



Detroit Front Door Program

Michigan Immigrant Rights Center

Needs Assessment Detroit Front Door Report

Description of the Programs: The Detroit Front Door program aims to connect every individual with immigration legal needs in the Detroit Metro area including Wayne, Oakland and Macomb counties, to a trained, legal professional. The current immigration legal services delivery system is both under-resourced and under-coordinated. Therefore, the goal of the Detroit Front Door program is to expand access to quality, free immigration legal services. This will impact an estimated 4,000 low-income immigrants facing legal crises in the Detroit area. The program focuses primarily but not exclusively on expanding access to legal resources and representation to immigrants who are in deportation proceedings. The Detroit Front Door program is led by the Michigan Immigrant Rights Center (MIRC) with support from the Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan and The Kresge Foundation.

The Michigan Immigrant Rights Center (MIRC) is a legal resource center serving Michigan's immigrant communities. MIRC works to build a thriving Michigan, a place where immigrants experience equity and belonging. In order to accomplish its mission, MIRC builds capacity through education and training about immigration law, builds coalitions among immigrant advocacy and other social justice and civil rights organizations statewide, represents individual clients in priority areas including naturalization and citizenship matters and the rights of survivors of domestic violence, refugees, unaccompanied minors, and immigrant workers. The Michigan Immigrant Rights Center is part of the Michigan Advocacy Program (MAP), a legal aid organization with a fifty year history of expanding access to justice.

Needs Assessment Purpose: This evaluation informs MIRC and funders about the immigration legal service gap that immigrant communities face in the Detroit metro area. The assessment sought to discover the most pressing unmet immigrant needs and the barriers that MIRC's community partners have to face in meeting those needs. The objective was to explore and develop strategies to bridge those gaps. Another important intended purpose of the evaluation process was to formalize a system that could facilitate a higher level of collaboration among community partners. Those partners include The University of Detroit Mercy School of Law - Immigration Law Clinic (UDMLC), Wayne State University Law School - Asylum & Immigration Law Clinic (WSULC), Southwest Detroit Immigrant and Refugee Center (SWIRC), and Catholic Charities of Southeast Michigan Hispanic and Newcomer Outreach (CCSEM).

Evaluation Questions

1. What services are clients seeking out the most in the Detroit metro area?
 - a. What are the responses to these needs that your organization has offered, has not offered and would offer if you had the capacity?
 - b. Considering the last two years, what are the organizational needs in terms of resources to accommodate to client's needs?
 - c. Could you describe how are intakes done at your organization?
2. What legal services is your organization providing?
 - a. What are the most pressing unmet clients' needs and what are the barriers to meet them?
 - b. What services you do not provide and would like to?
 - c. What type of cases do you usually refer to other immigrant service providers?
 - d. What type of cases would you like us to refer to your organization?
 - e. What type of cases would your organization like to refer to MIRC?
3. If Michigan Immigrant Rights Center (MIRC) had additional capacity to support your organization's unmet needs, what would you like from us?
4. If we have the capacity to support your organization with the intake process what would be a priority?
 - a. What type of cases you would like to receive support on from us?
 - b. Do you have any questions for MIRC?

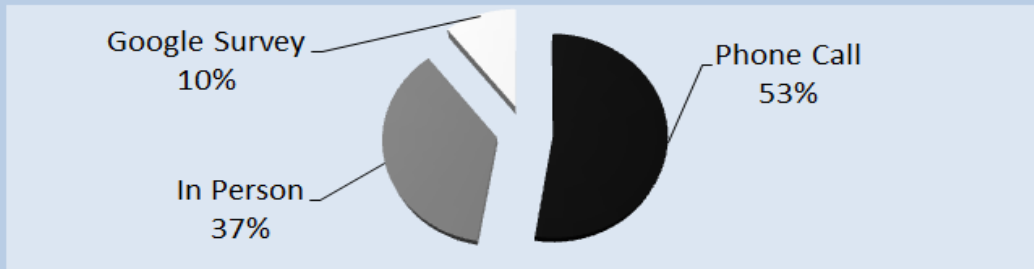
Evaluation Team: MIRC created an evaluation team including *Susan Reed*, managing attorney, *Ruby Robinson* co-managing attorney, *Tania Morris-Diaz*, staff attorney, *Erika Murcia*, intake coordinator & evaluator, *Molli Morgan*, intake coordinator, *Oswaldo Vega*, law clerk student intern. The function of the evaluation team was to create a process of accountability that included diverse professional perspectives.

