INTRODUCTION: IMMIGRATION, HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS

Carlos Teixeira (University of British Columbia-Okanagan) and **Barry Halliday** (Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The editors would like to thank Metropolis and its team, in particular Mona Marshy, for assistance and useful comments at different stages of this publication.

The successful integration of immigrants and refugees into a new society is based on their attainment of several basic needs, one of the most important of which is affordable, suitable and adequate housing. In recent years, there has been increasing attention paid to the role of housing in the integration process. This has prompted examinations of the links between access to affordable housing and the residential concentrations of newcomers and minorities on the one hand, and successful integration and inclusion on the other. For both individuals and families, not only the type of housing but also the neighbourhood in which it is found affects social networks, access to employment opportunities, participation in public social spaces, the nature and availability of social services, and newcomers' general sense of security. As a result, researchers and policy-makers alike are seeking to better understand the relationships between housing, neighbourhoods and integration into Canadian society. This special issue of *Canadian Issues/Themes Canadiens* tackles these relationships in a number of ways by exploring the links between immigration, housing and homelessness in Canada.

One of the defining characteristics of recent immigration to Canada has been its cultural and racial heterogeneity. Not only have the source countries of immigration changed but recent immigrants and refugees also come from a wider spectrum of socio-economic backgrounds. Not surprisingly, they also have distinct housing needs and preferences. These are perhaps most evident in Canada's largest cities – Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver, which continue to experience dramatic demographic, economic, and cultural changes as a consequence of immigration. These changes have profoundly altered not only the social and cultural composition of their neighbourhoods but have also contributed to the complexity of their housing markets. One of the most important consequences of these changes has been an increased demand for housing paralleled by a shortage of affordable housing, both in the purchase and rental markets.

Housing affordability is important because it determines to a large degree who can afford what type of housing (suitability / adequacy) and where in Canada. Although a significant proportion of immigrants and refugees exhibit what is called a progressive housing[1] career, many do not. For example, for some newcomers, responses to a shortage of affordable housing include living in crowded conditions, seeking out social housing, securing housing in unsuitable units and/or neighbourhoods, so-called 'couch-surfing', and even using homeless shelters as de facto transitional housing.

Beyond affordability, there are a number of other important issues. Recent research has shown that newcomers may be at a disadvantage when looking for and evaluating housing in Canadian rental and homeownership markets. Collecting and using information about housing vacancies, particularly in complex housing markets with low vacancy rates, can pose a serious challenge for recent immigrants and refugees. These difficulties can be amplified when combined with limited financial resources, language barriers, insufficient and/or inaccurate information provided by friends and family, discriminatory practices by landlords, neighbours and others, as well as a lack of knowledge on the part of newcomers about their rights and responsibilities as tenants or renters.

As a result of these housing barriers, but also through the force of social networks, we are witnessing increasingly diverse patterns of settlement of new arrivals to the country. While many newcomers disseminate across the urban and suburban landscape, some groups are concentrating spatially in certain neighbourhoods, communities and even high-rise buildings to form ethnic enclaves. Although initially these enclaves were observed in immigrant reception areas close to downtown, only later moving to form new enclaves in the suburbs, we are witnessing a new pattern where some groups are settling immediately in suburbs upon their arrival in Canada. The complexity of these settlement patterns has resulted in

challenges for the settlement services sector, as well as other community institutions, in accommodating to the shifting demographics, location, and related needs of immigrant and refugee clients. As new patterns of settlement emerge, so too do unique needs and issues arise with respect to immigration, housing and homelessness.

This special issue addresses many of the points raised above, and presents a wide cross-section of the housing experiences and challenges that face immigrants and refugees in Canada's housing markets. Some of the key questions addressed in this special issue include:

- What barriers are encountered in securing affordable housing in Canada? What strategies are newcomers using to cope with these barriers?
- What are the housing outcomes of newcomers? Is their housing situation suitable and adequate for their needs?
- Are newcomers in Canada becoming homeless after their arrival? If so, what are the contributing factors, and what are the policy and program responses?
- What policies and programs are in place to assist newcomers' integration into housing markets? Are changes needed?
- How are newcomers affecting Canadian housing markets and neighbourhoods?

As many of the articles in this volume suggest, the role of housing is much more central to integration than is commonly acknowledged. For most people, housing is the single-largest expenditure every month and, if unmanageable, can preclude other important expenditures. It can also necessitate activities (i.e. a second job) that could inhibit long-term integration in terms of skills-upgrading, language proficiency, community and civic engagement, among others. In this context, two common findings appear to span the diverse articles in this volume: (i) that refugees face the most difficult housing circumstances of all newcomers to Canada; and (ii) affordability is the single most significant barrier to housing, regardless of location.

OVERVIEW OF VOLUME

In Hiebert's article, we are presented with a finding that adds an important nuance to much of the current discourse on declining immigrant earnings and economic outcomes. Using data from the Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada (LSIC), Hiebert shows that despite lower overall incomes, a surprising proportion of immigrants and refugees are able to purchase homes in Canada's most expensive real estate markets relatively soon after their arrival. Hiebert suggests a number of reasons why this might be so, including the transference of wealth to Canada from abroad, and the assembly of multiple-family households to pool both income and risk. In his article, Haan focuses upon this last point, a phenomenon often referred to as 'crowding'. In particular, Haan looks to better understand the nature of crowding among newcomers relative to the Canadian-born population, as well as across ethnic groups, and by housing tenure (i.e. ownership versus rental). Haan explores when, and under which conditions, crowding can be viewed as an involuntary response to economic duress, and the conditions under which crowding is merely reflective of cultural preference, and/or an economic strategy to obtain more preferential outcomes in Canada's housing markets.

Part of the challenge of policy and research on housing and homelessness in Canada is its multi-jurisdictional nature. Wayland, in a summary of a larger report, provides a useful overview of the existing policies and services that currently exist to assist immigrants and refugees in securing housing. As well, she suggests a number of changes to policy and programs that could assist them in securing more favourable housing outcomes. A notable suggestion in this regard is enhanced coordination between housing policy, immigrant/refugee settlement, and integration policy and programs. For his part, Newbold suggests that we also consider the links between housing, homelessness and health. Declining health upon arrival, unsatisfactory neighbourhoods and living conditions, and limited social supports all point, according to Newbold, to increased risks of homelessness. In his article, Gaetz is focused on increased access to research on homelessness. To this end, he details the web-based library and information centre known as the Homeless Hub (www.homelesshub.ca). This is a national information repository and networking hub designed to engage policy-makers, among others, with homelessness research from across the country.

In a summary of a larger report, Paradis et al present the results of their study which followed 91 women-led homeless families in Toronto. Speaking of the experiences of both Canadian-born and immigrant and refugee families, the study suggests that because 'homelessness is neither inevitable nor natural', public policy interventions are needed in a number of areas including income support, housing, and childcare, regardless of immigration status. Policy interventions are also suggested by Preston et al. in their article exploring risks of homelessness in Toronto's York Region. Far from shelters or sleeping rough, these authors suggest that a number of immigrant homeowners in York region are at risk of homelessness due to insufficient income relative to the carrying costs of their home. Also important in this regard are appropriate services and supports such as shelters, housing counselors, or subsidized housing located within close proximity. In their study on homelessness in Ottawa, Klodawsky et al suggest that gender

and family status are the two factors that most affect one's ability to find stable housing after episodes of homelessness, regardless of country of origin.

A finding across many of the articles in this volume is that refugees and asylum-seekers generally face the greatest challenges in securing housing, and are also more likely to experience affordability as a significant barrier. Exploring this issue, Murdie provides an overview of refugee housing outcomes. His article identifies the combination of lower incomes and high housing costs as the cause of "serious affordability problems", and also provides a number of potential solutions that could help to mitigate against what he calls the precarious entry of refugees into Canada's housing markets. Sherrell adds to this picture by looking at the housing outcomes of Government-Assisted Refugees and refugee-claimants in two Canadian cities, Vancouver and Winnipeg. While acknowledging the importance of legal status and provincial context (e.g. social assistance rates, rental vacancy rates, etc.), Sherrell's findings also point to the importance of other factors which can be prevalent among certain refugee groups such as family size and composition, literacy, and health in determining housing outcomes. Francis' article on African refugees in Vancouver provides an important insight into how such factors can place certain groups at a high risk of homelessness, particularly when combined with other challenges such as childcare expenses, rent increases, and conflict with neighbours or landlords. The voices of undocumented migrants and those with illegal immigration status have remained largely unheard. Priya's article offers a snapshot of the characteristics and homelessness experiences of non-status or undocumented migrants in Vancouver and Toronto. From analysis of interviews with thirty-four migrants, Priya's findings indicate that patterns of disadvantage emerge which might be ameliorated by, first, improving access at the front-end of the refugee system in support of fundamental justice; second, improving access to basic health, housing, and emergency services in support of public safety, human dignity, and the best-interests of children; and third, examining innovations in regularisation and return programs to address situations of protracted illegality. In turn, Simich's article describes the functional and psychological significance of "home" and how refugee mental health and resettlement may be affected by the lack of social supports associated with the concept of home. Using illustrations from studies with refugee communities in Ontario and Alberta, the author suggests that the way in which refugees evoke experiences of "back home" reveals critical social and psychological gaps in their settlement and integration experiences.

Compared to Toronto and Vancouver, Montreal offers lower overall housing costs for both rental and ownership. In Rose's article, we learn that since the majority of recent immigrants to Montreal find themselves in the private rental market, it is there we should look for signs of future developments in the housing experiences of immigrants and refugees. Pare offers another perspective, namely that for some immigrants difficulties in the private rental market lead them to pursue home-ownership as a means to secure adequate housing. For others, social housing is the solution to meet their housing needs. This has resulted in a dramatic increase in the ethnic and cultural diversity of social housing across many of Canada's cities. Providing insight on this phenomenon in Montreal, Germain and Leloup found residents in social housing had families that were larger than the Montreal average, with an overrepresentation of single-parent households. Newcomers represent almost 70% of residents, and although 87% of these arrived prior to 1995, they represent 90% of those on waiting lists. Interestingly, Germain and Leloup found that interethnic relations amongst the youth of these social housing projects are positive although intergenerational tensions were found within certain groups.

In presenting the City of Montreal's response to these and other challenges, Bohemier's article suggests that the projects and initiatives within the City of Montreal's social development strategy can contribute to newcomer integration for those resident in Montreal's social housing. One of these projects, *habiter la mixité*, has evolved in the last decade to include three main elements: supporting families, interethnic harmony amongst seniors, and the promotion of youth community involvement. In her article, Berubé also discusses the social integration of immigrants and refugees in low-cost housing, but focuses specifically on Montreal's Saint-Marie neighbourhood. Covering a range of low-cost housing arrangements from social housing to the private rental market, Berube finds that immigrant and refugee perspectives on housing are inseparable from the quality of human relationships with their neighbours that the housing enables. Although Carter's article is also focused on social integration among residents of low-cost housing, he presents an additional facet to this issue, that of competition between aboriginals and refugees for low-cost housing in Winnipeg's inner-city. Carter argues that this competition, combined with low vacancy rates, results in an environment where landlords have greater liberty to engage in discriminatory practices.

Speaking from his experiences in Edmonton's settlement sector, Gurnett introduces *Trinity Manor*, a model of supported housing that combines subsidized housing with personalized capacity-building plans developed in cooperation with each tenant. For Gurnett, a stable and secure home is the ideal base from which more complex settle-

ment challenges can be addressed. In her article Gajardo discusses some of the ways in which housing service providers can interact more effectively with newcomers by providing 'culturally competent services', and offers a number of suggestions for policy and program challenges in support of better outcomes for this population.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

The articles in this issue are revealing of the diverse factors that influence the housing outcomes and experiences of immigrants and refugees in Canada's urban markets including housing affordability; low vacancy rates; a lack of knowledge about the functioning of the housing market; official language proficiency; difficulties accessing available housing information; and racism and discrimination by landlords, private and non-private agencies and real estate agents. As we see in this volume, newcomers encounter a wide variety of housing outcomes including absolute and episodic homelessness, use of transitional and/or supported housing, social housing, crowded conditions, attaining homeownership but at high levels of financial risk, and securing housing but in neighbourhoods that may not be suitable for their needs. Still, despite many articles noting the shortage of affordable housing, a remarkable number seem to attain homeownership relatively quickly after their arrival in Canada.

