

Refugees' qualifications may be fast tracked for review to help them find work

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The Association of Science and Engineering Technology Professionals of Alberta (ASET) is currently utilizing two initiatives that support refugees with engineering technology backgrounds. Foreign credentials are often not recognized in Canada, says ASET. They provide ways to work around these issues and fast-track employment.

Northern Alberta residents are asked to reach out if they know anyone arriving from Ukraine that has a background in engineering technology. Northern Albertan has both a Ukrainian population and ASET members.

"The fact that someone is displaced from home, country, perhaps family by war, famine and the like should stimulate compassion rather than 'discomfort'. These things can happen to anyone, and Canada is built on principles of openness and helping," ASET CEO Barry Cavanaugh says.

"Communities should be looking to how best they can welcome newcomers generally - as we have throughout our history - but the real need by refugees is something we cannot ignore in human decency," says Cavanaugh.

ASET's program fast-tracks people facing credential issues in one-half to one-quarter of the time it would take to redo their education. They added that further issues can arise if someone's academic institution is in a war zone and has been destroyed, since they would not be able to access academic documents. Their prior learning assessment and recognition (PLAR) grants these professionals necessary work portfolios.

Mila Wagner is an ASET member who left Ukraine after Russia invaded the Crimean Peninsula in 2014.

"I had everything back home in Kyiv, Ukraine: an apartment and a job--I felt very unsafe remaining in Ukraine and made plans to move to Canada. It took me two years to prepare. My little boy and I finally arrived in Alberta in 2016," says Wagner. "Despite having multiple engineering technology-related degrees from Ukraine, I had to take menial jobs, mostly cleaning to pay for English schooling, rent and food. I even had to visit a food bank."

Wagner also had no relatives in Canada when she arrived. She began applying for jobs but didn't receive any interviews due to these credential issues. At the time, Wagner wasn't aware of ASET's program and completed civil engineering technology education at Lethbridge College.

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

Cavanaugh outlined the two initiatives: the competency-based assessment program released in 2016 and an application fee waiver for engineering technology professionals with refugee status. After completing a Canadian English language proficiency test, refugees' education and work experience is evaluated. This grants a certified engineering technologist (CET) title. This title makes it easier for refugees to find work. The second initiative supports refugees dealing with financial issues. These fees of up to \$1,000 also go towards PLAR, practice exams, and certification exams.

Cavanaugh added that ASET funds their programming alone and that their focus is on refugees coming from any area or circumstance.

"ASET recognizes that many applicants who are refugees from countries in crisis are also suffering significant economic hardship," says an ASET news release.