

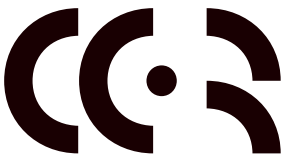
Canadian Council
for Refugees

Conseil canadien
pour les réfugiés

-
- Toronto
November 24-26

Towards equity and anti-racism
in Canada's immigration system

Fall 2022 Consultation Report



Introduction

The Fall 2022 Consultation took place in Toronto, from November 24-26, on the theme **Towards equity and anti-racism in Canada's immigration system**. The last few years have forced us to challenge our sense of the Canadian identity, especially when it comes to welcoming resettled refugees, refugee claimants, migrant workers, marginalized newcomers. Communities have called for efforts to address systemic barriers and inequities present at all levels of society as well as government policy, programs, and services.

Participants included newcomers, Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) representatives, government representatives and human rights defenders from all over Canada and abroad.

375 attendees

3 plenaries

15 workshops

5 caucuses

33 resource persons

46 moderators/facilitators

29 volunteers

Highlights

After two years of virtual events, this Fall 2022 edition was our first in-person consultation since 2019! The consultation represents a crucial opportunity to create or develop relationships that later allow for more efficiency in our work.

Our keynote speaker, Debbie Douglas, Executive Director of OCASI, opened the event by naming and deconstructing the very real ways racism and discrimination continue to prevail in our immigration systems. Debbie called for immediate and purposeful action—we cannot make transformative change without *explicitly* challenging the status quo.

The second plenary; CCR in a new era, featured the CCR's President and Vice-President, who spoke about the CCR's Strategic Plan and new leadership model, as well as three staff members who explained their role within the CCR. Attendees also learned about how to get more involved as we prepare for a transition.

During the Closing Plenary, our departing Executive Director, Janet Dench shared remarks about her time at the CCR and what the work and community means to her. We thanked her for her remarkable legacy! The Annual General Meeting was also a time to thank outgoing Executive members and Working Group chairs, and welcome those newly elected to leadership positions.

This consultation provided opportunities for dialogue between representatives of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and government officials from Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB), and Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA). This was particularly the case during the following workshops: *Dialogue with the government on refugee claimant issues*, *Mental health and the realities of detention*, and *Racial equity in immigration and refugee systems*.

The various sessions culminated in the identification of priority issues and action items for the upcoming year, detailed on pages 3-6 of this report.

Workshop insights

Priorities, ideas and/or recommendations for advocacy were identified in each session, reflecting the issues emerging during consultation discussions.

Improving how we support people in their immigration & refugee processes

- Participants agreed there was a need for a nationalized training program.
- We should integrate a mandatory policy into our organizations to further encourage staff to learn more and keep updated on the changing immigration regulations and policies.
- Improvements must be made to manage referral system: online resource centre, clear protocols, quality assurance, and more. Some issues will be addressed in the Quality of Service project.

Mental health and the realities of detention

- Avoiding detention needs to be at the forefront of any measures to reduce impacts on mental health.
- Work to be done on Community Liaison Officer role within CBSA, to build meaningful connections with community sector that can avoid detention in first place or work quickly to find alternatives.
- For members: if frontline or direct experience with detention, consider joining CCR's ad hoc committee on detention issues.

Mitigating the housing crisis in Canada

- Organizations should share the solutions that have been implemented at provincial or municipal level.
- Create a campaign advocating for access to housing (informing and raising awareness).

Sponsor capacity: Moving towards solutions

- Need to respond to challenge faced by sponsors to locate tools and assess and adapt them to their own needs.
- Regular, organized networking opportunities are identified as a capacity-enhancing measure.

Delays, discrepancies, and differences in family reunification

- Advocate for the implementation of a program to issue visas and open work permits to spouses, partners, grandparents, and dependent children (sponsored family members) abroad while they wait for the processing of their permanent residency application.
- We should eliminate minimum income requirements for the sponsors.
- Transparency is important: report aggregate data from Africa and Mideast on the number of applications being reviewed, approved, denied, per cent of approval rate, processing times, etc.

Migrant youth as agents of change

- Programs for youth need to focus on empowerment and shouldn't be based on immigration status.
- Anti-racism is crucial when considering approaches to working with migrant youth and giving them more access to power.

