



# **Response, Recovery, and Driving Equity**

Annual Report 2020

# Contents

<b>About WES .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2020 in Review: Letters from Our Leadership.....</b>	<b>4</b>
Letter from Our Board Chair.....	5
Letter from Our CEO .....	6
Letter from Our Managing Director for Canada .....	7
<b>Strategic Plan.....</b>	<b>8</b>
Our Values.....	9
Our Vision, Mission, and Strategies .....	10
Celebrating 20 Years in Canada.....	11
<b>Response and Recovery: Our Work in a Pandemic .....</b>	<b>12</b>
International credential evaluations during the pandemic .....	13
2020 Applicant Profile.....	14
Our research on the impact of the pandemic.....	15
Our advocacy on behalf of internationally educated health professionals .....	16
Our philanthropic response to the pandemic .....	17
<b>Driving Equity: Our Projects and Programs.....</b>	<b>18</b>
The WES Gateway Program .....	19
The Skilled Immigrant Integration Program.....	20
The WES Mariam Assefa Fund .....	21
Leadership and Board of Trustees.....	22

# About WES

World Education Services (WES) is a non-profit social enterprise dedicated to helping international students, immigrants, and refugees achieve their educational and career goals in the United States and Canada. For more than 45 years, WES has set the standard of excellence in the field of international academic credential evaluation. Through WES Global Talent Bridge, the organization joins with institutional partners, community-based organizations, and policymakers to help immigrants and refugees who hold international credentials fully utilize their talents and education to achieve their academic and professional goals. Its philanthropic arm, the WES Mariam Assefa Fund, supports catalytic leaders and organizations working to build inclusive economies and to ensure that immigrants and refugees can achieve their aspirations and thrive.



*At our March 2020 Town Hall, prior to the stay-at-home order in New York.*

**2020 in Review:**  
Letters from Our Leadership

## Letter from Our Board Chair

For nearly 50 years, World Education Services (WES) has sought to provide immigrants, refugees, and international students with the tools they need to achieve their educational and workplace goals in the United States and Canada. WES has supplied more than three million individuals with evaluation reports that demonstrate the value of degrees earned in countries other than the U.S. and Canada. At the same time, WES has worked to support programs and policies that open pathways which allow immigrants, refugees, and international students to succeed.

The year 2020 revealed the importance of this work. The COVID-19 pandemic dramatically reshaped global mobility patterns, the workplace, and educational institutions. International students and prospective immigrants saw their plans thrown into disarray,

as the most vulnerable in our communities, including many immigrants working in low-wage and frontline jobs, disproportionately suffered severe financial and health impacts.

WES quickly rallied to meet the rapidly changing needs of the communities and customers it serves. The Evaluation Production department was transformed so that WES could continue to support the immigrants, refugees, and students who rely on us for timely and accurate evaluation reports. As early as April, WES pushed forward policies to ensure that internationally educated health care workers had opportunities to join the fight against the pandemic in the U.S. and Canada. WES partnered with nearly 8,000 organizations globally to facilitate the secure transmission of digital supporting documents, enabling our applicants to quickly obtain proof

of the academic and professional qualifications they earned outside of the U.S. and Canada. Over the year, the WES Mariam Assefa Fund provided 8 organizations in Canada and 30 in the U.S. with US\$6.3 million to address the needs of immigrant and refugee workers in their communities.

WES also began to look ahead toward a dynamic and more equitable future, releasing a five-year strategic plan that will extend its position as a leading global social enterprise.

WES leadership and staff led the organization through a tumultuous year, and WES is positioned to continue driving impactful and responsive work through 2021 and beyond. On behalf of the WES Board of Trustees, I am deeply grateful for the perseverance and creativity that have improved opportunities for thousands of individuals and their communities.



Sincerely,

**Hans de Wit, Board Chair**

## Letter from Our CEO

The year 2020 was an extraordinary time to lead an exceptional global social enterprise. Throughout the year, staff at WES have used all the tools at their disposal to achieve better outcomes for the immigrants, refugees, and international students we serve. This includes one of the world's most extensive databases of global academic credentials; an agile, trusted network of local, state, provincial, and national partners; philanthropic and investment capital; and expertise in international education systems, in research, and in immigrant integration policy and advocacy.

My colleagues worked tirelessly to continue the organization's legacy of positive social impact. Despite many challenges, WES accomplished a great deal:

- We completed more credential evaluation applications and helped more individual applicants in 2020 than in any previous year in the organization's history.

- We worked closely with institutions around the globe to dramatically expand our ability to securely accept verified digital academic records—a consequential benefit to applicants confronting the realities of global disruptions to postal and other delivery services.
- We provided funding to 38 organizations in the U.S. and Canada to address pressing issues immigrant communities were facing, to improve pathways to economic mobility, and to uplift immigrant leadership.
- We supported efforts to help internationally educated health care professionals to join the fight against the pandemic.
- We commented on federal government proposals that would have harmed the international students and immigrants we serve.
- We reached 1,000 applicants served through the WES Gateway Program, our initiative to enable displaced individuals now living in Canada or the U.S. to provide proof

of their international education and skills.

- Our staff formed the Racial Equity Anti-Oppression (REAO) Committee, which is focused on the ways that WES can internally address issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

We also reflected on our past and looked toward our future as we sought to develop a five-year strategic plan that will lead us past our 50th anniversary and through 2025. To this end we engaged our staff to distill the values that sit at the heart of all the work we do. The values—Opportunity, Expertise, Equity, Inclusion, Enterprising—will continue to lead, guide, and inspire us each day.

