Navigating Service Delivery for International Students in Toronto

Report on consultations with service providers and post-secondary international students

Toronto East Quadrant Local Immigration Partnership

Toronto South Local Immigration Partnership

March 2025

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Acknowledgements

The TEQLIP and TSLIP Teams extend our heartfelt gratitude to all the participants of this project. We thank you for your time and valuable insights. We also thank the working group for this project, a dedicated team of service providers who are members of the TEQLIP Access to Information Action Group, TEQLIP Employment and Economic Opportunities Action Group, and TSLIP Systemic Issues & Social Change Working Group. Working group members include representatives from:

Golden Mile Labour Education Centre

Centennial College

Toronto District School Board

YWCA Toronto

United Way of Greater Toronto

The Housing Help Centre

Toronto North Local Immigration Partnership

We would also like to thank placement students from Catholic Crosscultural Services for their work on the community resources list.

Introduction

The Toronto East Quadrant Local Immigration Partnership (TEQLIP) and the Toronto South Local Immigration Partnership (TSLIP) collaboratively conducted a consultation project to create dialogue amongst settlement and social service providers and educational institutions to learn about their experiences in service delivery and coordination for post-secondary international students in Toronto. We sought to learn about the challenges that service providers and students face and explore avenues to address these challenges. This project was a community consultation project that brought together various stakeholders to discuss emerging issues and discover opportunities for collaboration and service coordination. We considered three main questions while developing and implementing this project:

> *What are the settlement experiences of international students?*

> *What is the role of service providers and educational institutions in supporting international students?*

> *What are potential areas of collaboration and policy improvement, or gaps between educational institutions, newcomer serving organizations, governmental bodies and other stakeholders?*

This report details the findings from this project, highlighting the key themes that emerged from community dialogue sessions and interviews with international students.

Methods: Collaborative design, community dialogue sessions, and one-on-one interviews with international students

This project was collaboratively undertaken by the TEQLIP and TSLIP, led by the following Action Groups and Working Groups:

- TEQLIP Access to Information Action Group
- TEQLIP Employment and Economic Opportunities Action Group
- TSLIP Systemic Issues & Social Change Working Group

Members of these groups came together to form a working group that informed the development and implementation of this project. The project had two key forms of engagement with participants:

Community dialogue sessions

We conducted three community dialogue sessions with a total of 18 service providers, members of educational institutions, or advocacy organizations. These participants were individuals providing settlement or other social services to newcomers, regardless of immigration status and/or engaging with post-secondary international students or issues relating to international

students through their work, advocacy, research, or other forms. Dialogue sessions took place in July and August 2024.

Members from the following organizations took part in community dialogue sessions:

Access Alliance Multicultural Health & Community Services

ACSA Community Services

Catholic Crosscultural Services

Centennial College

CICS Canada

George Brown College

Kababayan Multicultural Centre

Malvern Family Resource Centre

Humber College

Mennonite New Life Centre of Toronto

Migrant Workers Alliance for Change

Strides Toronto

Student Association of George Brown College, Canadian Federation of Students, Local 92

The Canadian Centre to End Human Trafficking

University of Waterloo

Woodgreen Community Services

Yonge Street Mission

YWCA Toronto

One-on-one interviews with international students

We conducted one-on-one interviews with 5 international students, with interviews taking place from August to October 2024.

Information and perspectives gathered from community dialogue sessions and interviews with students were thematically analyzed to produce this report. Key themes and recommendations from participants are summarized in the following sections. The goal of this report is to highlight the key issues, while serving as a starting point for further dialogue, research, and advocacy.

Challenges faced by International Students in Toronto

Through community dialogue sessions with service providers and one-on-one interviews with international students, we identified several key challenges faced by students as they navigate their journey in Canada. Students often face multiple and compounding challenges, which creates a vital need for adequate support and access to services. These are summarized below.

