The County of Santa Clara recognizes the positive impact that immigrant and refugee communities make every day on our economy, cultural richness, and social fabric. The Office of Immigrant Relations (OIR) honors and supports this impact by increasing community engagement, participating in policy advocacy, and implementing a robust legal services system.

Immigrant communities continue to be disproportionately affected by the ongoing pandemic as many are essential workers and live in high-density housing. Accordingly, the County remains committed to advocating and funding services for vulnerable immigrant communities.

To identify the ongoing and emerging needs of immigrant and refugee communities, OIR will launch an immigrant community needs assessment in Fiscal Year 2023. The needs assessment will further define and strengthen the programming and services provided to community members.

In a county where over 60% of children reside in mixed-status households, advocating and providing resources for immigrant and refugee communities helps the entirety of Santa Clara County thrive.

- Office of Immigrant Relations
County of Santa Clara Mission

The mission of the County of Santa Clara is to plan for the needs of a dynamic community, provide quality services, and promote a healthy, safe, and prosperous community for all.

OIR Approach and Mission

Community Services
Investing in immigration services and connecting community with the safety net

Community Engagement
Working in partnership with immigrants, refugees, and stakeholders to create a state of belonging

Community Policy Advocacy
Promoting and advocating for immigrant protections and immigrant economic mobility

We envision Santa Clara County as a social space where all members—including immigrants and refugees—are safe, trusted, respected, recognized for their contributions, and provided equitable access to services and decision-making so that they feel a sense of belonging and can thrive in their local communities.
In Santa Clara County...

the need for robust immigration legal services is critical to ensuring access to a network of safety net services and increasing self-sufficiency. Immigrants and refugees need prompt supports in determining eligibility for resources and screening for immigration relief. Due to the county’s high cost of living, immigration legal services are also cost prohibitive for many residents. Therefore, the County provides funding, the most in the nation, to support access to free or low-cost immigration legal services.

39% of all residents are immigrants - individuals born in another country
63% of all children have at least one immigrant parent
100 languages are spoken by residents, making Santa Clara County among one of the most diverse places in the world
There are approximately 140,000 undocumented immigrant residents
161,955 residents live in mixed-status households

Santa Clara County is 1 of 8 counties in California that receives funding to offer refugees additional employment and social services

Source: Economic Policy Institute; Migration Policy Institute (MPI); Muzaffar & Bolter, 2021; California Immigrant Data Portal, USC Dornsife

Alfred Leung, ProBonoPhoto.org
Approximately 300,000 immigrant residents are working in essential industries

Of those, an estimated 60,000 are undocumented workers

Source: Migration Policy Institute (MPI); Muzaffar & Bolter, 2021; California Immigrant Data Portal, USC Dornsife
Families residing in Santa Clara County are shouldering expenses of over $11,000 per month, with less than $1,500 allotted for other necessities. A Family of 4 living in Santa Clara County needs to earn $138,713/year. Families residing in Santa Clara County are shoulcdering expenses of over $11,000 per month, with less than $1,500 allotted for other necessities.

Per the Economic Policy Institute

The median hourly wage in Santa Clara County for an undocumented immigrant is $29 (or $60,320/year).

Even when there are two adults in a household making the same hourly rate, their combined income of $120,640, falls short of the Economic Policy Institute's family budget calculator for what a family of four needs to earn in Santa Clara County to maintain a modest yet adequate standard of living.

Undocumented and mixed-status families do not have additional monies in their household budgets to pay for immigration legal services, which average thousands of dollars per case.

https://www.epi.org/resources/budget/budget-factsheets/#/3712

Office of Immigrant Relations
Strategy One

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Overview

OIR is committed to providing current and accurate information in multiple languages on the ever-changing immigration landscape, resources, and immigrant rights through webinars, in person community presentations, quarterly newsletters, and social media posts. The office partners with legal services vendors, local Consulates, and community-based organizations to ensure amplified messaging.
Community Engagement
FY 2022 Highlights

