

A ROADMAP TO JUSTICE

ACTION IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

PART I – IMMIGRATION



Centre for
Refugee Children

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Introduction

Unaccompanied and separated children (UASC) face unique challenges navigating Canada's immigration and settlement systems. These youth often arrive without family, community support, or clear guidance, leaving them vulnerable to prolonged uncertainty, legal complexities, and emotional and mental distress.

To ensure UASC in Ontario have timely access to qualified mentorship, access to critical information, and individualized support throughout their immigration and settlement process, **A Roadmap to Justice** was developed. By identifying existing supports and proposing ways to provide better coordination across sectors, as well as working to ensure significant changes to Canada's immigration system and surrounding social service systems, this project seeks to better respond to the circumstances and realities of UASC and youth.

Through the active engagement of youth-led initiatives, community partnerships, and collaboration with policymakers, A Roadmap to Justice aims **to dismantle systemic barriers while building a supportive network for refugee children and youth**. This Action Implementation Plan outlines the strategic steps necessary to operationalize the recommendations and insights gained from two years of research, interviews, focus groups, data collection and the collection of lived refugee children and youth experiences. It serves as a blueprint to achieve lasting, systemic change by fostering collaboration across sectors, increasing access to resources, and creating a more inclusive and supportive framework for refugee children and youth.

About a Roadmap to Justice

The Vision

To create a responsive and equitable immigration and settlement system in Ontario that empowers UASC and youth to navigate their journey with confidence, dignity, and comprehensive support. Through mentorship, access to critical information, and tailored services, we envision a system that not only addresses the immediate needs of refugee minors but also ensures their long-term well-being, mental health, and successful integration into Canadian society.

The Mission

To advocate for systemic reforms in Canada's immigration and settlement systems while providing UASC in Ontario with timely access to mentorship, critical information, and individualized support.

Key Guiding Principles

Youth-Centered Approach: Prioritizing the voices, experiences, and needs of UASC and youth to guide every aspect of the project.

Collaboration & Partnership: Working with community organizations, policymakers, legal professionals, and social service providers to develop integrated and comprehensive solutions

Equity & Inclusion: Addressing systemic barriers and ensuring that all UASC, regardless of background or circumstances, receive the support they need to succeed.

Trauma-Informed Practices: Embedding sensitivity, compassion, and understanding into every interaction and process to minimize re-traumatization and foster safety.

Accessibility & Transparency: Ensuring that all UASC have access to clear, multilingual information and resources to make informed decisions throughout their immigration and settlement journey.

Sustainability & Accountability: Advocating for systemic changes that support future UASC by building capacity, allocating resources, and fostering collaboration, while committing to measurable outcomes, regular evaluation, and adaptive strategies to ensure continuous improvement in services.

Implementing the Roadmap to Justice Project



Strategic Steps

1 Capacity Building

- Equip service providers and professionals with tools and training to better support UASC, focusing on cultural competency and trauma-informed care.
 - Build awareness of UASC-specific challenges within the legal and social service sectors.
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2 Collaborative Program Rollout

- Launch mentorship and support networks that connect youth with experienced support who understand the immigration process.
 - Develop centralized resources that consolidate critical information for UASC to help them navigate legal processes and settlement options.
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3 Policy and Systemic Advocacy

- Work closely with policymakers to ensure the immigration system reflects the realities and needs of UASC.
 - Advocate for policy changes to improve access to immigration, legal, housing, and mental health services.
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4 Community Engagement

- Involve youth voices in designing programs to ensure the solutions remain relevant and effective.
 - Partner with grassroots organizations, schools, and settlement services to establish a cohesive cross-sectoral support network.
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5 Monitoring and Adjustment

- Conduct regular reviews to identify gaps and adjust implementation strategies to ensure long-term sustainability and success.

Implementing the Roadmap to Justice Project



Ingredients for Successful Implementation

Cross-Sector Collaboration:

- Strong partnerships across government, community organizations, and service providers will drive change. A collaborative approach ensures services are aligned and avoids duplication.
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Flexibility and Adaptability:

- Recognize the diversity of UASC experiences by tailoring programs to meet individual needs, with room for adjustments as the project progresses.
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Clear Communication Channels:

- Maintain open dialogue among stakeholders, ensuring everyone involved understands their role and the project's goals.

Youth Empowerment:

- Place unaccompanied children and youth at the center of decision-making to ensure programs genuinely reflect their lived experiences.
-

Sufficient Resources:

- Secure funding and allocate resources strategically to sustain the project and scale initiatives where necessary.
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Commitment to Equity:

- Address systemic biases and barriers to create a more equitable environment for UASC across all sectors.

Implementing the Roadmap to Justice Project



Organization Structure

1 Leadership Team

- **Project Manager & Coordinator:** Responsible for overseeing all aspects of the project and ensuring its success.
 - **Youth Leadership Committee (YLC):** Youth with lived experiences to provide feedback and insights to guide the direction of the project.
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2 Implementation Teams

- **Program Coordination Team:** Leads the development and delivery of mentorship, legal access, and settlement programs.
 - **Research and Evaluation Team:** Measures the project's impact and identifies opportunities for continuous improvement.
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3 Advisory Partners

- Include experts from legal organizations, community serving organizations, mental health services, and immigration authorities to advise on best practices and policy reform.
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4 Stakeholder Network

- Leverage a network of community groups, shelters, schools, and policymakers to ensure comprehensive support for UASC.
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5 Accountability Structures

- Conduct regular reviews to identify gaps and adjust implementation strategies to ensure long-term sustainability and success.

Outcome

01 Optimizing Information Accessibility



What do we want to achieve?

Based on the insights and experiences shared by UASC and youth, it is evident that they face significant challenges in understanding their rights, navigating immigration and legal processes, and accessing support due to the lack of tailored, accessible, and comprehensive information.

Despite the support provided by social workers, lawyers, and designated representatives, many minors struggle to navigate the overwhelming volume of information and numerous requirements they must comprehend and adhere to. To address these challenges, the project aims to improve the flow of information at critical stages of the immigration process by enhancing communication channels and tailoring resources to meet their unique needs.

Short-Term Goals (0-1 year)

1. Expand Accessible Resources: Collaborate with existing organizations (ex. COSTI, YMCA and other large-scale settlement organizations), to enhance the accessibility and reach of their information materials by adapting them to meet the specific needs of unaccompanied refugee children and youth and in a simpler language that this demographic can understand.

2. Improve Brochures at Points of Entry: Pilot revised brochures at one or two key Points of Entry in collaboration with immigration bodies, such as IRCC. Ideally, these brochures will include QR codes for multilingual access and tailored information on minors' rights, the refugee claim process, and immediate support options. Feedback from the pilot will guide adjustments and scaling.

3. Leverage social media for Youth-Friendly Communication: Continue to utilize social media platforms to share key updates in youth-friendly formats. Work with partners, including Legal Aid Ontario and IRCC, to co-create and/or circulate content that provides vital information about rights, services, and immigration processes in an accessible and engaging way.

Medium-Term Goals (1-3 years)

1. Proactive Referral Systems: Integrate referral systems into existing helplines and online platforms to improve access to essential social support, including healthcare, food banks, and shelters. This approach leverages established services, ensuring unaccompanied minors have straightforward pathways to these critical supports upon arrival.

2. Information Access at Points of Entry: Enhance the availability of legal and settlement support information at key ports-of-entry and immigration offices by implementing multilingual resources, QR codes, and active referral contacts. Collaborate with immigration authorities and other partners working at these locations to ensure that unaccompanied minors have clear guidance on connecting with shelters, legal aid, and social services as soon as they arrive.

Long-Term Goals (3-5 years)

1. Deploy Social Support Workers at Points of Entry: Collaborate with existing social service organizations to advocate for the presence of child- and youth-serving settlement and social workers at key ports-of-entry and immigration offices. These workers will help unaccompanied children and youth understand legal processes, clarify immigration terminology in eligibility interviews, ensure their rights are respected and connect them with essential front-end resources. The project will focus on identifying key locations and working with partners, such as settlement agencies and legal organizations, to ensure minors receive immediate guidance and support during their arrival.

2. Enhance Digital Access to Support Services: Work with existing digital platforms to improve accessibility to immigration resources, shelter information, and legal guidance for unaccompanied minors. Partner with organizations like IRCC and service providers to integrate a centralized Info Hub or links to resources within existing apps or websites, ensuring youth can easily find the support they need without creating redundant technology.

3. Strengthen Service Responsiveness and Communication: Advocate for improved communication practices within existing support services to ensure timely responses to inquiries from unaccompanied minors and youth. This includes working with legal aid providers, shelters, and community organizations to streamline referral pathways, set clear response time expectations, and establish proactive follow-ups for urgent cases.

Objective

The objective is to enhance information channels for unaccompanied children and youth by ensuring essential details are accessible, straightforward, and easy to understand. This includes simplifying communication to help minors confidently navigate legal processes, access necessary support services, and make informed decisions throughout their immigration journey.



