

SHARING SETTLEMENT AND INTEGRATION PRACTICES THAT WORK WES GATEWAY PROGRAM

World Education Services
Toronto, ON; Delivered Across Canada

Area of Practice:
Information and Orientation

Video:
<https://youtu.be/YVR3xPGy0MI>

A Pathways to
Prosperity Project

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PATHWAYS TO
PROSPERITY
Promoting Welcoming Communities in Canada



VOIES VERS LA
PROSPÉRITÉ
Promouvoir des communautés accueillantes au Canada

BACKGROUND ON THE ORGANIZATION AND IMPETUS FOR THE PROGRAM

World Education Services (WES) is a bi-national non-profit organization operating in the United States and Canada. They are dedicated to helping international students and skilled immigrants achieve educational and professional goals in Canada and the United States by evaluating and advocating for the recognition of international education qualifications. WES has provided credential evaluations to almost two million people worldwide. Their credential evaluations are widely recognized by 2,500+ educational, business and governmental institutions throughout Canada and the United States. WES is designated by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) as an official provider of Educational Credential Assessments (ECA) for degrees and diplomas earned outside of Canada. An ECA is required to apply for certain IRCC immigration programs.

In July 2016, WES launched the Refugee Pilot Project to meet the needs of the large number of Syrian refugees arriving in Canada without full proof of their credentials. WES sought to develop a reliable and rigorous method for providing credential assessments for refugees that would be acceptable to employers, regulatory bodies and educational institutions.

The goals of the Refugee Pilot Project were threefold:

- To meet the immediate needs of Syrian refugees with post-secondary qualifications;
- To better understand and address the challenges faced by refugees and other displaced individuals who have post-secondary qualifications but limited access to original documentation; and
- To establish a way to meet Canada's obligation as a signatory to the Lisbon Recognition Convention to ensure that refugees and other displaced individuals without full documentation received a fair assessment of their qualifications.

As the largest provider of credential evaluation services in Canada, WES was ideally situated to facilitate the recognition of credentials for refugees and other displaced individuals without full documentation. They partnered with trusted community agencies to find eligible participants and with academic and regulatory bodies to ensure that the resulting credential assessments would be recognized.

The Refugee Pilot Project provided an opportunity to test a new methodology for credential assessment and a new service delivery model with 337 Syrian refugees. The results were groundbreaking and proved that it was possible to create a reliable and replicable method for assessing and recognizing the post-secondary credentials of refugees and other displaced individuals with minimal documentation.

Building on the knowledge gained during the pilot phase, WES launched the Gateway Program in October 2018.

OVERVIEW OF THE PROGRAM

Name:

WES Gateway Program

Description:

The WES Gateway Program provides qualified participants with a high-quality credential evaluation report that is recognized and accepted by employers, higher-education institutions, and regulatory bodies throughout Canada.

Goal(s):

To provide a reliable and rigorous assessment of international credentials in the absence of full documentation for individuals displaced by conflict, environmental disasters, and economic turmoil.

Target Client Group(s):

Refugees and other displaced individuals from Afghanistan, Eritrea, Iraq, Syria, Turkey, Ukraine and Venezuela.

Delivery Partner(s):

Community-based organizations that work directly with immigrants, refugees, and displaced populations as well as regulators and educational institutions identify and pre-screen eligible participants, provide case management, and act as intermediaries.

Human Resource(s):

The WES Gateway Program has one full-time staff member, as well as ongoing support from internal staff from across all WES departments. Staff at designated referral organizations screen applicants and provide wrap-around support.

Funding:

Initial program development was funded by WES. The WES Gateway Program now utilizes a fee-for-service model, with financial assistance provided to clients in need through existing government programs) and/or WES-issued vouchers.

KEY FEATURES THAT CONTRIBUTE TO THIS BEING A PROMISING PRACTICE

Effective:

WES works with referral partners who work directly with refugees and other displaced individuals facing barriers to international credential recognition; these referral partners are critical to the program's success. WES provides the necessary tools, training and support to ensure the referral process is as simple and smooth as possible.

Efficient:

The WES Gateway Program is fully integrated into WES's online system. Referral partners can conduct initial screenings to determine client eligibility, as well as complete required client forms, directly in the WES Gateway Portal. Institutional partners can access credential reports through AccessWES, an online portal where they can view reports and corroborating materials used in the assessment.

Relevant:

WES conducted research on refugee credential assessment in Canada, Europe and the United States, as well as a feasibility study, prior to launching the Refugee Pilot Project. It was determined that a number of highly-educated refugees and other displaced individuals in Canada were facing barriers to international credential recognition, accessing post-secondary institutions and employment commensurate with their knowledge, skills and experience. Once in place, referral partners also reported that participants gained more than their proof of credentials; they gained confidence and knowledge, as well as felt empowered to make plans, access new opportunities and advocate for themselves.

Sustainable:

The WES Gateway Program operates on a fee-for-service basis and does not rely on government or other funding.

Transferable:

The WES Gateway Program is a collaborative model that relies on the involvement of cross-sector stakeholders. The application process is done completely online so referral partners can be situated in communities across Canada. Referral partners receive training from WES on all aspects of the program. Because of the transparent nature of the Gateway Program, credential assessment organizations in other countries could utilize similar methods to ensure educational assessments for refugees and displaced individuals in other countries.

Innovative and Forward Thinking:

The WES Refugee Pilot Project proved that it is possible to create a reliable, rigorous and replicable model to assess international credentials even when verifiable documents are not available.

Differs in Definable Ways from Other Similar Practices:

Unlike "traditional" credential recognition programs, the WES Gateway Program is designed to work for refugees and other displaced individuals who do not have full documentation of their credentials and cannot obtain them from their countries of education.

High Client Uptake:

During the pilot phase, WES exceeded its initial target of 200 clients by 69%, all of whom received credential reports.

High Client Retention:

All participants in the WES Refugee Pilot Program who completed the application process received credential reports.

Strong Evidence of Successful Outcomes:

WES conducted an evaluation of participants in the pilot project, which included a survey of 50 applicants who received an assessment. 75% of respondents who used their credential reports to apply to post-secondary institutions reported receiving an offer of admission. 84% who used their credential reports to apply for licensure or certification reported passing the initial review. Over 60% of respondents who used their credential reports to apply for employment reported receiving a job offer.

PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT AND EVALUATION STRATEGY

In 2017, WES paused the Refugee Pilot Project to undertake a program evaluation, which analyzed a sample of the first 205 individuals who applied for a credential assessment. Findings were based on survey responses from 50 applicants who received assessments and from 45 stakeholders, as well as 33 qualitative interviews with applicants, academic institutions, regulatory bodies, employers, referral partners, and WES staff. In addition, WES interviewed 11 of the 12 applicants who were pre-screened for eligibility but who did not successfully complete the application process. Interview bias was checked by using multiple interviewers and note-takers, and interview findings were triangulated with survey data.

For the WES Gateway Program, an evaluation framework was developed in consultation with internal and external stakeholders to measure outcomes and impact.

The WES Research and Evaluation Department conducts ongoing feedback and client experience surveys to measure outcomes and results.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

WES

<https://www.wes.org>

WES Gateway Program

<https://www.wes.org/ca/wesgateway>

A Way Forward for Refugees: Findings from the WES Pilot Project

<https://knowledge.wes.org/GlobalTalentBridge-A-Way-Forward-for-Refugees-Findings-from-the-WES-Pilot-Project.html>