

ASET hopes to streamline credentials for professional refugees

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The Association for Science and Engineering Technology Professionals of Alberta (ASET) is hoping Albertans will help spread the word of a new decision by the group to help refugees become certified to work in their professions in Canada.

Largely inspired by the on-going conflict in Ukraine, which has displaced millions of people, ASET voted back in May to waive \$1,000 of fees for any foreign-trained engineering technologists with refugee status in Canada.

ASET CEO Barry Cavanaugh said the organization made the move to try to help people in need, especially as it expects to see an influx of applicants from people who have fled Ukraine.

"The new wrinkle is for refugees.

We're set up so we can streamline any foreign-trained applicant," said Cavanaugh.

"We did a lot of work with hundreds of subject matter experts from our membership... to develop that, and that provided us with the level playing field where we could say to foreign-trained applicants that they're going to be treated exactly the same as any member here," he said.

"We can have them certified within six-months typically."

The move doesn't only benefit those fleeing Ukraine. Anybody with refugee status in Alberta can take advantage, but Cavanaugh said ASET felt like the move was prudent as more refugees arrive in Canada.

"We've always had foreign-trained applicants coming, some of whom were refugees that had been in the country for a while already when they applied," he said.

"We haven't seen them yet, but we know that there are some who are preparing to, from what we've heard. Why we did this was the immediacy of the Ukraine conflict, and that people are arriving in Alberta."

Any applicants with refugee status will have their application and certification exam fees waived. Application advisors will also work closely with people who apply to see that the process goes smoothly.

It can take between six months to a year for foreign-trained engineering technologists to earn all of their required certification to work in Canada through the program. The alternative would be attending a Canadian post-secondary school for the same program they've already completed elsewhere.

Cavanaugh encouraged anybody in Airdrie who may know of a refugee with an engineering technology background who has had trouble getting certified to reach out to ASET.

"We have application advisors who can help with the process, and we're easy to reach," he said.

"It's a fairly interactive process once they reach out and get started.

We will intervene with our application advisors to help."

Mila Wagner, an ASET member from Ukraine who came to Canada in 2016, leaving the country after Russia invaded Crimea, attended Lethbridge College to become certified in Canada although she had years on on-the-job experience in her home country.

She never got the opportunity to have her certification streamlined because she never knew about it. She wouldn't have had application fees waived back in 2016, but it would have still saved her a lot of time and money, she said.

"I had to pass the Canadian Language Benchmark Placement Test, and then I started applying for a job in my field, but nobody called me for an interview," said Wagner.

"My education and credentials were not fully accepted within Canada. During that time I didn't know about ASET or the competency-based assessment program, so in order to... meet Canadian standards I had to enroll in post-secondary education and earn my diploma."

She said she hoped others fleeing the on-going conflict in Ukraine will know where to turn when they arrive.

"It's a huge opportunity. You can spend less time and money, and be positioned in at least half of the time that I spend at (Lethbridge College)," she said.

"This will be beneficial for people who are beginning their new lives here. If people who come here would know where to start and what to do, then that is a game changer."

More information about ASET's programs and contact information can be found at aset.ab.ca.