

A ROADMAP TO JUSTICE

ACTION IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

PART II – SETTLEMENT



Centre for
Refugee Children

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Introduction

Unaccompanied and separated children significant challenges not only in navigating Canada's immigration system but also in their settlement journey. Arriving without family, community ties, or a stable support system, these children and youth often struggle with accessing essential services such as housing, education, healthcare, and employment. The lack of coordinated support leaves them vulnerable to social isolation, economic hardship, and long-term instability.

To ensure that UASC in Ontario receive the necessary support to establish a strong foundation in Canada, A Roadmap to Justice was developed. This initiative focuses on identifying existing settlement services, strengthening cross-sector collaboration, and advocating for systemic changes that prioritize the well-being and long-term integration of refugee children and youth. By addressing gaps in access to housing, education, mental health services, and financial support, this project seeks to create a more coordinated and responsive settlement framework.

Through youth-led initiatives, community partnerships, and collaboration with policymakers, A Roadmap to Justice aims to break down systemic barriers and build a holistic support network for refugee children and youth. This Settlement Action Implementation Plan outlines the strategic steps necessary to operationalize key recommendations and insights gathered over two years of research, focus groups, data collection, and firsthand experiences of youth. It serves as a blueprint to drive lasting, systemic change by fostering cross-sector cooperation, expanding access to essential resources, and ensuring that UASC have the tools and support needed to build stable and fulfilling lives in Canada.

About a Roadmap to Justice

The Vision

To build a responsive and equitable settlement system in Ontario that empowers UASC and youth to establish stable, fulfilling lives with confidence and dignity. Through access to safe housing, education, employment opportunities, mental health support, and tailored community services, we envision a system that not only meets the immediate needs of refugee minors but also fosters their long-term well-being, social inclusion, and successful integration into Canadian society.

The Mission

To drive systemic reforms in Canada's settlement system while ensuring that UASC in Ontario have timely access to safe housing, education, mental health services, and community support. By fostering collaboration across sectors, we aim to create a more inclusive, sustainable, and equitable framework that empowers refugee minors to build stable and fulfilling lives in Canada.

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.

Implementing the Roadmap to Justice Project



Strategic Steps

1 Capacity Building

- Train service providers, educators, and housing workers in culturally responsive and trauma-informed care to better support UASC.
 - Raise awareness of UASC-specific settlement challenges within social services, mental health, and education sectors.
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2 Collaborative Program Rollout

- Expand mentorship and peer support networks to help UASC navigate settlement services, housing, and education pathways.
 - 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 with policymakers to improve settlement policies that ensure secure housing, financial assistance, and social inclusion for UASC.
 - Advocate for systemic reforms that remove barriers to long-term residency, work permits, and access to mental health support.
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4 Community Engagement

- Ensure youth leadership in program design to create settlement solutions that align with their lived experiences and needs.
 - Strengthen partnerships with grassroots organizations, schools, and employers to provide holistic support for UASC.
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5 Monitoring and Adjustment

- Implement regular evaluations to assess settlement outcomes and identify service gaps, and adjust strategies based on feedback and emerging needs to ensure sustainable, long-term impact.

Implementing the Roadmap to Justice Project



Ingredients for Successful Implementation

Cross-Sector Collaboration:

- Strong partnerships across government agencies, community organizations, and service providers will drive meaningful change. A coordinated approach ensures that services are aligned, efficient, and avoid duplication.
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Youth Empowerment:

- UASC must be at the center of decision-making. By actively involving them in shaping programs and policies, initiatives will remain relevant, responsive, and reflective of their lived experiences.
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Flexibility and Adaptability:

- Recognizing the diversity of experiences among UASC is essential. Programs must be tailored to meet individual needs while allowing for adjustments as circumstances evolve.
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Sufficient Resources:

- Securing funding and strategically allocating resources is necessary to sustain long-term impact. Financial stability allows for the scaling of initiatives and ensures that critical services remain accessible to UASC.
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Clear Communication Channels:

- Maintaining open and transparent dialogue among all stakeholders is critical. Clear communication ensures that everyone involved understands their role, the project's objectives, and how to work collectively toward shared goals.
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Commitment to Equity:

- Addressing systemic biases and barriers is fundamental to creating an equitable environment for UASC. Every effort must be made to ensure that youth receive fair and just treatment across all sectors, regardless of their background or circumstances.

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

- Use regular progress tracking, feedback loops, and public reporting to ensure transparency and maintain trust with all stakeholders.

Outcome

01

Effective Mentorship and Support



What do we want to achieve?

Mentorship and support are essential pillars in empowering refugee children and youth as they navigate the immigration process and adapt to life in a new country. This section focuses on creating a robust framework that provides continuous, personalized, and culturally sensitive guidance to help young individuals overcome challenges and thrive. By extending age-based transitional support, ensuring consistent caseworker relationships, and introducing peer mentorship programs, we aim to address both immediate and long-term needs. Enhanced access to mental health resources, equitable referral practices, and specialized training for educators and service providers will further ensure that refugee children and youth receive the support they need to build a sense of belonging, achieve their aspirations, and successfully integrate into their communities. This holistic approach seeks to empower them with the tools, knowledge, and emotional backing necessary to navigate their settlement journey with confidence and resilience..

Short-Term Goals (0-1 year)

- 1. Shaping and Applying Effective Mentorship:** Collaborate with refugee youth to identify what constitutes effective mentorship within the immigration system and implement mentorship models informed by their insights. This ensures that unaccompanied and separated children receive personalized, youth-driven support throughout their immigration and settlement journey.
- 2. Implement Age-Based Transitional Supports:** Extend transitional support services to ensure continuity for minors as they transition into youth. This minimizes disruptions during their settlement process and helps them adjust to new challenges more smoothly.

3. Promote Equitable Referral Practices: Encourage cultural organizations to refer refugee children and youth to appropriate support services without discrimination. This guarantees that every child has access to the help they need, regardless of ethnic or racial background.

4. Assign Consistent Caseworkers: Ensure that each child or youth is paired with a dedicated caseworker who provides personalized and continuous support throughout their immigration and settlement process, fostering trust and stability.

5. Introduce Peer Support Workers: Integrate peer support roles within social service organizations to offer relatable guidance, share lived experiences and create a sense of belonging among refugee youth.

6. Mandate Guidance Counselor Training: Implement training programs and/or resources for school counselors to equip them with the skills necessary to support refugee children and youth effectively, with an emphasis on educational pathways and cultural sensitivity.

7. Establish Mentorship Connections Through Support Organizations: Partner with established support organizations to connect refugee children and youth with mentors who share similar career and educational backgrounds, providing tailored guidance and serving as inspiring role models.

Medium-Term Goals (1-3 years)

1. Develop Comprehensive Mentorship Programs: Establish structured initiatives that connect refugee youth with trained mentors who can offer guidance on education, employment, and social integration. These programs will provide clear, ongoing pathways for personal and professional development, ensuring that youth receive tailored, long-term support.

2. Recruit Consistent and Committed Volunteer Mentors: Engage experienced volunteers with a passion for mentorship, ensuring they commit to regular, meaningful interactions with their mentees. This consistent support is essential to build trust and create a stable, nurturing environment for refugee youth..

3. Provide Hope and Forward-Looking Guidance: Equip mentors with specialized tools and training that enable them to inspire hope by sharing personal experiences and actionable strategies. This guidance will empower youth to overcome challenges and work towards their future aspirations.

4. Create Resource Tool Kits for Service Providers: Develop and distribute practical toolkits that outline best practices for mentoring immigrant and refugee youth. These toolkits will support program coordinators and service providers in delivering consistent, effective support across all mentorship initiatives.

5. Establish Monitoring and Evaluation Systems: Implement robust mechanisms to assess the effectiveness of mentorship and support programs. Regular evaluations and feedback will inform data-driven improvements, ensuring that our initiatives remain responsive to the evolving needs of refugee youth.

Long-Term Goals (3-5 years)

1. Institutionalize Mentorship Programs: Integrate proven mentorship models into standard practices within educational institutions and social services, ensuring these support structures become a permanent and sustainable element of the refugee youth settlement process.

