

A CALL TO ACTION



Meeting the needs of migrant and racialized communities
in anti-gender-based violence work in Ontario

2018

INTRODUCTION



1.1 BACKGROUND

On March 2nd, 2018, over thirty leaders in anti-gender based violence advocacy and service provision from across Ontario gathered in Toronto for the #UsToo Roundtable, co-hosted by the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants – OCASI and the Barbra Schlifer Commemorative Clinic. The aim of the Roundtable was to identify how to better meet the needs of Black, racialized, immigrant, refugee, migrant worker, international student, and non-status communities (henceforth referred to as “migrant and racialized communities”) when addressing gender-based violence and supporting survivors.

We spent the day discussing the unique forms of violence faced by migrant and racialized communities, as well as the policy changes and paradigm shifts that are necessary in order to achieve more effective violence prevention and survivor support.

The Roundtable discussions were recorded, transcribed, analyzed, and used to produce the contents of this document. You’ll see quotes from Roundtable participants throughout the document, as well as links to external research and reports that support our recommendations and insights. It is our collective vision that we bring about systemic change so that all women and LGBTQIA people in Canada, regardless of their race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, immigration status, languages spoken, or disability, are able to live free from abuse and violence.

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In addition to drawing from the discussions that took place at the #UsToo Roundtable, we consulted with experts in key subject areas in order to supplement this Working Paper.

We would like to acknowledge the following people for their contributions: Sidrah Ahmad as the primary author of this Working Paper, and Shalini Konanur, Leila Sarangi, Nathalí Rosado Ferrari, Rupaleem Bhuyan and Chavon Niles for writing key sections. Also, Laura Osorio for the layout and design of this working paper.

1.2 ABSTRACT

Preventing gender-based violence and supporting survivors requires leadership and investment from all levels of government, coordinated work by a variety of stakeholders, a robust human rights framework, and meaningful grassroots community engagement. In Canada, initiatives to prevent gender-based violence and support survivors have been historically shaped around the needs of white, settler, English-speaking, cisgender, heterosexual and able-bodied women who are Canadian citizens and who have and some degree of economic and class privilege. In this paper, we propose a paradigm shift and new frameworks in order to centre the needs of Black, racialized, immigrant, refugee, migrant worker, international student, and non-status survivors of violence (henceforth referred to as **“migrant and racialized survivors of violence”**), and highlight the need to carry out this work in solidarity with Indigenous peoples.

We characterize the unique forms of violence faced by migrant and racialized women and LGBTQIA people, and provide context as to how specific policies and systemic forms of discrimination increase their vulnerability to violence. On this basis, we propose policy changes, paradigm shifts, and systemic changes to mitigate vulnerability to violence. We also put forward models of community engagement that do away with “cookie cutter” approaches to addressing gender-based violence, and propose using ground-up approaches to prevention efforts that reflect community needs.

“Migrant and racialized survivors of violence”

Black, racialized, immigrant, refugee, migrant worker, international student, and non-status survivors of violence.



1.3 WHY WE NEED TO SAY “#USTOO”

me too.



The #MeToo movement

was founded by Tarana Burke in 2006 to support Black girls who were survivors of sexual violence.¹ #MeToo gained widespread media attention in 2017 when famous, rich, mostly white Hollywood celebrities used the hashtag on social media and beyond in order to draw attention to widespread sexual violence and exploitation perpetrated by powerful men in Hollywood such as Harvey Weinstein. #MeToo has since grown to encompass broader conversations about sexual violence and other forms of gender-based violence, but there has been tension regarding the kinds of women who feel included in the movement, and those who feel left out. Important discussions are occurring regarding women who are migrant workers, who are Black or racialized, who are queer or trans, or who are disabled, and how sexual violence and gender-based violence impacts them. In this Working Paper, we aim to centre the needs of these survivors and make recommendations for how to effectively support them.

Migrant and racialized survivors often do not have the same protections as high-profile celebrities when they come forward with disclosures of abuse.²

In the context of Ontario, Canada, the programs, services and movements geared towards ending gender-based violence are often subtly or overtly shaped by colonialism, white supremacy and xenophobia, with embedded assumptions that there is a certain kind of woman that is deserving of gender-based violence prevention and support, and then there are those who are less important – who are disposable. It is in this context that we feel the need to say #UsToo.

We say #UsToo because Black women, racialized women, immigrants, refugees, migrant workers, international students, and women without status deserve safety from gender-based violence. We say #UsToo for those who are not only racialized but also queer, trans, or non-binary, and those who are living with disabilities. We say #UsToo for those with language barriers, who are struggling to find decent and safe work and housing, and those who are sex workers. These are the voices and struggles we came together to amplify in the Roundtable, and their needs are the central focus of this document.



1.4 WHERE WE STAND: SOLIDARITY WITH INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

We cannot speak about gender-based violence in Canada without recognizing the crisis of violence against Indigenous women and girls, the legacy of colonial violence and genocide, and gender inequalities in the Indian Act.^{3,4,5} As we aim to better meet the needs of migrant and racialized survivors in Canada, we must recognize the connection between xenophobia and racism towards migrants, and anti-Indigenous racism and colonization of Indigenous peoples. Both are predicated on the notions of white supremacy and the “Doctrine of Discovery”, an ideology that proposed the inherent right of white Christian settlers as owners of the land.⁶



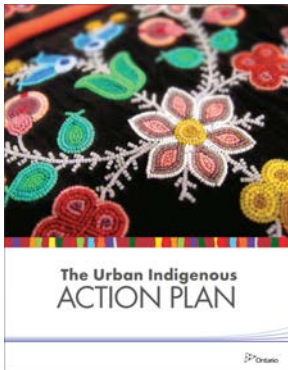
When I think of prevention, I can't disconnect colonialism, patriarchy, capitalism, and violence. How does that translate into the work that we are doing?

How much public education do we engage in terms of talking about colonialism within our communities and how that has impacted us? Also, what responsibilities are we meeting when it comes to standing in solidarity with Indigenous peoples here, as they fight for their rightful recognition?

- Farah Ahmed



Both migrant and Indigenous communities have experienced various impacts of colonization. While not equivalent to the specific and distinct experience of ongoing colonization Indigenous communities in Canada, many migrant communities have faced similar impacts of colonization, such as intergenerational trauma. It is vital that initiatives designed to address violence in migrant and racialized communities be aligned with and support of work being done within Indigenous communities, and not work at cross purposes with them. To begin carrying out this collaborative work with Indigenous communities, we recommend implementing the following guiding principles outlined in the Urban Indigenous Action Plan: ⁷



- Respect for Indigenous Cultures and Spiritualities
- Indigenous Leadership
- Collaboration and Co-Development
- Respect for Indigenous Diversity
- Transparency and Accountability
- Responsive to Community Priorities
- Cross-Government Coordination
- Equity and Access

It is our intention that moving forward, our movement we will continue to build meaningful relationships with Indigenous communities in Canada and link our anti-gender-based violence work in migrant and racialized communities with their struggles and goals.



It is still a colonized land. So everything from shelters to housing comes from the perspective of the colonizers.

-Sudhip Minhas



CONTEXT



2.1 STEPPING AWAY FROM GENERALIZATIONS: WHAT WE MEAN BY “MIGRANT AND RACIALIZED COMMUNITIES”

In this Working Paper, we discuss the needs of migrant and racialized communities; however, in focusing on this large category of people, it is vital to recognize that migrant and racialized communities are not all the same, and that specificity is needed in order to address the needs of individual groups. In this section, we explore the breadth of complexity of migrant and racialized communities in Canada.

Ethno-Linguistic Diversity

When designing gender-based violence prevention or survivor support strategies for migrant and racialized communities, it is important to “drill down” to the specific communities and subpopulations that an initiative is intending to support. This approach requires unlearning some of the labels and categories we may be accustomed to using in our frameworks and discussions.

Guidelines for Understanding Ethno-linguistic Diversity:

1. Don’t think of “refugees” as a monolithic category.

Instead, drill down to the specific needs of specific populations, such as Syrian refugees, Nigerian refugees, Haitian refugees, as their needs will be different based upon the specific context they are fleeing, and based upon their different social locations. For example, in the case of Haitian and Nigerian refugees, these populations are also subjected to systemic anti-Black racism that impacts the migration process.⁸

2. Look beyond broad ethnic categories given in the census.

Instead, drill down to nuanced needs of individual diasporic communities and sub communities. For example, rather than speaking about “the South Asian community”, we need to drill down to the needs of Tamil community, the Afghan community, Rohingya refugees, and so on.

3. Recognize that not all migrant and racialized communities’ needs will be the same.

Specific communities may be living with trauma related to war and displacement and the effects of undiagnosed post-traumatic stress. The effects of this kind of violence and trauma can unfold for years after the event, and these migrants will need support for these traumas.



I work with the Sri Lankan Tamil-speaking community. They have experienced violence for more than 30 years, and it is taboo to talk about domestic violence. There are a lot of women who couldn't go out to work or to ESL classes when they arrived here.

They experienced violence, on top of overcoming a war. Their primary role is to look after their children, so when the children go off to high school and university, their space is empty, and they suffer. They are afraid to come to healing groups because their husbands and/or families will say something unsupportive. The government must spend some money to educate them and create a way to make it safer for them to seek counselling or healing groups.

