



ginger group collaborative

Homelessness System Planning

Final Report

Sector Planning for Newcomers Experiencing or at Risk of Homelessness

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Community Capacity Building Team
and the City of Ottawa
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Table of Contents

1.0	Introduction	1
1.1	Antecedents	1
1.2	Information Gathering Approach	2
2.0	Environmental Scan	2
3.0	Housing issues of newcomers	5
3.1	Absolute and relative homelessness	5
3.2	Causes of homelessness among newcomers	5
3.3	Implications of homelessness among newcomers	9
4.0	Assets	9
4.1	Informal networks	9
4.2	Immigrant-serving Agencies	10
4.3	Mainstream local housing service agencies	11
4.4	System coordination	12
5.0	Needs and Gaps	12
6.0	Future Action	14
6.1	Research options	14
6.2	Options for action	15
	Annex A Research and Consultation Approach	16
	Annex B Key Informants	18
	Annex C Interview Guide	19
	Annex D References	21

1.0 Introduction

This report was commissioned by the City of Ottawa Housing Branch as one of several research, evaluation, and consultation activities leading towards the development of the Community Action Plan to End Homelessness. The rationale and terms of reference were developed by the Community Capacity Building Team (CCBT) in July 2005. The CCBT identified the Newcomer priority as a result of consultation with a number of key stakeholders and an ad hoc Roundtable meeting. The CCBT felt that newcomers at risk of homelessness face particular, at times unique, barriers and challenges that distinguish them from the rest of the population of Ottawa.

“While there are clearly homeless Newcomers, the extent and nature of the problem is not well known. A recent report on the utilization of shelters by Tim Aubry provides some statistics on those Newcomers who appear at the shelters, so it identifies only those who are already homeless.” (CCBT TORs, July 26, 2005)

In particular, the CCBT felt that attention should be placed on understanding the situation of those newcomers at risk of homelessness: “those who are “under-housed”, who cause themselves to be homeless (e.g. through eviction, etc), as well as those whose housing is affected by their place in the economy (e.g. low paying, insecure employment, etc)…”

This report sketches out a number of these themes through a literature and documents review, through interviews with a number of key informants in community agencies serving the newcomer population, and from interviews with recently arrived immigrants and refugees.

In Section 2, we present a brief environmental scan that serves to provide context to our study. Section 3 presents our findings regarding the main housing issues experienced by newcomers to Ottawa, and compares these findings with conclusions reached in the literature we have reviewed. Section 4 is an overview of services provided for newcomers in Ottawa and identifies both assets and gaps in this system. Section 5 presents a number of suggestions and options for future action, including research and advocacy.

1.1 Antecedents

In April 2002, the "Building the Ottawa Mosaic" conference on issues regarding ethno-cultural communities in Ottawa noted several barriers facing newcomers in Ottawa who were seeking access to housing. The conference participants recommended the development of a multi-year plan at the city level to deal with the housing issues of newcomers, one that included both short-term and long-term solutions. The same conference also called for greater participation by immigrant and ethno-cultural minority communities in Ottawa in the policy process [Local Agencies Serving Immigrants, 2002 #14: p. 21].

As a follow-up to this conference, The Ottawa Mosaic* conducted an exploratory study of the assets within immigrant and visible minority communities to address priority issues, including housing. In addition to identifying existing assets and initiatives in this sector, the study revealed the need for a new network to address the housing needs of newcomers, visible minorities, and other population groups marginalized from the current housing market. Such a network, the report argues, would allow for more effective participation in the community planning process, improve the sharing of information, and identify priorities for action, including research and advocacy (The Ottawa Mosaic 2004).

Our report should be seen in this context. Its aim is to identify the housing issues facing newcomers to Ottawa, to provide an overview of the services and other assets in the community for addressing these issues, to identify gaps and needs, and to suggest options for action by the City and the broader community, including newcomers themselves. Building the Ottawa mosaic is a challenge we all share.

1.2 Information Gathering Approach

Our report is based upon individual and group interviews with over 30 key informants from immigrant-serving agencies, housing support agencies, family shelters, community health and resource centers, private landlords and property managers, ethno-cultural and religious associations, and federal and local funders. With the support of OCISO, (Ottawa Community Immigrant Services Organization), we also conducted individual and group interviews with 15 newcomers about their housing experiences. We interviewed one researcher regarding a recent report on newcomers based on the Panel Study on Homelessness (Klodawsky et al. 2005). See Annex A, "Approach".

We have reviewed literature on housing and homelessness among newcomers in Canada. See Annex D.

2.0 Environmental Scan

Newspaper reports and a major policy speech by the Prime Minister in September, 2005, indicate that the federal government is preparing to announce a substantial expansion of immigration to Canada as well as a plan to develop new ways of working with local and provincial governments on the selection and settlement of immigrants and refugees (Clark 2005a; Clark 2005b; Martin 2005). Housing is an important aspect of this work, but it is part of a larger set of social and economic challenges that confront newcomers and the municipal and local non-governmental agencies that work with them.

Across Canada, these challenges are huge. Over the past 25 years, successive waves of newcomers to Canada have experienced increasing levels of difficulty finding suitable employment and achieving income levels above the poverty line. Picot (2004), drawing together data from several sources, has found that the proportion of recent arrivals (those who arrived in the previous five years) with household incomes below Statistics

* The Ottawa Mosaic is an initiative of Local Agencies Serving Immigrants (LASI) and the Social Planning Council of Ottawa.

Canada's low income cut-off (LICO) increased from 25% in 1980 to 31% in 1990 to 36% in 2000, while the rate among the Canadian-born population fell from 17% in 1980 to 14% in 2000. This trend occurred despite federal policy changes designed to give priority to applicants with skills needed in the Canadian economy, and despite newcomers' increased education levels. In 2001, 42% of recent arrivals had a university degree, compared to only 19% in 1981. In fact, the rate of increase in low-income rates was higher among the university-educated immigrants. Picot also found that the increasing rates of low income in the major cities (Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver) are heavily concentrated among newcomers. The overall poverty rates are increasing in those cities entirely due to increasing rates of low income among newcomers.

