



The Office of
New Americans

Office of New Americans

Annual Report SFY2024

Contents

A Letter from the Director of the Office of New Americans	3
The Office of New Americans	5
Immigrants Bring Vibrancy to Colorado’s Society and Contribute to Colorado’s Prosperity	5
Where Do New Americans Live in Colorado?	7
Why is Immigrant Integration Important for Colorado’s Future Prosperity?	9
The Polis Administration’s New American Integration Efforts	12
2024 Legislative Session - Notable Bills	13
National Advocacy	15
Priority Initiatives of the Office of New Americans	16
Continuing to Establish the Office of New Americans	16
Welcoming and Helping Newly Arrived Migrants Integrate	17
Immigration Legal Assistance	18
Employment Assistance for New Arrivals	19
Building Immigration Legal Capacity	21
Language Access	22
Rural Partnerships	23
Solidifying the New Americans Community Advisory Committee	24
Maximizing the Talents of New Americans	26
Legislated Programs Administered by ONA	27
Benefit Recovery Fund (BRF)	27
Integration of International Medical Graduates	28
Global Talent Task Force (GTTF)	29
Virtual Career-Aligned English as a Second Language (VCESL) Program	30
Immigration Legal Defense Fund (ILDF)	31
Thank You to Our Partners and Colorado’s New Americans	32
Appendix A	33
How Do Colorado’s Immigrant Demographics Compare to National-level Data?	33
Appendix B	34
Relevant Data to Understand Colorado’s New Americans	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). State fiscal year (SFY) 2024 was another historic year. It was a building year for ONA, as we launched several new initiatives, sunsetted different bodies of work, developed programs and managed new programs.

In SFY 24, Colorado continued to welcome immigrants and refugees to the state. The Colorado Refugee Services Program welcomed over 5,300 new arrivals consisting of over 1,600 Cubans, 1,200 Afghans, 400 Haitians, 400 individuals from the Democratic Republic of Congo, and 350 Ukrainian humanitarian parolees, with close to 1,000 arrivals from 42 additional countries.

Additionally, Colorado continued to experience an increase in new arrivals from the southern border, welcoming over 30,000 new arrivals to the Denver metro area in SFY 24. The State of Colorado continued to partner with the City and County of Denver, focusing on providing new arrivals who wanted to call Colorado home with a little assistance to help them on their path to self-sufficiency. In SFY 24, the state with philanthropic and public funding was able to provide immigration legal assistance to ~3,600 individuals, helping our newest Coloradans file for temporary protected status and/or employment authorization, not only providing a win for the individual or family, but also providing much needed talent for Colorado's employers. The state was also able to provide some housing assistance to ~6,600 people including over 2,800 children. Additionally, the state

conducted outreach and offered assistance to other areas of the state that were receiving new arrivals.

In SFY 24, ONA continued to build relationships with immigrant serving organizations statewide, meeting virtually with many and traveling in person to Fort Collins, New Castle, Lamar, La Junta, Frisco, and Fruita. Through these visits we have clearly seen how Colorado's New Americans,¹ those who were raised in Colorado, lived in Colorado for decades, and our newest arrivals are contributing not only to the state's economic growth, but also the vibrancy of Colorado.

A couple of highlights from SFY 24 included learning what the federal government is encountering on a visit to the southern border, and being a thought partner to and participating in the launch of Belonging Colorado, a special fund at the Denver Foundation. Belonging Colorado seeks to bring together people in new ways and expand Coloradans' sense of who belongs in our state. In a time of partisan politics and divisive rhetoric that mars the humanity in us, I am so grateful for this effort.

This coming year is full of uncertainties but it will be an impactful one for New Americans in Colorado, given the presidential election, potential ensuing federal immigration policy shifts, and the Supreme Court's decision on DACA. One thing that will not change is Colorado's commitment to the integration of New Americans who have been here for decades, and to those new arrivals who want to call Colorado home.

¹ [Jodeh, et al. Concerning the Creation of the Colorado Office of New Americans. 25 June 2021. 21-1150. 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: From left to right: ONA's Team: Dee Daniels Scriven, Anthony Cherwinski, Samantha Dewitt, Sharon Vidal Francis, Joshua Loya, Candace Heckstall, Adam Kogeman (not pictured) and Joe Barela, CDLE Executive Director, July 2024.

Specifically at ONA, we are looking forward to the Colorado Refugee Services Program (CRSP) joining our team on October 1, 2024, pursuant to HB 23-1283. We are hopeful for a year of growth and novel collaboration as we try to find ways to leverage this move for all of Colorado's New Americans.

In closing, I want to thank all of our partners statewide who are working tirelessly to advance the integration and inclusion of New Americans across Colorado - thank you! I also want to thank Governor Jared Polis, Alec Garnett, the Governor's former Chief of Staff (through September 14, 2024), and Joe Barela, Executive Director of the Colorado Department of Labor and Employment (CDLE) for their commitment and dedication to New Americans. Finally, ONA could not do what it is doing without ONA's mission-driven and hard-working team; so a big thank you to the team for your work in ensuring the inclusion and integration of Colorado's New Americans.

In partnership,
Dee Daniels Scriven
Director
Office of New Americans

The Office of New Americans

In June 2021, Governor Jared Polis signed HB 21-1150, Concerning the Creation of The Colorado Office of New Americans, 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 in Colorado.

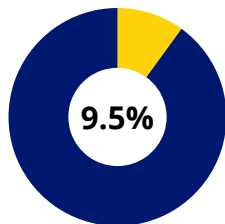
Immigrants Bring Vibrancy to Colorado's Society and Contribute to Colorado's Prosperity

Colorado's New Americans² are resilient, talented and diligent. However, they are not a monolith, they come from all over the world. Below are some important demographics pertaining to Colorado's New American population:

² Ibid.

Share of foreign-born living in Colorado

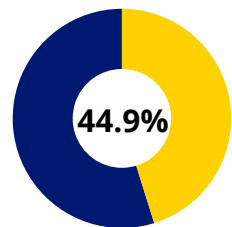
557,200 foreign-born



Top 5 countries of origin

1. Mexico	37.7%
2. India	4.7%
3. Korea	3.2%
4. China	3.0%
5. Ethiopia	2.9%

Share of foreign-born entered Colorado



► One in nine Coloradans,³ and one in eight workers in Colorado, is an immigrant;

³ American Immigration Council. "[Take a Look: How Immigrants Drive the Economy in Colorado](#)." 2024, map. Accessed 22 Aug. 2024.

► The top countries of origin for Colorado's immigrants⁴ include Mexico (37.7% of immigrants), India (4.7%), Korea (3.2%), China (3.0%), Ethiopia (2.9%);⁵

⁴ For much of the data included in the report, the term immigrant includes all foreign-born populations.

⁵ [American Immigration Council webpage](#).

