Housing challenges for refugee newcomers: existing research and its relevance to the #WelcomeSyrians experience

Damaris Rose, with Alexandra Charette

Université INRS – Centre Urbanisation Culture Société

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Outline

• Background on refugee stream admissions to Canada
• Housing experiences and trajectories of newcomers in the refugee streams - views from research
• Welcome Syrians
• By the numbers
• Finding housing: tactics and challenges: emerging knowledge, emerging questions
Refugee admissions in context

Total permanent resident admissions, 2014

- Economic immigrants: 63.4%
- Family reunification: 25.6%
- Refugee streams: 23,286 (8.9%)
  - Government-assisted (GAR): 2.9%
  - Privately-sponsored (PSR): 1.8%
  - Landed-in-Canada (successful refugee claimants): 3.0%
  - Dependants: 1.2%
  - Blended Visa Office-Referred (hybrid GAR/PSR, new 2013, exc. QC): 0.1%

Source: CIC 2014, Facts & Figures, Permanent residents, pp. 4,6-7
Federally-funded settlement assistance for refugee streams

• Overseas-processed and landed-in-Canada refugees: access to same settlement programs as other immigrant newcomers, **plus:**
  + GAR & PSR: immigration transportation loan, IFHP
  + GAR: *temporary housing on arrival*, start-up allowance, 1 yr income support (≈ provincial social assistance rates)

• PSR sponsor groups must provide basic needs including housing for 1 yr

• Refugee claimants awaiting decision are not eligible for federally-funded settlement services, except limited IFHP and help finding housing

*Provincial supports & program entitlements vary ...*
Refugee newcomer housing issues: types of research evidence

• Metropolis Project (1995-2012) → academic-community collaboration → improved evidence base

• **Point-in-time** studies with **retrospective** component
  • Qualitative research & small-scale surveys
  • Some larger, representative-sample surveys
  • Mostly single-city studies, limited comparability

• **Longitudinal** surveys of permanent resident settlement & integration **trajectories**
  • *U. of Toronto Refugee Resettlement Project*, 1979-81 boat people (10 yrs)
  • *ENI* (QC), 1989 cohort (10 yrs)
  • *LSIC* (StatCan-CIC) 2000-2001 cohort (4 yrs)
  (In-Canada refugee claimants not included)
The pivotal role of rapid access to stable and decent housing

For newcomers to Canada, obtaining decent and affordable housing in a safe and welcoming neighbourhood is an anchor point for a new start. In addition to fulfilling the elemental need for shelter, it provides a base from which to seek out other key resources such as health-care providers, schools, language training and job counselling. It is also the scaffolding for rebuilding a sense of feeling settled, being “at home.”

- Whereas prolonged stays in temporary accommodation lead to delays in accessing resources needed for settlement, which can delay eventual economic self-sufficiency...

Damaris Rose, article in Policy Options Politiques, 2016-05-20
http://policyoptions.irpp.org/magazines/may-2016/affordable-housing-for-refugees-is-a-major-challenge/
Personalized orientation services, key to positive first housing experiences...

‘Manolo’, government assisted refugee, Montréal, 2011:

“The greatest gift that God could have given to me and my family was to come to Canada, stabilization. The first place that I came to was here with [female settlement organization worker] (...) We had just arrived at the hotel and the snow was beginning to fall (...) We arrived, a large family and (...) she was the one that did everything with us, she (...) placed us, all the family, in two 5½ [5 room] apartments] (...) in the same building“

‘Lara’, refugee claimant, Montréal, 2011

“When I arrived, I didn’t know Montreal and I had no idea where I’d landed. When you look for housing (...) you don’t know anything about anything. You are just desperate to find a place to put yourself. I only saw the problems after I moved in. The mould, the rats (...)“
Main housing challenges in the early months/early years

- Lack of credit history/references
- Financial precariousness
  - exacerbated by transportation loan repayment
- Discriminatory practices

Particular vulnerabilities
- **Refugee claimants**: precarious immigration status
- **GARs**: large families, limited education/literacy, ‘high needs’ (impact of 2002 IRPA) ⇒ barriers to economic self-sufficiency

Problematic outcomes
- channeling into deteriorating rental stock, risk of inadequate housing (substandard, unsanitary...)
- unsuitable housing (overcrowded)
- at risk of homelessness (≥ 50% income to rent...)

