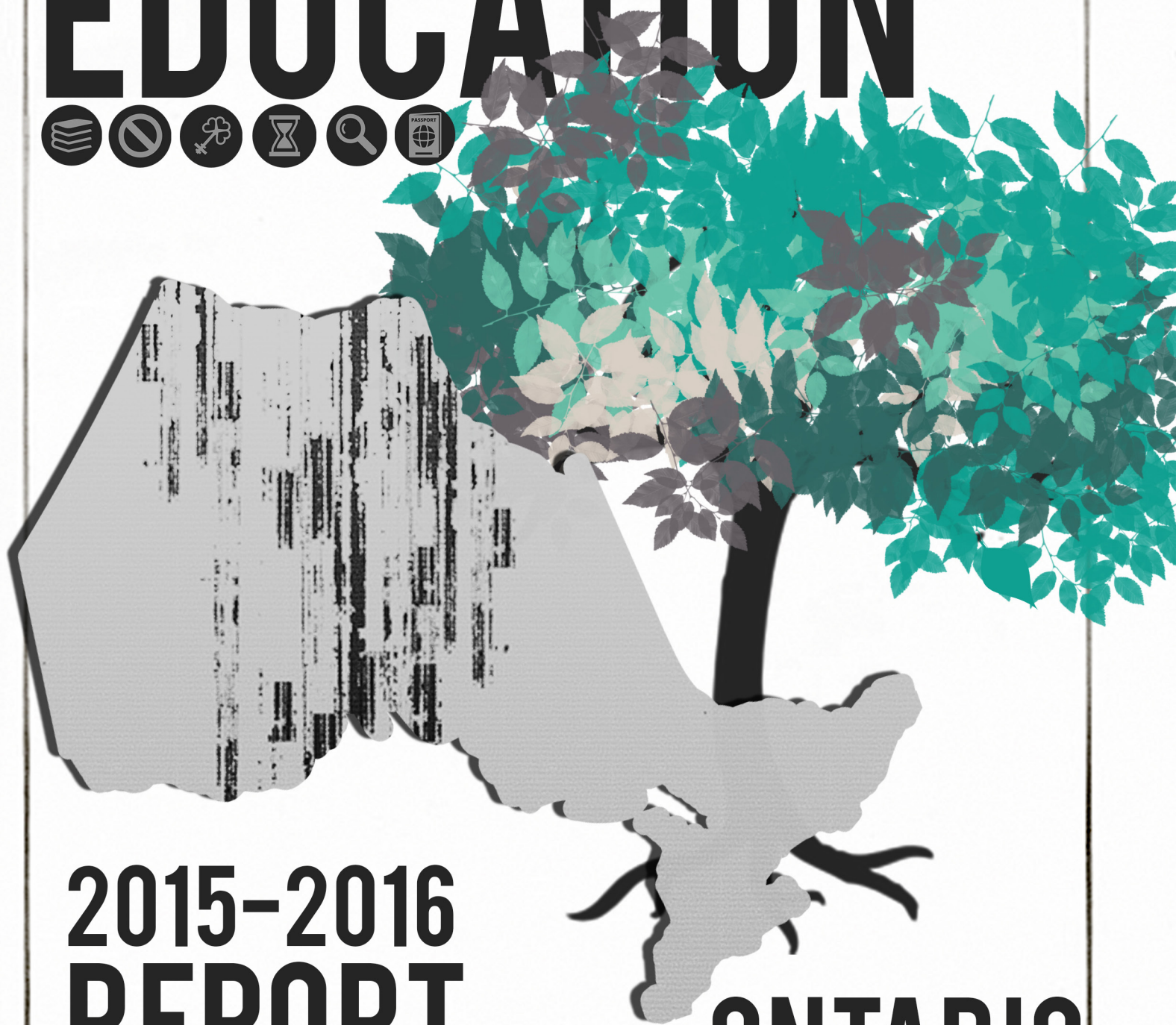


UPROOTED EDUCATION



**2015-2016
REPORT**

ONTARIO

Be Wish to
Goals in the World
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Am high to

Friendly
Multicultural
Safe Space
experience

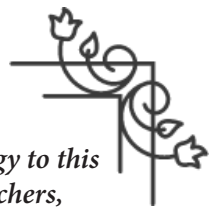
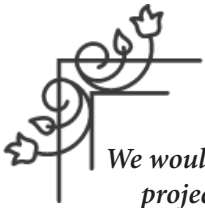
It's call out the
"Just Be yourself what so ever"
Shouldn't
You May Get a scholarship NOT!!!
What school???

Education should
Education is the key!!!
Privilege of few...



Education is the key
Success
I am not here I'm here
QUESTION!!!
NOTHING

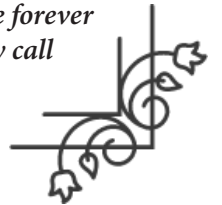




We would like to extend our sincere gratitude to the many people that lent their voices, time and energy to this project, including school administrative staff, guidance counsellors, principals, vice-principals, teachers, settlement workers in schools, academics and youth workers across the province. In particular we would like to extend our thanks to the Canadian Council for Refugees, The Canadian Council for Refugees' Youth Network, The Windsor Women Working with Immigrant Women - Youth Programs and Services, Immigrant Services Kingston and Area (ISKA), as well as many other groups and organizations throughout the province. And of course we would like to thank the Laidlaw Foundation, for their generous and continued support of both this project, and our efforts to champion the rights of precarious immigration status youth.

Special thanks to Rosa Solorzano, Jules Riseling, and Maria Alexiou for their creativity, time and effort.

And of course, this project would not have come to fruition if it were not for the courage, dedication and resilience of the FCJ Youth Network, and other precarious migrant youth across the province, who are forever breaking new ground and opening up new space for diverse newcomer youth to safely and securely call Canada home.



01

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ABOUT

Newcomer youth that are marked with less than stable immigration status face multiple barriers that prevent their full and equitable participation in Ontario Secondary Schools. Visitors, refugee claimants, temporary residents, and non-status youth are among the populations that are either barred access to, or have disengaging and inequitable experiences within Ontario high schools. Furthermore, less than permanent immigration status often intersects with other vulnerabilities to amplify existing oppressions, and produce multiple negative impacts.

While the exact number of students affected is impossible to measure, there is increasing recognition of this growing population. Estimates of people living with some form of precarious status in Canada range from 200 to 500 thousand, with some believing that even these may be conservative numbers. Within this population, there are no estimates for the percentage of youth, especially those that are attending, or trying to attend high school.

To respond to this issue, members of the FCJ Youth Network, a Toronto-based newcomer youth group, have undertaken a participatory research project to explore how the unique trajectories and social locations of precarious immigration status migrant youth intersect with access and involvement in Ontario high schools.

To achieve this, the group has facilitated six focus groups across Ontario (two in Toronto, two in Windsor, one in Kingston and one in Leamington) to hear from youth with precarious immigration status about their experiences navigating the Ontario secondary school system. We feel it is important to note that the initial aim of the project was much broader as it included more cities; however, due to a lack of visibility of this issue in smaller cities, our outreach efforts yielded surprising results. Despite knowing that non-status youth are residing in other cities (as we have received phone calls and visiting youth from places as far as Kitchener and Ottawa), service providers were largely unaware of non-status youth that could be contacted for interviews or to participate in focus groups. This in itself highlights the importance of this project, as non-status youth are disconnected from information and support in many parts of the province.

Despite this shortcoming, more than 50 newcomer youth have lent their voice to this project. Although we did not ask for disclosure of status, the majority of the youth who participated had, at one time or another, attended (or attempted to attend) an Ontario high school with a less than permanent immigration status. These voices were complimented by the perspectives of several service providers, as well as other school-based actors, who participated in interviews and an online survey.

The findings of this research have culminated in this report card that explores five salient themes: Getting In, Equitable Participation, Anti-Discrimination, Support, and Moving On. The themes were both identified and graded by newcomer youth, with the hope that this project will result in raised awareness, increased access, more equitable participation, and more responsive and engaged learning opportunities for precarious immigration status youth across Ontario.

We would like to end by acknowledging that learning does not always take place within the walls of the classroom, but as we value education as a human right, we would like to have opportunities for equitable participation in both formal learning spaces and in our communities.

LAILAW
FOUNDATION



FCJ Refugee Centre
Walking with Uprooted People

The loud shrill of the bell wakes you up from the World History induced haze that's clouding your thoughts. The noises of opening lockers and slamming doors grow louder and bring you back to reality as your fellow classmates begin to make their way out of the classroom. You follow them, knowing the familiar procedure that's become second nature and instinctual as the months fly by. You've grown accustomed to the flow of the crowd, learned how to navigate the hallways and not get run over by a mob of half-awake students at 10am on a Tuesday. At moments like this, things feel simple – the dull sound of steps climbing up the staircase. Heavy doors and old classrooms. Your classmates cramming for a test, and complaining about missed weekends. A few pass by, laughing and carrying coffee cups and others with overstuffed backpacks.

