

# Moving Forward



**Advancing the Economic Security of Immigrant Women in Canada**

**A DISCUSSION PAPER**



Moving Forward: Advancing the Economic Security of Immigrant Women in Canada

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We would also like to thank the seven community organizations that organized and facilitated the focus groups. (For full details on this process, please see Appendix One.)

We would especially like to thank Eva Pakyam of YWCA Toronto and NOIVMWC<sup>1</sup> and Kamal Sehgal of the Alberta Network of Immigrant Women, for providing background information for the report.

*“People feel secure when they have a secure job.  
Everything else comes naturally after that.”*

Focus Group Participant — Vancouver, British Columbia

We also thank the Canadian Women’s Foundation for their financial support, which helped make this research possible.

**The Women’s Economic Council is a nationally incorporated, not-for-profit organization.**

**Our mission is to advance women-centred community economic development to improve the lives of women, their families and communities.**

**Our vision is economic security for every woman.**

<sup>1</sup> NOIVMWC - National Organization of Immigrant and Visible Minority Women of Canada.

## ABOUT THIS REPORT

In our 2008–2012 strategic plan, the WEC Board of Directors decided to focus our work on two groups of women who face especially severe economic challenges: immigrant and refugee women, and Aboriginal women.<sup>2</sup> This report addresses the barriers facing immigrant and refugee women; we are also developing a separate project related to Aboriginal women.

As a first step to develop a strategy for immigrant and refugee women, WEC held focus groups to identify the key barriers to their economic security.<sup>3</sup>

This report summarizes the findings of those focus groups and is designed to support WEC’s ongoing dialogue with our community partners and stakeholders, with the goal of identifying potential strategies to advance the economic security of immigrant and refugee women.

The report begins with a few key statistics about immigrant women in Canada. (See [Snapshot of Immigrant Women in Canada](#), page 2.)

Next, we summarize the key barriers to their economic security. This information is drawn from the focus group discussions, background interviews with practitioners who work with immigrant women, and existing research reports and other documents. (See [Key Barriers to the Economic Security of Immigrant Women](#), page 3.)

The report concludes with a brief discussion on the social and sectoral context for developing a strategy to advance the economic security of immigrant and refugee women. (See [Moving Forward](#), page 10.)

<sup>2</sup> [Strategic Plan, 2008-2012](#), Women’s Economic Council, p. 5.

<sup>3</sup> The focus group process is described on page 12. Full notes from the focus groups are available from the Resources page of our website: [www.womenseconomiccouncil.ca](http://www.womenseconomiccouncil.ca).

## SNAPSHOT OF IMMIGRANT WOMEN IN CANADA

Today, about one in five women and girls who live in Canada were born in another country.<sup>4</sup>

In 2009, 105,964 women immigrated to Canada.<sup>5</sup> Although these women were very diverse, they shared a lot of the same characteristics.<sup>6</sup>

- Most were of working age (67% were between 25 and 64).<sup>7</sup>
- Most will live in one of Canada's major cities (75% live in Toronto/Montreal/Vancouver).<sup>8</sup>
- Most were from Asia or the Middle East (in 2006, 58.3% of all immigrants came from China, Indian, Philippines, Pakistan, South Korea, or Iran).<sup>9</sup>
- About 60% arrived as economic class immigrants (26% were family class).<sup>10</sup>
- Overall, they were more educated than Canadian-born women. (18% of immigrant women have a university degree compared to 14% of Canadian-born women .<sup>11</sup>)

<sup>4</sup> Women in Canada, Statistics Canada, 2005, p. 23.

<sup>5</sup> That same year, another 14,539 women arrived as refugee claimants. Facts and figures 2009 – Immigration overview: Permanent and temporary residents, Citizenship and Immigration Canada, page 108. Available: <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/resources/statistics/facts2009/index.asp>

<sup>6</sup> Includes female permanent residents over age 15. Facts and figures 2009.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> "Study: Immigrants in the Hinterlands," The Daily, Statistics Canada, January 25, 2008. Available: <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/080125/dq080125d-eng.htm>

<sup>9</sup> "2006 Census: Immigration, citizenship, language, mobility and migration," The Daily, Statistics Canada, December 4, 2007. Available: <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/071204/dq071204a-eng.htm>

<sup>10</sup> Economic Class includes people who immigrate as skilled workers, entrepreneurs, self-employed, and live-in caregivers, plus their spouses and children. Family Class includes those sponsored by a Canadian citizen or permanent resident. These definitions and statistics are from: Facts and figures 2009.

