

# **The Profile of Absolute and Relative Homelessness Among Immigrants, Refugees, and Refugee Claimants in the GVRD**

## **Final Report**

*Prepared for the National Secretariat on Homelessness*

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## Acronyms

Call for Proposals	CFP
Government Assisted Refugee	GAR
Greater Vancouver Regional District	GVRD
Homeless Individuals and Families Information System	HIFIS
Immigrant and Refugee Housing Survey	IRHS
Immigration and Refugee Board	IRB
In Core Housing Need and Spending at Least Half their Income on Shelter	INALH
Inland Refugee Society	IRS
Low Income Cut-Off	LICO
Mennonite Central Committee	MCC
Ministry of Human Resources	MHR
Multilingual Orientation Service Association for Immigrant Communities	MOSAIC
National Secretariat on Homelessness	NSH
Non-Governmental Organizations	NGO
Research Advisory Committee	RAC
Resettlement Assistance Program	RAP
Storefront Orientation Services	SOS
Surrey-Delta Immigrant Services Society	SDISS
Successful Refugee Claimant	SRC
University of British Columbia	UBC
Vancouver Center of Excellence for Research on Immigration and Integration in the Metropolis	RIIM

# Executive Summary

## Context and Objectives

There is little systematic knowledge about the extent of homelessness among immigrants and refugees in Greater Vancouver. This is due, in part, to the fact that marginalized populations are poorly recorded in key data sources. Basic social surveys, such as the census, do not necessarily include all groups. Some groups, including many Aboriginal people, may refuse to acknowledge the census. Others, including those without shelter, can easily fall below the notice of census enumerators.

The purpose of this project was to develop a better understanding of the position of immigrants, refugees, and refugee claimants in Greater Vancouver's housing system. Three research goals were identified at the outset:

1. Generate basic knowledge, and if possible a realistic estimate, of the number of immigrants, refugees, and refugee claimants experiencing relative or absolute homelessness in the Greater Vancouver Regional District (GVRD);
2. Understand the degree to which these communities provide in-group assistance to homeless individuals and families; and
3. Understand the ways that service organizations (NGOs) provide assistance to homeless individuals and families.

## Brief synopsis of the main findings

The various parts of this project converge on the point that the housing situation of newcomers to Greater Vancouver is heavily influenced by the social capital of existing ethno-cultural communities. As a result, the extent of relative and absolute homelessness among immigrants, refugees, and refugee claimants is less than would be expected given the income levels of these groups. This is not to say that the delineated groups are well housed. Indeed, many individuals and families are living in crowded, sub-standard conditions. However, the social networks operating among immigrant, refugee, and refugee claimant communities appear to mitigate against the worst forms of homelessness, and the groups of people we studied are actually underrepresented in the population using homeless shelters.

## Methodology

In approaching this research, and in light of the complexities in defining and enumerating homelessness, we adopted an evidence-based, multiple points of contact study combining both qualitative and quantitative methods. The project was composed of three sub-studies, each of which focuses on a particular aspect of homelessness.

**Sub-study 1** sought to examine those experiencing absolute homelessness by developing a portrait of the immigrant and refugee populations using emergency shelters and transition houses. This sub-study involved 12 semi-structured interviews with key informants from emergency shelters

and second stage transition houses in the GVRD; and the compilation and analysis of data collected by shelter personnel over seven 24-hour periods between October and December 2004. In total, we received 261 completed shelter data collection forms.

**Sub-study 2** sought to explore the housing situation of refugee claimants who have recently received a positive decision enabling them to stay in Canada. Thirty-six individual interviews were conducted with successful refugee claimants (SRCs) in the GVRD. The interviews were semi-structured and explored the housing situation of claimants both before learning of the positive decision, and in the first six months since learning of it. In addition, four interviews were conducted with settlement workers.

**Sub-study 3** sought to examine the profile and extent of relative homelessness among immigrants, refugees, and refugee claimants. In so doing, we hoped to generate a basic estimate of the ‘sofa surfing’ or ‘camping out’ population among recent immigrants, as well as to identify in-group systems of support through questions about the provision or receipt of housing assistance. This sub-study is mainly focused on the Immigrant and Refugee Housing Survey (IRHS), which was conducted on October 4-8, 2004. In total, we received 554 completed surveys.

## **Findings: Sub-Study 1**

The shelter survey conducted as part of this project reveals a sample population that is overwhelmingly English speaking (91%) and Canadian born (82%). Although immigrants and refugees form 38 percent of the population in Greater Vancouver, they account for only 18 percent of our respondents, and probably an even lower proportion of the total shelter population.

When facing a lack of secure housing, it was suggested that members of established ethno-cultural groups stay with family or other acquaintances, instead of relying on emergency shelters. For those lacking secure accommodations, these networks may be tapped to provide temporary accommodations. While established ethno-cultural communities may have the ability to “take care of their own”, other groups who lack extensive social networks, including recently arrived individuals and refugee claimants, may fall through the cracks.

Almost one quarter of the individuals staying in shelters reported some form of employment (either full-time, part-time or casual).

While some respondents in our shelter survey reported their last long-term housing as unstable (e.g., living in single-room occupancy hotels, staying with friends or family, or renting a friend’s couch), others reported having owned their last form of long-term housing. Key informants spoke of a cycle of homelessness in which people move between insecure housing and ‘rooflessness’ on a regular basis. Low social assistance and shelter allowance rates, when combined with institutional rules that limit shelter stays to no more than 30 days, produces a cycle in which whatever housing that is obtained is temporary. In the rush to obtain housing, and with limited means, clients settle in unsafe housing located in marginal and inexpensive areas of the city, thus perpetuating a cycle of social marginality and homelessness. Often, key informants report, these clients return to the shelter system within six months to a year.

The most frequently cited causes of homelessness were: financial (e.g., job loss, eviction); substance abuse (e.g., drugs, alcohol); mental health; family issues (e.g., breakdown); and physical or emotional abuse. When we combine all the immigrant categories (refugee, immigrant, permanent resident and citizen into that of immigrant), the three most frequently cited responses for homelessness are physical/emotional abuse, family issues, and mental health; while for non-immigrants the three most frequently cited are financial crisis, substance abuse and mental health.



*Main findings.*

- First, **there appear to be few immigrants and refugees using the shelter systems;**
- Secondly, **despite being homeless, many respondents reported having some form of employment;** and
- Finally, **shelter personnel expressed concern about the structural barriers that affect all clients,** including limited shelter and transportation allowances, as well as the time limits on stays (in light of current waitlists).

## **Findings: Sub-Study 2**

Until they obtain employment, SRCs are dependent on basic welfare provisions. All but three respondents in this study were dependant on welfare alone during the initial stages of settlement. Rental rates in Vancouver have been increasing, while the basic welfare allowance has not, leading to a critical affordability problem. Unless people share accommodations, refugee claimants and their families can rarely, if ever, afford larger units. During the initial settlement stages, 32 out of 36 SRCs found themselves spending between 50 and 74 percent of their income on housing in the initial settlement phase, and 4 respondents spent more than 75 percent.

For our interviewees, gaining entrance into Vancouver's labour market has been a trying and emotionally difficult experience. While some decided to wait and upgrade their language and education, those who sought work were stymied. The greatest barrier and point of frustration for those who had searched for work has been employers' expectation of Canadian work experience.

While many have had to deal with a labour market that does not recognize foreign experience or skills, some have accepted downward occupational mobility in order to attain employment. Of the sixteen claimants who possess a post-secondary degree, and who had attempted to attain employment, none were able to utilize their education, either in a practical application or in order to obtain a skilled job.

Lack of fluency in English also proved to be a significant barrier inhibiting access to adequate housing for refugee claimants. Only 5 of the 36 participants had arrived in Canada with fluent skills in English.

Ten claimants spoke about the issue of discrimination spontaneously. Of particular concern were issues of social insurance tagging, welfare discrimination, and a widespread reluctance of many landlords to rent to households with children.<sup>i</sup>

Little, if any, support was offered upon entry to Canada, and in the subsequent days after arrival, resulting in feelings of confusion and fear.

The SRCs who have come from China tell an interesting and unique story. While many claimants mention one or a combination of factors (crowding, substandard conditions and safety), the claimants from China speak of a housing situation that includes all of these factors in an alarming combination.

The vulnerability associated with refugee status as well as the macro and micro barriers faced by all immigrants, results in a high degree of homelessness, in one form or another. The situation is more extreme for claimants, who face deeper levels of deprivation than the average immigrant; recall that most claimants depend on welfare rates that are far below the poverty line.

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<sup>i</sup> Until permanent status is obtained, refugee claimants hold a social insurance number that begins with the number '9'. This tags the individual as a temporary visitor.

### *Main Findings*

First, **refugee claimants face unique obstacles that are symptomatic of their immigration class.** By virtue of their means of entry, claimants have a greater disadvantage in the housing and labour markets.

Secondly, **there is a discrepancy between what refugee claimants are receiving in basic aid, and the average cost of renting an apartment in Vancouver.** In addition, the vacancy rates for smaller, more affordable accommodations are particularly low.

Thirdly, **inadequate and substandard living conditions, overcrowding and safety concerns represent three major components of relative homelessness among SRCs.**

Fourthly, **claimants tend to be socially isolated.** The minimal levels of financial, documented human, and social capital of individuals in this group is associated with extreme vulnerability to homelessness. The situation is quite different for those immigrants and refugees who have access to social networks and support systems.

### **Findings: Sub-Study 3**

The IRHS was intended to be a representative sample of all clients who sought the services of immigrant and refugee-serving agencies on either a phone-in or an in-person basis during the week of October 4-8, 2004. Sixty-four percent of our respondents were female. Although respondents came from 61 countries, 52 percent of the respondents were born in 4 countries: China (19.1%), India (13.2%), South Korea (10.5%) and Iran (9.2%).

Many of the respondents who have arrived within one year are located outside the traditional immigrant receiving areas (the east side of the City of Vancouver).

Thirty percent of respondents reported their status as being Canadian Citizens, 60 percent are Permanent Residents (they arrived as either Economic Immigrants or through the Family Class), 5 percent are Government Assisted Refugees (GARs) and 5 percent are Refugee Claimants. Those who arrived as immigrants were more likely to be geographically dispersed than those who arrived as refugees/claimants.

Although 90 percent of survey respondents report having some form of housing, 7.5 percent were living in what could be considered temporary or unstable living conditions (e.g., staying with friends or family, living in single room occupancy hotels, or emergency shelters) over the three-month period directly preceding the survey.

Twenty-eight percent of respondents in the IRHS are receiving some form of help with housing, while 15 percent of the respondents who are not receiving help indicate that they have provided assistance to someone other than their parents or children. Almost one-quarter of those receiving help were staying with friends and family. Almost half (44 percent) of those who are receiving help have been in Vancouver 4 years or longer.

### *Main findings:*

- First, the **socio-economic profile of respondents who are providing assistance does not differ significantly from those who are receiving assistance.** Respondents in both groups reported high numbers of people who officially landed in Canada within the last three years, as well as living in households with no one employed;
- Secondly, it follows that **those who are providing help often do so despite living in precarious situations.** Over 61 percent of those providing assistance, for example, are in core housing need, while 25.6 percent are in critical housing stress;
- Thirdly, **there is a disconnect between the length of time people expect they will need assistance, and the length of time people have provided assistance.** Despite the perceived

need for help over long periods, those who have provided assistance report having done so for relatively short periods of time;

- Finally, **there is a lack of similarity between type of help received and type of help provided.** Those providing assistance generally help their guests obtain housing, while those receiving assistance say that they receive help paying the rent. This point reveals the fact that our sample included few immigrants who are relatively well off.

## Overall Conclusions and Policy Implications

The phrase that has come to represent our understanding of the situation is “hidden homelessness”. This is another concept around which all three sub-components of the study converge. The SRCs in our sample tell a fairly consistent story of their first encounter with Canadian society as confusing and full of anxiety. Their initial housing experience was typically in the cheapest accommodations available, in poor residential environments. They coped by sharing rents and crowding. Nearly all continue to be dependent on social assistance and nearly all are in situations of housing stress. But they are not “on the streets”, in large part because of their coping strategies and – in number of cases – help extended from social organizations and/or other members of their ethno-cultural community.

The existence of bottom-up self-help was even more apparent in the third aspect of our study, the survey of clients of settlement NGOs. In this part of the project we found a significant sharing of resources that mainly occurs within familial networks and ethno-cultural or religious communities. About 15 percent of those using settlement services are receiving some form of housing assistance, which ranges from help locating housing, through financial help, to the provision of housing (often temporary, but occasionally long-term). Nearly all of this activity occurs “below notice” of the Canadian welfare state. Those who are helped, in essence, are able to avoid the services of homeless shelters. Significantly, even those who are living in precarious circumstances extend whatever help they can to others in their close networks.

\* \* \*

These practices lead to several conclusions.

**First**, our study suggests that current levels of social/shelter assistance are exceedingly low, especially in light of the lack of affordable housing. When clients settle in unsafe housing, in inexpensive and marginal areas of the city, they tend to enter a cycle of homelessness, needing help from others.

**Secondly**, help *is* available. The positive side of the story is the extent to which mutual aid is provided. This is a clear example of what is variously labeled “ethnic resources” or “social capital” in the academic and policy literatures.

But systems of reciprocity do not include everyone – which is our **third** basic finding. Refugee claimants, given the combination of their uncertain legal status, lack of language facility, and lack of familiarity with Canadian society, are the most likely of all newcomers to “fall between the cracks” of *both* ethno-cultural communities *and* the welfare and housing provisions of the state.

**Fourthly**, we re-emphasize the phrase “hidden homelessness”. Immigrants, refugees, and refugee claimants appear to be particularly susceptible to relative homelessness, so their difficulties in the housing market are essentially invisible.

**Fifthly**, as we increasingly come to understand the fact that homelessness is a spectrum of conditions, rather than a single absolute state, it is logical that there also needs to be a spectrum of policy responses to homelessness.

# **The Profile of Absolute and Relative Homelessness Among Immigrants, Refugees, and Refugee Claimants in the GVRD**

## **Introduction**

In July 2002, the Greater Vancouver Regional District (GVRD) released its report on “Homelessness in Greater Vancouver”. Their findings were alarming: the population at-risk of (economic) homelessness in Greater Vancouver increased dramatically between 1991 and 1996. This increase may be attributed, in part, to worsening conditions for both renters and owners. The period between 1991 and 1996 was characterized by increasing property values and rental rates, low vacancy rates, and a decline in (real) household incomes. Further, the findings reveal that immigrant populations are disproportionately affected by changes in the housing market. For newcomers, the challenges faced by Canadian-born population in accessing (affordable) housing, are compounded by both economic and social barriers. In light of the declining fortunes of immigrant households over the last decade, these barriers are insurmountable for some.

This report details our attempt to extend the findings of the GVRD study, by examining the extent and profile of absolute and relative homelessness among immigrants, refugees, and refugee claimants in the GVRD. There is little systematic knowledge about the extent of homelessness among immigrants and refugees in the GVRD. This is due, in part, to the fact that marginalized populations are poorly recorded in key data sources. Basic social surveys, such as the census, do not necessarily include all groups. Some groups, including many Aboriginal people, may refuse to acknowledge the census. Others, including those without shelter, can easily fall below the notice of census enumerators.

Although literature exists on Canadian immigration and housing (Mattu, 2002; Junaid, 2002; Miraftab, 2000; Owusu, 1999; Chambron, Hulchanski, Murdie and Teixeira, 1997),

poverty (Picot, 2004; United Way of Greater Toronto and the Canadian Council on Social Development, 2004; Riel and Harvey, 2000; Lee, 2000) and homelessness in Canadian cities (Woodward et al., 2002, McCreary Centre Society, 2002; Zine, 2002; Talbot and Associates, 2001), little research has been conducted on immigrants and homelessness. For the purposes of this study it has been necessary to triangulate academic and policy-based literatures, including the above-mentioned bodies of research. Further, much of the existing research on homelessness and housing stress has been done through non-systematic qualitative research. While valuable, these studies cannot illuminate the *extent* of homelessness. We established this project as an evidence-based, multiple points of contact study that combines both qualitative and quantitative methods to create a profile of absolute and relative homelessness among immigrants, refugees, and refugee claimants in the GVRD. We have found that we were able to meet our original objectives in some areas of the study, but not in all of them.

Given the limited research on homelessness and at-risk populations, no one has developed a perfect methodology for researching them. In our study, we have chosen to adopt a set of experimental methodologies that build on methods already used in the literature, but which also introduces some new ones (such as tracking successful claimants, and surveying the client base of settlement service organizations).<sup>1</sup> We have used a variety of methodological tools, including interviews, focus groups, surveys and questionnaires, to explore the problem from multiple angles. In so doing, we provide a kind of test of methods that can be used to measure the scale of homelessness in future work. Certainly, some of our methods have been more successful than others. When possible, we have adjusted methods in an effort to produce more

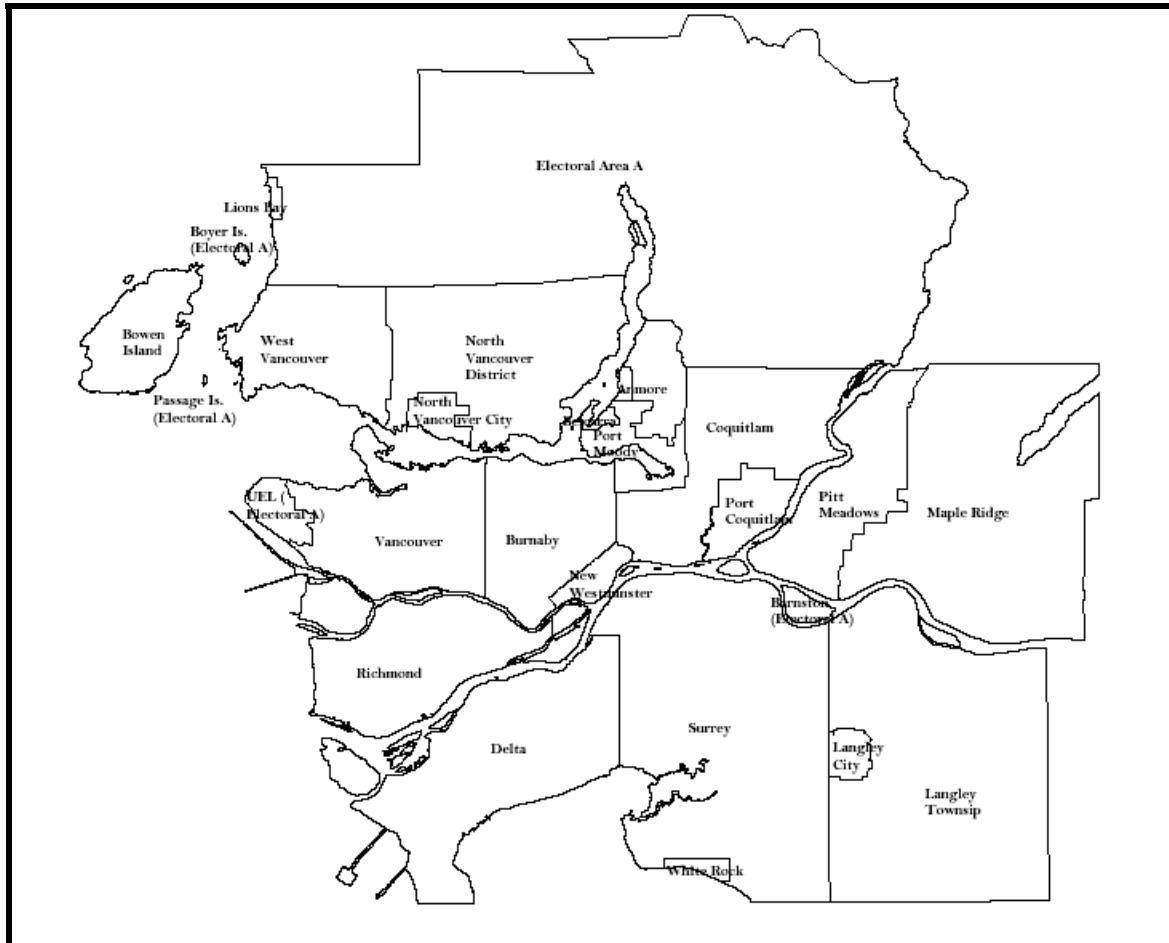
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<sup>1</sup> Our initial methodology is fully described in Sherman Chan, Daniel Hiebert, Silvia D’Addario and Kathy Sherrell, 2004, Study on the Profile of Absolute and Relative Homelessness Among Immigrants, Refugees, and Refugee Claimants in the GVRD: Methodology Report.

timely and representative results. Given that we have had to do this, readers should interpret our findings with a degree of caution.

## Geographic Scope

The geographic scope of this project encompasses the GVRD (see Figure 1.1).



**Figure 1.1: Map of Study Area**

## Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this project was to develop a better understanding of the position of immigrants, refugees, and refugee claimants in Greater Vancouver's housing system. Three research goals were identified at the outset:

1. Generate basic knowledge, and if possible a realistic estimate, of the number of immigrants, refugees, and refugee claimants experiencing relative or absolute homelessness in the GVRD;
2. Understand the degree to which these communities provide in-group assistance to homeless individuals and families; and
3. Understand the ways that service organizations such as non-governmental organizations (NGOs) provide assistance to homeless individuals and families.

## **Collaborative Relationship**

This study is the product of a number of factors coming together. Increasing government recognition that there is a need for knowledge about homelessness in Canada prompted a Call for Proposals (CFP) from the National Secretariat on Homelessness (NSH). At the same time, the immigrant and refugee-serving sector and advocacy groups in the Lower Mainland identified a need for research on homelessness, particularly in relation to the experiences of immigrants and refugees in the GVRD. Following a CFP from the NSH, MOSAIC has received funding from NSH to conduct research on the profile of homelessness among immigrants, refugees and refugee claimants in the GVRD. MOSAIC then initiated a discussion with the Department of Geography at UBC to become involved in the application.

The research is a collaborative partnership between MOSAIC and the Department of Geography at UBC. The research team consists of:

- **Sherman Chan**, Director of Settlement Services Department for MOSAIC, principal investigator (see Appendix A for information on MOSAIC).
- **Daniel Hiebert**, Department of Geography, University of British Columbia, Co-investigator and academic advisor. He is also a Co-Director of the Vancouver Metropolis centre (RIIM), and is engaged with another project on immigration and housing that uses data from the census and the Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada.
- **Kathy Sherrell** and **Silvia D'Addario** are the two Research Coordinators.
- **Barbie Wu** is the Executive Assistant.

## **Research Advisory Committee**

A Research Advisory Committee (RAC) was established under the direction of MOSAIC and Dan Hiebert to bring together a range of multi-sectoral knowledge for advice in the planning, implementation, and follow-up action of the study.

The RAC was integral in both providing feedback on potential gaps in the analysis and suggestions on how to present the data in a concise and easy to read manner. The committee met five times during the course of the project.

## **Basic outline of the report, and brief synopsis of the main findings**

This report has six basic elements. We begin with a review of the relevant literature on immigration and homelessness in order to provide academic and policy contexts for the project. Following a discussion of the methodologies employed in each of the three sub-studies that make up the whole project, including a discussion of the methodological adjustments that had to be made in the course of the research, we present the results of each study. Finally, we provide a general analysis that brings the three sub-studies together; in so doing we return to the main themes of the literature review and also develop a composite perspective on our work. In particular, we advance the premise that the housing situation of newcomers to Greater Vancouver is heavily influenced by the social capital of existing ethno-cultural communities. As a result, the extent of relative and absolute homelessness among immigrants, refugees, and refugee claimants is less than would be expected given the income levels of these groups. This is not to say that the delineated groups are well housed. Indeed, many individuals and families are living in crowded, sub-standard conditions. However, the social networks operating among immigrant, refugee, and refugee claimant communities appear to mitigate against the worst



forms of homelessness, and the groups of people we studied are actually underrepresented in the population using homeless shelters.

# **Part 1: Triangulating the Literatures on Immigration, Housing and Homelessness**

## **Introduction**

Immigrant settlement into Canadian society is a variegated process that includes a range of complex adjustments both on the part of newcomers and the host society. The housing experience of newcomers marks a primary dynamic for successful integration. However, there are both individual and structural barriers that inhibit many immigrants from attaining affordable and adequate housing. In response to the challenges that arise within the housing market, immigrants have adopted various strategies and coping mechanisms. This section will highlight the various obstacles and challenges that hamper the housing experience for many immigrants, refugees and visible minorities in particular. In addition to discussing the challenges that newcomers face, we also consider the strategies that are used in order to cope with housing barriers. We conclude with an assessment of the consequences of these barriers and the attempted strategies used to overcome them.

We begin with the premise that finding adequate housing is a kind of barometer indicating the degree of successful incorporation into a new society. Therefore, understanding the housing experiences of newcomers, including the barriers, strategies, and subsequent consequences, is an important first step in assessing the different levels of incorporation of new Canadians.

## **Barriers to Housing Access**

For many newcomers, finding appropriate and adequate housing marks the first basic step towards settlement. However, as noted by Chambon et al. (1997), Canadians do not have equal

access to adequate accommodation. Moreover, even similar groups of people in similar circumstances vary in their access to the stock of available housing.

### **Financial Obstacles for Newcomers**

There is a large literature contending that, upon arrival, immigrants earn less than the average Canadian-born person, but that, over time, this gap narrows. This process, also known as *economic assimilation*, may no longer be a reality in Canada, especially among new immigrant cohorts. In a study conducted by Statistics Canada, Garnett Picot (2004) reports that immigrants entering Canada during the 1970s have nearly reached economic parity with the average Canadian-born citizen. After spending more than twenty years in Canada, the 1970s male cohort earned 97 percent of the earnings of the ‘like’ Canadian (adjusting for age, education, etc.). Immigrants arriving during the 1980s earned approximately 85 percent of incomes earned by their Canadian-born counterparts after 16 to 20 years in Canada. Finally, the 1990s cohort earned 70 percent of the average Canadian-born income, after 6 to 10 years in Canada. These findings are roughly consistent for both men and women immigrants entering during the same time-period. Therefore, subsequent cohorts experience both a lower relative income upon entering Canada, as well as a delayed catch-up period. Further, the same research shows that even well-educated immigrants share this economic disadvantage. Picot (2004) explains that educated immigrant males arriving during the 1970s entered the Canadian labour market earning 82 percent of the earnings of the average male Canadian. By the 1990s, new immigrant males earned only 50 percent of their like counterparts. The trend for educated women is similar. These financial setbacks translate into difficulty accessing affordable and adequate housing.

Picot (2004) further shows that between 1980 and 2000, the proportion of immigrant family incomes that fell below the low-income cut-off (LICO) has risen considerably. In 1980,

24.6 percent of immigrant families lived below the cut-off, but this was the case for 31.3 in 1990, and by 2000 the proportion had risen to 35.8 percent. In contrast, the author notes, corresponding figures for the Canadian-born declined from 17.2 in 1980 to 14.3 percent in 2000. Reil and Harvey (2000) concentrate on the Toronto case, showing that visible minority immigrants have experienced the greatest increase in poverty levels there, from 20.9 percent in 1991 to 32.5 percent in 1996. Recent economic changes have therefore had uneven social consequences, and have been especially hard on immigrants.

Pendakur and Pendakur (1996) extend the general story of income dynamics into the labour market, and show that recent immigrants earn wages well below the Canadian average. In Vancouver, the average Canadian-born annual income was \$26,213 in 1991, compared with \$18,208 earned by immigrants of less than ten years' stay in Canada. In addition, 42 percent of this group of immigrants in Vancouver lived below the poverty line, almost triple the poverty rate for the Canadian-born. As a result of below-average earnings, housing and rent affordability is a chronic issue for new Canadians. In 1996, 21 percent of immigrant households suffered from "core housing need", which refers to a combination of poor housing quality and problems with affordability. Ley further reports that poverty tends also to be higher among immigrants who: have less than high school education, are females, do not speak English at home, or who are of non-European ethnicity (Ley, 1999).

On this latter point, Hiebert and Ley (2001) show that European groups earned average incomes 34 percent higher than non-European groups. They interpret this financial gap as the result of a combination of factors including human capital discrepancies, ethno-cultural clustering, and labour market discrimination (Hiebert and Ley, 2001). According to David Ley

(1999), poverty underscores the visibility of immigrant groups, and may lead to both alienation among newcomers and antipathy among the Canadian-born.

### **Barriers to Housing for Immigrants and Refugees**

In the mid-1990s, Adrienne Chambon, David Hulchanski, Robert Murdie, and Carlos Teixeira (social workers and geographers), initiated one of the most significant projects on immigrants and housing in Canada. They began by conducting a series of focus groups between 1994 and 1995, assessing the housing preferences and barriers of Jamaican, Somali and Polish immigrants. The authors assert that barriers to households need to be considered at both macro and individual scales. That is, housing barriers are experienced on a micro scale by the individual (or household unit), but are the result of macro level dynamics. Focus group participants varied in their personal characteristics, which were related to differences in their housing experience. The key variables examined included: level of income; colour of skin; source of income; ethnicity/culture/religion; knowledge of the housing system; gender; language/accent; household type and size; knowledge of Canadian institutions/culture; and level of experience with the dominant culture. The authors separated these obstacles into what they defined as primary and secondary barriers. The former include physical characteristics that cannot be changed by the individual, such as skin color and gender. Ethnicity, culture and religion are also considered to be primary barriers since they are difficult to alter. According to the authors, primary barriers are socially constructed by the larger society, implying that these barriers are given meaning by other groups. On the other hand, secondary barriers, including language, knowledge of institutions, can be altered and often do change over time (Chambon et al., 1997).

David Hulchanski, a Professor of social work at the University of Toronto (1997), has argued that ethnicity, race and gender all play an integral role in shaping access to the basic

necessities in society. He is particularly interested in the impacts of these characteristics on social integration more generally. Hulchanski concludes that if such (primary) barriers arise, full incorporation will not be fully attained by many newcomers. According to the study, people tend to view race as immutable and as inextricably bound with skin color. This visible marker is a key barrier for many black immigrants seeking rental accommodations. Participants noted that being a young black male often was seen to imply the presence of drug use and violence. Social class was viewed as a product of income, skin color, accent and cultural behaviours. Among black immigrants, males face the greatest barriers in the housing market. The stereotypes associated with this group often imply a stigmatization despite one's former social class and educational background. Turning from this specific example to the larger story, Hulchanski concludes that there are real barriers that translate in to unequal access to housing for many new immigrants. Negative stereotypes, prejudice and ethnocentrism are the underlying motivators for unequal incorporation into the Canadian housing market.

