

Supporting Maine's Foreign-Trained Professionals



Prepared for the



Maine Governor's Office of Policy Innovation and the Future



By



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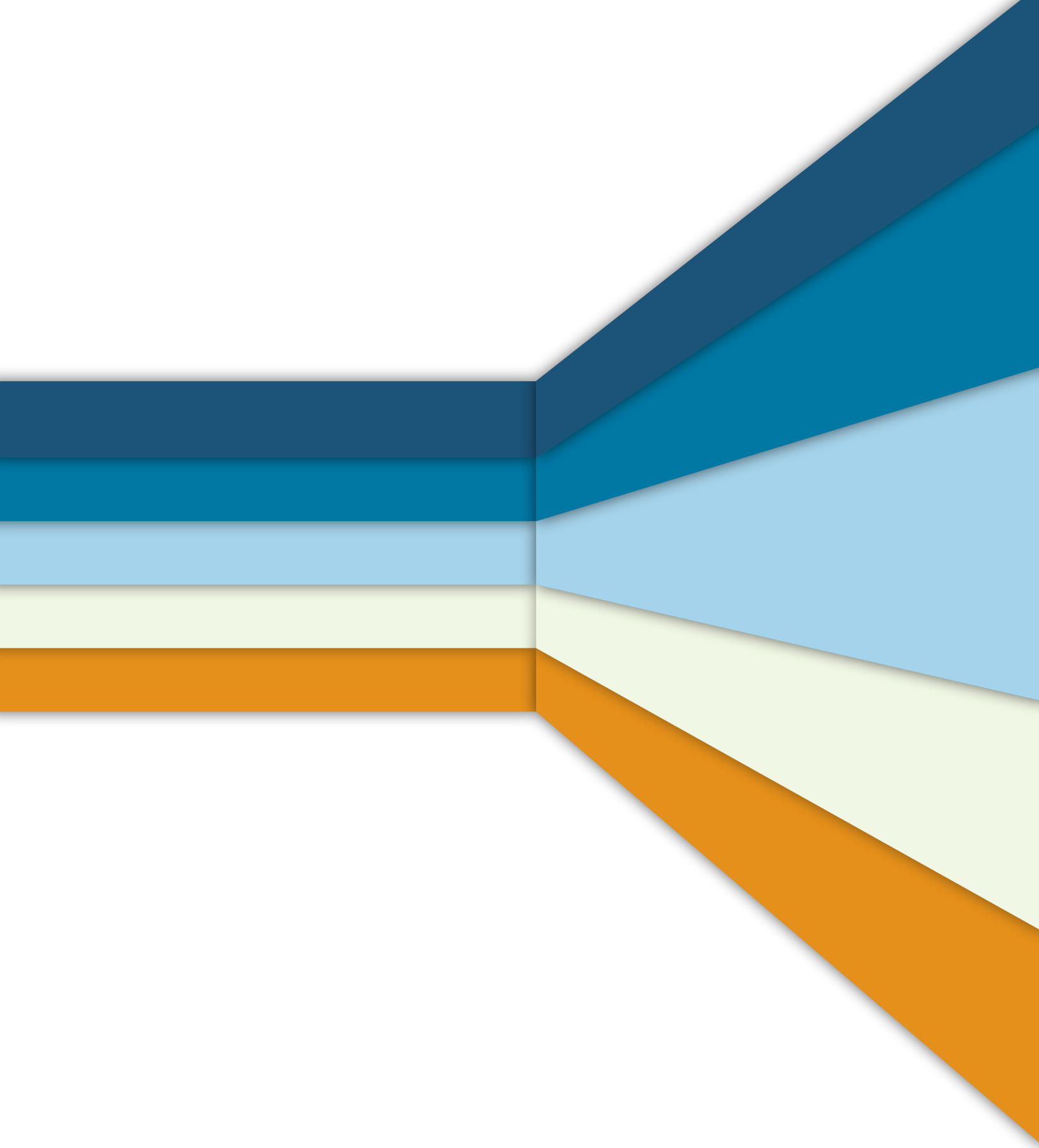
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As Maine seeks to improve its economic prosperity, one theme has become apparent: advancing the economy will require advancing the workforce. With a high potential for good careers but facing many roadblocks along the way, foreign-trained professionals present an important opportunity to unlock the state's existing talent.

Too often overlooked, foreign-trained professionals are individuals who received education and training abroad in professions like teaching and healthcare before immigrating to Maine. By reducing barriers to practicing their prior professions, Maine can advance the wellbeing of this growing segment of the population while improving the economy.

Currently, not enough immigrants with professional backgrounds are getting jobs that match their skill level. An estimated 24.2% of Maine's college-educated immigrants are either unemployed or working in jobs that only require a high school diploma or less. That statistic supports, if not understates, the anecdotal evidence that has formed a distressing narrative that professional jobs are inaccessible to many immigrants.

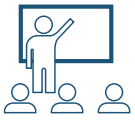
While this would be a challenge worth addressing in any case, there are two factors making it doubly necessary now. First, international immigration has been a steady source of population growth for Maine over the past decade. Second, Maine is facing a long-term workforce shortage, which will constrain its economic resilience and ability to grow. In the midst of a public health crisis, that constraint is particularly troubling in the healthcare professions.

The barriers foreign-trained professionals face in Maine can be divided into five key categories:

- » **Individuals must navigate a long, costly, and uncertain immigration process that can hinder their ability to plan for the future or gain an income.**
- » **They must find ways to meet basic income needs, which can directly or indirectly prevent them from pursuing opportunities to return to their profession.**
- » **Maine's education and training offerings are insufficient to match demand, do not always provide a useful path for higher-level professionals, and sometimes inherently exclude certain immigrants.**
- » **Most professionals must navigate a costly and burdensome licensing process.**
- » **Employers are not always familiar with or open to hiring immigrants.**

Additionally, there is little guidance for navigating the extremely long and complex process of pursuing a professional career as an immigrant.

Drawing from the experience of programs in Maine and around the country, there are a number of actions the State can take to alleviate these burdens. These are the first priorities:



Expand adult language education. Adult education classes teaching English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) should be expanded to match local demand. More occupation-specific and intensive programming is also needed.



Target support for work authorization gap. Funding for workforce training should be made available to individuals who do not yet have work authorization. Altering Competitive Skills Scholarship Program (CSSP) eligibility rules is the most direct method.



Train agency staff and increase community outreach. The State should improve its own hiring and client service practices regarding immigrants, beginning with cultural diversity and inclusion trainings. Agencies should also improve feedback gathering and direct outreach to incorporate community concerns as standard operating procedure.



Establish new workforce board committee. The State Workforce Board should establish a committee on immigrant employment to better address the needs of Maine's growing immigrant workforce, including foreign-trained professionals.

Given the current crisis surrounding the novel coronavirus, Maine should first look to implement programming for foreign-trained healthcare professionals as a first step to expanding support for other occupations. Beginning with the healthcare workforce, the workforce board committee on immigrant employment should coordinate implementation for higher-level, employer-sponsored workforce training programs; methods for adopting alternative career pathways; and improved service integration and data sharing. Additional grant support for credentialing should also be made available to expedite the career pipeline, particularly if the healthcare workforce shortage strains facilities' crisis response.

Looking past the current public health crisis, the committee on immigrant employment should begin planning implementation of cultural awareness trainings for private employers interested in improving their hiring and workplace practices. Longer-term, the committee could work in conjunction with the Governor's Office of Policy Innovation and the Future (GOPIF) to explore ways to cover basic workforce training attendance costs and provide financial aid for non-FAFSA eligible immigrants. In doing so, Maine will move towards its goal of creating pathways to meaningful work that match the skills of its immigrant community.

INTRODUCTION

The State of Maine established an economic development plan in 2019 to identify the best ways to improve prosperity. With three primary goals of growing wages, productivity, and the workforce, the crux of the State's mission was to get more people into good work. The second headline strategy, attracting new talent to Maine, included a specific action item to “help new Americans and other newcomers get qualified to work in Maine.”¹

Motivating that action item is the phenomenon of immigrants moving to Maine who have backgrounds in professional fields but are unable to get jobs that fully utilize their skills. As Maine looks for ways to get people into in-demand, well-paid positions, the fact that individuals have clear skills going unused is hard to ignore.

Stories of prior doctors, nurses, teachers, engineers, and lawyers unable to rejoin their fields is a source of frustration not only in Maine but around the country. A major barrier to getting people into higher-paid work has always been getting them the appropriate training and education. In the case of foreign-trained professionals, that barrier is absent or greatly reduced, but for other reasons they cannot get jobs matching their skill level. The result is they cannot achieve their full earning potential or career satisfaction and important jobs go unfilled.

This is not a new challenge facing Maine. But the pressing need to grow the economy, exacerbated by the turbulence of the coronavirus crisis, provides a new impetus for the state government to address it. This report aims to explore how the State can better support immigrant professionals in reentering their careers now that they are in Maine. It will focus on what barriers such individuals face to achieving that goal and how the tools of government may be used to alleviate them.

The healthcare industry serves as the common example throughout due to its size and importance in communities around the state. Given the current public health crisis, tools to grow the healthcare workforce will only become more vital.

This report represents one part of a broader effort to improve the state's economy, and as such, its recommendations can complement other initiatives in important ways. Much of the work nationwide on improving outcomes for foreign-trained professionals has learned from similar initiatives focused on veterans. Indeed, while immigrant professionals are the focus throughout the report, many of the challenges they face and policies to address them also apply, directly or indirectly, to veterans, the immigrant community writ large, and all Mainers looking to enter higher-skilled, higher-paid occupations. The state government should look to use its tools to improve outcomes for foreign-trained professionals and ultimately get more people into good jobs

1. Department of Economic and Community Development, “Maine Economic Development Strategy 2020-2029,” December 11, 2019, 27.

Maine's Immigrant Community

To begin, it is important to cover the history and characteristics of the group in question in order to understand the specific problems they face. Maine is home to roughly 48,000 immigrants, according to recent American Community Survey (ACS) estimates.¹ At 3.5% of the total population, that gives Maine the sixth-lowest proportion of immigrants in the United States.

Despite their comparatively small share of the population overall, there are a few reasons the demographic is notable for the state. First, they make up a disproportionate share of Maine's largest communities, Portland (12%) and Lewiston (6%). Immigrants have established strong communities there and play an important role in the local economy, schools, and culture. Second, as a source of steady immigration, they are one of the state's relatively few growing populations. This fact has grown increasingly relevant as the state ages and natural population growth has remained negative. Third, part of the immigrant population—although the stratified group defies easy categorization—faces significant economic challenges.

The makeup of Maine's immigrant community has changed significantly over the past twenty years. Maine seemed to miss recent large waves of migration to the U.S., and as a result, the state's immigrant community is somewhat different from the rest of the country. In 1990, Maine was roughly middle of the pack in terms of percentage of foreign-born population, at 27th-highest. In the ensuing ten years, Maine was the only state in the nation to have no significant change in its foreign-born population. This was a major discrepancy; the growth rate for the U.S. as a whole was 57%. By the 2000 Census, Maine was 38th in terms of foreign-born percentage, falling eleven places in ten years.²

A note on data:

Many of the demographic figures in this report rely on U.S. Census and American Community Survey data. Despite being the best source of general demographic statistics, these surveys are known to undercount immigrant populations, particularly recent immigrants.¹ All but two of Maine's census tracts in which 10% or more of the population was foreign-born had Census response rates below 80%, with some as low as 66%.² It is possible that Maine's immigrant community could be substantially larger than best survey estimates show, and its demographic characteristics may be different depending on what types of individuals did not respond to surveys.

1.. William P. O'Hare, *Differential Undercounts in the U.S. Census: Who Is Missed?*, SpringerBriefs in Population Studies (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2019), 47, 79, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-10973-8>.

2.. Calculated using data from HTC 2020 (<https://www.censushardtcountmaps2020.us/>), a project of the City University of New York Mapping Service.

