

# Bridging the Gap for New Americans

## Final Report



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## Executive Summary

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This report presents the findings from a review of existing research to address topics identified in the Bridging the Gap for New Americans Act,<sup>1</sup> Pub. L. No. 117-210, enacted in October 2022. The Act asks the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) to conduct a study about lawfully present immigrants and refugees admitted to the United States during the 5-year period prior to the law (October 2017–October 2022). The study’s target population under the Act, who are identified as New Americans, is lawfully present immigrants and refugees with occupational and professional credentials and academic degrees obtained outside the United States. In keeping with this request, and to better understand the labor market dynamics of a growing segment of the U.S. workforce, the DOL’s Chief Evaluation Office, in collaboration with the Employment and Training Administration, initiated a study to identify New Americans’ employment patterns and the factors and strategies that might help ease their transition into employment that uses their existing skills and knowledge.

The Westat Insight study team conducted a targeted literature review to examine the following research questions (RQs) about New Americans:

- RQ1. Overall prevalence:** What is the size or national distribution (by State) of New Americans as of 2017 or after?
- RQ2. Home-country training:** What types of professional credentials (such as postsecondary educational degrees, occupational certifications, and licenses) do New Americans hold before immigrating to the United States?
- RQ3. U.S. training:** What types of professional credentials do New Americans obtain after immigrating to the United States?
- RQ4. Employment patterns:** What types of employment do New Americans have before and after they immigrate to the United States?
- RQ5. Employment barriers:** What barriers may prevent New Americans from using professional credentials obtained outside the United States to secure skill-appropriate or other employment in the United States?
- RQ6. Employment support:** What promising strategies or approaches have been developed to help New Americans secure skill-appropriate employment in the United States?

The study team also evaluated and documented data sources identified in the studies in a data catalog. In addition, the study team conducted a review of public and private programs that help New Americans secure employment in the United States. The data catalog and the catalog of employment and training programs can be found on DOL’s Bridging the Gap for New Americans Study web page.<sup>2</sup> The study team also engaged with subject matter experts to identify relevant studies, programs, and data sources.

Each chapter of this report addresses a specific research question. Chapters follow a similar structure: They first describe sources of information and key takeaways, followed by limitations of existing research, an in-depth summary of relevant research, and conclusions.

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<sup>1</sup> Bridging the Gap for New Americans Act, Pub. L. No. 117-210, S.3157 (2022). <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/senate-bill/3157/text>

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Department of Labor. (n.d.). *Bridging the Gap for New Americans study*. <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/oasp/evaluation/currentstudies/Bridging-the-Gap-for-New-Americans>

Overall, the study team found no studies or datasets published after October 2017 that cover the New American population as it is defined in the statute and in this study (i.e., immigrants born outside the United States, lawfully present and authorized to work in the United States, and received professional credential outside the United States). No nationally representative data contain the specific combination of data elements needed to isolate the specific New American population by nativity, training, and location of training. Available information on prevalence, home-country training, and employment patterns is largely restricted to college-educated immigrants (some data do not isolate immigrants educated outside the United States) or immigrants with specialized professional degrees, such as physicians and other healthcare professionals. Research can only approximate the immigration status of immigrants with college degrees and whether their degrees or credentials are obtained outside the United States. Research on immigrants with professional credentials obtained outside the United States (e.g., occupational certifications or licenses) is State specific and not based on nationally representative data.

Studies published after October 2017 focus on the barriers to employment that college-educated immigrants and immigrants attempting to obtain occupational licenses in the United States face. This report presents data on the proportion of immigrants with college degrees who find skill-appropriate employment (i.e., employment related to their prior profession or academic field of study) versus employment that does not require a college degree or employment outside their field of study. This report highlights data comparing rates of licensure for immigrants educated outside the United States and immigrants with U.S. degrees. It also includes State and program data that provide insights into barriers associated with the licensure and recertification processes. This report also describes several programs that offer employment and training support to New Americans.

The key findings of this report are as follows.

Regarding the overall prevalence of New American population in the United States (RQ1)—

- ▶ The number of immigrants with at least a bachelor's degree obtained outside the United States was estimated to be approximately 7 million based on the 2019 American Community Survey (ACS) data (Batalova & Fix, 2021).
- ▶ In 2021, an estimated 13.6 million (34 percent) of the United States' 40.2 million immigrants aged 25 and older held at least a bachelor's degree (not restricted to those who received degrees outside the United States) based on the 2021 ACS. The proportion of college-educated immigrants who arrived between 2017 and 2021 was 47 percent (Ward & Batalova, 2023).
- ▶ The population of college-educated immigrants in 2018 (not restricted to those who obtained a degree outside the United States) was concentrated in five States (California, New York, Florida, Texas, and New Jersey) (Olsen-Medina & Batalova, 2020).
- ▶ The growth rate of the estimated number of college-educated immigrants slowed down in early 2020, coinciding with the COVID-19 pandemic, based on the monthly Current Population Survey (CPS) data from January 2010 to July 2022 (Peri & Zaiour, 2023).

Regarding employment and credentials (RQ2, RQ3, and RQ4)—

- ▶ An estimated 24 percent of immigrants who obtained college degrees outside the United States accepted a job that did not require a college degree or were unemployed, in contrast with 16 percent of U.S.-born individuals and 17 percent of U.S.-educated immigrants (Batalova & Fix, 2021).

- ▶ In 2019, it was estimated that less than 17 percent of foreign-educated immigrants with science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) and health degrees experienced education-occupation mismatch or were unemployed compared with immigrants with degrees in law and public policy (43 percent), agriculture and natural resources (37 percent), education (37 percent), and business (35 percent) (Batalova & Fix, 2021).
- ▶ The percentage of foreign-born workers with a bachelor's degree who held occupational licenses was estimated as 20.4 percent compared with 25.4 percent for U.S.-born workers. The disparity was greater among those with advanced degrees: Twenty-nine percent of foreign-born workers with more than a bachelor's degree were licensed versus 50 percent of U.S.-born workers with the same education level (Boesch et al., 2022).
- ▶ No recent studies using nationally representative data report on other professional credentials immigrants held prior to immigration (such as occupational certifications and licenses) or on fields of study. One State, Pennsylvania, collected data on the level of education and training received outside the United States from immigrants applying for occupational licenses. According to New Pennsylvanian Licensure Survey data, 40 percent of immigrants seeking occupational licenses needed to attain additional education or credentials to meet their desired licenses' requirements (Pennsylvania Department of State, 2021). The survey is based on a small, volunteer sample of immigrants applying for licensure in Pennsylvania.

Regarding barriers to using foreign credentials to obtain U.S. employment (RQ5)—

- ▶ Recredentialing or relicensing for New Americans who received their credentials outside the United States is complex, expensive, and time-consuming. Common barriers cited in the literature included difficulty meeting various requirements because of limited English proficiency, lack of recognition from licensing boards or postsecondary institutions for credentials and experience obtained outside the United States and problems navigating licensing systems, and lack of sufficient support to complete requirements, such as financial assistance or English language learning support (Friedman, 2018; Liebert & Rissler, 2022; Special Commission on Foreign-Trained Medical Professionals, 2022; WES [World Education Services], 2022).
- ▶ Factors correlated with lower rates of skill-appropriate employment among college-educated immigrants included immigration status, obtaining educational credentials outside the United States, having limited English proficiency, race, gender, and State of residence. Seventy-seven percent of immigrants with a master's degree, 80 percent with a professional degree, and 91 percent with a doctoral degree obtained skill-appropriate employment, compared with 50 percent of those with only a bachelor's degree. However, immigrants in occupations that required formal credential recognition and licensing, such as law and education, had the highest level of skill underutilization (Batalova & Fix, 2021).

Regarding the analysis of available resources available to assist in obtaining skill-appropriate employment (RQ6)—

- ▶ Described more extensively in the report, there are programs and organizations that focus solely on integrating New Americans into the U.S. workforce. However, the data on their success in helping New Americans obtain employment are limited (Latino Health Initiative, 2021; Sanz & Francis, 2021; Sutton & Sylvester, 2020; Upwardly Global, 2023b).

- ▶ Governors from various States have signed executive orders to remove barriers that prevent New Americans from gaining skill-appropriate work (Morse & Chanda, 2023; NCSL [National Conference of State Legislatures], 2020; Sanz & Francis, 2021; WES, 2022). Nonprofit organizations, State initiatives, and community colleges have implemented strategies and approaches intended to integrate New Americans into the U.S. workforce (Casner-Lotto, 2011; Harrington et al., 2020; McHugh & Morawski, 2017; Special Commission on Foreign-Trained Medical Professionals, 2022; Upwardly Global, 2023b).

This report notes several limitations to the studies and datasets referenced. Importantly, key datasets provide only some of the information needed to study the New American population. Large Federal surveys such as the ACS and the CPS lack details on respondents' immigration status and where they obtained degrees and credentials. For example, researchers estimate whether a respondent received a college degree outside the United States based on their age of immigration. Datasets that include more complete information, such as the National Survey of College Graduates, do not encompass the New American population as defined in this report or are outdated (such as the New Immigrant Survey [Jasso et al., 2003]). Finally, peer-reviewed journals have published little recent relevant research, and organizations generating much of the available evidence based on rigorous data sources seek to improve immigration policies as part of their mission, resulting in potentially biased information.

The Office of Homeland Security Statistics (OHSS) publishes data on the number of lawful permanent residents, naturalized citizens, refugees, and asylees by country of birth, occupation, and age (OHSS, 2022). While the publicly available version of the data does not provide sufficient information on degree or occupation prior to arrival for New Americans as defined in this report, using restricted data may enable researchers or policy makers to answer our research questions.

New data would need to be collected to fully capture all the information necessary to identify and estimate the prevalence of New Americans. Questions could be added to the ACS or the Survey of Income and Program Participation, for example, that would enable researchers to parse out additional immigration statuses and provide more details on occupational licenses, certificates, or certifications and where respondents received their degrees. In addition, to better ensure estimates and calculations from national datasets are credible and do not have perceived bias, more researchers studying New Americans should submit their work to peer-reviewed journals for assessment and publication.

# Chapter 1. Introduction

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## Relevant Statute

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The Bridging the Gap for New Americans Act<sup>3</sup> Pub. L. No. 117-210, enacted October 17, 2022, asks the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) to submit to Congress “a study of the factors affecting employment opportunities in the United States for applicable immigrants and refugees who have professional credentials that were obtained in a country other than the United States” (Bridging the Gap for New Americans Act, p. 1). The Act specifies that the study shall focus on individuals who are lawfully present noncitizens or naturalized U.S. citizens admitted to the United States “during the 5-year period immediately preceding the date of the enactment of this Act” (Bridging the Gap for New Americans Act, p. 2).

In keeping with this request, and to better understand the labor market dynamics of a growing segment of the U.S. workforce, DOL’s Chief Evaluation Office, in collaboration with the Employment and Training Administration, initiated a study of New Americans, defined as lawfully present immigrants and refugees admitted to the United States from October 2017 to October 2022, with occupational and professional credentials and academic degrees obtained outside the United States. To address topics identified in the Act, the Westat Insight study team conducted a targeted literature review on the New American population’s employment patterns, education, and training and the strategies that may help ease their transition into employment that leverages their existing skills, experience, training, and knowledge.

## Goals and Research Questions

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The goal of this study is to collect, review, and synthesize existing research from 2017 or after<sup>4</sup> to examine the following research questions (RQs) about the target population under the Act, who are identified as New Americans:<sup>5</sup>

- RQ1. Overall prevalence:** What is the size or national distribution (by State) of New Americans as of 2017 or after?
- RQ2. Home-country training:** What types of professional credentials (such as postsecondary educational degrees, occupational certifications, and licenses) do New Americans hold before immigrating to the United States?
- RQ3. U.S. training:** What types of professional credentials do New Americans obtain after immigrating to the United States?
- RQ4. Employment patterns:** What types of employment do New Americans have before and after they immigrate to the United States?

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<sup>3</sup> Bridging the Gap for New Americans Act, Pub. L. No. 117-210, S.3157 (2022). <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/senate-bill/3157/text>

<sup>4</sup> The enactment of the Act was on October 17, 2022; hence, the study period (i.e., 5-year period immediately preceding the enactment of the Act) is from October 2017 through October 2022. The study team also included studies published after 2022 to capture more recent findings. The report uses “2017 or after” as shorthand.

<sup>5</sup> For the purposes of this report on credentials and in the statute, New Americans are defined as lawfully present noncitizens and naturalized U.S. citizens, with professional credentials obtained outside the United States, admitted to the United States between October 2017 and October 2022.



**RQ5. Employment barriers:** What barriers may prevent New Americans from using professional credentials obtained outside the United States to secure skill-appropriate or other employment in the United States?

**RQ6. Employment support:** What promising strategies or approaches have been shown to help New Americans secure skill-appropriate employment in the United States?

## Study Methodology and Key Terms

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Using the research questions as a guide, the study team employed a targeted literature review to identify and synthesize relevant studies related to the New American population. In addition, the study team conducted a review of public and private programs that help New Americans secure employment in the United States. The study team also evaluated and documented data sources that can help characterize this population and their experiences. The data catalog and the catalog of employment and training programs can be found on DOL’s Bridging the Gap for New Americans Study web page.<sup>6</sup> The study team also engaged with subject matter experts to identify relevant studies, programs, and data sources. See table A.2 in the appendix for more information on the expert engagement.

This section defines key terms and describes strategies employed in the (1) literature review and synthesis, (2) review of programs and services, and (3) data discovery and documentation.

### Terms and Definitions

**New Americans:** In the statute and in this study, New Americans are defined as lawfully present immigrants and refugees with occupational and professional credentials and academic degrees obtained outside the United States. The legislation asks for a study that focuses on applicable immigrants and refugees admitted to the United States during the 5-year period immediately preceding the enactment date of this Act (i.e., between October 2017 and October 2022) who obtained professional credentials prior to immigrating to the United States. This study considers the four required components of the definition of a New American based on this Act as 1) born outside the United States, 2) lawfully present in the United States, 3) authorized to work in the United States, and 4) received professional credential outside the United States.

**Professional credentials:** This report focuses on postsecondary credentials,<sup>7</sup> obtained both domestically and internationally, and includes the following:

- ▶ Educational diplomas and degrees such as associate’s, bachelor’s, master’s, doctoral, and professional degrees (e.g., M.D. [Doctor of Medicine] and J.D. [Juris Doctor])
- ▶ Occupational certificates, certifications, and licenses (e.g., for electricians, paramedics)
- ▶ Apprenticeship certificates

### Literature Review and Synthesis

The study team identified and reviewed 107 studies from academic literature and gray literature, defined in this report as reports from organizations (e.g., advocacy groups, direct service organizations),

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<sup>6</sup> U.S. Department of Labor. (n.d.). *Bridging the Gap for New Americans study*.

<https://www.dol.gov/agencies/oasp/evaluation/currentstudies/Bridging-the-Gap-for-New-Americans>

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Department of Labor. (2020). *Understanding postsecondary credentials in the public workforce system*.

[https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/ETA/advisories/TEN/2020/TEN\\_25-19\\_Attachment\\_1.pdf](https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/ETA/advisories/TEN/2020/TEN_25-19_Attachment_1.pdf)

blog posts, web articles, and theses that helped address the research questions. Gray literature was included in the initial literature review to provide additional information on the services that advocacy groups and direct service organizations provide to New Americans. The study team assessed these studies based on their relevance to the research questions, currency and representativeness of the data, and rigor of the methods used. Blog posts, web articles, and theses were not included in the synthesis because they did not meet most of the criteria used to assess the quality of the sources. However, published reports from reputable organizations such as Upwardly Global and the Migration Policy Institute (MPI) were included because they met most of the criteria. See the subsection titled Assessment and Synthesis for a more detailed description of the team’s process for assessing the quality of studies and selecting those relevant for inclusion in this report.

The study team summarized the findings of relevant studies as well as documented their limitations. These efforts helped the team identify unanswered or partially answered questions. The team then synthesized the information collected during the literature review (by research question) and compared each study’s relevant findings within each research question.

### **Identifying studies**

To identify relevant articles, the study team developed a search strategy including determining search terms such as *New American*, *immigrants*, *refugees*, *foreign education*, *foreign/internationally trained/educated*, *highly skilled immigrants*, *credential*, *brain waste*, and *foreign occupational licenses*. These key terms were identified using the Bridging the Gap for New Americans Act Pub. L. No. 117-210 and terms commonly used in articles that DOL provided the study team. See table A.1 for more information on the search terms and strategy. The team searched for published literature using Google Scholar and in multiple databases such as PubMed, APA PsycINFO, Social Science Database, Sociology Database, Sociological Abstracts, and Cumulative Index of Nursing and Allied Health. The study team searched for gray literature in Google using the search terms as earlier detailed. Results were limited to English language publications from October 2017 to October 2022 with a focus on the United States, at the request of the legislation. Seminal work published before October 2017 was also included in this process. The study team also included relevant studies referenced in initially identified studies, selected after a scan to determine their relevancy to the research questions and tagged appropriately.

The study team scanned and categorized the collected studies based on whether they—

- ▶ Were relevant to at least one research question (RQ1–RQ6)
- ▶ Were published in 2017 or later
- ▶ Used data collected before or after 2017

### **Assessment and synthesis**

For the literature review synthesis, the study team focused on studies categorized as current (published in 2017 or later), most directly relevant to each research question, and determined by the study team to be rigorous. While the study team prioritized literature published in October 2017 or later, older studies were included if they were considered highly relevant to a particular research question. Criteria used to assess rigor of sources are summarized in this subsection.