Violence can be coming in multiple ways. They suffer from stress. I am facilitating a writing group with them called "Tell Us Your Stories." This highlights a timeline of the violence endured— about school life, hiding in bunkers, losing loved ones and about not having closure. And then coming here, sponsored by their husbands, into a new married life. They don't have any time to think about their hurt. These people are suffering after 20 years; they haven't tackled the issue from the beginning.

-Christabell Selvalingham 

There are a wide range of categories related to immigration status, which can greatly shape an individual's vulnerability to gender-based violence and ability to access support.

These categories include:

- Immigrants (economic class, family class, etc.)
- Refugees (convention refugees, privately sponsored, etc.).
- Temporary Foreign Workers (Caregivers, Seasonal Agricultural Workers, etc.)
- International Students
- People without status in Canada (non-status)

In a Section below, we will discuss immigration status as a root cause of vulnerability to violence, and suggest recommendations for mitigating some of this vulnerability.

6

There has been a big failure of our system to talk about race as it intersects with gender.

-Shalini Konanur

We need more solidarity; white women have to step up and stand up for intersectionality in gender equality.

-Roundtable Participant

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Distinct social locations can shape lived experience, vulnerability to gender-based violence, and barriers we face in accessing support. When thinking about migrant and racialized women and LGBTQIA people, we need to further consider how their intersecting social identities impact their experience.



Social identities and categories that are linked to discrimination and barriers include:

Race: Black people in Canada face systemic anti-Black racism, Indigenous peoples in Canada face anti-Indigenous racism, and people of colour in Canada face systemic racism.

Economic status: Low-income people face economic barriers and class-based discrimination.

Immigration status: People living with precarious immigration status face barriers to accessing services and are vulnerable to exploitation.

Gender Identity: Trans men and women and non-binary/gender-non-conforming people face prejudice, discrimination and barriers related to their gender identity.

Sexual Orientation: Gay, lesbian, two-spirited, and bisexual people face prejudice, discrimination and barriers due to their sexual orientation.

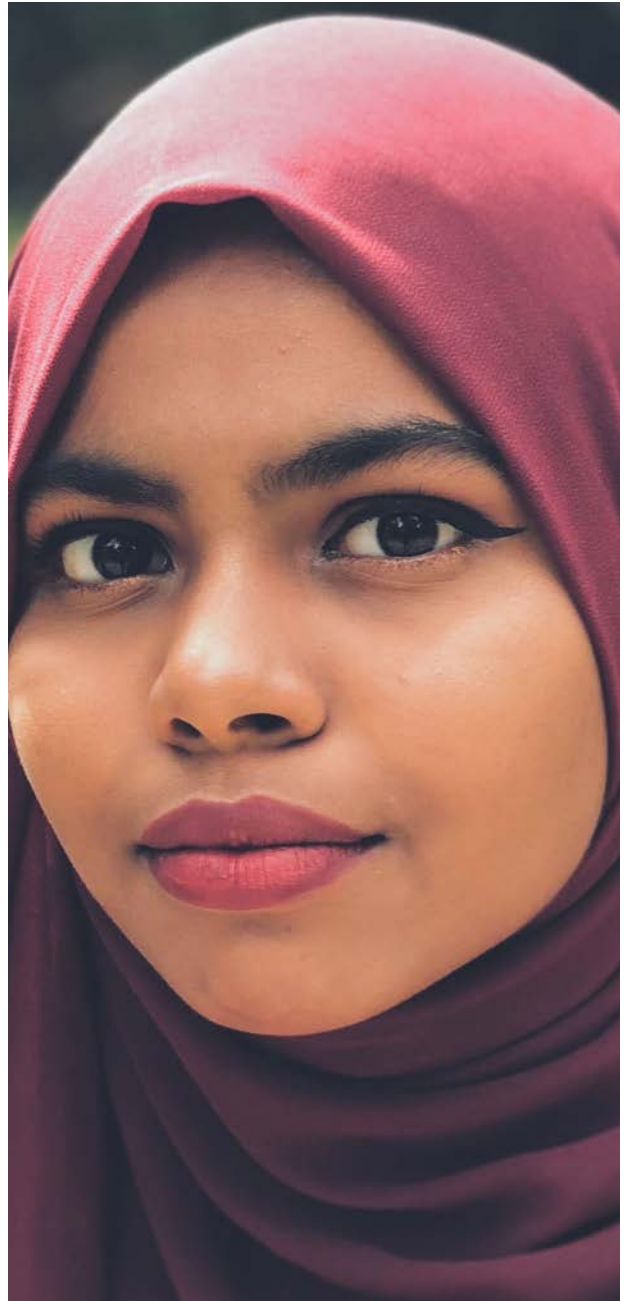
Disability: People living with in/visible disabilities face ableism as well as barriers to accessing services.

Language: People who not speak English face language barriers and stigma.

Creed: Members of marginalized faith communities face discrimination and forms of prejudice, such as Islamophobia.

HIV Status: HIV-positive people face stigma, discrimination and marginalization.

Age: Those who are elderly or who are youth face age-related prejudice and discrimination.



Urban vs. Rural Contexts: Those living in rural contexts face barriers to accessing services that are not available in their region or are inaccessible due to lack of transportation.

Sex Workers: Those who work in sex work face discrimination, stigma, criminalization and barriers to service.

2.2 UNIQUE DILEMMAS FACED BY MIGRANT AND RACIALIZED SURVIVORS OF VIOLENCE

In this paper, we argue against “cookie cutter” approaches to preventing gender-based violence and supporting survivors; particularly since the cookie cutter is rarely shaped around the needs of migrant and racialized communities. Indeed, migrant and racialized communities face unique dilemmas related to the topic of gender-based violence. It is important to acknowledge and grapple with these dilemmas in order to come up with relevant solutions that actually work for migrant and racialized communities.

The unique dilemmas faced by migrant and racialized communities are:

“How do I leave my survival unit?”

In the face of language barriers, economic exclusion, an often hostile immigration system, and systemic racism, for many migrants, their family and/or tight-knit community becomes the survival unit. So in situations of abuse within the family and/or community, it is not easy to leave.⁹

“How do I speak up without stigmatizing my whole community?”

Gender-based violence that occurs in migrant and racialized communities is often blamed on migrant and racialized cultures, whereas gender-based violence that happens in white Euro-Canadian contexts is not blamed on culture. This double standard makes it challenging for migrant and racialized survivors – particularly those who are Muslim – to speak up about abuse within their communities, as they risk vilifying their entire community, which is already stereotyped as barbaric or violent.^{10, 11, 12}

This process of vilification makes it difficult for these survivors to speak up, for fear that their stories will be used to further agendas of xenophobia, anti-immigration, and Islamophobia. What’s more, discussions of supporting migrant and racialized survivors of violence often include unhelpful colonial notions of “rescuing” them from their communities, again reinforcing the false idea that gender-based violence is rooted in one particular culture, when in reality it is a global phenomenon that happens across all races and cultures.





There's a fear that when you disclose information about abuse, the response will be, "Oh, that happened? Of course that happened because you're Muslim.



-Roundtable Participant

"How do I get protection when my community is over-policed and criminalized?"

Migrant and racialized communities face systemic criminalization and over-policing – particularly Black and Indigenous communities in Canada. This reality creates barriers to calling the police in situations of violence, for fear of police brutality or fear of turning someone over into the hands of the criminal justice system. It also creates barriers to reporting violence after the fact.

"How do I get protection without getting deported?"

Women without status in Canada also fear calling the police in situations of violence, for fear that the police will communicate their status to Canadian Border Services. Collaboration and communication between police forces and Canadian Border Services represents a major obstacle to non-status people's ability to access safety in situations of violence. Even where access without fear policies have been adopted by municipalities, they are not fully or consistently implemented.¹³

"What part of my identity do I have to leave at the door?"

Although it is false to assume that migrant and racialized communities are inherently homophobic or transphobic, many LGBTQIA migrant and racialized people feel like they have to choose between their queerness/transness and their cultural communities. Moreover, supports geared towards their cultural communities may not necessarily be LGBTQIA-positive, and LGBTQIA-oriented spaces may not reflect their cultural needs. Similarly, migrant and racialized people with in/visible disabilities are often left out of discussions of violence prevention, even though women with in/visible disabilities face high rates of violence. Initiatives to support people who are living with disabilities often do not reflect the needs of migrant and racialized communities.

"How do I get support if people don't think I deserve it?"

We are living in a time of increased xenophobia and division, where immigrants and refugees are seen as less deserving of support than people who have lived in Canada for longer, or were born here. In this environment, the needs of newcomers are pitted against the needs of longer-term Canadian residents, as if it is impossible to meet the needs of both groups. This creates conflict and division and makes it difficult to advocate for social supports and programs that meet the needs of newcomers to Canada.



When I spoke to the mayor about municipal voting rights and employment for newcomers, he said he is more concerned about the ‘real Canadians’ who have earned the privilege of citizenship.

