



REPORT 2024-2026

Building a Childcare System that Works

*For Immigrant & Refugee
Women in Canada
2.0*

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Women and Gender
Equality Canada

Femmes et Égalité
des genres Canada

Canada 

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Executive *Summary*

Building a Childcare System 2.0 is a systems-change initiative led by Pacific Immigrant Resources Society and funded by Women and Gender Equality Canada. From July 2024 to March 2026, the project supported immigrant and refugee women in Metro Vancouver to strengthen leadership, build understanding of child care policy, and connect lived experience to practical policy recommendations. At the centre of the work was the Childcare Leadership Group, whose members bring a dual perspective as mothers seeking care and as early childhood educators and assistants working in the sector.

From July 2025 to November 2025, participants and project staff carried out community-based research through surveys applied to a defined sample of **37 respondents, including immigrant mothers and immigrant child care workers, located in the Greater Vancouver area**. This quantitative data was complemented by qualitative insights gathered through a community of practice with **22 participants, early childhood educators and assistants**. Findings were analyzed by linking women's lived experiences to the ways child care policy is implemented and experienced in practice.

Key findings show uneven access and persistent barriers. Nearly half of surveyed mothers reported accessing a \$10-a-Day space, while others described long waits, confusing processes, inconsistent information, and language barriers. Most respondents from low-income backgrounds in the sample lived outside the City of Vancouver, underscoring geographic inequities in access. Among immigrant child care workers surveyed, many reported precarious employment conditions, including limited access

to benefits, low wages, stress and burnout, and few opportunities for professional development. Across the community of practice, participants emphasized that credential recognition remains a major barrier, training pathways are often difficult to access due to cost, language, and scheduling constraints, and workforce conditions directly affect quality and stability for children and families.

The recommendations that follow are grounded in these findings and focus on: equity-based expansion of \$10-a-Day spaces; strengthened navigation and multilingual access; workforce stabilization through a wage grid; clearer and more usable credential recognition pathways; inclusive supports aligned with BC's Inclusive Child Care Strategy; and stronger accountability through equity data and public reporting.

This report reflects the lived experiences of participants in the Childcare Leadership Group and is informed by structured community-based research, including survey data and facilitated dialogue conducted during the project period. The findings provide a representative snapshot of participant experiences and perspectives. Grounded in community insight, the report is intended to support informed dialogue and continued collaboration among government, sector partners, and community stakeholders.



An aerial photograph of a river winding through a forest. The trees have vibrant autumn colors, including yellows, oranges, and reds. The river is a deep blue-grey color, and the surrounding land is a mix of green and brown. The title 'Land Acknowledgement' is overlaid on the top left in a white serif font, with 'Acknowledgement' underlined in a dark orange color.

Land Acknowledgement

Pacific Immigrant Resources Society and the participants of the Childcare Leadership Group respectfully acknowledge that our work takes place on unceded territory of the **Coast Salish peoples**—including the traditional lands of the **x^wməθk^wəyəm (Musqueam)**, **S^kwx^wú7mesh (Squamish)**, and **səlilwətaf (Tseil-Waututh) Nations**.

As we support newcomers in building a life in Canada, we are committed to working in solidarity and collaboration with Indigenous communities and to amplify Indigenous histories, cultures, and traditions as the stewards of these lands since the time immemorial.

May this acknowledgement guide our work, reminding us all of our shared responsibilities as newcomers and guests on these lands, and of the ongoing work of **truth, reconciliation, and decolonization**.

01. Introduction

Pacific Immigrant Resources Society (PIRS)

Pacific Immigrant Resources Society (PIRS) is a community-based nonprofit organization that has supported immigrant and refugee women and their children in Metro Vancouver for 50 years.

Guided by a vision of a society that honours the strengths of diverse women and empowers their contributions, PIRS delivers accessible, inclusive, low-barrier, and trauma-informed programs that foster belonging, meaningful participation, and leadership.

Through language learning, employment pathways, and leadership development, PIRS helps women in integrating, participating and contributing within their communities. Since its founding in 1975, PIRS has been a trusted space where women build confidence, strengthen skills, and form lasting connections as they establish fulfilling lives in Canada.

Women's Leadership and Development

Advancing women's leadership is a core pillar of PIRS' work. Through its Women's Leadership and Development (WLD) programming, PIRS supports immigrant and refugee women at different stages of their settlement journey to strengthen leadership skills, and contribute to influence change within their communities and across systems.

These initiatives centre lived experience, peer learning, and storytelling to address systemic barriers commonly faced by newcomer women, including limited access to professional networks, challenges with credential recognition, language barriers, and the ongoing responsibility of child care.

Over time, programs such as Building Bridges and the Immigrant Women's Advisory Committee (IWAC) have helped create supportive networks and leadership pathways, enabling women to access critical resources and amplify their voices in community and policy-relevant spaces.

A Note to the Reader from the Participants of the *Childcare Leadership Group*

Far too often, the barriers faced by racialized immigrant and refugee women, whether we are working in child care or trying to access it—are overlooked in policy and practice. From January 2025 to February 2026, we came together as mothers and child care workers to form the Childcare Leadership Group, creating a space where our voices could be heard.

Over the past year, we built a sense of community and shared experiences related to migration and settlement in Canada, including the emotional impact of leaving our home countries and beginning again. We spoke about being unable to afford child care, the challenges in accessing employment opportunities when our professional experience is not recognized, and the difficulty of building a stable life amid a high cost of living. We also shared the ongoing uncertainty many of us feel about our future in Canada. Despite these challenges and our many responsibilities at work and at home, we made time to learn together.

We participated in workshops where we discovered that advocacy can start with speaking about our own experiences. We met with leaders in the child care movement, elected officials, and immigrant women who have found their own ways to overcome similar barriers.

We went into our communities across Metro Vancouver and collected stories from other immigrant and refugee women navigating the child care system.

For some of us, this movement began during the first phase of the Building a Childcare System project. In this second phase, we focused on understanding child care policy and the systems that shape our lives. We now better understand how immigration, child care, cost pressures, and gender inequality shape our daily lives.

By sharing these stories, we hope you will hear our voices as immigrant and refugee women working to build fulfilling careers in the child care sector, and as mothers who seek access to child care so we can pursue independence and an identity outside the home.

These challenges are not personal failures, but they reflect gaps in a system that does not yet work for everyone. We want to be part of changing that.

Signed,
The Participants of the Childcare Leadership Group



02. Project

Building a Childcare System: A Systemic Change Project

Guided by a vision of a society that recognizes the strengths of diverse women and supports their full participation, PIRS launched a systemic change initiative in 2022.

Building a Childcare System that Works for Immigrant and Refugee Women is a multi-year initiative led by PIRS and funded by Women and Gender Equality Canada. The project emerged in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, when unequal caregiving responsibilities intensified and structural weaknesses in child care systems became more visible. The initiative addresses long-standing inequities in early learning and child care by creating pathways for immigrant and refugee women to contribute insight into the policy conditions that shape their lives.

The initiative is grounded in a systems-level understanding of immigrant and refugee women's relationship to child care. Many experience the system both as families navigating access, affordability, and availability, and as members of the workforce that sustains early learning and child care. This dual perspective provides critical insight into how child care policy is experienced in the day-to-day lives of immigrant and refugee women.

The Childcare Leadership Group

At the core of the project is the Childcare Leadership Group; a cohort¹ that initiated with 20 immigrant and refugee women who bring lived experience as mothers, Early Childhood Educators, and Early Childhood Educator Assistants, navigating the child care system from both family and workforce perspectives.

