

A ROCKY PATH

Understanding Access to Education Challenges for Newcomer Children & Youth

Ontario Education Report Card Phase 1: June 2024

Prepared by:



Funded by:



A ROCKY PATH

Understanding Access to
Education Challenges for
Newcomer Children & Youth

Ontario Education Report Card
Phase 1: June 2024



DISCLAIMER:

The scope of this project is extended only to the Public English Language Regular and Separate school systems in Ontario at the Elementary and Secondary Levels; and the Public Post-Secondary Educational Institutions.

Among the families that participated in the research component of this project we had participants with different statuses, such as, Refugee Claimants, Non-Status, Humanitarian and Compassionate Grounds Applicants and Protected Persons/Convention Refugees.





Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	1
About The Centre	2
About The Project	3
Report Card: Phase 1	4
Getting In	5
Equitable Participation	9
Anti-Discrimination	13
Support	17
Moving On	21
Conclusion	25
Appendices	26
References	33

Acknowledgements

We would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the land we gathered on to carry out major components of this project. The land has given us the space to come together collectively as community to discuss the issues we face and collaborate on an inviting pathway for change.

In acknowledging the land, we want to acknowledge the resilience of the many Indigenous nations that have been on these, their ancestral lands since time immemorial and continue to nurture, conserve and protect the land.

We are able to gather and benefit from this land due to the colonial history of Canada that has displaced Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island while simultaneously inviting and offering the land to Indigenous and Non-Indigenous migrants and displaced peoples as well as settlers.

In our commitment to decolonization and solidarity with Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island and around the globe, we are hopeful that bringing the voice of community through accessible educational resources will aid in bringing the gap towards reconciliation and further our understanding and appreciation of Indigenous knowledge and processes.

We want to acknowledge the work of the FCJ Youth Network members that worked on the first version of this report in 2016, assessing access to education at Secondary level and the transition to higher education, which significantly informed the process and outline for the comparisons in this phase 1 report.

We would also like to thank the Uprooted Youth Committee (Fernanda, Janaina, Khadijah, Dennis, Marcos, Maria, Peshana, Amie) and FCJ Youth Network for their commitment to this project and ongoing tireless advocacy. We would like to thank the FCJ Refugee Centre Leadership (Carolina Teves, Diana Gallego, Tsering Lhamo, Loly Rico) and the Youth & Access To Education Team (Natalia Mercado Salazar and Stefan Enrique Joseph Kallikaden) for their mentorship and guidance throughout the process. We would like to thank our Communications Team (Alyaa Osman and Miguel Máiquez) for the designing and editing of this report. Last, but not least, we would like to thank Maytree for its interest and championing of equity in education and for funding this important project.

About the Centre

FCJ Refugee Centre

The FCJ Refugee Centre is a non-profit organization and registered charity, that has been working with newcomers, refugees, and others at risk due to their immigration status for more than 32 years. We address systemic issues that newly arrived refugee claimants face in Canada including lack of resources, marginalization, and discrimination. Our strength is found in our community, and with operational excellence we provide adaptive, agile, intersectional service delivery to the full spectrum of the newcomer population, with specialized attention to refugee claimants, those without status, and precarious migrants. We work every day to increase social visibility, acknowledge the value, and respect the inherent human dignity of all refugees and precarious migrants.

FCJ Youth Network

Over slightly more than the last decade, we have developed a program that brings newcomer youth together with the purpose to participate and establish deep roots in Canadian society while understanding the impacts of colonialism – this group being called the FCJ Youth Network (FCJYN). The FCJYN is a brave space for newcomer and migrant youth to come together on a weekly basis to learn, build, and participate in community development. It is an inclusive space for youth to support each other, get involved in the community, participate in a variety of activities and workshops, and engage in self-advocacy and activism on the frontlines. A really important aspect of the FCJYN is that it is open to any newcomer youth regardless of their status.

About the Project

Uprooted Youth Committee

The Uprooted Youth Committee leading the project is made up of youth that have experienced issues in navigating the education system as a result of various circumstances that commonly intersect at their immigration status. They are focused on the logistical framework, the conduction of focus groups, and the compilation and consolidation of materials that resulted in the production of this report.

Project Summary

In 2016, the FCJ Youth Network produced a report assessing the secondary school system in Ontario on 5 salient areas: Getting In, Equitable Participation, Anti-Discrimination, Support, and Moving On. This report was instrumental in setting the trajectory of several positive advancements in education access for people with precarious immigration statuses. However, due to regressions observed in recent times, and by support and funding from the Maytree Foundation, we have constructed a more extensive version of the 2016 report card to address the rising concerns, create a space for open communication, and foster actionable items for equitable change. Different from the initial report, this one will address the levels of Elementary, Secondary (High school, EdVance, Adult School), and Post-Secondary education access for newcomer youth and families.

The new report is divided into two phases:

- Phase 1: 2024 School Year End [Assessing Elementary, Secondary & Post-Secondary System with List of Areas Of Improvement]
- Phase 2: 2025 School Year End [Updates on Implementation of Suggestions]

Report Card: Phase 1

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.

C-

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 criticism?

D

SUPPORT

What level of support exists for newcomers students in Ontario schools?
Is this support effective and responsive to the nuanced needs of precarious migrants?

D

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 is focused on how Ontario Educational Institutions (including principals, vice principals, secretaries, staff, School Boards, the Ministries, and other relevant actors) facilitate or impede newcomer families and youth, particularly those with precarious immigration status, from getting into school in Ontario.

