



NATIONAL  
IMMIGRATION  
FORUM

GETTING **OPPORTUNITIES** IN THE  
HANDS OF **NEW AMERICANS** STRIVING  
FOR **THE AMERICAN DREAM**



## 1. Introduction

America's prosperity is linked to new Americans' access to the opportunities, skills and status that allow them to reach their greatest potential. For generations, immigrants have vigorously contributed to our society, shaping our culture and habits, while actively contributing to our economic growth. Every year, a number of individuals from foreign countries come to the U.S. with the energy and desire to pursue the American dream. However, for many immigrants it is challenging to start anew in America – a completely different environment with a different culture, habits and traditions. Essential matters such as finding a job, understanding our financial system, starting a business, understanding our school system, and understanding our immigration system can be somewhat of a mystery for new immigrants.

Despite these challenges, immigrants have helped strengthen and enhance our economy by spending money as consumers, filling jobs, paying taxes and starting small businesses. The entrepreneurial spirit and drive to innovate have been typical characteristics of immigrants coming to the U.S. Eager to thrive in the new environment, immigrants have been bringing innovative ideas and approaches, creating diversity and preserving our nation's adventurous spirit.

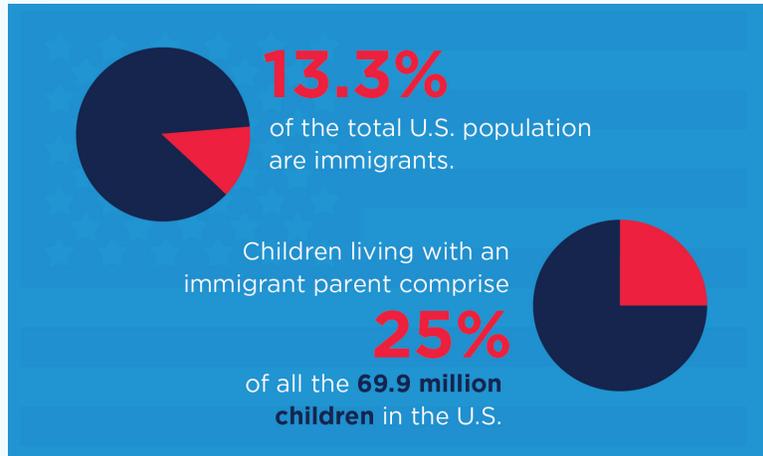
For America to continue to prosper, immigrants must be aware of and understand all the opportunities our country provides, so they can use their talents and drive to live up to their full potential, boosting our economy and enhancing our society as a whole. Yet, immigrants' ability to recognize and take advantage of opportunities is obscured by programs and systems that do not fully reflect a changing America. This paper describes a number of obstacles immigrants often encounter, such as transferring foreign professional training to the U.S. job market, lack of knowledge of our legal system, and various social problems related to overall unfamiliarity with our culture. It also highlights some existing programs and promising practices meant to assist them in overcoming these difficulties and provides a set of recommendations on how we might help immigrants reach their full potential and consequently maximize their contributions to our country.

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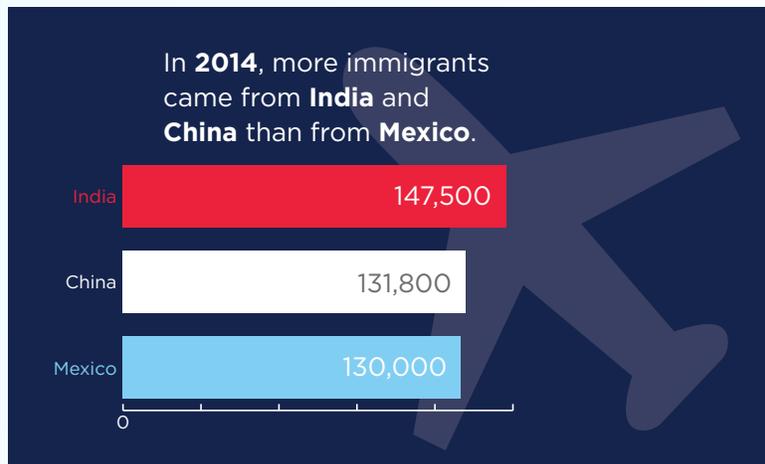
## 2. Immigrants Play a Vital Role in Our Society

The number of immigrants has been growing continuously since 1970<sup>1</sup>. Since 1965, almost 59 million foreign-born individuals have arrived in the United States.<sup>2</sup> As of 2014, the total U.S. immigrant population exceeded 42.4 million and represented approximately 13.3 percent of the total U.S. population.<sup>3</sup> Immigrants together with their U.S-born children comprise 26 percent of our total population. In 2014, there were about 17.5 million children under age 18 who lived with at least one immigrant parent, which accounted for 25 percent of all the 69.9 million children in the U.S. Most of the children with immigrant parents live in California (4.3 million), where they account for 49.1 percent of all kids residing in the state. The state with the second largest population of children