One of the main reasons for this increase in poverty rates among newcomers is the increasing difficulty they are having in the labour market. The unemployment rate among newcomers increased significantly during the 1981 to 2001 period (two census years that also happen to have been at comparable stages of the business cycle). For those who had been in Canada less than a year, the unemployment rate was 17% in 1981 and 30% in 2001; for those who had entered the country in the previous five years, the rates were 7% in 1981 and 13% in 2001 (Lochhead 2003).

There is also considerable evidence of underemployment among those who do have jobs. Statistics Canada (2003) has found that fully 60% of newcomers are working in fields other than those in which they had worked before coming to Canada. This is true both of university graduates and those with less education. One of the leading reasons for this is the difficulty newcomers encounter in gaining recognition for their professional and trade qualifications and experience. Over three-quarters of newcomers arrive in Canada with some form of qualification; for those in the economic class this will have served as an important factor in their acceptance to come to Canada. Yet, after six months, only 26% of those with qualifications have had them accepted by an employer, educational institution, or professional body. This problem is widely known. On a national scale, it represents an enormous underutilization of skill and lost productivity.

Picot surveys the range of explanations put forward for this deterioration in the economic and labour market conditions of newcomers, but reaches no firm conclusions. Some accounts stress the changing characteristics of the newcomers while others point to the social, economic, and policy environment they encounter in Canada. Both sides of the picture may be relevant. On the one hand, the proportion of newcomers arriving from the USA, Northern Europe, Southern Europe, the Caribbean, South and Central America, and Southeast Asia declined from 65% in 1981 to 28% in 2001. In the same period, the proportion of newcomers arriving from Eastern Europe, South Asia, East Asia, Western Asia, and Africa increased from 35% to 72%. Thus, some would claim that deteriorating outcomes may be due in part to differences in countries of origin, particularly language barriers and the quality of education systems. Picot notes that there have been declining returns to foreign work experience, especially experience in the newer countries of origin. However, this is, at best, only one side of the picture. On the other side, we must note major changes in the structure of the Canadian economy over this period, and in the characteristics of the labour force as a whole. There has been a significant increase in the proportion of Canadian-born graduates of universities and colleges over the past 20 years, and most new entrants to the labour market now have greater difficulty finding employment in their field than earlier cohorts. Moreover, labour market conditions can change rapidly, and occupations that offer good job prospects can quickly become unavailable to new entrants; this happened in the case of Ottawa's "tech crash" after the

year 2000. Newcomers thus enter a more competitive and volatile labour market than in the past.

The incidence and the depth of poverty among newcomers is also affected by cutbacks in the level and availability of social assistance, particularly here in Ontario, where the province cut benefits by over 21% ten years ago and has allowed even this level to decline with inflation since that time. Newcomers who are unable to find employment and whose personal savings run out in the months after their arrival must turn to social assistance for support. Income support to government-sponsored refugees through the Refugee Assistance Program is even less than social assistance levels and expires after 12 months.

Since 1991, the federal government has negotiated agreements with most provinces and territories regarding the settlement and integration of newcomers, but to date has not reached an agreement with Ontario, by far the largest recipient of newcomers. This "governance limbo" has been identified as a major barrier to the development of an effective response to the issues facing newcomers in Ontario [Mwarigha M.S., 2002 #67]. In 2004, however, formal negotiations began and are expected to result in a Canada-Ontario Immigration Agreement in 2005. It is expected that the agreement will provide a role for municipalities in policy and program planning, and that federal funding for the settlement and integration of newcomers, channelled through the province, will be increased substantially. According to one source, federal funding to Ontario should increase from its current level of around \$800 to about \$3000 per newcomer, thus expanding considerably the services for newcomers.

Here in Ottawa, about 8,000 newcomers arrive each year. By 2001, 21.8% of the population was foreign-born.* This has made Ottawa a much more culturally diverse community than in the past. Visible minorities made up about 15% of the population in 2001, and this percentage is expected to double by 2020 (United Way/Centraide Ottawa 2004: 12). In 2001, 55% of newcomers to Ottawa were in the economic class of immigrants, that is, skilled workers, entrepreneurs, and their dependents; 24% came to Ottawa in the family class, to join family members already here. Refugees made up about 21% of the total, a rate considerably higher than the national average of 14% (Canadian Labour and Business Centre n.d.: 5). Of the new arrivals in 2001, 51% held a university degree and a further 15% held some other form of post-secondary diploma or trade certificate (Ibid.: 6).

Newcomers who have arrived in Ottawa during the past ten years are twice as likely to be living in poverty as the general population. In 2000, a study by the Canadian Council on Social Development found that 64% of recent immigrants in the (old) city of Ottawa had incomes below Statistics Canada's low-income cutoff (LICO), compared to a rate of 28% for the total population; rates for the broader Census Metropolitan Area of Ottawa-Hull were comparable (Lee 2000). A more recent analysis by the Social Planning Council found that 49% of unattached recent immigrants in Ottawa had incomes below the LICO, compared to 30% of non-immigrant individuals; 19% of economic families* of

* Statistics Canada's community profile for Ottawa, based on the 2001 census. See www.statcan.ca.

* An economic family is defined as two or more individuals who are related to each other by blood, marriage, common-law, or adoption (Social Planning Council of Ottawa 2003: 45).

recent immigrants had incomes below the LICO, compared to 9% of non-immigrant economic families (Social Planning Council of Ottawa 2003: 42).