Additional research has been conducted by the same group in Toronto, focusing on the structural dynamics and obstacles that constrain housing choices for many newcomers. Approximately 60 percent of private households in Toronto are home owners. The remaining 40 percent are divided between the private (75 percent) and public or social (25 percent) housing sectors (Murdie and Teixeira, 2001). Within the private rental sector, approximately half of the rental market is purpose built. More recently this sector of the rental market has become less accessible, especially for immigrants. The remaining half of the rental market consists of rented houses and condominiums, apartments in houses, and social housing. These less conventional forms of rental accommodations have increased in significance recently. Robert Murdie and Carlos Teixeira (2001), both geographers, write that immigrant households have had a high

demand for large private rental accommodations. However, there have been no new rental developments of this type in Toronto during the latter part of the 1990s. Moreover, vacancy rates are extremely low for large rental units. The result has been a constant 'bidding war' for apartments, which has led to inflated prices. To further aggravate the housing situation for new immigrants and refugees, the authors report that since 1997, there have been no new social housing projects, owing to recent federal and provincial funding cuts. A high demand for subsidized housing coupled with an extremely limited supply has resulted in a ten-year waiting list for upwards of 40,000 households. The size of affordable dwellings also poses a great concern for many immigrant families, owing to larger than (Canadian) average family sizes. Murdie and Teixeira (2001) have indicated that 20 percent of immigrants live in households with more than five members, as compared to 10 percent of non-immigrant households. In a collaborative research project with MOSAIC, Faranak Miraftab (2000) conducted a study surveying the housing barriers faced by recent Kurdish and Somali refugees in Vancouver. The author found that both groups of refugees were composed of larger than average family sizes. As a result of asylum-seeking circumstances, the author also found that both groups of refugees were likely to have fragmented households, since spontaneous flight often results in some family members being left behind. Lone-parent families are therefore common for these groups.

Administrative practices create additional obstacles for newcomers. Miraftab (2000) reports that, for new refugees, administrative challenges can significantly affect the quality and rate at which adequate housing is attained. The lack of available information provided to newcomers is an undeniable barrier, and this is further evident in the ambiguity surrounding subsidized housing in Canada. Refugees are particularly limited in knowledge surrounding the process and availability of public housing. In addition, the selection process is largely covert and

therefore newcomers are unsure of who, exactly, qualifies for it. Language barriers within the application system exacerbate this problem. Since political and military crises occur throughout the world, refugee migration often arises from non-traditional source regions in terms of Canadian immigration, and refugees therefore do not have the same access to social support or established networks to assist with housing applications. The absence of legal documents also creates tensions. The law requires recipients of public benefits to provide identity documents. However, refugees coming from war-torn situations often arrive without identification, and in some cases children born in refugee camps have never been issued birth documentation (Miraftab, 2000).

The First Contact Project was planned and developed through the collaboration of the Toronto Region Canadian Red Cross and the City of Toronto's Refugee Housing Task Group. Through this research initiative, Bushra Junaid (2002) has attempted to investigate settlement trajectories of recent refugee claimants and to offer a pilot support service. The author began the research with the premise that refugee claimants require a sound and stable reception, which includes access to information and social support (as occurs in many European countries). First contacts within Canada and initial reactions to the new environment set the stage for future experiences. In addition, even though refugees may experience similar obstacles with integration, refugee needs vary considerably by gender, age, race, culture, language, religion and economic background. These factors have profound consequences on the viability of finding suitable housing. Discrimination, language problems and lack of knowledge surrounding the housing market may contribute to homelessness among refugees (Junaid, 2002).

This study interviewed sixty refugee claimants and determined that there are profound gaps within the reception process. The study found a lack of services within the ports of entry



(airports), which direct refugee claimants to adequate shelter, legal and health services. Moreover, the report detailed that refugees arriving at these ports of entry are not provided with sufficient information regarding available services. Refugees are not always provided with means of transportation to take them to proper shelter. Once the refugee manages to find transportation, the author notes that shelters with available emergency beds are limited. Service organizations often lack funding, or the available staff is under-trained, to deal with the complexities of the refugee settlement process. The author reports that, of the agencies studied, 80 percent provided services to refugee claimants; however, only 30 percent of them were funded to serve this particular group. The availability of legal assistance is also precarious. The lack of available resources and insufficient information about services creates a rigid settlement situation, which makes refugees vulnerable to homelessness (Junaid, 2002).

A prominent, albeit disturbing barrier that is emphasized within much of the literature is discrimination, which appears to be prevalent within the Canadian housing market. The Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) commissioned a project by Sylvia Novac, Joe Darden, David Hulchanski, Anne-Marie Seguin, and Francine Berneche (2002), entitled *Housing Discrimination in Canada: The State of Knowledge*, which details research conducted over the last forty years. The authors report that there is sufficient evidence to conclude that discrimination has been and continues to be an issue for many groups in Canada. Discrimination is particularly present in the private-rental sector, and primarily affects racial minority groups and women (Novac et al., 2002).

The authors report that between 1950 and 1990, 21 quantitative studies had been conducted on housing discrimination in Canada. The first study in Canada that sought to assess perceived racial discrimination was conducted by Henry (1969). This research revealed that in

Hamilton, black residents reported high levels of racial discrimination within the housing market. Henry found that blacks were concentrated in poor inner city areas and their housing quality was well below average. The report also states that 20 percent of housing-related complaints expressed by Henry's black participants were related to discrimination (Henry, 1969). One study conducted by The Canadian Newcomers African Aid Centre (Kasozi, 1989) found that out of 250 black respondents in Toronto, 43 percent had encountered discrimination in the housing market based on their race or class. More importantly, few of these black immigrants ever reported instances of racial discrimination to relevant authorities. The report concluded that racial discrimination constitutes a significant barrier to integration for black immigrants in Toronto.

A study conducted by D'Souza and the Centre for Equality Rights in Accommodation (1992) further confirmed the prevalence of racial discrimination within the housing market. The study found that women of colour, particularly single mothers, were most likely to experience discrimination (D'Souza, 1992). A pilot test was conducted in 1986 using both black and white single women as auditors in order to assess actual instances of racial discrimination in Toronto's rental market (Henry, 1989). The study found that out of 73 housing tests, 31 cases revealed racial discrimination, which included black females being notified of no vacancies (when a vacancy was available for white females), higher rents for black females than white females, and different availability dates given to the black females (Henry, 1989). Although all of the studies found evidence of discrimination, however, the research has been limited by small samples and methodological considerations. As such, it lacks the systematic knowledge needed for the purposes of policy development. Research on discrimination has focused primarily on the rental market and, therefore, little information exists regarding discrimination within the housing

(purchase) market, mortgage lending system, and home insurance. Past research is furthermore geographically limited (Novac et al, 2002). Canada does not have the detailed studies assessing housing discrimination prominent within the US context (Hulchanski, 1997). The areas in Canada that have been studied include: Montreal, Hamilton, Winnipeg and Toronto, with few cross-Ontario surveys. Novac et al. (2002) call for more multi-site and national research. Finally, past research has tended to focus on the experiences of either racial minorities or women, but these groups have rarely been examined together (i.e., by studies that detail the experiences of minority women) (Novac et al, 2002).

Miraftab (2000), concentrating on the refugee population of Vancouver, found that various forms of discrimination constitute barriers limiting refugees in their search for accommodation. She concludes that sheer racism was the primary form of discrimination, and that refugees are often refused accommodation based on their skin colour. Ethno-religious cultural practices also enter the equation, and specific attire or forms of cooking, for example, can be targets of discrimination. Finally, the source of household income also matters, and welfare recipients are often targeted (Miraftab, 2000). Miraftab asserts that these forms of discrimination against refugees, whether perceived or real, are significant, as they may trigger self-exclusion. When visible minorities sense the presence of discrimination, many limit their housing searches to areas populated by similar people. This, in itself, poses further obstacles in finding decent housing (Miraftab, 2000).

As a result of the obstacles faced by newcomers, access to housing is significantly compromised. Zine's (2002) work provides a kind of summary to this section. She explains that - for any household -- access to stable and affordable housing is made possible by a combination of social, cultural, economic and political factors. Structural barriers, such as high rent prices,

lack of social housing, long waiting lists and low vacancy rates, are intersected by reduced social assistance, legislation that generally favours landlords, and the lack of political intervention in housing crises. These factors are mediated by micro barriers such as race, ethnicity, gender, immigration status, age, religion and sexuality. Immigrants and refugees suffer further vulnerabilities as a result of their migration, such as economic instability, lack of knowledge of new cultural norms, language barriers, and unrecognized educational credentials in the labour market. Therefore, the multiple sites of disadvantage faced by immigrants and refugees, result in *differential incorporation*, which refers to unequal opportunities faced by particular groups (Chambon et al., 1997). This differential incorporation means that immigrants, refugees, and asylum claimants are most likely to experience housing stress and/or homelessness.

## **Responding with Strategies**

In response to the challenging circumstances that immigrants endure in the housing market, various strategies and/or coping mechanisms have been developed. Following the *life course perspective*, Chambon et al. (1997) argue that housing needs are given first priority by newcomers. Once settled into appropriate housing, the educational needs of their children are assessed, followed by the immigrants' own job training and labour market opportunities. For many new immigrants, then, housing is essentially the primary step in successful settlement.

It is important to realize that the traditional inner-city immigrant reception areas have been bypassed and the search for housing is now mainly taking place around the city fringes. According to Murdie and Teixeira (2001), three factors are especially prominent in the suburbanized settlement process currently under way by refugees from Somalia and Ghana: housing affordability, particularly in older suburbs; highly structured social networks in the housing search process; and employment opportunities in manufacturing situated in the suburbs

of Toronto. These factors have yielded a settlement pattern that is significantly different from that of previous generations. This newer pattern of settlement among recent immigrants and refugees hampers the ability to build institutionally-complete ethnic neighbourhoods, since newcomers settle in proximity but not in large numbers in any one location. This point is reinforced by Owusu (1999) who found that Ghanaians have a high propensity to settle in social housing in Toronto, which is scattered in relatively small clusters throughout the middle-distance suburbs. They are therefore spatially concentrated but not in a single location with the critical population mass required to support a thriving ethnic economy and attendant social services.

Recent research by Murdie and Teixeira (2001) describes immigrant and refugee strategies to finding affordable housing. However, in addition to cost, many immigrants experience additional barriers related to the size of their households. Rental accommodations, both private and public, are not designed for large families. Research conducted by Miraftab (2000) revealed that many refugees felt obligated to be dishonest about the size of their family in order to negotiate a contract. Family members were later 'smuggled' in after accommodations were attained. Overcrowding is prevalent among many refugee households. These conditions often lead to tensions among family members and increase the likelihood of domestic violence (Miraftab, 2000). Chambon et al. (1997) report similar developments in Montreal. Somalis particularly encountered problems related to family size and the need for appropriately sized housing. As in the Vancouver case, Somali immigrants in Toronto occasionally hid family members from landlords in order to compete for rental units. The consequence is often overcrowding, since rental apartments are generally limited to smaller households. In addition, immigrants face the potential for eviction if they are caught hiding additional family members. In

these situations families are subject to frequent moves, placing greater financial strain on the household and inciting potential psychological problems.

In a research project funded by the Vancouver Centre of Excellence, David Ley, Peter Murphy, Kris Olds, and Bill Randolph (2001) note that multiple family households are disproportionately associated with immigrants, especially visible minorities, in Vancouver. The authors contend that 'doubling up' helps to inflate household income and therefore allows households of modest means to afford larger rental units. Multiple family households are also sometimes seen as economic strategies drawn upon to cope with economic and emotional tribulations. In addition, larger households may increase the likelihood of homeownership (Ley et al., 2001).

Regardless of household composition, family members and friends are instrumental in housing searches for newcomers. Drawing on the work of Mark Granovetter (1994), Ray (1998) discusses the importance of social networks in the housing choices of immigrants in Toronto and Montreal. The strength of bonds tying people together is usually related to the time spent together, level of trust, and reciprocity that exists. Strong ties are characterized by intense relationships, namely those between relatives and friends. Weak ties are less intense and are limited to acquaintances, and are believed to link various social networks together. The scale of one's social network is directly related to one's length of time in Canada. Both strong and weak networks have been shown to be influential in providing newcomers with practical assistance and knowledge surrounding the housing market. However, Ray reports that recent immigrants to Toronto and Montreal have an inadequate support base. He suggests that newcomers are required to make decisions based on limited knowledge. This is particularly the case for immigrants who have been in Canada for 5 year or less.

## Consequences

The settlement barriers experienced by immigrants and refugees, and the subsequent strategies established to overcome them, have a variety of consequences. The two most evident of these are residential concentration of both old and new waves of immigrants, and high levels of poverty among newcomers.

### Residential Patterns Among Immigrants

In their attempt to examine the association between visible minority ethnic enclaves and labour market segregation, Hou and Picot (2003) have re-examined the *spatial assimilation model*, placing it within a Canadian context. This model is based on the assumption that newcomers are often young and lack economic resources, and as a result, are forced to cluster into inner city ethnic enclaves. Over time, the model stipulates that newcomers are able to acquire economic resources and are therefore free to settle in more desirable neighbourhoods with greater amenities, usually found within the suburbs. That is, as immigrants gain socio-economic achievements, they convert them into improved settlement choices, and move away from ethnically clustered neighbourhoods, towards a greater degree of spatial assimilation with the majority group(s) (Massey and Denton, 1985). This model has, for nearly a century, dominated our understanding of settlement patterns among newcomers. Murdie and Teixeira (2001) explain that immigrants arriving in Toronto prior to 1970 often followed the paths associated with the spatial assimilation model. This pattern was evident as most immigrants settled close to the downtown core and later moved to the suburbs. The move to the suburbs was generally consistent with the shift from renting to home ownership, thereby signifying upward social mobility. This pattern of upward social mobility was characteristic of the large pre-World War II influx of European immigrants, as well as those who came in the 1950s and 1960s. More

recent sources of immigrants include a large portion from Asia and Africa. Many are relatively wealthy and well-educated especially migrants from Hong Kong, and increasingly Mainland China. But there are also many who arrive without financial resources or high levels of education, such as refugees from Vietnam, Sri Lanka and Somalia (Murdie and Teixeira, 2001).

In response to the weak literature base that exists in Canada, Hou and Picot (2003) set out to gauge spatial assimilation within Canada's three largest cities, Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver. Among recent immigrants, the authors had reported that there has been a dramatic increase in the extent to which a member of a visible minority group is exposed to members of his or her cultural group in the neighbourhood setting. More concretely, in 1981 the average recent Chinese immigrant to Toronto would find herself or himself in a neighbourhood where 10.6 percent of the population was also Chinese; however, by 1996, this figure had increased almost three-fold to 29 percent. Ethnic clustering was found to be prevalent among Chinese and South Asians in Vancouver and South Asians and Blacks in Toronto (Hou and Picot, 2003). The authors reveal that between 1980 and 1990, neighbourhood exposure to own-group members increased dramatically among visible minority immigrants. Moreover, as years spent in Canada increased, so did the level of same-group exposure. This finding leads the authors to conclude that, within the Canadian context, the spatial assimilation model is not suitable. With respect to settlement patterns and labour market experiences, the authors report complex findings. Chinese immigrants are the most spatially segregated in Canada; however, the association between exposure to own-group members and labour market outcomes (employment, segregation and earnings) was negative, albeit insignificant. This implies that although spatial clustering was found to have some limiting effects on the labour market experiences of Chinese immigrants, the significance of this association was weak. In contrast, the authors reported that, among black



immigrants, there was less exposure to own-group members, but that it mattered more. For this group, the negative association between spatial clustering and labour market outcomes was found to be strong, indicating that as exposure to other blacks increased, employment significantly decreased, and as segregation increased, earnings consequently decreased (Hou and Picot, 2003).

Hou and Picot (2004) further explore the increase of visible minorities within Canadian cities, and the construction of ethnic enclaves, between 1981-2002. They note that immigrants arriving in the latter part of the twentieth century have settled primarily in a few large metropolitan areas. In 2001, 73 percent of Canada's 4 million visible minorities lived in one of the three largest census metropolitan areas (CMAs): Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver. According to the 2001 census, 34 percent of visible minorities arrived in Canada during the 1990s, 33 percent entered Canada before 1991, and 30 percent are Canadian born. The largest visible minority groups in Toronto were South Asians, Chinese and Blacks; in Montreal, Blacks, Arabs and West Asians were the most populous groups; and in Vancouver, Chinese, South Asians and Filipinos were the most prominent. The authors define a "visible minority neighbourhood" as one with more than 30 percent of its population from a particular visible minority group. Between 1981 and 2001, the number of visible minority neighbourhoods increased dramatically within the three CMAs. In 1981, only 6 neighbourhoods fell within the definition, but there were 77 in 1991 and 254 in 2001 (Census Tracts are used as the spatial unit; see Hou and Picot, 2004). Adding to their earlier work (2003), they employ an *isolation index*, which measures the probability that a member from a given visible minority group will meet a person from the same visible minority group in a particular neighbourhood. In Toronto, the isolation index for Chinese citizens has increased substantially from 10 percent in 1981 to 26

percent in 2001. For South Asians in 2001, the index was 25 percent in Vancouver, 20 percent in Toronto and 12 percent in Montreal. The authors' explanation for the drastic increases in the isolation indices is the direct relationship between the size of a group and its isolation index. Since the population for visible minority groups have increased substantially, so too has their index values. Still, they see the rise in index values for some groups, notably Chinese-Canadians, as larger than would be expected simply by their population growth.

In a publication funded by Statistics Canada, Myles and Hou (2003) explore *Spatial Stratification Theory*, which adds to the spatial assimilation theory by highlighting the constraints upon spatial mobility that affect some visible minorities. In short, this theory posits that, despite the general process of spatial assimilation, visible minorities may face barriers when the majority group uses mechanisms of exclusion to create and maintain social distance between them and racial minorities (Myles and Hou, 2003). The authors test this theoretical proposition within the Toronto context and conclude that spatial assimilation is occurring among some groups and not others. Black and South Asian immigrants tend to follow the patterns predicted by spatial assimilation theory, whereby over time these groups will find themselves in neighbourhoods where the population resembles the composition of the total Canadian population. Apparently, these groups are not adversely affected by the exclusionary practices outlined in spatial stratification theory. In contrast, Chinese immigrants are found to maintain high levels of spatial segregation even after long-term stay, and after adopting English as their home language (Myles and Hou, 2003). The authors concur with work conducted by Logan, Alba and Zhang (2002) in the US, which argues that early settlement success, marked by rapid home ownership, may retard and/or postpone the spatial assimilation process. This, according to Myles and Hou, is the primary difference that sets apart Chinese immigrants from all other

newcomers. The high levels of financial and human capital possessed by recent Chinese immigrants enable them to create *ethnic communities*, whereas the residential patterns of black and South Asian immigrants are more consistent with *immigrant enclaves* associated with the spatial assimilation model.

In their research on social polarization and urban deprivation, Ley and Smith (2000) offer several important insights regarding the settlement and socio-spatial situation of immigrants in Canadian cities. The authors assessed the three largest Canadian cities based on four correlates of deprivation (lack of high school education, male unemployment, government transfer payments and female lone parent families). Ley and Smith report that many census tracts in Canada contain one, two or, in few cases, three of these deprivation indicators. This suggests a shallow pattern of deprivation in Canada, that is not based on intersecting forms of deprivation likely to be transmitted from parents to children (*cf* the American idea of a “culture of poverty”). This research sits well with Ley’s (1999) earlier work, which offers an optimistic image of immigrant success and the trend of upward mobility for visible minority groups. In this paper, Ley also notes that there is little evidence that Canadian’s are facing the establishment of an underclass in the ways that are evident in the US (Ley, 1999).

However, these generally optimistic conclusions are challenged in later work by Smith (2004). In updating the original analysis by using 2001 census data, and adding Montréal to the mix, Smith finds that the association between concentrated immigrant settlement and indices of poverty increased considerably over the 1990s. She continues to see the degree of marginalization in Canada as less extensive and alarming as that in the US, but nevertheless charts a trend towards three converging forms of concentration, between the location of immigrant settlement, visible minority communities, and low income.

Echoing this interpretation, Chambon et al. (1997) explain that immigrants who enter Canada with limited financial capital are restricted to the rental sector. In Toronto -- their case study -- public housing is generally clustered in less accessible, and less desirable, suburban areas. These pockets of public housing are often in proximity to low rent private apartment buildings. Murdie and Teixeira (2001) note that the limited stock of public housing administered by the Metropolitan Toronto Housing Authority (MTHA) amounts to just 124 developments scattered across Toronto. These dwellings tend to be utilized by low-income families, lone-parent households and visible minorities. The authors therefore express concern over the potential creation of social ghettos, since many families are faced with few alternatives.

Inner city neighbourhoods have traditionally been sites of immigrant settlement. However, as these areas experience redevelopment, property prices and rent levels rise, and many immigrants are unable to afford living in these neighbourhoods (Hiebert, 2000). Owusu (1999) reports that the pattern of suburban settlement among Ghanaian migrants is similar to the residential patterns of other recent immigrant groups. However, suburban settlement differs from older patterns of inner-city settlement. Post-war suburbs are sites of affordable apartment developments, along with financially accessible townhouses. Therefore, this transition from urban to suburban settlement marks new social geographies for recent immigrants (Owusu, 1999), but the dynamic is still similar to the traditional one: most newcomers search for affordable shelter.

In a comparative study of immigrant housing, neighbourhoods and social networks in Toronto and Montreal, funded by the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation, Ray (1998) examines the geography of housing of various visible minority groups. In order to contest static ideas of the 'immigrant experience', Ray uses a comparative approach and finds that there are

considerable socio-economic, demographic and cultural differences within each city's immigrant population. As with other authors already discussed (*cf* Burnley and Hiebert, 2002), Ray's findings indicate the importance of suburban initial settlement. In the two cities, Jamaican, Haitian, Vietnamese and Central American immigrants are most likely to be renters, living in apartments, and to be spending more than 30 percent of their income on housing. The author also notes that even after long periods of time in Canada, the housing status of both Jamaicans (in Toronto) and Haitians (in Montreal) remains considerably lower than the British/French population, but also lower than recent Chinese and South Asian immigrants. The geographies of immigrant groups, particularly Jamaicans and Haitians, are influenced by the location of affordable high and low-rise apartments with the city.

### **Poverty and Homelessness**

In many cases the barriers that newcomers face in the housing market cannot be overcome, despite the use of strategies discussed earlier. The reality is that newcomers are significantly more at risk of living in poverty than the average Canadian-born person. Moreover, rising levels of poverty among immigrants may consequently imply rising levels of homelessness for these same groups.

In 2001, Kevin Lee (2000) conducted a study of urban poverty in Canada, which was funded by the Canadian Council on Social Development in Ottawa. His aim was to identify the population groups that are more vulnerable to poverty within Canada. Initial conclusions indicate that those who are young (aged 15 to 24) and those who are older (aged 75 and older) have the highest instances of poverty. In addition, women in every age group are most likely to live in poverty than men. In 1995, 30 percent of immigrants residing in urban areas were living below the poverty line, compared with 21.6 percent of Canadian-born residents. The author reports that

poverty levels dropped for those who have been residents of Canada a long time: those arriving in Canada prior to 1986 had a poverty rate of 19.6 percent, compared with 52.1 percent for those considered *recent* immigrants (arriving between 1991 and 1996) (Lee, 2000). The study shows that over 40 percent of the immigrant population lives in poverty in certain cities, such as Montreal, Quebec, Hull, Sherbrooke, and Longueuil. Moreover, in Richmond Hill, Coquitlam and Markham, the poverty rate for immigrants was four times that of the Canadian born. Lee connects poverty to the labour market and notes that language and cultural barriers often hinder employment opportunities. More importantly, many immigrants often experience discrimination in the workplace and, as is widely known, the difficulties associated with credential recognition. Also, labour market segmentation plays a role. Many immigrants work in the parts of the manufacturing sector that are marked by low wages and few prospects to move up the employment ladder. However, the author optimistically notes that poverty appears to decline as immigrants spend more time in Canada, thereby suggesting it is a temporary issue.

*Poverty by Postal Code*, a report jointly prepared by the United Way of Greater Toronto and The Canadian Council on Social Development, examines the changing spatial concentration of poverty in Toronto between 1981 and 2001. The report discusses the rapid increase of neighbourhood poverty in Toronto. The most vulnerable groups are lone parents, youth and children. Significantly for this research project, poverty, once largely composed of Canadian-born citizens in 1981, is now predominately associated with visible minorities and new immigrants. In 1981, 14.8 percent of immigrant families lived in poverty, as opposed to 12 percent of Canadian-born families. However, by 2001, the proportions had risen to 24 percent and 14.7 percent for immigrant and Canadian born families respectively. By 2001, immigrants accounted for 65 percent of the total 'poor' population in Toronto, while non-immigrants made

up only 35 percent of this total. The proportion of ‘poor’ immigrant families constituted less than half of the total ‘poor’ population in 1981. According to the report, ‘poor’ visible minority families (measured by Statistics Canada’s low-income cut-off level) have increased 362 percent, while the proportion of ‘poor’ non-visible minority families have decreased by 28 percent (United Way for Greater Toronto and The Canadian Council on Social Development, 2004).

Poverty within Toronto has increased dramatically over the last two decades. The report uses Statistic Canada’s gauge of neighbourhood poverty, which defines a neighbourhood (actually, a census tract) to be in a state of ‘high’ poverty when 26-39 percent of the population is living below the pre-tax low-income cut-off level. In 1981, there were 26 neighbourhoods (census tracts) in this category. This number increased to 57 in 1991, and by 2001 the number had jumped to 97 (out of about 900). Likewise, in 1981 there were only 4 poor neighbourhoods deemed to be ‘very high’ on the poverty measure (40 percent plus living below the poverty line), but by 2001 this number had increased to 23. The report explains that the most distinct pattern associated with the increase of poverty in Toronto is the diffusion of poverty to the inner-suburbs. In Toronto the traditional poverty ‘U’ shape describes the pattern of poverty that coincided with the main public housing developments of the 1960s and 1970s (Jane and Finch in the northwestern part of the city, down through the former city of York, to Parkdale, across the southern part of the city to Alexander Park, Regent Park and Moss Park, and across various neighbourhoods in Scarborough). This ‘U’ shape has been replaced with an ‘O’ pattern as poverty is now affecting northern suburban areas. This suburban extension of poverty is most notable in Etobicoke, the former city of North York and over much of Scarborough (United Way for Greater Toronto and The Canadian Council on Social Development, 2004).

## Homelessness

Defining homelessness has always proved to be contentious, and the particular definition adopted in a study will influence results, particularly in terms of the number of people included in the category of homeless. Further, the definition chosen will affect policy, since the scope of provisions and assistance are directly linked to the scale of homelessness that is identified.

According to a CMHC report written by Peressini, McDonald and Hulchanski (1995), the generally accepted definition for *homelessness* is the lack permanent shelter where one might sleep. In this manner, we come to understand homelessness as a visible phenomenon, whereby those affected by the lack of housing are evident in public spaces. However, this narrow definition of homelessness is not definitive. More recently, the literature on homelessness has tended to problematize the concept by contesting narrow definitions of the term (May, 2000: Valentine, 2001; Veness, 1993). Valentine (2001) evaluates homelessness as a continuum between being housed and being without a home. Drawing on the definition provided by the United Nations, Peressini et al. (1995) further divide the definition of homelessness into categories: *absolute homelessness* and *relative homelessness*. The former definition refers to those people who live without shelter and therefore reside on the streets or rely on public facilities such as emergency shelters. In contrast, relative homelessness refers to those people who possess shelter, but are subject to substandard, unsafe and/or temporary conditions. This latter group includes those people who ‘sofa surf’ or ‘camp out’ in often overcrowded dwellings belonging to either friends or family.

To understand homelessness as a spectrum ranging from absolute to relative (or hidden) homelessness, is to begin to understand that homelessness in itself is a fluid phenomenon. Begin, Casavant, Chenier and Depuis (1999) of the Canadian Parliamentary Research Branch draw on the argument that homelessness is characterized more by the instability of adequate housing



rather than the absolute absence of accommodation over a long period of time. There has also been a more recent reconceptualization of homelessness as more than just an issue of 'rooflessness'. Homelessness suggests more than just being without a house; instead, it implies to be without a 'home'. The home is more than just a place of shelter, it is tied to personal identity, family relations and one's place within the community (Baxter, 1991)

Zine (2002) also contests common notions of homelessness as merely an inner-city problem. The author explains that homelessness is a multidimensional process that consists of varying forms and degrees: homelessness affects nearly all neighbourhoods, including the suburbs (Zine, 2002). Kissoon (2000) adds a dimension to this point by asserting that homelessness is not a spontaneous occurrence. It is crucial to focus on a person's housing history, as their successes and failures shape the state of homelessness. Furthermore, for homeless people, the current situation may be merely one episode in a continuum of housing experiences. In seeing one's situation as a single event in a housing career, it allows for a greater understanding of the housing dilemma. Research therefore needs to take into account the number of dwellings occupied by a person, over what period of time, various social dynamics, etc. Kissoon (2000) contends that such a holistic perspective is conducive to developing greater preventative strategies.

### **Explanations**

The City of Vancouver Housing Centre (2004) has reported that homelessness has increased dramatically and visually manifested over the last decade. Deindustrialization has altered the state of the economy and subsequently the general opportunities available to the working class. The restructuring of the economy has increased the gap between the rich and the poor. This has, in effect, increased poverty rates and magnified economic marginalization within

the city and throughout suburban areas. At the same time Canada's welfare state has been shrinking in scope, given the shift towards neoliberal fiscal policy. These ideological and institutional changes have altered long standing generous social provisions. Such shifts have occurred without full recognition of the short and long-term repercussions on homelessness. For example deinstitutionalizing the mentally ill has occurred without adequate community resources to absorb those affected (City of Vancouver, 2004). Throughout the 1990's, reductions in the welfare state included reduced funding for housing, welfare assistance and healthcare. Moreover, the value of welfare support has declined dramatically in real terms, as provinces failed to adjust welfare rates to reflect inflation and increasing costs within the housing market (Hulchanski, 2004).

