



# IMMIGRANTS AND MINNESOTA'S WORKFORCE

## APPENDIX B: A REVIEW OF LITERATURE ON IMMIGRANT INCORPORATION IN THE WORKFORCE

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Minnesota's immigrant population is on the rise, and their role in the statewide economy will only grow larger in the coming decades. Along with many positive economic impacts of immigration, the state must adjust to cultural differences and political realities in an increasingly diverse environment. Recent developments across the United States and beyond make it clear that immigration can be a divisive issue, and its benefits are not always obvious. However, straightforward solutions from policymakers, employers, and nonprofits can make immigrant integration a smoother process and knock down the barriers that can keep immigrants from participating in the mainstream economy. Highly skilled immigrants are a particularly important target for policy solutions that can bring them into the economy and fill gaps in high-need fields, and investment in their success will reap considerable rewards for the state. Maximizing the economic potential of immigrants is inherently linked to creating a supportive and inclusive social environment in the state. All actors benefit from understanding the obstacles that immigrants face beyond the workplace and working to ensure a welcoming community for Minnesota's newest arrivals.

## MINNESOTA'S IMMIGRANT REALITY

A broad array of groups recognizes the importance of immigrants to the state's economy. With a decline in the native-born birth rate and a significant outmigration of native-born Minnesotans to other states, Minnesota's population growth has become increasingly dependent on immigrants. The recent surge of immigrants coming to the state makes Minnesota unique among Midwestern states, most of which are suffering net losses in migration. In recent years, the state has added between 10,000 and 15,000 immigrants per year, even as it suffers slight losses of native-born residents to other states every year.<sup>1</sup> As of 2015, about eight percent of Minnesota's population was foreign born and 10 percent of Minnesota's labor force was foreign born.

Any discussion of immigration should also carefully examine some of the common myths about its effects on Minnesota. For example, evidence clearly shows that the arrival of immigrants exerts little to no effect on the wages of native-born workers.<sup>2</sup> Immigrants to Minnesota consume similar levels of state public health dollars despite higher poverty rates, and are not associated with a rise in crime.<sup>3</sup> This does not mean that immigrant integration is not without any costs or growing pains; certain immigrant groups do rely heavily on public cash and food assistance,<sup>4</sup> and if there is any effect of immigration on wages and employment, it falls upon immigrants who have already arrived in the state.<sup>5</sup> However, the long-run economic benefits of immigration for the state exceed these potential costs, and as the experience of numerous Minnesota communities and organizations shows, social conflict between immigrants and native-born populations can be limited through public policies and conscious action by private and nonprofit partners.

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<sup>1</sup> Minnesota on the Move: Migration Patterns and Implications." Minnesota State Demographic Center, January 2015.

<sup>2</sup> Card, David. "Comment: The Elusive Search for the Negative Wage Impacts of Immigration." *Journal of the European Economic Association* 10:1 (2012), 215.

<sup>3</sup> "A New Age of Immigrants: Making Immigration Work for Minnesota." The Minneapolis Foundation, Minneapolis, 2010, p. 6-8.

<sup>4</sup> "A New Age of Immigrants," 7.

<sup>5</sup> Card, 214.

## Different Paths for Immigrants

Despite their importance to the economy and relative lack of negative effects on receiving areas, immigrants are not guaranteed success in the United States. Traditional theories of immigration suggested there was a standard path in which immigrants, over the course of several generations, come to merge fully into the broader American economy and culture as they gain language skills, acquire cultural competencies and gradually improve their economic standing. Instead, there are a variety of possible paths before all immigrants. While some integrate smoothly and also add their economic and cultural capital to society at large, others may remain isolated in pockets of poverty and eventually come to join or form a permanent underclass.<sup>6</sup>

Certain factors can predict the ease with which immigrants will integrate. Immigrants enjoy different levels of advantages based on the context of their reception in the United States and the levels of social and financial capital they have upon arrival. Immigrants who are welcomed warmly and bring high levels of capital are most likely to succeed in their new country, while those facing hostile reception and low capital are more likely to struggle.<sup>7</sup> This is especially true for immigrants with the lowest levels of human and financial capital, who can become trapped in negative feedback loops. Limited to narrow networks, these immigrants are unlikely to ever encounter improving material conditions and can funnel them into generational poverty and exclusion from broader society. Difficult financial conditions inevitably strain social capital, and make success far less likely. A public that is indifferent or actively hostile to the arrival of immigrants makes their success considerably less likely, and only opens the door for continued struggles.