<sup>11</sup> Immigrant Women: Employment Facts from ACTEW, ACTEW, April 2007. Available:

Females of all ages who are born outside Canada are more likely to live in poverty than Canadian-born females: 23% of all foreign-born females lived in a low-income situation, compared with just 16% of their Canadian-born counterparts. For recent immigrants, this number jumps even higher, to 35%.<sup>12</sup> Female immigrant children under age 15 were the most vulnerable, with 42% living in a low-income household – this was well over twice the figure for their non-immigrant counterparts, 17% of whom were classified as living in a low-income situation.<sup>13</sup>

*"Here, no one wants to listen to your complaints. Back home, everyone blames you for moving to Canada and tells you to stop complaining."*

Focus Group Participant, Vancouver-British Columbia

For women, their labour force participation is strongly affected by their immigration "category." Women who arrive in the skilled worker category are more likely to be in the labour force (91.1%) than women who enter in the family class (77%) or as a refugee (63.9%). Male immigrants, no matter their category, have a labour force participation rate of about 90%.<sup>14</sup> Women who have immigrated recently are less likely to be in paid employment than their male counterparts.<sup>15</sup>

[http://www.actew.org/projects/pwpsite/snapshots/Immigrantwomen\\_ACTEW\\_Mar07.pdf](http://www.actew.org/projects/pwpsite/snapshots/Immigrantwomen_ACTEW_Mar07.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> Women in Canada, pp.228-229.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Do Immigrant Class And Gender Affect Labour Market Outcomes For Immigrants? TIEDI Analytical Report 2, John Shields Et Al, Toronto Immigrant Employment Data Initiative, York University, January 2010, p. 6. Available: <http://www.yorku.ca/tiedi/doc/AnalyticalReport2.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> Of recent immigrants, 42.9% of women were in paid employment, compared to 57.1% of men. The 2008 Canadian Immigrant Labour Market: Analysis of Quality of Employment, Jason Gilmore, Statistics Canada, November 2009, p. 24.

Available: [http://dsp-psd.pwgsc.gc.ca/collection\\_2009/statcan/71-606-X/71-606-x2009001-eng.pdf](http://dsp-psd.pwgsc.gc.ca/collection_2009/statcan/71-606-X/71-606-x2009001-eng.pdf)

## KEY BARRIERS TO THE ECONOMIC SECURITY OF IMMIGRANT WOMEN

The research conducted for this report has confirmed that the key barriers to immigrant women's economic security include:

1. Precarious employment and/or low incomes
2. Lack of affordable and accessible childcare
3. Lack of affordable and adequate housing
4. Language skills
5. Lack of credential recognition
6. Lack of community supports

These barriers are discussed in more detail on the following pages.

Our research shows that these barriers have remained constant for many years, which reflects the major systemic nature of the problems.

Many of these barriers affect all women. Insecure employment, the lack of affordable child care, and a lack of affordable housing all contribute to the fact that 1.22 million Canadian women—and their children—live in poverty.<sup>16</sup>

However, most of these barriers are more acute for immigrant and refugee women.<sup>17</sup> They also face obstacles to economic security that other women do not, including language barriers, the ongoing failure of governments to cope with the challenge of credential recognition, and the immigration process itself (see box, this page).

<sup>16</sup> *Women's Poverty and the Recession*, Monica Townson, Canadian Centre For Policy Alternatives, September 2009, page 10. Available: [http://www.policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/National\\_Office\\_Pubs/2009/Womens\\_Poverty\\_in\\_the\\_Recession.pdf](http://www.policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/National_Office_Pubs/2009/Womens_Poverty_in_the_Recession.pdf).

<sup>17</sup> These barriers are also much more acute for Aboriginal women, another WEC priority area.

In addition, women from racialized communities—whether born in Canada or not—face discrimination. For example, research suggests that the downward trend of immigrant incomes over the past two decades may be linked to racial discrimination. As the number of immigrants from visible minority groups has increased, their income and employment situation has worsened.<sup>18</sup>



### Immigrant Women Speak Out on THE IMMIGRATION PROCESS

In the focus groups, the women told us how the immigration process can be improved:

- Provide mandatory information workshops overseas, before immigrating to Canada.
- Offer training sessions for new immigrants to familiarize them with Canadian systems (e.g., health, education, justice, taxation, housing, etc.).
- Develop a Welcoming Community toolkit; disseminate the information by building the capacity of other immigrant women to act as facilitators, using a 'train the trainer' model.
- Offer "one-stop" orientation and settlement services.
- Offer more supports for refugee claimants who cannot advocate for themselves due to language and financial barriers.
- Train and educate government officials on how to work more effectively with immigrant families.
- Eliminate duplication of services through improved national coordination.

<sup>18</sup> See *Immigrant Women: Employment Facts from ACTEW*.

## BARRIER 1: PRECARIOUS EMPLOYMENT AND/OR LOW INCOME

At one time it was safe to assume that, after a few years in Canada, immigrants could expect to earn just as much as those who were born here. This is no longer true. In fact, the economic well-being of immigrants “has been deteriorating over the past 25 years.”<sup>19</sup>

All women, whether immigrant or Canadian-born, are more likely than men to work in precarious jobs (part-time, contract, occasional, and/or seasonal) and to earn lower wages. Immigrant women earn about \$2,000 less than Canadian-born women and about \$11,000 less than immigrant men.<sup>20</sup>

On average, an immigrant with a university degree will earn “about \$5 an hour less than their Canadian-born counterparts.”<sup>21</sup> The unemployment rate for recent immigrants is now more than double the rate for Canadian-born workers.<sup>22</sup>

According to Statistics Canada, visible minority immigrants are more likely to experience low incomes than other immigrants, even after they have been in Canada for well over a decade.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Literacy Matters: Helping Newcomers Unlock Their Potential, TD Bank Financial Group, September 2009, p. 3. Available: [http://www.td.com/economics/special/ca0909\\_literacy.pdf](http://www.td.com/economics/special/ca0909_literacy.pdf).

