

Statement by World Education Services

A respondent to the panel: *Recognition of skills and qualifications and relevant measures*

At the Sixth Thematic Session: *Irregular migration and regular pathways, including decent work, labour mobility, recognition of skills and qualifications and other relevant measures*

Excellencies and Colleagues:

My name is Timothy Owen. I am the Deputy Executive Director of World Education Services (WES), and the Director of our Canadian office. WES is an international non-profit organization that operates in the United States and Canada, and facilitates the recognition of academic credentials from around the world. Our mission is to reduce barriers that lead to “brain waste” in destination countries and to facilitate the academic and labour market integration of people who move from one country to another. Brain waste reflects the failure to match the skills that migrants bring with the skills that societies need. Since 2012, WES has been one of several services designated by the Canadian government, as part of the Express Entry process, to assess the academic credentials of individuals who wish to be considered as skilled immigrants. WES assesses the credentials of more than 200,000 people annually through our US and Canadian offices.

Our statement focuses on the need to fairly and effectively recognize the qualifications of highly skilled individuals who leave their countries of origin, and have the desire and ability to make significant and needed contributions in the countries of destination in which they arrive. In many countries of destination, immigration policies actively attract skilled migrants, yet labour markets have been unable to effectively utilize their skills. No matter what the status of the individual, or the way in which they enter a country, it is important to have a consistent, transparent, and accessible way for host countries to be able to recognize the qualifications of migrants. Credential/qualification recognition is also a major way of enhancing the self-esteem of individuals, enhancing their aspirations for the future, and their ability to be productive members of their country of destination.

A recent study of workers in Canada found that among university educated workers, immigrants (26.9%) were more than twice as likely to be over-educated for their jobs than non-immigrants (12.%)¹. And according to the US-based Migration Policy Institute, 25% of all college-educated immigrants in the United States are affected by brain waste². The cost to economies of these countries is in the billions of dollars, due to lost productivity, the inability of businesses to fill key vacancies, and the loss of potential income, the resulting taxes paid, and the goods and services consumed.

WES has been working for many years to address this issue by providing a service that verifies academic transcripts, and provides a statement of equivalency that can be used by employers, licensing bodies, and academic institutions. This “degree equivalency” gives migrants, many of whom move between countries at a mid-point in their careers, a starting point for suitable employment. It also gives them a

¹ Frank Kristyn and Feng Hou. Over-education and Life Satisfaction among Immigrant and Non-immigrant Workers in Canada. Statistics Canada, 2017

² Batalova Jeanne, Michael Fix and James D. Bachmeier. Untapped Talent: The Costs of Brain Waste among Highly Skilled Immigrants in the United States. Migration Policy Institute, 2016

tool for self-advocacy: the “right to decent work” includes the opportunity to utilize the qualifications they earned in their country of origin.

As we think about the future, we should consider qualification assessment at (or before) the point of entry as a normative practice, and create seamless ways for individuals to upgrade their qualifications while still in their home country (for example through on-line programs), in order to align their qualifications with the requirements of the country to which they are migrating.

We need to provide customized guidance based on up to date labour market information in destination countries, that identifies employment opportunities that match migrants’ skills.

A “whole-of-government approach,” that includes authorities responsible for immigration, education, employment and licensing sectors is required to ensure that policies and programs are coordinated to ensure that qualifications are fairly recognized. And coordination needs to happen not just across departments, but also across different levels of government, at local and sub national levels, as well as at the national levels, taking into consideration complementary responsibilities that support migrant integration. In Canada, Local Immigration Partnerships have been developed across many cities, that bring together government and non-government players to plan and coordinate local integration efforts. This model is easily replicable in other countries.

At the same time, in order to facilitate qualification *recognition*, we need to consider developing more *Mutual Recognition Agreements* between countries of origin and countries of destination. A few, like the Canadian European free trade agreement (CETA), provide examples.