Targets

- **Culturally Tailored Resource Guides:** Ensure that culturally and linguistically tailored resource guides are available at designated key locations including ports-of-entry and immigration offices in Ontario by the end of Year 1, through collaboration with existing organizations.
- **Revised Brochures with Multilingual QR Codes:** Pilot and distribute revised brochures, equipped with multilingual QR codes and tailored content on refugee rights and support services, at selected Points of Entry in Ontario by the end of Year 1. This pilot phase will inform broader scaling based on feedback.
- **Robust Social Media Engagement:** Establish a dynamic social media campaign in collaboration with stakeholders such as Legal Aid Ontario and IRCC, aimed at disseminating vital information about rights and services in a youth-friendly format. The campaign will focus on sustained reach and active engagement across multiple platforms throughout the first year.
- **Integrated Referral System:** Develop and implement a streamlined referral system by integrating existing helplines and service platforms at key community centers and social service agencies. This system will ensure that refugee minors have consistent access to essential support services and will be operational by the end of Year 1.
- **Advocate for dedicated support at ports-of-entry and immigration offices** by collaborating with settlement and legal aid organizations to provide guidance for unaccompanied minors during eligibility interviews. The goal is to have structured support in place by Year 3.

- **Enhance digital access to resources** by working with existing digital platforms to integrate an Info Hub, ensuring youth can easily navigate immigration, shelter, and legal support services.
- **Work with service providers to improve response times**, aiming for a 24-hour callback rate for inquiries and requests for support by the end of Year 2, ensuring timely assistance without requiring direct project monitoring of all service interactions.



Current Progress

In Ontario, unaccompanied minors and youth going through the immigration process have access to a range of resources, though many are not specifically designed for their needs. The government provides information through the IRCC website and at ports-of-entry, but it is often too complicated for younger audiences. Organizations like the YMCA Immigrant Services offer settlement programs that include youth-specific support, while the Canadian Council for Refugees (CCR) works to protect refugee rights and shares helpful resources across Canada, including Ontario. Digital tools such as the Welcome to Canada Guide are available too, though they mainly provide general guidance rather than focusing on the challenges faced by unaccompanied children and youth. Social workers at shelters also play a key role by offering orientation and connecting minors to legal aid, and some provinces provide helplines for general inquiries. Even with these efforts, there is still a need for more accessible and youth-friendly communication to better address their unique challenges.



How Will We Measure Performance?

1. Surveys and Feedback from Children and Youth

Timeline: Conduct periodic surveys after the deployment of any new resources or tools, then annually or upon the completion of their immigration process.

2. Usage Metrics for Brochures and Digital Tools

Timeline: Review distribution numbers and QR code scan data quarterly to monitor reach and engagement.

3. Social Media Analytics

Timeline: Analyze engagement metrics (likes, shares, comments, and clicks) monthly to assess the effectiveness of outreach campaigns.

4. Referral System Tracking

Timeline: Monitor the number of successful referrals made through partnerships biannually.

5. Feedback from Social Service Workers at Ports-of-Entry

Timeline: Collect and evaluate period feedback from frontline workers after the deployment of any new resources or tools, and at regular intervals.

6. Callback System Efficiency Reports

Timeline: Analyze response time and resolution rates quarterly, starting 6-months post-implementation.

7. Mobile App User Data Analysis

Timeline: Review active user statistics and feedback through app analytics monthly, starting immediately and on an ongoing basis after launch.

8. Port-of-Entry Referral Usage Reports

Timeline: Review active user statistics and feedback through app analytics monthly, starting immediately and on an ongoing basis after launch.

9. Stakeholder Feedback (e.g., IRCC, IRB, and Support Services)

Timeline: Conduct structured feedback sessions with stakeholders annually to refine services based on their insights and observations.

10. Focus Groups with Refugee Youth

Timeline: Organize focus groups on an annual basis to develop in-depth qualitative feedback.



Who are the partners/stakeholders?



Internal Partners

- Centre for Refugee Children
- Canadian Council for Refugees (CCR)
- Ontario Coalition of Service Providers
- FCJ Refugee Centre
- Youth and Children Organizations



External Partners

- Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC)
- Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA)
- Children's Aid Society (CAS)
- Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB)

Outcome



02 Welcoming and Supportive Environments at Ports-of-Entry

What do we want to achieve?

While Canada prides itself on a fair and humanitarian immigration system, experiences shared by unaccompanied children and youth at Ports-of-Entry and immigration offices highlight significant gaps in support. For many, initial interactions with immigration authorities are defining moments that shape their trust in the system and their adjustment to life in Ontario.

Findings from our project show that 3 out of 5 unaccompanied minors reported negative experiences, including intimidating questioning, dismissive attitudes, and the absence of advocates, leaving them feeling vulnerable and unsupported when they started their immigration process. The project seeks to address these gaps by implementing trauma-informed, client-centered practices to ensure minors feel valued, respected, and safe as they navigate the immigration process.

Short-Term Goals (0-1 year)

1. Increase Third-Party Support at Ports-of-Entry in Ontario: Collaborate with refugee-focused organizations, such as the Centre for Refugee Children and local NGOs in regions where ports-of-entry exist, to establish the presence of trained advocates or settlement workers at key ports-of-entry. Their role will be to provide immediate guidance, ensure unaccompanied minors understand their rights, and support them during eligibility interviews to promote fair treatment and informed decision-making.

2. Enhance Access to Clear Legal Process Information: Develop and distribute simplified, multilingual materials outlining the child/youth's rights during refugee claim process, as well as information about essential resources such as access to healthcare and housing. These materials will be designed to ensure unaccompanied minors receive clear, accessible explanations of the steps involved and know how to seek support effectively.

Medium-Term Goals (1-3 years)

1. Strengthen Collaboration Between Immigration Authorities and Service Providers:

Facilitate partnerships between immigration authorities and refugee service organizations to improve coordination in supporting unaccompanied minors at ports-of-entry and immigration offices. This will include regular meetings, information-sharing, and clear referral pathways to ensure minors receive consistent and timely support.

2. Provide Training on Trauma-Informed Approaches: Work with legal, child welfare and social service organizations to develop training sessions for frontline immigration officers on trauma-informed practices. These sessions will focus on effective communication strategies, recognizing signs of distress, and fostering an empathetic approach when working with vulnerable minors and youth.

3. Improve the Eligibility Interview Experience for Unaccompanied Minors:

Advocate for adjustments to the port of entry eligibility interview process that instead of immediate eligibility interviews with uniformed officials upon arrival, schedule appointments in less formal and child-friendly settings to create a more supportive and approachable environment to give minors time to process what is going on and to provide an opportunity for them to receive information and support.

Long-Term Goals (3-5 years)

1. Develop a Standardized Framework for Supporting Unaccompanied Minors:

Work with government agencies, legal service providers, and refugee organizations to establish a consistent framework that ensures unaccompanied minors receive advocacy and support at all major ports-of-entry and immigration offices. This framework will define clear roles for advocates, outline best practices, and standardize procedures to create a more predictable and supportive experience for minors arriving in Ontario on their own.

Objective

The objective is to ensure unaccompanied minors feel supported and informed at Points of Entry by providing access to advocates, fostering collaboration with service providers, and implementing trauma-informed practices.



Targets

- **Deploy third-party advocates or service providers at select high-traffic ports-of-entry and immigration offices** to support unaccompanied minors during initial interactions, with a goal of assisting 90% of minors requiring this support within the first year of implementation.
- **Make available culturally and linguistically accessible legal guidance materials** at the ports-of-entry and immigration offices outlining the refugee process, rights, and available resources.
- **Facilitate collaboration between immigration authorities and service providers** by organizing at least two stakeholder meetings to improve coordination and advocacy at POEs.
- **Develop training sessions and materials for frontline immigration officers on trauma-informed practices** to enhance their ability to interact with vulnerable children and youth in a supportive manner.
- **Pilot adjustments to the eligibility interview process**, including scheduling interviews in more child-friendly settings at 2-3 high volume ports-of-entry in Ontario.
- **Institute clear communication protocols and guidelines** across agencies to create a standardized framework for welcoming unaccompanied minors, reducing fear and confusion in the immigration process.



Current Progress

Progress toward fostering trauma-informed practices and supportive environments for unaccompanied minors at Canadian points of entry is still in development. While advocacy groups like the Canadian Council for Refugees (CCR) highlight the need for trauma-sensitive approaches in immigration procedures, there is no standardized training in place for immigration officers that addresses the unique needs of unaccompanied minors.

Systemic and consistent implementation of measures remains an area requiring substantial progress. These gaps underscore the urgent need for action, as outlined in our project's goals.



How Will We Measure Performance?

1. Feedback from Children and Youth

Action: Conduct surveys or interviews with minors about their experiences at ports-of-entry.

