



Central Ohio's Plan for Welcoming Immigrants and Refugees

Strategic Welcoming Plan
2022 - 2025







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Letter from Columbus City Councilmember Emmanuel V. Remy

Hello Columbus, Ohio! I am thrilled to help share Central Ohio's Plan for Welcoming Immigrants and Refugees. Over a year of hard work from many talented and thoughtful local leaders has resulted in a comprehensive plan to welcome and support immigrants and refugees who call Central Ohio home.

Columbus City Council is proud to support this Welcoming Plan and other great programs through annual funding and technical assistance. During the height of COVID-19 in 2020, my office won and matched a Welcoming America Resilient Rapid Response Grant of \$10,000 to help us partner with local producer Tariq Tarey to film and disseminate informational COVID-19 videos in multiple languages with \$20,000 total in funding.

In 2021 my office launched a pilot program that provided grants to local resettlement and social service organizations that serve immigrants and refugees. The grants helped to train staff on Columbus Civil Service testing procedures to assist their clients when applying to jobs at the City of Columbus, with the ultimate goal of increasing diversity in our workforce.

Just a few months ago, Columbus City Council created the Afghan Neighbors Rental Assistance Fund that provided \$50,000 to our local resettlement agencies to help fill the gap when searching for housing as a new immigrant or refugee in Columbus, but not having the funding to support the landlord's income requirements. This program is being replicated in numerous cities for both Afghan and Ukrainian refugee and asylum housing support.

And finally, this year Columbus City Council will move forward legislation to implement a citywide Language Access Policy to help streamline language translation and interpretation resources throughout all departments. This legislation is one of the strategies listed later in this Welcoming Plan. Central Ohio is thriving with opportunity. And with a growing immigrant population, we need to support the growth and diversity of our region by working together in unison over the next three years to implement the strategies and goals of this plan not just in Columbus but throughout the region.

Yours in service,



Emmanuel V. Remy
Member of Columbus City Council



THE CITY OF
COLUMBUS
CITY COUNCIL

Letter from Franklin County Commissioner Kevin L. Boyce

I am excited to share with you the Gateways for Growth Challenge and its Multisector Strategic Welcoming Plan. Over the past several years, the Franklin County Board of Commissioners have made the needs of New Americans in our community a forefront of our work. In my first months as a Franklin County Commissioner, the Board adopted a resolution formally establishing the New American Advisory Council (NAAC) to identify challenges and barriers within the New American community, construct a platform that promotes inclusivity, and to offer solutions to the problems New Americans in Franklin County face. Since then, the NAAC and its partnering organizations have worked tirelessly to lead conversations with New Americans in Franklin County and identify how local governments can best support them.

The Columbus metropolitan area is home to over 184,000 New Americans, a population which has seen incredible growth in recent years. Not only do New Americans enrich our lively community with their culture and heritage, but they also make immense contributions to the local economy. The Gateways for Growth Challenge and a Multisector Strategic Welcoming Plan on Immigrant Integration is a unique opportunity that will allow the Board of Commissioners and local governments within Franklin County to receive customized economic research reports, tailored assistance to create a welcoming plan for New Americans, and grants to fund supportive efforts.

With the help of US Together, Welcoming City, the NAAC and its partners; this plan reflects the wants and needs of the New American community in Central Ohio, as well as solutions to addressing inaccessibility and other barriers New Americans have to overcome. This plan will provide Franklin County and its municipalities with a comprehensive guide to how local governments can best serve the ever-growing New American community.

Many thanks to the tireless efforts of everyone involved in the Gateways for Growth Challenge. I am grateful to be a part of sharing these efforts with our community and am truly excited to see this hard work unfold in our community.



Kevin L. Boyce
Commissioner
Franklin County Board of Commissioners



Office of
**COMMISSIONER
KEVIN L. BOYCE**

Letter from Gateways for Growth

In 2016, a partnership between Welcoming America and New American Economy—now the American Immigration Council—created the Gateways for Growth Challenge to support communities that have a demonstrated commitment to developing an inclusive, accessible, and welcoming environment for all residents. Since then, more than 70 communities have been awarded with tailored economic research on the contributions of immigrants and technical assistance in the development of a multisector strategic plan for immigrant inclusion in their communities.

In 2020, Columbus was one of only 10 communities selected nationally to receive both components of this competitive opportunity. Alongside colleagues in communities like Southwest Kansas and Minneapolis, Minnesota, Columbus received this award because of the commitment from local government, business, and civil society to work collaboratively. This collaboration toward concrete and action-oriented recommendations ensures that the region is addressing both the challenges and opportunities facing the immigrant community and is creating pathways for all residents to succeed.

US Together, in partnership with the City of Columbus and Franklin County, has worked over the past year with a multisector steering committee committed to ensure everyone in central Ohio feels welcomed and to ensure that the voices of those most impacted are represented throughout the plan. This process identifies opportunities to advance equity and demonstrates a commitment from all those involved to build a more welcoming central Ohio. We are thrilled to see this plan implemented and look forward to the ways in which Columbus becomes a more equitable, prosperous community by ensuring that all residents can belong.

Mo Kantner, Director, State & Local
Initiatives, American Immigration
Council

George Zavala, Western Regional
Manager, Welcoming America



WELCOMING
AMERICA



Letter from US Together, Inc. & Welcoming City

We would like to thank the generous participants who contributed to Central Ohio's Plan for Welcoming Immigrants and Refugees.

We believe that this Welcoming Plan illuminates the areas of service and support that require strengthening and development to ensure equitable access for immigrants and refugees. Only when an intentionally inclusive infrastructure is designed and implemented will immigrants and refugees have the resources and support necessary to thrive within new communities, like Central Ohio, and make them their own.

Information stemming from surveys and community conversations relating to this project indicate that people in the community do believe that it is important to have a comprehensive welcoming plan. The priorities, strategies, and goals in Central Ohio's Plan for Welcoming Immigrants and Refugees are based on an approach centered on Targeted Universalism (TU). This Plan expands upon immigrant integration efforts made in Central Ohio during the past 30 years. Our community eagerly anticipates the implementation of this Plan, along with the changes, opportunities, and improvements in service and resource access that it can inspire. We are humbled by and grateful for our role in this process and recognize the many individuals and groups who have dedicated their lives to creating equitable opportunities and welcoming environments, for immigrants and refugees.

Sincerely,



Nadia Kasvin
US Together, Inc.
Co-Founder & Director



Tatyana Mindlina
US Together, Inc.
Co-Founder & Director



Guadalupe A. Velasquez
Welcoming City
Managing Director



WelcomingCity

Letter from the Steering Committee

Central Ohio is a region where education, technology, the arts, sports, and business meet to form an innovative and dynamic union. The region's diverse landscapes and populations exemplify the beauty, creativity, and variety of experiences available in Central Ohio. Among these experiences are those offered by immigrants and refugees who contribute significantly to the economic, cultural, and social fabric of the region. For these populations and all others, it is essential that Central Ohio be a welcoming and inclusive community of opportunity and belonging for everyone who visits, works, or lives in the region.

The Gateways for Growth Initiative of Central Ohio endeavors to reduce barriers for immigrants and refugees in our community by developing a strategic plan to welcome them and create a space of belonging. Equitable opportunity and respectful treatment in all areas—education, employment, government, public safety, civic engagement, law, and leadership—are the cornerstones of a healthy, safe, and connected community based on social justice. Addressing the obstacles immigrants and refugees encounter in these areas, regardless of immigration status or language spoken, is central to a fair and just community.

This plan to welcome immigrants and refugees to Central Ohio is based on a multisector approach of identifying innovative policies, goals, and strategies through a Targeted Universal approach. The process included community members and leaders in business; government; and nonprofit, faith-based, academic, and multiethnic organizations to listen to the visions, needs, and concerns of immigrant and refugee residents of Central Ohio. The resulting comprehensive plan presents creative and viable recommendations that will improve the quality of life and economic potential for all residents. It provides a clear direction to make Central Ohio a more attractive, welcoming, inclusive, and globally competitive place for all.

We invite you to join us in realizing this vision for Central Ohio.