-Sudip Minhas



2.3 HOW VIOLENCE UNIQUELY IMPACTS MIGRANT AND RACIALIZED COMMUNITIES

The problem of gender-based violence in Canada is typically framed in terms of the following forms of violence:

- Femicide
- Domestic violence
- Sexual violence and harassment
- Workplace violence and harassment
- Online violence
- Trafficking
- Forced Marriage

All of the above forms of violence impact migrant and racialized communities. However, in order to capture the realities of migrant and racialized survivors, the scope of forms of violence we discuss needs to be expanded in order to include the additional forms of violence they face, and name the conditions that actively create their increased vulnerability to gender-based violence. These include:



1. Violence from the state

Immigration detention facilitates gender-based violence. Indefinite immigration detention in Canada is a practice that has been flagged by the UN and by human rights organizations, and represents an omnipresent threat to those living without status – a threat that can be used by abusers to coerce their victims to stay with them^{14, 15}. Furthermore, police violence, and the cooperation and information-sharing practices between police and Canadian Border Services creates conditions that render non-status women without protection, and highly vulnerable to gender-based violence and exploitation.

2. Immigration policies

Some immigration policies and practices create vulnerability to violence and/or worsen the impact of gender-based violence. These policies and practices include:

Barriers to obtaining Humanitarian and Compassionate Claims when you are a survivor of domestic violence.

The Safe Third Country Agreement.¹⁶ Under this agreement, asylum seekers crossing the Canada-U.S. border are being rejected under the assumption that the U.S. is a safe country, even though this is no longer the case. Women asylum seekers cite gender persecution as the top reason they are seeking asylum in Canada. Of the irregular border crossers who are women, 1 in 6 report fleeing gender persecution, with half of the cases being related to domestic violence.^{17, 18}

Policies related to immigration fraud. Investigations of immigration fraud are being used as an abuse tactic. Sponsored people who leave their spouse, common law / conjugal partner are because of abuse are often investigated for alleged “marriage fraud”. Many people choose to stay in abusive situations because of a fear that they may lose their immigration status.

Barriers to accessing pathways to permanent residency for people without status. People without status are highly vulnerable to violence and exploitation, because the abuser(s) can threaten to report them. The difficulty in obtaining status also opens up the possibility of exploitation. Bad lawyers (“ghost consultants”) exploit communities with promises of help, and yet their claims are thrown out.

The costs associated with obtaining legal status in Canada
These costs present an economic barrier for those who cannot afford it.

Health requirements of the Immigration and Refugee Protection (IRPC) Act. If the person has a disability and are experiencing violence the way the current IRPC Act is framed makes it less likely that they will report. All applications are evaluated under Canada’s Immigration Act where they may need to meet certain health requirements under section 38 1(c) of the 2002 Immigration and Refugee Act, which outlines parameters of inadmissibility for those who “might reasonably be expected to cause excessive demand on health or social services.”

20-25 years ago, the humanitarian and compassionate processing guidelines for immigration officers specifically considered abuse and domestic violence – those applications were routinely granted. That began to change in 2002, when the liberal government’s attitude shifted and those specific considerations disappeared. It becomes on small factor now. There is a lot of talk of gender at the federal level – marriages, trafficking, IPV. Why can’t there just be a regularization process? Stop re-traumatizing people.



-Shalini Konanur

3. Systemic racism and xenophobia

Racism and xenophobia can create vulnerability to violence and worsen the impact of gender-based violence. Black, Indigenous and racialized women and LGBTQIA people are often seen as more “deserving” of violence and less deserving of support. Racism and xenophobia can also result in hate crime-related violence, i.e. physical, sexual assault or verbal assault of racialized and migrant people in public spaces. Finally, racism and xenophobia can lead to a lack of political will and lack of societal pressure to put resources towards preventing violence against racialized and migrant women and LGBTQIA people, as well as an absence of media coverage of gender-based violence against racialized and migrant people.

4. Lack of safe and affordable housing

Domestic violence is a leading cause of homelessness among immigrant and refugee women.²⁰ Lack of safe and affordable housing creates an additional risk for domestic violence, as it can pressure women to stay in abusive situations for lack of any other options. The affordable housing crisis affects all communities, but is particularly acute for migrant and racialized women living in poverty or near-poverty. However, the housing needs of migrants are often seen as less important than the housing needs of others. Those with precarious immigration status are not included in housing policies. Although we have a national housing strategy, it does not mention precarious immigration status.

5. Migrant worker program policies

The structure of Canada’s migrant worker programs creates conditions in which gender-based violence can occur with little to no recourse.²² For example, Caregivers’ PR status is contingent upon completing their work contract. This dependent process creates a power dynamic that engenders vulnerability to abuse. Although there is no longer a live-in requirement for the Caregiver program, the geographic remoteness of families who require a live-in caregiver often means that caregivers have to live-in to make it work. The Caregiver program ties workers to their employer on “closed permits” which reinforces their dependence on employers to complete the work requirement. The Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP) program also creates vulnerability to gender-based violence, such as vulnerability to sexual assault by employers.

6. Precarious and low-wage work

The Ontario job market increasingly relies on low-wage, temporary and precarious work. Migrant and racialized women are overrepresented in these kinds of jobs.²¹ This economic status makes it difficult to leave abusive situations, as there may be economic dependence on the abuser. It also makes it difficult to report workplace harassment, violence, or unsafe labour conditions. Finally, for non-status women, exploitative and dangerous labour conditions can persist without recourse, as non-status women may fear reporting workplace abuse, because their status could become known.

7. International Student program policies

International Students in Ontario post-secondary institutions are charged high educational fees, especially at the undergraduate, graduate and professional learning levels. Students also pay tuition and ancillary fees that vary greatly based on the institution they attend and the academic program they pursue. This leaves many students in a state of financial distress, one which students (via the obtention of part-time or summertime work) and the K-12 and postsecondary education sectors alone are insufficiently able to relieve.

Some international students have experienced trafficking in order to cover their high tuition fees. Furthermore, international students are usually expected by their families and ethnocultural communities in Canada and abroad to excel in their education endeavours. These situations render students vulnerable to situations of abuse and violence that can compromise their academic success. When students are unable to maintain a good academic standing at an Ontario language institution, a K-12 school, or a university or college, they can be placed on academic probation or even dismissed. This translates to students losing their immigration status in Ontario and thus any support they could receive here to end instances of violence, exploitation or trafficking.

In terms of gender-based and sexual violence and assault within educational contexts, international students in Canada are insufficiently represented in conversations about sexual violence in the postsecondary sector. International students have been found to be disproportionately more affected by sexual violence than domestic students and they are not eligible for the same community resources as other immigrants due to their temporary resident status. For example, in Ontario, international students have to cover the costs of their own medical care, most often by purchasing a basic and extended health insurance policy that is considered equivalent to the Ontario Health Insurance Plan. International students also cannot benefit from standard Settlement Program services costed by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) and the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration (MCI). This leaves international students subject to the services available through their educational institutions or payable through their insurance plans alone, unless they can self-navigate the Ontario justice, human rights and victim support systems or find special programs funded by IRCC, MCI or other agencies in their local community.

International Students don't have access to regular settlement services. They go through services offered in the education sectors. They may also not have access to health services depending to what province they are in. In fleeing violence, these students are often tasked with having to pay for services not offered by the education system.

-Roundtable Participant

8. Isolation

6 If we are talking about North Durham, even going to your closest neighbor, as it is all farm, takes about 15 minutes to walk. So, you need a car. And those workers who come there are seasonal. Reaching out to those workers and having services accessed is not easy.

-Roundtable Participant

Isolation creates vulnerability to abuse, and abuse in turn thrives in conditions of isolation. Migrant and racialized survivors may be living with isolation due a variety of factors. These include language barriers, financial abuse/isolation, lack of transportation, or family responsibilities. Sponsored spouses may be highly isolated by their spouses and in-laws, monitored and not allowed to leave the house. Isolation tactics can be applied to people of all education levels and economic backgrounds.

Very well-educated people can be very isolated; they may not be able to access a bank account and may be prevented from having a credit history because of the way credit cards are issued. Those living in rural and suburban contexts also face geographic isolation, where access to housing, shelters and services are minimal, and maintaining anonymity is a challenge. Access to public transit is a major issue when limited or no public transit increases isolation. In some cases, survivors need to be driven for over an hour in a police cruiser to access services, or flown out of a reserve to receive services in shelters. Moreover, lack of consideration of people with in/visible disabilities when designing transportation, social services, and gender-based violence prevention and support resources contributes to isolation of people with in/visible disabilities.

9. Violence related to HIV status

For migrant and racialized HIV-positive women, gender-based violence is, in many cases, the cause of acquisition of HIV. Being HIV-positive, in turn, makes them further vulnerable to violence, as stigma around HIV status is held over them in intimate partner relationships, and used to force them to stay in violent relationships. Furthermore, HIV-positive women face institutional barriers and stigma related to their reproductive rights.

10. Violence related to homophobia and transphobia

While this can occur across all LGBTQIA communities, migrant and racialized LGBTQIA people can face stigma around sexual orientation and trans status within their tight-knit communities (although not all migrant and racialized communities or community members are homophobic or transphobic). In this context, their identity can be weaponized against them in situations of violence.

6 Stigma around sexual orientation and trans status are huge in the workplace and in relationship violence: "I will out you; I will tell people that you are trans; I will tell people that you're queer"—it's just the easiest way to oppress someone because of the stigma. It's like that with HIV status also. Breaking down those stigmas that will de-weaponize that type of oppression for transwomen and HIV-positive women.