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, p. 7.

<sup>21</sup> “Quality of employment in the Canadian immigrant labour market,” The Daily, Statistics Canada, November 23, 2009. Available: <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/091123/dq091123b-eng.htm>

<sup>22</sup> Understanding the Employment Service Needs of Internationally Trained Immigrants – Research Report, Nikhat Rasheed, Colleges Integrating Immigrants to Employment, 2009, p. 3. Available: [www.ciite.ca/SANTOS/18\\_Stafford/www/uploads/file/1.%20Understanding%20the%20Employment%20Service%20Needs%20of%20ITIs.pdf](http://www.ciite.ca/SANTOS/18_Stafford/www/uploads/file/1.%20Understanding%20the%20Employment%20Service%20Needs%20of%20ITIs.pdf)

<sup>23</sup> “Low income among immigrants and visible minorities,” Boris Palameta, Perspectives, Statistics Canada, April 2004. Available: <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/75-001-x/10404/6843-eng.pdf>

Immigrant’s earnings also vary depending on country of origin: immigrants from Hong Kong and Guyana earn the most; those from Pakistan and China earn the least.<sup>24</sup>



### Immigrant Women Speak Out on EMPLOYMENT & INCOME

In the focus groups, the women shared ideas for improving their income and employment:

- Offer coordinated work placement and volunteer opportunities, through settlement agencies.
- Offer toolkits for immigrant entrepreneurs.
- Offer tax breaks to companies that hire recent immigrants.
- Ensure at least one family member has a job in Canada before they immigrate.
- Start enforcing minimum wage, employment standards, and other labour laws.
- Strengthen human rights legislation to deal with race-based workplace discrimination.
- Reduce tuition fees to make education more accessible. Also, offer bursaries based on merit; sometimes a higher-income spouse (husband) will not financially support their wives to attend school.
- Engage government, businesses, and the community to address the issue of poverty.
- Reduce sales and income taxes so people have more income to support their families.

<sup>24</sup> “How Do Gender And Country Of Birth Affect Labour Market Outcomes For Immigrants?,” TIEDI Analytical Report 4, Valerie Preston et al, Toronto Immigrant Employment Data Initiative, York University, January 2010, p. 1. Available: <http://www.yorku.ca/tiedi/doc/AnalyticalReport4.pdf>

## BARRIER 2: LACK OF ACCESSIBLE AND AFFORDABLE CHILDCARE

The vast majority (77%) of Canadian women with a youngest child aged 3 to 5 are in the paid workforce.<sup>25</sup>

Research shows that “having children can be a significant determinant for precarious, low-paid employment. Women with children often have less earning power, as their domestic responsibilities can make traditional full-time employment difficult.”<sup>26</sup>

*“You can’t earn enough on minimum wage to pay for childcare.”*

Focus Group Participant, Burnaby-British Columbia

Women with access to reliable childcare have more employment options, but it is very difficult to find licensed childcare in Canada: for every 100 children there are only 12 licensed child care spaces available.<sup>27</sup>

When the Conservatives were elected in 2006, they cancelled the Liberal’s plan for a national child care program and replaced it with the Universal Child Care Benefit, which pays parents \$100 monthly for each child under age 6 – a payment which, for a typical family, would cover just three days of care.<sup>28</sup>

Compared to other affluent countries, Canada now ranks at the bottom of UNICEF’s ten benchmarks for provision of early childhood education and care.<sup>29</sup> Every year, growth in demand for childcare outpaces the creation of new daycare spaces.

Finding childcare is even harder for immigrant women because they are more likely to work in part-time jobs, to do shift work, and to work irregular hours. There are few childcare options for immigrant women who want services that reflects their cultural norms. In many immigrant families, parents and children are unfamiliar with institutionalized childcare. Cultural norms are usually unspoken, raising the likelihood of misunderstandings, and parents often struggle to understand eligibility and subsidy rules.

This chronic lack of affordable and appropriate childcare helps to contribute to the fact that “immigrant women participate in the labour force at considerably lower rates than immigrant men or Canadian-born women.”<sup>30</sup>



### Immigrant Women Speak Out on CHILDCARE

In the focus groups, the women spoke out about better supports for families with children:

- Provide universal daycare so single parents can work and not always worry about the children.
- Offer more non-profit childcare.
- Extend maternity leave beyond 12 months.

<sup>25</sup> Early Childhood Education and Care in Canada 2008, p. 179.

<sup>26</sup> Beyond Survival: Helping women transition out of poverty, Canadian Women’s Foundation and Eko Nomos, 2010. Page 36.

<sup>27</sup> “Fast facts on child care in Canada.” Perception, Canadian Council on Social Development, Volume 27, 1 & 2, 2004.

Available: <http://www.ccsd.ca/perception/2712/fastfacts.htm>

<sup>28</sup> All references in this paragraph are from: Women’s Poverty and the Recession, Monica Townson, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, September 2009, p. 25.

