



## OCASI – Green Party of Canada

### **1. Settlement Services**

*Settlement service is an important resource that helps refugees and immigrants to make a strong start in their new life in Canada. This year, the Government of Canada cut \$14 million from immigrant settlement services in Ontario<sup>1</sup>. Ontario has already faced cuts to settlement funding almost every year since 2010, affecting the capacity of community-based organizations that deliver these programs to maintain organizational stability and excellence in quality of service. The federal government no longer has immigration agreements with the provinces and territories, except in Quebec.*

**Question: How will you support the immigrant and refugee serving-sector to deliver appropriate settlement services to immigrants and refugees, and support them to reach their full social, political and economic potential?**

The current government's utter neglect of settlement services in Canada is on full display with the ongoing global refugee crisis. The latest wave of new Canadians, despite being better educated than their historical predecessors, have more trouble securing employment, obtaining proper housing, and accessing basic health services.

The Green Party will support settlement agencies like OCASI in their work to support immigrants and refugees to Canada. Greens will increase funding for training in official languages (ESL and FSL) for new immigrants through earmarked transfers to the provinces for primary and secondary public school and free night school programs. This change will support immigrants and refugees so that they can meet their full social and economic potential.

Federal-provincial agreements on settlement funding for new immigrants must be reviewed and recalibrated to ensure the successful settlement of new Canadians. Settlement funding has to be determined according to the particular needs of immigrants. A cookie-cutter, one-size-fits-all formula is not useful, as Ontario knows all too well.

Canada will have to address the Canada-Quebec Accord of 1991 that guarantees Quebec a minimum proportion of national funds regardless of how many immigrants actually come to that province. Although there are reasons to justify some inter-provincial variations in settlement funding, it is simply not possible to rationalize the current disparity between the federal support for an immigrant arriving in Montreal, versus one arriving in Toronto or Vancouver. We need to

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<sup>1</sup> Cut for fiscal year 2015-16. National budget for the year is \$282 million

address this anomaly in order to establish equitable and effective settlement funding across the country.

Greens are also the only party advocating a bold new vision for how our Confederation can work, together. To facilitate federal leadership in settlement services, a Council of Canadian Governments – representing the provinces, territories, Indigenous governments and municipalities – would meet to draft a comprehensive strategy. Sharing best practices and advocating for inter-jurisdictional solutions is the only way to guarantee refugees and immigrants are appropriately supported.

## **2. Employment**

*There is extensive research documenting the chronic underemployment of skilled immigrants in Canada, as well as research to show the strong correlation between racialization and the growing wage gap in the labour market<sup>2</sup>. Recent (past ten years) immigrants at all skill levels (internationally and locally trained professionals, tradespeople, lower-skilled dependents) are facing higher levels of un/under-employment compared to earlier cohorts, and compared to those born in Canada. For many, re-training, re-qualifying and licensing in Canada have not resulted in a significant change in job or wage prospects, and discrimination continues to be a significant barrier – particularly for racialized immigrants and refugees. This represents a significant missed opportunity for our economy and tremendous personal cost to the affected individuals and their communities.*

### **Question: What will you do to improve the employment prospects, and pay parity for immigrants at all skill levels?**

Employment disparities between new Canadians and the rest of the country run counter to the Canadian vision of a multicultural and equitable society. There is a huge mismatch between the skills of new Canadians and their actual employment. Many immigrants with university degrees now work in chronically low-income jobs. For many, there is a real sense of exclusion within a society that fails to give them equal opportunity in practice. The federal government must act to support improved employment prospects for new Canadians before this gap gets even wider.

We must establish, once and for all, expeditious certification mechanisms to recognize foreign credentials and work experience. It is unthinkable that we still have no viable procedures for their efficient verification and recognition. Establishing a more effective process for recognizing foreign credentials, requires more than long-overdue adjustments to immigration procedures. It also requires reciprocal recognition of credentials and work experience within Canada. The federal government must finally remove the myriad barriers to the mobility of people and businesses across provincial borders. This will facilitate the pre-clearing of foreign credentials

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<sup>2</sup> Block, Sheila and Galabuzi, Grace-Edward. Canada's colour coded labour market: The gap for racialized workers. 2011. Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives and Wellesley Institute.



and work experience and, most importantly, it will benefit all Canadians immeasurably and strengthen our economy.

Greens will also enforce the Employment Equity Act to ensure that racialized immigrants and refugees have equal opportunity for adequate pay, long-term employment and advancement in our society.