-Roundtable Participant

11. Violence related to the concept of “family honour”

Some migrant and racialized women and girls are trafficked, exploited, threatened or abused through the concept of “family honour”. In this process, abusers threaten to show their families or communities private photos or reveal private information about them, and wield these threats as a way to obtain power and control over the women or girls they are targeting. These kinds of threats have been used in situations of intimate partner violence and in trafficking.

6 Young women are being coaxed into trafficking through threats, such as being photographed in compromising situations. Even if they get support and start healing, going back to their communities is difficult. There needs to be more education in communities so they can be accepting of their daughters returning home.

-Roundtable Participant

12. Trafficking of people without status, and of migrant and racialized girls

Trafficking can include either labour or sex trafficking. Women without status are being trafficked, and it is sometimes being disguised as a relationship. When trafficked women are moved to new areas, this leads to a breakdown of their support system. In discussing trafficking, it is important to emphasize that it is about exploitation, and to be critical of top-down approaches that rely exclusively on the criminal justice system, as these approaches do not help migrant and non-status women who are being trafficked, as they may fear interacting with the police.

13. Violence against migrant sex workers

It is important to not conflate sex work with situations of trafficking (which can include any form of forced labour exploitation, including sex work). Non-status migrant sex workers face police and immigration violence: if police contacts the CBSA, they face deportation. Stigma against sex work and criminalization of sex workers contributes to this vulnerability.^{24,25}



6 We cannot conflate sex work with trafficking, because there are people who want to do sex work for whatever reasons they choose. We need to understand the police violence and immigration violence against sex workers and against migrant sex workers—if CBSA is called, they get deported. Be really mindful of asking what kinds of solutions you want to have, what kinds of support you want to have, because the violence is not in the work that they are doing; the violence is from the authority, the system.

- Yan Chen

14. Violence against migrant and racialized people with in/visible disabilities

There is a misconception that disabled people do not experience violence so there is no need for resources to be created for them, when in fact women with disabilities are more likely to experience violence than women without disabilities:

- Deaf women and women with intellectual disabilities are twice as likely to experience violence than women in Canada (DAWN, Canada).
- According to Stats Canada, 83% of women with disabilities will be sexually assaulted at least once in their life time in Canada.

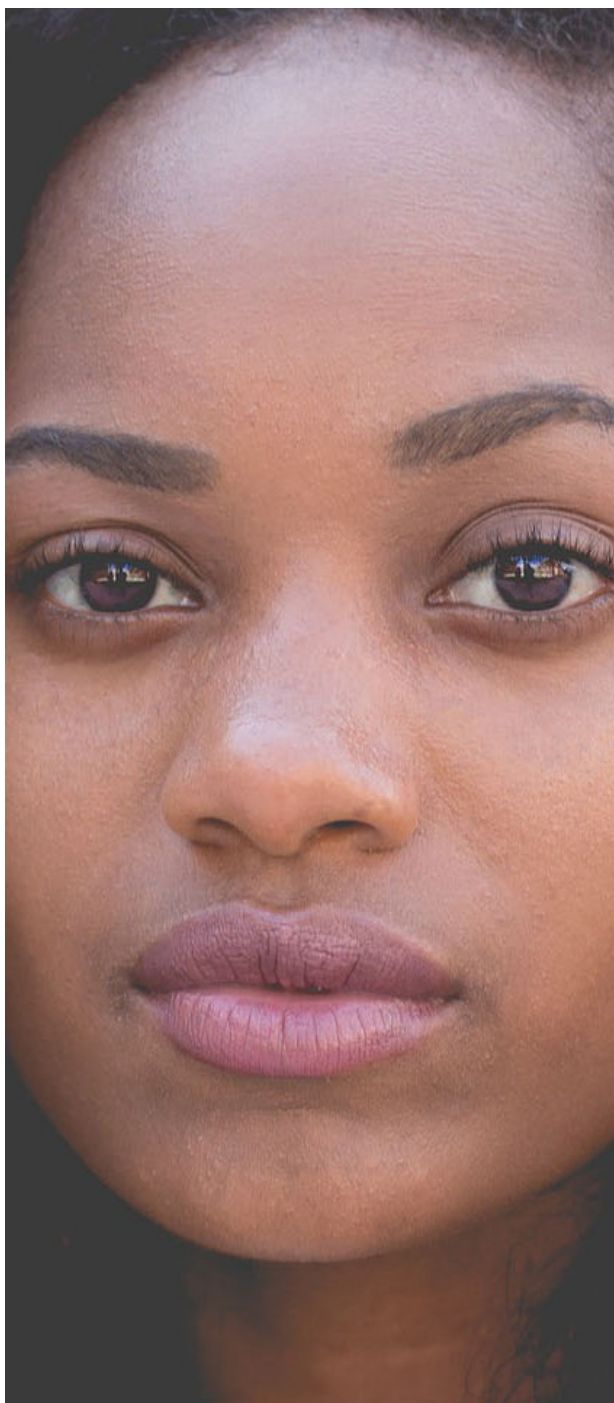
It is also important to note that a huge proportion of assault against people with disabilities in Canada at times comes from the health care sector, perpetrated by people in positions meant to aid people with disabilities in their independence, such as personal support workers, attendant care services, and so on. Black, Indigenous, and people of colour also have heightened risks of violence when looking at the disability demographics in Canada.

As mentioned by DAWN Canada, violence against women and girls with disabilities is not just a subset of gender-based violence - it is an intersectional category dealing with gender-based and disability-based violence. The confluence of these two factors results in an extremely high risk of violence against women with disabilities.²⁶



15. Elder abuse of migrant parents/grandparents

Parents and grandparents who are sponsored to migrate to Canada to join their families face unique vulnerabilities to abuse, particularly if they face language barriers. There can be exploitation in terms of how they are required to provide childcare or perform domestic work in the house: this is a combination of immigration violence, geographic and language isolation, and elder abuse. It's expensive to sponsor family members and spaces are limited - both of these issues cause long family separations that can cause family relationship breakdown.



16. Family violence

Violence is not only perpetrated by intimate partners – in-laws, extended family, caregivers, or employers can all be perpetrators in a system of abuse.

17. Lack of reproductive justice

Violence against migrant and racialized women can manifest as lack of reproductive justice, in terms of access to choices on birthing and the agency to not have children, as well as in sexual violence in the context of relationships, particularly marriages. Migrant women may not have knowledge around their rights and Canadian laws regarding marital rape, or information regarding STIs.

18. Psychiatrization

When newcomers arrive in Canada, colonialism and racism can cause their mental health to deteriorate. The labelling used in the mental health system can be problematic, and women receiving psychiatric services from a biomedical model that labels them can be harmful.

The above discussion demonstrates how a wide range of forms of violence faced by migrant and racialized women and LGBTQIA people. In order to address this broad and complex landscape of violence, we need bold shifts in our paradigms and policies in order to enact change.

A CALL TO ACTION



3.1 ADDRESSING ROOT CAUSES

In order to address violence against migrant and racialized women and LGBTQIA people, we need to address root causes in policies, structures and systems that perpetuate the crisis we are facing. The following policy areas need to shift in order to bring about our goal of ensuring that everyone can live free from abuse and violence. We've identified six areas where promising shifts can happen to improve the safety of migrant and racialized women and LGBTQIA people.

Immigration law

Women and LGBTQIA people with precarious status in Canada are highly vulnerable to violence, as abusers can exploit a lack of permanent status as a way to threaten, control and isolate their targets. People with precarious status who are living with abuse often face challenges in accessing services and supports, as many of these services ask for proof of status in order to access services. Even in emergencies, people without status may fear calling the police, for fear their status could become known. Moreover, there are insufficient pathways to accessing permanent status in Canada (see below).

As it stands, Canada's immigration laws and processes are an active agent in creating vulnerability to gender-based violence for those without status. We are living in a time of rising xenophobia and a push to close our borders and stigmatize asylum seekers. These ideologies make it difficult to advocate for progressive immigration reform. But these reforms are vital for addressing the severe vulnerability to gender-based violence faced by women and LGBTQIA people in Canada without status, or with precarious status.

We recommend the following actions:

1. End indefinite immigration detention.

Immigration detention creates vulnerability to domestic violence.¹⁵ Fear of detention and deportation increases non-status women's vulnerability to violence from traffickers, partners, or employers.

2. Regularize the status of migrant workers.

Migrant Mothers Project made a submission to IRCC Caregiver Pilot Program Consultations on reducing vulnerability to abuse and exploitation of migrant caregivers through landed status. We echo and support their recommendations.²⁷

3. Provide open work permits for migrant workers in Ontario

4. Give Caregivers access to language classes. People need to be familiar with the language in order to become permanent residents – the assessment happens at the YMCA. Currently, the YMCA requires that you bring your work permit. They look up your National Occupation Number (NOC) and only if your number matches your work permit will you be able to access classes. This system does not meet the needs and the lived reality of caregivers.

