



COLORADO

Department of
Labor and Employment

Office of New Americans

Annual Report 2021

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A Letter from the Director of the Office of New Americans



From Colorado's welcoming of Afghan Allies following the U.S. military withdrawal in Afghanistan, to the creation of the New Americans Community Advisory Committee and the successful 2021 legislative session, as you will read in this report, 2021 was a historic year for New Americans¹ in Colorado.

In June 2021, following the success of Colorado's New American Initiative, stakeholders advocated, the state legislature passed, and Governor Polis signed HB 21-1150 establishing Colorado's Office of New Americans (ONA). The law placed ONA in the Executive Director's office of the Colorado Department of Labor and Employment.

In June 2022, I was hired as the first Director of Colorado's ONA. As the first director, I want to ensure that the office fully establishes itself in and utilizes all the authority given to it under HB 21-1150. The state legislature intended ONA to support the integration and inclusion of New Americans in communities to help Colorado thrive, to help organize a structure for state agencies and immigrant communities to partner and enhance integration across the state and address any concerns or obstacles they encounter when accessing services, and to serve as a centralized location where state programs, initiatives, and policies focused on economic stability and successful integration for New Americans are housed.

ONA is currently a small but mighty team of two, and I am hoping to grow ONA's staff to continue making progress towards facilitating the integration and inclusion of New Americans into Colorado's economic,

civic and social life. Since June, I have worked to stand up the innovative programs passed by the state legislature in its 2022 legislative session, build relationships, and listen to stakeholders outside of the Denver metro area. While I am saddened by the real struggles that Colorado's New Americans face, I am encouraged by the dedication of community based organizations that serve New Americans, and even more so by the strength and tenacity of New Americans. The same strength and tenacity my parents showed when they immigrated to Colorado decades ago.

Thank you for your interest in this report and the work of the office of New Americans. If you are a partner in this work, and we have not yet met, I cannot wait to hear about the wonderful things you have been doing for New Americans and see what potential work we could do together to advance the integration of New Americans in Colorado.

In closing, I want to thank Kit Taintor, the former Senior Advisor for New American Integration for Governor Polis, whose hard work, innovations, and partnerships are highlighted in this 2021 ONA Annual Report; Joe Barela, Executive Director of CDLE, and Governor Jared Polis for their commitment and dedication to New Americans and for their work in making a Colorado for all.

In partnership,

Dee Daniels Scriven

Director

Office of New Americans

¹ In this report we use the definitions of "Immigrant" or "New American" as it is defined in HB 21-1150 (C.R.S. § 8-3.7-102(2)). "Immigrant" or "New American" means a Coloradan who has arrived, and a person who will arrive, to Colorado as an immigrant or refugee, and includes their children. The population includes: refugees, asylees, special immigrant visa holders, victims of trafficking, recipients of the Federal Deferred Action for Childhood Arrival Program, and all other immigrants and aspiring citizens seeking opportunity, safety, or reunification of family."

Background on New Americans in Colorado

Colorado residents come from all over the country and all over the world. In last year's annual report, which can be found [here](#), we outlined some important demographics pertaining to Colorado's New American population:



One in ten Coloradans,² and one in eight workers in Colorado, is an immigrant;

Over 600,000 Colorado residents (11% of the total) are native-born Americans with at least one immigrant parent;

At home, the top languages spoken by Coloradans other than English are:⁵

Spanish 49%

Vietnamese 2.7%

Chinese 2.5%

Russian 2.1%

Korean 2.0%

Over 30% of Colorado immigrants have an advanced degree;

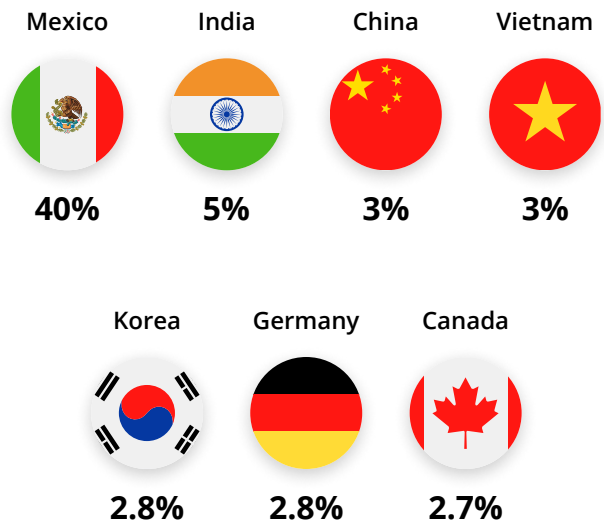
Nearly half of all immigrants in Colorado are naturalized citizens;⁶

Most (77%) immigrants are at least bilingual and report speaking English well or very well;⁷

Over 50% of foreign-born Coloradans entered the U.S. before 2000;⁸

Immigrants contribute \$5 billion in taxes every year, including \$1.5 billion in state and local taxes.⁹

The top countries of origin for Colorado's immigrants^{3,4}



Rather than revisiting the same information as we explored last year, we are going to look at the data a little differently and a little deeper.