**August 2021**
New Americans Fellowship

**September 2021**
Welcoming Week

**October 2021**
National Night Out in Gilroy

**November 2021**
Causes of Migration: Global and Local Trends webinar

**December 2021**
International Migrant Day

**January/February 2022**
Emergency Rental Assistance
Community Education Campaign

**March 2022**
Conversation with USCIS Director Ur M. Jaddou

**April 2022**
Inaugural Economic Development Campaign: Home is Here

**May 2022**
Reconnecting & Recommitting: Meet & Greet with the Office of Congresswoman Zoe Lofgren

**June 2022**
World Refugee Day

OIR’S Reach

11,630 Reached
Total Engagement

50+
Community Presentations and Webinars
Highlight: New Americans Fellowship

The New Americans Fellowship (NAF), a program that has graduated over 70 immigrant youth participants and has helped many former participants be hired as County employees, welcomed its sixth cohort in summer 2022. This year’s cohort, a group with various immigration statuses and educational backgrounds, envisioned and created a collective group project entitled “Stories Within Us: Contributions of Immigrants and Refugees in Santa Clara County.”

Through this multimedia campaign, the Fellows captured the voices of immigrant community members, their stories, and the invaluable contributions that they have made to our county. The project was highlighted during Welcoming Week in September 2022.

Stories Within Us: Contributions of Immigrants and Refugees in Santa Clara County
New Americans Fellowship

Fellows receive one-on-one mentorship from County leaders and participate in professional development coaching and workshops. Throughout the 10-week program, they were introduced to county residents, services the County provides, and career opportunities that the County offers.

NAF was broadened in summer 2022 to include U/T visa holders, asylees, refugees, Temporary Protected Status holders, and VAWA recipients, in addition to ensuring 10 slots for DACA recipients. The cohort brought diversity from their lived experiences and offered approaches, analysis, and solutions for the issues faced by various immigrant and refugee communities. Through NAF, the County continues to create a pipeline to strengthen and increase the diversity of a workforce that reflects the county’s residents and their experiences.

Mentors

Miguel Marquez, former Chief Operations Officer
Ky Le, Deputy County Executive
Mike Wasserman, President, Board of Supervisors
Susan Ellenberg, Vice President, Board of Supervisors
Cindy Chavez, Member, Board of Supervisors
Otto Lee, Member, Board of Supervisors
Maria Leticia Gomez, Director, Office of Communications and Public Affairs
Daniel Borca, Deputy District Attorney, Office of the District Attorney

Angela Shing, Director, Department of Employment and Benefit Services
Mariel Caballero, Deputy Director, Probation Administration
Beth Chance, Immigration Specialist, Public Defender’s Office
Cesilia Fernandez, Deputy Public Defender, Public Defender’s Office
Sera Fernando, Manager, Office of LGBTQ Affairs
Monica Tong, Program Manager, Office of Labor Standards Enforcement
Erika S. Rivera, Program Manager, Office of Immigrant Relations

Partners

San Jose State University
DreamCo. Marketing and Consulting Inc.
Kooltura Marketing Inc.

Community leaders who contributed to “Stories Within Us”
County of Santa Clara Office of Diversity, Equity, and Belonging
County of Santa Clara, Public Health Department, Violence Prevention Program
Highlight: Emergency Rental Assistance (ERA)

As the pandemic continued into 2022, the stark reality of families ravaged by COVID-19 and facing decreased work hours, job loss, and financial insecurities became readily apparent and its destabilizing impact more acute.

OIR, in partnership with the Office of Supportive Housing and the COVID Isolation and Quarantine Program, launched a robust community education campaign and provided 44 ERA webinars in English, Spanish, and Vietnamese. The webinars informed community members about who qualified for emergency rental assistance monies, how to apply, and which local agencies could assist through the process.

The webinars reached nearly 4,000 people and provided crucial rental assistance relief information.

