

Foreign Credential Recognition

The Case for Better Labour Market Information in Canada's Foreign Credential Recognition Process

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The Labour Market Information Council (LMIC) is a pan-Canadian non-profit that produces accessible, evidence-based insights on Canada's labour market. Through research, collaboration, and data innovation, LMIC supports governments, employers, workers, and educators in making informed decisions. Our work helps bridge information gaps, improve labour market outcomes, and strengthen Canada's workforce development ecosystem.

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Key findings

This report details the findings of a qualitative study conducted by LMIC. The research was designed to explore the LMI gaps in Canada's foreign credential recognition (FCR) process by learning more about the lived experiences of skilled newcomers. Overall, our study found:

- ▶ **Lack of timely information:** Most participants were unaware of the FCR process before they arrived in Canada. Earlier guidance on timelines, costs, and documentation was limited or missing.
- ▶ **Scattered and inconsistent resources:** On government and regulatory body websites, information about the FCR process and requirements for diverse occupations was often outdated, contradictory, or difficult to understand. As a result, many participants turned to informal sources instead.
- ▶ **Opaque processes:** Participants struggled to understand how their credentials were being assessed, by whom, and what benchmarks were being used, especially across jurisdictions and between regulated and non-regulated professions.
- ▶ **Financial and time burdens:** Unclear costs and long processing times created financial strain. Few participants were aware of the funding options and support programs available.
- ▶ **Technology gaps:** It appears that many systems still rely on in-person or manual processes. Where available, digital tools were not perceived as user-friendly or consistent across regions.
- ▶ **Disconnect with employers:** Our participants engaged with some employers who did not understand or recognize FCR evaluation badges, particularly in non-regulated fields. Some participants had to present their credentials and qualifications to these employers (despite having the FCR badge) or were not asked for the badge at all. This presents an area for further exploration.
- ▶ **Lack of data:** Our review of the literature and existing data sources reveals a lack of data available to track, measure, and evaluate labour market outcomes for individuals who go through the FCR process as well as a lack of data to assess the effectiveness of the process.

Executive summary

Foreign credential recognition (FCR) is an important pathway for skilled newcomers seeking to integrate into Canada's labour market. Yet, many internationally educated newcomers face persistent challenges when it comes to accessing the labour market information (LMI) they need to navigate the labour market effectively.

This report draws on qualitative insights from newcomers who recently navigated the credential recognition process to explore how LMI gaps complicate efforts. These newcomers' stories illustrate the personal and financial costs of navigating a fragmented, unclear system that sometimes provides conflicting information.

Participants described significant information challenges, including uncertainty around timelines, conflicting guidance from websites and jurisdictions they considered official, and insufficient pre-arrival information. While informal networks helped fill the gaps, relying on these involves risks of misinformation and fraud.

Our literature review further highlights that Canada lacks the program and outcome data needed to assess the role that FCR processes play in supporting successful labour market integration and associated employment outcomes. This information gap limits researchers' ability to evaluate labour market outcomes in relation to the FCR process.

Ultimately, this report outlines seven core themes that emerged from our research:

- ▶ lack of pre-arrival information
- ▶ inconsistent guidance
- ▶ unclear evaluation standards
- ▶ hidden financial costs
- ▶ technological challenges
- ▶ disconnects between employers and FCR processes
- ▶ limited data to track labour market outcomes in relation to FCR

The participants in our research offered constructive ideas for a better system, ranging from clearer guidance and centralized platforms to plain-language resources and more proactive information delivery. These fixes are within reach.

Strengthening the LMI systems around FCR is not just about recognizing foreign credentials; it is about recognizing the people behind them and ensuring they can contribute their skills and experience to Canada's workforce.

Introduction

Under the current [Immigration Levels Plan](#), Canada aims to welcome approximately 395,000 newcomers by the end of 2025, with decreases expected each year after that through to 2027 (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada [IRCC], 2024). Many of these newcomers¹ will bring skills in both regulated and non-regulated occupations (refer to box for explanations). The plan identifies immigration as a strategy to fill labour shortages—particularly in high-demand sectors, like health care and the skilled trades.

Despite the intention to leverage immigration to help address labour shortages (IRCC, 2024), Canada's foreign credential recognition (FCR) process presents multiple challenges for newcomers seeking to join its labour market. Internationally educated newcomers rely on FCR to assess and evaluate their education and credentials (Kupfer, 2025). Yet, the process is often complex, fragmented, and inconsistent, resulting in longer-than-expected timelines or barriers to securing employment that aligns with their training. Statistics Canada has noted that internationally educated professionals experience an overqualification rate in their current jobs that is nearly twice that of their Canadian-born or -educated counterparts (Statistics Canada, 2022).

Previous LMIC research has identified gaps in the FCR process. Our 2024 publication, [Navigating labour market information: Challenges faced by career development professionals](#), reported that 42% of surveyed career development professionals found information about international qualification recognition difficult to locate

What is labour market information?

LMI refers to any data or insights that help people understand current and future labour market conditions so they can make informed career, education, or hiring decisions.

