

# REPORT RELEASE!

**Tienen alas pero no las  
pueden usar:** Stories of  
immigrants in search of  
work credentials

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SkillWorks 



THE MAURICIO GASTÓN INSTITUTE  
FOR LATINO COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT  
AND PUBLIC POLICY  
UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS BOSTON



# Tienen Alas Pero No Las Pueden Usar: Stories of Immigrants in Search of Work Credentials

**Jonathan Vega-Martinez**, *UMass Boston*

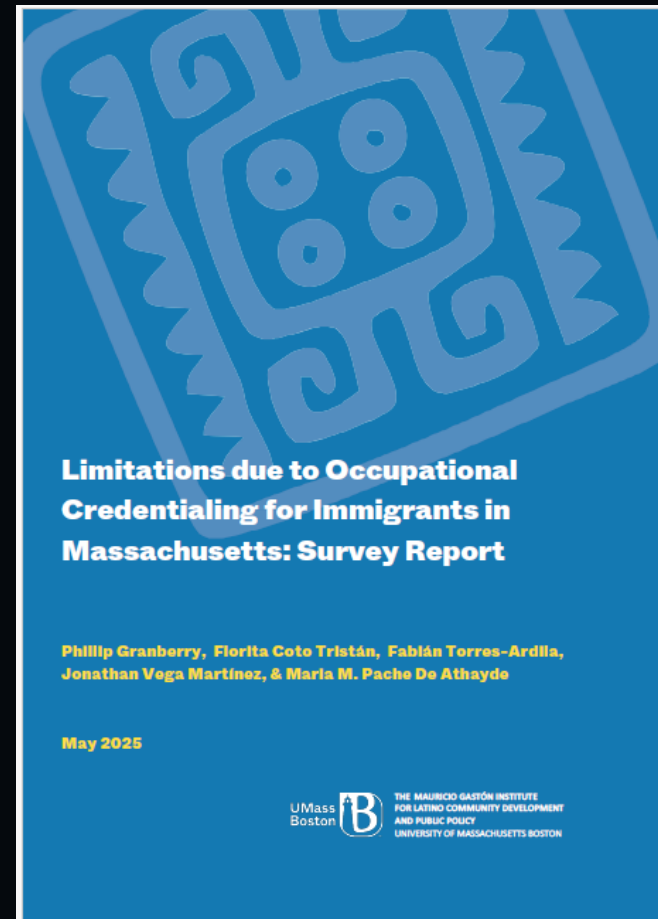
**Maria M. Pache de Athayde**, *UMass Boston*