The year 2020 was momentous. I am grateful to have walked through it alongside my WES colleagues, the leadership team, the WES Board of Trustees, and numerous partners. I am proud that WES has emerged from a challenging year in a strong position poised to continue to drive impact.



Sincerely,

*Esther Benjamin*

**Esther Benjamin**  
CEO and Executive Director

## Letter from Our Managing Director for Canada

The past year marked the 20th anniversary of WES in Canada. The anniversary was a banner year for WES, albeit in unexpected ways. The disruption to so many facets of our personal and professional lives created an opportunity to bring long-dormant issues to the forefront.

As the COVID-19 pandemic quickly transformed the world around us, we looked first to protect the health and safety of our staff. We would not, as an organization, ever be able to carry on with our work without first ensuring the well-being of our colleagues.

Our attention was also on the welfare of those we serve: immigrants, refugees, and international students, as well as the institutions that support them. Our own surveys on the impact of the pandemic on newcomers showed us that a significant portion had lost jobs and income and were struggling to meet basic needs.

Yet our surveys also revealed that prospective immigrants were still interested in coming to Canada despite the pandemic. That is

good news for the country. With a shrinking workforce and low birth rate, Canada must rely on immigrants to drive its economic recovery and long-term growth.

Canada welcomed nearly one million new permanent residents over the last three years. While WES has always focused on integrating newcomers' education and skills into Canada's economy, the disparate impact of the pandemic changed the course of our work and required us to ensure that new arrivals were not left behind amid large-scale disruption to the labour market. With a mind set on recovery, we began working in three key areas toward the future we wanted to see:

- **Inclusive recruitment and hiring strategies that incorporate immigrant talent sources:** We convened a coalition with Immigrant Employment Councils across the country to highlight the benefits of hiring and retaining immigrant talent amid the recovery and beyond. We shared stories, tools, and resources to support the integration of immigrants into Canadian workplaces.

- **Innovative and scalable solutions that enable better recognition of international skills, education, and experience:** We worked alongside advocates and partners in the Canadian health care system to identify ways of better utilizing the skills of internationally educated health professionals.
- **Targeted initiatives to work toward greater equality:** Looking through an intersectional lens, we saw that some immigrant groups, such as women and youth, could be left behind; as a result, we focused our efforts on pushing for more inclusive policies and programs.

As WES heads into year one of implementing its new strategic plan, the organization will focus its efforts on ensuring that Canada is prepared to realize the full potential of all newcomers. An opportunity to bring about a future that reflects our greatest hopes lies ahead: a more inclusive and equitable Canada where everyone has the opportunity to fulfill their dreams.



Sincerely,

**Shamira Madhany**

Deputy Executive Director and Managing Director, Canada

# Strategic Plan

The WES 2021–2025 Strategic Plan builds on the organization’s nearly 50 years of experience and leadership supporting the efforts of immigrants, refugees, and international students in the U.S. and Canada to achieve educational and professional success. The plan will guide WES’ work over the next five years.



## As part of the strategic planning process, WES staff and the Board of Trustees were engaged to define the core values of the organization.

Through an inclusive process that involved staff and leadership, WES developed five core principles to abide by—internally and externally—in partnerships, advocacy, and action.



A moment during our staff-led values conversation.

### Opportunity

We open doors so people can build better futures.

“ I saw how a WES evaluation helped a lawyer from Syria gain admission to a law school in Toronto. I knew I was in the right place and this was the work I wanted to do.”

Aliyyah Nazeem  
Institutional Relations, Canada

### Expertise

We challenge ourselves to be the best at what we do.

“ A lot of my work depends on the expertise of other departments. I am often going to call on our teams who have an expertise in a certain area and who are going to help me respond properly to a client.”

Michael Hearne  
Institutional Relations, U.S.

### Equity

We uphold fairness and justice in our work and actions.

“ We’ve heard the word ‘unprecedented’ a lot in 2020, but [our work] and the ways we break barriers and advance equity for people is truly groundbreaking.”

Shaunna-Marie Kerr,  
WES Global Talent Bridge, Canada

### Inclusion

We become stronger, more creative, and more resilient when we embrace diversity.

“ [Inclusion] feels so organic at WES. I’ll talk to colleagues and realize at the end of the day that I have heard so many different perspectives. It’s so valuable.”

Jeremy Howe  
Evaluation Production, Canada

### Enterprising

We are resourceful, inventive, and driven.

“ People are always willing to fill gaps where they see gaps, where they see opportunity to apply talents and efforts to push things forward. It’s indicative of the culture at WES.”

Anthony Castro  
Marketing, U.S.

## WES clarified its Vision and Mission and outlined its strategic plan.

Our Vision and Mission statements describe the results of our work and articulate the aspiration driving that work. The five strategies outline our approach to achieving our Mission and Vision.

### Our Vision

Everyone is able to put their education, experience, and skills to work **anywhere in the world.**

### Our Mission

We help people learn, work, and thrive in new places. We help society recognize the value of people's education and experience.

#### Enabling Individuals

We enable immigrants, refugees, and international students to make full use of their education, skills, knowledge, and experience so they can achieve economic and social mobility.