Timeline: Surveys are to be conducted on an annual basis when implementation begins over the next 5 years to assess changes in experience and perceptions.

2. Support Organization Feedback

Action: Gather feedback from third-party service providers (e.g., CAS, NGOs at the ports-of-entry) on the support provided to children and youth.

Timeline: Gather feedback quarterly for the first 2 years and then biannually thereafter to assess the consistency and effectiveness of support systems.

3. Training Completion & Effectiveness

Action: Track immigration officers' completion of trauma-informed training and assess their application of these practices through feedback mechanisms.

Timeline: Complete training for initial officers within the first year after it is developed and offered, followed by ongoing training for new officers annually.

4. Collaboration Success:

Action: Measure the number and effectiveness of collaborations with community organizations and service providers to support children and youth at ports-of-entry and immigration offices in Ontario.

Timeline: Initial partnerships are to be established within the first year, with an evaluation of collaboration success every 6 months for the first 2 years and annually thereafter.



Who are the partners/stakeholders?



Internal Partners

- Centre for Refugee Children (CRC)
- Children's Aid Society (CAS)
- FCJ Refugee Centre



External Partners

- Canadian Council for Refugees (CCR)
- Local Community Organizations (e.g., Refugee Centers, Immigrant Youth and minors serving organizations)
- Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB)
- Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA)

Outcome

03 Empowering Proactive Designated Representatives



What do we want to achieve?

The goal is to empower designated representatives (DRs) to provide consistent, effective advocacy and support for unaccompanied minors throughout their entire immigration process. According to subsection 167[2] of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA), minors under 18 or those unable to appreciate the nature of proceedings must have a DR appointed for proceedings before the Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB). The action implementation plan aims to ensure that DRs are well-equipped, motivated, and actively engaged in supporting minors, with an emphasis on their critical role in safeguarding the best interests of the child.

By empowering DRs with the right knowledge and resources, we aim to improve the experience for minors navigating the immigration system, identify and reduce associated settlement risks such as homelessness and health issues, and ensure they have the support needed to feel confident and secure throughout the process.

Short-Term Goals (0-1 year)

- 1. Continued DR Support:** Advocate for minors who turn 18 to retain access to designated representatives (DRs) until the completion of their refugee claim process. This will ensure continuity of support during their transition to adulthood, allowing them to navigate the legal system effectively without removing support they have relied on thus far.
- 2. Enhancing UASC Awareness:** Equip DRs with clear, accessible materials to educate unaccompanied and separated children (UASC) on their rights and responsibilities, and the DR's role in the immigration process. This will empower minors to make informed decisions and actively engage in their cases.

3. Regular Communication with Children and Youth: Establish guidelines encouraging DRs to provide consistent updates to minors about their case progress. This will create a reliable support system, reducing uncertainty and ensuring minors remain engaged and informed throughout the process.

Medium-Term Goals (1-3 years)

1. Ensure DR Access During Key Proceedings: Advocate for the consistent presence of designated representatives or trained support persons during interviews and hearings for all unaccompanied minors. This will provide emotional support and guidance, fostering a safer and more supportive environment during critical immigration processes.

2. Advocate for Expanded Recognition of DRs: Push for formal acknowledgment of designated representatives or child representatives across Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) and Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), aligning their role with the existing recognition at the Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB). This will ensure unaccompanied minors receive consistent support throughout their interactions with all immigration bodies.

3. Develop Training Programs for DRs: Implement comprehensive training programs focusing on trauma-informed care, procedural knowledge, and best practices for assisting minors in the immigration system. This will ensure DRs are better equipped to support minors at different stages of their cases.

4. Strengthen Feedback Mechanisms for DRs: Establish structured channels for designated representatives to provide regular feedback to service organizations. This will help identify challenges faced by minors, improve service delivery, and ensure ongoing adaptation to their evolving needs.

Long-Term Goals (3-5 years)

1. Shift DR Responsibilities to Specialized Organizations: Advocate for the transition of Designated Representative (DR) roles from volunteers to specialized organizations, such as the Centre for Refugee Children, which can employ trained staff to serve as DRs where needed, and can also support community members or relatives who are taking on the DR role for a child. This will enhance consistency, quality, and accountability in supporting minors through the immigration process. While our project can advocate for this shift, implementation would require collaboration with the IRB and other key stakeholders.

2. Establish Long-Term Funding and Support Structures for DR Programs: Work towards securing sustainable funding sources to ensure the long-term availability of DR support in Ontario. This includes advocating for adequate compensation, professional development opportunities, and scalable program structures. While our project can highlight the need for funding, government agencies and philanthropic organizations would play a key role in securing financial resources and prioritizing this support for children and youth navigating the immigration system.

Objective

To ensure that designated representatives (DRs) are effectively supported and equipped to serve as consistent, informed, and reliable advocates for unaccompanied minors throughout their immigration journey. By empowering DRs, the aim is to ensure that minors' legal, emotional, and procedural needs are met while navigating the complexities of the immigration system, thus safeguarding their rights and improving their overall experience within the system.



Targets

- **Enhanced Training:** Provide comprehensive training programs to designated representatives to ensure they have the skills and knowledge needed to support minors in various situations, such as legal, educational, and healthcare settings.
- **Increased Representation:** Increase the number of designated representatives from under-represented groups to ensure a diverse and inclusive workforce that can better understand and address the needs of minors from different backgrounds.
- **Improved Support Systems:** Develop and implement support systems, such as mentorship programs and professional networks, to help designated representatives navigate challenges and share best practices.
- **Policy Advocacy:** Advocate for policies and regulations that protect the rights and well-being of minors, ensuring that designated representatives have the authority and resources to act in their best interests.

- **Data Collection and Analysis:** Collect and analyze data on the effectiveness of designated representatives in supporting minors, using this information to identify areas for improvement and measure progress. This may include surveys and focus groups for children and youth, as well as feedback from DRs, legal counsel and other service providers.
- **Community Engagement:** Engage with communities and stakeholders to raise awareness about the role of designated representatives and the importance of supporting minors in various settings



Current Progress

Programs like the Centre for Refugee Children's (CRC) Child Representative Program provide specialized training and support to representatives working with refugee minors. These representatives help children and youth navigate the immigration process from their arrival in Canada to the completion of their refugee claims.

The Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB) has implemented a child rights framework and a guideline for decision-makers that emphasizes the best interests of the child and the child's right to participation. This framework ensures that minors' views are considered in all matters affecting them, taking into account their age and maturity.



How Will We Measure Performance?

1. Recognition of DRs Across Immigration Bodies

Action: Track progress in policy updates and agreements recognizing DRs by CBSA and IRCC. This can include monitoring formal acknowledgments, integration in processes, and meeting records.

Timeline: Review and assess progress annually, with initial benchmarks set within the first year of project implementation.

2. Training and Capacity Building for DRs

Action: Measure the number of DRs who complete comprehensive training sessions, including trauma-informed care and immigration processes. Collect feedback from participants through post-training evaluations.

Timeline: Training completion rates and feedback will be evaluated quarterly in the first year and semi-annually afterward.

3. Feedback and Communication Systems

Action: Implement a feedback mechanism for DRs to report issues faced by minors and their own challenges in fulfilling responsibilities. Assess the frequency and quality of feedback received.

Timeline: Implement a feedback mechanism for DRs to report issues faced by minors and their own challenges in fulfilling responsibilities. Assess the frequency and quality of feedback received.

4. Retention of DRs for Minors Turning 18

Action: Monitor the percentage of minors who request to retain their DRs after turning 18 and collect qualitative data through follow-ups on their experience.

Timeline: Track retention rates and conduct minor interviews within 6 months of their 18th birthday. Annual reviews of retention rates will be conducted over the next 3 years.

5. Case Support for Minors

Action: Measure the percentage of unaccompanied minors who have consistent access to DRs at key immigration milestones. Conduct regular surveys with minors to assess their experience with DR support.

Timeline: Initial surveys conducted within 6 months of the project start, followed by semi-annual surveys for 3 years to evaluate improvements.



Who are the partners/stakeholders?

> Internal Partners

- Centre for Refugee Children (CRC)
- FCJ Refugee Centre

> External Partners

- Other Service Organizations
- Service providers in Legal and Child Welfare Sectors
- Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB)
- Canada Border Service Agency (CBSA)
- Immigration, Refugee, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC)



Outcome

04 Simplified Eligibility Interviews



What do we want to achieve?

Simplifying refugee eligibility interviews for unaccompanied minors is essential to ensure their comprehension and comfort during the refugee claim process. Research indicates that traditional eligibility interviews can exacerbate psychological stress in traumatized individuals, including children.

To mitigate this, it's recommended to delay conducting eligibility interviews immediately upon a minor's arrival at the port-of-entry. Allowing a few days or weeks before the interview can help prevent re-traumatization, giving minors time to acclimate and receive the necessary support.