But in the end, in order to maximize the economic contributions of migrants, it is going to be individual employers that are the key players in recognizing migrants’ qualifications. While many employers advocate to government to allow more immigrants to enter their countries, they have not always hired these individuals at levels commensurate with their qualifications.

Greater efforts need to be made to increase awareness among employers of the quality of education systems in countries beyond their borders, and the skills and competencies that individuals bring with them. One excellent example of how this can be done is the mentorship programs that have been developed and coordinated by the Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council (TRIEC), a multi-stakeholder organization that includes employers, academic institutions, licensing bodies, and community agencies as its members. Mentorships provide opportunities for local professionals to mentor immigrants, and help them understand the local context for their work, and establish contacts in their field. Mentors also learn about the skills and competencies of these individuals, leading to a better appreciation of the contributions that immigrants bring to the workplace.

Thank you for your attention. WES is looking forward to working with governments and civil society members in countries of origin and destination, to create and strengthen initiatives that support qualification recognition and academic and labour mobility.

For more information please contact Timothy Owen, Deputy Director, World Education Services and Director of WES Canada at towen@wes.org .

Addendum to Submission by World Education Services

6th Thematic Session, UN Global Compact on Migration

Examples of Good Practices That Support Skills Recognition and Reduce Brain Waste

As a contributor to the GFMD-Business Mechanism consultations and as a not-for-profit organization participating in the Interactive Multi-Stakeholder Meetings for the UN Global Compact on Migration, World Education Services (WES) takes to heart the request for pragmatic solutions that have already proven effective for skills recognition and integration of migrant talent. We believe that the Compact could support many of these models, so we provide links below to examples for your consideration.

Multi-stakeholder networks

Multi-stakeholder networks bring together the actors in a particular state, region or city -- employers, education providers, community agencies, governments, chambers of commerce -- that can create a pipeline for immigrant talent that corresponds to local labor market needs. Public-private partnerships and dedicated funding for projects that reflect local economic development priorities build the infrastructure to support immigrant integration in the United States and Canada.

- WES recently launched the [National Skilled Immigrant Integration Program](#). In the pilot phase WES and its national partners will provide free, customized technical assistance to five U.S. cities and three states to convene employers, community colleges, service providers and others to create a sustainable platform for multi-stakeholder collaboration focused on the integration of skilled immigrants.
- [Local Immigration Partnerships](#) (LIPs) in Canada encourage coordination and cooperation among federal, provincial, and municipal governments and support broad range of local stakeholders to develop strategic plans factoring immigrant settlement and integration into the broader community planning process.
- The [Toronto Regional Immigrant Employment Council](#) (TRIEC) is an employer-led organization that coordinates multi-stakeholder engagement to address the barriers to employment. This successful model of Immigrant Employment Councils (IECs) builds a shared space for innovation and solutions to local labor market needs and is being extended to other regions in Canada.
- [IMPRINT](#) is a coalition of organizations, hosted by WES, which is dedicated to reducing brain waste among immigrant professionals in the United States. It provides research and technical assistance for policy advocacy. As part of its commitment to disseminate best practices and advocate for the adoption of policies that facilitate integration, IMPRINT has developed the following resources:

- The [IMPRINT Map of Programs and Services](#): programs and services in the United States designed to help immigrant professionals achieve successful integration
- The [IMPRINT Map of Policies by State](#): pending and enacted legislation related to occupational licensing affecting the mobility of immigrant professionals in regulated professions.
- The [Welcoming Economies Global Network](#) (WE Global Network) is a coalition of “rust belt” cities which are committed to rebuilding their local economies with immigrant talent. They use a regional development model to bring employers, local government and others to raise awareness of how migrant talent can meet labor market needs.
- The [Community College Consortium for Immigrant Education](#) (CCCIE) networks community colleges in the United States who are committed to the education needs of migrants, including those who with foreign credentials who can utilize the community college system for upskilling and short-term certification for employment. They promote promising practices in workforce training/career development and community-employer partnerships.

