions:

**Asylum seeker:** An asylum seeker is a person who has left their country and is seeking protection from persecution and serious human rights violations in another country, but who hasn't yet been legally recognized as a refugee and is waiting to receive a decision on their asylum claim.

**Refugee:** A refugee is someone who has been forced to flee conflict or persecution and has crossed an international border to seek safety. They cannot return to their country without risking their life or freedoms. It is a legal term that carries with it certain protections that refugees are entitled to.

**Migrant:** The term 'migrant' does not have an international legal definition. However, it is commonly understood to refer to someone who has chosen to leave their home to start a new life in another country. A migrant can return home without risking their life or freedom. The movement is understood to be voluntary.

In the themes shared by the community in the 2023-2024 Needs Update, [HS-Needs-Update-23-24.pdf \(bellevuewa.gov\)](#), many community members noted Bellevue's growth and diversification and ways that human services infrastructure has struggled to adapt to changing needs of the community. Between 2002 and 2022 Bellevue's population of foreign-born residents grew from 25% to 43%. The term "foreign-born" includes immigrants (documented and undocumented), refugees, and asylees.

The need for more culturally and linguistically responsive human services grows each year as Bellevue's population diversifies. While there are currently no dedicated human services funds for asylum seekers, they can still access services funded through various human services funds, such as shelters, food banks, and basic needs. Human Services staff have assembled a panel of providers with experience working with this community and organizations that provide programming accessible to asylum seekers.

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Representatives from the following agencies will be joining the panel:

- **Gabriela Lopez**, Migrant Legal Assistant at Riverton Park United Methodist Church RPUMC. Gabriela is a Promotora with King County Promotores Network (KCPN); Community Coordinator for Latinx Community Response Team for King County Department of Health and she also serves as Chair for Human Services Commission for the City of Kirkland.  
[Migrant Arrival Support | Riverton Park United Methodist Church \(rivertonparkumc.com\)](#): RPUMC's mission is centered around providing shelter, food, and community support to those who require it. As more asylum-seekers and refugees have come to our region, we have expanded our services to better serve our new neighbors.
- **Martha Lucas**, Executive Director at Washington State Coalition of African Community Leaders. Martha also served as the first Program Manager Consultant at Riverton Park United Methodist Church's Migrant Camp.  
[WSCACL - Washington State Coalition of African Community Leaders](#): WSCACL's mission is to provide African descent community member organizations a platform to share resources, promote collaboration, and be an influential voice.
- **Nasir Mohammad**, Resettlement Director at International Rescue Committee (IRC)- IRC is currently partnering with the Washington State launching the WA Migrant and Asylum Seekers' project as the "reception and navigation hub."  
[Seattle, WA | The IRC \(rescue.org\)](#): The International Rescue Committee provides opportunities for refugees, asylees, victims of human trafficking, survivors of torture, and other immigrants to thrive in America.
- **Veronica Rojas-Valdez**, Division Director at Coordinated Care Agency King County overseeing New Bethlehem Family Shelter and Sacred Heart shelter.  
[Coordinated Care Agency King County | Catholic Community Services of Western Washington \(ccsww.org\)](#): The Coordinated Care Agency is fully empowered to design and deliver innovative, welcoming, and comprehensive services and housing for people experiencing deep poverty and homelessness.

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Panel members will be asked round-robin style to answer the following questions:

1. What are misconceptions or misunderstandings about asylum seekers?
2. What are the most significant human services needs and barriers impacting the asylum seekers?
3. Based on your experience working with this community, what should be done to address these needs and barriers?
4. What challenges are you as a provider or agency experiencing that the Commission should be aware of?

Commissioners will be invited to ask questions after the panel has completed answering all question.