This report displays estimates and qualitative findings from variety of sources. Other than assessing the rigor of the source (see next paragraph), the study team did not conduct any original analyses of the

underlying data, such as looking at the U.S. Census raw data from which the figures were derived, to verify. The team also did not update analyses using more recent data because of their limitations.<sup>8</sup>

The study team assessed rigor based on relevancy, currency, authority, purpose, transparency, consistency, representativeness, transferability, and appropriateness of methods (see table 1). The team adapted the *currency, relevance, authority, and purpose* criteria for assessing rigor from Blakeslee (2004). The team added additional criteria and definitions specific to evaluating quantitative and qualitative research and analysis informed by a review of the literature (e.g., Johnson, Adkins, & Chauvin, 2020; Office of Management and Budget, 2006). Johnson et al. (2020) describes important criteria for assessing qualitative research, including its *transparency, transferability* and *appropriateness* of the data and analyses. The Office of Management and Budget (2006) released standards and guidelines for quantitative, statistical surveys, which informed the *consistency* and *representativeness* criteria.

Questions under each criterion are used to guide the team’s evaluation of information but not necessarily eliminate studies from the literature synthesis. This was not a formal assessment; the goal was not to develop a formal scale to evaluate the studies but to inform which studies to highlight and to discuss their limitations. In this report, the study team prioritized studies that met all criteria but balanced this approach with relevance and currency. If a study was highly relevant, for example, the team may have included it even though it was not representative. A study may be included despite its small sample size because of its relevancy. The team noted deficiencies in rigor in when describing the study in the Summary of Findings section of each chapter.

**Table 1. Criteria and Guiding Questions for Assessing Rigor of Sources for Literature Review**

Criterion	Definition	Questions
Relevance	Information directly addresses research question or study population	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Does the information relate to the topic or answer the question?</li> <li>■ Does the study population closely match?</li> </ul>
Currency	Information is timely—data collected in 2017 or later	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Was the information published or posted in 2017 or later?</li> <li>■ When were the data collected (2017 or later)?</li> <li>■ Has the information been revised or updated?</li> <li>■ Are the links functional?</li> </ul>
Authority	Researchers are affiliated with institution or organization with reputation for producing high-quality research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Who is the author/publisher/sponsor?</li> <li>■ What are the author’s credentials or organizational affiliations?</li> <li>■ Is there author contact information?</li> <li>■ Is it a journal article or report (versus a blog post or opinion piece)?</li> </ul>
Purpose	Intent or purpose of research is to present factual information rather than persuade or dissuade	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Are the intentions or purpose clear?</li> <li>■ Is the information fact or opinion?</li> <li>■ Does the point of view appear objective and impartial?</li> <li>■ Does the publisher have a vested interest in a particular outcome?</li> </ul>

<sup>8</sup> This report offers credible information responsive to the congressional request but does not use the quality standards of federal statistical agencies and should not be considered the result of any federal statistical agency whose data are cited.

Criterion	Definition	Questions
Transparency	Researchers have described data, methods, and analysis in detail	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Is it clear what the population is and how the sample was selected?</li> <li>■ Is it clear how the data were collected?</li> <li>■ Is it clear what measures were used and how variables were created?</li> <li>■ Is enough information provided to replicate the research?</li> </ul>
Consistency	Findings are generally consistent and resonate with other studies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Do the results and findings make sense in the context of findings reported by other sources?</li> </ul>
Representativeness (quantitative research)	Sample is designed to reflect population of interest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ How were sample members selected and recruited?</li> <li>■ Do the characteristics of respondents match that of the population?</li> <li>■ If the response rate was lower than 80 percent, were nonresponse bias analyses conducted?</li> </ul>
Transferability (qualitative research)	Findings transfer or apply to settings beyond those in which they were generated	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ How were participants identified and recruited?</li> <li>■ Is there a clear rationale for the sampling approach (e.g., purposive versus convenient)?</li> <li>■ How was a sufficient sample size determined (e.g., did the researchers reach data saturation)?</li> </ul>
Appropriateness	Data are collected and analyzed using methods appropriate for the population and research question	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ What methods were used to collect the data? Are they in line with best practices and the study's data needs?</li> <li>■ Do the measures accurately capture the intended information?</li> <li>■ Were appropriate analytic methods used?</li> <li>■ Do you come to the same conclusions reviewing the data tables or summary?</li> </ul>

Sources: Blakeslee, S. (2004); Johnson, J. L., Adkins., D., & Chauvin, S. (2020); Office of Management and Budget (2006)

## Review of Programs and Services Assisting New Americans

To capture the landscape of resources available to the New Americans, the study team conducted a search and review of available programs and services that provide employment assistance to New Americans throughout the country. The team used the World Education Services Global Talent Bridge U.S. Program Map (World Education Services, 2023) as a starting point to identify programs that focus on the immigrant population. The study team also reviewed publicly available information on each program in detail to extract data on key program attributes.

If the study team encountered additional programs serving New Americans in the process of the search, the team also reviewed and extracted data for those programs. The study team also included programs identified through Westat Insight's engagement with subject-matter experts. The full list of documented programs can be found at DOL's Bridging the Gap for New Americans Study web page.<sup>9</sup> This review should not be considered a comprehensive review of all programs available to New Americans in the

<sup>9</sup> U.S. Department of Labor. (n.d.). *Bridging the Gap for New Americans study*. <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/oasp/evaluation/currentstudies/Bridging-the-Gap-for-New-Americans>

United States because the study team did not actively search for programs independently. The aim of this scan was to understand the characteristics of a sample of programs.

The study team documented 80 public and private programs that address various needs of the New American population. The study team documented each program's location (State), partners and funding sources, types of services provided (yes/no indication for 11 service types), ethnicity(ies) of the intended service population, and occupation(s) targeted, and whether the program serves New Americans with professional credentials.

If a single organization administered multiple programs, the study team documented those programs separately (i.e., if an organization administers three distinct programs serving New Americans, the team counted three separate programs). If, upon review, the team found that a program did not provide direct services to the New American population, the team excluded that program from its analysis. See chapter 5 for findings from the analysis.

## Data Discovery and Documentation

This task focused on the discovery of potential data sources that could be used to conduct analyses related to New Americans. The team focused on national datasets and intentionally reviewed websites of agencies that conduct surveys. In addition, the team leveraged MPI's report on data sources related to immigrants and immigration compiled by governmental and nongovernmental sources (Batalova et al., 2020). The team also included agencies that had potentially useful program data. The team only considered subnational data sources (State, local, and nongovernmental organization data) if they were referenced in literature. The study team did not attempt to create a comprehensive list of local data because the research questions focused on national trends.

The goal of the study team's search was to develop a catalog of public-use and restricted-use national data sources and document the sources' coverage, accessibility, availability of information, strengths, and limitations. The data catalog can be found at DOL's Bridging the Gap for New Americans Study web page.<sup>10</sup> Table A.3 in the appendix uses information gathered through data discovery and provides descriptions and elements of the data sources mentioned in this report.

The following chapters summarize identified sources, key takeaways based on the literature review, limitations, and findings for each research question. Chapter 2 addresses RQ1 and provides context on the New American population. Chapter 3 focuses on RQs 2–4 on New Americans' employment and credentials. Chapter 4 summarizes findings for RQ5 on barriers to using foreign credentials to obtain U.S. employment. Chapter 5 summarizes available resources supporting employment of New Americans, addressing RQ6. Chapter 6 concludes.

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<sup>10</sup> U.S. Department of Labor. (n.d.). *Bridging the Gap for New Americans study*.  
<https://www.dol.gov/agencies/oasp/evaluation/currentstudies/Bridging-the-Gap-for-New-Americans>

## Chapter 2. Overall Prevalence of New American Population in the United States

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**RQ1: What is the size or national distribution (by State) of New Americans as of 2017 or later?**

### Sources

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The study team answered RQ1 by reviewing and synthesizing available research. The team identified 22 reports, briefs, posts, and articles relevant to the overall prevalence of New Americans. Seventeen sources were published in 2017 or later; five sources were published prior to 2017. Fourteen sources reported on data collected between 2017 and 2022. Thirteen sources presented analyses of the U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey (ACS) data (U.S. Census [Census], 2024a). The following text box provides a description of the identified data sources as of July 2023, and the limitations of these data sources in addressing the research questions are provided in the Limitations of Existing Research section. Table A.3 in the appendix provides an overview of data sources referenced, survey characteristics, and elements critical to the research questions. As mentioned in chapter 1, the literature review synthesis focuses on the recent analyses when possible (2017 or later) and includes only the findings from studies that meet the team’s rigor criteria and are deemed highly relevant to the research question (with exceptions noted).

#### Data Sources Used in the Studies

**The American Community Survey (ACS)** is a nationally representative survey of U.S. residents conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau. The survey collects detailed demographic, social, economic, employment, and housing data for communities in the United States. The ACS is conducted annually; however, for small samples, data from surveys across 5 years are pooled to create “5-year” datasets that facilitate more accurate estimates. Census makes publicly available detailed, de-identified ACS data for geographic areas with over 100,000 people via the Public Use Microdata Samples. These data are available from 2005 to 2021 and are updated annually (Census, 2024a).

**The National Survey of College Graduates (NSCG)** is a repeated cross-sectional biennial survey of college graduates in the United States conducted by the U.S. National Science Foundation. The survey examines the degree field, occupation, and other characteristics of college-educated individuals, including work activities, salary, and demographic information. The survey retains a 4-year panel for three biennial follow-up surveys. Data are available from 1993 to 2021 and are updated biennially (NCSES, 2022).

**The Current Population Survey (CPS)**, conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau, is a nationally representative survey of occupied households in the United States. The CPS is designed to measure labor force participation in the United States. In addition to the regular labor force questions, the CPS often includes supplemental questions on subjects of interest to labor market analysts. These questions include annual work activity and income, veteran status, school enrollment, contingent employment, worker displacement, and job tenure. CPS estimates, developed by the U.S. DOL’s Bureau of Labor Statistics, are available on data from 1994 to 2023 and are updated monthly (Census, 2024b).

## Data Sources Used in the Studies (continued)

**The Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP)**, conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau, is a nationally representative survey of United States residents designed to provide annual and subannual income dynamics, movements into and out of government transfer programs, family and social context of individuals and households, and interactions among these areas. Data are available from 1984 to 2021 and are updated annually (Census, 2024c).

**The Annual Survey of Refugees (ASR)** is a nationally representative annual survey conducted by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services through the Office of Refugee Resettlement to better understand refugees' integration during their early years of resettlement. Questions are related to refugee's first 5 years in the United States, specifically related to learning English, participating in the workforce, establishing permanent residence, and education before and after arrival. Data are available from 2016 to 2019 (Urban Institute, 2019).

**The American Medical Association's Physician Masterfile** includes current and historical data for physicians, residents, and medical students in the United States. This source also includes graduates of foreign medical schools who reside in the United States and have met the educational and credentialing requirements necessary for recognition. Data are restricted and have been collected and continuously updated since 1906 (AMA, 2024).

## Key Takeaways

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- ▶ None of the research the study team identified provides a complete picture of the prevalence of New Americans as defined.
  - The most recent research focuses on the prevalence of immigrants with a bachelor's degree who may or may not have been educated outside the United States (Olsen-Medina & Batalova, 2020; Batalova & Fix, 2021).
  - No studies estimate the number of New Americans who do not have a college degree but do have occupational licenses, certificates, or certifications.
  - One study provides enough information on the migration status of immigrants to identify those who are lawfully present if noncitizens (Batalova & Fix, 2021).
  - Federal agency data sources that provide immigration and visa statistics provide annual counts of new immigrants rather than a national count of all immigrants (Office of Homeland Security Statistics [OHSS], 2022; U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services [USCIS], 2022; U.S. Department of State [DOS], 2023).
- ▶ The number of immigrants with at least a bachelor's degree obtained outside the United States was estimated to be approximately 7 million, based on the 2019 ACS data (Batalova & Fix, 2021). In 2021, an estimated 13.6 million (34 percent) of the United States' 40.2 million immigrants held at least a bachelor's degree. This statistic does not specify where they received their degree (Ward & Batalova, 2023).
- ▶ Among all immigrants with a college education, it is estimated that 57 percent were naturalized U.S. citizens, and 17 percent were permanent residents, based on the 2019 ACS data (Batalova & Fix, 2021).

- ▶ The growth rate of the estimated number of college-educated immigrants slowed down in early 2020, coinciding with the COVID-19 pandemic, based on the monthly CPS data from January 2010 to July 2022 (Peri & Zaiour, 2023).
- ▶ Based on the 2018 ACS, the State share of the college-educated immigrant population (not restricted to those who obtained a degree outside the United States) was concentrated in five States: California (22.7 percent), New York (10.4 percent), Florida (9.3 percent), Texas (8.9 percent), and New Jersey (5.7 percent) (Olsen-Medina & Batalova, 2020).

## Limitations of Existing Research

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- ▶ **Research is only able to approximate the immigration status of immigrants with college degrees.** Research describing the prevalence of immigrants with college degrees relies on the ACS data. However, the ACS and the CPS do not distinguish immigrants with visas from those who are unauthorized; therefore, researchers using these databases to identify immigrants with both valid visas and college degrees have developed a method using the SIPP to estimate the number of noncitizens in the ACS who are lawfully present immigrants.
- ▶ **Research approximates, rather than directly report on, whether respondents' degrees or credentials are obtained outside the United States.** The ACS also does not include information on where college-educated immigrants received their degrees; therefore, researchers using these data have estimated this, operationalizing foreign-educated immigrants as those who have at least a bachelor's degree and who arrived in the United States after age 24.
- ▶ **The most recent and relevant reports are generated by organizations with a mission to improve immigration policies.** Only three studies looked specifically at the population of lawfully present immigrants and naturalized citizens with professional credentials obtained prior to immigrating to the United States (Batalova & Fix, 2020; Batalova & Fix, 2021; Batalova, 2022). While the data sources used are reputable and rigorous, they are not peer-reviewed journal publications.
- ▶ Limitations of current existing data sources include the following:
  - Existing surveys do not include the full combination of variables needed to define this population and estimate national and State prevalence. New data would need to be collected to fully capture all the information needed to identify and estimate the prevalence of New Americans. Where feasible, questions could be added to individual or household surveys that would enable researchers to parse out additional immigration statuses and provide more details on occupational licenses, certificates, or certifications and where respondents received their degrees. The New Immigrant Survey (Jasso et al., 2003) or the NSCG could serve as a model for these items. Surveys could include questions that probe where degrees were received, what year they were received in, and field of study. Questions on professional certifications earned or licenses obtained, when and where they were obtained, and primary subject are also needed.
  - The **NSCG** contains all the relevant information needed to identify educational degrees and occupational credentials obtained outside the United States by naturalized citizens and lawful noncitizens. However, the sample is restricted to college-educated adults. The sample size is not large enough to facilitate State comparisons (though it could be used to describe general regions, such as mid-Atlantic, South, or Midwest).



- The **ACS** is representative of all U.S. residents and is large enough to permit analysis at the State level. It identifies naturalized citizens, but it does not capture the immigration status of noncitizens (authorized versus not), nor does it ask respondents where they obtained their degrees. It also does not collect information on professional credentials other than educational degrees.
- Like the ACS, the **CPS** is nationally representative and large. Unlike the ACS, the CPS obtains information on occupational certification and licenses, in addition to educational degrees; however, the CPS does not capture where credentials are obtained (whether in or outside the United States) and is missing key elements required to identify immigration status for noncitizens.
- The **SIPP** captures the most complete information on credentials, including academic degrees, occupational certifications and licenses, and vocational degrees; however, the survey does not collect information on where the credentials were obtained. The SIPP's sample size is also not large enough to produce State-level estimates.
- The **ASR** contains much of the information required, including refugees' education degrees, occupational certifications and licenses, and where their training was obtained. However, the sample is too small to produce State estimates and is restricted to refugees who reside in the United States (and therefore does not include other immigrants with visas or naturalized citizens).
- OHSS, USCIS, and DOS collect data from immigrants on level of study, credentials received prior to entry, and country of origin (OHSS, 2022; USCIS, 2022; DOS, 2023). The agencies' reported public immigration and visa statistics are annual counts and do not provide an estimate of national prevalence.
- The **Yearbook of Immigration Statistics** (OHSS, 2022) contains annual counts of new lawful permanent residents, naturalized citizens, refugees, and asylees. The information includes counts by country of birth, country of last residence, current occupation, and age. It has two primary limitations. First, it only provides information on immigration in the current year (such as the number of foreign-born who are granted lawful permanent residence in that year) but not the total population of immigrants. Second, it provides the annual counts of foreign-born with advanced degrees only for immigrants that received lawful permanent residence due to their degrees (for example, degree is not provided for recipients of lawful permanent residence due to family preference). However, these limitations are restricted to public data. While the public data does not provide information on degree or occupation prior to arrival, restricted data may be able to answer our research questions.

## Summary of Findings

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The study team found no studies that provided current national estimates of the New American population as defined. Several studies used data collected prior to 2017, limiting their usefulness. For example, one study, using data from the NSCG, reported on the percentage of college graduates living in the United States who obtained their highest degree abroad (Arbeit & Warren, 2013), but these analyses relied on 2003 data. The study team found less information about immigrants with other professional credentials, with the exception of three studies that have reported on healthcare workers and physicians specifically (Batalova & Fix, 2020; Batalova, 2022; Boesch & Nunn, 2024).

