

# Ontario Election 2018

## Questions for Candidates

OCASI – Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants



Ontario Election Day is June 7, 2018

### Background

Immigrants are essential for Ontario's economy. They are needed to grow the workforce, stimulate innovation and keep Ontario competitive. But employment barriers prevent them from realizing their full potential and Canada as a whole from gaining the full benefits of immigration.

Ontario relies heavily on the labour of migrant workers. But they are the lowest paid in the province and the most vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. Most migrant workers cannot become permanent residents despite being such an integral and important part of the economy.

Indigenous people, racialized people and recent immigrants face the highest wage gap and are more likely to be living in poverty. The intersections of race and ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation and gender identity create further barriers to employment, housing and basic services for refugees and immigrants. Women and girls are disproportionately affected by violence at home, at work and in our communities.

Racialization of poverty, income inequality, discrimination and violence against women hurts us all and diminishes Ontario's potential.

This election let's call for a fair, equitable and inclusive Ontario – an [Ontario For All](#).

### Ontario facts and figures

3,852,145  
Immigrants

29.1%  
Percentage of the population

39,405  
Resettled refugees (Jan 2015 – Feb 2018)

120,235  
Migrant workers (2017)

Sources:  
[Census 2016, Statistics Canada](#)  
[IRCC Open Data Portal](#)

## I. Employment

Immigrants earn less than people born in Canada. On average, immigrants earned \$29,770 compared to \$36,300 earned by non-immigrants according to the 2016 census. The average income for recent immigrants is 37 per cent lower than the average income for non-immigrants. A disproportionate number of immigrants earn minimum wage, and are in precarious jobs.

Women in Ontario earn 29.3 per cent less than men. That number jumps to 43 per cent for Indigenous women, 38 per cent for women of colour and 34 per cent for immigrant women.

Job applicants with Asian names, including those with Canadian qualifications, were called for interviews 45 per cent to 60 per cent less times compared to Anglo-named applicants according to a recent study by Ryerson and University of Toronto.

We need concrete steps to reduce employment barriers for immigrants as well as all other Ontarians – for example an employment equity law which will ask employers to prioritize hiring qualified job applicants that face disproportionate employment barriers, such as people who are Indigenous, immigrants and refugees, racialized, people with disabilities and LGBTQ people.

We are calling for a [minimum wage that will keep people out of poverty](#).

### Questions

1. Will you introduce an Employment equity law for Ontario – with intentional implementation that delivers racial, gendered and other equity?
2. Will you support the \$15/hour minimum wage by Jan 1, 2019 and other changes that resulted from Bill 148?
3. Will you support self-employment and entrepreneurship for newcomers, racialized peoples and other under-represented communities, including by funding initiatives such as technology oriented hubs?

## II. Immigrant and Refugee settlement

Ontario has a proud tradition of welcoming refugees and supporting them to build a new home in our communities.

In the last few years, thousands of ordinary Ontarians gave generously of their time and resources to welcome and resettle refugees from Syria, Eritrea, Iraq and many other countries from where people are fleeing conflict and persecution.

Refugees and immigrants bring a variety of skills and experiences that benefit our economy, enrich our communities and make Ontario stronger and more vibrant.

Immigrant and refugee settlement services support newcomers to orient themselves, find jobs and housing, register in school, learn English or French and access services. These supports are essential for many to start building a new life in a new community.

The federal government provides the most funding for such supports. Ontario's investment is much smaller in comparison, but is very important to cover any gaps in services and to make sure all newcomers get the services they need.

### Questions

1. Will you increase base funding for immigrant settlement (NSP) programs?
2. Will you increase funding for English and French language training programs, especially for training delivered by community organizations in small, remote, rural and Northern Ontario communities?
3. Will you fund programs that support employment, including:
  - Bridge Training, which allows internationally-trained immigrants to put their skills to use?
  - Accelerated medical equivalency for internationally-trained physicians as well as additional residency seats?
  - More apprenticeship opportunities for immigrants who are [significantly under-represented](#) in such programs?
4. Will you invest in targeted employment education and training programs for immigrant and refugee women?

### III. Francophone Immigration

Francophone immigration is key to supporting the continued strength of Ontario's Francophone communities and carry on a French language tradition and culture. In 2012 Ontario set a 5 per cent annual target for francophone immigration to the province, while the federal annual target is 4 per cent.

Despite speaking one of Canada's two official languages, Francophone immigrants face significant barriers in getting jobs and accessing services in the primarily English-speaking province of Ontario.

We must ensure that Ontario gains the full benefit of Francophone immigration and that Francophone immigrants can thrive socially and economically. That will require targeted investment in French language supports and services and ensuring Francophone immigrants are employed at their full potential.

#### Questions

1. Will you support and fulfill Ontario's existing commitment of 5 per cent Francophone immigration?
2. How will you foster the building of strong Francophone immigrant communities in Ontario?
3. How will you support French language newcomer services?

### IV. Education

Started in 2017, Ontario is giving low-income post-secondary students grants to cover average tuition costs. Refugees and immigrants are over-represented among those who are low-income. They and all other low-income students will benefit, leading to long-term benefits for the entire province.

The Learning Opportunities Grant from Ontario Ministry of Education provides additional funding to Boards of Education to help students who are at greater risk of lower academic achievement. But as observed by [People for Education](#) funding changes have shifted the grant away from its original purpose of equity in education for students with socio-economic disadvantage.