#### Driving Systems Change

We partner widely to facilitate social and economic mobility for the individuals we serve, and we seek to build open and equitable systems that provide access to opportunity for immigrants, refugees, and international students.

#### Staying Ahead of the Curve

We ensure growth, organizational resilience, and continued impact by anticipating and pivoting to meet the needs of customers, academic institutions, clients, partners, and stakeholders in a dynamic environment.

#### Investing in Our People

We foster an inclusive, mission-driven culture where every employee feels valued, encouraged, and motivated, where every employee is empowered to do excellent work every day, and where every employee becomes a catalyst for change.

#### Leading as a Social Enterprise

We maintain the highest standard of excellence and ability to scale as a financially independent, sustainable organization driving measurable social impact.

## Celebrating 20 Years in Canada

In 2000, we recognized a disturbing trend in Canada: Immigrants and refugees were arriving ready to pursue their educational and professional goals but were met with unexpected challenges. Employers, post-secondary institutions, and professional regulatory bodies lacked the tools and systems they needed to understand the equivalency of higher education obtained in other countries.

WES began operating in Canada to address this issue. Since piloting in Ontario, WES has become a designated provider of Educational Credential Assessments for Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. WES evaluations are recognized by more than 1,300 institutions across the country.

Over the course of two decades, we have driven a change in how Canada’s institutions perceive international credentials. There are now systems in place to recognize education earned in countries other than Canada. This shift happened in tandem with a national ecosystem of organizations, advisors, and leaders in employment, immigrant integration, and higher education. WES continues to push for systemic change at a national and international level by launching initiatives such as the WES Gateway Program, or consulting on the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration.

As WES celebrates two decades of progress in Canada, it will continue to work toward a future when education, experience, and skills are fully recognized and valued.



Former and current Canadian staff and partners.



### 2000

WES launches in Canada.

### 2010

WES develops the capability to store and transmit transcripts and verified credentials to receiving institutions.

### 2013

WES becomes a designated provider of Educational Credential Assessments for the Canadian government.

### 2015

WES Global Talent Bridge launches to help ensure that immigrants can use their skills and education.

### 2018

WES expands a refugee pilot program into the WES Gateway Program for individuals educated in one of seven countries who cannot access their academic documentation.

### 2020

The WES Mariam Assefa Fund makes its inaugural grants in Canada.

WES celebrates 20 years in Canada.

# Response and Recovery: Our Work in a Pandemic

In 2020, the pandemic upended immigration and international higher education. WES' subsequent focus was on its constituents, the individuals whose international education, workplace, and immigration goals would be more difficult to achieve as a result of the upheaval. From the onset, WES understood that the pandemic would exacerbate existing inequities and create new challenges for immigrants, refugees, and international students in the U.S. and Canada.

WES responded by leveraging its network, resources, and expertise in international higher education and by swiftly focusing its social impact work on emerging needs. Our mission—to help people learn, work, and thrive in new places and help society recognize the value of people's education and experience—guided each of these actions.

## International credential evaluations during the pandemic

In March and April 2020, the emerging pandemic began to disrupt global mobility and global business operations. As higher education institutions closed campuses, and education ministries suspended working from their offices, and WES moved its own employees home to ensure their safety, WES international credential evaluation services felt the impact of an unprecedented global crisis. WES recognized how the pandemic would impact evaluation production, and so WES staff sought to adapt and innovate to ensure continuity in service to customers.

WES created internal processes for monitoring, planning, and tracking related to the pandemic's impact on global credential evaluation demand. The team closely reviewed key developments worldwide and COVID-19 metrics in the U.S. and Canada. These processes mitigated the impact of local stay-at-home orders on productivity by allowing small teams of WES staff to safely

return to the office when it was possible to do so in the fall.

To address disruption to the international flow of mail, WES developed its approach to securely receive digital files containing academic documents, while supporting institutional clients and partners as they adapted to the transmission of digitized documents.

This shift in practice enabled WES to safely receive and authenticate electronic files, which in turn ensured more rapid processing and review times for WES customers. WES received 65 percent of all supporting credential evaluation documents digitally by the end of the year, compared with only 7 percent in 2019. The shift also dramatically improved customer satisfaction

scores in 2020, as most customers experienced reduced processing times.

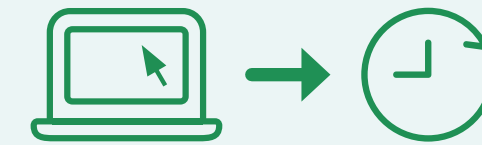
The result of this rapid response, innovation, and diligence during a period of such disruption was significant; at the end of 2020 WES completed a total of 435,407 credential evaluations, a 10 percent increase from 2019, and more than in any other year in its history.

