



Reforming Immigration and Supporting Immigrants

With immediate executive orders, as well as a legislative proposal released on the first day of his administration, President Biden has already dramatically improved the possibilities for progress on immigration. State and local policymakers will no longer be on their own on this issue. While the prospects of Congressional action remain unknown, state and local governments have opportunities to support and build on the Biden Administration's efforts.

The NewDEAL convened experts from the public, private, and non-profit sectors on January 28, 2021, to review President Biden's efforts, examine their impacts on states and cities, and provide a forum to discuss state and local policy ideas, including how to best tap into the economic potential of immigrant communities. **The discussion produced the below series of principles for state and local officials to follow, both in their advocacy for federal action and in the policies to pursue in their communities.**

Key Context

- Despite the damaging policies of the Trump Administration, leaders have an opportunity to not just roll back the policies of the past four years, but build a functioning, humane immigration system.
- After 35 years since the last major federal legislation on immigration, our legal immigration system is outdated and outclassed:
 - ▷ It predates the emergence of the global middle class and worldwide economy.
 - ▷ Undocumented immigrants have been here for an average of 16 years without any progress on addressing their status and bringing them out of the shadows.
 - ▷ A singular focus on activities at the border misses broader issues.
 - We need to change the legal, employment-based, and family-based immigration systems to make it easier for people to come here legally in the future.
 - It is crucial to rebuild the asylum system and build a holistic refugee system that works.

Call for Federal Action

- Support the Biden Administration's legislative proposal to:
 - ▷ Create an eight-year bold and broad pathway to citizenship.
 - ▷ Support an increase of 2.5 times the immigrants eligible to come to the United States via the employment-based system.
 - ▷ Make it easier for students to stay in the U.S. by allowing states and localities to petition for additional visas.
 - ▷ Make it easier for graduates of U.S. universities with advanced STEM degrees to stay in the United States.
 - ▷ Pass the provisions of the DREAM Act to make permanent protections for undocumented immigrants in good standing who were brought to the U.S. as minors
- Support additional steps to:
 - ▷ Lift the 140,000 cap on employment green cards that dates to the 1990s and unwisely includes in the cap green cards that are needed for workers' spouses and children.
 - ▷ Reform the H1-B visa program for specialty occupations to reflect industry and geographic needs rather than operating it as a random lottery.

Reform State and Local Policies

In addition to advocating for much-needed federal action, there are numerous steps that state and local leaders can take to strengthen our immigration system by better supporting immigrant communities.

- Maximize the benefits of the employment-based immigration system, and the broader immigrant workforce, for the economy
- Recognize the value of immigrant workers to address workforce issues that are stymying growth for businesses that cannot find skilled employees
- Ease access to driver's licenses and car insurance
 - ▷ 15 states and DC allow some form of driving privilege regardless of status
 - ▷ Bipartisan agreement is possible when advocates rally employers
- Rescind 287G agreements between ICE and local law enforcement
 - ▷ Eliminate cooperation by jurisdictions under the Secure Communities programs that allow deputization of local law enforcement to enforce immigration laws, and contribute to distrust between communities and law enforcement
- Institute Compassionate Credentialing to ensure immigrants, and especially refugees, can fully contribute to the economy
 - ▷ Refugees have only about 6 months of federal aid that they are entitled to, so states and localities must prioritize identifying these individuals and ensuring they are as employed as they are qualified to be
 - ▷ Support refugee resettlement systems that not only fulfill a moral obligation to refugees but also contribute to population and labor market growth
- Ensure appropriate compatibility of foreign degrees to the American system, preventing situations such as foreign healthcare workers being unable to participate in the pandemic response due to lack of pathways to an American credential
- Work with local institutions of higher education to ensure support for business incubators that attract immigrant entrepreneurs and generally provide resources for immigrants who come to the country through a university
- Make capital available to immigrant entrepreneurs, recognizing that is a key to ensuring they remain and create jobs in the United States
 - ▷ Ensure immigrant entrepreneurs have fair access to investors
 - ▷ Reach out to and convene investors to ensure they are exposed to immigrant communities

Other Resources

FWD.us has created a [comprehensive overview of key topics](#) that must be addressed for national commonsense immigration reform.

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