Sincerely,

The Gateways for Growth Steering Committee

Steering Committee Members

Samia Alzier

*Arab Americans of Central Ohio
President*

Joy L. Bivens

*Franklin County Health & Human Services Deputy
County Administrator*

Tarunjit Butalia

Interfaith Association of Central Ohio

Courtnee Carrigan

*Raising The Bar Performance Group
CEO*

Bill Christensen

*Vineyard International Ministries
Pastor - Emeritus*

Michael Corey

*Human Services Chamber
Director*

Lucille J. Frank

*Columbus City Council
Legislative Assistant*

Kelly Fuller

*Columbus Chamber of Commerce
VP Talent and Workforce Development*

Sean Grant

*Columbus Partnership, One Columbus
Vice President, Chief Administrative Officer*

Dr. David Harrison

*Columbus State Community College
President*

Dr. Rosaire Ifedi

*Ashland University
Associate Professor*

Scott Johnson

*OhioMeansJobs Columbus-Franklin County
Job Center Operator*

Nadia Kasvin

*US Together, Inc.
Co-Founder & Director*

Mark A. Lundine

*City of Columbus
Economic Development Administrator*

Pedro D. Mejia

*City of Columbus
Community Relations Coordinator*

Rebecca Nelson

Community Advocate

Urvi Patel

*Urvi Patel Coaching
Transformational Leadership Coach*

Marleise K. Ryan

*Franklin County
Small Emerging Business Coordinator*

Emily Savors

*Columbus Foundation
Director of Grants Management*

Jim R. Schimmer

*Franklin County
Director of Development*

Kim Stands

*City of Columbus
Human Services Coordinator*

Patrick Terrien

*Columbus Council on World Affairs
President & CEO*

Ariana D. Ulloa-Olavarrieta

*City of Columbus
Small Business Coordinator*

Guadalupe A. Velasquez

*Welcoming City
Managing Director*

Christina Vera

*Femergy®
Director of Operations*

New American Advisory Council

We would like to thank those from the New American Advisory Council and the community members who contributed to the process of this welcoming plan.

Nadia Kasvin

Chair

New American Advisory Council

US Together, Inc.

Co-Founder & Director

Laura Berger Abbas

Our Helpers

Chief Operating Officer

Sudarshan Pyakurel

Bhutanese Community of

Central Ohio

Executive Director

Maria Elizabeth Cortez

YMCA of Central Ohio

New American Welcome Center

Community Outreach Director

José Morales-Crispin

Franklin County Sheriff's Office

Community Outreach and

Engagement Manager

FCSO Externship Program

Coordinator

Karen Jiobu

Asian American Community

Services

Board Member

Kawther Musa

Heart of Ohio Family Health

Care Center

HIV Program Coordinator

Northeast Area Commissioner

Rebecca Nelson

Community Advocate

Guadalupe A. Velasquez

Welcoming City

Managing Director

Dr. Yung-Chen Lu

Ohio Asian American Pacific

Islander Advisory Council

Council Chair

Angie Plummer

Community Refugee &

Immigration Services

Executive Director

Dr. Seleshi Asfaw

Ethiopian Tewahedo Social Service

Executive Director

Keith Hanson

Columbus Metropolitan Library

Karl Rd. Branch

Manager

Bisha Rumicho, MBA

Columbus Metropolitan Library

Main Branch

Life Skills Strategy Leader

Emily Cooner

Office of Franklin County

Commissioner Kevin L. Boyce

Policy Aide

Hailey Crook, LSW

Bhutanese Community of Central

Ohio, Board Member

Care Source

Communications Coordinator

Nick Petrosky

Representative Leland, District 22

Legislative Aide

Kim Emch

Son Ministries

Founder & Director

Ibrahima Sow

Ohio New African Immigrants

Commission

Chair

Tariq Tarey

Jewish Family Services

Business & Employment Services

Coordinator

Abdi Soofe

City of Columbus

Outreach Coordinator

Surendra Bir Adhikari, PhD

MedSoc, MA

Ohio Department of Mental Health &

Addiction Services

Behavioral Health Administrator

Principal Investigator-Health

Disparities & Equity

Bhuwan Pyakurel

City of Reynoldsburg

Councilmember

Manju Sankarappa

Ohio Asian American Health

Coalition

Executive Director

Staff Member

Representative Craig, District 26

Ronald C. Todd II

Office of the Governor

Faith Based & Community Initiatives

Steering Committee Goals for Central Ohio

1

Create a shared vision for welcoming, integration, and belonging for immigrants and refugees

2

Develop a comprehensive plan of policies and programs that support the vision

3

Expand current immigrant and refugee integration initiatives

4

Build relationships across sectors that will leverage the resources and assets of diverse partners

5

Maximize the economic, civic, and social opportunities available to all residents



Process and Methodology

The Gateways for Growth Initiative of Central Ohio was born out of the grant for research from the Gateways for Growth challenge described above in the letter from that organization. Our Central Ohio Initiative began with creating a Steering Committee with the help of the City of Columbus, City Council of Columbus, and the Franklin County Board of Commissioners. The Committee includes community members and leaders from business, nonprofit, government, faith-based, academic, and multi-ethnic organizations. The Steering Committee approved the project to develop this comprehensive Welcoming Plan for Central Ohio. These stakeholders identified the expectation that the plan would include recommendations based on data collected from various groups in Central Ohio and agreed on the timelines, methods, and assigned duties and roles for this joint effort. The technical support provided by the New American Economy (NAE) and Welcoming America (WA) as part of the grant was essential in accomplishing our goal. It was a great honor to receive this opportunity and accompanying support.

In this plan, the following terms are used:

- 1) Immigrant: A person living in a country other than that of his or her (their) birth;¹
- 2) Refugee: A person who has fled war, violence, conflict or persecution and has crossed an international border to find safety in another country;² and
- 3) New American: An individual in the U.S. who is aspiring to take the Path to U.S. Citizenship, or who has, in the recent past, become a naturalized citizen of the United States of America³ (A term often used by government agencies).

Research methods consisted of fourteen (14) focus groups of immigrants and refugees, one of which included school administrators. Additional data were collected using four (4) surveys of immigrants and refugees—two (2) directed at adults and two (2) directed toward youth. Participants in the focus groups and surveys were identified by organizations that serve immigrants and refugees in Central Ohio.

The four (4) surveys addressed the following topics: 1) Safety/Safe Communities for Youth; 2) Education for Youth; 3) Equitable Access to Language; and 4) Economic Development/Small Business Development. The team identified bilingual community liaisons to conduct the surveys on Equitable Access to Language and Small Business Development in multiple languages. The four (4) surveys were conducted from September 2021 to January 2022. The fourteen (14) focus groups addressed the following topics: 1) Education; 2) Equitable Access to Affordable Housing; 3) Access to Healthcare; 4) Safe Communities; 5) Connected Communities; 6) Civic Engagement; and 7) Government Leadership. Interpreters were available for the focus groups. The fourteen (14) focus groups were conducted from September 2021 to early December 2021.

Process and Methodology

Additional data regarding Workforce Development presented in this Welcoming Plan of Central Ohio include community feedback from recent reports on Workforce Development.

Through the surveys and focus groups, immigrants and refugees were able to convey their needs, concerns, and recommendations on how to make Central Ohio a more welcoming, safe, and supportive environment for their diverse communities. School administrators were also able to share their observations, experiences, and recommendations for improving the immigrant and refugee educational and community experience in Central Ohio. Several members of the Franklin County New American Advisory Council contributed to this effort by co-facilitating some of the community focus groups and by providing feedback and insight about our findings.

Based on this input, the Steering Committee and aforementioned leaders created recommendations for Central Ohio's Plan for Welcoming Immigrants and Refugees. These priorities are:

- 1) Equitable Economic and Workforce Development;
- 2) Equitable Education;
- 3) Connected, Safe, and Healthy Communities Founded on Social Justice;
- 4) Equitable Access to Services, Resources, and ESL Classes; and
- 5) Civic Engagement, Government, and Leadership Development.

Implementing this plan will reduce barriers for immigrants and refugees in our community and create a more welcoming environment, a space of belonging, and economic, educational, and leadership opportunities for all. The following goals and strategies set the course for Central Ohio's Plan for Welcoming Immigrants and Refugees.

This plan is a significant result based on many people's work and input and provides a framework for future action. Achieving its potential will require clarifying the results we hope to achieve and continuing work on all our parts. Moving forward we will continue to work with all of our current partners and expand that group to have broader influence and impact in Central Ohio. Some of the immediate next steps are to:

1. Identify additional partners who can contribute to implementing this plan,
 2. Review and refine the goals and strategies with our partners,
 3. Identify and promote policies and programs in public and private organizations,
 4. Define the criteria for assessing success and identify corresponding metrics, and
 5. Implement regular monitoring of those metrics and provide reports about them.
-

New Americans in the Columbus Metro Area

The Demographic and Economic Contributions of Immigrants in the Columbus Metro Area¹

MAY 2021



Population

184,800

immigrants lived in the Columbus metropolitan area, Ohio, in 2019.