Methodology

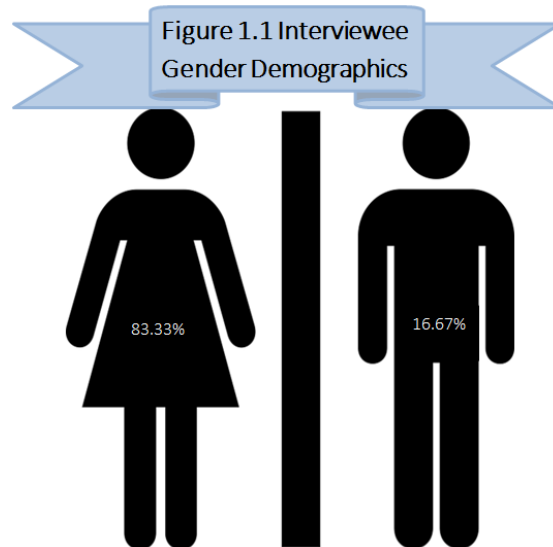
Evaluation Design: A customized needs assessment survey questionnaire was used to gauge the gaps in immigrant legal services in the Detroit metro area, and to identify the barriers that exist for immigrant legal service providers in satisfying the most pressing unmet needs in the community. This immigrant legal service provider needs assessment had a total of six knowledge themes: services immigrants seek, organizational needs, legal services provided, and unmet client needs, barriers faced to meet those needs, and strategies to enhance collaboration. These themes will be presented thoroughly in the findings section of this report.

Procedures for Data Collection: Representatives of 19 immigrant legal service providers completed a needs assessment survey lasting approximately 30 minutes to 1 hour. This assessment was conducted in person, via phone call or through filling out a Google survey form between May 1st and June 21st of 2018.

Figure 1. How Data Was Recorded



During this time, stakeholders were asked to share in detail their experiences in immigration legal services, the barriers they have faced and what their priorities have been, particularly during the last two years. From a gender demographic perspective, it was recorded that (83.33%) of the practitioners were female and only (16.6%) male (n=19) as shown in *Figure 1.1*. The participants stated their frustrations regarding the increased incidence of immigration enforcement in the Detroit metro area and the majority expressed that funding is one of the most difficult limitations. The data collected through this needs assessment shows that the current immigration legal services delivery system is under-funded and under-coordinated. Most of the immigrant service providers depend on limited staff and scarce resources, especially when providing services to immigrants with bond and deportation proceedings cases. In collaboration with other service providers, MIRC will develop into a hub for immigration service providers in Detroit metro area by supporting some community partners with intakes, Spanish language interpretation and case referrals. The stakeholders who participated in the evaluation expressed their appreciation in being able to take part, and they look forward to a continued partnership with MIRC.



