

# Supporting Newcomers to Find Housing: Insights, Challenges and Good Practices

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## Background

- Housing is the main barrier of settling and integration of refugees in Canada, and is at the same time an essential factor of integration
- Refugees (even privately sponsored that have access to prior existing networks) are most disadvantaged in comparison with other categories of immigrants. It takes 10-12 years to level up in terms of income and employment
- Discrimination in terms of housing, based on race, religion and ethnicity
- Very few studies have applied gendered lens to understanding access to housing
- Housing an important social determinant of health: deterioration in quality of housing signifies not only housing crisis but also health crisis.

## Housing Vulnerability of Refugee Claimants

- Lack of holistic and coordinated support services: housing response for refugee claimants is ad-hoc, fragmented and reactive
- Housing support oriented for refugee claimants has not kept up to speed with the rising need
- There has been a significant increase in the number of refugee claimants seeking assistance within the shelter system
- Pressure on the shelters: forms of territorial stigma, often situated in areas of social deprivation and disconnection from the integration practices
- Refugee claimants in emergency shelters report increased trauma, and decreased capacity to cope and navigate systems. Family separation

## Existing Approach to Housing Refugees (BC)

- Progressive Housing Approach that rely on generosity, and don'tt have adequate structural mechanisms for implementation
- Dependence on “submarket” of private rentals with low vacancy rates and high risks of housing discrimination and inadequate housing
- Reliance on non-profit frontline staff to administer services
- Informal social networks are fundamental to finding housing: maintaining informal networks with other non-profits, landlords.
- Use of informal cultural networks (often of same ethnographic group)
- Dependence on the benevolence of others (i.e. faith-based communities; host volunteers)
- 211 - Information about emergency housing numbers of shelter/transition house beds
- BC's Refugee Claimant Housing Referral System (BC CHARMS) connects refugee claimants to housing opportunities across BC.

# Housing Options

	Short Term	Long Term	Connecting Platforms
	Emergency Hotel Accommodation	BC Housing Registry	BC Charms
	Shelters/Safe Homes	Non-profit Housing that don't participate in the BC Housing Registry	Refugee Housing: Happipad
	Refugee Transitional Homes (Journey Home, Inasmuch, Kinbrace)	Co-ops that don't participate in the BC Housing Registry	
	Transition Houses (First and Second Stage)	Private Rental (sometimes with portable subsidies RAP, SAFER, HPP, CHCHB)	

## Gendered Lens to Refugee Housing

- Refugee households are much more likely to include lone parent families
- 13% of the Refugee Claims in Canada were based on Gender-Based Violence
- Women-led households: precarious work, higher probability of low incomes, dual burden of income earning and as care providers at home
- Immigrant women tend to avoid shelters (the most common affordable short-term housing available upon arrival) out of fear of having children exposed to violence and substance abuse; avoiding marginalized areas.
- Increased risk of hidden homelessness among refugee women: tend to rely on the informal networks for finding and maintaining housing
- Increased vulnerability to landlords' abuse

## Intimate Partner Violence

- 17.3% of immigrants and 11.7% of refugees experience a loss of home due to abuse by an intimate partner.
- Many more newcomer women live with abusive partners and feel unable to leave, sometimes because of concerns about the impact of leaving on their legal status in Canada, including women with precarious legal status in Canada who have children with Canadian partners who are caught between the family law and immigration system
- Barriers to accessing transition houses, include:
  - lack of knowledge about transition house services
  - language barriers
  - concerns that transition houses will not be culturally safe
  - concerns about ability to find permanent housing after they leave the transition house

# Intersecting issues of Intimate Partner Violence, Homelessness and Income Challenges: YWCA Munroe House



- Munroe House is a second stage transition house in Vancouver
- Provide 10 self contained units of housing to women fleeing intimate partner violence for 1 year
- Rent Geared to Income
- 3 free units with food gift certificates for women with no/precarious legal status in Canada, with children who cannot be removed from this jurisdiction, who are applying to stay in Canada on Humanitarian and Compassionate grounds
- Support for children/youth – PEACE program; SELF program in partnership with the Mothers Matter Center
- YWCA Employment Navigator
- Bursaries
- Priority in YWCA Childcare



## Systemic Change

Support the Housing Strategy recommendations developed by The Affiliation of Multicultural Societies and Service Agencies of British Columbia (AMSSA) and the BC Non Profit Housing Association (BCNPHA) to:

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

and

Increase and improve funding, support services and outreach

## Systemic Change

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

## Systemic Change

Increase and improve funding, support services and outreach

- Develop a province-wide coordinated access system for the resettlement of refugees and refugee claimants
- 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.

# Front Line Workers – Good Practices



- Provide information about IPV and transition house services in a way that can reach women who are isolated (in women's washroom, ESL classes and for mothers at child care centers)
- Respect client choices
  - About when/whether to leave an abusive partner.
  - About which housing to apply to
- Encourage, and where appropriate assist clients to fill out applications to as many different affordable housing sites as possible, including co-op housing
- Develop relationships with small and medium-sized housing providers. Let them know if you can be an ongoing support to your client
- Ask your organization if you can be a reference for your clients who are applying for housing
- Assist clients with completing a Rent it Right-type course that they can show potential landlords

## Front Line Workers – Resources and Referrals

- AMSSA's Housing Toolkit provides resources, information, and templates to assist in finding housing for newcomer immigrants and refugees in British Columbia.  
<https://www.amssa.org/programs/bc-refugee-resource-network/bcrrn-housing-toolkit/>
- Refer Refugee Claimants to Safe Haven for assistance with Housing Searches  
<https://bcrefugeehub.ca/bc-refugee-hub-bc-safe-haven-program-service-directory/>
- Refer to services providing support to women fleeing intimate partner violence like Battered Women's Support Services (BWSS) <https://www.bwss.org/> and Vancouver & Lower Mainland Multicultural Family Support Services Society and (VLMFSS) <https://vlmfss.ca/> . 211 can provide information on transition houses that currently have space available

“Again and again as I travel around I am stunned by how many citizens in our nation feel lost, feel bereft of a sense of direction, feel as though they cannot see where our journeys lead, that they cannot know where they are going. Many folks feel no sense of place. What they know, what they have, is a sense of crisis, of impending doom.”

bell hooks, *Belonging: A Culture of Place*



## HOME

Housing inequality and affordability is also about how “home” is imagined and practiced by newcomers and other vulnerable and marginalized populations.

# Innovative Housing Solutions



- Housing and Employment (Curing the Limbo, Greece)
- Communal Living (Sharehaus Refugio in Germany)
- Co-renting Practice (Poland; Montreal: CURANT in Belgium)
- Co-Housing and cohabitation Model (Netherlands: Plan Einstein, Zorgwonen)
- Social Rental Intermediation (Belgium)

*Affordable living spaces from city housing stock in exchange for work for public benefit*

*Holistic living experiment for community*

*Non-profit renting from landlords and subsequently subletting to refugee families, charging a below-market rent that they can afford.*

*Duo living with local seniors or local youth; relationships and solidarity bonds and practice of community*

*Providing incentives to private owners to make parts of their rental stock available and affordable to vulnerable groups*



**THANK YOU**