The increase of homelessness can therefore be understood as a juxtaposition of the economic marginalization of individuals and families alongside the declining rates of affordable and adequate housing. Demographic changes, including an aging population and increased immigration, have worked to exacerbate social and economic changes associated with the shrinking welfare state (Wolch and Dear, 1993). According to David Hulchanski (2004), homelessness can be caused by a combination of a lack of one of the following: affordable housing; adequate housing; and/or support services. The restructuring of the economy and the welfare state have clearly affected the prevalence of all three of these risk factors.

### **Enumerating**

Attaining an objective measure of the entire homeless population has proven to be difficult, both because homeless people are often 'hidden' from view, but also because of varying definitions of *homelessness*. Estimates that focus on absolute forms of homelessness target visible groups that reside on the streets and in shelters. However this definition ignores the

vast number of people living in temporary and substandard circumstances. By including this latter group into a definition of homelessness, the estimate of those living within the spectrum of homelessness will be much larger. In a study of the homeless population, Peressini, McDonald and Hulchanski (1995) note that enumeration is also contingent upon the methods of counting the homeless. The authors report eight basic methods that have been employed, which include censuses and one night counts, key person surveys, adaptations of area probability designs, service based designs, and automated client-tracking systems. Significantly, the authors note that these methods are not designed to actually ‘count’ the entire homeless population, that is, to enact a full enumeration. Instead these strategies are designed to estimate the size of the homeless population by statistical sampling procedures (Peressini et al., 1995).

Varying methods of counting the homeless will produce diverse results. Further, the spatial and temporal context in which these methods are deployed is also crucial. Simply put, different study locations will yield different estimates of the homeless population. To find those who are roofless, researchers focus on public spaces such as parks, or in emergency shelters. This group of homeless individuals is extremely difficult to enumerate owing to their high levels of mobility. Relative, or what is often called hidden, homelessness is generally not in plain view of society, and therefore presents different challenges to enumeration. Timing is another extremely important detail that will alter population counts. Seasonal differences bring about a different visual picture, as there is more visible homelessness in the warmer seasons. In addition, dates surrounding the distribution of welfare aid also affect the housing conditions of all of those living within the spectrum of homelessness. These factors need to be considered in order to avoid the problems of over and under counting the homeless.

## **Estimating**

In their research surrounding homelessness among the refugee population in Toronto, Ryan and Woodill (2000) further contest static notions of homelessness. The authors argue that for refugees, homelessness does not simply imply being without shelter. Among newcomers, especially refugees, homelessness may be seen as a separation from one's family, history and culture. This feeling of detachment suggests a state of emotional isolation, which may translate into feelings of hopelessness. The authors therefore assert that for many refugees, being homeless essentially involves, not only a loss of shelter, but moreover a loss of the social aspects of a home (Ryan and Woodill, 2000).

In a comprehensive study of homelessness in the GVRD, Woodward et al. (2002) acknowledge the temporal continuum of homelessness. People who are homeless today may have been housed yesterday and subsequently may find appropriate housing tomorrow. In order to assess the number of households at risk of homelessness, the authors employed a method created by the CMHC called *In Core Housing Need and Spending at Least Half their Income on Shelter* (INALH) with one modification that includes aboriginal households. The study concludes with some disturbing findings that indicate that between 1991 and 1996 there was an increase from 39,005 to 57,685 households at-risk of homelessness in Greater Vancouver. People between the ages of 25 and 44 years face the greatest risk of becoming homelessness. This precarious situation is shared by single-person households, women, and immigrants. The last two of these groups constitutes 51 and 41 percent of the 131,000 at-risk persons in the GVRD. Further, the findings indicate that Aboriginal people are at the greatest risk of homelessness. Significantly, according to the report, members of a visible minority made up 40 percent of at-risk persons.

Currently, there are growing numbers of studies on the following topics: immigration and housing in Canada (Chambon et al., 1997; Hulchanski, 1997; Junaid, 2002; Murdie and Teixeira, 2001; Miraftab, 2000; Owusu, 1999); poverty (Lee, 2000; United Way for Greater Toronto and The Canadian Council on Social Development, 2004); and homelessness in Canadian cities (Talbot and Associates, 2001; Woodward et al., 2002; Zine, 2002). However there appears to be a gap in the literature in the sense that the intersections between these concerns are not well explored.

## **Conclusion**

Finding accessible housing is a process that, for many, is hampered by significant challenges and obstacles. Immigrants and visible minorities are clearly at a disadvantage within the housing market. Newcomers frequently face a combination of primary barriers, such as skin color, gender, culture and religion, which impede their access to appropriate housing. The fact that immigrants are generally at an economic disadvantage after landing in Canada, and often lack supportive social networks, further hinders their housing search. These individual barriers intersect with structural or macro-level obstacles such as the limited supply of housing, and increasing rent prices.

In order to respond to the obstacles that impede their access to housing, immigrants have employed a number of strategies. However, despite these attempts, immigrants and visible minorities are much more vulnerable than the Canadian-born to poverty and associated problems securing shelter. The prevalent level of relative, or hidden, homelessness also raises concern, given the number of immigrants that are living in substandard conditions, or paying rents that are beyond their means. The literature base that concentrates on both immigrants and homelessness together is decidedly limited. Therefore, given the increasing poverty levels among newcomers,

and the lack of existing research, further attention should be devoted to the settlement trajectories of immigrants and refugees in the lower tier of the housing market.

On the basis of the literature review, we defined homelessness broadly as a spectrum of conditions that ranges across the following categories:

- Housing stress: households spending more than 30% of their income on shelter.
- Critical housing stress: households spending more than 50% of their income on shelter.
- Relative homelessness: individuals or households who are in temporary accommodations, such as “sofa surfing” or “camping out” with family members or friends.
- Absolute homelessness: individuals or households who are in shelters or, worse, living without shelter.

These categories inform much of the literature on homelessness, though different researchers label them differently. They also inform the 2002 GVRD study of this issue. Our study was specifically dedicated to the third and fourth categories, but also sheds light on the first two as well.

Before turning to our results, we wish to emphasize a point related to the geographical distribution of immigrants, refugees, and refugee claimants in Greater Vancouver. Over the past 20 years or so, the settlement of these groups in metropolitan Vancouver has become decentralized to a great extent. Generally speaking, the system of services supporting newcomers was established long before this dramatic shift. Some settlement agencies have emerged in peripheral suburbs, and others have developed suburban subsidiary offices. Still, there appears to be a mismatch between the rich set of services available to newcomers in the inner area (especially the eastside of the City of Vancouver) and the contemporary suburban choices made by newcomers. This issue forms a sub-theme of our project, and we will pay particular attention to the potential gaps that have formed given the different landscapes of service provision and the residential trajectories of newcomer groups.

## **Part 2: Methodology**

In approaching this research, and in light of the complexities in defining and enumerating homelessness, we have chosen to adopt an evidence-based, multiple points of contact study combining both qualitative and quantitative methods. Our intent is to create a profile of absolute and relative homelessness among immigrants, refugees and refugee claimants in the GVRD. The project was composed of three sub-studies, each of which focuses on a particular aspect of homelessness. This section of the report details the methods employed in the sub-sections, and discusses both issues that arose in the course of the research and steps that were taken to rectify these difficulties.

### **Sub-Study 1: The Shelter Survey**

The purpose of this sub-study was to examine those experiencing absolute homelessness by developing a portrait of the immigrant and refugee population using emergency shelters and transition houses. This sub-study involved a combination of approaches including interviews with shelter personnel, and the compilation and analysis of data collected by shelter personnel over a specified period of time.<sup>2</sup> Key informant interviews were conducted with frontline and managerial workers at shelters and transition houses in the GVRD. In so doing, our hope was to engage their knowledge base about their clients. In addition, we sought to conduct a systemic survey of shelters that was to be administered by their staff over a seven day period. The research team did not talk to anyone, directly, in the shelter population.

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<sup>2</sup> While we had initially hoped to include analysis of the Homeless Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS) data in our study, problems in the collection and dissemination of HIFIS data have prevented us from doing so.

The target population for this project included all homeless people in the GVRD. The sampling frame for this project included all individuals who used emergency shelters and transition houses in the GVRD during a specified period of seven days. Our objective was to discern the proportion of the population using these facilities that are immigrants, refugees, and refugee claimants, by collecting basic demographic information (language, country of origin, etc) at intake.<sup>3</sup>

We began the study by aiming for 100 percent participation in two regards: first, a representative from each of the 34 shelters and transition houses in the GVRD was invited to participate in the project (both in the initial focus group and key informant interviews), and second we requested that participating organizations collect information on all clients who accessed their services during the agreed upon period(s). We found these goals impossible to attain. Despite persistent efforts, a number of shelters did not respond to our requests for information or meetings. Further, some of the agencies that consented to be part of our study declined at the last minute.

### **Key Informant Interviews**

Twelve semi-structured interviews (2 group, 10 individual) were conducted with key informants from emergency shelters and second stage transition houses in the GVRD (see Appendix B for the interview schedule for Key Informant Interviews).<sup>4</sup> These shelters and transition houses were located in Vancouver (including Downtown, Vancouver West, Vancouver South), New Westminster, Richmond and Delta. Our key informants included:

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<sup>3</sup> A decision was made to include Youth-specific shelters in the shelter enumeration. Although this project examines adult immigrants and their dependents, the inclusion of shelter data from Youth-specific shelters may provide valuable information not available elsewhere in the study.

<sup>4</sup> One group interview was conducted with 2 people, while the other was conducted with 4 people.



- 3 Executive Directors,
- 1 Program Director,
- 4 Shelter/Program Managers,
- 1 Coordinator,
- 3 Outreach Workers,
- 2 Support/Case Workers, and
- 2 Front Desk Staff.

The format of the agencies involved varied from mat programs (i.e., clients sleep on the floor) to individual apartments, and included shelters designated specifically for men, women, women and children, families and one youth-specific agency. Although the capacity of the agencies ranged from 8 to 75 people, many of the participating agencies have either multiple locations or types of housing (e.g. emergency, transition, independent living) under their umbrella organization. There is some variability in regulations between the organizations. In general, shelters serving men have maximum stays of 7-14 days per month, while those serving women have maximum stays of 30 days. Further, men are required to be out of the shelter during the day, while women, and women and children's shelters, did not have this stipulation.

Over half of the agencies we interviewed have contracts with the BC Ministry of Human Resources (MHR); as such they can only accept clients who meet the criteria established by the Ministry.

Respondents in ten of the twelve interviews spoke of liaising with other agencies or organizations, and engaging in wider advocacy work. The degree of advocacy performed by the individuals and organizations interviewed varied from those who help provide clients with necessary information (e.g. providing clients with applications for BC Housing, directing them to appropriate services, or helping them get into the system – e.g. MHR) to those who assist in

family justice matters or accompany clients with multiple barriers to appointments. Others reported their involvement in multiple committees on poverty and homelessness in the GVRD.

### **Shelter Survey**

Shelter staff at participating agencies were asked to administer a systemic survey of clients accessing their shelter over a seven day period. In early July, the research team conducted a focus group with a sample of shelter representatives from around the GVRD. The purpose of the focus group was to introduce the study and obtain feedback on how to structure the study. Participants voiced the need to take into consideration various factors associated with the timing of data collection. The numbers of people relying on shelters varies according to the weather (e.g. cold/wet weather vs. hot/dry weather) and the number of refugee arrivals (with some seasons having higher numbers). In addition, the focus group raised the need to account for the distribution of income assistance. Accordingly, a decision was made to change the Shelter Data collection from one seven day period to three- two day periods and one-24 hour period between October and December 2004. Further, participants were shown a preliminary copy of the Shelter data collection checklist and asked for input as to which variables were most relevant to the study (see Appendix C for Shelter Data Collection Sheet).

Shelter representatives were asked to complete one checklist for each client who accessed their shelter on the requested dates, regardless of whether or not they were able to provide assistance. A decision was made to use a paper format of a lightly modified Homeless Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS) data collection sheet. A number of shelters indicated a preference for the paper format (e.g. due to dissatisfaction with HIFIS; broken computers; or HIFIS has not been implemented). Furthermore, the decision to use a paper format

(as opposed to a mixture of paper and computer formats) facilitated easier data entry. In total, 261 completed shelter data collection checklists were returned.

*Problems and issues that have arisen in the shelter survey*

Of the 34 shelters contacted, 19 agreed to participate. All shelters that agreed to participate were alerted before each data collection date by either mail or telephone. Despite repeated contacts, however, only ten shelters (covering Vancouver [Downtown, Downtown Eastside, Vancouver West and Vancouver South], Richmond, and Delta) returned our shelter data checklists. Although shelters were asked to collect information on all clients who accessed the shelter (regardless of whether they could be helped), the extent to which shelters complied varied significantly. In some cases, information was collected only on new arrivals, while in others information was collected on only one or two of the dates. There are at least two potential causes for this partial degree of participation in the study. First, shelters are chronically understaffed, and they have little time to deal with extra tasks; secondly, we did not include any form of compensation for shelters in our budget, and therefore had no incentives to offer for participation. Certainly the visits to shelters by the research team confirmed the understaffing issue. As noted, the lack of compensation may have influenced participation rates on the part of the shelters. Given the lack of compensation, our request served to increase staff workload without any promise of remuneration. Future efforts to engage with shelters should include some form of compensation similar to that offered to immigrant and refugee-serving agencies and the refugee-claimant participants in the other portions of this study.

While NSH strongly encouraged us to utilize HIFIS in our sub-study, this has not proven easy to do. On December 14, 2004 Kathy Sherrell, the Homelessness Research Coordinator, attended a one-day HIFIS conference in Vancouver. The meeting was informative, not only in

learning about the successful implementation of HIFIS in other regions as well as the planned implementation here, but also in revealing the fraught relationship between shelters represented at the one-day conference and the HIFIS program. To date, only two data-sharing protocols have been signed in the Lower Mainland region. It is not possible, then, to request the HIFIS coordinator to prepare a report for the dates specified for our project. The HRSDC BC/Yukon Regional Coordinator has encouraged us to contact the National Help Desk to inquire how to prepare a report, after which we would have to return to each shelter to show them how to prepare the report, and then request that they prepare reports for each of the requested dates. Given the problems of participation and the degree of understaffing in shelters, a decision has been made not to pursue HIFIS information. Instead, we have elected to contact Dan Garrison from the GVRD Homelessness Unit, and James Pratt who is involved with the Cold/Wet Weather Strategy, to see if they have any suggestions to deal with the ‘sketchy data’ that has been collected. Mr. Pratt has subsequently forwarded the Cold/Wet Weather Strategy statistics, which are drawn upon in the remainder of the report, when appropriate.

### *Methodological Issues*

Our shelter count was conducted over a period of 3 months. As such the potential exists for the same person to be counted multiple times. When appropriate, gender, age, and immigration status filters have been used to eliminate the second and any subsequent entries for the same person. In other instances (e.g., source of income, reasons for homelessness) all responses have been included. This is meant to capture information that may change over the course of the survey.

Two of the emergency shelters or second stage transition houses surveyed are (if not officially) specific to immigrants and refugees. One of them, for example, is dedicated to

providing assistance to Government Assisted Refugees (GARs). In total, these two sources account for 22 of 36 immigrants, refugees, or refugee claimants in our sample. If we include them in the study, we are biasing our findings towards the populations they serve, but if we exclude them we are ignoring the effect of services that are geared towards meeting the specific needs of these groups. As it stands we already have an over-representation of Canadian-born population in our sample. This will be amplified if we exclude respondents from these two shelters. After some consultation with the RAC, a decision was made to include the agencies in our analysis.

Eleven of the refugees (claimants or GARs) have arrived within the last year. While these respondents are homeless, the underlying reasons for homelessness may be different than for other immigrant and non-immigrant groups. In order to account for the different reasons for homelessness among recently arrived GARs, some of the analysis has been conducted with them excluded.

Further, at the request of the RAC, some analysis has been conducted comparing shelters located inside and outside the downtown core.

## **Sub-Study 2: The refugee claimant study**

In this part of the project, we sought to explore the housing situation of Refugee Claimants (RCs) who have recently received a positive decision enabling them to stay in Canada. We asked participants about the situation prior to the acceptance of their claim, and as it evolved since receiving a positive decision. Our target population included all recently Successful Refugee Claimants (SRCs) living in the Greater Vancouver area. In practice, though, we could only reach those who are known to service agencies. We recruited participants through refugee-serving non-government organizations. Members of the RAC noted that it is preferable to have

agencies take an active role in recruitment (rather than asking interested claimants to contact the research team), as language barriers and lack of familiarity with the research team would decrease the likelihood of potential participants making themselves available. We were told that successful claimants often inform service agencies that they have received a positive decision from the Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB). Upon hearing of successful claims, frontline workers were asked to inform these individuals about the research project and to seek their consent for participation.

We began this part of the project with a focus group that included representatives from three prominent local organizations that help claimants - The Mennonite Central Committee (MCC); MOSAIC Settlement Services; and the Inland Refugee Society (IRC). The focus group was instrumental in helping us finalize our recruitment strategy and the interview schedule for refugee claimants. In particular, focus group participants highlighted several issues they hoped we could explore in the interview phase: perceptions of safety; the process of choosing a neighbourhood in which to live; recommendations on the most effective ways to help claimants find housing; and systems of in-group housing support (see Appendix D for Interview Schedule for SRCs).

Following the focus group (and a meeting of the RAC), a letter was sent to five local settlement agencies inviting their participation. They were contacted by phone about one week later to confirm their participation and to explain the study in more detail. Agencies were asked to provide a preliminary list of potential participants by the beginning of September 2004, so that a round of interviews could be completed by October 2004. It became evident that this preliminary goal was not feasible. The timing of the project coincided with summer vacations, and most agency workers were unable to begin thinking about participants until after September

(after clearing away other work that had accumulated over the summer). Agencies began responding slowly, with fewer names than expected, by the beginning of October.

The number of names that trickled in was far less than originally projected in our methodological proposal, and our hope to receive a large list of potential participants, and to sample from it, was compromised. Moreover, we had also hoped to interview participants more than once, over a period of several months, but the slow speed at which the names arrived prevented this strategy. Another methodological issue arose. Several of the settlement agency workers participating in our research are themselves, and/or work with a clientele, that is mainly of Hispanic origin. As a result there was an initial ethnic bias, whereby a high ratio of participants in our interview pool were from Latin American countries.

We attempted to circumvent these difficulties by contacting other agencies that serve refugee claimants. In this process, the Greater Vancouver Working Group on Poverty, and several of its constituent members assisted us. Early in 2005, the broader recruitment strategy began to be effective. Additional names were provided to us, enough, in fact, to meet our original goal of 50 participants. However, time constraints have meant that we have only been able to interview 36 individuals in time to be included in this report. The regional composition of the participant pool is also more balanced, and includes a reasonable representation from Asia, South/Central America and Africa.

For the purposes of this research, ‘successful’ refugee claimants have been defined as those who have received a positive decision from the IRB – regardless if they are considered Convention Refugees or allowed to stay in Canada for humanitarian or compassionate reasons – and reside in Greater Vancouver at the time of the interview. The interviews were semi-structured and explored the housing situation of claimants both before learning of the positive

decision, and in the first year since learning of it. Interpretation was provided for interviewees as needed to ensure that they could speak in the language with which they are the most comfortable. Participants received a \$20 honorarium, which was intended to offset their costs (e.g., transportation, child minding). The general characteristics of our participants are listed in Table 2.1.

In order to better assess the claimant situation, we decided to add to our knowledge base by speaking with community representatives who are directly involved in helping asylum-seeking claimants. In all, four service agents have been interviewed from the following organizations: Kinbrace House, Mosaic, IRC, and Storefront Orientation Services (SOS). All of the workers that were interviewed were directly involved in the recruitment process with the SRCs. The purpose of this additional methodological component was twofold. First, the settlement workers are consistently engaged in housing issues with refugee claimants. Their opinions add breadth to the general conditions of settlement for these newcomers. Secondly, the settlement workers that have been involved in the recruitment process for this research have been able to offer some comments surrounding the difficulties of conducting research on the claimant population. These interviews have provided some important insights on the precariousness of the claimant situation, as well as providing recommendations for future research methods.



Interview	Place of Birth	Gender	Age	Level of Education	Date of Arrival	Country of last perm. Res.
1	Albania	Female	25	Post Secondary	2002	Greece
2	Albania	Female	22	Secondary	2002 July	Albania
3	Albania	Male	27	Secondary	2002 Oct	Greece
4	Albania	Male	32	Secondary	2002 July	Albania
5	Afghanistan	Male	26	Some Secondary	2003 March	Afghanistan
6	Benin	Female	22	Post Secondary	2003 Aug	Benin
7	Burundi	Male	36	Teaching Certificate	2002	Burundi
8	Cameroon	Male	32	Some Secondary	2001	Cameroon
9	China	Female	34	Some Secondary	2004	Peru
10	China	Female	63	Grade 6	1999	China
11	China	Male	37	Less than Secondary	2002	China
12	China	Male	22	Less than Secondary	2001	China
13	China	Male	49	Some Secondary	2001	China
14	China	Male	38	Less than Secondary	2001 June	China
15	China	Male	41	Some Secondary	2001	China
16	Columbia	Female	41	Post Secondary	2003 March	Columbia
17	Columbia	Male	44	Post Secondary	2003 March	Columbia
18	Congo	Female	37	Post Secondary	2003 Oct	Congo
19	Eritrea	Male	46	Some Secondary	2002 June	Eritrea
20	Guatemala	Female	40	Post Secondary	2001	Guatemala
21	Iran	Female	43	Graduate degree	1997/2004	Iran
22	Iran	Male	51	Post Secondary	1997/2004	Iran
23	Mexico	Female	35	Graduate degree	2001 July	Mexico
24	Mexico	Female	53	Post Secondary	1998 Nov	Mexico
25	Mexico	Male	57	Graduate degree	1998 Nov	Mexico
26	Mexico	Male	50	Post Secondary	2002 Jan	Mexico
27	Nicaragua	Male	21	Some Secondary	2004 Aug	Nicaragua
28	Nigeria	Female	35	Post Secondary		
29	Nigeria	Male	39	Diploma	2003 Oct	Nigeria
30	Peru	Female	43	Some Secondary	2004 Jan	Nigeria
31	Peru	Female	43	Post Secondary	2001 Dec	Peru
32	Russia	Female	43	Post Secondary	2002 June	Belarus
33	Sri Lanka	Female	29	Post Secondary	2003 July	UK
34	Sri Lanka	Male	24	Post Secondary	2002 Oct	Sri Lanka
35	Togo	Male	25	Some Post Secondary		
36	Togo	Male	30	Some Secondary	2002	Togo
	Togo	Male	30	Post Secondary	2000	Togo
	Zimbabwe	Female	20	Secondary	2001	Zimbabwe

**Table 2.1: Participant Information List**

### **Sub-study 3: The housing survey**

The purpose of this part of the project is to examine the profile and extent of relative homelessness among immigrants, refugees, and refugee claimants. In so doing, we seek to generate a basic estimate of the ‘sofa surfing’ or ‘camping out’ population among recent immigrants, as well as in-group systems of support. This sub-study is mainly focused on the Immigrant and Refugee Housing Survey (IRHS) which was conducted October 4-8, 2004. The research team consulted the RAC in designing the survey instrument and also held a focus group of interested parties to discuss the methodology and survey questions.

Prior to conducting the IRHS, three training sessions were held with representatives from Stream 1, and Stream 1 and 3 Blended Services agencies (one each in Vancouver, Surrey and Coquitlam).<sup>5</sup> The purpose of these sessions was to familiarize frontline workers with the research project, and specifically with the IRHS. All frontline workers were trained in the process for obtaining verbal and/or written consent; the structure of the survey (closed and open-ended questions); and how, and when, the survey was to be conducted. Feedback from the training sessions was used to prepare the final version of the IRHS.

The target population for this project included all recent immigrants to the GVRD. The sampling frame for this project included those individuals who accessed settlement services, on either a phone-in or in-person basis, over a one-week period. Our target agencies are Stream 1 Information and Support Services. Some Stream 1&3 Blended Service providers were also included. Our objective was to discern the profile and extent of relative homelessness among clients of participating agencies, and to identify in-group systems of support.

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<sup>5</sup> Stream 1 Information and Support Service organizations have settlement counselors/workers to provide settlement services to immigrants and refugees; while Stream 1&3 Blended Service organizations combine ESL teaching and settlement information in a group setting.

We envisioned the study as aiming for 100 percent participation from both immigrant and refugee-serving agencies, as well as from the clients accessing settlement services on either a phone-in or in-person basis. All settlement counsellors were invited to participate. However, we realized that this was unrealistic and reduced our expectations to a more realistic level, by estimating that 30 settlement counselors, or 60 percent of the estimated number of settlement counselors in the GVRD, would actually participate in the survey. Settlement counselors generally work with an average of 8 clients per day and, we estimated, would obtain a 50 percent rate of acceptance from their clients. We therefore expected 600 completed questionnaires over a period of five working days.

Sherman Chan, the Principal Investigator, determined minimum targets for agencies (50 completed surveys for each of the smaller agencies, and 150 completed surveys for each of the larger agencies). Upon submission of completed surveys, each of the agencies received a modest honorarium.

Settlement counselors were asked to complete the IRHS during phone-in or in-person services to immigrants, refugees, and refugee claimants during a period of one working week. The purpose of the IRHS is to examine the housing circumstances of clients who use the services of settlement service organizations. In recognition that some clients may access service agencies (either the same one or different ones) multiple times during a one-week period, clients were asked if they had already participated in the IRHS at the beginning of their interview. To minimize the possibility of clients being double-counted, the survey was only administered to clients who had not already participated.

Clients were asked a set of questions in a 5-6 minute instrument (see Appendix E for the IHRS). Although the instrument is written in English, it was delivered by settlement counselors

in the language of the clients' choice. Settlement counselors were then asked to translate clients' answers on the fly and record all responses in English. The survey contains both open- and closed-ended (i.e. tick and box) questions.

A post-survey working discussion was held with settlement counselors at MOSAIC on February 9, 2004. The purpose of this meeting was to present preliminary findings from the IRHS and obtain feedback on the survey process.

Six immigrant and refugee-serving agencies actually participated in this project; some agencies have multiple locations, so the actual number of specific points where individuals were surveyed is higher. One agency withdrew prior to implementing the survey because the majority of their interactions with clients are in a group format (e.g. LINC classes). In total we received 554 responses to the IRHS .

#### *What issues have arisen?*

In the course of conducting the Survey a number of issues have arisen that merit discussion. Settlement counsellors were asked to fill out consent forms for all participants regardless of whether the client agreed to participate or not. However, a number of counsellors decided to ignore this rule and administer consent forms only to those agreeing to participate in the survey. Inconsistencies in filling out consent forms means we are unable to determine the rate of participation in the project.

Further, although counsellors were asked to request participation from all clients during the week of October 4-8, 2004, responses from the post-survey discussion group at MOSAIC indicate that at least some of the settlement workers were selective in requesting participation from clients. One settlement counselor reported being selective in who (s)he asked to participate in that those clients who were in emotional distress were not asked to do so. This, of course, has

led to a potential bias: if the emotional stress was related to inadequate housing, the individual—and that situation—would not be registered in our survey. Another worker reported phoning clients who live in another area of the Lower Mainland to request their participation in the project (i.e., in this case, recruitment was proactive rather than reactive), on the grounds that many of the clients have large families and lacked the money for transportation to come to the agency to answer the survey. Also, in a discussion with a settlement worker after the data collection it was revealed that her agency requires settlement workers and clients to fill out two other forms. As such, it was difficult to collect all information without causing inconvenience to clients.

Some settlement providers reported that an undisclosed number of clients refused to participate because they had been part of research in the past and had not seen any results from it. Two issues were seen to be pertinent: **over-surveying** and **raised expectations**. Firstly, pertaining to that of over-surveying, one settlement counselor suggested that housing research is done over and over and over again, and cited the example of MOSAIC's recent study on sub-standard housing. Secondly, repeated participation in housing studies has resulted in raised expectations among clients that respondents will directly benefit from their participation and the study findings. After some brainstorming, the suggestion was made to address this concern in two ways: first, upon completion of the project, we will issue a press release of research findings to mainstream and immigrant-specific media organizations. Second, we will provide participating agencies with a one-page summary of findings in all major languages to be posted in the agency as well as on the MOSAIC website. At the end of the summary, it has been suggested that we add a sentence or two to the effect that it takes time to translate findings into

policy, and although we can give our findings to policy-makers (both in written form and through presentations) we do not have the jurisdiction to fix the problems ourselves.

Finally, one agency began data collection late because of a miscommunication. After discussion amongst the research team a decision was made to include the responses.

### *Potential biases*

Two potential biases have been identified that may affect our results. Firstly, the IHRS used a **self-selected sample**. Only those clients who approached participating immigrant and refugee-serving agencies for assistance during the week of October 4-8, 2004 were included in our sample. We cannot know about those who do not approach immigrant and refugee-serving agencies. Secondly, given the way the sector is structured, **immigrant and refugee-serving agencies are funded to provide assistance within the first three years after arrival**. As such we can expect to see higher numbers of people in our sample who are within the first three years after settlement, as opposed to those who have been here longer. Given that funding for the provision of settlement services is limited to the first three years after arrival, our ability to generalize about respondents decreases over time of settlement. Individuals in our sample who have been here more than three years, therefore, probably do not accurately represent the population of longer settled immigrants; we would expect that only a small proportion of this population needs to use settlement services, and therefore our sample is biased towards those requiring assistance.

### **Definition of help**

This sub-study seeks to identify in-group systems of support through questions about the provision or receipt of housing assistance. For the sake of this study, assistance or help, was

defined as being **informal** (i.e., from friends, family, religious or ethnic communities) rather than formal (i.e., social assistance, immigrant and refugee-serving agencies). The type of help received or provided was **self-identified**, but could entail one or more of a variety of things (but is not limited to them):

- Helping someone use a newspaper to locate appropriate housing;
- Translating for people (e.g., classified ads, rental interviews);
- Providing subsidized or free accommodations
- Providing money to assist in rental payments

Further, we recognize that help may be **temporally variable**. In some cases help may be extended over a very short-term (e.g. over a period of days) while in others it may be provided over a longer period (e.g. months or years).

## **Discussion**

From the beginning this project adopted an experimental methodology that incorporated a variety of tools. In the process we have encountered a number of obstacles that necessitated methodological adjustments, some of them quite substantial. We are also aware of the limitations that are associated with any ‘snapshot’ study that cannot capture the dynamics of homelessness.

