

Celebrating 100 Years of the International Institute of Minnesota



Unity Without Uniformity



For 100 years the International Institute of Minnesota has celebrated the diverse cultures of Minnesotans while helping newcomers thrive. Looking at the organization's history, perhaps what is most striking is how little has changed.

Since well before 1919, New Americans have come to Minnesota seeking opportunity, fighting discrimination, and ultimately bringing their cultural identities into the ever-evolving definition of "Minnesotan."

Through education, casework, advocacy, and cultural celebration, the International Institute of Minnesota has proudly served New Americans for 100 years.

In December 2019, the International Institute of Minnesota proudly celebrated its centennial – 100 years of service for and with New Americans. We honored this milestone through special community events and initiatives, like this remarkable Unity Without Uniformity exhibit.

In the pages that follow, you'll see how the Institute has adapted to the evolving needs of New Americans in Minnesota. Much has changed over the past century, but one thing hasn't: immigrants and refugees still come to Minnesota seeking safety, community and the opportunity to thrive. The Institute is here to help ensure that happens.

Every day people walk through our doors with dreams and ambitions, eager to work hard to move their lives forward and push past overwhelming loss, change and institutional barriers. Their presence in our communities shows us the meaning of patience, persistence and graciousness in pursuit of a new life in an unfamiliar place.

Although restrictive policies and dangerous rhetoric have been a threat to New Americans' livelihoods and the organizations that serve them, we are confident that we are on a path to building a more welcoming state and nation — in partnership with all our neighbors. As community members witness how New Americans strengthen neighborhoods, fill critical jobs and imbue the state with rich culture and knowledge, barriers begin to crumble.

As demand for our high-quality programs continues to rise, we are committed to expanding our services to extend our reach even further. We envision a community where every New American can reach their full potential and find respect, support and safety.

Thank you for your commitment to our mission over the past century and the years to come.

