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THE ONLY GOOD SOLUTION

**A PLEA TO NEW YORKERS REGARDING
THE HUMANITARIAN FAILURE OF THE MIGRANT CRISIS
AND THE NEED FOR LARGE-SCALE RESETTLEMENT**



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INTRODUCTION

Dear New Yorkers,

Yours is a city of success. I barely have to ask a fellow Bengali in the city and they'll tell me: the core promise of America — a life of opportunity — is alive and well in New York. So I would imagine that in your heart, there must be a deep pain and a confusion as to how this city — *your* city — has become so overwhelmed by the arrival of the more than one hundred thousand newcomers from the southern border.

I am writing to shed as much light as one person can, from a temporary room in Midtown,

My name is Aswar Rahman. I am the Director of the American Service, a humanitarian resettlement organization based in Minneapolis, with our original office in the western Ukrainian city of Lviv. So far this year, my small team has resettled 235 families in the state of Minnesota alone. Our organization has been hailed by government and philanthropic leaders as the most successful model for Ukrainian resettlement in America, by far.

I am also writing to discuss the failures.

Writing that last word causes me pain. I have seen up close the many New Yorkers who have cried and struggled and given more than could be asked of any human being to help in this humanitarian crisis. Not in this lifetime or any would I dare say

their *efforts* were failures. These New Yorkers are heroes of mine. Some are living saints, whose stories I will tell my children.

Yet, like every single one of you New Yorkers, they don't fuck around. If a thing isn't working, they'll call it out. I'm going to take a page from that book, put my Minnesota niceness to the side, and use the blunt talk I've heard, from the conversations I have been privy to, from city bureaucrats, from nonprofit leaders who wear suits and citizen humanitarians who can't afford one anymore, from soldiers, police officers, advocates, interpreters, floor cleaners — every category of frontline worker involved. There is deep discontent. There are observations that are siloed and usually ignored. There are disasters that are swept under the rug, many which could have been avoided by a simple conversation.

But my goal isn't to simply start a conversation. The time for that was in the early summer, when I first became heavily involved in the city's crisis. Now it's the edge of winter. Yours aren't as cold or as beautiful as ours in Minnesota, but when the mercury falls below 32, it won't make much of a difference to the migrant who is forced to sleep on the street. (I lose sleep thinking of that first newcomer, who has probably never felt a northern winter, who will walk the rest of their life with a hobble because of that night their toes had to be cut

off for frostbite in a New York City emergency room. There but for the grace of God go I.)

This is the time for action, and there are clear actions to take. They center on the fundamental concept of **resettlement**. To be sure, this isn't the "decompression" that has been tried. Not dropping people off in a motel in the middle of nowhere, hoping it works out. Not buying one-way plane tickets, naively thinking that migrants won't find their way back to the familiar suffering here compared to the friendless, brand new suffering wherever that plane lands.

The resettlement I know and have specialized in is the dignified, voluntary,

mutually-designed relocation of newcomers to places where there are arrangements for their essentials of living: work, housing, food, transportation, community, and *information*. (Note that I put work first. Not all work is paid. Learning English is work. Volunteering to clean up at the local elderhome is work. Work is productive action, and it is essential to human happiness.)

But before we get to details of a solution, let's first make sure we are on the same page about those failures that are an open secret to all those brave souls facing this humanitarian crisis on the front lines, every day.

ORIGINS OF THE CRISIS

I will speed through the root causes of failure that you already know. New York's humanitarian crisis is a direct result of the societal collapses happening in several parts of the world right now. Some developing nations, already vulnerable before, never recovered from Covid. Many were already in a downward spiral before the pandemic. Russia's destabilization of the world only added to their struggles, particularly in food security. Being a citizen of a poor country in the age of globalization is a raw deal and it only worsened to the point that it is unbearable. That's why people are leaving their homelands. Truth be told: If I was in their shoes, I'd probably make the journey to America myself. If my child's future was at stake, that probably would become a definitely, hell or high water.