² [New American Economy Map the Impact](#)

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

⁵ https://drive.google.com/file/d/1f4cqyneeDpVePWUU6mpMvLwy2k_WnIc/view

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

⁷ https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/sites/default/files/research/immigrants_in_colorado.pdf

⁸ American Community Survey 2019

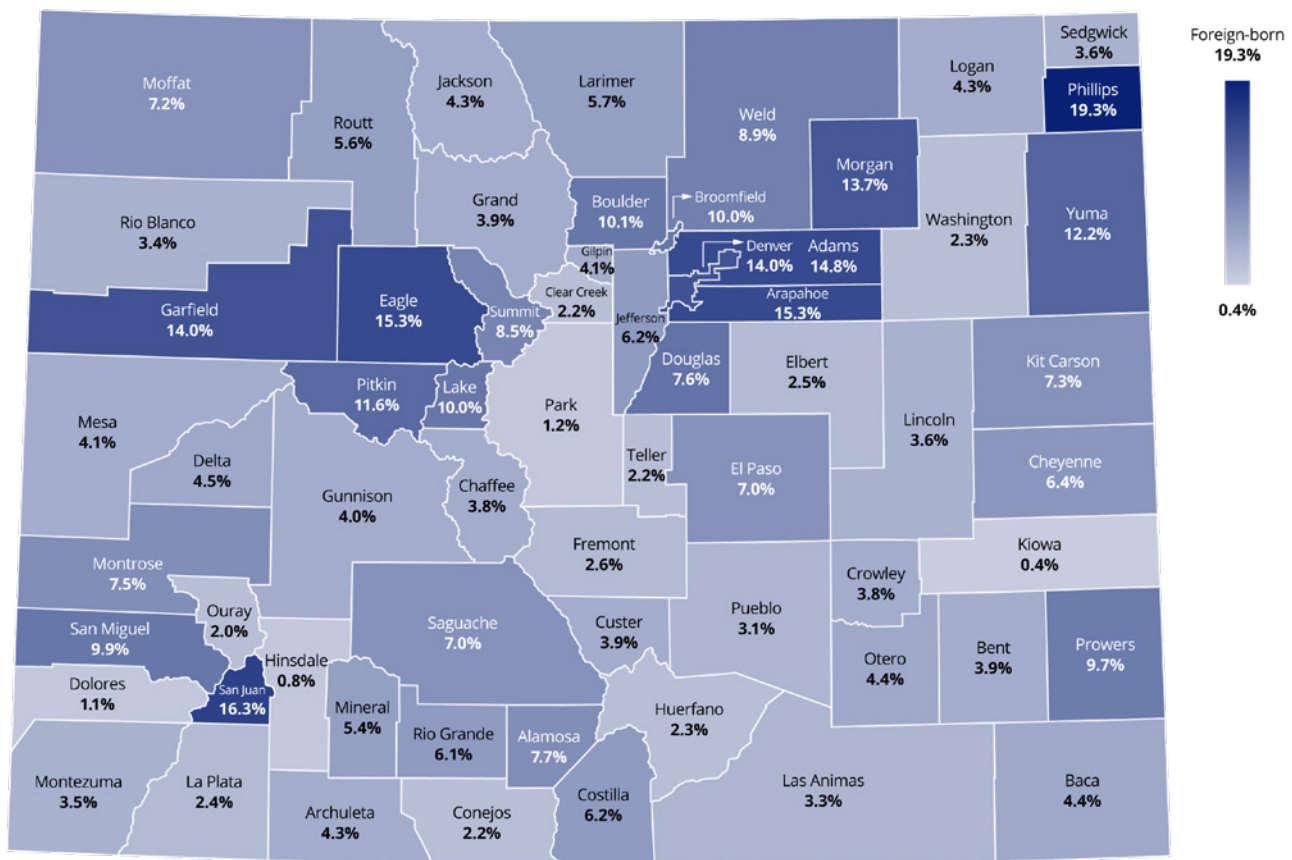
⁹ <https://www.newamericaneconomy.org/locations/colorado/>

Where Do New Americans Live in Colorado?

New Americans live in every community in our state, but there are areas of Colorado that have larger percentages of foreign-born.¹⁰

