



AN EXAMINATION OF THE MOST ACUTE HOUSING NEEDS OF BC'S NEWCOMERS:

A Refugee Housing Strategy

October 2024



Land Acknowledgement

AMSSA and BCNPHA acknowledge our work takes place on the unceded homelands of First Nations who have stewarded this land since time immemorial. The land and waters colonially named BC are home to over 290,000 Indigenous people and more than 200 distinct First Nations. As provincial umbrella associations, we recognize the privilege that we have as settlers on this land and acknowledge that our organizations and our members' housing operations and services are situated on Indigenous lands. AMSSA and BCNPHA are committed to creating a safe space for Indigenous voices.



About us

This strategy is co-developed by the Affiliation of Multicultural Societies and Service Agencies of BC (AMSSA) and BC Non-Profit Housing Association (BCNPHA).

AMSSA

The Affiliation of Multicultural Societies and Service Agencies of British Columbia (AMSSA) is the provincial umbrella association for agencies serving newcomers. The organization strengthens over 90 member agencies, as well as hundreds of community organizations that serve newcomers and build culturally inclusive communities, with the knowledge, resources, and support they need to fulfill their mandates.



BCNPHA

BC Non-Profit Housing Association (BCNPHA) has been the provincial umbrella organization for the non-profit housing sector for more than 30 years. We serve almost 600 members, including non-profit housing societies, businesses, individuals, partners and stakeholders, with education and professional development opportunities, research and advocacy, and asset management services. BC's non-profit housing societies manage more than 70,000 units of long-term, affordable housing in over 2,500 buildings across the province.



Acknowledgements

AMSSA and BCNPHA extend their gratitude and thank the advisory committee members for sharing their invaluable insights, knowledge and expertise which was instrumental in shaping this strategy. We also gratefully acknowledge the contributions of everyone who participated in focus groups and interviews, including service providers, front-line staff from emergency shelters, and settlement service providers, non-profit housing providers and settlement organizations staff who shared their experiences and expertise. Their collaboration and insights have been key to shaping the recommendations in this report.

Refer to Appendix 3 for a full list of advisory committee members.

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Executive Summary

When it comes to the relationship between newcomers and Canada's housing crisis, recent popular narratives have tended to conflate increasing immigration numbers with decreases in available housing. This narrative is dangerously simplistic as it lacks the nuance that the supply of affordable housing has not kept pace with rising housing need for several decades and fails to acknowledge the critical role immigration plays in supporting Canada's population and economy.

When examining a combination of those topics, the housing crisis and Canada's experience with immigration, a complicated picture emerges. The housing crisis in BC continues to significantly impact communities large and small across the province. Unpacking the making and extent of the housing crisis in this country is beyond the scope of this paper, yet it is important to note the compounding factors underlying the housing crisis including a limited supply of housing affordable to low-income households, the lack of sufficient investment into non-market housing over many decades, rising construction and labour costs, and slow development processes, which have all contributed to the crisis. As for the topic of immigration, the federal government has highlighted that immigration accounts for almost all of Canada's *labour force* growth, and "by 2032, it's projected to account for 100% of Canada's *population* growth"¹, demonstrating its centrality to the future of our communities.

Due to a variety of reasons, certain newcomer groups have not been adequately connected with the need to fund housing infrastructure as governments plan for the future of Canadian communities. Despite significant policy responses from senior levels of government in recent years into the realm of housing, there is still a significant gap in the availability of affordable homes for those who need them, and this issue extends to newcomers.

As a result of this housing gap, and an increase in the number of newly arriving immigrants and refugees experiencing housing need, "the settlement sector's capacity to keep up with the demand has been limited²". The ability for the settlement services sector to find adequate housing for newly arriving immigrants and refugees is significantly impacted by the lack of affordable housing coupled with immigration related barriers. These barriers include streamlined access to Canadian referrals or lack of credit history, level of income, barriers to initial employment due to insufficient Canadian experience, and language, among others. Recognizing the crucial connection between immigration, settlement, and housing, the *Affiliation of Multicultural Societies and Service Agencies of BC* (AMSSA) developed a study

examining newcomer housing needs, presenting short- and long-term opportunities and recommendations, including multi-sector partnerships that are needed to address newcomer housing challenges³. This report represents the next stage of the discussion started by that study.

Through the partnership between Affiliation of Multicultural Societies and Service Agencies of BC (AMSSA) and the BC Non-Profit Housing Association (BCNPHA), the strategy presented in this report builds on research completed to date and paves a way forward for our sectors to work in tandem with one another.⁴ Specifically, this strategy is focussed on housing challenges faced by refugee claimants and government assisted refugees in BC and presents potential solutions, strategies, and recommendations to address those challenges. Refugees are the focus of this report for a variety of reasons but primarily because they experience some of the most acute housing challenges of all newcomers upon their arrival, their housing needs are not accounted for in the same way other immigration paths are, and their incomes place them in the realm of clients typically served by the non-profit housing sector.

The strategy was developed with the critical insights of an advisory committee comprising of experts from the settlement sector and the non-profit housing sector.

The main objectives of this strategy are to:

- Determine the main housing challenges experienced by refugees and refugee claimants in BC;
- Identify short- and long-term strategies to address these housing challenges;
- Shift from an emergency response to a long-term strategic approach to housing refugees by recognizing their unique needs and their resettlement journeys.

About the Strategy

The strategy looks at available literature and data to gain a better understanding of the impacts of BC's housing crisis on immigrants and refugees. Findings show that affordability is the biggest barrier experienced by immigrants and refugees when it comes to housing and their needs cannot be addressed without increasing the overall supply of affordable housing in the province. In addition to affordability, immigrants face compounding barriers such as language and discrimination while navigating unfamiliar systems which directly impact their experiences in securing appropriate housing. A review of literature and existing data shows that different immigrant and refugee groups among newcomers are impacted by these barriers in a variety of ways.⁵

The barriers that newly arriving immigrants and refugees experience and the housing supports they receive largely depend on their immigration category. This means different immigrant and refugee groups have unique housing needs and require specific type of supports to address the barriers they are facing. Despite the common misconception that all refugees arrive to Canada through the same immigration stream, resulting in the same levels of supports being offered to all refugees, it is important to note that refugees arrive through a few different streams and/or programs which then determines the varied levels of support they receive. This is critical because the level of support a newcomer receives has been found to significantly impact their housing experiences.

In determining the scope of this strategy, level of need was carefully considered as was the unique position of the non-profit housing sector in serving those with very low- to moderate-incomes. Given unprecedented need in recent years, and the mandates of the partners involved in this work, this strategy focuses on the housing challenges experienced by Refugee Claimants and Government Assisted Refugees in the province and presents potential solutions, strategies, and recommendations to address some of these challenges⁶.

Overview of Findings

According to the most recent census data, approximately half of all “refugee”⁷ – led renter households in BC were experiencing Core Housing Need between 2016 and 2021, which is the highest compared to any other population group in the province⁸. This means these households fall below one or more when it comes to standards for affordability, suitability (overcrowding), and/or adequacy (repair), and are also not able to afford average market rent in the community.

Top Barriers to Affordable, Safe, and Secure Housing for Refugee Claimants

Refugee Claimants are not eligible for most government assisted supports

The temporary immigration status of refugee claimants makes them ineligible for most federal government supports and rental assistance programs in BC on arrival. Claimants are only eligible to apply for the province's income assistance⁹ after making their asylum claim – a process that can typically take a few weeks to months.

While the number of arriving refugee claimants in need has significantly increased, the direct housing supports geared towards claimants hasn't kept pace with the rising need.

As of 2023, approximately 260 refugee claimants were placed in approximately 48 dedicated refugee claimant transitional units through BC CHARMS which is a refugee claimant housing referral system¹⁰. Although this data does not account for all transitional units dedicated for refugee claimants in the province, the existing capacity cannot address the overall housing need of refugee claimants on arrival. Focus groups findings indicated that overall, approximately 370 refugee claimants can be served with current capacity of transitional homes and in comparison, BC received 7,700 refugee claimants in 2023.¹¹ Over the past five years, the number of arriving refugee claimants has fluctuated annually, with the most significant increase occurring between 2021 and 2023¹².

There has been a significant increase in the number of refugee claimants seeking assistance within the shelter system

Because of the lack of sufficient dedicated transitional housing supports, refugee claimants are having to increasingly rely on emergency shelter beds upon their arrival. In February 2024, the City of Vancouver staff surveyed 37 emergency shelters and found that 78% of the surveyed shelters experienced an increase in asylum seekers / refugee claimants and 32% reported that at least half of the beds were occupied by refugee claimants¹³.

Refugee claimant experiences within the shelter system are unique

Focus group findings indicated that low-barrier shelter environments can often be a culture shock for refugees and trauma informed practices in shelters may not be able to address the needs of refugees. The trauma refugees experience from persecution and violence, immigration status precarity, language barriers and racism while navigating complex systems in a new country can be different from the trauma and violence experienced by typical shelter users. Moreover, focus groups findings with shelter providers indicated that because of the limited number of family shelters¹⁴, refugee families are often separated when accessing the shelter system.

Housing response for refugee claimants is ad-hoc

A part of the reason for the acute difficulties that refugee claimants are facing is the lack of an integrated support system. Housing supports through provincial programs are typically for housing *search* support or temporary accommodations such as short-term emergency hotel stays and not in the form of dedicated housing supply with wrap-around supports geared towards refugees. Moreover, current supports focus on helping claimants understand the housing market, rather than enabling them to afford a home.

Discrimination based on race, religion and ethnicity

The inability to find appropriate housing has been identified as the most significant barrier preventing racialized refugees and refugee claimants from settling in Canada. Discrimination in the private rental market impacts the resettlement and housing experiences of refugees and refugee claimants. Discussions through focus groups highlighted situations in BC where particular groups of refugee claimants are denied housing based on their place of origin and race due to landlords' biases. Research also highlights instances where refugees are subjected to additional application requirements such as six months of security deposit in advance or needing co-signers/ guarantors which refugees often lack.¹⁵

Top Barriers to Affordable, Safe, and Secure Housing for Government Assisted Refugees (GARs)

Resettlement Assistance Program rates (RAP) are insufficient in meeting current market rental rates anywhere in BC.

While resettled refugees receive government assistance and supports on their arrival to Canada, these supports are not sufficient for GARs to access safe, secure and affordable housing in the province. A review of the RAP shelter allowance rate in comparison to the average rents in BC, showed that the allowance is incapable of covering for housing costs in cities across the province¹⁶. The shortfalls range from approximately \$620 - \$1,400 (*refer table 5*). Over the years, income supports received by GARs have not kept pace with the rise in housing prices in the private markets¹⁷.

Short periods of transitional housing support

The amount of time GARs spend in transitional supports is limited to a small number of days/weeks. The short periods of transitional stays combined with restrictive policies that limit the number of housing options GARs are eligible to view create barriers to finding affordable and suitable permanent housing. Research indicates that refugees with large families and those with other additional considerations take longer to find permanent affordable housing.

Forced to make poor housing choices due to the dynamics of existing rental markets - Unaffordable, Inadequate and Unsuitable housing

Larger family sizes common among refugee families complicate the search for affordable housing due to an insufficient supply of larger units and restrictions due to the National Occupancy Standards (NOS). This often means that refugee families may end up living in overcrowded conditions because of being denied housing due to larger family sizes or they have to live in smaller sized units with larger families to cover for housing costs.

Discrimination based on race, religion and ethnicity creates barriers to finding housing and leaves GARs vulnerable to evictions

Government assisted refugees encounter many of the same biases experienced by refugee claimants. Refugees are a diverse group, and their experiences are influenced by multiple identities such as gender, race, origin, class, age and disability. Their resettlement is often hindered by stereotypes and misinformation based on their place of origin and other intersectional identities which directly influences their housing experiences.”¹⁸. For example, a 2022 Ipsos study “ found that 64% of Canadians support accepting more Ukrainian refugees into Canada, while only 37% support accepting more Afghan refugees”¹⁹

Overview of Recommendations

While population projections used to plan for housing include anticipated immigration to BC, the housing response towards refugees and refugee claimants in the province has been largely reactive as the number of refugee claims cannot be adequately predicted. More recently, the lack of a co-ordinated response to housing refugee claimants has resulted in many living in precarious housing situations and at a higher risk of experiencing homelessness. Homelessness is far more costly than providing support services.

“...unique solutions are required to address the needs of refugees, along with broader efforts to address the rental housing crisis in BC.”

One of the major challenges faced by organizations and providers assisting both refugees and refugee claimants is securing access to affordable housing. Access to safe, secure, and affordable housing is constrained by the dynamics of the housing market such as the insufficient supply of affordable housing, low vacancy rates, and rising rents. Thus, unique solutions are required to address the needs of refugees, along with broader efforts to address the rental housing crisis in BC.

As such, we recommend the following:

Housing Systems and Policy

- Expand and invest in our overall affordable housing stock to address affordability pressures in the province
- Increase the number of dedicated transitional housing units for refugee claimants
- Expand provincial rent subsidies such as the Homelessness Prevention Program (HPP) to include refugee claimants
- Increase current capacity of emergency shelters including the number of available family shelters to better address needs of refugee claimants at-risk of homelessness
- Redirect interim funds used for refugees and refugee claimant accommodations, such as hotels, into sustainable housing solutions with wrap around supports
- Review policies for resettlement assistance for GARs to determine how to better meet the needed intended to be address through this program

Funding, Support services and Outreach

- Develop a province-wide coordinated access system for the resettlement of refugees and refugee claimants to support the flow of refugees into BC
- Create facilities that focus on connecting refugee claimants with housing solutions and other critical supports immediately upon arrival
- Implement a comprehensive data collection and management strategy to better understand the housing outcomes and gaps in service delivery for both refugees and refugee claimants.
- Establish a collective impact model to solve the systemic issues that refugee claimants are facing in the province
- Explore cross-sector partnerships to expand housing opportunities for both refugees and refugee claimants along the housing continuum

Raising Public Awareness

- Increase public awareness and understanding about the experiences of refugees and immigrants
- Increase awareness on the harmful limitations established by National Occupancy Standards

Education Resources

- Expand resources to educate refugees and refugee claimants on the housing system and tenant rights in the province



BC's Housing Crisis

1

1. BC's Housing Crisis

A review of existing literature shows that **affordability is the biggest housing-related barrier facing newcomers to Canada**. Newly arriving immigrants, and refugees in particular, must navigate through complex circumstances while experiencing language barriers, unfamiliar policies, and intersecting forms of discrimination including classism and racism, on top of facing all the same challenges that anyone in BC experiences when trying to access affordable, quality housing. To understand the full picture of the housing landscape that greets newcomers in BC, it is critical to examine the overall housing crisis in the province and within the rental housing market in particular. As of 2021, 37% of all renter-led households in BC were immigrants and refugees, of which, approximately 42,000 households landed in Canada between 2016 - 2021²⁰.

Rental housing options for low-income households have decreased and become more expensive over time and newcomers are impacted by this reality in the same way any other low-income household would be. Affordability problems in BC have been exacerbated by rising rents, low-vacancy rates, stagnant or declining availability of non-market housing, and difficulty accessing other means of low-income assistance such as access to rent supplements. With a provincial vacancy rental rate of 1.2% in the private rental market, finding safe and permanent housing is a challenge for most renter households²¹. In addition to low vacancy rates, average rents in the province increased by 30% between 2016 and 2021²².

BC is also losing the affordable housing it already has. Studies show the financialization of housing, where “rental apartments are treated as assets for financial investment and managed to generate maximum profits for investors” further reduces the availability of affordable housing and worsens housing security²³. BC is losing its naturally occurring affordable housing stock at a rapid pace due to tenant turnovers, redevelopments, and forced evictions. Between 2016 and 2021, BC lost 97,390 units renting below \$1,000, including 39,285 units renting below \$750²⁴. During the same period, only 8,027 new non-market units were built²⁵. In a five-year period, for every provincially assisted affordable home BC developed, three naturally occurring affordable units were lost.

Newcomers to BC have distinct needs when it comes to housing, yet it is critical to note that the unique housing needs of immigrants and refugees cannot be addressed without also increasing the overall supply of affordable rental housing in the province. Working in tandem with what is outlined further on in this paper, BCNPHA has released an updated plan for the province which quantifies and costs out what is required to address BC’s affordable housing crisis over the next decade. *Build More, Protect More: A New Affordable Housing Plan for BC 2024*²⁶ estimates that 12,500 new affordable homes will be needed annually over the next ten years to meet growing housing needs in BC. At a cost of \$6.7 billion annually, an investment to be shared between the provincial government, federal government, and community housing sector, capital is needed to match the urgency of the housing crisis that underscores the challenges faced by newcomers in BC.

“...needs of immigrants and refugees cannot be addressed without also increasing the overall supply of affordable rental housing in the province.”



The Impact on Newcomers

2

2. The Impact on Newcomers

Barriers experienced by newly arrived immigrants and refugees

Immigration is crucial to Canada’s population growth and economy. The federal government has highlighted that immigration accounts for almost 100% of Canada’s *labour force* growth, and “by 2032, it’s projected to account for 100% of Canada’s *population growth*”²⁷. In BC, the 2023 Labor Market Outlook anticipates that new immigrant workers will contribute to 46% of the additional labor supply in the province over the next decade²⁸. While immigration plays a critical role in addressing BC’s growing labor gap²⁹, the role of immigration has not been adequately connected with the need to fund housing infrastructure accordingly.

The systems through which governments estimate housing need and plan for growth historically have not adequately anticipated the scale of housing demand due to the misalignment between population growth targets and housing supply indicators³⁰. As a result, there is a growing gap between housing demand and supply – a problem that has been compounded by decades of underbuilding and underinvestment in the “right” supply of housing. This reality has fueled the narrative that newcomers (which includes newly arriving immigrants and refugees) may be contributing to the housing crisis. We see this through various narratives over the recent years, including the scapegoating of international students, temporary workers and more recently refugees blamed for the increase in homelessness³¹.

There is an emerging body of research examining how perceived threats predicts attitudes towards immigrants and immigration. These perceptions can significantly impact an immigrants housing outcome in the form of discrimination. Research shows that discrimination against immigrants has been known to create negative impacts on their settlement journey³². These barriers are amplified when examined through an intersectional lens and are more pronounced among non-status and racialized newcomers when accessing housing.

Access to safe, secure and affordable housing in the short-term and long-term is a key factor in determining the settlement journey of immigrants and refugees. For

“For newcomers to Canada, the largest barriers to accessing appropriate housing are affordability, discrimination, overcrowding and disconnection between services.”

newcomers to Canada, the largest barriers to accessing appropriate housing are affordability, discrimination, overcrowding and disconnection between services³³. Not all immigrants and refugees experience the same economic and housing trajectories in their settlement journey. Their settlement is typically undermined by policy barriers³⁴ and housing outcomes are largely dependent on the level of supports they receive, financial independence and location of settlement³⁵.

Research also indicates that the immigration categories through which newcomers arrive has an impact on their experiences with settlement and housing. According to the latest census data, “recent refugee” -led renter households were more likely to face some of the highest affordability challenges compared to any other household in the province³⁶. According to census data, “refugees”³⁷ include both resettled refugees and refugee claimants whose claims were accepted and granted a permanent resident status. The lack of adequate shelter and dedicated services geared to newly arriving immigrants and refugees results in many experiencing homelessness and living in precarious housing situations. In the most recent homeless count, the number of people who identified as an “immigrant or refugee” experiencing homelessness increased by 36% between 2020 and 2023 in Metro Vancouver³⁸. Research also indicates that the rate of hidden homelessness is high among newly arrived immigrant and refugee populations, as they are more likely to reside with family and friends and may not always access shelters/ formal systems³⁹.

For many newly arriving immigrants and refugees, multiple structural factors affect their settlement in Canada. Along with macro-level barriers such as the structure of housing markets and insufficient supply of affordable housing, a range of other barriers affect immigrant and refugee experiences when it comes to finding housing. Research indicates that heightened barriers to accessing housing are influenced by discriminatory treatment towards racialized newcomers constraining their access to adequate housing⁴⁰. Studies on housing related barriers and discrimination faced by newcomers identify three levels of barriers that affect newcomer’ experiences which are classified as primary, secondary and systemic barriers⁴¹.

Barriers	Experiences
<p>Primary</p>	<p>Discrimination based on person’s race, ethnicity, culture and place of origin creates barriers for all streams of immigrants and refugees. Research and findings from focus groups indicated that, based on place of origin and ethnicity, newcomers face discrimination from landlords when obtaining housing on the private rental market⁴². Literature also showed that “newcomers were subjected to increased eligibility requirements and denial of housing on discriminatory grounds”⁴³. Intersectional challenges of multiple factors such as gender further create additional barriers for certain newcomer groups when accessing housing. Immigrant and refugee women in particular experience higher poverty rates and unique barriers to finding adequate housing putting them at an even greater risk of homelessness⁴⁴.</p>
<p>Secondary</p>	<p>Additional barriers to housing that stem from access to Canadian referrals for employment and housing, level of income, family size, language, non-credit history, lack of knowledge of housing system and legal information on tenant rights.</p> <p>Research and focus group findings highlighted the lack of available information on services offered to newcomers and instructions on application processes t can hinder their capability to navigate the housing market and the difficulties encountered in finding employment or working for minimum wage can contribute to the limited housing choices they have available. A survey on the extent of substandard housing problems faced by immigrants and refugees in the lower mainland BC found that; due to lack of previous references and other proof of credibility newcomers were forced to pay higher than average 6-month deposits as security.⁴⁵</p>
<p>Systemic</p>	<p>Structure of housing markets (housing prices, availability of different types of housing), unit sizes, harmful limitations of National Occupancy Standards (NOS), long-waitlists for non-market housing, disconnect between settlement and housing policy, policy barriers such as qualification for rental assistance, social housing.</p> <p>Research shows that affordability is the biggest housing related barriers facing newcomers. Affordability problems are further exacerbated by rising rents, low-vacancy rates in the rental market, relatively declining availability of non-market housing, and other means of assisting low-income</p>

households. Additionally, the most recent census data indicates that refugees and low-income immigrants face higher rates of overcrowding which means they may be living in unsuitable housing to cover for housing costs. Research also indicated that the use of National Occupancy Standards (NOS) can limit housing options for newcomers, especially refugees who have larger family sizes⁴⁶. Housing is a key factor in the resettlement journey of immigrants and refugees and the lack of suitable, affordable housing can create barriers to successful settlement.

Different immigrant and refugee groups among newcomers are impacted by these barriers in a variety of different ways. The dependency on public systems of support upon arrival to Canada can also have effects on newcomer housing trajectories⁴⁷. “The idea of a progressive housing trajectory remains true for some newcomer populations, but there is wide variation in housing outcomes when broken down by immigration category”⁴⁸. Research shows that “a newcomer’s affiliation to an immigration category and their housing outcomes are closely linked”⁴⁹. Similarly, the barriers that newcomers experience and housing support they receive largely depend on their immigration category. Which means, different immigrant and refugee groups among newcomers have unique housing needs and require specific type of supports. While some require specific services such as supports navigating the rental market, others need specific types of housing such as non-market housing with wrap around services to support their settlement trajectory in BC. Hence, it is important to understand how housing outcomes differ for various immigrant and refugee groups in the province.

Housing Outcomes by Immigrant Group

Rising costs for both rental and homeownership have created challenges for individuals and families across the province in affording the basic necessity of housing. Renter households in particular face higher affordability challenges where a lack of affordable housing options puts them at a greater risk of homelessness. This impacts newly arriving immigrant and refugees who are more likely to seek rental housing in their initial years upon arrival in Canada. According to the latest census data, of the 66,700 “immigrant”- led households (landed immigrants or permanent residents) that landed in BC between 2016 and 2021, approximately 63% were renter households⁵⁰.

According to the latest census, overall, 36% of all households in BC are immigrant households (including both “permanent” and “non-permanent residents”)⁵¹. Of

these immigrant households, 240,000 are renter households accounting for 37% of all renter households in BC⁵² (Fig 1). Approximately, 39% of them were spending over a third of their income on rent and utilities and 19% were spending more than half of their income on rent and utilities⁵³ (Fig 2). Which means these households are likely to experience affordability challenges and maybe foregoing basic necessities such as food, medications etc. to cover shelter costs. As per the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) housing is considered affordable when 30% or less of your household’s gross income goes towards paying for housing costs which has become the general standard of measurement for affordability in Canada.

Fig 1: Proportion of immigrant-led renter households (including “permanent” and “non-permanent residents”)

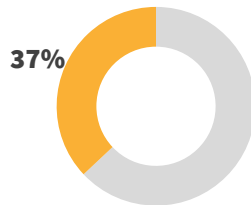
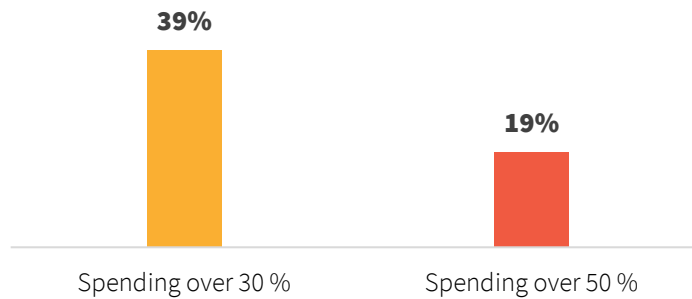


Fig 2: Proportion of immigrant-led renter households spending over 30% and 50% of income on housing costs, 2021 (including “permanent” and “non-permanent residents”)



A review of census data indicates that, within immigrant households, there is a significant difference between groups based on their admission category. While the housing experiences of students, work permit holders and refugee claimants are poorly documented in the literature available, the most recent census data shows that, “non-permanent residents⁵⁴” face the highest affordability challenges in all provinces. As per census, “non-permanent residents” include immigrants who have a “work or study permit” or who have “claimed refugee status in Canada”⁵⁵. The income-shelter gap for “non-permanent residents” in BC is the highest in the country. With a median annual income of \$55,600 “non-permanent resident” households make \$6,000 less than “non-immigrant” households but pay \$260 higher on an average in rents⁵⁶(*Table 1*). Which means “non-permanent residents” may be paying higher rents and are also spending significantly higher proportion of their income to cover for shelter costs and utilities.

In BC, 53% of “non-permanent resident” - led renter households were spending more than 30% of their income on rent and utilities. Of those, 34% were spending more than half of their income on rent and utilities putting them at a greater risk of homelessness⁵⁷ (*fig 3 and 4*). With lower incomes and limited supports, the average amount of time it takes for “non-permanent residents” to settle down is relatively longer compared to other newcomers. Additionally, most newly arriving immigrants would not be eligible for rental assistance programs that are in place to aid low-income residents in reducing housing cost burdens, as eligibility criteria requires applicants must have been a resident of the province for the full twelve-month period directly preceding the application⁵⁸. This is an example of one of the many ways in which housing and settlement policies have not been integrated in a way that accounts for the needs of immigrants and refugees.

Table 1: Income and rent by immigration categories, 2021 Census

	Average Income	Median Income	Average Rent	Median Rent
PHM ⁵⁹ is a non-immigrant	\$76,400	\$61,600	\$1,440	\$1,310
PHM is an immigrant or a non-permanent resident	\$80,800	\$66,000	\$1,580	\$1,460
PHM is a non-permanent resident	\$68,300	\$55,600	\$1,704	\$1,600
PHM is an immigrant	\$84,100	\$69,500	\$1,548	\$1,410

As per census, PHM refers to Primary Household Maintainer. The primary household maintainer is the person or one of the people in the household responsible for major household payments such as the rent or mortgage. In households with more than one maintainer, the primary maintainer is the first person listed⁶⁰.

Fig 3: Proportion of households spending over 30% of their income on rent and utilities, 2021 Census

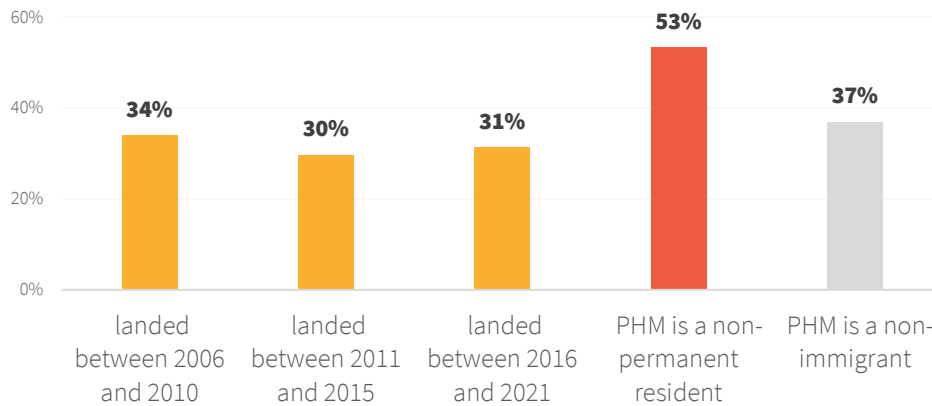
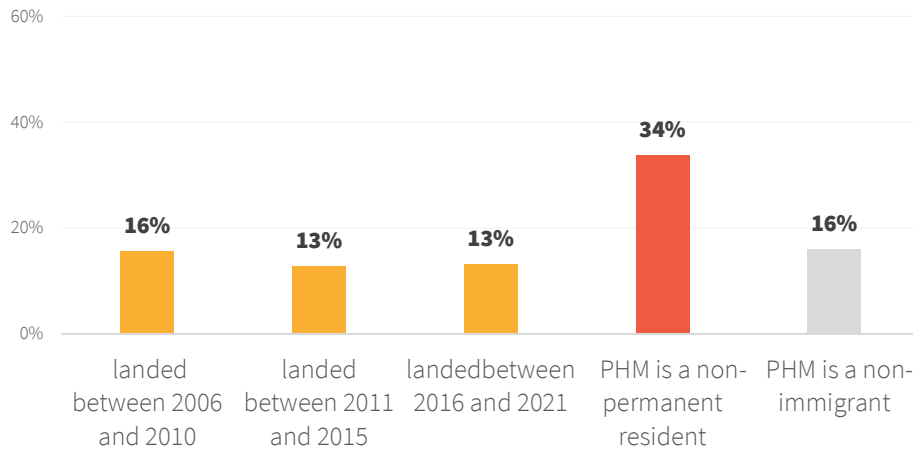
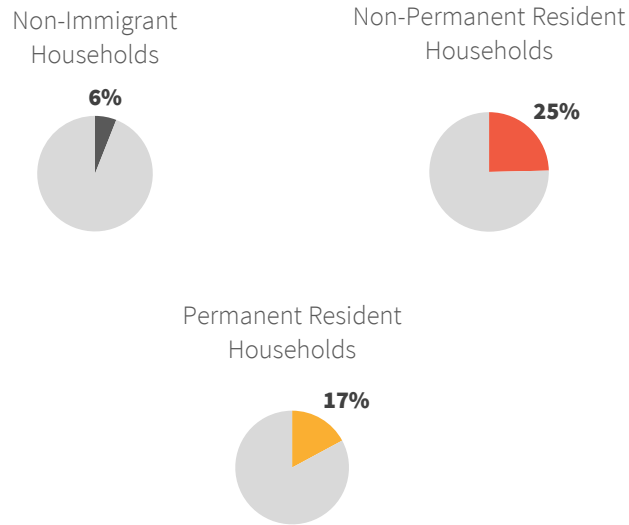


Fig 4: Proportion of households spending over 50% of their income on rent and utilities, 2021 Census



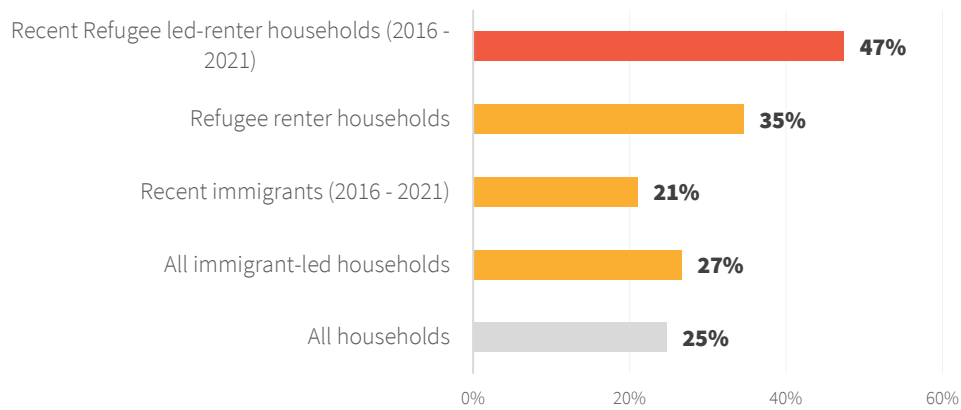
For many households, the unaffordability of housing also leads to overcrowded situations where individuals or families live together to cover for housing costs. According to the most recent census data, “non-permanent” residents are more likely to live in overcrowded conditions compared to other immigrant groups and “non-immigrant households” (Fig 5)⁶¹. As of 2021, 25% of all “non-permanent resident” households were living in overcrowded conditions⁶². Research shows that refugees and low-income immigrants may face higher rates of overcrowding because they cannot afford housing large enough to suit their needs, which means large families may be living in smaller sized units or different households may be living together to cover for housing costs.

Fig 5: Proportion of households living in overcrowded conditions by immigrant group, 2021 Census



A further breakdown of the categories highlights the significantly higher incidences of core housing need and housing affordability issues experienced by “refugees”⁶³. According to census data, “refugees”⁶⁴ include refugees who were in Canada when they applied for refugee protection and also refugees that were abroad and are referred for resettlement to Canada by UNHCR⁶⁵. As such, the term “refugee” encompasses both resettled refugees and refugee claimants whose claims were accepted and granted permanent resident status. On average “refugee”-led renter households were twice as likely to be in core housing need compared to other immigrant households. Which means these households who fall below one or more affordability, suitability (overcrowding), and/or adequacy (repair) standards, and are also not able to afford average market rent in the community. Among recent immigrants (i.e., those that arrived in Canada between 2016 – 2021), close to one in two “refugee”-led renter households were in core housing need (47%), about double that of other immigrant-led households (Fig 6)⁶⁶.

Fig 6: Proportion of Households in Core Housing Need by Immigrant Group, 2021 Census



Compared to other immigrants and the general population, refugees experience some of the greatest affordability challenges, spending a higher proportion of their income on shelter. According to the BC Refugee Hub, the median income of a refugee is \$27,000 per year after 10 years of living in Canada- that amount is \$13,600 less than national median income⁶⁷. Low employment participation, language barriers, high housing prices and insufficient social assistance rates in part account for why refugees are experiencing significant housing affordability problems amidst the complex process of resettlement, which increases their risk to homelessness. A CMHC study that examined the diverse needs of newcomers found that refugee claimants in particular need up to seven months to find housing and “disjointed services aimed to assist in resettlement make the challenges to affordability, discrimination, and overcrowding much worse”⁶⁸. The next part of the strategy dives deeper into the housing challenges experienced by refugees in BC over the last few years.

These findings highlight the different ways in which BC’s housing crisis impacts different immigrant and refugee groups based on their immigration category and consequently the relevant supports they receive (which is tied to immigration categories). Tying overall immigration to the availability of housing assumes all immigrants are the same, with the same housing needs⁶⁹. Addressing housing challenges of different newcomer groups requires a nuanced understanding of their unique vulnerabilities which is beyond the scope of this strategy. This strategy will primarily focus on the housing challenges experienced by refugees and refugee claimants over the last couple of years in the province and presents potential solutions, strategies and recommendations to address some of these challenges.



A Focus on Refugee Housing
Challenges in BC

3

3. A Focus on Refugee Housing Challenges in BC

As of 2023, across the globe more than 117 million people have been forcibly displaced and the total number of refugees globally has more than tripled over the last decade⁷⁰. As a result, an increasing number of refugees enter Canada every year seeking protection from persecution, violence, conflict and human right violations from their countries of origin. In BC, over the last 10 years, 26,375 refugees arrived through the Canadian Refugee Resettlement Program and 25,500 refugee claimants arrived at the border in need for protection⁷¹. According to the latest census data, 47% of all recent “refugee” -led renter households in the province were identified as experiencing core housing need compared to 25% of all renter-led households and 27% of immigrant -led renter households⁷². Of the recent “refugee” -led renter households experiencing core housing need; 760 households were living below affordability standards; 15 households were living below adequacy standards and 410 were living below suitability standards (*Table 2*)⁷³. Along with affordability challenges, housing choices are further constrained by smaller unit sizes leading to overcrowding and unsuitable housing conditions⁷⁴. Which means refugee families or individuals may be living together in smaller units to cover for housing costs.

Table 2: Number of Renter Households in Core Housing Need, Refugees and Recent Refugees

	Refugee	Recent Refugee
<i>Total number of households</i>	22,105	4,030
Households in core housing need	7,360	1,795
Households below affordability standard	4,310	760
Households below adequacy standard	235	15
Households below suitability standard	1,230	410
Households below 2 or more standards	1,590	610

It is important to note that refugees arrive through different streams and/or programs which determines the level of support they receive, consequently determining their housing experiences. There is a common misconception that all refugees arrive to Canada through the same stream of immigration and receive same level of supports. Refugees receive different levels of social supports upon their

arrival in Canada depending on the category to which they belong. The Canadian refugee resettlement program comprises of Government Assisted Refugees (GARs) who receive support on their arrival from the government and Privately Sponsored Refugees (PSRs) who receive supports from private groups for a period of one year. Broadly referred to as ‘resettled refugees’ GARs and PSRs are referred by United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) and have permanent resident status in Canada after they arrive. Another category within the resettled refugees is the Blended Visa Office Referral program (BVOR) which matches refugees identified for resettlement by the UNHCR with private sponsors in Canada. For BVOR refugees the Government of Canada provides support for six months and private sponsors are responsible for another six months of support. However, the number of refugees arriving through this particular program has decreased over the years.

Refugee claimants, on the other hand, directly come to Canada to seek asylum and do not receive the same level of supports as resettled refugees from the federal government. Claimants are not supported by government assistance immediately on arrival until a decision is made on their eligibility to make a claim. If eligible, their case is referred to the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (IRB) and they have 15 days to submit the “Basis of Claim.” During this time claimants may seek support for assistance with paperwork related to claims process, legal aid and housing search.

“...low vacancy rates compounded by challenges in the claims process such as delays in work permits, limited understanding of tenant rights, and language issues creates barriers to finding affordable housing for claimants in their initial months after arrival.”

Referrals are typically made to emergency shelters and transitional homes dedicated for refugee claimants. However, focus groups findings indicated that with limited capacities in shelters and transitional homes in Greater Vancouver, refugee claimants are unable to find adequate shelter. Additionally, shelter providers also indicated difficulty in connecting claimants with settlement services to help them navigate their resettlement process and also in moving them along the housing spectrum. During this period of time, refugee claimants are not eligible for any form of income assistance or direct housing supports. However, once a “Basis of Claim” is submitted a claimant is eligible for provincial social assistance and a work permit. But given the high housing costs, low vacancy rates compounded by challenges in the claims process such as delays in work permits, limited understanding of tenant rights and language issues creates barriers to finding affordable housing for claimants in their initial months after arrival. Only once their claim is deemed valid,

which often takes many months if not years, can they receive a protected person status and become eligible to apply for Permanent Residence (PR).

The lack of sufficient supports while navigating complex immigration barriers puts refugee claimants at a high risk of homelessness, a trend that has been observed across major cities in Canada. Between 2022 and 2023, the number of refugee claimants arriving in BC nearly doubled from 3,895 to 7,680 claimants⁷⁵ but, dedicated housing supports geared towards claimants has more or less remained the same. This level of increase in the number of refugee claimants alongside an affordable housing crisis has significant impacts on their settlement experience. As a result, the number of refugee claimants experiencing homelessness has significantly increased especially in the Lower Mainland region. According to the 2023 homeless count, 88% of refugee claimants experiencing homelessness have been in the City of Vancouver for less than one year and 56% of the claimants have been experiencing homelessness for less than six months⁷⁶.

The housing response towards refugees and refugee claimants in the province has been largely reactive. Different strategies have been adopted over the years during periods of mass humanitarian migrations to respond to the crisis depending on resources and systems in place during that given period of time⁷⁷. As a result, there remain significant gaps in addressing the housing challenges of refugees especially refugee claimants. Some literature highlights how “public attitudes towards the admission of refugees based on their country of origin are becoming increasingly conflicted”⁷⁸. Canada’s obligation to provide protection to refugees is enshrined in the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act*, which recognizes that “the refugee program is in the first instance about saving lives and offering protection to the displaced and persecuted”⁷⁹. But efforts to provide supports within our communities has largely been focussed on specific refugees under Canada’s refugee resettlement program to support broader international humanitarian objectives. Currently there remains a significant gap in supports geared towards refugee claimants. To effectively meet the housing needs of refugees and refugee claimants, there is an urgent necessity to shift from a housing response that is reactive to an integrated strategy involving collaboration among all levels of government and community partners.

Refugee Claimants

Refugee claimants have the most acute need for housing supports and services during the initial periods of resettlement. Many refugee claimants in particular spend years before their claims are decided, limiting their access to social assistance, health care and other social benefits. Moreover, the lack of social capital

and temporary status (lack of access to formal assistance) creates more difficult pathways to housing for refugee claimants⁸⁰. Over the recent years, there has been a significant increase in the number of refugee claimants arriving to Canada and there is no centralized plan to receive and resettle them. As a result, an increasing number of claimants are accessing the shelter system and experiencing homelessness on arrival in major cities across the country.

1. Refugee Claimants are not eligible for most government assisted supports

Claimants experience many constraints and barriers upon their arrival as they wait to receive “protected refugee” status in the country because they are not eligible for the same federal government assisted supports as resettled refugees in Canada making it more difficult to find adequate housing. At arrival, refugee claimants endure lengthy processes of security clearance, interviews and paperwork verification even after which they have to wait for several days or months until their claims are processed. In their initial days after arrival, refugee claimants are not eligible for many essential supports. According to the Canada Refugee Claim process, claimants must go through a set of processes to become eligible for social assistance, apply for temporary work visa and other services essential to their stabilization. Often, it can take up to weeks and even months for claimants to receive these supports⁸¹. During this period when claims are processed, despite the need for protection, refugee claimants often end up experiencing homelessness due to the lack of sufficient dedicated supports.

Provincial social assistance is the only form of income support that refugee claimants are eligible for after receiving their ‘Refugee Protection Claimant’ document⁸². A single person is eligible to receive \$500 per month (provincial rate) while a family of 6 receives \$940 a month, a rate which is wholly insufficient to cover for shelter costs anywhere in the province. Claimants would not be eligible for any other forms of rental assistance in the province. According to the province’s rental assistance program criteria, in order to receive rental assistance, the recipient must be a resident of BC for 12 months preceding their application⁸³. Additionally, with extremely long processing times at the Immigration Refugee Board (18-24 months) claimants have limited access to employment which directly impacts their ability to afford adequate housing and other essentials such as food and health services.

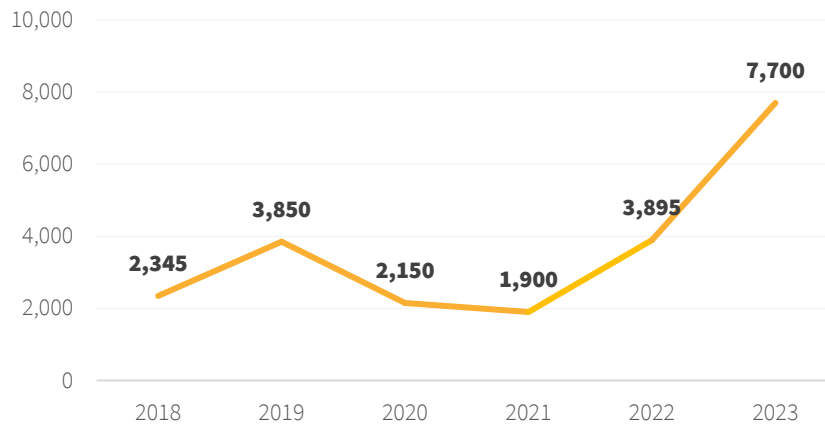
Table 3: Comparison of BC Social Assistance Rates to Average Rents

	Social Assistance Rate		British Columbia	Vancouver	Victoria	Kelowna	Kamloops
Studio	\$500	Average Rent	\$1,002	\$1,077	\$998	\$974	\$716
		Difference	\$502	\$577	\$498	\$474	\$216
2-bed	\$940	Average Rent	\$1,512	\$1,900	\$1,610	\$1,518	\$1,255
		Difference	\$572	\$960	\$670	\$578	\$315
3-bed	\$940	Average Rent	\$1,798	\$2,110	\$1,832	\$1,910	\$1,536
		Difference	\$853	\$1,170	\$892	\$970	\$596

2. Dedicated housing supports for refugee claimants have not kept pace with rising need

Between 2021 and 2023, the number of refugee claimants in BC increased by nearly 300%. Due to the global crisis and ongoing wars this trend has been observed across Canada (Fig 7)⁸⁴. Fleeing from persecution and violence RCs require a network of safe and secure housing supports to stabilize their lives upon their arrival in Canada. However, there remains a significant gap in the supply of housing supports and options geared towards refugee claimants. While the number of arriving refugee claimants in need has significantly increased, the direct housing supports geared towards claimants has not kept pace with the rising need.

Fig 7: Number of Refugee Claimants, BC



The only dedicated housing support for arriving refugee claimants in the province is transitional homes. Refugee Claimant transitional homes are temporary homes for refugee claimants generally for a period of three or more months. With very limited transitional housing capacity in the province most refugee claimants have to rely on other forms of housing support. As of 2023, approximately 260 refugee claimants were placed in approximately 48 dedicated refugee claimant transitional units through BC CHARMS which is a refugee claimant housing referral system⁸⁵. Although this data does not account for all transitional units dedicated for refugee claimants in the province the existing capacity cannot address the overall housing need of refugee claimants on arrival.

Focus group findings indicated that overall, approximately 370 refugee claimants can be served with current capacity of transitional homes and in comparison, BC received approximately 7,700 refugee claimants in 2023⁸⁶. Focus group interviews also indicated that refugees who were able to access transitional units were unable to transition out of the supports because of the lack of affordable housing options.

With the increasing need that refugee claimants are experiencing, community organizations and faith-based organizations have been providing supports and alternate shelter spaces where possible. But with limited funds, these supports can help only for short periods of time.

3. There has been a significant increase in the number of refugee claimants seeking assistance within the shelter system

Because of the lack of sufficient dedicated transitional housing supports, refugee claimants are having to increasingly rely on emergency shelter beds upon their arrival. A government of Canada study on *Homelessness Experienced by Newcomers to Canada* found that refugee claimants are overrepresented among those experiencing homelessness⁸⁷. The study also found that as of 2019, refugee claimants tend to have much longer shelter stays averaging at approximately 66 nights per stay⁸⁸. With limited shelter capacities and increasing housing need, it can be a struggle for refugee claimants to find space in existing shelters. Across lower mainland there are approximately 2,760 shelter beds which are already insufficient to accommodate those experiencing homelessness let alone newly arriving refugee claimants⁸⁹.

Between 2020 and 2023, the number of refugee claimants experiencing homelessness in the Greater Vancouver region increased by 120%⁹⁰. In February 2024, the City of Vancouver staff surveyed 37 emergency shelters and found that 78% of the surveyed shelters experienced an increase in asylum seekers / refugee claimants and 32% reported that at least half of the beds were occupied by refugee claimants⁹¹. Interviews also indicated a significant increase in the number of claimants accessing drop-in services for meal programs and other supports.

While trying to meet basic needs and survive, refugee claimants are also going through the complex process of immigration leading to their refugee hearing. Through focus groups and interviews, we heard that most refugee claimants prefer to settle in the lower mainland region in the initial days/ months upon arrival given the proximity to immigration services, such as reporting to the Canadian Border Service Agency (CBSA) and attending their claim hearings at Immigration Refugee Board (IRB). Their connection to Greater Vancouver is vital in their initial days when their claims are being processed and decisions are made as costs for travel from other regions of the province can quickly add up. With unaffordable rents in the lower mainland region and the lack of government assisted supports, emergency shelters may often be the only option.

4. Refugee experiences within the shelter system are unique

With the lack of dedicated supports and housing options, while emergency shelters provide much needed shelter, they may not be suitable forms of housing for refugee claimants. Focus group findings indicated that low-barrier shelter environments can often be a culture shock for refugees. The trauma refugees experience from persecution and violence, immigration status precarity, language barriers and racism while navigating complex systems in a new country can be different from the trauma and violence experienced by typical shelter users. Trauma informed practices in shelters may not be able to address the needs of refugees. Additionally with language barriers and complex immigration systems, shelter staff are not equipped to support refugees through their resettlement process. Research by MAP found that “refugee claimants in emergency shelters report increased trauma, and decreased capacity to cope and navigate systems”⁹².

Refugee families are also separated when accessing the shelters system because shelters are gendered, and most cannot accommodate large family sizes because of the limited number of dedicated family shelters. Across BC there are approximately 9 family shelters, with the City of Vancouver having 4 family shelters accommodating 167 beds which are limited in capacity relative to need⁹³.

With an increase in the number of people experiencing homelessness in BC, shelters spaces are needed for many vulnerable and marginalized populations across the province. Which means refugee claimants may be competing with large numbers of other vulnerable groups in the province for homeless shelters. Moreover, the shelter system is meant for short-term stays and relies on a steady flow of people moving and opening up spaces as needed. But due to the lack of affordable housing options people accessing shelters are unable to move along to more permanent housing.

5. Lack of holistic and coordinated support services – housing response for refugee claimants is ad-hoc

When it comes to supporting refugees at risk of homelessness, housing and settlement services occupy asymmetrical positions. The two sectors are funded by different levels of government which fails to adequately reflect the importance of housing as a determining factor in the settlement process⁹⁴. Refugee claimants for the most part do not receive any dedicated government funded housing supports. The support services primarily financed by the provincial government is through the BC Settlement and Integration Services (BCSIS) program⁹⁵ and more recently the BC SAF HAVN program⁹⁶. BCSIS offers settlement and integration services to temporary foreign workers, post-secondary international students, naturalized citizens, provincial nominees awaiting their permanent residency approval and refugee

claimants. However, according to research by MAP and sector organizations, as of 2019, “the referral capacity through the program only allows for dedicated housing with support services for RCs [refugee claimants] to reach 10% to 20% of all RCs through this program⁹⁷”.

Moreover, housing supports through these programs are typically provided through housing search support and not in the form of dedicated housing supply geared towards refugee claimants. While the more recently introduced BC SAF HAVEN program provides increased services to refugee claimants through increased funding, the housing supports available under the program are limited to short-term emergency accommodation in hotels for a maximum of 7 days and in the form of housing search and coordination support.

A part of the reason for the acute difficulties that refugee claimants are facing over the last couple of years is the lack of an integrated support system. Due to the lack of sufficient funding and an increase in the number of refugee claimants, existing supports have also started to diminish over the last few years. Most housing supports that refugee claimants currently receive are through on-ground partnerships and relations developed between the settlement sector, landlords and non-profit housing providers over the years.

Before 2018, Metro Vancouver had a program called ‘First Contact’ that was run by Red Cross which was essentially a hotline and referral system for refugee claimants – a safety net that does not exist anymore. Many refugees arrive in Canada with the daunting reality of finding themselves homeless, with little resources and a lack of knowledge of support services. Based on needs and vulnerability of the refugee, Red Cross would cover hotel costs, provide information on how to find affordable housing, process refugee claim and help claimants apply for legal aid or social assistance and connect them with settlement workers. As the number of claimants increased, the funding for the program ran out. Currently there is no other similar safety net to respond to the needs of refugee claimants.

6. Discrimination based on race, religion and ethnicity

Discrimination based on person’s race, ethnicity, culture and place of origin creates barriers when accessing housing. The inability to find appropriate housing has been found to be the most significant barrier preventing racialized refugees from settling in Canada⁹⁸. Literature shows that refugees face discrimination from landlords where housing may be denied based on a person’s race, place of origin and ethnicity. Findings from focus groups and research also indicated instances where refugees

are subjected to additional application requirements such as six months of security deposit in advance or needing co-signers/ guarantors which refugees often lack⁹⁹. Already limited by the dynamics of existing rental market in BC, housing options for refugees are all the more constrained due to the discrimination they face. The lack of understanding of who refugees are coupled with popular media opinion that scapegoats newcomers for the housing crisis can result in social exclusion and housing discrimination making the resettlement journey all the more difficult for refugees and refugee claimants.

Government Assisted Refugees

The number of Government Assisted Refugees (GARs) arriving in Canada has steadily increased over the years. Between 2016 and 2024, there were approximately 14,000 GARs in BC. While resettled refugees receive government assistance and supports on their arrival to Canada, research shows that in the long-term the supports are not sufficient for GARs to access safe, secure and affordable housing. These are compounded by unique challenges GARs face. According to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) criteria, individuals qualifying to be GARs are primarily vulnerable individuals including single parents, young children, LGBTQI+, individuals with medical pre-conditions related to war and other untreated trauma special needs due to physical limitations, and length of time spent in protracted refugee situations¹⁰⁰. This means GARs are likely facing immense trauma and have specific needs.

1. Resettlement Assistance Program Rates (RAP) are insufficient in meeting current market rentals rates anywhere in BC. (equivalent to social assistance rates)

Government Assisted Refugees receive income supports for one year upon their arrival through the Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC)'s Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP)¹⁰¹. The program has two main components: income supports and a range of immediate essential services. RAP rates are generally comparable to the provinces social assistance rates. Research shows that, over the years, RAP supports received by GARs have dwindled in relation to the price of housing on private housing markets¹⁰². Which means the core social provisions provided by the government are becoming increasingly inadequate to attain affordable and suitable home for GARs as they transition out of temporary housing¹⁰³. The shelter costs within RAP are equivalent to social assistance rates which cannot afford housing anywhere in the province. While average rents in the province increased by 30% between 2016 and 2021 the RAP allowance has only been

increased to match the social assistance rates. While RAP rates may afford social housing, the long waitlists due to an insufficient supply creates barriers for Government Assisted Refugees.

An analysis of the shelter costs provided through RAP and the average rents across communities in the province indicates that the RAP Monthly Shelter Allowance is incapable of covering average rental costs anywhere in BC (*Table 2*). Navigating language barriers, new systems and finding employment can take many months if not years, which means the supports received through the RAP may be the only form of income supports for some GARs. As shown below, it is extremely difficult to secure an adequate and suitable rental unit solely through the RAP supports. Housing, language and employment are all interlinked and needs to be taken into consideration when developing resettlement assistance programs.

Table 5: Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP) shelter allowance rates in comparison to average rents across BC

	RAP Shelter Allowance ¹⁰⁴		BC	Vancouver	Victoria	Kelowna	Kamloops
Single person; studio	\$375	Average Rent	\$1,002	\$1,077	\$998	\$974	\$716
		Difference	\$627 167%	\$702 187%	\$623 166%	\$599 160%	\$341 91%
Single person; 1-bed	\$375	Average Rent	\$1,238	\$1,442	\$1,212	\$1,222	\$972
		Difference	\$863 230%	\$1,067 285%	\$837 223%	\$847 226%	\$597 159%
Couple with two children or single parent with two children; 2-bed	\$700	Average Rent	\$1,512	\$1,900	\$1,610	\$1,518	\$1,255
		Difference	\$812 116%	\$1,200 171%	\$910 130%	\$818 117%	\$555 79%
Couple with two children or single parent with two children; 3-bed	\$700	Average Rent	\$1,798	\$2,110	\$1,832	\$1,910	\$1,536
		Difference	\$1,098 157%	\$1,410 201%	\$1,132 162%	\$1,210 173%	\$836 119%
Couple with five children; 3-bed	\$820	Average Rent	\$1,798	\$2,110	\$1,832	\$1,910	\$1,536
		Difference	\$978 119%	\$1,290 157%	\$1,012 123%	\$1,090 133%	\$716 87%

**Please note that this data highlights only the shelter allowance component of RAP. RAP includes income supports to cover other basic needs such as food, incidental, transportation and community allowance in addition to shelter allowance.*

2. Short periods of transitional housing support

GARs are funded by Immigration Refugee Citizenship Canada (IRCC) for hotel stays or other temporary accommodations through the Resettlement Assistance Program in their initial days upon arrival. The amount of time GARs spend in these transitional supports is limited to a small number of weeks. Given rising housing costs and low vacancy rates the short periods of transitional stays and associated policies that restrict the number of housing options that can be viewed are often not sufficient to find affordable and suitable permanent housing. The amount of time refugees require to find suitable permanent housing can depend on many factors such as location, family size and needs. Research indicates that refugees with large families and those with multiple special needs take longer to find permanent affordable housing. Additionally housing for single people may also take longer since they receive smaller rates of assistance from RAP. RAP shelter allowances in most cases can afford social housing but due to long waitlists, the short period of transitional stay is insufficient to access social housing.

3. Poor housing choices constrained by dynamics of existing rental markets - Unaffordable, Inadequate and Unsuitable housing

Large family sizes of many refugee families complicate the search for affordable housing due to an insufficient supply of larger units and restrictions due to the National Occupancy Standards (NOS) which does not take into account cultural context. The NOS stipulate that family size and composition should determine the number of bedrooms required by the household. While this provides a useful measure of suitability to assess if housing stock meets the needs of households, when adopted as a policy it creates barriers to housing especially in the midst of a housing crisis¹⁰⁵.

Focus group findings also indicated that landlords are less willing to rent housing to large families. This often means that refugee families may be living in overcrowded conditions to cover for housing costs or are being denied housing due to larger family sizes. The pressure to secure suitable housing is further exacerbated by rising rents, low-vacancy rates in the rental market, and the relatively declining availability of non-market housing. According to the latest census data, 35% of all refugee-led renter households are experiencing core housing need.

Most often, GARs may not have a choice with the location of housing and is largely determined based on where they land upon arrival. According to focus groups findings, housing expectations of GARs are not met in relation to what's available on the market. In most cases, refugees may not be aware of the high housing costs

before arriving. Additionally, the need for references and credit history by landlords limits the options available for refugees. Which means they may be living in housing that is unsuitable for their needs.

4. Discrimination based on race, religion and ethnicity creates barriers to finding housing and more vulnerable to evictions

GARs encounter many of the same biases experienced by refugee claimants. Refugees are a diverse group and their experiences are influenced by multiple identities such as gender, race, origin, class, age and disability. Research strongly indicates that the inability to find housing is the most significant barrier preventing racialized refugees from settling in Canada¹⁰⁶. Discriminatory treatment towards racialized newcomers and refugees even when housing is available increases barriers to accessing adequate housing. Literature indicates that “public attitudes towards the admission of refugees based on their country of origin are becoming increasingly conflicted”¹⁰⁷. For example, a 2022 Ipsos study “found that 64% of Canadians support accepting more Ukrainian refugees into Canada, while only 37% support accepting more Afghan refugees”¹⁰⁸. Stereotypes and internal biases fueled by misinformation significantly impact the resettlement of refugees. Discussions through focus groups highlighted situations in BC where particular groups of refugees and refugee claimants are denied housing based on their place of origin and race due to landlord’s biases.



Recommendations

4

4. Recommendations

The housing response towards refugees and refugee claimants in the province has been largely reactive. More recently, the lack of a co-ordinated response to housing refugee claimants has resulted in many living in precarious housing situations and at a higher risk of experiencing homelessness. One of the major challenges faced by organizations and providers assisting both refugees and refugee claimants is the need to find affordable housing. Access to safe, secure, and affordable housing is constrained by the dynamics of the housing market such as the insufficient supply of affordable housing, low vacancy rates, and rising rents. These conditions in the housing market impact all renter households and hence it is important that the efforts to address the housing challenges of refugees are thought of as a part of the “broad effort to secure housing right to all with a focus on identifying solutions that will address the barriers for low-income and racialized groups”¹⁰⁹.

This strategy recommends to:

Housing Systems and Policy

- Expand and invest in our overall affordable housing stock to address affordability pressures in the province
- Increase the number of dedicated transitional housing units for refugee claimants
- Expand provincial rent subsidies such as the Homelessness Prevention Program (HPP) to include refugee claimants
- Increase current capacity of emergency shelters including the number of available family shelters to better address needs of refugee claimant at-risk of homelessness
- Redirect interim funds used for refugees and refugee claimant accommodations such as hotels into sustainable housing solutions with wrap around supports
- Review policies for resettlement assistance for Government Assisted Refugees

Funding, Support services and Outreach

- Develop a province-wide coordinated access system for the resettlement of refugees and refugee claimants to support the flow of refugees into BC
- Create facilities that focus on connecting refugee claimants with housing solutions and other critical supports immediately upon arrival

A Refugee Housing Strategy

- Implement a comprehensive data collection and management strategy to better understand the housing outcomes and gaps in service delivery for both refugees and refugee claimants.
- Establish a collective impact model to solve the systemic issues that refugee claimants are facing in the province
- Explore cross-sector partnerships to expand housing opportunities for both refugees and refugee claimants along the housing continuum

Raising Public Awareness

- Increase public awareness and understanding about the experiences of refugees and immigrants
- Increase awareness on the harmful limitations established by National Occupancy Standards

Education Resources

- Expand resources to educate refugees and refugee claimants on the housing system and tenant rights in the province

More details...

Housing Systems and Policy

Expand and invest in our overall affordable housing stock to address affordability pressures in the province

Newcomers to BC have distinct needs when it comes to housing, yet it is critical to note that the unique housing needs of immigrants and refugees cannot be addressed without also increasing the overall supply of affordable rental housing in the province. Working in tandem with the other recommendations in this paper, BCNPHA has released an updated plan for the province which quantifies and costs out what is required to address BC's affordable housing crisis over the next decade. *Build More, Protect More: A New Affordable Housing Plan for BC 2024*¹¹⁰ estimates that 12,500 new affordable homes will be needed annually over the next ten years to meet growing housing needs in BC. At a cost of \$6.7 billion annually, an investment to be shared between the provincial government, federal government, and community housing sector, capital is needed to match the urgency of the housing crisis that underscores the challenges faced by newcomers in BC.

While BC's recent housing policies and programs address broader housing supply issues, measures to address refugee claimants housing needs have not been accounted for despite the increase in the number of claimants experiencing homelessness¹¹¹. Given that population projections cannot estimate the number of refugee claimants that may arrive, current measures to address the needs of marginalized populations at risk- of homelessness may not account for the housing needs of refugee claimants. In addition to the projected estimated units needed, the province should consider identifying the estimated supports in income assistance and additional units needed to address current and future need of refugee claimants. Additionally, the housing needs of refugees and refugee claimants across the province could be accounted through existing tools such as Housing Needs Reports.

Increase the number of dedicated transitional housing units for refugee claimants

Current refugee claimant transitional housing providers¹¹² in BC provide a range of supports to refugee claimants that are essential to their early settlement journey including short term housing (3-6 months), support to move into permanent housing, wrap-around case management, support with the required education and information that claimants need to navigate immigration barriers. This form of housing with wrap around supports has shown to have better outcomes for refugee

claimants in their initial months of resettlement and ultimately contribute to a better settlement journey.

As highlighted earlier in the report, despite the number of arriving refugee claimants in need having significantly increased in the province, the direct housing support has not kept pace with the rising need.

As of 2023, approximately 260 refugee claimants were placed in approximately 48 dedicated refugee claimant transitional units through BC CHARMS which is a refugee claimant housing referral system¹¹³. Although this data does not account for all transitional units dedicated for refugee claimants in the province the existing capacity cannot address the overall housing need of refugee claimants on arrival. Focus groups findings indicated that overall, approximately 370 refugee claimants can be served with current capacity of transitional homes and in comparison, BC received 7,700 refugee claimants in 2023.

With increasing need, the strategy recommends that the province explore opportunities to expand current capacities of transitional homes to help address the immediate housing and wrap around support service needs of refugee claimants on arrival.

Expand provincial rent subsidies such as the Homelessness Prevention Program (HPP) to include refugee claimants

There are currently several rent assistance and housing subsidy programs in BC, but none are available for refugee claimants. To be eligible for any form of rent assistance, the province requires the applicant to be a resident of BC for a minimum of 12 months preceding the application which means refugee claimants are unable to access any form of government assistance despite having a very high need. Claimants are only eligible to apply for the province's income assistance¹¹⁴ after making their asylum claim – a process that can typically take a few weeks to months, and the rate is not high enough to cover for housing costs in the province.

The strategy recommends reviewing the eligibility criteria for current provincial rent assistance programs and their expansion so that they could be made available to refugee claimant households. The Homeless Prevention Program¹¹⁵ which provides rent supplements to individuals in at-risk groups facing homelessness is one such program that can be expanded for refugee claimants. Such a benefit could help refugee claimants access rental housing especially in their initial days after arrival and reduce their risk of homelessness. As data indicates, refugee claimant-led renter households experience the highest core housing need in the province and there is a need for effective supports to address their housing needs¹¹⁶.

Increase current capacity of emergency shelters including the number of available family shelters to better address needs of refugee claimants¹¹⁷ at-risk of homelessness

Over the last year, Vancouver has seen a rapid increase in the number of refugee claimants needing emergency shelters and drop-in services. According to a City of Vancouver survey of emergency shelters in February 2024, 32% of shelter providers who were surveyed indicated that at least half of the beds were occupied by refugee claimants and 78% reported an increase in refugee claimants in shelters. We've consistently heard through interviews with housing providers that with language barriers and complex immigration systems, shelter staff are not equipped to support refugees through their resettlement process. Shelter providers typically connect with settlement service agencies to find supports for refugee claimants in the shelter system, but this is in an ad-hoc manner and does not work for the scale of the problem. In many cases shelter staff are training themselves and accessing different resources such as web translation services to support refugees and help them access services.

But with limited capacities and resources, shelters need adequate supports such as formal network of connection to settlement service organizations, information about the services refugee claimants need and increased funding to provide adequate supports for refugee claimants. Additionally, there is a need to expand the number of available family shelters to accommodate refugee families who are typically separated in the shelter system adding to the trauma they experience navigating new systems.

Redirect interim funds used for refugees and refugee claimant accommodations such as hotels into sustainable housing solutions with wrap around supports

The strategy recommends that the federal and provincial government redirect interim funds from temporary private hotel accommodations into more sustainable housing options with immediate wrap around services that better supports the immediate resettlement needs of refugees and refugee claimants on arrival. Transitional housing supports are crucial for both refugees and refugee claimants to address immediate housing needs on arrival. Investing in sustainable housing solutions with wrap around supports such as dedicated transitional units would not only provide more stable housing over a longer period of time but would also enable building long-term capacity to respond to future needs.

Refugee claimants. The current federal funding programs for refugee claimants include the Interim Housing Assistance Program (IHAP) and Interim Lodging Services program (ILS) for temporary accommodation rentals that include private

hotels¹¹⁸. IRCC projections estimated \$557 million in expenditure on temporary accommodations and services for refugee claimants of which, \$232 million would be spent on private hotel accommodations across Canada between 2023 and 2024 through the ILS program¹¹⁹. It is estimated that federal spending on temporary hotels is approximately \$5000 - \$6000 per month, per room compared to \$800 - \$1200 for community and civil-society operated shelter beds for refugee claimants which also includes essential wrap around supports¹²⁰. These temporary accommodations are not only cost ineffective, but they also lack long-term sustainability in providing stable support for refugee claimants who arrive with a need for immediate shelter and support to navigate the settlement and housing system. Moreover, it has also been identified that “sheltering claimants in hotels does not advance the long-term housing security outcomes of refugee claimants arriving to Canada while failing to meet human rights standards”¹²¹

Refugees3 Interviews and focus group findings indicated that federal cost expenditures on temporary hotel accommodations for Government Assisted Refugees is much higher compared to refugee claimants and in the long-term are not a sustainable housing solution. While expenditure on hotel costs remain high, the shelter allowances under the Resettlement Assistance Program have not kept pace with the rising housing costs. With low vacancy rates and increased housing costs, redirecting interim funds used for private hotel accommodations to long-term housing solutions not only creates sustainable housing options for refugees but also increases the supply of affordable housing where needed.

Review policies for resettlement assistance for Government Assisted Refugees

Given the low vacancy rates across the private rental market, long waitlists for non-market housing and rising rents, the current resettlement assistance does not enable those accessing it to successfully obtain housing in communities across the province. A review of the Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP) indicates that the shelter allowance under the program is insufficient to cover housing costs anywhere across BC. As of 2021, the average rents in BC are double and triple that of the RAP shelter allowance¹²². This income-shelter gap widens for single refugees who receive smaller shelter allowances under the RAP and is starker in larger cities such as Vancouver and Victoria where rents are much higher. Additionally, timelines and policies associated with temporary accommodations under the Resettlement Assistance Program such as the limit on the number of housing options that can be viewed, creates barriers to finding adequate, suitable and affordable housing for refugees especially for those with special needs and larger family sizes.

To better support the resettlement of Government Assisted Refugees, the federal government should take into consideration the housing costs in the province when setting assistance rates, policies and timelines under the Resettlement Assistance

Program. Extending transitional housing supports and investing in sustainable transitional housing solutions could enable Government Assisted Refugees to equip themselves with the tools and knowledge required to better navigate the housing system, understand their rights as tenants and obtain suitable housing within the existing constraints of the housing market.

Funding, Support services and Outreach

Develop a province-wide coordinated access system for the resettlement of refugee claimants to support the flow of refugees into BC

Successful resettlement of refugee claimants in BC requires partnerships across a range of government agencies at the federal and provincial level, municipalities, settlement service organizations, housing providers and community agencies. Through focus groups and interviews, both settlement service organizations and non-profit housing providers indicated a need for a coordinated system to better address the housing needs of refugees alongside the wrap around services that are crucial for their settlement.

The aim of coordinated access is to create a streamlined point of access to settlement services and housing, and to ensure refugees are effectively connected with the supports and housing that can best support their needs in their resettlement journey. Developing and implementing a systems approach can enable a coordinated long-term response to refugee housing needs.

No coordinated outreach / access points



Fully coordinated outreach from the time of arrival

No first points of contact – increased experiences of homelessness



Early intervention supports such as a welcome centre as first point of contact

Referrals for housing and settlement supports are case-by-base



Centralized referral management system

No formal systems in place to connect refugees to supports when experiencing / at-risk of homelessness



Formal network of support services involving all key assistance providers

Create facilities that focus on connecting refugee claimants with housing solutions and other critical supports immediately upon arrival

Housing is central to the resettlement journey of refugees and is inextricably linked to navigating language and employment barriers. As identified by AMSSA, “obtaining housing first increases the chances of better outcome in employment, better impacts on health as well as time to improve English if necessary¹²³.” But refugee claimants do not have access to any form of government assisted housing support on arrival which puts them at a higher risk of experiencing homelessness. As a result of the lack of early intervention support, the number of refugee claimants seeking support in the shelter system has increased.

As an early intervention measure, the province could consider developing a welcome center in partnership with municipalities and settlement service organizations in the lower mainland region that could be a first point of contact for arriving refugee claimants. The welcome centers could be equipped with immediate housing supports such as shelter beds, referral programs to connect refugees to transition and more permanent housing based on need, legal services and access to appropriate services to support refugee claimants as they navigate through their claim process to receive shelter allowance, work permit, social security and access to health services. Findings from focus groups, interviews and literature strongly indicated the vital connection for refugee claimants to lower mainland in their initial weeks to months on arrival given the proximity to immigrant serving agencies such as Canadian Border Service Agency (CBSA) and Immigration Refugee Board (IRB) to process claims and attend hearings. Dedicated welcome centers for refugees in the lower mainland region can help ease pressure on existing shelters, reduce trauma experienced by refugees in the shelter system and better support their settlement journey as they navigate through complex immigration barriers.

Implement a comprehensive data collection and management strategy to better understand the housing outcomes and gaps in service delivery for both refugees and refugee claimants

Planning for service needs and identifying gaps in existing systems relies on data. These needs become more apparent as the number of refugees and refugee claimants in need of housing supports is rapidly increasing. The recent increase in the number of refugee claimants at risk of homelessness has not been captured effectively and the lack of formal service connections makes it harder to identify their housing outcomes in the province. This creates a significant gap in effectively building an integrative provincial response to addressing their challenges.

Currently the gaps in data impact our understanding of the shelter experiences of both refugee and refugee claimants, their long-term housing outcomes and consequently the services that are required to support them through their

resettlement journey. In order to address the gaps, we recommend developing and implementing a data framework strategy that would support our understanding of refugee and refugee claimant housing needs.

To respond to future large-scale humanitarian responses, AMSSA put together recommendations for the creation of a provincial data framework based on experiences from previous mass migrations of resettled refugees to Canada¹²⁴. While the report analyzes data and associated gaps relevant to resettled refugees, the key themes from the study broadly highlight current and future data needs and challenges of data management and collection that can form the basis for creating a broader data framework to identify the needs of refugee claimants as well.

Establish a collective impact model to support solving the systemic issues that refugee claimants are facing

There is a lack of an integrated support system when it comes to supporting refugee claimants in the province. Most networks formed between settlement service organizations, non-profit housing providers and other community organizations serving refugee claimants are ad-hoc and most are formed on a case-by-case situation. We've consistently heard from settlement sector organizations and non-profit housing providers in the province the vital importance of having an integrated network to support the resettlement of refugee claimants. Through ongoing funding, the province could support the creation of an integrated network of settlement service providers, non-profit housing providers and community organizations focused on providing wrap around housing supports for refugees. Through this network it would be possible to;

- Establish connections between settlement services, housing providers and other service-based organizations to encourage cross-sector collaboration.
- Enable broader coalition work which is necessary to develop an understanding and shared priorities for addressing the housing needs of both refugee claimants and resettled refugees.
- Leverage and expand existing database systems such as BC CHARMS¹²⁵ where up-to date information can be shared relating to housing and settlement services for immigrant and refugees.
- Enable cross-sector training opportunities and knowledge exchange for staff in immigrant and refugee-serving organizations on the housing system in BC such as information related to income and housing supports and how to access them. Similarly, extend knowledge exchange to housing providers especially shelter staff on aspects such as the various programs under which immigrants and refugees arrive under and the kind of supports they are eligible under each of these programs.

Explore cross-sector partnerships to expand housing opportunities for refugees and refugee claimants along the housing continuum

The strategy recommends identifying and scaling up solutions and partnerships that have been effective on-ground to increase housing opportunities along the continuum for refugees and refugee claimants. Through focus groups and interviews we found that there is cross-sector collaboration on ground between settlement service organizations and non-profit housing providers to find innovative housing solutions to provide immediate housing supports for refugees and refugee claimants in need. Non-Profit Housing providers also indicated the importance of partnering with settlement service providers for support with the wrap around services within housing that refugees need for successful tenancies. Developing shared service models between non-profit housing providers and settlement service providers could enable long term housing supports for both refugees and refugee claimants.

For example, a non-profit housing provider highlighted a pilot partnership they are exploring with a settlement service provider in the province, where the housing provider would lease units on scattered sites to the settlement service provider to provide transitional housing for resettled refugees for a set period of time (typically 3 months). Once the refugees no longer require the transitional supports, their tenancies would convert to permanent tenancies operated by the non-profit housing provider. This would ensure that newly arriving refugees are supported with the wrap around services they need in the initial months on arrival and subsequently have access to permanent affordable housing in the long term.

Increasing Public Awareness

Increase public awareness and understanding about the experiences of refugees and immigrants

Public understanding of refugee experiences has largely been driven by media over the last few years as BC started experiencing an increase in the number of refugees that are in need of support. While not fully recognizing that the supply of housing has not kept pace with the rising need for several decades, media narrative has largely tended to focus on the increased number of refugees and immigrants arriving to Canada and it's impacts on the housing crisis. This phenomenon is mirrored across Canada. As a result, many immigrants and refugees face discrimination based on race, ethnicity, language and place of origin. The impacts of discrimination are directly reflected in their housing outcomes where landlords refuse to provide housing to specific immigrant and refugee groups due to internal biases. Countering these racial biases is essential to the development of inclusive housing policies.

These biases can only be addressed through increasing public awareness and education on the experiences of refugees and immigrants in Canada. Focus group findings indicated a particular need to educate the public on the different programs through which refugees arrive and the kind of support they receive to address misconceptions about their resettlement journey. The strategy recommends identifying opportunities to raise public awareness through sector-led organizations that have been leading anti-racism programs and fostering constructive dialogues in local communities. AMSSA identifies a number of programs and organizations leading this work within their Provincial Engagement Strategy and calls for increased funding to advance the capacity of these programs¹²⁶.

Increase awareness on the harmful limitations established by National Occupancy Standards

Across Canada, the National Occupancy Standards (NOS)¹²⁷ has become the measure of housing suitability. Although the NOS is a helpful measure of core housing need, as pointed by numerous studies and advocacy efforts, when NOS is used to match housing applicants to the appropriate units' size, the restrictive guidelines result in fewer families gaining access to limited social and affordable housing. This is a result of the widening gap between the number of available suitable units and the increase in the number of families in need of affordable housing. NOS also creates additional barriers and disproportionately affects groups such as women fleeing domestic violence, indigenous households, racialized households, immigrant and refugee households as the standards do not take into account the diverse needs of families, cultural preferences and the overall lack of affordable suitable housing.

Research and findings from focus groups indicated that large family sizes of many refugee families complicate the search for affordable housing as landlords are less willing to rent to large families. As a result, many refugee families often live in unsuitable conditions. Constraints such as the occupancy standards add to the existing barriers that refugees have to navigate through their resettlement journey such as discrimination, language and lack of understanding of the housing systems. As pointed by numerous studies, given its harmful limitations, there is a need to re-evaluate the approach to occupancy standards to focus on what the housing sector should do to provide affordable, suitable and adequate housing¹²⁸.

Education Resources

Expand resources to educate refugees on the housing system and tenant rights in the province

Focus group findings and interviews highlighted the significant impacts of the lack of understanding of tenant's rights on the housing outcomes of refugees. There is a need to develop and expand accessible information and knowledge in multiple languages on the housing system in the province, how to access it and resources on rights as tenants. The education resources can be built in partnership with sector organizations, tenant advocacy organizations and the province.

Appendix 1: Methodology

The methodology for the strategy primarily included three parts; a review of existing literature and available data sources, focus groups with settlement service organizations and frontline staff assisting refugees in their search for housing in the province and interviews with shelter and non-profit housing providers. As part of the developing the strategy we also convened an advisory committee with experts from the settlement and non-profit housing sector who significantly contributed to our understanding of the housing challenges faced by refugees in the province, helped identify knowledge gaps and strategies to address the challenges.

A review of recent literature, including a scan of secondary research and analysis such as academic literature, community-based literature, and available data broadly highlighted the impacts of BC's housing crisis on immigrants and refugees in the recent years.

The second part of the strategy which involved focus groups with settlement service organizations and frontline staff assisting refugees in their search for housing highlighted the challenges refugees have been facing in accessing housing and the barriers that staff and organizations have been contending with in their efforts to find housing for refugees in BC.

And the final part included interviews with non-profit housing providers who provide a range of housing supports for refugees including shelter supports, permanent independent housing and transitional housing supports in the Lower mainland and Vancouver Island. These interviews highlighted the challenges experienced by refugee claimants in emergency shelters in the lower mainland region and the barriers to adequate accessing housing supports. The interviews also highlighted the impacts of the lack of a formal network of supports and a co-ordinated system on service providers and housing providers in effectively providing the services needed for refugees to support their resettlement.

Limitations

The biggest limitation that impacted our understanding of the housing challenges experienced by refugees and refugee claimants over the last couple of years in the province is the lack of sufficient data and information that captures their housing experiences, need and settlement trajectory.

Appendix 2: Terminology

Immigration Terms

Immigration and immigrants are terms that are widely used, but not always as they were intended. The purpose of this document is to clearly define different immigration statuses in order to increase understanding of the terms themselves and how status impacts both the supports and barriers available to an individual.

“Newcomers” is an inclusive term that encompasses all immigrant statuses and categories including those that fall under temporary residents. While the term newcomer may be all-encompassing, it is nevertheless important to understand the distinctions in the different types of newcomers as it has implications for the different services and supports available to them.

“Immigrants” include individuals born abroad who have been granted the ability to reside permanently in Canada, comprising both permanent residents and naturalized citizens.

“Recent Immigrants” are defined by the period in which they obtained permanent status, specifically within five years of the reference year. Since this report primarily relies on the 2021 Census, this timeframe spans approximately from January 2016 to May 2021.

“Naturalized Citizens” refers to individuals who were not Canadian citizens at birth but acquired citizenship under the provisions of Canadian law. They are immigrants to Canada who acquired Canadian citizenship through the citizenship application process.¹²⁹

“Permanent Residents” are individuals who are not Canadian citizens but have been granted the right to live in Canada permanently by immigration authorities. They were formerly called “Landed Immigrants.” This group includes Resettled Refugees but not Refugee Claimants.¹³⁰

“Refugees” are people who have fled their homes because of a well-founded fear of persecution. “Resettled Refugees” are people who come to Canada after being referred by an organization like the United Nations High Convention on Refugees and accepted by Canadian immigration authorities. There are special programs to support resettled refugees, who may be supported by the Government of Canada and/or private sponsors during their first year in Canada.¹³¹

“Refugee Claimants” or **“Asylum Claimants”** are non-permanent residents who have applied for refugee protection in Canada because they fear persecution or face danger if they leave Canada. Refugee Claimants may also hold work and/or study permits while waiting for a decision from the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada.¹³²

“Temporary Residents” (or **“Non-Permanent Residents”**) include individuals from another country who have established a regular residence in Canada, including those holding a work or study permit (e.g., temporary foreign workers, international students) or having claimed refugee status (e.g., refugee claimants or protected persons who have not been admitted as permanent residents).

“International Students” come from other countries to attend school in Canada. They require a special permit (a study visa) to do so, and might be in graduate or undergraduate students, or in a professional degree program. International Students can work a limited number of hours unless they also hold a work permit.¹³³

“Temporary Foreign Workers” include people who come from other countries to work in Canada. They have work visas which allow them to live and work in Canada for a specific amount of time and have to be renewed. Temporary Foreign Workers are a kind of non-permanent resident.¹³⁴

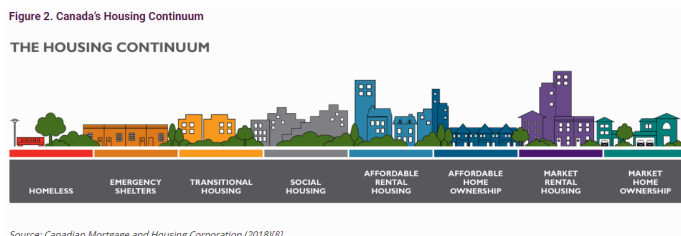
“Homelessness” is when someone does not have stable, safe, permanent, appropriate housing and has no immediate way to get housing.¹³⁵ Some groups are more likely than others to experience homelessness and there are many different factors that can cause homelessness.

“Unhoused” people have no shelter, staying in an encampment or a public space like a park, a street, or under a bridge.¹³⁶

“Hidden Homelessness” includes people who are couch-surfing or staying temporarily with family or friends but who have no permanent housing.¹³⁷ This kind of homelessness is considered “hidden” because it is harder to find and count people who are experiencing it.

Housing Terms

“Housing Continuum” is a concept used to describe a broad range of housing options available to help a range of households to access affordable and appropriate housing extending from emergency shelter and housing for people experiencing homeless through to affordable rental housing and homeownership.



“Overspending metrics” In Canada, housing is considered “affordable” if it costs less than 30% of a households before-tax income.

Spending over 30%: Households spending over 30% of their pre-tax income on shelter and utilities.

Spending over 50%: Households spending over 50% of their pre-tax income on shelter and utilities typically putting them at a higher risk of homelessness.

“Naturally Occurring Affordable Housing” (NOAH) are purpose-built rental units that are unsubsidized by the government but have been in the market for long enough that they rent quite low, typically because someone has been in them for a long time. NOAH units are at the greatest risk of being lost due to market speculation and upgrades leading to a mass erosion of relatively affordable homes.

“Vacancy rate” refers to the percentage of rental properties unoccupied in a particular geographic area at a specific time. Generally a 3% rental vacancy rate is considered healthy.

“Purpose-built rental” buildings are those that are non-stratified and held as rentals, on a monthly basis or longer i.e., those are that are built solely for the purpose of renting out.

“Non-profit housing” is rental housing that is owned and operated by community-based non-profit societies. The mandates of these societies are to provide safe and secure affordable homes to individuals and families with low to moderate incomes. Most non-profit housing societies receive some form of financial assistance from government to enable them to offer affordable rents. Non-profit housing providers own/operate a broad range of housing types in BC, which include shelters, supportive, transitional, and independent housing.

“Housing starts” are an economic indicator that reflect the number of residential housing projects that have been started over a specific length of time and ;

“Housing completions” reflect the number of residential housing projects that have been constructed over a specific length of time.

“Population projection” is a forecast of future population growth. Population projection metrics are used as base of analysis for setting housing targets. Both Statistics Canada and BC STATs produce population projections. While, Statistics Canada provides population projections for Canada and the provinces and territories, BC Stats produces its own population estimates and projections for B.C. All population projections metrics include Natural population change, Interprovincial migration, international immigration change and ‘non-permanent residents’ trends.

“Household projections” A private household refers to a person or group of persons who occupy the same dwelling and do not have a usual place of residence elsewhere in Canada or abroad. Each year BC Stats prepares an updated set of household projections after the population projection for the current year has been created. Similarly household projections also take into consideration the three variables: Natural population change, Interprovincial migration International immigration change.

“Core Housing Need” A household is considered to be in core housing need if its housing does not meet one or more of three standards which is; adequacy, suitability or affordability and it would have to spend 30% or more of its before-tax income to pay for shelter costs.

“Adequacy” is the condition of the dwelling: need of major repairs.

“Suitability” enough bedrooms for the size of family as determined by the National Occupancy Standards (NOS).

“National Occupancy Standards (NOS)” NOS provides a common reference point for “suitable” housing, which is how many people a given dwelling unit might accommodate given the number of bedrooms. The National Occupancy Standard continues to be used in Canada as an indicator of housing suitability as part of the overall assessment that determines if a household is in core housing need. Core housing need happens when housing is unsuitable, inadequate or unaffordable and the household can’t afford alternative housing in the local market.

Appendix 3: Housing Advisory Committee Members

Thank you to all the members of the Housing Advisory Committee for their generosity of time and critical contributions:

Anatasia Chivata, *S.U.C.C.E.S.S*

Brad Kinnie, *Journey Home*

Chelseah Klassen, *Inasmuch Community Society*

David Lee, *MOSAIC*

Derek Chu, *Kinbrace*

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Sasa Loggin, *Skeena Diversity*

Stephen D'Souza, *Homelessness Services Association of BC*

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⁴ This work also complements BCNPHA's overall affordable housing strategy for the province released in September 2024. The full strategy can be found at: www.housingcentral.ca

⁵ Newcomers refers to recent immigrants and refugees who have been living in Canada for five years or lesser. Please note that 'newcomers' has been used interchangeably with recent immigrants and refugees in this strategy depending on context.

⁶ There is very limited literature available on the experiences of Privately sponsored refugees and Blended visa office-referred refugees - especially their experiences as newcomers. Some literature shows that privately sponsored refugees have better supports in their initial year after their arrival but their housing experiences in the long term have not been recorded. And refugee number under the Blended Visa Officer Referred have reduced over the years so there is not much literature about their experiences as well. While refugee claimants experience the most significant challenges, among all the resettled refugees, GARs face the most persistent housing challenges in their initial year as well as in the longer term.

⁷ According to census data, "refugees" category includes "immigrants who were granted permanent resident status based on a well-founded fear of returning to their home country and also persons who had a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or for political opinion, as well as persons who had been seriously and personally affected by civil war or armed conflict, or had suffered a massive violation of human right". Which means refugees in this category include both resettled refugees and refugee claimants whose claims were accepted and granted a permanent resident status.

⁸ Statistics Canada, 2023, "HART - 2021 Census of Canada - Selected Characteristics of Census Households for Housing Need - Canada, all provinces and territories at the Census

Division (CD) and Census Subdivision (CSD) level [custom tabulation]", <https://doi.org/10.5683/SP3/8PUZQA>

⁹ BC's Income Assistance consists of a support allowance and a shelter allowance. The support allowance is intended to cover the cost of food, clothing, and personal and household items of the family. The shelter allowance is intended to pay for actual shelter costs. As of 2024, the maximum shelter allowance rate for a single person under the income assistance program is \$500.

¹⁰ Data obtained through a custom data request from [BC's Refugee Claimant Housing Referral System](#) aggregate reports

¹¹ Immigration, Refugee and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), Asylum Claimants by year, BC – 2023 , <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/refugees/asylum-claims/asylum-claims-2023.html>

Immigration, Refugee and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), Asylum Claimants by year, BC – 2019 , <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/refugees/asylum-claims/asylum-claims-2019.html>

¹² The number of refugee claimants increased by 300% between 2021 and 2023 from 1,900 claimants in 2021 to 7,700 claimants in 2023.

Immigration, Refugee and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), Asylum Claimants by year, BC – 2023 , <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/refugees/asylum-claims/asylum-claims-2023.html>

Immigration, Refugee and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), Asylum Claimants by year, BC – 2021 , <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/refugees/asylum-claims/asylum-claims-2021.html>

¹³ Housing and Homelessness Services survey, City of Vancouver, April 2024. Data shared with permission.

¹⁴ Across BC there are approximately 9 family shelters, and the City of Vancouver has 4 family shelters accommodating 167 beds which are limited in capacity relative to need.

¹⁵ CMHC. (2019). *Literature Reviews on Housing Needs: Newcomers*. CMHC. https://assets.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/sites/cmhc/professional/housing-markets-data-and-research/housing-research/research-reports/housing-needs/understanding-housing-needs/understanding-housing-needs-newcomers-government-assisted-refugees-69755-en.pdf?rev=474ac746-1a8c-4154-be0e-751547f5563d&_gl=1*_pqntm3*_gcl_au*_MTg5NDA4Nzk1Ni4xNzEzNDU4MzAw*_ga*_MTAxMTUyNjM3LjE2Mjk0MDMxNjY.*_ga_CYT7T7RT5C4*_MTcxODY2NDg4NC41Ny4xLjE3MTg2NjUyODEuNjAuMC4w

¹⁶ The RAP shelter allowance for different refugee family sizes as per IRCC's RAP allowance for BC was compared with average rents in BC, Vancouver, Victoria, Kelowna, Kamloops as per 2021 census data.

¹⁷ Silvius, R., Halldorson, E., & Al-Ubeady, H. A. (2021). *Putting Home at the Heart of Refugee Resettlement*. Manitoba: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. Refer page 29 for a comparison of the average market rents in BC and current RAP shelter allowance.

¹⁸ Sivarajah, A., Mares, E., Padi, F., & Anand, P. (2024). *Keys to the Future: Unlocking Adequate Housing for Refugees & Refugee Claimants in Canada*. Max Bell School of Public Policy, McGill University Pg 88

¹⁹ Sivarajah, A., Mares, E., Padi, F., & Anand, P. (2024). *Keys to the Future: Unlocking Adequate Housing for Refugees & Refugee Claimants in Canada*. Max Bell School of Public Policy, McGill University pg 88.

²⁰ Canadian Rental Housing Index, Census 2021. A Snapshot of Renters by Immigrant Status in British Columbia. https://rentalhousingindex.ca/en/#immigrants_prov; Data derived from the 2021 long-form census, obtained through a Statistics Canada custom data request.

²¹ CMHC Rental Market Survey, 2023. <https://www03.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/hmip-pimh/en/Profile?geold=59&t=2&a=6>

²² Canadian Rental Housing Index, Census 2021.

²³ August, M. (2022). *The Financialization of Multi-Family Rental Housing in Canada : A report for the Office of the Federal Housing Advocate*. Ontario: Office of the Federal Housing Advocate, Canadian Human Rights Commission.

²⁴ NOAH are unsubsidised purpose-built rental units that have been in the market for a long time that they rent quite low. Statistics Canada. Table 98-10-0253-01 Shelter Cost by tenure 2021, Statistics Canada. [Catalogue no. 98-10-0253-01](https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/98-10-0253-01/article/00001-eng) shelter cost by tenure 2016

²⁵ CMHC, Starts and Completions Survey, 2016 -2021, *obtained through a custom data request*

²⁶ For more information on the overall housing strategy visit: www.housingcentral.ca

²⁷ Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. (2022). *An Immigration Plan to Grow the Economy*. Retrieved from Government of Canada, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada: <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/news/2022/11/an-immigration-plan-to-grow-the-economy.html> <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/news/2022/11/an-immigration-plan-to-grow-the-economy.html>

²⁸ Work BC. (2023). *B.C.'s Labour Market Outlook : 2023 Edition* .

https://www.workbc.ca/sites/default/files/2023-11/MPSEFS_11803_BC_Jobs_LMO_2023_FINAL..pdf

²⁹ AMSSA. (2024). *A Collaborative Vision For Newcomer Integration in British Columbia*.

Vancouver: AMSSA. <https://www.amssa.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Provincial-Engagement-Strategy-Report-May-2024-Digital-version.pdf> pg. 13

³⁰ Filipowicz, J., & Lafleur, S. (n.d.). *Getting our houses in order: How a lack of intergovernmental policy coordination undermines housing affordability in Canada*.

Macdonald-Laurier Institute.

³¹Soma, C., Gupta, T. D., Marom, L., & Su, Y. (n.d.). Don't Blame International Students. The Housing Crisis Is Our Problem. *The Tyee*.

<https://www1.thetyee.ca/Analysis/2023/09/21/International-Students-Housing-Crisis-Our-Problem/>

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<https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/immigration-housing-crisis-costs-1.7088878>

³² Canadian Centre for Housing Rights. (2022). *"Sorry, it's rented": Measuring Discrimination Against Newcomers in Toronto's Rental Housing Market*. CCHR.

<https://housingrightscanada.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/CCHR-Sorry-its-rented-Discrimination-Audit-2022.pdf> pg. 8

³³ CMHC. (2019). *Housing Research Report, Literature Review on Housing Needs: Newcomers*. CMHC

https://eppdscrmssa01.blob.core.windows.net/cmhcprodcontainer/sf/project/archive/research_6/rr_69755.pdf

³⁴ Wayland, S. V. (2007). *The Housing Needs of Immigrants and Refugees in Canada*. CHRA.

Pg. 5

https://www.homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/FinalReport_CHRAImmigrationHousing_June_2007.pdf

³⁵ Jackson, M., Yerich, S., Godard, L., & Lee, H. (2018). *Building Supports, Phase III : Policy Component, Immigration, Refugee and Settlement; Housing and Health*. BC Society of Transition Houses. Pg. 92

<https://bcsth.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Building-Supports-Phase-3-report-final3pdfMay2018.pdf>

³⁶ When comparing populations that are at high risk of core housing need, data indicates that core housing need of 'refugee claimant-led renter households' is highest in the province ; Statistics Canada, 2023, "HART - 2021 Census of Canada - Selected Characteristics

of Census Households for Housing Need - Canada, all provinces and territories at the Census Division (CD) and Census Subdivision (CSD) level [custom tabulation]", <https://doi.org/10.5683/SP3/8PUZQA>

³⁷ According to census data, “refugees” category includes “immigrants who were granted permanent resident status based on a well-founded fear of returning to their home country and also persons who had a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or for political opinion , as well as persons who had been seriously and personally affected by civil war or armed conflict, or had suffered a massive violation of human right”.

³⁸ 2023 Homeless Count in Greater Vancouver. Prepared for the Greater Vancouver Reaching Home Community Entity. Vancouver, BC https://hsa-bc.ca/Library/2023_HC/2023_Homeless_Count_for_Greater_Vancouver.pdf

³⁹ Jackson, M., Yerich, S., Godard, L., & Lee, H. (2018). *Building Supports, Phase III : Policy Component, Immigration, Refugee and Settlement; Housing and Health*. BC Society of Transition Houses. pg. 99 <https://bcsth.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Building-Supports-Phase-3-report-final3pdfMay2018.pdf>

⁴⁰ Canadian Centre for Housing Rights. (2022). "Sorry, it's rented". *Measuring Discrimination Against Newcomers in Toronto's Rental Housing Market*. CCHR. Pg 8 <https://housingrightscanada.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/CCHR-Sorry-its-rented-Discrimination-Audit-2022.pdf>

⁴¹ Wayland, S. V. (2007). *The Housing Needs of Immigrants and Refugees in Canada*. CHRA. https://www.homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/FinalReport_CHRAImmigrationHousing_June_2007.pdf

Jackson, M., Yerich, S., Godard, L., & Lee, H. (2018). *Building Supports, Phase III : Policy Component, Immigration, Refugee and Settlement; Housing and Health*. BC Society of Transition Houses. <https://bcsth.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Building-Supports-Phase-3-report-final3pdfMay2018.pdf>

⁴² *Findings from focus groups and interviews conducted with settlement sector organizations and frontline staff conducted on May 7th, 2024, and May 30th 2024*

⁴³ CMHC. (2019). *Literature Reviews on Housing Needs: Newcomers*. CMHC. Pg 10 https://eppdscrmssa01.blob.core.windows.net/cmhcprodcontainer/sf/project/archive/research_6/rr_69755.pdf

⁴⁴ Milaney, K., Tremblay, R., Bristowe, S., & Ramage, K. (2020). *Welcome to Canada: Why are Family Emergency Shelters 'Home' for Recent Newcomers?*. MDPI

⁴⁵ Muttu, P. (2002). *Substandard Housing Problems Faced by Immigrants and Refugees in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia*. Regional Homelessness Research Committee. Pg 7
https://www.mosaicbc.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/SCPI-Summary-Report_0.pdf

⁴⁶ Diversity Community Resources Society. (n.d.). *Information Sheet: Housing Challenges of Refugees (Part 2)*. Refugee Readiness Team Fraser Valley.
https://www.dcrs.ca/assets/media/2019/01/RRT-FV_Information_Sheet_Housing_Challenges_Part2.pdf

⁴⁷ Milaney, K., Tremblay, R., Bristowe, S., & Ramage, K. (2020). *Welcome to Canada: Why are Family Emergency Shelters 'Home' for Recent Newcomers?*. MDPI.
[Welcome to Canada Why Are Family Emergency Shelter%20\(2\).pdf](https://www.mdpi.com/2077-0473/12/1/1000)

⁴⁸ Wayland, S. V. (2007). *The Housing Needs of Immigrants and Refugees in Canada*. CHRA. Pg8
https://www.homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/FinalReport_CHRAImmigrationHousing_June_2007.pdf

⁴⁹ Wayland, S. V. (2007). *The Housing Needs of Immigrants and Refugees in Canada*. CHRA. Pg42
https://www.homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/FinalReport_CHRAImmigrationHousing_June_2007.pdf

⁵⁰ Canadian Rental Housing Index – 2021 Census of Canada, Statistics Canada. *Data derived from the 2021 long-form census, obtained through a Statistics Canada custom data request.*
https://rentalhousingindex.ca/en/#immigrants_prov. According to census data, “immigrant households” account for households whose Primary Household Maintainer (PHM) are “landed immigrants or permanent residents”.

⁵¹ Census defines “immigrants” as “a person who is, a landed immigrant or permanent resident in Canada” and “non-permanent residents” as “persons from another country with a usual place of residence in Canada and who have a work or study permit or who have claimed refugee status (asylum claimants).”

⁵² Canadian Rental Housing Index – 2021 Census of Canada, Statistics Canada. *Data derived from the 2021 long-form census, obtained through a Statistics Canada custom data request.*
https://rentalhousingindex.ca/en/#immigrants_prov

⁵³ Canadian Rental Housing Index – 2021 Census of Canada, Statistics Canada. [Table 98-10-0255-01 Shelter-cost-to-income ratio by tenure including presence of mortgage payments and subsidized housing: Canada, provinces and territories, census divisions and census subdivisions](https://rentalhousingindex.ca/en/#immigrants_prov)

The housing metric used to measure housing affordability in Canada is 30% shelter cost-income ratio (STIR). This metric indicates that households spending more than 30% of their income on housing are likely to experience housing affordability challenges.

⁵⁴ “Non-permanent residents” is used interchangeably with “temporary residents” in this report. Census defines “non-permanent residents” as a person from another country with a usual place of residence in Canada and who has a work or study permit or who has claimed refugee status (asylum claimant).

⁵⁵ As per Statistics Canada, “Non-permanent resident” includes persons from another country with a usual place of residence in Canada and who have a work or study permit or who have claimed refugee status (asylum claimants).

⁵⁶ Canadian Rental Housing Index – 2021 Census of Canada, Statistics Canada. *Data derived from the 2021 long-form census, obtained through a Statistics Canada custom data request* https://rentalhousingindex.ca/en/#immigrants_prov

⁵⁷ Canadian Rental Housing Index – 2021 Census of Canada, Statistics Canada. *Data derived from the 2021 long-form census, obtained through a Statistics Canada custom data request.* https://rentalhousingindex.ca/en/#immigrants_prov

⁵⁸ As per BC housing Rental Assistance Program eligibility criteria, applicant must have been a resident of British Columbia for a full 12 month before the date of application. <https://www.bchousing.org/housing-assistance/rental-assistance-programs/RAP>

⁵⁹ PHM refers to Primary Household Maintainer

Dictionary, Census of Population 2021, <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/ref/dict/az/Definition-eng.cfm?ID=households-menage020>

⁶¹ Canadian Rental Housing Index – 2021 Census of Canada, Statistics Canada. *Data derived from the 2021 long-form census, obtained through a Statistics Canada custom data request.*

⁶² Canadian Rental Housing Index – 2021 Census of Canada, Statistics Canada. *Data derived from the 2021 long-form census, obtained through a Statistics Canada custom data request.* https://rentalhousingindex.ca/en/#immigrants_prov

⁶³ A household is considered to be in Core Housing Need if its housing does not meet one or more of three standards which are: adequacy (dwelling condition), suitability (household does not have enough bedrooms according to National Occupancy Standards) or affordability (spending more than 30% of its before-tax income to pay for shelter costs)

⁶⁴ According to census data, “refugees” category includes “immigrants who were granted permanent resident status based on a well-founded fear of returning to their home country and also persons who had a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or for political opinion , as well as

persons who had been seriously and personally affected by civil war or armed conflict, or had suffered a massive violation of human right”.

⁶⁵ Statistics Canada: Classification of admission

<https://www23.statcan.gc.ca/imdb/p3VD.pl?Function=getVD&TVD=323293&CVD=323294&CPV=3&CST=10102023&CLV=1&MLV=4>

⁶⁶ Statistics Canada, 2023, "HART - 2021 Census of Canada - Selected Characteristics of Census Households for Housing Need - Canada, all provinces and territories at the Census Division (CD) and Census Subdivision (CSD) level [custom tabulation]", <https://doi.org/10.5683/SP3/8PUZQA>

⁶⁷ *Incomes of Refugees in Canada*, The School of Public Policy, University of Calgary

<https://www.policyschool.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/SPTRefugeeIncomes2022.pdf>

⁶⁸ CMHC. (2019). *Understanding housing needs of newcomers and government assisted refugees*. CMHC. <https://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/professionals/housing-markets-data-and-research/housing-research/research-reports/housing-needs/understanding-housing-needs-newcomers-government-assisted-refugees#:~:text=Disjointed%20services%20aimed%20to%20assist,more%20interpersonal%20dependency>

⁶⁹ Zimonjic, P. (2024, January 2021). *Linking immigration to the housing shortage may be missing the problem, experts say*. Retrieved from CBC News:

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/immigration-housing-crisis-costs-1.7088878>

⁷⁰ Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. (2024, June 20th). *Canada honours and shows solidarity with refugees worldwide*. Retrieved from IRCC, Government of Canada:

<https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/news/2024/06/canada-honours-and-shows-solidarity-with-refugees-worldwide.html>

⁷¹ IRCC - Admissions of Resettled Refugees by Province/Territory, Census Division and Census Subdivision of Intended Destination and Immigration Category, January 2015 - January 2024

⁷² A household is considered to be in Core Housing Need if it's housing does not meet one or more of three standards which are ; adequacy, suitability or affordability (spending more than 30% of its before-tax income to pay for shelter costs.

Statistics Canada, 2023, "HART - 2021 Census of Canada - Selected Characteristics of Census Households for Housing Need - Canada, all provinces and territories at the Census Division (CD) and Census Subdivision (CSD) level [custom tabulation]", <https://doi.org/10.5683/SP3/8PUZQA>

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Division (CD) and Census Subdivision (CSD) level [custom tabulation]", <https://doi.org/10.5683/SP3/8PUZQA>

⁷⁴ A household that does not have enough bedrooms according to the National Occupancy Standard. NOS stipulates that family size and composition should determine the number of bedrooms required by the household. While this provides a useful measure of suitability to assess if housing stock meets the needs of households, when adopted as a policy it has the potential to create barriers to housing especially in the midst of a housing crisis

⁷⁵ IRCC – Asylum Claimants Processed by year, 2015 – 2024, CBSA and IRCC <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/refugees/asylum-claims.html>

⁷⁶ Housing and Homelessness Services, City of Vancouver, April 2024

⁷⁷ AMSSA. (2024). *Provincial Response Road Map: Recommendations in Preparation For Future Humanitarian Responses*. Vancouver: AMSSA. <https://www.amssa.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/BCRRN-Provincial-Response-Roadmap-final-Mar-2024.pdf>

⁷⁸ Sivarajah, A., Mares, E., Padi, F., & Anand, P. (2024). *Keys to the Future: Unlocking Adequate Housing for Refugees & Refugee Claimants in Canada*. Max Bell School of Public Policy, McGill University Pg 14

⁷⁹ Government of Canada, Immigration Refugee and Citizenship Canada, <https://www.international.gc.ca/transparency-transparence/women-peace-security-femmes-paix-securite/2023-2029-implementation-plans-mise-ceuvre-ircc.aspx?lang=eng>

⁸⁰ <https://www.homelesshub.ca/resource/finding-home-housing-experiences-government-assisted-refugees-and-refugee-claimants>

⁸¹ Zahid, S. (2023). *Asylum Seekers at Canada's Border*. House of Commons, Canada. <https://www.ourcommons.ca/Content/Committee/441/CIMM/Reports/RP12437392/cimmrp16/cimmrp16-e.pdf>

⁸² After arrival and clearing security checks, refugee claimants have 15 days to submit their basis of claim to the Immigration Refugee Board (IRB). Once a claimant has submitted their basis of claim and opened their refugee claim, they receive the Refugee Protection Claimant document. With that document they are able to do their medical exams, become eligible for provincial social assistance, work permit and a temporary social insurance number. <https://bcrefugeehub.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Refugee-Claim-Process.pdf>

⁸³ BC Housing, Rental Assistance Program eligibility criteria, <https://www.bchousing.org/housing-assistance/rental-assistance-programs/RAP#:~:text=More%20than%2030%20per%20cent,meet%20the%20program%20residency%20requirements.>

⁸⁴ Immigration, Refugee and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), Asylum Claimants by year – 2023 , <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/refugees/asylum-claims/asylum-claims-2023.html>

⁸⁵ Data obtained through a custom data request from [BC's Refugee Claimant Housing Referral System](#) aggregate reports

⁸⁶ Immigration, Refugee and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), Asylum Claimants by year – 2023 , <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/refugees/asylum-claims/asylum-claims-2023.html>

⁸⁷ Housing, Infrastructure and Communities Canada. (2019). *Homelessness Data Snapshot: Homelessness experienced by Newcomers to Canada*. Retrieved from Housing, Infrastructure and Communities Canada, Government of Canada: <https://housing-infrastructure.canada.ca/homelessness-sans-abri/reports-rapports/data-newcomers-donnees-nouveaux-arrivants-eng.html>

⁸⁸ Housing, Infrastructure and Communities Canada. (2019). *Homelessness Data Snapshot: Homelessness experienced by Newcomers to Canada*. Retrieved from Housing, Infrastructure and Communities Canada, Government of Canada: <https://housing-infrastructure.canada.ca/homelessness-sans-abri/reports-rapports/data-newcomers-donnees-nouveaux-arrivants-eng.html>

⁸⁹ As per the 2023, Greater Vancouver Homeless Count a minimum of 4,821 individuals were identified as experiencing homelessness. 2023 Homeless Count in Greater Vancouver. Prepared for the Greater Vancouver Reaching Home Community Entity. Vancouver, BC https://hsa-bc.ca/Library/2023_HC/2023_Homeless_Count_for_Greater_Vancouver.pdf

⁹⁰ As per the 2020 Homeless Count, a minimum of 25 refugee claimants were experiencing homelessness compared to a minimum of 55 refugee claimants in 2023.

2020 Metro Vancouver Homeless count: BC Non-Profit Housing Association (2020). 2020 Homeless Count in Metro Vancouver. Prepared for the Greater Vancouver Reaching Home Community Entity. Vancouver, BC: Metro Vancouver. Pg 49.

2023 Metro Vancouver Homeless Count: Homelessness Services Association of BC (2023). 2023 Homeless Count in Greater Vancouver. Prepared for the Greater Vancouver Reaching Home Community Entity. Vancouver, BC. Pg 46.

⁹¹ Housing and Homelessness Services survey, City of Vancouver, April 2024

⁹² Multi-Agency Partnership, BC (2019). *Towards A Housing Solution For Refugee Claimants in BC: A Plan for Action*. MAP. <https://mapbc.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/MJTT-Report-Towards-a-Housing-Solution-for-Refugee-Claimants-CE-MAP-Sept-16-2019.pdf>

⁹³ Statistics Canada. [Table 14-10-0353-01 Homeless Shelter Capacity in Canada from 2016 to 2022, Infrastructure Canada](#)

⁹⁴ Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants. (2015). *The Intersection of Settlement and Housing Services and Policies: Reducing the Risk of Homelessness for Immigrant and Refugee Women*. OCASI

⁹⁵ Services for refugees and refugee claimants, Government of BC, <https://www.welcomebc.ca/start-your-life-in-b-c/settlement-services#Temporary-residents>. Note: BCSIS is now the BC Newcomers Service Program

⁹⁶ Ministry of Municipal Affairs, Government of BC, <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2024MUNI0017-000438>

⁹⁷ Multi-Agency Partnership, BC. (2019). *Towards A Housing Solution For Refugee Claimants in BC: A Plan for Action*. MAP. <https://mapbc.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/MJTT-Report-Towards-a-Housing-Solution-for-Refugee-Claimants-CE-MAP-Sept-16-2019.pdf>

⁹⁸ CMHC. (n.d.). *Securing the right to housing for racialized refugees*. Retrieved from CMHC, National Housing Strategy Project Profiles: <https://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/nhs/nhs-project-profiles/2021-nhs-projects/securing-right-to-housing#:~:text=This%20research%20revealed%20that%20even,their%20new%20life%20in%20Canada>

⁹⁹ CMHC. (2019). *Literature Reviews on Housing Needs: Newcomers*. CMHC.

¹⁰⁰ <http://p2pcanada.ca/wp-content/blogs.dir/1/files/2019/10/Literature-Review-of-the-Outcomes-of-Government-Assisted-Refugees-in-Smaller-Canadian-Centres.pdf> pg 8

<https://www.unhcr.ca/in-canada/unhcr-role-resettlement/how-unhcr-resettles-refugees/>

¹⁰¹ For detailed break down of services covered under Resettlement Assistance Program , refer: <https://www.rstp.ca/en/bvor/rap-rates/>

¹⁰²<https://policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/Manitoba%20Office/2021/07/Putting%20Home%20at%20the%20Heart%20of%20Refugee%20Resettlement%20-%20Silvius%20C%20Halldorson%20and%20Al-Ubeady.pdf>

¹⁰³Silvius, R., Halldorson, E., & Al-Ubeady, H. A. (2021). *Putting Home at the Heart of Refugee Resettlement*. Manitoba: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives <https://policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/Manitoba%20Office/2021/07/Putting%20Home%20at%20the%20Heart%20of%20Refugee%20Resettlement%20-%20Silvius%20C%20Halldorson%20and%20Al-Ubeady.pdf>

¹⁰⁴ British Columbia Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP) Rates: https://www.rstp.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/New%20Rap%20Rates%20%28Jan%2001%202022%29/English/British%20Columbia_RAP_Rates-New_RR.pdf?t=1637362478

¹⁰⁵ McKay, A. *National Occupancy Standards: Use and Misuse*. BC Society of Transition Houses, Mitcas, UBC. <https://bcsth.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/BCSTH-NOS-Policy-Analysis-Alina-McKay-April-2021.pdf> , Pg 3

¹⁰⁶ CMHC. (n.d.). *Securing the right to housing for racialized refugees*. Retrieved from CMHC, National Housing Strategy Project Profiles: <https://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/nhs/nhs-project-profiles/2021-nhs-projects/securing-right-to-housing#:~:text=This%20research%20revealed%20that%20even,their%20new%20life%20in%20Canada>

¹⁰⁷ Sivarajah, A., Mares, E., Padi, F., & Anand, P. (2024). *Keys to the Future: Unlocking Adequate Housing for Refugees & Refugee Claimants in Canada*. Max Bell School of Public Policy, McGill University Pg 88

¹⁰⁸ Sivarajah, A., Mares, E., Padi, F., & Anand, P. (2024). *Keys to the Future: Unlocking Adequate Housing for Refugees & Refugee Claimants in Canada*. Max Bell School of Public Policy, McGill University pg 88.

¹⁰⁹ Silvius, R., Halldorson, E., & Al-Ubeady, H. A. (2021). *Putting Home at the Heart of Refugee Resettlement*. Manitoba: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. Pg 92
<https://policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/Manitoba%20Office/2021/07/Putting%20Home%20at%20the%20Heart%20of%20Refugee%20Resettlement%20-%20Silvius%20and%20Al-Ubeady.pdf>

¹¹⁰ For more information on the overall housing strategy visit: www.housingcentral.ca

¹¹¹ Based on City of Vancouver's data , As per the most recent homeless count, 88% of refugee claimants experiencing homelessness have been in the City of Vancouver for less than one year and 56% of the claimants have been experiencing homelessness for less than six months.

¹¹² Refugee claimant transitional housing providers, provide short term housing (3-6 months) for refugee claimant families along with wrap around supports essential to their resettlement such as filing claims, orient to Canada and search for a permanent home.

¹¹³ Data obtained through a custom data request from [BC's Refugee Claimant Housing Referral System](#) aggregate reports

¹¹⁴ BC's Income Assistance consists of a support allowance and a shelter allowance. The support allowance is intended to cover the cost of food, clothing, and personal and household items of the family. The shelter allowance is intended to pay for actual shelter

costs. As of 2024, the maximum shelter allowance rate for a single person under the income assistance program is \$500.

¹¹⁵ The Homelessness Prevention Program (HPP) provides portable rent supplements and support services to individuals in identified at-risk groups facing homelessness. Currently, Youth transitioning out of foster care, Women who have experienced violence or are at risk of violence, Individuals leaving the correctional or hospital systems and Individuals of Indigenous descent are eligible for the program. <https://www.bchousing.org/housing-assistance/homelessness-services/homeless-prevention-program>

¹¹⁶ Statistics Canada, 2023, "HART - 2021 Census of Canada - Selected Characteristics of Census Households for Housing Need - Canada, all provinces and territories at the Census Division (CD) and Census Subdivision (CSD) level [custom tabulation]", <https://doi.org/10.5683/SP3/8PUZQA>

¹¹⁷ Refugee claimant here includes both Asylum seeker and Refugee claimant. 'Asylum seeker' is a person that hasn't made a claim for refugee status yet and just arrived in Canada and 'Refugee claimant' is a person who has made a claim for protection as refugee. Focus groups indicated that asylum seekers are increasingly in need of emergency shelters especially more recently given the lack of sufficient supports until they make a claim for a refugee status. Since shelters do not collect disaggregated data on immigration statuses and the term 'refugee claimant' is used more broadly to refer to asylum claimants as well, we cannot determine the proportion of asylum seekers in need of shelter supports. Hence, the term 'refugee claimant' is used more broadly and includes both asylum seekers and refugee claimants.

¹¹⁸ Interim Housing Assistance Program (IHAP)- A federal government's program that provides funding to provincial and municipal governments, on a cost-sharing basis, to address interim housing pressures due to increased volumes of refugee claimants. Presently, eligible recipients are limited to provincial and municipal governments and funding is limited to temporary accommodations.

Interim Lodging Services program (ILS) - Funding provides temporary accommodations to refugee claimants whose immediate shelter needs cannot be addressed by a province or municipality. As of January 31, 2024, the federal government funds approximately 4,000 temporary rooms across Canada, housing over 7,300 refugee claimants

¹¹⁹ IRCC - Additional Funding Related to Hotels , Key Facts and Figures, December 05, 2023 <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/corporate/transparency/committees/cimm-dec-05-2023/additional-funding-hotels.html>

¹²⁰ Sivarajah, A., Mares, E., Padi, F., & Anand, P. (2024). *Keys to the Future: Unlocking Adequate Housing for Refugees & Refugee Claimants in Canada*. Max Bell School of Public Policy, McGill University Pg 33

¹²¹ Sivarajah, A., Mares, E., Padi, F., & Anand, P. (2024). *Keys to the Future: Unlocking Adequate Housing for Refugees & Refugee Claimants in Canada*. Max Bell School of Public Policy, McGill University Pg 35

¹²² As per 2021 census data, the average rent of a two-bedroom unit in BC is \$1,512 and in comparison a couple with two children or a single parent with two children would be eligible for a \$700 shelter allowance under the resettlement assistance program.

¹²³ AMSSA. (2024). *Working Towards Change: Understanding and Addressing Newcomer Housing Needs*. Vancouver: AMSSA. [Working Towards Change: Understanding and Addressing Newcomer Housing Needs - Report \(amssa.org\)](https://amssa.org/working-towards-change-understanding-and-addressing-newcomer-housing-needs-report)

¹²⁴ AMSSA. (2024). *Provincial Data Framework : Recommendations for a Provincial Data Management Strategy* . Vancouver: AMSSA.

¹²⁵ BC's Refugee Claimant Housing Referral System (BC CHAMRMS) connects refugee claimants to housing across the province. <https://refugeeclaimbc.com/>

¹²⁶ AMSSA. (2024). *A Collaborative Vision For Newcomer Integration in British Columbia*. Vancouver: AMSSA.Pg34

¹²⁷ Created by the federal, provincial and territorial governments in the mid 1980s, the National Occupancy Standard is 'a common reference point for "suitable" housing, which is how many people a given dwelling unit might accommodate given the number of bedrooms'. 'The National Occupancy Standard continues to be used in Canada as an indicator of housing suitability as part of the overall assessment that determines if a household is in [core housing need](#)'

¹²⁸ BCSTH. (2022). *The Housing Tell: No Room for National Occupancy Standards*. The National Right to Housing Network. <https://housingrights.ca/the-housing-tell-no-room-for-national-occupancy-standards/>

Ashlie, K., Godard, L., FitzGerald, A., Akbarnejad, G., & Guardado, S. (2022). *Keys to Home: Supporting Housing for Women Experiencing Violence*. BC Society of Transition Houses. https://bcsth.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Keys-to-Home_Gaps-Analysis-Report.pdf

Diversity Community Resources Society. *Information Sheet: Housing Challenges of Refugees (Part 2)*. Refugee Readiness Team Fraser Valley https://www.dcrs.ca/assets/media/2019/01/RRT-FV_Information_Sheet_Housing_Challenges_Part2.pdf

¹²⁹<https://www23.statcan.gc.ca/imdb/p3VD.pl?Function=getVD&TVD=117123&CVD=117123&CLV=0&MLV=1&D=1>

¹³⁰ <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/ref/98-500/007/98-500-x2021007-eng.cfm>

¹³¹ <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/refugees/about-refugee-system/how-system-works.html>

¹³² <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/refugees/asylum/claim-protection-inside-canada/after-you-apply.html>

¹³³ <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/study-canada.html>

¹³⁴ <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/corporate/transparency/committees/soci-sept-28-2023/canadas-temporary-foreign-worker-programming.html>

¹³⁵ <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/75f0002m/75f0002m2023004-eng.htm>

¹³⁶ <https://www.statcan.gc.ca/o1/en/plus/5170-homelessness-how-does-it-happen>

¹³⁷ <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/en/pub/75-006-x/2022001/article/00002-eng.pdf?st=jVvkYUmR>