These dynamics reflected where immigrants in Maine were—or were not—coming from. In 2000, Maine had by the far the highest share in the nation of foreign-born individuals from North America, reflecting its long history of French-Canadian immigration. It also had one of the lowest shares of immigrants from Africa and Latin America.³

Twenty years later, the makeup has shifted. Maine now has one of the highest shares of immigrants from

1. U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2018 1-year Estimates, Table S0501, data.census.gov.

2. Nolan Malone et al., "The Foreign-Born Population: 2000," Census 2000 Brief (U.S. Census Bureau, December 2003).

3. Malone et al.

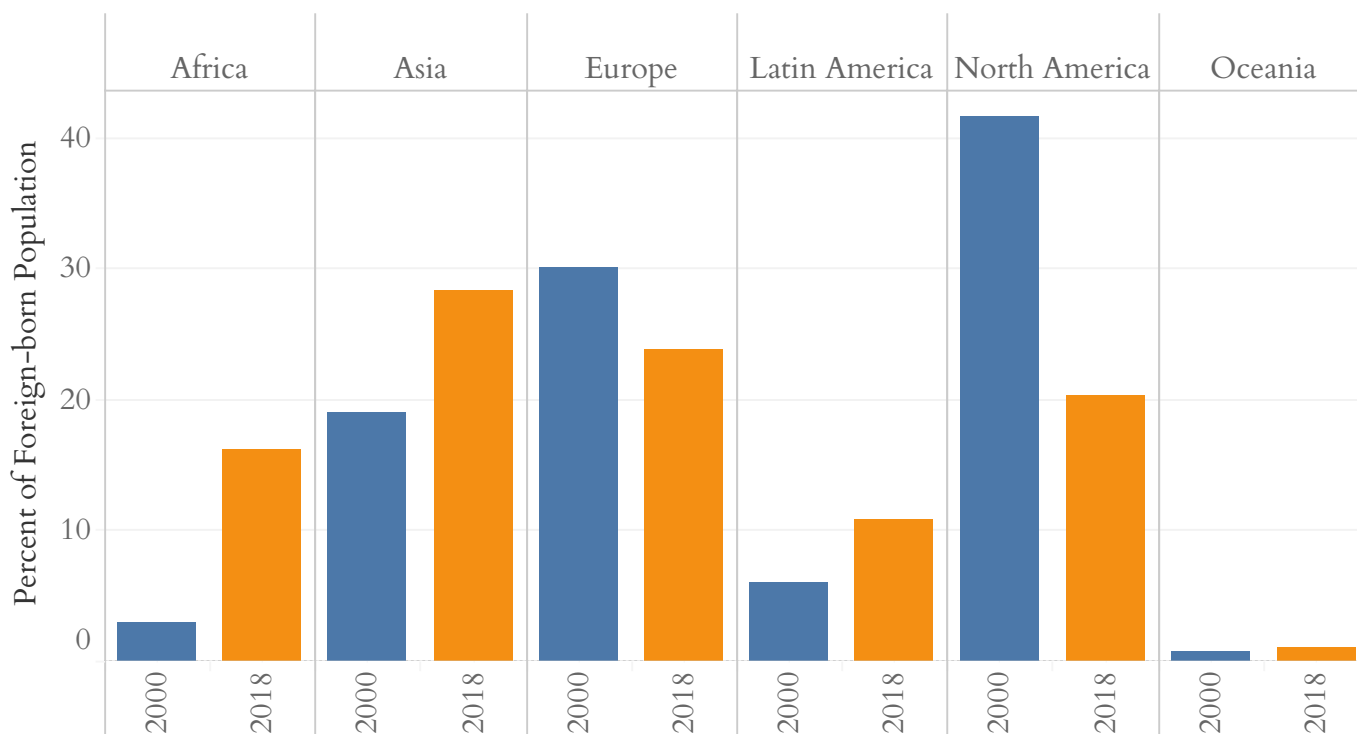


Figure 1: The makeup of Maine’s immigrant community has changed significantly since 2000. *Data source:* U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2014–2018 5-year Estimates, Table S0502, data.census.gov.

Africa in the U.S., ranking fifth after the Dakotas, Minnesota, and Maryland. Still, its share of immigrants from Latin America remains one of the lowest in the country, although it has grown. In recent years, the dominant perception of immigration in Maine has been that of migrants from central and eastern Africa moving primarily to the Portland and Lewiston areas. Indeed, in terms of growth, Census numbers reflect that perception. Yet, Maine’s Asian immigrant community has also grown substantially and is now the largest place of origin for foreign-born individuals in the state.⁴

The overall growth of Maine’s immigrant community seems unlikely to slow in the near future. As was heavily reported in the news, over 600 asylum seekers, primarily from Angola and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, arrived in Portland in 2019.⁵ The large

group that arrived over the summer reflected an unusual uptick in what has otherwise been a steady flow of African asylum seekers coming to Maine. Despite a precipitous decline in refugee resettlement under the administration of President Donald Trump, other pathways for immigration to Maine, including that of asylum-seeking, are still being utilized.⁶

The inflow of international migrants was one of the few sources of population growth for Maine in recent years. While domestic in-migration has also picked up, immigration from abroad remains an important source of growth. Between 2010 and 2018, Maine had a net in-migration of 10,343 people from abroad and 7,959 people from elsewhere in the U.S., according to Census Bureau estimates.⁷ International migration has been relatively steady over that time period, while domestic migration has swung from net losses early on

4. U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2014–2018 5-year Estimates, Table S0502, data.census.gov.

5. Randy Billings, “Influx of Asylum Seekers Fills Portland’s Overflow Shelters,” *Portland Press Herald*, December 12, 2019, <https://www.pressherald.com/2019/12/12/influx-of-asylum-seekers-fills-portlands-overflow-shelters/>.

6. Susan Roche and Philip Mantis, interview by author, January 24, 2020; Catholic Charities of Maine reports that refugee resettlements in Maine had fallen to 131 in FY19 from 675 in FY16. Data through December 2019 as provided by Hannah DeAngelis in interview with author, December 19, 2019.

7. U.S. Census Bureau, 2018 Population Estimates, Estimates of the Components of Resident Population Change: April 1, 2010 to July 1, 2018, Table PEPTCOMP, factfinder.census.gov.

Components of Maine's Population Change

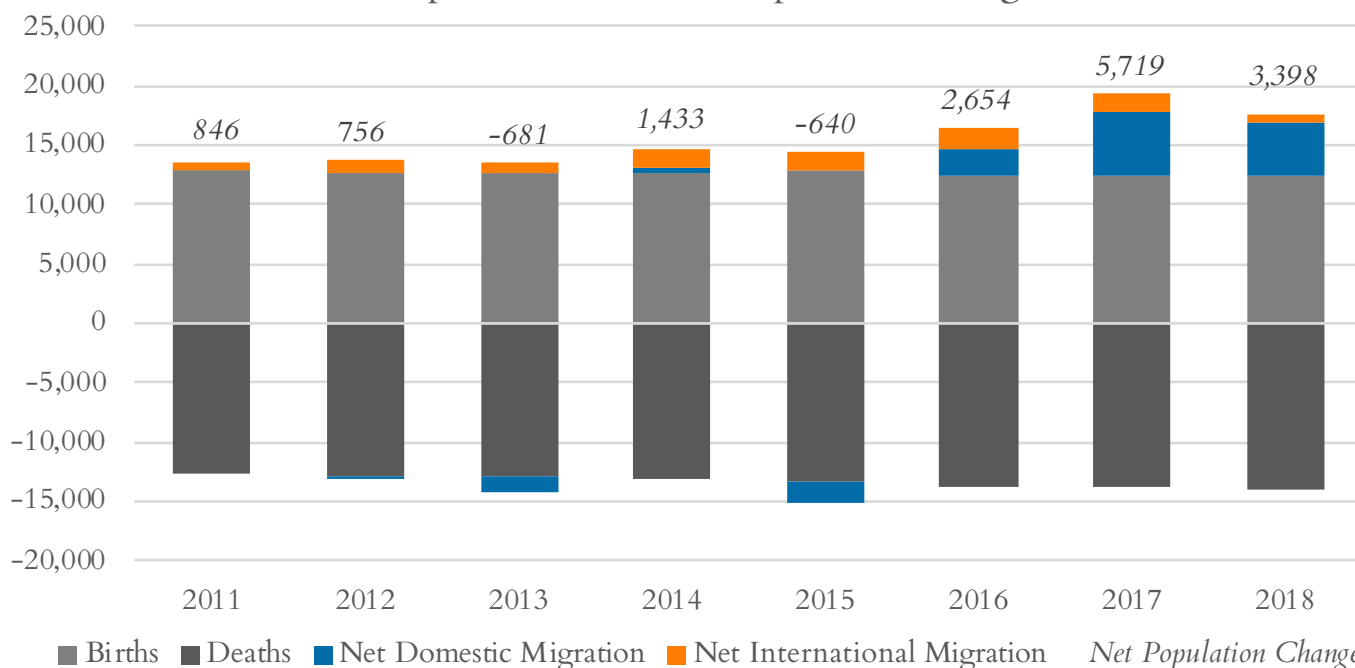


Figure 2: International migration has been a steady source of population inflow for Maine. The number above each bar represents Maine's net population change that year, equaling the sum of births plus net domestic and international migrants, minus deaths. *Data source:* U.S. Census Bureau, 2018 Population Estimates, Estimates of the Components of Resident Population Change: April 1, 2010 to July 1, 2018, Table PEPTCOMP, factfinder.census.gov.

to large net gains now. These numbers likely do not reflect the increase in asylum seekers in recent years.

For an aging state, that net inflow is vitally important. Over the same time period, the state saw 7,412 more deaths than births. Without migration, the state's population would have shrunk. That did in fact happen in some parts of the state, particularly in smaller towns that have not been destinations for migrants, domestic or international.

New people have meant both new opportunities and new challenges. Some have struggled to advance economically, especially those who are not yet citizens or lack permanent resident status. The overall poverty rate for Maine's immigrant population is nearly five points higher than its U.S.-born population, and the rate is another six points higher for those who are not yet naturalized citizens.⁸

But this belies the many differences within the immigrant community. Paradoxically, immigrants in Maine have a higher share of both individuals with graduate degrees and individuals with no high school diploma, relative to Maine's U.S.-born population. Immigrants have both a higher share of people making less than \$25,000 and more than \$75,000 per year, and they make up less of the middle band of the income spectrum.⁹ This reflects the challenge of referring to the "foreign-born" population in Census data as a catch-all category. The group includes individuals who immigrated decades ago to attend graduate school in the U.S. as well as individuals who arrived one year ago after walking through Central America with nothing but what they could carry.

For helping migrants re-enter their professions, that range of experience is a challenge. In practice, the needs of a nurse who immigrated from Europe to join family in the U.S. are very different than the needs of a

8. U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2014–2018 5-year Estimates, Table S0501, data.census.gov.

9. Ibid.

nurse who fled Africa and entered the U.S. as an asylum seeker. It is the latter category that has driven much of the conversation given the relatively high number of people in that situation and their acute needs.

Just under half of Maine's immigrants, 22,500, are not yet U.S. citizens—in reality, that number is likely much larger since non-citizens are less likely to be counted in surveys. From here, estimating immigration status is largely guesswork, since there is no complete state-level dataset. Comparing 2015 Department of Homeland Security data to ACS numbers, roughly half to two-thirds of most states' non-citizen immigrant population are lawful permanent residents, i.e. green-card holders.¹⁰ The majority of the remainder in Maine are likely refugees and asylees yet to receive green cards, as well as those still seeking asylum.

Despite the decline in refugee resettlement, the asylum-seeker population continues to grow. There are an estimated 4,000 asylum seekers in Maine, judging by pending cases before the Boston USCIS Asylum Sub-Office.¹¹ This does not include those with cases pending with the Boston Immigration Court or whose cases have not yet entered the processing system, which could be hundreds more.

There are a number of distinctions within the asylee and asylum seeker group, including country of origin, date of arrival, and whether they were traveling alone or with family. But relevant to this report, there is also a notable distinction between modes of arrival. Prior to 2017, most of the asylum cases in Maine were of people who flew directly to the United States on a visa and then declared they were seeking asylum. To be

able to afford a plane ticket and a visa, these individuals would by definition need some financial resources, since U.S. consular offices generally incorporate financial information into visa approval. Those that worked with this community in Maine observed that they tended to have a higher proportion of individuals with professional backgrounds.¹²

Since mid-2017, however, there has been a growing population of asylum seekers who took an indirect route to the United States. Beginning in South America, often Ecuador, they travel 3,000-odd miles by bus and foot through Central America to the U.S.'s southern border, cross without a visa, and give themselves up to Border Patrol. If and when they are released and allowed to proceed into the U.S., some travel to Maine.¹³ This is the predominant story of the many asylum seekers who arrived in Maine in 2019. Their journey also required access to financial resources and connections, but not necessarily as much as taking a direct flight to the U.S. While this group still contains those with professional backgrounds, the proportion is somewhat less than those able to take the more direct route.¹⁴

This points to a crucial question for the state government: what skills are immigrants bringing to Maine and how well utilized are they? The Migration Policy Institute (MPI) offers one of the best examinations of this question nationwide. Using ACS data, they estimate the proportion of the college-educated workforce that is unemployed or working in jobs that only require a high school degree or less, which they refer to as "brain waste". For Maine's foreign-born population, the rate of brain

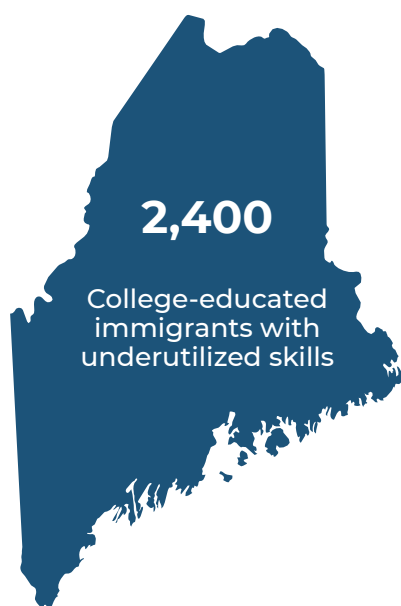
10. Bryan Baker, "Population Estimates: Lawful Permanent Resident Population in the United States: January 2015" (Department of Homeland Security, Office of Immigration Statistics, May 2019); U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2015 1-year Estimates, Table DP02, factfinder.census.gov.

