



WORLD EDUCATION SERVICES

Annual Report 2019

Mobility, Inclusion, and Impact

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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. WES advocates integrating skilled immigrants into the workforce in the U.S. and Canada; and its philanthropic arm, the WES Mariam Assefa Fund, supports efforts to dismantle the barriers that impede the economic advancement of immigrants and refugees in the United States and Canada.

Our Mission

WES advances the global mobility and integration of people into academic and professional settings by evaluating and advocating for the recognition of international educational qualifications and enabling individuals to fully utilize their education.



2019 in Review: Letters from Our Leadership





Letter from Our Board Chair

Since 1974, WES' contributions to the field of credential evaluation, international education, and skilled immigrant integration have been critical to the success of millions of individuals in the U.S., Canada, and around the globe.

2019 saw this work continue and expand, even as the organization successfully navigated a historic change in leadership. Mid-way through the year, Mariam Assefa, WES' longtime executive director and CEO, retired after 38 years at the helm. Mariam was an extraordinary, visionary leader who transformed the organization from its early years into the leading credential evaluator in North America.

Mariam instilled in the organization a commitment to excellence, to fairness, to mission, and to impact. She partnered across the globe to ensure the establishment of high-quality credential evaluation methodologies that have enabled several generations of internationally educated individuals to contribute their skills and knowledge to their field of education and work experience. As the leader of WES, Mariam measurably and undoubtedly changed our world for the better. The WES Board of Trustees expressed its recognition of her dedication and successful leadership of WES and its mission by establishing the WES Mariam Assefa Fund in her name. Capitalized with an initial investment of US\$30 million, the Fund will focus on economic opportunity for immigrants and extend the impact of Mariam's work and vision of equitable global mobility.

In the late spring, the WES Board of Trustees appointed Esther Benjamin as WES' next leader. Esther served in two U.S. presidential administrations. She has been a global executive in government, business, and civil society for over 25 years – leading programs and operations in more than 100 countries worldwide. Most recently, she was with Laureate Education as CEO for Africa Operations and CEO of Monash South Africa, Laureate's first university in sub-Saharan Africa. While there, she ensured access to high-quality education for thousands of learners, many of whom were the first in their families to attend university. Like Mariam, Esther has also measurably and undoubtedly changed our world for the better.

As we head into the coming year, the WES Board is grateful for the hard work and unstinting dedication of the organization's staff in the United States and Canada. We are grateful for Mariam's leadership and dedication, proud of all that WES has achieved to date, and confident that, under a dynamic new leader, the organization will continue to make strides in its efforts to ensure that international students, immigrants, and refugees have the opportunity and tools they need to fully contribute their training, skills, and talents to their new communities.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Hans de Wit'. The signature is stylized and fluid.

Hans de Wit
Board Chair



Letter from Our CEO

World Education Services is a remarkable organization: a social enterprise with a 45-year history and track record of giving millions of international students, immigrants, and refugees the tools to achieve educational and professional success, and of developing programs and networks that break down the barriers that too often prevent newcomers from contributing their hard-earned skills, talents, and knowledge to their new communities.

I joined WES as CEO and Executive Director in June 2019. My predecessor, Mariam Assefa, was a visionary, brilliant, and tireless leader. When I arrived at WES, the organization was already poised for another year of impressive accomplishments. These included:

- The delivery of credential evaluation services to nearly 500,000 international students, immigrants, and refugees around the world
- The launch of the WES Mariam Assefa Fund, our philanthropic initiative capitalized with US\$30 million
- Development of an innovative refugee hiring model in partnership with major Canadian employers
- Expansion of innovative signature U.S. and Canadian programs designed to ensure that refugees and skilled immigrants have the tools and opportunities to pursue their academic and professional goals in their new communities

WES has always been committed to putting its expertise to work to improve individual lives and drive systemic change. I am excited to have the opportunity to build on the organization's strong foundation to ensure that more newcomers to the United States and Canada have new and greater opportunities to achieve their dreams.