Yes, things like this are simple... carefree.

You arrive at your next class, and it's the same familiar routine. The same cast of characters, from the girl next to you who's always on her phone, to the guy who always stumbles in late. You know what's next.

A test is placed in front of you, its simple stuff, you've already studied this once... a long time ago.

This should be a piece of cake. You've gone over this stuff countless of times in your mind... And everyone knows you know the subject by heart. You grip the pencil a bit steadier and mechanically start filling in the answers.

Unfortunately, things aren't as simple as you wished they were...

Like a robot you finish the test and hand it in. You notice you're like the second student done, and wonder if you should have tried harder and checked your answers. But what does it matter now? You are left with time to kill and nothing to do.

Nothing to do except think, which you hate doing... Because when you're left to think your mind immediately lands the letter in your bag from CBSA, reminding you that you don't have it as easy as your classmates. The important date highlighted in your calendar flashes before you – screaming at you that there's only 4 days left before you're going to be deported, back to a country you haven't set foot in since you were in kindergarten. And now look at you... only a few short months from graduating high school, and all of that hard work for nothing. Your future crumbles before your eyes, because this country doesn't think you're the right kind of immigrant. You don't have the right status. So you have to leave.

And the rest of them?

They're lucky. They're just worried about a test.

REPORT CARD

GETTING IN

How Ontario Secondary School Boards, the Ministry of Education and other relevant actors (including principals, vice principals, secretaries, and other school staff) facilitate or impede newcomer youth, particularly those with precarious immigration status, from getting into high school in Ontario.

F

EQUITABLE PARTICIPATION

To what extent precarious immigration status youth feel included once in school, and valued as equal participants with diverse lived experiences; and how these experiences impact their participation in school.

C-

ANTI-DISCRIMINATION

How effective are current anti-discrimination policies in making precarious immigration status youth feel safe and included in schools. To what extent is immigration status recognized as a contributing factor to the complex relationship of power, privilege and oppression of students; are there appropriate and safe mechanisms for complaint.

D

SUPPORT

What level of support exists for newcomer students in Ontario schools? Is this support effective and responsive to the nuanced needs of precarious immigration status students? Are links being made to community agencies to fill gaps and meet emerging challenges?

C+

MOVING ON

How effective are school-based actors (teachers, guidance counselors, administrators, etc) in offering advice and support for the transition out of high school. Does this advice recognize the limited possibilities for youth with certain statuses? Is any advocacy being done to open more doors?

D-

Getting In

This section grades Ontario Secondary School Boards, the Ministry of Education and other relevant actors (including Principals, Vice Principals, Secretaries and other school staff) on how they facilitate or impede newcomer youth from getting into high school in Ontario.

DEAR SYSTEM
I KNOW I'VE POTENTIALS,
BUT I ALSO KNOW U'VE
STANDARDS,
CAN WE COMPROMISE!!

Explanation and Analysis

Although progress has been made to ease access to high school for anyone regardless of their immigration status, many newcomer youth still need to navigate unnecessarily burdensome and lengthy processes, and in some cases entry is being outright denied. Section 49.1 of the Ontario Education Act states that no one under the age of 18 should be denied access to school because of their immigration status, or that of their parents. Despite this legislation, many newcomer youth continue to face multiple challenges getting in the door.

First of all, any youth over the age of 18 are excluded by this legislation, begging the question: why is education more important for a 17-year-old than an 18-year-old? Moreover, if someone has been here for less than six months, they are unable to attend school unless they pay international fees. We believe that this outdated policy fails to recognize our increasingly nuanced immigration system, and the fact that many people are unable to make refugee claims for a variety of reasons, despite their intention to remain in Canada permanently. Through our research and work with precarious immigration status youth,

we can attest to the numerous consequences that befall a young person who has their education interrupted. In this climate of frustration and hopelessness, many youth either remain idle, which perpetuates feelings of being isolated and undervalued; or else they turn to precarious and possibly exploitative employment.

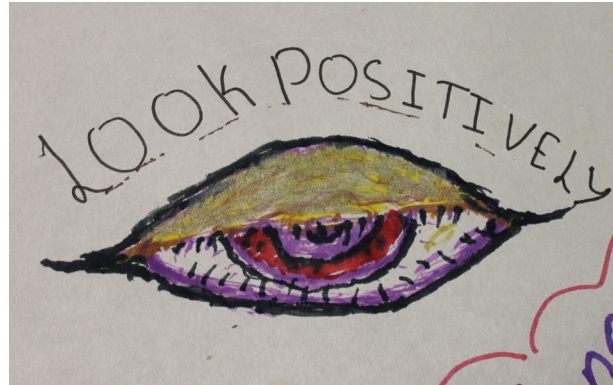
Even for youth that are able to tick the right boxes and fall within the parameters of the legislation, the way in is still treacherous. Both youth and service providers have spoken to us about how there is a widespread lack of understanding from school administrators and other gatekeepers about provincial laws, and that many non-status youth are still being turned away. As one young woman said,

“I did try to go to high school, but I was told I couldn’t because of my status. So I just stopped trying.”

Youth that have had the luxury of being connected to a community agency have had better luck. As another young woman noted,

“I didn’t do it by myself. One of the shelter staff helped me, so it was a little easier. She called the schools first, and the vice principal had never heard of [my status]. So he tried to understand and to help me because I was in an abuse shelter. That’s why I believe he actually helped.”

In addition to unknowledgeable staff, there are many other factors that deter and delay admittance to Ontario high schools for precarious immigration status youth. In Toronto, for example, despite the ghostly presence of a misnamed Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell Policy (DADT)¹, potential students still need to disclose their status at many points along the way. Students in Toronto spoke to us about having to go directly to the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) or the Toronto Catholic District School



Board (TCDSB) Orientation Centre to register for school. As one young person said,

“We talked about going to 5050 [Yonge Street]. That’s where they send you. Like you can’t actually sign up at the school itself. Going there can be pretty scary. It would intimidate anyone to actually go there.”

Other youth spoke about how at the TDSB headquarters they needed to disclose their status to an admissions person over a counter, in a hallway full of people. Similarly, at the Toronto Catholic District School Board Orientation centre, students need to state their status in a room full of school staff and strangers. Many other students have had their status mislabelled, and even referred to as “illegal” by administrative staff (which occurred in multiple schoolboards). For some, the fear connected with this level of disclosure is enough to prevent them from coming back – essentially dropping out before they even get in.

Moreover, through hazy understandings of both section 49.1, and the DADT policy, many youth do not realize their right to attend high school until it is too late. We have encountered many youth who have expressed immense frustration at not being connected to a community organization or a similar arena of support while they were still eligible to attend. Some of these young people spent the bulk of their

teenage years in limbo, isolated from any sense of academic progress, as well as social connections. It is important to note that for youth outside of Toronto, the admissions processes are much less onerous. This may be due to the reduced visibility of the issue outside of Toronto. However, a common thread that was brought up by youth across the province was the burdensome level of documentation that was needed to get in.

“ *It's like, 'Oh, I'm leaving. I'm going to another country. I'm going to gather ALL of my documents.'*

As one youth described,

“The only thing I really needed was my mom's death certificate, my dad's birth certificate, my birth certificate, and a letter from my dad. That was all they asked for.”

Another youth highlighted the challenges with documentation as she stated,

“It's like, 'Oh, I'm leaving. I'm going to another country. I'm going to gather ALL of my documents.' Depending on your situation you might not have grabbed everything. So to get it all from back home can be hard because you have to pay a lot of money... which is crazy. Then you got to wait for it to come.”

The challenges with documentation also lead to problems with recognizing credentials and placing students at the right level. In one student's experience,

“You've got to take documents to actually do the language test. And if you've got no status you can't do it because you don't have the documentation.”

This was echoed by another youth who states,

“I waited three months because I didn't have documents.”

Even for youth who have documents, many still feel as though they are put in the wrong grade, or their credentials are unfairly assessed. As one youth who came to Canada after finishing grade 11 in the United States said,

“Like, my freaking credentials were from the United States... it's like right across! Right there! We have like the same education system... And they did not accept my credentials because it was not a 'transfer school'. It was not like a direct transfer.”

Another youth shared a similarly confusing experience,

“I didn't have my transcripts from back home, but I had some of the actual certificates – like for English. When I showed them, they were like... well, they didn't know. They said they would assess it. But in two quads they never did it. They never told me what I needed.”