Within the shelter sub-study, understaffing and the lack of integrated systems of data management presented a problem for data collection within the shelter survey. Although interest in the project was high, problems of understaffing made participation prohibitive in terms of staff time; some shelters refused to participate because they were stretched to the limit, while others agreed and later withdrew their support for the study. This was aggravated by the lack of an integrated data system. While initially hopeful about the possibility of using HIFIS, the uneven

implementation among shelters and the lack of data sharing protocols in Vancouver made this an impossible option.

We advocate three strategies to deal with these problems: first, the successful implementation of the HIFIS system in Vancouver and signing of data sharing protocols would facilitate attempts to enumerate the homeless population accessing shelters and transition houses; secondly, providing remuneration for participation in data collection would have helped neutralize the understaffing problem; and, thirdly, research projects need to be amply resourced, with sufficient funds to enable frequent communication and visits to shelters. The last of these points is vital in terms of data transfer. While we agreed to reimburse agencies for costs associated with returning the forms (i.e., courier charges), arranging to pick up the surveys ourselves would have reduced workloads marginally.

Different operational cultures within institutions affected data collection in our shelter survey. While some agencies collected the requested information during intake, others filled out the data collection sheets at a later time, using information from their own intake forms. This factor may have resulted in inconsistent information being collected on a few of our survey questions.

The decision to create our own data collection sheets may have worked better in shelters geared towards women and children, than for those serving men. Unlike men's shelters, women's have longer time limits (30 days compared to 7-14 days for men's shelters) and 24-hour access (clients of men's shelters are required be out of the shelters during the daytime). The combined result is higher client turnover and long line-ups at night in men's shelters. Despite our attempts to create efficient data collection forms (one page of tick and box questions), this format may be better suited to shelters with lower turnover rates and continued access to clients. This



may also explain the high rates of participation by shelters serving women, and women and children, in our survey.

The most significant problem in the claimant sub-study was the acquisition of an adequate sampling frame of individuals willing to be interviewed. Our original ambition to *select* participants in a quasi-representative manner simply ran aground. At the outset, our NGO partners expected that generating names for this project would be possible, but later encountered difficulties. This has not been a matter of lack of will, or a breakdown in communication between NGOs and the research team. Rather, the successful claimant population was highly reticent to be included in the study. Given the ethical protocols of our project, we could not pursue this issue further. We therefore had to engage in a wider search of participants, over a much longer period of time, and even so, we have not been able to reach our original target of 50 interviewees.

Along the way, there was an interesting development. Members of our RAC suggested that we conduct focus groups with claimants who have not yet completed the determination process. In fact, one of the agencies dealing with claimants was willing to organize these meetings on our behalf. Much as we would like to have accepted this invitation, we could not, given the way the methodology of the project was defined, and also given our obligations to the UBC Behavioural Research Ethics Board.

In future projects, however, researchers ought to consider means of flexibly responding to initiatives like this, which are essentially the product of partnerships. In essence, our partners tried to help us realize our broad goal of gathering information, but the logical and institutional parameters of the research process prevented us from accepting their offer of help.

The format adopted for the IHRS (with settlement counselors conducting the interviews) worked well. By drawing on their rapport with clients, we likely were able to obtain larger numbers of participants in a shorter time than we would, had we approached clients ourselves. Further, settlement counsellors and service providers who attended our training sessions had the opportunity to have input into the survey questionnaire, and helped identify problems and gaps in our questions and potential sources of confusion.

However, it was difficult to conduct the survey in 5-7 minutes. This was particularly problematic in those agencies that are also collecting other information (e.g., one agency collects the required information for MHR as well as their own data form). Requesting participation, obtaining consent and conducting the survey had the potential to increase the amount of time spent with clients considerably. While we tested the survey among the research group, it would have been beneficial to conduct a sample survey of one to two day's duration with a limited number of counsellors. Doing so would have enabled us to test questions, wording and identify issues that had not arisen in the RAC or the training sessions.

Finally, despite our requirement that *all* clients be asked to participate, we are aware that some counsellors were selective in choosing survey respondents. Unfortunately, this issue was compounded by another. Some counsellors either refused, or did not bother, to record the number and basic characteristics of their clients who declined to participate in the survey. Therefore, we have no means to calculate sampling bias or to estimate the degree of representativeness of our sample.

In the beginning we approached this project using an experimental methodology that integrated multiple methods to form a relatively complete portrait of the extent and profile of homelessness among immigrants, refugees and refugee claimants in the GVRD. Difficulties

encountered in the course of our study have necessitated a number of changes, including some significant ones. In light of these difficulties, our findings should be read with some caution.

## Part 3: The Shelter Study

The purpose of this sub-study was to examine those experiencing absolute homelessness by developing a portrait of the immigrant and refugee population using emergency shelters and transition houses. This sub-study involved a combination of approaches including interviews with shelter personnel, and the compilation and analysis of data collected by shelter personnel over a specified period of time.

To avoid confusion this portion of the report has been divided into two parts: Section A will examine Key Informant Interviews, and Section B focuses on the Shelter Survey. General conclusions will follow.

### Part 3, Section A: Key Informant Interviews

#### Themes That Arose in the Interviews

Although we intended this project to be about immigrants and refugees, participants wanted to speak more generally in the interviews and focus groups. To be fair to those who donated precious time, we will provide a faithful account of what was said, even when it does not address our immediate concerns, and end with some comments on what it all means for our target population.

#### *Housing Needs and the Adequacy of Existing Services*

All of the respondents interviewed were unanimous in the belief that **demand for emergency shelter surpasses the ability of the current system to provide assistance**. One person representing a small (8-bed) shelter reported that s/he turns away 6-10 people per day. In

the course of our 35 minute interview s/he received 5 phone calls from agencies seeking to place individuals, all of which s/he had to turn down because the shelter was at capacity for the day.

Although a number of respondents felt there was a need for a **continuum of housing services** (from emergency shelters through transition houses and permanent accommodations), there was not necessarily agreement on what this should look like. For some, this was through the provision of more emergency shelters, while for others it was through the provision of more individualized and specialized emergency shelters designed to meet specific needs (e.g., seniors, disabled persons, First Nations persons, women fleeing abuse, wet or dry housing, zero tolerance centres, detox, services for those using methadone). One respondent advocated renovating empty buildings (such as the Sears building) into large emergency shelters to get people (particularly men who are turned out of shelters during the day) off the street and be able to provide increased services to them, while another advocated more integrated services that would allow people to move from emergency shelter to detox to supported living and eventually to independent housing. For one, increasing the numbers of shelters would just be a “bandaid” solution, and that in the long-term there is a need for more social housing. Another advocates the need for a long-term (i.e. 10 years) vision on homelessness and calls for an all-party agreement that would make working with homelessness less dependent on the political whims of parties in power.

Current rates of **social assistance and shelter allowance in BC are seen to be insufficient to meet the cost of living in Vancouver**. Respondents called for increased funding to allow people to access safe, secure housing in safe, secure neighborhoods. Multiple examples were provided of how insufficient funding is affecting the ability of clients to procure (safe and affordable) housing. One provider talked of settling people by cost, not suitability.

“Clients’ shelter allowances on the provincial rate level don’t allow them to live in Vancouver where a 2 bedroom apartment is likely to be \$1000 to \$1500 per month. The shelter allowance for a family of five is only \$625/month”.

Further, the current waitlists to access social assistance (which vary from 3-6 weeks) is aggravated by the 30 day limit in some shelters (although some are as short as 7 days). For those forced to endure the current waiting times, the strict limits on how long they may stay in a shelter produces an untenable situation in which it is difficult, if not impossible, to find housing within the 30 day period. Anecdotal evidence exists of sympathetic staff moving people from one shelter to another at the end of the allowed period.

For those who obtain social assistance, the requirement that they be out of the shelter within the month often means they end up in marginal or inexpensive areas of New Westminster, Burnaby or Surrey. Although over half of the clients find housing, some respondents suggested the housing is always temporary. This begins a cycle of relative and absolute homelessness in which many of the clients eventually return to the shelter.

**Longer shelter stays** were seen as being beneficial. In addition to allowing clients a period in which they are not experiencing pressures to obtain housing and in which they can “deal with the emotional effects of being homeless”, the longer limits would allow people more time to find affordable housing in better neighbourhoods.

In light of current waiting lists for BC Housing – which are estimated at 2-3 years – and the difficulties of accessing safe and affordable housing, many respondents expressed a **need for increased provision of subsidized and low-income housing**. Certain groups, including GARs and young people in the Downtown Eastside, are seen to be at a particular disadvantage in accessing subsidized and BC Housing. Government Assisted Refugees, for example, are not eligible to apply for BC Housing until after the first year (when they switch from federal to

provincial assistance). Also, the majority of housing in the Downtown Eastside is geared to meet the needs of those 45 years and older.<sup>6</sup> One agency reported a great deal of success in settling their clients in BC Housing because one of the staff has cultivated a good relationship with workers at BC Housing.

Respondents were divided on where housing should be located. One respondent was adamant that clients should be settled within the person's own community, while others called for more non-market and subsidized housing outside the downtown core in order to get people out of the drug or dependency environment. One provided anecdotal evidence of people who, despite working during the day, are unable to save any money because they are still "nipping at addiction". For this person, then, the most effective solution is to locate housing and clients outside the Downtown Eastside.

"Roadblocks everywhere they turn" was how one respondent characterized the difficulties of trying to obtain housing on a job that pays \$8-10 per hour. Other **barriers to accessing housing** included the propensity of landlords to refuse to rent to people without references or employment (both of which may be difficult for recent immigrants *and* those who have been homeless for long periods), language barriers (which enable immigrants to be taken advantage of by landlords), discrimination (e.g., number or age of children, cultural stereotypes), and lack of credit (e.g. for those who can't access housing due to debts incurred by former spouses or partners, e.g., BC Hydro or Telus).

For those staying in shelters, the cost of transportation was also seen as a barrier to accessing both housing and employment. Clients staying in shelters within the City of

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<sup>6</sup> In the Downtown Eastside individuals 45 years and older are considered to be seniors due to the reduced life expectancy in the area.

Vancouver, for example, frequently travel two or three public transit zones to access housing. For those who are uncomfortable with the provision of childcare in shelters, or for whom childcare is not an option, this trek must be done with children in tow. Few of the shelters are able to provide bus tickets on a regular basis due to cuts in funding for transportation.

North American ‘rules about housing’ which designate two people to a bedroom are often seen to be a barrier in accessing housing. Although a family of six would ideally be looking for a three bedroom apartment, there aren’t many available. In these situations, newcomers (or those assisting them) must try to convince the landlord to allow two people to sleep in the living room and two people in each of the bedrooms. These difficulties are amplified for larger families: a family of eleven, for example, has a shelter allowance of less than a thousand dollars per month.

#### *Percentage of Immigrants and Refugees Using the Shelters*

Key informants were asked about the percentage of immigrants and refugees using their shelter on an average basis. We must add a cautionary note, however: while the majority of agencies provided us with rough estimates, it is important to note that we cannot be certain about their reliability. For example, do staff members always know when clients are immigrants? They might assume immigration status from cues such as language and accent, which can be an imprecise method.

The majority of respondents estimated that approximately 5-10 percent of their clients are immigrants or refugees. Two organizations reported their current intake of clients to be 100 percent immigrants and refugees.<sup>7</sup> In some cases, respondents provided anecdotal evidence of shelters sending immigrants and refugees to other (i.e., more appropriate) shelters, while another

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<sup>7</sup> One of the agencies is dedicated to housing and providing assistance to GARs. While the second agency is not immigrant or refugee-specific, all of their current clients are immigrants or refugees.



shelter frequently refers immigrants and refugees to another facility within their organization that does not require Ministry vouchers.<sup>8</sup> Both refugee claimants and those lacking proper documentation are populations that may be particularly affected by these requirements. The inability of some newcomers to qualify under the MHR mandate was seen to prevent some immigrants and refugees from accessing the system.

“Because we are funded by the Ministry, we can only take those who the Ministry approves. And I do know we get a lot of calls [from (wo)men who do not qualify] and we try to settle them elsewhere.”

“There is just no place for them to go” for those who are not accepted by MHR.

This individual is adamant in his/her calls for more shelters and transition houses for individuals (e.g. recent immigrants and refugees) who do not meet the mandate of the Ministry or are not eligible for MHR and, as such, cannot access many of the shelters. Another noted that there is only one women’s shelter in Vancouver that does not require vouchers.

*Do reasons for using shelters different from native-born population?*

Respondents were divided as to whether immigrants and refugees use shelters for different reasons than the native-born population. For some, the particular status of immigrant/refugee is unimportant in light of their need for housing.

“Once they are here the bottom line is they need a safe, secure place to live. A place to be for support”.

Others expressed the view that, although immigrants and refugees may share some characteristics with the native-born born (e.g. addiction, domestic issues), they have distinctive reasons for using the shelters. Lack of information and (family) support systems or networks was by far the most frequently cited reason. The existence of language barriers was also cited, with

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<sup>8</sup> Interestingly this was the only shelter in the organization that provided any responses.

examples provided of clients who have ended up wandering the streets due to a mix-up with their immigration worker, and clients who were given the resources to find housing (e.g., computer print outs, newspaper ads) but possess neither the language nor technical abilities to know what to do with them. Those without status do not qualify for shelters and as such may move from transition house to transition house until they eventually have nowhere to stay, and end up on the streets or in exploitative relationships. Some refugee claimants have been sent into the shelter system by a faith-based service representative at the Vancouver airport.

For immigrant and refugee men, particular issues were seen to be at work. Cultural differences around the roles of women in their country of origin vs. Canada were seen to create problems for some men, as well as the frustration at not being able to support their families in Canada or struggling through the social services system.

For some, there were cultural differences that help explain why newcomers are **not** using shelters as much as the Canadian-born population, that revolved around the (perceived) risk of being deported if they access shelters, and a lack of cultural sensitivity when talking about some issues (e.g., abuse). Others credited the lack of shelter usage to “taking care of their own” and the lack of trust for service providers or officials.

#### *Dealing with Diversity: Challenges or successes?*

The extent to which agencies have been able to deal with diversity varied significantly between the shelters. Although some attempt to meet either dietary, religious and/or cultural needs, others are unable or unwilling to do so unless there are compelling medical reasons. One agency that provides limited meals reported being unable to really respect dietary needs, but expressed a willingness to respect people’s religious observances as long as they didn’t impact

on others. One of the emergency shelters is unique in that they provide prepared meals, but also allow clients to cook their own meals (with food provided by the shelter) if they so desire.

One agency that works with mostly refugees, reports segregating different nationalities in housing so that cultural differences (e.g., in food, religion, customs) do not produce tensions. Many of the agencies spoke of trying to connect people with the appropriate ethno-cultural or religious communities, or networks, with necessary services, and an admiration for the tendency of “ethno-cultural communities to help their own”.

*Next step: systems or networks of support facilitating the housing search*

Responses to the question about the next step (systems or networks of support) varied widely. One respondent felt it was necessary to identify specific needs (e.g., addiction, can they feed themselves? manage their money?), ensure supports are in place, and establish continuity (e.g., outreach, minimize the potential for isolation). In so doing, the goal is to find safe and affordable housing (not just shelter) for people that is located in their own community.

One respondent talked about how 80-90 people ended up in a building in Burnaby because the management has been very good about accepting clients from a particular agency. Despite his/her success in helping settle clients, however, the respondent expressed concern about this arrangement:

“This is in some ways comforting to those people because they have some common interests and background, but its not good from the point of view of housing because you have a lot of poor people living together and not getting on with integrating into Canadian society”.

For many, the provision of timely and useful information is seen to be a key issue in reducing homelessness among immigrants and refugees.

“I think (homelessness among immigrants and refugees) would happen less if (they) got proper help and guidance in the beginning ... If someone could help

them find housing, tell them what to expect, what their rights are as tenants and landlord issues”.

*Other issues that arose*

One provider gave us anecdotal evidence of a disturbing situation in which Ministry workers will respond to her/his calls or faxes, but not to those of clients. While the person related one specific example, s/he expressed the opinion that this happens fairly frequently.

During the interview process a number of inherent biases arose, which are worthy of further discussion. While isolated incidents, in and of themselves, they may influence the decisions of immigrants and refugees **not** to access shelters. One respondent, for example, expressed the view that we should be “helping our own” both in shelters and in the provision of special education (over ESL) in schools, while another repeatedly associated refugees with drug dealing and other types of criminal behavior. Anecdotal evidence also exists of shelters requiring newcomers to adopt Western names because shelter staff cannot pronounce their given names, and of agencies that disallow obvious signs of religious observance such as prayers. Finally, while not specific to immigrants and refugees, another respondent explained that s/he helps *those who are deserving* find housing. These biases, when compounded by structural barriers, may affect the likelihood of immigrants and refugees to access shelters and transition houses. It is important to note, however, that we can not be certain about the extent of these biases.

## **Part 3, Section B: Shelter Survey**

### **Characteristics of Respondents**

As noted, depending on the question and issues involved, we have conducted some of our analysis on the complete file of respondents, regardless of potential multiple counting, and some after multiple counts have been removed. When appropriate, we have compared the Canadian-born and Non-Canadian born populations, as well as single vs. multiple respondents (i.e., those whose information was collected on two or more data collection days).<sup>9</sup>

Analysis of the responses produces the following profile of clients who accessed participating shelters during the Shelter Survey:

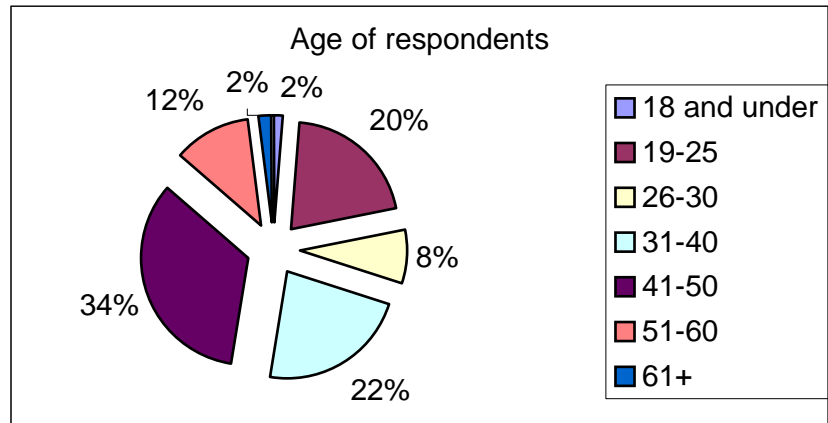
Twenty percent of respondents are from shelters within the downtown area, while 80 percent are from shelters located in other areas of Vancouver and the Lower Mainland. Over 90 percent of multiple respondents were counted at shelters outside the downtown area.

Almost 47 percent of our respondents were female (using a filter to eliminate multiple respondents). The percentage of females included in the study is higher than the corresponding number reported in the GVRD study, which suggests that there is a preponderance of males in the homeless population (68 percent). The high percentage of female respondents in our project may reflect the inclusion of three shelters and/or transition houses in the GVRD that are specific to women or women and children. Sixty-one percent (61 percent) of the Non-Canadian born population and 72 percent of multiple respondents are female.

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<sup>9</sup> Forty-three respondents, representing 16.5 percent of the total population, were counted on two or more data collection days.

All age groups were represented within our sample (including 2 percent who were aged 18 and under). Over half (56 percent) of all respondents were 31-50 years old, while 30 percent were 30 or younger.



**Figure 3.1: Age of Respondents**

Our data suggest a relationship between age and immigration status. Non-immigrants who were 26-30 years old were about 5 times more likely to access the shelter than immigrants (11.2 percent and 2.6 percent, respectively). For respondents aged 51-60, however, the opposite was true: immigrants were almost twice as likely to be staying in the shelter than non-immigrants (20.5 percent and 11.6 percent, respectively).

Although our respondents come from twenty-eight countries, the vast majority were born in Canada (82.1 percent). Of those born elsewhere, 39.1 percent indicated that they arrived as refugees (GARs or Claimants), and 27.8 percent as immigrants; 5.6 percent categorized themselves as permanent residents, while 27.8 percent have become naturalized (these last groups did not specify their class of origin upon arriving in Canada). Ninety-one percent of respondents reported being able to converse easily in English, 8 percent reported requiring help with conversation in English, and one person reported being able to converse easily in French.

Almost 15 percent of all respondents accessed the shelters as part of a family (as opposed to individual bookings). Over seventy-five percent of respondents who arrived as part of a family booked either 2 or 3 beds.

Ninety percent of clients listed their last permanent address as being in Canada (with multiples excluded); almost 80 percent were from British Columbia. This finding is reinforced by responses in the key informant interviews, for whom the majority of clients were from Canada, with many from the GVRD. This number was slightly higher for multiple respondents (93 percent of whom listed their last permanent address as being in Canada, and 88.4 percent listed BC); and significantly lower for the foreign-born population (63.9 percent of whom listed Canada, and only 52.8 percent listed BC).

Almost twenty percent of respondents reported having attended (or completed) university; one quarter reported having less than a high school education. It appears that immigrants were approximately 60 percent more likely to have completed some amount of university education (25.7 percent and 14.9 percent respectively). Only 12 percent of multiple respondents report some university education.

Over 40 percent of immigrants or refugee/claimants in the survey reported having arrived within the last year. What is surprising, however, is that over 20 percent arrived 11 years ago or more. Eleven of the refugees (claimants or GARs) have arrived within the last year (which makes sense given that a facility specializing in this population was included in our study).

## **Housing**

Over half (57 percent) of the total number of respondents list having had a house/apartment/condo as their last long term housing, compared to almost eighty-five percent of the immigrant/refugee population. Almost fifteen percent of respondents report their last long-term housing as being unstable (e.g., renting a room in a hotel, staying with friends or family, living on the street, staying in shelters or boarding houses, renting a friend's couch).

The vast majority of those who are now using the shelter system were previously in the rental market. Ninety-four percent of respondents (excluding multiple responses) reported having rented their last permanent housing. The Canadian-born population was almost seven times as likely to have owned their last permanent residence than the foreign-born population.

On this issue, 38 people chose not to answer the questions in the survey (this occurred in other parts of the survey as well). We are unsure about the cause of non-participation. It may be that individual clients refused to provide certain information. But it is also possible that shelter staff avoided the question (we were warned some staff have ideological objections to collecting data such as this), or that they filled out the shelter forms after the fact (i.e., from their intake sheet, rather than asking clients directly).

### **Contributing factors to homelessness**

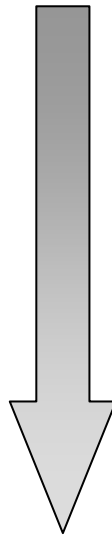
The most frequently cited causes of homelessness were: financial (e.g., job loss, eviction); substance abuse (e.g., drugs, alcohol); mental health; family issues (e.g., breakdown); and physical or emotional abuse. When we combine all the immigrant categories (refugee, immigrant, permanent resident and citizen into that of immigrant) some differences in the most frequently cited causes emerge.

For immigrants, the three most frequently cited responses for homelessness are physical/emotional abuse, family issues, and mental health; while for non-immigrants the three most frequently cited are financial crisis, substance abuse and mental health. For multiple respondents, financial crisis, family issues and mental health were the three most frequently cited responses, while substance abuse was number four.



### Sources of Income

Respondents were given a list of sources of income and asked to check all that apply. At least 20 percent of respondents indicated one of the following income sources: income assistance; disability; no source of income; and full-time employment. What is surprising is that approximately 10



<b>All respondents</b>
Income assistance
Disability
No source of income
Full-time employment
Part-time employment
Casual employment
RAP
Pension
Employment insurance
Training program

Table 3.1: All respondents

percent of our respondents report being employed on a full-time basis. In all, almost a quarter of the individuals staying in shelters reported some form of employment (full-time, casual, and part-time). This finding is supported by anecdotal evidence from shelter providers that many of the men staying in the downtown shelters are working (e.g., in temporary labor) during the day. One respondent reported that on average 10-15 clients (out of 36) receive wake up calls because they are working during the day.

When the analysis is rerun separately for immigrants and the Canadian-born, we find the following most frequent source(s) of income are, for immigrants: income assistance; RAP; and full-time employment.<sup>10</sup> For the Canadian-born, the corresponding list is: income assistance; disability assistance; and no source of income.

We recognize those who are staying at one of the shelters may not actually be homeless, since that facility is contracted to supply housing to GARs in their first few days/weeks in

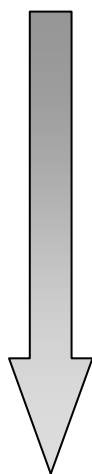
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<sup>10</sup> RAP refers to funding available under the Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP). RAP funding is available for a period of one year, and is equivalent to provincial welfare rates.

Vancouver. When we run the same table, excluding both duplicates and those staying at that centre, we find the most frequently cited sources of income for immigrants are: income assistance; full-time employment, and casual employment and no source of income are tied for third.

Like the results for all respondents, those outside the downtown were twice as likely to report income assistance as their source of income as they were to report disability (see Table

3.2). Those inside the downtown were disproportionately included in the RAP system. When we remove the refugee-specific shelter, full-



Outside Downtown	Downtown
Income assistance	Income assistance
Disability	RAP
No source of income	Full-time employment
Full-time employment	No source of income
Part-time employment	Disability
Casual employment	Part-time employment
Pension	Casual employment
Employment insurance	Pension
Training program	Training program

**Table 3.2: Location of respondents**

time employment replaces RAP as the second most frequent response.

Multiple respondents differed from all other groups in that disability support was the second most frequent response.

## Principal findings

In summary, analysis of key informant interviews and the Shelter Survey produce three main findings. First, **there appears to be few immigrants and refugees using the shelter systems.** Non-Canadian born populations are underrepresented in our study, even with immigrant and refugee-specific agencies included. Anecdotal evidence from the other sub-studies and discussions with key informants suggest that our finding is valid; that is: immigrants and refugees/claimants do not use shelters to the same extent as the Canadian-born population.

One key informant who is an immigrant him/herself, went so far as to say “it is not in our culture” (RAC member). Instead, it appears that immigrants and refugees are helping one another in their various communities.

Operators of a housing crisis phone-line in the GVRD report increased calls from immigrant/refugee populations in the West End of Vancouver who are couch surfing, and suggest that some may not be using shelters because of cultural reasons. Other information has suggested that when immigrants and refugees have no place to stay, they will stay with family or friends. This may be related to issues of trust, language, the depth of familial and friendship connections. We will return to this issue of social capital later in the report.

Second, **despite being homeless, many respondents reported having some form of employment.** Almost one-quarter of all respondents report being employed on either a full-time, part-time or casual basis. As already noted, anecdotal evidence from key informant interviews suggest many of the men staying in shelters are working in temporary labor during the day. In fact, among the immigrants and refugees using shelters, employment was the second most prevalent form of income.

Finally, **shelter personnel expressed concern about the structural barriers that affect all clients**, including limited shelter and transportation allowances, as well as the time limits on stays (in light of current waitlists). Although we have obtained a great deal of information on the state of the shelter systems, much of the information reflected the concerns of the workers (who are, for example, highly focused on mental health and drug addiction issues, as opposed to the situation of immigrants and refugees). Many of these concerns centre around housing for those who are particularly hard to house (e.g., individuals with mental health or drug addiction issues).

These issues are at the forefront of the concerns of shelter staff, much more so than immigration or refugee status.

### **Discussion: ‘*Taking care of their own*’? or falling through the cracks...**

The shelter survey conducted as part of this project reveals a sample population that is overwhelmingly English speaking and Canadian born. Our desire to develop a portrait of the immigrants who are using shelters and transition houses has met with smaller numbers than expected. Interviews with key informants suggest that our results – while not based on a perfect sampling technique – may nevertheless portray the situation accurately. They estimate the proportion of immigrants and refugees using emergency shelters and transition houses in the GVRD at between five and fifteen percent.

It is not the presence of, but rather the absence of, the non-Canadian born population that is noteworthy in our study. Although immigrants and refugees form 38 percent of the population in Greater Vancouver, they account for only 18 percent of our respondents. When respondents from the agency dedicated to GARs are removed, this number drops to under 13 percent, or about one-third of what we might expect. The implications of this finding are difficult to ascertain.

It is likely that ethno-cultural groups and religious communities are providing assistance to those in need. Key informants, for example, spoke of trying to connect existing clients to wider ethno-cultural and religious communities whenever possible. But when asked whether the reasons that refugees and immigrants use shelters differed from the Native-born population, key informants frequently attributed it to a lack of information and systems (or networks) of support amongst immigrants and refugees. These points appear to be contradictory, until we add another

potential element to the mix: probably some ethno-cultural groups have better networks of support that extend help to immigrants and refugees than other groups.

Certainly during the research we heard evidence that some ethno-cultural populations would not use shelters, with one provider going as far as to say “it is not in our culture” (RAC member) to use shelters. When facing a lack of secure housing, it was suggested that members of established ethno-cultural groups stay with family or other acquaintances, instead of relying on emergency shelters. Both strong (i.e., family) and weak (i.e., acquaintances) networks have been shown to provide newcomers with practical assistance and knowledge about housing markets (Ray 1998). For those lacking secure accommodations, these networks may be tapped to provide temporary accommodations. While established ethno-cultural communities may have the ability to “take care of their own”, other groups who lack extensive social networks, including recently arrived individuals and refugee claimants, may fall through the cracks. Here we are mindful of the literature on social capital, to which we return below.

Given the insecurity of their situation, refugee claimants may experience obstacles to settlement not faced by others. Unlike GARs (who receive assistance from a dedicated service agency), refugee claimants who arrive in Vancouver may not be provided with information on emergency shelters. One notable exception, however, is that some refugee claimants have been sent into the shelter system by a faith-based service representative at the Vancouver Airport. Those without proper documentation, or who do not qualify under criteria established by the MHR, are hindered in their efforts to access emergency shelters by a lack of available emergency beds that do not require Ministry vouchers.

For other claimants, key informants suggest, there is a perceived risk of being deported if they access shelters or emergency services. While we cannot be certain about the extent of biases

that emerged during interviews (e.g., shelters that require newcomers to adopt more easily pronounced Western names, or that disallow obvious signs of religious observances) these isolated incidents may influence the decisions of immigrants and refugees *not* to access the shelter system.

Key informants presented a portrait of the institutional environment of shelters that is consistent with those described by Junaid (2002) and Zine (2002). For agencies providing emergency shelter to immigrants and refugees the difficulties of insufficient funding and a lack of available emergency beds, may be compounded by a lack of appropriate training to cope with the complexities of refugee settlement. Language barriers, lack of documentation, and the effects of trauma are three potential obstacles to the provision of shelter services for recently arrived immigrants and refugees.