Findings

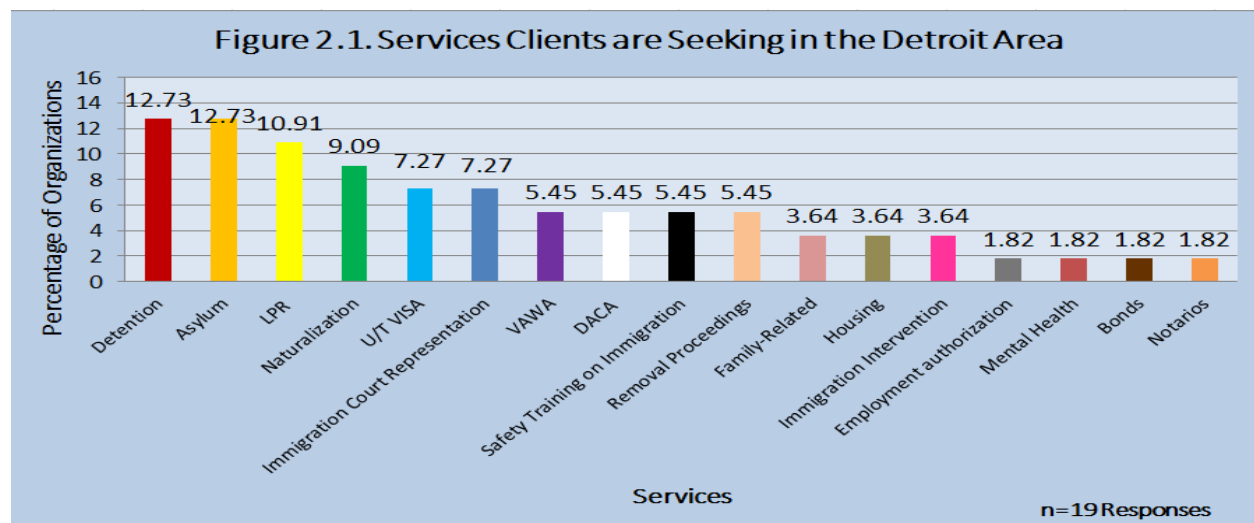
The majority of the organizations interviewed provide immigration legal services and a few offer social services to diverse populations in the Detroit metro area. Most of the organizations reported that due to funding priorities and limitations, they only can focus on offering certain types of services. *Figure 2* depicts the type of relief mentioned by interviewees that demonstrate the types of services sought by their clients. The size of the words correlates with the frequency this need was mentioned, the larger the word, the more times it was expressed.

Figure 2. Immigrant Priority Needs



Services Immigrants Seek

All (100%) of the immigrant advocates reported a list of the legal services that they have seen immigrants seeking in the Detroit area (n=19). *Figure 3* displays the most common services that the immigrant communities are seeking.



What are the services that immigrants are seeking the most?

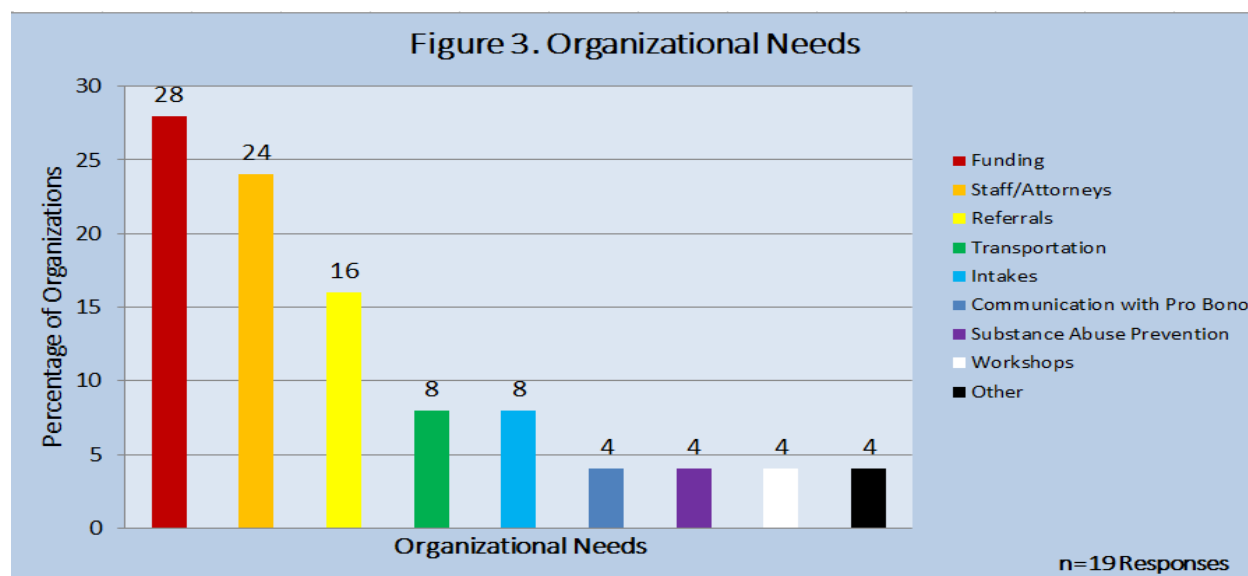
Monica Tay Belej attorney from CCSEM: *“Reliable, trustworthy legal advice in addition to full court representation, removal defense, waiver preparation and assistance for asylum seekers and immigrants with criminal records.”*