It is apparent that there is a glaring lack of consistency among schools and school boards about the procedures for admitting and placing students. The focus groups and interviews highlighted that getting into high school was like spinning a wheel, and experiences were contingent on a variety of factors – whether meeting the right person on the right day, having someone advocate on their behalf, being the right age, being here for the right amount of time, and so on. Thus, due to swirling misinformation and misreading of largely invisibilized

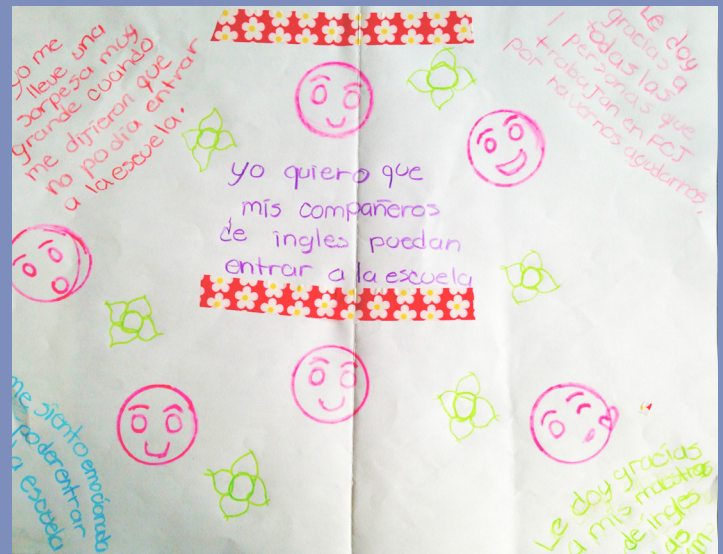
and exclusionary policies, weighty demands for evidence and documentation, and the perpetuation of fear and frustration, we unanimously give a failing grade for Ontario's ability to admit precarious immigration status students safely and efficiently.

Feedback from Service Providers

Many of the issues described above were echoed by service providers across Ontario who had supported precarious migrant youth in getting into school. The main challenges that service providers identified included language barriers, not having sufficient identification, and being asked to publicly reveal immigration status. In addition to this, some service providers also identified a lack of sensitivity to the issue among school staff as well as an often hostile environment throughout admission processes.

To remedy this, many service providers requested a more full and robust implementation of the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy, more adherence to (and better understanding of) section 49.1 of the Ontario Education Act (particularly in regions outside of Toronto), more community collaboration, and better, more streamlined processes to admit students into schools.

1. "All children who are qualified to be resident pupils of the Board, including those without immigration status in Canada, shall be entitled to admission to school. All children shall be welcome, regardless of immigration status, and information about them or their families shall not be shared with immigration authorities". (TDSB Policy P.O61 May 2007)



Members of the FCJ Youth Network started a program to mentor younger students who come to Canada and cannot access school immediately because of their precarious immigration status. Students with visitor's visas are made to wait six months when either they or one of their legal guardians will lose their visitor status and therefore be able to register for high school. Even then, students, especially those wanting to access high school, are made to fill out different forms and jump through multiple hoops in order to prove their education level and immigration status.

We, as members of the FCJ Youth Network who have been involved closely with this project, have gained a real understanding of this issue. We would like to point out that most, if not all students who have attended this program were not given a choice to move to Canada, but they were just brought by their families. As time goes on, frustration and fear became the strongest emotions that we witnessed in these young people. Fear of being denied access, worry of the grade they were going to be put in, and of course general anxiety about fitting into school.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To improve this grade we recommend the following:

› Ontario Schools and School Boards must work to raise the awareness of, and adherence to, existing legislation and policies to permit students to attend high schools regardless of their immigration status. More information sharing needs to take place within and among Ontario Secondary Schoolboards to promote cohesiveness in the information disseminated to potential students and their families.

› Policies and legislation must be revisited and assessed to reflect the changing immigration landscape in Canada. Flexibility and intersectionality should be prioritized to reflect the realities of diverse newcomer populations. This analysis should span multiple areas, including both criteria for admittance, documentation required, and other policies and directives that impede access for newcomer and precarious immigration status youth. Ideally, we hope to move towards admittance processes that value education as a human right, and promote access for anyone regardless of their immigration status, age, length of time in Canada, income, language ability, or any other determining factor.

› A community-driven, newcomer youth-informed training needs to be developed and delivered to all school staff across the province. This training should be made mandatory for all staff working for any Ontario School Board.

『CARLOS'S STORY』

Carlos came to Canada with his mother at the age of 14 after facing severe threats of violence in their home country. However, being from a “Designated Country of Origin”, and without sufficient evidence, the family was advised not to make a refugee claim, and pursue other means to regularization. After staying home for six months, waiting until he fell out of status, Carlos was jumping at the chance to start school. Not really sure where to start, Carlos’s mother took him to the local elementary school to register him for grade eight, as he had completed grade 7 back home. However, with the different system, and the time that it took to wait out his status, Carlos was told that he needed to register for high school. The obvious next step for the family was the local high school, where they were informed that they needed to go to an orientation centre to get assessed, because Carlos was new to the country.



With mounting anxiety and frustration, Carlos and his mother got in touch with a youth worker at a local community organization, to help them through the process. The youth worker went with Carlos to the orientation centre, where they were redirected to 5050 Yonge Street, and told that they had to get an eligibility letter because of Carlos’s precarious status. At 5050, anxiety grew for Carlos, as he was told that he was ineligible to register for school because of his status, and would only be admitted if he had an application pending with Citizenship and Immigration Canada. Fortunately,

with the advocacy efforts of the youth worker, Carlos was deemed eligible, but only if he were provided a letter from the community organization saying that they had an application for status in process.

Once this was done, Carlos returned to the orientation centre, and took his assessment test. He then brought the results of the assessment test and the letter of eligibility to the local high school, where once again he was required to submit documentation to prove his status.

Carlos is finally in school. But the journey to get here was marked with fear and violence. In this journey, Carlos had no less than seven stops along the way – the elementary school, two meetings at the high school, two visits to 5050 Yonge Street, and two appointments at the orientation centre, not to mention appointments with the community organization. At every stop, Carlos was asked to disclose his status, and even referred to as being in the country illegally by school board employees. In addition to the stress that any youth feels transitioning to a new school, Carlos’s stress was layered by being violently othered and excluded throughout this process. Is this any way for a young person to begin their Canadian education?

Equitable Participation



This section grades the extent to which precarious immigration status youth feel included once in school, and valued as equal participants with diverse lived experiences; moreover, it includes how these experiences shape their participation in school.



Explanation and Analysis

We would like to begin by noting that the high school experience spans both academic and non-academic participation. As such, in grading this section we have considered experiences both in and out of the classroom, which will be broken down as follows:

Non-Academic Experience

As student life is shaped by more than grades and graduation, it is important to take into

account how precarious immigration status intersects with other factors (language ability, length of time in Canada, social status, etc.) to limit full and equitable high school participation for many newcomer youth.

Many of the youth who participated in this project expressed that once they got past the gatekeepers, and managed to finally start their actual classes, things began to ease up somewhat – meaning that for many, getting in was the biggest battle. However, once in, many students still faced multiple challenges in navigating the Canadian education system. A

few youth acknowledged that these difficulties were often temporary, and parred it down to “just adapting to the school system over here.” However, multiple participants expressed how the education system here, and multiple actors within this system, failed to fully recognize the unique plight of newcomer youth, particularly those with precarious immigration status. Most prominently, youth expressed how there was a lack of awareness around the added and unique responsibilities held by many precarious migrants. As one youth who was here on his own mentioned,

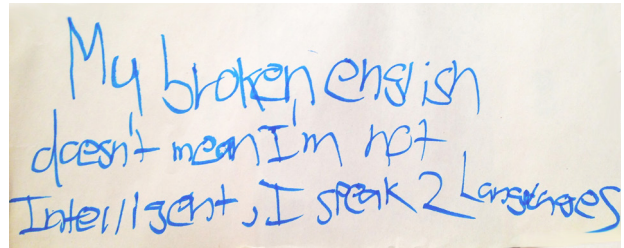
“When [we] come here and get into school, and do bad [...] because we’re working all night, and then going to school all day. I had to work all night. And I’m looking at the other kids, and I’m like, ‘I had to work all night!’”

Other youth who are here with their families, also need to take on additional responsibilities because their (often single) parents need to work long hours at under-the-table, survival jobs. In these jobs, exploitation often eclipses flexibility and possibilities for time off.

As one youth stated,

“You know, I find that a problem. When youth, depending on their situation, have things to do. Like family responsibilities. It causes problems with them. And although they might be in school, then it’s a problem to keep the grades up, because they have other stuff to do. Like dropping off siblings. Like me personally, I used to always miss my math class, and I got a 35 in math because I was never there, because I always had other things to do.”

An additional responsibility of newcomer youth, which is not without its pitfalls, is the need to interpret for parents.



One youth expressed their frustration with this process by saying,

“because the teacher would know that I’m telling [my parents], and she will think that I’m translating wrong. Or my parents want to talk to the teacher about something but they can’t.”

However, many participants in this project also acknowledged that there was support for them through settlement workers and others who could provide translation and interpretation as needed, alleviating this stress.