Immigrants made up **8.7%**

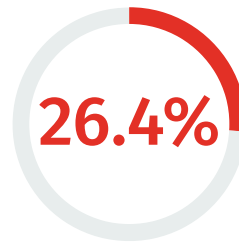
of the total population in the metro area in 2019.

Between 2014 and 2019, the population in the metro area increased by



The immigrant population grew by

+22.2%



of total population growth in the metro area was attributable to immigrants.

Demographics



of immigrants in metro Columbus are recent arrivals, with less than 5 years of residency in the United States, meaning

In the metro area, immigrants are

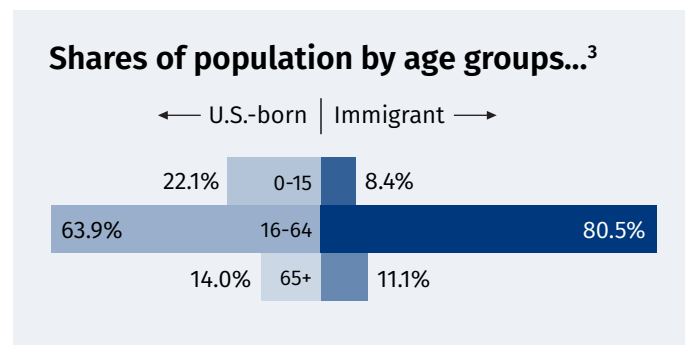
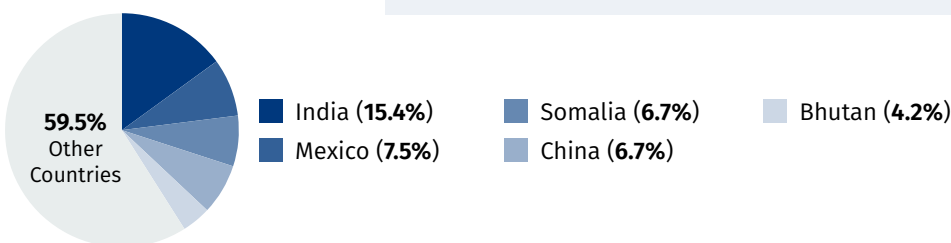


more likely to be of working-age than their U.S.-born counterparts, allowing them to actively participate in the labor force and contribute to the economy as taxpayers and consumers.²



of immigrants in metro Columbus have lived in the United States for more than 5 years.

The top five countries of origin for immigrants living in the metro area were



¹ Unless otherwise specified, data comes from 1-year samples of the American Community Survey from 2014 and 2019 and figures refer to the metropolitan statistical area of Columbus, Ohio.

² We define working age as 16-64 years of age.

³ Totals may not add up to 100 percent due to rounding.

Demographics *continued*

28,200

immigrants living in the metro area had limited English language proficiency, making up



of the immigrant population.

Among them, the top language spoken at home other than English was

Spanish

which made up **32.3%** of all non-English languages spoken at home by immigrants with limited English language proficiency.

Spending Power & Tax Contributions

Given their income, immigrants contributed significantly to state and local taxes, including property, sales, and excise taxes levied by state and local governments.

Foreign-born households held



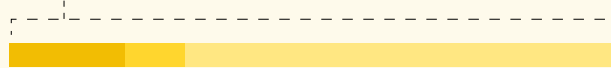
of all spending power in metro Columbus, more than their **8.7%** share of the population.

In 2019, foreign-born residents in the metro area contributed

\$15.4 billion

to the metro area's GDP, or **11.5%** of the total.⁶

In 2019, immigrant households in the metro area earned **\$7.4 billion**



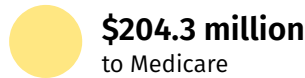
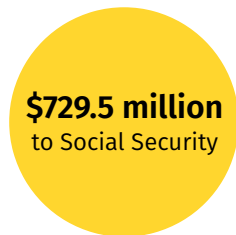
■ **\$1.4 billion**

went to federal taxes⁴

■ **\$712.4 million** went to state & local taxes⁵

■ **\$5.3 billion** left in spending power

Immigrants in the metro area also supported federal social programs. In 2019, they contributed



25.6%

of immigrants in the metro area received Medicare or Medicaid, compared with

31.3%

of U.S.-born residents in 2019.

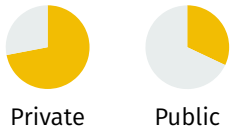
4 U.S. Congressional Budget Office. 2020. "The Distribution of Household Income and Federal Taxes, 2017."

5 Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy. 2018. "Who Pays? A Distributional Analysis of the Tax Systems in All Fifty States."

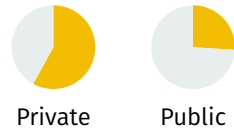
6 These figures derive from our calculations based on immigrants' share of wage income and self-employment income in the 1-year ACS sample from 2019 and the statistics of GDP from the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis.

Spending Power & Tax Contributions *continued*

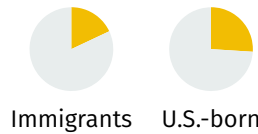
About **72.2%** of immigrants had private healthcare coverage, while **32.0%** had public healthcare coverage.⁷



About **58.2%** of U.S.-born had private healthcare coverage, while **25.9%** had public healthcare coverage.



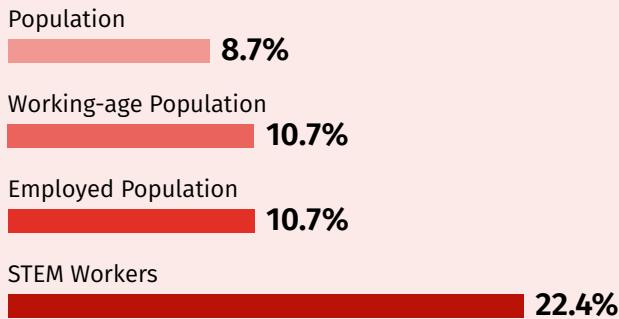
Given their household incomes, **17.5%** of immigrants lived at or below 150% of the federal poverty threshold as compared to **26.1%** of U.S.-born residents.



Workforce

Although the foreign-born population made up **8.7%** of the metro area's overall population, they represented **10.7%** of its working-age population, **10.7%** of its employed labor force, and **22.4%** of its STEM workers in 2019.⁸

Immigrant shares of the...



The immigrant working-age population was **49.9%** female and **50.1%** male.



The employed immigrant population was **43.2%** female and **56.8%** male.



Immigrants in the metro area are

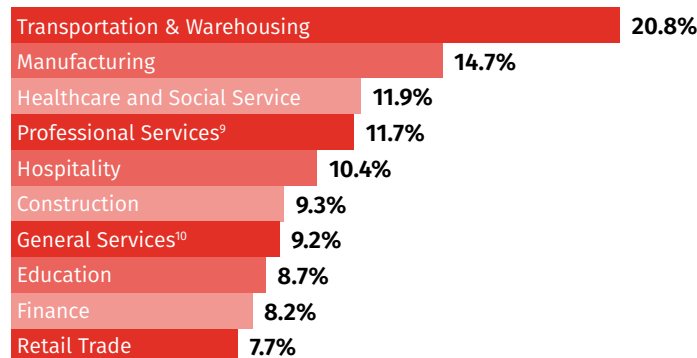
25.9%

more likely to be working age or employed than their U.S.-born counterparts.

Immigrants played a critical role in several key industries in the metro area.



of workers in the Transportation & Warehousing industry were foreign-born in 2019.



⁷ Including people who have both public and private healthcare coverage.

⁸ STEM refers to occupations that require background or expertise in Science, Technology, Engineering, and/or Math.

⁹ Professional services: Most of these industries include professions that require a degree or a license, such as legal services, accounting, scientific research, consulting services, etc.

¹⁰ General services include personal services (e.g. laundry services, barber shops, and repair and maintenance), religious organizations, social services, and labor unions.