Race and ethnicity are also important factors in immigrants' economic experiences. Employer perceptions of racial or ethnic groups remain powerful, and have a direct effect on employment prospects and possibilities of upward mobility within an organization.<sup>8</sup> Settlement patterns within cities are still driven strongly by race, which can limit access to economic opportunity and drive immigrants into ethnic enclaves; while there are plausible benefits to ethnic solidarity within an enclave, research now suggests that such arrangements limit immigrant earning potential.<sup>9</sup> Immigrant experiences are inseparable from broader debates on race relations in the U.S.

## The Role of Social Capital

With a variety of integrative pathways unfolding before immigrants to Minnesota, policymakers and other Minnesotans invested in their success should seek to use all possible methods to direct them toward outcomes that ensure successful integration. One of the most fruitful ways to frame this debate focuses on social capital as a source of connections and ties that make integration possible. This perspective recognizes the role of human relationships in life outcomes and incorporates all manner of relationships between individuals and groups across the public and private sectors and civil society. According to Robert Putnam, they involve "social networks and the associated norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness."<sup>10</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Portes, Alejandro and Min Zhou. "The New Second Generation: Segmented Assimilation and its Variants." *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 530 (2013): 74-96.

<sup>7</sup> Rajzman, Rebeca and Marta Tienda, "Immigrants' Socioeconomic Progress Post-1965: Forging Mobility or Survival?" in Hirschman, Charles, Philip Kasinitz, and Josh DeWind, eds., *The Handbook of International Migration: The American Experience*. Russell Sage: New York (1999): 242.

<sup>8</sup> Waldinger, Roger and Michael Lichter. *How the Other Half Works: Immigration and the Social Organization of Labor*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003.

<sup>9</sup> Xie, Yu and Margaret Gough, "Ethnic Enclaves and the Earnings of Immigrants." *Demography* 48 (2011):1293-1315.

<sup>10</sup> Putnam, Robert D. *E Pluribus Unum: Diversity and Community in the Twenty-first Century*, The 2006 Johan Skytte Prize Lecture. *Scandinavian Political Studies* 30.2 (2007).

These social relationships can take a variety of forms, including “bonding” relationships with those closest to a person and “bridging” relationships with members of other groups with whom one would not normally associate. The former relationships are most often used for everyday kinds of support, while the latter relationships can help individuals access information and resources that can help them get ahead in society. Social capital can at times be an inhibiting factor, as a limited network may stifle a person’s opportunities and lead them to a highly constrained set of possible outcomes. Immigrants who struggle to build many bridging relationships beyond fellow co-ethnics may fail to develop networks that can help them to improve their economic situation.<sup>11</sup> However, when expanded and cultivated, social capital may be one of the most effective means of moving people toward more successful outcomes and providing them with invaluable layers of support.

### **Diversity and Social Ties**

Scholarship on the interaction between diverse communities traditionally involved two basic theories. One, contact theory, suggests that contact with groups from different racial or ethnic backgrounds made cooperation more likely and decreased social discord. The other, conflict theory, posits the opposite approach, and predicts greater social strife when different groups encounter one another. Under scrutiny, neither of these basic methods holds up.

In their place, Robert Putnam proposes the more nuanced “constrict” theory.<sup>12</sup> Constrict theory harnesses a wide range of evidence to demonstrate that, in the short run, increased diversity within a community leads to less social interaction among its residents. Diversity seems to feed into a lack of growth of social capital, as people retreat from the public square and into private lives. Moreover, social networks within and outside of groups work in tandem. As people draw inward in reaction to changes in community demographics, they not only avoid contact with newcomers, but also withdraw from interaction with people in their own existing groups. Greater diversity, Putnam shows, is directly related to a less social, more isolated society.

These short-term concerns do not discount the long-term benefits of immigration, which are myriad. They do, however, create a paradox: the building block most necessary for successful immigrant integration can be depleted by their arrival. Policymakers and other immigrant allies must confront this conundrum and seek to transcend these barriers. If social trust in a community declines, the business climate declines with it, limiting the potential for growth.

