Data Snapshot | October 2026

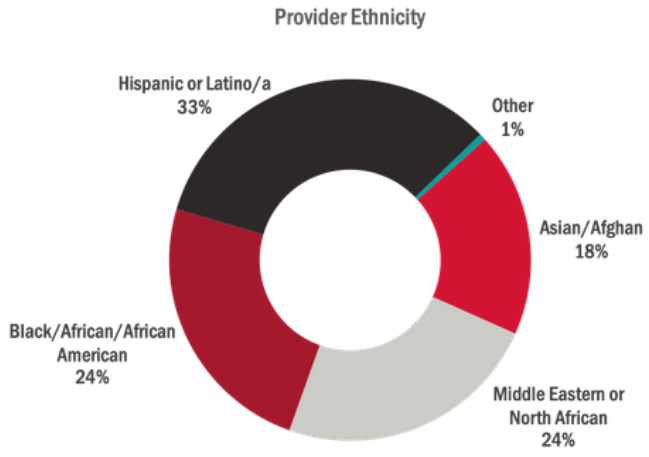
Immigrant and Refugee Family Child Care Providers in San Diego County

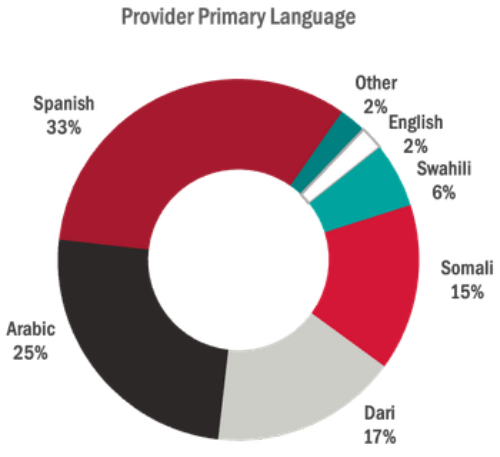
San Diego County is situated along the U.S./Mexico border and has a population of 3.1 million residents, 23% of whom are immigrants or refugees. Although children make up only 4% of the immigrant and refugee population, two in five children in San Diego County have at least one immigrant parent. While 40% of San Diego County's immigrants and refugees were born in Mexico, the population is diverse, with 68 languages spoken across the county.[1,2,3] San Diego County also has the largest concentration of refugees in California, and in the last 6 years has received more refugees than any other county.[4]

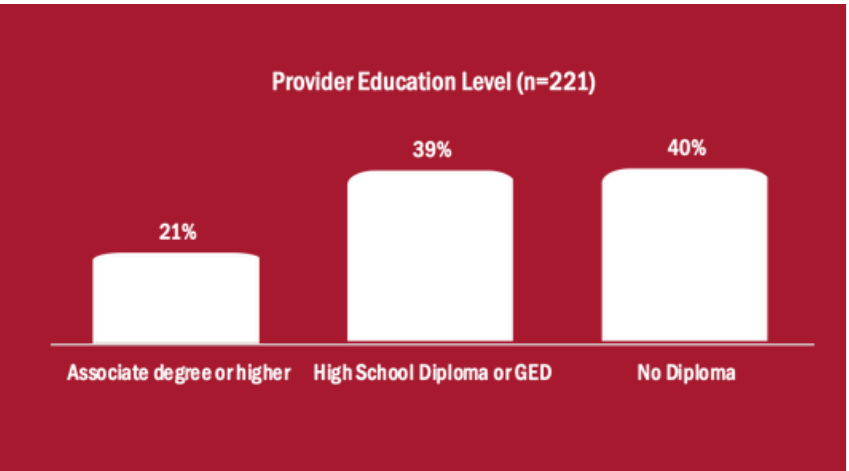
Family child care (FCC) has long been an important part of the child care landscape and is a favorable child care option for working families from immigrant and refugee backgrounds. FCC providers often come from the same country of origin as the families in their care, and can engage young children in a shared culture and language that reflect the goals and values of their family and community.[5] FCC is a viable employment opportunity for immigrants and refugees because of low start-up costs and minimal space requirements. It is also a practical option for refugee women who may already be at home caring for children and lack a formal education.

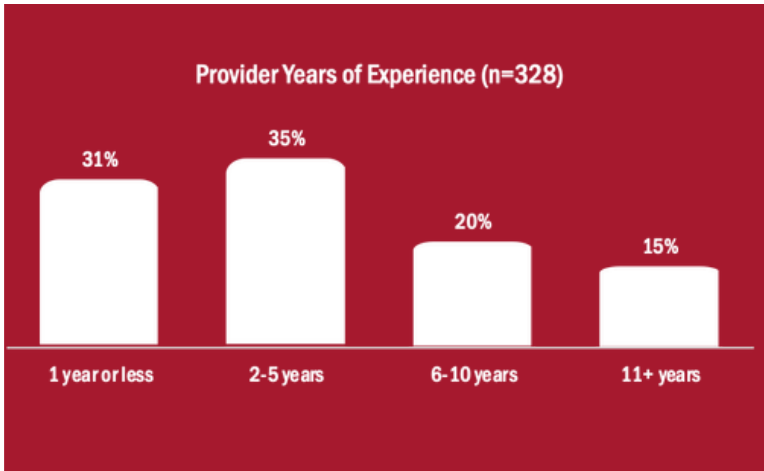
The following is a compilation of six years of data from the Steps to Family Child Care Success Program (STEPS), a professional development program designed to increase immigrant and refugee providers' skills in operating a successful business, increase the availability of high-quality, affordable child care, and honor and uplift their community. Funded by local philanthropic organizations, STEPS is a partnership between the Center for Excellence in Early Development (CEED) at San Diego State University and three local ethnic community-based organizations (ECBO's): Chicano Federation, Horn of Africa, and the International Rescue Committee.