In light of overriding issues within the system (e.g., the need for increased outreach programs, specific emergency beds, and non-market or subsidized housing), combined with low numbers of newcomers accessing emergency shelters, key informants were more focused on the needs of the wider community of homeless individuals and families as opposed to the more specific needs of immigrants and refugees. Current rates of social assistance in shelter allowances in British Columbia are seen to be insufficient to meet the cost-of-living in Vancouver. Structural barriers such as high rental prices, long waiting lists and a lack of affordable and accessible housing were identified as barriers to obtaining housing. Key informants suggested that for immigrants and refugees these difficulties may be compounded by a number of all-too-familiar barriers including size of families and the lack of suitable housing to meet the needs of large families, findings which echo those identified within the broader literatures (Murdie and Teixeira 2001, Miraftab 200, Chambon et al. 1997, Zine 2002).

There is also evidence in our study that circumstances for the working poor are precarious. Although self-reported, it is significant that almost one quarter of the individuals staying in shelters reported some form of employment (either full-time, part-time or casual). When respondents from the dedicated government-assisted refugee organization are removed from the analysis, the most frequently cited sources of income are income assistance, full-time employment, casual employment and no source of income. Even though many are engaged in some form of employment, these individuals cannot afford housing.

The shelter study also corroborates the concept of a continuum of homelessness that ranges from housing stress through relative homelessness to absolute forms. Moreover, there is a dynamic element to this set of conditions, and individuals shift from one part of the continuum to another over time. This point is consistent with the argument made by Begin et al. (1999), who see homelessness as the instability of adequate housing. While some respondents in our shelter survey reported their last long-term housing as unstable (e.g., living in single-room occupancy hotels, staying with friends or family, or renting a friends couch), others reported having owned their last form of long-term housing. Key informants spoke of the existence of a cycle of homelessness in which people move between insecure housing and “rooflessness” on a regular basis. Low social assistance and shelter allowance rates, when combined with institutional rules that limit shelter stays to no more than 30 days, produces a cycle in which whatever housing that is obtained is temporary. In the rush to obtain housing, and with limited means, clients settle in unsafe housing located in marginal and inexpensive areas of the city, thus perpetuating a cycle of social marginality and homelessness. Often, key informants report, these clients return to the shelter system within six months to a year.

While snapshot shelter surveys—such as the one undertaken in our project—provide important information on the clients accessing shelter at a particular time, the accounts of key informants reinforce the need to consider people’s housing histories, rather than viewing homelessness as a spontaneous event (Kissoon 2002). With this point in mind, we turn to the part of our project that dealt most directly with individuals and their stories.



## Part 4: The refugee claimant study

In this part of the project, we sought to explore the housing situation of refugee claimants who have recently received a positive decision enabling them to stay in Canada. We asked participants about the situation prior to the acceptance of their claim, and as it evolved over the first year since receiving a positive decision.

### Income

Successful Refugee Claimants are entitled to basic welfare provisions that range from \$510 per month for single, employable recipients, to higher amounts depending on the structure of the family and number of individuals within it (Table 4.1).

	<b>Basic Social Assistance per year</b>	<b>Basic Social Assistance per month</b>
Single Employable	\$6,120	\$510
Person with a Disability	\$9,437	\$786
Single parent with One Child	\$10,147	\$845
Couple with two Children	\$11, 893	\$991

**Table 4.1: Welfare Rates in British Columbia 2003 (National Council of Welfare, 2003)**

The claimants voiced their frustration over the issue that, during the intervening period between the acceptance of a refugee claim and official landing (obtaining permanent residence), it is nearly impossible to obtain work, since employers see them as temporary residents of Canada (see section on discrimination). Of 36 claimants, 32 relied upon government aid for at least the initial stages of settlement. Two of the remaining four claimants said that they were not eligible for welfare as a result of an initial negative decision of their case by the IRB. Twenty-

two of the 36 claimants have remained on welfare now that they have the right of permanent settlement in Canada. None of the respondents were averse to looking for employment; however a large proportion of claimants were unable to work (see section on labour market). Instead, the claimants believe they have no other options, and that they must subsist on welfare, even though the amount of aid barely covers their cost of housing alone. According to the National Council of Welfare (2003), the poverty line (measured by LICO) is \$19,795 for a single employable person living in British Columbia. Therefore, we could say that there is a poverty gap of \$13,351 for single recipients. In other words, the welfare system provides an income that is just 33 percent of the poverty line. For many claimants, this amount of aid was insufficient for initial settlement costs.

#### **Case Study**

Ali arrived in Canada by himself in 2003 from Afghanistan. At the airport Ali's appendix burst and he was rushed to the hospital and underwent emergency surgery. Without any knowledge of the medical system or social support, Ali was charged medical fees and was required to take antibiotics after his surgery which cost him well over \$200 a month. After one month of staying in Canada, Ali received his first welfare check totaling \$500. He found housing with a friend and they each paid \$350 a month in rent. Ali's medical expenses exceeded the \$150 that he had left over after paying his share of rent. In addition, Ali spoke of shrapnel wounds that he had endured during the war. He said that for months he required medical attention that he just could not afford. With no money left over, Ali said that he went hungry and thirsty for months. He stated that he had fainted several times owing to starvation and dehydration.

#### **Rent**

Rental rates in Vancouver have been increasing, while the basic welfare allowance has not, leading to a critical affordability problem. The average vacancy rate in BC is 3.3 percent. Although CMHC reported a slight increase in Vancouver's vacancy rate in 2003, it remains well

below the provincial average. Thus, as many interviewees told us, unless people were sharing accommodations, refugee claimants and their families could rarely, if ever, afford larger units. Many of the respondents sought bachelor or one-bedroom apartments, their only choice given their financial resources, even though they were living with children.

A 43-year old mother from Iran commented on the lack of affordable and vacant rental units in the Lower Mainland. She stated that, “I think there is not enough for the refugees that come here. The government has to plan to build [enough] apartments or houses”.

Despite a minimal increase over the past year, vacancy rates are lowest among those units that are most in demand by refugee claimants, bachelor suites (Table 4.2).

	Bachelor	1 Bedroom	2 Bedroom	3 Bedroom+
Vancouver CMA	1.5	2.1	2.1	2.3
Weighted Average in BC	2.4	2.7	3.8	5.8

**Table 4.2: Vacancy Rates in Market Rental Apartment Units in 2003 (CMHC, 2003)**

In this study, unaffordable rental rates were the most commonly cited barriers to finding housing in Vancouver. According to a report by the CMHC (2003), rental rates in Vancouver are well above the provincial average (Table 4.3). Without any information about, or prior knowledge of, the housing market, claimants find themselves unable to pay rent amounts that greatly surpass their welfare provisions.

	Bachelor	1 Bedroom	2 Bedroom	3 Bedroom+
Vancouver CMA	\$654	\$759	\$965	\$1119
Weighted Average in BC	\$602	\$695	\$806	\$917

**Table 4.3: Average Rents in Market Rental Apartment Units by Bedroom Type in 2003 (CMHC, 2003)**

A male claimant from China, age 22, commented on rent rates. He stated that,

“The rent is high, I wish it could be lower. I am on welfare; the supportive allowance is \$185, but housing costs me \$325. The \$325 I have received plus the amount of my younger brother, that is \$650 [combined]. The \$650 could hardly get us anything good; it is very, very hard”.

Interviewees were asked about their rental payments as a proportion of their total income, both at the time of their initial settlement and currently. There was much variation in answers about their initial settlement experience. For all of the participants, the first experience in the rental market occurred no later than one month after arrival. An overwhelming number of participants found themselves in a state of critical housing stress (spending more than fifty percent of income on housing). Of the 36 claimants, 32 found themselves spending between 50 and 74 percent of their income on housing in the initial settlement phase, and 4 respondents spent more than 75 percent. During this initial settlement period, all but three of the respondents noted that they were dependant on welfare alone for income.

The respondents were then asked about how much of their income is spent on rent at present. For many, the situation has improved. In terms of affordability, one respondent is currently spending more than 75 percent of her income on rent, down from 4. The number of claimants living in critical housing stress fell to 21. Moreover, the rent/income proportions were closer to the 50 percent mark, whereas the majority during initial settlement spent 65 percent or more. The number of participants in housing stress (30-49 percent) increased to 6, and 8 participants now spend less than 30 percent of their income on housing.

### **Case Study**

Brenda, a single mom from Congo has been paying more than 75 percent of her income on housing since she arrived in Canada in 2003. After staying in two emergency centres for the first three weeks here, Brenda found a one-bedroom apartment in New Westminster. Her rent costs \$660 a month with an additional \$140 for her phone bill and utilities. As a single mom, Brenda is entitled to \$845 plus an additional child benefit of \$246 a month. Brenda's monthly income totals \$1,091, while her housing expenses total \$800. Brenda has been on the waiting list for BC housing for over one year. She is frustrated that she and her son have to survive on the provisions of his child benefit. Brenda began crying while discussing her situation, she says, *"...it's so difficult now...you can't buy food, buy anything. Maybe if you go to the food bank, I can't eat meat, I can't eat food from my country. It's so difficult. I went [to the welfare office] to ask I need some [bus] tickets because I am going to school. They said we don't give tickets. I said how can I find a job if I can't learn English?"*

### **Labour Market**

For our interviewees, gaining entrance into Vancouver's labour market has been a trying and emotional experience. While some decided to wait and upgrade their language and education, those who sought work were stymied. The greatest barrier and point of frustration for those who had searched for work has been employers' expectation of Canadian work experience. These requirements are virtually impossible to attain, since one cannot gain Canadian experience without first having a job in Canada. As a result, most claimants are pushed into dependence on welfare aid.

### Case Study

Paulo, a 51-year-old man from Mexico, discussed his frustrations about the Canadian labour market. Paulo was a very successful businessman in his country and has worked in film production and within the media for over 25 years. In addition, he has taught related subject matter at a university. With all his training, skills and impressive facility in English, Paulo has been unable to attain work since his arrival here in 2000. He says that he is discriminated against because he does not have Canadian experience in his professional field. However when Paulo attempted to look for low-skilled work in the local cafes, he reported that he was then discriminated against for being too old and overqualified. Paulo has had to spend a number of years volunteering in a variety of places in order to attain Canadian experience. *“In my culture we don’t have this culture to be a volunteer, ...but sometimes like now when I need the money...after I arrived they said if you want to be a volunteer you are very welcome. I said ok fine I need to learn to speak English and learn many things. But now I can’t be a volunteer anymore, I need money. And they still say that if you want a job at the cinema because you have some knowledge in it...they ask why don’t you volunteer here. Because I don’t have time to be a volunteer I need a job, a real job. So the housing could be a problem for me and my future”*. Paulo feels very desperate at this point and confesses that he has nowhere to turn. Without employment income, Paulo feels his housing situation is very unstable.

While many have had to deal with a labour market that does not recognize foreign experience or skills, some have accepted deskilling in order to attain employment. A large number of the claimants who have looked for work are quite educated. Out of the 36 claimants, only 3 had less than high school education (all of these individuals were from China). Thirteen claimants had attained high school education or some level of secondary school. A majority of the participants had received a postsecondary education. One man reported finishing three of the four years of university, while 15 claimants reported attaining a college or university degree (one claimant received his education in the US prior to coming to Canada, while the others received their education in their country of origin).

Given their relatively high level of human capital, claimants were shocked at how unprepared they were for Vancouver’s labour market. For example Anthony, a 36-year-old male

from Burundi, received a post-secondary diploma in teaching. When asked to reflect on this situation, he said.

“When I came here I was [qualified to] teach, I couldn’t teach and I have my training diploma back home ... I volunteer for an elementary school ... teaching French, but what am I doing as a volunteer? I can’t make money ... I am capable to doing very well. I can’t do that because I am not allowed. So I cannot make enough money to find suitable housing”.

Of the claimants possessing a post-secondary degree, and who had attempted to attain employment, none were able to utilize their education, either in a practical application or in order to obtain a skilled job. Many of these claimants concluded that deskilling was a necessary reality in order for them to find jobs.

A 24-year-old male from Sri Lanka asked,

“I don’t understand why you don’t recognize education from another country...all the places need experience and reference and those kind of things. I don’t have experience [here] and education – they don’t recognize. So go and work as a computer operator, I can’t do that because I have a computer certificate but I can’t work...”

Upon arrival this young man found a job cleaning floors and washing dishes at a restaurant.

Currently, he is working two part time jobs, at a fast food restaurant and as a stock person at a grocery store.

The respondents who have been employed made it clear during the interviews that newcomers are not capable of fully integrating into Canadian society, since much of their time is spent catching up. In order to gain a foothold into the labour market, claimants are required to volunteer and/or be placed at the bottom of the labour market, regardless of their skill and education level.

## Language

Lack of fluency in English also proved to be a significant barrier inhibiting access to adequate housing for refugee claimants. Only 5 of the 36 participants had arrived in Canada with fluent skills in English. However, even those who had some prior command of English expressed difficulties. A 36-year old male from Burundi noted that,

“The problem for every person that comes from another country which is not really English speaking, you think that you know some English well, but when you come to a place where English is first language, you don’t understand what people say... not at all. They speak and you can’t hear what they say...”

Coming from Albania, a 32-year old male commented that, “it is hard because when you come, you don’t know nothing, you don’t know where to go. You don’t know no English...it’s hard if you don’t know somebody”.

Claimants who arrived without English expressed frustration, since they were unable to communicate or negotiate with landlords. When applicable, family members were sometimes called upon to mediate in these discussions. In three cases, (1 couple from Mexico, 2 single mothers from Peru and Guatemala), claimants were assisted by their children. A 53-year old mother of two from Mexico confessed that,

“I feel terrible, bad, because I can’t communicate good in English, because my kids help too, but you feel uncomfortable because you are with the parents and in a new country you are indefinite”.

The majority of the claimants from Africa are fluent in French. However, their fluency in one of Canada’s two national languages proved to be less useful than expected (see section on Orientation).

When asked about the availability of language classes, one settlement worker replied by saying that,



“[three settlement agencies] offer language, English classes for refugee claimants, but because funding is limited, they rely mostly on volunteers, so the level of English is just up to survival level, so it’s not enough to go out and get a job ... and most will be taken advantage [of] because of their status”.

A 34-year old claimant born in China, but who has arrived from Peru with her husband and two young children, was interviewed with the assistance of an interpreter. She and her husband both work and live in Chinatown. She stated that although they work full time, they still have taken several English courses provided by local settlement agencies.

“... at the very beginning [we] studied English at Inland Refugee Society and later on [we] went to Mosaic and then arranged for one to one tutor because [our] level of English is too low ... and now [we have] graduated and now [we] plan to enroll in a course at SUCCESS both of [us]. So [we] keep upgrading [our] language skills”

The claimant was then asked about her current level of comprehension in English. The claimant began laughing and answered that her English was at a very basic level. Despite the time that she and her husband have invested in English lessons, the woman explained that they could only afford to spare 1-2 evenings per week to practice English owing to their children and full time jobs.

## **Discrimination**

Discrimination has been noted in the literature as a factor that can contribute to homelessness for newcomers, as it restricts housing opportunities (Novac et al. 2002). During the interviews, the claimants were *not* explicitly asked whether they felt that they had experienced discrimination. However, 10 claimants spoke about this issue spontaneously, and felt that they were targets of discrimination for one or more reasons. Only one of these claimants voiced a concern about racism, and there was no other mention of discrimination on the basis of ethnicity,

race or religious affiliation. The issues that were of particular concern for the claimants included: social insurance tagging; welfare discrimination, and no children policies.

### **Social Insurance**

Until permanent status is attained, individuals receive a social insurance number (SIN) beginning with the number '9', which tagged them as temporary visitors. Many claimants are unaware of the significance of this category, but several spoke of ensuing difficulties. Several claimants discussed their inability to find work; moreover, several were confused as to why they were never called back after interviews, and/or asked to fill out personal information. Other claimants (3 men and 2 woman) were certain that the first digit of their SIN marked them as having only temporary status.

A 46-year old male from Eritrea recounted his experiences, he said that,

“There was a job in Coquitlam and everything was great. They showed me what to do, they told me how much they pay me, everything. And then they asked me for my SIN number and it says ‘9’. “What’s this, are you new?”...if you are new it’s terrible”.

This source of discrimination was a key barrier discussed by 3 out of the 4 settlement workers.

One settlement worker suggested that by eliminating this visual cue of temporary status, the claimant might integrate into society more easily.

### **Source of Income**

As noted, income and rent levels have been substantial obstacles in obtaining adequate housing. Low-income claimants have faced an additional barrier, which further complicates the housing process. While discussing their experiences, seven claimants (five women and two men) raised the issue of welfare discrimination. According to the participants, many landlords refuse to accept welfare cheques as payment for rent. Landlords are not willing to rely on this form of

payments, since they consider it to be unstable. Payments are based on the recipients' need, and may be suspended at any time, leaving recipients with no way to afford rent. Claimants were told by landlords that this was too much of a risk.

A 22-year old male from China asserted that,

“...there shouldn't be any problem with the government cheque; they need not to worry about [it]. Their attitude makes people feel uncomfortable, seems like I couldn't afford to pay, that is not too good”.

### **Children**

As noted earlier in the section on *rent*, larger accommodations are too expensive for claimants who subsist on basic welfare provisions. As a result, larger families seek smaller rental units and crowding occurs. During the interviews, three women highlighted issues surrounding housing and their children. They spoke of the difficulties of finding housing that is adequate for the size of their family.

A single mother from Peru noted that,

“It was small; we were together in one room, because when I was looking for [a] house, it was difficult because they all ask me about how many people and I have children and many times they tell me No if I have kids”.

This woman continued about her experiences and stated, “if you tell the truth, you can't find a home.”

One settlement worker confirmed such difficulties and added that,

“If a [SRC] has young kids like under three years old, most landlords don't like that because young children will cry at night and be noisy and write on the wall or riding a bicycle that will damage the carpet or use more water. So landlords prefer to rent to young couple without kids”.

## Orientation

All of the respondents reported that there was little, if any, support offered upon entry to Canada and in the subsequent days after arrival. When asked what kind of support or information was provided, all of the claimants said they experienced feelings of confusion and fear upon arrival and in all cases, the claimants were left on their own. A young female from Albania noted that, “[The Immigration officers] make it clear to you that this is what their responsibilities are and where they end and so you are on your own from that point on”.

When asked about her initial experiences in Vancouver and whether she was notified about any services upon arrival in Canada, Gretta, a 35 year old female claimant from Mexico said that “no one explained any services...no information what you can get as an immigrant, where to get money, how to get a home; I didn’t know about community centres. I feel totally isolated, no language, no family, no hope to go back, no money, no house”.

There were five respondents that arrived at the airport in Vancouver with French language skills. The participants arriving from Africa (specifically those from Benin, Congo, Togo and Burundi) were fluent in a dialect, as well as in French. These claimants were surprised that, upon arrival in a bilingual, French-English speaking country, there was no one who could communicate with them. The participants said that there was no one at the airport who spoke French, and that this made the asylum claim process much more difficult. A 25-year old male from Togo recounted his first experiences. He stated that,

“When I came here I could hardly speak any English...[the language] was difficult. The worker started to ask me a bunch of questions and I can’t speak English. I tried to speak, I asked if they speak French, and they didn’t know. I got so angry”.

The participants were also asked, “Where did you stay the first night you arrived in Canada?” Several claimants stated that the first night, and in some cases the first several nights,

were spent at the airport. Some were detained for lack of documentation, while others spent the first night at the airport because they had no other place to go to and were unable to find proper accommodations that first night. For example, one respondent from Nigeria arrived in Vancouver in 2003. She was 8 months pregnant and was accompanied by two children, aged one and four. She recalled her experience with the immigration officer,

“...they said that I had to go...I said where do you want me to go? [The officer] said anywhere...[I said] I don’t know anywhere...you have to tell me. I [asked], if I can sleep on the floor. She said yes. So I slept on the floor ... I am pregnant.”

Another women from Congo had a similar experience. On her first night in Vancouver, at eight months pregnant, she said, “...I had to sleep on the chair because I don’t know where I am.”

When discussing her first few days in Canada, one woman from Albania expressed her frustration over the lack of support during such a trying time.

“There are too many processes going on at the same time: you have find a house, you have report to immigration, you have to find a lawyer, you have to do your welfare papers, you have to go do immigration exam and if you lose the date, and then you have to go apply for the work permit and then you have to go apply for social insurance number and then you have to go and apply for a job, and then your hearing comes and ... its to many things to do at the same time ... And you only have twenty days to do everything and what if you don’t have your lawyer at that time and what if the lawyer asks for too much money and you don’t have the time to collect all of that money”.

The initial settlement period was trying for all of the participants. A single mother from Sri Lanka expressed the gender differences and cultural considerations that are sometimes overlooked. She stated that,

“Guys, they can go around and get the information, but ladies, in our country, we are taught that it is scary and especially because we don’t know the language and we cannot trust any body and so we cannot find the information right away”.

One settlement worker reflected on the capabilities of settlement agencies to provide initial information on housing to claimants. He stated that,

“...unfortunately the situation for a lot of settlement workers is that we don’t have that many resources to offer in terms of housing. We can’t say to our clients, by the way there is this specific way where you go to get all of the information and they will help and give you assistance and inform you about housing and where to go. There is no such thing. [Housing] is an area that the settlement sector has not put that much attention to it, and it’s the key thing from the beginning”.

## **Social Networks**

Only one participant had arrived to Canada with a family member who was already established here in Vancouver. All 35 claimants arrived without any preexisting social networks. Settling in a new country without any social support can make the housing situation for newcomers even more difficult. One settlement councilor stated that,

“If they are very honest and tell them that they are a refugee claimant, then most probably the landlord won’t rent a place to them first. They don’t know much about refugee claimants in their mind it’s always someone very desperate, no job, maybe experienced violence in their home country or their personality is unknown and also they don’t have networks here, so if anything happens they have no other sources to help these tenants. Stigmatisation is very serious”.

Although the claimants did not have anyone to assist them in the first few days after arrival, some claimants did manage to tap into “ethnic resources”. One settlement councilor noted that,

“[claimants] will turn to people that seem familiar to them. Familiarity. If they speak their language then they will approach them ... people who look like their group ... they are looking for a face or words that will lead them to a place”.

A 29-year old female from Sri Lanka recounted that she felt the safest approaching someone from her own ethnic group.

“On bus I met some Sri Lankan Singhalese lady, my language. She said do you know about Inland Refugee Society, they help refugees. Go and talk to them...then I go and I try to find them but it was difficult. We don’t know any information, especially BC housing, we don’t know anything”.

A 32-year old man from Cameroon was able to find housing by networking with other refugees and African migrants.

“I met this friend from Liberia. Then I spoke to him that I was looking for accommodations. In fact I was with one African guy that just came at the same time. So we were both looking for accommodation, so we happen to meet this guy who is from Liberia, then that’s when he invited me to meet [a settlement worker] at church with the possibility of how I can get accommodation”.

Another settlement worker credited the settlement of claimants to their creative survival methods. He said,

“They have been so creative, they develop these kinds of networks amongst themselves ... they start talking about living in such a place and they know the landlord now ... so it helps but it also brings its own problems because people end up being in places that aren’t necessarily the best”.

While discussing his observations in dealing with refugee claimants, another settlement worker asserted,

“...the more supported a refugee claimant is, not only with housing, but with relationships ... they have the support they need to pull it off and they settle in more quickly, generally find jobs more quickly. Refugee claimants are totally disconnected”.

## **Living Conditions**

### **Sub-standard conditions**

Inadequate and substandard living conditions constitute a major component of relative homelessness. Although all of the claimants reported having a space in which to live, their dwellings were often of low quality (Figure 4.1). Ali, for example, spent many of his nights sleeping on the floor or on old mattresses that had been discarded on the street. In the second place that he stayed, he recounted,

“...until that time we didn’t have blankets, we were sleeping on the floor ... we didn’t have anything until four or five months we were sleeping on the floor. We had no pillows, no mattress, no ... nothing. We didn’t even have cups, we were drinking water out of our hands”.

One woman who arrived from Mexico with her husband and two children, spoke about her first rental situation, she recounted that “actually in the first house when I move, I don’t have nothing with us, only buy a ... pillow, and the floor, we sleep on the floor, for 3 days, before we receive bed, mattress”. Her husband noted that they “received some furniture from Inland. They were helping a lot, and Mennonite Central ... MCC ... the same they help always”. Other claimants reported housing that was substandard. One man recounted his experiences since his arrival in 2002 from Eritrea. He has lived in six places since he moved to Canada and all of these places were described as unhealthy environments. At his fifth home, he said that he was forced into signing a one-year lease without knowing of the conditions. In order for him to avoid losing his \$400 deposit, he lived in this basement apartment for 12 months. He felt powerless to change the situation and asks,

“...what to do ... nothing? ... upstairs they are, I don’t know what kind of people, I don’t understand the whole night I can’t sleep. I talk to them many times ... but they don’t care ... they smoke in the house and they throw cigarettes in my front door, every time they spit at my front door ... they didn’t stop, they didn’t stop. The house is a basement and it’s so dirty and smelly. Because when I cook in that place there was no fan, no fan, so everything is dirty. Even all my clothes just smell ... because there’s no fan”.

Another couple noted that the conditions of their current home were affecting the health of their young daughter: “there are some problems with heat, [the landlords] really don’t care, he keeps the heat low because they want to save and ... it’s too cold for the baby”.

One settlement worker discussed, in general, substandard conditions that claimants experience. In addition, he noted that owing to other barriers, these conditions continually deteriorate.

“People end up being in places that aren’t necessarily the best and then they don’t know what to do or how to respond when it comes to letting the landlords/owners know there is a hole in the wall, that the dark hole is getting bigger and bigger and the fridge isn’t working”.





**Figure 4.1: Damp and Moldy Housing Conditions (Ramirez 2003).**

## **Crowding**

A prominent housing outcome for many SRCs was overcrowding. A number of problems lead to “doubling up” strategies in order to access rental units in Vancouver. As noted above, vacancy rates for larger accommodations are higher, but so are prices. Therefore, newcomers are forced to seek out smaller and more affordable accommodations. This quotation is representative of many:

“It was just a one bedroom and it was very hard for us; my son needs a bedroom and also me and my husband need one bedroom ... for our culture it is very important for our child. My son got the bedroom and me and my husband sleep in the living room. It was really, really, really hard time”.

A male claimant from Sri Lanka described his settlement experiences since landing in 2002. Since his arrival, he has lived in six units, and he is currently searching for his seventh. He commented on the crowded conditions of a one bedroom suite that he lived in for six months. He said, “the whole house was filled with beds, like two beds in the room and one bed on the outside”. In addition to crowding, claimants also mentioned substandard conditions, describing much of these places as dirty, smelly and requiring upgrades.

## **Safety**

Owing to financial constraints, claimants are settling in areas that have low rental rates or are compromised in quality. Alongside low-income and cheap housing complexes are also crime, drug abuse and prostitution.

This issue can be seen in the experience of a family from Nigeria. Nia was eight months pregnant and had two small children with her. Her husband Joseph was not able to reunite with them until several months later. Nia and the children spent their first month in an emergency

shelter. She said that, “The [emergency shelter] was very dirty and there was a lot of smoke, marijuana ... the smoke come inside, it was moldy and the kids were getting a lot of problems”.

Nia was very concerned about the health and safety of her children while living at the shelter. Once Joseph arrived in Canada the family was able to move into BC housing in the Downtown Eastside. The move out of the emergency shelter and into more stable housing did not increase feelings of safety for this family. Both parents are still quite concerned for the well-being of their children. Joseph says that, “We are so much worried about our own children, when we take them out there are the drunks and drug addicted ... it is not a good place”. In response to concern for their children’s safety, the couple applied for a transfer. They reported being told that a transfer is only possible after having lived in the housing complex for more than one year (they will be eligible in January 2006).

Another man spoke nonchalantly about the danger that surrounds him and his family.

Q. Do you find it safe here?

A. We are used to that.

Q. What about your children and wife, do they feel safe?

A. They need some time to adjust ... They dare not go out when it’s dark.

A 43 year-old female claimant from Russia also commented on safety issues. She discussed how her personal safety was compromised, as landlords were emotionally and physically abusive. This form of abuse was made possible through the constant threats of deportation. She said that one landlord had threatened her by stating that she had “tools to kick her out of the country”. This claimant continued to say that,

“Safety is always jeopardized, especially for the refugee claimant. Canadian, well educated intelligent women tried to use me as a free housecleaner, babysitter ... they don’t care; [she says] I kick you from the country. And guys are always looking for how to use women. And no one cares”.

## **A Home in Chinatown**

The SRCs who have come from China tell an important and unique story. While many claimants discuss one or a combination of the above factors (crowding, substandard conditions and safety), the claimants from China speak of a housing situation that includes all of these factors in an alarming combination. Six of the seven claimants from China found their first accommodations in Chinatown, and all six still reside in this area of the downtown eastside. As newcomers to the country, they arrived alone, without any financial resources or English skills. Without any knowledge of the housing market, all six found themselves wandering the streets. Several Chinese claimants relied on the advice of strangers, which led them to seek accommodations in Chinatown. The respondents said that once they arrived in Chinatown, they were all able to find somewhere to sleep; all five claimants found themselves in similar rundown accommodations that are geared towards newcomers from China. The interpreter/settlement worker acknowledged one specific hotel as the same place that nearly all of her refugee clients from China find themselves. According to these six participants, the conditions here were nothing short of horrendous. A male claimant aged 49 from China gave these details,

“Things there are in a mess...there were cockroaches everywhere. But the rent was cheap. There were a lot of seniors living there; they are dirty and have a lot of personal belongings, so things are in a mess. A lot of cockroaches. Dirty, stinky”.

The description of crowding varied slightly between respondents, but the image remained the same. Four of the claimants noted how this site for Chinese refugees allots one washroom and a small kitchen area for twenty to thirty people. Electricity and heating work sporadically at best. Each participant detailed the same list of unhealthy and unsanitary conditions, which include dirty, smelly and infested rooms. Being located in the Downtown Eastside, safety is also a major factor. A female claimant from China, age 65, became very emotional during the interview as she discussed her first reaction to living in Chinatown.

“...first it’s very noisy, second there is drug trading inside the hotel and some people using drugs and there is different mixture of people living there like refugee claimants, those very low income people, or long term residents and there is a gambling room for people to go gambling...”.