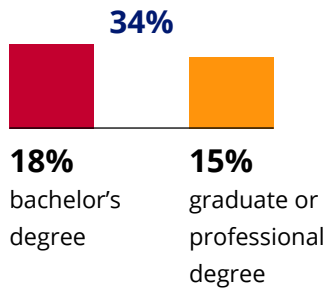
► 44.9% of foreign-born Coloradans entered the U.S. before 2000;⁶

► Nearly half of all immigrants in Colorado have become naturalized U.S. citizens;⁷

⁶ United States Census Bureau. "[Explore Census Data](#)." 2024, data. Accessed 23 Aug. 2024.

⁷ American Immigration Council. "[Take a Look: How Immigrants Drive the Economy in Colorado](#)." 2024, map. Accessed 22 Aug. 2024.

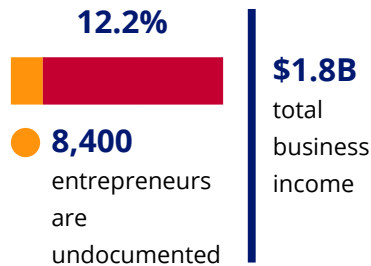
Educational attainment of Colorado immigrants



- Over 34% of Colorado immigrants have a bachelor's or an advanced degree (18.6% with bachelor's degrees and 15.6% with a graduate or professional degree);⁸

⁸ Ibid.

Share of entrepreneurs who are immigrants

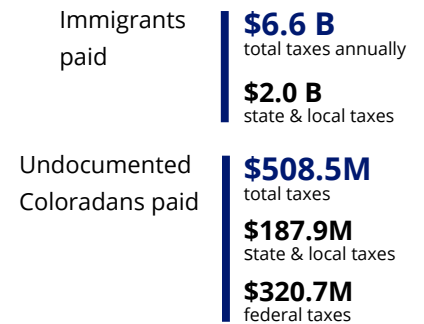


- 12.2% of Colorado's entrepreneurs are foreign-born and their businesses generate approximately \$1.8 billion in total business income;⁹

Approximately 8,400 of Colorado's entrepreneurs are undocumented;

⁹ Ibid.

Taxes and spending power

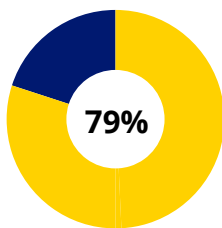


- Immigrants contribute an estimated nearly \$6.6 billion in taxes every year, including \$2.0 billion in state and local taxes;¹⁰

Undocumented Coloradans pay a total of \$508.5M annually in taxes; \$187.9M of state and local taxes, and \$320.7M in federal taxes.

¹⁰ Ibid.

Share of foreign-born that are proficient in English



- Most immigrants (79%) are proficient in English.¹¹

¹¹ Ibid.

Top 5 languages

1. Spanish	49.0%
2. Vietnamese	2.7%
3. Chinese	2.5%
4. Russian	2.1%
5. Korean	2.0%

- At home, the top languages spoken by Coloradans other than English, are Spanish 49.0%, Vietnamese 2.7%, Chinese 2.5%, Russian 2.1%, and Korean 2.0%;¹²

¹² New American Economy. "[Colorado Language Access and Demographic Data](#)." 2019. Accessed 23 Aug. 2024.

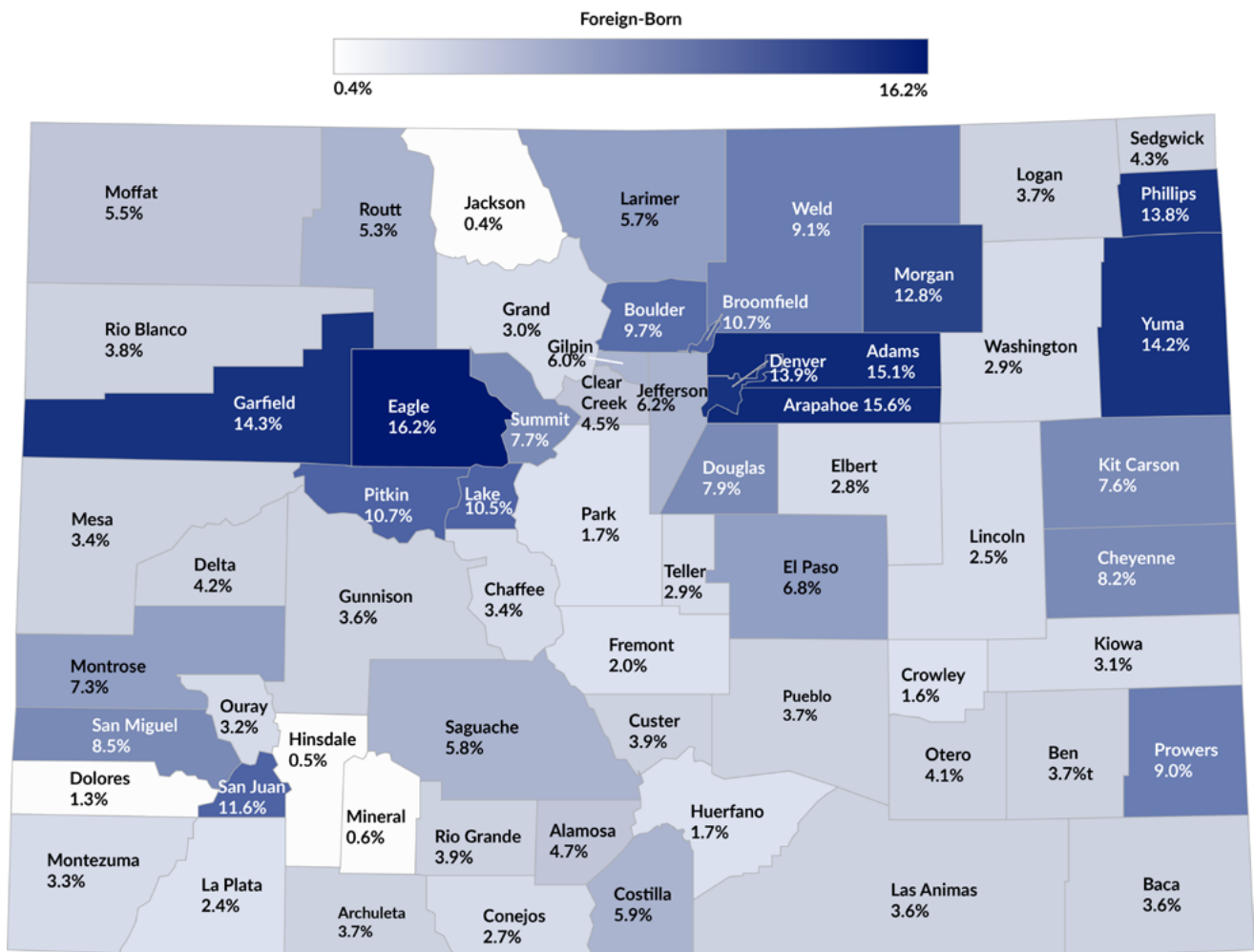
Additionally, Colorado's New Americans live in and contribute to every community in our state.

Where Do New Americans Live in Colorado?

