

Live-in caregivers made to work longer to earn status ^[1]

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EXCERPTS:

For decades, the country's caregiver program has brought in au pairs and nannies from abroad to care for tens of thousands of Canadian children and the elderly.

The program has also provided an opportunity for caregivers, mostly women, to permanently settle in Canada with their own families once they fulfill their nanny requirements.

But declining admissions for new nannies and longer waits for permanent resident status for those already here is fuelling speculation the program may be in jeopardy.

The number of caregivers accepted into Canada declined last year to 8,400, after peaking at 13,800 in 2007.

And the acceptance rate last year fell to 57 per cent compared to 73 per cent five years ago, according to the Association of Caregiver and Nanny Agencies Canada.

It now takes 18 months to bring a caregiver to Canada - up from 12 months in 2008, said association president Manuela Gruber Hersch.

"The government is slowly killing the program, making it unreasonably financially risky for families to use the program," she said. "There are families who can't find child care. Our aging population needs caregivers," said Hersch, whose group represents 35 caregiver agencies. "There is a need for this program."

As families wait longer for new nannies to arrive, caregivers already working here complain they are made to work longer to fill in the gap.

Caregivers are obliged to work as a live-in nanny for a minimum of two years in Canada before they can apply to become a permanent resident. While waiting for their new status, they receive an open permit entitling them to work in other fields.

However, caregivers complain they now wait 18 months - compared to 6 to 8 months a year ago - to get an open work permit while their immigration application is in process.

The longer it takes, the longer they are banned from working in other occupations.

Immigration Minister Jason Kenney also announced a plan this month to reduce the number of caregivers granted permanent status to 9,000 in 2012, down from 16,000 this year. Caregivers say a lengthy queue now means it will take longer to bring over their spouses and children.

Filipina nurse Ruby Primero, who came to Canada in 2008 as a caregiver, is eager to have her three sons and husband join her.

But the 40-year-old is also anxious to get her immigrant status after passing her Ontario nursing exam. She must be a permanent resident in order to become licensed as a registered practical nurse.

"I have two jobs waiting for me as soon as I get my licence. But right now, all I can do is continue to work as a nanny," said Primero, who filed her residency application more than a year ago and is still waiting for an open permit.

-reprinted from the Toronto Star

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