



# 2023 POLICY PRIORITIES

FEBRUARY 17, 2023





## THE UPWARDLY GLOBAL LENS ON POLICY

Recent high profile migrations from Afghanistan, Ukraine, and Latin America have pointed a spotlight on inadequacies in our current systems for immigrant and refugee inclusion. At Upwardly Global, we strongly believe that workforce inclusion at skill level is a key to improving the way that we support newcomers.

When done right, immigrant workforce inclusion can unlock a double win: offering newcomers a path to supporting themselves, their families, and their communities with dignity, and, in tandem, adding billions of dollars in value to our economy that increases shared prosperity. Persistent, long-term domestic labor market needs, including the mid-skill and high-skill levels in healthcare, technology, and beyond, underscore the timeliness of these efforts.

Upwardly Global has worked on the ground with over 20,000 immigrants and refugees who come to the U.S. with professional backgrounds and experience in order to match them with skill-aligned jobs in high demand industries such as healthcare, tech, finance, engineering, and business logistics and operations. Our program alumni earn an average starting salary of over \$67,000, a truly “thriving wage” that represents an average income increase of nearly \$60,000.

# FRAMING

**Why engage in policy?** Good policy with sound, people-centered implementation can accelerate our work exponentially. In contrast, legislation and regulation that invisibilize our community or put immovable barriers in the way of their finding skill-aligned work can — in spite of our best efforts — waste years or lifetimes and diminish newcomers' hope as they try to make up lost time and restart their lives. The result is that our country loses potential economic gains, innovation and immigrant contribution, and goodwill.

**How do we add value to policy makers?** Upwardly Global partners with allied organizations to ensure that immigrant and refugee professionals are recognized in high-impact policy and policy implementation. We lift up the voices of immigrants and refugee professionals, highlight the stories and statistics of job seekers we work with and the promise of their economic integration and social inclusion, and focus on narrative change to move hearts and minds.

**What are our goals?** Our 2023 policy goals focus on areas that directly relate to the Upwardly Global community and their efforts to find jobs that match their potential. For more information about our policy platform and 2020-2024 policy priorities, click [here](#).

# I. ENSURE THAT AFGHAN NEWCOMERS CAN STAY AND WORK IN THE UNITED STATES THROUGH PASSAGE OF THE AFGHAN ADJUSTMENT ACT OR ADMINISTRATIVE ACTION.

Since the fall of Kabul to the Taliban in 2021, over 100,000 Afghans have arrived in the U.S. Many come on humanitarian parole or through Temporary Protected Status (TPS), both of which will expire in summer and fall of 2023. We must ensure that Afghan newcomers are secure in their status in the U.S. and able to start new lives, which includes finding work where they can contribute their skills and invest in their new communities.



To date, Upwardly Global has supported training for over 5,500 Afghan professionals and worked with dozens of companies interested in hiring them. Placements secured by December 2022 alone will add over \$28 million to the U.S. economy over the year and bring much-needed skills to fill labor market gaps, as well as enrich our communities. If we placed the full number of Afghan professionals who have arrived in the U.S. into skill-aligned work, we would be adding some \$650 million in combined annual wages to the economy.

*If Congress and the Administration fail to renew the status of Afghan humanitarian parolees and TPS holders, these positive steps and the promising future will be halted, and Afghans will be forced to face the impossible choice of leaving the U.S. without prospects of going home.*

Each year, over 30% of Upwardly Global's job seekers are refugees, asylum seekers, TPS holders, and humanitarian parolees. We are deeply invested in ensuring that their status in the U.S. is transparent, and that processing and paperwork — including clear and expedited work authorization — are as seamless as possible. Not doing so compounds trauma and inhibits societal and workforce inclusion.