### **Potential for Conflict**

The literature supporting the role of building social capital in immigrant communities collides with Putnam’s constrict theory in problematic ways. Immigrants rely on social capital to succeed, and bridging ties beyond narrow groups are among the most effective methods for integration. There is no single method to serve residents who might otherwise slip through the cracks, and the public sector, private sector, and nonprofits all play key roles in building a cohesive Minnesota that integrates its immigrants.

The potential for conflict is especially problematic in communities with little recent history of immigration and diversity. In the long run, previous experience with diverse populations leads to greater acceptance in future moments of contact.<sup>13</sup> In an era in which many cities have suddenly become destinations for immigrants, these

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<sup>11</sup> Hagan, Jacqueline M. “Social Networks, Gender, and Immigrant Incorporation: Resources and Constraints.” *American Psychological Review* 63.1 (1998).

<sup>12</sup> Putnam, 144.

<sup>13</sup> Emerson, Michael O., Rachel Tolbert Kimbro, and George Yancey, “Contact Theory Extended: The Effects of Prior Racial Contact on Current Social Ties.” *Social Science Quarterly* 83.3 (2002).

new shifts may lead to social conflict. Immigrant reception, once limited to central cities such as Minneapolis and St. Paul, now happens across much of Minnesota, to the point that a majority of public school students in small towns such as Worthington are English language learners.<sup>14</sup> These interactions have not always been smooth, and immigration has grown as a salient political issue. This new dynamic threatens to test the depth of Minnesota's legacy as a state that tends to welcome new arrivals and accept a large number of political refugees.

A 2016 report from the Migration Policy Institute identifies five major sources of native-born concern over immigration:

1. Flows that outpace local preparation for immigrants
2. Economic concerns that frame immigrants as competitors for scarce resources
3. Shifts in public values or community identity
4. Acts of terrorism, crime, or rules violations
5. Lost public trust when the pace of immigration appears faster than the government's ability or desire to integrate immigrants<sup>15</sup>

Native-born concern over immigration trends stems from genuine anxieties, and dismissals of these worries as inherently prejudiced will only inhibit a cooperative outcome. Such concerns are also far from inevitable, as different countries experience similar immigration trends in wildly different ways. Reviews of the European Values Study of opinions on immigrants across Europe found no correlation between a country's GDP per capita or unemployment rate with perceptions of Muslims, whose arrival inflames tensions in some countries.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, the rate of change tends to be more influential than the absolute number of immigrant arrivals. Fear of terrorism and crime does appear to have a more direct relationship, though it is worth noting that a number of recent terrorist attacks in the United States and Europe were carried out not by immigrants, but by second- or third-generation residents of a country. The struggles of successive generations give added weight to the importance of creating pathways to integration for new arrivals.

### Managing Immigration-Related Conflict

The experiences of other countries and regions offer some guidance for effective integration policy. Above all, successful integration tools inspire a sense of confidence that local politicians and activists are motivated by more than a simple desire to help immigrants, and that they have a long-term vision for their integration into a society that will benefit from their inclusion. Research from the Migration Policy Institute recommends deliberate, careful considerations that make it clear the government is in control, and holds to promises. A key factor driving British voters to opt out of the European Union was the failure of David Cameron's government to meet its explicit goals for migration reduction, when in fact the United Kingdom admitted yet more immigrants between 2013 and 2015.<sup>17</sup> Germany, on the other hand, has to date proven remarkably capable of integrating its immigrants, and support for anti-immigration parties has therefore been much lower than elsewhere in Europe, though it must maintain its successes following recent waves of refugee arrivals, or the consensus will likely crack.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Minnesota Department of Education Student Data, 2015.

<sup>15</sup> Papademetriou, Demetrios G. and Natalia Banulescu-Bogdan. *Understanding and Addressing Public Anxiety about Immigration*. Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute. July 2016.

<sup>16</sup> Papademetriou, Demetrios G. *Rethinking National Identity in the Age of Migration*. Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute. February 2012.

<sup>17</sup> Papademetriou and Banulescu-Bogdan, 17.

<sup>18</sup> Heckmann, Friedrich. *Understanding the Creation of Public Consensus: Migration and Integration in Germany, 2005 to 2015*. Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute. June 2016.

