



SOUTH ASIAN WOMEN'S AND IMMIGRANTS' SERVICES

"If the women move forward, the whole community moves forward"

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Statement on the adoption of Bill C -12: **A new era of fighting for belonging and rights in Canada**

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About SAWIS

South Asian Women's and Immigrants' Services (SAWIS) is a community-based, women-led organization delivering services and social programs in the Oakridge, Taylor Massey, and surrounding East-Danforth neighbourhoods of Toronto since 2008. These neighbourhoods are known to have a high concentration of immigrants, refugees, and newcomer women and families from Bangladesh. After arriving in Canada, many families face profound challenges to their full civic, economic, and social participation in Canada.

About Bill C-12

As an organization working with migrants, including families with temporary and/or precarious status such as international students and refugee claimants, we oppose the adoption of *Bill C-12 – Strengthening Canada's Immigration System and Borders Act*. This bill, originally proposed in June 2025 as Bill C-2: Stronger Borders Act, completed its third-reading and received royal assent on Thursday, March 26, 2026.

The passing of Bill C-12 will result in the following immigration reforms such as:

- **Expanding ministerial powers:** The Minister of Immigration, Refugee, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) will now have powers allowing mass cancellation of immigration documents and applications (including permanent or temporary resident visas, and work or study permits)
- **Expanding administrative decision-making:** Refugee claims will now be screened-out by the Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB) before moving forward to oral hearings. Refugee applications that do not meet the IRB requirements will be referred to the Pre-Removal Risk Assessment (PRRA), which is the last step before deportations.
- **Restrictions to oral hearings:** Migrants will be restricted from filing refugee claims if:
 - More than one year has passed since their first arrival in Canada; or
 - Applied 14 days or more after crossing the land border between Ports of Entry.

These reforms will apply for all refugee claimants and other migrant groups arriving or making refugee claims in Canada after June 2, 2025.

What is the issue?

Since the bill's initial introduction as Bill C-2, SAWIS has been analyzing the proposed reforms with community women and youth, all of whom arrived in Canada as im/migrants looking to build stable, secure lives in Canada for themselves and their families.

From our collective assessment, **the new immigration reforms set a dangerous precedent that falsely equates the 'public interest' with im/migrants rights and belonging in Canada.** Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, media and government discourses at all levels incorrectly conflate immigration with the real affordability and compounding social crises, despite these problems existing for decades and migrants bearing the brunt of the crises^{1 2}. Instead of addressing the underlying causes, such as profiteering in housing, underfunding in key social programs such as healthcare, and austerity measures, attempts are made to shift responsibility away from powerful economic actors onto im/migrants as scapegoats for these issues.

Bill C-12 is a reflection of this familiar and concerning pattern which targets marginalized groups who have been disproportionately affected by the economic and social crises to justify and advance restrictive policy measures.

Our collective assessment reveals the following women concerns about the new provisions:

1. Lack of compliance with Canadian and international human rights law

The provisions in this Bill contradict the principle of non-refoulement under the international human rights law which states that *no one, regardless of immigration status, should be sent*

¹ Diversity Institute. (2025). *Immigration and the housing crisis: Debunking myths to advance an inclusive economy*. <https://www.torontomu.ca/diversity/news-events/2025/07/immigration-and-the-housing-crisis/>

² York University. (2024). *International students cap falsely blames them for Canada's housing and health-care woes*.

<https://www.yorku.ca/news/2024/01/26/international-students-cap-falsely-blames-them-for-canadas-housing-and-health-care-woes/>

back to a country where they would be in danger or subject to persecution³. Bill C-12 overlooks the possibility that a person's circumstances can change over time.

The bill also weakens access to independent, quasi-judicial oversight for refugee claimants. Individuals who will be rendered ineligible for a hearing before the Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB) will now be routed to the Pre-Removal Risk Assessment (PRRA) process. PRRA is a paper-based "safety net" intended only for exceptional cases and designed for speed rather than thoroughness⁴. Yet with the passing of the Bill C-12, it will be used as a substitute for full hearings.

This change will seriously undermine procedural fairness and access to justice. Critics have described PRRA as "wholly inadequate" because it lacks key procedural protections, such as guaranteed oral hearings and expertise to assess the merits of a claim⁵. It also has a higher likelihood of errors⁶, thereby undermining procedural fairness and access to justice.

2. Closing the doors for at-risk migrants

Under Bill C-12, time is weaponized. The rigid one-year deadline ignores the global realities – economic, social, humanitarian, and environmental crises that are constantly changing and unfolding. These realities, which Canada is directly/indirectly involved in, impact the ability of many temporary migrants (such as temporary foreign workers, international students, etc.) from returning to their home countries.

Some of the most vulnerable individuals, such as survivors of gender-based violence, war, and government persecution, are often faced with circumstances beyond their control resulting in delays in filing (ie. PTSD, limited documentations, fear of authorities, language barriers, access to legal services, etc.). Without access to hearings, judges and legal experts are unable to respond to the full-scope of refugee claims, placing survivors at serious risk of violence, and even death.

3. Expansion of undemocratic practices

Bill C-12 enables undemocratic, authoritarian practices by concentrating wide-ranging decision-making powers in the hands of the Minister and a small group of administrators. These new realities raise serious questions about due process, transparency, accountability.

