

Immigrant Protection Unit

New York Legal Assistance Group



Mission of the Immigrant Protection Unit

The Immigrant Protection Unit (IPU) is a legal unit of the New York Legal Assistance Group (NYLAG) that aims to alleviate the unique hardships many recent immigrants often face due to status, disability and age.

Language and cultural barriers, as well as recent changes in immigration law, often result in delayed or inaccurate handling of cases by government agencies. The IPU focuses its efforts on assisting low-income immigrants in citizenship and naturalization, adjustment of status, and other immigration processes. NYLAG's IPU also has unique expertise in representing clients in entitlement cases when critical benefits depend on immigration status.

In addition to providing direct consultation and representation to clients, IPU attorneys have been actively involved in immigrant advocacy and impact litigation helping thousands of immigrants.

Projects of the Immigrant Protection Unit

The **Citizenship Initiative & Naturalization Project** assists immigrants applying for naturalization who are faced with obstacles due to disability, age or recent changes in law. This includes providing assistance with adjudication of citizenship applications, disability waivers and impact litigation challenging USCIS practices.

The **New York State Refugee & Asylee Assistance Project** provides representation to refugees and asylees regarding immigration matters such as green card application, maintaining refugee status and naturalization while also safeguarding the needs of children by advocating for necessary government benefits.

The **Specialist Project for Immigrants from the Former Soviet Union** offers educational seminars, workshops and legal assistance to Russian-speaking immigrants in all areas of law.

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NYLAG
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LEGAL ASSISTANCE GROUP

www.nylag.org

IPU Snapshot: 2004 Services

Adjustment of Status
899 cases handled

Asylum
165 cases handled

Citizenship
1,849 cases handled

Immigrant Visa
515 cases handled

Refugee Travel Document
62 cases handled

Deportation
55 cases handled

Work Authorization
193 cases handled

Other
274 cases handled

Total
4,012 cases handled

Legal Areas Handled

The IPU provides services in the following areas:

- Adjustment of status/green card applications
- Anti-Immigrant discrimination
- Asylum
- Citizenship & naturalization
- Disability waivers
- VAWA self petitions
- Visas
- Work authorizations
- Community outreach & development
- Bylined articles and ongoing guest spots in non-English language media
- Participation in coalitions and task forces
- Trainings for attorneys, social service professionals and

IPU in the Community

IPU attorneys and paralegals routinely visit immigrant community centers and provide information

and training on immigration issues and public benefits issues, including Supplemental Security Income (SSI), food stamps and Medicaid. Additionally, IPU staff regularly conduct trainings for social services professionals who serve immigrant populations.

IPU Staffing

The IPU staff is multilingual and have combined expertise in immigration and benefits law which is invaluable to clients who are faced with language barriers and complicated recent changes in the law.

The IPU staff includes one supervising attorney, four staff attorneys and three paralegals—most of whom are immigrants themselves and all of whom are familiar with the complexities of the law from both personal as well as professional experience.

Translators are engaged if NYLAG is not able to provide such services in-house. However, for Spanish and Russian speaking immigrants, who comprise about 45% of NYLAG's client population, comprehensive translation services are available in-house.

Changing Lives: True Story

Ms. G is a 68-year old refugee from the Ukraine. In 1996, she entered the U.S. with her husband who later passed away. Her son and his family, including a 10-year-old daughter, remained in the Ukraine. Two years ago, her son died, and Ms. G discovered that her daughter-in-law abandoned their child, leaving her at an orphanage. Ms. G went to the Ukraine and adopted her granddaughter, but was unable to bring the child to the U.S. immediately. Ms. G returned to the U.S. without the child, distraught and in desperate need of free legal help. NYLAG was able to expedite the process and immediately applied for humanitarian parole for the child. The parole was granted, allowing Ms. G to finally be reunited with her granddaughter. NYLAG also assisted Ms. G in expediting her own naturalization proceeding, representing her at her interview. Finally, Ms. G realized her dream of becoming a United States citizen.