With gratitude,

Jane Graupman

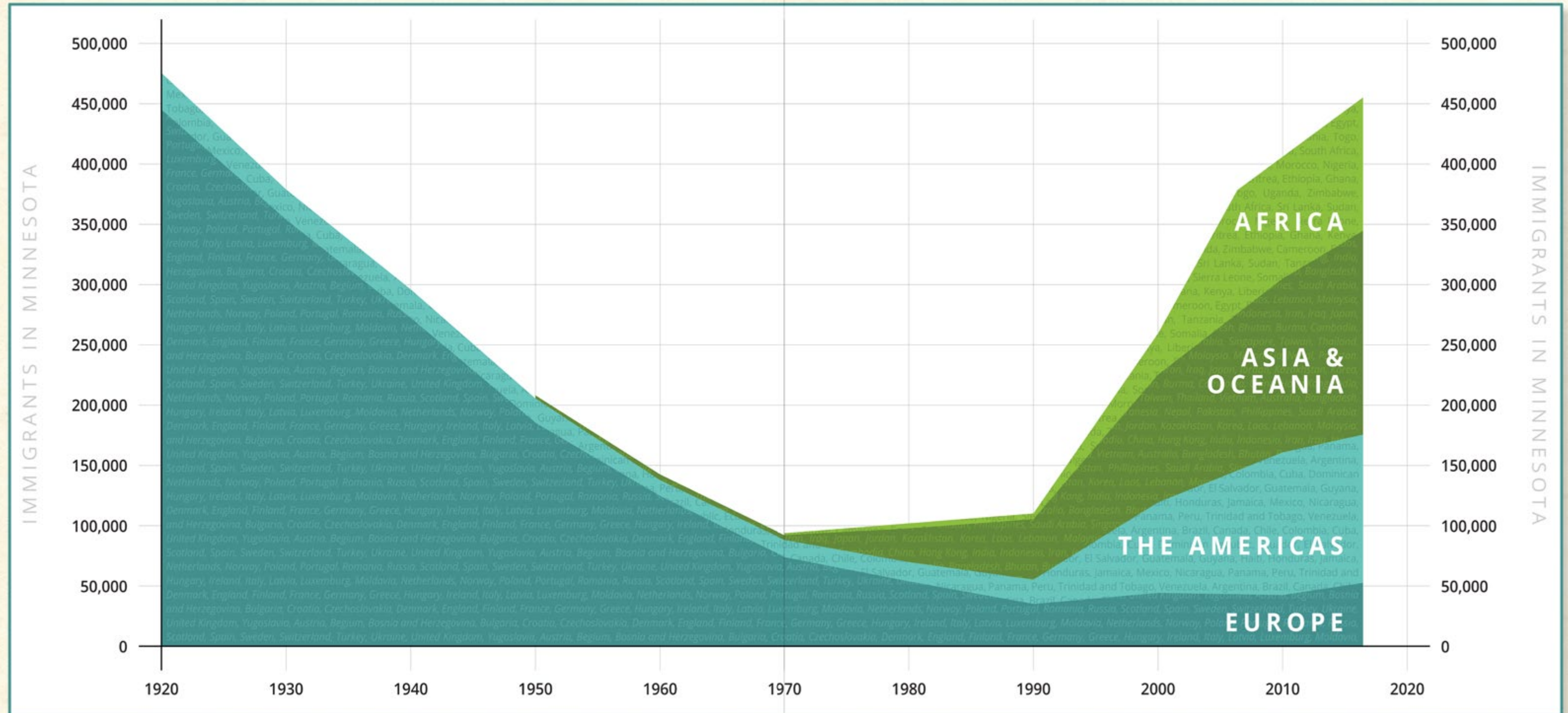


A Truly International Minnesota

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The International Institute of Minnesota has served
This visual illustrates the changing regional

New Americans from more than 100 countries since 1919.
identities of New Minnesotans using census data.



1919:
The International Institute of St. Paul opened. Foreign-born people made up over 20% of Minnesota's population.

1924:
The Immigration Act of 1924 restricted immigration, favoring homogeneity from Western Europe.

1965:
Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 prioritized skilled-workers and family reunification, opening up immigration for non-Northern Europeans.

1980:
Refugee Act of 1980 created formal refugee program in line with UN standards.

1990:
The 1990 Immigration Act increased immigration and created Diversity Visa Lottery.

2017:
The International Institute of Minnesota served people from 98 countries in one year. Immigrants made up about 8% of the population in Minnesota.



150 people of various nationalities attended the 1920 Christmas party. Brown's Photo Studio, 1920; courtesy of International Institute of Minnesota.

Mexican cafe at the Festival of Nations, 1942. The Mexican group first participated in the 1934 Folk Festival. Courtesy of the International Institute of Minnesota.

Creating a "City of Friends"

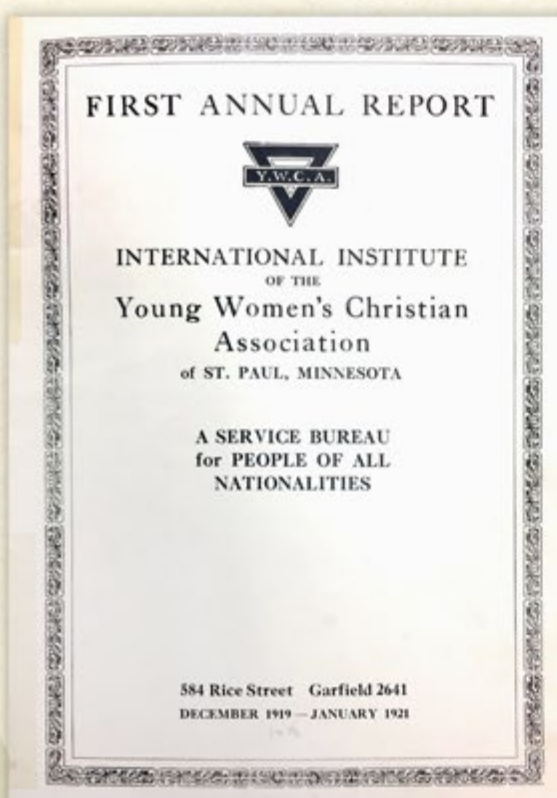
Rejecting the Melting Pot

Advocacy and Cultural Celebration

"The International Institute in St. Paul came into existence just after the first World War when the realization dawned that people of many nationalities were living in segregated groups cut off almost entirely from participation in the life of the United States."

—Bess Leuthold Beebe
First President of the Institute's Board of Directors

One Polish client quoted in the first annual report stated, "When I came to St. Paul ten years ago, there seemed to be no hope for a foreigner who could not speak English. I feel more at home since you came to see me and told me how I could get free medical aid and could learn English." Courtesy of International Institute of Minnesota.



