

2024 ANNUAL REPORT

# Thrive *Anywhere.*

**Celebrating 50 Years and Shaping  
the Next Era of Global Impact**



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For 50 years WES has been a beacon of vision, commitment, and partnership, helping people learn, work, and thrive in new places.

**AS A NON-PROFIT SOCIAL ENTERPRISE**, WES is devoted to the global mobility and success of immigrants, refugees, international students, and their communities. Fifty years ago, we set out to expand the credential evaluation field to ensure that the value of people's education and experience could be recognized anywhere, and to open doors of opportunity for millions of people around the world. Through policy, programs, advocacy, research, and philanthropy, our work supports and benefits the communities we serve. At WES, building a better future means ensuring that everyone can contribute their skills and talents wherever they are and wherever they go—a future in which anyone can thrive anywhere.



# Guiding the Vision: Leadership Committed to Global Impact

This year marked a historic milestone for our organization, as we recognized 50 remarkable years of serving the global educational community.

In 1974, a group including Returned Peace Corps Volunteers recognized a critical gap in the U.S. education landscape. They began offering evaluations of academic qualifications to individuals who held international credentials. Their efforts changed lives, transformed the education landscape, and marked the start of a collective commitment to support immigrants, refugees, and international students whose academic and professional goals and dreams lie in the United States and beyond.

Through our credential evaluation services, we have helped more than 4 million people advance their education and careers, and build futures in new countries.

In recent years, our organization's growth and impact has only accelerated. Notably, of the 4 million people we've served, we've reached 2 million of them since 2019 alone. This is a scale of operations and influence that we could have never imagined when WES was

founded half a century ago. And none of this would have been possible without our Trustees and staff—past and present. In particular, we would not be here today without our former Executive Director and CEO Mariam Assefa, a visionary and dedicated leader who guided our organization for 36 years.

This growth means that, for the past decade, WES has evolved from a credential evaluation provider to the expansive social enterprise we are today. Beyond that, we now leverage partnerships, programs, policy, and philanthropy to advance economic inclusion for newcomers and the communities they choose to call home.

We've developed new relationships with the governments of New Zealand and South Africa and established a presence in India; we successfully launched the WES Mariam Assefa Fund, which has supported more than 180 organizations with \$37 million in grants and impact investments; and we committed to 100 percent mission-aligned investing by 2030—adding a new dimension to how we can effect change.

We owe so much of our progress to the power of partnership. By developing relationships with nearly 60,000 education institutions around the world, and with more than 600 social impact partner organizations across the U.S. and Canada, we've extended our reach exponentially. These relationships are instrumental in breaking down barriers for the people we serve and for building a brighter, more welcoming global future.

As global mobility advances, WES is uniquely positioned to lead the way in addressing the challenges and opportunities ahead. With more than 120 million people displaced worldwide, according to the UNHCR, the need for equitable, humanitarian systems has never been more critical. Mindful of these trends, in 2024 WES developed a new 10-year strategy, building on our five decades of expertise. As we enter the next chapter of WES, our close collaboration with partners across sectors will continue to help everyone recognize the value of people's international education and experience, and we will continue to evolve and expand as we seek to build a world in which anyone can thrive anywhere.



**Audrey Hendley**  
Chair, WES Board of Trustees

**Esther T. Benjamin**  
CEO and Executive Director



# Driving Impact: Canada in Focus

The years 2024 and 2025 represent back-to-back celebrations for WES. In 2024 we celebrated 50 years of driving impact and economic inclusion as an organization. 2025 marks our 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary in Canada.

WES opened the Toronto office in 2000. Through decades of close partnership with hundreds of institutions and leaders across sectors, we've opened doors for millions of immigrants and refugees and helped countless communities across the country to successfully welcome newcomers.

This legacy of collaboration and changemaking continues today. In 2024, we served hundreds of thousands of people in Canada through our credential evaluation products and expanded our offerings and networks across the country.

Among our highlights in 2024, we co-hosted three Refugee Hiring events, bringing this highly

effective model to new communities in Canada and connecting employers with untapped talent—a win for all. We supported our partners in developing the Workplace & Immigrant Network (WIN), a long-term regional workforce integration initiative in the Waterloo Region. The WES Mariam Assefa Fund supported exciting new initiatives, including the creation of a leadership training program specifically for newcomers in technology.

Over the past year or so, our policy team has been working diligently alongside partners to shine a light on the underutilization and needed integration of internationally educated health professionals. Our advocacy is bearing fruit. In Ontario, for example, the first cohort of internationally trained physicians was assessed through the new Practice Ready Assessment program that WES and partners supported. The cohort is now licensed and practicing in communities across the province.

WES' efforts to drive economic inclusion and opportunity are increasingly recognized for their positive impact. In the fall of 2024, WES was honoured to receive the Canadian Chamber of Commerce Inclusive Growth Award.

At WES, we are committed to improving outcomes for immigrants, refugees, and international students. We have seen firsthand how everyone benefits when we build inclusive economies in which immigrants can thrive.

We also know that we cannot do any of this work alone. We are grateful for the countless contributions of our partners, past and present. In the years ahead, we look forward to continued collaboration with leaders from government, business, the non-profit sector, local communities, and more to drive economic inclusion and opportunity. Together, we will keep working towards a thriving future for Canada—and a future in which anyone can thrive anywhere.