2. Expand Support Networks: Broaden the scope and reach of mentorship and support programs to serve a wider demographic of refugee youth across multiple regions, ensuring equitable access to guidance and essential resources.

3. Advocate for Comprehensive Policy Changes: Collaborate with policymakers and stakeholders to reform legal and social service frameworks, mandating comprehensive support systems that systematically address the rights and needs of refugee minors and youth.

4. Foster Community Engagement: Promote active community involvement in supporting refugee youth by building local support networks, enhancing social cohesion, and encouraging inclusive initiatives that empower youth to thrive.

Objective

The objective is to establish a comprehensive and youth-driven approach to mentorship for refugee minors and youth. It aims to identify and implement effective mentorship models that address the unique challenges faced by UASC during their immigration and settlement journey. By incorporating youth feedback, fostering tailored support systems, and advocating for enhanced mentorship opportunities, this section seeks to promote emotional resilience, informed decision-making, and a smoother transition into their new communities.

Targets

- **Conduct semi-annual focus groups and surveys** with refugee youth to gather insights on their experiences with mentorship and support. Use this feedback to refine mentorship models and ensure they meet the evolving needs of UASC.
- **Facilitate mentorship connections** for refugee children and youth in Ontario by the end of the second year. This includes pairing mentees with mentors aligned with their educational and career aspirations.
- **Introduce peer support worker roles** and/or responsibilities at a select social service organization by the third year, ensuring trained individuals with shared lived experiences are available to provide emotional and informational support.
- **Develop and disseminate specialized training and resources** on refugee-specific needs to school boards and school guidance counselors within the first two-three years to enhance their ability to support refugee children and youth in navigating post-secondary education and career pathways.
- **Promote the practice of assigning consistent caseworkers** to refugee children and youth receiving settlement services in Ontario by the second year, by connecting with and providing resources and information to organizations on this subject.

- **Establish and/or include in resources annual awareness campaigns** targeting community organizations to promote inclusive referral practices for refugee minors, eliminating demographic-based barriers.
- **Distribute digital and printed guides** on mentorship and support services tailored for refugee children and youth by the end of the second year, ensuring widespread access to resources.



Current Progress

In Ontario, various initiatives have been established to support refugee children and youth through mentorship and settlement programs. Organizations such as COSTI's Youth Mentoring Program connect young newcomers with community volunteers who offer guidance to develop skills and integrate into Canadian society. The FCJ Refugee Centre's Youth Network provides a platform for migrant and refugee youth aged 14 to 25, facilitating weekly meetings that address barriers to equitable participation in society. Additionally, the YMCA offers mentoring programs focusing on employment readiness, assisting immigrants in job searches, resume building, and interview preparation. Despite these efforts, challenges persist in ensuring consistent and comprehensive support for all refugee children and youth, indicating a need for expanded and sustained mentorship opportunities across the province.



How Will We Measure Performance?

1. Mentorship Connections

Action: Track the number of organizations supporting refugee children and youth through mentors, ensuring they align with educational and career paths.

Timeline: Initial pairing targets to be met by the end of the second year, with ongoing quarterly reviews to assess mentor-mentee engagement and outcomes.

2. Peer Support Worker Program

Action: Monitor the implementation and effectiveness of peer support roles across 20 social service organizations, gathering feedback from minors and youth on the support they receive.

Timeline: Program evaluation after 6 months of operation, with annual follow-up to measure the impact of peer support on youth outcomes.

3. Guidance Counselor Training:

Action: Survey the 1,000 trained school guidance counselors on their ability to support refugee minors, specifically in career and education planning.

Timeline: Conduct post-training evaluations immediately after the first round of training, followed by annual assessments to measure progress and areas for improvement.

4. Consistent Caseworker Assignments:

Action: Collect feedback from refugee minors on their experience with assigned caseworkers, measuring the consistency and quality of support provided.

Timeline: Caseworker assignments to be reviewed annually, with progress assessments on whether minors report feeling supported and understood by their assigned workers.

5. Focus Groups and Surveys::

Action: Conduct semi-annual focus groups and surveys with refugee youth to gather insights on the mentorship programs and their effectiveness in supporting their settlement journey.

Timeline: The first round of surveys and focus groups to take place six months after program initiation, with ongoing semi-annual sessions to track improvements and changes in youth perceptions and experiences.

6. Awareness Campaign Effectiveness:

Action: Measure the reach and impact of awareness campaigns through participant surveys, tracking how many cultural organizations refer refugee minors to support services.

Timeline: Assess awareness campaign outcomes every six months to ensure consistent engagement from community organizations and improved referral practices.

7. Information Accessibility:

Action: Monitor the distribution and usage of mentorship and support guides, tracking how many youth engage with the resources through feedback and direct outreach.

Timeline: Initial distribution of guides by the end of year one, followed by annual assessments to gauge resource accessibility and effectiveness in providing support.



Who are the partners/stakeholders?

> Internal Partners

- Youth Engagement and Outreach Teams
- Refugee Youth and Children Organizations
- Youth Led Committees
- Peer Support Networks

> External Partners

- Schools and Educational Institutions
- Guidance Counselors and Social Workers
- Volunteer Mentors
- Mental Health Service Providers
- Cultural Organizations



Outcome

02 Ensure Safe & Secure Refugee Shelters



What do we want to achieve?

The objective of ensuring safe and secure shelter for refugee children and youth is to provide an environment that meets the physical, emotional, and psychological needs of UASC during their settlement process. Our findings emphasize the importance of creating specialized housing solutions and providing refugee children and youth with more agency in housing selection. This includes advocating for the creation of small-scale refugee homes for youth tailored to their specific needs and ensuring access to emergency shelter spaces regardless of their immigration status. Furthermore, our research highlights the necessity for shelters to employ staff with lived experience, as they can offer more effective support to youth navigating the immigration system.

We also identified the need for more youth shelters, particularly those designed to support refugee youth. In addition, shelter structures should be modified to resemble group living environments, ensuring that refugee shelters are not only safe but also conducive to community building. Lastly, support organizations must be adequately resourced to help youth transition from shelters, ensuring access to housing, education, employment, and essential services as they move forward with their lives in Canada.

Short-Term Goals (0-1 year)

1. Advocate for Dedicated Youth Shelters: Collaborate with government agencies, refugee organizations, and advocacy groups to increase the availability of youth shelters and homes specifically designed for refugee youth such as Anchor House, Matthew House, or refugee-specific programs operated by Covenant House and Sojourn House, ensuring youth have safe environments upon arrival.

2. Enhance Emergency Shelter Accessibility: 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. Empower Social Workers in Housing Placement: Provide social workers with the necessary resources and training to proactively assess and secure safe housing placements and neighborhoods for refugee children and youth, ensuring effective and secure transitions into stable, longer-term environments.

4. Promote Hiring of Experienced Shelter Staff: Advocate for the recruitment of shelter workers with lived experience and expertise in the refugee process and immigration system and establish training programs that equip those with no lived experience to address the unique challenges faced by refugee children and youth.

5. Integrate Comprehensive Support Services: Collaborate with mental health and legal professionals to embed essential services—such as counseling, legal assistance, and educational support—within shelters, ensuring a holistic support system for refugee minors from the moment they arrive.

Medium-Term Goals (1-3 years)

1. Expand Youth Shelter Capacity: Advocate for an increase in the number of dedicated shelters for refugee youth by advocating for new shelter spaces and coordinating with local governments. This will enhance the capacity to provide appropriate housing and community for all unaccompanied minors in need.

2. Establish Refugee Houses (Small-Scale Homes): Develop tailored housing options, such as refugee group homes, in collaboration with child welfare organizations and refugee-serving organizations. These homes will provide a home-like, stable environment that better meets the unique needs of refugee children and youth.

3. Empower Housing Choice for Minors: Advocate for policies that empower refugee children and youth to participate in selecting housing options that best meet their individual needs. Engage with Children's Aid Societies (CAS) and other relevant bodies to ensure that youth have a voice in their placement process.

4. Monitor and Evaluate Shelter Conditions: Advocate for implementation of regular monitoring systems to assess shelter safety and service standards by partnering with local authorities and community organizations. Periodic evaluations will ensure that housing facilities consistently meet the established quality benchmarks and address any emerging issues promptly.