 **435,407**

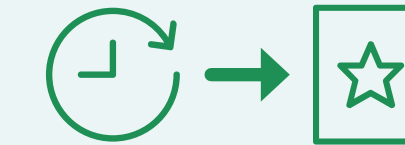
WES completed a record number of applications

 **65%**

WES received 65 percent of all supporting credential evaluation documents digitally, up from only 7 percent in 2019



Staff productivity and digitization drove down average processing times



Reduced processing times helped improve customer satisfaction scores

# 2020 Applicant Profile

**435,407** Total completed evaluations





## United States

**66,450**

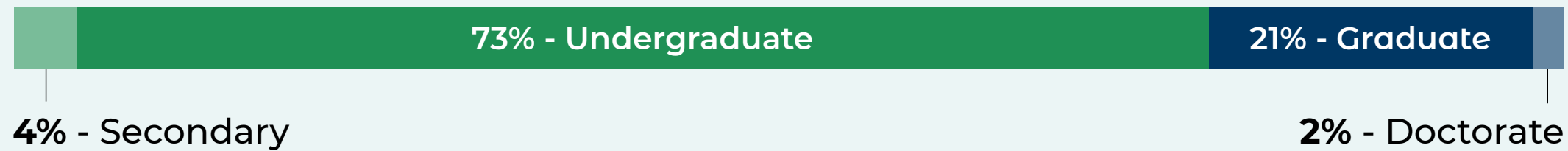
Completed evaluations

 **86%**

used their evaluation for **education**

-  **6.5%** - Employment
-  **5%** - Licensing
-  **1.5%** - Immigration
-  **1%** - Other


Highest Level of Education






## Canada

**368,957**

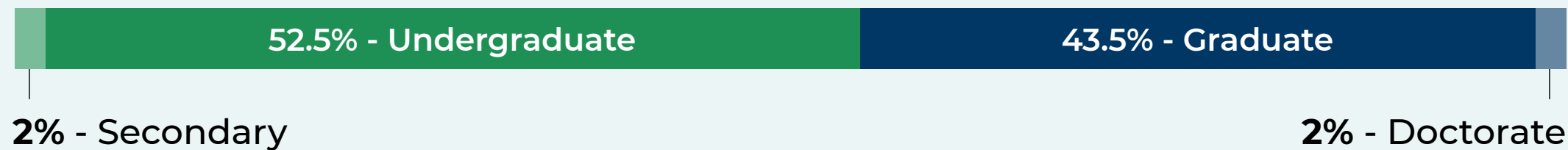
Completed evaluations

 **92%**

used their evaluation for **immigration**

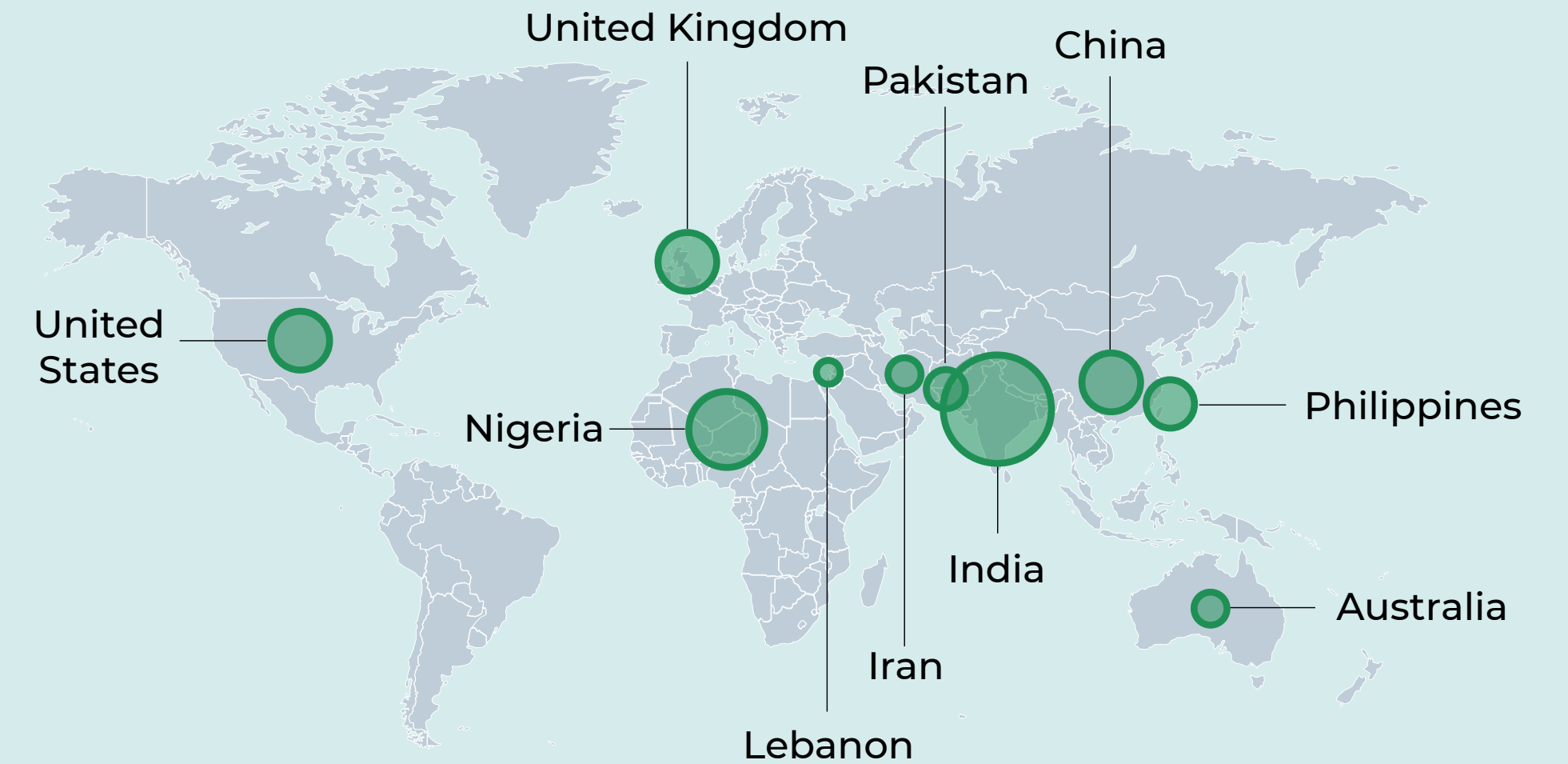
-  **4%** - Education
-  **3%** - Licensing
-  **1%** - Employment