Elementary: The process for getting in for newcomer families varies by status, but generally follows the steps of document collection by the family, following up with the relevant enrollment authority (school, admissions office, orientation centre, online application), orientation with the family and school staff on start day. Generally, the documents required are - passports, birth certificates (baptismal certificates for catholic schools), two different proof of address, and immigration status documents.

Secondary: The process is similar to that of Elementary with few changes. Generally, following the document collection, prospective students would need an assessment examination as well as a review of prior credentials. The baptismal certificate is not a requirement to go to Catholic school at this level.

EdVance: The process here is generally to book an assessment test and following the test, fill out the registration form, all done on the respective school websites. Generally, the documents required for registration are - passport/ID document, valid immigration status document.

Adult School: The process is similar to EdVance with the additional requirement of possessing a Study Permit. The Adult School day program also generally offers speciality programs in areas like Personal Support Workers, Pharmacy Assistants, Child Care Assistants, Hairstyling and more.

Post-Secondary: This has been one area of education that has significantly limited the scope of access for any non-regularized immigration status holder. Presently, just York University and Toronto Metropolitan University have a broad range program designed to meet the needs of precarious migrant students looking to study. Presently nothing is available in a similar manner at the collegiate level.

Getting In

Research Data

The families involved in this research shared that due to language barriers, lack of resources (such as computer or internet) and lack of technological literacy, finding the information needed about the education system was very difficult.

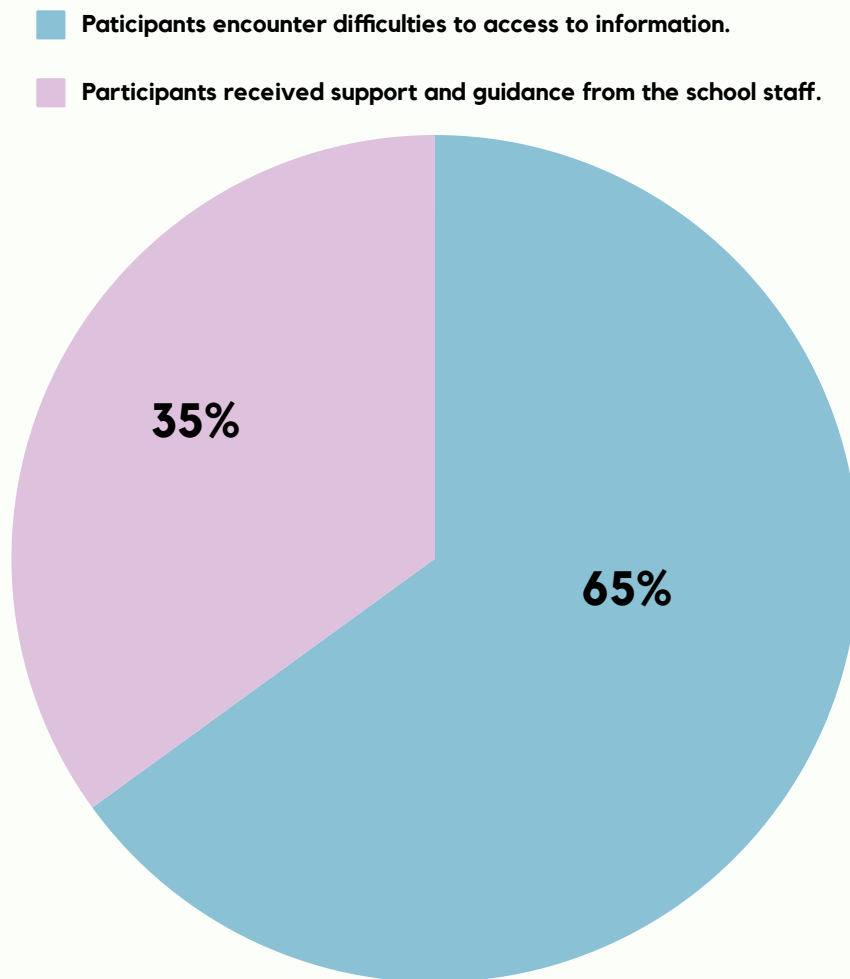


Figure 1: Access To Information On Enrollment Steps

Here is a statement from one of the families that participated in the project:

"We need more support, because the process is very confusing and sometimes you think to give up"

Anonymous, 2024

Getting In

Organizational Inputs

Elementary & Secondary: In Ontario, the Education Act mandates that all children under 18 have the right to attend school regardless of their immigration status. Specifically, section 49.1 of the Act reads:

"A person who is otherwise entitled to be admitted to a school and who is less than eighteen years of age shall not be refused admission because the person or the person's parent or guardian is unlawfully in Canada"

(Government of Ontario, 2004)

After interviewing our sample population, we found that 70% of the newcomer families were not familiar with the enrollment process or the mandatory documents needed to start the enrollment process until they connected with a community agency like FCJ Refugee Centre. Families were also unaware that aside from their type of immigration status, the educational institutions were not allowed to enquire about their immigration circumstances or story in general.

At FCJ, we saw between February 2023 and June 2023 alone, 18 cases of non-status families that were getting the directions of needing to cancel their Visa/Electronic Travel Authorization (ETA) which does not comply with Ministry of Education legislation. This was finally resolved in October 2023. During Summer 2023 there were several cases of refugee claimant families who were denied rightful fee exempt admission due to lack of recognition of the "Acknowledgment of Claim" as proof of status. Families indicated inconsistencies in information provided by the schools, the admissions office, and the school board website overall.

