

EMPLOYMENT AND CAREER SUPPORT



Finding work in a new country can be difficult, but there are many organizations and programs dedicated to helping newcomers start their careers in Ontario. This chapter will guide you through resources for job searching, improving your résumé, upgrading skills, and getting your foreign credentials recognized.

Employment Resources and Job Search

Job Bank (Canada): The Job Bank (at jobbank.gc.ca) is a free job search website run by the Canadian government. It lists thousands of job postings across Canada. You can filter by location (e.g., Toronto, Ottawa, Windsor), by occupation, and by skill level. It's a good starting point to see what jobs are in demand and the typical requirements. The Job Bank also has tools like a résumé builder, and information about wages and outlook for different jobs.

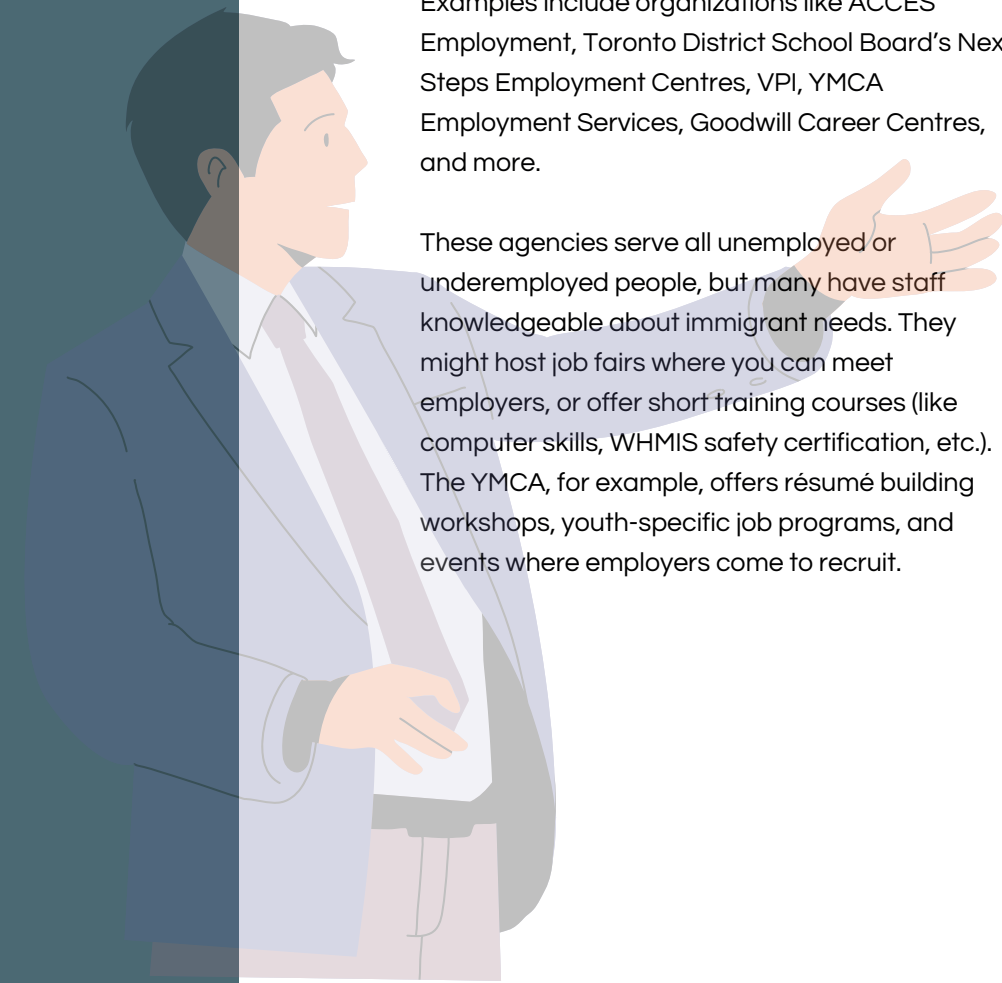
If you're open to opportunities outside your initial field, browsing the Job Bank can give you ideas. It also flags jobs that are designated for certain programs (like if an employer is open to hiring newcomers or supports a work permit process).