% of foreign-born population in Colorado counties

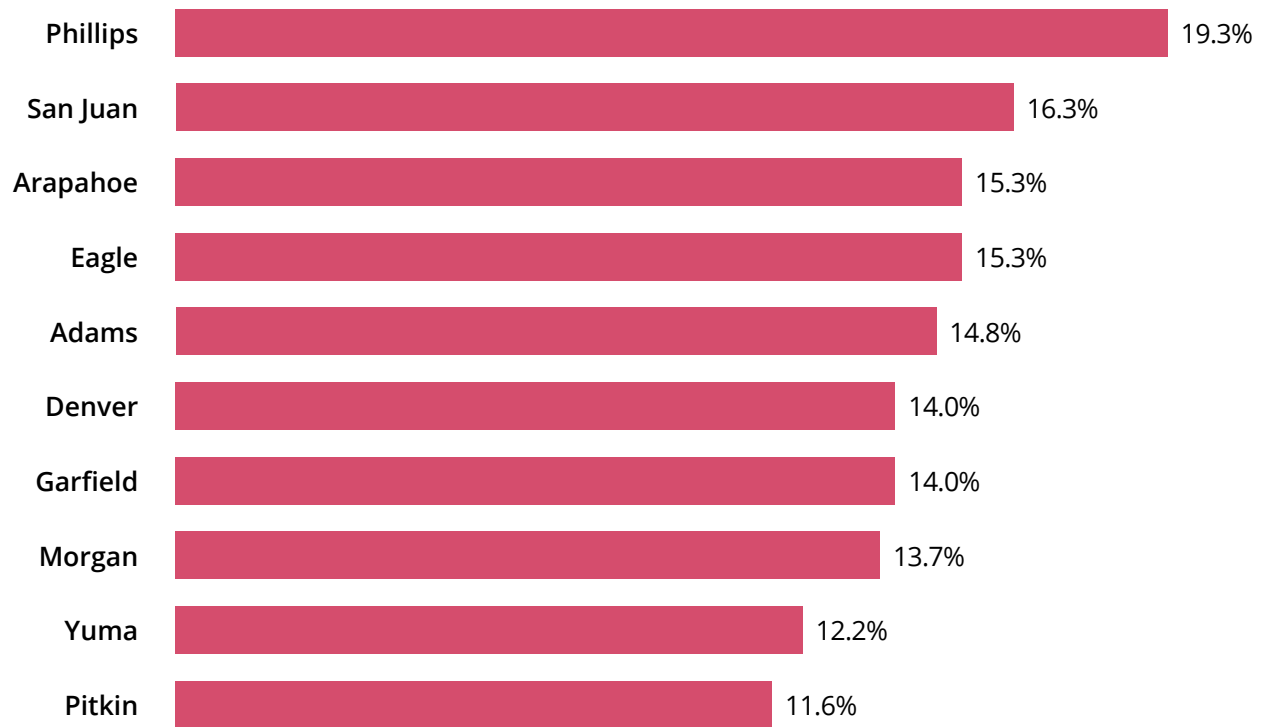
2020 ACS 5-YEAR ESTIMATE



Did you know that, according to the data from the 2020 American Community Survey, used above, Colorado's foreign-born population represents a significant percentage of residents in counties across Colorado? From Phillips County in the northeast, Eagle County in the central mountains and San Juan County in the southwest, this map represents New Americans who are living and contributing in communities across the state.

¹⁰ <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?g=04000000US08%240500000&tid=ACSDP5Y2020.DP02>

Counties with high New American populations



Colorado is state-supervised but counties administer most human and social services, such as food assistance or workforce services. While it is critical to have state leadership, it is also vital for local county and city governments to address barriers to New American integration and inclusion. The city of [Aurora's Office of International & Immigrant Affairs](#) and the city and county of [Denver's Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs](#) are both innovative examples of how local governments have stepped up to help newcomers connect with municipal services and advise internal counterparts and programs on how to ensure equitable access by New American community members on everything from business licenses to parks and recreation. Other local governments that provide

great examples of local innovation for New American integration and inclusion are Adams, Arapahoe/Douglas, Denver, Larimer, and Weld counties. Each county has implemented a unique model that dedicates staff to work specifically on integration and access issues for refugees. These trained front-line eligibility workers build skills in ensuring that refugee newcomers access the programs for which they are eligible. While the Denver metro area has three of the top six counties with the largest percentage of foreign born residents and has good examples of local governments helping integrate and include New Americans, an inclusive Colorado would replicate such infrastructure, as is possible, across counties and municipalities.

Spotlight on Eagle County



Immigrants in Eagle County pay almost \$40M in taxes and have \$126M in spending power.¹¹ Many New Americans come to the Roaring Fork Valley for work in the hospitality and tourism industries; the leading industry, according to Vail Valley Economic Development, is accommodation and food services. Eagle County's New American population is primarily Latino and from either Mexico or El Salvador. New Americans from El Salvador are likely to be recipients of Temporary Protected Status, which provides protection from deportation and work authorization but no path to citizenship, while those born in Mexico may have a multitude of other immigration statuses, including DACA. Over half of the New American population in Eagle County has lived in the U.S. for over 20 years and speaks English well or very well. Sixty percent have less than a high school diploma

and more than 95% are of working age.¹² One of our partners, [Voces Unidas de las Montañas](#), works with local government partners and other agencies to ensure a community where Latinas and Latinos are thriving, engaged, and leading; these efforts can assist Eagle County leaders create inclusive and integrated services and programs that serve this rich community.

Interested in your own county community's demographics? Check out the data from Colorado's Department of Local Affairs State Demography Office [here](#). Or visit the U.S. Census Bureau's [American Community Survey \(ACS\)](#)¹³ and The Center for Migration Studies has state and local data (gathered through the 2019 ACS) at <http://data.cmsny.org/state.html>¹⁴ and <http://data.cmsny.org/puma.html>,¹⁵ respectively.



¹¹ <https://data.newamericaneconomy.org/map-the-impact/>

¹² <http://data.cmsny.org/puma.html>

¹³ <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs>

¹⁴ <http://data.cmsny.org/state.html>

¹⁵ <http://data.cmsny.org/puma.html>

How Does Data About Our Immigrant Population Compare to National-level Data?

