

Neighbourhood Change Research Partnership

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Housing and integration trajectories of Syrian refugee families in Calgary and Metro Vancouver

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Community Partner/s	Calgary Catholic Immigration Society and Immigrant Services Society of BC

1. Rationale

Using a mixed-method, comparative approach, this project will explore the housing trajectories of government assisted Syrian refugees (GARs) after their first year in Canada and following the cessation of federal financial support. Drawing on GIS, qualitative interviews with key stakeholders and household interviews with Syrian refugee families, this project will document the early housing trajectories of refugee families in two Canadian cities, Calgary and Vancouver.

This research fits into a broader project on the social integration for Syrian refugees in Canadian cities. While immigration policy is determined at a national scale, the day-to-day integration experiences of immigrants and refugees to Canada takes place at the local level – in cities, communities and neighbourhoods. In order to understand how integration is experienced locally, it is critical to explore the social and spatial dimensions of these processes.

Both Calgary and Vancouver have resettled large numbers of Syrians. As of January 2016, Calgary has resettled 721 Government Assisted Refugees (GARs). Metro Vancouver has resettled 1700 GARs. In both cities, housing for the Syrian GARs has been concentrated in specific neighbourhoods; Guildford in Surrey, BC is home to 700 Syrian GARs and Forest Lawn in Calgary has a similar concentration of Syrian refugees. Guildford and Forest Lawn are communities where housing is more affordable but where there are existing challenges around poverty and social marginalization.

Scholarship in this area suggests that the relationship between integration, neighbourhood context and housing in Canadian cities is complex and highly variegated (Mendez 2009, Ley and Smith 2000). Public debates about concentrations of immigrant populations in one neighbourhood tend to be expressed in negative terms – exemplified by anxieties over ‘parallel societies,’ ethnic enclaves and the creation of an immigrant ‘underclass.’ Academic scholarship tends to be more measured pointing to the benefits and resiliencies of ethnic enclaves and neighbourhoods with high levels of ethnocultural diversity (Hiebert 2015).

GARs receive financial support from the Federal Government for their first 12 months in Canada. This includes a one time lump sum to cover housing start up costs, as well as monthly income support to cover basic needs (food, clothing and transportation). For those refugees who arrived between November 2015 and January 2016, this financial support is about to come to an end. It is also the case that some Syrian families were provided with subsidized housing or housing subsidies through corporate charitable efforts, such as the Welcome Fund for Syrian Refugees, during their first year in Canada. These subsidies are similarly coming to an end.

Canada has resettled 30,000 refugees since November 2015 and expects to continue this resettlement effort into 2017. Along with employment, housing is considered foundational to the integration outcomes of newcomers to Canada. This is especially true for government-assisted refugees who are the focus of this study. GARs are selected based on their need for protection and therefore face additional barriers vis-à-vis

language training, education and literacy (Hyndman 2011). Taking housing as a point of entry, this research will provide insight into the strategies and experiences of refugees following their first year in Canada.

2. Potential Policy Relevance

The integration experiences of this refugee population have significant policy relevance. Frontline settlement practitioners, municipal leaders and community advocates have expressed concern that the end of this federal funding will leave many refugee families in precarious situations. Due to the high levels of vulnerability among the Syrian refugee population, as well as considerable language barriers, there is concern that this population will face significant challenges in the labour market, leading to difficulties meeting basic needs, specifically housing, leading to a trajectory toward poverty.

This project will have relevance for policy makers at the federal, provincial and municipal levels. Immigration and refugee policy is determined at the federal level. This includes decisions around funding levels, housing support and resettlement services for refugees. By engaging key stakeholders and refugee families, this project will make a timely contribution to policy questions over refugee resettlement in Canadian cities. It may also provide feedback to the Federal government on the efficacy of resettlement services for refugees and the integration trajectories of Syrian refugee families.

When federal funding comes to an end (in early 2017) most GARs will transition to provincial income support. The challenges of the '13th month' have been given recent prominence in a *Globe and Mail* folio on Syrian immigration (5 December 2016), and a CBC roundtable with the Prime Minister the same day. Questions around housing availability, neighbourhood integration, employment and income support take shape provincially and at the municipal level. We expect this research to have policy relevance for policy makers at the local and provincial level working on issues of refugee and immigrant integration. As a multi-sited, comparative project, we are also hopeful that key findings from our two research sites might be shared across contexts and provide a more fulsome picture of how refugee integration is differentially constructed depending on local settings.

At the level of service delivery level, our project will take seriously the gendered, generational and household experiences of refugee integration and resettlement. By attending to the experiences of refugee families, we hope to contribute to the ongoing efforts of advocates and service providers working locally to support refugee integration and belonging.

3. Research Questions

- 1) Neighbourhoods, housing and integration: How does the neighbourhood context shape other processes of settlement and integration? How does a large concentration of Syrian refugee families impact the neighbourhood? How are these processes gendered? How does housing intersect with processes such as accessing services? What are the differential impacts within families (gender, generation)?
- 2) Production of housing vulnerability: How is housing vulnerability mitigated and/or produced by federal, provincial and municipal policy? What impact does federal funding have on the housing experiences of Syrian refugees? How is housing vulnerability produced?
- 3) Housing strategies of refugees: What are the housing strategies of government assisted Syrian refugees in Calgary and Vancouver? How do these change over time? How do they differ across contexts? What are the differential strategies within families (gender, generation)?

4. Specific Fit with the NCRP Objectives & Research Questions

This project aligns with the NCRP's research objectives by focusing on a population that is often overlooked in the literature on housing and inequality: refugees. Census data does not differentiate immigrants from refugees, making it difficult to trace the way immigration status shapes housing outcomes over time. While

refugees are largely concentrated in urban settings, little is known about their distinct experiences in the urban housing market. Our research will aim to address this gap in the literature by focusing on the early experiences of Syrian refugees in Calgary and Vancouver. As a comparative project, our research will also be relevant to policy makers at the municipal, provincial and federal level who are concerned with the relationship between housing and integration trajectories.

5. Research Design & Methods

This is a mixed-method, comparative project with three components: GIS, stakeholder interviews and household interviews with refugee families. Dr. Daniel Hiebert will supervise the research, which will be conducted by Bronwyn Bragg, a SSHRC-funded PhD student in the geography program at the University of British Columbia.

Component I: Mapping refugee settlement (GIS). Using data collected from the Refugee Assistance Program (RAP) providers, we will trace where Government Assisted Refugees were housed for their first year in Metro Vancouver and Calgary. RAP providers in Calgary and Vancouver collected the postal codes attached to where GARs were housed for year one. This information will be mapped alongside other census data, services and socio-demographic information to better understand the community and housing contexts where refugees were housed for their initial resettlement.

Component II: Policy review and stakeholder interviews. Working in collaboration with community partners in Calgary and Vancouver, the second component of this project involves interviews with key stakeholders. This includes RAP providers, settlement practitioners, municipal leaders, community advocates, policy makers and others connected with the resettlement of Syrian refugees at the local level.

Component III: Refugee family case studies. A critical component of this research involves documenting the housing strategies of refugee families following the end of government and charitable assistance. Because of the logistical and ethical challenges of interviewing refugee families, NCRP will support to pilot household interviews in one of my two field sites (Calgary). An Arabic-speaking research assistant will be hired to support this pilot research. As the research proceeds we will make a determination about the feasibility and necessity of undertaking additional household interviews in Vancouver as well.

The co-investigator will undertake interviews with ten households in Calgary at two different time periods in year two. Interviews will be held with different members of the families to capture the diversity of perspectives within a household (for an estimated 30 participants). These interviews will take place in two phases: Phase one will happen between January and March 2017 (at the beginning of year two) and between November 2017 and January 2018 (at the end of year two).

6. Role of Community Partners

This project will draw on the collective wisdom and expertise of the main RAP providers in Calgary and Vancouver. Both Calgary Catholic Immigrant Society (CCIS) and Immigrant Services Society of BC (ISSofBC) are interested in understanding the housing experiences of GARs. They are committed to providing the raw data for the GIS component of the research. In turn, I plan to share maps and key insights from the GIS analysis to these community partners for use in their future program development and service delivery. These agencies will also help inform the list of key stakeholders to interview and to support the initial household interviews in Calgary.

7. Role of Students / Research Assistants and Contributions to Training

The co-investigator/research assistant will carry out the bulk of the research. This will include primary and secondary background research, quantitative analysis of secondary data, conducting stakeholder interviews, developing and maintaining relationships with community partners, and conducting interviews with refugee families. The co-investigator/research assistant will also draft research reports and journal articles in collaboration with this project's PI.

8. Schedule

Dec 2016 – Jan 2017	Seek ethics approval from UBC Research Services
January-March 2017	GIS analysis; Participant interviews (phase 1) (N=30)
March-June 2017	Stakeholder interviews Calgary and Vancouver
June 2017	Preliminary analysis of stakeholder interviews and GIS data
Aug 2017	Share preliminary findings with community partners (plain language report)
Nov 2017-Jan	Participant interviews (phase 2) (n=30)
Jan-April 2018	Complete analysis and dissertation writing

9. Outcomes / Deliverables

- 1) A plain-language report to share with community partners and key stakeholders in Calgary and Metro Vancouver (NCRP research report)
- 2) Two public presentations to communicate findings community partners and key stakeholders in Calgary and Metro Vancouver
- 3) Three peer-reviewed journal articles drawing from material produced for dissertation

10. Budget Explanation

Total: \$18,100. Because the co-investigator is a recipient of a SSHRC Doctoral Grant, there is no need to compensate for time spent on this research project. Requests for funds are strictly to cover costs incurred during the research process.

\$12,250	Transcription Services (40 stakeholder interviews * 1 hour * 5 hours for transcription * \$35 per hour = \$7,000; 30 refugee interviews * 1 hour * 5 hours for transcription * \$35 per hour = \$5,250)
\$1,400	Honorarium for participants (40 stakeholder interviews * \$20 gift card = \$800; 30 participants * \$20 gift card = \$600)
\$1,300	Travel Vancouver - Calgary (2 flights * \$350/flight; Per diem @ \$60/day * 10 days = 600)
\$3,150	Community based research assistant, Arabic speaking (100 hours * \$31.49/hour = \$3,150)

11. Works Cited

- Hiebert, D. (2015) Ethnocultural minority enclaves in Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver. IRPP Study, 52.
- Hyndman, Jennifer (with research assistance from Silvia D'Addario and Matt R. Stevens). 2014. "Refugee Research Synthesis 2009 - 2013." A CERIS Report Submitted to Citizenship and Immigration Canada, Ottawa.
- Ley, D., and Smith, H. (2000) Relations between deprivation and immigrant groups in large Canadian cities. *Urban Studies*, 37, 37-62.
- Mendez, P. (2009) Immigrant residential geographies and the 'spatial assimilation' debate in Canada, 1997-2007. *International Migration and Integration*, 10, 89-108.

- ☐ Sent to the NCRP's Research Advisory Board for comment: date _____ deadline: _____
- ☐ Funding approved by the NCRP's Board: \$ _____ date _____

SSHRC Budget Worksheet

	Amount requested from NCRP	Contributions (In-Kind / Cash)	Contribution source	Total Project Cost
Personnel costs				
Student salaries and benefits/Stipends				
Undergraduate*				
Masters *				
Doctorate *		\$20,000 pa	SSHRC Doctoral Award	
Non-student salaries and benefits/Stipends				
Postdoctoral				
Other				
Travel and subsistence costs				
Applicant/Team member(s)				
Canadian travel				
Students				
Canadian travel	\$1,300			
Other expenses				
Non-disposable equipment (specify)				
Professional / technical services (specify: includes partner staff time contributed to or paid for by project, translation, editing, etc.)				
Transcription	\$12,250			
CBRA	\$3,149			
Other expenses (specify: includes honoraria, data purchase, field costs, printing, supplies, etc.)				
Honoraria	\$1,400			
Total	\$18,100	\$40,000		\$18,100

* Please indicate hourly rates for students and estimated number of students: