

Key Takeaways From the Bridging the Gap for New Americans Report

In 2023, immigrant workers made up [29% of the total U.S. workforce](#), a stark rise from 19% in 2000. Notably, all growth in the working-age population is now propelled by immigrants and their children, as this number would have otherwise decreased by 8 million without them.

Meanwhile, despite 41% of new arrivals holding a bachelor's degree or higher, as many as 2.2 million immigrants with degrees currently face unemployment or underemployment in the U.S.

Recognizing newcomers' potential to enrich both the U.S. economy and their local communities, Upwardly Global championed the Bridging the Gap for New Americans Act in 2022, which required the U.S. Department of Labor to draft the now-released ["Bridging the Gap for New Americans Final Report."](#) This report outlines the barriers internationally educated and credentialed "New Americans" face in securing skill-appropriate work.

Findings in the report pull from two of Upwardly Global's reports, ["Roadblocks to Workforce Inclusion for Young Adult Immigrants"](#) and ["Afghan Newcomers Bring Critical Value to U.S. Economy and Society,"](#) as well as data analysis conducted by PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) using Upwardly Global participant data and their demographic information.

Key findings include:

- An estimated 7 million college-educated immigrants received their degrees outside the United States, 24% of whom are unemployed or underemployed, with the majority residing in California, New York, Florida, Texas, and New Jersey.
- States like Washington, Tennessee, Nebraska, North Carolina, and Texas have seen significant

growth in the population of college-educated immigrants.

- Approximately 32% of internationally trained physicians practice in the Northeastern U.S.
- Immigrants with non-STEM degrees, especially those in fields requiring formal credential recognition, licensing, or strong English proficiency, experience significant education-occupation mismatches.
- Key barriers to skill utilization include English proficiency, race, education level, immigration status, and the complex, costly licensing processes to re-credential.
- States have enacted policy changes to ease the reentry of internationally trained healthcare workers into the U.S. workforce, complemented by initiatives from nonprofits, state programs, and community colleges aimed at integrating New Americans. Recommendations include increasing advanced English courses, expanding work experience opportunities, and providing industry-specific resources and coaching.

Key findings in the report from Upwardly Global's data:

- 76% of Upwardly Global job seekers that participated in focus groups and surveys shared they found it easier to prepare supporting documents for job applications after gaining access to Upwardly Global's resources.
- PwC's correlation analysis discovered that higher English proficiency resulted in better placement rates.
- This same analysis also found a positive correlation between placement and informational interviews.

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Upwardly Global's Recommendations

The Bridging the Gap for New Americans study highlights the untapped potential of immigrant and refugee professionals to boost the U.S. economy and spur innovation. It emphasizes the need to forge paths for skill-aligned employment.

At Upwardly Global, we champion an inclusive nation where everyone — including immigrants, refugees, and asylees — can prosper and contribute. We urge policymakers, employers, and immigrant-focused organizations to adopt strategies that promote shared prosperity and economic growth.

Key policy recommendations for enhancing the inclusion of immigrants in the U.S. workforce, particularly under the [Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act \(WIOA\)](#) Title I, include:

- 1. Governance and service delivery:** Expand impact of local workforce development boards responsible for managing workforce preparation and training activities across the U.S. through American Job Centers and other programs.

 - **Targeted guidance and policies:** Develop and issue specific guidelines to better support immigrants, particularly those whose skills are not being fully utilized.
 - **WIOA eligibility criteria:** Include immigrants as a priority population, and adjust the eligibility criteria to be more inclusive of immigrants based on their visa status.
 - **Include immigrant and refugee designation in the Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC):** Integrate a designation for immigrants and refugees within the WOTC eligibility, helping employers understand their workforce composition and invest in programs like English language learning.
- 2. Skill development, career navigation, and language access programs:**

 - **Job-specific skills and language:** Implement and expand state programs that enhance job-specific skills and language proficiency, which are crucial for licensure and employment.
 - **Career navigator programs:** Invest in programs that support entry-level and mid-skill immigrants, offering differentiated career pathways that cater to their re-credentialing, relicensing, and upskilling needs. See examples in [Colorado](#), [Maine](#), and [Washington](#)'s programs providing work-based learning and language skills tailored to specific occupations.
- 3. Utilization of federal funding for workforce integration:**

 - **Workplace learning incentives:** Create incentives for adult learners to engage in workplace learning, such as language learning or upskilling for specific career pathways. See example in [New York State's subsidies for language learning](#).
 - **Use WIOA funding for reforms and policies:** Leverage WIOA funds to identify necessary reforms and develop policies for better integration of internationally trained immigrants into the U.S. workforce. See example in Maryland's use of WIOA funds to establish the [Maryland Skilled Immigrants Task Force](#).
 - **Mandate state licensing guides:** Require states to issue and regularly update licensing guides for regulated industries. In partnership with Latham and Watkins law firm, Upwardly Global has drafted a number of [professional licensing guides](#) for immigrant professionals.