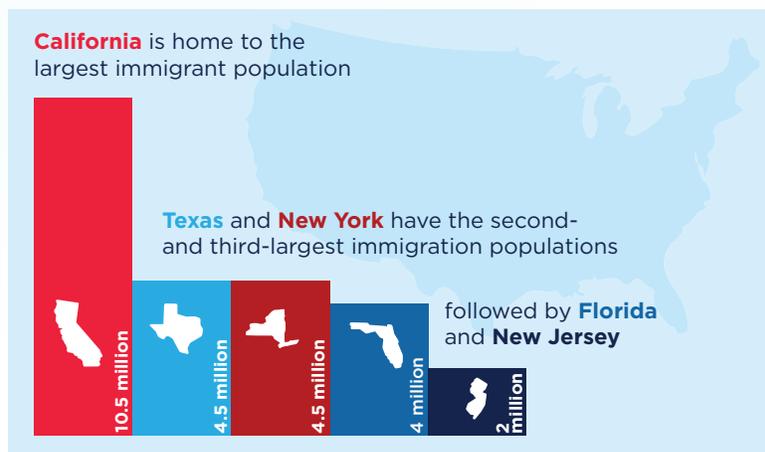
## IMMIGRANT POPULATION IN THE U.S.



## COUNTRIES WITH THE LARGEST NUMBER OF IMMIGRANTS COMING TO THE U.S.



## STATES WITH THE LARGEST FOREIGN-BORN POPULATIONS



with at least one immigrant parent is Texas, with a total of 2.3 million or 34.6 percent of the state's children.<sup>4</sup>

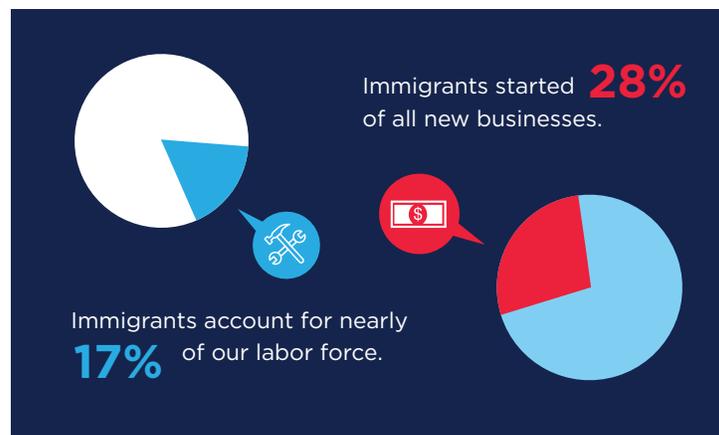
Immigrants from Mexico are the largest immigrant group in the U.S., accounting for about 28 percent of the total foreign-born population. However, the annual flow of Mexicans has been diminishing recently, and the number of arrivals from Asian countries has been increasing. In 2014, more immigrants came from India (approximately 147,500) and from China (131,800) than from Mexico (130,000).<sup>5</sup>

California is home to the largest immigrant population — about 10.5 million foreign-born individuals. Texas and New York, with about 4.5 million foreign-born people residing in each, have the second- and third-largest immigration populations, followed by Florida with 4 million and New Jersey with 2 million.<sup>6</sup> However, an increasing number of immigrants have been dispersing beyond these traditional immigrant gateway states. For example, Tennessee and Kentucky reported the biggest percentage growth in their immigrant populations between 2000 and 2014 — 102 percent each. Other states that experienced a large percentage increase over the same period were Wyoming, with a 101 percent rise, and North Dakota and South Carolina, with a 99 percent and 97 percent growth, respectively.<sup>7</sup>

Historically, New York and Chicago were the top two most popular cities where newcomers settled for much of the 20th century. After World War II, Los Angeles, Houston and Miami emerged as frequent destinations for those coming to pursue the American dream.<sup>8</sup> In recent years, immigrants have been settling in the suburbs of these and other cities. Today, a majority of the U.S. foreign-born population lives in suburbs.<sup>9</sup> Between 2000 and 2013, the suburbs of our nation's largest metro areas experienced a 76 percent increase in their immigrant populations.<sup>10</sup>