<sup>29</sup> Early Childhood Education and Care in Canada 2008, p. xi.

<sup>30</sup> Integration outcomes for immigrant women in Canada: A review of the literature 2000-2007, M. VanderPlatt, Atlantic Metropolis Centre, 2007. Pages 19-20. Available: [http://www.atlantic.metropolis.net/WorkingPapers/VanderPlatt\\_WP8.pdf](http://www.atlantic.metropolis.net/WorkingPapers/VanderPlatt_WP8.pdf)

### BARRIER 3: LACK OF AFFORDABLE AND ADEQUATE HOUSING

Anyone living on a low income in Canada is likely to have trouble finding affordable and adequate housing, but this is even more true for immigrants and refugees.<sup>31</sup>

‘Core housing need’ is defined as living in housing that needs major repairs, that is too small, or that costs 30% or more of the family’s total income. In many cities across Canada, the number of families in core housing need continues to rise, and immigrant families are nearly 1.5 times more likely to be in core housing need than non-immigrant families.<sup>32</sup>

In 2006, over 35% of recent immigrants were in housing that was inadequate, unsuitable, or unaffordable.<sup>33</sup> Many immigrants and refugees are forced to spend a high percentage of their income on rent: “... at least half of all new immigrant renters in the Montréal, Toronto and Vancouver housing markets were spending 50% or more of their income on housing.”<sup>34</sup> Immigrants without adequate financial resources may be placed in public housing that is often unsafe. In emergency situations, they may be placed in a shelter or hostel, however, “most shelter...staff lack the time, skills or resources to effectively house and settle newcomers.”<sup>35</sup>

Women without status –temporary workers awaiting the results of a refugee claim or those living “underground” – are particularly vulnerable to homelessness and to “deep poverty, housing instability, danger, and exploitation.”<sup>36</sup>

Visible minority immigrants often experience housing discrimination. “Landlords frequently discriminate against immigrant women on the basis of their gender, national origin, race, the presence of children, and their employment and income status.”<sup>37</sup>



#### Immigrant Women Speak Out on HOUSING

In the focus groups, the women spoke out about their housing needs:

- Provide more housing support for families in financial need.
- Provide more housing for single women with children.

<sup>31</sup> Housing Issues Facing Newcomers to Canada, Brief presented to the Parliament of Canada Senate Subcommittee on Cities, Damaris Rose Professor Institut national de la recherche scientifique – Centre Urbanisation Culture Société, Montréal, p. 2. Corrected version, 2009-05-07. Available:

[http://im.metropolis.net/research-policy/research\\_content/doc/Housing\\_issues\\_facing\\_newcomers\\_to\\_Canada\\_ROSE.pdf](http://im.metropolis.net/research-policy/research_content/doc/Housing_issues_facing_newcomers_to_Canada_ROSE.pdf)

<sup>32</sup> Dimensions of core housing need in Canada, Cooperative Housing Federation of Canada, 2007, p. 5. Available: [http://www.chfcanada.coop/eng/pdf/PublicPolicyDocs/Dimensions\\_of\\_Core\\_Housing\\_Need\\_in\\_Canada.pdf](http://www.chfcanada.coop/eng/pdf/PublicPolicyDocs/Dimensions_of_Core_Housing_Need_in_Canada.pdf)

<sup>33</sup> Indicators of Well-Being: Housing, Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, 2010. Available:

<http://www4.hrsdc.gc.ca/.3ndic.1t.4r@-eng.jsp?iid=41>

<sup>34</sup> Housing Issues Facing Newcomers to Canada, p. 4.

<sup>35</sup> Best Practices for Working with Homeless Immigrants and Refugees, Access Alliance Multicultural Community Health Centre, March 2003, p. 2. Available:

[http://www.settlement.org/downloads/BP\\_Executive\\_Summary.pdf](http://www.settlement.org/downloads/BP_Executive_Summary.pdf)

<sup>36</sup> Better Off in a Shelter? A Year of Homelessness & Housing among Status Immigrant, Non-Status Migrant, & Canadian-Born Families, Emily Paradis et al, Research Paper 213, Centre for Urban and Community Studies Cities Centre, University of Toronto, July 2008, p. iii. Available:

<http://www.urbancentre.utoronto.ca/pdfs/researchbulletins/ParadisetalBetterOffinaShelter7-2008.pdf>

<sup>37</sup> Immigrant and Refugee Women, Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women, 2010. Available: <http://www.criaw-icref.ca/ImmigrantandRefugeeWomen>

## BARRIER 4: LANGUAGE SKILLS

In 2006, allophones—people whose first language is neither French nor English<sup>38</sup>—made up 20% of Canada’s total population.

Between 2001 and 2006, four out of every five people who immigrated to Canada (about 1.1 million people) were allophone.<sup>39</sup>

This high number was due to changes in the source countries for immigration—in 2006, almost 60% of all immigrants came from Asia and the Middle East.<sup>40</sup>

According to the Maytree Foundation, “for immigrants to Canada, learning English or French is one of the key determinants of successful settlement, academic and labour market success.”<sup>41</sup>

Most immigrant and refugee allophones can speak some English or French, however, their fluency level is not usually high enough to allow them to succeed in the Canadian workplace.<sup>42</sup> Two years after arriving in Canada, immigrants rank language problems as their second most common difficulty in finding work (lack of Canadian experience is the first).<sup>43</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Statistics Canada includes people whose first language is an Aboriginal language in the allophone group.

