



# HOMELESSNESS PARTNERING STRATEGY

## Summary

### Exploring the Links Housing and Homelessness amongst Newcomers to Hamilton, Ontario

Newbold, B., Wayland, S., Wilton, R., Georgiades, K., Wahoush, O., & Wilson, K., McMaster University, 2011

This study examined the experiences of newcomers to Canada immediately after arrival in Hamilton, Ontario, in order to obtain a better understanding of housing and homelessness issues for newcomers in this region.

#### Key terms

**Newcomers/recent immigrants:** new Canadian citizens, immigrants, refugees, asylum seekers, temporary migrants and any other persons born abroad who came to Canada within the five years prior to the study for the purposes of living or working.

**Other immigrants:** long-term immigrants who have been living in Canada for more than five years.

**Non-immigrants:** Canadian-born citizens.

#### What are the issues?

- In the 2006 Census, 25% of Hamilton's population was described as "foreign-born." Hamilton attracts more than 3,000 newcomers per year, making it one of Canada's top five immigrant centres.
- Newcomers face unique challenges to securing housing, including: lack of credit; insufficient knowledge of the area; limited transportation options; and language barriers.
- Many newcomers to Canada live in crowded, unstable and substandard conditions.
- Immigrants settled in poor housing or marginalized areas tend to stay in those areas and become even more marginalized over time.

## What was done in this study?

- Interviews with 14 key informants (shelter providers, settlement agencies, property managers and community services and housing sponsors) to:
  - discuss newcomer housing and homelessness; and
  - review resettlement and housing policies directed toward newcomer housing.
- Interviews with 165 immigrant and non-immigrant students in grades 4 to 8 (including their primary caregivers) examined the direct effects of community and individual level influences on housing difficulties.
- Twelve interviews with recent immigrants and refugees explored the role of immigrant class and housing experiences.

## Results – Interviews

- Newcomers experience stress in many ways, including the burden of starting from scratch — finding appropriate housing and furnishings, adjusting to a new context and understanding how to navigate “the system.”
- There seemed to be little absolute homelessness among newcomers. They were often precariously housed in substandard housing or among the hidden homeless. They occasionally used shelters.
- Landlords often asked for references and credit checks that newcomers could not provide. Some newcomers felt that their interactions with landlords were intrusive and negative.
- Substandard housing led to concerns about bedbugs, cockroaches, lack of repairs and personal safety.
- Language was a barrier when newcomers were unable to explain what they needed or to understand housing expectations.
- Many newcomers had large families. Given the small units that were available, they had to separate. This created financial stress and removed supports that family members could provide to one another when living together.
- Despite funding constraints, shelter workers tried to build partnerships between agencies to better serve newcomers.

## Results – Survey

- Despite higher levels of parental education, first generation children (foreign-born) are more likely to live in rental dwellings and households.
- A larger proportion of recent immigrants (90.5%) and refugees (79.1%) reported living in rented housing, compared to other immigrants and non-immigrants.
- 47.1% of refugees lived in subsidized housing, compared to 21.7% of other immigrants and 28.1% of non-immigrant families.
- A larger portion of recent immigrants (44.2%) and refugees (37.25%) received social assistance.
- 14.3% of recent immigrants reported facing discrimination when getting housing, compared to 9.2% of other immigrants and 0% of non-immigrants.

Overall, the results from the survey reinforce perceptions that refugees and new immigrant arrivals are more likely to live in rented, subsidized housing and to receive social assistance.



## Recommendations

- Invest in new housing and repairs to current housing.
- Improve housing option information sources.
- Increase service provider collaboration to facilitate a greater sharing of resources.
- Increase the public's awareness, including landlords, around legal issues and the need for housing for this population.

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