Presently, non-status families are being asked for a notarized letter confirming their immigration status prior to admission, which is an additional bureaucratic barrier and a financial burden on families that are already struggling to make ends meet and don't have access to social assistance. Additionally, despite the lack of status being applied to the student and/or parent/guardian according to Section 49.1 of the Education Act, there are disparities in interpretation and application of this at the admissions offices.

Getting In

Adaptations for Equity

This section outlines key areas for improvement to ensure that newcomer students receive the support they need to thrive academically and socially. By focusing on financial support, cultural competency training for staff, and inclusive school policies, we can create a more equitable and welcoming environment for all students. Here, we present strategies and proposals to enhance accessibility and inclusivity, aiming to reduce barriers and foster a supportive educational experience.

Financial Support and Scholarships

Improvement Area: To increase financial support and scholarship opportunities for newcomer students.

Proposal: Develop targeted scholarships and bursaries for newcomer students, funded by government and private sector partnerships. Simplify the application process and provide assistance in multiple languages.

Impact: Improved financial support would make post-secondary education more accessible to newcomer students, reducing dropout rates and increasing graduation rates.

Cultural Competency Training for Staff

Improvement Area: Provide ongoing cultural competency training for teachers and school staff.

Proposal: Develop mandatory training programs focused on cultural awareness, anti-racism, and inclusivity. These programs should be updated regularly to reflect the evolving demographic landscape of the student population.

Impact: This would create a more inclusive and supportive school environment, reduce instances of discrimination and bullying, and improve student-teacher relationships.

School Policies and Protections: Safe Schools and Equity Policies

Improvement Area: Promote safe and inclusive schools through policies that protect the rights of all students, regardless of their immigration status.

Proposal: Implement and enforce comprehensive safe schools and equity policies that ensure the protection of newcomer students' rights, promoting an environment where all students feel safe and valued.

Impact: These policies would help create a secure and equitable school atmosphere, fostering a sense of belonging and safety among newcomer students, thereby supporting their academic and social success.

Equitable Participation

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

Programs in the Ontario education system are designed to be holistic, aiming to address the diverse needs of newcomers at all levels. Holistic education programs consider academic, social, emotional, and physical aspects to support the overall well-being and integration of students.

"Education is an important social determinant, and low educational attainment could have an impact on outcomes related to employment, income, health and well-being"

(Statistics Canada, 2022)

Once a newcomer child or a youth in Ontario has access to a school they have a variety of opportunities including after-school programs, academic support, and scholarships:

- After-School Programs: Many schools offer after-school programs focusing on homework help, sports, arts, and other extracurricular activities to help students integrate and succeed.
- Academic Support: Newcomers can access English as a Second Language (ESL) programs (not available in all schools), tutoring, and mentorship programs provided by schools and community organizations.

Some services and programs additionally designed to meet the needs of newcomers are:

1. Settlement Workers in Schools (SWIS)
2. Welcoming and Inclusive School Environment: including multicultural events and celebrations.
3. Academic Support: language support, tutoring, and academic mentoring
4. Social and Emotional Support: Programs include mental health services, peer support groups, guidance and career counselling, and extracurricular activities to help students build social connections.
5. Family and Community Engagement: Through workshops, orientation sessions, and community events to foster a supportive environment.

Equitable Participation

Research Data

In spite of having after school programs, academic support, scholarships and other the services, 50% of the participants of this research project shared that the school did not offer any academic support at the moment of enrollment. The other 50%, shared that the school offered them ESL classes and transportation services.

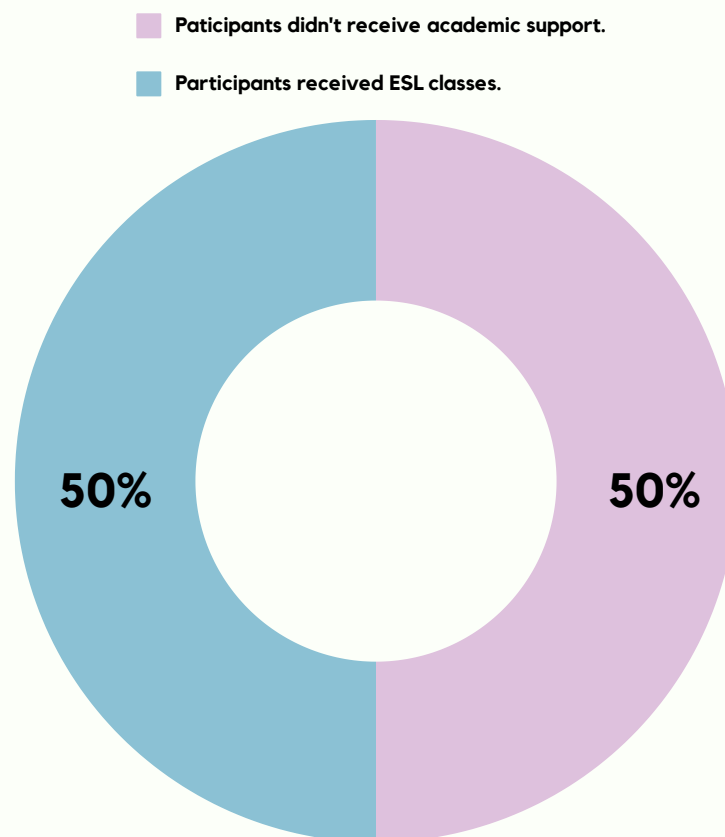


Figure 2: Academic Support Received During School

The participants that belonged to Post-Secondary level, shared the benefits and struggles of accessing different financial supports to continue their education:

"OSAP is a blessing but the process is not human. Who are blocking the opportunities to us? This is a country for opportunities but they do not help us"

Anonymous, 2024

Equitable Participation

Organizational Inputs

While the Ontario education system strives to provide holistic support to newcomers, challenges such as funding limitations, variability in program availability across different regions, and the need for continuous professional development for educators remain. Efforts are ongoing to improve and expand these programs to ensure they meet the diverse needs of newcomer students effectively.