As an immigrant to the United States, I feel privileged to take on my role at WES. I am pleased to work closely with an exceptional Board of Trustees, our experienced and deeply committed staff, our strong partner organizations, higher education institutions worldwide, and many other stakeholders as we continue to drive our mission through our 50th anniversary and beyond.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Esther Benjamin". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Esther Benjamin
CEO and Executive Director



Letter from **Our Managing Director for Canada**

The story of immigration is one of humanity’s movement across lands, nations, and borders. It is inherently a global conversation, to which Canada is a major contributor. As the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) noted in one 2019 report, “Canada has not only the largest [skilled labour migration system] in terms of numbers, but also the most elaborate and longest-standing ... in the OECD.”

But while Canada has systems, models, and policies that work to attract economic immigrants, there is still further progress required to ensure their successful labour market integration. WES seeks to understand how to drive this progress.

In 2019, we released research on career success among skilled immigrants. While we saw some positive trends, we also saw some troubling evidence of the barriers that individuals face in using the skills, education, and experiences they have obtained abroad. In the coming year, as we approach 2020, we move into a decade of action on the UN Sustainable Development Goals—a commitment to “leave no one behind.” Cross-cutting Canada’s 2030 commitments is a pledge to reduce inequality and stimulate economic growth. Immigration is at the heart of our economic future—creating enabling systems that ensure the integration and inclusion of immigrants, refugees, and international students into our communities, workplaces, and beyond.

At WES, this is also central to our mission. Over the last year-plus, we’ve built new systems to ensure that displaced individuals who cannot access proof of their educational qualifications can still move forward with their lives in Canada. The WES Gateway Program has been acknowledged as a best practice, including in the UNESCO Policy Paper 37, What a Waste: Ensure Migrants and Refugees’ Qualifications and Prior Learning Are Recognized.

In recognition of global compacts and conventions, WES will continue this work in driving an inclusive path forward to ensure the global mobility of skills, education, and experience—all in tandem with our incredible partners here in Canada, and across the globe.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Shamira Madhany'.

Shamira Madhany

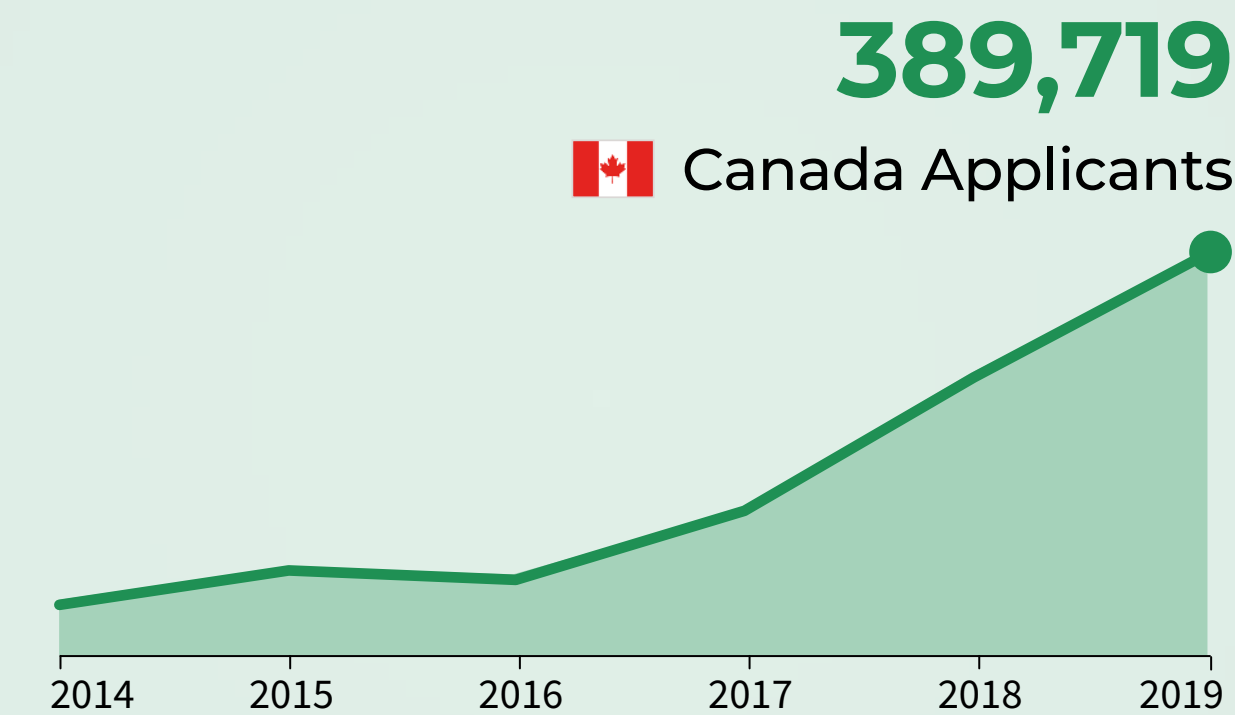
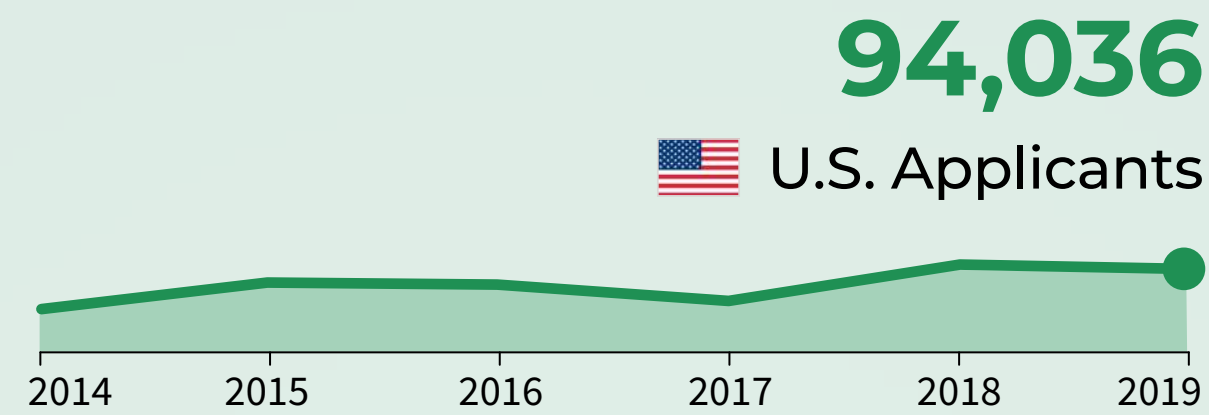
Deputy Executive Director and Managing Director, Canada