**Fabián Torres-Ardila**, *UMass Boston*

**Phillip Granberry**, *UMass Boston*



# Limitations due to Occupational Credentialing for Immigrants in Massachusetts: Survey Report



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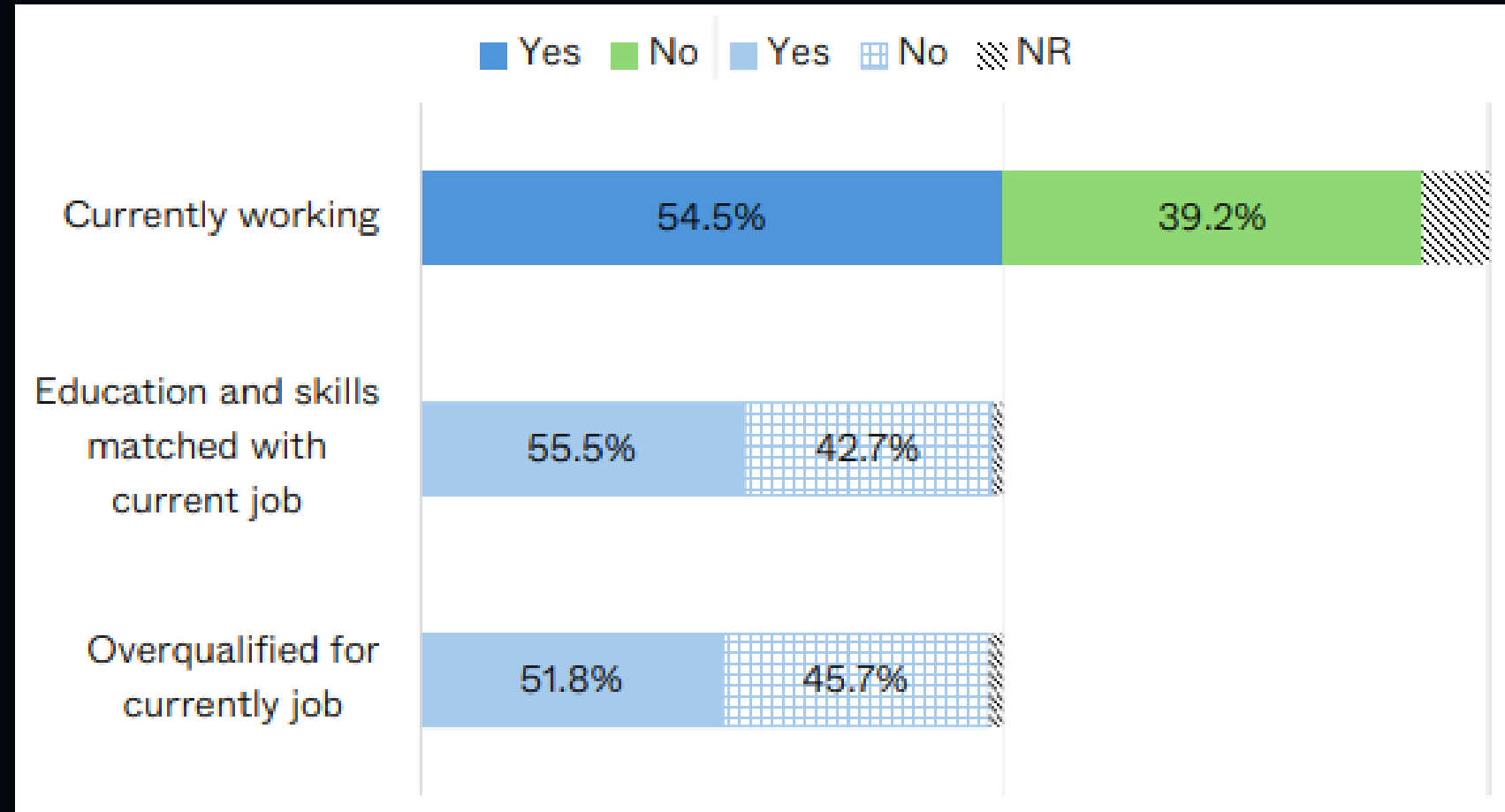
**María M. Pache de Athayde**, *UMass Boston*