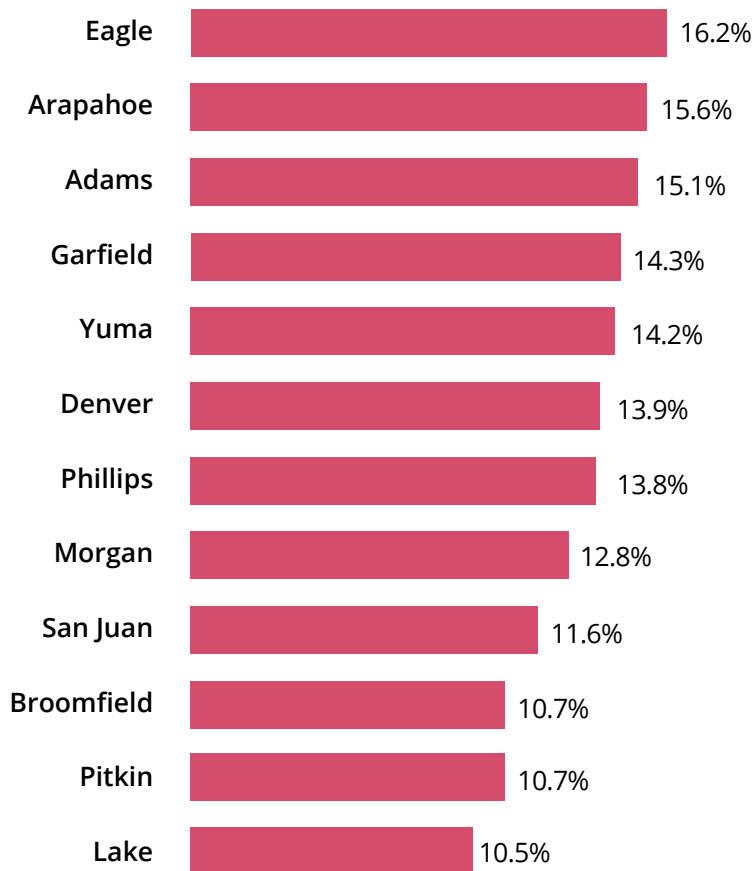
According to the 2022 American Community Survey (ACS) 5-year estimates, used in the map below, Colorado's foreign-born population represents a significant percentage of residents in many counties across Colorado.

Five of foreign-born population in Colorado counties

2022 ACS 5-year Estimate



Counties with double digit percentages New American populations



County	Percent
Eagle	16.2%
Arapahoe	15.6%
Adams	15.1%
Garfield	14.3%
Yuma	14.2%
Denver	13.9%
Phillips	13.8%
Morgan	12.8%
San Juan	11.6%
Broomfield	10.7%
Pitkin	10.7%
Lake	10.5%

Colorado is state-supervised but counties administer most human and social services, such as cash assistance, food assistance or workforce services. While state leadership is essential, it is also vital for local county and city governments to work with their New American residents to address any barriers that New Americans face and work towards their integration and inclusion.

With the prompting of immigrant leaders, the City of Gunnison has taken the initiative to ensure that their City's assistance and services are working for all of their residents. Another great example of a local government working with New Americans is Summit County. Summit County worked with Mountain Dreamers, an immigrant-serving organization, to

respond to the community's transportation needs around a local mobile home park, and additionally, sought to learn New Americans' perspectives on housing by engaging Mountain Dreamers who surveyed 400 residents on the issue.

ONA hopes that more cities and counties will join 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. If you are in local government and would like to start working on immigrant integration, but do not know where to start, contact ONA at newamericans@state.co.us.

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

While the federal government and Congress dictate our country's immigration policy; with immigrants constituting about 10% of Colorado's population, ensuring that immigrants successfully integrate¹³ into the state's formal economy, are able to engage civically, and feel like they belong is critical not only to those immigrants and their families, but to Colorado's current and future prosperity.

With Colorado's aging population, death rates, retirements and job openings per unemployed person increasing, we need immigrants and the talents and readiness to work that they bring. In its recent publication, the [2022 Population Summary](#),¹⁴ the CO State Demography Office (Office) found that annual deaths reached their highest levels on record, the 65+ age population grew by ~29k since 2021, and although births saw a slight increase, the overall birth rate has been declining since 2007, and will "have long-term impacts on K-12 and higher education, as well as labor force." The Office projects that even with workers staying longer in the workforce, the growth of the 65+ population is leading to a rise in retirements. Finally, the Office found "[a] rate of over 2.2 job openings per unemployed person" suggesting significant labor demand (with the caveat that some employers could list open jobs in multiple states, especially given remote work), and according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, in January 2023, Colorado had 222,000 job openings and a 68.2% labor participation rate.¹⁵



¹³ Migration Policy Institute. "[Integration Policy](#)." Accessed 29 Aug. 2024. MPI defines immigrant integration as "the process by which immigrants and their children come to feel and become participants in the life of their country of destination, and in its schools, workplaces and communities."

¹⁴ Colorado State Demography Office. "[2022 Population Summary](#)." Jan. 2024. Accessed 29 Aug. 2024.

¹⁵ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. "[AWDC Data Downloads - Airtable](#)." Airtable, 2021. Accessed 23 Aug. 2024.

New Americans are talented and hard working and they currently constitute one in eight workers in Colorado. They also work in a variety of jobs from construction and manufacturing to the professional, scientific and management industries. Thirty four percent of Colorado's New Americans have a bachelor's or an advanced degree.¹⁶ Pursuant to SB 22-140 (Expansion of Experiential Learning Opportunities), the Global Talent Task Force issued its final report with recommendations geared towards assisting Colorado's internationally trained professionals to return to their

profession or occupation. When ONA hears of an Afghan judge working at Krispy Kreme or an anesthesiologist from Venezuela who is looking for entry level work, it reinforces the need for Colorado to work toward maximizing the talents of immigrants who call the state home. Ensuring that the Afghan judge is in an industry or occupation where she is using her analytical and writing skills, will not only enhance her sense of belonging, it will also lead to greater tax contributions from her and provide Colorado's industries with needed talent.



Photo caption: From left to right: Members of the Colorado Refugee Speakers Bureau - Mulania Bathin, Oliver Fon, ZahraNouri, Amani Abdallah, Mobarakeh Nouri, Hnin Aung, Karina Urrego, Abdullah Noori, Tukano Salat, Mirwais Baheej, Raoudha Zelaya, Malika Azad, and Lojohomoi Lokonobei celebrating World Refugee Day, June 2024.

¹⁶ For more detailed data regarding Colorado's New Americans, see Appendix B.

Outside of economic integration, it is important to Colorado's current and future prosperity that New Americans feel like they belong. Research has found that "[a] sense of belonging is important to people's mental health, physical health, and place in society."¹⁷ In June of 2024, Belonging Colorado, the Colorado Health Institute, and Over Zero released the results of the study in the Colorado Belonging Barometer, a measure of belonging at the state level. The measure helps us understand the extent to which Coloradans feel a sense of belonging, disparities in belonging, belonging in different life settings (state, local communities, workplace, and a child's school), and potential next steps for advancing belonging.

