

Making Immigration and Integration Work for Americans

The Problem

- **The share of the U.S. population age 65 and older** will reach 21.2 percent by 2035, shrinking the labor force while driving up demands for health care and other essential services.
- **By 2031, deaths in the U.S. are projected to outnumber births**, meaning there simply aren't enough U.S.-born workers to fill workforce gaps.
- **More than 90 million people** live in areas of the U.S. without enough primary care physicians.
- **Only two workers enter the construction workforce for every five that retire**, slowing housing production and contributing to rising costs.

The worker shortage is already here, straining essential services and jeopardizing the country's economic health. While federal immigration policy has rightly focused on who can come to the U.S. and through which pathways, policymakers should also ask whether immigration and integration systems are working together to help immigrants contribute their skills and meet changing workforce and economic needs.

What We Propose

Immigration must work for the U.S., and immigration policy alone cannot deliver that outcome. While the federal government determines how people arrive and under what conditions they stay, integration shapes how fully immigrants can contribute their skills and how effectively communities and economies can maximize those contributions. Investing in domestic talent is essential to address both current and future workforce demands; however, this approach alone is not enough. The U.S. requires a comprehensive strategy that includes both immigration and integration.

World Education Services' *Built to Work* framework argues that policymakers should build stronger connections between immigrant talent and workforce needs—making it easier to recognize skills and credentials, connect people to jobs that fully utilize their skills, and help employers access talent that is too often left on the sidelines.

Ideas for Action

1. Strengthen capacity.

- Ensure that workforce systems account for immigrants' skills and credentials alongside domestic training pipelines.
- Expand formal channels for state and local knowledge to inform what's working and where the gaps are.

- Pair data already collected at the state and local levels with national data to respond to communities' real economic needs.
- Use federal incentives and technical support to help states fully utilize existing resources rather than build new systems.

2. Immigration Pathways → Successful Integration.

- Treat state and local partnerships, workforce data, and implementation experience as integral to pathway design.
- Structure pathways to respond to employer demand and regional priorities, so states can quickly connect immigrants to the jobs that need them.
- Track and report on whether pathways close talent gaps and deliver economic benefits.

A PRACTICAL AGENDA FOR THE NEXT 12 MONTHS

- **Take inventory** of what states are already doing—credentialing reforms, data systems, and pilots—that can inform federal thinking.
- **Create a formal channel** for states to share real-time workforce data, needs, and implementation insights.
- **Integrate workforce systems into the arrival process** itself, including credential evaluation, skills assessment, and occupational skills training.

Looking Ahead

Built to Work is a starting point, not a prescription. It is a framework for treating immigration and integration as essential solutions to address workforce shortages and benefit American workers, employers, and communities alike.

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**Explore the
framework:**



ABOUT WES World Education Services is a non-profit social enterprise that supports the educational, economic, and social inclusion of immigrants, refugees, and international students.