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



# Opening Doors to Opportunity

In 2024, WES supported nearly 500,000 people who trusted us to be part of their pursuit of thriving in a new place.

In 2024, WES served

**475,757**

credential evaluation  
applicants



and evaluated **619,339**  
academic qualifications



conferred by  
**22,795 institutions**



from **203 countries**  
and territories



with evaluations received  
by **5,199 U.S. and**  
**Canadian institutions**  
and departments

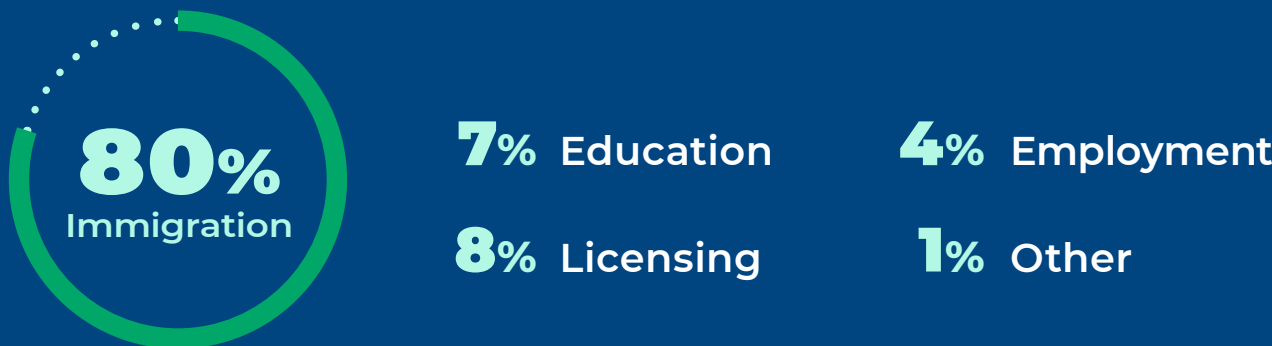


# Enabling Global Talent: Applicant Profile

## CANADA

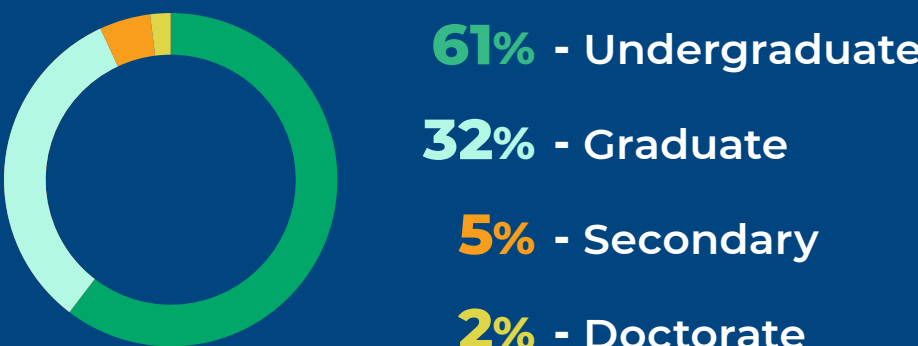
337,551\*  
Applicants

