



Taskforce on New Americans
Submission to the Workforce Training & Development Subcommittee
Upwardly Global Recommendations
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High profile recent migrations from Afghanistan, Ukraine, and Latin America have pointed a spotlight on inadequacies in our current systems for immigrant and refugee inclusion. Upwardly Global believes that workforce inclusion at newcomers' 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 in the mid- and high-skill level sectors in healthcare, broad based technology (as all businesses build tech units) and beyond, underscore the timeliness of these efforts.

Upwardly Global is the first and largest national organization to support immigrant and refugee professionals. We have 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, "good" jobs in high demand industries including healthcare, tech, finance, engineering, and business operations. In 2022, our clients earned an average starting salary of over \$67,000 that represents an average income increase of nearly \$60,000; during the year, our alumni added over \$600 million to our economy in combined wages. www.upwardlyglobal.org

Below are responses to the questions posted by the Workforce Training and Development Subcommittee of the Taskforce on New Americans based on our on-the-ground work in this field with immigrant and refugee professionals over decades.

I. What are the top three barriers New Americans face integrating into our nation's workforce?

Today, 2.3 million immigrants and refugees with foreign credentials are un- or underemployed, while our economy has millions of openings in areas where they would bring professional strength and expertise. This is the population that Upwardly Global has worked with for over 20 years, and that we know best. Critical barriers they face include:

1. Career navigation - newcomers are solely challenged to understand what jobs they qualify for, how their skills fit into the labor market, whether they need to relicense or re-credential – and what that career pathway journey might look like. Regulated industries such as medicine, legal, engineering, accounting and teaching have licensing requirements that differ by state, and the requirements change regularly. Some industries, such as

technology, are more skills-based and rely less on credentials, but without U.S. work experience, a U.S. credential or certification is often required. Being able to navigate the career paths, skilling options, and ultimate job opportunities requires navigation support.

2. Many of the job seekers we work with go to job centers, but do not find any services relevant to their skill level. Most of our resettlement and workforce systems chase “rapid attachment” low wage jobs for immigrants and refugees. In fact, we see tremendous diversity — in academic training, occupation, cultural awareness, and intersectional identities — among newcomers, with some 45% having a B.A. or higher degree. It is therefore important to take stock of a newcomer’s skills, background, and credentials while supporting them into jobs that have advancement prospects. Otherwise they are trapped into quickly-acquired, low-paying jobs that sorely lack long-term opportunities and upward mobility.
3. English is a common barrier for immigrant professionals. Basic language skills are critical for those who do not possess them, as well as professional and industry-specific English for individuals looking to go into mid-level jobs. Quality language programs are often expensive, and professional-level English training for adults are few and far between. In Upwardly Global’s 2023 report, “[Roadblocks to Workforce Inclusion for Young Adult Immigrants](#),” only 22% of respondents mention English proficiency as a barrier, however 43% requested targeted English language support to address cultural differences, industry lingo and professional communication. An emphasis here needs to include cultural differences, in particular as we support refugees and immigrants up the economic career ladder.

II. How can the U.S. government best address each of these areas?

1. Supporting quality career navigation programs
 - Invest in career navigator programs that can support entry and mid-skill newcomer talent. These should include differentiated career pathways for entry and mid-skill talent that aligns to recredentialing/relicensing needs, re/upskilling, and the job market. Wrap around services in job readiness training, mentorship programs, and credential evaluations can increase economic outcomes.
 - New technologies can be used to scale this work. Upwardly Global is currently customizing such a tool, which is a language-accessible AI-enabled tool, FutureFit, to auto-map a career-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 and Watkins law firm, Upwardly Global has drafted a number of [professional licensing guides](#) for immigrant professionals. Overall, international credentials need to be valued and recognized.

2. The Federal government can shift current incentive structures for workforce agencies and job centers that currently focus on rapid attachment jobs. Instead, they can explicitly make funding available and incentivize support that helps individuals land mid-skill jobs with opportunities for advancement. This should include differentiated services for newcomers with prior professional experience and education.