Despite being admitted to high school, precarious immigration status continues to plague many newcomer students, impeding their full participation. Some youth feel that they are continually asked about their immigration status every time they are required to provide a health card, or other official documentation.

As one youth put it,

“So, I think staff were really confused. And even now sometimes when I talk to teachers, or there’s a field trip, they like still don’t recognize it as a thing. They’re like, ‘oh, you’re supposed to have a health card.’ It’s just supposed to be that way.”

Not having immigration status, bars students from participating in extra-curricular activities, including joining sports teams and attending field trips. We have encountered multiple youth at the FCJ Refugee Centre who have even gone as far as putting deposits down for field trips, before realizing that they needed certain identification or a health card before they were allowed to go. The lack of recognition of how equitable participation for precarious status migrant youth extends beyond course work, further isolates and excludes these young people.

All of these experiences need to be negotiated while concurrently navigating the Canadian education system as newcomer youth.

As one youth describes,

“My first three years were actually really tough for me because I had a really hard time to make friends, and I kind of shut myself out. So it was kind of hard for me to want to go to school, and I skipped school a lot because of it.”

Other participants in the project echoed these sentiments, describing experiences of eating lunch and spending all their free time by themselves, feeling timid to make new friends. We acknowledge that such feelings may be present for anyone attending a new school; however, in our experience these feelings of loneliness and isolation are further exacerbated by youth with precarious immigration status, as they often need to hide this aspect of their identity, or are made to feel that they are doing something illegal.

“

I don't get to do what my friends are doing, and feel that I'm always lying, always hiding something. But hiding here is maybe better than hiding back home.

An important distinction to be made here is that these experiences may play out differently depending on the geographical location of the youth. Many youth outside of Toronto expressed that despite their precarious status, or experiences of migration, they had an overall positive experience in high school, particularly recognizing that high school was their gateway to a range of social, cultural and professional relationships. For example:

“Basically for me high school was fun because I got to make a lot of friends. I got to meet a lot of people and they introduce you to a bunch of stuff that you don't know... High school connects you to a lot of things.”

Or,

“Yeah, like sometimes they have like a game and you've never seen it before, and you're supposed to play it and you don't understand it. Like for me, baseball! They put me on the baseball team and I didn't know the rules. But it was fun and I had a teacher that helped me learn the rules.”

And,

“My school before they have a lot of students and the teacher can't know your name and they always change [your] class. But here there is only a little bit students and the teacher will come to you and sit down and help you.”

It is important to make the distinction that generally these positive experiences took place outside of Toronto, in areas where there is a much smaller concentration of undocumented students. Thus, invisibility and misunderstanding of nuanced or non-statuses may work in students' favour, as it is not con-

sidered a factor in deciding one's eligibility to participate in programs. So overall, this portion of the grade reflects the inability of school staff to be mindful of how the lack of immigration status, and its inherent instability, may dampen the educational experiences of these young people in nuanced ways. Many youth fear that they will make a wrong move and put their family at risk, causing them to keep their head down, and just get by. Greater awareness of this issue, and more safety checks in place to validate and cater to the experiences of non-status youth could be a step toward improving this grade. This will be detailed in the recommendations at the end of this section.

Academics

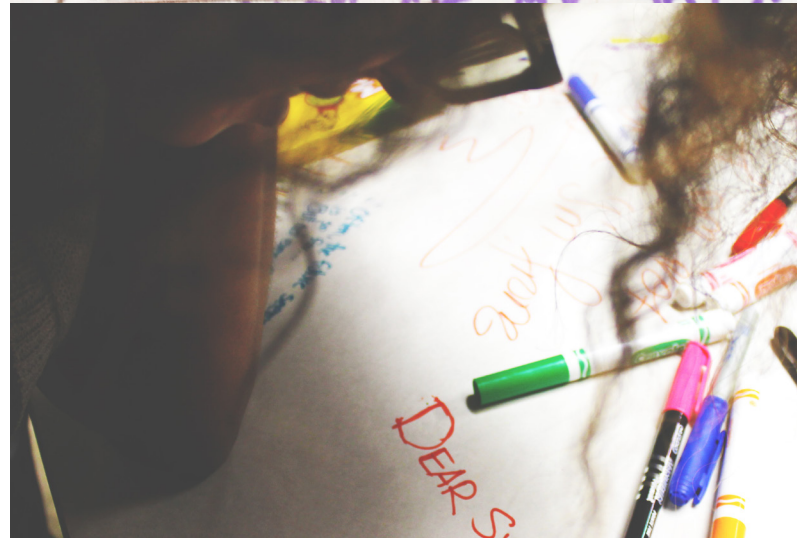
The grade for equitable participation improved with the inclusion of the academic experiences of non-status youth. Generally, many participants in this project found their grades improved significantly in Canada compared to their home countries.

“The North American education system, I feel it's easier in public education than going back to El Salvador. Because in El Salvador I was like dying. Dreading every day going to school.”

“Actually the tests here are very easy because you have a lot of options. And back home you actually had to know and write it down. It's like so different, and so much easier.”

“And the grade system is easy. So when we come here, everything is a little easier for us. But in the end though, it should be in the reverse. Like this country should be a little tougher for us. We need the challenge. It's so laid back. But I'm not complaining at all for the system.”

“I'm smarter here!”



Although many of these statements are subjective, and unique to the experiences of individual youth, participants in this project predominantly spoke with confidence about their grades and coursework in Canada. A few even provided some insight into why improvements may have been made:

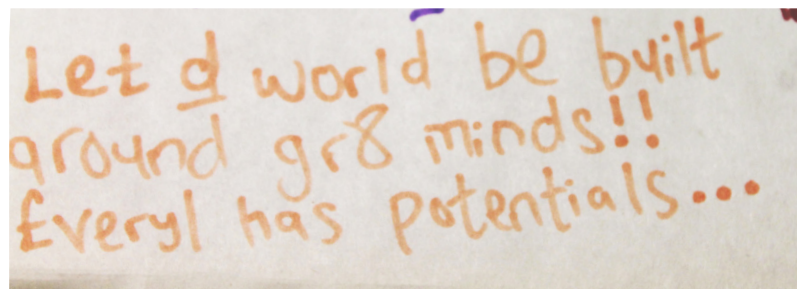
“So, it’s not that it’s harder... it’s just harder to get yourself to do it.”

Participants attributed their improved grades to several factors, including overlap with materials they had previously studied, and a more relaxed education system. Other youth connected their marked improvement to a greater level of support in Canada. When asked why they had improved, one student replied,

“To be honest, back home there wasn’t really a person taking care of me to say ‘go to school, get this, get that...’ But when I got here and I started finding out more about myself and about other countries and stuff, and I just got so interested in everything. I just wanted to know everything and I just got deep in it. And I was like, ‘wow! I love this place!’”

“And coming here it’s so hard to get into school. So when you’re finally into school, you’re like ‘no! I’m not missing this chance! I’m just going to make sure I pass every mark!’ And if you get 90 you want to cry. It hurts.”

Many other youth expressed feeling that they needed to go the extra mile to prove their worth. They felt that if they became that



perfect student, it might just be what’s needed to allow their families to remain in Canada legally. One youth spoke about how her brother took extra courses and maintained a near-perfect grade point average, in the off chance that it might be their ticket to permanent residency. All the family members (the brother included) worked extra jobs to cover the international fees for his post-secondary education. In this instance, the family’s only sure footing was found in education. These sentiments were echoed by other youth, who felt that they needed to achieve a “gold star” position in high school to be successful in Canada. Moreover, not being able to meet these heightened expectations quickly became an additional barrier for some, causing them to give up on their goals.

In addition to the reasons given above, many youth point to language issues as one of the main reasons behind their academic challenges.

“The English language crashes me down. When I first saw my mark, I almost had a heart attack because I’ve never seen that mark in my whole life.”

“Like, you used to be like so good at school work... and when you go to another language and it’s so different, and you don’t understand it. And it... just feels awful not understanding. It’s brutal!”

However, it is important to note that many participants in the project recognized that

learning English was a necessary hurdle to overcome to achieve success in school.

Thus, overall, due largely to the

failure to recognize the nuanced implications of being without status, the non-academic participation was much less favourable for precarious migrant youth; however, this stress was counterbalanced somewhat by the academic experience, which was considered to be more relaxed and supportive.

Feedback from Service Providers

Service providers who responded to our survey reiterated that inequitable participation is often invisibilized. When asked if programs are inclusive for everyone regardless of status, one respondent said,

“Many programs ask for obvious or hidden indicators of status, including [Permanent Residency], OHIP cards, work authorization, etc. Beyond that they are often insensitive to the particular needs and vulnerabilities of non-status youth and their families, leaving youth feeling alienated and unsafe to participate.”

Many other respondents indicated that many factors foster an inequitable and inaccessible environment for non-status youth, including strict funding parameters, a general lack of understanding around the Canadian refugee and immigration processes, and an absence of allyship.