### **3. Citizenship**

*Only 26 per cent of permanent residents who settled in Canada in 2008 acquired Canadian citizenship, compared with 44 per cent for immigrant who arrived in 2007 and 79 percent for those who arrived in 2000. These are the findings of research on citizenship acquisition released earlier this year<sup>3</sup>. Access to citizenship has become more restricted, and naturalized citizens and those with dual citizenship are treated differently under the law.*

#### **Question: How will you ensure access to citizenship and exercise of citizenship is equitable?**

The research clearly demonstrates that access to citizenship is rapidly becoming an unrealizable pursuit for many immigrants to Canada. Our immigration and refugee protection system is not prepared for 21st-century realities or challenges. A system with more than 50 entry streams that by 2010 had produced a backlog of one million applications - many of which languished in the queue for up to five or six years - is a dysfunctional nightmare at best. It is an embarrassment to a country like Canada that increasingly depends on interconnectedness with the rest of the world.

Immigration is first and foremost about citizenship. The Green Party is the only federal party to have concluded that the Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP) is irredeemably flawed and must be scrapped. Weak mechanisms for assessing labour shortages have allowed the TFWP to undermine wage and labour standards. At the same time, the program exploits foreign workers.

Any reforms to Canada's immigration system must strengthen our social fabric and be consistent with our fundamental values of the rule of law, equality, and fairness. The Green Party will initiate a comprehensive overhaul of Canada's immigration and refugee protection system. Our reforms will ensure an efficient and predictable path to citizenship for all immigrants and their families. In addition to the policies discussed in depth here, we will establish pathways to citizenship for temporary foreign workers and the families of new Canadians. Greens will work with municipalities and provinces to improve the integration of new Canadians. We will also

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<sup>3</sup> Griffith, Andrew. Multiculturalism in Canada: Evidence and anecdote. Metropolis Conference presentation. 2015.



repeal Bill C-24 which allows the minister of citizenship to revoke citizenship. Citizenship is a category that cannot have classes.

#### **4. Refugee sponsorship**

*59.5 million people worldwide were forcibly displaced as a result of war and persecution by the end of 2014 according to the UNHCR<sup>4</sup> - the highest level ever recorded. A year earlier the number was 51.2 million. Canada's Government Assisted Refugees program numbers have fallen by almost 22% in the ten years since 2004, and by 24% for all refugee programs<sup>5</sup>.*

**Question: What will you do to increase the number of Government Assisted Refugees (GARs) over and above the current numbers, and to welcome more refugees to Canada through all the programs?**

We are facing a global refugee crisis, as violent conflict, environmental factors, and political oppression serves to displace unprecedented numbers of people. At the same time, Canada is taking in fewer and fewer refugees. Those that do gain access face excessive delays and barriers to entry.

Some of the federal government's refugee protection changes, including tightening up certain administrative timelines, are headed in the right direction. However, the Harper Conservatives have proceeded with these and other measures based on the false belief that fraudulent refugee claimants are gaining access to Canada through improper channels. Certainly, with the regular immigration stream backlogged to an extraordinary degree in recent years, a small number of refugee claimants could be considered to be so-called "queue-jumpers." Yet truly unfounded refugee claims are made by only a tiny fraction of the refugees who arrive. Surely we can do better job of addressing this minor issue, without punishing the vast majority of law-abiding refugee claimants.

Instead of making the necessary reforms to improve our system, the government has arbitrarily identified so-called "safe countries" from which refugee claims cannot be made. It has also unduly limited legitimate appeals of rejected claims. To make matters worse, new rules severely restrict the subsequent consideration of the humanitarian and compassionate reasons justifying Canada's protection of individuals who have failed to satisfy the very strict international definition of a refugee.

There are important reasons to retain the subsequent humane and compassionate determination. Ultimately, the most efficient and fairest approach would be to combine the two matters into one, with the same decision-maker determining a claimant's eligibility as a refugee

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<sup>4</sup> Global Trends Report 2014: World at War. UNHCR. June 18, 2015. <http://www.unhcr.org/558193896.html>

<sup>5</sup> Facts and Figures 2013 — Immigration overview: Permanent residents. Citizenship and Immigration Canada. December 2014. <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/resources/statistics/facts2013/index.asp>



and, if the claim was unsuccessful, also determining whether humane and compassionate reasons nevertheless justified the claimant's staying in Canada. The government, however, has chosen to do the opposite without sufficient public debate.

While ensuring greater efficiency and fairness in the refugee determination process within Canada, we must also vastly expand and improve our front-line overseas ability to process refugees. Our inadequate processing of Syrian refugees is truly shocking. Despite the already weak Harper Conservative promise to accept 10,000 Syrian refugees, Canada has accepted just 435 government-sponsored refugees and 871 privately-sponsored ones.