2019 WES Applicants

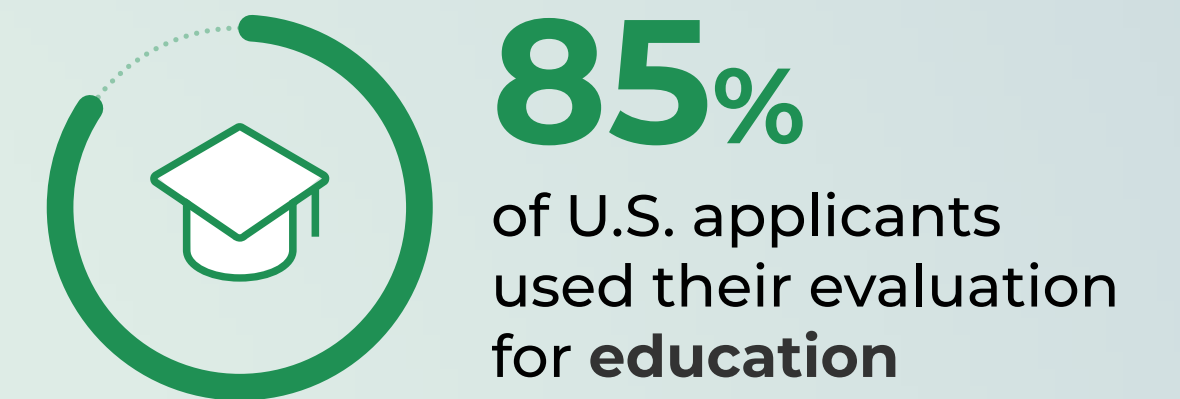
Top Countries of Education



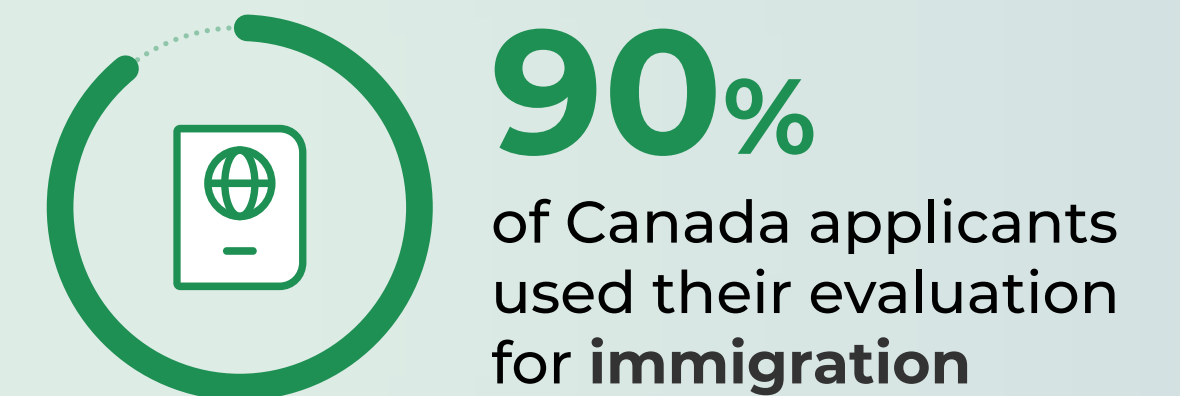
Total Applicants



Use of Evaluation



- 7% - Employment
- 6% - Licensing
- 1% - Immigration
- 1% - Other



- 5% - Education
- 3% - Licensing
- 2% - Employment
- 0% - Other



I immigrated to Canada because of air pollution. My son had asthma attacks. I needed to find a new place with a cleaner environment for my family. I arrived in April 2000. I had earned my doctorate in epidemiology in China, but **I had to prove I had specialized training and education to get a job.** I was finally offered a position in epidemiology because my employer understood my qualifications because of WES' evaluation report.”



Dr. Bruce (Zhiyong) Hong








-  Country of Origin: China 
-  Country of Education: China 
-  Now in: Canada 



I earned a Bachelor of Law degree from a university in Nigeria and my master's degree in oil and gas law from the University of Aberdeen, Scotland. The WES evaluation is like saying, 'Okay, she has the equivalent grade point in the U.S., although she received her grades in a different country.' That put me steps ahead of other job candidates who held foreign qualifications. Having my transcripts and degrees evaluated by WES **gave me confidence and assured me that my education was worth something.**”



Joy Okirie

-  Country of Origin: Nigeria 
-  Countries of Education: Nigeria and Scotland  
-  Now in: United States 



Projects and Programs



The WES Mariam Assefa Fund

2019 was a year of beginnings, learning, and action for the WES Mariam Assefa Fund. Building on WES' 45 years of experience supporting immigrants and international students in the United States and Canada, WES launched the Fund in June with US\$30 million.