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A TRAINED PILOT,  
AND UPWARDLY GLOBAL ALUM  
**I am SHAHPUR**

READ MY STORY



A TRAINED SURGEON,  
AND UPWARDLY GLOBAL ALUM  
**I am SOHAILA**

READ MY STORY



A TRAINED PILOT,  
AND JOBSEEKER  
**I am HAFIZ**

READ MY STORY



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Read our recent publication,  
["Data From Upwardly Global Projects  
Afghan Newcomers to Contribute  
\\$646M to U.S. Economy"](#)



## II. SUPPORT HIGH-IMPACT FEDERAL GUIDELINES THAT REMOVE BARRIERS FOR IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE WORKFORCE INCLUSION

Immigrant and refugee professionals are often invisibilized in federal policy making. The assumption that people who are educated do not need support is erroneous, as is the prevailing treatment of newcomers as if there is one size that fits all. Instead, federal programs should be created with an understanding of the differing needs of this population. Adjusting existing programs and creating new targeted ones can unlock significant potential and enhance inclusion.

Upwardly Global played a significant role in enacting two important vehicles that can surface opportunities for change and help realize solutions in 2023. As a result of the Bridging the Gap for New Americans Act, passed by overwhelming bipartisan majorities in 2022, the Department of Labor is tasked with conducting an 18-month study to highlight factors that can facilitate employment for immigrants and refugees with professional credentials obtained abroad. In parallel, the White House reinstated the Task Force on New Americans in January 2023 in an effort to coordinate efforts to support immigrants.

2.3 million immigrants and refugees with international credentials are unemployed or underemployed in the U.S. (Migration Policy Institute)



Top priorities for federal intervention, based on Upwardly Global's years of unique experience working with this population and seeing barriers firsthand, include the following recommendations:

## 1. SUPPORTING QUALITY CAREER NAVIGATION PROGRAMS

- Invest in differentiated career navigator programs that can support entry-level and mid-skill level newcomer talent. Career pathways should align to support recredentialing, relicensing, reskilling, and upskilling needs based on existing gaps in the job market. Wraparound services to support critical job readiness training, facilitate mentorship, and ensure credential evaluations also have the potential to increase economic outcomes.
- Adapt new technologies to scale this work. Upwardly Global is currently customizing a language-accessible AI-enabled tool, FutureFitAI, to auto-map a job seeker's skills to current labor market openings.
- Mandate states to issue licensing guides for regulated industries and update them regularly. In partnership with Latham & Watkins law firm, Upwardly Global has published dozens of professional licensing guides for immigrant professionals with a focus on healthcare fields, which are accessible at [upwardlyglobal.org](https://upwardlyglobal.org). Broadly, lift up examples of states that value and recognize international credentials.

## 2. SUPPORT QUALITY ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROGRAMS

- Quality and subsidized English language programs should be available for immigrants and refugees at all skill levels. This includes, importantly, language training with a specific focus on industry-relevant skills to enable immigrant professionals to land mid-skill jobs in their fields. These courses can be delivered via community colleges, universities, or through nonprofits such as Riverside Languages in New York.

### 3. SHIFT INCENTIVE STRUCTURES FOR WORKFORCE AGENCIES AND JOB CENTERS FROM RAPID ATTACHMENT JOBS TO MID-SKILL JOBS WITH OPPORTUNITIES FOR ADVANCEMENT

Currently, workforce agencies, job centers, and even community college career placement centers are rewarded for job placements – without a focus on quality jobs. The result is that many individuals, including immigrant and refugee professionals, are moved into jobs well under their skill levels. There are multiple ways that the federal government can direct services to alter this dynamic, such as:

- Open and direct Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) funds to programs that service immigrant and refugee professionals. Ensure that its implementation does not pose additional barriers to these communities, such as imposing requirements that may force participants to "accept first offers" or other eligibility criteria based on visa status and income level.
- Increase eligibility for immigrant and refugee professionals for Perkins loans, and direct federal funding to incentivize community colleges and universities to include workforce preparation for immigrants and refugees that are open to multiple visa categories.
- Ensure that the equitable workforce hiring and job-creation mandates included in the over \$2 trillion of new federal funding for green transition, CHIPS research, and other critical investments add immigrants and refugees as a priority/preferential population.
- Support funding for state Offices of New Americans (ONA) and highlight state efforts that move the bar on mid-skill employment, including cooperation with career navigator programs (the ONA in New York has a trailblazing program to build capacity for this work, which is run in cooperation with Upwardly Global) and coordination of resources available for wraparound support services.
- Reduce red tape for apprenticeship models and add on apprenticeships for mid-skill professionals re-entering the workforce.