Dialogue with government: refugee claimant issues

- Communications and transparency with processes must be improved by both CBSA and IRCC.
- Need for follow up with IRCC to provide concise and clear information to health care providers and school boards.
- Need for follow up with CBSA to ensure that intersecting factors in client's identity do not automatically flag a client as a risk when implementing the One Touch Program.

The climate emergency and forced displacement

- Need to develop policy and strategy across a wide area of activities (from education to advocacy, funding and supporting existing campaigns).
- Apply intersectional lens to all efforts/actions/discussions.
- Include Global South voices in all advocacy efforts.
- There is interest to set up a network to continue discussion.

Demystifying the removal process

- Connecting clients that apply for refugee status with the agencies that can provide support for the full refugee process, such as legal support, settlement services and advocacy.
- Making sure that clients understand removal order will be signed and frozen during refugee process.
- Encouraging organizations to provide support to clients throughout the entire process.
- Connecting clients with the human rights advocates that will support them.

Capturing the best of Canada's resettlement models

- Continue our advocacy for an equitable, global, inclusive resettlement program, with efficient and fair processing, more transparency, and equitable access to services and benefits.
- Identify innovations from special programs and emergency responses (e.g. biometrics upon entry, video interviews, speedy security clearances) but restore processes and services lost (e.g. Social Insurance Number (SIN) registration at Port of entry (POE), in-person services.).

Transforming our organizations to be anti-racist

- Organize and make space for more discussions about anti-racism: the topic should be addressed during each consultation and Working Group meeting.
- Train CCR member organizations on anti-racism and anti-oppression.
- Advocate for anti-racism, racial equity and justice to make transformational change at the political level with the government and other key actors.
- Reflect on how to be actively anti-racist in the sector and within the CCR: review leadership and the representation of people with lived experience at the CCR.

Who's in, who's out: border eligibility

- We should encourage clients to get legal representation at the border, as it is hard to secure legal support in that situation.
- Share more detailed information about border eligibility with members.

Afghan refugees: humanizing the crisis

- Ensure there is sufficient funding for resettlement services and programs crucial to the dignified welcome and integration of Afghan refugees in Canadian communities, particularly for mental health.
- Ensure that a consultative mechanism is in place that allows the voices and experiences of Afghan refugees to directly influence Canada's refugee policies towards Afghanistan.

