

Addressing the Verification Bottleneck: A National Pre-Verification Service for Credential Recognition in Canada

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Canada's economic success increasingly depends on its ability to attract, retain, and integrate skilled workers from around the globe. This is underscored by persistent labour shortages across key sectors, with a national job vacancy rate¹ of approximately 2.7%, and higher rates in critical industries such as healthcare and construction (Statistics Canada, 2025a). Yet recent immigrants experience weaker labour-market outcomes, with unemployment rates approximately 64% higher than Canadian-born workers (IRCC, 2024a).

One contributing factor is the length and complexity of licensure and credential recognition processes.² Internationally trained professionals often face prolonged timelines before they can practice in their field (LMIC, 2025). This is linked to delayed labour-market entry, underemployment, and earnings gaps (Finlayson & Globerman, 2023), with approximately 34.7% of recent immigrants reporting they are overqualified for their current job and earning about 27% less than their Canadian-born counterparts (Statistics Canada, 2025b; Statistics Canada, 2025c). These outcomes reflect structural inefficiencies within Canada's credential recognition framework, not gaps in worker competency.

With these challenges in mind, this paper proposes a targeted option to reduce delays in labour-market entry by addressing a procedural bottleneck: credential verification.

A Fragmented Credential Recognition System

Canada's credential recognition processes vary widely across sectors, regulatory bodies, and jurisdictions. Service standards and timelines differ substantially, making the system unpredictable and difficult to navigate for internationally trained applicants, even in occupations facing acute labour shortages (LMIC, 2025). Fragmented practices contribute to delays, skills underutilization, and barriers to provincial mobility (OECD, 2025).

Improvements to this system would align directly with federal priorities to attract and retain global talent while ensuring immigration remains sustainable over time (Office of the Prime Minister, 2025). Canada emphasizes economic immigration as a cornerstone of labour-

¹ The job vacancy rate measures the number of vacant positions as a percentage of total labour demand.

² Credential recognition is the process by which regulatory bodies assess and verify internationally obtained education, training, and work experience for licensing and certification.

market sustainability, with economic admissions projected to account for approximately 64% of permanent resident admissions under the 2026-2028 Immigration Levels Plan (IRCC, 2025). Any changes to credential recognition must operate independently of immigration selection decisions, while supporting pre-arrival preparation and faster post-arrival labour-market integration.

Within the current framework, the federal government's primary role is exercised through the Foreign Credential Recognition Program, which provides funding to support credential recognition-related initiatives delivered by provinces, regulatory bodies, and other eligible organizations. Provincial and territorial regulators independently verify educational credentials, licensing documents, and work history as part of their overall assessment process (ESDC, 2025).

While this approach preserves regulatory autonomy, it often requires applicants to submit the same documentation repeatedly to different regulators or jurisdictions, resulting in duplication, delays, and inconsistent timelines (ESDC, 2025). Federal tools such as the Job Bank (2025) help applicants understand credential recognition requirements, but do not perform credential verification. Federal evaluations continue to identify jurisdictional fragmentation as a persistent barrier to consistent and timely credential recognition (ESDC, 2025).

Proposed Policy Response: A National “Trusted Credentials” Pre-Verification Service

The proposal introduces a national service responsible for pre-verifying international diplomas, transcripts, licensing documents, and relevant work experience. This service would be available to internationally trained applicants seeking licensure in regulated professions and to participating regulators as a trusted source of verified documentation.

The service would operate as a single entity to conduct or oversee primary-source credential verification, either directly or through accredited providers operating under its authority. Applicants would submit documentation through a secure digital hub and, with informed consent, would receive a secure and portable verified credential package that could be shared with one or more jurisdictional or professional regulators. Verification activities would follow established best practices in primary-source verification and document authentication (CICIC, n.d.), along with standards for foreign language translation, privacy protection, and fraud prevention, consistent with federal information security and privacy management

requirements (Treasury Board Secretariat, n.d.). The service would verify authenticity and identity only, allowing provincial and territorial regulators to retain full decision-making authority over equivalency, scope of practice, certification level, and licensure, preserving their regulatory standards and jurisdictional autonomy. Additionally, this service is distinct from Educational Credential Assessments used for immigration, which determine Canadian equivalency for education credentials (IRCC, 2024b). The proposed model is for verification only and is designed to support, not replace, regulator assessment and licensing decisions.

Because all verification would be performed once using standardized protocols, participating regulators would no longer need to duplicate verification activities. Regulators could rely on the verified credential package for verification purposes without having to independently collect, authenticate, store, or manage applicants' original documents, while maintaining full authority over all final evaluation and licensing decisions. This approach, compared to the status quo, is illustrated at a high level in the attached **Appendix**.

The service would be available to internationally trained applicants both in Canada and abroad. For applicants already in Canada, verification could occur earlier in the assessment process, while for applicants abroad, verification could be completed pre-arrival to support earlier engagement with regulatory pathways upon landing.

Accordingly, the federal government, through Employment and Social Development Canada, should establish a national "Trusted Credentials" pre-verification service to standardize and centralize credential verification while preserving regulatory autonomy over assessment and licensing decisions.

Analysis: Impacts, Feasibility, and Risks

Document verification is among the most time-consuming and duplicative stages of credential recognition, with many regulators independently repeating similar checks (Camargo & Larose, 2025). Verification is therefore a suitable focus for reform. It is discrete, document-based, and well-suited to standardization, without requiring harmonization of licensing standards or assessment criteria.