“The intersection of how immigration keeps people under violence is devastating.”
-Shalini Konanur

5. Provide a clear pathway to status for women and LGBTQIA people experiencing gender-based violence.

Bring back a gender-based violence lens on humanitarian and compassionate applications and include an expedited process for permanent residence in these cases. Also allow people in these cases to be granted Temporary Resident Permits until they have permanent residence, allowing them to access provincial assistance like health care. When a person says they've experienced violence at immigration, they should automatically be believed; they should not have to provide "proof" in the form of a police report.

6. End abusive fraud/misrepresentation allegations when a survivor leaves an abusive partner.

The current process by which victims are subject to loss of status through investigation by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada is a re-traumatization and a state sanctioned form of abuse.

7. Remove requirement to "prove" one's queerness or transness in order to make a refugee claim based on sexual orientation-related or gender identity-related persecution

The form of proof that is deemed acceptable is often limited to a white, North American norm of expressions of queerness and transness, such as marching in Pride.

8. Eliminate discrimination against people with disabilities in immigration.

9. Regulate the rates that universities can charge International Students and implement more supports for International Students

International students are rendered highly vulnerable to the loss of their immigration status and/or situations of human trafficking due to the exorbitant rates they are charged. Ensure that sexual violence policies and services at universities, colleges, institutes and schools are accessible to international students and meet their specific academic and physical, sexual and mental health needs. Expand collaborations between government, education and community entities to address international students' unique violence management and prevention needs as K-12 students, language learners and postsecondary students.

10. Visitor Visa / family re-unification.

Allow survivors of abuse to re-unite with family members outside of Canada through the parent / grandparent sponsorship process and through the routine granting of visitor visas for family members who will support the survivor of abuse.



Sanctuary City Policies and Practices

Given that precarious immigration status creates vulnerability to violence, Sanctuary City policies and practices allow for people without status to access essential services and live with more safety and dignity, and mitigates some of the vulnerability to violence faced by those with precarious status. We recommend the following actions:

1. Build political will to adopt Sanctuary City policies

Currently, there is a Sanctuary City movement in Toronto, Peel and a few other municipalities are having these discussions. But there are other municipalities where there is no political will yet.

2. Where Sanctuary City policies exist, ensure that they are being implemented.



Even last year, the kind of disclosures we have heard are that the cops hang around the no smoking areas, catch non-status folks, and brag about it. They brag about being able to find non-status people. It's so pervasive: they work to try and get people without status – they are making up policies on the fly.

–Roundtable Participant



3. Where Sanctuary City policies exist, ensure that non-status people are aware of their rights and where to access services.

People need to know they can access services without disclosing information, and that they can say “I don’t have to show you my birth certificate” in order to access service in a school, for example. The Non-Status Services Guide was last updated in 2010 and needs to be updated again.²⁹ The information needs to go beyond Toronto – it needs to be made Ontario-wide.

4. Organizations need to open their doors to serve people without status.

There needs to be education around the fact that services should not be exclusively based on who funds you – the federal government is the largest funder, and they are restrictive, and people take that to mean they can’t serve anyone else. But most organizations also have provincial funding, and can serve non-status people under that umbrella.

5. Change the Police Services Act in order to prevent police from questioning anybody they interact with about their immigration status.

Economic Security

Economic status can present a major obstacle to leaving a situation of abuse, as the high cost of housing and living can create a financial dependence on an abuser. Indeed, migrant and racialized women live with a lower economic status than other women:

- Migrant and racialized women are among the lowest paid workers in Ontario, and over-represented in precarious work.
- Female immigrants earn less and have lower employment rates than both Canadian-born women and male immigrants, according to a new report.³⁰

Moreover, recent government data³¹ demonstrates that:

- Immigrant women are more likely to be low-income than Canadian-born women (20% of immigrant women vs. 10% of Canadian-born women are low-income)
- Recent immigrant women are more likely to be unemployed
- Women who immigrated at an older age face greater challenges in labour market integration
- 76% of immigrant women belong to a visible minority. Visible minority women generally earn less than non-visible minority women, and report facing discrimination
- Of immigrant women who have a degree, 62% earned it from an institution outside Canada. A major challenge reported by newcomers having difficulties finding employment was to get non-Canadian qualifications and job experience accepted in Canada.

Given these economic inequalities, we recommend the following:

- Fund employment programs to better meet the needs of migrant and racialized women
- Fund programs to support migrants in obtaining work in their field, and create pathways to recognize foreign credentials
- Implement the demands of 15 and Fairness³²

In addition to supporting access to stable employment, it is also necessary to have improved mechanisms for addressing workplace violence and abuse faced by migrant and racialized communities.

We recommend the following:

- Expand Legal Aid to cover employment law
- Protect workers from unjust dismissal (as outlined in 15 and Fairness)
- Protect workers during the process of making a complaint and penalize employers who retaliate (as outlined in 15 and Fairness)
- Ensure migrant workers receive special protection under the Employment Standards Act to prohibit reprisals from employers (as outlined in 15 and Fairness)
- Create culture shifts within workplaces in order to value the safety and needs of migrant and racialized employees. In workplace violence, it is important to consider what reporting mechanisms are available in the workplace, and to whom reports are made. Language barriers, precarious status, and racism can all come into play in cases of reporting workplace violence.

When we talk about workplaces and people coming forward to report, diversity is also an issue. Because who are you reporting to, and who is in those higher positions? And how do they understand you? If you have a language barrier, or if you have various identities, are you just coming off as angry, or they are dismissing you? These are barriers that many people face—especially, for people who are being trafficked.” systems response.

—Roundtable Participant

Finally, in addition to improving employment conditions, it is vital that a robust social safety net is in place for those who are not working, as this can be a key determinant for whether someone is able to leave a situation of abuse or not. We recommend improving income maintenance and benefits for migrant and racialized women and LGBTQIA people.

We recommend the following:

- Remove the requirement for having a police report as “proof” in order to get the housing benefit in cases of trafficking. This requirement creates a barrier for non-status people or others who fear going to police.
- Create provincial clarity around who is eligible for Ontario Works and ensure that that standard is applied across the board. People with precarious immigration status have experienced inconsistencies in their eligibility for OW. In some regions people are being refused, and then legal clinics appeal and succeed.
- Remove barriers related to immigration-status related eligibility for OW in situations of gender-based violence.
- Remove barriers to accessing the Canada Child Benefit from people without status. Currently, you can only get the Canada Child Benefit if the parents have PR. So you can have Canadian children, but not get child benefit.



I don't know if many people know what it means to be a 'sanctuary city'. It is meaningless without attaching something with financial or income financial benefits, such as childcare, access to subsidiary housing services, etc.

-Roundtable Participant



Queer and trans migrant and racialized youth face distinct barriers related to income security. We recommend the following:

- Remove age-based barriers around housing and access to income. These barriers negatively affect queer and trans youth who have been displaced from their families
- Implement flexibility around identity documents in order to access benefits. Name changes among trans youth can pose challenges in terms of identity documents.





Housing

There is an affordable housing crisis in Ontario, which reduces options and exacerbates vulnerability for women living with violence ³³. In addition, the VAW shelter system is being accessed by women without status who have crossed the border. We reject the notion that supporting those seeking asylum and supporting women living with abuse are competing interests. Indeed, women asylum seekers cite gender persecution as the top reason they are seeking asylum in Canada. Women experiencing domestic violence cite the lack of access to affordable housing as the number one reason they continue to live with their abuser.

Those who are able to access shelters are staying longer and longer. They are not moving out because they can't find affordable private market housing, and the social housing waitlist continues to grow. This means that more and more women and their dependents are being turned away from emergency shelter services for lack of space.

We recognize that temporary emergency shelter exists on a continuum of housing services. The province of Ontario needs to adequately invest in developing affordable housing that is accessible to all survivors of violence, including migrant, refugee, and trans/gender non-conforming survivors. Investment areas much include:

- Shelter capital repairs
- Transitional housing for those fleeing gender-based violence
- Social housing capital repairs
- Building new social and non-profit housing using low-barrier models and universal design.

Affordable Housing

The federal government is approaching housing as a human right and are allocating 25% of all of their investments into addressing the housing needs of vulnerable women and girls through an intersectional lens ³⁴. The province of Ontario, being the first to sign a bilateral agreement on this policy, must continue their leadership in this area.

We recommend the following actions for the Province of Ontario:

- add access to adequate housing as part of their gender-based violence strategy
- leverage existing policies to create new affordable housing
- implement inclusionary zoning so that developers are mandated to create affordable housing units in new builds³⁵
- promote other income security measures such as affordable childcare, low-income transit passes and basic income

The Shelter System

6 The VAW movement in shelters is so second-wave, white, middle-class feminism. When we are looking to work with not just transwomen but women who don't exist in binaries, there is a real couched resistance in how we work with them. How do we support other women in the shelters when and if they feel uncomfortable? There is no safe space. They are constantly affronted by everything. One transgendered poster is not being inclusive. 9

In terms of the existing shelter system, there are specific issues that create barriers for migrant and racialized women seeking support, including lack of access to culturally appropriate services. Survivors often disclose facing racism, transphobia, Islamophobia and other forms of discrimination by shelter residents and staff. Moreover, when disabled women seek shelter from abusive partners, the shelters are often not physically or attitudinally accessible and service providers lack knowledge and skills to support them. Shelter staff need to be trained to create accessible, trauma-informed, culturally appropriate environments, policies and procedures, including religious accommodations. Moreover, shelters need to adopt a zero-tolerance policy on all forms of discrimination and ensure that staff are trained and supported in upholding these standards.