Additionally, adjusting interview questions to be more understandable, removing unnecessary legal jargon and providing clear explanations of important terms can further aid in reducing stress and improving the accuracy of the information gathered. Implementing these measures fosters a more supportive environment, enabling minors to engage more effectively in the refugee claim process and safeguarding their mental well-being.

Short-Term Goals (0-1 year)

1. Revise Interview Questionnaires: Advocate for adjusting the language in minors eligibility interview questions to be child-friendly, minimizing legal jargon and incorporating clear explanations of complex terms. While our project can provide recommendations based on feedback from minors and DRs, implementing these changes would require collaboration with the immigration authorities who are conducting these examinations.

2. Provide Initial Orientation Sessions for Minors: Develop and implement short orientation sessions for unaccompanied minors within their first week in Canada. These sessions will introduce them to the refugee process, their rights, and expectations for interviews, helping build trust and reduce anxiety. Our project can directly lead this initiative in collaboration with other service providers.

Medium-Term Goals (1-3 years)

1. Train CBSA Officers in Trauma-Informed Practices: Advocate for mandatory trauma-informed training for CBSA officers, emphasizing empathetic communication and minimizing re-traumatization. While our project can provide research, case studies, and recommendations, the actual implementation would require collaboration with CBSA leadership and policymakers.

2. Implement Third-Party Support During Interviews: Work towards securing third-party advocates (social workers, legal representatives) during eligibility interviews. Our project can advocate for policy changes while piloting smaller-scale initiatives, such as increasing the presence of trained support personnel at specific ports-of-entry.

3. Advocate for Child-Friendly Interview Settings: Promote systemic shifts towards less intimidating interview spaces. While our project cannot directly redesign government facilities, we can collect feedback from minors and designated representatives to make recommendations to CBSA and IRB, ensuring interviews occur in more supportive environments.

Long-Term Goals (3-5 years)

1. Advocate for a Deferral Period Before Interviews: Work with policymakers and advocacy organizations to recommend a structured waiting period between arrival and eligibility interviews. While our project cannot legislate policies, we can collect data, present case studies, and collaborate with legal and refugee rights organizations to push for this change.

2. Formal Recognition of Third-Party Representatives (Collaboration & Advocacy): Support efforts to integrate third-party representatives (advocates, designated representatives, or social workers) into immigration policies. This would require engagement with IRCC, CBSA, and the IRB, as well as collaboration with legal professionals and human rights organizations to ensure minors have continuous, recognized support.

3. Develop a Feedback Mechanism for Continuous Improvement: Establish a structured process for minors and designated representatives to share their experiences and recommend improvements. Our project can lead this effort by setting up feedback collection systems, analyzing trends, and sharing findings with relevant stakeholders to inform policy and procedural changes.

Objective

The objective is to create a child-centered refugee eligibility interview process that prioritizes the well-being, rights, and unique needs of minors. By simplifying interview language, incorporating trauma-informed practices, and implementing structured support systems, the goal is to minimize re-traumatization, ensure minors understand the process, and empower them to navigate their immigration journey with confidence and fairness. This includes advocating for systemic changes and policies that establish a standardized, humane approach to eligibility interviews across all immigration touchpoints.



Targets

- Finalize and distribute standardized, child-friendly interview guidelines for use by CBSA, IRB, and IRCC officers across Ontario by the end of the second year, ensuring consistent practices provincewide.
- Develop and make available comprehensive trauma-informed and child-centered interview training for immigration officers in Ontario by the end of the third year, ensuring that these training modules are accessible for officers to complete and enhance the treatment of minors during eligibility interviews.
- Establish a policy change to delay eligibility interviews for minors until 7–14 days after their arrival by the end of the third year, providing time for initial stabilization and trauma recovery.
- Implement an evaluation framework to track the effectiveness of simplified interviews, with pilot assessments conducted quarterly in the first year and comprehensive reviews every six months thereafter.
- Collaborate with federal policymakers to enact a Canada-wide policy mandating simplified and child-friendly eligibility interviews, aiming for policy implementation within five years.



Current Progress

Canada has made progress in supporting unaccompanied minors during the refugee eligibility process, with the Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB) implementing guidelines to ensure the best interests of minors are prioritized. The Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) has a directive to limit the detention of unaccompanied minors and house them in appropriate conditions. However, challenges persist, including the lack of a cohesive policy addressing minors' protection, resulting in inconsistencies across regions. While the IRB has child-friendly guidelines, other immigration bodies like CBSA and Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) lack similar protocols, highlighting the need for more comprehensive, child-sensitive practices throughout the immigration process.



How Will We Measure Performance?

1. Minors' Feedback on Interview Experience

Action: Conduct surveys or interviews with minors about their experiences with eligibility interviews, focusing on the clarity of questions, whether they felt supported, and how well they understood the process.

Timeline: Surveys to be conducted bi-annually after implementation of simplified eligibility interviews to assess any improvements or challenges.

2. Feedback from Designated Representatives (DRs)

Action: Gather feedback from DRs regarding the new interview process, including the level of support provided to minors, any challenges faced, and suggestions for further improvement.

Timeline: Collect feedback from DRs and child support persons within 6 months of implementation, with follow-up surveys every 6 months to gauge ongoing challenges and solutions.

3. Training and Capacity Building for DRs

Action: Measure the number of DRs who complete comprehensive training sessions, including trauma-informed care and immigration processes. Collect feedback from participants through post-training evaluations.

Timeline: Training completion rates and feedback will be evaluated quarterly in the first year and semi-annually afterward.

4. Analysis of Interview Process

Action: Conduct surveys or interviews with minors about their experiences with eligibility interviews, focusing on the clarity of questions, whether they felt supported, and how well they understood the process.

Timeline: Surveys to be conducted bi-annually after implementation of simplified eligibility interviews to assess any improvements or challenges.

5. Stakeholder Engagement

Action: Hold regular discussions with stakeholders, including immigration bodies (IRB, CBSA, and IRCC) and service providers, to gather feedback on the effectiveness of the simplified eligibility interviews and any required changes.

Timeline: Initial stakeholder discussions are to be held 6 months after implementation, with subsequent discussions every year to monitor progress and make adjustments as needed.



Who are the partners/stakeholders?

> Internal Partners

- Centre for Refugee Children (CRC)
- FCJ Refugee Centre
- Canadian Council for Refugees (CCR)

> External Partners

- Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA)
- Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB)
- Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC)
- Children's Aid Society (CAS)
- Local Community Organizations (e.g., Refugee Centers, Immigrant Youth and minors serving organizations)



Outcome

05

Streamlined Access to Immigration Documents



What do we want to achieve?

Unaccompanied minors face significant challenges in navigating the complex immigration and refugee processes, requiring timely access and support to receive and/or complete critical documents, such as the Basis of Claim (BOC), Refugee ID, work permits, study permits, Permanent Residency (PR), and family reunification applications. To address these needs, the action plan proposes extending initial timelines for completing the BOC form and simplifying the extension process to ensure accessibility. It also emphasizes implementing standardized procedures to track the progress of refugee IDs, work permits, and other related documents, while enforcing accountability measures to address delays. Additionally, interim electronic work permits will be developed to enable minors and youth to access employment opportunities while awaiting their official work permits, supporting their integration into Canadian life.

Short-Term Goals (0-1 year)

1. Advocate for an Extended Basis of Claim (BOC) Timeline: Work with legal experts and advocacy groups to push for an extension of the BOC deadline for unaccompanied minors, taking into account their unique circumstances and vulnerabilities. Simplify the process for requesting extensions to make it more accessible and less bureaucratic. Unaccompanied minors often face challenges in providing complete and accurate information for their BOC due to trauma, language barriers, or a lack of familiarity with the process. Providing an extended timeline helps reduce the pressure on minors and ensures their claims are accurately and comprehensively represented. This extended timeline should be built-in to the IRB's practices so that minor refugee claimants are able to access this extended time without needing to make arguments or applications about why more time is needed.

2. Monitor Work Permit and Refugee ID Progress: Establish a system for monitoring the status of work permit and refugee ID applications to identify and address delays quickly. Timely access to work permits and refugee IDs is crucial for minors' integration and survival. Tracking the progress ensures that these applications are processed within reasonable timelines and helps address any issues that may arise.

Medium-Term Goals (1-3 years)

1. Advocate for Interim Electronic Work Permits: Work with legal and employment advocacy groups to push for the introduction of temporary electronic work permits for youth (and other refugee claimants) awaiting official versions. Many youth face delays in receiving their official work permits. Interim work permits will help them gain employment sooner, supporting their financial independence and integration into Canadian society. Since direct policy changes are beyond our immediate control, advocacy efforts will focus on presenting data on processing delays and their impact on youth employment.

