

SANCTUARY CITIES: ENSURING EVERYONE CAN USE MUNICIPAL SERVICES



Sweeping changes to federal immigration and refugee policies are forcing millions of migrants to leave their jobs. These changes weaken local economies and the social fabric of cities and towns across Canada.

Migrants feed our communities, care for our children and elders, staff our hospitals and long-term care homes, and keep public services running. Now, many are losing their work permits and may become undocumented.

Municipalities help keep all residents safe, including immigrants, migrant workers, international students, refugees, and others with precarious immigration status. Local governments can protect these community members by ensuring everyone can use municipal services without being asked about their immigration status.

Who is undocumented?

The term undocumented describes someone who is living or working in Canada without authorization from Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. Many undocumented people were denied protection as refugees but stayed in Canada because they were fleeing life-threatening situations. Other undocumented people were on a work or study permit that the federal government did not renew.

Undocumented people are already part of our communities. Many are women or part of the 2SLGBTQI+ community, and face a higher risk of abuse, violence, and exploitation.

What is a sanctuary city?

Sanctuary cities first appeared in the United States. Local governments passed ordinances, motions, laws or policies to protect undocumented people and allow them to use municipal services without being reported to immigration officials.

In Canada, municipalities have created Access Without Fear policies, often referred to as sanctuary city policies. These policies let undocumented residents use municipal services like transit, housing, libraries, and community centres without being asked about their immigration status and without fear of deportation or detention.

School boards and police boards have adopted similar policies so that undocumented children can go to school, and undocumented people can access police services.

Why sanctuary cities?

Undocumented people work and pay rent and municipal taxes. But they may not ask for help, assert their rights, or report abuses as a worker or a tenant because they're afraid of being detained or deported.

Undocumented people may find it unsafe or impossible to access services if your municipality requires them to register or show identification.

Municipalities can adopt Access Without Fear policies that let undocumented people access municipal services without fear of being detained or deported.

Which cities have Access Without Fear policies?

Toronto, Vancouver, Montreal, and other urban centres like Edmonton, Hamilton, Kingston, and London have adopted Access Without Fear policies.

What can municipalities do?

Local government officials can support undocumented residents by taking these steps:

- Work with migrant rights organizations to pass Access Without Fear policies in your municipality. National coalitions like the Migrant Rights Network, the Canadian Council for Refugees or Migrant Canada can connect you with local organizations. Contact the City of Toronto Newcomer Office to draw on their experience.
- Fund municipal service providers and train front-line staff on policies ensuring all residents have access to services.
- Educate people in your community with information like the Canadian Council for Refugees' Better Together campaign resources.

STATUS FOR ALL

CUPE advocates for all residents in Canada to have permanent resident status. It's the only way to guarantee everyone can access basic rights and services. Let's work together as municipalities, workers, and migrant rights organizations to achieve status for all.