Academic stress

Students balance academic obligations in addition to managing other challenges including financial stress, food insecurity, gaining work experience, and family obligations. Often, the stress of earning an income to pay tuition costs, debts incurred for migration to Canada, housing costs, and day-to-day expenses is present alongside academic obligations. Some students may also work to send money back to family members in their home countries. Students must perform well academically to meet their program requirements, while juggling these challenges related to financial stress. Members of educational institutions shared that oftentimes, having to balance work, academics, and family life is a major strain on students. Being unable to balance these obligations can have consequences, including prolonging the time it takes for students to complete their program, which adds to the costs of staying in Canada for a longer period of time. Students who are unable to meet academic obligations or reduce their courseload to manage financial stress can also run into issues with their student visa, and potentially lose access to some scholarships or bursaries they may have been receiving. One project participant noted this challenge by sharing:

> They [international students] don't have the luxury that a domestic student would, to work, study and, and do things in a part time way where this will just kind of add to their living expenses and costs by lengthening the total duration of their program... And again, if they're not able to work, then how are they paying for that extra time and duration?

Academic stressors also include challenges in finding appropriate internships and placements needed to meet program requirements. Many international students struggle to find co-op and work-study placements and may not have access to enough support from their educational institutions. Additionally, placements are often unpaid positions, which compounds students' financial stress.

Employment and financial stress

Finding suitable employment is a major challenge for international students. Working a job while studying is often vital for students in order to afford housing, food, tuition, transportation, and other living costs. Students shared that the Guaranteed Investment Certificate (GIC) allocations they receive per month are not enough to cover the costs of living. One student participant shared:

> *When I first came in September, we had to provide proof of $10,000 CAD for living expenses. This has since changed, but back then, we got $650 per month from our GIC, while rent alone was $730. How does that make sense for students who are trying to cover all their costs? It's challenging to be part of such a system.*

Affordability and financial strain are major stressors for international students, resulting in them seeking employment alongside their studies. Many students turn to precarious work, working more than one job, and working more than the permitted number of hours in order to meet financial needs.

Students are often balancing employment with academic obligations, including placement requirements for their program of study. Students' and service providers perceptions of the job market are that it is very saturated, and it is difficult to attain employment without established professional networks. Many participants shared that students often find work outside of their field, including lower-paying jobs to fulfil financial needs. Employers are often seeking Canadian work experience when hiring for roles, putting many students at a disadvantage in the hiring process, even if they have relevant experience gained in their home countries. A student participant shared:

> *One major challenge is that many employers prefer candidates with Canadian work experience, which, for someone new to the country, is a huge hurdle. You end up in this paradox where you need experience to get a job, but you can't get a job to gain experience. Building a resume that meets Canadian expectations also takes time and practice, and the support systems for helping international students navigate this process aren't available. There are very few resources designed specifically for us.*

Immigration status also plays a role in acting as a barrier to gaining employment. Students have limitations on the number of hours they can work due to their immigration status as international students. Additionally, participants shared that employers are often hesitant to employ international students due to their immigration status, even if they may intend to apply for permanent residency after their term of study.

Project participants shared that international students are approaching community agencies in order to access employment support. Service providers shared that this is one of the most common services that students seek. Many of the community and settlement service providers participating in this project shared that they are unable to assist due to funding restrictions, but the importance of this type of support cannot be underscored enough. While supports are available, participants questioned the accessibility and effectiveness of employment and placement services offered through educational institutions. One service provider shared:

> *I've spoken to quite a few international students about their co-op placements and often times they would tell me that the college itself does not help with finding a Co-op placement. A lot of times on their own when it comes to searching for one.*

An international student participant echoed this perspective, sharing:

> *... but the employment sector is much worse—nobody knows where to go, and even the university's resources are just as clueless. They rely more on personal connections with organizations or people. There isn't a standard process for job placement or for evaluating experience and categorizing people. I'm not sure if something like that even exists.*

Participants shared that ongoing access to community-based employmentprograms and services is important for international students seeking employment and job readiness support . They also shared that the few community-based resources students are eligible for are at full capacity. This can be a challenge for students who are seeking more immediate support.

Food insecurity

Food insecurity is tied very closely to financial stress and lack of employment for international students. Project participants identified food insecurity as a major challenge, with many highlighting the issue in the context of affordability and lack of access to community-based services for accessing food. Some agencies are able to offer food bank services to students seeking support but also refer to other resources in the community including faith groups and places of worship. Some students use food banks they are eligible for temporarily until they find employment, while they are a consistent support for others. One participant shared experiences of students being turned away from community food banks and directed back to their educational institution to access food support.