Workforce *continued*

SPOTLIGHT ON Immigrant Essential Workers

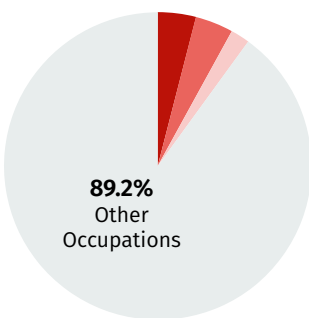
Immigrants have also been playing vital roles in critical industries that have kept the country functioning throughout the Covid-19 crisis. Immigrants in the metro area continue working in these frontline and essential industries:



SPOTLIGHT ON Job Demand In Metro Columbus In 2021

Not only are immigrants more likely to be of working age in the metro area, but they are also a crucial part of the city's economy, and could help us meet the needs of its fastest growing and most in-demand fields, especially as the need for bilingual and culturally competent public services and healthcare increases. **The top 5 industries with the highest demand for bilingual workers:**¹²

1. Retail Trade
2. Finance & Insurance
3. Healthcare & Social Assistance
4. Transportation & Warehousing
5. Professional, Scientific, & Technical Services



Immigrants tended to work in these occupations in the metro area in 2019.

- Software Developers (4.3%)
- Truck Drivers (4.2%)
- Postsecondary Teachers (2.3%)

Due to the role immigrants play in the workforce helping companies keep jobs on U.S. soil, we estimate that immigrants living in the metro area had helped create or preserve

8,500

manufacturing jobs that would have otherwise vanished or moved elsewhere by 2019.¹³

In 2019, about



of college-educated immigrants were underemployed, working in occupations not requiring a bachelor's degree.¹⁴

¹¹ These include services essential for daily living, such as building cleaning, waste management, auto repair, and veterinary services.

¹² Data is obtained from Burning Glass Technologies for the time period between April 1, 2020 and March 31, 2021.

¹³ Vigdor, Jacob. 2013. "Immigration and the Revival of American Cities: From Preserving Manufacturing Jobs to Strengthening the Housing Market." *New American Economy*.

¹⁴ Information of entry-level education for occupations is obtained from the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Entrepreneurship

9,800

immigrant entrepreneurs lived in metro Columbus in 2019, making up



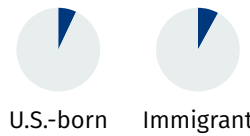
of the business owners in the metro area despite making up **8.7%** of the population.

Immigrant entrepreneurs in metro Columbus generated

\$289.6 million

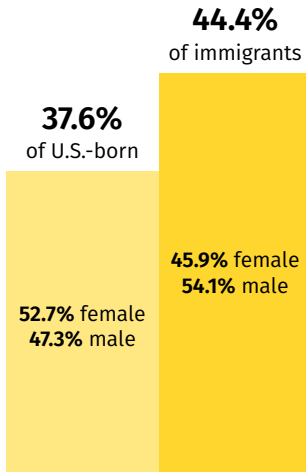
in business income in 2019.

While **7.5%** of the U.S.-born population were entrepreneurs, **8.2%** of foreign-born residents worked for their own businesses.

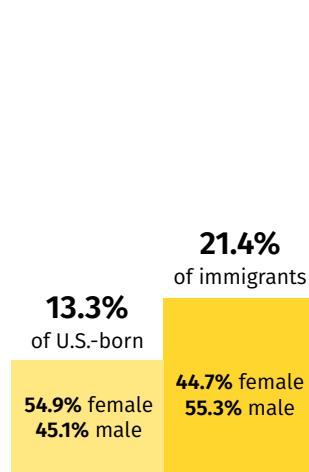


Education

Share of the metro area's population aged 25 or above that held a **bachelor's degree or higher** in 2019:



Share of the metro area's population aged 25 or above that held an **advanced degree** in 2019:



of K-12 students in the metro area were foreign-born in 2019.



of K-12 students in the metro area were the children of immigrants in 2019.

¹⁵ Data on total student enrollment is derived from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System maintained by the National Center for Education Statistics. Temporary residents refer to people who are not U.S. citizens or permanent residents.

¹⁶ Economic data is derived from the International Student Economic Value Tool maintained by NAFSA, the association of international educators.

SPOTLIGHT ON

University Population

7,900

students enrolled in colleges and universities in metro Columbus in fall 2019 were temporary residents.¹⁵

1,000

international students graduated with STEM degrees from colleges and universities in the metro area in the 2018-19 academic year.

3,900

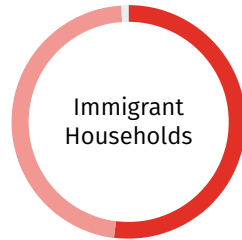
local jobs were supported by international students in the 2019-20 academic year.

\$342.5 million

was spent by international students in the 2019-20 academic year.¹⁶

Housing

In 2019, **62.3%** of U.S.-born households in metro Columbus owned their own homes, compared to **44.1%** of immigrant households.



- Lived in Houses **42,200** or **51.8%**
- Lived in Apartments **37,900** or **46.5%**
- Lived in Other Types of Housing **1,400** or **1.7%**

The total property value of immigrant households was

\$10.1 billion

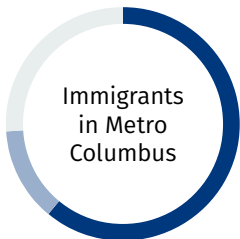
55.9% of immigrant households were renters. Their total annual rent paid was

\$450.5 million



of immigrant households in the metro area had access to broadband connection in their place of residence as compared to **85.7%** of U.S.-born households in 2019.

Naturalization



- 49.4%** Naturalized Citizens (91,200)
- 14.9%** Likely Eligible to Naturalize (27,500)
- 35.8%** Not Eligible to Naturalize¹⁷ (66,100)



Nationally, **48.7%** of immigrants are naturalized citizens, **15.9%** are likely eligible to naturalize, and **35.4%** are not yet eligible.



of households in metro Columbus had at least one foreign-born resident in 2019.

If all immigrants who are eligible to naturalize became U.S. citizens, their earning potential would increase by

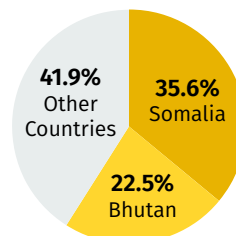
+8.9%¹⁸

Refugees

32,700

refugees, or **17.7%** of the foreign-born population in metro Columbus, were likely refugees.¹⁹

The top countries of origin for the refugee population in the metro area were:



¹⁷ Immigrants were not eligible to become naturalized U.S. citizens either because they have not met certain criteria for naturalization, such as residency requirements, age, and English proficiency, or because they are undocumented.

¹⁸ Enchautegui, Maria E. and Linda Giannarelli. 2015. "The Economic Impact of Naturalization on Immigrants and Cities." Urban Institute.

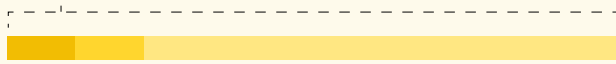
¹⁹ New American Economy. 2017. "From Struggle to Resilience: The Economic Impact of Refugees in America."

Refugees *continued*

About **17.5%** of refugees held at least a bachelor's degree.



In 2019, refugee households earned **\$737.9 million**



■ **\$82.8 million**

went to federal taxes²⁰

■ **\$78.3 million** went to state & local taxes²¹

■ **\$576.7 million** left in spending power

In 2019, about



of refugees in the area were naturalized U.S. citizens.

DACA-Eligible Population

In 2019, DACA-eligible people made up



of the foreign-born population in metro Columbus.

Undocumented Immigrants

41,100

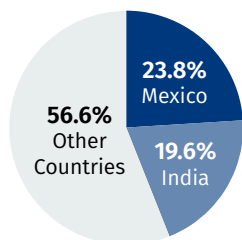
undocumented immigrants lived in metro Columbus in 2019.

They made up



of the foreign-born population in the metro area in 2019.

The top countries of origin for undocumented immigrants in the metro area were

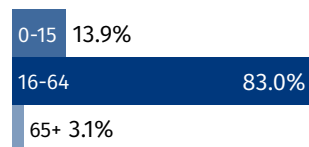


Undocumented immigrants are highly active in the labor force. More than



are of working-age in the metro area.

Undocumented immigrants by age groups:

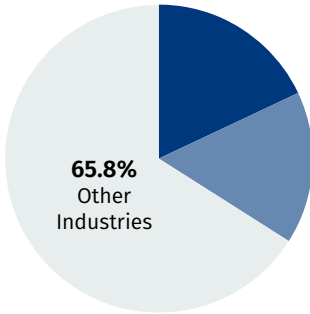


²⁰ U.S. Congressional Budget Office. 2020. "The Distribution of Household Income and Federal Taxes, 2017."

²¹ Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy. 2018. "Who Pays? A Distributional Analysis of the Tax Systems in All Fifty States."