Founded in December 1919, the International Institute of Minnesota (at that time called the International Institute in Saint Paul) began as a service bureau of the YWCA.

From the onset, the Institute helped the "foreign born" to learn English, build community, and access services. Run and staffed by women, the Institute served women, men, and children, whereas the YWCA only served single women.

In the first two years, the Institute partnered with 12 agencies to reach people of 13 nationalities. Three workers conducted 800 home visits.

Cosmopolitan Club group photo taken outside of the downtown St. Paul Public Library. Courtesy of the International Institute of Minnesota.



"Assimilation is a two-way street. It is not enough for the foreign-born to accept America. That is only half the story. The older Americans must accept these newer ones."

—Alice Lilliequist Sickels,
Executive Secretary of the International Institute 1931-1944

In the 1930s the Institute advocated for the value of diversity and acceptance in conversations still relevant today.

During the 1930s and into the 1940s, Mexican migrants in Saint Paul faced hostility and discrimination. Approximately two million Mexicans and Mexican-Americans were deported or expelled from the U.S., including at least 15% of the population in Saint Paul.

Beyond providing English classes to Mexican-Americans in Saint Paul, the Institute engaged in advocacy: working to dispel myths and ultimately publishing a report about the community in 1936.

The Festival of Nations, started by the Institute in 1932 (then called the Homeland Exhibit), quickly became a touchstone of Minnesota's cultural pluralism. It showcased cultural exhibits, ethnic performances and international food cafes to create acceptance and celebrate the diverse cultures of Minnesotans.



Mexican performers at the 1939 Festival of Nations. Left to right: Julia Rangel, Bridget Vasquez, Masadonio Vasquez, Mrs. Carmen B. Truitt, Mrs. Masadonio Vasquez, and Virginia Martinez. April 22, 1939; courtesy of the Pioneer Press.



Ukrainian exhibit at the Festival of Nations, 1939. The Ukrainian group first participated in the 1934 Folk Festival. Courtesy of the Immigration History Research Center Archives.



1942, courtesy of the International Institute of Minnesota.

NEW AT 7 CORNERS

Hostel Is Refuge For Nisei

By Kathryn Gorman
Staff Writer

SOMETHING new has been added to St. Paul's old and picturesque Seven Corners area.

One of the stone buildings facing the river on Kellogg blvd. has been turned into a hostel for persons of Japanese descent — most of them members of this country's "displaced" persons group, victims of the evacuation on the Pacific coast begun after



Family living in the St. Paul Resettlement Committee hostel. The term "Nisei" means the Japanese Americans born to Japanese parents in the United States. Pioneer Press, February 24, 1946.

A Pattern for a Peaceful Way of Life

The Festival of Nations in Wartime

Displaced by Prejudice

Japanese Americans Find Home In Minnesota

Executive Director Alice Sickels wrote an article for the Pioneer Press: "The Festival in preparation and performance is democracy in action." Saint Paul Pioneer Press, January 4, 1942, courtesy of the International Institute of Minnesota.



Festival of Nations Planned As Aid to Wartime Unity

By Alice S. Sickels
Executive Director, International Institute of Minnesota
LATE in the International Institute of Minnesota, plans are being laid for the first of a series of cultural groups and 3,000 volunteers participated in the sixth Festival of Nations.



However, it almost did not happen. There was great discussion of whether a peaceful gathering of cultures was possible in 1942. "The decision was to go ahead with the Festival because it was more needed in wartime than any other time..." said Bess Leuthold Beebe, General Chairwoman of the Festival.

No flags were on display and an interfaith prayer was offered. The Italian group withdrew but the Germans voted to stay in. Other Italians in the community heard about this and offered to participate in the ethnic dance program. They received a standing ovation after their performance.

Six months after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and the U.S. entry into World War II, 33 cultural groups and 3,000 volunteers participated in the sixth Festival of Nations.

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Ukrainian dancers performing at the Festival of Nations, 1942. The Ukrainian group first participated in the 1934 Folk Festival. Courtesy of Immigration History Research Center Archives.