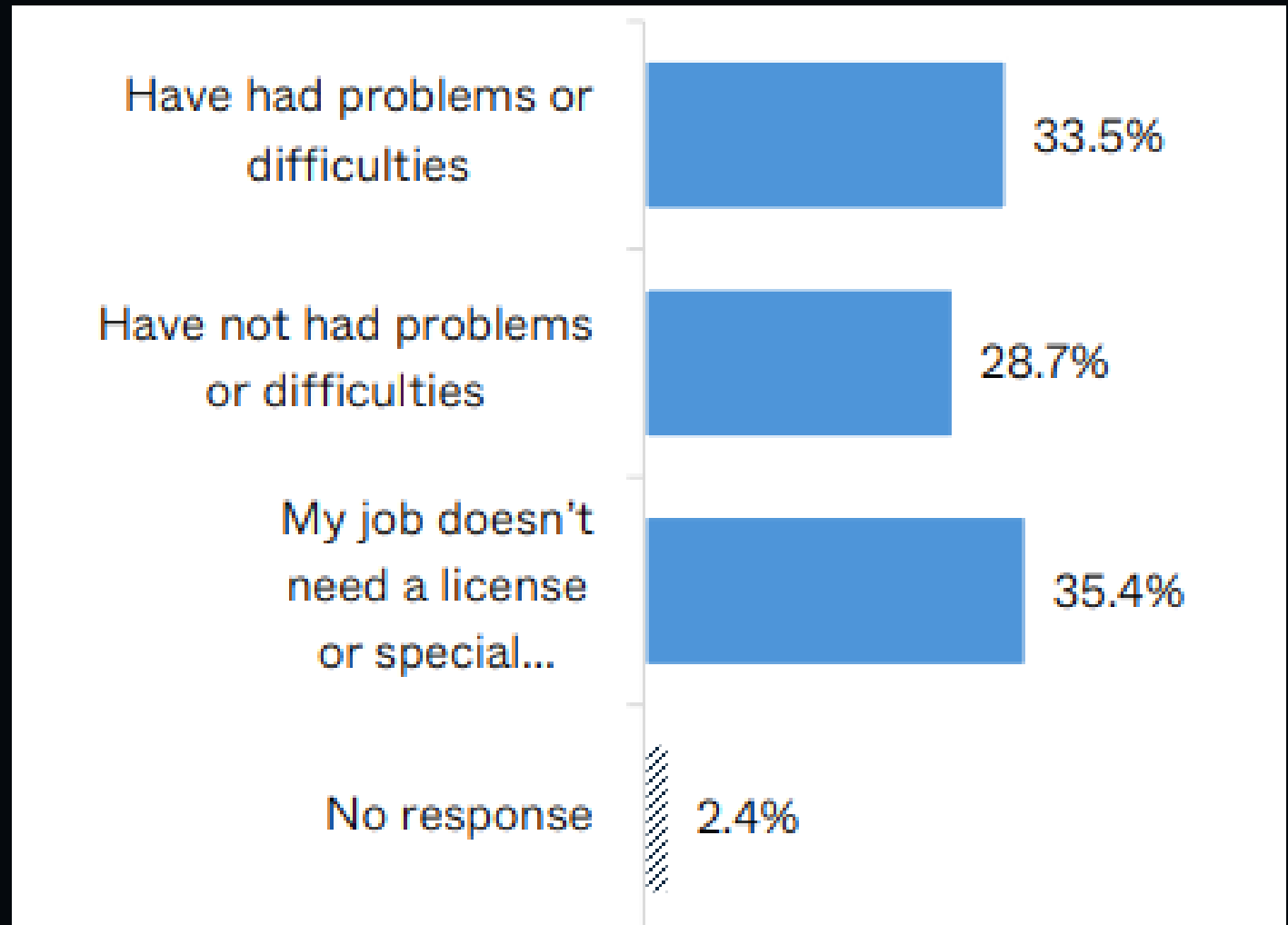
**Limitations due to Occupational Credentialing  
for Immigrants in Massachusetts**  
*Survey Report*