Likewise, Canada's proportion of foreign-born residents is larger than that of the United States, yet it maintains comparatively high public acceptance of immigration. Canada frames its inflows of immigrants as an economic benefit, and its ability to deliver expected, consistent immigration levels ensures confidence among native-born residents. Canada's ability to draw from a wide variety of countries also helps combat narratives that describe the country as being "taken over" by a particular ethnic or religious group.<sup>19</sup> The country maintains a stable flow in spite of economic fluctuation, and the major political parties all share a rough consensus about immigration policy.<sup>20</sup> Efforts to drive all discussion of immigrant flows out of standard political discourse, or failure of mainstream parties to adhere to promises, will likely only drive skeptical native-born residents to more radical alternatives.

Instead of targeting the most vitriolic anti-immigration activists, those who seek to build understanding between immigrants and native-born residents should direct their outreach toward the "anxious middle." This group, which forms a plurality of the population, harbors no real bias against immigrants, but also has some concerns about their economic impact, and may be uncertain about cultural changes or discovering that their new neighbors do not speak the same language.<sup>21</sup> That said, government responses to political debates over immigration cannot come off as a public relations operation with an obvious agenda, and attempts to cover up incidents of crime by foreign nationals can backfire. Evidence from several case studies builds a case for a middle ground on coverage of crime and terrorism by immigrants or children of immigrants, acknowledging its existence without harping on divisions. Local officials must not appear more concerned about political correctness than resolving issues.<sup>22</sup> Effective public policy at any level of government requires a careful balancing act and a finger on the pulse of public sentiment in both immigrant and native-born communities.

Putnam also offers a number of possible solutions to the challenges created by the constrict theory. He emphasizes English language training in ways that encourage collaboration between immigrant and native-born populations, and recommends aid from higher levels of government to the most affected communities. On a higher level, he points to the importance of tolerance and a wider idea of the American identity that can include many hyphenated labels that recognize both immigrants' roots and their new status in the U.S.<sup>23</sup> The threat of falling social trust calls for a wide range of solutions, from grand ideas of national identity to facilitating basic interactions between people of different groups.

### **Economic Integration of Immigrants: Broad Solutions**

National or state-level policy and conceptions of identity clearly influence immigrant integration, but much of the groundwork takes place on much more mundane levels. Routine economic activity suffers when societies turn inward and rely on networks that fail to extend to all corners. Shared economic activity also provides immigrants and native-born residents with a common goal in an environment that can operate at remove from some sources of inter-ethnic tension. The economic sphere is a key arena for immigrant integration, and provides a number of openings for building social trust and a prosperous economy.

The roles of local governments and non-state actors are especially important in a relatively decentralized country like the U.S. that has no official national integration policy outside of the refugee resettlement

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<sup>19</sup> Hiebert, Daniel. What's So Special About Canada? Understanding the Resilience of Immigration and Multiculturalism. Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, June 2016.

<sup>20</sup> Hiebert, 12.

<sup>21</sup> Katwala, Sunder and Will Somerville. *Engaging the Anxious Middle on Immigration Reform*. Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute. May 2016.

<sup>22</sup> Papademetriou and Banulescu-Bogdan, 11.

<sup>23</sup> Putnam, 164.



program.<sup>24</sup> With limited national interest in or funding for programs to bring immigrants into mainstream economic or political institutions, employers can play a crucial role by investing in their own workers' human capital. Intelligent investments by employers can produce considerable returns over time, as employees become stronger workers who remain loyal to their companies. Employers can also encourage unity not only by engaging immigrant workers, but also by reassuring native-born workers skeptical of immigrants that honest efforts are being made to build a common future.

Because the United States has no national immigrant integration program, the private sector is in a position to exert considerable influence over the ways in which immigrants are brought in to a new nation. Groups such as the Chamber of Commerce are well-aware of Minnesota's shrinking native-born workforce, and the economic opportunity that immigrants provide in order to maintain economic growth.<sup>25</sup> Compared to the general public, the business community is relatively well-attuned to the needs for change in workforce practices. Preparation for the new Minnesota economy, however, must go beyond simple recognition of demographic change. While lobbying at a statewide or national level can produce important results, it can also shape immigrant integration more directly through advocacy and education of its constituent members. The state can make its support for both immigrants and employers clear by providing funding and curriculum for integration programs.