Many of the articles contain policy and program recommendations aimed at improving housing outcomes in support of overall integration. Some of these include:

- the provision of additional housing information for immigrants and newcomers, including knowledge about their rights and responsibilities as tenants and homeowners;
- Mobile housing clinics to reach out to immigrants and refugees that may not access existing resources;
- Housing income supplements, particularly for refugees
- Social/community development strategies within social housing, both to assist immigrants and refugees in their efforts to integrate, but also in support of social inclusion for all residents;
- Enhanced coordination between housing and settlement/integration services;
- Provision of additional transitional housing in support of recent arrivals to Canada, and finally
- Construction of additional affordable housing.

Given the significant impact of immigration upon housing markets in Canadian cities – to say nothing of the importance of immigration as an engine of economic growth at both the local and the national levels – more research is needed regarding the housing experiences of newcomers in order to better understand:

- Why certain immigrant groups and refugee groups are more successful than others in locating appropriate housing in a suitable neighbourhood?
- What factors facilitate or inhibit this phenomenon?
- What meaning dœs homeownership hold among newcomers to Canada? Is it an indicator or successful integration and/or of social status?
- For those that do not pursue homeownership, are there competing financial obligations that provide important explanations i.e. saving for children's education; remittances, etc?
- Why major urban areas in Canada continue being the preferred destinations for settlement in contrast to smaller urban and rural areas?
- What impact dœs transnationalism have on newcomers in Canadian housing markets?
- What is the effect on newcomers' residential choices and behaviour on municipal community and infrastructure planning?

In addition to these questions, more research is needed regarding vulnerable households (those spending 30 percent or more of their household income on housing) because to a large degree, they fall outside the standard narrative of a progressive housing career for immigrants and refugees in Canadian cities. As well, the intersection of housing affordability and immigration seems to be a growing concern in mid-size Canadian cities. Thus, there is a compelling need for more research about the role of immigrants in these smaller markets given that this topic has, for the most part, been "off the radar" for most Canadian scholars until very recently.

There are also a number of intersections with other areas such as immigrant and refugee economic outcomes, racism and discrimination, as well as social inclusion, among others. As affordability is seen to be the predominant barrier for many in their quest to secure adequate housing, we may wonder whether efforts at improving foreign credential recognition will translate into higher incomes and therefore better housing outcomes. It is also worth pondering the possible explanations for the relative success of many immigrants and refugees in the Canadian housing market. Should this be viewed as a positive indication that newcomers are succeeding in Canada, or dœs it obscure precarious financial arrangements that could lead to high-risks of homelessness? Similarly, is the social value attached to homeownership drawing immigrants and refugees into the pursuit of housing at the expense of unsatisfactory living arrangements at the home and neighbourhood level? More to the point, how central is the role of housing to newcomer integration? As the valuable and important findings in this volume suggest, the answers to these questions will define the urban landscape of Canada for decades to come and so bear not only further examination but energetic response.

NOTE

[1] A progressive housing career is characterized by the improvement over time of one's housing circumstances as measured by such indicators as affordability, suitability and adequacy related to one's needs.

Immigration and Diversity in Francophone Minority Communities

Special Issue of *Canadian Issues / Thèmes canadiens*



The Metropolis Project and the Association of Canadian Studies have produced a special issue of the magazine *Canadian Issues* on immigration and diversity in Francophone minority communities. The issue (spring 2008) presents a range of perspectives on Francophone immigration and diversity in Canada. For the last ten years or so, Francophone minority communities have considered these issues to be critical to their economic, social and cultural development. The edition features an introduction by Chedly Belkhodja of the Université de Moncton and over 30 articles by knowledgeable policy-makers, researchers and non-governmental organizations.

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