



**CWS Statement to the House Judiciary Committee, Subcommittee on Immigration and Citizenship
Hearing: Oh, Canada! How Outdated U.S. Immigration Policies Push Top Talent to Other Countries
Thursday, June 24, 2021**

As a 75-year old humanitarian organization representing 37 Protestant, Anglican, and Orthodox communions and 24 refugee resettlement offices across 17 states, Church World Service (CWS) urges the subcommittee to address the barriers faced by foreign educated individuals and affirm the need to strengthen immigrant and refugee integration in the United States and help them continue to thrive.

We are a country with a proud legacy of immigrants and refugees who helped found this nation, and we recognize the valuable contributions they [bring to United States communities and the economy](#), especially during the [COVID-19 pandemic](#). Overall, there are [176,000 refugee healthcare workers](#) which is the most common field for 15.6 percent of refugees serving on frontlines. In [2015 alone](#), refugees earned more than \$77 billion in household income and paid \$21 billion in taxes. Refugees have [high rates of entrepreneurship](#), creating jobs and boosting local economies. Today, [fortune 500 companies founded by immigrants and refugees](#) shares increased from 40% to 44%. The United States has long recognized that immigrants and refugees are vital to the continuing prosperity of our communities – they pay taxes, help grow our economy, and bring unique skill sets, experiences, and insights.

While the economic contributions of refugees are impressive, their incredible degree of upward mobility truly stands out. Refugees are taxpayers and contribute back much more to our economy than they receive in initial benefits. A leaked [report](#) by the Department of Health and Human Services in July 2017 shows that refugees have brought in a net \$63 billion in government revenue over the past decade. Immigrants—including refugees—make up [more than 16% of all U.S. health workers; 8% of teachers; 25% of biopharmaceutical workers](#); and 25% of IT professionals. Ensuring that immigrants and refugees reach their professional and educational goals in the U.S. is beneficial to our communities and the economy. Businesses struggling to fill gaps in their labor force will gain the talent necessary to [compete and grow](#); immigrants and their families will benefit from improved economic opportunities; and, ultimately, communities across the country and the overall economy will [benefit from increased consumer spending](#), fiscal contributions, and improved services.

[Refugees and immigrants are beloved members of our communities](#) and vital to their prosperity. However, many immigrants and refugees remain unable to fully contribute their talents to the workforce because of systemic barriers, including the lack of recognition of their international education and experience, outdated occupational and professional re-credentialing processes, and insufficient access to meaningful workforce development and adult education services. Across the United States, [nearly 2 million immigrants with college degrees](#) are unemployed or stuck in low-skilled jobs, [including](#) as dishwashers, security guards, or taxi drivers, often because of difficulty getting their credentials recognized or other hurdles. This situation represents a waste of human capital affecting around 23% of college-educated immigrants and 18% of U.S.-born college graduates. The underutilization of [immigrant and refugee talent](#) has devastating effects on individuals, local communities, and the United States' economy. Nationwide, this results in [\\$39.4 billion in foregone earnings each year, and \\$10.2 billion lost in local, state, and federal taxes](#). The need to integrate talented immigrants and refugees into the workforce is increasingly urgent.

As the United States faces unprecedented challenges rebuilding following COVID-19, refugees are uniquely positioned to help. [Dr. Sura Alsaffar](#), for example, spent 16 years practicing as a physician in both Syria and Iraq. She treated patients during extreme war conditions, but was ultimately forced to flee as a refugee. Despite her extensive experience and efforts to successfully pass all three steps of the U.S. Medical Licensing Exam (USMLE), Dr. Alsaffar's medical career has stalled in the U.S. She earns \$15 an hour as an administrative assistant; to re-enter the medical field, she is working with the job coaching non-profit Upwardly Global. As the COVID-19 pandemic strains the U.S. health sector and the nation faces a looming physician shortage, cumbersome barriers to licensure prevent qualified professionals like Dr. Alsaffar from re-establishing their careers.

We encourage Congress and the administration to take the steps necessary for immigrant and refugee integration and inclusion to ensure opportunities for immigrants and refugees to contribute their professional skills and training. The economic health of the U.S. is dependent on the strength of its workforce, and immigrants and refugees are key to supporting our nation's recovery and ensuring its economic stability.