OIR remains committed to providing community engagement programming that gives community members access to much needed information and resources.
Strategy Two

COMMUNITY SERVICES

Overview

The need for free and low-cost immigration legal services touches many of our residents, both documented and undocumented. 39% of Santa Clara County residents are foreign-born, and nearly 162,000 U.S. citizens and lawful permanent residents live in a household with at least one undocumented family member.
Immigration legal services are crucial to the health and well-being of Santa Clara County residents. These services not only help immigrants who are seeking to adjust their status but also have a positive ripple effect through the many mixed-status families that reside within the county. Putting individuals on a path to legal status in the United States provides increased economic stability and self-sufficiency as well as helps folks feel more rooted and secure in this country. Additionally, obtaining immigration protections allows individuals to lawfully work in the U.S., affording better employment opportunities.

OIR’s contracted partners help Santa Clara County residents navigate complex immigration processes that require hours of evidence gathering and preparation. Without their help and expertise, thousands of residents would be unable to access immigration legal assistance.
OIR’s oversight of immigration legal services and community education contracts have a far-reaching impact within the county. This year, **6,913 people received legal services.** Another **471,930 were reached** through outreach providing information on immigration issues, public charge, housing, and education rights, and other related topics. OIR partners held a total of **668 educational presentations and workshops.**

OIR’s contracted partners, 16 agencies across Santa Clara County, continue to serve county residents while they deal with historic backlogs within the federal immigration system. In March 2022, United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) announced a 1.5 million employment authorization document application backlog. This work permit backlog means that many applicants have been waiting over a year, limiting the ability to work.

The delivery of immigration legal services has always been complex, but in a post anti-immigrant administration and an ongoing pandemic world, partner agencies have faced even more challenges. However, they continue to screen and assist many members of the community and put individuals on a path to permanency in this country every day.

**Work Permit Backlog**

As of early 2022, there was a 1.5 million work permit application backlog, causing both first-time and renewal applicants to wait upwards of a year for employment authorization. In May 2022, USCIS announced that they would automatically extend certain classes of work permits, creating relief for a small percentage of applicants. This extension does not help individuals who are waiting for their initial work permit. Further, people continue to have issues with employers not accepting the extension announcement along with their expired work permit as proof of the ability to lawfully work in the United States.
The Economic Impact of Obtaining Status

Legislative pathways that allow individuals to normalize their status also yield annual wage increases for immigrant workers and their American counterparts.

Source: https://www.americanprogress.org/article/citizenship-undocumented-immigrants-boost-u-s-economic-growth/
An investment of **$5,597,302** in Outreach, Education & Prevention, Case Management, Legal Services, and Intervention, Crisis Response & Rapid Response Network, and Unmet Civil Legal Needs resulted in the following:

- **668** Know Your Rights and Community Education Presentations
- **6,913** Community Members Received Legal Services
- **625** Participants at Citizenship Day

### FY22 Legal Services Budget Breakdown

- **9.6%** Rapid Response Network
- **12.4%** Unmet Civil Legal Needs
- **25.8%** Outreach, Education, and Prevention Services
- **52.2%** Case Management, Legal Representation, and Intervention Services

### Undocumented immigrants working without authorization earn:

- **35%** Less than Documented Counterparts
- **40%** Less than Native-born US Workers

Lack of legal status causes many to remain at low-paying jobs and can hinder professional growth and impact financial stability.
In 2022, OIR and its partners dedicated a portion of each contract to innovative pilots, projects, and initiatives. Examples include further investment in organizing and movement building, community navigator stipends, increasing outreach in hard-to-reach communities including South County, expanding capacity to support housing needs, and more.

**FY22 Innovation Themes**

- Community Protections
- Increased Community Partnership
- Increased Wrap Around Supports for Community
- Tracking and Implementing Best Practices in the Field

In preparation for the next Request for Proposals (RFP) in Fiscal Year 2025, OIR is working with a consulting firm to strengthen the contract evaluation process, better identify the County’s collective impact, and increase belonging for immigrant communities. Aryah Somers Landsberger of Bitstein LLC is an experienced immigration attorney who has assisted various cities, counties, and organizations with their immigration legal services delivery programs including the County of Los Angeles. Ms. Somers Landsberger is also serving as a thought partner in OIR’s collective impact modeling as the office works to find new and innovative ways to provide legal services and community education to the county’s residents.
Strategy Three