Moreover, the majority of responses indicated that these issues are also present within community organizations and other institutions attended by non-status youth, resulting in their heightened marginalization and isolation.



They Were Left With Her

I still had the dream though...
I had the biggest smile which shrunk...

Why?

I still had a dream though...
Some said it with a nice face.

My mum always told me that humans are two-faced,
I couldn't know.

Some said it, I felt misplaced...
I was nothing.

I was nothing.

Some, some...
the ones with cold souls,
Maybe it's not their fault...
it's their ignorance... or the system...

sigh!

I came with the biggest smile.
Maybe it was my fault!
I had too many hopes.
Too many *dreams*.

Canada!
The land of opportunities!

My mum used to say that I will go to school and be
somebody. Now I see Canada with misery, with...

Loneliness.

Now I see hopelessness,
My mum's dreams...

They were left with her.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We feel it is important to conclude by noting that improved conditions for precarious immigration status youth to get into school, will demand that more attention be paid to fostering safer spaces and more equitable participation in schools. So, to improve this grade and work towards these conditions we are suggesting the following:

- Foster greater dialogue about these issues among relevant parties, including school staff, students, students' families, community organizations and policy makers, to promote sensitivity to the issue and increase allyship. Non-status youth need more trusted allies to connect to appropriate services and supports
- Address funding models in relevant programs (community programs, after-school programs, etc.) that specifically exclude non-status youth (and precarious immigration status youth); better align these models with existing policies and legislation (Section 49.1, DADT, Sanctuary Cities, etc.)
- Implement practices within programs that are inclusive to non-status youth, including more flexible identification requirements and required sensitivity training among project staff.

『MARIA'S STORY』

After a few battles, I was lucky enough to attend high school in Canada. We were here without status, and, my parents were terrified about being discovered and sent back home. We've been here so long, that I don't really remember why we left in the first place, but I knew it was bad enough that we had to do whatever it took to not go back there.

I learned to keep my head down and not draw any attention to myself. I went to my classes, did my homework and tried my best to keep my grades up. But going from school to home, and home to school, was the extent of my high school existence. Nothing out of the ordinary that might put us at risk of being found out. I remember once that I registered to go on a field trip to Toronto to go to a museum there. I was super excited at first because I'd never been to Toronto, and I was really interested in history and different cultures. Well, that dream quickly died as soon as my teacher asked me for my health card. With this little question, it was all over. I made up some excuse about a wedding or something, and stayed home while my class went on the trip.

Stuck.

Alone.

Depressed.

Something similar happened to my little brother. He loves soccer and wanted to join his school's junior team. Again, we had to fill out a form and put our health information on the form. My parents cut it off right there. I always wonder how my brother felt going to the soccer games, and wondering what it would have been like if he were playing along with his friends.

But lucky us. We're at least safe compared to back home. And we're both getting pretty good grades, and our teachers like us at least. But it still sucks. I don't get to do what my friends are doing, and feel that I'm always lying, always hiding something. But hiding here is maybe better than hiding back home. Back there I wouldn't even be able to go to school at all



Anti-Discrimination

This section grades whether or not current anti-discrimination policies and practices are effective in making youth with precarious immigration status feel safe and included in schools. Furthermore, this section explores to what extent immigration status is recognized as a contributing factor to the complex relationship of power, privilege and oppression of students.

"It's all about the
School & Books
Not Background & Religion"

Explanation and Analysis

High schools are arguable sites of discrimination and violence. As these spaces often serve as a social and professional starting point for students new to Canada, it is important to understand how this violence and discrimination plays out for students, and knits a relationship with their wider societal participation.

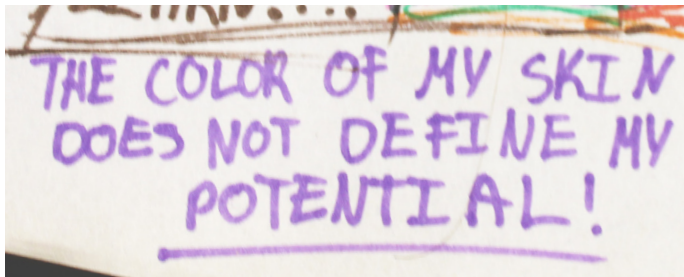
Many students experienced negative racialization, which took form differently in areas where there was less visibility of racialized bodies. As one youth described this

racialization at the hands of a teacher,

"I was not in class, and they watched a video about Africa. The next day [the teacher] asked me questions about the video. I'm basically the only black kid in class. I don't know if he's racist or sexist, or something."

As well,

"In school, I've seen some people discriminate black people. They have this idea that black people don't succeed academically. So when you tell them that you're doing



math or physics or whatever, they get surprised.”

And,

“I hated to be the only black kid in my class. Everyone was always looking, and I was like ‘oh my gosh, I don’t want to be in this class.’ So, I would just hide away.”

Another young woman described her experiences with her peers,

“People were like, ‘oh my god! I want to be friends with you because you are like the stereotypical black person on TV.’ But I’m not. Get used to it.”

These examples highlight how discrimination often came in the form of ‘tokenistic’ behavior, where only perfunctory or superficial attempts were made at understanding or valuing a person as a robust being. In addition to this, students were also targets of trivializing, ignorant and racist stereotypes.

“One of my friends, she wears a hijab. When they talk about ISIS, they are asking her so many questions.”

“I guess with like ISIS and stuff... whenever it’s brought up, the class will try to look at my friend (she wears a hijab). It’s really awkward like you’re waiting for

either an apology or some kind of statement that she’s not entitled to that.”

These examples bring to light many of the issues that were raised throughout this project. Students were pigeonholed, stereotyped and othered because of negative racialization. Moreover, many participants internalized these experiences in different ways. Some youth felt that they had to take additional lengths to counter the hurtful rhetoric and prove their worth.

“Once you come to us, you’re coming to a small city. You’re a minority in the city, so basically just step up and be true to who you are. Don’t be shy. Put yourself out there. And don’t care what other people think.”

“The idea that black people don’t really succeed puts them down. They hear that before they even try and so they just start believing it. And so they stop trying. And then they just drop out.”

Although there was a certain level of variance in the experiences of participants depending on where they were located (in urban or non-urban centres), discrimination and negative racialization were constants through the different interviews and focus groups. Moreover, we also feel it is important to recognize that these experiences are taking place within a wider environment marked by a fearful and hateful rhetoric towards racialized bodies. This is evident in ongoing accounts of racial profiling, police violence as well as xenophobic and Islamophobic hate crimes. This level of racism permeates the school walls and harms negatively racialized youth.

Another layer of discrimination takes form against those students who are, or are perceived as, newcomers to Canada. This has

emerged as a significant problem, as it adds an additional barrier to integrating newcomer students into the school environment.

“They call you immigrant, they call you newcomer. From the colour of your skin. From the hijab.”

“People call you ‘the new girl’. Everyone knows!”

Many students shared that they were marked as newcomers from their first day in the schools, and even referred to as “FOBs” (Fresh off the boat) by peers. This illustrates that being new to both the school and the country paved the way for greater othering and bullying for newcomer students.

“If you’re a newcomer, it’s not bad. You’re not a bad person. Back home there is a lot of problems. There are people killing each other, but you’re not a bad person.”

Assumptions based on students’ countries of origin adds additional injury to this conversation. This is evident in the following examples:

“If they know you’re Jamaican they’ll be scared and stuff. They’ll think you’ll try to kill them. I don’t know why.”

“You have to be friendly. You have to communicate with them. Like you have to show them that you’re not dangerous. That like my country has problems. I want to go back to my country, but there is a lot of problems.”

“Miss, I’m from St. Vincent’... Every single time she told me, ‘are you Jamaican? Are you from Jamaica? I remember you’re from Jamaica.”

“I’m from Saudi Arabia. They’ll be like, ‘whoah, you can speak English? You speak English so good.”

The examples of stereotypes that students experienced in high school were unfortunately plentiful in this project. And as the last example indicates, language became a key element of discrimination for newcomer youth. One participant said a common response from other students was,

“You don’t know English, why would I talk to you?”

This was echoed by many other participants.

“Oh, she’s ESL? She don’t know.’ They think you’re dumb.”

“If you’re new to Canada, they’re like, ‘how can you speak English?’ And I’m like, ‘that’s my first language. I speak English.”

Language ability became an exercise in othering for many students. Teachers, whether intentionally or not, amplified feelings of vulnerability and marginalization through their treatment of newcomer students.

“Teachers yell. They don’t take the time to explain. They aren’t culturally sensitive. Sometimes I want to drop out of school.”

“They change your name. Like, they always do that.”

“They call you immigrant, they call you newcomer. From the colour of your skin. From the hijab.”