Past credential recognition initiatives have focused on streamlining assessments or licensing pathways, including funding for system improvement projects, enhanced pre-arrival

information services, and profession-specific coordination models in select fields (ESDC, 2025). While these efforts have improved transparency and information-sharing, federal evaluations indicate they have had limited impact on timeliness and consistency, as they rely on voluntary uptake by autonomous regulators and do not address duplicative verification processes embedded within existing systems (ESDC, 2025).

In contrast, this new service targets verification. By providing a standardized and reusable verification package, the service would strengthen regulators' ability to make timely decisions while preserving full regulatory authority. In limited cases, such as nursing, centralized assessment or source-verification mechanisms already exist (ESDC, 2025). This new "Trusted Credentials" pre-verification service builds on that concept by extending the model across professions.

For immigrants already in Canada, faster verification would enable earlier access to bridging programs, examinations, and supervised practice. For newcomers abroad, completing verification pre-arrival would reduce periods of underemployment and reliance on settlement supports upon arrival. Together, these improvements represent a more effective use of public resources by accelerating workforce participation and reducing skills underutilization without increasing immigration intake or regulatory burden.

Implementation of the service could be phased, beginning with a pilot focused on a limited number of high-demand occupations and willing jurisdictions, prioritized based on documented labour shortages, high application volumes, and regulator capacity. This approach would allow operational processes and regulator uptake to be tested before broader expansion.

Interprovincial coordination is expected to be complex. In addition to differing credential requirements across jurisdictions, the system includes a large and diverse set of professional regulators, each with distinct mandates and processes. Early implementation would therefore require structured engagement with regulators and jurisdictions, including consultations to identify shared verification needs and concerns.

One key constraint is adoption. Because credential recognition is decentralized, early impacts depend on how quickly jurisdictions and regulators opt into the service. There is also a risk that user barriers, such as limited access to technology, digital literacy, and familiarity with

Canadian regulatory systems, could affect uptake. This could be mitigated through the phased implementation, early partnerships with high-volume regulators, federal onboarding and outreach support, and clear performance reporting. Strong governance through robust data-sharing agreements, and alignment with privacy legislation will also be essential to managing risks related to data security, trust, and system integrity.

Conclusion: Advancing Timely Labour-Market Integration

A national verification service will strengthen Canada's ability to fill critical labour shortages by accelerating entry into regulated occupations where vacancies persist. Earlier labour-market integration would generate positive economic effects, including increased productivity and higher tax revenues, while reducing reliance on income supports and supporting more stable settlement outcomes for newcomers.

More broadly, untapped talent already present in Canada, combined with duplicative administrative processes, represents a source of inefficiency and lost opportunity. By reducing verification-related delays and administrative burden, a national verification service would improve the functioning of labour markets, enabling skilled workers to contribute more quickly and fully to the economy.

Clearer and more predictable credential recognition pathways would also enhance Canada's attractiveness to highly skilled immigrants, reducing the risk that the workers Canada needs choose alternative destinations with faster or more transparent licensing systems.

A national verification service therefore offers a practical and scalable way to reduce delays, improve fairness, and unlock economic value currently constrained by procedural bottlenecks. By addressing this key inefficiency without altering regulatory authority, the proposal supports federal immigration objectives while strengthening Canada's long-term economic performance and labour-market resilience.

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Appendix

Illustrative Scenario: Internationally Trained Skilled Trades Worker

An internationally trained and licensed skilled trades worker applies to practice in province A.

Under the status quo:

- Before applying, the worker may use Job Bank to determine that the trade is regulated, identify the appropriate provincial authority, and understand general credential recognition requirements.
- The worker submits credentials to the provincial skilled trades authority or certifying body, including proof of training and apprenticeship completion, trade certification or licensure, employment history, and identity documents.
- The provincial skilled trades authority or certifying body initiates its own document verification process, requesting primary-source confirmation from the international training institution, apprenticeship authority, or licensing body.
- The applicant waits while the documents are verified, translated (if required), and reviewed. Timelines vary depending on institutional responsiveness and certifying body capacity.
- If the worker later applies to work in another province, or transfers within Canada, the verification process is typically repeated by the new authority or certifying body, requiring resubmission of documents and renewed verification.
- During this period, the worker may be unable to access trade-specific bridging programs, apprenticeship placements, certification examinations, or supervised work experience, and may only qualify for lower-skilled or non-certified roles.
- Total time from application to eligibility for certification or authorized practice may range from many months to several years, depending on jurisdiction and document verification timelines.

Under the proposed model:

- Before or after arrival in Canada, the worker submits the same credentials as outlined above, but to the national “Trusted Credentials” service through a secure digital portal.

- Unlike existing federal tools such as Job Bank, the Trusted Credentials service performs primary-source verification rather than providing guidance or referral information.
- Once complete, the worker receives a verified credential package that could be portable across participating authorities or certifying bodies.
- The worker applies to the provincial skilled trades authority or certifying body with the verified credential package. Because the document's authenticity has already been confirmed, the authority can proceed directly to jurisdiction and regulator-specific assessment, certification examinations, or supervised apprenticeship requirements. Regulators retain full responsibility for assessment and licensing decisions.
- If the worker later applies in another province, the same verification package can be reused, eliminating the need for repeated verification.