There is strong evidence that this incidence of low income among newcomers is related to unemployment and underemployment in Ottawa's labour market. (Canadian Labour and Business Centre n.d: 10).

Refugees are less likely to have skills in high demand in the Ottawa labour market and are therefore more likely to be unemployed or working in low wage jobs.

These experiences of labour market difficulty and low income are directly related to the issue of homelessness among newcomers. We now turn to that discussion.

3.0 Housing issues of newcomers

3.1 Absolute and relative homelessness

In our study, we have examined the issues faced by newcomers in relation to all forms of homelessness, from absolute to relative or "hidden" homelessness. By absolute homelessness, we mean a complete lack of shelter that makes it necessary to seek refuge in a temporary shelter or in a church or mosque, or to sleep in a vehicle, on the street, on a park bench, or in an abandoned building. By relative or hidden homelessness, we mean living in overcrowded or substandard conditions, being at risk of eviction, paying more than 50% of income on rent, living in abusive domestic situations, being forced to resort to "couch-surfing", or for any other reason being at risk of absolute homelessness (United Nations Centre for Human Settlement (Habitat) 1987).

The incidence of absolute homelessness among newcomers in Ottawa is a small fraction of the general problem. Data from the Homeless Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS) indicate that less than 9% of singles relying on shelters since the beginning of 2004 were immigrants or refugees. In the same period immigrants and refugees made up about 25% of families in the family shelters.*

There is not much data on relative or hidden homelessness in Ottawa. The United Way estimates that 26% of immigrants live in crowded conditions, compared to 3% of Canadian-born residents, and that 41% of immigrants spend more than 30% of their gross income on shelter, compared to 24% of Canadian-born residents (United Way/Centraide Ottawa 2004: 14).

3.2 Causes of homelessness among newcomers

The leading cause of both absolute and hidden homelessness among newcomers to Ottawa is inadequate income due to difficulty finding employment, and low wages, in combination with a shortage of affordable housing. Newcomers living in shelters in Ottawa are much more likely to report such economic reasons for their homelessness than Canadian-born shelter residents, and much less likely to attribute it to mental health issues or addictions (Klodawsky et al. 2005). However, there is a significant part of the

* HIFIS, City of Ottawa Aggregate Database, Report dated August 31, 2005.

homeless newcomer population who attribute the cause of their situation to domestic abuse. Sponsorship breakdown can also place dependent newcomers at risk of homelessness. Discriminatory practices by landlords can make it difficult for newcomers to secure adequate housing. We will discuss each of these causes in turn.

Many of our informants told us that they consider employment to be the priority issue for newcomers to Ottawa. We heard repeatedly about a common pattern of experience: newcomers, individuals or families, arrive in Ottawa with high expectations and sufficient savings to get through a transition period of several months. However, they soon run into barriers to labour market entry. Their qualifications and experience are not recognized, they send out applications and receive no replies, they have few contacts and lack the kind of information that might help them find employment in their field. Language skills are often an issue; if they are less than fluent in English, a large part of the labour market is closed to them. Most newcomers are not fluently bilingual in both English and French, and this also limits their opportunities in Ottawa. Newcomers told us that, with no job and no credit rating, they find it difficult to obtain rental accommodation, and may quickly deplete their savings on hotel expenses. This comes as a shock to many newcomers, especially those accepted in the economic class of immigrants, for they were led to believe by Canadian immigration officers overseas that their skills were in demand in the Canadian labour market. Many then accept any job they can find in the secondary labour market, where wage levels and available hours of work are frequently insufficient to keep even an individual above the poverty line, and are completely inadequate for supporting a family. Many in this situation must pay more than 50% of their income for their housing; rent can sometimes take as much as 85% of income, according to one property manager with many newcomers among his tenants.

The situation is even more difficult for many refugees. Sponsored refugees have access to Reception House on arrival, and receive a living allowance for the first 12 months under the federal Refugee Assistance Program. According to our informants, this allowance is inadequate to cover basic expenses at current price levels, and sponsored refugees who are unable to find work must spend more than 50% of their allowance on rent when they move out of Reception House. If they have not found work after 12 months, they must apply to Ontario Works for social assistance. Refugee claimants are in even worse straits, particularly those who arrive with few resources of their own. Finding a source of income of any kind is out of the question in the short term and, for many, the only option is to go to a shelter. Until recently, refugee claimants have made up a disproportionate share of newcomers in shelters. Klodawsky et al. (2005) found that 10% of newcomers in shelters attributed their homelessness directly to their refugee status; 40% of the refugees in their sample were still in the status of refugee claimant. Refugee claimants can apply for a work permit, but according to our informants they face even greater barriers to labour-market entry than other newcomers because employers are reluctant to hire them. Many also lack connections with informal networks that might serve as sources of access to employment and housing. Literature on the housing issues faced by refugees in other Canadian communities tends to confirm this picture (Miraftab 2000; Murdie 2001; Zine 2002; Murdie 2003; Ballay and Bulthuis 2004). Recently, shelter workers have noticed a decline in the number of refugee claimants in the shelters due to the inception of the Safe Third Country Agreement with the United States in December 2004. This and other security-oriented practices of the Canadian government have made it much more difficult for refugees to reach Canada. This is a different issue, but one of its implications is a decline in shelter use by refugee claimants in Ottawa.

Privately sponsored immigrants and refugees are also at risk of homelessness if their sponsorship breaks down. According to several of our informants, this happens frequently. Sponsored newcomers are less likely to have skills relevant to the labour market, and may be socially isolated. This is especially true in the case of seniors whose sponsorship breaks down. They may lack fluency in either English or French, have little or no chance of finding employment, and no savings or other assets of their own.

Employment and related income issues of newcomers, and the efforts to address them in Ottawa, are well documented elsewhere.* They are exacerbated by the shortage of affordable housing for people in Ottawa on low incomes. Some of our informants told us that the vacancy rate for rental accommodation has increased in recent years, but that this has affected primarily up-market units and has not improved the availability of affordable accommodation.