LMI can include

- ▶ **quantitative data** (such as employment rates, wages and salaries, business and industry trends, job vacancy data)
- ▶ **qualitative insights** (information from interviews, surveys, or lived experiences that sheds light on how people interact with the labour market)
- ▶ **forecasts and trends** (projections about future skills needs, occupational demands, or sectoral shifts)
- ▶ **informal sources** (advice from mentors, peers, or online communities that helps individuals make employment decisions)

At its best, LMI is timely, relevant, accurate, and accessible—enabling individuals and organizations to act with confidence in a changing labour market.

Source: LMIC

¹ The term “newcomer” refers to someone who has been in a country for a short time, usually less than five years. A newcomer can be an immigrant or a refugee who moved from their country of origin to another country.

(Camargo, 2024). While this report identified clear labour market information (LMI) gaps surrounding FCR, it didn't explore their specific nature.

In response, LMIC conducted qualitative research to better understand the specific gaps and challenges related to LMI within the FCR process and, where possible, suggested actionable solutions. This work aligns with LMIC's mandate to enable access to high-quality LMI that supports informed decision-making across education, career, and workforce pathways.

FCR is a vital part of the LMI ecosystem. As more skilled newcomers enter the Canadian labour market, it is essential to understand how LMI gaps in the FCR process affect both individual experiences, labour market outcomes and broader economic goals. Addressing these information gaps can help reduce underemployment and enhance the efficiency of the FCR processes to the benefit of Canada's labour market.

This report explores newcomers' lived experiences navigating the FCR process, identifies key information gaps, and examines how those gaps may hinder both individual outcomes and the clarity required for continued systemic improvements. Finally, this work outlines how improved LMI—clearer, more accessible, and available earlier—would support a more transparent and efficient FCR system.



Background and literature review

Defining foreign credential recognition

FCR is the process used to verify whether the education, skills, and work experience that someone obtained in another country are equivalent to the established standards in a province or territory where the internationally trained professional wishes to work (Employment and Social Development Canada [ESDC], 2025).

In regulated professions, credential assessment is mandatory. In non-regulated professions, it is not mandated, but is often recommended because employers in Canada can use the FCR results to better interpret and assess international qualifications.² Notably, FCR is mandatory for those applying through certain immigration programs, regardless of their intended profession.

According to the Government of Canada, FCR for regulated professions is typically carried out by the relevant regulatory body in each province or territory (ESDC, 2025a). This process often involves additional steps compared to the process that non-regulated professionals go through. For example, there may be certification exams or licensure processes, which may require extra documentation, fees, and processing time.

In non-regulated professions, the FCR [process involves assessing credentials \(such as education, work experience, or professional training\)](#) to determine if these meet the Canadian standards for an occupation. Various agencies across Canada can conduct such assessments.

Foreign credential assessment is also a requirement for individuals applying to immigrate through the [Federal Skilled Worker Program](#) and, in some cases, for those seeking to study or work in Canada. These assessments—commonly referred to as educational credential assessments (ECAs)—are used to verify that foreign credentials meet Canadian standards. According to IRCC, [ECAs help determine eligibility](#) for certain immigration programs and may guide applicants in identifying additional education or training needs.

How foreign credential recognition works in Canada

FCR in Canada operates within a multi-stakeholder governance model. Outside of a few federally regulated occupations, FCR and licensure are provincial and territorial responsibilities that are often delegated through legislation to regulatory authorities. There are approximately 500 regulatory authorities in Canada, and these all play some role in the FCR process (ESDC, 2015, as cited in Brosseau, 2020).

² After this research was completed, IRCC updated its web content focusing on credential recognition. The references here reflect the content that was publicly available at the time of our research (2024).

The situation is made more complex by the fact that the numbers of regulated occupations and compulsory trades vary significantly by jurisdiction, ranging from 65 to 275. In addition, Canada's decentralized system injects uncertainty into the process: for example, a profession that requires a licence in one province may not be regulated in another (IRCC, 2025a).

While both FCR and licensure fall under provincial or territorial responsibility, the federal government plays a complementary role by supporting the improvement of FCR processes and initiatives and sharing information with internationally trained workers. The Government of Canada has an interest in advancing processes to support the economic integration of skilled newcomers.

Roles of provincial or territorial and federal departments

First, Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) provides information to internationally trained workers. Second, Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) offers expertise on labour market integration, provides funding to improve FCR processes, and supplies LMI to newcomers. Finally, Health Canada supports improvements in the assessment and recognition of internationally educated health professionals.

At the provincial or territorial level, regulatory bodies carry out assessments for regulated occupations, with processes and standards set by provincial or territorial legislation (Brosseau, 2020). In contrast, employers maintain significant discretion in non-regulated professions, often deciding for themselves whether an applicant's education and qualifications are sufficient. This contributes to variation not just between jurisdictions, but also across sectors and among employers (OECD, 2019).

