

# Care for every child [CL] <sup>[1]</sup>

**Author:** Ross, Jen

**Source:** Toronto Star

**Format:** Article

**Publication Date:** 27 May 2006

## AVAILABILITY

See text below.

EXCERPTS It's 6:30 a.m. in the tiny agricultural town of Colina, an hour north of Chile's capital, as Patricia Cofre tiptoes into the bedroom to wake her three youngest children. Crowded together onto a slim foam mattress on the floor, their sleeping quarters reflect their poverty. ... "Every day, it's the same battle," she says with a sigh, struggling to put on his diaper. Like a growing number of Chilean women, this 36-year-old mother of four is just scraping by on her own. But a sweeping child-care policy being pushed by Chile's newly elected president holds hope that Cofre and others like her will have a chance to raise their children with dignity. Recently separated from an abusive husband and with no family support or money for child care, Cofre hadn't been able to work steadily outside the home. She and her oldest daughter would take turns caring for the young ones. That meant Cofre had an income only four weeks out of every six. But today, she is working full-time, thanks to a new daycare centre that just opened in Colina. The Rayen preschool centre is one of the first free government daycares under President Michelle Bachelet's ambitious program to ultimately provide free, universal preschool care from infancy through age 4. ... At a time when Canada is torn about how to move forward on national child care, this developing country at the other end of the world has the goal of opening 800 free government-run daycares by year's end, with more planned until the service is universal. Bachelet has already created 20,000 new spaces for public, preschool education & tripling the existing coverage. ... Bachelet is Chile's first female president and women across the country have been celebrating her child-care initiative as a sign their needs are being taken into account in the formulation of public policy. ... Bachelet's program also contemplates investments in infrastructure, nutritional programs, learning materials and training for early childhood educators. She has said one of her most important goals by the end of her four-year term is to reduce the gap in opportunities for Chile's children. That gap can be dramatic: as a region, the UN considers Latin America to have the most unequal income distribution in the world. But Chile has advantages. It is one of Latin America's major economic and political success stories, managing to reduce the poverty rate to 18 per cent from 40 per cent over the past 20 years. Today, the country is awash in funds from exports of copper, fruit and other commodities. But despite experiencing an economic boom over the last decade, the gap between the burgeoning upper middle classes and the poor is still vast. Bachelet's campaign centres on reducing such inequality, with a pragmatic socialism that embraces notions of free trade and free-market capitalism, yet seeks to widen the social security net. In the run-up to the vote, she said Chile should align itself with such "like-minded nations" as Canada, Australia and Europe. ... Only 37 per cent of Chilean women work outside the home, the lowest rate in Latin America and less than half the female participation rate in Canada. Bachelet is prioritizing care for the poor & especially poor women, who have a harder time entering the workforce. Since her election on Jan. 15, Bachelet has repeated her "woman's word" to deliver on promises geared towards women. These include a new anti-discrimination law, job training programs for mothers and an executive with gender parity. On March 11, she swore in the first cabinet in the entire hemisphere that is 50 per cent female & a UN goal. Only a handful of European countries can say as much. How Bachelet's ambitious programs will be financed is the question. Analysts warn that Chile is still a developing country. With a per-capita-income of roughly \$8,400, it doesn't have the tax base needed to finance such plans. "We're already seeing that the government wants to maintain a tax burden that is high for Chileans, considering our economic development," says Rodrigo Castro, an economist with the conservative think-tank Liberty and Development (Libertad y Desarrollo). "We all know taxes are an economic burden, with a negative impact on investment and jobs." Still, Castro is a proponent of universal child care. He's one of 14 experts recently named to a commission convened by Bachelet to report on how best to implement her universal preschool care plan. ... Bachelet knows she carries the hopes of many women on her shoulders. And with a presidential term recently shortened to four years, she'll have less time than ever to implement her ambitious plans. - reprinted from the Toronto Star

**Region:** Latin America and the Caribbean <sup>[2]</sup>

**Tags:** spaces <sup>[3]</sup>

**Source URL (modified on 27 Jan 2022):** <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/06/06/care-every-child-cl>

**Links**

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/06/06/care-every-child-cl> [2] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/region/latin-america-and-caribbean> [3] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/spaces>