The Rights of Non-Status Women Network (RNSWN) is an organized, grassroots collective of service providers, scholars, and individual community members in Toronto, Ontario. Our mandate is to address barriers to services and resources faced by non-status women through coordinated public education, knowledge exchange, and advocacy for the purpose of systemic change. We believe that all people—whether they are migrants or not and whether they have status or not—deserve to have their essential needs met and their human rights upheld so that they can live safe and dignified lives.

During this global COVID 19 pandemic, non-status women may be among the most exposed and the least protected. Non-status women prop up the essential service sector with their unrecognized, underpaid and often dangerous, cleaning, food production and care work; and most do not have the option of working from home. While these jobs put non-status women among those who are protecting and caring for the rest of us, they do so with great precarity, as labour rights, decent working conditions and minimum pay are often not respected. Furthermore, despite their efforts, non-status women who lose their jobs, or have to give them up to care for their children while schools are closed, may not be eligible for any of the government-issued financial supports.

As we focus on social isolation and self-quarantining, it is essential to recognize that the home can be a very unsafe place for non-status women. It is now well recognized that this crisis, as with any crisis, has increased incidents of gender-based violence. Non-status women facing violence in their homes often have fewer options for protection, as they may fear that calling the police or asking for help could put their ability to remain in Canada at risk. Non-status women experiencing abuse have limited access to information, counseling, health services and other social services, though there are agencies and shelters providing support.

The over policing of our communities to enforce physical distancing will have particularly negative impacts on people of colour. This includes additional powers that have been given to provincial offenses officers (including certain municipal bylaw officers, campus officers, TTC and other transportation constables, community housing constables, public health officers, and others) and the City of Toronto’s online system for reporting non-compliance. For non-status women, who are often racialized, surveillance by law enforcement can significantly increase stress and trauma, especially as many continue to work in informal sectors.
If we are truly “all in this together,” we must not leave non-status women behind. The Rights of Non-Status Women’s Network calls on municipal, provincial and federal authorities to:

• Make the **Canadian Emergency Response Benefit (CERB)** available to all, regardless of immigration status. At the present time, the reliance on a SIN to distribute benefits excludes non-status workers and either obliges them to put themselves at even more risk through non-compliance with social isolation directives and unsafe work, or potentially leaves them destitute.

• Make **social assistance** accessible for those who may not qualify for the CERB during this time of crisis. This access should be free of any immigration consequences. While social assistance in Ontario is accessible to some people without status, including H&C applicants and those who have an enforceable removal order but cannot leave the country for reasons beyond their control, this does not include all non-status women. The lack of access to social assistance leaves non-status women without the most basic resources or supports to protect themselves and their families.

• Make the **child benefit** available to everyone by amending s. 122.6(e) of the *Income Tax* that ties eligibility for the Canada Child Benefit to the immigration status of the applicant parent. Deep social, health and economic inequities and high rates of poverty existed prior to the COVID-19 outbreak. Rather than this virus being any sort of equalizer, it is amplifying these inequities multifold and children are paying the highest price.

• Ensure that **policing measures** do not put non-status women more at risk. Moreover, if non-status women do seek protection from gender-based violence, there must be absolutely no immigration enforcement actions. This would require police authorities to enforce strict access without fear policies. Extended powers of monitoring and enforcement such as the City of Toronto online system for reporting non-compliance should be terminated, and all provincial offenses officers must refrain from collecting any information related to immigration status.
• While there is currently a moratorium on evictions in Toronto, there must be no reprisals from landlords once the moratorium is lifted. Non-status women, in particular, may be susceptible to this violence, as they may be forced to leave their accommodation under the threat of being reported to immigration officials.

• Since physical distancing cannot be maintained within immigration detention, everyone currently detained must be released for their safety, as well as for the safety and health of others. Moreover, since the same is true of the shelter system, alternative accommodation must be provided that enables physical distancing and self-isolation.

This is an opportunity for the federal government to address all of these gaps holistically by implementing a broad regularization program to finally truly include our family, friends, neighbours and those who have been taking care of us in Canadian society.