Employment Ontario and Funded Agencies:

Employment Ontario is the banner for provincial employment services. Through this, there are Employment Resource Centres and agencies that provide free help with job searching: résumé and cover letter writing, interview practice, career counseling, and sometimes direct referrals to jobs. Examples include organizations like ACCES Employment, Toronto District School Board's Next Steps Employment Centres, VPI, YMCA Employment Services, Goodwill Career Centres, and more.

These agencies serve all unemployed or underemployed people, but many have staff knowledgeable about immigrant needs. They might host job fairs where you can meet employers, or offer short training courses (like computer skills, WHMIS safety certification, etc.). The YMCA, for example, offers résumé building workshops, youth-specific job programs, and events where employers come to recruit.



COSTI Employment Services:

COSTI, aside from settlement, also has employment programs specifically for newcomers. They run job search workshops, one-on-one employment counselling, and sector-specific training. They can help you prepare a Canadian-style résumé and practice common interview questions, which can be crucial for success.



Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI):

OCASI is more of an umbrella organization, but they advocate for immigrant employment and often pilot programs to help newcomers get jobs. They have a website called Settlement.org (as we've seen) which includes employment information. While you might not go to OCASI directly for a job, through their network you can find agencies that do offer services. They also host Job Search Workshops (JSW) program across many cities – a free series of workshops that teach newcomers how to find jobs in Canada (topics: networking, Canadian workplace culture, etc.).

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Networking and Mentoring:

A significant portion of job opportunities in Canada are found through networking (the “hidden job market”). Newcomers often don’t have established networks, but you can build them. Attend industry events, join LinkedIn and connect with professionals in your field, or consider mentorship programs. For example, TRIEC Mentoring Partnership in the GTA matches skilled immigrants with mentors in their field. Mentors help you understand the Canadian context of your profession, introduce you to contacts, and sometimes lead you to job openings. Studies show these mentorship programs double the chances of immigrants finding a good job in their field. Ask your employment counselor about mentorship opportunities.



Volunteering and bridging to employment:

Volunteering can be a way to get Canadian experience, improve language skills, gain references and find new opportunities. While volunteering doesn’t pay, it can fill gaps on your résumé and sometimes lead to paid positions. Even volunteering at a community centre or event shows initiative and helps you practice soft skills in a Canadian setting. (Be mindful not to let anyone exploit you though – volunteering is something you choose to do, and should be for non-profits typically. If someone asks you to “volunteer” full-time for a company, that’s likely not appropriate.)



Foreign Credentials Recognition

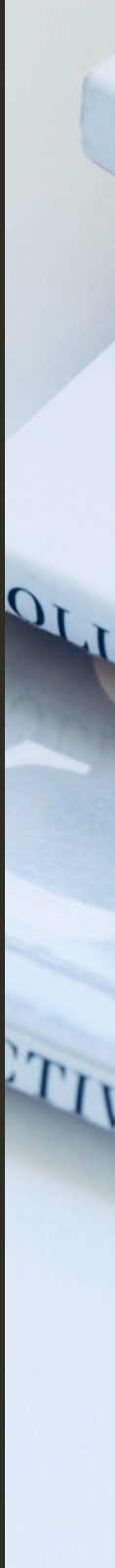
One of the toughest challenges can be that your education or professional credentials from back home aren't immediately recognized in Canada, especially if you were in a regulated profession (like medicine, engineering, teaching, nursing, etc.). But there are programs to help bridge that gap:

Ontario Bridge Training Programs: These are specialized programs funded by the government to help internationally trained professionals get licensed or job-ready in their fields. Bridge programs often include technical training for the Canadian context, exam preparation for licensing, language or workplace culture training, and sometimes a work placement. They cover professions like IT, finance, healthcare, engineering, teaching, and many others. Typically, you need to have had education or experience in the field from abroad, and often an English language proficiency at a certain level, to be admitted. Some programs are short (a few months) and some are longer (a year+).

