

New UWLP Report Highlights the Realities, Challenges, and Contributions of Immigrants and Refugees in Utah

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The [Utah Women & Leadership Project \(UWLP\)](#) at Utah State University released a new research report, [New American Women \(Immigrants and Refugees\) in Utah](#), providing one of the state's most comprehensive and current overviews of immigrant and refugee women and girls. The report combines national data, Utah-specific trends, and insights from community partners to highlight both the challenges New American women face and the vital contributions they make to Utah's economy and communities.

"New American women are essential to Utah's present and future," said Susan R. Madsen, founding director of UWLP and a co-author of the report. "They strengthen our workforce, enrich our communities, and contribute billions to our economy. Yet many face significant barriers that limit their ability to thrive. Understanding their experiences is key to building a more inclusive and prosperous Utah."

Utah is home to more than 341,000 foreign-born residents, representing 9.8% of the state's population. The number of immigrants has grown steadily over the past three decades, and nearly half of these individuals are women and girls. Together, Utah's New Americans come from more than 40 countries, speak over 120 languages, and contribute diverse skills, cultural strengths, and economic value to the state.

The report highlights three categories of immigrants: humanitarian immigrants (refugees and asylum seekers),

immigrants with legal authorization, and immigrants without legal authorization. The term New Americans is used to refer to all three groups. The report highlights several key findings:

- Immigrant and refugee women make up 4.8% of Utah's total population and 12.3% of all adult women in the state.
- Utah ranks 11th in the nation for refugee arrivals per capita, with 7,031 refugees resettled in the past decade.
- New Americans contributed \$3.1 billion in state and local taxes in 2023, including \$235 million from unauthorized immigrants.
- The challenges faced by New American women in Utah parallel those faced by immigrants throughout the U.S., including language and cultural barriers, issues accessing health care and other services, social isolation, lack of transportation, and obstacles to accessing educational and occupational opportunities.
- Refugee women, in particular, experience heightened vulnerability due to language barriers and fewer formal qualifications.
- Despite these challenges, New American women demonstrate resilience and leadership, with thousands starting businesses, supporting Utah's aging workforce, and contributing to community well-being.

The report emphasizes that New American women are disproportionately affected by economic downturns, policy shifts, and gaps in access to services. At the same time, they are central to Utah's long-term economic sustainability, especially as the state's population ages and workforce needs grow.

Actionable steps are outlined for individuals, organizations, and policymakers, including:

- Supporting local organizations that serve immigrants and refugees.
- Expanding access to childcare, transportation, and English language instruction.
- Strengthening pathways to education, employment, and credential recognition.
- Promoting inclusive community spaces and reducing discrimination.
- Ensuring policies that enhance access to food assistance, housing, and healthcare.

"Utah's future depends on our ability to welcome, support, and fully integrate New American women and their

families,” said Robyn Blackburn, UWLP research fellow and lead author. “When we remove barriers and expand opportunities, everyone benefits.”

Vanessa Tuttle, UWLP research associate, and Yvette Young, UWLP research manager, are also co-authors of the report.

The mission of the UWLP is to strengthen the impact of Utah girls, women, and families. Its premier initiative—[A Bolder Way Forward](#)—creates opportunities for Utahns to learn, engage, and contribute to meaningful change across 18 areas of focus. The UWLP is affiliated with USU Extension.

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