

Bill Summary: **Bridging the Gap for New Americans Act**

Background

The bipartisan Bridging the Gap for New Americans Act, an updated version of *the [Improving Opportunities for New Americans Act](#)*, would direct the Secretary of Labor to conduct a study examining the barriers to employment opportunities for immigrants and refugees in the United States who have international degrees or credentials. The Bridging the Gap for New Americans Act builds off the framework of the previous bill, but provides coverage for additional individuals described in the Afghan Allies Protection Act of 2009. This was added in light of the Afghan evacuation of 2021, and was done to include it as an amendment to the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), or in other legislation being passed to assist the Afghan evacuees.

Bill History

On the House side, Rep. John Katko (R-New York) introduced the Bridging the Gap for New Americans Act ([H.R. 6715](#)) in February 2022 with original cosponsors Reps. Jason Crow (D-Colorado), Brian Fitzpatrick (R-Pennsylvania), and Josh Gottheimer (D-New Jersey). Rep. Katko introduced a previous version of the legislation as the Improving Opportunities for New Americans Act in [2020](#) and [2021](#).

On the Senate side, on November 3, 2021, Sen. Amy Klobuchar (D-Minnesota) and original cosponsors Sens. John Cornyn (R-Texas), Chris Coons (D-Delaware) and Lisa Murkowski (R-Alaska) introduced the Senate version of the bill, Bridging the Gap for New Americans Act ([S. 3157](#)).

The Bridging the Gap for New Americans Act highlights the enormous potential for immigrants and refugees to strengthen the American workforce and bolster the economy. Having immigrants and refugees working at their full potential together with American-born workers would be especially helpful as the nation faces the coronavirus pandemic and the ensuing economic recovery. According to [research](#), over 2 million college-educated immigrants in the United States are unemployed or underemployed in jobs that fail to draw on their education and expertise.

Bill Provisions

- **Require a study on factors affecting employment opportunities for immigrants and refugees with professional credentials obtained abroad.** The bill directs the Department of Labor to conduct a comparison of employment held before immigrating and after, the credentials and academic degrees obtained before coming to the U.S., an analysis of any barriers that prevent the individuals from using their occupation experiences, and the availability of public and private resources to help immigrants and refugees attain employment commensurate with their credentials and experience.

- **Encourage collaboration across government agencies and non-profits.** The bill instructs the Secretary of Labor to coordinate with a wide range of government agencies, such as the Departments of State, Homeland Security, Education, and Health and Human Services, and relevant non-profit organizations and State agencies to compile existing data and resources on the issues of immigrant employment.
- **Develop policy recommendations for future congressional action.** The bill directs the Department of Labor to create policy recommendations designed to enable new Americans to obtain skill-appropriate employment, thereby reducing the human and economic toll of brain waste.
- **This bill differs from the original *Improving Opportunities for New Americans Act* in several ways.** It is formatted differently and does not include a congressional finding section, it expands the reporting deadline from one year to 18 months, and adds under the “applicable immigrants and refugees” section “individuals described in section 602(b)(2) of the [Afghan Allies Protection Act of 2009](#)”. Which is certain Afghans with special immigrant status.

Conclusion

The underutilization of immigrant’s and refugee’s professional skills is a long-standing issue that comes at a cost to all in unrealized wages, unrealized tax revenue, loss of talent, and loss of essential services. In the midst of a pandemic, an Afghan evacuation, and economic challenges, the United States must draw on the skills, expertise, and eagerness of immigrants and refugees already working shoulder-to-shoulder with Americans to contribute to this recovery effort and to future American growth and success. The Bridging the Gap for New Americans Act would provide a much-needed analysis of the present situation and issue recommendations for a brighter future that heightens the ability of immigrants and refugees to contribute and succeed at their full potential, and to work together with native-born Americans to get through the pandemic and help the economy fully recover.