Financial support (scholarships or loans) is sometimes available. For example, there might be a bridge program for internationally trained accountants that preps you for the CPA exams and gets you Canadian work experience, or a program for nurses to prepare for the licensing exam (NCLEX) and offer clinical orientation. The Ontario government's website has a list of bridge programs, and settlement agencies can refer you. These programs have been a pathway for many immigrants to re-enter their professions.

World Education Services (WES) Canada: WES is an organization that evaluates international academic credentials and provides a report that Canadian employers, schools, or regulatory bodies can understand. If you plan to pursue further education or certain licensing, you may be asked for a credential evaluation. WES is commonly used (though there are other agencies too). You send them your transcripts from your home country, and they issue a document stating, for example, "Master's degree from Pakistan is equivalent to a Master's in Canada" or "Bachelor's from country X is comparable to a 4-year Canadian bachelor's" etc.. This can be included in job applications to help employers grasp your education level. Note that WES charges a fee (around \$200-\$250), and the process can take a few weeks or months, so do it sooner rather than later if you need it. Some bridge programs or employers might help cover the cost.

Licensing bodies: Each regulated profession has a college or body (like Professional Engineers Ontario, College of Nurses of Ontario, etc.). If you're aiming to work in one of those fields, visit the website of the regulatory body – they often have a section for internationally educated applicants that outlines the steps to get licensed. It may involve taking exams, demonstrating language proficiency, possibly doing some additional courses or supervised work. It can be a long process (for example, medical doctors and lawyers face quite lengthy re-certification paths). A helpful approach is to work in a related job that is unlicensed while you work on licensing. For instance, a foreign-trained teacher might work as an Early Childhood Assistant or a tutor while completing licensing requirements to become a certified teacher.



Alternative careers: It's worth exploring "alternative careers" where you can use your skills without full licensing. For example, an overseas-trained doctor might not easily become a doctor here, but could consider roles like a research assistant, healthcare administrator, physician assistant (with further study), or in the pharmaceutical industry. Similarly, an architect might work as a architectural technologist or construction project manager. There's a website and initiative called Alternative Jobs (Settlement.org and Ontario government promote it) that can suggest related careers that utilize your background.

Language training for professions: Some programs like Occupation-Specific Language Training (OSLT) offer free courses in workplace English specific to certain sectors (business, health, technology, etc.). This can be very useful if language or accent is a barrier in professional communication.

Overall, be persistent and patient. It can feel frustrating if you have to take jobs for little pay initially or if employers don't recognize your experience. But many immigrants have gone through this and eventually succeeded in their fields or built new careers. Use all available supports – employment counsellors, mentors, networking events, LinkedIn (which is very widely used by professionals in Canada; make a profile if you haven't). Show willingness to learn and adapt, but also confidently highlight the unique skills and perspectives you bring as someone with international experience.



Workers' Rights and Legal Protections:

It's important to know that as an employee in Ontario, you have rights regardless of your background or status (as long as you're legally allowed to work). The Employment Standards Act (ESA) sets minimum standards for things like minimum wage, hours of work, overtime pay, public holidays, parental leave, etc. For instance, as of 2025 the general minimum wage is \$17.60/hour.

You should usually not work more than 8 hours a day or 44 hours a week on a regular basis unless you agree in writing and get overtime pay after 44 hours. You're entitled to a certain number of paid days off on public holidays, and after one year at a job, you get at least 2 weeks of paid vacation. If you're ever not paid on time or asked to work in unsafe conditions, you can contact the Ministry of Labour anonymously to complain.

Also, no one can charge you money to give you a job – if you use an employment agency, be aware that in Ontario, it's illegal for them to charge placement fees to workers (they should bill the employer, not you). There are protections especially for temporary foreign workers, but as a newcomer, you should also know about them in case you see exploitation happening.

Tip: Document your work (keep copies of pay stubs, any contracts, etc.). If something feels wrong at work, talk to a trusted person or legal clinic; for example, legal clinics often help with issues like wrongful dismissal or employment standards claims for free if you have low income.