Sanctuary Scholars programs are designed to support undocumented students and those with precarious immigration status in accessing higher education. However, these programs do not exist at every institution and presently are not available at the collegiate level. Additionally, the component of affordability is what takes students significantly longer to complete a program as compared to their peers that can afford to take a full course load.

Often, scholarships are not available to students with precarious status and when they are, they are limited to a few students per year; also, these sanctuary students are not eligible for OSAP (Ontario Student Assistance Program) due to their immigration status and are thus left to fund their studies out of pocket, especially when they are also not eligible for social assistance (Ontario Works). While some programs might only partially cover tuition costs, students are left to find additional funding for living expenses, books, and other basic necessities.

In summary, the Ontario education system offers a range of holistic programs designed to support newcomers at all levels of education, addressing their academic, social, emotional, and physical needs to facilitate successful integration and overall well-being, barrier-free as long as they have a regularized immigration status or are already in the educational system.

Equitable Participation

Adaptations for Equity

To ensure that newcomer students can fully engage and succeed within the educational system, it is essential to provide equitable participation opportunities. This section addresses the need for enhanced campus inclusivity and comprehensive support services. By establishing dedicated support centers, expanding the availability of school counselors and social workers, and implementing holistic support programs, we can create an environment where newcomer students feel welcomed and supported.

Campus Inclusivity and Support Services

Improvement Area: Enhance inclusivity and support services on campus.

Proposal: Create dedicated newcomer support centers on campuses that offer academic advising, mental health services, legal aid, and social integration programs. Promote cultural events and diversity initiatives to foster an inclusive campus culture.

Impact: Comprehensive support services and an inclusive environment would improve the overall well-being of newcomer students, helping them succeed academically and socially.

Expanding Support Services

Improvement Area: Increase the availability of school counselors, social workers, and settlement workers to provide personalized support to students facing academic, social, or emotional challenges.

Proposal: Enhance language support services, such as ESL programs, to ensure students with limited English proficiency can fully participate in their education.

Impact: Expanded support services would address the diverse needs of newcomer students, reducing barriers to academic success and improving their overall school experience.

Holistic Support Programs

Improvement Area: Develop and implement holistic support programs that address not only academic needs but also social and emotional well-being.

Proposal: Offer mental health services, peer mentoring, and extracurricular activities that foster inclusion. Create partnerships with community organizations to provide additional resources and support, such as tutoring, financial assistance, and family counseling.

Impact: Holistic support programs would ensure that newcomer students receive comprehensive assistance, promoting their academic achievement and emotional well-being.

Anti-Discrimination

This section is focused on how effective current anti-discrimination policies are in making precarious immigration status youth feel safe and included in schools; the extent immigration status plays in power imbalances; are there mechanisms for complaints.

In the province of Ontario, following Royal Assent of Bill 13 Accepting Schools Act, 2012: An Act to amend the Education Act with respect to bullying and other matters on June 19, 2012; the amended legislation states the rights and responsibilities of teachers, schools, school boards, other school board employees, and ministries when preventing or dealing with bullying and cyberbullying instances. The law pertains to all incidents of bullying and cyberbullying that affect the school's learning climate, whether on or off school property, face-to-face or electronic.

"Subsection 1 (1) of the Education Act is amended by adding the following definition:

"bullying" means aggressive and typically repeated behaviour by a pupil where,

(a) the behaviour is intended by the pupil to have the effect of, or the pupil ought to know that the behaviour would be likely to have the effect of,

(i) causing harm, fear or distress to another individual, including physical, psychological, social or academic harm, harm to the individual's reputation or harm to the individual's property, or

(ii) creating a negative environment at a school for another individual, and

(b) the behaviour occurs in a context where there is a real or perceived power imbalance between the pupil and the individual based on factors such as size, strength, age, intelligence, peer group power, economic status, social status, religion, ethnic origin, sexual orientation, family circumstances, gender, gender identity, gender expression, race, disability or the receipt of special education;

("intimidation")"

(Legislative Assembly of Ontario, 2012)

Types of bullying can be physical, verbal, written, social/relational, written, cyberbullying; and when the latter leads to online exploitation such as sextortion, this could be considered a criminal offence in Canada.

Anti-Discrimination

Research Data

Some families indicated a slower response to bullying in different schools and school boards. A few families indicated receiving through text, email, and seeing flyers at school regarding bullying prevention and the adverse outcomes of bullying, such as suicide. Some families indicated messaging and drills surrounding school shootings and fire alarms, but not bullying.