328 STEPS providers serve more than 2,000 children across San Diego County









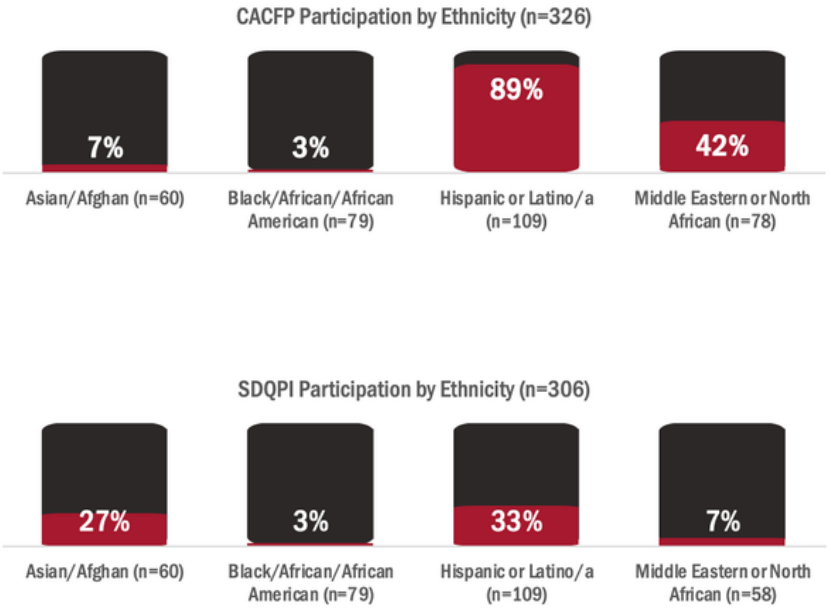
Immigrant and refugee families often prefer child care settings that reflect their cultural community and value opportunities for their children to maintain their home language and participate in cultural traditions, including food, music, celebrations, and religious practices.

86% **of children share the STEPS provider's racial or ethnic heritage.** n=275

79% **of children share the STEPS provider's primary language.** n=272

The STEPS model leverages cultural navigators who are from the same cultural communities as the providers they support, serving as a bridge to the multiple child care agencies and systems providers must navigate to operate a successful business.[6] These systems include licensing and regulatory agencies and government-funded child care subsidy contractors. Providers reported that they receive child care subsidies for 90% of the children in their care.

STEPS providers can also participate in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), a federal program that provides reimbursements to child care providers for nutritious meals and snacks, and the San Diego Quality Preschool Initiative (SDQPI), a county program designed to evaluate and improve the quality of early care and education. Data reveal greater access to CACFP and SDQPI for Hispanic, Spanish-speaking providers than refugees from other ethnic groups. Refugee providers describe barriers to participation in CACFP because guidelines do not align with the culturally traditional foods served in their programs and because of the complexity of program requirements.[7] Moreover, language barriers often make it difficult for STEPS providers to participate in programs such as SDQPI. To help address these barriers, STEPS cultural navigators provide training and technical assistance in providers' home languages.



Expanding the STEPS model by investing in cultural navigators through the Shared Service Alliance.

In 2023, STEPS became part of a new Shared Services Alliance (SSA) which serves as a larger backbone agency to provide business infrastructure resources for a collective of FCC providers, enabling them to share costs, deliver services, and access resources in a more streamlined way. Led by the YMCA Childcare Resource Service (CRS), and based on a nationally recognized model, the SSA is a collaboration between the YMCA CRS, Child Development Associates, the Chicano Federation, Horn of Africa, and the International Rescue Committee. To date, 94 STEPS providers have matriculated into SSA which currently serves 250 providers each year. Continued funding and expansion is needed to support the use of cultural navigators who make governing systems, resources, and programs accessible for immigrant and refugee FCC providers.

The STEPS Partnership

The Chicano Federation
116 Providers
856 Children
Spanish-speaking providers

Horn of Africa Community
54 Providers
270 Children
Somali-speaking providers

International Rescue Committee
158 Providers
1023 Children
Arabic, Dari, & Swahili-speaking providers

PRICE PHILANTHROPIES

San Diego Foundation

blue shield of California FOUNDATION

Girard Foundation

Sources: 1. San Diego County. (n.d.). *Demographics*. https://www.sandiegocounty.gov/content/sdc/hhsa/statistics_demographics.html. | 2. Vera Institute of Justice. (2025, March). *Profile of immigrants in San Diego County, California*. | 3. Berube, A. (n.d.). *Pulse on policy: Understanding greater San Diego's immigrants at a challenging moment*. Policy and Innovation Center. | 4. Refugee San Diego. (n.d.) *Our vision*. https://www.refugeesandiego.com/about. | 5. Shivers, E. M., Sanders, K., Wishard, A. G., & Howes, C. (2007). Ways with children: Examining the role of cultural continuity in early educators practices and beliefs about working with low-income children of colour. *Social Work in Public Health, 23* (2-3), 215-246. | 6. Garrity, S., Miller, S., Dunn, C., & Longstreth, S. (2024). "I help them see their potential": The role of cultural navigators in supporting the professional development of immigrant and refugee family childcare providers. Early Childhood Education Journal, 53, 1591-1603. | 7. Garrity, S.M., & Miller, S. (2025). "We need to try to go higher": An examination of Somali Family Child Care providers' participation in a professional development program in the United States. Journal of Early Childhood Research, 23, 371 - 388.

This snapshot was prepared by The Center for Excellence in Early Development at San Diego State University