Foreign Credential Assessment

There is a wealth of talent going to waste among immigrants and refugees already in place in the destination country, however recruiting this talent can be challenging. One powerful tool for securing immigrant talent is the ability to recognize and understand foreign qualifications -- how does a qualification earned abroad meet the employer’s requirements? This onus is on the employer in non-regulated professions; yet most employers, especially SMEs, do not have the in-house expertise to understand foreign credentials and will therefore pass over qualified candidates. That is why WES advises individuals to include the “degree equivalency statement” from their WES assessment on their resume -- to ground the candidate’s qualifications in terms familiar to the employer.

Agencies such as WES support the employment of migrants by validating the specific qualifications of individuals being considered for employment and determining the comparative value of secondary or post-secondary qualifications in the country of origin to the country of destination. This “levels the playing field,” allowing an employer to fairly compare candidates, while also authenticating the applicant’s claims through a third party.

The Government of Canada has gone further: its policy requires an [Education Credential Assessment](#) (ECA) as part of the pre-screening immigration protocol for skilled worker applicants, ensuring that skilled immigrants enter the country with a recognized assessment, which in turn encourages employers to take the value of foreign qualifications into account when offering employment. [WES provides the majority of these assessments for immigration purposes.]

WES also provides a free online [Degree Equivalency Tool](#) to individuals considering migration to Canada or the United States so they can anticipate the value of their qualifications in their intended destination country and plan accordingly.

- This same ‘preview’ tool can be used by employers who encounter an unfamiliar credential on an applicant’s resume.
- As the international leader in this field, WES continues to explore and invest in technology to link the qualifications of individuals with the skills and competencies needed by employers anywhere in the world.

Mentorships

Through mentorships employers can facilitate the sector-specific knowledge that immigrants need to transition to working in their field. Trained employees mentor individuals in developing their network, understanding cultural cues and practicing the soft skills required for successful employment in their field. This is a cost-effective, ‘win-win’ strategy since employers often recruit from this pool of talent.

- The [Mentorship Partnership](#), created by the Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council and piloted by the Royal Bank of Canada and others, is now being replicated in cities across Canada as a successful model of employer engagement.

Internships

The use of internships – familiar to employers as a way for young job seekers to gain work experience – is equally relevant and beneficial to mid-career immigrant professionals who need a way to demonstrate their qualifications and skills to employers and gain in-country work experience. Internships expose the immigrant professional to the local workplace culture, allow them to practice communication, teamwork and other soft skills, as well as providing them with a reference from a local employer for further job-seeking. At the same time, employers can transition a successful intern to employment making this another potential ‘win-win’ situation.

- Upwardly Global, a U.S. company working exclusively with immigrant professionals, promotes mid-career internships , or [midternships](#), for individuals in non-regulated professions who are able to take up mid-level management responsibilities based on their foreign qualifications and experience.
- [Career Edge](#) works with Canadian employers to provide paid internships to newcomers.

Apprenticeships

Apprenticeships allow foreign trained individuals to meet local requirements for entry into trades and professions by engaging in a training program that bridges to certification and employment. Immigrants who arrive in mid-career are often excluded from such training schemes and despite years of work experience find it difficult to enter these professions. We are encouraged by the recent expansion of U.S. Department of Labor funding for apprenticeships in the United States that will target underserved populations, including immigrants. Closer coordination with community colleges and vocational schools and more contextualized language programs will create viable career pathways for skilled immigrants using their transferrable skills.

Job Skills and Placement

Immigrant professionals arrive in the destination country with formal qualifications and work experience yet have little information or guidance about how to present their assets to an employer. Unless they understand the job search process, what is required (and not required) on a resume, and how to prepare for interviews, they are not able to compete with other applicants. Training that alerts them to their employment rights and identifies discriminatory practices empowers migrants to access decent work and professional development opportunities.