Kevin Piecuch attorney from SWIRC: *“We get calls from jail every day; people in immigration detention and/or immigrants who are in jail for other reasons; housing is especially difficult for folks who are in “long term limbo”, awaiting asylum application decisions.”*

Debra Ehrmann representative from Centro Multicultural La Familia: *“Due to recent trauma in families, there is a lot of request for emotional/behavioral support in mental health and legal services.”*

Organizational Needs

(68%) of advocates reported that their organizational needs include funding, staffing (specifically attorneys), and having high number of cases that need to be referred to other immigration legal service providers (n=19). *Figure 4* provides the entire list of organizational needs recorded.



What are the barriers your organization faces to meet those needs?

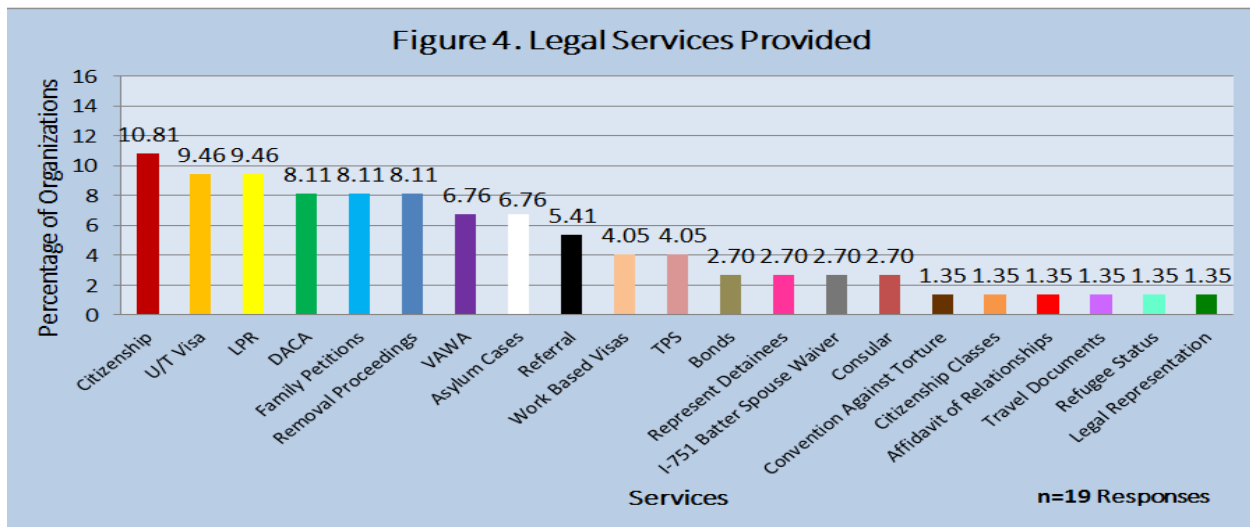
Anna Torman from JFMD: "We used to have more people doing the work. Now it's just me. I make the decisions as far as who I can help according to my capacity."