While Colorado showed a greater sense of belonging compared to the country, the study showed the need to increase belonging for all Coloradans across all settings. New Americans are impacted in specific ways. For example, in the setting of a child's school, naturalized citizens and noncitizens felt less belonging (25%) compared to those who were born in the U.S. with at least one immigrant parent or grandparent (54.7%), or those whose parents and grandparents were all born in the U.S. (54.2%).

Colorado is a welcoming state. Colorado wins when we continue to welcome and receive Colorado's immigrants as our newest neighbors, helping maximize their talents and promoting their sense of belonging.



Photo caption: 2024 Colorado Belonging Barometer Report Cover.
Photo Credit: Brian Clark, Colorado Health Institute Creative Director.

¹⁷ Colorado Health Institute, and Over Zero. [Colorado Belonging Barometer](#). June 2024. Accessed 23 Aug. 2024.

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.

In terms of state action, early on in the 2024 state legislative session, Governor Polis advocated for and signed a \$24M education supplemental to address the increase in newcomer students who were arriving into Colorado after the October 1st point in time count, providing schools

and school districts with additional needed resources to meet the needs of all students. The Governor also signed various bills detailed below that positively impacted New Americans, including: advocating for an amended HB 24-1137 in order that undocumented Coloradans could still register their businesses in Colorado, SB 24-182 reducing the obstacles for new Coloradans to obtain a Colorado's drivers license or identification, and HB 24-1280 establishing the Welcome, Reception, and Integration Grant Program.



Photo caption: From left to right: Peter Bakken, Mountain Dreamers; Sophie Shea, Colorado Fiscal Institute; Gladis Ibarra, CIRC; Senator Julie Gonzales, Representative Tim Hernández, and Governor Jared Polis signing SB 24-182.

2024 Legislative Session - Notable Bills

(in ascending numerical order)

In the 2024 legislative session, the state legislature created and passed, and Governor Polis signed numerous bills that will positively impact New American communities.

- **House Bill [24-1009](#)**
Bilingual Child Care Licensing Resources
(Sen. Ginal and Sen. Rich; Reps. Joseph and McLachlan)
This law requires the Department of Early Childhood (DEC) to update its licensing website with information and education that is in plain language and in the two most prevalent languages spoken in Colorado for those individuals who are interested in becoming child care providers. By March 30, 2026, the DEC shall submit a report to the Joint Budget Committee and other legislative committees concerning the barriers to becoming licensed child care providers by individuals who speak a language other than English.
- **House Bill [24-1137](#)**
Implement Fraudulent Filings Group Recommendations
(Sen. Winter F. and Senator Bridges; Reps. Mauro and Taggart)
The Colorado Secretary of State brought forward this law to implement the recommendations of the Fraudulent Filings Working Group charged by law to study additional measures to counteract fraudulent filings in Colorado's online business filing system. The law ensured that undocumented individuals whose primary residence or place of business is in Colorado could still establish a business if they hold a current, valid driver's license or identification issued by the state, or can verify their residency status with the Secretary of State (SOS). By January 1, 2025, the SOS must develop those policies in coordination with impacted communities and key community partners.
- **House Bill [24-1280](#)**
Welcome, Reception, and Integration Grant Program
(Sen. Fields and Sen. Cutter; Reps. Velasco and Garcia)
By December 31, 2024, the Colorado Department of Labor and Employment shall sign a contract with an umbrella administering entity to administer the Welcome, Reception and Integration (WRI) Program in coordination with the Office of New Americans. This law creates a statewide nonprofit infrastructure that is able and ready to help welcome and meet the needs of newly arrived migrants who want to call Colorado home.

- **House Bill [24-1323](#)**

School Graduation Attire

(Sen. Fields and Reps. Velasco and Hernandez)

Before or on the start of the 2024-25 school year, this law requires public schools, school districts, and charter schools to adopt a policy that allows students to wear recognized cultural or religious objects at any kindergarten, elementary, middle or high school graduation that do not substantially interfere with the ceremony. Additionally, the law prohibits schools from restricting what a student can wear under their graduation attire as long as the dress complies with the school's policy.

- **House Bill [24-1368](#)**

Language Access Advisory Board

(Sen. Gonzales and Sen. Bridges; and Reps. Lindsay and Velasco)

On or before December 15, 2024, the 11 voting member Language Access Advisory Board needs to identify language barriers for Coloradans with Limited English Proficiency (LEP), examine current language access measures relating to the legislative process, evaluate options for interpretation and written translation of legislative activities, assess language access needs with the ballot information booklet, and submit a report to the Legislative Counsel's Executive Committee including a summary of their work, the findings of their study and legislative recommendations.

- **House Bill [24-182](#)**

Immigrant Identification Document Issuance

(Sen. Gonzales and Sen. Bridges; Reps. Hernández and Velasco)

This law abolished unnecessary obstacles that undocumented Coloradans faced in obtaining a driver's license or identification card including repealing the requirements that the applicant have filed a CO income tax return, demonstrate residency in the state for the preceding two years, and provide a social security number of individual taxpayer identification number. Additionally, the law requires the Department of Revenue promulgate rules by January 1, 2027 that addresses what types, combinations and standards of documents issued by an agency of the U.S. Government, its contractors or subcontractors, an applicant could use to obtain a driver's license or identification card.

National Advocacy

In July 2023, as Vice Chair of the National Governors Association (NGA), Governor Polis together with Governor Cox (Chair of the NGA) launched a bipartisan immigration working group. This was only the third working group ever convened by the NGA and the only working group to date that focused on immigration. The group brought together a politically and geographically diverse group of Governors in order to find common ground on immigration principles that could be moved forward.

Governor Polis continued to regularly advocate with the White House and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) for the needs of Colorado's immigrants, including employment authorization for all new arrivals, expanded Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for Venezuelans and Nicaraguans, and employment authorization and relief for parents of Colorado's dreamers.

In SFY 2024, Governor Polis pushed DHS' U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) to make Form I-912 (Request for Fee Waiver) available online and waive fees for applicants filing their first application for employment authorization and/or TPS. Governor Polis also advocated for the DHS to revise its regulations to permanently lengthen the period of the automatic extension for up to 540 days for Employment Authorization Document (EAD) and/or EAD validity for eligible renewal applicants. Additionally, Governor Polis advocated that DHS continue to work on modernizing its systems and automating its processes in order to ensure that noncitizens have greater knowledge of the status of their immigration case including employment authorization and what they need to do in order to ensure their compliance with DHS requirements.

Photo caption: ONA National Network Meeting at the White House, October 2023.



Priority Initiatives of the Office of New Americans

ONA focused on the following initiatives for SFY 2024.

Continuing to Establish the Office of New Americans

In SFY 2024, ONA continued to establish relationships and the office itself.

