

Committee on the Judiciary
Subcommittee on Immigration Integrity, Security, and Enforcement
“The Impact of Illegal Immigration on Social Services”

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
2138 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6100

January 8, 2024

Chairman Jordan, Ranking Member Nadler, and members of the Subcommittee,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. I was born in Brazil and immigrated to the US in 2003. My husband is originally from Ukraine and has been living in this country since 1998. We are both incredibly grateful for all the opportunities that we had to study, work, and raise a family in America. I am here today to share my experience as an immigrant and a New Yorker who is deeply concerned about the impact of our open borders in the city that I now call home.

In February 2022 my husband’s hometown, Kharkiv, was invaded by the Russian army. His grandparents, both 85 years old, spent weeks hiding in their apartment as Russian planes dropped bombs on their neighborhood. On March 5th, one bomb landed in the courtyard of their building, killing 8 people, and blew out the windows of their apartment in the middle of winter. They then tried fleeing to the countryside, where a Russian tank fired on the car they drove in. In April, after several weeks of surviving within range of Russian artillery barrage, they accepted that they had to leave their country and managed to get on a train to the border with Poland, 600 miles away, and walk over the border to relative safety. They had to leave all their possessions behind. After that ordeal, they spent 3 months patiently waiting to obtain a United Nations refugee travel document, and a US entry permit under the United For Ukraine program. The US government vetted both them and us in the process, and we had to commit to providing them with financial support. We are glad they are now safe with us in New York, at least until the end of their two-year maximum stay under the United For Ukraine program.

The vast majority of the [161,000 migrants that have arrived in NYC](#) since last spring are not like my husband’s grandparents. They have not been forced to leave their cities and homes due to a war. They didn't go through a lengthy process of vetting and confirmation that they qualified for asylum. The vast majority of people arriving in NYC are economic migrants who will most likely not qualify for asylum status [based on what the US Department of Homeland Security is publishing on their website](#). At the same time, [there are more than 35 million refugees under the UNHCR mandate - the vast majority of women and children and 52% from Syria, Ukraine and Afghanistan. They are vetted by the United Nations and are waiting to be accepted by a country.](#) The United States has consistently missed the target for refugee intake — [a target that is just 125,000](#).

It is hard for me to understand why our country is allowing and even encouraging economic migrants to enter the US without any vetting process while failing to accept actual war refugees who are in a similar situation like my husband's Ukrainian grandparents were.

I live in NYC and the impact of the open border crisis has been felt by every New Yorker. Our mayor, Eric Adams, has worsened this crisis by offering incentives to attract economic migrants, such as housing for every migrant who arrives. This policy is having a devastating impact on our city finances, social services, and public schools. I am a public school parent and have worked on education policy for over a decade. I am particularly concerned about the impact of this crisis on NYC public schools and our children's learning.

[Mayor Eric Adams has estimated the cost of the migrant crisis for NYC taxpayers to be \\$12 billion over three fiscal years.](#) In 2023 NYC has spent \$5.2B on illegal migrants and the city has cut services for NYC citizens and taxpayers in order to address the substantial budget deficits facing our city.

Last November, the [New York State Comptroller Thomas DiNapoli warned that NYC is "teetering on a fiscal cliff"](#) because of the migrant crisis and increasing spending.

Last December, the New York City Comptroller testified about the cuts to NYC agencies and warned that the plan ["does not take into account whether mission-critical services are adequately staffed."](#)

These numbers are alarming, but don't fully describe the turmoil inside our public schools. School principals have little notice about when they will receive an influx of new migrant students - the schools don't have time to hire teachers and staff to serve the new students adequately.

I serve as Vice-President of the Community Education Council for NYC School District 2 in Manhattan. In my district, children who speak Spanish have been asked to act as translators for the new students. Last month at our meeting, a mother said that the school buses are now overcrowded and constantly late because of the new influx of students. Her 2nd grader son has been on time to school only a few days this school year. We can't understand why the new students were exempt from the vaccines required by the NY state, even though there has already been [an outbreak of varicella at a school in our district](#) in early 2023. Moreover, the [NYC Health Commissioner Ashwin Vasan sent a letter to health professionals](#) this year outlining the stark reality of what it means to have those arrive en masse from countries with different health protocols.

Last October [Mayor Adams canceled the classes of 250 incoming NYC school safety agents](#), which are desperately needed in our schools - he said that [parents would have to volunteer to keep our schools safe](#). The city has also announced that it is backing away from its commitment to offer universal preschool for 3-years-old.

District 75, which serves students with severe disabilities, will have to cut \$1M per school, and reduce staff. [“The cuts would gut extracurricular programming, thin out supply budgets, and exacerbate an already severe paraprofessional shortage, potentially pushing schools even further out of compliance with students’ legally binding special education plans, staffers from four District 75 schools said”](#).

But the biggest impact is on our public schools and our children’s learning. Here is what New York State Comptroller Thomas DiNapoli recently stated about the impact on NYC public schools:

“The city estimates that approximately 30,000 children of migrants and asylum seekers are enrolled in city schools during the 2023-24 school year, including 12,000 since June 30, 2023. DOE spent \$22 million on initiatives related to these students in FY 2023 despite not having budgeted for such costs. There are no budgeted costs for spending on these students in FY 2024 either. Fair Student Funding allocations alone for these students are likely to exceed \$125 million in FY 2024; however, additional per-pupil state aid would likely defray a portion of such costs.”