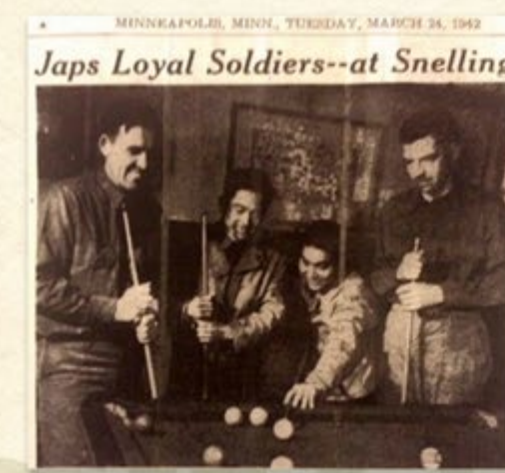


Sisters Akko (left) and Hiroko Ogata pose during the 1949 Festival of Nations. They lived with their mother Tomiko Ogata in the St. Paul Resettlement Committee hostel from 1945-1948. Tomiko was the hostel director from December 1945- August 1948. February 21, 1949, courtesy of the Pioneer Press.



Japanese American soldiers playing pool while serving at Fort Snelling, Minneapolis. Though it was "Japs," a derogatory term in use at the time, the article served to show that Japanese Americans were loyal and patriotic members of the U.S. armed services during World War II.

March 24, 1942, from the Minneapolis and St. Paul Newspaper Negative Collection, Minnesota Historical Society.



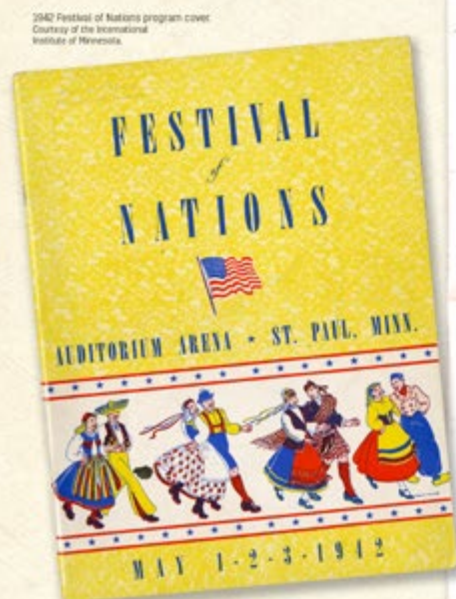
In 1942, the International Institute created the St. Paul Resettlement Committee to resettle Japanese Americans (Nisei) from internment camps on the West Coast. More than 110,000 Japanese Americans were forcibly removed from their homes during this time.

From August 1945 to August 1948, the committee operated the St. Paul Resettlement Hostel near the Institute, housing newly arrived Japanese American families and helping them find work.

In 1940, 51 Japanese people lived in Minnesota according to the census. By 1950 that number grew to more than 1000, not including the nearly 6,000 Japanese Americans working at the Military Intelligence Service Language School.

The U.S. army recruited and drafted these men to work as linguists in the war effort, and relocated them from California to Camp Savage in 1942, then to Fort Snelling in 1944. They were credited with shortening the war in the East by two years, saving nearly a million lives and billions of dollars.

1946 Christmas dinner at the Saint Paul Resettlement Committee Hostel. Some hostel residents from left: Yoneko Yamada, Frank Yanari, daughter Emi Yanari (in high chair), Kimi Yanari, Tomiko Ogata standing and holding the turkey, Hiroko Ogata seated (right). 1946, courtesy of Linda Hashimoto van Doornum.





In September of 1952, the President of the Institute's Board of Directors, Mrs. Kate Skiles Klein (second from right, standing), traveled to New York City harbor to welcome the first group of displaced people from the Venezia Giulia camp in Trieste. Courtesy of the International Institute of Minnesota



Hmong students at an International Institute party wearing traditional holiday clothing. 1976, courtesy of the International Institute of Minnesota.

Reflecting A Troubled World

Minnesota's First Official Refugees

The Aftermath of WWII and the Cold War

"The year 1945 saw great world changes....The problems brought to the International Institute reflected the problems of a troubled world."

-1945 Institute annual report

After World War II, the International Institute was prepared to resettle war refugees (displaced people) to Minnesota.

The Displaced Persons Act (1948-1952) allowed a total of 400,000 Eastern Europeans to come to the U.S. Of those who found a home in Minnesota, one third were of Polish descent, though the Institute also welcomed people from Hungary, Latvia, Estonia, Romania, and Ukraine. The Institute sponsored displaced persons and helped them find jobs and housing.

In 1952, the International Institute opposed the McCarran-Walter Act. A product of the Cold War, it explicitly barred immigrants from communist countries.

