Immigrants' Economic Contributions to Michigan's Workforce

Immigrants and refugees play a crucial role in Michigan's economy,[1] including in some of the state's fastest-growing and most in-demand fields, such as healthcare, behavioral health, and education.[2] In the overall workforce, new Americans already punch above their weight. In 2021, immigrants made up 8.4 percent of the state's workforce despite comprising just 6.9 percent of its population.[3] Nonetheless, Michigan is going to need more workers to complement the U.S.-born workforce, which is facing increasingly critical shortages as the state's population ages. In 2019, more than 3.1 million Michigan residents were 55 or older and will reach retirement age in the next decade, further exacerbating workforce shortages.[4]

For Michigan to remain competitive and address critical workforce shortages in high-demand fields, the state must continue to implement policies that attract and retain immigrant and refugee talent and build career pathways for immigrants and refugees who are already living in the state.

One solution to help fill workforce needs and attract and retain immigrant talent is to expand access to professional and occupational licensure pathways for internationally trained professionals.More than a dozen states have taken similar steps to reduce barriers to professional and occupational licenses, including Arkansas, California, Colorado, Illinois, Nebraska, New Jersey, Nevada, and Washington. Michigan is in a position to take decisive action to leverage the skills of the state's future workforce.

THE GROWING DEMAND FOR HEALTHCARE WORKERS IN MICHIGAN

As employers struggle to recruit and retain specialized healthcare workers, immigrants play a crucial role in helping to address labor shortages. With an increase in demand for multilingual and culturally competent employees, internationally trained healthcare professionals are uniquely positioned to provide support across all healthcare settings.

From 2018 to 2022, the number of overall online job postings in Michigan increased from 1.1 million to 1.4 million, an increase of 33.5 percent.[5] In the healthcare industry alone, online job postings increased from 99,600 in 2018 to 168,500 in 2022, a 69.2 percent increase,[6] and online job postings for healthcare occupations that requested bilingual skills grew by 93.6 percent,[7] evidence of the already critical need for culturally competent and multilingual healthcare workers.[8] Reducing barriers that prevent immigrants and refugees from entering the healthcare field will be crucial as the state's population continues to age out of the workforce.

The top three industries with the highest number of online job postings in 2022 were **Health Care and Social Assistance, Services (Administrative, Support, Waste Management, and Remediation)**,[9] **and Retail Trade**.

NURSING

While immigrant nurses already play an essential role in the state's healthcare workforce, the critical gap in care will widen if the state does not take action to reduce professional licensing barriers for qualified immigrants. As experienced nurses age into retirement and the need for culturally competent and multilingual care increases, immigrants are vital to the state's ability to provide care to all Michiganders.

From 2018 to 2022, the number of online job postings for **registered nurses (RNs)** grew more than any other nursing positions,[10] recording 11,400 new job postings and increasing by

+33.1%

Home health aide online job postings rose from 1,680 in 2018 to 2,881 in 2022,[12] an increase of

+71.5%

During that same period, online job postings for **licensed practical nurses (LPNs)** experienced the highest increase,[11] where demand for LPNs increased by

+92.6%

The average share of immigrants from 2015 to 2019 who were in the below occupations.[13]

7.5% RNs

6.2% Home Healthcare Aides

5.8% LPNs

## Increase in online postings for other nursing professions from 2018 to 2022:

Nurse Practitioners

+64.2%
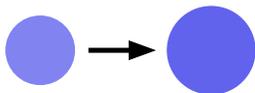
Medical Assistants

+45.7%
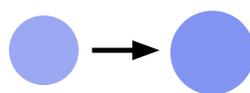
Nursing Assistants

+30.0%
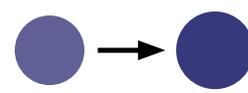
ORAL HEALTH

The demand for oral healthcare workers in the state also grew between 2018 and 2022.[14]

From 2018 to 2022, online job postings for **dentists** nearly **doubled**,[15] growing from:

576 to 1,161

During the same period, job postings **tripled** for dental assistants, increasing[16] from:

983 to 2,970

The average share of the below occupations from 2015 to 2019 who were immigrants.[17]

15.3% Dentists

5.3% Dental Assistants and Hygienists

SOCIAL WORK AND BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

As Michigan continues to become more linguistically and culturally diverse, and as the state grapples with an aging population, unhoused and incarcerated populations, and the opioid crisis, the demand for culturally competent and multilingual social workers and behavioral health experts continues to grow.