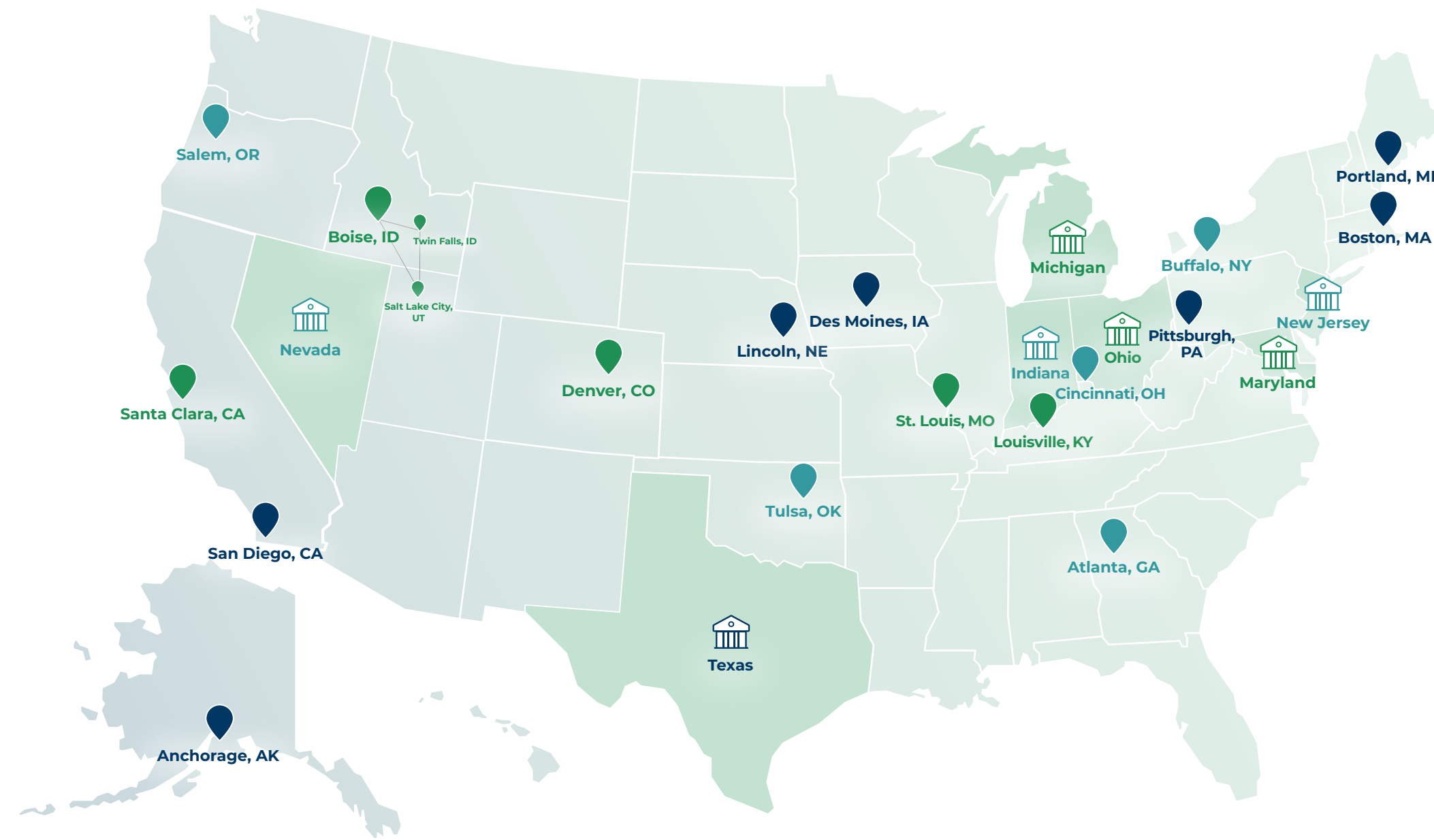
The launch significantly expanded the set of tools that WES can use to achieve its mission and vision of immigrant integration.

The Fund endeavors to ensure that immigrants and refugees have access to the skills, knowledge, and supports needed to advance in an ever-changing economy and workforce. It aspires to a world where economic mobility is possible for all immigrants and refugees.

Upon launch, Fund staff and leadership set about listening to leaders in the immigrant integration field to identify areas for early learning and funding. Within three months of launching, the Fund proudly announced its inaugural grants, which provided over \$1.2 million in funding to five organizations working across the United States to support immigrant and refugee workers and build a more inclusive economy for all. The Fund's grantee partners are testing approaches

to shift employer practices to be more inclusive of and invest in immigrant and refugee talent; determining how innovative financing can help to scale and deepen the impact of immigrant workforce integration interventions; and building leadership capacity in immigrant and refugee communities.

The WES Mariam Assefa Fund is just beginning its work of supporting immigrant and refugee workers and ensuring that economic mobility is within their reach. In 2020, the Fund team will build upon its first year efforts and undertake new initiatives, including additional funding rounds in the U.S., new partnerships, and the launch of its work in Canada.



2018, 2019, and 2020 | 📍 Cities 🏛️ Statewide Initiative

“

We have a provider network across Texas that was already engaged in delivering services to those who are internationally trained. When the opportunity to participate in the Skilled Immigrant Integration Program came, we immediately decided to apply. **SIIP really catalyzed everything we were trying to accomplish.** Now we have robust projects. We have statewide webinars and meetings, we’re developing a resource for interview protocols that we can disseminate across the state in order to promote better hiring processes, and we’re adapting a WES education career pathway guide to suit the needs of immigrants in the education field in Texas.