### Evaluation Purpose\*\*



60% of these applicants lived in Canada

### Highest Education Level



## UNITED STATES

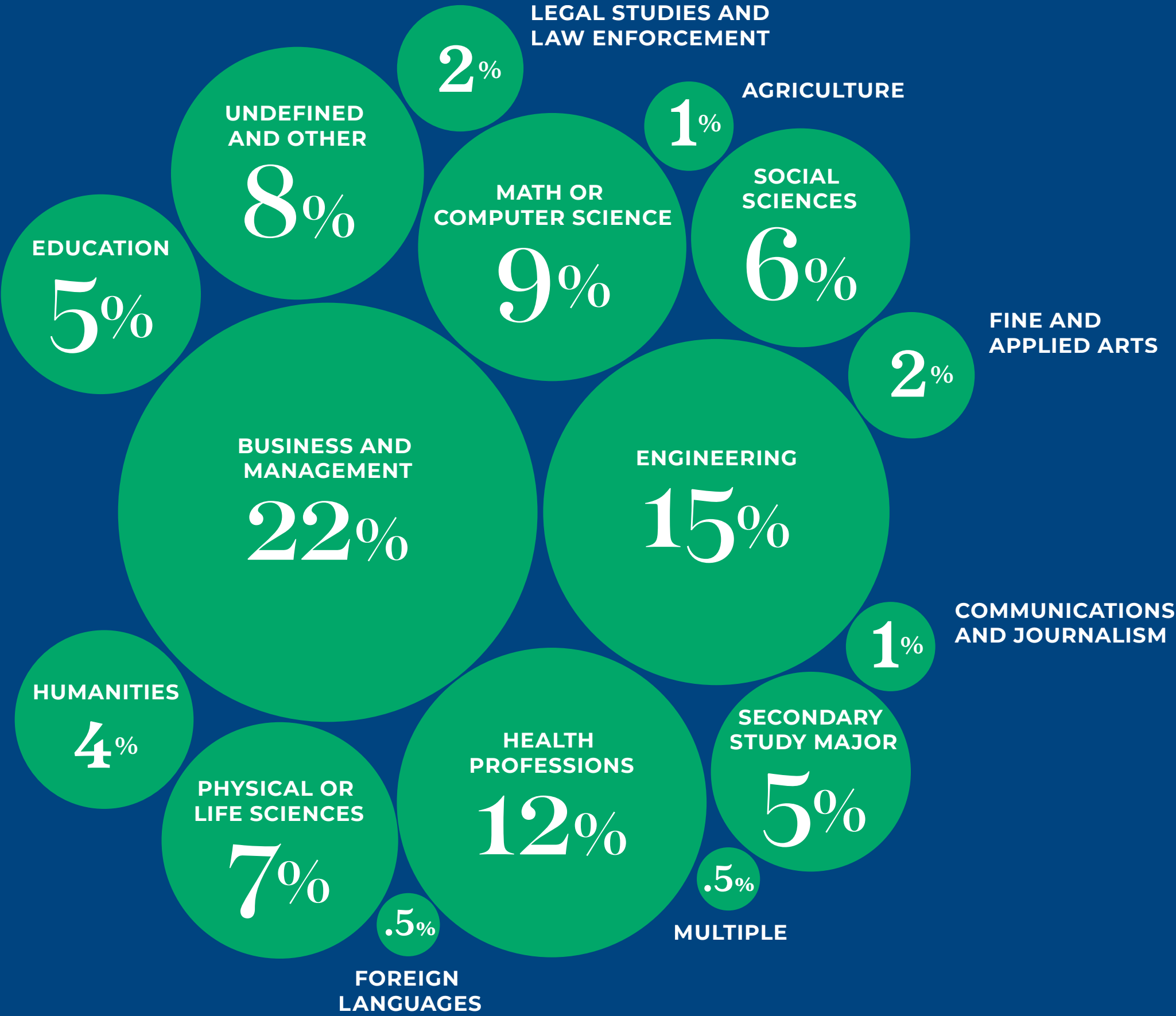
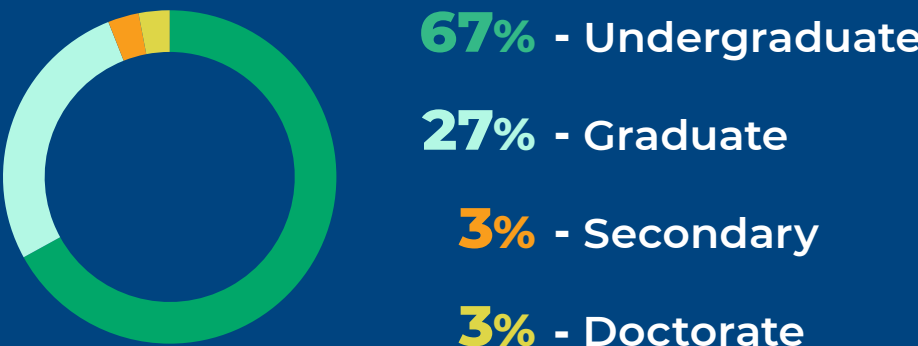
136,089\*  
Applicants

### Evaluation Purpose\*\*



45% of these applicants lived in the U.S.

### Highest Education Level



### Distinct Majors\*

In 2024, WES evaluated credentials associated with 35,318 distinct majors. These majors can be grouped into these fields of study.

\* 2,117 completed in other countries.  
\*\* Percentages have been rounded.

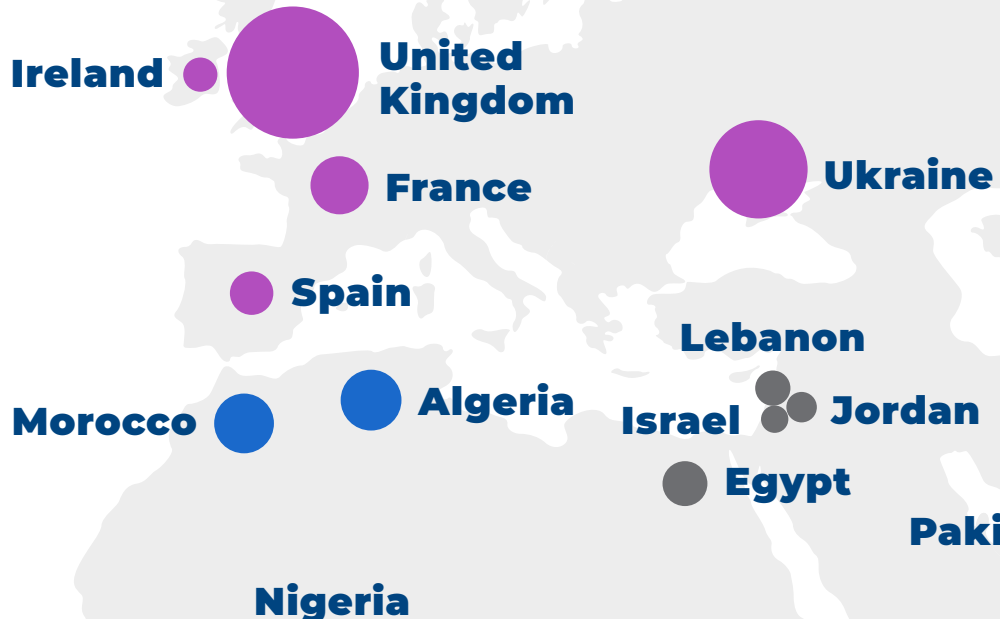
\* These majors were categorized into fields of study based on categories established by the Institute of International Education.