5. Expand Transitional Housing Options: Work to secure funding and policy support for increasing the availability of transitional housing for refugee children and youth. These programs will offer tailored accommodation that supports minors during critical periods of their settlement, facilitating smoother transitions to permanent living arrangements.

Long-Term Goals (3-5 years)

1. Secure Sustainable Funding for Shelters: Advocate for and secure long-term, dedicated funding for shelters specifically designed for unaccompanied refugee children and youth. This involves engaging with government agencies, donors, and key stakeholders to ensure the financial resources needed to maintain and expand shelter services are consistently available.

2. Establish Comprehensive Integration Programs: Develop and implement long-term programs in partnership with educational and community organizations that facilitate the integration of refugee youth. These programs will include language training, cultural orientation, and access to local resources, addressing the educational, social, and emotional needs of the youth.

3. Implement a Coordinated Supportive Housing Work Plan: Collaborate with organizations such as the Centre for Refugee Children (CRC) and relevant government bodies to develop and execute a comprehensive supportive housing work plan for refugee children and youth. This coordinated approach will bridge the gap between immediate housing and long-term settlement, ensuring holistic support throughout their journey.

4. Strengthen Community Support Networks: Forge partnerships with local community groups, non-profits, and volunteer networks to build a robust, integrated support system for refugee minors during and after their shelter stay. This will provide ongoing mental health support, educational assistance, and social integration services, ensuring a smoother transition into Canadian society.

Objective

The objective is to ensure that refugee children and youth have access to safe, secure, and supportive shelter environments. This involves advocating for the creation of more youth shelters tailored to the unique needs of unaccompanied minors, improving the quality and safety of existing shelters, and providing comprehensive support services that address their physical, emotional, and psychological well-being.

The section aims to foster a system where refugee youth are empowered to make decisions about their housing, receive services from well-trained shelter staff with lived experience, and are supported in their integration into the broader community. Ultimately, the goal is to create a sustainable, well-resourced system that provides refugee minors with a sense of safety, stability, and opportunity for growth as they navigate the challenges of settlement and immigration.



Targets

- **Increase the number of youth shelters/capacity:** Establish additional youth shelters/homes specifically designed to accommodate refugee youth by the end of Year 1, ensuring safer and more supportive environments for unaccompanied minors, with annual tracking on the increased capacity.
- **Expand emergency shelter access:** Work to ensure 100% accessibility to emergency shelter spaces for refugee youth, including those without documentation, by the end of Year 1, with annual tracking on refugee youth accessing emergency shelter in the province.
- **Hire staff with lived experience:** Advocate for the hiring of shelter workers with lived experience in the refugee and immigration system by Year 2. These workers will be equipped to handle minors' specific needs, offering personalized support. Through the project, offer access to resources and training to emergency shelters to increase knowledge of the immigration and refugee system.

- **Social worker empowerment:** Provide proactive housing support by training 20 social workers annually to ensure safe housing placements, with a focus on refugee minors' well-being and safety .
- **Comprehensive support services:** Implement mental health care, educational programs, and legal assistance in all youth shelters by Year 2, benefiting minors and helping them address their emotional, academic, and legal needs.
- **Regular shelter evaluations:** Ensure that regions overseeing emergency shelter conditions are regularly evaluating shelter conditions quarterly so that all refugee youth are housed in environments that meet their safety and well-being standards. Aim for 100% compliance by Year 3.
- **Fundraising and advocacy:** Work with government partners and the shelter sector to secure long-term funding for shelter services, including at least 3 major funding partners by Year 3, to maintain and expand these services, ensuring the program's sustainability and reach to refugee minors.
- **Integration programs:** Develop and launch community integration programs, including language training, cultural orientation, and access to local resources, to be implemented for refugee minors by Year 3.



Current Progress

In Ontario, significant strides have been made to enhance support for refugee minors and youth. Emergency shelter capacity has notably increased; in 2023, Canada reported 20,864 beds across 561 permanent emergency shelters, marking a 13% rise from the previous year. Many shelters now offer comprehensive support services, including mental health care, addiction treatment, and assistance with transitioning out of homelessness. Despite this, improvements are still needed.





How Will We Measure Performance?

1. Shelter Capacity Expansion

Action: Track the number of emergency shelter beds available for refugee children and youth, including the addition of new shelters and beds.

Timeline: Measure the increase in shelter capacity annually and compare the data against the baseline number of available beds in the first year of implementation. The target is to achieve a 15% increase in shelter capacity by the end of year 2.

2. Feedback from Shelter Residents

Action: Conduct surveys and interviews with refugee children and youth in shelters to assess their satisfaction with the housing conditions, safety, and support services provided.

Timeline: Conduct initial surveys within 6 months of implementation, followed by semi-annual surveys over the next 3 years to track improvements and challenges in shelter services.

3. Support Service Utilization

Action: Track the number of minors and youth who access mental health care, educational programs, and legal assistance while staying in shelters

Timeline: Collect data on service utilization every 6 months, aiming for at least 75% of sites/programs offering these services by the end of year 1.

4. Emergency Shelter Access

Action: Monitor the number of minors admitted to shelters, including those with and without documentation, ensuring that no child/youth is denied placement due to missing paperwork.

Timeline: Record shelter admission rates on a quarterly basis, with a target to ensure 100% of minors are admitted into shelters, regardless of documentation status, within the first year.

5. Worker and Staff Training Progress: Action

Action: Assess the number of shelter workers who complete training programs focused on the immigration system, refugee minors' needs, and trauma-informed care.

Timeline: Track the completion of training programs every 6 months, aiming for 80% of sites providing support to refugee youth have completed training and/or reviewed resources to support this work within the first year of the project.

6. Shelter Environment Assessment

Action: Ensure that government overseeing shelter programs are conducting regular assessments of shelter facilities to ensure they meet safety and maintenance standards. Include evaluations from minors to assess how "home-like" and secure they feel in their living environments.

Timeline: Ensure these assessments are being completed at regular intervals to ensure that all shelters maintain safety and comfort standards, with a focus on improving the quality of shelter design by the end of year 2.

7. Funding and Sustainability Tracking

Action: Monitor the funding received and allocated for shelter programs, ensuring financial sustainability for shelter operations and the expansion of services.

Timeline: Conduct an annual review of funding sources and expenditures, with the goal of securing long-term funding commitments by the end of year 1 to ensure continued expansion and support for shelters.



Who are the partners/stakeholders?

> Internal Partners

- Ontario Coalition for Service Providers
- Youth shelters and youth-serving organizations
- Refugee-serving Organizations

> External Partners

- Children's Aid Society (CAS)



Outcome

03 Child Welfare Placement & Support Strategies



What do we want to achieve?

In Ontario, refugee children and youth placed in foster care through the Children's Aid Society (CAS) often encounter significant challenges. These include frequent placement disruptions, limited access to culturally appropriate services, and difficulties in maintaining connections with their cultural communities. Additionally, many minors face barriers in accessing education and employment opportunities, which are crucial for their integration and development.

Our objective is to enhance the foster care experience for refugee minors by implementing strategies that address these challenges. This involves ensuring stable and supportive placements, providing access to culturally sensitive services, and facilitating connections with their cultural communities. By focusing on these areas, we aim to promote the well-being and successful integration of refugee minors into Canadian society.

Short-Term Goals (0-1 year)

- 1. Standardized Evaluation and Matching Process:** Collaborate with CAS and partner organizations to advocate for and pilot a standardized process for assessing refugee children's needs and matching them with foster or kinship homes that best align with their cultural and emotional requirements. This approach aims to reduce mismatches and improve the overall well-being of children in care while acknowledging that full implementation may depend on broader system reforms.
- 2. Streamlined Placement Procedures:** Work with CAS and shelter providers to streamline placement procedures so that refugee children and youth can transition more quickly from temporary or emergency housing to more stable, long-term arrangements. This initiative will help reduce the anxiety and instability experienced during the placement process.

