

*The Institute on Immigrant Integration Research and Policy seeks to advance the economic, social, and political integration of foreign-born New Yorkers and to promote responsive policies and practices.*

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## Expanding Work Authorization Isn't Just Good Government, It Mends Our Ruptured Immigration System

— Sarah Rogerson

The ability to fully participate in American society for any person within our borders often centers on economic integration. With an economy driven by capitalism and free markets, America requires citizens to participate in the market to be deemed successful by nearly any measure of integration. It may come as a surprise to New Yorkers that economic integration for immigrants is a space where agreement transcends partisan divides. This is largely because immigrants are, and historically have been, facilitators of large-scale economic growth in America, particularly in New York. There are likely few places where progressive New York policymakers and right-leaning, libertarian, Washington, DC-based think tanks agree on immigration, but economic integration is one of them.

Recent Congressional testimony from the Cato Institute highlights the [myriad ways](#) that immigrants support and grow the United States economy. However, immigrants to the United States cannot work while they are in the country unless they have permission to do so, which is based on whether they have a particular type of immigration status or visa. [Cato notes](#) that immigrants support the United

States economy and work at higher rates than US-born Americans, even though nearly a quarter of immigrants lack authorization to work legally in this country.” As a matter of sound economic policy, Cato has consistently urged Congress to reform immigration law to expand permissions to work by attaching work authorization eligibility to more visa types. Put simply by David Bier, associate director of immigration studies at Cato:

*Immigrants increase the supply of labor, which increases the supply of goods and services that people need; their consumption, entrepreneurship, and investment also increases the demand for labor, creating better-paying jobs for Americans elsewhere in the economy. Fundamentally, immigrants aren't competitors. They are [collaborators](#).*

The New York State Comptroller agrees, and most recently issued a number of [recommendations](#) to boost the ability for immigrant New Yorkers to work and contribute to the economy, including faster processing of work permit applications. This issue is particularly relevant to New York State because foreign-born workers comprise [almost half](#) of the self-employed

population in New York City, compared to 25 percent nationally. According to Comptroller DiNapoli, “Last year, New York City was down about 10,000 immigrant workers compared to 2015. Many industries in the city depend on these workers, including construction, where foreign-born workers made up almost 70 percent of all workers, while 65 percent worked in transportation and utilities, and nearly 55 percent worked in manufacturing last year.” He further [notes](#), “A diminished foreign-born

workforce could hurt businesses and lead to less entrepreneurship and fewer jobs.” When pathways to employment are restricted for immigrants federally, the economic impacts are disproportionately felt in New York’s state and local economies.

Expanding work authorization isn’t just good government, it isn’t just sound economic policy, it is a humane, just, and necessary step to mend our ruptured immigration system.

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