

The Housing Experiences of Syrian Families in
Southwestern Ontario

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Introduction and Research goal

Canada resettled:

- 56,260 Syrian refugees between Nov. 2015 and June 2018 (Bridekirk et al., 2020)
- 4,782 arrived in Southwestern Ontario (8.5% of Canada's total)

Demands and Stress on these Refugees:

- Settlement and integration process
- Arriving from non-English countries
- Accepted on humanitarian basis; big families
- They have no choice on their destination, determined by their sponsorship type; GAR (Government assisted refugees), PSR (Privately sponsored refugees) or BVOR (Blended Visa office- referred)

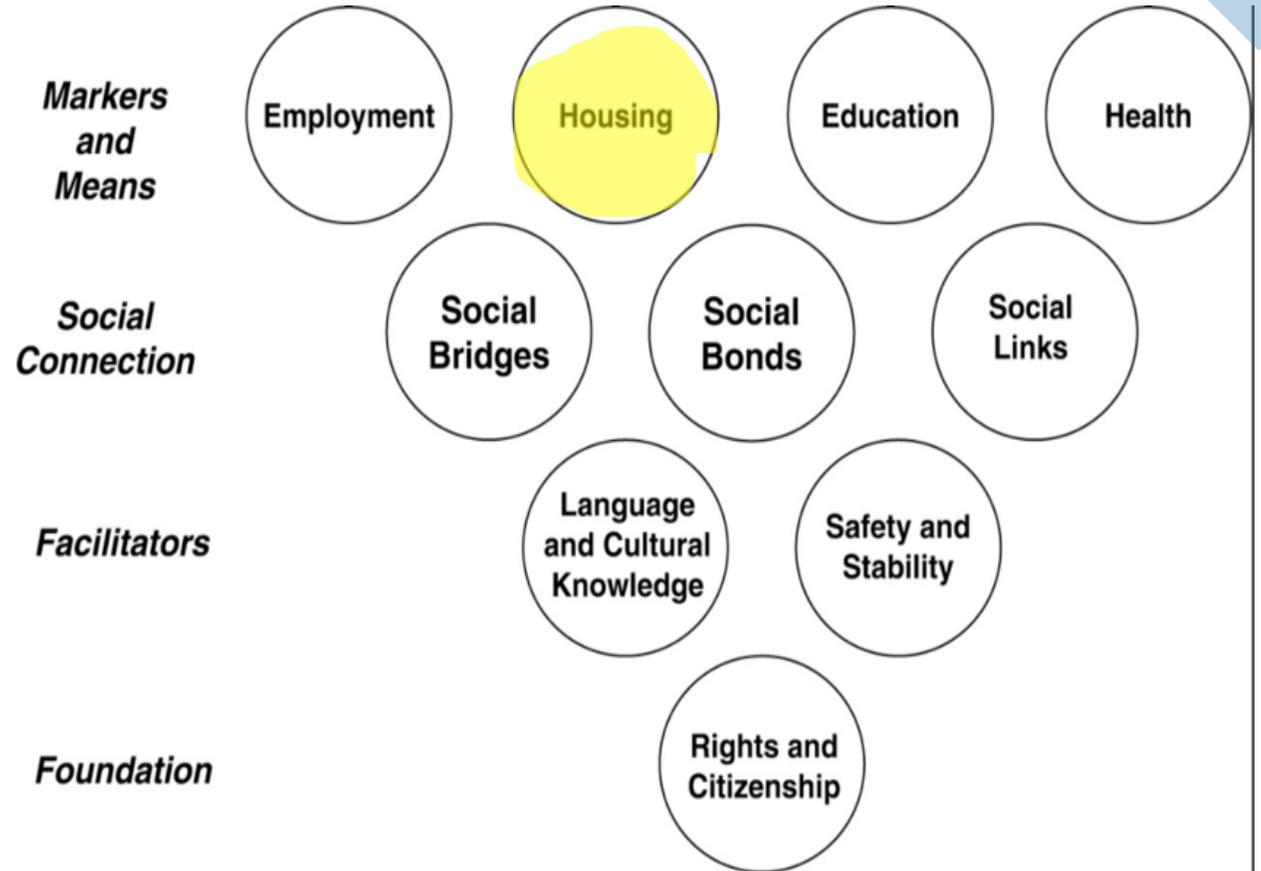
This research aims to explore the settlement and integration experiences of Syrian refugee families who have moved to southwestern Ontario since 2016. one of the aspects of their settlement experiences is housing.

