

## Background

On November 15, 2013 the Migrant Mothers Project organized a community forum to discussed responses to changes in immigration policy and ways to improve service delivery. The forum included 55 people and was co-hosted by Battered Women’s Support Services and YWCA Metro Vancouver. 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.

This forum included presentations on a range of topics including:

- An overview of immigration policies and their impacts on women
  - by Rupaleem Bhuyan, University of Toronto;
- An illustration of the challenges faced by migrant women who are live-in-caregivers seeking permanency in Toronto
  - by Rosa Artega, BWSS,
- Analysis of the Live-in-caregiver policies in Canada and their relationship to global inequalities; with attention to the Philippines as the primary source of Live-In-Caregivers in Canada
  - by Darla Tomeldan and Ai Li Lim, West Coast Domestic Workers Association
- An overview of the Mothers Without Status Campaign and efforts to provide social assistance to nonstatus women in British Columbia
  - by Andrea Vollans, Legal Educator YWCA, Metro Vancouver

## Discussion Themes

Many topics emerged at the Vancouver Forum which commenced with acknowledgement that we are on unceded Indigenous land belonging to the Coast Salish peoples, including the territories of Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh Nations. Throughout the forum, the connections between colonialism, global capitalism, and migration were integrated with analysis of the marginalization of women living with precarious immigration status in Canada. Here we expand upon some of the core themes that were raised at the Vancouver forum.

### 1. Linking Indigenous Sovereignty in Coast Salish Territories with Forced Migration

The Forum commenced with an opening ceremony led by Brandy Kane (Thunder Eagle Woman) who gave recognition to the traditional lands where the forum took place and led us in singing the *Wonder Warrior* song. Angela Marie MacDougall, Executive Director at

BWSS added to the introduction and noted that the significance of the Women Warrior Song and the central role that Indigenous women are playing as leaders in anti-Violence Against Women work in Vancouver. It was evident that the women's movement in Vancouver is committed to Indigenous sovereignty and recognizes the suffering of Mother Earth as inseparable to anti-violence work. This was further reinforced through linking the aboriginal plight of disputed lands in Canada, but also worldwide, to circumstances that lead to forced migration and oppression faced by immigrant women who are denied citizenship in Canada.

## **2. Globalization and the Live-in-Caregiver Program**

Linkages between global capitalism, the displacement of people worldwide, and gendered migration to Canada were especially pronounced in the Vancouver forum. It was noted that globalization and corporate culture have a transnational influence on government policies that result in environmental degradation, human displacement and cultural genocide. Live-in-caregivers were discussed as a group of women that represent a major source of income for the Philippines, but who must endure economic insecurity, forced cohabitation with their employers and family separation for several years. Through a series of case studies, forum presenters illustrated the layers of women face as live-in-caregivers and through their efforts to establish permanency in Canada and reunify with their families. The Vancouver forum attendees were conscious of the tragedies unfolding in the aftermath of typhoon Hainan, which in part contributed to heightened awareness of the structural violence associated with migration and global inequalities.

## **3. Social Assistance for Mothers without Legal Status**

In Vancouver, the Mothers without Legal Status Project, YWCA Metro Vancouver, began their research investigating the growing concerns for mothers without legal Canadian status and who have Canadian born children. Over five years of advocacy efforts, critical communication tactics and working with various ministries at the provincial level gave this group sufficient leverage to change certain policies in the Vancouver region including: 1) having children attend school without international student fees 2) allowing a mother to access British Columbia housing while waiting for permanent residency, and 3) providing social assistance to single parents without status who are fleeing abuse. The importance of these changes were echoed by other forum attendees that noted the positive impact that these changes have had on women attempting to access services, especially within the shelter system. Moreover, the YWCA wishes to continue their advocacy efforts with other YWCA's nation wide in order to make this a Federal campaign

## **4. Developing Allies for Community Organizing and Policy Advocacy**

The Vancouver Forum provided a space for attendees to discuss strategies around supporting women with precarious immigration status in Vancouver, but also to consider ways to develop networks with allies across the province and Canada-wide. The YWCA Metro Vancouver has been reaching out to YWCAs across Canada to explore the potential to expand their campaign for Mothers without Status to a federal level. There was a large

desire to rally public awareness on this concern and doing so through sharing of women's narratives, especially through social media and public awareness campaigns. In particular, the attendees noted the need to hold more events to raise consciousness on this topic in Vancouver.

## **5. Conclusion**

The Vancouver forum created a space to discuss precarious immigration status, within a larger context of colonialism, globalization and subsequently forced migration. It is these factors that continue to impact and create links between Mother Earth, Indigenous sovereignty, as well as women with precarious immigration status seeking safety in Canada. Women's experiences and resilience were honoured and shared amongst the group, which gave us a glimpse into the lives of the women that are caught in the middle of such global forces.

Service providers in the Vancouver area have been generating strong networks and are committed and able to discuss the injustices that are faced by their clients with precarious immigration status. Forum attendees highlighted the potential for networks amongst service providers to influence policy change at the local and provincial level.. However, additional efforts to mobilize networks that are able to engage media and policy makers to influence ministries at the provincial level and subsequently the federal level are critically needed. There was a strong sentiment of continuing to connect with one another in order to push for fair and equal policies for women, as well as their families, with precarious immigration status.

Within the anti-violence movement in Vancouver, there is an understanding that violence is significantly felt by women with precarious immigration status and that there is a need to prevent this violence from occurring by challenging and shifting unjust practices. Although more work remains to be done, the forum in Vancouver was an inspiring example of how to service providers, immigrant women and Indigenous leaders can work together to support women whose full humanity remains unrecognized in Canada.