Immigrants have been valuable assets to our economy, as they hold jobs, spend money, own small businesses and pay taxes. A recent study found that immigrants have a positive economic impact on long-term economic growth and that as adults, the children of immigrants contribute more in taxes than the native-born population.<sup>11</sup> By 2020, our nation is projected to be short 7.5 million workers.<sup>12</sup> Going forward, immigrants will play an increasingly important role in filling employers' needs. Currently, immigrants account for nearly 17 percent of our total labor force.<sup>13</sup> In comparison to their

## IMMIGRANTS ARE A VITAL PART OF OUR ECONOMY



native-born counterparts, foreign-born workers are more likely to work in service, construction and production/transportation jobs.<sup>14</sup> Over the past three decades, the education level of the nation's immigrants has increased significantly. Almost half of immigrant workers (47.3 percent) now work in managerial, professional or sales jobs,<sup>15</sup> providing a valuable source of high-skilled labor in professions such as computer programming, health care support and medicine.<sup>16</sup>

Immigrants also contribute to our economy as entrepreneurs and business owners. In 2011, immigrants started 28 percent of all new U.S. businesses, which reflects a significant growth from 1996 when 15 percent of new businesses were started by immigrants.<sup>17</sup> A recent report showed that more than 40 percent of Fortune 500 companies were founded by immigrants or their children.<sup>18</sup> Immigrants are also more than twice as likely to start a business as the native-born, and though their companies are generally smaller than those started by the native-born, they have an enormous and growing collective impact on our economy.<sup>19</sup> Research has also found that immigrants have a positive economic impact on long-term economic growth and that, as adults, the children of immigrants contribute more in taxes than the native-born population.<sup>20</sup>

### 3. Immigrants Strive to Overcome Economic Challenges

Some of the most pressing issues immigrants face are those related to their economic situations specifically, finding jobs or starting businesses, and lacking financial literacy. Having basic knowledge about U.S. economic and financial issues is crucial to achieve self-sufficiency, and enhance our economy and society as soon as possible after arrival.

For many immigrants, finding a job represents one of their first struggles after entering the country. They may be unfamiliar with how to market themselves — how to write resumes or how to make an impression in job interviews. They may lack knowledge about where to look or how to apply for work in their fields.

Although many immigrants come to the U.S. with college diplomas, training and work experience earned in their home countries, employers may require or prefer workers with training or experience in the U.S. labor market.<sup>21</sup> In many cases, immigrants are eligible to transfer their credentials to American standards, but they often lack knowledge about the process of having their foreign training recognized in the U.S.

As a result of the mismatch between foreign training and U.S. credentials, many educated immigrants accept low-skilled and low-paying jobs to be able to support themselves and their families. According to a recent study, around 1.7 million college-educated immigrants in the U.S. labor market were either unemployed or working in jobs that do not require a college degree, such as dishwashers, security guards or taxi drivers. This represents more than 23 percent of college-educated immigrants in the U.S. labor force.<sup>22</sup> Even if their training is recognized by U.S.

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employers, immigrant job seekers may be tripped up by their lack of knowledge of the job application process and lack of experience in writing an effective resume. This “brain waste” is a serious drain on our economy. If these professionally-trained immigrants were matched to appropriate jobs in their field, they would better meet U.S. employer needs, earn more and pay more in taxes.

Fortunately, there are organizations specializing in helping immigrants overcome such obstacles. One of these organizations is Upwardly Global (UpGlo), a nonprofit dedicated to reducing employment barriers for skilled immigrants and refugees, and providing a smoother path for integration into the professional U.S. workforce. UpGlo helps immigrants and refugees navigate the U.S. labor market and understand the U.S. job search process, assisting them with resume writing, preparation for job interviews and effective networking. Through its customized training and support, UpGlo helps immigrants and refugees achieve their full economic potential more quickly. After the basic job seeker training, UpGlo provides individual job search coaching, and connects immigrants with companies and organizations to fill jobs suitable to their skills and experience.<sup>23</sup>

Ruchi is an Indian immigrant who came to the U.S. with two master’s degrees in finance and experience from one of India’s most respected wealth management firms. Despite her extensive experience, she was not able to land a job in her field. Her resume got lost in the crowd because its format did not properly highlight her qualities. With help of UpGlo’s career advisor, Ruchi successfully completed all interview rounds and got a job offer from a leading U.S. bank.<sup>24</sup>

In addition to filling gaps in our workforce, paying taxes and spending money as consumers, immigrants have been enhancing our economy by starting new businesses. However, despite statistics showing higher rates of entrepreneurship among the foreign born when compared to the native-born population, companies run by immigrants have significantly lower survival rates than those founded and managed by the native born.<sup>25</sup> Such statistics stem from the fact that immigrant entrepreneurs face a number of difficulties on top of those faced by native-born business owners. Immigrant entrepreneurs struggle with lack of familiarity with the functioning of local markets, difficulties navigating the regulatory frameworks, and other issues, such as access to capital.<sup>26</sup> All these concerns represent barriers to entry, keeping many immigrants from fully participating in our economy.