Finally, in addition to being excluded because of negative racialization, being new to Canada, or language ability, issues are compounded for students with precarious immigration status. Non-status and precarious status youth experience significant fear and discrimination stemming from their unique situations. As touched on in the previous section, the possibility of having their status exposed is an added source of vulnerability, violence and fear for newcomer youth. Students often hide their statuses from teachers and classmates due to the fear that it will lead to negative consequences.

When asked if they felt comfortable disclosing their status, responses from participants included:

“If you’re new to Canada, and if [people] get angry, they’ll be like, ‘oh, I’ll just call immigration on you.’”

“My mom made sure to tell me not to tell my status.”

“[To not tell your status] is the first thing anyone tells you.”

“If they ask, I’m just like, ‘yeah, I got myself sorted.’”

“I’m just like, ‘I’m waiting for my PR [Permanent Residence] and that’s what you do. You lie about your status.’”



Students that were attending school in the Toronto District School Board indicated that they were aware of the “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” Policy, but it essentially carried no weight, as students were asked multiple times about their immigration status, and feared the information being shared with immigration officials. As indicated in the first section, proof of status was requested throughout the admission processes; however, some students were also asked when in school,

“My teacher actually asked about it before. She was like, ‘what’s your status here?’ My teacher actually asked me that question. And also she’s kind of racist.”

Revelation of being without status carries a significant threat for students and their families, who fear detention and deportation as a result. As detailed in the previous two sections, immigration status becomes a significant factor in shaping access and experience for precarious status migrant youth. What is important here to carry on this conversation, is that immigration status is another layer of identity that invites bullying, violence and othering of newcomer youth. Many participants in the project even spoke about being referred to as “illegal” by peers and staff.

Thus, the constellation of discrimination is vast for precarious status migrant youth. Layered with the racism and discrimination experienced by many students in Ontario high schools, newcomer youth with precarious immigration status are increasingly vulnerable due to additional intersecting elements. These students face a triple threat of being negatively racialized, criminalized and illegalized because of their social locations.

We would like to end this section by recognizing that oppression is a salient element that is

present throughout this project. Thus, to frame experiences of diverse newcomer youth in this context, we would like to describe our own working definition of intersectionality:

The FCJ Youth Network values that intersecting identities, such as age, gender, gender identity, ethnicity, class, social status, immigration status, sexual identity, experiences with authority, violence, etc., shape our individual uniqueness and inform our complicated relationships with power, privilege and oppression.

This is meant to highlight that there are several factors that intersect and interact to shape experiences of discrimination for newcomer youth. Thus, what was described in this section is in no way comprehensive, but what we have attempted to do is underscore the myriad of factors that feed experiences of oppression and marginalization for many newcomer students.

Finally, we recognize that several important steps have been taken across Ontario to counter discrimination in high schools (including forming policies, task forces, and student alliances); however, safety remains compromised for many precarious status migrant youth. When discussing possible responses to their experiences, one student shared:

“So one student went up to [staff] and he told them, ‘no, no! Deal with it.’ How are you supposed to deal with it? They’re making fun of you, and it’s hurting you!”

Fear became an important factor when students sought help to counter the discrimination they faced. Many youth with precarious status preferred to ‘keep their head down’ and not draw any attention to themselves and their precarious

situations. This will be explained more in the next section, but what is important to note here is that support to counter discrimination faced by non-status youth was insufficient in Ontario high schools.

Feedback from Service Providers

As our survey for service providers focused mainly on the multiple intersections of immigration status with education and other supports, any discussion of discrimination fell mostly within these parameters. The majority of respondents indicated that a lack of understanding of the many nuances of precarious immigration status heightens exclusion and marginalization for youth.

Respondents indicated that this form of discrimination could be alleviated somewhat with greater anti-oppression training, and increased promotion of youth engagement both in schools and the wider community. As well, an increased visibility of this issue may lead to the redirection of resources and funding to better support non-status youth.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Thus, because of the ongoing and significant problem of discrimination for precarious status migrant youth in Ontario schools, as well as the lack of safe mechanisms for complaint and avenues to seek support, we have given this section a D+. To improve this grade, we recommend the following:

- Revisit and evaluate current measures to counter discrimination in Ontario schools; better reflect diverse paths of migration and immigration statuses in school programs and curriculum

- Ongoing and robust anti-oppression and sensitivity training for ALL school staff to increase positive awareness of diverse migrant communities in Canada

- Work with community and community organizations to develop and implement a safe and effective complaint mechanism for youth that feel they have faced oppression, discrimination or been treated unfairly.

『Lakitia's Story』

I came to Canada from the Caribbean when I was a teenager. Being from a Caribbean country, I'd taken school in English my whole life, but for some reason I was still put in ESL classes. I don't know if it was because of the way I talked, or maybe my reading and writing wasn't too good.

But, I wasn't one to complain. So I went to class and did all the work. It was actually pretty easy, so I decided to stay in the ESL program. I was actually there for a couple of years. None of the teachers seemed to notice that my English was pretty fluent, and I was too shy to ask to change classes. Looking back, I guess it was kind of racist of them. Just because I spoke with an accent, means that I can't speak your English? I wonder if things would be different if I had something. I wonder if I'd be somewhere else now, somewhere better...

『Kwame's Story』

Grade 11... I have to say things were going pretty good for me. I'd been here for a few years, made quite a few friends, and even felt that I was becoming part of Canadian society. And then it happened. Mr. Stanley's geography class. A student teacher was leading the class, and we were talking about Africa. He talked about the poverty and the hunger and the lack of development in African countries...

WHAT?

I mean, I'm from Africa, and I lived there for most of my life. Sure, not everything I experienced was like here, but my life was NOT a World Vision commercial. I mean that's not the reason we left. Who was this white guy pretending he knew anything about my experiences, my culture, my country... I couldn't just let it slide by. I politely and humbly approached the teacher after class and tried to explain to him why what he said was oppressive. And for a split second I thought he understood. But then the next day, things took a turn. Instead of misrepresenting my home, history and culture, he turned it on me. When he brought up the situation in Africa, he was like, "Kwame, why don't you explain it to us? After all, you're from there..."

WHAT?

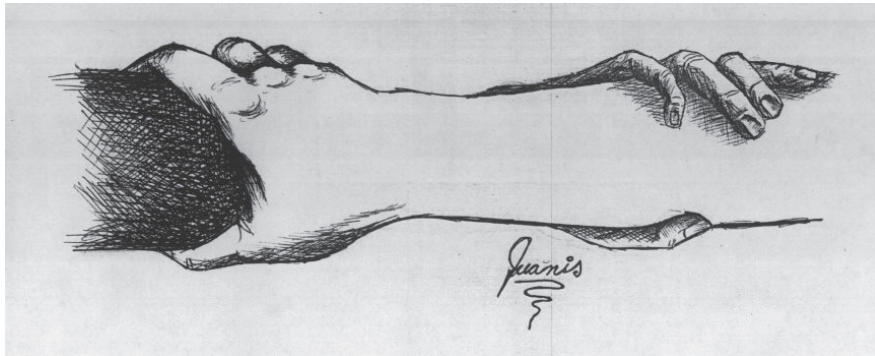
I might be from Africa, but that doesn't equip me to appropriately reflect the history, culture and practices of my country in their entirety. Why are you putting all that on my shoulders? Whether you realize it or not, that's an incredible weight to bear.

In my opinion, both of these extremes are racist and discriminatory. And the worst part is, is that no one else saw it that way. No one else batted an eye. Why can't you let me do me? If I want to share my experiences with you, then let me come to you. But more importantly, when I do, the least you can do is listen.

Support



This section looks at what level of support exists for newcomer youth in Ontario schools, and whether or not this support is effective and responsive to the unique and nuanced needs of students with precarious immigration status. Additionally, this section explores whether links are being made to community agencies to fill these gaps in the support being offered by schools.



Explanation and Analysis

Overall, the province fared much better in this section than other areas of this project. Many participants felt that despite a general lack of awareness and swirling misinformation in terms of immigration support, they were, for the most part, able to connect with supportive and sensitive staff and students.

“Sometimes I would go to the principal and she would listen. She would always listen to me. She was very supportive. She always tried to make sure I stayed out of

trouble. And my teachers, OMG! They were so great!”

“My school, my teacher... if you're new she would find a student to help you. She would not leave you alone, always making sure you understand.”