Highest Level of Education



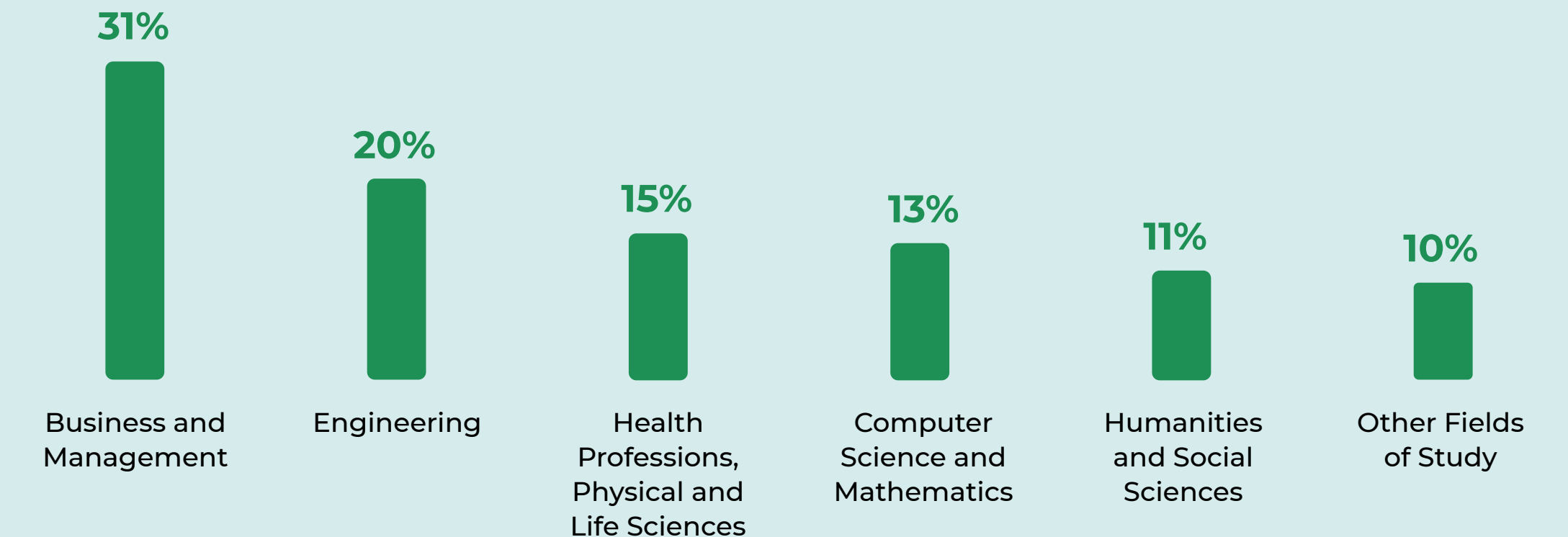
## Top 10 Countries of Education

In 2020, WES evaluated credentials from a total of 196 countries and territories.



## Top Fields of Study

In 2020, WES evaluated a total of 29,998 unique qualifications.



## Our research on the impact of the pandemic

To address the uncertain future of international higher education and immigration amid the pandemic and political change, beginning in March our research teams in the U.S. and Canada turned their attention to surveying how the attitudes of prospective international students, immigrants, and refugees, as well as those studying and living in the U.S. and Canada had begun to shift. The results yielded a series of insightful research reports and articles that provided the field with a nuanced picture of what had changed for the people WES serves.



Two feature images illustrating World Education News+Reviews (WENR) articles exploring the impact of the pandemic.

### In the U.S.

WES conducted surveys of higher education professionals in April and June, and prospective international students in April, June, and August. These surveys revealed how institutions strategically adapted in response to the crisis, as well as how the pandemic affected the plans of prospective students.

The surveys of prospective students revealed important differences between the views of international

students who study on temporary student visas and those of internationally educated immigrants who have more permanent status, referred to in the report as immigrant students, in the U.S.

The results of the initial round of surveys were summarized in a May WENR feature: “Perfect Storm: The Impact of the Coronavirus Crisis on International Student Mobility to the United States.”

Our U.S. research was featured in the Chronicle of Higher Education and presented in a webinar with the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO).

