

# Fact Sheet: Bridging the Gap for New Americans Act

## Background

An inclusive recovery should embrace and build on the talents and skills of immigrants and refugees and should recognize their critical economic, cultural, and academic contributions in the United States. The bipartisan Bridging the Gap for New Americans Act, **H.R. 6715/S. 3157** passed Congress in September. The measure directs the Department of Labor (DOL) to conduct a study on obstacles to employment facing immigrants and refugees in the U.S., including people recently evacuated from Afghanistan. The study will advance economic opportunity by addressing barriers impacting immigrants and refugees as they seek to rebuild their careers in the U.S.

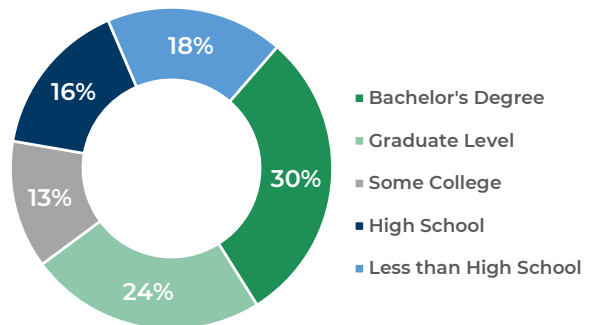
## The Challenge

Immigrants and refugees make up **nearly 20 percent** of the U.S. labor force. However, according to data from the Migration Policy Institute (MPI), **263,000 immigrants and refugees** with health-related degrees are unemployed or underemployed.

In 2017, more than 60% of immigrants and refugees age 25 or older had a bachelor's degree or higher

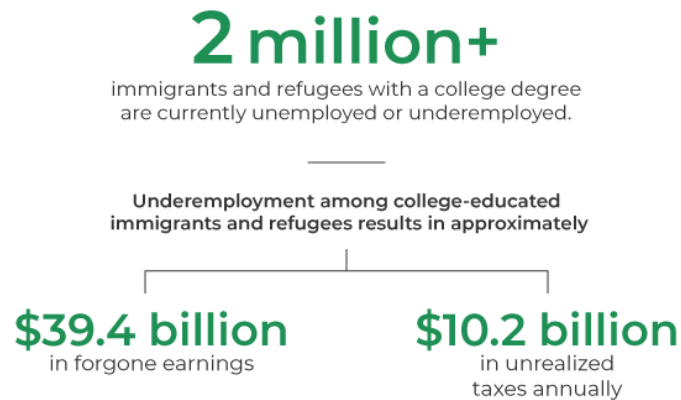


Education Level of Recently Arrived Immigrants and Refugees



Immigrants and refugees are **more likely** than their U.S.-born counterparts to hold an advanced degree. New American Economy (NAE) reports that in 2017, **more than 60 percent** of immigrants and refugees aged 25 or older in the U.S. had at least a bachelor's degree. More recently arrived immigrants and refugees **held a bachelor's degree** than any other credential—followed closely by graduate-level education.

Yet, according to MPI, **approximately 2 million** college-educated immigrants and refugees are unemployed or underemployed; of this group, 60 percent hold credentials from another country.



MPI estimates that the cost of this skill underutilization results in approximately **\$40 billion in forgone wages** annually, and \$10 billion in unpaid federal, state, and local taxes.

Systemic barriers prevent immigrants and refugees from contributing their valuable skills, talents, and experience to the U.S. workforce. Barriers to employment include:



Limited access to contextualized English language classes



Limited access to professional networks



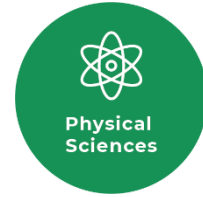
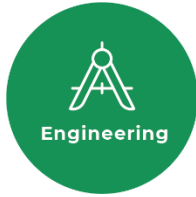
Lack of exposure to U.S. workforce culture



Lack of recognition of international education or experience by employers and licensing bodies

## The Opportunity

More than half of the nine most common undergraduate fields of study pursued by recent immigrants and refugees in the U.S. are in STEM disciplines, including engineering, computer science, life sciences, medicine and health, and physical sciences.



### **Proposed Study on Bridging the Gap for New Americans**

The landmark bipartisan legislation provides for DOL to conduct a study on obstacles to employment facing certain Afghan SIVs and other eligible immigrants and refugees who hold degrees or credentials from another country—a crucial step toward ensuring the economic mobility of immigrants and refugees in the U.S. The first-of-its-kind study will analyze the following areas:



Professional credentials and experiences of unemployed and underemployed immigrants and refugees who were educated abroad.



Barriers preventing Afghan SIVs and other immigrants and refugees from fully utilizing their international professional experience in the U.S.



Existing resources that support the use of the international qualifications of immigrants and refugees in the U.S.

To inform future policy and programming, the study will yield critical research on the barriers faced by internationally educated immigrants and refugees, identifying opportunities for workforce development, improved English language learning, and accessible adult education. Its results will guide policy recommendations to support immigrants and refugees who hold credentials from another country as they seek to re-enter their professions in the U.S.

### **Get Involved**

For updates on policy aimed at increasing access to economic mobility for internationally educated immigrants and refugees, check out the **IMPRINT Policy Tracker**.

To get involved in our policy and advocacy work, contact Fatima Sanz at [fsanz@wes.org](mailto:fsanz@wes.org).