# Top Countries of Education

## Europe\* 12%

Top 5 sending countries:  
**United Kingdom, Ukraine, France, Spain, Ireland**

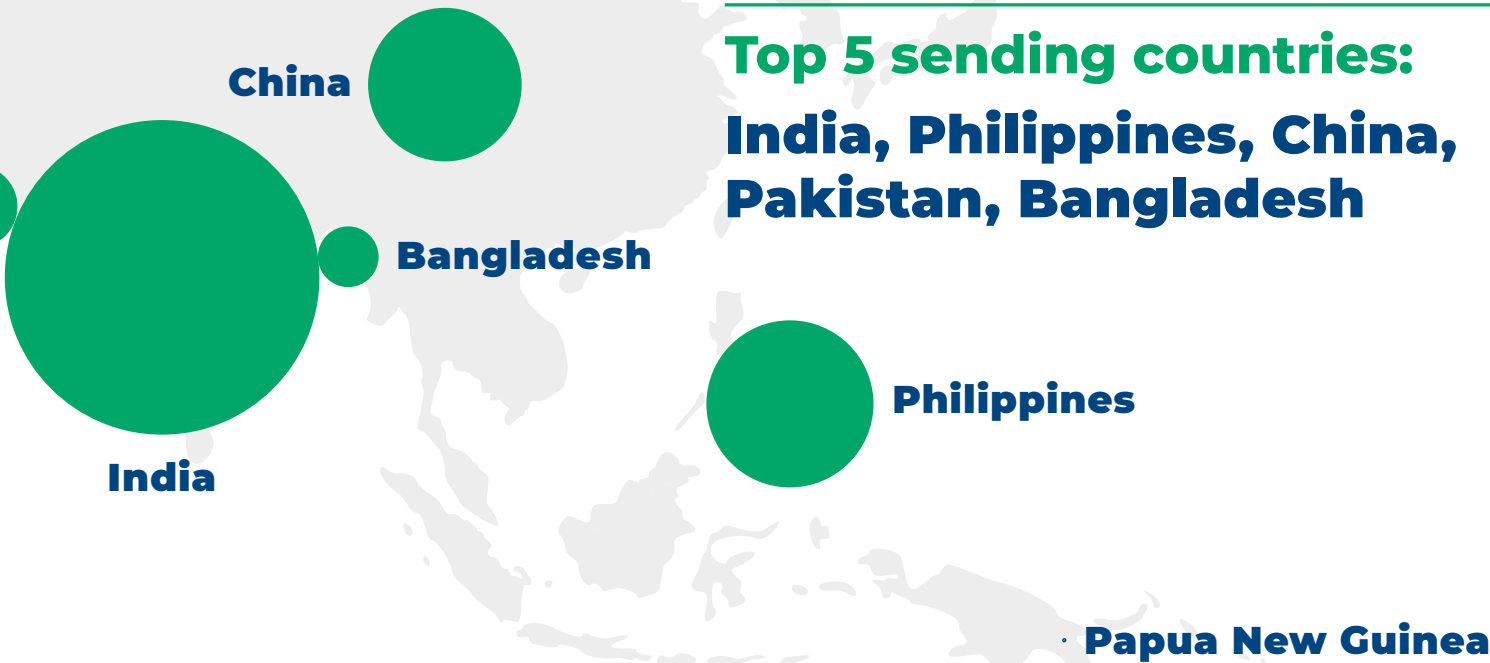


## Middle East\* 2%

Top 5 sending countries:  
**Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan, Israel, Iran**

