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<http://www.thestar.com/news/canada/article/1155144--new-immigrants-are-the-hidden-homeless-hidden-homelessness-a-growing-problem-for-canada-s-newcomers>



## New immigrants are the 'hidden homeless'

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Nicholas Keung



Anthony Rosario can smile about his subsidized apartment now, but the Bangladeshi father and his wife used to share a small Scarborough apartment with three adult children.

VINCE TALOTTA/TORONTO STAR

Anthony Rosario, his wife and three adult children shared a two-bedroom apartment in Scarborough when they first came from Bangladesh in 1998.

At times, they also shared their already crowded dwelling with other families, converting available space into bedrooms.

Space was tight but so was their budget, with their \$900-a-month rent eating up half the family's monthly income.

Up until February, Rosario and his wife, Mary, were still sharing their two-bedroom apartment with his son, daughter-in-law and two grandchildren.

"It's tough to live with so many people in so little space, but you are bound to live like this when you don't have money," said Rosario, 61, a bakery chef, who two months ago finally moved into a subsidized seniors' apartment after four years on the waiting list.

But a new [study](#) on immigrant housing warns that thousands of newcomers continue to live in “hidden homelessness” — in shared, overcrowded housing — an issue that has grown more acute, especially in Toronto, where affordable rental units are in short supply.

The national study by [Metropolis](#), an international network of researchers in immigration policy, found most newcomers reported spending more than 50 per cent of income on housing, with 15 per cent spending 75 per cent or more.

“Financial difficulties force many newcomers to share accommodations that are often poor quality, overcrowded and unsafe,” says the report.

The report is based on national housing data and surveys of 600 migrants in Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver. In Toronto, where the average wage is \$69,000, most newcomers surveyed had incomes under \$20,000.

“New rooming houses are being created in the suburbs, in locations without rooming house regulations. Often illegal, suburban rooming houses can offer deplorable housing,” the report continued.

Newcomers also face discrimination in the housing market, with refugees, temporary residents, single parents, large families and people who do not speak English or French facing the greatest challenge, said University of British Columbia professor Daniel Hiebert, the study’s lead author. “The housing situation generally improves over time for most immigrants but there’s a fraction of the immigrant population where the challenges remain and persist for a long time,” he said.

In Toronto, the vacancy rate for rental accommodation fell to 2.1 per cent in 2010, well below the 3 to 4 per cent threshold, a decline more “sustained and dramatic” compared with other immigrant gateway cities, the report states. (The city’s vacancy rate in 2011 fell again to 1.4 per cent.)

Since the 2008 global financial meltdown, the report says, construction projects were cancelled and the number of apartment starts fell by almost 50 per cent in the city.

The recent supply of apartments is mostly intended for the condominium market, which has increased from 22.1 per cent of all starts in 1996 to 44.6 per cent in 2010.

Since 2000, the Toronto Housing Databank found that units with rents between \$600 and \$900 have decreased by 66,069, while those with rents between \$901 and \$1,500 and over have increased by 48,760.

**“With rising rents, the loss of inexpensive rental units, and disproportionate growth in condominiums, the supply of affordable accommodation for newcomers, particularly those with children is limited,” said the study, whose Toronto section was led by York University professor Valerie Preston.**

Toronto is home to the largest stock of social housing in Canada, with 127,545 units of rent-geared-to-income housing in which residents pay no more than 30 per cent of total income before taxes on housing. However, almost 90,000 households are on the waiting list, meaning wait times of four to 21 years.

The study calls for a national housing strategy by all levels of government and the redesigning of housing services for newcomers.

### **Vacancy and average rents in Toronto in 2010**

Vacancy rate	Rent
Studio 2.3%	\$778
1-bedroom 2.4%	\$952
2-bedroom 1.9%	\$1,118
3-bedroom or more 1.6%	\$1,305

Dwelling (unit) starts in Toronto by type:

2008 2009 2010

Detached 11,308 8,130 9,936

Semi 2,362 2,032 1,654

Townhouse 4,612 2,918 4,365

Apartments 23,930 12,869 13,240

*Precarious Housing & Hidden Homelessness Among Refugees, Asylum Seekers and Immigrants*