

# A FAIR AND EQUITABLE ONTARIO

Ontario Election 2022 – The Issues

---

Thursday June 2, 2022 is election day in Ontario.

OCASI calls on the next government to commit to a fair and equitable Ontario for everyone, where refugees, immigrants and migrants can thrive.

This brief guide lists the main concerns for refugees, immigrants and migrants and proposes solutions. Between now and election day, ask candidates what they will do to support these solutions.

Are you on social media? Share our solutions or ask questions of candidates - #elxn2022.

---

## 1. Decent Work For All

### a. A representative workforce

- Ontario is home to thousands of internationally educated health professionals. Yet across Canada nearly 50% are either unemployed or underemployed.
- Internationally educated professionals and tradespeople in almost every sector face similar barriers to getting decent work in their field.
- Removing these barriers will address a devastating staff crisis in the healthcare sector, and skilled labour shortages in other sectors. It will help Ontarians recover and get back to work. It will result in decent work for thousands of people.

The solution: Invest in inclusive, employment pathways and programs that remove systemic barriers to licensure and accreditation, and gets people employed in decent work consistent with their training and experience.

### b. Economic empowerment

- Indigenous, racialized and immigrant communities in Canada report more part-time and unstable employment experiences, often with lower wages, lack of benefits, and job insecurity.
- Ontario's minimum wage is below the living wage (actual cost of living) in almost every region in the province. In November 2021 the living wage was \$16.30 in Thunder Bay; it was \$22.08 in Toronto. ([Living wage by region.](#))
- 57% of all workers and 78% of low-wage workers do not have access to any paid sick days. Racialized and immigrant workers are less likely to have access to paid sick days.

- Wages in the non-profit sector are approximately 29 per cent lower than the Canadian average. Bill 124 by the Ontario government froze wages in publicly funded sectors – sectors where racialized and immigrant women are highly represented and are often among the lowest paid workers.

The solution:

- Introduce and implement representative hiring legislation to remove systemic employment barriers for Indigenous peoples, peoples of colour, women, persons with (dis)abilities, LGBTQ community members and immigrants and refugees.
- Bring the minimum wage up to a [living wage](#);<sup>1</sup>
- Eliminate Bill 124.
- Implement 10 permanent employer-paid sick days for all workers.
- Raise employment standards protections and occupational health and safety provisions, and extend legal protections to all workers including gig workers.
- End discrimination against workers with disabilities.
- Bring stronger legal protection and stronger enforcement to protect migrant workers' rights.

#### c. Employment services

- Ontario has a basic responsibility to provide job seekers with employment services and supports to find and retain decent work.
- As a result of Employment Ontario transformation, employment services in Ontario are privatized and in the hands of companies driven by a profit motive. Before that, they were delivered by nonprofits who are experienced in helping job seekers to navigate labour market barriers. Services will be downsized from 500 delivery organizations across Ontario to 15.
- The new model does not adequately respond to the specific employment barriers immigrants and refugees.
- Women face persistent inequalities, including in the labour market. These inequalities are compounded for Indigenous, Black, racialized, and refugee and immigrant women. Yet women are not included in the groups recognized as having distinct employment needs (current designated groups are: youth, newcomers, Francophone, Indigenous, and Persons with Disabilities).
- Employment services for people on social assistance are contracted out. Low income people on social assistance, including people with disabilities, could be pushed into jobs even if they cannot do them.

---

<sup>1</sup> The living wage reflects what people need to earn to cover the actual costs of living in their community. In November 2021 the living wage was \$16.30 in Thunder Bay; it was \$22.08 in Toronto.

The solution:

- Stop Employment Ontario transformation until the pilot programs already implemented are studied, the findings are made public, and clients are consulted.
- Designate women as a group with distinct employment service needs and ensure they receive needed supports.

d. Immigration status

- Ontario has thousands of migrant workers and international students, and thousands of people without immigration status, the largest numbers in Canada.
- Immigration status is a federal responsibility, but the Ontario government can lead the call for a broad-based regularization program and call for fair and inclusive pathways to permanent residence for migrant workers and international students.
- Migrant workers, international students and people without immigration status cannot access many provincial services. Their rights as workers are not adequately protected.

The solution:

- Leverage the Ontario Immigrant Nominee Program (OINP) to expand pathway to permanent residents for workers in all sectors, and across all occupations.
- Make stronger rules and better enforcement to protect the rights of migrant workers and those on temporary work permits.
- Make provincial services available to all residents regardless of immigration status.

---

## 2. Healthcare For All

- An estimated 500,000+ people are excluded from OHIP coverage because of residency requirements or immigration status.
- With the onset of the pandemic, Ontario suspended the three-month residency requirement for OHIP.
- COVID-19 services were provided for residents who don't meet the criteria for OHIP coverage – including people with precarious immigration status.
- Healthcare is a human right and must be provided to all who need it.

The solution: Permanently eliminate the residency requirement for OHIP, and provide full healthcare for all residents regardless of immigration status.