Our nation's borders are insecure. No border where, since 2021, nearly *two million people* have been able to get in without any processing or interaction with border authorities cannot be considered secure. And this lack of security is causing unpredictable and unmanageable influxes. (I should make it clear that I am a dyed-in-the-wool liberal. My business, whose funds I used to start up the American Service, is built on providing services to Democratic campaigns. I carry a copy of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights with me wherever I travel.)

I will not delve into federal inaction here. That would require a series of books. Suffice it to say that nowhere is the political dysfunction of our time more apparent than in the failure of Congress and the White House in addressing the issue of the insecure border. I will argue, though, that holding out hope for useful federal action is not a viable strategy — nothing short of a miracle or an unimaginable nightmare will spur the Washington machine into action. We will have to be our own cavalry on this one.

Another cause of failure some have identified is the absence of channels of communication. Politicians have been unable to overcome partisan scorekeeping to talk to one another. However, the citizen humanitarian space has shown this is entirely possible. Yes, it's rough when a nonprofit on the border sends multiple buses at once, in the middle of the night — but the receiving parties appreciate the heads up, so they know which nights they won't be able to sleep. And when that communication develops, the charming human quality of becoming friends with the people we talk to comes into play, and perhaps the next bus can be scheduled for an arrival time friendlier to sleep.

A CATASTROPHIC COMBINATION

There are causes of this humanitarian failure that get far less daylight. The biggest of these is the underlying, long-neglected homelessness crisis in the city, and the baffling decision to apply the on-the-verge-of-collapse homelessness response mechanism to the migrant crisis.

Homelessness has been a fixture in the life of the city for decades. Before this crisis, nearly 50,000 New Yorkers slept in city shelters on any given night. Nearly half were children. Many were working poor. I don't need to tell you that this city is hard to afford.

When the migrants began arriving, it made sense to use the homelessness system, no matter how much it was already struggling. There was no other choice. Then weeks passed. Numbers increased. Months. No signs of relenting. Still, even when the city started seeing hundreds of newcomers every day, they were put straight into the homelessness systems.

There are obvious issues with overwhelming an already-overwhelmed system. What's usually left out of the conversation is that **homelessness is a fundamentally different challenge than migration.** Migrants are by definition mobile. Unhoused people are New Yorkers, here already, part of the community. Migrants are practically unguided. The unhoused, if they are unhoused for a period of time, are

better informed. The infrastructure to receive migrants is almost nonexistent compared to the systems in place to at least try to address homelessness. Migrants generally don't speak English; unhoused people generally do. Migrants are not integrated into the economy; many unhoused people are the working poor. Migrant groups tend to have addiction rates similar to or lower than the general American population; alcohol and drug abuse affect nearly two thirds of all unhoused people, according to American Addiction Centers.

But the biggest difference between migrants and the unhoused may be the one that caught most of New York off guard: that the crisis of migration is significantly larger in scale than that of homelessness.

There are about six hundred thousand people experiencing homelessness in America every year. That number ebbs and flows. It was lower around 2016, but higher in the years after the recession. It's a relatively static range, accounting for under 0.2% of our population.

We are fast approaching *three million* migrants arriving in the United States every year.

No homelessness system is a match for the migrant crisis, not in New York City, not anywhere in America

REGARDING THE RIGHT TO SHELTER

Some will say that, “Sure, it may not be ideal to deploy New York’s homelessness systems for this migrant crisis, but what choice did we have? Our hands are tied by the Right to Shelter.”

I would first encourage those to read this passage provided by the city’s Coalition for the Homeless:

In August 1981, after nearly two years of intensive negotiations between the plaintiffs and the government defendants, Callahan v. Carey was settled as a consent decree. By entering into the decree, the City and State agreed to provide shelter and board to all homeless men who met the need standard for welfare or who were homeless “by reason of physical, mental, or social dysfunction.”

First, I observe that this is a voluntary consent decree, open to re-interpretation, given the far different circumstances facing the city, over forty years since this ruling. Laws aren’t meant to be permanent, and consent decrees even less so.

Second, there needs to be discussion on the phrase “need standard for welfare.” This term has gone undefined. I would contend that this is the item being debated by papers like this one.