Project Implementation

Through facilitated workshops, peer learning, and community-based activities, participants examined their experiences collectively, identified shared priorities across settlement, employment, and care work, and connected these insights to broader discussions about child care policy and system barriers. The group provided a structured space for leadership development, confidence-building, and engagement with policy-relevant issues affecting immigrant and refugee women.

Building the Foundation (2022–2024)

The first phase of the project emerged in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and focused on supporting a feminist response and recovery within the child care sector. Three cohorts of the Childcare Leadership Group participated in leadership development workshops, storytelling and media engagement activities, and public speaking opportunities designed to strengthen confidence and collective voice.

During this phase, participants contributed lived experience to sector-level discussions, including engagement with the Wage Grid Advisory Committee convened by the Coalition of Child Care Advocates of British Columbia. This work established a foundation for leadership development, policy literacy, and collaboration across the child care ecosystem.

¹The cohort concluded with 14 participants.

Scaling the Vision (2024–2026)

The second phase built on this foundation by deepening leadership capacity and strengthening connections between community experience and policy change. Several participants from earlier cohorts continued their involvement, contributing continuity and peer leadership alongside new participants.

Building a Childcare System 2.0 focused on two key priorities:

→ **Strengthening immigrant and refugee women's confidence and capacity to engage meaningfully in policy dialogue**

→ **Supporting the development of policy relevant insights that reflect the lived realities of immigrant mothers and child care workers in Metro Vancouver**

This phase emphasized hands-on engagement in policy dialogue, community mobilization, and leadership development, with a continued focus on translating lived experience into policy-relevant insight through **three core activities**:

→ **Capacity-building workshops:** PIRS convened regular online and in-person sessions with the Childcare Leadership Group to build foundational skills for engaging with child care policy and systems. Several workshops were facilitated by child care advocates and sector leaders from across British Columbia and Canada.

→ **Sector gatherings and policy consultations:** Participants were supported to engage with government and child care organizations, articulating priorities grounded in their lived experience navigating settlement, training, employment, and care responsibilities in Metro Vancouver.

To date, more than 65 women have participated across four cohorts, forming a growing network of leaders contributing insight into efforts to strengthen the child care system in BC.

Frameworks for Understanding

The following frameworks informed how the Childcare Leadership Group interpreted their experiences and how project staff supported community research, analysis, and synthesis throughout the project.

1) Child Care: A Gendered Issue

Child care and gender equality are fundamentally interconnected; access to quality child care is a key factor in shaping women's ability to participate in education, employment, and civic life. In Canada, caregiving responsibilities continue to fall disproportionately on women, particularly racialized, immigrant, and low-income mothers.¹ When child care is inaccessible or unaffordable, women face barriers to earning income, having their skills recognized, and pursuing career pathways. These conditions can reinforce economic dependence and deepen existing inequities, including vulnerability to poverty and gender-based violence.

A gendered approach shows how immigration status, language, credential recognition, and racialization shape women's experiences of child care. It also underscores why lived experience is essential for understanding where child care falls short.

2) Community-Based Approach

A community-based approach kept the research rooted in participants' priorities. Project activities were informed by community knowledge, participation, and storytelling, while design, facilitation, and synthesis were supported by project staff.

Community engagement took place through facilitated workshops, peer conversations, and

¹canadianwomen.org/the-facts/womens-poverty

story collection in the community. These activities surfaced recurring barriers in child care, including affordability, access to spaces, workforce conditions, and the role of credential recognition in shaping women's opportunities. This approach ensured that the issues highlighted in this report reflect the lived experience of participants during the project period and contribute insight into broader conversations on access and inclusion in child care.

3) Co-Design

Co-design means people most affected help define the issues, set priorities, and shape solutions, starting from the beginning. Lived experience is treated as a form of expertise, held alongside practitioner knowledge and technical analysis. Rather than seeking input after decisions are made, co-design embeds participation throughout the process.

In Building a Childcare System 2.0, co-design meant that the Childcare Leadership Group collectively identified the key issues they encountered as immigrant mothers and child care workers. Their perspectives shaped how barriers were defined, how priorities were articulated, and how findings were framed. Project staff supported this process by facilitating learning sessions, organizing peer dialogue, and helping present participants' insights in policy-friendly formats, while prioritizing participants' language and framing wherever possible.



How Co-Design Worked in Building a Childcare System 2.0



The diagram above illustrates that lived experience informed the identification of issues, project staff supported learning and synthesis, and PIRS leadership reviewed the final materials for accuracy and alignment with the project scope alignment.

In practice, the Childcare Leadership Group brought lived experience and helped shape the analysis. Their contributions reflect the perspectives of participants during the project period and offer insight into how child care systems are experienced by immigrant and refugee women in Metro Vancouver. Project staff led facilitation, documentation, communications and preparation of the final report.

In summary: Participants identified the issues, community members contributed additional insight, and PIRS staff compiled the findings and prepared the report in collaboration with this group. Participants' knowledge is treated as evidence in its own right; where possible, we retain participant wording and framing to reflect their agency and the integrity of their lived experience.

Note on Scope: This project used a co-design approach to shape its findings and recommendations. It is not presented as a comprehensive policy platform or a system-wide co-design initiative with government or sector agencies. The insights reflect the perspectives of the Childcare Leadership Group during this project period.

During an in-person capacity-building workshop, participants engaged in a policy dialogue.



Community Engagement & Advocacy

Advocacy was integrated throughout the project as a means of supporting immigrant and refugee women to participate in democratic processes, build networks of influence, and engage in public dialogue on child care. Activities emphasized collective voice, visibility, and experience-based contribution, especially in spaces where the voices of immigrant and refugee women are typically underrepresented.

* Sector gatherings aimed at strengthening the capacity of the group included:

- A presentation on the barriers immigrant and refugee women face in the child care sector as an educator, family and community members, as well the federal election advocacy pledge at First Call BC's networking event.
- Meetings with the South Asian Women's Rights Organization where women leaders from Metro Vancouver and the Toronto East Danforth neighbourhood discussed parallels and differences in the child care system in B.C. and Ontario.
- A community of practice with Early Childhood Educators and Assistants
- A dialogue with the Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC on immigration pathways to Early Childhood Education.
- A meeting with participants and Brenda Lenahan (Complex Kids BC), on how she went from a concerned parent to a leading advocate for the rights of children with disabilities under the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.
- A Conversation Circle with Matilda Williams-Obiajunwa (Sisters in Canada Wellness Society), who shared her journey as a newcomer who became a member of the

Newcomer Council convened by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, which guides improvements in service delivery and policy.

- Attendance by two Childcare Leadership Group participants at Oxfam Canada's Child Care for All Summit 2.0 in Ottawa, as part of this project's partnership with Oxfam (see more on page 11).

* Call to Action Campaigns:

The Childcare Leadership Group signed postcards for International Women's Day 2025, calling for increased investments in child care to support women's labour force participation, and were mailed to government officials across B.C. and Canada.

In the lead-up to the April 2025 federal election, they created a non-partisan pledge "Enough Talk: Time for Action on Child Care", calling on all parties to commit to universal child care.

* Policy Consultations:

Participants were supported to put together a letter in response to the federal Department of Finance's 2025 Pre-Budget Consultation where they expressed the importance of funding for women's programs and investments in early learning and child care.

A participant presented her recommendations to the BC Budget 2026 Consultation.

Another participant visited the New Westminster City Hall to speak with Councillor Tasha Henderson, to discuss access to affordable child care spaces and regulations pertaining to the opening of new child care centres.

A participant met with a Senior Advisor to the Minister of Education and Child Care, Diego Cardona, to highlight barriers immigrant and refugee women face in advancing early childhood education careers, including bursary eligibility requirements tied to permanent residency status.

