

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-Chief:

You are listening to Work in Progress. I'm Ramona Schindelheim, editor-in-chief of WorkingNation. Work in Progress explores the rapidly changing workplace through conversations with innovators, educators and decision makers, people with solutions to today's workforce challenges.

The immigrant workforce in the US is diverse, touching every industry and every community. Immigrants and foreign-born workers contribute significantly to the US economy generating trillions in economic activity and tax revenue. Economists say reducing immigration could have a major negative impact on GDP growth. It's also important to increase access to education, workforce training, and capital for the population to increase their economic contribution. Last month at South By Southwest EDU, I was joined on stage by Katie Brown, Jina Krause-Vilmar, and Arturo Cázares to discuss this important topic. I started by sharing some statistics about the immigrant workforce.

There are 47.8 million immigrants in our country. That's about 14% of the population. One in five workers in our country is an immigrant. They contribute economically. The numbers are \$1.7 trillion of activity in the economy and over 579 billion in taxes that are paid, but the contribution is so much more than that as we know. So we want to talk about how we make sure that the impact is continuing to be strong in this country, and also how do we help improve the quality of jobs for immigrants so they can contribute even more. Joining me are Katie, Jina, and Arturo, and I'm going to ask them each to introduce themselves and tell you a little bit about the work that they do. So why don't we start Katie?

Katie Brown, EnGen founder and chief education officer:

Thanks, Ramona. I'm Katie Brown. I'm the founder and chief education officer of an organization called EnGen. We are a public benefit corporation and our mission is to help the multilingual workforce get access to the English skills they need for jobs with the potential for economic mobility. So there are, as we've said, one in five workers in the United States is foreign born. One in 10 is an English learner. As a country, we meet the needs of 4% of our adult English learners. There's almost no place for adult English learners to get access to the skills that will help them take advantage of the skills and credentials they have from their home countries or get access to all of the great workforce up-skilling that's going on across the country. And so that's what EnGen does. We work with companies that up-skill their frontline workers, things like Amazon's Career Choice Program, Walmart's Live Better U Program, and then programs that are sponsored by state government workforce initiatives. The state of Colorado, for example, has an up-skilling program for all new Coloradans trying to help everybody get access to English as a workforce skill.

Jina Krause-Vilmar, Upwardly Global CEO:

Hi, I'm Jina. I'm the CEO of Upwardly Global. We are a national organization that works with work-authorized immigrants, refugees, and asylees who are professionals in their home country but are underemployed here. So that is your rideshare driver, the security guard, the hotdog stand vendor who also happens to be a civil engineer from Venezuela or a surgeon from Bosnia, and we help them get back into their careers. We work both for employers to understand and value how to value this talent. We work with the credentialing system to understand how do we recognize the credentials of these individuals in the United States, and then we work with these individuals themselves in order to understand how to navigate back to their careers. I would say close to 50% of immigrants coming into the United States today have a bachelor's degree or higher. We have a very mixed skill flow of immigrants coming into the country, yet one in four of these individuals is un or underemployed.

Arturo Cázares, Latino Business Action Network CEO:

Hi everyone. My name is Arturo Cázares. I'm the CEO of Latino Business Action Network. We're a nonprofit. We are based in Silicon Valley, but we have a national scope. We partner with Stanford University and our mission is to grow the US economy by empowering Latino entrepreneurship. We do research on the impact that Latino business owners are having on the country as well as we have a couple of programs that we created at Stanford for Latino and Latina business owners to help them scale their companies to help them grow. And then we do a lot of ecosystem activities around the country to build a better ecosystem around entrepreneurship for Latinos and everyone else. Just some quick stats from some of our research. There's already more than 5 million Latino business owners in the US. Over half of them are foreign-born. They are generating almost a trillion dollars of revenue and they're creating jobs at twice the rate as other companies in this country. So that's already happening today, let alone the future growth as this population continues to ascend and grow within the US.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-Chief:

I would like to start our conversation with the idea that, and you've all brought it up in different ways, that the immigrant workforce is not monolith. We have entrepreneurs, we have people with bachelor's degrees who can't get the credentials that they need, and then we have lower-wage workers in our country who need some maybe additional training. So Katie, let's talk about lower-wage workers because I think a lot of those are the ones that maybe take advantage of your services.

Katie Brown, EnGen founder and chief education officer:

When you think about the frontline workforce, I mean Jina's right, there are 2 million immigrants in the US who are unemployed or underemployed. So they are working low-wage jobs but often have skills and credentials that far surpass the jobs that they have, so that's like one population that we need to take care of in a specific way. And their needs are very different from people who come here who have interrupted formal education, who lack literacy skills in their first language, who are coming from a very traumatic departure from either their home country or country they were displaced to. And so they have completely different needs. So when you think about a workforce system that's going to help these workers, you need to think about them as workers first and an immigrant second because they're just going to have different needs. Some of them are going to need rapid English skills.