Anson Green, State Director,
Texas Adult Education and Literacy

Our goal is to develop opportunities for people to go into professions and careers that already exist. I’m excited to now have the capacity to not only build professional pathways into a sector like health care, but also to establish pathways into new economic sectors like renewable energy so that people who are typically on the outside of the economy can be at the core of burgeoning sectors.

Mara Kimmel, First Lady of Anchorage, Alaska

The Skilled Immigrant Integration Program

The WES Skilled Immigrant Integration Program takes a **place-based approach** toward driving lasting systemic change to benefit skilled immigrants and employers.

This program offers communities across the U.S. an opportunity to leverage technical assistance from WES and its national partners and join a network of communities to further skilled immigrant integration initiatives at the state and local level. By 2019, the network of communities participating in the Skilled Immigrant Integration Program had doubled in size, from eight to 16. At the end of 2019, another eight communities applied and were admitted to the program as part of a new 2020 cohort.



The WES-led IMPRINT Coalition works closely with government, business, education, and other partners to raise awareness about the talents and contributions of immigrant professionals. In particular, IMPRINT works to **streamline complex professional licensing and re-credentialing processes, and advocate for the adoption of policies** that facilitate the rapid integration of these skilled workers. In 2019, the members of the IMPRINT Coalition continued to advance this work, each approaching it through their organization's own particular lens.



CCCIE raises awareness of the role community colleges play in delivering educational opportunities to immigrants, and promotes the range and quality of programs and services for immigrant students among community colleges around the country with a particular focus on re-licensing.



MIRA promotes the rights and integration of immigrants and refugees through policy analysis and advocacy, institutional organizing, training and leadership development, strategic communications, citizenship assistance, and capacity building for community-based organizations.



A social entrepreneurial non-profit that operates in San Francisco, New York, and Chicago to help employers connect to the largely untapped talent pool of work-authorized immigrant professionals in their cities, UpGlo has helped more than 1,600 job seekers move out of poverty and low-skill survival jobs and re-establish themselves in the mainstream U.S. workforce as engineers, teachers, and other professionals.



Welcome Back centers nationwide link internationally trained health workers living in the U.S. with communities in need of their services. The centers help immigrant health workers to obtain the necessary credentials and licenses to practice, market their skills appropriately and effectively, and obtain further education and experience to facilitate integration and find meaningful employment in the health sector.

