

Targeted Immigration for Economic Revival

The United States is facing two relatively uncorrelated economic issues that can be directly addressed with one policy initiative. The first issue relates to the current U.S. immigration policy that is geared towards family unification and allows only a limited number of immigrants to enter the country for employment reasons. The second issue relates to the poor economic performance of former manufacturing cities that have struggled to attract new, high growth industries to replace jobs that have been transitioned abroad. These two problems may seem to be unrelated, but under a targeted immigration initiative, both issues can be addressed in an economically efficient manner.

The first issue relates to the current U.S. immigration policy that only allows a limited number of highly educated workers to enter the country for employment reasons. Although there are benefits to the current socially focused policy, not allowing educated immigrants to enter this country limits the United States' economic growth potential. Recent research has highlighted the benefits that highly educated immigrants bring to a country and their outsized role in helping drive U.S. innovation, productivity, and job creation. Without a change to the current immigration policy, U.S. companies will be forced to expand outside the United States to hire the workers they desire.

The second issue relates to former industrial cities, particularly those located in the Midwest, which have failed to find a new engine for economic growth now that most manufacturing has shifted abroad. Since their heyday in the 1960s, these manufacturing cities have seen their population and property values decline dramatically. Although these cities have been trying to attract new industries, many have been unsuccessful in diversifying their economies due in part to their relatively less educated work force. The lack of a highly skilled work force has become a major hurdle that these cities will need to overcome to attract new, high growth companies.

The solution to both of these issues is a targeted immigration initiative to economically revive distressed cities. Under this initiative, the U.S. government will increase the number of visas it offers to highly educated immigrants if they work in one of these distressed cities. In order for an immigrant to be eligible for the program, the immigrant must be educated (holding at least a bachelor's degree), employed (having an employment commitment for a job before entering the U.S.), and young (under 35 years old). In order for a city to qualify for the program, its unemployment level and poverty rate must be above the national average and the city's population needs to vote to support the program for a specific period of time. The cities will be required to expand their public infrastructure to accommodate the increased population, as well as offer free English classes to help immigrants acclimate.

The initiative offers many positive benefits while also avoiding many of the criticisms of other immigration policies. This program will provide a new pipeline of educated workers to help U.S. companies grow domestically. These immigrants will fill jobs that otherwise would have been outsourced and, therefore, are not replacing existing U.S. jobs. This program will also benefit distressed cities by providing a new source of educated workers to help these cities attract high growth companies. Furthermore, unlike many other policies focused on unskilled immigrants, under this initiative, the highly skilled immigrant workers will be the economic driver. Local residents, who offer a surplus of unskilled labor due to high unemployment rates and low education level, will provide the labor required to support the increased population. These immigrants will be an economic contributor through tax payments, increased consumption of local goods and services, and improved productivity and innovation. Overall, the program should help revive these distressed cities through increased economic development, while at the same time, provide a pipeline of skilled workers to help American companies expand and thrive domestically.