Studies from October 2017 to October 2022 closely approximate portions of this population and provide national and State data using rigorous, nationally representative data from the ACS. MPI, a nonprofit organization with a mission to improve immigration and integration policies, conducted a recent study that comes closest to answering RQ1 that asks the size or national distribution (by State) of New Americans as of 2017 or later (Batalova & Fix, 2021). MPI’s study focused on college-educated immigrants who may have obtained their degrees outside the United States.

Because MPI researchers employ the ACS data, which are rigorous (see table 1) and because the authors use appropriate and transparent methods and analyses, this report includes the MPI study given the lack of relevant and recent information on New Americans published by other sources.

## National Prevalence

Using the 2019 ACS, Batalova and Fix (2021) reported that, as of 2019, an estimated 7 million college-educated immigrants received their degree outside the United States (see table 2). The majority of immigrants with a college degree were naturalized U.S. citizens (57 percent) or lawful permanent residents (17 percent). Approximately 14 percent were unauthorized immigrants, 10 percent were immigrants on temporary work visas, and 2 percent were humanitarian migrants.<sup>11</sup>

**Table 2. Number of U.S.- and Foreign-Born College-Educated Adults, as of 2019**

	Immigrants	U.S.-Born	Internationally Educated Immigrants			U.S.-Educated Immigrants		
			Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total
<b>Total civilian population</b>	12,805,200	61,034,500	3,515,300	3,635,900	<b>7,151,200</b>	2,705,400	2,948,600	<b>5,654,000</b>

Source: Originally published by the Migration Policy Institute (MPI) in Batalova and Fix (2021); data source: MPI tabulation of data from the 2019 ACS. Reprinted with permission.

Peri and Zaiour (2023) conducted time-series analyses of the college-educated foreign-born adult working-age population (18–65 years old) using data from the monthly CPS, from January 2010 to July 2022. The data suggest that the estimated number of foreign-born population in the United States declined considerably starting in late 2019 up to 2021, corresponding to a decrease in the growth rate of college-educated immigrants in early 2020, coinciding with the COVID-19 pandemic. Even though, the decline in the estimated number of foreign-born population has recovered from late 2021 to 2022, the authors use linear fitting to show that by June 2022, the number of working-age college-educated foreign-born individuals was smaller by 547,957 relative to the level that would have been achieved if the pre-2019 growth rate had continued (Peri & Zaiour, 2023). This statistic does not specify where they received their degree as the CPS data are used in this study.

## Country of Origin

Batalova and Fix (2021) also reported that immigrants from Asia accounted for the majority of the recently arrived<sup>12</sup> college-educated immigrants, with 23 percent arriving from India and nearly 10 percent from China/Hong Kong (see table 3). The authors defined “recently arrived” as immigrants are those who entered the United States between 2015 and 2019, using the 2019 ACS.

<sup>11</sup> For MPI’s methodology for assigning legal status to noncitizens, see *MPI Methodology for Assigning Legal Status to Noncitizen Respondents in U.S. Census Bureau Survey Data* at <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/about/mpi-methodology-assigning-legal-status-noncitizens-census-data>.

<sup>12</sup> Recently arrived immigrants are those who entered the United States within the 5-year period before the 2019 ACS (2014–2018).

**Table 3. Top 10 Countries of Origin of Recently Arrived College-Educated Immigrants to the United States, 2019**

Country	Number	Percent
India	537,000	23.1%
China/Hong Kong	225,000	9.7%
Mexico	108,000	4.7%
Philippines	96,000	4.2%
Venezuela	96,000	4.1%
Brazil	73,000	3.2%
South Korea	64,000	2.7%
Cuba	57,000	2.5%
Canada	55,000	2.4%
Nigeria	54,000	2.3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,323,000</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Note: Table includes all recently arrived immigrant adults in the United States, not only those in the labor force. Table lists only the top 10 countries of origin; therefore, the number and percentages for the countries do not equal 2,323,000 or 100 percent. “College-educated adults” refers to civilian, noninstitutionalized persons aged 25 and older with at least a 4-year education (i.e., a bachelor’s, master’s, professional, or doctoral degree), with no distinction of whether they received their degree abroad or in the United States. “Recently arrived” immigrants are those who entered the United States between 2015 and 2019. Source: Originally published by the Migration Policy Institute (MPI) in Batalova and Fix (2021); data source: MPI tabulation of data from the 2019 ACS. Reprinted with permission.

## Geographic Distribution

The most recent information on the number of college-educated immigrants residing in each U.S. State comes from Olsen-Medina and Batalova at MPI (2020); however, these tabulations are not limited to immigrants who received their college degree outside the United States. The authors used data from the 2018 ACS, Institute of International Education, and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services to estimate the number of college-educated immigrants residing in the United States in 2018. The authors reported the population of college-educated immigrants was concentrated in five States: California, New York, Florida, Texas, and New Jersey accounted for 57 percent of all college-educated immigrants based on the 2018 ACS data (see table 4).

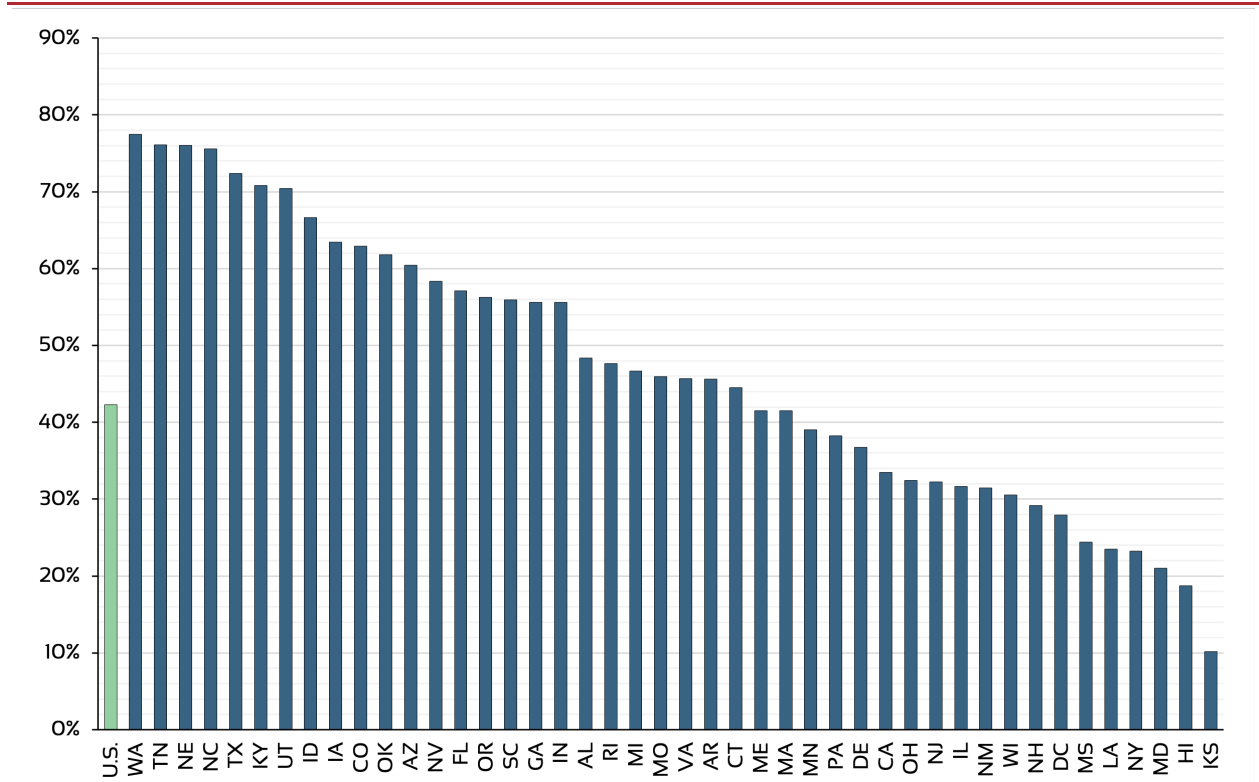
**Table 4. The Distribution of College-Educated (Both U.S. and Foreign-Born) Immigrants (Top 10 States)**

State	Total College-Educated Adults	College-Educated Immigrants	State Share of Immigrant College-Educated Population (%)	Immigrant Share of U.S. College-Educated Population (%)
California	9,193,000	2,851,000	22.7	31.0
New York	5,094,000	1,300,000	10.4	25.5
Florida	4,645,000	1,165,000	9.3	25.1
Texas	5,578,000	1,118,000	8.9	20.1
New Jersey	2,506,000	721,000	5.7	28.8
Illinois	3,059,000	531,000	4.2	17.4
Massachusetts	2,148,000	406,000	3.2	18.9
Virginia	2,258,000	396,000	3.2	17.5
Washington	1,902,000	370,000	2.9	19.2
Maryland	1,685,000	340,000	2.7	20.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>72,576,000</b>	<b>12,556,000</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>17.3</b>

Source: Originally published by the Migration Policy Institute (MPI) in Olsen-Medina and Batalova (2020); data source: MPI tabulation of data from the 2018 ACS. Reprinted with permission.

All States experienced growth in the population of immigrants with college degrees between 2010 and 2019, with the largest increases in Washington, Tennessee, Nebraska, North Carolina, and Texas (see figure 1) (Batalova & Fix, 2021).

**Figure 1. Percentage Change in the Number of College-Educated Immigrants by State Between 2010 and 2019**



Note: Seven States—Alaska, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Vermont, West Virginia, and Wyoming—are not shown because of a small sample size that can distort percentage changes.

Source: Originally published by the Migration Policy Institute (MPI) in Batalova and Fix (2021); data source: MPI tabulation of data from the 2010 and 2019 ACS. Reprinted with permission.

### Prevalence of highly skilled immigrants in healthcare professions

Most relevant research published after 2018 on immigrants with professional credentials focuses on specific occupations—in particular, healthcare occupations.

The National Resident Matching Program<sup>13</sup> compiled statistical tables and graphs in their Results and Data: 2023 Main Residency Match report (National Resident Matching Program, Results and Data, 2023) for all applicants who registered for the Match, including international medical graduates (IMGs) matched to U.S. residency programs. IMGs are physicians who completed medical school outside the United States and Canada and can be defined in two ways: 1) a U.S. citizen who graduated from an international medical school (Non-U.S. IMG) or 2) a non-U.S. citizen who graduated from an international medical school (Non-U.S. IMG). Non-U.S. citizens who graduated from a medical school in the U.S. or Canada are not IMGs (National Resident Matching Program, 2022). 10,801 non-U.S. citizen IMGs registered for the Match in 2023, which was 707 more than in 2022 (National Resident Matching

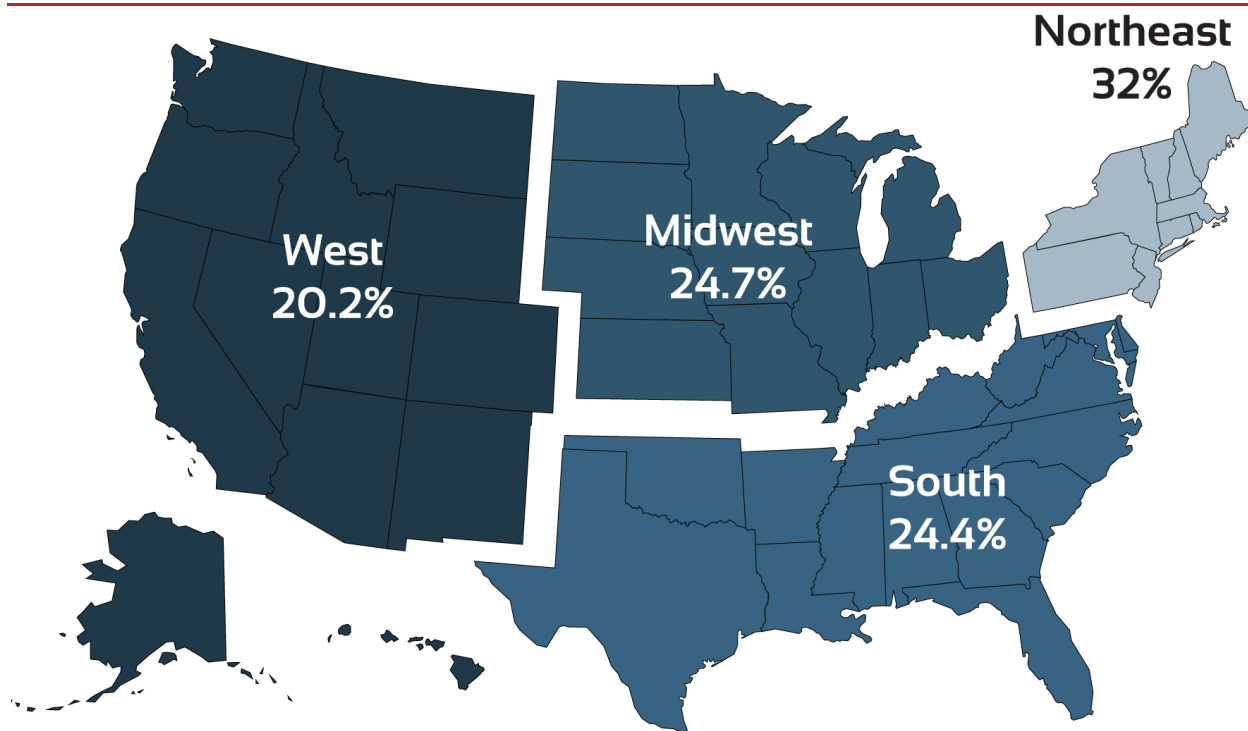
<sup>13</sup> See the National Resident Matching Program web page at <https://www.nrmp.org/>.

Program, Results and Data, 2023). The report provides additional statistics on match rates for non-U.S. IMGs by specialty.

Using the 2019 AMA’s Physician Masterfile and data on applicants to the Educational Commission for Foreign Medical Graduates certification process, Boulet et al. (2020) documented the prevalence of IMGs<sup>14</sup> in the U.S. physician workforce (the study did not distinguish between U.S.- and foreign-born IMGs). The authors reported that, of the “1,065,606 physicians listed in the 2019 AMA Physician Masterfile, 263,029 (24.7 percent) were IMGs” (Boulet et al., 2020, p. 4).

The American Immigration Council (2018), a nonprofit promoting laws, policies, and attitudes that aim to provide a fair process for immigrants, reported similar findings. Analysts used the AMA and Primary Care Service Areas (PCSAs) from the U.S. Healthcare Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) to develop counts of IMGs (also referred to as foreign-trained physicians) by the region in which they practice medicine.<sup>15</sup> Using the 2006–2010 ACS, 32 percent of IMGs identified in the American Immigration Council report practice in the Northeast, followed by the Midwest and South, with the fewest in the Western region (see figure 2). As in Boulet et al. (2020), IMGs could be U.S.- or foreign-born in this analysis.

**Figure 2. Percentage of All Physicians Who Were International Medical Graduates (Both U.S.- and Foreign-Born) by U.S. Region Between 2006 and 2010**



Note: Regions based on U.S. Census Bureau Regions and Divisions.

Sources: American Immigration Council (2018) analysis of data from the American Medical Association; U.S. Healthcare Resources and Services Administration; 2010 U.S. Census; and the 2006–2010 ACS.

<sup>14</sup> The AMA defines an IMG as an individual who graduated from a medical school outside the United States, Puerto Rico, or Canada; see the following web page: <https://www.aamc.org/data-reports/workforce/data/2022-key-definitions-commonly-used-acronyms-practice-specialties>.

<sup>15</sup> The AMA data on physician counts were reported by ZIP Code. PCSAs are collections of zip codes defined by the U.S. HRSA. The AMA ZIP Code data were associated with the PCSAs on the basis of the center of each ZIP Code. A ZIP code was assigned to a PCSA when its center (“centroid”) fell within a service area. Data on the characteristics of residents of PCSAs were obtained from U.S. HRSA.

## Conclusion

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- ▶ The study team found no recently published sources that provided general statistics on the size or national distribution of all New Americans. However, existing studies estimate the prevalence of immigrants who obtained college degrees outside the United States (Batalova & Fix, 2021) and the number and distribution of physicians who completed their medical training outside the United States (American Immigration Council, 2018; Boulet et al., 2020).
- ▶ Using the 2019 ACS, Batalova and Fix (2021) reported that, as of 2019, an estimated 7 million college-educated immigrants received their degree outside the United States.
- ▶ Most college-educated immigrants (those who received their degree outside the United States and those who received their degree in the United States) reside in five States: California (22.7 percent), New York (10.4 percent), Florida (9.3 percent), Texas (8.9 percent), and New Jersey (5.7 percent) (Olsen-Medina & Batalova, 2020).
- ▶ States that have experienced the most growth in the population of immigrants with college degrees are Washington (78 percent), Tennessee (76 percent), Nebraska (76 percent), North Carolina (76 percent), and Texas (72 percent) (Batalova & Fix, 2021).
- ▶ Between 2006 and 2010, 32 percent of physicians who were IMGs practice in the Northeast, followed by the Midwest and South, with the fewest in the Western region (American Immigration Council, 2018).

## Chapter 3. Employment and Credentials

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**RQ2: What types of professional credentials (such as postsecondary educational degrees, occupational certifications, and licenses) do New Americans hold before immigrating to the United States?**

**RQ3: What types of professional credentials do New Americans obtain after immigrating to the United States?**

**RQ4: What types of employment do New Americans have before and after they immigrate to the United States?**

### Sources

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The study team answered these research questions by reviewing and synthesizing available research. The team identified 57 studies relevant to RQs 2–4 on the types of professional credentials and employment New Americans held before and after immigrating to the United States. Types of employment can include full- and part-time employment, self-employment, and unemployment. The team also reviewed studies that describe the job characteristics or fields of work that New Americans hold and education-occupation mismatch (also referred to as skill underutilization). Forty-four sources were published in 2017 or later; only 19 sources used data collected after 2017.