## IMMIGRANTS AFFECTED BY “BRAIN WASTE”

About 24% or

**1.7 million**

foreign-trained  
immigrants are affected  
by “**brain waste**”



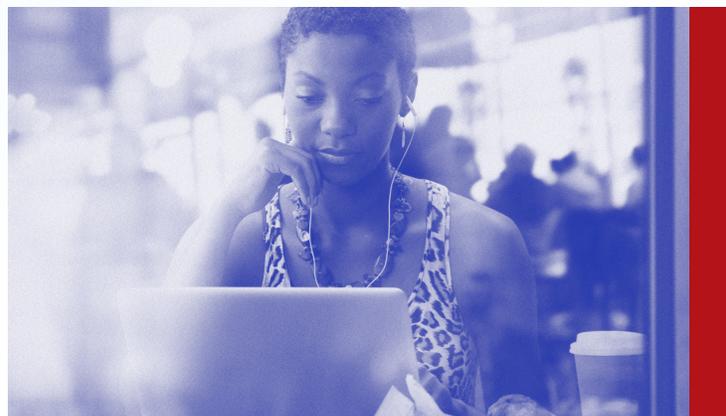
and are either  
underemployed, working  
in low-skilled jobs, or  
are unemployed.

As areas across the U.S. see the potential for immigrant entrepreneurship to help revitalize local economies, public and private organizations have been set up to assist aspiring immigrant entrepreneurs overcome obstacles. These organizations provide programs to help immigrants understand U.S. markets and to navigate local, state and federal policies and regulations, so these entrepreneurs are able to develop a business plan or grow their existing businesses. The intent is to increase the success rate of new businesses, or to increase the revenue of existing businesses, boosting the total value of the companies and allowing them to hire additional employees. More employment and successful businesses result in more money circulating in the local economy and more tax revenue for the country.

The Immigrant Entrepreneur Development Program, of the Michigan-based Access Growth Center<sup>27</sup>, assists aspiring immigrant business owners living in the Detroit area. The nonprofit offers training and coaching, financial development and business planning support for immigrant entrepreneurs. Among other services, the Access Growth Center helps immigrants learn about business planning, refine their business ideas, develop a marketing and branding strategy, and establish good customer service. The organization also helps entrepreneurs identify financial resources as well as other local business resources and partners.

In Minnesota, the Neighborhood Development Center (NDC)<sup>28</sup> serves immigrants and other low-income individuals who would like to start or expand their own companies in under-served neighborhoods in Minneapolis and St. Paul. The organization offers training and customized professional services to educate interested individuals, including immigrants and refugees, about business-related issues. NDC assists low-income business owners with financing and lending so they can expand their businesses. The NDC Entrepreneur Training teaches accounting, finance, the credit review process, marketing, operations, management and more, and ensures trainees develop skills such as budgeting, cash management and professional etiquette. The NDC model was also adopted by other organizations such as ProsperUS<sup>29</sup>, which offers similar services in Detroit.

Regardless of status, job or education, many immigrants struggle with lack of general financial literacy, which is often combined with overall unfamiliarity with the U.S. system and culture, as well as low English-language proficiency. Financial literacy is crucial to success in business, employment and life in general. Missed credit card payments or failure to file tax returns, stemming from a lack of basic financial knowledge, may have severe consequences, such as ruined credit or investigation by the Internal Revenue Services. Lack of financial knowledge may result in the distrust of our banking system, which some immigrants carry over from their home countries. As a result, many immigrants



have no checking or savings account. Moreover, when combined with low English proficiency, low financial education makes immigrants more vulnerable to scams and frauds. According to a recent Federal Trade Commission (FTC) report, scams that particularly affect immigrants, limited English proficient (LEP) individuals and other minorities, frequently prey on the need for financial stability through debt-related frauds. These include credit repair scams, debt relief schemes, mortgage relief frauds and advance-fee loan offers.<sup>30</sup>

There are wider cumulative effects of lack of financial literacy. Unpaid taxes or inability to raise capital to start a business due to bad credit history may prevent immigrants from maximizing available opportunities, thus keeping them from contributing fully to our economy. To mitigate this problem, various government, nonprofit and community-based organizations offer informational sessions, webinars and classes to increase financial literacy. Some programs offer personal coaching to immigrants; provide information about credit cards and insurance; and frequently even help them open bank accounts or choose suitable health coverage. One example, from Florida, is Project Prosper,<sup>31</sup> in the Tampa Bay area, which seeks to empower recent immigrants and refugees to achieve financial stability. The organization offers financial literacy classes taught by volunteers that cover a wide range of topics, including the basics of banking, budgeting and savings, credit cards, loans and car shopping, credit reports, credit scores and debt, keeping financial data safe and building wealth.