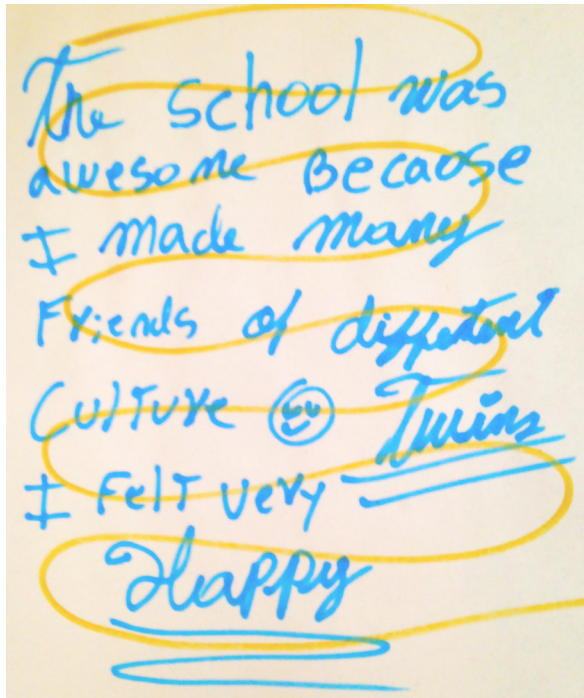
“I was getting a lot of mental health help and all this stuff, and my counsellor who was always with me through grade 9 and 10 retired. And I was like, ‘oh no’, because he was like the person I relied on so much. So I guess I stopped looking for other stuff

and started looking at myself to see what I could do, what I could fix, and what I had control over.”

As seen here, many youth are fortunate enough to connect with school staff that were supportive and took the time to listen to their unique problems. However, at the same time, many youth were selective about the information they provided when reaching out to staff and other students. Many youth felt that there was a general lack of awareness and understanding in schools about their precarious status situation, so it was simply easier to say that they were permanent residents, or waiting for their permanent resident card. In fact, in a Toronto focus group, when asked if they had disclosed their status to teachers, many participants laughed and asked,

“are you crazy?”

Other youth, after building some level of relationships with staff, including some principals, vice-principals, guidance counsellors and



teachers, felt that they had someone to confide in – someone who understood their unique and precarious situation. These individuals often acted as trusted intermediaries, and were influential in linking youth with relevant and responsive community services.

“There were only a few teachers that I could have told my situation, because I was scared. Like, if I tell this teacher, this teacher might not understand, and they would say it to someone else, and there was going to be problems. So I was like, the teachers that showed me they cared, they were the ones I was able to tell this is my situation, and I can’t do this, and I can’t do that.”

“So, I don’t know. It was tough for me making friends, but what I found helpful was like... our counsellor. He was really helpful and he connected me with organizations outside our school and like got me help. It was really nice.”

A large number of participants, mostly situated in Toronto and Windsor, really celebrated the existence of Settlement Workers in Schools. These workers were described as extremely strong supports for students, particularly in Toronto where they often had a more thorough understanding of nuanced immigration statuses. These workers were able to fill multiple roles, including interpreting, referring to community organizations and providing individual counselling and support as needed. The involvement of these workers in the educational experiences has significantly improved this grade.

However, a limited awareness of the implications of being without immigration status, or having some form of precarious status, detrimentally impacted some participants (particularly in non-urban centres).

“The guidance counsellor was supposed to be helping me, but she didn’t help me at all.”

“[My guidance counsellor] didn’t have a complete understanding of my situation and I did have to explain certain things. He cared enough to understand basic things, but didn’t know what everything meant. So the information he gave me was very misleading, which hurt in the end. He really tried and gave me all this help, but it didn’t even help after all. Like, he even got me a scholarship that I could never use.”

“But when I went there, the secretary didn’t know anything. She said ‘I have dealt with everything, but I have never dealt with this before!’”

“A lot of people in Kingston are afraid. Like, we have a youth worker upstairs, but they don’t go because everyone knows that the teachers talk to each other about the students. So, even if you’re picked on, they won’t tell the teachers because they know they talk to each other and it might make it worse.”

Besides formal actors, and trusted intermediaries, some youth found support through peer groups and in other informal settings. As one youth mentioned,

“The only place was this informal place. It was with this peer counsellor, who was Caribbean. So all the Caribbean people

used to hang out there.”

Thus, it has been made apparent through this study that support for newcomer students is accessed through a variety of means. However, despite a limited number of trusted friends, or a handful of trusted intermediaries that help shape a more inclusive and accessible space, there remains a heightened level of uncertainty, instability and fear for non-status and precarious immigration status students.

Feedback from Service Providers

Service providers brought attention to the many factors that result in less than adequate support for non-status and precarious status migrant youth. These included strict funding parameters; resources being overtaxed in meeting the needs of “eligible” clients; a sweeping disconnect with policies and practices; and a lack of collaboration among service providers, and between service providers and educational institutions.

However, nearly all of the service providers who responded to the survey indicated that they would often work outside their mandate to serve and support non-status youth. Unfortunately, there was also an indication that being somewhat unknowledgeable about the intricacies and implications of the immigration system could result in disservice and harm for these populations.

Ideas for improvement included greater referral networks, a reimagining of existing policies and directives to span precarious statuses, and (as always) more training.

“The only place was this informal place. It was with this peer counsellor, who was Caribbean. So all the Caribbean people used to hang out there.”

RECOMMENDATIONS

To increase support, we propose the following recommendations:

◦ Greater presence of an intersectional analysis in existing programming. Most participants agreed that programs that specifically targeted newcomer youth is not necessarily a viable solution, as there exists a certain level of stigma for those labeled as “new”; and this stigma is compounded for those that are negatively racialized, criminalized or illegalized. Thus, all programs should work to promote a positive and safe space for the wide range of identities that may be present.

◦ Mandatory training for staff across schoolboards that not only raises awareness of the many statuses that one can hold, but also provides information of community resources that would be better equipped to support youth navigating these situations.

◦ Greater participation in existing networks that support youth with precarious immigration status, including the Toronto Precarious Status Youth Network, The Toronto Counter Human Trafficking Network, and the Canadian Council for Refugees’ Youth Network.



『Malik's Story』

Malik was in Canada on her own, and attending high school in Canada without status. She had been sent by her family to live in the care of a distant relative – a person she had never met before. Unfortunately, the situation for Malik got pretty bad. Her relatives became abusive towards her, threatening her and forcing her to do an unreasonable amount of work around the house and for their family business.

Malik was exhausted, and it showed. She started falling asleep in class, and her marks began to drop. On the advice of some of her teachers, she met with her school's vice principal. Nearing the end of her rope, Malik broke down in the VP's office. Although fearful, she felt like she could trust this woman, and decided to disclose that she was here without status, and not sure how to get help for the exploitation she was facing.

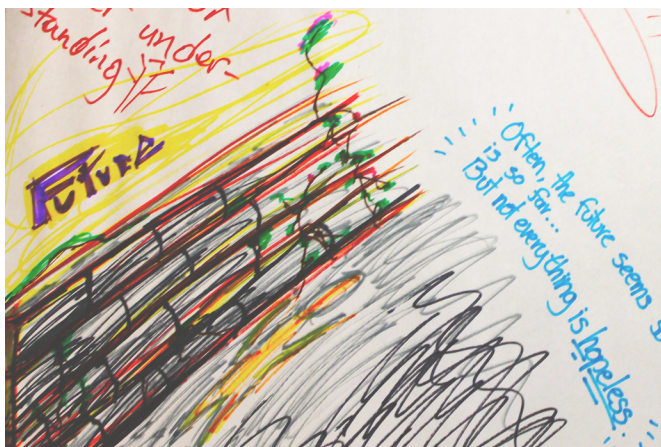
Thankfully, her VP stepped up to the challenge in a really supportive way. She not only managed to get Malik connected with a shelter that was appropriate for her, but also got her involved in a youth group, where Malik met other youth that were here with precarious immigration status. Things got better for Malik.

With community support, Malik was able to get the right help with her immigration situation, and recently received her permanent residence on Humanitarian and Compassionate Grounds. She is now attending college, and has plans of being a nurse in Canada so she can give back. Malik will always be grateful to her VP – thankful that she made the right phone call that day.



Moving On

This section grades how effective school-based actors (teachers, guidance counselors, administrators, etc) are in offering advice and support for the transition out of high school. Does this advice recognize the limited possibilities for youth with precarious immigration statuses?



Explanation and Analysis

We would like to begin this section by acknowledging that despite some slow improvements being made for precarious status migrant youth in Ontario schools, the options beyond high school are extremely limited. Thus, the implications for moving forward with autonomy and agency for precarious status migrant youth are deleterious at best. Many youth are violently othered, as they stand on the sidelines while their peers continue on to post-secondary education. When asked where they would be now if their status had been

regularized, one youth replied,

“Probably university already. Like, duh, I’m smart! But instead I’m stuck here. It actually impacted me a lot.”

Many youth expressed feelings of intense derailment and disengagement with their academic paths.

“You can’t do anything about it. Why even try?”

“I was advised to get scholarships for college. But then knowing my status and whatever I knew it was not possible. So I just didn’t bother. And because of that I also kind of... well, I could have done better. And then they said ‘try getting a scholarship’. I’m like, ‘okay... kill myself to get a hundred?’ Which I could do, but then I can’t get a scholarship! Does that make sense?”

This sentiment was echoed by many participants of the project, whose false hope was inflated by ill-informed or unaware guidance counsellors and other school staff.

