Credential Evaluations for Refugees and Displaced People: A Gateway Approach

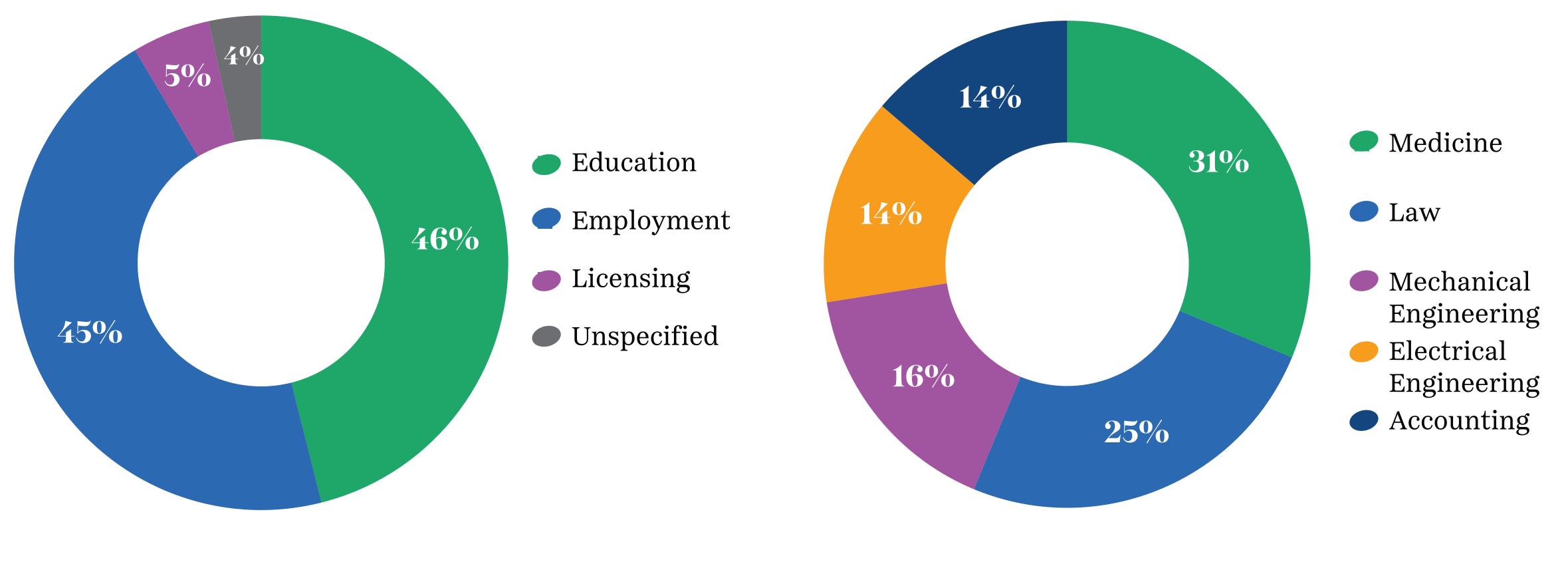
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Background

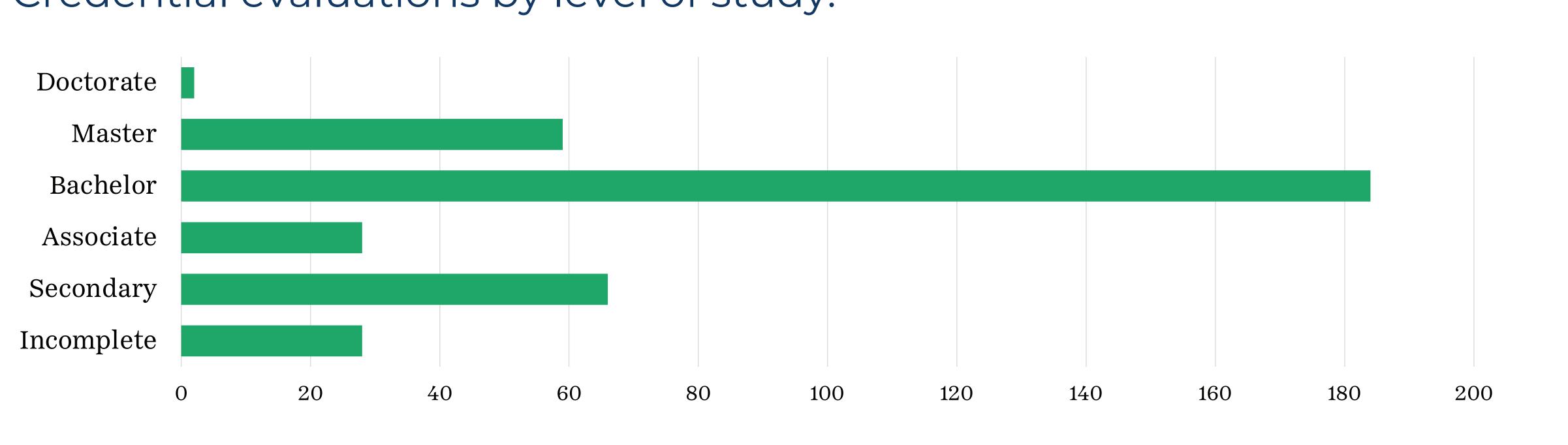
The Syrian civil war and the economic collapse of Venezuela have resulted in the forced exodus of over 12 million people (Arab Center Washington DC., 2022), (International Organization for Migration, 2022). Among the many other serious problems displacement can cause, it often precludes access to official academic documents, making it nearly impossible for refugees and other displaced people to obtain a standard credential evaluation report. Credential evaluations facilitate credential recognition, enabling individuals educated abroad to continue their education, become licensed professionals in their field, or pursue their career in the United States. What is needed is an alternative approach, one that evaluates academic credentials based on documentation that is incomplete or unverifiable.