The shortage of social housing is a chronic problem. The waiting list for ordinary newcomer families is five to seven years, and for seniors about one to two years. One's status as a newcomer is, in itself, not a basis for receiving priority ranking on the social housing waiting list. However, absolute homelessness is one of the three grounds for receiving priority access, and newcomers may be more likely to be in this situation than non-newcomers. It appears to be well understood within newcomer communities that homelessness, flight from domestic abuse, and safety are the three grounds for priority on the social housing waiting list. Klodawsky et al. (2005) report that foreign-born residents of shelters were well informed about social housing; some 80% were on the waiting list, and 33% were on the priority list. We heard complaints from newcomers about other newcomers jumping the queue by taking their family to a shelter, or by falsely claiming domestic abuse. Apart from their testimony, there was no other evidence for this that we could find, but the perception itself can be harmful, as it tends to undermine the legitimacy of the system.

Most of the problems with social housing are not specific to newcomers and thus do not require extensive discussion here. Nevertheless, the conditions particular to newcomers can exacerbate the problems with the social housing system. The rules at the City's family shelters require that residents accept the first unit assigned by the Housing Registry. This can make life difficult for newcomers whose social support networks are spatially concentrated in particular parts of the city. The Social Housing Reform Act of 2003 has increased substantially the amount of required reporting concerning changes in status in employment, income, and household membership. Front-line housing and settlement workers told us that the Act has increased the burden of paperwork enormously. Newcomers whose command of English or French is poor, or whose literacy skills are weak, are at risk of eviction if they fail to make timely reports according to the guidelines.

Klodawsky et al. (2005) have noted that "a large number of foreign-born homeless individuals in Ottawa are women and especially women refugees with children" (p. 40).

* See, for example, reports on the work of the Internationally Trained Workers Project (Canadian Labour and Business Centre 2003; Internationally Trained Workers Project 2004; Canadian Labour and Business Centre n.d; Canadian Labour and Business Centre n.d.)

Clearly, in Ottawa there is a cluster of homeless refugee women with children who confront a complex set of challenges, having to do with the speed at which they are able to settle their refugee claims, their disadvantaged education and language profiles, and their responsibilities for large numbers of children. An urgent need exists to address their specific settlement issues in a holistic and comprehensive manner (p. 41).

Citing a study of Somali refugee women in Toronto (Israelite et al. 1999), Klodawsky et al. suggest that this group is likely to have difficulties with English, limited education, and problems with intercultural communication, unemployment, single parenthood, social isolation, and feelings of worthlessness. This view was confirmed by several of our informants with respect to Ottawa. Many of the newcomers in the family shelters are African female heads of families who came to Canada as refugees. Some came as single parents; in other cases, something happened after their arrival to send them to the family shelter. It appears that many need specialized services, including income support, housing, literacy and language training, and help with the needs of the children and youth in their families. However, to our knowledge there has not yet been any research into the needs of this particular group of newcomers in Ottawa.

In addition to the problems already noted, many newcomers face systemic barriers in access to housing. Typically, landlords demand a letter of reference and some indication of a person's capacity to pay the rent, such as a payslip from an employer, a bank statement, a credit check, and/or a co-signer of the lease. Many newcomers are unable to meet these requirements. Newcomer women tend to be especially disadvantaged, since they are less likely to have access to a co-signer, or any credit history. Newcomers with large families face particular problems, because there are very few large units (four or five bedrooms) available in the city, and landlords often refuse newcomers on the basis of their family size. In some cases, newcomers' family size is large because of different cultural practices, such as multi-generational households and inclusion of extended family members.

Several informants told us that there is also discrimination by landlords on the basis of skin colour, religion, accent, and cultural background, in violation of newcomers' civil rights. This is rarely blatant, however. For example, newcomers will be told by a landlord that a unit "has been taken" when they arrive in person to see it. However, if a front-line housing worker checks with the landlord later, they will find that it is still available. According to several informants, blacks, especially francophone blacks, are much more likely to be the object of this kind of discrimination than other visible minorities. However, newcomers are usually reluctant to make an issue of this kind of discrimination, partly because they are preoccupied with solving their immediate settlement problems, and partly because they lack basic information on their rights.

Our small sample of landlords told us that, in their experience, most immigrants are preferable as tenants, since they are hard working, pay their rent on time, and receive support from settlement agencies. There may be a certain amount of positive discrimination from "newcomer-friendly" landlords. However, we have not found any research that has been done on the question of discrimination in housing, positive or negative, with respect to newcomers in Ottawa.

3.3 Implications of homelessness among newcomers

Most newcomers arrive in Canada with high expectations. When they encounter the difficulties we have described above, their responses vary. Some are simply more resilient than others. Nevertheless, the experience of culture shock, separation from loved ones, social isolation, difficulties finding employment and income, and the risk or actuality of homelessness, in combination, can generate mental illness when they persist over time. Refugees suffering post-traumatic stress disorder may be especially vulnerable.

Klodawsky et al. (2005) found that the mental and physical health status of foreign-born shelter residents was higher than that of Canadian-born shelter residents, suggesting that mental health issues are not a significant cause of homelessness among newcomers. Several of our informants, however, have observed stress, anger, and depression among newcomers due to this combination of factors, and believe that it is a serious concern. Others have noted feelings of shame on the part of youth whose families live in shelters. Some speculate that these stresses can be a cause of domestic violence.

We have noted the existence of some research on this topic in Toronto (Elmi 1999; Zine 2002; Access Alliance Multicultural Community Health Centre 2003), but we have not identified any that has been done in Ottawa beyond the findings of the first wave of the Panel Study on Homelessness (Klodawsky et al. 2005).

