



COLORADO
Department of
Labor and Employment



ANNUAL REPORT 2020

New American

INTEGRATION

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***A Letter* FROM THE GOVERNOR AND THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS**

In November of 2019, the State of Colorado launched the inaugural New American Integration Initiative. While long overdue, we are proud of this statewide initiative that focuses efforts to ensure more meaningful inclusion of those who have immigrated or emigrated to the United States, and more specifically the state of Colorado, into the state's civic, social, and economic fabric. Our country was built on the aspirations and contributions of immigrants who will always play a pivotal role in making Colorado a better place to live and work.

While this initiative was launched prior to the realities of dealing with COVID-19, as the state continues to respond to the challenges of the pandemic, our commitment to ensure that there are equitable opportunities for all Coloradans is undeterred. We are especially thankful for the numerous New Americans who are serving in critical and essential roles to ensure the health and well-being of Coloradans across the state.

While comprehensive immigration policy needs to be addressed at a federal level, the matter of integrating the immigrant community into our societal fabric can and should be addressed at the state and local level. New Americans arrive in Colorado for a variety of reasons, such as refugees fleeing war, parents seeking a better life for their children, or workers seeking to fill an occupational or professional opportunity. The state derives community and economic benefits when all Coloradans can succeed, and Colorado is proud to support opportunities for our New American community.

In the following pages, you will learn about how we have collaborated across state government agencies and with stakeholders to improve how we successfully integrate New Americans. The report provides to you information on Colorado immigrants' contributions to the greatness of our state and, equally important, the opportunities ahead. The Initiative will continue to enhance current and future state work to create an equitable Colorado, and this report outlines priority projects, including building strong workforce systems, and steps in the new year.

We appreciate your interest in this report as we collectively continue to build a Colorado for all.

Yours in partnership,



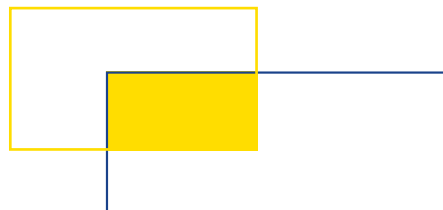
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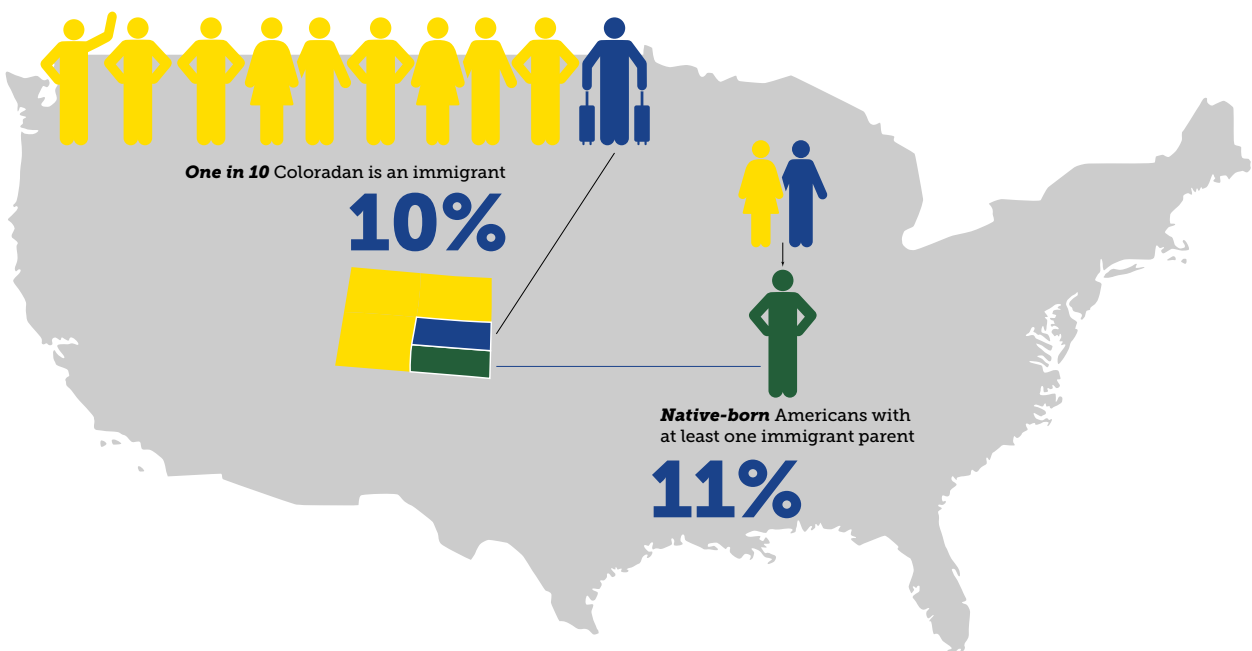




Background

ON NEW AMERICANS IN COLORADO

New American¹ communities have long played a vital cultural and economic role in Colorado, contributing to shared prosperity and wellbeing through their hard work, dedication, and love for our State. The community is growing and diversifying; **today, one in ten Coloradans is an immigrant.**² In addition, **over 600,000 Colorado residents** (11% of the total) **are native-born Americans with at least one immigrant parent.** Almost a full quarter of individuals living in Colorado are, or live with, an immigrant, which makes Colorado a state prosperous thanks to immigrants' experiences and skills.