Inclusive Child Care for All 2.0 Summit

Amplifying Immigrant Women's Voices

Building a Childcare System 2.0 was partnered with Oxfam Canada's Inclusive Child Care for All 2.0 project which supports increased engagement in policy conversations from diverse communities. Two participants of the Childcare Leadership Group (Amandeep Kaur and Swati Chakraborty) attended the Child Care for All Summit in Ottawa from November 24 to 25 where they networked with other advocates, parents, early childhood educators, and community leaders from across Canada to take collective action toward a more inclusive and equitable early learning and child care system.

Excluded in Practice

Participants shared their personal stories of exclusion from the child care system. Amandeep told her experience of arriving as an international student, navigating low wage survival jobs, lack of credential recognition, workplace injuries without support, and the ongoing struggle to keep up with the cost of living even after completing her ECE certification.

Swati shared how settlement and economic security are deeply tied to child care access. Despite holding a PhD from her home country of India, long waiting lists prevent her from full-time work, and now that her son is seven years old, he no longer qualifies for \$10-a-day child care which is only for children ages 0 to 6.

Mehrnoosh Amin-Aghaee (Project Coordinator, Advocacy and Engagement) for the Oxfam-PIRS partnership reflected on the insights from the community of practice (see more on page 18) and connected their stories to broader systemic barriers experienced by immigrant and refugee women.

Inclusion in \$10-a-day: British Columbia and Ontario

To elevate the voices of immigrant and refugee women, participants had the opportunity to be speakers on a panel with two representatives of the South Asian Women's Rights Organization (based in Toronto's East Danforth neighbourhood) where they connected their lived experiences as racialized immigrant women navigating child care. Safiya Ayuen (Policy and Engagement Officer) moderated the panel and highlighted the intersection of child care, credential recognition, immigration pathways, economic productivity, and systemic racism.



03. Research

Community Research from the Childcare Leadership Group

From July to November 2025, we, the participants of the Childcare Leadership Group, designed and carried out a community-based research of immigrant communities in Metro Vancouver to identify their needs through:

- One survey focused on **immigrant mothers'** experiences with \$10-a-Day child care.
- Another survey on **immigrant child care workers'** experiences navigating the child care sector.
- Interviews with immigrant families and child care workers in participants' communities.
- Observations in a **community of practice** with past participants of PIRS programs which captured nuanced experiences that survey alone could not reflect.

Over these five months, we combined qualitative and quantitative methods to ensure findings were evidenced-informed and grounded in lived experience.

Survey #1: Early Childhood Educators and Assistants

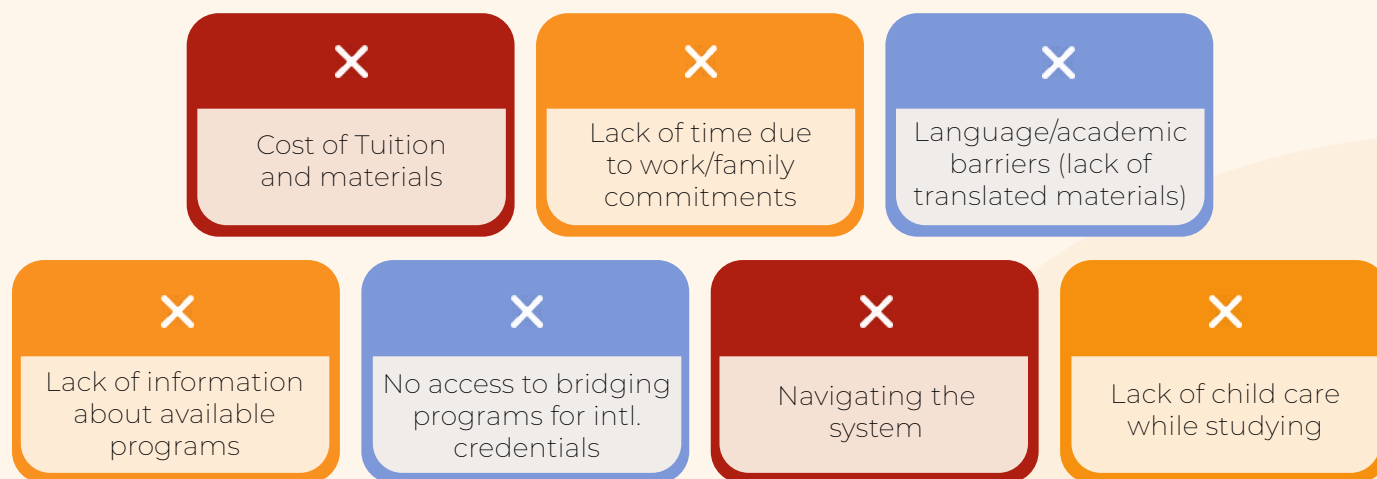
Demographic Findings

The survey collected responses from a total of 29 ECEs and ECEAs, from the total, 26 have provided location being, **42.3% from Vancouver, 3.8% from North Vancouver, 7.7% from Burnaby, 3.8% from Richmond (3.8%), 23.1% from Surrey, 3.8% from Langley, 3.8% from Abbotsford and 11.5% from Coquitlam**, with most participants being PIRS alumni, women who have completed training and leadership programs through the organization. Among participants, **14.3% identified as Canadian citizens, 60.7% as permanent residents, 21.4% as temporary residents, and 3.6% as refugee claimants**, reflecting the diversity of immigration status within the sector. Findings from the “Barriers & Opportunities for Immigrant and Refugee Women in the Child Care Sector” survey were organized into three themes: Access to Education and Professional Development, Employment and Workplace Conditions, and What support or changes are needed to stay or grow ECEs and ECEAs in the Sector.

Access to Education and Professional Development

The first section explored the barriers immigrant and refugee women faced when obtaining or upgrading their Early Childhood Education (ECE) certification. Among participants, only **13.8% holds Early Childhood Education (ECE) certification, 65.6% were certified as Early Childhood Education Assistants (ECEA), 3.4% holds a Responsible Adult certification, 13.8% responded didn't have a certification or were currently in training, and 3.4% holds International Credential (WES accepted)**, 86.2% of surveyed manifested multiple reasons why they were not able to obtain an ECE certification.

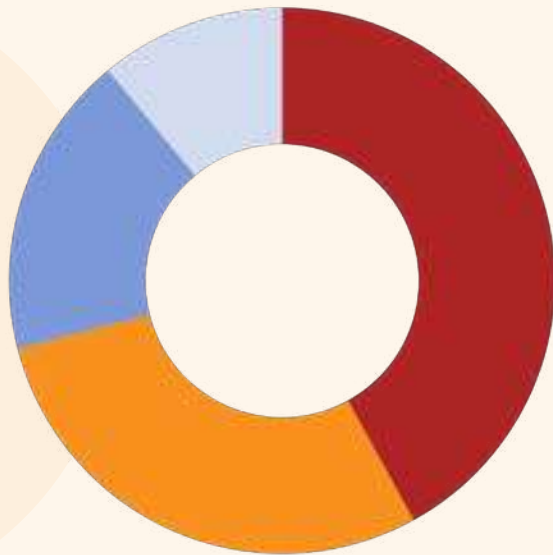
The main barriers experienced in obtaining or upgrading their certification identified include:



When surveyed were asked if they had access to ECE Bursary, only **13.8% responded receiving support through the ECE Bursary, 44.8% did not access, and 41.3% was not aware of its existence**. For those who have not accessed ECE Bursary, the reasons mentioned include; didn't know how to apply (application process too complex), didn't qualify or not offered for type of setting, have not applied or waiting for response, manifested status ineligibility and lack of information about ECE Bursary.