Health, mental health, and well-being

Participants in this project identified health as a major challenge for international students. This includes safety, mental health and well-being, and access to healthcare and mental health supports. Like other challenges, health is very interconnected with students' financial challenges, employment, and housing situations. Students also find it challenging to navigate the healthcare system in Canada, especially since they often have very limited health insurance through their educational institution. Students shared concerns over how limited this insurance is, as well as their fears about losing access to it after they complete their program and are seeking employment. One student shared:

> *My student insurance does cover some basics, like vaccinations, but there are still a lot of out-of-pocket costs, especially for medications. I had to visit a clinic recently and ended up paying for all the meds myself. This concern is only going to grow since once I graduate, my insurance will expire, and I'll be left without coverage. It's a big worry for the future.*

Access to health insurance is a concern for students beyond their period of study. One participant identified the challenges post-graduate work permit holders have in applying for provincial health coverage when they are unable to find and retain employment for the six-month requirement period. This gap in coverage can be harmful for students and any family members that rely on their healthcare coverage. In addition to this, participants highlighted the gendered impacts of access to healthcare insurance and coverage. Service providers shared that for international students with private health insurance, very often pregnancy and birth services are not covered, leaving students to pay out of pocket for these costs, which can be in the tens of thousands. One participant shared that time taken off from a program of study due to pregnancy is considered unauthorized leave and can jeopardize students' study and work permit situations.

Students and service providers also highlighted the mental health challenges international students face as they transition and live in Canada. Students' mental health is impacted by adjusting to a new environment, along with losing access to the family and social support networks they had in their home countries. Participants highlighted social isolation and juggling many stressors as major causes of mental health challenges. Accessing mental health support is not often viewed as an urgent priority by students dealing with many stressors. Additionally, stigma around accessing mental health services can hinder students from seeking support. One student shared:

Accessing mental health support has been difficult. As an international student, the transition itself is already hard, and my first winter here was tough. The isolation hits especially hard during the winter months. I've talked about some of my concerns with a few professors, and they were supportive. I also talk to my family sometimes, but there's a lot of stigma around mental health in my community, so it's not always easy to open up. Usually, more immediate concerns like housing or finances take priority, so mental health sometimes gets sidelined.

Participants highlighted that students are often unprepared for the challenges that the transition to a new country might bring prior to arriving in Canada. Conversely, one student participant shared that they perceived their mental health struggle as a natural part of their process of transitioning to Canada, and did not think to seek out professional support. Service providers shared that students tend to hesitate to access mental health counseling due to stigma, and/or a lack of information about how to access these services.

Gender-based violence

Service providers taking part in this project expressed their concerns around gender-based violence, intimate partner violence, and workplace exploitation faced by international students. They shared that they are aware that students are susceptible and experience to this violence, however it is not often reported to authorities or others that could offer support. One service provider shared that students fear that reporting gender-based violence could lead to issues with their immigration status. Service providers shared that due to a lack of reporting, they do not have access to more information about cases of gender-based violence faced by students, making it challenging to conduct advocacy and support work.

Housing

Students face many challenges when seeking out affordable and suitable housing. Participants shared that they rely on friends and family to navigate the housing market and are often susceptible to scams and situations where their tenant rights are not upheld. Participants shared that limited housing options, and a high demand makes it difficult to find and maintain housing. Service providers and students alike shared experiences of educational institutions offering inadequate support to students in finding off-campus housing, and campus housing is often limited and more expensive. Affordability is a major concern when it comes to housing. Many students live in shared accommodations and opt to live at a greater distance away from their educational institution in order to afford housing costs. In addition to affordability, students face unsafe and precarious housing conditions.

Participants reported overcrowded living conditions, poor infrastructure, and a lack of safety in their living environment. One participant shared:

> *Finding housing has been one of the toughest challenges. I spent a lot of time searching online through Facebook, Kijiji, and reaching out to my local contacts. At first, I stayed with a friend, but then I moved into a very cramped basement apartment. There were six of us sharing one washroom and one kitchen—it was pretty unhygienic and overcrowded. Unfortunately, that's just how it is right now, and I'm still trying to find a better living situation.*

Participants shared that students are not often aware of their tenant rights, and their need for affordable housing can cause them to accept unsafe conditions, face sudden and unlawful evictions, and risk their health and safety.