Sabrina Balgamwalla from WSULC: "As a law clinic, we have no intake staff so it is helpful to get case referrals after an intake has already been done."

Deborah Drennan from Freedom House Detroit: "Money, this includes resources to pay staff, and other administrative needs, Government stability, stability of a system, scheduling priorities, increase advocacy work beyond our own circles by engaging with people who don't understand the complexity of the work we do."

Legal Services Provided

The *citizenship* application process is offered by at least (10.81%) of legal service providers to immigrants who qualify for the naturalization. Relief such as *U-Visa*, *T-Visas* and long term *permanent residence* are offered at least by (9.46%) of the organizations. Whereas, only (2.70%) of the organizations provide support for cases that need bond relief and representation during removal proceedings (n=19).

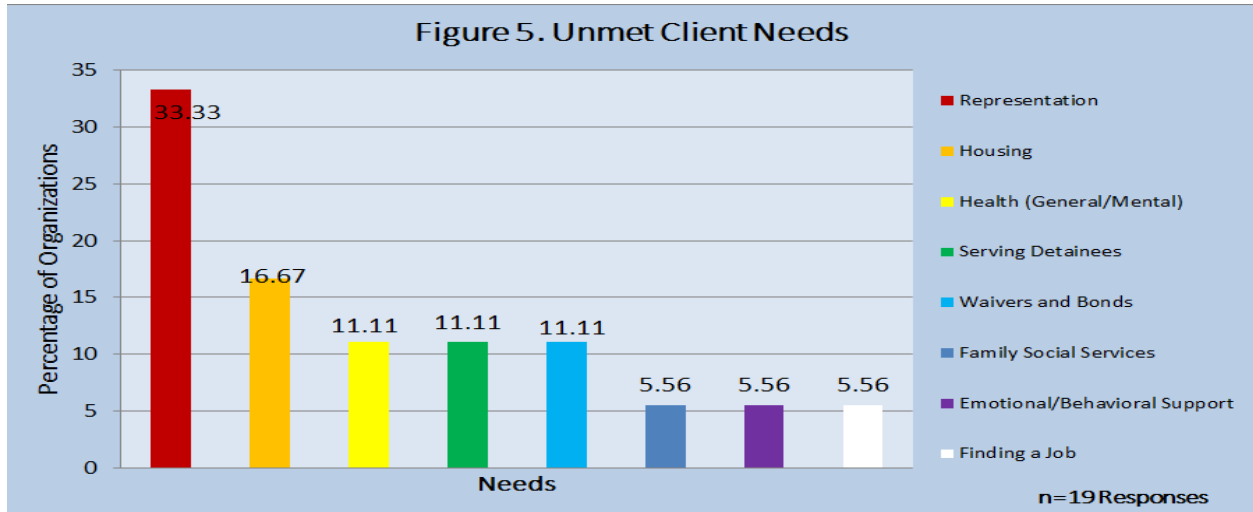


What legal services is your organization providing?

Nadine Yousif from CODE: "We provide legal aid and advocacy for those who want to assimilate and naturalize and also do family reunification. We develop workshops and "Know Your Rights" seminars on immigration and other legal issues. As a result of this administration and many of its immigration policies, we felt obligated to do more immigration work for the community. The Iraqi deportation crisis shifted the focus at CODE and we saw so many community members in need of affordable representation, so we helped alleviate financial burdens while also looking for quality and affordable attorneys for detainees when we could not help them ourselves."

Unmet Client Needs

(40%) of the interviewees stated that representation in removal proceedings and general attorney representation are two of the most pressing unmet immigrant needs regarding legal assistance (n=19).



What are the most pressing unmet clients' needs?