Long-Term Goals (3-5 years)

1. Advocate for Permanent Policy Changes for Prioritizing Minors' Documentation (Influence & Systemic Change): Push for legislative reforms that mandate faster processing timelines for children and youth's key documents (work permits, Refugee IDs). Efforts will focus on mobilizing stakeholders, presenting case studies, and influencing policy discussions at the federal level.

Objective

The objective is to ensure unaccompanied children and youth have timely and simplified access to essential documentation, such as the Basis of Claim (BOC) form, refugee IDs, and work and study permits. By extending initial timelines, simplifying extension requests, introducing interim solutions like electronic work permits, and establishing consistent monitoring systems, this section aims to reduce delays, alleviate administrative burdens, and create a more efficient and equitable process. These measures prioritize the unique needs of minors, supporting their successful integration and safeguarding their rights throughout the immigration process.



Targets

- Ensure that all unaccompanied minor refugee claimants receive access extended timelines for completing the Basis of Claim (BOC) form within six months of implementation, simplifying extension application process and building this extension into the practices at the Immigration and Refugee Board.
- Ensure Refugee Claimant Protection Document IDs are issued to 95% of eligible unaccompanied minors within four weeks of their application submission by the end of the second year. Develop interim electronic work permits to be accessible within 48 hours of approval for minors over 18 (or over 16 if possible), with a goal to implement this system within two years.
- Monitor to ensure frontline immigration officers are trained on any updated documentation processes being implemented and that the unique needs of unaccompanied minors are recognized by officers carrying out these new processes to ensure consistent support and awareness.



Current Progress

Canada has made efforts to improve unaccompanied minors' access to essential immigration documents. The IRB has established guidelines to ensure that proceedings involving minors are conducted with their best interests in mind, aiming to make processes more accessible and understandable for young claimants. Despite these initiatives, challenges persist. Unaccompanied minors often encounter delays in obtaining necessary documentation, which can hinder their ability to access services, education, and employment opportunities. The complexity of the immigration system and the lack of child-specific protocols in certain agencies contribute to these difficulties. Advocacy groups continue to call for more streamlined and child-friendly procedures to ensure that unaccompanied minors receive timely access to the documents essential for their integration and well-being.



How Will We Measure Performance?

1. Timeliness of Documentation Delivery

Action: Monitor and evaluate the average processing time for issuing Basis of Claim (BOC) forms, refugee IDs, and work permits for unaccompanied minors.

Timeline: Begin tracking within the first six months of implementation and release annual reports over the next three years.

2. Success Rate of Extension Requests

Action: Analyze data on the number of extension requests for completing the BOC form that are granted. Evaluate the ease of the request process through feedback from minors and their representatives.

Timeline: Conduct evaluations at six-month intervals during the first year and annually thereafter.

3. Interim Work Permit Utilization

Action: Track the issuance and usage of interim electronic work permits for youth over 18, assessing their impact on accessing immediate employment opportunities.

Timeline: Track the issuance and usage of interim electronic work permits for youth over 18, assessing their impact on accessing immediate employment opportunities.

4. Feedback from Minors and Stakeholders

Action: Feedback from Minors and Stakeholders

Timeline: Conduct focus groups and surveys twice annually for the first 3 years.

5. Reduction in Documentation Delays

Action: Measure the percentage reduction in processing delays for refugee IDs and work permits by comparing data from the start of the initiative with annual reports.

Timeline: Assess progress annually for the first 5 years.

6. Policy Compliance and Accountability

Action: Conduct regular reviews of agency compliance with updated policies and accountability measures for tracking documentation progress.

Timeline: Perform compliance reviews annually for five years, starting six months after policy implementation.



Who are the partners/stakeholders?

> Internal Partners

- Centre for Refugee Children (CRC)
- FCJ Refugee Centre

> External Partners

- Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB)
- Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA)
- Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC)
- Legal Clinics
- Settlement Service Organizations



**Introduction of
temporary electronic
work permit**



**Extended Basis of
Claim Timeline**



**Reduction in
documentation delay**



Tracking the timeline of documentation delivery

Outcome

06 Streamlined Legal Aid System



What do we want to achieve?

A streamlined legal aid system is vital to ensure unaccompanied minors and vulnerable youth can access quality legal representation throughout their immigration process without facing financial burdens or inadequate support. Current challenges include a lack of awareness among participants about the limitations on the number of hours covered by Legal Aid Ontario, often leaving them to bear additional legal costs. Moreover, there is no dedicated system to connect minors with lawyers who have specialized training in working with children, resulting in inconsistent support and outcomes. By creating a specialized list of qualified lawyers, extending Legal Aid certificates to be open-ended and adjustable, and ensuring youth are educated about their legal aid eligibility and entitlements, the system can better serve the needs of this vulnerable population. Additionally, addressing these systemic gaps will alleviate stress, improve case outcomes, and enhance trust in the legal process.

Short-Term Goals (0-1 year)

- 1. Raise Awareness of Legal Aid Entitlements:** Conduct workshops and informational sessions and develop resources to ensure unaccompanied minors and youth understand their rights to legal aid, including the current limitations of hour-based certificates. This empowers them to make informed decisions about their representation.
- 2. Specialized Legal Aid Training:** Partner with legal organizations and law societies to provide trauma-informed training sessions for legal aid lawyers on working with child refugees and migrants. Since formal training programs require external cooperation, the project's role would be to facilitate and advocate for their implementation.

3. Establish a Specialized Legal Aid List: Create a vetted list of legal aid lawyers who specialize in supporting children and youth, ensuring they possess the necessary training and experience to handle these cases effectively.

Medium-Term Goals (1-3 years)

1. Improve Accessibility to Legal Aid Services (Collaboration & Advocacy): Work with Legal Aid Ontario to simplify the application process and develop child-friendly materials explaining eligibility, required documentation, and step-by-step guidance.

2. Monitor & Evaluate Lawyer Performance: Advocate for the creation and/or updating of a feedback system where children and youth can share experiences about their legal representation, ensuring transparency and continuous improvement. The feasibility of this system will depend on legal aid and advocacy groups' willingness to implement such measures and to adjust current measures to ensure they are accessible for children and youth.

3. Expand Legal Aid Coverage: Advocate for extended legal aid support to cover appeals and other essential immigration-related services for minors. Since policy changes take time, efforts will focus on gathering data and presenting recommendations to decision-makers on what this expansion of legal support will focus on and entail.

Long-Term Goals (3-5 years)

1. Adopt Open Legal Aid Certificates : Push for systemic changes to shift from limited-hour certificates to flexible legal aid coverage based on case complexity. This requires sustained advocacy efforts in partnership with the legal sector, government and NGOs/human rights organizations.

2. Increase Legal Aid Funding: Work with stakeholders to advocate for increased government funding to expand legal aid services for unaccompanied minors and youth. This will require coordinated lobbying efforts and presenting evidence of service gaps and their impact.

Objective

The objective is to create a streamlined and equitable legal aid system that meets the unique needs of unaccompanied minors and refugee youth. By addressing limitations such as restricted hour-based certificates, a lack of specialized legal representation, and administrative barriers, this section aims to ensure that minors have access to high-quality, flexible, and comprehensive legal aid services. These improvements will empower minors to navigate the complexities of their immigration cases effectively while safeguarding their rights and well-being.

Targets

- With Legal Aid Ontario, develop a roster within the immigration bar of legal aid lawyers specializing in supporting children and refugee youth by the end of Year 2, with an aim of 30-40 lawyers in the province qualified to be included on this list. Ensure all lawyers on the list have undergone mandatory training in trauma-informed care within the immigration law context.
- Increase awareness to encourage more children and youth in immigration proceedings to apply for legal aid, in collaboration with Legal Aid Ontario and refugee-serving organizations. Receive statistics from Legal Aid Ontario on an annual basis on the number of child and youth applicants who are applying for immigration certificates, and the percentage who are eligible/approved for legal aid.
- Advocate for policy reforms to transition from limited-hour legal aid certificates to an open certificate system within 3 years. Facilitate bi-annual stakeholder meetings with Legal Aid Ontario, community organizations, and policymakers to review progress.
- Implement a tracking system to assess the average hours used by minors on legal aid cases within the first year of implementation. Use the data to identify gaps and propose adjustments in service delivery by Year 2.
- With Legal Aid Ontario, recruit and train 30 additional lawyers to specialize in refugee minors and youth cases within 2 years of the creation of the initial roster to reduce case backlogs and improve the quality of representation.



Current Progress

In Ontario, unaccompanied minors seeking asylum face significant challenges in accessing adequate legal aid. Many are unaware of their entitlements, including the limitations on the number of hours covered by Legal Aid Ontario, leading to unexpected personal expenses. Additionally, there is a shortage of lawyers with specialized training in child advocacy and immigration law, resulting in inconsistent support for these vulnerable individuals. While organizations like the FCJ Refugee Centre and Pro Bono Ontario offer some assistance, the overall system lacks a coordinated approach to effectively address the unique needs of unaccompanied minors and youth.



How Will We Measure Performance?