Employment and Workplace Conditions

This section examined participants' employment situations, work environments, and the challenges they face as a child care workforce. Survey responses showed that only **18% of participants work in licensed childcare centers, and the remaining 82% are employed in community-based non-profits, in-home child care, or are currently studying or unemployed.** Employment arrangements reveal precarity in the sector as follows:



- **42%** are currently unemployed
- **29%** being casual/on-call
- **18%** are part-time (under 30 hours/week)
- **11%** hold full-time (30+ hours/week) positions

Another finding revealed that only **21.4% reported receiving benefits such as health coverage or paid leave.** The remaining 78.6% manifested not receiving any benefits. The survey responders also shared their thoughts **about the Provincial wage grid for ECEs, 48.28% manifested they're not aware, but would like to learn more about it,** 27.59% manifested were aware but had concerns, and 24.14% were fully aware and supported.

About **65.52% of surveyed people said that a publicly funded wage grid would improve their quality of life and ability to stay in the profession,** about 20.69% were not sure and 13.79% said maybe. Respondents identified recurring challenges in the workplace including:



There were several key observations among immigrant educators:

- ▶ Financial and structural barriers prevent many immigrant and refugee women from advancing in their child care careers.
- ▶ Emotional strain and burnout are heightened by staffing shortages and low wages.
- ▶ There is a strong desire for mentorship, professional development, and peer support.
- ▶ Improved communication and cultural inclusivity are critical to workplace retention.

What support or changes are needed to stay or grow as ECEs and ECEAs in the Sector?

Respondents expressed the following:

- ▶ *“To stay and grow in my role, I would appreciate a higher salary that reflects the work and responsibility involved. More professional development opportunities, better staffing ratios, and dedicated planning time would also help reduce stress and improve the quality of care. Additionally, stronger support and recognition from management would make the work environment more positive and motivating.”*
- ▶ *“I need clearer support on job search, understanding the system, and more accessible training opportunities.”*
- ▶ *“To stay and grow in my role as an ECEA, I would really have more opportunities for mentorship and professional development. Clear communication, supportive teamwork, and a respectful work environment also make a big difference.”*
- ▶ *“Increase the wage to meet the cost of living”*
- ▶ *“More consistent planning time, mentorship opportunities, and recognition of our work would help me feel supported and motivated to grow in my role.”*

These findings highlight the need for accessible financial support, flexible training pathways, and targeted outreach to ensure that immigrant and refugee women can advance professionally in the child care field.



Survey #2: Immigrant Families Experiences with \$10-a-Day Child Care Program

Demographic Findings

The family survey was completed by a diverse group of newcomer families across Metro Vancouver and the Fraser Valley. A total of **11 immigrant mothers**, including 27.3% from Surrey, 9.1% from Delta, 18.2% from Vancouver, 9.1% from Coquitlam, 9.1% from Langley, 9.1% from West Vancouver, 9.1% from North Vancouver, and 9.1% from New Westminster. In terms of immigration status, 36.4% manifested being a permanent resident, 36.4% manifested holding a temporary resident status, and 27.3% naturalized citizens. **Nearly half of respondents (45.5%) identified as living in low-income households, and all low-income respondents lived outside the City of Vancouver.** Most households were two-parent families (63.6%), alongside single-parent (18.2%) and multigenerational households (18.2%), including grandparents who support caregiving. Through their answers, we can reflect on how immigrant families understand, access, and experience the BC \$10-a-Day Child Care Program. **Based on the parent survey, families' awareness and access to \$10-a-Day spaces is uneven and highly network-dependent.**

Access to \$10-a-Day spaces

5 out of 11 respondents (45.5%) reported that they had been able to access a \$10-a-Day child care space. Even among families actively looking, wait times can be long (e.g., 1–3 years and over 3 years were reported), suggesting that limited supply—not just awareness—is a major barrier to access.

Awareness of \$10-a-Day appears mixed, some families were confident navigating the program, while others reported “I’ve heard of it, but I don’t know the details” or not knowing where to start. Families most commonly learned about \$10-a-Day through informal and community-based channels, including:

- ✓ **Word of mouth (family/friends)**
- ✓ **Community organizations / settlement workers**
- ✓ **Child care providers**
- ✓ **Family members**
- ✓ **Self-directed searching (online directories/maps, calling/visiting centres, asking community groups)**

Barriers to Access for Immigrant and Refugee Families

Families who had not secured a \$10-a-Day space frequently described barriers that were both wayfinding-related and structural. Many reported not knowing where to look or how the system works, and described the process as difficult to navigate due to confusing application steps and inconsistent information. Others pointed to access constraints beyond information, including too few spaces in their area, long wait times, and distance/location barriers where available options were far from home. Some respondents also noted that language barriers and immigration-status-related factors made it harder to access information and secure a space.

Among the respondents (45.5%) who had successfully accessed the \$10-a-Day program, they reported positive benefits:

- ✓ Child care became affordable
- ✓ Reduced stress and financial insecurity
- ✓ Mothers were able to return to work, study or complete settlement programs
- ✓ Improved families sense of belonging and stability

Most families strongly agreed that \$10-a-day child care meets their needs; however, some expressed partial satisfaction:

- ✗ Limited flexibility in hours
- ✗ Inconsistent communication
- ✗ Lack of cultural responsiveness in centres

Overall, respondents described the \$10-a-Day program as transformative in impact, but not yet accessible enough to meet the diverse realities of immigrant and refugee families. Survey participants highlighted several systemic barriers that continue to limit access and shape families' experiences, including:

- ➔ Insufficient \$10-a-Day spaces, resulting in waitlists lasting months or years
- ➔ Difficulty navigating the system, including confusion about how to find and apply for spaces
- ➔ Language barriers, including a lack of translated information
- ➔ Location barriers, where available spaces are far from where newcomer families live
- ➔ Unclear or inconsistent information about eligibility and application processes
- ➔ Limited culturally safe and responsive environments in some centres
- ➔ Concerns about quality and oversight, including reports of inconsistent staffing qualifications and unclear standards

Immigrant mothers and Metro Vancouver need:

- More childcare centers supporting the \$10/day program.
- Higher wages and professional training for early childhood educators.
- Universal childcare access and flexible hours for working families.
- Culturally responsive and inclusive programs.
- Clearer communication and guidance for immigrant and refugee families.

Respondents expressed the following:

"I hope the government can standardize teacher training and strengthen supervision of daycare institutions."

"Have more spaces, create culturally safe spaces, and improve wages for educators."

"Make all child care centres \$10-a-day so that families can access it anywhere."

Community of Practice: Inclusive Child Care for All 2.0

Through the Building a Childcare System 2.0 partnership with Oxfam's Inclusive Child Care for All 2.0, PIRS hosted a community of practice of 22 child care workers (predominantly past participants of PIRS programs). The group met three times to examine systemic barriers and pathways toward a more equitable child care sector in British Columbia, with a focus on international credential recognition, professional development, and the \$10-a-Day system. Participants' certifications included ECEs, ECEAs, and Responsible Adults.