Immigration status and navigating the immigration system in Canada

Participants highlighted the challenges in navigating information and updates on policy and regulatory changes within the immigration system and the impacts these have on students' immigration status. Students shared that keeping up with information about policy changes is difficult, and they often have to review large volumesof information. They find it challenging to acquire the most up to date information, especially as policies go into effect at irregular intervals and affect students based on their personal circumstances. One student shared:

> *Since I've been here, it feels like the Canadian government issues new regulations every three months. We, as international students, and even our career counselors or university immigration advisors, are often equally confused. The information we receive is outdated—sometimes it's relevant to students who arrived months ago, but the norms have since changed.*

Service providers echoed these concerns, sharing that many students lack clarity about their immigration status, and as a result, cannot always make informed decisions about the next steps they need to take regarding their education and employment.

Service providers also shared that students might have different perceptions of the immigration system based on their experiences in their home countries. In some cases, they may be distrustful or fearful of public systems in Canada, including immigration. This can make it challenging for students to navigate the system and understand their rights. For example, participants shared that students who are forced to work more than the permitted number of hours to afford living costs, can be fearful of losing their status and facing legal consequences. They cited concerns about these students being exploited in the workplace, sharing that employers hiring these students leverage this fact to deny documentation and to fulfil any employment rights. Furthermore, students fearing reprisal in the form of being reported by employers and losing their status will

not report instances of exploitation or denial of rights. For some students, their status can become precarious, and they have limited avenues to find solutions. One service provider shared:

> *A number of international students have become undocumented for things like not being able to apply for permanent residency before their non-renewable work permits expire or having being forced to lose their study permits because they were not able to pay for tuition fees even after their schools have hiked them or have been defrauded by education recruiters and immigration consultants.*

Service providers also noted that they often encounter students who are not aware of the different regulatory requirements for changes in their immigration status as they complete their education. They shared examples of students changing their courseloads, or making the switch from a public to a private educational institution, and jeopardizing their ability to retain their study permit. They also highlighted that changing regulations for post-study status options leave students in situations where their options are unclear, and they are unable to make timely decisions about the next steps they need to take to be able to work and remain in Canada if they choose.

Misinformation and pre-arrival information

Students face misinformation as they navigate the new systems in Canada. Participants shared that they often found it challenging to understand the healthcare, financial, housing, and employment systems when they arrived in Canada, and did not always have access to readily available information. Students and service providers alike highlighted that international students rely heavily on information shared informally by friends and family. This can often lead to misinformation and seeking out the correct or relevant information is not always possible. Students may make significant decisions based on information shared by peers. For example, one participant shared:

> *I think my understanding of the healthcare system here is still very limited. From what I've heard from peers at school, some say that if you seek healthcare and get diagnosed with certain issues, it might affect your chances for PR (permanent residency) or work permit extensions. So, many choose to avoid it. Additionally, I haven't really been sure where to go. We do have mandatory insurance through the university, which gets renewed annually. However, I'm not even sure if I can use it for something as simple as a toothache. There's a lot of misinformation, and I haven't been able to verify the facts myself. So, I haven't accessed any services yet and can't provide much insight.*

In addition to accessing healthcare, service providers shared that a lack of information about legal and employment rights also puts students at a disadvantage as they begin their life in Canada.

Service providers highlighted the need for better pre-arrival information shared with international students to prepare them for life in Canada, including their rights and avenues for support. Participants identified several platforms for this information-

sharing, including through pre-arrival actors like immigration consultants in home countries, at airports, through community-based organizations, and by educational institutions. They also highlighted that immigration consultants and agents outside of Canada can provide misleading information to student prior to their arrival. One service provider shared:

> *One of the things that hasn't come up in terms of like access to information and knowing exactly what they're [international students] walking into is that a large, large part of the problem is international agents and the information that they are getting before they come to Canada isn't always accurate.*

Service providers shared that there is little regulatory oversight over recruitment practices for international students by immigration consultants outside of Canada. This makes students susceptible to being given misleading information even prior to their arrival in Canada.