<sup>39</sup> “2006 Census: Immigration, citizenship, language, mobility and migration,” *The Daily*, Statistics Canada, December 4, 2007.

Available: <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/071204/dq071204a-eng.htm>

<sup>40</sup> In the 2006, “recent immigrants born in Asia (including the Middle East) made up the largest proportion (58.3%) of newcomers to Canada. This was virtually unchanged from 59.4% in 2001. In contrast, in 1971, only 12.1% of recent immigrants for this period were born in Asia.” Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> “Renew and Expand Language Programs to Support Immigrant Children,” *Maytree Policy in Focus*, Issue 4, JUNE 2008, p. 2.

Available:

[http://maytree.com/PDF\\_Files/MaytreePolicyInFocusIssue4.pdf](http://maytree.com/PDF_Files/MaytreePolicyInFocusIssue4.pdf)

<sup>42</sup> The 2006 census reported that 88.5% of allophones could speak one of the official languages. However, 60% scored ‘poor’ or ‘weak’ on the International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey. *Literacy Matters: Helping Newcomers Unlock Their Potential*, TD Bank Financial Group, p. 11.

<sup>43</sup> *The Labour Market Progression of the LSIC Immigrants*, Statistics Canada. Available: <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/resources/research/lisic/section3.asp>

Despite the strong link between language skills and financial security, there are many eligibility restrictions for government programs such as LINC (Language Instruction for Newcomers). Citizens are not eligible, nor are “refugee claimants, temporary workers, and foreign students, some of whom will become permanent residents.”<sup>44</sup>

*“Before coming to Canada, I was always a happy girl. Now my struggle to earn a living has reduced me to being quiet and shying away from smiling and happiness.”*

Focus Group Participant —Edmonton, Alberta



### Immigrant Women Speak Out on LANGUAGE

In the focus groups, the women told us how their language barriers could be reduced:

- Don't force people to take hours of ESL training if they only need help with specific aspects of English.
- Allow people to enroll in employment training while they are taking ESL classes – this will speed up their settlement process.

<sup>44</sup> “Renew and Expand Language Programs to Support Immigrant Children,” p. 3.

## BARRIER 5: LACK OF CREDENTIAL RECOGNITION

According to the Conference Board of Canada, if the full value of immigrant's education and employment credentials was recognized, between "\$3.4 and \$5.0 billion would be added to the Canadian economy every year."<sup>45</sup>

As it stands, however, even immigrants who enter Canada as a skilled worker find that their work experience and credentials are often not recognized.<sup>46</sup> Many end up working in jobs that are far below their skill and education level. This carries more than a financial cost: many of these workers end up devastated to have their many years of education and work so easily dismissed. They often experience a loss of confidence and self-esteem, as well as depression and other serious mental health issues.

*"I feel I am doing slavery in the 21<sup>st</sup> century in a very developed country."*

Focus Group Participant, Vancouver-British Columbia

Many immigrants complain that the rules and expectations are not made clear in their home countries before they apply to immigrate. Once they arrive, they discover that retraining programs often have large tuition fees. Immigrant women face a double burden: they must "recertify and rebuild professional careers without the social capital that helped them combine childcare and career building in their home countries."<sup>47</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Performance and Potential 2004-2005: How can Canada prosper in Tomorrow's World?, Source: Conference Board of Canada, Ottawa 2004, p. 132. As quoted by Maytree Foundation at this URL: <http://maytree.com/policy/research-reference>

<sup>46</sup> For a brief overview of the challenges and recent changes, please see Recognizing Success: A Report on Improving Foreign Credential Recognition, Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration, House of Commons, November 2009. Available: <http://ceris.metropolis.net/Virtual%20Library/other/Canada2009ForCredRecog.pdf>. For up-to-date information, please contact the Foreign Credentials Referral Office of the Ministry of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism ([www.credentials.gc.ca](http://www.credentials.gc.ca)).

<sup>47</sup> Integration outcomes for immigrant women in Canada: A review of the literature 2000-2007, M. VanderPlatt, Atlantic



### Immigrant Women Speak Out on CREDENTIAL RECOGNITION

In the focus groups, the women shared their suggestions about the credential issue:

- Review people's credentials before they arrive in Canada so they know whether they will qualify in the Canadian labour market.
- Require recruiters to offer realistic information about the challenges of credential recognition in Canada.
- Work towards more international cooperation on measuring qualifications.
- Offer many more credential assessment and recognition programs.
- Offer incentives to employers to offer on-the-job training opportunities (e.g., paid internships for professionals who are working to earn Canadian credentials).
- Greatly simplify the certification/upgrading process.
- Eliminate duplication of services by centralizing the assessment process.
- Recognize immigrant's degrees without discrimination.
- Create a national system that sets standards for foreign education.
- Eliminate duplication of services through improved national coordination.
- Make pre-immigration credential seminars mandatory.