#### Questions

1. Will you support free post-secondary education for low and middle income students?
2. Will you establish an Equity in Education Grant as part of a thorough overhaul of the Education Funding Formula?

## V. Women's Safety and Security

Violence Against Women affects everyone. It is not limited to any one community – it crosses all socio-economic backgrounds, races, ethnicities, cultures, abilities, sexual orientations, gender identities and occupations.

Every 6 days in Canada, at least one woman is killed by her partner (Canadian Women's Foundation). Out of every 1000 sexual assaults in Canada, only 33 are reported to police and 3 lead to conviction (YWCA Canada).

While all communities experience domestic violence at similar rates, research shows that immigrant and refugee women enduring domestic violence face particular barriers including social isolation, economic exclusion, language barriers and racism that make it even more difficult for them to get support.

Women with precarious immigration status (including refugees, migrant workers and women without immigration status) face the greatest barriers. They have limited access to police services due to fear of detention and deportation based on their precarious status.

### Questions

1. Will you implement an Access Without Fear policy so that people with precarious immigration status can access police and other provincial supports without fear of immigration reprisals?
2. Will you invest in violence against women programs targeted for refugee, immigrant women and women with precarious immigration status?
3. Will you invest in women-focused programs in community organizations for women refugees, immigrants, migrant workers and women with precarious immigration status?

## VI. Poverty Reduction

Indigenous peoples, immigrants and refugees and racialized peoples are over-represented in poverty and face disproportionate disadvantage in employment, housing, education, healthcare and more. Among them, women, people with disabilities, and LGBTQ people face the highest disadvantage.

Ontario has a significant number of people with precarious immigration status. Despite living and working here for many years, they do not have access to the basic services and supports that are available to all other Ontario residents. Their precarious status makes them more vulnerable to exploitation, including wage theft by employers.

Ontario's poverty reduction strategy does not mention racialized people, despite their over-representation in poverty rates and their explicit inclusion in the Poverty Reduction Act. Racialized people have settled and lived in Ontario for many generations, and face different and unique disadvantages because of racial discrimination.

Ontario needs targeted poverty reduction measures that explicitly include those who are most disadvantaged – including through income support, taxation benefits, housing, childcare, and more.

Community Benefits Agreements (CBA) can help to reduce poverty. CBA is a contract that sets out specific benefits for the community in any infrastructure or development project, and is developed through an inclusive community engagement process.

### Questions

1. Will you introduce a racial equity lens in the Ontario poverty reduction strategy – which would make it consistent with Ontario's Poverty Reduction Act?
2. Will you support Community Benefits Agreements?
3. Will you support affordable housing subsidies for all newcomers, including those with precarious immigration status?
4. What is your position on the current Guaranteed Basic Income pilots?

## VII. Anti-Racism

Indigenous peoples, peoples of African descent and other racialized peoples in Ontario continue to experience systemic racism and discrimination. They have poor outcomes in health and education and are over-represented in poverty, low-income statistics, policing and the criminal justice system.

Often racism and religious hatred have combined, resulting in growing Islamophobia. Hate crimes against Muslims rose by 60 per cent in Canada in 2015 according to Statistics Canada. 48 per cent of hate crimes reported to police were motivated by hatred of race or ethnicity. The rate is believed to be much higher as many crimes are not reported to the police.

Systemic racism impacts generation after generation and affects social, economic and political opportunities for racialized people and communities – costing all of us and all of Ontario. Hate crimes cause deep harm to individuals, affect entire communities, and they impact the entire province.

In 2017 Ontario passed an Anti-Racism Act, set up an Anti-Racism Directorate (ARD), and launched a Black Youth Action Plan and a three-year Anti-Racism Strategic Plan.

### Questions

1. What will you do to address the escalation of racial and hate attacks in Ontario?
2. How will you address systemic racism – for example in employment, housing, education and access to services?
3. How will you support and continue to strengthen the Anti-Racism Directorate, the Black Youth Action Plan and the Anti-Racism Strategic Plan, including the collection of disaggregated data to measure investment and outcomes for racialized Ontarians?
4. Will you abolish all arbitrary street checks, require the issuing of receipts (that allow for ethno-racial and other relevant self-identification) for all police contact and engagement with members of civil society, and purge historical databases of information collected through “carding”?
5. Will you implement the [Independent Police Oversight Review \(2017\)](#) recommendations to strengthen police oversight, while addressing the limitations of Justice Tulloch’s recommendations?

## VIII. Healthcare

Over 500,000 people are denied health coverage in Ontario due to their immigration status. Lack of healthcare coverage has resulted in residents delaying or ignoring healthcare needs. People have died as a result and some have ended up facing long-term impacts to their health and thus higher costs.

Refugees, recent immigrants and migrant workers face ongoing challenges in access to healthcare because of poverty or low-income, language barriers, lack of culturally appropriate services and geography. There is a growing need for specialized trauma care for refugees, treatment for post-traumatic stress disorder and the effects of prolonged stay in refugee camps.

An estimated two to three million people in Ontario cannot afford dental care. Many end up in emergency rooms. There can be long-term impact on overall health for unattended oral health issues.

### Questions

1. Will you develop a comprehensive policy that will ensure access to [OHIP for all](#) residents, regardless of immigration status, including ending the three-month wait for OHIP?
2. What is your plan to provide comprehensive oral healthcare for all residents?
3. Will you invest in equitable access to healthcare for refugees and newcomers including culturally appropriate trauma care, mental health and addiction services and interpretation services?