Key issues raised across sessions:

1) International credential recognition

- ▶ Credential recognition remains the greatest barrier; processes are lengthy, costly, and inconsistent across provinces
- ▶ The 500+ hour work experience requirement is particularly difficult for newcomer mothers
- ▶ Financial and language barriers compound credential challenges and limit access to education and bridging programs
- ▶ Role and wage inequities undervalue internationally trained educators and discourage professional growth
- ▶ Workforce-entry and networking barriers make it harder for newcomers to enter the sector
- ▶ Information gaps create confusion and limit effective navigation of the credentialing system
- ▶ Mentorship, peer support, and advocacy networks are key resilience factors, but are not consistently supported

2) Professional development and career growth

- ▶ Training can be inaccessible due to high cost, language proficiency requirements, and scheduling conflicts
- ▶ Participants identified cultural gaps in ECE training content, including limited recognition of diverse approaches to child development and care
- ▶ Low wages and credential devaluation demotivate skilled workers and perpetuate inequity
- ▶ Limited access to child care makes it difficult for women to pursue education or complete practicum hours

3) From Policy to Practice: How \$10-a-Day Is Experienced on the Ground

- ▶ Participants valued the affordability and stability the \$10-a-Day program can provide to families
- ▶ Long waitlists and uneven access across regions remain major concerns
- ▶ Participants linked workforce conditions directly to child and family outcomes; educator shortages and low wages affect quality and stability
- ▶ Newcomer families require multilingual communication, culturally safe environments, and responsive programming, and participants noted gaps in training and resources to support this
- ▶ Participants identified a need for supports to strengthen advocacy capacity, including advocacy training, networking opportunities, mentorship, clear communications strategies, and platforms to share lived experience to share lived experience

Overall, participants expressed optimism about reforms, while emphasizing the need for equity, more robust workforce support, cultural safety, and immigrant-informed policy decisions.

What ECE(A)s Need to Thrive in the Child Care System

Across the three sessions, participants emphasized that immigrant and refugee women in the child care workforce need:

- ▶ Transparent, consistent, and affordable pathways for international credential recognition that honour the training newcomer educators bring
- ▶ A reduced financial burden for credential assessments and related fees
- ▶ A centralized information hub with streamlined, clear guidance on steps, eligibility, and supports
- ▶ Bridge programs that integrate English learning, paid practicums, and recognition of prior learning
- ▶ Action to address role and wage inequities, so internationally trained educators are not kept in low-paid positions while doing ECE-level work
- ▶ Funded, formal mentorship programs and accessible community-based networking opportunities to support dignified entry into the workforce
- ▶ Expanded publicly funded training bursaries
- ▶ Flexible and community-based learning models to reduce scheduling barriers and improve access
- ▶ Culturally responsive ECE training that reflects diverse approaches to child development and care
- ▶ A more coordinated approach linking language learning, professional development, and child care support would strengthen women's ability to pursue education and complete practicum requirements, particularly for those navigating complex immigration pathways or financial constraints.
- ▶ Supports and resources to strengthen advocacy and public engagement, including advocacy training, mentorship, networking opportunities, clear communication strategies, and platforms to share lived experience with policymakers and the public.



04. Stories

Stories: Immigrant and Refugee Women Navigating a Complex Child Care System

The following stories are drawn from real people and real interviews. To protect the privacy of participants who preferred to remain anonymous, some names and photos have been replaced with aliases.

Navigating Motherhood as an Immigrant Woman with a Child with Disability



#INCLUSIVE CHILD CARE
#CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

My name is Mandy, and I am a mother of two children whose lives have been shaped by both disability and chronic illness. My first child was born with a disability that requires constant care, and I myself live with Multiple Sclerosis (MS), which affects my mobility, energy, and overall well-being. Despite these challenges, I have always tried to create a stable and loving environment for my children.

For nearly five years, I remained on a waitlist for a daycare that could meet our family's needs and still be affordable. Each year, I hoped that a placement would finally open, but the wait continued much longer than anyone should have to endure. During these years, the lack of childcare support added heavy strain to our home. It limited my ability to rest, to manage my MS, and to ensure that both of my children had the opportunities and structure they deserved. My younger daughter, Nili, grew up watching me balance my own illness with her sibling's needs, and she carried a level of patience and maturity that no child her age should have to develop so early.

The emotional impact of these years was deep. There were times when I felt overwhelmed, discouraged, and unseen within the system. The exhaustion—both physical and emotional—was constant. Yet through all of this, I continued advocating for my children and for myself, trying to navigate a system that often felt unprepared for families like mine.

My experience showed how crucial it is for families facing disability and chronic illness to have timely access to child care, integrated

support, and services that recognize the realities we live with every day. It also revealed how long waitlists and limited resources can affect not only a parent's health but the entire rhythm of a family's life.

Even in the hardest moments, music became a source of comfort for us. Whether listening together at home or humming softly to ease the stress, music reminded us that hope still exists, even when the challenges feel overwhelming. It helped us hold on to small moments of peace in a journey that has often been anything but easy.

Families living with disabilities and chronic illness need timely, accessible childcare. No parents should wait years for support while struggling and their children needs. It's time to create a system that truly includes them. We call for expanded inclusive childcare spaces, shorter waitlists, and integrated support for families with special needs.



From Classroom to Waiting Room: A Teachers Journey For Credential Recognition

#CREDENTIAL RECOGNITION

#BARRIERS ENTERING THE WORKFORCE

When my husband, my child, and I moved to Canada, we came with big hopes. We saw Canada as a welcoming country and wanted a safe place where our family could learn, grow, and build a better future. Like many newcomers, however, we quickly realized that starting over in a new country can be more complex and challenging than we imagined.

The first problem was the cost of living. Rent was very high. At first, we rented a house, but it took almost all of our money. We could not keep paying that much, so we moved into a small basement with two students. Sharing one washroom with strangers was very stressful, especially with a young child. I felt like we did not have our own space or comfort.

Food was also a big challenge. Grocery prices were high, and it was hard to buy healthy food for my family. I tried to use food banks, but because I did not have my work papers yet, they said they could not help me. As newcomers, we also did not know what support was available. We were trying to survive, but we had very little information.

Finding work made me even sadder. In my home country, I was a teacher with many years of experience. But here in Canada, my certificates were not accepted. I emailed and called the ECE credential office many times, hoping for good news. They kept telling me to wait. After months of waiting, they finally said they could not recognize any of my papers. It felt like everything I worked for in my life was suddenly lost.

At the same time, I was trying to find a college and was also working on my Permanent Residency. I had to take care of my child, look for jobs, and complete paperwork all at once. It was too much.

My child would cry sometimes, and I felt so sad because I wanted to give them more love, more time, and more stability, but I was constantly stressed and tired.

Transportation was another problem. I cannot drive, so I use the bus. One rainy day, the buses stopped running. I was outside, holding my crying child, with no way to get to work. I felt stuck and alone. It showed me how difficult life is when you have no other options.

Later, I found work as an Early Childhood Educator Assistant. I was happy at first, but the pay was low, and my hours changed every day. Sometimes I worked eight hours, and sometimes only five or six. It was not enough money to live on. And even though I worked in childcare, I could not afford childcare for my own child because the fees were too expensive.

All these challenges—housing, food, job problems, transportation, low wages, and high childcare costs—made life very hard. Many nights I cried quietly, wishing I could give my child a more stable and happy life.

Yet even through these challenges, I continue to believe in the opportunities this country offers. I believe that if Canada had better support for newcomers—like affordable childcare, fair recognition of international certificates, easier access to food and housing, and better help finding jobs—families like mine could have a much better start.

This is my story. I share it because I hope that other newcomers will not have to face the same problems, and that all families can feel safe, supported, and welcome in their new home.

Stronger Families, Stronger Canada: A Call for Child Care Solutions

#AFFORDABLE CHILD CARE SPACES

When my family and I came to Canada eight years ago, we arrived with hope but not stability. We were on visitor and student visas, and we didn't understand the rules. Finding housing was our first barrier - every landlord asked for paycheques we didn't have.