Navigating services and access to support for international students

Current areas of service provision and assistance to international students

Service providers taking part in this project differed in the scope of service provision they were able to offer post-secondary international students. Their ability to provide students access to services was dependent on several factors, including program funding sources, program eligibility, service capacity, knowledge of community resources, as well as organizational resources available for their use. International students are eligible for programs and services provided by their educational institutions and some community organizations. Through our consultation with service providers, we found that these organizations include those that receive funding under the provincial Newcomer Settlement Program (NSP), and advocacy-based organizations. Several project participants worked in programs funded by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC). Service providers participating in this project shared that as recipients of IRCC funding, they are not able to support access for international students to any IRCC funded programming they provide. However, many service providers shared that although international students are ineligible for their services, they regularly seek support from these organizations. Service providers shared that in situations where they are unable to serve international students due to eligibility restrictions, there are various approaches that they take to offer some form of support. For service providers participating in our project, these include:

- Providing a referral and/or redirection to programs where students meet the eligibility criteria and can access support
- Providing informational resources and inventories on available services
- Providing informal support and tips on navigating different services and challenges

While most service providers taking part in our project shared that their program funding sources do not enable them to serve international students, we heard from several organizations that do provide programs and services to this group. Among these organizations, advocacy groups provide considerable support for international students in several areas. These supports include:

- Organizing both virtual and in-person peer support groups
- Connecting students with community resources and support
- Providing legal and immigration advice, and support with addressing cases of exploitation
- Advocacy, particularly in terms of policy change

The following sections will discuss insights on navigating service delivery for international students shared by participants of this projects. These service providers shared their different experiences, highlighting both challenges and opportunities to improve access to services for international students and improve well-being.

Informal Sources of Support for International Students

Both service providers and international students taking part in this project shared the importance of informal support outside of educational institutions and community organizations in addressing the needs of international students. Supports highlighted by the participants of this project include:

- Support provided at places of worship
- Virtual Community groups, often on social media sites
- Social networks, including classmates, friends, and relatives already living in Canada
- Community events and cultural activities

Participants highlighted that these sources of support were often low-barrier to access, and provided much needed support in an environment of trust and familiarity. Informal supports were particularly important for some international student participants in the earlier stages of navigating their transition to Canada. One participant shared their experience of accessing support at their place of worship. They shared:

> *I just feel more comfortable at my place of worship. It's easier to communicate my needs, and they're often more responsive. I don't have to follow a formal process like I would at school, where I'd have to go through a counselor and wait for responses. At the worship place, I can just have a conversation, and they'll get back to me when they can. It's more flexible.*

In addition to these informal sources of support through community organizations like places of worship, students participating in this project shared that they relied on their personal networks, like family and friends already living in Canada to access vital support, including finding housing, connecting with support workers in community organizations, and accessing cultural networks and events.

Barriers to accessing and providing support: service provider and student perspectives

Service providers and students shared perspectives on several barriers to providing and accessing support by international students. Most service providers participating in community dialogue sessions for this project worked in IRCC funded programs. They shared their experiences of being unable to assist students who approach their organizations for support. These service providers shared that students continually seek services and support, despite being ineligible for services due to their immigration status. One service provider shared:

> *So one of the biggest frustrations is always when we have someone who is in need of assistance and the status is that they have only work permits. So they can work, but we cannot assist them and they*

cannot access our funding because of the status. Again, they are student status, and they are kind of basically are in a crack. So, they're not permanent resident, they're not refugee, right. And they are like kind of stuck and they need assistance, and we can help them, but we can't because of the funding.

Service providers highlighted that while most settlement agencies are not mandated to serve students, turning them away often leaves service providers sense of frustration and helplessness. One service provider working with an IRCC-funded program also shared that workers at their organization were "overwhelmed" by the number of students seeking support daily.

Resource and Capacity Limitations

One of the most prevalent barriers to providing and accessing services identified by participants was the limited capacity within programs where international students meet eligibility criteria. Service providers working in non-IRCC funded programs shared that they operate with very low resources compared to the demand for services from international students. In reference to employment services, one service provider shared:

I think that with us, it's becoming overcapacity as there's so many international students that were admitted. And so, although for my program, we don't usually or in the past would get a lot of international students, we've experienced like a high increase with them for I think last year and this year.