Most sources presented analyses of the ACS, the SIPP, and the NSCG data. These data sources were summarized in chapter 2. Other studies used the Annual Survey of Refugees (ASR), the Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), and the New Immigrant Survey (NIS). Studies using ASR, PIAAC, and NIS were not included in the synthesis because of the limitations of these data sources based on the criteria used for assessing rigor of sources (e.g., currency, population covered, sample size). Table A.3 in the appendix provides an overview of data sources referenced, survey characteristics, and elements critical to the research questions.

Finally, some studies reported on qualitative data collected from interviews with immigrants to describe employment New Americans had before and after immigrating to the United States. This report includes only the findings from studies that meet the study team’s rigor criteria and are deemed highly relevant and most applicable to the research questions (with exceptions noted).

### Key Takeaways

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- ▶ No studies published since 2017 using publicly available national data describe the types of employment New Americans (or immigrants more generally) held before and after immigration to the United States. The only information available is from programs serving specific populations of immigrants or based on a very small number of qualitative interviews.
- ▶ A recent study using the 2021 ACS estimated that the proportion of all immigrants with at least a bachelor’s degree was 34 percent (Ward & Batalova, 2023). There was no distinction as to where this proportion of immigrants received their degree (i.e., in the United States or abroad). The proportion of college-educated immigrants who arrived between 2017 and 2021 was 47 percent (Ward & Batalova, 2023). There are no nationally representative data on other professional credentials immigrants held prior to immigration (such as occupational certifications and licenses).

- One State, Pennsylvania, has collected data on fields of study and trade or vocational training received outside the United States from immigrants applying for occupational licenses. Based on the New Pennsylvanian Licensure Survey, 40 percent of immigrants seeking occupational licenses needed to attain additional education or credentials to meet their desired licenses’ requirements (Pennsylvania Department of State, 2021).
- ▶ Research examining how the preimmigration credentials of college-educated immigrants align with the immigrants’ employment postmigration estimates that 21 percent of immigrants who obtained college degrees outside the United States take a job that requires less than a college degree or are unemployed, in comparison with the 16 percent of U.S.-born college graduates (Batalova & Fix, 2021).
  - In 2019, it was estimated that less than 17 percent of foreign-educated immigrants with science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) and health degrees experienced education-occupation mismatch or were unemployed compared with immigrants with degrees in law and public policy (43 percent), agriculture and natural resources (37 percent), education (37 percent), and business (35 percent) (Batalova & Fix, 2021).
- ▶ The only available data on postmigration training come from programs providing employment support to immigrants, State surveys, or qualitative interviews (Pennsylvania Department of State, 2021; Upwardly Global, 2023b). Most research on credentials immigrants obtained does not distinguish between degrees and licensure obtained in or outside the United States.

## Limitations of Existing Research

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- ▶ **Information on professional credentials is only available for college-educated immigrants.** Most information on professional credentials held prior to immigration is limited to immigrants who received college degrees and is not always restricted to those who received degrees outside the United States (Batalova & Fix, 2021; Ward & Batalova, 2023).
- ▶ **Research approximates, rather than directly report on, whether respondents’ degrees or credentials are obtained outside the United States.** The ACS does not include information on where college-educated immigrants received their degrees; therefore, researchers using these data have estimated location of training, operationalizing foreign-educated immigrants as those who have at least a bachelor’s degree and who arrived in the United States after age 24 (Batalova & Fix, 2020; Batalova & Fix, 2021). The Yearbook of Immigration Statistics provides information on individuals who received visas because of their degree status and their occupation prior to arrival. However, these statistics are annual counts and do not provide an estimate of national prevalence (OHSS, 2022).
- ▶ **Data that include details on preimmigration credentials other than college degrees and postimmigration training are State specific and not representative.** While the New Pennsylvanian Licensure Survey provides information on level of education obtained prior to immigration and immigrants’ field of study, the survey is based on a small, volunteer sample of immigrants applying for licensure in Pennsylvania (Pennsylvania Department of State, 2021).
- ▶ **The most recent and relevant reports are generated by organizations with a mission to improve immigration policies.** Only three studies looked specifically at the population of lawfully present immigrants and naturalized citizens with professional credentials obtained prior to immigrating to the United States (Batalova & Fix, 2020; Batalova & Fix, 2021; Batalova, 2022). While the data sources used are reputable and rigorous, the results could be perceived as biased.



## Summary of Findings

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### Employment Pre- and Postimmigration

The study team found no rigorous studies that compare pre- and postmigration employment of New Americans. However, gray literature revealed details about immigrants' pre- and postmigration employment and education (Pennsylvania Department of State, 2021; Upwardly Global, 2023b). Many studies that use Federal data sources examine only premigration or postmigration occupation. One source compares field of study associated with credentials obtained outside the United States with employment after immigration (Batalova & Fix, 2021).

Limited data are available from organizations that help immigrant and refugee professionals obtain employment in the United States. In partnership with Evacuate Our Allies, Upwardly Global released a report on Afghan newcomers' social and economic contributions to the United States (Upwardly Global, 2023b). Upwardly Global estimated that over 10,000 Afghan newcomers arrived in the United States with a college education and professional experience between August 2021 and September 2023. These data are based on a sample of immigrants who obtained services from Upwardly Global; therefore, this study does not meet the criteria for representativeness. However, because the study is highly relevant and findings are consistent with qualitative data collected from other organizations and States, the team reports the study's findings here.

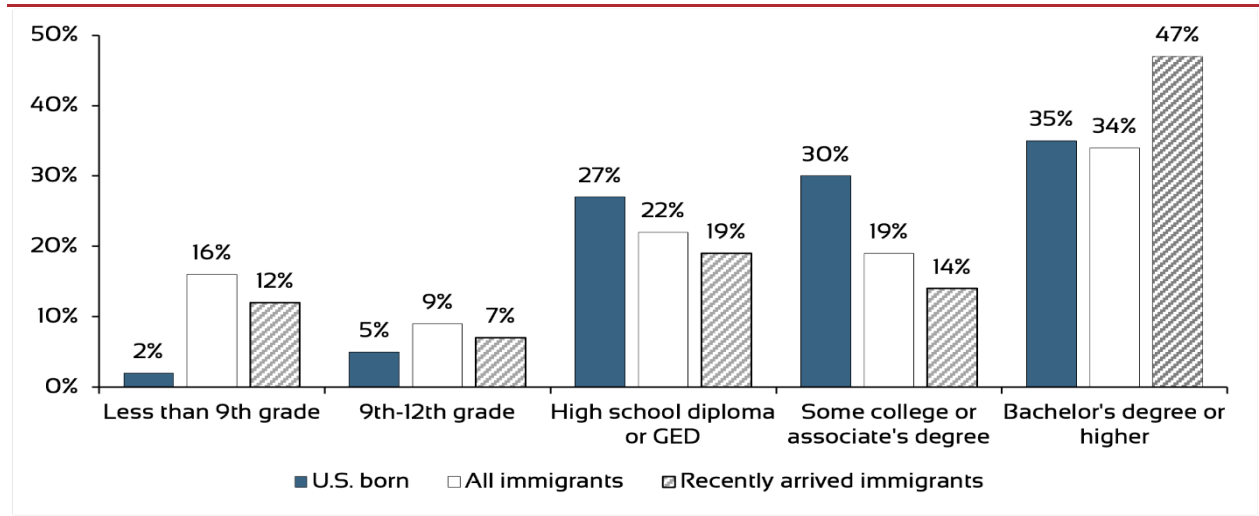
- ▶ As of March 2023, over 1,500 educated Afghans obtained employment in the following top industries after participating in Upwardly Global's in-depth coaching: business logistics and operations (21 percent), technology (13 percent), government and nonprofit (13 percent), finance and accounting (11 percent), engineering (9 percent), and healthcare (8 percent).

### Educational Attainment and Field of Study

Little national data are available on the credentials New Americans had prior to immigration. The most recent data come from MPI's Ward and Batalova (2023), who reported that, based on the 2021 ACS, 34 percent (13.6 million) of all immigrants aged 25 and older had at least a bachelor's degree. The proportion of college-educated immigrants who arrived between 2017 and 2021 was 47 percent (see figure 3). However, these data are not restricted to degrees obtained outside the United States.

Ward and Batalova (2023) also noted educational attainment varies by immigrants' countries of origin, with 80 percent of immigrant adults from India holding a bachelor's degree or higher in 2021 (more than any other origin country). India was followed by the United Arab Emirates (78 percent); Saudi Arabia (77 percent); Taiwan (73 percent); and Bulgaria, France, and Singapore (67 percent each). However, none of these analyses were restricted to immigrants receiving their degrees outside the United States.

**Figure 3. Comparison of Educational Attainment Among U.S. Citizens, All Immigrants, and Recently Arrived Immigrant Adults in 2021**



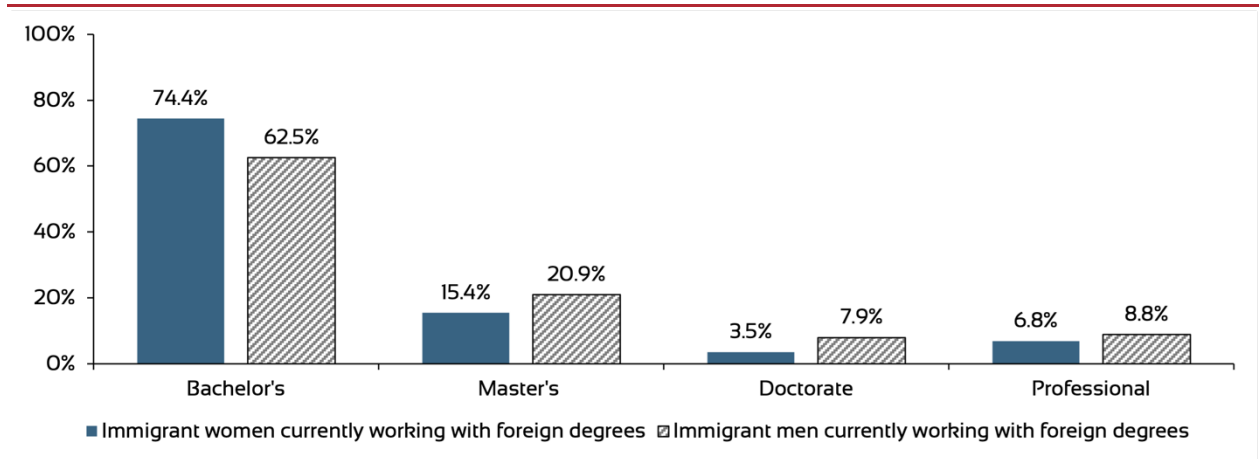
Note: Data are for adults ages 25 and older. Recently arrived immigrants are those who entered the United States between 2017 and 2021.

Source: Originally published by the Migration Policy Institute in Ward and Batalova (2023); data source: MPI tabulation of data from the 2017 and 2021 ACS. Reprinted with permission.

Information specific to preimmigration credential attainment is considerably older or restricted to a geographic region. Using the 2003 NSCG, a nationally representative sample of U.S. residents under 76 with at least a bachelor's degree, Arbeit and Warren (2013) identified approximately 7,118 individuals who were born abroad and had earned their most recent postsecondary degree outside the United States. The percentage of immigrant men versus women currently working with a foreign a postsecondary degree earned outside the United States varies by degree type (see figure 4).

Although the Arbeit and Warren study (2013) uses nationally representative data and can identify immigrants with degrees obtained outside the United States, the study does not meet the study team's criteria for currency. The team included this report because it is the only study using national data the team found that specifically addresses degrees obtained outside the United States prior to immigration.

**Figure 4. Foreign Educational Degrees of College-Educated Immigrants**



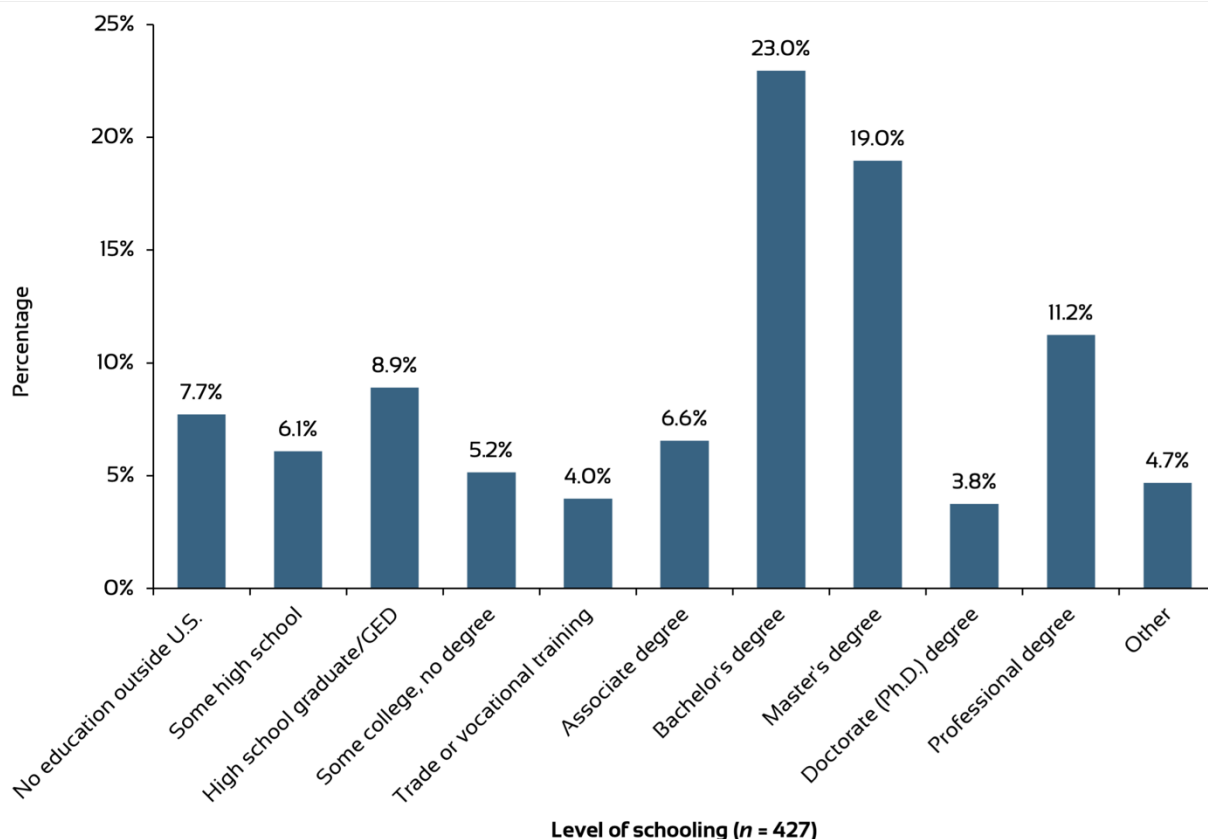
Source: Originally published in Arbeit and Warren (2013); data source: 2003 National Survey of College Graduates.

Data specific to preimmigration degrees are available for Pennsylvania through the New Pennsylvanian Licensure Survey which consisted of only 434 immigrants, refugees, and asylees who applied for a Pennsylvania occupational license. A study based on this survey summarized the proportion of immigrants residing in Pennsylvania who received schooling or vocational training outside the United States (Pennsylvania Department of State, 2021).

For the Pennsylvania study, survey participants were not randomly selected but were recruited using a combination of press releases, social media, and website promotion; therefore, this study does not meet the criteria for representativeness. Results are specific to Pennsylvania, where the immigrant population may not reflect national distributions. However, because the study is highly relevant and few other data sources are available, the study team highlights it here.

- ▶ Immigrants’ highest level of schooling completed outside the United States was reported as follows: 23 percent held a bachelor’s degree, 19 percent held a master’s degree, 11 percent held a professional degree, 3.8 percent held a Ph.D. degree, and 4 percent had trade or vocational training; 4 percent noted they held a license from a foreign country before moving to Pennsylvania (see figure 5).