For forty days, my family of four stayed in one room at a friend's apartment before we were able to secure a small one-bedroom place of our own. Even then, we knew our housing situation was temporary as we continued navigating the early stages of settlement. During this time, we sought legal guidance to better understand and manage our immigration process, which added financial pressure to an already difficult transition period. Finding work was also challenging while adapting to a new language, professional system, and job market. Although we were eager to contribute, access to affordable childcare became a significant obstacle. Long waitlists and high fees made it difficult to secure care that aligned with our financial situation and work schedules.

All of this puts a strain on our family. My husband worked long hours, and I stayed home because we couldn't find child care. I felt isolated and dependent, even though I wanted to contribute. Eventually, I went to adult school at night to learn English. After several years, I completed my ECE Assistant training and began working in a daycare, but even then, I earned minimum wage. The stress, financial pressure, and years of waiting held us back from building the future we hoped for when we came to Canada.

My experience is not unique. Many immigrant and refugee mothers face the same barriers; unstable housing, language hurdles, long childcare waitlists, and low wages even after upgrading skills. Together, our stories show what's possible when systems truly support families: affordable childcare, fair wages for early childhood educators, clear immigration pathways, and services that understand our cultural realities. When families are supported, communities are stronger.

That's why change is urgent. I ask our policymakers to:

- **Expand access to affordable, culturally inclusive childcare.**
- **Increase wages and career pathways for ECEs, especially immigrant women.**
- **Invest in settlement supports that include language learning, employment, and child care together.**

Families like mine shouldn't have to choose between survival and stability. We came here with hope, and with the right support, we can contribute fully to our communities.



From Expertise to Entry-Level: A Newcomer's Journey in Child Care

#TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

#PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

When I arrived in Canada two years ago, I came with several years of experience working with children and youth who had been displaced by the war in Afghanistan, which deepened my understanding of the unique needs of young people affected by conflict and instability.

During my time living in Turkey as a refugee, I also began teaching English to refugee children who were unable to attend school due to a lack of documentation. However, when I moved to BC, I quickly learned that my previous qualifications were not recognized, and I would need to restart my career path from the beginning.

As a newcomer, I faced multiple challenges at once. I struggled to understand the Canadian employment and education systems, and despite my background with children, most of my job applications received no response. It became clear that my international experience did not align with the formal requirements of the Canadian childcare sector. Without an Early Childhood Education (ECE) certificate, I was not eligible to work in licensed childcare, which created significant barriers to entry and limited my employment options. At the same time, navigating new workplace expectations and professional standards highlighted a broader issue: newcomers often face unclear pathways and limited support when integrating into the childcare workforce.

Beginning my ECE program became an essential step in moving forward. Through my studies and practicum placements, I gained a clearer understanding of Canadian licensing regulations. Even after completing my ECE training, the challenges did not disappear.

Many immigrant educators, including myself, continue to navigate low wages, high living costs, limited paid professional development, and workplaces that can be understaffed or lack formal support systems. For newcomers, understanding processes such as WorkSafeBC, health benefits, and employment protections can also be difficult and often requires additional guidance.

Reflecting on my experience, I see the importance of stronger structural support for newcomer educators. Clearer pathways for credential recognition, accessible training opportunities, and policies that ensure fair wages and stable working conditions would make a significant difference. If I could address policymakers directly, I would emphasize the need for systems that recognize the skills of immigrant and refugee women and provide the necessary support for them to contribute fully to the childcare workforce.

This journey highlights the realities many newcomers face when entering the Canadian childcare sector and underscores the need for policies that strengthen, stabilize, and value the diverse educators who make up this field.



Dreams Delayed: The Career Impact of Unaffordable Child Care

#FLEXIBLE CHILD CARE FOR NEWCOMER FAMILIES

My name is Maria, and I am a mother of two children, Sofia, who is five, and Leo, who is two. I moved to Canada seven years ago from the Philippines. When I first arrived, I was on a temporary work permit, and accessing childcare or applying for benefits was very difficult. I felt hopeful about starting a new life here, but the challenges quickly became clear. Everything felt unfamiliar, and even basic support systems were hard to reach.

Finding affordable child care for my daughter when she was a toddler was a constant struggle. Most centers were full, and the few that had space were far too expensive for my family. I had to quit my job for almost a year just to stay home and care for Sofia. The long waitlists, high

costs, and complicated application processes for subsidies created huge obstacles. Language barriers made it even harder to navigate the system and understand what support was available.

These challenges affected me deeply. I was stressed, overwhelmed, and sometimes felt invisible within a system that didn't seem designed for families like mine. Missing out on work opportunities and having to delay my career growth added to the strain, and the constant balancing act took a toll on my mental health.

Eventually, I found part-time daycare at a community center that was affordable. The staff there were welcoming and supportive, and for the first time in a long time, I felt that my children were in a safe, nurturing environment. This support made a real difference in our daily lives and helped me regain some stability and confidence.

From my experience, I believe that more subsidized childcare spots, information available in multiple languages, and flexible hours at childcare centers would make a huge difference for newcomer families. Programs like the one that helped us should be more widely available.

I want other parents in situations like mine to know that real solutions are possible. Policymakers need to create strong policies and invest in organizations that support all families, including immigrant and refugee families, so it becomes easier for people to access essential services such as childcare. Most importantly, systemic change is needed to make these services truly accessible to everyone.



Caregiver's Contributions to the Child Care System

For many immigrant and refugee women, caregiving becomes the first point of entry into the Canadian labour market. Yet despite their essential contributions, caregivers continue to face systemic barriers, including unrecognized qualifications, limited pathway into the formal ELCC workforce, and prolonged waiting periods for permanent residency. For Women arriving through the Caregiver Program, this work is often performed in isolation, with low wages, limited protections, and almost no access to professional development. **As our community research shows, many immigrant women work full time caring for children but remain excluded from the very childcare system they help sustain.** Tatyana's story, shared below, illustrates this reality.

Tatyana Liadenko: *Caring to Advocate*

Fifteen years ago, I came to Canada through the Live-in Caregiver Program. I believed: work well, be honest, and the rest will follow. The reality was harder—living in the employer's home, a closed work permit, dependence on a single contract, and a long road to status. Changing families meant restarting the hiring process and risking timelines. For many, the wait for PR stretched up to seven years. Two weeks before I was ready to apply, I was let go and spent six more months rebuilding paperwork and hours.

My degree is in English, German, and World Literature. I've worked with children since my teens—camps, private lessons, in-home care. It always felt natural: find a shared language, set a routine, explain calmly and clearly. In Canada, I met my husband, our daughter was born, and I deeply felt more the value of a steady adult by a

child's side. Care isn't "a couple of hours of play"; it's a world of details—sleep, meals, travel, safety, communication. When a nanny is confident and calm, the whole family's life becomes more predictable.

Back then, conditions in private households were tough. Pay was near the minimum while responsibility was at the maximum. Until PR, you could hardly study or upskill. Social life was limited—you spent most of your time in someone else's home. On paper, reports showed "twenty hours," but life felt like 24/7. I needed a foundation and room to grow. I trained as a law clerk, built a solid legal base, and later became a licensed immigration consultant. For the past five years, I've helped other women walk this path with fewer legal—and human—costs.

*From practice, here's what helps caregivers right away; **Functional English**—to study not just for an exam, but to speak with a doctor, teacher, 911, and parents, and to understand the answer. **Core safety/first-aid certificates**—confidence for you and peace of mind for families. **A short, supervised practicum** (even volunteer) with written confirmation of skills— the first "Canadian footprint" that eases talks with employers and colleges.*

More broadly, this is not only personal—it is systemic. What is needed is a short, clear bridge: language, safety, supervised hours, reference letters—and then a visible pathway: Responsible Adult, ECEA, licensed organizations, or family-based models, depending on what fits. When there is a clear first step into the profession, everyone benefits: children get a calm, kind day; parents gain confidence; women get a protected career route; communities grow more resilient.