## Asia\* 52%

Top 5 sending countries:  
**India, Philippines, China, Pakistan, Bangladesh**



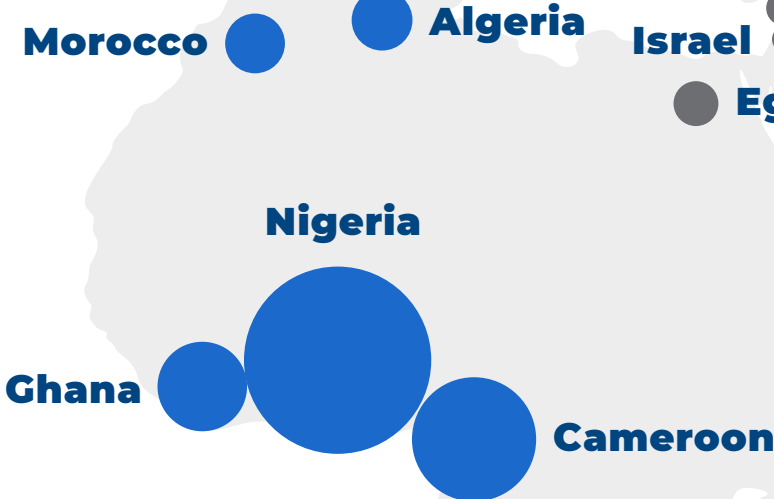
## Americas\* 9%

Top 5 sending countries:  
**United States, Brazil, Canada, Colombia, Mexico**



## Africa\* 24%

Top 5 sending countries:  
**Nigeria, Cameroon, Ghana, Algeria, Morocco**

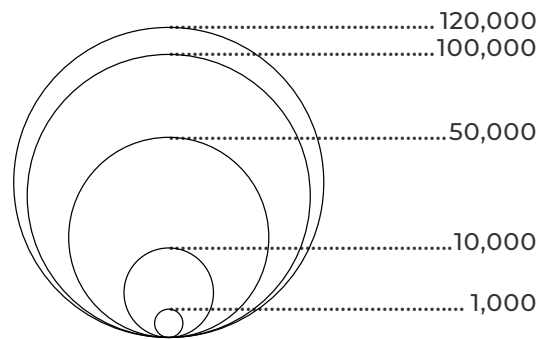


## Oceania\* 1%

Top 5 sending countries:  
**Australia, New Zealand, Fiji, Tonga, Papua New Guinea**



Number of evaluations per country



\* Note: Percentages have been rounded.



# Reflecting on 2024: Building on 50 Years of Impact

In 2024, WES made significant strides in India by expanding its footprint to support our growing operations. This included enhancing infrastructure to better serve our customers. These efforts reflect our commitment to providing seamless and accessible services to stakeholders across the region.

We established a new partnership with the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) to streamline the verification and transfer of digital academic credentials in India. This collaboration strengthens our

ability to support individuals pursuing academic and professional opportunities by ensuring a faster, more reliable verification process.

WES continued to foster international collaboration in 2024 through the launch of a new partnership with the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC). Additionally, we expanded our partnership with the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA), further enhancing our capacity to facilitate global academic recognition and mobility.





# Reflecting on 2024: Building on 50 Years of Impact *(cont'd.)*

Vision, commitment, and partnerships define WES' social impact initiatives, which have enabled thousands to thrive and contribute to their communities.

To date, the WES Gateway Program has supported the efforts of nearly 14,000 individuals to pursue education and careers in the U.S. and Canada. The program provides credential evaluations for forcibly displaced individuals who cannot access official documentation and is currently available to those educated in Afghanistan, Eritrea, Iraq, Syria, Türkiye, Ukraine, and Venezuela. In 2024, WES expanded its vision by testing Gateway in new countries and territories, including Haiti, Palestine, and Sudan, responding to record global displacement and ensuring that more individuals can rebuild their lives and thrive.

This year also marked the fifth anniversary of the **WES Mariam Assefa Fund**, established to foster inclusive communities

and economies. Since 2019, the Fund has awarded \$37 million to more than 180 organizations, catalyzed \$50 million from peer funders, and extended a robust network of partners across the U.S. and Canada. The Fund drives change across four key areas: opportunity, wealth, power, and justice. Late in the year, the Fund awarded \$1 million to 10 U.S. organizations advancing civic engagement and leadership among immigrants and refugees through its Elevating Migrant Leadership: Building Inclusive Futures initiative.

In 2024, the #ImmigrantsWork initiative, which collaborates with community partners and local employers in developing strategies to identify, recruit, hire, and retain immigrant talent, engaged more than 180 employers throughout the year, surpassing 700 employers since its inception. Building on this success, WES supported the launch of the Workplace

& Immigrant Network (WIN). This long-term workforce integration initiative is designed to create meaningful pathways for immigrant talent to thrive in workplaces across the Waterloo Region in Canada.

Additionally, WES continued its commitment to breaking down barriers through impactful programs, policy work, and advocacy. This included efforts to reduce licensing barriers for internationally trained doctors and nurses and expand the Refugee Hiring Event model—developed with Refugee Jobs Agenda Roundtable partners—to reach new communities in Canada.



**IN MEMORIAM** *Dr. Dewayne Matthews (1951–2024), former WES Board Trustee, was instrumental in stewarding the WES Mariam Assefa Fund and advancing our social impact work. We honor his legacy, his dedication to education and inclusion, and his commitment to expanding pathways to success for students worldwide.*



A smiling man with a shaved head, wearing a yellow and black patterned shirt, is the central figure. He is looking slightly to his left. To his left, the profile of a smiling woman with dark hair is visible. In the background, other people are blurred, suggesting a social gathering or event. The overall lighting is warm and indoor.

# 50 Years

## of Partnerships and Progress: Celebrating Our Legacy

For five decades, WES has opened doors for millions, enabling global mobility and creating opportunities for individuals to thrive in new places. From credential evaluations to philanthropic initiatives, policy work, advocacy, and impact investing, WES' journey has been rooted in the belief that everyone should have the opportunity to apply their education, experience, and skills to work anywhere in the world. Our progress is owed to our Trustees, partners, leaders, and staff, past and present, whose collaboration has been instrumental in driving impact.



