



The Office of  
**New Americans**

# Office of New Americans

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## Annual Report 2023



Contents

<b>A Letter from the Director of the Office of New Americans</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The Importance of Immigrant Integration for Colorado’s Future Prosperity</b>	<b>5</b>
Why is Immigrant Integration Important for Colorado’s Future Prosperity? . . . . .	6
Where Do New Americans Live in Colorado? . . . . .	12
<b>The Polis Administration’s New American Integration Efforts</b>	<b>15</b>
2023 Legislative Session - Notable Bills . . . . .	16
National Advocacy . . . . .	18
<b>Priority Initiatives of the Office of New Americans</b>	<b>19</b>
Standing up the Office of New Americans . . . . .	19
Welcoming and Helping Newly Arrived Migrants Integrate . . . . .	20
Rural Partnerships . . . . .	22
ONA’s Inaugural State Integration Plan . . . . .	23
Solidifying the New Americans Community Advisory Committee . . . . .	26
Ensuring State Agencies Removed Barriers to Certain Public Opportunities . . . . .	28
Fighting Brain Waste and Coaching Employers on Engaging New American Talent . . . . .	29
<b>Legislated Programs Administered by ONA</b>	<b>30</b>
Benefit Recovery Fund . . . . .	30
Global Talent Task Force . . . . .	30
Virtual Career-Aligned English as a Second Language Program . . . . .	30
Immigration Legal Defense Fund . . . . .	31
<b>Thank You to Our Partners</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>Appendix A</b>	<b>33</b>
How Does Colorado’s Immigrant Demographics Compare to National-level Data? . . . . .	33
Spotlight on Garfield County . . . . .	34



A Letter from the Director  
of the Office of New Americans

Thank you for your interest in the work of the Office of New Americans (ONA). What a year it has been! After being hired in June 2022, as the second member of ONA’s team, we had a big to-do list: establishing a new office, learning departmental and Governor’s Office processes and procedures, conducting listening sessions statewide, launching legislated programs, hiring new staff, building new relationships, and more.

While ONA was setting up, Colorado continued to welcome immigrants and refugees to the state. In SFY 22-23, Colorado, through the Colorado Refugee Services Program served nearly 4000 Afghans, 1,000 Ukrainian humanitarian parolees, 2000 Cubans and 700 individuals from the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Then in early December 2022, Colorado experienced a historic influx of new arrivals from the southern border, mainly individuals and families from Venezuela. The State of Colorado partnered with the City and County of Denver and during SFY 22-23, Colorado directed over \$10.5 million to help Denver address the needs of our newest arrivals. The state also provided emergency management technical assistance, intake support, culturally and linguistically appropriate navigators, and for those individuals and families that wanted to call Colorado home, integration assistance through culturally and linguistically appropriate community based organizations to help individuals and families transition out of emergency housing and into more permanent housing. While

not all new arrivals called Colorado home, through the end of the SFY, we welcomed over 12,000 individuals and families.

From our newest arrivals to those New Americans<sup>1</sup> who have lived in Colorado for decades, I am even more convinced that not only do New Americans contribute greatly to the backbone of Colorado’s economy, but also to the vibrancy of Colorado’s social life.

Looking forward, I have big plans for ONA and sincerely hope that we can make a positive impact for New Americans statewide; my concern is whether we will have the capacity to meet the needs that we currently see in front of us. This SFY, Governor Polis is the vice-chair of the National Governors Association and he is co-leading a bipartisan committee on immigration. While Congress and the federal government dictate federal immigration policy, states and localities feel the consequences of those policies. I am hopeful that this bi-partisan group of Governors can coalesce on substantive immigration principles and initiatives, and advocate for common sense reforms.

ONA is especially concerned with New Americans who do not have legal status, those who have been here for decades, and those new arrivals who have not yet had time to build community support or connections. While we have invested in our community based organizations to welcome new arrivals, there is continued work to be done so that all new arrivals can be welcomed,

<sup>1</sup> HB 21-1150 that established the Office of New Americans, defined “New American” as a Coloradan who has arrived, and a person who will arrive to Colorado as an immigrant or refugee, and includes their children.

# A Letter from the Director of the Office of New Americans (continued)



Photo caption: Left to Right: Luciana Chama, ONA Migrant Integration Manager; Dee Daniels Scriven, ONA Director; Yoli Casas, Executive Director of Vive Wellness; Marielena Suarez, Executive Director of Organizacion Papagayo; Mike Willis, Colorado’s State Emergency Management Director; Noah McCord, CO Emergency Management Outreach Specialist, at ONA’s First Anniversary Celebration.

received and launched with the advice, assistance and resources that they need to access opportunity and well-being as members of our communities.

This past summer, we celebrated the Office of New American’s first anniversary. ONA created its first HERO awards and bestowed them upon Yoli Casas of Vive Wellness and Marielena Suarez of Organización Papagayo. We wanted to recognize them for going above and beyond the normal course of business to serve Colorado’s newest arrivals. At the state, we understand that the work happens on the ground through our partners. So to all of our partners who are working to advance the integration and inclusion of New Americans across Colorado - thank you.

In closing, I want to thank Governor Jared Polis, Joe Barela, Executive Director of CDLE, and the General Assembly for their commitment and dedication to New Americans. I also want to thank ONA’s team for their dedication and work to stand up a new office and programs to ensure the inclusion and integration of Colorado’s New Americans.

In partnership,

Dee Daniels Scriven  
Director  
Office of New Americans

# The Importance of Immigrant Integration for Colorado’s Future Prosperity

Colorado residents come from all over the country and all over the world. Below are some important demographics pertaining to Colorado’s New American population:

One in nine Coloradans,<sup>2</sup> and one in eight workers in Colorado, is an immigrant;

At home, the top languages spoken by Coloradans other than English are:<sup>3</sup>

Spanish	49%
Vietnamese	2.7%
Chinese	2.5%
Russian	2.1%
Korean	2.0%

Over 30% of Colorado immigrants have an advanced degree (16.8% with bachelor’s degrees and 13.4% with a graduate or professional degree);








Nearly half of all immigrants in Colorado are naturalized citizens;<sup>4</sup>

Most immigrants (77%) are at least bilingual and report speaking English well or very well;<sup>5</sup>

Over 50% of foreign-born Coloradans entered the U.S. before 2000;<sup>6</sup>

Immigrants contribute \$5 billion in taxes every year, including \$1.5 billion in state and local taxes.<sup>7</sup>

The top countries of origin for Colorado’s immigrants<sup>9</sup> include:<sup>10</sup>

	Mexico	40%
	India	5%
	China	3%
	Vietnam	3%
	Korea	2.8%
	Germany	2.8%
	Canada	2.7%

Additionally, Colorado’s New Americans live in and contribute to every community in our state.<sup>8</sup>