In-home child care is not a "rough draft" job for newcomers; it is a serious profession with high responsibility and deep human meaning. When adaptation is smoother and more predictable, children, parents, workers—and the economy—win.

05. Policy

How Child Care Policy Appears in Underrepresented Women's Lives

Child care policy is experienced through whether care is available, affordable, and stable—and through the training and working conditions that shape the workforce. For immigrant and refugee women, these realities intersect with settlement, language access, credential pathways, and employment security. As a result, child care is not experienced only as a service, but as part of a broader set of systems that shape women's access to education, employment, income security, and civic life. Participants' experiences help reveal where policy intent does not align with lived outcomes. The section below outlines the current child care landscape and the policy context shaping these day-to-day realities.

The Current Child Care Landscape

Canada's child care system is in transition: shifting from a predominantly market-priced model—where affordability is mediated through parent fees and income-tested, demand-side subsidies—toward a more publicly funded approach with set fees, stable operating funding, and stronger public accountability. The Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreements (CWELCC) support this shift through shared priorities on affordability, expansion, quality, inclusion, and improved data and reporting, including increased reliance on operating funding to replace parent fees and sustain service delivery.

Implementation remains uneven. Although B.C. has expanded \$10-a-Day over time, only about 16,000 of roughly 159,000 licensed spaces (about 10%) are currently enrolled in the set-fee model. Most families therefore navigate a mixed system where fees and access vary by provider and geography, and affordability relies on partial fee reductions rather than consistently low, set fees.

As part of the inclusion objective under the Canada-British Columbia Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement – 2021 to 2026, British Columbia committed to “develop a plan and make progress to ensure that children from diverse and underserved populations, including children living in low-income households, Indigenous children, Black and other racialized children, children with disabilities or enhanced/individual support needs, children of newcomers to Canada, and official language minorities, have equitable access to regulated child care spaces in proportion to their presence in the population.” This project focuses on the perspective of immigrant and refugee women within that broader equity commitment, documenting how immigrant and refugee families and early childhood educators experience access and inclusion in practice.

At the same time, many centres are under operational strain. With fees capped or reduced, programs rely heavily on operating funding to cover day-to-day costs and educator compensation, while labour shortages and retention challenges can reduce effective capacity (e.g., closing rooms or limiting hours). These pressures shape lived outcomes for immigrant and refugee women both as mothers seeking stable, affordable care and as workers navigating credential pathways and workplace conditions that affect the sector's ability to expand and remain sustainable.

Connecting Lived Experience To Policy Evidence

Participants shared how they navigate child care as mothers and as early childhood educators and assistants, while project staff provided accessible policy information and facilitated structured discussions to interpret these experiences in context. Participant input was synthesized into shared themes and examined to identify where barriers connect to system design and where practical policy levers exist. The recommendations that follow translate participant-identified priorities into actionable policy recommendations. *The figure below summarizes the pathway used in this report:*



From lived experience to policy recommendations: the project's knowledge translation pathway linking participant experiences to shared themes, policy analysis, and PIRS recommendations.

Policy Recommendations

Participants' insights point to practical policy directions to improve affordability, access, inclusion, and workforce sustainability—particularly for immigrant and refugee women who experience the system both as families and as workers.

Equitable Access and System Navigation

- 1. Embed equity targets into \$10-a-Day expansion** by building on BC's current approach (provider intake/conversion and new-space investments), setting clear equity and geographic targets that prioritize underserved communities—including areas with high concentrations of newcomer families—and publicly reporting where new \$10-a-Day spaces are added and whether expansion is reducing uneven access.
- 2. Build on Child Care Resource & Referral (CCRR) to strengthen navigation and wayfinding** by resourcing a standardized, multilingual pathway that explains how families access licensed and \$10-a-Day care, what to expect with waitlists and admissions, and how to identify and contact nearby approved providers delivered through CCRR and embedded in settlement-serving organizations and community hubs.
- 3. Strengthen language access and culturally responsive communication in child care centres** by resourcing consistent multilingual communication practices that improve clarity on enrolment steps and expectations, ongoing communication with families, and responsiveness to language and cultural needs.

Affordability, Availability and System Design

- 4. Increase flexibility of care options to match family realities by expanding models** that address limited flexibility in hours, non-standard work and settlement schedules, and continuity of care supported through targeted operating grants and program requirements that enable flexible delivery without reducing quality.
- 5. Move toward universal \$10-a-Day coverage in licensed child care** by establishing regular intakes and a supported conversion pathway so any licensed provider that meets program requirements can apply, with priority for low-access communities and public/not-for-profit/Indigenous-led programs.



Workforce Stability, Compensation, and Quality

- 6. Implement a publicly funded, province-wide wage grid that clearly sets rates by role** (ECEs and ECEAs), experience, and qualifications, and supports employment stability across the sector—starting at \$30-\$40/hour (aligned with cost-of-living and retention needs).
- 7. Strengthen licensing oversight capacity and transparency** by resourcing health authority licensing programs to meet timely standards for **licensing approvals, routine inspections, and complaint investigations**, and by requiring **annual public reporting** on licensing capacity and performance—consistent with the B.C. Auditor General's 2025 recommendations on child care licensing capacity and accountability.

Training, Credential Recognition and Career Pathways

- 8. Build on the International Credentials Recognition Act by making credential pathways clearer and easier to navigate, ECE-specific, multilingual guidance** explaining what the Act changes, applicant rights, the step-by-step pathway to certification (timelines, costs, documents), and where to access bridging supports (English-integrated bridge programs, paid practicums, recognition of prior learning).
- 9. Strengthen access to training bursaries and financial supports for immigrant and refugee women** by improving outreach and plain-language guidance on how to apply, simplifying navigation of available supports, and addressing eligibility barriers that prevent some women—particularly those with precarious immigration status—from accessing the financial assistance needed to enter and advance in the sector.

- 10. Provide child care supports during training and practicums** by linking professional development and certification pathways with supports that address limited access to child care while studying, practicum-hour requirements, and family responsibilities so women can complete education steps without losing income or stability.

Inclusion, Accountability, and Community Voice

- 11. Advance British Columbia's Inclusive Child Care Strategy** by operationalizing equity of access for newcomer families (and other underserved groups) through stable, centre-level inclusion supports (e.g., dedicated inclusion staffing/time, interpretation/translation, culturally responsive practice supports) and a simple cross-ministry pathway so families can find and access supports without navigating multiple systems.
- 12. Strengthen equity data and public reporting by requiring annual public reporting with consistent definitions** on the number and geographic distribution of \$10-a-Day spaces, indicators of unmet demand and access barriers (e.g., waitlists/availability where feasible), and progress toward inclusion objectives, especially for groups named in the agreements, including children of newcomers to Canada. Where disaggregated reporting is limited, publish a clear plan and timeline to improve comparability and equity measurement over time, consistent with the 2025 Auditor General findings on CWELCC accountability.
- 13. Strengthen mentorship, peer support, and advocacy capacity for newcomer educators and parents** by funding community-based mentorship and networking opportunities, and providing accessible advocacy training and communications support so immigrant and refugee women can participate in policy dialogue around early learning and child care.

06. Conclusion

“Together, we envisioned a united and empowered ECE workforce driving sustainable change for children and families across British Columbia.”