**Figure 5. Pennsylvanian Immigrants’ Highest Level of Schooling Completed Outside United States**

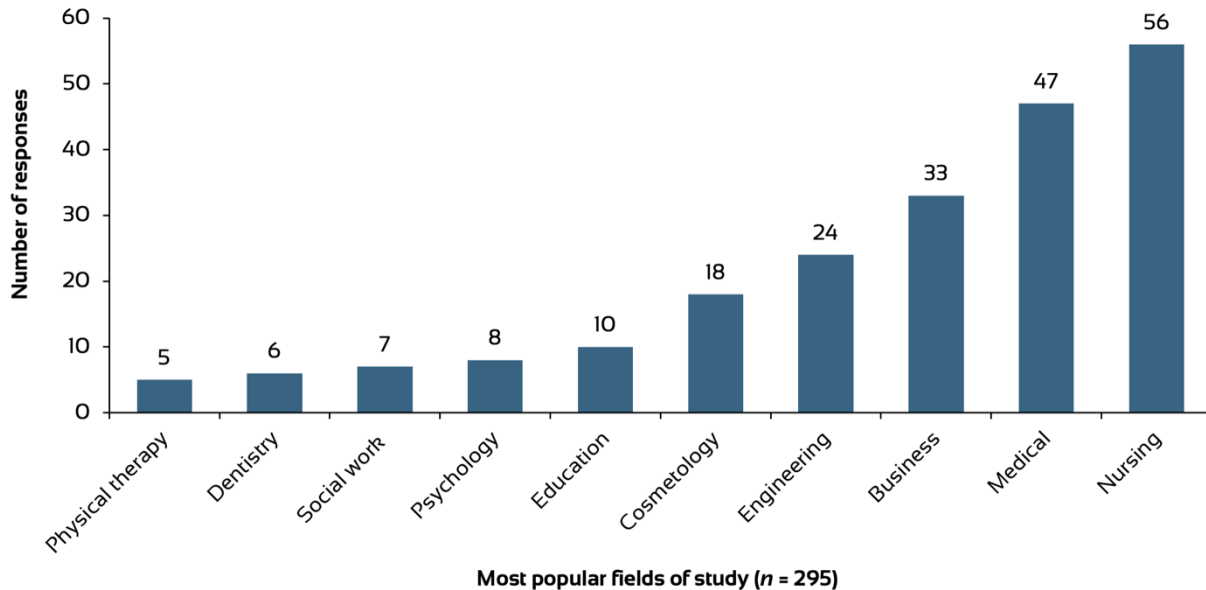


Source: Pennsylvania Department of State, 2021; data source: 2021 New Pennsylvanian Licensure Survey. Reprinted with permission.

- ▶ Respondents also reported on the field of study associated with the credentials they had obtained outside the United States. Out of the 295 responses, 178 completed their education in

nursing (56), medicine (47), business (33), and engineering (24) or completed cosmetology training (18) (see figure 6). The sample sizes are quite small at the field of study level.

**Figure 6. Most Popular Fields of Study Among Pennsylvania Immigrants Associated With Credentials Obtained Outside United States**



Source: Pennsylvania Department of State, 2021; data source: 2021 New Pennsylvanian Licensure Survey. Reprinted with permission.

### Education-Occupation Mismatch

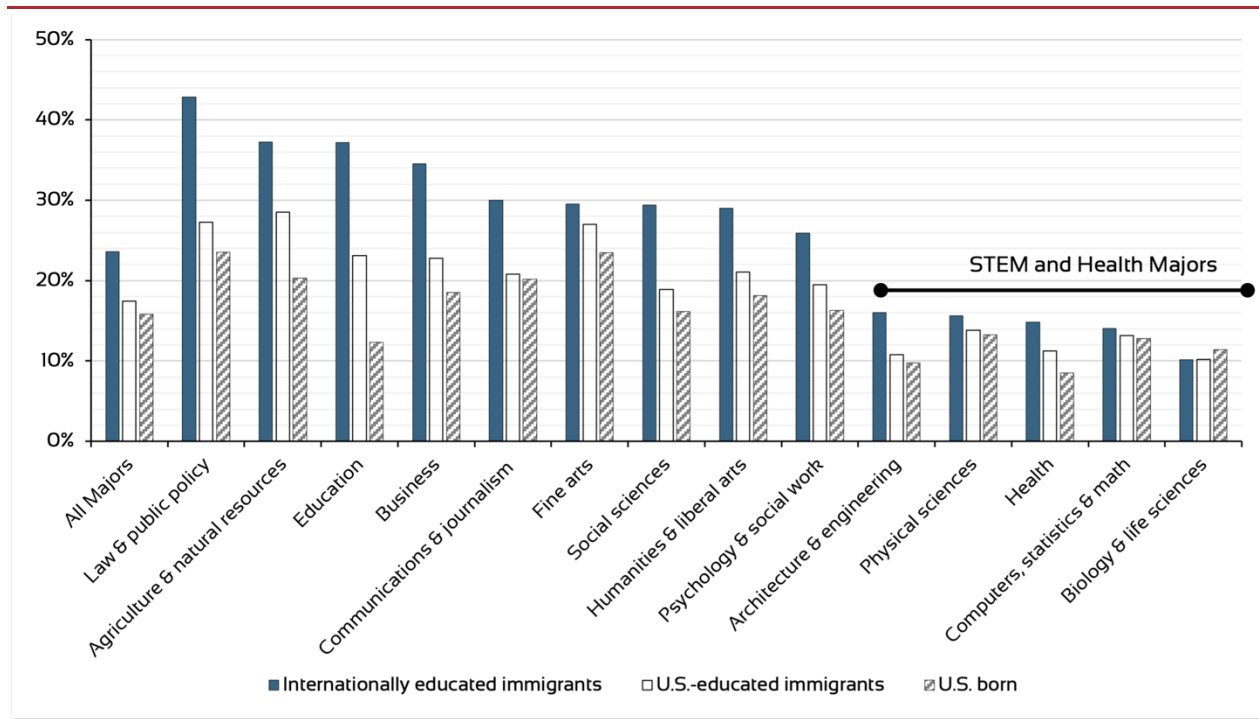
Some studies compare rates of skill-appropriate employment for highly educated immigrants and U.S.-born workers. This research estimates the proportion of workers with college degrees who are in jobs that do not require a college degree, are unemployed, or have jobs outside their fields of study. Two studies that use the ACS and SIPP data to describe national trends are highlighted here (Batalova & Fix, 2021; Li & Lu, 2023). However, while these studies do compare internationally educated versus U.S.-educated immigrants,<sup>16</sup> they focus exclusively on education credentials, in particular bachelor's degrees.

- ▶ Using the 2019 ACS data, Batalova and Fix (2021) examined education-occupation mismatch or unemployment (also referred to as skill underutilization) among college-educated immigrants. They reported that, while over 60 percent of college-educated immigrants were in high-skilled jobs (that required at least a bachelor's degree), 16 percent were in middle-skill jobs (only required some postsecondary education or training), and 21 percent—approximately 2 million college-educated immigrants—were in low-skill jobs that required no more than a high school diploma or were unemployed. This statistic does not specify where they received their degree. The rate of U.S.-born college graduates in low-skilled jobs or unemployed was 16 percent.
- ▶ Batalova and Fix (2021) also reported that education-occupation mismatch varied by preimmigration field of study. They reported that some of the highest levels of education-occupation mismatch or unemployment for immigrants were in occupations that required formal credential recognition and licensing, such as law, public policy, and education (see figure

<sup>16</sup> U.S.-educated immigrants were defined as persons with a college degree who arrived in the United States before age 25.

7). Other fields with high mismatch or unemployment levels were business and journalism, both of which rely on strong English language and general communications skills. It was estimated that less than 17 percent of internationally educated immigrants with STEM and health degrees—including architecture and engineering (16 percent), physical sciences (16 percent), health (15 percent), computer, statistics and math (14 percent), and biology and life sciences (10 percent)—experienced education-occupation mismatch or were unemployed, compared with degrees in law and public policy (43 percent), agriculture and natural resources (37 percent), education (37 percent), and business (35 percent).

**Figure 7. Share of College-Educated Immigrants and U.S.-Born Adults Who Experienced Education-Occupation Mismatch or Were Unemployed by Place of Education and Bachelor’s Degree Major in 2019**



STEM = science, technology, engineering, and mathematics

Source: Originally published by the Migration Policy Institute (MPI) in Batalova and Fix (2021); data source: MPI tabulation of data from the 2019 ACS. Reprinted with permission.

- ▶ Using data from the SIPP, Li and Lu (2023) examined discrepancies between workers’ level of education and education typically required for a job. The authors also examined discrepancies between workers’ field of study and type of education required for those occupations. Using pooled longitudinal data from the SIPP (1996, 2001, 2004, and 2008), the researchers focused on workers aged 22–55 with bachelor’s degrees. Li and Lu also used data from the ACS (2009–2013) to determine educational requirements for occupations (typical education for occupations) and merged the data with the SIPP data. Although the SIPP data analyzed do not meet the currency criteria, the study team included this study because it is highly relevant, consistent with other research, transparent, and appropriate and provides additional information on wage discrepancies and change over time.

- The researchers distinguished between U.S.- and foreign-educated immigrants<sup>17</sup> by comparing the age at arrival in the United States with age at completion of the highest degree earned.<sup>18</sup> Similar to Batalova and Fix (2021), Li and Lu reported that highly educated immigrants with foreign degrees were disadvantaged: Using logistic regression models, they estimated the average marginal effect of education-occupation mismatch controlling for demographic and other relevant variables.<sup>19</sup> They reported that immigrants with a foreign degree were 6 percentage points more likely to hold jobs that did not require a college degree than their U.S.-born counterparts (the higher incidence of education-occupation mismatch for foreign-educated immigrants was significant at  $p < .001$ ,  $n = 13,176$ ). Immigrants with a U.S. degree did not differ significantly from U.S.-born college graduates.
- Immigrants with foreign degrees also had a higher probability than U.S.-born college graduates of being in out-of-field occupations with lower pay (6 percentage points higher,  $p < .001$ ,  $n = 13,176$ ). Immigrants with foreign degrees were also least likely to improve their occupational mismatch over time. Both foreign-educated immigrants who have lived in the United States for 0 to 5 years ( $p < .001$ ) and those who have lived in the United States for 6 years or longer ( $p < .01$ ) were more likely to experience education-occupation mismatch than similarly educated U.S.-born workers ( $n = 13,176$ ).
- The authors also noted inequality in wages. Foreign-educated immigrants with college degrees earned hourly wages 8.5 percent lower than those of their U.S.-born peers because of occupational mismatch ( $p < .001$ ,  $n = 13,315$ ). U.S.-educated immigrants had no significant wage disadvantage.
- In analyses testing the mechanism underlying differences in education-occupation mismatch, Li and Lu (2023) reported that foreign-educated immigrants with non-STEM degrees were more likely to have occupational mismatches than U.S.-born college graduates with non-STEM degrees ( $p < .001$ ,  $n = 104,432$ ). In addition, similar to Batalova and Fix (2021), Li and Lu (2023) report that foreign-educated immigrants with non-STEM degrees were more likely to have occupational mismatches than U.S.-born college graduates with STEM degrees ( $p < .001$ ,  $n = 104,432$ ).<sup>20</sup>
- Immigrants less proficient in the English language were also more likely to experience a mismatch ( $p < .001$ ,  $n = 104,432$ ).

## Postimmigration Credentials and Degrees

Only one study, New Pennsylvanian Licensure Survey (Pennsylvania Department of State, 2021), published after October 2017, revealed the types of training and academic degrees New Americans (who were previously educated and trained in their home country) obtained after immigrating to the United States. Most research does not distinguish whether the sample population received their first degree or licensure in the United States. Research based on the New Pennsylvanian Licensure Survey reported that, of immigrants who received an occupation license outside the United States, 40 percent needed to obtain additional education or credentials to meet the requirements for licensure in

<sup>17</sup> Immigrants were defined as individuals born outside the United States who were not children of U.S. citizens living abroad.

<sup>18</sup> Individuals whose age at degree completion was less than the lower bound of the age at arrival were classified as immigrants with a foreign degree. Individuals whose age at degree completion was greater than the upper limit of the age at arrival were classified as immigrants with a U.S. degree.

<sup>19</sup> The control variables for all models were gender, race/ethnicity, age, marital status, years of education, working experience, job tenure, total number of occupational changes, public sector employment, union membership, metropolitan area residency, region, and survey panel.

<sup>20</sup> Li and Lu (2023) derived fully licensed occupations from Census 2000 occupational codes, calculated the percentage of fully licensed occupations linked to each field of study using the ACS data, and then linked this ACS information to the SIPP data using the respondents' fields of study. If the percentage of licensed occupations in the respondent's field was higher than the median percentage of licensed occupations for all fields of study, they classified the field as a licensed field.

Pennsylvania (the sample sizes reported were small— $n = 63$  respondents—and these data are not representative) (Pennsylvania Department of State, 2021).

## Conclusion

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- ▶ No nationally representative data compare pre- and postimmigration employment for the full New American population or examine pre- and postimmigration credentials.
- ▶ The most recent data available estimated the proportion of all immigrants with at least a bachelor's degree to be 34 percent using the 2021 ACS. There are no recent representative data on level of education, field of study, or other professional credentials received prior to immigration (Ward & Batalova, 2023).
- ▶ Immigrants with a foreign degree were 6 percentage points more likely to hold jobs that did not require a college degree than their U.S.-born counterparts (the higher incidence of education-occupation mismatch for foreign-educated immigrants was significant at  $p < .001$ ,  $n = 13,176$ ) (Li & Lu, 2023).
- ▶ Occupational mismatch is greatest for immigrants with non-STEM degrees (Li & Lu, 2023)
- ▶ Some of the highest levels of immigrant education-occupation mismatch are in occupations that require formal credential recognition and licensing or strong English language proficiency (Batalova & Fix, 2021).

## Chapter 4. Barriers to Using Foreign Credentials to Obtain U.S. Employment

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**RQ5: What barriers may prevent New Americans from using professional credentials obtained outside the United States to secure skill-appropriate or other employment in the United States?**

### Sources

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The study team answered RQ5 by reviewing and synthesizing available research: The team identified 46 reports, briefs, posts, and articles relevant to RQ5. Thirty-nine sources were published in 2017 or later; seven sources were published prior to 2017. Twenty-eight sources report on data collected between 2017 and 2022. This report includes only the findings from studies that meet the study team’s rigor criteria and are deemed highly relevant and most applicable to the research question (with exceptions noted).

### Key Takeaways

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- ▶ The study team found a few quantitative research studies (based on the criteria defined in the introduction) that describe the barriers New Americans face applying their experience earned abroad to secure skill-appropriate employment in the United States (Batalova & Fix, 2021; Friedman, 2018; Pennsylvania Department of State, 2021).
- ▶ Most research is focused on college-educated immigrants (e.g., Boesch et al., 2022; Cassidy & Dacass, 2021). Many studies focus on barriers to licensure and credentialing for healthcare professionals (rather than trade professions) (Special Commission on Foreign-Trained Medical Professionals, 2022; WES [World Education Services], 2022).
- ▶ Twenty-four percent of immigrants with college degrees obtained outside the United States experience education-occupation mismatch, according to the 2019 ACS. Factors linked to education-occupation mismatch for college-educated immigrants include immigration status, the attainment of educational credentials outside the United States, field of study, education level or type of credential, limited English proficiency, race, gender, and State of residence (Batalova & Fix, 2021).
- ▶ Recredentialing or relicensing for New Americans who received their credentials outside the United States is complex, expensive, and time-consuming. Common barriers cited in the literature include difficulty meeting various requirements because of limited English proficiency, lack of recognition from licensing boards or postsecondary institutions for credentials and experience obtained outside the United States, problems navigating licensing systems, and a lack of sufficient support to complete requirements (Friedman, 2018; Liebert & Rissler, 2022; Special Commission on Foreign-Trained Medical Professionals, 2022; WES, 2022).



## Limitations of Existing Research

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- ▶ Rigorous research on barriers is limited to studies estimating the proportion of college-educated immigrants in jobs that do not require a college degree and licensure rates among foreign-born workers and is not restricted to immigrants educated outside the United States (Boesch et al., 2022; Cassidy & Dacass, 2021).
- ▶ **Researchers approximate degrees or credentials obtained outside the United States.** The ACS does not include information on where college-educated immigrants received their degrees; therefore, researchers using these data to study the relationships between place of education-occupation mismatch or unemployment have estimated the number of foreign-educated immigrants, operationalizing the population as immigrants who have at least a bachelor's degree and who arrived in the United States after age 24 (Batalova & Fix, 2020; Batalova & Fix, 2021).
- ▶ **Researchers approximate the immigration status of immigrants with college degrees.** The ACS and the CPS do not distinguish lawfully present immigrants from those who are unauthorized to reside in the United States. Therefore, researchers using these sources to estimate the relationships between immigration status on education-occupation mismatch or unemployment to identify lawfully present immigrants with college degrees have developed a method using the SIPP to estimate the number of noncitizens in the ACS who have immigration status (Batalova & Fix, 2021).
- ▶ **Much of the information on barriers immigrants face to employment in the United States comes from State programs serving eligible immigrant populations, is qualitative in nature, or both** (Pennsylvania Department of State, 2021; Friedman, 2018; Liebert & Rissler, 2022; Special Commission on Foreign-Trained Medical Professionals, 2022; WES, 2022). The generalizability of these findings is thus limited.

## Summary of Findings

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Few quantitative studies examine barriers New Americans face obtaining employment in the United States. One study uses Federal data to estimate factors associated with education-occupation mismatch or unemployment among foreign-educated immigrants (Batalova & Fix, 2021). Other findings are based on qualitative, often State-specific, data or a synthesis of the licensing and credentialing process (Friedman, 2018; Pennsylvania Department of State, 2021). A summary of these studies follows.