3. Mandatory Trauma-Informed and Cultural Sensitivity Training: Facilitate training sessions and resource development, in partnership with local organizations, for foster and kinship caregivers on trauma-informed practices and cultural sensitivity for refugee children. This training will help ensure that caregivers are equipped to address the unique challenges faced by refugee minors, promoting better care and understanding within the system.

4. Targeted Recruitment of Foster and Kinship Caregivers: Advocate with CAS agencies to launch a targeted recruitment campaign in collaboration with local community organizations to expand the pool of diverse foster and kinship caregivers. Increasing the number of available caregivers will offer more placement options and reduce waiting times for suitable homes.

Medium-Term Goals (1-3 years)

1. Post-Transition Follow-Up: After refugee youth move from foster care to independent living, shelters, or transitional housing, conduct immediate follow-ups to assess the condition of their new housing and maintain bi-annual check-ins for at least one year. This ensures ongoing support during their transition and helps address any emerging challenges promptly.

2. Regular Feedback Collection: Establish a system to routinely gather feedback from children and youth in foster care through surveys and focus groups. Incorporating their perspectives will help identify challenges in the placement process and guide improvements to better meet their needs.

3. Collaborate for Holistic Support Services: Partner with local organizations to integrate comprehensive support services, such as mental health care, educational assistance, and community integration programs—into the foster care system. This collaborative approach will fill critical gaps and ensure children and youth have access to the full spectrum of resources necessary for their well-being.

4. Reduce Placement Disruptions: Advocate for and implement policies that decrease the frequency of placement moves. By promoting stability, we aim to foster emotional well-being and build trust in the foster care system, which is essential for long-term success.

5. Promote Kinship Care Placements: Work with CAS to identify and facilitate kinship care placements by engaging extended family or community members as caregivers. Kinship care provides a familiar and supportive environment that can greatly enhance the stability and cultural continuity for refugee children and youth.

Long-Term Goals (3-5 years)

1. Secure Permanent Housing Solutions: Establish policies and programs to secure permanent housing for refugee children and youth—such as long-term foster care or guardianship arrangements—to reduce uncertainty and stress while fostering a genuine sense of belonging.

2. Build an Integrated Foster Care System: Develop a comprehensive foster care framework that incorporates education, mental health support, and cultural programming. This holistic approach will ensure the multifaceted needs of refugee children and youth are met, supporting their overall development and successful integration into Canadian society.

3. Implement a Robust Tracking System: In partnership with other organizations and government divisions, develop and maintain a robust system for tracking long-term outcomes of placements, focusing on metrics such as educational attainment, employment, mental health, and overall well-being. Data-driven insights from this system will guide future improvements in the foster care system.

4. Establish a Youth Advocacy Council: Form a council composed of refugee youth with lived foster care experience to provide recommendations and advocate for policy changes. This will empower youth voices and ensure that support systems evolve in line with their real-world needs.



Objective

The objective is to ensure that refugee minors placed within the child welfare system, particularly in foster or kinship care, receive stable, culturally sensitive, and trauma-informed support that addresses their unique needs. It aims to create a child welfare framework that prioritizes timely and appropriate placements, minimizes disruptions, fosters long-term stability, and integrates holistic support services, including education, mental health care, and community resources. By centering the voices and experiences of minors, this section seeks to enhance their well-being, empower them to thrive, and promote their successful integration into Canadian society.



Targets

- **Increase Foster Care Placement Availability:** Expand the pool of foster and kinship caregivers within the next three years through targeted recruitment campaigns and partnership-building with community organizations.
- **Follow up after foster Care Transition:** In collaborations with other service providers, follow up with children transitioning out of foster care to independent living, shelters, or transitional housing immediately to assess their housing conditions. Maintain contact for at least a year, with biannual check-ins to monitor their transition and provide additional support.
- **Timely Placement Rates:** Ensure that 90% of refugee minors are placed in permanent or semi-permanent foster or kinship care arrangements within 45 days of entering the system by the end of year two.
- **Cultural Sensitivity and Trauma-Informed Training:** Provide access to 100% of foster caregivers and child welfare staff with training in trauma-informed care and cultural sensitivity within the first year to improve the quality of care and support for refugee children and youth.
- **Placement Outcome Monitoring System:** Advocate for CAS agencies to implement a comprehensive placement monitoring system by year two to evaluate the stability, well-being, and satisfaction of refugee children and youth in care, ensuring 75% of placements remain stable for at least one year.

- **Permanency Options for Long-Term Stability:** Facilitate kinship or permanent care arrangements for refugee minors within three years to promote stability and reduce the number of placement disruptions.
- **Support Services Integration:** Engage with communities and stakeholders to raise awareness about the role of designated representatives and the importance of supporting minors in various settings
- **Feedback Mechanism for Minors:** Develop and deploy a feedback mechanism by the end of the first year, ensuring children and youth provide input on their experiences, with results informing ongoing policy improvements.
- **Placement Disruption Reduction:** Achieve a reduction in placement disruptions and moves within three years by improving matching processes and increasing foster care stability.



Current Progress

In Ontario, significant strides have been made to enhance child welfare placement and support strategies. The Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies (OACAS) has introduced training programs, such as the Kujali series, to equip foster caregivers with skills in trauma-informed care and cultural sensitivity, particularly for Black children and youth. Additionally, the implementation of the Structured Analysis Family Evaluation (SAFE) provides a comprehensive set of assessment tools to evaluate prospective foster or adoptive parents, ensuring better matching between children and caregivers.

Collaborations with community organizations have also been strengthened to offer holistic support services, including mental health care and educational programs, to children and families involved with or at risk of being involved with the child protection system. These initiatives aim to improve outcomes and prevent children and youth from entering or reentering care. However, there are still more gaps to be filled.



How Will We Measure Performance?

1. Minors' Feedback

Action: Conduct regular surveys and interviews with children and youth in care to gather insights about their experiences, sense of safety, and cultural compatibility within placements.

Timeline: Initial surveys within the first 6 months of placement, followed by annual surveys over a 5-year period to track changes and improvements.

2. Placement Stability

Action: Track and report the number of placements moves experienced by each child, aiming to reduce the frequency of disruptions.

Timeline: Establish a baseline within the first year, with quarterly reviews to assess progress and identify trends over a 3-year timeline.

3. Time to Placement

Action: Measure the time taken from a child's entry into care to placement in a stable and appropriate home.

Timeline: Monthly reporting in the first year to identify bottlenecks, transitioning to biannual reports as processes stabilize.

4. Caregiver Retention and Recruitment

Action: Monitor recruitment and retention rates for foster and kinship caregivers, focusing on the success of targeted campaigns and training programs.

Timeline: Report recruitment metrics quarterly in the first year, with an annual review of retention rates over a 5-year period.

5. Child Outcomes

Action: Assess educational, emotional, and social progress through school performance reports, mental health evaluations, and participation in community programs.

Timeline: Annual evaluations starting one-year post-placement, with ongoing tracking over a 5-year period to measure long-term impact.

6. Caregiver Preparedness

Action: Evaluate the effectiveness of trauma-informed care and cultural sensitivity training for caregivers through pre- and post-training assessments and caregiver feedback surveys.

Timeline: Conduct assessments immediately after training and follow up at 6-month intervals for the first two years.

7. Community Partnerships

Action: Track the number and quality of collaborations with community organizations to support foster children and caregivers.

Timeline: Review partnership data semi-annually, measuring growth and impact over 3 years.

8. Access to Support Services

Action: Measure the uptake of mental health, educational, and legal support services provided to children in care.

Timeline: Quarterly service utilization reports, with an annual summary to highlight gaps and successes over 5 years.

9. Permanency Outcomes:

Action: Track the percentage of children achieving long-term stability through reunification, adoption, or permanent kinship placements.

Timeline: Annual reporting with an emphasis on progress toward targets over a 5-year period.

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Who are the partners/stakeholders?

> Internal Partners

- Children's Aid Societies (CAS)
- Caseworkers and Social Workers
- Data and Evaluation Teams

> External Partners

- Community Organizations
- Mental Health Services



Outcome

04

Enhancing Access and Support from Ontario Works



What do we want to achieve?

