

Immigration and the labor shortage

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Reduce backlog of people waiting for work permits

I agree with the sentiment of Marcela García’s recent column [“One clear answer to US labor shortages? Let more immigrants in”](#) (Opinion, Feb. 12), and I write as the chair of the American Immigration Lawyers Association’s New England chapter to stress a point raised in that piece.

Not only can immigrants help fill growing vacancies across the economy, but they can do so if we simply adjudicate the employment authorization document applications already filed with the US Citizenship and Immigration Services. At the beginning of October 2021, there were almost 650,000 of these applications waiting to be adjudicated. The waiting time for many applicants is now over 12 months — for an application that USCIS estimates takes just 12 minutes to adjudicate.

The individuals waiting for work permits are entitled to work under US immigration law, have taken all the legal necessary steps required to apply, and can contribute to all sectors of the economy, from health care and research and development to retail. They can fill the vacancies in manufacturing and at our hospitals, and they are already residing in the United States and have the legal right to work. Reducing this backlog does not require action by Congress, and will not only benefit the applicants but will also support the rebound of the US economy.

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US policy leaves undocumented immigrants living in the shadows

Marcela García's column on labor and immigration makes a straightforward argument but fails to address a fundamental issue: The tens of millions of undocumented residents of the United States already here, and the millions more crossing the border now, are not legally allowed to work. Under the banner of caring for these people who come seeking a better life, the current administration's policies merely confine them to live in the shadows. Opportunities for these immigrants are with unscrupulous employers who are willing to skirt the law. In this model, everyone loses.

The idealistic goal of "comprehensive immigration reform" is a convenient excuse for inaction. A renewable worker visa program addresses the labor shortage problem and seems to be an area of bipartisan interest. It's less than the grandiose visions that come out every campaign season, promising to fix every aspect of immigration and to make right every historical wrong. Rather, it's a small and achievable step with benefits for everyone.

Try asking your elected officials about this. I've been waiting nearly a month for a reply from mine (Senators Ed Markey and Elizabeth Warren and Representative Lori Trahan).

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