---

### 3. Housing For All

- Everyone deserves safe, secure, affordable, and well-maintained housing.
- More than 6 out of 10 recent immigrant householders are renters<sup>2</sup> and the housing crisis is taking a heavy toll on refugees and immigrants.
- The immigrant and refugee serving sector, and the broader non-profit sector are important partners for government to provide efficient, reliable and cost-effective affordable rental housing. They are more cost-effective compared to private developers as they are not driven by profit.
- Recent immigrants and refugees, particularly women and gender diverse people, face many systemic barriers in the rental housing market, and often face discrimination from landlords.
- Immigration status barriers often exclude people with precarious immigration status from housing programs and basic protections.
- Rental rates are more than 50% in Black communities. Black people may be at a higher risk of eviction in Toronto.<sup>3</sup>

The solution:

- Create more safe and affordable housing, appropriate for different family types, living situations, women and gender diverse people, and people with disabilities.
- Remove all immigration status barriers to housing programs, services and supports.
- Make targeted investments to address housing inequities faced by disadvantaged communities, including Black, Indigenous and people of colour communities, and recent refugees and immigrants.
- New affordable housing developed with public funds must remain affordable over the long-term; and prioritize non-profit community housing over for-profit projects by private developers.
- Provide legal supports for tenants by making Landlord and Tenant Board hearings more accessible, especially for refugees and immigrants and others who face systemic barriers to full and informed participation, and by restoring Legal Aid funding to provide access to justice for low-income residents.
- Support residents to maintain housing including stronger protection for tenants, and support measures for those facing income instability, and systemic changes and interventions to address racial and immigration status discrimination and bias.

---

<sup>2</sup> 'We can't wait: Preserving our affordable rental housing in Ontario'. Advocacy Centre for Tenants in Ontario. November 2019.

<sup>3</sup> Leon, Scott and James Iveniuk. 'Forced out: Evictions, race and poverty in Toronto'. Wellesley Institute. August 2020.

---

#### 4. End Systemic Racism, Racism and Xenophobia

- Ontario reported the biggest increase in hate crimes targeting race or ethnicity in Canada in 2020. Racism, Islamophobia and xenophobia are pervasive. They affect access to the labour market, education, housing, justice, and safety in communities.<sup>4</sup>
- Systemic racism exists in Ontario, and produces inequitable outcomes in health, employment, justice, education and life chances for Indigenous, Black and racialized groups.<sup>5</sup>
- The five-year Ontario Anti-Racism strategy is under review. Dismantling systemic racism and addressing racism and xenophobia requires a long-term commitment.

The solution:

- Make sufficient, stable and sustained investments in the Anti-Racism Directorate, Anti-Racism strategy and the Ontario Human Rights Commission and Tribunal.
- Support affected communities to build capacity and leadership, and work with civil society groups to address systemic racism, racism, xenophobia and hate.
- Permanently expand disaggregated data collection to the health sector.
- Introduce representative workforce legislation.

---

#### 5. Invest in Women

- Violence against women and girls was already at frighteningly high levels, and increased by up to 20% during the pandemic. Indigenous, racialized and immigrant and refugee women were deeply impacted by gender-based violence during the pandemic.
- Women's organizations and programs have been underfunded for many years, and don't have stable and ongoing funding. Programs for Black and racialized women are not equitably funded. Existing inequities grew during the pandemic.<sup>6</sup>

The solution:

- Fully invest in a coordinated, adequately-funded and community-led provincial strategy to end gender-based violence.

---

<sup>4</sup> An external review of the Ontario public service found systemic anti-Black racism within the organization. A racialized Muslim family was deliberately struck and killed on a public sidewalk in an Ontario community.

<sup>5</sup> Tracking COVID-19 through race-based data. Wellesley Institute and Ontario Health. March 2022.

<sup>6</sup> 'Leading the Settlement SHEcovery: Advancing an intersectional pandemic recovery by investing in women-serving-women-led organizations in Ontario's refugee-and-immigrant-serving sector'. OCASI. 2021.

- Increase Legal Aid funding for survivors and criminalized survivors of violence, and in family law.
- Invest in multi-year, sustainable, core funding for community-based, non-profit, and grassroots organizations for and by women and gender diverse people, including Indigenous-led and Black-led organizations which work with diverse and vulnerable women and girls who are survivors of violence.

---

## 6. Invest in the non-profit immigrant and refugee serving sector

- The immigrant and refugee-serving sector is part of Ontario’s non-profit sector – a \$50 billion economic driver that collectively employs one million people.<sup>7</sup> The sector is a natural partner in revitalizing the economy and building social cohesion, but it had massive economic losses as a result of the pandemic.
- Immigration is set to deliver billions in economic benefits to the Ontario’s economy.<sup>8</sup> But these gains can be fully realized only if systemic barriers to credentials and licensing are removed, and immigrants are hired in jobs consistent with their skills and experience. Nonprofit immigrant and refugee serving organizations are a part of the solution.
- The immigrant and refugee serving sector provides immigrant and refugee settlement and integration services, language training, interpreter services and helps to build communities where everyone is welcome and feels safe. Without sufficient and stable funding, these services will be at risk. Ontario funding for language interpreter services was cut, and was only partially restored.

The solution:

- Include the sector in economic policy including public capital investment, social procurement and community benefits agreements
- Increase operational investments in immigrant and refugee settlement and integration services, women’s organizations, and language interpreter services to unlock and swiftly integrate the economic potential of newcomers.
- Increase funding for women’s organizations, including women’s centres and shelters and language interpretation services, to support women facing multiple systemic barriers in employment, income support, housing, access to childcare, unsafe work, and violence.

[Updated 26/05/2022]

---

<sup>7</sup> ‘Stabilizing Ontario’s nonprofit sector to rebuild the economy and communities post COVID-19’. Ontario Nonprofit Network. April 2020.

<sup>8</sup> Desormeaux, Marc. ‘Immigration Will Lift Quebec, Ontario Economies, Even During a Pandemic’. Scotiabank. March 2021.