



## **An Agenda for an Inclusive Economic Recovery:**

Upwardly Global Policy Recommendations  
for the Biden-Harris Administration

December 2020

[Upwardly Global](#) outlines five policy recommendations to transform the lives of millions of immigrant workers and incentivize business to foster an inclusive economic recovery. As the U.S. grapples with one of the most significant economic downturns in our history, our ability to rebuild is linked to our embrace of the equity, inclusion, and the inherent diversity of our country's workforce, championing the skills of all workers, including native-born and immigrants

Upwardly Global is a national nonprofit with a 20-year track record of supporting more than 18,000 work-authorized, college-educated immigrant professionals, including refugees and asylum seekers, in overcoming systemic barriers and contributing essential skills to the U.S. workforce. We've partnered with dozens of U.S. employers, including Fortune 500 companies like Accenture, Visa, and Starbucks, to hire this talent. As a result, we've added billions of dollars to the U.S. economy in wages, taxes, and consumer spending.

Immigrants have always brought incredible potential to our country--and today, their skills, in tandem with those of native-born workers, are key to our economic recovery.

- **Immigrants are central to our COVID-19 response:** Immigrants make up [significant shares](#) of healthcare workers and disproportionately serve in other roles essential to our COVID-19 response, including [IT](#), [logistics](#), [education](#), and other [front-line jobs](#). Future efforts to rebuild our workforce must ensure that all workers with essential skills are able to put them to work.
- **Immigrants are also poised to drive our nation's economic recovery:** Immigrants' lived experiences and inherent diversity are proven to drive [resilience](#), [innovation](#) and business performance in U.S. workplaces--precisely what our economy needs to recover. Combined with the innovation and entrepreneurship of native-born workers, immigrants are an important driver of the U.S. economy: [nearly half](#) of all Fortune 500 companies in the U.S. were started by immigrants or their children. Immigrant-owned businesses employ [eight million Americans](#).

- **Immigrants are also essential to our long-term economic growth:** By 2050, immigrants and their children will account for [83 percent](#) of the growth in the U.S. working-age population, offsetting the trend of both [slowing U.S. birth rates](#) and [aging Baby Boomers](#) exiting our workforce. We need to invest in this next generation of our workforce.

Despite this potential, [two million](#) work-authorized, college-educated immigrants are un- or under-employed in the U.S. The stories of Upwardly Global's program participants illustrate these trends: a physician from Colombia works as a nanny in Philadelphia; a nurse from Tunisia supports himself as a ride-share driver in Chicago; an IT professional from El Salvador is a clerk in a California supermarket.

The systematic exclusion of this talent results in [\\$10 billion](#) in unrealized taxes and more than [\\$39 billion](#) in lost wages, not to mention a loss of prospective innovation and sidelining of diverse talent. Immigrant professionals face multiple systemic barriers in being able to fully contribute their skills and compete for mid- and high-skill jobs. The United States' workforce and economic systems generally undervalue foreign degrees, credentials, and work experience. Immigrant professionals often arrive in the U.S. with limited professional networks, industry-specific English-language skills, and soft-skills and familiarity with the U.S. job search process. They also face hurdles in translating their credentials and licenses, and experience racism, sexism and discrimination.

Addressing these barriers will create a more inclusive, equitable, and vibrant workforce, one where immigrants--and all U.S. workers--can fully contribute their skills. The work ahead requires investments in the workforce system that advance equity as well as incentivize commitments amongst employers to hire from underrepresented groups. There is bipartisan promise in building an inclusive economic recovery agenda that centers forward-looking immigration and integration policy.

To build back better, Upwardly Global encourages the Biden-Harris administration to advance programs and policies that:

1. **Advance both skills and equity in the U.S. workforce through federal appropriations for skilling, language access, and training.** The Biden-Harris Economic Recovery Task Force can advance employment outcomes through workforce investment while addressing racial and other equity gaps, including access to skilling and language programs. Upwardly Global calls for future economic stimulus and workforce development funding packages to include mid- and high-skill career pathways for underrepresented groups including millions of skilled, underemployed immigrants. Additionally, as the number of refugees admitted to the United States is set to increase under the Biden-Harris administration, investments in the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) should reflect the growing opportunity to support their full integration into the U.S. workforce. Finally, as the Workforce Innovation & Opportunity Act (WIOA), is reauthorized in 2021, Upwardly Global calls for increased program

funding to both Title 1 and 2. The legislation, which coordinates workforce development, education, and training programs across the country, has seen steady cuts for more than [two decades](#).

- *Suggested agency and timeline: Economic Recovery Task Force, in consultation with the U.S. Departments of Labor, Education, Homeland Security, Health and Human Services. First 100 days.*

2. **Ensure timely access to work authorization by reversing Trump administration immigration policies.** Timely access to employment authorization allows immigrants--including refugees and asylum seekers--to achieve self-sufficiency while also making significant contributions to our economy. Yet recent developments, including funding issues at USCIS, and a series of executive orders and regulations from the Trump administration, have put initial and renewal employment authorization out of reach for many immigrants, including asylum seekers. Upwardly Global calls for the Biden-Harris administration to ensure that USCIS is fully operational, focusing on its core work of supporting lawful immigration, and ensuring that those seeking safety in our country have the means to gain self-sufficiency.