**42.7% of respondents believe their education and skills do not match or only slightly match their job requirements**

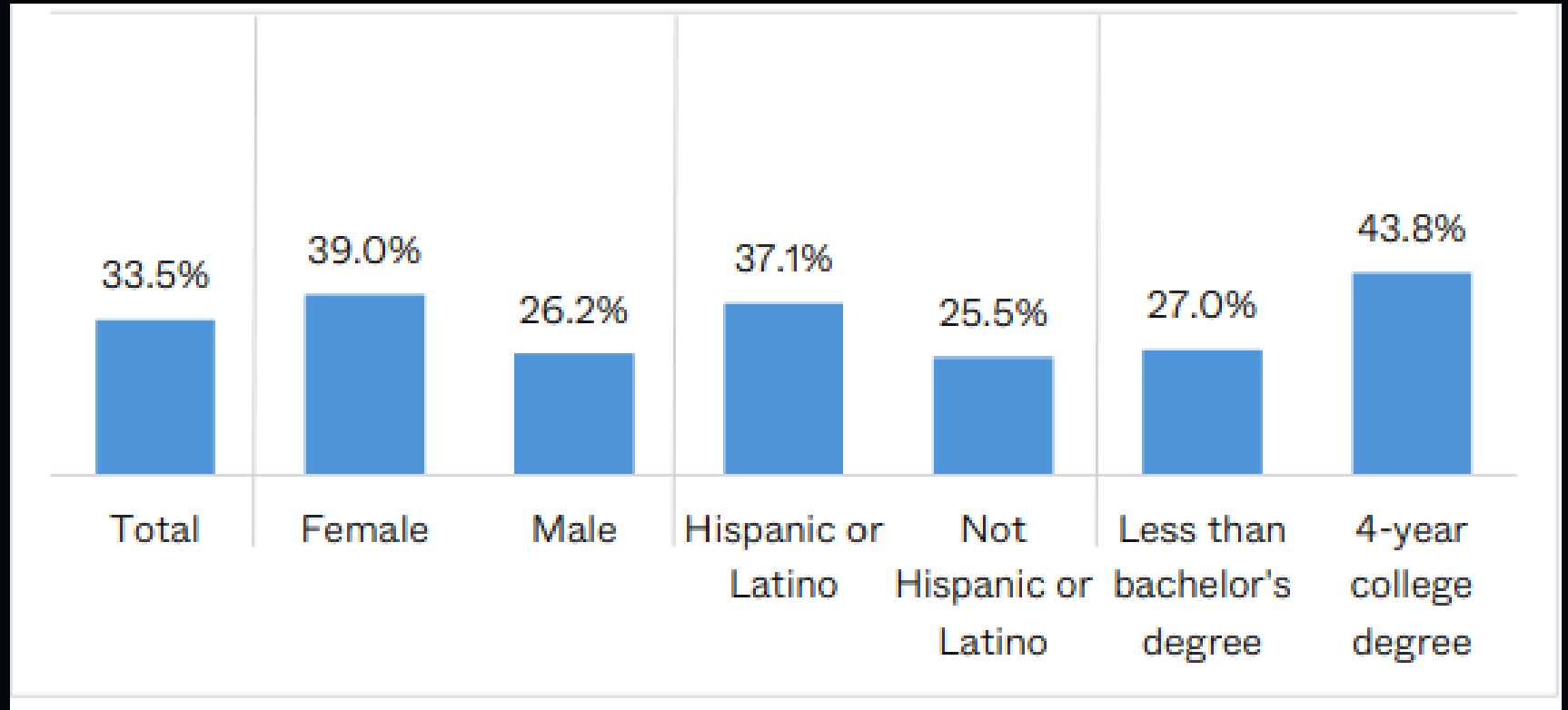
Source: Gastón Institute



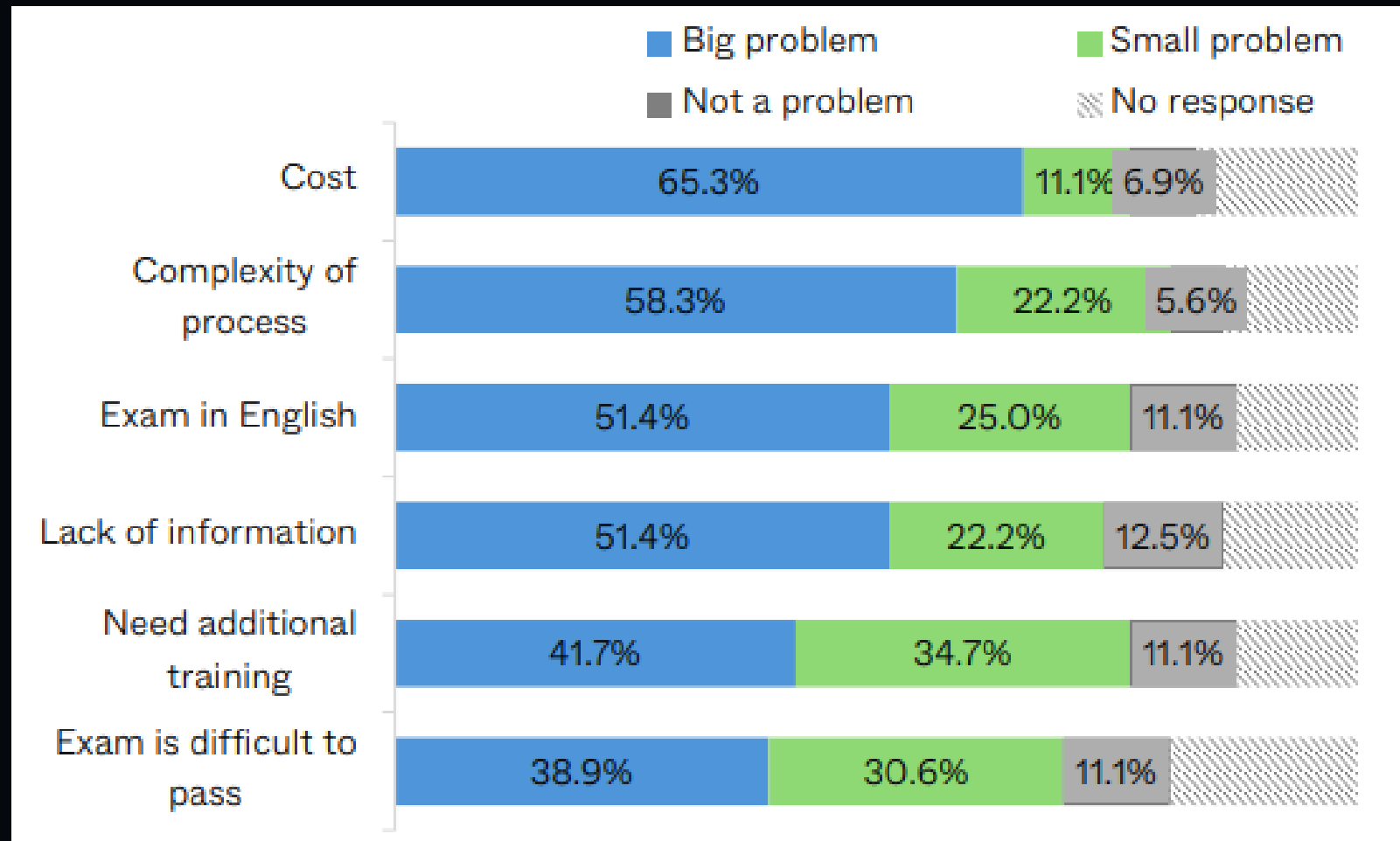
**A third of these overqualified workers lacked an occupational credential**