At the federal level, three departments play key roles (Evaluation Directorate–Strategic and Service Policy Branch, 2015):

- » **ESDC** offers expertise on labour market integration, provides funding to improve FCR processes, and supplies LMI to newcomers.
- » **IRCC** provides information and pre-arrival services to internationally trained workers.
- » **Health Canada** supports improvements in the assessment and recognition of internationally educated health-care professionals.

Canada's Foreign Credential Recognition Program

ESDC launched the [Foreign Credential Recognition Program \(FCRP\)](#) in 2003. The program was designed to provide federal leadership on FCR and facilitate national coordination among key stakeholders. The program addresses the persistent barriers faced by internationally trained professionals working to transition into meaningful employment (Abdul-Karim, 2018).

The FCRP has three core objectives (ESDC, 2025b):

- ▶ to develop and strengthen Canada's capacity for FCR
- ▶ to improve labour market integration outcomes for internationally trained individuals in targeted occupations and sectors
- ▶ to support interprovincial labour mobility

To achieve these, the program funds contributions to provinces and territories, regulatory authorities, and other organizations that support the labour market integration of internationally trained professionals. This funding is used to:

- ▶ make FCR processes faster and more efficient
- ▶ provide loans and support services that help professionals navigate the FCR process
- ▶ offer employment supports (such as work placements, wage subsidies, training, mentoring, and coaching) to help internationally trained professionals gain Canadian experience in their fields

Through these funding mechanisms, the federal government aims to simplify and harmonize FCR processes while empowering the provinces and service providers to improve their own FCR capacity.

As an example, the FCRP committed up to \$86 million to support 15 projects focused on improving credential recognition in health-related occupations in December 2022. Funding amounts ranged from \$500,000 to \$10 million (ESDC, 2024). Some recipients of larger funding amounts included:

- ▶ **Association of Canadian Faculties of Dentistry** for its General Dentistry Gap Assessment and Gap Training Program
- ▶ **Alberta Health Services** for its SMART (Sustainable, Multi-Collaborator approach from Arrival to Readiness for Practice and Transition) initiative
- ▶ **BC College of Nurses and Midwives** for its initiative titled Virtualizing Competency Assessments: Streamlining Nursing Licensure in Canada

- ▶ **Bow Valley College** for its Internationally Educated Health Professionals (IEHP) Pathway to Employment Program
- ▶ **Achēv** for its Employment Pathways in Canada – Health Careers program
- ▶ **Province of Nova Scotia** for its initiative titled Expanding NICHE (Nurses Integrating Care in the Community and Home): Scale and Spread of Streamlined Pathways to Licensure and Employment

These organizations intend to use the awarded funds to streamline certification and licensing requirements in entry-to-practice pathways.

Why foreign credential recognition matters now

Canada has one of the most educated workforces among G7 countries (Statistics Canada, 2022). This is often cited as a source of national strength and a key factor in sustaining Canada's standard of living and ongoing economic growth.

Since 2002, the federal government has shifted its immigration policy away from addressing specific labour market shortages and toward a broader focus on human capital, prioritizing the recruitment of highly skilled and well-educated immigrants (Evaluation Directorate–Strategic and Service Policy Branch, 2020). This shift emphasizes immigrants' skills and education by supporting their effective integration into the labour market.

For internationally trained individuals who will be (or are) newcomers to Canada, FCR plays an important role in enabling meaningful labour market participation. But without clear, timely, and accessible information about the process—including documentation requirements, timelines, costs, required steps, and variations by jurisdiction—many skilled newcomers face challenges when navigating the FCR process. These challenges can obstruct their ability to work in their fields.

These challenges are not only personal; they represent a potential risk to Canada's successful implementation of its plans for economic growth and resilience. As Canada continues to recruit highly skilled and educated individuals (Evaluation Directorate–Strategic and Service Policy Branch, 2020), such as those in health care, trades, and other high-demand sectors, ensuring fair and efficient credential recognition is essential.

What previous evaluations can tell us about foreign credential recognition today

[Federal evaluations of the FCRP—conducted in 2015 and in 2020](#)—identified persistent challenges in both the program itself and the broader FCR process. While each of these reports noted some improvements in FCR (in areas like transparency, consistency, timeliness, and fairness), the evaluations concluded that these gains could not be directly attributed to the FCRP. This was largely due to insufficient data and the high number of stakeholders involved (Evaluation Directorate–Strategic and Service Policy Branch, 2020).

One consistent finding across both evaluations was the lack of labour market outcome data for internationally trained individuals. This data gap limits the ability to assess whether broader credential recognition efforts and/or FCRP initiatives are leading to meaningful employment. The gap also impedes efforts to track outcomes over time.

The 2015 and 2020 evaluations also underscored persistent challenges in transparency and accessibility, such as:

- ▶ reliance on passive website content
- ▶ opaque decision-making processes
- ▶ confusing or unclear guidance in the available information

Notably, in a 2019 survey by World Education Services, approximately 14% of participating internationally trained individuals indicated that they did not know whether their profession was regulated in Canada. Given that FCR processes differ for regulated versus non-regulated professions, this is a significant finding. Further, despite the procedural differences, government sources frequently present information about regulated and non-regulated pathways together, contributing to confusion.

