



Briefing Note:

Regularization of pathways to immigration – ‘Status for All’

September 8, 2022

ISSUE

Canada’s immigration system has become increasingly based on temporary programs (with limited and precarious rights) where many residents struggle to extend short-term permits, with processes that are difficult to navigate and rife with unfair or arbitrary policies. This results in an increasing number of extremely vulnerable people with no immigration status in Canada whose health, safety and livelihood suffers (due to lack of access to key services such as health, police, and education, often exploitative precarious work situations, insecure housing, fear of deportation, etc.). To date, there are over 500,000 people, including families, living in Canada without any valid immigration permits¹.

OPPORTUNITY

Prime Minister Trudeau has asked the Immigration Minister to “explore ways of regularizing status for undocumented workers” (people without a valid permit to live in Canada). The Federal Minister Sean Fraser has been doing consultations during August with an expected proposal due end of September (2022).

[Canadian Council for Refugees](#) (CCR) and the [Migrant Rights Network](#) (MRN) are both leading advocacy campaigns based on #StatusForAll, urging organizations to write letters to Prime Minister Trudeau and Immigration Minister Sean Fraser. They are calling the new regularization program to comprehensively provide permanent status to all undocumented people in the country without exception as well as ensure that all low-wage migrants in Canada have immediate access to permanent residency.

This issue falls within our own organizational [advocacy priority of fair access to immigration](#).

OUR POSITION (aligned with CCR and MRN)

Access Alliance is advocating for a comprehensive, transparent, and equitable regularization program to provide a pathway to permanent residence status for all people with precarious/undocumented immigration status in Canada, including all migrant workers and failed claimants. This should include a clear and simple application process, free of cost, which can be easily completed without dependency on anyone else (e.g. immigration advisors, employers, etc.). In addition, there should be a moratorium on deportations and detentions while people are attempting to regularize their status.

RATIONALE

Many of the clients who access services at Access Alliance come with medical, social and economic needs that directly relate to their precarious immigration status. The most pressing examples are their (i) ineligibility to receive basic access to healthcare and (ii) greater likelihood to take on precarious

¹ Hershkowitz, M. G. Hudson, and H. Bauder. 2021. “Rescaling the Sanctuary City: Police and Non-Status Migrants in Ontario, Canada.” *International Migration*. 59(1): 38-57

work (i.e. unstable, unsafe, exploitative, low paying) which is linked to a higher risk of poverty, poor health outcomes, etc.

- (i) **Access Alliance is challenged by the demand for health services in particular for undocumented people here in Toronto, who are otherwise excluded from receiving mainstream services and basic healthcare. An inclusive comprehensive regularization plan would be critically important to open up service access to all, taking the pressure off organizations such as ours.** The percentage of undocumented clients visiting our centres has seen a steady increase over the past five years (from 19.4% in 2017-18 to 27.7% in 2021-22²). Other groups without secure immigration status (e.g. refugee claimants, students, etc.) also face challenges in accessing health care due to the 3-month wait period for OHIP. Lastly, throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and during a public safety crisis, our organization took on the important task of helping to ensure all people living in underserved communities have access to testing and vaccinations. As we learned throughout the pandemic, when the health and wellbeing of these underserved populations is not ensured, this will eventually compromise the health of everyone.
- (ii) **A large proportion of Access Alliance clients are living in poverty (i.e. below the Low-Income Cut Off), often linked to their inability to integrate fully into the Canadian labour market. This is reflective of newcomer and immigrant populations more broadly in Canada.** The client experiences we hear on a daily basis are complex and interconnected, linking to multiple determinants of health including their employment status. For example, *“a 22 year-old uninsured male from Portugal, working in construction, who only comes in when he’s had a serious injury and unable to be compliant with treatments, as he is not able to take time off from his 7 am -7 pm work.”*³ Regularization of undocumented people would not only increase labour rights for those experiencing precarious or exploitative work conditions, but would help to address labour shortages and bring people out of the shadow economy. In addition, “while undocumented residents already contribute to the tax base through consumer purchases, regularization could mean an extra \$1 billion remitted in income tax, as well as EI and CPP contributions.”⁴
- (iii) **Lastly, as an organization our commitment is identify and address systemic barriers that reduce health outcomes for people who are made vulnerable by our societal systems (such as immigration). This extends to ALL people living in Canada.** They regularly experience discrimination based on their immigration status (along with race, gender, etc.) when seeking

² Access Alliance Multicultural Health and Community Services. (2022). Annual Client Activity Report 2021-2022. Toronto.

³ Bala, V. (2022). A Day in the Life: Dr. Vinchala Bala, Access Alliance CHC; Mid West Toronto Ontario Health Team. <https://www.midwesttorontoht.ca/a-day-in-the-life-may-2022>

⁴ Syed Hussan in interview with Mojtehdzadeh, S. & Keung, N. (2022, September 3). A path to permanent residency. *Toronto Star*. <https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2022/09/02/canada-developing-path-to-permanent-residency-for-undocumented-workers.html>



employment, housing, as well as other services and supports that are available to the general public. Fear of deportation or detention are an every-day experience. All of these factors have negative implications for physical and mental health. The federal government has consistently promoted Canada as a country of refuge to those fleeing persecution, terror and war and generally welcoming of immigrants and refugees – it must carry through on that commitment. By implementing a comprehensive program instead of a partial or exclusionary one, can help all residents of Canada to be able to contribute fully to society and lead healthy dignified lives, and is a major step towards Canada becoming a just, inclusive society for all.

For more information, please read the Migrant Rights Network Policy Submission [here](#).