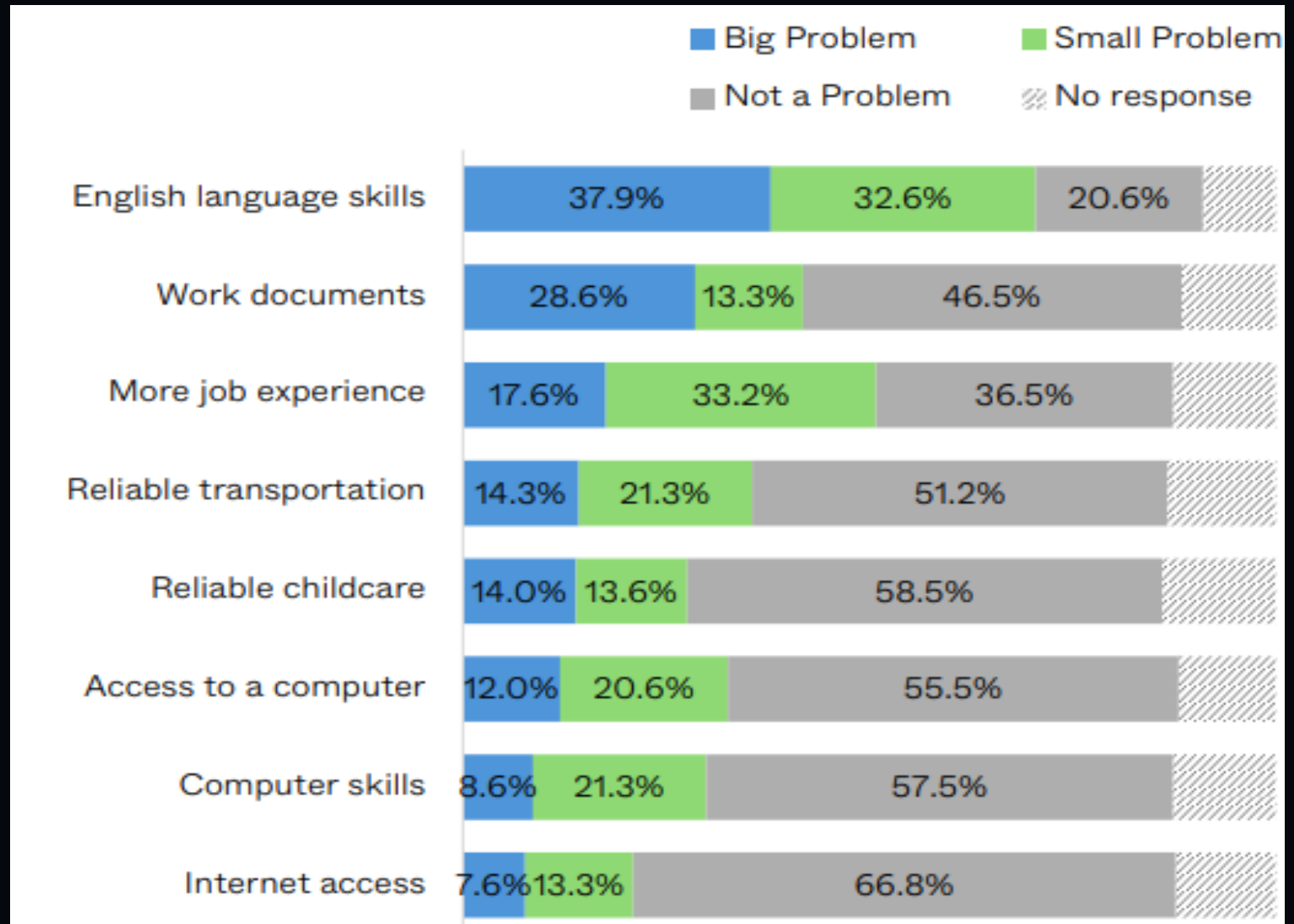
**Women, Latinos and those with more educational attainment have more difficulty with occupational credentialling**