# Marking

Half a Century of Impact



1974

**WES** is founded

20 credential evaluations completed



1998

**Automatic International Credential Evaluation System (AICES)**, WES' proprietary database, launches

2000

WES opens office in Canada to expand services

2011

WES launches **IMPRINT**, a U.S. coalition to support economic inclusion of immigrants

1984

4,700 credential evaluations completed

2005

58,600 credential evaluations completed





2012

**U.S. Programs & Policy** (formerly WES Global Talent Bridge) launches, further expanding our commitment to advancing economic inclusion

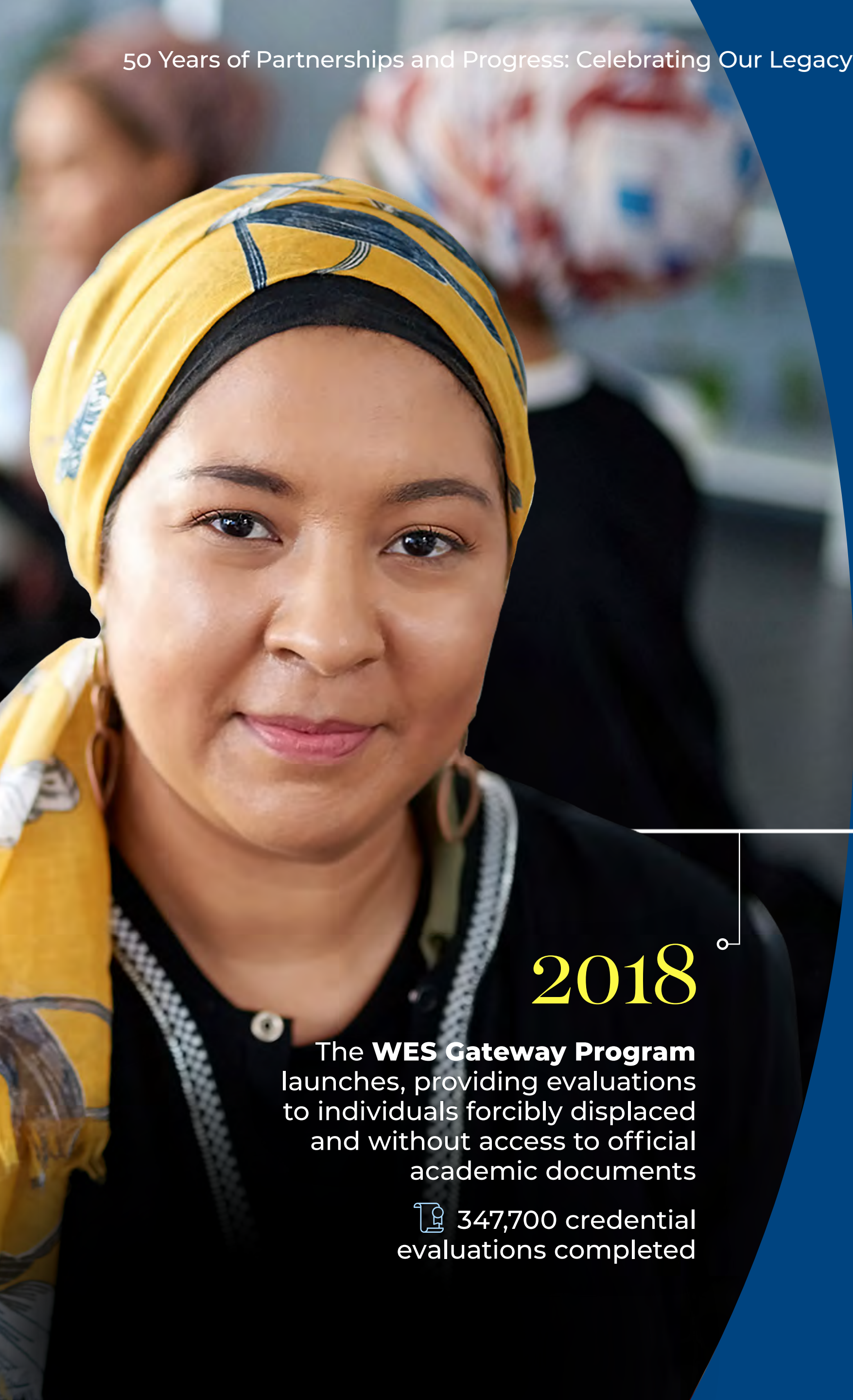
2017

**Strengthening Immigrant Inclusion Program** (SIIP, formerly Skilled Immigrant Integration Program), which supports workforce inclusion of internationally trained immigrants and refugees, launches

2013

WES becomes a provider of Educational Credential Assessments for the government of Canada





# 2018

The **WES Gateway Program** launches, providing evaluations to individuals forcibly displaced and without access to official academic documents

 347,700 credential evaluations completed

2019

**WES Mariam Assefa Fund** launches, providing another way to support inclusive economies

*Mariam Assefa*  
Former Executive Director & CEO, WES



2022

WES begins overhauling all business and technology systems to meet growing customer needs

2023

WES commits to 100% mission-aligned investing





2024

WES marks its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary

WES commemorated its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary by honoring the partnerships that have helped to shape its efforts to support immigrants, refugees, and international students. The special event was a celebration of shared commitment to building a future in which everyone is able to put their education, experience, and skills to work anywhere in the world. It also featured the announcement of the WES Values Awards and a scholarship initiative.

# Celebrating 50 Years with Our Partners

October 15, 2024



“

**There is immense gratitude to the WES team** for its steadfast and unwavering commitment to and investment in immigrant and refugee communities. We’ve continued to deepen the relationship and strengthen the partnership, and our organization is greatly aligned with WES as they lead with their values.”

