

Humanitarian Transition Project

Senate Bill 5506 Report

January 12, 2024

Executive Summary

Oregon's shared prosperity relies on the contributions, leadership and creativity of people who come from all over the world. However, our immigrant services infrastructure is not positioned to catch the full benefit of the social, cultural and economic contributions immigrants make to our state every year. Many newly arriving individuals and families are left drifting, without the basic supports they need to successfully resettle, rebuild their lives in safety and become fully integrated into Oregon communities.

In response to increasing numbers of asylum seekers fleeing violence or hunger and seeking safety in Oregon, ODHS established a Welcome Center that provided shelter and culturally appropriate meals while connecting individuals and families to immigration legal services and wrap-around supports. These vital services, provided in partnership with public agencies, Coordinated Care Organizations and community and faith-based partners, have helped people navigate the complex processes involved in gaining asylum, employment authorization and temporary protective status.

In its July 2023 end of session omnibus bill (Senate Bill 5506), the Legislature provided funding to ODHS to continue serving 300 individuals living at the Welcome Center through the end of 2023. The bill also provided a pathway for those living at the Welcome Center to move into community housing through a partnership between ODHS and Multnomah County Department of County Human Services. The Legislature directed ODHS to provide an update on the partnership's work to the Human Services Subcommittee of the Joint Committee on Ways and Means during the 2024 legislative session. Accordingly, this report will share the status of efforts to transition the current caseload of 300 individuals into community-based housing and wrap-around services; the number of similarly situated individuals who have arrived in Oregon in need of like services; and efforts to connect those individuals with community-based organizations and resources.

Background

The United States is witnessing unprecedented levels of migration to our southern border, driven by violence, hunger and economic oppression existing elsewhere in the Western Hemisphere. As the number of forcibly displaced individuals and families has continued to rise, migration to Oregon and other interior states has increased.

Upon arriving in Oregon, individuals who have been granted an eligible immigration status and/or are arriving through the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) are eligible to receive critical services, including help securing housing and culturally specific meals, and can access public medical, food and cash assistance programs. However, individuals and families who are in the process of seeking asylum typically are ineligible to work and do not qualify for federal benefits until and unless asylum is granted. Without access to these basic resources,

asylum seekers are at increased risk of experiencing homelessness, food insecurity and other forms of material hardship.

Safety, dignity and human rights for all who live in Oregon

The State of Oregon became the first sanctuary state in the nation in 1987 and has since strengthened its commitment to welcoming immigrants through several additional laws, including the 2021 Sanctuary Promise Act (House Bill 3265), which expanded the state's sanctuary law by prohibiting public officials from working with immigration enforcement based on a person's immigration status, thus helping clear a path for asylum seekers to seek help from public human services entities without fear of deportation. The following year, the Legislature passed Universal Representation (Senate Bill 1543), establishing a statewide legal navigation and representation program for all immigrants in Oregon.

Through community partnerships, ODHS' Welcome Center has helped hundreds of individuals and families successfully navigate the complex processes involved in gaining asylum, employment authorization, temporary protective status, and access to food, medical care and other key supports – making it an important model for serving the aims of Senate Bill 1543 and operationalizing Oregon's wider commitment to welcoming immigrants.

The Welcome Center

Early in the summer of 2022, the Port of Portland contacted ODHS regarding individuals and families who were arriving from the nation's southern border and using the baggage claim area for shelter. With direction from Governor Kate Brown, ODHS partnered with [Innovation Law Lab](#) and other community-based organizations (CBOs) to coordinate a humanitarian response whose mission was to connect new arrivals to the legal services they needed to navigate the asylum process, while also providing wrap-around services that could keep them safe and healthy as their case was pending.

To address these needs, ODHS opened the Welcome Center on November 1, 2022. The center has operated seven days a week, 24 hours a day out of The Hugo, a former Ramada Inn property in Portland owned by Fortify Holdings. ODHS contracted with Fortify for 125 rooms at the property, which could house approximately 300 people. As of April 21, 2023, the Welcome Center was operating at full capacity.