	United States	Colorado	Percent of total U.S. population in Colorado
Total population <i>(estimates)</i>	329,500,500	5,759,00	1.7%
Immigrant residents	44,788,044	537,334	1.2%
Undocumented immigrants	10,315,559	145,690	1.4%
DACA eligible residents	1,114,709	22,055	1.9%
Number of TPS holders	411,778	3,564	0.8%
	United States	Colorado	Higher or Lower than National Average
Immigrant share of population	13.6%	9.3%	Lower
Foreign-born population share of workers <i>(ages 16–64)</i>	78.7%	83%	Higher
Immigrant entrepreneurs share of immigrant population	9.8%	7.5%	Lower
STEM workers who are immigrants	22.9%	13%	Lower
Nurses who are foreign-born	15.2%	7%	Lower
Share of recent homebuyers who were foreign-born	14.3%	9.8%	Lower
Share of immigrant population eligible to vote	6.6%	4.3%	Lower

While we are New American-rich here in Colorado, and maybe more so than many U.S.-born Coloradans may assume, our New American population is below the national average. Southern border states and states like New Jersey and Virginia have larger New American populations than Colorado, and there is much to be learned from such states in terms of integration. In a way, we are fortunate to have the opportunity to learn from other communities who have succeeded, and sometimes tried and failed, to enhance New American inclusion.

The data above shows us that we have room to improve:

- Colorado has more working-aged immigrants than the national average, but we are not engaging them as effectively as we could in skilled occupations (such as in STEM or healthcare) or in entrepreneurial opportunities.
- Homeownership is often a proxy measure for building intergenerational wealth and providing economic stability. Colorado's percentage of foreign-born homebuyers is below the national average.
- Immigrants may not be linked with legal services that could assist them on the path to citizenship. Not all immigrants have a path, but immigrants may lack access to affordable immigration legal services that could put them on the path to citizenship and its benefits, such as the ability to vote.

States and cities, with larger populations of immigrants have, for example, created and funded initiatives focused on integration, immigration legal services, language access programs, entrepreneurial supports, career navigation, and career-aligned English language programs to help newcomer students succeed in today's workforce. As we seek to improve our New American integration outcomes, the investments other states and communities have made can serve as models and opportunities for us here in Colorado.



How Does Colorado's Immigrant Population Compare to its U.S.-born Population?

Another important indicator we can look at is Colorado's immigrant population compared with its U.S.-born population.

Age group	Foreign-born population share	U.S.-born population share
0-15	4.6%	20.8%
16-64	83%	64.3%
65+	12.4%	15%

A greater percent of the immigrant population is of working age than those that are U.S. born, which is the reason that while one in ten Coloradans is an immigrant, one in eight workers in Colorado is an immigrant.

Other important markers for us to understand include those that show how foreign-born Coloradans fare in terms of economic wellbeing:



Indicators of economic well-being	Foreign-born Coloradans	U.S.-born Coloradans
Median household income	\$65,008	\$78,969
Percent of the population with no health insurance coverage	22%	6%
Percent of the population that pays rent at an amount that is >30% of household income	53%	49%

While more immigrants are of working age than the U.S.-born population, their economic markers indicate lower financial and housing security. Part of this can be attributed to the type of industry U.S.-born and foreign-born workers occupy. For instance, there is a higher percentage of immigrants than U.S.-born Coloradans working in seasonal and lower-paid sectors, rather than higher paying sectors like finance.

Industry	Foreign-born Coloradans	US.-born Coloradans
Agriculture, forestry, fishing, and hunting; mining	2.2%	2.5%
Construction	13.5%	7.2%
Manufacturing	7.8%	6.7%
Wholesale trade	2.4%	2.4%
Retail trade	8.2%	10.1%
Transportation and warehouse; utilities	5.2%	4.7%
Information	2.4%	2.9%
Finance and insurance; real estate; rental and leasing	5.1%	6.9%
Professional, scientific, and management; administrative and waste management services	15.2%	14.9%
Educational services; health care and social assistance	18.2%	22.3%
Arts, entertainment, and recreation; accommodation and food services	11.8%	10%
Other services <i>(except public administration)</i>	5.9%	4.9%
Public administration	2.1%	4.7%

Immigrants' relatively lower economic security can also be explained by differences within industries.

Occupation	Foreign-born Coloradans	US.-born Coloradans
Management, business, science, and arts	34.7%	45.1%
Service	23.6%	16.8%
Sales and office	13%	19.5%
Natural resources, construction, and maintenance	14.7%	8.8%
Production, transportation, and material moving	13.9%	9.8%

More immigrants work in occupations with lower wages such as service (e.g., food, accommodations, etc.) than in management and business, occupations that normally pay a higher wage. This difference can be explained in part by the difference in educational levels.

Education Levels	Foreign-born Coloradans	US.-born Coloradans
Less than high school diploma	26.6%	7.6%
High school graduate <i>(includes equivalency)</i>	22.1%	21%
Some college or associate's degree	19%	28.7%
Bachelor's degree	18.1%	26.6%
Graduate or professional degree	14.3%	16%

Immigrant Coloradans are less likely than their U.S.-born peers to have a high school diploma, but the gap between the two groups is much smaller for advanced degrees. Immigrants, uniquely, fill workforce gaps at both low and high wage occupations, so while some of the disparities between the groups can be attributed to educational attainment, others, such as the very large

difference in health insurance coverage,¹⁶ may be a result of other factors, including that immigrants with professional degrees work in gig-economy jobs without benefits, and cannot enter higher paying jobs that are commensurate with their education since employers and credentialing bodies struggle to recognize their degrees and skill sets.

2019 Data	U.S.-born Coloradans	Foreign-born Coloradans	Noncitizen Coloradans	Unauthorized population Coloradans ¹⁷
No health insurance	6.5%	22.4%	35.2%	59%



¹⁶ <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/data/state-profiles/state/income/CO>

¹⁷ <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/data/unauthorized-immigrant-population/state/CO#healthinsurance>

Why is Immigrant Integration Important for Colorado's Future Prosperity?