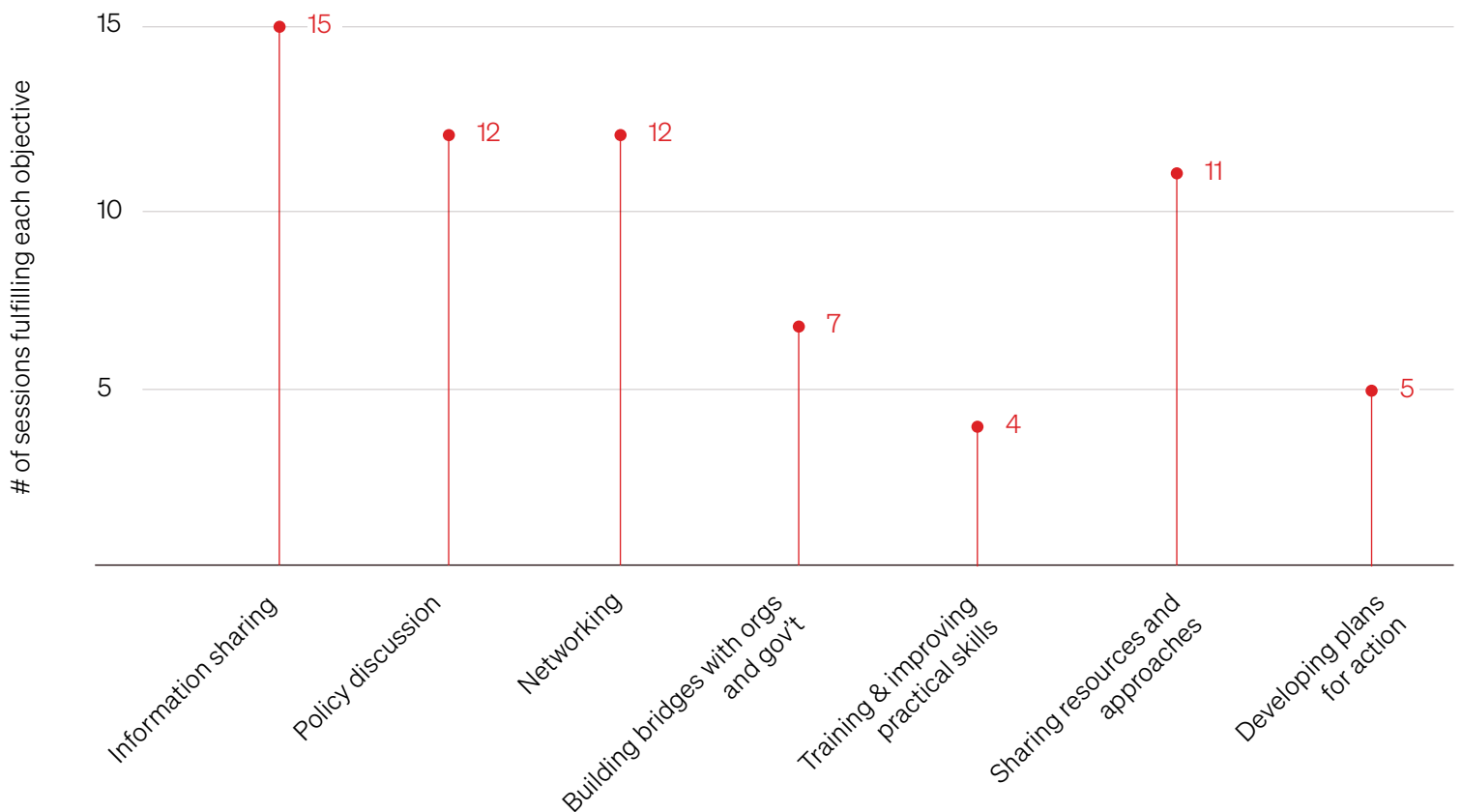
Racial equity in immigration and refugee systems

- Participants were invited to attend the next CCR meeting on our Anti-Racism project.
- For organizations: hold meetings about priority issues in the next 6 months.
- Priorities identified include: inequities in case processing delays, inequities in government response to emergencies, migrant workers and precarious status, developing government knowledge/sensitivity to anti-oppression and the realities of people with lived experience.

Other workshops included:

- Border injustice

The sessions achieved a range of objectives:



Caucus: Youth Network

- Create programs for newcomer youth to get involved, provide more outreach for existing programs.
- Give more leadership positions to Black, Indigenous and People of Colour (BIPOC) individuals in your organization and provide safe spaces for newcomer youth that are youth-led.
- Increase ease of networking/access to information for youth (ex. a mobile application/website listing all programs for youth).
- Advocate for changes in the job application process that employers use (preference for Canadian references, Canadian work experience, permanent address – can be discriminatory to newcomers).

Caucus: Supporting people in removal proceedings

- Need to find, per province, a member that can take on the translation and contextualization of the new resource on removals.
- Look into funding to adapt the resource and to share it with members.

Caucus: End Exploitation- Open Work Permits for Migrant Workers NOW

- Existing protection tools, such as the Open work permit for vulnerable workers (OWPVW) and Temporary resident permit (TRP), are only band-aid solutions. They are complex and limited in scope and do not address the prevention of exploitation.
- There is broad support for the call demanding that the government of Canada abolish the employer-specific work permit system, at a very minimum. The ultimate policy call is to grant permanent residence on arrival to all migrant workers.

Caucus: African Refugee Network

- Attendees started compilation of priorities for the Anti-Racism Project and listed members interested in contributing to the project.
- Advocate to recognize the International Decade for People of African Descent.
- Address the issue of exclusion of mental health aspects including expressive art therapy from the Interim Federal Health (IFH) coverage.
- Request information on existing visa offices, new visa offices, and any increase of visa officers.