Taking English as the example, if you think about teaching English to someone who's a doctor from their home country, you should teach them English in a completely different way from someone who doesn't have literacy skills in their first language, which is going to require something different. And what often happens is they get lumped into a big group, and we see example by example across the country that if you focus instead on what this population of learners and workers actually needs, then you can serve them much more efficiently and help them much more rapidly get access to the tools they need to be successful and be included in the economy in a way that's better for everyone.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-Chief:

The English part of it is important, and the way I think economic mobility, you need to be able to talk in a business setting with English. So I just would like to add that again a little bit more about that.

Katie Brown, EnGen founder and chief education officer:

So the English piece is interesting. In the US, we're horrible at language learning. Most people born here will tell you they took five years of Spanish, [foreign language 00:07:39]. And this is a massive problem because it means that most people born in the United States think of language as this insurmountable obstacle, and it does a huge disservice to immigrants who come here who have no choice. The only way

to access economic mobility and family sustaining wages and inclusion in the United States is to be able to speak in English because that's how you can have job interviews and talk to your boss. It doesn't matter that you are a brain surgeon. If you can't speak English, you're never going to get a better job. And so English has to be part of any plan or pathway to helping immigrants get access to economic mobility.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-Chief:

And Jina, when you talk about the people who have come into the country with that bachelor's degree, they already have that part of the education. Getting the credentials to be able to practice here is a big issue, right?

Jina Krause-Vilmar, Upwardly Global CEO:

Sometimes. So the reality is there are some jobs and occupations that you need to be credentialed in or they are highly regulated by the government. For example, doctors, nurses, but then there are jobs and occupations that are not like IT, technology, business, logistics and operations. And so those jobs are more accessible to people who come to the United States. I think the challenge really is part of it is credentialing, but we also have a systems problem. Our systems are failing individuals to be able to effectively integrate and to be included into the US economy. Part of that is because we fail to recognize the urgency of this work. Right now we are an aging population. We have 10,000 baby boomers retiring a day. In the next 15 years, we will have doubled the number of people who are 85 years and older. The number of individuals who are 65 years and older will increase by 30%.

We are not having as many children as we've had before. And so what we find is, which is not unique to the story of America, this is just the newest chapter, which is that immigrants are fueling our economy. And so what does that actually look like? Under the last administration, when we had individuals who were coming into the United States as immigrants legal work authorized, they would have had a \$7 trillion contribution to spending and a 1 trillion in additional taxes over a 10-year period. Now with the level of immigration decreasing as much as it has so far, Goldman Sachs recently wrote a report a couple of weeks ago that said gross domestic product, our growth as an economy, has been deducted by 0.3 to 0.4% just with recent immigration changes. So, we have to understand that immigrants are fueling the economy and they will continue to fuel the economy, and this is not a new story, this is a very old story. So where are we sitting now?

Now we're sitting with systems that are not set up to help people find that quality job. Most of our workforce systems or even our community college systems are really set up to help somebody find that first entry level first job, and so we're not really having people who are able to navigate. The first question you ask when you get here is, "What jobs do I qualify for? Am I competitive? Do I need a re-license? Do I need a re-credential? And if so, how?" There's no place in the United States today besides our organization where you can actually get answers to that question, so career navigation is a big challenge.

The second challenge is employers. Employers don't understand the value of this talent. If you have a degree from a university in Vietnam or if you have work experience with a USAID project in Rwanda, they don't understand what the value of that work experience or talent is. They have a much better understanding of what it means to have graduated from a University of Connecticut, and so that means they're easily tossed out because I don't even understand how to understand them.

The other piece which is not unique to immigrants but is unique really to people of color in the United States, which impacts immigrants as well, is there is a certain way to show up to be marketable in the

United States and it is very specific. And if you come from a culture that is much more community oriented, not I, me, I, me, you are not going to be able to market yourself, you are not going to be effective in networking and those are key skills you have to have in order to break through in a professional environment. And so these are the couple of things that we work on with individuals, but we also recognize that we have to be working with community colleges, and we have to be working with workforce development boards to equip them with the ability to provide coaching programs and access to services that allow people to navigate. And so we're also doing that work.

Arturo Cázares, Latino Business Action Network CEO:

So, if I could follow on in terms of this transition that was highlighted. In our recent research, and we surveyed thousands and thousands of business owners across the US over several years, in the more recent years, the number of Latino-owned companies in this country grew by 44%. At the same time, the number of white-owned companies in the country decreased by 3%. Were it not for Latinos creating new companies, the number of companies in the country would have declined. So that's part of that transition. Again, more than half of those companies are started by a Latino who wasn't born here. Another large percentage were by Latinos whose parents were immigrants, and so that's where you could see that immigrants are driving the future of the economy.

In terms of the challenges that we also see when we look at that kind of data is that for both groups, whether they were born here or not, Latino business owners with the same or better metrics for their business. And in general, Latino businesses are growing faster than the average across the board, and they're producing jobs at twice the rate and those jobs offer better benefits across the board on average, yet they're 60% less likely to get access to a bank loan at favorable conditions. And so again, this speaks to what was being talked about. There are implicit biases or just different ways that people are expected to show up. And if there are higher perceptions of risk, even if they're unfounded and those are attributed to specific groups, it can then impact these kinds of outcomes.