Individuals and families were eligible for Welcome Center services and supports if they:

- Had arrived in the U.S. from any U.S. port of entry;
- Had been paroled or proceeded at port of entry;
- Had arrived in the U.S. within the last two months, or were pregnant, medically fragile or a family unit with minor children; or
- Did not have federal employment authorization

The center has provided services through partnerships with local governments, Oregon Health Authority, Self-Sufficiency Programs Refugee Team, health and education systems, and CBOs. These services have included the following:

- Temporary shelter
- Culturally specific meals
- Eligibility determination for federally funded programs
- Immigration legal services
- Health care enrollment
- School enrollment for children ages three to 18
- Resource coordination
- Other supports as needed for navigating systems that affect people’s ability to successfully resettle

The Welcome Center served individuals and families from 19 countries across the globe. The table below reflects their countries of origin (in alphabetical order) and languages.

Countries	Languages
Afghanistan	Dari and Pashto
Angola	Portuguese
Burkina Faso	French
Burundi	Kiswahili and French
Cameroon	English and French
Columbia	Spanish
Congo	Portuguese
Cuba	Spanish
Djibouti	Somali
Equatorial Guinea	Spanish
Ethiopia	Somali
Ghana	English
Guinea-Bissau	Pulaar
Haiti	Haitian Creole, Spanish, French, and English
Mauritania	French and English
Peru	Spanish
Senegal	Wolof, Spanish, and French
Somalia	Somali
Venezuela	Spanish

Legislative appropriation and reporting requirements

[Senate Bill 5506](#), the end of session omnibus bill passed in July 2023, provided funding to ODHS to continue to serve 300 individuals living at the Welcome Center through December 31, 2023. The bill also provided a pathway for those living at the Welcome Center to transition into community housing through a partnership between ODHS and Multnomah County Department of County Human Services (DCHS). The bill included a General Fund appropriation of \$20.9 million to phase out temporary food and shelter services for guests living at the Welcome Center, including \$10.8 million to continue Welcome Center shelter operations for nine months and \$9.75 million for Multnomah County DCHS to move up to 300 households into long-term community housing through partnerships with culturally specific organizations.

A Senate Bill 5506 budget note directed ODHS to provide an update to the Human Services Subcommittee of the Joint Committee on Ways and Means during the 2024 legislative session, including the following points:

1. The status of efforts to transition the current caseload of 300 individuals (as of June 5, 2023) into community-based housing and wrap-around services,
2. The number of similarly situated individuals who have arrived in Oregon in need of like services, and
3. Efforts to connect those individuals with community-based organizations and resources.

These updates are provided in the following section of this report.

Intergovernmental agreement

With guidance from the Governor's Office, ODHS developed an intergovernmental agreement (IGA) with Multnomah County DCHS with the following scope of work:

- The IGA would be for provision of services to 300 households.
- Operational teams would ensure the 300 households referred to Multnomah County DCHS were not eligible for other public programs (such as refugee resettlement).
- Funds should be used to offer housing support, food, and wrap-around and legal services as the county determines necessary to best advance the ability of individuals to work and access other benefits.
- Multnomah County DCHS should strategically offer supports to prevent need for households to enter Portland Metro Area shelters after nine months and should partner with community- and faith-based organizations to offer the necessary supports.

ODHS entered into the IGA with Multnomah County on August 11, 2023. It went into effect on that date and runs through April 1, 2024. ODHS worked closely with the county to draft the IGA, committing to a collaborative process to transition the households within the prescribed timelines and budgetary parameters. To these ends, the Welcome Center stopped accepting

new guests and its waitlist was decommissioned as of September 30, 2023. Since that time, ODHS has used a Humanitarian Registry to gather information about the number of individuals and families who need shelter and other services, as directed by Senate Bill 5506.

Multnomah County contracted with three community-based organizations to carry out the housing transition project, which it named the See No Stranger initiative.