We recommend the following:

- Implement shelter standards and housing standards that incorporate trauma-informed, anti-racist, anti-oppressive and harm reduction approaches to services, with shelter and housing providers held accountable to these approaches
- Stop all forms of status-checks in shelter systems and shelter intake
- Language services, anti-racist and culturally and religiously safe services in shelters
- More shelter spaces and safe environments for migrant and racialized LGBTQIA people
- Improve infrastructure to enable shelter access for women with disabilities
- Implement zero-tolerance policies to racism, Islamophobia, transphobia, homophobia and ensure staff are trained and supported in implementing them.



Shelters have not been geared towards immigrants or refugees. It has been more for white communities. We have women from our communities calling us and saying they are not receiving understanding from the shelters towards their culture, religion, language or whatever it is. So, the trauma is a compounding of issues. Interesting enough the majority of women coming to NISA Muslim women's transitional homes are coming from other shelters due to lack of understanding and sensitivity.



-Roundtable Participant

In addition to these shifts within the shelter system, we recommend implementing policies that will support women's access to second-stage and permanent safe and affordable housing.

The Portable Housing Benefit

Portable housing benefits for survivors of violence must be designed with extreme caution, with the input of the people who will use it, and not at the expense of investments into bricks and mortar affordable housing. Studies of housing vouchers in the United States show that where there are mental health challenges, people fare worse on housing benefits because they can be uprooted from their communities and isolated. Housing benefits are marketed by the perceived benefit of giving recipients a "choice" of housing options. However, in the current housing market, housing benefit recipients are still extremely limited in where they can afford to live; this top-up still does not enable recipients to live anywhere they choose due to the vastly inflated housing market in the province determining where they can rent. With the lack of landlord licencing, racialized, immigrant, trans and nonbinary folk face racial, cultural and sex discrimination at the hands of landlords. We recognize the valuable and life-saving services that drop-ins, counselling, settlement and other wraparound supports play in breaking isolation, feeling safe, and obtaining and maintaining housing. Investments into wraparound support services are crucial and connected to accessing housing for this population.

We recommend the following:

- Shelter capital repairs
- Design portable housing benefit programs with extreme caution, with the input of people who will use it
- Have the portable housing benefit available for those who cannot get on to the Special Priority Program (SPP)
- Invest into wraparound support services for survivors of violence.

CAS

There is an overrepresentation of racialized and Indigenous children in CAS. Women with precarious status or without status is a large population within CAS that is not usually recognized. For many migrant and racialized communities, CAS represents a hostile system that does not meet their needs or improve safety of their families and communities.

We recommend the following:

- Remove mandating relationships between the VAW sector and CAS in order to obtain funding
- CAS should not be automatically called when women are seeking housing
- Women living in poverty should not be automatically surveilled by CAS
- Remove CAS involvement when HIV positive women present as pregnant. As it stands, CAS is immediately called with an alert and then the partner or the father is questioned about whether they know the woman is HIV positive.

Criminalization of survivors of gender-based violence

Racialized and migrant survivors face the risk of criminalization when they seek support for gender-based violence they are facing.

We recommend the following to mitigate this risk:

- Stop dual-charging in cases of domestic violence calls. Victims of domestic violence are retaliating by fighting back, and sometimes the abuser pretends to have been assaulted. The victim has to deal with the consequences. The issue of dual charging which works against racialized battered women, especially when juries are predominantly white men.
- Policies must be more systemized in jury selection, in order to ensure more fairness to victims.
- De-criminalize forced marriage. The criminal justice system is used to further criminalize racialized people in situations of gender-based violence, which makes it difficult for women to come forward. This is a racialized issue, and those being targeted are racialized women.
- Develop alternative models for justice, healing and/or reconciliation, apart from the criminal justice system.

Taking action in the above issue areas will go a long way towards addressing the root causes of increased vulnerability to violence in migrant and racialized communities. But more work is required. In the next section, we propose paradigm shifts in how we approach addressing gender-based violence in migrant and racialized communities.

3.2 THE NEED FOR PARADIGM SHIFTS

Anti-gender based violence initiatives that were developed to meet the needs of white women who are Canadian citizens are often transposed onto migrant and racialized communities, perhaps with a few modifications, presuming that they will be effective. However, it is vital to realize that migrant and racialized communities face unique dilemmas that often render a “cookie cutter” approach ineffectual. In order to meet the needs of migrant and racialized women and LGBTQIA people living with abuse, it isn’t enough to adapt current anti-violence practices. There needs to be paradigm shifts in how we think about this work, with new frameworks that reflect diverse communities’ needs. We propose the following five paradigm shifts in order to better meet the needs of migrant and racialized survivors of violence:

Paradigm Shift in Policy Language

We suggest that policies use the following guidelines in order to best meet the needs of migrant and racialized communities:

1. Policies should not negatively impact Indigenous communities. These policies must be contextualized in solidarity with Indigenous communities (see Section 1.4)

2. The language in policies must not perpetuate colonial racism. For example, Bill S-7’s previous title evoked colonial and racist depictions of migrant and racialized communities and targeted racialized communities for profiling.³⁶

“There’s a problem of language that we use with refugees and the orientalist lens of us vs. them. I want them to be agents of change. I do not want to impart my own plans or ideals on them. I want them to be agents of change and in charge of their own journeys.”

-Roundtable Participant

3. Policy frameworks need to be “anti-violence”.

This includes state violence, workplace harassment, intimate partner violence, and so on. (See Section 2.3 for a discussion of the broad forms of violence faced by migrant and racialized women and LGBTQIA people.)

4. Policy frameworks need to caution against using the phrase “violence against women”.

This phrase can signal exclusion to non-binary and trans women. “Gender-based violence” is a more inclusive term.

5. Policies need to have consistent language and framing across agencies. This way, survivors get consistent services.

6. Policies should have an intersectional gender framework and build off of each other. Policies around poverty reduction, housing, gender-based violence, immigration, and so on should build off of one another to achieve common goals.

Paradigm Shift in Data Collection

Migrant and racialized communities are too often erased from discussions on gender-based violence. In some cases, the right kind of data collection is not taking place, making it challenging to capture and represent the realities and needs of migrant and racialized communities and create evidence-informed policies. In other cases, data is available but is difficult to access.

We recommend that:

- There be a federal mandatory policy to collect disaggregated data, including race-based data
- There be an easier process for accessing data regarding misrepresentation cases in Canada
- There be an easier process for accessing data on the Caregiver program
- That the definition of homelessness is shifted to include women and LGBTQIA people experiencing violence.

Paradigm Shift in Budgets



Immigrant, racialized women are the poorest of the poor. We need to look at how we collect our revenues as well. These kinds of 10 cent increases in TTC impact low-income women differently, and it is just as big an issue as how these services are getting funded.

-Roundtable Participant



The frameworks used to create budgets need to be shifted in order to capture the intersecting needs of migrant and racialized women and LGBTQIA people.

We recommend the following:

- Budgets need to be looked at with a gender-based intersectionality lens, and budget decisions need to be made based on real intersectional gender-based issues. It is essential that budgets deal with race and gender intersectionality, as well as and other equity dimensions (Indigeneity, ability, age, family status, gender expression, and so on).
- Budgets need to be not only informed by policy makers, but from ground-up input, with an integrated component informed by advocates and community members who are impacted. That way, portions of these budgets can be allocated to smaller grassroots communities doing important work.

Paradigm Shift in Funding Processes

6 What do we think is worthy of funding? Are we going to fund grassroots women, champions within our communities who are already doing supportive work, or are we going to fund these massive agencies? And within these massive agencies how many can racialized women even exist there?

What are their hiring practices, what are their workplace environments like so that racialized women can feel ownership and empowerment?

Is there representation spiritually and culturally?

Is there representation in how we heal and support women?

-Roundtable Participant

In addition to a paradigm shift through policy language, data collection and budgets, we need to shift the perspective that governments, foundations and other funders have on what kinds of projects should be funded. We also need to critically examine funding processes that have built-in biases against the kinds of projects and initiatives that would best meet the needs of migrant and racialized communities.

We propose the following shifts in funding processes:

Allocate money for proposal development.

Funders should allocate money for proposal development, as was recently included by Status of Women Canada in a call for proposals. This funding for proposal development enables smaller and less resourced organizations to create competitive proposals.

Don't assume larger organizations should lead anti-gender-based violence work in migrant and racialized communities.

As it stands, funding of larger organizations for this work in migrant and racialized communities often creates power imbalances between larger organizations and grassroots community-level work. Funders need to ensure that funding goes more directly into community spaces. Funders also need to facilitate collaborative partnerships between community and professional organizations; one example of how to do this is a collective impact grant system.

Allocate support for applicants with language barriers.

Grassroots organizations should be able to access additional funds to support writing funding applications if there are language barriers faced by the main proponents of the grant. It is essential that anti-gender-based violence work takes place in linguistically diverse communities, but community members and organizations doing excellent work are often excluded from funding streams if they face English language barriers.



Encourage resource-sharing between larger organizations and grassroots organizations.