Again, so these are people who are already creating jobs, yet they're not able to grow their businesses as fast as they could because they're not getting fair access to capital. Our approach to that is to put the research out there and engage with all these different institutions so that they can then begin to improve the ecosystem because that speaks to an ecosystem challenge. There's nothing deficient about these people, right? They're creating the companies, they're growing the companies. It's really about having an ecosystem that becomes better. Once it becomes better for them, it becomes better for everyone else. Because you can imagine if you're an African American business owner or if you're a woman business owner, there's probably higher perceptions of risks associated with you just because of your identity that are undue. And so if we find ways for these institutions to address that, it opens up opportunities for everyone.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-Chief:

Is part of the reason that the Latino population is creating businesses quicker than maybe white American native-born? Is it because they can't get work and they are looking now I'm going to start my own business because I met a woman yesterday who's a doctor in Egypt and she came here and ended up having to start her own business because she could not find that work?

Arturo Cázares, Latino Business Action Network CEO:

Exactly. Exactly. So we see that in both cases, if you're an immigrant, it might be harder to get the kind of professional job that you want, and so you'll start doing whatever you can to survive. But then once you have the wherewithal, you might be more inclined to create your own business, even though that's

very risky, right? You can imagine it's not an easy thing to start a business, but when you compare that to the alternative, you take the risk because you're trying to advance. That's also the case for Latinos born in the US who are in a corporate setting where they're not seeing their careers advance, right? Again, for other issues related to how you show up or how you're expected to show up, and so then they might be more inclined to then look out and take the risk of starting a company because at least they can then try to find a better path.

Jina Krause-Vilmar, Upwardly Global CEO:

And I would add to that, which is it's not only based out of necessity. What I find, especially for people who are displaced, so refugees and asylees, they exhibit incredible amount of resilience entrepreneurialism. For an entrepreneur, you have to be comfortable with risk. And so just the fact that you've left everything behind and moved to a new country to rebuild means you have a high level of comfort or some level of comfort with risk, and so what we find is it's not surprising that 50% of Fortune 500 companies have been founded or co-founded by an immigrant. It's not surprising that 23% of patents which are important for innovation in this economy come from immigrants who only represent 14% of the US population, and so they have an outsized presence.

I want to bring this back to the AI conversation because the reality is if AI is changing how we view skills and we are no longer looking at a world of work where you have a specific skill, you do a specific task, you get a reliable outcome. What we're looking at now is how do we invest in people if AI is taking over the fact of you're a billing analyst, AI is now the billing analyst, but you're the billing strategist? So, now we're looking at how are we actually cultivating skills around curiosity, creativity, resilience, adaptability, and these are things immigrants and refugees bring in spades not only because of their own journey, but also because they come from a different way of thinking.

They come from a different context, they come from different upbringing, they come with a different language. We actually want to be competitive in AI. And I think if we want to recognize that 83% of growth in our working age population today comes from immigrants and the children of immigrants, then we need to actually be embracing and not assimilating, but embracing the cultural differences to be able to continue to spur that innovation. We've got an edge over most countries when it comes to that, and we should take advantage of it.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-Chief:

We'll have Katie jump in, but I want to say too, the business leaders that I speak to are saying there's not enough talent out there to fill these jobs. And with the AI as you're bringing it up, people don't have those skills. We need everybody. I have one guy I talk to a lot and he says, "We need everybody we can get to do this." How do we get the business owners to turn and look at this population in a different way?

Katie Brown, EnGen founder and chief education officer:

I think we're seeing business owners, at least ones who like when you're talking about big businesses, ones who want to recruit and retain talent are looking towards underused, underutilized talent pools, and immigrants, refugees, newcomers in general are one of those talent pools. One thing I wanted to uplift that Jina just mentioned is multiculturalism. So, before when I was talking about English as a workforce skill, yes it is. And every immigrant speaks at least one other language, and multilingualism is a superpower. So, being able to communicate in multiple languages if you're a healthcare giver, being able to have communities of care reflect the people who live in the communities, being able to offer customer service in multiple languages, being able to offer education in multiple languages, these are all

differentiators that are going to help businesses do better work, work more efficiently, work more safely.

And at least on the employer side, I'm starting to see large employers understand this and embrace it and be open. If you think about the Tent Foundation for Refugees and all of the employers who've made refugee hiring commitments, they're saying like not only are we welcoming refugees, we're going to create a welcoming and inclusive work environment for them. We're going to celebrate the talents that they're bringing. And I'm seeing, definitely not all employers, but some employers really look at this in a way that shows that they understand that the multilingual multicultural foreign-born workforce is the solution to being able to innovate and stay ahead if that's something that we're capable of doing.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-Chief:

And I just want to let everybody know, I meant to let you know early, we are happy to take your questions. We'll leave some time at the end, so if anybody has any questions, we will be taking them. I would like to talk about the impact of a country without immigrants, and we already talked about the amount of tax and we've had conversations about this that they already contribute and what they contribute to a community. So if we don't help uplift that population, then we're going to be losing other businesses, I believe. And if anybody wants to weigh in there.