2 [New American Economy Map the Impact.](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1f4cqyynneeDpVePWUU6mpMvLwy2k_Wnnc/view)  
3 [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1f4cqyynneeDpVePWUU6mpMvLwy2k\\_Wnnc/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1f4cqyynneeDpVePWUU6mpMvLwy2k_Wnnc/view)  
4 [https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/sites/default/files/research/immigrants\\_in\\_colorado.pdf](https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/sites/default/files/research/immigrants_in_colorado.pdf)  
5 [https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/sites/default/files/research/immigrants\\_in\\_colorado.pdf](https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/sites/default/files/research/immigrants_in_colorado.pdf)  
6 <https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST5Y2019.S0502?q=colorado+and+foreign+born&g=040XX00US08>  
7 <https://www.newamericaneconomy.org/locations/colorado/>  
8 <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=0400000US08%240500000&tid=ACSDP5Y2020.DP02>  
9 For much of the data included in the report, the term immigrant includes all foreign-born populations.  
10 [https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/sites/default/files/research/immigrants\\_in\\_colorado.pdf](https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/sites/default/files/research/immigrants_in_colorado.pdf)



# Why is Immigrant Integration Important for Colorado’s Future Prosperity?

The Migration Policy Institute (MPI) defines immigrant integration as “the process of economic mobility and social inclusion for newcomers and their children.” MPI goes on to say that successful integration builds communities that are stronger economically and more inclusive socially and culturally. With immigrants constituting about 10% of Colorado’s population, immigrant integration is critical to Colorado’s current and future prosperity.

In Colorado’s economy, a greater percentage of the immigrant population is of working age than those that are U.S. born, which is the reason that while one in nine Coloradans is an immigrant, one in eight workers in Colorado is an immigrant.

Age Group	Foreign-born Population Share	US.-born Population Share <sup>11</sup>
0-15	4.6%	20.8%
16-64	83%	64.3%
65+	12.4%	15%

11 All data in this table is cited from: <https://map.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/locations/colorado/>

Other important markers for us to understand include those that show how foreign-born Coloradans fare in terms of economic well-being. While more immigrants are of working age than the U.S.-born population, their economic indicators of well-being point to a higher cost of living; one reason being due to an increased dependence on the rental market.

Indicators of economic well-being	Foreign-born Coloradans	US.-born Coloradans <sup>12</sup>
Median household income	\$62,776	\$65,358
Home ownership rate	53.6%	66.3%

12 All data in this table is cited from: [https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST5Y2020.S0501?q=colorado+u.s.+born&g=040XX00US08\\$0500000](https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST5Y2020.S0501?q=colorado+u.s.+born&g=040XX00US08$0500000)

Additionally, the wide disparity in health insurance coverage also significantly impacts immigrants’ economic well-being, as it points to increased out of pocket expenses. This indicator, together with a lower rate of homeownership, point to a reduced level of economic well-being for Colorado’s immigrants.

2021 Data	U.S.-born Coloradans	Foreign-born Coloradans	Noncitizen Coloradans <sup>13</sup>	Unauthorized population Coloradans <sup>14</sup>
No health insurance	6.0%	25.6%	40.8%	59%

13 All data in this table (except the unauthorized population column) is cited from: <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/data/state-profiles/state/income/CO>  
14 <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/data/authorized-immigrant-population/state/CO#healthinsurance>





There is a higher percentage of immigrants working in seasonal and lower-paid sectors, rather than higher paying sectors like finance or health care. However, Colorado’s immigrants are not a monolith, as shown by the high percentage of immigrants working in the professional, scientific and management industry.

Industry	Foreign-born Coloradans	US.-born Coloradans <sup>15</sup>
Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting; mining	2.5%	2.2%
Construction	14.7%	7.2%
Manufacturing	9.2%	6.5%
Wholesale trade	2.2%	2.4%
Retail trade	7.9%	10.9%
Transportation and warehousing; utilities	4.8%	4.8%
Information	2.1%	2.8%
Finance and insurance; real estate; rental and leasing	4.8%	7.4%
Professional, scientific, and management; administrative and waste management services	14.7%	14.2%
Educational services; health care and social assistance	16.7%	21.8%
Arts, entertainment, and recreation; accommodation and food services	12.7%	10.1%
Other services (except public administration)	5.6%	4.8%
Public administration	2.1%	4.9%

15 All data in this table is cited from: [https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST5Y2020.S0501?q=colorado+u.s.+born&g=040XX00US08\\$0500000](https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST5Y2020.S0501?q=colorado+u.s.+born&g=040XX00US08$0500000)

Additionally, more immigrants work in service occupations (e.g., food, hospitality) that pay lower wages than in management and business occupations that normally pay a higher wage.

Occupation	Foreign-born Coloradans	US.-born Coloradans <sup>16</sup>
Management, business, science, and arts occupations	31.5%	45.1%
Service occupations	23.9%	15.5%
Sales and office occupations	13.9%	21.8%
Natural resources, construction, and maintenance occupations	16.7%	8.0%
Production, transportation, and material moving occupations	13.9%	9.5%

16 All data in this table is cited from: [https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST5Y2020.S0501?q=colorado+u.s.+born&g=040XX00US08\\$0500000](https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST5Y2020.S0501?q=colorado+u.s.+born&g=040XX00US08$0500000)

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.

Education Levels	Foreign-born Coloradans	US.-born Coloradans <sup>17</sup>
Less than high school diploma	28.7%	5.1%
High school graduate (includes equivalency)	22.7%	21.0%
Some college or associate's degree	18.5%	30.7%
Bachelor's degree	16.8%	27.3%
Graduate or professional degree	13.4%	15.9% <sup>18</sup>

17 All data in this table is cited from: [https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST5Y2020.S0501?q=colorado+u.s.+born&g=040XX00US08\\$0500000](https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST5Y2020.S0501?q=colorado+u.s.+born&g=040XX00US08$0500000)

18 <https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST5Y2020.S0501>



However, many immigrants with professional degrees work in jobs that are significantly below their skill level and pay grade, such as gig-economy jobs, because employers and credentialing bodies are unable, and struggle to recognize immigrants' credentials or assess their skills. If immigrants are unable to maximize their skills and abilities, the outcomes can be devastating. For example, when internationally trained doctors take jobs in the gig-economy, not only does that specific individual and family not gain the income that they should be attaining, but Colorado misses out on the expertise of an internationally trained doctor during a critical healthcare workforce shortage that we are experiencing.

However, if immigrants are able to maximize their talents and skills and obtain work that corresponds with their training and experience, they are not only able to provide for themselves and their families, but also to contribute to their local communities. Governor Polis supports and recently signed Senate Bills 21-077 and 21-199 for greater reciprocity for international occupational licensing and ensuring that documentation status does not prevent skilled immigrants from achieving certification. Additionally, through SB 22-140, Colorado continues to explore ways to eliminate obstacles and barriers to maximize the talents and skills of Colorado's immigrants. When New Americans win, Colorado wins.