1. Minors' Awareness of Legal Aid Entitlements

Action: Conduct surveys or focus groups with minors to assess their awareness of legal aid entitlements, including hour limitations and lawyer options. g formal acknowledgments, integration in processes, and meeting records.

Timeline: Initial surveys within the first 6 months of implementation, followed by bi-annual assessments to gauge improvement over 3 years.

2. Specialized Legal Aid Lawyer List

Action: Track the creation and utilization of a specialized list of lawyers with training in child advocacy and immigration law. Monitor the number of minors connected with lawyers from this list

Timeline: Report bi-annually during the first year after implementation, followed by annual reviews.

3. Flexibility in Legal Aid Hours

Action: Monitor the policy advocacy process for the adoption of open legal aid certificates. Measure progress through government engagement milestones, including meetings, pilot initiatives, and eventual policy changes.

Timeline: Quarterly updates for the first 2 years, transitioning to semi-annual updates as policy adoption progresses.

4. Client Case Completion Times

Action: Record the average time taken to resolve minors' immigration cases with the support of flexible legal aid hours. Compare this with baseline data from cases completed under the previous system.

Timeline: Annual reviews starting 12 months post-implementation.

5. Lawyer Satisfaction and Competency

Action: Collect feedback from lawyers on the adequacy of the hours provided, their ability to support minors effectively, and any gaps in the system.

Timeline: Annual surveys for the first 5 years.

6. Reduction in Additional Costs for Minors

Action: Track the percentage of minors who report needing to cover additional legal costs due to insufficient legal aid support.

Timeline: Bi-annual data collection for the first 3 years, followed by annual reviews.

7. Legal Aid Utilization Rates

Action: Measure the increase in legal aid certificate utilization by minors and track case outcomes linked to legal aid interventions.

Timeline: Ongoing tracking with bi-annual reporting



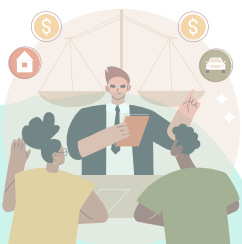
Who are the partners/stakeholders?

> Internal Partners

- Centre for Refugee Children (CRC)
- FCJ Refugee Centre
- Legal Aid Ontario
- Community Legal Clinics

> External Partners

- Settlement Organizations
- Canadian Bar Association
- Child Advocacy Groups
- Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB)



Outcome

07

Enhanced Legal Representation and Adjudication



What do we want to achieve?

While Canada's immigration system emphasizes fairness and accessibility, unaccompanied minors often face challenges in their interactions with legal representatives and Board Members. Participants reported issues such as lawyers being inexperienced in working with minors, displaying unprofessional behavior, and lacking clear communication. Some minors were misled about legal aid coverage, pressured to pay additional fees, or faced discrimination and bias, further complicating their cases. Language barriers and limited accessibility to lawyers added to their difficulties, leaving many feelings unsupported during critical moments.

Similarly, Board Members often fail to create a supportive environment. Minors described hearings as harsh and intimidating, with lengthy sessions, repetitive questioning, and insufficient breaks. Language misunderstandings with interpreters frequently led to unfair treatment, compounding the stress of these proceedings. To address these systemic barriers, our project aims to promote trauma-informed practices, child-friendly hearings, and equitable legal representation. Our goals are outlined below.

Short-Term Goals (0-1 year)

- 1. Legal Representation Awareness:** Provide UASC, refugee youth, and DRs with clear information on legal representation rights, including retainers, allocated hours, and scope of representation, through resource materials and partnerships with Legal Aid Ontario and legal organizations.
- 2. Strengthened Communication Protocols:** Advocate for improved communication standards between lawyers, DRs, and minors to ensure consistent updates and transparency throughout the legal process.

3. Linguistic Consideration in Hearings: Promote awareness among board members about linguistic differences in translation, ensuring fair interpretation without assumptions of omission or alteration.

4. Break Advocacy During Hearings: Encourage legal representatives to request regular breaks during hearings, recognizing that minors may hesitate to advocate for themselves due to intimidation or fear.

Medium-Term Goals (1-3 years)

1. Enhancing Hearing Environments: Advocate for policies that promote child-friendly and supportive hearing settings to reduce intimidation and stress for minors. For virtual hearings, this may include developing spaces where children and youth can attend their hearings that are comfortable, and trauma informed.

2. Bias Awareness & Reduction Training: Work with relevant stakeholders including Legal Aid Ontario and the IRB to implement training for Board Members and legal professionals on recognizing and addressing implicit bias, particularly with a focus on children and youth.

3. Standardized Trauma-Informed Practices: Promote the adoption of trauma-informed approaches among lawyers and board members to improve sensitivity and responsiveness when working with unaccompanied minors.

4. Empathy in Legal Proceedings: Encourage a culture of understanding within court and tribunal settings, ensuring Board Members engage with children and youth with fairness and avoid judgmental behavior.

Long-Term Goals (3-5 years)

1. Accountability for Bias-Free Legal Processes: Establish mechanisms to monitor and address bias in legal and hearing procedures, ensuring fairness and equity for minors.

2. Sustained Advocacy for Systemic Reform Engage in ongoing policy advocacy to improve legal and court processes, prioritizing the rights and voices of unaccompanied minors in decision-making.

Objective

To establish a fair, empathetic, and accessible legal process for unaccompanied minors by ensuring transparent and professional legal representation, fostering child-friendly hearing environments, and promoting sensitivity and understanding among legal professionals and board members toward minors' unique needs and experiences.

Targets

- Ensure 100% of unaccompanied minors have guaranteed access to legal representation within five years.
- In partnership with Legal Aid Ontario and the IRB, provide and make accessible specialized training to immigration lawyers and Board Members on trauma-informed approaches and child sensitivity within three years.
- Build-upon a system of procedural accommodations for child refugee claimants, including mandatory breaks and shorter scheduled hearing sessions, to be developed and implemented into practice within three years.
- Reduce interpreter-related misunderstandings during hearings by implementing revised protocols and training for Board Members and interpreters within two years.
- Within the training resources for legal professionals, emphasize the importance that legal retainer agreements for minors are reviewed and approved by their designated representatives or an adult caregiver.
- Conduct regular audits to ensure compliance with clear communication protocols, targeting 95% satisfaction among minors and their representatives within four years.
- Observe a reduction in negative feedback from children and youth in regard to their experiences at the IRB with the aforementioned changes being implemented, with an aim in a 25% reduction in negative feedback from year 1 to year 3 of the project.



Current Progress

In Ontario, unaccompanied minors in the immigration system are generally provided with legal representation through lawyers, to advocate on their behalf during Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB) hearings. The IRB has measures in place to reduce stress for minors, such as informal hearing settings and accommodations for testimony; however, challenges remain.



How Will We Measure Performance?

1. Implement Regular Feedback Mechanisms

Action: Conduct surveys with minors, designated representatives, and legal professionals to assess communication, legal support, and satisfaction.

Timeline: Annually, starting within the first six months of implementation.

2. Introduce Child-Centered Training for Lawyers and Board Members

Action: Provide training on trauma-informed approaches, language support, and bias reduction for lawyers and board members.

Timeline: Begin training programs within the first year, with ongoing refreshers every two years.

3. Establish Transparent Legal Agreements

Action: Ensure lawyers provide clear retainer agreements to minors and their designated representatives, outlining allocated hours and expectations.

Timeline: Immediate implementation, with regular reviews and updates annually.

4. Advocate for Child-Friendly Practices in Hearings

Action: Push for regular breaks, and shorter session durations, and ensure minors' comfort during hearings.

Timeline: Advocacy efforts to begin within the first year, with progress reviews every six months.

5. Monitor Board Member Sensitivity During Hearings

Action: Implement protocols to reduce bias from board members and ensure empathy, especially when working with interpreters.

Timeline: Immediate implementation, with evaluations every six months.

6. Monitor Case Outcomes and Efficiency

Action: Track case outcomes, processing times, and satisfaction to measure the effectiveness of changes.

Timeline: Ongoing, with annual evaluations of case outcomes and efficiency.



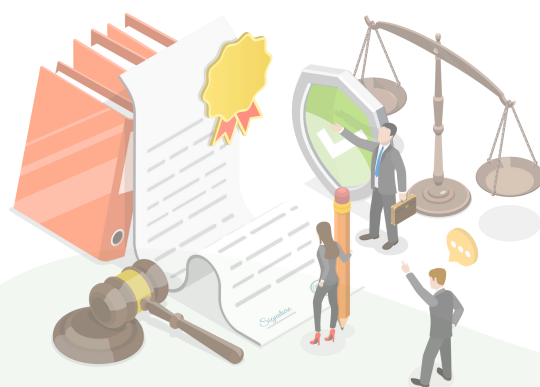
Who are the partners/stakeholders?