Arturo Cázares, Latino Business Action Network CEO:

So one of the things that we looked at, and we didn't do this research, but I think the University of Colorado was looking at the impact that deportations have. And so people might think, well, the undocumented are the least productive or at the lowest level when it comes to sort of contributing economically. But the reality is that for every a hundred deportations, you lost about 75 workers that were just gone because other Americans refused to take those jobs. So now you have a lack of workers for companies because those companies lost those 75 workers, they had to downscale and eight other jobs for US citizens were lost. And so that was just from the labor force impact. It will drive inflation and it will also increase unemployment if you start reducing the number of immigrants, which is a double negative.

And if you try to quantify, another university was looking at what is the overall economic impact? They were looking at if 1 million people were deported, and again, some of the numbers that are being talked about are much higher than that. If 1 million people were deported, that would impact the US economy by 1.2%, something like that, which is a massive impact on the economy that you're talking a huge negative shock, let alone if the numbers go up from there. This is thinking about what we would consider sort of the immigrants that are on the lowest level of this. When you start thinking about not empowering all immigrants, then they're still here, but much less productive than they could be otherwise. Again, that's another huge impact on the country. Again, if we continue down a path of becoming more xenophobic, it will impact us in very negative ways. And it's not just the communities that are unfairly targeted that are impacted, it's all of us that are impacted by that large of an economic loss.

Jina Krause-Vilmar, Upwardly Global CEO:

So I would say if we had zero immigration today, by 2100, so 2100, 75 years, we would be one third the size. Let that sink in. This is like Avengers Endgame. We would be one third the size. We would have fewer kids in schools, empty parks, fewer businesses. That's the impact of immigration in America because we are a country of immigrants. One of the things that we really care about is actually moving the conversation from immigrants are good for the economy to immigrants are good for our

communities. And so we did a report with American Immigration Council that looked just at the Great Lakes. What we found is that in rural areas, for every immigrant who moved into a rural area, they generated 1.2 additional jobs. For immigrants that live in poor low-income neighborhoods, when they do economically better, they reinvest in those neighborhoods, whereas you and I would move out to a nicer neighborhood. And so they actually have an outsized impact, not only in our rural communities, but as you said to the tax base.

When immigrants move into communities, they're contributing to the tax base, which means better roads, more infrastructure, and bringing in new businesses. So what we have found is, especially in rural communities, including refugees who have completely revitalized entire rural communities by taking up agriculture jobs where people have left, we're seeing that immigrants are having a positive impact on rural areas in an outsized way as well. So, I would say there's a huge economic impact for the country, but also if we want resilient, thriving communities and we want to be a resilient, thriving country, then we need people.

We have had 43 consecutive months of labor shortages in this country, and we have a 4% unemployment rate. It's really low. We don't have enough people. We hear that from business too all the time. We don't care if the towns work authorized, we don't care where they got their education from, as long as they can do the job. And so we know we have a labor shortage issue, but we also know that immigrants help us build... They're veterans, they're volunteers, they're working in civil jobs. Although I know many of those are being ended now, but I think it could be a really scary story for America.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-Chief:

What would you each like to see done? I mean, we've kind of touched on a lot of different things with the businesses and employers and the government. What do you think we should be doing? How should we be encouraging everyone to employ more immigrants?

Jina Krause-Vilmar, Upwardly Global CEO:

So I would say first we have a real challenge where we have to help people understand who immigrants are. I mean, if I asked you all to stand up and said... Actually stand up. If you're an immigrant, please stand up. Stay standing. If you're the child of an immigrant, please stand up. If you have somebody in your family who was an immigrant, a grandparent, or an aunt, an uncle, please stand up. If you know somebody who's in your life that you care about who is an immigrant, please stand up. So, we are... Thank you. You can sit down. So basically every single one of you stood up. The reality is we are a country of immigrants. We are the children of immigrants, we are the ancestors of immigrants. We have to reclaim that story. The narrative is really important here. We have to share it, we have to own it, we have to be proud of it, and we got to talk about it.

We got to talk about your immigration story, your parents' immigration. You have to talk about it because if it's not part of your identity anymore, that means it's no longer part of the identity of America, and it has to be because we're not going to have the ability to start accepting that we need more immigrants in our country. So I think that's one thing. I think the other thing is businesses need to accept that having diversity of thought and experience and perspective is good for the bottom line. Most of them do. Most of them... The data's out. We don't even have to argue this using evidence anymore. I mean, I wrote a couple of statistics down here, but for companies that have greater ethnic diversity, they're 35% have higher profitability,

Katie Brown, EnGen founder and chief education officer:

And I think that problem is going to solve itself. 75% of employers are looking for workers. We know that employers that have immigrant friendly, newcomer friendly, inclusive policies do better. They retain more workers, they attract more workers. I don't know what it's going to be this year or next year. It's going to be very clear that employers that are welcoming to newcomers are going to do better than employers that are not. But we need policies that make it easier for immigrants to be welcomed.

Everyone in here stood up when Jina just did her exercise because everybody either is related to an immigrant or knows an immigrant because immigrants are everywhere and it is very, very hard for them. Still, when they speak with a foreign accent, people look at them and say things like, "Oh, well, you don't speak English very well, or you have broken English." Well, everyone has an accent.