These findings point to a broader issue: while policy intent may be clear, the FCR processes themselves often lack clarity and systemic coordination.

The state of LMI in foreign credential recognition

Case study: LMI gaps in the health-care sector

LMI related to FCR is often unclear as well as difficult to find and access. These issues affect both the information provided to newcomers during the FCR process and the data available to researchers attempting to assess the process. The result is a series of blind spots across the ecosystem.

The health-care sector provides a particularly compelling example of why improved data collection related to FCR is necessary. In 2009, the Pan-Canadian Framework for the Assessment and Recognition of Foreign Qualifications was introduced as a joint federal-provincial initiative aimed at improving transparency, consistency, timeliness, and fairness in labour market outcomes, particularly for people in high-demand, regulated occupations, such as engineers, nurses, physicians, and other health-care professionals (Evaluation Directorate–Strategic and Service Policy Branch, 2020).

Despite this, 2021 Census data show that internationally educated health professionals who arrived in Canada from 2016 to 2021 experienced lower employment rates and higher unemployment rates, and were less likely to work in their fields, than those who'd arrived before 2016 (Frank et al., 2023). These recently arrived professionals also had the largest earnings gap with immigrants who arrived earlier.

While the cited report provides useful insights into health-care workforce trends and newcomer experiences, it does not directly assess the role of FCR in employment outcomes. Again, our ability to understand the specific impacts of FCR on labour market integration and employment outcomes is limited. These gaps reinforce the need for improved LMI that would make it easier to evaluate the role of credential recognition in employment outcomes.

Information gaps and system-level challenges

As noted, there is limited clarity and consistency around how FCR processes operate and how they affect occupational outcomes (Nauta & Speer, 2024; Ng & Gagnon, 2020).

Regulatory ambiguity is especially pronounced in “grey zone” occupations—those that fall between regulated and non-regulated occupations. For example, listings on the Government of Canada’s Job Bank for trades like carpentry or welding often mention the need for a high school diploma and legal status, but not for certification or licensing. This makes it difficult for newcomers to determine whether FCR is required and, if so, where to begin.

Outside the “grey zone,” scholars such as Sweetman et al. (2015) have noted the limited availability of economic analyses or trend data on regulated and/or licensed workers in Canada. These gaps are also acute in non-regulated professions, which are frequently overlooked in policy and media discussions (McCoy & Masuch, 2007). Importantly, much of the Canadian FCR literature has focused on newcomers’ labour market outcomes without distinguishing between regulated and non-regulated professions (Ng & Gagnon, 2020).

While platforms like Engineers Canada and the National Nursing Assessment Service offer some centralized information, they often do not account for cross-provincial inconsistencies, and information about comparing credentials is not clearly presented.

FCR analysts have raised additional concerns about topics such as quality control, perceived cultural mismatch of foreign credentials, underutilization of human capital, and barriers to equitable labour market participation (Banerjee et al., 2018; Evaluation Directorate–Strategic and Service Policy Branch, 2020).

While long-form census data provide insights about internationally trained individuals by capturing occupation, immigration status, education credentials, and training location, the data do not indicate whether someone has undergone FCR or an ECA. LMIC could not identify any recent, publicly available, administrative, or longitudinal data that linked FCR participation to labour market outcomes in a consistent or robust manner. While it is possible that jurisdictional and federal bodies may collect such data internally, the information is not easily accessible to researchers.

The ongoing lack of clear, robust, and accessible LMI is contributing to ongoing confusion about FCR processes and their implications for occupational outcomes (Nauta & Speer, 2024; Ng & Gagnon, 2020; Thomas, 2021).

Canadian government initiatives and the evolving policy landscape

In recent years, federal and provincial governments have introduced a range of initiatives aimed at modernizing FCR processes and improving credential recognition outcomes. This momentum is important because 2021 Census data indicate that foreign-educated immigrants with credentials in high-demand areas (such as health care) face high rates of mismatch: the results showed that only 36.5% of internationally trained registered nurses were working as registered nurses or in related occupations and that just 41.1% of immigrants with foreign medical degrees were working as doctors (Statistics Canada, 2022).

At the provincial level, momentum is building around FCR reform, particularly in the skilled trades. In 2024, Alberta and Ontario signed a Memorandum of Understanding

to share information, align resources, and co-develop recognition frameworks (Ontario Newsroom, 2024). These efforts are intended to help more skilled newcomers navigate apprenticeship and certification pathways more efficiently and to address critical labour shortages. Similarly, in 2023, British Columbia introduced new legislation to modernize FCR for sectors facing acute skill shortages, including construction, teaching, environmental science, and social work (BC Gov News, 2023).

Similarly, in response to pandemic-era shortages, the National Nursing Assessment Service partnered with regulatory bodies in New Brunswick, P.E.I., Saskatchewan, and Manitoba to accelerate licensing timelines for internationally educated nurses, reducing delays by up to three months (Crea-Arsenio et al., 2023).

