

ASET makes it easier for refugees to fast track into tech fields

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(Photo caption: Mila Wagner left her home and job in Ukraine to come to Canada to work.)

Refugees who are engineering technology professionals will have an easier time earning their professional designations and finding work in their field without having to return to school. This is all thanks to the Association of Science and Engineering Technology Professionals of Alberta (ASET).

The first stage of making these refugees' lives easier occurred a few years ago when ASET launched the competency-based assessment, which was a way for them to review people's experience and qualifications. It would then allow for foreign-trained, and other engineering technology professionals, a faster route to establishing their careers.

“We thought that was useful in a lot of ways.

It helped a lot of Canadians,” said ASET CEO Barry Cavanaugh.

ASET then decided recently to waive all application fees, which are right around \$1,000, for refugees seeking to become members and attain their designation.

Cavanaugh said that they began to realize that they had a fair number of refugees in their applicant base from foreign trained groups and that big changes would soon start happening with the Ukrainian crisis. He said they became aware that people would be coming to ASET in a hurry to find work in their field.

“Given the urgency of their situation, not just Ukrainians, but refugees generally, we should waive application fees and examination fees so that we don't put another roadblock in their path,” he said.

“If you're coming from an urgent situation like most refugees are, we just want to remove obstacles where we can.”

After Russia invaded Crimea in 2014, single mother Mila Wagner headed to Alberta two years later with her son, leaving her home and her job in Ukraine. When she arrived, it was a challenge for her to get a job.

“When I started applying for a job in my field, as I had engineering related experience and a degree from back home, nobody called me for an interview because my education and credentials were not fully accepted here in Canada,” she said.

During that time she didn’t know anything about ASET or the competency-based assessment program, so in order to get a job she had to enroll in post-secondary education and earn a professional diploma. She attended Lethbridge College for two years and obtained a civil engineering technology diploma.

Once she learned of ASET in school, she became a member right away, which was free to her as a student.

Although she didn’t know of the things ASET did, she is happy that others coming to Canada will get the help they need in getting back to work quickly with the recent waiving of fees.

“It’s a huge support and help for the people who want to start their new life in a different country.”

In the past, most of the standards were based on Canadian education when it came to refugees entering the country.

People would have a hard time translating what the equivalent would be in another country, but Cavanaugh feels it’s much better now because of how they assess applicants.

Within the engineering technologist field, there are 21 different disciplines, with a large number in civil engineering technology like road building, construction, bridges, etc.

“They’re involved in every aspect of our daily lives. They’re not just all around us, they contribute really meaningfully to the economy of the province,” said Cavanaugh.

Typically, an applicant’s education consists of a two-year program focused in engineering technology.

ASET has around 18,000 members, with 21 of them calling Stettler home.