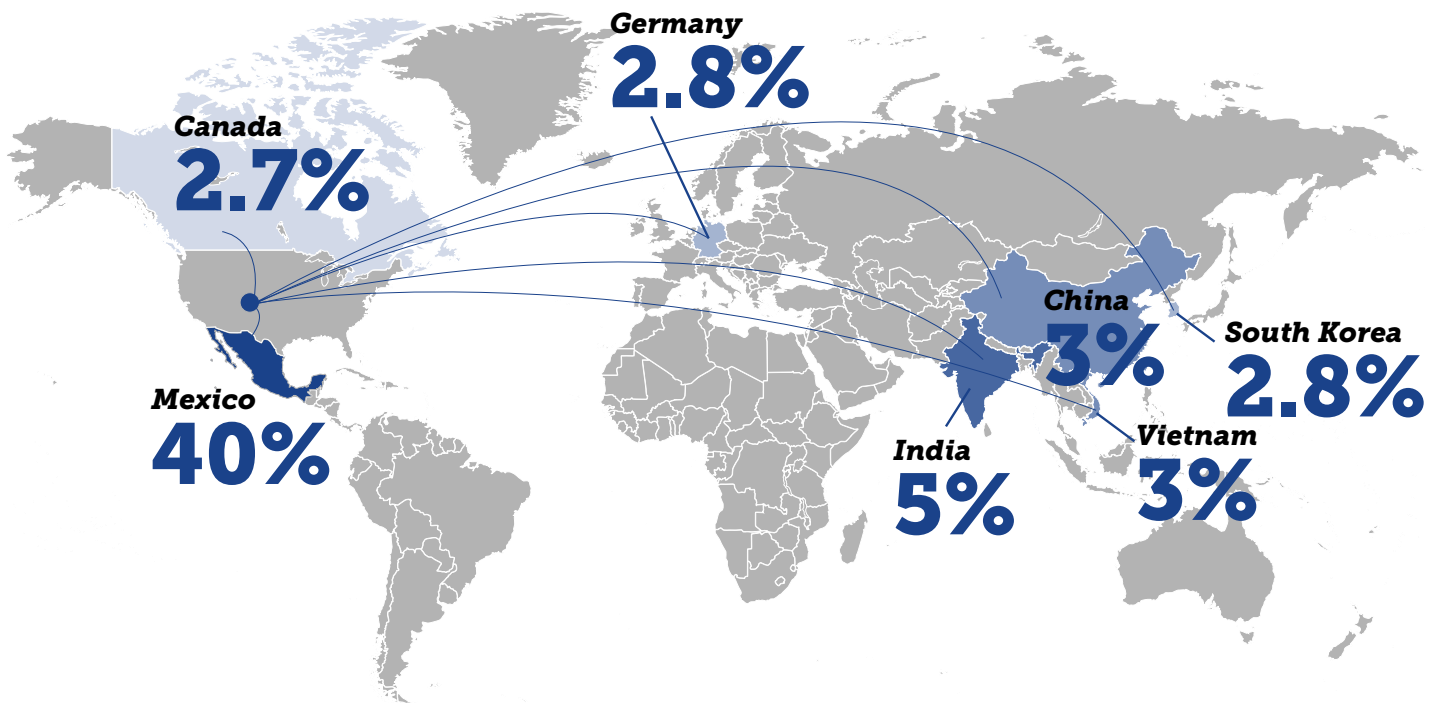


¹ For the purposes of this report, New Americans are those Coloradans who came to our country as immigrants, asylum seekers, or refugees and their children. It is important to reflect that integration—and a transition away from the feeling of being new—is not a linear process. In the usage of this term, there is an inherent need for self-identification. Most data and information is collected by immigration status or country of birth, not self-identification of a term that is applicable to one's experience, thus the use of the term immigrant and refugee in portions of this report. The term New American is not an immigration status, but encompasses many different types of immigrants.

² [New American Economy Map the Impact](https://www.newamericaneconomy.org/locations/colorado/). Accessed on 10/22/20 at <https://www.newamericaneconomy.org/locations/colorado/>.

Who Are Colorado's Immigrants?

Colorado's New American community is not a monolith. Coloradans from Senegal, Mexico, Indonesia, Russia, Ethiopia, Bosnia, Iraq, Cuba, and Venezuela all call our state home. The top countries of origin for Colorado's immigrants³ are Mexico (40% of immigrants), India (5%), China, (3%), Vietnam (3%), Korea (2.8%), Germany (2.8%) and Canada (2.7%).⁴