While these initiatives signal progress, newcomers continue to encounter incomplete, inconsistent, or contradictory information across FCR-focused sources, government websites, and service channels. This disconnect between the processes in place and the user experience contributes to newcomer frustration and potential delays in labour market integration.

Further, despite increased investments and cross-jurisdictional coordination, there remains no clear source of data on FCR participation to assess labour market outcomes and FCR impact and effectiveness. As noted in a [2023 report from Health Canada](#), for individuals in the health field, this lack of labour market outcome data remains a gap. In LMIC's own research suggests that while federal and provincial/territorial bodies responsible for ECAs or FCR may collect some of this data internally, it is not shared in ways that support evaluation or system-wide reform.

For example, without data to track FCR and related labour market outcomes, FCRP impacts cannot be accurately measured or associated, and efforts to improve FCR processes cannot succeed. Improving LMI within the FCR system is essential for ensuring a smooth, efficient, and clear pathway that skilled newcomers can follow to integrate into the Canadian labour market.

Methodology and limitations for the current study

This qualitative study was designed to explore the LMI gaps within Canada's FCR process based on the lived experiences of skilled newcomers. LMIC defined newcomers as those who had arrived in Canada within the last five years because the intent was to capture current or recent experiences.

This research was guided by the following central question:
What LMI gap(s) exist in and around the FCR process?

Two supplementary research questions were also explored:

- ▶ What LMI gap(s) have skilled newcomers observed in the FCR context?
- ▶ Based on their experiences, including any barriers they have faced, how do newcomers perceive access to LMI in the FCR process?

Research design

To address these questions, we used the following methods:

- ▶ a review of relevant literature
- ▶ four focus groups (8–12 participants each)
- ▶ three supplemental one-on-one interviews
- ▶ qualitative analysis of data gathered in focus groups and interviews

The national call for participation published on the LMIC website received more than 300 expressions of interest. Our initial inclusion criteria required participants to have arrived in Canada within the past five years and to be either navigating or to have recently completed the FCR process.

We developed additional selection criteria to ensure diversity and representation, aiming for balanced gender representation and national geographic coverage. Because of the sensitive and personal nature of the focus group discussions, overly heterogeneous groupings were avoided to encourage open and comfortable participation.

The participant group included individuals residing in British Columbia, Alberta, Manitoba, Ontario, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick. Due to sample size and qualitative design, participants could not be grouped strictly by jurisdiction. While regional diversity was important, the analysis did not aim to compare jurisdictional processes directly. Rather, the intent was to explore any common LMI challenges that newcomers face when trying to understand and navigate the FCR process, regardless of region or profession.

To ensure participant preparedness and informed consent, all individuals selected to participate received the following in advance: detailed project information, focus group objectives, and a consent form. Sessions were conducted virtually and moderated by LMIC researchers. The three additional one-on-one interviews helped confirm that thematic saturation had been reached before we advanced to analysis.

A qualitative analysis was conducted for both the focus group and interview data. Themes were drawn from participants' narratives and were aligned with the core and supplementary research questions. The resulting insights are presented thematically in the findings section of this report.

Limitations

Because recruitment and participation occurred entirely online, newcomers with limited internet access or low digital engagement may have been under-represented. We sought to mitigate this by continuing sessions until saturation was reached. Additionally, the sample size and format limited jurisdictional comparisons. Instead, the results emphasize the system-wide patterns of LMI gaps that emerged across contexts.



Findings

The lived experiences of internationally educated newcomers navigating the FCR process in Canada reveal widespread and persistent gaps in accessible, reliable, and timely LMI. Across all focus groups and interviews, participants described similar challenges—regardless of profession or province—highlighting issues in how information is delivered, accessed, and understood. These themes emphasize the personal and systemic consequences of inconsistent LMI and identify opportunities for improvement across Canada’s credential recognition landscape.

1

Timing and accessibility of information

Most participants were unaware of the FCR process before arriving in Canada—a situation that points to a lack of timely LMI at the pre-arrival stage. Information packages, when provided, did not include practical guidance on FCR, leaving newcomers unprepared for the FCR journey.

Participants also highlighted unequal access to support, noting that while principal applicants often received targeted guidance, spouses or secondary applicants were left to navigate the system independently. This was reflected in a participant’s comments:

“Yes, he [principal applicant—spouse] received a lot of help with the Health Match program. [It helped] with applying for the work permit. That was very difficult as well, the work permit process.”

— Participant

Participants also described confusion about where to start, who to contact, and how to prepare for the process. When resources were located, they were often overly technical and inaccessible, particularly for those whose first language was neither English nor French.

Even among those who engaged with FCR as part of their permanent residency application, there was a low level of understanding around timelines, costs, steps, and required documentation, highlighting a disconnect between immigration processes and the provision of essential LMI.

2

Quality and reliability of available information

Participants consistently described the information landscape for FCR as decentralized and noted the conflicting nature of available information related to the FCR process. Official government sources were often inconsistent, with discrepancies across websites and jurisdictions, making it difficult to determine which information was reliable and current.