### In Canada

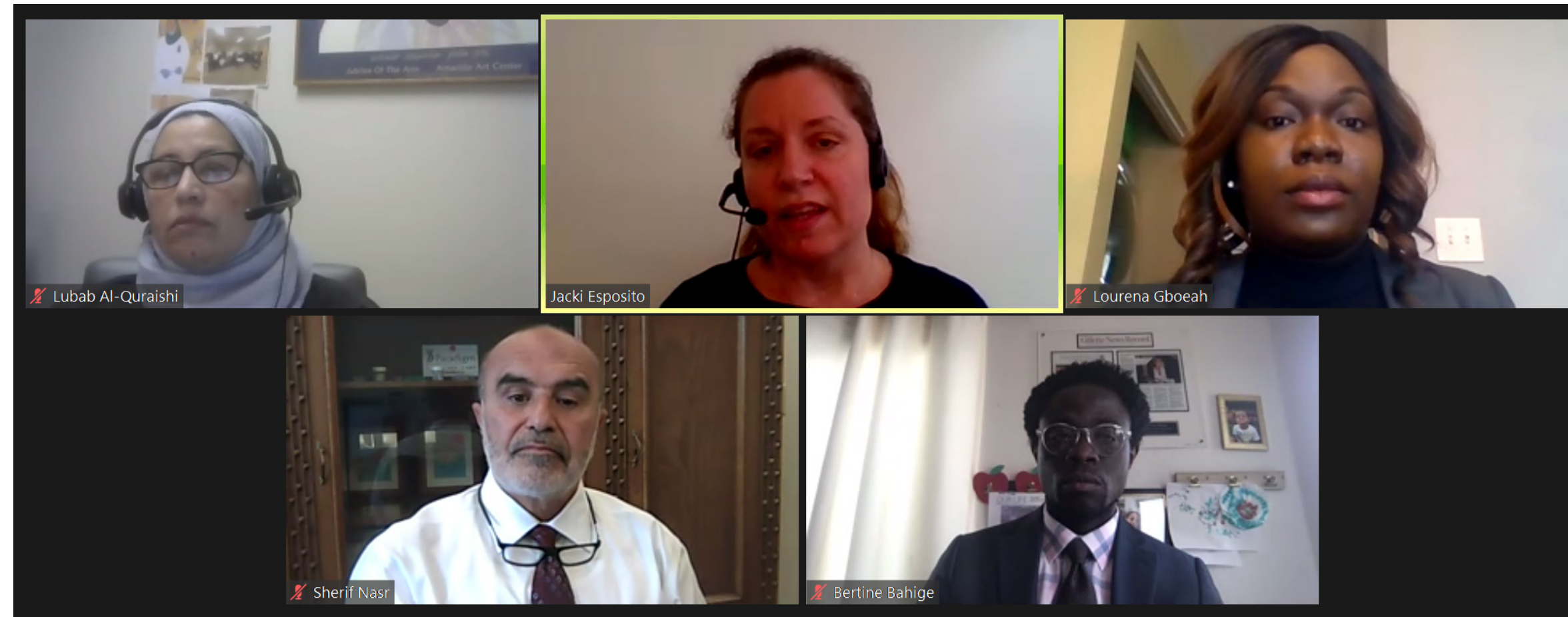
WES Global Talent Bridge in Canada published three reports analyzing results from surveys conducted in April, June, and August of prospective immigrants and immigrants already in Canada. The reports revealed the pandemic’s disproportionate impact on recent immigrants, temporary workers, and international students in terms of lost jobs, lost income, ability to afford basic needs, and access to financial support benefits.

These insights will inform more effective policy, improved student support within higher education institutions, and more targeted economic recovery efforts.

These findings were explored in an August WENR feature: “How Has COVID-19 Impacted the Financial Well-Being of Immigrants, Temporary Workers, and International Students in Canada?” WES research was also featured in Times Higher Education and The Star in Canada.

## Our advocacy on behalf of internationally educated health professionals

WES Global Talent Bridge has long been an advocate of improved pathways to employment for immigrants and refugees with international credentials and experience. The COVID-19 pandemic added urgency to this work.



IMPRINT Coalition Director, and WES U.S Policy and Advocacy Director, Jacki Esposito speaking with partners and IEHPs.

### In the U.S.

WES leads the IMPRINT Coalition, a national alliance dedicated to advancing policies and models that promote career pathways for immigrants and refugees seeking to use their international credentials in the U.S. IMPRINT launched advocacy efforts in 2020 to break down barriers to licensure for internationally educated health care professionals (IEHPs). To date, six states—Colorado, Massachusetts, Michigan, Nevada, New Jersey, and New York—have issued executive orders

adjusting licensing requirements to allow internationally trained doctors to practice temporarily.

IMPRINT continues to convene partners in advocacy to open pathways for immigrants and refugees who hold international credentials. In addition, WES is assisting the state of Nevada as it continues to review applications from internationally trained medical professionals to receive temporary licensure.

### In Canada

The pandemic revived a largely stalled conversation on barriers to licensure and labour market entry for internationally educated health care professionals. WES worked strategically with Canadian partners to create systemic solutions to the problem. WES provided a set of policy recommendations to a commission on COVID-19 in the long-term care sector in order to increase the number of career and licensure pathways available to IEHPs,

specifically, internationally trained nurses. The recommendations had considerable bearing on the Ontario provincial budget released at the end of 2020. Currently, WES is convening a network of internationally trained doctors' groups and continues to work with its partners to improve career paths for IEHPs.

“

It was very difficult sitting on the sidelines during a pandemic when we know that we possess the clinical knowledge, skills, and experience to help.”

**Joanna Walters**  
Completed her medical training in Jamaica in 2014 and is now studying for her Canadian medical license. Currently she works as a doctor's assistant in Markham, Ontario.

“

When I received the temporary medical license, I was really happy for two reasons. First, my title is now MD, matching my U.S. colleagues who share my level of experience and training and second, I am now able to help my community during COVID.”