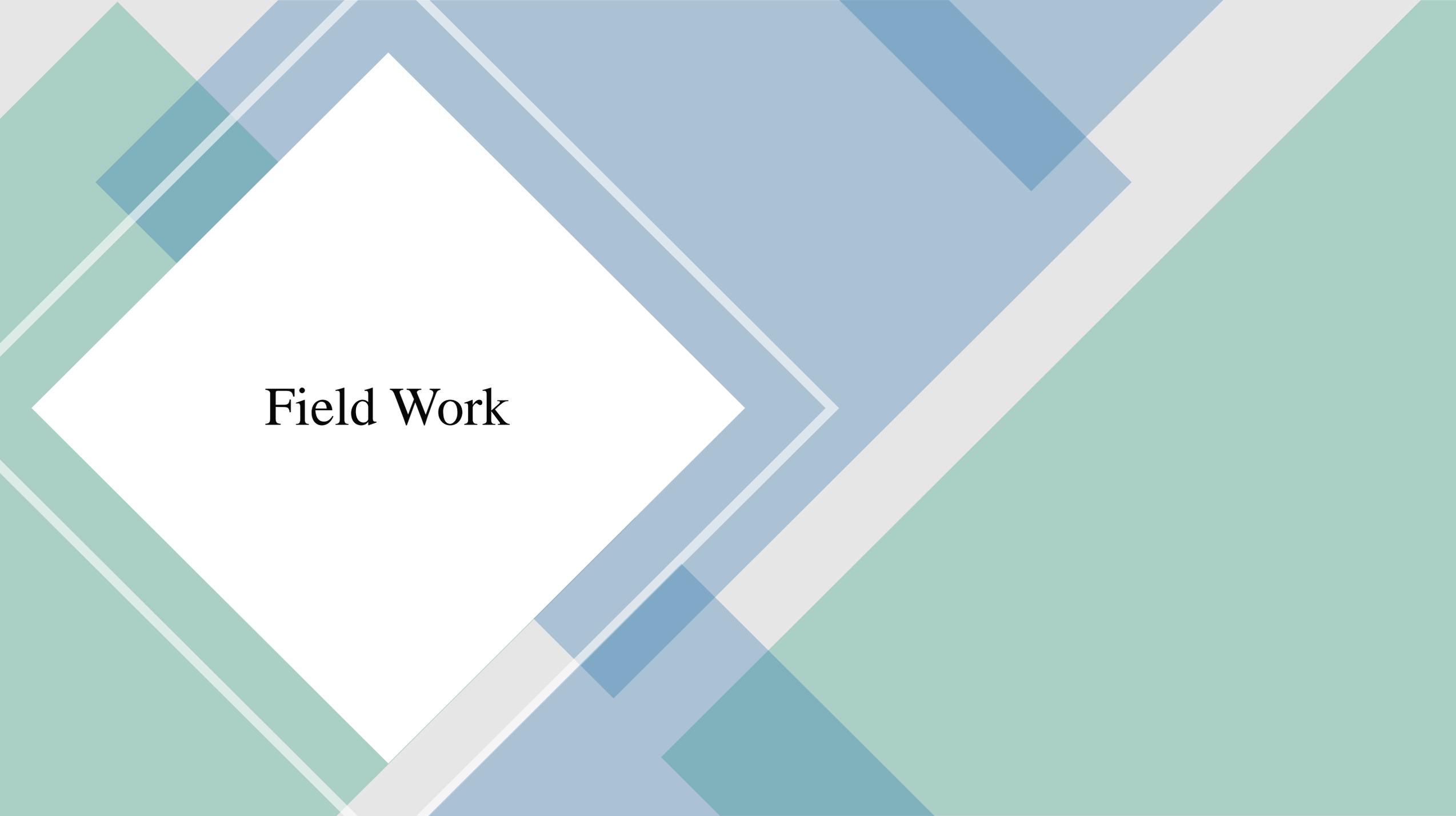
Conceptual framework

Ager & Strang's (2008) state that

Housing has a well-established impact on refugees' overall physical and mental well-being, as well as their ability to feel "at home".

The **indicators** of adequate housing include the physical **size**, **quality**, **facilities** of housing, and the **financial** security of tenants and, where appropriate, **ownership**.





Field Work

Participants and communities

Rural and small towns (RST) Interviews= 15	Census Agglomeration (CA) Interviews= 4	Census Metropolitan Areas (CMA) Interviews= 32
Hanover	Ingersoll (two families)	Chatham Kent (six families)
Dunnville (one family)	Woodstock (one family)	Guelph (seventeen families)
Goderich (two families)	Bradford (one family)	
Palmerston (two families)		
Listowel (four families)		
Harriston (two families)		
Drayton (two families)		
Tilbury (one family)		

Interview Guide

Housing experiences

- A. Have you changed your place more than once since you moved to Canada?
- B. Do you find the house you live in fit with your and your family needs in terms of size of the house and facilities, location, and renting
- C. Can you describe your relationship with your landlord?