Our goal is to create a more reliable and accessible Ontario Works (OW) system for unaccompanied refugee children and youth. Based on the challenges identified through the voices of these youth, we seek to address key barriers such as a lack of awareness about available programs, difficulties in communicating with caseworkers due to language and communication barriers, and issues accessing vital information through the My Benefits platform.

By implementing specialized caseworkers with lived experience or expertise in the refugee and immigration system, providing mandated workshops for OW staff on trauma-informed practices, enhancing access to services through improved online platforms, and offering regular information sessions, we aim to ensure that refugee minors receive the tailored, empathetic support they need to navigate the system effectively. Ultimately, we want to create a more responsive and supportive OW experience that empowers these youth to fully utilize available resources and build a stable foundation for their future.

Short-Term Goals (0-1 year)

1. Gather User Feedback on the My Benefits Platform: Conduct surveys and focus groups with unaccompanied minors to identify usability, accessibility, and clarity issues on the My Benefits platform. This initiative will ensure that the platform is tailored to the specific needs of refugee children and youth, enabling them to better understand and access available resources and services.

2. Initiate Regular Workshops and Webinars: Launch a series of workshops and webinars to educate minors about OW programs and services, with a focus on providing step-by-step guidance for navigating the My Benefits portal. These sessions are designed to empower children and youth with the knowledge and confidence to utilize these resources effectively.

3. Assign Specialized Caseworkers: Designate caseworkers with expertise in working with refugee children and youth to provide timely, individualized support. These professionals will offer sensitive counseling and referrals to essential services, addressing the unique challenges faced by minors during their settlement process.

Medium-Term Goals (1-3 years)

1. Enhance Caseworker Training: Develop and implement training sessions and resources for caseworkers to build greater sensitivity to the unique challenges faced by unaccompanied minors, including trauma-informed care and the complexities of out-of-home placements. This training will equip caseworkers to respond effectively to the specific needs of each child/youth, ensuring that support is both compassionate and tailored to individual circumstances.

2. Improve My Benefits Platform Accessibility: Upgrade the My Benefits web portal to better serve minors in care by enabling them to communicate their needs directly without having to go through an adult to access progress reports, track case status, and stay informed about available programs. Enhancements will be designed with the unique requirements of refugee minors in mind, ensuring a user-friendly, accessible interface that simplifies navigation through the system.

3. Expand Information Sessions: Organize regular information sessions for refugee children and youth, providing clear guidance on OW programs and other support services. These sessions will empower minors with the knowledge of their entitlements and practical steps to access support, ensuring they are well-informed and better prepared to navigate the settlement process.



Long-Term Goals (3-5 years)

1. Implement Continuous Feedback Mechanisms: Establish ongoing channels such as regular surveys, focus groups, and digital feedback tools for refugee children and youth to share their experiences with OW services, including the My Benefits platform. This continuous feedback will drive iterative improvements and ensure that service delivery remains responsive to the evolving needs of minors.

2. Develop Comprehensive Support Programs: Design and implement holistic support programs tailored to the unique needs of unaccompanied refugee minors. These programs will address critical areas such as education, mental health, and social integration, ensuring that minors have access to resources that promote their overall well-being and successful integration into Canadian society.

3. Advocate for Policy Reforms: Engage with policymakers, advocacy groups, and key stakeholders to push for reforms that guarantee the rights and needs of unaccompanied refugee minors are consistently met. This includes advocating for the development of a national policy dedicated to the care and support of separated children, ensuring long-term, systemic improvements in the immigration and settlement process.

Objective

The objective is to improve the experience of unaccompanied refugee children and youth within OW. It focuses on addressing key challenges such as lack of awareness, communication barriers, and accessibility issues related to the My Benefits platform and caseworker interactions. The section sets clear, actionable goals for the short, medium, and long term, aiming to create a more effective and empathetic support system for this group of individuals. This includes enhancing access to resources, improving communication, and providing specialized support through trained caseworkers. The ultimate goal is to ensure that refugee children and youth can fully utilize the services and resources available to them, helping them integrate successfully into Canadian society and achieve stability. These improvements will help in bringing about a more supportive, efficient, and youth-centered service delivery system.



Targets

- **Informing Minors about Programs:** Ensure that unaccompanied refugee minors and youth are informed about the programs available to them through OW by the end of the first year through workshops, webinars, and targeted communications.
- **My Benefits Platform Redesign:** Advocate to redesign the My Benefits platform to be more user-friendly for unaccompanied minors and refugee youth, focusing on simplified navigation, multilingual options, and accessibility improvements. Complete recommendations for this redesign by the end of the first year. Additionally, ensure that children and youth can independently access and understand key information on the platform, such as reports, requests, progress updates, and status changes by the end of the first year.
- **Workshops and Webinars:** In partnership with OW offices and community organizations serving refugee children and youth, conduct monthly workshops/webinars to educate unaccompanied refugee minors about the services available through OW and how to navigate the My Benefits platform, while also aim to have at least 80% of workshop participants report increased knowledge and confidence in using the platform and understanding available resources by the end of the first year.
- **Specialized Caseworkers:** Advocate for access to specialized caseworkers for unaccompanied refugee minors accessing OW by the end of the first year, ensuring personalized and effective support. As well, offer training and/or resources to OW caseworkers on working with refugee children and youth, including appropriate communication strategies for minors, including language and cultural sensitivity, with the aim of rolling out these resources within the first 6 months.
- **Caseworker Communication Experience:** Determine the percentage of minors who report a positive experience in communicating with their caseworkers through surveys or interviews. Target a minimum 80% satisfaction rate by the end of the first year.

- **Continuous Feedback Mechanism:** Implement a continuous feedback loop for minors using the My Benefits platform, with surveys conducted quarterly. Aim for at least 50 minors to provide feedback each quarter, ensuring ongoing recommendations for improvements based on their input.
- **Information Sessions:** Host monthly information sessions throughout the first year, and ensure that 80% of attendees report an improved understanding of their rights and available support programs after attending the sessions.



Current Progress

As of December 2024, Ontario Works (OW) has implemented several updates to enhance service delivery and support for those in need. The Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services has outlined service expectations for OW for the 2024–2025 period, focusing on the provision of financial assistance to eligible recipients and employment services that facilitate participation in employment-related activities. This includes the delivery of discretionary benefits to Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) recipients and the establishment of local policies for program administration.

However, as of July 2024, OW rates have not been increased or adjusted for inflation, marking the sixth consecutive year without changes. In contrast, ODSP recipients received a 4.5% increase in core rates due to inflation adjustments, and families with children saw a similar increase in their monthly Ontario Child Benefit (OCB) amounts.

Effective October 1, 2024, the Ministry assumed responsibility for initial eligibility decisions for OW, including the authority to approve initial payments and applicant notifications, aiming to streamline the application process. Despite these efforts, challenges persist, particularly for unaccompanied refugee minors. These individuals often face difficulties accessing and navigating the My Benefits platform, compounded by language barriers and a lack of tailored support. Additionally, communication with caseworkers remains a significant issue, with minors reporting challenges in understanding and utilizing available resources. These ongoing problems highlight the need for targeted interventions to address the unique needs of unaccompanied refugee minors within the OW system.



How Will We Measure Performance?

1. Number of Minors Utilizing OW Services

Action: Track the registration and participation rate of minors in Ontario Works programs.

Timeline: Review the number of minors enrolling in services at regular intervals (monthly or quarterly) for the first year, then annually for subsequent years.

2. Percentage of Eligible Individuals Enrolled in Specific Programs

Action: Use surveys or interviews to assess minors' awareness of and enrollment in specific Ontario Works programs.

Timeline: Conduct surveys immediately following program implementation, and periodically to gauge continued awareness and enrollment trends.

3. Satisfaction with the Level of Communication by Caseworkers

Action: Review case logs for communication consistency and assess the quality of communication using feedback mechanisms like surveys or interviews with minors.

Timeline: Survey minors on satisfaction with caseworker communication at regular intervals (every 6 months).

4. Employment Rates for Participants at the End of the Program

Action: Follow up with minors who have participated in employment-related services to track employment outcomes.

Timeline: Evaluate employment rates 6 months and 1 year after the program's completion.

5. Satisfaction with the Quality and Timeliness of Received Support

Action: Survey minors to assess their satisfaction with the support they have received, focusing on the quality and timeliness of services like housing, healthcare, and education.