**Lubab Al-Quraishi**  
A refugee from Iraq now practicing in New Jersey as a result of the executive order. She had previously worked at a CVS and as a restaurant cashier.



## Our philanthropic response to the pandemic

Immigrant and refugee workers number disproportionately among health care, food delivery, and janitorial service workers in the U.S. and Canada. They are also overrepresented in industries hard-hit by a faltering economy, such as the caregiving, food, retail, and hospitality sectors. Workers in these sectors have also been on the front lines of the COVID-19 pandemic.

To address the pandemic's impact on immigrants and refugees in low-wage work, the WES Mariam Assefa Fund team mobilized to support these communities.



*The WES Mariam Assefa Fund team at a retreat prior to the onset of the pandemic.*

### In the U.S.

In the first few weeks of the pandemic, the Fund made multiple rapid-response grants and donations to organizations working on the ground with immigrant and refugee communities, providing supports such as financial assistance and translation services.

### In Canada

Early in the pandemic, the Fund made donations to frontline organizations to address increased demands at a time of financial distress. Later in the year, the Fund made its first grants to organizations in Canada, several of which are working to address the impact of the pandemic on immigrants and refugees.

“

Our principle of ‘learning by doing’ as a funder is a constant. Every day, we learn from our grantee and investee partners about what’s needed to ensure that immigrant and refugee workers can access good jobs and advance in their careers. In the face of extraordinary difficulties in 2020, our partners met the moment with resilience and innovation, working to create stronger, more equitable, and welcoming workplaces and communities.”

**Monica Munn**  
Managing Director, Philanthropy

# Driving Equity: Our Projects and Programs

## The WES Gateway Program

The WES Gateway Program provides credential evaluations for displaced individuals who have limited proof of their academic achievements. Launched in 2018, the program has established a growing network of 26 committed referral partners in Canada. In 2020, WES piloted the program in the U.S. with 15 referral partners in 13 states.

The WES Gateway Program is available to eligible individuals educated in Afghanistan, Eritrea, Iraq, Syria, Turkey, Ukraine, and Venezuela. A WES credential evaluation can help participants continue their education, become licensed in their field in Canada or the U.S., or take the next step in their career.

In December 2020, the WES Gateway Program reached a significant milestone: 1,000 applicants in Canada and the U.S. have received a credential evaluation since the program's launch. These individuals now have a tool that demonstrates the validity of the academic qualifications that they bring to their new country. Their evaluation report is proof that the education

these individuals earned abroad is equivalent to that of degrees earned in Canada or the U.S.

Thus far, 58 higher education institutions and 22 regulatory bodies have received evaluation reports issued through the program.

The WES Gateway Program embodies WES' commitment to help individuals thrive in their new communities, and it emphasizes the importance of international credential recognition in immigrant and refugee integration. In 2020, a large majority of program participants (86 percent) reported that after receiving a WES assessment they felt better equipped to be advocates for the recognition of their international education.

# 1,000+ applicants

in Canada and the U.S. have received a credential evaluation since the program's launch.

# 58 higher education institutions and 22 regulatory bodies

have received evaluation reports issued through the program.



Ninos Ishaia, a WES Gateway Program applicant.

“

I worked as a teacher of English in Syria and wish to pursue my career in Canada. I was very happy to have the WES Gateway report reviewed and accepted by both of the competitive higher education institutions that I applied to. I'm currently enrolled in a Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages program at Fanshawe College and aspire to become a certified member of TESL Ontario (Teachers of English as a Second Language Association of Ontario).”

Ninos Ishaia  
Country of Origin: Syria  
Country of Education: Syria

## The Skilled Immigrant Integration Program

In the rapidly shifting landscape of 2020, WES Global Talent Bridge continued working toward the equitable integration of immigrants and refugees in the U.S. and Canada. Through its partnerships with diverse stakeholders, WES Global Talent Bridge provided resources, programs, and referrals to immigrants and refugees with international education and experience. These collaborations—including with policymakers through the Office of New Americans (ONA) network and the IMPRINT Coalition, and with state/local stakeholder networks through the Skilled Immigrant Integration Program (SIIP)—created opportunities to effect change in the long term and in swift response to the pressing needs of the year.

SIIP engages a growing cohort of communities across the U.S. in a dynamic network to support and promote immigrant and refugee

integration initiatives. In the face of demands brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2020 SIIP program offered not just the opportunity to receive technical assistance from WES and its national partners, but also a crucial space for communities to look to one another for guidance and support.

In December, the program’s annual convening brought together a diverse group of service providers and partner agencies to reflect on a historic year and pave pathways forward on behalf of internationally trained immigrant and refugee professionals. The convening was held in conjunction with the first WES Global Talent Bridge Immigrant Economic Integration Summit, a four-day virtual forum that drew participation from 350 organizations, institutions, and government agencies representing 39 states.



Legend: 2018, 2019, and 2020 communities ● Cities 🏛️ Statewide Initiative

“

As Nevada’s Office for New Americans begins to lay down the groundwork for immigrant workforce development in the state, it is wonderful to have a network that holds so much knowledge in this space to lean on and get guidance.”

**Charina de Asis**  
Director  
Nevada Governor’s Office for New Americans

“

The SIIP network is an indispensable resource given that it offers access to tried and tested innovative ways for eliminating some of the roadblocks faced by the foreign-skilled in navigating the American employment process.”