> Internal Partners

- Centre for Refugee Children (CRC)
- Legal Aid Ontario
- Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (IRB)
- Legal Professionals' Associations
- Law Offices in Ontario
- FCJ Refugee Centre

> External Partners

- Canadian Council for Refugees (CCR)
- Immigrant and Refugee Support Organizations
- Children's Legal Aid and Advocacy Organizations



Outcome

08

Hearings



What do we want to achieve?

Children and youth navigating immigration hearings often face a process that is overwhelming, complex, and emotionally distressing. Current approaches, including in-person hearings, can exacerbate feelings of anxiety and re-traumatization, especially for those who have fled violence or other traumatic experiences. To address these challenges, it is crucial to offer more compassionate hearing options tailored to the needs of minors. Paper-based or file review hearings can provide a less intimidating and more youth-friendly alternative, ensuring fairness without compounding trauma.

Unaccompanied minors also face significant challenges during immigration hearings, often due to their separation from their parents or legal guardians. This separation can affect their mental health and make it harder for them to present their cases effectively. The lack of expedited hearings and the absence of a policy for unaccompanied and asylum-seeking children worsen these difficulties, leading to prolonged uncertainty and stress.

Additionally, an option to extend the role of designated representatives (DRs) for minors who turn 18 during their immigration proceedings should be made available, maintaining essential support through this transitional period. Equally important is the approach taken by Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB) members during hearings; they must exhibit patience and understanding when working with minors, creating a supportive environment for youth to share their stories and engage meaningfully in their cases. By adopting these changes, hearing can become more equitable and considerate of the unique vulnerabilities of young asylum seekers.

Short-Term Goals (0-1 year)

- 1. Raise Awareness:** Advocate to policymakers, stakeholders, and the public about the emotional and psychological challenges minors face during immigration proceedings to build support for reforms.
- 2. Refine Guidelines for Vulnerable Groups:** Strengthen the IRB's guidelines for unaccompanied minors, ensuring they address documentation challenges, trauma, and dependency on third-party support.
- 3. Stakeholder Engagements:** Collaborate with legal experts, child welfare organizations, and immigration advocates to promote trauma-informed practices and align resources for reform.
- 4. Data-Driven Advocacy:** Collect case studies and evidence to highlight the benefits of paper-based hearings and extended DR support, reinforcing proposals for system-wide implementation.
- 5. Child-Friendly Document Guidance:** Develop accessible, multilingual guides with visual aids to help minors understand document submission requirements and receive real-time assistance.

Medium-Term Goals (1-3 years)

- 1. Trauma-Informed Training for Legal Professionals:** Advocate for training programs for immigration officials and legal representatives on trauma-informed practices to improve hearing experiences. Focus on promoting participation and collaboration with existing legal training programs.
- 2. Prioritize File-Review and Evidence-Based Processes for Minors:** Advocate for the prioritization of file-review or evidence-based processes for every minor instead of requiring them to attend an in-person hearing. This would help minimize re-traumatization and ensure that only cases requiring further clarification proceed to a full hearing.
- 3. Child-Friendly Hearing Environment:** Promote best practices for making hearing spaces less intimidating, such as allowing minors to have a trusted support person present and minimizing unnecessary witness testimonies. Rather than mandating hearings, encourage IRB to consider child-friendly accommodations.

4. Advisory Group on Unaccompanied Minors: Advocate for an advisory group or working group to assess best practices for handling minors' claims with feedback from minors and designated representatives.

5. Monitoring and Evaluation: Focus on collecting feedback from minors and DRs to track the effectiveness of implemented measures.

6. Streamlined Processes: Support advocacy efforts to introduce tailored processes, such as short hearings or file-review approaches, but recognize that implementation is ultimately within the jurisdiction of the IRB.

Long-Term Goals (3-5 years)

1. Extend DR Support for Transitioning Minors: Advocate for policy adjustments to mandate all minors turning 18 to retain their Designated Representatives (DRs) until their immigration process is completed, ensuring continuity of support.

2. Standardized File-Review Hearings: Work toward securing formal adoption of paper-based or file-review hearings as a standard option for minors to minimize re-traumatization and streamline processing.

3. Specialized Expertise in Unaccompanied Minors Cases: Advocate for a designated team within the IRB composed of professionals with expertise in child protection, refugee law, and trauma-informed care to work as a task force for unaccompanied minors.

4. Systemic Monitoring & Solutions: Promote ongoing assessment of systemic barriers such as delays, language barriers, and access to services. Support data-driven recommendations for policy adjustments to improve minors' experiences.

5. Sustainable Support Networks: Strengthen collaboration between legal aid, mental health services, and community organizations to ensure ongoing support for minors beyond the immigration process.

6. Child-Centered Immigration System: Advocate for system-wide reforms that embed trauma-informed, child-centric principles into immigration proceedings, ensuring long-term protection and well-being for minors

Objective

The objective of this section is to create a more compassionate, child-centered immigration hearing process that reduces the risk of re-traumatization for minors. This includes introducing options like paper-based hearings, ensuring continuity of support through extended access to Designated Representatives (DRs), and implementing trauma-informed practices among immigration officials and legal representatives. By prioritizing the emotional and psychological well-being of minors, the aim is to foster a system that is fair, supportive, and attuned to the unique needs of children navigating the immigration process.

Targets

- Pilot paper-based/file review hearings for 100-200 minor claimants in immigration proceedings within the first two years, to expand this option to all eligible minors by the end of five years to reduce the risk of re-traumatization.
- Implement policy changes within 2 years to ensure minors who turn 18 have the option to retain access to their DRs until their immigration process concludes. Aim to support 100% of minors who request ongoing support after turning 18 annually through this measure .
- Develop and provide training to IRB staff and legal representatives province-wide within three years on trauma-informed practices to improve their interactions with minors.
- In partnership with the IRB, establish monitoring tools within the first 18 months to assess the effectiveness of paper-based hearings and extended DR support, with annual evaluations and published reports on outcomes.
- Host a series of stakeholder workshops (3-5) within the first year to engage policymakers, child welfare organizations, and legal experts, highlighting the importance of trauma-informed practices and support for minors.
- Secure dedicated funding within two years to ensure every minor in immigration proceedings has access to a Designated Representative throughout their case, including those who turn 18 during the process and request continued support.

- Draft a report in year 3-4 on the impacts of trauma-informed processes and file-review/paper-based refugee claim hearings for minor claimants.
- Develop resources to make available to children and youth on accessing mental health and counselling support, to be provided through their engagement with the IRB and/or legal Aid Ontario to ensure support during a stressful process.
- Implement procedural accommodations into the IRB's guidelines on child refugee claimants to ensure shorter hearings and more supportive environments are provided to children and youth.



Current Progress

In Ontario, efforts are underway to enhance the immigration process for minors. Advocacy groups are promoting the adoption of paper-based hearings to reduce the risk of re-traumatization for minors during immigration proceedings. However, some lawyers may not inform minors about this option, limiting its utilization. Preliminary policy discussions with immigration authorities have begun to address these concerns, aiming to create a more supportive environment for minors navigating the immigration system. Additionally, the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada has implemented guidelines to ensure that children under 12 are not required to attend hearings unless necessary and that Designated Representatives are appointed to assist minors under 18 during proceedings. Despite these measures, challenges remain in fully implementing trauma-informed practices and ensuring minors are adequately informed of their rights and options.

The current progress in handling refugee claims, particularly for unaccompanied minors, is reflected in two main procedures: the File-Review Process and the Short-Hearing Process.

The **File-Review Process** is used for straightforward claims with clear evidence. Claims deemed suitable for this process are reviewed without a hearing, allowing for quicker decisions. Once selected, claimants or their counsel are notified and must submit any additional documents within 15 days. If the file meets the necessary criteria, a decision can be rendered without a hearing (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada).

The **Short-Hearing Process** applies to claims with one or two simple issues. These hearings are typically completed in two hours. For unaccompanied minors, this process ensures a supportive environment, minimizing stress and duration. Multiple short hearings may be scheduled on the same day for efficiency.



How Will We Measure Performance?

1. Minors' Feedback on Paper-Based Hearings

Action: Conduct surveys or interviews with minors about their experiences with paper-based/ file review hearings to assess their comfort levels and perceived reduction in stress.

Timeline: Surveys will be conducted within the first 12 months of implementation and repeated annually over the next 3 years.

2. Retention of Designated Representatives (DRs)

Action: Monitor the percentage of minors turning 18 who are able to retain their DRs until their immigration cases are resolved (when requested).

Timeline: Quarterly reports will be generated to track compliance, starting immediately after the policy amendment is implemented.

3. Trauma-Informed Training Impact

Action: Evaluate the effectiveness of training programs for immigration officials by assessing their application of trauma-informed practices during hearings.

Timeline: Assessments through direct observation and feedback from minors and DRs will be conducted semi-annually for the first 2 years.