Additionally, from an economic perspective, Colorado needs immigrants. Since 2007, Colorado's birth rate has been declining, and in 2021, annual births were at their lowest level since 1999.<sup>19</sup> Additionally, Colorado's population is aging. Over the past two years, an estimated 66,000 Coloradans in 2021 and 67,000 Coloradans in 2022 turned 65 years old. Due to aging, the death rate has also increased, but due to COVID-19 over the past few years, the numbers have increased more rapidly than previously expected. With the declining birth rate, aging population and increased death rate, Colorado has a labor shortage. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce attributes the labor shortage to early retirements, lack of affordable childcare, and a decrease in net international migration.<sup>20</sup> At the end of SFY 22-23, Colorado had 181,000 job openings and a 68.7% labor participation rate.<sup>21</sup> Even if we just wanted to maintain our current labor force, Colorado needs the skills, talents and readiness that immigrants bring.

Not only does Colorado need immigrants, but we should want the skills that immigrants bring because immigrants drive innovation. A National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) [study](#) published in December 2022, conducted by Berkeley, Harvard, and Stanford economists shows that "immigrants represent 16% of all U.S. investors, but produced 23% of total innovation output, as measured by number of patents, patent citations, and the economic value of these patents."

<sup>19</sup> <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/f622f3746d7649749b103e1e2b018a35>

<sup>20</sup> *Understanding America's Labor Shortage*; Stephanie Ferguson. <https://www.uschamber.com/workforce/understanding-americas-labor-shortage>

<sup>21</sup> <https://airtable.com/appgXwQK3b02J1xmW/shreWVwHho8aByjHG/tbljzBXEwAljlcfft/viwDkQanRPEdevu6t/recuCaD6JenNScP4H>

Additionally, the study found that immigrant inventors have an especially strong impact on the innovation production of their collaborators, these inventors are responsible for 36% of aggregate innovation.

Finally, outside of the economic sector, immigrants make Colorado richer with the diversity they bring. Colorado's immigrants come from scores of countries around the world. They bring their respective heritage, culture, tradition, religion, language, and food with them. When immigrants are welcomed to share these parts of themselves, Colorado grows in its understanding and experience of the world, nations, ethnicities, religions, languages, cuisine, but most importantly, their new neighbors.

In [The Belonging Barometer: The State of Belonging in America](#), Over Zero and the Center for Inclusion and Belonging at the American Immigration Council found that "[l]ocal communities thrive when residents interact with and understand the experience of other residents across identities and differences." Another key finding of the report is that belonging is vital for American society and that when communities are welcoming, individuals feel like they belong, and we all win. If Colorado can welcome and receive immigrants and refugees as our newest Coloradans, our newest neighbors, then we will experience all of the richness that each unique individual and family brings.