### Factors Associated With Education-Occupation Mismatch or Unemployment

Using the 2019 ACS data, MPI's Batalova and Fix (2021) used both descriptive analyses and logistic regression models to examine factors associated with education-occupation mismatch or unemployment (also referred to as skill underutilization) among college-educated immigrants.<sup>21</sup> The study's authors defined skill underutilization as employment of college-educated adults in jobs that required a high school degree or less or unemployment. While this study's analyses focused on workers

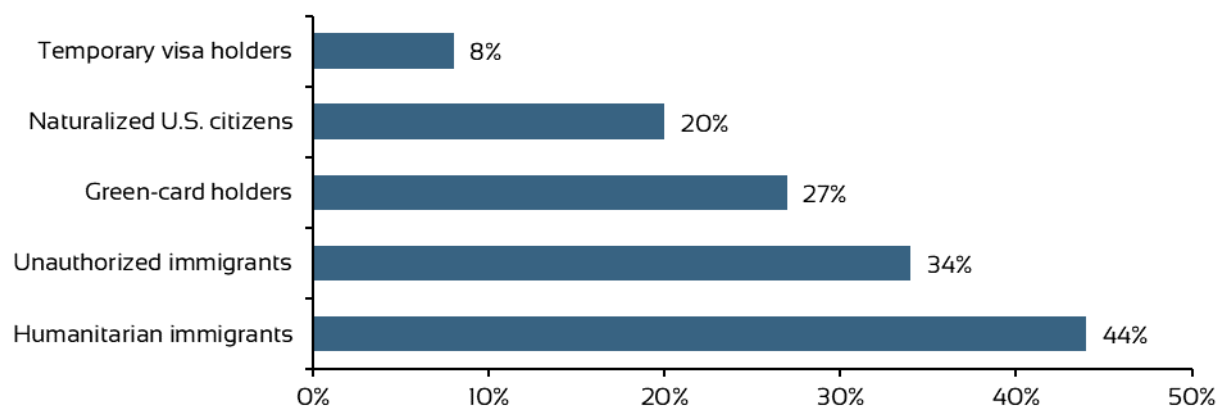
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<sup>21</sup> This analysis employed three sets of logistic regression models. One explored the relationship between college graduates' skill underutilization, nativity, and place of education while controlling for the effects of race and ethnicity, English proficiency, level of education, having a STEM degree, State of residence, and several demographic variables (i.e., gender, age, school enrollment, and presence of children under age 5). A second model tested the relationship between skill underutilization and race and ethnicity of U.S.-born college graduates while controlling for workers' level of education, having a STEM degree, State of residence, and demographic variables. A third model tested the relationship between skill underutilization of immigrant college-educated workers and their race and ethnicity, English proficiency, and age at arrival while controlling for workers' level of education, having a STEM degree, State of residence, and demographic variables.

(aged 25 and older in the civilian labor force, as defined in the MPI report), they were not restricted to workers with any particular immigration status. Key findings from this study follow.

- ▶ **Immigration status.** Among college-educated immigrants, 44 percent of reported humanitarian immigrants (refugees and certain asylees) experience education-occupation mismatch or are unemployed. This number is 34 percent for immigrants who are unauthorized to reside in the United States.<sup>22</sup> Twenty percent of college-educated naturalized U.S. citizens and 27 percent of college-educated permanent residents experience education-occupation mismatch or are unemployed (Batalova & Fix, 2021). Figure 8 shows the proportion of immigrants estimated to experience education-occupation mismatch or be unemployed in each immigration status. These findings are consistent with data collected from Upwardly Global (PwC, 2021) that showed individuals with permanent residency and work authorization had higher placement in employment following job placement programs than other immigrants.

**Figure 8. Percentage of College-Educated Immigrant Adults Who Experienced Education-Occupation Mismatch or Unemployed, by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Status**



Note: The “green-card holders” group excludes immigrants who arrived as humanitarian migrants and have shifted to lawful permanent resident status. This latter group is classified as “humanitarian migrants.” Humanitarian migrants are defined as those who arrived in the United States as resettled refugees, certain asylees, special immigrant visa holders, and Cuban and Haitian entrants.

Source: Originally published by the Migration Policy Institute (MPI) in Batalova and Fix (2021); data sources: MPI tabulation of data from the 2014–2018 ACS and the 2008 SIPP. Reprinted with permission.

- ▶ **Place of education.** Batalova and Fix (2021) reported that 24 percent of immigrants who received their education in another country experience education-occupation mismatch or are unemployed, compared with the 17 percent of immigrants who are educated in the United States.<sup>23</sup>
- ▶ **Field of study** is also a factor. Some of the highest levels of skill underutilization for immigrants were in occupations that require formal credential recognition and licensing, such as law and education (Batalova & Fix, 2021). Other fields that have higher skill underutilization levels were

<sup>22</sup> Because the ACS does not ask respondents about their immigration status at the time of arrival in the United States, MPI researchers developed a proxy estimate of humanitarian migrants based on foreign-born respondents’ countries of birth and year of immigration in the United States. This estimate was a conservative one. In the case of a few countries that sent large numbers of nonhumanitarian immigrants and humanitarian migrants (for instance, asylum seekers from the People’s Republic of China), it was impossible to distinguish between the two groups based on the information the ACS collects. For this reason, arrivals from these countries were not included in the “humanitarian migrant” estimate total.

<sup>23</sup> Because the ACS does not include information on where college-educated immigrants received their degrees, MPI classified foreign-educated immigrants as those who had at least a bachelor’s degree and who arrived in the United States after age 24.

business and journalism, both of which rely on strong English language and general communications skills. In contrast, less than 17 percent of immigrants with STEM and health degrees experience education-occupation mismatch or are unemployed, compared with the 35 percent of immigrants with degrees in law, education, or business. This disparity is also prominent among immigrants with foreign health degrees; 15 percent of immigrants with a foreign health or medical degree experience education-occupation mismatch or are unemployed, compared with the 9 percent of U.S.-born health graduates.

- ▶ **Education and credentials.** Based on the 2019 ACS, 77 percent of immigrants with a master’s degree, 80 percent of those with a professional degree, and 91 percent of those with a doctoral degree were employed in high-skilled jobs in contrast to only 50 percent of immigrants with a bachelor’s degree (U.S.- and foreign-educated immigrants were combined in these analyses) (Batalova & Fix, 2021).
- ▶ **Race and ethnicity.** Batalova and Fix (2021) reported that 32 percent of Latino immigrants and 26 percent of Black immigrants experienced education-occupation mismatch or were unemployed in 2019, in contrast to 18 percent of White immigrants and 16 percent of Asian American and Pacific Islander immigrants. (These analyses did not differentiate college degrees obtained in or outside the United States.) Regression analyses revealed that, controlling for gender, educational attainment level, English proficiency, and State of residence, race remained one of the most salient factors associated with skill underutilization.
- ▶ **English proficiency** plays a large role. Batalova and Fix (2021) reported that level of English proficiency is the strongest single predictor of skill underutilization among all college-educated immigrants. (These analyses did not differentiate college degrees obtained in or outside the United States.) Approximately 55 percent of immigrants who reported speaking English “not well” or “not at all” and 33 percent of immigrants who reported speaking English “well” experienced skill underutilization in 2019.<sup>24</sup>
- ▶ **Gender** is also related to skill underutilization. While there was little difference in skill underutilization for female and male immigrants educated in the United States, 38.6 percent of immigrant women with foreign degrees experience education-occupation mismatch or are unemployed, compared with 20.5 percent of immigrant males with foreign degrees (Batalova & Fix, 2021).
- ▶ **State of residence.** Skill underutilization for college-educated immigrants varies by State. Batalova and Fix (2021) reported that, in most States, skill underutilization was higher among college-educated immigrants than U.S.-born; however, in some Midwestern States (Michigan, Ohio, and Pennsylvania), the gap was much narrower. These results combine U.S.- and foreign-educated immigrants.

## Barriers Related to Credentialing and Licensure

Using data from the CPS (2016–2019) and the SIPP (2008), Cassidy and Dacass (2021) reported that immigrants were significantly less likely to have a license than U.S.-born individuals. The authors used linear probability regression and controlled for age, educational attainment, survey year, month of sample (month 1 or 5), month of the year, whether the individual appeared once or twice in the sample, and number of children. The coefficients on the immigrant, men, and women dummy variables were

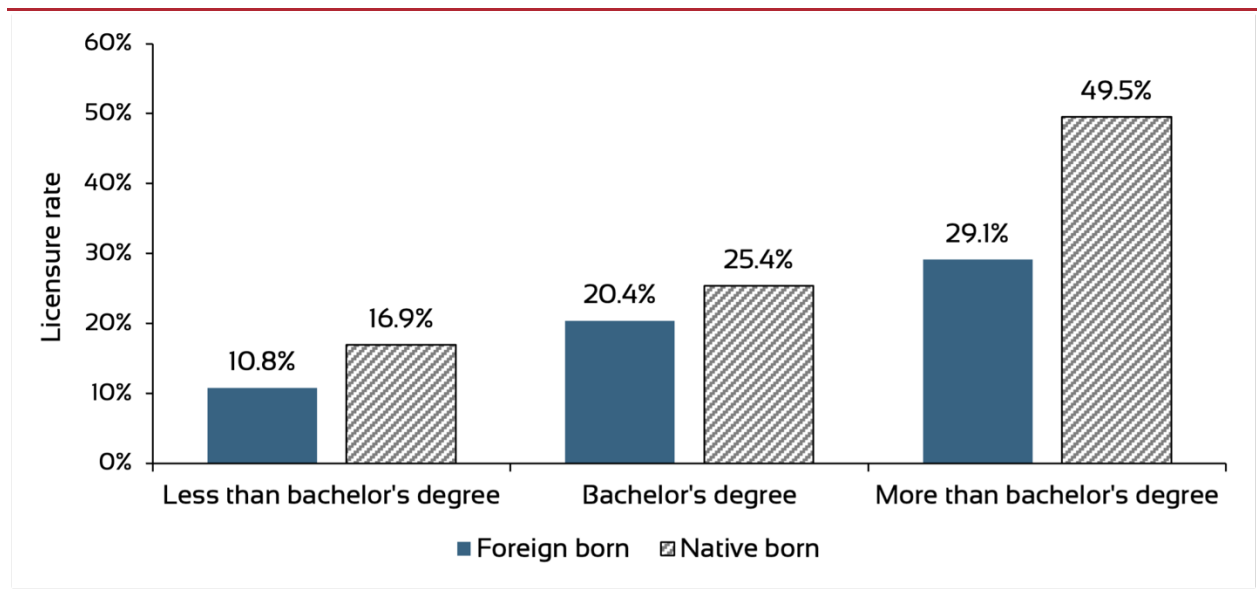
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<sup>24</sup> Batalova and Fix (2021) defined persons who reported speaking English “not well” or “not at all” on the ACS as persons with very low levels of English proficiency. Persons who reported speaking only English or who reported speaking English “very well” were considered fully proficient in English.

-.097, -.088, and -.095, respectively and were all statistically significant with  $p$  values smaller than .001. The authors found that, 10 years after migration, immigrant men were 47.4 percent and immigrant women were 21.4 percent less likely to be licensed than their similar U.S.-born peers. The authors also did not distinguish between foreign- and U.S.-educated individuals in these analyses, and the analyses were not restricted to lawfully present immigrants.

Using 2016–2022 data from the CPS, researchers from the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis (Boesch et al., 2022) reported similar findings. They identified foreign-born workers and reported the workers’ rates of licensure. The researchers found that, 20.4 percent of foreign-born workers with a bachelor’s degree held occupational licenses compared with 25.4 percent of U.S.-born workers. The largest disparities were between foreign-born workers with the highest educational attainment and their U.S.-born counterparts: 29.1 percent of foreign-born workers with more than a bachelor’s degree were licensed versus 49.5 percent of U.S.-born workers with the same education level (see figure 9). The authors also did not distinguish between foreign- and U.S.-educated immigrants in these analyses, and the analyses were not restricted to lawfully present immigrants.

**Figure 9. Foreign-Born Workers With More Than Bachelor’s Degree Experienced Largest Licensure Disparities**



Note: Licensed individuals were defined as those who indicated having a professional certification or industry license that a government entity issued. These data were a national sample, which includes individuals aged 16 and older, accessed via the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series Current Population Survey (IPUMS-CPS).

Source: Boesch et al., 2022; data source: CPS, January 2016–May 2022. Reprinted with permission.

Based on an extensive review of State and national licensing processes, Friedman (2018) outlined challenges to licensure for workers who received their education or training outside the United States. These challenges and barriers may be limited to the location of one’s training. As a result, Friedman did not document challenges associated with citizenship, birthplace, or visa status. Although this report does not meet the criteria for authority because it is not a peer-reviewed report, its findings are included because of its transferability and purpose. Barriers to licensure for people educated outside the United States can be grouped into three primary, interrelated categories.

- ▶ Complexity and variation in licensure rules across States

- Most licensing requirements vary across States and may or may not mirror national boards when such national boards exist. Some State licensing requirements do not specify requirements for individuals with foreign credentials, and in these cases, knowing what steps to take is difficult.
- ▶ Credentials and experience from country of origin not recognized by licensing boards or U.S. institutions of higher education
  - Immigrants who entered the United States with degrees or certifications earned at foreign institutions must have those credentials evaluated by an accredited credential evaluation organization to be valid in the United States. This requirement is particularly difficult for individuals who are no longer in contact with their degree-granting institution because of their refugee status.
  - The organizations from which evaluations are accepted vary by licensing board, university, and professional. Evaluations received from other organizations would not be accepted as valid.
- ▶ Challenges understanding requirements and passing requirements with limited English language proficiency
  - The recredentialing process requires an understanding of the English language proficiency requirements, which can vary by State and licensing boards. The minimal score required to pass the exam also varies depending on the exam.
  - English language proficiency can also act as a barrier to gaining work experience because of job requirements or employers’ unconscious bias.

Work experience, English language proficiency, and credential evaluations are often requirements for licensure but may also act as barriers to one another. For example, most national and State licensing boards include in-country work experience for licensure; however, gaining work experience with limited English language proficiency and without confirmation of licensing can be extremely challenging. English language proficiency can act as a barrier to both credential evaluation and gaining work experience as it can prevent skilled immigrants from passing required exams or understanding national or State board requirements (Friedman, 2018).

### **State data**

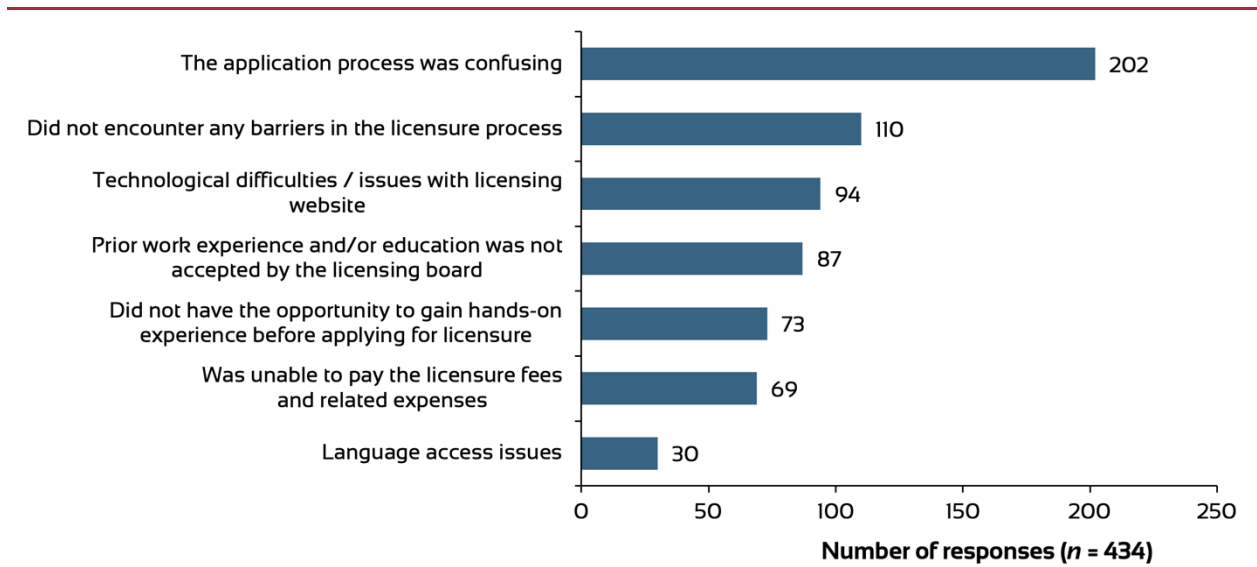
Research focused on five States summarizes barriers to work for foreign-trained professionals and issues guidance on promoting employment for this group—focusing on effectively applying preexisting educational and professional credentials. States involved in this work include Virginia (Liebert & Rissler, 2022), Pennsylvania (Pennsylvania Department of State, 2021), Maine (McLaughlin, 2020), Vermont (Harrington et al., 2020), and Oregon (Friedman, 2018). Unlocking States’ available talent fully leverages the skills and knowledge of a State’s labor force to promote economic growth and ease staffing shortages.

While States collect some relevant administrative data, most data on barriers are qualitative in nature and have been gathered using focus groups or interviews conducted with immigrants already authorized to work. An exception is Pennsylvania, which conducted a survey of nearly 500 immigrants, refugees, and asylees who held a Pennsylvania occupational license or had applied for one in the past and were denied (Pennsylvania Department of State, 2021).

As chapter 3 notes, the Pennsylvania study did not randomly select survey participants but instead recruited them using a combination of press releases, social media, and website promotion; therefore, this study does not meet the criteria for representativeness. Results are specific to Pennsylvania, where the immigrant population may not reflect national distributions. However, because the study is highly relevant and findings are consistent with qualitative data collected from other States, the study team highlights the study’s key findings (Pennsylvania Department of State, 2021):

- ▶ Fifteen percent of respondents held a license in another country before relocating to the United States.
- ▶ Immigrants denied licensure reported their foreign education was not accepted as a qualification, they failed the English language proficiency examination, or had unaccepted documentation or used incorrect forms. The sample size of denied applicants is small ( $n = 54$ , out of 500).
- ▶ Immigrants responding to this survey identified their primary barriers to licensure as the confusing license application process (202) and the technically challenging licensing application website (94) (see figure 10). Other barriers included problems with credentials not being accepted (87), lack of work experience (73), the amount of fees and expenses (69), and language access (applicants did not have the option to take their licensing exam in their native language or have an interpreter assist them) (30).

