



IDEAS THAT INNOVATE

# State & Local Policies

## Integrating Highly-Skilled Immigrants and Refugees





# Integrating Highly-Skilled Immigrants and Refugees

## Policy

Providing State resources to support efforts that recognize and utilize the talent of the highly-skilled immigrants who are permanently authorized to work in the United States, but who are underemployed or unemployed.

## Where it's working

- State of Michigan
- Similar elements of highly-skilled immigrant integration in California, Illinois, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, and Pennsylvania

## Players

- State of Michigan Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs (LARA)
- Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC)
- Upwardly Global
- Michigan employers

## What does it mean?

Working with Global Detroit, the Michigan Office for New Americans (MONA), and other state and regional economic development partners, the State of Michigan's Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs (LARA) has worked to assist Upwardly Global to develop licensing and credentialing tools and to open an office to assist highly-skilled immigrants and refugees in Michigan.

Upwardly Global (UpGlo) is a national non-profit that works with highly-skilled immigrant job seekers who are permanently work authorized but who are either unemployed or underemployed, due to their inability to resume their professional careers in the U.S. UpGlo provides training and acculturation on the professional job search process, supporting job seekers with soft job skills in the areas of resume development, developing a professional U.S. network, and interview skills; and actively connecting them with employers in state and national networks. UpGlo's mission is to eliminate employment barriers for highly-skilled immigrants and works toward a vision where highly-skilled immigrants are seamlessly integrated into the professional workforce and the fabric of American life and for the value they add to both. Click on this link to learn more about UpGlo: [www.upwardlyglobal.org](http://www.upwardlyglobal.org) ↗.

The State of Michigan, through LARA and the MEDC raised resources to help cover the costs of an UpGlo staff person for two years to be located in Detroit and to launch the Global Engineers in Residence (GEIR) Program. GEIR expands on the traditional paid internship model to connect foreign educated, trained and experienced engineers with interested employers in a collaborative, low-risk workplace immersion program. Additionally, Michigan State University has generously donated office space for the UpGlo office in Detroit.

Additionally, UpGlo has created a template for Michigan's professional licensing processes. UpGlo licensing guides are written to make the statutes and regulations more easily

understood to help job seekers understand the steps required to secure a state professional license. With funding from the New Economy Initiative of Southeast Michigan and cooperation from LARA, UpGlo published ten professional licensing guides for skilled immigrants onto the UpGlo and LARA websites, making Michigan the fourth state (after California, Illinois, and New York) for which such UpGlo guides exist. (New Hampshire guides have since been added to the UpGlo site).

LARA has since expanded the on-line resource and currently has created guides for 20 occupations, with the plan to add five new guides every six months. The Guides all provide a step-by-step overview of how to complete the licensing process in the State of Michigan for those who received professional education, training, or experience outside the U.S. LARA partners with MONA in determining the next set of professions for which guides will be written based upon input from a wide variety of ethnic chambers and ethnic business organizations. Additionally, LARA has implemented a centralized process for providing assistance for professional licensing questions.

## Why does it matter?

There are more than 1.8 million immigrants in the U.S. who are college-educated but are unemployed or significantly underemployed.<sup>1</sup> Immigrants often possess important labor skills for the regional economy, but can be underemployed because of professional licensing issues, cultural differences in the job search process, or language barriers. We see the impact of these barriers in taxi drivers and janitors who, in their home country, were, for example, engineers, doctors, or veterinarians.

The benefits of tapping into this pool of highly-skilled immigrants are well documented. Independent research of more than 500 highly-skilled immigrant clients served by UpGlo suggests that the full employment of these workers in their professional capacity created nearly 1.4 additional jobs for U.S. workers.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, the increase in wages by fully-employing these highly-skilled immigrant professionals (which also creates job openings

as they leave their current positions as nannies, cab drivers, wait staff, etc.) itself has a positive impact on local economies. If just five percent of these under-employed immigrant professionals nationwide could be placed into professional-level jobs paying \$40,000 per year, they would add approximately \$6 billion in tax revenues alone over five years.<sup>3</sup> Increased professional integration can spur other positive outcomes, including homeownership, civic participation and citizenship.