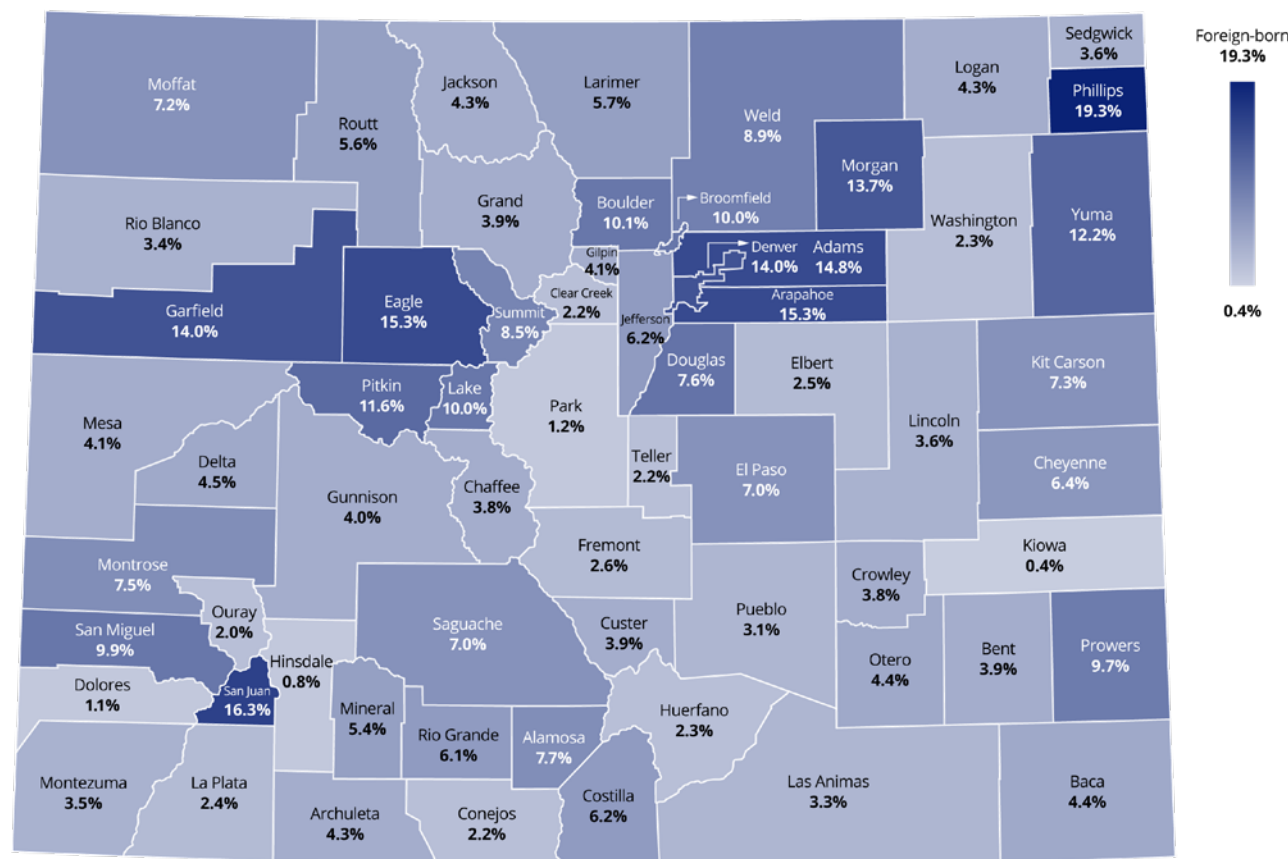




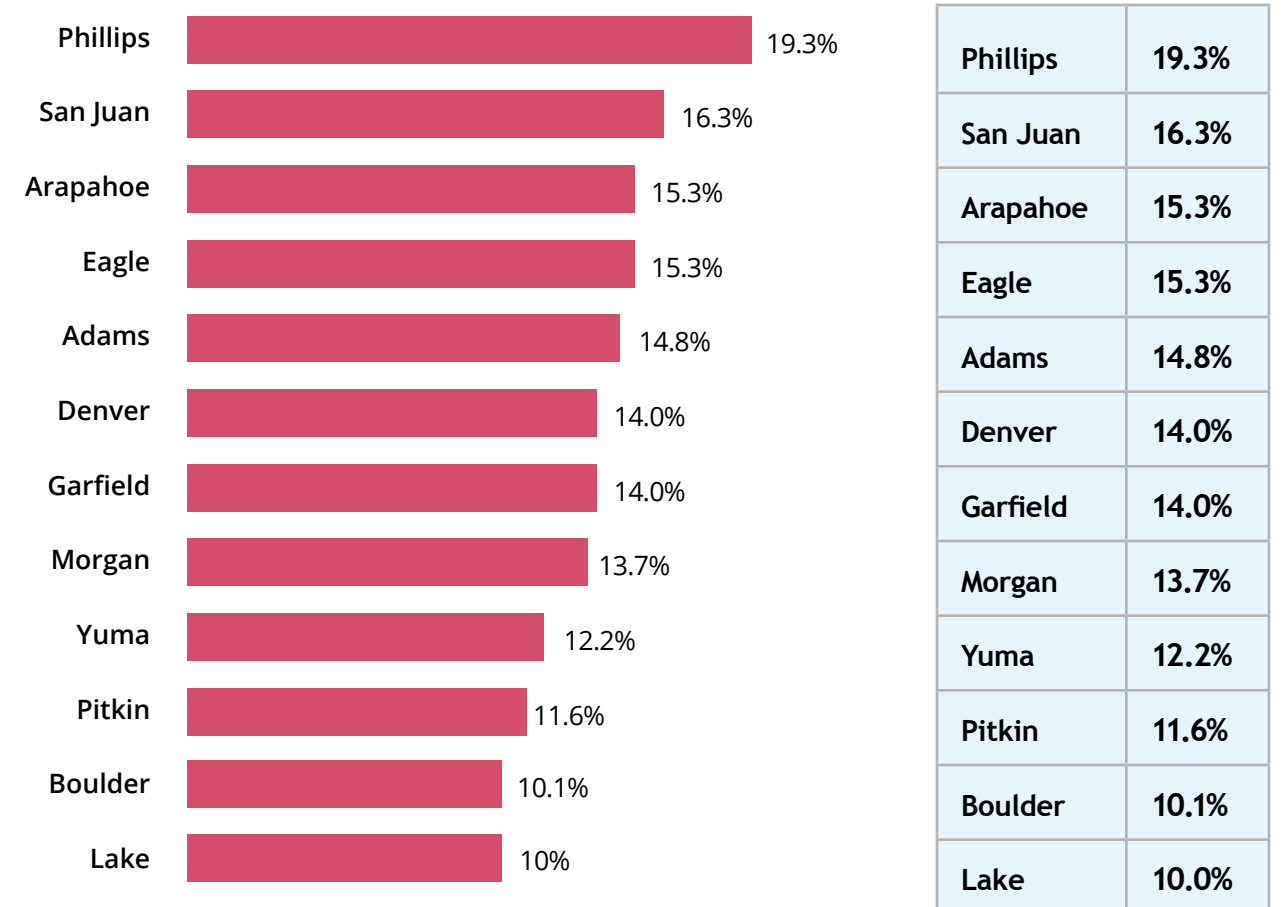
## Where Do New Americans Live in Colorado?

According to the 2020 American Community Survey 5-year estimates, used in the map below, Colorado's foreign-born population represents a significant percentage of residents in many counties across Colorado.

**% of foreign-born population in Colorado counties**  
2020 ACS 5-YEAR ESTIMATE



### Counties with double digit percentages New American populations



Colorado is state-supervised but counties administer most human and social services, such as cash assistance, 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 that New Americans face and work towards New American integration and inclusion. The City and County of Denver and Aurora are great examples of local governments who are working on the integration and inclusion of New Americans. ONA hopes that more cities and counties

will join in the work of helping integrate and include their own community members, New Americans living and contributing to their respective counties across the state, in order to make Colorado, a Colorado for all. To see a spotlight on Garfield County and learn more about how to access county level statistics, [see Appendix A](#). If you are in local government and would like to work on immigrant integration, but do not know where to start, contact ONA at [newamericans@state.co.us](mailto:newamericans@state.co.us).





# 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 their integration and inclusion. The Governor announced the New American Initiative in November 2019, and he signed House Bill 21-1150 (Rep. I. Jodeh/Sen. J. Gonzales), which created ONA. 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 HB 21-1150 ensures that ONA leadership continues to advise the Governor and his team on immigration, New Americans and New American integration into Colorado.



Photo caption: Daniela Campbell is the Digital Coordinator in the Governor’s Office. In Daniela’s words, “[I]t has been a long journey to achieve this milestone, and I can finally call myself an American, after living here for so long, in a place I love and consider home. After a successful presser, the wonderful Communications team surprised me with a party in the Governor’s office. All the flags, all the decorations, the food, all America!” Although Daniela just became a U.S. citizen, she has been a Coloradan for 25 years, and is serving our state. Congratulations Daniela!



# 2023 Legislative Session - Notable Bills

(in ascending numerical order)

The state legislature created and passed, and Governor Polis signed numerous bills that specifically impacted New American families during the SFY 22-23 legislative session.

- **House Bill [23-1004](#)**  
***Language Access in Insurance Documents***  
(Sen. J. Gonzales; Rep. E. Velasco).  
Effective January 1, 2024, this law requires insurers to certify that the English-language policy has been correctly translated by a certified or qualified translator. The law also requires insurers that issue auto, home or rental insurance policies to offer, make available, and issue the policy application, the policy, and related documents and forms in the same language that the insurer used in advertisements, and to offer an applicant a form to select their language of choice for those documents. The law provides specific remedies if the insurer fails to comply.
- **House Bill [23-1117](#)**  
***Affidavit Supporting Eligibility Public Benefits***  
(Sen. J. Gonzales and Sen. N. Hinrichsen; Reps. L. Garcia, I. Jodeh).  
Until this law was signed, Colorado law prohibited a Legal Permanent Resident (LPR) who received public assistance (e.g., TANF, Medicaid) from signing an affidavit of support to sponsor an individual to come to the United States. The former law treated LPRs differently than U.S. citizens who received public benefits, which likely violated the equal protection clause of the Constitution and contributed to family separation. Now LPRs in Colorado do not have to choose between receiving needed assistance and sponsoring a family member or friend to come to the United States.

- **House Bill [23-1100](#)**  
***Restrict Government Involvement in Immigration Detention***  
(Sen. J. Gonzales and S. Jaquez Lewis; Reps. L. Garcia, N. Ricks).  
State and local governments are prohibited from assisting the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) with its detention of immigrants. Local governments with existing detention agreements with ICE must terminate those agreements by January 1, 2024.
- **House Bill [23-1143](#)**  
***Federal Authorize Firearms for DACA Peace Officers***  
(Sen. J. Gonzales and Sen. B. Kirkmeyer; Reps. R. Armagost, C. Kipp).  
This law allows the Peace Officers Standards and Training (P.O.S.T.) Board to create rules around individuals who have either applied for asylum or have received deferred action from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and want to serve as a certified peace officer or reserve peace officer. The law allows every law enforcement agency to amend its written firearms policy to include an eligible immigrant to possess a firearm, as long as the rules comply with federal requirements.