In cases where larger professional organizations receive funding to carry out anti-gender-based violence work that is also being carried out through unfunded grassroots community level initiatives, the larger organizations should be encouraged to reach out to those doing the work at the community level and provide opportunities for resource-sharing. For example, larger organizations can commit to supporting grassroots organizations through financial contributions or through in-kind contributions of office space or access to counsellors for participants in their initiatives.

Value smaller, grassroots organizations that are not able to collect large scale data.

There is a move towards database analysis and metrics to evaluate organizations; these metrics often rely on quantity over quality. Larger organizations are able to collect and reflect larger numbers, but this framework excludes recognition of the contributions of grassroots organizations because they do not have resources to pay evaluators to collect this kind of data and they operate at a smaller scale. In assessing which organizations to fund and/or who should take a leadership role in a partnership, the ability to collect data on large numbers of people served should not be the sole consideration for funding.

Shift away from relying on top-down, “standardized” resources.

These formats do not always work for migrant and racialized communities, particularly considering the breadth of complexity of these communities, as outlined in Section 2.1. Rather than funding the development of top-down, standardized resources, recognize the need for grassroots-up resources created by community, for community. Challenge the assumptions that resources that are developed by and for the community are not “evidence-informed”.



If it's not bottom-up and appropriate, it will never be preventative.

-Roundtable Participant



Compensate migrant and racialized women and LGBTQIA people for their work.

We need a paradigm shift away from the automatic notion that migrant and racialized women and LGBTQIA working at the community-level do not need to be compensated for their labour and can be used as volunteers. While it is important to value grassroots work and the expertise of community members with lived experience, this kind of work and expertise needs to be financially compensated.

Don't restrict arts funding to people who went to school for art

There needs to be an expansion on what forms of art are considered valid, especially considering the different practices and definitions of art in racialized and migrant communities.

“How do we set the agenda or narrative around what we want to see captured or validated as “success”? When we talk about measurables for funders, there are very lofty goals of what “success” looks like and how it is supposed to manifest from a very privileged, very white sector. How do we tease apart and measure success such as “I saw Nina get out of bed today”, and recognize that as better than the work Jane did when she participated in 10 groups. The measure is not there – it is not recognized. How do we be proactive about those pieces instead of reacting when reports come in in order to tick off certain boxes.

-Roundtable Participant

Paradigm Shift in How We Measure “Success”

Funders’ and evaluators’ measurements of “success” in anti-gender-based violence work have enormous power to expand or constrain the possibilities to address violence and support survivors. Rather than reflecting the outcomes envisioned by communities, the “success measurements” outlined by funders too often drives the work that is being done.

We recommend shifting our thinking on measuring “success” in the following ways:

- Revisit what kind of methodologies, research and data are considered valid by funders. Research into the number femicides in Canada is informative and important; however, this number is only one window into the state of gender-based violence in the community. The reduction of femicides, while vital, captures only one aspect of a complex picture of violence prevention and intervention.
- We need to shift away from measuring success solely in terms of how many resources have been printed and distributed. We need to define project goals in terms of building networks, coalitions and increasing community capacity. These are more qualitative measurements, and there needs to be room for having these processes as accepted benchmarks for success.
- The professionalization of anti-gender-based violence work needs to be replaced with a more flexible understanding that meets community needs, particularly around who is seen as being qualified to consult on a topic or evaluate a project.

“We have to be creative— what is a consultant? What is an evaluator? If I want to know whether I am doing well with an FGM program, am I going to hire some academic to evaluate the project, or am I going to ask the community to tell me if it is going well or not? So it’s about thinking about those creative ways that you actually are engaging communities

-Notisha Massaquoi

“I really hope we are not just counting down fewer deaths. I don’t want that to be the metric that we are focussing on.

-Roundtable Participant

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



4.1 WHAT SHOULD ANTI-GBV COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN MIGRANT AND RACIALIZED COMMUNITIES LOOK LIKE?

Community engagement, education and outreach are key components of gender-based violence prevention strategies. However, Euro-centric concepts of what prevention means and looks like are often enforced through institutions, funding requirements and measurements of success. In order to meet the needs of migrant and racialized communities, community engagement strategies need to be shaped around these communities' unique and nuanced needs, rather than using a cookie cutter or one-size-fits-all approach. This requires challenging preconceived notions of what education and outreach should look like, and embracing new frameworks for community engagement that are created by and for migrant and racialized communities, and informed by advocates who are doing this work at the community level.

We recommend considering the following approaches when developing community engagement strategies with migrant and racialized communities: use a trauma aware model, break isolation, enable access to information, engage men and boys, and use the arts. We'll go through each of these approaches below.

Use a trauma-aware model

In providing services, we do not need to hear the narrative of violence at all – we believe you as soon as you walk in and you tell us the support you need, unless you want to report. Through this approach, we are seeing many more immigrant women come forward to gain access and support.

-Roundtable Participant

Survivors of gender-based violence from migrant and racialized communities often live with the effects of trauma. It's important that policies, programs and services are designed to recognize and respond to trauma.

Some examples of practices that implement a trauma-aware model are as follows:

- 1. Implement an assumption** that anyone you work with or encounter may have an abuse history or be living with abuse currently. Women's Health in Women's Hands (WHIWH) reports that 85% of their clients have experienced sexual violence; therefore, WHIWH has adopted an approach where they do not wait for a disclosure from clients, and instead use a trauma-aware model where they assume every woman who comes into the space has been through violence. This way, they ensure that every staff person is able to provide the necessary support when needed.
- 2. Don't make it a requirement** that someone has to share their abuse narrative in order to obtain support. Some people looking for support do not want to focus on the violence; they want to focus on themselves and healing.
- 3. Be aware of the impact of trauma on children** in families where gender-based violence is occurring, and ensure that children are able to access support.

6 Young people in school sometimes end up being the only knowledge and cultural translator for the parents. And that is an incredible toll and burden. And I think it is under-recognized by everybody, including the kids. They themselves think that this is what they are supposed to do: they think they are being the right kind of kid, that they are helping. And sometimes that means covering up the abuse. And sometimes it means finding the mom a service, and that can be agonizing, too. Whatever supports can be put in place to recognize this emotional labour that our children are doing for our communities is really important.

-Roundtable Participant

Break isolation and create community

Isolation is a core component of abuse. Migrant and racialized survivors of violence often face compounded levels of isolation due to the systemic barriers they face. Therefore, breaking isolation and creating safe spaces for connection with others is a key component of gender-based violence prevention and survivor support. Some examples of community engagement strategies that focus on breaking isolation are as follows:

1. Create spaces to “hang out”.

Grassroots prevention work that looks like “hanging out” provides a safe, low-pressure way to access and connect with understanding people. This model of creating safer spaces for people to come together and build community replicates and builds upon what naturally occurs and works within migrant and racialized communities. For example, women working in the Caregivers program talk about the park as a space where people bring strollers and share information. A good example of a program that uses the relaxed “hanging out” community engagement strategy is the Black Daddies Club, as it replicates the barber shop as a space to have important discussions.³⁷ These communal spaces are powerful sources of information, resilience and healing.

2. Develop a long-term strategy to build relationships and develop trust.

People need to be engaged and not necessarily talk about violence on the first encounter. For example, you can first find creative ways to bring people together to engage and socialize, like a nail art competition, and then weave in discussions about violence after a sense of safety and community has been established. Once people feel safe and a sense of belonging, and empowering relationships have been created, it is easier to work towards prevention. In this process of building community, we can also build capacity among natural leaders, who can provide peer-based support and build internal and community strength.

3. Create space to speak about multiple forms of violence.

Community engagement, outreach and education needs to reflect the broad range of violence experienced by migrant and racialized women and LGBTQIA people in order to be authentic. Being able to speak about the multiple layers of violence people are facing – such as racism or exploitation at the workplace – will enable meaningful conversations related to gender-based violence to flourish as well.

6 How do we advocate for this with funders as a legitimate and powerful intervention? Having someone to have coffee with and chat, cook traditional food with and sit down together isn't as sexy as other programs which tend to get funded.

-Roundtable Participant

4. Tailor programs to the needs of specific

sub-communities. Supports need to be drilled down to meet the needs of these specific communities, particularly those facing multiple forms of marginalization. For example, Somalis are coming from a Black, immigrant/refugee, first-generation, and mostly Muslim identity. Supports need to be available for Somali survivors that cater to those intersecting identities and lived experiences. Note: while these supports are put in place, it is important to recognize that some women and LGBTQIA people may not want to work with workers or community members who speak their language or share their culture, for fear of being judged.

5. Make sure the space is accessible.

Migrant and racialized women and LGBTQIA people living with disabilities often face isolation due to spaces not being accessible and services not being created with their needs in mind. Steps should be taken to ensure that infrastructure, programming, services and resources are developed that can reach those who are living with a wide range of disabilities.

6. Build on networks of peer support.

Breaking isolation is more difficult in cases of migrant workers, who may be isolated by the terms of their employment contracts. In these cases, we recommend building on networks of peer support, such as those developed by informal communities of Caregivers, and advocating for policy change that increases the mobility of migrant workers and their independence from their employers.

6 My problem with outreach is invisibility—such as with migrant workers. Why are they invisible? They come here with their caregivers or in another capacity with a Visa or a working permit with a name of an employer. Even if they experience violence, they cannot leave, as their status is in jeopardy due to their status with their employers. How do we do outreach for these women? We need policies and structural changes to allow these people to be mobile.

