

# How State and Local Leaders Can Design Better Immigration and Integration Systems

## The Problem

- **By 2031, deaths in the United States are projected to outnumber births**, meaning there simply aren't enough U.S.-born workers to fill workforce gaps.
- **More than 90 million people** in the U.S. live in areas 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.

These pressures are straining essential services and jeopardizing communities' economic health. Yet for decades, immigration and integration have been treated as separate conversations that often don't include state and local insights. As a result, immigration often happens to communities, not *with* them, even though it's local systems that determine whether workers' talents reach the employers who need them.

## What We Propose

Immigration shapes who arrives and under what terms; integration—recognizing workers' skills and connecting them to jobs—shapes whether people and communities can thrive. A successful strategy will invest in immigrant talent, those here and those yet to come, as well as domestic in order to meet workforce needs.

World Education Services' *Built to Work* framework argues that immigration and integration should be viewed as parts of a single economic system. Treating credential recognition, skills verification, and pathways into jobs that fit people's experience as core economic infrastructure can help address workforce shortages communities already face. This approach connects talent to opportunity without leaving skills on the sidelines.

## Ideas for Action

### 1. Strengthen integration capacity.

- Include immigrants and immigration in the workforce and economic planning structures that shape opportunity for everyone.
- States and regions know their employers and workforce needs best. This knowledge should shape the modernization of systems such as credential recognition, workforce navigation, and coordination strategies.
- Review local data and results to make informed decisions.
- Focus resources on building systems that will support communities for years to come.

## 2. Design immigration pathways with successful integration in mind.

- State and local partnerships, data, and implementation experience should inform how pathways are designed and improved, including for stability and permanence.
- States can make the case for connecting pathways to workforce systems that can adapt to changing regional conditions. Responsive pathways ensure that immigrants can access commensurate work and contribute to achieving local workforce and economic development goals.
- Track and share how pathways translate into filled jobs, healthy businesses, and visible community benefits.

### A PRACTICAL AGENDA FOR THE NEXT 12 MONTHS

- **Identify where skilled talent is getting stuck**—where barriers to licensing, credential and skill recognition, language access, and workforce navigation keep people working below their skill level.
- **Strengthen local integration capacity** by expanding the remit of existing workforce boards, employer networks, and other stakeholders to include immigration and integration.
- **Embed the work in existing plans and tools** developed by workforce boards, sector partnerships, and economic development strategies—rather than creating a parallel system.

## Looking Ahead

States and localities understand their own workforce needs, systems, and priorities, and are best positioned to put that knowledge to work. *Built to Work* is a starting point, not a prescription. It is a framework that leaders can adapt to meet the needs of their own communities.

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**Explore the  
framework:**



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