

Building Supports Phase 1

Housing Access for Immigrant & Refugee Women Leaving Violence

The Building Supports project is a collaborative three-year project co-led by BC Non-Profit Housing Association, BC Society of Transition Houses and the FREDa Centre for Research on Violence Against Women and Children. The purpose of the project is to understand the barriers in accessing short- and long-term housing for immigrant and refugee women (IRW) leaving violent relationships and to identify practices and policies that can facilitate the removal of barriers to safe, secure and affordable housing. This infographic summarizes the findings from the first phase of the project. The objective of the first phase was to understand the experiences of IRW attempting to secure safe, affordable and culturally appropriate housing after leaving domestic violence.

RESEARCH

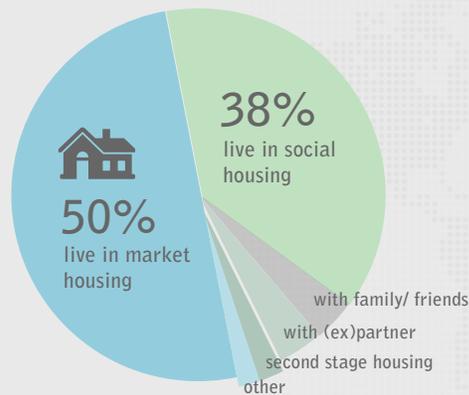
DEMOGRAPHICS OF FOCUS GROUP & INTERVIEWS WITH IRW

43% Permanent Resident

36% Canadian Citizen

17% Refugee

- + Originated from 22 different countries
- + Spoke 25 different languages
- + Had been in Canada for 1.5 to 36 years
- + 90% had children (average 2.2)
- + 74% had their children living with them



METHODOLOGY

- + Online survey of Transition House and Multi-Service Agencies (n=89)
- + Interviews with Housing Managers (n=15)
- + Focus groups and interviews with women with lived experiences (n=39)
- + Workshop with stakeholders (n=16)

KEY THEMES

BARRIERS

SAFETY

- + Language and cultural barriers
- + Shame and fear of disclosure
- + Lack of familial and community support
- + Lack of knowledge about available services
- + Lack of financial security
- + Limited housing options

POLICY

- + Time limits in Transition Houses
- + Income assistance policies
- + Immigration and sponsorship policies
- + BC Housing policies

HOUSING

- + Lack of affordable housing
- + Discrimination
- + Misconceptions about Transition Houses
- + Challenges of communal living
- + Long waitlists and inadequate sized units
- + Tenant selection process
- + Inadequate income assistance
- + Lack of support
- + Landlords

IMPACTS

- + Physical and Mental Health
- + Risk of homelessness
- + Return to abuser

“I was in a relationship waiting and living [in] hell because I didn’t know that we have all this kind of supports.” (Focus group participant)

SOLUTIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS



HOUSING

- + Improve access to affordable housing in safe, accessible locations.
- + Create and disseminate clear messaging about housing availability and access.

“Then just like more housing. Like more affordable housing. Like every day I probably get like two applications a day and people calling me and telling me their situations and then what do I say to them?” (Housing Manager)



SUPPORT

- + Provide information about violence against women and supports in multiple languages in various media both prior to and upon a women's arrival in Canada.
- + Assist women to help them navigate Canadian systems and find affordable housing.
- + Recognize the importance of ESL classes and opportunities for training and education for immigrant and refugee women.
- + Provide cultural competency training and education about the dynamics and impacts of abuse to housing managers, landlords and other service providers supporting immigrant and refugee women.
- + Enhance cross-sector support and collaboration.

*“So a lot of it is just, you know, helping her kind of settle into Canadian society and bringing in outside resources as well and that speak the language that can kind of walk her through the system and help her understand that it's okay, yes things are different, but we're all here to help you.”
(Housing Manager)*



POLICY

- + Ensure that flexible and responsive policies and regular policy review are an important part of organizational culture.
- + Review income assistance rates and policies.
- + Review BC Housing policies.
- + Review sponsorship laws and processes in cases where a woman is being abused by her sponsor.

*“For women who are attached to their husbands' status, their immigration status and if they leave then they're without status. So if they're leaving, then you're supposed to go back to your country. So, I think one of the big changes being discussed or was, [is] that when the family comes in that they each get their own status, and it's not attached to the primary person, ...the kids have their own status and yeah they're not all linked to him.”
(Housing Manager)*

NEXT STEPS

The research findings from Phase 1 will inform Phase 2 of the project, which focuses on the development, piloting and evaluation of promising practices for transition house workers to improve their capacity to support IRW in accessing longer-term safe, secure and affordable housing.

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SFU