We need to have open conversations about how to be welcoming and how to be inclusive and what resources they need, because the truth is that they are working harder than everyone else. They have a smaller social safety net. When you've left everything behind and you've come here and you don't have aunts and uncles to help you out and family to help you out, you have to do all of the work yourself and take care of your kids and go to work when you're sick. They're doing all of those things and we are using them as pawns. We had bipartisan immigration reform on the table that was not resolved because we continue to just keep pushing immigration, immigration when the truth is that if you get a bunch of employers and people together in a room and you ask them, what do you think about immigrants?

And you look at all of the polls that probably you're more familiar with than I am, what they say is, "No, we agree. If you're here and you're working, you should get a pathway to being legally work authorized. If you're here and you're working, you should be able to stay, you should be able to pay taxes and get access to resources and take care of your families." So we need to do it. So we need to put policies in place that do that and hold our elected representatives responsible for creating a way for us to have an economy that actually functions, so we don't have a third the size of the United States in 75 years.

Arturo Cázares, Latino Business Action Network CEO:

I would echo, I don't think we have to do anything extra for immigrants from this perspective of we just need to treat them as us because that is who we are. Every one of us in this country or most of us are, if not immigrants ourselves, descendants at some point of an immigrant. That's who we are. By creating these artificial obstacles based on the accidents of where you were born, we're just hurting ourselves because that's our future. And if every time we create an obstacle, we're not going to recognize your degree, we're not going to recognize your certification. You have to do X, Y, and Z because you weren't born here. All of those things are not necessary. We wouldn't do that to anyone else, and we're not protecting any group by doing that because they are who we are. And so just enabling them, I would say, is what we need to do.

Related to that is this idea of getting okay with the fact that our country is diverse. There's no going back on that. That's who we are. We never were different. It was a fallacy to think that we weren't. We always have been diverse in some way or another, whether it was all these different peoples from Europe amalgamating into one people. There's no difference now whether the people coming from India, Mexico, Colombia, China, the same exact thing is happening again. It's who we are, who we have always been. We just have to get good with the fact that our country is a diverse country. That's what's made us strong and we should embrace who we are.

Jina Krause-Vilmar, Upwardly Global CEO:

I would add that, I mean, we have this old story in the United States, which is, you come here, you sacrifice everything, you work hard, and your kids will have a better shot. The reality is for us, for example, my mom, she immigrated here from India through an arranged marriage. They got divorced.



She ended up raising myself and my four sisters on her own. She had a master's degree in education. She was not able to use that master's degree, so we lived the regular story. We grew up in poverty, she sacrificed everything. Now we have two doctors, a nurse, and the disappointment, which is me because I'm not in the medical industry. So, I think we can change that story. We don't have to relive that.

We know exactly that if we make certain investments, we can actually set people up for success. And when we set them up for success, we all thrive because I already told you that story. But that also helps us make the argument of they're not living in homeless shelters, they're not on the streets. These are the images that people are using to sort of vilify that immigrants are a burden on the system. But the reality is, okay, we let people come here, but then we don't help them set up for success so of course they're going to fail.

Katie Brown, EnGen founder and chief education officer:

And I think Arturo's point was perfect is we don't need to do anything special. We just need to stop putting artificial barriers up for people. We need to make resources available to people so they can figure out what job they can do with the skills that they have so we don't have to make them wait a generation. We have AI that can write emails for us. We shouldn't have to make people wait 30 years before they can get something better than what they had before they came.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-Chief:

If anybody wants to line up at the mic, we'll take some questions. And you're right there, you can ask a question.

Audience Question:

My name is Cherie Hatcher, and I am a PhD student at Texas State in adult professional community education. Thank you all for this. I'm deep in dissertation, and so my topic is internationally professionally trained women specifically. So when I hear you talk about immigration, it even gets worse when there's a gender divide. The gender divide is for real, and what happens is that they end up in care work, which we all need. We all need people to care for us, but what happens is that we aren't caring for them.

Jina Krause-Vilmar, Upwardly Global CEO:

Immigrant women on average earn 53 cents to a white man's US dollar. They are the lowest earning in any of these categories because of the intersection of that identity, and they are segmented into low wage work. And the reality, low wage work is low wage because women do it. Teaching is a low wage job because it's dominated by women. If men started entering into the teaching profession in big waves like they did in computer science, it would become a more prestigious job with a higher paying salary. So, there is this gender divide, but there are gender barriers that immigrant women face. Not only the caregiving, but elder care for immigrants. Because I always tell people, we do not put our mamas in elder care homes. We're expected to take care of them for the rest of our lives.

And so elder care is another issue that immigrant women face. Their social mobility is much more restricted. If you're going to meet somebody in order to network to get a job, you're not going to hang out on your stoop as a woman. You're not going to go to a bar, you're not going to go to a gym to meet people. Women, they're not safe places for women to do that. So their ability to have the time because they're time-poor, they're taking care of home, doing work, taking care of kids and elders. They're time-poor, but they also have fewer spaces where they can actually start building a network to move up.

Audience Question:

Immigrant women make 53 cents on the dollar, so you would think, "Oh, economic boon, let's hire the cheaper labor." That is not what happens. They recruit men who then come with women, and those educated men have educated wives because that's just our social fabric across the globe. But they yet still are pigeoned into these low economic jobs. Despite that they could be the economic boom because we got to pay them less. I mean, we don't have to, but we do, right? But that we still treat them poorly, so that is, to me, the evidence right there. Right?

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-Chief:

Thank you for your patience.

Audience Question:

Thank you.

Audience Question:

Hi, my name is Leah. I'm coming from north of New York City, and I worked in education with immigrants for a long time and still do in some ways, but I'm just looking for some clearer language for when I argue these points. And Jina, I think you said something that I just wanted to hear you talk a little bit more about, which is my understanding is the birth rate is decreasing in the US and politicians in charge at the moment are trying to decrease immigration rates. So I always want to try to bring this out that we need more population. Our birth rate, that's going to be very hard to shift our birth rate, so why not just continue high rates of immigration? Can you give me more language and reasoning around that?

Jina Krause-Vilmar, Upwardly Global CEO:

Yeah, I can give you lots of language. What I want to do is I want to be careful about two things. There is a conversation in the administration today that we should be pre-selecting people who come to the United States based on their skill and their ability to fill certain jobs, and that's a Canadian model. I am a firm believer in that you cannot pre-select talent. People who come to the United States because they want to be here because they're joining family that are here, because they're seeking safety to come here, they are deeply invested in our country and staying in our country and contributing to our country. And I think we should continue to allow people to come into the United States, not only because of the skills that they have, but because they're coming because they want to stay. And so I would say that's one caution I try to give people because it's a quick slippery slope when we try to say, "Well, we need people to fill jobs, and we have huge labor shortages."

So, we have huge labor shortages. I would say we have labor shortages. We have 10,000 baby boomers retiring a day. We've got an aging population. And by 2035, which is 10 years from now, a hundred percent of growth in our working age population will come from immigrants and the children of immigrants, a hundred percent. If we know that, what does that mean for how we're preparing our schools? What does that mean for how we're preparing workplaces and businesses with English language access? How do we get ahead of setting up the systems to prepare for that in the next 10 years so that we're actually set up for success would be some things I would say.

Katie Brown, EnGen founder and chief education officer:

And just to add onto that, pre-screening of talent. Talent is probably evenly distributed, opportunity is not. Trying to determine before somebody comes to the United States, whether or not they have the right talent to come is ridiculous.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-Chief:

So I will add to that [workingnation.org](http://workingnation.org) if you guys want to go and look at it. We have written about this quite a bit. So if you're looking for, as you were saying, language or reports that have been referenced up here from all three of our panelists, we have that on the website.

Arturo Cázares, Latino Business Action Network CEO:

I think just a final add to that, the levels of immigration right now are not high. When we look at historically as a percent of the current population of the country, it's not at a high level. There's a lot of politicization of that. Maybe it's more visible in certain places, but that's because we are putting impediments and not allowing these people to just integrate much more broadly and easily into the society as we used to allow in the past in previous generations. But as a percent of our total population, it is not at a high level. It has become a political issue, which is why it's talked about that way.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-Chief:

Okay.

Audience Question:

My name is Marcia. I'm originally from El Paso, Texas, but now I'm in Fairfax, Virginia. Proud daughter of a Mexican immigrant. Two of my siblings have started pretty significantly large businesses, so definitely contributing to our economy. I'm a school board member in Fairfax, Virginia, and worked in the school system for 27 years. And really my comment is I've seen a lot of underemployed people in our school system, and this is my first year as a school board member, but I was able to mobilize people in our school system to start a program called ¡Avanza!. So what we're doing now, and we just started it, we had 200 applicants for a hundred slots of people that work in our system that are underemployed as custodians and instructional assistants. And we are going to pay for them to get their certifications and we're going to fast track them to become teachers because we need teachers.

And aside from the fact that we're going to raise their standard of living to be able to live in a very expensive community, a lot of these employees have the cultural competency that we need in our community. One of the people that has applied is someone that I helped get a job that had a PhD and was teaching English in her country, but she was working as an instructional assistant. So, this is going to be life changing for them. It's also going to be life changing for our students where they have that cultural competency. So I think that everybody here in this room, whatever organization they're in, we kind of look at those opportunities that within our organizations we can provide and I'm just really proud that we're doing this for the first year and that we had 200 applicants for a hundred slots.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-Chief:

That's really fabulous.

Audience Question:

Hey everyone, I hate to be that person, but there's only one behind me, so I may ask two questions. Basil Tushan, I'm an immigrant myself. I'm actually a medical doctor who transitioned away from that to

do a lot of immigrant work by choice. So I feel you, Jina. Not just the only non-healthcare child in the family, I walked away from it. I can imagine how that went. Anywho, currently, there's a movement in a lot of states to actually allow people who don't do residency to be able to practice medicine. Some of the requirements are different from state to state. I'm seeing a lot of nods. You all are obviously familiar. So I'm wondering if you can speak to which state model you think which state is doing it best.

And then my second question, which is completely 180, this administration is clearly an administration that's very not pro-immigrants. They're also transparent in the fact that they're very transactional. So, does any of you see any intersections with some of their priorities, like leverage points? I mean, we can say the points, we can screen the things why immigration is important, they're not going to care. But are there any pragmatic intersection of the administration priorities that for the next four years we can focus advocacy efforts on?