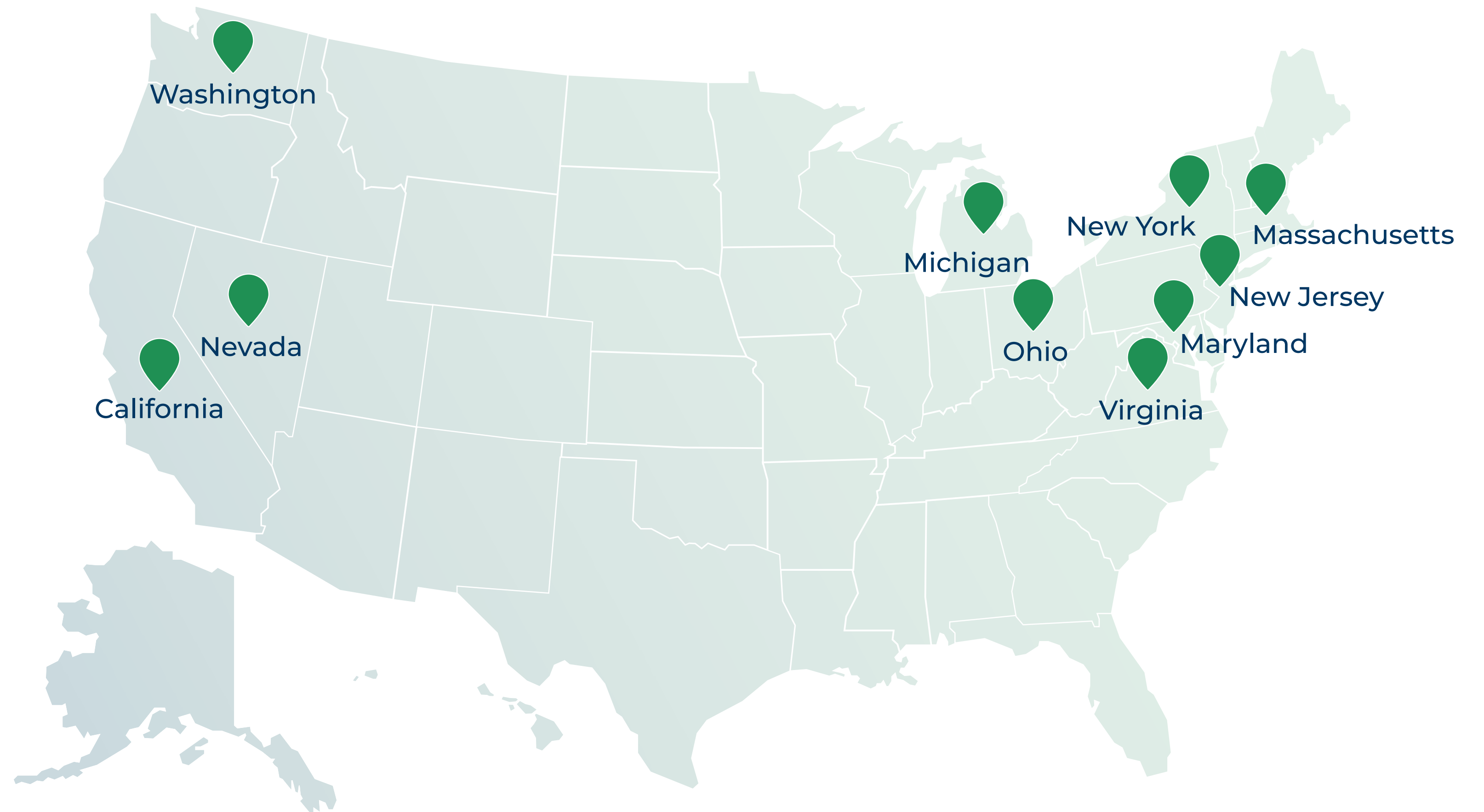


The Philadelphia-based Welcoming Center is a non-profit economic development organization that connects newly arrived individuals from around the world with the opportunities they need to succeed. The organization has a proven track record of helping work-authorized immigrants obtain evaluation of their international credentials, pursue the licensure or certification needed to become re-established in their professions, and establish themselves in the American workforce.

Offices of New Americans

In states around the nation, **WES-led partnership and policy work has helped influence** the development of an emerging Office of New Americans (ONA) state network, which focuses on critical areas of economic development, skilled immigrant integration, and workforce development.

ONAs provide state policy leaders an opportunity to come together to share best practices in immigrant integration and act as a critical anchor to help immigrants fully integrate as professionals into their new communities. In addition to supporting the work of existing state offices and immigration policy staff, the ONA state network extends peer-to-peer mentoring, coaching, and research to officials from other states exploring the possibility of establishing a state-level Office of New Americans, a task force, or a dedicated staff position on immigrant integration issues. Member states in 2019 include California, Michigan, Maryland, Massachusetts, New York, and Ohio.





Afghanistan



Eritrea



Iraq



Syria



Turkey



Ukraine



Venezuela

The WES Gateway Program

The WES Gateway Program provides credential evaluations for **displaced individuals** who lack official academic documentation.

The program, which launched in Canada in 2018, is WES' response to the displacement crises that have forced tens of millions of people worldwide to flee their homes, many without access to verifiable academic documents that prove their educational achievements.

Eligible individuals have educational credentials from Afghanistan, Eritrea, Iraq, Syria, Turkey, Ukraine, and Venezuela. With a WES credential evaluation in hand, Gateway participants can continue their education or seek employment commensurate with their skills and training. Participants in the program have used the credential evaluation reports they receive to gain admission into Canada's most competitive professional programs, to move forward with licensure requirements, and to obtain skilled employment. The program had a soft launch with selected partners in the U.S. in 2019 and is expected to expand further in 2020.



Refugee Hiring Event

The barriers that impede refugees and newcomers from obtaining work in Canada are high and wide, and often **exacerbated by the inability of employers to connect with refugees who are experienced, knowledgeable, and eligible to work.**

In October 2019, WES and Toronto-based ACCES Employment, together with local community partners, co-organized a refugee hiring event based on a model successfully piloted by Starbucks Canada. Interested refugee candidates participated in an in-person preparation session prior, and each was guaranteed an interview

with a participating employer. The event ultimately welcomed more than 100 refugee participants and 15 participating employers, including Starbucks Canada, IKEA Canada, and Shopify.