In the SFY, ONA launched two new programs and several new initiatives to address the needs of New Americans. Additionally, ONA launched a statewide listserv CONA Connect, updated its website, and continued its rural outreach efforts in order to ensure that ONA is a statewide office for all of Colorado's New Americans. Finally, with the passage of HB 23-1283 (Transfer Refugee Services to New Americans Office), which mandates the transition of the Colorado Refugee Services Program (CRSP) to ONA, ONA has been meeting with CRSP and its team to prepare for the upcoming transition.



Photo caption: From left to right: Adam Kogeman, Joshua Loya, Dee Daniels Scriven, Anthony Cherwinski, Arif Hersanie, Sharon Vidal Francis, and Samantha Dewitt. ONA Team Building Event, April 2024.

Welcoming and Helping Newly Arrived Migrants Integrate

In SFY 2024, Colorado continued to see a historic number of new arrivals, over 30,000. The state continued to regularly convene a policy group including Governor's executives, Department of Local Affairs (DOLA), the Department of Public Safety (DPS) and ONA. At the beginning of the SFY, the state partnered with 3 community based organizations (CBOs) to provide integration services to those who wanted to call Colorado home. Throughout the year, ONA actively engaged as a steering committee member for the Newcomer's Fund launched by the Rose Community Foundation in order to quickly deploy funding to address unmet needs.

In July 2023, ONA was able to hire a Migrant Integration Manager to help with coordination and conduct outreach among those CBOs that were working to address

the needs of new arrivals. Through this work, ONA was able to collaborate with CBOs and faith based organizations across the state including in the following cities and counties: Aurora, Boulder, Carbondale, Colorado Springs, Denver, Fort Collins, Fort Lupton, Garfield, Greeley, Lakewood, Longmont, Steamboat Springs, Summit and Weld.

In November 2023, ONA was able to hire a term limited Migrants Grants Specialist, and through an interagency agreement with DPS, ONA took over the management of the grants. The state ultimately provided funding for 11 CBOs to mainly provide those integration services (e.g., case management, housing, immigration legal assistance) that would help new arrivals on their path to self-sufficiency.



Photo caption: New Coloradans making 1000 arepas to give away at migrant shelters, 2023.

The outcomes of the grants were exceptional. Through our partners, the state's support helped secure housing assistance for those who could sustain the investment, with a focus on serving families.



Photo caption: Juan Peña, Rooted with Roofs conducting outreach and engagement for the TPS virtual legal project.

Immigration Legal Assistance

In September, 2023, the Biden administration extended TPS to Venezuelans who arrived in the U.S. prior to July 31, 2023. Thousands of newly arrived Venezuelans in Colorado were suddenly eligible to apply for this relief which included access to employment authorization. Additionally, the federal government issued humanitarian parole to those who made appointments and entered the U.S. via the Customs and Border Protection (CBP) One App, making many new arrivals from various countries eligible to apply for employment authorization. Knowing that hardly any of those newly eligible would have the resources to pay for the necessary immigration legal assistance or the steep fees to submit TPS and EAD applications (\$545 and \$495, respectively), ONA quickly drafted a

proposal and successfully obtained a private \$500,000 donation to launch the state's immigration legal assistance work for new arrivals. ONA asked the private donor to give the money to the Rose Community Foundation, who gladly launched the Newcomer's Workforce Fund.

With this private funding, ONA established partnerships with the University of Denver Law School, Catholic Charities of Denver and the Justice and Mercy Legal Aid Center (JAMLAC), nonprofit and low bono immigration legal services providers to provide free TPS and employment authorization legal assistance to eligible new arrivals. Additionally, ONA also appealed to USCIS for partnership, which was critical and led to new arrivals' applications being affordable and receiving expedited processing.

With additional state funding of \$1,000,000, ONA was able to scale its efforts. Through partnership with the Roche Immigration Law Firm and Purpose Aligned Consulting, ONA helped develop an innovative virtual legal assistance model which leveraged low bono immigration attorneys nationwide to serve eligible Coloradans more quickly and at a scale that would have been impossible with Colorado's immigration attorneys alone.

By the end of SFY 2024, ONA and its partners were able to help approximately 3,700 individuals apply for TPS/EAD (2,739) and EAD (958). To ONA this is not just a number, but it represents individuals and families who had no viable option for survival but are now on a pathway to self-sufficiency. Through the end of calendar year 2024, ONA plans on continuing its partnerships with immigration legal services providers to continue helping those who need assistance.



New Coloradans receiving their employment authorization documents, 2024.

Employment Assistance for New Arrivals

With thousands of new arrivals receiving employment authorization, ONA worked to ensure that these new Coloradans were connected with employers. In January and March of 2024, ONA partnered with the Emily Griffith Technical College, the Spring Institute, and Centro De Los Trabajadores to host two hiring fairs with targeted outreach to new arrivals with work authorization. A total of 757 work-authorized New Americans and 21 unique employers attended these hiring events.

These events highlighted the demand for supporting new arrivals with job search services and job placement. Attendance at the hiring fairs was significantly higher than anticipated, as seen in the photo below where a line of New American job seekers wrapped around the

building during the March employment fair. Following the success of these hiring fairs, in May 2024, the City and County of Denver committed to host in-person hiring fairs for New Americans with ONA's support in an advisory capacity.

In SFY 2024, ONA began leading two task forces with local area workforce centers to enhance centers' readiness to serve New Americans. At the end of the SFY, ONA, in partnership with the CDLE Employment and Training Division, launched the New Americans Virtual Connection to Work, a virtual job fair pilot aimed at connecting New Americans with employers in need of talent. The plan is to run the pilot through December 2024.



Photo caption: Employment fair hosted by ONA, Spring Institute, and Emily Griffith at the Mosaic Campus in Denver, March 2024.

Building Immigration Legal Capacity


ONA's immigration legal assistance initiative for new arrivals and visits to rural partners highlighted the need for greater immigration legal capacity across the state. Many areas of Colorado outside of the Denver metro area are immigration legal "deserts" where communities lack access to free or affordable immigration legal services.

Recognizing the need to expand access to free and affordable immigration legal services, ONA successfully applied for a one time grant from the Emerson Collective to invest in increasing Colorado's cadre of U.S. Department of Justice Accredited Representatives (DOJ Accredited Reps).

DOJ Accredited Reps are immigration legal professionals who can provide critical immigration services to immigrant communities at a fraction of the cost it takes to train and deploy immigration attorneys. In Colorado, prior to ONA's initiative, there were ~30 DOJ Accredited Reps. Many, especially those in rural areas, have mainly worked in isolation, reducing their potential impact.

The Emerson funding was provided to 3 Colorado nonprofit immigration legal services providers to hire and train 6-8 new DOJ Accredited Reps, an increase of at least 20% over the existing statewide total. The providers have also used the funding to establish a new statewide DOJ Accredited Rep professional network to enhance learning, resource sharing, collaboration and impact. ONA partnered with the Catholic Charities of Denver to administer the funding and coordinate partners for evaluation and reporting.




Photo caption: Naturalization Ceremony at History Colorado, August 2, 2023.