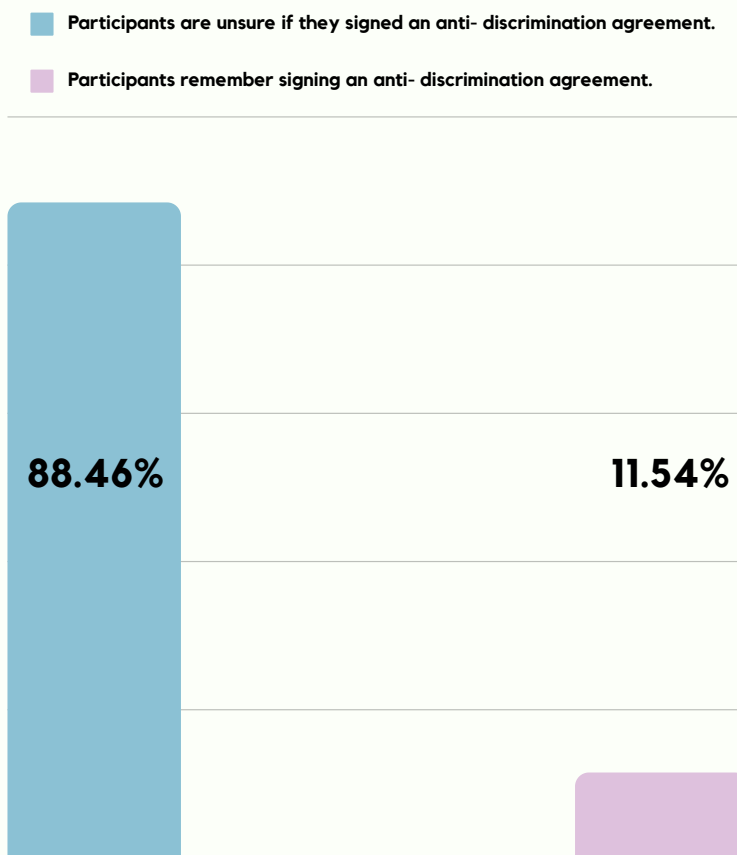


Figure 3: Anti-Discrimination Agreement Signing

Here is a statement from a family that participated in the project:

"My daughter experience bullying very constantly and coming always to our home with bruises and she cries because she is afraid of the girl that bother her. Unfortunately, the teacher said that this girl doesn't know how to regulate with her emotions but last time she punched her and she punched her head in the desk. I am tired to see that nothing change."

Anonymous, 2024

Anti-Discrimination

Organizational Inputs

While the Ontario education system strives to provide holistic support to newcomers, challenges such as funding limitations, variability in program availability across different regions, and the need for continuous professional development for educators remain. Efforts are ongoing to improve and expand these programs to ensure they meet the diverse needs of newcomer students effectively.

Sanctuary Scholars programs are designed to support undocumented students and those with precarious immigration status in accessing higher education. However, these programs do not exist at every institution and presently are not available at the collegiate level. Additionally, the component of affordability is what takes students significantly longer to complete a program as compared to their peers that can afford to take a full course load.

Often, scholarships are not available to students with precarious status and when they are, they are limited to a few students per year; also, these sanctuary students are not eligible for OSAP (Ontario Student Assistance Program) due to their immigration status and are thus left to fund their studies out of pocket, especially when they are also not eligible for social assistance (Ontario Works). While some programs might only partially cover tuition costs, students are left to find additional funding for living expenses, books, and other basic necessities.

In summary, the Ontario education system offers a range of holistic programs designed to support newcomers at all levels of education, addressing their academic, social, emotional, and physical needs to facilitate successful integration and overall well-being, barrier-free as long as they have a regularized immigration status or are already in the educational system.

Anti-Discrimination

Adaptations for Equity

To create a safe and welcoming environment for all students, it is essential to actively combat discrimination and bullying. This section outlines strategies to promote anti-discrimination, enhance language support, and foster cultural sensitivity within schools. By implementing comprehensive anti-bullying policies, inclusive curricula, we can ensure that newcomer students feel valued and protected.

Implementing Anti-Bullying and Anti-Discrimination Agreements

Improvement Area: Enforce anti-bullying and anti-discrimination agreements as part of the enrollment process.

Proposal: Require students and parents to sign anti-bullying and anti-discrimination agreements during enrollment. Educate the school community on the importance of these agreements.

Impact: This proactive approach would set clear expectations for behavior, reduce instances of bullying and discrimination, and create a safer school environment for newcomer students.

Language Support Programs

Improvement Area: Provide comprehensive language support for students with or without regularized status.

Proposal: Ensure all schools offer ESL (English as a Second Language) programs and language support to help newcomer students improve their language skills and communicate effectively

Impact: This will enable newcomer students to fully participate, improving their academic performance and social integration.

Bi-annual Cultural Sensitivity Trainings

Improvement Area: Foster an inclusive environment.

Proposal: Implement bi-annual cultural sensitivity training for all students and staff, including measurements and evaluations to assess effectiveness. Update training content regularly to reflect current cultural dynamics.

Impact: Regular cultural sensitivity training would reduce cultural misunderstandings, promote inclusivity, and create a more supportive school environment for newcomer students.

Support

This section is focused on the level of support that exists for newcomer students at Ontario educational institutions; the effectiveness in addressing nuanced needs of precarious immigration status students; and the links to community agencies to fill gaps and meet emerging challenges.

Often times, once in school, most children and youth go through the process of socialization and develop and build on interest areas and form social groups to enjoy their commonalities. When the intersection of immigration status is taken into consideration, there is often a nuanced need of comprehension of the different implications of living with precarious immigration status to fully and freely get integrated into community.

The important stakeholders in this conversation would be the people on the frontlines that are usually the ones the students turn to for support and guidance such as teachers, professors, guidance counselors, Settlement Workers In School (SWIS), Regulated International Student Immigration Advisors (RISIA) and sometimes peers too.

According to the Government of Canada:

"SWIS provides newcomer youth, children and their parents/guardians with school-based settlement services that are essential for integrating into Canadian society, and the Canadian education system. Moreover, the Government of Canada has an evident role in providing SWIS, despite education being a provincial/territorial responsibility, as the Federal Government is responsible for newcomer integration."

