

# GBV AND MIGRANTS<sup>1</sup>

## CONTEXT

Gender-based violence knows no borders, and occurs in every society and culture. However, immigrants, refugees, and other migrants may experience increased vulnerability to gender-based violence due to factors related to their migration status.

Women (including cis women and trans women) and non-binary immigrants and refugees face unique barriers to accessing support for violence or abuse.<sup>2</sup>

## HOW IMMIGRATION STATUS CAN AFFECT PEOPLE EXPERIENCING GBV<sup>3</sup>

- Those already in Canada who are sponsored by a spouse may be threatened that their spouse will withdraw the sponsorship if they “cause trouble.” This form of control is often used by abusive spouses to make the other spouse stay in the relationship.
- If a refugee claimant is being abused by their spouse or partner during the refugee process, they often do not know that they have the right to separate their refugee claim from their partner’s. Some claimants believe that they will only be granted refugee status if they stay with their

1 According to the United Nations, an international migrant is someone who changes his or her country of usual residence, irrespective of the reason for migration or legal status.

2 OCASI, *Initiative to End Gender-Based Violence in Immigrant and Refugee Communities*.

3 Canadian Council for Refugees, *How immigration status can affect women in situations of violence or abuse*.

abuser, particularly if their claims are based on similar circumstances.

- Non-status migrants are particularly vulnerable when experiencing violence because they have no legal status. This often makes them too afraid to call the police when an incident of gender-based violence occurs, due to fear that police involvement will lead to deportation. Also, many people are afraid to access any social services because they fear that their lack of status could become known.
- Immigrants with status may be manipulated or controlled by their partner in various ways that are unique to the newcomer experience. For example, their partner may prohibit them from learning English/French or from working, keep them isolated in the home, threaten to take custody of the children, or threaten to alienate them from their cultural community by telling people they are a bad parent/partner.
- People working in Canada through the Temporary Foreign Worker and Seasonal Agricultural Worker Programs may experience heightened vulnerability to GBV (in particular, sexual assault, due to the power imbalance between workers and employers, and the fact that their work permits are tied to a specific employer).

## BARRIERS TO ACCESSING SUPPORT

### Language Barriers

- Immigrant and refugee folks often cannot access information and services in the languages they speak, and language interpretation is not always available.

## **Social Isolation**

- There are often not enough community-based resources for immigrant and refugee folks in general, particularly for those experiencing violence — many people may not meet narrow qualifications to be eligible to access support services.
- Immigrant and refugee folks may not know what resources are available to them.
- They may not have access to information about Canadian law.
- They may encounter shelters that are full (though this is a concern for all survivors), or that do not accommodate them and their children, and do not respect their cultural beliefs and practices.

## **Fear of Law Enforcement & Deportation**

- They may have been detained during their immigration process to Canada, which may make them hesitant or afraid to interact with police/authorities.
- They may not call the police in an emergency because they fear the police may share their status with Canadian Border Services.
- They may be sponsored by an abusing partner or have their refugee claims tied to the claim of an abuser.<sup>4</sup>
- Abusive partners or families may withhold immigration documents and threaten to separate the person from any children they have in common.<sup>5</sup>

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4 Immigrant and Refugee Communities — Neighbours, Friends, & Families (IRCNFF), *Violence Against Women*.

5 IRCNFF, *Violence Against Women*.

## **Economic Exclusion**

- Lack of access to sufficient income can create economic dependence on a perpetrator of violence, and make it more difficult to leave.
- They may not be able to afford the cost of transportation to services they require.
- They may not be able to afford to pay rent and live on their own.

## **Racism and Xenophobia**

- Immigrants and refugees are sometimes denied services or face stereotyping and harmful remarks due to discrimination from front-line services.<sup>6</sup>
- Many immigrant and refugee folks report having their culture and religion blamed for the violence they survived.<sup>7</sup>

## **WHEN INTERVIEWING/WRITING ABOUT IMMIGRANTS AND REFUGEES, REMEMBER TO**

- Consider their whole story. Be careful not to contribute to stereotypes.
- Check in from time to time. Talking about their life experiences can cause emotional stress from past traumas.
- Let them know in advance what topics you want to cover.
- Explain to them why you are asking certain questions.

6 IRCNFF, *Violence Against Women*.

7 IRCNFF, *Violence Against Women*.

- Offer interpreters for people who speak English as a second language.
- Do your research before the interview on their country of origin and culture.
- Be very clear about how you are going to use their interview and offer to show them the final piece before it is published.

## LOCAL MULTICULTURAL SUPPORT SERVICES

### **MOSAIC Multicultural Victim Service**

<https://www.mosaicbc.org/services/counselling/multicultural-victim-services/>

### **MOSAIC Stopping the Violence Counselling**

<https://www.mosaicbc.org/services/counselling/stopping-the-violence/>

### **Vancouver and Lower Mainland Multicultural Family Support Services**

<https://www.vlmfss.ca/>

### **DIVERSEcity** (Surrey)

<https://www.dcrs.ca/>

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*Developed in consultation with Ninu Kang, [MOSAIC](#)*

## FURTHER READING

[equalpress.ca/migrants](https://equalpress.ca/migrants) 