This lack of standardization contributed to widespread mistrust of formal sources among participants. As a result, many turned to informal sources, like word of mouth, online forums, or informal social media groups. While these informal channels offered support, they also introduced risks: unofficial sources may offer up misinformation, or advice that is only applicable in specific contexts. They may also be fraudulent.

“When you go to the net [and] search for ‘the FCR processes,’ you notice that there [is] a lot of information, a lot of scattered information. Some websites are kind of intertwined together...you just find yourself being lost.

“So, I think it was better for me navigating through social media, where people have created groups and then explain [the process] much better.”

— Participant

Participants noted that official platforms offered detail, but lacked the clarity, responsiveness, and user-friendliness of informal spaces. However, relying on peer-shared knowledge left participants vulnerable to inaccurate or incomplete information, particularly when jurisdiction-specific rules were not clearly explained.

3

Complexity and transparency of the process

Participants widely described the FCR process as ambiguous, with little clarity around evaluation benchmarks or academic equivalency frameworks. Many were unclear about how their credentials were being assessed. They did not know who was assessing them or what standards were used in the process. This highlights a critical information gap in the transparency of FCR systems.

Jurisdictional variation and inconsistencies between regulated and non-regulated professions further complicate the overall experience for newcomers. Further, some participants went through FCR while recent regulatory changes were being applied and experienced a mid-application shift in requirements, leaving them without clear

recourse or updated guidance. Many had to repeat certain steps or take additional steps, creating more confusion.

A significant source of stress was the lack of detailed information about documentation requirements. Participants often did not know which documents to bring, how to authenticate them, or what translation protocols were accepted.

When it came to what steps to take and what to expect from the process, one interviewee who lived in an English-speaking country for more than 20 years before arriving in Canada said:

“It’s a running joke in our family. So, my husband is English, and I always said, ‘Well, it’s probably because I’m not really English, so I don’t understand.’

“But he had the same difficulties with Canadian bureaucracy, just along the permanent residency application, and he is English. I honestly don’t know how people whose first language is not English... how they manage—I don’t know. Just filling out the applications, we were at each other’s throats constantly. It was so difficult.”

— Participant

4

Financial and time-related information gaps

Participants consistently underestimated the time and cost associated with the FCR process, often reporting unexpected financial strain.

Publicly available information to support financial planning or budgeting was limited. While some institutions offered payment plans, few provided financial assistance or clear guidance on how to access available supports.

None of the participants we spoke to mentioned receiving loans for evaluation expenses, and only one mentioned being eligible for a pathway program that covered some evaluation costs. The remainder mentioned assistance with developing payment plans only after they had already begun the process and were having difficulty with the associated costs.

Long timelines and a lack of upfront clarity about documentation requirements and processing duration delayed participants’ ability to enter the workforce and/or to apply for jobs aligned with their skills.

“No, no one is gonna tell you you’re gonna pay this amount of money until it’s time for you to pay.”

— Participant

5

Language and technology limitations

Many participants found the technical language used in FCR-related communications to be difficult to understand. This was true even among highly highly-educated individuals and those fluent in English. Instructions were often difficult to interpret, leading to confusion and disengagement.

“I had some challenges [in] communications. At some point, I actually thought I would get the whole thing done online ... But at one point, I knew that I had to do so many of those processes physically. It was difficult communicating with them sometimes.”

— Participant

Despite expectations for digital-first systems, many participants encountered outdated or inconsistent technology interfaces. Document submission often required phone calls or in-person appointments, creating inefficiencies that contrasted sharply with the digital capabilities newcomers expected to find in Canada.

Where digital tools were available, participants encountered issues like system crashes, long wait times, and inconsistent requirements across jurisdictions. These obstacles added frustration to an already complex process and undermined confidence in Canada's digital public services.

Together, these language and technology barriers reflect a broad disconnect between user needs and service design, underscoring the importance of accessible, user-tested LMI systems.

6

Disconnect between employers and foreign credential recognition processes

Participants working in non-regulated professions expressed uncertainty about the value of undergoing FCR, especially when employers did not request or recognize credential assessments. Several noted that, despite completing the process, they were asked during hiring to resubmit documentation or explain their qualifications.

“[The FCR evaluation badge wasn’t asked for] unless it was a requirement from a company I would have been trying to get hired from. If it was not a requirement, I wouldn’t have done it. I wouldn’t see the point. No one has ever asked about my studies or questioned whether I can do my job or not because I studied outside of Canada.”

**— Participant in a non-regulated profession
(who went through a permanent residence program)**

This disconnect between the FCR system and employer practices added a layer of frustration, with some participants stating they would have opted out of the process entirely had they known its limited relevance in certain job markets.

Some also described instances in which employers prioritized work experience and practical skills over credential evaluation badges, adding to the perception that FCR held limited relevance in certain industries. These gaps between credential recognition systems and real-world hiring practices point to a misalignment in how FCR processes are perceived by employers and highlight an area that needs further exploration.

What is a badge?