In May 2016, WES published its recommended best practices in credential assessment for refugees and other forcibly displaced people (Loo, 2016). In 2019, the WES Gateway Program was officially introduced in the U.S. to provide alternative evaluation reports to referred individuals who are unable to obtain official or complete documentation. A total of 293 evaluation reports were completed under the WES Gateway Program for applicants from Syria and Venezuela from 2019 to 2023.

Professional pathways and top majors:



Credential evaluations by level of study:



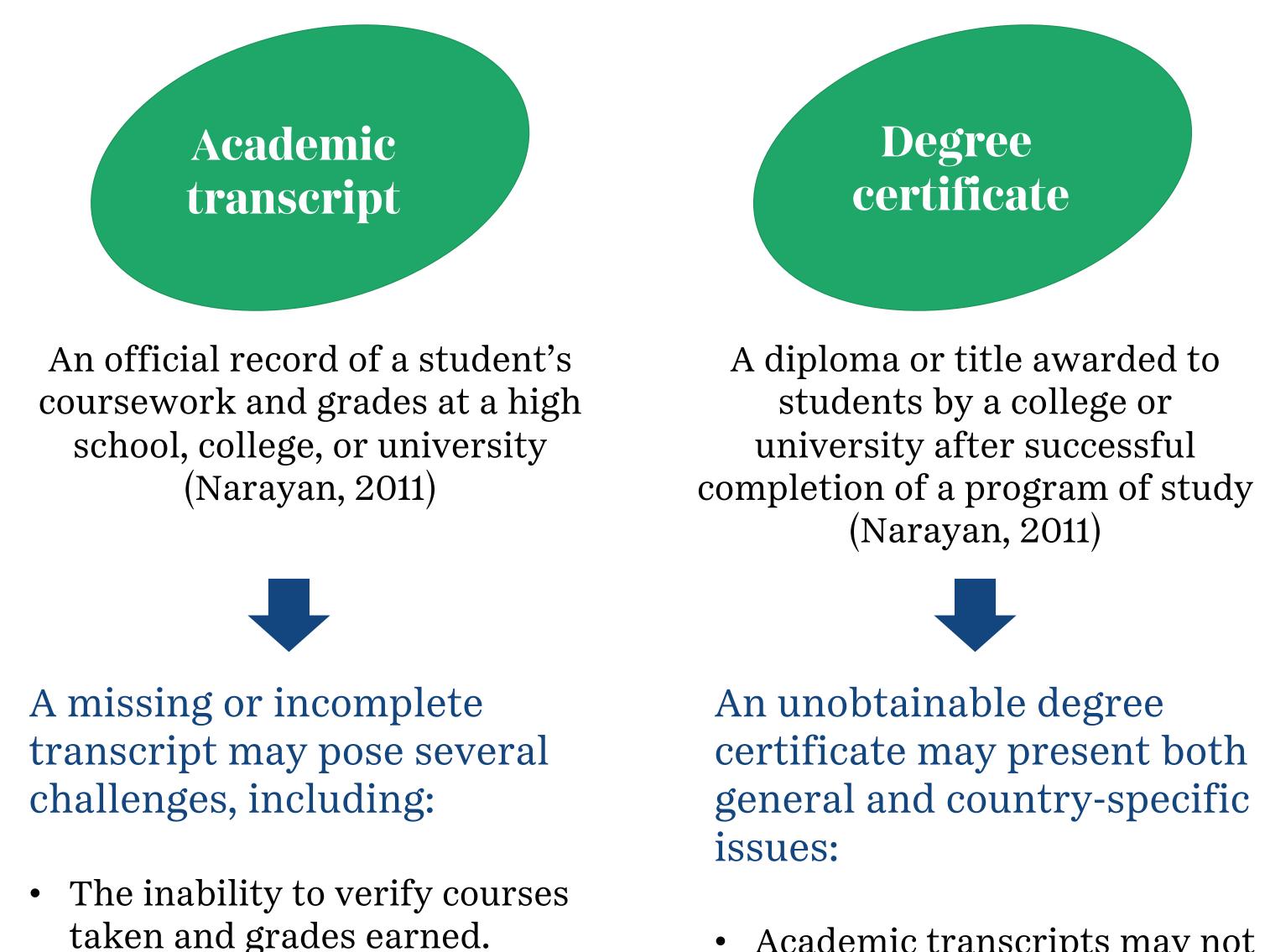


Challenges in Alternative Credential Assessment



E Documents

To conduct an alternative credential assessment, at least one officially issued document is required, such as an academic transcript, degree certificate, or professional license.



- A lack of identifying information, such as a date of birth or a student ID number.
- indicate degree conferral information.
- To graduate, students often need to meet additional requirements.

The documents listed above may serve as credible evidence that the applicant has attended or completed a program of study. The student's claims are then verified using the best information and resources available.



The war in Syria has left more than one in three schools damaged, destroyed, or repurposed (UNICEF, 2023), while the political and economic crisis in Venezuela has led to low salaries, a declining student population, rampant crime, and a loss of civil liberties which has worsened the country's already deteriorating educational infrastructure and hindered universities from providing basic services, such as issuing or verifying academic records (Loo, 2018), (Gil Gutiérrez, 2021), (ULADDHH, 2021).