11. Susan Roche and Philip Mantis, interview by author, January 24, 2020.

12. Beth Stickney, interview by author, January 21, 2020; Susan Roche and Philip Mantis, interview by author, January 24, 2020.

13. Rob Wolfe, "Asylum Seekers from Africa Describe Difficult Journeys to Maine," *Portland Press Herald*, June 12, 2019, <https://www.pressherald.com/2019/06/12/asylum-seekers-describe-journeys-from-africa-to-portland/>; Rob Wolfe, "Asylum Seekers Defy Death for a Better Life in Portland," *Portland Press Herald*, June 30, 2019, <https://www.pressherald.com/2019/06/30/the-road-to-portland/>.

14. Beth Stickney, interview by author, January 21, 2020; Susan Roche and Philip Mantis, interview by author, January 24, 2020.



The prevalence of skill underutilization in the immigrant community aligns with, if not understates, anecdotal evidence. Every service provider, relevant government official, and member of the immigrant community seems to have multiple stories of people who were professionals in their home country but got stuck in entry-level jobs after arriving in Maine. Angela Okafor, elected to the Bangor City Council in 2019, provides a prominent illustration: she was a lawyer in her home country of Nigeria and was admitted to the Maine bar, but she could not get a job at any Maine law firm and ended up working as a dishwasher until she could open her own practice.^{17,18} Hers is one of many similar stories included in local and national coverage of Maine's immigrant community.¹⁹ Attention to this issue has grown as Maine has begun grappling with a wider challenge: a long-term workforce shortage.

waste is 24.2%, or an estimated 2,400 individuals.¹⁵ This number is possibly an underestimate given the undercounting issue referenced above and that it uses averaged 2013–2017 data, which would miss the uptick in asylum seeker arrivals in recent years.¹⁶ Answering this question with more specificity would require more data collection and analysis by Maine agencies and service providers.

A Constrained Workforce

Maine has had stagnant workforce growth for many years. With the highest median age in the nation, its labor force has been flat at roughly 700,000 civilian workers since 2005. More concerning is that as Baby

15. “State Workforce Data – Maine,” Migration Policy Institute, Migration Data Hub, accessed January 28, 2020, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/data/state-profiles/state/workforce/ME>.

16. More recent data is not available because the Census Bureau used different occupation codes for 2018 ACS data, making analysis across years difficult. Because of Maine's comparatively small immigrant population, there are not enough respondents in single-year surveys to draw inferences. Information provided by Jeanne Batalova, interview by author, February 20, 2020.

17. “Councilor Angela Okafor,” City of Bangor, accessed January 30, 2020, <https://www.bangormaine.gov/content/1538/1751/22996.aspx>.

18. Robbie Feinberg, “From Nigeria To The Bangor City Council: Angela Okafor Makes History,” accessed January 30, 2020, <https://www.mainepublic.org/post/nigeria-bangor-city-council-angela-okafors-makes-history>.

19. For state-level examples, see The Editorial Board, “Our View: New Mainers Face Barriers to Full Entry,” *Press Herald*, February 25, 2019, <https://www.pressherald.com/2019/02/25/our-view-new-mainers-face-barriers-to-full-entry/>; Ben McCanna, “Underemployed Immigrants: A Plug for Maine's ‘Brain Drain’?,” *Press Herald*, March 18, 2014, <https://www.pressherald.com/2014/03/18/underemployed-immigrants-a-plug-for-maines-brain-drain/>; Seth Koenig, “Immigrants Are Needed to Fill Maine's Workforce Gap. Here's What's Getting in the Way,” *Bangor Daily News*, March 4, 2016, <https://bangordailynews.com/2016/03/04/politics/5-barriers-still-preventing-immigrants-from-doing-more-to-fill-maines-workforce-gap/>; J. Craig Anderson, “Immigrants Find Cold Reception from Maine Employers,” *Portland Press Herald*, June 23, 2018, <https://www.pressherald.com/2018/06/22/immigrants-describe-cold-reception-from-maine-employers/>.

For national-level examples, see Noble Ingram, “This City Is Short of Teachers. It's Tapping Immigrants to Help,” *Christian Science Monitor*, March 12, 2019, <https://www.csmonitor.com/EqualEd/2019/0312/This-city-is-short-of-teachers.-It-s-tapping-immigrants-to-help>; Katharine Q. Seelye, “Lacking E.M.T.s, an Aging Maine Turns to Immigrants,” *The New York Times*, March 27, 2017, sec. U.S., <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/27/us/maine-immigrants-emergency-medical-technicians.html>;

Maine Civilian Labor Force

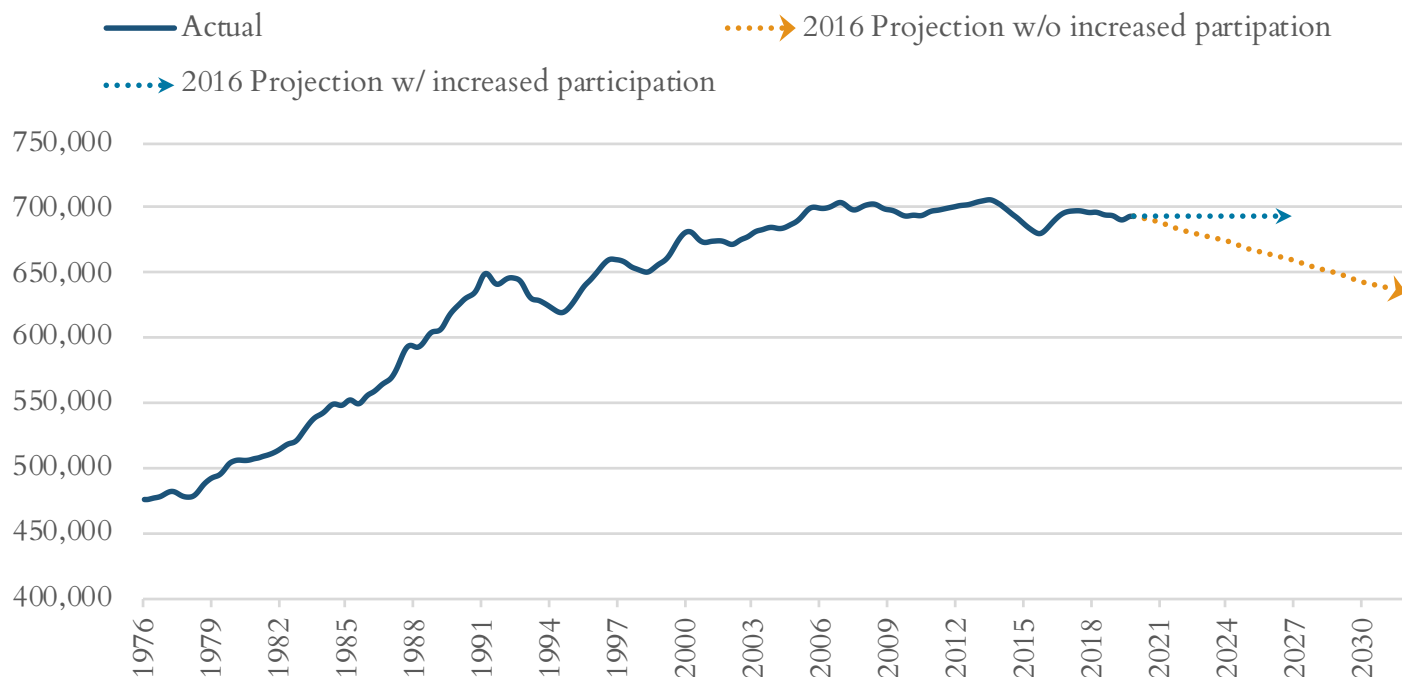


Figure 3: Maine’s civilian labor force has plateaued. Based on demographic projections using trends through 2017, Maine’s working-age population would decline significantly over the next decade. However, if workforce participation rates increase, as MDOL projected in 2016 would occur through 2026, then the workforce could remain stable. See *Maine Workforce Outlook: 2016 to 2026*, Maine Department of Labor, <https://www.maine.gov/labor/cwri/publications/pdf/2026Outlook.pdf>. Data for 1976–2019 from “Labor Force Statistics by Geography,” Maine Department of Labor, accessed March 15, 2020, <https://www.maine.gov/labor/cwri/laus1.html>

Boomers retire, the state’s workforce could decline by roughly 10% over the next decade.²⁰ That type of workforce loss would cause a severe strain on Maine’s economy, state and municipal governments, and community wellbeing. The shock to employment from the coronavirus pandemic could temporarily cover up this problem, but it will return as soon as the economy begins to recover. If employment and workforce numbers fall simultaneously, Maine could find itself stuck with a smaller economy following the crisis as job growth is capped by a smaller pool of available workers.

The healthcare industry provides a pointed example of workforce constraints. Using data through 2016, the Maine Department of Labor (MDOL) projected that healthcare would see the greatest job growth through 2026 in both absolute and percentage terms out of all occupation groups.²¹ In 2016, those occupations already had some of most disproportionately high vacancy rates in the state, with over 3,000 openings for nursing assistants and registered nurses (RN) alone.²² Data analyzed by the Center for Health Affairs shows that Maine’s RN shortage is likely to worsen significantly in the next few years; a shortage of 600

20. Calculations based on demographic trends through 2017. See: Department of Economic and Community Development, “Maine Economic Development Strategy 2020–2029.”

21. Center for Workforce Research and Information, “Statewide Employment Projections to 2026,” Maine Department of Labor, accessed February 12, 2020, <https://www.maine.gov/labor/cwri/outlook.html>.

22. Center for Workforce Research and Information, “2015 Job Vacancy Survey,” Maine Department of Labor, accessed February 12, 2020, <https://www.maine.gov/labor/cwri/jvs/evaluating.html>.

RNs in 2015 is projected to grow to 3,200 by 2025.²³ Maine's aging population affects both the supply and demand sides of the healthcare workforce equation: staff will be retiring as the elderly population grows and requires more healthcare.

Maine hospitals are already feeling this pressure and are trying to make up for it by increasing hiring bonuses and casting national and international recruiting nets.²⁴ Still, Maine's healthcare workforce has gained relatively few new internationally-trained nurses. Since 2010, 109 foreign-educated nurses applied for credential evaluation from Maine, according to data provided by CGFNS International. They represented 26 countries, the most common being the Philippines, Nigeria, and Jamaica.²⁵ For comparison, there were 1,187 graduates of Maine nursing schools in 2017 alone.²⁶

The current crisis surrounding the novel coronavirus compounds these issues. At the time of writing, it is unclear what the full impact of the crisis will be on Maine's economy, migration flows, and professional employment, particularly in healthcare. In the short-term, the need to fill the healthcare workforce may become even more crucial. In the medium-term, the State may have greater incentive to get Mainers into licensed professions, which can be less susceptible to economic cycles and provide a higher income base. In the long-term, the state's ability to grow and build a resilient economy will remain tied to workforce constraints. In any case, the need to invest in foreign-trained professionals remains.

The economic development strategy published by the state in December 2019 includes a goal to "attract 75,000 people to Maine's talent pool"—in other words, to reverse the projected workforce decline.²⁷ There are two basic approaches to achieving this goal: increasing

the labor force participation rate and attracting more workers to the state. The State's strategy calls for both, and both have a role to play for the immigrant community. The aim is to help immigrants already living in Maine as well as those newly arriving get into good jobs.