This woman stated how unsafe she felt in an environment where there was rampant drug use and dealing as well as illegal gambling. She still resides in Chinatown five years after her arrival. All six of the claimants who have lived or are still living in Chinatown felt compelled to reside in this precarious environment primarily because they cannot see any other option. Without the ability to speak English, and without information of how to learn English, these claimants felt that there was no other way to communicate with others or even perform basic tasks such as shopping for groceries, unless they were in a culturally homogenous environment. Chinatown provided a familiar environment during a very daunting and unstable period. Financial constraints are also a key factor in the clustering of claimants in Chinatown. The participants all quoted the same rental rate of \$325 per month and all were restricted to the welfare allowance of \$510 per month. Spending more than fifty percent of their income on housing, these five were all in critical housing need.

One settlement councilor who works with Chinese claimants was asked about the settlement patterns of her clients. She discussed Chinatown as a likely starting point for claimants who are new to Vancouver. She stated that,

“These refugee claimants don’t have many resources to look for other places, and plus these places, the landlord don’t like to rent a place to refugee claimants, so they are stuck in a hotel in Chinatown and the living condition is very bad. I heard from my clients that there are mice, and people break in and steal their stuff and also the facilities, shared kitchen and shared bathroom and very it’s noisy and also people are gambling ... so the whole environment is not very healthy”.



**Figure 4.2: Kitchen Shared by Six Families (Ramirez, 2003)**

## **Research Dilemmas and Consideration**

The settlement workers were asked to reflect upon the difficulties of conducting research that focuses on the housing needs of refugee claimants. Three agents highlighted that this group is highly transient. Owing to their vulnerable position within housing and labour markets, SRCs are subject to constant moves and abrupt changes in contact information. Single SRCs were described as the most difficult to track overtime. SRCs with families are perceived to have greater stability as a result of parenting and labour responsibilities.

One settlement worker noted that there was a further problem. He stated that the settlement patterns of this group are difficult to examine owing to the circumstances that accompany their refugee status. The claimants were already in a vulnerable state during their visits with the frontline workers, and so collecting consent for the research project seemed ill timed. He stated that,

“Even though we are in contact with these people, it has to be the right moment. We can’t just throw something on top of what they already have to deal with ... that limits how much we can respond to you as a researcher ... once you start talking to someone about their problems and it’s the right time, they’re hoping to talk to you, and its useful information. The reality is they’re ... individuals trying to look at the big picture and then the small picture that’s the immediate solution. So the objectives don’t match”.

## **Discussion: Struggling to survive with few resources**

The experiences of the refugee claimants who participated in this research are consistent with many of the barriers discussed in the relevant literature. In addition, these interviews bring to light some other issues surrounding settlement amongst refugee claimants in particular.

The research conducted by Adrienne Chambon, David Hulchanski, Robert Murdie, and Carlos Teixeira (1997) discusses the primary and secondary barriers that newcomers face upon arrival. They assert that primary obstacles include physical characteristics that cannot be changed by the individual, which include skin color, gender, ethnicity, culture and religion. Secondary barriers include factors that may be changed by the individual such as language and knowledge of institutions. This study found very little evidence that primary barriers were affecting the acquisition of housing for refugee claimants as much as secondary barriers. The main concerns would be classified by Chambon et al. as secondary barriers which, according to this study, proved to be far from temporary and changeable. The picture that emerges from this research is that refugee claimants face unique obstacles that are symptomatic of their immigration class (a factor not on the list provided by Chambon et al.). In many cases, immigrants who face secondary barriers are able to integrate over time into the Canadian housing and labour market. However, the likelihood for full integration is greatly hindered for refugee claimants owing to their more vulnerable position upon arriving. Claimants arrive in Canada with little financial and social capital, and for those who possess human capital, proper documentation is often lacking,

and/or foreign credentials go unrecognized. And so, by virtue of their means of entry, claimants have a greater disadvantage in the housing and labour market. The participants noted that discrimination was apparent in the initial settlement period. These ‘secondary’ barriers include: a temporary-status social insurance number; social assistance as a source of income; lack of language facility; and lack of knowledge of the locality. According to the research conducted by Picot (2004), recent immigrants require more catch-up time in order to reach economic parity with the Canadian born citizen. However, the process of ‘catching up’ may not apply to successful claimants, who have fallen so far behind in the period after their arrival that they may never achieve income levels comparable to the Canadian-born. David Hulchanski (1997) argued that primary barriers – when they are activated by discrimination – impede full incorporation. However, our study provides evidence that in the case of successful claimants, secondary barriers can be just as significant a force.

Finding shelter upon arrival has been the greatest struggle for claimants. Upon arrival claimants are left to find housing in a city with little or no initial information, since they are not eligible for standard settlement services that are provided to immigrants and GARs. According to the research conducted in Toronto by Junaid (2002), refugee claimants require more information and support upon arrival within the ports of entries. Our study corroborates this point: in the Vancouver case, claimants are rarely assisted with information about shelter and social aid. Several of the respondents were left to sleep on the floor of the airport, while others (as in the case of Chinatown) roamed the streets searching for some form of assistance. This example raises another key barrier for claimants in the orientation and initial settlement process: language. Many felt confused and fearful, and even those with fluent skills in French were unable to communicate with immigration officials.



The search for adequate housing after the initial period of arrival raised other issues. Robert Murdie and Carlos Teixeira (2001) show that, in Toronto, rental units are in high demand among recent immigrants. The size of affordable dwelling units is inadequate for new immigrant families. In addition, the supply of social housing units does not remotely meet its demand. Our findings were consistent with those of Murdie and Teixeira. However, since SRCs mainly subsist on welfare, even small rental units are sometimes out of reach for these newcomers. There is a discrepancy between what refugee claimants are receiving in basic aid, and the average cost of renting an apartment in Vancouver. In addition, the vacancy rates for smaller, more affordable accommodations are particularly low. Individuals therefore face bleak alternatives: they can learn to cope at the very bottom of the housing market (as in our Chinatown example), or can share accommodations and live with crowding. Moreover, the income-rent discrepancy means that these newcomers have virtually no money left over for other basic necessities such as food and clothing.

This portrait of RC settlement is then best described by what Chambon et al. (1997) describe as *differential incorporation*. This term refers to the unequal opportunities faced by particular groups. Zine (2002) discusses the intersection between three types of barriers to adequate housing: structural barriers (such as high rent prices, lack of social housing, long waiting lists and low vacancy rates); institutional barriers (reduced social assistance, legislation that generally favours landlords); and micro barriers (such as race, ethnicity, immigration status and age). For claimants, we would add that they are also more vulnerable as a result of their arrival class, which appears to amplify the difficulties faced by immigrants more generally, including economic instability, lack of knowledge of new cultural norms, language barriers, and unrecognized educational credentials in the labour market.

The vulnerability associated with refugee status as well as the macro and micro barriers faced by all immigrants, results in homelessness, in one form or another. Pendakur and Pendakur (1996) argued that, as a result of below-average earnings of recent immigrants, housing and rent affordability is a critical issue. The authors noted that 42 percent of recent immigrants in Vancouver lived below the poverty line in 2001, almost triple the poverty rate for the Canadian-born. The situation is more extreme for claimants, who face deeper levels of deprivation than the average immigrant; recall that most claimants depend on welfare and the rates are far below the poverty line. Recall, also, that most claimants are members of visible minority groups, which in general face greater barriers in the labour market (e.g., Hiebert and Ley, 2001; Ley, 1999).

Above all, perhaps, claimants tend to be socially isolated. As Miraftab (2000) states, claimants are not included as readily as other immigrants in established social networks when they first arrive, and suffer from this fact when entering the housing market. The individuals in our sample group, for example, do not typically have elaborate, close social networks to draw upon (despite the fact that they were recruited from settlement service and advocacy organizations). Only a small number of participants were able to rely on the assistance of family members. In contrast, a number of respondents did discuss the importance of what Granovetter (1994) refers to as weak ties, acquaintances and friendships that were formed after arrival. This is most prevalent in the case study that discussed the experiences of SRCs from China. In the absence of strong ties (family and close friends), some of the Chinese respondents, as well as other respondents, said that they had no other option upon arrival, but to roam around the streets and look for a familiar face, someone who shared their cultural background. The spatial segregation that occurs among Chinese-speaking claimants is consistent with much of the literature, which reports the above-average levels of residential clustering among Chinese groups

(Hou and Picot, 2003). It is interesting to note, though, that the group of Chinese claimants in our study lives in the downtown area, which is quite different than what would be expected given the growing literature on the suburbanization of initial settlement (e.g., Murdie and Teixeira, 2001). In the case of the Chinese claimants, the participants saw the combination of low rents and cultural familiarity in Chinatown as important, despite exceptionally poor housing quality in the area. Therefore, for some claimants, social networks based on weak ties forged after arrival, were seen to be vital strategies for settlement.

In short, SRCs face challenging circumstances that are consistent with those discussed in the literature. These are common barriers faced by immigrants and visible minorities, but it is also clear that claimants also face unique challenges that are associated with the refugee process. The minimal levels of financial, documented human, and social capital of individuals in this group is associated with extreme vulnerability to homelessness. The situation is quite different for those immigrants and refugees who have access to social networks and support systems.

## Part 5: The housing survey

The purpose of this part of the project is to examine the profile and extent of relative homelessness among immigrants, refugees, and refugee claimants. In so doing, we seek to generate a basic estimate of the ‘sofa surfing’ or ‘camping out’ population among recent immigrants, as well as in-group systems of support. This sub-study is mainly focused on the IRHS which was conducted October 4-8, 2004.

### Characteristics of respondents

Analysis of the responses produces the following profile of clients who sought the services of immigrant and refugee-serving agencies on either a phone-in or an in-person basis during the week of October 4-8, 2004:

- Sixty-four percent of our respondents were female, 35% male, and 1% other. The high proportion of women sampled in our survey may reflect a proclivity for women to seek assistance from immigrant and refugee-serving agencies, a general predilection for women to be more willing to participate in social surveys, or some combination of both these reasons.
- Over half of our respondents (56%) were between 31 and 50 years old (see Figure 5.1 for complete breakdown); almost fifteen percent were 61 and older, while almost one-quarter (24%) were over 50.

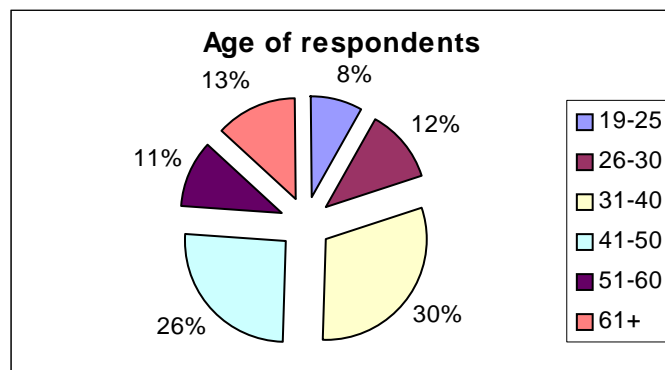
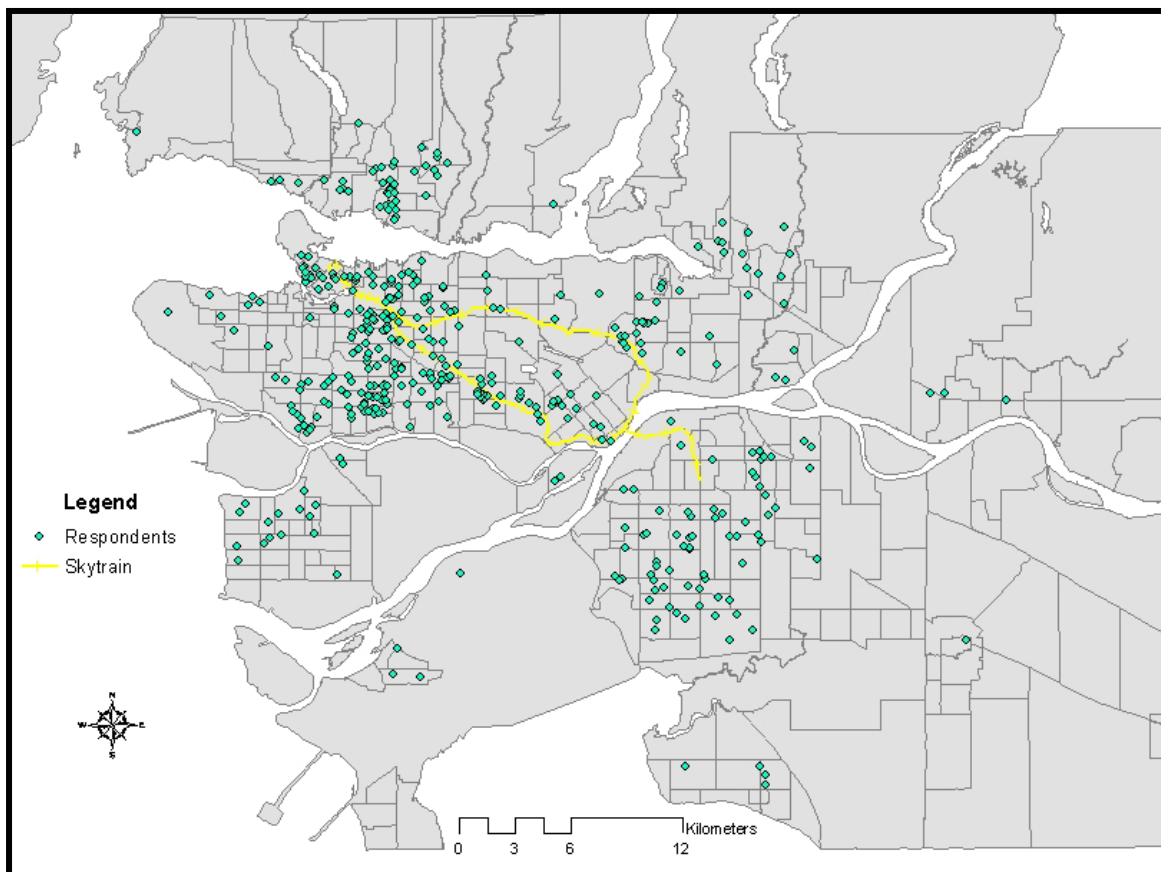


Figure 5.1: Age of respondents

- Although respondents came from 61 countries (see Appendix E for a full listing of countries of birth with frequency of response), 52% of the respondents were born in 4 countries: China (19.1%), India (13.2%), South Korea (10.5%) and Iran (9.2%).

### Geographic dispersion

Eighty-four percent (84%) of the respondents provided information about their residential location in the form of either a postal code or by giving counselors the nearest intersection to their home.<sup>11</sup> Although respondents were drawn from throughout the GVRD, the largest single group was located within the City of Vancouver (see Figure 5.2).<sup>12</sup> Three spatial concentrations



**Figure 5.2: All respondents Who Provided Location Information**

<sup>11</sup> Some respondents elected not to provide their location. In other cases, it was not possible to geocode the information provided (e.g. postal codes in the wrong format or responses were provided at the level of the city).

are evident within the City of Vancouver: the downtown core; a North-South corridor extending between Main Street, and Victoria Drive; and south of 41<sup>st</sup> Avenue. With the exception of the area south of 41<sup>st</sup> Avenue, very few respondents were located West of Granville Street. The largest concentration of respondents on the North Shore (including North and West Vancouver), is located along Lonsdale Avenue, although a smaller concentration is evident in Lynn Valley. In Burnaby, respondents were primarily located along the skytrain routes, with concentrations evident at Lougheed Mall and along the Metrotown/Edmonds corridor.

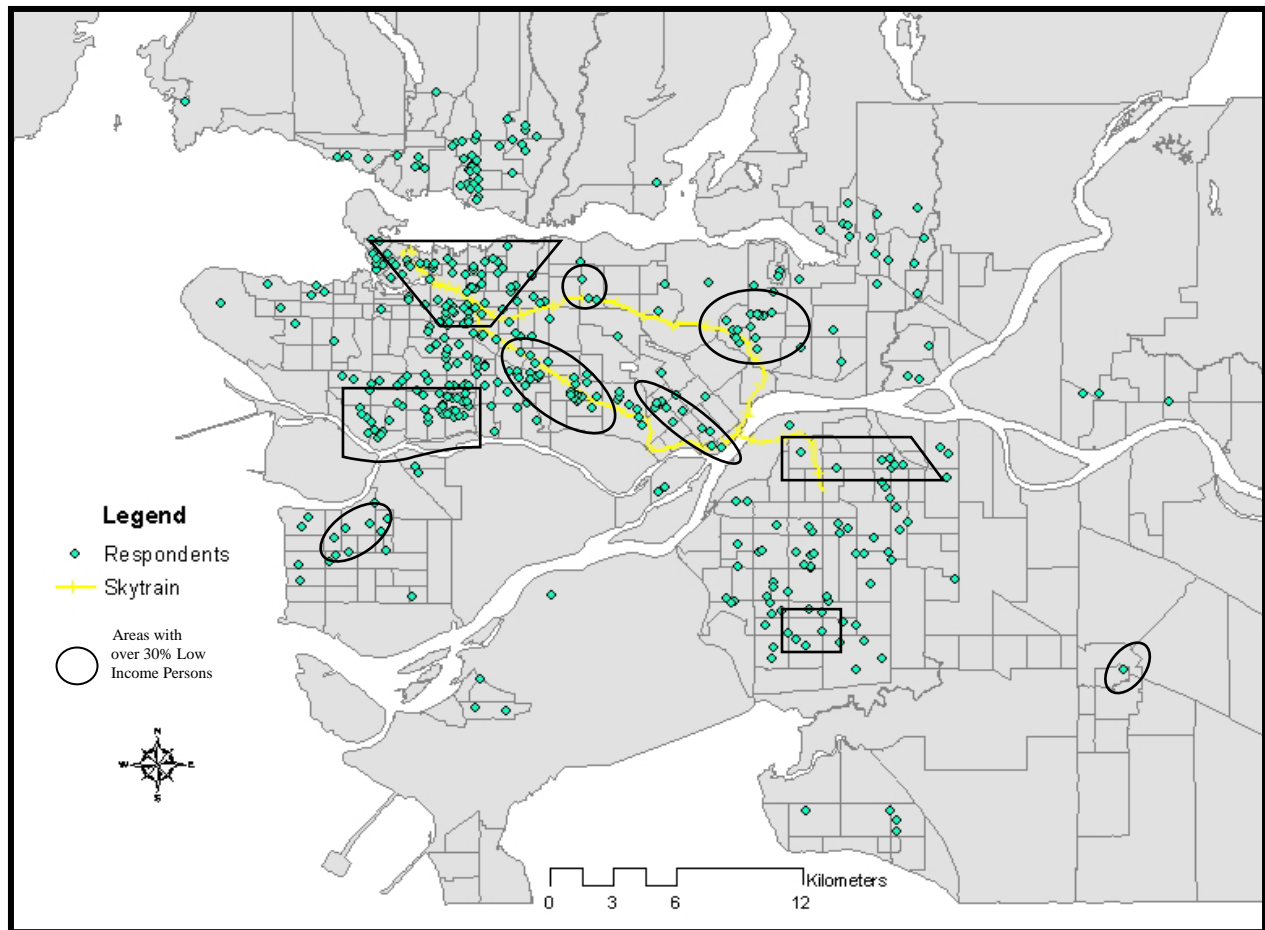
Respondents in Surrey, North Delta, Coquitlam, Port Moody, New Westminster and Richmond followed a more dispersed pattern, while West Vancouver, Langley, Maple Ridge, South Delta (including Tsawassen and Ladner) and Whiterock are notable for the small number of respondents.

Many of the locations inhabited by our respondents also conform to areas in which at least 20 percent of the population of the Census Tract are considered to be Low Income Persons). Figure 5.3 shows areas in which at least 30 percent of the population qualifies as Low Income. While we cannot say that our respondents qualify as Low Income (according to Census definitions) the extent to which our respondents are located within areas of high concentrations of Low Income Persons is striking. One anomaly, is that the largest group of respondents in North Vancouver (along Lonsdale) is in an area of relatively few Low Income Persons.

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Findings that allude to location information are drawn only from those whose information we could successfully geocode.

<sup>12</sup> This reveals another potential bias – the location of service providers relative to the location of immigrants.

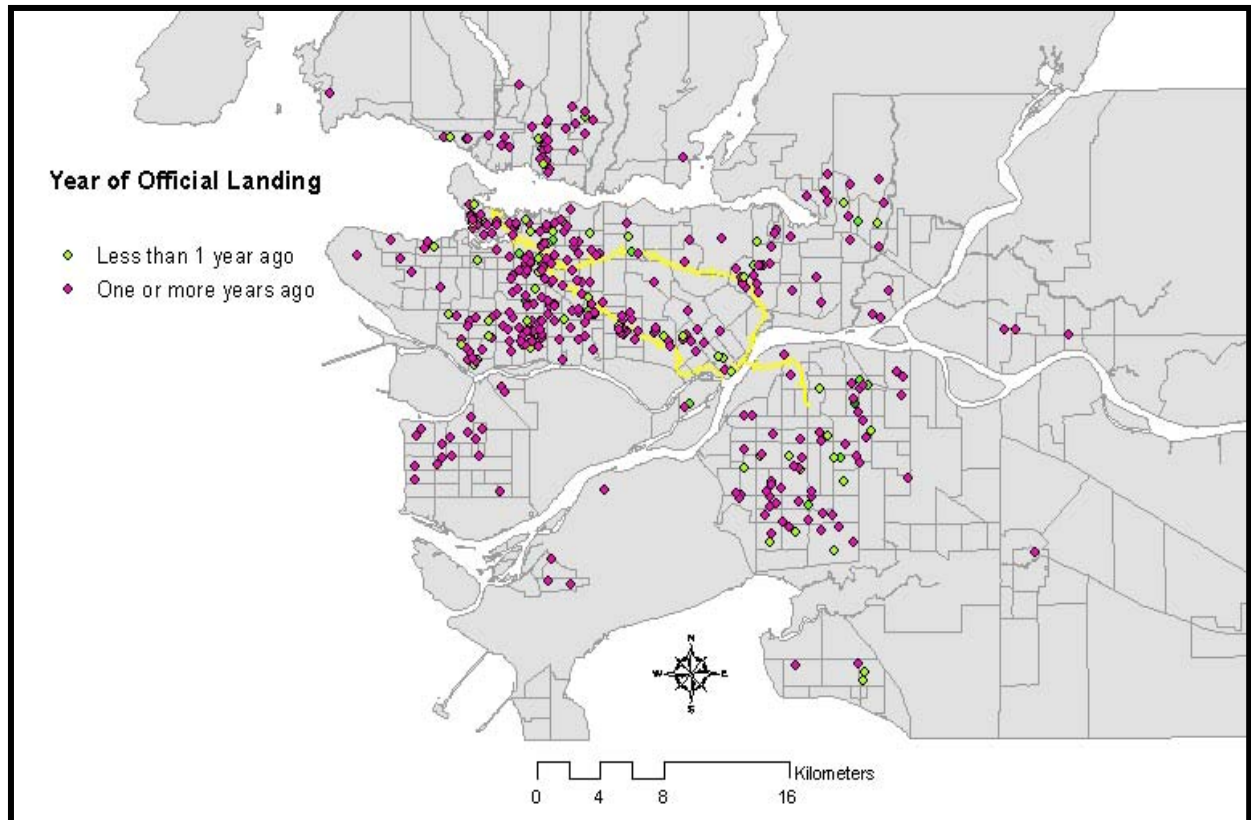


**Figure 5.3 Map of all Respondents with Incidence of Low Income Persons (greater than 30%) overlain**

### **Year of Official Landing**

We find that, when grouped into the simplest categories of arrival period (less than vs. more than one year), there is a significant association between time of arrival in Vancouver and participation in the labour market ( $<0.001$ ). Sixty-eight percent of newcomers to Vancouver who arrived within the last year report having no one employed in the household, while 55% of those who arrived more than one year ago report at least one person being employed.

The suburbanization of newcomers is also evident in our sample (see Figure 5.4). Many of the respondents who have arrived within one year are located outside the traditional immigrant receiving areas (the east side of the City of Vancouver).



**Figure 5.4: Year of Official Landing for All Respondents**

#### **Status Now or on Arrival**

Respondents were asked to indicate their immigration and citizenship status, currently as well as upon their arrival. While our intention was for respondents to answer both these questions, many only provided their current status.



Thirty percent of respondents reported their status as being Canadian Citizens (though they would have arrived as immigrants or refugees before naturalization), 60 percent are Immigrants (including Economic and Family reunification), 5 percent are GARs and 5 percent are Refugee Claimants (Figure 5.5).<sup>13</sup> The current status of respondents in this study mirrors the larger population of

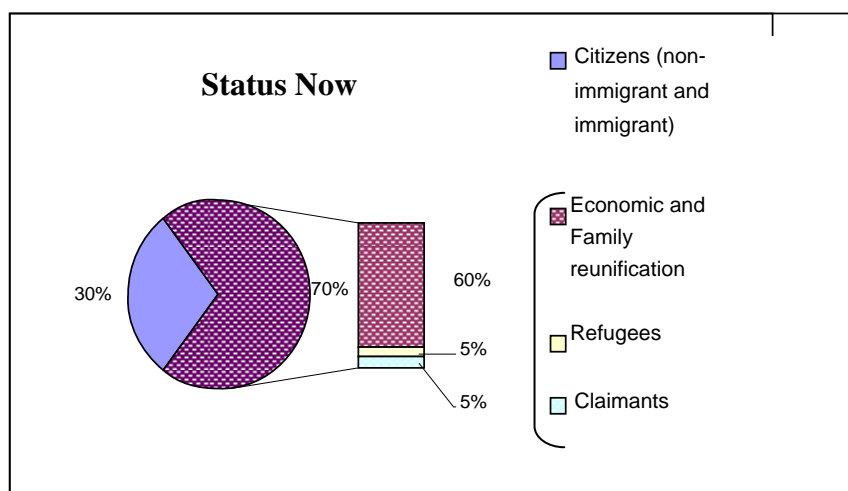
newcomers to Canada.

Since 1996, economic and family reunification classes have accounted for approximately 85 percent of newcomers

to Canada, while

refugees have accounted for 13 percent of newcomers. When we remove Citizens from our respondents, economic and family reunification classes account for 85% of the total, while refugees and claimants account for the other 15%.

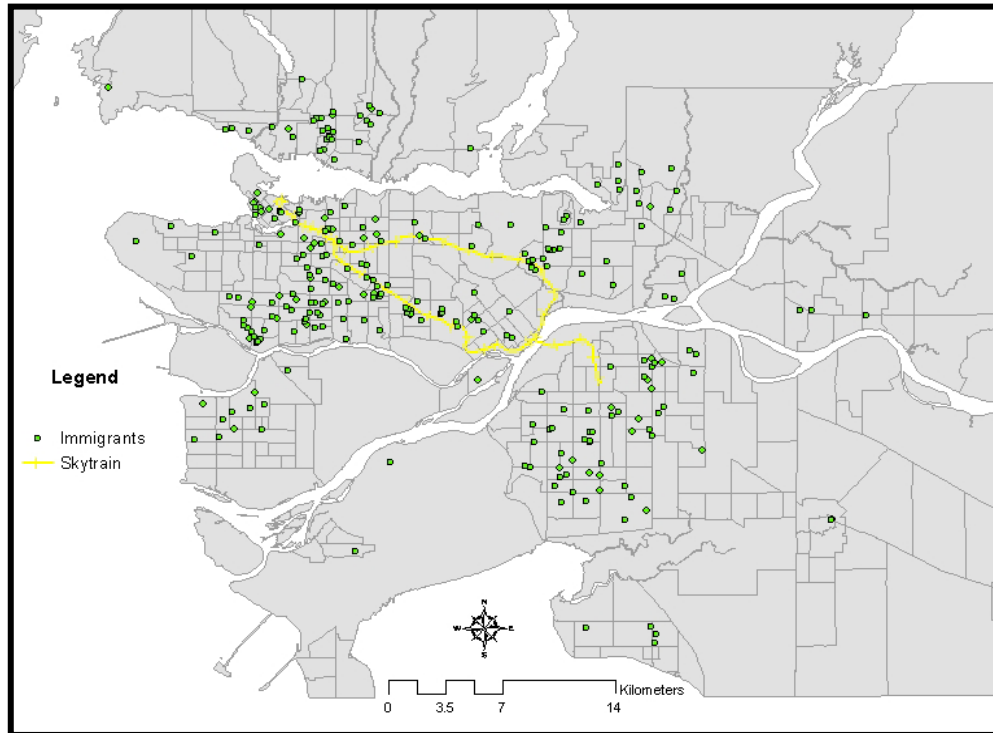
Those who arrived as immigrants were more likely to be geographically dispersed than those who arrived as refugees/claimants (see Figures 5.6 and 5.7).<sup>14</sup> Larger concentrations of immigrants were evident in the downtown core, along Lonsdale Avenue (in the downtown core of North Vancouver), downtown Vancouver, along the North-South corridor from Main Street to Victoria and South of 41<sup>st</sup> Avenue (in Vancouver) and around Lougheed Mall (in Burnaby).



