

# TORONTO – A SANCTUARY CITY?

Paulina Malys, März 2021  
M.Sc. Geographie des Globalen Wandels (1. Semester)

## IDEA OF SANCTUARY CITIES

Providing **access to municipal services** for non-status and precarious status migrants "without fear being identified, detained or deported." [4][6]



## DON'T ASK DON'T TELL POLICY

Policies to **protect illegalized migrants** that "prohibit municipal police forces and city service agencies from **requesting, recording, disseminating status information**, and deny cooperation with federal immigration authorities unless required by federal or state law." [1]



## LIVING WITHOUT LEGAL STATUS IN TORONTO

"It's very hard. We just feel **locked out**"

(Person with less than full status) [2]

"People always ask: **what's your status?** That's the first thing when you go to the doctor. **What's your status?** Fill out the form. **What's your status?** So, I don't know what to put. Because you're not a landed immigrant, what are you then? I'm just living here. I've got nothing."

(Person with less than full status) [2]

"I was afraid to call the police. I don't want to, **they will send me home one day**"

(Person with less than full status) [2]

"For the medical, I **have to be my own doctor**, because it's very expensive"

(Person with less than full status) [2]

## LIMITATIONS OF THE CONCEPT [1][9]



Don't Ask Don't Tell policy is not always working ("Often asking, always telling")



→ police often disregard policy and continue to call border enforcement agency



just most rudimentary services provide secure access



difficulties in transforming and training staff according sanctuary policies

minimal impact on material conditions

racial profiling

## GEOGRAPHICAL PERSPECTIVE [1][4]



The concept of urban citizenship employed by Sanctuary Cities unsettles the "conventional understanding of citizenship [...] and belonging." [4] Thus disrupts legally limiting categories of citizenship. By contesting the national legal framework in which specific individuals are considered 'illegal' (illegalized) by the state, sanctuary cities define belonging at the local scale. This practice questions the authority of municipal governments to decide issues of migration and security. This reclamation of self-determination encourages new practices of identity formation and includes illegalized migrants in (imagined) local communities. Sanctuary cities have the potential to create an inclusive community by using urban citizenship to reduce legal and socially constructed barriers to belonging.

## HISTORY OF SANCTUARY CITIES [1][3][5]

Origins in the USA

People from Guatemala and El Salvador flee to the USA

1980s  
Sanctuary Movement  
faith-based communities provide protection and asylum

1985  
First Sanctuary City  
Madison

more and more cities, counties and states adopt those policies

End of 1980s  
policy subject illegal immigrants instead of refugees

since 1980s  
Initiatives by Toronto-based Chilean refugees

2004  
Don't Ask Don't tell campaign launched by activists

2013  
Sanctuary City by-law

### Sources

**Literature** [1] Baubler, H. (2016): Sanctuary Cities: Policies and Practices in International Perspective. In: International Migration Vol. 35 (2) (2017). DOI: 10.1111/imig.12308. 174-187; [2] Bartholomew, C.; McDonald, L.; Hyatt, P.; Wright, C.; Zentgraf, S. (2006): Access Not Fear. Non-Status Immigrants & Civil Services. Preliminary Report; [3] Collingwood, L.; Gonzalez O'Brien, B. (2019): Sanctuary Cities: The Politics of Refuge. Oxford University Press, 202; [4] Hudson, G. (2019): City of hope, city of fear: sanctuary and security in Toronto, Canada. In: Baubler, H. (ed.), 2019: Sanctuary Cities and Urban Struggles: Rescaling Migration, Citizenship, and Rights. Manchester University Press; [5] Macdonald, L.; Wright, C. (2019): Sanctuary City Organizing in Canada. From Hospitality to Solidarity. In: Migration and Society. Advances in Research Vol. 1 (2018). 147-155. Bingham Books. DOI: 10.3147/jvms.2018.010113; [6] Butler, H. (2013): Planning Toronto (2013): Accessing Community programs and services for non-status immigrants in Toronto: Organizational challenges and responses. Social Planning Toronto. <https://www.sptoronto.ca/>; [7] Freepik: Map: Open Street Map, passport icon made by Freepik from [www.flaticon.com](https://www.flaticon.com/)