The restrictionist law ultimately passed, with an upside: it opened the door for Chinese, Korean and Japanese immigrants to secure the long-denied right to citizenship. The International Institute helped them apply.



In 2018 a record-breaking five Hmong American candidates were elected to state government. Six Hmong lawmakers (incumbents and freshmen) formed the first Minnesota Asian Pacific Caucus. From left: Rep. Tia Xiong, Rep. Kathy Wei, Rep. Fui Lee, Rep. Samanthu Yang, Rep. Jay Xiong, Scott Takaue, Pioneer Press, December 16, 2018. Courtesy of the Pioneer Press

The end of the Vietnam War began a new era for the International Institute of Minnesota.

The Indochina Migration and Refugee Assistance Act of 1975 created an official refugee status and allowed 130,000 refugees from the Vietnam War to resettle in the U.S.

The Institute debated its role in the program, before ultimately welcoming these first refugees from Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam. In 1975, the Institute helped welcome an emergency arrival of 3,800 refugees to Minnesota.

In the four years between 1976 to 1980, the Hmong population in Minnesota grew from zero to 10,000. The Hmong moved to Minnesota to flee persecution under the communist regime in Laos: many who came to Minnesota worked with the CIA. They were the largest group resettled by the Institute throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s.

The Hmong formed a strong community, and Saint Paul grew to be the largest Hmong population per capita in America.

Saint Paul Dispatch, November 21, 1947, courtesy of the International Institute of Minnesota.



Kiyoko Nakamura at her naturalization ceremony at the International Institute in St. Paul. Kiyoko and her husband Frank Nakamura were forced to leave their home in Portland, OR and live in the Minidoka internment camp in Idaho during World War II. They resettled in St. Paul to be with family, including daughter Ruth Nakamura Taniguchi and son Howard Nakamura in September of 1945 after World War II's end.

1947, courtesy of Judy Nakamura Murakami



The Institute hired the first Vietnamese caseworker in the state, Nga Truoc, in 1976. Here she is shown, facing, meeting with a client. 1976, courtesy of the International Institute of Minnesota.



Hmong folk art exhibit booth at the 1988 Festival of Nations. The Hmong and Lao groups first participated in 1980. Courtesy of the International Institute of Minnesota.





A Somali family reunited at the Minneapolis-Saint Paul International Airport, resettled by the International Institute of Minnesota. 2014, Alexander Zlotai for the International Institute of Minnesota.

The Land of Lakes Welcomes the Nation of Poets

"Being a young Muslim, Somali man, I realized I have a role in my community. Poetry is not just a speech. It's an action."

—Abdifatah Farah aka Abdi Phenomenal
award-winning Somali poet, based in Minneapolis



Minnesota State Rep. Ihan Omar accepting the Diga Zilaal Award at the International Institute of Minnesota Women's Day Celebration in 2020. Omar was the first Somali American elected to state legislative office in the United States and the first Somali American elected to the United States Congress. 2024, Alexander Zlotai for the International Institute of Minnesota.



Somali cultural exhibit booth at the Festival of Nations, 1999. This was the first year the Somali group participated in the Festival. Courtesy of the International Institute of Minnesota.



Nura (center) and her daughters resettled to Minnesota from Somalia through the International Institute of Minnesota. 2016, courtesy of the International Institute of Minnesota.