From 2018 to 2022, online job postings for **general social workers**[18] in Michigan increased from 826 to 1,191, or

+44.2%

During the same period, online job postings for social work and counseling occupations that listed **bilingual skills**[19] doubled, growing by

+100.4%

During that same period, **substance abuse counseling**[20] online job postings increased by

+71.4%

During that same period, **marriage and family therapist**[21] postings increased by

+15.3%

The average share of the below occupations from 2015 to 2019 who were immigrants.[22]

5.0% Counseling-Related Professions

4.6% Social Workers

As demand for teachers continues to grow, especially in areas like English as a second language, districts are struggling to find enough licensed educators. Immigrants are already playing a growing role in helping fill these positions, but as the shortage persists, more qualified individuals will be needed.[23]

In 2022, online job postings for Michigan's **K-12 educational services sector** increased from 28,500 postings in 2018 to 52,700 in 2022 , or

+84.8%

From 2018 to 2022, online job postings for K-12 teachers and educational support occupations that listed **bilingual skills**[25] grew by

+39.2%

In 2022, **middle school teachers**[26] were highest in demand, with online job postings increasing from 2,662 job postings in 2018 to 3,677 in 2022, an increase of

+38.2%

From 2018 to 2022, online job postings for **elementary, middle, and secondary teachers and teaching assistants** in Michigan increased from 9,100 postings to 14,000[24] or

+58.6%

During that same period, online job postings for **elementary school teachers**[27] experienced the highest increase, where demand for elementary school teachers increased by

+84.2%

Teaching assistants also had a high rate of increase in online job postings from 2018 to 2022. Online job postings increased by

+86.8%

The average share of the below occupations from 2015 to 2019 who were immigrants:[28]

5.4% Teaching Assistants

4.3% K-12 Teachers

Immigrants across the skills spectrum already play a crucial role in Michigan's workforce. But as fields like healthcare, social work, and education face shrinking labor pools, more workers are needed to complement the U.S.-born workforce. Many states have recognized the importance of reducing licensing barriers in order to leverage the skills and talent of new Americans. Michigan, too, must expand professional and occupational licensing opportunities to all Michiganders, regardless of immigration status, if it is to care for, educate, and protect the state's future.

ENDNOTES

1. Unless stated otherwise, all data in this report is reflective of Michigan.

2. We define an immigrant as anyone born outside the country to non-U.S. citizen parents who is a resident in the United States. This includes naturalized citizens, green card holders, temporary visa holders, refugees, asylees, and undocumented immigrants, among others.

3. American Immigration Council analysis of data from the 1-year 2021 American Community Survey. See American Immigration Council, "Map the Impact: Michigan," accessed on December 6, 2023, https://map.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/locations/michigan/.

4. American Immigration Council analysis of data compiled by Lightcast 2023, https://kb.lightcast.io/en/collections/3904183-data-methodology.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid.

8. This includes nurses, health tech, dentists, and healthcare support occupations. However, it does not include physicians.

9. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, this sector is comprised of establishments performing routine support activities for the day-to-day operations of other organizations, such as office administration and clerical services, cleaning, and waste disposal services.

10. American Immigration Council analysis of data compiled by Lightcast 2023, https://kb.lightcast.io/en/collections/3904183-data-methodology.

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid.

13. American Immigration Council analysis of the IPUMS microdata from the 2015-19 American Community Survey, 5-Year Sample.

14. American Immigration Council analysis of data compiled by Lightcast 2023, https://kb.lightcast.io/en/collections/3904183-data-methodology.

15. Ibid.

16. Ibid.

17. American Immigration Council analysis of the IPUMS microdata from the 2015-2019 American Community Survey, 5-Year Sample.

18. American Immigration Council analysis of data compiled by Lightcast 2023, https://kb.lightcast.io/en/collections/3904183-data-methodology.

19. Ibid.

20. Ibid.

21. Ibid.

22. American Immigration Council analysis of the IPUMS microdata from the 2015-2019 American Community Survey, 5-Year Sample.

23. American Immigration Council analysis of data compiled by Lightcast 2023, https://kb.lightcast.io/en/collections/3904183-data-methodology.

24. Ibid.

25. Ibid.

26. Ibid.

27. Ibid.

28. American Immigration Council analysis of the IPUMS microdata from the 2015-19 American Community Survey, 5-Year Sample.