Jina Krause-Vilmar, Upwardly Global CEO:

Yes, there is a movement to basically help internationally trained doctors. We have 145,000 internationally trained doctors in the United States who are not working as physicians, and so there has been a movement by several states to have... Because if you're a doctor, you have to restart. You have to take the USMLEs 1, 2, 3, you have to redo residency, which is four years. And then if you want to do a fellowship, specialize, it's another two years. On average, it takes somebody five to six years to go back into becoming a physician and it's expensive. And so we actually helped the state of Illinois pass legislation that allows internationally trained doctors to work under a US licensed doctor for two years and then become a full-fledged a US doctor, and so that cuts down basically six years to two.

The state of Massachusetts just similarly passed legislation. So far we are promoting Virginia's version of legislation, so Virginia has passed. There's a coalition of us called Imprint. I'm happy to connect you and we are actively trying to get it passed across the country. There was also a documentary recently released about this issue. I mentioned it also because I'm in it, really good in it. And so I can also recommend that and I'll let you know what it is.

Audience Question:

[inaudible 00:41:25].

Jina Krause-Vilmar, Upwardly Global CEO:

I don't remember. It's not my documentary. I was just interviewed. And then there was a second question. So the hard part is, so we work with individuals at Upwardly Global who have come with degrees. The US government calls them highly skilled. That's what the Department of Labor calls them, skilled and highly skilled. There is interest in shifting immigration policy in the administration, both with Elon Musk and the Trump administration to think about how do we bring in highly skilled individuals. The goal, I think, there would be how do we expand that as much as possible so that it's lifting as many boats as possible and not just lifting one boat.

What we're very careful about is we don't even say our community is skilled because everybody has skills. It's kind of ridiculous to say you're high skilled, I mean, what does that mean? Especially with AI because the skill is curiosity. So if you're a really curious person, you're highly skilled at this stage. So, we just call ourselves professionals. That's it. But I think there's a space there. We don't know if the Department of Treasury and the Department of Labor would also be pushing back because of the economic argument, and so there might be space there as well.

Katie Brown, EnGen founder and chief education officer:

I would echo that, that if there is any chance for advocacy around skilled, skill is very wide and everyone is high skilled. And also there is an economic argument to be made for immigrants being here and working. And the people who have the ear of the decision makers in the current administration are often people who have very large businesses that rely on immigrant labor. It is going to be very clear if there is widespread deportation that those businesses will not function, so that is also a problem that might just take care of itself when there are two pieces of this administration's agenda that are at obvious cross purposes.

Arturo Cázares, Latino Business Action Network CEO:

Yeah, it's not just an economic argument, but in terms of the intersection with the administration, it's all about the economics of it at all levels of immigration in terms of the professional or non-professional immigrant. Because a lot of these large corporations and think about a lot of industries in this country, construction, food production, manufacturing, those are not professional level jobs, but a lot of professional level jobs are lost without those workers. And so there is very much an economic argument, and in fact, it will improve unemployment by having more immigrants at all levels of the spectrum because it will create more jobs for all levels of Americans that are already here.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-Chief:

We have one last question.

Audience Question:

Hi, I'm Kelsey and I work with NaTakallam. We're an online language learning platform that hires refugees as tutors and translators. I guess my question to you, we're talking about highly skilled, we're talking about sort of bottom line, we're talking about refugees and immigrants are people, right? That's all sort of a part of the work that we do. As a social enterprise, we have to also find pragmatic solutions to be able to be that sort of stepping stone to long-term livelihood support. We find that right now, actually 60% of our language partners are able to sustain themselves with the income that they're generating through our services. But we know that that's not the ultimate goal, right? So potentially they ultimately want to be placed elsewhere doing their actual profession, right?

They want to become doctors, they don't necessarily want to be teaching their native language, and so we see this as sort of like a stepping stone. How do we navigate the current environment taking practical, pragmatic solutions without losing our humanity and really convincing people that, okay, these are people that are highly skilled, they're also human, you should hire them? And also you should work with us to sort of integrate that mindset shift that also affects your bottom line, but also just makes our world better?

Jina Krause-Vilmar, Upwardly Global CEO:

My short answer is you should work with Upwardly Global. That's exactly what we do. We help these individuals get jobs. We do work with partners. We also equip partners if you are going to provide career services. We also equip partners with the ability to provide the career service programming so that you don't have to reinvent the wheel. We do lean a lot on AI, so we have an AI resume builder. We have an AI capability that allows us to match talent with employers, job openings. Let's not reinvent the wheel, let's create economies of scale. You do what you do best, we'll do what we do best and we'll join powers. And I do think that's the only way we're going to make it.

There is an ecosystem that needs... You said there's an ecosystem. The ecosystem is being actively destroyed. Refugee resettlement is gone, education might be gone. Sorry guys. The Department of Education might not survive a lot of nonprofits. The nonprofit sector itself is under attack because 95% of them get funding through government grants, which are now gone. We have to make sure that whatever the ecosystem we have, that we strengthen it. Partnership is what my response would be.