- **House Bill [23-1237](#)**  
***Inclusive Language Emergency Situations***  
(Sen. P. Will and Sen. T. Exum; Rep. E. Velasco).  
By July 1, 2024, the University of Colorado’s Natural Hazards Center (NHC) must study and determine what municipalities, counties, sheriff’s offices, fire districts, and local 911 agencies need to provide emergency alerts in minority languages and to persons with disabilities. Additionally, the NHC must study and determine what local 911 agencies need in order to provide live interpretation during a 911 call. By January 8, 2024, the NHC must submit a report with its findings to the Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Management in the Department of Public Safety and to the General Assembly.
- **House Bill [23-1283](#)**  
***Transfer Refugee Services to New Americans Office***  
(Sen. J. Gonzales; Rep. I. Jodeh).  
In response to the HB 21-1150 work group’s report [Final Recommendations Regarding the Establishment of the Office of New Americans](#), the state legislature adopted the work group’s recommendation to move the Colorado Refugee Services Program (CRSP) from the Colorado Department of Human Services to ONA within CDLE by October 1, 2024. Moving all New American initiatives and programs under ONA will help streamline efforts and potentially leverage federal funding to help increase access to services and benefits for New Americans.

- **House Bill [23-1257](#)**  
***Mobile Home Park Water Quality***  
(Sen. L. Cutter and Sen. K. Priola; Reps. A. Boesenecker, E. Velasco).  
This law creates a water testing program with prioritization criteria and testing standards for mobile home parks that will be administered by the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment’s (CDPHE) Water Quality Control Division. If the testing reveals an issue with water quality, CDPHE will notify the park owner and other stakeholders with test results, recommendations, remediation, and possible grant opportunities. Then the mobile home park owner must submit a remediation plan to CDPHE within 120 days.
- **Senate Bill [23-189](#)**  
***Increasing Access to Reproductive Health Care***  
(Sen. D. Moreno and Sen. L. Cutter; Reps. D. Michaelson Jenet and L. Garcia).  
This law reduces surprise billing, expands access to reproductive health services for Medicaid users, removes patient cost-sharing for reproductive health care services offered to Coloradns who are privately insured, and adds family planning-related services to the state’s reproductive health program. Additionally, the bill mandated the Department of Public Health and Environment to convene a family planning access collaborative on or before September 1, 2023. The Collaborative is to identify legislative, regulatory and funding strategies to close access gaps and publish recommendations on or before December 15, 2023.

# National Advocacy

In August 2022, Governor Polis joined other state and local elected leaders and signed on to a letter urging President Biden to rebuild the refugee resettlement program and establish a higher refugee admissions goal for Federal Fiscal Year 2023.

Additionally, in August 2022, Governor Polis called on congressional leadership to pass the Afghan Adjustment Act to provide permanent protection to the Afghan allies who supported our country and its service members through the two-decade U.S. engagement in Afghanistan. Governor Polis wanted to ensure that the 3900+ Afghan allies that chose to call Colorado home were able to reach their full potential in our great state.

In November 2022, following the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals decision that the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program was unlawful, Governor Polis called on congressional leadership to take immediate action and pass permanent protection for Dreamers.

In December 2022, Colorado began to experience a historic migrant influx of new arrivals coming from across the southern border. While immigration is a normal everyday occurrence, Denver had never seen arrivals in such great numbers. Governor Polis established a migrant support policy working group composed of his executive team, and the Departments of Public Safety, Local Agencies, and Labor and Employment, specifically the Office of New Americans to regularly meet and make recommendations for the state’s role in assisting with new arrivals. Governor Polis regularly advocated through letters and phone calls with the Administration

and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security to provide temporary protective status and employment authorization to Colorado’s newest arrivals.

Governor Polis, in partnership with former Denver Mayor Michael B. Hancock and peer funders, Rose Community Foundation launched the Newcomer’s Fund (Fund) inviting companies, foundations and individual donors to contribute to the Fund to ensure that Colorado was prepared to welcome new migrant arrivals who wanted to call Colorado home. The Fund raised \$800k to support emergency shelter, food, and support services and provided flexible and immediate support to local community based organizations that were working hard to welcome the state’s newest arrivals.



Photo caption: Governor Polis providing remarks at the official state celebration of Hispanic Heritage Month at the Governor’s Mansion on September 21, 2022.

# Priority Initiatives of the Office of New Americans

ONA focused on the following initiatives for SFY 22-23.

## Standing up the Office of New Americans

A majority of SFY 22-23 was spent establishing ONA. As the SFY began, ONA was a team of two with a big mandate, a handful of legislated programs to stand up, departmental and Gubernatorial systems to learn, listening sessions to conduct and relationships to build. By the end of the SFY, ONA made considerable progress conducting listening sessions with immigrant and refugee organizations statewide, launching programs, and hiring mission centered team members to manage those programs.



Photo caption: The Office of New Americans Team (from left to right) - Adam Kogeman, Administrator; Anthony Cherwinski, Global Talent Administrator; Candace Heckstall, VCESL Manager; Dee Daniels Scriven, Director; Luciana Chama, Migrant Integration Manager; Cristi Villamil, former Program Assistant; Mohammad Arif Hesarnie, former Benefit Recovery Fund Manager.



# Welcoming and Helping Newly Arrived Migrants Integrate

As the southern border started seeing thousands of arrivals in the summer of 2022, ONA began meeting with local community based organizations that wanted to help assist nonprofit organizations in Texas that were overwhelmed. While the Denver metro area only saw 5-10 migrant arrivals on a weekly basis through the fall of 2022, after Thanksgiving, Denver saw a significant spike in arrivals. In December 2022, the City and County of Denver (Denver) issued a state of emergency declaration and began providing emergency shelter to new arrivals.

ONA in collaboration with the Governor’s office and the Departments of Local Affairs and Public Safety regularly met as a work group to discuss and decide where the state could offer assistance.

Unlike the Afghan evacuation in 2021 where Colorado received sufficient federal funding to stand up temporary shelter for Afghan allies, there is not a proportional federal funding stream to support newly arrived migrants. In FFY 2023, the Emergency Food and Shelter Program - Humanitarian fund that converted to the Shelter and Services Program awarded \$1.6M to the state to provide emergency support to newly arrived migrants.

Despite the low federal reimbursement rate, the state spent over \$10.5M towards supporting Denver’s emergency response and funding culturally and linguistically appropriate community based organizations (CBOs) to provide navigation support, housing assistance and other supportive services to individuals and families who wanted to call Colorado home.

Additionally, ONA identified unmet needs and met with philanthropic partners to meet those needs, for example in mental health. ONA also served on the Newcomers’ Fund steering committee to award grants to CBOs serving newly arrived migrants. ONA also regularly reached out to CBOs and local government agencies statewide to see what if any support they could provide.