**Cost, complexity of process, and English language proficiency are the leading problems with obtaining an occupational credential**



**English language proficiency and work documents are the other leading factors limiting employment**



# Estimation



# Each year about 4,500 new immigrants to Massachusetts confront credentialing issues

<i><b>Statistic</b></i>	<i><b>Average</b></i>
<i>Estimated number of foreign-born employees who arrived 2018-2022, ages 18-54, and speak English less than very well*</i>	67,181
<i>Percentage of respondents currently working who have had difficulties getting credentials</i>	33.5%
<i>Estimate of residents in MA with credentialing issues <b>In a 5-year period 2018-2022</b></i>	22,506

Source: Gastón Institute with data from 2023 American Community Survey and Gastón Institute Credentialing Survey



**Tienen Alas Pero No Las Pueden Usar:  
Stories of Immigrants in Search of Work  
Credentials**



# Defining and Redefining the Problem

## Original Definition

There is a lack of pathways for credentialed immigrants to regain their credentials which leads to underemployment.

## Redefined Problem

Pathways into recredentialing exist but information is difficult to access, processes are convoluted, and the material reality of immigrants' lives often get in the way.

# Methods Summary

**Narrative  
Analysis**

**Root Cause  
Analysis**

## **Immigrants in Massachusetts**

- Credentialing challenges
- Meaning to their stories

# Factors That Influence Credentialling

## Internal Forces



Aspirational  
Capital



Managing  
Change in  
the U.S.

## External Forces



Credentialling  
Process



Social and  
Cultural Capital



Family Ties



Immigration  
Policy

# Managing Change in the U.S. (internal)

## Definition

The ways immigrants adapt to the social, economical and political impacts of immigration.

## What it means for our findings?

Many of the obstacles faced by immigrant in their credentialing process were related to the difficulty of adapting to their new life in the U.S.

*“ I fell into a depression, one because at work, [..] my coworkers were not empathetic to me. Sometimes they treated me badly. Sometimes the bosses themselves wouldn't try to help, coworkers wouldn't help either. I suffered, you could say, a little bit of labor exploitation because it was very stressful working so many hours with such minimal pay, doing such heavy labor. [...] On top of that, I arrived very skinny. I couldn't eat well, my body rejected my food. [...] A lot of people were saying that the food is like that, because sometimes you end up with stomachache when you eat. In my case, I just threw it up. [...] I started to be able to start eating here after about two months, because what I could eat here was fruits and water. After some time I got used to that. I think it was the stress of moving, I don't know...”*

**Respondent 20, Female**

# Credential Process (external)

## Definition

Describes the obstacles to navigating the credentialing process

## What it means for our findings?

It is often unclear to immigrants that they need to validate their credentials and what that process entails.

*It's accessible, but it's not very intelligible. It's not very clear. [...] Because all you do is enter the web page of the organization and they say, "You need to fill out this first form and we will let you know if you can proceed to the second stage." Then after the second stage they might say "we need these documents," but there's not a person that's advising you, that is guiding you, that is helping you in the process. It's more so like you do everything yourself and you try to understand.*

**Respondent 4**

## RECOMMENDATION 1

### Clearinghouse repository

- Create a statewide clearinghouse repository of credentialing information

## RECOMMENDATION 2

### Network

- Strengthen and foster a network of community-based organizations and non-profit organizations (NPOs) for the implementation of programs for the support of immigrants going through the credentialing process

## **RECOMMENDATION 3**

### **Professional English**

- Support the funding and implementation of professional English courses

## RECOMMENDATION 4

### Funding for Research

- Expand funding for research to enhance support for immigrants in the credentialing process