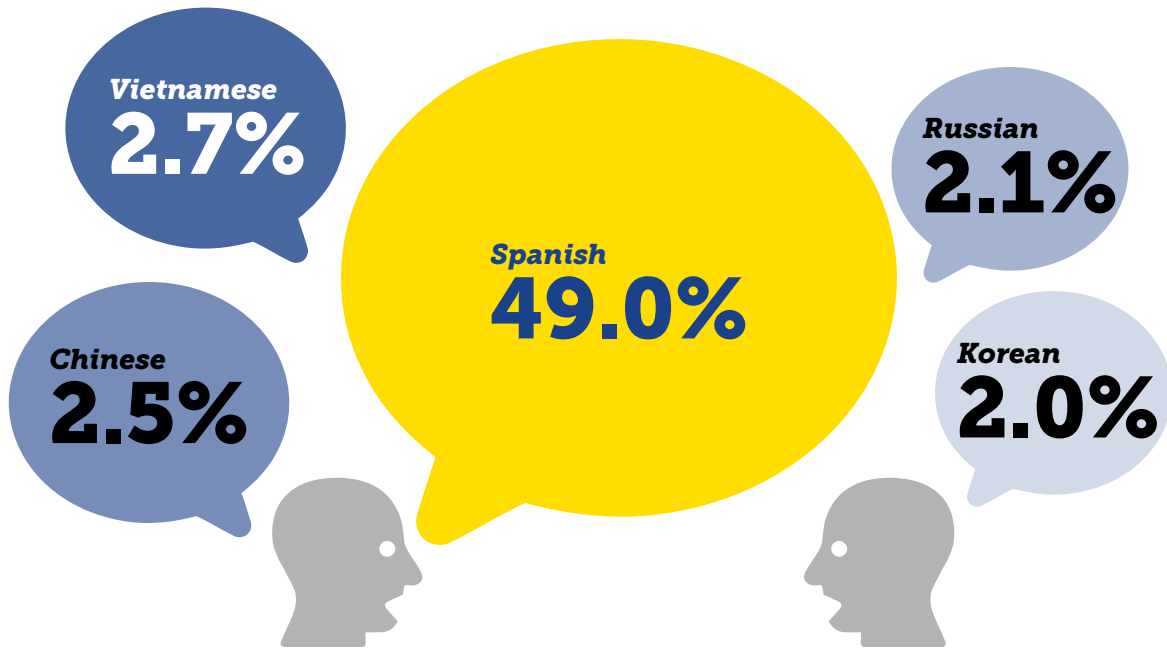


Top countries of origin for Colorado's immigrants

³ For much of the data included in the report, the term immigrant includes all foreign-born populations.

⁴ https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/sites/default/files/research/immigrants_in_colorado.pdf

At home, the top languages spoken by Coloradans other than English are Spanish 49.0%, Vietnamese 2.7%, Chinese 2.5%, Russian 2.1%, and Korean 2.0%.⁵



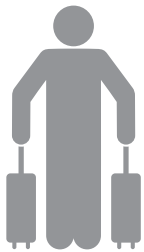
Top languages spoken by Coloradans other than English

Just like there cultural differences between Louisiana and Colorado, or in small communities such as the Amish within the American population, there can also be differences in language, faiths, and ethnicities within New American communities from the same country. Individuals from Burma may identify as Karen, Karenni, Rohingya, Mon, or other ethnicities with distinct traditions and cultures; Congolese from Kinshasa may speak French whereas Congolese from eastern provinces may speak Swahili; and immigrants from India may be from different faiths, including those rooted in Hinduism, Christianity, and Islam.

⁵ https://drive.google.com/file/d/1f4cqyneeDpVePWUU6mpMvLwy2k_Wnlc/view

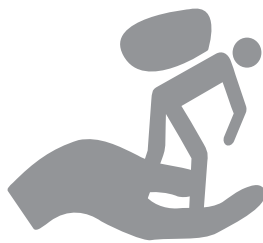
Some areas of the state have larger immigrant populations than others, but immigrants call all corners of the state home. For instance, there are over 150 languages spoken in Aurora Public Schools, and **in Denver metro, one in six business owners is an immigrant.**⁶ Other areas of the state are equally as diverse: the Roaring Fork and Vail Valleys are home to immigrant families from Mexico, Guatemala, Mauritania, and El Salvador; agricultural communities like the San Luis Valley and the Western Slope welcome Latino migrant and seasonal workers as well as provide long-term homes for immigrants working in local economies; and Fort Morgan and Greeley in northeast Colorado have vibrant Somali and Burmese populations. In fact, Fort Morgan is Colorado's only majority-minority community, where the majority of the city's residents hail from minority populations.

What's the difference between an immigrant, refugee, asylum-seeker and migrant?



immigrant

An immigrant is someone who makes a conscious decision to leave their home and move to a foreign country with the intention of settling there.



refugee

A refugee is someone who has been forced to flee their home because of war, violence or persecution, often without warning.



asylum-seeker

An asylum seeker is someone who is also seeking international protection from dangers in their home country, but whose claim for refugee status hasn't been determined legally.



migrant

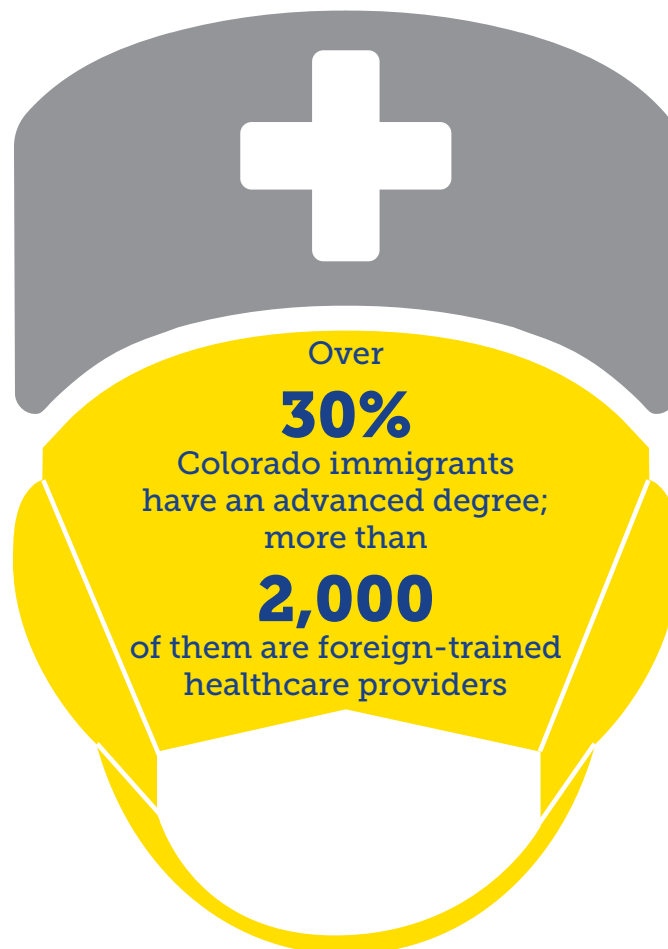
A migrant is someone who is moving from place to place (within his or her country or across borders), usually for economic reasons such as seasonal work.

