

# Quebec asylum seekers navigate legal battle for child care benefits, while other provinces forge ahead <sup>[1]</sup>

Quebec asylum seekers battle suspended child care payments, while other provinces take steps to welcome those seeking refuge from war and persecution.

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Access online <sup>[2]</sup>

### Excerpts

While a five-year debate rumbles on in Quebec's Court of Appeal over resuming child care benefits for asylum seekers, the rest of Canada is continuing to make preparations to welcome more people who are fleeing conflict and war back home.

In 2018, under Quebec's former Liberal government of Philippe Couillard, the Ministry of Families decided to exclude asylum seekers from receiving subsidized child care benefits, by applying a new interpretation of Section 3 of the Reduced Contribution Regulation of the Educational Childcare Act.

In May 2019, asylum seeker Bijou Kanyinda took the current Quebec government, headed by François Legault's Coalition Avenir Québec (CAQ), to court, saying the Liberals' interpretation of the regulation was discriminatory in terms of gender, social status, and ethnic origin. Kanyinda has partnered with the Comité Accès Garderie (Daycare Access Committee), whose lawyers are arguing their case based on the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and the Quebec Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms.

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While deliberation continues, Entre Parents, a neighbourhood house in Montreal, has stepped in: Their free childcare service is provided four days a week, even if a single child can only attend once a week, so that more children of asylum seekers can benefit.

"Lack of access to public child care can have an impact on access to work, as well as child development and Francization," Lucian Nica, immigration coordinator at Entre Parents, said in French, referring to the process of promoting and ensuring the use of the French language.

The Institut de la statistique du Québec reports that as of 2017, eight percent of children hadn't attended child care programs, leading to poorer communication skills and general knowledge than their peers.

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"Work is freedom," said a Haitian asylum seeker, anonymously, who added that there was always someone back home to look after her family. "I can't afford the luxury of leaving my children in daycare."

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Meanwhile, over in neighbouring Ontario, the federal government recently opened a new reception centre worth \$7 million in the Peel Region, to process and house asylum claimants and provide them key services needed for them on arrival.

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Miller said the feds were also redistributing protected persons to other locations to which they consented to go, shortening the time required for them to receive vital services, and organising work permits for them so that vital labour shortages could be filled.

With the centre likely to be close to Toronto's Pearson Airport, often the first point of arrival for people seeking safe harbour in Ontario, the opening of the new centre was also welcomed by Toronto Mayor Olivia Chow.

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In Saskatchewan, subsidized child care is available for asylum seekers as defined in the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (Canada), as detailed in Saskatchewan’s Child Care Regulations 2015, provided they have been granted Permanent Resident status, and are either employed, seeking employment, engaged in business, enrolled in education or training, or are receiving pre-employment services.

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Meanwhile, in British Columbia, following the introduction of ChildCareBC in 2018, all families participating in licensed child care programs can save up to \$900 a month through the Child Care Fee Reduction Initiative (CCFRI).

“All families in British Columbia, including asylum seekers, who access licensed child care at participating facilities are eligible to receive the CCFRI,” a spokesperson from the Ministry of Child Care and Education said by email. “There are also no eligibility requirements for families to access affordable child care at a \$10 a day ChildCareBC centre.

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People in Nova Scotia who earn under \$35,000 per annum are eligible for the maximum child care subsidy. To be eligible for the subsidy, they may also not have more than \$50,000 in savings and/or liquid assets.

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