Audience Question:

I guess just to sort of follow up on that, so a lot of our translation clients, for example, we're working with NGOs who've had their funding pulled, those programs no longer exist. That severely impacts our ability to support our workforce. So how do we then work within the system, disrupt it, whatever? I have this internal battle every day of like, "Okay, let's work with it, let's burn it down. What are we really doing here?" How do we approach organizations, businesses that are potentially more insulated from sort of the negative impacts of what's happening to work with that and promote like real systems change, right? Like what's the solution there? Do we know?

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-Chief:

I just want to say I don't know if there is an insulated entity out there because businesses are under attack from shareholders as well for using DEI. No matter how it shows up, some of those companies are fighting back. Just as you're saying here, you mentioned a lot of nonprofits are finding their funding on pause. So what Jina said about partnering and people banding together, I don't want to speak for the panel, but that sounds like the answer.

Audience Question:

The only solution.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-Chief:

And raise your voice.

Audience Question:

Thank you.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-Chief:

We'll take one more question and then we only have a few more minutes. Okay.

Audience Question:

Elena Korbut, I'm the executive director of PAIR Houston. We essentially make sure that kids, refugee asylee, emerging bilingual kids don't fall through the cracks of the public education system. My background is a refugee resettlement, so you're kind of preaching to the choir I think in this audience. I think what frequently is missing from these conversations about employment is the cultural sensitivity that employers should undergo in order to build trust with the refugee and immigrant population. And so looking at the example of Houston, that's something that works really well. So if it's, let's say, an Amazon warehouse and they provide an ESL class or they spend time... Through a translator, they hire translator and they learn about the population that works with them and then provide accommodations like a prayer room for men and women, it reverberates. I mean, it's a small, tiny investment, but that makes such a big difference.

In our work we communicate with parents, parental engagement is very difficult, but that's exactly what builds trust. And there is a great study, Kinder Institute at Rice University in Houston. They have something that's called Houston Area Survey, and so every year it gets published. There's going to be one coming out at the end of this year that speaks directly to the fact that the white population is aging, it's dying, and it needs to be replaced by the immigrant and refugee workforce. The attitudes towards immigration are positive in spite of what's happening politically, so to me, it's not a one solution fits all. Right? So you have to have allies, whether it's community partners, nonprofit organizations, but it's getting this messaging out and then encouraging people that went through this experience to speak up.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-Chief:

I just want to give each person up here a chance to finish up their thoughts. I'll start with you, Arturo, because down to entrepreneurship, you're doing something in a couple of weeks and I want you to be able to tell everybody about this.

Arturo Cázares, Latino Business Action Network CEO:

Yeah. We're a nonprofit. As I said, we do a lot of research. Every year we do quite extensive research report on the impact Latino entrepreneurs are having on the US economy. Once a year, we do a summit related to that. It's much more than just a research event, but it is a research event at Stanford University. It's open to the public. The president of the university once remarked to me that when they release a research report about 20 people show up. When we release this report, we expect over a thousand people to come from across the US. It will be a party. All of you welcome. It's a great gathering around entrepreneurship, around the Latino community, and you don't need to be Latino. Anyone who wants to be a part of it is by definition us, and you're all welcome. If you can make it out to Stanford University out in California, let me know, I'd be happy to receive you.

Jina Krause-Vilmar, Upwardly Global CEO:

So I would say I would encourage us to think of systems change solutions. I would encourage us to think creatively with the space that we have by investing more deeply in partnerships. Partnerships are built on trust. I do think to do systems change work, we need organizations that actually work directly with communities so that they have the proximity, insight, and trust of those communities so that they actually can represent through human-centered design solutions that will actually work. And I think if we ask ourselves as a collective, the big question of how do we support the economic inclusion of immigrants, refugees, and asylees, I think in this room we could come up with ideas. And so I think those are the kinds of things we have to do more of in the next four years.

Just to answer the question quickly, employers have to be at that table, not because it's an extractive solution of I need labor, but they also have to do the hard work. To your point of we have to understand these communities, we have to be able to support these communities to thrive because when our workers thrive, we thrive. When our workers thrive, the communities we're serving or live in thrive. And so we do a lot of work with employers, but they have to want to do it.

Katie Brown, EnGen founder and chief education officer:

To piggyback on the employer piece, I mean, everybody needs to work. We all are working, our immigrants are working, our children are working, like working is a thing that we all need to do. So, speaking up about the need for a multilingual workforce, why supporting the multilingual workforce makes sense, the benefits of the multilingual workforce. This is the only session at this conference that's talking about immigrants, refugees, and newcomers, and everyone in this room stood up when we

asked you how you were connected to immigrants. That's a huge disconnect and everybody can help make this better for everyone by having this conversation over and over and over. 20% of the working population in the United States was not born in the United States, but 1% gets talked about, so we have to have the conversation.

Jina Krause-Vilmar, Upwardly Global CEO:

And a hundred percent of our workforce will eventually be immigrants and refugees and their children.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-Chief:

I really appreciate, these are three of the smartest people and most compassionate people I know on this. And I just want to thank everybody and I want to thank you guys for being a great audience. That was our panel at South by Southwest EDU on the economic impact of immigrants. I'm Ramona Schindelheim, editor-in-chief of WorkingNation. Thanks for listening.