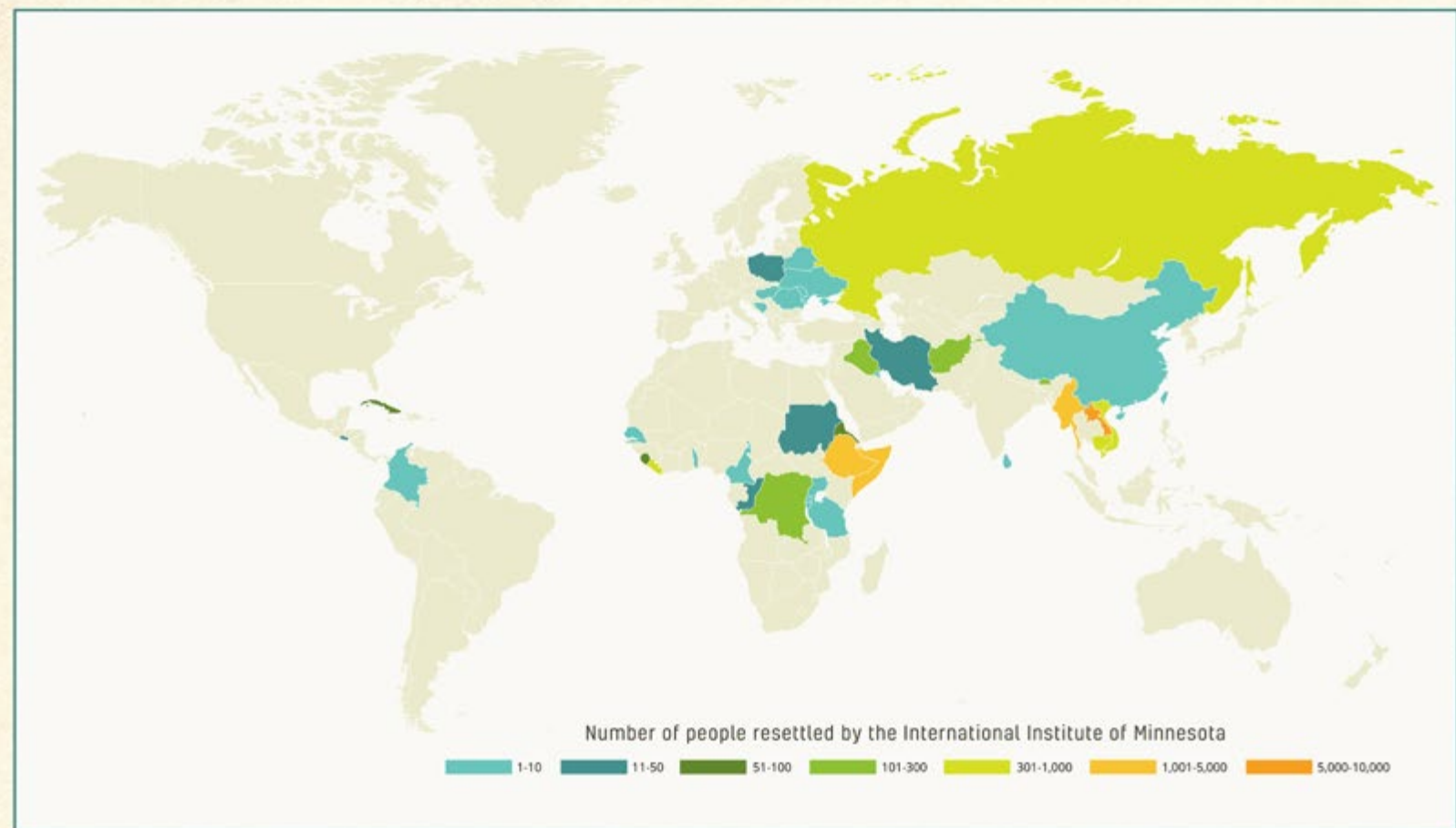
In the 1990s, the Institute began to welcome refugees from Somalia, the "Nation of Poets," along with people fleeing violence from around the world, including Bosnia and Liberia.

In 1999, the Institute was solely responsible for resettling 10% of the U.S. national quota for Africans. The Somali community grew rapidly in part because of the Immigration Act of 1990, which prioritized family reunification.

Today, there are more Somalis in Minnesota than any other state. Nearly one in three people with Somali ancestry in the U.S. live in Minnesota. The availability of jobs and sense of community made Minnesota the lead destination for secondary migration in the U.S., and Somali-Minnesotans contribute greatly to the community as business owners, artists and politicians.

All Are Welcome in Minnesota

From 1980-2018, the International Institute of Minnesota resettled nearly 25,000 refugees from 37 countries.



People with refugee status came to the Institute from these countries, according to agency data

Kuwait	1	El Salvador	11	Cuba	52	Afghanistan	103	Iraq	287	Burma	1830	Laos	9922
Senegal	1	Congo	13	Sierra Leone	77	DR Congo	112	Russia	521	Ethiopia	3271		
Tanzania	1	Iran	17	Eritrea	91	Bhutan	238	Vietnam	562	Somalia	4518		
Uganda	1	Sudan	30					Liberia	579				
Belarus	2	Poland	36					Cambodia	652				
China	2												
Burundi	3												
Colombia	3												
Moldova	3												
Cameroon	4												
Rwanda	4												
Sri Lanka	4												
Bosnia and Herzegovina	5												
Ukraine	5												
Romania	6												
Togo	7												
Hungary	8												

The Institute continued welcoming refugees into the 21st century, resettling New Americans from 37 countries around the world.