Source: International Rescue Committee

⁶ https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/sites/default/files/research/immigrants_in_colorado.pdf

New Americans' Education and Professional Background

In addition to its cultural, language, and ethnic diversity, the immigrant population includes a wide variety of backgrounds and experiences. Immigrants arrive as engineers and physicians, as well as with limited former opportunities for formal education. **Over 30% of Colorado immigrants have an advanced degree,**⁷ and more than 2,000 of them are foreign-trained healthcare providers,⁸ including the hundreds who have arrived through the refugee program in the past several years. Twenty-nine percent of immigrants have less than a high school diploma and yet have ample skills in industries like construction, farming, entrepreneurship, or cosmetology.⁹ Some spent decades in refugee camps; still others arrived on a student visa to study at one of our great universities or were recruited to fill a workforce gap in one of our crucial industries.



⁷ <https://www.newamericaneconomy.org/locations/colorado/>

⁸ <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/news/us-health-care-system-coronavirus-immigrant-professionals-untapped-resource>

⁹ <https://www.newamericaneconomy.org/locations/colorado/>

New Americans' Immigration Statuses

New Americans also vary in their immigration status and available paths to citizenship. **Nearly half of all immigrants in Colorado are naturalized citizens**,¹⁰ while approximately 160,000 are currently undocumented and may lack the opportunity or resources to obtain citizenship. Fifteen thousand Colorado residents have Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA),¹¹ and over 60,000 arrived to Colorado as a refugee, asylee, or as a Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) holder.¹² Almost 3,000 Coloradans have Temporary Protected Status,¹³ such as from countries like El Salvador, Sudan, or Syria, and a few hundred came to our state as Cuban parolees or entrants. Some immigrants, like those with DACA, arrived as children; still others, like SIVs, came to our state due to persecution they faced after assisting with U.S. military objectives in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Could you pass the written portion of the citizenship test? [Try this civic practice test!](#) Do you also have \$2,500? That's the approximate cost for a family of four to apply for citizenship.

Did you know that Colorado has one of the top-performing refugee resettlement programs in the state? The program serves populations of humanitarian concern, such as refugees and asylees. Learn more [here!](#)

While immigrants come for all backgrounds, there are key similarities among many of them. **Most (77%) immigrants are at least bilingual** and report speaking English well or very well. Many have children or other family members, such as spouses, who are U.S.-born citizens, and the vast majority of Colorado's New Americans are aspiring citizens. Given the opportunity, they seek permanency and citizenship. And, **immigrants contribute not only as workers and taxpayers in our economy, but also as economic drivers themselves.**

¹⁰ https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/sites/default/files/research/immigrants_in_colorado.pdf

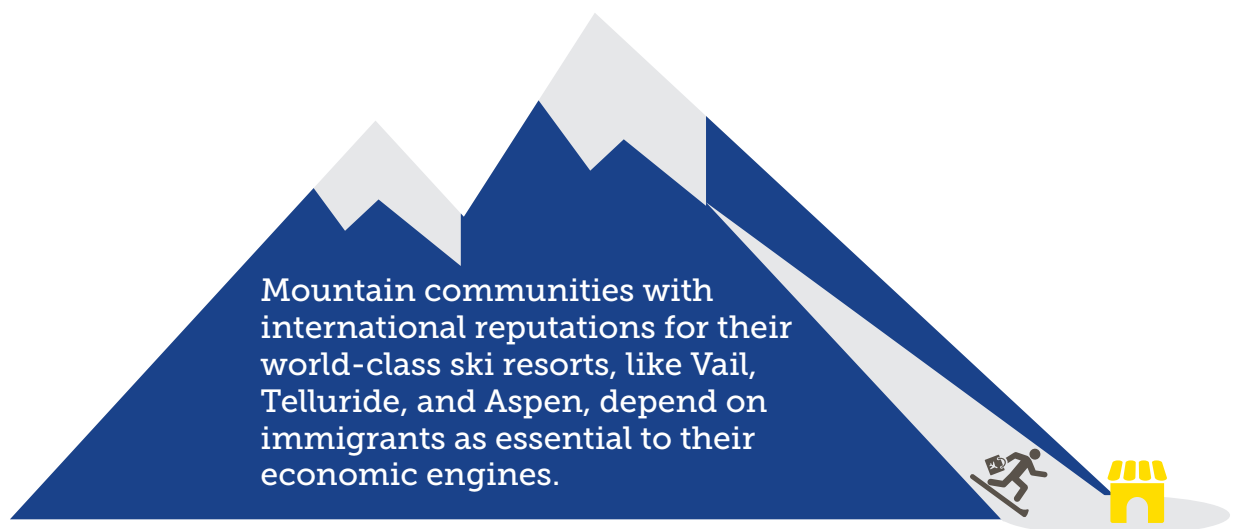
¹¹ https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/sites/default/files/research/immigrants_in_colorado.pdf