Humanitarian Transition Project Budget

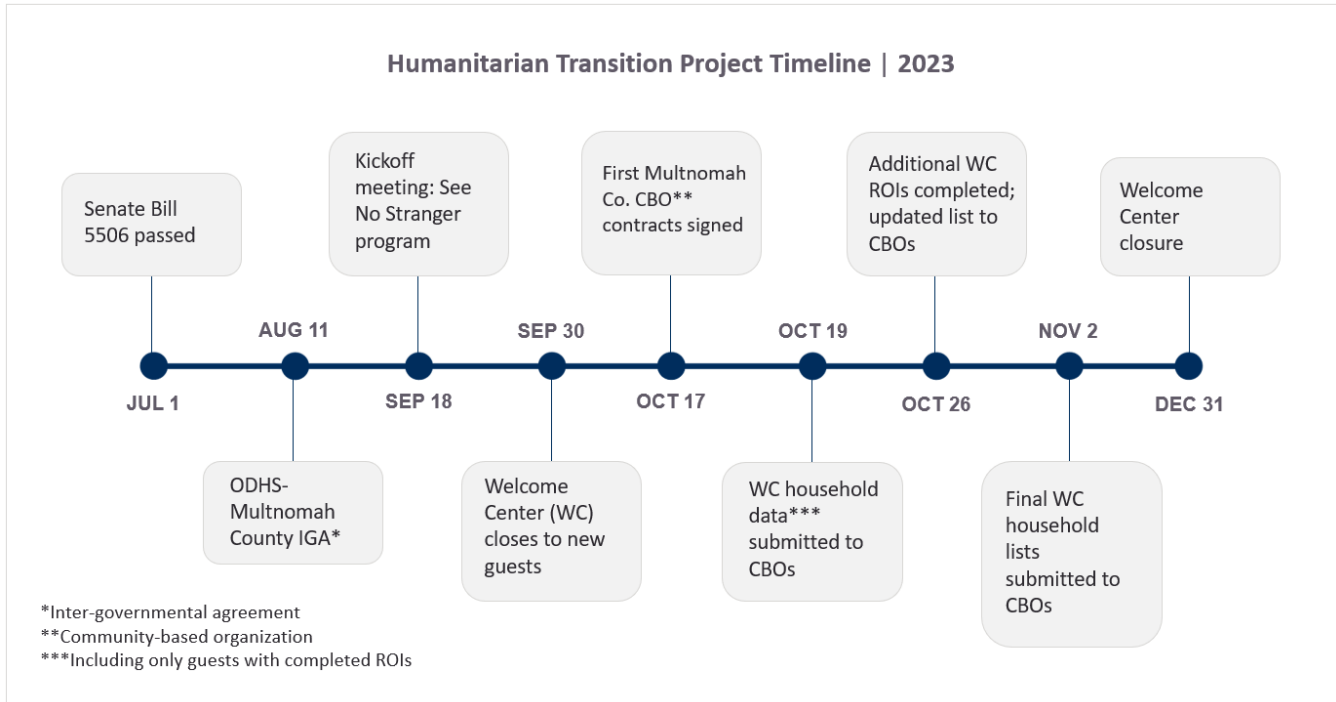
Summary	Budget	Expenses to Date	Projected	Total Actual & Projected	Balance Remaining
Welcome Center	\$ 10,820,050	\$ 6,993,796	\$ 1,187,264	\$ 8,181,060	\$ 2,638,990
Multnomah County	\$ 9,750,000	\$ 9,750,000		\$ 9,750,000	\$ -
Design (Staffing)	\$ 377,564	\$ 106,697	\$ 26,403	\$ 133,100	\$ 270,867
Total	\$ 20,947,614	\$ 16,850,493	\$ 1,213,667	\$ 18,064,160	\$ 2,909,857

Project Status Update and Timeline

Efforts to transition current caseload

- **ODHS Self-Sufficiency Programs – Refugee Program**
 The ODHS Office of Strategic Partnerships (OSP) and Self-Sufficiency Programs-Refugee Program worked together to identify and transition from the Welcome Center any Haitian and Afghan households eligible for federally funded benefits. Through a partnership with community-based organizations and a resettlement agency, 48 households and 114 individuals were moved into community housing between July 12 and December 12, 2023.
- **ODHS partnership with Multnomah County DCHS: See No Stranger, Phase I**
 The kick-off meeting for Multnomah County’s See No Stranger initiative was held on September 18. Partnering CBOs signed their contracts with the county between Friday, October 13 and Monday, October 16, to assist Welcome Center guests with moving into community housing. The contracted CBOs were:

 - [Oregon/Southwest Washington African Community Development Center](#),
 - [Afghan Support Network](#), and
 - [Portland Refugee Support Group](#).