The issue of hidden homelessness is also under-researched. Front-line housing and settlement staff have told us that overcrowding is common, and that much of the rental accommodation available to people on low income does not meet basic standards. "Hidden homelessness is huge," one informant told us, and several others confirmed this. Once again, however, we found no research on the particular experience of hidden homelessness among newcomers in Ottawa.

4.0 Assets

In the spirit of the asset-based approach used by The Ottawa Mosaic in its recent study (2004), let us now survey the assets in the community to address the housing issues of newcomers.

4.1 Informal networks

Research in other cities suggests that most newcomers acquire and maintain their housing with the support of informal networks of family, friends, and cultural or faith communities. Among the services provided in this way are short-term housing on arrival, housing search, translation and cultural interpretation services in dealing with landlords, co-signing of leases, and financial assistance. Frequently faith communities centered around mosques, temples, synagogues, or churches are at the core of these networks. These are critically important services; in their absence NGOs and municipally-based agencies would face much higher demand for support (Miraftab 2000; Zine 2002; Murdie 2003; Ballay and Bulhuis 2004).

The same literature also identifies significant limitations on the capacity of informal networks. Informal accommodation for newcomers can only be short-term, since it

places a heavy demand on its hosts, whether they are family, friends, or a religious or cultural centre. Information on housing issues, especially tenants' rights, is often lacking. Moreover, informal networks are weak or lacking for some communities, especially for newcomers from more recent countries of origin. There is, therefore, a strong case for researching the state of the informal networks in any community and developing innovative methods of strengthening them.

Informal networks are clearly an important asset in addressing the housing needs of newcomers in Ottawa. According to our informants, social and family contacts assist with finding housing, much of which never comes onto the market. They provide “transitional” housing, (i.e. temporary shelter prior to finding a place of one’s own), in some cases allowing newcomers in a state of absolute homelessness to avoid the use of shelters. They provide material support, including translation, co-signing leases, and loans to cover rent payments. In Ottawa, we heard, some communities have strong networks, such as the Chinese, Vietnamese, and Somali communities, while others do not.

In the Muslim community, the Zakat Committee at the Ottawa mosque provides informal assistance, including financial assistance for rent payments, co-signing leases, references for landlords, translation, and assistance to refugees. The mosque intervened when there were communication problems between the Muslim population and the landlord in the large Bayshore apartment complex owned by Minto. It has recently purchased a four-unit building to provide transitional housing to women and children during family break-ups.

Sometimes informal networks coalesce into more organized initiatives, such as the Multifaith Housing Initiative (MHI), which encourages faith communities to take action on affordable housing. MHI owns five apartments and is planning ten more. There is no specific allocation for newcomers, but some members have a tradition of support for refugees and can be expected to continue this work.

4.2 Immigrant-serving Agencies

The six immigrant-serving agencies that make up the LASI (Local Agencies Serving Immigrants) network provide a wide range of settlement services to newcomers, including assistance with housing issues. LASI has chosen to focus its efforts as a network on employment issues, on the premise that this is the most critical issue facing newcomers. However, LASI members all recognize that housing is also a critical issue, and all of them provide services in this area.

The Catholic Immigration Centre (CIC) operates Reception House. This facility serves a dual purpose. It is primarily a transitional shelter serving government-sponsored refugees and various other refugee claimants and immigrants who have been referred to it by Ontario Works; it also serves as a regular emergency shelter for homeless newcomers. The City of Ottawa’s Housing Branch funds up to 25 beds with an emergency shelter per diem. Reception House has 24 rooms that can accommodate up to 96 people. CIC also provides housing search support, mediation with landlords, orientation on current landlord-tenant law, assistance with settling into a new home, and information on other housing-related services in the community. CIC works with 5,500 immigrants and refugees a year, of whom about 1,500 are newly arrived. CIC has also developed innovative volunteer programs. Its Host Program matches newcomers with compatible Canadians to assist them with the settlement process. CIC is also developing

a program to train airport volunteers to improve their capacity to assist newcomers arriving in Ottawa for the first time.

The Ottawa Community Immigrant Services Organization (OCISO) serves 16,000 people annually. Most of its housing-related services are provided by referrals to Housing Help, which has located a staff person at OCISO to provide a more responsive service to newcomers. (Housing Help is described in more detail below.) OCISO gives support on housing issues that arise for newcomer women who are fleeing abusive situations, and for youth assisted by their 21 Multicultural Liaison Officers located at Ottawa schools.

The other members of LASI are smaller. In general, they provide individual, client-centered assistance to their clients in a holistic manner. Support regarding housing issues frequently arises in the context of other issues that newcomers raise. The Jewish Family Services (JFS) provides assistance to both Jewish and non-Jewish clients; it currently has about 400 active cases (not all of whom are newcomers). The JFS has also provided support to Somali Family Services in its early stages; the Somali Family Services currently has about 800 active cases. The JFS works with faith-based communities centered on synagogues, which can assist clients in various ways to find and keep their housing. The Lebanese and Arab Social Services Agency of Ottawa Carleton (LASSA) assists newcomers with House searches, co-signing leases, interpreting legal issues, and assisting with dispute resolution with landlords. The Ottawa Chinese Community Social Services provides social services to low-income members of the Chinese community, many of whom need housing. They generally work through informal networks in the Chinese community to find short and long-term housing solutions, mediate with landlords when necessary, and provide information through the Chinese press on housing options. Immigrant Women's Services has, among its other services, a transitional and housing support programs for abused women. It assists women who need to make their claim to obtain shelter.