Timeline: Conduct satisfaction surveys at regular intervals, with an initial survey conducted after 6 months of service.

6. Overall Satisfaction with Services

Action: Regularly survey minors to gauge their overall satisfaction with the services provided through OW, assessing their general well-being and experience.

Timeline: Conduct surveys every 6 months, with follow-up interviews or focus groups to provide deeper insights.

7. Improvement in Quality of Life Indicators (Housing, Healthcare, and Educational Attainment)

Action: Track changes in key social and economic indicators (e.g., housing stability, healthcare access, educational progress) for minors before and after receiving support through OW.

Timeline: Measure these indicators at the start of service, at the 6-month mark, and annually to assess long-term improvements.



Who are the partners/stakeholders?

> Internal Partners

- Centre for Refugee Children (CRC)
- FCJ Refugee Centre
- Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC)
- Children's Aid Society (CAS)
- Ontario Works (OW)

> External Partners

- Canadian Council for Refugees (CCR)



Outcome

05 Education Access and Integration



What do we want to achieve?

The education system presents a unique set of challenges for unaccompanied refugee children and youth. These students often face barriers to accessing and navigating the Canadian education system, compounded by a lack of understanding of educational pathways, language barriers, and limited support networks. The goal is to create a more inclusive and supportive environment for these students by equipping guidance counselors, teachers, and settlement service providers with the tools, knowledge, and resources to effectively support refugee children and youth.

By promoting collaboration between schools and settlement services, offering capacity-building workshops, and providing clear information about educational pathways, we aim to ensure refugee minors can succeed academically and have access to the resources they need for personal and educational growth. The system will also ensure that children and youth are informed about credential assessments, flexible academic accommodations, and mental health support services, so they can navigate the education system with confidence.

Short-Term Goals (0-1 year):

Primary School, Junior High and High School

1. Streamline Enrollment Processes: Partner with school boards to simplify registration for refugee children by allowing enrollment even without complete documentation, such as proof of address or previous educational records. This will remove immediate barriers and ensure that children and youth can enter the educational system without delay.

2. Create Multilingual Guides: Develop toolkits and guides for Designated Representatives, legal guardians and community caregivers/relatives that provide clear, accessible instructions on navigating the enrollment process and the broader education system. These resources will ease the transition into Canadian schools by addressing language and cultural challenges.

3. Expand English as a Second Language (ESL) / French as a Second Language (FSL) Programs: Increase access to ESL and FSL programs to help refugee children overcome language barriers. Enhanced language support is essential for their academic success and smoother integration into the educational environment.

4. Ensure Confidentiality in Educational Processes: Advocate for policies that maintain the confidentiality of a child's immigration status during school enrollment and throughout their education. This measure will help create a safe and supportive learning environment where minors can focus on their studies without fear of exposure or discrimination.

Medium-Term Goals (1-3 years):

Primary School, Junior High and High School

1. Provide Specialized Support for Refugee Minors: Foster partnerships between schools and settlement services to implement dedicated support programs—such as mentorship initiatives, peer integration programs, and orientation sessions—that help refugee children and youth adapt to school life, providing the emotional and practical resources needed for a smoother transition.

2. Introduce Early Childhood Education Programs: Ensure that unaccompanied and separated minors have access to Early Childhood Education (ECE) programs. These initiatives will promote emotional stability and cognitive development, building foundational skills and establishing a sense of security critical for later academic success.

3. Train Educators on Trauma-Informed Practices: Offer professional development opportunities for teachers and school staff to learn trauma-informed approaches. This training will enable educators to better understand and address the unique emotional and academic challenges faced by refugee minors, ensuring a supportive classroom environment.

4. Implement School-Based Support Systems: Establish dedicated school counsellors and support services focused on mental health, career guidance, and academic counselling for refugee children and youth. These systems will provide targeted assistance to address psychological and emotional challenges, fostering resilience and long-term academic and personal success.

Long-Term Goals (3-5 years)

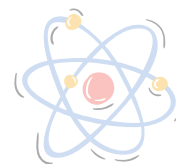
Primary School, Junior High and High School

1. Guarantee Universal Access to Education: Advocate for policy reforms working with educational stakeholders and government agencies to ensure that all unaccompanied minors can access elementary and secondary education without restrictions, regardless of immigration status. This goal will help establish a long-term foundation for academic and personal development.

2. Establish Long-Term Recreational Programs: Develop and sustain recreational programs, including sports, arts, and play initiatives, that help refugee children and youth cope with trauma and promote social inclusion. By integrating these programs with existing community initiatives, we aim to provide continuous emotional support and foster a sense of belonging.

3. Sustain Funding for School-Based Support: Collaborate with government bodies, philanthropic organizations, and community partners to secure long-term funding for educational support programs that serve refugee children and youth. This includes mentorship, advocacy, and research initiatives designed to ensure ongoing support and sustainability of these services.

4. Enhance Technology Access and Educational Tools: Advocate for and facilitate access to critical technology resources, such as laptops and reliable Wi-Fi, to ensure that refugee children and youth can engage fully with digital learning platforms and online resources. This initiative will help bridge the digital divide and support academic success in a rapidly evolving educational landscape.



Short-Term Goals (0-1 year): *Post Secondary Education*

1. Increase Awareness of Educational Opportunities: Develop partnerships with universities and colleges to share information on scholarships, programs, and resources tailored for refugee students. Create multilingual guides that detail pathways to post-secondary education including application processes, eligibility requirements, and financial aid options and launch information sessions and workshops to inform refugee youth about these opportunities.

2. Enhance Access to Vocational Programs: Identify and expand access to Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) programs for refugee youth, enabling them to gain marketable skills for employment and fostering economic independence.

3. Strengthen Guidance for Educational Transitions: Collaborate with settlement services and local schools to streamline support for refugee students transitioning to post-secondary education. Develop short-term mentorship programs connecting refugee youth with current university or college students to provide personalized guidance and peer support throughout the application and transition process.

Medium-Term Goals (1-3 years): *Post Secondary Education*

1. Expand University and College Programs: Establish tailored programs for refugee and migrant students at post-secondary institutions by building on successful models from schools such as York University and Toronto Metropolitan University. Develop bridging programs to support transitions from high school or adult education to university, with a strong emphasis on language support, academic preparation, and integration into campus life.

2. Support Financial Accessibility: Collaborate with public and private organizations to create targeted scholarships, bursaries, and financial aid opportunities for refugee students. Additionally, explore alternative funding options such as reduced tuition fees and assistance with study permit requirements to help alleviate financial barriers to post-secondary education.

3. Increase Access to Specialized Programs: Expand the availability of specialized initiatives that focus on enhancing language skills, fostering leadership development, and promoting community engagement. These programs are designed to support refugee youth throughout their academic journey and facilitate their successful integration into higher education and beyond.

Long-Term Goals (3-5 years): *Post Secondary Education*

1. Achieve Equitable Access to Post-Secondary Education: Advocate for and implement federal and provincial policies that remove barriers to higher education for refugee youth, ensuring they can pursue their academic goals regardless of their immigration status.

2. Strengthen Bridging and Alternative Pathways: Develop comprehensive programs to support refugee youth with interrupted education, providing structured pathways into post-secondary studies, vocational training, or employment. Establish partnerships between post-secondary institutions and employment agencies to create direct career pathways, ensuring refugee youth have meaningful opportunities after graduation.

3. Foster Long-Term Educational Integration: Sustain long-term support systems, including mentorship programs, internships, and community networks, to help refugee youth succeed in post-secondary education and transition into stable, fulfilling careers.



Objective

The objective is to improve access, support, and success for refugee children and youth within the education system, both at the primary, high school and post-secondary levels. This includes providing tailored resources, workshops, and support services that address the unique challenges faced by refugee students, ensuring they can successfully integrate and thrive academically. It also aims to foster collaboration between schools, settlement services, and educational institutions to bridge gaps, create pathways to higher education, and provide necessary accommodations. Ultimately, this section focuses on creating an inclusive, supportive environment where refugee students can receive the education they need to succeed and build a better future.

