



**POLICY BRIEF 2024**

# **Confronting Anti-Palestinian Racism**

**A Call to Action for Canada's  
Immigrant Service Sector**

*Fatima Elmasry*

The LEVEL Youth Policy Program takes place on the traditional and unceded territories of the *xʷməθkʷəjəm* (Musqueam), *Sḵwxwú7mesh* (Squamish) & *səlilwətaʔ* (Tsleil-Waututh) Coast Salish peoples.

#### GRAPHIC DESIGN

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#### COVER ILLUSTRATION

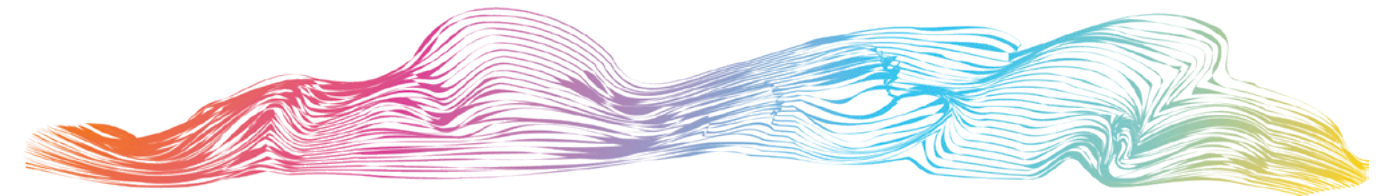
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#### HEADSHOT PHOTOGRAPHY

Naybu Taw Photography

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# About the LEVEL Initiative

LEVEL is a youth engagement initiative of Vancouver Foundation that aims to address racial inequity. We do this by investing in the leadership capacity of Indigenous, racialized, immigrant, and refugee youth to create more opportunities throughout the non-profit and charitable sector.

Despite being the fastest-growing youth populations in British Columbia, Indigenous, immigrant, and refugee youth don't have the same opportunities as other young people. Race continues to be a factor that hinders their ability to have a say in decisions that impact their lives.

LEVEL empowers these youth by building their capacity to challenge and change those systems that hinder their ability to build a more just world.

### LEVEL consists of three pillars of work to advance racial equity

1. LEVEL Youth Policy Program
2. LEVEL Youth Organizing
3. LEVEL BIPOC Granting

### About the LEVEL Youth Policy Program (LEVEL YPP)

The LEVEL Youth Policy Program (LEVEL YPP) brings together young people between the ages of 19 and 29 from across British Columbia who identify as being Indigenous or racialized immigrants or refugees. Indigenous and racialized newcomer youth are dispropor-

tionately impacted by certain public policies but are rarely included in the development and implementation of public policy process. The LEVEL YPP aims to provide these youth with equitable training and leadership opportunities to better navigate the public policy landscape, and to develop new tools and skills to influence, shape, and advocate for policy changes that are relevant in their own communities. Having young people directly involved in shaping policies that impact their lives is essential to creating systemic, meaningful change. The LEVEL YPP's training is grounded from and within Indigenous peoples' worldviews, which the program acknowledges, could vary from person-to-person or nation-to-nation. Indigenous worldviews place a large emphasis on connections to the land. This perspective views the land as sacred; where everything and everyone is related and connected; where the quality of the relationships formed are key in life; where what matters is the success and well-being of the community, and where there can be many truths as they are based on individual lived experiences.<sup>1</sup> As such, an important premise of this training is to centre and place a particular focus on the fact that the work that has gone into developing this training, as well as the training itself, has taken and will take place on unceded (never given away/stolen) territories of the *hə́nq* 'əmin 'ərn-speaking Musqueam peoples, of the Halkomelem-speaking Tsleil-Waututh peoples, and of the *sníchim*-speaking *Sḵwxwú7mesh* (Squamish) peoples.