-Participants of the Childcare Leadership Group

This report documents how immigrant and refugee women in Metro Vancouver experience the child care system during a period of major reform. Across surveys and community dialogue, participants described \$10-a-Day child care as transformative in impact when families can secure a space—reducing financial stress and enabling mothers to work, study, and participate in settlement and community life. At the same time, participants consistently identified barriers that make access uneven: limited supply and long waitlists, unclear and inconsistent processes, language barriers, gaps in cultural responsiveness, and workforce instability that affects quality and availability.

As both families and workers, immigrant and refugee women offered a grounded view of where policy intentions do not yet match lived realities. The recommendations in this report translate participant-identified needs into practical system changes that can strengthen equity, help stabilize the workforce, and make affordability reforms accessible in practice, not only in principle.

Voices from the Childcare Leadership Group

I know what it means to rebuild a life in a new place while caring for others. Through my participation in the Childcare Leadership Group, I'm advocating for immigrant families and child care workers to be truly seen, valued, and included in decisions that affect our lives.

- Amandeep Kaur

As an Early Childhood Educator, the idea of building a strong childcare system is deeply personal. I carry a heavy workload and significant responsibility for the care, safety, and development of young children, yet my compensation does not reflect the importance or complexity of this work. Every day I give my time, skills, and emotional energy to support children and families, but like many ECEs, I often feel undervalued and underpaid.

As an immigrant, this challenge is even more real. I came here with hopes of stability, growth, and a better future for my family. I want access to fair wages, professional respect, and strong resources so I can pay off my student loans and provide a secure upbringing for my children. A well-built childcare system would mean affordable, high-quality care for families, but also fair pay, benefits, and career pathways for educators like me.

To me, this project represents dignity, equity, and sustainability. It means recognizing ECEs as skilled professionals, supporting immigrant educators, and creating a system where those who care for young children can also care for their own families without constant financial stress.

- Asma Insaf

I joined the Child Care Leadership Group to address the unique barriers immigrant women face in accessing quality and inclusive child care. My time here has taught me how policies are built and, more importantly, how our lived experiences and active advocacy serve as the essential foundation for more equitable barrier-free systems.

- Dounia Mlik

This project is special to me because it gives us a space to share our voices and support each other.

- Gehan Hassan

Participating in BCS has been a meaningful experience that allowed me to listen, learn, and reflect from different perspectives. Through respectful dialogue and collaboration, I gained a deeper understanding of the importance of community, mutual support, and active participation in creating positive change. This experience strengthened my commitment to stay engaged and contribute my skills while continuing to learn from others.

- Guadalupe Flores Villegas

As a parent, this program helped me better understand the challenges within the early childhood system and how they directly affect families like mine. It created space for parents and community members to share lived experiences and feel heard in shaping policy recommendations. The program strengthened community connections, highlighted the value of culturally responsive care, and reinforced the importance of fair recognition and support for educators—ultimately contributing to more inclusive, supportive environments for our children and families.

- Javeria Awan

For me, Building a Childcare System means “Investing in a bright future”

- Khadijeh Mohammad Khani

I want to contribute to Canada’s growth and support women, children, and families, particularly immigrant and newcomers communities. As a woman, I’m passionate about making a positive impact and helping my country thrive.

- Maryam

Through volunteer work on PIRS projects—and now beyond PIRS in the wider community—I’ve gained the language, tools, and networks to turn lived experience into support for others, especially women who, like me, are building their future through family care and early learning. Here, data and stories become practical steps: clearer pathways, a safer start, and real hope.

- Nadezda Fedortsova

As a childcare leader in different cohorts over the past few years, one of my most meaningful experiences has been helping build and strengthen its childcare system. From the beginning, I knew there would be a light at the end of the tunnel and that was my motivation to advocate and commit in order to create a safe, welcoming, and supportive environment for children and families. This experience helped me develop leadership, communication, and problem-solving skills, and it made me feel proud to contribute to something that truly serves the community.

- Mireille Keubou

The project helped me gain more knowledge and confidence about childcare through Zoom sessions where important topics were clearly explained.

- Nargis Jelali

Being part of the CLG made me feel seen, heard, and capable of driving change in the childcare sector for immigrant and refugee women. It not only deepened my understanding of systemic barriers but also gave me the tools and voice to help co-design solutions.

- Samira Rajabi

I’m glad to be in childcare leadership group, the most important thing to me right beside every parent to get their children in daycare and available space and support services for all they need we hope to make sure that we have a great future and community support for strong relationships between communities and families. Patient care to reach a goal for all.

- Sawsan Hamie

This is just the start of something big— a movement that advances one step at a time! Through the childcare leadership group, I have gained clarity about the future and a deeper understanding of my role in contributing to positive change in the childcare sectors.

- Selamawit Hagos

For me, this project represents hope — hope for empowered educators, confident children, and connected, thriving families.

- Swati Chakraborty

As a participant, I see this project as a powerful space where our lived experiences as immigrant and refugee women are valued and transformed into leadership and policy influence. It has strengthened my confidence, connection, and ability to advocate for a child care system that truly reflects our families’ realities.

- Yodit Habte

Women's Leadership and Development Team

Program Manager (on leave)



Nataizya Mukwavi led the overall planning, oversight, and accountability of the projects under the Women's Leadership and Development program, ensuring delivery aligned with the workplan, budget, and funder requirements. She provided strategic leadership to the team, maintained relationships with funders and key partners. She oversaw reporting, monitoring and financial management until November 2025.

Interim Program Manager



Bassema El Alie assumed full program management responsibility, ensuring continuity of initiatives under the Women's Leadership Development program during the transition period. She provided leadership and oversight to maintain program delivery, funder compliance, and team support, while also contributing to the design and development of different projects to strengthen and sustain programming.

Inclusive Child Care for All 2.0 Project Coordinator, Advocacy & Engagement



Mehrnoosh Amin-Aghaee coordinated all project activities and stakeholder engagement for Inclusive Child Care for All 2.0, a national initiative delivered in partnership with Oxfam Canada and Child Care Now. She led three Communities of Practice with PIRS alumni working as ECEs, ECEAs and RAs, creating space for dialogue on systemic challenges in the early learning and child care sector. Organized nationwide child care advocacy webinars on universal child care system rather than a targeted approach.

Building a Childcare System 2.0 Project Coordinator



Celeste Flores led the implementation of the Building a Childcare System 2.0 project, coordinating activities, stakeholder engagement and supported the Childcare Leadership Group through capacity building planning and facilitation. She promoted participant leadership, advocacy and systemic change efforts. She monitored progress, addressing challenges while documenting outcomes and impact for reporting and evaluation.

Policy and Engagement Officer



Safiya Ayuen translated policy research and data on child care and related labour and gender issues into accessible formats for the Childcare Leadership Group. She facilitated structured learning spaces and supported participants in applying evidence to articulate how child care systems are experienced in their lives. She mobilized immigrant and refugee women to become child care advocates, while building and maintaining relationships with sector stakeholders.

Project Assistant



Annette Quayson provided essential administrative and logistical support across Women's Leadership Development initiatives, with particular focus on Building a Childcare System 2.0. She supported online and in-person meetings during planning and implementation. She assisted with communication with participants and vendors. She contributed to the smooth implementation of project activities and overall operations.

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Organizations

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- Child Care Now
- Childcare Resource and Research Unit
- Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC
- First Call Child and Youth Advocacy Society
- OXFAM Canada
- South Asian Women Immigrant Services (SAWIS-SAWRO)








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To learn more about the Building a Child Care System project and read the full report, scan the QR code or visit the link <https://pirs.bc.ca/bcs/>



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