The last item, quoted by the Coalition, sheds far more light on who this consent decree

was meant for, and who it wasn’t. The vast majority of migrants are able-bodied. Mentally, though many have been traumatized by their journey and experiences in their homeland, mental dysfunction due to this trauma has been limited. As for social dysfunction, it is a clinical term used to describe personal issues with social adjustment. This is not to be confused with *societal* dysfunction, as one could argue that the migrants are experiencing in their homelands.

While there is substantial merit to continuing the conversation, it’s a hard argument to make that a voluntary consent decree designed forty years ago was meant to include this unprecedented — perhaps unforeseeable — influx of migrants. In fact, it seems like it was written in a way to specifically *exclude* the right to shelter, outside of narrow bounds.

There’s a silver lining in this comparison: **the migrant crisis is far more addressable than the homelessness crisis.** Homelessness is extremely complex and deep-rooted in the ills in our society. If there was an easy solution, smart minds and big hearts would have solved it. For the migrant crisis, however — that problem has a solution, as you will see later in this document. For now, allow me to share a few of the major failures in this crisis, which will lend valuable context for those forthcoming solutions.

FAILURE IN PAPERWORK

There was never a proper paperwork filing regime. I saw in the summer how a cobbled-together group of dedicated volunteers took time off from work and school to help fill out government forms needed for these migrants' success in America. From our work with Ukrainian newcomers, it became absolutely paramount that we have our paperwork in order for every single newcomer.

The most obvious paperwork gap was that of filing for asylum. It is a common misconception that an application has to include all possible evidence at the time of *initial* filing. This evidence, important as it is, can be easily submitted after the initial application. This misconception kept many migrants from ever filing their asylum applications, with some even missing the one-year-from-arrival deadline as they tried to craft the perfect application.

The date of initial asylum application is extremely important, because it sets off the five-month countdown to apply for an Employment Authorization Document (EAD), allowing the migrant to be hired as an employee — i.e. to work legally for an American employer.

If there was a paperwork regime in place, similar in any shape to the American Service's paperwork system, then virtually every migrant would have their asylum application submitted within the first few days of arrival, and the ability to work for an employer within a matter of months. (It should be noted that asylum applications are taking years to process, meaning that even if a person's case for asylum is to be denied, then they would have almost as many years of legal American-level income to take back home with them. Economic motivations are central to this migrant influx.)

FAILURE IN KNOWLEDGE CENTRALIZATION

Related to the failure in paperwork is the failure of knowledge centralization. I was surprised to learn that several high-level leaders discounted the permeation of smartphones within even the lowest-income migrant. A smartphone is an unimaginably helpful tool, particularly when it comes to sharing information.

For our Ukraine program, we digitized everything. I instructed my team, “If anything needs to be explained to more than one person, write up a doc or record a video showing how it’s done.” This applied to all paperwork submissions that didn’t require a lawyer’s input. Our people learned how to use translation apps, how to apply for jobs, how to buy a bus pass — all of these and far, far more exist either in document or video

form, for *any* member of the community to access. Information is power, and we empowered every single person we worked with.

This knowledge bank, had it been made, would not only have saved a tremendous amount of staffing hours, but it would have strengthened the migrants and reduced their suffering. They would know that their success in America is their responsibility, and they would know that they can help themselves. What’s more — what we saw with our Ukrainian newcomers — is that when you know how to do something useful, you almost magically become inclined to teach someone else how to do it. It is a wonderful quirk of human nature, and it can be activated by making knowledge accessible to all.

FAILURE IN ENGLISH

Of the tools denied to the migrants in New York City, I believe the most useful one — the one whose denial has caused the most harm — is the English language. I will say clearly: if you wish to succeed in America, the best thing you can do is learn English. One's native language has deep value (my mother made sure I knew Bangla, and it is one of her greatest gifts to me). English simply happens to be the language of life in America. It is the language that makes the difference of many thousands of dollars of income per year. It is the difference of whether you are able to defend yourself in a court of law — or at least understand what the hell is going on. It is the tool you can use to give joy to everyone you meet, to share your thoughts and experiences, to live as a full member of American society, even if not equal in citizenship status.