Undocumented Immigrants *continued*

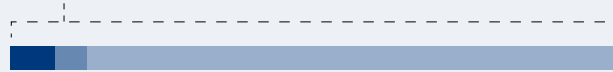
Undocumented immigrants tended to work in these key industries:



- Hospitality (18.3%)
- Manufacturing (15.9%)

In 2019, undocumented immigrant households earned

\$887.2 million



■ **\$66.9 million**

went to federal taxes²²

■ **\$44.7 million** went to state & local taxes²³

■ **\$775.6 million** left in spending power

²² U.S. Congressional Budget Office. 2020. "The Distribution of Household Income and Federal Taxes, 2017."

²³ Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy. 2018. "Who Pays? A Distributional Analysis of the Tax Systems in All Fifty States."

Continued on Next Page

Population in the City of Columbus

103,500

immigrants lived in the City of Columbus, Ohio, in 2019.

Immigrants made up



of the total population in the city in 2019.

Between 2014 and 2019, the total population in the city increased by

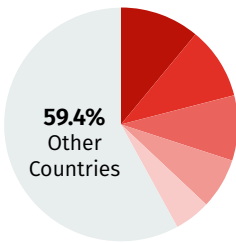


The immigrant population grew by

+19.8%



of total population growth in the city was attributable to immigrants.



The top five countries of origin for immigrants living in the city were

- India (10.5%)
- Mexico (8.5%)
- Ethiopia (4.8%)
- Somalia (9.9%)
- China (6.9%)

Spending Power & Tax Contributions in the City of Columbus

Given their income, immigrants contributed significantly to state and local taxes, including property, sales, and excise taxes levied by state and local governments.

Foreign-born households held



of all spending power in the city, more than their 11.7% share of the population.

In 2019, immigrant households in the City of Columbus earned

\$3.6 billion

■ **\$656.2 million**

went to federal taxes²⁴

■ **\$353.0 million** went to state & local taxes²⁵

■ **\$2.6 billion** left in spending power

²⁴ U.S. Congressional Budget Office. 2020. "The Distribution of Household Income and Federal Taxes, 2017."

²⁵ Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy. 2018. "Who Pays? A Distributional Analysis of the Tax Systems in All Fifty States."

I. Equitable Workforce & Economic Development





In order to create an equitable work environment for immigrants and refugees within our Central Ohio economy, a variety of changes are required. By centering on racial equity and the qualifications and skills of immigrants and refugees via unified economic and workforce development policies and programs, we will be able to enhance our current economy and ultimately elevate residents of the Central Ohio region.⁴

Goals

- Position immigrants and refugees for economic advancement by creating a strong, coordinated infrastructure pathway for career advancement and certification
- Create an ecosystem to support the whole individual by providing workforce and educational opportunities and training, as well as wraparound services from nonprofit organizations
- Raise awareness in Central Ohio communities regarding the need to understand immigrant and refugee cultural, race, equity, and social justice barriers
- See more policies created by policymakers, businesses, and intermediaries to align stakeholders in workforce and economic development and incorporate racial equity, community voice, and neighborhood needs

Short-Term Strategies

- Investigate the different means of transportation that can be provided for immigrants and refugees (New Americans) for work opportunities
- Provide racial and cultural training for employers and employees to enhance their ability to hire, retain, and promote people of color^{4,5}
- Incentivize employers, institutions, and organizations to adopt formal training

Short-Term Strategies (Continued)

- Simplify the hiring process by encouraging hiring based on skill, as opposed to education level
- Create and uphold policies that support foreign credential recognition
- Collaborate with existing organizations and institutions to create pathway guides for internationally trained professionals to assist them in gaining recognition for their credentials
- Expand on career pathways that start with entry level positions in target sectors with good employment prospects
- Establish policies that promote mutual understanding and support advancement and retention such as mentorship programs, Lunch and Learn events, Employee Resource Groups, and additional networking activities
- Ensure a safe and productive work environment by providing critical accommodations and bilingual materials for immigrants and refugees, for whom English is a second language
- Offer contextualized English training programs, bilingual training videos, and translated documents in the workplace
- Provide greater accessibility to English as a Second Language (ESL) courses near places of employment or in the workplace
- Provide wraparound services, such as mental health services and assistance with identifying affordable safe housing
- Establish relationships with nonprofit service providers that are linguistically and culturally proficient
- Hire cultural liaisons at the city, county, and places of employment
- Provide more opportunities to develop skills such as paid internships and apprenticeships
- Encourage leaders to set race-forward goals for workforce development systems

"There has to be a planned strategy of inclusion to change the culture of a company. It's not something that happens in a day. You must work on it day by day. It's hard work, but it's worth it."

-Brian Lehman, Employer

Long-Term Strategies

- Bring “jobs to the people and people to the jobs” by creating more reliable means of transportation and encouraging employers to host shifts that are more in sync with transportation timelines
- Expand the number and locations of apprenticeships, paid internships, and entry-level positions that have better employment prospects and that support people of color, immigrants, and refugees
- Collaborate with state certification boards and the Ohio General Assembly to establish legislation recognizing foreign credentials

“Fortunately, Columbus has the global labor pool we need.”

–Natasha Aparicio-Pongonis, Entrepreneur



"Learning how to make a more inclusive environment for my employees has given me a sense of purpose in my career. It's the right thing to do and it benefits everyone."

–Brian Lehman, Employer

Immigrant and refugee business owners each employ an average of 6-20 employees in their businesses and generate significant revenue with 37.2% making \$100,000 to \$250,000 annually.⁴ However, despite their resiliency and strong diversity, immigrant and refugee business owners experience a greater number of challenges than non-immigrant owners.

Goals

- Support immigrant and refugee entrepreneurship by increasing access and awareness of financial assistance programs and products to grow and expand businesses
- Improve awareness of and accessibility to public transportation options and broaden outreach to multilingual communities
- Expand staffing opportunities and support for small businesses

Strategies

- Aid in establishing relationships between banking and credit institutions
- Provide seminars in working with investors
- Share knowledge of how public transportation functions
- Extend public transportation's reach to more areas of the city
- Provide more accessible and affordable parking for customers and employees
- Provide technical assistance in areas such as marketing, sales, minority certifications and other general business needs by connecting with Entrepreneur Support Organizations (ESOs)
- Provide opportunities to hire more individuals who share similar demographics
- Increase access to networking and community support
- Make city and county resources and programs more accessible by presenting materials and information in multiple languages

Community Spotlight: Tarek Albast



Tarek Albast, the owner of Mr. Hummus Grill, began his career in the food industry as a teen chef in Lebanon. By age 15, he was serving as head chef and managing 22 people in a local restaurant. However, his 14-hour workdays netted him a mere \$300 per month. In search of greater opportunity, Tarek decided to move to Columbus and join his father, who supported Tarek's transition. "He was my backbone in every way," says Tarek. His mother, who taught him how to cook authentic Lebanese cuisine, stayed behind in Lebanon. Tarek received a green card the same year he arrived and shortly after he graduated from high school. His passion for food led him to enroll at Columbus State's culinary school, open a hookah lounge and later launch Mr. Hummus Grill. Tarek's fifth-year in America was bittersweet; he became a citizen, but his mother also died that same year. She had helped fund Tarek's ventures. "I know she'd be proud of my success today," he says.

In Columbus, Tarek's world opened up. "People respect you and appreciate what you do here," he says. "You make more money — enough to actually live on and build a life. Here in the U.S., people think of you as a human more than anywhere else." After culinary school, Tarek was able to put his passion for food and hospitality toward opening a hookah lounge. Most importantly, he felt safe in his new environment. In war-torn Lebanon, he lived in a constant state of fear. "In Columbus, I no longer have to worry about walking on a street and getting bombed," he says.

Of course, it's challenging to be an entrepreneur in a new country. In his early days, Tarek made financial mistakes and sometimes worked 100-hour weeks. Eventually, both businesses became successful. The hookah lounge serves Mediterranean cuisine and attracts people from all over the city. Mr. Hummus Grill, which began as five food trucks, is now a popular dine-in restaurant. This summer, Tarek will open a second location in Italian Village.

Like most restaurant owners, Tarek experienced severe financial challenges due to the pandemic. Fortunately, loyal customer support kept his restaurants open. Customers have continued to order falafel and shawarma, sometimes tipping upwards of 35 percent. "They tell me, 'We love your food. Stay strong. We're not going to leave you hanging,'" he says.

"Columbus is my home now; it has my heart," Tarek says. "It's made me who I am today."

II. Education (K-12)





When schools work well, the parents or guardians, teachers, and administrators work together to teach and encourage students to learn and grow. This becomes more difficult to do well when the parents or guardians and the students come from a different country or have different cultures than the prevailing one of the country they live in. The issues cover a broad range from basic communication to understanding each others' cultures to adopting policies that accommodate differences to the day-to-day issues of transportation.