## INTENDED TIMELINE

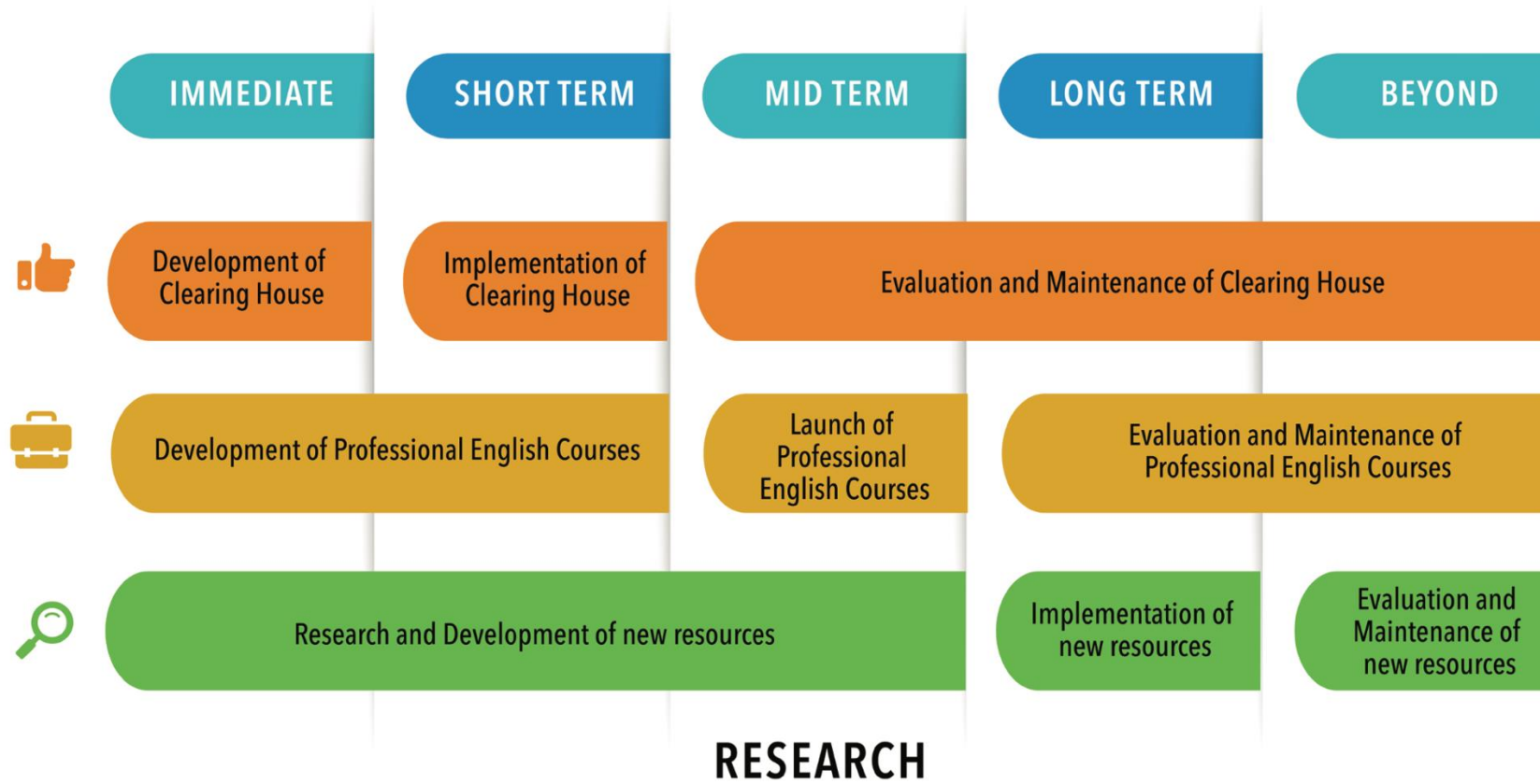


Figure 1. The diagram illustrates the integration of the various recommendations across a proposed timeline, highlighting their interconnectedness and alignment over time.



**Take Action**

**Hearing: Committee on Labor and Workforce Development**

**11:00 AM Room B-1 and Virtual**

**An Act to promote Economic Mobility through ESOL S.1326**

**Written Testimony:**

**Written or pre-recorded testimony may be submitted until  
Tuesday, June 24th at 5:00 PM via email  
to [labor.workforce.development@gmail.com](mailto:labor.workforce.development@gmail.com)**