This is pathetic compared to the kind of effort Canada has made in the past, such as when we accepted over 60,000 Vietnamese refugees. It pales in comparison with Sweden's acceptance of at least 14,000 Syrian refugees to date, and completely fails to take into account the hundreds of thousands of others currently displaced across Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey. Canada should welcome 25,000 Syrian refugees to Canada, and must overhaul our refugee protection system, which is failing those in need around the world.

## **5. Migrant Workers**

*Canada has relied for decades on migrant workers to support and sustain our economy. In previous years, migrant workers in all occupations and sectors were allowed to stay and build a new life in Canada for themselves and their families. In recent years while migrant workers are recruited to work in almost all sectors and occupations only some are allowed to stay. The most recent change has further restricted the pathway to permanent residency for Caregivers and Domestic workers who arrived through what was known as the Live-in Caregiver Program until December 2014.*

**Question: What will you do to provide a pathway to permanent residency to all migrant workers, including those recruited through the Temporary Foreign Worker, International Mobility and Seasonal Agricultural Worker programs?**

When immigration is viewed through the lens of citizenship focusing on the successful integration of new Canadians, then the controversy over temporary foreign workers should surprise no one.

The Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP) entrenches the bizarre concept that Canada is prepared to expedite the entry of persons whose sole purpose is to work here, often without basic rights or protection, and develop absolutely no attachment to our country. Yet successful immigrants come with a wide range of skills that are equally valuable to both our society and economy. Ultimately, all immigrants deserve equal protection and an equal chance at successful integration as Canadian citizens.



Certainly, we need to streamline and accommodate the various provincial and territorial labour needs and employer demands, but this must be done within a coherent long-term national framework. This will require sustained federal and provincial collaboration and an efficient immigration entry system, one that is integrated with employment- and training-related programs and objectives.

Canada's immigration policy is not well served by a Temporary Foreign Worker Program that has grown out-of-control, nor by the complex, hasty changes to the TFWP announced in 2014. The federal government must eliminate the TFWP altogether, and move forward with policies that will address Canada's skilled labour shortage while offering foreign workers pathways to citizenship

## **6. Family reunification**

*Family reunification is a pillar of Canada's immigration program. Changes to legislation and policy in recent years combined with existing barriers are contributing to an increase in prolonged and sometimes indefinite delays in reunification. They include a narrow definition of family (example: non-biological children are not included), a category of "excluded family members, lower maximum age of a "dependent child" who can be sponsored, limitations on reunifying with parents and grandparents and more. Refugees and immigrants, particularly those from the Global South are subject to greater scrutiny and are among those most affected. Between 2010 and 2013, family reunification reduced by 15%<sup>6</sup>.*

### **Question: What will you do to remove barriers to family reunification and allow all categories of family members to reunite in Canada?**

The effective elimination of family reunification under the Harper Conservatives does not support new Canadians' ambitions to become full participants in Canadian society. The Green Party will reduce the recent policies that have placed barriers on family reunification. Instead, we need to expedite reunification, to ensure that new Canadians have the support they need to become full members of Canadian society.

## **7. Residents without Immigration Status**

*Canada has a large and growing number of residents without full immigration status. The growth in this population has resulted in part from gaps in immigration and refugee policies and practice and a massive growth in migrant workers, who also happen to be vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. Residents without immigrant status are a part of our economy and our communities. Most do not qualify for any form of government assistance, and support themselves and their families through their own efforts. They pay taxes without receiving the full benefit of legal resident status.*

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.



**Question: What is your position on the regularization of residents without full immigration status?**

All Canadians benefit when residents obtain full immigrant status. New Canadians are able to participate more fully to Canada's economic, social, cultural, and political life. At the same time, they are recognized for their contributions and entitled to the same protections and supports as other Canadians. The Green Party will establish a program to deal with the estimated 200 000 people living in Canada without official status, which will leads to full landed immigrant status for those who have become contributing members of Canadian society.

The Green Party is also concerned by recent changes to the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, which has fostered a culture of fear and discrimination. Overly cautious security officials have in some cases put the civil liberties of new Canadians at risk. Canada spends \$54 million every year to hold immigrants in detention facilities for noncriminal status offenses. Many are detained indefinitely, in clear violation of human rights and international law. Others are deported without due process. The Green Party will repeal changes that violate the basic principles of natural justice, including those that encourage rapid deportation, allow detainees to be held without charges, and impose jail time retroactively, targeting people who arrive by ship.