#### **4. Institutions and Programs Need to Provide New Americans with Practical Knowledge**

In addition to making a living and understanding our financial system, newcomers face a number of additional challenges as they start settling in the United States. Our institutions and programs need to provide the practical knowledge that newcomers need to be included in our society. Without knowledge of basic legal rights and responsibilities, newcomers may fall into situations that may adversely affect their futures in the U.S. Newcomers are commonly unfamiliar with our immigration and labor laws and may lack understanding about how to obtain basic documentation.

Immigrants who have completed the immigration process, involving various screenings and interviews, still frequently lack specific knowledge about the rules attached to their visa category, including their rights and responsibilities associated with their immigration status. The absence of information or misinterpretation of our laws may lead to unintended violations of our immigration laws, resulting in the individual overstaying his or her visa. These types of violations may make the individual ineligible for adjustment of status or to naturalize in the future.<sup>32</sup> A violation of immigration law can also lead to the individual's deportation. Time and time again immigrants have provided anecdotal stories about how they received incorrect advice and fell out of legal status.

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A recent U.S. Federal Trade Commission (FTC) report examined the phenomenon of scammers that have targeted immigrants from various countries, preying on their need to adjust immigration status.<sup>33</sup> Immigrants are also vulnerable to other types of crime. Mayerling Rivera, co-director of the Immigration Affairs Program at the Manhattan District Attorney's office, noted that that immigrants are reluctant to report crimes for various reasons, including fear of deportation and language barriers.<sup>34</sup> Institutions should be doing more to provide accurate information to immigrants.

Unfamiliarity with U.S. labor laws (often combined with lack of English-language proficiency) has also been an issue for many immigrants, who may not know that employers are required to pay at least minimum wage, carry workers' compensation or follow certain safety and other workplace regulations. Exploiting this unfamiliarity, some employers have misclassified their workers as contractors to avoid paying workers' insurance and payroll taxes.<sup>35</sup> A recent study indicates that non-citizens in California and New York are approximately 1.6 and 3.1 times, respectively, more likely to suffer from minimum wage violations.<sup>36</sup> Such behavior hurts not just the affected immigrants, who lose employee benefits, but all U.S. workers, as it puts downward pressure on wages, and creates an unfair competitive advantage for unscrupulous employers breaking the law.

Another problem some immigrants encounter is lack of knowledge about the documents they need to start their new lives in the U.S. and where to obtain them. Documents such as a social security number and photo identification are important not just for identification, but also for a variety of other purposes, ranging from getting hired and opening a bank account to entering certain buildings.

A number of nonprofit, private and government institutions run a variety of programs and events to provide new immigrants with basic information, including basic legal rights. There are, for example, widely available immigration guides offered by various institutions and agencies. The guides are usually provided online as well as in hard copy format. The U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) "Welcome to the United States A Guide for New Immigrants"<sup>37</sup> is a brochure for arriving permanent residents that provides basic information about life in the U.S., including health care, education and financial systems. There is also information on becoming a citizen. The booklet has been published in 14 languages. Yet, not all immigrants are aware of this information.

Many nonprofit organizations offer similar materials via fact sheets and flyers that immigrants can pick up in person or find on their websites. Immigrants can find a wealth of information on the websites of state and local agencies and community-based organizations.

A number of multi-service organizations exist to provide information to newcomers to help them integrate into their communities. These "welcoming centers" provide immigrants with legal information, social services, employment assistance and other support. For example, the Welcoming Center for New Pennsylvanians<sup>38</sup>, a nonprofit organization founded in 1998, provides a variety of information on where to get legal advice, obtain a driver's license or find a consulate. The Welcoming Center cooperates with a number of pro bono legal counsels, hosting monthly legal clinics to help immigrants and their families get reliable information about the immigration process and other

**Institutions should be doing more to provide accurate information to immigrants.**

aspects of U.S. law. Moreover, the Welcoming Center provides a detailed guide describing how to get a social security number, or individual taxpayer identification number. Further, the center offers a broad variety of other resources covering a number of social issues, such as health care, housing and transportation.

Ensuring that immigrants not only have access to, but also actually receive and understand this type of practical information is fundamental to building an inclusive society in which new Americans are able to thrive.