According to the College of Immigration and Citizenship Consultants:

"A RISIA is an international student advisor (ISA) licensed by the College. RISIAs are employed in the Canadian education sector and can provide immigration advice to international students and their dependents about:

- *Study permits*
- *Temporary resident visas*
- *Study permits related to other permits currently available in Canadian immigration programs"*

Support

Research Data

There was a mixed response in data from families regarding receiving support. Some families indicated that they did not receive any support at all and needed to navigate the system by themselves, some only received support at the time of a crisis, and some received support but the lack of comprehension of their status by the staff led to inadequate remedies.

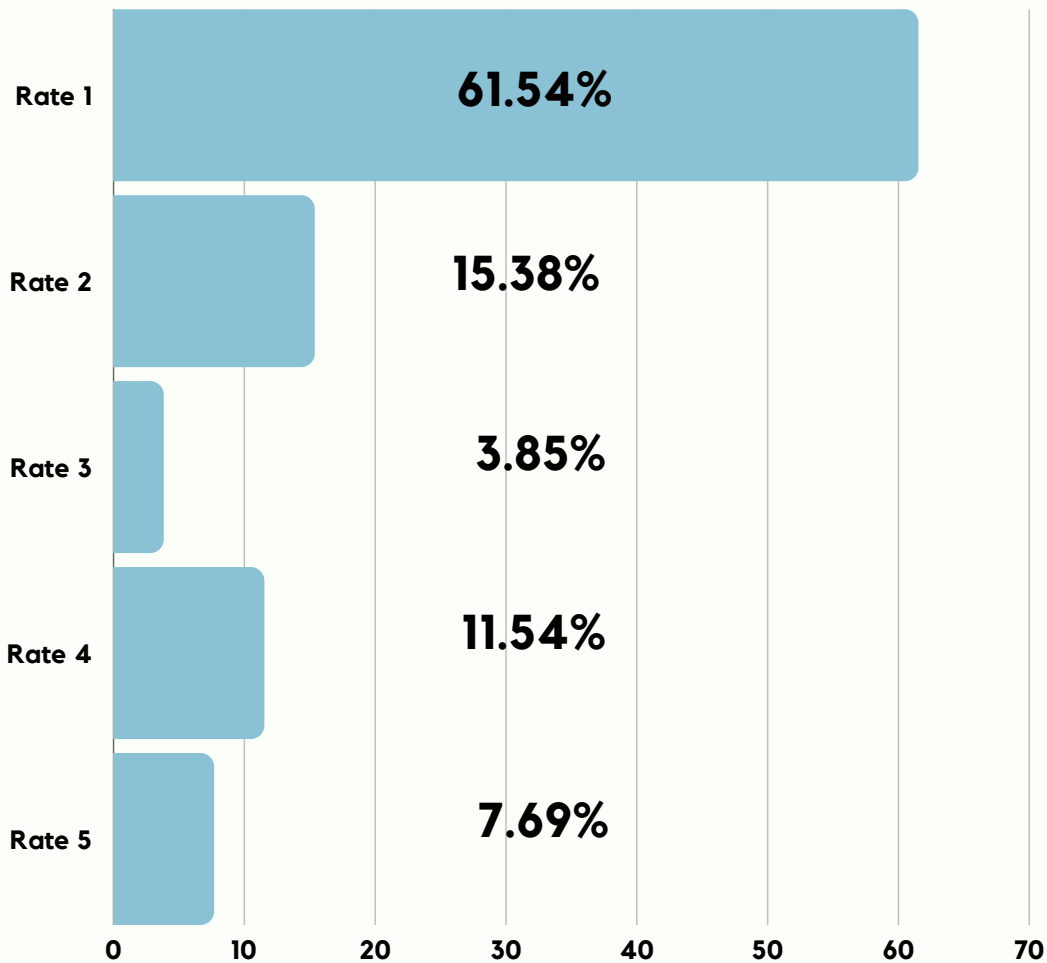


Figure 4: Access To Adequate And Informed Support

One family said:

"It is not easy because people are always hiding information, and until I was suffering they didn't decide to mention about FCJ."

Anonymous, 2024

Support

Organizational Inputs

Through analysis, it is indicative of a trend in support being extended as a reaction to a situation that occurs, rather than a proactive wraparound essential component of integration. A majority of the families iterated that it was extremely challenging to navigate through the system in order to access adequate and situationally informed supports to address the immediate and long term needs of their families.

It is important to note that while well meaning actors exist at all levels of education, several of them act on the situation without possessing appropriate and up to date knowledge of immigration processes and varying statuses. This often times leads to more harm than good caused as the families end up losing access to something they rightful should have access to under legislation; or are left with a financial debt from an application they did not have to make in the first place.

Also, although under current policy outlines it does not indicate the demographic of newcomers that SWIS are permitted to work with, it has been identified that when working with people that possess precarious immigration statuses, not a lot of supports exist that they can be referred to, even in a big metropolitan and sanctuary city like Toronto.

Additionally, at the post-secondary level, it is important to note that anything outside the scope of a RISIA would require a Registered Canadian Immigration Consultant (RCIC), an immigration lawyer, or the support of a community agency in facilitating the process as the parameters of their practice are limited.

In summary, the Ontario education system is lacking in a broad range wraparound service model that meets the diverse needs of newcomers with all types of precarious immigration statuses and well meaning actors could benefit from periodic trainings to facilitate this process better.

Support

Adaptations for Equity

This section highlights the importance of providing enhanced multilingual support and comprehensive orientation programs. By ensuring that key information is accessible in multiple languages, employing bilingual support staff, and offering orientation programs, schools can alleviate the challenges faced by newcomer families.