-Roundtable Participant

7. Provide childcare where possible.

In creating safe and welcoming spaces in order to break isolation and share knowledge, access to childcare is an important barrier to address, so that migrant and racialized mothers and caregivers are easily able to access the space. Childcare can be provided through having an onsite childcare provider, or through determining a fair childcare price, and giving women with children those funds directly so that she can secure childcare from a neighbour, family member or friend.

Enable access to information

Community engagement efforts often include an explicit goal of ensuring that specific information reaches those who are at risk for violence, so that they can recognize what is happening and know where to access support. In the case of migrant and racialized communities, the scope of information that needs to be shared needs to reflect the multiple forms of violence they are vulnerable to and the additional barriers that they face.

The information provided to migrant and racialized communities should include:

- Information for migrants regarding Canadian laws around issues of gender-based violence, including domestic violence, consent, and marital rape.
- Information about what services that are available, and how to access them.
- Information about Sanctuary City policies, the rights of non-status people, what municipalities Sanctuary City policies have been adopted in, and what the risks are in terms of the actual implementation of the policies. A list of services available for people without status across the province should also be updated and made available.
- Information regarding the different forms of violence – especially violence that is not physical, such as financial violence and isolation – needs to be shared.
- Information about CAS, and what can happen with CAS involvement in the family, needs to be made available. This conversation is a type of violence prevention, and supports acknowledging the realities of the violence as well as an opportunity to reflect on parenting practices.

In addition to having the explicit goal of sharing the above information, community-based education efforts need to ensure that information is being conveyed in **meaningful and accessible formats and in appropriate settings**, so that it actually reaches those who need it.

We recommend the following approaches to sharing information with migrant and racialized communities:

Share information in a pre-arrival context.

This pre-arrival information should be shared in accessible and easy-to-understand formats.

6 There have been a lot of dollars and focus put towards pre-arrival services. How many women access those services? A lot of the information about the services are gendered. A lot of the women coming in cannot read or write, so how much information gets to the women that need it?

-Roundtable Participant

For years we have just been giving people one piece of paper with information or a telephone number. But we have to have pre-arrival education to prevent exploitation.

-Roundtable Participant

Re-inforce and re-share information in post-arrival contexts.

This information can be shared through Settlement Workers in the settlement planning process and by other service providers. Settlement agencies should provide information regarding healthy family relationships, what abuse looks like, and where to find support resources within the settlement plans they develop for clients. It is important that this information is shared in the context of supportive relationships and service providers who are available to follow up and make referrals.

6 A lot of our culturally defined communities occupy suburban spaces because it's less expensive and they can get everything they need for their lives in these communities. But these conversations on gender-based violence are not penetrating those communities. How can we actually bring change so that with the next sort of eruption of a movement, it's not just us sitting here only? And I know this is a provincial conversation, but let's be real about where the work is happening and where it is not.

-Roundtable Participant

Share information in diverse languages.

Information should be shared in diverse communities' languages, where possible. Many migrants feel that they can express themselves more authentically in their home language, and this kind of expression is important for conversations about violence. Translated resources should be translated into accessible language levels, not into high-level academic words.

Share information in simple, non-academic language.

Information should not rely on complex academic language, especially considering the needs of people with dyslexia. Information should be shared in formats that are user friendly and accessible: for example, through a colouring book instead of a toolkit.

Share information in formats that can be easily hidden.

Resources need to be developed in discreet and small sizes, so that they are easily taken by those at risk for violence or living with violence.

Share information outside of major urban centres.

Community-based education needs to happen within geographic regions inhabited by migrant and racialized communities. This includes rural and suburban communities – not just those living in major urban centres such as Toronto.

For example, a small resource that you can put in your jacket pocket.

Share information in accessible formats.

Information and resources need to be made available in formats that are accessible to women and LGBTQIA people living with disabilities. Information presented in webinar formats can be shifted to podcast formats in order to make them more accessible to people on their phones. Information needs to be made available in formats accessible to people who cannot read or write, such as video resources where people are explaining information in an accessible way.

Share information in places that migrant and racialized survivors of violence will be able to find it.

Information needs to be placed in spaces where migrant and racialized women and LGBTQIA people will be able to easily access it. For example, information about helplines can be placed in hair/nail salons, on grocery carts, etc.

Women who don't have status – there is a level of violence they are at risk for, there is a level of violence they are experiencing. There is also the matter of how long it takes for them to be able to get any type of services. We have to be mindful of how we reach these people by thinking about where they are going and how we can get resources into those spaces that have nothing to do with the violence they are experiencing.

-Notisha Massaquoi

Share information within a safe peer support group.

Information needs to be shared in the context of peer support groups in that already exist within the community, such as in LINC classes and community kitchens. This is a way to get information to individuals who would otherwise not allowed be allowed to leave home, except to attend the group.

Share information through the public school system.

Information can be shared on healthy relationships, consent, and how to get support for abuse. Information should be shared with teachers and guidance counsellors, in order to ensure that they have the right responses to disclosures of abuse (i.e. "I believe you"), and that they know who to call next.

Share information in spaces of worship and in community centres.

Share information both online and offline.

Don't assume that the populations you are trying to reach with information are on social media: older migrant and racialized women may not, for example, be as active on social media or may not have internet access. Community-based methods of sharing information are irreplaceable in these contexts.

Engage Men and Boys

Meaningfully engaging men and boys is vital to gender-based violence prevention work.³⁸ Community engagement with men and boys needs to shift away from top-down information sharing about what not to do, and instead use a model of engaging men and boys in being reflective on their place in the world, connecting with healthy role models, unlearning toxic masculinity, and reflecting on their role in creating a less harmful world. Recommendations:

- Create spaces and programs for men to engage with other men in learning about healthy masculinity and unlearning toxic masculinity
- Create spaces and programs for men to engage with other men about how to speak up about abusive behaviour if they witness it.



Use the Arts

As someone who did not go to school for art, it was intimidating to apply for something and not think that I am not a good artist, so it's important to understand that there are different forms of art and artists. Funding should not be just for people who go to school for art.

-Roundtable Participant

In considering ways to make information accessible, usable, and meaningful for migrant and racialized communities, the arts stand out as a powerful tool for not just conveying information but for co-creating knowledge in a powerful way.

We propose the following recommendations and suggestions for using the arts in anti-gender-based violence work in migrant and racialized communities:

- Don't assume that people who have gone to school for formal education in the arts must be the ones to lead an arts-based program. Many community members can engage different forms of art to bring people together and create change.
- Create sustained arts-based programs for racialized and migrant communities, with a focus on specific community members most vulnerable to violence. Again, programs that focus on building long-term relationships and trust will be more effective.
- Tailor the art form to the community's needs and what will be most likely to bring people together. Don't assume that all audiences or art forms are going to work for all communities. For example, gathering for cooking and telling stories may be more likely to bring certain people together than a poetry class.
- Use a broad definition of arts, including:
 - quilt-making
 - planting/gardening
 - hair braiding
 - nail art
 - reading poetry aloud together
 - poetry slams
 - using theatre to co-create skits
 - opportunities to tell your story
 - yoga, movement, dance
 - using therapeutic art like colouring/drawing
 - informal song-dance parties
 - podcasts and videos
- Be aware that arts based engagement isn't suitable for all circumstances. For example, in some cases, art may be seen as a luxury, with more emphasis and importance being placed on making ends meet.

The above suggestions demonstrate a range of unique approaches to gender-based violence prevention and support work within migrant and racialized communities. We recommend that these methods of community engagement be validated and supported by funders and governments, in order to move forward in a positive way.

CONCLUSION



We hope that our collective voices in this Working Paper have demonstrated the need for systemic change in order to better meet the needs of migrant and racialized survivors of violence.

In doing this work, it is vital to recognize the complexity of migrant and racialized communities, and look at issues of ethno-linguistic diversity, immigration status, and intersectional identities when considering how to support specific groups of survivors in migrant and racialized communities. We must also appreciate the unique dilemmas faced by migrant and racialized survivors of violence, who are often navigating complex pressures that can make finding support for gender-based violence more difficult. Moreover, in order to understand the full scope of gender-based violence faced by migrant and racialized communities, we need to expand our concept of “violence” to include systems that cause increased vulnerability to gender-based violence, such as certain immigration policies, precarious and low-wage work, and lack of safe and affordable housing. In recognizing how these systems cause vulnerability to violence, we can begin to address root causes.

In this Working Paper, we hope that we have convinced you that it isn’t enough to include migrant and racialized communities in anti-gender based violence work. Paradigm shifts must occur in how we think about this work, and how we plan and execute prevention and survivor support initiatives. Shifts in policy language, funding processes, and measures of “success” can help us envision initiatives that truly address the needs of migrant and racialized communities with an intersectional lens. Indeed, specialized programs focused on breaking isolation and community-building are key components of anti-gender based violence prevention and survivor support work in migrant and racialized communities, and these approaches should be valued and recognized by governments and other funders.

We envision a future in Ontario where migrant and racialized survivors are able to live free from gender-based violence, and access supports that meet their needs. The call to action in this Working Paper, and its specific recommendations, can help map out a path to make that possible.

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