

Who Sustains Child Care?

Immigrant Women's Experiences
Working in B.C.'s Child Care System



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Summary

This brief shares insights from 22 immigrant women navigating work and training in British Columbia's early learning and child care (ELCC) sector. Their perspectives were gathered through a Community of Practice (CoP) hosted by the Pacific Immigrant Resources Society (PIRS) as part of the [Inclusive Child Care for All 2.0](#) project.

The goal is to surface lived experiences that are often missing from public conversations about child care. While this is not a representative sample, the stories and patterns that emerged point to broader structural challenges and opportunities for change.

Care work remains one of the most feminized forms of labour globally, a pattern that is evident in the ELCC workforce. In Canada, women make up approximately [96%](#) of the workforce, and immigrants account for [39%](#) of early learning educators and child care providers.

Yet their pathways into stable, rewarding careers in the sector are often fragmented and difficult to navigate. Understanding these experiences matters not only for equity but for sustaining and expanding low-fee, licensed, high-quality child care—increasingly recognized as essential to Canada's economic and social infrastructure.

Who We Heard From

Between July and September 2025, PIRS convened 22 immigrant women in Metro Vancouver who were working in, or trying to join, the ELCC sector. All participants had completed training through PIRS to obtain either a [Responsible Adult](#) (RA) or Early Childhood Education Assistant (ECEA) certification.

Through three facilitated sessions, participants shared their experiences with education, employment, and career progression. The sessions were trauma-informed and culturally responsive, creating space for open dialogue. While the findings are not statistically representative, they reveal recurring patterns that reflect broader workforce dynamics.



What We Heard

Credential Recognition Barriers

Many participants arrived in Canada with post-secondary education and professional experience, often in education-related fields. However, their credentials were frequently not recognized, requiring them to re-enter training pathways that were costly, time-intensive, and difficult to navigate.

“Although I hold a Master of Education and have seven years of experience as an elementary school teacher in my home country of Ukraine, the lack of recognition of my qualifications in Canada required me to re-enter training and obtain an ECEA certification to work in the sector.”

Limited English proficiency added further complexity, particularly in navigating credential recognition systems and accessing higher levels of certification within the ELCC sector.

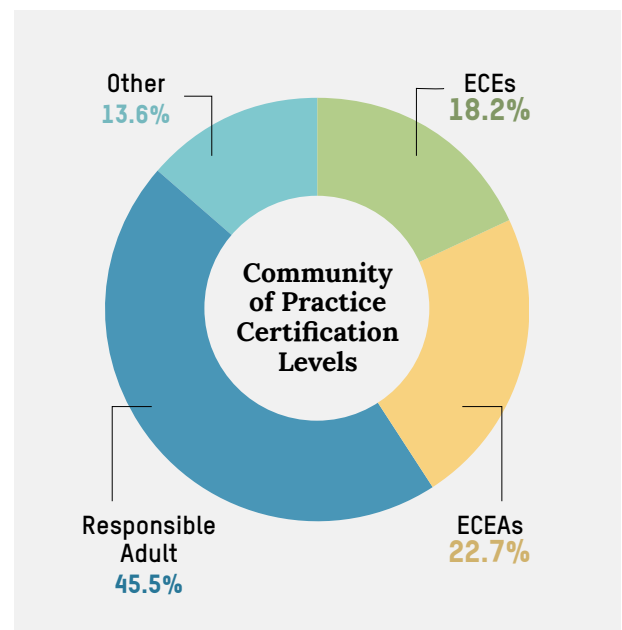
Child Care Access

Participants consistently identified access to low-fee, high-quality child care as a barrier to both employment and further training. High costs and limited availability restricted their ability to pursue an ECE certification or maintain stable work.

“I completed the Responsible Adult and ECEA programs at PIRS and was able to start working. However, I cannot continue my education to become an ECE because I work full-time, I do not have access to child care, and I do not have the time or money to pursue further training.”

This highlights a structural tension; those working in child care often face the same access barriers as the families they support.