The effects are not limited to the schools.

The elderly were kicked out of their housing to make space for migrant shelters, [including a 95-year-old Korean war veteran](#). The budget cuts to finance the migrant crisis [will impact every city agency and we are already seeing reduced staff and services at critical agencies such as at Fire Departments and libraries](#). City libraries are taking a 3% cut and stop opening on Sundays. The FDNY reduced its headcount by 54 people.

The impact on New Yorkers is nothing compared to the devastating consequences this policy has on migrants themselves. As you know, the women and children making this harrowing journey are subjected to unimaginable horrors. Not one child should be allowed to take on this dangerous and life-threatening journey through the world’s deadliest land route for migrants. However, the current policies of the US government are encouraging kids and mothers to take this journey.

The [DHS itself published a harrowing emergency report](#) in 2019 recounting the violence, sexual exploitation, trafficking, and abuse of children making this journey. Because adults accompanied with a child have priority on the border for processing. The report shows us pictures of adults and kids who have drowned in the river. It tells in detail how smugglers are renting kids for adults to cross the border, and then sending the kids back in a process called “recycling kids”. We have all seen the videos on social media of kids being medicated in order to cross the border easier. And there are plenty of examples of the horrors that wait kids and women at the border:

- Female migrants often suffer rape, assaults, and gun violence on the path northward towards the United States [\(Cleaveland & Kirsch, 2020\)](#).

- "UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), said in an October 2021 news release. "Week after week, more children are dying, losing their parents, or getting separated from their relatives while on this perilous journey." UNICEF estimates that half of the children who crossed in 2022 were under five years old, and at least one thousand were unaccompanied or separated." [\(Council for Foreign Relations\)](#)
- "The physical risks along irregular migration routes are innumerable, especially for children. As well as the dangerous terrain they traverse – from jungles and rivers to railway lines and highways - children may also encounter violence, exploitation, and abuse." [UNICEF](#)

This situation has made thousands of kids easy prey for child and sex trafficking. And the US government has done nothing to discourage these horrible dynamics in our border with the policies being implemented.

I grew up In Latin America and know how America represents the dream of prosperity and a better life to so many people. When the Mayor of NYC then promises to anyone an expensive and luxurious hotel room for free, of course you will listen to the smugglers and take this journey. It's cruel how our government is encouraging this instead of doing everything to prevent women and children from crossing the border and instead encouraging them to do it the right and legal way.

- Female migrants often suffer rape, assaults, and gun violence on the path northward towards the United States [\(Cleaveland & Kirsch, 2020\)](#).
- UNICEF said in an October 2021 news release "Week after week, more children are dying, losing their parents, or getting separated from their relatives while on this perilous journey." UNICEF estimates that half of the children who crossed in 2022 were under five years old, and at least one thousand were unaccompanied or separated." [\(Council for Foreign Relations\)](#)
- "The physical risks along irregular migration routes are innumerable, especially for children. As well as the dangerous terrain they traverse – from jungles and rivers to railway lines and highways - children may also encounter violence, exploitation, and abuse." [UNICEF](#)

Like every New Yorker, I have asked myself multiple times what drives this situation. Why are our country and city encouraging economic migrants who can walk miles to make it here to come to NYC while refusing to accept genuine refugees?

There are lots of people and organizations making money out of this crisis with the city having no-bid contracts, and our City Comptroller has refused to investigate these contracts. Only last month the Comptroller Brad Lander took away the mayor's power to make emergency contracts without prior approvals.

Here are a few examples of the what NYC taxpayers are financing:

- [The Roosevelt Hotel is being used as an intake center and it has a \\$220M contract with NYC for the next three years.](#)
- [The emergency contract of \\$432M with DocGo](#) is now being investigated by the State because of their lack of experience in providing shelter and support services.
- New York City's public hospital system in late October approved up to [\\$324.7 million in contracts for private security services](#) at the city's "humanitarian relief centers" for migrants

Since 1990 there has never been more than 45,000 people granted asylum in the US. Last year it was 36,000 and yet there were 2.8 million border crossings in 2022 and, according to the Migration Policy Institute, there are more than 1.3 million asylum applications pending as of May 2023 taking on average 4 years to complete. New Yorkers want to know what the plan is for the 161,000 migrants that arrived in our city. How many more services for NY citizens will be cut to finance this absurd policy? If migrants are receiving letters with an appointment to process their asylum claim in 10 years, will NY taxpayers pay for hotel rooms and shelters for the next 10 years?

Nearly [40% of New Yorkers are foreign-born, and 60% live in a household where at least one family member was born abroad.](#) Legal immigration has made New York one of the best cities in the world. The current crisis of open borders and no policy to prioritize who should be allowed to enter to our country is threatening NYC. New Yorkers need support from the federal government to deal with this situation. We can barely manage the 161,000 people who arrived in our city in the past year, and it is not sustainable to continue receiving hundreds of new migrants daily. New Yorkers feel abandoned by our Mayor, by our Governor, and by our City Comptroller. That is why I am here asking Congress to look at this situation before NYC is completely bankrupt and our greatest American city can't come back.

Sincerely,
Danyela Souza Egorov