## 5. Cultural Integration of Immigrants Helps America Prosper

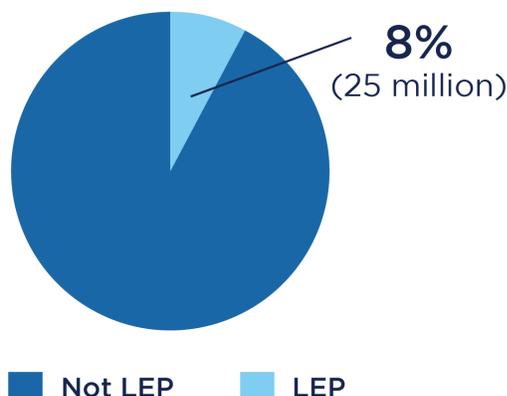
For America to prosper, it is critical to address the social and cultural barriers that impede immigrants' full integration. Assisting immigrants with unraveling these issues increases their sense of belonging and helps smooth their inclusion in our society. Instead of struggling with the kind of everyday tasks that many of us take for granted, immigrants should be able to harness their talents to boost our economy.

Welcoming centers and other immigrant service organizations help immigrants understand and complete initial tasks. In Indianapolis, the nonprofit Immigrant Welcome Center<sup>39</sup> offers classes covering topics such as the green card application process, understanding landlord-tenant rights and fraud protection. Moreover, the Center connects newcomers with "Natural Helpers," a group of immigrants who are already settled in the city, live and work in immigrant neighborhoods, and volunteer to assist new immigrants and refugees with finding community organizations and services. Among other services, the Natural Helpers connect foreign-born individuals with government agencies, and health care and legal service providers; advise them on public transportation, education and housing; and provide them with police and fire safety information. The volunteers speak more than 40 different languages, which allows the organization to provide services to large numbers of refugees and immigrants.

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Some state and local government agencies provide immigrant integration services as well. The New York State Office for New Americans<sup>40</sup> provides immigrants with information and training, on such topics as English-language acquisition, job skills development, starting or expanding a business, and applying for citizenship or deferred action. The office operates a network of 27 neighborhood-based Opportunity Centers run by a range of community-based organizations and located in places with high concentrations of newcomers. These centers use professional staff, in-class technology and community volunteers to conduct English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) classes, help eligible youth apply for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), offer entrepreneurship opportunities to the immigrant community, and support interested and eligible immigrants through the naturalization process. The office runs a toll-free hotline, which provides live assistance in more than 200 languages to anyone in need of information and referrals, regardless of immigration status.

## LEP INDIVIDUALS IN U.S. POPULATION



Another barrier many immigrants face on their journey to participate fully in our society is low English-language proficiency. Inability to understand and speak English restrains immigrants from participating in the broader community by making it difficult to understand American culture and make friends and connections outside of their native language group. Even for some immigrants familiar with English basics, comprehension, pronunciation and reading are often challenging for them. Approximately 25 million individuals in the U.S., or nearly 8 percent of the total U.S. population, are limited English proficient (LEP).<sup>41</sup> To help immigrants overcome difficulties with learning English, there are organizations, including nonprofits, churches, colleges, adult education and other programs, providing English as a second language (ESL) classes. New strategies eliminate the separation of English-language classes and workplace training, which is more suited for training non-traditional immigrant students who have work and family responsibilities.<sup>42</sup> For example, Skills and Opportunity for the New American Workforce, a project of the National Immigration Forum, uses an original, customizable curriculum to deliver contextualized English-language instruction to retail workers. The training covers vocabulary and concepts relevant to the employment context — customer service, store safety, technology and team communication.<sup>43</sup> (For more information about English learning, read the National Immigration Forum’s paper “Immigrants and the Importance of Language Learning for a Global Society.”)

Another tricky task for many immigrants and refugees is navigating our education system. Immigrants often come from countries with different educational structures and different pedagogical approaches. Adult immigrants may face barriers trying to access the education system for themselves, and those with children may have difficulties understanding how to approach elementary and secondary education. This is especially true for those parents who are not well educated or have minimal formal education. Children must face adjusting to U.S. society and culture while simultaneously facing the typical challenges of growing up and learning.

There are nonprofit organizations that focus on helping foreign-born students and their parents navigate our education system.

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For example, the Window of Educational Opportunities (The Window)<sup>44</sup>, a joint project of a number of New York-based organizations, introduced an online tool NYCEdúcate.org.<sup>45</sup> This bilingual web portal was created to facilitate access to and knowledge about the U.S. education system for the Mexican community living in New York City. Rather than having to search multiple sources, immigrant families can obtain information about educational opportunities and resources at any level (from infant and early child care to adult and post graduate education) in one place. The Window, in cooperation with other educational organizations, also provides a series of informational workshops to ensure that parents as well as students are aware and able to understand all the opportunities, resources and services that are available to them.