Enhanced Multilingual Support and Resources

Improvement Area: Address language barriers to make the enrollment process easier and more accessible for newcomer students and their families.

Proposal: Provide multilingual enrollment materials, including forms, instructions, and informational brochures in languages commonly spoken by the local community, such as Spanish, Arabic, Mandarin, Punjabi, and others as relevant.

Impact: Multilingual enrollment materials would ensure that families understand the enrollment process, school policies, and available support services, reducing confusion and improving accessibility.

Bilingual Support Staff

Improvement Area: Assist families during the enrollment process with language support.

Proposal: Employ or train bilingual support staff who can help families translate documents, explain procedures, and answer questions.

Impact: Bilingual support staff would facilitate smoother communication during the enrollment process.

Comprehensive Orientation and Welcome Programs

Improvement Area: Help newcomer students and their families familiarize themselves with the Canadian education system and their new school environment.

Proposal: Develop orientation programs specifically tailored for newcomer families, covering topics such as school routines, academic expectations, extracurricular activities, and available support services.

Impact: Orientation programs would equip families with the knowledge and tools they need to navigate the school system confidently.

Moving On

This section is focused on how effective are school based actors (teachers, guidance counselors, administrators, etc.) in offering advice and support for the transition out of current to next level of school/stages of life such as employment. Does this advice recognize the limited possibilities for youth with certain statuses; and is any advocacy being done to open more doors?

Elementary: This level of schooling is generally one of the easier to transition out of as both the opportunities and protected right to move to Secondary school are readily accessible.

Secondary: The process of moving on from this level of school entails a little more care from the side of staff and guidance counsellors as what options exist post high school depend on the long term plans the student has and what their immigration status will allow for that aligns with those hopes and dreams.

EdVance: This level of schooling is the first in the five that is not protected under the age range of legislation, and thus requires the existence of some form of valid and active immigration status to get in. However, at the stage of moving on, the student has passed through all the hurdles of enrollment and now are looking for options in higher education or employment, both of which require an approach of care and consideration of where they are along their immigration journey and what can be done to facilitate the needs of affordability from a realistic perspective of the individualized needs of the student.

Adult School: At this level of school, the student could be anywhere from the age of 21 upwards, so addressing the needs of the student is fully reliant on the components of their age, their academic and professional goals, with a consideration of past credentials and any specialized programs taken at school, without omitting their immigration status stages.

Post-Secondary: There needs to be significant care taken at this level of school in prioritizing the support needed by the student with their ongoing immigration journey while in the Sanctuary Scholars programs because while these programs on successful completion guarantee a degree/academic credential, it does not guarantee regularized immigration status nor working status.

Moving On

Research Data

There were a lot of different things families shared when asked if anyone in the educational institution structure had reached out to provide a transitional support plan catered to their needs; and if they wanted to share anything additional in consideration for the report. Please see a few of these responses below:

"No, we are the ones that look for support in the non-profit sector."

Anonymous, 2024

One family noted that they get emails from shelters about programs they can access, but in the end, most if not all of the programs they actually cannot because of their status. Another family said that there are not enough teachers and staff to meet the needs of the large newcomer population.

A student presently in Secondary High School said:

"I would like to receive support in my educational journey. More support for transition to the college and university."

Anonymous, 2024

A parent of a student in Elementary School said:

"Training about how to access services specially for recreational activities for our children. "

Anonymous, 2024

One family shared how they feel treated by the system:

"They also see bad if you are refugee, my children prefer to be silent and avoid to say they are Mexican, specially after the visa was implemented. They always say that Mexicans are parasites and that we want to live with the government money, and they always avoid to help us to translate even when we see people are speaking Spanish but we don't want to bother them. Also if you have a financial barrier they don't help even if they have the support available. "

Anonymous, 2024

Moving On

Organizational Inputs

One of the long standing core values of FCJ has been that of amplifying the voice of refugees, migrants, and folks with precarious status and finding creative platforms to include their unadulterated experience and perspectives for self-advocacy; and in that tradition, we want to draw the spotlight on the suggestions of some of the project participants.

When asked about the future of education for newcomers, this is what a parent of a student in Elementary School had to say:

"I would like to see they are more patient because not everyone is patient and we feel stress because we want to explain but because of the language barrier they are not compassionate and they are in rush and they don't take the time to explain us with detail the process and let us know about the time because people always say one thing and then other thing and then we got more confused and sometimes is not like this and they lied to us. if you work for jobs like that you have to have the patient and skills, many work just for work and not for help. Also, it is important to mention that sometimes the people send us to multiple places for receive support and then from them they send us to again a different place and they just confused us more and I work so I cannot spend money and time going to multiple places."

Anonymous, 2024

One parent of a student in the EdVance program said the following:

"I would like to say that I hope this project works because we want to see a positive change in my daughters life and she can also work."

Anonymous, 2024

One family shared that they feel school secretaries sometimes play the role of information gatekeepers, and that this is a mix of helpful and withholding of information. Another family indicated that it would be extremely helpful to have ESL included from day one. Another parent shared their request for technology support and transit assistance like TTC Tokens for all students.

Moving On

Adaptations for Equity

To ensure the continued success and integration of newcomer students as they progress through the educational system, it is essential to provide targeted academic and career counseling, as well as bridging programs that address their unique needs. This section outlines strategies to help newcomer students make informed decisions about their educational and career paths, and to prepare them for post-secondary education and future careers. By focusing on these areas, we can support newcomer students in achieving their full potential and successfully integrating into Canadian society.

Targeted Academic and Career Counseling

Improvement Area: Provide specialized academic and career counseling for newcomer students.