There are many reasons, but in the interest of brevity, here are three:

Colorado is aging faster than most states

Colorado is one of the fastest aging states in the country, and our State Demography Office projects that Coloradans over the age of sixty will outnumber those age 18 and younger as soon as 2023. This demographic shift is a first, but it will become our new normal as generations of Coloradans continue to live long lives. As Colorado continues to grow proportionally older due to decreased birth rates and advances in public health and health care, our state will need to boldly address the unique opportunities and distinct challenges that accompany an aging population.

One of those challenges is ensuring that older Coloradans have access to the care they need, whether they choose to age in place or live in a retirement community. Immigrants, whether noncitizens or naturalized citizens, already comprise 16% of the direct care workforce.¹⁸

The Colorado Health Institute estimates that “1.2 million Coloradans will be over the age of 65 in 2030, roughly a 50% increase from 2018. A majority (about 70%) will likely need some level of support from family members, friends, and/or direct care workers at some point in their lives.”¹⁹ Integrating immigrants into these workforce opportunities and creating career pathways within them will continue to be key to Colorado's future.

In addition, as U.S.-born Coloradans age, Colorado will increasingly rely on its New American population in every sector of the workforce. In 2021, an estimated 12% (360,500) of all workers in Colorado were

foreign-born. Additionally, Colorado's immigrants have a higher labor force participation rate than the total population, 70.2% versus 60.8%, and a lower unemployment rate. Finally since 2010, immigrant workers in Colorado have increased by 25% (over 73,000 individuals). Therefore integrating immigrants into a diverse range of occupations such as finance or office administration or in industries such as healthcare and education will be vital to keep our economy healthy. This type of integration requires the workforce system and employers to adapt.



¹⁸ <https://phinational.org/policy-research/workforce-data-center/#var=Citizenship&states=08>

¹⁹ <https://hcpf.colorado.gov/sites/hcpf/files/Closing%20the%20Care%20Gap-June%202020.pdf>

Colorado is growing and diversifying

The 2020 Census showed that Colorado's population increased by 14.8% since 2010, placing it in the top ten states in terms of population growth. Colorado's population also diversified. The white, non-Hispanic population is projected to decrease from an estimated 66.9% of the population in 2020 to 58.5% by 2040. Individuals identifying as Hispanic are forecasted to grow from 23.9% to 30.5% from 2020 to 2040. The second fastest growing group will be those who identify as Asian American or Pacific Islander (AAPI). Overall, the "minority" population share is projected to increase by 8.2% between 2020 and 2040, from 33.1% to 41.5%. Colorado is not alone in its diversification; across the U.S., states and local communities are experiencing similar demographic shifts.

Many immigrants may also be members of "minority" communities, but while they are part of the demographic change, they are not the single

contributing factor. For instance, more people moved to Colorado in the last decade (over 700,000) than the entire population of immigrants in the state. The diversification of Coloradans, both now and in the future, will require increased representation by minorities in many of our industry and occupational sectors. For instance, health outcomes are worse for many Coloradans from black and brown communities. Racial discordance between patients and physicians predicts worse quality of care, as compared to racial concordance,²⁰ and immigrant healthcare professionals can help address this challenge. For businesses, the customer base is changing, and staff who represent diverse communities can assist in ensuring that businesses retain, and grow, their customers. Integrating immigrants into our workforce now has ample value for Coloradans and the business community alike.

Immigrant-owned small businesses are the backbone of a healthy economy

According to the Small Business Administration, "[s]mall businesses are the lifeblood of the U.S. economy: they create two-thirds of net new jobs and drive U.S. innovation and competitiveness. A (2019) [report](#) shows that they account for 44 percent of U.S. economic activity." The Harvard Business Review notes that "a 2012 [study](#) found that immigrants were more likely to start businesses than members of the native population in most of the 69 countries surveyed. In the United States, where 13.7% of the population is foreign-born, immigrants represent 20.2% of the self-employed workforce and 25% of startup founders. Additionally, according to a [2018 study](#) by the National Foundation

for American Policy, immigrants founded or co-founded 55% of the United States' billion-dollar companies — so-called unicorns." Some of this can be attributed to the fact that immigrants are more likely to start businesses because they are determined, hardworking and have a high risk tolerance, as evidenced by the fact that they emigrated in the first place. Other aspects of this include that entrepreneurship can provide immigrants with opportunities for upward mobility faster than other employment paths. Integrating immigrants into our economy through entrepreneurial pathways has big pay-offs in terms of economic prosperity, job growth and innovation - all things that serve Colorado at large.

20 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5591056/>

The Polis Administration's New American Integration Efforts

Governor Jared Polis recognizes the importance of New Americans to our community and the mutual benefits which can be found through integration and inclusion. He announced the New American Initiative in November 2019, the first of its kind in the State of Colorado, and the legislature carried forward this work through House Bill 21-1150 (Rep. I. Jodeh/Sen. J. Gonzales), which created the Office of New Americans (ONA) in the Colorado Department of Labor and Employment. Colorado joins more than a dozen states in the creation of an Office. ONA's mission 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. Currently, ONA sits at the intersection of policy development and implementation, and the legislation ensures that ONA leadership continues to advise the Governor and his team on New Americans and New American integration issues.



Legislative Achievements

The 2021 legislative session saw an impressive slate of immigrant-focused bills introduced, and passed, by the Colorado legislature and signed by Governor Polis. Local media, such as [Colorado Newsline](#) and the [Denver Post](#), as well as national media acknowledged the historic session.