Goals

- Increase teacher and administrative staff understanding of multicultural competence, race, equity, and social justice
- Create and deepen partnerships between school districts and immigrant and refugee community organizations, families, and students that remove barriers that hinder student and parent engagement
- Expand safe transportation options to schools and resource centers
- Strengthen connections and communication between schools and resource centers

Short-Term Strategies

- Establish a centralized countywide "Welcome Center" for immigrant and refugee students and families to facilitate a welcoming school experience and facilitate the enrollment and transitioning processes
- Foster community wide support for immigrant and refugee families through a coordinated peer to peer mentorship and ambassadorship program utilizing a common systemwide toolkit for immigrant and refugee students, parents, and guardians

Short-Term Strategies (Continued)

- Include professional development requirements for teachers, administrators, and school staff about multicultural, race, equity, and social justice issues in K-12 education
- Encourage professional development providers to create and certify training on multicultural, race, equity, and social justice issues curriculum in K-12 education
- Create a centrally managed guide that is published in easily accessible forms (that may include print, online and phone apps) for the 15+ local school districts to share programs, tools, and expertise. This will deepen partnerships between school districts and immigrant and refugee community organizations, families, and students and serve support teachers, teaching assistants, and school administrators
- Coordinate safe transportation options for students (and families) who must travel long distances in and through dangerous locations and contend with heavy traffic and an absence of sidewalks and safe walkways
- Work with school districts to develop bilingual videos that review guidelines on parents' and guardians' roles and responsibilities through concise and respectful communication
- Create or expand ESL classes for students, parents, and guardians, that include childcare options

"The best way to invigorate our economies, truly integrate our communities, and build a ready 21st century workforce is to build a dynamic educational system that reflects our 1st generation K-12 newcomers and our neighbors with foreign degrees and vast potential."

-Ibrahima Sow, Community Advocate

Long-Term Strategies

- Establish a countywide Parent Ambassador Exchange Mentorship Program for immigrant and refugee parents and guardians by pairing them with local parents who will help them navigate school systems more effectively and gain access to community resources more readily
- Foster a space of intercultural exchange, resulting in peer-to-peer learning, greater understanding, and a sense of belonging via mentorship
- Create a toolkit to provide training for local parents to become Mentor Ambassadors, serving as a resource for immigrant and refugee families
- Develop a uniform set of standards for determining residency countywide to remove barriers for immigrants and refugees to enter the U.S. education system
- Re-examine school enrollment policies for immigrant and refugee students who arrive in Central Ohio near the age of 18. Explore options and develop alternative pathways for immigrant and refugee youth facing this serious obstacle to accessible educational opportunities
- Expand financial aid workshops in multiple languages for traditional and nontraditional higher education degrees
- Develop parent and student educational engagement sessions for those immigrant and refugee students who have an interest in STEM, Building Trades, and Manufacturing



III. Connected, Safe & Healthy Communities Founded on Social Justice





New arrivals need strong networks of knowledgeable and helpful supporters who will help them thrive in Columbus and the Central Ohio region. These social networks are essential for navigating regional service opportunities and for locating resources.

Goals

- Develop and cultivate relationships and social networks among receiving and newcomer communities to create a welcoming culture based on understanding, respect, and a sense of belonging
- Increase and maintain communication and unity among the receiving communities and New Americans through planned activities and opportunities.
- Explore the intersection where racism affects many black and brown communities resulting in “Othering” and identify educational opportunities for bridge building

Short-Term Strategies

- Work with established mainstream networks to increase opportunities for inclusion of immigrant and refugee communities
- Establish a simplified process for newcomers to access services, resources, and social networks to “move from surviving to thriving”
- Create a welcoming and empowering mentorship program between new arrivals and well-established residents of Central Ohio to build a relational network of trust and expertise that fosters communication and lifelong connections
- Construct a Centralized Welcoming Empowerment resource guide available in easily accessible forms (that may include print, online, and phone apps) for immigrants and refugees to acclimate and thrive in Central Ohio

Long-Term Strategies

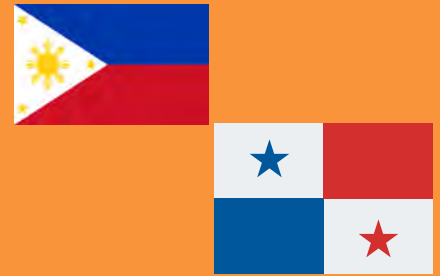
- Commission the Franklin County New Americans Advisory Council to collaborate with the City of Columbus to develop a plan and proposal to create a regional Welcome Center



"People need to have resources that are available to them. The biggest issue is transportation. Refugees and immigrants want to work. People just need to connect. Better advertising and accessibility to transportation and translation services would better support immigrants and refugees looking to become involved in business."

-Brian Lehman, Employer

Community Spotlight: Antoinette Wilson



As a first-generation American growing up in Toledo, Ohio, Antoinette Wilson watched her parents make a tangible difference in their community. Her father was a pediatric physician from the Philippines. Her mother was a pediatric nurse from Panama. Over three decades, the family helped over 30,000 patients at their practice. “Every time we were out in the community we’d run into a patient,” Antoinette says. “The community embraced us.”

When her parents weren’t working, they threw themselves into community service, volunteering at underresourced hospitals, charity events and Filipino cultural engagements. “I grew up in a family where our parents were always working hard and always giving back,” Antoinette says. “This is the kind of work ethic and altruism many immigrants bring to Ohio.”

Today, Antoinette and her three siblings all continue to live in Ohio, where they’ve built thriving careers. One brother is the CEO of a hospital, another an entrepreneur and her sister works for an international consulting group. Antoinette has run Triumph Communications from Columbus for nearly two decades. She was also appointed as the first woman Assistant Secretary of State in 2008. Throughout it all, she has volunteered on projects to help the homeless and assist immigrant organizations with ESL training. She also mentors women interested in running for public office.



Antoinette believes Columbus is an ideal city for immigrant families. “When people come here, they feel the energy,” she says. “They see the opportunities. They sense that it’s inviting and inclusive.” She said the city is good about showcasing its global diversity, including frequent festivals and cultural events that connect immigrants and native-born Americans. She’s sad to see such opportunities for exchange put on hold during the pandemic, and she hopes the city will prioritize them as it reopens. “The better we understand each other, the better we work together. And that makes Columbus stronger for all of us,” she said.

The intercultural exchange enjoyed by new arrivals and receiving communities leads to mutual understanding and enriches our communities through shared celebrations and social relationships.

Goals

- Recognize the accomplishments and contributions of immigrants and refugees in Central Ohio
- Promote opportunities for greater interaction with immigrants and refugees and the general population
- Enhance and promote public accommodations and social opportunities to connect immigrant and refugees with individuals and families within the Central Ohio region

Strategies

- Collaborate with local, statewide, and national multiethnic and mainstream media sources to publish local success stories of resilience and contribution showcasing immigrants' and refugees' social, cultural, and economic contributions to the Central Ohio region
- Expand access to City of Columbus recreation centers and Metro park systems, libraries, museums, sporting events, and festivals to foster cultural and social inclusion





Language and cultural barriers hinder strong relationships among immigrants, refugees, and first responders and create misunderstandings. These problems make it difficult for everyone to see each other clearly and lead to distrust.