Metropolis Centre, 2007. Pages 19-20. Available: [http://www.atlantic.metropolis.net/WorkingPapers/VanderPlatt\\_WP8.pdf](http://www.atlantic.metropolis.net/WorkingPapers/VanderPlatt_WP8.pdf)

## BARRIER 6: LACK OF COMMUNITY SUPPORTS

All low-income women experience a lack of effective community supports. There is a particular lack of economic development programs that take into account the reality of women's lives, especially the impact of their domestic and caretaking roles.<sup>48</sup>

Immigrant women need a wide range of culturally-appropriate services, including those that address social isolation, domestic violence, financial literacy, and healthy living.

In health care, there is a chronic shortage of "culturally appropriate and accessible gender sensitive health care policies and practices; cultural sensitivity training for service providers and cultural competency at all levels of the health care system."<sup>49</sup>

Immigrant women also need community programs that help them to understand the Canadian workplace. As one focus group participant said: "Many other countries have very structured workplace hierarchies, but here the structure is very flat. Women have to understand that they need to take individual responsibility."

*"I have no idea about the Canadian workplace, so I am afraid to approach the job market."*

Focus Group Participant —Moncton, New Brunswick

<sup>48</sup> These programs provide practical economic supports including on-site child care, bus tickets, clothing for job interviews and economic literacy. See for example, [If Women Mattered: The Case for Federally Funded Women-Centred Community Economic Development](#), Women's Economic Council, 2010.

<sup>49</sup> [Integration Outcomes for Immigrant Women In Canada: A Review Of The Literature 2000-2007](#), Madine VanderPlaat, Saint Mary's University, 2007, p. 16. Available: [http://www.atlantic.metropolis.net/WorkingPapers/VanderPlaat\\_WP8.pdf](http://www.atlantic.metropolis.net/WorkingPapers/VanderPlaat_WP8.pdf)



### Immigrant Women Speak Out on COMMUNITY SERVICES

In the focus groups, the women told us about the types of community services they needed:

- Offer more CED programs such as skills training, employment, career change, and work experience opportunities.
- Offer more settlement services – waiting lists are much too long.
- Provide leadership development for visible minority women in order to increase their participation in decision-making roles.
- Support settlement agencies to look beyond short-term supports, such as job-finding, to long-term approaches that create economic stability for immigrants.
- Provide stable funding to community organizations so they can offer ongoing, reliable programs.
- Provide information sessions for stay-at-home immigrant women who don't qualify for other training programs.
- Provide one-on-one mentoring from established volunteers, to offer advice and information about Canadian culture.
- Offer more financial literacy programs such as budgeting, pensions, etc.
- Offer more language training programs
- Offer more recreation and healthy living programs.

## MOVING FORWARD

This paper summarizes the key barriers to immigrant women's economic security.

To recap, they include:

1. Precarious employment and/or low incomes
2. Lack of affordable and accessible childcare
3. Lack of affordable and adequate housing
4. Language skills
5. Lack of credential recognition
6. Lack of community supports

Given the scope of these barriers and their systemic nature, at first glance it may seem an overwhelming task to develop a cohesive and realistic strategy for change.

*“The discussion about the challenges was becoming overwhelming, so we switched for awhile to talk about the joys of being in Canada. We didn't want women to leave feeling depressed.”*

Focus Group Facilitator — Burnaby, British Columbia

### THE CURRENT CONTEXT

To make it even more challenging, this work must take place in a social and political environment where the barriers facing immigrants and women currently seem to be a low priority.

Some politicians claim that women have already achieved economic equality, and gender-specific programs and analysis have almost completely disappeared from government agendas.

And, despite the critical role that immigrants play in Canada's social and economic vitality, their issues often seem to be an afterthought. In the media, issues related to immigration are

often presented in a negative light, sometimes even with hostility.

In December 2010, the federal government announced significant funding cuts to immigration settlement services in every province except Quebec. In total, funding will be reduced by \$53 million. Most of the cuts, \$43 million, will be in Ontario; some community agencies will likely be forced to close.<sup>50</sup>

These agencies help immigrant women and their families become more economically secure through front-line services such as settlement support and employment training – services that are not available elsewhere in the community.

While these impending reductions will be very challenging, over the last few years there has been some progress (albeit slow) on the issue of credential recognition.<sup>51</sup>

In addition, there is good research on the barriers facing immigrant and refugee women, including specific recommendations on how to make progress at the systemic level (see Appendix Four for some examples).

### DEVELOPING A STRATEGIC FOCUS

For WEC, this report is just the beginning of a long-term process to create a strategy for its work with immigrant and refugee women.

Two areas of WEC's Strategic Plan 2008–2012 have implications for this work:<sup>52</sup>

1. Research and Advocacy for Public Policy Change – establishing partnerships to conduct relevant research and advocate for positive change to public policies that impact women-centred CED.

<sup>50</sup> “Funding axed for immigrant services,” Nicholas Keung, *Toronto Star*, December 23, 2010.