Newcomer Programs, such as the one held by the Indianapolis Public School (IPS) system,<sup>46</sup> are designed to assist refugee and immigrant students with limited or no English to succeed in the classroom. Every year, the 12-month program focuses on students in certain grades, who have been in the U.S. for less than a year. The main purpose of the program is to assist students with the development of foundational literacy skills, such as reading and writing in English, while simultaneously learning the content they need in order to be prepared for high school. The program also helps immigrant students and their families with the acculturation process by providing information about the U.S. schooling system. In the 2017-2018 school year, the IPS plans to expand the program, so it can serve any students in third to ninth grades. After completion of the program, the students are eligible to enroll at IPS schools in their neighborhoods. The program has served approximately 60 students so far, coming from countries such as Mexico, El Salvador and Guatemala.

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## **6. Recommendations**

Ensuring immigrants understand and are aware of all the opportunities provided by our country is critical to America's success. Government and community institutions have a key role to play in ensuring that barriers to opportunities for new Americans are addressed. The following recommendations would help new Americans striving for opportunity use their range of talents and reach their full potential, boosting the nation's economy and enhancing our society.

### **a. Establish a White House Office for New Americans**

A White House Office for New Americans should be established. This office would coordinate with state and local partners to eliminate barriers preventing immigrants from fully integrating into our communities, accessing opportunities and contributing to our country. One of the primary responsibilities of the office would be to drive a national strategy for immigrant integration and ensure that existing federal programs and activities are coordinated to minimize duplication of services, and increase efficient use of federal resources to eliminate barriers to integration. Another responsibility would be to collect information about best practices and to disseminate information to state and local governments and nonprofit organizations serving immigrants and refugees and to

encourage these entities to work in partnership with the federal government to address integration barriers. Moreover, this office should ensure that the nation has more complete data about the U.S. foreign-born population, and that federal agencies regularly analyze available data about the foreign-born to ensure that programs meet their needs and do not create unnecessary barriers to benefits to which they are entitled. Another function of the office would be to analyze agency programs and policies to evaluate their effectiveness in meeting the needs of the nation's immigrants.

**b. Expand the Services of USCIS' Office of Citizenship**

The USCIS Office of Citizenship should be viewed as an immigrant's main source of reliable information about a broad variety of issues, including financial literacy, employment, English-language learning, education, and legal rights and responsibilities. Congress should provide appropriations to the Office of Citizenship to ensure that it can provide additional services. Also, in conjunction with a White House Office for New Americans, the Office of Citizenship should encourage states and local communities to establish state and local agencies that would partner with it and other agencies and nonprofit organizations to provide information to immigrants in their local areas.

With additional resources, the Office of Citizenship could operate in local USCIS offices to serve as a clearinghouse for information, provide in-person programs to help inform immigrants about how to navigate our education, health, immigration and financial systems, and provide resources to learn more about how to find a job or start a business. These services, including making information available on its website, should be provided in a broad range of languages, so they are accessible to as many immigrants as possible.

The Office of Citizenship should also set up a Help Desk call line or live chat for immigrants inside and outside of the U.S. The Help Desk would allow immigrants to speak with an agency representative who could provide information, advice and referrals. The Help Desk representatives would answer general questions about requirements attached to different visa types and specific questions about an individual's application status. The Help Desk could provide referrals to sources of information on topics such as employment, entrepreneurship, taxes, education and English-language classes, as well as to local government agencies and immigrant organizations in a person's local area.

Providing reliable information to immigrants is crucial for their faster integration into U.S. society and prevents immigrants from inadvertently pursuing wrong paths and making bad decisions. Additionally, having the government provide this information will boost immigrants' trust in U.S. institutions, which is also important for immigrant inclusion.



### **c. Government Agencies Should Improve How They Provide Key Information to Immigrants**

USCIS should develop a summary of resources and contacts to which immigrants should refer for answers to immigration-related questions. This handout should at minimum include information about the White House Office for New Americans and USCIS' Office of Citizenship and website address to the USCIS' "Welcome to the United States: A Guide for New Immigrants" and other relevant sources providing foreign nationals with essential basic information on legal, financial, social and other matters. The handout should be available in various foreign languages.

Federal agencies that have employees and offices that encounter foreign nationals should make this information readily available. For example, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officers should hand the summary to all lawful permanent residents at a minimum and ideally to all immigrants who may decide to call our nation home when they pass CBP inspection for entry to the U.S. This handout would ensure that the first source of information immigrants receive after entering the country is from a reliable source making them less likely to fall prey to scams. The summary could even be made available at U.S. embassies and consulates around the world to allow immigrants who plan to come to the U.S., to prepare better for their arrival, resettlement and integration.