Proposal: Create dedicated counseling positions focused on the unique needs of newcomer students, offering guidance on course selection, post-secondary pathways, and career planning.

Impact: This initiative would help students make informed decisions about their education and career paths, improving their chances of success and integration into Canadian society.

Bridging Programs and Pathways

Improvement Area: Expand bridging programs and pathways for newcomer students.

Proposal: Establish more bridging programs that help newcomers meet the prerequisites for their desired programs, including language courses, academic upgrading, and preparatory courses for specific fields of study.

Impact: These programs would facilitate smoother transitions into post-secondary education, ensuring that newcomer students are adequately prepared and confident in their academic abilities.

Closing off this final section of the report, we want to share a hopeful message from two families:

"We need more support, because the process is very confusing and some times you think to give up."

Anonymous, 2024

"My son's experience in Canada is wonderful, he doesn't want to go back. For us as adults, it is very hard special in winter there is no job and we want to live here even the hardships and I experience anxiety but I take less medicine that when I was living in Mexico."

Anonymous, 2024

Conclusion

The research conducted with families highlights the critical need for targeted improvements to support newcomer students in the educational system. The results underscores the significant challenges faced by these students and their families.

Families found it difficult to access information due to language barriers, lack of resources, and technological literacy. To address these challenges, we propose increasing financial support through targeted scholarships, providing cultural competency training for staff, and implementing safe schools and equity policies. These measures aim to reduce dropout rates, improve graduation rates, and create a more inclusive and supportive school environment. (See figure 1, P6)

Equitable participation is another critical area of focus. Despite the availability of after-school programs and other services, half of the participants did not receive academic support at enrollment. Enhancing campus inclusivity with dedicated support centers, expanding the availability of school counselors, and implementing holistic support programs can address both academic and socio-emotional needs. These initiatives aim to foster a sense of belonging and improve the overall well-being of newcomer students. (See figure 2, P10)

Combating discrimination and bullying is essential for creating a safe and welcoming environment for newcomer students. The survey revealed that most participants did not remember signing an anti-discrimination agreement. Enforcing anti-bullying and anti-discrimination agreements, providing comprehensive language support, and conducting bi-annual cultural sensitivity training can help create a safer and more inclusive environment, reducing instances of bullying and discrimination. (See figure 3, P14)

Support for newcomer students and their families is crucial during the transition into the school system. Half of the participants reported not receiving the needed support. Providing multilingual enrollment materials, employing bilingual support staff, establishing a language support hotline, and developing comprehensive orientation programs can ensure that families are well-informed and feel supported. Enhanced communication and support services will lead to better student outcomes and a smoother integration process.(See figure 4, P 18)

As students progress through the educational system, targeted academic and career counseling and bridging programs become increasingly important. Many participants faced difficulties accessing information, though a significant number received support from school staff. By providing dedicated academic and career counseling and establishing bridging programs, we can help newcomer students make informed decisions about their education and career paths. These initiatives will improve their chances of success and integration into Canadian society.

By addressing these key areas, we can significantly enhance the educational experience for newcomer students across the board.

Report Card Elementary

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.

C-

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 criticism?

D+

SUPPORT

What level of support exists for newcomers students in Ontario schools?
Is this support effective and responsive to the nuanced needs of precarious migrants?

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+

Report Card Secondary High School

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.

D+

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.

D+

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 criticism?

F

SUPPORT

What level of support exists for newcomers students in Ontario schools?
Is this support effective and responsive to the nuanced needs of precarious migrants?

D+

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?

F

Report Card Secondary

EdVance

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.

C+

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 criticism?

D

SUPPORT

What level of support exists for newcomers students in Ontario schools?
Is this support effective and responsive to the nuanced needs of precarious migrants?

D

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?

F

Report Card Secondary Adult School

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.

C-

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.

B

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 criticism?

D

SUPPORT

What level of support exists for newcomers students in Ontario schools?
Is this support effective and responsive to the nuanced needs of precarious migrants?

B-

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?

C-

Report Card Post-Secondary

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.

C

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 criticism?

D

SUPPORT

What level of support exists for newcomers students in Ontario schools?
Is this support effective and responsive to the nuanced needs of precarious migrants?

D+

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-

Report Card: 2016 Edition

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 criticism?

D

SUPPORT

What level of support exists for newcomers students in Ontario schools?
Is this support effective and responsive to the nuanced needs of precarious migrants?

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-

Scan To Access 2016 Report



"Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world."
Nelson Mandela

References

College of Immigration and Citizenship Consultants (n.d.). About RCICs and RISIAs. <https://college-ic.ca/become-licensed/about-rcics-and-risias?l=en-CA>

Government of Ontario (2021, May 10). Policy/Program Memorandum 136. <https://www.ontario.ca/document/education-ontario-policy-and-program-direction/policyprogram-memorandum-136#:~:text=A%20person%20who%20is%20otherwise%20entitled%20to%20be,person%27s%20parent%20or%20guardian%20is%20unlawfully%20in%20Canada.>

Legislative Assembly of Ontario (2012). Bill 13, Accepting Schools Act, 2012. <https://www.ola.org/en/legislative-business/bills/parliament-40/session-1/bill-13>

Research and Evaluation Branch Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (2022, February). Evaluation of the Settlement Workers in Schools (SWIS) Initiative. Government of Canada. <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/corporate/reports-statistics/evaluations/settlement-workers-school-initiative.html>

Statistics Canada (2022, February 1). Educational participation and attainment of lesbian, gay and bisexual people in Canada. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/89-28-0001/2022001/article/00001-eng.htm>