2021 General Session - Notable Immigrant-inclusive Bills (in ascending numerical order)

- **Senate Bill 21-009**

Sen. S. Jaquez Lewis and Rep. Y. Caraveo

Through the creation of a new program, Coloradans, including those without documentation, will have access to contraception and counseling services so that they may plan what is best for themselves and their families.

- **Senate Bill 21-077**

Sen. J. Gonzales and Reps. A. Benevidez, C. Kipp

Immigration status will no longer be an eligibility requirement for state and local licenses, certificates or registration. Examples of this include occupational licenses, like Certified Nursing Assistants, or municipal business licenses. This change affects all Coloradans without lawful presence, including those with work authorization such as DACA recipients.

- **Senate Bill 21-087**

Sens. J. Danielson and D. Moreno and Reps. K. McCormick and Y. Caraveo

This bill expanded agricultural workers' rights, regardless of someone's immigration status, by bringing agricultural workers under the same protections many other workers enjoy - minimum wage guarantees, overtime pay, meal breaks, rest breaks, and the right to organize, have visitors at employee housing, and access overwork and health protections.

- **Senate Bill 21-131**

Sen. J. Gonzales and Rep. Gonzales-Gutierrez

To ensure the data privacy of applicants to state programs and services, including drivers licenses, state agencies cannot disclose personal identifying information for the purpose of immigration enforcement, unless required by law or a court-issued subpoena, warrant, or order. State agencies must obtain certifications before providing access to shared databases, must limit collection of information on immigration status to only that which is necessary, and must submit regular reports to ensure their compliance with the new law.

- **House Bill 21-199**

Sens. S. Jaquez Lewis, F. Winter and Reps. D. Esgar, S. Gonzales-Gutierrez

In order to create equity in opportunities, effective July 1, 2022, lawful presence will no longer be a requirement for state and local public benefits, where permitted under federal law. This expands access beyond what becomes available under SB 21-077 and HB 21-1054.

- **Senate Bill 21-233**

Sens. R. Rodriguez and C. Hansen; Reps. A. Benavidez, S. Gonzales-Gutierrez

Many immigrants without lawful presence are ineligible for unemployment assistance due solely to their immigration status. This bill facilitates a study to help understand what inclusion in unemployment benefits for undocumented Coloradans could look like in our state.

- **House Bill 21-1054**

Sen. J. Gonzales and Rep. D. Jackson

This bill ensures that those without lawful presence in the United States can access state and local housing assistance. While some housing programs may have federal eligibility requirements that require certain types of immigration status, undocumented individuals and families will have increased access to housing stability resources.

- **House Bill 21-1057**

Sens. R. Rodriguez, J. Cooke;

Reps. K. Tipper, D. Roberts

Current law states that it is criminal to threaten to report another person's immigration status in order to steal money or valuables. This 2021 law adds that it is criminal to threaten to report someone's immigration status in order to make someone do something (or not do something).

- **House Bill 21-1060**

Sen. J. Gonzales and Reps. S. Gonzales-Gutierrez and I. Jodeh

The "U visa" provides a pathway under federal immigration law towards lawful permanent residency for immigrant victims of certain crimes. Eligible applicants must have a certification form from law enforcement stating that the person has been a victim and is or has been helpful in the investigation or prosecution of the crime. This bill will ensure that all law enforcement agencies complete the certification within a specific timeline, and it also outlines factors that can be considered, protects personal information from immigration authorities, and ensures law enforcement tells victims about the U visa.

- **House Bill 21-1075**

Sen. J. Gonzales and Rep. S. Lontine

Words matter. This bill eliminates the use of the term illegal alien in contracts for services and replaces it with "worker without authorization."

- **House Bill 21-1150**

Sen. J. Gonzales and Rep. I. Jodeh

The creation of a Colorado Office of New Americans in the Department of Labor and Employment ensures New American-related issues can be elevated to and addressed by the state government. The bill creates a New Americans Community Advisory Committee and envisions investment into community based organization infrastructure to ensure equitable access for New Americans to opportunities.

- **House Bill 21-1194**

Sen. D. Moreno and Reps. K. Tipper, N. Ricks

An immigration legal defense fund will expand the availability of free legal services and representation to low-income individuals in immigration proceedings, with a priority on those in immigration detention and those experiencing deportation in rural areas of the state. ONA will award grants through this fund to nonprofit organizations in Colorado to provide this free legal advice, counseling, and representation.

- **House Bill 21-1313**

Sen. J. Gonzales, Reps. A. Benavidez and S. Gonzales Gutierrez

This bill allows the office of the child protection ombudsman to initiate investigations on behalf of unaccompanied immigrant children who are housed in state-licensed residential child care facilities, and, in connection therewith, making an appropriation.



National Advocacy and an Innovative Partnership to Welcome Afghan Allies

In May 2021, following the announcement of the U.S. military withdrawal from Afghanistan, Governor Polis sent a letter to President Biden declaring Colorado's readiness to partner with the U.S. government to ensure the safety of all Afghans who helped our military in Afghanistan.

Additionally, shortly after the fall of Kabul in August 2021, Governor Polis wrote again to President Biden and the Secretary of the U.S. Department of State encouraging the administration to consider all options to bring Afghans who supported the U.S.

military to safety, and to let them know that Colorado stood ready to assist in the evacuation process.