STARTING A BUSINESS

Some newcomers are interested in entrepreneurship. Ontario has resources for that too (though it's a big topic). Settlement agencies sometimes run entrepreneurship workshops. There are Small Business Enterprise Centres in many cities offering free advice on starting a business (writing a business plan, registering the business, understanding taxes). There are even microloan programs targeting newcomers who want to start small businesses. If self-employment is your goal, definitely leverage those supports and be aware of any licensing needed for your type of business.



Reflection Activity:

Think of two industries or job roles you are interested in pursuing in Canada. Write them down. Under each, list some steps you will take to gain Canadian experience or otherwise advance in these fields. Consider options like volunteering, internships, enrolling in a bridge training or evening classes, getting a mentor, or joining a professional association. For example: "Industry: Accounting. Steps: 1) Get my foreign accounting credentials evaluated by WES; 2) Enroll in a Bridge to Accounting program to prepare for CPA exams; 3) Volunteer as a bookkeeper for a non-profit to get local experience." Do this for each chosen field.

(Template – feel free to use a numbered or bulleted format for clarity, e.g.:

Field of Interest 1: _____

- Step 1: _____
- Step 2: _____

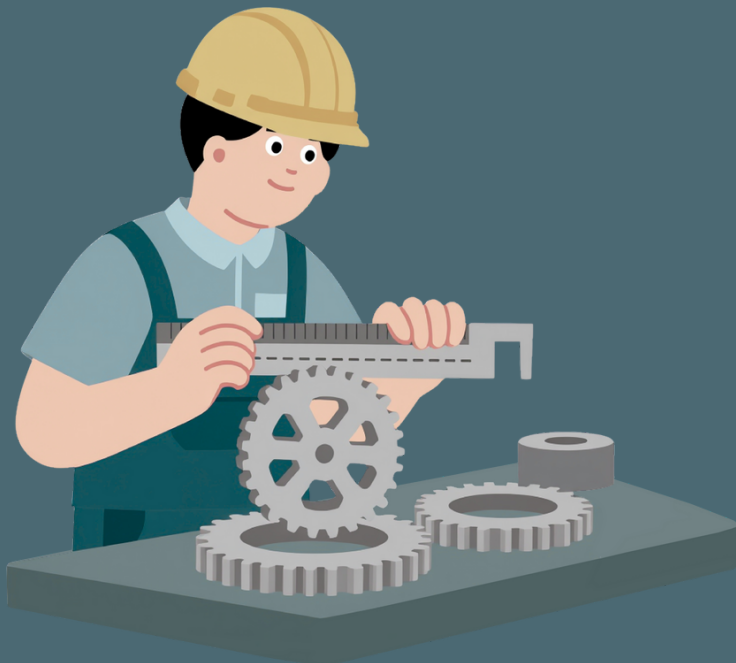
Field of Interest 2: _____

- Step 1: _____
- Step 2: _____)*



CASE QUESTION: RETURNING TO HIS FIELD

Binh worked as an electrical engineer in Vietnam for 10 years, but in Canada he hasn't been able to find a job in engineering and is working in a survival job unrelated to his field. What programs or steps could help him get his credentials recognized and find employment in his field? (Think about the credential evaluation, any licensing by Professional Engineers Ontario (PEO), and especially the existence of bridging programs for internationally trained engineers. Also consider mentorship or engineering internships. What advice would you give Binh to systematically work towards re-entering engineering?)



ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Raheen Fatima is a first-generation Canadian immigrant and an environmental author whose work focuses on the intersection of climate action and human well-being. She is committed to making information clear, supportive, and easy to understand, especially for people navigating new systems. She believes that when individuals are informed and confident, they are better able to care for themselves, their communities, and the planet.



As an immigrant who grew up in a remote Albertan town, Inaam Chattha understands how climate change, mental health and access to resources are deeply connected. He founded Green Mind Canada to create space for young people to talk about climate anxiety. He also wrote three children's books that help children understand climate emotions and feel empowered to act. He is an Ocean Wise ambassador.