Findings in response
to 3 interview
questions

Have you changed your place more than
once since you moved to Canada?

Syrian families moved between communities

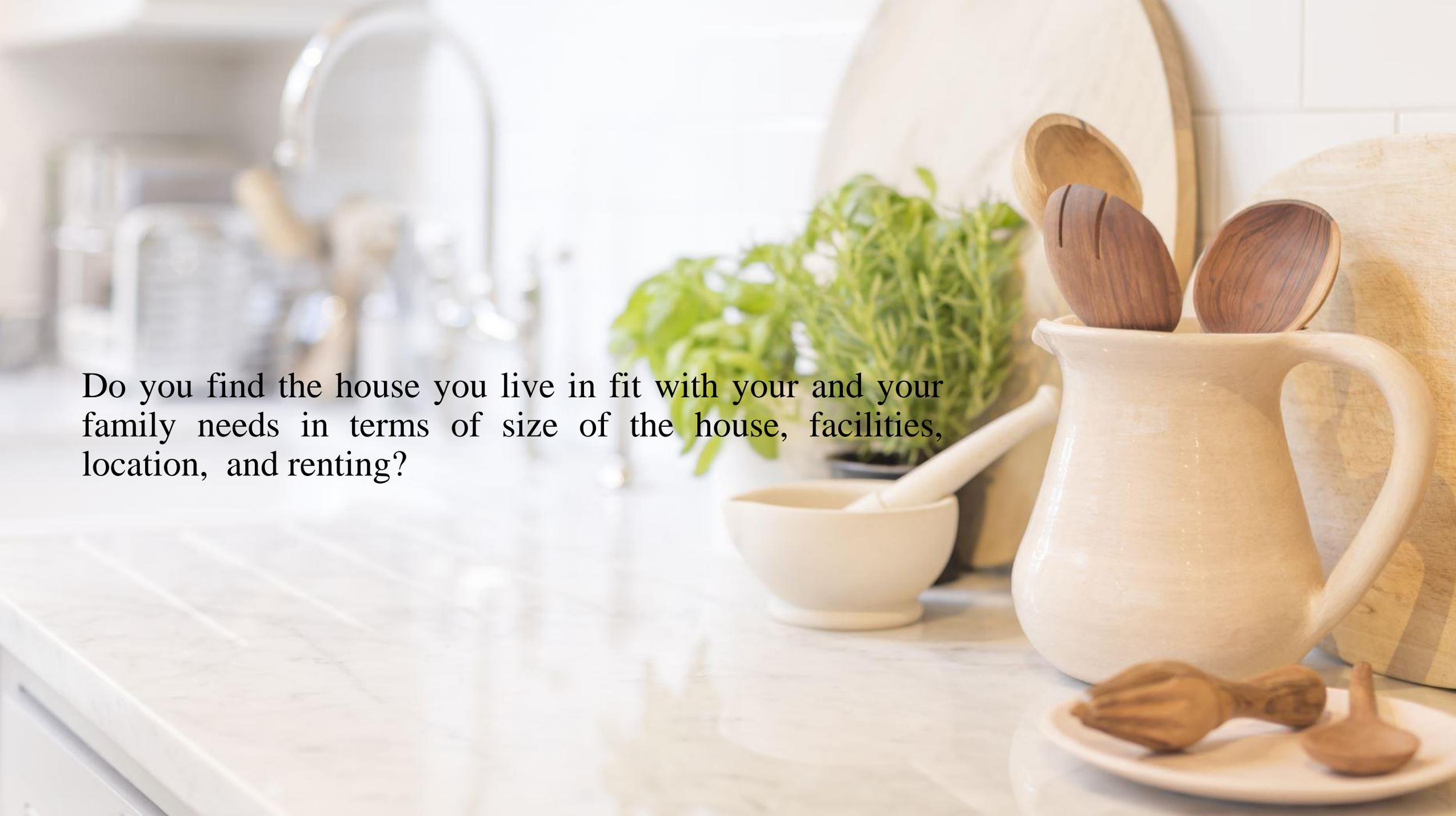
1- Moved between communities; either from a big to a small community or small to bigger community;

2- The **majority** of Syrian families moved from a **big** to a **smaller** size communities

Syrian families moved between communities

They moved between communities for various reasons:

- To join **family** and **friends**
- To look for **employment**
- To look for a **cheaper** rent or
- To purchase a **house**

A kitchen scene featuring a white ceramic pitcher filled with wooden spoons, a mortar and pestle, and fresh green herbs on a marble countertop. The background shows a sink with a chrome faucet and a wooden cutting board leaning against a white tiled wall.