Caucus: Broadening options for family reunification for refugees

- Canada's Multiculturalism Act and the diversity and inclusion paradigms make it imperative for Canada to adopt an understanding and definition of "family" and "family members" that goes beyond the Eurocentric concepts of nuclear family. A first step could include, for example, increasing the age of dependent children (currently under 22).
- Canada could explore a family reunification pathway that blends refugee and family-class immigration, while also leading to good economic outcomes. Within Canada's existing economic pathways, there may be opportunities to lobby provincial governments for more flexibility in provincial nominee programs to give points for family connections.

Outcomes

The Working Groups met twice during the Consultation. Each group discussed priority issues, elected Co-Chairs and voted on the action items below.

- A motion to approve a [joint resolution regarding the Child Welfare survivors](#) was passed at the meetings.

Immigration and Settlement

Action items for the CCR include:

- Submission to the House of Commons re. legislative amendment on human trafficking.
- Advocate to provinces to increase Housing Shelter Allowance.

Action items for members include:

- Increase youth engagement in organizations, include youth in positions of leadership and encourage them to join the CCR Youth Network.
- Support and endorse the Open Work Permit campaign.

Inland Protection

Action items for the CCR include:

- Advocate for CBSA to provide interpreters in removals interviews.
- Discuss the removals report with CBSA, highlighting recommendations in line with CCR resolutions.
- Advocate that CBSA always transfer eligibility interviews to other provinces upon request of the claimant.

Action items for members include:

- Share removals resource with people in the process being supported by your agency.
- Collaborate to have removals resource translated and adapted to different regions.
- Reach out to local Member of Parliament (MP) and provincial government representative about the CCR's regularization campaign.

Overseas Protection and Resettlement

Action items for the CCR include:

- Advocate with IRCC for integrated and community approach to address mental health.
- Advocate with IRCC to establish clear service standards for processing of PSR cases, establish communications benchmarks for stages in processing, and publish statistics on applications in process.
- Bring to the attention of government that refugees in South Africa are systemically rejected based on untenable ground.

Action items for members include:

- Send concrete examples to CCR about particularly compelling cases in South Africa that were rejected, especially if refugees had a refugee status determination from South Africa.
- Write to or meet with MPs to get quicker action on the issue of refusals in South Africa.

Evaluation results

Evaluation forms were handed out when the event ended, and sent by email in a follow-up with participants.



forms filled out in French



forms filled out in English



95%

agreed the Consultation was well organized



96%

agreed the overall program was very strong



91%

said it helped them acquire useful knowledge & contacts



71%

stated the event helped increase their capacity to address racism



89%

felt the event raised awareness of barriers to full participation in society



89%

agreed the Consultation provided opportunities to participate



96%

agreed participants and panelists were diverse



91%

would attend the event again / recommend it to others

Comments from participants:

"I'm very new to the sector [...]. This event was helpful to see where people have come from and what could be ahead"

"Frankly, the best of the many consultations I've participated in since 2017"

"Workshops and conversations with other participants were especially helpful"

"Thank you for helping all of us build contacts and relationships and be moved to be part of this amazing meaningful movement for change"

"This is always an excellent forum, especially for government officials - many of whom are passionate about refugee protection issues, while recognizing that their role is very different from that of refugee advocates"

Acknowledgements

The Canadian Council for Refugees gratefully acknowledges financial support from the College of Immigration and Citizenship Consultants and the Sisters of St Joseph of Toronto.



As well as our workshop sponsors:

Improving how we support people in their immigration & refugee processes



Who's in, who's out: Border eligibility



The workshops were organized by many active and diligent volunteers across Canada, and we are grateful for their contribution. We also thank the panellists and moderators, on whom the Consultation's success depends!

We wish to thank the members of the Local Organizing Committee for their commitment, time, and energy:

- Barbara Treviranus
- Maggie Perzyna
- Jenn McIntyre
- Loly Rico
- Anne Woolger
- Varka Kalaydzhieva
- Jyoti Singh

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- COSTI – Yasmine Dossal
- FCJ Refugee Centre – Loly Rico
- Sisters of St. Joseph of Toronto – Varka Kalaydzhieva

Finally, our gratitude goes to the local volunteers, whose contribution is invaluable and whose goodwill and devotion we truly appreciate.