The impact was overwhelmingly positive: Of the refugees who attended, 29 were offered jobs on the spot and 42 received conditional job offers dependent on a second interview or occupational testing.

Sponsored by Starbucks Canada and the Tent Partnership for Refugees, the refugee hiring event helped more than 70 people move forward on the path of economic advancement and integration. It also helped WES and its partners develop a blueprint to be used for similar events in other localities.

“

Many of the job seekers who attended the event received their first job opportunities in Canada. They felt employers **recognized the value of their professional and work experience**, and left excited about their future prospects.

Allison Pond, President & CEO, ACCES Employment

It's necessary to be aware of who job seekers are and how to create new and innovative opportunities to meet them. **The quality of the job seekers was impressive.**

Sonia Sangha, Equality Diversity and Inclusion Lead, IKEA Canada

I had been searching for a job since I landed in Canada in April 2019 as a Palestinian refugee. At the refugee hiring event, the WES interviewer **immediately saw my potential, and I was offered a second interview on the spot.** I started as an academic records specialist on December 2, 2019.

Waseem Al-Nounou, Academic Records Specialist, World Education Services

Original Research

WES believes **sharing knowledge and information** is key to bringing down the barriers that keep immigrants and refugees from economic advancement and helping international students and professionals achieve their academic and career goals. In 2019, WES published several original research reports to share our knowledge, inform our peers across various sectors, and ultimately drive research-based change that will have a positive impact on international students, immigrants, and refugees.



Who Is Succeeding in the Canadian Labour Market? Predictors of Career Success for Skilled Immigrants

WES examined the educational and professional characteristics of skilled immigrants in Canada to determine how these factors impact success in the labour market.



Are U.S. HEIs Meeting the Needs of International Students?

The WES Research team surveyed 1,921 current international students and recent graduates and held an online focus group to better understand student perceptions about various aspects of life at U.S. institutions of higher education.



Beyond Academic Credentials: Toward Competency-Informed Hiring

WES looked at the potential benefits of a competency-informed approach to hiring skilled immigrants and at a more holistic approach to assessing an individual's knowledge and skills.



Leadership

Leadership

2019 Leadership



Esther Benjamin
CEO and Executive Director



Shamira Madhany
Deputy Executive Director and Managing Director, WES Canada



Paul Feltman
Deputy Executive Director, Global Talent Policy and Programs



Lisa Connors
Deputy Executive Director, Chief Financial Officer



Holly Sanders
Senior Director, Knowledge Management and Training



Megan Blackburn
Senior Director, Strategy and Planning



Michael Lowe
Senior Director, Human Resources



Monica Munn
Senior Director, WES Mariam Assefa Fund



Dimitri Moumoutjis
Director, Evaluation Production



Beka Tavartkiladze
Senior Director, Evaluation Services



Gabe Vasquez
Senior Director, Marketing



Ashley Craddock
Senior Director, Strategic Communications



Ed Lavelle
Chief Information Officer



Stacey Simon
Senior Director, Strategic Partnerships and Policy

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Chair, WES Board of Trustees
Director, Center for International Higher Education



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Dewayne Matthews
Fellow, Lumina Foundation



Willis Wang
Vice President and Associate Provost for Global Programs, Boston University





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



“

There are so many people out there who are so scared that their education may not be up to the standards of a U.S. education. My WES evaluation **changed my life**. I'll be graduating this year. I hope to go back to India and use my skills and education to develop the growing economy of my home country.”



Raman Solanki

 **Country of Origin:** India 

 **Country of Education:** United States 

“

I arrived in Canada as a refugee. **WES was able to reconstruct my program of study and enable me to begin working toward my professional engineer designation.** Now I am a certified building safety codes officer. My training allows me to serve the public and protect their interests.”



Ziad Ajweh

 **Country of Origin:** *

 **Countries of Education:** *

 **Now in:** Canada 

*prefers not to mention country of origin/countries of education for safety reasons



[wes.org/AnnualReport2019](https://www.wes.org/AnnualReport2019)

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