Targets

- **Distribute 10,000 Multilingual Guides:** Distribute culturally and linguistically tailored guides outlining pathways to primary, secondary, and post-secondary education by the end of the first year. To Increase awareness of educational opportunities among refugee minors and youth and help them navigate the Canadian education system.
- **Increase ESL/FSL Enrollment by 25%:** Expand ESL/FSL programs, enrolling more refugee minors in these programs. The aim is to improve language proficiency and ensure refugees can effectively integrate into the education system.
- **Implement Capacity-Building Workshops for 100% of Guidance Counselors:** Offer capacity-building workshops for guidance counsellors in Ontario school boards within the first year. The aim is to equip guidance counsellors with the knowledge and skills to better support refugee minors and address their unique challenges.

- **Establish Partnerships with Settlement Services:** Establish partnerships between schools and settlement services to provide on-site support for refugee minors within 12 months with a goal of 30 such partnerships. The aim is to strengthen support systems for refugee students by offering integrated services in educational settings.
- **Provide Academic Support to Refugee Students:** Through partnerships with community organizations, provide academic support (tutoring, mentorship, guidance) to at least 500 refugee students within the first 18 months. The aim is to improve academic outcomes for refugee minors through targeted interventions.
- **Increase Financial Aid for Refugee Students:** Advocate to secure more scholarships, bursaries, and financial aid for refugee students, in collaboration with universities, colleges, and private organizations, within the first 2 years. The aim is to ensure financial accessibility for refugee students pursuing post-secondary education.
- **Reduce Enrollment Barriers for Refugee Students:** Reduce unnecessary documentation and procedural barriers for refugee minors enrolling in primary, secondary, and post-secondary education by simplifying the enrollment process and ensure easier access to education for refugee minors.
- **Increase Pathways to Post-Secondary Enrollment for Refugee Students:** Increase enrollment in post-secondary programs (including university and college) for refugee students by the end of the third year. The aim is to ensure greater access to higher education for refugee youth, contributing to their long-term social and economic integration.





Current Progress

As of December 2024, Ontario has made notable progress in improving educational access for refugee children and youth. The Ontario Education Act guarantees that all children between the ages of 6 and 18 have the right to attend school, regardless of their immigration status, ensuring that refugee minors are not excluded from primary and secondary education. The Ministry of Education further supports this by mandating immediate enrollment upon registration, irrespective of documentation. At the post-secondary level, initiatives such as the “Sanctuary Scholars” programs at York University and Toronto Metropolitan University (TMU) provide eligible non-status youth with the opportunity to access undergraduate degrees at domestic tuition rates, reducing financial barriers.

However, challenges persist, including language barriers, a lack of awareness about available resources, and the need for trauma-informed educational practices. To address these issues, various initiatives have been implemented, such as capacity-building workshops for guidance counselors, partnerships between schools and settlement services for on-site support, and teacher accommodations to ensure flexibility for minors navigating immigration processes. These efforts are aimed at improving the educational experience and outcomes for refugee minors, helping them integrate successfully into Canadian education system and society.



How Will We Measure Performance?

1. Elementary and High School Enrollment Success

Action: Collaborate with school boards and community organizations to streamline the enrollment process for refugee minors, focusing on documentation support and language services.

Timeline: Monitor to ensure all unaccompanied minors are enrolled in elementary or high school within 30 days of arrival. Monitor progress in reducing enrollment barriers, such as documentation and language support, within the first year.

2. Language Program Outcomes

Action: Increase access to ESL/FSL programs for refugee minors and ensure language support is available during their first week of school.

Timeline: Ensure refugee minors participate in ESL/FSL programs within their first year. Track improvements in language skills and academic performance through regular evaluations.

3. Post-Secondary Access

Action: Establish pathways and provide guidance for refugee youth to access post-secondary education or TVET programs.

Timeline: Support refugee youth in transitioning to higher education or vocational training within three years. Track retention rates and provide ongoing support to ensure their success after the first year.

4. Feedback Mechanisms

Action: Conduct annual surveys and focus groups with refugee minors to gather feedback on educational initiatives and identify areas for improvement. Continue with the second phase of the project “A Roadmap to Justice” to ensure the implementation of these recommendations.

Timeline: Collect feedback annually from refugee minors participating in educational programs. Use the data to assess and refine educational services, ensuring they meet the needs of students while continuing the second phase of the project to implement the recommended improvements.



Who are the partners/stakeholders?

> Internal Partners

- Ontario Ministry of Education
- School Boards (e.g., Toronto District School Board, Peel District School Board)
- Universities and Colleges
- Centre for Refugee Children
- FCJ Refugee Centre

> External Partners

- Local Settlement Services
- ESL/FSL Language Program Providers
- Mental Health and Social Services
- Private Sector Partners

Outcome

06

Insufficient Support for Transition



What do we want to achieve?

Refugee and migrant youth in Canada face significant challenges as they transition to adulthood, often due to a lack of comprehensive support systems. Many of these children arrive under precarious circumstances, such as separation from guardians, trafficking, or parental incapacitation, leaving them vulnerable and in need of specialized assistance. Once in Canada, they often face barriers to education, employment, and housing, which severely hinder their ability to gain independence and build a stable future. These minors frequently encounter additional challenges, including language barriers, limited access to resources, and a lack of national-level policy to guide their protection and integration.

Without proper guidance, undocumented minors often fall through systemic cracks, struggling to navigate the complex processes needed to access essential services like education and employment opportunities. In response to these issues, it is crucial to establish targeted programs and policies that offer transitional support, similar to the models seen in Europe, ensuring that these minors have the resources, guidance, and opportunities they need to succeed as they move into adulthood. These measures should focus on education, social integration, mental health, and long-term support, aiming to empower minors as they transition out of care and into independent living.

Short-Term Goals (0-1 year)

1. Create a Centralized Database of Available Resources and Service Providers:

Develop and maintain a centralized, accessible database listing key resources for undocumented and refugee minors, including health services, legal aid, educational programs, and housing support, helping minors and service providers navigate the support system more efficiently and reduce possible barriers.

2. Implement Mandatory Cultural Competency Training for Front-line Workers:

Introduce mandatory training for social workers, educators, legal aid professionals, and other front-line workers to enhance their understanding of the cultural and trauma-related challenges refugee minors face. Training will focus on cultural sensitivity, trauma-informed care, and navigating the legal and social complexities affecting these youth.

3. Develop Standardized Intake Procedures Across Provinces: Establish a uniform intake process for undocumented and refugee minors to ensure consistent and equitable access to services regardless of their province of arrival. This will reduce delays and confusion, allowing minors to receive support more efficiently.

4. Establish Immediate Educational Placement Protocols: Implement clear guidelines to facilitate the swift enrollment of refugee minors in schools, minimizing disruptions to their education. This may include streamlined registration processes, expedited assessments of academic records, and targeted support to help them transition into the school system smoothly.

Medium-Term Goals (1-3 years)

1. Develop a National Policy Framework for the Protection of Unaccompanied Minors: Advocate for a unified national policy to ensure consistent protection and support for unaccompanied minors across Canada. This framework will establish legal rights and protections, define service standards for education, housing, and healthcare, and promote coordination between government agencies and service providers.

2. Create Specialized Training for Legal Professionals Working with Refugee and Undocumented Youth: Develop targeted training programs for lawyers, paralegals, and legal advocates to enhance their understanding of the unique legal challenges faced by refugee and undocumented minors. Training will cover key areas such as family reunification, refugee claims, international legal protections, and trauma-informed legal representation.

3. Implement Comprehensive Mental Health Support Systems: Expand access to trauma-informed mental health services, including counseling, psychological support, and emotional well-being programs, through schools and community organizations. These services will help refugee and undocumented minors process their experiences and integrate successfully into their new environment.

4. Establish Bridge Programs for Post-Secondary Education Access: Develop structured transition programs that provide language training, academic preparation, and financial literacy support to help refugee and undocumented minors overcome barriers to post-secondary education. These programs will facilitate entry into universities, colleges, and vocational training programs.

5. Develop Vocational Training Partnerships with Employers: Collaborate with employers to create apprenticeship, internship, and on-the-job training opportunities for refugee and undocumented minors. These programs will equip them with practical skills, enhance employment prospects, and support long-term economic integration.