The migrants in New York City have been put into the homeless system in such a way that now, despite nearly a year of living at a repurposed Manhattan hotel, exactly one out of over six hundred rooms in the hotel has a functioning English speaker in it — and that man already knew English when he came. What was the point of coming to America, if someone had no intention of becoming American?

I would not be quick to assume it was a lack of desire to learn from the migrant. Everyone, I have learned, wants to do something if they are convinced that this knowledge will reliably better their lot in life. The issue has been one of expectations and access.

With our Ukrainian newcomers in Minnesota, we have succeeded in building a culture of learning English. If someone, after months of arriving, still speaks no English, then they are considered an anomaly, and will — with lots of love and good spirit — be prodded by other community members to take the task more seriously. Most don't need this prodding. English is a great language in its own right, and people are eager to learn. The social expectation, from the program administrators down to your roommate, helps.

Then it becomes a matter of access. Thankfully, there are robust offerings for English language education in essentially every urban core in the United States. There are funding structures built around bringing in more English speakers. The American Service has not had to create our own program. We've simply had to create a digitally-accessible list, and point our newcomers in the right direction.

FAILURE IN REPAYMENT

This failure is related to expectation as well: the expectation of repayment. It is a matter of human dignity to pay for what you need. It is a matter of human compassion to not withhold what is needed, until payment is made. You can help somebody and make it abundantly clear that there is a cost associated with all this, and that it is the receiver's duty to contribute back to these costs when they are able.

This is how we structured our Ukraine program, and not even of our own volition. Our newcomers, from the penniless moment they landed, were already making promises of repayment of any costs. Our organization at first insisted this wasn't necessary, but the newcomers wouldn't hear of it — they would pay us back when they could, as a matter of duty. We realized that this was not something to be discouraged

out of politeness — it would be a pillar of our success.

We have experienced virtually complete repayment of all assigned costs within a matter of months of someone's arrival. We don't assign all costs, and offset several expenses through fundraising. It's not the money that matters here — it's the sense of responsibility, and the crucial feeling of dignity that accompanies knowing that you earned what you have.

The migrant system in New York City has become almost the polar opposite of our model. The city may survive these expenses, but what a wasted opportunity to not only create a more sustainable system, but also to reinforce someone's dignity, reasonably motivate them towards action, and perhaps even discourage any overreliance on the city's resources. All things have a cost.

MONEY AND POWER POLITICS

There are two more items that are less failures and more weaknesses built into the nature of crises. Let us call these aggravating factors: that a crisis can be extremely lucrative, and that a crisis can be a powerful route to air long-standing grievances between powers.

First, it is no secret that there are people getting obscenely rich from this chaos. Contractors charging thousands per day. Hoteliers seeing full occupancy at New Years Eve rates. It would probably come as no surprise to the vast majority of New Yorkers if investigations were launched at the end of all this that found several additional zeros and decimal points moved to the right. The money to be made from any crisis, much less a severe crisis in the wealthiest city in the world, makes it harder to actually solve it.

Second, this humanitarian crisis has several political benefits, particularly when it comes to settling scores, or to setting up advantageous discussions in the future. I do not make this observation to sound conspiratorial, or even cynical. I say this

because I have made a career out of Democratic political strategy, and have seen up close the strategies used by different powers to set themselves up for success.

The migrant crisis has churned out political weapons. Red border states can punish blue cities while accusing them of hypocrisy. Blue cities, long paying more than they receive, can challenge their state leadership. All can blame the federal government, which is already an endless sequence of accusations and counteraccusations, punctuated by elections and occasional transfers of power. This byzantine network of political leverage makes it so that solutions — or, at least, *certain* solutions — are prohibited, merely because it would upset the balance of power or, more accurately, the ongoing battle for power between different interested parties.

These two aggravating factors, along with the central blunder of combining the migrant and homelessness responses, as well as the failures in paperwork, knowledge-sharing, English education, and expectation of repayment, have created what I call the humanitarian failure in the New York City migrant crisis.

THE CURRENT TRAJECTORY

How does all this end? It doesn't. It either becomes something better or worse. Almost all routes forward are worse.