In September 2021, Governor Polis, in partnership with the fiscal sponsor Rose Community Foundation, announced the Colorado Afghan Evacuee Support Fund ("Fund") inviting companies, foundations and individual donors to contribute to the Fund to ensure that Colorado was prepared to welcome Afghan evacuees. The Fund raised \$1.14 million to support mental health, legal services, and resettlement agencies assistance to Afghan evacuees.



Priority Projects of the New American Initiative/Office of New Americans

Beyond a historic legislative session, the New American Initiative (subsequently changed to the Office of New Americans or ONA) also shepherded a number of other achievements including:

Welcoming Afghan Evacuees through Operation Allies Welcome

In August 2021, upon watching the U.S. military withdrawal from Afghanistan, the ensuing fall of Kabul, and the hundreds of Afghans who were attempting to evacuate, ONA identified the need for an expanded state response. This was a historic effort that required a historic response and ONA's ability to convene state agencies and community partners was critical to the mission. ONA brought together all relevant state agencies and programs to assist in welcoming efforts, bringing new partners and partnerships to the table. State funds were utilized for housing assistance, and work with local partners, such as workforce centers, ensured that employability services were available for eligible Afghans.

To manage this initiative and others, in collaboration with the Governor's office, ONA stood up the Unified Command Group (UCG) in support of refugee resettlement agencies and the federal government in order to ensure the same level of welcome, to the extent possible, for all Afghan evacuees, regardless of their immigration status.

The UCG group was a partnership between these three main agencies: the Office of New Americans, the Office of Emergency Management, and the Colorado Refugee Services Program.



Office of New Americans	Colorado Refugee Services Program	Division of Homeland Security & Emergency Management
CDLE/Gov	CDHS	CDPS
Colorado immigrants and refugees, regardless of status	Office of Refugee Resettlement (federal) eligible populations	Coloradans facing emergency needs
Policy development, refinement, and implementation	Coordination of resettlement infrastructure	Coordination of short-term assistance
Cross-agency coordination	Primary partner to resettlement infrastructure in CO and funder of resettlement services	Coordination of Colorado Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (COVAD)
Partners with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, the White House, and other federal partners depending on issue areas	Partners with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Refugee Resettlement and the U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration	Partners with FEMA (and other national agencies)

The UCG met weekly and focused on short term housing, cash assistance, food stability for Afghan humanitarian parolees,²¹ health response to care for the physical and mental health needs of Afghan evacuees, and longer-term housing aimed at stability. Colorado's approach was multisectoral, coordinated, collaborative and agile.



Multisectorial

We bring together experts in areas across sectors, to include workforce and health, in order to respond to whole community needs, because we know Colorado has the expertise we need.



Coordinated

We coordinate across sectors and partners, in order to ensure efficiency and elegance in our ability to welcome and integrate newcomers, because we value the contributions newcomers bring.



Collaborative

We collaborate with partners in order to draw upon existing expertise in our community and agencies, because we know that each partner brings vital and unique abilities.

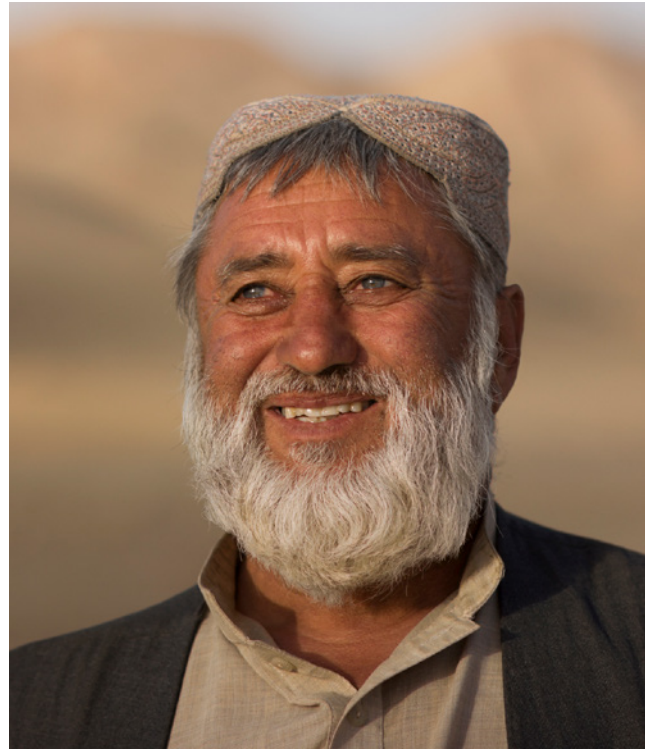


Agile

We remain agile in a dynamic and changing environment, in order to shift as needed as information changes, because we know adaptability is key.

²¹ Until September 30, 2021, Afghan humanitarian parolees were ineligible for mainstream and Office of Refugee Resettlement benefits until Congress passed the Afghanistan Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2022.

Colorado was one of a handful of states that set up a transitional and temporary housing site to serve newcomers effectively and efficiently by offering a safe space for Afghans to begin their integration process. The housing site eased the stress on local resettlement agencies (LRAs) and other partners welcoming hundreds of individuals, allowing service providers to focus their efforts, skills, and expertise on other priorities, such as long-term housing security, linkages to schools, healthcare, job-training opportunities and employment. LRAs were lead partners to Afghans, responsible for the same services they typically provide, including case management and cultural orientation, but the state housing site reduced redundancies in the traditional resettlement model by providing short-term transitional housing and centralizing resettlement agency services, as appropriate, at a single site. The site also facilitated the ability of additional partners, such as other nonprofit organizations who serve refugees with an opportunity to assist in the effort.