—**Marissa Tirona**  
*President, Grantmakers Concerned with Immigrants and Refugees*

“

**The impact, of course, on the individual student, an immigrant, is enormous** because they get a quality standard of their previous education and what it means to continue education or to immigrate to the United States or Canada. We created the WES Mariam Assefa Fund to stimulate even more possibility that we could, within the context of our mission, support organizations to help [immigrants, refugees, and international students] integrate into society, use their skills, get their jobs, and restart their lives.”

—**Hans de Wit**  
*Former Board Chair, WES*

“

**[WES] looks at the world with a much wider lens,** at the communities and the people that it serves who are very, very diverse. It looks at some of those communities that do not have the same opportunities and seeing, okay, how can we connect the dots? How can we make people’s lives better?”

—**Julie Reddy**  
*Board Member, WES*





# WES Values Awards

## Awardees

As part of the award, WES donated US\$60,000 to an organization of each awardee's choosing.

**THE WES VALUES AWARDS HONOR TWO RECIPIENTS** (one in the U.S. and one in Canada) for their outstanding leadership in advancing educational and economic inclusion.

Dr. Diya Abdo is founder of Every Campus A Refuge (ECAR), which calls on college and university campuses to house and support refugee families. ECAR's flagship chapter at Guilford College has hosted 86 refugees thus far.

Syed Hussan is founder and Executive Director of the Migrant Workers Alliance for Change (MWAC), Canada's largest membership-based organization of migrant farmworkers, care workers, current and former international students, and others in policy and regulatory reform. MWAC supports its 30,000+ members in seeking quality jobs and equity in the workplace.



Photo credit:  
Migrant Workers  
Alliance for Change



# Scholarship Awardees

**THE SCHOLARSHIP INITIATIVE**, a contribution of nearly \$400,000, supports more than 20 refugee students studying in the U.S. and Canada.

Three partner organizations are collaborating with WES to implement the initiative in the 2025/26 academic year. The funding will help cover tuition, books, lodging, access to social services, and more. The unique scholarship model also establishes a platform to engage more donors—including higher education institutions and other funders—to support additional refugee students.



The **Community Sponsorship Hub**, which supports the Welcome Corps on Campus



**WUSC**, a Canada-based organization which supports education, economic opportunities, and empowerment for youth, especially women and refugees



**Southern New Hampshire University**



For five decades, WES' commitment to supporting global mobility has meant that, for millions of people, their international education and experience have been recognized and valued, opening doors and changing lives. *To date, we have ...*

completed credential  
evaluations for over

4 million  
individuals

collaborated  
with nearly

60,000  
educational  
institutions  
in over 200  
countries

been recognized  
by more than

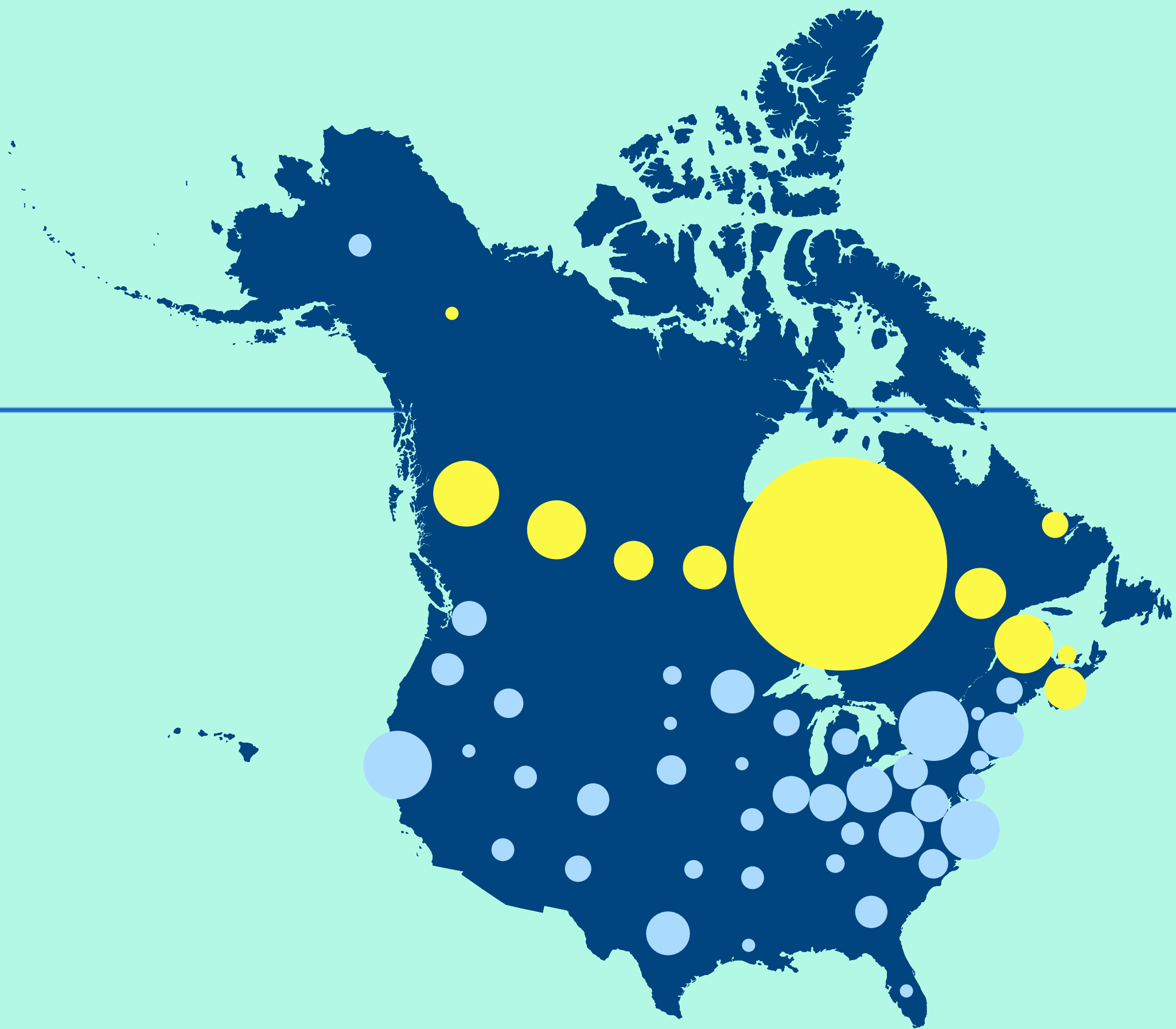
5,300 U.S.  
& Canadian  
institutions &  
departments