ONA created the [Colorado Migrant Welcome Guide](#) (Guide). The Guide is intended to assist asylum seekers and migrants, from any country, who do not yet have an immigration legal status but want to call Colorado home.

Additionally, in May 2023, ONA hired a Migrant Integration Manager to support these CBOs, and to provide support and overall coordination to the City of Denver and CBOs in Denver, Aurora and beyond.

As Colorado has now been identified by new arrivals as a desirable destination, as funding and capacity allows, ONA is unlikely to stop working to ensure new arrivals who want to call Colorado home, are welcomed, oriented, and set up for success.



Photo caption: Mohammed Arif Hesarnie (“Arif”), ONA’s former Benefit Recovery Fund Manager volunteering at Denver’s emergency shelter for migrants in January 2023. Although Arif and his family just arrived to Colorado in July 2022, he is already finding ways to give back and is eager to serve those in need.



Photo caption: Julio Mendoza, (Juls) is a Denver-based multi-disciplinary artist who celebrates his heritage through art. His art style “Surrealismo Cultural” or “Cultural Surrealism” focuses on cultural identity, community and social justice. Juls donated his time, talent and resources to create this beautiful mural in an apartment furnished by Mile High Ministries that a Venezuelan migrant family which includes a 4 year old (who loves tigers), will soon call home. To learn more about Juls check out his [website](#) or [instagram](#).



Photo caption: Vive Wellness instructor Lila is teaching karate to newly arrived migrant youth whose families are calling Colorado home.



# Rural Partnerships

To ensure that ONA does not by default focus only on New Americans in the Denver metro area, ONA has been purposeful in traveling outside of the Denver metro area and listening to leaders of immigrant and refugee serving organizations, who are many times immigrants and refugees themselves. During SFY 22-23, ONA conducted in person visits to Silverthorne, Leadville, Montrose, Alamosa, Durango, Lamar, La Junta, Avondale, Pueblo, Greeley, and Fort Collins.

ONA listened to community leaders and learned of the issues New Americans encounter including those related to: the high cost of living, digital literacy and access, exploitation, gatekeeping, health access, lack of housing, language access, need for mental health resources, mobile home park insecurity, insufficient

nonprofit capacity, limited resources, racism, undocumented Coloradans fear to report crime, wage theft, lack of programming for youth, and transportation.

ONA also attended the Community Resource Center’s Rural Philanthropy Days for the Southwest in Durango and facilitated a panel with the goal of highlighting the work of two immigrant serving organizations to funders: Compañeros and the First Southwest Community Fund.

In SFY 23-24, ONA will be launching its Rural Initiative to continue: elevating the needs and concerns of rural New Americans, and helping immigrant and refugee serving organizations troubleshoot issues and liaising with state agencies in order to obtain necessary information and/or access to state assistance and programs.



Photo caption: At the Centro de Los Pobres, Avondale, CO. Pictured from left: Koralia DeLara, Esperanza Saucedo, Brandi (last name unknown) Nancy Crafton, Ashleigh Flores, Patricia Serna, Betty Velasquez, Dee Daniels Scriven.



Photo caption: In early June, ONA hosted a panel discussion at the Southwest Rural Philanthropy Days conference with leaders of immigrant-serving organizations, Matt Karkut of Companeros, and Azarael Madrigal of First Southwest Community Fund. In an engaged conversation with attendees, the panel spoke to the unique challenges and opportunities of New Americans in southwest Colorado.

# ONA’s Inaugural State Integration Plan

Through HB 21-1150, the state legislature mandated ONA to “implement a statewide strategy to facilitate economic stability and promote successful economic, social, linguistic, and cultural integration by investing in the success of immigrants in Colorado.” In response to that mandate, in December 2021, ONA partnered with Kone Consulting to produce its [New Americans Initiative Safety Net Research report](#). In June 2022, CDLE hired ONA’s first Director.

After reviewing the report, ONA leadership conducted listening sessions statewide to ensure that any statewide strategy or plan addressed the issues raised by New

Americans statewide. In March 2023, ONA launched its [Inaugural State Integration Plan](#). The plan is robust and aims to advance the integration and inclusion of New Americans in Colorado’s communities. The plan addresses high priority needs of Colorado’s New Americans and includes numerous strategies and activities that ONA with its current capacity cannot accomplish on its own. However, with the full partnership and engagement of Colorado’s civil society, it can be done. ONA treats the state integration plan as a living document and will continue to hone it in furtherance of its overarching goal of helping New Americans thrive in Colorado.



Photo caption left and right: New American youth served by Full Circle of Lake County (FC) in Leadville designed and painted this mural in collaboration with a local artist, McKenzie Stock. The youth specifically picked the monarch butterfly and western tanager to put into the mural as they both represent a migratory species that fly from South America all the way to Canada through Leadville. Circle plaques next to the mural explain the mural, including this statement, “Diversity makes our community better, and we are thankful for our friends from around the world.” FC’s mission is to “empower our community through youth development, family supports, immigrant services, and resource connection.”



Photo caption: The Office of New Americans visits with the Hispanic Affairs Project team to learn about the amazing work they are doing not only in Montrose but the surrounding five counties. Pictured here from left to right: Ricardo Perez, Dee Daniels Scriven, Karen Sherman, Elisa Rodriguez and Karla Montoya.





Photo caption: On May 9, New American students at Aurora Central High School (ACHS) made the case for a legislative bill to support immigrant entrepreneurs to State Representatives Mandy Lindsay and Naquetta Ricks and Aurora City Council Member Angela Lawson. The event was the conclusion of a month-long civics and government course in which the students researched, drafted, and evaluated multiple bills. ONA Administrator, Adam Kogeman, presented to the students about ONA’s work and provided feedback on an earlier version of the bill. The event and the students’ project were led by the exceptional ACHS teacher, Nicole Reinstedt.



Photo caption left: Representative Lorena Garcia, Executive Director of the Colorado Statewide Parent Coalition (CSPC) presents her parents Teresa and Richard Garcia, with the inaugural Commitment Award at CSPC’s annual Partners in Education Gala. An award that is bestowed upon individuals who exemplify and dedicate their lives to fighting for equity and justice in education for marginalized communities.



Photo caption right: On April 11, 2023, ONA held a regional stakeholder meeting in Northern Colorado. One of our youngest New American attendees, seven year old Amy Lopez closed out our meeting with an inspiring song.

Photo caption: The first and only all-female mariachi group in Colorado, Mariachi Alma Del Folklore playing at Westwood’s 3rd Annual Cinco De Mayo community celebration.



Photo caption: In celebration of World Refugee Day, the International Rescue Committee, Lutheran Family Services Rocky Mountains, ECDC/ African Community Center and Colorado Refugee Connect, in partnership with the Colorado Refugee Services Program in the Department of Human Services hosted a Refugee Speakers Bureau Showcase. Tetiana Stratilat, Thai Nguyen, Homayoon Milad, Jaqueline Umurisa, Sabe Kemer, Heleena Kakar and Kansime Shalom shared their stories.