The differences between native-born and immigrant careers are most extreme for the most and least educated immigrants. These differences are significant since a disproportionate number of immigrants fall into one of these two categories. Industries with large shares of employees with college degrees tend to have substantially lower shares of immigrant workers, and even well-educated immigrants are less commonly represented in these groups. Cultural and language barriers explain part of this gap, as does the sometimes limited transferability of degrees or licenses from foreign universities and institutions. For the least educated immigrants, a lack of the requisite training or language skills necessary to perform many low-skill jobs proves a significant barrier, even for some low-skill positions.<sup>26</sup> Immigrants with English proficiency are twice as likely to work in skilled positions as their counterparts who are not proficient.<sup>27</sup> Continued gaps and barriers are not destiny, however, and employers can take many different steps to position their immigrant workers for economic success.

### Employer Steps

Employers, no matter their size or sector, play an essential role in building immigrants' careers. Organizations with diverse workforces reduce perceptions of barriers within a field, which reassures future employees of all backgrounds and allows organizations to hire the best candidates for positions. Such a workplace culture requires active engagement from management, and requires buy-in from the entire organization, not just its leaders who set the agenda.

A report from The Urban Institute provides a thorough list of methods employers can use to promote immigrant integration:

- Workplace language programs
- Naturalization assistance
- Occupational training that workers understand
- Assessment of foreign-acquired skills
- Equip human resources and legal staff with knowledge of immigration law

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<sup>24</sup> Enchautegui, Maria E. *Engaging Employers in Immigrant Integration*. Los Angeles: The Urban Institute, August 2015.

<sup>25</sup> "Minnesota's Immigrants: A Resource for the Economy." Minnesota Chamber of Commerce, January 2016.

<sup>26</sup> Card, 214.

<sup>27</sup> Batalova, Jeanne and Michael Fix. *Uneven Progress: The Employment Pathways of Skilled Immigrants in the United States*. Washington DC: Migration Policy Institute (2008): p. 21.

- Diversity management
- Immigrant-conscious employee-assistance programs
- Immigrant sponsorship for status adjustment
- A seat at the bargaining table
- High Performance Work Practices (HPWPs) with an immigrant lens
- Cultivation of relationships with immigrant organizations<sup>28</sup>

Broader theories about best practices for employee retention and development, most notably High Performance Work Practices (HPWPs), are relevant to immigrant integration efforts. HPWPs aim to make management more responsive to workforce needs by promoting open sharing of information with employees, frequent training, rewards for strong performance, and employee engagement.<sup>29</sup> Despite a strong track record, such workplace practices are rarely targeted directly at immigrants. While focusing on immigrants alone may inflame native-born employees who believe they are being excluded, a broad program with particular components for immigrants could still provide the necessary specialized training. The sources and extent of HPWPs effectiveness remain understudied, leading to the predictable but worthwhile point that strong employer support for workers improves their effectiveness.

HPWPs can also help to create pathways for immigrants to build longer-term careers. Employee training should go hand-in-hand with wage increases, as new skills render workers more productive and potentially attractive to other employers. A steadily rising pay grade demonstrates an employer's sense of investment in a worker, leading the worker in turn to develop a sense of loyalty toward the employer's efforts to cultivate a lasting relationship.<sup>30</sup>

Language training by an employer has a number of benefits for all parties. While it is a myth that a lack of English-language requirements will prevent immigrants from ever learning the language—historically, practically all immigrants to the U.S. have attained English fluency within several generations—English assistance can help both the employer and the immigrant in the short run. Language skills developed with an employer are likely to be relevant to the work, assuring that employees are fluent in topical subjects and avoiding misunderstandings. Work-based language training simplifies employees' lives, as lessons on the worksite are easy to attend and do not disrupt life beyond work.<sup>31</sup> Employers with multiple sites, such as a Minnesota meat-packing plant or agricultural company, might benefit from technology that allows the employer to deliver lessons at scale. Nearly everyone surveyed for the case studies accompanying this report argued that language barriers were one of the greatest, if not the greatest, barrier to integration.

Any industry that interacts directly with local customers must also adapt to increases in the immigrant population within an area. Bilingual employees are an asset to businesses and organizations that either currently work with immigrant populations or may do so in the future, and all employees with client or customer contact may need to have passable levels of cultural awareness. Immigrant employees help to build a workforce reflective of the surrounding community, and can save the employer training time and money when they are already familiar with the language and customs of new arrivals, and can even suggest product or marketing innovations.

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<sup>28</sup> Enchautegui, 24-28.

<sup>29</sup> Enchautegui, 13.

<sup>30</sup> Enchautegui, 15.

<sup>31</sup> Burt, M., & Mathews-Aydinli, J. (2007). *Workplace instruction and workforce preparation for adult immigrants*. Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics.