It's unlikely that the numbers of newcomers will slow any time soon, much less stop. Consider just Venezuela: nearly 8 million have left the country. Only a small sliver have made their way to America. There are many, many more Venezuelans on the way. This is true of many countries. The world is more unstable now than any other time since the worst episodes of World War II. The influx of migrants is unlikely to stop, short of divine intervention.

For New York City, the most likely outcome of the current trajectory may be the full-scale collapse of the homeless system. It was overwhelmed long before this crisis. It has been underwater for years due to this crisis. But it will be that moment when a migrant in the homeless system sheds their identity as a migrant and embraces the simpler identity of homeless that this nightmare will become reality.

But the full collapse of the homelessness system won't just affect those suffering unhoused New Yorkers. City budgets are precarious designs, even in good years. Already the Adams administration is calling for 5% budget cuts across the board. As the influx continues to grow, that 5% will turn

into double digits. Soon, entire departments may need to be cut out. This may be what Mayor Adams meant when he said this crisis will "destroy" New York City.

Then, there is the real possibility that this crisis in its current trajectory will help usher in the first truly fascistic government of the United States. Already, the former President has announced that, if returned to power, he will round up everyone he suspects to be unworthy, hold them in camps, and expel them en masse. This is completely outside the values of American democracy, and a move that, even if feasible, may very well destabilize our whole hemisphere. The nation we know may be irreparably damaged, because this crisis in our most powerful city was not tamed.

At the foundation of all of these outcomes is incalculable human misery. It would be the irretrievable loss of a piece of our souls. It would be the children who are traumatized by their mishandling by a system that they could not possibly understand, and the parents who would have to live with the pain of having failed in their pursuit of a better life. Things don't always work out. This is something that the world outside America knows well, but we here oftentimes need to be reminded. And as much as it hurts to say: this crisis just may not work out in our favor.

RESETTLEMENT IS THE ONLY GOOD SOLUTION

There is only one good ending to this: large-scale resettlement.

This resettlement is far from the “decompression” that has been attempted so far. Decompression, an official term used to describe the emergency relocation of migrants, has proven to be an abject failure. Consider how dehumanizing that word is. Then it will not come as a surprise that decompression took the form of busloads of newcomers shipped to rural motels around New York state, with a prayer that things would work out. (Of course, it didn’t.) Decompression is what Abbott can claim to be doing, dropping newcomers off in random parts of the country, with no warning or even attempts at preparation. In New York City, decompression now has taken the form of one-way plane tickets.

There’s nothing wrong with decompression, except that it doesn’t work. Why would it? If all these migrants wanted was open space, no one would have come to America, and found the first quiet city across the nearest border. People come here to build a life,

whatever that may be. And they come here, and nowhere else, because America is one of the few places left in the world where a life can even be built.

Resettlement acknowledges that fundamental human desire to succeed. Resettlement doesn’t just move people around — *it works with them to create a viable plan.*

When I visit the makeshift migrant response centers in the city, I see that so much effort is put into the triage — i.e. initial processing and enrollment of newcomers — and rightfully so. But I can’t help but ask every person I speak to, “What is your plan in America?” I am surprised that I almost always get a blank stare. Very few people think about this, newcomers and their helpers alike. The newcomers can’t yet believe they made it this far. Those helping them can’t afford to zoom out from the immediate overwhelming challenge and think about this. But for me, based in another part of the country, it’s the only question I can think of.

SUCCESS OF OUR UKRAINIANS

Every resettlement plan must have two components: where someone will stay and what they will do. This has to be put on a timeline. There must be clear expectations. Then, there must be thorough instructions on how to achieve their goals.

Here's how I resettled over 235 Ukrainian families this year:

I picked a metro with low housing costs compared to earning power, and decent worker demand. The Twin Cities metro of Minneapolis and Saint Paul, where I grew up and own my house, happened to be an ideal area.

I haggled with property owners to reach an affordable rate per bed. It turned out that the lowest cost housing in a safe area near the urban core happened to be in off-campus student housing neighborhoods. An unoccupied building there is a big strain on the owner's pocketbook — the bigger the house, the more the strain. I took these big houses, got comfortable mattresses, bedding, dining table sets, and cooking equipment (the Four Essentials, I'd call them) and furnished these buildings.