“[My guidance counsellor] went out of his way to find scholarships for me that I could apply to. And I did it, and I kind of knew that I couldn’t, but I still did it. Because I was with the hope that I was actually going to be able to go... but then... All that shit happened and I was told I can’t go.”

“My teachers always pushed us to go to college and university. But I knew from grade 11 that it would be very difficult to get into College. So I didn’t really pay much attention to it. But then I still tried. And they kept pushing me, pushing me, pushing me...”

“I have four teachers and staff from the school. [They] actually encouraged me to go to university and apply for university. And although they’re great, I love them, they’re great teachers... PLEASE STOP! They didn’t fully understand my situation and even when I tried to explain it, they still didn’t understand it.”

“I only told my guidance counsellor about [my status]. And she would always say to me, ‘yeah, you should get your [status] and get into college. You’re very good and you’re a smart student, and blah, blah, blah...? Whatever.’”

“All of my teachers kind of encouraged me to go because of my grades, and whatever. I did really well, so they were like advising me - “there’s this school to go to.” And this lady in the office, after graduation when I went to pick up my photos and stuff, she gave me the booklets to the colleges and stuff. And with them not knowing, I would just say to them ‘yeah, I’m just going to apply,’ or ‘I applied to this place’. Because of them not knowing about my status, because I didn’t feel comfortable telling them, but I only told my guidance counsellor about whatever. And she would always say to me, ‘yeah, you should get your [status] and get into college. You’re very good and you’re a smart student, and blah, blah, blah...’ Whatever.”

Another youth, when asked if their status was considered when being advised about next steps, they replied,

“I was blinded by hope, and I didn’t even consider it.”

These examples are very telling as they highlight some of the salient, but often invisible issues faced by non-status students when considering their future. Whether or not they are aware that they will likely be unable to continue on to post-secondary school, many students felt devalued and deflated as they approached the end of high school.

Other youth and youth workers highlighted a tendency for some guidance counsellors to stream students into non-academic or trades programs. These practices (although not necessarily widespread in the province) have been criticized for their inherent racism

and discrimination. Many youth were negatively racialized in Ontario high schools, and thus assumed to be less capable of post-secondary success than their non-racialized peers. Although, this was explained more in the Discrimination section of this report, we feel it bears repeating here. As one youth explains her experience in class,

“I remember one time... I had to do this article, and I did my article ahead of time and I was reading to my teacher out in class, and everybody was like SHOCKED! Shocked that this black girl wrote this article. And I was like, ‘why?’, and he was like ‘it’s not that I thought you were dumb, but...”

Another youth explains a similar experience in the guidance office:

“I guess they look at what’s easy for you, instead of what you want to do.”

Thus, the road forward beyond high school becomes pretty bleak for precarious immigration status youth. With extremely few options, many youth have no choice but to turn to exploitative and derailing next steps, furthering their isolation and disengagement.

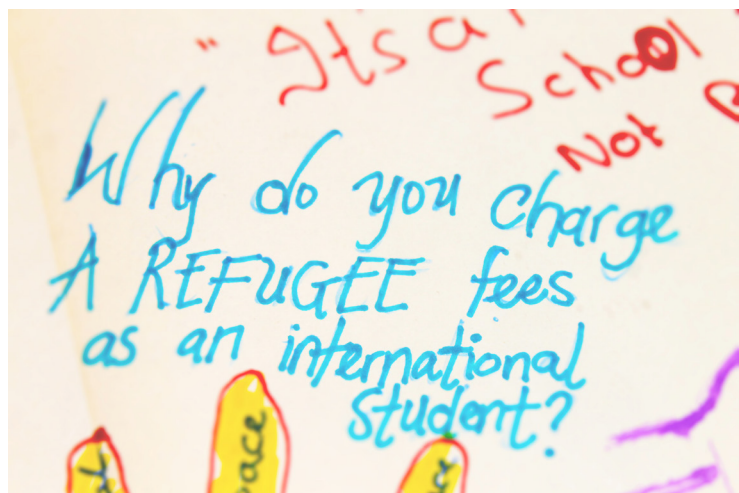
Feedback from Service Providers

There was little attention given to this issue in the survey results from service providers other than indicating that there exists a far-reaching ignorance within educational systems to the nuances of the immigration system.

However, interestingly, while few respondents detailed the specific challenges associated with bridging the gap for

non-status youth between secondary and post-secondary education, a greater proportion of respondents indicated that they had a lot of understanding around access to post-secondary education (35.71% for secondary compared to 42.86% for post-secondary).

The conclusion we have drawn from this feedback (as well as our own experience) is that there are at present less possibilities for non-status and precarious status migrant youth to attend post-secondary education. For example, in our own work with precarious status migrant youth, we have had much greater success with enrolling students in secondary institutions than we have with post-secondary institutions, where we have only been able to support a few youth who were “accepted in principle” for permanent residency. It is our belief that this disparity results from tighter, albeit more overarchingly ambiguous, policies, as well as a greater importance attached to funding for international students.



RECOMMENDATIONS

To improve this grade, we propose the following recommendations:

- School boards, teachers and staff should use their educational networks and provincial ties to support existing efforts that are aimed at increasing access for precarious immigration status youth in post-secondary institutions

- Develop policies and practices that support precarious immigration status youth in moving forward positively after high school; this may include accessing community support and exploring alternatives to post-secondary education

- Further develop trainings to include access to post-secondary; extend trainings around these issues to other relevant actors including: guidance counsellors, college/university representatives, etc.

『Salma's Story』

I was a refugee claimant when I went to my guidance counsellor to talk about applying to College. I had talked to him before about it and the idea had crossed my mind a few times. The one that pushed me to begin the talk was my film teacher, who also wanted me to go to University to pursue what I wanted to do as a professional. I thought that I was on my way.

My guidance counselor had known about my status since the beginning and had some idea of what that implied. I even remember him asking me to keep him updated on whatever happened



to my status, if it changed or anything. So, because I was still a refugee claimant, waiting for my hearing, I never needed to update him about anything. He wasn't at all sure if my status would mean anything for me trying to access post-secondary education, but he still encouraged me to try. Both my teacher and the counselor researched different scholarships until they surprisingly found one that I could apply to regardless of my status. They convinced me to go for it, and I applied. What none of us knew at that time that the amount of money I needed was a lot more than domestic fees.

After that, I went and applied to three colleges, but only did the entrance exam for one. I received the acceptance letter and I was ecstatic! It was a simple letter, but it meant I had the key to start a new chapter, the future I wanted. I did not know about the fees until it was too late. I received another letter, this time it was the one that brought me back to reality and flat out told me I couldn't access school. As a refugee claimant I needed to pay international fees. The fees were too high for what the scholarship would give me. The deadline was too close for me to even access the money from the scholarship...

There was nothing I could do. I was not going to be attending College the next fall.

CONCLUSION

The links and overlaps in and among the five sections of this report have not only highlighted several residual and emerging issues that plague precarious immigration status youth in Ontario schools, but have pointed to the fact that much work needs to be done to respond to these issues. Despite some positive shifts in knowledge and awareness, and piecemeal support from trusted intermediaries, a lot more work must be done before we can call Ontario high schools “safe” for precarious immigration status youth.

It is our experience that this issue is growing, and that more students in Ontario schools are finding themselves without legal immigration status and being detrimentally impacted as a result. We hope that this report has provided some indication of the number of people that reside in Canada in this situation, as well as how the lack of immigration status shapes individual experiences of students within Ontario schools.

At the time of publication, we are receiving daily inquiries from service providers in support of non-status and precarious immigration status youth, and continue to welcome new youth to participate in the FCJ Youth Network.

As a result, we would like to finish this report by stating that this report is not finished. Rather, we would like to think of this report as an organic document that can continue to collect and communicate the experiences of precarious immigration status youth, both inside and outside of educational institutions in Canada, as well as some promising practices to effectively and efficiently respond to these issues.

To improve and increase space for precarious immigration status youth in Ontario schools, we would like to push for cross-sectoral and collaborative efforts, which are underlined by valuing education as a human right. Any measures of support or response must be deeply informed and driven by newcomer youth communities, and must appreciate their experiences through a robust intersectional lens. As shared throughout the recommendations in this report, we think that next steps should promote flexibility and greater inclusion of diverse populations in school programs and curriculum, and implement a wide range of trainings for school staff.

We hope we can carry these conversations forward, and work collaboratively to support diverse newcomer youth as they attempt to participate in Canadian schools.

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EVERYONE!!

any from
us from
writing
grabbing...
hoping.
SYSTEM
POTENTIAL
KNOW
STANDARDS,
COMPRIMISE!!

RAISIN
BREAD

EDUCATION

Shouldn't be a privilege of few...

multiple
roots
Cascadia

My brain
doesn't mean
I'm not
Intelligent

to know how to
cool school
any go school

is
simplification!

Unit 4