4.3 Mainstream local housing service agencies

A range of local agencies that serve the general public also serves newcomers. Housing Help assists people searching for housing or in danger of losing it. It provides help with finding housing, information on tenants' rights, and mediation with landlords. As mentioned above, it has placed a staff person at OCISO to serve the particular needs of newcomers. In addition to those served at OCISO, Housing Help estimates that 10% to 15% of its clientele of 1000 annually is made up of newcomers. Action Logement, which provides the francophone community with similar services, had 2,255 new cases in 2004, representing 6,461 persons. Approximately 50% were newcomers, and 51% had a mother tongue other than English or French.

Housing Help and Action Logement are two of the six members of Ottawa's Housing Loss Prevention Network (HLPN). They work with housing loss prevention workers at four of Ottawa's community health and resource centres: Pinecrest-Queensway, Carlington, South-East Ottawa, and Nepean. The HLPN has recently been evaluated; the evaluation report should provide rich detail on its performance, including its services to newcomers. Other community health and resource centres in the city also provide housing-related support to their clients, and several are located in parts of the city with large concentrations of newcomers.

4.4 System coordination

Coordination among the various agencies providing housing-related services to newcomers lacks any formal structure apart from the Housing Loss Prevention Network, which links front-line workers, and an informal network of Spanish-speaking front-line workers. Even with the HLPN, several of our front-line informants felt that there is now less contact among front-line workers than there was a few years ago when the data-gathering system was being set up and housing support workers met monthly or quarterly to share information and solve problems. On the whole, however, we heard that people are trying very hard to work together, recognizing that coordination is time-consuming and expensive.

The executive directors of the agencies in the LASI network coordinate their involvement in different sectors of the community: OCISO in education, CIC in police services, the IWS in child protection, the JFS in support of the Somali community. LASI members are members of Ottawa's Alliance to End Homelessness. However, none of the executive directors has chosen to concentrate on housing and homelessness as such.

A roundtable of people concerned with the housing issues of newcomers was intended for the present study, but could not be arranged because of scheduling difficulties.

5.0 Needs and Gaps

One general, underlying problem related by several of our informants is that no one level of government in Canada owns the responsibility for responding to the housing needs of newcomers.

Outside Quebec, the federal government is the sole gatekeeper for immigration, determining the volume and, in general, the skills, qualities, and characteristics of immigrants to Canada. The federal government downloaded responsibility for social housing to the provinces in the 1980s, and Ontario downloaded it to the municipalities in the 1990s, but without transferring the fiscal capacity to do the job adequately. Municipal governments and local NGOs have the task of responding to the settlement needs of newcomers on the ground, supported by budgets assembled from various federal and provincial departments, municipal taxes, and charitable sources.

There is a clear need for a framework agreement that spells out the roles and responsibilities of the federal, provincial, and municipal levels of government with regard to the housing needs of newcomers, perhaps as part of a broader framework agreement on immigration, housing, or both. Such an agreement also needs to recognize the critical role and the requirements of community-based organizations providing services at the local level.

This may be an auspicious moment to advocate such a framework agreement. The federal government has taken an interest in the concept of "place-based public policy" that envisages a more co-operative set of relationships among the three orders of government* on a range of public issues. Recent statements by the Minister of

* For background on the concept of "place-based public policy" see Bradford (2005).

Citizenship and Immigration suggest that the federal government will encourage local involvement in immigration policy (Clark 2005b). At the same time, the federal government's recent announcement of its intention to increase immigration substantially over the next five years has evoked much public criticism of its track record in supporting the settlement of immigrants to date.[†]

A second gap frequently mentioned is the need for good information, provided in the right time and place. Several of the newcomers we interviewed felt they had been misinformed, or not informed at all, by Canadian immigration officers at embassies overseas about the real conditions existing in Canada. Many expected to find that their skills were in high demand and that they would be employed immediately. They told us that Canadian embassies abroad should provide prospective immigrants with accurate information about the labour market, problems with the recognition of credentials and experience, and the cost and availability of housing in their destination cities. On arrival, newcomers need information about the services available to them locally. This should be available at the airport. Many landed immigrants and refugee claimants receive no information at all about local services, and hence do not know where to turn for advice about reasonable rent levels, their rights as tenants, or which neighbourhoods are suited to their needs. People in shelters and sponsored refugees receive this kind of information, but many others do not. It would be very helpful, we were told, if informal networks could receive information on services available, to pass to newcomers on arrival. This requires getting out into the communities where newcomers are being received, with information in accessible forms.

Third, some of the front-line workers in agencies and shelters serving the general public expressed a need for more intensive cross-cultural communication and sensitivity training.

Fourth, some newcomers have a high level of need for personal support, and need to be accompanied to visit landlords, learn the public transportation system, attend health appointments, and so on. Many of the front-line settlement agencies do some of this work, but cannot work with everyone. Several felt that it would be useful to develop a core of volunteers with a range of language skills, perhaps through working with existing informal networks. Access to childcare is a particular need of women in shelters who need to search for housing, employment, and so on. For example, the Forward Shelter offers only 10 hours of respite childcare per week.

Fifth, newcomer seniors need places to connect, where they can communicate in their own language, learn about their rights, and overcome their social isolation. This could be another way of supporting informal networks.

Sixth, some of our informants recommended “transitional” or temporary housing for newcomers, furnished accommodation where they could stay for the first few weeks or months while they become oriented and acquire the information they need to make good housing decisions. Such accommodation could be modeled on Reception House but made more widely available and paid for by the newcomers themselves. Toronto's Romero House has also been suggested as a model.

[†] See, for example, the Globe and Mail editorial of September 27 (2005).

A further need, this one specific to sponsored refugees, is a more adequate level of income support under the Refugee Assistance Program. The federal government takes responsibility for sponsored refugees during their first 12 months in Canada, but provides an allowance that is less than the benefits under Ontario Works, which is itself inadequate to cover basic living expenses.