The IGA with Multnomah County included two phases (the second of which is discussed in the Similarly Situated Individuals section below). During the first phase the See No Stranger CBOs were to focus on moving households and individuals living at the Welcome Center into community housing. ODHS ensured Welcome Center shelter community members had a signed release of information on file to allow their referral to the See No Stranger CBOs. The CBOs received their initial list of households between October 17 and 19, within three days of signing their contracts. The CBOs received their final list on November 2, after all releases of information were signed by Welcome Center shelter community members.

The Welcome Center provided safe shelter, food and resources for a total of 469 individuals through December 31 and referred 196 households and 319 individuals who were living at the center to the Multnomah County See No Stranger program.

Welcome Center households transitioned into community housing as of December 31, 2023

Community-based organization	Households referred	Households transitioned	Percentage completed
Afghan Support Network	31	31	100
Oregon/SW Washington African Development Center	71	71	100
Portland Refugee Support Group	94	64	68
Total	196	154	89

Welcome Center guests (individuals) living in community housing as of December 31, 2023

Community-based organization	OCT	NOV	DEC	TOTAL
Afghan Support Network	0	7	72	79
Oregon/SW Washington African Development Center	3	43	52	98
Portland Refugee Support Group	4	30	75	109
Total	7	80	199	286

By the end of 2023, See No Stranger case managers had provided between 15 and 40 hours of case management per referred household, providing supports in the following areas:

- Interpretation
- Employment services
- Education assistance
- Basic Income enrollment
- Oregon Health Plan referral
- Legal referral
- Donated clothing assistance
- Housing placement
- Obtaining household supplies
- Mentoring/coaching
- Transportation assistance (licenses/permits/rides)
- Cultural orientation

Multnomah County reports that all referred households had enrolled in basic income services as of January 2024.

Similarly Situated Individuals

There is no formal mechanism for counting arriving asylum seekers in Oregon like there is for refugees. As a result, ODHS has had to rely on partners to supply data about people who sought Welcome Center services and others who are receiving supports outside the Portland Metro Area. Importantly, therefore, the data reported below does not reflect the entire population of asylum seekers in Oregon, but rather is a snapshot of those who have interacted with the Welcome Center and select partners.

Humanitarian Registry

In an effort to identify similarly situated individuals and families who continue to arrive in

Oregon needing services, ODHS established a waitlist, now called the Humanitarian Registry. The registry primarily represents individuals who have arrived in Oregon and visited the Welcome Center shelter to seek services; others were added to the registry by a community partner and still others added themselves directly. As of December 31, the registry included:

- 434 individuals
- 232 households (89 family and 143 single households)

The registry also has nine single individuals who have been added since January 1.

See No Stranger: Phase II

In the second phase of the IGA with Multnomah County, ODHS referred 57 registry households to the See No Stranger CBOs on December 15, 2023, and another 47 households on January 2, 2024. Many of the individuals and families were houseless and experiencing food insecurity and had exhausted their money during their journey to Oregon. As asylum seekers, all were unable to work.

Humanitarian Registry: Household and individual referrals to See No Stranger CBOs

Community-based organization	Dec. 15 Households	Dec. 15 Individuals	Jan. 2 Households	Jan. 2 Individuals
Afghan Support Network	10	17	12	13
Oregon/SW Washington African Development Center	26	28	18	19
Portland Refugee Support Group	21	55	17	41
Total	57	100	47	73

Total households referred: 104

Total individuals referred: 173

Welcome Center closure impacts

Oregon’s Interfaith Movement for Immigrant Justice (IMIrJ) reported in December that they have been supporting 91 individuals (28 households); the organization has housed approximately 9 individuals (2.8 households) per week since the closure of the Welcome Center to new guests on September 30. IMIrJ also reports that asylum-seeking individuals and families are living in neighborhoods outside the Portland Metro Area – namely in Eugene, Salem and Tillamook communities – but we do not have specific data for these populations.

