

Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada Gender Based Analysis (GBA+) and Canada's Immigration System

Issue

Despite welcoming record numbers of immigrants each year, Canada has not been able to ensure a smooth integration process for them. Immigrant women, especially, are discriminated against, overworked, and marginalized in the workplace. Reforms are needed to address issues in the immigration system and labour market.

Background

- Immigrant women are often exploited and excluded by their workplace. Those who were previously working in their home countries are likely unable to find the same occupation in Canada due to their lack of Canadian education and experience.
 - As such, immigrant women are often forced to switch to lower-status jobs that require different skill sets.
 - As a result, immigrant women have to learn new skills and forego some of the old skills they had in their previous jobs.
- Women also have to face the additional challenge of taking care of their families and house. Moreover, in an individualistic society like Canada, their traditional support system (for example, joint families) is lost.
- Immigrant women from developing countries come from patriarchal societies and face prejudice from the men in their family who are not used to women making a living.
- Women, who are often the sponsored spouse, cannot access social assistance unless they are divorced from their spouse.

What is GBA+?

- The Government of Canada is committed to supporting the full implementation of gender-based analysis plus (GBA+) across federal departments.
- GBA+ was introduced to ensure that any programs, policies, and legislations developed consider the impact they will have on people of all genders.
- The “plus” in GBA+ means that the Government of Canada recognizes that GBA goes beyond biological sex. GBA+ acknowledges that everyone has multiple identity factors like race, religion, age, and ethnicity,

GBA+ and IRCC

- Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) is obligated, under the Immigrant and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA), to provide a GBA+ assessment of the impact of its policies in its Annual Report to Parliament on Immigration.

- It has introduced some new policies recently such as the Caregivers: Home Child Care Provider Pilot and Home Support Worker Pilot, Rainbow Refugees Assistance Partnership, and Visible Minority Newcomer Women (VMNW) Pilot.
- These policies have been developed according to GBA+ but it is too soon to comment on their impact. Furthermore, it remains unclear how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the funding for these projects.

Key Considerations

Economic Implications: Canada's immigration policy prioritizes high skilled workers who are fluent in the official languages and who can add economic stability to the country. The government must strike a balance between economic and family immigration streams.

Stakeholders: The concerned stakeholders and their priorities should be met and are listed below.

- a. Government of Canada- Ensuring economic and social prosperity for Canadians and permanent residents (who are future citizens).
- b. Immigrant women- Equitable access to a labour market where they are not forced to work long hours for lower pay and are not marginalized.
- c. Immigrant advocacy groups- Ensuring that immigrants do not feel excluded and discriminated against.
- d. Future employers and the labour market- Access to human capital (workers and skills) who have the knowledge of and can integrate into Canadian society. Hence their emphasis on 'Canadian work experience'.

Employment Equity Act: This act encourages employers to ensure that their workplace represents Canada by removing barriers to entry for four historically marginalized groups - women, people with disabilities, Aboriginal peoples, and visible minorities.

Recommendations

Apart from the newer GBA+ based government projects, the government can take the following steps to ensure a more equitable immigration experience for women.

- Government Outreach and Program Evaluation-
 - Direct consultations with immigrant women to better understand the challenges and problems they face in Canada should be held. Immigrant women's groups and non-governmental organizations catering to this sector should also be consulted.
 - A regular and consistent program evaluation of GBA+ projects and policies and their effectiveness should be carried out to help the government plan its next steps.
 - Public engagement mechanisms should be designed where the women's concerns and opinions are heard and considered.

- Through widespread awareness of the Employment Equity Act, employers should be encouraged to hire female immigrants.
 - There are several policies that would achieve this goal:
 - a. Tax relief for corporations that hire greater proportions of immigrant women.
 - b. Implement objective hiring practices/techniques.
 - c. Implement a government program that companies can apply to in order to subsidize the wages of newly hired immigrant women.
 - d. Improve the existing foreign credential recognition process which is expensive.
 - Immigrant women also face racism and sexism in the workplace. Government funded inclusion and diversity training to employers can help mitigate this.
- Language is one barrier all immigrants, including women, face. As such, the existing English and French language education programs should be expanded. The learning centres should also provide daycare services so that women do not have to worry about leaving their children at home.
- Female immigrants who are sponsored spouses, threatened by the fear of deportation, are at the mercy of their husbands and are unlikely to leave the relationship, even if it's abusive. Awareness programs can help them understand their legal rights and improve their access to public services.