Language Access

Since ONA's launch and through its listening tour, ONA learned that language barriers are a key challenge to providing effective government services to the approximately 300,000 Coloradans with limited English proficiency.¹⁸ With the generous support of the Colorado Trust, ONA partnered with national language access experts at the Migration Policy Institute (MPI), to assess the current state of language access at Colorado state agencies and identify opportunities for improvement. MPI's report, scheduled to be released by the end of 2024, will contain findings and recommendations that will inform a coordinated effort to enhance language access across the state government. While many states have invested in language access, this ONA/MPI initiative makes Colorado the first state to conduct a proactive, state-level assessment of this nature.



Photo caption: State Agency and MPI Staff at the ONA Statewide Language Access Assessment Convening, March 2024.

¹⁸ Migration Policy Institute. "[Language and Education](#)." Data hub, 2023, Tabulations based on the [U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey \(ACS\)](#) and [Decennial Census](#). Accessed 26 Feb. 2024.

Rural Partnerships

In SFY 2024, ONA conducted statewide outreach on serving new arrivals. ONA also continued to build relationships and promptly respond to immigrant serving organizations throughout Colorado that reached out regarding various issues.

During SFY 2024, ONA facilitated a panel at the Community Resource Center's Rural Philanthropy Days for the Southeast in La Junta with the goal of highlighting the work of two immigrant serving organizations to funders: Lamar Unidos and Centro de Los Pobres. ONA also traveled to meet with immigrant leaders and immigrant serving organizations in Fort Collins, Frisco, Fruita, Lamar, La Junta and New Castle.

During these visits, ONA learned of issues New Americans encounter including those related to: mobile home parks with no running water, wage theft, access to mental health services, lack of transportation, lack of access to recreation, no youth programming, and the inability of the community to communicate with 911.

There is still more work to be done. In SFY 25, ONA plans to relaunch a rural initiative in order to continue elevating the needs and concerns of rural New Americans, and helping immigrant and refugee serving organizations troubleshoot issues and liaise with state agencies in order to obtain necessary information and/or access to state assistance and programs.



Photo caption: Stakeholder meeting with community members in the Roaring Fork Valley, New Castle Library, July 2023.

Solidifying the New Americans Community Advisory Committee

The New Americans Community Advisory Committee (NACAC) continues to operate since its establishment by HB 21-1150 in December 2021. Comprising 20 diverse immigrant and refugee leaders statewide, the committee meets once a month virtually to address and advocate for issues pertinent to the New American community.

Through SFY 2024, the NACAC deepened its connection with the state of Colorado, fostering new relationships and identifying gaps and challenges that face New Americans when it comes to engaging with state agencies. Notable sessions include: Homelessness Prevention and Response - Governor's Office, Advancing Students for a Stronger Tomorrow (ASSET) and the Colorado Application for State Financial Aid (CASFA) - Department of Higher Education, Colorado Housing Connects, and

the Division of Professional Occupations - Department of Regulatory Agencies.

In early 2024, at the annual in-person gathering of the NACAC, the committee bid farewell to several founding members and welcomed seven new members, who bring fresh perspectives, broader geographic representation, and renewed energy to the committee's work. During this gathering, the committee reflected on the past year and shared their vision for the future of the NACAC. Collectively, the members elected a new executive team, entrusting them to lead and guide the committee toward their vision. ONA, Colorado State University's Office of Engagement and Extension, Department of Ethnic Studies, and the Colorado Refugee Services Program (CRSP) continue to support and guide the NACAC in its endeavors.



Dr. Eric Ishiwata engaging the 2024 NACAC, at the annual in-person meeting, January 2024.

Solidifying the New Americans Community Advisory Committee (continued)

Under the leadership of the new Executive Board and with the support of the administrative team, the NACAC established a strategic plan aimed at achieving its goals of enhanced engagement with state agencies and amplifying the voices of the New American community, including the implementation of a member-led statewide survey and resource awareness campaign. The NACAC continues to elevate its presence within the New American community by becoming a valuable asset and connection to Colorado's state resources that help New Americans.

Throughout the NACAC's growth, it has provided state agencies with the ability to tap into its knowledge, experience, and networks, thereby providing invaluable feedback with the hope of fostering the inclusion of New American voices in policies and programs presented by the state of Colorado.



The 2024 New American Community Advisory Committee at the annual in-person meeting, January 2024.

Maximizing the Talents of New Americans

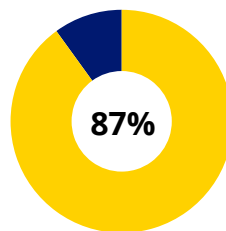
When skilled workers are underemployed or not employed in their field of education and/or training, families lose potential income and the state misses out on talent and tax revenue. ONA is working to ensure that the talents of Colorado's New Americans are fully utilized to meet the state's need for skilled workers.

The 2023 Colorado Talent Pipeline Report (TPR) states there are 2.5 jobs for every 1 unemployed person in Colorado.¹⁹ The TPR anticipates that the greatest employment growth will be in the social sciences and healthcare sectors.²⁰ Unfortunately, MPI estimated that from 2012 - 2016, 87% of legally present immigrants with health-related degrees were underutilized in Colorado, ranking Colorado as second in the nation for underutilizing immigrants' health-related degrees.²¹ Not only does this

result in the brain waste of Colorado's New Americans, it negatively impacts Colorado's economy and misses the opportunity to meet Coloradans' needs for access to health services.

This past SFY, ONA has worked to maximize the talents of New Americans in the following ways. ONA led the Global Talent Task Force (GTTF) which published a report on barriers faced by internationally trained professionals, and implemented the Virtual Career-Aligned English as a Second Language (VCESL) program which supported thousands with upskilling. ONA also launched the Integration of International Medical Graduates (IMG) program and published a webinar series to help employers engage Colorado's New Americans from recruitment to upskilling.

**Legally-present
immigrants with
health-related
degrees underutilized
in Colorado 2012-2016**



¹⁹ Colorado Workforce Development Council. "[2023 Colorado Talent Pipeline Report](#)." Accessed 2 Aug. 2024.

²⁰ "2023 Colorado Talent Pipeline Report," 30.

²¹ Batalova, Jean, et al.. "[Brain Waste among U.S. Immigrants with Health Degrees](#)." Migration Policy Institute, 9. Accessed 2 Aug. 2024.

Legislated Programs Administered by ONA

Benefit Recovery Fund (BRF)

On April 2, 2024, ONA launched the highly anticipated Benefit Recovery Fund (BRF). The state legislature, through [SB 22-234 \(Unemployment Compensation\)](#), 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. While ONA at the end of 2022, selected a third-party administrator (TPA), [AidKit](#), through the public procurement process, to serve as the TPA for the BRF, there were some unanticipated requirements and obstacles that needed to be addressed prior to launch.

First, the state had to officially ensure that funding for the BRF was not first deposited into the Unemployment Insurance Trust Fund (UITF), triggering U.S. Department of Labor rules and regulations. So the state passed SB 23-232 (Unemployment Insurance Premiums Allocation Federal Law Compliance) creating a support surcharge, separate from the UITF, which would fund the BRF. Second, ONA had to establish data sharing agreements with Colorado's Departments of Human Services and Revenue, and the Unemployment Insurance Division at CDLE. Finally, although the BRF was hosted on AidKit's platform, it had to undergo a legislatively mandated information technology gating process, to ensure that the BRF met IT, security and accessibility standards, and reduced risk for the state.

