

# **ASET offers fast route into employment for refugees**

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The Association of Science and Engineering Technology Professionals of Alberta (ASET) is making certain steps easier for refugees of engineering technology backgrounds coming to Alberta from war-torn countries.

Two important, but not well-known initiatives are available. The first new initiative is a waiving of application fees for individuals with refugee status, which can cost almost \$1,000.

The second is competency-based assessment program, which started in 2016, but is still available today and what it does is that as long you pass the English benchmark tests, it will get you into the process and gets your background, documentation and your portfolio assessed by ASET so that you can get certified.

Then you become certified, usually a - Certified Engineering Technologist.

Without ASET's competency-based assessment program, refugees and newcomers would go take courses and do post-secondary education to try and bridge the gap.

When employers see that Certified Engineering Technologist title, they are confident that you can do the job.

Why is this important? It's because a lot of people coming in from other countries don't have the correct credentials. You see doctors and engineers driving cabs and what not.

ASET is one of the first organizations to remove the barrier.

They aim to help Ukrainians and other refugees with engineering technology backgrounds get on their feet professionally.

High River is home to 37 ASET members with more Ukrainians coming here and to Alberta because of the war.

After Russia invaded Crimea in 2014, single mother Mila Wagner made the difficult decision to leave her home and job in Ukraine and move to Alberta two years later with her three-year-old son, Nikita. When she arrived in Alberta in 2016, she discovered that her multiple engineering technology-related degrees from Ukraine did not translate in the Canadian employment market and no one would hire her. She had to take on menial work until she was able to earn a civil engineering technology diploma at Lethbridge College.

This is similar to what many refugees experience.

"When you move into a new country and you have a three-yearold son holding your hand, it was quite challenging starting all over again," said Wagner.

"During this time, I had to make sure I was capable to take care of myself and my son. That was definitely very challenging to me."

Wagner says that when she first came to Canada, she had to pass the Canadian language benchmark placement test.

"I started to apply for jobs, but no one was calling me for an interview, because my education and credentials were not fully accepted here in Canada," she said.

"I didn't know anything about ASET at this time or the competency-based assessment program. I only believed that best path was to go complete a diploma at a post-secondary college."

Wagner says that if any of her journey sounds familiar to please reach out to ASET by going to their website and learning more.

"I wish I would have known about that competency-based assessment program."

Had she known about it, she could have been fast-tracked into earning an ASET designation - subject to having the required application documentation -and ultimately working in a career-related job in half to a quarter of the time required to complete an additional engineering technology diploma in Canada.

While she praises the excellent civil engineering technology education that she received at Lethbridge College where the instructors are top-notch and go above and beyond to help their students, she wishes she'd known about the ASET program.

"If I could have been accredited through ASET from my previous schooling in Ukraine, I could have been positioned in a job in my field sooner," said Wagner, now an ASET member.

"I think the competency-based assessment program combined with application fee waiver will be a game changer for refugees from Ukraine and other countries."

ASET is making it easier than ever for refugees with tech backgrounds to get on the career paths for which they were educated in their home countries said ASET CEO Barry Cavanaugh.

"Alberta and Canada as a whole need more people with the technical knowledge and experience to contribute to our province and nation and we value what these newcomers bring," he said.

How the competency-based assessment program works: Foreign-trained professionals who have passed an ASET-approved English language proficiency test and are seeking certification and an ASET certified engineering technologist (CET) or certified technician designation (CTech) now

undergo a competency assessment. This includes submitting academic credentials, work experience documents -such as CV, competency summary, job descriptions, and references - confirming their work experience locally and abroad. They then complete a professional practice exam that tests them on Alberta-specific legislation and professional ethics, and the ASET certification exam (if applying for the CET designation) that tests them on their technical competency.

In some cases, foreign-trained professionals are not able to access academic documents. For example, if they are refugees from a war zone, their academic institution may have been destroyed. ASET's PLAR model allows foreign-trained professionals who are unable to produce academic transcripts to complete a work portfolio to demonstrate equivalency to the academic requirements. Skills and knowledge obtained outside of an academic program are evaluated for the purpose of recognizing professional competence, and certification exams test for the educational standard.

If you are a refugee or emigrating to Canada and you would like to see what more ASET can have to offer, or if you have any questions, please reach out to them at email:

[asetceo@aset.ab.ca](mailto:asetceo@aset.ab.ca).