2016-10-11
For example, in Montréal study of 200 settlement organization clients, 2010-11

- GARs faring as badly as refugee claimants in experience of insanitary housing (35%)
- GARs much more likely to experience housing difficulties due to family size
  → Options often limited to ‘refugee-tolerant’ buildings in mediocre neighbourhoods
- GARs at risk of multiple forms of discrimination
  - Vs refugee claimants’ vulnerabilities ← precarious legal status
- Similar findings in Vancouver, Toronto, Winnipeg

See Rose & Charette 2014; Preston et al. 2012; Francis & Hiebert 2014; Sherrell 2010.
Longer-term outcomes: very positive, say longitudinal studies. And yet …

- LSIC (2000-01 cohort): After 3-4 years, all refugee streams are catching up with economic and family class immigrants in terms of housing outcomes, even including home-ownership rates.
- But since the GAR profile has greatly changed since 2002 – to what extent is the LSIC out-of-date?
- IRCC longitudinal data: GAR economic integration is slower, PSRs’ has improved.
- PSR housing outcomes???
  - only 1 recent study (Winnipeg): strongly positive, but points to sponsorship breakdown as risk factor for loss of housing.
  - Big expansion of PSR (Syrians) → key research need.
The #WelcomeSyrians operation: numbers, categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Arrivals</th>
<th>Government assisted refugees: 16 417, 53.2%</th>
<th>Privately-sponsored refugees: 11 360, 36.8%</th>
<th>Blended Visa-Office Referred: 3 085, 10%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>30 862</td>
<td>2015/11-2016/09</td>
<td>26 202 in first 4 months</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of whom</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>26 202 in</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>first 4 months</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
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Comparison of GAR and PSR streams (Preliminary IRCC data 2016/01)

GAR
- Large families migrating together
  - Majority have 5-8 people on application, often more
- No English or French
- Low literacy levels in Arabic
- Majority are rural people, with low education levels
- Some more educated, with more urban work experience (from Aleppo or Lebanon)

PSR
- Smaller families
- Solo migrants
- Majority know some English or French
- No less likely to have experienced trauma than GARs...
#Welcome Syrians: distribution of settlement destinations (as of 2016/09)

Source: calculated from online data, IRCC and MIDI
### Syrian refugees by category, selected CMAs (as of 2016/09)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>GAR</th>
<th>PSR</th>
<th>Blended</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>CANADA</strong></td>
<td>30 862</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toronto</td>
<td>5 601</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montréal</td>
<td>4 396</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>96%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vancouver</td>
<td>2 073</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ottawa</td>
<td>1 724</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calgary</td>
<td>1 590</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edmonton</td>
<td>1 593</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hamilton</td>
<td>1 162</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winnipeg</td>
<td>978</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Halifax</td>
<td>924</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fredericton</td>
<td>484</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: calculated from online data, IRCC and MIDI
Housing in year 1: tactics, challenges—preliminary overview

• Impacts of delays in finding “permanent” housing
  • Lost time for settling, finding work - 12 month clock ticking...
  • Short-term secondary migration to cheaper housing market – what happens to their settlement organization support?

• Affordability & suitability
  • GARs with large families + low incomes in tight markets – settlement organizations not fully forewarned
  → Settle in smaller cities or suburbs with cheaper housing
    • Access to specialized assistance (critical mass)?
    • Access to training, jobs (transportation)?
    • Opportunities for intercultural contacts?
Housing in year 1: tactics, challenges—preliminary overview (contd.)

• Affordability & suitability (contd)
  • Recourse to private sector largesse
    • Welcome Fund
    • Ad hoc local solutions (developers, landlords)

• Adequacy - physical condition
  • trade-offs for affordability
  • Use of short-life housing (slated for demolition) for refugees needing stability...

• Readiness of private sponsors
  • Knowledge of housing system/market?
  • Preparedness for full-year commitment?
Impacts of “month 13”???

- Does end of GAR support and PSR commitments mean end private-sector subsidies – by individual landlords? Via Welcome Fund?

- Disruptions due to involuntary moves/secondary migration?
- Trade-off between other essentials to pay rent?
- How many refugee families will be affected?
- Different provincial eligibility criteria/availability of social housing / government rent supplements?
Research in progress…

« Finding housing for the “Welcome Syrians” refugee newcomers: A cross-Canada analysis of initiatives, challenges and lessons learned - SSHRC-funded project, (890-2016-4027) - Damaris Rose (INRS) with collaborators Valerie Preston (York) & Kathy Sherrell (ISSBC)

• Main housing challenges and successful initiatives across Canada - commonalities and sources of variation from place to place?

Data sources:

• witness testimony to H of C, Senate committees, May-June 2016
• On-line media coverage from all cities welcoming ≥ 50 refugees
• Small number of key informant interviews
• Webinar discussions of findings with settlement organizations
• Time frame: short! (2016/09 – 2017/07)
Selected bibliography
(includes hyperlinks to grey literature)


Sherrill, Kathleen M. 2010. "Legal Status, Place, or Something Else? The Housing Experiences of Refugees in Winnipeg and Vancouver." Canadian Issues / Thèmes canadiens 2010 (Fall): 52-57.