Goals

- Increase the number of positive interactions between the public safety administration, law enforcement, firefighters, and immigrant and refugee communities as an essential means of building trust
- Increase professional development training for all public service providers and administrators through required education on multicultural competence, race, equity, and social justice
- Develop methods to address concerns relating to mental health and bias, regarding law enforcement officers and other public safety providers
- Improve emergency management in addressing the health (physical and mental) and safety of all residents, regardless of immigration status or language spoken

Short-Term Strategies

- Develop an extensive communication system that requires law enforcement officers and firefighters to use language access services in real time
- Partner with immigrant and refugee serving organizations to develop recruitment practices of bilingual law enforcement officers, firefighters, and 911 dispatchers to foster trust and strengthen communication, between public safety departments and immigrant and refugee communities
- Expand the number of multicultural and multilingual liaison officers at the city and county
- Engage immigrant refugee community in developing a multicultural competency training curriculum specific for public safety

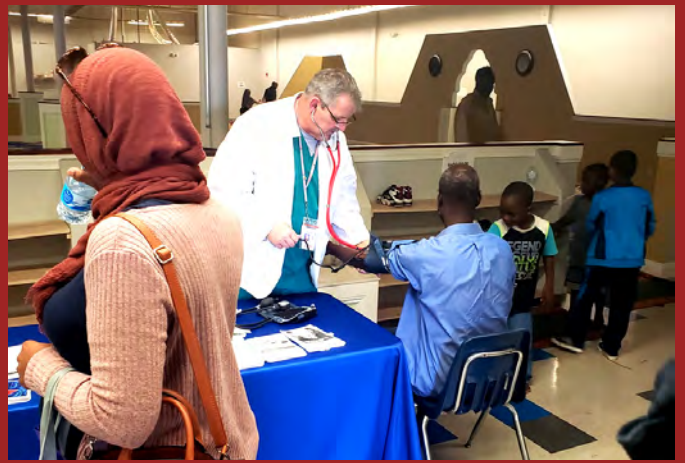
Short-Term Strategies (Continued)

- Hire more multicultural and multilingual residents to work in public safety
- Collaborate with immigrant and refugee organizations to offer multilingual educational sessions on navigating the Civil Service application process including what to expect when taking the exam
- Community Engagement - Host bi-annual community convenings between public safety and the immigrant and refugee communities centered around safety to gain input and learn from each others' cultures
- Work together to establish a year-long schedule of more “community friendly” engagements
- Rebuild the existing multicultural advisory council
- Expand and develop bilingual videos and PSA’s regarding fire safety and prevention and 911
- Evaluate existing mental health and bias assessments used in reviewing public safety employees and update them to reflect cultural competency
- Develop alternative de-escalation techniques relating to cultural norms and expectations

Long-Term Strategies

- Develop a long-term plan for establishing a strong relationship built on trust between public safety providers and immigrant and refugee communities





Several youth participants in our research said feeling safe in their communities is a significant concern.

Goals

- Cultivate youth confidence and safety through peer-to-peer activities and support
- Increase youths' abilities to access protection and contribute to community safety
- Increase opportunities to build relationships between youth and first responders based on trust and understanding

Strategies

- Strengthen youth bonding by creating sporting events, community youth groups, and an “Explorers” program
- Establish safety initiatives, such as a Neighborhood Watch, that offer youth and their families protection and a safe means of reporting dangerous activity
- Create community events to connect first responders and young community members; this allows officers to better understand the community they are serving

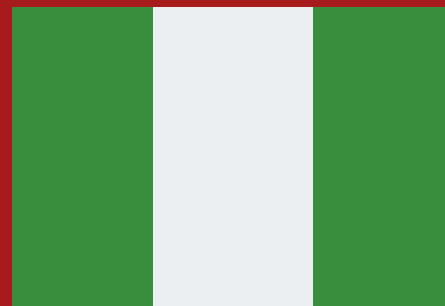


Youth Summit with Welcoming America



Community Spotlight:

Deba Uwadiae



In 2010, Deba Uwadiae, his wife and three children were selected to receive visas through the U.S. Diversity Visa Lottery, allowing them to move from their native Nigeria to Central Ohio.

Their transition wasn't easy. In Nigeria, Deba had risen from political reporter to editor-in-chief and publisher, but Columbus news outlets overlooked him. His wife had studied physics and managed the family travel agency in Nigeria, but she, too, couldn't break into the professional job market. They suspected their accents created a barrier. Receptionists would sometimes offer them Spanish interpretation. "I speak fluent English; I don't speak Spanish," Deba says with a laugh.

While working with his wife at Cheryl's Cookies to make ends meet, Deba was determined to make the most of their American opportunity. He started his own publications, the New Americans and New Americans Business magazines, which cover subjects relevant to the Ohio immigrant community. The New Americans magazine currently trains 10 interns from the Ohio Media School, employs four part-time contributors and works in partnership with Apex 1 Radio. Deba's wife returned to school and now works as a nurse on the front lines of the pandemic. Two of their children are college educated and their third just graduated from high school.

Deba feels welcomed by the people of Columbus and loves the life that he and his family have built here. In 2018, he joined a City Council-sponsored leadership and professional development program, which helps new immigrants become active community stakeholders. However, he also recognizes that the City could do more to support new arrivals. "We need ads and outreach to connect them to resources," he says.

"After the pandemic, we need events that bring them face to face with social services organizations, employers seeking workers and others who can help them acclimate to the City."

In the meantime, Deba is stepping up. In response to the global pandemic, he started the New American Community Information Center (NACIC) to connect local immigrants to life-saving social services. NACIC has also helped immigrants apply for citizenship and assisted new citizens with voter registration.

Deba believes his news outlets and nonprofit work can help foster a more welcoming community. "When immigrants are seen, when our accents are heard, we are normalized," he says. "It's not that people don't want our talents; many simply aren't exposed to us. Once they are, they'll see everything we have to offer."



IV. Equitable Access to Services, Resources & ESL Classes



Significant issues around the ease of accessing healthcare and communicating with healthcare professionals exist for immigrant and refugee communities. These issues are exacerbated by fundamental cultural differences in views on medical treatment, particularly concerning mental health.

Goals

- Increase the number of positive interactions between healthcare professionals and immigrant and refugee communities as an essential means of building trust and improving outcomes
- Improve knowledge about navigating the U.S. healthcare system for immigrant refugee patients
- Foster understanding regarding cultural differences in how mental health is seen, understood, and treated
- Increase the scope and conveyance of mental health education and services for immigrant and refugee communities

Short-Term Strategies

- Expand training about multicultural competency, race, equity, and social justice for medical professionals, hospitals, and clinics
- Develop an emergency management communications plan for Limited English Proficient residents
- Develop a standard procedure for how to interact respectfully with multicultural and multilingual communities
- Require multicultural competency, race, equity, and inclusion training for medical systems and service providers
- Formalize working agreements with nonprofit organizations that serve immigrants and refugees to provide educational training and bilingual marketing materials on navigating the healthcare system
- Promote awareness of mental health challenges and addiction and recovery and diminish stigma through a strategic marketing campaign emphasizing professional assistance, support, and outreach sources
- Increase interpreter services training workshops and expand scope to include multicultural competency component

Long-Term Strategies

- Develop a long-term hiring strategy for recruiting multilingual and internationally trained professionals through apprenticeships and benefits packages that include educational opportunities for upward mobility within the healthcare system.
- Focus on retention through multicultural competency, race, equity, and inclusion training workshops and host lunch and learn conversations with staff



Many factors prevent equitable access to safe and affordable housing for immigrant and refugee communities. These include the limited supply of housing, lack of knowledge about services and programs that support renting and homeownership, and lack of access to those services.

Goals

- Increase access to financial literacy programs that promote building credit, homeownership, investment, and wealth-building
- Promote the value of including immigrants and refugees in the development of comprehensive housing plans in Central Ohio
- Improve availability of and access to affordable housing for immigrants and refugees
- Create a landlord tenant network to improve the relationships between landlords and immigrant and refugee tenants

Strategies

- Establish ongoing relationships between organizations that serve immigrants and refugees and the Columbus Metropolitan Housing Authority and local developers to discuss projection of housing needs of new arrivals
- Explore the allocation of affordable housing development requirements to be used for the unsubsidized population, while requiring developers to include unsubsidized low-income housing into all financing plan
- Provide access to bilingual information, services, and products regarding tenants' rights, housing terminology and system, and acts of discrimination
- Support and address concerns of uninhabitable substandard living conditions and hold landlords accountable
- Provide multicultural competency education to reduce cultural differences as barriers to equitable housing

Language barriers play a vital role in the success of the immigrants and refugees entering the United States. These barriers can be addressed by providing language services such as an interpreter or a translation service (especially in medical, legal, and school settings) and by language training for the immigrants and refugees.

Goals

- Promote the appreciation of multilingualism and its benefit to enhancing our global economy, social, and cultural ecosystem
- Promote the understanding of Title VI requirements to provide services in multiple languages

Short-Term Strategies

- Create language access plans for the City of Columbus and Franklin County
- Develop an ESL master asset map for the Central Ohio region and develop a marketing and communications plan to raise awareness of where language services are provided
- Develop a coordinated system of encouraging employers, government, and social service agencies to create language access plans and encourage language access services
- Invest in interpreter services training for employers, government and social service agencies to understand the impact it will have in creating a welcoming community
- Provide more accessible ESL classes that are in sync with free or affordable childcare options
- Explore safe transportation options to attend classes
- Emphasize the importance of starting ESL classes earlier and provide instruction for parents to help their children learn English

Long-Term Strategies

- Develop a plan with tax incentives (or subsidies) to motivate employers who provide Contextualized English programs in the workplace
- Celebrate bilingualism and offer language online courses for native English-speaking employees to learn other languages



“I give back because I’ve received so much. Columbus is extremely open-minded, supporting diversity, providing resources to entrepreneurs and helping new immigrants integrate quickly. I’m so glad I found my home here.”

