

Immigration status can exclude parents from childcare support ^[1]

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Excerpts

While the federal and provincial governments sign agreements to reduce childcare costs by the end of the year, immigrants with precarious status will likely continue being denied subsidies, says one expert, which ultimately will negatively impact their children.

“Even if the child is Canadian-born, in some provinces, if the parents are not permanent residents, they don’t qualify for a childcare subsidy,” says Prof. Judith Bernhard, an early childhood education expert at the Toronto Metropolitan University.

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In April 2021, the federal government announced it would be signing agreements with each province and territory to reduce daycare costs by 50 per cent by the end of this year everywhere outside Quebec, and transition toward \$10-a-day by 2026.

It earmarked a \$30 billion investment over the next five years, with a minimum of \$9.2 billion per year after that.

But Bernhard says nothing in that plan indicates the situation will change for immigrants with precarious status, which includes refugee claimants, temporary workers and non-status residents.

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Though it doesn’t distinguish the parents’ immigration status, Statistics Canada predicts that by 2036, 39 to 49 per cent of all children under the age of 15 will have an immigrant background.

Yet, immigration status remains an eligibility requirement in every province. In fact, as a 2013 comparative analysis of all provinces shows, British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan and Quebec don’t give child care subsidies to refugee claimants, while New Brunswick does on a case-by-case basis.

After calling those provinces for an update, a spokesperson in Alberta confirmed that neither refugee claimants nor refugees were eligible.

Manitoba’s spokesperson said while immigration status is an “informational requirement,” it does not ultimately determine eligibility.

B.C.’s spokesperson confirmed refugee claimants are not eligible. New Brunswick’s spokesperson said only protected persons — or convention refugees — can apply, excluding refugee claimants.

Saskatchewan did not respond before this article was published.

Meanwhile, Quebec introduced legislation in 2018 excluding asylum seekers from receiving the child care subsidy. A legal challenge against that legislation began proceedings in April.

It should be noted that refugee claimants and other individuals with precarious immigrant status are also excluded from accessing the Canada Child Benefit, a tax-free monthly payment made to eligible families with children under 18-years-old, according to a Toronto Star op-ed.

Since 2017, Toronto has been designated a sanctuary city, meaning that immigration status, in theory, should be no reason to deny anyone municipal services.

But according to the city’s website, while anyone can access the city’s child care facilities, immigration status is still required to be eligible for subsidies.

Update: Since publication of this story, Children’s Services sent a clarification saying, “Toronto Children’s Services does not consider immigration status (including refugee and refugee claimant status) to determine eligibility for child care fee subsidy.”

After pointing out to them that their website says otherwise, the department said, “Staff will review relevant pages and charts on toronto.ca to ensure information is displayed accurately.”

Nevertheless, the fact remains that “the cost of child care is prohibitive to many families, even those with full legal status,” according to a

2007 report co-authored by Bernhard looking at the effect of precarious immigration status on children.

Read the full report here: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/27226031_Living_with_Precarious... [3]

"This lack of access to services for children placed a strain on mothers with uncertain status who were often hesitant to even find out whether they were eligible for various services," the report says.

Camila Casas Hernandez arrived in Toronto with her husband and daughter from Cuba in 2014 as permanent residents. But even with status, she says in Spanish, and even when she was able to get the subsidy, it was difficult to access child care centres due to lack of spaces.

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Hernandez, a graduate student in the master of arts program in early childhood studies at Toronto Metropolitan University, says she was a psychologist back home.

But here, she was compelled to accept minimum wage jobs due to the well-documented difficulty immigrants have in "This lack of access to services for children placed a strain on mothers with uncertain status who were often hesitant to even find out whether they were eligible for various services," the report says.

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According to a Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA) report, "Alberta, Ontario, Manitoba, and P.E.I. are counting their low-income subsidy system as part, or all, of their targets." Read the full report here: [https://policyalternatives.ca/gamechanger?](https://policyalternatives.ca/gamechanger?mc_cid=b3f4e8040c&mc_eid=48b0a...)

[mc_cid=b3f4e8040c&mc_eid=48b0a...](https://policyalternatives.ca/gamechanger?mc_cid=b3f4e8040c&mc_eid=48b0a...) [4]

But while this will see a reduction in out-of-pocket expenses for some parents, the report states, "overall, parent fees generally will not be reduced. This would have the effect of driving down the average for all parents to meet the 50 per cent federal target but this fee reduction will not extend to parents who aren't eligible for subsidies."

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In the end, says Bernhard, it's those with precarious status who will suffer the most, as they are not only excluded from receiving the subsidies, but often feel stigmatized for trying to access services, fearing "that maybe it'll be held against (their immigration process) one day."

Region: Canada [5]

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Source URL (modified on 13 Dec 2023): <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/22/05/immigration-status-can-exclude-parents-childcare-support>

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