4. Policy Adoption for Paper-Based Hearings

Action: Track the number of minors opting for paper-based hearings as a percentage of eligible cases.

Timeline: Data collection will begin 6 months after introducing the option and will be reviewed bi-annually.

5. Systemic Changes and Advocacy Efforts

Action: Document advocacy outcomes, including the number of policymakers engaged and public endorsements of trauma-informed practices for minors in immigration proceedings.

Timeline: Reports will be published annually, detailing progress on stakeholder engagement and systemic policy changes.

6. Minors' Psychological and Emotional Well-being

Action: Measure improvements in minors' psychological and emotional well-being through post-hearing feedback forms and clinical assessments.

Timeline: Annual reviews will be conducted, starting one year after introducing the new measures.

7. Monitoring and Evaluation Systems

Action: Develop and refine tools to assess the efficiency and effectiveness of implemented policies and training programs.

Timeline: Initial tools will be developed within the first 6 months and updated based on feedback every 2 years.



Who are the partners/stakeholders?

> Internal Partners

- Centre for Refugee Children (CRC)
- FCJ Refugee Centre

> External Partners

- Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB)
- Law firms
- Mental Health Organizations



Outcome

09 Challenges and Opportunities for Improvement in Access to Translators

TRANSLATE



What do we want to achieve?

Access to quality translation services is essential for ensuring that minors and refugees can fully understand and participate in immigration proceedings. However, challenges persist in the availability, quality, and professionalism of interpreters, leading to significant barriers in the legal process. Inconsistent access to translators during critical moments, such as meetings with lawyers and hearings, can lead to misunderstandings that affect the fairness of proceedings. Moreover, instances of unprofessional behaviour by interpreters, such as inadequate translations or inappropriate conduct, further complicate the process. Additionally, board members' impatience and lack of understanding of language nuances contribute to these challenges, potentially leading to the misinterpretation of key information. Addressing these challenges requires improved access to reliable and professional translation services, better communication practices between lawyers and clients, and cultural competency training for immigration authorities and board members to ensure more inclusive and equitable experiences for minors.

By improving these systems, we aim to create a more accessible and supportive environment for minors and non-English-speaking individuals navigating the immigration process.

Short-Term Goals (0-1 year)

1. Guaranteed Access to Translators: Ensure translators are available during critical stages, including initial legal consultations and hearings, to prevent language barriers and delays.

2. Clear Communication of Language Rights: Lawyers must inform clients of their language rights and document their preferences early to prevent miscommunication and ensure timely access to translation services.

3. Interpreter Training on Professional Conduct: Develop accessible training materials for interpreters, emphasizing neutrality, accuracy, and professionalism to improve service quality for minors and non-English speakers.

Medium-Term Goals (1-3 years)

1. Standardized Stakeholder Training: Develop a mandatory training program for immigration officials, lawyers, and decision-makers on language rights, cultural diversity, and best practices for working with interpreters.

2. Interpreter Handbook on Professional Conduct: Help develop a practical guide outlining ethical standards, cultural considerations, and best practices to ensure high-quality and consistent interpretation services.

3. Dialect-Sensitive Interpreter Training: Incorporate dialect differences into interpreter training to enhance translation accuracy and prevent miscommunication in legal and immigration settings.

Long-Term Goals (3-5 years)

1. Legislative Advocacy for Translation Rights: Collaborate with policymakers to establish legal protections ensuring non-English speakers have guaranteed access to quality interpretation throughout the immigration process.

2. Interpreter Certification & Quality Assurance: Implement regular assessments and certification programs to uphold high professional standards among interpreters, ensuring continued accuracy and reliability.

3. Public Awareness & Self-Advocacy Campaigns: Develop outreach initiatives to educate non-English speakers about their language rights and available interpretation services, empowering them to navigate the immigration system with confidence.

Objective

The objective is to improve access to qualified translators and interpreters for non-English-speaking minors and individuals involved in the immigration process. It aims to address the challenges faced by these individuals in understanding legal and immigration proceedings, ensuring they receive fair treatment, and preventing misunderstandings that may arise due to language barriers. This section seeks to establish effective systems, raise awareness about language rights, implement proper training for legal and immigration professionals, and advocate for policies that guarantee consistent and professional translation services at critical points throughout the process. Ultimately, the goal is to enhance communication, foster cultural sensitivity, and ensure that language does not become an obstacle to justice and fair treatment in immigration procedures.

Targets

1. Ensure Immediate Access to Qualified Translators

- **Target:** Guarantee that 100% of minors, legal consultations, and hearings have access to qualified translators at key points (airports, legal consultations, and hearings) within the first year of project implementation. Track through feedback mechanisms and input from refugee and migrant children/youth.
- **Timeline:** Complete by the end of Year 1.

2. Lawyer and Paralegal Training on Language Rights

- **Target:** Ensure that 95% of lawyers and paralegals handling immigration cases for minors are trained on their obligations to inform clients of their language rights and document language preferences at the outset by the end of Year 1.
- **Timeline:** Complete by the end of Year 1.

3. Interpreter Training Materials

- **Target:** Develop and distribute a easy-to-understand resources/handbook for interpreters on professionalism and best practices to 100% of interpreters working in immigration cases with children by the end of Year 1.
- **Timeline:** Complete by the end of Year 1.

4. Training for Immigration Officers, Lawyers, and Interpreters

- **Target:** Provide mandatory training for 100% of immigration officers, lawyers, and interpreters involved with minors in immigration cases on language rights and cultural sensitivity by the end of Year 2.
- **Timeline:** Complete by the end of Year 2.

5. Standardized Interpreter Use Across Immigration and Legal Processes

- **Target:** Achieve province-wide implementation of guaranteed access to certified interpreters for all non-English-speaking minors across immigration and legal processes within 5 years.
- **Timeline:** Complete by the end of Year 2.



Current Progress

In Ontario, efforts are underway to enhance translation and interpretation services for minors involved in immigration proceedings. Organizations such as the Kitchener-Waterloo Multicultural Centre offer certified translation and interpretation services, including over-the-phone and in-person assistance in various languages. Similarly, the New Canadians Centre collaborates with professional agencies like MCIS Language Solutions and LanguageLine Solutions to provide certified interpretation and translation services to clients. Additionally, the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (IRB) maintains an Interpreter Handbook to guide interpreters in providing services during hearings. Despite these initiatives, challenges persist, including inconsistent access to translators during critical moments, unprofessional behaviour from some interpreters, and instances of impatience among board members during hearings. Addressing these issues remains a priority to ensure effective communication and fair treatment for minors in the immigration process.



How Will We Measure Performance?

1. Access to Qualified Translators

Action: Track the availability of qualified translators during critical points, such as at PoEs, legal consultations, and hearings.

Timeline: Collect data on translator access within 3 months of project implementation, with quarterly reports for the first year to ensure consistent availability.

2. Interpreter Professionalism and Training

Action: Evaluate the professionalism of interpreters by conducting periodic assessments, including feedback from minors and legal representatives on interpreter behaviour and performance.

Timeline: Conduct assessments starting 6 months after project launch, with bi-annual evaluations and adjustments based on feedback over the next 2 years.

3. Access to 24/7 Translation Services

Action: Measure the accessibility and efficiency of the 24/7 translation services through user feedback and incident tracking (e.g., missed appointments, delays).

Timeline: Feedback will be collected within 3 months of establishing the service and reviewed quarterly to ensure accessibility.

4. Cultural Sensitivity Training for Immigration Officials and Lawyers

Action: Implement surveys and interviews with immigration officers, lawyers, and interpreters to assess the effectiveness of cultural sensitivity training and its impact on their interaction with minors.

Timeline: Initial surveys will be conducted 6 months post-training, followed by an annual survey to track improvements and identify areas for further development.

5. Handbook for Interpreters

Action: Evaluate the use and effectiveness of interpreter handbooks through feedback from interpreters and legal representatives regarding clarity, usefulness, and ease of implementation.

Timeline: Collect feedback 6 months after handbook distribution and implement revisions based on responses for the first year.

6. Improvements in Interpreter Quality Control

Action: Monitor and collect feedback from minors, lawyers, and immigration officials regarding the quality of interpretation services, focusing on accuracy and professionalism.

Timeline: Feedback will be collected within 6 months after the implementation of quality control measures, with quarterly reviews to assess progress.

7. Awareness Campaigns

Action: Track the reach and effectiveness of awareness campaigns on language rights and available interpreter resources through surveys with non-English-speaking clients.

Timeline: Surveys will be conducted within 6 months of the campaign launch and repeated annually to evaluate shifts in awareness and knowledge.



Who are the partners/stakeholders?

> Internal Partners

- Centre for Refugee Children (CRC)
- Training and Development Teams





> External Partners

- Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB)
- NGOs and Advocacy groups

Action Progress Tracker

Thank you!

Thank you for taking the time to read this report. If you have any questions or would like to discuss our findings further, please don't hesitate to reach out to us.

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