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 programs that service immigrant and refugee professionals, and ensure that requirements do not lock out this community, including items such as ‘accepting first offers,’ and re-evaluate eligibility criteria based on visa status and income level.
 - Increase eligibility for this community for Perkins loans and direct federal funding to incentivize community colleges to include workforce preparation for immigrants and refugees, open to multiple visa categories.
 - Ensure that the equitable workforce hiring and job creation mandates included in over \$2 trillion in new Federal funding for green transition, CHIPS research and other critical investments include immigrants and refugees as a priority/preferential population.¹
 - 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, run in cooperation with Upwardly Global) and coordination of resources available for wrap-around support services (such as in Maryland - see below).
 - Reduce red tape for apprenticeship models, and add on mid-skill apprenticeships for mid-skill professionals re-entering the workforce
3. Support quality English language programs, with a specific focus on industry-relevant skills, to enable immigrant professionals to land skill-aligned work. These courses can be supported through community colleges or through nonprofits such as Riverside Languages. One of the best examples is New York University’s targeted English language courses for refugee professionals.

III. How might the U.S. government best ensure New Americans know available workforce and job training programs and their workers’ rights?

¹ The Bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, with over \$1.2 trillion in funding over five years; the Inflation Reduction Act, with \$391 billion to address climate change and develop renewable energy; and the CHIPS and Science Act, which will allocate \$280 billion in new funding.

Newcomer task forces or workforce working groups, staffed by and organized through state agencies with programming and info sharing led by on-the-ground practitioners within the region can ensure coordination and address service gaps through effective referral systems, and ensure that people are not locked out of opportunity for lack of accurate and available information. For example - the State of Maryland Skilled Immigrant Taskforce (part of the Division of Workforce Development and Adult Learning, Maryland Department of Labor).

IV. What are data and information gaps relating to New Americans and their integration into our nation's workforce that you would like to see the U.S. government address?

Today, there is no system to collect and understand on any level the skills and backgrounds that immigrants and refugees bring to the U.S. Standardizing data collection among agencies that work with this population in ways that do not compromise confidentiality is critical so that we can design and support appropriate systems and programs that better connect new Americans to jobs at their skill levels – thereby adding to immigrant inclusion and integration and to the U.S. economy.

USCIS is a natural entry point as most immigrants need to go through USCIS for paperwork, work authorization or visa status changes and renewals. Coordinating with this federal agency to collect robust data, and support information sharing as a one-stop shop might be an effective way.

These efforts can also go a long way to building public support for immigrants and refugees as part of our economic engine and to a key to shared opportunity and prosperity. Data collected should be intersectionally disaggregated by gender, race/color and ethnicity. In addition, many Arabs are told to list themselves as 'white'; another nativity category should be considered for this community.

Finally, in order to better build confidence with the business community, it is important to track the length of time it realistically takes to renew work authorization, ensure legal pathways for those with work beyond their 2-year work authorization status; and shift application times for renewal to allow for enough time to receive renewal. For example, one can renew their work authorization 180 days before it expires; however it can take over 5 months to receive, which results in individuals being fired, and reduces the likelihood of companies to take on this risk.

V. What tools, mechanisms, or partnerships should the U.S. government establish to help New Americans integrate into our nation's workforce?

Establishment a New Americans Advisory Council. To ensure ongoing stakeholder engagement and public narrative, there should be an established New Americans Advisory Council responsible for advising the Task Force and its activities. The members should be appointed by the Domestic Policy Council and should include representatives from state and local government, immigrant advocacy organizations, community service providers and other organizations and individuals. Goals of such groups should include enhancing the visibility of and funding for solutions that address challenges facing skilled immigrants; consolidating career navigator and other support resources that have proven effective in



reducing barriers to skill-aligned workforce inclusion, and engaging with businesses and the private sector.

We hope that the Department of Labor, working with this taskforce, can also use the upcoming study mandated by the Bridging the Gap for New Americans Act on skilled immigrant workforce integration to highlight these gaps and propose long-term solutions.

Contact: Jina Krause-Vilmar, President & CEO, Upwardly Global, jina@upwardlyglobal.org