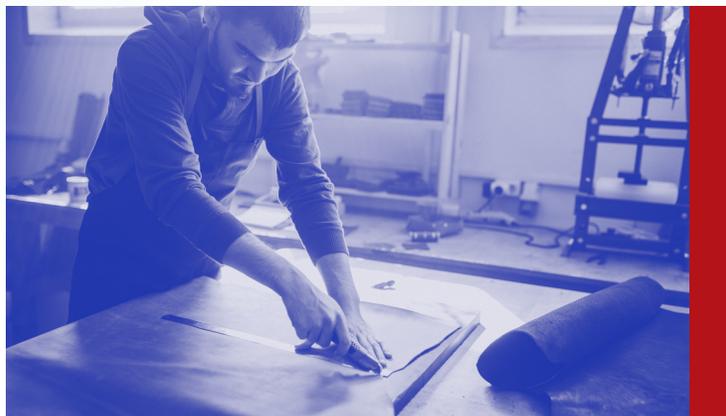
Additionally, USCIS could encourage state and local government agencies, foreign countries and others to provide this information as well. For example, departments of motor vehicles (DMVs), foreign consulates and embassies, and community-based organizations could provide this information to immigrants they serve.

Lastly, USCIS should develop materials similar to its "Welcome to the United States: A Guide for New Immigrants" aimed at different groups of immigrants beyond legal permanent residents. These materials should be more user-friendly than the current information provided on the USCIS website and include information about various visa categories and a chart explaining their use, requirements, rights and responsibilities, as well as the potential future path to permanent immigration for each of them.

### **d. Ensure that Programs for Small Business Owners Include Immigrants**

The Small Business Administration (SBA) and other entities serving small businesses should ensure that their programs, events and initiatives for small business owners are accessible to immigrants and limited English-proficient entrepreneurs across our country.

The SBA website should include a section with information specific to immigrant business owners, such as visa options and requirements, loan eligibility for foreign nationals, as well as links to other



government agencies and nonprofit organizations that assist immigrants with starting and growing their businesses, and this information should be available in multiple languages. Moreover, the SBA learning center, in cooperation with USCIS, should develop a series of online lessons (available in different languages) that would cover topics such as the availability of different types of visas, loan eligibility, basic financial issues relevant to starting a business, overview of legal requirements to start and operate a business, and overview of the U.S. financial system and institutions. Lastly, the SBA should increase awareness about the importance of immigrant-owned small businesses and their significance for the U.S. economy.

Nonprofit organizations and other entities serving small businesses should ensure that immigrants are eligible and aware of their programs and services. Their websites should contain information specifically relevant to immigrants, such as membership requirements for foreign-born applicants. These entities should include immigrant business owners as they highlight success stories. Supporting the integration of immigrant entrepreneurs into the U.S. business community is important for growing prosperous companies and building healthy competition that helps our nation secure its position as the No. 1 economy in the world.

**e. Support Immigrant Children in Public Schools**

Government agencies, philanthropy, local communities and businesses should support programs that help provide immigrant and refugee students the opportunity to reach their full potential at school. While these programs should focus on providing newcomers intensive English-language support and helping them meet high academic expectations, they should also orient the students to U.S. culture and what it's like to be a child in the U.S. Also, these programs should include a component focused on providing newcomer parents with support, such as providing basic literacy or computer classes, and targeted outreach in different languages to ensure parents are engaged in their children's education.

Additionally, schools should hire personnel, including counselors, teachers, administrators and specialists with appropriate language, culture or other qualifications and sensitivities, who will be most effective in helping immigrant students. States should consider creating alternative credentialing programs for foreign-trained education professionals that may allow them to start working in school systems more quickly.

Assisting immigrant children to adapt and become a full part of our society is essential for the future success of these children and the country.

**Government agencies, philanthropy, local communities and businesses should support programs that help provide immigrant and refugee students the opportunity to reach their full potential at school.**

## 7. Conclusion

Immigrants represent a vital part of our economy and society. Besides starting businesses and hiring employees, immigrants have helped strengthen and enhance our economy by spending money as consumers, filling jobs and paying taxes. Immigrants have also played an important role in adding to our culture.

For immigrants to recognize the full range of opportunities America presents and realize their full potential, we need to address the lack of knowledge that immigrants may have about our laws, institutions and financial system.

We need to have a national strategy for immigrant integration. Our government agencies need to make more information more easily accessible to newcomers. Communities need to support and maintain programs that assist children and their parents acclimate to schools. For America to continue to thrive, we need to ensure that immigrants are aware of, understand and put to good use all the opportunities available to them.

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