# Solidifying the New Americans Community Advisory Committee

The New Americans Community Advisory Committee (NACAC) created by HB 21-1150 was launched in December 2021. The NACAC membership is made up of a diverse (by ethnicity, geography, gender, sexual orientation, occupation, and religion) group of 21 immigrant and refugee leaders statewide who meet virtually once a month.

ONA, in partnership with Colorado State University’s Office of Engagement and Extension and Department of Ethnic Studies and the Colorado Refugee Services Program (CRSP) (collectively known as the administrative team), continued to solidify the work of the NACAC. Over the past year, ONA guided the NACAC to create and adopt by-laws, elect an Executive Committee with members serving as chair and vice chairs, and develop their own agenda for monthly meetings. The NACAC identified housing, education and jobs as its top three priority issues.

The NACAC invited the following state agency officials to engage through presentations or listening sessions: Governor’s Office - Homelessness Policy Advisor; Department of Labor and Employment - Director and the Office of the Future of Work; Department of Law - Office of the Attorney General; Department of Public Health and Environment - GetAhead Colorado; and the Office of Economic Development and International Trade - Director and the Minority Business Office.

Through the NACAC, members have:

- 1. Improved their awareness and understanding of state functions, programs and resources;
- 2. Increased their sense of empowerment due to: new, direct relationships with state officials; discoveries regarding existing, but previously unknown, state offices and programs; and an increased network of peer leaders who work on similar issues statewide;
- 3. Unprecedented access to state officials, when their individual attempts had led to dead ends; and
- 4. Increased awareness of their own strengths, as they have elected an Executive Committee tasked with agenda setting and meeting facilitation.

NACAC members cited the following areas for growth: improved partnerships with state officials; minimizing offline work given their heavily committed schedules; and increased language access at NACAC meetings so that all members have no impediments to full participation.

As the NACAC remains in its nascent phase, ONA hopes to continue elevating the NACAC as a resource to state partners for New American input and feedback into planning, policies and program implementation. Additionally, the Administrative team hopes to more fully integrate the NACAC and its members into formal advisory positions in support of state offices’ new projects, programs, and resources.



Photo caption: On January 21, 2023, the inaugural New Americans Community Advisory Committee celebrated their first annual in person retreat in Denver, CO with the Executive Directors of the Colorado Department of Labor and Employment and the Office of Economic Development and International Trade. Pictured left to right. Front row: Selma Hamid, Ndeye Ndao, Maria Gonzalez, Eve Lieberman OEDIT, Joe Barela CDLE. Second row: Dr. Eric Ishiwata CSU Advisor, Tania Chairez, Alejandra Ospina, Luis Antezana, Ricardo Perez, Vera Azuka, Lailey Hashem, Antonio Soto Minority Business Office Director, Lilia Vierya, Dee Daniels Scriven ONA Director, and Neb Asfaw.



Photo caption: On January 21, 2023, at the first inaugural NACAC in person retreat, members taking a break from working on establishing by-laws for the NACAC.



Photo caption: On April 13, 2023, New American, Arthur Antoine, PhD, PE, PMP, spoke at the 19th Annual Colorado Transportation Symposium at a breakout session entitled Trends Affecting Transportation on the plight of New American professionals seeking employment in the Architecture, Engineering, and Construction (AEC) industry.



Photo caption: On April 11, 2023, the Office of New Americans team headed up north to hold our first regional quarterly stakeholder meeting. ONA met with over 20 impressive New American leaders from Northern Colorado communities including Ft. Morgan, Ft. Collins, and Greeley. We ended the meeting with a group photo and an inspiring song from a seven year old attendee.



# Ensuring State Agencies Removed Barriers to Certain Public Opportunities

On July 1, 2022, SB 21-199 went into effect. The law prohibited the state from requiring lawful presence in order to obtain earned state assistance, benefits or licenses. As stated by Colorado’s General Assembly, “it is the public policy of the state of Colorado that we ensure that our state-funded programs are not denied to people based on their immigration status.”

Advocates worked to alert ONA of various state agency applications that while on their face did not seem to ask the direct question of lawful presence, through the requirement of a social security number on an application form, still had an unintended consequence that was contrary to the law. In collaboration with the Governor’s Office of Legal Counsel, ONA worked to educate and inform all state agencies about the legal requirement to remove verification of lawful presence from applications for state assistance, benefits, licenses, etc.

Photo caption: Angelica Raya Trejo, Immigrant Advocate; Maricela Lucas, Crime Victim Housing Coordinator; and Flora Archuleta, Executive Director of the San Luis Valley Immigrant Resource Center.



# Fighting Brain Waste and Coaching Employers on Engaging New American Talent

In an effort to help employers expand their workforce and utilize New Americans’ talents and skills, ONA created a three part webinar series entitled “Working With New Americans: From Recruiting to Upskilling.” As the title implies, the series coaches employers step-by-step on how to engage New Americans from recruitment through upskilling. This past year, ONA has presented the content to various engaged employers and through the creation of the [online webinar series](#) the information will be accessible at any time to all Colorado employers to expand their workforce and to prevent the brain waste of Colorado’s talented New Americans.



Photo caption above and left: On October 22, ONA together with national partners Welcome.US and REACT DC hosted a job fair at the Community College of Aurora. More than 200 job seekers, 22 employers, and 40 volunteers attended the fair and over 59 job offers were extended on the spot, and follow up interviews were scheduled for many more. Special thanks to the Adams County Workforce Center, the African Community Center, Aurora’s Office of International and Immigrant Affairs, Muslim Youth for Positive Impact, Project Worthmore, the Colorado Refugee Services Program, all of the interpreters, and many other organizations that promoted and assisted with this job fair.

# Legislated Programs Administered by ONA

## Benefit Recovery Fund (BRF)

Through [SB 22-234](#), the state legislature mandated ONA to stand up an unemployment insurance program for eligible undocumented individuals who through no fault of their own, were separated from employment and are not receiving other state-administered wage replacement assistance. At the end of 2022, ONA selected a third-party administrator (TPA), [AidKit](#), through the public procurement process, to serve as the TPA for the BRF. ONA is currently ensuring that AidKit has the necessary information from state agencies in order to minimize fraud. AidKit and its nonprofit partner, [Impact Charitable](#) will conduct community outreach, build and host online applications, determine eligibility, and distribute funds quickly and securely. ONA hopes that the BRF will launch in SFY 23-24.

## Global Talent Task Force (GTTF)

Through [SB 22-140](#), the state legislature tasked ONA with establishing a Global Talent Task Force (GTTF). In September 2022, ONA launched the GTTF with 24 members, including 12 appointed members from the state senate, house of representatives, Governor’s office and state agencies, and 12 members selected through a competitive panel review process. The GTTF has been busy reviewing existing pathways in at least five in-demand sectors for global professionals and skilled workers living in Colorado to obtain credentials that will help them return to work in their professional field or occupation. By December 31, 2023, the GTTF will produce its final report with recommendations and submit it to the Governor and the General Assembly on how to increase Colorado’s ability to harness the skills of New Americans.