We are open about finances with our Ukrainians — all are expected to contribute to their own resettlement. In cases of need, we have a common fund that can be drawn from with community approval, but the fund must be replenished by the borrower as soon as possible.

I tried at every step to model our resettlement model to my best understanding of human nature. I know people like things more when they're *not* free. I know it's important for someone to have quality and comfort, but that luxury and coddling would demotivate even the hardest workers.

And I knew that there is nothing as fundamental to human dignity than work. I firmly believe that most of my Ukrainians would rather sleep in a car and work, rather than live in a mansion without the opportunity to earn for themselves, to build the life they want.

For the Ukrainians who got Employment Authorization Documents (EADs — often mislabelled as “work permits”), allowing them to be taken on as an employee for a company, I got them jobs that pay, on average, \$20 per hour. (That has the purchasing power equivalent of \$40 per hour in New York City.)

For Ukrainians without EADs, I prepared to help them form their own Limited Liability Companies (LLCs) which, surprisingly enough, are completely detached from the immigration process. Foreign nationals are allowed by virtually every state to form these LLCs, and then the federal government issues Individual Taxpayer Identification Numbers (ITINs), to allow these newcomers to pay taxes. On the gray-area question of “does working for

your own company mean you're violating employment law?" there is no record of negative impact on a newcomer's legal situation. Instead there are several instances of being a tax-paying LLC owner *benefitting* someone's defense of immigration status. There are at least 800,000 such LLCs in existence in the United States now, keeping people out of homeless shelters and poverty, keeping children fed, benefiting the economy, and generating billions of dollars in tax revenue every year.

I should add here that all newcomers need work, but not all work needs to be paid work. Learning English is work. Volunteering within the organization or out in the community is work. Preparing a dinner for the next family arriving is work. We encourage work, not just moneymaking, though that's quite important, too.

After the Ukrainian arrived, I fronted the cost of housing for the first month. I secured connections to food banks. I set the expectation of learning English. (Quite often, I would give the newcomer a heads up, with a smile, that I will personally only speak English to them, and that I would make my Minnesotan accent thicker over time so they get used to it.) For any children in our program, I make sure to go out of the way to talk to them — they learn English so fast! — see how they are, see if they're liking their schools. I get kids enrolled into school within days of arrival.

I don't do this alone. I hire people far better than me and — crucially — these are English-speaking people from *within the*

community. This is an anomaly in the humanitarian space. The habit is always to put out a job posting offering low pay to local people who have Master's Degrees in something nonprofit-related, and hope that Google Translate will take care of the communication barrier. I go the other way. I pay all of our staff well (After all, I'm telling all my newcomers to take only well-paying jobs, aren't I?) and make sure they speak both the community's language and English. I seek out the people who have *experienced* what my newcomers are experiencing, so they can speak from a place of authority and sympathy that an outside hire simply couldn't imitate. And I will tell you this: my staff are heroes to me. It's an honor to be able to work with them.

It's because of this hiring habit, combined with our appreciation of self-sufficiency, that we have created innovations such as a fully digitized library of resources. It's not uncommon for Ukrainian newcomers far removed from our program to regularly access our resources. We don't hold onto information that could help people. We make it as accessible and well-known as we possibly can.

I keep my staff size small. This is partly to help us weather hard times, like in the summer of 2023, when the US government had a severe backlog — a slowdown that turned into a monthslong drought. We made it through with some salary deference for senior staff. I have a salary on paper, but only accept it on the months when there is a safe surplus. It is a small sacrifice for having

the most successful Ukrainian resettlement program in my country.

Our success rate for our beneficiaries stands at 98%, including the contract failures that we had in the earliest weeks of the program. While we were still refining our interview process, we unfortunately encountered

some people who were violent, some who refused to work, some who refused to contribute to their own resettlement, and some who simply wanted to leave the program, thankfully on good terms. The vast majority of our beneficiaries are successful in America, getting their own homes and achieving financial independence in a mere three months upon arrival.