In many regions, including Michigan, there is a STEM talent shortage. A recent Detroit-area job fair included 50 companies with approximately 3,000 open engineering jobs. Unfortunately, only 276 engineers applied for these positions.<sup>4</sup> More than two-thirds of Michigan's UpGlo clients have degrees in the STEM fields. Connecting talented, highly-skilled immigrants with employers can be a critical element of a regional economic growth strategy and plan, generating opportunity not only for an immigrant and his/her family, but to employers and the local community as well.

The State of Michigan's efforts to support UpGlo reflect one of the strongest public commitments to not only collaborate in the technical information needed to develop the licensing guides, but in providing public resources to create a local UpGlo office and to focus on connecting immigrant talent to a need in the labor market that is not being met—in this case, engineering talent.

## Resources for Action

### **Michigan Department of Licensing & Regulatory Affairs**

[http://www.michigan.gov/lara/0,4601,7-154-10573\\_68301---,00.html](http://www.michigan.gov/lara/0,4601,7-154-10573_68301---,00.html) ↗

### **Michigan Office for New Americans**

[www.michigan.gov/ona](http://www.michigan.gov/ona) ↗

### **Upwardly Global**

[www.upwardlyglobal.org](http://www.upwardlyglobal.org) ↗

### **Global Detroit**

<http://www.globaldetroit.com/partner-initiatives/upwardly-global/> ↗

### **IMPRINT**

<http://www.imprintproject.org/about-imprint/immigrant-professional-integration> ↗

## Additional Reading

Qngong Ji and Jeanne Batalove, "College Educated Immigrants in the United States," Migration Policy Institute, December 27, 2012.

"A Look at Skilled Immigrant Workers in the U.S.: Tapping into Global Talent Already Here Results in Clear Economic Benefit for Immigrants and for Nation," Upwardly Global, April 2013.

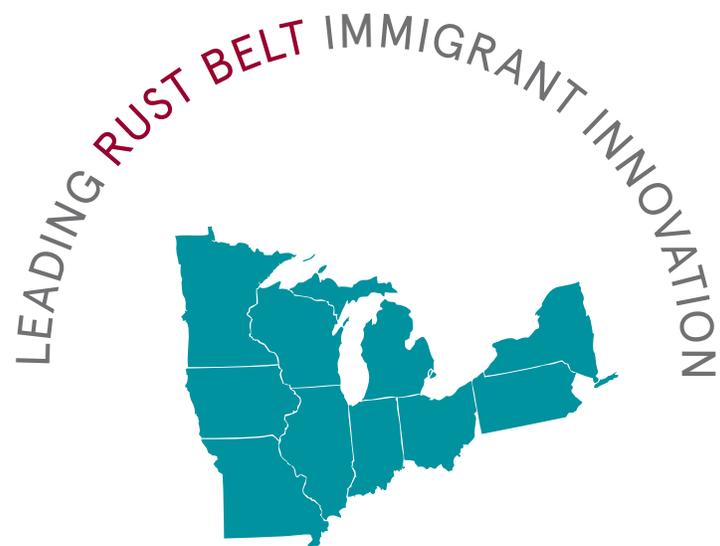
## Contacts

Karen Phillippi  
Deputy Director  
Michigan Office for New Americans  
State of Michigan  
phillippik@michigan.gov

Annie Fenton  
Senior Associate, Employment Services  
Upwardly Global  
annief@upwardlyglobal.org

### ENDNOTES

1. Qngong Ji and Jeanne Batalove, "College Educated Immigrants in the United States," Migration Policy Institute, December 27, 2012.
2. "A Look at Skilled Immigrant Workers in the U.S.: Tapping into Global Talent Already Here Results in Clear Economic Benefit for Immigrants and for Nation," Upwardly Global, April 2013.
3. IMPRINT website at <http://www.imprintproject.org/about-imprint/the-challenge> ↗
4. Tom Walsh, "Michigan Can't Afford to Lose Its Lead in Engineering Talent," Detroit Free Press, December 1, 2013.



Global Network

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[WelcomingEconomiesNetwork@gmail.com](mailto:WelcomingEconomiesNetwork@gmail.com)

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