Other needs and gaps mentioned were not specific to newcomers. Of course, we heard frequently of the need for an adequate supply of safe, affordable, permanent housing. To this we would add that the city needs more housing designed to meet the needs of larger families and multi-generational households.

6.0 Future Action

Our first, and central, recommendation is that the City convene a roundtable of leaders in Ottawa's newcomer community to address the complex set of issues facing new immigrants and refugees. Such a grouping could identify priorities for research and action on the housing issues identified here, but could also address a broader agenda, including advocacy initiatives in relation to other orders of government.

The agenda of such a grouping could include prioritizing the options that follow.

6.1 Research options

In earlier sections we have identified a number of potential research projects that would be useful. Research within newcomer communities needs to be conscious of the needs, sensitivities, and cultural assumptions of those communities. In many cases, a community-based reference group or steering committee would be advisable, and participatory methods might be the most effective way to achieve the desired results. The work of Toronto's Access Alliance Multicultural Community Health Centre (2003) could serve as an example of this approach.

Among the possible research options, we have identified the following:

- Investigate informal networks that provide assistance to newcomers in Ottawa: their strengths, limitations, and ways they could be strengthened.
- Investigate the nature and extent of hidden homelessness among newcomers in Ottawa, its causes, and ways it could be addressed.
- Assess the extent to which family conflict caused by a mismatch between living arrangements and house design leads to homelessness on the part of newcomer households. (Suggested by Klodawsky et al. (2005)).
- Assess the needs of single parents among newcomers in family shelters and social housing.
- Investigate the nature and extent of discrimination affecting newcomers' access to housing in Ottawa.
- Assess the impact of absolute and hidden homelessness on the mental health of newcomers.

6.2 Options for action

- Work with municipal leaders to advocate a framework agreement that sets out the roles and responsibilities of the three orders of government regarding the settlement of newcomers in Canada, one that recognizes the critical role and the requirements of community-based organizations providing services at the local level.
- Advocate increased federal funding for newcomers' accommodation, given federal responsibility for immigration policy.
- Advocate higher levels of income support for sponsored refugees under the federal government's Refugee Assistance Program.
- Advocate more stable funding arrangements for voluntary organizations serving immigrants.
- Provide information on local services available to newcomers in more accessible ways to new landed immigrants and refugee claimants. Methods could include improved information services at the airport, a 24-hour telephone service, and outreach to informal networks.
- Provide intensive cross-cultural communication and training, as well as training on serving women who have been victims of abuse, to front-line workers in agencies and shelters serving the general public.
- Expand volunteer programs by working with informal networks to develop a core of volunteers with a range of language skills to assist newcomers with a high level of need for support.
- Strengthen informal networks by providing them with information resources and assisting in the development of facilities for seniors in their communities.
- Develop temporary accommodation for recently arrived immigrants to be made available at cost for short-term stays on arrival in Ottawa.
- Develop follow-up action plans on the basis of the research options chosen, for example, taking action on systemic discrimination, substandard accommodation, or more effective forms of support for single parents.

Annex A Research and Consultation Approach

The planning study drew its information from a review of recent, relevant literature on immigration and housing in Canada, as well as from key informants who are working on housing with newcomer populations, and newcomers themselves. The TORs for the planning project were the following:

- consult with all significant stakeholders (including primary and collateral service providers, clients, funders) to determine current service levels and gaps and to identify emerging issues
- conduct research around unique needs of newcomers in finding and retaining housing and best practices for services provided to meet those needs
- prepare a report that reflects the research and consultations in a description of options to improve the services to effect better housing results for this population.

Identifying Key Informants

- * Key informants in community agencies were identified through the LASI members (Local Agencies Serving Immigrants) and through contacts at the Community Health Centres.
- * Several names of local landlords were provided by one of the LASI members, the Landlords Association of Eastern Ontario, and personal contacts.
- * Recent immigrants and refugees were all located with the assistance of OCISO (Ottawa Community Immigrant Services Organization). A flyer was prepared by the researchers and circulated to settlement workers to give to their clients several days before an open meeting at OCISO. The researchers stressed that the invitation was voluntary and open to anyone who was interested in telling about their experience with finding housing in Ottawa. They were assured that their contributions would be anonymous in any report. In addition, one of the OCISO counselors organized a private interview with three female clients who had experienced particularly difficult housing crises.

A Roundtable on Newcomers and Housing

The idea of a Newcomer Roundtable on Housing was agreed to by the CCBT as part of this research and consultation project. [CCBT, Terms of Reference for Sector Paper on Newcomers Experiencing or at Risk of Homelessness, July 26]. The Roundtable was envisioned as a place to shape options for this sector, based on the research and stakeholder consultations. It was not possible to convene the Roundtable in time to shape the options and recommendations for this Report. The researchers are recommending, however, that such a Roundtable be convened as early as possible, in order to further shape the community action planning for this sector, and to define priorities for further research.

Annex B Key Informants

The following is a list of organizations that the researchers contacted for interviews. Agency informants were promised that their names would not appear in the body of the Report. Newcomer informants were promised total anonymity.

We spoke with front-line workers: housing eviction prevention workers, multi-cultural and settlement workers in community agencies as well as with Executive Directors of several organizations. In some of these organizations we spoke with several people at a time or separately. Two of the funding bodies were interviewed (municipal and federal); we did not contact provincial or non-government funders such as the United Way. Through OCISO we were able to gather the experiences of 15 recent immigrants and refugees to Canada, now living in Ottawa.

A total of 56 key informants were interviewed in single and group interviews.