The new changes will allow the Minister sweeping authority to cancel, suspend, or modify immigration documents, halt new applications in certain categories, and terminate ongoing applications if deemed in the "public interest." These documents and applications are broadly defined without any safeguards, which could lead to unfair treatment and discrimination against certain groups.

The Bill also allows the sharing of personal information within and outside the immigration department, including with foreign entities. Weakening data protections for newcomers may jeopardize the safety of migrants and refugees in Canada or their country of origin if they are forced to return.

Supporting out community

Many of SAWIS's staff, volunteers, and service users expressed immense uncertainty and anxiety around the new changes. SAWIS affirms its commitment to continue work with our community members to see how we can support families affected by the new changes.

SAWIS is continuously looking to connect community members to resources they require to improve their security and stability in Canada. For those who are looking for more information about Bill C-12 or legal services, check out the resources below are an important starting point:

1) C-12 Is Now Law – Find out how you are affected.

A step-by-step guide explaining how Canada's new immigration law (Bill C-12) affects refugee claims, including eligibility rules and key deadlines.

<https://migrantrights.ca/c12islaw/>

2) Legal Aid Ontario – Find affordable representation

Financial aid for low-income individuals/families requiring legal services and representation regarding refugee, housing, income support, and other areas of law.

³ Office of the High Commissioner United Nations Human Rights. (n.d.). *The principle of non-refoulement under international human rights law*. <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Migration/GlobalCompactMigration/ThePrincipleNon-RefoulementUnderInternationalHumanRightsLaw.pdf>

⁴ Wallace, S. (2025). *Getting It Right the First Time: Exploring the False Economy of Bill C-12's Refugee Process Shortcuts* (Version 2). Toronto Metropolitan University. <https://doi.org/10.32920/30389143.v2>

⁵ Canadian Council for Refugees. (2025). *Bill C-12: Strengthening Canada's Immigration System and Borders Act: Submission to the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security (SECU)*. https://ccrweb.ca/sites/ccrweb.ca/files/2026-01/CCR_C-12%20Brief_SECU.pdf

⁶ Wallace, S. (2025). *Getting It Right the First Time: Exploring the False Economy of Bill C-12's Refugee Process Shortcuts* (Version 2). Toronto Metropolitan University. <https://doi.org/10.32920/30389143.v2>

<https://www.legalaid.on.ca/>

3) Steps to Justice

A step-by-step guide to understanding Refugee and other areas of law.

<https://stepstojustice.ca/legal-topic/refugee-law/>

In addition to connect community members to vital resources, SAWIS will continue to work with our community and other affected communities across Toronto to advocate for equitable immigration reforms. This work cannot be done alone – SAWIS will be collaborating with legal clinics, elected representatives, and civil society organizations to connect affected community members to spaces where they can raise awareness about these challenges.

SAWIS is urging elected representatives, policy decision-makers, and civil society representatives at all levels to change course in their decision-making, and adopt the urgent recommendations that are continuously being proposed by migrant communities. The urgent recommendations are outlined below:

COMMUNITY WOMEN DEMAND EQUITABLE IMMIGRATION POLICY! A list of urgent reforms required to address the new vulnerabilities created by BILL C-12		
At the city level...	At the provincial level...	At the federal level...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Revisit and strengthen ‘Sanctuary Cities’ (aka “Access TO” policies) to ensure that all migrants, regardless of immigration status, are able to access essential municipal services. The City must strengthen existing policies/eliminate barriers by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Expanding access to child care subsidies ○ Expanding access and capacity of Toronto Public Health and community clinics to provide healthcare services ○ Support migrants access affordable social housing ● Eliminate any potential collaborations and information sharing between municipal services (including Toronto Police Services and Toronto District School Board) and federal authorities regarding immigration detentions and deportations ● Advocate for meaningful, comprehensive responses to the housing and other social crises with other municipalities and levels of government 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Expand OHIP coverage to uninsured migrants who have been residing in Ontario for at least 3 months and are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ International students and post-grad students enrolled in studies ○ Refugee claimants ○ Temporary foreign workers ○ Anyone else who lost status or are in-between status ● Increase social assistance rates for all OW and ODSP recipients, and end claw-back measures ● Increase funding to Legal Aid Ontario and expand scope of legal services to adequately fund immigration and family law-related matters ● Immediate allocation of public funds to build non-market subsidized and social housing to address housing crisis, instead of funding developers ● Eliminate information sharing between provincial agencies (including Employment and Social Services offices) and federal authorities regarding immigration detentions and deportations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Eliminate undemocratic immigration reforms proposed through Bill C-12 ● Eliminate the newly proposed 4% co-pays under the Interim Federal Healthcare Program ● Fulfill long-standing promises for ‘Status for All’ by expanding regularization programs for the many thousands of migrants who already established their lives and are working in Canada ● Increase IRCC budget to adequately address the hearing backlogs and severe underfunding of immigrant services ● End immigration detention practices, which have been repeatedly found to undermine the rights of migrants

*Statement from the South Asian Women's and Immigrants' Service (SAWIS)
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