One of the specific actions called for in the plan specifically looks to improve the fare of college-educated immigrants currently working in jobs that do not utilize their skills. While not the only community of concern, the prospect of having former teachers, nurses, or engineers working in entry-level jobs is a wasted opportunity for both those individuals and the state as a whole. The plan sets a high goal, saying, "Above all, Maine must be known by new Americans across the United States as the most effective State to find a meaningful job that matches their career aspirations with their prior skills."²⁸ To achieve that reputation, Maine will need to first understand and then reduce the many roadblocks immigrants face to reentering skilled careers.

23. Lynn Turnbull, Lisa Harvey-McPherson, and Donna DeBlois, "Maine's Nursing Workforce" (Maine Nursing Action Coalition and the Center for Health Affairs, 2017), https://usm.maine.edu/sites/default/files/nursing/Maine%20Nursing%20Infographic_10.4.17.pdf.

24. Judy West, interview by author, February 3, 2020. See also Lori Valigra, "How A Lewiston Hospital Group Is Trying To Offset The Nursing Shortage," *Maine Public*, October 27, 2019, <https://www.mainepublic.org/post/how-lewiston-hospital-group-trying-offset-nursing-shortage>.

25. Franklin Shaffer, email to author, March 16, 2020.

26. Susan Sepples, *State of the State's Nursing Programs*, University of Southern Maine, https://usm.maine.edu/sites/default/files/nursing/State_of_Nursing_Programs_2017.pdf.

27. Department of Economic and Community Development, "Maine Economic Development Strategy 2020-2029," 10.

28. Department of Economic and Community Development, 27.

METHODOLOGY

There are three main information sources for this report: U.S. Census and American Community Survey data, government and nonprofit publications, and interviews. Interviews were the primary mode of original research, and they were conducted in person and by phone between late November 2019 and early March 2020. They are the foundation for the following description of career pipeline barriers, as well as some of the discussion of policy approaches in other states.

Most of the interviews were with service providers of different kinds: program administrators for workforce trainings, adult education, career counseling, and government benefits. Additional interviewees included advocacy groups, nonprofits, and state agencies, among others. A full list is provided in Appendix A.

This is a qualitative study. A rigorous quantitative evaluation of program effectiveness, particularly for a specific subpopulation like foreign-trained professionals, would require data that was not available during the research period. The State's ongoing implementation of a longitudinal data system, if effectively tied in across departments, will make such quantitative research more feasible in the future. At present, the reviews of knowledgeable interviewees are the best option for gauging programs' current and potential effectiveness.

The description of challenges in Maine and actions of other states is followed by policy recommendations for the state government to pursue.

Career Pipeline Barriers for Foreign-trained Professionals

Immigrants with professional backgrounds face a host of barriers to entering skilled employment in Maine.

Immigration Process

A long, costly, and uncertain immigration process can hinder people's ability to plan for the future or gain an income.

Meeting Basic Needs

Fulfilling basic income needs can prevent individuals from pursuing opportunities to return to their profession.

Education and Training

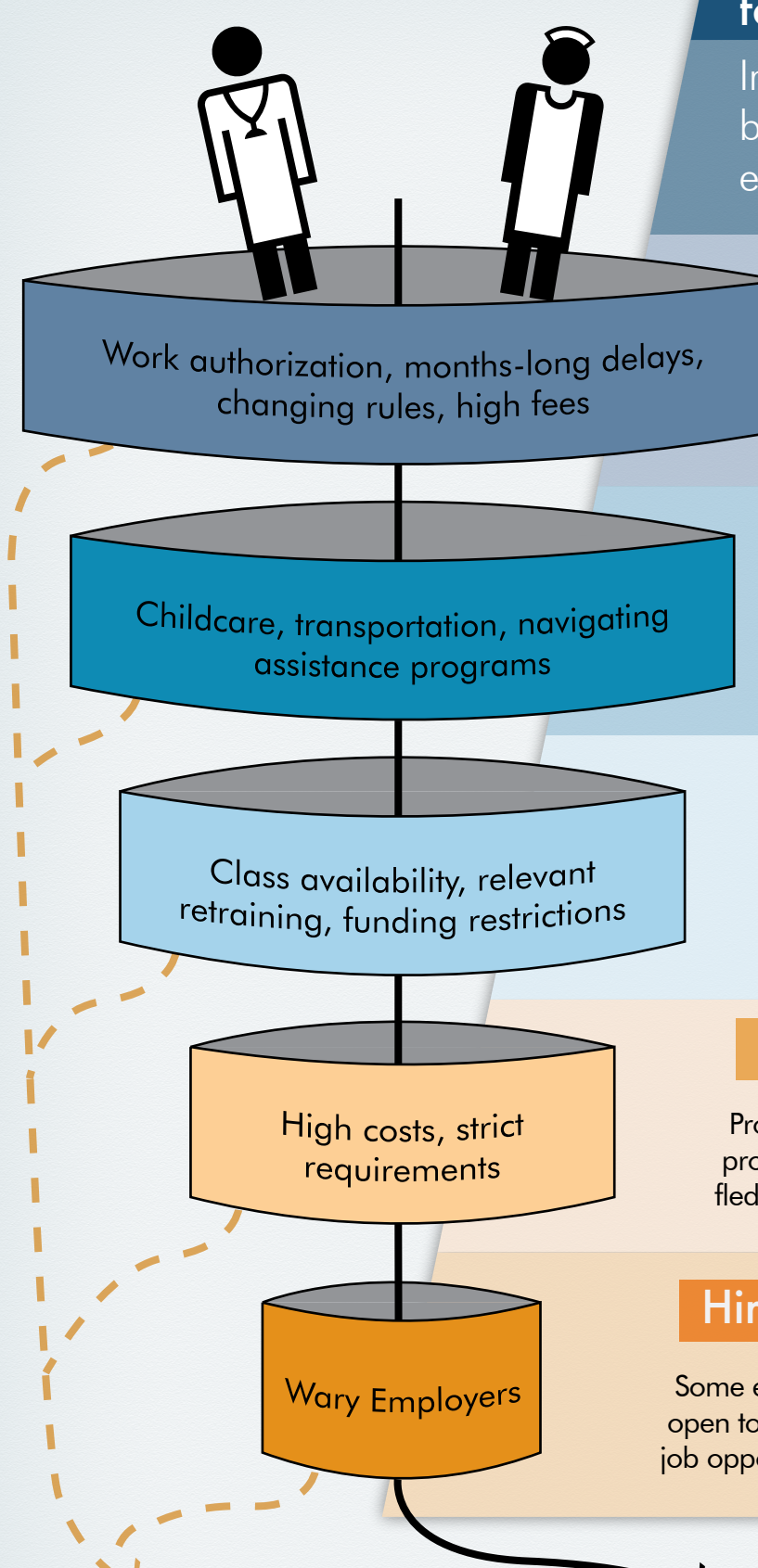
Maine's education and training offerings don't match demand and can exclude certain immigrants from funding.

Licensing

Professionals must navigate a difficult licensing process that could be impassable for someone who fled violence or disaster.

Hiring and Employment

Some employers are not always familiar with or open to hiring immigrants, which can lead to missed job opportunities.



Work authorization, months-long delays, changing rules, high fees

Childcare, transportation, navigating assistance programs

Class availability, relevant retraining, funding restrictions

High costs, strict requirements

Wary Employers

Underutilized skills

Those who fall out of the pipeline often get stuck in lower-paying jobs than they deserve

Fully-utilized skills

Those who successfully navigate the pipeline can fill needed, high-paying jobs

CARRIER PIPELINE BARRIERS

Foreign-trained professionals face a host of barriers to entering skilled employment that matches their backgrounds. At every stage of the process, from arrival to hiring, they encounter challenges that slowly but surely winnow the number of people who make it into the jobs they are trained for.

While there is no single pathway from arrival to employment, this section is grouped in rough order of need—without addressing the first problem category, it is difficult if not impossible to solve the next. The key sections are:

1. Immigration process
2. Meeting basic needs
3. Education and training
4. Licensing
5. Hiring and employment

Immigration Process

When considering how to best help immigrant professionals, the State should not underestimate the ability of the U.S. immigration process to derail an individual's path to gaining and maintaining employment. The process is extremely costly, lengthy, and uncertain. This section focuses primarily on asylum seekers because of their disproportionate share of newly arriving immigrants in Maine, but some of the content will be relevant to refugees and individuals who directly receive green cards through family, marriage, the diversity visa program, as victims

of violence or trafficking, or other means. It does not focus on employment-based visas since individuals with those visas are more likely to be hired into jobs commensurate with their skills, by definition, or they are only in the U.S. temporarily.

Barrier 1: Processing Time and Work Authorization

The time to receive work authorization, asylum status, lawful permanent resident status (i.e. a green card), and citizenship presents a significant barrier for foreign-trained professionals.

For asylum seekers, applicants can expect the process to take years.¹ In the theoretical best-case scenario, someone who files an affirmative asylum application with U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), fulfills all the requirements, and receives approval could have asylum status in about six months.² But even for relatively “simple” cases, the extreme backlog at USCIS means that timeline is rarely adhered to, if ever. And far more common than receiving straightforward asylum approval from USCIS is to be denied and referred to an immigration court for appeal. For those who applied for asylum defensively, their cases automatically go through the immigration court system. The average processing time for a case in the Boston Immigration Court in FY2019 was 1,177 days.³ The hundreds of asylum seekers who arrived in Maine in 2019 may not have their cases decided for three years or more.

Many asylum seekers who arrived prior to 2018 have fallen into a different trap. USCIS imposed a “last in, first out” policy in January 2018, which had the effect

1. Samantha Hogan, “Stuck in the Stack,” Pine Tree Watch, July 25, 2019, <https://pinetreewatch.org/maine-asylum-seeker-is-stuck-in-the-stack/>.

2. Affirmative asylum refers to individuals who arrive in the U.S. on a valid visa and then request asylum. Defensive asylum is the alternate case, which refers to an individual applying for asylum after being apprehended for entering the U.S. without authorization. Roughly 60% of asylum cases filed in 2018 were defensive. In practice, it often refers to individuals who cross over the southern U.S. border, turn themselves over to Border Patrol, and declare that they are seeking asylum.

3. TRAC Immigration, “Immigration Court Backlog,” Accessed January 29, 2020, https://trac.syr.edu/phptools/immigration/court_backlog/.

of moving earlier asylum applications to the back of the line. Given that USCIS is unable to keep up with the current pace of new asylum cases, old cases are effectively stuck in limbo. The Immigrant Legal Advocacy Project (ILAP) estimates there are around 1,000 people in this situation in Maine. They report having some clients who filed for asylum in 2014 and are still waiting for an interview with USCIS. It is this earlier group of asylum seekers that interviewees observed to be disproportionately more likely to have professional backgrounds.⁴

These delays have a number of consequences for those interested in reentering a profession. First, asylum seekers—as well as some others awaiting immigration decisions, such as those applying for green cards as victims of human trafficking—are not eligible for federal student aid. Second, asylum seekers can only petition to bring their family members to the U.S. once they have been granted asylum. In addition to the stress of prolonged separation from their families, they may have complications due to needing to send financial support to their home country, uncertainty whether they will be able to remain in the U.S., and greater difficulty caring for those in their household if they were able to bring some but not all of their family.

But the challenge service providers highlight the most is work authorization. Asylum seekers are eligible to apply for an Employment Authorization Document (EAD) 150 days after applying for asylum with the USCIS and can receive it 30 days later. Before then, they cannot legally be hired by an employer.

In practice, that 180-day timeline is rarely adhered to due to a variety of administrative issues. First, an individual cannot apply for defensive asylum until their case shows up on the right immigration court's docket. For those who crossed the southern border, their case might not show up for months.⁵ Second, a number of federal policies, including “last in, first

out”, have created process pitfalls that can delay work authorization by months or years—work authorization is tied to progress in the asylum process, so a delay in one can mean a delay in both.⁶ Recently, the Department of Homeland Security promulgated a rule that would require asylum seekers to wait a year before applying for work authorization and not allow any asylum seeker who entered the U.S. without authorization (i.e. crossed the southern border) to receive an EAD.⁷

When an individual finally does receive their EAD, it must be renewed each year for a \$410 fee. Those renewals can sometimes be delayed, and an employer cannot continue to employ an individual whose work authorization lapses. That can play into some employers' concerns about hiring immigrants, particularly asylum seekers, and make them reticent to employ otherwise qualified individuals.

Meeting Basic Needs

Barrier 2: Access to Programming

Programming for foreign-trained professionals, ranging from career counseling to community college classes, cannot always count on a “build it and they will come” approach. Many potential participants could face scheduling conflicts due to childcare or work obligations, and some may have difficulty physically traveling to the location.

