

Written Submission for the Pre-Budget Consultations in Advance
of the Upcoming Federal Budget By:
OCASI – Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants
To Standing Committee on Finance
August 2021

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Recommendation 1 - That the government revamps the immigration and refugee system in relation to:

- Introduce a fair and equitable regularization program to provide access to permanent residence status for all residents with precarious immigration status or without immigration status, including all migrant workers.
- Develop national regulatory standards for the protection and safety of all migrant workers.
- Reset the economic immigration program consistent with labour market needs and work deemed to be essential during the pandemic in all skills areas and skills levels.
- Relax criteria and increase quotes for family class immigration; remove caps and minimum necessary income requirements from the parent and grandparent sponsorship program.
- Expand the pilot project to sponsor undeclared family members to include everyone made inadmissible by IRPA 117(9)(d), and repeal that provision in the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act
- Repeal criminal inadmissibility in the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA)* to remove double punishment and end double jeopardy.
- End all immigration detention. Pursue alternatives consistent with respect for dignity and human rights when detention is judged to be necessary; and end the use of tracking bracelets as an alternative to detention.
- Establish a fully resourced independent oversight body for the Canada Border Services Agency.
- Repeal the Canada-U.S. Safe Third Country Agreement.
- Eliminate citizenship fees.

Recommendation 2 - Support the settlement and integration of refugees and im/migrants by adopting the following measures:

- Open federally-funded settlement and integration services for all regardless of immigration status.
- Amend Section 91 of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act and regulations to exempt non-profit organizations and their employees from sanctions for providing free immigration services to clients.

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Recommendation 3 - Advance equity and eliminate racial discrimination by implementing the following concrete measures:

- Create a National Action Plan Against Racism to accompany and provide the necessary details for the national Anti-Racism Strategy, containing concrete strategies with actionable goals, measurable targets, and timetables, and the necessary resource allocations to accompany each strategy and action to address all relevant forms of racism and faithism - including anti-Indigenous racism, anti-Black racism, anti-Asian racism and Islamophobia.
- Adopt a federal Anti-Racism Act to build a legislative framework and foundation for the Anti-Racism Secretariat - with dedicated and sustainable funding support. The Anti-Racism Act must name and address all relevant racism and faithism, including anti-Indigenous racism, anti-Black racism, anti-Asian racism, and Islamophobia.
- Mandate the collection of data disaggregated by race and other sociodemographic identities to better measure and understand the racial and equitable impacts of government policies, budget allocations, programs, and practices in the labour market, economic inequality, and poverty; in policing, the criminal justice system and access to justice; in child welfare; environment; health and mental health; housing; social and cultural benefits; education; refugee protection, interdiction, immigration and citizenship; and media, social media, and mass communication.
- Develop regular and transparent reporting mechanisms and an accountability framework for the ownership and responsible use of data to improve life outcomes and wellbeing of racialized communities.
- Update the federal Poverty Reduction Strategy and the National Housing Strategy to include targeted actions and objectives to alleviate disproportionate levels of poverty and address core housing needs across racialized communities and without immigration status barriers.

Recommendation 4 - Strengthen the federal Employment Equity Act to ensure racialized and other systemically and historically disadvantaged communities have equitable access to all labour market opportunities across Canada, including through the following equity measures:

- Add "employment equity" consistent obligations and conditionality to all economic recovery, social and physical infrastructure investments and financial transfers.
- Use federal government good offices to encourage the development of parallel legislated employment equity regimes – provincially, territorially, and municipally.

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- Require impact and community benefit agreements (CBA's) to be attached to all investments - which include employment equity obligations and requirements.
- Ensure fair and equitable public procurement contractor provisions.

Recommendation 5 - Ensure equitable access to federal benefits and supports for low-income residents through adopting the following concrete measures:

- Repeal S.122.6 (5) of the Income Tax Act which defines eligibility to Canada Child Benefits based on the parents' immigration status.
- Remove immigration status as an eligibility requirement for all federal benefits including all emergency relief benefits during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Reduce the Old Age Security (OAS) Residency requirement to three years, allowing seniors who have recently immigrated to Canada to qualify and become eligible for the Guaranteed Income Supplement if they are living on a low-income.

Recommendation 6 - Ensure gender equality by adopting the following measures:

- Ensure the Canada-wide early learning and childcare plan is affordable, uses a gender and racial equity framework in the development and delivery, and is free of immigration status barriers.
- Provide targeted funding for racialized, refugee and im/migrant communities to appropriately address gender-based violence.
- Make targeted investments in immigrant and refugee women's organizations and programming.

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The greatest and deepest economic, social and health impacts of COVID-19 were felt by racialized and migrant peoples, particularly women, and those who are living on low-incomes and experiencing intersecting inequalities based on race, class, disability, education, and migration and immigration status. They are also disproportionately represented in jobs with greater exposure to COVID-19 across multiple sectors.