<sup>51</sup> *A Commitment to Foreign Credential Recognition: Government of Canada Progress Report 2009*, Minister of Public Works and Government Services Canada, 2010. Available: <http://www.credentials.gc.ca/about/pdf/progress-report2009.pdf>

<sup>52</sup> *Strategic Plan, 2008-2012*, Women's Economic Council, p. 3.

2. Sector Support Projects – continuing to strengthen the sector by leading and managing pilot projects, building capacity at the community level and using expertise to facilitate action through relevant partnerships.

Over the next three years, WEC will continue to dialogue and partner with its community stakeholders in order to begin developing specific projects to advance the economic security of immigrant and refugee women.

These projects could potentially include leadership development, financial literacy, social enterprise and co-operatives, training, and or advocacy. These strategies will likely also include building regional partnerships through collaboration and capacity building projects.

It is our hope that this report serves as a useful summary of the key issues, one that will help WEC and its community partners to create a concrete roadmap for moving forward.

### THE WOMEN'S ECONOMIC COUNCIL

WEC\* was founded in 2002 to advance women-centred community economic development to improve the lives of women, their families and communities.

We are a nationally incorporated, not-for-profit organization of women-centred community economic development organizations and practitioners.

### OUR WORK

In response to the experiences of women working in the Community Economic Development (CED) sector, the Council:

- Strengthens the women-centred CED sector and organizations through information-sharing and sustainability assistance;
- Helps to provide a national voice for women-centred CED to increase awareness of the effectiveness of holistic, women-centred CED;
- Raises public awareness about policy changes necessary to support women's economic security; and
- Researches and documents issues, trends and outcomes of the diversity and spectrum of women-centred CED.

\* (formerly the Canadian Women's Community Economic Development Council)

## **APPENDIX ONE:**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

In early 2010, the Women's Economic Council sponsored a series of seven focus groups across Canada on the theme *Sharing Immigrant Women's Economic Security Priorities*.

The focus groups were held between February 15, 2010 and April 15, 2010.

The purpose of the focus groups was to learn more about what economic security means to immigrant women in Canada and how it might be achieved.

The following community organizations acted as hosts for the focus groups.

1. Gordon Neighbourhood House, Vancouver, BC
2. South Burnaby Neighbourhood House/Maywood Community School, Vancouver, BC
3. Immigrant Services Society of BC, Vancouver, BC
4. Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers, Edmonton, AB
5. Centre for Newcomers, Calgary, AB
6. Alberta Network of Immigrant Women, Calgary, AB
7. The Multicultural Association of the Greater Moncton Area, Moncton, NB

Each organization received a \$200 honorarium for hosting and organizing the focus groups. They were asked to gather together a group of immigrant women, facilitate a 1 to 1.5 hour focus group, provide refreshments, and give each woman an honorarium for participating. The organizations were also asked to take notes and submit them to WEC.

#### **Focus Group Questions:**

In all seven focus groups, the women were asked the following five questions:

1. Think about what it would mean for your family to have economic security – stable income that meets your family's needs plus access to health, education, housing, information and safety. What prevents your family from having economic security?<sup>53</sup>
2. As an Immigrant woman, what stops you from earning an income you can be proud of?
3. What changes in government policy would make things better?
4. What changes to community programs or services would make things better?
5. Is there anything that you want to add?

A total of 70 women attended the focus groups. The women represented a broad range of ages, employment backgrounds, and immigration journeys. The women had immigrated to Canada from across the globe including China, Mongolia, the Philippines, Vietnam, Korea, Nepal, Iran, Egypt, Morocco, Nigeria, Guyana, Peru, Colombia, Mexico, and Venezuela. Their time in Canada ranged from 18 years to two months.

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<sup>53</sup> Pre-focus group feedback on the questions was very positive. Post-focus group feedback on questions 1 and 2 advised WEC to consider underlying assumptions in future research (i.e., that the women participating in the focus groups may, in fact, currently have economic security and/or an income of which they are proud).

## **APPENDIX TWO:**

### **FOCUS GROUP INVITATIONS**



## **Sharing Immigrant Women's Economic Security Priorities**

### **Who?**

The Women's Economic Council (WEC) is seeking 6-8 organizations that provide employment, self-employment, social enterprise or co-operative supports to improve the economic security of Immigrant women.

### **What?**

In order to effectively advocate for funding, policy and regulatory changes to support the economic security of Immigrant women, WEC's work must be grounded in Immigrant women's priorities and lived realities.

As part of gathering this information, WEC invites you to host a 1-1.5 hour focus group with 10 Immigrant women in your community.

### **How?**

WEC can offer each host organization an honorarium of \$200 to conduct a focus group. WEC will supply instructions and questions. Each host organization will conduct one focus group and send notes documenting the responses of participating Immigrant women to WEC.

### **When?**

All focus groups will take place **before Friday March 12, 2010**.

### **Why?**

The poverty and economic insecurity experienced by many Immigrant women in Canada is unacceptable. Period. Effectively removing systemic barriers requires government policies that recognize and respond to the priorities of Immigrant women. WEC will use information gathered in the focus groups to advocate for policy change.

