

# Refugee Re-Settlement and Housing: Trends and Challenges

Prepared for MANSO Integration Summit  
October 25, 2017

Dr. Ray Silvius  
Associate Professor  
University of Winnipeg  
[r.silvius@uwinnipeg.ca](mailto:r.silvius@uwinnipeg.ca)

# Our Research Project

- Refugee Housing Histories and Housing Trajectories: The Global-Local Nexus
  - 3 yr. project to study refugees, housing outcomes, and ideas of home in Winnipeg, MB
  - Ethnographic
  - (Mini)longitudinal

# Social Housing in 20<sup>th</sup>/21<sup>st</sup> Century

- Canadian Context
  - 2<sup>nd</sup> lowest amount of social housing (as percentage of overall housing stock) of any advanced industrial nation @ 5 percent (Silver, 2011, p.33)

# Social Housing in 20<sup>th</sup>/21<sup>st</sup> Century

- Winnipeg/Manitoba Context:
  - Winnipeg: Chronically short of affordable housing stock in 20<sup>th</sup> c. (Silver, 2015)
  - Since early 2000s, Winnipeg's vacancy rate between 1-2% (Brandon, 2015, p. 34)

# Rental Market Woes

- 2011: >%50 of Winnipeg rental households with at least one of CMHC's 'core housing need':
  - costing more than 30 percent of income;
  - unsuitable # of rooms (family size);
  - in need of major repairs (Brandon, 2015, pp.29-30)

# The Manitoban/ Canadian Context: Mind the Growing GAP?

- For GARS, a growing GAP:
  - Between shelter allowance provided under Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP)
    - AND cost of available housing
  - MB Employment and Income Assistance housing allowance (basis of federal Resettlement Assistance Rates) unchanged for 2 decades prior to 2014 (Putko, 2013)

# MIND the Growing GAP?

## Manitoba Resettlement Assistance Rates as of January, 2014

RENT & UTILITIES	MIN	MAX	RENT & UTILITIES	MIN	MAX
SINGLE SHARING	\$285	\$311	FAMILY OF FIVE	\$488	\$588
SINGLE LIVING ALONE	\$285	\$360	FAMILY OF SIX	\$513	\$613
COUPLE	\$387	\$487	FAMILY OF SEVEN	\$537	\$637
FAMILY OF TWO	\$387	\$487	FAMILY OF EIGHT	\$561	\$661
FAMILY OF THREE	\$430	\$530	FAMILY OF NINE	\$585	\$685
FAMILY OF FOUR	\$471	\$571	FAMILY OF TEN	\$609	\$709

Source: Silvius et al, 2015

Average cost of 3+ bedroom apartment in Wpg

\$1,180 (Oct 2013) \$1,327 (Oct 2016)

Source: [https://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/odpub/esub/64479/64479\\_2014\\_A01.pdf?lang=en](https://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/odpub/esub/64479/64479_2014_A01.pdf?lang=en) and [https://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/odpub/esub/64491/64491\\_2016\\_A01.pdf?fr=1508167018634](https://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/odpub/esub/64491/64491_2016_A01.pdf?fr=1508167018634)

# The Manitoban/ Canadian Context: Mind the Growing GAP?

- The stories:
  - From buildings with swimming pools to dilapidated inner city housing
  - Use of child-tax benefit, other supports to pay for housing
- The lesson:
  - Re-settled refugees seeking housing amongst long-term structural housing crisis



# Life After RAP

- The Realities of the Transnational Family:
  - ‘I cannot sleep because my kids are always calling me to ask for money. They don’t have shoes, they don’t have clothes. All the money we get here, we just send to these kids...’

# Life After RAP

- The Realities of the Transnational Family:
  - ‘...Sometimes we send money, but those people taking care of the kids don’t use the money the way we want. If it is possible for our kids to finally come to Canada, that would be great. We would like to know, we informed them [immigration officials] about our kids in Africa, why is it taking so long?’
  - Interviewee from Congo

# Life After RAP

- Budgetary Constraints:
  - ‘You have to do some adjustments. If you were accustomed to eating morning, noon and evenings, you have to cut some food. No dinner. Forget about dinner. Just breakfast and supper. Or if you were accustomed to drinking tea and milk, remove milk and maybe just drink black tea.’
    - Interviewee from Congo

# Life After RAP

- Impossible trade offs between
  - Paying for housing and household/family necessities
  - Pursuing language training, education
  - Long-term employment plans vs. ‘survival’ jobs
  - Obligations in Winnipeg and obligations to family/community overseas

# What about the Syrians?

- Welcome Place, housing arm of Manitoba Interfaith Immigration Council:
  - Nov 4, 2015 – March 11, 2016:
    - 928 Syrian arrivals to Manitoba
    - 766 of which were GARs

# Homes, Not Hotels in Manitoba

**“Syrian refugees in GTA hotels struggle to find affordable housing”**



Source: <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/programs/metromorning/refugees-hotel-housing-1.3485542>

# Homes, Not Hotels in Manitoba— How?

- ‘Political will’ at provincial/federal levels
- Increase in human resource capability
  - WP staff increases from approximately 40 to 79 (January – April 2016)
- Increase in temporary/transitional housing
  - 2 new buildings
- Increase in long-term housing
  - Rent Supplement Program

# Long Term Housing: Provincial Policy Mechanisms

- Rent Supplement Program (from MB Housing and Community Development):
  - Pay the difference between market rate and housing budget of eligible candidates
  - Not 'transportable' – applicable to approved units only



# Rent Supplement Program

- Did it work for Syrian refugees?
  - Expanded specifically for Syrian resettlement
  - Eligible units approved by MB govt. (safety and cleanliness), placed on inventory
  - Family can 'move right in' in short period of time with assurance that different between budget and unit is covered

# Rent Supplement Program

- Did it work for Syrian refugees?
  - Expanding the range of houses
    - Higher quality housing
    - New neighbourhoods
    - Size of units
      - Large families with special needs
- Program has been put on hiatus since April 2016

# Next Steps

- Convey political capital and social good will demonstrated towards Syrians into permanent capabilities for the refugee serving sector
  - Discussion on low income realities of many refugees

# Next Steps

- Anticipating prolonged global refugee *crises*, enhance social and subsidized housing capabilities
- Restore and Expand Rent Supplementation for *all* GARs
- Housing First as model for refugee re-settlement?

# Additional Sources

- Brandon, J. (2015). The more things change: low-income housing in Winnipeg today. In J.Silver & J.Brandon, Editors, *Poor Housing: A Silent Crisis*. (27-46). Fernwood Press.
- Putko, K. (2013). “The role of municipal, provincial and federal governments in addressing the affordable housing needs of refugees in Winnipeg.” Unpublished manuscript developed for Welcome Place, Manitoba Interfaith Immigration Council.
- Silver, J. (2011). *Good Places to Live: Poverty and public housing in Canada*. Fernwood Pub.
- Silver, J. (2015). Chronic! A brief history of low-income housing in Winnipeg. In J.Silver & J.Brandon, Editors, *Poor Housing: A Silent Crisis*. (8-26). Fernwood Press.
- Silvius, R., Al-Ubeady, H., Halldorson, E. & Praznik, J. (2015). Refugees and housing in Winnipeg’s inner-city: turning organizational knowledge into policy options. In J.Silver & J.Brandon, Editors, *Poor Housing: A Silent Crisis*. (96-111). Fernwood Press.