COMMUNITY POLICY ADVOCACY

Overview

OIR provides the County with immigration policy subject matter expertise and ensures that local practices and procedures are examined through an immigrant belonging lens. The office assists County departments when immigration-related issues arise and endeavors to lead response efforts when new and immediate needs emerge. Further, the office contributes to the County’s advocacy efforts by working closely with County Counsel’s Social Justice and Impact Litigation team and the County’s Intergovernmental Relations office, allowing OIR to help shape local, statewide, and federal immigration policies.
Highlight: Afghan Response

With the end of U.S. military presence in Afghanistan in April 2021, there was a mass exodus of Afghan people as they fled unchecked Taliban rule. Many families were able to enter the U.S. and it was estimated that California would receive over 5,000 evacuees. Santa Clara County was among the first municipalities to strategize around the imminent resettlement of Afghan refugees and authorized a nearly $1 million investment in resettlement efforts. OIR, in partnership with trusted community-based organizations, provided a no wrong door approach for Afghan refugees. This allowed newly arrived individuals to receive services from the resettlement agencies including mental health support, housing, employment, and other services. Partner community-based organizations also provided immigration information to Afghan folks who needed to adjust their status.

Highlight: U Visa Certification Advocacy

One of the various forms of relief that partner agencies assist with is the U nonimmigrant visa, a visa that can be issued to persons who have been victims of certain qualifying crimes and who have also assisted law enforcement with the investigations. One of the U visa filing requirements is a signed certification form that confirms the victim applicant assisted law enforcement with an investigation. Unfortunately, the pandemic has caused marked delays in the adjudication of criminal offenses, therefore causing delays in advocates being able to obtain certifications for their U visa clients. These delays further hinder victim applicants’ ability to apply for a U visa, a process that already takes seven plus years. As a result, OIR, partner agencies, the South Bay Coalition to End Human Trafficking, the VAWA Taskforce, and the District Attorney’s Office have collaborated to discuss options to reduce the harm and wait times for U visa applicants.
OIR has closely collaborated with the Office of the County Executive’s Intergovernmental Relations Office to identify and support state and federal immigrant friendly policies. OIR has also worked closely with the Office of the County Counsel on its continued immigration law advocacy which included submitting public comments on the Biden Administration’s proposed regulations on public charge and DACA. The office has helped shape the County’s response to nationwide anti-immigrant policies and amplified the voices of immigrant community members and their families.
Closing

Emerging Needs & FY 2023 Goals
Since March 2020, immigrants have been disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, with many losing their livelihoods while supporting their children’s distance learning and suffering from extreme isolation. Most economic mobility programs do not include alternative models for immigrants, regardless of legal status; thus, OIR commits to researching alternative models that support immigrants.

In March 2022, OIR attended a meeting with USCIS Director Ur Jaddou where she shared top priorities including hiring, community engagement, and addressing severe backlogs. County partners are experiencing similar backlog challenges as they support families in obtaining immigration relief.

As OIR stays ahead of trends and analyzes new data, the team is eager to determine strategies that directly support the Indo-American community, now the second largest immigrant group in Santa Clara County, surpassing the Vietnamese-speaking community, according to the Equity Research Institute at the University of Southern California.
**FY23 Goals**

**Implementation of needs assessment**
Work with the Othering and Belonging Institute on a Board-directed comprehensive needs assessment to identify current, ongoing, and changing needs in the immigrant community in Santa Clara County that will inform future investment, partnership, and growth.

**Develop strategy for new RFP for immigration legal services programs**
With only two years left in the current RFP, OIR commits to partnering with stakeholders and the community to determine core goals and strategies as well as a robust theory of change model that will support families in getting on a path to permanency while continuing to promote the protection of immigrants who currently do not have recourse in the immigration system.

**NAF 2023**
As OIR continues to promote NAF, it will further develop the robust and innovative program that incorporates professional and leadership development, mentorship, and the uplifting of immigrant contributions.
Meet the Team

Zelica Rodriguez-Deams
Manager

Erika S. Rivera
Program Manager I

Milina Jovanovic
Immigrant Services Coordinator

Teresa Castellanos
Immigrant Services Coordinator

Aundraya Martinez
Management Analyst

Sandy Vasquez
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