Long-Term Goals (3-5 years)

1. Establish a Nationwide Network of Support Centers for Undocumented Youth: Develop a coordinated, nationwide network of support centers dedicated to serving undocumented and refugee youth. These centers will offer critical services, including legal aid, education assistance, mental health support, and job training. By ensuring consistent and specialized support across regions, this network will help youth access essential resources without delays and foster collaboration between key stakeholders.

2. Secure Permanent Funding Mechanisms for Transition Support Programs: Advocate for long-term funding solutions to sustain programs that support undocumented and refugee youth as they transition into adulthood. This includes securing government funding and building partnerships with private donors, NGOs, and philanthropic organizations to ensure ongoing and expanded service delivery.

3. Develop Comprehensive Data Collection and Monitoring Systems: Implement data-driven monitoring systems to track the effectiveness of services provided to undocumented and refugee youth. By analyzing program outcomes and identifying service gaps, these systems will inform policy decisions and drive continuous improvements in support structures.

4. Establish Cross-Border Cooperation Protocols for Refugee and Undocumented Minors: Collaborate with countries of origin, transit, and other receiving nations to develop cross-border cooperation protocols that protect and support refugee and undocumented minors throughout their migration journey. These protocols will address key issues such as family reunification, safe return procedures, and shared responsibility for service provision.

5. Create Pathways to Citizenship for Long-Term Resident Undocumented Youth: Advocate for the creation of immigration pathways that grant legal status to undocumented youth who have lived in Canada for an extended period. Providing a structured pathway to citizenship will enable them to access stable housing, healthcare, education, and employment opportunities, ensuring their full participation in Canadian society.

6. Implement Sustainable Integration Programs Extending Beyond the Age of Majority: Develop long-term integration programs that provide continued support for undocumented and refugee youth as they transition into adulthood. These programs will focus on employment, education, housing, and social inclusion to prevent isolation and ensure that youth aging out of existing services can successfully establish independent and stable lives.

Objective

The objective is to identify and address the systemic gaps and challenges faced by undocumented and refugee minors as they transition to adulthood in Ontario. This includes recognizing the difficulties these youth encounter in areas such as education, employment, mental health support, legal assistance, and overall integration into society.

The section aims to advocate for more comprehensive, coordinated, and accessible services to ensure these minors receive the support they need to navigate their transition to adulthood successfully. This involves outlining the need for targeted interventions, policy changes, and support systems to empower undocumented and refugee youth, helping them achieve independence, stability, and a sense of belonging within Ontario's social, educational, and employment systems. Ultimately, the section seeks to promote a more inclusive and sustainable approach to the challenges these youth face as they move into adulthood without the necessary support structures.



1. Create a Centralized Resource Database

Target: Develop a comprehensive, culturally competent database of available resources and service providers for undocumented and refugee minors.

Timeline: Complete and launch the database by the end of the first year, with a target of having listings included.

2. Cultural Competency Training for Front-line Workers

Target: Train front-line workers (social workers, teachers, legal professionals) in cultural competency, focusing on the unique needs of undocumented and refugee minors.

Timeline: Conduct initial training sessions within the first 6 months and aim for full completion of training within 1 year.

3. Establish Educational Placement Protocols

Target: Implement standardized educational placement protocols for undocumented and refugee minors, ensuring placement within the first 30 days of arrival.

Timeline: Achieve 100% adherence to the protocol by the end of the first year, tracking enrollment and academic progress.

4. Develop a National Policy Framework

Target: Advocate for the development of a national-level policy specifically addressing the protection and transition of unaccompanied refugee minors.

Timeline: Begin policy discussions within the first year, with a goal of establishing a framework within 2 years.

5. Create Vocational Training Partnerships

Target: Establish at least 10 vocational training partnerships with employers and educational institutions to provide undocumented and refugee youth with skills development.

Timeline: Secure the first 5 partnerships within 1 year, with a goal of 10 partnerships by the end of the second year.

6. Implement Mental Health Support Systems

Target: Implement comprehensive mental health support systems, including trauma-informed care, for refugee and undocumented minors.

Timeline: Set up mental health programs in at least 3 regions within the first year, with expansion to 10 regions within 3 years.

7. Track and Monitor Progress with a Data Collection System

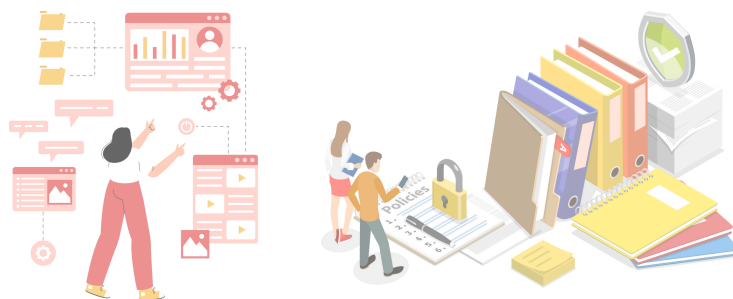
Target: Develop and implement a secure data collection and tracking system to monitor the progress and needs of undocumented minors transitioning to adulthood.

Timeline: Implement the tracking system within 1 year, ensuring regular updates and evaluations every 6 months.

8. Create Pathways to Citizenship for Long-Term Resident Youth

Target: Establish clear pathways to citizenship for undocumented youth who have resided in Canada for 5 years or more, with a special focus on their transition to adulthood.

Timeline: Start legislative discussions within the first year, with a goal of introducing formal pathways within 3 years.





Current Progress

In Ontario, several programs are in place to support undocumented and refugee minors, including the Youth-in-Transition Worker program, which helps youth navigate adult service systems, and initiatives like Matthew House that provide safe housing and mentorship for unaccompanied minors. The Newcomer Youth Engagement Program targets immigrant youth aged 12 to 21, helping them adapt and integrate into Canadian society. However, challenges persist, such as the lack of a centralized database for service providers, gaps in national-level policy addressing the specific needs of unaccompanied minors, and insufficient comprehensive mental health support. These issues highlight the need for more coordinated efforts, including standardized educational placement protocols and a national policy framework to ensure seamless and sustainable support for undocumented and refugee minors as they transition into adulthood.



How Will We Measure Performance?

1. Minors' Feedback on Transition Support

Action: Conduct surveys and focus groups with undocumented and refugee minors to gather feedback on their experiences with transition support services, such as housing, education, and employment access.

Timeline: Initial surveys and focus groups will be conducted within the first 6 months of project implementation, with follow-up surveys annually for the next 3 years to assess changes in experiences and identify ongoing challenges.

2. Educational Placement Success

Action: Track the success rate of refugee and undocumented minors in securing timely educational placements. This will involve collaborating with school boards and community organizations to streamline enrollment processes and gather data on enrollment success.

Timeline: Review and report on the placement success within 6 months of project launch, with bi-annual assessments to track the progress and effectiveness of educational placement protocols.

3. Employment and Vocational Training Outcomes

Action: Measure the access and success rate of refugee and undocumented minors in employment or vocational training programs, including partnerships with employers and the implementation of bridge programs.

Timeline: Assess employment outcomes for minors within the first year of the project and track their progress annually for up to 3 years, monitoring retention rates and employment stability.

4. Service Utilization and Accessibility

Action: Evaluate the utilization of services by refugee and undocumented minors, such as mental health support, legal assistance, and vocational training. This will include surveys of service providers to measure accessibility and effectiveness.

Timeline: Begin service utilization reviews within 6 months of the project's start and conduct ongoing evaluations annually, ensuring service gaps are identified and addressed.

5. Feedback from Service Providers

Action: Gather feedback from front-line workers, service providers, and community organizations on the effectiveness of the transition support programs and cultural competency training.

Timeline: Conduct bi-annual surveys and focus groups with service providers starting in the first year of the project to assess improvements in cultural competency and overall service delivery



Who are the partners/stakeholders?

> Internal Partners

- Community Organizations and NGOs
- FCJ Refugee Centre
- S4 Collective
- Youth Leadership Committee
- Legal and Social Services Team





> External Partners

- Employers and Vocational Training Providers
- Youth Support Networks

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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