

RESEARCH SUMMARY

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Precarious Housing & Hidden Homelessness among Refugees, Asylum Seekers, and Immigrants: Bibliography and Review of Canadian Literature from 2005 to 2010

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What you need to know

This paper, prepared as part of a larger research project, lists 155 documents published between 2005 and 2010 dealing with precarious housing and hidden homelessness among refugees, asylum seekers, and immigrants in Montréal, Toronto, and Vancouver. The paper lists the documents both alphabetically and by theme, and includes an abstract or short summary of each one.

What is this research about?

The objective of the larger research project is to compare systematically the housing situations and needs of immigrants and refugees in Montréal, Toronto, and Vancouver, the three metropolitan areas in Canada where the majority of newcomers settle.

This literature updates and builds upon an earlier review by the same authors. Both were prepared for the Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS) of Human Resources and Skills Development, Canada (HRSDC).

The documents were placed in 11 categories; in the list below, the number of items in each category is indicated in parentheses, although several documents could be placed in more than one theme.

1. Bibliographies and Syntheses of the Immigrant and Housing Literature (11)
2. Challenges and Barriers Faced by Immigrants in Canadian Housing Markets (24)
3. Housing Careers, Residential Mobility, Social Networks (19)
4. Settlement Patterns, Ethnic Enclaves, Segregation (25)
5. Statistical Studies of Newcomers in the Canadian Housing Market (13)
6. Housing Needs (9)
7. Housing Adaptations (2)
8. Creating Home (5)
9. Homelessness (31)
10. Homeownership (10)
11. Planning for Immigrant Settlement (5)

What did the researchers do?

The researchers surveyed 11 Canadian and international journals focusing on housing, urban studies, and immigration, as well as the Homeless Hub (www.homelesshub.ca), the Theses Canada Portal of Library and Archives Canada, and the annual literature reviews prepared for Metropolis.

What did the researchers find?

a) Challenges and Barriers

Affordability remains the most important barrier for most immigrants and refugees in acquiring adequate and suitable housing, especially in high-cost cities such as Toronto, Vancouver, and Calgary, but increasingly in certain mid-sized cities. Other challenges include finding housing in relatively good condition, suitable for a large family, and in a safe neighbourhood, as well as accessing reliable information about housing vacancies. Difficulties in finding appropriate housing can be accentuated by external factors such as gentrification or competition by other groups, as well as discrimination.

b) Housing Careers, Residential Mobility, and Social Networks

Most immigrants improve their housing position over time. However, the degree of improvement

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depends on immigrant group, location in Canada, and ability to achieve homeownership. Refugees and certain visible minority groups usually experience precarious beginnings in the housing market. Newcomers in more affordable cities such as Kitchener-Waterloo and Winnipeg improve their housing position more rapidly than newcomers in more expensive housing markets such as Toronto and Vancouver. For most newcomers, social networks are important in facilitating progressive housing careers.

c) Settlement Patterns, Ethnic Enclaves, Segregation

The trend towards immigrant concentration in the suburbs continues, as a result not only of long-established immigrants relocating from central cities to the inner and outer suburbs but also newcomers bypassing central cities and settling directly in the suburbs. However, ghettoization, as it has emerged in many U.S. cities, is not a factor in Canada. Projections also indicate that large spatial concentrations of immigrant poverty will not emerge, except possibly in Toronto, where economically marginalized areas of immigrant settlement in the inner suburbs continue to develop. Place (neighbourhood) is important in shaping immigrant lives, both positively and negatively and particularly in areas of concentrated poverty.

d) Housing Needs and Adaptations, Creating Home

For some groups, difficulties obtaining adequate and reliable information about housing opportunities represent a major barrier in achieving a successful housing career. Increasingly, non-profit agencies are being asked to fill the gap. Churches, mosques, and other places of worship also play an important role in the social support and settlement patterns of immigrants. In some cases, internal changes to a house are needed to accommodate an immigrant family.

e) Homelessness

It appears that immigrants are over-represented among the hidden homeless population rather than the visible homeless. Evidence from the Greater Toronto Area suggests that immigrants without a

fixed address (those suffering from absolute homelessness) are less likely to participate in language classes, training sessions, and networking programs. They also have few resources among family and friends. Immigrant women often end up homeless (in a shelter) due to partner abuse or job loss. The housing situation of non-status migrants has also received attention, especially in Toronto and Vancouver.

f) Homeownership

Homeownership rates differ among immigrant groups and other cohorts. Some of the differences may be accounted for by variations in wealth or age at arrival. Overall, homeownership rates have declined for more recent arrivals due to declining income prospects. Immigrant homeowners in the outer suburbs may be more vulnerable than others.

How can you use this research?

This literature review not only pulls together what is known about the housing difficulties of immigrants and refugees, but also highlights gaps in knowledge that need to be filled.

About the researchers

Robert Murdie is Professor Emeritus and Senior Scholar, in the Department of Geography, York University. Jennifer Logan holds a MA in Geography from York University.

Keywords

Immigrants, Refugees, Asylum Seekers, Housing, Homelessness, Hidden Homelessness, Housing Careers, Canadian Housing Markets

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