Do you find the house you live in fit with your and your family needs in terms of size of the house, facilities, location, and renting?

The physical size of house

- “The house is **too small**; there is only three bedrooms and one bathroom. I have **six children**, and they spend most of the time in the basement because the house is too small for us.”
 - A female PSR participant- Guelph
- “The house we used to live in Tillsonburg was **small**; I have **five** children. There **are not enough rooms or bathrooms** that accommodate our needs”
 - A female PSR participant- Tillsonburg

The house quality and facilities

“The first house we lived in was in Harriston; it was an **old** and **not well maintained**. Therefore, we decided to move to another house in Listowel.”

- A male GAR participant – Listowel

“The problem in this house is that it has a **bad smell**; we cleaned and sanitized more than once, but the smell is **persistent**.”

- A male PSR participant- Hanover

“The **kitchen** is in the **center** of the house and is open to the sitting area. Visitors are be able to see what I was doing in the kitchen. Furthermore, we **shared** the house with another family. We used to live on the first floor, and they used to live on the second.”

- A female PSR participant- Guelph

“We live in an **apartment**, we have a **shared** laundry room, and we have to pay money. I need privacy in doing the laundry, we are not use to share **laundry** room back home.”

- A PSR female participant- Listowel

The house location

“Since we came to Canada, we moved to this house; the **location** is **perfect** and this what we like most about it. Our house is **near stores** like a fresco, food basics. The good thing is that my **children walk to school**, and it is only ten minutes walk.”

- A male BVOR participant- Guelph

“The house is **far away** from the school **bus stop**, and I had to walk my daughter in good and bad weather. I am thinking of **moving** to a new house; a house which is near the bus station and my daughter's school.”

- A female BVOR participant-Guelph



The house rent

"We pay \$1300 per month in addition to the **yearly increase** on the rent and my salary barely reaches \$1800 per month. I ask my friends to **lend me money** to cover our expenses and pay our house rent. The rent consumes three-quarters of our income."

- A male BVOR participant- Guelph

" We pay for the house rent \$2300, in addition to, heating bills. Therefore, we used to pay monthly total around \$3000. We stayed in house for nine months then we had to look for a cheaper house."

- A female PSR participant- Guelph

The house rent

“Our house rent is **\$1650** without other bills and our food. We work and barely cover our rent and expenses. The living expenses are very high; house rent, car expenses and bills.”

- A male PSR participant- Dunnville

“The rent is high is **\$1200** plus other expenses. Sometimes we don't heat the house to save expenses.”

- A GAR female participant - Listowel

Can you describe your relationship with your landlord?

Relationship with landlord

“ I could not find a house for renting in Goderich. They don't **prefer** to rent their houses for **big** families. Therefore, I had to stay in a shelter house with my children for six months. Then I rented a townhouse, where the owner agreed renting his house.”

- A female GAR participant- Goderich

"We were trying to find a suitable house that fits our family members and not expensive as well. It was difficult to find one as many landlords **refused** us as we are a **big** family.“

- A female PSR Participant- Guelph

Relationship with landlord

“He is a great man; his wife is a nice lady. They always **visit** us at home. Every time we **face** a situation, they **solve** it.”

- A male BVOR participant-Guelph

“The house was near downtown, was old, and needed maintenance. One day, the landlord asked us to leave; he wanted to do maintenance on the house and sell it. ”

- A female PSR participant- Guelph

Purchase a house

"We came as **refugees**; we faced tremendous **hardships** during the war and exile. We stayed in Lebanon for three years, and it was hard. We moved from **house** to **house** during our exile journey. My children were **depressed** and **anxious** when moving from one place to another. Therefore, we bought our house."

- A PSR female participant- Woodstock

"We purchased the house because we want to have **stability** in our lives and **settle** in this community. However, If we rent a house, we will not have **stability** in our lives. At any time, the **landlord** would **ask us to leave** the house."

- A male PSR participant – Chatham Kent

Conclusions: Challenges for Syrian families in housing

1. **BIG** family size; landlords are reluctant to rent them their houses. In other cases, they were asked to leave the house.
2. **RENTAL** market is expensive; it adds up with other expenses. Therefore, they are continuously looking for a cheaper house
3. **FINDING** affordable, suitable and fair rent is challenging.
4. **HOUSING** experiences might have a positive or negative impact on the settlement and long-term integration among Syrian families.