Once these unanticipated requirements were addressed, AidKit built and hosted the online application. The BRF application is accessible via [ONA's website](#). The application is completely electronic and AidKit has a dedicated team of support specialists that provide application support, efficiently determine eligibility of applicants, distribute funds quickly and securely, and review appeals. By using the TPA, the law ensured the protection of an applicant's personally identifiable information (PII). Additionally, by contract, AidKit is unable to share any PII from the BRF unless it is mandated to do so under a court order.

Since April 2, the BRF has received over 275 applications and has paid out over \$101,000 to 35 claimants. While this may seem to be a slow start, ONA believes it has provided AidKit with more time to refine and ensure the integrity of the BRF.

ONA's highest priorities in the implementation of the BRF is to protect against fraud in order to ensure the sustainability of the program for years to come and to serve the highest number of eligible individuals. Moving forward, ONA, together with AidKit, will continue working on increasing the visibility of the BRF program by collaborating with trusted immigrant-serving CBOs.

Integration of International Medical Graduates

After a competitive process, in August 2023, ONA signed a contract with the Denver Health and Hospital Authority (DHHA) for the Integration of International Medical Graduates (IMG) program. DHHA created a curriculum for and successfully launched Colorado's Clinical Readiness Program (CRP) for IMGs. DHHA subcontracted with the Spring Institute to establish the IMG assistance program (AP), which provides direct services to IMGs who wish to reestablish their medical careers in CO.

In January 2024, DHHA accepted the first four participants into the CRP. The CRP lasts for nine months after which the cohort will be assessed and assisted in applying for residency programs. Colorado's medical workforce is desperate for more doctors. The goal of the program is for these IMGs to obtain medical licensure to fill critical healthcare gaps (hopefully in Colorado) and diversify the physician's workforce for better health outcomes. The CRP and AP programs orient IMGs to the U.S. medical system via training ranging from highly technical medical rotations to case noting and U.S. workforce culture in the medical field. DHHA is planning on beginning its selection and placement process in the summer of 2024 for its second cohort.

The Spring Institute has successfully served 16 IMGs through the AP this past SFY. The Spring Institute will continue recruiting participants for its AP in the summer of 2024.



Photo caption: From left to right: Suhaila, Islam, Hind, and Sulafa, four of Colorado's internationally trained doctors constituting the first cohort of the IMG Program. Photo Credit: Jeff Mosier.

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 law tasked the GTTF to review existing pathways in at least 5 in-demand sectors for internationally trained professionals and skilled New Americans living in Colorado to obtain credentials that would help them return to work in their professional field or occupation. The 5 in-demand sectors included construction with a focus on electricians, early childhood education,

healthcare with a focus on nursing, information technology with a focus on software developers, and education with a focus on secondary teachers. The GTTF identified cross-cutting barrier themes of certification and licensure, work-based learning, cultural responsiveness, language access, and financial barriers.

In SFY 2024, the GTTF drafted and published its [Global Talent Task Force Final Report](#) consisting of recommendations to address barriers that Colorado's internationally trained professionals face in re-entering their line of work in Colorado. In December 2023, the GTTF submitted its final report to the Governor's Office and General Assembly.



Photo caption: From left to right: Allie Needham, Rep. Iman Jodeh, Dr. Janelle Johnson, Anthony Cherwinski ONA's Global Talent Administrator, Dana Bustamante, Dr. Deborah Young, and Sarah Kitonsa, all GTTF members celebrating together at ONA's First Anniversary Event, July 2023.

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

Through the passage of [SB 22-140](#), the state legislature tasked ONA to stand up the VCESL program to offer free career-aligned virtual English classes for in-demand industries and occupations.

Through a competitive process, ONA selected two vendors, EnGen and Burlington English, to implement the VCESL program. The vendors were selected in the fall of 2022 and ONA finalized contracts with the vendors in January 2023.

In SFY 2024, ONA and its vendors worked to promote the VCESL program, establish partnerships with employers, workforce centers, libraries, nonprofits, and enroll Colorado's English Language Learners (ELLs) into the program. ONA and its vendors established 49 partnerships and enrolled ELLs speaking 27 native languages from 73 cities across Colorado. A total of 4,160 of Colorado's ELLs benefited from the program, building confidence along with their English skills in workforce sectors desperate for talent such as nursing, education, construction, manufacturing, retail, hospitality, engineering, and STEM.

On June 30, 2024, the VCESL program was sunsetted per SB 22-140. To learn more about the VCESL program, please read the program's [ONA's Virtual, Career-Aligned English as a Second Language Program Report](#).

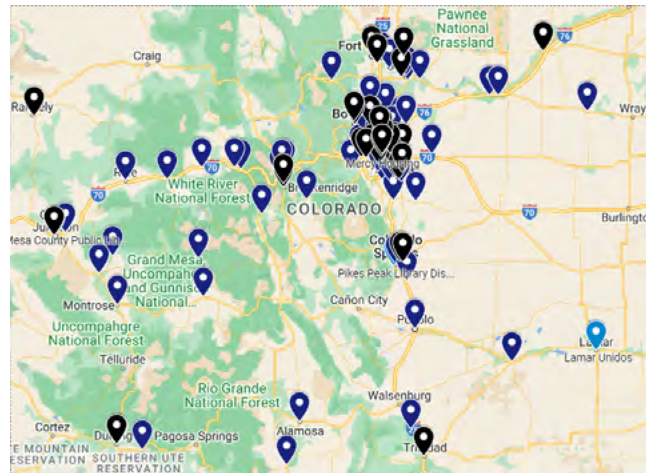


Image: VCESL Enrollment Map of ELLs Across the State.



Photo caption: Aileve, a Venezuelan mother and VCESL participant who took courses in Early Childhood Education to accelerate her certification coursework with a local school district in order to become a paraeducator.

Immigration Legal Defense Fund (ILDF)

Through [HB 21-1194 \(Immigration Legal Defense Fund or ILDF\)](#), ONA administers the ILDF which provides free legal representation to New Americans 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 assist 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 SFY 2024, annual funding for the ILDF was \$350,000. In October 2023, 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 the International Rescue Committee (IRC) to provide representation to non-detained indigent clients outside of the Denver metro area in the central mountains.

In terms of results, in SFY 2024, 109 individuals facing deportation received free legal representation through the ILDF. Of these, 76 were non-detained individuals in Summit, Eagle or Garfield counties and 33 were detained by ICE at the GEO facility in Aurora. ILDF-funded attorneys secured the release of 20 (60%) of the detained individuals.