Expanding Workforce and Economic Opportunities

Immigrant Skills Recognition

Colorado has about 2,000 foreign trained healthcare professionals, according to the Migration Policy Institute, and we know, at least anecdotally, that they are underemployed and often not even working in the healthcare field. In the spring of 2021, with ONA's support, the Governor and 13 state legislators asked the Department of Regulatory Agencies' (DORA) Nurse Physician Advisory Task Force for Colorado Healthcare (NPATCH) to identify ways in which Colorado could improve the ability of international medical school graduates to gain licensure. NPATCH is a healthcare policy task force that is housed in DORA's Division of Professions and Occupations (DPO) and was created in 2009. This existing commission, alongside the ONA and staff from DPO, created recommendations for consideration.

The recommendations can be found [here](#). National groups, such as World Education Service and the International Rescue Committee, have highlighted the work of NPATCH, such as through the [States Lay the Foundation: Refugee and Immigrant Workforce Inclusion Legislative Summit](#).



Building capacity to understand the challenges through data

Colorado also became the first known state to be able to understand immigrants' engagement with our public workforce system. [Workforce Centers](#) across the state link job-seekers with services, such as resume writing, career training, and linkages to apprenticeships. Yet, these services are often underutilized. [Connecting Colorado](#), the state's database for workforce centers and job seekers, collects information on participants and outcomes, including demographic markers such as zip code. CDLE and ONA added a self-identifier marker to understand whether immigrants were participants and to set a goal to increase that number by 10% in state fiscal year 2022. CDLE and ONA envision that the population served by workforce programs reflect the population of the state and the achievement of equitable outcomes. Building the ability to collect such information and set baselines are important first steps towards improvement.

Supporting front-line staff and communities

In order to collectively achieve the goal to increase the number of New Americans engaged with the workforce system, ONA worked closely with the [Immigrant and Refugee Center of Northern Colorado](#) and [Employment Services of Weld County](#) to develop the first [New Americans Workforce Toolkit](#). This toolkit responds to identified needs from frontline workforce center staff and provides information that supports their desire to work with New Americans in their communities. Some workforce centers have since made the associated training available (or even mandatory!) for staff, helping Colorado collectively move towards a more inclusive workforce system.

Establishing the New Americans Community Advisory Committee

Prior to the passage of the HB 21-1150, upon the request of the New American Initiative (ONA's predecessor) the Colorado State University's Office of Engagement and Extension and Department of Ethnic Studies researched similar committees throughout the U.S. Canada, and Australia and developed a white paper entitled, "A Community Advisory Committee on New American Integration for the State of Colorado: Research and Recommendations" that was presented to state leaders and CSU administrators in January 2021.

Based on recommendations from the white paper, the state legislature passed HB 21-1150 mandating ONA to establish and work with a New American Community Advisory Committee (NACAC) that can provide input on state programs and policies from Colorado's New American communities.

ONA continued to adopt best practices that were outlined in the white paper, and through CSU, hired a Program Administrator to initiate a statewide recruitment process for NACAC members. Over 40 interviews were conducted and 22 members were selected to serve on the first NACAC. Special consideration was given to ensure NACAC membership reflected a diverse cross-section of Colorado's New American communities with members expressing diversity in terms of ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, age, immigration status, and geographic location within Colorado. The NACAC launched its first meeting on December 7, 2021 and the committee convenes virtually every first Tuesday of the month.



Understanding New Americans' Ability to Access State Programs

In order to understand whether New Americans are able to access state programs, ONA partnered with Kone Consulting to identify and recommend changes to state program access points to facilitate New Americans' ability to benefit from programs for which they are eligible. The study focused on state government programs that aim to meet basic needs (e.g., food, benefits, housing, unemployment insurance) and provide economic opportunities (e.g., career services, job training programs) for newcomers. The specific state programs included the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Colorado Works (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Colorado Childcare Assistance Program (CCAP), Unemployment Insurance, Workforce Centers, Housing Choice Vouchers (HCV or Section 8), and the Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP).

Through key informant interviews, mystery shoppers, focus groups and surveys of county agencies and community based organizations, Kone Consulting

described their overall assessment in the final report [New Americans Initiative Safety Net Research](#). They produced program specific [recommendations](#) and formulated four key recommendations which should drive state agencies' approach to New Americans:

- New Americans engage and access information from trusted community leaders and organizations;
- A one-door portal for applications or information (online and/or by phone) with multi-lingual support would create an accessible, seamless experience;
- Digital skills training with a financial stipend is needed to support equitable digital access for New Americans;
- State inter-agency collaboration through the Office of New Americans is essential for pulling and leveraging resources to meet the needs of New Americans.



Thank You to Our Partners

Thank you to the many partners of the New American Initiative, in both the public and private sectors, for valuing and advocating for the establishment of Colorado's Office of New Americans.

Thank you to community based organizations, service providers and advocates who continue to make Colorado a more welcoming place, a Colorado for all.

Finally, a special thank you to Colorado's New Americans for continuing to contribute to the civic, economic, social and cultural fabric of Colorado; Colorado is a better state because of you.





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