FCR evaluation badges are digital credentials that recognize the completion of foreign credential assessments. They provide a portable, verifiable way for newcomers to demonstrate their qualifications to employers, regulators, and postsecondary institutions. These badges can be shared online to help streamline the job search process

Reflections and recommendations

How newcomers navigate foreign credential recognition challenges—and their recommendations for improvement

The cumulative effect of inconsistent LMI and unclear FCR processes hindered many participants' integration into the Canadian workforce. In the absence of consistent formal guidance, many newcomers turned to informal networks, social media groups, and cultural communities. While helpful at times, these channels were unregulated and inconsistent, and sometimes excluded those outside specific cultural or linguistic groups.

Participants in our study described common threads of confusion, delay, and emotional strain, caused not only by the complexity of the process itself but also by the lack of accessible, trustworthy information to navigate it. However, our work also reinforces that LMI challenges extend beyond newcomers' experiences. Researchers and the public also lack sufficient outcome data to evaluate labour market outcomes related to FCR.

Nevertheless, participants were constructive in offering ideas to improve the FCR process and the information that supports it. Their suggestions focused on the seven key areas outlined in this section.

Better pre-arrival and early-arrival information

Many participants we spoke to had little or no understanding of the FCR process before they arrived in Canada. They had received no, or limited, information about it. As a result, they were unable to plan for FCR process timelines, documentation requirements, or related costs. They emphasized the value of receiving targeted, practical information earlier in the immigration journey. Improving the timing and accessibility of FCR-related information could reduce delays, mitigate financial strain, and support more effective early-stage labour market integration.

More multilingual, plain-language resources tailored to newcomer experiences

Participants consistently shared that available information was often too technical and typically limited to English and French. To improve accessibility, they recommended providing clear, jargon-free documents in the official languages, and ideally in multiple languages. Plainer language and better translations could reduce reliance on informal (sometimes conflicting) sources.

Clearer and earlier guidance on timelines, steps, and required documents from authoritative sources

Participants identified a lack of clear, step-by-step guidance as a key source of stress. They recommended that regulatory bodies and assessment agencies publish standardized checklists and roadmaps tailored to specific professions and regions. These tools would improve trust, help newcomers anticipate requirements, and reduce the avoidable costs associated with repeat submissions or last-minute translations.

LMIC acknowledges there have been recent reforms designed to improve transparency. As of 2024, eight provinces have introduced or amended fair registration legislation and are now requiring regulatory bodies to publish credential recognition criteria and timelines online.³ In addition, Alberta, British Columbia, Ontario, and Saskatchewan have introduced service standards requiring regulatory bodies to render decisions within specific timeframes. New Brunswick and Newfoundland and Labrador have announced plans to introduce similar measures.

LMIC supports these efforts and encourages continued coordination across jurisdictions. We look forward to seeing outcome data associated with these legislative reforms. We encourage regulators to consider additional tools—like tailored checklists and decision aids—to further strengthen the user experience.

A centralized and verified online portal for information and submissions

To reduce fragmentation, participants suggested a single digital platform that would consolidate verified information from regulatory bodies, assessment agencies, and employers. Whether used solely for guidance or also for credential submission, such a platform could offer consistency, transparency, and real-time updates, directly addressing the challenge of scattered and unverified sources.

LMIC supports the need for centralized, authoritative platforms to reduce confusion and streamline access to accurate information. Some provinces, including Ontario, British Columbia, and Saskatchewan, have introduced online FCR application portals for priority sectors. While implementation is still evolving, these tools represent promising steps toward a more transparent, coordinated FCR ecosystem.

We encourage policy makers and regulatory bodies to continue aligning these efforts with the lived experiences of FCR participants to ensure platforms are accessible, multilingual, and tailored to help newcomers make informed decisions.

³ See these examples: British Columbia's [*International Credentials Recognition Act*](#), Manitoba's [*Fair Registration Practices in Regulated Professions Act*](#), Ontario's [*Fair Access to Regulated Professions and Compulsory Trades Act*](#), Alberta's [*Fair Registration Practices Act*](#), and Newfoundland and Labrador's [*Fair Registration Practices Act*](#).

Improved digital resources to help with communications, document delivery, and status updates

Participants voiced strong frustration with outdated communication systems and the absence of online tracking. They recommended secure digital platforms for document uploads, real-time status updates, and streamlined communication. These improvements could reduce the need for in-person visits and time-consuming phone calls—experiences that many described as inefficient and avoidable.

These are not small asks, but they are feasible. They reflect a need for better, more responsive LMI systems (not necessarily new ones) that are central to the programs and policy initiatives that seek to improve the well-being of the Canadian economy and society.

Accessible LMI for foreign credential recognition outcomes

LMIC's literature review revealed gaps in publicly available LMI on FCR. This prevents evaluation of the efficacy of the FCR process and its impact on newcomers' integration into the Canadian labour market. The effect of FCR on their associated labour market outcomes is poorly understood. This has policy consequences due to the lack of benchmarks for what constitutes FCR impact: it is difficult for programs, researchers, and policy makers alike to know if FCR interventions have meaningful on how individuals experience this process or consequences on labour market outcomes.