These newcomers start businesses, become a critical part of the workforce and bring their culture to Minnesota, creating a more vibrant, global community.



Three families resettled to Minnesota. 2017, courtesy of the International Institute of Minnesota. Information graphic provided by All Are Welcome Here.



Legacy in Action

Moving into a Second Century

In 2019, the International Institute of Minnesota remains a thriving welcome center for immigrants and refugees on Como Avenue in Saint Paul: serving 4000 people from 100 countries every year. Its mission: to help New Americans achieve self sufficiency and full membership in American life. The same pillars that the Institute was founded on in 1919 guide its major programs:

Refugee Services

From serving the displaced from the World Wars, to welcoming the first official refugees, providing casework for new arrivals has long been the core of the Institute's work.



1975, courtesy of the International Institute of Minnesota.



2010; Alexander Zoltai for the International Institute of Minnesota.

Workforce Development

Started in 1990, the Institute's Medical Careers Pathway has helped 2800 New Americans find work as nursing assistants, nurses, and other medical professionals. In 2013, the Institute created the Hospitality Careers Pathway to help newly-arrived women with limited English skills find jobs to address immediate financial stability.



Mike Zerby for the Star Tribune, May 30 1994; courtesy of the International Institute of Minnesota.



2014; Alexander Zoltai for the International Institute of Minnesota.

Legacy in Action

Moving into a Second Century

Immigration Services

Since the beginning, the Institute has recognized citizenship as an important achievement for New Americans: teaching classes, offering application assistance and hosting ceremonies. The Institute has helped 12,000 people apply for citizenship since 2001.



November 17, 1949; courtesy of the Pioneer Press



2018; courtesy of the International Institute of Minnesota.

Education

The Institute has offered English classes to New Americans since 1919, recognizing language learning as one of the most important steps to building a life in Minnesota.



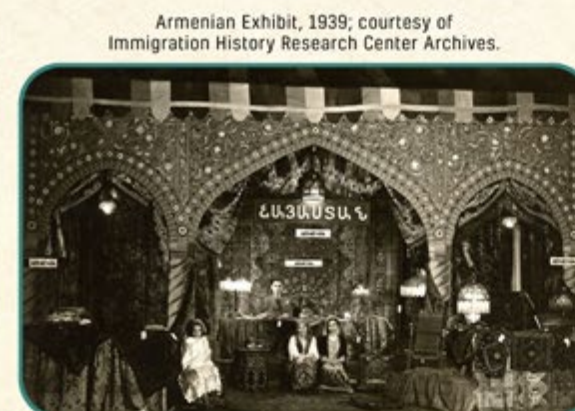
1940; courtesy of the International Institute of Minnesota.



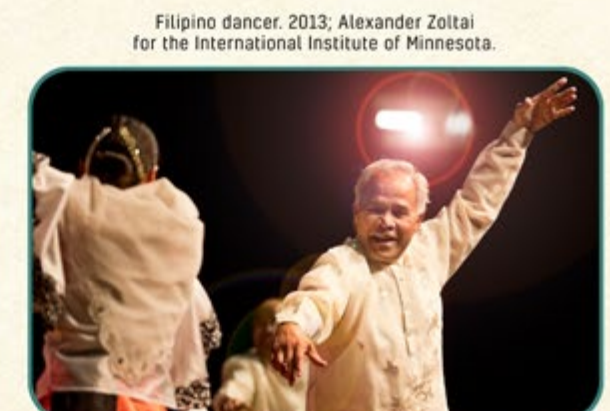
2010; Alexander Zoltai for the International Institute of Minnesota.

Festival of Nations

From 1932 to today, the Festival of Nations remains a celebration of the many ethnic communities that shape Minnesota, now attracting 50,000 people each year.



Armenian Exhibit, 1939; courtesy of Immigration History Research Center Archives.



Filipino dancer. 2013; Alexander Zoltai for the International Institute of Minnesota.

Unity Without Uniformity is presented by:

Immigration History Research Center Archives,
University of Minnesota Libraries



Ramsey County Historical Society



The International Institute of Minnesota



INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE  100 YEARS
of Minnesota AND GROWING

To learn more or get involved, visit IIMN.org/100Years

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