ILDF funded services have profound positive impacts on Colorado families and communities. This SFY, with ILDF funds, the IRC helped an Afghan national, his wife and two minor children quickly submit an asylum application to the Denver Immigration Court due to their fear of persecution by the Taliban. For nearly a year, this new Colorado family relied on local faith organizations and social service providers to meet basic needs including housing, food, clothing, school enrollment, and other assistance. Despite frequent hardships, the family continually worked to integrate into local networks and give back to other community members, whether by organizing social gatherings or interpreting essential meetings for other Afghans. While they are awaiting the outcome of their asylum applications, they were able to file and receive employment authorization documents for all family members. At present, the father, who is fluent in English and holds an advanced degree from Afghanistan, can finally pursue formal employment and contribute his talents to Colorado's economy.

For more information about the ILDF, check out the [HB 21-1194 SFY 2024 Annual report: Immigration Legal Defense Fund](#).

Thank You to Our Partners and Colorado's New Americans

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!!!



Appendix A

How Do Colorado's Immigrant Demographics Compare to National-level Data?

	United States	Colorado	Percent of total U.S. population in Colorado
Total Population (estimates)	331,097,593	5,770,790	1.7%
Immigrant residents	45,281,071	547,602 ²²	1.2%
Undocumented immigrants	9,940,700 ²³	139,200 ²⁴	1.4%
DACA immediately eligible population	1,160,000	21,000 ²⁵	1.8%
Number of DACA recipients	528,300	11,980 ²⁶	2.2%

	United States	Colorado	Higher or Lower than National Average
Immigrant share of population	13.8%	9.5%	Lower
Foreign-born population share of workers (ages 16-64)	77.7%	82.5%	Higher
Share of entrepreneurs who are immigrants	22.6%	12.2%	Lower
STEM workers who are immigrants	23.1%	11.2%	Lower
Share of immigrant population eligible to vote	50.7% ²⁷	46.1% ²⁸	Lower

Compared to the national average, Colorado has a slightly lower immigrant share of the population, but a higher share of foreign-born workers.

²² United States Census Bureau. “[Explore Census Data](#).” 2024. Accessed 22 Aug. 2024.

All data in this table is cited from the above source.

²³ American Immigration Council. “[Take a Look: How Immigrants Drive the Economy in the United States of America](#).” 2024. Accessed 22 Aug. 2024.

²⁴ American Immigration Council. “[Take a Look: How Immigrants Drive the Economy in Colorado](#).” 2024. Accessed 22 Aug. 2024.

²⁵ Migration Policy Institute. “[Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals \(DACA\) Data Tools](#).” March 2024. Accessed 22 Aug. 2024.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ American Immigration Council. “[Take a Look: How Immigrants Drive the Economy in United States of America](#).” 2024. Accessed 22 Aug. 2024.

²⁸ American Immigration Council. “[Take a Look: How Immigrants Drive the Economy in Colorado](#).” 2024. Accessed 22 Aug. 2024

Appendix B

Relevant Data to Understand Colorado's New Americans

Age Groups: Foreign-Born and U.S. Born Coloradans

Age Group	Foreign-Born Population Share	U.S.-Born Population Share ²⁹
0-15	5.0%	19.5%
16-64	82.5%	64.4%
65+	12.5%	16.0%

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

Indicators of Economic Well-being: Foreign-Born and U.S. Born Coloradans

Indicators of Economic Well-being	Foreign-Born Coloradans	U.S.-Born Coloradans ³⁰
Median household income	\$76,375	\$89,144
Home ownership rate	56.8%	67.2%

These economic indicators point to a higher cost of living for foreign-born Coloradans because they reflect an increased dependence on the rental market and inequities in generational wealth building.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ United States Census Bureau. "[Explore Census Data](#)." 2024. Accessed 22 Aug. 2024. All data in this table is cited from the above source.

Health Insurance Coverage: U.S.-Born, Foreign-Born, Noncitizen and Unauthorized Coloradans

2021 Data	U.S.-Born Coloradans	Foreign-Born Coloradans	Noncitizen Coloradans ³¹	Unauthorized population Coloradans ³²
No health insurance	5.4%	23.0%	36.3%	59%

The data shows a wide disparity in health insurance coverage between U.S. born and foreign-born, noncitizen and unauthorized Coloradans. The results of not having health insurance can lead to delayed healthcare, an increase in out of pocket health costs, and medical debt.

Educational Levels: Foreign-Born and U.S.-Born Coloradans

Educational Levels (age 25+)	Foreign-Born Coloradans (age 25+)	U.S.-Born Coloradans ³³ (age 25+)
Less than high school diploma	27.3%	4.8%
High school graduate (includes equivalency)	21.7%	20.3%
Some college or associate's degree	19.0%	29.6%
Bachelor's degree	17.7%	28.5%
Graduate or professional degree	14.4%	16.8%

The data shows that foreign-born Coloradans are less likely than their U.S.-born peers to have a high school diploma. It also shows that foreign-born Coloradans have a high percentage of advanced degrees. It is important to note that many of Colorado's New Americans with advanced degrees may be employed significantly below their skill and potential income levels because employers and credentialing bodies are unable or struggle to recognize immigrants' credentials or assess their skills.

31 Migration Policy Institute. "State Immigration Profiles, Colorado." 2022. Accessed 22 Aug. 2024.

32 Migration Policy Institute. "Profile of the Unauthorized Population: Colorado." 2019. Accessed 22 Aug. 2024.

33 United States Census Bureau. "Explore Census Data." 2024. Accessed 22 Aug. 2024.

All data in this table is cited from the above source.

Industries Employing Foreign-Born and U.S.-Born Coloradans

Industry	Foreign-Born Coloradans	U.S.-Born Coloradans ³⁴
Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting; mining	2.3%	2.0%
Construction	14.3%	7.2%
Manufacturing	9.2%	6.7%
Wholesale trade	2.1%	2.3%
Retail trade	8.2%	10.8%
Transportation and warehousing; utilities	5.6%	5.0%
Information	2.3%	2.7%
Finance and insurance; real estate; rental and leasing	5.2%	7.5%
Professional, scientific, and management; administrative and waste management services	14.8%	14.9%
Educational services; health care and social assistance	17.5%	22.0%
Arts, entertainment, and recreation; accommodation and food services	10.6%	9.3%
Other services (except public administration)	5.6%	4.7%
Public administration	2.4%	4.8%

The data shows that foreign-born Coloradans are disproportionately employed in the construction and manufacturing industries. It also shows a high percentage of Colorado's immigrants are working in the professional, scientific and management industry, as well as the educational services, healthcare and social assistance industries.

³⁴ Ibid. All data in this table is cited from this source.

Occupations Held by Foreign-Born and U.S.-Born Coloradans

Occupation	Foreign-Born Coloradans	U.S.-Born Coloradans ³⁵
Management, business, science, and arts occupations	34.5%	47.4%
Service occupations	21.7%	14.6%
Sales and office occupations	13.7%	20.8%
Natural resources, construction, and maintenance occupations	16.0%	7.8%
Production, transportation, and material moving occupations	14.1%	9.4%

³⁵ Ibid. All data in this table is cited from this source.



COLORADO
Department of
Labor and Employment