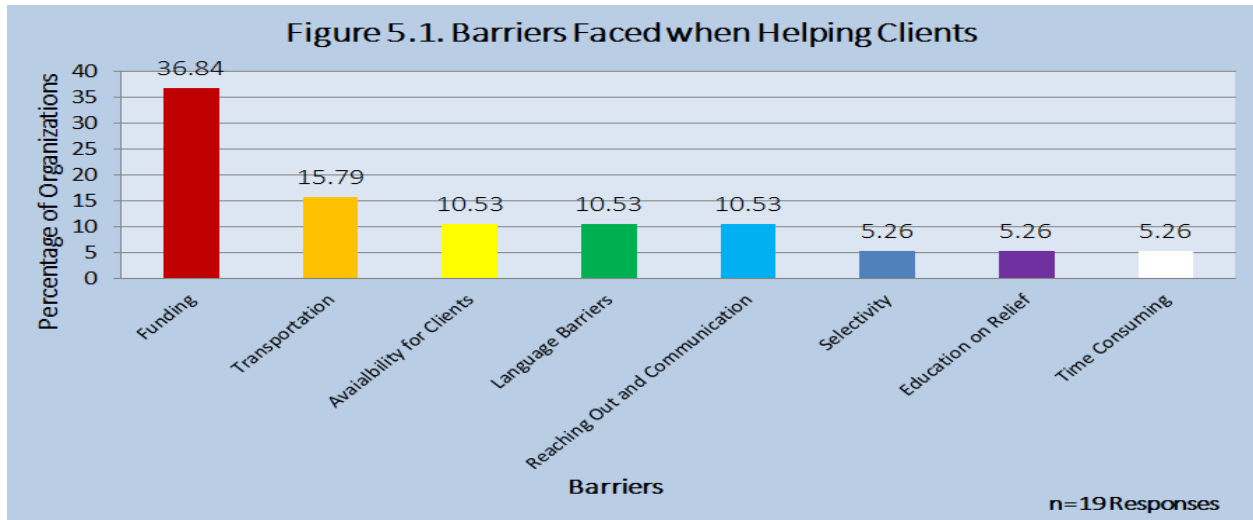
Sabrina Balamwala from WSULC: "Serving detainees is challenging, particularly those with medical and mental health needs. Our clinic represented an individual who needed medical and psychological evaluations on short notice, and the total cost was \$2,500. It also took a lot of effort to get him moved from Chippewa County Correctional Center, where there were no providers nearby."

Carlos Valdovinos from Lakeshore Legal Aid/La Vida: "Finding representation that is affordable for them, we have clients that have relatives that have been detained by ICE and we cannot help them and they cannot afford an attorney."

Alex Vernon from UDMLC: "Cases in proceedings. We are not able to help everybody, but if we could, indigent detainees would be a priority because of their expedited court timeline and all of the logistical hurdles they face in preparing their cases, if they have a viable case."