... and joined forces with

600+ social  
impact partners.



By 2030, we will  
have implemented  
a unique social  
enterprise model with  
a 100% mission-aligned  
investment portfolio.



# At the Heart

## of WES: Our People

The dedication and passion of our staff through the years have made WES the trailblazing social enterprise it is today. Their unwavering commitment to our mission and their collaborative spirit remain pivotal to developing and maintaining strong relationships with our partners. Every day, WES colleagues bring their drive, determination, and expertise to work to ensure that anyone can thrive anywhere.





# Celebrating 50 Years with Our Staff

## Employee Retreat



“

We are here to lead in a time we’re needed most. We can and we will endure the headwinds to build a world where all immigrants can thrive anywhere.

—**Sidney Hargro**  
*Incoming Chair,  
Board of Trustees, WES*





# Our People

“

WES’ belief that **immigrant inclusion enriches communities and economies** is what drew me to the organization. As a social enterprise, WES is uniquely equipped to develop innovative tools that build inclusive and equitable systems where everyone—especially migrants, refugees, and other minorities—can express their identities and feel like they belong.”

—**Daniel Cervan-Gil**  
Associate Director,  
Employer Initiatives, WES



“

**I am deeply passionate about all aspects of international education**, including credential evaluation, policy, and institutional relations. As an immigrant and former WES applicant, I am moved by the social impact initiatives at WES. This work has provided me with a sense of purpose, identity, and stability in a new country.”

—**Dragana Borenovic Dilas**  
Senior Manager,  
Service Management  
Group, WES



“

**Global mobility is at the heart of our work.** With increasing numbers of people crossing borders for education, employment, and refuge, the demand for credential recognition and support services has never been higher and WES is at the forefront of meeting this global need.”

—**Beka Tavartkiladze**  
Senior Director,  
Global Education  
and Knowledge, WES





# Executive Leadership



**ESTHER T. BENJAMIN**  
CEO and Executive Director



**MEGAN BLACKBURN**  
Senior Director,  
Strategy and Planning



**ABBIE COWAN**  
Chief People Officer



**NITEESE LENTON**  
Chief Financial Officer



**SHAMIRA MADHANY**  
Managing Director, Canada,  
and Deputy Executive Director



**MONICA MUNN**  
Chief Social Impact Officer



**CHERYL CRAMER TOTO**  
Chief Operations Officer



**JOHN VERMAATEN**  
Chief Financial Officer  
until October 2024

**WES’ LEADERSHIP OFFERS A DIVERSE RANGE OF EXPERTISE** that guides our mission to expand opportunities and drive positive change worldwide.

# Board of Trustees



**AUDREY HENDLEY**  
Chair, WES Board of Trustees;  
President, American Express  
Global Travel & Lifestyle Services



**SIDNEY R. HARGRO**  
Vice Chair, WES Board of  
Trustees; Executive Director,  
The LeadersTrust



**FERIDUN  
HAMDULLAHPUR, CM**  
Treasurer, WES Board of  
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University of Waterloo



**HELEN HAYWARD**  
Secretary, WES Board  
of Trustees; Independent  
Board Director



**FANTA AW**  
Executive Director  
and CEO, NAFSA



**TOMAS CHAMORRO-  
PREMUZIC**  
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ManpowerGroup



**DONNA DANIELS**  
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Managing Director, Technology  
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Global Business Services,  
McDonald’s Corporation



**AJAY PATEL**  
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Qualifications Authority



**PAOLO VARIAS**  
Director of Seniors Services,  
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Corps; Former U.S. Government  
Diplomat; Senior Advisor  
Emeritus, RTI International



**ESTHER T. BENJAMIN**  
Ex officio; CEO and  
Executive Director,  
World Education Services