**Figure 10. Experiences of Pennsylvanian Immigrants When Applying for Occupational Licensure**



Source: Pennsylvania Department of State, 2021; data source: 2021 New Pennsylvanians Licensure Survey. Reprinted with permission.

Qualitative data collected and reported on barriers to work in Virginia are consistent with the findings in Pennsylvania. For example, the Office of New Americans in the Virginia Department of Social Services (Liebert & Rissler, 2022) commissioned a study that included semi-structured interviews with 51 representatives of immigrant-serving organizations and other community members and focus groups with 46 immigrants recruited to represent different regions of Virginia, countries of origin, time in the United States, and barriers to integration. Top challenges respondents cited included the following:

- ▶ Inability to transfer credentials and work experience obtained in their home country or credentials not recognized and working in less skilled jobs as a result
- ▶ Becoming trapped in jobs because of a lack of English proficiency and the need to obtain additional education or credentials for jobs in the United States
- ▶ Financial strain caused by earning entry-level wages or incurring debt for education, training, or recertification
- ▶ Racism, lack of equity, and biases of employers
- ▶ Lack of affordable English language programs and other job training, retraining, certification, and career assistance

### **Upwardly Global data**

Upwardly Global has collected a dataset that includes demographic information and participant data about nearly 58,990 Upwardly Global program participants (immigrant, refugee, and asylee professionals) since 2011. The collected information includes the country of origin, immigration status, U.S. arrival date, highest degree earned, profession category, and English assessment scores. Upwardly Global (2023a) shared a report with the study team that included an analysis of this dataset for the period between January 1, 2018, and July 31, 2023. The data include 11,148 individuals who were accepted and trained by Upwardly Global during this period, 166 countries were represented, 46.6 percent were women, 4,947 were placed in skill-aligned jobs (self-reported), and 51.1 percent were placed in a job within 12 months of completing training.

In addition, the PricewaterhouseCoopers' (2021) conducted an analysis of Upwardly Global data that include 20,000 jobseekers between January 2016 and February 2021. Using a correlation analysis, PwC (2021) found that individuals with higher English assessment scores and higher English speaking level had higher placement rates. The correlation between the English assessment score and placement is 0.13, and between placement and English speaking level is 0.12; both correlations are statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ) with a 95 percent confidence interval.

Note that the survey respondents were immigrants who had obtained services from Upwardly Global and were recruited to answer the survey using a combination of email and website promotion; therefore, this study does not meet the criteria for representativeness. In addition, the study does not meet the criteria for authority because it is not a peer-reviewed report. However, because the analyses are highly relevant and findings are consistent with qualitative data collected from other organizations and States, the study team highlights the key findings.

### **Challenges to licensing for internationally trained healthcare professionals**

Several sources about barriers to licensure focus on physicians and other healthcare professionals; however, much of the recent work is State specific or based on small, nonrepresentative samples. One paper, prepared by the Special Commission on Foreign-Trained Medical Professionals (2022) for the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, described structural obstacles facing internationally trained healthcare professionals in Massachusetts. The commission reviewed county and State data and other literature, and held meetings with key contributors (including representatives from the Department of Public Health, professional licensing boards, medical associations, and groups that advocate for immigrant populations).

In addition to barriers associated with limited English proficiency and lack of familiarity with U.S. licensing requirements mentioned in the previous sections of this chapter, the Massachusetts study noted the following barriers for internationally trained healthcare professionals in the United States:

- ▶ “The complexity and state-by-state variation of licensing requirements;
- ▶ Arbitrary and sometimes discriminatory regulations, including required non-clinical coursework, time limits to complete testing, and rigid English proficiency standards;
- ▶ Unclear and inconsistent messages from licensing boards, workforce bodies, and higher education institutions on the relicensing process;
- ▶ Lack of financial assistance to cover licensing, testing and other fees;
- ▶ Lack of dedicated support from boards, workforce and adult education bodies, and higher education systems to help internationally trained health professionals navigate these and other barriers” (Special Commission on Foreign-Trained Medical Professionals, 2022, p. 14).

Even if physician licensing candidates have completed their requirements in their home country, they are required to pass a clinical skills test, an English language proficiency test, and the U.S. Medical Licensing Exam and complete a U.S. residency program (even candidates with years of practice outside the United States). States evaluate credentials, and the entire process can take several years.

WES (2022) reported that, in addition to physicians having their international degrees validated and completing the required multistep U.S. Medical Licensing Examination, IMGs seeking to become licensed in the United States must typically repeat a residency in their specialty. The Federal funding cap that limits the number of residency slots available in the United States presents a significant obstacle to IMGs seeking to obtain a residency (WES, 2022).

Internationally educated nurses and dentists face similar challenges related to English proficiency testing required for licensure and credential evaluation. In Massachusetts, for example, dentists are required to have graduated from a school of dentistry accredited by the American Dental Association’s Commission on Dental Accreditation (CODA), which recognizes only U.S. and Canadian dental schools. Individuals with an international degree from an institution not accredited by CODA may be eligible for licensure after completing a time-consuming and costly U.S. advanced standing dental education program, which allows graduates of an international dental school to obtain a recognized dental degree in the United States in a shorter period of time compared with traditional dental school programs (Special Commission on Foreign-Trained Medical Professionals, 2022).

## Conclusion

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- ▶ Rigorous research on barriers is limited to studies focused on college-educated immigrants (Boesch et al., 2022; Cassidy & Dacass, 2021). While research that has been conducted on immigrants in licensed fields applies across fields, studies often focus on barriers to licensure and credentialing for only healthcare professionals, rather than trade professions (Special Commission on Foreign-Trained Medical Professionals, 2022; WES, 2022).
- ▶ Key factors contributing to skill underutilization among college-educated immigrants include lack of English language proficiency, race, level of education, and immigration status (Batalova & Fix, 2021).



- ▶ Qualitative data from States and programs describe barriers (Friedman, 2018; Liebert & Rissler, 2022; Special Commission on Foreign-Trained Medical Professionals, 2022; WES, 2022).
  - These studies reported New Americans found the licensing and recredentialing process complex, time-consuming, and costly. Credentials and experience obtained outside the United States were often not recognized or accepted for employment and licensure and needed to be repeated. Lack of English proficiency was a barrier, both to understanding the process and requirements and to obtaining additional work experience required.
  - New Americans also described financial strain caused by earning entry-level wages or incurring debt for education, training, or recertification. They also cited racism, lack of equity, and biases of employers.

## Chapter 5. Analysis of Available Resources to Assist New Americans Obtain Skill-Appropriate Employment

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**RQ6: What promising strategies or approaches have been developed to help New Americans secure skill-appropriate employment in the United States?**

### Sources

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The study team answered this research question by reviewing and synthesizing available research and conducting a review of programs providing employment-related assistance to immigrants. For the literature review, the team identified 28 sources related to this research question, 24 of which were published in or after 2017. Of these 24 studies, 3 used data collected before 2017. All the sources used qualitative data, such as interviews with participants, or analyzed program data to understand the employment support provided to New Americans. No studies provide findings from rigorous impact evaluations that would enable the study team to attribute improvements in employment to the strategy or approach. Several State reports suggested policy changes that would remove employment barriers for foreign-trained professionals. This study includes only the findings from studies or reports that meet the team's rigor criteria and are deemed highly relevant and most applicable to the research question (with exceptions noted).

For the review of programs and services, the study team built a catalog documenting characteristics of 80 public and private programs and services that provide employment assistance to New Americans throughout the country (see chapter 1 for additional detail on this process). The full list of documented programs can be found at DOL's Bridging the Gap for New Americans Study web page.<sup>25</sup> This chapter discusses findings from this scan applicable to RQ6.

### Key Takeaways

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- ▶ Programs and services have been identified in the literature that are focused solely on integrating New Americans into the U.S. workforce (Latino Health Initiative, 2021; Sanz & Francis, 2021; Sutton & Sylvester, 2020; Upwardly Global, 2023b).
- ▶ States have enacted policy changes to reduce the licensing burden for foreign-trained healthcare workers (Morse & Chanda, 2023; NCSL [National Conference of State Legislatures], 2020; Sanz & Francis, 2021; WES, 2022).
- ▶ Four organizations report on the types of services they provide and present qualitative and quantitative data on the outcome of services; however, these data do not meet the study's criteria for rigor (Latino Health Initiative, 2021; Sanz & Francis, 2021; Sutton & Sylvester, 2020; Upwardly Global, 2023b).
- ▶ Organizations serving New Americans and States looking to reduce barriers for foreign-trained immigrants have identified potential strategies to help New Americans secure skill-appropriate employment (Harrington et al., 2020; McHugh & Morawski, 2017; Special Commission on Foreign-Trained Medical Professionals, 2022; Upwardly Global, 2023b).

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<sup>25</sup> U.S. Department of Labor. (n.d.). *Bridging the Gap for New Americans study*.  
<https://www.dol.gov/agencies/oasp/evaluation/currentstudies/Bridging-the-Gap-for-New-Americans>

## Limitations of Existing Research

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- ▶ Organizations have released annual reports or posted information on their website describing the outcome of their services. **However, the study team did not find any organizations, except for Upwardly Global, that attribute a specific type of service to an outcome.** Upwardly Global analyzed its demographic data for the trends and outcomes of the specific supports provided to New Americans in its program (PwC, 2021).
- ▶ **No available research assessed the impact of the policy changes on New Americans' employment outcomes (e.g., job placement and licensure).** From the identified research, governors from six States (Colorado, Massachusetts, Michigan, Nevada, New Jersey, and New York) have issued executive orders and amended laws to remove some employment barriers for foreign-trained healthcare workers (Sanz & Francis, 2021), but the data available cannot demonstrate the impact of these changes on foreign-trained healthcare workers.

## Summary of Findings

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In the research assessed, only one quantitative study examines the promising strategies or approaches used to help New Americans secure skill-appropriate employment in the United States (PwC, 2021). However, the study team reports on approaches organizations and State agencies have identified and enacted to help New Americans secure skill-appropriate employment. These approaches include policy changes and program services. Other approaches consist of support services that immigrant-serving organizations and community colleges provide. The following section summarizes the approaches.

### State Policy Changes

Driven by concerns about healthcare provider shortages during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, governors in Colorado (Executive Order D 2020 038), Massachusetts (COVID-19 Order No. 41), Michigan (Executive Order 2020-150), Nevada (Emergency Directive 044), New Jersey (Executive Order No. 244), and New York (Executive Order 202.10) signed executive orders that allowed IMGs to obtain temporary licensure to be able to practice their profession (Sanz & Francis, 2021). These executive orders included lowering the number of clinical experience hours required for licensure and, in some States, no longer needing to complete a U.S. residency program.

Other States have amended their laws to remove barriers to employment for IMGs (The Council of State Governments, 2022; WES, 2022). The following examples highlight a few of the actions States took:

- ▶ In 2019, Arkansas amended its law to allow IMGs who practice medicine under an academic license<sup>26</sup> for a period of 2 consecutive years to become eligible for an active, unrestricted license to practice in the State without having to complete a U.S. residency program (WES, 2022).
- ▶ In Virginia, IMGs who hold a license in another country and have “evidence of medical competency” may apply for a “limited professional license” or “limited fellow license” to practice in hospitals and outpatient clinics where patient care is provided by a medical school.<sup>27</sup> The board of medicine may permit an individual who practiced with a limited professional

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<sup>26</sup> “The academic license to practice medicine in the State of Arkansas shall authorize the practice of medicine only within the clinical and educational programs in the State of Arkansas” (Ark. Code § 17-95-412).

<sup>27</sup> 18VAC85-20-210. <https://law.lis.virginia.gov/admincode/title18/agency85/chapter20/section210/>

license for five consecutive years to substitute this period and one year of post graduated training completed outside of the U.S. for one year of U.S. residency training<sup>28</sup> (WES, 2022, p. 2).

The NCSL, the Council of State Governments, and the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices collaborated to create the Occupational Licensing Project, portions of which were funded by a DOL grant. The Occupational Licensing Project's final report (NCSL, 2020) provides policy examples of occupational regulation from 16 consortium States and a review of policy trends from all 50 States. The authors reported that, between 2017 and 2019, States introduced 33 bills focused on immigrants with work authorization, with 17 of the 33 enacted. The project's partners also produced the report *Barriers to Work: Improving Access to Licensed Occupations for Immigrants with Work Authorization*, which described the historical and current trends of occupational licensing and regulation for foreign-trained workers (Morse & Chanda, 2023).

The New Americans State Network, a workgroup the American Immigration Council runs, provides a forum for officials from member States to share best practices in immigrant and refugee integration into the workforce (ONA, 2023). The 16 member States include California, Colorado, Illinois, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Nevada, New Jersey, New York, North Dakota, Ohio, Oregon, Virginia, and Washington. The Network also provides peer-to-peer mentoring, technical assistance, policy analysis, and economic research for officials from nonmember States who are considering establishing an Office of New Americans in their State.

## Community Colleges

Community colleges have also established promising strategies to support their immigrant students, as noted in Casner-Lotto (2011). Although this report was published in 2011 and does not meet the currency criteria, the study team includes it because it is highly relevant and there is a lack of other information on supports provided to immigrant students. The author also released a more recent report in 2019 that highlighted the initiatives of community colleges and partners aiming to integrate immigrants and refugees into the labor market and society (Casner-Lotto & Wisell, 2019). Based on a review of 15 community colleges that are part of the Community College Consortium for Immigrant Education, Casner-Lotto (2011) summarized the supports for all immigrant students at each college. Foreign-educated immigrants received the following supports:

- ▶ Miami Dade College's Refugee/Entrant Vocational Education Services Training program offered assistance with translating and evaluating foreign-earned credentials.
- ▶ Five colleges provided academic and career advising services, taking into account the various English proficiency and educational levels of immigrant students.
- ▶ Nine colleges provided English as a Second Language (ESL) programs and bridge programs that build the academic, language, and literacy skills of immigrants.

For example, Westchester Community College's Professional Development Center delivered a yearlong English training program to nonnative English-speaking scientists and researchers of Regeneron Pharmaceuticals to improve their English proficiency. Palm Beach State College's Davis Global Education Center operated a one-stop education and resource information center for immigrant students enrolled

<sup>28</sup> 18VAC85-20-122. <https://law.lis.virginia.gov/admincode/title18/agency85/chapter20/section122/>

at Palm Beach State College; students received part-time scholarships based on financial need and by meeting academic requirements.

## Program Services and Support

Through reports identified in the literature and the program search, the study team highlights six organizations that provide services and support to New Americans with foreign credentials and insights from organizations and State offices to better integrate New Americans.

### *Identified in the literature*

The study team identified reports from multiple organizations and programs providing services and support to New Americans with foreign credentials that describe training and other services they offer to help New Americans integrate into the U.S. workforce.

The study team identified the following organizations detailing examples of programs that serve and support New Americans:

- ▶ WES established the WES Gateway Program to help displaced individuals educated in Afghanistan, Eritrea, Iraq, Syria, Turkey, Ukraine, or Venezuela receive credential evaluation reports. The program is intended to help individuals who became displaced because of circumstances in their country and have limited proof of academic achievement continue their education, become licensed in their field, and start their career in the United States (World Education Services, n.d.). A report on this program (Sanz & Francis, 2021) does not provide data on outcomes.
- ▶ Created in 2013, the New Mainers Resource Center focuses on developing and executing a strategy to integrate and use the skills of foreign-trained immigrants living in Maine, specifically those with an advanced degree or experience in a professional field (New Mainers Resource Center, n.d.). Program data from 2017 show the New Mainers Resource Center served immigrants with various educational and professional backgrounds; the Center served 180 immigrants with undergraduate degrees and 75 with graduate degrees or higher. The most common professional backgrounds immigrants held in 2017 were business or economics, healthcare, computer or IT, architecture or engineering, education, and legal (Scherer & Sutton, 2018). The New Mainers Resource Center develops licensing guides for specific professions, conducts research, and produces reports with findings and recommendations for overcoming licensing barriers. Staff have also served on statewide task forces and participated in training workshops to inform employers and policymakers about the unique needs of New Americans.
- ▶ Founded in 2000, Upwardly Global is a nonprofit dedicated to advancing the inclusion of immigrant, refugee, and asylee professionals in the workforce and helping these individuals bring their skills and perspectives to the American economy. The organization provides individualized and industry-specific job coaching; builds the capacity of other immigrant-serving organizations to provide employment support; encourages employer-change practices such as diverse hiring, promotion, and retention initiatives; and shares the stories of immigrants and supports policy priorities that can build the field and shift systems to advance inclusion (Upwardly Global, n.d.-a).
  - From focus groups with 66 participants and 207 survey responses, Upwardly Global reported 76 percent of Upwardly Global jobseekers found it easier to prepare the necessary

- job application supporting documents after gaining access to Upwardly Global’s communication tools and templates (Vanelli, 2022).
- PwC conducted an analysis of Upwardly Global’s participant demographic and participation data that include 20,000 jobseekers between January 2016 and February 2021 to identify trends and indicators to improve placement of their immigrants and refugee jobseekers in the United States (PwC, 2021). PwC presented its analysis to Upwardly Global, and the study team received its findings from Upwardly Global. As noted earlier that the survey respondents were immigrants who had obtained services from Upwardly Global and were recruited to answer the survey using a combination of email and website promotion; therefore, this study does not meet the criteria for representativeness. In addition, the study does not meet the criteria for authority because it is not a peer-reviewed report. However, because the analysis is highly relevant, the study team highlights the key findings.
  - Using a correlation analysis, PwC (2021) found a 46-percent placement rate for candidates who attended vocational training. The correlation between placement and vocational training is 0.24, and between placement and informational interview is 0.26; both correlations are statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ) with a 95% confidence interval. In contrast, PwC found that language coaching and mock interviews have lower correlations with placements, 0.1 and 0.044, respectively, and both correlations are statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ) with a 95% confidence interval.
  - ▶ The Welcome Back Center of Suburban Maryland supports internationally educated health professionals working in Maryland (Latino Health Initiative, n.d.; Latino Health Initiative, 2021). The center reported serving 96 participants from July 2020 to June 2021 with a variety of services, including ESL courses, entry-level health courses, exam preparation courses, job readiness preparation workshops, and individual career coaching. Of those 96 participants, 1 completed their credential evaluation, 5 passed the Nursing Licensure Exam as registered nurse, and 3 obtained their Certified Nurse Assistant license. The center was successful in helping secure 20 job placements in Maryland’s healthcare field; 5 participants began working as a registered nurse in Maryland, 5 physicians secured employment in the health field (although it is unclear whether they were employed as physicians), and 10 began working in the health field as a licensed practical nurse or a patient care technician or in other health-related jobs in Maryland. The outcomes of the remaining 67 participants were not reported.