Naturalization assistance may be the least controversial program that an employer can offer. Citizenship provides immigrants with access to government services and political participation, while also providing the employer with employees with a greater stake in a new home. Citizenship also opens up some occupations that would otherwise be unavailable, such as those requiring security clearances.<sup>32</sup> Immigrants must also go through American civics training that even immigration critics support wholeheartedly.

Studies within Minnesota support the broader literature on immigrant integration. A white paper by the Greater St. Cloud Development Corporation (GSDC) identifies practices for engaging with diverse populations that builds on interviews with job-seekers, employers, and local employment agencies. Employment agencies can make a concerted effort to serve immigrants through use of interpreters, bilingual employees, applications in multiple languages, and awareness of cultural differences that job-seekers may encounter. They can also encourage immigrants to adapt to American workplace norms while ensuring that native-born employers understand cultural particularities, such as prayer schedules, of immigrant employees. Soft skills, all parties agreed, were frequently a barrier that separated candidates from jobs, even when they appeared well-qualified on paper.

In all cases, clear, up-front communication proves highly effective in heading off potential conflict. The importance of direct communication underscores the need to overcome language barriers to avoid losing any important information in translation. If an employer encounters a language barrier, hiring bilingual employees (to be paid at a premium for any translation services in addition to their normal job functions) can provide an essential bridge. Employers must also recognize that a one-size-fits-all approach for immigrants will not work, even for immigrants from the same country of origin. As with any employee, direct investment and engagement by the employer or management will lead to greater trust, senses of recognition and value, and opportunities for a long-term, mutually supportive relationship.<sup>33</sup> Above all, literature on employer-driven integration emphasizes “unity of purpose” within organizations, which ensures that all levels of the group are on the same page and offer a coherent pathway for immigrants within it.<sup>34</sup>

### Highly Skilled Immigrants

Immigrants with extensive experience or higher degrees are among the most valuable targets for integration into an economy. Canada’s experience with an immigration policy that focuses explicitly on well-educated immigrants has a track record of relative popularity with the native-born population, and fills important gaps in the economy.<sup>35</sup> Minnesota’s immigrant population, which has a larger percentage of workers with a college degree than the native-born population,<sup>36</sup> presents ample opportunities for greater integration.

Highly skilled immigrants also provide some of the most obvious benefits to the U.S. economy, with little in the way of costs. Jobs in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) enjoy full employment in the United States, and industry leaders testify to employee shortages. STEM fields have a high proportion of foreign-born workers, and these areas of study attract many foreign-born college students, but many find themselves unable to stay in the U.S. after graduation. STEM immigrants also have no negative effect on wages

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<sup>32</sup> Enchautegui, 25.

<sup>33</sup> “Workforce Solutions: Applied Perspectives for Integrating Diverse Populations in the Workforce.” Greater St. Cloud Development Corporation, August 2015.

<sup>34</sup> Enchautegui, 29.

<sup>35</sup> Hiebert, 8.

<sup>36</sup> “A New Age of Immigrants: Making Immigration Work for Minnesota.” The Minneapolis Foundation, Minneapolis, 2010, 3.

of native-born workers.<sup>37</sup> Highly skilled immigrants usually offer the greatest benefit at the lowest cost to the host nation.

Possession of a degree or experience gained in a different country, however, may not translate smoothly into the U.S. economy. Immigrants may lack the necessary credentials to work certain jobs despite possessing the technical skills that make these jobs attainable. Even in countries that give heavy weight to skilled workers in their immigration systems, new arrivals almost always take pay cuts and less desirable positions than they would have had in their countries of origin.<sup>38</sup> While most highly skilled immigrants ultimately succeed economically, only over time do they come to receive higher pay and jobs that match their skills.