Community Health and Resource Centres	
Pinecrest-Queensway Health & Community Services	Suzi Gruda, Settlement – HLPN Kathy McCurdie, settlement worker at Carling Shelter
Centretown Community Health Centre	Elizabeth Chin, Multicultural Community Developer
Southeast Ottawa Health and Community Services	Hinda Hassan, Housing support worker Mohamoud Hagi-Aden, Community connections coordinator
Forward Family Shelter	Francine Vachon, supervisor
Reception House (Catholic Immigration Centre)	Heng Chao, Housing Worker
Agencies and Associations	
Catholic Immigration Centre	Carl Nicholson, Executive Director Pauline Anderson, Settlement Worker Carla Cardell, Settlement Worker Dekha David, Settlement Worker
Ottawa Community Immigrant Services Organization (OCISO)	Nancy Worsfold, Executive Director Velinka Nevrencan, Mgr Settlement Services Anna Ticas, Outreach with Housing Help
OCISO LINC (Lang training)	8 participants in a LINC class
OCISO	7 clients of OCISO
Jewish Family Services	Adriana Jary, Executive Assistant Mara Muzinkansky, Settlement Services
Ottawa Chinese Community Social Services	Rupert Yeung, Director of Counselling and Mental Health programming
Lebanese and Arab Social Services	Fred Awada, Executive Director
Immigrant Women Services	Vanadana Mirawadi, Case worker
Somali Centre for Family Services	Mohamoud Hagi-Aden, Consultant/Advisor
Housing Help	Trudi Sutton, Executive Director
Action-Logement	Rosine Kaley, Director 8 housing support workers
Arladun Somali-Canadian Society	Mr. F. Hassan
Ottawa Mosque – Zakat Committee	Gus Akrouche
Ottawa Muslim Association	Bader Siddiqi, President Dr. Malik, Past President
Ottawa Muslim Women's Association	Shano Bejkosalag, Vice President
Multifaith Housing	Gay Richardson, Secretary

Funders	
City of Ottawa Housing Branch,	Jason Abbott, HIFIS database manager
HRSDC, National Homelessness Initiative	Louise Atkins
Landlords	
a property manager for a large corporate landlord	
landlord – rooming houses for singles	
landlord and property manager for multiple units in downtown core	
Other	
Researcher, Carleton University	Fran Klodowsky, Professor

Annex C Interview Guide

Generic Interview Schedule (September 9/05)

We used this generic interview schedule to plan our individual, open-ended interviews. We adapted it and added more specific questions as appropriate to the particular interviewee(s).

Introductions: We are working with a number of other researchers and with the Community Capacity Building Team to prepare a Community Action Plan on Homelessness. Part of the plan will consider the particular housing issues faced by newcomers to Ottawa.

1. Background conditions affecting the housing outcomes of newcomers

What recent trends or changes -- positive or negative -- have you seen in the background conditions that affect the housing outcomes of newcomers?

e.g. employment conditions for newcomers

changes in rules or practices governing refugees

overall number of newcomers arriving in Ottawa

2. Housing Issues for newcomers:

How would you describe the housing issues faced by immigrants and refugees in Ottawa now?

- * Nature and scope of the problem of absolute homelessness? Extent to which newcomers rely on shelters or transitional housing.
- * Nature and scope of relative or hidden homelessness: "surfing," overcrowding, sub-standard accommodation, etc.
- * Do particular groups of newcomers have greater difficulty than others?
 - refugees vs. immigrants
 - refugee claimants vs. sponsored refugees
 - youth
 - elderly persons
 - women
 - particular ethnic / language groups
- * To what extent do newcomers report discrimination from landlords or other gatekeepers to housing? Probe for type of discrimination, based on
 - skin colour

- income level
 - income source (e.g. welfare)
 - religion
 - ethnicity/language/accent/national origin
 - family size
 - gender
 - other
- * Is there any significant number of people without legal status as immigrants or refugees, in Ottawa? If so, what specific problems do they face?
 - * How important are informal social networks -- family, friends, church groups, mosques, etc. -- in helping newcomers to find housing?
 - * Do any of the following play a significant role in the experience of immigrants and refugees with respect to housing?
 - health, including mental health issues
 - substance abuse
 - * What do immigrants and refugees most need to ensure they obtain and maintain adequate housing?
 - * Any documentary sources we should know about? (evaluations, research etc.)

3 Agency Support

How and to what extent does (a specific Agency) support the attainment and maintenance of better housing for newcomers?

- * How do clients get to know the Agency?
- * If clients are referred from other agencies, how are these arrangements working? Could they work better in some way?
- What particular housing-related services are provided by the Agency?
- Does the Agency support informal social networks in any way to help newcomers find and keep adequate housing?
- * Where do clients go after they move on from the Agency? Do you stay in touch, or follow up?
- How do clients assess the support they receive from the Agency?
- To what extent is the Agency involved in advocating better policies by municipal, provincial, and/or federal governments, specifically with respect to the housing issues of newcomers? Does the Agency support advocacy groups working on these issues?

4. Support System Functioning

What agencies are working to support newcomers with housing or related support? (This includes both agencies serving immigrants and refugees particularly and agencies serving the general population, including immigrants and refugees).

- * How effective are partnerships among agencies in responding to the housing needs and general integration of newcomers?

very effective ___ adequate _____ not very effective ___ poor _____

- * Could anything be done to strengthen or enhance these partnerships?

- * How would you rate the coordination of services for newcomers in Ottawa now?

Very good _____ Adequate _____ Not so good _____ Poor _____

- * Can you describe how your Agency and other newcomer organizations coordinate?

- * What has changed in the past 4 or 5 years?

- * How well is the housing and support system serving immigrants and refugees working now? Why do you say this? (City and community agencies).

very well ___ adequately _____ not so well _____ poorly _____

- * What is needed to fill the service and support gaps? That might improve access to, and maintenance of adequate housing for newcomers?

- What can be done to support informal social networks that help newcomers to find and keep adequate housing?

- * What should be the guiding principles for a plan of action on housing, with respect to newcomers?

5. Follow up

Who else should we talk to?

Are there any relevant documents that you would suggest?

Annex D

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