## Virtual Career-Aligned English as a Second Language (VCESL) Program

Additionally through the passage of [SB 22-140](#), the state legislature tasked ONA to stand up the VCESL program with at least one qualified vendor with an established and existing virtual platform that offers career-aligned English as a second language classes for in-demand industries and occupations. Through a competitive process in the fall of 2022, ONA selected two vendors, EnGen and BurlingtonEnglish. In April 2023, ONA launched the program. This free program is designed to help Colorado’s employers expand their talent pools and educate adult English language learners with the career and sector specific English that they need to seize better employment opportunities. The program aims to prevent brain waste and help New Americans showcase their talent and skill. The program is legislated to expire on June 30, 2024.

## Immigration Legal Defense Fund (ILDF)

Through [HB 21-1194](#), ONA administers the Immigration Legal Defense Fund (ILDF) to help immigrants who are in removal proceedings in order to promote family unity, due process, increase judicial efficiency, and protect civil liberties. The law designates 70% of the funding to go to immigrants who are detained, and 30% to be spent on those who are not detained, with two-thirds of that 30% designated to immigrants outside of the Denver metro area. In the 2022 legislative session, the state legislature increased the funding from \$100,000 to approximately \$350,000. Through a competitive procurement process, ONA selected the Rocky Mountain Immigrant Advocacy Network (RMIAN) to provide immigration legal representation to detained clients at the Aurora immigration detention center and Mountain Dreamers (MD) to provide representation to non-detained indigent clients outside of the Denver metro area in the central mountains.

For the first half of the current grant period,<sup>22</sup> from January through mid-June 2023, 51 individuals facing deportation received free legal representation through the ILDF. Of these, 29 were non-detained individuals in Summit, Eagle or Garfield counties and 22 were detained by ICE at the GEO facility in Aurora. ILDF-funded attorneys secured the release of 17 (77%) of the detained individuals, a majority of whom had spent 90 - 610 days in detention.

The success of the ILDF is already having a positive impact on Colorado’s communities. A recent example is a family of four who has lived in Colorado for 6 years sought asylum after one of the children survived sexual abuse in their home country. With steep medical and daily living expenses, they were unable to afford legal fees or a needed psychological evaluation. Through the ILDF, the family successfully gained asylum and consequently received employment authorization. The parents moved from cleaning houses in the informal economy to formal retail positions which provide stable income and benefits. One of the children has graduated from high school and is now studying psychology at a local college.

<sup>22</sup> Under HB 21-1194, the ILDF was inadvertently created as a six month program. ONA proposed the ILDF be converted to a twelve month program that aligned with the state fiscal year, and the proposal was adopted through HB 23-1283.



# Thank You to Our Partners

Thank you to our many partners, in both the public and private sectors, for valuing and advocating for Colorado’s New Americans and for 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 talented and hard-working New Americans for continuing to contribute to the civic, economic, social and cultural fabric of Colorado; Colorado is a better state because of you!



Photo caption: Youth served by Convivir Colorado with their families in front of a mural created by artist Diego Florez entitled “La Serpiente Dorada.” Photo Credit: 2022 La Serpiente Dorada Reveal, Anthony Maes-Angle @anthonymvze

# Appendix A: How Does Colorado’s Immigrant Demographics Compare to National-level Data?

	United States	Colorado	Percent of total U.S. population in Colorado
Total population (estimates)	326,569,308	5,684,926 <sup>23</sup>	1.7%
Immigrant residents	44,125,628	539,514 <sup>24</sup>	1.2%
Undocumented immigrants	10,315,559	145,690	1.4%
Employed DACA recipients	1,159,000	21,000 <sup>25</sup>	1.8%
DACA eligible residents	392,000	9,000 <sup>26</sup>	2.3%
Number of TPS holders	411,778	3,564	.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 (ages 16-64)	78.7%	83%	Higher
Immigrant entrepreneurs share of immigrant population	7.7%	6.7% <sup>27</sup>	Lower
STEM workers who are immigrants	22.9%	13%	Lower
Nurses who are foreign-born	15.2%	7%	Lower
Share of immigrant population eligible to vote	50.9%	44.9% <sup>28</sup>	Lower

23 <https://data.census.gov/table/ACSDP5Y2020.DP05>  
24 <https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST5Y2020.S0501>  
25 Migration Policy Institute, National and State Estimates of Immigrant Populations Eligible for the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) Program, December 2021; <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/data-hub/deferred-action-childhood-arrivals-daca-profiles>  
26 Migration Policy Institute, MPI National and State Estimates of Employed Workers Among Current Deferred Action for Childhood Recipients (as of June 30, 2021); <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/data-hub/deferred-action-childhood-arrivals-daca-profiles>  
27 <https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST5Y2020.S0501>  
28 <https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST5Y2020.S0502>



Compared to the nation, we have a slightly lower immigrant share of the population. Also unlike other larger states and cities with more significant immigrant populations, Colorado does not yet have a statewide non-profit infrastructure to welcome, receive and launch immigrants who arrive without legal status. As Colorado seeks to improve our New American integration outcomes, we can look to states and cities who have made investments into and have been working longer on immigrant integration, to see what opportunities and models Colorado can utilize to move our integration efforts forward.

# Spotlight on Garfield County

Immigrants in Garfield County pay \$44.5M in taxes and have \$143.4M in spending power.<sup>29</sup> Many New Americans come to the Roaring Fork Valley for work in the hospitality and tourism industries. As housing prices and the cost of living has increased, New Americans continue to move down the valley into Garfield County. While these New Americans are working hard as the backbone of the booming hospitality industry at the ski resorts in Colorado, they are struggling to access basic services: clean water, health care, local transportation outside of routes to work, after school programming for their children, and more. Garfield County’s New American population is primarily from Mexico. According to 2019 data, over 66% of the New American population in Garfield County has lived in the U.S. for over 10 years and close to 50% speak

English well or very well. Over 98% of Garfield County’s New Americans are of working age.<sup>30</sup> New Americans in Garfield County are intelligent, hard working, and community-oriented. Most New American leaders in Garfield County have lived in the Roaring Fork Valley most of their lives and they are keen in finding solutions to overcome some of the long-standing obstacles to their communities’ well-being.

If you are interested in your own county’s demographics, check out the data from the Colorado Department of Local Affairs’ State Demography Office or visit the U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey (ACS).<sup>31</sup> Also, the Center for Migration Studies has state and local data (gathered through the 2019 ACS) at <http://data.cmsny.org/state.html> and <http://data.cmsny.org/puma.html>, respectively.



29 <https://data.newamericaneconomy.org/map-the-impact/>  
30 <http://data.cmsny.org/puma.html>  
31 <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs>