

This PDF provides the 7-Jan-11 Globe & Mail article on Vancouver poverty trends, together with the maps that the article is based on.

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B.C.'s hidden new face of poverty

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From Saturday's Globe and Mail

No longer are those struggling to survive easily spotted wandering around the Downtown Eastside. Now they're often new to the country, trying to make ends meet in the suburbs

From the sidewalk, the home of the Kokeihi family looks just like any other in the suburban Burnaby neighbourhood.

And inside that brick bungalow, the array of family photos and the flames licking inside the fireplace reinforce the image of a family leading a comfortable life. But it's a misleading one - the family of Iranian refugees is on income assistance and barely making ends meet. They struggle to find work and cringe upon mention of their monthly bills.

"Life is so hard in Canada," says daughter Shabnam, the member of the family of six who is most comfortable speaking in English.

Without Canadian references, Ms. Kokeihi says work has been hard to come by. And refugee support groups have told the family they're on their own if they want to pursue a career in their chosen field of music.

Forget what you think you know about poverty in the Lower Mainland - it's no longer about the gritty images of the Downtown Eastside.

Increasingly, the poor of Metro Vancouver are like the Kokeihis: scattered outside the urban core, making them all the harder to see, much less help. According to data supplied exclusively to The Globe and Mail, the Downtown Eastside is among the areas in the city whose wealth has grown the most between 1970 and 2005, though that change has been driven by pockets of prosperity rather than an overall jump in the standard of living.

But at the same time, pockets of poverty are building in the suburbs. According to research by UBC geographer David Ley and the University of Toronto's Cities Centre, the areas where average income contracted the most in that same 35-year period are in the outlying areas of Vancouver and its suburbs: southeast Vancouver, north Richmond, Burnaby, Surrey and Coquitlam. Several were also among the poorest, compared to the rest of the city, in the 2006 census.

These areas, magnets for both immigration and refugee settlement, have become nodes of low income, unemployment and the invisibly poor. The people who live there are disproportionately new Canadians and visible minorities.

Local governments have yet to catch up to the changing face of Lower Mainland poverty.

The city of Coquitlam approved its first permanent homeless shelter just last month, after intense debate and in the face of vocal opposition from local residents.

But it's becoming impossible to ignore the growing need for shelters, social services and supports in areas built for low-density, single-family dwellings in middle-class neighbourhoods. Part of the problem is that poverty in the suburbs can be hidden behind the doors of neatly appointed bungalows.

"If it's not in your face regularly, I think there's sometimes a sense people won't think it's as big an issue as it really is,"

says Martin Wyant, executive director of SHARE family and community services in Coquitlam.

The availability of services and supports reflect this: Vancouver has far more units of subsidized housing per capita than any of its surrounding municipalities, even though the areas where poverty is growing the most are outside the city's limits.

Prof. Ley calls it the "suburbanization of poverty." He has been working with researchers in Toronto and Montreal, documenting shifts in income disparity in those three cities.

"I think there's going to be quite a bit of surprise at the data on the maps," he says. "This is fresh information."

The rise in suburban poverty is driven by both economic and migratory shifts: Relatively affordable suburbs overtake downtown when it comes to attracting both immigrants and refugees.

As land values in the Lower Mainland have risen, especially in the city of Vancouver and along the water, the premium placed on choice real estate means "people have sorted themselves more across neighbourhoods according to their income," says Krishna Pendakur, an economist with Simon Fraser University and co-chair of Metropolis British Columbia, which researches cities and diversity.

A report from the Immigrant Services Society of B.C. found 84 per cent of government-assisted refugees arriving in the Lower Mainland settle outside the city of Vancouver. At the same time, Richmond, Burnaby and Surrey have higher concentrations of recent immigrants and visible minorities. And the region's non-white population is increasingly concentrated in localized neighbourhoods, geographer Dan Hiebert, also a Metropolis co-chair, found in a study commissioned by Citizenship and Immigration Canada.

Beyond the obvious peril that new pockets of poverty could arise in the suburbs, there are less obvious dangers - including the public-health impact of poor, scattered neighbourhoods. Health officials are just beginning to track the impact of neighbourhood-scale stratification, but early data indicate that where you live increasingly predicts how healthy you will be. In part, that's a result of people moving to affordable neighbourhoods, and the poor being statistically less healthy. But there is also a self-reinforcing cycle, in which poor people in those suburban neighbourhoods have less access to services that could help improve their health.

In some cases, the universal approach of public-health promotion is actually increasing disparities, says Vancouver Coastal Health's chief medical officer Patricia Daly. That indicates a need for targeted health campaigns that zero in on vulnerable areas.

Municipal governments say they're aware of the region's growing income gap. But the data on neighbourhood-level poverty is new.

"There are low-income families in the city. A lot of them are recent immigrants or refugees," says Basil Luksun, director of planning and building for the city of Burnaby. "I don't think we zero in on any particular area in saying, 'This is an area that has a lot of issues.' ... What we, as a city, try to do is to address the overall livability of the city. And to do that I think we try to address that in terms of the needs of the community across the whole spectrum."

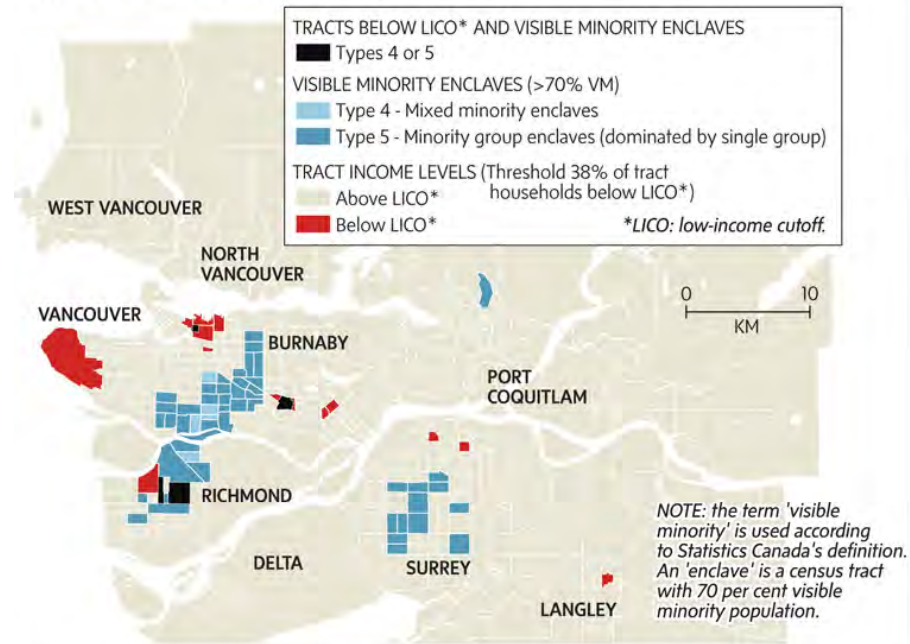
But statistics alone don't tell the whole story of poverty.

According to the numbers, Munira Elhassan is destitute. She receives \$680 in government assistance, and monthly rent in her subsidized building in the Edmonds area of Burnaby eats up \$328 of that. Much of the leftover money goes to medication stemming from a bad fall that left her unable to work. A very proud woman - in Egypt, she was a civil engineer with a chauffeur - she still finds a way to offer treats to her visitors.

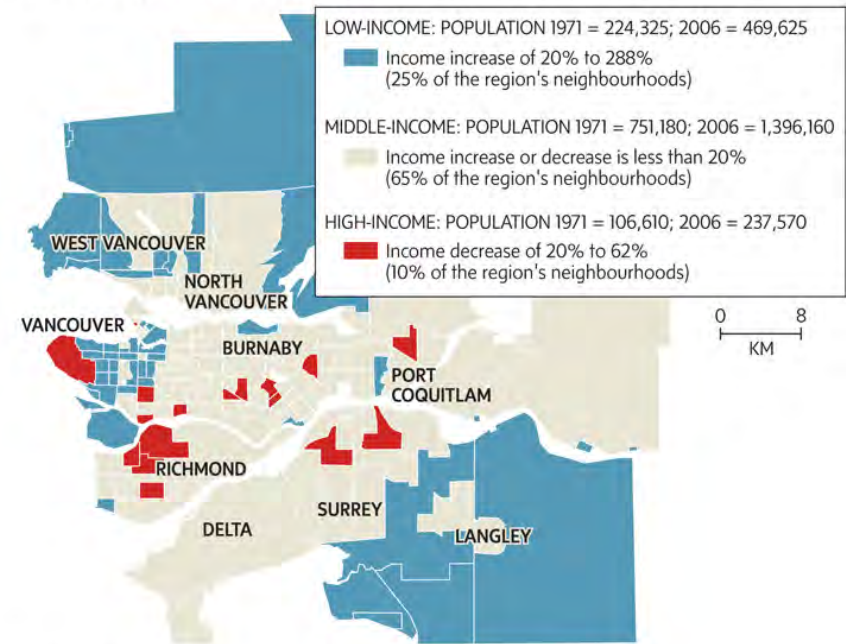
Life in her neighbourhood is very good, she insists, pointing to support from refugee service groups and her mosque. That's a far cry from when she first arrived in this country and had no idea how she'd survive financially. "I came here and felt like I was a little dot in the middle of the ocean," she said. "I didn't know where to go."

POCKETS OF POVERTY ARE ARISING IN THE SUBURBS OF VANCOUVER WHILE PROSPERITY IS POPPING UP IN THE DTES.

» LOW INCOME CENSUS TRACTS AND VISIBLE MINORITY ENCLAVES

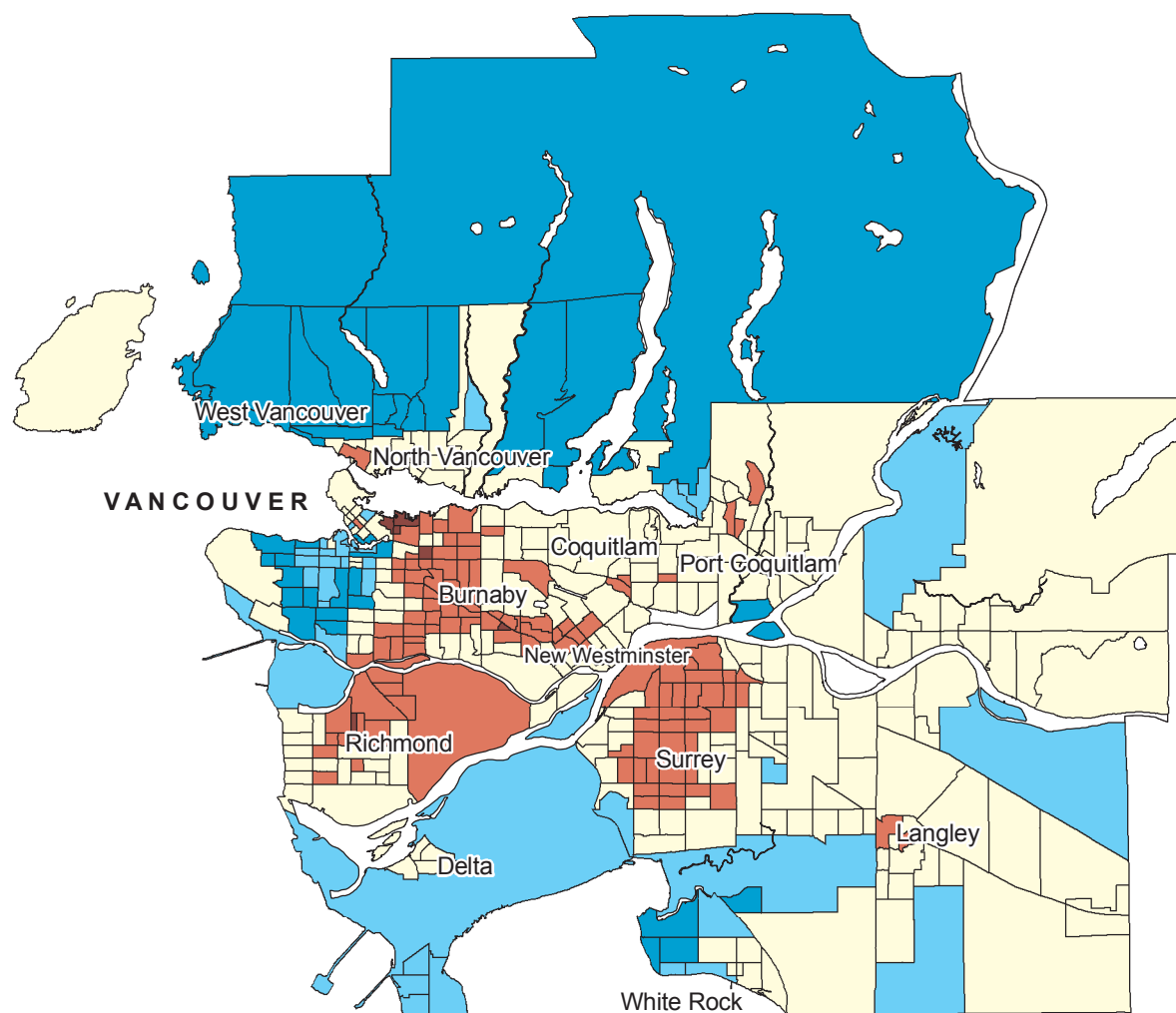


» CENSUS TRACTS WITH THE GREATEST INCREASE/DECREASE IN AVERAGE INDIVIDUAL INCOME FROM 1970 TO 2005

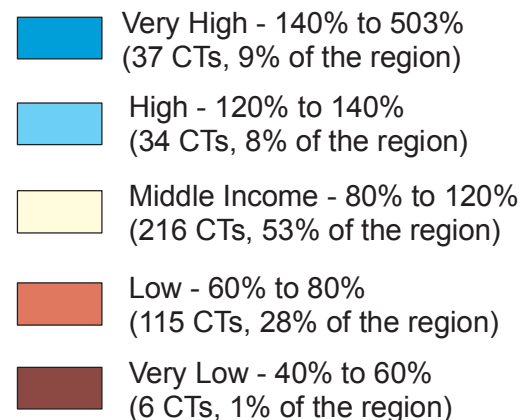


Average Individual Income 2005

Neighbourhoods in the Vancouver Region



Census Tract Average Individual Income compared to the Vancouver Census Metropolitan Area Average of \$36,123



 Not Available

Notes:

(1) Census Tract boundaries are for 2006.

(2) Average Individual Income is for persons 15 and over and includes income from all sources.



10 5 0 10 Kilometers

Source: Statistics Canada,
Census Profile Series, 2006.

 Cities Centre
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

Greater Toronto Urban Observatory
www.gtuo.ca www.NeighbourhoodChange.ca

Average Individual Income 1970

Neighbourhoods in the Vancouver Region