1. <https://www.ictinc.ca/blog/indigenous-peoples-worldviews-vs-western-worldviews>



# Biography

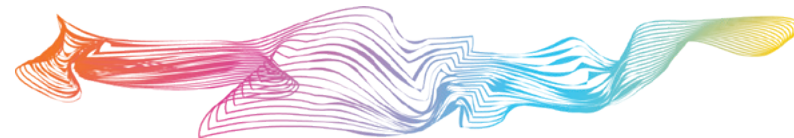
## Fatima Elmasry



*Fatima, born as a stateless Palestinian refugee, came to the unceded land of the Coast Salish peoples over 15 years ago. She completed her studies in Political Science and Social Justice in Education at Simon Fraser University (SFU).*

*Fatima has a deep passion for social justice and organizing with racialized migrant communities. She has been working with and engaging newcomers for several years through her involvement with DIVERSEcity Community Resources Society, Umoja Operation Compassion Society, and World University Services of Canada.*

*In her free time, she enjoys spending time with her five sisters, two cats, and too many nephews and nieces to count.*



# Executive Summary

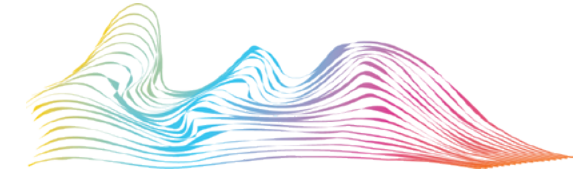
*The immigrant service sector operates within inherently political contexts, where understanding and supporting newcomer clients necessitates a comprehensive grasp of global impacts, historical narratives, current events, and foreign affairs.*

This nuanced perspective is particularly crucial when addressing the unique experiences of Palestinians and the oppressive systems that hurt them.

Among the diverse clientele of the immigrant sector, a large portion comprises Palestinian newcomers. While these individuals share commonalities with immigrants from other regions, their experiences are also shaped by the distinct challenges posed by Anti-Palestinian Racism (APR).<sup>1</sup>

APR originates from the historical colonization of Palestine and the ongoing denial of the Nakba, symbolizing the mass displacement of Palestinians in 1948. This racism perpetuates through misinformation, distortion of historical truths, and the erasure of Palestinian narratives and rights.<sup>2</sup> By discrediting Palestinian identity and minimizing their grievances, APR reinforces systemic inequalities and violence.

In Canada, APR manifests through systemic discrimination, cultural biases, and political pressures, resulting in exclusion, silencing, and stereotyping that marginalize Palestinians and undermine their identity and rights.<sup>3</sup> This pervasive issue extends across educational institutions, workplaces, media portrayals, and refugee policies, perpetuating injustice and impeding Palestinian inclusion and advocacy efforts.<sup>4</sup>



***By implementing targeted staff training, advocating for equitable policies, and creating healing spaces, organizations can actively combat Anti-Palestinian Racism (APR) and support Palestinian refugees and immigrants.***

The immigrant service sector plays an important role in addressing and dismantling APR. By implementing targeted staff training, advocating for equitable policies, and creating healing spaces, organizations can actively combat APR and support Palestinian refugees and immigrants. It is imperative that immigrant-serving agencies affirm Palestinian identities and ensure comprehensive support and advocacy.

To effectively combat APR, organizations such as DIVERSEcity Community Resources Society must provide their staff with education and training around APR. This approach fosters awareness, provides holistic support to clients, and advocates for policy reforms that contribute to more equitable and inclusive spaces for Palestinians in Canada. Recognizing and addressing APR as a distinct and urgent issue in Canada is crucial, necessitating the amplification of Palestinian voices, respect for their rights, and validation of their experiences.

# Background

## WHAT IS ANTI-PALESTINIAN RACISM

Anti-Palestinian Racism (APR) is a pervasive and distinct form of discrimination deeply intertwined with Orientalism, anti-Arab prejudice, and Islamophobia.<sup>5</sup> Although these concepts are interconnected, each is distinct with its own scope and impact. APR operates through a spectrum of behaviors that marginalize Palestinians and delegitimize their experiences. This includes actively silencing Palestinian voices, excluding them from public discourse, dehumanizing Palestinians, erasing their narratives and history such as the Nakba, defaming Palestinians and Palestinian narratives, and justifying violence against them.<sup>6</sup>

This form of racism denies Palestinians their identity as Indigenous people with collective rights and belonging in historic Palestine.<sup>7</sup> It also undermines their human rights and dignity, perpetuating stereotypes that portray Palestinians and their allies as inherently antisemitic, terrorist sympathizers, or opponents of democratic values.<sup>8</sup> We can see the parallels between APR and anti-Indigenous racism. As more and more organizations take on reconciliation and decolonization commitments, they need to take on APR as an extension of these commitments. Such slander not only defames individuals but also aims to delegitimize broader Palestinian movements for justice.<sup>9</sup>

Anti-Palestinian racism employs strategies that racialize and stereotype Palestinians, contributing to what is known as the "Palestine Exception." This phenomenon systematically denies basic rights, such as freedom of

expression and association, to Palestinians and their advocates.<sup>10</sup> Individuals who support Palestinian rights often face false accusations of antisemitism, using the highly discredited International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's (IHRA) definition that is being adopted across Canadian institutions, a term increasingly wielded to suppress legitimate discourse and activism.<sup>11</sup>

## UNMASKING ANTI-PALESTINIAN RACISM IN CANADA

Anti-Palestinian Racism remains a significant and inadequately addressed issue in Canada, with incidents intensifying since October 7, 2023.<sup>12</sup>

These incidents include hate crimes targeting Palestinians, discriminatory employment practices, school suspensions, firings, doxxing of pro-Palestinian individuals, and the criminalization of Palestinians based on their views on Palestine.<sup>13</sup> Tragically, APR has led to fatal violence, exemplified by the shooting of three Palestinian students wearing keffiyehs in Vermont.<sup>14</sup>

APR transcends isolated hate crimes; it is entrenched in institutional practices. This includes government surveillance of pro-Palestinian individuals and organizations, and universities cracking down on pro-Palestinian demonstrations in recent months.<sup>15</sup>



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Concrete examples of anti-Palestinian racism include the CBC reprimanding journalists for signing an open letter advocating for improved reporting on Palestine.<sup>16</sup> Media outlets actively avoid using terminology that acknowledges the Palestinian experience, such as omitting the term "Palestine."<sup>17</sup> Service Canada's erasure of Palestinian identity, in the case of a 90-year-old Palestinian woman who was told her renewed passport could not list "Palestine" as her country of birth.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, targeted efforts to ban the keffiyeh, a traditional Palestinian cultural scarf, underscore the discriminatory practices specifically aimed at Palestinians.<sup>19</sup>

It is important to recognize that many instances of APR go unreported due to various barriers including a lack of awareness about the terminology and uncertainty about reporting procedures. Furthermore, agencies often fail to categorize APR separately, sometimes conflating it with Islamophobia or other forms of discrimination.<sup>20</sup>



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Long Live Palestine, poster by Dio Cramer.

Complaints regarding Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) offices handling APR matters have highlighted issues such as treating concerns as personal mental health issues, delayed or no responses to complaints, redirecting to anti-Islamophobia initiatives, and dismissing concerns or requests for resolution.<sup>21</sup>



## IMPACTS OF ANTI-PALESTINIAN RACISM IN IMMIGRANT SERVICES

### Immigrant Experiences of Anti-Palestinian Racism

Immigrant-serving organizations have a profound responsibility to support refugees and immigrants worldwide, addressing the root causes of displacement and advocating against injustices that have forced their clients into their current state. Among these groups, Palestinians constitute one of the largest and most long-standing refugee populations globally, with approximately 7.2 million dispersed worldwide,<sup>22</sup> including nearly 50,000 of which reside in Canada.<sup>23</sup>

However, upon arrival in Canada, Palestinians often face significant challenges beyond displacement, including adapting to a new language, culture, and navigating unfamiliar systems. Adding to these challenges is the pervasive issue of APR, which exacerbates their vulnerability.

Incidents of APR are distressingly common in Canadian schools, where Palestinian and non-Palestinian immigrant children face anti-Palestinian sentiment.<sup>24</sup> Reports from high-school and elementary students reveal

interactions with teachers and school administrators who perpetuate anti-Palestinian racism through silencing, exclusion, stereotypes, and defamation of Palestinians and their narratives.<sup>25</sup>

For example, a single mother of three, client X, shared with DIVERSEcity Community Resources Society that her 10-year-old daughter's Grade 5 teacher spread misinformation about Gaza, wrongly portraying Palestinians as instigators of conflict. This misinformation deeply affected X's daughter, who returned home upset and feeling unsafe. Such incidents not only cause distress and anxiety but also discourage open discussion about Palestine and Palestinian identity among immigrant children.

Similar incidents in schools across Canada include immigrant children being prohibited from using the word "Palestine" in graduation quotes and being told not to wear keffiyehs.<sup>26</sup> Refugee and immigrant youth often lack the knowledge and support needed to advocate for themselves or recognize instances of APR. Another form of APR, in some schools, is the complete avoidance of discussing Palestine altogether—neither its history nor current events are mentioned or taught. Additionally, world maps displayed in classrooms often exclude Palestine altogether.<sup>27</sup>



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The refugee parents of these children often struggle to support their children for several reasons:

1. **Children refrain from sharing their experiences** because they understand the burdens their newcomer parents already face and do not want to add more to their post-migration stress.
2. **Parents may not know how to effectively support their children or navigate Canadian systems**, including understanding their rights.
3. **Immigrant parents fear potential reprisals** and are reluctant to take any action that could bring unwanted risk.<sup>28</sup>

Other forms of APR experienced by newcomer Palestinians include being subjected to hate speech in public spaces, where visibly pro-Palestinian individuals often receive slurs or offensive gestures.<sup>29</sup> Some have been unjustly labeled as terrorists simply for wearing keffiyehs. This hate speech also permeates the online world, where many profiles publicly express anti-Palestinian sentiments. Online hate comments targeting Palestinians often criticize their presence as refugees in Canada or coming to Canada and dismiss activism and calls to action as disruptive or associated with terrorism.<sup>30</sup>

Anti-Palestinian Racism has had a profound impact on the mental well-being and daily activities of this population. It has inflicted racialized harm and trauma on pro-Palestinian individuals, affecting both those directly targeted and their broader networks, including their families and communities.<sup>31</sup> This deliberate targeting intensifies fear and anxiety among Palestinians, discouraging them from openly identifying as Palestinian or participating in Palestinian-related activities.<sup>32</sup> This fear also extends to allies who may hesitate to show support.

This heightened anxiety often leads Palestinians to hide their identity to avoid becoming targets of attack.<sup>33</sup> However, this defensive measure can result in additional negative effects such as depression, feelings of demoralization, and a sense of isolation. Some newcomers have expressed reluctance to attend pro-Palestinian demonstrations due to concerns about potential violence and intimidation tactics from law enforcement and Canadian security intelligence services.<sup>34</sup> There is also a pervasive fear of being doxxed and the consequent risk of losing opportunities for education or employment.<sup>35</sup>

Furthermore, individuals may opt not to identify as Palestinian altogether out of fear of facing backlash, whether in job applications or in societal interactions.<sup>36</sup>

### Anti-Palestinian Racism in the Workplace

Anti-Palestinian Racism shows up in the immigrant-serving workplace in various ways including:

- **Silencing of Pro-Palestinian Voices:** There is a fear of bringing up anything related to Palestinian identity, as it is seen as taboo or too political and complicated. Recent incidents show people expressing pro-Palestinian views being censored, leading to job loss and hostile work environments. This atmosphere has silenced many Palestinians and their supporters in the immigrant-serving sector, fearing repercussions for speaking out, especially in organizations funded by supporters of



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- Israeli policies, with fears of funding being withdrawn.
- **Failure of Organizations to Address Gaza:** Many organizations fail to acknowledge the situation in Gaza, opting for neutral stances in emails and communications. Staff emails on Palestine often avoid using the terms "Palestine" or "Gaza," referring instead to a "situation of humanitarian crisis in the Middle East." This neutrality can inadvertently justify violence against Palestinians, equating the oppressed with the oppressors and blaming the oppressed for their circumstances.
- **Professionalism of Wearing Keffiyeh:** Wearing a keffiyeh at work is often deemed unacceptable or unprofessional, further marginalizing Palestinian cultural identity in professional settings.
- **Exclusion in Client Databases:** Palestinian identity is often excluded when creating client profiles in databases. Options typically list "West Bank or Gaza Strip (Palestine)" as the only choices, disregarding Palestinians from other areas in occupied Palestine. This omission undermines Palestinian identity and erases their diverse origins and backgrounds.
- **Inadequate Immigration Laws and Funding:** Current immigration laws and funding allocations often do not adequately support Palestinians, contributing to their marginalization in immigrant-serving sectors.
- **Validation of Palestinian Identity:** Immigrant service staff often fail to validate Palestinian identity in these spaces, neglecting the cultural and familial connections many staff members have to Palestine. Many staff have immediate family in Gaza, experiencing distress over ongoing atrocities like genocide, apartheid, and colonization, including severe humanitarian crises and the withholding of vital aid by Israel.

- **Lack of Awareness Among Staff:** Some staff members in immigrant-serving organizations, especially those who are not involved in frontline work, are unaware of the complexities and realities of APR. They lack information and understanding about APR, which leads to ineffective support for Palestinian clients and the harboring of problematic ideas or biases. This lack of awareness further complicates efforts to provide culturally sensitive services and support to Palestinian immigrants and refugees in Canada.
- **Lack of Resources and Knowledge for Staff:** Immigrants and many staff members lack terminology and awareness of resources specific to addressing APR. This deficit in knowledge can prevent staff from adequately supporting clients facing APR or recognizing discriminatory behaviors within the organization. It underscores the need for comprehensive training and access to resources that equip staff with the tools necessary to address APR effectively and support clients facing discrimination.

### Canada's Refugee Policy and the Palestinian-Ukrainian Contrast

Not only do we witness the impact of Palestinian racism within organizations serving immigrants in Canada, but this sentiment also manifests before Palestinians even arrive in the country. Anti-Palestinian racism is evident in resource allocation within the immigrant service sector, as well as in the immigration process and the acceptance of refugees from



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Palestine into Canada. There is a noticeable double standard in Canada's approach to Palestinian refugees compared to other groups.<sup>37</sup> For instance, when comparing Canada's responses to the Ukraine crisis and the Gaza crisis, it becomes apparent that Palestinians from Gaza do not receive the same level of consideration, empathy, and respect.

Canada's government rightfully acted swiftly in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, launching several initiatives to support displaced Ukrainians. These programs included extended temporary status, enabling Ukrainians to work, study, and reside in Canada until conditions in Ukraine stabilized. Importantly, there was no limit on the number of visas issued, resulting in over a million Ukrainians being granted visas, regardless of their familial ties to Canada.<sup>38</sup>

When it came to the support offered to Gazans, it took months of Palestinian-Canadians pressuring the government for them to take action.<sup>39</sup> Once they did, the biases were clear. Gazans seeking safety in Canada were only offered a 3-year temporary visa and were capped at 1,000 applicants. And that is only if they met the strict eligibility and screening requirements. Gazans had to have immediate family members in Canada. The special immigration measure for Gazans seeking refuge included a heinous screening process, and the eligibility made it very difficult to qualify. In the application, Gazans were

made to include an unprecedented amount of personal detail, asking about "a full and detailed employment history, since the age of 16 years, including exact dates, description and details on your roles and responsibilities, name(s) of supervisors(s), reason for leaving the job, and any disciplinary issues." People are being asked to supply their social media accounts, all previous phone numbers and email addresses, every passport they have ever had, and details about "any scars or injuries which have required medical attention."<sup>40</sup> Ottawa, due to pressure, later announced they would increase the cap to 5,000 visas offered to residents in Gaza under this program. However, the program continued to face significant criticism, largely due to Canada's inability to facilitate the evacuation of any Palestinians from the Gaza Strip as a result of this initiative.<sup>41</sup> Mentions of "terrorism" and "security" were also noted in discussions by public officials regarding the special immigration measures.<sup>42</sup> Such rhetoric defames Palestinians by associating them with security concerns and portraying Gazans as potential security threats, actions constituting APR.

The contrasting treatment of Ukrainian and Palestinian refugees highlights a clear double standard. The Trudeau government swiftly and comprehensively responded to Ukraine, removing application caps and not mandating Canadian relatives for entry. This disparity not only reflects racial bias but also underscores systemic APR.



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# Proposal

## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The immigrant-serving sector has a responsibility and role to play in addressing APR. As organizations dedicated to supporting immigrants, they must engage in addressing the systems that hurt them. We urge DIVERSEcity Community Resources Society to adopt comprehensive policies to combat APR and to support Palestinian communities. Specifically:

### 1 Staff training on Anti-Palestinian Racism.

- **Implement mandatory staff training on APR within our equity training program.** This training is crucial to raise awareness about the issue, educate staff on recognizing and addressing discriminatory behaviors and ideas, and foster a more inclusive and supportive workplace environment.
- **Clearly define APR, distinguishing it from Islamophobia.** Anti-Palestinian Racism is a form of anti-Arab racism that silences, excludes, erases, stereotypes, defames, or dehumanizes Palestinians or their narratives. This includes:<sup>43</sup>
  - i) **Denying the Nakba and justifying violence against Palestinians.**
  - ii) **Failing to acknowledge Palestinians as an Indigenous people** with a collective identity, belonging, and rights in relation to occupied and historic Palestine.
  - iii) **Erasing the human rights, equal dignity, and worth of Palestinians.**
  - iv) **Excluding or pressuring others to exclude Palestinian perspectives, Palestinians, and their allies.**
  - v) **Defaming Palestinians and their allies with slander**, such as labeling them as inherently antisemitic, terrorist sympathizers, or opposed to democratic values.
  - vi) **Equip staff with knowledge of self-advocacy resources to support clients facing anti-Palestinian racism**, particularly vulnerable Palestinian refugees.
  - vii) **Ensure training materials provide adequate representation and objective reporting**, avoiding neutral statements and ensuring Palestinian voices shape the delivery of training.

### 2 Advocacy and Support for Palestinian Refugee Clients.

- **Advocate for increased support, resources, and funding for Palestinian refugees and those escaping Gaza on visas.** This should include raising awareness among stakeholders and government officials about the specific needs of this community.
- **Call on the Federal Government to remove the visa cap on Palestinians seeking refuge in Canada**, expand eligibility criteria, waive fees, and facilitate the evacuation of refugees from Gaza.

- Put pressure on the Federal Government to address their inadequate efforts to bring Palestinians.
- **Collaborate with local immigrant service organizations to advocate for comprehensive training on anti-Palestinian racism across the sector.**

### 3 Protect Expressions of Support for Palestinian Human Rights.

- **Ensure that staff and clients are supported and protected when expressing support for Palestinian human rights.** This includes safeguarding those who display pro-Palestine office decor, make pro-Palestine statements, or wear pro-Palestine attire (such as keffiyehs, shirts, or buttons).

### 4 Creation of Healing Spaces and Flexible Support Options.

- **Establish dedicated healing spaces within our organization for both staff and clients impacted by anti-Palestinian racism.** These spaces will offer support, resources, and a safe environment for dialogue and healing.
- **Provide flexible support options for staff during personal distress related to the ongoing crisis in Gaza**, including paid time off for those with family in Palestine, in addition to regular vacation and sick days.
- **Allow flexibility in work schedules and environments to accommodate personal needs during times of heightened stress and concern.**

### 5 Endorse Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS).

- **Encourage staff to be mindful of their purchases** for events, programming, and other materials brought into our workspace.
- **Consider boycotting companies complicit in the suffering of Palestinians**, including HP, Starbucks, Walmart, McDonald's, Domino's Pizza, and Pizza Hut.
- **Raise awareness among staff about ethical purchasing decisions and the impact of these choices** on Palestinian communities affected by ongoing conflicts.

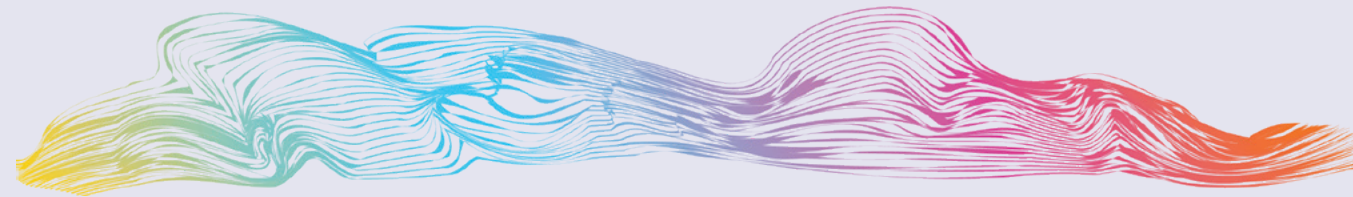
These policy proposals aim to address APR, support Palestinian communities, and foster a more inclusive and supportive environment within our organization.



**The immigrant-serving sector has a responsibility and role to play in addressing Anti-Palestinian Racism.**



# Conclusion



Anti-Palestinian racism marginalizes Palestinians through the suppression of their voices, erasure of their narratives, and legitimization of violence against them.<sup>44</sup> The immigrant-serving sector, including organizations such as DIVERSEcity Community Resources Society, holds a critical responsibility in addressing APR. They must commit to educating and training around APR, advocating to reform policies that perpetuate APR, and providing support to vulnerable Palestinian refugees and

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immigrants to ensure their safety and protection against APR. By actively combating APR, immigrant-serving organizations must aim to uphold Palestinian rights, dignity, and inclusion.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I acknowledge that this policy proposal takes place on the ancestral, unceded territory of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and səliłwətaʔ (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations. I am grateful to these Nations for allowing us to learn and live on their lands and for the knowledge and inspiration I have drawn from them in advocating for Palestinian Indigenous sovereignty against settler colonialism. The resistance in Palestine owes much to the anti-colonial struggle on Turtle Island, learning from their resistance to colonization for over 500 years.

I dedicate this work to God, to every Palestinian living in the diaspora, and to my family in Gaza who remains resilient, beautiful, and continue to celebrate and teach life despite enduring genocide.

Special thanks to Amora Takawira, our YPP facilitators, my mentors Vihbor Garg and Harsha Walia, and the 2024 cohort participants for their unwavering support, care and the love they bring to every space we share.





*Recognizing and  
addressing Anti-Palestinian  
Racism as a distinct and urgent issue  
in Canada is crucial, necessitating the  
amplification of Palestinian voices,  
respect for their rights, and validation  
of their experiences.*

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