



Realizing the Right to Adequate Housing for Racialized Refugees and Newcomers

*This is one of five issue papers outlining priority issues for advocacy identified by the CCR's **Anti-Racism project**. The identification of priorities has been informed by member organizations and consultation with people with lived experiences, particularly those of African descent.*

Summary of the issue

The right to adequate housing is a fundamental human right protected under international law and prioritized for implementation in Canada's National Housing Strategy Act. Despite this commitment, many refugees and newcomers, specifically Black and racialized refugees and newcomers, face **disproportionate barriers** to realizing this right due to systemic racism. Misleading and false narratives blaming refugees and newcomers for the lack of adequate housing undermine public support for refugees and migrants, generate further racist harm in these communities, and exacerbate the barriers they face in accessing adequate housing.

Barriers to accessing housing

- Many residents in Canada face barriers to accessing housing, including a mismatch between income and housing costs, discrimination in rental and homeownership markets, and long waitlists for social and affordable housing units. Racialized households, and Black families and individuals in particular, face **specific barriers** due to racism, including **anti-Black racism**. One **study** found that 1 in 4 single parents who were Black experienced discrimination when searching for rental housing. Black refugees and newcomers face compounded vulnerabilities in realizing their right to adequate housing due to their immigration status.
- While the federal government's housing strategy has **recognized** the importance of addressing the housing needs of racialized communities, immigrants and refugees, there has been inadequate follow through, with no commitment to **measure housing outcomes** for these populations. In 2022, 35% of **racialized children** without permanent residence lived in core housing need, a rate nearly twice as high as for non-racialized children without permanent residence (19%).
- While corporations and private developers put affordable housing out of reach, political and media actors in Canada have scapegoated refugees and newcomers for the so-called **housing crisis** instead of holding all levels of government to account for their failures to

regulate corporate entities, including pensions funds, and invest in affordable housing for over three decades.

Experiences of racialized refugees and newcomers

- Racialized refugees and newcomers face overt and covert forms of racism in the housing market, setting up barriers that non-racialized refugees and newcomers do not experience. One study for example showed landlords were explicitly open to housing non-racialized newcomers such as Ukrainians, but not refugees and newcomers from countries such as Afghanistan or Syria. Other study participants shared how a landlord refused to rent to a specific nationality due to a previous experience with a tenant from that group, thereby generalizing an entire population.
- Housing case workers who accompany refugees in their search for housing have highlighted instances where units suddenly become unavailable once landlords become aware that the prospective tenants are refugees, particularly racialized refugees or large families, demonstrating how racism further limits access to housing for newcomers, in addition to barriers such as language, credit checks and lack of awareness of tenant rights.
- Refugee claimants who arrive in Canada seeking protection face particularly acute needs for interim housing. Currently, refugee claimants—mostly racialized and including many from the African continent—are being housed in hotels or find themselves shunted to overcrowded homeless shelters without supports to address their unique needs. The lack of interim housing for refugee claimants creates significant risk for those who are attempting to build a new life in Canada. Tragically, a Kenyan woman and a Nigerian man died in a span of a few months between 2023 and 2024 while waiting to access shelter in Mississauga.

A holistic approach to realizing the right to housing

- Research has shown that individuals experiencing homelessness incurred an average of \$12,209 in public healthcare costs, compared to \$1,769 for housed individuals. As Black and racialized individuals already face disproportionately negative health outcomes in Canada, addressing racism in the right to adequate housing will not only be more cost-effective, but would also mitigate other negative effects, such as those related to health and wellbeing.
- Funding community-based housing for refugee claimants run by civil society organizations is a cost-effective approach that provides tailored and culturally sensitive support for the unique needs of racialized refugees upon arrival in Canada while operating at a fraction of the cost of government subsidies to hotels. Matthew House in Ottawa, for example, provides shelter, food and wraparound support for less than \$1,000 per month, compared to hotels costing the government thousands of dollars monthly per individual.
- Ensuring that racialized refugees and newcomers are guaranteed their right to adequate housing is a positive outcome for broader Canadian society. When racialized refugees and newcomers are housed, they can focus on working, educating their children and integrating

themselves into their community, thereby creating a positive and win-win situation for communities across Canada.

Recommendations

- All levels of government should expand investments in affordable public (non-market) housing to help guarantee the right to adequate housing. The federal government should lay out a plan to increase the share of non-market rental housing in Canada's housing stock to align with other OECD countries (from 3.5% to 6.9% of Canada's total housing stock) by 2034, as advocated by the **National Right to Housing Network (NRHN)**. Governments should develop specific strategies to improve housing outcomes for Black and racialized households and individuals and track and report on progress toward this goal.
- The federal government, provinces and territories should strengthen tenant protections. As recommended by the **NRHN**, the federal government should implement the Renter's Bill of Rights as National Tenant Rights Standards, requiring provinces and territories to bring their legislation up to a core standard to be eligible to receive federal housing funding, which would also enable the federal government to regulate rent control and vacancy control.
- Policymakers should boost spending on income supports, such as disability benefits, particularly as Black and racialized refugees and newcomers are more likely to experience poverty in Canada and are unable to cover their housing costs.
- All levels of government should work together to scale up investments and provision of **reception centres and community-based interim housing** for refugee claimants including wraparound support services that address claimants' unique needs, particularly in a culturally sensitive manner, in order to set refugees from all backgrounds up for success in their integration to Canada.

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