

## Background

In this document we provide a brief summary of the community forum that took place in Montreal on October 25, 2013. The forum was co-hosted by the Migrant Mothers Project, University of Toronto and Table de Concertation des Organismes au Service des Personnes Réfugiées et Immigrants (TCRI) and included 30 people who engaged in dialogue about the challenges service providers face when supporting immigrants and recommendations for improving service delivery. Forum attendees included educators, front-line workers, management and volunteers who work in the areas of immigration and refugee settlement, immigration law, child protection/children's aid, health care services, adult education, anti-violence against women services and community development.

The forum panelists included:

- Rupaleem Bhuyan, Associate Professor, Factor – Intwentsh Faculty of Social Work University of Toronto
  - Evelyn Mondonedo, PINAY Quebec
  - Richard Goldman, Comité d'aide aux Réfugiés, Responsable Volet Protection TCRI (Table de Concertation des Organismes au Service des Personnes Réfugiées et Immigrantes)
  - Amel Belhassen, PhD, UQÀM et membre du CA RAFIQ (Réseau d'action pour l'égalité des femmes immigrées et racisées du Québec)/Responsable du Comité Sécurité Économique
  - Rita Acosta, Mouvement contre le Viol et L'inceste
  - Yasmina Chouakri, Coordinatrice Volet Femmes TCRI et Présidente RAFIQ
- A facilitated discussion explored the following questions: How have recent & proposed changes to immigration policy shaped your work? How are you currently working with women with precarious status? What are your top priorities/concerns at this time? What strategies do you have in supporting immigrants with precarious status?

## Discussion Themes

The Montreal Forum involved several lively discussions in French, Spanish and English where attendees discussed numerous challenges facing immigrants in Quebec. Forum attendees agreed on the need for networking as a necessary step towards taking action with regard to immigration policy, but also with regard to proposed changes to the Quebec charter. As this

was the MMP's first community forum outside of Ontario, we were able to identify several issues that are unique to Quebec as well as commonalities with forums we had previously held in Ontario.

### **1. Neo-Colonialism and Globalization**

The Montreal Forum attendees played close attention to the ways in which colonialism is alive and thriving in Canada and Quebec. As a result of globalization and neo-colonialism, leave their home countries and seek protection in Western Countries to only face an array of barriers that include economic, cultural and socio-political forms of oppression. A presentation by PINAY noted that neo-colonial policies contribute to the migration of Filipina women as live-in-care givers to countries such as Canada. PINAY has been lobbying the Canadian government to address the injustice imposed by this visa program by forcing women to live with their employers while they are separated from their own families. Even though the federal government has made changes to the Live-in-Caregiver program, by extending the time frame to accrue work hours from three to four years, this was described as akin to extending a jail sentence. Live-In-Caregivers continue to struggle for the right to permanent residency upon entering Canada, as well as the removal of the live-in requirement. PINAY is also working transnationally, towards improving economic development in the Philippines so that women do not need to emigrate to learn a living for their families.

### **2. Intersecting Sexism and Racism and Access to Services**

Discussions in the Montreal Forum highlighted the ways in which policy changes have exacerbated intersections between sexism and racism. Newly sponsored spouses, a majority of whom are female, have been negatively impacted by the imposition of conditional status. Due to confusion about this policy change, forum attendees reported that some women who were given permanent residency (i.e. not conditional) are confused about their rights and have been manipulated by their abusers based on their fear that their status can be revoked. This is one example where vulnerability within Canadian immigration policies, reinforces gender inequality at systemic as well as interpersonal levels.

Forum attendees also shared that due to gender inequality, women are often unable to secure employment or must remain at home due to lack of affordable child care. Furthermore, several attendees noted that the proposed changes to Quebec's Values Charter has heightened the overall racist climate in Quebec, thus generating concerns for the impact on already marginalized immigrant women who are racialized and have a precarious immigration status.

### **3. Networking and taking action**

Montreal Forum attendees exchanged several examples of how to best to move forward to address intersecting sexism and racism affecting immigrant women. There was a call for a feminist movement among immigrant women that would bring attention to the concerns that of immigrant women who are racialized and who have precarious status. Several

attendees offered examples of their activist history and recalled being part of the first groups to lead the feminist movement in Canada. The women noted that they must seek new ways to integrate immigrant women into the broader feminist movement, while addressing the legitimate fears of potential consequences that may deter immigrants from joining a political movement.

#### **4. Group Strategies**

Attendees of the Montreal spoke of building solidarity among newcomer women and women with precarious immigration status. There was consensus that service delivery and policies must draw from an integrated gendered and race analysis in order to create and systemic change in Quebec. The potential for collective mobilization and action was spoken intently, as many agreed that this is the only way to remain visible and to demand changes that impact women. Attendees also shared that being able to share the knowledge was essential and that at times, organizations that have limited resources often struggle with mobilizing for fear of funding cuts. As such, the need for educators and universities to continue to do this research and persist on the intersection of gender, immigration status and race needs to be maintained in order to create change.

#### **5. Conclusion**

The MMP is grateful to TCR for graciously co-hosting this forum and assisting with inviting service providers and immigrant women through their networks. This forum highlighted the benefits of engaging in dialogue across provinces, while illustrating some of the specific challenges that are arising in Quebec due to the proposed ban on religious signs in public offices.