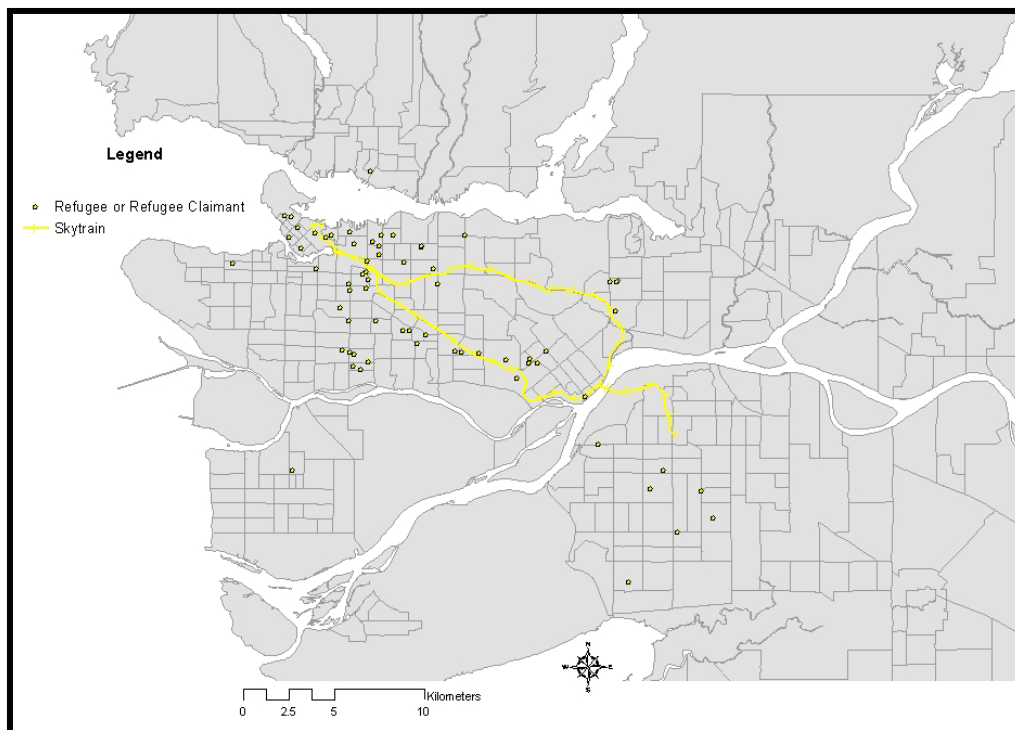
**Figure 5.5: Status Now of respondents**

<sup>13</sup> While refugees and claimants are presented separately, the categories have been combined in some of the subsequent analysis. The term refugee/claimant is used to denote instances when the categories have been combined.

<sup>14</sup> For this analysis a filter was set to select those whose status was immigrant either now *or* on arrival. The same was done for refugees and claimants.



**Figure 5.6: Respondents whose status is Immigrant**



**Figure 5.7: Respondents whose status is 'Refugee' or 'Refugee Claimant'**

Unlike immigrants, who are widely dispersed throughout the GVRD, the (relative) absence of refugees in some areas is striking. With the exception of a small concentration South of Oakridge Mall, the majority of refugees/claimants in our sample are located in close proximity to Skytrain and major transportation routes (e.g. Hastings Street). In addition, a small group is located in Surrey/Delta, an Indo-Canadian area.

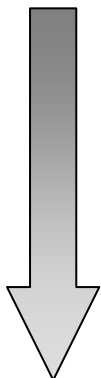
### **Housing**

The majority of respondents (89.5 percent) report having some form of housing. Almost two-thirds (65.4 percent) rent their housing, 30.6 percent own their own housing, and 3 percent checked ‘other’. While we cannot be certain what people meant by ‘other’ (there was no open-ended response for this question), it may refer to situations in which young adults are still living with their parents (e.g., students) and/or in multi-generational households. While the type of housing varied significantly between respondents, 7.5 percent report living in what could be considered temporary or unstable circumstances (e.g., staying with friends or family, living in single room occupancy hotels or emergency shelters) over the three month period directly preceding the survey. One person reported having no housing/shelter at all over the same period.

Respondents were provided with a list of barriers to accessing housing (including an open-ended response), and asked to indicate any difficulties they had experienced (see Table 5.1).<sup>15</sup> Almost half (49.5 percent) reported having experienced some difficulty in obtaining housing (excluding responses for ‘other’). Immigrants and refugees/claimants alike both found that *language* and *size of family* were their greatest obstacles in finding housing, while *religion*

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<sup>15</sup> Respondents were asked to check all that apply.



<b>Immigrants</b>	<b>Refugee/Claimant</b>	<b>All responses</b>
Language	Language	Language
Size of family	Size of family	Size of family
Age of Children	Ethnicity	Age of Children
Ethnicity	Age of Children	Ethnicity
Gender	Gender	Age
Age	Age	Gender
Religion	Religion	Religion
Disability	Disability	Disability

**Table 5.1: Barriers to accessing housing**

and *disability* were the least frequently cited barriers. Despite the similarities, there was some variability between the groups.

Refugees/claimants were twice as likely as the total respondent group to cite language as a barrier to accessing housing (76 and 36 percent respectively). Fifty-six percent of immigrants cited language as a barrier. Immigrants were almost twice as likely as all respondents to cite *size of family* as barrier (39 and 22 percent respectively). Thirty-four percent of refugees/claimants cited size of family as a barrier. Anecdotal evidence arose in the other parts of the project (the shelter and claimant sub-projects), as well as interviews and meetings, of people lying about the number of children in their families in order to obtain housing, as well as instances of over-crowding due to lack of affordable housing of sufficient size for the families involved. *Age of children* was cited more frequently by immigrants (22 percent), while *ethnicity* was perceived as a more significant barrier by refugees/claimants.

In retrospect, our decision to use the terminology of *ethnicity* as opposed to race has proved somewhat contentious. At a training session in September, the suggestion was made to ask whether ‘race’ was experienced as a barrier to obtaining housing. After discussion among the research team and RAC, we decided to use the term ethnicity instead of the more highly-contested ‘race’. At a follow-up meeting with settlement counselors who had participated in the

survey, however, some objected to our decision, as they felt that people were more likely to say that ‘race’ is a barrier to obtaining housing, than they were to say that ‘ethnicity’ is a barrier.<sup>16</sup> When asked, the service providers felt that we may have obtained different results if we had asked whether race was a factor. Whether ‘race’ would have produced different results is subject to debate. In a subsequent discussion, a participant remarked they were doubtful whether respondents would stop to differentiate between ‘race’ and ‘ethnicity’; instead the participant remarked that for many ‘race’ and ‘ethnicity’ would be seen as equivalent forms of definition. In other words, this is an unresolved issue, but it is possible that the wording of our question did not encourage participants to speak about racism.

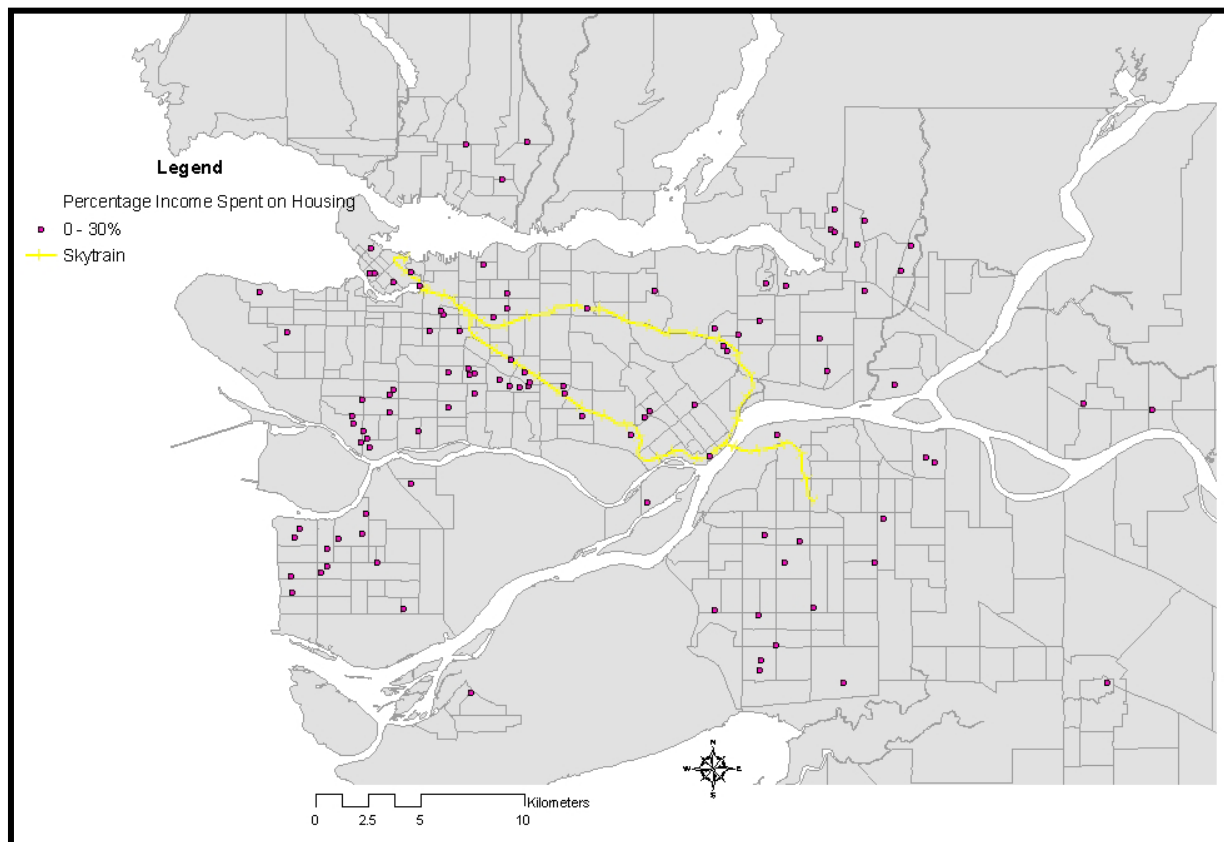
The question on barriers to accessing housing also invited an open-ended response. The most frequent points made were: financial situation, high rent, lack of information, income assistance/welfare, and low rental assistance. Given the small number of responses it was not possible to break these down by group. Again, many of these barriers are supported by our findings in other parts of the study. High rental rates, insufficient welfare allowances and unstable financial situations also figured prominently in interviews with SRCs (see Part 3). One settlement counselor reported that the difficulties faced by her/his clients primarily centered around: race, religion, ethnicity and the number of children. It is interesting that this counselor placed race at the top of the list, when so few respondents mentioned it as an issue.

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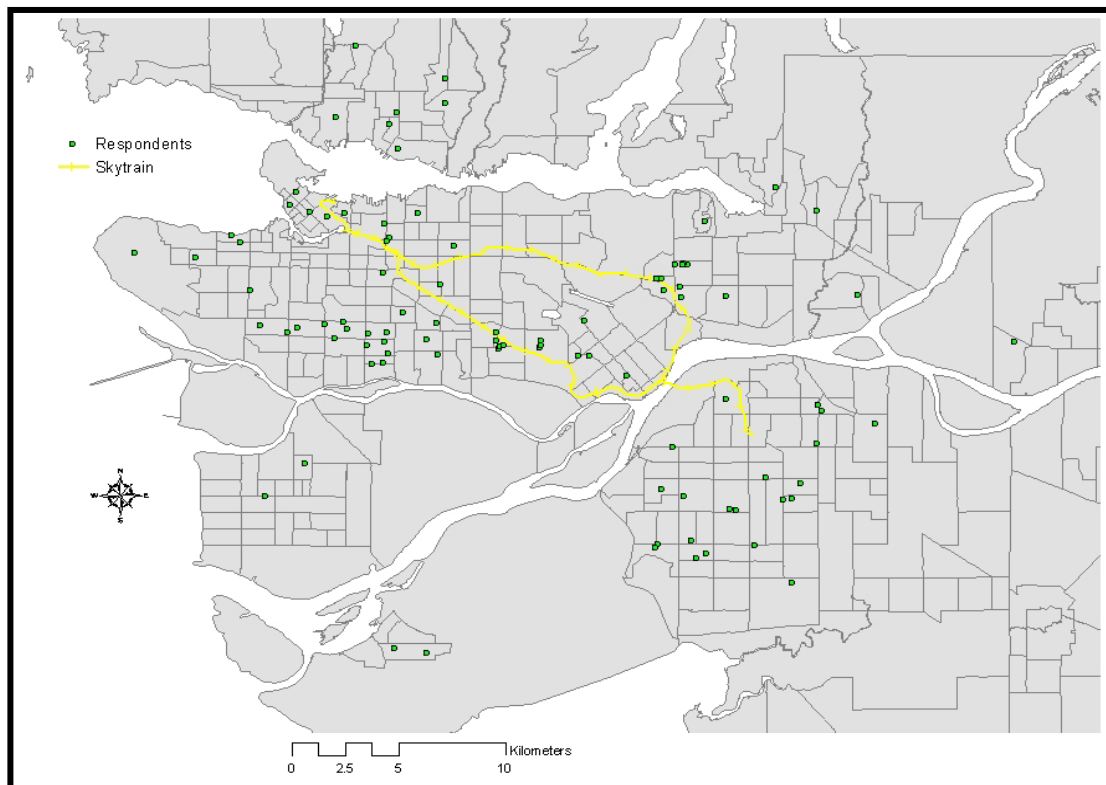
<sup>16</sup> The example given was that not all Africans are Black; so when Africans experience difficulties obtaining housing it is because they are Black, not African.

## Percentage of Household Income Spent on Housing

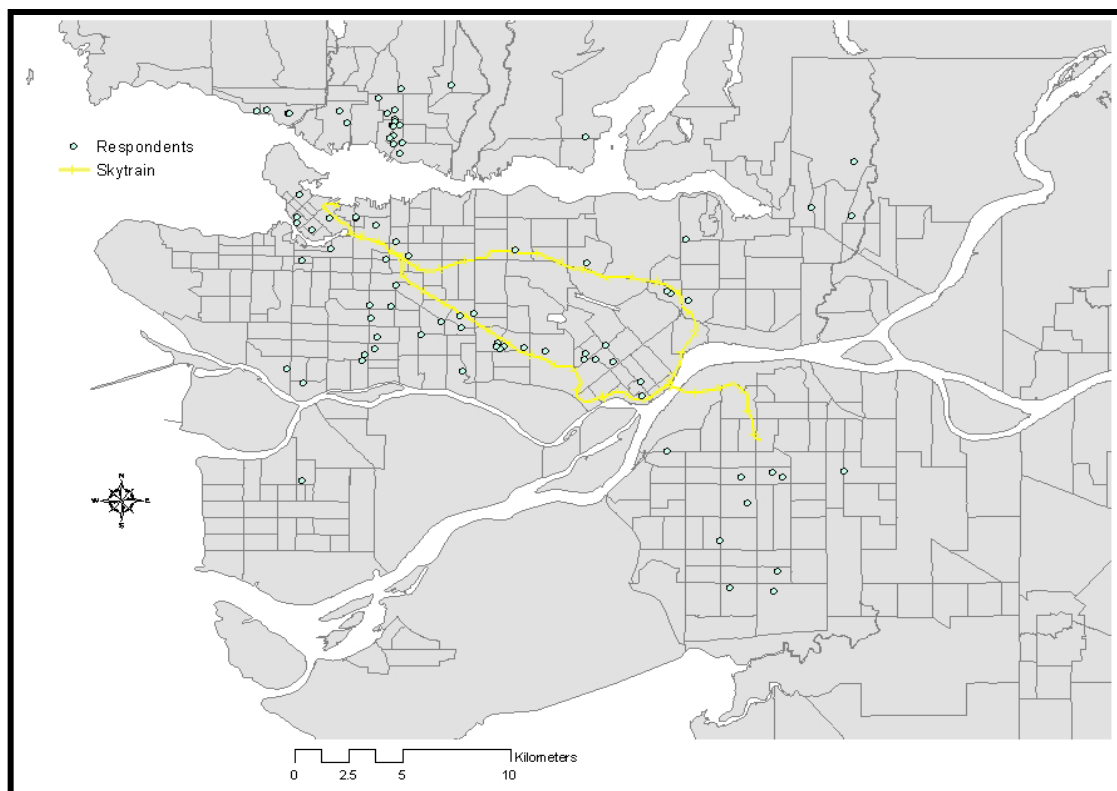
Thirty-five percent of the respondents who are *not* receiving help with housing (regardless of whether they are providing assistance or not) report spending less than 30 percent of their household income on housing, and would therefore be seen as in a ‘normal’ situation with respect to housing. Just over 32 percent of the same group of respondents are experiencing housing stress (i.e., they spend more than 30 percent of their total monthly income on housing (Figures 5.8, 5.9 and 5.10), and the same proportion is experiencing critical housing stress (i.e.



**Figure 5.8: Percentage of Income Spent on Housing (<30%)**



**Figure 5.9: Percentage of Income Spent on Housing (31-50%)**



**Figure 5.10: Percentage of Income Spent on Housing (>51%)**

they spend over 51 percent of household income per month on housing).<sup>17</sup> The majority of respondents on the North Shore report spending over 51 percent of household income on housing, while those in Richmond were more likely to report spending less than 30 percent of their income on housing.

### **Respondents receiving help with housing**

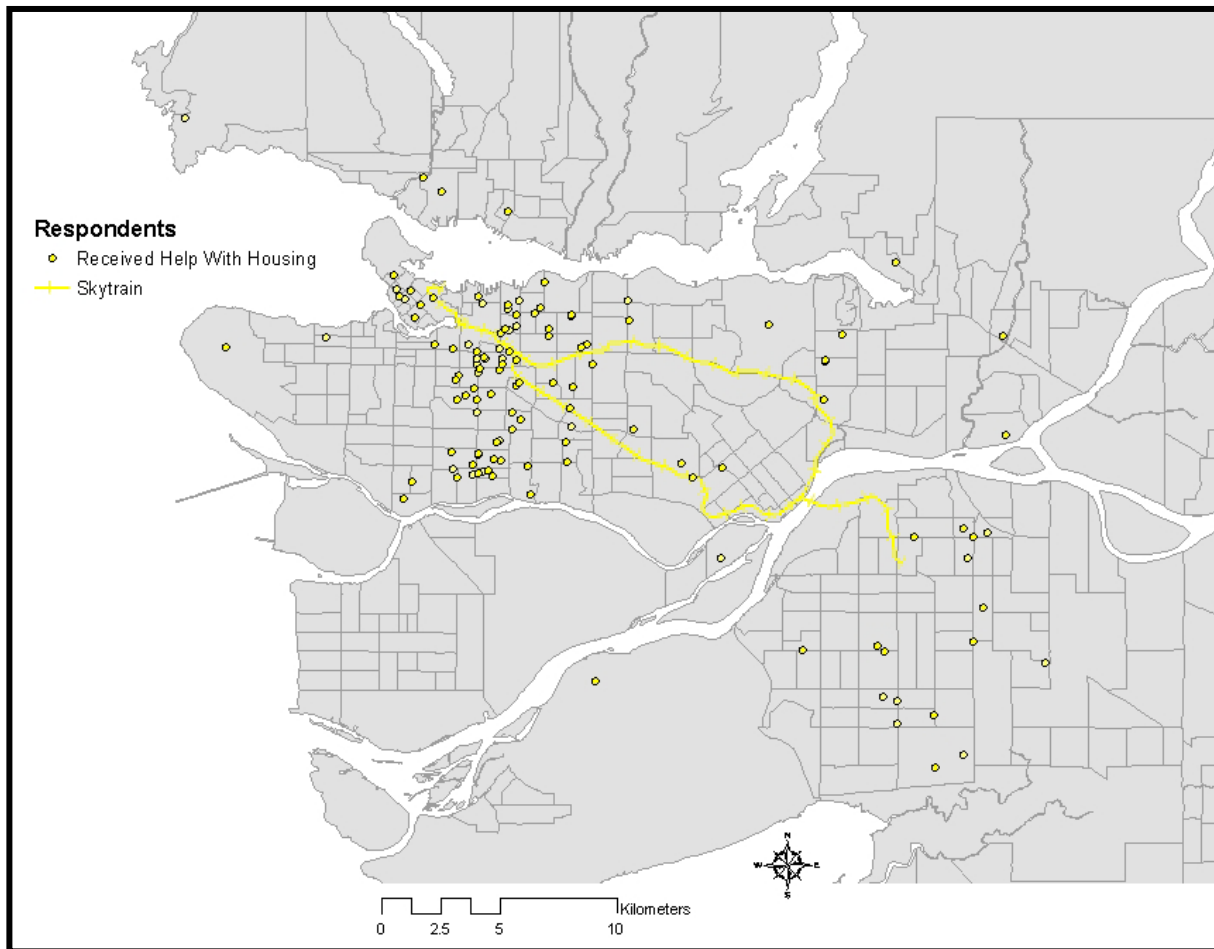
Twenty-eight percent of all respondents report that they *received help* with housing. Almost one-quarter of those receiving help were staying with friends and family. With the exception of claimants, all groups were more likely to receive help from people whose current status is immigrant or citizen. Claimants, on the other hand, were more likely to receive help from other claimants. Again, this finding is supported by both the interviews in the second sub-study, and anecdotal evidence from representatives of immigrant and refugee-serving agencies in the GVRD.

Respondents who have received help with housing are overwhelmingly located within the downtown core and the North-South corridor from Main Street to Victoria Drive (Figure 5.11). Despite the large number of respondents around Lonsdale Avenue (on the North Shore) who spent over 51 percent of household income on housing, only one person reported having received help with housing. No respondents from Richmond reported receiving help with housing.

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<sup>17</sup> It is important to note that this question was only asked of those respondents who were *not* receiving help with housing. Had we asked all respondents what percentage of their household income is spent on housing, we may have reached different conclusions. Anecdotal evidence on this point has been obtained in both discussions with service providers and through interviews conducted as part of the claimant sub-study.

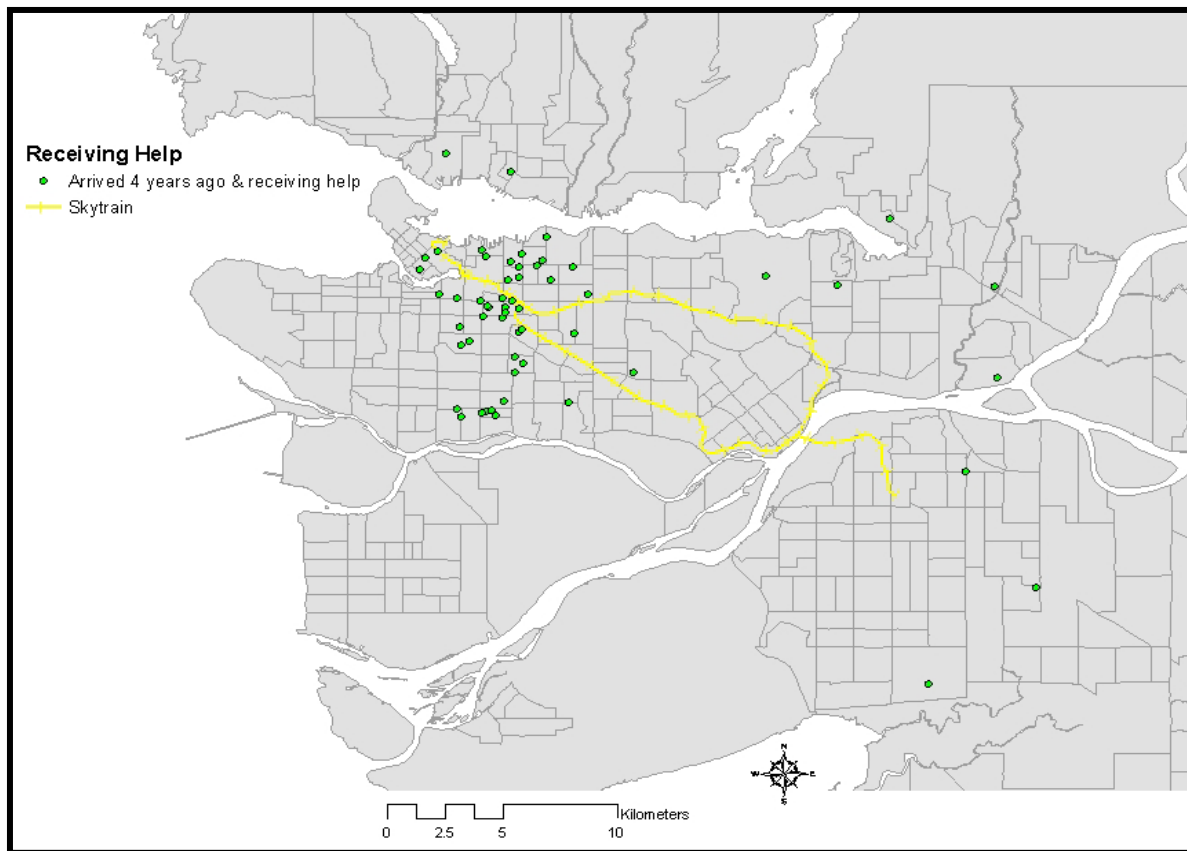




**Figure 5.11: Respondents who have received help with housing**

Almost half (44 percent) of those who are receiving help have been in Vancouver 4 years or longer (Figure 5.12). Two things are important to consider in relation to this finding. First, only those who approached immigrant and refugee-serving agencies during the week of October 4-8, 2004 are included in these findings. Those who have not approached agencies for assistance are not considered. Second, immigrant and refugee-serving agencies in British Columbia are funded to provide services for the first three years of settlement. The finding that almost half of those receiving help have been in Canada beyond the time when newcomers are expected to require assistance suggests that the problems of settlement extend over a longer period of time than is assumed by current funding systems. Again, those receiving help who arrived more than

four years ago are primarily located along the North-South Corridor between Main Street and Victoria Drive. The overwhelming majority of respondents who arrived 4 years ago or more and who are receiving help with housing are located within the City of Vancouver itself.



**Figure 5.12: Respondents who have arrived 4 years ago or more and are receiving help with housing**

Refugees/claimants who are receiving assistance with housing were four times as likely to report having no one employed in the household (80.5 percent) than to report having one or more members of the household being employed (19.5 percent); while approximately half of the households categorized as immigrants reported one or more individuals in the household who were employed.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> The relationship is statistically significant ( $<0.001$ ). In contrast, the relationship is **not** statistically significant for those providing help with housing.

### **Respondents providing assistance with housing**

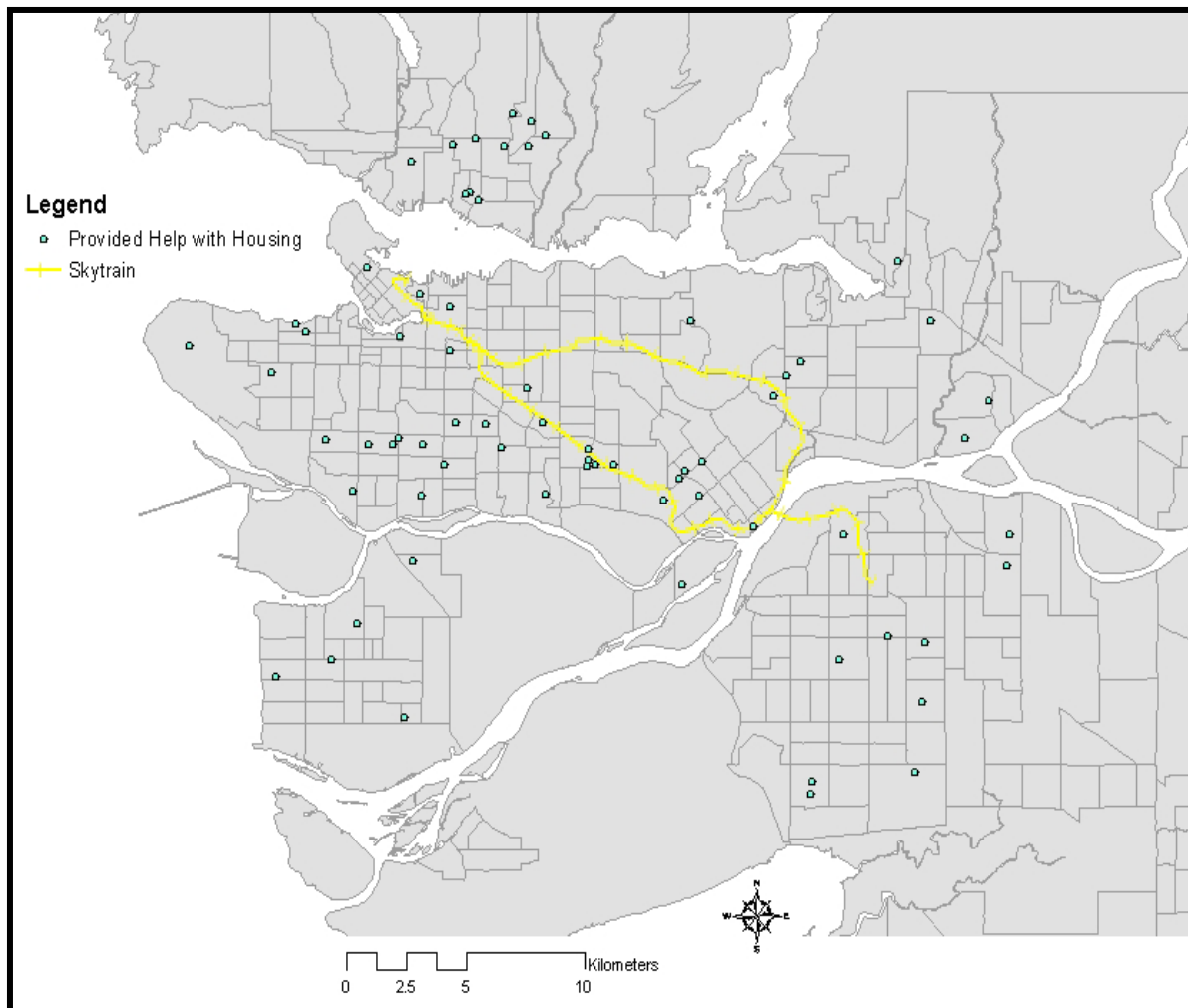
Fifteen percent of those who are not receiving help with housing report having *provided assistance* to someone other than their parents or children. It is important to note, however, that these respondents were drawn only from those who are not receiving help with housing. Had we asked all respondents (including those who are receiving help with housing), we may have obtained different results. The majority of respondents who reported that they provided assistance did so for people from the same region of origin (i.e., ethno-cultural group).

Over 60 percent of those who have been here more than one year *and* have provided help with housing, report having one or more people employed in the household, compared to 20 percent of those who have been here less than one year.<sup>19</sup> Eighty percent of those who have been here less than one year and who are providing help report having no one employed in the household.

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<sup>19</sup> For those who are providing assistance with housing, the relation between year of arrival in Vancouver (more/less than one year) and employment **is** statistically significant (0.003).

Those respondents who have provided assistance are more geographically dispersed than those who have received assistance (Figure 5.13). Unlike the strong North-South pattern evident



**Figure 5.13: Respondents who have provided help with housing**

in the map of those receiving assistance (Figure 5.11), those providing assistance were more likely to reside in North Vancouver, Richmond and along the portion of the Skytrain route that extends from Edmonds/Metrotown into New Westminster. Despite the large number of respondents along the North-South corridor between Main Street and Victoria Drive who reported having *received* assistance, there is a relative absence of respondents in this area who report having *provided* assistance. Conversely, in Richmond and North Vancouver, more

respondents reported providing assistance with housing than having received assistance. In the Downtown core, more people reported having *received* help with housing than having *provided* assistance.

