IN SUMMARY:
Report on the Experiences of Non-Status Persons Accessing City of Toronto Services

The Organization behind the Report

The Rights of Non-Status Women Network (RNSWN) is an organized network of non-profit agencies and community members in Toronto, Ontario. We do not receive any regular funding and are a grassroots organization. Our mandate is to address barriers to services and resources faced by women without immigration status through coordinated public education and advocacy for the purpose of systemic change.

Motivations for the Report

RNSWN has long been aware of difficulties faced by non-status persons when trying to access City of Toronto services, despite the fact that the City has had a Sanctuary City Policy, which since February 2013 has been in place to ensure that Toronto’s services are supposed to be accessible to all Toronto residents, regardless of immigration status. The City of Toronto is responsible for the delivery of services such as affordable housing, public transit, ambulances, child care, and employment and social services, which are critical to the well-being of all residents, and are equally critical for non-status persons, who also face significant barriers to accessing non-municipal public services. As home to an estimated 10,000 to 250,000 non-status persons, it is urgent that the City of Toronto live up to its mandate to be a sanctuary city, so as not to further marginalize and endanger non-status residents.

How the Research was Conducted

A six-question survey was designed by RNSWN. Paper copies were distributed to all attendees at the RNSWN forum in May 2016 and electronic copies were distributed to the entire RNSWN mailing list in July 2016. In total, 57 responses to the survey were received and analyzed by RNSWN.

Research Results Highlights

- 75.4% of the respondents identified themselves as service providers assisting non-status clients. The remaining respondents identified as service providers who do not assist non-status persons (3.5%) and community members (21.1%).
- 93% of the respondents reported that they, their clients, or someone they knew had had difficulty accessing City of Toronto services due to lack of immigration status.
- The services that the greatest percentages of respondents reported difficulty with were: Toronto Employment and Social Services (76.4%), Toronto Community Housing Corporation (65.5%), Public Health Services (58.2%), Children’s Services (54.5%), Shelter, Support, and Housing Administration (43.6%) and Emergency Medical Services (41.8%).
IN SUMMARY:
Report on the Experiences of Non-Status Persons Accessing City of Toronto Services

- 68.5% of respondents reported that a non-status person had been asked directly about immigration status by City of Toronto staff, 68.5% reported that a non-status person had been asked to submit documents about their immigration status, 72.2% reported that the non-status person had been asked to provide identity documents that only a person with immigration status would have, and 63% reported that the non-status person had been asked to provide other documents that only a person with immigration status would have while attempting to access City services.

- When asked to provide examples of incidents in which non-status persons encountered difficulty accessing City services due to immigration status, respondents frequently indicated that the non-status person required the intervention of a service provider to assist them in gaining access to the services and that sometimes even then, the non-status person would not gain access to services and/or would stop trying to access the services out of fear of potential negative consequences.

RNSWN’s Recommendations for Next Steps

1) The City of Toronto Ombudsman should undertake a formal investigation of the City of Toronto’s application of its own Sanctuary City Policy.

2) The City of Toronto should review its governing policies to determine whether they all accord with the Sanctuary City Policy.

3) The City of Toronto should ensure thorough training of its staff so that they can correctly apply city policies and so that they are attentive to the rights and the needs of non-status persons trying to access services.

4) Action to address the problem of non-status persons’ access to City of Toronto services must be undertaken quickly for the sake of the health and well-being of already vulnerable and marginalized non-status persons.

Endorsements

The recommendations in the report were endorsed by: Assaulted Women’s and Children’s Counsellor/Advocate Program (AWCCA) at George Brown College; Cathy Schmidt; Community and Legal Aid Services Programme at York University; Cornelia Mazgarean, JD, LLM; Deepa Mattoo LL.B.,M.B.A; FCJ Refugee Centre; Gillian Reiss, JD; Migrant Mothers Project at the University of Toronto; Nir Gepner, Lawyer; Ontario Coalition of Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI); Rupaleem Bhuyan, PhD; Salina Abji, PhD; South Asian Legal Clinic of Ontario; Springtide Resources Inc.; and Willowdale Community Legal Services.

Distribution of the Report

A copy of the report was sent to the City of Toronto Ombudsman in early 2017. A public version was subsequently created and the full text is available for free on RNSWN’s website: https://rnswn.wordpress.com/. We welcome you to distribute the summary and to cite or distribute the text of the full report widely.

Jade Wallace for the Rights of Non-Status Women Network, May 2017