Asylum seekers and refugees generally need to take the first job they can get—in fact they may be required to based on the assistance they receive. Once dependent on that source of income, they may not be able to lose any work hours to participate in workforce programming or engage in the licensing process. Part of the need for maintaining income is to

4. Beth Stickney, interview by author, January 21, 2020; Susan Roche and Philip Mantis, interview by author, January 24, 2020.

5. Susan Roche and Philip Mantis, interview by author, January 24, 2020.

6. Ibid. For example, if an individual needs to reschedule their interview with USCIS for any reason or they delay their court date trying to find a lawyer.

7. “Asylum Application, Interview, and Employment Authorization for Applicants,” Federal Register, November 14, 2019, <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2019/11/14/2019-24293/asylum-application-interview-and-employment-authorization-for-applicants>.

support family. Workforce and government assistance service providers report that a common refrain among immigrant clients is that they need to get to work as soon as possible in order to support their families.⁸

Roughly 15,000 children in Maine have at least one foreign-born parent, about 6.5% of all children in the state.⁹ Caring for those children limits time to engage in a professional career pathway, and the childcare availability crisis across Maine affects these individuals no less than others in the state. Six organizations noted childcare in interviews as a notable barrier for foreign-trained professionals.¹⁰ Without a way to ensure their children are looked after, they simply cannot attend programming.

Often mentioned in the same sentence as childcare, transportation can be another limiting factor for programming access. General Assistance does not help with transportation in this case; participating in its “workfare” requirements can grant access to funds for transportation to work, but not classes.¹¹ The location of programming can have an effect—a student living in Gorham or Westbrook may not be able to regularly attend a class in Portland. This problem overlaps with housing demand—as the housing market in Portland has tightened, recently arrived immigrants have had to look farther afield. Many 2019 arrivals moved to the Brunswick area, for example, which only has one part-time English language learner teacher in the regional adult ed center.¹² Sometimes these barriers can make the difference in a foreign-trained professional getting the programming they need.

Barrier 3: Assistance Program Requirements

A more explicit barrier to some immigrants pursuing a professional career path is if they rely on programs like TANF or General Assistance and are either unable to get appropriate training and support while on the

program or do not know how. In the case of TANF, the State contracts FedCap to provide various services for recipients to fulfil work requirements, which fall under the ASPIRE program. FedCap has roughly 400–500 immigrants in their caseload at any given time.¹³ The statutes and department rules governing ASPIRE grant a fair amount of flexibility in what programs participants can pursue to fulfil activity requirements. Case managers can approve participation in training programs on a case-by-case basis as long as they fulfil certain requirements, namely that it will provide a credential of value for an in-demand occupation. It takes work, but it is possible for new training programs to partner with FedCap and DHHS to ensure their offering will count and hand off participants more smoothly.¹⁴

What sounds like a reasonable process in theory seems to pose some serious challenges in practice, however. ASPIRE policies may nominally be flexible, but it appears many participants have had difficulty connecting to available resources and navigating procedural requirements. The result, according to some who work with the immigrant community, has been serious frustration and difficulty accessing services. This may uniquely affect foreign-trained professionals insofar as they already face an inordinate number of barriers as described in this report, but more likely this is an issue affecting all ASPIRE participants and is best addressed independently.

The other side of administrative challenges is participants’ lack of awareness of what resources are available. This is reportedly a problem facing General Assistance recipients. They must participate in “workfare” administered by their municipality, but the requirements are quite flexible and many education and training programs can fulfil them. That does not seem to be well-known among participants, however, and there may be a prevailing perception within the

8. Liz Ray, Jessica Myers, and Serena Powell, interview by author, January 22, 2020; Sally Sutton, interview by author, December 19, 2019; Patti Saarinen, interview by author, January 3, 2020.

9. U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2018 1-year Estimates, Table B05009, data.census.gov.

10. NMRC, Catholic Charities, WMCA, GPWI, FedCap, and ILAP.

11. Sally Sutton, interview by author, December 19, 2019.

12. Beth Stickney, interview by author, January 21, 2020.

13. Serena Powell, interview by author, January 22, 2020.

14. Kim Moore, interview by author, January 2, 2020; Bill Grant and Jen Tiner, interview by author, December 12, 2019.

immigrant community that the work requirements for General Assistance are very restrictive.¹⁵ It is ultimately up to program administrators to make clear to recipients where there is flexibility.

Education and Training

Barrier 4: English Language Acquisition

A good level of English language ability is undoubtedly necessary for foreign-trained professionals to enter their fields in Maine; their job will likely demand it, as will any qualifying exams. About 22% of non-citizen, foreign-born individuals in Maine speak English “less than well”, according to ACS data.¹⁶ Although more granular data is not available, some interviewees reported that asylum seekers, especially those arriving recently, have tended to have a higher need for English training.

Every organization interviewed for this report referenced English training as a key barrier to foreign-trained professionals—many listed it as a top concern. The challenge is time and capacity. There are a few primary avenues for English language acquisition for adults in the Portland area, namely Portland Adult Education (PAE), LearningWorks, the Immigrant Welcome Center, and the Salvation Army. In the rest of the state, adult education is generally the primary provider, including in Lewiston. By all accounts, the English training system is over capacity; while individuals can usually find some way to engage in English learning, there are not enough courses to best match many students’ learning needs.¹⁷

While the current system already struggles with demand, an even higher level of training would be ideal. For scheduling and cost reasons, most classes run a couple times per week. PAE’s standard ESOL class offerings go up to five hours per week.¹⁸ This is

sensible given the time constraints most students have; work and family obligations mean there is only so much time for language training. However, if starting with little knowledge, it could take years at that pace to learn English at a high enough level to practice a profession. Intensive English programs could shorten the timeframe, but they require more resources.

Added to the need of general English acquisition is occupation-specific language. Learning centers already offer some workplace English programming, such as PAE’s “ESOL Job Classes”, which covers “job search skills, English for work, U.S. workplace culture, and basic computer skills”.¹⁹ There has also been an increased look at occupation-specific language training. Examples include the Education Academy programs run by Portland and Lewiston adult education, MaineHealth’s partnership with the Immigrant Welcome Center, and Greater Portland Workforce Initiative’s (GPWI) Bridge to CNA program. These programs only cover specific career paths and occupational languages, however, and those trying to follow other career paths have few options.

Barrier 5: Workforce Programming Eligibility

A substantial amount of Maine’s workforce programming is provided through federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) funds. WIOA funds may not be spent on individuals who do not have work authorization. This is a notable problem given the number of asylum seekers who do not yet have that authorization and will take many months to get it. Typically, once individuals do receive work authorization, they begin employment as soon as possible.

When considering how to help foreign-trained professionals begin their careers in Maine, this poses a conundrum. Asylum seekers with professional backgrounds often need some form of training to get up to speed on how to work in their profession

15. Julia Trujillo, interview by author, February 26, 2020.

16. U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2018 5-year Estimates, Table S0501, data.census.gov.

17. Sally Sutton, interview by author, March 2, 2020.

18. Portland Adult Education, “ESOL Class Schedule,” accessed February 2, 2020, http://portlandadulthood.org/programs_and_courses/english_learning/esol_class_schedule.

19. Portland Adult Education, “ESOL Classes,” accessed February 2, 2020, http://portlandadulthood.org/programs_and_courses/english_learning/esol_classes.

in the U.S. They have the most time to participate in workforce trainings when they are not yet able to work. But they are not allowed to participate in many trainings until they can start working.

The exact number of foreign-trained professionals impacted is unclear, but multiple interviewees, including every direct workforce training provider, mentioned this “work authorization gap” as a significant issue. As an example, the head of Lewiston Adult Education estimated 6-12 people per month come to them who have prior professional experience but do not yet have work authorization. Without it, they are limited in what workforce trainings they can participate in.

Barrier 6: Appropriate Training Availability

Immigrant professionals in need of further education and training quickly have their options narrowed by their language ability, legal eligibility, and available funding. That smaller spectrum of opportunities may or may not include a pathway that is truly relevant to an individual’s past experience. While participating in available training might lead to a better job than they would otherwise have, it may not be the highest value match based on their past education and experience.

For example, GPWI’s Bridge to CNA program has had participants that were doctors in their home countries. They had no issue with the content of the CNA training, but they needed to improve their English test scores in order to begin those programs.²⁰ The Bridge program was likely a good fit for them given the available options, and the program has seen participants go on to further education beyond CNA training. But it raises the question of whether Maine’s training and education environment is creating the best pathways for people in that position. If a foreign-trained doctor begins moving up the ladder at the CNA level, it would take a lot of time, financial aid, and luck to reach the highest available position—likely at the physician’s assistant or nurse practitioner level. The initial constraining factor, however, is likely more one of English ability than medical knowledge.

Undoubtedly, medical professionals educated in most other countries need some level of additional training to work in the United States. Although certain countries have made a deliberate effort to harmonize medical education, the range of differences in international curricula makes it difficult for foreign-trained professionals who moved to Maine independently to plug directly into open positions.²¹ But having to put all comers through a medical assistant funnel may not be the best use of human capital if it is not primarily the medical training they are lacking. Due to simple cost and demand reasons, employer-sponsored trainings for new hires are often for entry-level positions, designed to be accessible to someone who has never worked in the industry before. It is a natural outcome of limited resources and a vast array of educational needs—it is safe to start everyone from square one. The unfortunate side effect is postponed careers and earnings.

A similar problem arises with Maine’s degree-granting institutions. Multiple interviewees mentioned the limited ability for students to take selected courses at Maine’s 2- and 4-year colleges to fill specific training gaps. A foreign-trained nurse may only need two or three courses to reach equivalency (which the licensing system would have to be prepared to recognize) but must go through an entire 2-year program again if they want to reenter the profession in Maine under the current system.

Licensing

Barrier 7: Credential Evaluation

Most professions require a license to practice in Maine. To obtain a license, a fundamental step is having credentials reviewed and validated. Licensing boards generally rely on national organizations for this evaluation, and there are specific groups that handle international credential review. For example, CGFNS International provides the service for nurses hoping to work in the U.S. An applicant must submit transcripts and diplomas and an “English Language Proficiency

20. Kim Moore, interview by author, January 2, 2020.

21. For an example of the difficulty in evaluating specific international training compatibility, see: CGFNS International, “Comparative Study of Nursing Education and Learning Outcomes: The Case of the Philippines and Norway” (International Labour Organization, November 2014).

Report” to CGFNS, the organization confirms whether they are valid, and then CGFNS provides a “Credentials Evaluation Service Professional Report” to the Maine State Board of Nursing.²² This report costs \$450.²³ Most professions require a similar process.

There are two problems foreign-trained immigrants can face here. First, they may not have easy access to their transcripts. Many evaluation services need the education institution to send an individual’s transcript directly—a clear challenge for anyone who fled their country due to violence, persecution, or natural disaster. CGFNS is piloting a program to evaluate the credentials of Syrian refugees without normal record access, which could provide useful lessons for helping similarly displaced groups in the future.²⁴ But for the time being, a nurse who could not request a transcript be sent to CGFNS by their school would have to redo their education under current Maine Board of Nursing requirements. Sometimes, immigrants travel with physical copies of their transcripts and diplomas. Depending on the profession—teaching and engineering for example—they may be able to submit those physical copies for evaluation.²⁵ For other professions, holding physical copies at least presents the option for review if policies are updated in the future to allow their consideration.

Second, the cost of evaluation can be prohibitive. The \$450 required for reports from CGFNS is a substantial amount of money for someone who recently arrived in the U.S., especially those initially reliant on government assistance programs. There are some resources, including at MDOL CareerCenters and for TANF recipients, that will cover the cost of credential translation and evaluation.²⁶ Options are

22. “Credentials Evaluation Service Professional Report,” CGFNS International, Inc., accessed February 4, 2020, <https://www.cgfns.org/services/credentials-evaluation/credentials-evaluation-service-professional-report/>.

23. “Fee Schedule and Policies,” CGFNS International, Inc., accessed February 4, 2020, <https://www.cgfns.org/support/fee-schedule/>.

24. Franklin Shaffer, email to author, March 16, 2020.

25. Scherer and Sutton, “Foreign Trained Professionals: Maine’s Hidden Talent Pool,” 12–13.

26. RuthAnne Healey, interview by author, December 19, 2019; Liz Ray, Jessica Myers, and Serena Powell, interview by author, January 22, 2020.

A note on licensing:

The New Mainer’s Resource Center (NMRC) published a major report on the issue of licensing for immigrants as well as guides for specific professions.¹ The report provided a number of recommendations, some of which are reflected in this publication, to specific licensing authorities.