Academic transcripts may not

academic or administrative

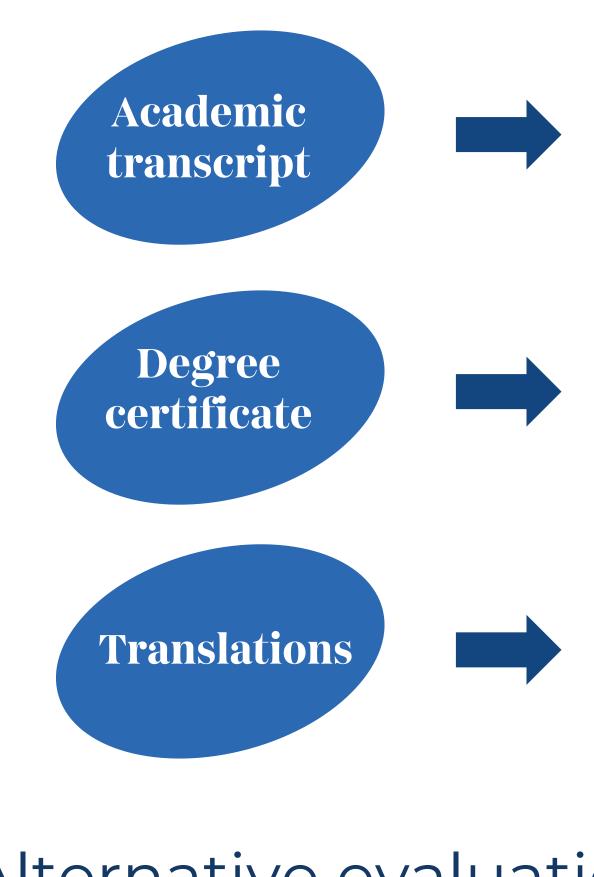
Professional license

Official document indicating that an individual has met the minimum requirements to practice or use a professional title (NYS Professions, n.d.)

A professional license issued by the appropriate authority is useful in that:

- It often requires completion of a specific credential.
- In lieu of a degree certificate, it may be able to serve as proof of award.

Standard evaluation process:



Backgroun profile Portfoli Assessment

WES Gateway Program: 2019-2023



293 alternative credential assessments completed in all levels of study from Syria and Venezuela, sent to over 150 recipient institutions, organizations, and licensing bodies across the United States.

Sources

las-universidades-en-venezuela-article



Sent in an official sealed envelope, stamped or signed across the back flap by the appropriate official

Sent electronically by the institution

Sent by the applicant

Certified, word-for-word translations of the above documents, sent by the applicant

Alternative evaluation process:



Gather information from the applicant, including identification information and a reconstruction of the applicant's education and professional background, including all schools attended.



Corroborate the applicant's background information with available documents, such as transcripts, diplomas, and professional licenses.



Evaluator applies in-house expertise, conducts online research, and analyzes sample documents and external resources to assess the documents and prepare an evaluation report.

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