UNIQUE CHALLENGES OF MIGRANT RESETTLEMENT

I am under no illusion that any such program for migrants will be the carbon copy of the Ukrainian program. The Ukrainian program simply gives us a starting point — the things that *should* work. The reality will be that we will have to take close notes on what's working and what's not. We will have to experiment to find solutions that address the unique challenges of migrant communities. But the core of our mission for both populations is the same: we want them to succeed in America, and we will create an environment for them in which that is possible, as long as they're willing to put the work in.

The migrant resettlement program we propose begins with securing vacant large-capacity houses in the university areas of Minneapolis. Owners of these buildings — often eight or more bedrooms in capacity — are happy to rent them out to one lessee.

Here we run into the main funding gap in this whole model. The owners are willing to play ball, but they know that the newcomers have no background checks or verifiable rental histories. The risk they are taking is substantially higher than, say, even leaving the houses empty. The solution to this is a larger-than-usual housing deposit. In fact, a housing deposit that, say, covers 50% of the length of the lease may lead to significant bargaining power for the total cost of the

lease. If 100% is offered as a deposit, then maximum power is reached, and many months of rent expense can be shaved off the total cost.

This arrangement actually generates a profit, because all newcomers in our program repay their cost of resettlement. If they pay at or below market rate for their housing, we can negotiate on the back end with the housing owners to shave off two or more months of rent. Why? Because we're paying a larger-than-usual deposit that offsets the greater risk, we're giving them full occupancy of high-quality tenants who will take care of the first real home they have in America, and also because, if they don't, I'm going to go to the next big empty house owner and see if they're interested. That two months or more of rent we are able to haggle down is the earned revenue that I will need to pay my staff, build an emergency fund for the community, and cover all other program-related costs

For the migrants, we will have the EAD and LLC routes available, just as with the Ukrainians. If you can be hired by a company, we'll get you a well-paying job. If you wish to start an LLC, we'll get you started down that route.

Employers can be a great source of direct funding into the program, though I usually

contend that it's better for our newcomers to simply get paid more. Their earning power is a top priority, and they can then contribute with more confidence towards their own resettlement.

Other elements of the migrant program will be modeled after the Ukrainian program.

Food, English classes, the staffing model et cetera will start off nearly the same, and we will adjust to match the needs of the migrant communities we work with. This is an unprecedented moment in American history, and the program being proposed is also unprecedented — there's a lot we'll have to learn by doing.

FAILURE TO COORDINATE WITH CITY GOVERNMENT

I have presented several detailed proposals to the City of New York over the past year, all going in-depth into how a program can be launched — or, at least, *tested* — to emulate the success we have with Ukrainians for the migrant crisis. I have spoken to six different city departments. I have lost many nights of sleep ensuring that every “i” was dotted and every “t” crossed.

Only one department ever gave me a definitive answer, and that was along the lines of “this is out of our wheelhouse.” There has been plenty of feet-dragging, with occasional insights into the bureaucracy’s thought process. *“This is too unprecedented. We don’t have a process to support something like this.”* I wish I knew who made the processes, I would talk to them. *“Your organization is too new.”* We started with the outbreak of the Ukraine War, with the unprecedented expansion of humanitarian parole, which in turn played into the migrant crisis. All of this is new. *“We don’t know if this will work.”* Try. Try at whatever scale you’re comfortable with, but you must try.

Perhaps the most unsettling insight was when a city staffer informed me that “it’s easier for the city to spend ten million than it is to spend ten thousand.” This was around the middle of the summer. That was the sentence that made me think, at that

time, that maybe this isn’t the crisis to work on, and that my time would be better spent on the Ukrainians. I had one city official let me know that if I misspent any allocated resource that I would be facing jail. I said I would ask for the harshest punishment.

At the very moment, I have an estimated capacity of two thousand people *on standby*. These are empty bedrooms and jobs. These are two thousand people that I would need a matter of weeks to successfully relocate and resettle. I was hoping the city would be a partner to this, but after six separate attempts, I am starting to lose hope. It would be nice if these attempts ended with dead ends. Instead, it has been like walking down a poorly lit hallway that only gets dimmer and dimmer as you walk, until you’re pretty sure you’re in darkness. Then it’s time to turn back and try again.