Additionally, the Legislature, via LD 1841, directed the DPFR Commissioner in 2019 to create a working group to study licensing barriers for immigrants, as well as licensed professionals from other states.² The Commissioner submitted the group’s analysis and recommendations to the Legislature on March 3, 2020.³

This report concurs with those recommendations and encourages the continuation of the working group to further refine and implement improvements to the licensing process. Because of the ongoing work of NMRC and DPFR, this report does not delve into specific barriers within and recommendations for the State’s licensing rules and instead considers larger issues surrounding the process.

1. Dani Scherer and Sally Sutton, “Foreign Trained Professionals: Maine’s Hidden Talent Pool” (New Mainers Resource Center, November 2018), <https://nmrcmaine.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/NMRC-Maines-Hidden-Talent.pdf>.

2. Senator Erin Herbig, “Resolve, Directing the Commissioner of Professional and Financial Regulation To Create a Working Group To Study Barriers to Credentialing,” Pub. L. No. LD 1841, accessed February 4, 2020, https://legislature.maine.gov/legis/bills/display_ps.asp?LD=1841&snum=129.

3. Commissioner of Professional and Financial Regulation, “Report Submitted Pursuant to Resolve 2019, c. 79” (Maine Department of Professional and Financial Regulation, March 3, 2020).

limited, however, and do not appear to match demand. The establishment of a \$75,000 revolving loan fund at the Finance Authority of Maine to cover these types of expenses, via LD 1685 enacted in 2019, may prove to be a solution. The new program was being rolled out at the time of writing, so it is not yet clear if and to what extent it will remove this barrier. Given the inherently precarious finances of those covered by the program, however, even small loans may turn out to be too much risk for applicants to take on.

Additionally, while these problems arise at the licensing stage, that may not be the last time. Employers sometimes require primary verification of education. MaineHealth, for instance, must verify an applicant's education credentials themselves.²⁷ Reducing the evaluation barrier at the licensing stage may only be the first step for professions in which this is the case.

Barrier 8: Length and Cost of Process

The issue of credential evaluation is one notable part of a long licensing process. There is typically a fee involved with each step, which NMRC categorized as: “application fees to the board, transcript evaluation fees, translation fees, application fees to exam administrators and exam preparation course fees.”²⁸ For a nurse, these fees add up to \$1,500–1,700. That tally does not include any required additional coursework or potential lost earnings from having to reduce work hours to take courses.

The number of steps involved in the process can also be confusing for applicants. Immigrant or not, an individual is unlikely to understand the full licensing process without guidance. DPFR's websites are not easily understandable to someone not already familiar with the process.²⁹ While DPFR staff can provide guidance, applicants may not know that they can

contact them for support. NMRC provides a key role here in offering navigation help, but they are steadily running overcapacity.³⁰ Without financial support and process guidance, licensing can be a high barrier for immigrant professionals.

Hiring and Employment

Barrier 9: Getting hired and retained

From the applicant's perspective, employer barriers manifest in whether or not they are hired for a job and whether or not they can keep it. But behind an employer's hiring and firing decisions are a range of potential concerns. One is a skepticism towards the qualifications of an immigrant professional. It may not be clear to an employer how an individual's credential translates to the desired requirement, or whether it is as valuable as a U.S. degree.³¹ The same question may also arise with an applicant's work experience; if it is not U.S. experience, they may not know if it is relevant. A broader issue is language ability and accent. Employers can discriminate based on English skill or accent if they think it will affect the person's performance, and that seems to be a factor among some Maine employers, particularly for customer-facing positions.³²

On top of these specific concerns, there is a more general effect of reticence to hire immigrants based on a range of perceptions. Many interviewees reported seeing this uncertainty across employers. The details of the wariness vary: discomfort with accents, different workplace norms, uncertainty about work authorization, questioned performance ability, and any number of variations of thinking an immigrant would not be a good “fit”. Some immigrants have reported directly they have been rejected for positions

27. Judy West, interview by author, February 3, 2020.

28. Dani Scherer and Sally Sutton, “Foreign Trained Professionals: Maine's Hidden Talent Pool” (New Mainers Resource Center, November 2018), <https://nmrcmaine.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/NMRC-Maines-Hidden-Talent.pdf>, 13.

29. Commissioner Anne Head, interview by author, January 21, 2020.

30. Sally Sutton, interview by author, December 19, 2019.

31. Bill Grant and Jennifer Tiner, interview by author, December 20, 2019; Dawn Mealey, Mary LaFontaine, and RuthAnne Healey, interview by author, December 13, 2019.

32. Bill Grant and Jennifer Tiner, interview by author, December 20, 2019; David Wurm, interview by author, December 17, 2019. See also “Immigrants' Employment Rights Under Federal Anti-Discrimination Laws,” U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, accessed February 5, 2020, <https://www.eeoc.gov/eeoc/publications/immigrants-facts.cfm>.

and sidelined on the job for reasons related to their origins.³³

Following these concerns, some interviewees told success stories of businesses hiring immigrants. Employers who were at first skeptical about hiring individuals with heavy accents would find those concerns dissipate once they were on the job and everyone simply got used to it. Businesses that had workplace culture issues were able to resolve them once they made a deliberate effort to do so. The story trend was typically one of wariness on the part of employers being cleared up by time, education, and experience.³⁴ While not always the case, larger companies tended to have more capacity to sort out best practices for hiring immigrants and a greater workforce demand to do so, while smaller establishments were more concerned about missteps.³⁵ Increased need to expand the workforce could lead more businesses to make an effort to take appropriate steps to work with the immigrant community.

Cross-cutting Issues

Barrier 10: Little guidance for a complex process

Programs that guide individuals through each step of the process from arrival to professional employment are few to none. The journey takes many years and dealing with multiple federal, state, and local government agencies; nonprofit service providers; educational institutions; third-party regulators and evaluators; and private funders and employers. Moreover, the process is different for every individual. A former nurse from the DRC who made it to Maine as an asylum seeker would have a different path if they came as a refugee. A former teacher would follow a different process if they moved to Bangor instead of Portland. Advice given to one person may not apply to the next.

Navigating this complex system inevitably requires guidance. There are a few organizations that provide some form of this guidance, namely NMRC, MDOL CareerCenters, DHHS via FedCap, Lewiston Adult Education, the regional workforce boards via Workforce Solutions and Western Maine Community Action, and a range of nonprofits that have immigrant-focused programming. But none of these capture the full career pipeline. For example, they may offer great guidance on navigating government assistance requirements and available workforce trainings, but not the licensing process or immigration needs. They may have good connections with some training programs but not others. Additionally, their assistance may be time limited, or they may have a waiting list.

Every service provider interviewed for this report identified coordination and process navigation as a significant barrier. Most mentioned that the lack of advising covering the full career pipeline for an immigrant professional complicates or slows progress. Some also specifically claimed that services did not always coordinate well together—that a “warm handoff” was often absent. The result is that as people are passed from administrator to administrator—at best case worker to case worker—some fall through the cracks. Needed support then may end up delayed or not granted at all. Addressing this barrier could serve as a multiplier effect, boosting the value of new and existing efforts to improve outcomes for foreign-trained professionals.

33. Cleo Barker, “Barriers to Employment and Overcoming Economic Integration Challenges for Foreign-Born Workers in Maine” (Honors College, University of Maine, 2018); Koenig, “Immigrants Are Needed to Fill Maine’s Workforce Gap. Here’s What’s Getting in the Way”; Anderson, “Immigrants Find Cold Reception from Maine Employers.”

34. Bill Grant and Jennifer Tiner, interview by author, December 20, 2019; Patti Saarinen, interview by author, January 3, 2020; Beth Stickney, interview by author, January 21, 2020; Abdikadir Negeye, interview by author, February 21, 2020.

35. Beth Stickney, interview by author, January 21, 2020.

LESSONS FROM OTHER STATES

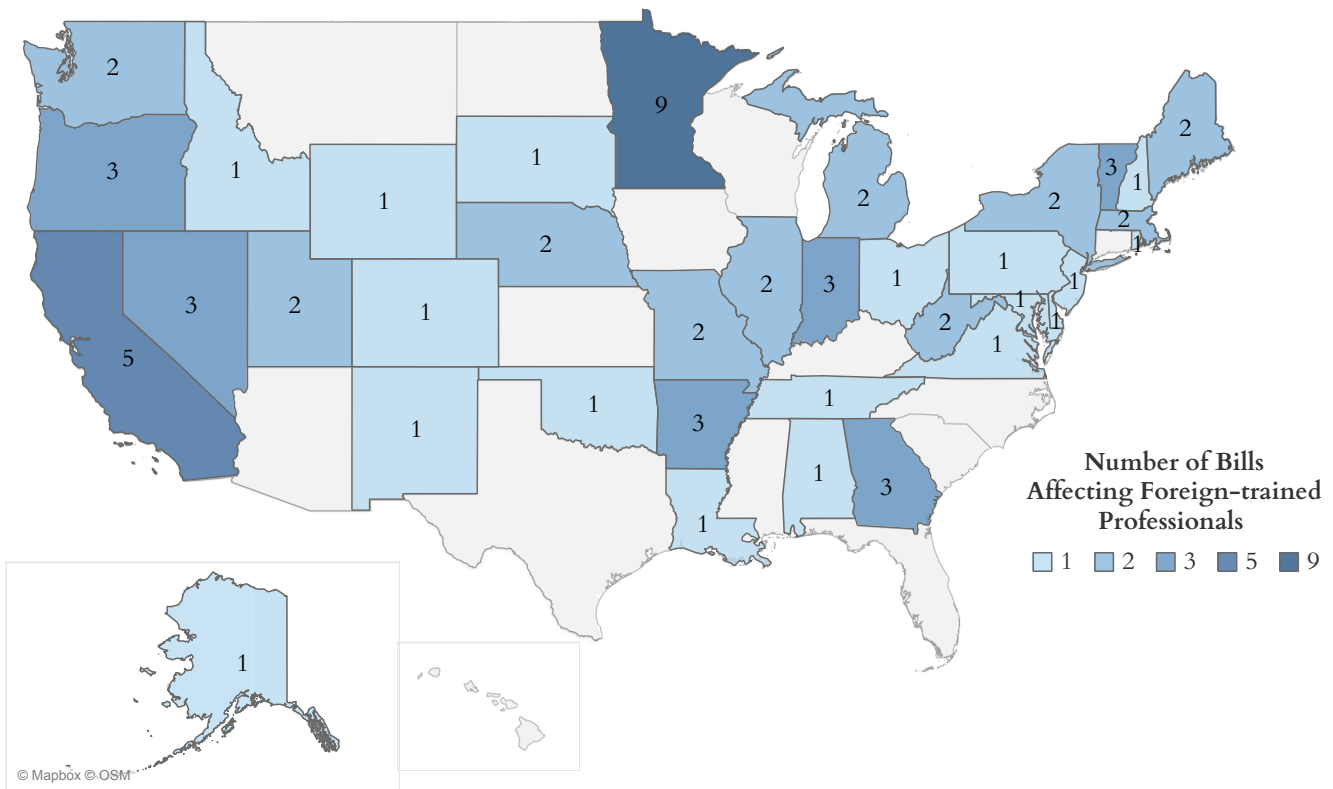


Figure 4: Many states have passed bills affecting foreign-trained professionals since 2012. *Data source:* “IMPRINT Policy Map: Integrating Foreign-Trained Immigrants and Refugees,” used permission of World Education Services (WES), WES.org., accessed March 9, 2020, <https://www.imprintproject.org/policy-map/>.

The phenomenon of immigrant skill underutilization is a topic of discussion across the United States. Many state governments have taken notice, driven by concerns similar to Maine’s, and have created a range of working groups, reports, and policy changes in response.

MPI estimated there were just over 2 million college-educated immigrants either unemployed or working in jobs below their skill level in the U.S. in 2017, a rate of 22.5% of all college-educated immigrant workers.¹ For policymakers interested in improving livelihoods and growing their state’s skilled workforce,

these individuals are a clear target for advancement. Since 2012, 36 states have passed at least one piece of legislation that touches upon supporting foreign-trained professionals.

The National Conference on State Legislatures examined the work states had done on this issue through mid-2018 and identified three common and overlapping approaches: establishing task forces to provide recommendations and pursue implementation, modifying licensure requirements, and improving targeted workforce and English training.²

1. Jeanne Batalova, Michael Fix, and James Bachmeier, “Untapped Talent: The Costs of Brain Waste among Highly Skilled Immigrants in the United States,” Migration Policy Institute, December 2, 2016, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/untapped-talent-costs-brain-waste-among-highly-skilled-immigrants-united-states>.