Portland Refugee Support Group (PRSG) reports that as of January 2024, they are supporting 64 households with 168 people who could not access services at the Welcome Center due to its September 30 closure to new guests.

Anecdotally, we know there are more community- and faith-based organizations and individuals who are supporting people throughout Oregon.

Similarly situated individuals outside the Portland Metro Area

Three organizations spanning Lane, Marion and Polk Counties have provided data on the populations they serve:

- [Oregon Oregon Community Asylum Network](#) (OCAN), a Eugene-based organization, now assists and supports 45 adults and 11 children. OCAN reports that many of the asylees now have work permits and are employed, and most are living in their own homes. Additionally, the adults are receiving language training and the children are enrolled in school.
- Based in Marion County, [Ariana House](#) is currently serving three families (four adults and four children) at its location, and another four adults and one child at an offsite location.
- [Church at the Park](#) (C@P) is a Salem-based organization providing housing-focused shelter, workforce development, and resource navigation with the aim of supporting people to move from homelessness to stability. C@P is currently serving four families seeking asylum.

Efforts to connect individuals with community-based organizations and resources

To connect Welcome Center guests and other unhoused asylum seekers with resources and services, ODHS offered Weekly Resource Pop-Ups at the Welcome Center through a partnership with Oregon Health Authority's Community Partner Outreach Program (CPOP) team, partner CBOs, coordinated care organizations and several Multnomah County agencies.

Core resources offered at the weekly pop-ups included:

- **Medical benefits and care**
 - The Oregon Health Authority's CPOP team and other staff helped more than 330 individuals and families gain access to medical benefits and helped provide system navigation for hundreds more. The OHA CPOP team also provided care to pregnant women, children, teens and anyone arriving with immediate medical needs.

- Coordinated Care Organizations (CCOs) scheduled appointments and assisted with serving individuals with complex medical and mental health conditions.
 - The Multnomah County Health Department and its clinics also scheduled appointments for Welcome Center guests or individuals visiting the Welcome Center.
 - A primary care physician volunteered weekly at the center.
- **Universal Representation**
Navigation and legal services were provided through Innovation Law Lab, [Equity Corps of Oregon](#) and [Pueblo Unido](#). These services specifically supported:
 - Individuals and families applying for asylum,
 - Individuals applying for employment authorization documents, and
 - Individuals applying for temporary protective status.

Innovation Law Lab collected data on the population served, however the data was not available at the time of this report's publication.

- **School enrollment and transportation**
Portland Public Schools – McKinney-Vento Homeless Program assisted with:
 - School enrollment for children and youth from preschool to high school, and
 - Arranging transportation to and from school, including extracurricular activities, parent meetings and school events.

As of October 16, 2023, the McKinney-Vento Homeless Program had supported 80 children and youths at the Welcome Center, ages three to 18, who were from Africa, Latin America and Afghanistan.

- **Other resources and services**
Welcome Center partners have also provided:
 - English as a second language classes and interpreter services
 - Mobile phones
 - Bus passes
 - Personal hygiene products
 - Diapers and baby wipes
 - Gift cards and food boxes
 - Shelter at sites other than the Welcome Center

More information, including an archive of weekly updates from the project period, is available on the Department's [Humanitarian Transition Project web page](#).

Challenges and Gaps

Our state continues to see an unprecedented increase in arrivals including refugees, parolees, asylum seekers and others. The absence of federal funding and infrastructure to support those arriving without refugee or other benefits-eligible status is causing additional hardships for people who are arriving in desperate need of refuge and protection. Like other states, Oregon must be creative and develop its own solutions. While the Welcome Center has been an important example of this work, its closure at the end of last year leaves critical gaps in Oregon's system of services and supports for asylum seekers.