- A recent [report](#) from the Future Skills Centre found that recent immigrants, workers who are racialized, Indigenous workers and young workers are disproportionately holding precarious jobs, and all have experienced adverse income outcomes due to the pandemic. 55% of racialized workers who are also recent immigrants reported either a loss of hours of work or job loss or both.
- [Statistics Canada labour force survey data](#) reported in December 2020 showed the unemployment rate for racialized women was 10.5% compared to 6.2% for white women and the former group's unemployment rate was only slightly higher than racialized males (10.0%). Further, Indigenous women and racialized women are among the last to return to jobs lost during COVID, and the impacts are different for different groups. The unemployment rate for Black women was the highest at 13.4%. East Asian women are the furthest from pre-pandemic employment with a 10.2% unemployment rate. The unemployment rate for Indigenous women was approximately 16.8%.
- An [interdisciplinary research team](#) at Carleton University reported that immigrant women encounter vulnerabilities due to gendered responsibilities that negatively impacted their employment experiences. This included a reversal of career trajectory, layoffs, and decreased availability for short-term employment opportunities. In addition, many were deemed ineligible for emergency government support.
- Statistics Canada [reports](#) that in Ontario's most diverse neighbourhoods (aka racialized/immigrant communities) COVID-19 infections were three times higher, hospitalizations rates were four times higher and deaths were twice as high.
- The 2016 Census found the gender pay gap is higher for women who are Indigenous, racialized and are immigrants. Racialized women working full-time, full year earn an average of 33% less than non-racialized men, at 67 cents to the dollar. Immigrant women working full-time, full-year earn an average of 29% less than Canadian-born men, at 71 cents to the dollar despite having higher levels of education.
- Researchers at University of Toronto, [report](#) a sharp rise (up from 11% to 35%) amongst those reporting discriminatory experiences in the last two years.

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The April 2021 Federal Budget acknowledged that Indigenous, Black, racialized, refugee and immigrant women and communities face long-standing systemic inequities, and made some solid investments to address some of the resulting disparities. They include investment in Black communities and businesses, disaggregated data collection, a national action plan to address gender-based violence (GBV), funding to address GBV among refugees and immigrants, a national childcare strategy, and more investment in the Social Finance fund.

Immigration is a cornerstone of Canada's domestic and foreign policy. It contributes to the growth of the economy, supports international obligations to refugees from across the world, and furthers Canada's commitment to family reunification.

Unfortunately, the government does not recognize the many ways that national economic gains from immigration are not evenly shared and frequently rest on egregious systemic racism, discrimination and human rights violations, in particular among migrant workers and refugee communities. For example, racialized communities represent a large and growing population of immigrants to Canada, but changes to immigration law and policy continue to throw up barriers to full inclusion in this country.

Recommendation 1 – That the government revamps the immigration and refugee system proposes a series of remedies to dismantle systemic barriers and bring a measure of equity to the immigration and refugee program

Recommendation 2 - Support the settlement and integration of refugees and im/migrants calls for federally-funded settlement and integration services to be opened up for all regardless of immigration status; and calls for the amendment of S.91 of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act and regulations to exempt non-profit organizations and their employees from sanctions for providing free immigration services to clients.

Presently, settlement and integration services are provided only for permanent residents and Convention Refugees, leaving out many others who need information and critical support, including refugee claimants, migrant workers and international students.

With respect to S.91, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) over the last decade started to bar nonprofit organizations from providing free refugee- and immigration-

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related assistance to the people they serve. The original intention of this provision was to prevent unscrupulous individuals from exploiting and defrauding people for paid assistance on immigration matters.

Nonprofits provide much needed free assistance to vulnerable communities and were not the intended target of Section 91. As a result of this shift, primarily low-income refugees and migrants who cannot afford to pay a lawyer or consultant for assistance are left without any support. A significant number are racialized migrants and women—people who are overrepresented in poverty statistics in Canada.

Recommendations 3 – 6 propose concrete measures to address structural and systemic racial inequalities at multiple intersections including gender and immigration status.

While the federal government has pursued feminist budgeting and use of the GBA+ framework, racial equity was not clearly stated in the previous budget nor in government policy announcements. As a result, racialized residents are often excluded from measures that are intended to benefit everyone, as demonstrated by disproportionate levels of racialized poverty and racial inequities in fundamental areas such as housing, health, education and more.

The effects of structural racism are demonstrated in income inequality, the over-policing and incarceration of Indigenous and Black peoples, and profound inequalities in education, health outcomes, employment, and life chances. Structural racism continues to disadvantage Indigenous, Black, and racialized and migrant communities at disproportionate rates in Canada.

These recommendations propose concrete measures that will address systemic racism, the growing racialization of poverty and the resulting increased levels of social exclusion and marginalization of racialized, refugee and im/migrant communities as well as lay the foundation for a more prosperous and fair society for all.

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