2. Ann Morse and Ishanee Chanda, “Barriers to Work: Improving Access to Licensed Occupations for Immigrants with Work Authorization” (National Conference of State Legislatures, July 17, 2018), <http://www.ncsl.org/research/labor-and-employment/barriers-to-work-immigrants-with-work-authorization.aspx>.

There is no common template for how to address this topic, given states' different demographics, workforce needs, licensing systems, and workforce programming. Still, there is much Maine can learn from the last decade of policymaking surrounding immigrant professionals. Michigan, Massachusetts, and Minnesota are useful cases to examine for the implementation methods they used as much as the particular policies they pursued.

Michigan's efforts began in full with the establishment of an Office of New Americans (MONA) in 2014 by executive order. The order explicitly referenced licensing and workforce training as two of the policy issues the office would coordinate.³ There was substantial collaboration between MONA and Michigan's Licensing and Regulatory Affairs Agency (LARA) due to the involvement of LARA's director, who later became the governor's cabinet director.

Two key features of the approach were full support from the governor and a sequencing that focused on addressing low-hanging fruit first to build momentum.⁴ One product of this was the creation of over forty licensing guides for skilled immigrants. Another was legislation that allowed barbers trained in countries where records were not available to substitute work experience for the education requirements of a barber's license. In 2015, Michigan International Talent Solutions was established, which provides job search coaching specifically for immigrants with a degree from a foreign university.⁵

Michigan had a key structural advantage to undertake licensing reform, which was that state licensing was

more centralized than Maine's system. Unlike in Maine, the licensing boards cannot promulgate their own rules or interpret their own statutes, with those functions instead residing within LARA. The establishment of an Office of New Americans, which served as a clear point of contact and champion for reform efforts, was also more viable in a state with nearly seven times the budget of Maine and a dedicated funding stream in the form of state-administered refugee services.

In some ways, Massachusetts has taken a very different path than Michigan, focusing more on research and planning. Key strategic plan efforts in 2008–09 and 2014 touching on issues of immigrant professionals culminated in major reports that struggled to gain traction due to a combination of timing issues and lack of political will.⁶ There is currently a law pending before the legislature that would establish a commission to recommend ways to reduce licensing barriers for foreign-trained professionals.⁷

While the impact of Massachusetts' planning efforts have not always met expectations, it is worth noting that the state is starting ahead of the pack. It has a longer history of state services for its immigrant population—its Office for Refugees and Immigrants was established in its current form in 1992. Services that would be novel recommendations for a state like Maine are already up and running in Massachusetts, such as an Office of Multilingual Services within the state labor office and a community college center dedicated specifically to helping foreign-trained nurses.⁸

This reflects the fact that immigrants represent

3. Governor of Michigan, Executive Order, "Creation of the Michigan Office for New Americans, Executive Order No. 2014–2 of January 31, 2014," https://www.michigan.gov/documents/snyder/EO_2014-2_446407_7.pdf.

4. Michael Zimmer, interview by author, February 19, 2020.

5. Rebecca Kruth, "New State Program Matches Skilled Immigrants with Employers," *Michigan Radio*, November 2, 2015, <https://www.michiganradio.org/post/new-state-program-matches-skilled-immigrants-employers>.

6. Westy Egmont et al., "Massachusetts New Americans Agenda" (The Governor's Advisory Council for Refugees and Immigrants, October 1, 2009); Jeffery Gross, "Rx for Strengthening Massachusetts' Economy and Healthcare System" (Governor's Advisory Council for Refugees and Immigrants, Task Force on Immigrant Healthcare Professionals in Massachusetts, December 2014), https://www.immigrationresearch.org/system/files/gac_task_force_report-final-12.18.14_compressed.pdf; Jeffery Gross, interview by author, February 24, 2020.

7. Sen. Joanne Comerford, "Resolve Establishing a Special Commission to Foster Greater Opportunities for Skilled Immigrants in the Commonwealth," Pub. L. No. S.1053, accessed March 1, 2020, <https://malegislature.gov/Bills/191/SD962>.

8. The Office of Multilingual Services lies within the Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development. Bunker Hill Community College hosts the Boston Welcome Back Center, which assists "nurses trained in other countries to become registered nurses in Massachusetts".

nearly one quarter of the state’s entire workforce—to have any program serving the workforce in Eastern Massachusetts means serving immigrants. And at 19.6%, the state has lower “brain waste” for immigrants than Maine and the U.S. as a whole.⁹

Minnesota provides an interesting model in its laser-focus on immigrants with backgrounds in healthcare. Beginning with a task force in 2014, the state passed a number of bills in the ensuing two years to help integrate foreign-trained health professionals into the workforce. Legislation included tweaks to licensing requirements for doctors that allowed more flexibility for graduates of foreign medical schools and who previously practiced in another country.¹⁰

The legislature also appropriated funds to establish an International Medical Graduate Assistance program, which maintains a roster of individuals looking to reenter the medical profession, provides them with comprehensive transition assistance, helps facilitate residency placements, and continues to review licensing barriers.¹¹ While there has been some work on nurses and other health occupations, the primary focus has been on physicians, arguably the most difficult licensed profession to address. The state has made progress, but it has required many years and substantial appropriations—in 2015 for example, the legislature appropriated \$500,000 for the medical graduate assistance program and another \$200,000 for licensing exam preparation courses and fees.¹²

These are three brief examples of what other states have been doing to support foreign-trained professionals, and they are representative in that each state’s approach has been different. As policymakers in Maine move to implement programs and policy changes to support its immigrant workforce, they should be quick to look to their counterparts in other states for ideas.

9. “State Workforce Data – Massachusetts,” Migration Policy Institute, Migration Data Hub, accessed March 1, 2020, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/data/state-profiles/state/workforce/MA/US/ME>.

10. For a recent example, see: Sen. Michelle Benson, “An Act Relating to Health and Human Services,” Pub. L. No. Chapter 9-S.F.No. 12 (2019), <https://www.revisor.mn.gov/laws/2019/1/Session+Law/Chapter/9/>.

11. International Medical Graduate Assistance Program, “Report to the Minnesota Legislature” (Minnesota Department of Health, August 1, 2018), <https://www.health.state.mn.us/facilities/ruralhealth/img/docs/2018imgleg.pdf>.

12. Morse and Chanda, “Barriers to Work: Improving Access to Licensed Occupations for Immigrants with Work Authorization.” See also: “IMPRINT Policy Map: Integrating Foreign-Trained Immigrants and Refugees,” World Education Services (WES), accessed March 1, 2020, <https://www.imprintproject.org/policy-map>.

RECOMMENDATIONS

There are a number of policies Maine could pursue to improve the ability of immigrant professionals to reenter relevant, skilled work. In some cases, these policies will affect only those individuals, but more often they will aid broader groups as well. The barriers facing immigrants with professional backgrounds usually affect the immigrant community in general, not to mention U.S.-born Mainers. For policies that require program piloting or a ramp-up timeline, the initial focus should be on the healthcare sector, given current needs, but with the goal of expanding to the full range of other professions

These recommendations are compiled from the suggestions of interviewees and fleshed out by additional research into existing state policy and the experiences of other states. They are prioritized by expected impact paired with current feasibility. They consist of no more than one immediate priority per department. By implementing these policies, the State could improve employment outcomes for many residents and grow Maine's high-skilled workforce.

For immediate action:

1. Expand adult language education
2. Target support for work authorization gap
3. Train agency staff and increase community outreach
4. Establish new workforce board committee

For program piloting and coordination:

5. Create bridge training programs with employers
6. Enhance career pipeline advising and program handoffs
7. Identify alternative job pathways
8. Review and grow credential evaluation funding
9. Provide cultural awareness support for employers

For longer-term planning:

10. Aid non-FAFSA eligible students
11. Cover basic costs to attend classes

For Immediate Action

The Governor's Office should work with the relevant departments to implement these policy changes before the end of 2020.

1: Expand adult language education

Maine institutions' capacity to teach English to speakers of other languages must expand significantly for the growing immigrant community to be able to swiftly and successfully enter the workforce. The natural way to do this will be through the infrastructure the State already supports, namely local adult education organizations. ESOL offerings should be increased to match local demand—meaning prioritizing Portland and Lewiston, followed by growing destinations like Brunswick, Augusta, Biddeford, and Bangor.

While expanding general language offerings is valuable, the State should also look at supporting occupation-specific training as well as intensive offerings for those who cannot yet work. These intensive language courses will be best paired with workforce-specific programs in coordination with interested employers, since that can increase the value for the participant as well as meet work requirements for TANF. Portland and Lewiston's adult education groups already have experience providing these types of trainings, and with appropriate resources, they could expand their offerings. In all cases, educators should explore the potential for distance learning as a way to make up for transportation challenges and, at the time of writing, a potentially long period of school closure due to coronavirus.

One avenue to providing the necessary resources is for the Legislature to appropriate specific funds. At the time of writing this report, LD 647 is a bill awaiting decision on the Appropriations Committee table that would do precisely this. It calls for, among other things, \$1 million per fiscal year in additional funding for language instruction (\$600,000 for general English language acquisition, \$400,000 for vocation-specific). Aside from this specific legislation, the best avenue would be to incorporate greater funding for this purpose into the Department of Education's general biennial budget request. Sustainability and predictability are key—with persistent funding, adult education can hire teachers and plan courses more effectively.

Key department: **Department of Education**

Feasibility notes: Cost is the primary concern. Expanding language education to the appropriate level will be high cost but proportionately high impact.

2: Target support for work authorization gap

The time between an asylum seeker's arrival and their receipt of work authorization is the most important period for intervention, but one in which there is currently little support. Once their basic needs are established, the ideal is to get people into language and workforce training as soon as possible. Because of federal funding and employer restrictions, the onus is on the State to make funding available to fill this gap, whether through MDOL, adult education institutions, or the community college system. Some private foundations may also be willing to partner on these efforts. The sooner the State acts to fill this gap, the better; an asylum seeker is only in this phase once, and participating in training becomes far more difficult after they start working.

The clearest step the State could take to address this gap would be to update the eligibility requirements for the Competitive Skills Scholarship Program (CSSP). MDOL's promulgated rules governing the program include "legally eligible to work in the United States" as an eligibility criterion.¹ The governing statute does not include this restriction.² Since CSSP funds are primarily used for attending college and training programs, the purpose of the fund does not pose an inherent restriction. The rule could be amended to include individuals who have started the work authorization process and/or are likely to receive authorization within a certain amount of time following the completion of their CSSP-supported training. This would likely be considered a substantive rule change, meaning MDOL would have to go through the legislative rulemaking process. MDOL could join this change with a larger evaluation of CSSP rules that potentially inhibit funding for foreign-trained professionals, such as limited applicability to certain programs or income threshold limits.

While this will be an important and necessary first step, it is worth noting that CSSP funds are already insufficient to match current demand. Given CSSP's relevance to not only the issue of foreign-trained professionals but the State's broader goals for workforce improvement, expanding its allocation to match demand should be a high priority.

1. Maine Department of Labor, Bureau of Employment Services, *Rule Governing the Competitive Skills Scholarship Program* (Maine 2015), 3, <https://www.mainecareercenter.gov/docs/2019/CSSPRules.pdf>.

2. "Competitive Skills Scholarship Program," §2033 Maine Revised Statutes, accessed February 25, 2020, <https://legislature.maine.gov/legis/statutes/26/title26sec2033.html>.

Key department: **Department of Labor**

Feasibility notes: Amending a rule through the legislative process can be administratively burdensome, but it is a manageable and relatively well-defined process. Cost increases will match application increases, which will depend on how well newly eligible applicants connect to the resource and if the inflow of asylum seekers remains steady.

3: Train agency staff and increase community outreach

As the State seeks to improve services and employment outcomes for foreign-trained professionals, it will also need to “walk the walk” internally. The first step is to have agency staff participate in cultural competency trainings to improve their understanding of working with people from different backgrounds. MDOL has already been providing staff with cultural training, and DPFR is looking to follow suit. All staff that interact with the immigrant community as clients should be the first priority. But the State should also plan to model the behavior it would like to see in the wider economy, meaning it should be looking to integrate immigrant professionals into its workforce. That could require additional training for hiring managers and potential placement teams.

Additionally, state agencies must consider how to appropriately integrate voices of the immigrant community into decision making processes. Some interviewees expressed a desire to see working and engagement with the immigrant community become part of the core competency of state agencies as opposed to a series of one-off meetings and check-ins (including for reports like this one). Part of that may come from cultural trainings, but it will also require direct engagement.