**Valerie Mills**  
Sr. Program Manager  
Mayor’s Office of Immigrant Affairs, City of Atlanta

## The WES Mariam Assefa Fund

The year 2020 was the WES Mariam Assefa Fund's first full year of operation, during which it responded to the urgent issues facing immigrants and refugees due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the long-term impediments to economic mobility.

The Fund was motivated by a future when immigrants and refugees can build the careers they desire and be part of inclusive and equitable economies and communities across the U.S. and Canada.

As the pandemic's impacts unfolded, the Fund ensured that grantee partners could meet communities' changing needs and quickly pivot to virtual settings. It also awarded rapid-response grants to organizations addressing the immediate toll the pandemic was taking on immigrant and refugee communities in the U.S. and Canada.



In parallel, the Fund expanded efforts to dismantle the barriers that often

impede the success of immigrant and refugee workers. The inaugural Canadian grantee partners are creating stronger career pathways for immigrants and refugees, investing in immigrant leaders, and nurturing innovation in the immigrant-serving sector.

Similarly, the first two impact investments, totaling \$750,000, backed solutions providing digital training for immigrant workers and the broader supports workers need to succeed, such as access to the financial system.

The Fund also launched its first open grantmaking initiative, the Opportunity Challenge, with the Tarsadia Foundation, to surface community-driven solutions to support immigrant workers; 500 organizations from 42 states applied, leading the funders to double the initial financial commitment and award a total of \$2 million to 12 awardees and 8 semi-finalists.

We have supported **43** organizations

 35 in the U.S.  8 in Canada

and awarded **US\$7.5M**  
since the Fund launched in 2019.



Photo courtesy of grantee partner Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia (ISANS), which helps immigrants build a future in the province.



Photo courtesy of grantee partner Many Languages One Voice, which works to cultivate power within immigrant communities in Washington, D.C.

“

Our partnership... has come at an invaluable moment in our work with immigrants and refugees in Toronto. The communities we work with have been hit hard by COVID-19, and this project is enabling us to do critical work on the ground.”

**Deena Ladd**  
Executive Director,  
Workers Action Centre

“

California's property service workers are on the front lines of our state's public health crisis. In every building that remains open, they risk their health each day by going to work. We are grateful for the support of the WES Mariam Assefa Fund to address the immediate needs of our communities and work toward inclusive recovery.”

**Luis Sandoval**  
Executive Director,  
Building Skills Partnership

## Leadership



**Esther Benjamin**  
CEO and Executive Director



**Shamira Madhany**  
Deputy Executive Director  
and Managing Director, Canada



**Paul Feltman**  
Deputy Executive Director,  
Global Talent Policy and Programs



**Cheryl Cramer Toto**  
Chief Operations Officer



**Megan Blackburn**  
Chief of Staff and Senior Director,  
Strategy and Planning



**Beth Clarke**  
Senior Director,  
Strategic Partnerships,  
Canada



**Ashley Craddock**  
Senior Director,  
Strategic Communications



**Jill Handy**  
Senior Director,  
Human Resources



**Monica Munn**  
Managing Director,  
Philanthropy



**Holly Sanders**  
Senior Director,  
Evaluation Production, U.S.



**Biren Shah**  
Chief Technology Officer



**Stacey Simon**  
Senior Director,  
Strategic Partnerships  
and Policy, U.S.



**Beka Tavartkiladze**  
Senior Director,  
Evaluation Production, Canada



**Gabe Vasquez**  
Senior Director,  
Marketing



**John Vermaaten**  
Interim Chief Financial Officer



**Michael Lowe**  
In Memoriam, Senior Director,  
Human Resources,  
2012–2020

## Board of Trustees



**Hans de Wit**  
Chair, WES Board of Trustees  
Distinguished Fellow, Center for  
International Higher Education  
Professor Emeritus of the Practice,  
Boston College



**Lynn Shotwell**  
Vice Chair, WES Board of Trustees  
President and CEO,  
Worldwide ERC



**Audrey Hendley**  
Treasurer, WES Board of Trustees  
President, American Express  
Global Travel & Lifestyle Services



**Helen Hayward**  
Secretary, WES Board of Trustees  
Independent Board Director



**Samuel Artmann**  
General Manager,  
Sonder Inc.



**Ann Buller**  
Former President and CEO,  
Centennial College



**Misha Esipov**  
Co-Founder and CEO,  
Nova Credit



**Feridun Hamdullahpur**  
President and Vice Chancellor,  
University of Waterloo



**Sidney R. Hargro,**  
President, Philanthropy Network  
Greater Philadelphia



**Joanna Harries**  
Senior Vice President  
of Expansion,  
Endeavor Global



**Maryana Iskander**  
CEO, Harambee Youth  
Employment Accelerator



**Shakti Jauhar**  
Co-Founder and  
CEO Mechanism Wellness



**Francisco Marmolejo**  
Higher Education President,  
Qatar Foundation for Education,  
Science and Community  
Development



**Dewayne Matthews**  
Fellow,  
Lumina Foundation



**Aaron Williams**  
Former Director, U.S. Peace Corps  
Former U.S. Government Diplomat  
Senior Advisor Emeritus,  
RTI International



**Ex-officio**  
**Esther Benjamin**  
CEO and Executive Director,  
World Education Services

# [wes.org/AnnualReport2020](https://wes.org/AnnualReport2020)

@ 2021 World Education Services. All rights reserved.