## Findings

Analysis of the IHRS produces four main findings. First, the **socio-economic profile of respondents who are providing assistance does not differ significantly from those who are receiving assistance**. The majority of respondents who are providing or receiving assistance reported their Official Landing as being within the last 3 years. This was upwards of 60 percent for all groups, and as high as 80 percent for claimants.

Both those providing and receiving assistance report high numbers of households in which no one is employed. Of those households **receiving** help, 35 percent report having one or more persons employed, while 45.2 percent of households **providing** help report having no one employed. We find high numbers of respondents who report providing assistance with housing, yet have no one employed within the household (42.6 percent for immigrants and 54.5 percent for refugees/claimants).

It is interesting to note, though, that the geographical distributions of those providing and receiving housing aid are different. Those providing aid are located in areas with more expensive housing, while those receiving aid are in the lowest-rent areas.

Secondly, despite this fact, **those who are providing help often do so despite living in precarious situations**. Of those who have provided assistance (78 respondents), the percentage of people who have provided assistance decreases as the percentage of income spent on housing increases. Astonishingly, over sixty percent of respondents who report having *provided* assistance are at-risk of homelessness (i.e., they spend more than 31 percent of income on

housing), while 25.6 percent are in core-housing need (i.e., they spend at least 51 percent of their income on housing).

Thirdly, **there is a disconnect between the length of time people expect they will need assistance, and the length of time people have provided assistance.** Despite the perceived need for help over long periods, those who have provided assistance report having done so for relatively short periods of time. Overwhelmingly, then, help is relatively short term, with 75.9 percent of assistance being provided over a period of days and/or weeks (Table 5.2).

	<b>For those receiving help: How long do you expect to need help for? (%)</b>	<b>For those providing help: How long did you help these people for? (%)</b>
<b>Days</b>	2 (1.4)	33 (42.3)
<b>Weeks</b>	1 (0.7)	23 (29.5)
<b>Months</b>	25 (17.6)	21 (26.9)
<b>Longer</b>	114 (80.3)	1 (1.3)
<b>Total</b>	142 (100)	78 (100)

**Table 5.2: Length of time for providing or receiving help**

Finally, **there is a lack of similarity between type of help received and type of help provided.** Unfortunately, a lack of consistency in language between the two questions prevents full comparison. Despite this, we see that although 68.8 percent of respondents who are receiving help with housing report receiving help with their rent, only 1.3 percent of those who are providing help report helping pay the rent (Table 5.3).<sup>20</sup> Rather, 74.7 percent of those who are providing help report helping their guests find housing. Shelter and welfare/income were the two

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<sup>20</sup> In a subsequent meeting a settlement counselor suggested that people's understandings of what it means to pay someone's rent vs. to let them stay with you also affects the results of this study. Because the responses were self-identified it is not possible to probe how people understood the idea of paying the rent.

	For those who are receiving help with housing: type of help received (%)		For those who are providing help: what type of help have you provided? (%)
Rent	106 (68.8)	Free stay	18 (24.0)
Shelter	17 (11.0)	Pay rent	1 (1.3)
Other	31 (20.1)	Find housing	56 (74.7)
Total	154 (100)	Total	75 (100)

**Table 5.3: Type of help received or provided**

top responses for other. Given the precarious position of the people providing assistance, this may reflect the only type of help clients can provide.

Our sample is unlikely to include those who can provide financial help or a lot of space (e.g., free rent) as the people who can do these things generally do not require settlement assistance. This may help explain why the majority of help provided was for finding housing, while the majority of people receiving help stated that they had received help paying rent. Given the potential biases in our ability to include more affluent immigrants in our sample, we are not confident about generalizing to the larger population that is providing help.

### **Discussion: Living on the edge: Relative homelessness and in-group systems of support**

In this part of the study, we sought to generate a basic estimate of the newcomer population that is sofa surfing, or camping out, and identify the in-group systems of support that enable this form of ‘invisible’ homelessness. In so doing, we attempted to enumerate a population that is often missed in studies of homelessness because they are not on the streets or in shelters. Rather, they are in temporary, unstable or unsafe housing. Our instrument for this

task was the IRHS, which documented the characteristics of clients accessing immigrants and refugee services on either a phone-in or in-person basis during a one-week period.

While we hoped to gather evidence about in-group systems of support, the bulk of the clients who participated in our survey neither provided nor received assistance with housing. To enable discussion of all respondents, this section has been divided into two parts: a general discussion of findings as they pertain to the larger group, and a more focused discussion of the extent of in-group systems of support among immigrants and refugees in the GVRD.

#### **(a) Relative homelessness**

At the beginning of the report, we defined homelessness as a spectrum of conditions that ranges across the following categories: housing stress, critical housing stress, relative homelessness and absolute homelessness. Respondents in the IHRS were located at varying points along this continuum.

According to Pendakur and Pendakur (1996), 21 percent of immigrant households in Canada in 1991 suffered from ‘core housing need’, which can be defined in terms of a combination of affordability problems, crowding and/or poor housing quality. In our survey sample of those using settlement services, 65 percent of respondents who are not receiving help with housing are experiencing ‘core housing need’, as defined by measures of affordability.<sup>21</sup> Even within the population that is not receiving assistance with housing, then, there is widespread evidence of relative homelessness. Further, over half of our respondents who report being in ‘core housing need’ spend nearly half of their monthly household income on housing (i.e., they are near the category of ‘critical housing stress’). While not probed directly, evidence

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<sup>21</sup> In regards to measures of affordability, our category of housing stress is analogous to ‘core housing need’. Individuals and families in ‘core housing need’ spend more than 30 percent of their household income on housing.



of over-crowding and poor-quality housing emerged in both the survey and discussions with key informants. Again, as seen in the study of the shelter population, we were told that some people lie about the number of children in their families in order to obtain housing, as well as instances of overcrowding due to lack of affordable housing that is of sufficient size to meet the needs of the families involved.

Although 90 percent of survey respondents report having some form of housing, 7.5 percent were living in what could be considered temporary or unstable living conditions (e.g., staying with friends or family, living in single room occupancy hotels, or emergency shelters) over the three-month period directly preceding the survey.

Obstacles to obtaining housing include both primary (e.g., 'race', ethnicity, age, gender) and secondary (e.g., language, knowledge of institutions) causes, as defined in the literature.<sup>22</sup> Findings from this study underscore the significance of both primary and secondary obstacles to housing among our respondents. While language (secondary) was the most frequent response among all groups, size of family (primary) was second among all groups. Meanwhile, religion and disability were the least frequently cited barriers.

For immigrants and refugees this has meant that housing is ultimately selected primarily by price, and the criterion of suitability takes second place. As inner-city housing rises in price (except for the Downtown Eastside and Chinatown ... as seen in the claimant study), immigrants are pushed towards suburbs. The standard model of immigrant adaptation to the North American city is based on the idea of spatial assimilation, that is, immigrants moving outward as they build social and financial capital. We are unsure whether this has been happening for the participants

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<sup>22</sup> Some obstacles are not as clear-cut as others. For the purposes of this study we have chosen to include number of children as a primary barrier. Although we recognize the number of children living with in individual may change

of our survey who have been in Vancouver for a long time, since we do not have information about their socio-economic circumstances over time. We can say, though, that those who have arrived most recently, even within the last year, have settled outside traditional inner-city immigrant receiving areas, directly into suburbs. The propensity of newly arrived immigrants to bypass traditional reception areas is consistent with recent scholarship on this issue (e.g., Owusu, 1999; Hiebert, 2001).

There is anecdotal evidence in this survey (and the shelter survey as well) suggesting that settlement is influenced by the location of affordable housing (see also Ray 1998). Further, the pattern of settlement is concentrated along routes that are well serviced by public transportation (e.g. sky train, major bus routes), suggesting a convergence between the transportation system and the housing market (i.e., many of the most affordable housing units are near transportation corridors).

Our findings conform with those of Smith (2004), who argues that there has been a geographical convergence of three social groups in the major metropolitan areas of Canada during the 1990s: recent immigrants; visible minorities; and people living in poverty (as defined by the Low Income Cutoff). Further, the location of respondents throughout Greater Vancouver reaffirms the findings of Zine (2002), that homelessness is not merely an inner-city problem; homelessness affects nearly all neighbourhoods, including the suburbs.

### **(b) The extent of relative homelessness and in-group systems of support**

The second objective of this part of the project has been to generate an estimate of the extent of relative homelessness and to identify in-group systems of support. While literature

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over time (as they age and obtain their own housing), we feel that in the current context the number of children is a primary barrier since it cannot easily be changed.

exists on relative homelessness as it pertains to measures of affordability and poor housing quality, we have not been able to find systematic work on the population that is sofa surfing or camping out. In this project we have attempted to address this group through questions relating to the informal provision or receipt of help with housing. While the shelter survey provided anecdotal evidence that in-group systems of support exist, this part of our study helps develop a picture of who is providing and receiving help with housing, as well as the nature of help that is being provided.

Twenty-eight percent of respondents in the IRHS are receiving some form of help with housing, while 15 percent of the respondents who are not receiving help indicate that they have provided assistance to someone other than their parents or children. However, at least in terms of the sample for our project, the socio-economic profile of those providing help does not differ substantially from those who are receiving help (other than in terms of geographical location). Respondents in both groups reported high numbers of people who officially landed in Canada within the last three years, as well as living in households with no one employed. Like those who are receiving assistance, those providing assistance often do so despite living in precarious situations. Over 61 percent of those providing assistance, for example, are in core housing need, while 25.6 percent are in critical housing stress.

In part, the relatively weak socio-economic position of those providing assistance helps explain the modest forms of support offered compared with the much more considerable level of need. We have seen, for example, notable differences between those providing vs. receiving help, both in the length of time assistance is needed, and the type of help that is given. Although those providing assistance report having done so for a relatively short period of time (days or weeks), those receiving assistance expect to need help for longer periods of time (months or

longer). In terms of the type of assistance, we see a similar disconnect: those providing assistance generally help their guests obtain housing, while those receiving assistance say that they receive help paying the rent. There is a sub-group that is missing from our analysis: those who provide more substantial forms of housing support—who apparently do not need the assistance of settlement NGOs.

The findings of the IRHS underscore the importance of in-group networks that bring about mutual aid, such that coping mechanisms are found and homelessness among immigrants and refugees remains largely hidden. The availability and importance of these networks of support is not equal across all populations, of course, as we saw in the claimant study.

## **Part 6: Overall Conclusions and Policy Implications**

Our study was designed around three sub-components: a shelter survey; interviews with SRCs; and a survey of the clients using general settlement services. At the outset we saw these as relatively distinct pieces of the puzzle. However we have come to see them as parts of a logical sequence. The shelter survey reveals that immigrants, refugees, and refugee claimants—groups that account for nearly 40 percent of the Greater Vancouver population—are not well represented in homeless shelters, where they probably comprise about one in ten clients. This is especially remarkable when we consider that these groups experience incomes that are well below the metropolitan average, exceedingly so in the case of refugee claimants. The obvious question is, why does the relatively low socio-economic status of immigrants, refugees, and claimants not register more in terms of absolute homelessness? Our other two sub-studies help us understand this paradox.

The phrase that has come to represent our understanding of the situation is “hidden homelessness”. This is the concept around which all three sub-components of the study converge. The SRCs in our sample tell a fairly consistent story of their first encounter with Canadian society as confusing and full of anxiety. Their initial housing experience was typically in the cheapest accommodations available, in poor residential environments. They coped by sharing rents and crowding. The initial experience of marginality has, unfortunately, not improved very much following the granting of permanent residence. Nearly all continue to be dependent on social assistance and nearly all are in situations of housing stress. But they are not “on the streets”, in large part because of their coping strategies and—in a number of cases—help extended from social organizations and/or other members of their ethno-cultural community.

The existence of bottom-up self-help was even more apparent in the third aspect of our study, the survey of clients of settlement NGOs. In this part of the project we found a significant sharing of resources that mainly occurs within familial networks and ethno-cultural or religious communities. About 15 percent of those using settlement services are receiving some form of housing assistance, which ranges from help locating housing, through financial help, to the provision of housing (often temporary, but occasionally long-term). Nearly all of this activity occurs “below notice” of the Canadian welfare state. Those who are helped, in essence, are able to avoid the services of homeless shelters. Significantly, even those who are living in precarious circumstances extend whatever help they can to others in their close networks.

\* \* \*

These practices lead to several conclusions. First and foremost, our study suggests that current levels of social/shelter assistance are exceedingly low, especially in light of the lack of affordable housing (whether available from the regular market or from non-market providers). We see evidence of market failure in this study and a need for a greater proportion of housing that is allocated by need rather than price considerations. When clients settle in unsafe housing, in inexpensive and marginal areas of the city, they tend to enter a cycle of homelessness, needing help from others.

Our second fundamental point is that help *is* available. The positive side of the story is the extent to which mutual aid is provided. This is a clear example of what is variously labeled “ethnic resources” or “social capital” in the literature. The term “ethnic resources” is used by those who study the economic integration of immigrants, and is usually distinguished from the human capital, and/or “class resources” of the individual. Members of certain ethno-cultural groups receive collective benefits that exist regardless of their educational attainment,

accumulated wealth, and so on. This is particularly the case for large, well-organized ethno-cultural communities that have developed a degree of institutional completeness that includes help for those in need, such as the Chinese-Canadian population in Greater Vancouver. The term “social capital” is also invoked to understand the advantages that derive from membership in an ethno-cultural group, but with a greater emphasis on the presence of reciprocity and trust. That is, on the one hand, individuals belonging to a group share resources, whether these are access to employment, knowledge about host society norms and expectations, or the tangible benefit of housing provision. And, on the other hand, these systems of sharing are both based upon, and foster, enhanced networks of trust within groups. We believe that the social capital of particular ethno-cultural groups is a key factor in the relative absence of immigrants and refugees in the shelter population. Many, therefore, are protected within their family networks and communities.

But systems of reciprocity do not include everyone—which is our third basic finding. Refugee claimants, given the combination of their uncertain legal status, lack of language facility, and lack of familiarity with Canadian society, are the most likely of all newcomers to “fall between the cracks” of *both* ethno-cultural communities *and* the welfare and housing provisions of the state. The initial experience of marginalization appears to have a scarring effect for these individuals, at least those who were included in our sample.

Fourthly, we re-emphasize the phrase “hidden homelessness”. Canadians, by and large, equate homelessness with absolute “rooflessness”, or living in shelters or on the streets. It is easy to understand how this common-sense understanding has arisen, but it ignores a large part of the problem: relative homelessness. Immigrants, refugees, and refugee claimants appear to be particularly susceptible to relative homelessness, so their difficulties in the housing market are essentially invisible.

Fifthly, as we increasingly come to understand the fact that homelessness is a spectrum of conditions, rather than a single absolute state, it is logical that there also need to be a spectrum of policy responses to homelessness. These responses should include adding to the stock of social housing, as we have already mentioned, but they should also take the emerging systems of mutual aid into consideration. In essence, strengthening civil society—that is, assisting the development of community groups, NGOs, religious institutions, etc.—builds social capital and indirectly contributes to wellbeing, in the housing market and more generally.

Finally, our project has led us to pose a basic question. We have seen that systems of ethnic resources and social capital appear to help immigrants, refugees, and claimants escape the worst forms of absolute homelessness. Can these social networks be fostered in the larger metropolitan community? If so, how? It would be an impressive outcome if Canadian society could learn from the experience of newcomers, rather than expecting the opposite.



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## Appendix A: MOSAIC

MOSAIC (Multilingual Orientation Service Association for Immigrant Communities) is a multilingual non-profit organization dedicated to addressing issues that affect immigrants and refugees in the course of their settlement and integration into Canadian society.

MOSAIC's mandate is to support and to empower immigrant and refugee communities, helping them to address critical issues in their neighborhoods and workplace.

Since its inception in 1976, MOSAIC has assisted new immigrants and refugees through its numerous multilingual services. MOSAIC's programs and services are constantly evolving and developing in response to the needs of the community.

Our vision and mission guide our work.

*“Our vision is of a Canada that welcomes all people, that supports their right to equality and choice as they determine their goals and aspirations, and that acknowledges their contributions in enriching and strengthening our communities.”*

*“Our mission is to support immigrants and refugees by listening to and responding to their needs. We do this through advocacy and through accessible, practical, and diverse services that enable them to meet their personal goals while building bridges to the larger community.”*

Today, MOSAIC has blossomed into a \$10 million dollar organization with over 120 staff, 500 volunteers and 250 contractors. Services offered include interpretation, translation, English classes, employment programs, family programs, community outreach/development programs, volunteers programs, and bilingual and settlement services.

For further information about MOSAIC and this research document - A Study on the Profile of Absolute and Relative Homelessness Among Immigrants and Refugees in the GVRD, please visit [www.mosaicbc.com](http://www.mosaicbc.com) or contact:

MOSAIC Settlement Services  
1720 Grant Street,  
Vancouver, BC V5L 2Y7  
Canada  
Tel: 604-254-9626  
Fax: 604-254-3932  
Email: [settlement@mosaicbc.com](mailto:settlement@mosaicbc.com)

## **Appendix B: Key Informant Interview Schedule**

1. Does your organization have a website or brochure that details what services / activities are offered? If not, could you briefly describe your organization in terms of what services or activities you offer?
2. What are your responsibilities in the organization?
3. What do you think are the housing needs for the homeless in Vancouver?
4. Do you believe adequate services or supports exist to meet the needs of homeless individuals and/or families in the GVRD?
5. In your experience, what do you think would be the percentage of immigrants, refugees and refugee claimants that your organization deals with?
6. Do you think the reasons why immigrants, refugees, and refugee claimants are using shelters are different than the Canadian-born population? If so, can you elaborate?
7. How does your organization deal with cultural diversity among clients? (e.g. diet, language)
8. Can you comment on the challenges faced, and degree of success of your organization in dealing with diverse clients?
9. What is the next step for people who use shelters? What systems or networks of support? How do they obtain housing?
10. Is there anything else you could add in relation to the issue of homelessness of immigrants, refugees, claimants and the management of associated issues?

## Appendix C: Shelter Data Collection Checklist

Name of Shelter \_\_\_\_\_ Date completed: \_\_\_\_\_

1. **Individual** *or* **family** (circle one) *if family*: number of beds being booked \_\_\_\_\_

2. Date of birth \_\_\_\_\_

3. Gender (circle one)                      **male**                      **female**                      **other**

4. Language ability (circle one)  
able to converse easily in English                      able to converse easily in French  
requires help with conversation in English

5. Country of origin \_\_\_\_\_

6. When did you come to Canada? \_\_\_\_\_ (year/month) Born in Canada \_\_\_\_\_

7. Citizenship and/or Immigration Status (circle one)  
Refugee (Claimant or Government Assisted)                      Canadian citizen (immigrant)  
Immigrant                      Canadian                      citizen                      (non-immigrant)  
Permanent resident

8. Education level (circle level completed *or* currently enrolled in)  
Less than high school                      High School                      University

9. What was your last permanent address?  
*either* city and province \_\_\_\_\_ *or* postal code \_ \_ \_ \_ \_

10. Source(s) of income (circle all that apply)  
employment – full time                      pension(s)                      no source of income  
employment – part time                      disability benefits                      other \_\_\_\_\_  
employment – casual                      income assistance  
employment insurance                      training program

11. What was your last type of long term housing? (circle one)  
house                      basement suite                      boarding house  
apartment                      room in hotel                      other \_\_\_\_\_

12. Did you **own** *or* **rent** your last type of long term housing? (circle one)

13. What are the contributing factors to you being homeless (circle one or more)  
abuse (e.g. physical, mental, sexual)                      substance abuse (e.g. alcohol, drug or other)  
family issues (e.g. breakdown)                      conflict with law  
financial crisis (e.g. job loss, eviction)                      unsafe housing  
mental health                      other \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix D: SRC Interview Schedule

### Individual demographics

Age	Gender	M / F		
Level of Education	Less than secondary	Some level of secondary	Post Secondary	Other
Place of Birth				
Place of Origin				
Country of last permanent residence				

### Pre Migration Characteristics:

Year of birth
Year of migration to Canada
Did you migrate with anyone else?

### Housing situation during claim period

- Could you briefly tell me about your housing situation before you came to Canada?
- Have you lived in more than one place since arriving in Canada?
- Could you tell me about the place you stayed in the longest?
- What was the location of this place, postal code \_\_\_\_\_ or intersection?
- What type of dwelling was it?
- How did you find out about that place?
- How much did it cost to live there?
- How much was total rent, including hydro, electricity and gas?
- How did you pay for rent?

#### [Quality of housing]

- Were there many things wrong with the house/apartment? e.g. plumbing, leakiness?
- Did you wish to stay there for a long time?

### Household characteristics

- What is the location of the place you live in now, postal code \_\_\_\_\_ or intersection?
- What type of dwelling is it?
- How many bedrooms?
- How did you find out about that place?
- How many people live here? Who are they/what relation to you?
- Why did you choose to live in this particular area?
- Are there many people from your cultural community that live in this area?

### Current housing situation

- How much is rent now, including hydro, electricity and gas?
- How do you pay for the rent?
- Are there many things wrong with this place now? How is the plumbing and heating; are there leaks etc.
- How safe do you feel living here for you and for your kids (if applicable)



-(if applicable) is there room for your kids to play outside, is this adequate space?

-What were the hardest things about trying to find housing here in Canada?

-How did you try to get over these obstacles?

#### Current labour market situation

-Where are you working right now?

(if applicable)

-How long?

-How did you find out about his job opportunity?

#### Sources of Income

-Do you have any sources of income [other than from your work (if applicable)]

-What proportion of your total household income goes to rent?

e.g. < 30%                      30%-50%                      > 50%

-Are you currently financially assisting any other family or friends here in Canada or somewhere else, such as remitting money back home? If so, can you tell me about that? e.g. how much and how often.

#### Housing expectations

-How would you like to see your home change for the better?

#### Anticipated housing situation

-How do you see your housing situation changing over the next 3 months?

-How will you make this happen (strategies)?

## Appendix E: Immigrant and Refugee Housing Survey

### Part A

1. Gender of respondent:

☐ Female ☐ Male ☐ Other

2. How old are you?

☐ 19-25 ☐ 26-30 ☐ 31-40

☐ 41-50 ☐ 51-60 ☐ 61+

3. What is your immigration status? (N = Now A=Arrival)

☐ Immigrant ☐ Refugee ☐ Refugee Claimant

☐ Canadian Citizen

4. If you are an immigrant, what category did you arrive under?

☐ Principal Applicant ☐ Dependant ☐ Family Reunification

5. What country were you born in? \_\_\_\_\_

6. When did you arrive in Greater Vancouver? \_\_\_\_\_ (month/year)

7. When was your official landing, in Canada? \_\_\_\_\_ (month/year)

8. Do you feel you have experienced difficulties in accessing housing for any of the following reasons (check all that apply)

<input type="checkbox"/> Ethnicity	<input type="checkbox"/> Gender	<input type="checkbox"/> Religion
<input type="checkbox"/> Age of children	<input type="checkbox"/> Size of Family	<input type="checkbox"/> Disability
<input type="checkbox"/> Language	<input type="checkbox"/> Age	<input type="checkbox"/> Other _____

9. Do you have housing? (i.e. do you and your family rent or own housing).

☐ Yes ☐ No

10. Are you receiving free help with housing? (e.g. help with money to pay the rent, or being provided with shelter or a room)

☐ Yes ☐ No

***If no (i.e. you ARE NOT receiving help with housing other than government assistance) please go to Part B on page 2 (yellow).***

***If yes (i.e. you ARE receiving free help with housing) please go to Part C on page 5 (green).***

*Part B: For those who ARE NOT receiving free help with housing*

11. How many people live in your household? (i.e. space with shared kitchen and/or bathroom)

Adults \_\_\_\_\_ Children \_\_\_\_\_

12. How many bedrooms does your housing have? \_\_\_\_\_

13. Including yourself, can you tell us whether each of the adults in your household have a *full time job* (i.e. more than 30 hours per week), a *part-time job*, *are not employed, but are looking for work* or *are not employed, and not looking for work*.

	Adult Members of the Household					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Employed full-time (more than 30 hours per week)						
Employed part-time (less than 30 hours per week)						
Not employed, but looking for work						
Not employed, not looking for work						

14. What is your postal code? \_ \_ \_ \_ \_

**Or** what is the nearest intersection? \_\_\_\_\_

15. Over the last three months, what has your housing situation been? (check all that apply)

☐ House                      ☐ Apartment                      ☐ Suite in a house  
☐ Townhouse                      ☐ Single Room Occupancy Hotel                      ☐ Social housing  
☐ Room in a House                      ☐ Co-op Housing                      ☐ Own a home  
☐ Stay in shelter(s)                      ☐ Stay with friends/family  
☐ No housing/shelter                      ☐ Other \_\_\_\_\_

16. How much of your household income do you think you spend on housing per month?

☐ 0-30%                      ☐ 31-50%                      ☐ 51% or more

17. Do you:

☐ Own?                      ☐ Rent?                      ☐ Other

18. If you rent, do you have problems with your landlord?

\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ No

***If the answer is no, please proceed to number 20, page 3.***

19. Are you experiencing particular problems with your housing? (*e.g. is it in need of major repairs? Do you control your heat? Landlord doesn't issue receipts, didn't sign rental agreement*). If so, what type of problems are you experiencing?

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20. Not including your parents or your children, have you helped anyone who has been in need of housing in Canada? (*e.g. adult brothers or sisters, cousins, friends, acquaintances*)

\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_ No answer

***If no, proceed to question #31 on page 4.***

21. If yes, what arrangements did this include?

\_\_\_ Having individual(s) stay with you either for free or for small amount of money

\_\_\_ Helping pay their rent

\_\_\_ Helping someone find housing

\_\_\_ Other (please explain) \_\_\_\_\_

22. How long did you help these people for?

\_\_\_ a few days \_\_\_ a few weeks \_\_\_ a few months

23. What is the immigration status of your guest(s)?

\_\_\_ Immigrant \_\_\_ Refugee \_\_\_ Refugee Claimant

\_\_\_ Visitor \_\_\_ Student

24. How long have your 'guests' lived in Canada?

\_\_\_ Just arrived \_\_\_ 0-6 months \_\_\_ 7-12 months

\_\_\_ 1-2 years \_\_\_ 3-4 years \_\_\_ 5 years or more

25. What was the country of birth for the individual(s) you assisted?

\_\_\_\_\_

26. What was their country of last permanent residence?

\_\_\_\_\_

27. Of those you assisted, how many were adults? (i.e. 19 years of age or older)

\_\_\_\_\_

28. Of those you assisted, how many were children? \_\_\_\_\_

29. Why did these people need help?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

30. What is your relationship with the people/person you assisted (or are assisting)?

\_\_\_ Family                      \_\_\_ Friend                      \_\_\_ Cultural community

\_\_\_ Religious group                      \_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_

31. Do you expect to give this type of free help to anyone else during the next year?

\_\_\_ Yes                      \_\_\_ No                      \_\_\_ No answer

32. Is there anything else you would like to tell us about your housing situation?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

*Thank you for participating in our survey. If you have any questions or comments, please contact Kathy Sherrell at (604) 254-9626, ext. 330.*

*Part C: For those who are receiving free help with housing*

33. What type of free help, if any, do you receive?

\_\_\_ Help with rent \_\_\_ Shelter \_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_

34. How many people live in your household? (i.e. space with shared kitchen and/or bathroom)

Adults \_\_\_\_\_ Children \_\_\_\_\_

35. How many bedrooms does your housing have? \_\_\_\_\_

36. Including yourself, can you tell us whether each of the adults in your household have a *full time job* (i.e. more than 30 hours per week), a *part-time job*, *are not employed, but are looking for work* or *are not employed, and not looking for work*.

	Adult Members of the Household					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Employed full-time (more than 30 hours per week)						
Employed part-time (less than 30 hours per week)						
Not employed, but looking for work						
Not employed, not looking for work						

37. What is your postal code? \_ \_ \_ \_ \_

**Or** what is the nearest intersection? \_\_\_\_\_

38. Over the last three months, what has your housing situation been? (check all that apply)

\_\_\_ House \_\_\_ Apartment \_\_\_ Suite in a house

\_\_\_ Townhouse \_\_\_ Single Room Occupancy Hotel \_\_\_ Social housing

\_\_\_ Room in a House \_\_\_ Co-op Housing \_\_\_ Own a home

\_\_\_ Stay in shelter(s) \_\_\_ Stay with friends/family

\_\_\_ No housing/shelter \_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_

39. Where do you live right now?

\_\_\_ Rent home/apartment/suite \_\_\_ Stay with friends/family

\_\_\_ Stay in shelter \_\_\_ No housing/shelter

\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_

40. If you are staying with someone, are they:

\_\_\_ Family \_\_\_ Friend \_\_\_ Cultural community

\_\_\_ Religious group \_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_

41. How long do you think you will need housing help for?

\_\_\_ Days \_\_\_ Weeks \_\_\_ Months \_\_\_ Longer

42. How do you think you will get out of housing need? (e.g. obtain employment)

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43. Is there anything else you would like to tell us about your housing situation?

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Thank you for participating in our survey. If you have any questions or comments, please contact Kathy Sherrell at (604) 254-9626, ext. 330.

## Appendix F: Countries of origin (with frequency of response)

No response	2	Fiji	2	Poland	4
Afghanistan	18	Ghana	1	Romania	1
Algeria	1	Guatemala	3	Russia	9
Angola	1	Honduras	1	South Korea	58
Argentina	1	Hong Kong	29	Saudi Arabia	1
Azerbaijan	1	India	73	Serbia Montenegro	6
Bangladesh	1	Indonesia	1	Sierra Leone	4
Bosnia Herzegovina	6	Iran	51	Singapore	1
Brunei	1	Iraq	26	Somalia	3
Burundi	2	Japan	2	Sri Lanka	6
Cambodia	5	Laos	1	Sudan	9
Campochia	1	Latvia	1	Syria	1
Canada	1	Lebanon	1	Taiwan	19
Chile	1	Macedonia	1	Togo	2
China	106	Malaysia	1	Turkey	4
Colombia	11	Mexico	10	Uganda	1
Congo	1	Mongolia	1	Ukraine	1
Croatia	3	Nigeria	1	UN	6
Ecuador	1	Pakistan	9	Vietnam	23
El Salvador	4	Peru	4	Total	554
Ethiopia	3	Philippines	5		