¹² <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1hujMx8xS9dqDFIt-SuDKYxIOIZBM6dkz/view>

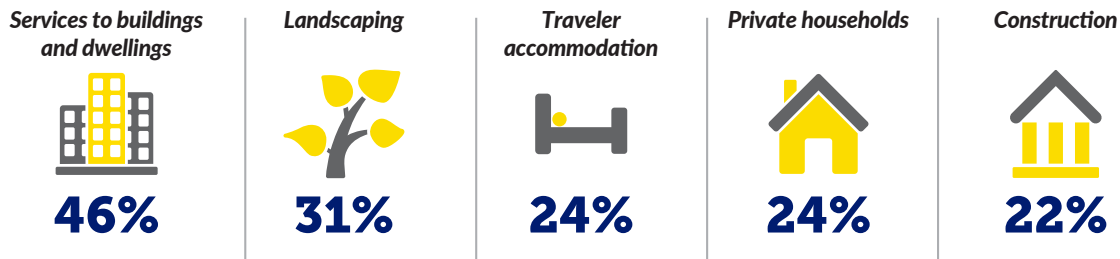
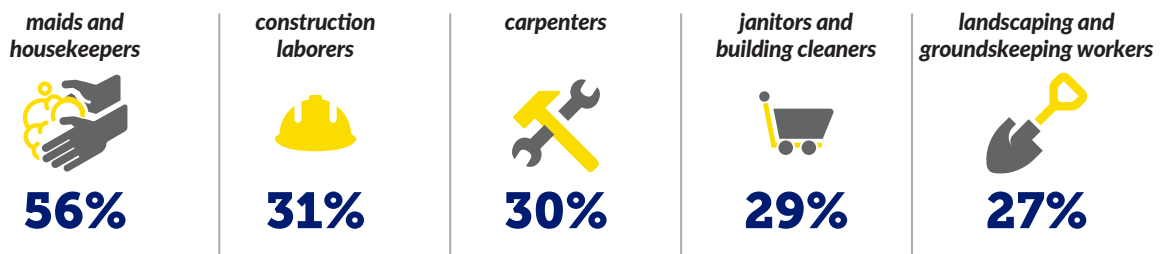
¹³ Find out more about Temporary Protected Status [here](#); find out about more types of immigration statuses [here](#)

New Americans' Economic Contributions

One in eight Colorado workers is an immigrant.¹⁴ That's because immigrants are more likely to be of working age than their U.S.-born counterparts. A full 83% of Colorado's foreign-born population is between the ages of 16-64, while only 64% of the U.S.-born are working-aged. As Colorado's population continues to age, the immigrant population will become even more critical to the state's economy and wellbeing: research suggests that Coloradans will increasingly depend on immigrant tax contributions and labor, including in areas such as home healthcare that serve the older adult population. Already, Colorado depends on foreign-born labor for some of its most crucial industries, like tourism, construction, and technology. We can see their significant economic contributions today: according to the Colorado Office of Economic Development and International Trade, tourism is one of the strongest economic drivers in Colorado. In 2016 alone, 82.4 million visitors spent a total of \$19.7 billion in the state, generating \$1.2 million in state and local taxes, and **immigrant workers provide approximately a quarter of the workforce for traveler accommodation, a key occupation in our tourism industry.** Mountain communities with international reputations for their world-class ski resorts, like Vail, Telluride, and Aspen, depend on immigrants as essential to their economic engines. In addition, 13% of STEM workers in Colorado are immigrants, helping shepherd the growth of this important sector, especially as many economies, like Denver's, move away from an over-reliance on oil and gas.



¹⁴ https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/sites/default/files/research/immigrants_in_colorado.pdf

Top Industries with Highest Share of Foreign-Born Workers¹⁵**Top Occupations** with Highest Share of Foreign-Born Workers

Did You Know? Immigrants contribute considerably to the COVID-19 vaccine development and distribution for the nation as they make up a key part of America's biomedical industry. Immigrants make up nearly a quarter of the Pharmaceutical Manufacturing (24.8%) and Medical Equipment and Supplies Manufacturing (23.9%) industries, as well as 15.6% of Pharmacy and Drug Store workers. **Immigrants are also behind both Moderna's and Pfizer's vaccine development success stories.**

Immigrants often embody the entrepreneurial spirit. Over 36,000 immigrant entrepreneurs employ 102,298 workers in Colorado;¹⁶ these **immigrant entrepreneurs are job creators** in communities across the state. Many of these entrepreneurs start small businesses, such as restaurants, insurance companies, and adult care centers. In fact, according to the National Bureau of Economic Research, **immigrants create about 25% of all new small businesses nationwide.**¹⁷ The 42,844 immigrants who are sole proprietors in Colorado account for 12% of all self-employed residents, generating \$1 billion in business income.¹⁸

¹⁵ <https://www.newamericaneconomy.org/locations/colorado/>

¹⁶ <https://www.newamericaneconomy.org/locations/colorado/>

¹⁷ https://www.nber.org/system/files/working_papers/w24494/w24494.pdf

¹⁸ https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/sites/default/files/research/immigrants_in_colorado.pdf

Beyond job and business creation, **immigrants have \$14.2 billion in spending power annually**; spending has a multiplying effect as individuals purchase goods and services that drive the same elsewhere. And spending power propels job creation: research by the Colorado Refugee Services Program showed that for every refugee resettled in our state, four Colorado jobs are created.¹⁹ Immigrant contributions also extend to our state and local budgets. **Immigrants contribute \$5 billion in taxes every year, including \$1.5 billion in state and local taxes,**²⁰ adding to our shared economy by funding things such as schools and infrastructure.



Did you know:

44% of all Fortune 500 companies

were started by immigrants or their children?

Source: [New American Economy](#)

Immigrant integration is a dynamic, two-way process in which newcomers and the receiving society work together to build secure, vibrant, and cohesive communities.²¹ Integrating immigrants into Colorado benefits all of us as individuals and our state as a whole.

What is the difference between integration and assimilation?

Assimilation expects immigrants to give up their distinctive collective identities and cultural practices as they become part of our community.

By contrast, **integration**, as a term and as a policy priority, understands that immigrants' culture is additive, offering rich diversity of thoughts and ideas that enrich receiving communities. Immigrants integrate in ways that celebrate their unique cultural identities and the basic values and principles of the communities that welcome them, such as gender and racial equity.

¹⁹ <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1F2Wt0NySei2nlwH-PC7nTr6MPRbqcxm9/view>

²⁰ <https://www.newamericaneconomy.org/locations/colorado/>

²¹ Grantmakers Concerned with Immigrants and Refugees



The Polis Administration's **NEW AMERICAN INTEGRATION EFFORTS**

Governor Jared Polis recognizes the importance of immigrants to our community, which is why he announced the New American Initiative in November 2019, the first of its kind in the State of Colorado. The initiative's charge is to identify and address issues related to integration, foster enhanced inclusion of New Americans in Colorado's civic, social, and economic life, and ensure equitable opportunities for newcomers; it also harnesses the work of the pre-existing New American Stakeholder Group that coordinated public-private partnerships in early 2019. The initiative is co-housed at the Governor's Office and at the Colorado Department of Labor and Employment (CDLE), under the leadership of Joe Barela, the agency's executive director.

To advance this work, Colorado recently passed:

- **HB 20 1420, which increases state earned income tax credit** and extends it to residents who use an Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN).
- **Colorado's Healthy Families and Workplaces Act**, which requires employers to offer sick leave and prohibits retaliation based on a worker's immigration status.
- **SB 20 083, which protects an individual from civil arrest while the person is present at a courthouse** or on its environs, or while going to, attending, or coming from a court proceeding.
- **HB 20 1415**, which provides **public health whistleblower protections** for all Colorado workers.

In addition, the Governor's Office **issued Data Privacy Guidelines**, instructions for executive and state agencies that limit inquiries and collection of information and disclosing personal information to third parties and the federal government. These instructions include immigration status and will help protect immigrants. The Governor's Office worked closely with immigration advocates to establish, refine, and implement privacy protocols that protect all Coloradans' data.

The New American Integration Initiative has also been vital in the Administration's pandemic response: it has created an immigrant and refugee [resource guide](#) (also in [Spanish](#)) and convened a New American Stakeholder Group sub-committee. This ongoing engagement ensures information sharing and informs the Governor's Office and state agencies on concerns within the refugee and immigrant communities.

With partners across the state, as part of the COVID-19 pandemic response, the administration took important steps to improve collective health and wellness, including:

- Proactively asking the federal government to **automatically renew DACA and TPS during the pandemic** to provide stability to Colorado families.
- Clarifying that **COVID-19 testing and treatment is covered under emergency Medicaid**, increasing accessibility regardless of immigration status.
- Issuing an Executive Order allocating \$10 million for emergency rental and mortgage assistance to low-to-moderate-income individuals, with **preference to those ineligible for other forms of assistance like unemployment benefits or food assistance**.
- Allowing **foreign-credentialed physicians to obtain temporary licenses** to respond to the COVID19 health crisis.
- Raising over \$22 million in private funding through Colorado's COVID Relief Fund, with a **focus on immigrants, refugees, and people who speak English as a second language**.
- Ensuring that the [State's COVID-19](#) website has resources translated into [Spanish](#), [Vietnamese](#), [Chinese](#), [Somali](#), [Nepali](#), and [Arabic](#).

- Together with Gary Community Investments and Rocky Mountain PBS, launching [Colorado Classroom: Read to Me at Home](#) which has **English Development Lessons to target the immigrant community.**
- Under the leadership of the Office of Economic Development and International Trade, and its Minority Business Office, launching the [Energize Colorado Gap Fund](#) which **prioritizes businesses that are owned by people of color, including immigrants.**
- Issuing guidance to [detention centers and law enforcement](#), **including the ICE facility in Aurora** to protect detainees health and mitigate outbreak potential.
- Expanding financial aid for college students who were ineligible assistance from the federal government.

In addition, while the state budget forecast continues to project an annual operating deficit through FY 2022-23, one-time funds became available after restoring major cuts. The Governor's budget, presented to the Joint Budget Committee in November 2020, directed these one-time funds to stimulate the economy and help Colorado recover faster and sustainably. The budget included:

- \$45 million in rental assistance, for which all Coloradans can apply.
- **\$5 million in direct assistance to those ineligible for other forms of assistance like the federal stimulus payments, unemployment benefits or food assistance.**
- Up to \$3,500 in tuition assistance to Colorado's students, including ASSET and DACA students.

The Colorado state legislature passed some of these items in a special session in December 2020, including rental and direct assistance.



Priority Projects **OF THE NEW AMERICANS INITIATIVE**

In January- early March 2020, the New Americans Initiative held stakeholder meetings with key partners across the state, representing interests as varied as those from immigrant rights, industry and business, climate justice, health and mental health, refugee resettlement, and local government perspectives. These interviews, along with an assessment of opportunities within state government, informed priority projects for the New Americans Integration Initiative.²² These priority projects fall into four distinct categories:



***Economic
Development***



Access



***Education
& Outreach***



Sustainability

²² It is important to acknowledge that integration is multi-variate and includes work across education, workforce, human services, youth, and health and wellness domains. The priority projects are building blocks from which state government can expand and grow.

The New Americans Stakeholder Group confirmed the importance of these priorities in its March 2020 meeting, including the further development of priorities to include the following goals:



Economic Opportunity

- **Workforce Development:** Identify equitable opportunities for the inclusion of New Americans in ongoing workforce programming, work-based learning programs, and apprenticeships.
- **Skills Recognition:** With the Colorado Department of Regulatory Affairs (DORA), create and disseminate guides that help newcomer professionals navigate the licensing and credentialing process in Colorado and identify opportunities to streamline foreign-born professionals' ability to continue their careers.



Access

- **Language Access:** With partners across state agencies, develop and suggest language accessibility tools and expectations for state systems and programs that enhance Coloradans' abilities to connect with state government.
- **Data Privacy:** Working alongside all departments and the Governor's Office, help ensure the implementation and execution of the Governor's data privacy guidelines and work with state agencies to bolster data privacy protections and share safeguards as they relate to the federal government and third-party requests.
- **Safety-Net Program Access:** With stakeholders and state agencies, recommend high-value, low-cost changes to increase New Americans' access to benefits from programs for which they are eligible.



Education and Outreach

- **Celebration:** Partnering with CDLE and other state agencies, highlight the benefits that New Americans bring to our workplaces, workforce, communities, state, and economy.



Sustainability

- **Community Engagement:** With partners at Colorado State University, pilot a community advisory committee to inform the work of the New American Initiative to help connect the broader community to opportunities provided by state government programs to facilitate economic stability and integration.
- **Recommended Strategies:** Research, explore, and recommend strategies and solutions with federal, state, and private partners to support the goals of the initiative over the long-term.

Learn More:

In pursuing these priorities, the Initiative has determined that the following must be integrated in all efforts:

- **Adaptability:** As circumstances, environments and priorities change, the work may need to shift to accommodate needs, opportunities, challenges, and/or changes.
- **Balance between short- and long-term strategies** ensure that changes and improvements are long-lasting.
- **Equity, diversity and inclusion** are paramount to achieving real change for Colorado's New American community.

Short-term Outcomes:

From March-October 2020 the initiative has succeeded in attaining many of its short-term goals which, in turn, advance the long-term ones:

- **Workforce Development:** New Americans were included as priority populations in Colorado's Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) 2020-2023 State Plan, which outlines the state's priorities and offers opportunities for local workforce boards and centers to align their goals.
- **Skills Recognition:** With DORA, the Initiative worked to ensure foreign-trained healthcare professionals could obtain temporary licenses to assist with the pandemic response. This experience will inform longer-term solutions. In addition, the initiative has identified concrete opportunities for licensing reform in the years ahead, including by ensuring access to credentials to those without lawful presence.
- **Language Access:** The Governor's Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Executive Order outlines accessibility, including language accessibility, as a key initiative, and state agencies continue to enhance language accessibility by improving systems and by prioritizing the hiring of bilingual staff.
- **Data Privacy:** Working alongside the Governor's Office Policy team, stakeholders, and other state partners, the data privacy implementation guidelines have been updated to enhance protection of all Coloradans data.
- **Safety-Net Program Access:** Stakeholders identified research as an essential first step to improve access to safety-net programs, and initial commitments by research (University of Denver) and funding partners, including the Colorado Health Foundation, have been established.
- **Celebration:** In partnership with the CDLE's Communications team, the Initiative has published thought leadership pieces and participated in learning opportunities, such as with the Colorado Business Roundtable. A website for the initiative was also launched at CDLE.
- **Sustainability:** Colorado State University students developed a white paper based on extensive research, which includes recommendations for a community advisory committee.

2020-2021 Action Steps

Setting short term goals that lead to long-term outcomes is a tenet of the initiative's work. For the remainder of the state fiscal year (ending June 30, 2021), goals include:

- **Improved Connections with Workforce Development Opportunities:**
 - Dissemination of toolkits, guides and training to support state and local partners integrating New Americans into ongoing service delivery;
 - Updating of policies and practices to include New Americans as a priority population;
 - Initial exploration of a pilot program to supplement local workforce regional services through the evidence-based community navigator model (*promotora*) to enhance connection between workforce services and New American communities.
- **Skills Recognition:**
 - Support the effort to expand opportunities to gain licenses and credentials for New Americans through legislative action.
 - Enhance the outreach and education on licensing and credentialing by expanding access to [immigrant skills guides](#), which will include architects, healthcare professionals, engineers, and cosmetologists.²³
 - Participate in learning opportunities with key national partners and other state leaders.
- **Language Access:**
 - Inform state standards and expectations under Executive Order D 2020 175 on Equity, Diversity and Inclusion, while eliciting feedback from stakeholders.
 - Explore and recommend action steps towards improved language access in the Unemployment Insurance program.
- **Data Privacy:**
 - Continue to work alongside stakeholders and the Governor's Office to find collaborative solutions that protect Coloradans' data and their safety and security.

²³ DORA's new [immigrant licensure webpage](#) will be updated as new guides become available.