The Project on Workforce at Harvard provided a landscape of programs, policies, and practices intended to strengthen immigrant inclusion in the workforce using data from 131 grant applicants to the WES Miriam Assefa Fund’s open grant competition (Dolan et al., 2022). The grant competition was open for two rounds: 84 applications were submitted between May and July 2021. Sixty-one applications were submitted between September and November 2021. Two duplicate applications were removed and 12 were removed because they were deemed irrelevant to immigrant and refugee workforce development. The WES Miriam Assefa Fund provides grants that range from \$100,000 to \$150,000 and spans 1–2 years to U.S. and Canadian organizations “working to shift employer practices and develop career pathways that support the economic mobility and success of immigrants and refugees.” Although this restricted dataset is not representative of all immigrant-serving programs in the United States and the programs are not exclusive to serving immigrants with foreign credentials, the study team highlights this report because of its relevancy to this research question.

- ▶ Five percent of the 131 applicant organizations focused on assisting with credential recognition (translating credentials and experiences from foreign countries).

- ▶ Thirty-two percent of the 131 applicant organizations provided job-specific skills training, and 29 percent provided foundational skills training (e.g., language training).
- ▶ Although 93 percent of the 131 applicant organizations were focused on serving recent arrivals, there was no information on the number of those organizations that serve immigrants with foreign degrees or credentials.

### *Insights from organizations and State offices to better integrate New Americans*

Many organizations and State offices have put forward suggestions, including the following, to reduce employment barriers for New Americans.

- ▶ **Increase advanced or technical English language instruction courses in local programs.** MPI (McHugh & Morawski, 2017) and the Vermont Department of Labor (Harrington et al., 2020) recommended increasing the availability of English language courses that focus on building immigrants' professional and technical workplace English skills.
- ▶ **Provide other opportunities to gain relevant work experience or meet requirements.** Apprenticeships provide flexibility for individuals to demonstrate competency rather than requiring them to meet fixed practice hours (Director of the Office of Professional Regulation for Vermont Secretary of State, 2019). Bridge programming also gives foreign-trained immigrants an opportunity to fill gaps in their education or work experience to meet an eligibility requirement (McHugh & Morawski, 2017).
- ▶ **Create industry-specific resources and coaching.** Upwardly Global recommended creating targeted and differentiated career navigation support for New Americans to foster workforce inclusion, including resume writing support and cover letter templates (Vanelli, 2022). The Special Commission on Foreign-Trained Medical Professionals in Massachusetts (2022) also recommended creating detailed licensing and career pathway guides and web pages for each licensing board that provided an easily navigable overview of the licensing process, including links to relevant resources.

### *Identified by the review of programs and services*

The study team documented 80 public and private programs that provide direct services to the New American population. Of these programs, 37 target New Americans exclusively, while 43 target immigrants more broadly. Of the 80 programs, the most common services these programs provide are professional development/career counseling (75 percent), classes (other than ESL) or educational counseling (61 percent), ESL classes (40 percent), and licensing or credentialing services (40 percent). Other notable services these programs provide include social services (19 percent) and admission or tuition assistance (15 percent). The healthcare industry (18 percent of programs), specifically nurses and physicians, were the most prominent professions served by programs.

The 80 documented programs are distributed across 30 States, with Massachusetts being home to the highest number (9). Most programs serve only individuals in a specific State or locality. In some cases, the study team was unable to determine how long programs have existed. For programs or organizations where this information is publicly available, launch dates range from very recent (in 2023) to as early as 1919. The full list of documented programs can be found at DOL's Bridging the Gap for

New Americans Study web page.<sup>29</sup> The following text box provides examples with self-reported information on job placement reported by selected programs.

### Selected Programs and Their Outcomes

**Upwardly Global’s Career Coaching Program** offers one-on-one coaching, access to training and certifications, resume building, and networking for New Americans (with a bachelor’s degree or higher) in 18 States and Washington, DC. (Upwardly Global, n.d.-b). The Career Coaching Program produced 1,116 job placements in 2022 (Upwardly Global, 2022).

The International Institute of St. Louis offers a **Career Pathways Program**, a 4-week course focused on building job readiness (International Institute of St. Louis, n.d.-a) and a Workforce Solutions Program focused on job placement services (International Institute of St. Louis, n.d.-b). In 2022, the institute placed 282 immigrants in jobs (International Institute of St. Louis, 2022).

**The Scholars at Risk’s Protection Program** arranges temporary academic positions for academics who are forced to leave their home country. The program arranged 189 academic job placements for the 2022–2023 academic year (Scholars at Risk, n.d.).

## Conclusion

- ▶ States have enacted various policy changes to remove barriers that prevented foreign-trained healthcare workers from resuming their careers in the United States (Morse & Chanda, 2023; NCSL, 2020; Sanz & Francis, 2021; WES, 2022).
- ▶ Nonprofit organizations, State initiatives, and community colleges have implemented strategies and approaches intended to integrate New Americans into the U.S. workforce (Casner-Lotto, 2011; Latino Health Initiative, 2021; Sanz & Francis, 2021; Sutton & Sylvester, 2020; The Council of State Governments, 2022; Upwardly Global, 2023b; WES, 2022).
- ▶ Except for PwC’s analysis of Upwardly Global’s data (PwC, 2021), there is no evidence available related to the extent to which policies, programs, strategies, or approaches were able to achieve their stated outcomes.
- ▶ To reduce barriers to employment, organizations recommended increasing the number of advanced English language courses, expanding opportunities to gain work experience, and providing industry-specific resources and coaching (Harrington et al., 2020; McHugh & Morawski, 2017; Special Commission on Foreign-Trained Medical Professionals, 2022; Upwardly Global, 2023b).

<sup>29</sup> U.S. Department of Labor. (n.d.). *Bridging the Gap for New Americans study*.  
<https://www.dol.gov/agencies/oasp/evaluation/currentstudies/Bridging-the-Gap-for-New-Americans>



## Chapter 6. Conclusion

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This report presents the findings from a review of existing research to address topics identified in the Bridging the Gap for New Americans Act enacted in October 2022. The Act asks the DOL to conduct a study about New Americans, defined as lawfully present immigrants and refugees admitted to the United States during the 5-year period prior to the law's passage (October 2017–October 2022), with occupational and professional credentials and academic degrees obtained outside the United States.

The Westat Insight study team conducted a targeted literature review to explore the characteristics, employment patterns, challenges, and opportunities faced by New Americans. The study team discovered that New Americans represent a significant portion of the U.S. population, with distinct patterns in employment, credential recognition, and geographic distribution. Despite possessing valuable skills and qualifications, New Americans encounter substantial barriers to obtaining employment that matches their education and professional backgrounds. Credential recognition emerges as a paramount hurdle, with many skilled immigrants finding that their foreign qualifications are not readily accepted or valued equivalently in the U.S. job market. Licensing requirements and professional certification processes present additional obstacles, often requiring time-consuming and costly retraining or examination. Beyond institutional barriers, the study also sheds light on social and linguistic challenges that further complicate the skill-appropriate employment process for New Americans.

The Westat Insight study team also identified resources regarding the factors and strategies that might help ease New Americans' transition into employment that uses their existing skills and knowledge. Targeted interventions, such as bridge programs and mentorship initiatives, have facilitated smoother transitions for some New Americans into their respective professional fields.

Isolating New Americans within datasets for comprehensive analysis proves exceptionally challenging because of limitations in existing research and data collection methods. Key datasets such as the ACS and the CPS provide partial insights but lack detailed information on immigration status and where degrees and credentials are obtained. The absence of nationally representative data specific to New Americans necessitates targeted data collection that can more accurately identify and analyze this population's unique characteristics and needs.

In conclusion, while New Americans possess the potential to significantly enrich the U.S. labor market and contribute to economic innovation, realizing this potential fully requires overcoming substantial barriers. Addressing these challenges necessitates a concerted effort from policymakers, educators, employers, and community organizations to create pathways that facilitate the recognition of foreign credentials and that support the professional integration of New Americans. Enhanced research and data collection efforts are essential for tailoring these interventions effectively and ensuring that New Americans can contribute to their fullest potential.

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## Appendix

**Table A.1. Literature Search Terms**

New American Terms	Employment Terms	Barrier/Facilitator Terms
“new American*”	“career readiness”	discriminat*
Immigrant*	employment	racist/racism/racial
Immigrants [C]	“employment readiness”	Racism [P, S]
Immigration [P]	“Employment Status” [P]	prejudice*
Emmigrat*	underemploy*/under employ*	Prejudice [P, S]
“Emigrants and Immigrants” [M]	Underemployment [S]	Ethnocentrism [S]
“Emigration and Immigration” [C]	workforce	barrier*
Refugee*	workplace	facilitat*
Refugees [P, S]	licens*	support*
“foreign trained”	certificat*	program*
“foreign educat*”	credential*	challeng*
“internationally educated”/“international educat*”	“high skill*”/“highly skilled”/ “highly-skilled”	integrat*
“Foreign Workers” [P]	“skilled labor market”/“skilled labour market”	inclusion
“Foreign Labor” [S]	training	“Employment Practices”
migrant*	education	“Employment Training Programs”
expatriat*	“highly educated”	
Expatriates [P]	“college educated”	
“Expatriate Employees” [S]	“university educated”	
“naturalized citizen*”	overeducat*/“over educat*”	
“permanent resident*”	“education mismatch*”	
Citizenship [P]	“occupation mismatch*”	
noncitizen*/“non citizen*”	“occupational downgrad*”	
Noncitizens [P, S]	“brain waste”	
“international medical graduate*”		
“Foreign Nurses” [C]		

**Note:** Terms in columns were combined with OR. Columns were then combined with AND. Text terms and database-specific indexing terms were used in combination within each database.

[M], [C], [P], [S] = Subject headings used in the following databases:

- [M]: PubMed
- [C]: CINAHL
- [P]: PsycINFO
- [S]: Social Science Database, Sociological Abstracts, Sociology Database

\* Term will be searched with multiple endings (e.g., skill\* = skill, skills, skilled)

**Table A.2. Subject Matter Experts and Organizations Consulted**

Organization	Description	Experts	Contribution
<a href="#">Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis</a> (Minneapolis Fed)	Researchers and subject-matter experts in the Minneapolis Fed’s community development division analyze a range of topics including labor markets and labor market policies.	Ryan Nunn, Assistant Vice President of Community Development and Engagement  Mary Hogan, Senior Policy Analyst, Community Development and Engagement	Ryan Nunn is an author on two reports on the impact of occupational licensing on immigrants referenced (Boesch et al., 2022; Boesch & Nunn, 2024), and the data tool that draws on the CPS microdata to produce estimates related to licensed workers and occupations (Boesch & Nunn, 2023). The study team met with Ryan Nunn and Mary Hogan to discuss their report’s findings, methodologies and their research using Upwardly Global data. The study team attended a webinar that Minneapolis Fed hosted about barriers foreign-born workers may experience in the labor market and how States are responding (Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis, 2023).
<a href="#">Migration Policy Institute</a> (MPI)	MPI is an independent, nonpartisan think tank that seeks to improve immigration and integration policies through research and analysis, opportunities for learning and dialogue, and the development of new ideas to address complex policy questions.	Jeanne Batalova, Senior Policy Analyst	The study team met with Jeanne Batalova, an author on six of the seven MPI reports referenced (Batalova, 2022; Batalova & Fix, 2020 and 2021; Olsen-Medina & Batalova, 2020; Ward & Batalova, 2023) to discuss the reports, MPI’s methodologies and findings, and other potential data sources that could fully answer the study’s research questions.



Organization	Description	Experts	Contribution
<a href="#">Upwardly Global</a>	Founded in 2000, Upwardly Global is a nonprofit dedicated to advancing the inclusion of immigrant, refugee, and asylee professionals in the workforce and helping these individuals bring their skills and perspectives to the U.S. economy. The organization provides individualized and industry-specific job coaching, shares the stories of immigrants, and supports policy priorities that can build the field and shift systems to advance inclusion.	<p>Rebecca Fishman, Advocacy and Strategic Initiatives Coordinator</p> <p>Stephanie Alman, National Director of Employment Services</p> <p>Fahad Alnimah, Senior Manager of National Programs</p> <p>Sam Marashi, Senior Salesforce Administrator</p>	The study team met with Upwardly Global to discuss the programs and services it provides to New Americans and the data it collects from its clients. The study team referenced two of its reports (Upwardly Global, 2023b; Vanelli, 2022). Upwardly Global provided the study team with descriptive statistics of its clients in the 2023 report and PricewaterhouseCooper’s detailed analysis of Upwardly Global’s demographic data, in the form of an internal PowerPoint (PwC, 2021).
<a href="#">World Education Services (WES)</a>	WES is a nonprofit that supports the educational, economic, and social inclusion of immigrants, refugees, and international students.	<p>Fatima Sanz, Senior Policy Manager</p> <p>Debra Means-West, Director of Resource and Network Development at WES Global Talent Bridge</p>	WES developed the <b>Global Talent Bridge U.S. Program Map</b> (World Education Services, 2023), which informed the study team’s documentation of the 80 public and private programs that provided direct services to the New American population. The study team and WES discussed how programs and services were selected for the program map, the requirements, and the survey that programs filled out. The study team also referenced two WES reports that focused on international medical graduates (San & Francis, 2021; World Education Services, 2022).
<a href="#">Office of New Americans State Network</a>	The network is a workgroup run by the American Immigration Council and World Education Services that provides a forum for officials from member States to share best practices in immigrant and refugee integration into the workforce.	States represented: California, Colorado, Michigan, Minnesota, Nevada, New York, North Carolina, North Dakota, Ohio, Oregon, Utah, Virginia, Washington, Wisconsin	The study team attended the Office of New Americans State Network monthly meeting to present the purpose of this study and discussed other potential work or State-level data that the Office of New Americans is collecting.

**Table A.3. Data Sources Referenced, Survey Characteristics, and Elements Critical to Research Questions (as of July 2023)**

Data Source	Survey Characteristics			Citizenship / Immigration Status			Professional and Occupational Credentials			
	Population covered	Most recent public release	Can produce State estimates	Naturalized citizens	Noncitizen authorized statuses (e.g., refugees seeking asylum, LPRs)	Educational degrees (e.g., H.S., A.A./A.S., B.A./B.S., M.A./M.S., Ph.D.)	Professional degrees (e.g., M.D., D.D.S., J.D.)	Occupational certifications or licenses (e.g., teaching, nursing, electrician license; project management certification; IT certification)	Occupational certificates (e.g., vocational degrees)	U.S. or foreign educated
American Community Survey	U.S. residents	2021	✓	✓		✓	✓			
American Medical Association’s Physician Masterfile	Physicians, residents, and medical students residing in United States (includes foreign educated)	2022					✓			✓
Annual Survey of Refugees*	Refugees residing in United States 1.5-6.5 years	2019	✓	N/A	✓	✓	✓			✓
Current Population Survey	U.S. residents	2023	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		
National Survey of College Graduates	U.S. residents with college degrees	2021		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
New Immigrant Survey <sup>a*</sup>	Newly arrived lawfully present immigrants	2009	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies*	Adults living in household of country	2017	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Data Source	Survey Characteristics			Citizenship / Immigration Status			Professional and Occupational Credentials			
	Population covered	Most recent public release	Can produce State estimates	Naturalized citizens	Noncitizen authorized statuses (e.g., refugees seeking asylum, LPRs)	Educational degrees (e.g., H.S., A.A./A.S., B.A./B.S., M.A./M.S., Ph.D.)	Professional degrees (e.g., M.D., D.D.S., J.D.)	Occupational certifications or licenses (e.g., teaching, nursing, electrician license; project management certification; IT certification)	Occupational certificates (e.g., vocational degrees)	U.S. or foreign educated
Survey of Earned Doctorates*	All individuals receiving research doctorate from accredited U.S. institution in given academic year	2022	✓			✓	✓			✓
Survey of Income and Program Participation	U.S. residents with oversample of households with low incomes	2022	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	

LPR = lawful permanent resident; N/A = not applicable

\*Indicates that source was not used in the summary of findings for literature review synthesis because of the limitations based on criteria used for assessing rigor of sources (e.g., currency, population covered, sample size).

<sup>a</sup> Sample is large enough to provide State estimates in some States but not all.