**For more information, contact Jessica Notwell, WEC Executive Director, at 905-227-3175 or [janotwell@womenseconomiccouncil.ca](mailto:janotwell@womenseconomiccouncil.ca).**



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February 15, 2010

The Women's Economic Council (WEC) works toward economic security for every woman by advancing women-centred CED to improve the lives of women, their families and communities. Women-centred CED includes training and skills development, co-operatives, small business development supports, social purpose enterprise, micro-lending, and much more. It starts with women's lives, working with women at the grass roots level using holistic, empowerment-focused programming, and challenges deeper and more systemic elements of economic and social inequality.

WEC engages in concrete action to support women's economic security including:

- Facilitating practical, community-based supports for women experiencing the deepest rates of poverty and economic insecurity including Aboriginal women, racialized and Immigrant women, and women living in rural and remote locations.
- Strengthening the women-centred CED sector through information-sharing and capacity-building projects for grassroots organizations working with women.
- Raising public awareness about policy changes necessary to support women's economic security.

WEC prioritizes supporting Immigrant women's economic security through both providing direct support to organizations working with Immigrant women on CED as well as increasing national-level advocacy about the reality of Immigrant women's lives and policy change needed to support the participation of Immigrant women in CED.

In order to effectively do this work, WEC's action must be grounded in the lived realities, needs and goals of Immigrant women in Canada.

We know that Immigrant women bring myriad assets to the Canadian social and economic context including diverse skills and knowledge, experience in employment and community development, and education and training. We also know that the poverty and economic exclusion experienced by many Immigrant women results from systemic barriers and inequality.

WEC is inviting community and CED organizations serving Immigrant women to each host one 1-1.5 hour focus group with 10 Immigrant women to gather specific information about the economic security priorities of Immigrant women in Canada. (Please see front page for detailed information.)

If your community or CED organization is interested and able to host a focus group **before Friday March 12, 2010**, or for more information, please contact Jessica Notwell, Executive Director of the Women's Economic Council, at 905-227-3175 or [janotwell@womenseconomiccouncil.ca](mailto:janotwell@womenseconomiccouncil.ca).

Thank you!

Jessica Notwell

## **APPENDIX THREE:**

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## **APPENDIX FOUR:**

### **RESEARCH ORGANIZATIONS**

The following are examples of organizations that have researched immigration settlement issues and produced recommendations for systemic change.

#### **COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS**

1. *NOIVMWC – National Organization for Immigrant and Visible Minority Women of Canada (www.noivmwc.org)*

Founded in 1986, NOIVMWC created the Livelihood Project, a five-year project with the goal of ensuring immigrant and visible minority women achieve ‘full inclusion’ in Canadian society. NOIVMWC held cross-country consultations, organized a national conference, and produced reports<sup>54</sup> which identified key priorities (one was Income Security) and specific strategies to achieve each. Unfortunately, NOIVMWC has since lost all of its federal funding and is no longer in operation, however many resources are still available on its website.

2. *OCASI – Ontario Coalition of Agencies Serving Immigrants (www.ocasi.org)*

OCASI is a network of council of autonomous community-based agencies serving immigrant communities in Ontario. Their mandate includes service coordination issues, research, policy, and advocacy. For example, in 2009 Citizenship and Immigration Canada proposed to revamp federally funded settlement services, a process they called “modernization.”<sup>55</sup> OCASI has

<sup>54</sup> See for example: [The Livelihood Project: Report of the Livelihood Conference](#), National Organization of Immigrant and Visible Minority Women of Canada, Calgary, April 22-23, 2005.

<sup>55</sup> This approach would revamp the federal settlement delivery model from a “suite of programs” which includes LINC (Language Instruction for Newcomers) and ISAP (Immigrant Settlement and Adaptation Program) and the Host program, to a single integrated program. See for example: [Settlement Program: Implementation of the Modernized Approach \(For External Stakeholders\)](#), Citizenship and Immigration Canada, Fall 2009. Available:

published an analysis of the potential impact of this change, making specific recommendation on how the new services should be implemented.<sup>56</sup>

#### **PRIVATE FUNDER**

3. *The Maytree Foundation (www.maytree.com)*

Maytree is a private charitable foundation. Their work focuses on income inequality and leadership in immigrant communities. For example, they recently published research on the recent dramatic expansion of Canada’s temporary foreign workers program, pointing out that: “experience in other countries has demonstrated that similar temporary ‘guest worker’ programs have resulted in the creation of an undocumented underclass.”<sup>57</sup> They have also published detailed strategies to address immigrant underemployment.<sup>58</sup>

#### **UNIVERSITY-BASED RESEARCH**

4. *Metropolis Canada (http://canada.metropolis.net)*

Metropolis Canada is an umbrella organization for immigration research across Canada, publishing dozens of reports on everything from language training for immigrant women, to the economic well-being of seasonal agricultural workers, to the health of immigrant women in the hotel housekeeping sector.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Metropolis Research Centres of Excellence are located in Vancouver, Burnaby, Edmonton, Toronto, Montreal, Halifax, and Moncton. This research is funded by Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. See: [http://canada.metropolis.net/index\\_e.html](http://canada.metropolis.net/index_e.html)