- **Safety-Net Program Access:**
 - Submit research on access issues to state agency stakeholders and other key partners by June 30, 2021.
- **Celebration:**
 - Continue to provide thought leadership through articles and presentations
 - Enhance website to include additional information useful to a Colorado audience
 - Explore and create additional messaging modalities.
- **Sustainability:**
 - Create the community advisory committee
 - Increase capacity through additional partnerships and fundraising.





Future Recommendations FROM THE FIELD

Looking to Other States, Best Practices. Recommendations from the Field²⁴

Where can we go from here? Under a broad charge, there are many opportunities going forward. Learning from other states and localities is a way to plot a path forward. Some ideas are:

- Explore and recommend strategies towards the **creation of an Office of New Americans** to centralize and codify efforts to assist New Americans and the state at large. States like Virginia, Ohio, New York, Michigan, and New Jersey have created Offices of New Americans with varying scopes, missions, and sizes.
- **Align New American efforts with those related to equity.** New American integration efforts will not be successful without advancing equity efforts across systems at the same time. For instance, if employers do not recognize the value of diversity in their hiring practices and don't eliminate inequitable barriers, the workforce ecosystem designed to help economic integration will not meet its goal.
- **Support the development and enhancement of a network of immigrant-serving nonprofits across the state.** Refugees, unlike the broader immigrant community, have a network of publicly-

²⁴ This research is supported by months-long research by the Office of the Governor's internship program, specifically Oliver Byles and Lucy Krakoff-Carlson.

funded and coordinated agencies that assist in integration, including workforce development and education. Other immigrants do not have the same level of consistent support because many immigrant-focused nonprofits, rightly so, concentrate on immigrant rights. These nonprofits may be unable to stretch limited resources to offer a wide array of services. Nonprofits are key to integration efforts, as they are trusted messengers and partners. Investment in a New American network composed of nonprofits can help them coordinate services, including with government agencies, that would enhance the mutually-beneficial integration process. States such as California and New York have and continue to benefit from investment in such approaches, and have been able to offer equitable services, including during the pandemic, because of earlier investment in infrastructure.

- **Create, fund, and implement New American navigator positions** within workforce development centers. California, Michigan, and New York have created Navigator positions within their workforce development programs and community college systems. The intent of these positions is to assist all work-authorized immigrants with language barriers, lack of a documented education and employment history, and other obstacles to employment. Navigators establish reciprocal, mutually-beneficial relationships between communities and systems and also act as a recruitment arm for mainstream systems, such as the public workforce system, increasing enrollment and outcomes overall.
- **Invest in digital literacy and inclusion.** Across industries, age groups, and demographics, digital inequity creates substantial barriers to educational attainment, promising careers, and civic engagement. Targeted digital inclusion efforts can ensure access to affordable high speed internet, web-enabled technology, and the training needed to build digital literacy skills and mindsets. For example, the [Digital Navigator model](#) championed by the National Digital Inclusion Alliance can create connective tissue between resources and disconnected communities, all while ensuring cultural sensitivity and understanding.

- Support participation in **virtual adult English language acquisition classes**. More than 1 in 10 frontline workers have limited English language skills. The proportion of English learners is much higher in certain frontline and/or low-wage jobs, such as home health care and meatpacking than it is in high-skill jobs. English proficiency is one of the most powerful steps a worker can take to improve their economic prospects, but at the same time businesses and job training programs rarely invest in these skills as part of their upskilling efforts. Virtual classes assist training providers and employers with established curriculum and provide participants with flexible scheduling. Virtual English classes focused on in-demand career pathways would open **work-based learning opportunities** to the New American community, contributing to the talent pipeline Colorado's economy needs.
- **Incentivize partnerships between local community-based agencies and government partners** to create a network of resources that provide career and educational services. For example, the Cedar Riverside Opportunity Center²⁵ workforce center in the Cedar Riverside neighborhood of Minneapolis serves primarily New Americans, including the largest concentration of East African immigrants in the state. This workforce center is unique because of its vast network of service providers. The center has five core partners: a nonprofit, the county library, the local community college, the county office for workforce development, and the city of Minneapolis. Before the Center, the community had an 18% unemployment rate, double the state average. In the first year of operation, 127 tutoring sessions were offered, 33 library cards were issued, 25 students registered for courses at Minneapolis College, 53 people completed digital literacy courses, and, most importantly, 321 people were placed in jobs. This concentrated effort lowered the neighborhood's unemployment rate into 9.3%. While this rate is still above the statewide average, the interventions mentioned above successfully cut the neighborhood's unemployment rate in half, demonstrating the benefit of such partnerships.

²⁵ <https://emerge-mn.org/cedar-riverside-opportunity-center/>

- **Promote skills-based hiring practices.** In 2020, as part of Governor Polis' Wildly Important Priority to ensure all Coloradans have access to opportunities for quality, life-long education connected to the future of work, CDLE set a goal to increase adoption of skills-based job descriptions/hiring practices from 5% to 10% in organizations within private and public sectors. Skills-based practices benefit employers and workers alike, and offer a unique opportunity for New Americans to apply the knowledge, skills, and abilities they acquired abroad to opportunities in Colorado. For instance, an employer could equate experience in a certain field, such as plumbing, to a plumbing credential.

State efforts to integrate Colorado's New American community must address and respond to opportunities and challenges. Our immigrant community continues to grow and diversify, and in a Colorado that works for all, we need to build systems so that all have opportunities to achieve equitable outcomes. Thoughtful and long-term integration efforts help us, as a state, continue to move towards shared prosperity. Successful integration of immigrants builds communities that are stronger economically and more inclusive socially and culturally – benefiting **all** Coloradans.



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