### III. ENSURE IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE WOMEN ARE INCLUDED IN THE PARENTAL LEAVE AND WAGE GAP MOVEMENTS.



In the U.S., women and people of color continue to face serious obstacles in the labor market, evident in pay gaps and occupational segregation. These challenges are further exacerbated for Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) immigrant and refugee women, who must also deal with intersectional challenges and are most often relegated to low-wage work and subject to increased job loss in economic downturns. Gender discrimination, the “motherhood penalty,” and the continued disproportionate responsibility for care work severely impact women’s economic choices, careers, and participation in social and public life. This is particularly true in the absence of support systems and networks for immigrant women of color.

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Approximately 50% of Upwardly Global's job seekers are women, and 75% are BIPOC. We are working internally to build a set of more targeted skills, mentorship, and networking supports for this community. In parallel, in 2023, we will work with coalitions on the ground to ensure that immigrant and refugee women's voices are included in the broader narrative to advance women's economic power. This will include advocating for legislation expanding parental leave, closing the gender wage gap, and providing additional support for child and elder care. In collaboration with other organizations, Upwardly Global is committed to strengthening equity and inclusion for BIPOC women and gender-expansive immigrants and refugees in our programs and communities.

Upwardly Global has placed **4,300** women in thriving-wage jobs that are projected to add **\$280 million** to the economy in 2023.

To learn more about this work, read our recent publication, [Roadblocks to Workforce Inclusion for Young Adult Immigrants \(Published on December 7, 2022\)](#).







#### IV. SUPPORT HEALTHCARE LICENSING REFORM EFFORTS IN ILLINOIS AND NEW YORK.

Continued healthcare licensing reform for immigrant and refugee professionals can have a profound impact on unlocking opportunities for internationally trained medical professionals who, today, are unable to contribute their expertise to the U.S. healthcare system. So many of these individuals are eminently qualified to fill in chronic healthcare worker shortages in the U.S. and bring cultural competency that is so desperately needed to reach the over 30 million Americans who are underserved by our healthcare systems today.



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Over the last 10 years, over 2,000 internationally trained doctors applied to join Upwardly Global's program, and we see many more individuals trained in other healthcare fields. We supported hundreds of them into alternative professions and helped others go through the arduous and expensive path to relicensure. Policies that ease relicensing while continuing strict standards of care would be paramount to solving a dire workforce shortage.

Upwardly Global is helping to lead long-term legislative reform for internationally trained doctors in Illinois. We helped pass H.B. 5465 with bipartisan majorities in the General Assembly in 2022, mandating the creation of the Task Force on Internationally-Licensed Health Care Professionals. Upwardly Global has been named as a task force member and will convene a coalition of local and national groups, including nonprofit, government, and healthcare employers, who will join with state regulators to lead this work. Our goal is to pass state laws that offer alternative, more efficient licensing options and employment inroads.

We hope to replicate these efforts in New York, even as we work simultaneously to build our paid internship program with NewYork-Presbyterian and seed similar opportunities with other healthcare systems across the country.



139,000 is the estimated shortage of physicians in hospitals around the country by 2033. Meanwhile, 165,000 internationally-trained medical professionals are un- or underemployed in the U.S. today.



# ABOUT UPWARDLY GLOBAL

Upwardly Global, a nonprofit with offices in San Francisco, New York City, Chicago, and the Washington, D.C., area, is the first and longest-serving organization dedicated to advancing the inclusion of immigrant and refugee professionals into the U.S. workforce. With a leadership team that includes experts in diversity hiring, workforce development, and women's empowerment, we work to build out career pathways and thriving-wage employment to support wealth building for low-income, underserved refugee, immigrant, and asylee professionals across the country through innovative and responsive direct service, employer engagement and partnerships, and capacity building and train-the-trainer work with other frontline immigrant and workforce organizations.