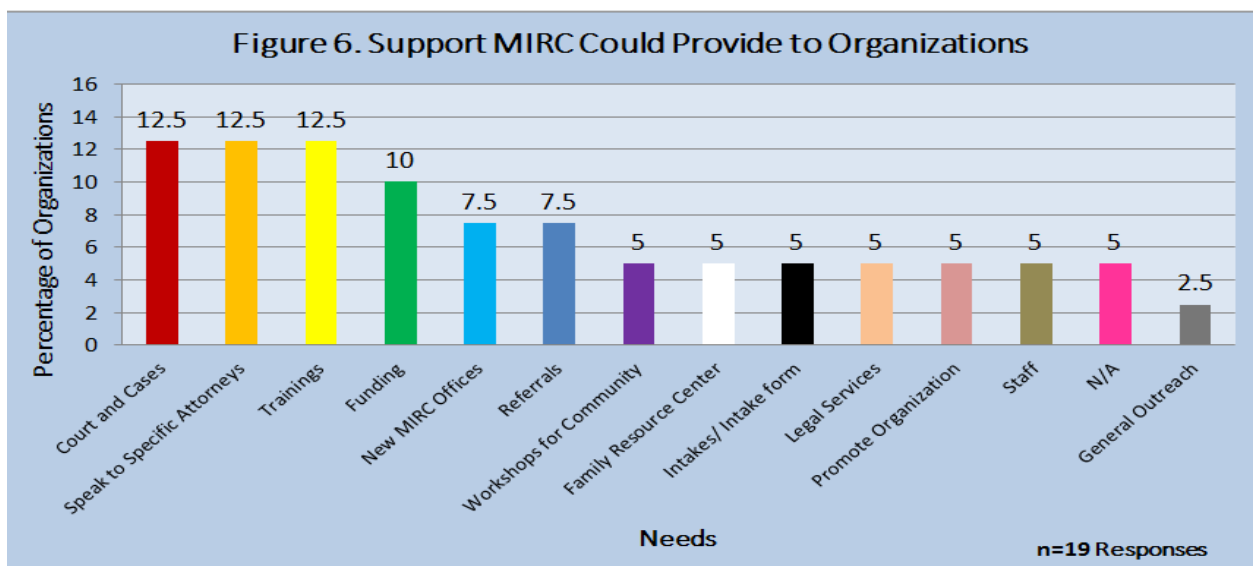
Barriers Faced to Meet Client's Needs

(36.84%) of legal advocates mentioned that funding is one of the primary barriers that prevent them from meeting client's needs. *Figure 5.1* includes all the barriers mentioned.



Strategies to Enhance Collaboration

Most of the legal services providers (62.5%) highlighted organizational needs including support with court cases, general legal advice for DOJ accredited representatives, training, funding, office expansion and referrals (n=19). However, *Figure 7* illustrates the ways community partners believe that MIRC could better support them if more resources were available.



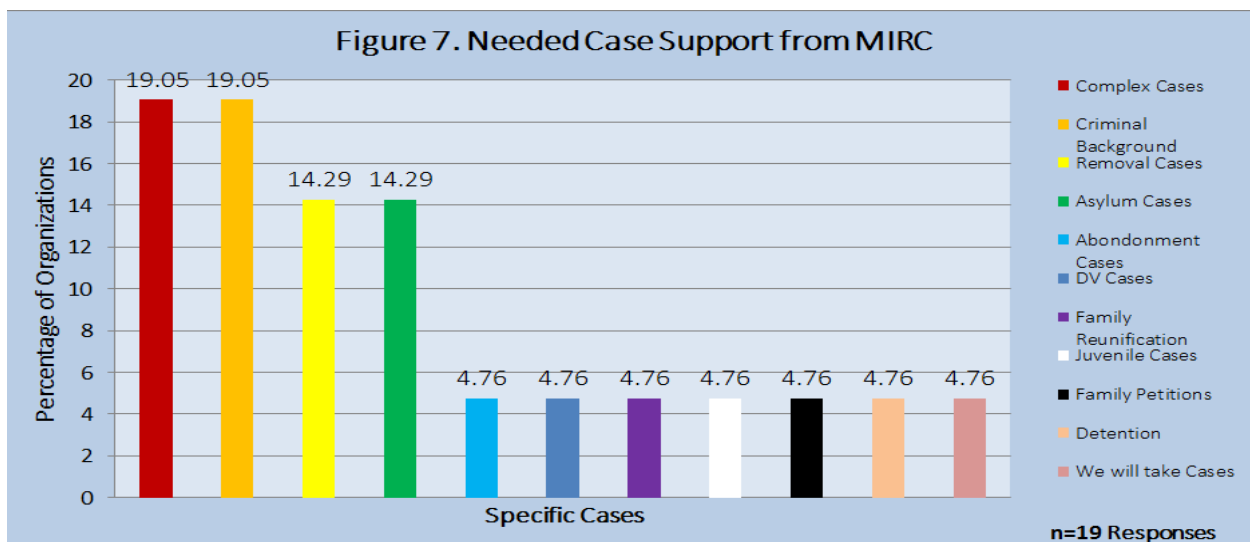
If MIRC had additional capacity to support your organization's unmet needs, what would you like from us?

