

Rebecca “Rebkah” Zellelew is a Refugee and Immigration Rights Advocate, research assistant and collaborator, and freelance documenter for The City Bureau. The nonpartisan nonprofit newsroom aims to produce trustworthy, equitable, and effective civic journalism by upholding the democratic process, monitoring, and publishing local government meetings. Formerly a refugee resettlement case manager at the Ethiopian Community Association of Chicago, she was responsible for several departments including New Arrival Support Services, Case Management Services, and Reception and Placement. She has written and successfully secured grants, assisted youth programming, worked on the Ethiopia Nation-building project supported by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and is an ECAC museum committee member. Additionally, she has experience as a community Census Outreach Coordinator and campaign canvasser for the Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights.

A staunch advocate on human rights issues impacting women, youth, and migrants, Zellelew has long advocated for actions that empower marginalized communities beginning as a youth student organizer and activist. She is deeply committed to supporting and creating spaces where others can self-advocate and be the engineers of their own change. She currently serves in several nonprofit organizations committed to amplifying community voices through advocacy and organizing, storytelling, direct action, and celebration such as Refugee Action Network as the Advocacy and Organizing chair, World Refugee Day Chicago as co-chair, and Social Change. Since the start of the pandemic, Zellelew has made it a point to distribute PPE, food, clothes, and items to families, old clients, and the homeless.

Rebkah is the daughter of former Ethiopian refugees born and raised in Chicago IL and suburbs. Bilingual in Amharic and English with intermediate proficiency in Spanish and ASL, she holds a bachelor’s degree in Women & Gender Studies and Psychology, with a minor in Biology and Peace Studies from Marquette University. She is currently a UNA-USA Emerging Leaders Fellow and undergoing plans for graduate school.