



Protecting Refugee and Immigrant Youth from Exploitation and Human Trafficking

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With gratitude to our community, legal, and settlement partners for their collaboration in protecting newcomer youth

Where Child Welfare Meets Immigration and Human Trafficking

Across Canada, refugee and immigrant youth are navigating complex systems that can leave them unprotected.

Some arrive as Unaccompanied or Separated Children (UASC); others live with precarious or unresolved immigration status.

Without secure status or coordinated supports, these young people can face language barriers, limited networks, trauma, isolation, and limited access to essential services — all of which increase vulnerability to exploitation and marginalization, including the risk of human trafficking.

Hidden Vulnerabilities – When Systems Don't Connect

Immigration, child welfare, and settlement systems often operate in silos and issues can remain invisible within and across systems meaning people don't receive the help they need. Youth may lack access to education, healthcare, and income supports, while isolation and vulnerability increases risk of exploitation.

CWICE's integrated model has resulted in:

- Increased numbers of youth achieving secure immigration status.
- Reduced exploitation risks through coordinated interventions.
- Enhanced system capacity through specialized training.
- Improved outcomes in safety, education, and community connection.



When systems fail to align, youth fall through the cracks.

CWICE's Role – Bridging Systems, Building Safety

The CWICE is a unique Centre of Excellence in Canada, with expertise in the intersection of child welfare with immigration, settlement, travel and border-related issues.

CWICE provides:

- Consultations and services when individuals are managing complex child welfare and immigration needs
- Direct services to families and youth with complex immigration needs.
- Education and training to build awareness, sector capacity, and transform systems
- Research that informs practice, policy and legislative development

Our approach is:

- Culturally responsive – understanding diverse migration journeys.
- Trauma-informed – prioritizing healing and dignity.
- Rights-based – ensuring every child's safety, stability, and belonging.



When youth are seen, supported, and documented they are safer.

Impact and Outcomes – From Vulnerability to Empowerment

Key strategies to protect newcomer youth from exploitation:

- Screen for immigration and exploitation risks.
- Pair child welfare workers with immigration specialists.
- Coordinate with settlement and legal partners.
- Amplify youth voice, choice, and empowerment.
- Support access to documentation, education, and healthcare.

Overview of human trafficking in Peel Region

- 70% of human trafficking victims in the Region of Peel are under the age of 25
- 62% of Canadian human trafficking cases originate in the Greater Toronto Area
- 63% of victims trafficked in Ontario are Canadian citizens
- As Canada's largest airport, in Peel Region, Pearson International Airport staff work to prevent and partner with organizations to end human trafficking, because air travel can be used by traffickers
- Peel Regional Police respond to concerns at the airport, within the community, and work in an integrated way with policing around the GTA and beyond.



Scan to learn more about Human Trafficking in Peel

Looking Forward – A Call to Action

- Strengthen cross-sector partnerships to close service gaps.
- Embed immigration expertise in all child welfare settings.
- Advance policies and funding that recognize intersecting vulnerabilities.
- Continue research and data collection to guide system change.



Every newcomer child deserves protection, stability, and hope — regardless of immigration status.



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