I tried to forget about New York. There’s plenty of suffering in the world, and if my place is to help Ukrainians and migrants now enrolling in federal offices in Latin America, so be it. It was the call of a dear friend of mine — one of the few living saints I have had the honor of working with before — who called and said I should care. The image of those amputated toes on the first frostbitten migrant crept in. Now I can’t sleep well until I have a system in place.

MARCHING AHEAD

The migrant resettlement system I propose can be scaled extremely fast. It is modular, and replicable in other metros. I don't like to throw out numbers without evidence. The two thousand I can take on a timeline of weeks is based on several factors, and assuming that certain variables will stay within an estimated range. This is uncharted territory, and speculation can only mean so much. What's most important is to *do*, to try, to start. I can start with very little, if need be, and even what little evidence that generates will be enough to give real numbers.

What do I need to get started? **The biggest impediment to starting a scalable program is the cost of those housing deposits.** These are fully refundable. In fact, depending on the funding terms, these may even be *profitable* to the lender. Other program costs, as mentioned before, are covered by negotiating rent discounts with property owners, and keeping the excess of the already below-market-rate payments made by beneficiaries. We don't need much for our program — it's the housing costs that are prohibitive.

I also need to be able to host an event or few at the city government's shelter facilities, to be able to connect to migrants directly. Currently, I can't set food in places like the Roosevelt Center, where a simple plastic table and a chair would allow me to swiftly find those first two thousand people to be resettled. The first groups to resettle will

need to be carefully selected, as these first resettlers will become the *de facto* leaders within the community. They will need to be well-poised not only to succeed within our program, but to be of the mettle that would allow them to guide the next, ever-growing cadres of newcomers arriving through our program, whether in Minnesota or elsewhere.

I will also need to see how we can best make use of the city's one-way flight ticketing program. This can be an important saved cost if there is already a pool of funds ready for plane travel. Even the most basic level of coordination, if the city becomes open to it, would allow my program to scale rapidly.

And I need advocacy to achieve all of these. I am an outsider. I am fortunate to know leaders throughout Minnesota, and to have a reputation strong enough to ask for meetings and, on occasion, resources. I don't even know where to begin with a city so big. It's possible that government isn't even the place to be asking, but I have yet to discover the proper alternative.

I'm already starting this program, hell or high water. I consider myself fortunate with what I have been able to build for myself in the United States, and I am willing to start the system with my own business revenue. However, I know that the pace of growth will be very, very slow compared to what I can do if I am not reliant on my own funds for these early stages.

Migrants in the New York City shelter system are eager to go. I have earned their trust, because I have earned the trust of those people that have been helping the most — those living saints who give up nights and salaries to make sure these vulnerable people have a safe place to sleep, food to eat, and some hope remaining for the future. I can't help but feel that I have not done enough to earn that trust, but now that I have it, I will cherish and protect it no matter what.

I was an immigrant kid who watched my mom work twelve-hour days at a small saree shop to put food on the table for my sister and me — food that she cooked with love after those long days. I have seen sustained courage and self-reliance up close. It's hard for me to ask for help. I'm afraid that's what I must do.

Anyone who has an idea — any suggestion, any avenues, any connections that might

help scale this program fast, please let me know. **Resettlement is the only way this crisis in New York reaches a good ending.** I don't know anyone else who can do this — there certainly hasn't been anyone who stepped up to help Ukrainians at the scale that my team and I did. I'm worried that I may be the only one even offering a workable solution to this crisis, and that I am failing in my responsibility to secure the help that is needed for success.

New York is bearing the brunt of this crisis. New York will be the place it is solved. Half of Americans trace their roots to your Ellis Island. And as bad as an influx of a hundred thousand people in a year may seem, your city, a hundred years ago, was welcoming over a million of the tired, the poor, the huddled masses yearning to breathe free.

If anyone can help me solve this, it is a New Yorker.

CONTACT

Please reach out to me at mail@aswar.us if you can think of any way to help in the launch of this resettlement route. We need to get people out of the homeless systems of New York City and on the path to new lives, around the country. This is the only good solution.

