



Turning the tide on stigmatization of Black and other racialized newcomers in public opinion

*This is one of five issue papers outlining priority issues for advocacy identified by the CCR's **Anti-Racism project**. The identification of priorities has been informed by member organizations and consultation with people with lived experiences, particularly those of African descent.*

Summary of the issue

Black and other racialized refugees and refugee claimants suffer the impacts of deep-seated stigmatization, affecting all their experiences in Canada. Negative perceptions rooted in racism, particularly anti-Black racism, inform the stories that are told about them, including in the media. These prejudices influence policies adopted, decisions made by officials, services offered or denied, access to housing and employment opportunities and everyday interactions and the degree to which people feel welcome or not. We need to reverse growing negative public attitudes towards newcomers and combat racism at every level.

Stigmatization – a common thread

Negative and racist public attitudes serve as a common thread throughout and across the five priority issues areas identified in CCR's Anti-Racism project. They lie behind the inequities and indignities experienced by African and other racialized refugees.

- **Normalization of suffering of Africans.** Just as racism once served to justify slavery and colonization, it today underpins perceptions that experiences of violence and deprivation are normal for Africans and other racialized persons. Long processing delays are therefore tolerated. There are few calls for emergency responses to crises in Africa.
- **Ignorance.** There is widespread ignorance in Canada, including among many officials, about the contexts African and other refugee claimants come from. This leads to a lack of sensitivity and bad decisions, such as whether a claimant should be detained.
- **Perception of threat.** Black Africans as well as Muslims are routinely and unfairly perceived as representing a threat. This results in the adoption of restrictive policies and disproportionate rates of detention.
- **Perception of being a burden.** Refugee claimants, particularly from Africa, are regularly presented as being a resource drain, even though they bring many skills and often work at

jobs Canadians won't take, paying taxes for services they are not entitled to. They are unfairly blamed for Canada's housing shortage. Public messaging of these prejudices leads to them feeling unwelcome.

- **Discrimination.** Black refugees in particular regularly experience discrimination, including in access to housing. Daily experiences of racism, whether by public officials, service providers or others, lead to a loss of dignity in everyday life.
- **A vicious cycle of negative public opinion.** Recent polls show decreasing support among Canadians for immigration, and more people (though still a minority) questioning the proportion of racialized newcomers. These trends are driven by scapegoating of newcomers by political leaders and widespread negative and unfounded messages in the media. Public opinion is used to justify policies increasingly closing Canada's doors which further depress support for newcomers.

Solutions

Rooting out racism is a long and hard task. The following are some suggested steps related to the experiences of refugees and refugee claimants.

- Increase public education about the depth and nature of systemic racism in immigration system. This should include a focus on specifically anti-Black racism.
- Sensitize government officials to the realities of racialized migrants and refugees. All immigration and border officials should receive training on trauma-informed interactions.

For refugee- and immigrant-serving sector:

- Conduct self-analysis of ways racialized newcomers are presented and treated.
- Offer support for newcomers of African descent to discuss experiences of racism and creating opportunities for healing.
- Support racialized newcomers in speaking out about their experiences and advocating for their rights.
- Create counter-narratives and uniform consistent public messages for the sector to amplify to combat the growing trend of negative stereotyping and scapegoating.

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