

Fact Sheet # 8

Understanding the Racialization of Poverty in Ontario In Immigration & Newcomer Settlement in 2007

How do immigration and settlement processes affect the racialization of poverty ?

Definitions

Economic immigrants are workers and their families who are accepted into Canada because of their skills or education.

Family Class immigrants are people who are sponsored by a family member who already lives in Canada.

Convention refugees are granted protection in Canada because they face persecution in another country.

Refugee claimants are people who are in Canada & have made a claim for protection. Over half have of such claims are denied.

“Non-status” refers to anyone who’s living in Canada for what ever reasons, cannot obtain legal status or has status that expired.

Regularization would mean that non-status or undocumented people are given legal status in Canada.

Most immigrants – 80% of whom since 1981 are from racialized communities - come to Canada because they believe that their skills will be needed. Often, their credentials are not officially or formally recognized.

Many refugees come to Canada to escape extreme poverty, abuse, violence or war, but many face poverty and discrimination in Canada too, and social services are not able to effectively address their needs.

Immigrants and refugees find that the hardest part of settlement is finding a job. In 2001 – 44.6% of recent immigrants (immigrated between 1996-2001) fell under the low income cut-off (LICO) rate.

Almost 60% of recent newcomers who are working are employed in parttime, contract-based employment (usually without any health insurance or benefits)

Although immigrants to Canada have much more education than in the past, they have a higher chance of being poor. Between 1981 and 2001, the number of immigrants who are poor in Toronto - largely people of colour - grew by 125%.

There are not enough English as a Second Language (ESL) training programs. School boards are unofficially allowed to transfer their ESL funds to other program areas as they need if they wish.

It is estimated that 200,000 to 300,000 people live without legal immigration status in Canada, mostly in Ontario.

Many “non-status” people come from countries of extreme poverty and violence, but do not qualify as Convention Refugees. Not having status means that such newcomers:

- * can’t access health & social services, police protection
- * cannot work legally, so risk abuse and unfair wages
- * do not qualify for housing support
- * often cannot send their children to school
- * don’t qualify for some language training programs, etc.

The only way for non-status to apply for status is on “humanitarian and compassionate” grounds. This is granted only in very exceptional cases.

Quick Notes

- * Ontario’s growing racialized communities face a disproportionate, ongoing, & increasing risk of being poor.
- * **Racialized** persons refers to people of colour who are Canadian-born & to newcomer communities of colour.
- * By **racism**, we mean both the individual attitudes and behaviours as well as the built-in ways in which social policies and societal institutions discriminate.
- * Households that fall below Canada’s **low income cut-off (LICO)** measure, spend a much larger percent of their income on basic necessities like food and shelter than the average family.
- * Racialized families are from 2 to 4 times more likely than white families to fall below the LICO.
- * Individual and systemic racism have clear & negative impacts on life chances for people of colour in Ontario.

Canadian policies for family sponsorship can delay or prevent families from reuniting because:

- * “family” does not include siblings or extended family.
- * refugee children cannot sponsor parents or siblings.
- * those living below the LICO or on social assistance cant sponsor others
- * there are high fees and very long delays.

Immigration and refugee processes place many women in dependant situations.

Some immigrant and refugee women face violence in their homes, but have little or no protection because:

- * they fear calling the police could result in deportation.
- * escaping abusive relationships with sponsors can mean losing status.
- * they may not know about support services or counseling
- * many have no health coverage.
- * people have been reported to immigration when they tried to access healthcare, social housing or other services.
- * abusive men know they can escape punishment if women are in positions where they cannot afford to report violence.

What can be done, and examples of who is doing it ?

We must advocate for:

- * Clear immigration policies and consistent services.
- * Expanded family class policies to help more families reunite.
- * Reduced wait times for all types of newcomers.
- * A refugee claims process that is fair and consistent.
- * A regularization programme for all non-status people in Canada.
- * Stable funding for agencies serving newcomers.
- * Expanded ESL learning accessible to all newcomers.
- * Expanded translation services in healthcare settings, schools & so on
- * Fair, consistent criteria for newcomer access to their trades & professions.

Canadian Council for Refugees is a non-profit umbrella organization committed to the rights and protection of refugees in Canada and around the world, and to the settlement of refugees and immigrants in Canada. For more information: www.ccrweb.ca or (ph) 514-277-7223

Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI) works toward equality for immigrant and refugee communities through their 170+ member organizations across Ontario. Contact : www.ocasi.org or Phone - 416-322-4950

STATUS Campaign is a national network of groups & individuals calling for a regularization programme for non-status immigrants in Canada. Contact : www.ocasi.org/status or E-mail : status@ocasi.org

Everyday Lives

“A lot of employers are delighted to hear that you have no papers, because they can overwork you and exploit you.”

I don’t really think [social services] help in term of looking for a job... It’s just about paying your rent until you can pay it for yourself. ”

“...if people weren’t so ignorant about Africa in general, it would be much easier for us, really.”

“My husband and I got into Canada by the points system. We passed and became landed due to our education, English skills and other factors... But then we got here and there were no jobs. Our diplomas were not really worth anything.”

“We all go through the same kind of feeling... not being able to access anything here. Just not being seen as people. You know, as human beings, entitled.”

“To sponsor, you need a certain income. What can you do? I cannot make that much.”

“My mom told me... we have to work twice as hard in order to achieve the same sort of level or to be seen on the same level.”

“Legal or illegal, with or without papers we all pay taxes. We are contributing to the growth of this country. So, if they do not want us to be legal then they should return us all the money that we have contributed.”

For Further Information, Action Ideas & Advocacy Tools please go to -

The Colour of Poverty Campaign

www.colourofpoverty.ca