Service providers referring students to other organizations share that there are a very limited number of programs they direct students to in Toronto. They share that students are met with long waitlists for programs that are at full capacity. One example shared by many service providers across the three dialogue sessions was the long waitlists for employment support programs. They highlighted that employment is a need for students that is more immediate and requires access to timely support. Given the current capacity of organizations serving students, this need is not currently being met. Referring to an employment program serving international students, one service provider shared:

Long waitlists would be an issue. For example, like [organization name], that's one of the main job search programs for international students. And although the facilitator's amazing and she's very

responsive, that sometimes it takes my international student clients two to three months to even get a reply from them. So, the long wait list is a huge issue. I think that there's more international students than there are providers for these, these helpful programs for them. It's like they're outnumbered.

The challenge of resource limitations and service provider capacity is not limited to community organizations. Service providers from educational institutions also highlighted the overwhelming demand for services offered to students through their educational institution. One participant shared:

And at the college level, obviously we have supports in place, but the number of students relative to the number of staff is, you know, the support ratios sometimes become overwhelming.

Service providers shared that while these challenges exist, they continue to find ways to support students that approach their organizations, even if they are not mandated to serve them. Some examples shared by service providers participating in this project include developing their own resources to meet emerging needs, starting to outreach and build relationships with local educational institutions with international students, and providing informal guidance and redirection to appropriate services.

Information and responsiveness to student needs

Another significant challenge identified by participants in this project was the lack of resources and information about international students' service needs. Many service providers shared that it is challenging to identify community services they can direct students to due to their eligibility criteria and the capacity within organizations that are mandated to work with students. One service provider shared:

There are a lot of service providers and a lot of community agencies out there and trying to navigate which have funding and which don't have funding. It's a really time consuming effort.

Service providers also described their challenges in understanding students' needs, particularly in cases of exploitation and abuse. They highlighted that international students are often apprehensive about engaging with organizations or systems of authority to report violence in the workplace or at home, fearing reprisal or issues with their immigration status. They shared that this limits the information that is brought to the attention of community-based

and advocacy organizations, making it difficult for them to offer appropriate programs and support.

Looking ahead: opportunities to address challenges and improve the experiences of international students

Participants shared several recommendations on addressing the challenges discussed through dialogue sessions and interviews, highlighting key areas for improvement. These recommendations were wide-ranging, exploring community-based approaches, service coordination and collaboration, and policy and regulatory change.

Access to information
Increasing access to timely and relevant information was a recommendation provided by both service providers and international students taking part in this project. Service providers emphasized the importance of information at all stages of the journey, including pre-arrival information. They recommended that a major part of support offered by educational institutions should be information on how to navigate the services that are available in the community, with details and support on how eligibility for these programs operates. One service provider highlighted that knowledge of services is key to accessibility, and equipping students with an initial knowledge of service navigation can reduce barriers. International students also addressed the importance of access to accurate information, sharing that increasing access to vetted resources could be very beneficial to students. One student participant shared:

> *There should be a repository of reliable information for international students, maybe a government or school-endorsed website. I'd be willing to subscribe to services like that if it prevented me from losing money to scams.*

Leveraging technology and online resources to increase access to information
Service providers highlighted that technology can be a tool used to increase access to information, and as a result, access to services and support for international students. One participant suggested the use of an app that could filter services based on eligibility criteria, providing students with a list of organizations where they could access support.

Shifting perspectives on addressing employment needs
Service providers discussed the need to approach addressing employment needs for international students from a more strengths-based perspective. They shared that many students seeking employment have relevant experience gained in their home countries

that could support them in their employment in Canada. One student participant recommended that in addition to highlighting the importance of Canadian credentials and experience, service providers recognize and leverage the skills and experience students already have to support them in gaining employment. Participants also recommended that service providers providing employment services can support students in communicating their previous experience in the Canadian context and using the appropriate language and tools for the Canadian job market. Service providers also discussed the importance of shifts in hiring practices that would help address some barriers students have in gaining employment. They recommended the use of incentives for employers hiring international students, and changes to hiring practices to be more inclusive towards individuals with credentials and experience from outside Canada.

