

SKILLED IMMIGRATION POLICY

U.S. Is Lagging Behind in Skilled Immigration Policy

Research demonstrates highly positive impacts of skilled immigration resulting in countries competing globally for talent. Although many countries are continuously introducing new policies to attract more skilled workers, the U.S. immigration policy is in a gridlock with not much progress.

Promising Policy Findings

Practically all research shows that skilled immigration tends to benefit its destination countries with relatively minor negative consequences for skilled natives. Having understood the importance of talent for global competitiveness, many developed nations are introducing novel policies to attract skilled workers. Across the globe, doors are increasingly open for the highly proficient migrants. U.S. is one exception to that rule, as our skilled immigration programs (in particular the H1-B) has seen little change over the last decade. Policy debate and public discourse focus more on how to stop migrants from coming in than thinking about why we should attract those who can contribute to the country's economic and technological advancement. Those two issues can and should be considered as separate matters.

Recent research shows that immigration policy does impact the flow and selection of migrants into the source country. Skilled immigrants are coming from an ever-broader set of source countries but moving to a smaller set of destination countries. The role of women in the global high-skilled migration has also changed dramatically: they now represent the majority of skilled immigrants globally. Research also shows that the U.S. depends on skilled immigrants as entrepreneurs, employees, and educators. While the issue around undocumented migration is politically complicated, skilled migration policies should in many ways be much less controversial to deal with – at least in the light of much evidence and policy case studies from other countries.

Approaches and Recommendations

Recommendations for enhancing our focus on skilled immigration include:

- Make available for research the USCIS (and other) data on person-by-person initial immigration status and visa category, and allow linking these to other Federal databases for greatly improved research on the actual economic contribution of skilled immigrants. This calls for collaboration between the Department of Homeland Security, Department of Commerce and the Census Bureau.
- Sponsor a review of “what works” in terms of skilled immigration policies. Many countries have recently introduced new policies that allow analyses into changes of migration patterns over time. Researchers should utilize data from the period before these policy reforms (the baseline period), and compare that situation to the period after

the policies were enacted, also contrasting to other countries that did not enact any new policies. Based on that review, draft a set of policy proposals for discussion among interested parties.

- Involve firm-representatives in the policy discussion around skilled immigration. Many U.S. companies are actively interested in these questions, as demonstrated e.g. by their lobbying efforts and large numbers of applications for skilled work visas. Tailoring a skilled immigration program that closely fits the labor demands of U.S. firms will help maximize the positive impact of the migration. Similarly, involve in these discussions representatives from universities and colleges, as well as other educational institutions. These institutions are vital both in creating the human capital of tomorrow, as well as bringing in large number of immigrants who will perfect their skills in the United States and potentially stay as workers and educators.