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Affordable housing elusive for new Canadians in Vancouver, Toronto and Montreal

With housing prices at record levels, a University of British Columbia-led study finds that new Canadians are struggling to find adequate and affordable housing in the country's three largest cities.

The study of 600 immigrants and refugees using settlement services in Vancouver, Toronto and Montreal finds that half of those surveyed reported living in crowded dwellings with hazards such as dampness and mould, broken plumbing, insect infestation and inadequate heat.

The incomes of study participants were significantly below the national average, which negatively impacted their housing choices, particularly in the more expensive housing markets of Vancouver and Toronto. In Toronto, for example, where the average wage is \$69,000, most newcomers surveyed had incomes under \$20,000.

Editors: View findings for Vancouver, Toronto and Montreal at <http://mbc.metropolis.net/media.html>.

“Either we pay the rent and we go hungry, or we live in a chicken coop but we eat,” said one respondent in Montreal. Most reported spending more than half of their income on housing, with 15 per cent spending 75 per cent or more of their income on housing.

“While the majority of immigrants to Canada see major improvements in their housing situation over time, for some, housing remains a critical issue for a very long time,” says Daniel Hiebert, a professor in UBC's Dept. of Geography and lead author of the study published today online by *Metropolis BC*, a centre of excellence for research on immigration and diversity.

“For this group, there is a persistent need for affordable housing,” says Hiebert, adding that refugees, temporary residents, single parents, large families and people who do not speak English or French face the greatest challenges. “This goes contrary to the myth that all immigrants do better over time – that they start under difficult circumstances and gradually things get better for them.”

In each of the three cities in 2011, a survey was administered to 200 people who were clients of non-profit settlement services. Of the 600 overall participants, an effort was made to balance the numbers of refugees and immigrants.

According to Hiebert, the findings suggest that the general lack of affordable housing in Canada's major cities has a major impact on new Canadians. He adds that many newcomers report facing discrimination in the housing market and experiencing significant difficulties finding employment, even with the requisite skills and qualifications.

Canada has one of the highest levels of immigration per capita in the developed world, as its population grows .8 per cent annually through legal immigration. The country accepted more than 280,000 new permanent residents in 2010.

“Settlement services are created to help people during their first three years in Canada,” Hiebert says. “But half of the people we were speaking to have been in Canada for over three years and are still using settlement services. Housing is a major problem for this subset of people.”

The study is part of a larger research project entitled *Precarious Housing and Hidden Homelessness among Refugees, Asylum Seekers and Immigrants in Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver*. Study co-authors include UBC graduate student Jenny Francis, **Valerie Preston from York University in Toronto** and Damaris Rose from the Institut national de la recherche scientifique in Montréal.

The research was funded by the Homelessness Partnering Strategy program, a division of Human Resources and Skills Development Canada.

View the full study at: <http://mbc.metropolis.net/media.html>.

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