We need administrative data on who participates in FCR and for what occupations. Ideally, these data could be linked to other datasets like T1 Family Files (anonymized datasets derived from T1 tax returns, compiled and maintained by Statistics Canada to support social and economic research), employment insurance data, and the Longitudinal Immigration Database. This would significantly bolster the ability to assess labour market outcomes for FCR participants longitudinally and reliably. Linking to other datasets offer a way for policy and program developers to compare the outcomes of immigrants who did not pursue FCR to those who did.

LMIC acknowledges it would take time and resources to develop a more centralized data collection system since there are multiple FCR providers who are embedded within different types of institutions with different reporting structures. While fully centralized collection of FCR participant data could be challenging, time consuming and resource intensive to accomplish, there are less intensive approaches that could help to address the lack of LMI about FCR. Adding questions about FCR participation to surveys such as the Canadian Census, Statistics Canada's Labour Force Survey, and other federally collected surveys would support the gathering of baseline data. This would allow researchers to begin to more clearly understand the labour market experiences of FCR participants, and the experiences with the FCR process, as well.

For these potential approaches to improving LMI for FCR system evaluation and associated impact, it will be key to ensure data are accessible to FCR administrators, researchers and policy makers who support newcomers.

Collect LMI on employer perceptions of foreign credential recognition

Particularly in non-regulated occupations, both FCR participants and the literature revealed a lack of clarity on the role that employers play in FCR participants' integration into the labour market. While policy makers and FCR administrators should continue to make considerable efforts to improve the FCR process for newcomers, employer discretion determines whether a newcomer will be offered an interview and hired for a job. This is why it is essential to understand how employers perceive the FCR credential badges that newcomers receive from diverse assessment agencies across Canada. Understanding this could allow the appropriate parties to develop strategies and LMI that lead to two key improvements: greater employer trust in the credentials that newcomers hold, and fewer misunderstandings or negative assumptions on the part of employers about the value of foreign credentials or the associated evaluation processes. In the absence of understanding employer perceptions and behaviors, however, it will be difficult to craft meaningful, targeted, and impactful approaches.

This information would help us gain some insight into the value held for them in FCR processes and credential badges. Surveys combined with qualitative interviews with appropriate control groups would provide a fulsome portrait of this complex aspect of FCR and newcomer integration into the Canadian labour market.



Concluding thoughts

Canada's newcomers have valuable knowledge and expertise (IRCC, 2025b) to contribute. Yet, when they seek employment in their professions, significant information gaps hinder their progress. This notion is supported by the current research as well as previous evaluations of the FCR process in Canada (ESDC, 2020).

Our study engaged a diverse group of internationally educated participants—from engineers and nurses to user experience (UX) designers, educators, and business strategists—working in both regulated and non-regulated fields. Their insights provide a nuanced perspective on how professional contexts influence the FCR experience.

While many participants described the process as confusing, stressful, and emotionally draining, some expressed satisfaction and gratitude, particularly when they were able to work in their occupation. For many, the opportunity to rebuild their career in Canada and to be part of the Canadian workforce was a source of pride. However, this appreciation does not negate the reality of the challenges they encountered. Nearly every participant mentioned the emotional toll, financial strain, and time-intensive nature of the FCR process. These difficulties were compounded by the lack of adequate, trustworthy, and timely LMI.

A more transparent, streamlined, responsive FCR process—aligned with labour market realities—could improve both newcomer outcomes and broader workforce integration efforts. Strengthening LMI within the FCR ecosystem is critical to this transformation.

High-quality, accessible LMI empowers newcomers with knowledge and agency. It helps them to make informed decisions, to prepare adequately, and to enter the labour market efficiently and confidently.

However, the need for better LMI does not end with individuals; it extends to policy makers and researchers. As highlighted in this report, Canada still lacks comprehensive administrative and outcome data to track how FCR processes influence labour market outcomes over time. This limits both accountability and the crafting of evidence-based policy solutions.

Improving the FCR experience is a shared responsibility. It requires collaboration among all stakeholder groups—federal, provincial, and territorial governments; regulatory bodies; immigrant-serving organizations; employers; and LMI providers. With coordinated action, FCR can become a bridge—rather than a barrier—to meaningful work. Collaboration would also support a more coherent and robust system of data collection, strengthening LMI and allowing for its application to more effectively evaluate foreign credential recognition processes.

To that end, LMIC is committed to sharing these insights across the LMI ecosystem,

engaging directly with career development professionals, governments, and service providers to translate these findings into actionable improvements and to lend support to crucial initiatives already underway. We will also continue exploring how emerging technologies and data solutions can strengthen the LMI infrastructure supporting newcomers.

This research is intended to support the construction of more inclusive LMI systems. With lived experience and evidence-based insights now available, the next step is collective action. An effective FCR system must recognize not only foreign credentials themselves, but the people behind them. To ensure these individuals feel valued—and to support their contributions to Canada's prosperity—the FCR process must offer a clear and inclusive path forward.



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