



Why Businesses Should Support Immigration Reform

On March 1, 2022, during the State of the Union address, President Biden [highlighted](#) that providing a pathway to citizenship for Dreamers, farmworkers, essential workers, and immigrants with temporary protected status (TPS) was “not only the right thing to do – it’s the economically smart thing to do.” President Biden’s insight was correct: the American economy stands to benefit from reforming the immigration system. Similarly, by extension, American businesses are uniquely invested in these needed reforms, such as [addressing](#) the status of Dreamers, the agricultural workforce, and others, as well as border security.

1. Immigrant Workers Can Help to Tackle America’s Labor Shortage

Businesses need workers and, in many cases, are struggling to find them. The United States is facing an acute [labor shortage](#). While many factors have caused the problem, reductions in net international migration (NIM) levels – representing the lowest level in decades – has accelerated the workforce deficit. This has had cascading effects across the economy, leading to a surge in inflation, lost opportunities for companies, and strains in supply chains across economic sectors. Immigration reforms that would increase legal immigration would represent a partial, but helpful solution to labor shortages.

2. Many Industries Rely on Immigrant Workers

Immigrant workers are an essential part of the U.S. workforce, contributing across sectors and playing a noteworthy role in the U.S.’s economic health. The following industries represent just a handful of those who would benefit from legislative reforms to our immigration system:

A. *Agricultural and Food Sectors*

America’s [agricultural and food industries](#) rely on migrant labor. Immigrants make up as much as 73% of farmworkers in the country. Additionally, approximately 3.8 million immigrants work in the U.S. food sector, representing more than one in five food workers. Immigrant farmworkers are pillars of the country’s food supply chain and agricultural economic prosperity. They not only allow the United States to maintain a self-sufficient food supply, assuring a level of food security, but they also help our nation to be the largest exporter of food in the world. However, farmers and agricultural processors have limited access to legal workers, and most undocumented farmworkers have no pathway to permanent status. Existing programs like the H-2A agricultural guest worker program are cumbersome, exclude key industries like dairy products, and are [in need of reform](#).

B. *Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM)*

One of America’s greatest strengths has been its ability to attract global talent to strengthen its technological and entrepreneurial competitiveness. Immigrants represent over a quarter of [STEM workers](#) in the United States. In addition, first- and second-generation immigrants have established 46% of the high-tech companies on the Fortune 500 list. Yet, even with these significant contributions, there still is a major labor shortage in the STEM workers who help power these industries. Recent estimates show that STEM job openings in the country

outnumber qualified workers by 3 million. This gap is projected to widen to 6 million by 2030. Businesses that rely on STEM workers need Congress to pass reforms to attract and retain foreign STEM talent, allowing for continued economic growth and technological advancement for the economy as a whole.

C. Healthcare Industry

Foreign-born workers make up an [important](#) part of America's healthcare workforce. They play a key role in the [home healthcare](#) industry, making up as much as 25% of personal care aides and 38% of home health aides, with demand for workers growing in coming years as the population ages. Foreign-born workers also represent as many as 28% of all highly-skilled healthcare professionals — like physicians and surgeons. Worryingly, [according](#) to the Association of American Medical Colleges, demand for physicians will continue to grow faster than supply in the coming years, leading to a projected total shortage of between 54,100 and 139,000 physicians by 2033. Accordingly, it is critical to attract and retain immigrant healthcare workers. Congress can act to modernize existing visa programs and provide additional support for training and education to build out the available workforce in these sectors. It can also adopt legislation to allow essential immigrant workers—including health care workers—to earn permanent resident status and the possibility of citizenship.

3. Immigrant Workers Build a Stronger Economy

In addition to directly benefiting from a stronger, larger immigrant workforce, U.S. businesses stand to benefit from increased economic growth and activity provided by immigrant workers. [Immigrant workers](#) make up 17.4 percent of the labor force in the United States. They pay taxes, buy local products, and run 28% of all “Main Street” businesses that supply necessities — such as gas stations, grocery stores, laundromats, and restaurants. [Immigrant households](#) earn around \$1.5 trillion in total income, wielding significant spending power that powers local economies. They also pay more than \$220 billion in federal taxes and approximately \$105 billion in state taxes.

Dreamers are a noteworthy subset of immigrant workers and are employed in a wide range of occupations, including thousands who are self-employed. [Dreamers](#) who work lawfully under Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), play a critical role in the American economy. Through DACA, Dreamers can obtain work authorization, pay their fair share of taxes, and build businesses that hire American workers. DACA recipients make substantial contributions in taxes and economic activity and fill vital roles in the U.S. workforce. Over the next ten years, it is estimated that DACA recipients will contribute an estimated \$433.4 billion to the GDP, including \$60 billion in fiscal impact and \$12.3 billion in taxes to Social Security and Medicare. However, due to ongoing litigation, Dreamers continue to face uncertainty and will continue to do so [until Congress passes permanent protections for them](#). This uncertainty impacts not only Dreamers themselves but their families and communities, as well as the businesses that employ them.

4. Immigrants Help to Tackle America's Demographic Deficit

Reforming the immigration system also will help address the challenges that an [aging](#) population poses. With baby boomers reaching retirement age, fertility rates falling, and net immigration levels not keeping pace, U.S. businesses will struggle to find workers amid a working-age population that is shrinking in relative terms. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, nearly one in every four Americans is projected to be 65 years or older by 2060. At that point,

94.7 million people over age 65 will be living in the country — close to twice the number today. At the same time, the overall population is growing at a slower rate than it has in almost a century, leaving unfilled openings in crucial industries. Legislative reforms to the immigration system are essential to counter these trends and support the long-term health and prosperity of American businesses and the U.S. economy more broadly.

Conclusion

Reforming the U.S. immigration system is an economic imperative. Businesses benefit from needed immigration reforms to provide [permanent solutions](#) for Dreamers, the agricultural workforce, and other essential workers. These reforms can help address ongoing labor shortages, fill job openings in key sectors dependent on immigrant labor, strengthen the U.S. economy, and address long-term demographic shortfalls.