



NDP Responds

Note: We have yet to release our full platform but here are the answers to date outlining our commitments.

ONTARIO COUNCIL OF AGENCIES SERVING IMMIGRANTS

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 Ontario¹. 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 NDP recognizes that immigration strengthens our society and our economy. But under the Conservatives, it's becoming harder for immigrants to come to Canada and succeed. Too many immigrants have been left stranded on the margins of our job market. An NDP government will work to restore fairness and transparency to our immigration system, make family reunification a priority, and restore the \$30 million in funding that the Conservatives failed to spend on foreign credential recognition programming. We will also work with the immigrant and refugee serving sector to remove unnecessary restrictions on supportive services and to expand the reach of settlement services.

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 market². 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?

It's clear helping new immigrants just isn't a priority for Stephen Harper. His government failed to spend nearly \$30 million that was set aside to help new Canadians get their credentials recognized. In fact,

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

² 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.

recognition of foreign credentials remains the number one barrier to obtaining employment in Canada, according to the government's own Panel on the Employment Challenges of New Canadians.

An NDP government will help newcomers to get their skills and credentials recognized, obtain Canadian experience, and achieve the remuneration their skills and education deserve. We will restore the \$30 million in funding for the Foreign Credential Recognition Program; offer grants to professional bodies to develop harmonized national standards with a single point of contact; expand the practice of orientation sessions in visa offices to educate and support potential immigrants; and create an awareness campaign for employers to encourage them to give immigrants their first opportunity.

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 year³. 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?

Under Stephen Harper and the Conservatives, it has become harder and harder for immigrants to come to Canada and succeed. They've created huge backlogs, increased fees, politicized the citizenship test, made children and seniors pass language tests, and created new categories of citizenship rights. An NDP government will work with stakeholders to restore fairness and transparency to our citizenship and immigration system and to undo harmful Conservative changes. We will repeal Conservative legislation that treats naturalized and dual citizens differently from other citizens. We will review the citizenship test. And we will remove the requirement for 14-17 year olds and 55-64 year olds to pass a language test in order to receive citizenship.

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 UNHCR⁴ - 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 programs⁵.

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?

In response to the worst humanitarian crisis since the Second World War, the Conservatives failed to step up on the world stage and to do our share in resettling refugees in Canada, even though

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

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

⁵ 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>

government officials were advising the government that they had the fiscal capacity to do much more. An NDP government will make sure that Canada is doing its fair share and welcoming more government assisted refugees. We will also provide more resources to speed up processing for privately sponsored refugees, so that sponsors are not waiting for up to five years to welcome refugees to Canada. Finally, we will abide by the ruling of the Federal Court and fully restore the Interim Federal Health Program.

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?

Instead of bringing workers to Canada as immigrants, with the possibility of becoming citizens, the Liberals and Conservatives preferred to bring them in as temporary workers, with fewer rights and far more vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. In fact, the Conservatives systematically removed pathways to citizenship for temporary workers.

The NDP believes that if you're good enough to work here, you're good enough to live here. That's why we will create and restore pathways to citizenship for all temporary workers in Canada.

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%⁶.

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

Family reunification is a priority for the NDP. Evidence shows that immigrants do better when they have the social support of family around them. Parents and grandparents can be an important source of moral and financial support. Reunification of children with parents is an internationally recognized human right.

⁶ Ibid.

But under Stephen Harper and the Conservatives, families are waiting longer and longer to be reunited – children and spouses are now waiting 2-3 years to be reunited, while parents and grandparents are waiting up to ten years. And that's when they can be reunited at all. The Conservatives have capped the number of parent and grandparent sponsorships and changed the rules to make family sponsorship a luxury out of the reach of many families. The NDP will work to make family reunification a priority for our immigration system. More details will be available in our platform.

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.

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

The NDP believes that non-status immigrants should have the opportunity to apply for permanent residence on humanitarian and compassionate grounds. That's why we called on the government to extend the grace period for Haitian refugee claimants earlier this year, after the Conservatives gave them only six months to apply for permanent residence before beginning deportations. We also called on the Conservatives to restore pathways to citizenship for Temporary Foreign Workers and to allow workers who had submitted an application for permanent residence to stay until their application received a decision when the Conservative government started enforcing the four-in, four-out rule earlier this year.