Service coordination and collaboration
When discussing the role of the different stakeholders in addressing the needs of international students and facilitating access to services, service coordination and collaboration were key themes shared by participants. Participants discussed the roles different stakeholders have been playing in the communities where international students are living, studying, working, and seeking support. Members of educational institutions recognized the important role that community organizations are playing in supporting students. While referring to community organizations, participants from educational institutions shared the following perspectives:

> *I think schools have relied on your organizations and settlement agencies to kind of fill some of that support gap that we don't either have the expertise or the resources to provide.*

Another participant shared:

> *I think we need to work together. Like, I don't think we're going to solve everything that international students need if educational institutions and community agencies don't work together, they need us both. You know, there's room here for both of us to be servicing the students.*

Participants recommended an increase in service capacity for community-based organizations, highlighting that they are well-positioned to provide both relevant and sustainable to students. One service provider shared:

I think having more supports also at the community level is part of that solution. So that we are supporting them as they're growing and as they're learning.

Increasing the capacity of services offered by educational institutions was also a key recommendation, particularly in terms of housing and employment support.

To understand the dynamic of the different stakeholders working to address the challenges faced by students, service provider participants were asked to share how they currently collaborate with educational institutions and other community organizations to support international students. While some participants did not have any initiatives focused on this area, several service provider participants did share examples of how their organizations are beginning to approach this challenge in a collaborative way. Some actions taken by participants and their organizations include:
- Engaging in dialogue events and research projects to learn about the international student experience and share perspectives
- Participating in informational events for students hosted by educational institutions
- For advocacy organizations, hosting workshops and information sessions for staff at educational institutions

These steps were shared as promising practices for service providers, particularly those seeking to take initial steps in engaging with partners like educational institutions. Some service providers also shared that they have built partnerships with educational institutions to host students for experiential learning placements, however, they did not share any specific programs or benefits for international students in this regard.

Addressing gaps in policies and protective regulations for international students
Participants recommended strengthening regulations affecting international students, particularly in terms of housing, employment, and interactions with overseas immigration consultants/agents. Service providers emphasized the importance of improving regulations for landlords to maintain better living conditions for students. One service provider noted that the housing situation for students is "dire", leaving many individuals in precarious or abusive situations. Student participants reflected on their experiences as well, sharing their experiences in living in precarious housing situations where they fear landlords may evict them without adequate notice, and where overcrowding may put their health and safety at risk.

Service providers shared similar recommendations for protecting employed students, highlighting that protective regulations should be supported by educational institutions that are hosting international students. One service provider shared:

> *[International students] are working so many hours and they're working in precarious situations because, you know, that's the best they can get. And they get abused because they don't have rights they're not being protected. So, I think some safeguards have to be put in place by the government and supported by colleges and institutions that greet them, because they're very vulnerable.*

In addition to policies protecting students in the workplace, some service providers highlighted the need for a shift in how educational institutions develop and market programs of study to international students. One service provider shared their perspective, advocating that educational institutions should invite students to programs that align with provincial and federal labour market demands. They shared ensuring students are well-equipped for the workforce is in part related to their program of study, which may result in challenges finding meaningful employment opportunities. Other participants also agreed with this perspective, with one participant highlighting the need for broader collaboration between educational institutions, industry partners, and community partners to provide insights to shape programs.

Lastly, a key area identified by participants was the role of unregulated immigration consultants in and outside of Canada in recruiting and informing international students. As discussed in earlier sections, students can become susceptible to misinformation, fraud, and financial repercussions when receiving services from unregulated immigration consultants and agents. Students also shared experiences of receiving inaccurate information from agents in their home countries. Service providers highlighted that more stringent regulations for individuals providing these services are needed to protect students. They also highlighted that within this large industry, many consultants or agents may falsely present themselves as licensed under Canadian regulations, but due to limited oversight, may never face consequences and continue to provide services. One service provider shared:

> *The overseas agents sometimes also do work closely with Canadian immigration consults and licensed or a license or the Canadian International Students advisors. And so, there is a level of responsibility as well here in Canada before the students come because of the channels used for recruitment and recruitment is really a broad, aggressive and large scale and there lacks really oversight and control.*

Many other participants highlighted this as an important policy issue, advocating for more protections to be put in place for students.