The U.S.'s decentralized system for immigrant integration proves a barrier to widespread action on fixing issues with credentials. Other countries' policies, such as the Bologna Process designed to standardize credentialing requirements across the European Union, offer one possible model for national-level legislation, and the U.S. can make significant strides by simplifying regulations.<sup>39</sup> In the meantime, however, state and local governments and agencies that serve immigrants must simply aim to be as transparent and supportive as possible. Basic information presentation offers one of the most straightforward methods of service to immigrants, and one-stop shops for information on pathways to credential attainment and possible resources. Policy solutions should also avoid strict litmus tests that categorically accept or reject the validity of foreign credentials, and offer paths to complete requirements if immigrant workers fall just short of U.S. standards.<sup>40</sup>

There are many barriers to building on and improving immigrants' skills, and current incentives frequently leave actors unwilling to change the status quo. Immigrants often lack the money or time to attain necessary training, politicians have little interest in a new constituency that typically wields little power, and employers are unsure about investments in an often transient class of workers.<sup>41</sup> The support network for refugees, while robust and effective at rapidly securing employment opportunities, often prioritizes short-term employment over long-term career development, and does not take the time to carefully match jobs with skills or credentials. Inability to identify a longer-term path for refugees can prove both limiting and costly, as they are locked into low-income paths that lead them to stay on government supports for decades.<sup>42</sup> Immigrant integration efforts are often plagued by a lack of political will and short-term thinking, which can cause skilled immigrants to slip through the cracks and end up in careers that fail to make use of their talents.

Integration efforts for highly skilled immigrants must understand the full spectrum of jobs that immigrants do. Literature often focuses on high-skill and low-skill workers, but there is a broad middle range of job opportunities, and growth in immigrant employment, instead of being concentrated on the ends, largely mirrors the native-born population.<sup>43</sup> Immigrant employment still lags somewhat in some of the fastest-growing mid-skill

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<sup>37</sup> "Help Wanted: The Role of Foreign Workers in the Innovation Economy." The Information Technology Industry Council, Partnership for a New American Economy, and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. n.d.

<sup>38</sup> Batalova, Jeanne and Michael Fix. "Uneven Progress: The Employment Pathways of Skilled Immigrants in the United States." Washington DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2008.

<sup>39</sup> Batalova and Fix, 34.

<sup>40</sup> Sumption, Madeline. Tackling Brain Waste: Strategies to Improve the Recognition of Immigrants' Foreign Qualifications. Washington DC: Migration Policy Institute, July 2013, p. 14.

<sup>41</sup> Benton, Meghan. Maximizing Potential: How Countries Can Address Skills Deficits within the Immigrant Workforce. Migration Policy Institute, 2013, p. 1.

<sup>42</sup> Capps, Randy and Kathleen Newland with Suzan Fratzke, Susanna Groves, Gregory Auclair, Michael Fix, and Margie McHugh. *The Integration Outcomes of U.S. Refugees: Successes and Challenges*. Washington DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2015, p. 6.

<sup>43</sup> Capps, Randy, Michael Fix, and Serena Yi-Ying Lin. *Still an Hourglass? Immigrant Workers in Middle-Skilled Jobs*. Washington DC: Migration Policy Institute, September 2010, p. 1.

level jobs, such as nursing and software engineering. Moreover, immigrants working middle-skill jobs tend to have higher levels of educational attainment than their native-born counterparts, again suggesting their skills are not fully utilized.<sup>44</sup> These skill- and income-based steps are often not fixed, and provide opportunities to move up the ladder and increase earnings. Efforts to incorporate immigrants must move beyond creating immediate opportunities, and aim to create pathways that can lead to steadily improving outcomes.

## CONCLUSION

State and local governments, employers, and nonprofits can take clear steps to strengthen immigrants' standing in the Minnesota economy and help them toward stable, productive futures. High-skilled workers are obvious targets for integration through programs that ensure the credentials they attained abroad are put to the best possible use in the United States, and that they can complete any schooling or training necessary to meet U.S. standards. Employers can help immigrant employees grow by setting up career trajectories instead of locking them into a single position. Policymakers can loosen regulatory barriers and facilitate English language training, which attacks one of the most significant barriers for otherwise qualified workers.

Solutions for immigrant economic integration also cannot operate in a vacuum. Employers and economic development groups stand to benefit from embracing a broader agenda that attacks the potential for conflict outlined earlier in this article. Failure to ease conflicts and welcome immigrants into Minnesota communities will only worsen the context for immigrant reception, which, in turn, harms immigrants' abilities to attain successful outcomes. Negative perceptions of incoming immigrants can create a self-fulfilling prophecy, and successful integration requires a complete approach that extends into immigrants' lives beyond the hours they spend at work. With a holistic strategy, all stakeholders in immigrants' futures in Minnesota can ensure the economy works for its newest residents while also meeting the state's economic needs.

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<sup>44</sup> Capps, Fix, and Lin, 3.