-Natasha Aparicio-Pongonis, Entrepreneur



Community Spotlight:

Natasha Aparicio-Pongonis



Natasha Pongonis came to the U.S. as an exchange student attending the Ohio State University. A native Argentinian, she envisioned a brief stay in Ohio and then a post-college life pursuing an architecture career in Europe. But fate had other plans. At OSU she fell in love with an American. After Natasha graduated, they married and permanently relocated to Ohio.

Acclimating to the U.S. came with challenges. Natasha spoke limited English, but she discovered a wealth of English-learning opportunities in Columbus; she started taking free classes multiple times a week. When she encountered strangers at grocery stores or around her neighborhood and stumbled over her words, “everyone was so patient,” she says. “People would take the time to explain things slowly. They encouraged me as I tried my best.” Very quickly, Natasha mastered the language.

When Natasha was hired by an architect-design firm in Costa Mesa, California, the couple moved west. But it didn’t feel like home. They missed the diversity, family-centric lifestyle and opportunities for young professionals in Columbus.

After returning in 2008, Natasha co-launched Nativa, a data-driven communications agency that works with organizations like the Centers for Disease Control and Procter & Gamble. The company helps its clients understand the changing demographics of the U.S. consumer market and tailor ad campaigns for diverse audiences for maximum impact. “We absolutely depend on a diverse staff to meet our clients’ needs,” Natasha says. “Fortunately, Columbus has the global labor pool we need.” In 2015, Natasha co-founded O.Y.E. Business Intelligence, a multicultural data analytics software that uses machine learning and face recognition technology to help organizations engage the faster-growing consumers in America, such as Hispanics, Blacks, and Asians regardless of the language they speak.

Today, Natasha’s Columbus-based companies employ dozens of people. She also volunteers with the Girl Scouts of Ohio and WELD, helping to mentor the next generation of female leaders. “I give back because I’ve received so much,” she says. “Columbus is extremely open-minded, supporting diversity, providing resources to entrepreneurs and helping new immigrants integrate quickly. I’m so glad I found my home here.”



Everyone needs access to legal services at some point. Vulnerable populations such as immigrants and refugees may need more legal help in some areas than the general population. Therefore, easy access to affordable legal services with adequate language support is critical to the well-being and advancement of immigrants and refugees.



Goals

- Create an equitable process for obtaining access to affordable legal services for immigrants and refugees to ensure their safety, livelihood, health and well-being, and ability to thrive in the Central Ohio region

Short-Term Strategies

- Develop a robust supportive service network and database of attorneys who provide affordable or pro-bono legal services to address immigration and employment issues
- Support and promote nonprofit organizations that host free legal clinics and provide affordable immigration services

Long-Term Strategies

- Establish a fund to provide financial assistance to immigrants and refugees in need of legal services and resources

V. Civic Engagement, Government & Leadership Development



By engaging in civic action through volunteering or in elected or appointed positions, immigrants and refugees can experience leadership opportunities and access more welcoming spaces, services, and resources. They can also bring meaningful insight and representation to local, county, and state governments.

Goals

- Increase awareness of the benefits of volunteering and establishing connections using professional and social networks
- Develop and expand existing civic and leadership programs to broaden the leadership training experience
- Expand naturalization efforts for eligible immigrants and refugees as well as coordinated measures to become voters, civic participants, and elected officials

Short-Term Strategies

- Develop a report about the immigrant and refugee communities covering all municipalities in Central Ohio to understand demographics, leadership, cultural understandings, and community methods of communication
- Collaborate with the Board of Election in each county in Central Ohio to engage new citizens on the importance of voting and how to register as voters
- Collaborate with Cities for Citizenship and local financial institutions to provide loans to pay for citizenship classes and exams and build credit for immigrants and refugees
- Revive the City of Columbus funding and support for civic engagement training to organizations that help immigrants and refugees become citizens and expand to other Central Ohio municipalities
- Facilitate a series of conversations in immigrant and refugee communities on the importance of running for office

Long-Term Strategies

- Develop a coordinated plan to create an Immigrant led Global Ambassador certification to meet the desire of many immigrants and refugees to "give back" and serve others
- Collaborate with existing civic and leadership programs to expand opportunities for immigrants and refugees
- Create an exploratory committee representative of the immigrant and refugee community to develop a curriculum and training program that will identify the benefits of volunteering and avenues for service
- Provide direct incentives and capacity-building instruction on how to operate a civic administration effectively





The New American Forum



Goals

- Increase immigrant and refugee employment in government agencies to reflect Central Ohio's globally diverse population
- Increase immigrant and refugee presence as civic leaders in Central Ohio for example on City and County Boards and Commissions
- Re-imagine service delivery for the immigrant refugee community
- Build government programs that cultivate and support civic participation and leadership development among immigrant and refugees

Short-Term Strategies

- Hire multicultural liaisons
- Utilize data and personal stories to improve policies and practices on immigrant integration
- Develop standard operating procedures for government departments and agencies to use for utilizing tools, programs, and resources that aid in immigrant integration
- Enhance city and county websites to provide access to bilingual information and critical documents
- Increase opportunities for immigrants and refugees to serve on city and county boards and commissions
- Create a long-term outreach plan to leverage every opportunity to engage with the community, and build trust and interest in civil service and governmental agencies
- Increase budget to expand government programs and policies and support local partners
- Create educational workshops outlining the local government structure and procedures for accessing government services and programs and partner with organizations that serve immigrants and refugees to deliver workshops



Short-Term Strategies (Continued)

- Coordinate with city and county to recognize multicultural holidays and cultural celebrations through a master calendar

Long-Term Strategies

- Explore the creation of an Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs serving Central Ohio communities to identify their needs and concerns and to foster a spirit of welcoming and belonging
- Support existing multicultural leadership programs and expand capacity through local government administrative programs

Closing

Creating a welcoming community requires an infrastructure that supports open communication and access to information, resources, and services that allow all residents to “not just survive, but thrive.” Creating a community of belonging means bridging social structures, communities, and networks. Hence, a community centered on both welcoming and belonging requires community efforts to promote the integration of all residents new and old, as well as recognizing their needs for acceptance, safety and protection, trust and respect, and appreciation for their contributions to the community.

Recognition of the economic and societal contributions made by immigrants and refugees in our Central Ohio communities and working to engage them in all aspects of our communities creates a sense of appreciation, belonging, and welcoming that they can enjoy as valued community members. It also enriches the lives of everyone in our communities. We welcome and invite the Central Ohio region to embrace immigrant and refugee integration and recognize the benefits and vibrancy it brings to the region.

Project Team

Leads

- Guadalupe A. Velasquez, Welcoming City
- Nadia Kasvin, US Together
- Lucille Frank, Columbus City Council

Team Members

- Yulani Rodgers
- Moira Donovan

The Ohio State University Interns

- Grace Crouser, Fall Semester
- Quinn Hall, Fall Semester
- Jordan Wallis, Fall Semester
- Jacob Depinet, Spring Semester
- Parul Pari, Spring Semester
- Mariam Khan, Spring Semester



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This Welcoming Plan presents recommendations for Central Ohio, founded on data obtained through surveys, focus groups/community conversations, and related reports. We recognize that additional barriers may exist that were not revealed during the process.

Footnotes

1 "Explainer: Who Is An Immigrant?," Migrant Publishing, February 2019, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/content/explainer-who-immigrant>

2 "What is a Refugee?," The UN Refugee Agency, 2021, <https://www.unhcr.org/what-is-a-refugee.html>

3 "What or Who is a New American?," Authentic Journeys, March 2018, <https://authenticjourneys.info/2019/03/what-or-who-is-new-american.html>

4 "Advancing Workforce Equity in Columbus: A Blueprint for Action," Matthew Walsh, Abbie Langston, Edward Muña, 2021, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/19zZvwCM5lli-puSzgVK9C8b5-6GS7pIT/view?usp=sharing>

5 "Economic Well-being & Integration Among Immigrants and Refugees in Central Ohio: Preliminary Findings," Hanna Haran, Arati Maleku, January 24, 2022, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Oeglwko8q6ysVCXFq2gKuSVgRAO-4kjY/view?usp=sharing>





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