- [Upwardly Global](#) provides a free online job skills training program to qualified immigrant and refugee jobseekers in the United States, including resume preparation, interview tips, networking and other job-search skills.
- The online platform developed by the Toronto Regional Immigrant Employment Council, known as [TRIEC Campus](#), offers soft skills training and workplace orientation for newcomers.
- [Hire Immigrants](#), an employer-led initiative in Canada, encourages the hiring of high-skilled immigrants and disseminates resources and best practices for employers.

Licensing information and support

Migrants in regulated professions must be relicensed in their country of destination. Relicensing is a time-consuming, expensive and confusing process in the North American context which is fragmented by professional bodies with overlapping jurisdiction, and by regulations that differ by state or province. Newcomers need to have access to up-to-date, accurate information on licensing regulations and educational pathways to meet requirements. Organizations that support individuals in navigating this terrain -- by bridging deficits in education, supporting exam preparation, organizing clinical placements, providing financial assistance and low-cost loans for exam fees -- are critical to the “integration infrastructure” that needs as much attention as the migrant recruitment process. There is also important policy work to be done to reduce barriers to regulated professions, building on some examples provided below.

- [Access Centre for Regulated Employment](#) provide services to both internationally-trained individuals and employers – including recruitment, training, licensing support, placement services – helping immigrants navigate the challenge of relicensing.
- [Welcome Back Initiative](#) in 10 U.S. cities provide support to foreign-trained health professionals in the relicensing process, including training, financial assistance and placement.
- Lack of harmonization of regulatory requirements across jurisdictions within professions is a persistent barrier to increasing the mobility of immigrant professionals. Initiatives that support licensing portability tend to be voluntary and sector specific, such as the U.S. [Nursing Compact](#) and mutual recognition agreements between countries.
- The [Pan Canadian Framework for the Assessment and Recognition of Foreign Qualifications and](#) subsequent Government investment in pilot projects to reduce barriers in more than a dozen occupations have created models of best practice that can be adapted by many countries. Also, Fairness Commissioners in several Canadian

provinces ensure compliance with best practice legislation that calls for timely, transparent and fair assessment of foreign qualifications.

- Many regulatory bodies in Canada maintain a dedicated portal for immigrant professionals on their websites. This should be encouraged by governments at all levels with user-friendly navigational tools and a “one-stop shop” where possible.
- Clear, accurate, accessible information and guidance about licensing requirements are essential for informed decision-making. Immigrants arriving in mid-career may do better to use their qualifications and skills in an alternative or related career. Strategies that avoid deskilling by long periods in “survival jobs” are needed. Immigrants must be able to compare the cost of relicensing to training for a new career.
- Immigrants and refugees must be eligible for training schemes available to underserved and vulnerable populations. For example, the new workforce funding (WOIA) in the United States now explicitly identifies the reskilling of migrants as a legitimate objective.
- Short-term, low interest loans help immigrants cover the costs related to training or relicensing. The [Immigrant Access Fund](#) has been so successful that it is now being implemented nationally by the Government of Canada. The Immigrant Bridge Program, successfully piloted in New York City, had similar loan provisions and exceptional employment outcomes but was never scaled up for lack of funding.

Bridging Programs: Bridging programs address gaps in training and the deficits that foreign-trained professionals may have which impede their integration. Even those in non-regulated professions can benefit from soft skills and workplace orientation programs, and all can benefit from language and academic readiness programs.

- [Consortium of Agencies Serving International-Trained Professionals](#) (CASIP) brings together select academic providers and employment services adopting a ‘no wrong door’ policy to refer newcomers to the services they need to address deficits in language, education and job-readiness. Referral to bridging programs is seamless.
- [The Ryerson University Gateway for International Professionals](#) in Toronto brings bridging programs for many professions under one roof.
- [The New York State Office of New Americans](#) invests in training and placement services for immigrants in the STEM fields.

The UN Global Compact on Migration represents a singular opportunity for Member States to rely on stakeholders who have expertise in research, policy development, technical assistance and services to immigrants and refugees. Together with employers and governments, we can implement solutions for those who have the right to “decent work,” in this case to work commensurate with their talent and qualifications.