Conclusion: creating dialogue, reflecting on challenges, and taking action

This report highlighted the challenges faced by international students in navigating challenges, and accessing support and services, while also focusing on barriers to providing services faced by community service providers. By speaking to students and service providers, key challenges for students were highlighted, providing insight into areas for service needs. Student challenges were wide ranging, encompassing aspects of financial stress, health and well-being, and navigating information and systems. The community dialogue sessions also sought to learn more about the service provider experience, exploring current areas of service provision and assistance to international students, the role of informal support for students seeking services, and barriers to service provision. Participants also reflected on challenges and shared opportunities for improving the experience of students. These recommendations include improving access to information for students, increasing service coordination and collaboration between community service agencies, educational institutions, and other partners, and addressing key policy and regulatory issues.

This project is a first step in creating dialogue and discussing perspectives around addressing the needs of international students in Toronto. The community dialogue and interview formats allowed for a deeper understanding of issues, centering the perspectives of individuals experiencing challenges and barriers, as well as those working in the community spaces where international students seek support. Participants in this initiative reiterated the need for continuing dialogue and further opportunities for stakeholders to connect, discuss, and collaboratively address barriers to service access for international students, provide adequate and timely access to relevant support, and ultimately improve the experience of students studying, working, and living in Toronto.

Community resources for International Students

Organization	Address	Email	Phone number
Access to Food Support			
ACSA Community Services - Community Food Centre	1911 Kennedy Rd. Unit 105 Scarborough, ON M1P 2L9	hubreception@acsa.ca	(647) 723 - 9238
ACSA Community Services Food Asset Map	Online food asset map	Click here to access the map	
Centre for Immigrant and Community Services Food Bank	2330 Midland Avenue, Scarborough, ON M1S 5G5	info@cicscanada.com	(416) 688-0792 (647) 472-0385
Feed Scarborough	772 Warden Ave Toronto, ON, M1L 4T7 Canada	info@feedscarborough.ca	(416) 936-3975
Salvation Army, Community and Family Services - Scarborough Citadel	2021 Lawrence Ave., E., Scarborough, ON M1R 2Z2	scarborough.cfs@salvationarmy.ca	(416) 759-1721
Settlement and general support			
Catholic Crosscultural Services	55 Town Centre Court, Suite 401, Scarborough M1P 4X4	Click here to send an email message Click here to register to become a client	(416) 757-7010
Malvern Family Resource Centre	90 Littles Rd Scarborough, Ontario, M1B 5E2	Click here to send an email message	(416) 284-4184
Toronto Community & Culture Centre - Toronto - Head Office	222 Spadina Ave Unit 217 Toronto, ON M5T 3B3	tccctoc@gmail.com	416-971-7883
COSTI - International Student Connect	2301 Keele Street, Unit 102 Toronto, ON M6N 3Z9	ISC@costi.org	1-844-871-4567

TNO (The Neighborhood Organization)	10 Gateway Blvd, Suite 104 Toronto, ON, M3C 3A1	info@tno-toronto.org	1-855-421-3054
Woodgreen Community Services	815 Danforth Avenue, suite 100 Toronto, ON M4J 1L2	info@woodgreen.org	(416) 645-6000
Newcomer Women's Services Toronto	355 Church Street, Suite 201, Toronto ON, M5B 0B2	info@newcomerwomen.org	(647) 224-1371
Health, Mental Health and Housing Support			
The Housing Help Centre	205-2500 Lawrence Avenue East Scarborough, ON, M1P 2R7		(416) 285-8070
The Canadian Centre for Refugee & Immigrant Health Care	4158 Sheppard Ave E, Scarborough, ON M1S 1T3		(647) 267-2176
Information, Advocacy, and Legal support			
Migrant Workers Alliance for Change		Click here to send an email/request for services	(647) 858-2854
Chinese and Southeast Asian Legal Clinic	123 Edward Street, Suite 505 Toronto, Ontario, Canada M5G 1E2	csalegalclinic@gmail.com	(416) 971-9674
Legal Aid Ontario	20 Dundas Street West, Suite 730 Toronto, Ontario M5G 2H1	info@lao.on.ca	(416) 979-1446 Toll free: 1-800-668-8258
West Scarborough Community Legal Services	2425 Eglinton Avenue East, Suite 201 Scarborough, ON M1K 5G8		(416) 285-4460
South Asian Legal Clinic of Ontario	45 Sheppard Avenue East, Suite 106A Toronto, ON M2N 5W9	Click here to send an email message	(416) 487-6371