Chief among those gaps:

- **Centralized access to resources and services**
Individuals and families continue to arrive in Oregon but there is no longer a centralized location for them to access needed services or essential resources. This leaves many of our newest community members in the difficult position of having to navigate unfamiliar systems – often in a language they don't yet speak – to get their most basic needs met.
- **Safe Shelter**
Oregon is extremely limited in sheltering options that have capacity for new arrivals, expertise serving migrants and/or supports for speakers of languages other than English.
- **Food access**
The Welcome Center provided critically important meals to individuals and families housed by community partners. Without this service, or a similar resource to take its place, our newest community members may be more likely to experience prolonged food insecurity.

Ongoing Efforts and Next Steps

Shelter pilot

In December 2023, Portland Refugee Support Group negotiated a new contract with Fortify Holdings to continue using the hotel site that had housed the Welcome Center to support arriving individuals and families. While Portland Refugee Support Group (PRSG) and partner CBOs work on the fundraising plan for that effort, PRSG has signed a pilot agreement for three months to lease a minimum of 25 rooms at \$1650/month or pro-rated at \$55/night. This will allow the use of a braided funding model which will include private, CCO Flex Fund Health-

Related Services, and See No Stranger dollars for those eligible as they await long-term housing.

Office of Immigrant and Refugee Advancement

The Governor 's Office has tasked ODHS Office of Immigrant and Refugee Advancement with pursuing a legislative concept for the February 2024 session that would address the ongoing needs of asylum seekers in Oregon.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Providing protection to those seeking safety from violence and persecution is one of Oregon's core values, reflected in our sanctuary laws and other legislation that aims to support the successful resettlement of our newest community members. Refugees and asylum seekers of many faiths and cultural backgrounds are being welcomed by Oregonians in communities all around the state, where they are integrating successfully and contributing to the economic, civic and social fabric of our communities. But Oregon's migrant services infrastructure must be improved if we are to ensure everyone newly arriving in our state can rebuild their lives in safety and achieve this kind of success.

The Welcome Center functioned as a partial and temporary solution to these ends and modeled a way for public, community and private partners in Oregon to coordinate efforts and effectively provide arriving individuals and families with shelter, legal services and wrap-around supports. Now, there is an important opportunity to develop a long-term plan for Oregon's immigrant services infrastructure. To be successful, the plan should grow from a cross-sector collaboration and tap into existing expertise around the state and the community-based organizations of all sizes that are already engaged in this work, particularly:

- Housing agencies experienced in serving houseless individuals and families
- Food security entities
- Legal nonprofits experienced working with migrants, refugees and asylum seekers
- Community-based organizations
- Coordinated Care Organizations
- Local school districts' McKinney-Vento Homeless Programs
- Resettlement agencies
- Faith-based organizations
- Philanthropic organizations
- Oregon lawmakers
- State agencies

ODHS is committed to continuing to work with the Legislature and our public and community partners to develop a sustainable humanitarian response and ensure each of our newest community members can access the supports they need to thrive in Oregon.

Appendix: National and state immigration data

- The [American Immigration Council](#) reports that between 2016 and 2021 the immigrant population in the United States grew by 3.7 percent or 1.6 million people. This growth represents about 18.3 percent of total population growth in the United States.
- According to the [Migration Policy Institute](#), the total number of immigrants from all countries in Oregon is 412,400, which is approximately 1 percent of the nation's total immigrant population.

TABLE 1. Top five counties in Oregon where immigrants¹ are living

County	Number of Individuals
Multnomah	109,500
Washington	107,000
Marion	43,600
Clackamas	35,700
Lane	21,200

Table 1 data from the [Migration Policy Institute \(MPI\) Data Hub](#) - Migration Policy Institute tabulation of data from the U.S. Census Bureau's pooled 2017-2021 American Community Survey.

¹ The term "immigrant" here refers to people residing in the United States who were not U.S. citizens at birth. This population includes naturalized citizens, lawful permanent residents (LPRs), certain legal nonimmigrants (e.g., persons on student or work visas), those admitted under refugee or asylee status and persons illegally residing in the United States.



For additional information:

Cheryl Miller
Director of Strategic Partnerships, ODHS
cheryl.m.miller@odhs.oregon.gov
503-480-4340

Margie Salazar
Senior Legislative Policy Analyst, ODHS
margarita.s.salazar@odhs.oregon.gov
503-947-1108