Some community leaders interviewed for this report recommended that the state agency reduce dependence on their voices and instead incorporate feedback from community members directly. Options for achieving this include implementing follow-up surveys and feedback meetings with service recipients as well as having local staff attend community events and meetings. While this issue may be particularly acute for some of the immigrant community, the same recommendation holds for improving services for other groups around the state who face specific challenges.

Key departments: **Bureau of Human Resources; Labor; Health and Human Services**

Feasibility notes: The chief burden will be staff time, both for attending trainings and conducting community outreach. The only additional direct costs will be hiring cultural competency trainers.

4: Establish new workforce board committee

Because much of the necessary work to support foreign-trained professionals will require ongoing implementation support, these efforts should be incorporated into the State Workforce Board. The Board is an existing group of many of the key stakeholders relevant to these recommendations and is the body tasked with carrying out the workforce components of the Maine Economic Development Strategy.

Specifically, the Board should establish a committee focused on immigrant employment. A more targeted subsection of the Board could better address the needs of Maine's growing immigrant workforce, including foreign-trained professionals. The committee should ensure foreign-trained professionals remain part of state policymaking conversations, from strategic initiatives like the economic development plan and Educate Maine to specific projects like the Department of Education's implementation of a new state longitudinal data system.

Maine's regional workforce boards should follow suit in establishing dedicated committees to immigrant employment. Particularly given the regional boards' direct role in federal program funding, this could ensure new training projects are connected to needed resources.

Key department: **State Workforce Board**

Feasibility: Many relevant actors for a committee on immigrant employment are already part of the Board, but additional members may need to be recruited. This will primarily require staff time and a dedication to carrying out the committee's actions.

For Program Piloting and Coordination

These recommendations will require further piloting and coordination before becoming full-fledged programs. The Workforce Board committee should pursue these projects with an initial focus on the healthcare sector, given the current public health crisis.

5: Create bridge training programs with employers

The State should support the application of employer-connected workforce training models to link foreign-trained professionals directly with skilled job openings. Someone with a prior background in a profession may be able to slot into a higher position if given the appropriate education. Ideally through incentivizing funds, the State could support a partnership with employers that uses the familiar model of new hire pipeline trainings but instead for higher-level retrainings.

For licensed professions, this could be quite demanding. It will be difficult to find a large pool of people on the same occupational path that are starting at the same level. To make better use of resources, in these cases, the provider should look to partner with multiple employers for the same program—an approach that Lewiston Adult Education used successfully for its construction training program. The training could be open to anyone for whom retraining would be relevant, such as veterans or people who took prolonged leave from an occupation, in addition to foreign-trained professionals.

There are a few models for programs along these lines. The Education Academy programs run by Portland and Lewiston’s adult education departments are one example. They provide targeted training for people who were teachers in their home countries and want to reenter the profession in Maine.

Applying this model to other occupations could pose additional challenges—healthcare occupations are more fragmented, for example, and the local public school system is a uniquely centralized employer—but it is still worthwhile to pursue. MaineHealth’s partnership with the Immigrant Welcome Center and GPWI’s Bridge to CNA program are two general models for pairing English and healthcare training.

Key department: **Labor**

Feasibility notes: Creating comprehensive training programs is time- and resource-intensive. Employer buy-in and sponsorship can ease both of those burdens and is necessary to create a worthwhile program. The upfront cost will largely be staff time in planning and coordinating an education provider, program administrator, relevant licensing staff, and employers to design the process.

6: Enhance career pipeline advising and program handoffs

The state government should use its convening role to bring together relevant players in the career pipelines of foreign-trained professionals—adult and higher education institutions, workforce training providers, state and municipal benefit administrators, immigration legal services, state licensing staff, immigrant support nonprofits, key community leaders, and relevant employers—to identify how they can better serve clients in a seamless manner. MDOL and DHHS are engaged in some joint projects to improve integrated services, which is an important start.

In the case of foreign-trained professionals, however, there are many more organizations individuals must work with that the State should look to help integrate. The State should not necessarily attempt to establish a new program to accomplish this—standing up another “one-stop shop” initiative risks being more duplicative than helpful. The best approach will have to be determined by convening staff of the many programs in question to discuss solutions.

As part of this effort, swiftly implementing a state longitudinal data system is a must. One source of trouble for program beneficiaries is that, for the most part, services do not share files with one another.¹ Data systems within the state government itself are disjointed as well. The first-order result is that individuals must go through a new intake process for almost any new service they contact. Moreover, the State could answer more questions about beneficiaries and program effectiveness if it were better able to coordinate the information already being gathered. The Department of Education was recently awarded a federal grant to implement such a system, and ensuring it is well-connected across DHHS, MDOL, adult ed, and workforce board programming will go a long way towards connecting foreign-trained professionals to the right place.²

1. The workforce board providers, like Workforce Solutions, and MDOL are one exception—the former can share some case files with some programs of the latter.

2. “Maine State Longitudinal Data System,” Institute of Education Sciences, Funded Research Grants and Contracts, accessed March 23, 2020, <https://ies.ed.gov/funding/grantsearch/details.asp?ID=3387>.

Key department: **Labor; Office of Family Independence; Education**

Feasibility notes: Better coordination will require continuous engagement and ensuring staff is aware of the needs and available opportunities for foreign-trained professionals. Hosting meetings will cost little other than staff time. Implementing an effective shared data platform will require substantial staff time, but the Department of Education has already received funding to support such an effort.

7: Identify alternative job pathways

For some professions and some individuals, it is highly unlikely if not impossible for them to return to their prior profession once in Maine. If someone was a doctor in their home country, for example, the residency requirement for M.D. licensure in the U.S. can be an insurmountable barrier. For people in this situation, the State should work with employers to identify what alternative jobs could make use of their skills and pay appropriately well, even if they cannot achieve the exact same title again.

The State's role in this case could primarily be that of convener, bringing together employers with relevant immigrant and policy groups to identify valuable alternatives. Depending on the role in question, the effort may also require input or rule change recommendations from the Department of Professional and Financial Regulation.

Key department: **Health and Human Services; Professional and Financial Regulation**

Feasibility notes: This requires coordination among education providers, DPFR, industry regulators, and employers to identify what pathways are useful, desirable, and feasible. The largest burden will likely fall on employers to consider how to integrate new or tweaked positions into workflows and the hiring process. The State's role will largely be one of coordinating and incentivizing.

8: Review and grow credential evaluation funding

There are a variety of supports for individuals who need their credentials translated and evaluated: the Competitive Skills Scholarship Program (CSSP) through MDOL, the New Mainers' Resource Center, DHHS for TANF recipients, and specific programs like LAE's educator training. However, these resources are somewhat of a patchwork and do not match demand. LD 1685, enacted in 2019, took an important step in addressing this gap by creating a \$75,000 revolving loan fund for covering credential evaluation and translation. The Finance Authority of Maine (FAME), as the issuing authority, and workforce service providers should monitor how this fund is used and incorporate feedback from loan recipients.

Given that it is explicitly for immigrants who may not yet have received work authorization, it is possible that the uncertainty of incurring a debt of even a few hundred dollars may discourage applicants who do not yet have a steady income. Therefore, the State should continue to explore avenues to provide more grant money for this purpose through programs like CSSP and NMRC.

In the immediate term, the State should consider avenues to use funding for credential evaluation for healthcare workers given the public health crisis. Routing such funding through existing programs like CareerCenters and adult education could help identify and advance needed healthcare professionals more quickly.

Key departments: **FAME; Labor**

Feasibility notes: Reviewing the new program will not be uniquely time- or resource-intensive. If there is an identified need for more funding or a different mechanism, some staff time will be necessary to plan a new funding stream. But the dollar amounts are unlikely to be more than five figures.

9: Provide cultural awareness support for employers

To ease the hiring barrier facing immigrant professionals, the State could help ensure employers are familiar with hiring and working with people from different parts of the world. Cultural awareness/competency trainings are a straightforward way to increase this capacity among employers. There have been successful initiatives like this in Maine already—multiple interviewees pointed to cultural trainings for construction employers that all parties found valuable. There appears to be demand among employers for these types of trainings, but they likely need guidance on how to set them up or clear incentives to participate.

MDOL could sponsor group trainings for employers that otherwise may not arrange them on their own, beginning with sectors that have the highest potential to hire foreign-trained professionals. Longer-term, MDOL could aim to create a practice modeled on its SafetyWorks! initiative, focused on hiring and inclusion best practices instead of physical workplace safety. In doing so, the Department could move beyond group trainings and into more targeted trainings and consultations for Maine employers.

Key department: **Labor**

Feasibility notes: Hosting workshops and working with employers is well within MDOL's competency. MDOL can work with the Maine Chamber of Commerce and the Maine Business Immigration Coalition to identify a practitioner and interested businesses, as well as test viability. Pilot trainings could utilize existing funding streams, but if the initiative grows, additional funding would be necessary.

For Longer-term Planning

The Workforce Board committee should plan to further study these issues to identify solutions.

10: Aid non-FAFSA eligible students

Given the high number of individuals in Maine still going through the asylum approval process, their ineligibility for federal student aid could be holding back a number of potentially skilled members of the workforce from completing additional coursework necessary for licensure.

The state government should explore options with Maine's higher education institutions, particularly the community college system, and private scholarship funders to identify ways to close this funding gap. To reduce potential costs, funds could be made available specifically to those with professional backgrounds. The State may also wish to consider closing the funding gap for minors in the same position as part of a broader push to improve higher education availability. This is a clear strategy higher education institutions can adopt as they pursue goals under Educate Maine to improve the percentage of Mainers with a credential of value.

Key department: **Education**

Feasibility notes: This will require longer-term planning given the number of stakeholders and relatively large resources involved. Since most of the student higher education funding process is tied in some way to the FAFSA, implementing a scholarship independent of that process would be administratively difficult but potentially high impact.

11: Cover basic costs to attend classes

Applicable to more than just immigrant professionals, the State should look for ways to support participants in classes and trainings beyond simply making them available. Providing a pool of funds for public transportation vouchers could reduce a notable burden for low-income individuals, including recent immigrants, who need to attend classes to obtain good employment. An immediate point of intervention would be to support vouchers for workfare participants to travel to classes in addition to their workplace.

Additionally, providers should be aware of participants' childcare needs as well. Childcare is a much broader issue, itself the focus of ongoing research by the State, and totally covering its cost for parents to attend trainings may not be feasible. However, as the government looks to address Maine's childcare challenges in general, it will be important to consider the needs of this particular population as well. Providing childcare subsidies, co-locating childcare facilities with education centers, or facilitating childcare coordination among students and community members could all help individuals participate in needed trainings.

Key department: **Health and Human Services**

Feasibility notes: This issue touches on many policy areas and will need to dovetail with other ongoing planning efforts.

APPENDIX A - LIST OF INTERVIEWS

American Immigration Council:

Suzette Brooks Masters, Senior Strategist

Catholic Charities:

Hannah DeAngelis, Director of Refugee and Immigration Services

CGFNS International, Inc.

Franklin Shaffer, President and CEO

City of Portland:

Julia Trujillo, Director of Office of Economic Opportunity

Coastal Counties Workforce Inc.:

Jillian Sample, Director of Operations

FedCap:

Serena Powell, Executive Director, Breaking the Cycle

Greater Portland Workforce Initiative:

Kim Moore, Project Director

Immigrant Legal Advocacy Project:

Philip Mantis, Legal Director

Susan Roche, Executive Director

Immigrant Welcome Center:

Damas Rugaba, Director of Finance and Operations

Lewiston Adult Education:

William Grant, Director

Jennifer Tiner, Assistant Director

Maine Business Immigration Coalition:

Beth Stickney, Executive Director

Maine Department of Health and Human Services:

Jessica Myers, Eligibility Supervisor

Liz Ray, Associate Director of Policy and Programs

Maine Department of Labor:

RuthAnne Haley, CareerCenter Consultant

Mary LaFontaine, Regional Director, Southern Maine CareerCenters

Dawn Mealey, Deputy Bureau Director

Maine Department of Professional and Financial Regulation:

Anne Head, Commissioner

MaineHealth:

Jennifer O'Leary, Manager, Center for Workforce Development

Judith West, Chief Human Resources Officer

Maine Immigrant and Refugee Services:

Abdikadir Negeye, Associate Director

Maine Immigrant Rights Coalition:

Mufalo Chitam, Executive Director

Migration Policy Institute:

Jeanne Batalova, Senior Policy Analyst

Portland Adult Education:

Sally Sutton, Program Coordinator, New Mainers Resource Center

Representative Kristen Cloutier**World Education Services:**

Jeffery Gross, Senior Advisor

Michael Zimmer, Senior Policy Consultant

Western Maine Community Action:

Patti Saarinen, Program Coordinator

Workforce Solutions:

David Wurm, Director