Antonia Morabito representative of La Sed: *“Since there is a high-volume of Latino immigrants in Southwest Detroit, it would be beneficial for the community to have representatives from MIRC in Southwest Detroit.”*

Diego Bonesatti representative of Michigan United: *“The thing that sets MIRC apart from any organization in the state is their expertise on the intersection of immigration and state law and policy. MIRC is the go to on all of that work and it's a constant need.”*

Organization Priorities

(100%) of the immigration legal advocates reported a number of priorities for which they would need support from MIRC (n=19). *Figure 8* indicates the areas where MIRC's support could be the most useful to the community partners: support with complex cases (19.05%); cases with criminal background (19.05%); cases in removal proceeding (14.29%) and asylum cases (14.29%) are the top priorities.



Conclusions

According to (52%) of the service providers interviewed, *low funding and being understaffed* are among the greatest barriers that their organizations face. As a result, there is a decrease in the services they can provide. In addition, (40.01%) of legal advocates consider *representation in court proceedings, general attorney representation, detainee and bond cases* as some of the most critical unmet immigrant's need in the Detroit area. However, only (2.70%) of the immigrant legal service providers are able to offer services for immigrants who are detained. This data clearly demonstrates that the current immigration legal services delivery system in

Michigan is under-resourced, and the immigrant communities are woefully under-served. The data gathered from this study demonstrates, there exists a gap in immigration legal services in the Detroit metro area, which requires more resources and better coordination.

Acknowledgments

First of all we would like to offer our gratitude to all the representatives and organizations who participated in the Immigrant Legal Service Provider Needs Assessment and for all the work you do in the Detroit metro area to support immigrants. This includes Debra Ehrmann from the *Centro Multicultural La Familia* (CMLF); Yumana Dubaisi from the International Institute of Metropolitan Detroit (IIMD); Sabrina Balgamwalla from *Wayne State University Law School-Asylum & Immigration Law Clinic* (WSULC); Kevin Piecuch attorney from *Southwest Detroit Immigrant and Refugee Center* (SWDIRC); Deborah Drennan & Clairissa Scheiderer from *Freedom House Detroit* (FHD); Carlos Valdovinos & Shanilinin Calderon from *Lakeshore Legal Aid/La Vida* (LA VIDA); Maria Etienne & Rebecca Olszewski from *Catholic Charities of Southeast Michigan - Hispanic and Newcomer Outreach Pontiac Office* (CCSEM); Monica Tay Belej attorney from *Catholic Charities of Southeast Michigan Macomb Office* (CCSEM); Diego Bonesatti & Amanda Youssef from *Michigan United* (MU); Nadine Yousif from *CODE Legal Aid Inc.* (CODE); Sharon Hannawa from the *Chaldean Foundation* (CF); Antonia Morabito from *La Sed*; Vesna Cizmick from *Samaritas New Americans & Refugee Services* (SAMARITAS); Alex Vernon from *University of Detroit Mercy School of Law - Immigration Law Clinic* (UDMLC); Lidia Reyes Flores from *Latino Family Services* (LFS); Migladys Bermudez from *Justice for Our Neighbors* (JFON); Mary Lane from *Welcome Mat Detroit* (WMD); Anna Torman from *Jewish Family Services of Metro Detroit* (JFSMD); Emily Diaz-Torres from *Macomb International Service Center* (MISC); and Sandy Porter from *PIAST Institute*. In addition, we want to thank the *Kresge Foundation* for their financial support in the development this needs assessment. Finally, we want to appreciate the evaluation team for your hard work.