This challenge is particularly pronounced in British Columbia. With only about 10% of child care providers enrolled in the \$10 a Day program, the supply of affordable child care spaces remains limited, contributing to some of the [highest child care fees](#) in Canada. The province's [pause on new enrolment](#) in the program, along with changes to the [Operating Funding Model](#) during an unspecified stabilization period, risks further constraining access and slowing progress toward universal child care.



Employment in Entry-Level Roles

Many participants were concentrated in entry-level roles, particularly as Responsible Adults (45%). The Responsible Adult certificate requires 20 hours of training in child development and safety.

While these jobs provide an entry point into the sector, they rarely offer clear pathways for advancement. Participants described a cycle of limited income and unstable schedules that made it difficult to pursue further education, therefore limiting their ability to move into other roles within the sector.

Unclear Immigration Pathways

In British Columbia, the Skills Immigration stream of the BC Provincial Nominee Program [prioritizes](#) fully certified ECEs who are licensed by the ECE Registry and have secured permanent, full-time job offers, positioning them for targeted invitations to apply for permanent residency.

Between 2022 and 2023, nominations within the education occupations category—which includes both teachers and ECEs—increased by 51%, signalling a growing dependence on immigration to fill workforce gaps across education sectors, including ELCC.

However, access to these pathways has become more restrictive over time. Before April 2025, Early Childhood Education Assistants (ECEAs) were also eligible for targeted draws. Following a 50% reduction in federal nomination allocations for 2025, the province narrowed eligibility criteria to focus primarily on ECEs with higher certifications, usually a bachelor's degree.

Participants' experiences suggest that obtaining these credentials is itself fraught with barriers, including the non-recognition of foreign qualifications, limited access to affordable and flexible training, language requirements, and challenges in securing child care.

As a result, many immigrant women already working in the sector remain concentrated in entry-level positions such as ECEAs or RAs, with limited opportunities to transition into fully certified ECE roles. This, in turn, restricts their access to more stable and secure immigration pathways, reinforcing a cycle of constrained mobility within both the labour market and the immigration system.

What This Means

Taken together, these experiences highlight a system where barriers are interconnected and mutually reinforcing.

This has broader implications:

- **For workers**, it limits career progression, income stability, and long-term settlement.
- **For the sector**, it constrains the supply of qualified educators at a time of growing demand.
- **For families**, it affects the availability and quality of child care.

Efforts to expand early learning and child care under the Canada-wide agreements depend on a sustainable, fairly compensated, and qualified workforce. Without addressing these interconnected barriers, expansion may stall.

Recent policy developments, such as British Columbia's International Credentials Recognition Act (2024), signal progress. The Act introduces requirements for timely and transparent licensing decisions and removes Canadian work experience requirements for regulated professions, including ECEs and ECEAs. It also shifts away from self-regulation toward stronger government oversight and applies to multiple regulatory bodies. However, more coordinated action is needed across systems.



Key Areas for Action

As Canada and British Columbia advance toward a universal early learning and child care system, recruiting and retaining qualified ELCC professionals, including immigrants, is critical to its success.

The experiences shared through this Community of Practice underscore both immigrant women's essential contributions and the systemic barriers they continue to face. Addressing these challenges is fundamental to building a child care system that is inclusive, diverse, and equitable.

Participants' experiences point to several areas where changes could support them to thrive in British Columbia's ELCC sector:

1. **Improve compensation and working conditions for educators and child care staff**

Implementing a province-wide wage grid that starts at \$30-\$40 per hour, depending on qualifications and experience, to support recruitment, retention, and career progression.

2. **Expand \$10aDay child care to all licensed programs**

Increase the supply of public and non-profit licensed child care spaces through a coordinated, long-term provincial strategy.

3. **Streamline credential recognition processes**

Ensure the implementation of a more transparent, timely, and accessible system to better recognize internationally trained professionals.

4. **Support career pathways for newcomer and immigrant educators and child care workers**

Invest in bridging programs, mentorship, and language supports to enable labour market mobility.

5. **Maintain clear immigration pathways**

Maintain clear immigration pathways for qualified ECEs, including viable options for those currently working in the sector, to better reflect how workers enter and progress within the sector.