- *Suggested agency and timeline: U.S. Department of Homeland Security's U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). Day One.*

3. **Expand community college access for immigrants to build accessible pathways to high-demand careers.** Community colleges are a pathway for skill-building for many underrepresented groups, but tuition barriers, limited availability of evening/weekend courses, and a lack of coordinated wrap-around support for career advancement have left prospective students behind. The Biden-Harris administration has an ambitious goal to provide up to two years of tuition-free community college for working adults and other students. Upwardly Global calls for these programs to include (1) funding for vocational and professional English-language courses and (2) supportive services for job seekers, including immigrants, that assist in their understanding of the job market, credentialing, and navigating cross-cultural barriers to the job search.

- *Suggested agency and timeline: U.S. Departments of Education, Labor, and Homeland Security. First 100 days.*

4. **Establish a federal-level Office of New Americans to scale state and local success in immigrant immigration.** State and local-level agencies and coalitions have led [nimble, innovative work](#) on removing employment barriers for work-authorized immigrants and [building accessible professional licensing practices](#). The Biden-Harris administration has committed to establishing a federal-level Task Force on New Americans, which will coordinate federal efforts to support immigration and immigrant integration. This Task Force should be developed into a well-funded White House Office of New Americans, to ensure ongoing coordination amongst state, local, and federal agencies. In addition to advancing an agenda that promotes lawful immigration to the United States, this Office has an opportunity to support the full economic integration of

immigrants by studying, scaling, and advancing promising practices at the state and local level and working in close coordination with federal-level economic recovery efforts.

- *Suggested agency and timeline: Task Force on New Americans in consultation with the Economic Recovery Task Force and state-level Offices of New Americans. First 100 days.*

5. **Champion diversity and inclusion in the private-sector U.S. workforce through a tax incentive program.** Diversity in hiring translates to [resilience](#), adaptability, and [innovation](#) across employers. Yet as a full [85 percent](#) of positions are filled through existing networks, candidates from underrepresented communities, including immigrants, are at a disadvantage in hiring, creating [homogenous teams](#) with flawed decision-making abilities. The Biden-Harris administration has an opportunity to advance Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) in the U.S. workforce by incentivizing work-based learning and employer hiring practices through a tax credit program. On-site learning opportunities like paid mid-ternships and returnships, or mid-skilled apprenticeships, give immigrant and refugee talent an opportunity to learn U.S. workplace culture and obtain U.S. industry experience, all [shown](#) to be critical for opening doors and addressing talent needs for employers.

- *Suggested agency and timeline: U.S. Department of Labor and the Internal Revenue Service, in consultation with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. First 100 days.*

Upwardly Global leadership and program alumni are available to provide additional information, promising practices, testimonials, and statistics to support the Biden-Harris administration in shaping an inclusive policy agenda. Please contact Sara McElmurry, Director of Communications, Policy and Research, at [saram@upwardlyglobal.org](mailto:saram@upwardlyglobal.org) for additional information.

# Appendix

Figure 1: Upwardly Global Candidates' Skill Sets

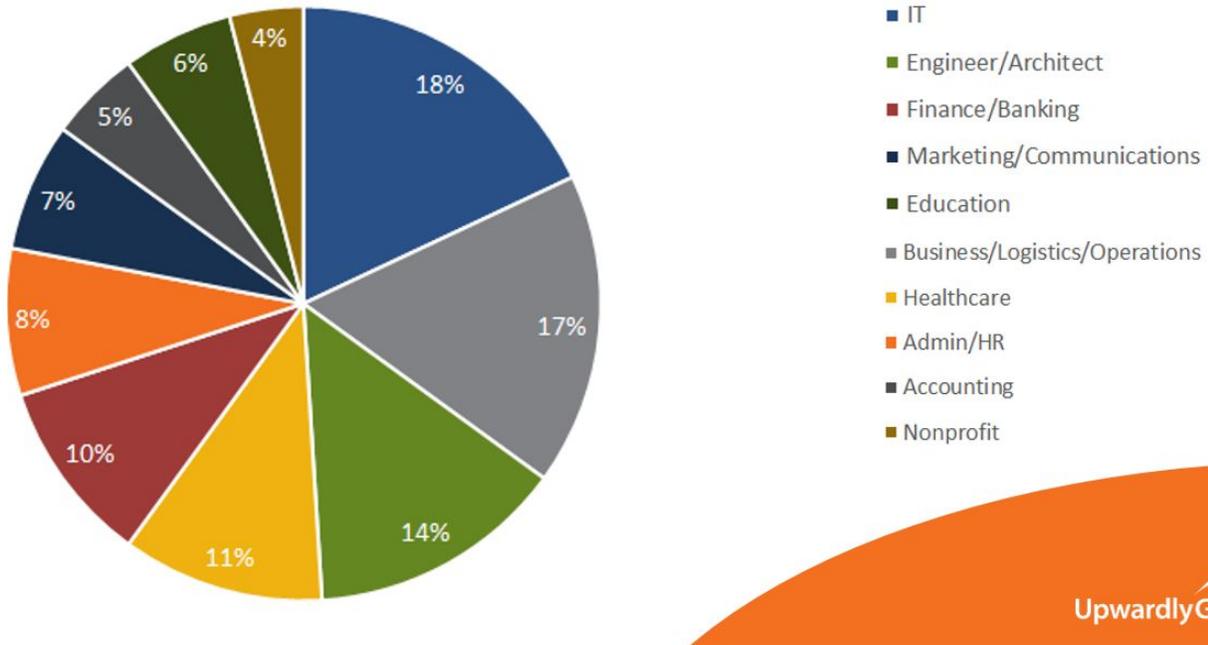


Figure 2: Upwardly Global Impact During COVID-19

