

## **OCASI – Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants submission to Minister of Finance – Ontario 2019 Pre-Budget Consultations**

International talent attraction and integration through immigration is among Ontario’s top advantages. Immigrants and refugees make significant economic, social and cultural contributions, and help to sustain stable communities.

Industry leaders agree immigration and the diversity it brings gives Ontario a competitive economic edge. Immigration supports population growth in small and medium communities and helps fill jobs.

The following recommendations are mindful of the fiscal challenges the Ontario government has outlined.

### **1. Build Ontario’s prosperity by supporting newcomers to become established more quickly, through investment in newcomer settlement services, including employment based language training and Francophone newcomer settlement services.**

Investment in newcomer settlement services and language training is good value for money. Services provided by community-based organizations are cost effective and deliver good return on investment. The organizations are a bridge between newcomer communities, public institutions and the private sector.

Francophone organizations support French-speaking newcomers to become established economically, socially and culturally through supporting and strengthening Francophone community connections.

### **2. Build Ontario’s prosperity by investing in employment services and entrepreneurship for newcomers and Bridging programs for skilled immigrants; and support the Ontario Fairness Commissioner’s work to cut red tape in credentials recognition.**

The immigrant employment rate in Ontario is growing, including for recent immigrants<sup>1</sup>. This is good news. But Canada loses upto an estimated \$17.1 billion every year

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<sup>1</sup> Lahouaria Yssaad, Lahouaria and Fields, Andrew. “The Canadian Immigrant Labour Market: Recent Trends from 2006 to 2017”. December 24, 2018. Statistics Canada.

because immigrants are employed below their skill level<sup>2</sup>. Ontario likely has the biggest share of lost earnings. Employment services, especially Bridging programs are effective in ensuring immigrant professionals can be employed in jobs consistent with their skills and education.

Immigrants face ongoing challenges in the long and costly process to have international credentials recognized. The Office of the Fairness Commissioner has been effective in cutting red tape and bringing more transparency and fairness to credentials recognition by regulatory bodies.

**3. Invest in a poverty reduction strategy for Ontario with targeted benefits to support those who are most affected, including:**

- fair wages, strong worker protection and fair access to good jobs;
- affordable childcare;
- affordable housing and social housing;
- and collect disaggregated data to track impact across affected groups with the goal of reducing racial and other inequities.

Ontario's poverty reduction strategy is necessary to help people make ends meet and get ahead.

Certain groups experience disproportionately high levels of poverty, primarily as a result of systemic barriers<sup>3</sup>. One in two children of immigrants, one in four racialized children, and one in three Indigenous children in Toronto live in poverty<sup>4</sup>. The proposed recommendations can be targeted to ensure that those who are over-represented in poverty too can benefit equitably from the strategy.

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<sup>2</sup> El-Assal, Kareem and Fields, Daniel. "450,000 Immigrants Annually? Integration Is Imperative to Growth". 2017. Conference Board of Canada.

<sup>3</sup> Poverty Trends 2018. Citizens for Public Justice.

<sup>4</sup> 2018 Toronto Child and Family Poverty Report: Municipal Election Edition. Social Planning Toronto.