

Introduction

Last year was a **great year** for our advocacy and policy work! How we've approached this:

We have determined that building an inclusive workforce means shifting to a **strategic ecosystems approach** that **bolsters the systems** across workforce services, community colleges, and refugee resettlement agencies in order to connect newcomers with economic opportunities at their skill level, both in the early days of arrival and over the years as they navigate the labor market.

Over the past three years in particular, we have seen significant flows of forcibly displaced persons coming through the Southern border. Related to this:

- We estimate that approximately 25% or around 10,000 of Afghan newcomers to the U.S. since August 2021 are college-educated.
- [Recent data](#) from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development indicate that 76% of women and 71% of men who have fled Ukraine possess a bachelor's degree or higher.
- The U.S. government began collecting data on the educational and professional backgrounds of individuals coming through the Safe Mobility Offices (SMOs) in December 2023; initial numbers are forthcoming.

To ensure women are not left behind, we are **addressing the unique barriers that immigrant women face** due to the intersection of their multiple identities — such as gender, color, and immigration



status — through our Women's Economic Power initiative. We are advancing family-oriented policies that are crucial for our job seekers looking to build their lives and contribute to local communities.

To this end, we aim to build a vibrant U.S. workforce where newcomers are welcomed, included, and fully able to contribute to the economy, their communities, and our shared future. We do this through three **key advocacy pillars**:

1. Advance newcomers' full inclusion in local communities and economies.
2. Support systems that champion immigrants' potential and skills.
3. Celebrate the contributions of immigrants, refugees, and asylees.

This document provides an update on progress we've made towards achieving our [2023 policy priorities](#).

I. Ensure that Afghan newcomers can stay and work in the U.S. through Afghan Adjustment or administrative action.

As of mid-January 2024, we have helped nearly **650 Afghan** professionals (arriving after the start of Operation Allies Welcome in August 2021) secure full-time and skill-aligned employment, reached over **4,500** users with our Afghan-specific learning portal, and awarded over **250** scholarships to Afghan newcomers pursuing additional training and certifications. Our Afghan response efforts to provide differentiated workforce services during a moment of crisis received national recognition, with honorable mentions in [Fast Company's World Changing Ideas 2023](#) and the [Ragan Crisis Communications Awards](#).

[H.R.4627](#) and [S.2327](#) were reintroduced with bipartisan support in July 2023. We had a multipronged and targeted approach to demonstrate our [support](#) for the bills and to elevate our economic data and success stories to partners and policymakers.

- **Building the case:** We published an [impact report](#) on our Afghan response work, released a [thought paper](#) on the value of Afghan newcomers to the U.S. economy and society, and issued a [press release](#) with updated data to mark the two-year anniversary since the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan.
- **Getting the word out:** We reached over 47,000 readers through our monthly newsletter with calls for Afghan Adjustment, advocated for Afghan newcomers in several media outlets, and conducted an Afghan Adjustment ad campaign and amplified key partner messaging, resulting in over 14 million social media impressions in 2023.
- **Leveraging partnerships:** We garnered nearly one million social media impressions through a Twitter town hall to highlight the economic contributions of Afghan newcomers and call for passage of Afghan Adjustment. Additionally, we worked with partners to incorporate our content and thought leadership into talking points for Capitol Hill briefings and other events and publications. While Afghan Adjustment is still pending in Congress — impacting



the right of tens of thousands of Afghans to live and work safely in the U.S. — we have been working in coalition to encourage newcomers to apply for asylum.

Given our relationships with the **Office of Refugee Resettlement and the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services**, we participated in several Afghan support centers across the U.S., disseminated new employer-focused resources for hiring Afghans, and collected on-the-ground feedback for government partners.



II. Support high-impact federal guidelines that remove barriers for immigrant and refugee workforce inclusion.

Task Force for New Americans

We advised the White House’s Task Force for New Americans subgroup on workforce and submitted our [recommendations](#) with partners earlier last year. We look forward to seeing the final report from the administration in early 2024.

Bridging the Gap for New Americans Act

- Last year, we [advocated](#) for the passage of the Bridging the Gap for New Americans Act, which commissions the Department of Labor (DOL) to conduct a federal study to help understand and remove systemic barriers for immigrants and refugees.
- We’ve been collaborating with the DOL to elevate our aggregate impact data from the past five years (the period under study) to help inform the report and share our learnings. Our data set is one of the largest

and, perhaps, the only one with information about degrees and professional experience obtained prior to immigration.

Expanding economic options for those seeking safety in the U.S.

- We led conversations with the Domestic Policy Council, the National Security Council, the Department of State, and other U.S. government agencies to design employment solutions for the new SMOs in Latin America.
- We joined the [Let Asylum Seekers Work campaign](#) and endorsed [state legislation](#) in New York.

Inclusion in artificial intelligence

- In order to advance President Biden’s new [executive order](#) on artificial intelligence (AI), we are engaging federal and state agencies like the DOL, the Department of Education, and others to create guidelines for contractors using AI technologies to ensure bias and discrimination is not baked into the system.



- We released a [new report](#) that examines the impact of AI-enabled technologies on career navigation for immigrant, refugee, and asylee professionals seeking work in the U.S. Our findings include: 35% of education credentials on resumes and 20% of work experience credentials were misidentified. The nonrecognition of skills inhibits newcomers from finding skill-aligned work.

III. Ensure refugee and immigrant women are included in the parental leave movements.

- To date — with Upwardly Global’s support — **10,000 immigrants, refugees, and asylees (46% of whom are women)** are in thriving-wage jobs, contributing closer to \$560 million to the U.S. economy with their combined starting salaries.

- **Childcare is the primary reason** that our female job seekers drop out of our program, followed by survival jobs and elderly care. Over 40% of our survey respondents cited childcare as the main barrier to their participation and ability to secure skill-aligned work.
- By listening to our job seekers, we learned that the issue of childcare has consistently emerged as a significant obstacle for our community. Our participants face many challenges such as high cost, limited availability, and inconvenient program hours that make childcare extraordinarily difficult to obtain. Access to high-quality, reliable, and affordable childcare helps increase their earnings and allows them to seek job, educational, and training opportunities.
- We submitted our research findings and action-oriented policy recommendations to the White House’s Task Force on New Americans in January 2024 and are partnering with groups like the Center for Law and Social Policy to further our advocacy.

IV. Support healthcare licensing reform efforts in Illinois and New York.

We continue to work in coalition to advance inclusion and eliminate licensing and other barriers for internationally trained healthcare professionals.

In 2023:

- We advocated for [three federal bills](#) introduced by Representative Adam Smith (D-Wash.) to help internationally trained healthcare professionals enter the U.S. workforce and to help alleviate labor shortages in the industry.
- In **Illinois**, our advocacy, coalition building, and community engagement efforts had a direct result yielding legislative wins with the potential to help thousands of international medical graduates (IMGs), as highlighted in our [press release](#) and [thought paper](#). By doing this work in coalition, our ecosystem of partners is able to continue supporting and sustaining the success of this legislation and help field inquiries coming from other states. The International Medical Graduates Academy (TIMGA) and Upwardly Global finalized a [new partnership](#) to leverage TIMGA's tremendous experience implementing similar legislation in Washington State for the Illinois context.
- In **New York**, we are exploring opportunities with partners to engage around [Senate Bill 7002](#), which was introduced in fall 2023 and would minimize the renewal process for IMGs to practice medicine in the state through limited permits.
- We have engaged in several **thought leadership** activities related to our work in healthcare, from speaking at events to sharing information about alternative career pathways for IMGs, publishing white papers, and contributing to a [recent analysis](#) with the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis. We look forward to sharing a forthcoming paper on our partnership with NewYork-Presbyterian in the near future.



Our path forward

Together, we have accomplished so much in 2023. In addition to what is written above, we participated in numerous thought leadership conversations, consultations, brainstorming, coalition meetings, media interviews, advocacy events, and conferences. To all of our partners, champions, and stakeholders: **Thank you** for your trust and collaboration!

In 2024, we look forward to deepening our strategic ecosystems approach and to sharing more about our advocacy and policy priorities for the year in the near future.

For more information, please visit [Upwardly Global's policy and advocacy landing page](#) or contact Advocacy and Strategic Initiatives Coordinator [Rebecca Fishman](#).