



## 2023 City of Toronto Budget Consultations

### Written Submission from World Education Services (WES) January 2023

#### About WES

World Education Services (WES) is a non-profit social enterprise dedicated to helping international students, immigrants, and refugees achieve their educational and career goals in Canada and the United States. For more than 45 years, WES has set the standard of excellence in the field of international academic credential evaluation. Through WES Global Talent Bridge, the organization joins with institutional partners, community-based organizations, and policymakers to help immigrants and refugees who hold international credentials fully utilize their talents and education to achieve their academic and professional goals. Through its grantmaking, impact investing, and partnerships, the WES Mariam Assefa Fund seeks to advance economic and social inclusion for immigrants and refugees. Since 2013, WES has been a designated provider of Educational Credential Assessments (ECAs) for Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC).

WES is pleased to provide inputs into the City of Toronto budget process because of the significant role newcomers play in the economy and social fabric of the city.

Our inputs focus on preparing an equity-based budget and the following priority areas: (1) targeted skills training and workforce development, (2) employment and social services delivery, and (3) creating a welcoming and inclusive city.

#### Preparing an Equity-Based Budget

The City of Toronto is the top destination for many immigrants. In 2021, there were over **1.2 million immigrants** in the city, representing almost 47 percent of the population. More than **220,000** of those immigrants arrived with refugee status. The city also hosts **thousands of non-permanent residents** (for example, asylum seekers, international students, work permit holders, and undocumented persons) every year.

Newcomers – including immigrants, refugees, asylum seekers, international students, work permit holders, and undocumented persons – play a vital role in contributing to Toronto’s economic, social, and cultural prosperity. They bring work experience and skills, new perspectives, and ethnic and linguistic diversity. They also help address complex labour force challenges, including an **aging population** alongside a **shrinking workforce and labour and skills shortages**.



WES appreciates the **city's acknowledgement** of “the importance of municipal leadership on newcomer issues,” and shares the **city's vision** of creating safe, welcoming, equitable, and inclusive Toronto for all newcomers regardless of immigration status. Fulfilling this vision requires rigorous commitment and a comprehensive analysis of existing policies and programs. Equally important, municipal leadership must consider newcomers' education and experiences.

It follows that the City of Toronto's budget scope should ensure that municipal policies, programs, and funding are available to identify and eliminate barriers to equitable and meaningful newcomer integration.

Newcomers face various challenges, such as finding **affordable accommodations** and **commensurate employment**. The pandemic and the rising cost of living continues to impact many and increases the need for **mental health supports**.

Many newcomers also face distinct challenges linked to intersectionality because of their racialized identity, gender, age, and immigration status. For example, **racialized newcomer women** are often not able to find work in the same sector and at the same level as that of their previous work experience. A 2022 **research by the Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council (TRIEC)** involving 395 newcomer women in Toronto, 80 percent of whom are racialized, found that despite having a master's degree and, on average, eight years of work experience, almost 60 percent had to downgrade their qualifications.

**Immigrant youth** are more likely to be found in low-skilled, low-wage work than their Canadian-born counterparts – despite having higher levels of educational attainment. With youth being among the hardest hit groups during the pandemic, additional support is required to ensure the skills of immigrant youth are being fully utilized.

Findings from **2022 research by the Canadian Centre for Housing Rights** showed that racialized newcomers in Toronto are more likely to face discrimination when searching for rental housing, compared with their non-racialized counterparts.

A recent release of **Toronto Police Service (TPS) data** reveals that racialized residents, many of whom are likely also newcomers, continue to be disproportionately targeted by police. This race-based data are relevant given recent proposals to increase the TPS budget by **\$48.3 million** this year.

The budget should similarly allocate more funding to the delivery of other front-line social services to benefit marginalized communities that include newcomers. These services include municipal

employment and skills development initiatives, housing programs, childcare services, public transit, mental health care, and shelters. Such investments would contribute to newcomer, business, and community well-being, and be in line with the **Toronto Newcomer Strategy**, the **Toronto Poverty Reduction Strategy**, and the **Toronto Action Plan to Confront Anti-Black Racism**.

Preparing an equity-based budget would also contribute the city's leadership and role model in setting the standard for other municipalities, who are increasingly recognizing the value and contributions that newcomers make to communities.

## Recommendations

The City of Toronto should strengthen its commitment to the **Toronto Newcomer Strategy** through effective fund allocation and municipal policy alignment. WES recommends that the following should be the priority areas of focus.

### Skills-Training and Workforce Development

- Promote the use of the **Community Benefits Framework and the Social Procurement Program** that has demonstrated economic benefits for all.
- Provide **support and services to businesses, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises, to hire and train newcomers** using competency-based assessment and hiring practices.
- Continue to support the work of the **Refugee Jobs Agenda Roundtable** through active participation and take a leadership role in initiatives like the **Refugee Jobs Agenda Roundtable's Refugee Hiring Event** (co-organized by WES and Jumpstart Refugee Talent), which connects employers and sector partners to refugees seeking meaningful jobs.
- Include **credential assessment as an eligible employment support expense** to remove financial barriers to accessing education, licensure, and employment for skilled immigrants and refugees.
- Participate in the Workforce Census for the City of Toronto employees in health care to help identify and support the **sizeable labour pool of internationally trained health care workers** living in the city, who can make meaningful contributions to positions in hospitals, long-term care (LTC) facilities, and health centres, or as home care service providers.
- Support the creation of **paid immigrant and refugee youth work integrated learning opportunities** at the city in order to provide them with the social capital and hands-on work experience they need to be fully included in the labour market in the short and long term.

## Employment and Social Services

- Provide **employment and social services to all newcomers**, regardless of immigration status.
- Work with the immigration and settlement sector to create and pilot a **newcomer inventory talent project** to address the city's human resources needs and the underutilization of newcomer talent.
- Invest in and significantly expand shelters and affordable non-market housing options.
- Invest in **more affordable, publicly operated, high-quality childcare spaces** to support all Toronto residents, including newcomer parents as they enter and advance in the workforce.
- Work with post-secondary institutions to ensure **international students have access to and are made aware of available supports** offered through the city and the post-secondary sector, including financial and health services.
- Invest in **free, high-quality, culturally sensitive trauma counselling** for all Toronto residents, including refugees, asylum seekers, and undocumented persons.
- Fund more **community agencies and grassroots organizations** providing settlement and integration services to newcomers.

## Creating a Welcoming and Inclusive City

- Ensure access to **more efficient, reliable, and affordable public transit** by investing in the Toronto Transit Commission (TTC), which is often crucial for employment and accessing municipal services.
- Conduct a **systemic review of city policies and programs** to identify and address barriers to accessing city services, including the ability of undocumented persons to access municipal services without fear of their personal information being shared with the officials of the Canada Border Services Agency.
- Take concrete measures to address **systemic xenophobia and racism**, including in city services like policing, and provide funding to community-based anti-racism and anti-hate initiatives.
- Require the use of an **inclusive equity analysis** in the development and implementation of municipal policies and programs.